

PART ONE

UNDERCOVER SOLDIER

AUSTIN MITCHELL

Undercover 'Soldier' Austin Mitchell

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

If you purchase this book without a cover you should be aware that this book may have been stolen property and reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher. In such a case, neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Published by

Austin Mitchell

ISBN-13: 978-1500586324

ISBN-10: 1500586323

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, institutions, places, and incidents are creations of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously, and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual or other fictional events, locales, organization or persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

For my late brother, Carlton Constantine Mitchell.

‘Desmond’

Other Books by the same Author:

Uptown Lovers (Novel)

The Downtown Massive (Novel)

Bring back the good old Days (Anthology of short stories)

Waiting to cross the Bridge (Anthology of short stories)

Going to the bushes to cut Firewood (Anthology of short stories)

Taking a short cut Home (Anthology of short stories)

Days up the River (Anthology of short stories)

The Fire by the Wayside (Anthology of short stories)

Riding the milk truck to School (Anthology of short stories)

Making grass mats to Sell (Anthology of short stories)

Life at 22 Lane (Play)

The Free Loaders (Play)

A Dangerous Hike (Short novel)

Going into the hills to Teach (Anthology of Short Stories)

- **Fred Billings was taken off the streets and brought up by Gus Mc Creed and his late wife, Charlene. Fred knows that he owes his very existence to this man, but his life's goal is to amass as much wealth as he can and will not let sentiments stand in his way.**
- **Lorena McCreed has lost her childhood sweetheart in a mysterious accident. Now her foster brother is scaring away her suitors because he knows a strong man could ruin his plans for a takeover.**
- **Curtis 'Bendoo' Johnson, Special Branch Detective, was sent to Wareika Hills to infiltrate the gang hiding out there. Two joint police-military raids on their headquarters have failed to flush them out. Can Bendoo accomplish this dangerous and almost impossible task?**
- **Danny King was one of the largest drug barons on the island until he and McCreed clashed in a war that threatened to turn the streets of Kingston red. Now King, defeated by McCreed is trying to make one last comeback and destroy his old enemy.**
- **Gaskell Burke, a disgraced lawyer, believes that McCreed ordered the hit on his brother and seeks revenge. He and some of his brother's former associates have taken over his small syndicate. Their intention being to strengthen it enough to confront McCreed, then kill him and take over his share of the market.**

- **Gus Mc Creed wants to dominate the Jamaican drug trade.**

He has effectively gotten rid of most of his rivals. But new enemies are springing up all over the island. Can Mc Creed summon all the experience he has garnered from his days as a mob hit man to defeat his rivals? Or will they destroy him in a winner take all?

Part One

Chapter One

Bendoo kept one eye on the road while thinking about the summons he had received from his boss, Neil McDonald, the head of Special Branch. It wasn't every day that you received such a call so it had to be something important. He followed the road which hugged the side of a mountain. A vehicle was parked ahead of him and a man was pulling a woman towards the car. He passed the vehicle, looked in his rear view mirror, then decided to stop. Knowing how isolated this place was, he patted the gun in his waist reassuringly, before getting out of the vehicle.

"What's going on here?"

"Nothing, mind your own business."

"I didn't ask you any questions, Mister. Is this man bothering you, Miss?"

"Didn't you hear what I said, guy? You must be deaf or something."

The man rushed in, swinging a fist at him. Bendoo blocked the blow and hit him on his jaw. He punched him under the chin and he staggered and fell.

The woman was screaming and getting hysterical.

Bendoo hovered over him, fists clenched, but the man staggered to his feet, ran to his car, jumped in and the car roared away.

Bendoo rushed to his car, intent on pursuit when the woman shouted.

"Are you going to leave me here?"

"Come with me, let's see if we can catch him."

She held her wrist.

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, I'm okay, thanks for helping me."

"That's all right, some men can be downright stupid."

The woman didn't comment.

"What was this quarrel about, anyway?"

She flashed him a look of irritation mixed with embarrassment. She was about twenty-five, he guessed, admiring the flush that spread over her smooth skin as she caught him looking at her.

"We've probably lost him by now."

She didn't comment.

"I hope I didn't intervene in anything that I shouldn't have. I hate to see men take advantage of women."

The flush in her cheeks deepened.

"That's okay. Thank you again. Believe it or not, that guy's my foster brother."

"What, and he's treating you like that. If I were you I'd report him to the police."

"My father wouldn't like me to do something like that."

"Oh, why not?"

She turned on him, her eyes blazing.

"Have you ever heard about Gus McCreed?"

"Gus, who?"

"Why do you look so shocked? Do you know him?"

"No, I've only heard about him, but it doesn't matter. I'll drop you home if you wish."

He frowned. What was Gus Mc Creed's daughter doing up here?

"What's your foster-brother's name?"

"Fred Billings, you're lucky he didn't try to shoot you."

"Does he carry a gun around with him all the time?"

“He’s very violent and unpredictable. That’s all I know.”

“One of these days he’s going to mess with the wrong person.”

“That’s what my father keeps telling him.”

He opened the car door and gestured for her to get in.

“I don’t take rides from strangers. I don’t even know your name.”

He looked at her.

“What do you want me to do? Leave you stranded here? Taxis hardly run up here.”

She looked as if she didn’t believe him.

“My name’s Curtis Johnson but everybody calls me Bendo. If you want I can show you my identity card.”

She waved him away.

“It’s all right. Do you live up here?”

“I was in the area dropping off something.”

When she got into the car, he noticed that she didn’t have a bag, maybe she had left it in Fred’s car. He drove for a while before she spoke.

“If you drop me in Half Way Tree, I’ll take a taxi home.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier if I took you home?”

“I don’t want to inconvenience you or have you run into Fred again.”

He didn’t say anything. It was a typical Friday evening with many vehicles on the road transporting people home from work, schools and the markets.

They had left Wireless Station Road now and were descending Old Stony Hill Road.

“You didn’t tell me your name.”

“You didn’t ask me.”

She smiled.

“I’m Lorena.”

“Your parents named you well, it suits you. Do you live with them?”

“My mother died years ago. I’m mostly in Ocho Rios to help run our hotel. I come up some weekends.”

“I like Ocho Rios a lot. It’s a beautiful place. Where is your hotel exactly and what’s the name?”

“It’s called the Charlena, after my mother. It’s on Watson Street.”

“Whenever I’m down that way again, I’ll be sure to look you up.”

She laughed.

“I’ll be glad for that. We’re always happy to welcome new guests.”

“Hey, I never knew that Gus McCreed had such a beautiful daughter.”

She laughed again.

“A lot of people say that. They only see one side of my father. But I suppose I got my looks from my mother.”

“It must have been hard on you.”

“Very much, but I suppose God knows best.”

“Is your father, Gus McCreed, the ex-boxer? I use to hear them talk about him.”

“The same person, I can’t remember any of his fights. I was too young, maybe not even born yet. Anyway, I think I’d better end this conversation. My father would be angry if he knew I was discussing him with a complete stranger.”

He wasn't offended by her remarks. Many people in the force suspected McCreed of illegal activities, but they had nothing against him that could stand up in court. According to the grapevine, he had been a hitman for several American crime syndicates. He was also rumored to be a drug baron.

"Where do you stay when you come up?"

"My father lives in Coopers Hill but that doesn't matter. I told you I'll take a taxi home."

He ignored the rebuff. This girl was hard to understand. One minute friendly, the next, exactly the opposite. In Half Way Tree, she got out, thanked him and walked to the taxi stand. Maybe she had money on her to take a taxi, he thought as he drove off.

He drove up Hope Road for his meeting with his Chief. He wondered what his assignment would be this time.

His last mission had been to track down a gang of drug smugglers operating between the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. It had ended in a shoot-out at the gang's headquarters in Port Antonio. One of the gang members was killed, but the other four were captured and were scheduled to go on trial in early August.

His thoughts turned to McCreed and his beautiful daughter's face came to mind. Despite his girlfriend being in the United States, he knew he had to see her again.

After he was cleared by the officers on duty, he got to Mc Donald's office.

Mc Donald was tall, bald headed and had a stony face. He guessed his age to be in the late forties.

After they shook hands, he said.

"I suppose you're wondering why I sent for you, Bendo?"

"Yes, sir."

"A gang of gunmen based in Wareika Hills is responsible for the recent upsurge in criminal activities on the island."

"We believe that the gang is working for a syndicate and that their operations might not only involve murder and robbery but hard drugs as well. So far we have no evidence. We believe that the only way we can break up the gang is to send a man to infiltrate them and we have decided that you're the best man for the job."

"Me, sir? I know you have better men than me in the Force."

"We might, but we feel that you are the best man for this job."

"What do I have to do?"

McDonald picked up a file and skimmed a few pages.

"You have to look the part of a Rasta dreadlocks. Then you have to find a way to get into the gang. You've got two weeks to prepare for it and then you're on your own. After you get in, you are to feed us with information about them."

"How am I going to get in touch with them?"

"Every now and again some of them come to town. How you get in is your business. Your contact will be Delbert Wood."

Bendo was aware that the Chief was probably keeping certain details about the forthcoming operations from him. He was avoiding eye contact by looking out of a window. He knew that raids had been made on Wareika but had failed to flush out the criminals. There was talk that information about the raids had been leaked.

"Woody has rented a furnished room for you off Mountain View Avenue. We want you to collect what you'll need and move in from tonight. He will keep an eye on your car and apartment. We're putting out a press release that fifteen men will be going to England for a six-week's training course. Your name will be on the list to account for your absence."

“How much of a chance do you think I have?”

“Just watch your back.”

“I’ll do the best I can, sir.”

“Good, I know that you won’t let us down.”

McDonald shook his hand.

Bendoo then left the office and went home to his apartment in Queensbury, where he picked up some clothes and other necessary items.

Lorena McCreed had lied to Bendoo about taking a taxi home. She could have gotten her car later and let him drop her home, but she didn’t want to chance a fracas if Fred was home.

She took one down to McGrath’s garage on South Camp Road. The employees called it the ‘Factory’ for reasons she had never discovered. Dangler, the garage manager, wiped greasy hands on his overalls as he came to greet her. He led her to her car and held the door open as she climbed in. She drove it once around the yard and stopped beside him.

“How does it drive?”

“It feels all right.”

“Good, those guys worked on it all day yesterday.”

She reached into her pocket and took out three crisp twenty-dollar notes and gave them to him. The charge for the work would be billed to the hotel.

“Buy yourself and those guys a drink,” she said and drove off.

When she reached home, Caslyn was in the kitchen looking after dinner. Caslyn and her mother, Charlene, came from the same village. She had started working for them about twelve years ago and never left. On her weekends off, she returned home to look for her relatives.

“Cas, dad or Fred come home yet?”

“Only Fred, Miss and he didn’t stay long.”

“Did he leave my bag with you?”

“I put it in your room.”

Damn him, she thought and went to her room to retrieve the bag. She took out the Smith and Wesson automatic Colt. 22, her father had insisted that she keep for protection. She had completed a firearms instruction course and kept the weapon with her at all times.

She took a bath, then ate some of the dinner, Caslyn had prepared. She then occupied herself with television, wishing that her father return home soon. She needed to discuss this latest episode with Fred.

Her thoughts strayed from the television to Bendoo. She had seen the bulge of an object resembling a gun through his T-shirt and suspected that he was a member of the armed forces. In addition to the gun, he was clean-shaven. He looked about thirty, making him about six years older than her.

Her childhood sweetheart, Bobby, was a year older than her. He was her next-door neighbor when they lived in Vineyard Town. His family had moved to Barbican before her family went to live in Coopers Hill.

She had started out with boarding school in rural Jamaica. After her mother’s death, she had relocated to Kingston and attended school there. More than anything else, she was interested in partying and couldn’t wait for the holidays. She and Bobby would go to endless parties around town. He was always the life of a party.

They continued the relationship, despite no longer living close to each other; falling in love and planning to marry after they completed university. But five years ago, after attending a party they each hitched a ride home with a different friend. As they drove off, she felt that something would go wrong. Near dawn the next morning, his mother called to tell her that the car with him and his friends had run off the road into a precipice. While his friends escaped with broken limbs, Bobby was the only fatality.

The policemen, who investigated the accident, suspected that another vehicle was involved but couldn't prove it. She had cried for weeks. She tried hard to take her mind off him. After a while she managed to put him at the back of her mind. When she graduated from university, she returned to her father's hotel as the assistant general manager. She had actually done her major in computer science while her minor was in management. She envied her girlfriends, who were getting married and having babies while she partied, unable to find a man to spend the rest of her life with.

Then Fred returned from university abroad. He had changed, no longer the jovial youngster she had known. Instead, he had become much more aggressive, almost overbearing. He had several brushes with the law which had cost her father plenty.

His attitude caused most of her male friends to stop visiting her. When she confronted him, he told her that those men weren't her type.

"It's none of your business, which man, I talk to."

"Gus is afraid that these guys are only after his money. I can bet that it's you who treat them when you go out."

"So what, it's not your money I'm using."

"Gus says I'm to keep an eye on you. I intend to do just that."

"Go to hell. I'm not telling you who to talk to so why do you want to choose a man for me?"

She had complained to his girlfriend, Johanna Mc Farlane but to no avail. She had fallen back into his arms on his return. She seemed to be the only person, who didn't notice any changes in him after those four years in America. Maybe it was the upscale apartment he had bought her as well as the large amounts of money he gave her, enabling her to live a life of leisure. She didn't even seem to care that he had shot and wounded a man in a fight over another woman.

Today was another example of his uncontrollable behavior. Had Bendoo not intervened, she didn't know what might have happened. She was determined to resolve the matter with her father. If he couldn't control Fred's behavior, then she would just have to stay in Ocho Rios permanently.

Sometimes she wondered if the change in him had something to do with her aunt, Delta, refusing to have him -court her daughter, Shermaine. They were in the States studying at the same time. She had heard rumors about the affair even before they both went away. Delta had told her in no uncertain manner that she didn't want her daughter having anything to do with Fred.

Chapter Two

Two weeks later McDonald took Bendoo and Delbert Wood to see the Commissioner, Hubert Haskins. Haskins was a middle-aged man who had made it out of the ranks to the top. After the customary courtesies, McDonald went straight to business.

“We’re going to give you two weeks to make contact. If you fail we’re going to cancel the whole operation. If you’re successful and reach Wareika, get in touch with Woody at the first opportunity.”

McDonald looked at Bendoo.

“They’ll allow you time to leave the camp so you do it then, but you have to be very careful.”

He paused and surveyed the room.

“Woody will drop you home, from now on you’re on your own.”

Bendoo returned to his lodgings. The two weeks he had spent preparing for the mission and trying to grow a beard had been of some help. He had been to the marijuana yards and had taken some of the stuff. Most nights he was out until late, either at bingo or card games. Sometimes he went to the movies with some of the people from his yard. Everybody called him Bendoo. He had let it be known that his woman was in America and she was filing immigration papers for him.

Wood usually came to look for him in an unmarked car. He brought him letters from his girlfriend, Barbara Newell. He usually called her from a call box on Mountain View Avenue. So when Wood dropped him off at his gate that Monday morning, he knew that he was undercover and the real action was about to begin.

He began to move into areas, which he knew bad men frequented. He returned to his usual haunts. He kept his ears close to the ground hoping to get in contact with one of the gunmen from Wareika but with no luck.

He was desperate to make contact by the beginning of the second week as time was running out. At about four o’clock that Monday afternoon he was walking on Mountain View Avenue when someone shouted.

“Bendoo!”

He didn’t recognize the voice, but froze, thinking that it might be a policeman. A tall, well-dressed dreadlocks came up to him.

“Bendoo, do you remember me?”

He looked at the man, but gave no sign of recognition. He took a closer look.

“What! Nigel, it’s years now since I’ve seen you.”

“That’s true, then what are you doing for yourself now?”

“I’m just hustling, things are rough.”

“I know how it is, it’s the same thing I’m doing too.”

“Come and have a drink, Nigel. I was going to have one when you called me.”

He and Nigel had grown up in the same village, but at the age of fifteen the latter had left for Kingston. He later heard that he had converted to the Rastafarian faith. He heard little news about him after that, but here was the man standing before him with his long locks. The two of them went into a nearby bar.

He bought a few malt beverages and learned that Nigel was now called Niah. He told him that if he wanted work he had some friends whom he could talk to. He told him that he wanted some work as he was low on cash.

They went outside and sat on a bamboo bench under a huge almond tree.

“Is it a long time since you came to town?”

“Country isn’t saying anything. I used to load buses, then I got mixed up in the politics and started to fire guns for certain politicians.”

“Are you good with a gun?”

“It’s few men who can test me. I’ve fired M-16, AK-47, Ruger, Bushmaster, Browning, Beretta, even some home made guns too. Any gun you can think about I’ve fired it already. I was with the Dugout gang from Waterhouse and then I joined the Clappers from the Maxfield. Most a those shops and bars that you see close down on the avenue it’s because of us.”

He then explained to Niah how the Clappers gang met its demise. He told him how he and two other gang members escaped the police dragnet by hiding in an empty cesspool.

Lately the police turned up the heat on them, forcing him to hide out in Mountain View at a brethren’s house.

“Men scatter all over the place. Some are even in the country-side.”

Niah told him where to meet them the next night. They then parted, Niah returning to where he lived and Bendoo to his yard.

He suspected that Niah was part of a gang and didn’t want to tell him. He would find out everything tomorrow night.

In the morning he phoned Wood to let him know that he believed he had made contact. He then informed his landlord that he was returning to the country.

Some of the tenants speculated that he was moving because his papers had come through. He simply told them that he wanted to enjoy some more country life before going to America. Wood brought an unmarked van and together they put the few pieces of furniture and other items into it and moved them back to his apartment.

So that night armed with a bag containing a few pieces of clothes and a gun specially assigned to him for such undercover work, he waited at the corner of Langston Road and Mountain View Avenue. He was there from ten o’clock and was getting impatient when a car drove up, its headlights drowning him. Two men dressed in military fatigues jumped out of the car, guns lining him up.

“You name Bendoo? Get in, Niah told us about you,” one of them ordered.

Bendoo got in beside the driver.

This man’s face was hard, he had several scars from knife cuts, no doubt, he thought. He guessed his age to be in the early thirties. He also guessed that he was in charge of this particular operation.

“Why do you want to join our gang, brethren?” the driver asked.

“Niah told me about you guys. I like what I heard. He said you guys would have no objections to me joining so long as I know how to use a gun.”

“The boss pays good money, but it’s dangerous work and you have to work hard.”

“I love hard work and I’m not afraid of the police or to fire my gun.”

He wondered why the two men in the back of the car kept so silent. Both had their fingers close to the triggers of their rifles.

A Ford pickup drew up beside them as they passed West Kings House Road and turned up Upper Waterloo Road. They were going on a raid, he realized.

Joe Simmonds, his wife and children plus their house guest, an American woman, returned home from an art exhibition in Liguanea. Joe stopped his car in front of his gate on Norbrook Drive and was about to get out to open the gate when a white Ford Escort drove up, stopped suddenly. Two men jumped out of the car, guns pointed at them.

The driver of the car, got out, brandishing a handgun.

“All of you come out,” he ordered.

“What’s the meaning of this, have you come to rob me? I can tell you that you aren’t going to get away with it.”

Simmonds began to perspire, but he told the others to get out of the car.

“Where are the dogs, old man? We know that you have bad dogs,” the gang leader stated.

“I don’t have any dogs. What do you want from me?”

“It’s a lie you are telling. You have them inside waiting to attack us. Where are they, old man?” the gang leader repeated.

Then a Ford pickup drove up. In it were three men, two in the front and one in the back. It stopped behind the car and the occupants got out.

“Everything all right so far, Premba?” the driver of the pickup asked the gang leader.

Premba nodded.

The driver of the pickup was on the short side. Probably about five feet four inches and would be about twenty five, Bendoo thought. He had a handgun tucked into his waist.

“What happened to the dogs, Premba?” one of the van sidemen asked.

“They are tied up, Dally,” Premba replied.

The two men who had been pointing guns at Simmonds and his family returned to the car.

“Hey, old man, we want all of you to go into the house and find all the money you have and give us.”

Simmonds again protested.

“What do you want?”

“What do you have to give us? You have enough money in there, old man? It’s a long time we’ve been watching you.”

Simmonds reached the front door of his house now, the five men were breathing down his neck.

“Open the door, old man, don’t bother try anything. Don’t touch any buttons,” Premba warned.

Simmonds pushed open the front door of his two-story house. He and his family and their guest led the way into the living room, followed by the gang members, two of whom raced upstairs.

“Chaser and Dally, both of you come back down.”

The two youths retreated downstairs. Simmonds could see that they were mere boys.

“Where were both of you going? Just sit down and listen to what I have to say. You know that I don’t joke with no man.”

“Yes, Premba,” Dally replied as they both joined their companions on the soft couches.

Premba and Joe Simmonds were left standing.

“Now, old man, you are going to lead us upstairs. Who is up there?”

“Everybody who lives in this house is here. Nobody else is here.”

“You must have a helper and a gardener. Where are they?”

“They don’t live on,” Mrs. Simmonds replied.

Premba looked at her.

“Are you his wife? Who is she and who are they?” he asked, pointing to a thirty something Caucasian looking woman and a teenaged boy and girl.

The middle-aged woman hesitated before replying.

“I’m his wife and she is our house guest and they are our two children.”

She pointed to each person as she spoke.

Premba nodded.

“Old man, we want all that you can give us, the more cash the better. See, we have a pickup outside; we want it full before we leave.”

“Where is your vault with the money?”

“I don’t have any vault.”

“Where do you keep your valuables?”

Simmonds didn’t answer.

“Joe, give him whatever money we have,” Mrs. Simmonds pleaded.

“Duffus, did you cut the telephone wires?” the gang leader asked.

Duffus nodded.

“See, you can’t get any help and the two men with the long guns will shoot anybody they see leaving their house.”

Simmonds gave Premba his wallet.

“It’s only two hundred dollars in there,” Premba said and flung the wallet down on the floor.

“Old man, we know that you have a vault. Go and open it and let us see what you have in there.”

“Joe, why don’t you do as he says?”

Joe Simmonds climbed the stairs ahead of the gang leader. Two minutes later they descended the stairs. Premba had a money pan with him. He took the key from Simmonds and opened it. He took out the money and counted it.

“It’s just four hundred dollars in there. It’s a big vault the man has, full of paper.”

“Maybe if we took away your son, or your daughter we would get more money,” Duffus suggested.

Bendoo looked at their captives and could see them cringing up in fear at Duffus’ latest suggestion.

“We are going to take away their valuables. Come, Duffus and Bendoo let us see what else they have here.”

The three men then went through a systematic search of the house. Everything valuable that could be easily disposed of was taken. The whole operation lasted the half hour it had been timed for. Simmonds and his family and their guest could only look in awe as the robbers moved their loot out of the house to the pickup.

“We are finished now,” Premba announced. He was holding a videocassette recorder.

“It’s a long time I’ve wanted one of these things, now me and my girlfriend can get to watch some blue movies.”

“What are we going to do with these people?” Duffus asked.

“Let them stay, hey, Mister Simmonds, you see the man with the long gun, the big fat one. You must thank the Lord that he and I are not the same. If I ever let him loose, he would smash up your house,” Premba declared as his captives cowered before him.

“What happen, aren’t you going to take away these women’s rings and the old man’s too?” Bendoo asked.

“Come, take off the rings and the chains. And you, Mr. Simmonds, we are still not pleased that it’s just this little amount of money we found in your house.”

“How is that, old man? A rich man like you should have more money than that,” Duffus stated.

“Where is the rest of the money, daddy?” Bendoo asked.

“Please, my husband has no more money. Why do you believe that because we live in a big house, we are rich?” Mrs. Simmonds asked.

“Your husband owns a lot of companies. He is a multi-millionaire. Just give us the rest of the money that you have,” Premba told her.

“They are trying to fool us. They must have more money in their house,” Bendoo insisted.

“Those things you have taken are worth thousands of dollars. I could never replace them, what more do you want?” Simmonds pleaded.

Premba looked at him.

“You want us to beat you up, elder? Where’s the rest of the money?”

“Make him get up and go show us,” Bendoo suggested.

“He doesn’t have any more money,” their guest cried. “Can’t you understand?”

“Where is your money?” Premba turned on her.

“I only have two hundred and fifty dollars. If I give it to you, will you take it and go?”

“Sure, just give it to us.”

“Come with me,” she said and stood up.

“No, go for the money and bring it to him, Liz,” Mrs. Simmonds warned.

Premba hissed his teeth.

“What are you afraid of, woman?” he asked, looking at her.

He then followed the American woman up the stairs into her room. Presently he returned with a roll of bills, the woman behind him, he was smiling.

“Come, my friends, let’s leave.”

