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“BOXES”

by
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PROLOGUE

Deep in the basement of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., lie the reputed boxes of files documenting eye witness accounts, police interviews and photographs relating to the fateful day when John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated. Identified by only a simple number, the files are scheduled to be opened in 2017, with their content to reveal the secrets, strategies and the people behind the assassination. Fascination with the file had been eroded with the passage of time and the countless more pressing events of the Vietnam War, Watergate and the attack of September 11. Nobody had really bothered with the files since the mid 80's.

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What is not known to the American people, is that the boxes containing the JFK files are empty.

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After opening a shipping container belonging to a deceased relative, a man uncovers new evidence surrounding the JFK assassination which not only confirms the conspiracy theory, but also reveals the people responsible.

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Chapter One

May 2003 - Washington, D.C.

Under a moonless night sky, a zodiac quietly slipped through the waters of the Potomac River with five individuals clad in black military fatigues. On orders from a high ranking official at the Pentagon, the hand picked FBI agents were on a classified mission to secure a Top Secret File. Passing under the Kutz Bridge, the zodiac continued north until it reached the shore near Independence Avenue. After securing the zodiac, the agents disappeared into a clump of shrubs near the waterline. It was a ritual that had been repeated over the last two evenings and with any luck, this would be the final night. Stepping onto the lip of a concrete culvert, they reached through the overgrown branches, and pulled open the metal grate the city had installed to prevent homeless people, drug addicts or over adventurous children from entering. With their night vision goggles already in place, the agents crouched down and entered the tight tunnel, then loosely replaced the grate behind them.

Covered with slimy green moss, the old tunnel was damp and the air musty, from the continual stream of water that had flowed through for over seventy-five years. After crab crawling for almost two hundred feet, the agents emerged wet and covered with slime, into a much larger storm drain situated right under Independence Avenue. At least now they could stand

upright. With the low rumble of the passing vehicles overhead they continued to follow the source of the water for just over half a mile.

The agents had lucked out with the weather. If it had been raining, the tunnels could be impassible with surging water. Making their way through the melange of storm drains, the agents finally came to another small culvert, forcing them to again crab crawl as they continued to follow the stream of water. At the end of the short tunnel, the agents finally reached their destination, an old concrete maintenance room. Moving over to the right, an agent flipped a switch that barely illuminated the space. Lifting their night vision goggles, the foundation walls to the National Archives Building stood before them. Beneath the foundation flowed a steady steam of water that had eroded a crawl space large enough for the agents to gain access.

The National Archives building was constructed over an underground stream and over the many years of its continual flow, the water had not only slowly eroded away the soil, but had also softened the thick concrete floor. Over the past two nights the agents gradually enlarged the crawl space large enough to crouch in and room to chip away at the floor’s crumbling concrete. Any rebar that they encountered was so rusty that it either broke with a heave from a crowbar or simply melted away with a quick blast from a plasma cutter. The further up they chipped away, the harder the concrete became. The last remaining foot of floor was still solid and had not been affected by the streams erosive affects. An agent from inside the shallow tunnel finally gave the thumbs up as they were ready to punch through the remaining layer of concrete to complete their mission. After drilling a small hole, the agent inserted a snake tube camera equipped with night vision up through the concrete floor to survey the space above. Beginning to spin the flex tube, the agent abruptly stopped. He put his finger up to his mouth. Not more than four feet away was

a pair of boots. The agent motioned that someone was above. They were all curious why someone was down in the basement at such a late hour as their Intel had no reports of any personnel scheduled to be in the area. They concluded that it must just be someone from the janitorial staff. The agent continued to watch. A moment later the boots move away from the camera lens along an aisle of shelving loaded with cardboard filing boxes. Another person was standing in a doorway. The individuals could only be seen from the waist down so the agent began to twist the flex tube to get a better look when the figures suddenly left the room.

They waited for five minutes before the lead agent gave the thumbs up. Removing the camera the agent quickly inserted a rod up through the hole then pushed a button on a control box. Nozzles splayed out in a fan formation and began to slowly rotate as bright blue liquid erupted from their ends. Removing the tube the agents moved back several feet. Several minutes went by and the agents became restless and began to wonder if their newly developed acid to eat through concrete would work. A few more minutes past. Finally numerous bluish spots could be seen followed by a few droplets of liquid. But, the blue glow and dripping quickly diminished. The agents knew that their lab would need to refine their formula. Frustrated with no additional acid to complete the hole, one agent slammed the side of his hand upwards. To their amazement, the remaining concrete completely shattered into popcorn size pieces. Although not designed to work in this way, the agents were pleased with the final result as a clean edged hole cut it's way through the floor.

An agent cautiously popped his head through the opening and waived for them to follow. One agent immediately walked over and stood guard at the door while the others lifted their night vision goggles and scattered through the room searching the filing boxes with their

flashlights. The boxes were all marked with a name along with a file number, but the box they were seeking was only identifiable by its number alone.

CLICK-CLICK.....CLICK-CLICK. A sound came from out of the darkness. It was the sound from a Cricket, a dime store frog toy, indicating that someone had found what they were looking for. The same type of signal was used by paratroopers during night drops during the Second World War to communicate and regroup in the dark.

The agents made their way to the sound which happened to be right back near the hole in the floor, exactly where the agent first spotted the boots. Illuminated by a flashlight, they saw the box that they were after sitting eight shelves high and simply labeled 2017. Considering the complex nature of the names of the other boxes, this box stood out from the rest. It was a top secret file that had been sealed in 1964 for the sake of National Security and was not to be opened and revealed to the public until the year 2017.

Placing the box on the floor, an agent pulled out a knife to cut open the tape that sealed the box, but noticed that the tape appeared new, and not brittle and yellow as one might have thought. The agent quickly sliced the tape and lifted the lid. Reaching into the box he extracted a large bundle of paper, then proceeded to flip through it with his thumb. All the agents apart from one agent who was casually leaning his shoulder against the file room's only door, were shocked to see that the information they were seeking had been replaced with a stack of plain white paper. The JFK files were gone.

Suddenly there was a loud crash as the door to room flung open, catapulting the agent who was unlucky enough to be standing in it's path, across the aisle and smashing him into the shelving. The agent instantly tried to get up but his body went limp as two pistol shots quickly

rang out. Three figures flew through the door and scattered behind the shelving as they fired in the direction of the unsuspecting agents, still standing out in the open. Before an agent could draw his weapon to return fire, another agent was shot and fell near the hole.

“K!.....Get the hell out of here,” an agent yelled out as swung his Heckler & Koch MP5 submachine gun around from his back and laid down a barrage of gunfire towards the doorway. For security reasons, the agents had been instructed to only communicate with each other by the letter of their first name.

K, was nearest to the hole and jumped in feet first. More shots rang out above as K began crab crawling towards the maintenance room. The two remaining agents returned gunfire. Several of the assailants were hit and slumped to the ground. The agents thought they were just getting the upper hand when several new figures entered through the doorway. One agent was shot in the leg and dropped to a knee.

“T! Go!.....I’ll cover you!” yelled the wounded man as he fired a barrage of gunfire from his automatic pistol. T jumped for it. Immediately, gunfire erupted from the hole as T popped up and returned fire to aid his comrade.

“H! Come on!”

H launched himself towards the hole but was immediately hit by several rounds, cutting the agent’s escape short. As T tried to pull his buddy down the hole, H in his last heroic effort, grabbed a hold of the dead agent beside him and pulled him along.

The hole was only wide enough for a large man to fit through and was now temporarily sealed, as the two agents hung wedged upside down. T rushed to aid his comrades. Lifting their heads and pulling back their eyelids, he knew that they were both dead.

K was already waiting in the largest culvert when T crab crawled out of the narrow tunnel from the maintenance room. A blast of gunfire hit the far wall, narrowly missing their legs. They had just started to run when K grabbed T’s arm and immediately stopped.

“We’ll never make it to the end of this culvert without at least one of us or both of us getting shot,” said K.

“So, what do you have in mind?”

“To give us the time we need.”

Scooting back to the culvert opening, the two agents waited and listened patiently to the sounds coming from within. With a quick look, K caught a glimpse of a flashlight about half way through. With fresh ammo clips and a head nod, both agents fired into the depths of the culvert. Only a few moans and groans, as well as a few profanities were heard. K and T quickly made their way down the main storm drain.

“Who the hell were those guys?” K called out as they stopped where several culverts intersected.

“I have absolutely no fricking idea,” replied T in-between heavy breaths. But I’m wondering how they knew we were there?”

“I don’t know,” answered K. “I can only guess the guy standing near the files either spotted the flex tube or heard the concrete floor collapsing, then called security.”

“That was no security detail. You were the first one down the hole so you probably didn’t get a good look at them. They were fully decked out in special forces fatigues. Oh, and let’s dispense with the code names shall we? Is it Kathy, Kathleen?”

“Katia,” she quickly interjected.

“I’m Tony. Nice to formally meet you.”

“You too.”

Tony and Katia were just about to turn into the next culvert when a couple of shots echoed through the tunnel. They dashed into the adjoining culvert.

“That didn’t deter them very long,” vexed Tony.

After an exhausting run the pair crab crawled through the last culvert. Tony shoved the wire grate open. They emerged dirty, sweaty and down three men. Not to mention that their mission was a complete failure. The fresh night air was a welcome relief. They had no time to waste and immediately slid down to the Zodiac. Dragging it into the water, Tony quickly hopped in. Katia glanced up towards the culvert opening, only to see flashes of light being reflected off the inside wall.

“We’re not going to make it,” she announced.

“Have a little faith,” replied Tony. He reached and pulled out a container from a knapsack lying on the floor of the Zodiac. Tony tossed the knapsack out to Katia, then began fiddling with the outboard motor. A few moments later with a pull of a cord the engine came to life and the Zodiac was heading towards open water. Three figures suddenly emerged from the culvert moments later. Seeing the boat speed away, they raised their MP5’s and raked the boat with several short bursts. The boat suddenly slowed and started to circle to the left. A small fire sprouted from the engine. Without warning the zodiac exploded into a fireball, illuminating the surrounding shoreline.

As the remains of the zodiac smoldered away, two figures in black fatigues were slipping through the trees behind their adversaries. Continuing south, the pair made their way back to the

Kutz Bridge. Tony had jerry-rigged the outboard with duct tape to hold the throttle open and keep the zodiac driving on a straight course. After starting the motor, Tony simply dove off the back of the boat and swam a short 10 feet back to the shore. His spur of the moment decoy had worked as planned.

Once a safe distance away from the culvert, Tony and Katia quickly changed from their black fatigues into jogging gear stowed in the knapsack. Out of the blue, a group of early morning runners slipped past their location. Tony and Katia emerged from behind a bush and casually pulled into the rear of the pack. Behind them, a searchlight from a helicopter hovering over the Zodiac was already hunting for any signs of life.

Chapter Two

Dallas, Texas - November 22, 1963

Streams of light from a slight crack in her bedroom curtains slipped through the fabric and crossed Madam Aderes's face. Her eyes lazily fluttered open. Working late the previous night she pulled the blanket across her face to try and catch a few more precious moments of sleep. A loud bang suddenly echoed from the street below. "That sounded like a gunshot," Aderes said to herself. She hustled over to the window and carefully peeked through her curtains. Aderes had reason to worry. This was not the safest part of town to live in, but the one bedroom flat was all that she could afford and it was also within walking distance to work. Peering down, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Another sound boomed from the street below. Aderes flinched, as well as several people on the sidewalk. A trail of black smoke lead to the tailpipe of a car just rounding the corner. "Just the backfire of a car," she thought in relief.

Aderes pulled back the curtains fully, revealing a bright sunny November day in Dallas. She opened the window. There was a warm breeze that was breaking through the clear early morning air. Leaning on the edge of the sill, Aderes took in a deep breath. Her expectancy of fresh air was dashed as the whiff of exhaust fumes from the untuned car had already wound its way up to her second story dwelling. She wrinkled up her face and waved a hand in front of her nose, but she remained seated. Aderes sensed that there seemed to be a certain buzz in the air. More traffic and people scurrying about than normal. “Everyone must be running off to see that parade people were mumbling about at the restaurant last night,” she conjectured.

Madam Aderes made her living as a fortuneteller by reading tea leaves, taro cards and palms, at well-known restaurants. She had a kind, trusting disposition and was usually able to talk the owner of the restaurant into giving her a booth in the back to conduct her readings. Although most restaurant owners were a little skeptical in the beginning, they soon found that Madam Aderes brought in new and welcomed clientele. At times, people were even lined up out the door. Her abilities at reading peoples fortunes with uncannily accurate and soon sought after by multitudes of people. Unfortunately, Aderes never stayed in a city long enough to make close friendships, set down roots or enjoy the fruits of her labors. Her restless and tormented past always kept her on the move.

Shrugging her shoulders, Aderes made her way across the sparsely furnished one bedroom flat to make breakfast. A small kitchen table topped with marbled yellow Arborite and edged with a chrome band sat under one of the two small windows. The stove and white Firestone fridge were nestled next to the table. A clean but older dark burgundy pullout couch placed opposite the kitchen doubled as her bed, and an old oval corded rug placed in the middle of the

room covered the cool hardwood floor. Several dirty dishes and pots were stacked on the counter and in the sink. She was a little lazy at times and would clean the house and dishes when she felt like it. Her bathroom was the only room that was separate from her living quarters.

The distinct aroma of bacon, eggs and fresh brewed coffee were soon wafting through Aderes open window to the street below. Passersby smiled slightly as they whiffed the air, wishing that they too should have taken the time to make such a savory breakfast. Aderes enjoyed food and was accustomed to making a hearty breakfast almost every day. Although some of her hourglass figure had filled in slightly over the years, she still was a very striking woman and kept in good shape with regular daily walks.

For some reason Madame Aderes forgo her tradition of reading the morning paper, and instead ate her breakfast while gazing at the people on the street below. Little did she know at the time, but by straying from that one little daily routine, her future would be taken down a different path. After her leisurely breakfast, Aderes decided to head outside and see what all the fuss was about. She had only moved to Dallas a few months ago and this was a good excuse to keep exploring her newly adopted city. Madam Aderes carefully applied her make-up. Even though Aderes was a little neglectful with household chores, she was very particular with her appearance and took the extra effort to make herself presentable before going out in public. “You never know who you are going to meet,” she philosophized to herself. Putting on her beige trench coat, she wrapped a head scarf around her hair, then grabbed her purse before heading out. As she stepped onto the sidewalk, Madam Aderes noticed that most of the traffic and people were headed towards downtown, so she just followed the crowd.

It was nearing noon as the morning had quickly disappeared and Aderes discovered

many new shops and restaurants that she did not even knew existed. After several more blocks of walking and snooping in the odd store, she found that many of the shops were closed.

“Unusual for this time of day. If I knew that all the shops were going to close early today, I would have just stayed home,” she sulked to herself. The streams of people slowed and started to line up along the streets. Walking further down, Madam Aderes found a break in the crowd near a grassy park.

“Excuse me.” Aderes asked a lady standing next to her. “What’s all the fuss about? Is there a parade coming by?”

“Oh, it’s not a parade dearie. Haven’t you heard? It’s the Presidential Motorcade. The President will be driving by any moment,” the woman replied excitedly as she craned her neck down the street to get a glimpse of the motorcade.

With no idea of what a Presidential Motorcade was or even who the President was, Aderes again wished that she would have just stayed at home. But she found the cheering of the crowd a little exhilarating as well as the surrounding architecture. She reached into her purse and pulled out her camera. After receiving both a camera and movie camera from a boyfriend she once dated in Hollywood, Aderes had become somewhat of a photographic buff and always had a camera and movie camera stuffed in her purse or coat pocket to record the many places she had lived in. Even though Aderes watched her money closely, she made sure that she always carried extra film to satisfy her hobby.

Her panoramic photo shoot of Dealey Plaza was soon interrupted by the roar and clapping of the crowd. As the motorcade drew closer, Aderes placed her sunglasses on her head and quickly starting snapping photos. Thinking that she recognized the woman sitting in the rear seat

of the convertible, Aderes glanced up from the viewfinder to get a better look, but the lady suddenly turned her head and waved to the crowd on the other side of the street. The motorcade then slowed and turned down a short street. Aderes rushed across a short park to an area where only a few people were standing. She just had to get another glimpse of the woman sitting in the convertible. Aderes began clicking away as soon as the convertible rounded the corner, but her camera unexpectedly ran out of film. With no time to replace the film she quickly exchanged it with her movie camera. As the black Continental convertible got closer, Aderes started the camera rolling. The dark haired woman turned her head towards Madame Aderes. Looking up from the camera, their eyes met briefly. Aderes recognized the woman immediately. They had met several months previous. The woman in the convertible at first looked away, but returned eye contact a split second later, also acknowledging recognition. The returning stare of the lady was that of horror.

An ear splitting CRACKK..K...K suddenly filled the air, then reverberated off the nearby buildings like thunder echoing through a mountain valley. The President slumped forward and raised his arms. Two more shots rang out. Aderes instinctively looked towards the source of the sounds, camera still recording. The crowd's overjoyed cheers turned to silence, then to screams of horror and panic. People dropped to the ground all around her. The air exploded again as a fourth shot rang out. The President reeled backwards. Aderes had seen these images before. She stood steadfast. Her movie camera remained rolling, capturing every moment.

Chapter Three

Seven months earlier - Washington, D.C.

The night started off like most evenings at Martin's Tavern for Madam Aderes, a name she conceived years before, which she thought to be regal, impressive and a little mystical for her line of work. She had been working at the club for only a few months and already had a growing following. Her reputation as being a remarkably accurate fortune-teller spread quickly throughout the city. Phil the owner of Martin's Tavern relished the extra customers that Madam Aderes drew in. It didn't matter whether it was her readings or her good looks. At 46 years, Madame Aderes could still turn the heads of most men and as well as a few women. In her younger days, she was considered an absolute bombshell and was on the Hollywood scene dating a few of the movie stars of the day.

She was born Grace Slawka Sereda in 1917, in Probizna U.S.S.R.. With the political upheaval and tensions rising from Stalin's rise to power and fearing imprisonment or execution, her family fled and escaped to Canada. Grace was only six years old at the time. They first

settled in Drumheller, Alberta before moving to a farm near Lac Bellevue, Alberta a few years later. Grace lived a rough and meager childhood as her family endured the hardships of living off the land. Even though her father was stern and often a cruel son of a bitch, she managed to cope with his outbursts until she was about 15 years old when suddenly for some unknown reason he began to throw angry tantrums and beating the hell out of her on numerous occasions. Not able to take the abuse any longer, Grace left the farm at the age of 16 and moved to a nearby town where she was taken in by the family of the town's police constable. It was a little over a year later before Grace finally returned to the farm to briefly visit her mother. Leaving home for good, Grace wandered aimlessly living her life like a gypsy. After years of living throughout North America, Grace again settled into a new city, this time Washington, D.C..

Most of Aderes's appointments that evening had not shown up due to the rainy weather. Since she only had had a few walk-ins request a reading, she decided to pack up and head home. The distinct sound of flapping umbrellas shaking off water could be heard at the front entrance as several people entered the restaurant. Grace peeked around the corner of her booth to see three men in grey trench coats. Huddled between them stood an elegant looking lady wearing a stylish white coat with a matching pillbox hat. One of the men immediately summoned the owner. After a short discussion, Phil walked back towards Madam Aderes's booth.

“A woman who has just arrived is requesting a reading,” Phil announced with zeal.

“I was just about to leave Phil. It's been a long day and Im exhausted. Just tell her that I've already gone home.”

“Sorry, but I already told her that you were still available and I've ordered her one of your special pots of tea. Besides, I think that you may want to stay and do her reading. She is a very

prominent lady, and may even leave a great tip.” Phil winked as he rubbed his thumb and first two fingers together.

“Fine,” Grace agreed. She knew that she could use the extra cash.

“Send her over in a few minutes. I have to set out my cards again.”

“Great!” Phil replied elated, then clapped his hands and skipped up before spinning around quickly to return to inform the client.

Grace was still unpacking the last few items she had already placed in her bag when she heard the distinctive sound of high heels walking on a tiled floor. She glanced down the aisle. Two of the men had positioned themselves like guards at the front door. The third was following the woman down the aisle. As the woman came around the corner of the booth, she stopped suddenly and gasped. Seated behind an oval table was a woman wearing a long black dress with a round neckline. Draped around her neck were numerous gold, silver and pearl necklaces, her wrists covered with several ornate gemstone bracelets. Her fingernails were painted a brilliant red that matched her lipstick. A black shawl decorated with colorful flowers hung over her shoulders and a black babushka adorned her head. Two large candles were burning brightly at each end of the table, with decks of cards centered between them. Light from the flickering candles cast eerie shadows across Grace’s face and the semicircular booth. The scene looked like something right out of a Hollywood movie.

“Are you Madam Aderes?” asked the woman with a little hesitation.

“Good evening.....Yes I am,” Grace replied in a deep mysterious voice, as she waived her arm across the table motioning for the woman to have a seat. Her mysterious voice was all part of an act to heighten the atmosphere of the readings.

“My name is Mrs. Ke.....”

“No names please,” interrupted Grace immediately.

“Oh. Very well then,” the woman replied a little taken back.

The manager himself delivered the pot of tea and also brought along a camera.

“Would you mind if I get a photo of you with Madam Aderes?” Phil asked politely.

The wall behind Grace was lined with photographs of famous people which included several Hollywood Stars from the 1940’s, politicians and a couple members from the Mafia. Phil wanted to capitalize on adding a photo of Madam Aderes with her present client, as it would most likely bring in some new clientele. Grace had no idea who the woman was and why Phil was making such a fuss over her, but cheerfully smiled to be accommodating.

After the photo was taken, Grace poured her client a cup of tea.

“This will be too hot to drink right now, so while it’s cooling I’d like to start by reading your palms,” Grace said reaching out with her open hands.

The woman placed her hands gently into Grace’s.

“I see that you are a very kind, polite and gracious woman.” Grace always started her readings with a complement to make her clients feel a little more at ease and good about themselves. She also had a clever way of asking generic questions from her clients. Without thinking, the client would divulge personal information which Grace would use later on in the reading. Although some saw this as a cheap parlor trick, Grace truly did have an intuitive gift as a fortune teller and would only use this information if she could not get an energetic reading from the individual.

“You have a long life line and a very interesting life ahead of you.”

Another line usually used by Grace. Everyone likes to hear that they will have a long and

interesting life. The woman smiled and reached for her cup of tea.

“Oh!” Grace blurted out. “Quickly! Scoop up the bubbles that are floating in your tea with your spoon and drink them. It is a very good sign. It means that you will be coming into money.”

The woman obliged and carefully scooped the bubbles floating in the center of the tea cup. Not missing a single bubble, the woman politely sipped them from the spoon. She continued to sip her tea as she listened intensely with the reading of her palms. Grace drew out her readings until she knew that her client was nearly finished drinking their tea.

“Have you finished your tea?” asked Grace.

“Almost.”

“Very well then.....let’s see what your tea leaves foretell. Please leave just a little of the tea mixed with the tea grounds, and place your saucer upside down over your cup, like this.” Grace would always demonstrate with her own cup to any new clients.

“That’s perfect. Now, hold the saucer while you turn the cup over.” Again the woman followed Grace’s lead. “Take your left hand and turn the cup three times counter clockwise.” The woman at first turned the cup clockwise but quickly realized her mistake and reversed direction before Madame Aderes could correct her.

“I hope your little miscue will not affect your future. So, let’s see what good fortune awaits you, shall we?” Grace announced in an annoying and skeptical tone. Grace always took her readings quite seriously and would not stray from any inconsistencies. But it was late and she was tired. Grace would let this little slip up go by.

Grace picked up and slowly rotated the cup. She studied it intensely.

“My.....what a fascinating life you have led.” Grace announced with a pause. Grace had a

habit of pausing and stretching out her sentences, as she thought it to be more dramatic.

“Lots of money keeps showing up. And, I see much travel.” Grace continued to slowly spin the cup. Suddenly Madam Aderes’s face looked saddened and a little more ominous. “There are some darker days ahead. Much darker. Let me see what else there is.”

“No, no. Please tell what you just saw,” the woman asked, sounding very concerned as she leaned over trying to get a glimpse inside the cup. “That’s why I’m here. I want to know everything whether it’s good or bad.”

“Very well,” Grace replied. “I see the passing of someone close to you. Maybe a grandparent, uncle, aunt or friend.” This was a fairly safe prediction, as everyone will have a relative or acquaintance pass away at some point in their lifetime.

Turning the cup for the last time, Grace’s face grew pale. Noticing the expression on Madam Adere’s face the woman became very concerned and asked, “What is it?”

“Nothing of interest.”

“Please! Tell me what you see,” begged the woman.

Grace did not want to scare the woman with the true devastation she perceived. Looking up from the cup, Grace smiled slightly and said, “Nothing dearie. I just misinterpreted the leaves. The leaves in this section seemed to all clumped together, meaning there might be a few unsettling days ahead. Maybe it’s just a storm coming in later this week.”

Little did Grace know that what she truly read in the leaves would have national ramifications in the not too distant future. The leaves never lied.

“I also see more travel.....and an older, very wealthy gentleman, but that is all I see. Let us move on, shall we?”

“Yes, by all means,” the woman agreed.”

As Grace began to shuffle her deck of Tarot cards, there was a light tap on the woman’s shoulder from the gentleman that was standing over the proceedings.

“We really should be going Mrs. Ken.....”

“No names please!” Grace quickly reminded her client, as she raised her hand towards the man.

“Yes, yes. I’ll be ready to go shortly,” the woman replied to her chaperone, clearly not ready to leave until her reading was finished. “Sorry for the interruption Madam Aderes.” Grace sighed deeply, letting her client politely know that she was a little annoyed with the interruption.

Starting with the Minor Tarot Cards, Grace placed the deck in front of the woman and asked her to cut the cards into three separate decks. Selecting the middle pile, Grace started turning over the cards. The number three card was the first card turned.

“I see heartache ahead of you,” Grace stated, in her deep mysterious voice. She immediately turned over the next card revealing a seven, then shrewdly added, “As well as deceit and trickery.”

The woman started to squirm as the cards were not off to a great start. Flipping the next card revealed a Queen.

“Awe.....this reveals you are motherly, intelligent and generous, and travel again appears,” Grace said with more enthusiasm. The next card flipped was the number six.

“It seems that you will definitely be doing a lot of travel in the upcoming year,” Grace announced in a more optimistic tone, as the cards seemed to be turning more positive.

There was another tap on the woman’s shoulder.

“Sorry, but we really must go,” the man said insistently.

"We will only be a few more moments my young man," Grace said as she shoed the man away with her waving hand.

"May I finish your reading?" Grace asked the woman looking directly into her eyes.

"Yes. By all means. Go ahead." The woman nodded and also motioned with her sweeping hand for the man to leave.

Reaching across the table, Grace picked up another deck of cards and again shuffled them. After having the woman cut the cards only once, she arranged them face down on the table. Waving her hands over the cards, Grace paused and placed her hand down on a card then flipped it over.

"The Lovers - love, beauty, sex....," Grace said coyly as she smiled while raising her eyebrows.

"I see that there is a special person in your life. Maybe a husband.....or lover?"

"Yes, a husband," the woman replied humbly as she blushed a little.

Grace smiled. With a quick wave of her hands, she selected another card. Nothing was said at first.

"Oh. Does that mean I mean I might be living in a great palace?" the woman asked, breaking the silence. The card depicted a castle tower.

"No," Grace replied pausing for a moment. "It actually means that you or someone you know, may have to overcome some adversity or a catastrophic event."

The woman leaned over the table a little and said curtly, "Madam Aderes. Most of the cards you keep drawing cards seem to be rather gloomy and fatalistic. Maybe I'll have better luck."

Stretching over, she quickly grabbed a card. Before Grace could say a word the woman sent the card twirling through the air with a flip of her wrist. Time seemed to almost stand still as Grace

watched the card twirl and float in slow motion like a falling leaf. Sneaking a peek as she arranged the cards on the table, Grace already knew what the card was. It landed on the table with the sound of thunder rumbling through a mountain valley. It was the Death Card.

Not a word was spoken for several moments. Grace could see that the woman's heart was pounding through her throat. It was obvious that the woman was thinking the worst.

“I'm sorry, but I need to leave immediately.”

With her hands shaking the woman reached into her purse, pulled out several bills and placed them on the table. Grace immediately reached over and clasped the woman's hand. Blurred images of the woman immediately flashed in a dizzying array of scenes before Grace's eyes - An open air car traveling down a street. People waving. Several loud bangs. A crowd in chaos. A man next to her appears injured. The woman's hands and dress are covered in blood. The images suddenly stopped as the woman pulled her hand away. Lost for words, Grace sat and stared across the table. Without saying another word, the woman got up and headed towards the door. “Please wait!” Grace blurted out and started to follow. “This card is not a card meaning death but of transformation. Please let me expla.....”

But the woman quickly put her arm out backwards, turned her head slightly and nodding back and forth. The woman entered the limo and gave a final glance back into the restaurant with tears streaming down her cheeks.

Grace had never had a reading go so terribly wrong. Unfortunately, the cards were not kind tonight. With a heavy heart she packed up her things for the second time.

Knowing who the woman was, Phil was more than a little perturbed. “She sure looked upset. What the hell kind of reading did you give Grace?”

“The cards just weren’t going my way tonight,” Grace replied meekly.

“Well, don’t let it happen again. It’s not good for business.” Phil began pacing back and forth and was getting hotter under the collar every second. “Get the hell out of here and take the next couple of days off before I fire you on the spot!”

Even though Grace wasn’t under his employment, she was using his establishment to earn her income. She wanted to rebuff, but kept her comments to herself. She needed a place to work out of.

“Yes sir.”

By morning the light rain had turned into a downpour. Still depressed about last night’s events, Grace just wrapped the blanket around herself and stayed in bed. She moped around the apartment for another three days before coming out of her self induced exile. She was not used to having an unhappy client. On the fourth morning Grace found herself wandering the streets in a daze and the cool morning air soon cleared her thoughts. Walking by the restaurant where she worked, Grace poked her head in to inform them that she would no longer be doing readings at the restaurant. She had made up her mind that it was time for her to once again move on. This city would always remind her of that very upsetting reading. Grace walked back to her booth, then removed all the photographs off the wall and packed them along with all her other belongings into a cardboard box that she had scrounged from the kitchen.

Grace returned to her apartment with a bit more jump to her step, even though she was burdened by the weight of a heavy box. She had decided that she would move back in with one of her sisters for a while to regroup before looking for work once again. Entering her apartment, Grace removed her head scarf and coat and placed them on a nearby chair. Never wanting a

recurrence of the unpleasant events from three nights previous, Grace pulled out her decks of Tarot cards and removed all the cards that might be seen as being negative. This would insure only positive and happy readings to all her future clients. She then pulled out the folded shipping boxes stored in her closet and began the daunting task of packing. It took Grace three days to sell what large pieces of furniture she had before she was able to leave.

A knock at the door late in the afternoon indicated that her taxi had arrived. Greyhound had already picked up her boxes earlier in the morning. The taxi had arrived early, so Grace had the driver take her for a final tour of the city. She enjoyed the beautiful blooms of the city's numerous cherry trees as the taxi drove by the White House, Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. Grace was saddened that she was leaving such a beautiful city but at the same time looked forward to the thought of a fresh new beginning.

Arriving at the bus station, Grace paid the cabbie, trudged her suitcase into the depot, and then stood patiently in line.

“Next!” asked the woman at the service desk in monotone voice, as she gazed at her watch.

“Where to miss?”

“I'd like a one-way ticket to Edmonton,” replied Grace.

The agent looked up somewhat bewildered.

Chapter Four

Calgary, Alberta, Canada - Present Day

“Dad. Hey.....DAD! There’s someone at the door,” Alix bellowed from down the hallway. There was no reply, so she called out loudly again. Still no answer. Footsteps marched loudly down the hallway towards the family room. A fire was smoldering in the fireplace which needed to be stoked with another log when Alix entered the room.

“Dad. Haven’t you heard me calling?”

Erik Black was an imposing figure standing six feet tall with a well toned physique. With regular workouts in the gym and martial arts classes, he looked ten years younger than his age of 55 showed. Most people who met him thought he worked for the military or police. Some even remarked that he would make a great James Bond. A visual artist for over 35 years, Erik had taken leave from his painting to focus his time on writing a novel about his aunt’s life and

exploits as a fortune teller. With a mild mannered personality, his only pet peeves were incompetence and being interrupted when concentrating on his creative pursuits. Erik had been deep in thought working on his novel when his daughter’s untimely voice punctuated the air. He was not happy. Erik rubbed his fingers across his black greying thinning hair.

“What is it?” Erik barked in frustration.

“Get your hearing checked will you. There’s someone at the door,” his daughter Alix repeated loudly annoyed with her dad’s half conscious state.

After dispatching a fly by the night tradesman, Erik returned to the family room only to find Alix slouched in an armchair reading his notes.

“What the heck are you working on?” asked Alix.

“I’m trying to finish the novel about aunt Grace.”

“Oh, don’t you mean your Crazy Old Aunt Grace?” scoffed Mackenzie, Erik’s second daughter. She had walked into the room immediately after her father then rudely grabbed the notebook out of Alix’s hands.

Everyone in the family thought that Grace was a little loony with her wild stories of her seemingly implausible adventures. As a child, Erik always listened with excitement as his mother told him about her sister traveling across North America as a fortune-teller, dating Hollywood Stars and her association with members of the Mafia, which left him awestruck. But what always stuck in the back of his mind, was the story of his aunt being present at the JFK assassination and her filing a report with the police stating that she knew who was behind the shooting. After the passing of his aunt when Erik was in his mid forties, he was intrigued to say the least when he heard that a couple of boxes shipped from his aunt had mysteriously arrived on his mother’s

doorstep. Knowing Erik’s interest in his aunt’s past and with little interest in the boxes herself, Erik’s mother gave the two boxes to him. It was only after he explored the contents thoroughly did Erik find his aunt’s life to be even more compelling than he had ever imagined, which inspired him to document her adventures.

“Yes, my Crazy Old Aunt Grace,” Erik replied trying to mimic his daughter. “But, I don’t think that she was really all that crazy. She did have some issues and was a little more eccentric than most people, but.....”

“Come on Dad! All those famous Hollywood stars that she claimed to have known and dated.....and being at the JFK assassination. Puleeze, give me a break,” jeered Alix.

“Yeah dad, who are you trying to kid?” Mackenzie chimed in. “She was nuttier than a loon.”

Erik was getting a little annoyed with both of his daughters, but stayed calm and defended his position.

“You both may think so, but there seems to be some interesting material I found in one of her boxes that supports her stories. There were several old black and white photographs of her with some old Hollywood Stars, plus, she had a diary with the phone numbers and addresses of the head directors of the CIA, the FBI, CSIS and the Dallas Chief of Police. There’s also an old home movie film that she took of the Kennedy’s assassination which I only had a brief chance to view. All this information was in just one of the seven boxes that were originally shipped to my mom. She only received two of them and is trying to hunt down the other five missing boxes. I can only imagine what other great items might be in them.” Erik enjoyed collecting historical items was getting excited even with the thought of what might be in the five missing boxes.

“I still think that she was just a crazy old lady with a very vivid imagination,” Mackenzie

reiterated. "Didn't you also tell us that she knew someone from the mob? What was his name?

A Bug something?"

"Yes, Bugsy Siegel," informed Erik.

"Plus, didn't I overhear you telling mom that Grace's side of the family was related to a Russian King?" Alix added. Both girls started to snicker and giggle.

"That's fine girls. You go ahead and laugh. But, what if her stories are even partially true?"

"Well, like you've always told us, the proof is in the pudding," chuckled Mackenzie. "Before you waste any more of your time writing that novel, don't you think that maybe it would be a good idea to do some research about your aunt's stories and separate what's fact and what could just be a delusional fantasy?"

Erik knew that his daughter was absolutely right, but didn't want to admit it.

"Aren't you and mom supposed to be heading to the Bahamas in about a month?" asked Alix, changing the subject out of the blue. Erik had no idea where his daughter was going with this.

"Yes, but what has that got to do with our vacation?"

"Everything, just let me finish. If memory serves me correctly, you have a flight connection in Houston. So, why don't you and mom take a side trip to Dallas for a couple of days? You can snoop around the city archives, plus see if any of the restaurants that your aunt Grace claimed to have worked at are still around. You might even want to drop by the police station to see if she really did file a report. While you're doing your research, mom could just go shopping. You know how she loves to shop."

"I'll give it some thought."

Alix's suggestion was sound and logical, but Erik also knew that he would need to get his wife's

approval before making any flight changes. His wife was not pleased with the amount of time Erik was spending writing about his aunt.

The next morning after a restless sleep, Erik brought up the subject of the upcoming vacation to the Bahamas while having breakfast with his wife Mary.

“Listen, would you mind if we took a little side trip over to Dallas for a day or two on our way down to the Bahamas?”

“What’s in Dallas that’s so important?”

“I would like to do a little research on that book I’m writ.....”

“WHAT!” interrupted Mary’s booming reply.

Erik’s wife of twenty-five years was usually very understanding, but his writing had turned from a hobby into a full time obsession. It didn’t bode well with Mary.

“Are you still wasting your time on that stupid book? If you think for one minute I’m going to sit in a hotel room while you traipse around Dallas looking for long lost information about your aunt....you’re nuts!” Mary rattled on as her voice got increasingly louder. “If you want to waste your time, go ahead. But, I will NOT be joining you.”

“You could go shopping?”

“Sorry, no desire. I just bloody well want to get to the Bahamas. No detours.”

For his wife not be in any mood to go shopping, he knew she was definitely pissed off at him.

Erik fully understood his wife’s frustration. She worked long hard hours and looked forward to just laying back and enjoying the warm ocean breezes, crystal clear blue-green water and deserted white beaches in the Bahamas every year. It was a time that they both would unwind from the stresses of city life and rekindle their relationship. They were also very lucky that

Mary’s sister owned a property on the island of Abaco, making it a very affordable yet luxurious vacation.

Erik had a few more bites of toast and sat quietly for a spell, letting Mary cool down a bit. He knew that the side trip would be maybe one of the only opportunities he would have to see if his aunt’s material was authentic so he pushed the boundaries ever so slightly.

“Then how about we just rendezvous in Fort Lauderdale?”

There was a long pause as she continued to read the Saturday morning paper.

“Fine,” Mary said a little calmer. “Just rebook the flights and let me know the time and place where we’ll meet up.”

“Thanks. I’ll make the arrangements right after breakfast.”

Little did Erik know at the time that by adding his little side trip to Dallas would have life altering affects.

A short time later Mary called out as she headed out the door, “My tee off time is in about an hour, so I’ll see you at dinner. Remember that the Campbells are coming over for dinner and a couple rounds of cards. What did you decide to cook?”

“Oh, ah.....how does rack of lamb sound?”

“Great. They’ll be here around 6:00.” Mary said, her voice trailing off as the screen door slowly closed behind her.

Erik had completely forgotten that they had invited company over for dinner, but it was no big deal. Since the arrival of their first child, they threw social conventions out the window and decided that roll reversal would best suit their family and financial situation. Mary went back to work shortly after giving birth to each child. Erik stayed at home and took care of the kids, did

the cooking and still brought in extra income by painting pictures and selling them through art galleries. It was a win win situation for everybody.

The morning after entertaining the Campbells came way too quickly. Erik's head was pounding from drinking way too much red wine while playing Canasta well into the night. Mary and Erik rarely tied one on but every once in a while, usually when they got together for dinner and cards with close friends, they would end up letting loose a bit. This time, more than a bit! Erik took a walk down to the local coffee shop and grabbed a Double Double (2 sugars & 2 creams) to help clear out the cobwebs. The rest of the day was a write off. Both of them just sat mindlessly in front of the TV watching movies while nursing their headaches. They kept reminding themselves that it would be a long time before they would indulge that much again.

Monday morning rolled around and Erik's headache had disappeared, but a new one was about to begin. An early March winter storm had delivered about a foot of snow during the night, and it was still snowing. This was a very typical occurrence for Calgary. The snow was falling almost as fast as Erik could shovel it. After an hour, it looked like Erik had shoveled enough snow from his four car driveway to fill a dump truck. The snow continued to fall and Erik leaned on the shovel for a brief break. Even at the age of 50, a snowfall still fascinated Erik. He couldn't help but admire the beauty of snow flakes as they twirled and floated to the ground and found something very refreshing when a late winter snowstorm blanketed the ground. The usual stagnant city air suddenly felt clean and crisp. There was a sense of renewal.

Erik looked down the street and noticed that a few of the neighborhood kids had made a snowman, adorned with a hat & scarf, buttons for eyes and a carrot for the nose. They had already started to make a mate to keep the first company. A few children took a break from

rolling the large white balls and fell backwards into the ever deepening snow, waving their arms and legs sideways making snow angels. One child standing off to the side looked to the heavens, mouth open, trying to catch every snowflake he could before it hit the ground. Erik found himself looking up towards the specked masses of snowflakes, dancing and fluttering downwards. Opening his mouth, Erik also began to snatch as many snowflakes as he could just as he did when he was a child, without a worry in the world. Erik glanced around to see if anyone has spotted him indulging in this childhood activity. Movement in a neighbors window across the street caught his eye. There standing and holding a large coffee cup was Mrs. Hunter, a disgruntled retiree. The Gladys Kravitz of the neighborhood. Erik waved meekly. Her stern gaze cracked a little smile. Erik smiled back and shrugged his shoulders. Out of the blue, Mrs. Hunter began grinning ear to ear and then giggled as she raised her cup, gesturing a toast. Erik looked skyward again and caught a few more flakes to relive that wonderful childhood memory.

The sound of a snowplow racing down the street breaks Erik’s upward gaze and returning him to reality. Luckily, Mary had departed for work a half hour earlier or she would have been stuck at home for the better part of the morning as a wall of snow now covered his freshly shoveled driveway. Cursing at the driver Erik renewed the task of clearing a new mountain of snow. His headache had returned.

It was a little past noon by the time Erik cleared the snow from the driveway and sidewalks. He was grateful that the snow had stopped falling. Heading inside, Erik made a hot pot of tea and warmed up some homemade turkey soup, then settled into the family room where the fireplace was blazing. It wasn’t long before rays of sunlight suddenly came beaming through the partially opened shutters. Lifting the shutters Erik could see that the clouds had cleared,

replaced by a brilliant blue sky. The sun reflecting off the snow was blinding. Water soon started dripping off the roof. Glancing at the outside thermometer, Erik noticed that the temperature had risen from minus 10 Celsius to plus 15 within an hour. A warm Chinook wind known as a snow eater had obviously followed the brief storm. The streets soon turned into slush pools with cascading streams of water flowing towards the storm drains. Pouring another cup of tea Erik picked up his notebook and returned to writing about his aunt.

Chapter Five

Washington, D.C., April 24, 1963

"A ticket to where?" the Greyhound agent asked from behind the ticket counter.

"Edmonton, Alberta," Grace answered.

Grace had three sisters. Two lived in the Toronto area and Elsie the youngest, lived in the city of Edmonton which was located just over 100 miles from the old homestead where the sisters were raised. Noticing that the agent was a little puzzled, Grace added, "CANADA. I believe that there should be a bus leaving within the hour. I called earlier."

"Thank you," the ticket agent explained, a little embarrassed. "It will just be a moment. Yes, here we go. It leaves out of Gate 7 at 4:30 PM, with one transfer in New York, another one in Toronto, Ontario, and the last transfer in Winnipeg, Manitoba. That will be \$ 97.50."

"That's fine." Grace replied as she dug around her purse for her wallet.

"Do you have any luggage?"

"Just the one suitcase here, plus I had several boxes that were picked up from my apartment by

one of your men earlier today. They should be here somewhere.” Grace replied as she casually glanced around the station.

“Here you go,” the agent said as she slapped a shipping sticker to the suitcase. “Your other boxes will arrive under a separate shipment, so you’ll have to check in with an agent when you arrive at your destination. Remember, your bus leaves at 4:30, Gate 7,” the agent called out as Grace had already started walking away.

The grumbling coming from Grace’s stomach told her that she needed to stop at the cafe and grab something to eat. After a quick meal, Grace boarded the bus and with a deep sigh, settled herself in for the long arduous journey that laid ahead of her. Before long the late afternoon had turned into night as the pavement continued to roll beneath the bus. The darkness had blurred out the landscape so Grace tried to doze off, but the lights of the next town or city continually interrupted her from any sleep. From Washington the bus traveled to Baltimore, Philadelphia and onto New York, where she made the first transfer late into the night. Following a two hour lay over, it was off to Buffalo, then on to the US/Canada border. The sun was just starting to rise when the bus reached the outskirts of Toronto.

Grace started to recognize several city features, as she had lived and visited Toronto on numerous occasions. Her longest stay was back in 1944 when she was motivated to contribute to the war effort and worked at an aircraft manufacturing plant, assembling Mosquitos and Lancaster Bombers. While the bus rolled through the city, Grace pondered the idea of maybe just staying here again instead of making the extra long trip to Edmonton. Having sisters already living here would make it an easy transition. Grace called them soon after she departed the bus, but there was no answer from either of them. Taking a walk outside Union Station to stretch her

legs, she found the air filled with the familiar smell of automobile exhaust, distilleries and the moist air off Lake Ontario. All mixing together they created a very unique odor. Grace had found that every city she traveled to, and there had been plenty, had their own very distinct aroma. She could almost identify a city by the smell of it alone.

The bus taking Grace on the next leg of her journey wasn't scheduled to leave for a couple of hours and so she continued trying to reach one of her sisters, but to no avail. An announcement squeaked over the intercom. “Gate 12 is now loading for passengers to Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton. The bus is on time and scheduled to leave at 10:30am.” Since she couldn't get a hold of either of her sisters, plus knowing that most of her belongings were already en route to Edmonton, Grace grabbed her suitcase and headed to Gate 12. Who knows what direction her life may have taken had she managed to contact one of her sisters in Toronto.

Although the rest of the journey was uneventful, Grace did manage to pick up a little extra cash along the way by reading tea leaves for several of the passengers during some of the lunch and dinner breaks. She even made enough money to nearly cover the cost of her ticket. Finally, after several long exhausting days of travel, the skyline of Edmonton could be seen on the horizon. All Grace wanted to do was to find a comfortable bed and sleep the day away. As she stepped off the bus and entered the station, Grace scanned the station hoping to see the familiar face of her sister, but to no avail. It was obvious that her sister had not received Grace's shipping crates with the attached letter. Warily, Grace made her way to the street and hailed a cab.

A faint whiff of Lipton chicken noodle soup crossed Grace's nose as she stood at the front door of her sister's house. With her clenched hand already raised, Grace had second thoughts

about knocking. Both Grace and her sister Elsie had had their differences and confrontations over the years, making their relationship strenuous to say the least. Not only was her relationship with Elsie tense, it was also extremely strained because of Elsie’s husband, Sid. From the moment Elsie started dating Sid, there was just something about him that Grace just did not like.

Elsie was washing dishes while watching her two young boys play in the backyard through the kitchen window when she heard a knock at the front door. Opening the door, Elsie was surprised, but not surprised to see Grace standing there with suitcase in tow. It was common practice for Grace to just show up at someone’s place without any warning.

“Grace,” Elsie exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

“Didn’t you get my shipment of boxes with the attached letter saying that I would be arriving today?”

“No.”

“Well, it should have been delivered by now. They were sent before I left Washington. Are you going to invite me in...or what?” Grace asked brashly.

“Yes, come in, come in. Have a seat while I check on the kids. Can I get you a cup of tea or coffee? There’s a little bit of soup that the boys didn’t finish, if you’d like.”

“No thanks. Just a cup of tea would be great. It’s been a very tiring trip.”

“What brings you back to Edmonton?” Elsie called out as she walked into the kitchen.

“Ohhh....” Grace replied, drawing out her words. “I needed a change of scenery and thought it would be nice to see you and the kids again.”

“How long are you planning to stay this time?” asked Elsie as she returned to the living room.

“Oh, I don’t know.....but I was kind of thinking of maybe moving back to Edmonton for a

spell and find a place to work,” Grace replied as she got up and meandered towards the front window.

Although she knew the answer to her next question, Elsie asked it anyways. “And, where are you staying?”

“I was actually hoping that I could stay with you for a while. Just until I find work and a place to live. The Silk Hat downtown will probably let me conduct my readings out of one of the back booths again. Once everyone knows I’m back in town, people will flock down to have their fortunes read,” Grace bragged, like a peacock strutting its feathers.

Even though Grace was a humble person, she still wanted to let her relatives know that she was successful. She would always boast to her sisters about all the places she had traveled to, what famous person she had done a reading for and all the adventures she had experienced. She was a walking encyclopedia of the who’s who, plus places to see.

“I don’t think staying here is such a great idea Grace. Remember the last time you stayed? We all got into a huge argument and you left in a big huff,” Elsie spouted, then she walked into the kitchen to grab the whistling kettle. Pouring the boiling water into the teapot Elsie checked on the kids again before retuning to the living room with the teapot and mugs in hand.

“Elsie. Please. Just for a short time. I promise not to make any trouble for the two of you this time, and besides....I really would like to spend time visiting with the boys again,” Grace pleaded in a phony melodramatic tone. Grace was especially fond of Elsie’s children, Erik aged 5 and Lorne aged 3, who were more than a handful for Elsie to deal with. Whenever Grace was in town for a visit, she always liked to spoil them by taking them for an ice cream cone, go to a movie or take them shopping to buy them a new toy. Even when talking to Elsie on the phone, Grace

would always be more concerned about her nephews, than her own sister. It was years later before Elsie fully understood why there was such an unusual attraction and bond to her boys.

"Look. I really don't think it's a good idea. Sid will not be happy, and you know that the two of you hate each other!"

"It'll only be for a couple of days, maybe a week at the most," Grace begged again.

"Fine. A week tops!" Elsie agreed against her better judgment. "Sid is working night and day, so you might not see much of him anyway."

Sid owned a construction company and was busy working twelve to fifteen hours a day building houses. There was an oil boom in Alberta and people were flocking to the area looking to make their fortune.

"Put your things in the guest room."

"Thank you. I really appreciate it," Grace replied with a forced smile, then parted the living room drapes and glanced down the street.

"Are you checking to see if the Mafia are still following you?" Elsie prodded.

Ever since Grace had traveled to Hollywood several years ago, met Bugsy Siegel and dated several of the leading actors of the time, she always thought that people wearing black suits and driving black automobiles were following and watching her every move.

"Oh.....no, no. I was...ah...just checking to see where the boys were. I'd like to say hello to them," Grace replied hesitantly. She was caught off guard with Elsie's comment.

"Right," Elsie said skeptically. "They're playing in the backyard."

"Thanks. I'll have a quick visit with the boys, and then have a little nap," Grace said yawning

and stretching her arms over her shoulders. “ I’m a little exhausted from the long bus ride.”

“Here we go again. Just eat and sleep without lifting a finger, just like all your other visits!” Elsie thought to herself.

Sure enough, Grace woke up right before dinner, ate politely while talking briefly to the kids, and then promptly retired to her room again without lending a hand to clean up or wash the dishes. Luckily, Sid was still working late. All hell broke loose when Sid returned from work that evening around nine o’clock. Elsie told Sid during his late night dinner that Grace had returned to town and would be staying with them until she got settled. Storming out of the house, Sid decided to go back to one of the houses he was building to let off a little steam by pounding some more nails. Sid didn’t return home until just before 1a.m., so he either had calmed down, or simply ran out of nails. The next morning Elsie reminded Sid that Grace was still family, and convinced him that he would have to put up with her for the short time she would be staying, even if he didn’t like it. Without another word, Sid grabbed his lunchbox and headed out the door, slamming it behind him.

The days soon became a week, followed by another week and yet another. The Silk Hat restaurant did provide Grace with a booth which gave her a source of income, but finding an apartment proved to be illusive. Grace gave excuse after excuse for not finding a place to live. Not close enough to work. Too far from the grocery store. Too run down or the rent was too high. Elsie finally came to the conclusion that Grace just enjoyed being catered to. The only good thing about the situation was that all of Sid’s construction projects were ahead of schedule, as he purposely stayed late at work every day just to stay away from Grace. After putting up with Grace’s excuses and laziness for just over a month, Elsie finally had enough and confronted her

at dinner that night.

“I’m sorry Grace, but Sid and I have decided that you need to find a place by the end of the week, or move in with someone else.”

“What?” Grace exclaimed. “You’re going to kick out your own sister? What have I done?”

“Well, actually it’s what you haven’t done,” Elsie replied firmly. “You have never helped with cooking a dinner once, paid for any groceries or helped with any of the other chores that need doing around the house. It’s also difficult sharing one bathroom between all of us. The only thing it appears you do, is eat, sleep and go to work.”

“How about the boys?” Grace snapped back. “I take care of them when you need to run errands.”

“Yes, I must admit that you do, but you’re also scaring them half to death, telling them wild stories about your past and saying that the Mafia is always following you.....”

“Well, they are. Even if you don’t believe me.” Grace interrupted snootily.

“You’re crazy. No one is after you Grace. It’s all in your mind,” Elsie said raising her voice a little while tapping a finger against her temple. “I think you need some professional help.”

“What do you mean?”

“Go see a shrink!” Elsie blurted out.

“Well.....if that’s how you feel,” Grace replied dejectedly. She rose from her chair and went straight to her bedroom, closing the door firmly behind her. Elsie felt terrible afterwards knowing that she probably did hurt Grace’s feelings. Tough love is never easy.

Knocking lightly on Grace’s door a short time later, Elsie said, “Listen Grace. I’ll get a neighbor to watch the boys tomorrow and the two of us will look for an apartment, OK?”

But there was no reply, so Elsie returned to finishing the daily chores and then read a book

until Sid arrived home late into the night. Explaining her confrontation with Grace, Sid completely agreed with Elsie’s decision and even offered to take a half day off work to help search for a suitable place for Grace to live.

It was late into the night when Grace seemingly had been awakened by the sound of someone turning the squeaky knob of her bedroom door. Leaning up on her elbows, Grace peered through the darkness towards the door but could hardly make anything out. She was still in a sleepy daze. Just as she was reaching to turn on her bedside lamp, two masked figures came bursting into the room and immediately grabbed her.

“What’s going on?” Grace blurted out. Her captors grip instantly became firmer.

“Stop. Please stop! Who are you people?”

As one of the captors kept Grace pinned to the mattress, she caught a glimpse of the second person holding something in their hand. With the light of the full moon shining through the window it revealed the object. A syringe. Horrified, Grace yelled out, “STOP. Somebody help!” Suddenly Grace could see the syringe flash through the air, then felt excruciating pain as the needle penetrated deep into her arm and the cool liquid being forced into her veins.

“Why are you doing this to me? Who are you.....peo..pl.....,” Grace slurred out the words, as her eye lids began to sag. Darkness soon followed.

Early the next morning Grace woke up startled but relieved that she was still alive and in her own bedroom.

“Why would anyone want to hurt me?” she thought to herself. “And who? The Mafia? No. There was no way that they would have been able to track me down. I am too tricky and smart for that. I’m on the move too many times for them to ever find me.”

Pausing and trying to recall the assault from last night, all she could remember was that there was one larger person along with a smaller person. Both of them were wearing black masks, and the smaller person wasn't very strong.....possibly a woman. But who.....just who, would do such a terrible thing to me?"

Slowly Grace rose from her bed then moved to the door and cracked it open slightly. Seeing that the coast was clear, she opened the door cautiously and quietly crossed the hallway to the bathroom. Standing at the sink and splashing her face with water, it suddenly dawned on her, "Did those culprits drug Sid and Elsie too? I better check on them."

Grace was quickly drying her face when something in the mirror caught her eye. Behind her, draped over the shower rod, were two black nylon stockings. The image of the masked assailants flashed into Grace's mind.

"My god. Was it Sid and Elsie? No, not my own sister! But, she did say that she wanted to get rid of me. And Sid absolutely hates me," Grace said thinking out loud to herself again. "I've got to get out of here!"

Quietly she returned to her room and got dressed. She quickly packed her suitcase then silently tiptoed down the hallway. Just as she passed across the kitchen doorway, to her horror she saw Sid and Elsie having breakfast.

"I see that you already have your bags packed. About time you're leaving!" Sid snapped.

"Good morning Grace," Elsie said. "Don't mind him. You should grab some breakfast before we head out to look for a place for you to live."

"No thank you," Grace replied sternly. "I'll be just on my way."

"But you haven't even found a place to rent yet."

“Don’t worry. Any place will be better than here. Good bye!” Grace spouted angrily, then turned to walk away.

“Well, at least comb your hair. You look like hell,” remarked Elsie.

“Must have been all that tossing and turning you did last night. Did you have a nightmare about having to do some chores around the house or something?” taunted Sid.

Grace turned back to face Sid and Elsie.

“It was no nightmare. It was the two of you, trying to get rid of me. Storming into my room in the middle of the night, wearing masks.....and injecting me with some kind of drug,” Grace spewed in anger. “You two can’t fool me. Do you think I am stupid?”

Sitting bewildered and dumbfounded for several seconds, Elsie finally responded, “What in the hell are you talking about? You’re crazy. Why in the world would you ever think that we would want to drug you?”

“Because you want to get rid of me. I over heard the two of you talking a few nights ago, and you both said you want me out of your life!”

“That’s not true Grace. We just want you to find your own place to live.”

“Right!” Grace replied skeptically. “I know it was the two of you who drugged me. Your masks are hanging in the bathroom.”

“Masks?” exclaimed Elsie mystified, then immediately walked down the short hallway and looked into the bathroom. “Those are just my stockings.”

“Well....that’s what I saw you wearing when you injected me with that needle!”

“A needle?” asked Elsie dumbfounded.

“Yes. I was jabbed right here in my arm,” Grace replied as she lifted up her sleeve. Looking

around her arm for a few seconds Grace added, “It’s here somewhere. I was positive that I saw the puncture wound this morning.”

“Sure you did,” Sid piped up skeptically.

“Look Grace. You must have just a bad dream,” Elsie said trying to diffuse the situation.

“It was no dream. I saw the needle, I felt the pain. I know it was the two of you.....I just know it,” Grace yelled. Tears began running down her face and her hands were now shaking. “I’m reporting this to the police!”

Grace promptly picked up her suitcase and walked towards the front door.

“That’s fine Grace. Go ahead. I’m sure the police will enjoy hearing some cockamamy story about being drugged by your relatives. They have better things to do than listen to a nut case like you,” Sid yelled out. “And since you’re leaving, what the hell do you want us to do with all your stuff we have stored in our garage?”

“I’ll send for it!” Grace replied turning her head ever so slightly, then walked out the door.

A couple of hours later there was a knock at Sid and Elsie’s front door.

“It’s probably just Grace returning. She must have cooled off and come to her senses,” Elsie thought to herself.

Opening the door, Elsie came face to face with two police officers.

“Hello. I’m Constable Williams and this is Constable Jones. We are looking to speak with Sid and Elsie Blasnovischuck.”

“I’m Elsie. How can I help you?”

“We’re following up on a complaint that was filed. May we come in?”

“Yes, of course,” Elsie replied a little startled.

“Is your husband home?” Constable Williams asked.

“No. I’m sorry, he left for work a few hours ago. What’s this about?”

“Do you know a Miss Grace Sereda?” asked Williams.

“Yes. She’s my sister. Why? Has she been in an accident or something? Is she all right?”

Even though they had their differences, Elsie was quite concerned.

“No, she hasn’t been in any accident, but she has filed a complaint with very serious accusations,” Williams stated as he flipped through his small notepad. “She said that you and your husband drugged her while she was sleeping last night?”

Elsie thought Grace was just spewing off steam when she said that she was going to report them to the police, but obviously she was serious.

“That’s a total lie. She just fabricated the idea from a bad dream she had last night. We heard her tossing, turning and talking in her sleep for hours. I got hardly any sleep myself because of her,” Elsie replied raising her voice and stammering a bit. “She has a history of always making things up, and in fact, she even thinks that the Mafia is after her!”

“Really?” replied Constable Jones skeptically.

“Yes! She use to brag about dating a Bugsy Siegel, as well as numerous Hollywood Stars like Carry Grant and.....sorry I can’t remember all the other names, but there were many. Oh, and she also thinks that she’s related to Russian Royalty. I believe his name is Nicholas.....yes, Czar Nicholas II.” Elsie started to ramble on. “Can you believe all that nonsense? I’m her sister, and I would definitely know if our family was related to Czar Nicholas!”

“Well, we’re not here to discuss any connection Grace may or may not have with the Mafia, or about how many Hollywood stars she dated, or even about being related to this Czar fellow.

We're here to investigate her accusation that you and your husband drugged her."

"Preposterous!" Elsie exclaimed.

"Do you mind if we look around? It could help clear up this matter," asked Jones.

"Go right ahead. I have nothing to hide!"

The officers searched every room in the house, opening drawers, lifting up mattresses, checking the closets and even turning the trash can upside down. As the officers returned into the living room, Elsie asked, "Well? Did you find anything?"

"Only these black stockings your sister claimed that you used as masks. They were hanging in the bathroom," said Jones as he held them out.

"Of course they were hanging in the bathroom. I washed them and hung them up to dry, after wearing them all day yesterday!" Elsie explained in frustration then grabbed her stockings out of his hand.

"In any case, we would like to talk to your husband as soon as possible to get his side of the story and clear this matter up. Do you think you can get a hold of him and come down to the precinct within the next hour?"

"I don't think we can make it that short of time frame. Sid is working on a construction site so I'll have to try and track him down with the two way radio, plus I need to find someone to watch my children."

"Well then, how about right after lunch. Say 1:00?" asked Williams.

"I'll try my best to make sure that we're there," replied Elsie.

"Well, call me at this number and please let me know once you know," Williams said as he wrote down a phone number. "I'll also make sure that Miss Sereda will be there so we can hear both

sides of the story first hand. Hopefully, this matter will be cleared up by the end of the day.”

“That would suit me just fine! The sooner the better. After pulling an idiotic stunt like this, I don’t think I want to ever see my sister ever again,” vexed Elsie.

It took Elsie a couple of hours before she finally tracked Sid down and manage to find a babysitter for the boys. They arrived at the police station shortly before 1:00 and approached the main desk.

“Can I help you?” the duty officer asked.

“Yes, we are here to see Constables Williams and Jones,” answered Sid sternly.

“And you are?”

“Sid and Elsie Blasnovischuck.”

“Just have a seat over there please. The officers are just finishing up with an interrogation.”

Elsie had already filled Sid in with the discussion she had earlier with the constables. Sid was fuming! This time Grace had gone too far. While Sid and Elsie waited, they noticed that several of the officers walking past them had stared at them oddly, making both of them feel very uncomfortable.

“Is it just me, or does it look like everyone here is staring at us oddly?” Sid asked Elsie.

“Yes. It’s almost like we’re hardened criminals. Obviously Grace’s fabricated story about us injecting her, has spread around the precinct. You know how good she is at bamboozling people. It’s how she makes her living!” Elsie exclaimed agitatedly. She shakily lit up a cigarette as her nerves started to get the best of her.

It was about 1:25pm when Constable Williams finally approached the waiting area.

“Sorry for the delay, but we had to re-interview Grace regarding the accusations surrounding the

events that took place last night. Would you follow me please?”

Scornful stares followed them as they continued towards the interrogation room.

“If looks could kill, we’d be dead in seconds,” Sid whispered to Elsie.

Grace was seated at the far end of the table with Officer Jones, as they entered the interrogation room and Sid immediately stormed up to Grace.

“Why the hell would you make up all those accusations against us?” Sid blurted out angrily.

“We’ve always been so good to you, fed you and given you a place to stay.....”

“Please calm down and have a seat,” interjected Officer Jones. “I thought I’d let Miss Sereda sit in on the discussions so we can get all the facts squared away, but if it’s going to be a problem, I’ll have her wait in another room. So what’s it going to be?”

“Fine, she can stay,” replied Sid as he sat down and folded his arms in disgust. “Let’s get this over with!”

A heated debate ensued, each denying the others’ story. Grace held fast to her story that she was injected with drugs, while Elsie and Sid insisted that Grace just had a terribly vivid dream. Both Elsie and Grace were visibly upset, as they both wiped tears from their faces.

“May I go and freshen up a bit?” asked Grace.

“Sure, go ahead,” replied Constable Jones. “The Ladies Room is down the hall to the right.”

“Thank you. I’ll be just a couple of minutes.”

Sid piped up, “If we really did inject her, then why don’t you have Grace show everyone where the puncture wound is!”

Just as Grace was closing the interrogation room door, she paused and cocked her head slightly, listening to Sid’s suggestion. The officers quickly looked at each other a little dumbfounded that

they did not think of this idea themselves. Jones then stammered, “I was....just about to suggest the same thing. We’ll have Miss Sereda show us her arm as soon as she returns.”

Looking into the mirror in the restroom, Grace lifted up her blouse sleeve and began searching for the puncture wound.

Five minutes of waiting for Grace to return, soon became ten. After fifteen minutes Jones finally piped up, “I’ll run and get someone to check and see what’s taking her so long.”

Several minutes later, Jones returned and revealed that she was not in the ladies room.

“What?” exclaimed Williams.

“The duty officer said that he thinks he saw a woman matching her description walk out of the precinct at least 15 minutes ago,” Jones explained.

“Shit!” muttered William’s under his breath. “I wonder why the hell she would just take off like that?”

“Grace may have overheard our conversation about proving she was injected. I think she has made it quite clear that she has no intention of showing any of us her alleged puncture wound, or else she wouldn’t have ducked out of here,” Elsie remarked smugly. “I told you she just had a bad dream!”

“It appears that might be the case,” agreed Williams.

“She couldn’t have gone far. Jones, can you quickly go and send out a message for the boys to keep their eyes out for her,” ordered Williams.

“Sure thing,” Jones replied, and then he hustled out of the room.

“Are we free to go?” asked Sid.

“Yes, for now. One of us will be in contact with you when we find her.”

"Thank you," said Elsie.

Just as they got up to leave, Williams asked, "Oh, by the way. You wouldn't happen to have photograph of Grace would you? It'll make it easier for our officers to track her down."

"I might have one," Elsie replied, then started digging through her purse.

Elsie pulled out a few photos and thumbed through them. "Here. You can borrow this one. It's the only one I have. The rest are at home."

"Thank you. This photo will work out fine, and I'll try and get it back to you soon."

Sid and Elsie then quietly left the precinct out a side door

After the Blasnovischucks departed, Jones returned and sat on the edge of a desk next to Williams.

"So what do you think? This whole situation sounds very bizarre to me," declared Jones.

"Sorry, what?" bewildered Williams as he looked up from gawking at the photo. "I was just a little spellbound by this old photo of Miss Sereda. She was a pretty attractive gal back in her day."

If constable Jones had been a criminal history buff and not been so captivated by Grace posing vivaciously next to a 1939 Cadillac, he might have recognized the famous profile of Bugsy Siegel sitting in the rear seat.

"I was just saying that this case is a little bizarre," repeated Jones.

"Yes, there is definitely something very unusual about her accusations, not to mention Miss Sereda herself. There seems to be a certain air about her, almost like she's royalty or something."

Williams said as he scratched his head.

"Maybe she does have connections to the Mob and they are the ones who tried to drug her?"

Jones implied.

"That could be a possibility. Who knows what kind of information she might have overheard, if she's in fact had associations with the Mafia," alluded Williams. "Listen Jones. Make sure you have our boys find this Sereda gal before she decides to skip town."

"I'm on it," Jones replied as he hopped off the desk and hollered down the hallway for a few extra officers after leaving the interrogation room.

By the time the radio call went out to the squad cars, Grace was already standing in a line at the Greyhound station. Before heading to the police station, Grace had already made up her mind to leave Edmonton and stored her suitcase in a locker at earlier that morning. Continually scanning the station lobby for signs of the police, she impatiently waited in line. Grace finally reached the ticket counter.

"Hi. Could you tell me when the next bus to Vancouver, B.C. leaves?" asked Grace.

"Sorry, you just missed the last bus to Vancouver by ten minutes. There's another one that leaves first thing in the morning at 7:00. Would you like to purchase a ticket for that departure?"

"No. What time is the next available bus leaving Edmonton, and to where?" Grace asked.

"Let's see," the agent said as she went through a list of bus schedules. "If you hurry, you can catch the last bus down to Calgary. From there you might be able to get a connecting bus to Vancouver," the agent said as she glanced towards the clock in the lobby.

"I'll take it!" Grace reached into her purse for her wallet.

Grace grabbed the ticket and scurried over to the departing gate. She arrived just as the bus door was closing. The driver reopened the door, punched her ticket and stowed her suitcase under the bus. Grace was once again on the move, this time sooner than she had ever anticipated.

As the bus pulled out of the bus shelter and drove past the main entrance, Grace noticed two police officers leaving their squad car and heading towards the station. As one of the officers glanced towards the passing bus. Grace ducked down from her window seat.

“That was a close call,” Grace thought to herself.

The officers approached the ticket counter and showed the photo of Grace to the agent.

“Do you know if the lady in this picture purchased a ticket in the last half hour or so?”

“Search me?” replied the agent chewing her gum crudely. “My shift started five minutes ago.”

“Is the other ticket agent still around?”

“How the hell am I supposed to know! What do I look like...a baby-sitter? Look boys, I’ve got a huge line of people building up here. Sorry, you’re on your own! Can I help the next person in line?” she bellowed, continuing to chew her gum like there was no tomorrow.

The officers continued to search the station along with all the buses that were about to depart, but had no luck in finding Grace.

Grace’s bus rambled through the streets of Edmonton to the outskirts of town and slowly picked up speed for its journey down the highway, heading south to Calgary. The prairie landscape undulating softly with vast wheat fields stretching as far as the eye could see. Sporadic dust trails dotted the fields, as farmers were busily preparing their small patch of earth to plant this years crop. Further west, the prairies would gradually grow into a vast forest of deciduous trees which then rose up into formidable foothills, acting as sentinels to the seeming impenetrable walls of rock and snow of the rugged Canadian Rocky Mountains. With Edmonton disappearing behind her, a small tear rolled down Grace’s cheek. The familiar smell of diesel filled the air and the hum of the tires could be heard rolling over the pavement.

Chapter Six

Present Day, Calgary Alberta - Canada

“Have you finished packing for your trip yet?” Mackenzie asked her dad, interrupting his writing. “You have to be at the airport in an hour.”

The last three weeks had flown by so fast that Erik didn’t even know where the time went.

“Yes Mack. I just have a few last minute things left to pack in my carry on.”

Erik had already packed his cloths along with his aunt’s material, which included her diary, photocopies of her letters, several photos he had developed from the old home movie as well as an old answering machine tape, all into a knapsack. Erik always like to travel light and found that by using a knapsack he could quickly grab, dash and catch a connecting flight in a hurry. He had his fair share of late and lost luggage. The last items he stuffed into the knapsack were his

shaving kit, the notebook on the novel he was writing and finally a large package of ju-jubes, which he loved to nibble on when traveling.

Erik arrived in Dallas late in the afternoon and checked into the Fairmont Hotel. Deciding it was too late in the day to do a thorough inquiry at the police station, he hopped a cab to explore the heart of the city. Dallas was like every other large metropolitan city with people scurrying around like ants and traffic scooting back and forth with the odd car horn blaring. He explored a couple of art galleries he stumbled upon and then found some great sales at Neiman Marcus that his wife would have absolutely loved. With his stomach growling, Erik headed back to The Fairmont and grabbed a bite to eat. The hotel restaurant was phenomenal but the heavy food and the long day had taken its toll, so he headed up to his room to get some sleep. This was just as well since he wanted an early start in the morning.

Erik was up at the crack of dawn, eager to get going. He had a lot of places to see and research to complete in his short two day excursion. Leaving his personal items in the hotel room, Erik grabbed his knapsack filled with his aunt's along with his notebook, which he tucked away into a narrow flat compartment. Although Erik had done some initial research on the internet ahead of time about the places he wanted to visit, he still wanted to speak with someone at the tourist bureau at the Old Red Courthouse and Visitor's Center to see what else Dallas might have to offer. Every place that Erik needed to see was within walking distance, which gave him a great opportunity to really explore the historic district of Dallas.

His first stop was Dealey Plaza, where the assassination of JFK took place. Like so many before him, Erik retraced the route taken by the Presidential Motorcade on that fateful day and found the experience very eerie. There was a certain stillness and silence in the air when he

entered the Plaza, almost as if the spirit of JFK was watching over the scene, waiting for someone to finally solve the mystery surrounding his murder. Erik began to ponder back to a history class - Was there just a single shooter or were there others involved? Why did witnesses suddenly change their testimony about what they observed that day? Why did some of the witnesses mysteriously disappear or succumb to unexplained accidents? Who actually orchestrated the plan? The Mafia? The Cubans? An independent organization? Or, the United States Government themselves? Maybe some of them worked together? Was he snooping into something that he shouldn't be? The number of questions far outweighed the answers.

Erik made his way to The Texas School Book Depository Building and spent a good hour in the 6th Floor Museum in trying to glean all the information possible. Maybe with any luck, he would catch a glimpse of in an old photo of his aunt in a display case. Before arriving in Dallas, Erik had reviewed as many of the movies and documentaries that were public knowledge, and his investigation at the Depository just reinforced much of what he already knew. Leaving a little disappointed without finding a clear likeness of his aunt, his mind was never the less bombarded with information. As his eyes slowly scanned the plaza, Erik started envisioning the events of the assassination with ghost like images materializing before him - the limousine turning the corner - the cheering of the crowd as the Presidential Motorcade drove by - The President and First Lady waving - hearing the first gunshot, followed closely by a second and seeing the President's body being jolted forward. Then as the limo slowed for a brief moment, hearing another rifle shot - the President's body jolted backwards - Mrs. Kennedy crawling onto the back of the limo - In the distance, a faint cloud of smoke still lingered in front of a wooden fence near the grassy knoll - The cheering from the jubilant crowd turning into utter stillness. Suddenly the sound of screams

break the silence as the crowd begins to realize the situation. Out of the corner of Erik’s eye, something catches his attention back towards the Plaza. While most of the people had hit the ground to get out of the line of fire, one single figure stands alone, oblivious to the events. It looks like a woman, her true identity hidden by a colorful scarf wrapped over her head. She appears to be filming the entire incident with an old home movie camera. Could that have been where Erik’s aunt was standing? Could that actually be his aunt? Her head lifted and started to turn towards Erik.

“Sorry,” said a passerby accidentally bumping into Erik.

“That’s okay,” Erik replied, a little annoyed.

“Shit, I was just about to see the woman’s face,” he thought. “Serves me right for standing in the middle of the sidewalk.”

Erik glanced back to the Plaza, but the vision had disappeared. Erik continued walking bewildered in what he had just visualized. With his head still hazy Erik had arrived at the area known as the grassy knoll. Suddenly faint ghostly images appeared again. The President’s Lincoln was now disappearing into a tunnel. Numerous people were running up the grassy knoll where Erik had earlier envisioned the puff of smoke. The fence on top of the knoll became transparent like a pane of glass, revealing a couple of men scurrying across a parking lot, one of whom carrying a long object. Turning his attention quickly back to the Plaza, Erik hoped that he might catch a glimpse of the mysterious woman from his first vision. All he saw was the regular everyday goings on of a busy metropolitan city. Erik returned his attention back towards the fence, but that illusion had also disappeared. Shaking his head a little, Erik began wondering if he was just overtired or if he might have inherited some of his aunt’s unique foretelling abilities.

In either case, he was a little unnerved. After leaving the grassy knoll, Erik headed to the JFK Memorial and then on to the public library before criss-crossing his way through the downtown core. He stopped briefly at one more art gallery then picked up a sandwich for an early lunch before arriving at the Dallas Central Library on Young Street.

The Library was unusually slow and Erik had the good fortune to be directed to Margaret Leblanc in the archival department. Margaret had been employed at the library for almost 40 years with a keen interest with the history of Dallas and her expertise would soon become invaluable. She was a heavy set woman standing just over five feet, with greying shoulder length hair and a round face with plump rosy cheeks. A set of narrow wire framed glasses hug from the tip of her bulbous nose just above a beautiful smile that lit up the room. She almost reminded Erik a little of his aunt. Over the years, Margaret had become an authority on the JFK assassination and was quite accustomed to people researching the event, but found Erik’s story about his aunt much more intriguing than any of the stories from previous researchers. This compelled her to dig even deeper into the archives and find numerous photos documenting the event, some of which she even never knew existed. After a half hour of patiently waiting, Margaret arrived with a stack of files and Erik began the daunting task of waded through the myriad of archival material. Margaret headed back into the vault. Erik carefully spread the photographs across several tables. It took some time but Erik finally found what he was looking for. A couple of photos of woman in a beige coat and wearing a head scarf. Her height and stature appeared to be similar to Erik’s aunt, but unfortunately there were no clear photos of her face.

Margaret returned with another stack of material, this time much larger than the first. She

noticed the two photographs that Erik had pulled to the side. She picked up one of the photos.

“So, do you think that you found a photo of your aunt?” Margaret asked with her distinct Texas accent.

“I’m not sure because her face is turned away, but I believe she could be this person right here,” Erik replied pointing to a woman. “I can remember my aunt always wearing a beige coat and a headscarf just like this woman is wearing. They look identical to one’s that Grace use to wear.”

“This person?” Margaret asked with her voice rising a little.

“Yes, why do you ask?”

“Because that woman is known as The Babushka Lady. See, it’s even labelled on the back info label,” Margaret announced as she flipped it over. “Are you familiar with who she is?”

“Isn’t she the woman who was seen taking pictures of the President with a home movie camera, then simply disappeared into the crowd?”

“Yes, that’s correct. Her true identity along with any photographic evidence she might have captured, have eluded the authorities and historians to this day. That can’t possibly be your aunt.”

“Why not? She worked as a fortune teller and travelled throughout Canada and the United States for most of her life. Kind of makes sense that no one could find her.”

Erik could see by Margaret’s expression that he might be on to something.

“Can I help you sort through this new pile of files?”

“Sure. Just pull any photos aside that have a woman wearing a beige coat.”

Erik was very grateful for the offer as the daunting task of reviewing all the material was getting tiresome and he still had no real proof that Grace was ever in Dallas.

“So. You said that your aunt was a fortune teller?” Margaret asked inquisitively as they

scoured the photographs.

"Yes, and a very good one from what I understand."

"I can remember that my mother was big into seeing a fortune teller after my father past on."

"Sorry to hear about your father."

"That's okay. It was a long time ago. Several months before JFK was assassinated. Anyways, I can always remember how well rested and relieved she was after getting a reading from Madam Aderly, no..... Madam Adays, no, that wasn't it. It'll come to me in a secon....."

"Madam Aderes?" Erik broke in.

"Yes, that's it!" Margaret said excitedly. But her excited expression soon turned into puzzlement.

"How would you know that?"

"Because that was the trade name my aunt used."

"Well, I'll be," Margaret exclaimed as she slapped her knee. "Small world. Anyways, it sure was a sad day when my mother heard that Madam Aderes had suddenly moved out of Dallas. Come to think of it, I believe it was right after the assassination."

Both Margaret and Erik stopped sorting and made direct eye contact. Erik raised his eyebrows.

They both knew at that very moment, that they were thinking that Erik's aunt and the Babushka Lady could very well be the same person.

"Well Mr. Black, I think we'll need something concrete and more substantial if we're going to prove that your aunt and the Babushka Lady are indeed the same person."

Margaret reached over to grab a few more photos from the stack of files and accidentally tipped over a glass of water, spilling it across a few copies of the photos which Erik had developed from Grace's film. Erik immediately picked up the photos and started dabbing them

with his shirt sleeve. Margaret apologized profusely then retrieved some Kleenex from a nearby table to assist. Cursing under his breath Erik happened to glance at a library photo that was laying close by and suddenly did a double take. He picked up the still damp copy of Grace’s photo and peered closely at the position of the President’s limousine, then examined the library photo again. The angle of the car as well as the people lining the route were identical, as if both photos were taken almost simultaneously. The only difference was that the library photo had been taken from a greater distance and what really peaked Erik’s interest was the photo also captured the image of a woman in a beige coat appearing to be operating a camera or movie camera. A rush of adrenaline surged through his veins.

Grabbing a nearby magnifying glass, Erik excitedly started to examine the two photos in closer detail. After a few moments Erik suddenly pulled his head back and scratched his head. “You look a little perplexed Mr. Black,” Margaret declared. “Is there anything wrong?” “No, but yes. Maybe you could take a look at these two photos and tell me if you see the same thing I think I’m seeing.”

The librarian picked up the magnifying glass and began to examine the two photos.

“So what is it that I’m suppose to be looking for? Other than they both show the faint outline of a person in a window on the sixth floor, and it’s a well known fact that Oswald allegedly fired from the sixth floor of the School Book Depository building.”

“Yes, but look at how the flag is flapping in each photo. They’re absolutely identical, meaning that the two photos were oddly taken at precisely the same time. The only difference is that the library photo was taken from a further distance and it shows a woman in a beige coat shooting a movie camera in the very same direction. That woman has to be my aunt. There’s no one else

pointing a camera in the same direction.”

“You could be very well right.”

“There’s something else that’s unusual. Take another look at my aunt’s photo, this time at the opposite side of the building, up along the roof line.”

After a few moments Margaret suddenly pulled her head back. “Oh my! It looks like there’s someone on the roof pointing what looks to be a rifle.”

“Exactly. But the person is not in the library photo.”

Margaret immediately inspected the photos again.

“There seems to be a smudge on the library photo, right where the person is suppose to be.”

“Let me take a look.”

Erik picked up the photo and examined it with the magnifying glass then began tilting the photo back and forth.

“There’s a different sheen in that area. I think that this photo has been altered.”

“The conspiracists would have a hay day with these photos, but I’m sure the authorities would say that it’s just an anomaly, a stain on the negative or it was touched up after someone spilt something on it. Listen, I’m going to get a cup of coffee. Would you like one?”

“No thanks. I’m already coffee’d out.”

Erik casually perused through the myriad of library photos scattered across the desk waiting for Margaret to return. He knew that the two matching photos was probably just a coincidence. Suddenly a photo caught his attention. He pulled it from the collection. Erik quickly sorted through his aunt’s photos from an adjoining table, then stared in disbelief. He couldn’t believe his eyes. Another set of matching photos! Although not shot at identical angles, the

positioning of the crowd and vehicles made them a very close match. This time both photos focused on the area known as the grassy knoll. Erik knew the conspiracists had theorized that the final kill shot came from the grassy knoll so he eagerly took a closer look. His heart raced. The library photo clearly showed the image of the woman in the beige trench coat facing in the direction of the grassy knoll operating a movie camera. She was the only person standing. The other people around her were kneeling or laying down, taking cover from the gun fire. The matching photo from Grace clearly showed the grassy knoll, and what also appeared to be a puff of smoke lingering in front of a fence. Erik took another look at the library photo then tilted it a bit. It also had a duller sheen in one area. The area where the puff of smoke was on Grace’s photo. Another doctored photo. To Erik’s thinking, with two doctored photos it was no longer a coincidence. Not only did these photographs prove that Grace was in Dallas at the time of the assassination, they also proved that there was another shooter on roof of the School Book Depository Building and behind the fence on the grassy knoll. The ramifications that Erik had just uncovered evidence that might confirm the conspiracy theory was mind-boggling.

Margaret returned with coffee in hand. Erik couldn’t hold back his enthusiasm and was grinning like a cheshire.

“Margaret. I think I’ve found another matching pair of photos. Here, have a look.”

Margaret carefully analyzed the photos.

“So, what do you think?” Erik asked impatiently.

“Well, they appear to have been taken just seconds apart and the woman in the beige coat is again seen filming in this photo but her face is still partially hidden. This doesn’t prove that your aunt is the Babushka Lady.”

“Oh, but I think it does. Take a look towards the fence. My aunt’s photo shows a puff of smoke near the fence on the knoll. The library photo shows the woman in the beige coat filming towards the fence. Everything in both photos are almost identical just as in the previous two we discovered. There’s just one thing missing.”

“What, I still don’t see any difference.”

“There’s no smoke by the fence in the library photo.”

“It may have been blown away by the wind by the time the library photo was taken,” conjured Margaret.

“I don’t think smoke would disappear that fast. Tilt the photo and look at the fence area again.”

Margaret looked to Erik in astonishment. “This photo appears to have been altered as well.”

Erik could see the wheels turning in Margaret’s head.

“I do believe that your aunt is the Babushka Lady,” Margaret concluded. “Not only that, but these photographs she took could rekindle the conspiracy debate and possibly rewrite history. We should see if there are any more matching photos.”

Erik and Margaret searched through the photos three or four times over the next hour but no other exact matches were found.

“It’s just been a hectic day, plus it’s getting a little late in the afternoon,” Erik announced after glancing at his watch. I really do need to get going. Can I take some copies of these photos?”

“Certainly.”

As he waited for the copies, Erik pulled Grace’s diary out of his knapsack to see if there was anything else he might need to research before leaving the library. While flipping through the pages, he noticed that one of the pages was sticking out the bottom. Not wanting to loose the

page, he opened the diary and found that it was not a loose page at all, but rather a piece of paper extending from between the back outside cover and the inside cover sheet. The passing of time had taken it's toll on the book and the glue had seemed to have simply given away. Carefully Erik pulled the paper out and unfolded it curiously. At first it simply appeared to be just a list of names, but under closer examination it seemed to be some sort of makeshift payroll list with a date, a dollar amount and check mark beside each name on the list.

“Did you find anything else interesting?” asked the librarian as she returned with the photocopies and peered over Erik's shoulder.

“Oh, yes. But it's nothing important. Just something that was in my aunt's diary. It appears to an old payroll list.”

“Sounds interesting.”

“Yes, a little. Looks like these people were making a pretty good monthly salary back then.

Someone by the name of Dale Ferguson was paid \$1500.00 on October 23, 1963, a Wayne Peters paid \$2000.00 on October 27th and a sizable \$100,000 to someone with the initials T.H..” Erik was absolutely astonished. “And, there are a least another dozen or so names on the list.”

“Would you mind if I had a look?” asked Margaret inquisitively.

“No, go ahead.”

Margaret carefully picked up the letter and read it semi-out loud.

“I know that you said you needed to get going, but can you spare just a few extra moments?”

“Sure.”

The librarian quickly disappeared around a book shelf and returned a short time later reading from a file folder.

"This is quite interesting," Margaret said as she approached Erik.

"What is it?" Erik asked very intrigued.

"A couple of the names on the list sounded familiar, so I checked our public records. All of the names on the list are of Dallas Police Officers who served back in 1963."

"I didn't know that the police made that much money."

"They didn't!" replied Margaret in amazement. "Their annual salary was only about \$6000.00, so they must have been on a very special assignment to receive that kind of money."

"Maybe it was just a bonus?" Erik speculated.

"Maybe, but there is something else about these names, especially the T.H. initials, that is still bugging me.....and I can't quite put my finger on it right at the moment. Listen, I'd like to do some more digging around on my own time and I know you need to get going, but would you mind if I go and take a photocopy of this list?"

Erik followed the librarian over to a nearby photocopier. Margaret carefully placed the paper down on the glass and was about to close the lid when she suddenly stopped, leaned over and peered closely at the back of the paper.

"What is it?" Erik asked.

"There seems to be a pencil sketch on the back of this paper. Have you noticed it before?"

"No. I only found that letter a few minutes ago."

"Well, it's too faint to make out anything as it is, but let's see if I can get a better image made from this high tech machine, shall we?" Margaret said as she started to push a few buttons.

After adjusting the contrast several times and running a few trial copies, Margaret finally stopped at the fourth copy and stared at it in utter astonishment.

“What is it?” Erik asked curiously.

“It’s a map.”

“Of what?”

“Dealey Plaza,” Margaret announced excitedly as she started pointing to the drawing. “This is the overpass next to the grassy knoll. Over here is the Dal-Tex building and this box marked with the initials TSD is the Texas School Book Depository Building.”

“What do you think these circled numbers represent?” Erik asked pointing to a couple of them.

“No idea, but this thicker line shows the route of the Presidential Motorcade. The line that’s running down the middle of main street which is scribbled out, is the original route the Motorcade was supposed to take.”

“Then this map was made by someone from the inside,” Erik piped in.

“Not necessarily. The newspapers got wind of the route change and published it several days before the 22nd.”

Erik stared at the map for a moment then flipped it over to the list of names, then back to the map.

“Do you know what? I wonder if this map shows where the police officers listed on the back were supposed to be stationed along the route. See, there are eight circled numbers along or near the route.”

“Let me have a look,” Margaret said as she pulled the paper out of Erik’s hands.

She too flipped the sheet over several times, scrutinizing the list and the map.

“You could be right, but there are nine names and numbers on the list and only eight numbers are on the map. This T.H. guy, labeled number nine, is missing from the map.”

"Maybe he was the head honcho and didn't want his position compromised?"

"Perhaps," Margaret tentatively agreed, then finally ran off copy from the photocopier.

As they both examined their own copy, Erik suddenly spotted something else.

"Hey Margaret. Do you see these small X's that are circled?" Erik asked as he looked up.

Margaret was already staring at Erik.

"Where did your aunt get this?"

"I have no idea. Why do you ask?"

"Because if memory serves me correctly, all the X's appear to be at locations where the conspiracy theorists believe the other rifle shots came from. I am absolutely baffled why a woman from Canada would have a map like this in her possession. Are you sure that she never talked or wrote about this?"

"Come to think about it, I do seem to remember a notation in her diary the same day the president was assassinated."

Erik quickly thumbed through the diary. "Yes, here it is. It reads:

I went to the police to file a statement saying that I knew who shot the President. They took me to see an inspector in another room. I told the inspector that during a rest stop while traveling on a bus to Dallas, I overheard two men talking about making a hit on some type of President. A guy named Rahoul was describing where all the shooters were going to be positioned along the route the Presidential Motorcade would follow, to man named Lee. He then told this Lee guy that he was to be positioned in the TSD building. I later found out that Lee's last name was Oswolt or Oswald. I thought the conversation to be so unusual that I even made notes about it in my diary.

Like a fool I handed my diary over to the inspector. Then, he had the nerve to ask me if I even knew what a hit was. I told him of course I do. I use to date Ben Siegel years ago and overheard several conversations about planning a hit to snuff out the competition. He asked Ben who? I told him Ben Siegel, or Bugsy as most people know him by. I could tell by his little smirk that he didn't believe me. He told me that I had a very vivid imagination but would still look into the matter. Then that stupid inspector had the nerve to confiscate my diary. Said it was evidence. He unlocked a drawer in his desk and placed it in a large envelope. I was fuming mad! He was about to re-lock the drawer when another officer barged into the office requesting immediate assistance and the inspector ran out of the office. There was no way in hell that I was going to leave my diary at the police station, so I simply took the entire envelope from the unlocked drawer then slipped past the commotion in the main lobby. Not only did I get my diary back, but when I opened up the envelope when I got home, I found a large bundle of money and a map that looked identical to the map that the men left at the Cafe in Red Deer. Only difference was there were a bunch of names scribbled on the back of the inspector's map. Oh well. His loss. My gain. That'll teach that Inspector Harris for trying to steal my property. I'm tiring of Dallas and will be leaving soon.