“You got all of the money, she said she had?” Bendoo asked.

“Yes, these people don’t have any more money.”

Premba pointed his gun at each of his captives, in turn.

“Any of you ever feel gunshot yet? You see if any of you ever report this to the police, those two guys with the long guns will be coming back for all of you.”

“Cut off the lights, Duffus.”

The whole house was soon plunged into darkness as the robbers ran towards their vehicles. Bendoo and Premba got into the car and the latter started it.

The two men were in the back with their guns at the ready. One of them fished some marijuana cigarettes out of a bag and lit one each for himself, the other man, Bendoo and Premba.

Duffus drove off the Ford pickup a few seconds before them, a tarpaulin covering the stolen merchandise. Dally was beside him in the front while Chaser was in the back. The time was one o’clock.

Premba drove onto a dirt road and stopped. Duffus had parked on the main road near the dirt track. Bendoo was surprised at the number of heavily armed men waiting for them. In a short time the pickup was emptied of its contents as the robbers and their cronies made their way back to their hideout with the Simmonds’ possessions.

Dally crept into his house through the back door. He shared the room with his younger brother, Clive who was now snoring very loudly. He closed the door and dug into his pocket for his matches and lit the kerosene oil lamp. His mother couldn’t afford electricity, so she made them use that kind of lamp.

He sat himself down in a chair. His dinner was on the table, but he wasn't hungry. He was thinking about Mr. Simmond's son, Russell. They had played both football and cricket against each other. He had seen the look of stark recognition on the youth's face. The boy would inform the police that he was a member of the gang that had robbed his parent's home. The police only had to check at school or come into the area to find out where he lived. He had to leave the area and give up school. He should have shot Russell or at least tell Premba about it. They should have worn masks. Now he alone was in trouble.

He went to the small dresser and quietly opened the drawers. He began to take out his clothes. He took his other pair of shoes and a few more pieces of clothes as much as the bag could hold.

Clive was snoring even louder now. He took out his wallet and counted eighty-four dollars in it. He took a ten-dollar bill and threw it on the bed.

He then picked up his bag and went through the door gently closing it behind him so as not to awaken Clive. His next move would be to check Chaser. He would tell him about Russell, as he didn't know the youth as he went to a junior high school. The two of them would go to the Factory and then be taken to Wareika Hills.

Chapter Three

Neil McDonald was sitting on the patio of his Red Hills Height's home. He was thinking about the two meetings he had today. He was also thinking about Bendoo. The first meeting was called by the Commissioner for senior operating officers. The discussion mostly centered around the ransacking of businessman, Joe Simmond's house by a gang of armed thugs. Haskins told them that he had gone there last night and the place was in shambles. On arrival on the scene, he was greeted by reporters, all of whom wanted his reaction to what had taken place. Photographers were snapping up everything. A deputy superintendent, attached to operations, Brendan Fox, was also on the scene as well as several other policemen.

Nothing much had come out of the meeting. Bill Nugent, the crime chief said that Simmonds had identified three of the robbers as persons on the most wanted list from the papers. It was generally agreed that it was men from Wareika. Everybody was of the view that the Wareikans were working for some of the biggest drug syndicates on the island. Simmonds wasn't aligned to any of them so it was puzzling why they would raid his house. The meeting was almost finished when Haskins got a call from the Minister of National Security, Duncan Fuller, that he wanted a meeting with him. Fuller told him that the army top men would be there.

McDonald knew that the Minister didn't have operational control over the military. He had, however gotten the permission of the Prime Minister to include them in important security discussions.

From what he knew of the Minister, he was of medium height and was beginning to go bald. A lawyer, he became Minister when his predecessor didn't seek re-election, preferring to go to Canada as High Commissioner.

Once again the topic centered around the Simmonds.

"They smashed up the man's house and robbed him and his family. They took two hundred and fifty dollars from that American woman," Fuller lamented.

"Mr. Simmonds said that he recognized three of the men from their pictures in the papers. Those men come from Wareika," Bill Nugent, the crime chief stated.

"We sent men up there after them and up to now we can't get them out of there."

"Those men have time to hide their weapons and because it's so high up they can see anybody coming up there after them," Bruce Mallory, the army Chief of Staff argued.

"I am clueless as to why they would rob Mr. Simmonds. Unless they are looking for some soft targets," Wayne Powell, the police operations chief remarked.

"Bruce, you and Hubert devise some plan to deal with those criminals. I have a meeting with the Prime Minister, tomorrow. Only hope that none of this comes up."

McDonald had gone in the Minister's car and explained that he had an operative at Wareika.

"I only read about secret agents in books or see them in movies, but I'm willing to listen to you."

"I have a dossier on him."

He passed the file to the Minister.

Fuller leafed through the file.

"He looks like a good man. I only hope he can pull it off."

"I'm sure he can."

Fuller passed the file to Mallory.

Mc Donald was aware that the Minister was annoyed because after the last raid on the gang's headquarters, things had calmed down considerably.

He knew that last night's atrocities had blown the lid off. Already there were calls from opposition political parties, several civic and business organizations for something to be done. Something like this happening again and Fuller would certainly be in trouble with the Prime Minister.

"What you have here is not a bad idea," Mallory remarked.

"It's not bad, but it's going to take too long."

Fuller looked at Mc Donald.

"I'm going to give you a chance Neil, but you only have until the middle of next month."

That would only give Bendoo two weeks. It wasn't much time, but if the gang kept quiet there was a chance that he could buy some more time out of the Minister.

Chapter Four

Premba drove the Fiat motor car along the Rock Hall main road before making the appropriate right turn and heading up into Coopers Hill. There were two other men in the car, Ardez and an African-American, Karl Rattigan. They went through a maze of roads, finally ending up on one called Reef Close. Premba stopped the car in front of a big iron gate, which guarded a huge mansion. Two Doberman dogs moved silently towards the gate. The occupants of the car had their windows down as they enjoyed the cool mountain air.

Caslyn came to the gate as the men came out of the car. She led the dogs to their kennel and locked it before returning to the visitors.

“What’s happening, Cas? It’s a long time since I’ve seen you,” Premba greeted her.

The other two men greeted her too. They made their usual half-joking comments and offers to party with her while she opened the gate and led them to the porch.

“Let me call the boss.”

She left them on the porch and went into the house.

At that moment Gus McCreed was seated in a lounge chair near his swimming pool. A girl barely out of her teens, was lying across his knees and he was tickling her ribs. When the telephone rang, she picked it up and handed it to him. He listened for a few seconds before hanging up. He pushed her off his knees and stood up.

“I have business to do, you go up to the house and lay down until I come up.”

The girl disappeared up the steps.

The three men came down to the swimming pool.

“Hey, Gus, how’s the man?” Rattigan asked.

Gus smiled.

“All of you come and sit down.”

He pointed to the other chairs beside the pool.

“Let me get some drinks for you.”

“I want a beer, I’m really thirsty,” Ardez stated.

“One for me too,” Premba put in.

“I’ll just drink a coke,” Rattigan requested.

“Hey Cas, come down here.”

Gus looked up as the girl came down to the pool.

“Yes, sir, you called me?”

“Bring some beers, soft drinks, glasses and a bucket of ice.”

“Yes, sir.”

She hurried up to the house.

“Cas seems to be getting fatter.”

Rattigan pointed to her retreating figure.

“You want to try her?” Gus asked.

“Another time.”

“If you keep fooling around these women, Rattigan, you’re going to be a nervous wreck by the time you return to the States,” Ardez warned.

“Show me the one I can’t manage, Ardez.”

“Rattigan, I saw you checking some real sexy girls. You’re going to need lots of strength to manage those girls. If you eat the local food, you’ll be all right, but as you’re not used to the taste you might have to try some seafood,” Premba put in.

“Those real sexy girls will drain you of your strength,” Gus warned.

“It’s the same thing I’ve told him, but he doesn’t believe me, says I’m talking foolishness,” Ardez said. “You can buy some okra too. Let your woman steam it down for you or if she doesn’t know how to do it, you can beg one of those girls.”

Caslyn came with the drinks. She put the tray down on a table and the men took their drinks. Rattigan winked at her, but she gave him a blank stare and made her way back upstairs.

“Gus, we did a little raid last night, nothing big. It’s just to keep the boys active,” Ardez told him.

While he didn’t approve of these off the cuff raids, Mc Creed couldn’t fault Ardez.

“Did everything go as planned? I don’t want any unplanned killings or any unlawful acts.”

All three of his visitors assured him that nothing like that happened.

“Did Butler give trouble again? Why don’t you shoot him one of these days, Premba, or stab him up? If you aren’t careful he will spoil one of these raids for you guys.”

“I had to keep him out of the people’s house this time. He can work, but when he sees liquor and women he goes crazy and most of the times I have to draw my gun on him.”

“He wants a bullet, that’s what he’s working for.”

“Let him go on, he’s going to feel my nine millimeter one of these days.”

“The new man, Bendoo, acted all right? Who brought him in?”

“Niah told us about him. Said that he used to fire guns for that big politician, Colbert Nevers,” Ardez told him.

“Oh, Nevers, he used to work for that dirty fucker.”

Mc Creed remembered how he had helped the man win his seat, hoping to get some contracts for him to supply various government projects with hardware supplies but it never happened. As a matter of fact he only got two contracts hardly enough to make up for his contribution to the man’s campaign.

“Bendoo’s all right, he’s tough, a good man for us to have,” Premba assured them.

“You’re right, we don’t want any idiots with us, it’s pure bad men we’re dealing with.”

“How do you think the police will react when they find out that it was us?” Rattigan asked.

“K is handling that, he’s going to send me information on what they plan to do.”

K was a highly placed police official, who was in a position to supply the gang with the information they needed. It was he who had informed them about the two impending raids on their hideout.

Mc Creed knew the importance of keeping well paid informants in strategic positions. None of them, except K knew him personally. They were paid out of an account, which he kept for such purposes.

“K should have something interesting to tell us, this being our first raid in a long time,” Rattigan declared.

“He’d better have, that’s what we’re paying him to do.”

“What’s the next move, Gus? See one hundred dollars of the money we took from an American woman we saw up at Simmond’s house,” Ardez said, handing him the money.

“Shame on you, Ardez, take it and buy some drinks for yourself and those guys.”

Rattigan laughed.

Karl Rattigan was an athletic looking man. His father was an African-American while his mother was from the Dominican Republic. A Vietnam veteran, on his return from the war he had done short stints with both the F.B.I and the C.I.A before coming to work for Paolo Colombo, who owned several gambling dens in Miami. He also controlled a huge portion of the city's drug trafficking.

Rattigan specialized in setting up drug trafficking rings.

When Colombo had been thinking of spreading his tentacles overseas, he had been sent to do the job. So far he had succeeded in setting up drug trafficking rings in several countries. Countless numbers of highly placed government officials had been bribed to turn a blind eye to the Colombo operations.

Jamaica had a lot of drug syndicates, so Colombo wanted to ensure he chose the right one. Some of these syndicates had gunmen just as dangerous as the Columbians or the Mafia. The country produced the best marijuana. It was also strategically placed to be used as a transshipment port for getting hard drugs from South America to the United States.

This was where Junior 'Ardez' Marriot had proved useful. Originally a waiter, he had migrated to the United States to join his mother and sister. His first job was as a waiter in a restaurant owned by Colombo.

One night he had wounded an African-American in a fight outside the restaurant. Colombo had been impressed. His Jamaican roots and Puerto Rican features were a distinct advantage. Colombo had easily gotten him off the rap and made him throw a gun for him. When things had gotten too hot for him, he had fled to Jamaica aboard a marijuana plane with twenty-five grand hidden in a secret compartment of his suitcase.

He rented a room in Kingston and banked the loot in several different banks so as not to arouse suspicions. He wanted to buy a minibus and had discussed the matter with several of his friends.

He was still debating the idea when one evening he came home to find his front door half-open. He entered cautiously to find two men sitting in his sofas, smoking marijuana, both had guns pointing at him. His hands had dropped instinctively to his pocket for his own gun. One of the men laughed and reached into his pocket for the gun that Ardez had left in the bottom drawer of his dresser.

"Are you looking for your gun, Ardez?" the man asked. "See it here, we found it in your dresser."

"How come you just broke into my house like that and ransack the place? What do you want with me? Are you policemen?"

The man, who had his gun, stood up and stretched.

"We've been looking for you for a long time, Ardez. Mister Colombo says he wants you to return his money."

"Wants me to return what? I have no money for him. Look how many millions he has. Why is he bothering me about this little money?"

"He has some business out here he wants you to handle for him. He wants you to come up and see him," the taller gunman told him.

"Me to go back to the States, you're mad."

"Are you disrespecting our boss, Ardez?" the shorter gunman asked. The other man was drawing hard on his marijuana cigarette, but the muzzle of the gun he was holding never wavered from Ardez's heart.

"What are you going to do, shoot me?"

“Easy, Ardez, the boss is dealing with some big money and you stand to get some of it,” the taller gunman said, trying to calm him down. The two men had talked to him about Paolo’s proposal. After much persuasion and assurances that he wouldn’t be harmed, he had agreed to go up and see Colombo.

The drug baron had given him details of what he wanted to be done. Returning to Jamaica he had contacted Gus McCreed. After much persuasion, the man had accompanied him back to Miami. Colombo wanted all the marijuana he could get plus he wanted to use the island as a transshipment port for hard drugs from South America to the United States. He had agreed to supply Mc Creed with weapons and training for his fighters in order to protect the syndicate. That was where Rattigan with his Vietnam experience had come in.

He also wanted to contact some people on the island, with whom his father previously had dealings. Many of them were former drug smugglers, who were now operating legitimate business concerns. He wanted McCreed’s men to contact these people for him as with their legitimate fronts, they could easily handle the drug smuggling business for him.

“We contact all of these people tomorrow and let them know that we want them to help us.”

“Suppose they refuse?” Premba asked.

Mc Creed looked at him.

“Any one of them who refuses, we’re going to deal with them.”

Premba took out a cigarette and lit it. He inhaled deeply.

“Let’s go up to the house,” Mc Creed said.

The house had two stories and contained twelve rooms and a huge patio which extended down to the swimming pool area. It had out-rooms for the helper and gardener. It was one of those modern designed houses. McCreed had personally overseen its construction. It had cost him a tidy sum, but it was well worth it.

He could entertain guests without feeling cramped for space.

From the balcony of his mansion, he had a panoramic view of Kingston.

The four men sat in the living room. A very expensive looking burgundy rug covered the floor. A big television set sat in the middle of the room.

“You got a palace here, Gus,” Rattigan remarked.

“It took me years to build,” Mc Creed replied. He got up and disappeared into the kitchen. Presently he returned with a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Scotch Whiskey, a bucket of ice and some glasses.

Over the whiskey, Rattigan asked.

“Where’s Cas, Gus?”

“She’s sleeping. It looks like you want her man to cut you up.”

“I could have a knife in him before he blinks, Gus.”

Mc Creed burst out laughing.

Ardez was more interested in Friday’s operations.

“I would like to see these people’s files,” he requested of Mc Creed.

“Okay,” Mc Creed replied. He left and went into another room, returning with the documents.

“These are the reports on the people you’ll be visiting on Friday.”

He passed the files around to the men and they read in silence.

“Boss, these people are so powerful that it seems hard to believe they’ll take those kinds of risks to help us,” Premba opined.

“We have something on all of them. The majority of them are crooks and we can destroy them if we want.”

“Let’s see how they react to our demands,” Rattigan remarked.

“Fred and I have drawn up the plans for Friday. I want you all to read them carefully before briefing the men,” Gus told them before handing Ardez a thick brown file.

Ardez took the file from him. Gus looked at his watch.

“It’s seven o’clock,” he said. “Let’s call it a day. K should have contacted me by now, wonder what’s preventing him? Anyway, I’ll contact you if I hear anything new from him.”

Ardez stood up with the file. His two companions stood up too.

“I’ll be seeing you, Gus,” he said as they marched out of the room.

Mc Creed received K’s report at eight o’clock that evening. He dismissed the report as containing nothing of strategic importance. Nevertheless, he was worried. He wondered if they had made an error in raiding a man like Joe Simmonds house. The man was a multi-millionaire owning several companies. In the future, he would warn Ardez against any such ventures and against such high profile targets. He didn’t anticipate another attack on Wareika. The security forces would have learned their lesson and would therefore resort to other methods to destroy Wareika. He had urged K to find out what those plans were.

Chapter Five

Gus McCreed was born in Kendal in the parish of Manchester in central Jamaica. The little farming village was to be made famous, some thirty-seven years later by that horrendous train crash. At twenty he had migrated to Kingston via a market truck. That was in the forties. Kingston had been hell in those days of widespread poverty. He had stopped with relatives in Allman Town. There had been restlessness on the streets as the trade union movement began to take root. After much loafing and partaking in free for all brawls, he had found work at the Golden Emerald nightclub and restaurant. The early shift saw him working as a doorman in the restaurant and when he worked late it was that of a bouncer in the nightclub.

He had developed into a fearsome young man, fearing no one and ready to take on all comers. It was here that he learned about the power of money.

The way he had seen the local people humiliated at the Golden Emerald had turned something inside of him. The rich locals taken into society owed it to their wealth. Gus knew that he had to make a lot of money if he wanted to be powerful.

He was a womanizer, sleeping around with the women in his yard, at the nightclub and eventually with this fabulous married woman, Paula Jones. He knew that it was a rule of management that employees weren't allowed to get romantically involved with patrons, but Paula's charm and beauty swept him off his feet and he ended up in her bed. When the manager heard about his romantic escapade with the patron, he was fired immediately.

After he left the club, he moved from one job to another. He later learned that one of Paula's neighbors had informed her husband about her one night stand with him and the man had given her a frightful beating. Gus didn't feel any remorse about what had happened to her; after all she had cost him his job.

He gambled a great deal and was used to carrying a gun. He used it frequently when he started working for Rhyging, who was overlord of the Jamaican underworld in the forties.

Gus was in Kingston when he heard the news.

Rhyging had been killed in a shootout with the police over at Lime Quay. He had fled the island when he managed to buy a boat ride to America. He stopped with a friend in a small apartment on the West Indian side of the Bronx. He was soon involved in peddling bootlegged liquor, a killing and gang warfare before he became the number one hit man for the Carlo Santini mob. He soon wanted to quit, but the crime boss had set him up to take the rap for several unsolved murders. Once again, he had to take flight with the Santini organization hot on his heels. He had stowed away on a Jamaican bound ship by bribing the captain.

Once in his homeland, Gus had thought that the Santinis would forget about him, so he had begun to haunt his old digs again. One night after a visit to one of his women off Red Hills Road, he took a taxi to his home in Duhaney Park. Another man was in the front of the car. The driver told him that the man had begged him a lift to his home in Pembroke Hall. He saw nothing strange about it reasoning that the men were obviously friends. The soft life had made him lose much of his wariness. On the way home, the men had stopped the car and he found himself staring into the muzzle of a gun.

"Gus McCreed, you dirty fucker. Do you know how long I've wanted to kill you? Mister Carlo paid me good money to get rid of you."

Looking the man in the eyes Gus realized how stupid he had been. This was Speedo Driscoll, the New York assassin. He had done some special work for Santini, he remembered.

The three men got out of the car.

Gus had heard that the thin man was a cold-blooded killer, who liked to see his victims suffer before he got rid of them.

They relieved him of his gun, then took him to the edge of a gully. It was one of those concrete made canals, built to take flood waters down to the sea. He was sure that the waters from this gully would run down into the Sandy Gully. It was wide and deep, although it was only dangerous when flooded. One would likely break all their limbs if not their neck if they fell into this gully.

“I’ll give you a chance, Gus, but you have to try jumping that gully,” Speedo said, pointing down into the gully.

“Damn it, Speedo, you’re going to kill me, your own black brother for some white son-of-a-bitch?”

“I collected the man’s money already,” came the gunman’s harsh reply.

Gus knew that he was telling the truth. To a working professional gunman, the only important thing was the amount of money he was being paid to do the job. In desperation, he shouted.

“Speedo, watch it, car coming!”

The gunman had fallen for the cheap trick and turned around and Gus lunged at him.

The taxi driver stabbed at Gus and missed as he swiveled his body away from the knife. He tripped the driver and as the man fell, kicked him, making him roll to the edge of the gully, lose his balance and fall over. They heard his screams as he fell into the gully. Speedo fired at Gus, who threw himself on the ground as the bullet flew over his head.

Speedo was now trying to bring his gun to bear on Gus again, but the bigger man’s fist tore into him sending him spinning sideways. He was over him and kicked the gun out of his hand. He then dragged the killer to the edge of the gully.

The little man was begging for mercy now. Gus ignored his pleas and shoved him over the gully. He paused only to listen to the agonized screams of the killer and the sound his body made, as it came into contact with the concrete at the bottom of the gully.

Gus collected his own gun, Speedo’s gun, the taxi man’s knife and the spent shell and took them home with him.

As he neither listened to the news nor read the newspapers, Gus could only guess as to what had happened to both men. He suspected that they may have gotten some life threatening injuries when they fell in the gully. He did make some inquiries from people who lived in the area, but nobody seemed to know anything. After that he never heard from the crime syndicate again.

Gus reflected that apart from being paid to kill him by the crime boss, Speedo may have been carrying a grudge against him because of the rumors about him and his wife. He had only begun sleeping with the man’s wife after she left him.

He had spent the next two and a half years doing some boxing, but decided that the sport was too tough and he was getting too many head blows. He threw in the towel after he lost a fight, he thought he had won.

He then decided to use his savings to open a wholesale store in Downtown, Kingston. There was fierce competition as the Jews, Chinese and Syrians dominated the trade. He wasn’t afraid to take a few pieces of stolen merchandise from the boys since they were willing to take a fraction of the price for it. Business had progressed so well that he eventually branched out into hardware dealing, buying the adjacent premises to open that store.

By this time he had met Charlene Raymond, a registered nurse, and they had gotten married after a six-months period of courtship. She got pregnant soon thereafter. Charlene was an American citizen as she had actually been born in the States. He didn't object when she decided to have her baby over there so that it could have citizenship of that country. However, he had felt a tinge of disappointment that it wasn't a boy and more when she failed to get pregnant again. However, Lorena was a bundle of joy and then one day a little boy was left in one of his stores.

Nobody saw the woman, who left him there. A piece of paper in one of his pockets disclosed that his name was Fred Billings and that he was two years old. Gus decided to take him home and when his mother never showed up to claim him, started treating him as the son he never had. He decided to give the boy the best education he could have despite Charlene's reservations.

He had also tried his hand at politics, contributing to Dean Merchant and later Colbert Nevers' campaigns. He had lost off both men for Merchant ran unsuccessfully and although Nevers made it to parliament he had virtually turned his back on him. He had vowed to stay far from politics.

A few years later he moved into the marijuana trade. Several syndicates, some of them, with heavily armed men, were controlling the trade.

Rather than form a syndicate, Gus had been content to go it alone, relying on his reputation as a former mob hit man to keep his rivals at bay. It was not long before he realized that he had to get his own fighters too. He had recruited several men to take the fight to his rivals. At least two syndicates had been destroyed and one of their leaders killed while the other was seriously wounded. The marijuana money had enabled him to build a hotel in Ocho Rios and a mansion in Coopers Hill.

It was after they had moved from Vineyard Town to Coopers Hill that his troubles with Charlene began. He began staying out late at nights, and on weekends, in Ocho Rios, ostensibly for business but more for womanizing. Charlene hadn't liked it. Relations between them deteriorated, as they were constantly quarrelling. Lorena was at boarding school so she didn't see the life that existed between her parents.

Finally, Charlene returned to live with her sister in Vineyard Town in East Kingston. By this time his name was being linked to the underworld. Still, she didn't seek a divorce or return to full-time nursing. He supported her and Lorena, sending them a hefty check each month. When Charlene died from cancer, Lorena decided to return home and attend school in Kingston. At sixteen years old, she was capable of looking after herself.

She was his daughter and he loved her, but there was always that look in her eyes. An accusing stare as if to say 'You were responsible for my mother's unhappiness'. He tried to improve his relationship with her by cutting down on his drinking and his love life.

Lorena had made excellent progress in high school, and had gone on to do a successful degree course in Computer and Management at the University.

When she returned, he had sent her down to the hotel in Ocho Rios as the assistant general manager.

She was as fiery as her mother had been. He would have loved to see her taken out of his hands, if only Bobby hadn't died in that terrible car crash.

A year after Charlene's death, he met Rosalee Pearson. She was a widow and fifteen years his junior. They met at a petrol service station on Red Hills Road when he helped to put air in her car tires. He was attracted to her and struck up a conversation. They saw each other regularly and soon started a relationship. Her accountant husband had been killed in a car crash in Southern Florida. They had agreed that she would resign her job to take the kids around while he remained in the States. Everything seemed to be working out until tragedy struck, leaving her alone to raise three girls aged ten, twelve and fourteen.

He knew that the insurance money she would get would only allow her to live for a couple of years without resuming work. He understood her fear of getting into any serious relationships let alone marriage. He had tried to help the girls, buying them presents and helping Rosa with transporting them home from school. The girls' relationship with Lorena was barely cordial; maybe it was the age difference. Rosa felt satisfied with the relationship. Her daughters seemed to be growing up and they weren't as tense and withdrawn, as they were a year or two after their father died. A year ago, she had informed him that their immigration papers had come through.

He had known that her sister was filing for her. She had explained that she wanted to see her daughters through school so that the whole family would be going up. He had asked her if she wanted help but she had refused, saying that she had enough money plus her sister had a job waiting for her. She had rented out her house in Orange Grove. He had dropped them at the airport that day with Rosa, telling him that as soon as the girls were on their own she would return to him. In the meantime, they would have to be satisfied with a long distance relationship.

With more money coming in from the expanded marijuana business he was able to open up another hardware store, Uptown, Kingston. Marijuana was serving as a third economy in Jamaica. The government had clamped down on several occasions.

Several of his marijuana fields as well as airstrips were destroyed. Stiffer penalties were also introduced. These were only temporary measures to appease the American authorities. He was able to keep a low profile and with the help of K and other agents, keep his men from being arrested. When the clampdown ceased, he was able to resume full activities again. It was during one of these lulls in activities that Ardez, a waiter at the Golden Emerald for a short time, sold him the idea of collaborating with the Miami drug lord, Paolo Colombo. He was surprised when the man contacted him because the latest he had heard was that he was living in the States and was a big time gangster. He had been reluctant to have anything to do with Colombo, remembering his New York experience with Carlo Santini.

Ardez had explained that there was plenty of money in it for both of them if they played their cards right. He also explained to Gus what had happened to him. To Gus it sounded very similar to his own experience with the Santinis.

He had been up to Miami to see Colombo, who had explained his plans to him. Colombo surprised him. He didn't look like the typical drug lord and there were no armed bodyguards present.

There had been about three days of negotiations until the deal was finally signed. Colombo would pocket sixty percent of the profits, Gus twenty-five percent and Ardez fifteen. Rattigan would come to Jamaica a week later, on a two month contract to train the fighters.

On return to Jamaica he had contacted some men living in the Wareika Hills. All were on the dodge from the police for one reason or another.

Gus' men were moved to the hills and more fighters recruited. More shacks were built up and more homes raided to furnish these shacks. The gang was to protect the marijuana fields from rival syndicates and to protect the drug smuggling ring when it started. The base at Wareika had hardly been set up when at least one other syndicate and several individuals had challenged them.

The subsequent war had the police investigating this upsurge in serious crimes and they were able to pinpoint the perpetrators as criminals hiding out at Wareika. When the combined police and military launched their attack, they were ambushed all along the way and had to beat a hasty retreat, suffering minor casualties. A second attack had met the same fate.

The gang had gotten rid of the last resistance and now all the marijuana Colombo wanted he could get. It had been a hard fight to get rid of the last obstacle to his setting up a syndicate. Danny King was almost as big as he was before he teamed up with Colombo. Had he not had the Wareikans he could never have defeated King and break up his syndicate.

McCreed heaved a sigh of weariness, emptied his glass of whisky and flexed his big muscles. He stood up and started for upstairs to join an already sleeping Cynthia.

Chapter Six

Danny King sat on the patio of his Cherry Gardens home with his two friends, Bradley 'Brad' Elliot and Lester 'Lex' Malcolm. He sipped his gin and tonic as he reflected on the past. He was one of the biggest players in the marijuana business until Gus McCreed moved in. The two men had confronted each other in a battle that had threatened to turn the streets of Kingston red.

King remembered Dickson Lunan. Lunan had teamed up with him against Mc Creed, but had pulled out his forces at the last minute leaving him exposed on several fronts. His retreating forces were easy targets for his enemy's gunmen. A couple of days later he had found out where Lunan was holed up. He had gathered whatever forces he could find and attacked him. Mc Creed had come to his aid and his forces were beaten back. He didn't know where that traitor was now. He had sworn to kill him wherever and whenever they met.

In the final battle, McCreed's superior forces had defeated him once again. Several of his men were killed and he had to negotiate a truce with his archenemy. This had not gone down well with his remaining men; all of whom had seen several of their comrades killed in cold blood and wanted revenge.

However, although his children were abroad, King still felt that he had a family to protect. The truce effectively sent him into retirement and to make do with his merchant tailoring business as his only source of income. He had closed down his ten year old security firm five years ago. His surviving fighters had joined other syndicates or migrated. Brad Elliot and Lex Malcolm were small players, who felt increasingly threatened by McCreed's growing dominance of the trade.

Lex Malcolm was tall and wiry and in his late forties. He had been in the laundry and dry-cleaning business for the past twenty-one years and was comfortably rich. However, his probings into the marijuana business had paid huge dividends and he wanted more. Gus McCreed, the obstacle had to be removed.

Brad Elliot was short and fat. He was in his early forties and his auto parts store was doing quite well. However, over the past few months he had been making plenty money out of marijuana, supplying Lex Malcolm, that was until Gus McCreed moved in. It was too much money for one man to stand in his way. Gus McCreed had to be eliminated.

Brad Elliot would buy the marijuana from growers in the rural areas. He would cure it and then Lex would get it shipped. He would then pay Brad after taking his commission. The warehouse with all their machines was burned to the ground one night and everything destroyed. When Brad contacted the growers they said they were now contracted to a new man. They refused to tell him the man's name. He suspected that it was Mc Creed. Both he and Lex knew then that they needed help.

Both men knew that King had a sordid past. He was suspected of more than one murder, was hauled before the courts several times, but got away when witnesses failed to show up.

"King, I thought that you made a mistake in signing that peace treaty with McCreed. It's that treaty, which allowed him to get so powerful," Lex stated.

"You know what Lunan did to me. He left me exposed on several fronts. I lost several of my men because of him."

"You should never have trusted Lunan," Lex told him.

"I'm breaking the treaty now and declaring war on Mc Creed."

Lex took out his gold cigarette case and lighter, helped himself and then passed them around.

"I feel that you gave up too easily. If you're going to lead this syndicate, we want positive leadership."

King was riled.

“I said that the peace treaty is off. You guys weren’t around during that war. I simply didn’t have enough fighters and ammunition to continue fighting.”

“Go easy, King,” Brad intervened. “Lex means that we have to fight this guy to the bitter end.”

“But that’s what we’re going to do. We haven’t even started planning yet and he wants results already.”

“Why don’t we get a man to bump him off?” Lex suggested.

“If you get rid of McCreed you’re only doing Fred Billings a big favor,” King opined. “Remember that he killed a man and shot and wounded another since returning from America.”

“You never even heard a thing about it after it happened, they just squashed it,” Brad stated.

“McCreed bought it out, you can bet that’s what happened. I hear that his daughter carries a gun too,” King put in.

“That family consists of pure gun toting people, but that can’t stop us if we’re serious and want to move against them,” Lex opined.

Brad ignored Lex’s impatience.

“Why don’t we try to infiltrate his organization?” he suggested. “We could get to Fred, feed him a line, let him know that we’re interested in seeing him take over from McCreed. The way I hear it is that he wants to take over, the earlier the better. That guy is certainly ambitious.”

“His ambitions might earn him an early grave,” King remarked.

“You know anybody close to him?” Brad asked.

“Rory Dillon knows him, and he and I are good friends. We could give him a message to give him,” King suggested.

“If I know Rory, he’ll want to know what kind of dealings we and Fred are in,” Brad stated.

“I will take care of Rory,” King told them.

“Jack is supposed to join us, he didn’t contact you, King?” Brad asked.

“He had to go to Ocho Rios, but he said he’ll be at our next meeting.”

They were talking about the dental technician, Jack Marriot. Jack had been a part of the Colombo drug trafficking network. He related to King what had happened to him.

He had run afoul of them and had been warned off. He knew that his life had only been spared because of the amount of money involved.

Jack usually bought marijuana and shipped it to the Colombo syndicate. He had his people on the ports, who usually handled the export for him. He had made a shipment, got the money to pay the growers, but had reported to them that the U.S.A authorities had seized the goods. The syndicate learned of this duplicity and he had to repay the money, a small matter of five thousand Jamaican dollars. He had found the money and made the payment. Looking around him in Jamaica, he realized that Gus Mc Creed was dominating the drug trade and he had tried to cut in.

It was the first time he was seeing the two men who confronted him that afternoon in the car park, Downtown, Kingston. He didn’t even have time to go for his gun before they slammed into him. They seemed to be running a contest to see who could hurt him the most. They had left him in a broken up, bloody heap that had required him to spend two months in hospital.

It was this beating that had made him contact King about reviving his syndicate. He was convinced that it was Mc Creed’s men who had beaten him up.

“I still feel that we should bump him off,” Lex reiterated.

“If Fred doesn’t agree to work with us, we’ll hire some men to get rid of both of them,” King assured them.

“I hear that they’re mixed up with the Wareika gang,” Brad remarked.

“He used some of those men to fight me. If we don’t use Fred and they’re really mixed up with that gang, then it’s no use breaking the peace treaty,” King explained.

“Okay, I’ll wait until you talk to Fred,” Lex conceded.

King looked at him questioningly.

“If you want to quit, you can go right ahead, Lex, but don’t bother counting on me to help you,” he stated, looking at Brad for support.

Brad nodded.

Lex shook his head.

“As I said, I’m willing to wait.”

It was one-thirty that morning when Lex and Brad left King’s home for their respective houses. By this time they had exhaustively discussed all of their plans to take over McCreed’s syndicate.

Gaskell Burke was drinking a cup of coffee as he read the morning papers. He was a tall, thin man with a deathly pallor and was in his late forties. He was wondering what was going on, the papers seemed to be full of violence. He still had clippings of the newspaper report about the murder of his brother, Danville, filed away. That was a year ago, he was sure it had been McCreed’s fighters as his brother had reported the threats on his life to him. The hit had taken place as he left his bar that Saturday night.

He had spent five years in the police force before deciding he wouldn’t reach the officer ranks any time soon. His brother had virtually funded his law studies and to lose him like that was hard for him to take.

He had sworn revenge. He had to make some contacts as before he died Danville had given him the names of some men, who wanted to join his syndicate. He had their phone numbers and would be putting through some calls to them. They were Ken Stone, Benn Sanderson and Wally Judge. These men plus himself would form the nucleus of a syndicate to avenge Danville, destroy Gus McCreed and control his section of the Jamaican drug market.

He remembered the other newspaper clipping. ‘Prominent lawyer, Gaskell Burke, barred from practice’. He wasn’t a gambling man; he dabbled in the stock market and didn’t have a large portfolio. However, Danville had told him about Mc Clelland & Sons Limited, one of the largest conglomerates on the island. Their results were about to be published; they looked so good, that it was likely that the price of the stock would double in a few days.

He had pumped more than thirty thousand dollars into it, the majority of it being the proceeds of a property sale on behalf of two overseas clients. But the company’s results weren’t all what was expected and the stock plunged and he found himself with a potential loss of over twenty thousand dollars. Then the clients called for their money, and when he couldn’t deliver, they had reported him. He had been disbarred, even though the stock eventually appreciated and he paid off the two clients and his own legal fees. His fall from grace meant that many doors were now closed to him but the few that were left enabled him to dabble in some real estate and other investments. This was nothing compared to his income when he used to practice, but his wife hadn’t complained, that was, until she gave him the shock of his life by filing for divorce.

At three o’clock on Thursday afternoon, Ardez received Gus McCreed’s relay from K. He was in his house at Wareika. The structure was made of concrete. They had actually captured it from an old man they saw living there. It consisted of two rooms and a porch. He had used his masonry skills to renovate the house, tiling both rooms among other things.

The old man had gone somewhere else to live, taking his goats with him. Ardez used one room for a living and dining room and for meetings with his lieutenants. He had a spacious bedroom. It contained a queen sized bed, a dresser and a built in closet to keep his family's clothes. The kitchen was detached and had an earthen fireplace. A stand up shower was behind it. A pit toilet was further on. Piped water was available as the men had secretly connected pipes to a Water Authority main and led it up into the village. A powerful generator supplied whatever electricity they needed. A qualified technician had been paid to connect a telephone line to the Camp.

Ardez knew that the 'Camp' as the men described their hideout was well situated. It could only be reached by a trail, which was guarded at several points by fighters. All other paths would be difficult because of the thick bushes, trees and rocky hillsides. The entrance to the village was guarded by a machine-gun.

Two men with sub-machine-guns were in the trees overlooking the trail. Each gun was manned around the clock on eight-hour shifts. The two gun nests were also lookout points. A searchlight was mounted atop a tree overlooking the trail.

Ardez issued the password for each night. It was relayed by mouth around the camp and to the guards. He was commander of the camp. His second in command was Premba. The latter commanded a group of ten men whom he carried on raids with him. These included Duffus, Dally, Chaser and Bendoo. This was 'A' unit; a man called Grosset and another man named Pennant, commanded B and C units respectively, each with eight men under his command.

Ardez knew that Grosset had particularly distinguished himself in the defeat of the security forces during their two raids on Wareika. He had seriously wounded one man in the first and two in the second plus putting several to flight, including the famous Bull Mosely. It was this type of fighting that had earned the ex-convict his job as B unit's commander. Pennant, who commanded C unit, had escaped from reform school with Premba. The two men had found themselves at Wareika after years of wild living, shootouts with the police and gang wars.

Dangler, who was manager of the Factory, while not being on the police most wanted list, or operational, was known as a bad man to tangle with. Ardez knew about his days as a political warlord.

The women at the camp, were mostly along with the men. Most had come willingly, though a few were either captured or lured there innocently. Many were former high school students. He was proud of the fact that his woman had come to live with him willingly.

He put the last of the stew beef and fried plantain in his mouth and washed it down with the last of the sour sop juice. He belched loudly, then took out his rag and wiped his face. Natalie, his woman and Barry, their nine months old son, were in the room sleeping. He had five other children with three different women. He used to support them before migrating to the States, but had lost track of them. He had planned to link up with them when he returned to Jamaica but his involvement with Wareika had put those plans on hold.

He lit a cigarette and took a bottle of stout out of the small refrigerator, while he thought about tomorrow. He had a meeting with his lieutenants at six o'clock. He drained the bottle of stout and drew hard on his cigarette. He opened the window and looked outside. He saw Grosset's big frame approaching along with Pennant, Premba and Rattigan. As usual Grosset was smoking a huge cigar.

The men sat around a wooden table. Grosset had put out his big cigar. He put the rest in his pocket and leant back in the wooden chair and relaxed. He had been on the run from very early in life and couldn't remember having found time to relax before coming to Wareika.

"I just got a message from the boss, K sent it. The police are going to be setting up roadblocks all over Kingston," Ardez reported.

Rattigan cleared his throat.

"That shouldn't trouble us, not this phase of the plan," he opined.

"Let them look, they aren't going to find anything," Premba declared.

Grosset chuckled at this. Ardez surveyed the room.

"Tomorrow we launch the second phase of our operations. We'll be visiting some people, who used to deal with Paolo Colombo's father. We're going to ask them if they're ready to repay the money he lent them to start their businesses. He did a lot of other things for them, some of which they'll never be able to repay. Some of them promised that they would help out with anything he wanted to be done out here just so that they didn't have to repay him, or return the favor. We have some things on some of them that they don't want the police to know about. We know that some of them are going to refuse, but we'll deal with them."

The men were listening intently. Ardez continued.

"Three teams of you'll be going. One team is going to be here in Kingston, that's Premba and Duffus. Grosset and Bendoo will be in Montego Bay, and Pennant and Pablo in Ocho Rios. We're hand-delivering the letters to them, with Paolo Colombo's signature. They'll get an unlisted telephone number to call to say whether or not they'll cooperate. I'll be at the Factory waiting to give them instructions on what to do."

"What happens if they don't phone?" Pennant asked.

"We're giving them twenty four hours to contact us. If they don't call, we're going to wipe them out."

"Suppose they phone the police?" Grosset asked.

"Remember what I said, we have things on them, and they know it, so they aren't going to any police."

"Why don't we just go to their homes or business places and fire some shots at them?" Pennant suggested.

"We want them to know that we're serious. It's for you to show them that we mean business and we'll kill them if they think we're joking. All of you'll get a list of the people you'll be visiting."

"Dress good, so you look like businessmen. Make sure that your crew cut their hair and oil it too to look presentable. We don't want any trouble with the police so drive carefully and don't bother act suspiciously."

"What about Dillinger and Butler?" Pennant asked.

"We would be taking a big risk in taking them along. They would be sure to be recognized. Their pictures are in the papers daily and the police are offering a reward of five thousand dollars for each of them dead or alive."

"This new guy, Bendoo, I don't like to go on any mission with anybody I don't know anything about," Grosset stated.

Ardez looked at Premba.

"He's good, that's a tough man, I'm telling you," Premba replied.

"I hope so, I don't want anybody with me, who can't defend themselves."

"From what Premba told me, he looks like somebody we can use," Ardez said reassuringly.

"I have to go with what Premba said," Grosset said, apparently satisfied.

"Grosset just mentioned trouble. What, if any of these people decide to create a scene? I mean it's quite possible that they'll have security guards at their business places," Rattigan stated.

“I did some investigations and found out that none of them has anything around them that we can’t handle.”

Rattigan took out a cigarette and lit it. He realized that he was among some of the most dangerous men he had ever encountered. For a man from a first world country, the reverence to which he had become accustomed to in many third world countries was missing here and had been from the beginning. He was glad that these men had accepted him as one of their own and treated him as an equal. He took the cigarette from his lips as Ardez addressed them again.

“Rattigan will remain here, he’s in charge until I return.”

“What about you, Grosset, you look worried?”

“Everything’s cool, Ardez,” Grosset replied.

“That’s good, you know Montego Bay so you should be all right down there. Pennant, you should be okay in Ocho Rios and Premba in Kingston and Spanish Town. If you can’t gain entrance use your identity cards. They’ll show that you’re employed to the National Development Unit. When they read the letter they’ll know otherwise. If they try to do anything funny, discipline them.”

“What about weapons?” Grosset asked.

Ardez took the cigarette Pennant had just given him and drew hard on it. He let out a ring of smoke.

“Take them with you, but make sure you hide them.”

Thunder rolled in the sky signaling rain as outside had already darkened. Ardez stood up and stretched. He groaned sleepily.

“Well, that’s enough for now. I hope that all of you get plenty of sleep because you’re going to be very busy tomorrow.”

The men rose and slowly filed out. It was drizzling slightly and some of them would be only too happy to throw down in bed and sleep. Ardez made for the bedroom where his woman and son were already snoring.

At a minute past ten o’clock that night, Buster, the gardener at Mc Creed’s house, let in the Ford Laser containing Fred Billings. It had stopped raining now.

The two Doberman dogs came snarling around the car, but became pacified when its occupant got out of the car.

Fred made for the house. Mc Creed was in the living room watching television.

“Fred,” Mc Creed said, shaking his hand.

“Is everything all right?” Fred asked.

“Yes, the operation will be starting tomorrow.”

He went to the liquor cabinet and took down a bottle of bourbon. He went into the kitchen and returned with a tray of ice and made drinks for both of them.

Taking a sip of the drink, he asked.

“You arranged everything at the hotels, Fred?”

“Everything’s all right, both in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay.”

“I only hope that Ardez and Rattigan briefed them on what to do.”

“You’d better go to the office tomorrow. I’ll stay here to keep up to date with what’s going on.”

“If this works out, Gus, we’ll be making thousands of dollars.”

“You’re right, and any little guy, who tries to stop our progress we just have to move them out of the way.”

“I’m going to have a bath so I’ll see you in the morning, Gus.”

“I don’t think I’ll be waking up that early, but I’ll see you in the evening. Hope that you take care of everything at the office.”

“No problem,” Fred said as he disappeared up the stairs.

Later Fred sat in his room thinking. He knew that it would soon be time to move against Gus McCreed. Every time he thought about it, he had a gnawing feeling in his stomach. He owed his very existence to this man. But the organization was growing and it needed a young and dynamic person to run it. If Gus should go now Lorena could never manage on her own and would prefer running the hotel, to getting involved with the shadier side of the business. His plans were to keep her single just in case Gus died before he was ready to make his move. He regarded her as a sister and felt that she despised him because of his over-protectiveness. If she got married, it could spell trouble for his plans. He had seen Rory Dillon, who had given him Danny King’s message.

He had been abrupt with him because he knew that whatever organization, King formed would never be a match for McCreed. The man had backed down from McCreed once and there were no guarantees that he wouldn’t do so again.

His own plans to get rid of McCreed had to be foolproof and would leave him in the clear and in control of his empire. It would be a very hard thing to move against the only two persons, who had ever shown him any kindness, but his ambitions were not in playing the underdog to anyone.

One of his reasons for feeling this way about his foster relatives was what he felt they had done to him. Shermaine, Delta’s daughter and he were in Miami and hopelessly in love. The affair had actually started out here but had blossomed once they were abroad.

Delta was Charlene’s sister and Lorena’s aunt. She was against the affair and had in fact flown to Miami to put an end to it. He didn’t think Lorena had anything to do with it. Shermaine didn’t return home with him, making him suspicious that she wanted to end the affair. In fact she was now married to a Latin American man. He felt that they had done this to him because he was an outsider, but he would show them.

He remembered a man named Roy Bailey, who had confronted him in their Downtown, Kingston offices, claiming to be his father. That was a year before he went abroad to study. He had chased him away. He had done his own searches. His mother was Mavis Billings and she was from a village called Dudley, down in St. Catherine, near the border with Clarendon. He had checked the records and discovered that she had died when he was about ten. It appeared that she had no living relatives in the area so he just left it at that.

Chapter Seven

Brad Elliot sat behind his desk at his auto parts store on Old Hope Road. He was reading a pornographic magazine. He kept them in his desk drawer. Sometimes some of the girls would borrow them while others would call him naughty for reading them.

A knock sounded on his office door and he shouted for the person to enter.

Buxom Marie Deslandes pushed open the door and entered.

“Two men here to see you.”

“Who are they? What do they look like?”

“They look like government officials.”

“Are you sure they’re not some tax people? They showed you their identity cards?”

“They work for some development agency.”

“You can bet that it’s another waste of taxpayers’ money. I hope that they aren’t here to waste my time.”

“Show them in.”

The girl went out to the men and showed them the long corridor they had to take to reach Brad’s office.

When the men entered, he offered them seats. He took the letter of introduction from Premba. He only read a quarter of it when he swore and flung it down.

“What’s this, have both of you come here to trick me? I’ve never had any dealings with anybody named Colombo, so get out of my office before I call the police.”

He jerked out his desk drawer. Premba whipped the gun out of his pocket and pointed it at his forehead.

“Touch that gun and you’re dead.”

Duffus came around the desk and jerked open the drawer further. He took out the gun. It was a Beretta semi-automatic pistol.

He handed it to Premba.

“It’s a good gun, the guy has. Where did you get this gun from, Mr. Brad?”

Brad didn’t answer him.

Premba went and locked the door.

“What are you dealing with, Mister Brad? What happen, you don’t want to hear what my boss has to say? Are you saying that he’s making a mistake?”

Brad sprang up from around his desk and came towards the door. Duffus came to face him and he punched at him. Duffus avoided the punch and gave him a left hook to his chest. A kick to his knee made him grab it and hop around the room on one foot. Duffus then hammered left and right combinations to his midsection. The man folded up on the carpet. Duffus grabbed the man’s towel and wiped his sweating face.

“That was a good workout the guy get, now just turn him over on his back.”

Duffus hammered a kick to his side, which spun him over on his back.

“Mister Brad, do you understand me? The boss is giving you twenty-four hours to live. If I were you I would contact him,” Premba warned.

Duffus flung the towel at him as the two of them walked out of the room. At a quarter to ten that morning Ardez got the call, Brad Elliot had been contacted, immediately the countdown on his life began.

Lex Malcolm kept shaking his head that morning. He had left home in Golden Spring at eight o'clock and had two blown out tires. One happened in Stony Hill and the other at Mary Brown's Corner. He had cursed his luck both times. Now it was ten minutes past ten and he was just arriving at his office. The receptionist, who also doubled as his secretary, showed him two men who were waiting on him. From their identity cards he saw that one was Livingstone and the other, Gray. They were from some government agency called the National Development Unit. He had never heard of it before, but governments in this country had a habit of forming all sorts of agencies, primarily to waste taxpayer's money. Normally in such a mood he would have chased them out of the office, but they would only be back. He motioned them to accompany him upstairs.

Once in his office, he offered them seats and took the introductory letter from Premba. He read a quarter of it and then began to swear.