“Your aunt dated Bugsy Siegel?” Margaret blurted out in astonishment.

“Yup.”

“Boy, did she ever get around.”

“I know. She lead a very unusual life which I only know half of. I haven't read all of her diary or the letters she wrote to my mother yet.”

“Well, I suggest that you do. Listen. I’m going to do a lot more snooping around tonight to see if I can find anything else about the people on this list. Can I keep this photocopy?”

“Sure.”

“Where can I reach you if I find anything?”

“At The Dallas Fairmont. Room #304. Oh, here is my business card just in case you happen to find anything after I leave Dallas.”

Erik quickly stuck the map under the pile of library photos and packed up to leave. After thanking Margaret for all her assistance, they parted company with a handshake and promised to keep in touch. Little did Erik know at the time, that the discovery of the map would have repercussions later that night.

Now the only thing Erik needed to complete before leaving Dallas was to find a copy of the statement Grace filed with the Dallas Police Department. He left the library excited but with some apprehension.

Chapter Seven

Dallas Police Headquarters

With his thumb hooked on the strap of his knapsack Erik stopped just outside the Jack Evans Police Station later than he had planned. Gazing upwards, Erik began to wonder if he was just wasting his time.

“Hi there,” an officer said, unexpectedly coming up from behind Erik. “You look a little lost. Do you need some assistance?”

“Oh....yes,” Erik replied a little startled. “I’m here to do a little historical research.”

“Well, just follow me and I’ll take you to the duty officer. He’ll know who you’ll need to talk to.”

“Great.”

The officer walked Erik into the building. Just inside the main entrance, an old late 1920’s

or early 1930’s restored antique police car was displayed proudly.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what’s in your knapsack?” the officer asked warily as they approached the main desk.

“Just some photos and my notebook, why?”

“Protocol. Mind if I have a look?”

“Not at all,” Erik replied as he passed it to him.

“Looks fine,” he said after his routine search.

“Hey Mike. This gentleman is looking for some historical information. Could you please assist him?”

“Sure, not a problem. What type of information are you looking for?” Mike asked.

“Well... I have an unusual request. I’m doing some background research for a book that I’m writing and I’d like to find out whether or not my aunt filed a report here, back in 1963.”

“63? Man, that goes back a bit!” said the officer. “Just have a seat over there, and I’ll see if there is anyone available that can help you.”

“Thanks,” Erik replied.

Fifteen minutes later, Erik noticed the officer at the duty desk chatting to an elderly gentleman dressed in street cloths while pointing in his direction. The man looked to be in his mid-seventies, slim and fit for his age with grey balding hair. His dark grey slacks were held up by navy blue suspenders. Eye glasses dangled by a neck cord over his white dress shirts and red and white stripped tie. As the older gent approached, Erik noticed a badge attached to his belt. Erik would learn later that the man had been retired from the police force for just over ten years and came back to the force to review cold case files after his wife passed away, just to keep

himself busy.

“Hi, I’m Constable Milligan.....John Milligan.”

“Are you the fellow looking for some information dating back to the 60s?”

“Yes I am,” Erik replied as he stood up and shook hands. “My name is Erik Black.”

Erik’s real birth surname was Blasnovischuck. After constantly being teased as a young boy with nicknames too numerous to mention and tired of repeatedly spelling his name to almost every new person that he met, he decided to change it. Shortly after graduating from The Alberta College of Art and spurred by an art instructor who told him - “Who the hell would buy a painting signed with the name of Blasnovischuck splattered across the canvas,” Erik combined the first three and last two letters to create a new identity.

“I’m doing some research for a book that I’m writing about my aunt. She claimed that she filed a report with the Dallas Police Department back in 1963.”

“Look Mr. Black. My work involves working on cold case files and I’m way to busy to search for an old report, just for some kind of book you’re writing. Sorry, but I can’t help you. Now, if you’ll excuse me. I have to get back to my work,” Constable Milligan replied. He turned and started to walk away.

“Please, I’ve come all the way from Canada,” Erik pleaded. “I’m just trying to confirm if my aunt even filed a report.”

Stopping, he turned and shook his head, “Sorry. Can’t help you,” he reiterated, then continued walking.

“It’s about the Kennedy assassination!” Erik called out.

Many heads suddenly turned, eyes gawking. Although occurring less frequently now, the

station had seen its share of crazies claiming to have information about the assassination.

Turning in his tracks Milligan returned and approached, stopping with his nose only inches apart from Erik’s.

“That case is considered closed, and I suggest that you don’t bother yourself with something that is really none of your business or concern. Go home Mr. Black!”

Looking at him directly in his eyes, Erik said, “I’m not trying to snoop into the Kennedy assassination. I’m just searching for information about my aunt who filed a report right after Kennedy was shot. Her name was Grace Sereda. Maybe you recognize the name?”

“Sorry, I don’t have time for this! I’ve worked here for a long time sonny and have heard too many bogus reports over the years on what people either heard or saw that day,” Milligan replied as he again turned and walked away.

“How about a Grace Slawka.....or Yaroslava Sereda.....a ...Gloria Slawka Sereda?” Erik broadcast as he called out many of the names that his aunt used as aliases. She was constantly aware that there were people trying to find her, at least in her own mind, so she changed her name often. The only name she used consistently was her trade name, Madam Aderes.

As Milligan passed by the duty officer and was about to turn down the hallway Erik called out “How about Madam Aderes?”

Milligan slowed his pace briefly and cocked his head slightly, but continued walking.

All the time Erik had been calling out the names to Milligan, he was also following him and ended up near the duty officer’s desk. Looking at the duty officer, Erik shrugged my shoulders while splaying his hands out and said, “I guess nobody wants to know that my aunt was the infamous Babushka Lady!!” Erik left the precinct cursing under his breath, “How stupid and

naive could I have been, thinking that they would actually help me.”

Erik had walked a couple of blocks from the precinct when a voice called out, “Mr. Black..... Mr. Black!! Hold on a minute.”

Erik turned. It was Milligan.

“Mr. Black. Could you please hold up?” Milligan leaned his arm on a nearby newsstand box to catch his breathe. “Sorry. I’m not as young as I use to be.”

“That’s okay. Take your time.”

“I’m fine now, thanks. Listen, did you tell the duty officer that your aunt could be the Babushka Lady?”

“Yes.”

“And what makes you believe she was the Babushka Lady?” asked Milligan.

“Well, I have some letters that she wrote to my mother and her diary which describes her activities when she lived in Dallas, plus a box of sound tapes and some photos I developed from a portion of an old film depicting JFK being assassinated.”

Milligan was speechless for a moment.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” asked Erik.

“Oh, yes, yes. I’m fine. Listen, I’d be very interested to talk about your aunt further but I’m trying to finish up solving an old case. Can you come back to the precinct sometime tomorrow?” asked Milligan.

“Sorry, but time will be a little tight. I’m on a flight leaving Dallas tomorrow.”

“Then, why don’t we go back to my office and talk about it now.”

“I thought you were too busy,” Erik replied a little taken back.

“I am, but I’ll catch up and finish my other work tomorrow.”

As they walked back towards the precinct Erik and Milligan exchanged small talk, with Erik learning about much of Milligan’s career as a police officer. Milligan did most of the talking.

“Please. Have a seat,” Milligan announced after they entered his office.

“Thank you.”

Erik soon found himself ogling Milligan’s workspace which was as large as a boardroom. It looked more like a museum than an office. There were files neatly arranged on a large antique table surrounded by several old wooden leather tufted arm chairs. Old filing cabinets lined an entire wall. On the opposite wall, an old bookshelf containing books, microscopes, old cameras and film projectors stood next to a large bulletin board with photos and sticky notes. Anything to do with old police investigative work, seemed to be housed in his office.

“Interested in antiques, Mr. Black?”

“Yes, my house is filled with antique furniture and nicknacks, but you definitely have some interesting pieces.”

“Thanks. It’s taken my whole career to amass this collect, and since I’m not getting any younger, I’m thinking of donating it to one of the city’s museums.”

“They’d be fortunate to get this memorabilia,” Erik replied jealously.

“Yes, very fortunate, but we should get down to the business at hand. Now, fill me in on exactly what you’re looking for, and why you mentioned to the duty officer that you believe your aunt might be the Babushka Lady?” asked Milligan.

“Well, my aunt claimed to have filed a report here at the station back in 63’ and I’m just trying to

confirm whether or not she did.”

“She filed a report with us?”

“Yes. The same day of the shooting I believe.”

“Do you know what the report was about?”

“Yes. One of the letters she wrote to my mother stated that she informed officers at the Dallas Police station that she knew who the shooter was, but her allegations were dismissed.”

Milligan’s eyebrows rose slightly.

“Also, I think that my aunt can be seen in several of these photographs I found at the Dallas Central Library,” Erik said as he reached into his knapsack.

Milligan’s placed his hand immediately on his revolver and Erik froze, his eyes darting back and forth from Milligan’s face to his clutched hand on the revolver handle.

Slowly, Erik raised his shaking hand out of the knapsack, barely holding onto the photos.

“Sorry. It’s just instinct after almost fifty years on the force,” Milligan said semi-apologetic as he took a quick peek into the knapsack. Satisfied, he slide it back to Erik.

“Listen. Why don’t we head down to our boardroom and grab a coffee. You can set up your photos there on an empty desk, while I search for that old police report. Sorry again about the gun.”

“That’s okay. I understand,” Erik replied, still a little shaky.

“Your aunt’s name again was Grace.....?” Milligan asked as they entered the boardroom.

“Sereda,” Erik filled him in, knowing Milligan had forgotten.

“She also went by several aliases,” Erik announced as he cautiously pulled out a notebook and the stack of photographs from his knapsack.

As Erik scanned his notes for the list of Grace’s aliases he couldn’t help but notice Milligan’s eyes widen as he shuffled through a couple of the photos. Not being able to find the list of names from his mishmash of notes, Erik quickly jotted down a half dozen names that came to mind on a nearby sticky note pad.

“Here are a few of the names I remember my aunt using. As soon as I find my list, you’ll have another dozen or so names that you can also investigate.”

“Thanks,” Milligan replied as he put down a photo that he had been scrutinizing.

“Just make yourself comfortable and I’ll go check these names out. Be back in a bit!” Milligan replied as he left the room.

Milligan had no intention of following up on the names he was just given. He rushed back to his office to make a phone call.

“Hello,” answered a man from his cell phone.

“Bill?” asked Milligan.

“Yes, who is this? I’m busy having an anniversary dinner with my wife, so it better be important.”

“Sorry to interrupt. It’s John Milligan from Dallas Police Headquarters calling. I don’t know if you remember me or not, it’s been quite a few years since we last talked. You told me that if anything important ever came up again about the JFK case to give you a call discreetly.”

“Yes, I remember you. You’re one of the officers that was on duty when Kennedy was shot.”

“That’s correct,” Milligan replied a little somber. “I was stationed at the precinct. It was my first job out of the Academy.”

“Your call isn’t about another crackpot just looking for attention like the last time you contacted

me about five years ago, is it?”

“No, this guy appears to be genuine and he has some very interesting photographs that I think you might want to take a look at.”

“Just set up a time for me to meet with him tomorrow.”

“I suggest that you get down here as soon as possible. One photo definitely shows a puff of smoke on the grassy knoll. He also has a flight booked to leave Dallas tomorrow,” Milligan stated firmly.

“Fine. I’ll be there within the hour. Just keep him busy.”

No sooner than Bill hung up from talking to Milligan, he was dialing a number on his cell.

“Summers?”

“Yes?”

“It’s Bill. Get a hold of Peterson and Reid. Meet me down at the Dallas Precinct within the hour.

Raven Claw may have to be reactivated.”

Chapter Eight

Erik had been waiting in the boardroom for almost an hour and was getting a little antsy.

He was on his third cup of coffee when his cell phone rang.

“Hello.”

“Mr. Black?” came a woman’s voice over the phone.

“Yes.”

“Hi, it’s Margaret from the Dallas Museum. I found only a little bit more information for you, and thought I’d contact you before you left Dallas.”

“That’s great Margaret. What did you find?”

“It’s not much, but I’ve confirmed that all the names on that payroll list are definitely names of police officers that were on duty when the President was shot. I also believe that the T.H. initials

are for a Thomas Harris. If you recall, the amount of \$100,000 was next to his initials. He was the officer in charge of assigning police officers along the route taken by the President.”

“Well, that’s a pretty hefty bonus he received for doing a job he already was getting paid to do, at least in my opinion,” Erik uttered as he pulled out the photocopy of the payroll list.

“Yes, it definitely is. Especially back in 1963,” Margaret replied. “But something is still bugging me about this list.”

“How so?”

“The route was lined with umpteen officers, yet only a few of the officers are listed. Why weren’t all the officers given a bonus?”

“Who knows? Maybe there is another list?” Erik suggested.

“Maybe. Anyways, this little project of yours has got me very intrigued. I’m going to keep snooping around and hopefully something else will turn up.”

“Oh, who was the name of the T.H. initials again? Tom……?” Erik asked. He wasn’t paying close enough attention when Margaret first told him.

“Thomas Harris.”

Erik quickly printed the name under the initials, circled it and then put a question mark beside it.

“Thanks for the update Margaret. I’m at the police station now, so I’ll try and confirm if the initials are for a Thomas Harris. An old timer is helping me, but he sure is slow. He went to research a name for me and he hasn’t returned in over 45 minutes. Maybe he’s forgotten about me.” Erik proclaimed, as he placed the payroll list under the museum photographs. “I’ll contact you if I find out if you were right about the initials Margaret. Oh, you’ll have to excuse me Margaret, the fellow who is helping me just returned. Thanks again Margaret.”

“Hope to talk to you soon Mr. Black.”

“Sorry, it took longer than I thought, but I contacted some people who have a lot more expertise surrounding the JFK case than I do. You wouldn’t mind if a couple of other agents discuss this matter with you, do you?” Milligan asked. More than a couple of people abruptly entered the room and closed the door behind them.

“No.....I guess that’s all right,” Erik replied.

The sudden interest to Erik’s inquiry made him a little unsettled.

“Hi, I’m Chief Investigator Bill Harris. And these are agents Frank Peterson, Laine Reid and Anika Summers,” Harris announced as each of them shook Erik’s hand.

Agent Harris was an imposing man in his fifties, weighing about 225lbs, over 6 feet in height with graying hair. His body appeared toned and sculpted, the result of many hours in the gym. Erik thought it odd to hear that another officer had a last name of Harris, but put it off as just coincidence.

“We’re part of a special task force in the CIA in charge of investigating any new information on cold case files that pertain to sensitive government matters. Constable Milligan has informed us that you may have new evidence surrounding the JFK assassination. Is that true?” asked inspector Harris.

“Yes, that’s...correct,” Erik stuttered. He had no idea that his aunt’s material had suddenly become a sensitive government matter that needed to be investigated by a special task force.

“No need to be nervous. We’re just here to ask you a few questions and see what evidence you have,” said Agent Reid in a calming tone. She obviously noticed that Erik had become fidgety and uncomfortable.

"Constable Milligan has also informed us that you think that your aunt may be the missing Babushka Lady, and that you also have some photos copied off a video she took?" stated Agent Harris.

"Ah...yes, I believe that she might be the Babushka Lady, but that's not why....."

"Well that's why we're here," interrupted Harris abruptly. "So show us what you've got. We haven't got all day."

"This is probably just another wild goose chase," muttered Agent Peterson. "I could be at home having a nice home cooked meal and watching a baseball game."

"Just ignore him Mr. Black," appeased Agent Reid. "Please explain why you think that your aunt might be the Babushka Lady."

Erik was starting to regret even coming to Dallas, but not wanting to go away empty handed, he thought it best to cooperate in hopes of getting a copy or at the very least seeing a copy of the police report Grace allegedly filed.

"Well, these are photos that I found at the library earlier today," Erik stated as he pushed the short stack of photos across the table. "Do you see this woman standing in the trench coat wearing a babushka in each of the photos from the library?"

"Yes. We are all well aware of the woman known as the Babushka Lady. So what!" said agent Summers trivially.

Summers was a very attractive woman with shoulder length blonde hair. She appeared to be in her early forties, slender and fit body, with a hard stern look about her.

"But isn't it true, that the identity of the Babushka Lady still remains a mystery?" Erik asked.

"Yes, just get to the point please," Summers replied impatiently.

Erik pulled out an old photo of Grace from his wallet and slid it across the table.

“See,” Erik declared. “She appears to be wearing the same trench coat and is wearing a babushka.”

“It’s not even the same head scarf for Christ’s sake!” blurted out Agent Peterson.

Peterson didn’t really seem to fit the typical mold of what the general public perceives what a CIA agent should look like. At just over 5 feet tall, Peterson had a slim build, and was probably all of 130 lbs. soaking wet. His receding hair line, sunken cheeks, long pointy nose and potted skin complexion made him look a little creepy and sinister, and looking much older than his real age of 32.

“No, it’s not the same babushka, but how many different types of baseball caps do you wear?” Erik rebutted. “The scarf may be different, but you must admit that there is a resemblance. Look closely at her height and stature. I believe that my aunt is the missing Babushka Lady.”

“Yes, this lady is wearing a head scarf and a similar coat, but there are no clear images of her face in any of these photos! Milligan! You brought us all the way down here, for this load of crap!” Harris blurted out, angrily sliding the photographs back towards Erik.

Erik really didn’t appreciate how unprofessional all the agents were acting. Only Agent Reid was civil. As Erik bent down to pick up a couple of photos that had inadvertently fallen to the ground, all the agents headed for the door, except for one.

“Do you have anything else?” Agent Reid asked kindly. She leaned over the table with interest.

“Yes.”

The other agents paused at the door and turned, waiting to hear what Erik had to say.

“These are photos I made from a film that my aunt shipped to my mother shortly before she passed away,” Erik divulged as he spread them across the table. “Have you seen any of these photographs before?”

“No.....I haven’t,” exclaimed Reid.

The other agents moved back around the table in renewed interest. You could almost hear a pin drop as their jaws dropped with utter astonishment as they examined the array of images. Among the photos were several shots of the buildings that surrounded Dealey Plaza, as well as photos of the Presidential Motorcade. Reaching over, Erik picked up two photographs.

“This photograph depicting the School Book Depository was taken by my aunt. And this is a photo I discovered in the Archival Department of The Dallas Library.”

“They look almost identical,” announced Reid.

“Yes, pretty much. Except that the library photo was taken a little further away and it also captures the image of.....”

“A woman in a beige trench coat,” Reid interjected. “And it looks like she’s filming almost in the same direction.”

“She’s probably just putting on lipstick,” Agent Summers replied dismissively.

Erik quickly searched through some of the photos.

“I disagree Agent Summers. Here’s a photo of her, probably taken by the same person, that shows her walking and carrying a movie camera.”

Agent Summers didn’t reply and continued to look at the photos cynically.

The agents were tight lipped and a little dumbfounded as they stood starrng at the photos with their arms crossed. Erik got caught up in the moment of revelation and continued on

excitedly.

“Here are another two photographs that are a close match. This library photo shows the same woman in the beige coat who appears to be filming towards the grassy knoll. And this is another photo taken from my aunt’s film.

Harris picked up the last two matching photos and started to inspect them even closer.

“I’d have to agree, they do seem to match, but we’ll need our forensics department to authenticate these photos.”

The agents remained speechless for several moments until Peterson pointed to Grace’s photograph of the grassy knoll and whispered out loud, “That looks like a puff of smoke by the fence.”

Harris immediately picked up the photograph to inspect it. Erik knew enough from history that this photograph, might be the smoking gun that proves there may have been more than one shooter, to one of the most famous conspiracy theories in recent history.

“Looks more like a smudge on the photo or maybe a something on the camera lens. Have a closer look Peterson!” Harris spouted while giving Peterson an austere look.

“Yes, it look likes a smudge to me,” Peterson said a moment later, obviously getting the message from Harris’s insinuating glance. “And looking at the library photo, there’s no indication of a puff of smoke.”

“Yes but hold the library photograph at an angle. You can definitely see that the surface of the paper has a duller sheen in that area. I think that the library photo has been airbrushed to cover up the puff of smoke. And it’s the same with these two photos. My aunt’s shows someone with a rifle on the rooftop and the library photo doesn’t. If you look closely, the library photograph also

appears to have been doctored.”

The agents became silent while scrutinizing the photos closer.

“You did say that you got this group of photos that supposedly show your aunt, are from our Public Library?” Agent Harris finally asked as he waved his arm over a group of photos.

“Yes. Margaret, who is quite an authority on the JFK assassination, dug them out of the archives for me. She’s quite the authority on the JFK assassination. She’s probably still hunting for a few more photos as we speak.”

“I thought we already had taken care of all the evidence from the library?” Harris whispered over to Peterson.

“We did. But this Margaret woman must have a hidden stash,” muttered Peterson.

“I just noticed that your aunt’s photographs are numbered in the bottom right hand corner, but several seem to be missing. Why is that?” Peterson piped in.

“Oh. I numbered them according to each frame from my aunt’s film reel, just to help keep track of the sequence of events.”

Sorting through the photos, Peterson placed the motorcade shots in order.

“Looks like a mini montage of the motorcade procession. Do you have any of the missing photos with you?” asked Peterson.

“Sorry. I just brought a few of them with me.”

“Listen Mr. Black. We first need to establish if these photographs, as well as the original film you have are indeed authentic. We’ve seen too many photoshopped pictures come across our desks, claiming to be authentic. For all we know, your aunt’s photos could be the ones that are doctored. Do you still have the original film you made these photos from?” Harris asked.

“Yes, but it’s just a portion of one of the films.”

“It’s just a portion from one film?” Peterson broke in. “You mean there are more tapes?”

“More than likely.”

“What do you mean.....more than likely?” Peterson added.

Erik was beginning to think that he should have kept his big mouth shut, because he may have just opened up another can of worms.

“Let me explain. My aunt constantly moved from town to town and city to city for almost her entire life because she always thought someone was following her. When I was a kid, I remember my mother telling me that Grace was a little peculiar and had a strange habit of separating things whenever she shipped her belongings. That way, just in case a crate was lost or misplaced, she would at least have some clothes, dishes or even as in this case, have a few photos to look at. Most of her family thought she was a little loony, but when you think about the logic behind it.....”

“You mean that there are other shipping crates with possibly more evidence?” interrupted agent Summers.

“Yes, but only two have been opened because....”

“How many crates are we talking about?” Summers interrupted again.

“Seven in total, and five are mis.....”

“Enough about the bloody crates already. Let’s get back to the issue at hand, shall we?” Harris burst in. We don’t need to worry about what might or might not be in any additional crates. We need to deal with the film Mr. Black has with him now.”

“You do, have it with you?” asked Summers curtly.

Even though the agents assumed that Erik had the film with him, Erik had never actually informed them that he had it in his possession. He was telling the truth by saying he still had the film, but just neglected to tell the agents that it was locked in a safe back home.

Erik paused. He didn't know why he paused, but he paused. It was enough of a pause to raise their suspicions. “Well.....do you have the film, or not?” Summers repeated much louder. Call it intuition or a sixth sense, or just the manner in which the agents were now interrogating him, Erik started to second guess divulging his JFK material to them. Maybe he was over reacting, but Erik had read and heard many stories about witnesses simply disappearing and thought it best not to let them know where the original photos and movie film were. Erik shuffled through the photos on the desk quickly and then searched through his knapsack.

“I thought I brought it with me, but I must have forgotten them in my hotel room,” Erik lied.

Now he just wanted to get out of there, even if it meant not finding his aunt's police report.

“Are you sure?” Summers said as she picked up my backpack and shook it upside down.

Only Erik's notebook, a pen, set of headphones from the plane and a package of ju jubes scattered across the table. She then threw the knapsack back down on the desk. The agents seemed to becoming even more aggressive than Erik thought necessary. It was a good thing that he left the original movie film locked in a safe back home and that the photocopies of his aunt's letters and one sound tape, were hidden in a concealed compartment of his knapsack.

“Like I said, the film is probably back in my hotel room,” Erik replied trying to distract the agents. He didn't want them to find his aunt's letters.

“And what about the tape you mentioned?” piped in Milligan from behind the agents.

“A tape? A tape of what?” Harris asked moving over to Erik like a vulture looking for the last

morsel of meat on a carcass.

“It’s just a tape from an old telephone answering machine.”

“I have no idea what’s on it as I haven’t been able to find a machine to playback any of the old tapes yet. I grabbed it out of a small box filled with other tapes just before I left for the airport. I know that the tapes probably have nothing to do directly with my aunt being in Dallas in 63’ because I believe that there were no answering machines back then. It’s documented in my aunt’s diary that she had numerous conversations with the FBI and CIA years later, so it may contain some other interesting conversations.”

“Do you have the tape with you?” Summers piped in contemptuously. She snatched up the knapsack swiftly and roughly searched the small outside compartments.

Erik prayed that she wouldn’t search the inside and find the hidden compartment. Not finding anything, Agent Summers tossed it back to Erik. He definitely didn’t like the direction of this interview was heading or the temperament of the agents. Erik was now starting to get a little agitated.

“Sorry. I know I had it,” Erik replied as he padded and searched his pant pockets to mislead the agents again. “It’s also probably back in my hotel room.”

“What hotel are you staying at?” Agent Harris asked. “I can send a couple of agents with you, and you can give the material to them.”

“I’m staying at The Fairmont,” Erik replied without thinking. “But, I’d rather just drop the material off tomorrow morning, if that’s OK with you?”

“It would only take a few extra minutes out of your.....” Peterson started to say.

“Look, it’s been a long day, I’m exhausted, and all I want to do is grab a bite to eat and hit the

sack. My plane doesn't leave until 1:00, so I'll make sure to drop off the material to you, on my way to the airport.”

“Tomorrow would be fine Mr. Black,” announced a polite female voice standing slightly behind Erik.

“You do look a little peaked and I'm sure that the rest of the agents can be patient enough to wait until the morning for the material.”

Harris looked questioningly towards Agent Reid. She immediately leaned over and whispered in his ear, “You guys have been pretty rough on this guy, don't you think? I suggest we let this guy go back to his hotel. We don't want to spook him or lodge a harassment complaint. We can always station an agent at the hotel to keep watch.”

“Maybe you're right,” Harris replied.

“So, we'll see you in the morning Mr. Black, say...9ish?” asked Agent Reid

“Nine would be fine.”

“Oh, but I have one more quick question about these tapes, before you leave,” asked Reid, who had moved silently to the side of Erik.

“Sure.”

“Why do you think your aunt would need to keep tapes of her telephone calls?” Reid asked.

“I have absolutely no idea. But I do know that in her diary, she states that she was always getting weird and strange phone calls. So she started keeping the tapes of the conversations that were left on her machine. A few of the people who left messages are also recorded in her diary. Officers from the CIA, FBI, CISIS, and even the names and numbers for several police chiefs from New York, Toronto and Dallas, are all listed. Who knows who or what's recorded on all the tapes. All

I know is, that to her dying day she always thought that her phone was tapped and that someone was always following her,” Erik replied starting to blabber on again.

“That’s a little bizarre,” spat Summers.

“Yes, why would anyone want to tap your aunt’s phone? For what possible reason?” Harris asked loudly.

“It may be a variety of reasons. She dated Hollywood stars, so maybe a jilted lover? Or, maybe her past association with Bugsy.” Erik blurted out, again without thinking. The whole interrogation and the agents actions were fatiguing and had made him absentminded.

“Bugsy? Hollywood stars? Secret tapes? And new photos of the JFK Assassination? This is just way over the top to be believable. Who the hell put you up to this charade? Peterson! Was this your idea of an April Fool’s joke? If it was....you got me pretty good,” said Harris as he started to chuckle a little. “And where the hell did you find such a great actor? He was perfect!”

Summers looked over towards Peterson.

“That was a good one Peterson,” said Summers also starting to chuckle.

Peterson just sat there dumbfounded.

“It wasn’t me,” he said shaking his head and denying the prank.

“Mr. Black, if that is your real name, you can collect your stuff and please leave,” Harris said laughingly. “I’ll make sure that Agent Peterson here gives you a good tip for such a great performance.”

“But, I’m not an actor. All of this information is true. All of it! It’s no joke.” Erik tried to explain.

“My aunt was also known as Madam Aderes, a well known fortune teller. Please, just look her name up in your records and you’ll find that everything I’m saying is true!”

“Oh, and she’s now also a famous fortune teller?” piped in Peterson.

“Sure she is Frank.....And I’m Tinker bell. Want to see me fly?” Summers added as they all began to laugh again. “You just don’t know when to quit, do you Mr. Black?”

The agents all carried on like a bunch of giddy school kids except for agent Reid, who was just smiling slightly.

Frustrated, Erik gathered his materials quickly and left the precinct dejected. Although Erik did not find out whether or not Grace had filed a report with the Dallas police, he was pleased that he had discovered some new photographic evidence from the library that appeared to prove Grace’s claim that she was in Dallas at the time of the assassination. It was past dinner time and he needed something to eat plus a good stiff drink, so Erik headed to a restaurant that the Fairmont’s concierge had suggested.

Chapter Nine

Milligan was on duty at the precinct on November 22, 1963, and it was a day that was forever etched in his mind. When Milligan first heard the name Madam Aderes called out by Erik near the Duty Officer's desk, it seemed familiar but really didn't register. However, after listening to the recent discussions about JFK and hearing the name for a second time, it suddenly struck a cord with him. Milligan quietly excused himself and left the boardroom. Agent Reid followed.

"Hey Milligan, what's up? You look concerned," asked Reid as she grabbed his arm.

"The name that Mr. Black called out.....Madam Aderes, definitely rings a bell and I just want to check it out."

"Mind if I tag along?"

"Not at all."

The other agents remained in the boardroom and sat around the table carrying on about how great Peterson’s April Fool’s joke was. Peterson kept trying to deny the prank but the agents continued to giggle and badger Harris.

“Mr. Harris. I have some new evidence about the JFK assassination,” Summers said in a deep voice, trying to imitate Mr. Black. “You see, my aunt, who knew Bugsy and dated Hollywood Stars, appears to be our missing Babushka Lady with photographs to prove it!” Summers continued the imitation, but couldn’t hold back chuckling.

“Don’t forget about the other crates filled with other photos,” Harris added into the fray. They all began to laugh uncontrollably.

“But honestly guys, I didn’t set up the prank,” Peterson burst out. The room became silent.....then burst into extreme hysterical laughter, even bringing Peterson into the mix. Summers and Harris had to wipe the tears from their eyes, they were laughing so hard.

About 10 minutes later as the agents were still joking around, Milligan and Reid returned to the office.

“Hey guys,” Milligan called out to the kibitzing agents.

“Hey! Guys!” repeated Milligan much louder.

“Yes, what is it Milligan?” giggled Peterson, casually looking over.

“I forgot to tell you guys this, but when Mr. Black first came into the precinct, he originally wanted to know if his aunt had filed a report with us back in ‘63.”

“A report about what?” asked Agent Summers still snickering.

“A report saying that she knew who shot JFK,” replied Milligan.

“Now you’re sounding as kooky as Mr. Black,” giggled Summers.

“Don’t laugh. It’s true,” Reid cut in.

Suddenly you could hear a pin drop.

Harris immediately grabbed the file from Milligan. Reading the contents for a moment, he passed the file over to Summers and Peterson.

The realization that they evidence in their hands that could possibly prove the conspiracy theory just 10 minutes earlier, was truly sobering.

“New photos showing the JFK assassination, the Mafia, Hollywood Stars, some guy from Canada snooping around for an old statement, maybe more photos in unopened crates and finding the identity of the Babushka Lady?” agent Peterson called out. “For Christ’s sake. Can anyone make any sense out of this?”

“Thanks for your assistance Milligan,” Harris interjected. “I’d like to talk to my agents in private if you don’t mind.”

Reid closed the door behind Milligan.

“Do you realize the implications of what would happen if any of these new photographs are actually authentic and are leaked to the public?” Harris stated firmly as he stood up and pounded his fist on the table. “Especially the photo of the extra shooter on the rooftop and the photo of the grassy knoll. As you all know, Raven Claw had all the photographs at the library airbrushed to coverup the conspiracy and destroyed the JFK File back in 2003 so no evidence was left that implicated our governments involvement. It was arranged that just before the documentation was to be revealed in 2017, the public would simply be informed that a recent fire unfortunately destroyed the entire file. The conspiracy theory would finally be put to rest and the government would be protected.”

“This Mr. Black now poses a bit of a problem, doesn’t he,” added Summers.

“Yes, and it is the responsibility of this special unit to deal with the situation,” replied Harris.

Their unit, code named Raven Claw, was a special division of the CIA which originated near the end of WWII. Their mandate was to confiscate all materials and information that may implicate any US Government or high ranking politicians involvement in unscrupulous activities. In this case, the assassination of JFK. Raven Claw enlisted special agents that believed in the greater good of the American people which would carry out orders without question or hesitation. Immediately after JFK was assassinated, Raven Claw was on the scene so fast, it was as if they already knew what was going to happen that day. Eye witnesses to the second and third shooters were debriefed into believing they did not see anybody. Those who could not be convinced, succumbed to mysterious accidents or simply disappeared. All of the photos and film reels were sealed and hidden from the public, with the exception of some material that had made it to the press before Raven Claw could confiscate them. Over the years, less and less information surfaced about the JFK case so the Dallas division went into dark mode. They returned to regular CIA duties and waited to be reactivated should any new information ever resurface.

“Frank!” Harris barked out.

“Yes?”

“I need you and Summers to head to the Fairmont and bring Black in. We need to question him to find out if he has any other material hidden somewhere plus see if anyone else knows about his discovery.”

“And if he refuses?” asked Peterson.

“You know the drill. Just keep him alive,” replied Harris without having to go into any details.

“If he isn’t there, tear the place apart and take whatever material he left in the room then set up surveillance outside the hotel. Try and grab him without making a commotion.”

“Anything else sir?” asked Agent Summers.

“Yes. Contact our district office to reactivate all our agents in the Dallas area. Also have them put a bulletin out on Black with all the taxi companies,” Harris added. “Make sure any leads go directly to our office. We don’t need any local police involvement. Reid, I’d like you to contact Davis at head office and have him use ‘Talon’ to do a background check on this Mr. Black, as well on his aunt, mother, father, and anyone else who might have knowledge about this material.”

Raven Claw was still a branch of the CIA and would use every available resource that the local division could offer, including the use of ‘Talon’, which investigates information about people who may pose a threat to the National Security of the United States.

“We need to get him at any cost!” Harris commanded. “Understood?”

“Yes sir,” they replied almost simultaneously.

Agent Reid spotted something under a chair and bent down to retrieve it.

“Looks like Mr. Black misplaced one of his photos.”

“Good,” replied Harris. “Send it over to our office and have our lab see if it’s authentic or a forgery.”

“But all the technicians have left for the day,” spouted agent Reid.

“Well, that’s not my problem Laine. Just track them down for Christ’s sake and give them the photo, then hit the streets to see if you can spot Black. He’s in a strange city and might be just

wandering around," barked Harris.

"Yes sir."

"There's something else here you might want to look at Bill," added Reid, as agent Summers looked closely over her shoulder.

"What is it?" rebuked Harris.

"It appears to be a photocopy of some kind of payroll list, and a hand drawn map on the reverse side that looks a lot like Dealey Plaza," Reid announced as she flipped it from front to back a couple of times. "It was stuck behind the photo. Black must have copied it fairly recently because you can still smell the fresh ink off the photo copier."

"Probably from the library," Peterson surmised.

"Let me have a gander," Harris ordered grabbing it out of Reid's hands.

Harris carefully scrutinized both sides of the page and was immediately taken a back when he came across a name that was circled beneath the initials T.H.

"Is that a name you recognize sir?" asked Summers.

"No. Why do you ask?" Harris stammered.

"Because your expression indicates that you recognized something."

"No, it's nothing. My ulcer is just acting up a bit," Harris fibbed. "Now, all of you get to your assignments. I have to make a quick call, so I'll catch up with you guys later. Close the door behind you."

"Hello!" answered the voice sharply.

"Hello sir. It's Bill."

"Good to hear from you. It's been a while."

"Yes, far too long," Harris replied.

"How's Lucy and kids?"

"They're good sir, but not wanted sound too rude, I'll get right to the point," Harris said abruptly.

"Is this line secure?"

"Yes. Only you and a few other trusted individuals have access to this number. I was wondering why you called me on this line."

"There's been a new development in the JFK case," Harris disclosed earnestly.

"What are you talking about? I ordered Raven Claw to destroy all the evidence that would incriminate any of my involvement."

"Well, not all the evidence. Constable Milligan from the Dallas Police contacted me earlier today and informed me that a man by the name of Erik Black came into the precinct with some revealing material about the JFK assassination. He had some photos of the JFK assassination that were supposedly taken by his aunt. I had a look at them and one definitely shows a second shooter at the scene, and the other shows smoke from the shooter that was positioned at the grassy knoll," explained Harris.

"Probably just another hoaxter that photoshopped an old photo," replied the man on the phone.

"I don't believe that they are fakes sir. He also brought in some photocopies of pictures that he dug up in the Dallas Library Archives. You wouldn't believe me unless you viewed the photos for yourself, but the library photos show what appears to be his aunt filming the assassination."

There was silence on both ends of the phone as both men knew the gravity of the situation.

"That's impossible! We've seen every single photo and film that was ever taken at the assassination."

“Except, for the film taken by the Babushka Lady,” Harris said unnervingly. “That is if you remember who that was.”

“Yes I remember. But you can’t be serious!” perplexed the man on the phone.

“Very serious sir.”

“No matter. Just find and destroy all the material. If there is no physical evidence, then nobody will be the wiser. Understood?”

“Understood sir,” replied Harris. “But there is one last item that you may want to hear about.”

“Go on.”

“Mr. Black accidentally left a photocopy of a hand drawn map of Dealey Plaza with numbers circled at different locations on it. On the reverse side of the paper are a list of names with dollars amounts beside them as well as a check mark. It kind of looks like a payroll list,” Harris explained.

Harris paused, as he was expecting a reply from the man, but it never materialized.

“Hello, are you still there?” asked Harris.

“Yes, Sorry. What are the names on the list Bill?”

Harris called out all the names, finishing with the initials T.H., along with the name circled with a question mark.

“Those initials and the circled name allude to you, don’t they sir.”

“Yes.”

Again there was silence on the other end of the phone.

Finally Agent Harris spoke. “I don’t know how, but it looks like Black or someone that is helping him, somehow figured out who the initials belong to.”

"Has anyone else see the list?"

"Two other agents saw the list just briefly."

"Find out if they read my name. If they did, you know what to do," the man on the phone ordered. "I would like your unit to apprehend Black alive so we can find out exactly the true extent of his information and who he might have shared this knowledge with. I am authorizing Raven Claw to be reactivated to clean up this matter, and I want you at the helm. Can I count on you, son?"

"Yes father, just leave it to me," Bill said solemnly.

Blocks away, Erik had entered Dakotas Restaurant. His nose was treated to the wonderful aroma of a grilled steak. It reminded him of one of his favorite restaurants back home, Caesars, and after the events of today he definitely needed a little reminder of home. Erik sat back, ordered a double Delwhinnie Scotch and pulled out his notebook. Writing about his aunt would hopefully help him take his mind off the days events.

Chapter Ten

Late May, 1963 - Edmonton, Alberta

Grace's bus departed Edmonton and headed south towards Calgary. An odd assortment of individuals were scattered throughout the bus, from several single passengers to a few trades people, some business men, a family of three and a couple of loud rough looking characters fresh off the oil rigs. Most of the passengers sat in the middle or near the front of the bus, but Grace chose to sit near the rear, two rows up from a couple of casually dressed men which were seated in the very last row. Grace had both seats to herself and decided to take advantage by stretching out and leaning her back against the window to read a magazine.

Once the bus got rolling, Grace could hear the men behind her occasionally talking in a foreign language, but couldn't quite recognize the nationality over the hum of the engine. Just over an hour into the trip, the bus began to lurch forward and back a little, then slow down considerably.

“Sorry folks. We’ll have to make an unscheduled stop,” the driver called out.

Grace was sitting too far back to hear exactly what he said but had a good hunch as the bus was lurching a little more violently. The bus limped its way into the nearest town of Red Deer to evaluate the problem.

“Sorry again folks for the unexpected delay,” the driver bellowed out after he turned the engine off. “Hopefully it won’t be anything too serious so I can get you back on the road as soon as possible. You can grab a bite to eat in the cafe if you like. The food here is pretty good.”

Most of the passengers were understanding except for a couple of unsympathetic complainers which the driver had to calm down. Grace slid over in her seat and had just started to get up, when she was bumped in her shoulder by a passenger.

“Sorry miss. I didn’t see you.” It was one the men that were sitting in the last row.

“That’s quite all right,” Grace replied.

“Please, go ahead.”

“Thank you,” said Grace.

Grace headed to the cafe and sat in a booth near the back. She ordered a hearty meal of steak, baked potato, corn on the cob, salad, a slice of garlic bread and a cup of tea.

As she sipped her tea, Grace couldn’t help but hear other people’s conversations, as she had developed an acute sense of hearing from the years of reading peoples fortunes in similar environments. A couple of men were discussing the bus delay, a family was discussing their upcoming visit with relatives and one woman was trying to control her son while he ran up and down the aisles. One particular and intriguing conversation caught her attention. It came from the booth right behind her.

“Is everything in place?” asked one of the men.

“Yes, but keep it down will you!” replied the other man in a harsh loud whisper.

He had a deep voice with a slight accent. Grace believed she recognized the voices to be those of the two men who were sitting behind her in the rear of the bus.

“I have some inside information on the exact route the President will.....”

“Here’s your order miss. A steak, baked potato, corn, salad and garlic bread. Right?” the waitress said, interrupting Grace’s eavesdropping.

“Yes. That’s correct,” Grace replied.

“Would you like anything else?”

“No, no... That’s fine. Just the bill please!” Grace said hurriedly.

“.....the car will travel down this route, turning right at this location, and left at this corner.”

Leaning back in her seat Grace could hear the tapping of a pen on paper.

“You’ll be located here, marked TSD, in the Texas Schoolbook.....”

“Here’s your bill miss,” the waitress interrupted once more.

“Thank you,” replied Grace, and began eavesdropping again.

“We’ve arranged for you to get a job there until the hit takes place,” the man whispered loudly.

Grace was taken aback a little when she heard this. She knew very well what a hit was. She had heard it on several occasions when living the high life and dating an unsavory character in Hollywood. Grace just never thought that she would hear it back home in Canada. Grace leaned back and cocked her head slightly to hear better.

“Plans have been made for the limo to slow down around here and we’ll have an additional man located here.” A pen sound tapped after each instruction. “As well as here, behind this fence on

top of a grassy....”

“Can I get you boys anything?” the waitress asked the men.

“Lee. Do you want some dessert?” asked the man with the deeper voice.

“No thanks” the other man replied.

“How about some fresh coffee?”

“We’re fine, thanks.”

Grace now knew that one of the men’s names was Lee.

“And you miss? Freshen up your coffee?” the waitress asked Grace as she rounded the booth.

“Thanks. But I’m having tea, thank you.”

The waitress left and Grace resumed her eavesdropping, but there was only silence. The men were either whispering so softly that Grace couldn’t hear them, or they left the booth. Sitting quietly, Grace waited patiently.

“Any passengers that were on the bus from Edmonton to Calgary can now re-board. The repairs have been completed and we’ll be leaving in 10 minutes,” announced the bus driver from the front of the cafe.

Grace continued to sip her tea while straining her ear to hear more of the men’s conversation, but all was silent. Looking through the window Grace could see the passengers lining up to board the bus and decided that she should pay her bill. Rising up from the booth with a little apprehension, Grace casually put on her coat while glancing at the booth where the men were seated, only to find it empty. Grace plopped her purse on the table and as started rummaging around for money to pay her bill when she noticed a napkin with writing on it, laying on the floor near the next booth. Thinking quickly, Grace purposely dropped a couple of coins, hoping one would fall near

the napkin, which one luckily did. Bending down to pick up her coins, she casually snatched the napkin. Standing up with the napkin scrunched in her hand, Grace fished out her money and placed it on the table next to her bill.

Glancing out the window she noticed one of the men that was seated in the booth behind her was padding his coat pockets searching for something as he stood in line to get on the bus. He turned and walked back towards the cafe. Grace stuffed the napkin in her coat pocket and turned quickly, almost colliding with a waitress who was clearing the table behind her. Grace promptly headed towards the Ladies restroom and scooted inside just as the man opened the cafe door. Grace waiting patiently for a minute then cracked the restroom door slightly. Peering out, she spotted the man searching the seats and floor around the booth.

A waitress approached him. "Did you lose something sir?"

"No.....ah.....I mean yes," the startled man replied. "I seem to have misplaced a note I wrote on a napkin. You didn't happen to see it?"

"Sorry, I didn't. When the tables get cleared, everything gets dumped into the garbage. If it's really important, I can help you search through the trash," replied the waitress.

"No, that's fine. It's not that important," replied the man. "Thanks anyways."

As the man was talking with the waitress, Grace quietly slipped out the cafe and boarded the bus.

The man from the cafe walked past Grace's seat a few minutes later. Grace pretended to be reading a magazine, but her attention was focused on the men's conversation.

"Did you find it?" Grace heard a deep voice call out from the back row.

"No! I didn't," the man replied as he slid into his seat.

"What happens if someone finds it?"

“I don’t think we have anything to worry about. It’s probably in the garbage all covered with table scraps.”

“You’d better pray it is. We can’t afford any slip ups,” said the deep voiced man.

“There won’t be on my end. By the way, what guarantees do I have that I’ll get out of the building safely plus who’s going to pay me?”

“My contact who I only know as T.H. works with the local police and has everything organized. He’ll pass on final instructions once you get to Dallas. And, don’t worry about the money. The US Government has lots of dough.”

“The Government is backing this operation?” asked a stunned Lee.

“Yup. I don’t know exactly who or why, but what do we care. We’ll both be rich.”

The rest of their conversation was drowned out as the whine of the engine started to rev up.

All was silent from the rear of the bus for quite a while, before Grace finally picked up on the sound of the men talking again.

“Where the hell are we going? And why are we taking this stupid bus trip anyways?”

“It’s just a little diversionary trip to help throw the feds off your trail,” answered the man with the deep voice. “Relax and enjoy the scenery Lee.”

“What scenery? It’s black out there! And you still have not told me where the hell we are going!”

“Don’t worry. By tomorrow afternoon you’ll be back in the States and enjoying the landscape of North Dakota.”

“North Dakota?” questioned the man, who she now knew was named Lee. “And then do we head south back to New Orleans?”

“No. We continue on to Chicago to do some window shopping, and then up to Montreal for a

meeting with a few of my people.”

“Chicago..... Montreal. Am I ever going to get back home?” asked Lee.

“All in good time my friend. All in good time. Right after our meeting in Montreal, we can unwind a bit and enjoy some great jazz and fine women. Just like we did back in New Orleans, right Lee?” the deep voice chuckled, followed by the sound of a slap on a person’s thigh. “You can fly home the next day.”

“Whatever you say Raoul,” replied Lee.

Now Grace knew both their names. Again, all became silent from the back row.

The bus continued to eat up the miles and the lights of Calgary could be seen on the horizon. Arriving at the bus terminal, Grace gathered up her belongings. Stuffing her gloves in her coat pocket, she unwittingly forced the now forgotten napkin into the deep corner of the pocket lining. Grace stalled and waited until everyone else had departed the bus before leaving. Making her way to the bus schedule, Grace noticed that the bus she wanted to take to Vancouver wouldn’t be leaving until early the next morning. Since she was in a hurry to put as many miles between her and Edmonton, she scanned the board for an alternative destination.

Thinking back to some of the men’s conversations, Chicago came to mind. She had lived in Washington, New York and Boston, but had never been to Chicago. Grace was also very intrigued by the men who were sitting in the back of the bus and was eager to hopefully overhear more of their chitchat. Walking over to the ticket counter, Grace was pleasantly surprised that the next bus to Chicago was leaving within the hour. Undaunted by the distance, her trip would take her east from Calgary to Regina, then through to Winnipeg, before heading south to Fargo, North Dakota and then east again to Chicago. Grace purchased tickets for only the first three legs of her

journey, which would take her as far as Fargo. In her haste to leave Edmonton, Grace had accidentally left the bulk of her money in the bottom drawer of her dresser. She hoped to make extra cash to purchase the additional tickets needed to get to Chicago by reading Tarot Cards to some of the passengers before reaching Fargo. If she didn't, she would be stuck in Fargo for a while. It was nothing new for Grace to be traveling by the seat of her pants.

Chapter Eleven

Dallas, Texas - Present Day

"Last call. Would you like another drink sir?" the waitress asked interrupting Erik's writing.

"Oh, no thanks. Just the bill please," Erik replied with a yawn.

It was almost 1a.m. and Erik had totally lost track of time as he often did while writing. Erik paid the bill, then headed back to the hotel. Even though the hotel was only a short walk away, he was a little nervous walking late at night in an unfamiliar city. He continually scanned the sidewalk behind and ahead for any suspicious looking characters. With the hotel in sight a couple of blocks away, he cast his head back around for one last look and could have sworn that a person jumped sideways, as if they did not want to be seen. He quickened his pace.

"Agent Reid. Have you tracked down Mr. Black yet?" asked Harris over his Bluetooth.

"Sorry, not yet sir. How about you. Have you had any luck?" asked Agent Reid.

"No. I've been too busy tying up a few loose ends at the Library, but where the hell could this guy be?" asked Harris irritably. "Summers and Peterson searched Black's hotel room hours ago and found absolutely nothing."

"He may have put the material in a storage locker or maybe it's still in a compartment in his knapsack. I noticed that Summers didn't check it very thoroughly," declared Reid.

"Possibly. Anyways, the concierge at the Fairmont has not seen him return and the front desk clerk said that he hasn't checked out yet, so I've stationed Peterson to watch for him from his car in front of the hotel."

"Maybe he's just at a bar or strip club?" suggested Reid.

"I've already sent Anika.....I mean Agent Summers, to check all the clubs in the vicinity."

Calling Agent Summers by her first name was a slip of the tongue. The slip could have also been his long time association with Agent Summers. It was even rumored that some of the assignments Harris and Summers went on were not assignments at all, but rather just an excuse to meet at a discrete location. Although Agent Harris was a dedicated family man, he was still like 90 percent of the male population who wouldn't turn down an opportunity to have sex with another woman.

"Have you had any sightings from any of the taxi companies?" asked Harris.

"Nothing yet. He must be on foot, so he can't be too far away," Reid replied as she stepped out from behind a bush to continue tailing her quarry. "I'm sure that he'll turn up soon."

"I certainly hope so. It's imperative that we find him and grab that knapsack. I'll decide what to

do with Mr. Black once we have him.”

“Can’t we just pick him up in the morning sir? We’ve been searching for several hours and we already know where he’s staying and which flight he’s scheduled to leave on, so it wouldn’t be easier to.....”

“Absolutely not!” blurted out Harris. “We’re not sleeping until we nab him, understood!”

“I understand sir,” replied Reid as she watched Erik enter the Fairmont Hotel.

Reid bypassed the main entrance and took a shortcut through the South Tower doors. A small group of people had just left the front desk when Erik entered the lobby.

“Any messages for Room 304?” he asked.

After checking his computer, the front desk clerk replied in a Spanish accent. “Sorry sir, nothing.”

“Thank you,” Erik replied and turned towards the elevators.

He had taken only a few steps when the front desk clerk called out, “Oh, Mr. Black. I just remembered that there was a couple of people looking for you, maybe three or four hours ago. Were you expecting anyone?”

“No?” he replied puzzled.

“Well, they seemed very concerned that you were not here. I noticed them hanging around the lobby for a while before heading for the lounge.”

“What did they look like?”

“It was a man and woman, both dressed in suits.....Here, I’ll go with you and see if I can find them. I’m not too busy right now.”

“Who the heck would be looking for me at this time of night?” Erik thought to himself as the

desk clerk lead him to the lounge. Scanning the lounge, the only people visible were a group of women cackling away at the bar and the back of a woman as she walked into the restroom.

"Sorry, I don't see them," announced the desk clerk.

"No worries," Erik replied. He thought the front desk clerk probably just mistook him for a different Mr. Black.

Erik pulled out his room card and unlocking the door. To his amazement he found the room totally ransacked. The bed mattresses were turned over, drawers pulled out, the mini-bar contents strewn across the rug as well as his clothes and shaving kit. Erik was livid. As he weaved his way through the clutter. Erik suddenly thought about the two people that were looking for him and became a little apprehensive. Calling down to the front desk, Erik informed the clerk about his room then asked for a better description of the two people who were looking for him earlier. From what the front desk clerk described, it instantly reminded Erik of two agents who were in the precinct boardroom earlier. Maybe the new information about the JFK case he had brought to their attention was more important than he first thought. And maybe, the front desk clerk did have the right Mr. Black after all.

"I'll send a security person up shortly," said the clerk.

"Thank you," Erik replied with his heart still racing.

"I'll also be happy to refund your stay with us, as well as upgrade you to one of our best suites for this unfortunate incident," said the clerk politely. "Just come down to the front desk after the security guard arrives so you can pick up a new room card.

"Thank you. That's very kind of you," Erik replied and started to pick up his belongings.

"Hey Reid. Where are you now?" asked Harris.

“Oh....I’m just driving the streets, hoping to get lucky and spot him. Why do you ask?” replied Reid, misleading Harris.

Agent Reid was actually replying from inside the Fairmont Hotel. She had discovered Mr. Black walking the streets earlier and was tracing his movements for the last half hour. After Black entered the hotel, Reid followed and entered through a secondary entrance so she wouldn’t be spotted. Once arriving in the lobby, Black was nowhere to be seen and the front desk clerk was preoccupied with several people. She decided to have a quick look in the lounge to see if Mr. Black happened to be having a nightcap when nature called. Reid was just about to leave the restroom when her phone rang. It was Agent Harris.

“I just had a call from Peterson,” Harris reported to Reid. “He’s spotted Black enter the Fairmont. Summers is already on her way, so meet us at Peterson’s car in ten minutes. His car is parked across the street near the main entrance.”

“Ok,” replied Reid, as she walked out of the restroom and headed towards the lobby.

Finding no one attending the desk, she wished that she had remembered Black’s room number when he divulged it in the boardroom. Glancing towards the main entrance, Reid noticed Agents Harris, Summers and Peterson looking up and down the street.

“Where the hell is Reid?” asked Summers.

“Who knows?” replied Peterson. “Maybe she’s waiting inside.”

“Well, we don’t need her assistance anyways,” stated Harris impatiently. “The three of us can handle this minor situation ourselves.”

The three agents headed into the hotel. Agent Reid was nowhere to be seen. Standing at the vacant front desk, voices could be heard from an open door to the back office. Harris called out

while slapping his open hand on the counter to get someones attention.

Erik was tired and after waiting for almost 10 minutes amongst the mayhem, his normally calm and collective personality grew very impatient. With his belongings already packed in the anticipation to move to another room, Erik threw his knapsack over his shoulder and headed down to the lobby. Erik exited the elevator and walked down the short hallway into the lobby then stopped dead in his tracks. There at the front desk were the special task force agents from the interrogation room. Erik was like a deer caught in headlights and just froze. Maybe it was from watching too many cop shows on TV, but it suddenly seemed suspicious to him that the CIA would be sent here to investigate a simple hotel robbery. His intuition told me to get out of there now!

Erik knew that if he made any sudden movements they would probably spot him. Just as Erik was just about to make a move when he caught sight of the another female agent that was in the interrogation room. She was walking down the hall from the South entrance carrying a tray of Starbucks coffee and made direct eye contact. Erik thought his goose was cooked. But to his surprise, the agent gave a couple of slight sideways head nods to the left. Her expression was one of “Run you fool.....Run!” Still frozen in his tracks, Erik could see Agent Summers head slowly turning in his direction.

“Hi guys!” Agent Reid blurted out.

As all the Agents turned their attention to Reid, Erik bolted around the corner, ran past the elevators and through some double swinging doors. It was the kitchen.

“Why didn’t she alert the other agents?” Erik thought to himself. “And, why did she let me go? I know that she saw me.”

Whatever the reason, Erik scampered through the kitchen and out the back door into the alley.

"When did you show up Agent Reid?" Peterson asked a little befuddled. "I didn't see you enter the hotel."

"You must have been napping," sneered Reid. "Do you want coffee or not?"

The agents all grabbed a coffee just as the front desk clerk returned to the desk.

"Could you please see if a Mr. Black is in his room," Harris asked flashing his badge.

"Actually, he just called down a little while ago saying that someone had broken into his room," replied the clerk.

"He's in room #304, but I just asked one of our security officers to look into the matter. That's him walking towards the elevators," the clerk said pointing.

"Thank you," replied Harris.

"Excuse me!" Summers called out, while walking briskly towards the security man.

"Yes?"

"Hi, I'm Agent Summers," she said flashing her badge. "I understand you're investigating a disturbance in room #304?"

"Just heading up there now."

"Thanks, but we'll handle it from here."

"Oh, okay," the security guard said nonchalantly as he really didn't want to deal with the problem anyways.

As Harris and Peterson met Summers at the elevators, Harris barked out his orders quietly.

"Peterson, you take the stairs. Summers, you and I will take an elevator each. And Reid, you can....."

“Cover the main floor,” Reid said finishing off his sentence in dismay.

Harris and the other agents just grinned smartly, as Agent Reid was always given the least interesting assignments. As soon as Harris, Peterson and Harris were out of sight, Reid quickly headed down the hallway Erik made his escape then through the kitchen entrance.

“Did a guy carrying a knapsack come through here?” called out Reid flashing her badge to the staff after she entered the kitchen.

“Out that back door,” answered one of the cooks meekly.

Running between the prep tables and hot cook tops, Reid managed to bump into only one of the cooks before flying through the rear door. Scanning each direction quickly, she caught sight of Black entering a cab at the end of the alley. Several of the kitchen staff soon poured into the alley to see what all the fuss was about. All they spotted was the female agent standing at the end of the alley summoning a taxi.

Agents Harris, Peterson and Summers not only returned to the lobby empty handed, but also found that they were down one agent as agent Reid was nowhere to be seen.

“Summers, go and check the restroom to see if Reid is in there,” ordered Harris.

She returned less than thirty-seconds later. “Nothing sir.”

As the agents left the Fairmont, Harris tried to get a hold of agent Reid on her phone but she did not answer.

“Where the hell did she take off to?” Harris yelled as they stood by their cars. “We lost our suspect and now one of our agents!”

“Maybe she caught sight of Black and is trying to apprehend him,” surmised Summers.

“I hope that’s the case,” fumed Harris.

“Should we call in Dallas’s finest to help us out?” asked Peterson.

“Definitely not!” replied Harris abruptly. “I already told you that we need to keep this operation quiet unless we hear otherwise by the director of Raven Claw. Understood?”

The agents didn’t reply, but just nodded.

“What the hell have I gotten myself into?” Erik thought to himself as the cab sped down the street. “All this hush hush conspiracy theory just might be true, and I might have opened up a can of worms that needed to stay sealed. I think I should get the hell out of Dallas. Hopefully they’ll forget about me.”

“Have you decided on where you want to go mister?” the taxi driver asked.

“Yes. The airport.”

“Reid. Agent Reid. Come in!” Agent Summers called through her Bluetooth.

“Reid here.”

“Harris. I’ve reached Reid,” announced Summers.

“Put her on speaker phone, will you. Where the hell have you been Laine?” asked Harris angrily, but still with a little concern in his voice.

“Sorry sir. I’ve been having a little trouble with my Bluetooth.....scratch..... scratch.... In pursuit of suspec.....scatch.....just turned east onto

Commer.....scratch...scratch.....Copy?..... ..scratch.....silence.”

“Reid. Agent Reid! Our connection is bad Laine. Say again!” Harris exclaimed loudly. But now the line was dead.

“Commer? Commer? Commerce Street!” exclaimed Peterson.

“What the heck is on Commerce?” asked Harris.

"Only thing I can think of is the Greyhound Station," Peterson answered.

"Just get in and drive Peterson!" Harris ordered.

As Erik left the cab at the airport terminal he passed an extra \$100 bill to the driver. Holding the bill firmly in his grasp he said, "You haven't seen me before and you didn't drop me off at the airport. Just in case anyone asks. Understood?"

"Understood," the driver said as he pulled the money quickly out of Erik's grip. "Don't forget your bag sir."

Erik was getting so tired that he could hardly think straight, and almost forgot his knapsack.

"Thank you," Erik replied. "I'd be dead in the water without this!"

By the time Erik entered the terminal, the driver was already on his cell.

"CIA Dispatch! This is taxi 139 from The Yellow Cab Company."

"How may we help you 139?"

"Yes, ah....I just dropped off someone who matches the description of the man you guys are looking for," the cabby said eagerly.

Agents Peterson, Harris and Summers had been searching the bus station for a good half hour before a call came in from their head office. Peterson pressed his hand over his ear microphone to hear over the speaker announcements at the Greyhound Bus Station.

"Agent Harris. That was Johnson calling from our office. He received a report a few minutes ago from a cabby saying that he picked up someone fitting Black's description near the Fairmont, and then dropped him off."

"Dropped him off where?" asked Harris.

"Wouldn't say. Said he wants a little something for his trouble," answered Peterson.

“Tell Johnson to inform the cabbie, that if he doesn’t tell us the location, the only little something he’s going to get is the IRS checking to see if he’s claimed all his tip money over the last ten years!” Harris barked.

Peterson relayed the message to Johnson and waited patiently for a reply.

“The cabby said he dropped him off at the airport,” Peterson announced. “ He also said that the guy was in such a hurry that he almost forgot his knapsack in the backseat.”

“That’s got to be our guy! But, didn’t Mr. Black say that his plane wasn’t leaving until around 1:00?” asked Summers.

“That sounds about right,” replied Harris.

“Maybe we should we have security hold him?” asked Peterson.

“No! Remember? We’ve got to keep this as quiet as possible,” Harris reminded everyone. “The security would probably search him thoroughly and find all his material. This would cause even more problems. The fewer people who know about Mr. Black and the material he is carrying, the better.”

“Then we need get down to the airport,” announced Summers. “He couldn’t have hopped a plane in this short of time and we might find him just sitting around.”

“Oh! Have either of you heard from Reid again?” asked Harris.

“Absolutely nothing,” replied Summers. “Either her phone is on the fritz or.....”

“Or, Black somehow found out that she was following him, and took her out,” interrupted Peterson.

“What do you mean? Take out Reid? That’s kind of a dumb comment don’t you think,” replied Summers snidely. “From the quick profile done on him by head office, he has no military or

criminal record, has only two speeding tickets in his entire life and he doesn't even hold a weapons permit. By all accounts, this man poses no threat to any of us. He's just a simple family man looking for answers for that stupid book he's writing.”

“Stupid book or not. If the information he is holding leaks out to the press and the public, it could have significant implications to not only our government, but it could also have some international implications,” added Harris. “Summers. Contact our office and have them find out which airline Black is returning to Canada on. Peterson. You're behind the wheel again.”

By the time the agent drove out of the parking lot, Summers had received a reply from their office.

“He's not scheduled to fly back to Canada,” announced Summers. “He's headed to Fort Lauderdale on a 1:00 American Airlines Flight this afternoon, and then scheduled to leave the next day to the Bahamas, along with his wife.”

“His wife?” blurted out Harris.

“Yes, his wife. Mary Black.”

“That's a bit of an unexpected twist,” declared Harris.

“Well, we won't have to worry about Mr. Black flying over to the Bahamas, will we? Because he won't even make it to Fort Lauderdale!” bragged Peterson with confidence.

“Let's certainly hope so Peterson,” replied Harris.

“Hi. I need to change my ticket and get on the first plane to Fort Lauderdale, please,” Erik asked the American Airlines ticket agent as he handed her his ticket.

“One moment sir while I check,” replied the agent. “There is a plane that is just preparing to leave, but unfortunately there is no time for you to get on the plane in time. The next plane leaves

tomorrow morn....”

“Please! I beg you. I must get to Fort Lauderdale immediately. It’s an urgent family matter,” Erik said in desperation. “My mother had an accident while on vacation, and the doctors don’t know if she’ll pull through.” Erik knew that the only one who might be dying would be him, if he didn’t show up to meet his wife at the Aventura Mall in Fort Lauderdale.

“I’ll run to the gate. Please!!”

“Just a moment sir, I’ll see what I can do,” she replied as she picked up the phone and started punching her keyboard. “Do you have any luggage?”

“No, just this knapsack.”

She punched in a few more commands on her keypad, and the ticket machine suddenly spit out a new boarding pass. “You’ll have to hurry Mr. Black. The plane is already running several minutes behind schedule and the pilot will only wait for only another 10 minutes. If you can’t make it in time, you’ll be out of luck and have to wait for the next flight tomorrow morning! Here is your boarding pass. Gate 17.”

“Thank you. I can’t thank you enough.” Erik exclaimed in relief.

“Just hurry and go directly to the pilots’ security line. I’ll inform them, so they’ll be expecting you. Now go!”

“You’re the best!” Erik said, his voice trailing off as he sprinting away from the desk, blowing the agent a kiss.

Erik passed through the security checkpoint with little difficulty and hopped onto a waiting transportation golf cart. He passed the driver \$20 to not pick up any extra passengers and drive as fast as possible. With only a minute to spare the flight attendant greeted Erik with just a smile,

but her expression was one of “Why the hell are you so late mister?”, which Erik thought he probably deserved. The curtain separating first class closed immediately behind him as he headed down the aisle. Erik also got the usual stares and glares from the passengers who hated being delayed by a tardy passenger. He had just stowed his knapsack under the seat in front of him when a flight attendant’s voice came over the intercom, “Ladies and gentlemen. We should be getting under way very shortly. We are still waiting for one more passenger to arrive. Sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you for your patience and understanding.”

That at least that took some of the heat off Erik for being late.

Long slender muscular legs extended beneath the knee length dress of a woman wearing business attire, marched steadily down the jetway as she punched out numbers on her cell phone.

“Hello,” answered a woman’s voice on the line.

“I hear that the blossoms in Washington are in full bloom, this time of year.”

“Yes, but I prefer to see them under the light of.....?”

“A purple moon,” answered the woman walking in the jetway. “Hi, it’s Katia.”

“How can I be of assistance?”

“Is Tony Fontaine still stationed in Florida?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact he is. Why do you ask?”

“I’ll explain later. Can you transfer me directly to him please, and quickly.”

“No problem.”

“Thanks.”

“Hello,” answered a man in a husky voice.

“I hear that the blossoms.....oh to hell with that.....Purple Moon! Sorry to cut to the chase, but

I’m running out of time,” announced the woman in the jetway.

“Go ahead,” replied the man.

“Tony?”

“Yes.”

“Hi....It’s Katia.”

“What the hell do you want at this ungodly hour?”

“Black is on the move. I can’t explain everything right now, but I’m en-route on American Airlines, flight 1036 to Fort Lauderdale and will need assistance once I arrive,” Katia said as she neared the end of the jetway. “Where exactly in Florida are you?”

“Miami,” Tony replied.

“I need you to get to the Fort Lauderdale Airport. I’ll be landing in about two and half hours.”

“I’ll pick you up in the parking lot adjacent to Terminal 3,” replied Tony. “I’ll be driving a white BMW.”

“Thanks, and remember there will be two of us.” replied Katia. “I’ll see you in a few hours.”

Closing her cell phone as she approached the door to the plane, she flashed her badge to the awaiting flight attendant and then handed over her boarding pass.

“Thank you for holding the plane. Police business.”

“I understand. Your seat is right this way miss,” the attendant said as guided her to a first class seat.

Hearing the wheels lock into place as the plane lifted off the runway, Erik sat back, closed his eyes, and tried to grab some sleep. But the adrenaline that was still pumping wildly through his veins from the day’s events caused him to just stare aimlessly into space. Erik decided to just

review a few unread copies of his aunt’s letters before working on his novel.

Shortly after Erik Black’s plane departed, Agents Harris, Peterson and Summers screeched to a halt in front of the airport terminal. “Peterson you and I will scan the area. Summers, I’d like you to ask one of the American Airline ticket agents if Black has checked in early,” ordered Harris. “We’ll meet back here in 20 minutes.”

The agents fanned out as instructed and returned to the meeting point in roughly 20 minutes. Harris and Peterson were chatting about their negative findings when Agent Summers sauntered up.

“Well?” asked Harris.

“He checked in about an hour and a half ago.”

“Great. He should be around here someplace,” replied Peterson.

“Not likely. He caught an earlier flight and is already in the air,” replied Summers. “His plane is scheduled to land in about two hours.”

Harris paused and collected his thoughts.

“Summers, call our Raven Claw field operative in Fort Lauderdale and explain our situation. Have him put together a small crew to apprehend Black when he leaves the terminal. Oh, and contact the Dallas precinct and have them forward a photo of Mr. Black to you, then forward it on to our operative. Peterson! Find us a jet to Florida, NOW!” bellowed agent Harris.

Chapter Twelve

It didn't take too long before Erik had fallen asleep, as the Boing 747 raced towards Florida at almost 600 MPH. Thought of his aunt soon filled his dreams.

Late May 1963 - Calgary Greyhound Bus Station

With almost two hours until Grace needed to board the bus to Regina, so she headed to the bus station's cafe where she was well accustomed to eating. The food at most bus station cafe's wasn't always the greatest, but at least in was something in her stomach. Although the cafe seemed to be unusually busy, Grace lucked out and only had to wait a few minutes in line before being seated at a table.

"Hey, Madam Aderes! I see you're back in Calgary again. It's been quite a while."

exclaimed the waitress as she seemed to materialize out of nowhere. The waitress was a blonde haired, blue eyed attractive and bubbly lady, spoke with a Texas twang and had tons of personality. Although Grace couldn't remember the waitresses' name, she couldn't help but notice the name tag that read, 'Shirley', which was mounted on her uniform just above her large perky breasts.

"Are you planning to stay in Calgary this time, or just passing through again?"

"Just passing through again."

Grace would often travel through Calgary, using it as a mini hub when traveling through Western Canada.

"What can I get you honey?" asked the waitress chewing her gum crudely.

"I'll just have a hamburger with fries and a cup of tea please," Grace replied. It was one of her favorite dishes.

"Hey everybody, it's Madam Aderes," she announced to the other cafe staff as she hopped around a little while pointing to Grace.

Several of the staff waved politely back while producing big grins.

"Listen. Do you have time to do another one of those readings you do? The last one you did for me was so true it was unbelievable."

Grace was tired but she needed the extra cash, so she put on a big smile and said, " Sure, I'd love to."

"That's great," replied Shirley. "I'll put your order in and take my break now. Hey Jenny. I'm on my break," she yelled out to a woman standing behind the cash register. "Catch my other tables

will you? I’ll be only ten minutes or so.”

“Sure thing,” Jenny replied a little annoyed, as there was a line up of people waiting to pay their bill.

Shirley hurried back to Grace’s table with short quick strides with her arms pushed tightly against her body. Sitting down excitedly, she put her elbows on the table then rested her chin in her hands.

“I’m ready!” Shirley exhaled as Grace was arranging her Tarot cards.

Grace not only read Shirley’s fortune, but the fortunes of three other staff members and one cafe patron. She managed to make an ample amount of money in the short amount of time she had, before the announcement suddenly came over the intercom that her bus was boarding.

Being so thankful that Shirley had enthusiastically advertised Grace’s talents that she tried to return the money she charged Shirley when she was paying her restaurant bill.

“Listen honey. Thanks, but you keep it. You can just do a free reading for me the next time you’re passing through. Maybe you should even think about staying in Calgary a bit. You’d probably even like it,” Shirley proclaimed with a big smile. “Oh, and you can just forget about this too,” she added as Shirley grabbed the bill from Grace and crumpled it up.

“You’re too kind,” Grace replied graciously, and her eyes welled up a bit.

“You have yourself a good trip now. And think about staying longer next time, will you?” Shirley called out. Grace was already walking away and waved her arm without looking back.

Wiping a tear from her eye as she boarded the bus, Grace again found a seat all to her self near the back. As she unfolded a copy of the Calgary Herald newspaper, she noticed that the two men who traveled down on the bus from Edmonton gravitated passed where she was sitting, and

once again grabbed the seat right behind her. The smell of the men's cigarettes wafted over the seat and the odor of diesel soon filled the air, as the bus rolled out of the station. It wasn't long before the bus began to chew away the miles and the sound of the wheels wound into a steady hum. The constant drone of the engine and the hum of the wheels were hypnotizing, which reminded her of one of Grace's very first long bus excursions, when she traveled to Los Angeles.

Reminiscing, Grace started day dreaming back to a time that was wild and exciting. A time when she was a vivacious young free spirited woman, full of vim and vigor. A time of glitz and glamour, of danger and intrigue. It was also a time that she would remember fondly, as well as a time to keep hidden in the past. After several head nods, Grace slipped into a deep sleep.

Chapter Thirteen

1939 Los Angeles, California

Grace was excited as the bright lights of Los Angeles appeared on the horizon. The bus had been traveling for over five hours on terrible roads after departing Las Vegas at 7:00 pm. It had been a long journey since leaving Edmonton two days earlier, and her bum was tingling like she was sitting on pins and needles for the last ten miles. Suddenly, there was a loud BANG! As the bus started shaking, the driver slowed and pulled it to a stop on the side of the road.

"Sorry folks," the driver announced. "Sounds like we might have a flat. I'll check it out."

Re-boarding the bus a short time later, the driver confirmed his suspicions.

"Yes, we do indeedee have a flat tire folks," he announced trying to make light of the situation.

"Anyone who wishes to stretch their legs can do so. Just be careful and please stay close to the bus, or in the ditch."

"How long is it going to be before we actually arrive in L.A.?" blurted out a passenger.

"Well, I can see the lights of L.A. right there on the horizon," the driver said pointing. "It should

only be about a half an hour or so, once the tire is repaired. The only problem is that it’ll probably be a good hour or two before a repair crew will be out to fix it, so unfortunately you’ll just have to relax and please be patient.”

There was a few of the usual groans, but most of the passengers were just too exhausted to even worry about it. Some of them even slept right through the whole ordeal and had no idea that the bus was delayed, until the bus pulled into the station. Grace remained on the bus, squirming in her seat for at least a half hour. Unable to find sleep, she decided to get up and walk around a bit and find out how much longer the repairs might take. Departing the bus Grace walked around to the front of the bus where the driver, illuminated by the headlights, was standing trying to flag down a passing motorist. Unfortunately there was not much traffic that late at night, with only the odd car traveling in the opposite direction.

“Excuse me. But how much longer will it be?” Grace asked.

“Probably a couple more hours. It’s late in the night and there haven’t been any cars drive by for me to flag down yet,” replied the driver.

Grace sighed, but knew there was nothing she could really do. While keeping the bus driver company, Grace introduced herself.

“My name is Grace, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you Grace. My name is Hank,” the driver said as he shook her hand.

Pacing back and forth and kicking at the odd pebble while chatting to Hank, Grace glanced down the highway and noticed headlights coming up from behind them.

“There!” Grace exclaimed, pointing down the road behind the bus. “Someone is headed our way!”

“It’s about time!” replied Hank.

The headlights became brighter and brighter as the vehicle approached rapidly. As the approaching car sped towards them, the bus driver stepped out into the road and started waving his arms frantically.

“I don’t think they’re going to stop!” Hank called out as he jumped back in front of the bus to avoid being hit.

Grace quickly threw open her coat and raised her dress well above her knee, and pretending to pull up her nylon stockings. Hank just started shaking his fist high above his head, as the car thundered by.

The air was suddenly thick with dust, and the sound of screeching metal on metal suddenly could be heard. Looking back around the side of the bus, they could see nothing but the dust of the passing car and hear the squealing of brakes. Slowly, as the dust settled a bit, they could see the dim glare of red tail lights gradually getting brighter, as they got closer to the bus. Grace looked over towards Hank and seeing that he was startled by Grace’s actions, she shrugged her shoulder a little and said, “It worked, didn’t it?”

A brand new black 1938 Buick Convertible Sport Phaeton, slowly rolled to a stop in front of Hank and Grace. Even though the car was covered in a thin layer of dust, Grace could see that it was a luxurious automobile and was very impressed. She always had a hankering for fancy automobiles.

“Sorry about the dust,” the driver said after he got out of the car.

Grace and Hank were still coughing and swatting the dust out of the air.

“I didn’t see you until the last second. Do you need some help?” asked the driver as he made his

way around the car.

"Yes. We've got a flat. Are you headed to town?" asked Hank.

"You bet."

"Great. Could you stop by the bus station and have them send a crew out to fix our tire?"

"Not a problem. Anything to help a damsel in distress," the driver of the car replied. He was leaning against the spare tire that was mounted in the front fender with his arms crossed, smiling and ogling Grace from head to toe.

"Thanks," replied Hank. "Greatly appreciated."

The front window on the passenger side of the car unexpectedly rolled down.

"Hey miss! No need for such a pretty lady to wait in a stinky old bus," piped up the passenger.

"How'd you like a ride into town?"

Pausing for a moment, Grace happened to glance over to Hank and noticed him shaking his head negatively slightly.

Whether it was the fancy car they drove or the way they looked and talked, there was something about these men that Hank just didn't sit well with him. Hank was a good judge of character. Unfortunately Grace couldn't see that quite yet. A full moon and the lights from the car's headlights bouncing off the side of the bus revealed the driver. He was a heavy set man about 5'6" tall, wearing a business suit covered with several dust smudges and sporting a wide brimmed black fedora. The passenger with his arm resting on the door sill was wearing a checked sports jacket and appeared to be slighter in stature. He was clean shaven with a thin face and slicked back hair.

"Do you mind if we catch a ride?" asked a middle aged couple who had snuck in

behind Grace and Hank. “My mother was in an automobile accident and we need to get to the hospital as soon as possible,” pleaded the woman.

“We don’t need the hassle boss,” the driver said looking over to his passenger.

“Don’t worry about it Mickey. They’re just hitching a ride. What if it was your mother that was in the hospital, hey?” replied the passenger as he swatted his drivers arm.

“Sure. Hop in,” Mickey then called out and motioned with his thumb to the back door.

As the couple returned to the bus for their belongings, Mickey called out, “And what about you miss. Do ya need a ride or not?”

Seeing that she would have company along for the ride, made Grace feel a little safer.

“Sure. Why not!” answered Grace. “Hey Hank. Would you mind grabbing my bag? It’s a black suitcase in the overhead rack in row 12, with the last name of Sereda on it.”

He did not answer, but just walked onto the bus and returned shortly with her suitcase.

Hank whispered to Grace when he returned as he handed her the suitcase. “I don’t recommend that you go with these guys miss. I’ve seen my share of characters over the years and they look a little shady to me,” Hank whispered to Grace as he handed her the suitcase. Grace had the same feeling, but didn’t want to admit it.

“Not to worry Hank. I’ve got company,” Grace replied quietly, motioning to the couple who were walking towards the big Buick. “But thanks for caring.”

Grace rubbed her hand on Hank’s shoulder, then turning towards the car said, “I’ll make sure someone comes back to help you!”

“Thanks,” Hank replied. “Be careful.”

The large trunk lid of the car was already opened, and the driver standing nearby, as Grace

approached the rear of the Buick.

“Hi there miss. My name is Mickey,” he said as he padded and swiped some of the dust off of him.

“Nice to meet you, Mickey. I’m Grace.”

“Here, let me grab that for you Grace.”

“Thank you.”

As she peered into the dimly lit trunk, Grace could see that there was a mishmash of shovels, pick axes, a baseball bat and a rope strewn about. Mickey quickly reached in and grabbed a tarp from the side of the trunk and pulled it over the tools.

“Oh.... Don’t mind that stuff. My boss and I were just burying some trash earlier this evening,” Mickey said with a slight snicker, throwing her suitcase in a little roughly.

The other couple who were also waiting at the rear of the car also had their suitcases tossed into the trunk roughly. They weren’t too appreciative for the rough handling, but buttoned their lip as they were grateful to hasten their arrival to see the woman’s mother.

When Grace opened the back door, the passenger in the front seat called out, “Why don’t you sit up here, little lady!”

“Thank you, but I’m fine here in the back,” Grace replied as she crawled in, with the couple following close behind.

“Suit yourself.”

The Buick spun gravel as it sped away, leaving another cloud of dust billowing behind them.

“Hi, I’m Grace,” she said introducing herself to the couple. The couple reciprocated.

“Well, hello there Grace. I’m Ben,” the passenger from the front seat said as he leaned way over

his seat to shake Grace's hand.

"Hello," Grace replied.

"So, where are you from Grace?" asked Ben, totally ignoring the other couple.

"Canada."

"Canada? You sure are a long ways from home. What brings you to L.A.? You here to become the next big Hollywood star?" asked Ben.

"No, nothing like that. I just wanted to see what all the fuss Hollywood is all about. Maybe even get a job and stay a while."

With his arm bent across the back of the seat, Ben rested his chin in the crevasse of his arm and continued to idly chatted with Grace until they reached the outskirts of Los Angeles.

The interior of the car grew brighter and brighter as they made their way into the downtown core, Grace finally got a better look at the man who had sweet talked to her the entire drive to the city. He was a very attractive man, appearing to be in his early thirties, clean shaven with puppy dog eyes and matching droopy eyebrows, and a charming smile.

Ben was also able to see that Grace was much more attractive that the dim lights revealed back at the bus. He always had a way with women and would go to great lengths, if he thought he could get them in the sack. He definitely wanted to score with a Canadian, and decided to put game plan in place that he hoped would payoff dividends down the road. If not.....he could always find other women to bed with.

"So, what kind of job would you be looking for?" Ben asked.

"Not sure. Just something to help pay the bills," answered Grace.

Ben reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small notepad and pen and started scribbling.

"Here you go," Ben said as he ripped the paper from the pad and handed it over to Grace. "Just give this note to the owner at Ciro's. He'll set you up with a job, if you'd like. He owes me a couple of favors."

"Thank you Ben," Grace replied a little coyly. "That's very kind of you. I'll keep it in mind."

Finally Ben's car turned on to Sunset Boulevard, and Grace's eyes were brighter than the lights of the strip, as she ogled in awe at the bustling nightlife.

"So I see that you're impressed by our wonderful city."

"Yes. Who wouldn't be."

"So where would you like to be dropped off Grace," asked Mickey.

"At the bus station please. I promised Hank, the bus driver, that I would make sure to send a repair truck out to him."

"If you'd like, you can stay the night at my hotel. It has an extra bed," Ben offered, in hopes of possibly scoring sooner than later.

"Thanks, but I think it best if I get my own room. Besides, you need to drop this couple off at the hospital, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. I almost forgot," Ben replied disappointedly.

"Here we go Grace. The Greyhound Bus Depot," announced Mickey as he parked at the curb.

"Thanks for the ride," Grace as she opened the door.

"Maybe I'll see you around town?" aspired Ben.

"Maybe."

Grace closed the door and walked towards the main entrance.

Chapter Fourteen

Fort Lauderdale, Present Day

“Excuse me sir. Seat-backs up please. We’re preparing to land,” the attendant called while touching my shoulder, waking me from my dream.

Peering out the window Erik could see the Atlantic Ocean lapping at the Florida shoreline as the plane banked slightly on its approach for landing. He was glad to be far away from the inconvenience of having my room broken into, as well as the mysterious behavior from the agents, which left a bitter taste in his mouth.

The woman sitting next to Erik was watching the news channel on the seat back. Although he couldn’t hear the report, he still glanced over and read some of the headlines as they scrolled across in the lower banner. Erik couldn’t believe what he was reading.

Fire destroys Archives at The Dallas Public Library - Head Librarian,
Margaret LeBlanc assaulted and in serious condition in hospital - Suspect chased
off by three good samaritans - Arson suspected.

“What kind of a person would want to hurt a kind elderly woman and destroy all that historical documentation?” he thought to himself.

Before Erik could read any further information, the screen went blank and the flight attendant announced that the plane was preparing to land in Fort Lauderdale. As the wheels hit the tarmac, Erik glanced at his watch and noticed that the plane had arrived on time at 7:30 am., despite that he and the other late arriving passenger had delayed the departure. Eager to rendezvous with his wife for a well needed vacation in the Bahamas, Erik started gather up a few of Grace’s letters that had accidentally slipped to the side of his seat. When the plane finally came to a stop at the terminal, Erik grabbed his knapsack and rose from the seat in hopes of getting ahead of the crowd of crushing passengers. Unfortunately, everyone else had the same idea so Erik made it only one row ahead, which ended up to be a blessing in disguise.

Erik suddenly felt a tap on his arm.

“Excuse me sir,” called out the passenger who was sitting next to him. “Is this one of your letters?”

Taking it from her outstretched arm, Erik grabbed it and quickly scanned the letter.

“Yes it is. Thank you very much,” he replied, and quickly excused his way back to his seat.

He searched around and under the seat thoroughly for any additional letters that may have fallen,

but found nothing.

“I’ve got to be more damn careful,” he thought to himself. “I can’t afford to misplace any of this information.”

Erik thanked the passenger again and departed the plane. While walking down the jetway, Erik turned on his cell phone to try and reach his wife. There was no answer. Since Erik had no checked luggage, he immediately headed out of the terminal. The Florida heat smacked Erik with a thud as he departed the air conditioned terminal. He had been to Florida on numerous occasions and it was both exhilarating and comforting to once again feel the warmth. But he was still looking forward for his feet would be wading through the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea the next day.

Erik was hoping to catch Mary at the hotel before she headed out on one of her shopping sprees, so Erik tried to wave down a cab. A caravan of black SUVs with tinted windows suddenly raced down the terminal roadway, parking at equal intervals along the curb.

“That’s odd,” Erik thought.

Then almost simultaneously men in dark suits exited the vehicles, appearing to be searching for someone. They spread out and scanned the crowd.

A cab seemed to be heading in Erik’s direction, when it was unexpectedly cut off by a hotel shuttle. As the shuttle door opened, he was rudely jostled about by the other people that were waiting for that shuttle. Suddenly, Erik felt the grasp of a hand squeezing his arm and tug him slightly backwards.

“If you want to live, do exactly as I say!” a woman’s voice whispered.

“What?” Erik uttered in astonishment as he turned towards the voice that was pulling at his arm.

“Hey, aren’t you Ms.....?” Erik began.

“No time to explain. They’ve spotted you,” the woman interrupted motioning towards the black SUVs.

Glancing to where she had motioned, Erik could see one man standing near one of the black SUVs staring in their direction while talking into the lapel of his jacket. He then started walking briskly towards Erik.

“Into the shuttle!” the woman ordered as she firmly grabbed Erik and pushed him into the shuttle. “Those men are special agents. If they nab you, both you and your material will be history!”

Erik was just too startled and baffled to say anything at first.

“Get out of the seat!” she barked to the driver as she flashed a badge.

The driver obliged and the woman sat in the driver’s seat. Just as the woman was about to start driving, a large tour bus pulled next to the shuttle, blocking any escape.

The man from the SUV was within fifty feet of the shuttle when the car in front of the shuttle pulled away. Bolting forward, the shuttle headed down the causeway. Only managing to travel a couple of hundred feet, it was suddenly surrounded and forced to a stop by three black SUVs.

Agents quickly exited their vehicles and circled the shuttle with guns drawn, then carefully entered the shuttle. The agents exited the shuttle a few moments later with the shuttle driver accompanying them, who then pointed back to where the tour bus was still double parked. Unbeknownst to the agents, Erik and the woman had fled out the driver’s door to the shuttle and then fled into the parkade.. The woman had forced the driver to speed away by pointing a

revolver into Erik’s ribs, then threatening to shoot Erik unless the driver obeyed her instructions.

As Erik and the woman hid behind a large concrete pillar, they had a clear view of the shuttle as it sped away and then quickly becoming corralled. Seeing that the agents were preoccupied with the shuttle driver, the woman prodded Erik through the parkade, while making a call on her cell.

Within seconds, a BMW came flying out of nowhere, and abruptly stopping in front of them.

“Quick Mr. Black, get in,” the woman said as she opened the rear door.

Pausing slightly and looking directly into her eyes, Erik finally remembered the lady’s name.

“Agent Reid.....isn’t it? What’s going on?”

“Just get in. I’ll explain as we go!” she replied.

Glancing back towards the SUVs, she noticed one of the agents pointing in their direction. She slammed the door behind her and shouted out, “They’ve spotted us. Get us the hell out of here, pronto!”

“I’m on it Katia,” replied the driver, as the BMW lunged forward.

“Katia? I thought your name was agent Laine Reid. Who are you people?” Erik asked bewildered.

“This is Tony.”

“Hi!” Tony replied as he slid the car into a 90 degree turn.

“Hi,” Erik replied back while he slide across the seat and squishing Katia against the door.

“And I’m Katia,” she said reaching out to shake my hand. “I work for.....”

“Hang on!” Tony shouted out. “They’re trying to beat us to the exit.”

As Erik looked out the window, he could see a SUV racing parallel to the BMW, racing to block

our escape at the exit. Tony kicked it into the next gear. The BMW smashed through the barricade just in front of the SUV, but just managed to clip the rear trunk, spinning the car in circles. The SUV ricocheted off the Beemer and crashed into a parked car. Facing the opposite direction on the one way road, Tony could see more SUVs racing towards them. Tony shifted into reverse and sped backwards, then slammed on the brakes and cranked the steering wheel, swinging the car a full 180 degrees.

Both Katia were being tossed around the car like rag dolls as they hadn't even thought to put their seat belts on. Rubbing his head, Erik glanced back and saw the grill of a SUV almost on top of them. Tony threw the car into the next gear and slowly put some distance between them and the SUV, as they headed towards the freeway.

“What the hell is going on!” Erik shouted out angrily. “Who are those people, and who are you? Reid? Katia? Laine? Just who?”

“Buckle up while I explain,” Agent Reid replied as Tony swerved the BMW through traffic.

“My real name is Katia Cummings, and I work for a special undercover unit with the FBI called Fortress. Our primary objective to protect and preserve any information regarding national security issues. Although we are a branch of the US Government, we work totally independently and are not under any authority other than that of a very few select government personnel. Even the President is not aware of our existence.

“Hang on!” Tony called out as car horns blared while he drove through a red light. Looking back, Erik could see that the SUVs were forced to slowly make their way through the maze of traffic. Tony made a hard left at the next intersection, followed by a right down an alley trying to loose their pursuers.

As the BMW pitched back and forth, Katia continued her story. “Shortly after the assassination of JFK, witnesses’ testimony was either twisted, lost or dismissed, and in some cases the witnesses simply disappeared. A couple of concerned District Attorneys, along with a few Senators who were privy to the CIA’s cover up of the incident, assembled a small group of trustworthy FBI Agents and formed a new division called Fortress. Since its inception, Fortress has gathered, protected and secured valuable information on numerous high profile cases.”

Suddenly Erik could feel the car accelerate rapidly as Tony drove onto a freeway ramp. Tony hammered the accelerator once on the freeway, and Erik felt like he was in a NASCAR race, as the car sped and darted around vehicles.

“They’re still on us!” Tony said as he peered through the rear view mirror.

“Well, get rid of them!” urged Katia.

“I’m trying, but the freeway is getting a little jammed.”

While staring through the rear window, Katia continued. “The information and photographs in your possession are of great interest to the people who are chasing us. They are from an organization called Raven Claw, whose sole purpose is to suppress or destroy information that implicates any of our government’s involvement on politically sensitive issues. I was assigned by Fortress to work undercover and infiltrate Raven Claw’s operations. From what I’ve seen of your material, it needs to be protected. Raven Claw will stop at nothing to confiscate your evidence, which may include killing you, if they think the information might implicate the United States Government’s involvement in the assassination.”

Erik turned nine shades of white, and sick to his stomach after hearing this information.

“And how do I know that you’re not the one’s who want to destroy my material,” Erik asked

nauseously.

“Because I would have already killed you by now, and I’d be suntanning on the beach!”

“What the fuck have I gotten myself into?” Erik said solemnly, leaning forward and putting his face into his hands.

“Don’t worry Mr. Black. We’ll get you out of this. Coming up on our left Tony!” Katia suddenly shouted. The traffic congestion had allowed the other agents to catch up.

SMACK! The car was suddenly jolted sideways. A SUV had pulled along side of the Beemer and was trying to run it into the concrete retaining wall.

“Grab hold!” Tony blurted out, as the car was sideswiped again.

This time Tony was expecting the collision and turned into the SUV just before impact. Three more SUVs suddenly came up and joined into the pursuit, blocking any chance of an escape to the rear.

“Incoming!” Katia yelled out, as an SUV raced up from the rear.

The SUV came in from the side again and squeezed the Beemer towards the concrete wall.

With the another SUV pinning the car in from behind, Tony had to make a quick decision.

“Hang on!” Tony hollered.

Giving two quick successive sharp turns of the steering wheel to the left, Tony jolted the SUV just enough to giving him a little breathing room. Noticing that an off ramp was fast approaching, Tony again turned the wheel hard to his left, but this time holding the Beemer tight against the SUV. Before the driver of the SUV realized it, the off ramp dividing barrier was upon him. With one last jolt, Tony sent the SUV careening into the up-sloped barrier which launched it spiraling into the air. The BMW continued down the steep off ramp with two

SUVs still following in hot pursuit.

Tony was immediately forced to slam on the brakes for a red light as he approached an extremely busy intersection. Suddenly there was a loud thunderous crash behind the BMW, as the SUV that was hurtled into the air came smashing to the roadway. Landing on it's hood, it began sliding down the ramp. Not reacting in time, the first pursuing SUV smashed into the overturned car and hurtling it into the back of the BMW, forcing it into the intersection of crisscrossing vehicles. With quick wit, Tony floored the pedal and propelled through the intersection. Narrowly missing being t-boned by the oncoming traffic, Tony had no choice but to continue driving up a freeway on ramp.

The upended SUV didn't fair as well. The momentum from the second SUV crashing into it, sent it directly into the path of a fully loaded cement truck, with the SUV exploding on impact. The second SUV screeched sideways to a stop only to be hit by the third pursuing SUV, along with several swerving vehicles that were trying to avoid the cement truck. The pursuing agents were temporarily trapped.

Driving back onto the freeway, Erik, Tony and Katia were relieved to say the least, that they had narrowly missed a disaster. As Tony brought the car up to speed, Katia noticed that they were getting weird looks from the passing motorists. Looking out the rear window, several pieces of loose sheet metal could be seen strewn along the freeway with vehicles trying to avoid driving over them. A little steam started to appear from under the Beemer's hood.

“We need to find a new set of wheels,” Katia called out.

With another sudden thunderous crash, their car was propelled forward as the BMW was rammed again from the rear. Another SUV obviously didn't follow down the off ramp and had

instead, continued down the freeway. The SUV dropped back slightly, then returned quickly and pulled up along side of the BMW. With guns drawn out of the open windows, the agents fired several rounds towards the tires. Katia leaned over Erik, rolled the window down and laid a barrage of bullets across the side of the attacking vehicle, causing it to retreat. Erik’s ears were still ringing when Katia then leaned out the window and emptied her clip into the front grill.

Being blinded from the radiator steam, the driver of the SUV wandered aimlessly back and forth across the lanes of traffic, until it was clipped by a passing pick-up truck. As Tony drove away, Katia and Erik looked behind them to see that the SUV had come to a stop in the middle of the freeway with vehicles swerving left and right trying to avoid a collision. Out of the blue a semitrailer approached, and with no where to go, the driver cranked his rig hard to his left, causing the trailer to slide sideways. Smoke rose from the braking tires as the semitrailer continued to slide right over the SUV, shearing the roof clean off and surely decapitating anyone who had not ducked down. Erik was speechless as he tried to digest what had just happened.

Chapter Fifteen

"Summers. Have you received any reports from our agents in Florida yet? Harris asked, as their Lear jet slipped through the clouds over the Gulf of Mexico.

"One just coming in now," Summers replied while listening to her Bluetooth. "The last report to dispatch was that Mr. Black somehow eluded them at the airport, but they are now in close pursuit of him on the freeway just north of Fort Lauderdale."

"What do you mean eluded them? How could Black escape from trained agents? Harris exploded.

"It appears that he may have had some help, from sources that we are unaware of sir."

"This guy might be smarter than we think boss," piped up Peterson.

"Or, just plain lucky!" added Summers.

"Just keep me updated with their progress. Have either of you heard from Reid yet?" asked Harris.

“Nothing yet sir,” Peterson replied as both Summers and Peterson shook their heads.

“I wonder where the hell she’s disappeared to?” pondered Harris. “Never mind. She’s probably still wandering aimlessly back in Dallas. Where’s that background report I asked for on Black?”

“I believe that was Reid’s assignment sir,” answered Summers.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake. Reid better have a good explanation for herself or she’ll be filing papers for the next 50 years! Peterson, get me some detailed information on this guy pronto! I want to know absolutely everything about him.”

“You got it sir!”

Tony had decreased speed due to heavy traffic, and it wasn’t long before another SUV was on their ass. It obviously made its way through the carnage left by the cement truck. It gave the BMW a couple bone crunching thuds from behind, but Tony’s expert driving skills kept them from veering into a concrete barrier. The SUV then pulled along side of the BMW and Katia, Mary and Erik braced themselves for the inevitable collision, which never materialized. As the SUV pulled up close, agents suddenly leaned out of the SUV’s windows with weapons drawn, motioning for Tony to pull over. Ignoring them, Tony quickly started evasive actions the best he could by swerving through the traffic. But the damaged BMW was no match for the SUV as it soon pulled along side again.

Katia called out to Erik, “Put down your window again!” As Erik followed instructions, Katia reached into her jacket and extracted her revolver. Leaning over Erik again, she opened fire at the tires and engine, making the SUV retreat slightly while it dodged vehicles. While Katia reloaded her revolver with a fresh clip the SUV re-attacked, this time raking our hood with a couple of rounds of bullets. A vast amount of steam started to seep out from under the hood as

they obviously had riddled the radiator full of holes. A man in the rear seat of the SUV pointed his gun directly at Tony and motioned for him to pull over again.

"Not on your life," Tony muttered. "Take care of them Katia!"

Upon hearing Tony's orders, Katia opened fire across the SUV. The front passenger sought refuge by retreating into his seat, while the rear passenger instantly slumped over the open window sill, covered in blood. As the SUV slowed, Katia emptied the remainder of her clip into the hood. With a lucky shot, Katia had hit the hood release which pried the hood open like a can opener, then smashed into the front windshield, spraying glass across its occupants. The driver being blinded by the hood and flying debris slammed on his brakes, but it was too late. His SUV smashed directly into the back of a CocaCola truck sending its contents careening across the road.

"We need to get off this freeway quick!" Katia implored.

"Way ahead of you," Tony replied as he had already exited onto an off ramp.

Chapter Sixteen

"Just got an update on our agents that were pursuing Mr. Black," Summers announced as the Lear jet started its descent towards Fort Lauderdale.

"And....?" replied Harris impatiently.

"It appears that four of our vehicles were destroyed in the pursuit on Freeway 95. Two agents are dead. Seven other agents were severely injured and are presently en-route to the hospital."

"How could one simple civilian take out nine trained CIA agents?" Harris raged.

"We believe that he is getting help from someone," surmised agent Summers.

"What?" Harris extorted.

"Agents from the fourth pursuit vehicle said that they saw Mr. Black, along with another person, get into the backseat of a BMW at the airport. They also said that the driver eluded their pursuit like a trained professional," replied Summers sheepishly.

Harris sat quietly for several minutes, then asked Summers, "Any word on Agent Reid?"

"No, absolutely nothing."

"Contact head office to try and pinpoint her location by using the GPS located in her phone."

"Right away sir," Summers replied.

"Oh, before I forget. Did you happen to see the name circled on the piece of paper Reid found in the boardroom?" asked Harris casually.

"Sorry, no. Reid's thumb was covering most of the name. Why do you ask?"

"Because.....never mind and just listen. I'd like you to contact Eddy Hobson at DARPA," Harris said suddenly changing the subject. "I know he's been working on a new satellite system called Cyclops, and I'd like to find out if it's up and running yet."

The Cyclops satellite system was the newest revolutionary surveillance satellite that the United States Military had ever developed. It was designed not only for military purposes to track the movements of enemy troops and equipment, but also to aid law enforcement agencies. Telescopic lenses from five satellites orbiting the earth thousand of mile apart, focus on a 10,000 square mile area and fed to it's mainframe. The information is extrapolated into a three dimensional holographic image and projected into a large warehouse located somewhere in north Florida. The operators can then zoom in and freeze frame any object within that area, so someone can physically walk around the projected images for detailed analysis. The Cyclops mainframe also has access to any financial transactions and can hack into all video and surveillance cameras throughout the world, which include ATM machines, retail stores, traffic cameras and even the camera on a home computer. With its advanced facial recognition program, Cyclops can inevitably track down any individual, almost anywhere and any place.

Agent Harris had heard about the satellite through his good friend Eddy Hobson, who was heading up the Cyclops Project, which was still in its testing phase. Harris was hoping that he

could get Cyclops deployed over Fort Lauderdale. Eddy owed Harris a favor.

“Bill. I’ve just received an update on Agent Reid,” Summers announced as the jets landing gear locked into place.

“Well, where the hell is she?” barked Harris.

“She’s actually in Florida sir.”

“FLORIDA?” exclaimed Harris with astonishment.

“Do you think she’s trailing Black?” Peterson piped in.

“How the hell do I know, Peterson. But I sure the hell hope so. Where exactly in Florida is she?”

Harris asked Summers.

“Just trying to determine that now sir,” Summers replied as she was receiving a continuous update. “She’s in Fort Lauderdale, but it’ll be another few moments for exact coordinates.”

“If Reid’s on Black’s trail, then why the hell hasn’t she already apprehended.....”

“I’ve got her pinpointed on my laptop sir,” Summers blurted out as she interrupted agent Harris.

“Her GPS signal indicates that she’s traveling southbound on Freeway 95, and appears to be exiting onto West Broward Blvd..”

“Freeway 95? Isn’t that the Freeway that our agents were chasing Black on?” asked Harris.

“Yes, I believe so,” replied Summers.

“Can you show me location of where our vehicles were taken out?”

“Just give me a second while I contact our office.”

A few moments later she was forwarded the coordinates.

“Right here sir,” Summers replied, pointing to several red dots flashing on her screen.

“For Christ’s sake. The locations where our agents were taken out are just before the exit Reid

just took. She must be tailing Black. Inform head office that our plane will be landing shortly and to have a car waiting for us. Then have them get a whirlybird in the air to pinpoint Reid by tracing her GPS signal. We'll catch up to her on the ground.”

“Anything else sir?” Summers said wearily.

“Yes, just one more thing. Do we know what type of vehicle Black made his getaway in?”

“It's a white BMW,” replied Summers after scanning the report on her screen.

“Then request that the agents in the chopper also keep an eye out for Black's vehicle as well,”

Harris added.

Agent Harris racked his brains, but just couldn't figure out why the hell Reid had gone AWOL.

Chapter Seventeen

The BMW trudged down the off ramp with dangling metal and steam pouring out from under it's hood. Limping along for just over a mile, Tony found a parking garage to ditch the car. Driving up to the third level, he parked next to a Ford Taurus. Within a minute, Tony had broken into and hot wired the Taurus while Katia and Erik transferred several duffle bags into the back seat of their new set of wheels.

"Don't get too comfortable folks. I see we've got company," Tony announced pointing to the shadow of a helicopter against a nearby building.

"How the hell was anyone able to track us here so fast?" Katia said in bewilderment.

"Katia, do you still have your agency cell on you?" asked Tony as they drove towards an exit.

"Shit! It's rigged with a GPS," Katia replied as she instantly remembered. "Sorry, forgot all about it."

Pulling out the phone from her purse, Katia scanned all the latest calls and messages to see if

there were any important messages. One message from a friend and dozens from agent Summers. Katia just shrugged her shoulders and turned off the phone.

As Tony pulled behind a short line of cars waiting to exit the parkade, Katia rolled down her window in anticipation to toss the phone in a nearby garbage can.

“Wait!” Erik yelled while grabbing the cell from Katia’s hand.

“Where the hell are you going?” Katia asked frantically through her open window, as Erik had quickly exited the car. The sound of the helicopter could be heard hovering near the parkade exit.

“Just pick me up around the corner,” he shouted out. “Hey Tony! Pass me your hat, will you.”

Putting on Tony’s hat, Erik walked briskly towards the exit and casually dropped the cell into the back seat of an open convertible that was a couple of cars ahead of them. The male and female occupants totally unaware of his actions.

Erik pulled the hat down to cover his face and continued through the main exit, then immediately turned right and walked nonchalantly down the sidewalk. As the convertible zipped past Erik, the shadow of the helicopter could be seen following. Keeping his head down, Erik continued his pace and rounded the corner. After walking another half of a block Erik glanced back towards the corner. No Taurus was in sight. His face became white as all the blood started to rush from his head.

“My knapsack is still in the car!” he suddenly thought to himself. “Have they taken my material and left me high and dry?”

Erik was panic-stricken. He was about to turn around and go back when a short horn burst made him jump.

“You look pale and a little distraught Mr. Black,” Katia said hanging out the rear window. “Did

you think that we were going to leave you behind?”

“It did kind of cross my mind.”

“Don’t worry Mr. Black. We’re here to help you any way we can. Now hop in,” Katia said as she slid over behind Tony.

“That was quick thinking,” Tony exclaimed after Erik climbed into the backseat.

“Thanks. It should buy us a little time while those guys go on a wild goose chase.”

“Well it appears to be working,” Katia announced as she pointed out her window.

Looking out the window, the helicopter could be seen heading back towards the freeway as it pursued the decoy vehicle.

Chapter Eighteen

"I have an exact location on Agent Reid sir," Summers announced, as the plane touched down. "The chopper has a lock on Reid's GPS signal coming from a red convertible. They have also confirmed the occupants to be a woman with a male driver, which might be Mr. Black. The car is presently heading back towards Hwy. 95."

"Great!" replied Harris. "Reid must have managed to apprehend him from whoever helped Black escape from the airport. Inform the chopper that we've just landed and to contact us every 5 minutes with an update on Reid's exact location. We'll follow up and then intercept."

Within ten minutes of landing, Harris along with Summers and Peterson were greeted by a fellow agent and escorted to an awaiting vehicle.

"Hi, I'm Agent Duke. Anything you guys need or want, just ask."

"Thanks," replied Harris, shaking Duke's hand.

Agent Duke drove across the tarmac and stopped the car in front of a chain linked gate where a security officer was waiting. As they were about to drive onto the exit ramp way, a tow truck

with a damaged SUV hoisted up passed by.

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Peterson. “Someone certainly did a number on that rig.”

“That’s one of ours, and it’s a small fender bender compared to what happened on the freeway.

Just hang on. I’m getting an update coming in from the chopper,” announced Duke as he put his hand up to his Bluetooth.

Harris, Summers and Peterson were a little taken back with the news, but said nothing.

“The convertible just got onto the freeway and is heading north on Hwy. 95, added agent Duke.

“That puts us about 10 minutes behind them.”

“Where the hell do you think Reid is taking Black?” Peterson asked.

“Who knows and who cares. As long as she has him in her custody, we have nothing to worry about,” replied Harris.

As Harris and his agents sped north along the freeway with sirens blaring, they were able to cut the convertible’s lead down to six minutes. In less than a minute they came across the carnage in the southbound lane, which had completely shut down all southbound traffic.

“My mother of god!” exclaimed Peterson. “It looks like a fricking war zone! Are you sure this Black fellow doesn’t belong to some sort of military or undercover agency? He sure is doing a good job of demolishing our agency!”

“As far as we know, he is just a civilian,” answered Harris. “Summers. Have you received any detailed intel on Black’s background yet?”

“Sorry, but I’ve been a little preoccupied. I’ll get right on it,” Summers replied as her cell phone rang and motioned for Harris to wait a second. “Hello, agent Summers here. Just hang on. It’s Hobson over at DARPA for you sir.”

“Eddy. How the hell are you?”

“Busier than a one armed wallpaper hanger. What’s this unusual request for the use of my newest toy? And how the hell do you even know about the very existence of Cyclops?”

“Raven Claw,” replied Harris.

“Christ, I haven’t heard that name for a while. What’s going on? Can you fill me in?”

Harris paused for a moment.

Eddy joined Raven Claw in 2001 and had become fast friends with the chief of field operations, Bill Harris. Raven Claw sought out an expert at computers and surveillance with a military background and thought they found the perfect candidate when Eddy’s file came across the Director’s desk. Upon accepting the position, Eddy was assigned to work with Agent Harris to work undercover as CIA operatives. Their assignments came solely from the Director of Raven Claw. The Director was a mysterious and aloof figure, who’s identity was known only to one other Raven Claw agent, Bill Harris.

Eddy proved to be a very valuable asset on numerous missions, but after participating in stealing documents from the Washington National Archives Building in 2003, he resigned his position. Eddy had been severally injured in a shootout when stealing the documents, and while recuperating had learned that the recovered documents were actually the secret JFK files. After discovering that the files were destroyed instead of just being moved to a more secure location, he became disillusioned and quit on the spot. Eddy would have mysteriously disappeared too, if it wasn’t for Harris’s intervention. Once you signed on to be a Raven Claw Agent - You were always a Raven Claw Agent. But Harris convinced the Director, that Eddy could still be of great use to them down the road. Eddy was indebted to Harris.

Agent Harris knew that it was imperative to have Eddy on board and decided to bring him up to speed. “Since you were once involved with Raven Claw, I guess I can breach protocol.

Some new information regarding the JFK assassination has resurfaced.”

“What? You’re not bullshitting me, are you?” replied Eddy sounding interested, but he really was not. Eddy couldn’t care less about any Raven Claw activities.

“I thought that all leads and loose ends were already taken care of.”

“So did I,” replied Harris. “But it appears that there is one more loose end to tie up. Someone has come forward with some new evidence that could potentially be very harmful to the government, should the press get a hold of it and make it public. Have you ever heard of the Babushka Lady?”

Eddy pondered for a moment before replying. “Vaguely. If memory serves me correctly, isn’t she the woman who was seen taking film footage at the assassination which the CIA and the FBI have been trying to locate ever since?”

“Yes, she was the only loose end until now. We now believe that her film along with other crucial material is in the possession of her nephew, Erik Black. But more importantly, he also has a very important letter that I need to get my hands on, but I don’t have time to go into the details right now. Listen, is Cyclops up and running yet?” asked Harris.

“You bet. It’s going through some preliminary tests over Cape Canaveral as we speak. We’re still ironing out a few glitches with the system, but hopefully we won’t have any major issues.”

“Sorry to interrupt sir, but I just received word that the chopper has to head back to base,” announced agent Duke. “When your request came in for their assistance, they didn’t have time to refuel from their last assignment.”

“That’s just fucking great! Sorry for the interruption Eddy.”

“No problem Bill.”

How long would it be before Cyclops could get us an image from over Fort Lauderdale?” Harris asked. The sound of a keyboard being tapped quickly filled his ear.

“Done!” replied Eddy.

“Already? That was fast! And not a second too soon. We just lost the use of our chopper.”

“With Cyclops presently positioned over Canaveral, we actually have the capabilities of pinpointing a target anywhere in Florida . We’re still programming and testing the facial recognition component, but other than that.....just tell me where and exactly what I’m to look for?” asked Eddy.

“I’m heading north on Interstate Hwy. 95 in a Black Escalade, and we’re just approaching the Port Everglades interchange.”

“Just hang on a bit,” replied Eddy. “Yup, I think I’ve got you located. Have your driver flash his headlights. Yes, that’s you alright. Now what?”

“The vehicle we are pursuing is a red convertible, which the agents in the chopper identified as either an Infinity or Lexus. It should be only a couple of miles ahead of us.”

“Just give me a second or two. Here we go. A male driver with a lone female passenger?”

“Yes, that’s them,” replied Harris excitedly.

“Cyclops is also informing me that there is a GPS signal coming from a cell phone issued to an Agent Reid?”

“Bingo! Way to go Eddy! Where are they?”

“They are about four miles ahead of you, just passing the Stirling Road exit. They seem to be clipping along pretty good.”

"Driver! I mean Agent Duke.....isn't it?"

"Yes it is sir," replied the driver.

"Could you pick up the pace a bit?"

"No problem," agent Duke replied as he hammered the accelerator.

"Eddy. Can you get me an identity on the couple?" asked Harris.

"Sorry, my screen is only displaying a rough 3D image of the vehicle and passengers. I'm getting a little interference from a nearby storm system, and Cyclops is still not linked up to the traffic surveillance computers yet. If you want, I can send you a video feed."

"No need. We'll just follow your instructions."

"You're only about a mile and a half behind now," reported Eddy. "They're turning off the freeway at Hollywood Boulevard.

A few minutes passed with no correspondence from either party.

"They're now turning onto Entrada Drive, heading towards the Orange Brook Golf Course? Tell me you're not just racing to meet up with a couple of golf buddies Harris!"

"You're a barrel of laughs Eddy. Just keep track of them, will you."

Another minute passed before Eddy came on the speaker again.

"Cyclops is giving me some sporadic images and it appears your suspects have parked at the golf course, and are getting their golf bags out of the trunk."

Harris, Summers, Peterson along with they driver looked at each other dumbfounded.

"I'm still getting Agent Reid's GPS signal from that vehicle, but are you sure that we're following the right suspects?" asked Eddy.

"Positive," replied Harris. "Why else would we be receiving Reid's GPS signal, if it wasn't her?"

We’re almost at the golf course, so I’ll know in a minute,” proclaimed Harris.

Agent Duke spotted the convertible as soon as they pulled into the parking lot, and screeched to a halt right behind the suspects, accidentally knocking over one of their golf bags. The agents flew out of the SUV with guns pointed at the male occupant. The couple cautiously raised their hands, with the male stuttering “Sooorrry for speeeding officers. We were jussst trying to make our tee time.”

“That’s not Mr. Black sir,” whispered Summers as she lowering her weapon. “And that isn’t Agent Reid either!”

“Do you have a cell phone on you?” asked Harris to the couple, who were still flustered. They both produced a phone and slowly passed them over to Agent Summers. Harris grabbed the phones and as he held them high in the air, he looked awkwardly skywards.

“It won’t help if you hold them any closer to Cyclops, Bill. I can see them just fine,” Eddy announced over Harris’s bluetooth. “And you can put your head down too. You might give yourself whiplash,” Eddy chuckled, and then said, “Reid’s GPS signal is not coming from those phones. The signal is coming from behind the driver’s seat.”

“Peterson, can you search behind the driver’s seat and see if you can find Reid’s phone. The two of you can put your hands down,” Harris said.

They were reluctant at first until Harris motioned for the agents still pointing their revolvers, to holster their weapons.

“Got it!” Peterson announced, as he gently placed into a plastic bag.

“That’s not our phone,” the man proclaimed.

“We know. But do you have any idea on how it came into your possession?”

“Not at all.”

“Well, I’m terribly sorry. We were searching for the person that this phone belongs to,” Harris said sheepishly, as he pulled out his wallet. “Tell you what. Why don’t you have a round of golf on the Government, for the inconvenience.”

“Thank you. We will!” replied the woman sternly, pulling the money from Harris’s hand, as the couples fear had quickly turned into anger.

The agents scurried to their vehicle with their tails between their legs, to regroup and strategize their next plan of attack.

“Well, what now Boss?” asked Summers.

Harris thought for a brief moment, then asked agent Duke to reactivate the speaker phone.

“Eddy. You still there?”

“You bet! Almost like old times, hey Bill? Wouldn’t miss this action for all the tea in China. What do you need?”

“Can Cyclops go back in time?”

“Not really Bill. Nothing can go back in time, unless you’re H.G. Wells or on board the Enterprise with Spock and Captain Kirk,” Eddy snickered.

“Very funny Edwardo! I see you haven’t lost a bit of your dry humor,” Harris chuckled back. Edwardo was an old nickname the agents used to call Eddy after hearing too many of his dry jokes after tossing back a few too many drinks.

“Well, actually Cyclops is designed to record and save activity for a one year period. But we’re not at full operation status with the memory saver so we can probably only go back an hour or two at most. Why?”

"I'd like to retrace the movements of the suspect we are looking for, a Mr. Black, starting from the time he landed at the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood Airport, about 45 minutes ago."

"I'll see what I can pull up, but I can't promise anything. Do you have a photo or can you give me a description of him to help narrow down who I'm looking for?" requested Eddy.

"Peterson. Can you....."

"Already on it Bill," said Peterson as he slipped a photo through a portable scanner.

"Thanks," replied Harris.

"I've got the info a-okay," announced Eddy a few moments later. "Give me a bit of time to work on it, Bill. I'll call you back when I have something to report."

"Well boys.....I don't know about you, but it's been an extremely long day, and I'm parched. How about if we hit the 19th Hole for a quick refreshment until we hear back from Eddy!" Harris expressed in an upbeat tone.

"Sounds good to me," agreed Summers, as she led the way to the clubhouse.

Chapter Nineteen

After picking Erik up around the corner of the parking garage, Tony wandered the streets for a while until he came across another parkade. Tony parked the Taurus alongside an old rust bucket and again swapped vehicles. They repeated the process several more times over the next few hours, varying the selection of vehicles.

"Is it really necessary to make all these switcharoos?" Erik finally asked getting a little disgruntled.

"Just trying to make it very difficult for anyone to track us," replied Tony.

"How the hell would anyone be able to track us after all these switches?"

"You'd be very surprised with the tracking capabilities of our government Mr. Black," responded Katia.

Looking over, it was the first time that Erik had the opportunity to realize how striking of a woman Katia really was. She appeared to have some Spanish or Cuban heritage mixed with Caucasian. Her auburn shoulder length hair was pulled back in a pony tail, exposing her facial features, which were almost that of a model or Hollywood star. Her agency issued skirt and white fitted blouse revealed a very shapely figure.

“Mr. Black.....Mr. Black!” Katia said raising her voice.

“Sorry. Yes, what is it?” Erik replied sheepishly. He was a little embarrassed that he had been caught gazing at her.

“As I was trying to explain Mr. Black, our government has a very sophisticated network of tracking systems, and we need to be very careful.”

“Katia, have you heard the rumor, that the government has been working on a new type of satellite system that will revolutionize surveillance?” Tony broke in.

“Vaguely.”

“Well, it’s called Eagle Eye or One Eye, or something like that. Anyways, besides having instant access to all government and public surveillance cameras, it’s also able to hack into any computer system in the world undetected. It’s also reported to have upped the ante when it comes to facial recognition. The image resolution that it produces is so high that it can even spot the smallest of details, such a mosquito that has landed on someone,” enlightened Tony.

“Let’s hope it’s just a rumor,” Katia muttered. “Eagle Eye or not. What we’re trying to tell you Mr. Black, is that it is extremely important that you stay out of the publics eye.”

“I guess I’ll try my best,” Erik replied quietly. He was still baffled with all the goings on.

“Hey Tony!”

"Yes Katia?"

"We need to find a place to hide low for a while until we can figure out a way to get Mr. Black out of this mess. Do you have any places that come to mind?"

"Just one....."

"Holy shit!" Erik interrupted while glancing at his watch.

"What is it?" asked Katia.

"I was supposed to meet up with my wife Mary, a half hour ago at the Bella Luna Restaurant in the Aventura Mall."

"That's not going to happen Mr. Black," Tony blurted out.

"I need to phone her then!" Erik said while pulling his cell phone out.

"I'm sorry, but you can't phone her. The CIA will be able to track your call," Katia called out as she grabbed the phone from his hand. "Please do not use it again until either Tony or myself gives the OK. Understood? Just turn it off," Katia ordered as she returned it into his open palm.

"I didn't know you were traveling with anyone," quizzed Katia. "Did you happen to mention this to anyone at the Dallas precinct?"

"I can't remember. I might have. Why?"

"If you did, I'm sure that the CIA have done their homework, which means they probably already know that Mrs. Black is already in Fort Lauderdale. They also probably know which hotel the two of you are registered at, which is most likely already under surveillance. Tony, we need to intercept Mrs. Black before she heads back to the hotel. The freeway is probably still jammed with rush hour traffic. Do you know a back route to Aventura?"

"Sure do. The old Federal Highway should do the trick. I should be able to get us there in less

than half an hour.”

After listening to the radio while on route, Erik learned that the freeway was in absolute chaos.

The police had shut down the freeway completely to investigate the accidents and to allow for air ambulances to airlift critically injured people to the hospital. Erik now knew that he was in a very serious situation. Due to traffic being diverted to alternate routes from the recent freeway incident, they arrived at Aventura Mall an hour later, well over Tony’s estimated time.

Aventura Mall, which is a popular destination point for both tourists as well as locals, was busy as usual when Tony drove into the parking lot. Erik’s wife was standing near the SW entrance and hailing a cab, as she obviously got tired of waiting for him.

“There she is, wearing the white shorts and turquoise Polo T-shirt,” Erik announced, just as a cab was pulling up in front of her.

Tony immediately angled his car in front of the cab to block its departure. Without thinking, Erik got out of the car and called out, “Mary, over here!”

Looking around briefly to find the direction of the voice, Mary spotted Erik. Slammed the taxi door, she walked towards Erik with the expression of both anger and worry.

“MR. BLACK! Get back in the car NOW!” shouted Katia.

“Where the hell have you been?” Mary asked exasperated. “I’ve been waiting for almost two hours, and you didn’t even have the curtesy to call and let me know that you were going to be late!”

“Just get in quickly and I’ll explain.”

Mary gave the rusty car Tony had hijacked the once over and then peered in to see my travel

companions. She became a little perturbed after noticing that a very attractive woman was accompanying Erik.

“Who the hell are these people?” Mary muttered, in a loud angry whisper.

“Will the both of you just get in the god damn car,” Tony blurted out.

Erik grabbed the parcels out of Mary’s hands and shoved Mary into the car, followed by her purchases. With the parcels sprawled all over Katia’s and Mary’s laps, Erik hopped into the front seat.

“Get us out of here ASAP Tony. Mr. Black may have been recorded on one of the mall’s security cameras,” Katia ordered.

Tony immediately pulled us into the malls’ parking garage so we could regroup.

Mary leaned forward and was about to spurt something out, but was intercepted by Katia.

“Mrs. Black. Hi, I’m Katia and this is Tony,” she announced. “We work in a special division of the FBI called Fortress which assigned us to protect Mr. Black, and now you Mrs. Black, due to the present circumstances.”

“Protect us from what?” blurted Mary.

“A covert division of the CIA called Raven Claw. Your husband brought forward some old photographs and an old payroll list that may provide proof that there was a conspiracy, as well as US involvement in the JFK assassination.

“You guys know about the payroll list as well?” interrupted Erik.

“Well, yes Mr. Black. But it’s really your list. You accidentally left it under the desk in the interrogation room.”

Erik just shook his head and grabbed his knapsack to verify Katia’s statement. His suspicions

were soon confirmed as the photocopied payroll list was indeed missing, but the original was still safely hidden in the back of Grace’s diary.

“Anyways, as I was saying Mrs. Black, Raven Claw would like to get their hands on Mr. Black’s material. Once they do, we believe that they will destroy the evidence to protect the interests of several corrupt individuals within the United States Government,” explained Katia

At first there was silence and pause in the car, as the color left Mary’s face.

Katia then added, “Raven Claw will stop at nothing to retrieve this material. Fortress on the other hand wishes only to protect the information. Americans have a right to know the truth about that day.”

After another pause, Mary took a deep breath and asked, “Does all this have anything to do with that research were doing for that hair brained book you’re writing?”

All Erik could do was shrug his shoulders and nod his head in agreement.

“You fucking idiot! What the hell have you gotten us into?”

“How the hell was I supposed to know it would lead to this. I was just checking to confirm if Grace’s letters and stories were true. And now we know they are,” Erik replied.

“So what do we do now?” Mary asked, with a little panic in her tone.

“Calm down Mrs. Black. We’ll keep the two of you safe. What hotel where you booked into?”

“The Fairmont Turnberry,” they replied in unison.

“I see you like the Fairmont chain Mr. Black,” noted Katia.

Neither of them replied, but Mary looked at Erik suspiciously.

“Well you won’t be staying there tonight,” Katia dictated.

“What about all my luggage that’s already in the room, and my golf clubs,” Mary exclaimed.

“Sorry, but you’ll have to forget about them for now. The hotel will either ship them back to your home or put them in storage for you. Regardless, you won’t be using your clubs for a while,” replied Katia. “We’ve got to keep you two hidden until things cool down a bit.”

“And how long is a bit?” Mary asked skeptically.

“Maybe a week or two? Depending on how persistent these agents are.”

“A week or two! That’s impossible. I have to be back at work in”

“Sorry, but you won’t be going back to work either,” Tony interrupted Mary.

“What do you mean?”

“Raven Claw will be watching both your home and where both of you work

“So, from this point forward, until your husband’s material is secured, you’ll be under our strict protection.”

Mary’s glare definitely told Erik that he would be in the dog house for quite a while.

“Listen Mr. Black, we need to know who else knows about this material, as they may also be in great danger,” Katia informed me.

“Do you mean our kids and other family members could be in danger?” asked Mary.

“Yes. If they have knowledge about the material, they may be at risk,” replied Katia.

Both Mary and Erik just sat staring at each other for a moment, contemplating the gravity of the situation. Both of them were visibly upset. Katia asked Tony to take a walk and survey the garage for yet another car so she could calm the Blacks.

“So Mr. Black,” Katia asked calmly. Has anyone else has seen the letters and photos?”

Pausing for a few moments, Erik finally answered, “No one comes to mind. I’m basically the only person who has seen the photos and Grace’s diary. Mary and my daughters haven’t seen

anything to my knowledge. They do know that I’m writing a book about Grace’s life, and have only heard about her material and adventures through stories that I’ve told them. Then there’s my mother. She probably knows the most about Grace’s history, but she never did see any of the material that I have discovered.”

“And you’re positive that your mother did not see any of the material?” quizzed Katia.

“Pretty positive,” Erik replied confidently.

“I happened to be visiting my mother when a shipment of Grace’s boxes had mysteriously arrived. My mother despised Grace for years and wanted nothing to do with the boxes, but I insisted that she at least glance through the contents. She proceeded to dump everything in the box across her carpet, then rifled through items quickly. I remember her picking up a diary, but she just flipped through it. Then, after she found a small jewelry box, she said that I could do whatever I wanted with the rest of Grace’s stuff. When I was finished repacking Grace’s box, my mother opened a closet door and then gave me a huge stack of old letters that Grace had sent to her. She told me that if I didn’t want them she was going to throw them out. Always being interested in historical things, especially relating to relatives, I grabbed them. It wasn’t until I returned home that I discovered the home movie film, a stack of old photos and the box of answering machine tapes. That’s when I really got reinvigorated to continue writi.....”

“Is there anyone else Mr. Black?” interrupted Katia wearily. She had been expecting just a short and quick answer but Erik had gotten carried away with his explanation.

“Oh yes. There are also a few friends who know I’m writing about Grace, but they’ve never seen any of the actual material. Do we need to worry about them?”

“You’d be surprised who the government will interview to try and track you down Mr. Black.

But I don't think that we need to worry about your friends for the moment,” reassured Katia.

“We do though, have to get your family and mother to a safe location. Once Tony and I have the two of you in a safe location, I'll arrange for you to contact them on a secure line and explain the situation.”

Erik's cell phone rang. The display read Margaret Leblanc.

“I thought I told you to turn your phone off!” scolded Katia.

Erik just shrugged his shoulders. “Sorry.”

“Hello.”

Erik listened intently for several moments before thanking Margaret and acknowledging that she was safe, despite the fact she was still in the hospital.

“Anything we need to know about?” asked Katia.

“Yes, I believe so. That was Margaret Leblanc, the head librarian at the Dallas Library. She also knows about my material. She was researching the archives for further information about the people on the payoff list and just informed me that most of the names on the list have risen and hold powerful positions within the Government, Military or Law Enforcement. She was assaulted during an attempted arson fire last night.”

“Obviously the work of Raven Claw. I'll have our agency send someone over to keep an eye on her. Now turn that phone off.”

Tony suddenly pulled up in another vehicle.

“Time to move,” he yelled out.

Chapter Twenty

Harris was getting a little impatient waiting for a call from Eddy, when his cell buzzed.

“Bill?”

“Hi Eddy. That took a while for such a high tech advanced computer!”

“Sorry Bill, but like I mentioned earlier, Cyclops is still in the testing phase so don’t expect miracles.”

“So, what have you come up with?”

“I started by focusing at ground zero, when you said that this Mr. Black guy arrived at the Fort Lauderdale Airport. By the way, do you have a laptop with you? I can relay the images directly to you if you have it handy”

“Just hang on a second. Okay, go ahead and send it.”

“On its way.”

“Got it,” Harris announced a few moments later.

“Now, is the guy you’re trying to track down, the fellow that is just about to get into this shuttle bus? I got the image off one of the airport surveillance cameras,” Eddy asked as he zoomed the surveillance camera in on a male.

“Yes. That’s Mr. Black.”

“Great. I’ll lock his image into the facial recognition program.”

Something behind Mr. Black suddenly sparked Bill’s interest.

“Eddy, can you zoom behind Mr. Black a little? Great, that’s good. Now can you focus on the woman just to the right of him? Thanks Eddy.”

“Cyclops has just identified her as....”

“Agent Reid!” Summers interrupted as she and Peterson had been gawking over Bill’s shoulder.

“Is she one of your agents?” asked Eddy.

“Yes. She went off the radar map just over a day ago. I had a hint that she might have been in the area, but this definitely confirms my suspicions.

“What do you think she’s up to Boss?” Peterson asked, adding in to the discussion.

“I don’t know, but at least we see her with Black,” replied Harris.

“Maybe she’s working an angle to get Black to give up his material!” stated Summers.

“Could be,” puzzled Harris. “Eddy, can you track their route from that point on?”

“I’ll give it a go.”

Agents Harris, Summers and Peterson watched and listened to Eddy as he traced their escape from the agents at the airport and then followed the route taken along the freeway. They

got a good close up view of the carnage from the ensuing chase after Eddy focused Cyclops focused in.

“It looks to me like Reid was actually returning fire just before all hell broke loose sir,” Peterson remarked.

“It appears so. What the hell is her angle?” Harris questioned. “Eddy, can you get me an ID on the driver of the BMW?”

“Hang on, while Cyclops searches it’s databanks.”

The agents stared at the frozen 3D screen, while Bill rotated the view. Summers gasped slightly as the image of Agent Reid could be seen aiming her hand gun at her own agents.

“I’ve got the driver identified as a Tony Fontaine, who was enlisted with the Navy Seals from 1993 until 2001. He was on a mission in Iraq where he disappeared and is still listed as missing in action.”

Another window appeared on Harris’s computer screen, displaying a full synopsis of Fontaine.

“Well, it appears that he’s not M.I.A. anymore,” Summers intervened. “And, I’d definitely wouldn’t kick him out of the sack, for eating cornflakes in my bed,” she added ogling at Tony’s appearance.

“Summers! We all know you have a thing for three legged men, but let’s keep focused.....shall we?” requested Harris.

“Yes sir,” Summers replied a little sheepishly.

“I’d be careful if any of you have a run in with him,” Eddy uttered. “As you can see by reading his history, he is one of the most highly decorated soldiers that the Navy Seals ever enlisted.

Needless to say, you don’t want to get on the wrong side of this guy.”

“Can we continue on with tracking their movements?” asked Harris anxiously.

“You bet. After escaping capture on the freeway, you can see them exiting onto Broward Blvd. and then headed into this parking garage. The BMW has yet to leave the garage, but I have a report from the local police that they received a complaint, about a vehicle that was stolen from that location. It was a Ford Taurus, just give me a second. There! You can see it here as it is leaving the garage.”

“This is going to take for ever,” Harris cut in. “Is there anyway we can speed this up Eddy?”

“Not a problem,” Eddy replied as the images started to flash by.

The image froze as the Taurus entered another parkade.

“They might be switching cars again,” Eddy announced.

Images froze and focused in on each vehicle as it exited the parkade, with pop up windows describing the identity of each person in the car until one image suddenly enlarged to fill the screen. It was Tony Fontaine. Harris and his agents were absolutely amazed with Cyclops’s capabilities, especially since it wasn’t even fully operational yet.

“Eddy. We don’t have all day going in and out of parkades! Can you cut to the chase and tell us where they are now?” Harris interrupted impatiently.

“Sure. No need to get testy,” Eddy replied as the screen fast forwarded from one parking garage to another, until it finally stopped.

“Cyclops has recorded them entering the parking garage at Aventura Mall about one minute ago. I’ve already sent a signal to jam the exit gates. No cars can leave until you give me the go ahead to disengage a gate.”

“Thanks Eddy. Listen. We’re starting to get a few drops of rain down here. How’s it looking your way?”

“It’s pouring right now, and the forecast is for a severe electrical storm to move in shortly.”

“How long can you keep tracking these guys?”

“We haven’t tested Cyclops in a storm situation yet, so this will be a perfect opportunity to see how it performs. I’ve locked your suspects identities into Cyclopes tracking program, so wherever they go, an eye will be on them. I’ll just authorize this little side adventure of ours, as an addition test for our eye in the sky!”

“That’s great Eddy, and sorry for me being a little testy, but it’s been a long day.” Harris said apologetically.

“No problem,” replied Eddy.

“What’s the plan of attack sir?” Peterson asked in earnest.

“We’ll head down to Aventura Mall and stakeout each exit along with some backup crews. I’m sure they’ve already swapped to yet another car, so I’ll have Eddy release the exit gates to let one car out a time and survey each car as it leaves the parkade. Once they’re spotted, we’ll just hang back and keep surveillance on them, from both Cyclops and on the ground. She’s up to something, but I can’t quite put my finger on it. Let’s just be a little patient and see what plan Reid has up her sleeve.”

“Maybe Reid is trying to persuade Black into disclosing where he has the original material hidden.” Peterson conjectured.

“I hope for Reid’s sake, you’re right. Summers!” barked Harris.

“Yes.”

“Have you received the Intel on Mr. Black’s history?”

“Not yet sir.”

“What the hell is taking so long?”

Summers just shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, make it your number one priority, and while your at it, I want you to find out the connection between this Fontaine fellow, and agent Reid. And I want it fast! Understood!”

“Yes sir,” Summers replied, biting her lip. She was getting tired of agent Harris continuing to barking orders to her, and seemingly no one else.

Chapter Twenty-One

Tony had hot wired another inconspicuous car, an older model Jeep Grand Cherokee, which at least gave them plenty of room to throw all their stuff in. The foursome had been forced to squeeze several of Tony's large duffle bags into a few compact cars on a couple of occasions. The best part of this vehicle was that it didn't leave a smog trail behind them like their last one.

Winding their way through the parkade, they made their way to one of the exits and found that there was a lineup of cars were waiting to leave. After several minutes of waiting and listening to the tooting of horns, Tony got out of the car to get a better view of what the hold up was. It appeared that the gate was seized, as there were a couple of guys trying to lift it. Other distant horns could be heard within the garage, and glancing around, Tony could see that one of the other exits was also backed up with cars.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," Tony proclaimed.

Tony headed towards the seized gate.

“Out of the way!” Tony shouted as he jumped into the air and gave the gate a thunderous kick.

The two fellows looked at Tony a little shocked and puzzled.

“Sorry, but I’m late for dinner at my mother’s. And if you knew my mother, you wouldn’t want to arrive late either, or you’d look pretty much like this gate.”

The men quickly got into their car and sped off as Tony jogged back to the Jeep. The line of cars quickly dispersed with Tony following.

“By the look of those clouds coming in, we could be in for a pretty good storm,” Tony announced as huge sporadic rain drops started to hit the windshield.

* * * * *

Bill’s cell phone rang shortly after he found a good stake out spot near the Aventura Mall parking garage.

“Hello.”

“Mr. Harris?”

“Yes.”

“It’s Agent Woods. Our team has just arrived at the North gate, and it seems that someone has broken through the barrier arm. We’ve re-blocked the exit with our car, but I don’t know how many cars may have left or even if your suspects are still in the garage.”

“Thanks for the update Agent Woods. Make sure that you search every vehicle thoroughly before letting any cars proceed.”

“Understood sir.”

“Peterson. Get a team in there see if our suspects are still in there.”

“You got it sir, but the smashed gate might have been a diversion so they could make a getaway through the mall,” replied Peterson.

“I’ll take care of that angle,” Harris replied as he was already on his cell phone.

“Hi Eddy. It’s Bill.”

“What’s up?”

“Our suspects may have slipped through the parkade exit by smashing through the gate, before our agents were in place. Can you trace all the cars that might have left before we re-secured the exit, and can you also pull up all the video feed from the mall’s security cameras? They might have also used the broken barrier arm as a diversion and then escaped through the mall.”

“Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but Cyclops has just gone on the fritz. This electrical storm is acting like a blindfold, and any image we are getting are either full of static or completely blank.”

“That’s just fucking great!” Harris exclaimed.

“Listen. I’ll rewind back as far as I can to the parkade with Cyclops. As for the mall’s security cameras, that’s not a problem at all. Give me a couple of minutes, will you?” requested Eddy.

“Call me back, once you’ve got it.”

“Sir, I’ve just received the background check that you requested about the Blacks,”
Summers interjected.

“Head office apologizes for the delay, but the reason it took so long to find out anything about Mr. Black, is that his Social Insurance Number kept matching up with a Mr. Erik

Blasnovischuck.”

“What?” responded Harris with astonishment.

“Yes. After digging deeper, the agency has discovered that he changed his last name unofficially to Black at around the age of 23. And he has been using two different names ever since. His birth certificate and passport identify him as Mr. Blasnosvischuk, while most of his other ID, like his credit cards, marriage license, memberships etc., are under Black. He was married in 1980, has two daughters - Alix 22 and Mackenzie 20, both of whom have been attending college for the last couple of years.

“Then his wife and daughters must have knowledge about his aunt’s material,” conjured Harris.

“Most Likely.”

“Then we need to send a couple of our agents to find out what exactly they know, and if they know where Black might have hidden the original material,” conveyed Harris. “I’ll contact head office to get the assignment approved.”

Harris immediately called head office, put in his request and then quickly hung up.

“Head office will back to me shortly,” Harris announced to his agents.

“What about any of Black’s friends, neighbors and relatives?” asked Peterson

“When the agents quiz his family, they can also find out who Mr. Black may have told,” replied Bill. “By the way. Has anyone taken the initiative to find if the Blacks are booked into any hotels? If they happen to slip through the noose at Agenda, then we might be able to nab them at the hotel.”

Agent Summer quickly punched several keys on her laptop. The Black’s have reservations at the Fairmont Turnberry, tonight and then scheduled to.....”

“Hang on Summers while I get this call,” Harris interrupted.

“Hi Eddy. What do you have for me?”

“You’re in luck. Cyclops was still operational at the time your suspects may have left the parkade. We’ve confirmed that only seven vehicles left the north exit before your agents blocked the gateway. We were able to get photos of all the license plates, as well as the drivers, but I’m afraid to say that all the cars were being driven by women, plus the cars are locally owned. Your suspects must still be holed up in the parkade.”

“Maybe or maybe not. Can you identify the drivers with the facial recognition program?”

“Yes. I’ll call you back,” replied Eddy.

“Sorry Summers. You were saying?”

“Yes, as I was saying, is that the Blasnovischucks are booked into the Turnberry and are scheduled to leave in a couple of days on flight CO 149 to Treasure Cay, Bahamas, from the Fort Lauderdale Airport at 9:35am.”

“That’s good news Summers!” replied Harris. “But, let’s just refer to them as the Blacks, shall we? It’s just so much easier.”

“Yes sir,” replied Summers.

“Hang on. It’s head office this time,” Harris said as the satellite phone buzzed. The agents waited patiently as Harris paced the floor and updated the chief at head office.

Looking dejected as he got off the phone, Bill announced, “We’ve just been instructed from the Director, to take whatever measures needed to confiscate Black’s material. And if we can’t confiscate the material in the next 48 hours, we are ordered to eliminate and leave no trace of the material or anyone who knows about it.”

All the agents sat motionless, as they knew that they may have to terminate civilians to protect the greater good of national security. It didn't sit well with them, but they were trained to carry out orders, and if they needed to take the Blacks out, they would.

“Summers, I'd like you to instruct the agents that we are sending to question the Blacks friends and relatives, to act as discretely as possible. If they discover that they know too much, the agents are ordered to take care of the situation, as head office has ordered. And, make sure they make it look like an accident,” instructed Harris.

“Don't you think that's a little extreme sir?” questioned Summers. “They're simply civilians,” “Civilians or not, we have our orders! If they know too much, we have to extinguish the source,” Harris asserted.

Summers knew that Harris was going way overboard, and had an inkling that there was something else he wasn't telling her and Peterson. Maybe something personal. Regardless she was given an order, which she had to carry out.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Driving casually away from Aventura Mall so not to draw any unnecessary attention to themselves, Erik and Mary plus their new friends made their way to Biscayne Blvd., and headed south to Normandy Drive then on to South Beach. Nicknamed SoBe, South Beach is renowned as being America’s Riviera. A hustling bustling hub of restaurants, clubs, boutiques and Art Deco architecture, it’s a coastal magnet for topless bronze sun worshipers frolicking in the surf. A place to see movie stars, supermodels and tycoons. When the sun goes down, SoBe glows with neon lights and comes alive as people flock to the array of nightclubs. It’s a place to see, and be seen.

As they drove into South Beach, there was a brief break from the storm that had blanketed the area not more than a half hour earlier. The only hustling and bustling of the South Beach reputation that Mary and Erik had heard so much about, were that of people running to take

shelter. Another storm cell was brewing in the North and could be seen approaching fast.

It wasn't long before the heavens had opened up again to unleash torrents of rain. The typical bright neon lights, paled in comparison to the sheet lightening storm that blanketed the area.

Turning off Ocean Drive, they turned and twisted down several side streets and alleyways, before stopping behind a quaint but older three story art deco hotel that had seen better days.

“Great driving Mrs. Black,” Tony said as Mary handed the keys over to him.

Mary was in no mood to even reply. Tony had Mary switch places with him back at the parkade exit. Both Tony and Katia had suspicions that Raven Claw might identify their images with the traffic cameras. Katia suggested that Mary's identity would hopefully be much harder to trace, and even more so, since she was wearing sunglasses and Tony's hat.

With cascades of rain pouring down, everyone unload their gear quickly and stored it under the canopy at the rear entrance. Tony backed the Jeep under a tree, then scooted over and unlocked a nearby wooden shed. With Erik's help, they camouflaged the Jeep with an old canvas tarp, then headed back to the canopy to take shelter. Drenched like wet rats, Tony and Erik helped the women gather their things, then lead the way up the rear stairwell to the top floor. Unlocking the door, Tony poked his head in and with the hallway being vacant, they headed quickly and cautiously to the end of the hallway.

The room, which faced the main street was a little dingy and dusty, furnished with an older box television, a ragged chair, one queen size bed and one sofa, that Erik and Mary later discovered was not a pull out. The accommodation was definitely what Mary and Erik were accustomed to. It would be awkward and cramped to accommodate all four of them, but they had no choice under the present circumstances.

“Hopefully we’re here for only one night,” Erik whispered to Mary.

“Sorry for the condition of the room, but our organization hasn’t used this safe house for quite a while,” Tony announced. “We should be safe here for a couple of days, if need be.”

“Great!” Mary exasperated under here breath.

“Don’t worry Mrs. Black,” replied Tony, as Katia walked over to the window. “Once things cool down a bit, we’ll be moving to another safe house that’s better equipped to accommodate us, and to monitor our safety.”

Katia carefully surveyed the street below, then closed the shutters. Walking over to the bed, she sat next Mary and reported, “The two of you can relax a bit for now, but be prepared to move at a moment’s notice! You and Mr. Black can have the bed tonight. Tony and I will take shifts on the sofa.”

“Thank you. When can we talk to our family?” Mary asked with concern.

“Not for a day or two,” Katia answered. “Your family should be okay. I’ll have Tony set up a secure line, but once you contact them, we’ll have to clear out of here. No matter how secure the satellite feed might be, there’s always a chance of the signal being intercepted and traced.”

With resignation, Mary and Erik laid back on the bed and grabbed the TV remote. No sooner that the TV came to life, the room went suddenly black, as a thunderclap erupted directly overhead. Another loud clap immediately followed, shaking and rattling the window and walls. Tony cracked opened the shutters slightly and looked up and down the street.

“Looks like the entire area has been knocked out by the lightning,” Tony announced.

“The good news is, that this storm will hopefully wreak havoc with some of their surveillance systems.”

"Let's only hope!" added Katia.

A dazzling lightning show could be seen through the partially opened shutters, as rain could be heard pounding the hotel rooftop.

Mary and Erik just huddled closer together and wrapped a blanket tight over their heads.

* * * * *

Bill's cell phone rang again. It was Eddy.

"Hi Bill. I've cross referenced the license numbers with the facials from the recognition program and have identified all the drivers in the seven vehicles that left the parkade before you agents could contain it."

"That's great," Bill responded dejectedly. "I'm putting you on speaker."

"Don't sound so happy!" Eddy spouted.

"Sorry Eddy, but head office has instructed me to eliminate our suspects if we can't get a hold of Mr. Black's material within the next 48 hours. And since we have no idea where the Black's are or where the original material might be hidden, orders are orders and it pretty well seals Mr. & Mrs. Black's fate."

"Well, this might help you locate them. Six of the people who left the parkade are local homemakers, but one driver was identified as a Canadian. It seemed a little strange as the car is registered to a Mr. Smith from Miami, so I contacted Mr. Smith. He confirmed that his wife is not a Canadian, but she did go shopping at Aventura Mall."

"Do you have a name of the driver for me Eddy?" Harris replied quickly.

“Yes, and it’s not Mrs. Smith. I’ve got an identity match via an Alberta driver’s license as a Mrs. Mary Black,” Eddy replied, hearing the agents cheering a little in the background.

“Great work Eddy. Where do you have them located?”

“Sorry to dampen your spirits, more than this fricking weather probably already has, but Cyclops could only trace them to the South Beach area before the next storm rolled in. There was a brief break in the weather so Cyclops was able to track them heading towards the South Beach area. They were near the Tides Hotel along Ocean Drive, when we lost the signal due to the storm.”

“At least that narrows our search grid a little,” replied Harris sounding a little more upbeat.

“Well, I can even narrow it down a little further. Cyclops was briefly able to tap into the Traffic surveillance cameras, and had them located around 9th and 10th Street. They were in the vicinity of the Blue Moon and Fairwinds Hotel before the storm knocked out the power to the entire South Florida area. Sorry, but I won’t be able to help pinpoint them until either the power is restored, or the skies clear so Cyclops can focus in.”

Even though Cyclops was the most sophisticated surveillance system ever built, it had one drawback. It has to have relatively clear skies to be able to positively identify objects.

“Thanks for your help Eddy.” Harris said with appreciation.

“Peterson! How long before we can get crews down to those two hotels?”

“At least 45 minutes, since all the traffic lights are out.”

“Well, let’s get on it shall we? We need to find out if they might have checked into one of those hotels. Summers! Check with the taxi companies to see if they’ve picked up anyone resembling our suspects. They might have just used this location as a decoy to ditch the stolen car. It’s not

likely, but they may have decided to just use their existing reservation. Peterson, send an agent to the Turnberry."

"I'm on it Boss," Peterson exclaimed with confidence.

"And let's not loose them this time," Harris said condescendingly.

* * * * *

Relentless rain pounded on the roof as the lightning storm continued, dashing any hopes of catching any sleep. Tony had left on an errand and Katia had melded with her seat, starring at the streams of water running down the window. There was so much rain coming down, that Erik and Mary thought Florida would soon disappear and become part of the Atlantic Ocean. Mary and Erik cuddled closer together.

* * * * *

The headlights of four vehicles went dim as Harris and Summers, along with several other agents had surrounded The Blue Moon Hotel. Peterson had staked out the Fairwinds with another crew. It had taken almost an hour to put together two crews together and coordinate a simultaneous raid of the two hotels.

"Hey Harris," Peterson called out over the speaker phone.

"Yes, what is it?" replied Harris.

"Did you have any luck finding the Blacks at the The Blue Moon?"

“Not yet. Summers is just checking at the front desk as we speak, to see if they are registered.

How about you?”

“They never checked in here, but I did find out something unusual.”

“What is it?”

“The hotel has one room on the top floor that has been permanently booked, for over thirteen years.”

“That is unusual,” replied Harris. “Sounds just like one of our CIA’s safe houses.”

“Sure does. And it gets better,” Peterson continued. “Although the staff have reportedly never met the occupant, they do report catching a glimpse of a very tall muscular man coming in and out the rear entrance on the odd occasion.”

“That description sounds like a match to Tony Fontaine.”

“Yes, it sure seems coincidental that our suspects are tracked to this location and a guy looking like Tony, has been seen coming and going out of The Fairwinds.”

“We’ll be there as soon as Summers gets back to the car.”

“My crew and I are already in position, and we’re ready to go in,” announced Peterson.

“They must be still here because one of the agents could hear voices through the door.”

“Fine, go ahead. But remember that we’d like to capture them alive, especially Mr. Black. He knows where all the original material is hidden. But, if there is any resistance from the others, you know what to do!” Harris implied.

“Understood,” acknowledged Peterson.

Peterson motioned for his agents to attach silencers to their weapons, then reached for the door to see if it was locked.

* * * *

The rain was relentless, as it continued to pound the roof and windows. Mary and Erik were slowing dozing off when they heard someone grab the door handle.

* * * *

To Peterson’s surprise, the door was unlocked. Opening the door slowly, he poked his head in cautiously and scanned the room with a flashlight and revolver. Peterson’s crew crept in stealthily, pointing their lasers throughout the room, focusing on the lumpy beds.

* * * *

As the door creaked open, a flash of light crossed the blanket that Mary and Erik were huddled under.

* * * *

A sudden flash of light filled the room followed by a tremendous thunderclap that spooked one of the agents, causing him to bump and send a lamp shade crashing to the floor. Without warning, a greenhorn agent fired his weapon towards the bed. The other agents following suit, riddling the mattress full of holes.

* * * *

A loud bang jumped both Mary and Erik right out of their skins. Peeking out from the blanket, Erik saw Tony behind the steering wheel of our borrowed jeep, drenched like a wet rat. Tony had received a call from the Fortress office, tipping him off that Raven Claw was on their way to the South Beach area, so Tony and Katia decided it was best to immediately move to another safe house. The storm and power outage ended up being a blessing in disguise, as it would be impossible for the traffic cams to trace their movements. After leaving the Fairwinds

Hotel, Tony drove to the freeway and zipped back to Fort Lauderdale, until they reached a non-discript hotel named the Seville about a half hour later. It was located well off the beaten tracks, several blocks from the Atlantic Ocean. Tony drove to the rear of the building, and pulled up under the fire escape, then ran out into the rain and was gone for quite some time.

“Sorry it took me so long, but I had to make sure that absolutely no one followed us,” Tony announced after he returned to the Jeep. “We’ll need to move all our gear quietly into the safe house and I’ll ditch this vehicle later.

“Sorry, but you two will have to lend a hand,” Katia said looking over the front seat. “The sooner we get our gear moved, the sooner you two can try and catch some shuteye.”

Katia and Tony hopped out of the car with Mary and Erik following reluctantly, as both their bodies were craving sleep. By the time the Blacks exited the Jeep, Katia was already on the roof of the car and pulling the escape ladder down.

Working as a relay team, they transferred their gear up to Katia on the first landing, then Mary followed. Erik scrambled onto the car and grabbed the ladder when the car suddenly started to roll forward. Tony quietly glided the car out of the parking lot, leaving Erik dangling in the rain. Erik managed to pull himself up a couple of the wet railings before slipping and clutching the last rung with one hand. Although Erik was in great physical shape for a man his age, he was no super athlete. With his grip was weakening, Erik was about to let go when he heard Katia shout out, “Grab my hand!”

Spotting Erik struggling, Katia had swiftly shimmied down the ladder to give aid. Erik immediately swung his free arm upward and clutched Katia’s open hand. With a firm grip, Katia hauled him up enough for Erik to get a foothold. Erik remarked to her later, that her strength was

more than her stature suggested. After assisting Erik up to the first landing, where Mary was waiting absolutely soaked to the bone, they loaded up the gear and made their way up to the top landing.

Undaunted by the three story drop, Katia swung around the railing and stretched out her leg onto the ledge of an old weather beaten window, that looked like it hadn't been opened in years. With one foot on the old window ledge and the other balanced on the iron railing, Katia followed Tony's instructions and reached up to the top of the window frame. There, wedged into the framework, was a key. Removing the key, Katia then jumped back to the landing and unlocked the door. The fire escape door, with peeling paint and rusty hinges, also looked liked it had seen better days. To Erik's surprise, it glided open with ease.

They quietly headed into the building and down the hallway, stopping at the first door on their right. Again following Tony's instructions, Katia slid up an old mail box adjacent to the door which revealed a key pad. Pressing numerous keys, the lock clicked and Katia pushed the door open.

Mary and Erik immediately dropped all the baggage inside the doorway, headed straight to the bathroom and stripped off their wet cloths. After a hot shower, they found the confines of the nearest bed and huddled together to keep warm.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Fairwinds Hotel, Florida

"Hold your fire you idiots!" Peterson exasperated. "We were supposed to try and apprehend the suspects, not execute them!"

A call came in through Peterson's Bluetooth.

"Peterson here."

"We've come up empty. How did you make out?" Harris asked.

"Just hang on two seconds," Peterson replied as he cautiously approached the bed and threw back the covers.

All he found were pillows made to look as though someone was lying in the bed.

"Sorry Boss, there's no one here. But they did leave a laptop that is still playing some kind of show, so we probably just missed them," Peterson explained as he ran his finger across the top of a dusty desk.

“Shit!” exclaimed Harris. “Well, search the place to see if you can get a print or some other indication they were there. Summers and I will get over there right after I report to headquarters.”

“See you in a bit,” replied Peterson.

After updating headquarters, Harris and Summers drove over the Fairwinds Hotel and were just about to leave their vehicle, when Peterson called back.

“Hi, it’s Peterson here sir.”

“What do you have for me?” asked Harris attentively.

“I found four sets of prints from the room which I sent to our lab. I just received the results, so you should be getting the results any second now.”

Summers laptop beeped, indicating that she had just received an incoming message. Four photographs appeared across her screen along with matching fingerprints. The first photo was of Agent Reid. The second was Tony. The third and fourth photos just displayed two silhouette head shots with a question mark centered in each.

“Well Peterson, that confirms that at least Reid and Fontaine were there, and I’d hazard to guess that the other two are Mr. and Mrs. Black!” Harris conjectured. Just hold tight for a minute.

Summers and I are on our way up.”

“No problem,” replied Peterson.

“Oh.....who the hell is jabbering in the back ground?” asked Harris, as he slammed his car door.

“The laptop. It’s playing a rerun of an old Three Stooges movie, and the boys are getting a chuckle out of it while searching the room. Almost looks like someone almost knew we were

coming and are mocking us boss.”

“Unbelievable. You guys are supposed to be trained professionals. Just shut it off,” ordered Harris.

“Sorry Bill, but the guys were just having a little laugh. It’s been kind of a hectic day. The show is just about over anyways.

“Just shut the fucking thing off NOW!” barked Harris. “We don’t have time to.....”

BOOOOMMM!!!!

The windows from the top floor room were suddenly lit up in a fireball, sending shattered glass and debris into the air, scattering around the agents. The explosion subsided as quickly as it happened, leaving only a few flickers of flames burning. Harris and Summers stood stunned.

With the realization that the room had probably been booby-trapped, Harris and Summers snapped out of their trance, and quickly made their way towards the building. Escaping hotel guests filled the stairwell, hampering Harris and Summers endeavors to make their way up to the third floor. The sound of sirens could be heard in the background. The corridor looked relatively unscathed when Harris and Summers entered, except for two agents at the end of the hallway staggering and moaning, their faces and clothes blackened by the blast. Summers tended to the injured agents while Harris grabbed a nearby fire extinguisher. Amazingly, there were only a few smaller flames which Harris had no problem dousing. A moment later, Summers joined him as paramedics and firefighters had arrived.

As Harris and Summers made their way around the room, they were astounded by the devastation that lay before them.

The walls were surprisingly only slightly blackened, but everything else in the room

looked as if they had been thrown into a blender. Trails of smoke from still smoldering debris were being taken care of by the fire department. Amidst the rubble, scattered in different areas of the room laid four motionless agents, including Peterson. A paramedic checking his vital signs looked up to the agents and shook his head. Harris yelled blue bloody murder and vowed vengeance.

After Harris cooled down a bit, they surveyed the room, and noticed that the blast seemed to be directed inwards, which obliterated any evidence from previous occupants.

“Looks like someone sure knows how to handle explosives,” stated Harris.

“Yes, and this might confirm that the Blacks are getting some help from this Fontaine fellow,” Summers said softly, still in a state of shock.

“Gee Summers! What ever gave you that brilliant deduction?” Harris replied very sarcastically. Summers wanted to blast back, but under the circumstances she thought it best not to.

“Do you think Reid had anything to do with this Bill?” asked Summers hesitantly.

Pausing and thinking for several seconds, Harris finally answered, “Yes Summers. I don’t know how or why, but I do believe that she is involved somehow.”

“I’ll call headquarters to send a clean up crew here as soon as possible,” Summers said placidly.

“Thanks,” acknowledge Harris dejectedly. “And have them go over everything with a fine tooth comb.”

“Yes sir.”

With absolutely no leads as to the whereabouts of their quarry, both Summers and Harris returned to their car dejectedly, knowing that they were back to square one. At least until Eddy could get Cyclops back on line.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The next morning, Mary and Erik awoke at the second safe house amongst a clutter of electronic gadgetry, paperwork filing cabinets and an entire wall plastered with flat screen television screens. It looked more like a television production room than a safe house. Situated in front of the monitors was a large desk with numerous computers, radio communication equipment and other electrical devices. Tony was busy talking to someone on his cell phone, while at the same time punching a keyboard and monitoring the flat screens with the images constantly changing. The power had obviously been restored sometime during the night.

To the right of the desk, Katia was standing in front of a map mounted on a large wall, with a myriad of photographs, newspaper clippings and sticky notes around it. Pins dotting the map were connected to the other surrounding material with thin red strings. Inspecting the wall closely, Erik found it to be a chronicle of events about JFK. There were several old police reports from eye witnesses saying that they saw a second shooter, followed by newspaper clippings

about how the same witness had disappeared or died in a mysterious accident. Another black and white photo showed the Babushka Lady standing with her back turned to the camera. A sticky note was tacked across the corner of the photo with the name Madam Aderes circled and a question mark written next to it. It was obvious that someone had just added the sticky note, as Erik could still smell the fresh scent of felt pen marker.

Following a red woolen string attached to that photo to about three quarters of the way down the wall, Erik came across an unsettling discovery. It was a photo of him, sitting on his front porch writing in a notebook! From that photo, there were numerous strings leading to other photos and sticky notes, including one recent photo of Erik entering the Fairmont Hotel in Dallas.

“Yes, Mr. Black,” Katia said, breaking him away from his open mouth stare. “Fortress has been watching you for a while.”

“Why?” he rebutted questioningly. “You even have a photo of me at my home. Why?.....Why in God’s green earth would you have me followed? Just tell me why, Katia? And, how the hell do you know where I live?” Erik said as he was getting hotter and hotter under the collar.

Not able to avoid hearing the conversation, Mary walked over to take a look at what Erik was so upset about.

“What the heck is all this?” questioned Mary sternly.

“Calm down Mr. and Mrs. Black, and let me explain. “As I said, we’ve been watching Mr. Black for a while.”

“Who is we, and why the hell have you been watching my husband?” blurted out Mary again.

“Please Mrs. Black!” Katia replied, trying to be patient. “You’ve probably forgotten, as you may

have been in a little state of shock when we picked you up at Aventura. Let me backtrack a bit to make everything as clear as possible. You may want to listen in as well Mr. Black.”

“Fine!” Mary said in a huff, and then sat down to listen. Erik soon followed.

“As I have already mentioned, I work for Fortress which is directed by the FBI. We received an anonymous tip, that Raven Claw was planning to secretly confiscate and destroy certain vital government documents. Fortress ordered Tony and myself to head up an operation to secretly obtain the documents so no tracks could be traced back to us. Unfortunately, we failed in our attempt and Raven Claw beat us to the punch.”

“And who is Raven Claw again?” asked Mary.

“They are a covert division of the CIA, whose mandate is basically to coverup any US political blunders.”

“And, if I may ask, what were the documents?” inquired Mary.

“It’s classified. But under the present circumstances, I can tell you that the documents were the JFK files. They contained the information that pinpointed who was involved in the plot to assassinate the President.”

“I still don’t see how this has anything to do with Erik,” quizzed Mary.

“Just let me finish.

After the JFK files were stolen, I was assigned to infiltrate Raven Claw and work as a double agent to find out if the files were in fact destroyed, or simply hidden in a secret location. Tony was my handler. Despite learning that the JFK file had indeed been destroyed, I remained working undercover to keep Fortress abreast of Raven Claw’s operations. With little activity over the last few years, Raven Claw was placed in dark mode and I was assigned to their Network

Surveillance Division. It was here, that Mr. Black’s repeat google inquiries about Oswald, the Cubans and the Mafia, the Dallas Police Department, weapons and ballistic reports, plus anything else pertaining to the JFK assassination were detected.

“How could you possibly know what I’m doing on my home computer?” Erik interjected. “As I just said, Network Surveillance. They monitor the digital airwaves from home and business computers, looking for particular words or combination of words and phrases that are intrinsic to specific activities, such terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, assassinations and such. Snooping into sensitive government affairs is not always the wisest thing to do.”

It was lucky for Mr. Black that I intercepted his inquiries and not some other agent,” Tony chimed in.

“Yes, and I came to the conclusion that you were either someone who was doing some simple research, or you were planning an assassination yourself,” added Katia. “I withheld giving Raven Claw the information, but did notify Fortress of my findings. They thought it was worth investigating further, so an agent was sent to your home to look into it. After keeping tabs on you and your inquiries for several months Fortress deemed you harmless, except for Tony and myself. There was something that just didn’t seem to sit right with us, call it a sixth sense, so we’ve been keeping tabs on Mr. Black off the record.”

Mary and Erik were finally starting to put two and two together.

“Then how did Raven Claw ever find out about Erik’s material?” Mary put forward. “Unfortunately, Mr. Black presented both his and the library data to the wrong people at the Dallas Police Station,” Katia replied. “Everyone in the room was a Raven Claw agent, except for Milligan and myself. After Mr. Black left, Raven Claw was officially reactivated.”

Mary just looked over to Erik with exasperation.

“Why don’t I just give them my material and then we can just forget that any of this ever happened?” proposed Erik.

“Mr. Black, do you really think that Raven Claw is going to simply let you walk away? Katia exclaimed. “Number one, you would be handing over only photocopies. They would want to know where all the original material is located. Especially the payroll list. God only knows how your aunt ever got her hand on that. Number two, and more importantly, you just simply know too much, if you get my drift.”

Erik paused for a moment before Katia’s statement hit home.

“Yes, I get your drift,” Erik replied.

“Now, I hope everything is clear?” asked Katia optimistically.

“Yes,” replied Mary resolutely.

“Listen, we only have you, as well as your family’s best interests in mind,” Tony added.

“Our best interests in mind? You’ve got us holed up a room, God knows where. We’ve been chased and shot at and.....”

“And yet, you are still alive,” Tony cut in. “Also, arrangements have already been made and your family is on their way to a safe location, as we speak. If it wasn’t for our involvement, you and even possibly your wife might have been pushing daisies!”

Both Mary and Erik stood speechless for a moment, thinking just how true Tony’s statement might be. Noticing that the Blacks appeared a little shaken, Tony and Katia left them to their thoughts. Downcast, Mary started to organize their belongings while Erik just continued to study Tony’s collage in greater detail.

The storm that had battered Florida the previous day, continued throughout the rest of the day and well into the evening. Everyone found a routine to keep themselves busy. Tony and Katia took shifts monitoring the consoles and flatscreens, Mary read a book plus helped with the cooking while Erik unwound by working on his novel.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Late May 1963, Canada

The vibration of the bus rolling over a set of railway tracks awoke Grace from her vivid dream on her first visit to Los Angeles.

“Regina!” announced the driver. “We’ll be taking a quick half hour break to refuel, so you might want to grab something to eat.”

Grace waited until she thought all the passengers had departed the bus. Entering the station, Grace glanced back towards the bus and noticed that the two suspicious men who’s names she now knew as Lee and Rahoul, were still sitting in the rear seat.

“I hope that they transfer to another bus,” Grace thought to herself.

There was definitely something very suspicious about them, but she just couldn’t quite figure out

exactly what. Grace used the restroom in the station and then grabbed a sandwich and juice to eat on the bus. After returning to her seat, she noticed that the men were no longer there.

Shortly after Grace finished her lunch, the driver boarded and stood on the first step bellowing, “Winnipeg! Last call for anyone traveling to Winnipeg!”

As the bus started moving, Grace was slightly relieved as the two men had not re-boarded. Her delight was soon dashed when the bus suddenly jolted to a stop and the door was reopened for a couple of late arrivals. To Grace’s dismay, the two strange men had returned to the bus.

“Sorry, but we just lost track of time,” Lee apologized to the driver.

“You’re two very lucky gentlemen. It would have been a long wait for the next bus!” the driver declared, being a little annoyed.

The men returned to their seats at the rear of the bus and Grace couldn’t help but hear them chirping back and forth.

“I told you that we needed to hurry up Lee. If we missed this bus, it would have put our whole operation in jeopardy. Plus, instead of us doing the hit, we might have ended up being the targets for screwing things up.”

“Shh!” replied Lee. “Keep it down, will you. We can’t afford being overheard Rahoul!”

But Grace had overheard them, and was starting to put two and two together.

Grace was definitely no stranger to the lingo and goings on of the mob. It reminded her of her time back in the late 30’s, when she was hanging around with Siegel. Grace wanted to inform the police at the next bus depot, but that was not an option, as she suspected that the Edmonton Police had probably issued an all outs bulletin for her arrest.

“Well, there’s nothing I can do about it for now,” Grace concluded to herself, as she just propped

her elbow on the arm rest, with her face in her hand.

With thoughts of Siegel fresh on her mind, Grace started day dreaming.

* * * * *

Late 1930s, Los Angeles.

Grace had taken Ben’s offer up and was working at Ciro’s for almost two months as a waitress. The work was hard and the hours long, but the tips were great which made the job bearable. Grace had tried on several occasions to convince the manager that she would like to set up a booth for her tea cup and tarot card readings, but she was continuously shrugged off. The manager didn’t believe, as he put it, “In that Hoodoo Voodoo Witchcraft sort of stuff.”

It was 10:00pm and getting near the end of her late night shift when Grace was given one last table. Sitting in the booth were two men with menus in front of their faces, and several women dressed to the nines in beautiful dresses, fur coats and jewelry.

“Hello. What can I get for you?” asked Grace.

Lowering the menu, Grace was astonished to see that it was Hank, the driver of the car who Grace hitched a ride with when she first arrived in L.A..

“Well, if it isn’t the pretty lady from the desert,” Hank said as he tapped the arm of the gentleman sitting next to him.

The man Hank tapped peered over the top of his menu, took a very quick look, and then returned reading the menu before quickly lowering the menu once again. Even though Grace’s

appearance was a little rough after working all day, she still retained a certain elegance about her.

“Yes. I remember you.... Grace.....isn’t it?” the man said taken aback by Grace’s beauty. “And you do remember me, right? I’m Ben,” he said stammering a bit.

Even though Ben said that Grace was a pretty lady back in the desert, he had no real idea of how beautiful her features really were, until now.

“Oh, yes, of course I remember you. And thank you very much for helping me get this job.”

“Think nothing of it. How are you making out?” Ben asked.

“Great for the most part, but I still would like to be able to work at what I’m really good at.”

“Which is?” asked Ben.

“I read tea cups and tarot cards. But, I haven’t been able to convince Mr. Wilkerson to let me try it out for a spell.”

“Well, I’ll see what I can do for you. Why don’t you sit down and give me a reading!”

“I’d love to, but I’m still working. I should be finished soon. Can I come over after you’ve finished your dinner?”

“Certainly. I look forward to it,” replied Ben.

“Thank you again Mr..... Sorry, but I do believe that you did not tell me your last name.”

“Siegel. Ben Siegel. You might hear a few people refer to me as Buggy, but please just call me Ben. I actually don’t care for Buggy too much.

“Certainly, Ben. I’ll see you in a little while,” Grace said as she was walking away backwards.

Inadvertently, she bumped into the arm of another customer sitting in an adjacent booth and spilling his drink onto the man’s suit.

“What the heck are you doing?” the man said as he stood up and started wiping off the spill with

his napkin.

“I’m terribly sorry. Let me wipe that up for you and get you a fresh drink. What were you drinking sir?”

“How could you be so clumsy you silly.....”

“Hey Cary. Calm down. It was just an accident,” Ben said as he rose from his chair and helped the man wipe off his suit.

“This is my friend Grace,” Ben said. “And Grace, this is Mr. Grant. Mr. Cary Grant.”

Grace was taken aback at meeting such a well known Hollywood star.

“Nice to meet you, under the circumstances,” Grace said shaking his hand. “Again, I’m terribly sorry for spilling your drink.”

Cary finally looked up to see Grace’s genuine forgiveness, not to mention her beautiful face and hourglass figure.

“Well, you should be a bit more careful,” Cary said with a little more composure.

“Listen Cary. How about if I get your suit cleaned for you tomorrow?” Ben suggested as he padded Cary on his shoulder.

“Thanks for offering Ben, but I think I’ll just take care of it myself.”

“Why don’t you come and join us,” asked Ben. “I would, but you look like you have your hands full right now,” Cary replied still wiping off his suit, while gazing into Grace’s eyes. “Maybe another time.”

“Very well,” replied Ben.

Grace finished cleaning up the mess and brought Cary a few extra rounds of drinks, on the house. Grace ended up working later than expected as one of the waitresses went home sick

leaving Grace to pick up her shift, and derailing the card readings with Ben. Grace apologized to Ben for not being able to complete the reading, which Ben didn't mind at all, as things were starting to heat up with his date.

A few days later, Ben returned to Ciro's and arranged for Grace to do a reading for him, this time with only his sidekick Hank and Hank's date to accompany him. Grace started the reading with the standard tea cup reading, but the giggles and muffled laughter from Hank and his girlfriend started to annoy Grace, as she took her readings very seriously.

Seeing that Grace was getting a little perturbed, Ben spoke up.

“Look Hank and, uhm, Lucy?”

“Lois,” re-informed Hank.

“Ok, Lois. Could you two please keep your skepticism to yourselves, and just let Grace do her work. There might be something to all this fortune telling stuff.”

“Sorry Boss,” replied Hank with forced seriousness.

Grace finished Ben's tea cup reading and then brought out the Tarot Cards. Shuffling the deck, Grace instructed Ben to cut the cards and then continued with the reading. By this time a small crowd, including Cary Grant, Betty Gable and Dick Powel, had gathered around the booth to see the goings on. The first couple of cards that Grace flipped happened to minor non consequential cards, that Grace turned into positive meanings. The third card turned over was ‘The Emperor’, which meant that Ben was full of energy enthusiasm and a person who other people would follow. She also told him that he was restless, bored and discontented. Ben unconsciously squirmed in his chair a little which drew a few snickers from some the onlookers. The fourth card turned was ‘The Wheel of Fortune’ which meant good luck and fortune. It fit

Ben to a T. The following card was ‘The Fool’ which drew only muffled whispers.

“You can skip that card Grace,” Hank spoke up. “Everybody knows that Ben’s no fool.”

“It doesn’t mean exactly what you think, but that’s alright. I can bypass it. And by the way. I would prefer it if you referred to me by my professional name when I’m conducting my readings,” Grace announced in a serious tone.

“Please call me Madam Aderes.”

“Very well then.....Madam Aderes. Could you please finish my reading,” Ben requested.

“Maybe your next card might tell everyone what a great lover you are Ben,” came a seductive voice from within the group of people that had gathered.

A few whistles erupted and the crowd parted like the Red Sea, as an attractive woman sauntered through the cluster of people, stopping at Grace’s booth. Ben gazed up from the cards to see an old flame, Jean Harlow.

“Hello Jean. Haven’t seen you for a while.”

“Been busy working on a film, but please, don’t let me interrupt your fortune teller.”

“Grace, I mean Madam Aderes, please continue,” Ben said looking back into Graces’ eyes with affection.

Miss Harlow, noticed the attraction immediately.

“I believe that your next card might just reveal your romantic side Ben,” Madam Aderes said with a teasing look in her eye. She was somewhat attracted to Ben.

Madam Aderes flipped the next card over, revealing “The Lovers”, as murmurs and a few more whistles rose from the crowd. Grace smiled, as it wasn’t simply a luck of the draw flip. She had carefully marked the cards, so she knew exactly which card was about to be flipped. By

foretelling the identity of a few of the cards before turning them over would guarantee that her readings were accurate and believable.

Grace noticed that she had everyone’s attention including the manager of the restaurant, who had joined into the liveliness, and she was enjoying every minute of it.

“How the hell did she know that card was coming up?” said one of the on lookers.

And others could be heard saying, “God.....she’s good,” and “Amazing, absolutely amazing, she’s really good.”

Everything was going great. The crowd grew larger and everyone was oohing and awing at the turn of every card. Even Madam Aderes was getting a little over exuberant, exaggerating her mysterious deep voice and waving her hands mystically over the cards. Then Madam Aderes face went a little pale as she spotted her secret marking on the last card to be flipped.

“I think that I have had enough for one evening,” Madam Aderes said putting the back of her hand on her fore head and reclining back into her seat.

“Oh, come on Grace,” Hank said forgetting to use her trade name.

“There’s just one card left.”

“I’m sorry, but I’m just too tired.”

Ben’s eyes never left Grace, as he reached over and put his hand on the last card. Grace shook her head ever so slightly. Ben could also see the look of, “Please don’t turn that card over.” “You heard the lady. She’s too tired. Back to your seats everyone,” Ben said firmly as he slid the card part ways across the table. Grace was just about to pick the card up off the table, when a hand reach over Ben and grabbed the card. Hank had picked up the card and without looking at it, flung it into the air spinning like a helicopter rotor.

Every eye focused on the card as the card seemed to hover in mid air, before floating down in slow motion and landed softly back on the table. It might as well have been a brick that hit the table, as all viewers stood frozen in time when the ‘Death’ card was revealed.

Grace and Ben’s eyes met. Grace’s were filled with apprehension, and Ben’s with anguish. Ben then got up and grabbed Hank by the scruff of his neck.

“What the hell did you do that for? Didn’t you hear Grace say that she didn’t want to continue?” barked Ben.

“Sorry Boss, but curiosity got the best of me.”

“It’s okay Ben,” interrupted Grace as she got up and put herself in between the two men. “The death card does not necessarily represent that you are going to die. It has many meanings. Please sit down and let me explain the meaning behind the card.”

As they sat down, Grace could hear whispers from the crowd, “I think she knew what that last card was, don’t you?”

“She must have known. Just look at how many cards she foretold before even flipping them.”

“Yes I believe you’re right,” whispered another person.

And still another person muttered, “Knowing Bugsy’s temperament, I definitely wouldn’t have wanted to be the person turning over that card.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, please, quiet down,” Grace announced as she stood up. The crowd grew hushed.

“Thank you. Now let me explain. The ‘Death Card’ card does not mean that this gentleman will just keel over and die on this very spot. This card simply indicates that something.....like a business deal or a relationship that might be coming to an end. And then, new fortunes will

emerge. Where there is an end, there is also a beginning.”

Grace paused and transfixed a mystical gaze throughout the crowd.

“That is the end of my readings for today.”

Ben thanked Grace for clarifying the meaning behind the card, while the crowd clapped their approval.

“Madam Aderes. Can I book a time for you to do my reading?” came a voice from within the crowd. It was Cary Grant.

“I’d also like to book a session,” another voice called out.

“And I as well,” came a third.

“I’d like to, but I’m only working here as a waitress,” replied Grace regretfully.

There was a sigh of disappointment that emanated from the crowd. Suddenly a man emerged from the crowd and whispered something in Grace’s ear. It was Mr. Wilkerson, Grace’s boss.

The patrons were slowly dispersing with dismay when Mr. Wilkerson quickly spoke out. “Please, ladies and gentlemen! May I have your attention. My name is Mr. Wilkerson, and I’m the owner of this fine establishment. I am pleased to announce that Grace.....”

Grace grabbed his shirt, tugged him down a little, and whispered in his ear.

“Sorry. I’m pleased to announce that Madam Aderes will have a booth set up by tomorrow night and will be available to conduct her readings. Who was the first person that wanted to book a time?”

“Right here,” said Cary as he sidestepped his way through the receding crowd.

Grace could not believe how her luck had just turned around. Other people soon followed Cary’s lead and a long line formed in short order, as word of Grace’s unique talent spread like

wild fire throughout the club. By nights end, Grace was booked for the remainder of the week and into the beginning of the next. The socialites spread the word quickly about Madam Aderes, and within weeks she had become somewhat of a celebrity herself. She became so popular, that anyone who wanted their fortunes told, would have to book months in advance.

Over the next six months, Grace rolled in the money and hobnobbed with all the Who's Who of Hollywood. She went out with numerous men but never really settled or went steady with anyone in particular. Although she did see Cary and Ben quite a bit, she always told any man that started to get too serious, that she wanted to 'Keep her options open.'

Everything in Grace's life was going absolutely perfectly, and she couldn't ask for anything else, until one particular evening. Even though Grace knew that Ben had started dating a Hollywood actress, she eagerly accepted a dinner invitation as she enjoyed being in the limelight with Ben.

The evening started off well with a wonderful meal at the Biltmore Hotel. Throughout the dinner Ben continually made suggestions that they should get a room for the evening, and Grace caught on quickly exactly why he had chosen a hotel for their dinner date. Grace was in no mood to fooling around that evening and convinced Ben that she would just love to spend the evening dancing the night away. Ben reluctantly agreed. They hit several bars including The Brown Derby, where they accidentally bumped into Hank and yet another one of his new girls for the night. The foursome continued to bar hop until they ended up at Tropicana's, where things started to heat up.

“Ben. It's getting late and I have a busy day ahead of me tomorrow,” Grace said, slurring her words. “Could you please take me home?”

“Sure, but why don’t we go back to the Biltmore for a final nightcap,” Ben replied, also slurring his words, then nibbled her neck.

“Sorry Ben. Not tonight. I’m just not in the mood, okay?”

“Come on Gracey,” Ben begged again while grabbing Grace’s hand and placing it on his crotch, under the table.

Grace knew by feeling the bulge in his trousers, she would have a hard time to dissuade him.

“Put your pistol back in its holster,” Grace said half jokingly and slapping his thigh. “You don’t want that thing going off prematurely.”

“Why don’t you two get a room?” Hank broadcasted.

Grace just glared at both Hank and Ben.

“Fine, I get the message. I’ll take you home,” Ben said a little perturbed. “Hank, bring the car around, will you?”

“But.....”

“No buts. Just get the car.”

As they drove towards Grace’s apartment, Ben leaned over the back seat and whispered something in Hank’s ear. Grace was half passed out and didn’t even noticed that Hank had changed routes. Fifteen minutes later, Grace could feel that the car had come to an abrupt stop, waking her from her short nap.

“Hey....This isn’t where my house lives..... I mean where my house is,” Grace said giggling while slurring her words .

“No, but I thought that it would be a great place to do the rumba!” Ben replied with optimism, then leaned over and gave Grace a kiss on her neck.

“I already told you...hick-up, not tonight,” Grace said with another hick up.

“Hey Hank, can you please take me home,” Grace asked as she leaned over the front seat, only to see his girlfriend’s head bobbing up and down over his lap. “Oh Hank, hick-up, couldn’t you wait until you got me home?”

“I think they’ve got the right idea Gracey,” Ben said grabbing her arm and pulling her towards him.

“Ben, I said no!” Grace stammered, while trying to push herself away.

“You’ll do what I bloody well want,” Ben demanded as he grabbed Grace’s head with both hands, then kissed her forcefully.

Grace squirmed and started hitting back, but Ben held her firm until he suddenly yelled out in excruciating pain. Grace had bitten his lip so hard that it started to bleed.

“You fucking bitch,” Ben hollered out in fury.

Impulsively Ben pushed Grace back so violently that she hit her head on the door, knocking her semi-unconscious.

Ben leaned over and roughly hiked Grace’s skirt up, then forced her legs apart. He unzipping his pants and thrust his throbbing member deep inside her.

Still too drunk and dazed from hitting her head, Grace decided that there was no use in fighting back. Turning her head away from Ben, she closed her eyes. Grace had seen several sides to Ben, from tender moments to anger, but was totally shocked to see this side of him. As a tear rolled down her cheek, her mind was taken back to another time, another place. A time that Grace wanted to forget forever. But it was not to be.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The Dream Within The Dream - Alberta, Canada, 1933

On top of a small hill, nestled amongst an old grove of aspens, sat several rustic wooden buildings. Grace had returned in time to the place she grew up, a small mixed farm near Lake Bellevue, Alberta. Her family as most of the other people from the surrounding farms, were of Ukrainian descent, who had fled the perils of the Russian Revolution to seek refuge in Canada. Her mother Ann, having bloodlines to Czar Nicholas II, was especially thankful to be far away from the turmoils in her homeland.

They lived in a small three room log cabin, built from the large trees felled when her father broke the land. It was simple in design and craftsmanship, and furnished with only the basic necessities. A long narrow table covered with a cloth acted as the kitchen counter and a large galvanized tub centered in the middle, acted as both sink and washtub for the youngest children.

On the wall next to the counter sat a small wooden stove, which doubled as a heater for the long and bitterly cold winters. A small throw carpet covered only a portion of the wood planked floor and a single kerosine lantern hung from the rafters. Grace slept on the floor while the younger children shared a bed in one of the bedrooms. An old burlap sack strung across a wire acted as a makeshift curtain. There were several out building scattered about the yard which housed the livestock from which they survived. A large garden behind the house produced fresh vegetables, and the nearby fields provided a succulent supply of wild raspberries, blueberries and Saskatoon berries.