"Who the hell are you?"

He reached for his briefcase.

"Don't bother with that, old man, unless you're tired of living," Premba warned.

He had his gun out, pointing at Lex's forehead.

Duffus came around the desk, opened the briefcase, which didn't carry a combination. He took out the Taurus semi-automatic pistol.

"Where did the old man get this gun from?" Duffus asked before handing it to Premba.

"It looks like a brand new one too, we should be able to sell it for some good money. We have more to pick up today."

Premba pocketed the gun.

Lex sat up and moved his chair away from the desk.

"Finish reading the letter, Mister Lex."

Lex's eyes blazed.

"If you're trying to blackmail me, it's not going to work. So get out of my office and go about your business if you know what's good for you."

"Shut up and read the letter, old man."

"So you don't want to hear what the boss has to say, old man. He's only giving you twenty-four hours to contact him."

"You dirty dogs, I have a good mind to...", Lex said. He stood up and picked up the phone. Duffus hit him on his wrist with his gun butt and he doubled up in pain, holding his wrist. A kick from Premba sent him to the floor. The two men looked at him.

"You see who you're dealing with, old man," Premba told him.

Leaving him sprawled on the floor; they opened the door and walked out. At five minutes to eleven that morning Ardez got the call that Lex Malcolm had been contacted.

Bendoo and Grosset arrived in Montego Bay at approximately eight o'clock that evening. After booking into their hotel, they went to a nightclub and picked up two women.

They would leave on Saturday morning. Having had their breakfast they returned to their rooms to prepare for the day's interviews.

Their first interview was with Gordon Bishop. He agreed to comply with their demands. Their next four interviews were all incident full. Grosset's temper broke each time forcing their victims to hastily agree to their demands.

They were now on their way to visit block factory operator, Joseph Tai. Bendoo was feeling tired from having driven all over Montego Bay. He wanted nothing but a hot bath to get rid of the dust and sweat. At Albion they asked about the block factory and were given directions.

They took a pot holed filled road and crossed a bridge that could only accommodate one vehicle at a time. Finally, they arrived at the block factory. There was a sign at the gate marked 'Joseph Tai's Block Factory.' The guard examined their identity cards before letting them in. Bendoo parked the car in the customer's parking lot. Two trucks were in the loading bay; one had nearly finished loading while the other was about ready to load.

Bendoo and Grosset made their way to Tai's office and showed his secretary their identity cards. She motioned them to take a seat while she tried to contact her boss. Bendoo wondered what kind of asset this man would be in the forthcoming campaign while Grosset wondered if he had another office. The good part of the interview could be handled here, but if the man got difficult this was hardly the place to give him a beating.

When the Chinese man came in, both men introduced themselves as National Development Unit employees. He told them to follow him to his office, upstairs. Once in his office, he examined their identity cards, meanwhile offering them seats on two wooden chairs.

Finally, he returned their identity cards and sat down behind his desk. He took the letter from Grosset but didn't bother to open it.

"I'm lucky, my friends warned me about you, two. I was here waiting and planning how to get rid of you. You two guys are really unlucky. I don't even want to know who you're working for."

He lit a cigarette. Grosset started to get up out of his chair.

"Sit down, big man! You've beaten up a lot of men today. I have a good mind to tag your bodies and leave them on some rubbish heap."

"You dirty dog!" Grosset stood up when the door opened and two youths entered, guns drawn, lining up him and Bendoo.

"Frisk them, Mr. Tai," one of the youths said.

Tai came from around his desk and began with the still seated Bendoo.

He was looking at Bendoo and fidgeting when the latter made his move. He flicked him over his head, falling to the floor in the same motion. The man landed on the smaller of the two youths, knocking the gun out of his hand. Grosset had already sensed Bendoo's move because as Tai sped over the latter's head, he had thrown his chair at the other youth and dived at his legs. Both moves caught the youth by surprise. He tried to parry the chair and was unprepared for Grosset's flying tackle, which sent him crashing to the floor.

Bendoo had in the meantime taken up the other youth's gun and had him covered. Tai was out cold; he had received a cut to his forehead, which was now bleeding. Grosset now drew the other youth off the floor. Bendoo picked up the gun, he had dropped, when hit by Grosset's flying tackle. The youth was whimpering, almost imploring, when the giant's fist crashed into his jaw crushing up teeth and flesh almost tearing his head off.

The youth skidded across the room, landing into a wall. He fell to the floor, blood streaming from him. He spat out blood and broken teeth. Grosset went after him and kicked him in his side, which doubled him up. He then drew the youth off the floor, wielded him in the air several times and then flung him into a corner of the room. He then turned to the other youth. There was stark terror in the youth's eyes. The giant walked up to him and grabbed him around his shoulders. He then slammed him with a right hook, which launched him over the desk.

He went around the desk after the youth. He picked him up and wielded him in the air and then flung him on the other youth.

He then turned to Tai and kicked the man in his side which made him groan and roll over on his back.

“You have twenty four hours to read the letter and get in touch with us, Tai. Don’t bother to get smart with us again, old man or else tomorrow you’re going to find yourself sleeping on a block of ice.”

He and Bendoo walked out of Tai’s office. Their job in Montego Bay was completed. They would return to their hotel and prepare for the homeward trip in the morning. At a quarter to five that evening Ardez got the call that Joseph Tai had been contacted.

Grosset was sure that their mission had been successful. None of those contacted would take his threats or the beatings they had received lightly.

Ardez got several calls that evening, all of which he noted. Still, there were other people to report and he knew that once the deadline had passed it would be time for action.

Lex drove through the heavy traffic on his way to King’s house. His right hand was in a plaster and he was still feeling the effects of the blow that the gunman had given him with the gun-butt. He didn’t try to drive fast for fear of increasing the pain in his hand.

Who had sent the two men? Was it Paolo Colombo? Did he want back his father’s money? All those questions had to be answered first before he could feel safe. Damn them all, he swore under his breath. He wasn’t going to make any report to the police. All he needed was another gun to take care of those two gunmen should they return to threaten him.

When he arrived at King’s house, he saw Brad’s car parked outside. What the hell was Brad doing here? Were he and King planning something behind his back? He touched the car horn and King’s wife came out.

She was a pretty attractive woman with a body that belied her age, he had always thought during the fifteen years he had known her.

“Lex, how are you? Danny’s around the back with Brad. What happened to your hand?”

She looked concerned.

He finally parked his car behind Brad’s car and got out.

“Hello, Betsy, how are you?”

He greeted her with a hug.

“I met in a little accident today, it’s nothing serious,” he said, going through the gate after her.

She directed him to King and Brad.

Both men raised their eyebrows on seeing him.

“What happened to your hand, Lex? Have you been fighting?” King asked him.

Lex took one of the glasses, threw out some of the whiskey, and dumped three cubes of ice into it. He stirred the mixture, took a good swallow before finding a seat on one of the patio chairs.

“Two men came to my office today saying that they represented some government agency. They showed me a letter, which asked me point blank if I was ready to return the favor I had received several years ago. If I refused, they promised to kill me. It had a telephone number, which I was to call when I was ready to cooperate. I got angry and told them to get out of my office. They

refused, held a gun on me and one of them hit me on my hand with his gun-butt.”

“What are you saying, Lex? The two of you have to tell me what’s going on. Maybe it’s the same two men, who went to look for Brad. When he tried to run them out of his office they beat him up and took away his gun.”

Lex drank some more of the whiskey.

“It was the Colombo organization, which set up my business for me. You know that was a long time ago. All these years passed so I just forgot about them, especially since they left Jamaica and went to live in Miami. I know that some day they were going to want me to do something for them. Well, this is it and I just don’t want to get involved.”

“It’s the same way I got my set-up,” Brad told them. “Two men came to look for me today, saying that their boss wanted to talk to me. Like Lex said, I just don’t want to get involved.”

“Well, what are you going to do? It’s the Colombos. Since they moved to Miami, I hear that Henri’s dead and it’s Paul, who’s running the show now. I hear that he’s a drug lord and that he has links with the Mafia and the Columbians. It’s a trick they played on you. You probably gave them a stake in the business which they never exercised. That stake must be worth thousands of dollars now. They could demand everything at once. Or maybe if you decide to work for them fulltime, they’ll forgive the whole debt.”

His words provided cold comfort for the two men. They knew they were in grave danger.

Lex drank some more of the whiskey.

“They’re working through somebody in Jamaica though. If we could just find out who that person is, we could eliminate him and put ourselves in the clear again.”

“I gave them a forty per cent stake in my business. Like you said King, it’s worth thousands of dollars now,” Brad told them.

“They got forty five percent in mine too. I could never buy back that stake from them,” Lex stated.

Danny King remembered that Henri Colombo had operated a loan shark agency for over ten years in Downtown, Kingston. When the socialist winds started blowing on the island, he had fled with his family to Miami. He knew that the man didn’t live long after migrating. He had heard that his son, Paolo, decided to audit his books. After doing a careful analysis of his father’s records, he was surprised at some of the things he discovered. He decided that he could use this information for his benefit. Jamaica was near enough to be of some use to him.

“So where’s the letter? You have the phone number? We could get somebody to phone and find out what they want.”

The two men thought over what he had said.

“You mean we should phone and let them know that we’ll cooperate with them?” Brad asked.

“But you don’t know what they want and you’re refusing. If I were you, I would wait until they tell me what they want me to do before I do anything.”

“If I know those men, it’s nothing good they want us to do, and that’s why I refused,” Lex told them.

The sun had disappeared and the darkness was slowly falling. King turned on the patio lights.

“This looks serious. Paul seems to be more dangerous than his father. You have to do something fast.”

King knew that his two friends and future business partners were in a predicament. They had gotten easy money and now the Colombos wanted them to repay the debt by helping them to carry out some scheme. Both men weren’t prepared to cooperate because of the inherent danger, which they sensed must be lying behind such a scheme. They both faced death and the time was constantly shortening.

“What do you think they could be interested in out here? I don’t think since they ran away to Miami they’ve returned to the island.”

“It must be marijuana and they could use the island to ship cocaine from Columbia to the States,” Lex replied.

“They want us to use our warehouses to store the drugs for them,” Brad remarked.

Lex considered what Brad had just said.

“I don’t think we’re the only ones they contacted. That means it’s a big operation, they are undertaking,” he opined.

“They must have people out here working for them, maybe some gang that they want you to work with,” King told them.

“Wait! The Wareika gang and Gus McCreed must be involved!” Brad shouted triumphantly.

“Well, at least we’re getting somewhere. That was simple deductive reasoning. Rory is supposed to report back to me about his meeting with Fred. In the meantime, you’d better keep out of circulation. I just hope they never trailed you here.”

Both men started looking around and out onto the roads.

“Trailed!” Le echoed the thoughts of his colleague.

“They could follow you here, if they’re going to carry out their threats, they have to know where you are.”

“Are you advising us to go into hiding, King? I’m not hiding from anyone,” Lex was defiant.

“Well, don’t bother to take my advice, continue to run your business as usual. You’re going on as if you alone can fight Paolo Colombo and McCreed. Brad, try talking some sense into him, I’m going inside, I’ll soon be back.”

He returned to find the two men in silence.

“So, Brad, what have you and Lex decided to do? I can’t offer either of you any protection, so you know you’re on your own.”

“King, if I go into hiding, what will happen to my business? I can’t keep on exposing my wife, I don’t want anything to happen to her on account of me. I might as well go out there and face McCreed and his gunmen,” Lex pleaded.

“Listen to my plan, Lex, before you do anything,” King said. “We’re going to put McCreed under so much pressure that he’ll forget about you two.”

Both of his listeners looked surprised.

“What are you saying, King?” Brad asked.

“We’re going to hire some men to raid his weed fields and his warehouses.”

“Raid his weed fields? Wouldn’t it be better to hire some men to plant it for us?” Lex opined.

“Too risky, plus we’d have to either rent, lease or buy land. This is our short term strategy,” King replied.

“What about your lands, King?” Brad asked. “I thought you still had those lands, even if you’re no longer cultivating weed.”

“Ah, come on Brad, you and Lex should know that we either rent or lease lands and get a few men to cultivate the crop for us. If it’s their land, we give them money to prepare the land and then we share the profits from each crop. Most of my growers are working for either Mc Creed or other syndicates now. But our long term strategy must be to acquire some sizeable holdings and enough fighters to protect our syndicate.”

It was getting late, Brad looked at his watch and stood up.

“King, I like your plans; I’m sure that Lex likes them too, but I have to leave. You can contact me and tell me how things are going.”

Lex and King stood up.

“I’m going to leave too, but I want to know more about those plans of yours. You can phone me and tell me more about them.”

King accompanied them to the gate and shook their hands. He watched them leave.

From inside the living room Betsy King watched the last of her soap opera. She desperately hoped that Danny wasn’t returning to his various schemes. They had raised three good children all of whom were abroad. If he returned to his unsavory past, she would go and join them. The idea had always appealed to her, but she had remained in Jamaica because of his stubbornness and the children’s desire that she remain with the old man, despite what they knew about his nefarious activities.

She knew that all her children were aware of how rampant drug trafficking; especially marijuana was in Jamaica. The two boys had won football scholarships to the same United States college in consecutive years. It was while in the third year of academic studies that a fellow student had approached the elder son. Betsy remembered what he had told her.

The man told him that he knew some men, who were willing to pay top dollars for the Jamaican weed his father had stored in warehouses in Kingston. It came as a shock to the youth and he had promptly phoned her. She had tearfully told him the truth. The three kids had wanted to come to Jamaica to confront their father. They had vowed to remove her from the island if he didn’t call a halt to those activities. She had phoned them to say that their dad was concentrating on his merchant tailoring business these days. Now it seemed that she had misread her husband again.

Later on that night Grosset and Bendoo again went out clubbing. They picked up two more women. Bendoo now found himself with Peachie, the younger of the two women. They had a good session of lovemaking. She was a bit shy at first, but he caressed her expertly and she responded to him with passion. When they finished, she had dropped off to sleep, but he lay on the bed thinking.

So far his cover was secure. None of the men at Wareika suspected him to be a Special Branch agent. He had at first been apprehensive about Niah but it appeared that he had lost contact with his relatives so there was no danger from him.

He had handled his tasks intelligently. The trip to Montego Bay was a trial one and he knew he had performed creditably so far. He knew that once the gang had any doubts about him, they would give him some very dangerous tasks to perform.

The girl in Bendoo’s bed looked at him. He was sleeping like a log, she thought. She got up off the bed without making a sound and tiptoed to where his clothes were.

Bendoo opened his eyes and came back to reality, he must have dropped off to sleep. Peachie was not on the bed. He saw her searching his clothes, his bag and the drawers of the dresser. She was conducting a fruitless search for money he thought, for he had hidden his wallet under the mattress on his side of the bed.

“What are you looking for?”

He got up off the bed and turned on the lights.

“I was looking at my watch to find out the time.”

“You can’t look at this kind of watch in the darkness and know the time, come put on your clothes.”

He threw them at her. She was crying as she dressed.

There was a knock on the door. Bendoo opened it slightly.

A female voice whispered, “Peachie.”

Bendoo flung the door open and grabbed the woman and drew her into the room. It was Sophia, the girl, who had been with Grosset and she was fully dressed.

“Where are you going?”

“Let me go!”

She snapped open her bag. He suspected that she had a knife inside. He drew her towards him, took away the bag from her and pushed her down on the bed.

Peachie took up her slippers from off the floor and rushed at him. He pushed her away and she fell on the floor.

There was a commotion in Grosset’s room and the giant came to knock on Bendoo’s door.

“Bendoo, Bendoo, open up.”

Bendoo opened the door and Grosset came in. He spied Bendoo with his girl’s bag and her on the bed. Immediately he went after her, drawing her off the bed.

“Where’s my wallet?”

Bendoo opened Sophia’s bag. The giant’s fat wallet lay concealed among perfumes, tissue papers, an ice pick and other odds and ends.

“See it here, Grosset,” he said, holding up the wallet. “Let her go. This could cause trouble and we don’t want anything like that.”

His warning saved the girl. Grosset just pushed her away from him and took his wallet from Bendoo.

Both girls were crying, but the giant had found his wallet intact, plus he had disobeyed his boss’ orders. He opened the door.

“Hey, Bendoo, just get rid of these two women,” he said before making his way back to his room.

The two women waited until they heard Grosset’s door closed behind him before they ran from the room.

Bendoo soon dropped off to sleep after spending a few minutes reviewing the day’s events.

Chapter Eight

At ten o'clock on Saturday morning Ardez sat around the telephone at the Factory. Most of the calls had come in yesterday. All of those who called had agreed to cooperate. So far he hadn't heard from Brad Elliot, Lex Malcolm, Joseph Tai and Winston Young, the Ocho Rios restaurant owner, who had been contacted by Pennant and Pablo. At five that evening the four men hadn't telephoned and Ardez called McCreed. The man told him to immediately put the death squads into action. Premba and Lance were already patrolling Ocho Rios and Pennant and Pablo were in Montego Bay.

Ardez had chosen Dillinger and Butler to wipe out Lex and Brad. They left their headquarters at eleven o'clock that night for Lex's Golden Spring home. Dillinger was driving a Ford Cortina motor car. When they reached the house it was in darkness. Butler got out of the car and went up to the gate. Dillinger soon joined him.

"This house looks like nobody lives in it," Butler remarked.

"Looks that way," Dillinger agreed with him.

"What do we do now?"

"We can't stay round here, because we don't know if any policemen are in the area."

He turned the car around and drove out to the Golden Spring main road and headed for Brad's house.

This house was a two-story building and to their dismay the two killers found it in darkness, also.

"Same thing again, it looks as if these guys knew we were coming after them. I think we're being set up," Dillinger opined, warily.

"I don't fancy this kind of work," Butler said as he lit a cigarette.

They were still looking at the house and shaking their heads in disappointment at missing out on two such easy hits when a police car came speeding down the road. It went past them, but at the bottom of the road it stopped and started backing up.

"Police, Dillinger!"

"I told you that it was a trap," Dillinger said as he dived into their car for the M-16 as the police car stopped and two policemen jumped out. Butler, who was hiding behind their car, fired his .38 Taurus revolver. The policemen dived behind their car and returned his fire. Dillinger began firing with the M-16. The two other policemen had dived out of their car and were firing at Butler and Dillinger.

The policemen had shot out their car tires when Butler made a bid to escape by jumping into a gully. Dillinger seeing his comrade's treachery put the M-16 on rapid fire, knelt behind the car and opened up anew on the policemen who returned the fire. He was hit with a hail of bullets and collapsed beside the car. The policemen approached him cautiously.

"That guy looks like Dillinger, and he looks as if he's dead," a police Corporal said, looking at the blood spattered body. His colleagues meanwhile, ran to inspect the gully that Butler had jumped into.

"Anybody has any idea where this gully leads to?" Delbert Wood asked.

"It leads down to Constant Spring," one of the members of the unit replied.

"We have to find him, because it doesn't look as if he got shot," Wood replied.

He and the other three policemen gave up the search for Butler at about one o'clock that morning and trudged wearily back to their vehicle.

King knew that Lex and Brad were now fugitives from McCreed's gunmen. Lex had told him that he had suggested to his wife that they spend the weekend in Port Antonio. Without further ado they had packed and headed for a private villa, they had always used down there. That was after they had put up a sign that they would be closed that Saturday.

Lex didn't know how much longer he would stay in hiding, but it certainly seemed long enough. It seemed to him that King had tricked him. He had better come up with some tangible plans soon; he was no fool.

Brad had left Kingston that Saturday afternoon. He and his wife and three sons were staying with relatives in Port Maria. He had told her the truth and she believed him. He had also phoned Marie to let her know he would be out of office for the rest of the week. Douglas Wright, his sales manager, would have to carry on. Damn it all anyway, he would have to fight McCreed all the way.

King and Jack came to meet them in Golden Spring. King reported on Rory Dillon's failure to convince Fred to join them. Lex was livid at the news and wanted them to carry out the second part of their plan and eliminate both McCreed and Fred. However, his fellow syndicate members, including Jack vetoed this. Jack then told them of his association with Paolo Colombo. He also told them of how they had fallen out and his run in with McCreed's fighters and the beating he had received at their hands.

King then explained to them that he had recruited four men to raid one of McCreed's marijuana fields in St. Ann. Lex was still grumpy and declared that if this raid wasn't successful, he would be leaving the syndicate. The meeting broke up with King promising to give them a report about the raid at their next meeting.

Bendoo had learned that Dillinger had been killed up in Stony Hill but Butler had escaped. He had identified the two men as the ones holding the semi-automatic rifles on the Simmonds that night. He had heard that two of the men, who had refused to be blackmailed, lived in that area and had alerted Wood. They had met in the back room of a bar on Mannings Hill Road. He had told him that he was now at Wareika Hills. He gave him an account of what was taking place up there.

He was still in shock that they hadn't been able to prevent Tai from being killed. He hadn't been able to find out the names of the other people visited but he had given Woody the names of the persons he and Grosset had visited in Montego Bay. He had heard of a restaurant owner being gunned down in Ocho Rios but wasn't sure if he was connected to the present operations.

Although Ardez was in charge of the 'Camp', he knew that he wasn't the brains behind the organization. He had been racking his brain to find out who it could be but although he had come up with a lot of names all seemed too refined and polished to deal with the types of cutthroats at Wareika.

Niah had been tight lipped about it. He didn't want to press him as he was new and might arouse suspicions by asking too many questions. He put it at the back of his mind that if he didn't find out by natural means, then a strong draw of the marijuana and a few bottles of stout might make Niah talk.

His thoughts wandered to Barbara. Her last letter, which Wood had delivered before he came to Wareika, had said that she was praying for him and that she was sick with worry. He had hastily written her back, assuring her that he would be okay. His thoughts turned to Lorena McCreed, the beautiful girl he had met up in the hills. She had been very feisty, no wonder she had gotten into trouble with Fred Billings. He wondered what had happened to her. Gus Mc Creed? Could it be him? He had always heard that Mc Creed was a drug baron, but the man seemed a world apart from Wareika.

Bendoo got up and opened the board windows to let in some fresh air. He looked down on the glow of the city below. A strong breeze was blowing. He would have gone down to Niah's shack to smoke some herbs with him and his brethren, Shower and Gungoo but all three men were out manning the machine guns. He wanted a stout and was about to go for one when there was a knock on the door. He went and opened it. Camilla, Rattigan's woman, was there.

"What do you want?"

"I'm lonely. Karl has gone out. Can I come in and talk to you for a few minutes?"

He hesitated.

"Karl won't say anything if he knows I was here. He knows that neither you nor Niah will trouble me. Which is more than can be said of the others."

"Okay, then come in," he replied and led the way into the room. She sat on one of the wooden benches beside him.

She was blond though she had cut off most of her hair. She was wearing a faded T-shirt and a cut off jean shorts, which showed off her beautifully, tanned legs. She was, he guessed about five feet six inches tall and would be around twenty-five years of age. Her breasts looked very firm. She was quite attractive, but up here in Wareika Hills she wouldn't get the necessary things that a woman needed to make herself look glamorous.

"I'm fed up with life here. I want to get out but Karl won't let me. He figures that if I leave I would go to the authorities and tell them what's taking place up here. You must believe I'm married to him. He tricked me under the pretext that he was an artist living up here because it provided him with beautiful scenery to paint. After I came I realized I was trapped and couldn't escape."

"I've been hoping that I would find someone to help me to escape. Can you help me? You seem kind and strong."

Bendoo wasn't sure that this wasn't a trap. He thought it would be better to find out more about her before he did or say anything.

"You're asking me to do the impossible. I don't see how you can escape from up here alive. All of the escape routes are guarded around the clock by machine guns."

"I would advise you to forget about trying to escape and stay with Karl. I'm sure that when he's leaving, he'll take you with him."

She looked at him, not trying to hide the scorn she felt.

"I thought you were one of the better ones up here. It seems as if you're all the same. All of you, just killers and robbers," she spat at him.

Bendoo could see that her face had reddened considerably.

She stood up and was about to leave the room. He took her hand and led her back to the bench.

"If I told you anything else I would be encouraging you to get yourself killed."

"Well, what can I do?"

"Do as I suggested."

"To hell with your suggestions. Guess, I'll just have to do it on my own then. Goodbye."

She got up to go again.

Bendoo stood up and came around the bench and held her hands. He sat her back in the chair and sat beside her. He put his arms around her shoulders.

“I wouldn’t like to see you go and get yourself killed Camilla, wait on Rattigan.”

He tried consoling her.

She began to cry.

“He destroyed all of my papers. Even if I get out I don’t know how long it’s going to take for me to get out of Jamaica and I have no money.”

“Don’t you have any relatives who can help you?”

“I have a sister, Elizabeth, we’re very close. I’m sure she’s been down here already looking for me, but she’s probably returned home by now.”