It was late in the afternoon, early in the summer of 1933, when Grace remembered reluctantly returning home from school. Her father Walter was a mean old son of a bitch, and she knew that there would be an arms length list of chores waiting for her. Grace was the oldest of four siblings and was expected to the majority of the work. To Grace’s surprise, her father seemed to be in a hurry for some strange reason and only gave her a couple of chores to complete.

Grace had just finished all her tasks when she heard her mother calling her in for dinner. Grace’s mother Ann, was the gentlest, kindest, most giving person in the world. The complete opposite of Walter. The ‘Old Man’ as all his kids secretly called him, was the last to arrive at the table in his usual dirty and stinky self.

“Everyone get their chores done?” he barked entering the kitchen.

“Yes, father,” everyone answered quietly as they stared down at their plates.

All the family members ate their food politely while Walter just inhaled his meal. Before anyone else had finished eating, he pushed his plate away and stood up.

“Come on Grace. You can come lend a hand with something I need to pick up.”

“Why don’t you take Allen to pick up your hootch?” Ann said, knowing full well where Walter was going. Every June, was the time when all the neighboring farmers got together to bottle and pick up their portion of the moonshine they had started brewing several weeks earlier.

“Are you questioning me woman?”

“No, but Grace hasn’t even finished her dinner,” Ann replied meekly.

“I don’t care. I’m late as it is,” Walter barked as he looked at his pocket watch.

“That’s okay mom,” Grace cut in. “I’ll finish it when we get back.”

Grace had heard enough arguments over the years about her father’s involvement with making moonshine, and didn’t want to see her father’s explosive temper taken out on her or her mother.

“I just hope he doesn’t decide to stay too long,” Grace thought to herself.

After loading a several dozen glass gallon jugs from the storage shed, Grace’s mother watched in dismay as the old 1926 International, disappeared over a knoll just past the farm gate. They drove through the back roads to a remote area surrounded by low lying hills. The sun was getting low and insects could be seen meandering in the rays of sunlight that beamed through the trees. Walter pulled the truck off the dirt road and across a small meadow before parking the truck behind a large clump of willow trees. As they walked to the back of the pickup, Walter looked around suspiciously making sure no one had followed them.

“We walk from here. Hurry up and grab that batch of jugs Grace,” Walter ordered. “You need to know the way before it gets too dark, ‘cause you’ll be hauling the jugs back when it is!”

The glass jugs clanged together as Grace grabbed two batches of four jugs each, bundled together with binder twine.

“Be careful with those, damn it!” Walter yelled out in a loud whisper. “I’ll have your hide if you break any of them.”

The moonshine was extremely valuable to Walter, not only to drink himself, but as valuable trading stock for bartering merchandise.

Grace watched in dismay as her father picked up only two loose bottles, before they headed off down a cow trail to the end of the meadow and into an aspen grove. They wound their way through the bush and crossed several more meadows until they reached a small stream. Breaking away from the cow trail they headed along the stream following a barely visible path that was seldom used.

Another five minutes of trudging through the ever thickening bush, Grace knew that they must be close to the hidden distillery, as a pungent aroma became getting stronger and stronger. Finally, after about twenty minutes from leaving the truck, they broke into a small open area, bustling with activity. A rifle was suddenly swiveled in their direction from a man sitting in a tree platform. Walter called out a password as he raised and waved his left hand. The man then lowered his weapon. The camp was filled with several large copper barrels with coiled copper tubing attached, men stoking a fire beneath the barrels and other men filling containers. Most of the men were in their dirty farm clothes, with the crotch of their pants hanging half way down to their knees, being held up with suspenders over a loose fitting collared shirt. The younger men were dressed much the same except the pants fit properly and their shirts were much tighter fitting.

“As usual Walter. You’re just in time to bottle and leave,” a fellow farmer called out as he approached them. “Almost all the grunt work is already done.”

“Sorry George, just lost track of time,” Walter lied, knowing full well that he was supposed to have arrived several hours earlier to put in his fair share of work.

“I’m sure you did,” George replied skeptically. “And who’s the pretty lady with you?” George asked as a several whistles came from the crowd.

“My daughter, Grace!” Walter said raising his voice, making sure everyone in the camp could hear him. “So, don’t get any wild ideas. Just keep your pencils in your pants boys.”

Even though Walter may have been a mean S.O.B., he was still very protective of his children, especially the three girls.

Walter immediately rolled up his sleeves and helped with the bottling. Over the next couple of hours Grace made several trips back to the truck with jugs full of moonshine, and returning with the extra empties. Her father only helped on the first trip, making sure Grace didn’t get lost, but left the remaining tireless return trips to Grace. The majority of the farmers had brought at least one of their sons to help out and already had their jugs loaded. Most of them were sitting around a fire, catching up on stories and telling jokes, as they passed around a couple of jugs of moonshine. Grace had hauled only half of the jugs to the truck and tried to get her father to help out as it was getting late into the evening. But the ‘Old Man’ was already in the bag, along with most of the other farmers.

A few of the farmers’ sons were sitting off to the side and passing around their own jug when they spotted Grace struggling to pick up another batch of jugs. Three of the boys casually got up and swayed past the boisterous group of farmers, and headed towards Grace.

“I see that your dad is tooooo.....busy taste testing.....and it looks like you could use a hand with haaauuling.....hick-up, your jugs,” one of the boys said, stammering through his sentence.

"Thanks, but I can manage by myself," Grace replied, seeing that the boys had too much to drink as they swaying back and forth where they stood.

"Nonsense," spoke another boy. "Weee'd.....be glad to help."

The three boys wouldn't take no for an answer and picked up the remaining jugs.

"Lead the way missy," prompted one of the boys, as he leaned over and attempted to do a ceremonious bow.

Holding a kerosene lantern to light up the way, Grace led the stumbling and staggering boys back to the truck. Along the way Grace was introduced to the boys as Billy, Tom and Bruce. Grace didn't know how they made it to the truck without breaking a jug, but she sure was glad that they did. Her father would have most likely beaten the hell out of her if one did break.

"Thank you very much," Grace said gratefully, placing the lantern on the ground. "I would have been loading these jugs until the cows came home, if it wasn't for your help."

"No problem," Billy said as placed the jugs on the ground and then twisted the cap off one of the jugs.

Taking a big gulp, he passed the jug on to one of the others, then staggered towards Grace forcing her to back up against the truck.

"And now....we'd like to get a little payment....for our trouble," Billy said hiccuping, as he grabbed the top of the truck box on either side of her.

"What do you mean?" Grace replied a little frightened and angry.

"Oh, you know," Billy answered pressing his body firmly into Grace and leaned forward for a kiss.

But she quickly turned her head away at the last second. Grace could feel a bulge coming from

Billy’s pants, but had no idea what it was as she was not told about the facts of life yet.

Billy lifted one arm away to undo his zipper, giving Grace the chance to work her arms in between her chest and his. She didn’t have a clue what was going on, but didn’t like the situation one bit.

“Stop it!” she yelled as she pushed him away violently.

Billy stumbled backwards, tripping on a rock and smashing his head on the ground. Grace stood frozen for a moment, then gasped and turned her head away, clasping her hands over her face at the sight of Billy’s exposed erection. Billy supported himself up onto his elbows, then rubbed the back of his head. He was enraged as he wiped the blood from his hand onto his pants. Billy looked to his buddies and motioned for them towards Grace. They knew exactly what he meant.

Placing the jug down they rushed forward and hopped in the truck box. They quickly grabbed Grace’s arms and held them firmly against the rail. Grace shook her head back and forth screaming for help as Billy staggered to his feet. Stumbled over to Grace, he slapped her across the face with an open hand. Tom looked around in the back of the truck and spotted an old rag.

“Here Billy, use this.”

“Thanks. Now shut the fuck up you stupid bitch,” Billy yelled out.

As he started to tie the rag, Grace quickly lifted her knee into Bill’s groin, which just infuriated him even more. Billy got up, grabbed and pulled Grace’s head back by her hair and punched her just below her ribcage, knocking the wind out of her.

“So you want to play rough do you?” Billy exhorted. “I told you we needed to be paid for our help, and you’re going to pay up.”

As Tom and Bruce held Grace tight, Billy raised her dress up and ripped down her panties.

Grabbing and hoisting her legs apart, he thrust himself inside her. Grace threw her head back and screamed in excruciating pain as she was ripped apart. Billy thrust himself over and over, until Grace could feel his body tighten as he let out a low groan.

As he withdrew from Grace, Tom and Bruce could feel Grace’s body go limp. Billy did his pants up and then noticed blood on his hands.

“Whoa Boys!!” he exclaimed. “We’ve got ourselves a virgin here!”

He then padded his hand across Grace’s face a couple of times.

“Thanks little lady! I’m fully paid, but you still owe my buddies,” he said with a snicker.

Grace’s eyes opened wide with fear. Tears began pouring out as she shook her head sideways, grunting through the gag. Billy and Bruce changed places. As Bruce dropped his pants, Grace tried to plead with her eyes for him not to continue, but the excitement of the moment and the adrenaline running through the boys veins was too much to overcome. He thrust his member in deep. Grace reeled her head back again in excruciating pain, but relinquished that there was no use in struggling and just let her body go limp. Bruce withdrew from Grace and whooped and hollered, like a native warrior who had taken a white man’s scalp, with his bloody hand raised high into the air. Then it was Tom’s turn.

Billy and Bruce were having a tough time holding Grace’s limp body up.

“Swing her around the back of the box boys,” Tom called out.

They slid Grace to the rear of the opened tailgate and held her face down. Tom lifted her blood stained dress, undid his zipper and forced himself inside her. Grace screamed again as Tom sodomized her. Grace’s body went limp and she passed out.

When Grace finally awoke, the smell of sex still permeated the air. She had no idea how

long she'd been lying in the back of the truck, but all she could feel was pain between her legs. Her arms shook as she forced herself up. Standing by the tailgate, Grace undid the gag tied around her mouth as murky memories of the rape flooded back.

Grace cleaned herself off the best she could, then painfully loaded the remaining jugs into the truck and closed the tailgate. Grabbing a blanket from behind the truck seat, she got into the truck and rolled herself into a ball under the blanket. With streams of tears poured down her face, her only thought was that she wanted to die. She waited in horror for the return of her father. Grace knew that if he ever found out about what had just happened, he would probably kill the boys and then most likely her. She had to somehow pull herself together, and keep this incident a secret.

Grace cried herself to sleep huddled under the comforts of the blanket. She had no idea how long she'd been asleep before the truck door creaked open.

“Grace. Grace!” a voice came out of the darkness.

Her father had finally returned.

“Grace.....wake up.....”

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The Awakening - Los Angeles, Late 1930's

“Grace. Grace! Wake up!” a voice came out of the darkness.

Grace opened her eyes from a catatonic state, only to see Ben grinning like a cheshire.

“Was it as good for you as it was for me?”

“Get off of me!” Grace said sternly.

“What? No second round?”

“I said get the hell off me!!!” Grace shouted as she pushed him off.

“Oh come on Grace. Don't be so pissed. It's not like we haven't fucked before.”

Grace still had her high heel shoes on and began kicking at Ben violently, all the while screaming and yelling. Ben defended himself the best he could, before Grace landed a stiff kick to his ribs and another to his still exposed limp penis. Ben keeled over in agonizing pain.

Reaching up over her head, Grace opened the car door and crawled out headfirst. Getting up quickly, she reached into the car, grabbed her purse and a shoe that had fallen off.

“I don’t ever want to see you ever again!” Grace yelled, slammed the door, and walked away limping on only one shoe.

Ben opened his door and clambered out, still hunched over in pain.

“Come on Grace. Come Back!”

“Not on your life,” she yelled back as she lifted her leg and took off her shoe. “You’ll never see me ever again.”

“Go and pick her up,” Ben called out to Hank, as he got back into the car.

Grace turned her head as she heard the car wheel around and race towards her.

Surveying the adjacent bush, Grace made a snap decision and headed into the trees. The car came sliding to a stop on the loose gravel sending dust swirling around the car. Ben got out of the car and hobbled over to the edge of the bush. It was too dark for Ben to see anything, and he was in no shape to be bushwhacking through the brush to look for her.

“You can never leave me Grace!” Ben yelled out. “I’ll find you Gracey!” I’ll hunt you down and find you. There’s no place you can hide. No matter how long it takes, no matter where you go, I’ll find you.”

If Ben had just walked thirty feet into the bush, he would have found Grace huddled behind a rock. She had taken shelter behind the rock as it was even too dark for her to find her way through the shrubs. After hearing the car door slam and the tires spit gravel, Grace still waited for a minute before slowly standing up. Taking a short step back the ground gave away unexpectedly, almost causing her to fall backwards. Regaining her balance she looked down over

her shoulder and spotted the headlights of Ben’s car driving along the windy road below. A shudder ran through her body, as she sat down on the lip of a cliff to regain her composure and contemplate her future. Grace didn’t know it at the time, but it would be the last time she would see Ben. She spotted his photo in a newspaper several years later, with the headlines stating that he had been murdered.

“Hank. I don’t care what it takes, but I need you to find Grace. When you locate her, find out how much she has overheard about our activities,” Ben instructed Hank as they drove. “If she knows too much, then you know what to do.”

Hank just nodded his head.

It took Grace a good hour of walking before making it back to town, where she managed to hail a cab. She asked the cabby to drive her to Long Beach, where a friend of hers lived. By the time the cab arrived at her friend’s house Grace had passed out in the back seat from exhaustion.

“Miss. Miss!” the cab driver said as he shook her shoulder through the open door.

“Miss. We’re here. Miss, please.....”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Late May 1963, Winnipeg, Manitoba

“Miss, please wake up. We’ve arrived at Winnipeg,” the bus driver said as her again shook Grace’s shoulder.

“Oh!” Grace replied as she pushed herself away from the driver.

Grace’s dream within a dream had come to an abrupt end.

“Sorry for startling you.”

“That’s quite all right,” Grace replied as she came to her senses. “I must have been in a deep sleep.”

“More like a nightmare from what some of the other passengers were saying. They said you were tossing and kicking and yelling out ‘no’ quite a bit.”

“Yes, it wasn’t a very pleasant dream,” Grace replied meekly as she pulled out a Kleenex to wipe some tears from her eyes and sweat from her forehead. “Sorry if I caused any trouble.”

“No trouble at all. We’ll be here in Winnipeg for about an hour’s layover, so you might want to get some breakfast at the diner.”

“Thank you. I definitely could use a strong cup of coffee right about now.”

Just over an hour later Grace returned to the bus with a full stomach, and stared out the window sat as the bus rolled out of the station. She was now on her way south towards the United States. The bus had arrived at the Canada/USA Border an hour later and Grace suddenly became extremely nervous. She just realized that she would have to go through US Customs.

“Surely the Edmonton police had put out an all points bulletin on me,” she thought nervously.

But there was little she could do as the bus slowed to a stop.

“Well, if I get caught, I get caught,” she resigned. “There’s nothing I can do about it now!”

Then, she immediately had a crazy idea.

“Identification. Please have your identification out please,” a customs officer announced as he entered the bus, with another agent following close behind.

Slowly they made their way down the aisle checking everyone’s identification, before stopping at Grace’s seat.

“Miss. Miss!” the officer called out. But Grace did not move. Only her eyes could be seen moving back and forth under her eyelids, as she pretended to be in a very deep sleep.

“Just leave her be,” said the other officer that was leaning over his coworkers shoulder. “She looks harmless enough.”

Lee and Rahoul were not as lucky. They had tried to take a cue from seeing the agents

bypass Grace as she slept, but their plan was quickly foiled. The officers kicked at their boots and shook their shoulders vigorously until the officers were acknowledged. Both men were questioned in length, but eventually allowed to continue on their journey. The officers glanced at Grace as they passed her seat and again called out, "Miss!" And with still no reply or movements, they shrugged their shoulders and grinned at each other before making their way down the aisle. Grace's ploy had worked, as she was now successfully in the United States, and heading towards Chicago.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Present Day - Fort Lauderdale

Mary and Erik had awoken the second morning to find themselves alone, except for a note left on the fridge door: "GONE FOR GROCERIES - TONY IS ON WATCH OUTSIDE - DO NOT LEAVE THE ROOM - WE'LL BE BACK SOON. Katia.

Mary turned on the early morning news to catch up on current events, but Erik made the ill conceived idea to grab a cup of freshly brewed coffee and head out to the balcony to work on his novel. His peace and quiet came to an abrupt end a few hours later, when all hell broke loose.

"Mr. Black! Please get back inside," Katia announced from the open patio door, with a couple of bags of groceries.

"I'm sorry, but I just wanted to get a bit of fresh air while writing down a few notes about my aunt's....."

"I've told you Mr. Black, that it is imperative that you and Mrs. Black stay inside at all times! Now get your ass back in here! Katia demanded, as she threw a blonde wig onto a chair.

“Sorry, but I don’t see what all the fuss is about. Who’s going to see me from behind the walls that are surrounding the balcony?”

“The fucking guys who have been trying to kill us, you stupid idiot!” Tony bellowed from behind Katia, from the doorway. “We’ve already told you numerous times about the surveillance satellites! Raven Claw has almost caught you twice, and from just talking to one of my sources, the word out on the street is that they want your material at any cost.”

“You might want to think about just handing over all your material to us for safe keeping,” Katia interjected. “After our organization verifies its authenticity, they will present it at a Press Conference. Once it’s made public, there will be no need for Raven Claw to pursue you any further.”

It suddenly dawned on Erik that it was the second or third time that Katia had asked him to turn over the original material. “Why couldn’t they just use the photocopies he had in his possession?” Erik asked himself.

“I disagree. I’ve seen enough movies to realize that I already know too much information, and they’ll probably just hunt me down and make me disappear anyways. I think my best bet is to get this information to the press and get it published in a newspaper. Once the public is informed, they might get off my case.”

“You’re dealing with fire Mr. Black,” Tony warned. “Don’t you think that Raven Claw has already contacted the press? I’m pretty sure that all the media networks have been warned that they might be contacted by an attention seeker from Canada who has forged some photographs about the JFK assassination?”

“Believe me. Raven Claw has covered all their bases,” added Katia. “Not only that Tony, but do

you remember talking about the rumored super surveillance satellite the government has been working on, which you called Eagle Eye?”

“Yes, you’re not trying to tell me that it’s.....”

“Bingo, give the man a cu-pie doll. It’s no rumor. It’s called Cyclops, and Raven Claw has full access to it. Word has it, that is so sophisticated, it can practically count the beads of sweat running down a person’s face.

“I think we need to get the two of you out of Florida and then you can hand over the original material to us for safekeeping,” Tony proposed.

“That’s interesting,” Erik thought to himself. “Now Tony was even asking for the original material!”

“But how the hell are you going to get us back to Canada, with all the high tech surveillance systems out there?” Mary piped in. “Not to mention this Cyclops thingamajiggy supposedly watching our every move.”

Everyone paused for several moments. If only Tony and Katia had better Intel, they would have learned that Cyclops was off line due the storm, and would have been able to attempt a clean getaway.

“Leave that to us,” Tony said breaking the silence. “In the mean time, we need to prep you with a few things that may come in handy, just in case we get our backs caught against a wall. Have either of you handled any weapons before?” Tony asked as he flung a large black duffle bag onto a bed.

“Well, I used to hunt when I was a teenager, so I know how to handle a shotgun and rifle, but haven’t used one in 30 to 35 years,” Erik replied.

“I’ve only used a water pistol when I was a child,” Mary added as she smiled slightly. “Why do you ask?”

“Because, should the need arise, both of you will need to know how to handle every weapon in this bag,” Katia answered firmly as she walked over and unzipped the bag.

Pulling out a rifle, she tossed it across the bed towards Erik, “Think you can handle this?” Erik snatched it out of midair and inspected the strange looking rifle, “Looks like it came from a James Bond movie.”

Erik found out later that it was a Heckler & Koch submachine gun.

“I could probably aim and fire, but that’s about it.”

Tony rummaged through the bag and pulled out a hand gun, then handed it to Mary. She quickly placed it on the bed and took a step back.

“I’m not fond of guns at all!” Mary exclaimed squeamishly.

“Well, whether you like it or not you’ll need to know how to handle each and everyone of these weapons,” Katia said as she proceeded to empty the duffle bag. “Let’s begin, shall we?”

Over the next hour, Tony and Katia gave them instructions on how to load and handle the weapons, including dismantling and reassembling them, which Mary thought was going a little overboard. They didn’t argue though, but listened and practiced intently. Katia expected perfection, and after the intense training session, Erik and Mary knew just about everything they needed to know about handling a Heckler & Koch MP5, a Benelli M4 shotgun, a Glock and Beretta 92 compact pistol, as well as Tear Gas and Smoke Grenades. Except of course, for actually discharging any of the weapons.

With lunch still an hour away, Tony returned to the monitoring station, while Mary and

Erik just flopped themselves on the bed and began watching TV.

“Oh!” Katia said suddenly as she spun around. “Weren’t you the two of you scheduled to fly to the Bahamas today?”

“Holy shit! You’re right. Maybe we can head there and disappear for a while,” Erik replied hastily as he began scrambling to put his belongings together.

“You can stop packing Mr. Black. The two of you won’t be going anywhere,” Katia announced.

“But....”

“No buts. I’m sorry, just please hand over your tickets so I can dispose of them. I wouldn’t want you two to get any wild ideas.”

Erik reluctantly handed her the tickets.

“Hey Tony. I’m heading out to survey the area and then get some groceries,” Katia announced.

Tony and Katia had been adjusting their appearance every time one of them had to go out in public, so without any inhibition Katia quickly stripped down to her skivvies. Her shapely and very fit figure left little to the imagination. Mary slapped Erik’s arm, as she caught him staring a little too much. Katia was into a new identity within minutes. Wearing a large sunhat, sunglasses, black Capri pants and a white blouse, she took on the appearance of Audrey Hepburn.

“I’ll be back shortly,” Katia announced as she flew out the door.

Tony listened to some radio transmissions and scanned the TV screens for a short time, before walking over to a closet and pulling out a black suitcase.

“Now, let’s get you two some new identities,” Tony proposed.

Over the next few hours, Tony instructed them on the unique art of creating a good

disguise, then photographed each new identity. After completing the process, Tony set up a small work station with a cutting board, glue, stamps, a laminating machine plus a few other items. Forging three new sets of passports along with matching driver’s licenses and credit cards, Tony then gave them explicit instructions on when they should be used. He also reminded them not to forget changing into the matching disguises before using them.

“Why don’t you two take a break while I put the finishing touches on your new identities.” The relentless hours of working on disguises and weaponry had been exhausting for the Blacks. Mary ended up having an afternoon siesta and Erik had almost fallen asleep when Katia, obviously back from her errands, nudged his foot.

“Come on. You still could use a little more practice with the Glock,” prompted Katia.

Reluctantly, Erik crawled off the bed and followed her down the hallway.

“We can practice in here,” she said as she pulled him into the bathroom. “It’ll be a little quieter so we don’t wake up your wife. Here, grab the Glock and assume a shooting stance, then look at yourself in the mirror. It’s often helpful if you can see your stance in front of a mirror.”

Erik followed her instructions but he still looked uncomfortable and awkward due to a sore back.

“Sorry,” he said apologetically. “I’ve had a few back injuries over the years.”

“I understand, but if you make a few minor adjustments, you should have better balance.

Katia grasped Erik’s leg and moved it back slightly. Then corrected the bend in his elbow.

“That’s better, but here, let me show you,” Katia said as she assumed a proper shooting stance.

“See the difference?”

Erik just shrugged his shoulders. “Looks the same as mine.”

“Not even close. Here, stand behind me, reach around and clasp my hands.”

Obliging her request, I positioned myself behind her and timidly reached around and clasped her hands.

"Don't worry Mr. Black. I won't bite," Katia said as she snuggled her body into mine.

"Now, do you feel the difference in this stance?"

"Yes," he replied with a little hesitation.

Erik lied to make her feel better, as he really didn't feel any difference.

"Now just remember to squeeze and not pull the trigger and you'll do fine," she proclaimed.

Katia then slowly turned face to face with Erik leaving his arms still wrapped around her.

Erik was taken aback slightly when she wrapped her arms around him and looked up coyly.

Over the short time since meeting Katia, Erik had noticed her quirky smirks and that peculiar look a woman gives a man when she is interested in him. Although she was an extremely beautiful woman, Erik was already spoken for and his commitment to his wife was eternal.

"I suggest....," she said pausing for a second, looking wantonly. "Sorry, I suggest that the best place for you to conceal your weapon, is here in the crevasse of your back."

Katia slid the revolver in gently then took a short step backwards and tapped her hand on Erik's chest.

"I better go and see what Tony is up to," she said with an expression of 'I want you, but I know I can't have you.'

Katia and Erik found Tony busy monitoring the console. Mary was standing next to him. After a quick bite to eat, Katia announced that she needed to go and make the final arrangements to get the Blacks out of Florida. She felt it wasn't safe to for them to use any of their

communications equipment any longer, no matter how secure they thought it might have been.

Stripping down again, Katia dawned on a new disguise and was out the door within five minutes.

“I don’t know how long I’ll be. And Tony, please keep an eye on them!” Katia dictated as she left the room.

Grabbing a deck of cards and a crib board off a nearby shelf, Mary and Erik sat down and played several rounds.

Chapter Thirty

The Blacks appeared to have simply disappeared into thin air and agent Harris was at his wits end, so he ordered his agents in for a special meeting at the Florida CIA satellite office. It was 10 am, two days after the explosion that had taken the life of Peterson and the other agents at the Fairwinds Hotel. Being overwrought with anxiety, Agent Harris was bugging Eddy once again for an update.

"Hey Eddy. Any luck with getting Cyclops back on line?" Harris asked anxiously over the speaker phone.

"Sorry Bill. But our ground station took a direct lightening strike which fried most of the circuitry. We've been working night and day to make repairs, but it could be up to a week before Cyclops is fully functional."

"That's not what I wanted to hear Eddy," exclaimed Harris.

"I guess you guys will just have to rely on the good old fashioned way of performing detective work," Eddy suggested. "And by the way, I'm sorry to hear about Peterson."

"Thanks Eddy," Harris replied somberly. "You'll let me know the second that Cyclops is back on line, won't you Eddy?"

"You bet," Eddy replied, then turned off the speaker phone.

"Okay everyone. You heard the bad news," Harris bellowed. "We need to deploy a grid search around the last known location of the Blacks, and against my better judgement, I've asked the local black & whites to lend assistance. I'd like to introduce you to Ryan Johnson, Fort Lauderdale Chief of Police. I've already briefed him with the all the basic details pertaining to this case."

"Glad to of service," Johnson replied nodding his head in acknowledgment. "Just to bring all of you up to speed, I have assigned these dozen police officers for your explicit use, as well as another six constables to monitor video cams throughout the city."

"This will free up our Task Force to oversee the entire operation," Harris interjected. "Now gather around and pay attention," Bill added as he rolled out a map. "We'll all meet here at the Fairwinds Hotel, Black's last known location, and fan out from there. Here are a few photographs of our fugitives. All other pertinent information about this group will be forwarded to your laptops shortly. We've notified the airports, train stations, bus stations and all the taxi companies to be on the lookout for Mr. & Mrs. Black, as well as Agent Reid and Tony Fontaine. Also, there will be a chopper on standby for extra support, so don't hesitate calling in for it's assistance if you spot our quarry. Like the old saying goes, keep your eyes peeled, ears to the ground and don't leave any god damn stone unturned. And one last thing. Please don't take this

group lightly. Several of my agents has already been killed and others seriously injured. Any questions?”

No one dared ask anything in fear of having to listen to another long winded explanation.

“Sorry to cut in,” interrupted an agent who barged into the conference room. “But I think that we may have a lead on one of the suspects.”

“That’s great!” Harris replied upbeat. “Where?”

“Have a look at the screen,” the agent replied as he programmed a nearby computer. “A 911 call came in from a citizen who reported an altercation near the Casablanca Cafe, so he checked a nearby traffic cam to verify the incident. You can see here that the man tried to grab this woman’s purse,” the agent said pausing the video. “But as you can see, the woman fended off the would-be thief extremely well.”

The video showed the woman grabbing the man by the arm, then striking him in the nose with the base of her hand. As the man reeled back, the woman drove her foot into his knee, collapsing the man to his good knee, before she finished him off with a swirling sidekick to the head. Picking up her sunglasses off the road, she quickly disappeared around the corner.

“Yes, looks can be deceiving. I’d say she had some defensive training,” replied Summers. “But, what does this have to do with who we’re looking for?”

“I’m just getting to that. When we focused in on the woman’s face, this is who our facial recognition program came up with.”

Harris and Summer’s jaws dropped as the portrait of Agent Reid flashed on the screen. “We’re back in business boys!” Harris exclaimed with a wily grin. “Given this new information, we’ll need to start a new grid search. Let’s all meet here at the Casablanca Cafe, and teams will

head north and south from there. Johnson, I’d like blockades stationed at all the waterway bridges, here and here,” Harris announced pointing to the map that was sprawled on the boardroom table. “As well as all along the Florida A1A, here, here and here. Let’s get a move on and tighten the noose!”

“I believe it’s just a matter of time before we apprehend them sir,” Agent Summers whispered optimistically to Harris.

“Yes, time is one thing I think our little rat pack is running out of!” Harris retorted.

As the agents started to file out of the room, Summers pulled Agent Harris over to the side. “Bill. You do remember that the Blacks are scheduled to leave on a flight for the Bahamas today, don’t you?”

“Yes, Summers. I remembered.”

“Do we have anyone stationed at the airport, just in case they decide to board the plane?”

“Don’t worry Summers, I’m way ahead of you. Head office has authorized a back up plan which has already been put in place. Should they have be foolish enough to take the flight, special arrangements were made with security to let them proceed. In fact, if my memory serves me correctly, the Blacks should already be halfway to their destination.

“So your going to just simply let them getaway? Why?” perplexed Summers.

“I didn’t say that they would be getting away. The plane will never reach it’s destination. We’ll make sure that the report from NTSB will state that the plane crashed due to instrument malfunctions. The Bermuda Triangle will inevitably take the blame, and our worries will be over.”

Summers didn’t say a word but was absolutely astonished to hear that agent Harris was

going to take such drastic action so soon. She didn't know why, but it seemed apparent that agent Harris was taking extreme measures in this case. A little too serious and personal for her liking. She was also dismayed knowing that several innocent lives would be taken to achieve Harris's mission, which was way beyond normal protocol. For a fleeting moment Summers pondered her moral ethics and whether she should continue working within the Raven Claw division. The moment quickly passed, as the motto within the organization stated that, 'Once a Raven Claw Agent-Always a Raven Claw Agent'.

“None of the other agents are to be informed, understood?”

“Yes sir,” Summers replied solemnly.

“For now, we need to concentrate on nabbing Reid and Fontaine,” Harris stated. “We'll find out what materials and information they retrieved from the Blacks, and then they'll meet a similar fate to Mr. and Mrs. Black!”

As Harris and Summers made their way down to the Casablanca Cafe, Bill received a call.

“What's wrong?” Summers asked, seeing that he was visibly upset.

“Seems our two passengers didn't show up for their flight.”

“What do you mean?”

“It appears that the Blacks cancelled their flight at the last second, and a couple of standby passengers took their seats,” Harris said dejectedly.

“That's a setback,” replied Summers.

“Yes, very disheartening. I just sent 19 people to their deaths for no reason,” Harris answered gravely.

“Looks like we're back to square one,” Summers mumbled somberly.

“Not quite square one. We do have a lead on where agent Reid is, and I’m sure that Fontaine and the Blacks are nearby.”

Bill then made yet another call to Eddy.

“Hi Eddy, it’s Bill again. Sorry to keep bugging you, but do you have that one eyed monster back on line?”

“Not yet, but I’ll have a better idea in about 24 hours.”

“Shit!” Harris exclaimed.

“Look Bill, if it’s any consolation, not everything is lost.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I told you that our ground station computers were fried, but the storm didn’t affect the operational capabilities of Cyclops at all.”

“And?” Harris interjected quickly.

“It means that Cyclops has been recording everything from when I programmed in the last location coordinates. When our ground system is back on line, we can backtrack the timeline and trace them from their last known location, and then fast forward to their present location. In the mean time, you should continue searching for them and give me an update on any current sightings. The more information I get, the better.”

“I actually just received a lead that Agent Reid was spotted near the Casablanca Cafe, and agents are heading down to that location now,” Harris informed Eddy.

“Great. I’ll add that information to the database once the ground computers are up and running.”

“Thanks again Eddy,” Harris replied graciously. “With any luck, my agents will beat Cyclops to the punch.”

A short time later Summers and Harris arrived in front of the cafe. All the other team members were already waiting. After a brief update, the agents departed on their designated sectors and searched for their quarry well into the night, but to no avail. Leaving only a skeleton crew to patrol the streets, Harris and the remaining agents called it a day. The search would resume again the next morning.

Chapter Thirty-One

It was early in the morning the next day before Katia finally arrived back at the safe house. As Erik was already partially awake, he rolled over in the bed and snuggled in next to Mary. He remained motionless while listening in on Tony and Katia's conversation.

"Any trouble?" Tony whispered.

"Just some punk trying to grab my purse, but nothing I couldn't handle. You'd better have a look at this morning's paper," Katia said anxiously.

Erik opened one eye slightly to see what the fuss was about.

"The flight to the Bahamas that the Blacks were scheduled to take has disappeared," reported Katia very concerned.

"What?" replied Tony in disbelief.

"Yes, it's a little unbelievable. Raven Claw really must want Mr. Black's material."

“So any clues to why the flight disappeared?” Tony asked.

“Too early to tell, and from all reports there have been no signs of any wreckage spotted.”

“Sounds like another mysterious Bermuda Triangle disappearance,” Tony said trying to make light of the situation.

“More likely a mysterious Raven Claw disappearance, if you ask me,” replied Katia. “We may have aggravated our situation when your booby-trapped room detonated the other night. It ended up killing several agents including one of the lead investigators, Peterson. That article is on the bottom right hand corner.”

“Shit!” replied Tony as he grabbed the paper.

“I don’t think that Raven Claw is even interested in retrieving Mr. Black’s material anymore. They just want to eliminate any trace of evidence that would shed new light on the JFK case, which includes the Blacks! Head office also informed me that Raven Claw has asked the local black & whites to lend a hand.”

“That’s all we need!” spat Tony as he threw the newspaper into a nearby trash can.

“SHHHH! Not so loud, “ Katia said in a loud whisper.

“Let’s just step outside the door and talk. I don’t want to wake up or alarm the Blacks just yet,” Katia said quietly.

After Tony and Katia stepped outside the room, curiosity got the best of Erik so he crept out of bed, and walked cautiously towards the slightly opened door. Katia and Tony were standing about ten feet away. Erik carefully extracted the newspaper from the trash bin and tucked himself behind the door. As he listened intently to Tony and Katia’s conversation, Erik unfolded the paper and read the headline, ‘Continental Flight CO149 Disappears From Radar.’

“Head office has also just learned that they have also asked the local black & whites to lend a hand.”

“That’s all we need!” spat Tony. “So what do you suggest?”

“I made special arrangements with head office last night but first we need to convince Mr. Black to turn over the original material so we can secure it in a safe location,” Katia said lowering her voice.

Erik noticed that Tony and Katia had taken a couple of steps further down the hall making it harder to hear their conversation.

“Once we know where the material is being kept, we can get rid of the Blacks.....have the original material.....killing both of them.”

With their voices still getting more muffled, and hearing only bits and pieces of the conversation, Erik leaned forward slightly to get his ear closer to the crack in the door. A creak in the floor caused Katia to stop speaking. Hearing the crack as well, Erik immediately took two giant leaps and landing back in the bed. He resumed his original sleeping position just as the door flung open. Nothing was said, but Erik could swear he could feel Katia’s breathe on the back of his neck. Several minutes passed before he heard the door quietly close, but still remained motionless for several minutes, ensuring that one of them was not secretly watching.

Carefully squinting one eye and seeing that no one was adjacent to our bed, Erik stretched casually and surveyed the surroundings, confirming that neither Katia and Tony were in the room. Erik nudged Mary awake, then whispered firmly.

“Mary, we need to get out of here!”

“Whaaat?” she replied groggily.

“We need to escape from Katia and Tony.”

“What are you taking about? They’re protecting us from that Raven organization. Aren’t they?”

“It’s Raven Claw, and that’s what I thought also. But I just overheard them talking in the hallway, saying that they are going to get rid of us as soon as they find out where I’m hiding Grace’s original letters, tapes and photographs!”

“You sure that you weren’t just dreaming? They both have put their lives on the line several times to keep us safe. What exactly did you hear?”

“Even though some of their conversation was a little muffled, I did hear them say that once they know where Grace’s original material is kept, they can get rid of the Blacks. And then I heard them say, “Killing both of them!”

“You’re positive?” Mary asked again skeptically.

“Positive. I don’t even know who’s on who’s side anymore. All I know is that, as soon as we get a chance, we need to hightail it out of here.”

Erik could see that Mary still didn’t believe him, so he quickly pointed to the headlines in the newspaper he pulled out of the trashcan.

“This was the flight we were supposed to be on. And, it’s somehow just vanished off the face of the earth?” Erik said intensely, pointing to the headlines. “I have a sneaky suspicion that it was no accident.”

“Do you have a plan?” Mary whispered frantically.

“Nope. We’ll just have to wing it!”

“What made the floor creak?” asked Tony when Katia returned.

“Who knows? It’s an old building. I checked on them and they’re both still asleep. Anyways,

arrangements have been made by head office to override all the traffic cameras at 10:00 tonight.

We’re to make our way down to Port Dania, where a zodiac will be waiting to transport the Black’s to a submarine. From there, the sub will head north along the coast to Canada. Our contacts in Canada will take over from there.”

“Sound’s like you had a busy night,” exclaimed Tony. “Did you get any sleep?”

“Not a wink. And, I still have a few last minute errands to take care of, so I doubt that I’ll see any shuteye till maybe this afternoon.”

“Why don’t you go freshen up and take a quick shower? I’ll run down to the lobby and get everyone some breakfast.”

“Thanks Tony, that sounds great. I haven’t had a shower in over two days. Oh, could you bring an extra plate of bacon. You know how I love bacon.”

“No problem,” replied Tony as he grinned.

Katia quietly opened the door and stepped inside, catching in the midst of getting dressed.

“Oh you’re awake! That’s great!” she said enthusiastically, not even caring that Mary had just put on her bra, while Erik was caught totally nude hopping around on one foot with the other foot caught in his underwear.

“I’ve got some great news. Everything will be taken care of tonight.”

Mary and Erik looked at each other with great trepidation.

“Listen. I’m absolutely exhausted, so I’m going to have a quick shower and I’ll fill you in when I get out,” Katia announced. “Tony will be back in a few minutes with breakfast.”

“No problem,” Erik said red faced as he tucked his manhood into his underwear.

“See you in a minute,” smirked Katia as she entered the bathroom.

No sooner than the bathroom door latched and the water could be heard running, Erik and Mary flew into action. Getting dressed and grabbing their belongings, they were out the door within a minute. The door had barely shut, when Erik quickly returned to snatch his backpack, containing his notebook and all the material about Grace. Noticing that the agents duffle bag was open near the foot of the bed, Erik rummaged through it until he found the fake passports Tony had made for them. Removing the passports, he also noticed that the two pistols they had practiced with, were lying on the bottom of the bag along with numerous clips of ammo. Erik hurriedly stuffed everything into his backpack except the Glock, which he placed into the crevasse of his back.

“What the hell is taking you so long?” Mary asked impatiently as she poked her head in the room.

“Nothing. Just forgot my backpack.”

Just as Erik stood up, they heard the shower shut off.

“Let’s go!” Mary whispered firmly.

They immediately entered the rear stairwell and made their way down hastily and cautiously to the main floor. Peeking out the stairwell door, Erik caught a glimpse of Tony with a tray-full of food just entering the elevator. Waiting until the elevator doors closed, Erik and Mary hustled through the rear hotel door and burst into the parking lot.

“Check to see if anyone has left their keys in the ignition,” Erik called out.

“Not very likely,” Mary replied as they started running from car to car.

“Shit they’ve spotted us!” Mary shouted out.

Looking up immediately, Erik could also see Katia standing at a window in shock with

dripping wet hair. She briskly lifted the window.

“Stop! Mr. and Mrs. Black! Please Stop!” Katia called out earnestly, leaning out. “Get back in here before someone spots you!”

Mary and Erik just turned and ran.

They ran and ran blindly, trying to keep to the back alleys and off the main streets, not knowing where the heck they were or where they were running to. At times it seemed that they were just traveling in circles. Mary and Erik were getting a little exhausted as they approached a busy street, and needed to take a breather, they huddled against a dumpster to contemplate their next move.

“It’s a pretty busy street, and there might be a traffic cam at that set of lights,” Mary said pointing down the street. “Do we risk crossing it?”

“I don’t know. There isn’t another alley on the other side of the street, so we can either try and blend in with the crowd, or go back the way we came.”

“Well hurry up and decide. This dumpster reeks!” Mary replied as she squirmed up her face.

Erik glanced down the alley and spotted a car that had turned into the alley and was heading their way. The decision was instantly made for them.

“We’ve got to go!” Erik blurted out and grabbing Mary’s arm.

“What?” Mary said wincing and clasping her arm.

“I just saw a car coming down the alley and we can’t afford to wait around to see who’s in it.”

They leapt from behind the dumpster and then walked casually, blending in with the people on the crowded street.

“Let’s wait here for a second and pretend to be shopping,” Erik told Mary as he motioned

towards a sales rack situated on the sidewalk.

Erik took a brief look back towards the alley and noticed that the car had stopped halfway across the sidewalk, with the driver appearing to be searching for something or someone! As the driver looked in their direction, Erik seized Mary’s arm again and pulled her into the store.

“Hey! Not so hard! I’m going to have a bruise if you keep grabbing me so hard!”

“Sorry, but we needed to get in here quick. Tony and Katia were in the car that just pulled out of the alley!”

“Shit!” Mary exclaimed. “What now?”

“This place must have a back door, so we can probably sneak back into the alley.”

Pulling aside a curtain at the rear of the store Erik saw that they definitely had a back door, but it was partially covered by boxes and a filing cabinet. It appeared that it hadn’t been used in years.

“We’ll have to go out the same way we came in,” Erik announced to Mary, as he returned to the front of the store.

Cautiously they scanned the street and sidewalk for anything or anyone that looked suspicious or out of place. The coast seemed to be clear and they walked nonchalantly out of the store.

“Don’t you think that we need to find out exactly where we are, before we go any further?” Mary asked.

“Good idea. Let’s poke our heads in here,” Erik replied as they were approaching a drug store.

They purchased a map, and with the guidance from the sales clerk, pinpointed their exact location. They now knew where they were, but had no idea on where to go.

“How the hell are we going to get out of Fort Lauderdale and then make it back home? I’m sure

that there’s been an all points bulletin put out on us,” Erik said, perplexed, while studying the map.

“We’ll probably have to walk all the way back to Canada,” Mary exasperated.

Pausing for a moment while studying the map, Erik then replied, “You’re probably right.”

“I was just kidding, you pinhead,” Mary snapped back.

“No, no. You may be onto something. But definitely not all the way to Canada. Come and take a look at the map, and what do you see,” Erik said with his finger pointed on the map. “The Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport.”

So?” Mary replied.

“Don’t you remember? We flew over to the Bahamas with Nissan and Vivi two years ago, from that airport!”

Nissan was a former fighter pilot for the Israeli Air Force and had moved to the USA to set up a small private charter company. He was an extremely well known for his flying abilities. Erik had the good fortune to act as his co-pilot on their trip over to the Bahamas with him. Vivi, who coincidentally was also from Israel, had moved to the USA to become a pilot. She enrolled in a flight training course with Nissan as her instructor. Vivi was a very astute student and it wasn’t long before she became an excellent pilot and was asked to become a partner with Nissan’s charter business. With the long times spent away from home, their friendship grew and they soon became lovers, keeping their affair secret from their separate marriages.

“If Nissan can’t get us all the way up to Canada, maybe he can get us part way there. Or maybe even better yet, over to the Bahamas where we can hideout until things settle down.

Nissan has dealt with most of the Customs Offices throughout the Caribbean, so we should have

no problem in getting past Customs, especially if we use one of our fake passports.”

“The CIA or FBI will still probably track us down, because they most likely have all flights departing Florida monitored,” Mary proclaimed.

“Yes. But they will be looking for a Mr. and Mrs. Black, not Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson,” Erik replied with a cunning smile as he pulled one of the fake passports from his knapsack.

“Well that might throw the Feds off our back, but what about Katia and Tony? They made the fake passports. Don’t you think that they’ll trace us down?” Mary replied smartly.

“You’re probably right. But if we play our cards right, it will take them some time to track us down. That will give us a bit of breathing time and hopefully we’ll have figured out a way to get back to Canada. Regardless, we just can’t hang around here waiting to get caught. We have to at least try to escape.”

“Sounds like a plan. But how do we get to the Executive Airport without being seen or traced by the traffic cams?” Mary asked.

“Just like you suggested earlier. We walk! Up the beach and then via these side streets,” Erik said, directing his finger along a possible route across the map.

“Let’s grab some water and get going then,” Mary agreed a little more upbeat. “It’s going to be a long hot walk!

Chapter Thirty-Two

Bill was en route to restart the search the next morning when he received a call.

"Harris, it's Chief Johnson, FLPD."

"Yes Chief. What's up?"

"We have a possible location for Mr. and Mrs. Black from a hit on our facial recognition program."

"Where?" Harris said excitedly.

"We picked them up from a traffic cam walking across Almond Avenue near Las Olas Boulevard."

"Thanks Johnson."

"Do you want me to send some extra backup?"

"Not right now. I think that the units you assigned to me will be able to handle them, but keep them on standby, just in case."

"No problem, but please let me know when you nab them. I'd like to assign my men back to their regular patrols as we're running a little thin in other areas of the city."

"Will do."

Harris immediately ordered all the units to Las Olas Boulevard.

* * * * *

Stepping out of the store, Erik scanned the street. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but with everything that had happened over the last several days, something told him to stay alert and watchful. They hadn't walked more than 100 feet when Erik recognized agent Summers driving a White Tahoe on the opposite side of the street.

"Turn away from the street!" he barked to Mary, but it was too late.

The squeal of tires and automobile horns filled the air as the SUV u-turned across traffic, and slid to a stop hard against the curb, in an open parking spot hardly big enough to park a compact car. The driver's side wheels lifted a foot in the air before slamming back to the pavement. As Summers and Harris slowly exited the Tahoe, Erik and Mary were already high tailing it down the block.

"Nice parking Summers," Bill said sarcastically as he rubbed his head and lower back. He just leaned against the SUV knowing that he was in no condition to run after the Blacks as they made their get away.

"Sorry Bill. I guess I got a little to excited," Summers said while rubbing her neck.

"Sorry nothing! Next time, save your excitement for the bedroom. I don't know about you, but I'm too sore to chase them, and there's no way in hell we can get this fucking car out of this parking spot either."

Harris informed his other units to pick up the chase and then embarrassingly asked for one unit to come pick them up.

Mary and Erik continued running several blocks to stay ahead of their pursuers, but soon started to get tired. They were both fairly fit, but were in no shape to keep this pace up.

“Look,” Mary announced and pointed as we rounded a building. “Let’s catch that bus. It’ll put some distance between us, plus we’ll get a little breather.”

Little did they know that Katia and Tony had just pulled to a stop at the same intersection and observed them running across the street before boarding the bus.

They had only traveled a couple of minutes and had just passed an old riverboat restaurant when Erik spotted a car pull up even with the bus. An arm flashed out towards the driver, flashing a badge and waving for the driver to pull over. It was Katia!

“Shit!” Erik exclaimed. “It’s Katia and Tony!”

“How’d they find us?” Mary asked astonishingly.

“Who knows, but we need to get the hell off this bus without them knowing.”

Leaning back against a pole, Erik twitched with pain as the gun in the small of his back pinched his skin. He had completely forgotten all about it. Suddenly he had crazy idea, and then pulled the gun.

“Just play along with me,” he whispered to Mary.

While concealing the weapon from the other passengers, Erik grabbed Mary’s arm and then approached the driver. Holding Mary firmly and shaking her arm slightly, Erik pointed his gun at the driver and gave him explicit instructions.

“Do exactly what I say or I’ll shoot this woman,” he whispered into the driver’s ear.

Tony became impatient with the erratic speed of the bus and the driver not willing to pull over, so he wheeled the car in front of the bus and slammed on his brakes, forcing the bus to come to an abrupt halt. Flying out of their car, Katia tapped on the bus door with a badge, then entered the bus frantically while Tony remained outside covering the side door. Katia searched the bus quickly but thoroughly, until in horror she looked out the rear window, where she saw Erik and Katia running down the sidewalk towards a marina.

Unbeknownst to Katia and Tony, Erik had instructed the driver to slow the bus down enough, so that they could jump out the side exit and then he was to bring the bus back up to speed and continue to drive. If he didn't follow Erik's orders to a T, Erik informed the driver that the woman would be history!

“Tony!” Katia shouted out as she jumped out the side door and pointed down the street. “The buggers somehow got off the bus!”

Tony and Katia immediately started running after them. Mary and Erik ran up to the Bahia Mar Hotel, and stopped briefly at the front door to catch their breath.

At first it appeared that they had made a clean getaway did, but just as they were going to enter the hotel, Erik caught a glimpse of two people running in their direction.

“Those two never seem to give up!” Erik blurted out. “Let's keep moving.”

They quickly surveyed the lobby after entering the hotel and briskly walked through the lobby and out to a pool deck. Spotting an opening at the far end, they disappeared out the rear gate. Their options of escape seemed to have dwindled from little to almost zero. Before them laid the harbor!

* * * * *

"Sir. It's Inspector Johnson on the line," Summers announced to Harris.

"Yes Johnson. What is it?" Harris replied impatiently as he was still standing, waiting for one of his units to pick him up.

"We just had a report from a transit driver that there has been an incident involving two people matching the description of Mr. and Mrs. Black. Just give me two seconds until I patch into the bus's surveillance camera..... Yes, it does appear to be Mr. and Mrs. Black. And from what the bus driver said...."

"Please don't go into all the details. Just tell me where they are!" interrupted Harris.

"They hopped off the bus near the Bahia Mar Hotel, south on Seabreeze Boulevard. Would you like some backup now?"

"Thanks but I think we can still handle it on our own."

"Are you sure we couldn't lend a hand?" Johnson replied with a snicker. "I heard through the grape vine that your car is in a bit of a tight spot."

"Thanks again, but my ride just arrived. Oh, by the way. Can a chopper land near that location?"

"Sure, just directly east of the hotel in South Beach Park. Although, with all the trees around, it might be a little tricky landing. You may want to get Agent Summers to land the chopper for you. She's used to parking in tight spots," Johnson burst out giggling.

"You just won't give it up, will you Johnson?"

"Nope, but all joking aside, I'll send a unit to clear any beach goers to make sure it's safe for the chopper to land."

"Thanks," replied Harris.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Erik and Mary stood at the edge of the pier staring at the medley of luxurious yachts, but they had no time to be tourists. Something caught Erik’s eye nestled amongst the boats about three or four piers away.

“Come on Mare. We don’t have much time.”

He often called his wife Mare on occasion, a nickname he used whenever he needed to catch her attention.

They ran and came to an abrupt stop, like two racers from the Amazing Race arriving at a pit stop. A sign read - Boat Rentals.

“How can I help you folks?” asked the attendant.

“We need to rent a boat quickly,” Erik sputtered.

“Sorry mister, but everything has been rented out. If you come back in a couple of hours, I might

have something for you.”

“What about that one there?” Erik asked pointing to a 30 foot Cigar Boat tied up close to them. Painted a brilliant flame red with white, black and lustrous Caribbean green strips lining it’s sides, it emanated speed.

“Sorry. It’s reserved to a prominent Hollywood celebrity who’s scheduled to arrive in just over an hour,” the attendant replied glancing at his watch.

Looking back towards the hotel, Erik could see Tony and Katia standing at the poolside exit. He immediately put his arm around Mary and twisted her slightly to keep their backs directed towards their foe.

Mary pleaded, “Are you sure that you don’t have any boats available?”

“Nope. No boats, just some jet skis.”

“We’ll take them!” Mary blurted out.

They signed the paper work without reading a word and paid with one of the fake credit cards Tony had given them. Erik turned his head a little and caught a glimpse of Tony and Katia walking down the adjacent pier.

“Now, let me show you a few basic instructions on how to.....”

“That’s okay sonny,” Erik barged in while grabbing the keys off the counter. “We’re well versed in how to drive these babies.” Although Mary and Erik grew up in different cities on the ballad prairies in Alberta, they both spent their vacations at nearby lakes and were very accustomed to handling watercraft. It was only just one of many things that attracted them to each other.

Hopping on the jet skis, they cruised slowly away from the pier as not to bring any undo

attention to themselves. It appeared that they might make a clear break, until Erik glanced back towards the dock and saw Tony and Katia talking to the attendant who was pointing in their direction.

“Hit the gas Mare,” Erik yelled out. “They’re on to us.”

Erik led the way but had no idea where they were heading. The Fort Lauderdale Harbor consisted of numerous canal channels that were lined by luxurious homes with private docks and every type of watercraft imaginable. Erik decided to stay in the main channel to hopefully put some distance between them and their pursuers.

As the Blacks drove blindly, the main channel seemed to be getting narrower and narrower. Coming to a fork in the channel, Erik motioned for Mary to slow down, then pulled along side of her to discuss if she had any hunches on which channel they should take.

“What’s up?” Mary asked as they both glanced over their shoulders.

Erik had no time to even respond. Cruising down the channel was the cigar boat that was parked at the marina. Both Mary and Erik had inklings that Tony and Katia might have commandeered the boat. No word needed to be spoken as the Blacks just gunned their throttles.

Taking the fork to the left, they immediately made another quick left into yet another channel. Several larger yachts were moored close together along a wooden pier. With Mary following closely behind, Erik instantly turned between two yachts then tucked themselves neatly behind the stern of a boat and under the shadows of the pier.

“Stay hidden behind this boat,” Erik instructed Mary. “I’ll act as a diversion and lead them away. Once they take chase, wait at least five minutes, then head in the opposite direction. They can only chase one of us at a time.”

“Are you sure about this?” Mary asked apprehensively.

“No, but yes. Here, take my knapsack.”

Mary reluctantly slung the knapsack over her shoulder, and with a sigh said, “Be careful.”

“Let’s rendezvous back at the boat rental booth. If I don’t show up within the next half hour, you’ll have to figure something out on your own,” Erik instructed as he kept a visual towards the channel.

Their hunch was right. After loosing a visual on the jet skis, Tony and Katia were now cruising slowly down the channel and scanning in-between the yachts. The Cigar Boat slipped past their temporary hiding spot. They remained undetected, but Erik knew he had to stick to the game plan. He waited a minute, then slowly pulled out from between the two yachts and hit the throttle. Hearing a jet ski, Tony looked back, then whipped the boat around to begin pursuit. Although the Cigar boat out matched the speed of the jet ski, it was no match at the maneuverability and agility of Erik’s nimble craft.

It was like a game of Cat and Mouse. Every time the boat would get close to the jet ski, Erik would either whip down another canal at the last second or do a U-turn. The chase continued down numerous channels but Erik just couldn’t shake them. Suddenly water was spraying up in front and to the right of him. Looking towards the boat, Erik couldn’t believe his eyes. Katia was firing her revolver in his direction. Erik pulled back on the throttle slightly. The speed boat quickly caught up and pulled alongside, close enough for Katia to almost jump onto the jet ski. Both Tony and Katia began yelling for Erik to stop while indicating to kill the engine with a slashing motion across their throats.

Erik suddenly noticed that they were approaching a concrete wall. The end of the canal

was fast approaching and knew that there was little chance for an escape. They were almost upon the concrete wall when he saw that the canal wasn't a dead end at all, but rather a T-intersection. It was like a light bulb went on and made a last ditch effort to escape. Erik cupped his hand to his ear pretending not to hear her, then looked behind their boat and pointed in an effort to distract them. They both took the bait and looked simultaneously. It was all the time Erik needed as he instantly gunned the throttle and pulled the jet ski directly in front of their boat. When Tony and Katia realized Erik's pointing was a decoy, they turned back, only to be blinded by gallons of water spraying them by the jet skis's rooster tail. Erik cranked his craft hard left, narrowly missing the wall by only inches. Blinded by the spray, Tony didn't see the wall until the last second. Tony immediately turned trying to avoid impact, but too little too late. The Cigar Boat smashed broadside against the wall, catapulting both Tony and Katia into the air before exploding. Flames and smoke billowed skyward.

Hearing the explosion, Erik peered back then cut his engine. The Cigar Boat smolder in a fiery blaze, half submerged in water. He felt sink to his stomach at the thought that he was responsible for killing two people. Leaning over the side of the jet ski, Erik emptied his stomach. As he floated there dumbfounded, Erik heard the sound of a jet ski approaching. It was Mary. “I was still hiding behind the yachts when I heard the explosion and saw the billows of smoke. I thought it could have been you!” she stammered with a tear. “You scared me half to death!” Leaning over, Mary slapped his arm. “I'm fine, but I can't say the same for Tony and Katia.” Erik replied. “From the looks of what's left of that boat, I think that they're both dead.” “Better them than us,” Mary retorted.

Little did the Blacks know at the time, but both Tony and Katia did not die in the crash. Katia luckily had landed almost directly in the middle of a backyard swimming pool, and luckily received only minor injuries. Tony, who was launched at a lower trajectory, didn't fair as well. He cartwheeled and rolled across a lawn before stopping at the edge of a pool deck, breaking an arm, a leg and several ribs in the process.

The Blacks just floated on their jet skis for a moment in a state of shock and disbelief. Erik reflected back to Grace's stories and letters about being followed and began to wonder - Were the photographs and the film Grace recorded back in '63 one of the reasons that she was always on the run? Did she mistakenly show the wrong person the revealing photographs, the same as he did? With him now in possession of the material, would he and Mary be on the run for the rest of their lives as well? And, with Tony and Katia betraying them, who could they really trust now? There were too many questions and not enough time to come up with any immediate answers. All Erik knew, was that they had to keep on the move.

Chapter Thirty-Four

"Hi Bill, it's Chief Johnson here again."

"Yes Johnson, what is it?" replied Bill, holding his bluetooth closer to his ear.

"We've just received reports from numerous citizens, that there has been a high speed chase throughout the canals between a speed boat and a couple of jet skis."

"So what's your point?" exuded Harris. "I don't have time to worry about a high speed boat chase. I'm too busy trying to track down the Blacks."

"Well, that is my point!" exclaimed Johnson. "From all the reports we are receiving about the chase, the offenders not only match the description of the Blacks, but also Agent Reid, along with a large husky gentleman. These guys sure seem to be giving you a go for your money."

"Just tell me how long will it be before the chopper lands at South Beach Park?" asked Harris.

"It should have already landed, and is probably waiting for your arrival," answered Johnson.

"Thanks for the update Johnson. I'll contact you when I can track them down."

"Are you sure that's not if.....you track them down?" Johnson bantered.

"Very funny Johnson. Just make sure the chopper is there!"

* * * * *

With her wet clothes weighing her down, Katia struggled desperately to swim to the side of the pool. Finally grabbing the edge, she pulled herself along towards the ladder. Climbing out of the pool exhausted and looking like a wet rat, Katia went to the aid of Tony, who was semi conscious and in pain.

"Tony, Tony. Are you all right?" Katia asked as she removed her handbag that had been slung across her shoulder.

"Not really," replied Tony groaning. "I've had better days. Seems like we've underestimated the Blacks abilities."

"Yes, just a little," resigned Katia. "I need to get you to a hospital."

"Sorry, but no can do. Can't chance the Feds maybe tracking me down," Tony replied with more grunts and groans. "Just pour me into a cab. I'll contact an old army buddy of mine, who's a medic."

"Oh my! exclaimed a voice from behind Katia. "What's happened here?"

"Do you need an ambulance?" came another voice.

“No, no. That’s quite alright. I think it’s only a few bumps and bruises,” replied Katia, knowing full well that the extent of Tony’s injury were much more severe.

Several more people arrived out of the blue. Most likely concerned neighbors.

“Katia,” Tony called out while pulling her close to his ear. “The smoke from the boat is bringing unwanted attention. Get me out of here fast!”

Katia fumbled around in her wet pocket and finally pulled out her badge.

“Is the owner of the house here?”

“Yes, I’m the owner,” replied a middle aged woman who was standing close to Katia.

“Listen. I’m Inspector Lain Reid from the FBI, on a special assignment. I sure could use some assistance in getting my partner back to one of our medical units, without the local authorities getting involved. We don’t want our undercover operation compromised. Would it be possible for someone to drive us?” asked Katia.

“Why, I suppose so,” the woman replied hesitantly.

Surveying the pool area quickly, Katia stood up and began requesting assistance from a few of the people standing by.

“Can the two of you bring that lawn chair over and you over there,” she requested, pointing to a woman, “And, can you please grab those towels, and bring them over?”

With his large build it was a bit of a struggle to get Tony onto the lawn chair but everyone pitched in and helped without any complaints.

As Tony was picked up and carried off, Katia peered through the smoke and flames of the still burning boat. The hazy image of Mary and Erik could be seen as they pulled their jet skis up to a nearby pier just below a magnificent mansion where a large social function seemed to be in

progress.

“Inspector,” a voice called out from a side gate to the pool deck. “Your partner is already in the car waiting for you!”

“Oh, yes. Sorry, I’ll be right there,” Katia shouted back, then limped her way to the front of the house.

“Sorry Tony, but I just spotted the Blacks headed to some kind of party a couple of houses over,” Katia said excitedly as she started to get into the car.

Tony just grinned and started laughing to himself.

“What’s so funny?” asked Katia.

“I’ve heard that Canadians always know how to have a good time, but I think that the Blacks have just put the icing on the cake.”

“How so?”

“Even in the midst of running for their lives, they still seem to have the time to take in a party.”

“Come on Tony, let’s get you to your doctor friend. I think the bump on your head is worse than I thought.”

“No. You have to stay and track down the Blacks before Raven Claw catches up to them. Instruct this gentleman to please take me to English Park,” Tony said squirming in pain.

“You got a pen?”

“Yes,” replied Katia as she reached into her side pocket. “But no paper.”

Tony grasped the pen loosely and pulled Katia’s hand feebly towards him, then proceeded to write a phone number on her hand, winching in pain the whole time.

“Call Sally McGuire at that number and tell her that TANK is in a pickle.”

“Tank?” Katia spat out. “Was that your nickname when you were with the Navy Seals....Tank?”

“Just call her for Christ sake. You can see that I’m not doing so well.”

“I thought you said that your medic friend was a buddy,” Katia snickered back.

“Sally might be a female, but she is the best buddy any squadron could have! She got my squadron out of more tight situations, than you could imagine. Now....can you please just call her, and then go track down the Blacks!”

“Fine, but only if you have Sally update me with your condition,” Katia insisted.

“Agreed,” Tony replied as he rested his head back onto a makeshift pillow.

“Could you please get this man to English Park as soon as possible,” Katia implored. “A woman by the name of Sally McGuire will meet you at the entrance. And, thanks for all your help.”

She closed the car door and the Mercedes did a slow u-turn, then headed down the street.

As Katia started limping towards the mansion that was hosting the party, she immediately called the number scrolled on her hand.

Chapter Thirty-Five

While Erik and Mary floated on their jet skis next to the pier, Erik noticed a chopper nearby, appearing to patrol the harbor.

“Well, we lost one of our pursuers, but it looks like we might have another one coming our way,” Erik proclaimed as he pointed it out to Mary. “Let’s just pull in along side these other jet skis tied up here.”

They might have had second thoughts about docking their jet skis if they had only taken the trouble to glance back towards the burning boat, as they might have noticed that Katia had been watching them.

“That sure was some slick driving mister!” a guy looking to be in his early twenties exclaimed, as he and a young woman walked down a ramp to the pier.

"Thanks," Erik replied humbly.

"I sure wish we could have some fun like that, Jimmy. All we do is sit around, smoke pot and play games on our cell phones. I'm bored!" the girl said, as she passed over what appeared to be a marijuana joint.

Jimmy grabbed the joint and gave the girl a sneering look. The couple seemed harmless and simple, probably the result of smoking one two many joints that day, and the Blacks tried to take everything in stride.

"We'll have some fun later Jenny, but first I have to deal with these intruders," explained Jimmy, then asked the Blacks, "So, why was someone chasing you two nice old folks anyways?"

"Nothing that would interest you, but please, don't tell anyone that you saw us," Erik replied as he started walking up the pier ramp towards the mansion.

"Sorry, but I can't let two hoodlums interrupt the party," the Jimmy interjected, stopping our progress with his arm. "My sister is getting married in a few hours and she doesn't need any disturbances."

"We just need to take a shortcut through the property," Mary asked politely.

"Sorry. There is no way I can let you two through."

"Unless you tell us the truth about why you're being chased," interjected the girl with a giggle and a wily smirk towards Jimmy.

"That sounds like a great idea Jenny," replied Jimmy with his own sly grin. "But you have to tell the truth, and not just some made up story. Deal?" he asked hold out his hand to seal the proposal.

Erik figured it was just their way of having fun, but was still a little hesitant to agree, until

he noticed that the chopper was circling closer.

“Deal,” he replied shaking his hand quickly, then began to stammer as he tried to make up a story at the spur of the moment.

“We.....ah.....,”

“Come on, spit it out,” encouraged Jenny.

“We stole these jet skis!” Mary broke in.

“Yes, we stole the jet skis!” Erik said proudly as he expanded his chest. “Now can we please go?” he added, beginning to walk up the pier ramp.

“I don’t believe you,” the man said putting his arm out to block the Black’s way.

With the chopper getting ever closer on each pass, Erik started to panic. It was fortunate for the Blacks that the Cigar boat had sank quickly, dowsing the flames and smoke, which most likely would have directed the chopper straight to their location.

Without thinking, Erik said, “We....robbed a bank and then stole the jet skis for our getaway.”

“Right!” Jenny exclaimed. “Then show us the money!” she added enthusiastically, as she tried to lift the flap off Erik’s knapsack.

“Okay, okay! We didn’t rob a bank or steal the jet skis,” Erik said pulling the bag away. “You want the truth? Then here it is. You probably know little about the JFK assassination at your age, but my aunt left me with some material that sheds new light onto the conspiracy theory. She was hounded and chased until the day she died, and now that I have the material, I’m the one being chased! Will that suffice?” Erik said auspiciously.

“Man, you sure know how to spin a tale mister,” Jenny said giggling. “You should have stuck with the robbing a bank story.”

“Look, it’s the truth!” Mary piped up. “And if you don’t let us go soon, that chopper will see us in another one or two passes and we’ll probably end up like that boat at the bottom of this channel!”

“Listen, I do happen to know who JFK was!” exclaimed Jimmy wittingly. “My college thesis paper was based on the JFK conspiracy theory. I also came to the conclusion that there was a conspiracy and that it was orchestrated by Americans with a lot of clout. If you have some proof, I’ll help you in any way that I can.”

Erik quickly slung his knapsack around, undid the zipper and rummaged through it until he found the photo file.

“Here are a couple of photos that the public have never seen before. That is, except for the guys that are after us.....and now you.”

“Holy shit!” exclaimed Jimmy. “These are unbelievable. I bet my grandfather would also be very interested in seeing these. He helped me with my thesis. How many more photos do you have?”

“Several, but you or no one else will get a chance to see them if the guys in that chopper spot us,” Erik declared, pointing to the chopper.

“Then get going to the mansion, and run along the side bushes to the left. They might provide a bit of camouflage,” Jimmy said in a concerned manner.

“It may be too late,” Mary interjected. “The chopper will be over us on its next pass.”

“You guys need a diversion!” Jenny blurted out.

“Great idea Jenny,” agreed Jimmy. “Give me the keys to your jet skis. We’ll try to lead them away. Oh, and give us your shirts.”

“Thanks. By the way.....my name is Erik Black, and this is my wife Mary,” Erik said finally

introducing themselves. “And we already overheard your names. Jimmy and Jenny. Right?”

“You got it,” replied Jenny with a giggle.

Erik couldn’t help but smile a bit, because their free spirited outlook brought him back to his college days, when he and Mary had experimented with marijuana. With the chopper only a half circle to go before it would be directly over them the Blacks didn’t hesitate in exchanging shirts. They also knew that who ever was searching for them from the chopper, probably had a physical description on them as well.

Jimmy hopped up the ramp and unlocked the wrought-iron gate, while Jenny untied the Black’s jet skis. Surveying the grounds for security guards, Jimmy gave the Blacks the all clear then returned quickly to join Jenny.

“Mary, hold the gate. I’ll be right back,”instructed Erik.

“Hey Jimmy! he shouted as they started the engines. “You forgot this.”

Erik tossed a knapsack to him which Jimmy or Jenny had forgotten near the gate.

“And, Thank You!”

Both Jimmy and Jenny gave the thumbs up and sped off, while Erik scrambled up the ramp and hid with Mary behind a storage locker. Glancing skyward, they could see that the chopper veered immediately off its grid pattern and headed straight towards the speeding jet skis. Whoever was following them, took the bait like a greyhound after a rabbit.

Chapter Thirty-Six

"Mr. and Mrs. Black! Your days are finally numbered," glowed Harris, zealously grinning like a cheshire, as his chopper followed the two speeding jet skis. "Summers, keep our agents on the ground abreast with our location, and update them every few minutes."

Summers just nodded in acknowledgement and continued to watch the jet skis as they expertly zig zagged their way through channel after channel

"Are you positive the Blacks are driving those jet skis?" Summers asked Bill over the headset.

"It has to be them," Harris nodded in reply. "The clothes match the Black's last known description, and the lead driver is carrying a knapsack. Don't worry Summers. We'll find out soon enough."

Jenny and Jimmy knew that they couldn't outrun the pursuing chopper. As they made their

way to the main channel and then out to the open ocean, Jimmy motioned that the two of them needed to split up. Jenny headed right paralleling the shoreline, while Jimmy headed to the left, towards the South Beach Park. Without any warning, the chopper dived down and buzzed Jimmy from the rear, so close that the landing rails almost took his head off. He had guessed correctly that the chopper would chase after him instead of Jenny. Jimmy started driving in an irregular snaking pattern to avoid another confrontation, but the chopper continued to dive-bomb him. All at once, there were sprays of water bouncing up around the jet ski. Glancing skyward, Jimmy spotted a man hanging out the chopper window with a rifle motioning for him to stop, but he ignored the man's directive and continued zig zagging. Suddenly the fuel warning light on the jet ski had begun to glow red. Making a snap decision, Jimmy cranked his craft hard right and twisted his way through a couple of boats, before making a beeline for the shore. Beach goers scattered as he beached the craft.

Even before the jet ski came to a stop, Jimmy had launched himself off to get a good running start. He was immediately pelted and blinded by a wall of sand that was churned up by the chopper landing a short distance in front of him. Jimmy dropped to his knees and covered his head. As the fine pebbles of sand started to settle, Jimmy stood up and was about to run, but saw that it was no use. He was surrounded by several agents with their weapons aimed in his direction.

The air was still a little misty with sand as Agent Harris yelled out, “Okay Mr. Black. The gig is up. Just hand over your knapsack and tell us where you're hiding the original film, and we'll pretend that we never met.”

If Jimmy had any reservations on the importance of the middle age couple's material, they were

soon squashed.

“I didn’t know my knapsack was of such importance,” Jimmy yelled out as he tossed it over towards Harris.

As Harris bent down to unzip the bag, Summers spoke out, “Bill, I think that we have a problem.”

“What is it Summers?” Harris replied as he rummaged through the bag.

“That isn’t Mr. Black.” Summers replied as the sand had settled to the beach.

“What do you mean it isn’t Mr. Bla.....” Harris stammered as he looked up and was shocked to see that Summers was right.

“Who the fuck are you?” barked Harris.

“I’m Jimmy. Who the hell are you guys?”

“The CIA,” announced a rookie agent.

Harris fumed that their identity had been revealed, and would deal with the agent at another time.

“Where’s Mr. Black?” roared Harris.

“Sorry, but I don’t know a Mr. and Mrs. Black,” replied Jimmy playing ignorant.

“Then why were you and the other jet skier running from us?”

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders after thinking for a second and said, “I don’t know. Caus, maybe you guys spotted us smoking pot?”

He giggled a bit, still showing signs of being high. For some reason, Harris didn’t believe his, or like him.

“Put this guy in the chopper,” Harris ordered.

Harris was beside himself and started pacing and muttering to himself, then kicked the jet ski.

“Summers. Get over here!”

She had never seen agent Harris so disconcerted and agitated in all the years she had been working under him, and her intuition told her that things might get out of hand.

Harris leaned over and spoke quietly into Summers ear.

“Things could get complicated for us if this Jimmy guy informs the press that CIA agents were taking pot shots at a jet skier for no apparent reason. Too much publicity might even get this case put on the back burner for a while, which is something we absolutely can’t afford. It’s imperative that find the Black’s before they completely go off the grid.”

“I don’t know why it’s so important for us to get ahold of this old JFK material anyways. It’s not like it’s going to effect anyone.....,”

“I’ll not hear anymore of that insubordination Summers,” Harris barged in. “Orders are orders. Is that clear?”

“Yes sir.”

All was silent as Bill stared out over the ocean and contemplated. A moment later Summers could hear him muttering to himself, “Maybe I should just drop him out in the ocean. No one would be the wiser.”

Summers was extremely shocked with agent Harris’s attitude and didn’t like the direction this operation was headed. Eliminating evidence or witnesses was one thing and she had no problem dealing with that. But, to start getting rid of innocent civilians was another matter all together. It was something that she had not signed up for, and it grated her to her core. Something was definitely up with Bill, but she had absolutely no inkling on what it was. She would just have to go with the flow.

“How about if I try to persuade him to keep his mouth shut? Then you wouldn’t have to feed him to the sharks!” Summers said without thinking.

Harris just glared at Summers with distain.

“Sorry. I couldn’t help but overhear you mumbling,” she added quickly.

“You’d better try your best because there might be just one less jet skier buzzing up and down the coast!” Harris fumed.

Summers thought Bill had definitely gone off the deep end and headed straight to the unsuspecting young man.

“I need a few minutes alone with him Gerry,” Summers announced as she relieved the guard.

Waiting until the officer was out of earshot, Summers looked Jimmy directly in his eyes and said, “Now listen to me very carefully.

You need to forget about this incident completely, or my boss will take this matter into his own hands.”

“So what are you guys gonna do, rough up a Senator’s grandson?” Jimmy replied smugly.

Summers was a little taken back at hearing this, but continued on.

“Senator’s grandson or not. These agents play for keeps and it might not be a happy ending for you! Do you get my drift?” Summers said sternly.

“Yes Mam,” Jimmy replied a little more seriously.

“Now, are you sure that you don’t know a Mr. Black? This jet ski of yours matches the description of the one he rented.”

“Like I said lady. I have never met this Black fellow, nor did I see any of his JFK material,”

Jimmy replied, again covering up for the Blacks.

Instantaneously, he realized that he had just slipped up.

“I don’t remember any of our agents mentioning anything about some JFK material,” enlightened Summers. Dispirited, she knew immediately that they just might have to send him swimming.

“Well, the other agent that was guarding me told me all about the material,” Jimmy made up on the spot.

“Hey Gerry! Get over here, and bring agent Harris with you,” Summers called out, turning her back to Jimmy.

Jimmy knew he was going to be in deep shit and had to think of something quick. Luck was on his side as he spotted a jet ski zipping past.

“Hey! Maybe that’s the guy you’re looking for.”

All the agents spun to take a look, straining their eyes to identify the driver of the jet ski.

Seeing that the jet ski was occupied by two bikini clad beauties, Harris and Gerry reluctantly turned and headed for the chopper. Summers remained looking towards Bill and Gerry.

“Any luck convincing him to stay quiet?” Harris asked as he approached Summers.

“Yes, but I think we have a bit of a problem.....”

“Problem is right! Where the hell is the guy?” Harris blurted out looking behind Summers.

“He’s right here,” Summers replied, turning and pointing with a wave of her arm.

But Jimmy had vanished. In the brief time that all the agents were observing the jet skier, Jimmy had slipped out the opposite side of the chopper and ran into a clump of nearby shrubs.

“How the hell does a trained agent take their eyes off a prisoner, and let them escape?”

screamed Harris, as every word got progressively louder.

“Sorry sir. Just like the rest of you, I was trying to get a quick view of the jet skier.”

Harris stomped and kicked at the sand like a little kid, then immediately ordered the chopper pilot to take off and search for the Jimmy.

“Gerry, you and Summers search the bushes behind the chopper. I’ll get the remaining agents to comb up and down the beach,” ordered Harris.

The agents returned to the jet ski a short time later, empty handed.

“He’s long gone sir,” Summers reported meekly.

“Any reports from the chopper?” asked Harris.

“None, but I’ll contact him now sir.”

A few moments later, Summers shook her head negatively as she hung up her phone. Bill began pacing and cursing under his breath while looking at Summers with disdain.

“Now what?” Harris fumed. “We don’t even have a clue as to where the jet skier is or even the Blacks. I’m not as worried about finding that Jimmy guy, as I am in finding the Blacks. Let’s get our heads together and come up with a plan of attack,” announced Harris.

Summers leaned over and asked the agent that was guarding Jimmy a question. He shook his head negatively.

“Ahem,” interrupted Summers as she cleared her throat. “You may want to rethink not finding Jimmy.”

“Why is that Summers?”

“Because when I was talking to him, he mistakenly slipped up and mentioned that he did not see any of the Black’s JFK material.”

“So?”

“So, nobody here has said a thing about any JFK material. The only way he would have known that the Blacks had this information was that he met the Blacks, and then for what ever reason, they told or showed him the material,” Summers surmised. “And come to think of it.....just before we started pursuing the jet skiers, I remember catching a glimpse of two other people on the pier. One seemed to be holding a gate, while the other was running up the ramp. There seemed to be a large reception in progress behind the main house. Maybe, the Blacks somehow convinced Jimmy and his partner to act as decoys, then headed to disappear within the crowd.”

“If they did, then we have again underestimated the Blacks resourcefulness,” Harris declared.

“Let’s get the chopper back here and then we’ll head back to that location. The Blacks might be still hiding amongst the party goers. And Summers....”

“Yes?” she replied quickly.

“Contact Eddy for me, and find out the current status of Cyclops. We sure could use his eye in the sky.”

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The Wedding Reception

After the chopper followed the jet skis acting as a decoy for the Black’s escape, Mary and Erik followed Jimmy’s instructions and headed towards the main house by staying close to the shrubbery on the left side of the property. The house was a buzz of activity, as an array of banquet personnel were gearing up for the wedding. Several guests had already arrived and were mingling pool side, and security personnel could be seen scanning the grounds at various locations across the property. A large white tent with the sides rolled up had been erected adjacent the swimming pool, and a band could be seen moving in their equipment for the nights activities. The house itself was no ordinary home, but rather a massive architectural marvel that encompassed much of the front of the property, with a modest guest house sitting adjacent. The

whole scene was right out of ‘Lifestyle of The Rich and Famous’.

Near the far end of the property, a group of guests seemed to be gawking in the direction of where the cigar boat crashed just up the canal, and the sound of sirens could be heard in the distance. Nearing the house, the shrubbery suddenly ended, leaving the Blacks out in the open. Erik was hoping that the distraction in the canal would make it easier for them to make their way to the main house without being noticed.

“Now what Mr. 007?” Mary asked sarcastically.

“I guess that we casually walk across the lawn and act like one of the guests.”

“Dressed like this?” Mary said grabbing her torn and dirty shirt. “You’ve got to be kidding!”

“We have no choice. Or would you rather head back to the canal and then swim to the marina?

I’ve heard that sharks just love to cruise the canals looking for a little something to nibble on.”

“Just get going,” Mary vexed, still being irked by their predicament.

At first no one really paid any attention to them, until they made it closer to the pool. The Blacks grabbed a couple of martinis from a passing waiter, then Erik grabbed a towel that was draped over a nearby chair and threw it over his shoulder to camouflage his appearance. But with the condition of Mary’s clothes and Erik looking like an overstuffed hot dog in Jimmy’s shirt, it was just a little too obvious that they looked like two party crashers. The guests started gawking and whispering.

The Blacks continued with the charade, casually walking and pleasantly nodding while smiling to the odd person, until the overpowering aroma of food stopped them in their tracks. Before them lay a table with trays of appetizing morsels waiting to be served to the waiting guests. Erik and Mary were absolutely famished, and temptation briefly overcame their need to

flee. Trying to be nonchalant, they started snacking and even indulged in another martini. Their snacking had almost turned into a meal, until Erik glanced across the grounds. Standing in the entrance to the large white tent, an older gentleman in a tuxedo was chatting with one of the security men while pointing in their direction. The security man immediately put his hand up to his bluetooth and started talking.

“The gigs up. Let’s move!” Erik proclaimed and wrapped his arm around Mary’s shoulder to hustle her along.

Mary stood steadfast as she quickly grabbed a couple more tasty treats for the road.

“You never know when we might get another chance to eat again,” Mary reveled with a smirk.

“There’s never a dull moment with you is there?” Erik replied, then tugged her away.

The Blacks hustled through two open garden doors, leading them into a grand hallway which ran the entire width of the mansion. They couldn’t help but marvel at the interior. Two large spiral staircases winding up to the second level bookended the far end of the hall, with a large golden chandelier hung elegantly between them. The walls, painted a rich medium brown, showcased numerous works of art which were mounted in ornate gold frames. The numerous caterers, musicians and florists milled about over the brightly polished marble floors, making their final preparations for the wedding.

“So, I guess now we just walk out the front door,” Mary said as she took a step.

“Not so quick,” Erik replied as he pulled her behind a large bouquet of flowers. “There’s security at the front door and by the looks of their reaction, they just got the message that there are a couple of unwanted guests here.”

“They’re headed this way!” Mary announced.

The Blacks froze for only a second before flying into action.

“Quick. Pick up that bouquet of flowers and we’ll join in with the staff that are heading in and out of that hallway,” Mary said quick-wittedly.

As Erik concealed his face amongst the flowers, Mary walked along side pretending to preen the large bouquet.

It appeared that they had fooled the security, at least for the moment, as they made their way undetected into the hallway. Suddenly the Blacks seemed to be caught in a traffic jamb, as servers with fresh and empty trays of appetizers were passing to and fro.

“Quick, follow me,” Mary exclaimed as she guided Erik through an open doorway. “Anybody in here?”

The room was luckily vacant, so they closed the door behind them. Scattered about, were a few boxes of supplies for the wedding and a rolling clothes rack with several catering uniforms hanging and it was obvious that they wouldn’t be able to stay for long. Neither of them had to say a word when they spotted the rack of uniforms and quickly started to exchange clothes.

With only their shirts and underwear on, they heard someone grabbing the door handle. The door cracked open only slightly as they heard a male call out, “Did anyone check this room?”

“I don’t think so,” came a muffled reply from down the hallway.

“Just go with the flow,” Erik instructed Mary as he guided her against the desk.

Pressing his body into hers, Erik began kissing her. The door instantly swung open, almost hitting Erik in his backside.

“Whoa!” uttered the intruder, as he came across the two half naked people.

Glancing at a reflection in a framed picture on the desk, Erik could see that the person was one of the security guards, as he holstered his pistol inside his suit jacket.

"Sorry for the intrusion," the man said, and left the room.

Erik took a quick peek towards the door, when it suddenly reopened a bit.

"Sorry again, but did either of you happen to see a couple of people wearing old dirty shorts, with one of them carrying a backpack?" the man called through the partially opened door.

"Ah.... Yes, I believe I did. They were standing outside helping themselves to appetizers and having a martini," Erik replied trying to sound irritated.

"Thanks," replied the agent, and he departed once again.

"Were they in there?" asked someone through the still slightly opened door.

"No, but I sure could use some of the afternoon delight that two of the caterers are indulging in."

Erik reached back and closed the door fully, and turned the lock.

"That was close!" Mary said with a deep sigh.

"Too close," Erik added turning back towards Mary.

"No use letting a great opportunity go to waste," Mary said in a seductive voice, as she grabbed Erik's shirt collar and pulling him towards her.

Whether it was the adrenaline surging through their veins from being chased, or that they hadn't had sex for almost two weeks or a combination of both, it had ignited their juices. Erik leaned forward into Mary. Tilting her head to the side, Erik began kissing Mary's exposed neck, then slowly nibbled his way down to the crevasse of her breasts. Mary laid back and rested her elbows on the desk, and they were soon in the throws of passion. Noises of people just outside the door caused them to pause for a second, but the thrill of the moment soon overcame any

fleeting thought of stopping they may have had. Both Erik and Mary smiled contently and gave each other another kiss after their impromptu escapade, before quickly hustled into action.

"I think that you should see if the coast is clear before we make our way out of here," Mary said as she snatched a pair of pants off the clothes rack.

"I'll go and do a little snooping around and see if I can find a back exit," Erik replied as he pulled up his zipper. "Oh, everyone seems to be interested in my knapsack so try and find something to hide it and our clothes in. Maybe one of those boxes over there."

Erik stuck his head out into the hallway and surveyed the corridor. To his right, one guard was standing at the rear of the grand hallway. Looking left, Erik could see the continuing parade of caterers coming and going, and assumed the hallway lead to the kitchen.

"There has to be a back entrance through the kitchen," he thought to himself. "I'd better check to see if there might be a security guard posted."

Exiting the room, Erik closed the door behind him and glanced back towards the grand hallway. The guard suddenly turned his head in Erik's direction. He appeared to be the same guard that interrupted their romantic interlude. Doing up the last button on his newly acquired uniform, Erik casually waved at the guard with a little smirk, before turning and walking down the hallway. At the end of the hall he turned right and proceeded through a set of swinging doors which lead him into the kitchen.

Erik was astonished to see such a massive kitchen. Scores of cooks were busily preparing their assigned dishes at the numerous stainless steel cooktops, while waiter and waitresses were snapping up the food as fast as it was finished. It looked more like a large commercial restaurant operation than a regular residential kitchen. He needed a way to find the rear exit through all this

organized mayhem. Spotting a green garbage bag gave him the perfect excuse to slide his way through the kitchen, without being too conspicuous.

"Excuse me. Pardon me," Erik said as he accidentally bumped into a few people. Catching sight of the rear exit he tried sidestepping several more cooks, but was inadvertently bumped, and narrowly missed falling into the searing flame of a flambé. Erik crashed out the back door, dropped the garbage bag and started smacking his smoldering sleeve. "Like they say, if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen," came a chuckling voice from a chef who was carrying in a box of supplies from a nearby delivery van. "Very funny!" Erik replied, still smacking at the coat sleeve.

Picking up the garbage bag, Erik wandered around looking for the dump bin, which also gave him the perfect opportunity to scan the grounds for an escape route. To his dismay, the property was surrounded by a large 10 foot stone wall, lined with palm trees. The only possible escape was to either pole vault over the wall or walk through the front gates, which unfortunately was occupied with several security personnel. Since Mary and Erik were never big on track and field sports, it left the main entrance as their only option for a possible getaway. Puzzling on how they were going to get past the guards, Erik tossed the garbage bag into the bin then turned back towards the house and running bumping into the bumper of the delivery van. As Erik supported his arm on the van and rubbing his shin, he glanced inside the van and instantly thought of an escape plan.

* * * * *

Katia's limp was becoming more and more noticeable as she finally neared the mansion. It was a much longer walk than Katia had anticipated. A procession of limos and taxis were lined

up to the estate waiting to drop off their passengers and the block was full of parked vehicles.

Katia flagged down one of the departing cabs. She really didn't want to go anywhere, but really just needed a comfortable place to sit and relax for awhile.

“Where to miss?” The cabby asked as she entered the back seat.

“Just reverse back up this street a bit,” replied Katia with a slight groan. “I'll tell you where to park.”

“I saw you limping a bit. How did you hurt your leg?” asked the driver, trying to make conversation, as he drove slowly in reverse.

“Long story. Oh! Pull in here,” Katia instructed. “Right behind that black town-car.”

“That has to set a record for the shortest fare I've ever had,” the cabbie announced cynically after parking the car. “That will be \$5.25 miss.”

“Just keep the meter running. The government will cover the costs,” Katia replied flashing her badge.

“Anything you say, miss.”

“Who's house is this?” asked Katia.

“Senator Richard Chalmers lives here miss.”

Security will be tighter than a drum, Katia thought. I'll just have to sit it out a while.

Katia had a perfect vantage point to see the entrance to the mansion and a bit of the grounds, as well as all the vehicles leaving the premises. Pulling out a small pair of binoculars from her handbag, she wiped the moisture off the still damp lenses and began to zoom in on the departing cars. A dozen or so vehicles had left the premises, with no signs of Mr. and Mrs. Black as passengers, when a flash of white caught her eye to the side of the house. Focusing the

binoculars on the white object, she at first shrugged it off as just one of the catering staff dumping garbage into the dumpster. She even giggled at little when the person bumped into the van. But Katia’s giggle abruptly stopped when the person turned, wincing in pain before bending down to rub his shin.

“It couldn’t be?” Katia whispered out loud, then took a closer look with the binoculars.

“Mr. Black?”

Chapter Thirty-Eight

“That’s the pier right there!” Summers pointed while shouting to be heard over the loud helicopter rotors.

“Are you sure?” asked Harris.

“Positive. There’s the large function I told you about, going on right behind the pier. Hey Charlie. Can you take us over the estate to just across the canal?” Summers asked the pilot.

“There seems to be some unusual activity going on over there.”

“No problem. Looks like quite a commotion,” replied the pilot.

From the air the agents could see EMS vehicles approaching down the roadway, to assist the ones that were already on the scene. People from the surrounding properties were lined up along the canal wall, peering at the debris in the water.

“Charlie. Could you please circle back a bit and hover over the spot where all the people are

gathered. I think I spotted something,” Summers requested.

Charlie circled back and slowly approached, hovering over the lawn so the downdraft of the rotors wouldn’t disturb the water.

“There!” Summers exclaimed excitedly, pointing down. “Looks to be a large speed boat submerged in the water, or what’s left of it.”

“So what?” shrugged Harris.

“So what!” exasperated Summers. “Don’t you remember getting a report that two people matching Reid and Fontaine’s identities, were seen chasing two jet skiers in a cigar boat? Plus the people driving the jet skis, reportedly resembled Mr. and Mrs. Black?”

Harris looked a little perturbed that he hadn’t put two and two together to figure this scenario out before Summers did. He had completely forgotten about the earlier report.

“So the two people I saw on the pier ramp had to be the Blacks,” Summers continued. “And what better place to hide, than to disappear within a large crowd. I suggest that we land ASAP and check to see if the Blacks might be there. And with any luck, we might also find Reid and Fontaine snooping around.”

“By the looks of that boat Summers, I don’t think that we don’t have to worry about searching for agent Reid and Tony Fontaine any more,” Harris put forward.

Just then a call came in for Harris over the choppers communications headsets.

“It’s Agent Kelly sir, and I’m at the boat rental shop. The jet skies were rented out to a Mr. & Mrs. Brentwood, from Kansas.”

“Well, there goes your theory about the Blacks being our mysterious jet skiers, Summers!”

Harris said looking over to her as he knew she had also heard the conversation.

"But, the interesting thing is sir," added Kelly, "is that when I showed the photographs of the Blacks to the owner, he positively identified them as the couple who rented the jet skies."

"He's positive?" Harris quizzed skeptically.

"Yes, and he said they seemed to be in a big hurry."

"Thanks Agent Kelly. Please standby for further orders. Summers, I guess you might be right after all," Harris declared without really apologizing. "Not only might the Blacks be down there, but you were right in assuming that the Blacks are getting help. How else could they possibly get their hands on fake passports?"

Summers nodded in acknowledgement and then turned her head with a slight grin, as she knew that it hard to get any kind of complement from Harris.

"Charlie. Where can we put this bird down?" Harris asked.

"The best and safest place, is probably at the downtown heliport. I'll radio ahead and have Agent Kelly meet us there."

"Summers. Contact all our other available agents and get them down here to cover this location," ordered Harris.

"I think that is Senator Chalmer's home, and I think that it's located in a gated community," Charlie interjected. "If you secure the main gate quickly, it should be fairly easy to flush out your quarry."

"Nothing seems easy when it comes to dealing with the Blacks," Summers interjected.

"You can say that again," Harris added. "Summers, send a unit to immediately cover the front gate, and you'd also better send a couple of agents to confirm if Reid and Fontaine were the occupants in that sunken boat."

"Yes sir," replied Summers.

"Oh, have you talked to Eddy yet with an update on Cyclops?"

"Yes, but I forgot to tell you."

"Well, what did he say?"

"Cyclops should be ready for preliminary testing in a day or two at the most. Eddy also said to stop bugging him, and to just let him do his work. He'll call us when Cyclops is a go."

Several minutes later the chopper landed at the downtown heliport and all the agents hopped out with their gear.

"Hey Charlie!" Bill yelled out as the rotor blades were still slowly whirling. "Where's our ride?"

"Stuck in traffic," Charlie shouted back. "Probably the same with the agents you sent over to secure the entry gate."

"Shit! Looks like the Blacks might slip out of the noose again!" Harris thought to himself with resignation.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Erik rubbed his shin for a brief moment after grazing it on the bumper then headed back to the kitchen. He tried to nonchalantly slip past the bustling staff without being noticed, but to no avail.

“Hey! Where do you think you’re going?” asked a chef, stopping Erik with an outstretched arm.

“Ah?” is all Erik could muster.

“You must be Henry.”

“Henry?” Erik replied a little baffled.

“You are Henry Ferguson, aren’t you?” The chef said pointing to the badge on Erik’s uniform.

“The replacement for Francois?”

“Oh, yes of course,” Erik replied as he glanced at his name tag.

“Well, it’s about time you showed up! You’re late!”

“Sorry, but it’s just been one of those days, running all over the place.”

“No time to chit chat. You need to get to work.”

“Yes, Chef Marcel,” Erik replied nodding in agreement as he read the chef’s name badge.

Chef Marcel was a portly man standing about 5 ft. 6 inches tall, weighing about 275 lbs., sporting a handlebar mustache. He fit to a T, the Hollywood stereotype image of what a chef should look like.

“I need you to cook up these mussels, pronto!” chef Marcel ordered.

Although Erik would cook gourmet meals on a regular basis for family and friends, he only had cooked mussels a few times.

“And, how would you like them prepared?” Erik asked hesitantly.

“The menu calls for...”

“Chef Marcel! Chef Marcel!” bellowed a voice from the entrance to the kitchen.

“Yes?”

“Senator Chalmers would like to speak with you immediately.”

“I’ll be right there,” replied the Chef as he turned and began walking away.

“What about the mussels?” Erik called out.

“Just follow the recipe,” the Chef replied as his voice began to trail off.

“What recipe?” But the swinging doors had already shut behind the chef.

“Now what,” Erik thought. “I could just go grab Mary and make a run for it, but we probably wouldn’t get far. The way the other chefs are gawking at me, I better just cook the mussels quickly, then get Mary.”

Finding no recipe posted at my station, Erik asked a few of the other chefs in hopes of finding the recipe, but they just shrugged their shoulders and continued to preparing their assigned dishes.

“Fine,” Erik whispered to himself, then walked to the reffridgerator.

When he opened the large stainless steel fridge, he couldn’t believe his luck. There sitting on the bottom self, was a large bowl of bruschetta next to several bowls of mussels submerged in cubes of ice.

“I might just be able to pull this off,” he said grinning to himself a little, and then began hunting for a few more ingredients.

Erik remembered that the few times he had cooked mussels, was sautéing them in white wine then adding bruschetta and serving them on a bed of pasta with a gremolata garnish. He would forgo the pasta as he knew Mary would be wondering where he was.

After finding all the necessary ingredients, he swiftly started making my garnish, which consisted of finely chopped lemon rind, parsley, garlic and kosher salt, then grabbed a large frying pan. Adding wine to the pans, he cranked up a burner and quickly rinsed the mussels which luckily had already been scrubbed. With the wine coming to a boil, he added the mussels and cooked them for about two or three minutes until they all opened. Removing the mussels with a large ladle, Erik reduced the wine a little then added the bruschetta and let it simmer for another couple of minutes before adding the mussels back into the mix. Erik then added his own secret ingredient, a splash of Sambuca liquor. Looking at his watch, he knew he needed to plate this dish quickly and get back to Mary.

Chapter Forty

Immediately after Erik left to search for an escape route, Mary emptied a box of wine glasses to hid their clothes and Erik's knapsack inside, then patiently waited for his return. Mary was standing anxiously near the desk with her arms folded, staring out the window when she finally heard the door handle rattle.

"What took you so.....," Mary said turning, stopping in mid sentence.

"I would have been here sooner, but you were busy with one of the other caterers," grinned the guard that had barged in earlier.

"Oh.....you startled me," Mary said holding her hand over her chest and taking in a couple of deep breaths.

"I see that you've finished servicing one of the caterers," the guard said slyly. "Was it as good as it looked?"

“None of your damn business. Now if you excuse me, I have to get back to work,” Mary replied unsettled.

Mary picked up a box and turned away, pretending to be doing a required task. The guard approached and quickly wrapped his arms around her waist and pinned her against the desk.

“Since you’ve already taken care of one of the caterers, then you should have no problem taking care of one of the security staff,” the guard demanded.

Holding her with one arm, the guard started to remove her pants with his free hand. Mary was shocked and overcome with the strength of the man as her pants were already down to her knees. She pushed herself with all her might up from the desk and quickly twisted face to face with the attacker. Mary screamed for help and tried to push the man away, but the guard immediately slapped her face.

“Shut up, or I’ll knock you silly with the next one.”

He reached down and groped to remove her panties, and it seemed all Mary could do was to pray that someone had heard her plea for help.

Mary started to panic, as her panties had been removed and the man started to maneuver himself into position. Pinned down by the weight of the man’s left arm on her chest, Mary squirmed and flung her arms about.

“I like it when they’re a little feisty,” smirked the guard.

Mary heard the guard’s belt buckle hit the floor and she knew that she would have to take matters into her own hands. While flaying her arms about to fend off the guard’s final assault, Mary’s hand accidentally brushed against a hard object. Looking over she saw that it was a bronze statue of a horse just outside of her grasp. With the guard about to penetrate her, Mary darted her arm

forward and poked her finger into the man’s eye. As he winced and grabbed at his eye, the guard released just enough pressure on Mary’s chest for her to reach the bronze.

In a flash, Mary swung the bronze as hard as she could into the side the guards head. He grabbed his head with his hand and reeled back in pain. Mary slid off the desk and swung the bronze for a second blow, but the guard had recovered slightly. Sensing the oncoming blow, he grabbed Mary’s wrist just before impact.

“You bitch!” he said as he squeezed her wrist until she dropped the bronze, which unlucky for the guard, landed on his foot causing him to flinch. It was all the time Mary needed. She instantly rocketed her right knee upward, landing it full force into the man’s groin. As the guard keeled over in excruciating pain, Mary grabbed his hair and slammed his face into the edge of the desk. He crumpled to the floor like a sack of potatoes.

* * * * *

Being delayed in the kitchen, Erik was completely oblivious to the goings on in the storage room. Trying to hurry, Erik grabbed a ladle and spooned the mussel mixture into small dishes, sprinkled them with the gremolata garnish, then placed them on large silver serving trays.

“Now what?” Erik thought. “I’ve never worked in a commercial kitchen before.”

Following the cue of a nearby chef, Erik yelled out, “Mussels plated!”

Servers immediately came over, picked up the trays and headed towards the door which gave him the perfect opportunity to sneak away. Just as Erik was walking leaving the kitchen, heard one of the other sous chefs call out, “Where the hell is all the bruschetta I prepared?”

Erik just hustled out and headed back towards the office.

* * * * *

The handle to the office rattled again and Mary promptly scurried behind the door.

Erik had just entered the room when he saw a flash of an object coming straight for his head, but stopping but only a fraction of an inch from his nose.

“Thank god you’re back!” Mary said frantically, dropping the bronze and she wrapping her arms around him.

“Hey, what the hell is going on here?” Erik said curiously, after seeing a man with his pants around his ankles laying on the floor, and then noticing that Mary was half naked.

“The fucking bastard tried to rape me!” Mary spewed in anger.

“He tried to rape you?”

“Yes! I was just putting our stuff in a box, when I heard the door open, thinking that it was you, but it wasn’t. It was this fucking asshole!” Mary blurted out, then continued to ramble on.

“Where the hell were you? And what took you so long?”

“Calm down....Are you alright?”

“Yes I’m alright, and no.....he didn’t fuck me, because I know that’s your next question.”

Erik didn’t reply, as he was about to ask that very same thing.

“Well, it looks like you took care of yourself pretty good,” Erik said looking down at the man.

The guard laid crumpled on his side with a gash on the side of his head. His face was covered in blood and his twisted nose indicated that it had been broken.

“Is he alive?”

“I don’t know and I couldn’t care less.”

Walking over to the man crumpled on his side, Erik shoved his shoulder hard with his foot, as his disdain for the man did not let him be gentle. With the guard laying motionless on his back, Erik leaned down cautiously and checked to see if he had a pulse. Fortunately, but unfortunately in this case, he was still alive.

“He has a pulse and is still breathing. I think we should tie him up and then make an anonymous call to the police once we’re in the clear and tell them what happened,” Erik suggested.

“And do you think that the police are really going to do anything, without an eyewitness?” Mary replied curtly, as she stepped between the guard’s spread out legs.

“Not on your life,” she added, then preceded to swiftly kick the man in his groin.

“You fucking bastard,” she called out, and then kicked him again and again.

Erik could almost feel the pain transferring to his own groin.

“OK, OK.....OK,” Erik called out as he pulled Mary aside. “I think that the punishment has already fit the crime. We need to get out of here!”

“Where’s the box with our stuff?”

“Right there, by the paper shredder. And if there was a knife around, I’d cut the fucker’s dick off and run it through the shredder, just like every other fucking rapist should get,” exasperated Mary.

“I couldn’t agree more,” Erik replied, wincing at the thought.

As Erik leaned over to pick up the box, he heard a loud crunching thump. Turning his head quickly, he saw Mary lifting the bronze statue off the guard’s now bloody left hand. She then

swiftly lifted the statue over her head and brought it smashing down again on his other hand.

"What the hell are you doing?" Erik said stupefied.

"Just making sure that the bugger has a hard time pulling out his pecker to take a pee, let alone having sex."

"Enough already. Put some pants on and let's get the hell out of here. There's a delivery van out back, with the keys still in the ignition. We should be able to drive out the front gate with no questions asked. And grab another box so it looks like we both have a reason to go out the back door," Erik instructed Mary.

After Mary put some pants on, Erik opened the door to leave when he heard yet another dull thump behind him.

"One more for good measure!" Mary announced with no remorse. "Now I feel better. Let's go!" Erik could only guess that the guard had received another kick to his groin.

* * * * *

Back at the heliport, Summers received a call on her Bluetooth just as Harris their ride pulled into the parking lot.

"Hey Bill. Just got word that one unit has secured the entrance to the gated community."

"Good!" replied Harris as a car stopped in front of him.

"What in hell took you?" Harris barked at Agent Kelly as he slamming the door behind him.

"Sorry, but there is a ton of road construction plus major problems on the freeway sir," replied the agent. "Where are we headed?"

"Senator Chalmer's residence. Here are the GPS coordinates given to me by the pilot," Summers said as she handed them over the back seat.

"Hope you guys aren't in too much a rush. We'll be heading right back through all the traffic problems."

"Just step on it. I haven't got all day Agent Kelly!" Harris replied stressfully.

* * * * *

Chapter Forty-One

With only the odd glance from a couple of the chefs, Mary and Erik made their way through the busy kitchen without a hitch. Approaching the back door, they heard a voice bellowing from the swinging doors. It was Marcel, the head chef.

“We need more mussels! Everyone is gobbling up them like there is no tomorrow. Where’s that replacement chef, Henry?”

Several of the cooks looked around and shrugged their shoulders, but one pointed in Eriks direction.

“I think that’s him near the exit.”

“Hey! Henry!” Marcel barked as he recognized me. “Where are you going? I need another batch of mussels, pronto!”

“Just need to get some stuff out of the van,” Erik lied, knowing full well that he would be high tailing it out the front gate. “I’ll be back in two shakes.”

Suddenly another voice called out from the entrance door to the kitchen,” I’m Henry. Sorry I’m so late but I got stuck in traffic, then I simply got lost. Could you tell me where I can change into my uniform?”

The gig was up! Erik quickly shoving Mary through the rear exit, then hopped in the van to make a dash for the exit!

* * * * *

Katia waited patiently in the taxi, surveying each vehicle through her binoculars as it departed. A white van suddenly appeared out of nowhere and pulled in behind several limos that were waiting to pass the security check point. Katia spotted the caterer’s signage on the side of the van she simply ignored the vehicle. Suddenly several people wearing white uniforms appeared from behind the house, waving their arms and running towards the front gate.

“This looks interesting!” Katia whispered to herself.

As Erik inched his way forward, a few of the cooks ran in front of the van forcing him to slam on the brakes. While the caterers tried to open the doors, a short heavy set man from the group bolted directly towards the guards, gesturing with his arms and jabbering away. Katia strained her ear to try to hear the conversation through her open window, but she could only make out the word “Impostor,” which puzzled her. At first the guards appeared to be not too concerned with the chefs grumblings until Katia noticed one of the guards listening to a call coming in on his Bluetooth.

Abruptly the guard motioned to a couple of the other guards, then pointed towards the van as he withdrew his revolver. With weapons drawn, the guards surrounded the van and ordering the occupants out.

"Mr. and Mrs. Black?" Katia said astounded, as the two occupants got out of the van.

"Resourceful. Very resourceful."

"Can we go now miss?" asked the cab driver impatiently.

"Just keep your pants on buddy and keep the meter running," Katia replied rubbing her ankle, as the swelling and throbbing became more noticeable and painful.

Katia reached into her hand bag and pulled out a small black plastic container that was about the same size as a cell phone.

"I hope this is still working," she said as she wiped some moisture off of it and pushed a button.

A map appeared with a red dot.

"Great! My GPS receiver is still working," she whispered to herself.

Katia had observed after first meeting the Blacks, that Erik was never too far from his knapsack, so she discretely hid a tracking device in it while the Black's were sleeping one night. She could have just taken the knapsack that night, but knew it just contained the photocopied material. It was imperative for her to locate the original material, so it was logical for her to know where Mr. Black was at all times.

"So what's the special occasion at the Senator's house?"

"It's Senator Chalmer's granddaughter. It says here on the front page that she is getting married," replied the driver with a Cuban accent. He folded the newspaper, then pointed out the article as he passed it to Katia.

"No wonder there are so many security people running around. You may as well just sit back and relax," Katia instructed the driver. "Looks like we might to be here a while."

Chapter Forty-Two

“Sorry, I tried my best,” Erik said dejectedly, as the guards starting escorting the Blacks back towards the house..

“It’s OK. I’m a bit tired of being on the run anyway,” replied Mary.

“Hurry up!” demanded the guard nearest to Erik, then jabbed the muzzle of his gun into his ribs.

“Hey! Can’t you see that we’re cooperating?” Erik yelled back in pain, only to receive another jab once his head turned forward.

“What was supposed to be a short research trip followed by a nice romantic getaway, has definitely turned into a nightmare,” Erik thought to himself.

“Don’t do anything stupid!” ordered one of the guards as they approached the front doors.

All of the security personnel proceeded to conceal their weapons so as to not alarm any of the

guests.

When the Blacks entered the grand hallway, the smell of flowers permeated the air. Stunning arrays of bouquets had now filled the entire room. Waiters were still buzzing back and forth like honeybees that just found the motherlode of nectar. An immense wedding cake stood in the corner surrounded by lights, cameras and reflectors for an obvious photo shoot, and several musicians were carefully setting out their instruments nearby.

“In here,” ordered a guard as he hustled the Blacks into an office. “Sit down,” barked one of the guards as he closed the sliding doors, then turned towards the Blacks with his handgun drawn. Another man sat on the edge of an armchair with a short machine gun resting across his lap. As the Blacks patiently awaited their fate, the sound of a siren could be heard coming to a stop near the front of the mansion.

“I guess they’ve already called the police,” I said solemnly to Mary. The office doors slid open and an older gentleman entered the room with another two guards at his side. With a full head of greying hair and wearing a finely tailored navy blue suit, he looked very distinguished.

“Looks like Armani,” Mary leaned over and whispered to Erik.

Mary was a fashion aficionado, and missed her calling. She should have been a buyer for Saks Fifth Avenue, instead of working as a Payroll Administrator for an asshole of a boss.

“Who are you people, and why are you crashing my granddaughter’s wedding?” blurted out the gentleman.

“Sorry for any intrusions or trouble that we might have caused, but we were just trying to take a shortcut through.....”

“Yes, yes. I spotted the two of you sneaking your way up from the canal, and then observed you helping yourself to the hors d’oeuvres and champagne. But, why? Why on my granddaughter’s wedding day?” he repeated.

“We needed a place to hide, and noticed your party from our jet skis, so we thought it would be a great place to blend in with a crowd,” Mary replied as she nudged me and nodded her head towards the slightly opened doors.

Three paramedics pushing a stretcher whizzed past, heading in the direction of the kitchen. The gentleman motioned for the door to be closed.

“You don’t look like the type of people to cause any trouble, and I’m usually a good judge of character, which brings me to wonder.....why would you need to hide?”

There was a knock at the door and one of the guards opened it a crack.

“It’s Marcel the head chef, Senator Chalmers.”

Mary and Erik looked at each other and were absolutely dumbfounded to hear that the gentleman they were talking to, was a Senator. As the door slid fully open, Marcel entered the room and the Blacks had a hunch that they were definitely in trouble.

“You informed me several minutes ago that someone impersonated one of your chefs. Is this the man?” asked the Senator.

“Yes, it certainly is.”

“So not only have you crashed my granddaughter’s wedding, but you’ve probably poisoned half the guests,” spouted the senator as he began to pace the floor.

“Actually Senator, the mussels he cooked are a hit with the guests. I really would like him to cook up a couple of extra batches,” piped up Marcel.

The Senator stood stunned in disbelief, but was also relieved to hear that no guests would get food poisoning.

“Sorry Marcel. That will not be possible. Please go and cook some more mussels for our guests yourself. Now where were we?” the Senator asked, trying to recollect the conversation.

“Ah, yes. You trying to hide in my home. Why?”

“You would never believe us,” Erik replied.

“Try me. And don’t try and pull a fast one by me by fabricating some nonsense story. Just tell me the truth.”

“Fine!” Erik replied, thinking that the Senator sounded like the kid on the pier.

Erik noticed that Jimmy and Jenny had found their way back to the mansion, and were now leaning against the door frame listening to the conversation.

“We are being chased by either the FBI or the CIA - or both.”

“Go on,” requested the Senator.

“Well, to make a long story short, they are after some photographs that I have which my aunt left to my family after she passed away.”

“And, what pray god is so special about these photographs?”

“They appear to confirm the conspiracy theory surrounding the JFK assassination. One photo shows a trail of smoke coming from a rifle behind a fence”

“That’s impossible. Every photograph ever taken surrounding that event has been investigated and explained,” rebutted the Senator.

“Except for the photos taken by the elusive Babushka Lady,” Jimmy said as he entered the room, interrupting the conversation.

"Hello Jimmy and Jenny," Erik said as they entered the room. "I'm pleased to see that you both made it back safe after helping us out."

"You know this couple?" the Senator asked Jimmy. "And, by the way, where the hell have the two of you been? You were supposed to be greeting the guests."

"Sorry Granddad, but we were just acting as decoys for Mr. & Mrs. Black, to help get them out of an unusual predicament they were in."

"Decoys? Babushka Lady? What the hell is going on here? Can someone please enlighten me?"

"Everything they told you is true," Jimmy said emphatically. "Mr. Black quickly showed me a few copies of the photos down at the pier, when the Blacks were looking for an escape route. It was right after he evaded a speed boat that was chasing him, which caused the boat to crash into the canal wall. And then.....this helicopter came swooshing in.....and that's when Jenny and I led the police away on a wild goose chase, and....."

"Slow down Jimmy," interrupted the Senator. "You're starting to ramble."

It seemed apparent to the Blacks that Jimmy and Jenny were still high from smoking weed. There seemed to be an expression on the Senator's face that showed he was intrigued with the Black's story.

"As for the Babushka Lady, don't you remember? You helped me with my thesis paper about the JFK assassination which was based on missing witnesses and testimony," apprised Jimmy at a slower pace.

"Ah yes. Now I remember. "She is the only person that was seen filming the assassination, who's film has never been seen," recollected the Senator sounding more interested.

“Yes. That’s the woman,” Jimmy confirmed.

“So after all these years, photographs have finally surfaced that might corroborate that there was a second shooter at the assassination?” the Senator said looking in Erik’s direction. “And you’re telling me that your...”

“Aunt,” Erik said filling him in.

“Thank you. Your Aunt, is this missing Babushka Lady?”

“The evidence seems to be pointing in that direction.”

“Well, let’s see some of these so called new photographs of the assassination.”

“Shit. They’re still in the van,” Erik said feverishly. “I need to get them immediately.”

“Travis. Please escort Mr. Black back to the van so he can retrieve his material. And for Pete’s sake, put that weapon away. I don’t think that Mr. Black will try to make a run for it while his wife remains here.”

Several minutes later, Erik returned to the office with a box in hand. He set the box down near the senator and was about to open it, when Travis intervened.

“Sorry Senator. But procedures dictate that everything is to be inspected before you can handle it.”

“Very well then, inspect the box.”

Travis opened the box cautiously and pulled out the Black’s loose clothing first, then grabbed the knapsack and Mary’s handbag. His eyebrows rose as he inspected Mary’s bag, which produced a handgun. Handing it over to one of the security guards, he then searched the knapsack. It didn’t take him long to find the Glock pistol along with the clips of ammo that Erik hid when changing into the careering uniform.

"Planning a little war are we? Or, is this story of your's just a fabrication so you can try to get close to the Senator, for an assassination attempt?" Travis questioned inquisitively.

"No. It's nothing like that at all!" Erik responded defensively. "I actually stole them from some agents that I thought were protecting us, but really weren't," Erik tried to explain. "You can have them. They just weighed us down anyways."

The Senator and Travis looked skeptical.

"Go ahead. Check the serial numbers. They are registered probably to either the CIA or the FBI," Erik suggested.

"Senator. I still think we need to turn these two over to the police," Travis was suggesting, when a loud disturbance in the Grand Hallway erupted.

Everyone in the office stepped out of the office, only to see the paramedics rush by with a man loaded in a stretcher.

"My god!" Travis exclaimed, as he stopped the paramedics with his outstretched arm. "That's Rick! What the hell happened to him," he asked one of the paramedics.

"He's in pretty rough shape with a slight concussion. We could only make out a few of his mumbled words. He mentioned something about intruders and a woman caterer? If that makes any sense?"

Mary just shrugged her shoulder when Travis looked in her direction, and then knew that what appeared to be food stains on her uniform, was actually blood.

"The asshole had it coming to him. He tried to rape me!" Mary spouted angrily.

"I don't know what the hell to do with the two of you," the Senator uttered.

Without warning, a shrill voice echoed throughout the hall. Sweeping the room, everyone's

eyes stopped at the visibly upset bride standing near the wedding cake. One of the photographer’s lights had somehow toppled, almost splitting the cake in two. The Senator rushed over to investigate. Not far behind were the guards with Mr. and Mrs. Black in tow.

“How did this happen?” The Senator spouted.

“One of the paramedics accidentally knocked it over,” replied a waiter meekly just as Marcel arrived.

“Marcel! Can this be fixed?” asked the Senator.

“I don’t think that there is anything that could be done to fix this cake, other than have a new cake made. And, with only three hours before the cake cutting ceremony, there is unfortunately not enough time.”

Stomping over to the Blacks, the Senator exploded in rage. “If it wasn’t for the two of you, none of this would have happened! Get them out of my sight! I’ll deal with them later!”

As the security guards started to direct Erik and Mary back to the office, Erik spoke out, “I might be able to fix the cake for you.”

The Senator turned towards Erik and motioned for the guards to stop.

“What did you say?”

“I think that I can fix the cake. That is if I have the right supplies.”

“So. First you impersonate one of my chefs, and now you’re suddenly a baker who can magically fix this wreck of a cake?” Marcel piped in.

“My daughter and I run a part-time business back home called Madhatters Cakes, and we specialize in creating extreme cakes. So to answer your question, yes. I believe that I can fix this cake.”

“What the hell is an extreme cake?” asked the Senator.

“They are cakes that are taken to a new level of workmanship and design,” explained Erik.

“Have you every watched Ace of Cakes or The Extreme Cake Challenge on TV?”

“I can’t say that I have,” the senator said sounding concerned.

“Well, I guess that’s not important for right now. The questions is, do you what me to fix your cake or not?”

“I’ve seen a few of the episodes of Ace of Cakes, and I think they are wonderful,” the Senator’s granddaughter interjected, as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

Senator Chalmers pondered for a moment or two after noticing the faint flicker of hope in his granddaughter’s tearful eyes, then announced, “If, and only if, you can fix this cake, then I’ll forget that the two of you were ever here. If you are not able to rescue this crumbled in mess, then the two of you will be on your way to the police station.....agreed?”

“Agreed,” replied Erik enthusiastically. “Okay, let’s get to work.”

Erik soon learned from Marcel that all the supplies needed to repair the cake were on hand except for the fondant, which is a very thick icing used in decorating cakes. Marcel immediately got on his cell phone to call a few of his contacts.

“The fondant will here in twenty minutes,” Marcel exuded. “What else do you need?”

“A place to work, one or two competent cake decorators and five minutes with the Bride and Groom.”

It took just over five minutes discussing a few alternatives for redesigning the cake, but the young couple seemed to be very pleased with the rough sketch Erik whipped up.

“I overhear what Granddad said, and I hope everything goes your way,” the bride expressed as

she dabbed her eyes with a tissue.

“You’d better go and get your makeup touched up dear,” Mary suggested .

“Yes, you two go and mingle while we get working on your cake,” Marcel announced, then he and Erik left the office. “It’s been a while since I’ve worked on a cake, but I’m the best help you’re going to get on short notice.”

“Fine by me,” Erik replied.

“Chop, Chop people!” Marcel barked out, clapping his hands to the waiters that were standing around. “Let’s get this cake in the kitchen pronto!”

Chapter Forty-Three

Agents Harris and Summers were cruising along the freeway at a pretty good clip as they made their way towards the Senator hCalmer’s residence.

“What the hell traffic are you talking about?” Harris said to the driver cynically. “We’ll be there in no time.”

“I’m not too sure about that Bill,” Summers piped up as they approached a backlog of vehicles.

“Just put the siren on and zing through on the shoulder,” Harris ordered. “We don’t have any time to waste. Step on it!”

The driver followed orders and was zipping along great until they were passing a semi trailer while rounding a corner. Out of the blue, a front end loader suddenly appeared parked on the shoulder. The driver slammed on the brakes, but too little too late, as the car slid and

nosedived under the rear end of the loader. Harris, Summers and the driver exited the vehicle with only bumps and bruises and were thankful that front end loader wasn't facing in the other direction. Bill popped et airbag with his pocket knife and got into the driver's seat. He desperately tried to unwed the car from the loader's grasp, but to no avail. The wheels just burned rubber.

“Looks like this just isn't one of our days!” Summers said, standing by Bill's open window.

“Appears so Summers,” Harris replied dejectedly. “Call for another car.”

“I already did,” replied Summers.

“Great!

Oh, and get hold of any units that are waiting for us, and inform them that we'll get there as soon as we can. Let's hope that this delay won't let the Blacks slip through our fingers again,” Harris said, looking at the driver indignantly.

Summer's cell phone rang.

“Summers here. Thanks I'll tell him. That was Eddy. Cyclops is up and running earlier than expected! He's running a few initial tests and would like you to head over to the base station right away.”

“About time!” elated Harris. “Get me a second car and order the chopper back to the heliport and to be ready to go when I arrive. You head to the Senator's home as planned. We'll get the Blacks one way or another!”

Chapter Forty-Four

Marcel and Erik had already removed all the icing and cut away all the damaged portions of the cake when the fondant arrived as promised, 20 minutes after Marcel had called in a favor. The driver had informed them that it was a good thing that his bakery was on this side of the freeway, as he had heard on the radio that there were major construction delays as well as a few car accidents near the construction zone, causing huge traffic delays.

Erik started carving and redesign the cake while Marcel and the driver, who luckily was also a baker, began coloring and rolling out the fondant. With the invaluable help of Marcel, the additional baker and Mary, Erik managed to complete his creation ten minutes before the cake cutting ceremony.

Marcel took a step back, crossed his arms and marveled at the newly created cake. “Well, it’s definitely not a traditional wedding cake, but it sure is unique,” Marcel announced

cheerfully. “If you ever want to expand your business into Florida, give me a call. I’ll put you in touch with all the right people.”

“Thanks Marcel. I’ll keep it in mind,” replied Erik proudly.

With snow covered trees and white fondant enveloping the cake, it resembled a large wintery mountain. A ravine snaking down the centre where the photographers light pole had created the most damage. The redesigned cake was covered with white fondant to resemble a large wintery mountain, with a ravine snaking down the centre where the photographers light pole had created the most damage. A ski chalet was located at the bottom, with wires and a few chairs attached leading up to a small hut perched at the top, replicated a ski lift. There were even a couple of skiers riding in the chairs and a couple of deer hidden amongst the trees. Skiing down the hill were fondant figures of the bride in a wedding dress with her veil trailing behind, and the groom in his tux.

Erik’s newly created cake was conceived right after his quick conversation with the bride and groom. He learned that the bride had met her soon to be husband, during a ski vacation at Lake Louise in Banff National Park, which coincidentally is located a short drive from Calgary, Alberta where the Blacks live. The couple were also planning and return to the Canadian Rockies for their honeymoon, which immediately sparked Erik’s creativity for the redesign. Later that evening, they would all joke that it had to be karma that brought them all together.

Marcel and Erik carefully rolled the cake out to into the Grand Hallway, where all the guests had assembled for the official cake cutting ceremony. The room fell silent as the bride gasped and placed her hands up to her cheeks. Erik immediately thought his goose was cooked, until she removed her hands from her face, revealing a huge smile stretching from ear to ear.

"It's absolutely beautiful," she exclaimed as she ran over and gave Erik a hug as everyone in the room started to clap, all clamoring to get a better look at the cake.

"Thank you ever so much, for saving my day. We hope you will stay to enjoy the rest of the evening, won't you?"

"Well.....?" Erik started to explain while looking over to Marcel and one of the guards.

"Unfortunately, I don't think that your grandfather would approve," replied the guard.

"Nonsense!" the bride disputed. "Have the two of you had anything to eat yet?"

"We've been too busy fixing your cake, miss," Erik replied, shaking his head.

"Marcel! Please see that all of you get something to eat and drink. You all deserve a well deserved rest and pat on the back. Thank you again Mr. Black," she added.

Erik just nodded in approval.

The foursome slowly made their way through the crowd towards the kitchen, with the Senator leading the way and a guard bringing up the rear. People constantly interrupted their progress to shake their hands in appreciation, as the news about the earlier damage had spread quickly. Erik could probably have taken a dozen or so cake orders right then and there, as numerous guests had asked either for a business card or where his bakery was located.

"I see that your cake creation is certainly a hit with my granddaughter, as well as all the guests," the Senator declared to Erik as they gradually walked across the Grand Hallway.

"Despite the fact that you were caught trespassing, impersonating a cook and your wife disabling my head security man, I believe that I owe you a debt of gratitude for making my granddaughter's wedding day - a day to definitely remember! I'd also like to talk to you later about these photos you have. I have somewhat of a personal interest and connection to the

Kennedy event.”

“Not a problem Senator. I’m glad everything turned out so.....” Erik replied, stopping in mid sentence as someone was causing a disturbance at the front entrance.

“For the third time. I need to talk to Senator Chalmers on a very important matter!” the woman called out annoyed.

The entire room feel silent as they wanted to see what the disturbance was about. Erik thought that the unruly person looked familiar, but couldn’t quite place a name until he recognized the distinctive female voice. It was Agent Summers!

“Shit!” he exhaled softly.

Erik hunched down slightly and directed Mary quickly into the hallway leading to the kitchen.

“Do you know that person?” The Senator asked as they walked past him, noticing their evasive actions.

“Yes. That’s one of the agents from Dallas that I believe is trying to retrieve and destroy my material. I don’t know if she is CIA, FBI or what organization,” Erik replied in a harsh whisper.

“All I know is that ever since arriving in Florida, we’ve been chased by cars and boats, and even shot at! Do me a favor Senator. Please just hand over my knapsack to them, and let them destroy the photos. I don’t care anymore. I would just like for my wife and I to be left alone, so we can make our way back home.”

Without uttering a word to us, the Senator nodded towards another guard standing close to the Blacks who then escorted them into the kitchen. The Senator turned and walked towards the front entrance.

Chapter Forty-Five

Five minutes before the commotion at the front door, Katia observed several SUVs barreling down the street, and abruptly coming to stop at the gate to the mansion. After the flash of a badge from an extended arm out the rear window of the lead SUV and a brief discussion, the security guards let the vehicles pass. Pulling up to the main entrance, agents poured out of the three SUVs and clustered along the short set of stairs. Peering through her binoculars, Katia could see the agents part like the Red Sea, as one agent was bringing up the rear.

"Summers!" whispered Katia out loud. "I should have gone in there to get the Blacks instead of waiting for them to come out. Now all hope of exposing the truth about the JFK assassination to the world is probably slim to none," she thought a little disheartened. "Harris will use everything within his power, including torture, to find out where Mr. Black has the original material hidden. How the hell am I supposed to get the Blacks away from Raven Claw now!"

* * * * *

“May I ask why you are interrupting my granddaughter’s wedding day?” the Senator called out as he approached the intruders at the front foyer.

“Hi. I’m Agent Summers, with the CIA,” Summers proclaimed as she extended her arm to shake hands with the Senator. “Sorry Senator Chalmers, but it’s a national security issue, and I can’t discuss the details.”

“National Security!” Chalmers interrupted angrily, not bothering to shake her hand. “I’m a god damn Senator and I’ll find out one way or another. You better start explaining, or I’ll have you working as a filing clerk until you retire!”

Summers knew she couldn’t divulge the entire operation or any information about Raven Claw, so she tried to keep her answer short.

“We believe that two people we are looking for, may have entered your estate several hours ago, and may still be somewhere on your property.”

“That’s absolutely impossible,” the Senator replied irritated. “My property is surrounded by a ten foot wall on three sides and the canal entrance is lined with a high chain linked fence. Plus the entire property is monitored by cameras and motion detectors, and I have numerous security personnel patrolling 24/7. No one gets in or out of this property without my security knowing about it.”

The Senator had taken every precaution to make sure that his property was well secured, ever since he narrowly missing being shot on a trip to Montana. Lobbying to reinstate protection

for grizzly bears in 2009, a truck full of drunken rednecks decided in the middle of the night to use the retreat the Senator was staying at as target practice. For some strange reason, the assailants have never been apprehended. He still receives death threats from people who believe every bear should just be shot and stuffed.

“We still have reason to believe that these two people may have somehow breached your security and may be mingling with your guests,” Summers declared, as she pulled out and displayed a photograph of the Blacks.

“Coffee or tea for anyone?” a waiter interrupted, overhearing the conversation.

“Not right now, thank you” replied the Senator to the waiter.

“Oh! I believe I just saw a couple that looks just like them, going towards the kitchen,” the waiter blurted out.

“May I have your permission to see for myself if this couple is still on the property, now?” asked Summers.

“By all means. I’ll let one of my men show you the way, but you’ll have to excuse me for a moment while I attend to some of my guests. Oh, you will let me know if you do find them, won’t you?”

“Not a problem,” Summers replied, as one of the Senator’s guards led the way.

The Senator leaned over to one of his security men and spoke quietly into his ear, who then quickly departed through a side door. Then the Senator promptly picked a phone from a table near the front door.

“Kitchen!” announced a voice over the phone.

“Put Marcel on the phone without delay. It’s an emergency!”

“Marcel here.”

“Conceal the Blacks immediately. CIA agents will be coming through the door in less than a minute. Instruct everyone in the kitchen to pretend that they have never seen or know nothing about the Blacks. Just inform the agents that you thought you saw some guests go out the back door. I’ll explain later.”

“Gotcha,” replied Marcel as the line went dead.

As the agents were about to enter the hallway leading to the kitchen, the Senator could see that Marcel might a little more time to conceal the Blacks.

“Oh, Agent Summers!”

“Yes?” replied Summers turning back towards the Senator.

“You forgot your photo,” the Senator announced while waving it in the air and walking slowly towards Summers. They met near the middle of the Grand Hall.

“You might want this to confirm the couple’s identity with the kitchen staff.”

“Thank you,” Summers said as she reclaimed the photo from the Senator.

She quickly turned and resumed her mission.

“Hopefully that will give Marcel an extra bit of time to hide the Blacks,” The Senator thought to himself.

Summers and several of her agents hastened back to the hallway and made a beeline for the kitchen.

“Pardon me,” a waitress called out rudely as she accidentally bumped into Summers while trying to exit the kitchen.

Not knowing kitchen protocol, Summers inadvertently had gone through the wrong side of the

swinging doors, causing the waitress to nearly dumped a large platter of desserts.

“No problem,” replied Summers gruffly, then proceeding through the double hinged doors.

“Okay! Can I have everyone’s attention please!” she yelled out.

Most of the kitchen staff glanced quickly, but some remained busy with their duties.

“I’m looking for two people who just entered this kitchen several minutes ago. Here is a photo of them,” Summers said as she started to go from person to person. “Have any of you seen these people?”

“No miss,” said one cook.

“How about you?”

“They don’t look familiar to me,” said another.

“And how about you? Have you seen them?” Summers asked yet another cook.

“No, I don’t recognize them.”

Erik was the next person in line. Marcel thought that the best way to hide the Blacks was to put them to work as part of the staff. The ploy had worked for Erik earlier, so why not now.

“And you there, in the tall chef’s hat. Did you see these two people come through this kitchen?” Summers said gruffly as she was getting a little testy.

Erik tried his best to simply ignore the voice as he kept his back towards her.

“Hey, buddy. I asked you a question.”

Summers took a step towards Erik and was about to grab his shoulder when Marcel called out with authority, “Sorry, but he’s deaf, and please stop hassling my cooks. I’m the head chef, so I know everyone who comes in and out of my kitchen. Let me have a quick look at the photo. But please make it snappy. We are all still preparing desserts for the Senator’s guests, and he won’t

be too happy if they’re delayed.”

Summer flashed the photo in Marcel’s face.

“Yes, I recognize the two of them. They nonchalantly meandered through my kitchen, raving about the food tonight, and then headed out the back door. We have guests dropping in from time to time complementing our cooking, so I thought nothing about it. I will say that they were very polite though.”

“Thanks,” interrupted Summers, and then immediately darted out the rear door with the other agents.

“Search the grounds thoroughly,” commanded Summers. “And report back here in ten minutes.”

“Summers here,” she said answering her cell.

“Hi Erika. It’s Bill.”

“What’s up?” replied Summers.

“I just met up with Eddy and he’s just reprograming Cyclops,” replied Harris.

“Great. Can you get Eddy to focus Cyclops on Senator Chalmers’s estate?”

“Sorry Summers, but when that electrical storm hit the Cyclops ground station, it not only fried computer components, but it also stuck Cyclops in some sort of technological glitch,” Harris tried to explain.

“I don’t get it. Is Cyclops working or not?” puzzled Summers.

“Here, I’ll let Eddy try to explain over the speaker phone,” replied Harris.

“Hi Agent Summers. I’ll just cut to the chase as I’m too busy to chit chat. The Cyclops satellite system orbiting the earth is still fully functional and recording southern Florida as we speak, but our ground station cannot display any current recordings. Somehow, we can only view

what Cyclops has recorded in the past, starting about two weeks ago. And currently, the system is only allowing us to fast forward at twice live action speed. We're doing our best to fix the problem.

"And how long will this take?" Summers exasperated.

"No time frame set. It could take one minute, one hour or an entire week if Cyclops remains locked in the mode it's in."

"Well, the sooner the better. We just had someone identify the Blacks leaving out the rear kitchen door at the Senator's house less than ten minutes ago. I've got all my agents searching the surrounding area now, so with any luck we won't need any help from Cyclops."

"I'll contact you when Eddy informs me that Cyclops is fully operational," Harris jumped in. "And report to me immediately if you happen to find the Blacks."

"Will do," replied Summers with a yawn. "The sooner we get these guys the better. I'm so tired and stressed out right now, I could just lay down and go to sleep."

"You can sleep all you want as soon as the Blacks are taken care of," replied Harris.

Chapter Forty-Six

"Look miss. I'd really like to know how much longer we have to sit around," the cabby said to Katia as he was getting very impatient. "My shift was over ages ago, and I do have a family that I need to get back to."

"Look...sorry, but I don't even know your name."

"Manuel, miss."

"Look, Manuel. I really have appreciated your patience, but I will need the services of this vehicle until I say otherwise."

"But miss...."

"Shah, Hang on a second," Katia asserted. "I see some activity down the street."

At the end of the Senator's perimeter wall, two people wandered onto to the street and appeared to be looking for something or someone. One of them returned back into the property, while the other person began jogging slowly back along the sidewalk to the main gate. Upon reaching the gate, a man flashed a badge to the security and was immediate allowed entrance.

"That looks like one of Summer's agents," Katia thought to herself. "I wonder why there are

agents still snooping around, and why Summers hasn't left with the Blacks in her custody yet? I was positive that I spotted them earlier. Could I have been mistaken?"

"Miss? Can I please drop you off somewhere? I really need to get back to my family," Manuel pleaded.

"Sure Manuel, you can go."

"Great. Where to miss?"

"I'm not going anywhere. You are. Sorry but I'm going to have to commandeer your cab Manuel."

"But, you can't!" Manuel rebuffed in disbelief.

"Oh yes I can," Katia stated.

"But how am I supposed to get home?"

"Catch a cab. There are a couple of cabs just up the block waiting for departing guests. I'm sure they won't mind helping a fellow cabby."

"No! You cannot have my cab!"

"Oh yes I can, and will!" Katia commanded, pulling back her coat jacket and revealing her weapon. "Don't worry. I'll keep the meter running and I'll leave you a big tip, courtesy of the US Government. Now you'd better hurry up before someone else grabs your ride."

Manuel exited the cab abruptly and slammed the door in frustration.

"You better deliver this car back to me in one piece lady!" he bellowed through the open window, and stomped off up the street.

Katia moved up to the driver's seat, then refocused her attention to the main gate with her binoculars.

Chapter Forty-Seven

“Any sign of the Blacks?” Summers asked, after all the agents returned to the rear door of the kitchen.

Every agent just shook their head.

“What!”

“The only thing that seemed a little unusual, was that the corner gate that leads to the street was unlocked and left wide open,” one agent spoke up.

“That is a little strange, since the Senator was so adamant that his security is tighter than a drum. I think I need to have a quick chat with the Senator,” conveyed Summers.

Erik’s heartbeat was just subsiding from the close call with Agent Summers not ten minutes earlier, when the agents burst back into the kitchen and stormed past Erik and out towards the Grand Hallway. Marcel had insisted that the Blacks remained at their cooking station until the coast was absolutely clear.

“That was a little too close for comfort,” Erik whispered to Marcel who was standing close by.

“Way too close. Just keep looking like your part of the staff, and I’ll let you know when the agents have left the property.”

“Thanks Marcel.”

“So, Agent Summers. Did you have any luck finding who you were looking for?” the Senator asked as she approached him.

“Unfortunately no!” she replied in frustration. “They most likely slipped out your corner gate. For some strange reason, it was left wide open.”

“What?” the Senator replied trying to look surprised. “Those damn gardeners. That’s the second time in as many months that they’ve left the gate ajar. Looks like I’ll be searching for some new landscapers tomorrow.”

“Looks that way Senator,” Summers replied a little skeptical.

There was something about the Senator’s story that didn’t ring true with Summers. She thought it odd that immediately after the Blacks had been identified by a waiter, they seemingly escaped a very secure property through an unlocked gate.

“Well, if you’re finished looking around, I’ll have one of my staff show you to the door, as I still need to attend to my guests.”

“No need. We’ll find our way out. Oh, by the way, here’s the photo of the people we are trying to apprehend, just in case they have the nerve to return. They are known as Mr. and Mrs. Black, and don’t be fooled by their appearance. We consider them armed and dangerous. You should contact us immediately if you spot them!”

“Thank you Agent Summers. I’ll keep that in mind,” the Senator replied.

Summers then turned and exited through the main entrance.

"Marcel."

"Yes Senator," replied Marcel who had snuck up beside the Senator.

"Please go and get the Blacks, and bring them to my study in 5 minutes."

"Thank God they finally left," Marcel exasperated. "I've had the kitchen staff keep preparing desserts, just to cover for the Blacks, and there are enough pastries back there to sink a ship!"

"Thanks for concealing the Blacks for me. Greatly appreciated. And Marcel, I'll explain everything to you later," the Senator said assuredly.

* * * * *

"Ok agents, gather around," Summers said as they approached their vehicles. "The Blacks might be still wandering the neighborhood and I want everyone to keep an eye out for them for the next little while. The only exit from the community is still being covered, so Agent Daymond, I'd like you to park up the street to keep watch on the Senator's house, and I want the other two units to survey the streets. The rest of us will be hoofing it door to door. The neighborhood is relatively small, so it shouldn't take too long to check it out. We'll meet back at the main gate at 11:00. Now, let's get going!"

"Hey Agent Summers," Agent Daymond called out. "Wasn't that cab across the street here when we first arrived?"

"I have no idea. Another cab might have taken its place. They all look the same to me, but I'll check with the driver to see if he might have spotted our suspects."

Katia rolled up the window and slid away from the door a bit, after she noticed Erika talking to another agent near their SUV while pointing and focusing their attention towards her cab.

“Shit! Erika will recognize me for sure.” Katia thought, as Summers started to walk towards the cab.

Katia turned her head away and began reading a magazine that was laying on the front seat.

Summers had not even walked ten feet, when her ankle turned over slightly from stepping on a rock.

“Are you alright?” asked Daymond, noticing that Summers was limping.

“Yes, I’m alright,” Summers stammered. “But I think I twisted my ankle a bit.”

“Listen. Why don’t you go and take a breather,” suggested Agent Daymond. “I’ll head over and question the cabbie.”

“Fine,” replied Summers, frustrated but relieved at the same time.

Katia was still pretending to be busy reading the magazine, when she heard a tap on the window. She tried to keep looking away as she rolled the window down slightly and said, “Yes, what is it?”

“I’m Agent Daymond with the CIA, and I have a couple of quick questions I’d like to ask, if you don’t mind,” he said, displaying his badge.

Katia was surprised, but relieved to hear that of a male’s voice, instead of Summer’s.

“Yes, by all means,” Katia said with trepidation, as she slowly turned and peeked out of the corner of her eye, just in case Summers was in the vicinity.

“Have you been sitting here for a while, miss?”

"Yes. For a couple of hours at least. Why do you ask?" Katia replied, relieved that Summers was no where in site, and then rolled the window down fully.

"You didn't happen to see a middle aged couple recently leave the premises located just across the street?" Agent Daymond asked as he passed a photo through the window. "They would have been wearing shorts and t-shirts, and would have definitely looked out of place in this neighborhood."

"Well, come to think of it. I did see a man and a woman pop out at the end of the wall down the street, about 20 minutes ago. They were too far away from me to identify them, but the couple looked like they were in a big hurry. They ran down the street and then disappeared around the corner," Katia said deceptively.

She remembered the agents searching for someone from that gate earlier and used it as inspiration to try and lead the agents away from the Senator's house.

"Thanks. You've been very helpful," Agent Daymond said, then turned and immediately started talking on his bluetooth.

"That should keep you buggers busy on a wild goose chase for a while!" Katia whispered out-loud.

Chapter Forty-Eight

Mary and Erik were already in the Senator’s study when the sliding doors parted and the Senator entered, followed by a guard.

“Thanks for opening the corner gate Travis. The diversionary ploy worked just as I had hoped. I’d like a few words alone with the Blacks, and in the meantime, could you please go and re-lock that gate,” requested the Senator.

“I’m not sure that you should be left alone with them?”

“I’ll be fine,” the Senator said as he escorted Travis out of the studio and then slid the doors shut.

“Can I have a look at those photos of yours now?”

“Sure, by all means,” Erik replied a little puzzled.

“Besides rescuing the wedding cake, you may be wondering why I decided to conceal your identity from the CIA?”

"Yes, that did cross our minds," Erik replied, as he handed over the photos.

"Well, the fact of the matter is that I do have somewhat of an interest in the JFK assassination. I was a rookie police officer in Dallas, and was assigned to patrol Dealy Plaza on the day Kennedy was assassinated. I can still see the crowded streets filled with joyous people, the cheers from the crowd as the President drove past. And I can still remember the smell of gun powder that filled the air after the rifle shots rang out, and the horrific screams from the crowd. It was like it happened yesterday, and it will be a day that I will never forget."

"Nor will other countless Americans," Erik replied softly.

"I will also never forget my debriefing from the CIA, persuading me that I did not hear all the rifle shots that I said that I heard. It still haunts me to this day that I went along with how the US government hid and covered up my information, not to mention all the other eye witness accounts. It is part of the reason I went into politics, to hopefully get access to the truth. But, after several years of hitting brick walls at every turn with my investigations, I gave up the search," the Senator said somberly.

He then turned to recompose himself a little and then poured himself a drink.

"And now, after all these years, you two show up with some new information which could help solve the mystery of the conspiracy theory," he said a little more upbeat. "Can I get you two a drink?"

"Ah.....yes, thank you. That would be great. I sure could use one after a day like today. A scotch on the rocks, if you have it," Erik replied.

"Make that two," Mary added.

"Here you go," the Senator said as he handed them glasses that were filled to the brim. "That

should help take off the edge a bit.”

“Now lets get back to your story, shall we? Start from the beginning and don’t leave anything out. Just the truth. If there is one thing that I can’t stand is someone who beats around the bush.”

It was almost midnight by the time Erik finished filling in the Senator with most of the details including the commotion in Dallas, the Raven Claw and Fortress organizations, the scene at the Fort Lauderdale Airport and the freeway as well as the canal chase, which eventually brought them to where they were now. The Senator meticulously examined every photo, all the while Erik and were explaining their situation. The only items that Erik didn’t delve into more deeply, was about his aunt’s childhood, her involvement with Bugsy and her nomadic lifestyle. He thought these were irrelevant details at the time. And the day had been hectic enough to say the least, and he just wanted to hit the sack.

“Well, I think that about covers it,” Erik said with relief.

The Senator sat stunned at what he had just learned.

“I can’t believe that after all these years, there is concrete proof that there was more than one shooter!

We need to get this information to the right people before this Raven Claw organization gets a hold of it. I thought that I knew all the inner workings of our Secret Service Departments and can’t believe that I’ve never heard about this Raven Claw organization before. Anyways, the two of you should be safe staying here for the night. Travis will show you to the guest house and I’ll have him post a couple extra men outside your door.”

“Thank you Senator. We definitely could use some sleep,” Mary said with a yawn.

“Oh, there is one more thing that I forgot to mention,” Erik announced just as the Senator

opened the studio door.

“Yes?”

“Have you ever heard of Cyclops?”

“Sure. It’s a creature from Greek mythology!”

“No. I mean the government’s surveillance satellite system.”

“A surveillance satellite called Cyclops? No, I don’t believe I have. Please enlighten me.”

“Just before we escaped from the Seville Hotel, I overheard bits and pieces of Tony and Katia’s conversation, and they were talking about a new satellite called Cyclops.

From what they said, it’s supposed to be some kind of new super surveillance satellite, with an advanced facial recognition program and 3D imaging capabilities.”

“Sorry, but I have no knowledge about this so called super surveillance satellite, or this Raven Claw organization you mentioned earlier.

It seems that I’m being left out of the loop.” The Senator surmised. “I’ll check with some people I know I can trust within the CIA and FBI to see if Raven Claw and this Cyclops Satellite truly exist. Now, I suggest that you both retire to my guest house and get some sleep. We’ll continue this conversation tomorrow morning.”

“Sounds good to me,” Mary replied with a big yawn.

“Good night Senator. We’ll see you in the morning. And, thank you for your hospitality and taking us in for the night,” Mary added graciously.

“Think nothing about it. Just get a good night sleep.”

The Blacks were accompanied to the guest house by Travis and a couple of security personnel, who took up posts around the building for the remainder of the evening. Crawling into

bed, Mary immediately fell asleep, but the adrenaline of the day’s events kept Erik just staring mindlessly at the ceiling.

He was so overtired and wired from the past few days events, that he was almost giddy.

Sliding out of bed, he picked up his backpack and headed outside to the front porch. The guards casually chatted while sitting on the porch rails as Erik curled up in a large comfy lounge chair, pulled out a copy of one of his aunt’s letters and started writing.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Late May, 1963 - Fargo, North Dakota

The Greyhound rolled to a stop in front of the bus depot in Fargo, North Dakota. Her ploy to slip over the border by faking to be asleep had worked like a charm.

As Grace entered the diner, she heard someone talking in a similar language to her native tongue, Ukrainian. Quickly turning to her left without looking, she accidentally bumped her shoulder against Lee, as he and Rahoul were both exiting the restroom.

“Izvionite,” (which means “Sorry,” in Russian) Lee said.

“Tse normal’no,” Grace replied without thinking (which in Ukrainian means ‘That’s okay’).

Both Grace and Lee briefly stared at each other strangely then headed to grab a table. Lee stopped and suddenly turned his head back towards Grace with a puzzling look. Rahoul put his hand on Lee’s shoulder and asked, “What’s the holdup?”

“That lady speaks Polish or Ukrainian!” Lee whispered angrily.

“Yeah, so what?”

“So what! If she can speak Polish or Ukrainian, then she can most likely understand Russian, and might have overheard some of our conversations ever since we left Edmonton!”

“That might pose a problem,” Rahoul said troubled. “Just sit down and don’t make a scene. We’ll figure something out.”

Grace sat nervously eating her dinner, knowing full well that the men she knew as Lee and Rahoul, were now aware that she spoke Ukrainian. She started to wonder if they might suspect that she had overheard their conversations regarding an assassination mission. She always seemed to be within earshot.

“Maybe they’ll just ignore and forget about me.” Grace thought optimistically. “But what if they don’t? What would they do? Rough me up? Oh, silly me. I’m just getting myself worked up over probably nothing.”

She had just about finished a third cup of coffee and her dessert when the bus driver called out, “The bus is ready for all passengers headed to Chicago. We’ll start boarding in 15 minutes.”

Grace downed the last bit of her coffee and headed to the restroom. She always tried to avoid using the uncomfortable facilities on the bus. Leaving the diner, Grace walked and approached the forward facing bus from the rear. She was about to step onto the lower step, when the driver suddenly called out quietly from behind her.

“Miss!”

“Oh! You surprised me!” Grace said startled as she turned around. “Yes, what is it?”

“You have been sitting in rear section of the bus since we left Winnipeg, haven’t you?” the driver asked very inquisitively.

“Yes.”

“Anywhere near the two gentlemen sitting at the very back?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Because I was sitting in a booth directly across from those two shady looking characters while getting a bite to eat and they seemed to be discussing something about a woman sitting in the back of the bus.”

“That would probably be me. I’ve been stuck sitting near them ever since I left Edmonton.”

“I don’t know what you said or did to them, but it sounded like they were extremely upset with you. One of them even said that he would take care of the problem. Listen lady. I’ve been around the track enough times to know what that means.”

Grace also knew exactly what it meant.

“I think it would be in your best interest to wait for the next bus to Chicago,” the driver said sounding very concerned. “The men are already on the bus, so you can hide in the bushes over there until the bus leaves.”

Grace didn’t have to be told twice to confirm that her original intuition was true, and asked the driver to remove her luggage from the still open cargo compartment. Grabbing her bags, Grace thanked the driver profusely. Hugging close to the bus, Grace walked briskly and slipped into the shrubs. The driver quickly closed the cargo doors, then boarded the bus. A cloud of dust trailed behind the bus as it raced down the road.

It took almost a half hour before Lee noticed that the Ukrainian speaking lady who had been overhearing their conversations since departing on their trip, was not in her usual seat. He immediately walked up the aisle and scanned each seat. Finding no trace of her, he returned to his seat, and another heated debate with Rahoul ensued.

Grace cautiously returned to the station and after looking at the bus schedule, realized that she would have to wait until tomorrow until the next bus to Chicago would be departing.

"There's no way in hell I'm waiting that long. Once those two guys find out that I'm not on the bus, they might come back looking for me," Grace conjured to herself.

"Well! If it's not Chicago, then where?" Grace whispered to herself.

As she was reading the scheduled departures, a man's voice bellowed from an intercom.

"DALLAS! Last call for any passengers leaving to Dallas, Texas!"

As a bus pulled out from the Fargo Bus Station, Grace settled into her seat, pondering what great adventures and experiences might await her in the great state of Texas!

Chapter Fifty

Present Day, Fort Lauderdale

Erik’s eye lids flickered as the warmth of the early morning sun broke across his face. Wiping the sleep from his eyes, he rubbed his neck, then sat up to stretch and yawn. Erik realizing that he must have dozed off while writing about Grace, and glanced around looking for his notebook. Not seeing it anywhere, he jumped up in panic and started searching in and beneath the lounge chair, but it was nowhere to be found.

“Are you looking for this?” a voice said coming from someone sitting on the rail. Erik’s head was still too groggy to identify that it was Senator Chalmer’s voice. “Yes,” Erik replied turning towards the voice, then recognized the unexpected visitor. “Good morning Senator,”

“I was walking past the cottage on my early morning stroll and noticed a notebook by your

feet. The wind was flapping the pages around pretty good, so I hope that I retrieved it before you lost any of your notes,” The Senator said as he walked over and passed Erik the notebook.

“Thanks you. Greatly appreciated,” Erik replied as he quickly flipped through the notebook checking for any missing pages.

“Sorry for being a little snoopy, but I took the liberty to read some of your notes as well as taking a second look at the photographs you showed me last night,” the Senator announced as he handed over Erik’s material. “I hope you don’t mind. The photographs were sticking out of your knapsack.”

“No. That’s quite alright,” Erik replied trying to sound indifferent. In fact Erik did mind, but didn’t bother voicing his opinion. Erik knew he was in no position to start a trivial argument.

“You left out quite a bit of information about your aunt during our discussion last night, Mr. Black.”

“Yes, I just touched on the information I thought was pertinent,” Erik replied as he sorted through his papers.

“Well, needless to say, it seems that your aunt lived a very long, troubled yet interesting and exciting life.”

“It seems that you must have read more than just a few pages Senator. And yes, she did seem at times to live on the edge a little.”

“I have to ask though, is any of her story true?” The Senator inquired looking Erik straight in the eye.

“From reading all her letters and hearing the stories told to me by my mother, all the events are essentially true,” Erik replied, returning a similar stare. “Of course I have ad-libbed several areas

in my notes to fill in some gaps and missing pieces, as I still have not been able to locate 5 of her boxes that were shipped to my mother after her death. Who knows what information may be in those crates.”

“Five missing boxes?” You mean there might be more photos that may corroborate the Kennedy conspiracy theory?”

“Possibly, and god only knows what other information might be in those boxes.”

“Does anyone else have knowledge of these photos, the missing crates and that map you were telling me about?” asked the Senator.

“Yes. The police in Dallas, who ended up calling the CIA, which I believe is connected in some way to Raven Claw. And speaking of the map, did you happen to come across it when looking through my material?” asked Erik a little panicked as he shuffled through his paperwork once more.

“Sorry, no.”

“Damn! I know that I have the original, but the photocopy is missing.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much since you said you still have the original. And, no one but the person who wrote it would even know what it was, with maybe the exception of this Raven Claw organization,” surmised the Senator.

“Come to think of it. The last time I remember seeing the map was back at the Dallas precinct. If I somehow lost it there.....”

“Then I think that you are in a bit of shit, if you don’t mind me being a little blunt,” interjected the Senator.

“Yes, my wife and I are well aware,” Erik replied a little disgruntled. “It’s like one of my father’s

sayings: There was a man who was buried up to his bottom lip in a pit full of shit and yelled out to a passerby - *Don't make a ripple.*"

"That's pretty profound," the Senator replied chuckling. "Now is there anyone else who knows?"

"Just a few friends and relatives who think I'm a nutcase for writing and researching my aunt's life story."

"Well, nutcase or not is yet to be determined. Whether you believe me or not, I'd like to offer my help."

"Very well then," Erik said a little skeptically. "What do you have in mind?"

"From studying your photos more closely, I noticed that they were just photocopies. Government agencies and the press would have a field day touting that they have been photoshopped. I will need to secure the original film negatives from you and get them authenticated by a trusted friend of mine."

"Another person who wants the original material," Erik thought to himself dismayed.

They we're both tired of running and needed to start trusting someone, and Erik wondered if the Senator was their knight in shining armor. Having a good first impression about the Senator, he trusted his instincts and continued to listen.

"If the photographs along with the map and payroll list prove to be real, the evidence will be overwhelming in proving that there was a conspiracy. We'll need to present the evidence to the public at a press conference, which will hopefully get the monkey off your back. I don't think that Raven Claw will have any need to continue pursuing you and your wife any further once the information is out in the open. And the few old cronies still alive that were involved, will

hopefully be found and brought to justice,” the Senator finally concluded with a clap of his hands and a large smile that beamed ear to ear.

“That sounds all good and dandy, but I am the only one who can retrieve the original material,” enlightened Erik.

“Nonsense. Just tell me where you’re hiding the material and I’ll send some of my most trusted security personnel to get them.”

“Well, for starters the film is locked in a safe, up in Canada.”

“Not a problem, just give me the exact location, as well as the combination to the safe.”

“Sorry, but when Mary and I decided to purchase a safe, Mary had to have the best new thing on the market, so I bought a biometric safe. I had it cemented into the floor during a renovation, and you need my fingerprint to open it,” Erik replied apologetically.

“Then that does pose a bit of a problem getting you back into Canada as I’m sure all of the public transportation systems are being monitored,” exasperated the Senator. “We’ll need to find a place to hide you and your wife until things blow over a bit. Either that, or you can cut off your finger and give it to me, so my men can open the safe.....Just kidding,” he renounced quickly seeing the look of horror cross Erik’s face.

“But seriously, you’d better pray that no one finds out about the original material is locked up in a biometric safe. If an organization is bold enough to assassinate a President, they will have little difficulty in cutting off a mere civilian’s finger to get access to the safe.”

Erik just sat there stunned.

“Now where can I conceal you?” The Senator said breaking the silence.

“It probably won’t matter where we hide, Senator,” Erik said with resignation.

“For Christ’s sake, just call me Richard or Mr. Chalmers. I’m so tired of always being called Senator.”

“Ok Mr. Chalmers. It won’t matter where we hide.”

“And your reasoning is?” Chalmers questioned as he began to pace the deck.

“Back at the safe house, I remember overhearing the agents saying that the Cyclops surveillance satellite was knocked out of commission during that electrical storm. I’m assuming that it’s probably already fixed, or will be soon!” Erik replied. “They might even have Cyclops locked onto this location as we speak.”

Just then, the Senator’s cell phone rang, interrupting our conversation.

“Speak of the Devil. It’s my contact getting back to me,” the Senator said looking at the number on the phone.

“Hi Tommy. What have you found out?” Senator Chalmers asked.

Mary had wondered out onto the porch and was leaning against the door frame.

“Good morning. What’s up?” she asked with a yawn.

“Good morning,” Erik replied. “The Senator and I were just discussing our situation.”

“Just hold on a second,” the Senator cut in as he noticed Mary standing nearby. “I’m going to put you on speakerphone Tommy. The Blacks, who I told you about, are sitting right here and may want to hear this first hand. Sorry Mr. and Mrs Black, but I contacted one of my trusted friends to confirm if your information about Raven Claw and Cyclops was indeed true.”

“That’s OK Senator. I would be doing the same thing if I was in your position,” Erik replied.

“Go ahead Tommy,” conveyed Chalmers.

“It took some arm twisting and I had to call in a lot of favors, but Mr. and Mrs. Black were

quite right about Raven Claw as well as Cyclops. Raven Claw was actually called Deep Sponge, and was first conceived right after WWII to destroy any information about war crimes committed by the USA or the allied forces.”

“I didn’t know that we committed any war crimes!” interrupted Senator Chalmers.

“That’s because they did their job very well, Richard. Anyways, after WWII the group was dismantled, or at least that’s what everyone was led to believe. A small splinter group made up from some of the original members, was formed by some high ranking official who believed that the USA still needed to have an organization dedicated to the greater good of the country. They called themselves Raven Claw, and ever since the end of the war they have been involved with everything from covering up UFO sightings to covering up assassinations, both on home soil as well as abroad.”

“Interesting,” Chalmers interjected.

“Yes, but that’s not all. They now operate at arm’s length with the government and are funded mainly by corporations and high ranking officials with deep pockets. They have members infiltrated in numerous police forces, political parties, the CIA and most probably the FBI, which I have yet to confirm. It appears that they are a nasty and notorious group to deal with, and will stop at nothing to meet their objectives. You’ll want to keep your distance from them.”

“That doesn’t sound too good,” Mary said dejectedly.

“No it isn’t, especially when they regain access to Cyclops. You guys will be up shit creek without a paddle.”

“So what’s Cyclops all about?” asked Chalmers.

“It’s the most sophisticated surveillance satellite system ever built. To put it simply,

Cyclops has the ability to track down their objective within a 10,000 square mile area and with the use of five satellites, produce three dimensional holographic images in a warehouse. It can see everything from every angle. It also has a facial recognition program that is second to none and can hack it's way into any ATM, traffic camera or any computer anywhere in the world.

With its advanced facial recognition program, Cyclops can inevitably track down any individual, almost anywhere and any place. The only good news is that it was knocked out of commission during that electrical storm.”

“That is good news,” replied the Senator with enthusiasm.

“Not so fast Richard. Once Cyclops is back on line, which could happen anytime, you'll have a snowballs chance in hell to find a place to hide. There's no time to go into all the details, but it has backtracking capabilities.”

“Which means?” asked Chalmers.

“As long as it's centered over a particular area it can continually record information over 10,000 square miles, even if the ground station is out of commission for repairs.

“Just get to the point,” Chalmers said getting a little anxious.

“It means that if Cyclops was programed to focus onto the Fort Lauderdale area, Mr. and Mrs. Black's movements can be traced from the time they arrived, to where they are now. By the way Richard. You never did tell me why Raven Claw is after the Blacks?”

“Sorry Tommy, but you probably already know more than you should have. I don't want to put you in any more harm's way than needed.”

Click-Click-Click, came a sound over the receiver.

“Senator, I think my mother has just arrived,” Tommy announced, hoping the Senator would pick

up on his coded phrase.

"Yes, I understand. Give my best to her," replied the Senator, then ended the call.

"Is there a problem?" Mary asked, seeing that the Senator looked a little concerned.

"There might be. I think that someone may have just tapped into our conversation, but I don't think they had a chance to hear too much."

"We have little time to loose," Chalmers replied taking a quick look skyward. "Mrs. Black. Why don't you go and get dressed while I arrange breakfast to be brought over. I anticipate that it might be a long day for the two of you and who knows when you'll get another chance to eat."

The Senator made a quick call on his phone, then asked Erik to join him at the patio table

A full breakfast of scrambled eggs, sausages, bacon, waffles, fruit, toast and coffee was delivered within 10 minutes.

"That was quick!" Mary said as she reappeared on the porch.

"Like I said, we have no time to waste. Actually, it was already prepared for the quests that stayed over last night," The Senator replied with a smirk. "Now eat up, while I figure out a way to get you two out of this predicament."

Chapter Fifty-One

Katia could barely keep her eyes open after her all night vigil near the Senator's estate. From her perfect vantage point, she was able to watch as every person came and went through the main entrance of the mansion. But to her dismay, she didn't even get a glimpse of the Blacks.

"I just have to be patient," she thought, resting her face into her arm across the open window sill. It wasn't five minutes later that her patience had paid off, as a golf cart had just pulled up to a side entrance to the house. Katia raised her binoculars as two people suddenly emerged from the mansion and walked quickly to the cart

"Mr. and Mrs. Black!" uttered Katia to herself.

Unexpectedly the air was filled with the thumping of rotor blades, as a chopper flew just above the palm trees and swooped in low behind the house, before landing on an open grassy area. Katia started the engine immediately and inched the taxi forward so she could get a better

view. As the taxi rolled to a stop, Katia could now see that there were a total of four occupants in the golf cart parking along side of the chopper. Something behind the chopper towards the canal distracted her and she refocused her binoculars on the object. She wasn't shocked at all, to see a person standing on the canal wall focusing on the helicopter with their own set of binoculars.

“I see that you have all your basis covered, Raven Claw,” Katia thought to herself, as she placed the binoculars in her lap.

Suddenly, two black Escalades that had been parked further up the street, raced up and stopped at the front gate, blocking her view.

“What the hell?” Katia said out loud.

Although the occupants paid no heed to a lonely cabbie, Katia recognized the passenger in the second vehicle through the SUV's open window. It was Summers!

“Here we go again!” thought Katia. She crept the taxi forward and parked a short way up the street. “Summers must have got word from her agent standing on the wall.”

The whine of a motor and increased thump of rotor blades indicated that the chopper was taking off. As the chopper lifted off, it disappeared behind the mansion briefly before banking over the house. The black Escalade quickly u-turned and started to pursue. Katia immediately followed. While shadowing the Escalade, Katia maintained a vigil on the chopper as it darted past buildings and palm trees, until she found herself on the freeway.

“Looks like they're headed towards the airport,” Katia thought.

Her suspicions were confirmed, a short time later as she spotted the chopper slowly descend in the vicinity of the airport. Two more black SUV's suddenly whizzed past her cab and pulled in behind Summers.

“Shit! I might have been able to eliminate Summers and a few of her agents, but now that she has additional backup, it’ll be virtually impossible to get to the Blacks.”

With lights flashing and sirens blaring from the SUVs, Katia sucked in close behind the speeding convoy.

“There!” Summers pointed out to the driver as they approached the airport. “The chopper is landing behind that building at the far end of the terminal.”

The driver zig zagged through the busy terminal traffic, acting like each car was a pylon in an obstacle course. Taking a hard right at the end of the terminal, the SUV crashed through a chain link security fence and headed onto the tarmac. All four SUVs came to a screeching stop in front of a private jet and the chopper. Katia parked the taxi with a full view of the proceedings.

Senator Chalmers had followed his two companions towards the boarding ramp to the awaiting jet, when Summers and her agents filed out of their vehicles with guns drawn.

“Stop that chopper!” Summers immediately ordered.

But the chopper pilot seemingly did not see the approaching agents and lifted off, then slowly banked away.

“Why didn’t you stop the chopper?” asked Summers as the agents returned.

“What did you want us to do? Shoot the chopper out of the sky? Besides, the side doors were left open and the only people on board were the pilot and co-pilot.”

Summers then turned her attention to the man approaching the loading ramp.

“CIA! Stop where you are!” yelled Summers over the diminishing sound of the chopper’s rotor blades.

The Senator stopped in his tracks, turned and waiting calmly as the CIA agents approached.

“What a pleasant surprise Agent....?”

“Summers! We met last night at your house, remember?”

“Ah yes, Agent Summers. How can I help you?”

“We are still looking for the two people who pose a threat to national security, and our investigations lead us to believe that they are the two people who boarded this plane just ahead of you.”

“The same two people you were looking for last night? You must be mistaken.”

“Sorry Senator, but I need to apprehend these individuals now!” Summers commanded as she sidestepped Chalmers and hopped into the plane, followed by another agent.

The luxurious jet was definitely designed for comfort and business. There were six huge leather seats, a small but functional desk located near the rear and a single cot for a passenger to sleep in on long flights. There, sticking out partially into the aisle, Summers saw what appeared to be the top of a knapsack. Walking closer to the two seated individuals sitting with their backs towards the front of the plane, Summers could clearly recognize the clothing that the Blacks had reportedly been wearing.

“Mr. and Mrs. Black! I’m sorry but your running has come to an end,” Summers boasted as she walked past the seats and turned in triumph at their overdue capture.

With her gun pointing at her suspects, Summers gleeful smile turned sour, as she came face to face with the passengers.

“I’m sorry but you must be mistaken. We are not Mr. and Mrs. Black! I am Marcel and this is my assistant Veronica,” Marcel replied. “We are Senator Chalmer’s personal cooks!”

Looking down at the knapsack, Summers now saw that it was not the knapsack that Mr.

Black had in Dallas. The top was the identical color but that was all that was similar.

“Sorry, my mistake,” Summers said shockingly, as her face became beet red with embarrassment and her inner rage started to boil over. She then stomped off the plane.

“Did you find who you were looking for?” asked the Senator.

“No, I’m afraid it’s a case of mistaken identity. I’m terribly sorry for inconveniencing you Senator.”

“Not a problem. But, if you’ll please excuse me, I have to be on my way. Good luck in your search,” the Senator shouted out as he disappeared into the plane.

As the jet engines roared to life, the airplane door was hauled shut and the plane immediately started taxiing towards the runway.

Katia had no idea on what happened inside the plane, but she did see Summers and her agents depart the jet empty handed.

“What?” She thought. “Where the hell are the Blacks?” Katia quickly reached into her bag and pulled out and turned on the GPS transponder.

“Well, Mr. and Mrs. Black. I see that you are at an airport, but just not this fricking one!” Katia said out loud to herself. “How the hell did the two of you manage to fool both me and Raven Claw, and end up at the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport?”

Katia put the taxi in gear and drove quietly away.

As the Senator’s plane hurtled down the runway, Summers received a call on her cell.

“Summers here!”

“Erika, it’s Bill.”

“What’s up?”

"Just wanted to give you an update on Cyclops. We've had a bit of a delay getting Cyclops back up to speed. Eddy couldn't figure out why he couldn't get the fast forward mode to work properly, until he rechecked the circuitry boards. The tech guys missed finding one fried circuit board located in the back of the unit. The problem is, that Eddy didn't have a replacement board in stock, and had to request one to be flown in."

"Well, that helps us out a hell of a lot," exclaimed Summers dejectedly.

"The good news is, that it is just being delivered as we speak. Eddy has guaranteed that once the circuit board is installed, Cyclops will be immediately operational, which should be in about fifteen minutes! Any luck in finding the Blacks?"

"I thought we had them located trying to leave on a private jet, but it was a case of mistaken identity. I won't go into all the details, but I may have pissed off a Senator. We may want to have our office send Senator Chalmers an apology along with a case of his favorite wine."

"That's just swell Summers. Anyone else we have to send wine to?"

"No, but needless to say we are again back to square one, with no idea where the Blacks are."

"Don't worry Summers. Cyclops will track them down! Just have all our agents ready to be deployed," Harris instructed, then hung up the phone.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Erik and Mary were elated to see the jet being stormed by the Raven Claw agents as they looked back from the chopper window. Senator Chalmers elaborate plan for the Black’s escape had worked flawlessly so far. Earlier that morning, the Senator’s security cameras had picked up a couple of suspicious looking vehicles staked out near the Senator’s property. Knowing that the street is usually empty of vehicles, the security zoomed in and took a couple of photos of the occupants. Upon seeing the photos, Mary and Erik recognized Agent Summers sitting in the SUV and that the driver of the cab was Katia! With two different organizations watching the front of the property, and most probably the canal, the Senator knew that no one would just walking out the front or back door.

Remembering that Erik had mentioned they had been given several sets of fake passports and that they knew the owners of Excalibur Air, a small one plane charter company who flew out

of the Executive Airport, the Senator had devised a plan that would hopefully get them out of the country undetected. When the chopper came in for a landing, the Senator had instructed the pilot fly low along side the huge party tent that was still standing. Marcel and Veronica had made their way into the tent earlier and waited until the chopper flew low and slowly across the rear of the tent. Marcel and Veronica then dashed out and jumped in through the helicopter's side door. Mary and Erik were instructed to make a slow departure out the main entrance to an awaiting golf cart, to ensure that they would be observed by the agents surveilling the property. Shortly after boarding the chopper, Mary and Erik quickly exchanged clothes with Marcel and Veronica.

Following the Senator's orders, the pilot flew slow enough so the helicopter could be easily followed from the ground. After landing near the Senator's private plane, everyone waited patiently until they spotted the SUVs breaking through the fence. Marcel and Veronica then departed briskly and made their way onto the jet, while the Senator followed casually. All the Blacks had to do to complete their escape, was to depart in the chopper. Mary hid under the back seat and Erik was disguised as the co-pilot. The plan was almost foiled when the armed agents approached the chopper, and ordered the pilot to cut the engine with a slashing motion across their necks. Mary and Erik thanked the pilot later for ignoring the agents, but were shocked to hear that he honestly didn't see the agents. They were even more shocked when they heard that if he did see the agents, he most likely would have obeyed their commands!

The Senator couldn't risk the possibility of being overheard by wiretaps or other monitoring devices, so he quietly asked his chopper pilot to personally make arrangements with Nissan and Vivi, the owners of Excalibur Air, to be ready to fly to the Bahamas at 10:00 that morning with two passengers. Once the chopper was airborne, the pilot flew as fast and as low to

the ground as possible to avoid being seen and tracked from the ground. Landing right in front of the Excalibur hangar, they arrived just in time to see Vivi as she was loading a cooler into the plane.

“Thanks for getting us here safely,” Erik called out to the pilot as they started to grab all their gear.

“Oh, the Senator wanted you to have this,” the pilot yelled over the thumping rotor blades. “He said hopefully it will tide you over until things cool off.”

“Thanks!” Erik replied as he stuffed the envelope into his side pocket.

“Good luck,” he replied, giving the Blacks a thumbs up.

Mary and Erik squatted low to the ground and huddled together as the chopper lifted off, leaving them in a whirlwind of dust. As the dust was still settling, Erik reached out to pick up their bags when he noticed that they were already being lifted off the ground.

“It’s OK. I’ve got your bags Mr. and Mrs. Hanson. I’m Vivi,” she said with a puzzled look on her face. “Could you please follow me to.....Mary????” Vivi asked with an accent that sounded more French than Israeli, her native tongue. “You’re not Mrs. Hanson!”

“Hi Vivi. Yes, it’s Mary Black.”

Vivi immediately put down the bags and gave Mary a big hug and a kiss on each of her cheeks and then turned, giving Erik a hug and kiss on each of cheeks as well. Vivi had recognized Mary almost straightaway as she looked almost identical to her sister, who flies over to the Bahamas with Nissan and Vivi several times a year.

“Mr. Black! It’s great to see the two of you again.”

“It’s great to see you too Vivi,” Mary said. “Thanks for being able to take us over to the islands

on such short notice.”

“Ah, I’d love to fly you over, but we are already booked to fly someone else,” Vivi announced disappointedly. “In fact, I was expecting our clients to arrive in that chopper.”

Just then Nissan rounded the nose of the plane, head down, reading the flight manifest.

“Have the Hansons arrived yet Vivi?” Nissan asked looking up. “Mr. and Mrs. Black. What a pleasant surprise.”

“No, not yet,” Vivi cut in. “They’re late!”

“Actually, they’re not late at all,” apprised Mary as she handed over the fake passports to Vivi.

“And we’re ready to go when you are,” apprised Mary as she handed over the fake passports to Vivi.

The ‘Brentwood’ passports that the Blacks used when renting the jet skies were traceable, so the they were already onto their second set of fake passports, and were traveling as Mr. and Mrs. Hanson. Erik and Mary had to be careful not to misuse this set, as they only had one additional set of forged passports left.

“But, I don’t understand. Why are you flying under the name of Mr. and Mrs. Hanson?”

“Sorry Vivi, but we don’t have any time to waste. Mary and I will explain everything to you once we’re in the air,” Erik replied hastily.

While Vivi and Mary boarded, Erik immediately started helping Nissan load their baggage.

Turning around to grab one last item, Erik was confronted by an attractive woman wearing khaki colored shorts and a white collared short sleeve blouse. Adding her long dirty blonde hair and large sunglasses, she appeared to be ready to embark on a desert safari. Even with the large sunglasses, Erik immediately recognized her.

“Mr. Black, do you remember Zara?” Nissan announced with an informal introduction.

“Yes, of course I do,” Erik replied and reached out to shake her hand. “She flew over to the island with us last year, I believe.”

“Mr. Black. It’s so nice to meet you again,” Zara replied. Ignoring his outstretched hand, she cradled his face in her hands, and gave him a kiss on each cheek.

Erik started to blush a little, as he was not used to all the sudden affection from both Vivi and Zara.

“I guess that’s just how Israelis just greet each other?” Erik thought to myself.

“OK, enough greetings already!” Nissan shouted out. “Get in and buckle up. We have to get going!”

“Mary!” Zara cried out as she entered the plane.

Mary also received her heartfelt welcome, with quick pecks on her cheeks.

Zara, who the Blacks first met about the same time last year, was introduced to them as Vivi’s cousin, and had been coming over from Israel for several years to vacation with Nissan and Vivi. During the Blacks first flight over to the Bahamas with Zara, they immediately hit it off with her. After having a few too many glasses of wine, they learned that Zara was actually a retired Mossad Agent who worked with the Israeli Intelligence Service. The agents are responsible for collecting intelligence and running covert operations that may include assassinations, outside the borders of Israel. She never described any details about any specific assignment, but she did divulge a few of her duties. And from what she told them, the Blacks hated to think what would happen to any person who might cross her. Zara then swore the Blacks to secrecy. They were never to mention that they even knew her, or that she was an ex-Mossad

Agent. Erik felt at the time that she was not retired, as much as she was trying to stay one step ahead of her agency trying to track her down. And didn't believe that any secret intelligent agent really gets to retire.

Nissan was about to step into the plane when something crossed his mind.

“Nissan. I think we may have a problem,” Erik said leaning out the door.

“What is it?” he replied with urgency.

“I forgot to mention that we're carrying weapons. Two handguns and ammo.”

“What? Where are they?”

“Right here in my knapsack.”

Nissan stepped into the plane and secured the door.

“Give them to Zara. She'll know what to do with them. Now come up and sit with me. You can be my co-pilot again,” he said slapping Erik on his shoulder. “It seems that the two of you are in a difficult situation. You can tell me everything, and I'm sure that your good wife, will fill in Vivi and Zara. And don't worry about getting caught with the weapons. Not only does Zara know all the ins and outs of getting weapons through airport security systems, but we personally know all the Customs officers throughout the Caribbean. We have never had any of our luggage checked in the last five years.”

Settling into the copilot's chair, Erik put on the headset and took a gander back at the threesome. Vivi was opening a bottle of wine while Zara was hiding our handguns in the bottom of her suitcase. He could tell from the three women's facial expressions, that Mary was already in the midst of explaining their plight.

“Mr. Black,” Nissan called over the headset as he slapped Erik's arm. “Please pay attention to

my instructions on how to fly a plane. They may come in handy one day.”

Nissan ran through the take off procedures as they taxied to the end of the runway. After a ten minute delay, they finally received clearance from the tower and Nissan had Erik push the throttles forward.

Rumbling down the runway Erik quietly spoke his own good luck saying, “Let’s Rock n’ Roll,” which he says to himself any time he’s taking off. Mary and Erik had been on a flight departing Cancun, Mexico, when a pelican flew directly into the center one of the turbine engines on a large Canada 3000 jet, just as the planes wheels were going to leave the ground. The engine was destroyed on impact, forcing the pilot to limp back to the airport and make an emergency landing on a single engine. The Blacks thanked our lucky stars, and told themselves, that it just wasn’t their time to go. Ever since that flight, just to settle his nerves, Erik always repeats the saying quietly to himself when the plane starts roaring down the tarmac. About to head out over the ocean in a small seven passenger plane, his good luck saying was spoken with much more fortitude.

Chapter Fifty-Three

Katia pulled the taxi to a stop at the front gate of The Executive Airport, just in time to see a plane heading down the runway. From looking at her GPS transponder, it confirmed that the Blacks were on that plane.

"You can run, but you can't hide Mr. and Mrs. Black," Katia uttered to herself, as she pushed the speaker button beside the gate.

"Hello," a male voice called out. "Your name and who are you flying with, please."

"I'm inspector Kat...Laine Reid with the FBI," Katia said, almost forgetting to use her disguised identity. "I need to know who is on the last plane that just departed."

"I'm sorry miss, but that information is private."

"I'm a god damn FBI agent, and I need to know NOW!"

There was a pause on the intercom.

"I'll need to see some identification first, miss. Just come to the first building on the right, and I'll come out to meet you."

"Thank you!" Katia replied, as the chain link fence opened slowly.

Katia spotted a man waving to her and she parked her car as directed.

"Nice set of wheels for an FBI agent," the man said jeeringly.

"It's a long story and I don't have the time of day to explain," she replied flashing her identification.

"Thank you....Miss Laine?"

"It's Reid. Agent Laine Reid!" Katia replied impatiently.

"Sorry Agent Reid. I'm Mike Smith. Would you please follow me."

Katia followed Mr. Smith into the office and was asked to wait at the chest high counter.

"Now, which flight are you looking to find out information about?" Mike asked as he logged onto his computer.

"The one that just left about five minutes ago."

"That would be Excalibur Air," Smith said as the sound of a photocopier could be heard printing.

"It's owned and operated by Nissan and Vivi. Nissan is probably the best pilot around.

Ex-military. They're not in any trouble are they?"

"No, I'm not after them, but the people they are transporting."

"Here's a copy of their flight manifest. As you can see, they are flying to Nassau. Their passengers are listed as a Mr. and Mrs. Hanson, and a Zara....."

"Thank you," Katia replied, quickly taking the copy from Smith and scanning it.

"So I see that the Blacks grabbed the fake passports Tony made for them before they ran,"

Katia thought to herself.

"Would you like me to call the authorities in Nassau to detain them?"

“No! That’s quite alright. I’ve been assigned to just follow and keep track of their movements,” Katia replied, thinking quickly. “I see by reading their manifest, that there’s no indication that Excalibur Air is scheduled to return or head to another destination. Is that normal?”

“It is for a small charter company. Times are tough right now, and most charters never like to return deadhead so they’ll hang around the airport for a while hoping to pick up passengers for a return flight, or a flight to another island,” Smith replied.

Katia had flown enough to know that, a deadhead flight was a return flight with no passengers.

“Or, maybe Excalibur island hop with their passengers, using Nassau as it’s hub. Some vacationers just like to never have a set itinerary and wish to travel on a whim or by the seat of their pants,” Smith conjured.

“Listen. Do you know if there are any other charters available right now?” Katia asked.

“I have absolutely no idea miss. You’ll have to contact each charter separately,” Smith answered as he flipped through some paper work, then pulled out one sheet. “Here is a listing of all the charter companies in the area. You can use that phone over in the corner, if you’d like.”

“Thanks,” replied Katia as she was handed the listings. “Greatly appreciated.”

“No problem. If you need anything else, just bellow.”

“I will,” Katia replied as she sat down near the courtesy phone.

“This will take forever,” Katia whispered to herself as she placed the list on a coffee table. Picking up the phone, she dialed a number while rescanning Excalibur’s flight manifest.

“Hi Tony? How are you feeling?”

“OK, considering.”

“Listen, I’ve tracked the Blacks down.....”

“Hey that’s great,” Tony interrupted. Have you taken them back to the safe house?”

“No, no Tony, just listen,” Katia replied quietly, as she did not want to be overheard by the many ears in the small office. “I’ve tracked them down but I haven’t apprehended them yet. In fact, they just took off in a small plane headed to Nassau, and I need to follow them,”

“Are you positive that the Blacks were aboard?”

“Positive. My transponder has them heading for Nassau, and the flight manifest states that two of the passengers are a Mr. and Mrs. Hanson. Isn’t that is one of the names you used on the fake passports you made?”

“Yup.”

“Then I need to find a plane to follow them, now! Since you live in the area, do you know anyone who owns a plane?” Katia asked still whispering.

“Let me think a bit. Can you call me back in a while?” replied Tony with a yawn.

“I know you need your rest Tony, but this is important. You can sleep after we hang up.”

“The only one that comes to mind is a guy by the name of Gus McGregor, who I’ve flown with on numerous occasions. He’s retired and restores old aircraft out of the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, but I think that he might.....”

“Thanks Tony,” Katia interrupted. “That’s all I need to know. Oh, by the way, I do need you to do me one last favor. I already know that one of the pilots has a military background, but I know nothing about the co-pilot or their other passenger, so can you do a background check for me? I don’t want to have any surprises when I try and apprehend the Blacks.”

Katia then quickly recited the names on the manifest to Tony.

“Thanks Tony. Call me as soon as you have the information.”

“No problem. Send my best to the old codger for me.”

“Will do,” Katia replied, and then hung up.

“Hey,” Katia said standing up and walking over to the desk. “Can you guys direct me to Gus McGregor’s hangar?”

Katia thought it better to talk to Gus in person so no one else in the office could overhear her conversation.

“That didn’t too long for you to find a flight,” Smith said in amazement.

“Just lucky I guess.”

“Well, he’s an old timer, but is still considered to be one of the best pilots around, next to Nissan.”

“He has to be, to be able to keep those old derelicts up in the air,” one of Smith’s employees blurted out while chuckling.

“Yah. Some of his planes are older than he is!” added another employee.

“Never mind them Agent Reid. His planes may be old, but that old codger keeps them in tip top shape. You have nothing to worry about,” Smith said trying to reassure her.

“So how do I find him?” asked Katia.

“You’ll probably find him in one of the two last hangers, down that way,” Smith said as he pointed the way. “I noticed that you were limping a bit when you came in, so you’re welcome to use the golf cart parked out side, if you wish.”

“Thank you. I’ll definitely take you up on that offer.”