She showed him a picture of her sister.

He could only stare. It was the woman, whom they had robbed at the Simmonds’ home that night.

“If she came to look for you, the first place she’s going to contact would be your embassy so if you go there they’ll help you.”

“I don’t want to go back to Karl. I feel he’s going to kill me. He has threatened to do it if he ever sees me talking to another man.”

Bendoo looked at her, he suspected that Rattigan had a mean streak in him. If he encouraged her to escape, she could very well tell him. He was also afraid of doing anything silly that might jeopardize the mission.

“Come, I’ll walk you back to your shack, maybe your sister is still looking for you.”

“Thank you.”

She stared at him.

“I can find my way home.”

She went through the door, her head held high.

Bendoo knew that she felt angry and probably hurt, but he had to treat her just as any ordinary Wareikan would.

Chapter Nine

Pinchie and Evert sat in their bamboo hut smoking marijuana. Both men had formed a partnership four years ago to plant marijuana. Pinchie had inherited the one-acre plot from his father, himself a marijuana farmer. After the old man's death, he had gotten his friend, Evert, to help him plant the crop. Their field was in a wooded area of the community, but could be reached by a dirt road. They had to plant other crops to hide the marijuana field.

For the last two years things had gone quite well because the new man was guaranteeing them protection from poachers and from both honest and crooked policemen. Pinchie was planning to buy a car, which he hoped to use as a taxi. Evert had a motorcycle and both men were hoping to improve on their respective houses with the proceeds from this crop.

It was a Monday evening and they had just come to spend an hour or two, looking over the crop, which would soon be ready for reaping.

Pinchie was tall and thin and was twenty-five years of age. Evert on the other hand was of medium height and was twenty-six years of age.

"Evert, I saw a girl on the road and I spoke to her and she told me that she has loved me for a long time and wants to be my girl."

"What's her name?"

"She's Josiah Bethune's daughter."

"There are a lot of men pursuing her. How come you're so lucky?"

"We're going to meet down by the Chocho river. I'm going to make sure that she enjoys it because I know that if I satisfy her, then no man can take her away from me."

"These young girls aren't staying with any man too long because they're young and flighty."

After smoking some more marijuana the two men departed the hut at approximately seven o'clock that evening.

On Wednesday evening they met at the hut again.

"So how did it go? Is everything all right?"

"Nothing at all happened."

Pinchie tried hard to hide his disappointment.

"What are you saying? I don't believe you."

"The girl and I were down there. And just as we were ready to make love, I heard her cry out. When I looked I saw a shadow in a white sheet coming towards us. So I jumped up and rushed for my machete but it was only the sheet I caught, because the man ran away."

"But who could have wanted to spoil your fun though?"

"I don't know, because it's not only you I told about it. Everybody I checked says it wasn't them."

"I hope that you don't think that it was me because I was down at Miss Little's bar last night. Somebody told me that you were running through the district with your machete claiming that some man had spoiled your fun."

"I'll find out one day though. I must set a trap for that man."

Both men lapsed into silence as they smoked more marijuana. They were too filled with their own thoughts to notice the stealthy approach of the four men. Pinchie uttered a shout as the hut's door was kicked down and four masked men entered. He made a valiant attempt to reach his machete, but one of the men hit him in his head and he fell. Evert made a darting move for his machete, grabbed it, but one of the men used an axe handle to hit him in his back. Their attackers continued to inflict more punishment on them. They then produced rope and bound their hands and feet. They then made their way out of the hut and down into the marijuana field to reap the weed and pack it into bags for the truck to take it into Kingston to a warehouse where it would be stored.

On Thursday afternoon the poachers finished reaping the marijuana. In between that time they had gone to look at the men, both of whom had regained consciousness momentarily, then lapsed back into unconsciousness throughout the night. During the day they finally regained consciousness, but found it impossible to untie themselves. At twelve o'clock that night the truck left loaded with the weed for Kingston. Before it left, the poachers returned to the hut and gave the two sleeping men some more lusty blows.

The poachers returned to their respective homes. One returned to Bay Farm Road while the other three remained in St. Ann. Meanwhile the Wareikans were still roaming the island in their search for Brad and Lex.

On Friday one of McCreed's planters, Rusty, went into the field to have a chat and a smoke with his brethren. He was surprised to find the land bare except for the other crops which they planted. Instead of luscious growing marijuana plants all he saw were peas, corn, sugar cane, coco and some cash crops. Some of these crops had been cut down too, and lay on the ground. He went up to the hut, pushed open the door and came upon the unconscious figures of Pinchie and Evert. Both men were stretched out on their backs and on examining them, he realized that they had been beaten up all over their bodies and had gotten some head wounds.

At first he thought it to be the police. They were capable of reaping a crop of marijuana and disposing of it for their own benefit, but they would never beat up these two youths like this. He didn't want to panic, the best thing to do was to inform the men's families and let them take it from there. He would then have to get in touch with the boss and let him know what had happened. He was still at a loss as to why the two men's families having not seen them return home hadn't launched a search for them.

There was no way he could get through to the boss this evening but tomorrow he would take a bus into Kingston and phone him to let him know what had taken place. He didn't want to make the call locally for fear of anybody hearing what he was saying.

Rusty took the minibus into Kingston on Saturday morning as intended.

Prior to his departure, he had kept his silence about what had happened. Even his woman said that he looked sad and wanted to know if everything was all right, but Rusty wasn't going to say anything without the boss' permission. He arrived at Parade at ten o'clock that morning and took a taxi to the Factory.

Rusty gave Dangler an account of the incident. He gave him the telephone for him to speak to Ardez who in turn called Mc Creed and brought him up to date with the situation.

Mc Creed was shocked, but didn't want to over-react. He wondered who could have done it. None of the other syndicates and himself were currently at war. G.C had run to the United States with his wife. Moses Johnson, Aston Lecky and Danville Burke were all dead. Jack Marriot had been beaten up, Ruddy Brown, shot and warned off. Danny King, after the break up of his syndicate, had returned to operating his merchant tailoring business. Dickson Lunan, after King's defeat became an ally, but was now abroad, living under a false name he had heard.

None of these men were capable of attacking him. No, it must be some little guy, trying to make a big payday. Better to step on his head before things got out of hand.

His orders were for Premba to lead a group of men down to McKenzie Lands, find and destroy whoever it was that had beaten up the two men and stolen their marijuana.

Ardez now sat in his front room. His lieutenants were seated on chairs, that they had stolen from some upper St. Andrew homes. As usual Grosset had a huge cigar, which was threatening to suffocate those in the room. The time was one o'clock.

"We want these men dead. We have to teach them a lesson not to fool around us again," Ardez declared.

All of the men nodded in agreement.

"Where is the man, who brought the information, Ardez? I hope he was discreet about it. If we're to catch those poachers it'll have to be by surprise. He should also have stayed around to act as a guide," Rattigan advised.

"Rusty will keep his mouth shut. He won't tell anybody what we're coming down there to do. He returned home, but he always has his gun on him. I'll tell you where to find him when you go down there."

"Who are they, Ardez?" Premba asked.

Ardez knew that emotions were running high.

Pinchie and Evert were trusted comrades. Most of those in the room at one time or another had received bags of top quality marijuana whenever they were in the rural areas and came across either man. Their attackers wouldn't go unpunished.

"I don't know, but we must find them when we go down there. The boss says I'm to send you, Grosset, Lance, Pennant and Chaser. Butler's going too, he's telling me some foolishness, but I feel that he ran left Dillinger because it's only three shots fired out of his gun."

"That guy, Butler, is a big coward," Premba declared.

Ardez knew that this was war plus they also wanted to avenge Dillinger's death if not on the police, on the men, who had beaten up their colleagues and stolen their marijuana.

"Rusty said they just beat up Pinchie and Evert, and reaped our weed. The boss believes that it was some local boys, who did it. We have to hit them hard so they don't mess with us again."

All of them agreed with him.

"You're going to leave here at three o'clock today. You should reach McKenzie Lands at around seven o'clock. You can check out some popular spots to see if there are any big spenders around, but you have to find those men and deal with them."

"What about those two big men? The boss doesn't want us to look for them again?" Grosset asked.

"We're still looking for them so if you see them, you know what to do."

"I thought Bendo was coming too?" Grosset inquired.

“Bendoo, Duffus, Pablo and Dally are going to St. Mary to look for them. Our sources tell us that they have been sighted up there.”

“I hope all of you heard what I said. Go and look after your weapons and make sure that they’re working. The boss wants you to use machetes to make it look like a local war, but as far as I’m concerned, shots may have to be fired.”

Grosset stood up.

“My machete is sharp like a razor.”

The others stood up and filed out of the room.

In the two hours that they had available the men would be fixing up their gear. Some would be sharpening up their machetes. Rattigan was now in the armory selecting ammunition for them to carry.

They arrived in McKenzie Lands at around dusk. Rusty was waiting for them at the agreed spot. He appeared edgy and sad and still looked to be in shock at the horrible beatings his friends had received. Over the marijuana that he brought for them, the men heard more details about the beatings. He told them that they were trying to keep it under wraps. The two men had been able to walk to their respective home, but would need medical attention fast. The boss would have to find a doctor for them as they didn’t want the police to know about what had happened. He also told them that a few confidants of the weed-men were out searching for any clues as to who their attackers might be.

Premba was frowning at the information being provided by Rusty.

He was wondering whether it was a wise move for them to come into the area as any strangers were bound to arouse suspicions.

However, Rusty assured them that he didn’t think that the poachers were in McKenzie Lands but there were two adjoining districts that they could check out. Premba, Grosset and Lance now sat in one of the bars pointed out by Rusty in Zion Mountain district, ordering beers. The talk was general for all the time they were hoping that someone would enter and give them the clues they were looking for. At the same time there were also wary of the presence of any policemen. The second car driven by Pennant and containing Butler and Chaser passed by the bar and went around a corner to stop. None of them got out.

By eight o’clock that night after drinking a sufficient quantity of liquor and playing around with the barmaid, the men decided that they wouldn’t find Pinchie and Evert’s attackers here, they had better look elsewhere.

The next bar was a mile away in Guango Ridge district. They entered and Premba did the ordering. A pool table was in another room and was unoccupied. He and Grosset started a game, leaving Lance at the bar.

The second car passed by the bar and went further up the road to stop.

Chaser got out and came into the bar to buy drinks. He gave no indication that he knew Lance.

The group led by Premba was in the bar for about a half hour when two youths dressed in party clothes, came in.

They went up to the bar and ordered beers. When they finished their first pints, they ordered more. The bottles kept on piling up while they dropped coin after coin into the jukebox and punched just about every song available.

Premba was watching them as he had given up playing pool when Lance pointed out the two youths to him. He came and sat at the bar and the latter took his place at the pool table. These two youths looked as if they had money and were being careless with it. From their general behaviour it was obvious that they were country boys, who had seen a little of Kingston but nothing about the city had rubbed off on them.

Grosset and Lance abandoned the game to join Premba at the bar. The two youths now left for the vacant pool table to start a new game.

Pennant finished his stout and threw away the bottle. He lit a cigarette.

Beside him Chaser was rolling some marijuana leaves to smoke while at the back of the car Butler was having his second stout.

Premba, Grosset and Lance returned to their car. They knew that these two youths could be some of the men they were looking for. They just had to be patient. They didn't have long to wait. Both youths were perturbed at not finding any women for the night so far and thought they might try another area, where they were available. There was also a dance being kept in New Roads, about a mile east of Zion Mountain.

They came out of the bar and headed up the road intent on getting to the dance in New Roads. Both youths had taken in too much liquor to be aware of anyone else on the road. When he thought that they had gone a good distance, Premba spun the car around and started after them. A minute later Pennant drove off behind him.

When Premba reached the youths he stopped the car suddenly. Grosset and Lance jumped out, pointing guns at both youths, who were caught off guard.

"Police, don't move," Grosset shouted as he came out of the car.

Both youths put their hands in the air when they saw the guns.

"Who are you?" one of the them asked. He remembered these men from the bar.

"Police," Grosset repeated. "Give me a clean search."

He gave Lance his gun and started with the taller of the two youths. He came up with a ratchet knife, a pack of contraceptives and sixty dollars in twenty-dollar bills. The shorter youth except for twenty dollars more, had just about the same things on him.

Pennant had driven up and stopped behind Premba's car, but no one got out. The two youths had begun to have a ray of hope when they saw the headlights of Pennant's car, but that hope died when the car drew to a stop behind their captor's car.

"Where are the guns?" Premba asked.

"We don't have any guns, we're not gunmen," the taller youth replied.

"We know you're lying, but we'll find out," Premba told them.

"Now get into the car and don't try anything or else you're going to be sorry," Grosset warned.

One got into the back seat of Premba's car, while the other got into Pennant's car. Premba drove on the main road for some time before he saw a dirt road and turned into it. They had been interrogating the two youths with no success so far. They had never heard of Pinchie or Evert. They didn't know anything about weed. The money they were spending was what they had earned as bauxite workers. Premba drove on the lonely dirt road for some time before stopping the car.

They opened the car doors and filed out. Pennant's car drew up beside them and the occupants got out. The two suspects were made to stand beside a tree. Grosset and Pennant took out their razor sharp machetes from the car trunk. Chaser and Lance had their AK-47s trained on both youths.

"Who sent you to beat up Pinchie and Evert and steal our weed?" Grosset growled at them.

“We told you already that we don’t know what you’re talking about,” the taller youth replied.

Butler moved up to the taller youth with his gun and pointed it at his head.

“Hey, we’re going to kill you if you don’t tell us who and you beat up Pinchie and Evert and stole our weed,” he warned.

“We don’t know what you’re talking about, it’s just the dance, we’re going,” the shorter youth pleaded.

Pennant and Grosset pointed their razor sharp machetes at both youths’ necks.

“Where did you hide our weed?” Premba asked.

Both youths remained silent.

“Shoot this youth in his head, Butler,” Premba ordered.

“Wait, wait, we’ll tell you what you want to know,” the taller youth pleaded.

“It was Josiah Bethune, who hired us, he told us that we’d get plenty of money.”

“How many of you, did he hire?” Grosset asked.

“Let us go and we’ll tell you,” the shorter youth pleaded.

“Tell us and we’ll let you go,” Pennant countered.

Both suspects went mum again.

Then all of a sudden the taller youth made a huge leap in the air and dropped into a gully. They heard him rolling down its steep inclines. The men fired a volley of gunshots after him. After a while there was silence.

“I think, we got him,” Premba declared. “The little fucker is dead.”

“Do you want to get what your friend just got?” Grosset asked the other youth.

The youth was stupefied. His clothes were wet with perspiration. His lips were white and his eyes wild with fear.

“Josiah lives off the main road about a mile from here.”

“Who lives with him?” Grosset asked. “And what does he look like?”

“He lives with his wife and children. He is short and stout and walks with a limp.”

“Does he have any daughters?” Premba asked.

“One daughter and two sons. The daughter just left school.”

That would make her about seventeen mused Premba, remembering that his own school days had ended at fifteen when he stabbed a boy in the abdomen and had to flee school and the boy’s friends. It had taken a year for the police to catch up with him, but by that time he had done more bad things. He had been sent to the Stony Hill Approved School, where he had spent ten months, before escaping along with Pennant. He had managed to stay one step ahead of the police. Since he had joined McCreed’s syndicate, he was several steps ahead of them. Josiah Bethune’s daughter could make this trip more than interesting, he thought.

As if reading Premba’s mind, the youth said.

“She’s Pinchie’s girlfriend.”

The gang leader nodded in acknowledgement of what the youth had just said.

“You see how wicked you are. The youths and you are friends and just because you’re getting money to steal their weed, you beat them up, nearly killed them. That’s why we should kill you.”

“Hey, boy, you have to show us where this man lives.”

The youth didn’t appear to hear what the gang leader said.

“Now get into the car and just remember that you’re already dead,” Premba shouted at the frightened youth.

They got into their cars and drove away. Their next destination being Josiah Bethune's house.

Chapter Ten

Josiah Bethune had been given a government house as an act of political patronage. He didn't put all his energies into politics, however, as he did some farming. He planted a small amount of marijuana, which he dried and sold to a man, who bought the stuff wholesale and then he would go to the various rural towns and retail it. He didn't know if this man made any money, but he was always on time with his payments.

With this money plus what he got from his other crops and being a casual laborer on several construction sites, he was able to turn his simple dwelling into a respectable four bedroom house complete with a kitchen, two bathrooms and a living and dining room.

He had never been satisfied. There was always this feeling of envy when he saw the fabulous mansions going up around him and the expensive cars being driven by men he knew to be of humble means. He knew that these men had achieved their wealth through marijuana cultivation. On his small plot of land there was not much he could do. He had to plant other crops for his household use. These crops he used to hide the marijuana plants. His efforts to rent or lease land were in vain as the prices being asked were very high. He had turned to poaching, but it was a dangerous business. He nearly lost his life when the owner of a field, which he was poaching along with two other men, had summoned help and a terrible fight took place. He had received several wounds all over his body, which had hospitalized him for over two months. He now walked with a limp as a result of those injuries.

Six months after he came out of hospital, Raiders, whom he knew for several years as a man who moved from country to town and got into all sorts of trouble, had contacted him. If his memory served him right, the man had never done time. A man in Kingston wanted some marijuana for exporting and wasn't prepared to buy it. He wanted it poached but would pay good money. His mind had immediately hooked on Pinchie and Evert's field. The two men worked alone so it should be easy pickings. He had studied their movements and knew that they normally were partying or playing board games most nights. He told Raiders this and they had recruited two youths, Richard and Martin. The two youths were unemployed and had gotten into all sorts of trouble. Martin had done six months for chain snatching while Richard had served a year for robbery.

They had actually started cutting the plants when Raiders said that there was a light in the hut. They had approached it without making any noise and there were the two men. He hadn't wanted to hurt them, but Raiders insisted that they would find the cut plants and probably raise an alarm and so they had attacked them. He had received three hundred dollars and Richard and Martin one hundred and fifty dollars each. He was due to get another hundred dollars in three week's time. Both youths were also due to receive another fifty dollars at that time.

Josiah sat in the bar and relaxed; he was drinking white rum and had bought some of his friend's drinks already. He hadn't seen Richard or Martin since they had received their money. He felt that they were sensible youths who wouldn't let anybody know what had happened. At least Raiders had warned them that he knew where they lived so they should be careful with their mouths.

Premba parked the car by the roadside and he, Grosset, Lance with the surviving youth leading the way, made it down to Josiah's house. This was the first house on the dirt track.

Premba knocked on the door. Josiah's wife came to the door believing it to be her husband or her sons.

If it was her sons, she would send them to look for Juliet, who had told her that she was only going up to the dance to talk to some of her friends. She said that she would be back by ten o'clock, but now it was eleven and there was no sign of her. Her husband always came home late at nights, especially if he was drinking.

"Josiah," she called out.

Grosset answered her in a fake voice.

The woman half-opened the door and looked out. It wasn't Josiah! Desperately, she tried to close the door, but Grosset grabbed her hand and closed his left hand over her mouth. He then pushed her through the door as the other three men followed.

They went into the living room where the woman was made to sit in one of the couches along with the youth. Premba, Lance and Grosset stood over them with guns and machetes.

"Don't make a sound woman, we're looking for your husband, where is he?" Grosset asked.

"Josiah has gone drinking."

"Has he been spending a lot of money lately?" Premba inquired of her.

He had to agree that this was a reasonable size house, but its interior didn't indicate that the man had gotten a windfall lately; still it could be all going into his liquor, women or gambling.

"Are you policemen?"

Premba nodded and motioned to the youth.

"Tell her what you just told us about Josiah."

The youth looked at Mrs. Bethune, but didn't say anything.

"Hey, boy, tell her what you did. I told you that you're already dead."

Premba took out his gun and pointed it at the youth's head.

"Hey, boy, start talking fast or else you're going to die."

The youth looked into Mrs. Bethune's motherly face and remained silent.

"Richie, what has Josiah done to these men?"

Richie was close to tears.

"We helped him steal their weed."

"It's a lie you're telling on Josiah, lies he's telling on him." Mrs. Bethune burst out crying.

"Mamma, listen, the only way you can save your husband is to pay us. Do you have any money?"

"No, sir, it's my husband, who keeps all of the money."

"Hey, Premba, it looks like we're joking with these people," Grosset complained.

"It seems as if this youth thinks we're joking with him," Lance said. He went up to Richie, pulled him out of the couch and put his knife at his throat.

"Mamma, just give us the money you have and let us leave," Premba warned.

The woman got up and went into a room. Premba followed her. Presently he came out pushing her before him, a roll of bills in his hand. He counted the money, which amounted to three hundred dollars.

"Let's move, guys, hey, boy."

He turned to Richie and drew his gun.

"You should be dead."

Richie saw Premba draw the gun and he leaped out of the couch and made a desperate jump at a board window, knocking it out as he went through. The men ran up to the window, firing shots through it. Premba and Lance went through it and dropped into the back of the yard. There was no sign of Richie. They ran to the edge of a gully behind the house.

"I think he jumped into this gully," Premba pointed out.

They peered down into the gully, but couldn't see anything. They could hear a thrashing sound in the gully and both men fired a volley of shots down there. Then the sound ceased.

"What was the boy trying to do, Premba?" Grosset asked, as he opened the back door and joined them.

"The little idiot was trying to escape. I think we got him.

Hey, come, let's leave," Premba told them.

"It seems as if the old lady has fainted," Grosset told them.

"She fainted," Premba expressed his surprised.

They returned inside to find Mrs. Bethune sprawled out on the floor.

"The heavy blasts of the gunshots seemed to have shocked her and she fell out of the couch," Grosset remarked.

"Are you sure she didn't get a heart attack?" Lance asked, looking at the unconscious middle aged woman.

"Come, guys, let's move, we might see the old man on the road."

The three men went out of the house and headed for their car. Chaser and Butler were sitting on top of Pennant's car. When Premba's group reached them, Chaser asked.

"What happened, we heard shots?"

"The youth was trying to escape by jumping through a window, but we shot him. I think he's dead," Premba reported.

They got into their cars and drove off slowly.

Josiah had now finished drinking. He paid his bill, but not before cursing off the barmaid and telling her that she had padded the bill. He staggered out of the bar, the barmaid watched him go.

As he staggered along the road feeling a bit tipsy, he saw a car coming towards him. Had he not been in such a stupor he would have pulled into the bushes but he staggered on.

The car stopped beside him.

"Hey, daddy, do you know where Mr. Bethune lives?" Premba asked.

"I don't know anybody by that name."

As he finished speaking, two men jumped out of the car, one with a gun and the other with a machete.

"Get into the car, grandfather. We know who you are, so don't try to play any tricks on us," Grosset told him.

Another car was coming along the road; Josiah looked on as the car's headlights approached. The car stopped beside them.

"Is this the old man?" Pennant asked.

"The same man, the youths were telling us about," Grosset replied. "The description fits him. Short and stout and walks with a limp."

"Get into the car, we have some questions to ask you," Premba told him.

Still Josiah hesitated.

"Who are you, police?"

He heard a 'click' behind him and his body tensed.

"Just shoot him, Lance," Premba directed.

Josiah looked at Grosset and at the other men and realized that he had no chance of escaping. Grosset started pushing him towards the car and finally bundled him into the back. He and Lance got into the backseat on either side of the old man.

Premba spun the car around and headed for Kingston, Pennant followed in the Ford Escort. They drove for some time before they again found a dirt track and went into it. Pennant in the other car didn't follow, but remained on the main road near the entrance of the track.

Premba drove for about a kilometer before stopping. They got out of the car and dumped the old man on the ground.

"Who paid you to beat up Pinchie and Evert and steal our weed?" Premba asked.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Let's chop off his head, Premba," Grosset suggested.

He moved closer to Josiah with his machete. The old man looked at Grosset and realized just what a predicament he was in.

"It was Raiders, who hired us, me, Martin and Richie. He lives in Kingston and he returned with the truck, which carried the weed."

"Raiders, I know him. He lives in a lane off Bay Farm Road. He should be dead long ago. That guy held up my sister and stole her chain. He's an old thief. He's a tall man, with a long knife mark in his face," Lance told them.

The old man nodded.

"Who, Raiders said was buying the weed?" Premba asked.

"He didn't tell me the man's name."

"Where does this man live?"

"Raiders only told me that he lives in Kingston."

Premba opened the car door and got back inside.

"I'm getting tired of this. Old man, where is the money, search his pockets," he told Grosset and Lance.

Grosset was at the old man's pockets immediately. He came up with one hundred dollars and a pack of contraceptives.

Grosset hissed his teeth.

"How much money did you find, Grosset?"

"One hundred dollars."

"It's only that money I have, I don't have any more. It's the truth, I'm telling you."

Premba felt that this man was of no more help to them.

"Hey, come, let's leave this place now," he directed at Grosset and Lance.

As he shut the car door, Lance asked, "What happen, Premba, you're not going to fire two shots into the old man?"

Premba didn't reply, only spun the car around and drove past a prone Josiah. He had only driven a few meters when he stopped and put the car into reverse. The old man only saw when a hand reached out of the window, saw the gun, but couldn't throw himself aside as it barked once then twice. The first shot took him in his left breast, the next one in the neck. Premba put away the gun and drove off again. When they reached the main road they pulled up beside Pennant's car.

"We're going to check a guy on Bay Farm Road," Premba told him and drove off. Pennant gave him a two-minutes start before following.

In the early hours of the morning McCreed's fighters returned to Kingston and headed for Bay Farm Road. Lance directed them to a lane and they reversed the car into it. Pennant didn't come into the lane, but stopped a few meters from the entrance and waited on Premba's group.

Premba stopped his car before a board gate, which guarded a tenement yard. A board house was on the other side of the road, Lance said that this was the house and the three men went over to it. Premba pulled the gate open and they entered the yard. Grosset knocked on the front door of the house.

“Raiders, Raiders.”

They could hear snoring inside the room. There was a creak of bedsprings and a rustle of bedclothes.

“Who is that?”

Grosset hit the plywood door with a rockstone he had picked up in the yard and it shattered into pieces, the three men rushed into the room.

Raiders didn't even have time to grab his machete before Grosset grabbed him.

“Raiders, you dirty fucker. You beat up Pinchie and Evert and stole our weed.”

He drove a right hook into the man's belly, which sent him crashing to the floor.

Premba had turned on the lights. Raider's woman, was curled up in a corner of the bed.

“Get out of the bed,” he shouted, looking approvingly at the curvaceous woman's figure.

“Hey, guy, we're taking away your woman as revenge, because you beat up our friends.”

The girl was about to scream when he grabbed her and covered her mouth with his hands.

“Raiders do you have any guns or money?” Premba asked.

The man shook his head.

“I don't have any guns or money.”

Premba looked at him and laughed.

“You spent off the money already, you dirty fucker.”

“Who paid you to beat up Pinchie and Evert and steal our weed?” Grosset shouted at Raiders, his hands were in the man's nightshirt. Lance was at the door with the AK-47 rifle.

The man didn't answer Grosset.

“Where did you hide our weed?” Premba asked him.

“I rode my bike back to town. I don't know where the truck went with it.”

Raiders realized that he had been betrayed. He was about twenty six years of age with a hazy look in his eyes from too much marijuana smoking and violence.

Premba was searching the room for a dress, presently he found one, which he threw at the woman. This she put on over her nightie. He then told her to pack her bags. When she finished, he started to push her towards the door.

“Where are you taking her?” Raiders asked.

“What you want to know that for?” Premba asked him. **“Where you're going you won't be needing her again.”**

Lance raised the AK-47 and pointed it at Raiders.

“We're wasting too much time talking to him, I'm getting sleepy.”

“He knows who is the man behind the stealing of our weed,” Grosset told Lance.

“I don't know who you're talking about. But I can tell you about Josiah Bethune, he's their contact up in the country.”

“We settled with your friends already, Raiders. That's how we know about you. Save your life by telling us who he is,” Premba told him.

“I don't know who he is,” Raiders said finally.

“So you don’t know who is paying you, well, okay then, Raiders,” Premba said as he pushed the girl out of the house, Grosset going before him. He signaled to Lance. Lance pointed the gun at the condemned man, who realizing what was about to happen, flung himself on the floor. He tried to roll under the bed, but Lance had already started shooting. Two shots caught the man in the back of the head. He lay on his belly at the side of the bed.

Again Lance aimed the gun and fired it into the man’s back. He then backed out of the house and ran to the car, opened the door and got in where Grosset was holding the mortally wounded man’s woman. Premba had already started the car and they drove off. They went back out onto the main road and headed for Wareika, Pennant keeping a short distance behind them.

The next day, Sunday, at around nine-thirty in the morning Bendoo was sleeping in a hammock when he heard shouts waking him up. Grosset, Lance, Pennant, Butler and Chaser were there. The men all sat on a long bamboo bench near the hammock.

“What’s happening, Bendoo?” Grosset greeted him.

Bendoo rubbed his eyes, trying to get rid of the sleepiness, which he still felt.

“I’m trying to get some sleep.”

“So how did it go? I heard that you guys crashed a party and really enjoyed yourselves,” Lance stated.

“We didn’t see the two men and nobody knew anything about them so we just decided to spend the rest of the night at a party. We reached up here about four o’clock.”

He got out of the hammock took some paper, put some of the marijuana in it and began making a cigarette.

“This herb’s nice,” he remarked as he let out a ring of smoke.

“Last night was nice. I saw Dally with a real sexy girl. We smoked up a lot of the green herb and drank some hard liquor.”

“So what happened, you didn’t get any girls?” Lance asked.

“Of course, I got two of them, Duffus got two too. Hey we had to take Dally’s girl away from him. He wanted to spend the whole night with her.”

“He’s a dangerous youth,” Grosset remarked.

“He was high on the green herb and liquor. He’s not supposed to wake up until tomorrow.”

“So what happen to Pablo?” Lance asked.

“Indian, hey, he found a girl up there. The girl didn’t want to let go of him so we had to leave him up there. He said when he’s ready he’ll just borrow a motorcycle and come in on it.”

“When we were dancing with some of the girls we saw some little guys making up their faces but when they realized that we were armed they just had to cool it.”

“Bendoo, the four men we wiped out last night were the ones, who beat up Pinchie and Evert and stole their weed,” Grosset told him.

Bendoo tried not to show any emotion.

“Those men should be dead. They can’t beat up our friends like that and live. I’m angry that Ardez never sent me because it’s a long time since I’ve killed a man.”

“Bendoo, Premba kidnapped a girl from Bay Farm Road and brought her to the camp. When we were coming down, Lance and I had to hold her to prevent her escaping. When Lance shot her man she flung herself down on the ground. It’s a wonder people never came to find out what was happening. Then when we were coming up here she put up a fight trying to escape. We had to leave her down at Rattigan’s shack. She refused to go to Premba’s shack with him,” Grosset told him.

Bendoo was glad, if the girl was at Rattigan's shack it meant that Camilla was taking care of her.

He grimaced, but tried not to show it.

"Grosset, are you mad? When people hear those guns barking, they are not going to leave their houses."

"That's true, Bendoo, all when we held the gun on the guy he didn't want to tell us anything. He tried to roll under his bed, but I let him have three shots."

Bendoo rolled some more marijuana leaves and lit it.

"Premba knows that Bridget will fight his new woman," he declared.

"He wants to get rid of Bridget. The two of them are always fighting," Pennant stated.

Bendoo knew that Bridget loved fighting as she had told him that she had once wounded a girl in a fight. She loved partying and going to dances. Premba had told him that she had two children for him but they were with her mother in the country.

"We saw two expensive motorcycles up at the dance. We wanted to take away one of them, but because Duffus is from that area, he said we shouldn't do it," Bendoo told them.

"I understand how Duffus felt. They probably would have blamed him when they found that the motorcycle was missing," Pennant stated.

"Yeah, I agree with you. I'm going to get some more sleep," Bendoo told them.

He climbed back up into his hammock as most of the fighters began drifting back to their shacks, shortly he was snoring.

Chapter Eleven

Lex felt like a man on the edge of a precipice. His wife was now operating his business and he had to be in hiding from McCreed's gunmen. She had gotten redundant eight months ago and had been unable to find another job. He felt that the present situation was unbearable and it would be better for him to leave the syndicate. He reflected on King. The man was obviously not fit to lead anyone. His puny efforts to raid McCreed's weedfields were completely useless. They would not make much money from the small amount of weed poached so far. Brad and Jack were just as spineless. All three were worthless and he would have nothing more to do with them.

He drove to Bigs Avenue that evening. There were syndicates, he knew, who had fighters for hire, but he was not sure of their relationship with McCreed. Bigs Avenue men were always there for hire plus they were reliable and trigger-happy. He employed four men.

All had done small jobs for him before. He gave them an advance and told them to meet him on Monday if they were successful. He gave them the directions to McCreed's house and the type of car he drove. He then drove at breakneck speed for the meeting with King and the man, who had flown down from Miami, G.C. Cox.

G.C. Cox was a hard cigarette smoker. His doctors had warned him several times to the extent that he was smoking a pack a day, down from the two packs of ten years ago. At fifty-two he cut a rather professional figure being clean cut and always neatly dressed. He stepped out of the Air Jamaica jet at the Norman Manley International Airport, collected his baggage, went through immigration and customs and headed for a waiting taxi, that would take him to King's Cherry Gardens home. He would then head for his sister's house in Meadowbrook Estates.

G.C's sojourn away from Jamaica had been a long one and the man responsible for this was none other than Gus McCreed. He had narrowly escaped death at the hands of his gunmen. The big bald head giant was cutting a clear path to dominating the drug and marijuana trade. If he hadn't refused his offer to buy the lands at Jackfruit Valley and the weed crop, then maybe he wouldn't have to run away. He knew he shouldn't have run away, but he had reasoned that it was safer because had he stayed he would certainly have been killed, with so many bloodhounds on his trail. How McCreed had known about him, he didn't know, since he was a small grower.

The death squad, which had visited his office that afternoon, had mistaken his accountant for him and had ruthlessly cut down the man. He suspected that when McCreed heard that his men had gotten the wrong man he had sent them on a hunt for him with orders to shoot to kill on sight. He had gone into hiding, hardly venturing out at all. His wife began looking after their immigration papers and after some pocket lacing they got permanent visas to reside in the United States. They had left for the States from Montego Bay airport being sure that McCreed would have people watching Norman Manley airport in Kingston. Even then he had worn a deep disguise.

But now he wondered why he had run away. His stationery manufacturing business was doing well and marijuana growing and exporting, was only a small part of his operations, albeit the most profitable.

In the States, he had found a job and he and his wife had settled down comfortably in Miami, but a salary alone didn't suit a man like him and he had begun to move around. He got his feel of the United States drug market, saw its potential and knew he could make his fortune.

He had phoned King, telling him of the great possibilities that existed in the U.S.A. King was by now out of business, betrayed by his friend, Dickson Lunan and defeated by McCreed. G.C had wanted to make a fresh start.

King had replied favorably. No confrontations until they were strong enough. After paying the taxi driver he had been warmly welcomed by King and his fabulous wife, Betsy, to whom he had been introduced as an old friend.

Now on Friday night he sat in the back room of Ridley Squire's bar in Stony Hill, with his host, Brad Elliot, Jack Marriot and Lex Malcolm, who had just arrived and looked like he had driven like hell to reach on time. King had introduced him to his partners as an old friend of his and he was glad.

"We have to treat this man like one of us. He says he wants to join our syndicate," King told them.

"That's no problem so long as he has a contribution to make," Lex stated.

King looked very hard at him.

"This man's just like us, it was Mc Creed, who put him out of business," he remarked.

"I'm glad that I can meet some men, who hate that man just like I do," G. C said supporting King.

"What are your plans, G.C?" Lex asked.

"Why are you going so fast, Lex?" King countered. "Let's review our little operation last Thursday night. We're going to make some good money off it. If we can make some more raids on his fields we can really make some money to hire some good men to help us fight against him."

"I'm looking buyers, I have a man who's interested. He's one of my old time customers. He's coming to look at it and to make me an offer. The dryers at the warehouse are working overtime."

“They killed two of the men we hired and the two youths were badly shot up and are in hospital. It means we’ll have to hire a different set this time around, that’s what I don’t like,” Brad remarked.

“How did they find those men so easily though? I know some men, if you pay them well they’ll do anything for you,” G.C said ignoring Jack’s question.

“So why didn’t you hire some of those men you’re talking about to get rid of him?” Lex asked.

King looked at him; Lex took out a cigarette and lit it.

“Those guys charge a lot of money,” G.C replied.

“As I see it, it doesn’t matter how much they charge, we’ve got to find the money to pay them. Once we get rid of Mc Creed and Fred, we’ll be the ones running things,” Lex stated.

“The weed’s in a safe place, isn’t it?” G.C asked.

“It’s in a warehouse that I have,” King replied.

“Once we have the weed, we can hire some men. If we tell them about our plans, I’m sure they’ll go along with us. There are a lot of men out there, who hate Mc Creed’s guts,” G.C opined.

“I can’t wait to see some more action. I’m sure Brad agrees with me because we want to return to our businesses,” Lex stated.

“Danny has more raids planned,” Jack put in.

The room was silent.

“Order some more drinks, Brad.”

Brad got up at King’s request and went out to the bar.

“I thought you were doing the planning, Jack,” Lex’s sarcastic remark cut deeply into the silence of the room.

“You damn well knew that I wasn’t doing any planning, Lex.”

“Look how Fred turned us down. I think he believes that we’re no match for Mc Creed. I don’t doubt anything G.C is saying, but my wife has to be operating my business for me because of Mc Creed’s gunmen. I have to do something about that. If any of you’re serious and want to join me, you can give me a call, until then so long,” Lex declared, standing up.

“I don’t know why you were asking me about planning, and you know I wasn’t doing any,” a still angry Jack Marriot flung at him.

“You’re always going on as if you’re a bad man, Jack,” Lex told him.

Jack stood up.

“It’s you who are always going on as if you’re a bad man. You want to go for it, Lex. You want to go for it,” Jack challenged, pointing to Lex’s new gun in his waist. The two men faced off each other. Jack’s gun was also in his waist.

King realizing that the two men were about to draw on each other shouted.

“Don’t bother with that!”

Lex stalked angrily outside.

“Lex, Lex, wait, wait,” King shouted after him, but it fell on deaf ears.

Jack re-took his seat

“He’s going on as if he’s a bad man, and the other day when those guys robbed him he couldn’t do anything. They took away his gun and busted up his hand.”

Brad returned with the drinks, he set them down on the table.

“Where’s Lex?”

“He’s gone,” Jack volunteered.

“What the hell!” Brad exclaimed, and rushed outside, but he was too late. Lex was just driving off and kept his eyes on the road despite Brad’s shouts.

Brad returned to the room looking very angry and disheveled.

"I wonder what's gotten into him," he remarked.

"That man's a big fool," G.C said as he lit a fresh cigarette. Jack lit his first cigarette for the night off it.

"He can't do anything without us, unless he plans to kill Mc Creed personally or hire some stupid guys to do it for him," King remarked.

Brad began pouring out the drinks; Danny King took a sip of the rum and milk.

"Gentlemen, let's get down to business and forget about Lex," he advised them.

The four men started talking in low tones. G.C told them about his contacts, including Ruddy Brown. King told them about his planned raids on McCreed's marijuana fields. After much persuasion Brad Elliot agreed to recruit the poachers. The meeting broke up with G.C promising to contact Ruddy.

Wednesday June 12,1978-Gaskell Burke was seated around a table at the Rio Nuevo Suite of the Hill View Hotel. He had rented it for a half-day business meeting. In the room were Ken Stone, Benn Sanderson and Wally Judge. Stone was tall and thin. Wally and Benny were both short men with both being stout. All three were underworld figures. Stone usually handled Danville's shipments in Miami, getting buyers for him. Benny and Wally worked for separate outfits.

"We're going to starve if we don't do something about what's going on," Gaskell stated.

"It's a long time a shipment hasn't passed through my hands and that's why I came out here," Benny stated.

"I can give you the lowdown on what's going on. It's a man named Mc Creed who's running things now. Danville told me certain things about him," Burke told them.

"These two men don't like guns, Gaskell. I've told them that they'd better return to the States because they won't last long out here," Ken warned.

"I can take them to the range and give them some shooting lessons. I know a man who will be willing to rent them a gun for a weekly fee," Burke told them.

"You see how good Danville was with a gun and look what they did to him. Two of Danny King's associates want to join us, but I've told them that I want nothing to do with King. If they want to join us they'll have to kill him or else he's going to kill them."

"Let's get down to planning the syndicate and forget about King," Wally declared.

The four men then got down to planning with Ken telling them about two men he knew, who would be willing to come to Jamaica, to train fighters if they could be found, to attack McCreed's gunmen. Burke told them that he had an old house that was given to him to be sold, that they could use. The meeting broke up with Burke returning to his office while the others caught flights home.

Ruddy Brown promoted dances and stage shows. He operated between Miami and Kingston. He could be called something of a marijuana broker. He arranged deals between buyers and sellers of marijuana. He also got planes out of Miami to pick up marijuana supplies at various Caribbean locatons. He was relaxing and smoking one of his favorite cigarettes after making love to his second woman for the night. He had sent the first one packing after she made a particularly crude remark about a friend of his.

He stretched full length on the bed and crushed up the cigarette in the ashtray. The ashtray had been given to him by a Bahamian beauty queen. He looked at Susie again. He should have taken a group to Jamaica this Independence but decided against it after much meditation on his encounter with McCreed's gunmen. That was six months ago; he had been checking around for possible supplies of marijuana, when he received an anonymous telephone call to lay off and return to the States if he wanted to live. He had ignored the call as coming from some crank.

It wasn't until one evening he returned to his guesthouse in Ocho Rios to find three men in his room. One was a huge giant of a man, whom he subsequently learned was called Grosset. The others looked just about as dangerous.

He wasn't easily intimidated though.

"What are you guys doing here?"

"Are you, Ruddy Brown? You'd better come with us, our boss wants to talk to you," the giant demanded.

"I'm not going anywhere with you, you'd better get out of here before I call the police."

"Don't ask any more questions, guy. Just do as we tell you," the giant ordered again, knitting his brows.

"Move your dirty selves from here," he shouted and went for his gun. He was surprised at the speed at which the giant's gun appeared in his hand. His fist had just closed around the butt of his gun when the giant's gun exploded and he felt a searing pain in his right shoulder.

The two other men had also drawn their guns. He had fallen to the floor and the giant relieved him of his gun.

"It's because the boss wants to give you a chance or else I would pump some more bullets into you," the giant warned.

He had spent two months in hospital and although he reported the matter to the police nothing came out of it.

It was only when he returned to the States and met G.C, his old friend that he realized that it was Mc Creed's gunmen, who had shot him. He had been livid with fury, but G.C had shown him the futility of trying anything against the Mc Creed organization.

Now he lay looking at the ceiling of his apartment and thinking about the future. His money was fast running out and most entertainers wanted big retainers before they signed any contract to perform. He should get a steady job, but he hated office jobs. He loved a job, which had a certain amount of intrigue and excitement to it. Despite the risks, entertainment had that plus that was how he got his drugs through and got to know the right people. In the past he had made huge amounts of money through this avenue. It had allowed him to live comfortably and do a lot of partying.

He was nudging Susie for them to make love again when the telephone rang. He reached down and picked it up. It was an overseas call. He waited a few seconds for the connection.

Susie groaned and rolled over in the bed, but did not wake up.

"Ruddy, is that you?" came a male voice.

"Who's that calling me? Rahtid, G.C, is that you? What's going on? Where are you calling me from?"

"I'm out here in Jamaica. I've teamed up with a syndicate. They want to try a thing against Mc Creed. I've told them about you and they want you to come down here to talk to them."

"I'll do that yes, but who are those men though?"

"You know Danny King, Lex Malcolm, Brad Elliot and a couple of other men."

"Is this the same King, whose gang Mc Creed wiped out?"

“Yes, but he’s recruiting fighters for a low level war with Mc Creed. Those other men look like they mean business. He claims that it was Dickson Lunan who betrayed him.”

“Whether or not Dickson betrayed him, I don’t think he could have beaten Mc Creed.”

“Yeah, I have to agree with you.”

“G.C, I’ll contact you again and you can give me some more information on things over there. So how are the girls down there?”

“They’re out here as fat as ever.”

“What, G.C, keep yourself in check, don’t overdo it, my friend. I’ll be out there soon to help you out,” Ruddy shouted, laughing as he hung up the phone.

What the hell, something was coming his way at last. He decided against venturing into Jamaica until he was sure of some protection against Mc Creed’s gunmen, meanwhile he would stay in Miami and arrange things.

He turned to wake up Susie; a good bout of sex now would do him good. It would be just what he needed to send him to sleep. Tomorrow would be a busy day.

Chapter Twelve

Bendoo lay in a tree at Wareika. He had just returned from his latest meeting with Wood. He gave him a full account about the activities at the camp. He knew that once he got to know who the boss was then it would be easy to wipe out this gang of drug smugglers. He lay relaxed in the tree; he could see the beautiful glow of the city. The fresh cool air of the mountains was certainly a refreshing change from all that dust and pollution down there.

He had told Wood about the criminals up here. Premba Mc Donald, Lance Thompson and Desmond Pennant, were serial killers. These three men along with others, had taken part in the hold-up of a bank in St. Ann's Bay. They had killed a policeman in making their getaway. A policewoman on the scene had shot and killed one of the criminals, but the rest had escaped with almost a hundred thousand dollars. That was about five years ago, he was sure that they would have spent off that money. He wasn't sure if people like Miles Butler, Matthew Grosset, Stan 'Dillinger' Boyd, Weston Duffus and Pablo 'Indian' Maragh were a part of the original gang. As for Ardez, Wood was still looking for information about him.

The police had gotten hold of the letters to Tai and the man from Ocho Rios, Winston Young, but had not been able to trace the telephone number. They must have gotten some crooked technician to set up the number. Maybe it was the same man who had set up the line for them to use at the ranch. They also could not make out who had signed the letter.

He was awakened by the sound of the machine gun. Sub-machine gunfire was also coming from the two look out points. The big searchlight was on and was scanning the trail. A group of men led by Grosset rushed to the machine-gun nest and began taking up positions. Bendoo jumped off the tree limb and made his way into the compound.

A voice challenged him.

"Who are you?"

"It's me, Bendoo," he said to Nelson, the man on guard duty.

"Pass, Bendoo."

He made his way back to his shack to get his gun; all the units were being deployed.

When he went to the gun nests he saw fighters below looking at what remained of the two intruders.

"They're Phanso and Roxy," Butler stated.

"They must have been coming to join us," Ardez remarked.

"The two of them just escaped from the General Penitentiary," Pennant stated.

"They're just unlucky. I can't blame the men handling the machine guns. They just have to shoot at anybody they suspect is trying to infiltrate us. We'll bury them in the morning," Ardez stated.

The two bodies were riddled with bullets. At least a dozen bullets had drilled each man as the three heavy caliber guns had brought fire to bear on them simultaneously.

Bendoo felt sick in his stomach. Wareika was simply impregnable. He noticed the short time it took for the fighters to get to their posts. A surprise raid was nearly out of the question. A raiding party must come by the trail for to travel by any other route would be almost impossible.

The machine-gun nest would have to be destroyed, the search-light put out and the ammunition depot either captured or blown up as a launching pad to any successful raid.

The fighters were slowly trickling homewards. Bendoo saw Grosset and went over to him.

"Where were you, Bendoo?" the giant asked.

"I was having a smoke. When I heard the machine-gun I thought it was the security forces who were attacking us."

“Those two men behaved like idiots, they just burst in on us without any warning,” Grosset said.

“Is it the trail they came through?”

“We’ll find that out in the morning.”

“The fighters who are manning the machine-guns are certainly sharp.”

“We’re safe up here. It’s two times the security forces come up here and found that we had bigger guns than they.”

“The boss wasn’t joking when he set up this place.”

They had reached the camp compound now.

“I’ll be seeing you,” Grosset said as he set off for his shack, which was at the eastern end of the village. Bendoo said goodbye too, and made off for his shack at the western end of the village. Niah was seated outside, drinking a stout.

“What’s happening, Bendoo?”

Bendoo put down the rifle and took a seat on one of the benches.

“Were you out there, Niah?”

“Yes, those two guys were foolish to try to reach us like that.”

“How did they reach here? Do you think it was the trail they came through?”

“It must be through there, I don’t see any other way.”

Bendoo went for a stout out of the tiny refrigerator and went to turn on the radio; a soap opera was being aired.

“Turn that off, Bendoo. You don’t see is foolishness that.”

“Just because you can’t understand the show, that’s why you are calling it foolishness.”

“I want to listen to my radio, so I’m going to my shack.”

“Okay,” Bendoo replied, whereupon Niah departed for his shack.

Lorena Mc Creed looked into Paul Eason’s face and laughed. She wouldn’t say that he was handsome, but he was certainly fun to be with. He had returned from the States a year ago and occupied a senior position with a top bank in Ocho Rios. A mutual friend at a party they attended had introduced them.

They danced, chatted and generally had a good time since both of them were without a date. The next day he called her, asking for a date but she refused. That was a month ago. He told her that he had broken off his relationship with his American girlfriend just before returning to Jamaica. She wasn’t sure she believed him, but had decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

They were now back at their table.