Katia arrived at the last two hangars nearly ten minutes later and she became a little unsettled after seeing their outside appearance. The hangars looked like they were from a movie

set for a war movie, instead of taking up usable space at the airport. Katia wasn't too far off on her first impression. Built during WWII, they were the first hangars constructed at the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, which was originally named West Prospect Satellite Field. Clad in horizontal wood siding with peeling paint, the expansive building had huge sliding doors with glass panels and a domed roof where recent shingle repairs could be seen.

“Maybe it's better inside?” Katia said to herself with optimism.

Katia observed that one of the large sliding doors was slightly opened slightly, and could hear a distant sound of a hammer hitting steel.

“Hello! Is anyone here?” Katia called out as she slipped through the narrow opening.

There was no answer, but the sound of someone grinding metal could be heard in the deep recesses of the hangar. The only light that illuminated the space was coming through the large windows from the sliding front doors and the two side walls.

The air permeated with the distinctive odor of old used oil, dust and metal that has just been ground. From the windows, sporadic beams of sunlight broke through the hazy air, displaying the shapes of large and small aircraft stacked closely together. The planes lined two sides of the hangar, with a wide space down the centre. A dim light suddenly flashed somewhere in the distance.

Making her way to the rear of the hangar, Katia wound her way through a maze of planes, scaffolding and work tables towards the intermittent bursts of light. In-between the bursts, she could again hear the sound of metal banging metal. Finally, after bumping her shins a few too many times, she found her way in front of a large sliding door with a small entrance door that was partially opened. Another flash of light radiated from the opening. Pausing, Katia thought

the place looked a little sketchy and pondered on whether she should just turn around and try to find another charter company to fly with. Since she had come this far, she decided that she may as well continue on.

Cautiously she approached the doorway and entered. To her pleasant surprise she found the room was well lit. Running almost the entire length of the hangar, the narrow room was only 50 feet wide with a low slanted roof and was filled with every kind of shop machinery imaginable. Working at a nearby table was a worker wearing large leather gloves and a welding helmet, hammering away at a piece of metal.

“Excuse me,” Katia called out. But the worker didn’t hear her over the sound of the hammering.

“Hello. I’m looking for....”

A burst of intense light suddenly radiated from the table. Katia stumbled backwards as she covered her eyes from the blinding light and bumped into a rack of aluminum tubing, sending the tubes careening to the floor, along with herself.

“What in earth is going on over there?” the worker called out, as the crashing tubes obviously interrupted his work.

“I’m sorry, but the light blinded me and I....”

“Here, let me give you a hand up miss,” interjected a man with a deep silky smooth voice.

“Oh, thank you, and I’m sorry for the mess,” Katia said as she made wide eyed gestures trying to refocus her eyes.

“Are you alright miss?”

“Yes, I’ll be okay in a minute or two,” Katia replied as she brushed herself off a bit.

“The spots should disappear shortly,” the worker said as he assisting in getting Katia to her feet.

“Now, what brings such a pretty lady to an old dirty place like this?”

“I’m looking for Gus McGregor.”

“Well you’re looking at him, or at least you will be once those spots in your eyes disappear.

Didn’t anybody tell you not to look directly at the light from an arc welder?”

“No.”

“Well, now you know. So, why are you looking for me?”

As Katia’s eyes started to clear, there standing before her was an elderly gentleman looking to be in his mid 70s, with receding grey hair and well weathered tanned skin. Katia was surprised to find out later that Gus was actually 83.

“My name is Inspector Laine Reid with the FBI,” Katia announced remembering to use her undercover name this time. “I’m looking to hire a pilot to assist me in following two suspects, who just flew out of here about 20 minutes ago.”

“Why me, and not some hotshot young whipper snapper?”

Tony Fontaine, who I believe is a friend of yours, said that you’re the best pilot around, and I can’t afford to let these guys get away

“He did, did he? I appreciate his confidence in me, but by the time we’d be airborne, that plane will be long gone. You’d have to be a fortune teller to find them.”

“Well then, you can call me Madam Reid, the fortune teller,” Katia announced as she pulled out a GPS transponder and placing it on the table next to them. “This is a GPS tracking device. I placed a bug in their backpack, so I know exactly where they are.”

“That’s great, but let’s have a cup of tea and something to eat. I’ve learned to make sure I know exactly what I’m getting myself into before taking a giant leap of faith.”

“But I think we should leave immedi.....”

“Not to worry. I’ll have an assistant of mine gas up one of my planes and we’ll be out of here soon enough. That is, if I’m still interested after you fill me with all the details. Besides, what’s the rush, Madam Reid the fortune teller. We know exactly where there are, don’t we?” Gus stated as he picked up the transponder off the table and placed it in Katia’s hand.

“Andrew!” Gus shouted towards the back of the room.

“Yes,” came a distant reply.

“Could you quickly rustle up some lunch and tea for two, and after that, gas up old Betsy would you. I might be taking her out for a spin.”

“No problem.”

“Now Miss Reid, let’s take a stroll and you can tell me your story.”

“Please, just call me Laine,” Katia communicated as they walked back into the dimly lit hangar, and abruptly tripped over an old metal bucket.

“More bumps and bruises coming up,” Katia whispered outloud.

“This might help,” Gus said overhearing her, then reached over and flipped a switch.

The space immediately surrounding them was instantly illuminated by work lamps, revealing an old menacing looking war plane, encircled by several work tables and scaffolding.

“What kind of plane is this?” asked Katia.

“It’s a German JU 87 Stuka Dive Bomber. I discovered it in a hidden bunker, along with other treasures shortly after the war.”

“Quite the find!” replied Katia enthusiastically. “My father use to collect some war memorabilia, but nothing like this! I’m sure he would have loved to have seen this. His collection was passed

down to me after he died, and I’ve been only able to add the odd item to it occasionally.

“Well, if old war artifacts are of interest to you, then you might want to have a gander at these,”

Gus said as he took a few steps back and flipped another couple of light switches.

Like the lights of an old hockey arena, the overhead bulbs crackled with electricity, coming to life slowly, from a dull warm yellow glow to a glimmering white light.

Looking beyond the Stuka, Katia could now see that the hangar was not only filled with numerous WWII planes, but it also comprised of a couple WWI bi-planes, a tank, jeep, several motorcycles and a large PT Boat, all in various states of disrepair or restoration.

“My God, you could almost start your own little war,” Katia exclaimed.

“Probably could, if they were all restored to original condition. But, that will be many years down the road, and unfortunately I don’t think that I’ll be around to see that come to fruition.”

“I see here that you were a highly decorated pilot, with many kills attributed to you,” Katia said as she read old newspaper articles that were hanging in frames on a nearby wall.

“Oh, just ignore those silly things. They were a gift some of my buddies gave me on my 75th birthday, about ten years back. A few of the guys are still alive and kicking, and still drop by on occasion, so I had to hang them up as I didn’t want to insult their generosity,” Gus said humbly.

Katia knew that she needed to get in the air sooner than later, but didn’t want to push the subject too hard, as he might not want to take her. Besides, there was just something very interesting about this old codger that she liked.

“Here is Andrew with our tea and sandwiches. Please take a seat,” Gus said as he waived his hand towards an old wooden crate. “I believe that you have a story you wanted to tell me, and why you needed my services?”

Chapter Fifty-Four

Summers was still sitting in her car on the tarmac at the Fort Lauderdale Airport pondering the situation, when her cell rang.

"Cyclops is back on line!" Harris announced before Summers could even say hello.

"About time," Summers said quite relieved. "So give me an update on where the Blacks are."

"Eddy and I are just going through the digital recording starting from our last confirmed sighting at the jet ski rental shop. Do you have your laptop close by?"

"Yup. I have it right here."

"I'll forward a live stream to you."

"Thanks Bill, just give me a second or two...there. We're in sync."

Summers could overhear Bill as he gave Eddy instructions, "Eddy. Can you fast forward it a bit, until one of us spots something of interest?"

Images suddenly speed across the screen.

“Who the hell is chasing the Blacks in that speed boat?” Harris inquired.

“Hold it there Eddy!” Summers requested. “Now rewind a little. Okay, stop! Can you focus in on the two people in the boat?”

“No problem,” Eddy replied. “Our facial recognition program should identify them shortly.”

Small portraits of Agent Reid and Tony Fontaine suddenly appeared in separate boxes at the bottom of the screen, along with a brief history of each of them in a side bar.

“That is one hell of a fast recognition program,” Bill added. “I see that the reports about Agent Reid and Tony Fontaine being involved in this case are true after all.”

“I still can’t figure out if Reid has gone awol, or if she is still working for us,” Summers interjected.

“Neither can I, Summers,” added Harris. “Let it run Eddy.”

Harris and Summers reviewed the video and watched all the events unfold, from the boat crash, to the Blacks entering Senator Chalmer’s house, to the van being stopped trying to leave the Senator’s property. Cyclops even identified Reid keeping surveillance from the taxi parked in front of the Senator’s estate.

“Summers,” Harris spoke out. “Didn’t you mention that the Blacks made their getaway through a side gate?”

“Yes, but by looking at this recording, it appears that a security officer opened the gate and not the gardeners, as the Senator suggested. Can you keep it going still focusing on the gate Eddy?” Summers asked.

Images sped past, then stopped when there was further activity again at the side gate.

“There are some of our agents surveying the gate,” Summers announced, then instructed Eddy to keep the footage rolling.

“And, now it appears that the Senator’s guard is back closing the gate again, ten minutes later”

The time clock in the lower right hand corner on the screen displayed the exact date and time. A pop up window with the guard’s identity appeared on the computer screen, confirming he was employed by the Senator. Eddy continued to fast forwarding through the recording, stopping and starting at Harris’s or Summers’s request.

“Stop it right there Eddy!” Summers called out. “Do you see what I’m seeing, Bill?”

“Yes. I see two people jumping into the chopper behind that party tent just as it is leaving the Senator’s estate. So what?”

“So what!” exclaimed Summers, “Eddy, rewind to when the Blacks are getting in the chopper. Freeze it there Eddy. Look, the Blacks, the Senator and one of his guards are getting into the chopper after it lands here. That means that including the pilot and the two last minute passengers, there should be a total of seven people in the chopper.”

Seven portraits appeared at the bottom of the screen, the Senator, his guard, Marcel and Veronica, with stats on each individual displayed on a side bar. Cyclops had no problem tracing their identities. Although everything you wanted to know about them was displayed, the agents could not care less about where Marcel grew up or what high school the Senator attended, or even what all their credit card and bank account numbers were. Nor did they care on how many parking tickets Veronica had. They only were interested in finding the Blacks.

“I still don’t know where you’re going with this Summers,” Harris said restlessly.

“Just hang onto your pants and have a little patients, will you? Now, when the chopper landed at

the Fort Lauderdale Airport, we know that only four people got off,” Summers continued. “The Senator, his guard and two people who we thought were the Blacks, but who ended up being the Senator’s personal chefs. That leaves two unaccounted people not including the pilot.”

“So, where the hell did the Blacks disappear to?” barked Harris. “Did you check the chopper before it left? Maybe the Blacks just stayed on board?”

“I was close enough to get a good look at the chopper through its open doors when it departed,” Summers replied. “The only people on board were the pilot and a copilot.”

“Eddy. Can you please rewind to when the chopper was landing at the Senator’s house.....Great, stop there. Now, zoom in on the cockpit,” ordered Harris. “Thanks.”

“There’s no copilot.” Summers expressed humbly.

“Looks like this Marcel fellow and his accomplice, might have acted as decoys,” Summers presumed.

“Exactly! It’s my guess that Mr. Black acted as the copilot when the chopper departed, and Mrs. Black more than likely hid somewhere in the chopper. Eddy, let’s take a closer look towards the back of the chopper,” Harris ordered. “Okay, now do a heat signature trace. Thanks Eddy. There! Behind the back seat. Do you see it Summers?”

“Yes,” Summers replied astonishingly, as they both stared at the distinct image of a person crouched down behind the chopper’s rear seat.

“Why in the hell would Senator Chalmers assist the Blacks in getting away?” asked Summers at a loss.

“Who knows. Maybe the Blacks had a gun pointed at the Senator, and he had no choice in the matter,” Bill replied.

"That's a possibility," Summers replied.

"Summers. I'd like you to get back to the Senator's house and go over it with a fine tooth comb. Grill the hell out of all the staff, and see if you can turn something up. I'll head back to Fort Lauderdale and call you when I land at the Executive Airport," instructed Harris. "I'll also have Eddy continue to review the recordings and send a live stream to both of us."

"Anything else?" asked Summers.

"Besides a stiff drink.....no, just an answer as to why the Senator is aiding the Blacks. I'll see you in a bit!"

Chapter Fifty-Five

Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport

“Well Miss Reid.....”

“Please, you can call me Laine,” Katia interrupted.

“Well then, Laine. That was indeed a very interesting story,” Gus said as he got up and without another word towards the shop door.

“What? Where the hell is that old codger going? He didn’t even say goodbye,” Katia thought to herself. “I guess he didn’t want to get involved. No choice but to hunt down another pilot.”

She stood up and started to walk back towards the main hangar doors.

Katia hadn’t gone but twenty feet, when she heard Gus shout out, “Hey! Where the hell are you going? I thought you needed a pilot!”

Turning around on a dime, Katia spotted Gus just outside the shop doorway with a couple of old

leather jackets in hand.

“Here!” Gus called out as he handed over a jacket to Katia. “It can get darn cold up there when flying one of these old birds.”

Katia was grinning ear to ear after hearing Gus would fly her, but her brimming smile soon dissipated after hearing the words, old birds!

“Now which one of these beauties should we track your culprits down with?” Gus said as he patted the dusty Stuka, then smacked his hand clean on his pant leg.

Katia turned white, as the blood drained from her face.

“Let’s see.....We could take this Stuka and blast the hell out of anyone who gets in our way, or, how about that baby over there,” Gus said while pointing to a large plane across the hangar.

“It’s a Douglas DC 3. Still needs a tune-up and could use an oil change, but it’ll get us there. Although, we might have trouble landing on some of the island’s shorter runways.”

“Never mind landing, we’d probable crash on take off,” Katia thought, detecting that the wheels were almost flat!

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure the tires get topped up before we leave,” Gus said chuckling to himself as he noticed that Agent Reid had turned another shade of white.

Gus was quite the character. Observing that Reid’s eyes were darting from plane to plane, and how her smile turned sour after he had mentioned flying one of these old birds, he decided to just toy with her a bit.

“You don’t look too good Miss Reid.”

Katia was accustomed to flying in the comfort of commercial jets, and was terrified of the thought of having to fly in a rickety old crate.

“Would you like a drink of water?”

“Yes, that would be great.”

The water was a welcome relief and after a few minutes, the color started to come back to Katia’s face.

“You look much better. Now we better get going. I hate landing in the dark.”

“Thanks Gus, but maybe I’ll just take a raincheck. I’m still not feeling too great.” Katia said nauseously.

“Nonsense! Pay no heed to an old guy like me. I was just playing with you. Life wouldn't be the same if you can’t have a little fun once in a while.”

“Fun for you maybe,” Katia thought.

“Come on, we’ll cut through my other hangar. The plane is on the other side.”

“Great! More junk for me to trip over,” Katia contemplated.

“After you Miss Reid,” Gus said politely as he opened a door and turned on the lights to an enclosed breezeway.

Katia was absolutely awestruck upon entering the second old wooden hangar, as it had been fully refurbished and appeared to be now operating as a museum. Scores of planes lined the exterior walls and the reflections of restored vintage aircraft could be clearly seen gleaming off the shining polished floor. Overhead lights spotlighting each plane. Numerous people wearing headsets were milling around while watching old film footage on large screens behind each plane.

“Welcome to The McGregor Vintage Plane Museum, Miss Reid,” Gus announced.

“Please Gus. Call me Laine. This is absolutely incredible. I’ve never seen anything like it in my

life!”

Ever since Gus’s wife was killed in an auto accident shortly after he returned home from the war, Gus started restoring vintage aircraft to keep himself busy. It soon became an obsession, and he has never been able to stop collecting and restoring vintage planes. No one quite knows where Gus gets all the money to restore the aircraft, as it is very expensive and time consuming to bring planes back to their original glory. Most people think that he hit it big in Vegas or won the lottery, but a few people believe in the rumor that he had found a stash of Hitler’s gold, hidden in a remote bunker or cave.

Katia just stood there with her mouth open in awe.

“Miss Reid. We need to get going!” Gus said as he pointed to his watch. “Don’t worry, I’ll give you a personal tour when we get back.”

Katia followed Gus across the Museum and out the far door. Parked close to the hangar, was a large odd looking plane with a bulky green grey fuselage with a white underbelly. The two propeller engines were mounted on an overhead wing near the fuselage, and two large pontoons were attached under the far side of each wings. A United States Navy Emblem was painted near the tail and under the wings. Painted near the nose of the plane exhibited a scantily clad pin up girl, laying on her stomach with her arm bent to support her head and her legs bent upwards at her knees. The plane looked like it had just come fresh off the assembly line, ready to go to war.

“I take it, this is Betsy,” Katia said with an odd look on her face.

“Yup. Just finished restoring her last week. It’s a Grumman Goose. This baby cruises at almost 200 miles an hour and has a range of just over 600 miles. She’s gone through many test flights, but this will officially be her maiden flight.”

“You don’t have anything a little smaller and faster, do you Gus?”

“I do, but this old girl will let us land in some of the most remote locations, on both land or water. Ah, here comes Andrew.”

Andrew, one of Gus’s assistants, had stepped out of the Goose and walked over to assist Gus and his new acquaintance. Andrew was short and stocky but looked very fit for his age, and appeared to be a few years younger than Gus.

“Miss Reid. I’d like to officially introduce you to my brother-in-law, Andrew. Andrew, this is Agent Reid.”

“Just call me Laine. Nice to meet you,” Katia said as she reached out to shake his hand.

“Sorry for not introducing Andrew when he served us lunch, but I was too eager for you to get started with your story.”

“That’s quite alright Gus.”

“She’s all gassed up and ready to go,” Andrew announced. “But I had only enough time to throw a few things into the cooler, so we’ll have to grab some food after we land at our destination. Where the heck are we flying to anyways?”

Katia pulled out the GPS transponder.

“Looks like we’re headed to Nassau,” she announced, as the dot hovered over the island of New Providence.

After they boarded the plane, Gus and Andrew went forward and started to do a final check list, while Katia accidentally kicked something under her seat while trying to buckle up.

Reaching down she pulled out a metal pail with a handle on it.

“Hey Gus! Is this to bail us out if we take on too much water?” Katia said chuckling as she tried

to be a little funny.

“Yup! Gus replied with a grin. “It’s used to bail all right, but not water.”

“If not water, then what?” Katia replied with a crinkled face.

“Your bladder.”

Katia was already bursting at the seams, and had assumed that there was a washroom on the plane.

“Hang on Gus! I’ll be right back!” Katia bellowed.

Jumping to the ground after Andrew opened the door, Katia could hear Gus laughing from the cockpit.

Chapter Fifty-Six

Summers was still interrogated the staff at the Senator’s residence, about an hour after she hung up from last talking to Bill, when her cell rang.

“Most probably Bill,” Summers thought.

“Hi Summers,” Harris announced, not even giving Summers a chance to respond. “We just touched down at The Executive airport. Have you been following any of Eddy’s updates?”

“Sorry Bill, but I’ve been just too busy interviewing the Senator’s staff.”

“Any luck with that?”

“None. Some of them were pretty vague and inconsistent with their answers though. Even the one waitress who said that she was positive that she saw them go into the kitchen, has done an about face,” Summers reported. “I’m just guessing, but it appears to me that they have been instructed on what to say.”

“It doesn’t matter. Cyclops has tracked the chopper the Blacks escaped in, back to this airport.

They departed shortly after landing, along with another passenger, in a small twin prop plane operated by Excalibur Air. It’s reportedly to have just landed in Nassau a few minutes ago.”

“Looks like they’ve got a bit of a jump on us,” Summers interjected.

“That’s not the only person who has a jump on us. Cyclops also picked up images of Reid arriving at the Executive Airport exactly at the time the Blacks took off. She went into an old hangar about an hour ago, and hasn’t come out since,” Harris detailed.

“She’s probably trying to find a pilot to get her to Nassau,” Summers speculated. “It’s obvious that Reid has been tailing the Blacks all along, but I’m still wondering what she’s up to and why she doesn’t have them in her custody yet.”

“Not to worry. As long as Eddy keeps an eye on the Blacks with Cyclops, we should be able to nab them as early as tomorrow. I’m just taxiing up to the hangar that Cyclops spotted Agent Reid head into, and with any luck I’ll catch up to her before she gets a chance to take off. I’ve got some questions for her, and she better have a damn good reason why she went off the grid!”

“I’ll get over to The Executive Airport as fast as I can,” Summers replied.

Harris, along with his agents hopped out and briskly made their way to the decrepit building as soon as his jet pulled up to the second to last hangar. With the noise from their jet heading back to its hangar impeding any verbal orders, Harris motioned for two of his agents to cover the rear of the building. After waiting several minutes to make sure his men were in position, Harris gave orders over his Bluetooth to proceed cautiously into the hanger.

“What kind of place is this?” an agent called out silently, as the vintage antiques were lit up from their flashlights. “Looks like someone parked all these planes back during the war, and

either lost the key to the hangar or forgot where he parked them.”

“There’s a light coming from a door in the back sir,” announced one of the agents.

The agents searched the rest of the hangar, and finding no sign of Agent Reid, they cautiously made their way to the source of the light. Taking a quick peek into the adjacent room, they charged into the room, only to find several shop workers engaged with their job at hand.

Harris motioned for his men to scatter and search the entire room. Walking up to a man grinding some metal, Harris tapped him on the shoulder.

“Yes, what is.....,” the man said stopping short as he spotted the gun at Harris’s side.

“Are you in charge here?” asked Harris.

“No. Gus McGregor is.”

“You didn’t happen to see a woman come in here by any chance, did you?”

“Yup. I believe that she and Gus headed to the main museum about 15 minutes ago.”

“How do I get to the museum?”

“Head back into the hangar and turn left. Go through the last door on the left and into the breezeway. It’ll lead you right into the museum.”

“Thanks,” Harris said, and then whistled out to his agents for them to return.

* * * * *

Katia had just stepped out of the washroom when she unexpectedly spotted Harris and the other agents entering on the opposite side of the hangar.

“How the hell did they find me?” Katia asked herself, perplexed.

Quickly she turned around and joined in with a small tour group that happened to be passing by. Moving to the rear of the group, Katia slipped behind a large wall display and disappeared through the side door.

With the props on the Grumman Goose already whirling, Katia ran to the door near the tail and hopped in.

“Let’s go!” she said hurriedly.

“What’s the hurry all of a sudden?” asked Gus.

“Because the guys who are trying to find the Blacks before we do, are in the museum right now!”

Without saying another word Gus edged the throttles forward and headed to the runway, then contacted the tower for immediate take off clearance.

“Attention! Attention!” a voice came over the museum’s intercom. “I have just been informed, that if anyone is interested, a recently restored Grumman Goose will be taking flight shortly. You can get a glimpse of the plane as it passes by the opened main hangar doors. It’s being flown by the museum’s founder, Gus McGregor.”

Harris was listening vaguely to the announcement, and paid no heed to it until he heard the name of Gus McGregor being broadcast. Knowing that Agent Reid had been spotted with him, he grabbed a couple of his men and ran towards the hangar door. The roar of the planes engines echoed through the hangar as the Grumman slowly taxied by, just as Harris arrived at the doors. Katia swiftly slunk back into her chair after she spotted Harris and his men arrive at the hangar doors.

Bill pulled out his cell as the Grumman headed onto the runway.

“Hi Eddy. I’ve got another little favor to ask you,” Harris requested.

“You know that I’m busier than a one armed paper hangar, so it better be little!” Eddy replied with some irritation.

“An old Grumman Goose plane is just flying out of the Executive Airport as we speak. Put a tail on it with Cyclops, will you?” asked Harris.

“Sure, but no more requests for a while Bill. I’m having trouble enough trying to keep the surveillance of the Blacks under wraps from my superiors,” Eddy replied annoyed, and then hung up the phone.

Summers had finally located Agent Harris at the airport, when the Grumman Goose slowly lifted off the runway and floated into the late afternoon sky.

“Hi Bill. Sure is a nice old bird that just took off,” Summers declared. “Didn’t know you were interested in vintage aircraft.”

“I’m not! I’m only interested in one of the passengers. I caught a glimpse of Reid peering out one of the windows!”

“She sure does get around and always seems to be just one step ahead of us,” Summers declared .

“Yes, it is of some concern, but don’t torment yourself over it. We’ll catch up to Reid and the Blacks soon enough. But first, we need to get our jet back here.”

After making a quick call to the pilot who had just flown them to the airport, Harris cursed and then quickly made another call. Slamming his cell phone shut in anger, Harris cursed again.

“What’s the problem?” asked Summers.

“It appears that a landing gear warning light has come on and the pilot is trying to track down a mechanic. Then I called our Agency to request for a backup plane, but of coarse, there are no

other jets available.

If the pilot can't get the plane fixed soon, we may have to hire or commandeer another plane. In the meantime, we'll just have to sit tight until the landing gear is given the go ahead,” Harris said dispiritedly.

“Hopefully it's not too serious a problem and we can make the island by nightfall,” Summers added.

“Hopefully,” Harris agreed.

Harris's cell rang again.

“Hello.”

“Hi Bill, it's Eddy.”

“What's up?”

“You'll never guess where that Grumman Goose appears to be heading?”

“Let me take a wild guess. Nassau?”

“You got it!”

“Thanks Eddy. Just keep track of them. We've got some mechanical problems with our plane and I don't know when we'll be airborne.”

“Not to worry. I put in a request for a couple more days of testing on Cyclops with head office and I just received the go ahead from my superiors. Just get your ass over to Nassau. Cyclops will take care of the rest.”

“I only wish that Cyclops could just shoot a laser at the Blacks, but that technology probably won't happen in my lifetime.”

“It'll be here sooner than you think Bill,” Eddy said optimistically. “The second generation of

Cyclops is already on the drawing board, with those capabilities in mind. Although, with how long it's already taken you to try and catch the Blacks, Cyclops 2 will probably beat you to the punch when it's due to become operational.....two years from now," Eddy said chuckling.

"Very funny Eddy. Always the comedian," Harris rebuked.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

Present Day - Nassau, Bahamas

The crystal green/blue clear water below us glistened in the late afternoon sun, as Nissan prepared for landing at the Nassau International Airport. It is no wonder that tourists are drawn to the Caribbean throughout the year. With its warm climate and shallow waters, it makes it the perfect destination vacationers or scuba enthusiasts to try and find one of the many undiscovered shipwrecks still laden with pirate treasure. The Blacks never seem to tire of the islands as they return year after year.

The one and a half hour flight to Nassau gave the Blacks a chance to fill in Zara, Vivi and Nissan with all the details about the predicament they were in. Zara didn't say much during the trip, but listened intensely to Mary's explanation.

“Is there anyway you can you help them Zara? Vivi pleaded after hearing about their dilemma.

Although she disliked Vivi putting her in this position, she missed the covert operations when

involved with the Mossad, and accepted the challenge.

“I am willing to help the two of you on one condition,” Zara announced, while giving Vivi a stern look.

“What’s the condition?” Mary asked.

“That you follow and execute my instructions without any questions, no matter what they are!

Understood?” Zara asserted.

“Understood,” the Blacks replied almost simultaneously.

“Now which forged passports are you currently using?”

“The Hansons.”

“How many times have you gone through customs with them?

“This will be our first,” replied Mary.

“They’ll have to do for now. The CIA or FBI will still be able to track us here, but it will take them a while to find out where we’re staying. By that time, we’ll be long gone. After we find accommodation for the night, I’ll provide you with a new set of passports. Now, just let Nissan do most of the talking to the Customs officers and we should have no problems.....Mr. and Mrs. Hanson!” Zara added, just as a reminder of who they were supposed to be.

* * * * *

Fort Lauderdale

“How long does it take to fly to Nassau?” Katia called out from her seat.

“What?” replied Gus with his hand placed over his ear.

“How much longer?” she repeated.

Gus just shook his head, indicating that he still couldn’t hear her. Then he motioned for her to come forward to the cabin.

“Andrew,” Gus said over his headset. “Be a good chap and trade places with Miss Reid for a while, will you?”

“You got it.”

As Katia approached the cockpit, Andrew indicated that he was trading places with her. After buckling in, Katia placed the headphones on while Andrew showed her where the on/off button was to communicate with the headset.

“How long does it take to get to Nassau?” Katia yelled through the headset.

“You don’t have to yell! I may be old, but I’m not completely deaf. At least not until now,” Gus said as he held one side of the earphones off his head.

“Sorry.”

“It’ll take us over an hour to get there with this headwind.”

“I’ve got a question to ask if you don’t mind.”

“Sure. You asking me if I’m available for a date or something?”

“Not a date, but a girl does always like to be taken out for a bite to eat,” Katia said smiling.

The late afternoon sun was breaking thru the starboard window and illuminating the cabin and its occupants in a warm orange glow. Katia couldn’t help but notice how handsome Gus was for a man of his age.

“Then a date it is!” Gus replied with a chuckle. “I feel I owe you a dinner for giving you a hard

time back at the hangar. You can pick the restaurant as soon as you find the culprits you're after....so should I make the reservation for around 8:00 later tonight?" Gus asked optimistically.

"Thanks for your vote of confidence Gus, but the Blacks seem to have become quite illusive. They have been able to elude both the Raven Claw organization I told you about, as well as myself."

"So then we should make the reservation for 8:30!" Gus said encouragingly.

"8:30 it is!" Katia said playing along with Gus's implied confidence.

Katia felt a tap on the shoulder. It was Andrew, pointing and indicating that he wanted to borrow her headset. Katia obliged.

"How's the plane running Gus?" Andrew asked. "Do you need me back up here?"

"Not right now, Betsy is running just fine. Besides, Miss Reid is a lot easier on the eyes than an old wrinkled bird like you."

Taking Gus's comments all in stride, Andrew just shook his head and returned the headset to Katia.

"Hey Gus. I have another question for you," Katia said after donning the headset.

"Sure, fire away."

"I just wanted to know why you really decided to help me."

"Well, who wouldn't want to come to the aid of a beautiful damsel in distress."

"You don't have to butter me up any more Gus. Remember, we have a dinner date for 8:30."

"Okay. I'll stop kidding around, at least for the moment. After listening to your story back in the hanger, and finding out that new information has surfaced which may unravel the mystery surrounding the JFK conspiracy theory, I felt a little obligated to help."

“How so?” asked Katia inquisitively.

“It was back in 1944 during the war when I was stationed in England.”

“You look way too young to have served in WWII,” Katia interrupted.

“Flattery will get you everywhere my young lady,” Gus said with a wily grin.

“If you must know, I stole my older brother’s ID, and enlisted at the tender age of 15. Most people thought we were twins anyhow, so it was no problem impersonating him. He stayed on the farm and never did see any action. After getting my wings and with a few kills under my belt, I volunteered for Operation Aphrodite. It was a mission which involved pilots to fly B-17’s filled with explosives over Europe, then send them crashing into known V-1 missile locations. The pilots of course were supposed to bail out before the plane hit its target.”

“That sounds absolutely outrageous!” Katia declared.

“Yes it may sound a little preposterous, but it was vital that the Allies started hitting back at the German V1 rocket program, which was wreaking havoc on England.

Anyways, it was an early morning in August of 44’ I believe, and I was heading to the airport when my car got a flat tire. As I was changing the tire, a passing vehicle ran over my extended leg and luckily only broke my ankle.”

“Didn’t the driver see you?” Katia interrupted.

“Apparently not.

Several cars had already zipped past me which raised quite a bit of dust, making it difficult for anyone to see anything at 4:00 in the morning. The guy didn’t even stop. Probably thought they just hit a bump in the road.”

“So, that’s why you have a slight limp.”

"Better that, than what would have happened if the car was a couple of feet closer to me. I would have been squashed like a bug on a windshield." Gus said as he stared out into space.

"Gus. Are you alright?"

"Yes, sorry. It's been a while since I've even thought about it. So where was I.....Oh yes, my foot being run over. Obviously I had to be replaced. I found out the next day while laying in a hospital bed, that the plane that I was designated to fly, had exploded prematurely over eastern England. Both pilots were killed."

"That's horrible," Katia replied regretfully.

"Yes, that in itself is horrible. But what's worse, is the pilot who replaced me, was a Kennedy."

"A relation to President Kennedy?" Katia asked inquisitively.

"Yes. One of his brothers," Gus answered solemnly. "Ever since then, I've felt that I needed to pay back a debt of gratitude, but never knew how. Not until now."

Guy pretended to fidgeted with some of the instruments, then stared out the window.

"You know that it wasn't your fault that you weren't on that plane, don't you Gus?" Katia said trying to ease his visible pain.

"Yes, but somehow I still feel responsible. Maybe by me helping you find the Blacks and recovering their material, which might solve the conspiracy controversy, will in someway repay my debt. The Kennedy family, as well as all Americans, have a right to know who was behind the assassination."

"Yes, I believe you're right Gus."

"And, why the hell do I or anybody else have to keep waiting for the original JFK file to be opened? Just tell me Why?" Gus said, starting to get agitated. "The government should just get it

over with and bloody well release the file.”

“Calm down Gus,” Katia said trying to appease the pilot. “I totally agree. But it’ll probably never happen. That’s why it’s so important for us to find Mr. and Mrs. Black. I’ve seen the photographs and a map that Black has in his possession, and believe me, it’s an eye opener. If the general public could only see Black’s evidence before Raven Claw destroys it, I’m sure that the public would demand that the JFK case be reopened immediately.”

The sun had began to set, and they both stared at the colorful sky, contemplating the undertaking that lay ahead of them.

“Made it just in time,” Gus announced breaking the silence. He had spotted landfall.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

Nassau, Bahamas

After checking into the Atlantis Royal Tower Resort, Mary and Erik made their way to the room, then removed the disguises that they had put on during the flight. The Royal Tower is probably the most well known and most recognizable hotel in the Caribbean as it embodies the Lost Continent theme. Zara knew that anyone that might be pursuing them, would more than likely expect them to be staying in an off the beaten track, dump of a hotel. She had other plans. Staying in an upscale hotel provided numerous exit points, the ability to blend in with the larger crowds and of course, all the comforts that an upscale hotel provides. Vivi also knew the manager, who was kind enough to give them a room for the night

As Mary and Erik plopped themselves face first onto the bed, in hopes of catching some shuteye, Zara called out, “Not so fast. We have some work to do.”

Zara threw her suitcase on the adjoining bed and dialed the numbers to the combinations locks.

The locking snaps sprung open and Zara lifted the lid. Punching in another set of numbers on the original lock, popped open a secret compartment from the bottom of the suitcase.

“Vivi. Could you please go and get some dinner for us while I make some new identities for these two,” Zara requested.

Zara then removed a small compact camera, several sets of passports, miniature laminating machine, rubber stamps and small stacks of cash from varying countries. After setting up her accoutrements on a nearby desk and then taking several photographs of the Blacks, Zara began the detailed task of reproducing some exceptional passports.

Vivi returned roughly an hour later with some fabulous smelling food, and Zara had just completed two sets of new identities for the Blacks. Zara then passed each of them a short stack of documents consisting of fake passports and drivers licenses.

“You are now Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. Here are some notes on where you work and live. On this second set of passports, you will be Mr. and Mrs. McKinnon. Study the notes well, and please don’t get them mixed up! Once you’ve thoroughly memorized the information, give the notes back to me so I can destroy them. Also, here is some cash to tide you over a while. Sorry, I wish I had more.”

“Just hang on!” Erik interjected as he reached into the side pocket on his cargo shorts.

“The chopper pilot passed this envelope to me just before we landed by Nissan’s plane.”

Opening the envelope revealed a stack of one hundred dollar bills.

“That should last us a while,” Mary said thankfully.

“Don’t count on it. Traveling through the Caribbean can be very costly,” Vivi piped in. “This little bit of food I just picked up was almost fifty dollars!”

“Yes, we’ll have to be careful on what we purchase,” replied Zara.

“Well, I don’t know about you guys, but I’m starved,” Vivi said opening the containers of take out food.

Pulling out grouper burgers, fries and conch salads, they relished every morsel of the Bahamian cuisine, as everyone was famished.

Finishing her meal quicky, Zara suddenly headed for the door.

“I’ll be back in a while. And by the way, enjoy the accommodations folks. After today, we’ll be sleeping wherever we can, including the plane, beach and even park benches if need be.”

“So why did you check us in to this expensive hotel?” asked Mary.

“Don’t worry about it. It was complements of the manager. You can thank Vivi,” Zara proclaimed, then closed the door behind her.

Vivi had met the manager several years earlier while vacationing in Nassau. Upon checking into the hotel, Vivi happened to overhear that the manager was having trouble finding a pilot willing to land on a remote island, because of it’s short runway. When Vivi learned that it was for an urgent family matter, she offered her services immediately. The manager kept in touch with Vivi and Nissan ever since and always reminded them that if they ever needed anything, all they had to do was ask. Vivi had now called in her favor.

It was later in the evening by the time Zara returned to the hotel room. Everyone was asleep except for Vivi, who was keeping vigil.

“It doesn’t appear that anyone followed us, but I’m afraid that our movements might have been

tracked by satellite surveillance,” Zara said apprehensively. “Personally I think that it is only a matter of time before we are caught.”

“How so?” asked Vivi.

“I checked with some of my contacts via satellite phone, and they confirmed the Blacks story about the surveillance satellite called Cyclops, as well as the Raven Claw organization. They had heard rumors about Cyclops’s capabilities for months, but had no idea that it was already up and running. If this Cyclops satellite ever pinpoints the Blacks’ location, there will be virtually no where to hide, and this Raven Claw organization will be on us in a flash.”

“Maybe you should tell the Blacks that it maybe in their best interest to just turn themselves in?” asked Vivi.

“No. You know me better than that Vivi. If they turn themselves in, you’ll probably see their obituaries in the morning newspaper. Listen, I gave my word that I would help them escape and that’s exactly what I’m going to do. We’ll just have to pray for some divine intervention. I’m heading out again to keep watch for the rest of the night, but I’ll check back with you periodically.”

* * * * *

The sun was just touching the horizon when the Grumman Goose touched down quietly on the calm waters at the Paradise Island Airport. Gus thought that the conditions were perfect to test out a water landing on the newly restored old bird, plus the airport was in close proximity to where the GPS transponder had the Blacks located. Even though the airport was small and had

little traffic, it took Gus, Andrew and Reid a fair bit of time to clear Customs, as Reid had to fill in special forms so she could carry a weapon.

“I’ve booked us into the Comfort Inn, which isn’t far from here. Gus and I are in room 212, and you’re in the adjacent room 214, Miss Reid,” announced Andrew after he hung up his cell.

“Thanks Andrew,” Katia replied graciously.

Although Katia was not bashful, she was appreciative that she would have her own private room.

As the taxi drove to them to their hotel, Gus and Andrew reviewed the performance of the Goose, while Katia peered at the transponder and pondered her next move.

“Aren’t you checking in Miss Reid?” asked Gus as he exited the cab.

“I’ll check in later. I want to get to the Blacks sooner than later. If Raven Claw isn’t here by now, then I’m sure they’ll be here by the morning.”

“So, we’re still on for dinner at 8:30 then!” Gus said confidently.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence Gus. Let’s just hope that the Blacks cooperate once I catch up to them. I still can’t figure out what spooked them into running from Tony and me. Anyways, I’ll see the two of you later tonight. Oh, and by the way, that was a great water landing Gus. Didn’t even know that we had touched down.”

“Thanks. Break a leg,” replied Gus as he closed the taxi door.

“Where to Miss?” asked the cabby impatiently.

“To the Atlantis Royal Tower,” Katia replied as she plugged the GPS transponder into her laptop.

“Now where exactly in the hotel are you two hiding?” Katia thought as a 3D cross sectional blue print drawing showing the floor plan appeared on the screen. “There you are! Why the hell are

the two of you staying in an upscale resort instead of hiding in a remote location? You probably have no idea how much danger you are in!"

"Here you go Miss. The Atlantis Royal Tower." The cabby announced suddenly, as the hotel was only a short drive from the Comfort Inn.

"Thank you," Katia replied.

Without hesitation, Katia headed for the elevator and pushed 8. As the doors opened, Katia headed left, guided by the detailed map on her laptop. Zeroing in on the room, Katia was about to knock on the door when her cell phone suddenly rang.

"Hello," she whispered, taking several quick steps away from the door.

"What ever you do, do not approach the Blacks!"

"What do you mean, don't approach the Blacks. I finally found the Blacks, and now your telling me not to even talk to them? I'm standing practically right in front of their hotel room door, so you better have a damn good explanation."

"They are traveling with an ex-Mossad agent," Tony enlightened Katia.

"A what?"

"An ex-Mossad. Welcome to the world of James Bond!"

"You sure know how to make a girl's day Tony," Katia exuded.

"Oh, and that's not all. I had a buddy of mine infiltrate the airwaves from the Cyclops ground station, and found out that Raven Claw has been using Cyclops to track the Blacks. Raven Claw most likely knows exactly where the Blacks are located, as well as who they're traveling with. My contact also mentioned they might even be tracking you as well, K." Tony declared sounding very concerned.

“Raven Claw must have some deep rooted connections in the Government or at the very least, connections with someone who is in charge of the Cyclops operations, to get access to such a high level surveillance system,” Katia declared as she walked a few steps further away from the door. “It appears that we have definitely underestimated the importance of Mr. Black’s material, Tony. Is there anything else I need to know about the company the Blacks are traveling with?”

“Yes. The pilot is an ex-air force pilot from Israel, and I’m assuming that the co-pilot may also have some military training, as they knew each other when living in Israel before becoming partners in Excalibur Air. If you think that you’re just going to knock on their door and receive a warm welcome, you should think again. I don’t know how the Blacks got involved with this group, but they are in good company. I sure wouldn’t want to go nose to nose with any Mossad agent at any time. She’d probably rip your head off before you could even say boo.”

“She?”

“Yes. She!” Tony exclaimed. “I’ve just sent you an email profiling the three people the Blacks are traveling with. Walk away now! Remember that the Blacks for some reason don’t trust either of us anymore, and they’re armed as well. That makes the odds 3 to 1 at the very least and 5 to 1 if the pilots are involved in some way. You’ll have to hang back and bide your time until you have the opportunity to find the Blacks by themselves.”

“But the Blacks are just a few steps away.”

“Katia, just leave now and call me later.”

Katia disappointedly hung up from Tony and checked her Blackberry for Tony’s email, as she stood in front of the elevator door.

An image of the Mossad agent along with her stats appeared on the screen, just as the elevator door opened. Katia walked forward without looking, and bumped shoulders with a person who was getting off. Her phone was knocked out her grasp and landed hard on the elevator floor.

“I’m sorry,” Katia said apologetically, as she rubbed her shoulder and looked up.

Katia was staring face to face with the person displayed on her phone.

“That’s quite alright. Here, let me get your phone for you,” Zara said as she bent down and reached for the phone.

Katia began to panic at the thought of the woman finding a photo of herself, displayed on a complete stranger’s phone. Zara picked up the phone that was lying face down, and Katia could see the light from the screen reflecting off the tile floor. She froze, not knowing whether she should scream, run or pull her weapon. As Zara turned the phone face up, the screen suddenly went blank.

“Looks like your phone is toast,” Zara said, before handing it to Katia.

“Oh shit,” Katia exclaimed trying to sound disappointed, but she was in truth thoroughly relieved. She swiftly took her hand off her gun, that had been concealed in the back of her pants.

The screen was not only blank, but had several cracks running across its face. The elevator door started to close but Zara held it open.

“Well, it serves me right for not looking while I’m texting,” Katia said thinking quickly. “Good thing I wasn’t driving.”

“Yes, good thing. Check with the front desk. They can probably tell you where you can buy a new phone,” Zara said as she released the door.

“Thanks. And again, sorry.” Katia added, just as the elevator doors closed.

“That was close call, and man, she’s built like a brick shit house!” Katia thought as she rubbed her shoulder again.

As Katia got off the elevator and was walking towards the front desk, she gave her phone a few shakes, but nothing happened. She then noticed that the battery lid was slightly ajar, so she snapped it shut and the image of Zara instantly radiated from the screen. With a sigh of relief, Katia headed out of the lobby into the warm salty night air.

“Can I get you a cab Miss?” asked the doorman.

“Thanks, but since it’s such a nice clear night, I think I’ll walk,” replied Katia. She had also noticed that the Comfort Inn Sign was a short distance from where she stood.

With a slight limp, Katia walked slow but steadily and found herself in awe from the countless stars filling the night sky. She was so stricken by their beauty, that she almost walked into a light pole.

“For Pete’s sake. I’m an accident looking for a place to happen,” she whispered to herself, and looked at her watch to see what time it was.

“I better hurry it up a bit if I still want to make my dinner date. At least the night won’t be a total right off,” Katia thought.

Continuing her saunter, she pulled her phone out to call Gus while stepping off the curb. A screech of tires filled the peaceful night air, followed by a dull thump!

Katia’s body was suddenly propelled airborne, as she had inadvertently walked directly into the path of a speeding scooter.

* * * * *

The aroma of bacon, eggs, coffee and pancakes permeated the hotel room, waking Erik from his deep slumber. Erik had had a restless sleep from listening to party goers whopping and hollering in the hallway until the middle of the night and sirens blaring throughout the night.

"Time for the both of you to get out of bed," Vivi called out.

"You'd better come and eat some of this breakfast that Zara got for us, as I anticipate this will be a long day."

The Blacks were nearly finished eating their breakfast, when the muffled sound of a cell phone could be heard ringing. Everyone looked around and checked their cells, only to find that the sound was coming from Erik's backpack. The phone must have rung almost a half dozen times, before Erik was able to answer.

"Hello.....Hello!"

But there was no reply. Erik was just about to press end, when he heard a faint voice.

"Mr. Black?.....Hello....."

"Yes, Hello," Erik replied quickly.

"It's about bloody time! Don't you check your messages?"

"Marcel?" Erik asked, suddenly recognizing his voice. "How did you get my number?"

"From the business card you gave to the Senator. Now listen carefully. I'm calling just to relay a message - The One Eyed Monster is keeping an eye on you, but will be blinded for a short period of time, starting at exactly 8:00 am today - Did you get that?"

"Yes, but...."

Click! The receiver went dead.

"Who was it?" Zara asked immediately.

“It was Marcel. Senator Chalmer’s head chef.”

“What did he want, one of your famous recipes?” joked Mary.

“No, he just relayed a peculiar message. He said that The One Eyed Monster is keeping an eye on us, but would be blinded for a while starting at exactly 8:00 this morning.”

“What the hell kind of message is that?” Nissan blurted out.

“I have no idea,” replied Erik as he pondered the statement. “One Eyed Monster.....One Eyed monst, Cyclops! It’s obvious that Marcel is telling us that Cyclops will be shut down or maybe out of range, starting at exactly 8:00 today.”

“He’s also shrewdly telling us that Raven Claw already knows exactly where we are right now!” Zara surmised. “They’re probably already on the island or soon will be. We need to get out of here and off this island now! Nissan and Vivi, you need to get to the airport and get the plane ready for immediate departure. We’ll pack everything up here and follow shortly.”

Chapter Fifty-Nine

“We’re a go for take off,” the pilot announced after he entered the administration office at the Executive Airport .

Harris and the rest of his crew had been trying to catch some shuteye in the office chairs and a single lounge sofa. Only Summers had a half decent sleep because she was graciously given the sofa.

“Sorry for the delay, but we had to get a part flown in,” the pilot added as the agents gathered their belongings. “I’ve arranged for food to be on the plane, so as soon as you get on board, we’ll be able to take off.”

“Thanks,” Harris said grumpily.

The bright morning sunrise blinded the agents as they departed the office. Blocking the sun with their hands, they made their way onto the plane heavy eyed and fell into the comfy leather chairs.

“Why the hell didn’t we just sleep here last night?” blurted out one of the agents, as he rubbed his neck. “It would have been a hell of a lot more comfortable than sleeping in those office chairs.”

“You boys are getting soft,” Summers said with a smirk pretending to empathize. “I slept just fine!”

“Don’t worry Summers. Next time we’ll flip for the sofa.”

The seat belt sign illuminated in tune with its beep, interrupting the agents’ gibberish and signaling them to buckle up. Shortly before 7:00 am, Harris and his agents were flying over the Fort Lauderdale cityscape and heading south towards Nassau.

* * * * *

Arriving at the Nassau Airport fifteen minutes after Vivi and Nissan, The Blacks had already put on disguises on route that matched their new passport photos. Zara following a couple of minutes later, as she hung back in another cab just to make sure that no one had been tailing them. After clearing airport security with no problems, they headed to the Excalibur plane and buckled up. Minutes later, they were airborne.

It was a little after 7:30 am when Erik peered out his window as they flew over their hotel. He couldn’t help but take immediate interest to an old amphibious plane parked near the water’s edge at a small seaplane airport. Erik always had a keen interest in vintage memorabilia, and this plane stood out prominently with a khaki green fuselage, covered with air force decals. Erik tapped Nissan on the shoulder and motioned for him to look down.

“Man, would I ever like to take a spin in that baby.”

“That looks like one of Gus McGregor’s old birds,” Nissan replied. “I know him quit well.

Maybe I can get him to take you up for a spin one day.”

“That would be great!” Erik replied exuberantly.

Banking quickly, the plane rose in altitude as Nissan took a headed south.

“So, have you come up with a plan yet?” Mary asked Zara.

“Yes, but I think your husband should be in on the conversation. Vivi, can you please trade places with Erik? Thanks.”

“What’s up?” Erik asked as he sat down beside Zara.

“I’ve come up with a plan, to hopefully help us elude Raven Claw.

We start by heading south until 8:00, when Cyclops is supposedly scheduled to stop tracking us.

Nissan will then hopscotch to several islands, leaving us discretely on one of them. After

dropping us off Nissan and Vivi will stop off at a few more islands before heading back to

Florida and conduct their business as usual. The three of us will rent a boat or hop water taxis

and travel from island to island, until we rendezvous with Nissan at a pre-arranged island on a

specific date. We will repeat the process until I know that Raven Claw is no longer tracking us.

Also, we’ll have to be prepared to readjust our strategy should unexpected circumstances occur.”

“How long do you think that we’ll have to island hop?” Mary asked.

“As long as it takes,” Zara replied sternly. “Or, both of you can just turn over the evidence to Raven Claw for them to destroy. Then, if you can convince them not to get rid of you on the spot, you might be able go back to living a relatively normal life.”

“What do you mean by relatively normal life?” Mary asked a little unnerved.

“In my past experiences, in cases similar to yours, things will never go back to the way they were. You will always be wondering in the back of your mind if someone is watching you, and when they might start harassing you for further information,” Zara stated looking concerned.

“So what do you suggest? That we should just go to the press and go public with the material I have with me?” Erik asked.

“I believed you mentioned that the material you have are just photocopies, and the originals are hidden away in a safe?”

“Yes.”

“And does Raven Claw know that originals existence?”

“Yes,” Erik said dejectedly.

“Then if you go public with just the photocopies, Raven Claw will firstly discredit them as fakes. Then they will find a way to acquire the original photos and film, as well as any other material they think necessary. Your safest bet is to find a place to stay hidden until things cool off a bit. I believe that we have a good head start on Raven Claw, and having that satellite system off our tail will definitely be to our advantage. Let’s just hope that you deciphered the Senator’s message properly Erik, because if you didn’t, Raven Claw will be on to us in no time flat.”

For the next half hour, Zara sat near the cockpit discussing the details with Nissan and Vivi through an extra set of headphones. All Mary and Erik could do, was to sit back and try to relax, which was easier said than done under the circumstances.

Chapter Sixty

Fort Lauderdale was just disappearing on the horizon when Harris pulled out the satellite phone to make a call.

“Hi Eddy.”

“Where the hell have you been? I’ve been trying to reach you for well over an hour!”

“Sorry Eddy, but it was a long night and I must have slept through your call. We just left Fort Lauderdale about ten minutes ago. Are the Blacks still on Nassau?”

“No, the Blacks are no longer on Nassau. Cyclops spotted them taking off heading south, with Excalibur Air, about 15 minutes ago,” Eddy said, then gave Harris our flight coordinates. “You should be able to make visual contact in about 30 minutes at your present speed.”

“Thanks Eddy. Please keep me posted if they should make any course changes,” Harris requested.

“Oh, before we hang up, I almost forgot to tell you, Cyclops has confirmed that there are five people on board the plane by using the facial recognition program. Nissan and Vivi, the owners of Excalibur Air, Mr. and Mrs. Black and the fifth occupant is a female that we have just identified as a retired Mossad Agent, that is known as Zara. Sorry, no last name. She may prove to be a handful if she’s in any way helping the Blacks.”

“It’s most likely just coincidental that she’s traveling with them, and it doesn’t matter who she is Eddy,” Harris replied confidently. “I’m sure my agents will be able to handle themselves.”

“Just like they handled the Blacks in Florida?” Eddy said giving Harris the gears again.

“Always the joker Eddy,” Harris said. “Tell you what. If I don’t finish this case by the end of today, dinner will be on me. Your choice of restaurants. Deal?”

“Deal.” Eddy replied and hung up the phone.

Harris walked up to the pilots and gave them the coordinates for them to change course. Returning to his seat, Harris boasted, “Eddy has just pinpointed the Black’s location and we’ll have them in our sights in a half hour or so. We should be home for dinner. Case closed!”

“Any reports of Reid following the Blacks?” Summers asked.

“Who cares,” Harris replied snootily. “After she landed in Nassau, we unintentionally lost track of her, and I didn’t bother to ask Eddy to track her down. Just sit back and relax. We should be home for dinner. In my opinion, this mission is basically complete.”

Eddy was monitoring Harris’s jet close in on the Blacks when the phone rang.

“Hello, Eddy here.”

“Is this Eddy Hobson?” asked the caller.

“Yes it is. How can I help you?”

"This is General Noland, up in Washington. I understand that you are in charge of operations for the Cyclops Project."

"Yes that is correct," Eddy replied, a little puzzled.

"I have orders from the Pentagon that you are to redeploy Cyclops to the Middle East immediately. I'll fax you the requisition as well as the coordinates."

"I can't!" Eddy spouted out. "It's currently being used on a top secret assignment for the CIA."

Eddy couldn't tell the General that he was actually doing a favor for an old army buddy, as his ass surely would have been fired.

"Sorry Mr. Hobson. This a direct order from the Pentagon. You are to redeploy Cyclops by 8:00am EST today!" ordered the General loudly. "Is that understood Mr. Hobson?"

"Understood," replied Eddy sheepishly, as he glanced at the clock on the wall.

"For Christ's sake, it's 7:55!" Eddy said, talking out loud to himself.

As Eddy started punching his keyboard, he picked up his phone.

"Hello, Summers here."

"Put Bill on now!"

"It's Eddy. Sound like he's in a panic."

"Hi Eddy, you missing me already? It's only been five minu....."

"Cyclops has to be redeployed," Eddy interrupted.

"What!"

"Sorry Bill, but orders just came in from a General Noland direct from the Pentagon, and Cyclops is to be redeployed by 8 am today!"

"Shit!" exclaimed Harris as he looked at his watch. "That's in just 5 minutes."

“Actually less than three minutes. Your watch must be running a little fast.”

“Can you delay the redeployment for a while?” asked Harris agitatedly.

“Sorry, but orders are orders. If I piss off the Pentagon, I probably would not only be demoted, but you would also loose any chance of using Cyclops at a later date. Listen, I’ve still have you on screen for another minute, and you’re closing in fast on the Black’s location. You should have a visual on the Excalibur plane anytime now, just off your starboard side.

“Still no visual Eddy,” Harris said peering out his window.

“Keep looking, you’re almost on top of them,” Eddy said as he looked at the clock.

“Nothing, Eddy.”

“Sorry Bill, you’re on your own,” Eddy said dejectedly as he pushed the enter key to initiate Cyclops’s new coordinates.

“We just passed them, below and to the left!” one of the agents suddenly called out.

“Eddy, we’ve got them in sight!” Harris announced to Eddy, but the line was already dead.

Harris walked up to the cockpit and instructed the pilot to circle around.

* * * * *

“Isn’t that a little close?” Vivi said to Nissan as she pointed to the jet passing by overhead.

“Yes, I’ve been keeping track of them on radar for the last 5 minutes,” replied Nissan.

“Looks like they’re turning away,” added Vivi.

A few minutes later, Nissan pointed to the radar screen.

“They’re not turning away Vivi. The plane appears to be circling back!”

“What the hell are they up to?” Vivi wondered out loud.

Less than a minute later, a thunderous roar filled the cabin as the jet flew just over the Excalibur plane, causing it to buck wildly from the jet’s tail draft. It took both Nissan and Vivi to regain control of the plane as it had started to nosedive.

“Looks like they’re circling back again!” Vivi yelled out, pointing to the radar.

“Everyone buckle up and hang on!” Nissan shouted.

Nissan couldn’t visually see the jet coming up from behind, so he had to use the radar. Making a calculated guess, Nissan nosed the plane down to avoid another tail draft, just as the jet whizzed by.

“What the hell is going on Nissan?” Zara yelled out from the rear.

“I think that plane is trying to knock us out of the sky!” Nissan shouted back.

“It’s my guess that it’s Raven Claw!” Erik called out.

“Vivi, how far are we away from any land?” Zara asked anxiously.

“Crooked Island should be just ahead. There!” Vivi exclaimed pointing out her window. “If memory serves me correctly, there’s a private runway along the North shore. The runway is very short, but we should have no problem landing. Do you think we can make it before they run us into the ocean?”

“We’re sure going to try,” replied Nissan with confidence.

After a few more evasive moves, Nissan had the runway in sight, but the plane was flying just 200 feet above the ocean and one more nosedive or down draft could prove fatal.

“It’s going to be close. Their almost on top of us again!” Nissan exclaimed as he glanced at the radar screen, just as Vivi deployed the landing gear.

The plane landed hard, as Nissan was forced to come in hot. The jet buzzed past only a few meters above the Excalibur plane, causing it to swerve from side to side. Nissan and Vivi hammered on the brakes, but the plane didn't appear to be slowing.

“End of the runway is coming up Nissan!” Vivi called out.

Finally the brakes dug in, stopping the planes only a few feet from the end of the runway.

“Let's move!” Zara yelled out as she opened the door.

Everyone grabbed some gear and immediately filed out of the plane. They were about to make a run for the trees, when Zara called out.

“I can't believe it,” she said pointing. “I think they are going to try and land that jet on this short runway!”

The jet had circled around and was heading straight towards them.

Chapter Sixty-One

“The runway isn’t long enough Agent Harris,” warned the pilot.

“Just land the god damn plane. If you think that I’m going to let these guys slip out of my fingers again, you’re crazy!”

“They’ll never make it,” Nissan said.

“Everyone, back on the plane.....quick!” Zara ordered.

The jet flew directly over them and touched down on the tarmac, just as Nissan restarted the engines. Nissan spun the plane around quickly, then gunned the engines and followed the skid marks made from the braking jet. The wind blew wildly inside the cabin as Zara purposely kept the door open.

As Nissan glided his plane slowly airborne, he could see that the jet had definitely overshot the runway. Zara immediately asked Erik to grab hold of her belt as she braced herself against the edge of the open door and fired several rounds from her pistol, aiming at their engines.

She then swung the door shut with Erik’s assistance, and then gave Nissan the thumbs up after securing the door. Nodding, he shoved the throttles forward. Zara had instructed Nissan to take

off at the slowest speed possible, to give her a better opportunity to hit her target. As Nissan banked the plane, they could see agents pouring out of their jet and futilely fire at them.

* * * * *

“Well, looks like you were right after all,” Harris said abashed, standing by the pilot who was raking the crushed shelled overrun with his shoe.

“Looks that way,” he replied, then walked away to inspect for any damage.

Harris, along with Summers, followed the pilot around as he did his inspection, while the other agents huddled together discussing Agent Harris’s bad decision to land.

“I guess we’ll have to get some of the locals to pull us out,” Harris exclaimed after he saw that the wheels were buried up to their hubs.

“You’ll need more than a tow to get this baby back up in the air,” the pilot said agitated, as he inspected the engines.

“Not only are the engines filled with shells from the overrun, it appears that someone is a good shot.”

The pilot then stuck his pinky in one of the holes. All Harris could do was kick at a pile of shells in frustration.

“Summers!” Harris barked out. “Call headquarters and have them dispatch a couple of smaller planes that are capable of getting us off this island. Agent Higgins, I want you to contact the nearest major airport and find out what GPS signal that plane is transmitting on. There’s more than one way to keep track of them. The rest of you can maybe go and find out

where the nearest hotel is, if there even is one. We might be stuck here for at least one night."

Harris boarded the plane and sat impatiently near Higgins, who was also the co-pilot.

"I've got them located both on radar and their GSP locator sir. Looks like they're headed northwest, towards Rum Cay Island."

"Good job Higgins," Harris replied just as the sat-phone rang.

"It's Eddy," Higgins said, passing the phone to Harris.

"Hi Eddy. What's cooking?"

"Did you nab them?"

"Nope. We ran into a slight delay and I don't want to go into all the details, but to put a long story short, we're grounded and they've flown the coop sort to speak!"

"Sorry to hear that. You know that you can still track them by using their GPS signal."

"Thanks, but we're already on it."

"Great. Oh, One more thing before we hang up. I wanted to find out what the big rush was for me to redeploy Cyclops in such a hurry, so I contacted a friend at the Pentagon. The only thing my contact could tell me, was that Cyclops was moved under the recommendation of a Senator."

"A Senator! Senator who?" quizzed Harris

"He didn't know. All he knew, that it was a Senator."

"Thanks for the info Eddy," Harris said gratefully. "Let me know if your contact learns the identity of the Senator."

"No problem," Eddy replied, then hung up.

"Why the glazed look?" Harris asked looking over to Agent Higgins.

"I don't know how to explain it sir.....but the Excalibur plane just vanished!"

Chapter Sixty-Two

“How are you making out Zara?” Vivi asked kneeling just behind the cockpit.

“Got it!” exclaimed Zara as she held up a couple of wires from her awkward position.

Zara had exchanged seats with Vivi and laid upside down looking for the GPS and radar transponder wires. While Zara was working under the console, Nissan had lowered the plane to just above sea level to avoid radar detection.

“Well.....the good news is, that no one can track us now,” Nissan called out hesitantly.

“And the bad news?” Erik shouted back, as he sensed Nissan’s uncertainty.

“We’re flying blind!”

“Just like the good old days, hey Nissan?” Vivi chuckled.

“Yup. Nothing like flying with just an altimeter, map and a compass.”

“Where are we headed?” Vivi asked Nissan.

“San Salvador, but we’ll be telling the air traffic controllers in Nassau, that we’re heading to Rum Cay, which will mislead anyone who might be listening in on the airwaves.”

“N-A-S, this Alpha Bravo One - do you read? - Over,” Vivi called out over the radio.

“Alpha Bravo One - this is Nassau Airport, go ahead.”

“N-A-S, Alpha Bravo One - heading northwes.....towards Rum Cay.....Trouble with GPS and Rada.....In Bermu..... iangle.....Compass spinni.....radio breaking up.....will contact aft.....landing,” Vivi reported as she played with the radio frequency tuner while scratching the microphone.

“That was a great idea Zara,” Nissan said smiling. “That will give us a good excuse to be flying off the grid. Now buckle up, we’ll be landing soon.”

Nissan wasn’t kidding. No sooner than they had buckled up, the Mary and Erik felt the plane bank and heard the landing gear being lowered. San Salvador Island had only been about a fifteen minute flight from Crooked Island.

“Might be a little rougher landing than usual,” Nissan called out from the cockpit.

Glancing out the window, Erik thought he caught a glimpse of a pickup truck, passing under the plane. The plane bounced and rumbled along, while trees and shrubs whizzed by.

“Some of these island airports sure are sketchy,” Erik muttered to Mary as the plane finally came to a stop. Nissan shut off only one of the engines.

“Grab your gear quick!” Nissan yelled out. “Vivi and I need to get to get airborne. If air traffic control doesn’t pick us up on their radar soon, they might send out a search party.”

Mary and Erik jumped out first. Peering through the heat waves off the pavement, Erik could see

the old truck they flew over, driving down the runway heading directly for them. Only it wasn't a runway! It was a narrow two lane highway.

“This is no airport,” Mary exclaimed in astonishment.

“No, it isn't,” Vivi said as she stepped out of the plane and quickly ran towards the truck to flag it down. Nissan had chosen to land at the northern end of the island on the seldom used Queen's Highway, as having to go through Customs at the airport would have most likely pinpointed their exact location to their adversaries.

Mary, Zara and Erik quickly unloaded their gear, while Vivi chatted with the driver of the truck.

“Good news,” reported Vivi as she returned to the plane. I've covered our unusual landing by convincing the driver that the three of you are part of a new reality TV show. I explained that the contestants get dropped off at remote locations, and then have to fulfill a scavenger hunt, before radioing to be airlifted out. And even better news, is that not only do you have a ride, but you also have a place to stay for a while. The guy owns some cottages on the other side of the island and is willing to put you up for a while.”

Vivi could talk her way into or out of anything. Her good looks didn't hurt either.

“Zara!” Vivi yelled out as she was about to close the plane door. “Nissan thinks that we should make slight change our original plans. We're already scheduled to drop off some other passengers on this island in two days. Instead of picking you up on a neighboring island in a weeks time, he'd like to pick you guys up at this same spot at 9 am, then fly all of you over to the next island. He mumbled something about the price of fuel.”

“And if you're not there for some reason?” Zara asked inquisitively.

“You know we’ll be there Zara.”

“Yes, but I always want to have a backup plan in place, just in case.”

“Then make your way to Turks and Caicos as we originally planned. We’ll meet at Sharkbites Bar & Grill near the Turtle Cove Marina in two weeks, at 1:00 sharp!

If you guys run into any problems or need some help, contact a guy by the name of Benny. He’s one of the bartenders there, and can be trusted.”

Vivi waved and blew a kiss before slamming the door shut. The second propeller slowly started to spin and within moments both engines were whirling. The plane surged forward, then rushed down the road, leaving the Blacks in a cloud of dust. Through the heat waves rising off the hot pavement, a vehicle unexpectedly came over a rise and was heading on a collision course with Nissan. The Excalibur plane hadn’t reached take off speed and struggled to get in the air. Suddenly the vehicle could be seen swerving into the shoulder, just as the plane lifted off the highway before disappearing behind a rise in the road. Moments later, the plane rose slowly and banked towards the West. The Blacks and Zara would learn at a much later date, that Nissan and Vivi had just missed colliding with the car, if it wasn’t for the quick thinking of Nissan performing a bounce take off.

“Just throw your stuff in the back,” the driver instructed as we approached the truck. The pickup was a turquoise 1971 GMC half ton, still holding a semi brilliant shine, with a few rust spots along the fender wells started to show it’s age.

“Hi, I’m Peter Findlay.”

Everyone shook hands and did the typical formal introductions, before hopping into the truck. Mary and Zara sat in the cab, while Erik jumped in the back with their luggage along with a

bunch of building materials. Peter was a well tanned middle aged Caucasian with a medium build, wearing cargo shorts, a pastel Hawaiian shirt and work boots.

As Mary and Zara chit chatted with him on route to his cottages, Peter was intrigued about the scavenger hunt and wanted to know everything about the reality show, that Vivi had cleverly fabricated to him earlier. Trying to avoid the topic, Zara just kept changing the conversation by asking him about the island, the activities, restaurants and then quizzing him about himself. Peter tried to boast that he was a descendant of the pirate John Watling, who the island was originally named after, but they soon found out he was just pulling their leg.

He was actually a fellow Canadian who retired to the island ten years ago. Peter didn't really retire, as much as he became a treasure hunter. The Bahamas, known to have been a haven for pirates, have lured many a folk seeking to find lost treasure. Peter Findlay was no exception. During a vacation to San Salvador ten years previous, Peter had heard rumors that there was still treasure somewhere on or around the island, hidden by either Captain Kidd or John Watling.

While snorkeling in a remote bay, Peter accidentally discovered several old cannons half buried in the sand, which had been uncovered from a recent storm. Nestled near the mouth of one cannon were a couple of coins stuck together. Upon verifying the authenticity and age of the coins back in Canada, Peter soon became fascinated and obsessed with the prospects of discovering more of the treasure.

“Well, here we are!” Peter exclaimed as he pulled up to several small cottages. “As you can see, I still have quite a bit of work to do before they're all finished.”

Peter had purchased the old cottages that had been damaged by a hurricane, at a bargain price.

His idea was to fix up the units and then rent them out to provide extra income for his pursuit of

the treasure. Only three of the eleven cottages were completed, but from all appearances, he was going to have a little gem of a resort once he finished the remaining eight units. The three renovated cottages were painted a medium pea green with white trim around the doors and windows. Turquoise blue shutters bookended each window. A covered porch wrapped around each cottage, with a couple of wicker chairs placed near the front door. Between each building the brilliant blue/green ocean sparkled, just beyond the stunning white sand. The remaining eight cottages, in various states of restoration, snaked a path through the natural vegetation and large palm trees that lined the beachfront property.

“They’re simple a treasure! Mary remarked enthusiastically.

“That’s what my wife keeps telling me too,” Peter replied lightheartedly. “Anyways, all the units that I’ve restored are booked, but you can bunk up in the unit I’m working on over there. It’s only about 75% finished, but at least you can have a shower and lock up your belongings while you’re out scavenging.”

“Thanks for your hospitality,” Mary exclaimed.

“You’re welcome. Oh, the grocer store is closed today due to a death in the family so you won’t be able to get any groceries. Why don’t you come by for dinner tonight, say 7:00?”

“That would be great,” Zara said gratefully.

“And bring along that list of scavenger items you’re looking for. Maybe I can lend a hand or at least point you in the right direction,” Findlay suggested.

“Thanks again. See you at 7:00.”

Chapter Sixty-Three

Nassau, Bahamas

Strips of light from partially opened blinds shimmered off the ceiling as Katia's eyes fluttered open.

"Where am I?" Katia said softly as she rubbed her eyes.

"You're in the hospital Miss Reid," Gus said sitting in a chair close to the bed.

"What the hell happened? I feel like I've been run over by a steamroller."

"You were only a clipped by a scooter," Gus smiled. "It didn't steamroll you, but it did enough damage just the same. The doctor said that you have a couple cracked ribs, a sprained ankle and a pretty good size bump on your noggin. Could have been much worse."

"Thanks for being here Gus," Katia said grunting, as she tried to sit up on her elbows. "I need to get back to the plane to follow the Bla..."

"Whoa there Missy. You just lay back and relax," Gus said as he gently eased her back to the pillow. "There's plenty of time for us to track down the Blacks, remember? You placed a tracking device on them."

"Yes, but Raven Claw will probably get to them before we do," Katia said anxiously.

Both of them were unaware that Raven Claw had no idea where the Blacks were. Gus paced the room a couple of times, pondering the situation.

"Tell you what. You rest and heal up here until the doctor gives you the OK to travel, and I'll keep on the Blacks trail. I'll either come back for you once your released or we'll rendezvous someplace," Gus said excitedly.

"Sorry Gus. Raven Claw is it's too dangerous an organization for you to deal with."

"Nonsense! I made it though the war, didn't I? Don't you worry none Miss Reid, I can take care of myself. Besides, all this running and chasing around has invigorated this old codger. Makes me feel like I'm 30 years old again."

"Thanks Gus."

"Think nothing about it. Glad to be of service to such a pretty lady. Now, here's your purse. One of the nurses gave it to me for safe keeping."

"By the way Gus, how did you find me?"

"I wasn't too worried when you broke our date for dinner," Gus said raising his eyebrows. "But I was very concerned when you still hadn't shown up by 2 a.m., so I immediately contacted the police."

Katia was a little surprised but very appreciative that almost a complete stranger would be so considerate. A tear trickled down her cheek.

“Now Laine. Why don’t you show me how this transponder of yours works, and I’ll be on my way.”

“Thanks for finally calling me by my first name Gus, but there’s something that you need to know,” she said sheepishly. “My real name is Katia Cummings. I work for the FBI, but not in the capacity of a regular agent. All I can tell you, is that I am assigned to a Special Unit in charge of...never mind. My assignment is classified, and if I tell you anything more, I’d have to shoot you!” Katia said sternly.

Gus was taken aback slightly, before Katia broke a sly but painful grin.

“Payback!” Katia burst out, thinking that she finally got back at Gus for his practical jokes.

“You had me there for a second,” Gus said relieved. “Now, can you please give me the transponder.”

After being quickly briefed on how to use the transponder, Gus was about to leave but stopped at the foot of the bed and turned.

“Oh, you might need one of these to get yourself through customs,” he said as he reached into his shirt pocket, then tossed Katia her real and undercover passports. “Sorry, I came across them in your bag when I was searching for someone to contact, just to let them know that you were in a hospital.”

“So, you already knew I wasn’t who I said I was?”

“Yup!” Gus said grinning, knowing that he once again had the last laugh.

“So then why didn’t you just leave, after you found out that I misled you?”

"Integrity is very important to me. If you hadn't have come clean a few minutes ago, I would have just tossed the transponder back and told you that you're on your own. Now if you don't mind, I've got a date with the Blacks and I'm burning daylight," Gus exclaimed, then promptly left the hospital room.

"He's quite the character," Katia thought to herself before shutting her eyes again.

Gus walked into the hospital cafeteria and found Andrew sitting patiently having a cup of coffee. Gus didn't say anything, but just held out his open hand.

"She didn't!"

"Yes, she did. She came clean. I told you that I was a good judge of character. Now where's my twenty bucks?" Gus said with a wily smile and an open hand.

Gus and Andrew often placed bets on different things, and both of them hated to loose.

Andrew peeled out a bill and slapped it in Gus's hand a little chagrined. He had lost the last seven bets in a row.

"Thanks, better luck next time. Listen. We need to find the Blacks ASAP, so why don't you get us a cab. I have to make a quick call to a friend of mine up in Washington before we leave Nassau.

Chapter Sixty-Four

As the Excalibur plane approached the Rum Cay Airport, Vivi popped up from an upside down position from under the control panel and announced “There! All re-hooked. Zara’s instructions were perfect. Are you getting a signal?”

“You bet,” answered Nissan. “We should be hearing from Nassau Control Tower any time now.”

A call suddenly came across the radio.

“Alpha-Bravo-One. This is N-A-S, do you read?”

“Loud and clear N-A-S.”

“We see that you’re back on radar and communications. Where the hell have you been and what’s your destination?” asked the flight controller.

“Heading to Rum Cay. We had slight issues with our Radar, radio and GPS systems for some unknown reason. Maybe the Triangle at work again,” Nissan said misleading the Controller.

The Bermuda Triangle, also known as The Devil’s Triangle, encompasses an area from Bermuda to Puerto Rico, then west to Miami, and is notoriously known for mysterious disappearances of aircraft and ocean going vessels.

“Everything seems to working fine right now and we’d like permission to continue on to Fort Lauderdale Executive. We’ll have someone inspect the plane there.”

“Alpha-Bravo-One, this is N-A-S, you have permission to continue to FXE,” the controller said, and then gave Nissan new coordinates to follow.

“Roger N-A-S,” Nissan replied. “Alpha-Bravo-One out.”

After reattaching the GPS and convincing the air traffic controllers at N-A-S that it must have been The Bermuda Triangle that was running interference with the plane’s electronics, Nissan and Vivi touched down briefly at Rum Cay to appease the air traffic controllers. They returned to Fort Lauderdale four hours later after refueling on Long Island.

* * * * *

It was six hours after Bill’s plane had slid off the end of the runway, before his team made it back to Fort Lauderdale. With the radar and GPS reconnected to Nissan’s plane, as well as reviewing the N-A-S control towers records, agent Harris and his team had no trouble tracking down the Excalibur plane.

“Are you Nissan?” asked Harris, as he entered the Excalibur Hangar

“Yes? Are you Mr. Williams? Vivi and I weren’t expecting you until tomorrow.” Nissan replied as he reached out and shook Harris’s hand and then gave Summers a big hug. “Nice to meet you

Mr. & Mrs. Williams.”

“No.....I’m Inspector Harris with the CIA, and this is Agent Summers.”

“How can I help you Inspector?” Nissan asked.

Nissan stayed calm and collected as he continued to do a routine inspection of his plane. He had been pre-warned by Zara, that he might have a visit from Raven Claw, and was instructed to make sure that he had a good story line fabricated, just in case.

“I’d like to know exactly where you dropped off your last passengers, a Mr. & Mrs. Black,” Harris asked getting right to the point.

“The Blacks? Sorry, but my last passengers were not the Blacks. I believe that their names were Mr. & Mrs. Hanson and a Miss Jones,” Nissan replied acting a little annoyed.

“Or, at least that’s what they told us. Everything started off fine, even paying for our overnight stay in Nassau, but things turned upside down the next day.”

“How so?” asked Summers.

“Well, we were flying according to our flight plan when another aircraft mysteriously started buzzing us, forcing us to land,” Nissan explained excitedly. “The other plane tried to land but ran off the runway, which the buggers rightly deserved. Anyways that’s when Miss Jones insisted that we take off immediately. I told her no, because I wanted to ring the neck of that asshole of a pilot who tried knocking us out of the sky. Then she pulled out a gun and demanded that we depart immediately and that she would take care of the matter for me!” Nissan said, speaking his words faster while getting increasingly agitated. He was trying his best to play up the situation.

“Slow down,” said Summers trying to calm the excited pilot.

“She took a couple of shots at the plane as we flew over it.....not that I blame her, then ordered

me to fly them to a nearby island. I don't know who or why that plane tried to force us down. All I know, is they got what was coming to them! Everyone on my plane could have been Killed!!”

Nissan rambled on, finished with a flurry.

Summers and Harris looked at each other tight lipped.

“And you're sure that you don't know these passengers personally?” asked Harris skeptically.

“What the hell do you mean.....know them personally?” Nissan replied raising his voice.

“Well, we've had two of your passengers under surveillance for some time now, and you can clearly see here on this laptop, that you are embracing the couple when they arrived at your plane,” Harris said wily as he open his laptop.

Nissan was taken aback slightly, as he could clearly see the embrace.

“How the hell did you get that photo?” Nissan asked looking at the surrounding buildings at first, before looking skyward.

“It's of no concern to you, just answer the question. Do you know the couple in this photograph that you are embracing?” Summers commanded.

Recovering quickly, Nissan responded. “Oh that! No, I don't know them. They're some new clients that we just met. Both Vivi and I want all our clients to feel welcome so we always greet our clients that way, especially Vivi. It helps takes the edge off, for those nervous type of fliers.” Vivi suddenly arrived unexpectedly.

“Mr. & Mrs. Williams? It's so nice to meet you,” Vivi said excitedly with a big smile, followed by a hug and giving each of them a kiss on their cheeks. “Isn't your flight scheduled for tomorrow?”

Vivi had gone to get some old rags for Nissan from inside the hangar when she suddenly heard voices. Standing patiently behind the office wall, Vivi overheard the entire conversation. Nissan knew first hand about Vivi’s affectionate greetings and simply played the odds that when she showed up, she would do her customary greeting. This time he hedged his bet correctly.

“Sorry, but I’m Inspector Harris and this is Agent Summers. We’re with the CIA.”

“Oh, how can we be of assistance?” Vivi asked politely.

“That’s quite alright. Your partner here has already given us all the information we need at the moment,” Summers replied.

“Oh, just one more thing before we leave.”

“Yes Inspector?” replied Nissan.

“Which island did you drop them off at?”

“I really didn’t care which island we dropped them off at, as long as they got off our plane. I think it was Rum Cay. We were ordered to land on a highway, drop them off and then leave immediately. You can check with the N-A-S control tower to confirm everything.”

“Thanks. We’ll look into it,” replied Harris. “Can we charter your plane to get to the island?”

“I’d love to help you out, but as you can see, I’m still looking into the mechanical issues I had with my GPS and radar,” Nissan replied. “Plus, we’re booked to fly the Williams over to Turks and Caicos tomorrow, that is if the repairs are finished. Is the following day okay?”

“Thanks, but no thanks.”

As Harris and Summers turned and departed, Summers was already on her cell, looking for another air charter.

“That was a close call, but it should give the Blacks and Zara a good head start while those agents are on a wild goose chase,” Nissan exhaled to Vivi after the agents left the hangar.

“You missed your calling Nissan.”

“How so?”

“That was a great piece of acting. You should be up for an Academy Award,” declared Vivi.

“Thanks, but all the credit should go to Zara. She versed us well on how to explain our actions. You should be awarded as well for your performance,” Nissan said giving her a big hug.

“Nonsense. I had a heads up when I cracked the door to the washroom and heard your very agitated performance. I just hope that our performances were convincing enough to bamboozle the agents.”

“So, do you believe their story?” asked Harris, as Summers had just finished her phone call.

“No reason not too. But I’ll check with the N-A-S control tower and the FAA, just to make sure,” suggested Summers.

“We need to find a plane to get us to Rum Ca.....”

“A plane is already on it’s way Bill,” interrupted Summers. “But we can’t get there till sunrise at the earliest, as the airport at Rum Cay has no runway lights.”

“That’s why I hired you Summers. You’re always one step ahead of me. Have all the agents ready to go by 5 am.”

It was almost 5:30 the next morning before two Pilatus twin turboprop airplanes were finally loaded when Summers received a call just before boarding.

“That was N-A-S,” Summers reported after hanging up. “It appears that the Excalibur flight story

checks out. They did report having instrument problems en-route from Crooked Islands to Rum Cay, and they even have a complaint from someone saying that they were run off the road by a plane traveling down a highway. The driver of the car only caught the first few letters on the side of the plane....EXCAL.”

“Well, that confirms that the Blacks must be on Rum Cay,” Harris said excitedly.

“The funny thing is though, that the control tower received the complaint from someone on San Salvador Island, not Rum Cay,” Summers apprised Harris.

“Where the hell is San Salvador?” Bill asked anxiously.

“Give me a second,” Summers replied as she keyed in her laptop. “Looks like it’s about 30 miles northeast of Rum Cay. Do you think that Nissan and Vivi gave us the wrong island on purpose?”

“Not likely,” replied Harris. San Salvador is near Rum Cay, and with their recent navigation problems, it’s probably easy enough to have mistaken the two islands. I don’t think we need to bother with Excalibur Air any further.”

Summers nodded in agreement.

“Change of destinations!” Harris called out to the pilot as he boarded the plane.

The pilot just peered back with a questioning look.

“San Salvador!” Harris shouted out, as the cabin door was shut behind him.

Chapter Sixty-Five

San Salvador, Caribbean

Mary, Erik and Zara awoke late the next morning, rubbing their inflated stomachs and messaging their soar heads, from indulging in one too many pork chops and way too many glasses of wine. The Findlay’s hospitality was way over the top and everyone had hit it off immediately, like old friends getting back together after several years of separation. Peter became enthralled about the scavenger hunt and quizzed the group throughout the evening. He even drew a map, pinpointing all the locations on the island that they might find some of the scavenger items they needed from a fake list that Mary had quickly written out in the washroom. The Blacks were sorry that the evening had to end, as all the fun and laughs had been a welcome relief to the stressful days that they had just endured. Little did the Blacks know at the time, that

it would be the last good meal they would eat for some time.

“We need to get to town for some groceries, plus I need to briefly stop off at the marina briefly,” Zara announced with a raspy voice.

“Can we at least have a shower and clean ourselves up a bit?” Mary asked.

“It’s already after 10:00, and we need to get in and out of town as soon as possible. There will be plenty of time to have a shower after we get back from completing our errands,” Zara suggested strongly.

“And Erik, do you have to keep dragging that knapsack around? Our hands will be full of supplies. The door will be locked and I’m sure that it’ll be safe here.”

Reluctantly he agreed and they headed out the door, after Erik hid the knapsack in a closet and covered it up with some loose building material.

“Where are you all heading?” Mrs. Findlay bellowed from her opened top jeep.

“Into town for a few supplies,” Zara replied.

“Well, you’re in luck. That’s exactly where I’m heading. Hop in.”

The warm salt air hitting their faces was not only liberating and refreshing, but also sobering. It should have taken us only fifteen or twenty minutes to travel the short distance to town, but instead took nearly an hour. Mrs. Findlay insisted on giving them a quick 25 cent tour along the way. It was a Saturday, and the town was a bustling hub of activity with the island celebrating their annual Sugarloaf Homecoming Festival. Numerous tables displaying locally handcrafting goods, and other tables loaded with food and drink for sale, lined the main street. Foregoing the Festival, Zara insisted on going directly to the local grocery store to pick up their needed supplies. They packed most of the groceries into a couple of coolers they had also

purchased, and along with jugs of water and bags of ice, pushed the three loaded grocery carts down to the marina.

"Just leave this stuff here in the shade," Zara instructed. "I have a favor to ask from an old friend I made when I visited the island several years ago, so why don't you two head back to the Festival. I'll catch up with the two of you in a bit."

The Festival was a welcome relief to the hectic pace the Blacks had endured over the past week. The mood was light hearted and cheerful, with children running around and tourists bartering for handicrafts. Forgoing breakfast due to Zara's hast, Mary and Erik were hungry and the aroma of the local cuisine immediately drew them to the food tables. With a medley of food that filled their plates and grabbed a table. Their taste buds exploded with the unique flavors Conch Chowder, Grouper Fritters, Crawfish and Johnny Cakes. They finished with a heaping helping of Guava Duff Dessert and watched as a Junkanoo marched past, entertaining the locals and tourists alike.

"Hi," Zara said suddenly appearing out of nowhere. "Show no emotion with what I'm about to say, and just continue eating. I believe that Raven Claw or the FBI has somehow managed to track us to the island."

"What?" Mary burst out.

"Shh," Zara said quickly, grabbing Mary's forearm. "I said don't make a scene. I believe that there are a few agents circulating throughout the crowd."

"How the hell could they track us here so fast with all the precautions we've taken?" Erik asked taken aback.

"I've been wondering that myself. The only thing I can think of is that the driver of the car that

Nissan narrowly missed while taking off, saw the plane’s registration numbers and made a complaint to the airport,” Zara replied calmly as took a sip from Mary’s drink.

“Well, which of these people are the agents?” Mary asked.

“Sorry, but if I point them out to you, you’ll probably unconsciously stare at them, which will let them know that we’ve spotted them.”

“So, what do we do?” Mary asked panicking again.

“We go shopping of course. Just stay close to me, act natural and listen to my instructions.”

They casually finished their drinks, got up from the table and blended in with the now growing crowd. Stopping at the odd vendor, they pretending to interested in their wares, while Zara carefully kept tabs on the locations of the agents. Hidden behind a large canopy from one of the vendors, Zara spotted a small sign displaying Beach Walkway and motioned for the Blacks to follow her. Approaching a vendor’s tent near the walkway, Zara stopped and chatted with a couple of teenagers who were playing a game of Hackisac. She then handed them some money before ushering the Blacks into the tent. Moments later, a commotion erupted between the teens and the agents that Zara had spotted earlier. By the time the agents calmed the situation and hustled over to the tent, the Blacks and Zara had disappeared.

The walkway led directly to the local dive shop near the marina.

“I still don’t see any agents following us,” Erik announced after looking back up the walkway.

“Believe me, you don’t want to see any agents following us, because that might be the last thing that you do see. Now follow me,” Zara said as she grabbed Mary’s hand and guided her around the corner of the dive shop.

Erik followed, but as he turned the corner he ran smack dab into Mary and Zara who were

backpedalling, forcing him to retreat with them back behind the dive shop.

“Shit!” Zara exhaled angrily. “Looks like there might be two agents patrolling the docks and surveying the boats. I hope they didn’t spot us.”

“How do you figure?” asked Mary.

“There’s not too many guys who wear dress slacks, shoes and a long sleeved shirt, when vacationing in the Caribbean.”

“Better come up with a plan quick,” Erik said tugging at Zara’s shirt. “There’s another two guys halfway down the walkway and it looks like they’re carrying weapons.”

Zara stood frozen for only a moment, contemplating the situation before rushing into action.

“Quick, get in the back,” Zara ordered as she opened the back of a van parked behind the dive shop.

Zara hopped in the drivers seat, and seeing that the keys were still in the ignition, started the engine and drove away hastily, but not too fast to not draw any unwanted attention to them.

With the crime rate at almost zero, it wasn’t pure luck that keys were found in the ignition, as the carefree islanders usually leave their keys in their car as well as their houses unlocked. The islander’s philosophy and logic is ‘Where can you run and hide, when you live on a small island?’

Two agents from the docks had joined in with the pair who had just exited the walkway. One of them pointed towards the departing van as he had caught a glimpse of group getting into the van. Another agent raised his weapon to fire, but the van had just slipped behind a building. “Zara. I think that they’re on to us!” Erik shouted out.

Zara weaved quickly thru the back streets to avoid the throngs of people still meandering at the festival. Finally hitting the main highway, Zara turned south and floored the pedal, leaving a trail of stinky exhaust in it's wake. As they rounded the southern edge of the island, Zara caught a glimpse of several cars in her side mirror. And they were gaining fast.

Looking at Mary with resignation Erik thought to himself, “How the hell are we going to get out of this?”

“Hang on back there,” Zara shouted just after a bullet ricocheted off their back bumper. “I’m making a hard left turn.”

Seconds later, Zara slammed on the brakes and cranked the wheel hard to the left onto an old dirt trail. Billows of dust clouded the air behind them, forcing the pursuit car to fall back.

For the next five minutes, the Mary and Erik were bounced around in the rear of the van, until the bouncing abruptly stopped. Everything became quiet, except for the roar of the engine. It was almost as if they were floating on a blanket of air.

“BRACE YOURSELF!” Zara yelled out.

The sudden stillness was shattered as the van jolted to a stop, with water engulfing the front window.

Water steadily rose up and over the front and side windows, until the vehicle receded beneath the surface, leaving only swirling vortexes and traces of bubbles to mark it's demise. The weight of the front engine dragged the van and it's occupants plunging towards the bottom. In her zest to escape, Zara had driven them directly into a lagoon.

The van filled up quickly. Illuminated dimly from the headlights breaking through the depths, the three of them made their way up to the rear of the van. The last pocket of air was

nearly gone. Erik submerged, then forced open the rear door. With Mary and Zara following close behind, they swam out of their watery coffin. Suddenly Erik started to twist and contort as he gasped for air. Moments later, his body went limp.....and darkness overcame him.

Approaching the lagoon through the dusty haze, the driver of the lead vehicle suddenly slammed on his brakes, but a little too late. Stopping half way over the edge, the car slowly began tilting forward, then plunged into the water. It disappeared in seconds. Only one of the two occupants made it out, as a head popped to the surface coughing and spewing water. A minute later a second car skidded to a stop, only feet from the steep embankment, when it was instantly struck by the third vehicle, almost sending it into the watery depths.

Harris, Summers along with three other agents just stood at the edge of the lake with their hands on their hips, contemplating what the hell had just happened.

Grabbing the arm of one of his agents, Agent Harris leaped over the edge.

“Where the hell are the Blacks?” Harris yelled down to the agent who was now clinging to the side of the steep embankment.

“Out there,” the agent shouted back as he pointed out over the water.