“You know something, I didn’t know that you were so nice,” he complimented her.

She was definitely enjoying his company.

“I didn’t know that you were such a good dancer.”

Paul smiled to himself. In the States he had been known as ‘Paul the party animal.’ It was only because he and his latest Jamaican girlfriend had broken up why he had been at the party alone and of course that tip off he got from his friend.

He ordered some more drinks; they talked a bit more and got up to dance again.

“I’d like to see you more often.”

“I told you that I’m not seeing anybody else at the moment, so you can always call me. And depending on my schedule I might be willing to go out with you, but running a hotel can be hectic at times.”

“Okay, baby, anything you say, but you know how I feel about you,” he said, holding her closer now.

They were silent now as the song finished and they returned to their table.

They had just sat down when a tall man came over to them.

“Hi, Paul Eason, what’s going on? It’s a long time since I’ve seen you.”

“Rory Dillon, it’s been a couple of years now since I’ve seen you too.”

Paul used both hands to shake the man’s hand.

“Sit down, Rory, let me buy you a drink, and meet my date, Lorena.”

“Sorry, I’m just leaving, but I have a party to invite you to.” the man shook her hand and gave Paul a card.

After the man left Paul explained to her that both of them had been classmates at college in the States, but had lost contact with each other since leaving college.

“You want to go with me?” he asked her, showing her the card.

She took the card and looked at it.

“It looks like a dance, I don’t like to go to those places.”

She returned the card to him.

He thought to himself. If she didn’t want to go, that was no problem. Most of the girls in the bank would be only too willing to date him if he gave them the word.

“It’s going to be at his mother’s home, nobody’s going to bother you if you come with me.”

“I’ll think about it.”

She looked at her watch; it was five minutes past one o’clock.

“Look at the time, I have to go home. I have to go to work in the morning.”

“I thought you were the boss, so what are you worrying about?”

“Paul, I have to set an example, if I’m absent from work because I was partying the night away what do you believe the staff will think?”

He called over the waiter and asked him for the bill.

“Maybe you need a break, take a holiday, go abroad, have fun.”

“I don’t need any holiday, I’m okay.”

“You know something, lots of people, who live in towns like Ocho Rios believe that they’re on a permanent holiday.” ``

“I don’t know about you, but I work very hard.”

He laughed.

“That’s how I like to hear you talk,” he said as the waiter reappeared with their bill.

He wrote a check and gave him, and they departed.

Later that morning after he had dropped her off at her apartment, she lay thinking. Although it was their first real date she had some doubts about him. She certainly wasn’t going to rush into anything with him until she got to know him better.

Chapter Thirteen

Gus McCreed sat beside his swimming pool, eating fried chicken and drinking fruit punch.

"I'm satisfied with the way you guys went about wiping out those two idiots, who beat up Pinchie and Evert and stole our weed. Although those two young guys survived, I don't think they'll fool around our weed again or tell the police who shot them," he addressed the men. They were Grosset, Premba, Ardez, Rattigan and Pennant. Fred was there too.

"Those two youths managed to jump down a gully after they pumped those bullets into them. I don't know how they survived. We didn't find out where they hid the weed though. Premba said that none of the men knew where the truck went with it," Ardez explained.

"You confronted at least two of the men who could have told us who was behind this whole set up. I believe the man you wiped out in St. Ann knew more than what he told you. Maybe the two youths you shot up, didn't know anything, but the man you killed on Bay Farm Road must have returned to Kingston with it. He must have known where they took it, you should have beaten it out of him," Mc Creed blasted out.

Grosset swallowed a huge piece of chicken and drank some cold beer.

His brows were knitted.

"Raiders said he returned to Kingston on his motor-cycle. He left St. Ann before the truck did," Premba stated.

They had heard conflicting reports that the two youths were still in hospital in St. Ann. Other reports had it that they had been transferred to a hospital in Kingston.

"We can write off that weed, that's a lot of money down the drain. It's time we got rid of those skunks," Fred stated.

"We have gone all over the island looking for those two men, but so far we haven't had any luck in finding them," Ardez declared.

"They are here," Fred stated. "They haven't run away like G.C and Ruddy. It looks as if they're up to something."

"We're going to hit them hard. The way we wiped out those two idiots, should serve as a warning to them. If they try to leave the island my people with the airlines will know," Mc Creed told them.

"We'll have to intensify the search for them," Rattigan put in.

"You're right, I want those men dead. I've put a reward of two hundred and fifty dollars on each of them. You can spread the word and let some of those guys on the road know about it," Mc Creed stated.

"Boss, those two men aren't so smart to be hiding from us for so long, we must find them," Ardez opined.

"They must know that their houses have been broken into and it doesn't bother them. Both of them now have other people running their business for them. It seems as if they're staying with their friends or relatives. Check all of the guesthouses and hotels. They must be somewhere. They must need money to spend so they'll have to go to the banks. I'm going to talk to my contacts in the banks and put them on full alert," Mc Creed declared.

Fred Billings took the cigarette from Grosset and lit it with a flash of his lighter.

"I hope that none of you are thinking of going for a swim, you drown easily on a full stomach, Grosset," Mc Creed shouted at the giant who was stuffing his mouth full of chicken and chips.

The others looked at the huge figure of Grosset and laughed. Mc Creed belched loudly. He looked at the plate of chicken and chips at his feet.

“Well, I don’t think I want anymore,” he said.

Rattigan and Premba both chose marijuana cigarettes as their dessert. Pennant, who always travelled with a bottle of home-made wine, filled one of the cups and passed the rest around to be shared.

“I would like to start our operations next week Friday,” Gus stated.

“Some boats will be coming in from South America with lots of stuff for us to store before they go to the States. We’ll be shipping them out on Sunday nights. The people whom we contacted will store them for us.”

“What kind of stuff will they be bringing in, boss?” Pennant asked.

“Mostly cocaine, those guys in Columbia have their own labs and chemists too. We’re just going to be a transshipment point for them for now.”

“We’re going to get a good cut. It’s plenty of money anyway you look at it.”

“How are we going to move it inland?” Fred asked.

“Our fishermen friends, Tom and Eddie, will collect it for us. You guys will take it from them. I don’t want the Factory to touch it.”

He had hardly finished talking when there were several loud explosions above them.

“What the hell, those sounded like gunshots!” he shouted.

“They came from up the house!” Fred in turn shouted.

“They’re attacking the house,” Ardez said as they all drew their guns.

“Spread out around the lawn. We’re going to wait for them down here. Fred, go and turn off the lights.”

Fred rushed to the light switch that controlled the lawn and pool area and in a second the whole area was plunged into darkness.

Lex’s four men having ransacked McCreed’s house without finding him, made their way down to the pool area, guns drawn and at the ready.

Mc Creed’s fighters were moving in the darkness. As the Bigs Avenue men came onto the lawn they were challenged.

“Who are you?” Grosset shouted and moved his position. He was greeted with instant gunfire. Instantly Mc Creed’s fighters closed in on the Bigs Avenue gunmen.

One of the men was shot in the right leg in the first hail of fire. He fell in the grass. The other three men ran to seek cover, returning the fire as they ran. They were cornered. All around the lawn shots sounded.

One of the men was killed by a withering hail of fire from Mc Creed’s fighters. Another man made a huge leap and went over a fence. The men ran to the fence, but they couldn’t see him in the long grass. They let off a volley of shots after him. The man shot in his leg had managed to roll under a hole in the fence in the meantime and was trying to get away. The men ran up to where the hole in the fence was and fired a volley of shots in the long grass trying to flush him out. Then Grosset shouted.

“One of them is trying to get away, boss.”

The fourth man was trying to escape. He knew that if he jumped the fence, he could escape in the bushes, as they were quite thick and he might be able to hide from his pursuers in them.

All the men were running after him. He was shot in both legs just before he reached the fence. He lay on the ground only a few meters from it.

“Take him alive,” Mc Creed ordered.

Grosset reached the groaning figure on the ground first.

“Don’t move or else I’ll blow your head off,” he warned.

The others reached them a second later. They stood looking down at the youth who was groaning like a baby.

“Who sent you?” Mc Creed asked the wounded man.

Only a groan came from his lips.

“Pick him up, Grosset, let’s take him to where the other one is,” Mc Creed instructed. “The other two fuckers escaped, they won’t get far. I’m sure we shot them. We’ll find out what happened to them in the morning.”

Grosset picked up the wounded man and slung him across his shoulders. When they reached the body of the other man, he threw him down and let out a deep breath. He took out his rag and wiped his forehead. By this time, Ardez had gone and turned the lights back on.

“Any of you recognize any of them?” Fred asked.

“I’ve never seen any of them before,” Premba answered.

“This one will have to tell me who sent him,” Mc Creed said.

“It seems they did some damage up at the house. I’m going to have a look,” Fred told them.

“Ok, Fred. It looks like these men are serious. I have to get something out of this one even if I have to kill him.”

The youth was still groaning from the bullet wounds to his legs. His trousers were soaked in blood.

“Stop your noise and tell us who sent you.”

“He’s playing dumb boss, let me beat it out of him,” Grosset suggested.

“I’ll manage. One of you give me a knife.”

Pennant gave him his ratchet knife. He bent down and put the blade at the youth’s throat.

“Who sent you, boy? Tell me or else I’m going to cut your blasted throat.”

“Carve him up piece by piece,” Rattigan suggested.

The wounded youth was still groaning and shaking his legs.

Mc Creed began to squeeze his throat.

“Are you ready to talk, boy?”

When no answer came from the youth, he squeezed even harder.

“I’ll talk. It was Lex Malcolm, who sent us. He paid us to kill you.”

From inside his shirt pocket, he fished out a small passport size photograph of Mc Creed.

“Where’s Lex now?” Ardez asked him.

“I don’t know, he just came to Bigs Avenue to see Bigger and told him what he wanted us to do.”

“Did he pay you all of the money?” Ardez asked. “If you had killed Mister Mc Creed where were you supposed to meet Lex?”

The youth seemed perplexed.

“Bigger said he told him to phone him as soon as he finished the job.”

“Is Bigger one of those who escaped?” Mc Creed asked.

The wounded youth pointed at the dead man on the ground.

“Search Bigger’s pockets, see if you find the telephone number,” Mc Creed directed.

Grosset was at the dead man’s pockets immediately. He came up with a wallet, which he pocketed, a ratchet knife, a pack of contraceptives and a notebook, which he gave to Mc Creed.

McCreed began turning the pages.

“See it here.”

He waved a leaf of the book at them.

Just then Fred came running down to where they were.

“They killed the dogs.”

“It’s a good thing that it’s Caslyn’s weekend off and Buster has gone to the country. As for those two dogs they were the best I ever had.”

Mc Creed looked downcast.

“Gus, you were smart to have bought so much land, that you don’t have any neighbors living near you to hear those gunshots,” Fred stated.

“We have to get Lex now once and for all. Where’s the nearest telephone booth from here?”

“One is at Rock Hall,” Fred replied.

“You can go there later tonight, Fred. You can disguise your voice, tell him where to meet you and we can send two men to kill him.”

“Good idea,” Rattigan agreed. “But we’ll have to choose a place to which he’ll come readily.”

“Make it Bigs Avenue. We can move into Bigger’s shack because I’m sure that’s where he would have met them. Is that true, youthman?”

The wounded man nodded.

“Where’s the shack?” Ardez asked.

“First house on your left going into Goffe Lane.”

“All of you hear that, we can move in tomorrow about seven thirty. It’ll be dark by then, you can tell him to come at about eight o’clock Fred, and bring the rest of the money. He might want to hear it first so you can tell him that you dumped the body in some bushes.”

“What are we going to do with Bigger’s body?” Ardez asked.

Mc Creed considered for a while before replying. He took the dead man’s gun, looked down at the still groaning figure of the youth who had his eyes closed in an effort to fight the pain in his legs. He aimed the gun at the man’s chest and pulled the trigger twice.

He returned the gun to Ardez.

“There are some garbage bags up at the house. We can stuff the bodies in them. You know where to find Tom and Eddie. Let them handle them for us.”

“In the morning you can help me look for the spent shells, Fred. We’ll have to clean up the place to get rid of any blood stains.”

Pennant went for the garbage bags and they put the bodies in them.

On Sunday night Pennant and Duffus moved into Bigger’s shack.

The time was seven thirty and Lex was scheduled to deliver the rest of the money by eight o’clock.

“Hey, I’m suspicious about that guy, Bendoo. I haven’t said anything to anyone yet though, but I saw him talking to a man who looked like a policeman,” Duffus said.

“Who Bendoo, you must be joking. Are you saying that he’s a police informer?”

“This man was clean shaven, wore plain clothes and had a gun sticking out of one of his pockets.”

“What are you talking about, Duffus?” Pennant asked, still in shock at what he was hearing.

“We have to deal with him when we return.”

“If what you’re saying is true, I’m going to fill him full of lead. I’m going to empty out my gun in him.”

They took some more blows off the marijuana pipe.

“The boss wants this man dead, so you just make sure that you shoot to kill.”

“If he comes here, he’s dead.”

“It’s about time a man like that should be dead.”

He took another drag off the marijuana pipe. They were working themselves up into a killing mood.

“If we weren’t up at the boss’s house last night they would still be digging lead out of him.”

“It looks as if he wants to challenge the boss.”

“He’s looking for his death.”

Lex got Bigger’s call late Saturday night that his mission had been successful and that Mc Creed’s body had been dumped in some bushes. Bigger said that they had backed up Mc Creed’s car on the Forrest Hill’s main road. They had shot him in the car, taken out his body and thrown it over a retaining wall.

Already he was thinking of returning to his house as soon as Mc Creed’s death was officially confirmed. Gus Mc Creed, his greatest enemy, was dead! He drove through Kingston without having to feel himself in any danger. He would be taking over his arch-enemy’s empire. Once the men at Wareika heard that their boss was dead, they would have to leave their hideout or stay and become bandits, making frequent forays into the city. He would have to get through to them before the panic started. Control of the marijuana fields Mc Creed controlled, would be his. Danny King, Jack Marriot, G.C and Brad Elliot didn’t figure in his plans. If they tried to cut in they would be eliminated. They were all afraid of Gus Mc Creed and as such he had no use for them.

As for Fred Billings, he didn’t count. He had a feeling that Mc Creed’s daughter would not be interested in his syndicate. He would therefore force Fred to cooperate with him.

He would have to get in touch with Gaskell. The man was forming a syndicate to take over the small one, his brother formerly operated. He wasn’t sure how big or how strong they were planning to become. From all accounts, the man was broke, so it must be his partners, who were funding the syndicate. He would have to strike a deal with them. He had heard about Ken Stone and his contacts up in Miami and New York. Rumor had it that he and Ruddy Brown were enemies. There were also rumors that he knew more about the business than Brown, which might be an added incentive to teaming up with Burke.

He was nearing Bigs Avenue now, he looked at his watch, it was nearing eight o’clock and he was supposed to reach Bigger’s shack by that time. He had the balance of the money, four hundred dollars in all in a small brown envelope, having already advanced them a similar amount. He drew up beside the shack, switched off the engine and turned off the lights. He opened the car door and got out, taking the envelope with him.

Nearing Bigs Avenue, Delbert Wood heard a barrage of gunshots and wondered if they would be too late to save Lex Malcolm? He turned on to Bigs Avenue and saw a car speeding up the avenue and accelerated his car, he looked over on the other side of the road where some women had gathered. That must be the car with the killers he thought and that was the crime scene.

He slowed to a crawl when he heard a siren and a police car came screaming up the avenue. Wood stopped his car as the police car came up and went over to the crime scene and a Sergeant and two Constables jumped out.

Wood recognized the Sergeant. He was Donald Reid; they had served a year in Linstead along with Bendo.

“Donald, take care of the crime scene for us, we’re going after them,” he shouted and sped off.

They caught up with Pennant and Duffus on Red Hills Road.

“They’re turning on Washington Boulevard,” one of the Element men in the back of the car said.

“We’re not putting on our siren, we’re just going to follow and try to capture them. I think there are two of them in the car, have your guns ready just in case,” Wood instructed the Element men.

They followed them from Washington Boulevard to Spanish Town Road. Nearing the Ferry Crossing, Pennant switched over into the left lane.

“They’re turning, it looks as if it’s the Dyke Road they’re going on,” Wood stated.

Pennant and Duffus went across a bridge and turned on to the Dyke Road.

“That car is following us, I think it is a police car,” Duffus warned.

“We’re going to drive down to Independence City and come back this way. If they’re still following us, we’re going to open fire on them,” Pennant told him.

They had driven half-a-kilometer on the Dyke Road.

“They’re still following us, fire some shots at them, Duffus,” Pennant instructed.

Duffus pointed the gun out of the window and fired at the car tires but missed.

The policemen returned the fire. Pennant stopped the car and he and Duffus jumped out and ran into the bushes, each going in the opposite direction.

Duffus had jumped into a grove of trees and was firing his gun. He saw a policeman show his head and he fired but missed. Then he heard a voice behind him say.

“Drop the gun if you don’t want to die.”

Realizing that he stood no chance, he let the gun fall from his hand.

He was immediately handcuffed by one of the two policemen.

Pennant had run into some bushes and he and Wood traded bullets.

He got up and jumped into a gully with Wood and the other Element operative in hot pursuit. From a kneeling position in the gully Pennant fired at Wood, who returned the fire, hitting him in his left side. The other policeman opened up on him. He was hit in the head and left breast and collapsed in the gully. Both policemen waved to their colleagues as they approached the mortally wounded man. The four men were able to bring him up to the top of the road from where they radioed for an ambulance.

Chapter Fourteen

On Monday night King met his partners in Ridley Squire's bar. They had ordered drinks and were sitting in the back room as usual.

King took a sip of his rum and milk.

"Lex's dead. I don't know what he was trying to do. I heard that the police killed one of his attackers and captured the other one."

"The police didn't give out their identities?" G.C asked.

"All the police said was that they are still investigating," Brad replied. "But it's a move he made against Mc Creed and it backfired on him."

"The funeral will be next week Thursday. His wife called me. She told me that she intends to sell out the business and then migrate," King told them.

"After what happened, I can't say I disagree with her, if the man had only listened to us. It's a good thing they don't have any children. So how did it go, Brad?" G.C inquired.

"It went well, I used some city men," Brad said in response to G.C.

"That's how I like it, we take out anybody this time?" he asked.

"We knocked out one man and tied him up, it looks as if it was his field," Brad replied. "We got a good amount."

"The guy who's arranging the shipment for us, says we will have to wait. I think he's getting scared," King told them.

Brad drank some more of his rum and orange juice.

"If he can't do it, we'll have to get somebody else. Pity Lex isn't around anymore, he had a lot of contacts on the ports. I'll try to contact one of them."

Jack drank some of his white wine.

"Good if you could do that, Brad. Anyway, it's a good blow we give the guy and we have a lot more to give him."

"I would like to attend Lex's funeral, but I'm not sure that Mc Creed's fighters won't be around waiting on me to show up," Brad stated.

"I'll be going so I'll represent the syndicate," King told him.

Brad was a very relieved man knowing that he would be represented at his friend's funeral.

"On Tuesday we're going to raid one of his fields down at Plum Valley in St. Catherine," he stated.

"How soon are we going to get down those other drying machines, G.C?" Jack asked.

"I spoke to Ruddy the other night. He was pleased with what we're doing. He knows some of the people, who make them and he's going to get in touch with them. He says that anytime we're ready, we can start. He can get a plane down here anytime. He knows the right people, who have the money," G.C declared.

"You get the markets for us through Ruddy, G.C. I know him, damn smart boy. I can't understand why he's not making it over there," King wondered out aloud.

"He's the wild type. He has to earn a lot of money to support the large number of women he has," G.C replied.

"Is he coming down here?" Jack asked.

"You know that it was Mc Creed's men, who shot him. He's not afraid of them though. He says he knows somebody, who's willing to lend him a gun to use when he comes out here," G.C replied.

“I hope that all of you have your guns on you if it’s even to carry one of those guys with you,” King told them.

“I got one to rent, if anyone of them come after me, I am going to empty it out in him,” G.C threatened.

“You can bet that they took away Lex’s gun after they shot him,” King opined.

Jack yawned.

“I’m feeling sleepy,” he stated.

“It’s time we leave, I’ll contact you about our next meeting,” King told them.

They all stood up and filed out of the room to their respective cars.

Ruddy debated the idea of coming to Jamaica for several days. It wasn’t that he was afraid of Mc Creed; it was the feasibility of the trip. King had told G.C to tell him to come. He would have to borrow a gun when he got there, as he didn’t believe that he could provide him with any type of security. G. C had painted a rosy picture, but it could never be, not if Mc Creed was still alive. Something else was on his mind, thus his need for a gun. He had heard that Ken Stone was saying that he didn’t want to come to Jamaica because he was afraid of encountering him down there. He felt that the man was jealous of him because of the life he lived, while he had to be scraping around to make ends meet.

Lately, though everything had gone wrong for him. He had lost most of his entertainers to more powerful organizations. His bank balance had taken a plunge. He couldn’t go to the big scenes any longer. His creditors had all but declared him bankrupt. The Colombians, Mafioso and other Latino groups were controlling the drug market so there wasn’t much for him there. He decided he would go to Jamaica, avoid Mc Creed’s men and see what G.C and his friends had to offer. If he didn’t like it, he could always return to the States and forget about them. If he met Ken he would show him which one of them was braver. He wouldn’t be taking any of his Miami women with him.

He put through two calls, one to G.C to tell him that he was on his way. Of course he wouldn’t be able to meet him at the airport, as he wasn’t sure that they wouldn’t be spotted. The other call was to one of his women, whom he knew would be overjoyed to accommodate him on his short stay in Jamaica.

So then on Wednesday evening a tall man of good physical stature, handsome and well dressed, stepped out of the Air Jamaica jet, collected his baggage, went through immigration and customs and was hugged and kissed by a stunningly beautiful girl.

“Ruddy, I’m so glad to see you. When you called me last night I felt so glad knowing that I was going to see you again.”

“What’s going on, girl? Every day I think about you. I don’t think I can stay so long without you again.”

“You have so many women over there that you don’t even remember me.”

“A lot of them are after me, yes, I won’t deny that. But it’s you alone I’m interested in, so they can go on wasting their time.”

They were coming towards her Honda Prelude motor car now.

“See my car here, Ruddy, you drive. I’ll give you the directions to my apartment. It’s off Constant Spring Road. You don’t even know that I’ve moved from Portmore.”

They had driven to her apartment. There he had a hot bath and then dinner under candle lights. You had to give it to Donnette; she knew how to look after a man. They had then gone to a cabaret show at the Drummond Court hotel on Old Hope Road. When they returned, they had made love after which both of them had dropped off to sleep. When he woke up she had gone to her work at the bank.

He took a bath, then ate the breakfast, she had left for him. He phoned her about using her car and she told him to take a taxi down for it.

In a small back room of Angella's sports bar on Dunrobin Avenue, five men sat having drinks. They were Danny King, Brad Elliot, Jack Marriot, G.C. Cox and Ruddy Brown.

It was Ruddy's first meeting with King's syndicate.

"I have people calling me every day about the stuff I used to supply them. When I tell them that my supplies have been cut off they don't believe me. They think I'm trying to pull a fast one on them," Ruddy said to his eager listeners.

"Good to hear you, Ruddy. What we want is ready cash to build this organization. That's why we sent for you. You get the stuff sold for us over there or get the contacts to come for it and pay us on the spot," King stated.

"You'll get the ready cash, King and no bad money. Once I can guarantee the stuff, my friends don't need anything more than that," Ruddy boasted.

"Could have kept myself afloat meddling in the South American and South East Asian stuff, but I didn't want to spoil the reputation that Jamaican weed gave me. Now you guys are giving me another chance and I intend to grab it with both hands," he continued.

"We'll guarantee you a good fee for each of our shipments," King told him.

"That's okay by me; tell me how do you stand security wise? Will the police bother our planes? Will you let them know that our airstrips aren't to be touched? My people might not want to come unless their safety can be guaranteed."

"As soon as things begin to roll we'll put a few influential policemen on our payroll," King stated.

"Better put them on before it's too late. I know these guys out here. It's going to take a lot of money for them to look in the other direction," Jack opined.

"About how soon can Ruddy tell his people to come for the stuff?" G.C asked.

Brad took the cigarette from his lips.

"About next week Saturday. We should have enough ready for shipment," he replied.

"We have thousands of pounds of the stuff down at the warehouse. We could let one or two of your people handle it. As from next week we'll have to begin finding buyers fast because my men will be hitting his fields at least three times a week," he continued.

"Are your boys good, Brad?" Ruddy asked. "Understand that the first set were shot up. Two died and two are still in hospital."

"Those were country boys, we're using city men now," King replied.

"Good, good," Ruddy replied. "Hope you cover your tracks well, Brad."