Harris stared out and spotted bubbles of air popping on the water's surface, then grinned slightly.

“Where’s your partner?”

The agent just pointed down into the water. Harris just shook his head in dismay.

“At least that’s the last agent I’ll be losing to the Blacks. Summers, call for a tow truck and get some divers out here. We need to recover some bodies. Oh....and can someone please help get that agent out of the water.”

Chapter Sixty-Six

The Descending Dream

As he floated in limbo, the black darkness that surrounding Erik started to fade. A hazy image of a bus driving through heavy mist slowly materialized out of the fog. Moments later he seemed to be floating and traveling along side of the bus. Erik suddenly realized that he must dead, because the last thing that he remembered was opening the rear doors to the van and then struggling to breath. Staring at the people in the bus, his attention was drawn one particular window.

"I think I recognize that woman!"

Floating closer to the bus, the fog dissipated and the woman's features became clearer. It was his Aunt Grace!

Rising over the bus, Erik descended through the roof and emerged in the aisle next to where Grace was seated. Erik now knew for sure that he must be dead, and assumed that the loved one to meet him at the Pearly Gates, was his aunt.

“Hello,” Erik called out to Grace as he sat down in the empty seat next to her. “Aunt Grace?” It’s me.....Erik.”

But Grace didn’t flinch. Erik then waved a hand in front of her face, still with no results. All at once the bus slowed, then lurched to a stop.

“Dallas Bus Station!” the driver of the bus called out.

In a split second Grace was already walking down the aisle. Her image suddenly blurred and then disappeared completely. A moment later, Erik had transpired in an unfamiliar apartment, surrounded by several shipping containers. Looking down at one of the unopened boxes, he was astonished to see who the boxes were sent from. The address was that of his parent’s house. Looking up, he immediately caught sight of his aunt standing in front of a calendar pinned to the wall. She was crossing out several dates.

“Aunt Grace. Can you hear me?” Erik called out as he walked over to her, but she didn’t reply.

As Grace walked away from the calendar he could see that she had crossed out all the days leading up to June 7th. The image of the calendar began to blur, but he did manage to notice the year right before everything went blank. It was 1963. Erik turned to call out again, but without warning the room had transformed. He was now standing in a cafe. In a booth next to him was Grace, having a cup of tea. A stately woman then walked up to the booth and asked, “Madam Aderes?”

“Good Evening.....Yes, I am Madam Aderes.”

The woman was about to introduce herself but the image before Erik suddenly blurred.

“Is this what its like to be dead?” he thought. Then, Erik was instantly back at Grace’s apartment. He was beginning to feel like Ebenezer Scrooge.

Grace had just put on a coat and threw a scarf around her neck before heading towards her front door. She spun around abruptly, walked over to the calendar and struck out another date. Inquisitively, he made my way to the calendar and saw that November 20th was marked off. Today was November 21, 1963.

“My god, time sure does fly by when you’re dead.”

The date seemed to ring a cord with Erik, but he just couldn’t figure out exactly why.

He followed Grace outside into the evening night, where she stopped at a news stand and picked up a booklet on horoscopes. While she was paying for it, Erik glanced down at a copy of The Dallas Times Herald. Then today’s date hit me like a ton of bricks, as the front page read, *Plea For Space Plan Kicks Off JFK Tour*, along with a map showing the intended route the President would be taking.

“This is the night before Kennedy’s assassination!” Dozen of questions filled his head. “Why was I here? Was I here to somehow give some type of signal or sign to someone? How was I supposed to do this? Maybe I’m here just to witness that Grace was actually along the motorcade route, taking photographs and film of the event. Maybe I’ll even see second shooter first hand, not that it’ll do any good since I’m already dead.” All these questions and not a sure answer.

Glancing up Erik noticed that Grace had disappeared. Looking both ways down the sidewalk, she was nowhere to be seen. Gazing across the intersection, he spotted her as she had just stepped onto the far sidewalk. Erik jumped out into the street without looking, then instinctively looked for oncoming traffic, but it was too late. Two headlight beams were speeding directly towards him, and all of a sudden, he could feel his body being grabbed and pulled away.

Chapter Sixty-Seven

The Awakening

A rush of air filled Erik's mouth as he felt his body being pulled and shaken. Erik's eyes blinked open. Two lights still continued speeding towards him. Suddenly his body was jerked backwards, just as the lights hurtled past, a mere ten feet away. Coughing and spewing, he still gasped for air. Staring at Erik were two relieved faces surrounded by rising bubbles of air, hidden behind scuba goggles. Zara gave the thumbs up signal asking if he was OK, then motioned to the pressure valve on Mary's dive tank. Erik just nodded in agreement, acknowledging that he understood what she meant.

While driving down the dirt road, Zara had ordered the Blacks to put on the diving equipment that was in the back of the van, and to get another set of tanks ready for her. Mary and Erik thought she was an absolute nutcase, but she reassured both of them that she knew exactly

what she was doing and to just trust her. Between not being too familiar with diving equipment and being bounced around on the dirt road, the Blacks struggled to get the diving equipment on. The van hit the water before the Blacks knew it. Zara had her scuba gear on in a flash and began helping Mary, as the van was quickly filling up with water. With the last pocket of air disappearing swiftly, Erik took one last gulp of air, placed the regulator in his mouth and quickly submerged to open the rear doors before swimming out. In an instant, Erik suddenly had no air and realized that he had forgotten to turn on the pressure valve to his tank. Twisting and contorting he tried to reach the valve, but just could grasp it. The van had sunk another 15 feet before Mary and Zara had escaped from the van, and spotted Erik struggling. Zara, an experienced diver, recognized the problem immediately and quickly swam up and turned on the pressure valve on. But, Erik had already passed out.

After Erik motioned that he was OK, Zara adjusted his buoyancy compensator to let him float and recover for a moment. Looking down through the depths Erik could see faint beams of light coming from the headlights of the van, but was baffled by seeing a second set of lights nearby. He would later find out that the second vehicle narrowly missed dragging him to the bottom, if it wasn't for Zara to pull him out of it's way.

Tapping Mary and Erik on their arms, Zara indicated that they needed to follow her. The Blacks stuck close to Zara, slowly swimming and descending until they reached a sheer cliff face at the far end of the lagoon. Zara glanced around as if searching for something, then looked at her depth gauge and motioned that they needed to go down further. Erik had no idea why the hell she wanted them to dive down, when all they needed to do, was to just get to the surface. But Zara had already gotten them out of several tight situations, so Erik just followed.

The water was clear and getting cooler as they followed the straight shear downward until they reached a dark patch along the wall, that at first appeared to be nothing more than a large pile of rocks and plant life clinging to the wall. As Zara guided them around the rocks, she turned on her flashlight, then pushed aside the kelp to reveal a gloomy and ominous opening about 10 feet across by 7 feet in height. Both Mary and Erik grabbed Zara at the same time and shook their heads and hands sideways telling her that they had no intention of going into the black void. Zara then motioned for them to wait while she swam to the bottom of the entrance and picked up a rope that lead into the cave. It became obvious to the Blacks that the cave had previously been explored.

“Maybe the rope will lead us to a hidden grotto which we can hide in for a while?” Erik thought to himself.

Zara waved for the Blacks to follow and held up her hands in a praying position to convince them to trust her. They all looked to the surface as the dull sound of a propeller could be heard overhead. It became apparent that the people who were chasing them, were now scanning the surface for signs of life or looking for floating bodies. There was now no choice in the matter. The Blacks had to head into the dark depths of the cave. Swimming cautiously to the entrance Mary and Erik turned their flashlights on, and with great trepidation, slowly pulled themselves into the unknown.

The cave soon diminishing in both height and width, until it formed into a narrow tunnel about five feet in diameter. Zara glanced back and noticed that both Mary and Erik had stopped in their tracks. Swimming on another 20 feet, Zara turned and waved the Blacks on, as she straightened her body upright to indicate that the tunnel had widened. Cautiously the Blacks

pulled their way to the end of the tunnel.

Emerging from the narrow tunnel, Mary and Erik surprisingly found themselves in a large cavern. As the three flashlights swept the area, the Blacks were instantly amazed by the unusual but beautiful underwater landscape. Bright green columns of stalagmites protruded from the ground and stalactites drooping down from the ceiling, illuminated in dazzling contrast to the cobalt blue water. Marine life was almost none existent, except for a few small almost transparent shrimp that drifted past their flashlights. An unusual object laying in a shallow cully of rocks caught Erik’s attention and he left the safety of the rope to investigate. There nestled in the rocks lay a skull of a crocodile, the remnants of a previous age when freshwater crocodiles inhabited the island. A sudden poke in Erik’s ribs from Zara told him it was time to keep moving.

The cavern narrowed again with their rope guiding them to a large rock with several additional ropes leading to a patchwork of tunnels. Starting from the left, Zara counted the ropes then headed off towards a tunnel. This time the Blacks had no apprehension to continue on, even though there was barely enough room for them to slide through. Although the tunnel widened slightly, it was much longer than the first and Erik started to feel a little claustrophobic. After some time, shards of light streaking through the water indicated that the tunnel had lead to an open body of water.

“That was absolutely unbelievable!” Erik said ecstatically, as he removed his mask after popping to the surface.

“Are you OK?” Mary called out in concern as she lifted her mask.

“Yes, yes I’m OK. Thanks to whoever turned my valve on.”

“That was Zara,” Mary replied. “And thanks. You saved my husband’s life.”

"Yes. Thank you," added Erik appreciatively.

"You're welcome," Zara said before they swam towards a low sloping beach.

"That was truly an amazing experience!" Mary declared they walked out of the water.

"And how in blazes did you know that the two lakes were linked by a system of underwater tunnels?"

"They're actually called Blue Holes," Zara replied as they started to remove their scuba gear.

"Vivi and Nissan brought me this place nearly ten years ago when I was vacationing with them.

They knew that I was an avid diver, and thought that this place would be a completely different diving experience for me. I've been hooked on Blue Holes ever since, and try to explore a new one every year. Hurry up and get your gear off. We need to get going!"

They hid the scuba gear behind some rocks that were covered by some large shrubbery. Erik was itching to tell Mary and Zara about the dream he had when he had blacked out, but thought it better left to another time.

"It'll be impossible to bushwhack through this thick vegetation to get back to our cottage," Zara announced as they put on their wet footwear. Following Zara's instructions, Erik had stuffed all their shoes into a fishnet bag before putting on his scuba gear.

"We'll have to hike down this trail back to the main road and take our chances on hitching a ride.

The sooner we get back to our cabin and off this island, the better. Once Raven Claw finds out that the van is empty and there are no bodies floating around, they'll assume that we somehow managed to escape," advised Zara.

"By then, we'll hopefully be long gone," Erik interjected.

"Yes. And as long as your friend can keep that Cyclops surveillance satellite at bay, Raven Claw

will have a tough time finding us,” Zara said optimistically.

“Maybe Cyclops is already back on line. It didn’t seem to take these agents too long to track us to this island,” Erik suggested.

“You could be right,” Zara replied, and then said nothing more.

By the time they found their way back to the main road, they were all starting to get blisters from their wet footwear. Hiding behind some shrubs, Zara kept surveying the passing vehicles, waiting for one that she was sure didn’t contain any other agents.

“Mary, when I give you the signal, pretend that you’ve twisted your ankle and come out limping,” Zara said hurriedly as she spotted a delivery van approach. She quickly jumped out and flagged down the van.

“Would you be so kind and please give us a lift?” Zara said as she waved for the Blacks to come forward. “My friends and I were hiking and one of them twisted their ankle.”

“Sure. Not a problem.”

“Thanks.”

Mary hobbled up to the van and then was helped into the front seat with Zara’s assistance. Zara and Erik then jumped in through the side door and found themselves amongst rolls of electrical wire, ladders and tools, all scattered haphazardly about.

“Where you folks headed,” the driver asked in a Bahamian accent. He was a slight man looking to be in his early thirties, with caved in cheeks and prominent cheekbones, and sporting a sparsely grown goatee. He introduced himself as Nathan.

“Back to our cottage, would be.....” Erik started to say, before Zara quickly interrupted.

“We’re headed to the marina, but we need to stop briefly to pick up our stuff along the way, if

that’s not too much of an inconvenience to ask.”

“Not at all,” Nathan replied. “I’m heading in that direction anyways. Where are you staying?”

“The Whirlwind Cottages.”

“Oh, they’re just down the road a bit. Owned by Peter Findlay. I know him well. I do all the electrical work for him. Doesn’t like anything to do with electricity you know..... Great guy..... Originally came from Canada..... and man, did he ever get a hell of a deal on buying those cottages. They need a lot of work, but man.....when they’re finished....”

Nathan didn’t stop talking until he parked right in front of their cottage, which came as a welcomed relief.

As Zara unlocked the cottage door, they could hear Nathan start chatting up another person, this time with Peter, who happened to be fixing a shutter on the cottage next door.

“Gather your stuff quickly and let’s get the hell out of here,” Zara said hectically after they entered the cottage.

“Can we at least change out of these damp clothes?” Mary asked.

“You can change once we get aboard the boat.”

“Boat?” Erik questioned.

“Yes. That’s why I was at the Marina earlier. Now, let’s get a move on.”

“I need to quickly use the washroom,” Mary said.

“That can wait.....”

“Sorry, but it can’t wait,” Mary spouted irritably, and promptly slammed the washroom door.

Zara and Erik grabbed the luggage and headed outside.

“Hey!” Peter called over. “You guys leaving so soon?”

"Yup. "We found all the items we needed for the scavenger hunt except for the photo of a sunken ship," Zara fabricated. "We're catching a ride with Nathan down to the marina right now."

"Sorry, to hear that you're leaving so early. I was hoping to have that game of canasta that you promised me last night."

"We'll have to take a raincheck," Erik replied, as Mary walked up to the van. "Maybe the next time we want to take a vacation, we'll give you a call."

"You're welcome here any time. But remember, I want that game of canasta," Peter said after he came over and shook their hands. "But remember, I want that game of canasta."

"Deal!" replied Erik before hopping in the van.

Nathan had driven only about fifty feet before he slammed on the brakes, producing a cloud of dust that enveloped the van. Hopping out, Erik ran back to the cottage and returned a few moments later toting his knapsack.

"For Christ sake....that's the second time you've almost forgotten that thing!" Mary spouted.

"Good thing your head is screwed on, or you'd be forgetting it too."

Nathan just chuckled and started gabbing away again until they pulled up to the main road.

"Man! Someone sure is in a hurry," Nathan blurted out as a tow truck went zooming by. "Must be an accident down the road."

"Or, maybe someone just drove off the road into oblivion," Erik said looking over to Zara and raising his eyebrows.

"Maybe," Zara replied with a slight grin.

"Well, what ever it is, it looks pretty serious," Nathan spouted just as a police car sped past followed by another two vehicles in close pursuit.

Mary, Zara and Erik were relieved that the drive to the marina was only a twenty minute drive, as Nathan chattered the entire way. Even though Zara suspected that most of agents would be hunting for them near the Blue Hole, she took no chances and requested that Nathan drop them off on a side street near the marina. Grabbing their luggage, and making sure Erik had his knapsack in tow, they thanked Nathan for the ride, then cautiously made our way to the boat rental shop.

“Nice guy, but man can that guy talk,” Erik said as they walked into the shop.

“Hey Dez,” Zara said as she walked up and gave a woman a kiss on each cheek.

“I know I said that I might need a boat tomorrow, but I actually need it right now, if that’s possible.”

“No problem. It’s already gassed up and ready to go,” she replied while getting the key out of a locked cabinet.

“Thanks Dez. I owe you one,” Zara said gratefully.

“No, we’re even now. Just bring it back in one piece!” Dez replied as she placed the keys into Zara’s open hand.

As the three nonchalantly walked down the pier, Erik couldn’t help but notice that the marina was almost filled to capacity with numerous watercraft, from small aluminum fishing boats right thru to luxurious 100+ foot yachts. A few sport fishermen were unloading their daily catch while others were proudly taking photos of a marlin, as it hung from a large weigh scale. A few people were returning to their boat laden with goods from the Festival, and several Bahamian teens could be seen busily scrubbing the salt off a few of the larger yachts. Busily gawking at the goings on, Erik walked right into Mary who had suddenly stopped with

Zara alongside a sleek looking boat.

“This is it! The Horizon Seeker.” Zara declared, reading the name on the side of the boat.

“Wow, this is quite a boat,” Erik said keenly as he assisted Mary and Zara into the boat.

“It’s an Intrepid Sports Yacht. It cuts through waves like a hot knife through butter, carries plenty of gas and 60 gallons of water and it’s plenty fast, which is a perfect fit for our needs,” proclaimed Zara. “Stow our stuff below, while I go cast off and get us under way.”

Three 275 Hp Mercury Engines started instantly and purred like kittens. Being well versed at handling boats Erik would have driven the boat out of the marine slip himself, but this boat required the use of it’s bow thrusters to maneuver out of the tight quarters. Not ever using thrusters before, Erik left it up to Zara, but watched and learned from her every move.

After slowly cruising out of the harbor, Zara hammered the throttles and showed the Mary and Erik what the three kittens were really made of, as the boat raced across the water like a cheetah after it’s prey. Looking along the shoreline, Erik thought he caught a glimpse of the old war plane he had seen back in Florida floating behind several large sailboats, but because of the distance, he dismissed it as just another boat. The ocean on the west side of the island was unusually calm and the Intrepid clipped along at almost full speed. The speedometer read 56mph.

Erik explored below deck and found some beer that Dez had unexpectedly supplied. He cracked a beer open for each of them and after delivering a beer to Mary who was sitting and enjoying the scenery from the rear seat, joined Zara at the console. Zara, as well as Mary and Erik were absolutely parched and thanked him profusely for the refreshment. After several large gulps, she punched in some coordinates to plot a course.

“Where are we headed?” inquired Erik.

“An island called Samana Cays. It’s an island that I haven’t been to yet, and I’ve heard that not too many people go there. It should be a good place to hold up for a while.”

“How long will it take to get us there?”

“At this rate of speed, a good hour and a half, but don’t count on the water staying this calm.”

Zara was true to her words, as about ten minutes later they started to hit 2 foot waves, which soon grew to 4 footers on the open ocean, slowing their speed to 20mph.

“How did you manage to snare this beauty?” Erik asked Zara while tightly grabbing a hold of the roof railing.

“Let’s just say that Dez owed me a favor.”

“How so?”

“I see that you’re the snoopy type.”

“Not really. Just trying to make conversation.”

“Well, I made friends with her about ten years ago, when vacationing with Vivi and Nissan, and rented a boat from her. We also hired her as a guide for a couple of days to show us some good dive sites. Through our conversations, I learned that she was being harassed and threatened by some drug runners who wanted to use this very boat, because it can outrun most of the patrol boats in the area. Anyways, early one morning when I arrived with supplies for the day’s trip, I foiled their plans to hot wire the engines. They threatened me. I threatened them. They decided to pay me a visit later that night.”

“That must have been unnerving?” interjected Erik.

“Nothing I couldn’t handle, and they won’t be bothering Dez anymore.”

Erik looked at Zara with his eyebrows raised, then she firmly added, “Let’s just say that it’s a

little hard for drug runners to run, when they go for a swim with an anchor attached to one of their legs.”

Erik’s jaw dropped at first in astonishment, but then grinned slightly, knowing that he and Mary were in good hands.

“How much farther?” he asked, changing the subject.

“Don’t worry. We should hopefully make it there before nightfall.”

* * * * *

Search lights from deep within the Blue Hole, emanated an eerie green glow against a dark blue sky. The sun had sunk below the horizon almost an hour earlier. A diver popped to the surface and gave the thumbs up, indicating that the van was finally ready to be hauled up. The van had embedded itself upside down and sunk in the soft silt, making it impossible to inspect the interior. Agent Harris had insisted that he had proof that we had perished in water.

When the local authorities arrived on the scene, a thin gas slick could be seen reflecting off the water. They demanded that the vehicles be removed as quickly as possible while taking every precaution not to damage the fragile embankment surrounding the Blue Hole. After a little searching, Harris learned that there was an old crane located on the opposite side of the island, being used to erect roof trusses on a new church. With a little persuasion, and of course the promise of a large paycheck, Harris convinced the crane operator to assist in extricating the two vehicles. It was eight hours later that the crane was finally in place and the first vehicle was ready to be hauled up.

The crane creaked, groaned then shuddered as the cable became taut and started to lift the silt laden van out of the mucky bottom. Covered with kelp and other debris, the van looked like a creature from days gone by as it was lifted out of the water and placed on the embankment.

Harris immediately rushed over and pulled some kelp off the driver's door, revealing the logo to the dive shop and its name, "San Salvador Diving Excursions."

Impatiently, Harris opened the drivers door, only to be covered with buckets of silt and water. As Harris was busy wiping the mud off his clothes, another agent pulled the rear doors open and searched through the van in hopes of finding their quarry entombed within.

"No bodies in here sir," the agent said, sticking his head out the door.

"You're kidding me, right?" exclaimed Harris.

"No sir. There's just some scuba gear completely covered with a thin layer of silt, that's secured to the side of the van."

"Maybe they jumped from the van before it went off the edge, then hiked out of here," conjectured Summers.

"Possible, but highly unlikely. This vegetation is virtually impenetrable, plus I already had some of the boys check the road for any signs of foot traffic, and the only thing they reported seeing were some small reptile and bird prints," replied Harris.

"So where the hell are they? They just couldn't have vanished into thin air. The divers did a thorough search of the water and have found no bodies," Harris bellowed.

"You don't think that they escaped using scuba gear, do you?" Summers asked as she tipped toed her way through the silt and glanced into the back of the van.

"That would be impossible. Our divers did a thorough search of the water and have found no

sign of them. Plus, even if they managed to evade our divers, their air would have run out hours ago and they would have been forced to surface. And the only way up these steep banks is by that single ladder,” pointed out Harris.

As Harris and Summers stared out over the water, a male approached from behind them and spoke.

“Sorry to interrupt, but I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation. I might have a possible answer.”

“And what makes you think that you know the answer?” Harris spouted out rudely.

“Calm down Bill. Seems he’s only trying to lend a hand,” intervened Summers. “Sorry about that Mr?”

“Just call me Ted. I’m the owner of the dive shop and that’s my van you just hoisted out on the water,” he said solemnly, then poked his head into the back of van to have a quick look.

“So, where do you think the occupants are?” asked Summers earnestly.

“I’ve dived this hole numerous times, and it has a cavern and tunnel system that leads to another Blue Hole that’s about a quarter of a mile away. I had four tanks loaded in the van for a dive trip and there is only one tank still secured.”

“Maybe the tanks broke loose and are stuck at the bottom.” Harris conjectured.

“Highly unlikely. All my tanks are secured tightly with belts. Come have a look,” Ted said as he pulled vigorously at the remaining tank. “I also see that three sets of flippers, masks and flashlights are also missing from their compartments. If you were to ask me, I think that they just put on the scuba gear and somehow found the entrance to the caverns. The system of tunnels and caverns even has guide-wires secured in place, so divers don’t lose their way.”

"Thanks for the info Ted. It's been helpful," Summers said appreciatively.

"No problem," replied Ted, then turned and walked away.

"Bill, do you think that it might have been feasible for the Blacks escaped through the tunnels?"

"Feasible? Remember Summers, they have a Mossad Agent assisting them. Not only is it feasible, but highly likely. I'd put money on it."

"Let's pack it in for tonight, Bill. Everybody is exhausted," Summers said wearily. "We'll fish the other car out tomorrow, and start a ground search around the other Blue Hole.

One way or another, we'll find them sir."

"I certainly hope so Summers," Harris said dejected and frustratedly.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

The Intrepid had arrived at Samana Cay after dusk, and they moored the boat for the night. Erik was not accustomed to the sound of waves lapping against the hull and the constant swaying of the boat, which kept him up most of the night. It was almost daybreak before he finally found sleep.

His dreams had taken him back to mid evil times. While walking across a fast flowing creek, Erik happened across a man lying face down along it's steep banks. A large pool of blood covered the ground and a nearby boulder. His horse was standing and pawing the dusty trail above. It was obviously that the rider had the misfortune of falling from his horse. A paper scroll sticking out from the man's vest pocket caught Erik's attention. Curiosity and human nature getting the better of him, Erik carefully pulled the scroll from under the flap and unrolled the paper.

As he read the note briefly, he was shocked to discover that the King's second in command

was planning to assassinate the King. It stated the place, date and time. A small crudely drawn map was at the bottom of the letter, with numerous X's scattered around a square box marked courtyard. Above the courtyard was the word Archers, with arrows pointing towards the X's. Suddenly Erik heard the thundering sound of horses galloping. Looking in the direction of the sound, Erik was staring at seven riders, sitting on stallions on the opposite bank. They started yelling and screaming, blaming Erik for the death of their comrade. Four drew their swords and immediately spurred their horses down the steep banks. The others, began removing their bows from around their shoulders. Erik stuffed the scroll inside his satchel and high tailed it up the bank, just as arrows started to fly. One zipped past only inches from his head. Another could be heard bouncing off the rocks below. And the third arrow nearly struck home, just grazing his left arm. Erik quickly dodged behind a large clump of bushes and hopped upon the dead man's horse. As Erik thrust his heels into the horse's flank, another assault of arrows flew in his direction. The closest, embedding in the trunk of a large Aspen only a few feet in front of him and another Erik could have almost caught with his teeth. The archers were obviously good marksmen, and Erik thought that they could very well be the assassins mentioned in the letter.

With the riders still only half way across the stream, Erik pushed his horse hard, hoping to put distance between them. The forest seemed to grow darker as Erik rode on. The path ever narrowing. Without warning, a whooshing sound whizzed past Erik's head as another arrow had narrowly missed its mark. The riders had caught up much faster than Erik had suspected. Again he dug his heels in hard and spurred his steed onward. Suddenly the trees ended abruptly, leading Erik into an open field. Halfway across the field, Erik glanced back at his pursuers and noticed that they had stopped just outside the tree line. Erik slowed his horse to a trot, then stopped and

turned to face his adversaries. His horse needed the small rest. Erik was completely baffled as the men laughed and pointed at him. Strangely, one of the riders pulled a leather cord with an object tied to one end from his pack and began whirling it. A quiet whistling sound soon turned into a loud shriek, as all the riders and Erik covered their ears. A distant echo of the noise replied. The man stopped swinging the cord and the riders slowly return into the trees. Another shrill sound filled the air, but it was not coming from the riders still ever watching from within the forest edge. A large dark shadow enveloped Erik. Looking skyward, the blood suddenly left his face as a large dragon was swooping in for the kill. Abruptly, he again dug his heels into his trustworthy friend. The reared up, then bolted away just as the great beast's talons clasped shut. A loud angry shrill rang out. The winged creature banked and flapped wildly to gain altitude for another attempt. Erik urged his savior onward towards the protection of the nearby forest. Erik looked back, and seeing the dragon was closing ground fast, knew it was going to be a close race. The trees were so close. So was the dragon. He could hear the monstrous flap of the dragons bat like wings and almost feel the beast's breath. Another dark shadow drew over Erik. He thought for sure that he was about to loose the race, when suddenly he was streaking through the trees. A loud crash followed immediately behind, as the dragon clipped the top of the tree while trying to abandon the chase, then crashed to the ground. Erik glanced back to see the creature scramble to his feet. An angry roar erupted, followed by a fiery jet of flames. Although Erik could feel the searing heat, it fell short of it's mark. The trees near the field ignited, forcing the dragon to withdraw. As Erik pulled up the reigns and praised the horse as they came to a stop. His horse was exhausted and snorted heavily with nostrils flared. Peering through the tree tops, Erik could see and hear the wounded dragon squawking as it flew unsteadily away.

It had been a nonstop flurry of life threatening action and Erik was beginning to wonder what else could possibly happen. He didn't have to wait another 2 second s to find out. Through the flames roared the seven riders at a full gallop. Although exhausted, Erik had no choice but to trust is his friend once again and spurred him onwards. Twisting and turning through the rugged terrain, Erik again emerged from the forest into an open field. The field began to immediately slope away and rock walls to his left and right seemed to appear out of nowhere. Erik was now trapped on three sides, as his pursuers had just bolted out of the forest. Erik's horse suddenly stopped short, almost catapulting him off the saddle. Regaining his balance, Erik now saw that his horse stood only inches from a sheer rock cliff that overlooked a lake. Erik had no time to even think of his options as an arrow embedded itself into the back of the saddle and startling his steed to leap forward. More arrows flew just above his head as they plummeted down the fifteen feet to the lake below.

As Erik surfaced, he spotted his adversaries at the end of the cliff. He knew that he was literally a sitting duck. The men dismounted and made ready their bows as Erik knew that their was no escape. All of a sudden Erik felt something grasp both of his legs, and within seconds, he had been pulled deep below the surface of the water. Peering upwards, shimmering streaks flashed through the water as the arrows slid to a harmless stop, then slowly fluttered downwards.

Starting to run out of air, Erik instinctively tried to swim to the surface, but the strong grip around his ankles held firm and continued to drag him lower. Trickles of bubbles started to escape his mouth as he could no longer hold his breath. His sight started to darken and he ceased struggling. Instantly Erik felt the grip from his ankles release. Two shapes came from below and swan directly in front of him. He felt gentle hand cupping his head and soft lips firmly pressing

against his mouth. A steady stream of air was forced into Erik's lungs, keeping him alive and kicking. Opening his eyes, Erik was gazing upon two mermaids with long hair flowing over well proportioned breasts and a sleek blue/green tail. They smiled, then quickly motioned for Erik to follow as they pointed to a cave in the side of the cliff. Thinking that it was an underwater grotto, Erik nodded in agreement. The mermaids quickly grabbed Erik by his wrists and propelled him forward.

After a short swim through the cave, the mermaids started to swim up towards a glimmering light shining above the surface of the water. Erik again couldn't hold his breath any longer and tugged his arms back. Recognizing Erik's need for air, the second mermaid embraced Erik and pressed her lips against his. Another warm flow of air filled his lungs. But what started as a life saving breath, ended with the mermaid giving Erik a passionate kiss including a little roaming from her tongue. Her dazzling deep blue eyes were memorizing. The other mermaid glided over and joined her companion by nibbling on Erik's ear before breathing another breath of life into him. As well as a sensuous kiss. Their hands started to caress and wander across his body. Just as one of the watery damsels grabbed at Erik's belt, three large red eyes materialized from the bottom most depths of the underwater cavern. The eyes grew larger as they slowly rose out of the darkness. With panic in their eyes, the mermaids instantly pushed Erik towards the surface above, then swam away. Only a few feet from the surface, Erik glanced downwards to see the dim image of the mermaids darting to and fro, trying to draw the great eyes away, but the eyes continued to advance upwards towards Erik. Kicking the last few remaining feet of water, Erik reached up and grabbed a rocky ledge. Hoisting himself out of the water, he plopped his ass on the edge and was immediately blinded by the bright sun glaring down from the sky above.

Squinting across the water Erik saw the last of his tantalizing sea maidens, as one had popped her head out of the water before diving below with a slap of her tail on the surface.

Strangely, Erik could feel that the ledge was smooth and polished. He blocked the sun's rays with one hand then with the other, wiped the water from his eyes. As Erik's feet dangled in the water, he was stunned to feel them resting on a hard smooth surface. With a resounding thud, Erik pounded his foot hard against the bottom. The underwater grotto had disappeared, or was it just an illusion to begin with, he pondered Erik's eyes had now adjusted to the light and he noticed large red spots just feet below the surface. Just beyond the spots, a large spray of water was spouting skyward. In the background, Erik heard the sound of an automobile rumble past, the air filled by its smoky exhaust. A woman nearby, was holding her son's hand as he waded knee deep in the fountain. She stood motionless staring open mouthed at Erik. The young boy stood pointing out towards the middle of the fountain in awe, flipping his head back and forth from his mother to the water. Erik realized that he was sitting on the edge of a fountain. The red spots, just lights glowing through the shallow water.

Standing up, Erik stepped out from the water and wiped at his wet clothes. He was still dressed in his medieval attire, with a sword at his side and the satchel draped over his shoulder. Licking his lips, Erik could still taste the mermaids' kisses. People stared. A few snickered as they strolled by. Glancing about, Erik noticed the area was a buzz of people. Passing automobiles with their big outer fenders and glistening chrome grills, seemed to be no newer than the early 1930s. Numerous outdoor cafe's lined the streets, where patrons enjoyed eating their breakfast while reading the morning paper. Between a row of buildings the Eiffel Tower stood proudly. Erik surmised that he had somehow been transported to Paris just before WWII.

A screech of braking tires opposite the fountain caught Erik’s attention. Two men wearing police uniforms emerged, one man pointing towards Erik. They started to walk quickly around the circular fountain, one in each direction. Erik didn’t wait around to find out what they wanted and walked away nonchalantly. As soon as he rounded the corner of a building, Erik set off as fast as he could, but was hampered by the weight of his wet garments.

The police came around the corner already sprinting and started to gain ground quickly. Erik knew that it would be just a matter of time before the officer would catch him and was about to give in, until he spotted something up ahead that would change the odds. Erik grabbed a bike leaning against a light standard and pedaled for his life.

“Arret” - “Arret”, yelled the officers, but Erik ignored their commands and pedaled even harder. Erik was putting some distance between himself and the officers when he suddenly approached T-intersection. Clipping around the corner at too great of speed, Erik came face to face with an oncoming automobile. Turning hard to avoid an eminent collision, he found himself headed directly towards a vegetable and fruit cart. The bike hit the pushcart broadside, sending Erik flying through the air and into a sidewalk cafe. Apples and cabbages rolled across the road raising havoc with the early morning traffic. Cars swerved into each other as well as cars parked along the curbside.

With a resounding thump, Erik landed onto a table before sliding off and slamming his head hard on the cobblestone sidewalk. Erik looked in a daze skyward. The blurred images of the police officers hovered over his head. The last thing Erik remembered as he turned his head sideways, was a double image of a broken coffee cup, it’s contents dispersed nearby. Then everything went black.

Chapter Sixty-Nine

The stress of current events had obviously weighed heavy on his mind and Erik awoke with a jolt after his restless and unsettling sleep. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee waffled through the air. Reluctantly, Erik swung his legs off the bed. He reflected briefly on Grace’s stories of constantly being on the run. The sleepless nights. Always looking behind her back. Was this the sort of life that she had endured? Was this the life he and Mary would now have to live? Erik had just started to pour himself a cup of coffee when Mary began to stir from her slumber. Not only had Mary never had a cup of coffee in her life and even dreaded the very smell of it. She was not a happy camper. Erik hustled up to the deck.

The brightness of the sun blinded him for a moment. Shading his eyes with one hand, he fumbled with one hand to find and put on his sunglasses. It was an absolutely incredible scene. The sky was clear blue, not a cloud in sight and there wasn’t even a ripple on the water, until he heard some splashing towards the shore.

"Good morning," Zara called out.

"Good morn....ning," Erik stammered, then choked and coughed as he was in the midst of swallowing his coffee.

"Talk about a picture perfect day!" he thought. Not only was the landscape like the front page of a travel magazine with pearly white sand and bright blue green water, but there standing in the water up to her mid thighs, was Zara.....buck naked, bathing in the ocean.

"You can pick up your tongue and put your eyes back in your head anytime now," Mary said from behind Erik as she slapped his ass.

"Come on in. The water is warm," uttered Zara.

"I think we'll just have a shower below deck," Erik replied, trying not to stare. But it was hard for him not to dart his eyes sideways a couple of times to sneak a peek at Zara's hour glass figure.

"Sorry, but since we're not due to rendezvous with Vivi and Nissan for another two weeks, we have to save on water. You'll have to bathe in the ocean, preferably before breakfast. You both could use one," announced Zara, politely saying that both of them were getting a little ripe.

Taking a whiff under his armpit, Erik couldn't have agree more, as his head reeled back and his faced screwed up. He definitely stunk to high heaven. Mary and Erik made their way to the beach, while Zara wallowed in the water. Walking down the beach a short distance from Zara, they waded in then crouched into the water and bashfully removed their swimsuits. Although the Blacks had skinny dipped on the odd occasion, it was always in a secluded location with absolutely no one around.

"I think you'll need these," Zara voice suddenly said from behind them.

Turning, there was Zara, standing knee deep in the water with a bar of soap and a bottle of shampoo in her outstretched hands. Her tanned still wet body glistened in the sun, exhibiting her firm breasts in all their splendor. Her muscles were well toned, but not overly developed, and Erik could now tell that she truly was a natural dirty blonde, as a nicely trimmed mohawk extended up from between her legs.

“Thanks,” Erik stuttered.

“Look, you guys,” Zara said as she waded closer. “There’s no use being shy. We’re going to be in tight quarters for a while and seeing a lot of each other. I’ve slept with both men and women, but never at the same time, so I’ve seen it all. There is absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about seeing a person naked.”

Even though in the back of their minds they knew that she was probably right, Mary and Erik were still speechless.

“Now here’s the soap,” she said as she slapped the bar of soap into Mary’s outstretched hand.

“Get cleaned up while I go finish making breakfast.”

Walking toward shore Zara suddenly turned, “Oh, you’ll need this for your hair,” she said, and tossed a bottle of shampoo a little too high over Erik’s head.

Instinctively, Erik jumped up and caught it, then landed back on his feet, mid thigh deep in the water.

“I guess the water is not as warm as I thought,” Zara said with a smirk.

Mary just broke out in a thunderous laugh.

Chapter Seventy

Harris and Summers arrived at the adjoining Blue Hole early the next morning to begin scouring the shoreline. It wasn't long before the hidden scuba gear was found and shoe prints leading down a trail were discovered.

"Now what?" asked Summers. "They could be anywhere by now."

"I've already notified the airport authorities late last night to be on the watch for them, so no worries there."

"What about the marina?" piped up Summers.

"No one's been answering my calls, so we'll need to get down there. If there are no reports of anyone seeing them, we'll head into town. Someone has to have seen them," replied Harris.

After having no luck at the marina, Harris and his agents headed into town, showing photos of the Blacks to almost everyone in town, but with the same results. That was until Summers accidentally bumped into a man delivering supplies to a merchant, as she walked blindly out of a retail store.

"I'm sorry," Summers said apologetically as one of the boxes hit the ground. Picking it up, she replaced it on top of the other boxes and held the door open for him.

"Thank you miss," said the man.

"You're welcome," replied Summers turning to go, but quickly turned back.

"Oh! You didn't happen to see this couple around town, have you?"

"Sure have. That looks like Mr. and Mrs. Jameson.....Jackson.....no..... Johnson! Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. I picked them up along with another woman along the road, on the other side of the island. Said they got lost hiking. Very nice people. Said that they were on a scaveng....."

"And where did you take them?" Summers cut in, seeing that the man started to ramble.

"Dropped them off at the Whirlwind Cottages. They're about ten or so miles south of town. Owned by a Mr. Peter Findlay. That Mr. Findlay, he's a great guy as well. Known him for years. Do some work for him now and again. Sure wish I would have bought up those old....."

"Thanks for your help Mr?" Summers interrupted.

"Nathaniel Morgan. Folks around here just call me Nathan. The old-timers say that I'm a descendant of the famous pirate Henry Morgia....."

"Thanks again Henry....I mean Nathan," Summers interrupted, once again a little daunted by the man's ramblings. "But, I really do have to get going."

Summers had an inkling that if she didn't leave now, the guy would keep talking till the cows

came home. If Summers had been a little more patient, she would have learned that the Blacks final destination was the marina, and not the cottages. She spotted Harris just down the street.

“Bill!....Bill! Summers shouted

“What’s up?” asked Harris after meeting up with Summers.

“I’ve got some information about the Blacks. First, they’ve already changed their identities again and are going by the name of Mr. & Mrs. Johnson.”

“That Mossad agent certainly keeping us on our toes,” interrupted Harris.

“And second.....they’re staying just south of town, at the Whirlwind Cottages, owned by a Mr. Peter Findlay.”

“Good work Summers,” replied Harris as he flagged down a passing taxi.

After driving south for just almost 20 minutes, they came across a brightly colored sign that read “Whirlwind Cottages.”

“Thanks,” said Summers to the cabbie. “Can you please wait for us?”

“Sure,” replied the driver.

No one answered at the manager’s cottage, so Harris and Summers began searching the property.

“These are really nice little cottages,” Summers remarked after glancing through one of the windows. “I wonder what the rental rate is?”

“Great time to be thinking of taking a vacation,” vexed Harris.

“Look Bill. If you don’t like taking vacations, it’s your problem. I haven’t had any time off for over a year and I think that I deserve a break. Once this stupid mission is completed, this might be the perfect place to take a vacation,” added Summers a little disgruntled.

"Oh, before I forget again, but do you remember that old plane Agent Reid took off in?"

"Yes, why?"

"I could have sworn I saw it floating behind a bunch of sailboats down in the harbor. I'd like to check it out later, just to be sure."

The sound of someone hammering nails caught the agents attention.

"That might be the property owner working on that cottage over there," Summers said pointing.

"Hi. Are you Mr. Findlay?" asked Harris.

"Yes, how can I help you?"

"Is there a Mr. & Mrs Hans.....sorry, Johnson staying here?"

"Why yes, but they left yesterday in a hurry, along with their friend. Are you taking part in the scavenger hunt as well?"

"Ah.....?" Harris stuttered briefly.

"Yes, we're involved," Summers said, quickly thinking on the spot. "We're actually a couple of the judges, just making sure that the contestants are following the rules."

"They didn't happen to tell you where they were going, did they?" asked Harris.

"No. They said that they just had one more item to find, so I'm guessing that after they found it, they were headed back home or wherever they needed to deliver all the scavenger items to."

"Thanks for your help Mr. Findlay," Summers said shaking his hand.

"Say hi to them for me, when you see them," Findlay replied.

"Yes. We'll definitely pass on your message, but if you happen to hear or see them again in the next little while, could you please contact me?" Harris said as he wrote down his cellphone number on a piece of note paper.

"Sure, be glad to," replied Findlay.

Summers and Harris hopped back in their cab and returned to town.

"What do you have in mind now Bill?"

"Well, with nothing to go on besides their name change, we have no choice but to regroup and head home. I'll contact Eddy and try to twist his arm to try and get the use Cyclops again, plus we'll get a hold of every contact we have in the Caribbean to keep on the watch for them.

Hopefully one of them gets sloppy by accidentally using a credit card or an ATM. We just have to hope for a lucky break."

"Before we head home, let's check out the marina. If that old plane is the one Reid took off in, maybe we can at least locate her and find out why the hell she went awol."

"And she may also have a clue as to where the Blacks might be heading," added Harris. "Driver. Swing by the marina before you take us back to our hotel."

Chapter Seventy-One

Zara thought that the uninhabited island of Samana Cay was as good as any to hold up for a while and see if they had made a clean getaway. Immediately after their first morning ocean bath Zara instructed the Blacks on how to read the radar screen, then insisted that someone would need to monitor it around the clock. The “Horizon Seeker” had been custom built with state of the art communication and tracking systems, which was another reason why the drug runners wanted to steal it.

Over the next few days the Blacks and Zara explored the shoreline the in shifts, and discovered some old ruins in the adjacent bay. The rest of the island remained elusive. Any old trails leading away from the ruins were extremely difficult if not impossible to navigate, as they were completely overrun with vegetation. The group later discovered, after reading a couple of travel books left on the boat, that the ruins belonged to the Lucayan Indians, who inhabited the

island around the time that Christopher Columbus was said to have made his first landfall in the New World. They were also amazed to learn that after the departure of the Lacayans, the island had remained uninhabited due the thick reefs that surround the island with only a few narrow channels for boats to pass through. The only people that dared travel to the island are the odd obsessed scuba diver or residents of nearby islands, who occasionally come to collect Cascara bark. With no water, electricity or shelters on the island, it now is considered a true deserted island. When Erik asked Zara how she managed to navigate through the dangerous reefs, she simply replied that someone up above, must have been watching over them. Erik attributed it to just dumb luck.

The serenity of island life was a welcome relief to the frenzied activities from being on the run. As the days passed they settled into the daily routine of one person monitoring the radar and air waves, while the other two would look for fire wood, go spear fishing, cook or sometimes just take a leisurely walk down the beach. Of course Erik never did inform Zara on how many times he had fallen asleep when monitoring the console during his first night shift. Even though Erik was wanted to start writing about Grace in his journal again, he need to unwind and just laid back and enjoyed soaking up the sun, trying to forget their plight.

By weeks end, Erik could see that the women were fast becoming friends and would often see them chatting and laughing while walking the beach. On one occasion he even noticed them washing each others backs before having a splash fest, in one of their ritual morning baths. Mary’s usual reserved character was slowly diminishing, as was her inhibitions. By the time Erik decided to join in their water fight, they had already gotten out of the water and were walking down the beach in the buff to dry off. Well, not quite totally naked, as Zara carried her revolver

wherever she went.

On the eve of two weeks minus a day, Zara announced that it was time to rendezvous with Nissan & Vivi, and that we would be leaving the island shortly after lunch tomorrow at high tide, to better navigate the now known treacherous reef system. The time had gone by in a flash, and if they had it their way, they all would have simply liked to remain on the island and let the world pass them by a while longer. But unfortunately, that was not to be.

Up to then not a single boat or plane had gotten near enough to the island to cause any concern. With only the exception being when they were all bathing in the ocean, the first morning on the island, with no one monitoring the radar. Zara had thought she heard the faint sound of a plane, but dismissed it, as all the birds chirping and singing muddled any chance of positively identifying the sound.

On the day of their departure, the women had finished with their morning bath and went for a last stroll down the beach. With still several hours before high tide, and no more books to read, Erik sat back and began to read the Intrepids instruction booklet, as he casually kept glancing at the radar screen. He was about to go grab another cup of coffee, when he noticed some unusual activity on the radar screen. Three objects that appeared to be heading well north of the island, did an abrupt 90 degree turn and were making a beeline towards their location. Erik monitored the screen for the next ten minutes. The objects did not veer from their course. Based on their rate of speed, Erik speculated that the three objects were watercraft, which would give them some but not a lot of time to leave. Heading out to the open deck and scanning the beach, the girls were nowhere to be found. Grabbing a set of binoculars, he quickly spotted them at the far end of the beach, wading through the shallow waters. Erik knew that they were

definitely too far to hear him shouting from the boat, so he pulled out his revolver and let a round go. As the women started to jog back, Erik began storing everything away. A gut feeling told him that Zara would want to leave immediately, regardless of high tide.

“What’s up?” asked Zara anxiously, arriving 20 minutes later.

“Take a look at the radar. I noticed these boats about 30 minutes ago. They were heading well north of us but suddenly turned 90 degrees and began heading directly towards our island. And they haven’t changed course since.”

Zara pushed a few buttons on the two way radio and listened to the airwaves. As luck had it, she did manage to pick up on a conversation between the three boats. The discussion was broken and garbled, but the Blacks and Zara did hear the phrase ‘had to be there’ plus the words ‘search’ and ‘black’. It definitely sounded as if they were on their trail. If the message had come in clearer, Zara and the Blacks could have just patiently waited for high tide. The group of boats were only a flotilla of amateur treasure seekers looking for Blackbeard’s Treasure.

“They still could just be some scuba divers or fishermen, but we can’t take a chance,” Zara said without panicking. “Besides, we still need to rendezvous with Nissan and Vivi. It just means that we’ll be a little early. Get things packed up while Mary and I go and get some clothes on.”

“Way ahead of you. Everything is already packed.”

“Great! Then start the engines and pull up the anchors. I’ll be right back,” Zara instructed.

Erik had just pulled in the bow anchor and edged the throttles forward to get us underway, when a slight scratching sound could be heard scraping the hull. He immediately put the engines in reverse.

“Whoa there cowboy,” Zara called out, hopping up from below deck wearing only bikini bottoms

and one of Erik’s T-shirts. “High tide isn’t going to be here for about another 6 hours, and as we have learned the reefs here are terrible. We’ll have to inch our way out. I’ll take over the wheel. You head up to the bow and direct us through the reef. Lift up either your left or right arm to indicate which side of the boat is getting too close to the coral.”

They were making great progress with only a few minor scratching sounds, followed by Erik yelling out, “Sorry,” for being a little slow at the switch. Even though the water was crystal clear, the reflected sunlight off the slightly rippling water, making it difficult to see the coral until the Intrepid was almost on top of it. All of a sudden a wall of coral lay before them and Erik threw up both my arms and yelled for Zara to stop.

“There’s a complete wall of coral blocking our way,” he shouted back.

“How far below the water?”

“Looks to be really close to the surface but I can’t be positive. There are even a few columns sticking out of the water on each side of us. How the hell did you drive through all this coral without getting a scratch?”

“We lucked out and probably came in at high tide.”

“Mary, grab that pole we made for spearfishing and pass it up to Erik. We need to find out exactly how close the coral is to the surface.”

Zara kept the boat stationary in the mild current, by using the throttles and bow thrusters while Erik jabbed the pole down to the coral.

“Looks like we have only have about two and a half to 3 feet of clearance.....max! Erik shouted back after visually estimating the wet stain on the pole.

“We’ll have to look for a deeper passage or wait until the tide comes in a bit, but by looking the

radar, that is not an option. I estimate that those boats will be here in about 20 minutes,”
exasperated Zara as she put the throttles into reverse.

“Look around. There’s coral sticking up everywhere,” Erik shouted out. “This seems to be the only semi-clear channel out of the bay.”

Pausing for only a moment, Erik instantlyly started calling out instructions, “Zara. Continue backing up and keep it in a straight line with this narrow channel. Mary, watch at the back and let Zara know when she’s getting too close to the coral.”

“OK, Stop!” Mary shouted out a few minutes later.

Erik estimated that they were now about 200 feet away from the wall of coral that was obstructing their immediate escape.

“Zara. Hit the throttles full speed, and keep this sucker straight,” Erik yelled out. “Drive right between the two large pinnacles of coral.

“Forget it! The hull will tear open like a tin can,” refused Zara.

“Look. We can wait around to find out if the boats are filled with tourists, or the agents from Raven Claw.....or you can just trust me. It’s your choice.”

Zara looked over to Mary with questioning eyes. Mary just nodded in acknowledgement.

“Then hold on!” Zara called out hesitantly, as she slammed the throttles to full.

Everyone held their breath as the Intrepid sped steadily towards freedom or their demise. “Come on baby, plane.....plane.....plain!” Erik whispered out loud, as the boat closed in on the wall of coral hiding only feet below the surface.

The boat reached planing speed a moment before reaching the two peaks of rising coral. With only one slight course correction, they shot through the narrow channel without so much as a

scratch, much to everyone’s relief.

“How the hell did you know that we’d clear the reef?” Zara asked as Erik returned to the console.

“I didn’t!” Both Mary and Zara stared at him first surprised, then in anger and horror.

“Don’t worry. It was just a good calculated guess. I read the owner’s manual and it stated that this boat has a draft of two and a half feet at the props, when planing. By my estimate, the reef measured about 3 feet under the surface, so we had plenty of clearance, as long as we made it up to planing speed.”

“You risked our lives with a calculated guess?” Zara said, as she punched him in the arm. Mary followed suit and gave Erik a cuff across the back of his head.

“Next time, be positive!” exasperated Mary.

“Me, be positive? What about Zara’s blind luck getting us on the Island in the first place?” Erik replied in a kibitzing tone.

“That was not luck. It was simply skillful navigating,” Zara replied, rebutting the banter.

“Skill? That was no skill. That was just.....”

“Anyone for a drink,” interrupted Mary. She was getting tired of the gibberish. “I know that I could certainly use one after that stupid stunt!”

“A beer would be great,” Zara requested.

“Make that two,” Erik added.

“Three beers it is,” Mary announced, then went below deck.

Erik wanted to reassure the women that there in fact was plenty of water between the hull of the boat and the jagged coral, so he retrieved a tape measure from the toolbox. Pretending to

wrap up an anchor line, he nonchalantly measured the wet portion of the pole. It measured a mere 31 inches! Erik never did mention to the girls that there was only one inch of water that separated them from clearing the reef successfully or damaging the hell out of the props.

“Sorry, but we’ll have to share. It’s our last one,” Mary announced coming up from below deck.

Passing the bottle around, they all glanced back with a little sorrow. The island was slowly fading from view and their nirvana would soon only be a memory.

* * * * *

On the opposite side of Samana Cay, in a secluded bay along the northern edge of the island, the props of a Grumman Goose began slowly turning. Moments later, two Pratt & Whitney 450hp nine cylinders motors whined, then raged and thundered to life. Gus spun the plane around at the end of the bay and guided the throttles forward, making sure that he stayed away from the reef that walled in the bay. The plane gradually skimmed over the lightly rippling water, then lifted gracefully, before banking Westward.

“About time we left this God forsaken desolate piece of sand and trees,” Andrew spouted in relief. “We only have one jug of water left, and we were running low on rations.”

“It may be barren and desolate, but what a jewel of an island. No people. No Cars. No pollution.....”

“And No Water and No Electricity,” Andrew interrupted. “It’ll only be a jewel of an island once some developers buy it up.”

“That’s debatable Andy,” Gus said argumentatively.

“To each his own,” retorted Andrew. “But, you can’t tell me that your not craving a nice cold beer, right about now, are you?”

“That definitely would hit the spot Andrew.”

“Well, then turn this plane back to Samana Cay and land at that beautiful air conditioned airport, so I can buy you one,” Andrew spouted sarcastically.

“I get your point. But when we do land back on a civilized island, you’re buying the beer Andy.”

“It’ll be my pleasure.”

“Great.....because I’m reeeeeealllllly thirsty,” Gus emphasized.

Unexpectedly, the satellite phone rang.

“Hello,” Gus answered.

“Hi Gus, it’s Katia.”

“How the heck are you?” Gus replied very concerned.

“I’m doing great, but why haven’t you updated me on the status of the Blacks?”

“Hang on while I put you on speaker.....Sorry Katia, I would have, but thought it best to keep a silent vigil. You never know who might be listening in. And besides, the Blacks have been hold up on a secluded island for the last couple of weeks. They actually just left the island a while ago and are headed southwest towards Crooked Island, probably to replenish their supplies. We’re heading to refuel and replenish our supplies on Long Island.”

“Why didn’t you just fill up where you are?” asked Katia.

"Because the island is an absolute wasteland of pure white sand and trees," Andrew cut in.

"There is not a soul who lives there, except for the fools we're keeping track of."

"Sounds like a piece of paradise to me," replied Katia enthusiastically.

Gus just looked over at Andrew and grinned.

"Long Island is the closest island that has aviation fuel, so we'll gas up there and catch up to the Blacks after that. The transponder has a lock on their position, so we'll have no problem catching up to them."

"Well, why don't you boys stay and put your feet up for a while when you get to Long Island.

The doctors have given me clearance to leave the hospital, so now I can come assist in the surveillance. I can probably be at the airport within a half hour and catch the next available flight to Long Island."

"That's fine by us," Gus replied. "I'll call you once we've booked ourselves into a hotel."

"It's about time we got to sleep in a descent bed!" Andrew blurted out.

"See you guys in a while, and make sure that you keep that transponder close by. Without that we're dead in the water," Katia remarked before hanging up.

Katia arrived at Deadman's Cay Airport on Long Island at about 4:30 that same afternoon, and headed to the hotel that Gus said he booked. They chitchatted over dinner in the hotel room, but Katia just couldn't keep from yawning. After struggling to keep her eyelids open, she curled up on the sofa and was out for the count. It was only 7:30 pm.

The next morning Katia woke up and was shocked to see that neither Gus nor Andrew nor their gear were anywhere to be seen. A piece of white paper folded over the clock on the nightstand caught Katia's attention.

Good Morning!

We're at the airport loading up Betsy.

Hotel bill has been paid. See you when you get here.

Gus.

"Holy shit!" Katia said out loud to herself, as she glanced at the clock.

"It's almost 10am."

Gathering her belongings, Katia rushed down to airport, only to find Gus and Andrew playing cards on a couple of crates.

"Morning!" Katia said as she walked up behind them, with a big yawn.

"Good afternoon," replied Gus with his usual wit.

"Very funny Gus. But I guess that I deserved that one. Why the hell did you let me sleep in?"

"After seeing you rubbing your ribs and still favoring that one leg, I thought you could use the extra rest."

"Thanks Gus. I never did sleep too good in the hospital. Here, let me give you a hand with loading the last of these boxes you were using as a card table."

"You go and just have a seat in the plane. Andrew and I will finish loading," Gus instructed as he assisted her into the plane.

"Thanks Gus."

Gus hopped into the cockpit a few moments later, flipped a few switches and started the engines while Andrew loaded the last box.

“So long Katia. Good luck with your quest,” Andrew announced.

Standing by the open door, the wind from the props flapped his clothes wildly about. He held his hat on his head with one hand.

“You’re not coming with us?” Katia called out over the roar of the engines.

“Sorry, no. I’ve got too much work to do back home. And besides, island hopping is just not my thing. Gods speed,” Andrew said as he waved.

“Thanks for all your help.” Katia replied as she blew him a kiss.

Andrew slammed the door shut, then smacked his hand a couple of times on the door, letting Gus know he was clear to go.

“You may as well come and have a seat up here,” Gus called out as he began taxiing to the runway.

“Andrew really isn’t coming with us?” Katia asked a little glum as she settled herself into the copilots seat.

“To be honest, he absolutely hates just sitting around and twiddling his thumbs. Has to keep his hands and mind busy all the time. That’s what makes him such a great aircraft restorer. I on the other hand, love to sit around, relax and read a book quietly. Haven’t been able to do that in years, so I’m quite enjoying all this cloak and dagger stuff,” Gus said smirking.

Gus did a last second check over the airwaves to confirm it was clear for takeoff, then rolled the plane onto the tarmac and headed down the runway.

“I think I prefer the water take offs and landings,” Katia stammered as the plane vibrated down the poorly maintained tarmac.

“You won’t be saying that if we ever have to land in rough seas, my dear.”

A few moments later Gus pulled up on the yoke, and the shuddering stopped.

“So, yesterday afternoon you said the Blacks last location was near Crooked Island. Let’s see if they are still there, shall we?” Katia said as she pulled out the transponder that Gus returned to her at the hotel.

“Shoot. They’re not at Crooked Island at all! They’ve made their way to Turks & Caicos. Looks like somewhere in the Providenciales, on the West side of the island. I won’t be able to pinpoint their exact location until we get closer to the island.”

“Perfect. The major airport is located at the Providenciales,” Gus replied as he banked the plane southeastward.

As they headed towards Turks and Caicos, Gus began giving Katia further instructions on how to fly the plane.

Chapter Seventy-Two

Arriving at Turks & Caicos a day early than the scheduled time Nissan had stipulated, Zara immediately donned on large sunglasses and a wide brimmed straw hat to explore the marina and the surrounding area for surveillance cameras. She returned a short time later and informed the Blacks of areas they should avoid, unless they were well disguised. They all decided it best to just stay out of sight and hang around the boat relaxing for the remainder of the day. Mary and Zara started packing up their belongings late in the afternoon in anticipation of flying out with Nissan and Vivi the next day.

Tired from the trip, Erik put on his sunglasses and a hat that acted as a paltry disguise before heading topside to hose the salt water off the boat. He had just turned on the hose when he couldn't help but hear the unique rumble and drone of an airplane that only vintage aircraft engines can deliver. Turning towards the sound, he spotted it low on the horizon, coming in for a landing at the nearby airport. Erik couldn't be positive, but it appeared to be the same amphibious plane that he saw at the Executive Airport and at the marina in Sans Salvador. “That

old warbird sure does get around,” he said to himself. He really didn’t think too much about it at the time. The rest of the day dragged by. Erik finished cleaning up the boat then joined the women below deck. A little dejected at the thought of being on the run again, they just lallygagged around the remainder of the day.

The next morning after a sparse breakfast, they filled the boat up with gas but didn’t bother replenishing the water supply or buy food as they anticipated leaving shortly. It was just after 12:30, that Zara suggested that put on some makeshift disguises and head over to Sharkbites to wait for Nissan and Vivi to arrive.

One o’clock came and went. So did 1:30, 2:00, 2:30 and 3:00. Zara knew something was up.

“Is Benny here?” Zara asked one of the female bartenders.

“I think his shift starts at 4:00 today. Can I get you a refill?” she asked.

“Yes!” Erik replied eagerly. They had been nursing ice water all afternoon, as Zara insisted they needed to keep their wits about themselves, but Erik was getting restless, impatient and thirsty for something a little stronger.

“Ladies, what would you like?” Erik asked.

“Nothing for me.” Zara said immediately.

“I think I’ll just have.....oh heck, just order something and surprise me,” Mary said.

“Bring each of us a Sharkbite,” Erik said after looking over the drink menu. “And I’ll also have a Sharkbite burger with fries. I’m famished. Mary? Zara? What would you like?”

“A chicken burger with fries,” answered Mary without hesitation.

“Make that two,” added Zara, as her stomach could be heard grumbling.

While sitting at the bar a scuffle between two men who had too much to drink, suddenly erupted right next to Erik, scattering drinks, food and flinging bar stools to the ground. A built bouncer and a bartender tossed the guys out on their asses like a bag of trash, before any more damage was done.

"Everyone OK?" Erik asked, as he picked up a stool that had fallen onto his knapsack.

"We're fine, but you look a little like a tossed salad," Zara said as she picked a piece of lettuce off his shoulder. "Why don't you go and clean up while we're waiting for the food."

"No, that's OK. Just help brush me off quick, looks like our food is here."

As Erik spun around to get wiped off, he couldn't help but notice an older gentleman wearing aviation sunglasses and an outdated Hawaiian shirt. He was sitting next to an attractive woman looking to be in her late thirty's, wearing khaki capris and a cream colored blouse with the sleeves rolled up. Large sunglasses under a wide brimmed straw hat, finished her ensemble. "If he's her sugar daddy, he's one lucky old bugger!" Erik thought chuckling to himself.

"Here you go folks," a waitress said delivering our food. "It's on the house, or I should say it's on the two guys who just got tossed out. The bouncers made sure they'd cover the cost of your meals."

"Thanks."

"And here's three more drinks, also complements of the hooligans."

"Thank you," the Blacks and Zara all said in unison.

Just as Erik were finished his meal, he noticed a well tanned man in his late twenties standing at the end of the bar and chatting with their female bartender. She was pointed in his direction. Strolling over and stopping directly in front of Zara he asked, "What'll it be folks?"

“We were drinking Sharkbites, but I think that we’re good for right now,” Zara replied.

“Three more Sharkbites, coming right up!”

“Sorry, but.....”

“Hi. I’m Benny. I heard that you were looking for me?” he interjected as he continued to mix the drinks.

“Yes,” Zara spoke up immediately. “I understand that you know Vivi and Nissan?”

“You bet. How can I help you?”

“We were supposed to meet Nissan and Vivi three hours ago, and they haven’t shown up. Have they contacted you?”

“Yes. They called and wanted to leave this message with you,” Benny replied quietly, as he withdrew a napkin from his shirt pocket, “But don’t read it here. Someone might be watching.” Benny casually placed the napkin under Zara’s drink, then slid it forward, before moving down the bar to another customer.

“We need to get going,” Zara said as she casually tucked the napkin in her handbag while getting money out for a tip.

Zara and Mary headed for the exit, while Erik took a couple of big gulps from my drink. He just hate seeing a good drink go down the drain. Catching up to the girls, they immediately hailed a cab.

“To the airport, quick!” Zara called out after Erik had barely closed the door.

Zara instinctively looked behind them, which caused Erik to look as well. The older gentleman and the younger woman from the bar were quickly getting into another cab.

“It appears we’re being followed,” Zara announced, then leaned over and talked to the

driver.

The cab took an immediate right turn. A few moments later, the cab wound it's way onto the main road and sped towards the airport. As the cab pulled to a stop up in front of the terminal, the pursuing cab pulled up and stopped a little further back. The first cab sat near the main entrance, with no one exiting for some time. A man approached from the terminal.

“Looks like they're picking up a passenger,” Gus surmised as the cab driver assisted a man put his luggage in the trunk.

“Keep following that cab,” Katia instructed the driver.

Katia and Gus trailed the cab back past the road to the marina, until it arrived at The Hotel Ocean Club. Only the new male passenger exited.

“Something doesn't look right here. I don't see any shapes of other people in that cab. Quick! Pull up in front of that taxi please,” Katia ordered her cabbie.

They pulled up in front of the cab just as it was about to leave. Katia flew out of the cab with her hand in her purse, grasping her revolver and peering through the windows for any signs of other passengers. There were none!

“Where are the other people you picked up at Sharkbites?” Katia shrieked at the driver.

“Other passengers?” the cabbie replied acting like he didn't know what she was talking about.

“Yes, other passengers!” Katia repeated as she released her pistol and pulled out her FBI identification. “Where the hell are they?”

“Oh, those people,” the cabbie answered sounding absentminded. “They wanted me to drop them off just around the corner after leaving Sharkbites. One of the women paid me triple the fare just to drive to the airport as fast as possible. Who was I to argue?”

"They could be anywhere by now," Gus said dejectedly after Katia explained the situation, then started rummaging around in her handbag.

"Not anywhere Gus. We know exactly where they are," Katia said smugly as she pulled out the transponder.

Her smirk soon turned into concern, as the red locating dot had vanished. Katia tapped the unit against the palm of her hand a few times. There was still no dot on the screen.

Zara, Mary and Erik briskly walked through parking lots and along pathways to get back to the marina.

"Who the hell do you think they were?" asked Mary, as they approached the Intrepid.

"Most likely Raven Claw," replied Zara. "Could they have been the FBI agents that were supposedly helping you?"

"The guy was way too old to be Tony. But thinking back, the woman did resemble Katia somewhat," Erik replied ambiguously.

"Doesn't matter who they were," Zara piped in. "We just need to get out of here."

"But what about meeting up with Nissan & Vivi?" Mary asked anxiously.

"Like I mentioned before, we have to adapt to the situation," Zara answered curtly as they boarded their boat.

"You know that we have absolutely no food on board Zara," Erik called out as he tossed his knapsack on the deck.

"I'm positive that there is another marina and a grocery store on the South end of the island," replied Zara, as the two women cast off the lines. "We should be able to get there before nightfall."

“And if we can’t get there on time,” Erik asked inquisitively.

“Then we go hungry, and adapt to the situation again,” Zara replied a little annoyed. “Look you two, I’m trying to make the best out of a bad situation, so stop asking so many questions and just go with the flow. Okay?”

“Sorry, but I didn’t think that asking questions would upset you so much,” Erik replied.

“I’m just a little stressed.” It was Zara’s excuse to cover for her PMS.

It was the first and last time that the three of them squabbled over anything. Erik grabbed the wheel and guided them through the harbor.

* * * * *

“Hey!” Gus said excitedly. “I think your transponder is working again.”

Katia quickly lifted the transponder to see the dot illuminated.

“They’re near the marina, Gus! Driver, get us to the marina now!” commanded Katia.

* * * * *

“Zara, can you take the wheel? I just want to stow my knapsack below deck before someone trips over it.”

“Sure.”

Erik lifted the lid to the storage compartment then threw his knapsack in heavily, still a little upset with the minor confrontation.

* * * * *

“Shit!” Katia exclaimed, banging the transponder against her hand again. “It’s gone out again.”

“Hey, didn’t you saying that you hid the bug in Mr. Black’s knapsack?” asked Gus.

“Yes, why?”

I bet the stool that fell onto Erik’s knapsack when those two guys were fighting, probably damaged the sending unit,” Gus surmised.

“You might be right Gus. Let’s just get down to the marina. We might just get lucky and spot them.”

* * * * *

“What does the note say?” Erik asked after Zara snaked the Intrepid through Turtle Cove Marina and out to open water.

“Grab the wheel,” she replied, then reached for her handbag.

Unfolding the napkin, Zara read in out.

Unable to make any future rendezvous at this time. FAA has grounded us until further notice for a thorough electrical inspection and an inquiry as to why we landed on the road in San Salvador. Keep in touch with Benny. We’ll update him when we’re given the go ahead to fly. Sorry!

V & N.

"Well, that's definitely not good news to hear," expressed Mary.

"No," replied Zara. "And it means we'll just have to map out yet another escape plan."

Mary and Erik searched through a guide book, confirming that there was indeed another marina on the southern end of Turk's & Caicos. Arriving later than expected at Cockburn Harbor, they found the grocery store had already closed. Resigned to eat more takeout food from a nearby bar, they planned to be at the doorstep of the grocery store when it opened.

* * * * *

Katia and Gus scoured the Marina and then Sharkbites Bar, but came up empty handed.

"Any ideas?" Gus asked, leaning against a pillar near the bar.

"Are you in a rush to get back to the States?" asked Katia.

"The only thing waiting for me back in the States is an old greasy motor that needs restoring, and Andrew can handle that.....so no, I'm good to go. What do you have in mind?"

"I'm thinking that if the transponder received a signal once, then it's possible that it might be just damaged slightly, and still able to send out intermittent signals. We just have to wait for the transponder to pick up another signal and then head to that destination. With any luck, it'll stay on long enough for us to catch up to them."

"Great!" responded Gus, as he walked away.

"Hey! Where are you going?"

"If I have to hang around waiting for that little red light to shine, then I'm not doing it with a parched mouth. I need something to wet my whistle. How about you?"

“I’ll have a Bahama Mama,” Katia replied with a gratifying smile.

She had the feeling that Gus really wanted to be back in Florida tinkering on one of his old planes, but knew that he was also old school, and once he gave his word that he would help her, he was bound by that commitment.

“Two Bahama Mamas and two Kaliks please. I’ll be sitting at the table over there, where the pretty lady is.” Gus called out to the bartender as he pointed towards Katia.

“Coming right up,” replied the bartender, who just happened to be Benny.

“Whaaaaat?” Gus asked like there was nothing wrong, after seeing the stern look on Katia’s face for ordering two drinks. “Don’t worry. I think that we might be here for a while.”

“In this case, I hope you’re not right,” replied Katia resolutely, as she placed the transponder on the bar next to her purse.

“Here you go. Two Bahama Mamas and Two Kaliks,” a waitress announced as she slid the drinks to them.

Several hours had passed and the drinks were getting Katia a little light headed, so Gus ordered them some food. Twenty minutes later, the waitress delivered their order.

“Here’s your Tandoori Chicken miss. And the Smothered Steak for you sir. Can I get you anything else?”

“No, we’re fine for now,” replied Gus.

“Oh, I think someone is buzzing you on your phone. It’s been blinking since I took your food order.”

Gus and Katia had become so engrossed in conversation, they had neglected to keep vigil on the transponder.

Katia immediately dropped her utensils and fumbled for the transponder.

"Shoot! Missed it!" Katia said in frustration, as the light was no longer blinking. "Damn, I should have been paying closer attention. I told you the bug was probably just damaged slightly."

"Oh miss!" Gus called out to the waitress as she was walking away. "Could you please bring us a couple of big glasses of water."

"Coming right up, sir."

"I think that we both need to clear our heads a bit," Gus whispered over to Katia.

Katia grabbed the transponder and placed it near the top of her plate, and stared at it for the remainder of the night.

Chapter Seventy-Three

Two weeks had passed since Agent Harris and Summers lost track of the Blacks, and were sitting alone in a hotel room back in Florida, monitoring computer screens and making phone calls. Harris received orders from the director of Raven Claw three days previous, informing him that he would be pulling the plug on the operation unless they got a tangible lead. Harris argued for more time, and was successful to a point. The director agreed that a smaller team could keep monitoring and searching for the Blacks for a while. Harris and Summers were it!

"Any luck?" Bill asked as he entered the room with a couple of bagged lunches.

"Nothing at all," replied Summers. "It's like they fell off the face of the planet. Listen, while you were gone, it came to mind that we haven't followed up on the whereabouts of Agent Reid since she landed on Nassau."

"And your point is?" asked Harris.

"My point being, how did Reid know that the Blacks were headed to Nassau in the first place?"

And why does it seem that she always seems to be just one step ahead of us. She beat us to the boat rental shop, she was seen near Senator Chalmer's estate and even knew that the Blacks were headed to Nassau before we did," Summers postulated as she paced the floor.

"Yes, that does seem to be more than just a coincidence," pondered Harris.

"I'd hazard a guess that she's placed a bug on the Blacks and knows exactly where the Blacks are. And she's probably tailing them in that old plane," discerned Summers.

"Maybe, and I believe that the old warbird is called *Gus's Goose*," briefed Harris. "But don't you think that she would have nabbed them by now?"

"Not if she's found out that the Blacks are in the company of a Mossad agent. She might be just a little reluctant to approach them on her own."

"Send out an All Points Bulletin out on Agent Reid and see what it turns up. We have nothing else to go on at the moment," ordered Harris.

It only took Summers a little under a half an hour before she some results trickled in.

"Hey Bill! I might have something here. I just got off the phone with The Nassau Traffic Control Tower and they confirmed that an old amphibious plane, I'm assuming is *Gus's Goose*, landed in Nassau the same day that you saw Reid in it's window back at the Executive Airport. The plane departed Nassau a few days later, destination unknown. Then two weeks later, which was yesterday, it reportedly landed at Long Island for the day, and is currently in Turks & Caicos."

"Looks like it's been hopscotching around a bit," interjected Harris.

"Yes, and I bet if I hunt a little deeper, I'd suspect that the *Goose* was probably at San Salvador.

Two emails appeared on Summers's laptop almost simultaneously.

"That's not all," Summers said reading the first message. "It appears that Reid was hospitalized

the same day she landed in Nassau. Seems she was clipped by a scooter during the evening and sustained a sprained ankle, a couple of cracked ribs and a slight concussion. She was discharged from the hospital yesterday.”

“Anything else?” asked Harris.

“Let’s see.....” Summers said pausing as she read her second email. “Yes! The records from Bahamas Customs indicates that she flew out of Nassau yesterday, heading for.....”

“Let me hazard to take a wild guess,” Harris interjected. “Long Island or Turks?”

“Give the man a cu-pi doll,” Summers replied zealously.

Harris stared out the window thinking about his next move.

Summers finally broke the silence.

“Hey, why don’t we track down the *Goose* and hide our own bug on it. The way I see it. You find the *Goose*, you find agent Reid. You find Reid, then you find the Blacks. Find the Blacks.....”

“Find satisfaction.....Satisfaction in eliminating the Blacks,” Harris said fiendishly.

The wheels of a small twin turbo prop lightly touched down just as the sun broke the horizon the next morning, and Harris and Summer’s plane then taxied towards the relic of the past at the Providential Airport on Turks & Caicos. Cruising along side of *Gus’s Goose*, two figures dressed in black fatigues, disembarked and stealthily approached the plane. As one figure stood guard, the second figure entered the plane. Thirty-seconds later, both figures slid silently back across the tarmac, and back into the slow moving turbo prop. Several minutes later, the plane parked near the terminal and two passengers dressed as tourists disembarked.

* * * * *

The wind was blowing lightly on the southern tip of Turks & Caicos, as Zara and Mary headed to the grocery store to replenish their provisions. Call it a sixth sense, but there was something in the air or the way the birds were behaving, that made Erik stay on board to listen to the weather reports. Unbeknownst to the group, Harris and Summers had landed that same morning on the North shore at the Providentials.

“There’s a storm coming in from the North,” Erik announced immediately, as Mary and Zara arrived back to the boat an hour later.

“I know that by looking at this clear sky it doesn’t look like a storm will hit, but the forecast predicts that one is due to hit the island by mid day.”

“Stow the supplies below quickly,” Zara announced as she cast off the mooring lines. “We need to keep on the move.”

“What about the incoming storm?” Mary asked, being very concerned.

“Sounds like we have a couple of hours jump before the storms arrives. The waters look fairly calm right now and with the speed of the Intrepid, I’m sure that we can get to Haiti before the storm reaches us,” Zara replied confidentially.

Before long, the Intrepid was clipping across the water at 50 mph and Turks & Caicos soon disappeared below the horizon. Within an hours time from their departure, the ocean increased from diminutive ripples to three foot swells, forcing Zara to pull back on the throttles slightly. From the North, a large wall of dark clouds completely covered the horizon and marched steadily nearer. It wasn’t long before the ocean chop had increased to four feet, slowing their progress to only 20 mph. A look of concern could be seen on Zara’s face. The storm was approaching must faster than she had anticipated. Zara pushed on, bouncing the Intrepid from

wave top to wave top, as fast as the boat would allow.

* * * * *

A red light flashed on and off in erratic successions, as Katia monitored the transponder in the shelter of their hotel room at The Comfort Suites. Rain had just started pelting the ground outside.

“Hey Gus! I’m receiving intermittent signals on the transponder, and it looks like they’re headed towards Haiti by boat,” Katia informed Gus.

“Well, we’re going to have to wait until this storm passes,” Gus replied. He was watching the weather report on the television. “Looks like a small squall, but I sure as hell wouldn’t want to be caught out in open water. Their boat must be pounding the waves pretty good to cause the bug to be sending those irregular signals. Give it a rest for a while and come watch a movie. From all the news reports, we won’t be leaving until tomorrow morning at the earliest.”

Just as Katia put the transponder down on the night stand, the intermittent blinking ceased completely.

* * * * *

A thunderous jolt threw Mary and Erik on the deck as the boat slammed hard into a large wave. Zara was forced to slow the Intrepid down to a crawl. The thought of being out in the open ocean with no land in sight was frightening enough for Erik, even on a clear day. With the

waves now at seven feet and rain starting to fall, he was scared shitless. Visibility had gone from bad to worse within minutes.

"Get below deck and dig out the life jackets and survival raft!" Zara yelled out as water splashed over the bow and the driver's console, almost sweeping all of them off their feet.

Erik hustled Mary down the short stairs to the deck below, then closed the hatch behind her.

"Get below," Zara yelled out, pushing Erik towards the hatch.

"Sorry, can't do that," Erik replied. "Looking at the radar we should be spotting land any time now, and four eyes are better than two."

The wind had shifted from the north to the northeast, and had pushed the Intrepid miles off Zara's intended course. Suddenly and with little warning the waves slowly started to subside, then diminished almost completely. The pelting rain was replaced by a thick blanket of fog, and Zara slowed the boat down to a slow idle as an eerie hush enveloped the boat.

"That's weird," Erik said as he opened the hatch to let Mary back up to the deck.

"Yes and very unusual, but I have heard stories about the weather changing in the blink of an eye in this part of the caribbean." replied Zara.

"No, I didn't mean the weather being weird.....I mean that thumping sound."

"Sorry, but I don't hear anything."

"Me either," Mary added, with both women shrugging their shoulders. "And how can you possibly hear anything? You're completely deaf in one ear!"

"I'm positive that I hear I low thumping," Erik repeated.

Zara turned off the outboards and they all leaned their ears into the wind.

"You're right. I do hear a low thumping," Zara said quietly.

“I think you’re right,” added Mary. “And it seems to be getting closer.”

A dark massive object suddenly manifested from the fog like a lumbering mammoth. It was the first time that Erik had seen Zara indecisive, as she just stood in a frozen gaze. The three outboards unexpectedly burst to life. Unexpectedly, Mary had reached over and started the engines. The powerful outboards sprang forward like a surging stallion, sending Zara and Erik sprawling to the deck, as the Intrepid narrowly escaped the impending collision.

“You two are a little slow at the switch, aren't you?” Mary yelled down at them from the steering wheel.

“Thanks,” Zara said a little embarrassed, then returned to take over the wheel.

“ I think that if that tanker had another coat of paint on her, we would have been squashed like a bug on a windshield,” Erik added as he rubbed his hip.

“Maybe the next time, the two of you should go below, and leave the driving to me,” smirked Mary, as she pulled back on the throttles and handed the controls back to Zara.

As if driving out of a long dark tunnel, the Intrepid suddenly emerged from the fog bank into a clear sky, just as the sun was racing to reach the horizon. It was especially a great relief for Erik to see land in the near distance on either sides of the boat.

“Looks like the storm blew us all the way over to the Northwestern shore of Haiti, in the Canal de la Tortue,” Zara said as she viewed the radar screen. “It’s already 7:00 and it’ll be dark soon. I think that we should head to the closest shoreline and find a safe cove for us to set anchor for the night.”

After an hour of cruising the shoreline of the island lying just north of Haiti, they found a small and somewhat secluded cove.

As we sat quietly eating dinner later that evening, Erik asked, “Hey Zara....quick question.”

“Yes?”

“Do you think that Raven Claw has regained access to Cyclops?”

“No idea. But if they did, we probably would have already been surround by a flotilla of boats by now. Why do you ask?”

“Because it seems strange that someone was able to find us on San Salvador, and also on Turks & Caicos.

Shoot!” Zara said as she slapped her forehead. “Either Raven Claw or Katia and her buddy probably planted a bug either on you, or in some of your belongings. Sorry, but that should have been one of the first things I needed to check out. I was just too absorbed in getting the two of you out of the States.”

Zara quickly pulled out her bag and pulled out a small device. Over the next half hour, Zara scoured and scanned all our belongings, plus every other possible item on the boat, including every crook and cranny on their bodies.

“Looks like you two are clean, and there are no signals emanating from anywhere on the boat, so I don’t know how they tracked us down. But hopefully, we’ve finally lost them.”

They continued eating and sat silently contemplating the day’s events. Not two words were spoken about the storm, the close call with the tanker or about Zara’s misjudgment to travel with the knowledge of an impending storm. Her guilt ridden eyes told the whole story. Everyone was just thankful and lucky to be alive.

Chapter Seventy-Four

Strolling down the beautiful white sands of Turks & Caicos two days after the storm had crossed over the island, Gus asked Katia, "Anything coming from that transponder yet?"

"Absolutely nothing," she replied, as she glanced at it again for the umpteenth time. "Sorry Gus, not even a hiccup."

"Think that they might have gone down in the storm?" Gus put forward.

"Possibly, but I have a gut feeling that they survived the storm. The intermittent signal I was receiving had them heading south, so they could have made it to Haiti or to a nearby island. I think that we should wait another couple of days, just to be sure. Besides, you can't tell me you're not enjoying all the beautiful scenery here Gus," Katia snickered as she noticed Gus ogling two well proportioned women in skimpy bikinis that had just walked past.

"Yes, I definitely would like to enjoy the scenery a little closer," Gus alluded with a wily

smile. “But, at my age, all I can do is watch and dream.”

“I don’t know Gus. You still look pretty spry to me,” smiled Katia. She wished that Gus was forty years younger. With the mid-day sun becoming blistering hot, Katia and Gus decided to turn around and make their way back to Sharkbites for lunch.

About five hundred feet behind Gus and Katia, a woman was following near the water’s edge. Seeing Gus and Katia turn, she quickly headed up the beach to a nearby home. Pressed against the wall of a vacant home, and hidden by some shrubbery, the woman secretly watched and waited. Gus and Katia sauntered by just as there was a vibration in the back pocket of her shorts.

“Hello,” whispered Summers.

“Any luck finding the Blacks?” asked Harris.

“No, but I did accidentally came across Agent Reid while snooping around the Marina, and have been following her movements. Sorry, I should have let you known sooner.”

“And where is she now?”

“She’s down at the beach with an older fellow. Looks like they’re headed back towards the marina.”

“We don’t want her to have any inkling that she’s being followed, so make sure you keep your distance,” ordered Harris. “We want her to lead us right to the Blacks. Is that understood?”

“Understood,” echoed Summers contemptuously.

“And as if I already didn’t know that!” she thought smugly to herself.

* * * * *

A slight rubbing sound against the Intrepid’s hull awoke Zara early the morning after the storm, alerting her that something was amiss. She quickly nudged Erik awake, by placing a hand over his mouth with a finger up to her lips to insure he made no noise. She then woke Mary the same way. Zara quietly pulled her suitcase from a storage compartment and placed it upright on the bed. Punching several numbers on the latch locks, the bottom section fell open revealing several weapons. Zara grabbed an odd looking metal box, and with a couple of flips and twists, the intertwined pieces of metal unfolded into a lethal assault rifle with a silencer.

Zara motioned for the Blacks to squeeze against the forward wall, then she carefully unlocked the galley door and slowly opened it a crack. All Zara could see was a rifle along side of a pair of cargo shorts, and the sound of someone fiddling with the console. Voices erupted in loud whispers in a language that was unrecognizable. What was recognizable though, was the distinctive sound of someone engaging their weapon. With the end of the silencer already pointing through the galley door, Zara fired one quick shot. A loud thump hit the deck, and the whispering ceased. In a flash Zara slid the door open and rushed onto the deck, opening fire on the occupants of a boat that was tied along side the Intrepid. Two shots suddenly exploded immediately behind Zara. Another loud thump was heard hitting the deck.

Turning quickly, Zara pointing her weapon in the direction of the sound, and Erik suddenly found himself self looking down the barrel of an assault rifle. Zara immediately stood down. Her eyes immediately moved behind Erik to a wounded man rolling around in pain on the cabin deck.

“Like I said before, four eyes are better than two,” Erik remarked modestly.

“Thanks,” replied Zara graciously, then lifted her weapon and fired one more round.

The man was now motionless. Erik was surprised yet not surprised at Zara’s ruthless and unemotional action. In the back of his mind, there was also a certain satisfaction that the perpetrators received their just reward.

“What the hell is going on?” Mary asked hysterically as she came up from below deck.

“Just some modern day pirates or drug runners,” Zara replied.

“Did you have to kill them?” Mary asked in shock, as she saw a couple of bodies floating in the water surrounded by blood.

“Unfortunately, yes. It’s not in these types of individuals nature to take hostages. They wanted the boat to either smuggle drugs, sell it to an unsuspecting client or just take the outboards and sink the rest of the boat.....something they were willing to kill for.”

“Ohhhh.....” replied Mary with her voice trailing off.

Or, they might have just knocked off your husband and sold the two of us into the sex trade,”

Zara added, further explaining the seriousness of the situation.

“Mary, I think you should go and lie down below deck. You look a little pale,” Erik suggested.

Walking over to the side of the Intrepid, Zara raised her weapon and basted several more rounds along the waterline of the intruder’s boat. The holes quickly disappeared below the water and bubbles surfaced from the escaping air.

Zara had just finished shoving the second man overboard and Erik had started to hose down the blood soaked deck, when the faint whine of another boat could be heard approaching from around the point. Starting the engines, Zara immediately began hoisting the anchors, but the boat was on top of them in a flash. Zara partially hid in the the stairwell to the cabin with her weapon ready. Glancing on the opposite side of the Intrepid, Erik saw the last remnants of the

sinking boat as the nose slipped beneath the surface.

“Hello there!” asked the man in almost unintelligible English, as his boat glided nearby.

“You didn’t see my partner’s boat pass by?”

“Sorry, no,” Erik replied trying to sound dumbfounded.

The men just whispered to each other shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders. All seven men were armed with rifles or pistols, but only one man had his weapon vaguely pointed in their direction. The men in the boat thought that the two lone occupants of the Intrepid were simply tourists and would be ripe for the picking. They would soon find out that their indiscretions would have unexpected consequences.

“Nice boat!” another man called out with a strong Cuban accent.

“Thanks,” Erik replied.

“How much you want for your boat?”

“Sorry, the boat is not for sale,” Erik called out, as he continued to mop the deck.

“Tell you what mister. I make you a good offer. I not pay you, you pay me \$1000.00 for boat and you throw in your woman hiding on stairs you.....and I let you swim to shore and live. If not.....I shoot you, then take the boat and your woman,” the man said waiving his pistol around while all the other men started to laugh hysterically.

Erik glanced over to Zara who was motioning with her eyes to look down on to the deck. Leaning against the rear seat of the boat, was an automatic weapon from one of the pirates that Zara had shot.

There are sometimes moments in person’s life that defines who they are and what they are really made of. This was one of those moments. With the thoughts of his family and friends

suddenly coming to mind, Erik’s survival instincts suddenly kicked in. Knowing that this may be the only chance to get a drop on the unsuspecting scum, Erik pretended to fall on the wet deck, sending the mop flying high into the air, making the pirates laugh even harder. Landing on purpose beside the AK-47, Erik cocked it and then slowly rose and sat on the rear seat while rubbing his head. The assault rifle concealed along the side of the boat.

“I think that I’ll go with the first choice,” Erik replied as he placed my finger on the trigger. “How would you like me to pay you? Visa?”

“Oh, you’re a fun one,” chuckled the man. “You hear that men? He wants to pay us with Visa!”

The pirates howled with laughter.

“Cash will do,” the man said the leader still chuckling.

“How about Silver or Gold?” another man hollered out.

Suddenly one of the men pointed towards the water. A quiet hush came over the boatload of men, as a body floated near their boat. Reaching into the water, one of the pirates grabbed the persons hair and lifted the head above the water. Their immediate shock of recognition was all that Erik needed to see. It was now or never!

“I think that I’ll just pay you with lead,” Erik called out as he lifted and aimed the AK-47.

Before they could even grasp Erik’s one-liner, they were all lying motionless on the deck of their boat. Zara didn’t even get a shot off. Her gun had jammed. A few muffled moans echoed from the boat, as not all the men had been completely silenced. Erik had no remorse. No tears. No sickening feeling for killing another human being. But he knew he had changed. In the brief time it had taken Erik to pull and then release the trigger something deep inside of him instantly changed. No longer was he the naive, innocent, polite Canadian. Erik’s good natured personality

had suddenly become a little desensitized.

Fire immediately flared from the outboard motor on the bullet ridden boat. Zara knew it wouldn't be long before the flames would ignite the gas tank, so she quickly hauled up the last anchor and sped the Intrepid out of the small cove. A thunderous explosion erupted a few moments later, leaving nothing but toothpicks floating on the surface of the ocean. She looked over to Erik with a little admiration.

“I thought you mentioned that you were a lousy shot when you use to go hunting with your father!”

“I was.”

“Yah right! Are you hiding anything else that I should know about?” asked Zara, raising her eyebrows.

Erik didn't reply. He was deep in thoughts and Zara left him alone. She knew exactly what it felt like, after a person makes their first kill.

They set a course heading east, along the southern shore of Haiti, then hopscotched from island to island until reaching Antigua. It's numerous bays would provide a multitude of safe havens for them to hideout. They would also be able to restock much need provisions. After a couple of days tucked away in a secluded bay rimmed with stunning white sand, Erik, Mary and Zara started to feel like they were back on Samana Island. Only the odd boat had passed by. It even felt comfortable enough for to begin writing in his journal one afternoon, but another boat suddenly appeared and moored at the far end of the cove that put him on edge. He was still a little jumpy since the incident on Haiti. Even though the boat carried a family out to do a little snorkeling, it curtailing his writing mood. He tossed his knapsack back into the storage

compartment and nervously watched them for the remainder of the afternoon.

That night while eating dinner, Zara told Mary and Erik some unsettling information.

“I don’t know how else to tell you guys, so I’ll just spit it out. We’re running out of money.”

“But how?” exclaimed Mary disquietedly. “The Senator gave us quite a bit of money. We couldn’t have spent it all!”

“Most of it was used for gas, and at \$600.00 a tank, it doesn’t take long to burn through it,” replied Zara.

“So what’s the solution?” Mary asked sounding very concerned.

“By my calculations, we have enough money to get us back to Turks and Caicos, maybe as far as San Salvador. I know that we just arrived here, but with our funds running low, I think we should head back to Turks and see if Benny has heard from Vivi and Nissan. If Benny hasn’t heard anything, then we’ll pass a message thru Benny, for them to rendezvous with us where they dropped us off on San Salvador.”

“And if Vivi & Nissan can’t make it?” Erik questioned.

“Then we’ll include in the message for them to send a trustworthy friend. Once we rendezvous, I’ll hopefully have figured out a way to get you guys back to the mainland undetected, and then into some sort of witness protection program. It’s been fun being with you guys, and I love you both to pieces, but we just can’t keep living on the lam. We’ll be caught sooner or later.”

“I think that we’re beyond any kind of witness protection program,” Erik said pessimistically. “If Raven Claw has infiltrated the CIA and can get access to the world’s greatest satellite surveillance system, I don’t think that they’ll have any trouble infiltrating a Witness Protection Program!”

“We’re fucking screwed!” Mary cut in.

“Yes, I think that we’re definitely screwed,” agreed Erik. “And, the only reason why Mary and I are still alive.....is because we have you helping us!”

“Listen you two, we’ll figure something out,” Zara said trying to sound upbeat. “But our first mission is to get back to Turks & Caicos and get Benny to contact Vivi & Nissan. We leave first thing in the morning.”

Chapter Seventy-Five

Gus and Katia had just departed the Turks & Caicos Airport as there had been no further bleeps from the transponder for a full week since the storm. They had succumbed to the fact that the Blacks most probably were lying somewhere on the bottom of the Caribbean Sea.

"So I guess the JFK conspiracy theory will remain that.....just a theory. Or at least until when the official file is scheduled to be opened," Gus said trying to make idle chit chat.

"Won't matter Gus. The public will never know the truth," replied Katia with resignation.

"And, why do you say that?"

"Because the JFK file in the National Archives Museum is missing."

"What do you mean it's missing?"

"I won't go into all the details, but back in 2003 the FBI got wind that an organization....."

“You mean Raven Claw,” Gus cut in.

“Yes. An informant told us that Raven Claw were preparing to infiltrate The National Archives in Washington and steal the files. Myself and several other FBI agents successfully broke into the archives only to find that the entire file was already gone. Then all hell broke loose!” Katia said starting to get agitated. “I still don’t know exactly how Raven Claw knew we were there, but they ambushed our team. Only Tony, who I’ve already told you about, and myself escaped alive. Anyways, the files have probably been destroyed by now. The only remaining hard evidence proving there may have been a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy, lies with the Blacks.....”

“Which now lie at the bottom of the ocean,” Gus piped in.

“In all likelihood, that’s very true Gus. There’s no use even trying to track down where Mr. Black hid the original film, as I’m sure Raven Claw has already taking care of that bit of business.”

Katia then just turned her head in resignation, and stared towards the ocean.

The temperature was dropping as the *Goose* rose in altitude and Katia reached back behind the seat to grab a jacket. As she clutched the coat she glanced up, only to see Gus staring at her blouse, which had popped a button while retrieving the jacket.

“Gus!” Katia exclaimed, slapping his arm. She quickly threw the coat around her shoulders then pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped her arms around them.

“Sorry for staring Katia, but it’s not what you think. Just take a look in your right pocket. I could have sworn that I saw a red glow,” Gus replied a little disquieted while he rubbed his arm.

Katia reached into her white shirt pocket and pulled out the transponder. It was flashing, but sporadically.

“Gus! The Blacks must still be alive!” Katia said ecstatically. She swiftly connected the

transponder to her laptop.

“They’re in Antigua!”

The plane abruptly banked hard to the right, as Gus had already read Katia’s mind.

Following five miles behind, the occupants of a Beach Craft King Air were monitoring their own transponder. The twin turbo prop King Air slowly banked and shadowed the *Goose’s* every move.

* * * * *

It was mid morning when the Intrepid pulled out of Jolly Harbor in Antigua. With the funds almost depleted after refueling the boat, they could only marginally replenish their food supplies. The thought of not eating and loosing even more weight than Erik already had, was not one that he relished, and he prayed for calm seas to expedite our journey. Just as they departed the mouth of the harbor, an odd looking amphibious plane was making a water-landing in the nearby cove. Erik immediately recognized the plane. It was the same old warbird that he had seen on a couple of other occasions, but put off mentioning it to Zara as she was too busy giving Mary a refresher lesson on how to read the navigation equipment.

* * * * *

“Are you still getting a signal indicating that the Blacks are in Jolly Harbor?” Gus asked, just as Betsy settled into the water after touching down near the inlet to the harbor.

"No," replied Katia disheartened. "It cut out again about 10 minutes ago. But they must still be in the harbor. Why don't we move in a little closer and moor near the entrance for a while.

Hopefully this damn thing will start bleeping again."

"Fine by me," replied Gus.

Peering out from one of the windows of their twin turboprop as the plane lowered its gear in preparation to land at the Antigua airport, Harris and Summers had a clear view of the *Goose* cruising towards the entrance to Jolly Harbor.

* * * * *

Erik was sitting in the stern of the *Intrepid*. The warm salty air flowed briskly across his face as they skimmed across the calm waters. Staring out to the distant horizon, Grace's life reverberated in his mind, and haunt him.

"Was this how his aunt lived? - Always on the run - Constantly moving from place to place with someone following her - Was the JFK documentation he had in his knapsack, the same reason that Grace lived like a nomad, and now him? - To her dying day, Grace never relinquished her belief that she knew who shot the President - Why did the Dallas Police ignore her statements? - And why did everyone think that she was crazy and a paranoid schizophrenic? - Maybe she was a looney bin - But maybe, she wasn't - Maybe, it was just the stress of being on the run finally got to her - Erik knew that even in the short time that he and Mary had been on the run, they started to become paranoid and suspicious of who might be chasing them, and how close were they to being caught? - What would they do to them if they in fact did get caught? - Maybe

Grace’s paranoia developed in the ensuing weeks or even months after the assassination. It was well reported that several witnesses had died mysteriously, which would make anyone very suspicious and apprehensive. Grace may have been frightened that the police had second thoughts about her testimony, and decided to come after her for the home movie she had told them about. Afraid that she might disappear just like many of the other witnesses had, she decided to run, and kept running for the remainder of her life. Maybe Grace was a schizophrenic - Maybe he had inherited the gene. Erik’s head was starting to hurt with the overloads of the ‘What Ifs’ and ‘Maybes’ but the parallels to Grace’s journey and his seemed uncanny.”

A sudden nudge against Erik’s shoulder broke his trace.

“Looks like you were miles away,” Mary said sitting down beside me. “Everything okay?”

“Yes, just daydreaming and enjoying the breeze blowing in my face. Kind of reminds me of driving down the highway in my moms old 64’ Pontiac convertible,” Erik replied, with a forced smile, trying to hide his anguish. Everyone already had enough on their minds without him adding to the fire. Mary knew Erik well enough to know that something was bothering him, but didn’t pry any further. She left him to his thoughts.

Benny was standing preparing drinks behind the counter when Zara and the Blacks entered Sharkbites Bar. With the ocean remaining relatively calm, they arrived back to Turks & Caicos in two and a half days. They hoped that Benny would have news about when Vivi and Nissan might be returning. They had no money, no provisions and no gas to go any further.

“Hi Benny,” Zara said softly as we pulled up a couple of stools at the bar.

“Hi!” Benny replied in astonishment as he looked up. “Thank god you’re back.”

“What’s up?”

"Nissan contacted me a couple of days ago and left a message," Benny replied. He glanced around the bar suspiciously.

"Well.....?" Zara said impatiently.

"Sorry. The message is that they will land every Wednesday at noon, at the same place where they first dropped you off. That gives you three days to get to wherever you're going.....and don't tell me the location. Is there anything that you guys need? You all look a little thin."

"Yes, a good bit to eat would be great, but we can't pay. We're out of money," Erik replied awkwardly. He was a little embarrassed that they had to beg for a meal.

"Order what you want, and don't worry about the bill. How's your fuel situation?"

"Running on fumes," Zara replied.

"That won't do. When you go to fill up down at the marina, ask for Roger. I'll let him know that your coming and don't worry about the bill. He has a tab a mile long that he has yet to pay."

"Thanks," Erik said gratefully. "How can we repay you?"

"Don't worry about it. I've always admired the Kennedy family, so just stay alive."

Benny's comment was completely out of left field and surprised the three of them. It showed on their faces.

"But how do you....."

"Vivi," Benny cut in. "She discreetly informed me about why you're on the run. And, don't blame her for telling me. Vivi and I have been friends for years and I kind of forced her into divulging the information before I would help her. Now...what do you guys want to eat?"

Chapter Seventy-Six

With the tourist season on Antigua at it's peak, Gus and Katia were forced to take refuge on the *Goose*. The transponder hand't blinked again for the last three days, and even Katia was beginning to give up hope of ever finding the Blacks.

"Well Gus, unless we get something from this transponder soon, we should maybe start thinking about heading back to the States," announced Katia dejectedly.

"I'm fine with whatever you decide on. Even though this has been an interesting venture and a great break from my regular routine, I am a little eager to get back to my shop and start restoring that Stuka Dive Bomber."

"How about we wait the rest of the night out. If there's still no signal by the morning, we'll head home," Katia suggested.

"Sounds good to me," replied Gus. "I don't know about you, but I'm starving. Why don't we

jump in the Zodiac and head to shore to grab some dinner. Oh! And it's my turn to pay.”

Katia just smiled, then pulled on the rope attached to the Zodiac.

* * * * *

Harris and Summers were relaxing poolside while waiting for movement from the tracking device they had hidden in the old warbird. The heat and drink had taken its toll and they both had succumbed to a late afternoon siesta. Harris's phone rang.

“Hello!” Harris answered a little woozy.

“Bill?”

“Yes.”

“It's Eddy. Sorry but we've got a bad connection and I can barely recognize your voice.”

“It's not a bad connection. I'm just a little tired and groggy. What's up? I hope you're calling to tell me that you have access to Cyclops again. We sure could use it's assistance.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but Cyclops is scheduled to remain over the Middle East for at least the next three months.

“Shit, Eddy! That's not what I wanted to hear.”

“Well that's not why I was calling. Even though Cyclops is out of range, I've kept the rest of our surveillance equipment looking for any signs of your quarry, and we just got a lead.”

“That's great news. Where are they?”

“We got the lead from the Nassau Police. I'm presently running the image through our facial recognition program to confirm the person's identity. Hang on Bill, I'm just getting a read out as

we speak. Yes, I have a confirmed identity,” Eddy stated as the image of Zara opened up on a window on his computer screen. “The Mossad agent Zara, that has been assisting the Blacks, was just spotted from a surveillance camera at a marina on the island of San Salvador.”

“That’s the same place we first lost track of them!” interjected Harris. “Why would they go back?”

“If your asking me, my guess would be that they might be trying to rendezvous with someone.”

“Could very well be. Anyways, thanks Eddy. We finally have something tangible to go on.”

“Well it’s just dumb luck that we found them,” Eddy added. “Due to a rash of boat thefts, the owner of the marina had just installed surveillance cameras, which have a live feed to the Central Police stationed in Nassau. I guess the photos that you sent out to all the Police agencies and airports has paid off. Listen Bill, I’ve got to go. An old friend of mine just stopped by. I hope that this lead pans out for you Bill.”

“So do I, Eddy. Thanks again, and stay in touch,” Harris replied gratefully.

“Richard!” Eddy declared as he stood up and shook hands. “It’s been a while.”

“Yes Eddy way too long. Is there someplace secure where we can talk?”

“What’s up?” asked Eddy after his assistants left upon his request.

“Don’t ask how I found out, but we need to discuss Cyclops and your involvement in tracking down the Blacks,” exclaimed Senator Chalmers.

* * * * *

“Why do you look so happy?” asked Summers, as Harris stood up, beaming ear to ear.

“You can pack up your suntan lotion and put that transponder away away. Eddy just got a lead

that the Blacks are back on San Salvador,” Harris replied as he hastily started gathering up their belongings. “Call our pilot and tell him to get the plane ready. I want to be on San Salvador before nightfall.”

“What about agent Reid?” Summers asked as she folded her beach towel.

“What about her? We still don’t know what the hell she’s up to and besides, for one time we’re going to be one step ahead of her.” Harris replied shrewdly.

Within the hour, Harris and Summers were airborne and flying over Jolly Harbor. The *Goose* was still at anchor.

* * * * *

While Agent Harris and Summers were lazily having their siesta, Zara and the Blacks had already arrived at San Salvador. It was mid afternoon. Zara dropped Mary and Erik off on the beach in front of the Whirlwind Cottages, then headed back at the marina to return the Intrepid to her friend Dez. They crossed their fingers that the Findlays might have a cottage available.

Erik knocked on the Findlay’s door, but there was no answer. A familiar voice called out from the trail leading to the cottages. It was Peter.

“Well, hello there strangers,” Peter trumpeted with a big smile as he approached. He then shook Erik’s hand vigorously and gave Mary a heartfelt hug. “Back so soon?”

“Yes, but unfortunately just for two nights,” Mary replied We were wondering if you might have.....”

“Of course I’ve got room for you,” Peter chimed in. “You can have your old cottage back. I just

finished the renovations on it yesterday.”

“That’s great!” Mary replied.

“Where’s your other friend....Zara?”

“She’s just down at the marina and should be along shortly,” Mary replied.

“You guys look great, but a little thin. Why don’t you two go drop your gear off in the cottage, relax a bit and come for dinner around six o’clock? Here’s the key,” Peter said as he reached into his pocket.

“We don’t want to impose more than we already have,” Erik replied.

“Nonsense! I insist. You can fill me in with all the details about your scavenger hunt, and then we can maybe play that game of canasta you promised me.”

With the wonderful aroma of food wafting out the door, it was a deal that Mary and Erik just couldn’t pass up. They headed over to the cottage, unpacked then cleaned themselves up a bit. Just before heading out the door, Erik tossed his knapsack into the corner of the closet.

A couple of hours later, after everyone had overfilled their stomachs, there was a knock at the door. Zara was welcomed with open arms and given the Royal treatment of hugs, followed by a mouth watering dinner. They began to feel somewhat safe again and whiled away the evening enlightening the Findlays with some, but not all of their harrowing ordeals. The stress of being constantly on the run had finally caught up to the Blacks as well as Zara and they let their guard down for a late night of drinking and playing cards.

After landing on San Salvador just before sunset, Harris and Summers immediately began hunting for the Blacks starting at the marina, where Zara was spotted. It was a Monday night, and except for a few people cleaning their catch of the day or having a drink and talking about

the ‘one that got away’, the marina was quiet. No one recognized Zara’s photo. They headed to the local bars. It was a Monday, and the bars as well as the town was pretty much shut upped for the night. Discouraged, Harris and Summers headed to get a room at the local hotel and resume their search in the morning. As ‘Murphy’s Law’ would have it, the first person Harris and Summers should have asked, was the last. The cabbie. He immediately recognized the photo of Zara, and informed them that he had dropped her off at the Whirlwind Cottages just after the dinner hour.

“Summers. Call head office and have them send every available agent here by first light,” Harris ordered as they walked towards into the lobby. “Have them meet us at the main road leading to the cottages at 9:00am. I’ll contact the local police and have them monitor all departing flights from the airport. We’ll scout out the cottages at first light.”

“Anything else Bill?”

“Yes. You can also inform head office that they won’t have to worry about the Blacks after tomorrow.”

Chapter Seventy-Seven

Gus and Katia had just finished a tasty Italian dinner at the Al Porto Restaurant when Katia suddenly realized that she didn't have the transponder with her. Katia insisted that they head back to the *Goose* straightaway to make sure that she hadn't lost it, but rather just misplaced it somewhere on the plane. Back onboard, it didn't take to spot the transponder lying on the floor near the cockpit, as a small red light could be seen flashing in the dark.

"Shoot!" exclaimed Katia, teed off at herself. "I should have made sure that I had it with me before we headed to shore."

"Well, there's nothing we can do about it now. It's too dark to fly out tonight, so we'll head out at daybreak," Gus said trying to downplay her mistake. "Let's get the zodiac packed away and get some sleep."

Gus awoke the next morning to find Katia just staring at the transponder.

“How long have been staring at that silly little box Katia?” Gus asked while yawning, from his pilot’s seat.

“Most of the night. I guess I’m a little paranoid that it’ll just shut off at any second again. When can we get going?” Katia asked with a big yawn.

Gus reached up and flipped a couple of switches. As the propeller on the left engine started to slowly turn, Gus asked, “So, where are we headed?”

“San Salvador,” replied Katia with a smile.

The engine kicked to life, and the right prop slowly started rotating.

A couple of hours later, *Betsey* touched down softly on the calm ocean waters near the entrance to the Riding Rock Marina, on the west side of San Salvador Island.

“Nice landing.”

“Thanks Gus,” Katia said proudly. “You’re a very good teacher.”

“No, I think you have some natural talent there missy.”

“Gus, can you take us into the harbor? My phone is ringing.”

“No problem.”

“Thanks. Hi Tony,” Katia answered after looking at the call display.

“Hi Katia. Where the hell are you?”

“Hang on a second, I’m putting you on speaker. We just landed at San Salvador Island, why?”

“Are the Blacks under your protection yet?”

“No, but we just landed at San Salvador Island and it shouldn’t be too much longer,” Katia replied as she zeroed in the transponder in on the Blacks exact location. “It’s been a daunting chore to finally track them down, but I’ve got them located just under ten miles away from our

current location.”

“I just received another tip from an inside source, that Raven Claw is already on San Salvador, and know that the Blacks are hiding out at a place called The Whirlwind Cottages. Agent Summers is the only agent with Harris right now, but they have asked for a backup team, which just left Florida about an hour ago. The inside scoop is that even if the Blacks hand over all their material, Raven Claw has been ordered to leave no loose ends. It seems that the only way the Blacks are going to be getting out of this jam is in a body bag.”

“That’s not the kind of news I wanted to hear Tony.”

“One last thing Katia. My source also indicated that Raven Claw has been shadowing your every move, from the first time you were on Turks & Caicos. They most likely put a tracking devise somewhere on your plane. Watch your back Katia.”

“Thanks for the heads up Tony. I’ll keep in touch,” replied Katia as she started searching the plane.

“That certainly doesn’t sound too good for the Blacks,” Gus said a little dispirited, as he started searching for the devise.

“No it doesn’t.

“Any ideas on how to get the Blacks out of this mess?” asked Gus as he sat down on a nearby seat.

“Not yet! But I would like to find that bloody tracking devise first though. Even if we manage to escape with the Blacks, Raven Claw will know exactly where we are.” Katia continued to scour the interior. Gus just remained seated in one of the passenger seats, listening intently.

“Well, are you going to help me or not?” Katia said a little annoyed after glancing over and

seeing Gus just sitting there.

He cracked a slight smile from the corner of his mouth. “Is this what you’re looking for?” Gus was holding out the tracking devise that he had found from under one of the seats several minutes earlier. He opened the door and the reflection of the harbor waters glistened about the cabin. Gus tossed the small box over to Katia.

“That’s okay Gus,” Katia replied as she tossed it back to him. “You can have the pleasure.” He rolled it in his hands and played with it momentarily, then with a sideways flip of his wrist, the tracking devise was quickly deep-sixed.

“Anything come to mind yet about getting the Blacks off this island alive?” asked Gus. “Nope. But we need to come up with idea fast. By my calculations, Harris’s backup agents should be landing soon,” Katia said looking at her watch.

“I don’t think that Harris would risk rushing in on the Blacks and a Mossad agent without any backup. He’ll wait for reinforcements. We could try to get a jump on Summers and Harris, but I think they’ve got the upper hand. They undoubtedly have staked out the location and are well positioned to spot approaching vehicles a mile away.”

Both Gus and Katia just sat, pondering the situation. Glancing through the open door, Gus spotted a boat moored at the marina.

“Well, if we can’t rescue the Blacks from land, then how about by water?” Gus asked as he motioned with his thumb towards the old fishing boat.

Katia just smiled and grabbed the small zodiac laying in the rear of the plane.

* * * * *

A barking dog just outside the Black's cottage window awoke Erik from his stupor. It had been another late night of drinking and playing cards with the Findlays. Erik couldn't remember much after the third game of canasta and who knows how many bottles of wine. Like snakes milling around in a snake pit, he found himself entangled in amongst the arms, legs and naked bodies of Zara and Mary. He could only assume from their positions and the smell of sex permeating the air, that the three of them must have indulged in some very salacious exploits. Erik and Mary had discussed having someone else join them in bed for a provocative night of sex on numerous occasions. And although Erik was a little shocked at first that it finally transpired, it didn't surprise him, as the three of them had become very impassioned friends over the course of their journey.

Erik's head started to pound and he needed some air. Still half drunk he got dressed and grabbed his knapsack then headed out to the beach. He only made it as far as the beach chairs before flopping himself down to watch the remainder of the sunrise. Images flashed in his head of his night with the two women. Not knowing what images were fact, or were merely delusional from the overabundance of the alcohol, were irrelevant. The images were intoxicating. He started to rub his temples to relieve his headache.

One does peculiar and unusual things when still half drunk. Erik was no different, and he pulled his notebook with good intentions of writing. He started reviewing one of Grace's letters, but his eyelids soon felt like lead weights and slowly shut. Memories of Grace recounting her stories when she lived in Dallas flooded his mind.

Chapter Seventy-Eight

Dallas, Texas - November 22, 1963

It had taken several months before Grace had settled into a routine since first arriving in Dallas. And life was good. But standing near Elm Street with her movie camera still rolling as the President's car sped away, Grace somehow knew that her new idealic life in Dallas was shattered and would never be the same.

Seeing people running towards the grassy knoll, Grace instinctively followed like a lemming running towards a cliff. The smell of gunpowder still hung heavy in the air as she approached the fence. Most of the people were clamoring around, talking about hearing a gun shot and spotting someone behind the fence. Peering through a crack in the fence, Grace caught a glimpse of some movement. Not being able to see over the fence, she lifted up her camera and began blindly filming. The rushing mass of people flooding the hill were now growing angry.

Unnerved, Grace made her way through the frenzy and headed back towards her apartment.

Passing the School Book Depository Building, she rounded the corner and disappeared amongst the crowd.

Arriving in her apartment, Grace removed her babushka and stared blankly out her window at the confused and bewildered people on the street below. The gravity of what had just happened suddenly sunk in and her eyes welled up with tears. She reached deep into her coat pocket and pulled out a napkin and wiped a tear from her cheek, then flipped it open to blow her nose. Grace stood motionless as she inquisitively gazed at the napkin. It was the napkin with the map on it, that she had picked up off the floor at the cafe in Red Deer. She had completely forgotten about it since placing it in her pocket. Grace flattened it out on her kitchen table.

Even though it was crudely drawn, the map and names looked vaguely familiar. *Houston Street - Elm Street - Railroad Overpass, Wooden Fence* and the initials *TSD*. The letters *TSD* stumped her for a moment. She repeated the initials several more times in her head. Peering more closely at the napkin, Grace noticed what appeared to be sharp indentations of a pen dotted around the initials.

Suddenly she recalled the two men’s conversation from the adjacent booth, and the tapping of a pen. “You’ll be located here, marked *TSD*, in the Texas Schoolbook.....” is all she heard. All at once, it clicked in. The men had to be referring to The Texas Schoolbook Depository building. She had just walked past the building not more the twenty minutes ago.

Everything about the two men that had boarded the bus in Edmonton, started to make sense.

“I need to inform the police about this,” thought instinctively, but then remembered that there

still might be a warrant on her, for her arrest. Grace paced the floor pondering the dilemma she faced. “Should she or shouldn’t she?” After several agonizing minutes, Grace new that the right thing to do was to report the information to the police, regardless of the outcome. Replacing her head scarf, Grace tucked the napkin in her handbag and headed out the door.

The streets were filled with bewildered people. Some were huddled in groups talking about the President, some people were crying and being comforted by others, and some were just standing....staring out into oblivion. As Grace made her way towards the station, she glanced up and noticed that she had just passed under a sign to a camera shop. Remembering that her film reel was finished, she backtracked a few steps and dropped the film off for developing.

Numerous police officers and civilians were busily coming and going to the Police Station when Grace arrived, which made he uneasy. Grace stood near the entrance and again pondered on whether or not she should go in. Reassuring herself that it was the right thing to do, she continued into the station.

Jostling her way through the maze of people, Grace made her way up to the Duty officers desk. The name card read Constable David Lewis.

“Yes, what is it lady? I’m a little busy at the moment.”

“It’s about the shooting downtown a little while ago. I think I know who shot the President,” Grace replied.

“You what?” replied skeptically.

“I think I know who shot the President,” Grace repeated louder.

Several people and officers stopped in their tracks as they overheard the conversation.

“And how do you know this information Miss.....”

Grace was about to announce her name, but paused a moment.

"Miss? Your name?" asked the constable again.

"Oh, sorry. My name is Aderes....Madam Aderes."

"So, Madam Aderes," the officer said raising his eyebrows. "How do you know who shot the President?"

By this time, several officers had gathered around with great interest to hear what this lady had to say.

"Well, I was at a bus station cafe, and overheard a couple of men talking about making a hit, and mentioning a route a President would be traveling, and something about some kind of School Building, if my memory serves me correctly," Grace stammered. She was nervous and uneasy, but continued on. "The men's names were a Lee Ossy?...Oswild...something like that, and the other man's name was Rahoul. Sorry, I don't know the his last name."

"And where did you overhear this conversation?"

"Oh, in a bus stop cafe up in Red Deer."

"Red Deer?" asked Constable Lewis. "Which state is that town in miss?"

"Oh, Red Deer is not in the States. It's a small town up in Alberta, Canada."

"Canada?" Lewis repeated skeptically.

Several of the other officers shook their heads and grinned while walking away. Another officer leaned over and talked quietly to the duty officer, "I think that she's exactly like some of the other nut cases that we've had in here today. Someone just seeking attention."

"I was just thinking the same thing. But we have orders to get a statement from everyone, so escort her to a chair and have her fill out a report."

“Miss.....Hi, I’m inspector John Milligan. We’d like to get a statement from you, so if you would please follow me, I’ll find you a place to fill it out.”

“Certainly,” Grace replied as she followed the officer. “Oh, I almost forgot. I also so have a napkin with some notes on it. Would you like to see it?”

“No, that’s quite all right. I’ll maybe have a look at it after you’ve finished filling out your statement. As you can see, it’s pretty busy in here and I have a lot of people to attend to.”

“As you please,” Grace said a little chagrined.

Grace had finished with her statement and waited for well over an hour before losing her patience.

“Is Inspector Milligan around?” Grace asked as she approached the duty officer. “I’ve finished my statement and I’d would like to show him this napki.....”

“I believe Milligan is busy at the moment,” Lewis interrupted. “But you can just put your statement in the bin and someone will talk to you when they can.”

“But.....”

Constable Lewis looked up and glared. Without saying a word to Grace, he just pointed to the bin. Grace got the message, closed her handbag and slapped her statement in the bin before stomping back and plopping herself in a chair to wait, along with umpteen other people sitting in a long line along a wall.

The afternoon dragged on and on, but finally Grace’s statement reached the top of the pile.

“Madam Aderes!” Inspector Milligan called out, as he started to scan the page to get a quick heads-up on the statement. “Madam Aderes. Is Madam Aderes here?”

“Maybe she’s in the restroom,” Lewis submitted.

"Could be," replied Milligan.

Milligan was about to put the file back in the bin when something caught his eye from reading the Aderes statement.

"Hey Dave."

"Yah?"

"What was the name of the guy that was arrested in connection to the assassination?"

"I believe his name was Lee Oswald, why?"

"Has his name been released to the public yet?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Some of the boys are taking turns interrogating him."

"Madam Aderes!" Milligan called out loudly, as he surveyed the waiting room.

"Is there a problem Milligan?" asked Lewis.

"Yes. There might be. This Aderes lady, said that she knew who shot the President."

"So have half the people we've had in here today. So what?" Lewis said nonchalantly.

"Then tell me how she knew it was Oswald?" Milligan replied pointing to Oswald's name on the statement. "He was arrested only hours ago."

"Shit!" exclaimed Lewis dumbfounded. "Grab some of the guys and search the building, and the grounds. She might still be hanging around. Was she the dark haired lady?"

"Yes. She had a beige trench coat on and was wearing a head sca....."

"Is that her down the hallway?" interrupted Lewis as he pointed to a woman leaving the restroom.

"Thanks. I'll check." Milligan said as he headed across the room.

"Miss Aderes?" Milligan called out as he approached the woman.

“Yes?”

“Hi. Sorry for taking so long to get to your statement, but as you can see, we are a little overwhelmed.”

“Well, it’s about time! I’ve been waiting all afternoon!”

“Please, if you wouldn’t mind just following me.”

Milligan led Grace across the room and down a hallway. Stopping and knocking on a door, a voice bellowed from within, “Come in!”

As Milligan entered, a man sitting behind a desk was checking off items on a piece of paper, then looked up and quickly stuffed a piece of paper into a large brown envelope. He then placed the envelope in the top right drawer in his desk.

“What is it Milligan? I’m extremely busy.”

“I think that you may be interested in talking to this woman,” Milligan said as he handed Aderes statement to the man, then leaned over and spoke quietly to him.

The man behind the big mahogany desk looked up to Milligan in shock, and then over to Grace who was still standing in the doorway.

“Thanks Milligan. Show the lady in and then you can get back to your other duties. I’ll take it from here.”

Milligan motioned for Grace to enter, then departed the office.

“I’m Inspector Thomas Harris.” He reached over his desk and shook her hand.

“Nice to meet you,” Grace replied curtly. She was still miffed about the long wait. “I’m Madam Aderes.”

“That’s an unusual name. What nationality is.....”

“I didn’t wait for hours on end to discuss my name or nationality!” Grace interrupted abruptly.

“I’m here to report that I know who was responsible for the incident downtown!”

“Please, just calm down miss. Have a seat and tell me what you know,” Harris replied motioning to a chair beside his desk.

Grace pulled out her diary, which she faithfully recorded her daily activities. Over the next half hour, she recounted in detail her journey from Edmonton to Dallas. Harris soon grew tired of Grace’s side stories of living in Hollywood and dating some of the Hollywood elite. He was about to curtail the interview, but began listening intently after Grace stated to describe how she came across the napkin with a map drawn on it. She carefully handed the napkin over to him. As Harris inspected the napkin closely, his expression change from inquisitive to grim.

A sudden knock on the door interrupted the interrogation.

“Sir! You better come quick. There’s a disturbance from a small mob in front of the precinct.”

“I’ll be right there,” Harris replied and immediately stood up. “I’m sorry Miss Aderes, but we’ll have to continue this conversation in a while. You can grab a coffee down the hall in the lunchroom and wait there until I get back. I shouldn’t be too long.”

“Maybe I should just come back another time,” Grace announced as she reached over to grab the napkin and her diary.

“Sorry, but this is now evidence,” Harris said as he quickly picked the material up.

“But that is my property!” Grace stammered angrily.

“Don’t worry, it’s in safe hands.” He pulled out the brown envelope from his desk drawer. “It will be returned after it’s thoroughly examined.”

“Inspector Harris! We need your assistance now!” another officer reported as he barged into the

room. Harris quickly placed the napkin and Grace's diary in the envelope, then returned it into his drawer.

"If you'll excuse me," Harris said abruptly as he dashed out of his office.

Grace was now infuriated. Not only was she miffed at spending her entire afternoon at the precinct, she was incensed that Inspector Harris had the gall to confiscate her material. No sooner than Harris left the office, Grace promptly rose from her chair, closed the door slightly, then boldly walked behind the desk. While keeping an eye on the doorway, Grace opened the drawer and retrieved the envelope. Stuffing it in her purse, she cautiously made her way out of the office and down the hallway. With most of the officers preoccupied with the commotion at the front entrance, Grace quietly exited out a side door.

Returning much later than expected from subduing the unruly crowd, Harris was eager to interrogate Madam Aderes further. Checking the lunchroom and then his office, Harris found that she had already departed. Exhausted and frustrated, Harris sat down in his chair, put his feet up on the window sill and gazed out with his hands rested behind his head. A knock on the door broke Harris's blank stare.

"Yes, what is it?" Harris called out.

"Hi inspector. It's officer Saunders. You asked me to come by to pick up a little something for my trouble."

"Yes, yes Saunders. Come in," replied Harris. "Were you able to dissuade people from snooping around the knoll?"

"For the most part, sir. That was until it was engulfed by a swarm of people who rushed up the hill right after the President's motorcade sped past."

“Do you know if anyone spotted the operatives behind the fence?” asked Harris anxiously.

“I can’t say for sure or not. But, I did notice that a woman had her movie camera pointed over the fence.”

“A woman did what?” blurted out Harris. “Did you at least grab the camera from her?”

“That was my intention sir, but by the time I pushed my way through the crowd, she had vanished.”

“Did you put a bulletin out on her?”

“No. I wrote out the report, but completely forgot to hand it in. Sorry,” officer under replied meekly. “Here it is here, sir.”

Harris snatched the report from Saunders hand and scanned it quickly.

“It can’t be,” Harris muttered out loud to himself. “Are you sure that the woman with the movie camera was wearing a beige trench coat?”

“Yes, positive. Oh, and I also forgot to write down that she was also wearing a scarf around her head,” added Saunders.

“Was she carrying a dark colored handbag?” asked Harris with keen interest.

“Come to think of it.....yes, I believe so. Why?”

“Not important. You can go now. Just leave your report with me.”

“Hmm, hmmm,” Saunders hinted to Harris as he held out his hand while rubbing his thumb a couple of fingers together.

“Oh yes. Your bonus. Hang on,” Harris said as he opened up the top desk drawer.

Harris was completely dumbfounded to discover that the envelope was missing. It not only contained Aderes’s diary and napkin, it also contained a map and payroll list along with a large

sum of cash. He immediately checked the other desk drawers and then the nearby filing cabinet. The envelope had vanished and his frustration showed.

“Is there a problem sir?” asked Saunders as Harris began shuffling through the piles of paper on his desk.

“No! I just remembered that I left all the bonuses at home for safe keeping, Saunders,” Harris lied, as he tried to contain his anger. “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure you get it in the next day or two. Now, please leave!”

No sooner than the door shut, Harris was on the phone, “Lewis, it’s Harris. Listen up. I want an APB put out for a Madam Aderes. She was the lady in a beige trench coat that came in earlier who was also wearing a headscarf.”

“Yes, I know exactly who you are referring to. She’s the lady who said she knew who shot the president,” exclaimed Constable Lewis.

“Is there anything else we know about this woman? Phone number, address or where she works?” asked Harris.

“Just give me a second, Milligan just dropped off her initial report, and it’s here somewhere,” Lewis replied as he shuffled through some paperwork. “Yes, here it is.” Lewis scanned the report quickly. “Not much here sir. No phone number or home address. But she did write down her occupation.....Fortune Teller.”

“Did she write down the place she works?”

“No, but my guess is that she would have to be working out of a nightclub or restaurant,” surmised Lewis.

“Then I want every club and food establishment searched until we find where she works. They’ll

surely have a home address and phone number for her.”

Harris pulled out his notebook and promptly began writing.

“Here’s a list of a handful of constables that I want assigned to this case.

Make sure they know that apprehending this Aderes woman is given top priority. And I want to be notified the minute she has been brought in. Is that understood?”

“Yes sir. I’ll get right on it, sir.”

* * * * *

Grace arrived back at her apartment mad, but satisfied that she had her possessions back.

“Who do they think they are, that they can think that they can take my diary away from me?”

Grace uttered to herself. She pulled the envelope out of her handbag and dumped the contents on her kitchen table.

Grace stared in disbelief as a bundled of bills rolled out. Slowly, she reached over and picked up the cash, then ran her thumb through the stack. Her hands started to tremble slightly as she carefully placed it back on the table.

“Why would a police officer have this much cash just lying around in his desk?” Grace pondered.

As she contemplated on what to do with the money, Grace noticed that her diary had flipped open and the napkin hung loosely out. The napkin had seen better days and Grace delicately picked up the napkin and gently placed it on the table. Removing her coat, Grace hung it over a kitchen chair and then put a kettle of water on the stove to make a cup of tea. Perplexed

by the wad of money, Grace returned and re-flipped through the stack, but much slower as she tried to roughly count it. Out of the corner of her eye, Grace spotted a piece of paper that had also fallen from the envelope. Reading it quickly, it seemed to be just an unimportant list of names, but the sun shinning from the window reflecting through the paper, revealing that there was something else written on the reverse side. The kettle whistle blew and Grace dropped the paper back down on the table.

With a hot cup of freshly brewed tea in hand, Grace returned to the kitchen table and stared at the paper.

“Just a map,” Grace said ho-huming to herself.

Glancing over to the nearby napkin, she took a sip from her cup, then all at once started coughing and sputtering. Grace shakily put the cup down and stared in astonishment. The maps on both the napkin and paper, were almost identical. The only difference she could find was that one map had circled numbers marked at several locations, while the napkin had circled X’s marked in the identical locations. This seemed a little too coincidental.

Suddenly it occurred to Grace that the map she had innocently picked up in the cafe, was somehow linked to the shady men from the bus and The Dallas Police Department. Grace suspected that the maps as well as the list of names might be of significant importance, but she could no longer trust the Dallas Police. Grace decided to keep the money and hide the maps. Her diary was with her at all times and would be as good as anyplace to keep the material safeguarded.

Opening the book, Grace noticed that the back cover had separated slightly. It was old like it was used daily and time had taken its toll. With a knife, she delicately enlarged the opening.

After ironing the map from the police station flat, she cut the napkin to a single thin sheet and placed it within the still warm pressed paper. She then carefully slid it between the endpaper and cover before re-glued the open edge. Grace poured herself another cup of tea. Contemplating her situation, Grace suspected that the Dallas Police would surely be looking for her. Luckily, she hadn't disclosed her real name or address. She would be patient and wait until things cooled down a bit. Maybe they would forget about her. Maybe they wouldn't. But Grace realized that she could no longer live in Dallas.

* * * * *

It took Harris's agents just over a week before they discovered that Grace, who they only knew as Madam Aderes, was conducting her psychic readings out of restaurant in the West End. Since Grace only accepted cash payments from her clients and never opened a bank account, there were no leads as to her real name. The misunderstanding in Washington had left a bitter taste in Grace's mouth, and she refused to disclose her real name to anyone.

With little else to go on, Harris ordered a surveillance team to watch the restaurant around the clock.

Pressured by numerous inquiries from the Chief of Police for justification on the surveillance, Harris was given to the end of the week to find his material witness. Word spread quickly throughout the precinct about the search for the mysterious woman who was wearing a headscarf, and it wasn't long before an officer of Ukrainian heritage nicknamed Madam Aderes, the Babushka Lady.

* * * * *

Over the last week and a half, Grace had stayed hidden in the sparse by comfortable confines of her apartment. She kept herself busy by reading books, watching TV and packing for the inevitable trip she was forced to take. As Grace stared out her window, there was a knock at her door.

“Yes. Who is it?” Grace called out through the door.

“Greyhound miss. Here to pick up some parcels.”

“Come in,” Grace replied as she opened the door.

“So how many crates are you shipping?” the young man said as he began filling in the shipping order.

“Seven.”

“And where are they going?”

“To my sister’s house in Edmonton. Here is her name and address,” Grace replied as she handed a piece of paper over to the man. “I’ve already labeled the crates.”

“Thanks. I’ll get these loaded up in the truck and be out of your hair in no time.”

“No rush. My bus doesn’t leave for another couple of hours.”

After the man left Grace took one last look around the empty room that had been her home for the past six months. With a quiet click, Grace had reluctantly closed the door behind her, then walked the short flight of stairs to street below.

It was a business as usual for the citizens of Dallas with people going to and fro, but Grace

could sense that the mood and the charm of the city had changed. The smiles and cheeriness of the passerby's had gone. Their usual hustling pace, replaced with a slow methodical stride. Withdrawn in their own internal thoughts, they just plodded along on their daily routine. Only one woman acknowledge Grace with a polite but subdued smile, as she trodden past.

The taxi that Grace had called for, was already waiting just outside her apartment.

“Where to miss?” asked the cabbie.

“Oh, just drive around a bit will you. I'd like to see some of my old haunts before I leave town.”

“Sure thing. Anywhere in particular?”

“Not really. I'll tell you as we go.”

“Anything you say, miss,” replied the cabbie as he shrugged his shoulders.

Grace had only travelled a few blocks when she called out, “Oh, stop here please, stop!”

The driver pulled over to the curb.

“I'll be right back. I need to pick up something,” Grace announced as she exited the car.

Several minutes later, Grace returned, “Sorry, but I forgot that I was getting a film developed at the camera store.”

“Not a problem. It's your nickel. Have you decided on where we are headed yet?” asked the cabbie.

“Yes. Fort Worth.”

“Fort Worth?” the cabbie questioned in disbelief. “Why not just take the Greyhound?”

“Because I hate taking buses,” Grace lied.

She actually enjoyed traveling by bus, but feared that the police would be watching for her at all the public transportation terminals in Dallas.

"It's going to be expensive," declared the cabbie. "Are you sure that you can cover the fare?"

"Not a problem," Grace replied as she pull out several bills from her stash of newly acquired money and flashed them over the seat. "Turn left at the second corner. I'd like to say a few good-byes to some of the people I worked with over that last six months."

The taxi rambled down the street until Grace announced, "The restaurant is just up to the right."

The driver pulled over and parked in the first available parking stall about 50 feet before the restaurant. Grace exited the cab. The door almost hit a gentleman accompanied by a woman holding his arm as they were just walking past. A barber leaning against his doorway looked up from reading his newspaper and snickered. As Grace closed the door, the sight of two men casually playing cards on the hood of their car caught her attention.

"That's a little strange," Grace thought to herself.

One man was half sitting on the hood, while the other man stood and then glanced up towards the restaurant. She wouldn't have given it a second thought if the men were young, but these two men appeared much older and were wearing business suits with white collared shirts and sporting fedoras. Suddenly, one of the men slapped his buddy's arm and pointed in the general direction of Grace. They immediately started walking briskly across the street. Grace froze. "Were the two men undercover police officers?" she asked herself. "Have they spotted me?"

As if in slow motion, a woman unexpectedly sauntered past Grace. Grace immediately did a double take. The woman was wearing a light colored coat, head scarf and large sunglasses. She could have been her twin, if Grace had been wearing her usual garb. Her trench coat was laying

in the back seat of the taxi. Just as the woman grabbed the door handle to the restaurant, the two men from across the street were on her in a flash. As one of the men produced a badge, Grace caught a glimpse of a sidearm just inside his jacket, and she promptly returned into the back seat of the taxi.

“Drive on!” Grace ordered.

“I thought you wanted to stop?” asked the cabbie.

“I did. But, I’ve changed my mind. Just head to Fort Worth please, immediately.”

Grace’s hunch that the police might be searching for her had been confirmed!

A little over an hour later Grace instructed the cabbie to stop within sight of the Greyhound station, a few blocks away. Grace thanked the driver and gave him a sizable tip, before walking slowly in the opposite direction of the bus station. Continuing to glance over her shoulder, Grace waited until her cab had turned the corner before spinning around and heading towards the Greyhound Station.

“Where to miss?” the ticket agent asked as Grace approached the counter.

“A one-way ticket to Edmonton, Alberta.

“Just one moment while I check.”

“That’s in Canada,” Grace enlightened the clerk.

“Yes, thank you.”

While the ticket agent was searching for a rate, Grace glanced around the station and saw a travel poster that caught her attention.

“Here it is. A one way ticket to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, will cost you....

“Sorry, but I’ve changed my mind,” Grace interrupted. “I’d like a one way ticket to.....

Chapter Seventy-Nine

The licking of a dog on Erik's ticklish feet, stirred him to consciousness. It was a little past 8 o'clock. As his eyes focused, Erik could see that the Findlay's dog Wildy, had taken the liberty to hop up on the lounger and curl up next to his legs. Erik shook his feet slightly to ward off the ticklish licking. Wildy looked up briefly before starting to lap at his feet again. Rolling over, Erik propped himself up and with a gently nudge, the dog hopped onto the sand. Looking between his feet, Erik spotted an old fishing boat was anchored close to shore. His head still pounded, and he cursed to himself. He hated having a red wine hangover.

A rustling of paper just to the left and slightly behind Erik caused him to turn. There sitting in a beach chair was a man wearing a tacky Hawaiian shirt, large sunglasses and cargo shorts, with a newspaper folded over his lap. A safari hat cast a shadow over his face, obscuring his identity.

“Good morning,” Erik called out in a raspy voice, just trying to be polite.

“Morning,” the man muttered.

Turning forward, Erik grabbed his notebook that he was half sitting on. Grace’s letter was sticking out from the back pages. Erik assumed that he must have tucked it away before falling asleep. With semi fresh thoughts on Grace’s activities, Erik began jotting down some notes to record his dream.

“Have you been on the island for long?” interrupted the man.

“No, just got here yesterday,” Erik replied before returning to his writing.

There was something about the man’s voice that sounded familiar, but Erik just couldn’t pin point it.

“Sure is a nice place to get away from civilization,” he interrupted again.

“Yes, it certainly is,” Erik replied, annoyed, but still trying to be cordial.

“Do you know if there are any good places to grab a bite to eat?” he added, once again interrupting Erik’s writing.

“Sorry. I don’t want to sound rude, but I’m here to get a bit of peace and quiet so I can get my work done,” Erik said still politely, but straight to the point.

After a brief moment, the man spoke up and interrupted Erik again.

“With a tan like yours, you must have retired early or maybe you’re a travel writer or something? I could help but notice that you’re busy trying to write. Man, I sure would like to live that lifestyle. Seeing the world, taking photographs and writing about your adventures. What I wouldn’t trade to....”

Erik had finally had enough of the man’s gibberish and this time it was his turn to interrupt.

“Yes, I am trying to write! And I have a headache,” Erik emphasized. “Sorry, but you’ll have to excuse me. I need to head back to my cottage to continue my writing and check on my wife.”

Sliding over to side of his lounge chair, Erik reached down to grab his knapsack and was astounded to discover it wasn’t there. He quickly stood up and searched around his chair.

“Looking for this?” the man said as he lifted up Erik’s knapsack before dropping it back down on the sand. “Oh, and there’s no need for you to check on your wife or your Mossad friend. I’ve already checked in on both of them.”

Erik just stood there puzzled and stunned by his comment.

“Just sit back down Mr. Black,” the man ordered as he removed his sunglasses.

It was Agent Harris! Erik was about to bolt towards his cottage, but Harris opened up the newspaper on his lap to reveal a revolver. Erik paused

Unexpectedly, a young couple were strolling along the shoreline and Erik glanced towards them. Harris instinctively knew what Erik was thinking.

“Now, you wouldn’t want me to have to kill those nice innocent people now, would you? Please Mr. Black, sit down,” he ordered in a loud whisper.

“You’ve got what you want, so why don’t you just leave me and my wife in peace!”

“Oh, don’t worry Mr. Black. Your wife is already enjoying her peace, as well as your friend, and you’ll be joining them shortly.”

Harris’s comments didn’t click with Erik immediately.

Reaching down, Harris picked up the knapsack and flung it at Erik’s feet.

“Now, put the notepad in your knapsack, then toss it back to me.”

Erik did what he was told, but only threw the knapsack a few feet from where he was sitting.

Annoyed, Harris got up and retrieved the bag.

“I think it’s time we take a little stroll down the beach,” Harris announced as he slung the knapsack over one shoulder. He tucked his pistol in the front of his shorts then pulled his shirt over to conceal it.

It was then that Erik noticed some dark red marks splattered on Harris’s shorts. Instantaneously, Harris’s comments just moments ago registered, and it made Erik sick to his stomach thinking that it could be blood. He prayed that his instincts were wrong but could only assume the worst for Mary and Zara. Erik’s Ukrainian blood started to boil. There was no way in hell I was going to go down without a fight.

Erik stood up and began slowly walking down the beach. He started trying to formulate a way of escaping what seemed to be certain death. “If I get close enough to the thicket, I might be able to run in quickly before he can get a shot off,” he thought to himself. But looking closer, the brush was thick, with no openings or space to run through and quickly dismissed the idea. Then, glancing towards the ocean, he noticed someone snorkeling nearby, which instantly sparked another idea. “Maybe if I can get close to the waters edge, I might be able to dive in and swim under into deeper water. The water would slow down the bullets. But that’s just plain stupid. I’m grasping at straws. My only hope was that Harris might stumble or get distracted for a split moment, so I could try and wrestle the gun away from him.

“Just past that rock, there’s a path into the bush. Take it!” Harris ordered.

“Where’s your partners in crime?” Erik asked trying to distract him as they approached the rock.

“Agent Summers? When Summers and I reconned the area earlier, we discovered that your wife and Zara appeared to be asleep in your cottage, so I sent her up to rendezvous with a back up

team on the main road. Then after I found you simply asleep on the beach, I decided that I’d just finish off the assignment by myself.”

“So, you want all the glory of killing some innocent civilians all to yourself, do you?” Erik said turning to face him while beginning to walk slowly backwards.

“You could say that,” Harris replied proudly. “But please, don’t consider yourself to be a mere civilian Mr. Black. In my opinion I think you’re no better than any terrorist. My organization believes that you and the information that you uncovered would tarnish the reputations of numerous politicians and would not only jeopardize American’s belief in their government., but also blemish International relations.”

Erik suddenly stumbled on a rock and fell backwards.

“Get up Mr. Black!”

“This might be my only opportunity to make a move,” Erik thought to himself as he grabbed a fistful of sand.

“Don’t even think about it,” Harris said as he had taken notice. “Just get up and get to the path.”

“No! If you’re going to kill me, you can bloody well shoot me in front of all the beach goers coming up from behind you. I’m not moving an inch!”

Harris glanced back just briefly, but enough for Erik to make a move. He bound to his knees quickly and threw a fistful of sand just as Harris turned his head back towards Erik. Instinctively he put his arms up, blocking most of the debris, but giving Erik a second chance to reload. Scooping the sand with both hands, Erik flung the sand towards Harris’s head. This time with better luck. Harris coughed and spewed, then pulled his pistol. Wiping at his eyes he fired blindly towards Erik, missing him by only inches. Erik catapulted myself sideways, just before

Harris shot several more rounds into the sand. Harris blinked several times and wiped the sand from his face and now spotted Erik. But now, Erik was lodged between a large rock and some impenetrable shrubs with nowhere to run. Harris start to raise his pistol. Erik was about to take one last desperate lunge towards him, when he suddenly heard a swooshing noise sailing through the air.

Harris stood motionless. His gun feel from his hand. He then raised his hands up, and placed a hand on each side of a spear lodged through his torso. Blood began trickling out of his mouth. Harris then slumped to his knees and made a last ditch attempt to grasp his revolver. His eyes bulged with hatred. Gurgling blood replaced any cursing that he tried to convey before falling face first into the sand. A sudden movement at the waters edge caught Erik's attention, as a woman in snorkel equipment emerged with a speargun in hand. Erik bolted, not waiting to find out who she was. All he could think about was getting back to the cottage to check on his wife and Zara.

Fifty feet down the beach Erik found the path. He could hear the woman yelling his name, but ignored her and continued running blindly down the windy trail. Coming to a crossroads, Erik took the one that looked like it was headed back in the direction of the Findlay cottages. Luck was on his side, as he emerged in the parking lot adjacent the Finday's residence a few minutes later.

As Erik rushed up to the front entrance to his cottage, he noticed that the front door was slightly ajar. He quickly burst through and called out to the women. There was no response. Erik briskly made his way towards the bedroom. There lying on the bed, were both women, in the same positions that he remembered leaving them.

"Mary! Zara! Wake...." he started to say as he rushed over to the bedside. But Erik stopped mid-sentence when he spotted blood trickling down from a bullet hole in Zara's forehead. Her head was still resting peacefully on her pillow. Darting to the far side of the bed, he found Mary lying face down, with her head turned sideways in a pool of blood. Both women never knew what had hit them.

Erik screamed in agony and dropped to his knees. Grabbing Mary's outstretched hand, he just stared out into space in total shock. It all seemed like just a dream.

"This couldn't be happening," Erik thought, as he ran his hand through Mary's soft wavy hair. His sight blurred as tears welled up and began streaming down his face.

Through his obscured vision, a shadow appeared at the bedroom door and he immediately jumped up and started fumbling for Zara's revolver, which he knew she always kept under her pillow. Just as his hand gripped the handle, Erik felt a pointed object against his ribs.

"Mr. Black. Please don't," a voice said calmly.

Erik lifted his hand off the revolver and turned slowly to meet his assailant.

"Well, just get it over with," he relinquished, but was surprised when he looked up, to see that it was Katia.

"Get what over with? Do you think I'm here to kill you? What ever gave you that crazy idea? Tony and I were assigned to protect both of you, and unfortunately I see that we have somewhat failed," Katia announced as she glance down at the women.

"So, you're not here to kill me and destroy my material?" Erik asked very puzzling.

"Not in the least! Here is your knapsack that I found near Harris," Katia exclaimed as she threw it near Erik's feet. It was splattered with fresh blood.

“But, I overheard you back at the hotel in Fort Lauderdale, saying that you wanted to get rid of us after you retrieved the original material.”

Katia stood there for a moment thinking back before her face indicated that she remembered the conversation.

“So it was you that made the floor creak when Tony and I were discussing about how to get the two of you out of Florida. You must have misunderstood the conversation. If memory serves me correctly, I remember telling Tony that we needed to get rid of your pursuers.....Then once we had the original material safely secured, we needed to get you out of Florida before Raven Claw ended up killing the both of you. It was something along those lines.”

“You.....honestly didn’t want...to kill us?” Erik asked between sniffles.

“Not at all. And Mr. Black.....I am truly sorry about your wife.”

“Thank you,” he replied, then wiped more tears from his face.

Erik stood there feeling so foolish, to run away from the very people that were trying to save them.

“Don’t blame yourself Mr. Black. Anyone might have misunderstood the conversation if they didn’t hear all of it.”

“But my wife and Zara might still be alive if I only.....”

Katia’s eyes darted to the bedroom window and held up her hand, stopping their conversation. Some kind of movement had caught her attention.

“There’s cars coming down the driveway. Like I said before.....if you want to live, follow me!” Katia blurted as she held out her hand.

“What about my wife and Zara. I can’t leave them.....”

“You will if you want to get out of here alive. And it’s your only hope, if you want to get even with Raven Claw for what they’ve done.”

Erik’s heartache faded and anger started to build within after hearing Katia’s remark.

“Lets move!” Katia ordered as she abruptly pulled at Erik’s arm. “Grab your bag. We need to get to my boat anchored near the beach. This speargun is loaded for only one shot, and my revolver is in the boat!”

Erik took one last glance towards the bed and paused, but Katia jerked him forward. Katia and Erik sprinted down the beach and began hopping through the water. Wading hip deep the last twenty feet, Erik tossed his knapsack into the boat, then assisted Katia up the awkward ladder. Making his way into the boat, Erik immediately ran to pull up the anchor while Katia tried to start the engine.

The engine coughed and sputtered, but didn’t start. Katia tried again. The engine sputtered a little longer, but still didn’t turn over. On the third try the engine barely, but finally came to life as plumes of smoke billowed from the loud exhaust.

* * * * *

The backup agents had finally arrived, and Summers immediately headed to meet up with Harris. Discovering that Bill was nowhere to be seen, they cautiously entered the Black’s cottage. After a cursory search of the main living area, they made their way to the bedroom and quickly found Mary and Zara laying in a blood soaked bed.

“Do you think this is the work of Agent Harris?” asked one of the agents raising his eyebrows.

“Knowing Bill, yes,” replied Summers. “But, I sure the hell would like to know where he is.”

“What the heck is that noise?” asked another one of the agents.

Summers walked towards the rear of the cottage and peered out a window overlooking the beach.

“Shit. I think that’s Mr. Black!” Summers called out.

With the engines still running roughly Katia pushed the throttles down slowly so they wouldn’t cut out. Suddenly the water around the boat was splashing up with small fountains. Glancing back to shore Erik discovered the cause, as several agents were lined up across the beach firing their weapons. Splinters of wood erupted from the side of the boat and disabling one of the twin outboards as the agents found their distance. With a small stream of smoke coming from the outboard, Erik reached into his knapsack, pulled out his revolver and wildly sprayed the beach as he returned fire. One agent grabbed at the side of his ribs and fell to one knee.

“At least they know that we’re not defenseless,” Katia called out as Erik stood by the console and reloaded. “Save your ammo. They’re out of range now.”

“So, now what?” Erik asked after placing the revolver in the crevice of his back.

“We limp our way back to the harbor and then get the hell off this island. I’ve got someone waiting for us.”

After a brief search around the cottages and up each side of the beach, Summers finally found Agent Harris lying face down in the sand. His head was cocked to the side and sand crabs had already started to pick at Harris’s blankly staring eyes. There was nothing that Summers or the other agents could do to help Harris now. Returning to the cottage, Summers came across the wounded agent who was in desperate need of attention. With her extensive medical background, Summers immediately tended to the agent and sent her remaining agents to try and track the boat

along the shoreline road. She would wait until they returned.

“I don’t know if this tub will go much further,” Erik announced skeptically as the remaining outboard sputtered and their speed slowed slightly. He walked back to inspect the outboard as it sputtered and hesitated again.

“Looks like this engine took a bullet as well,” he yelled up with a bit of oil dripping off his finger. “Any idea on how long it will take to the harbor?”

“At this rate of speed, probably half an hour, as long as this second engine holds out.”

“But that might be the least of our worries. We have company,” Katia declared as she pointed to the shore.

Cruising along the shoreline road was a vehicle matching their speed.

“We’ll be sitting ducks once we make it to the harbor,” Erik exclaimed.

“I don’t think that we’ll make it that far,” replied Katia as trails of smoke started to rise from the outboard.

Rounding a peninsula, Katia suddenly smiled and her face lit up. “Well I’ll be, you old son of a gun!” Katia exclaimed.

Erik followed her line of sight to see what she was so happy about, and couldn’t believe his eyes.

The old amphibious warbird that he had spotted on numerous occasions, was just floating in a quiet bay about a quarter of a mile away.

“We won’t have to go all the way to the harbor after all,” Katia announced as she sounded the horn.

The side door to the plane was already open and the figure of a man appeared to be sitting at the doorway.

“Do you know how to drive a boat?” Katia asked.

“Ever since I was a kid.”

“Good, because I’d probably run right into the plane. Just pull in close enough so I can toss a rope.”

“You old codger! I thought that you were going to wait in the harbor?” Katia called out when she was within earshot.

“I knew where you were headed so I thought I’d meet you half way. Besides I wanted to do a little fishing,” he replied as he held up a snapper.

“Here, grab the line, we need to get out of here fast!” Katia exclaimed as she tossed the rope.

“Where’s everyone else?” he asked as he assisted Katia into the plane.

“Didn’t make it,” Katia replied with a somber look.

“Sorry to hear that. I better head up front to get this bird cranked up.”

“I hope it won’t take too long. We’ve got company,” Erik yelled out as he pointed to a small bluff.

The vehicles that were shadowing them along the shoreline had just pulled up to the edge of the peninsula. Throwing his knapsack to Katia, Erik followed and jumped into the plane just as one engine came to life, then tried closing the side door.

“It closes like this,” Katia instructed as she reached over shoulder to shoulder and assisted Erik in pulling the door shut.

“Thanks,” Erik said appreciatively. Their eyes met briefly, with an enrapturing stare.

“Katia! Can you get up here?” the pilot shouted. “I could use an extra pair of hands. We’re

going to be running into some chop as soon as we get out of this bay.”

As Katia ran up to the cockpit, Erik couldn't help but notice the condition of the plane. Except for a few pieces of sandwich wrappers, a couple of empty pop cans and two fish in a metal pail, the WWII vintage warbird appeared to be right off the assembly line, ready to assist in the war effort.

Suddenly gunfire erupted from the shore and loud pinging sounds could be heard as a few bullets ran through the fuselage. Erik reached into his knapsack and grabbing his pistol, then immediately swung the side door open and returned fire. One agent fell and the rest dove for cover. He only fired one more shot before the gun was empty. The momentum of the plane surged ahead as the pilot gunned the throttles, causing Erik to sidestep slightly. Another couple of bullets ripped through the fuselage, right where he was just standing.

“Katia! More ammo,” Erik yelled out, but was drowned out by the loud engines. He slid my gun across the floor, hitting the console, which caught Katia's attention. She immediately looked down, then back towards Erik yelled. Katia just pulled out her own revolver and quickly slid it back to Erik. Just as the plane was traveling past the peninsula, several more rounds of fire tore through the plane. Erik noticed that one of the agents was resting across the hood of the car, taking aim with a rifle.

With the bouncing of the plane in the mild ocean chop, and the spray from the pontoons beginning to splash across the doorway, Erik took aim the best he could and emptied the clip in hopes of at least giving them enough time to get out of range. After Erik emptied the revolver, there was no return fire from the bluff. Erik assumed that he must have been lucky enough to have hit the shooter or the plane was now safely out of firing range. Erik quickly slammed the

door shut. The bouncing and shuddering immediately stopped as the plane finally left the choppy water and became airborne.

"Is everyone okay up here?" Erik asked as he slid up to the cockpit on the wet floor.

Katia discretely grabbed her arm.

"You're hit!" Erik exclaimed. Katia's arm was soaked with blood.

"It's just a graze."

"There's a first aid kit behind my seat," the pilot called out.

Erik grabbed the kit and then assisted Katia to a rearward seat.

"That was a close call," Katia said wincing slightly as Erik began cleaning the wound.

"Sorry."

"Did you manage to hit any of them?" asked Katia.

"One for sure, but can't be sure about the others. The plane started bouncing around and I was blinded by the water spraying across the doorway."

"Yes, that was kind of a rough take off," Katia declared.

"Listen. Why don't you rest back here and I'll see if I can help up front," Erik suggested. He had just finished dressing the wound the best he could.

"Sure."

Erik made his way back up to the cockpit and tapped the pilot on the shoulder.

"You must be Mr. Black," the pilot said loudly just as Erik was about to introduce himself.

"And you must be Gus McGregor," Erik replied to the surprised looking pilot. "Nissan mentioned that you owned this beauty."

"You know Nissan?" Gus yelled out over the noise from the engines.

“Yes, and Vivi as well. Nissan spoke very highly of you. He even gave me a flying lesson. May I?” Erik shouted out in reply. He then motioning to the co-pilots seat.

Gus just nodded. Erik strapped himself into the seat and donned the headset.

“That’s better,” Erik said through the mic. “Now we don’t have to shout.”

“So you said you know how to fly?” asked Gus.

“Well, Nissan did let me handle the wheel by myself for.....”

“Good!” Gus interjected, then abruptly turned some dials, flipped a few switches and unstrapped himself. “Hold her steady while I check out what damage was done to the plane.”

“But.....” Erik started to say, but it just went on deaf ears, as Gus left the cockpit to check out the plane.

Erik just gripped the wheel firmly and prayed for the best. Nissan had only given him the basics on flying in a small plane, and not on how to handle a flying hippopotamus. The plane swayed to and fro slightly, but nothing to be too concerned about.

“Doesn’t appear to be too much damage,” Gus announced as he returned from his inspection and climbed into his seat.

“Sorry about the bullet holes in your plane,” Erik said sincerely.

“That’s okay Mr. Black. It’ll just give it a more authentic look. Anyways, how’d you make out up here?”

“No problems. I guess Nissan is a great instructor.”

“Yes, Nissan certainly is a great instructor,” Gus said with a wily grin. He leaned back and put his hands behind his head.

“Aren’t you going to take over the controls?” Erik asked anxiously.

“No need. Auto pilot.”

Erik just sat there stunned and a little disappointed that he really hadn’t been flying the plane.

“Don’t worry about him Mr. Black,” Katia said as she had unexpectedly approached the cockpit.

“That’s just his nature.”

“So, where are we heading?” Gus asked Katia.

“I’m assuming that the agents have a jet sitting at the airport and are most likely thinking that we’re going to be headed straight back to the States. We need to find someplace to lie low for a while,” Katia postured.

“My sister-in-law has a condo in Treasure Cay, on Abaco?” Erik suggested. “I don’t think that it’s too far from here.”

“Thanks, but Raven Claw probably already has that information,” stated Katia.

Suddenly the plane banked hard to the right as Gus had retaken control of the plane.

“I have the perfect spot,” Gus exclaimed as he guided the plane down towards the ocean to get them below radar detection.

* * * * *

Summers waited as long as she could for her agents to return, but the condition of the wounded agent she was tending to worsened. After rushing the agent to town and finding only a modest medical centre, Summers was forced to head the airport and commandeer a plane to fly the man to the nearest hospital, located in Nassau. Summers had no idea that she had driven past

the turnout to the bluff, where her other agents were now lying dead beside their vehicle.

Once getting her agent safely to the hospital, Summers immediately called a phone number that Bill had given her, should he ever be seriously injured. Summers was surprised to learn that the number belonged to the director of Raven Claw. She quickly brought him up to speed with the outcome of their mission. After the director composed himself upon learning the fate of Bill, Summers was stunned when the director informed her that he was Thomas Harris, Bill's father. Dispirited and disheartened Thomas ordered that the search for Mr. Black be terminated. Black was probably miles away and untraceable. Too many agents had already lost their lives for his own personnel ambitions.

Summers disagreed. Vowing vengeance and requesting permission for an all out search, she informed the director that Black was in fact very traceable. Summers immediately pulled out the transponder in hopes of getting a location on Agent Reid, knowing that Black would be nearby. The transponder was no longer sending out any signals. Upon hearing the news about the non-responsive signal, Thomas denied her appeal, but did consent to have someone monitor video surveillance cameras on their facial recognition computer. He assigned the lonely duty to her alone. Thomas then dispatched a clean up crew to coverup the mess Summers had left behind. Summers was ordered to stay and assist before returning to the States.

Chapter Eighty

It was just before noon when *Betsey* touched down on calm waters in a secluded bay. Once ashore, Erik was surprised that a beachside campsite had already been constructed on the remote island. A khaki canvas tarp was stretched over a horizontal pole tied between two palm trees, created a lean-to, large enough for two large people. Several layers of palm branches stacked on the ground provided a natural mattress. A circle of rocks containing charred wood and ashes laid at it's doorstep. A fire would bring welcome relief to the cooler night air and the smoke would ward off the blood thirsty No-see-ums.

"So, how do you like my secret hideaway?" Gus asked as he dropped his bag near a lean-to.

"It kind of reminds me of the island my wife and I were on, when we were trying to hide low from Raven Claw, and ended up staying a couple of weeks. Both Mary and I really wished that we would have never left."

"Well Mr. Black, it reminds you of the island, because it is the same island. You were just on the opposite side," Gus announced.

"Really?" Erik replied in astonishment.

"Yup. While you, your wife and friend were on the other side, I was hiding here with my assistant Andrew. Speaking of Andrew.....I need to get a hold on him."

"Sorry Gus. No radio contact," interjected Katia.

"So how in the hell did you know we were on this island?" Erik asked mystified.

"I placed a tracking devise in your knapsack back in Florida. Gus volunteered to watch you until I could rendezvous with him. We would have been able to get to you sooner if it wasn't for the tracking unit cutting in and out all the time. It must have got damaged at Sharkbites when the bar stool fell on your knapsack," Katia speculated.

"So that was you and Gus, who tried following us when we left Sharkbites?" Erik asked in amazement.

"Yup. And I must say, you guys were pretty good at giving us the slip."

"Yes. Zara had an amazing ability to stay one step ahead of trouble all the time.....except for just one," Erik replied solemnly.

Erik's thoughts were immediately filled with his last image of Mary and Zara, lying on the blood soaked bed. His eyes began to well up. He excused himself, then walked away. Katia got up to follow, but Gus grabbed her arm.

"Just leave him be. I think that he needs a bit of time to himself," Gus conveyed quietly.

Several weeks had gone by and running low on supplies, Katia decided that we needed to risk getting back to the States. Discussing potential ways to get them back undetected, Erik

suddenly remembered the plan to get picked up by Nissan.

"Hey, does anyone know what day is it?" Erik asked.

"It's Wednesday," Gus replied after looking at his watch. "Why?"

"Not to go into too many details, but arrangements were made with Nissan and Vivi to rendezvous with us.....," Erik announced, then paused and swallowed hard. He couldn't help but reflect back to Mary and Zara. His wound was still open.

"Go on," Katia encouraged.

"Oh, sorry. Every time I say us, it reminds me of Mary.....anyways, as I was saying, arrangements were made with Nissan from Excalibur Air, to land on San Salvador island every Wednesday at noon, until the three of us finally showed up."

"And how do you expect to get past customs at the airport?" quizzed Gus.

"Easy. Nissan won't be landing at the airport. He'll be landing on a road on the northern end of the island."

Gus looked skeptical at first, but his mouth soon broke into it's usual wily grin.

"It's only 8:15. We still have time to get there," expressed Gus.

"Do you trust this Nissan fellow?" asked Katia.

"You don't have to worry about Nissan. I know him quite well. He is a man of his word and I'd trust him with my life," Gus conveyed.

Katia pondered the idea for a moment before accepting that this might be the only way to get Erik into the States undetected.

"You have to remember that Raven Claw is very resourceful, and is monitoring all flights and airports very carefully. It still may be risky, but it looks like this might be our only shot," Katia

relinquished.

“Let get a move on then,” Gus burst out with a loud clap of his hands.

While *Betsey* was flying low over the water towards San Salvador, another plan suddenly formulated in Erik’s mind. But he kept it to himself.

Gus landed softly just out side The Riding Rock Marina just before 10:00. He preferred water landings as he could land and depart pretty much on his own timetable, without the hassles of dealing with Air Traffic Controllers or Customs Agents.

They moored The Goose then crossed the harbor in the small zodiac, docking next to a large 100 ft. yacht.

“Are you sure that you don’t want me to accompany the two of you?” asked Gus.

“Positive. We’ll be fine,” Katia replied. She lifted her shirt slightly to reveal a revolver tucked in the front of her shorts.

“Have a safe flight back,” Katia said as she pushed Gus away from the dock.

“You too. See you in Florida,” Gus replied.

As Katia and Erik started walking alongside the luxury yacht, a couple of local young men waved while they were busy scrubbing and hosing down the boat. The friendliness of the Bahamian people was one of the reasons what drew Mary and Erik to return to the islands year after year. Erik returned the wave and smiled, before heading up the dock to quickly see Dez at the boat rental shop.

After introducing Katia, Dez asked Erik if he had heard the news about the incident at The Whirlwind Cottages. Dez reached under the counter and produced a copy of The Nassau Guardian Newspaper. The headline read “*Four People Killed Over Botched Drug Deal*”.

Below, the article started by saying that: Mr. and Mrs. Findlay, the owners of the Whirlwind Cottages were killed along with two other unnamed individuals over what is believed to be a botched drug deal. There was even a close up photo of large packages of drugs, lying on some bed sheets next to a woman’s leg. It went on to say other things, but Erik had read and seen enough, as he recognized Zara’s ankle bracelet in the photo. He was sickened by the news about the Findlays. It was then, that Erik informed Dez that both Zara and his wife were the unnamed individuals. They had been murdered there, but not over drugs.

Dez was devastated and Erik consoled her, but he shed no tears. He was already cried out. Even Katia’s eyes welled up but soon composed herself. Erik asked Dez if she had heard what had happened to the bodies. She couldn’t be sure, but had heard rumors that several helicopters had landed near the Whirlwind Cottages, then left shortly afterwards on the same day as the shootout. Katia concluded that it definitely looked like a Raven Claw clean up crew came to cover up their botched attempt at apprehending Mr. Black.

Katia looked at her watch. “We have to get going Erik or we’ll miss our ride. Dez, can you call us a taxi?”

“Sure, but there’s usually one parked near the harbor. Why don’t you have a quick look before I call.”

While Katia headed outside to find the taxi, Erik divulged his escape plan that he had conceived. He wouldn’t inform Katia about the change of plans until the last minute. A toot of a car horn indicated that Katia had found them a ride. Erik thanked Dez and hustled out the door.

Near to where Nissan had originally landed, the taxi pulled over to the side of the road. Erik looked at his watch. It was 12:10, and there was no plane in sight. Knowing that the

instructions were to meet at twelve noon sharp, Erik concluded that they had missed the rendezvous with Nissan and would have to hide out for another week. While standing near the taxi, Erik decided it was as good as any time to inform Katia about the slight change in plans. She reservedly agreed. Suddenly, a large shadow crossed over the taxi, right before they heard the roar of a low flying plane. It touched down on the highway a short distance away and Katia instructed the taxi driver to follow. Pulling up behind Nissans plane, Erik jogged over and opened the side door to see Nissan’s bright and smiling face.

“I thought that we’d missed you,” Erik exclaimed, as Nissan stepped out of the plane.
“Sorry. Was flying into a good headwind partway here.”

“Nissan, this is Katia,” Erik announced. “She’s the FBI agent that Mary and I thought was chasing us, but have recently learned otherwise. She actually.....

“Where’s Zara and Mary?” interrupted Nissan as he gave Katia his customary greeting. Erik didn’t know any other way of informing him except by telling him straight up. He swallowed hard.

“Mary and Zara were murdered by Raven Claw Agents.”

Nissan just reeled over in shock and began sobbing. Whipping the tears from his eyes, he quickly composed himself, and asked Erik and Katia to get on the plane. He would find a way of finding retribution another time. Erik briefed Nissan on his plan, then instructed the cabby to drive a couple of miles down the road and block any traffic that may be coming, to keep the road clear for take off. Two miles down the road as instructed, the taxi blocked both sides of the narrow highway. Nissan’s plane lifted off well before the car and banked back towards the harbor.

* * * * *

"I wonder if they ran into any trouble?" Gus contemplated as he peered skyward from the windows of the *Goose*. It was still moored just outside of the harbor. A few minutes later, Gus spotted a plane flying low along the shore line and over the harbor, waving it's wings from side to side as it flew by.

"Looks like the rendezvous went off without a hitch," Gus said to himself with great relief.

The props on *Betsey* started to whirl. Gus headed for home, unaware of Erik's change in plans.

Chapter Eighty-One

The air was hot, humid and musty, as Summers sat and monitored the surveillance screens. It had only been a couple of weeks since returning from San Salvador, but she was already bored of the daunting assignment. It had only been a couple of weeks since she had returned to Florida. A muffled sound of a cell phone rang out. Searching the desk, she soon found it coming from her purse that she had placed in the bottom right hand drawer. Pulling the phone from a side pocket, she instantly recognized that it was not hers, but Bill's. Summers had totally forgotten that she had picked it up off the beach near his body.

"Hello?" answered Summers.

"Is Agent Harris there?" a voice with a Bahamian accent asked.

"No. He's.....he's unavailable. I'm Agent Summers, can I help you?" she replied nonchalantly.

"Ah, yes, I guess so. Agent Harris told me and my buddies to contact him if we ever saw any of the people in these photos he left with us. He said he'd give us a hundred dollars if we saw any

of them."

"Yes, go on," Summers replied with interest.

"Well, I spotted the man. He came in on zodiac, from a funny looking plane that lands on water, with couple of uder people, not in the photos," he continued in broken Bahamian.

"What did he look like?" Summers asked with renewed interest.

"A white guy with a dark tan, wearing shorts and t-shirt."

"Anything else you can tell me about him?"

"Nope. But he looks exactly like guy in photo. Name under photo says.....Mr. Erik Black."

Summers was so excited that she almost peed herself as she jumped in jubilation.

"Do you know if the man returned to the plane?"

"Don't know miss. I was working below deck for the last little while. But, when I came topside to finish my duties, the boat they came to shore on was gone. Then, the funny plane took off, right after a low flying plane waved it's wings at me and my buddies."

"Can you tell me more about the plane that was floating on the water?"

"Shure. It was dark grey. Had big star on side.....oh and a lady painted at front of plane."

"What did the other two people with Mr. Black look like?"

"One guy was old. The other was a very pretty woman, with kinda reddy hair."

"That sounds like Agent Reid!" Summers thought to herself. "And the older fellow must be her pilot. I wonder if she is finally bringing Black in?"

Summers still had no idea that Reid was assisting Black, let alone that she was the person who killed Agent Harris.

"How long ago did the funny looking plane leave?" Summers asked hurriedly.

“Just a couple of minutes before you answered the phone, miss.”

“Thanks. You’ve been very helpful. I’ll make sure that you get your hundred dollars.”

After getting the man’s mailing address, Summers immediately contacted the Nassau and Fort Lauderdale Air Traffic Controllers to get an update on all flights that had departed San Salvador. She wasn’t surprised to hear that an old amphibious warplane had just requested flight coordinates to The Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport. But, she was somewhat puzzled to hear that a second plane, also originating from San Salvador, had made the same request just moments before the first. It seem too coincidental, when Summers learned that the second plane was from Excalibur Air. Remembering that the Blacks had first escaped from the States by using Excalibur, Summers speculated that one of the planes might be a decoy. Summers hung up from air traffic control and immediately dialed another number.

“Thomas here,” an angry voice bellowed. “This better be important!”

“Hi Mr. Harris. It’s Agent Summers, and yes it is an urgent matter. I just received a tip that Mr. Black is.....”

“I told you that the case was shelved Summers!” the chief abruptly interrupted.

“Well, you better un-shelve it!” Summers snapped back. “Black is on one of two flights that departed from San Salvador Island a short time ago. Both planes are scheduled to arrive at the Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport in just under two hours.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Are you still there sir?” quizzed Summers.

“How reliable is your tip Summers?” asked Thomas.

“Good,” Summers replied telling a little white lie. She wanted to get Black, whatever it took.

“Fine. You get one more crack at taking care of Mr. Black,” Thomas reluctantly agreed. “Arrange for six units to meet us down at the airport in one hour.”

“Us, sir?”

“Yes, us, Summers! Do you really think that I’m going to let you bungle another attempt at nabbing Black?” Thomas enlightened her. “I want to see first hand what’s so special about this Mr. Black fellow that has turned our organization into a three ring circus. I’ll see you at the airport in an hour!”

Chapter Eighty-Two

Nissan’s plane was immediately surrounded by several vehicles as he pulled up to his hangar at the Executive Airport. He wasn’t surprised as he saw numerous agents file out with weapons drawn.

“Everyone get out slowly with your hands above your head,” shouted one of the agents.

Nissan opened the door slowly, then placed his hands on top of his head. He was instant grabbed and pushed against the plane’s wing.

“Okay, the rest of you.....out!” the agent yelled into the plane.

“It’s empty. I was flying solo,” Nissan called out.

A couple of agents cautiously advanced towards the door, then poked their heads in to see for themselves.

“Where is Mr. Black?” asked Thomas firmly, as he and Summers approached.

“Like I told you guys before. I don’t know a Mr. Black,” Nissan replied annoyed.

“Is this true Summers?” asked Thomas. “Fill me in,” he added.

“Yes, we have already asked this man about the Blacks once before. He did assist the Blacks in their escape from Florida, but they were using false passports so this fellow had no way of knowing it was the Blacks,” Summers explained.

“So, remind me again Summers. Why the hell are we questioning this man?”

“It just seemed too coincidental that this plane left San Salvador along with the same plane Black arrived in.”

“The key word here Summers, is coincidental,” Thomas said firmly. “Let this man be on his way.”

“This must be a decoy plane,” Summers thought to herself. She scanned the sky for the old warplane.

“There!” she announced suddenly as she pointed to a plane that was on it’s landing approach.

“That’s the other plane that departed San Salvador. Air traffic control told me that the second plane was an old amphibious warplane. Black has to be on it. The man who tipped me off, said that he spotted Black leaving an old war plane and came to shore on a small dingy. And, there aren’t too many war planes flying around that I know of.”

The big lumbering plane touched down gently, then started to taxi back along the hangars. As the plane was about to pass in front of Nissan’s hangar, the agents waved the plane down.

“I think the shit’s going to hit the fan,” Gus whispered out loud.

Again, weapons were pointed and agents surrounded the plane, believing that Mr. Black was

onboard.

"What the hell is going on here?" Guy yelled out as he opened the door.

"Please step out sir," ordered one of the agents.

After Gus departed the plane, two agents stormed inside.

"No one else is on board sir," said one of the agents as he jumped back out.

"Where is Mr. Black?" Summer hollered angrily.

"You don't have to yell miss," Gus responded swiftly. "I'm sorry, but I don't know a Mr. Black."

"And what about the woman that you picked up on San Salvador Island. Her name was Laine Reid?" interjected Summers, a little more politely.

"Oh, her?" Gus replied. "I dropped her off along with another fellow, a Mr. Johnson I believe his name was, who hitched a ride from Antigua. The woman hired me a while back to fly her all over the Caribbean. Said she was a location scout for a Hollywood film company that was going to be filming some kind of a pirate movie. It's been a great gig and I was paid well. You know....."

"Thank you. I think we've heard enough," interrupted Thomas.

"But what about Reid and Black? They still must be back on San Salva....."

"Forget about Reid and Black!" yelled Thomas. "We've been on a wild goose chase long enough. If Black or the material he's carrying ever resurfaces, we'll deal with him then!"

"But....."

"No buts Summers. This mission is over!" Thomas repeated. Although not directly responsible for his son's death, he felt that she was indirectly responsible plus incompetent. As he stomped off, Thomas had already made up his mind to relegate Summers to a menial desk job. In a small secluded room, with no windows.

After the agents departed, Gus taxied his plane up to his hangar. Nissan drove up in a golf cart a few minutes later.

"Where are Mr. Black and Katia?" Gus asked as he walked up to Nissan.

"I was about to ask you the same thing," puzzled Nissan. "They told me at the rendezvous spot, that they were returning to the harbor to fly back with you. I was instructed to do a flyby over your plane, to let you know that they were on their way back!"

"Well, that's not what was supposed to happen," exclaimed Gus. "The original plan was for them to get on your plane, then you were to do a flyby to let me know that they made it safely to your plane."

"They must have suspected something or had a good reason to make a change so abruptly," surmised Nissan. "Any ideas where they might be?"

"None. But, maybe that was their plan all along," replied Gus.

Chapter Eighty-Three

High in the upper atmosphere, the booster rockets of five separate satellites positioned thousands of miles apart, shut down precisely at the same time. Gliding into place, large solar panels unfurled like a butterfly emerging from it's cocoon. A hatch slid open from the underbelly on each satellite and a large telescope extended below, focusing down on the same target.

Cutting across the open waters northwest of San Salvador, salt air could be seen blowing through the hair of a man and woman standing at the controls of a 42 foot Sports Boat, as a 3D image materialized in a remote warehouse in Florida. A hand then moved over a control stick and repositioned the viewpoint to the side of the boat. The name on the hull read “Horizon Seeker.”

“Have you positively identified them and their location?” asked a man standing behind a computer technician sitting in front of a monitor.

“Yes it's them. Our facial recognition program discovered their location them from a surveillance

camera at the San Salvador Marina, which narrowed down our search area,” replied the technician. “It didn’t take too long after that to locate a sports yacht skimming across the ocean just north of the island.

“Great work Eddy. Is there anyway of contacting them?”

“Yes. Just give me a couple of seconds..... sorry, but Reid’s cell is blank. I’ll try Blacks. It’s ringing. Just use that phone over there Richard,” Eddy said as he pointed to a nearby phone.

“I’ve programed your name into the display screen, in hopes that Black will answer it.”

Erik heard his phone ringing and dug it out from his back pocket. He was amazed by the name on the screen.

“Hello,” Erik answered hesitantly.

“Mr. Black?”

“Senator Chalmers. Great to hear your voice,” Erik replied, relieved to hear a recognizable voice.

“Your’s too Mr. Black. From what I’ve heard through my contacts, I understand that you’ve had a bit of misfortune. My condolences,” Chalmers replied sympathetically. “But listen, we haven’t got much time, and you can fill me in when you get back. I’m going to pass you over to a buddy of mine. He’ll give you coordinates and instructions to guide you back safely to Florida without being detected by the authorities.”

“Thank you Senator.”

Chapter Eight-Four

Erik threw back his bed covers and began searching for the source of freshly brewed coffee. For a coffee addict like himself, there was nothing better in his mind to get one going than indulging in a ritual morning fix. Tracing the source, he found himself outside on the front porch overlooking a splendid garden.

"Good morning," a voice said, just off to his right. "Or, should I say good afternoon!" Looking over, Katia was sitting in an Adirondack chair sipping a cup of coffee. A pot of coffee with a sugar bowl and a container of cream was placed on a silver tray next to her.

"Morning. Looks like you just woke up as well," Erik replied, noticing that Katia's hair was still ruffled and her eyes appeared tired and a little saggy.

Their journey from San Salvador had been long and arduous, driving through rough seas and dodging boat traffic. They didn't make it safely to the Senator's house until almost morning. Erik had a premonition that flying with either Nissan or Gus would result in being captured, and thought it best to try to slip into the States by using the Horizon Seeker. They narrowly missed being captured by the Coast Guard as they neared Fort Lauderdale, but for some unknown reason, the Coast Guard called off the chase just after warning that they were about to open fire. After the near capture, Erik and Katia wound their way silently through the canal system and docked at the Senators pier.

“Coffee?”

“Yes, that would be great.”

“A double-double, if my memory serves me correctly,” Katia replied.

“Good memory. Yes, a double-double. Where's Senator Chalmers?”

“He dropped by about a half hour ago and said he would return after he finished his lunch.

There he is now,” Katia announced as she pointed in the direction of the Mansion.

“What the heck time, is it?” Erik asked as he yawned and brushed a hand through his hair.

“1:30ish,” Katia replied grinning.

“I guess you weren't kidding when you said Good Afternoon!” Erik avowed.

Katia just grinned again and took another sip from her cup.

“Good afternoon Mr. Black,” the Senator said as he stepped up onto the porch. “Did you have a good sleep?”

“Yes, thank you. I see that your daughter is back from her honeymoon,” declared Erik after he noticed the young couple talking to the Senator's wife. “Did they enjoy their time spring skiing

in the Canadian Rockies?”

“Yes, they did mention that they had an unbelievable time, thank you. Listen, don’t take this the wrong way, but I’d like to have a brief word with Katia in private. The two of us can catch up on your ordeal a little later.”

“No problem,” Erik replied, then waled to the end of the porch and leaned his shoulder on a large white pillar.

While the Senator walked discussing matters with Katia, Erik couldn’t help but stare at the young newlyweds talking to their mother, standing in their lush garden. Butterflies fluttered about and the fresh scent of flowers permeated the air. The scene reminded him of the time when his mother had to discuss an important matter with Mary and himself. He was about 28 years old at the time. It was just after a backyard party and all the guests had departed, when his mother approached the two of them with tears in her eyes. She then began to explain something, that she had kept secret for a very long time. What she related, shocked Erik to his core. It appeared that his aunt Grace, really was not his aunt at all. She was Erik’s grandmother, and his mother was the product of the rape, when Grace was a young girl. The weight of the world suddenly seemed to be lifted off his mother’s shoulders.

Everything about Grace’s life suddenly seemed to make sense. The reason why she always returned to Edmonton. Her infatuation with his brother, sister and himself, was not from what he had perceived as a nosy, pesky aunt. But rather from a gentle caring grandmother, that just wanted to be close to her grandchildren. Erik reflected on when he was a condescending teenager and all the times he averted Grace as just a bothersome old aunt. It irked him. If only he had only known earlier in his life, he might have had a better understanding and relationship with her. If

only.....

“Mr. Black.....Mr Black!” a voiced called out, interrupting Erik’s reflections.

“Oh, sorry. What is it?” he replied looking over to the Senator.

“Katia has briefly informed me about your adventures, and I see we have a lot of things to talk about. Are you still in possession of all your aunt’s material?”

“Yes, it’s safely tucked away in my knapsack.”

“Great. We’ll need to get that locked away for safe keeping.”

“Not a problem. It’s been a great burden to bare and I’m tired of toting it around. But the material I have in my knapsack is only a portion of the evidence I inherited. The rest of it is locked away back home. I think that we should make arrangements for me to hand over all the material to you for safekeeping. Except for a few personal momentous, I don’t want any part of the material any longer.”

“Yes, I agree. And after it’s deemed to be authentic, I’ll arrange for a press conference and disclose the information to the American citizens. I also vaguely remember you mentioning something about more of your aunt’s material being hidden away in some other crates or boxes?” the Senator put forward.

“Yes. She originally shipped seven boxes to my mother just before she past away, but only two arrived. It’s probably just coincidental, but when I was searching for information in the Dallas library, I discovered a weird similarity. When Oswald arrived into the States from The Soviet Union, he had also shipped seven boxes. Only two arrived.”

“That is a little mysterious, but back to the story about your aunt, sorry, grandmother. Where are her other boxes?” Katia inquired.

"Who knows?" Erik replied shrugging his shoulders. "My mother tried to track them down, but had no luck. The only thing that I know for sure, is that she supposedly shipped them from a boarding house in Winnipeg, Manitoba."

"Then, I think that you, Katia and I have our work cut out for us," the Senator proposed.

"What do you mean?" Katia and Erik asked almost simultaneously.

"We need to start hunting for the five missing boxes."

* * * * *

After the authenticating Grace's material, the Senator disclosed to the public the newly discovered evidence proving there was a conspiracy behind the JFK assassination and recommending that a full investigation be conducted to apprehend the perpetrators.

Several weeks after the Senator's press release, while remaining hidden within the Senators guest house, Erik had come across an interesting article in the local newspaper which stating that anyone still living that conspired in the JFK assassination were either apprehended, took their life or simply disappeared. Erik smiled slightly at the thought that the death of his wife and their friend, was not in vain.

Chapter Eighty-Five

Canada - Two Months Later

In an old boarding house in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a young boy is trying to hide from his parents so he doesn't have to go to church. The boy conceals himself in his favorite play spot under the basement stairs. He had hidden there before and had never been discovered. As his mother walked down the stairs examining the basement with a flashlight. He giggled to himself as she called his name, just as he had done before. But this time, just a little too loud. She immediately pulled back the curtain covering the space and found the boy huddled behind a few boxes.

As she scanned the small enclosure, she discovered that her son had turned it into some kind of play spot. Numerous toys were neatly arranged in a row, and several old photos were leaning against the wooden stairs, propped on boxes. As she hauled the boy out kicking and screaming, he accidentally knocked over a box, scattering its contents across the floor. Being already a little late for church, the mother hastily picked up a small pile of cloths and tossed them back into the box. An old movie camera remained on the floor, along with a couple of photos that

had fallen from their perch. Gazing at the photos that were scattered on the floor, she couldn't help but notice that almost all the photos were of famous celebrities. The woman then noticed that there was something very particular about the photos. A mysterious looking woman dressed in black dress that was adorned with jewelry and wearing a scarf on her head, stood beside each celebrity. She didn't recognize the woman in the photograph, but assumed she must have been well known to be posing with all these famous people.

Folding over the top of the cardboard box she read the Greyhound shipping label, *To Elsie Blas....vis..., 109...,4th Street, Edmont....,berta, From:ace Sered....., Winnipeg, Manitoba.* That was all that was legible. The label had been torn and ripped off either by accident or by her son. She then picked up the old movie camera.

“I wonder who this old relic belongs to? It even looks like there is still some old film in it,” she thought to herself as she inspected the camera. The woman shrugged her shoulders, then placed the movie camera and photographs carefully back in the box and pushed it back under the stairs.

***** END *****