"Even though they nearly wiped out the first set, they weren't going to squeal on us. I'm one hundred percent certain the two injured youths don't know who hired them," King replied.

G.C started to bow his head. Brad looked at his watch.

"It's after ten," Ruddy said. "I think I'll better be going."

"Yeah, it's about time. I'll phone you men to let you know when's the next meeting," King said as they all got up and filed out of the room.

Ardez sat around a table in his shack with Grosset, Premba and Rattigan.

“The police killed Pennant and captured Duffus. Last night some men went into Alton’s weed field, knocked him out, tied him up and then stole his weed,” he reported.

The men sat with heads bowed.

“We might have to go down there to chop and shoot some more of those guys,” Ardez threatened.

“Since we killed Lex, I thought the poaching would have stopped, but it seems to be continuing,” Grosset remarked.

“I feel it’s that guy, Brad, who’s behind it. If we could capture him, we would make him tell us about their whole set up,” Ardez declared.

“He has disappeared, but his business is still operating. I feel that it’s he and some more men who’ve teamed up to fight against us,” Premba opined.

“I’m going to send some men from the camp to go on patrol with some of the growers,” Ardez explained.

“That sounds good to me,” Grosset stated.

“Where’ll our bases be?” he asked.

“Rattigan’s drafting up a timetable, which will show the group’s base on the night they’re operating. More than one group won’t be leaving here at the same time,” Ardez explained.

“Just collect your time tables from me in the morning,” he finished.

Premba stood up.

“Some men are really stubborn. It looks like they want us to come down there to shoot up the place again.”

“If we catch any of them, we might have to bring them up here just to show their friends how we really deal with people, who fool around us. We might just go after those two youths and make sure they are dead, this time around,” Ardez stated.

“We might do that, yes,” Premba replied as they filed out of the room.

Gus McCreed was worried; somebody was after his business. They had only used the stupid Lex Malcolm as a front. Since all of his enemies were dead, destroyed or exiled, it had to be somebody new. Probably somebody with overseas contacts, who wasn’t prepared to plant, only to reap. Such a person or organization he would have to destroy. If it came to a war he was prepared to lead his fighters into it.

He had to pay the medical bills of the two growers, who had been beaten up. These were heavy strains on his resources. He hoped that the plans they had formulated, would stop the poachers in their tracks.

He had to buy two more dogs to replace Polo and Roxy. The killers must have shot them before they jumped the gate for those dogs wouldn’t have given them a chance.

So Brad was still alive and had virtually vanished. His house had been stripped by both the Wareikans and thieves from the area. His small auto-parts business was still operating, however.

If he was found, then he would provide the lead they needed. But the gang had just about exhausted their search for his possible whereabouts. So Ardez had changed the shoot on sight orders to capture and bring to the camp.

Finding such an elusive person would depend on luck.

It was getting dark. He felt for a night on the town. The Outer Edge would be ideal. He picked up the phone.

Delbert Wood drove through the light afternoon traffic for his rendezvous with Bendoo. He parked his car in one of the parking lots of the Garden Terrace beer joint on Molyne's Road.

Bendoo was waiting for him, as it was mid-afternoon the place was quite scanty. The undercover man was already sipping a stout and he ordered a malt beverage for Wood.

"We can't get a word out of the guy we captured."

He was surprised by the large growth of beard the undercover man had grown since the last time he had seen him.

"Don't worry yourself, he'll soon talk. We can hold him for Lex's murder," Bendoo told him as he took a seat.

"Are you sure you weren't followed here?" Wood asked.

"I came down to go to Jones Town. I told them that I have a girlfriend down there. I stopped a couple of times to see if they were following me but I didn't see anybody. They trust me as one of the gang now. I've taken part in nearly all of their operations since I've gone up there."

"So you told me already, but the Minister is worried. He's under a lot of pressure from the Prime Minister. He wouldn't mind if everything could keep on the level so he wants us to move faster."

"As soon as I get to know the boss, I can wrap up this operation. But it's hard work, Rattigan insists that when we aren't operational we go into training. I can hardly get time to come and give you a report."

"How soon will you get to know the boss?"

"About next week, he has a big meeting with Ardez and the other commanders. They want me to go too, so you can see that they trust me."

"Are you sure it's not a trap? Remember, it's two of their men they've lost since you've been up there, plus we've captured two of them too."

"You got anything out of Indian?"

"He doesn't want to talk, but we have charges, we can book him on."

"See the weed here," Wood said, handing Bendoo a paper-bag of marijuana, which the latter stuffed into his travelling bag and stood up.

"I'll see you, Woody, maybe in another week or so to update you on any new developments."

"Sure, I'll be waiting," Wood said as the two men shook hands and went their separate ways.

He took a bus to Half Way Tree and then another over to Rockfort.

Premba's visit to St. Ann on Friday night had proved fruitless. It couldn't prevent one of the grower's fields from being reaped.

On Monday night some heavily armed growers were on a routine patrol of fields in the area when they came upon the reaped field.

Talbot, the grower, looked at the empty land in total disbelief.

"The damn thieves stole my weed," he cried out.

The others were speechless. Only a few days ago Talbot had been boasting that he would soon be ready to reap his field.

On Tuesday morning McCreed got Ardez's call that Talbot's marijuana field had been poached. Slowly he was being pushed into a fight, he thought. Somebody wanted to give him hell; well they would get more than they had bargained for. Fred Billings hadn't yet gone to the office. He came into the living room where McCreed was.

"They reaped another of our fields," he told him. He looked downcast.

“What the hell are you saying, another poaching? This is getting out of hand,” Fred declared.

He poured some orange juice into a glass, took a swallow and looked at Fred.

“We worked out a plan to trap them. If it succeeds that should take care of them.”

He explained the plan to Fred.

“It sounds good, but I’d like to see us capture their leaders and take them up there and really work them over.”

Mc Creed paused before replying.

“That’s what we plan to do.”

Fred stood up.

“I have to run as I’m late already. I’m just going to eat a sandwich,” he said, hurrying off into the kitchen.

“Tell Caslyn to make an omelet for me,” Gus shouted over his shoulder.

“I’ll do that.”

Danny King looked at the shapely figure of his wife. Betsy had kept her figure down the years. At fifty she could pass for a woman fifteen years her junior. He was glad for her, she had given him a challenge and he had lived up to it. After all it was now twenty six years since they were married and while he had a couple of extramarital affairs with a few women, he was sure she had never been unfaithful to her marriage vows. Now their marriage was facing a crisis and he was not sure he knew how to deal with it.

“Betsy, I didn’t hear what you were saying last night. Are you thinking of going to live in the States?”

“I’m planning to spend some time with the children. Danny, I’m going to stay with Gail until I’m ready to return home.”

Gail was the last of the their three children. The two boys were engineers. They came home to visit their parents regularly. It seemed surprising that King should be fighting to get a piece of the drug trade again. But his underlying ambition was to destroy McCreed.

“So how long do you intend to stay over there?”

“Danny, I don’t know why you have somebody like G. C coming here. I just feel that you’re going to get yourself in trouble again. I just don’t want to be here when any police or gunmen come to look for you.”

“I’m running a legitimate business, and you know that too. G.C is one of my long time friends. If you don’t want him to come here I can always stop him.”

“Danny, ever since Lex was killed, I’ve been worrying about you. One of my friends told me that he had run away, leaving his house. Mary was running the business. Now that he’s dead, she’ll have to give back the people their clothes. She told me that she’s selling out the business and going away and I don’t blame her. Danny, are you not satisfied with what you have, what more do you want? My friend says she was surprised to hear that he was dead because she thought that he was in the States. I understand that Brad has also run away, leaving his house. I understand one of his employees is operating his business for him. Both of them were coming here nearly every day.”

“So they used to come here, but they used to go to lots of other places too. What else do you see me doing except running my business?”

“Okay,” she replied. “G.C isn’t just down here on vacation?”

“What G.C does is his business and I don’t want to hear anymore.”

Betsy stormed away to her room, crying.

Just then a car drove up to the gate and immediately his two Alsatians were beside it howling in fury. The gate lights were on. From the patio King could see the car, but couldn't make out the driver. He went out to the gate cautiously.

It was Ruddy Brown; he got out of his car.

"King, what's going on? I thought I would just come by you to see how you're doing," he said as he closed the car door. King had the dogs under control as they came through the gate, sniffing at the stranger.

"Come in, Ruddy, the dogs won't trouble you. The bad ones are locked up."

King waited until Ruddy went through the grill door and onto the patio before he let the dogs go.

"You want a drink, Ruddy?"

"Sure, give me a cold beer."

King took some white wine and the two men sat on the patio.

"I like your ranch, King."

"It took me a lot of years to build and lots of money too," King replied as he switched on the patio lights.

Ruddy took a long drink of his beer. He had heard that King had a fabulous wife and he was hoping to meet her.

"I want to set up myself in Jamaica, settle down and start a family. Out here the people are natural. In America, they're too artificial. I'm not getting any younger, so I might just call it a day anytime now."

"You can't do that yet, Ruddy. We still want you to work on the Miami part of our operations."

"Give me about two weeks or so and I'll have all the contacts you're going to need, so that's no problem."

"We still have the McCreed problem to deal with."

"G.C told you that I got something to borrow. If I see any of those guys, who shot me, you know what I'm going to do. I have it in my pouch."

He patted the pouch.

"Don't worry yourself, we're going to get rid of that son of a bitch sooner than you think."

Ruddy acted as if he didn't hear.

"King, I guess you know Ken Stone. I hear that he's in Miami, issuing threats about what he's going to do to me if we ever meet up, out here."

"What's the problem between both of you?"

"To cut a long story short, his parents used to help me out. You know how it is in Kingston sometimes. Well, that guy wants me to finance him and his parents. I give them money sometimes, but not him. Because of that, he's saying that I am disrespecting him. Now he's spreading all sorts of rumors about me."

"You'd better watch yourself, because Ken won't be afraid to draw his gun on you."

"I want to tell him that I'm not afraid to draw my gun too, so anytime he's ready, he can come."

"So when are you returning?"

"I'm staying until next week with one of my girlfriends, but my money has run out. I'm looking a small loan, say about three hundred dollars. I don't want her to feel that I don't have any money."

King whistled.

"That's a lot of money, are you sure you can use it off before you leave?"

“I have a few things to buy before I go up plus I want to buy some things for my girlfriend.”

“You want a check or cash?”

“I’ll take cash because I don’t have a bank account out here so I might have problems changing a check.”

“I don’t have that kind of money on me now, but you can check me at my office in the morning.”

“Are you crazy? When I was coming here I had to stop a couple of times to make sure that nobody was trailing me. I don’t trust Mc Creed. Are you sure that they aren’t watching your office?”

King considered for a moment.

“Come and check me here tomorrow for it then,” he told him.

“Yes, that’s cool,” Ruddy replied as Betsy King came to the doorway and couldn’t help noticing the neatly dressed man. She thought that he was in his mid thirties.

King rose.

“Ruddy, meet my wife, Betsy. This is Ruddy Brown, I’m sure you’ve heard about him.”

“How are you, Mrs. King?” Ruddy asked, standing up and shaking her hand.

“I’m fine.”

“So which group are you bringing down this Independence?” she asked.

Ruddy sat down again.

“I’m trying to get the Chentelles, so if I get them will I see both of you there?”

“Danny and I are at most of those, events though I have to drag him most times.”

“Is that true, King?”

“Lately, maybe, things aren’t what they were like in the old days.”

“Yeah, I can tell you about that,” Ruddy remarked

“Anyway, that’s how I like to see people enjoy themselves,” he continued.

“I’m going back inside to look on those kids,” Betsy said, referring to her two nieces, who were spending the week with her.

“Okay, Mrs. King, some other time,” Ruddy waved as Betsy returned inside.

“King, you’ve made it already. Why don’t you just take it easy?”

“What McCreed did to me will never let me rest in peace until I see him under six feet of earth. I just want to get even with him. Another man I must kill is Dickson Lunan. I blame him for everything that happened to me.”

Ruddy was nodding in acknowledgement of what the man had just said.

“I can understand your feelings. I’ll call you tomorrow before I come for the loan. I’m going now, say goodbye to your wife for me.”

King saw him to the gate.

All that G.C had said about Betsy was true. She must be in her early fifties he guessed, but she could pass for a much younger woman. He would come early tomorrow evening to pick up the money and do some serious flirting with her.

Chapter Fifteen

Ken Stone, Wally, Burke and Benny were having their second meeting upstairs Danville's bar.

"Everything's set up for the guys, I've told them that they must pay their fighters so that they can turn against their boss," Burke declared.

"Those men are some jokers. I heard that that guy, Ruddy Brown, is their contact man in Miami. He doesn't know anything about the business," Ken stated.

"We're not going into anything with them, Ken. Jack was telling me that Lex hired some guys to take out McCreed but some of them got taken out and Lex himself too," Burke told them.

"That's what I've been telling you, the bigger the man, the more you have to plan for his downfall. That's why we have to use those two guys I've been telling you about," Ken stated.

"Ruddy Brown is a guy, my family used to help when we lived in Kingston. I saw him in Miami pretending that he doesn't know me. He doesn't have any more money or girls than me. I've let it be known that if he knows what's good for him, he'd better not let me meet up with him anywhere out here.

"I hear that he's broke, he doesn't have any money to promote any shows. They'll soon seize his house and his car too. I know the girl, who he's with out here. She'll soon dump him when she finds out that he's broke."

Burke looked at them.

"He's out here, though? Jack and Brad want to try something, but they're waiting to see what McCreed's up to."

"You'd better get ready guys because things will soon start to fall in place. As I said before, we aren't waiting on anybody," he warned as a waitress appeared with snacks and drinks.

The men did some more talking while eating their snacks with Burke telling them that he had done some repairs to the old house in which some guns were stored.

The meeting ended at eleven o'clock that night with Ken going to sleep with a woman at Eight Miles. Burke returned home while Wally and Benny caught late flights home.

The Wareika gang was about to reap its first success in its attempts to catch the poachers. Premba's group had accompanied a grower, Jacob White, to his field. They made a stealthy approach to the field and from their vantage point they could see that it was being reaped.

"The blasted thieves!" Premba exclaimed.

"Let's kill them," Jacob demanded, drawing his gun.

"The boss wants us to wait and find out the destination of the truck. This might give us a chance to find out who's behind this whole set up," Premba stated.

"But I'm going to lose my crop."

"When we shot up those guys, who had beaten up Pinchie and Evert, we thought that it was just Lex alone. Now he's dead and the poaching is still continuing. Right now we believe that there are some more men out there fighting against us and we have to find them and deal with them," Premba explained.

Jacob was far from convinced.

"I can't let those guys steal my weed like that, Premba. I have to do something about it. I can't lose my weed like that. I will go stone broke after this. They are going to destroy all of my other crops."

Bendoo tried to persuade Jacob.

“Jacob, this is the first lead we’ve got on the gang. They want to take over from the boss and bring in different people to grow the weed. All of the growers will be killed if we don’t wipe out these men.”

There was silence as Jacob lapsed into deep thought.

A strong gust of breeze hit the trees, making them sway.

“No smoking, I believe that they have a lookout so we’d better watch out,” Premba warned. Shower and Chaser sat themselves down on a dried tree trunk. Bendoo, Premba and Jacob soon joined them.

“They must have hidden their car somewhere,” Bendoo observed. “We never saw it when we were coming in.”

“Don’t worry about their car; it’s the truck we’re interested in. When it comes and leaves with the weed we’ll follow and see where it goes. This might give us a chance to find out who’s behind this setup,” Premba explained.

“Bendoo,” he instructed. “Go and hide the car.”

He gave him the car keys whereupon the latter departed. Bendoo found a spot on a dirt track off the main road to park their car. He came out of the car, locked it up and lit a cigarette. He doused it, remembering Premba’s warning. Then he stood in the darkness and fingered the gun in his pocket.

He knew that if they followed the truck when it came, they might get a chance to break up the opposing syndicate. If they hadn’t gotten rid of the poached weed then their warehouse must be full. He would have to tell Wood about it for him to organize a raid. With that, he trudged back to where Premba and the others were.

“You saw anything suspicious?” Premba asked.

“No, I parked the car in a safe spot so that nobody can see it from the road.”

“Good,” Premba stated. “There are only four of them down there and they’re working very fast.”

“I bet that the truck will come in tonight and maybe pull out in the morning,” Shower speculated.

“I’m not so sure,” Premba replied. “They won’t risk transporting it by day, I feel that it’s tomorrow night they’ll be coming for it. That means that we have to watch all night.”

“Are you returning to your home or are you staying to watch with us?” Premba asked the bearded marijuana farmer.

“I’m staying, if it comes to a fight I’m in it.”

“That’s what I want to hear. Bendoo you, Shower and Chaser sleep until two o’clock, then you can take over from me and Jacob,” Premba instructed.

Bendoo slept his quota and then took over along with Shower and Chaser to watch. The poachers had ceased their activities and had gone to sleep; though it was possible they had taken turns watching and sleeping.

At six in the morning they came off their shift. Jacob departed for food and water. The poachers could be seen putting together a fire on which to cook their breakfast.

“These guys are well organized, this doesn’t look like a hit and run operation to me,” Bendoo remarked.

“We’ll soon find out,” Premba told them.

Hunger was beginning to gnaw at their stomachs when Jacob returned with a bucket of water, a basket of food and a large thermos. The men used the water to wash their hands and faces, then sat in the grove of trees and wolfed down the food.

By this time the poachers had also eaten and were again at the marijuana plants with their machetes. One man was now bagging the stuff.

In the grove of trees, Premba's group was cut off from the poachers' view by a range of hills. They couldn't be outflanked because Chaser was higher up with a view of the road, the poachers as well as his colleagues. Jacob was positioned with a view of the poachers' lookout and of Chaser. As they were working the men kept a grim silence.

By midday the poachers had finished reaping Jacob's marijuana field. They then took a break to cook some more food. Jacob, his head hung low, departed for his home to get some more food, whereupon Bendo took up his position.

After they had eaten, they re-took their positions to watch the poachers complete the bagging of their colleague's weed. Having completed their tasks, the poachers went to sleep on the bags.

It wasn't until after ten o'clock that the poachers began moving out the weed. In all there were twenty bags so each man would have to make five trips.

The truck didn't arrive until twelve o'clock. From their vantage point the Wareikans observed the men packing the bags into the truck and covering them with a tarpaulin.

Two of the poachers went in search of their car while the other two went with the truck. When the truck drove off, the car was behind it. Premba's men came out of hiding and made for their car. They were able to keep a safe distance as the truck took the main highway linking the North Coast to Kingston.

The truck and car arrived at a building on Collins Avenue. One of the truck workers got out and opened the gate for it to be reversed inside.

Premba had gotten the lead he wanted and Ardez was briefed early that morning. He detailed a twenty-four-hour surveillance of the building.

By Thursday they were able to rent an adjoining building for the purposes of a warehouse. The patrols would now move from the country to Collins Avenue.

Premba's group was again the first to taste success. They were on the six o'clock to two o'clock shift when a car drove up to the gate and stopped. Two men got out, opened the gate and went inside the premises. Bendo wasn't with the group this time, which included Premba, Dally and Shower.

As the two men went inside, a young man came out of the house scowling. He talked to the visitors for a few seconds before they went inside the building.

Premba put down the binoculars.

"I recognize both of those men."

"That short guy's Brad Elliot and the tall one is Ruddy Brown. He's a playboy, has women all over the Caribbean."

The guard's manner never changed, he was still scowling and looking around.

"Hey, isn't that Churchill?" Shower asked of the guard he was looking at through the binoculars.

Premba took the instrument from him.

"It's him all right," Premba said, returning the binoculars to Shower just as Churchill went inside, closing the door behind him.

"Hey, he's working for them, wonder if Errol is down there too," Premba said, pointing the gun in the man's direction.

"I have to obey the boss' orders, that's why I didn't shoot him."

They had been at a dance when Churchill and some more of Aston Lecky's gunmen had suddenly showed up, guns blazing. In the ensuing shootout Premba had received a slight wound, but Delgo, a member of their gang, had been killed. Premba had shot at Churchill, but missed as they disappeared on their motorcycles.

"The boss will be interested to know that Ruddy Brown is back on the island and Mister Brad is mixed up in stealing our weed too," Premba said.

"Lecky's dead, I wonder who Churchill is working for these days," he declared.

"What do we do now?" Shower asked.

"We wait until they come out and then follow them. They might lead us to the rest of their syndicate," Premba replied.

Unaware of being under surveillance the two men went about their business.

"We hardly have space here for more, Brad," Ruddy remarked.

"Last week's raid was the last we plan until we get the new warehouse on Jackson Road."

They were examining the dryers, which heated up the storeroom to dry the plants.

"I heard that you guys are recruiting some more fighters," Ruddy remarked.

"We have to do that in case we get into a war with McCreed," Brad replied.

Ruddy nodded in acknowledgement.

"King isn't serious, if we don't attack McCreed he's going to think that we're soft," he added.

"That's what we plan to do once we sell some of the weed and get some money," Brad stated. They had just finished inspecting the major storeroom. Ruddy stuffed some of the marijuana in a paper bag he was carrying.

"Time we leave," Brad said. "I have to take my wife to the doctor about two o'clock today."

Churchill closed the door behind them and they went to Brad's car and drove away. Premba came down and started their car, the others piling in.

They followed the car now being driven by Brad to Constant Spring Road where Ruddy got out. Dally was let out to locate his apartment.

They caught up with Brad at the stoplight at the corner of Waterworks Road and Constant Spring Road. Then they trailed him to where he was staying in Port Maria.

Gus McCreed got the call that the organization was about to be exposed. He immediately called for a conference of his lieutenants in the back room of Mac's bar and restaurant in Cross Roads. The owner, John McKenzie, had known Gus for years and could do with the income from these informal gatherings. The meeting started at seven o'clock and Bendoo went along with the other commanders.

"That was some good work you did, Premba. Now that we found them, it's just a matter of time before we wipe them out," McCreed stated. He and Fred had already congratulated Bendoo for the fine job he was doing.

"We saw one of that fucker, Lecky, boys down there," Premba told them.

"We wiped Lecky of the map, didn't we?" McCreed boasted.

"We know that at least two of them are involved, boss. The place on Collins Avenue is where they store the weed. Once we wipe out those guys, we can always reclaim it," Ardez declared.

"Are those guys guarded?" Fred asked.

"I didn't see anybody with them and the place seems almost deserted except for one guard, who appears to sleep on the premises," Premba replied.

“I gave Ruddy a chance to run away to the States and now he’s returned to fight against me. Well, I’m not giving anybody a second chance. As for Brad Elliot, he should have been dead a long time ago.”

Bendoo digested every word the big, bald head giant was saying. He didn’t try to look Fred Billings in the eyes, fearing that the man might recognize him from their chance encounter up in Stony Hill. He hoped that his large beard and his knotty hair would help disguise him.

“I want those two put under twenty-four hour surveillance. Until they lead us to the rest of the syndicate, they’re safe, but once we find out where the rest of them are, we’re going to wipe out all of them.”

“There are two men I’m suspicious about. Both of them are friends of Ruddy Brown and Brad Elliot.”

“Who are they, boss?” Ardez asked.

“Jack Marriot and G.C. Cox.”

“I can’t believe that G.C came back to Jamaica without us knowing. We’ll check up on both of them and see if they are involved,” Ardez stated.

Fred looked at his watch.

“It’s eight o’clock; I have to drop off something at Johanna’s apartment. I’ll be seeing you guys.”

“I don’t think I have anything more to say. Say hello to Johanna for me, Fred,” Gus said as Fred Billings departed.

“Ardez, you put our plans into action and let me know the results.”

He and the other commanders walked out of the room to their cars.

Ruddy had driven Donnette’s car down to the nearby petrol service station on Constant Spring Road to buy some petrol and fill her car tires. He finished and was driving into a side road to get back on to Constant Spring Road. As he looked out of the car he saw a man two inches or so taller than him, standing beside a rental car, it was Ken. He drove and parked on the sidewalk and got out of the car.

As he came out of the car he heard Ken say.

“Hey, Ruddy Brown, I hear that you’re up in Miami calling up my name. You said that I want you to buy me liquor and give my parents money.”

Ruddy’s gun was in his pocket. Ken had his gun in his waist.

“I hear that you’re out here saying what you’re going to do to me when we meet.”

“Did I ever beg you anything yet? How come you’re spreading rumors about me? Saying that I don’t have anything and how I am mashed up.”

“So you aren’t up there spreading rumors about me too?”

“You’re a liar,” Ken shouted and chucked Ruddy, who chucked him back.

The two men were backing away from each other in an attempt to go for their guns. Some drivers, who had parked and were watching the fracas rushed up when they realized what was about to happen. They got between the two men as Ken shouted.

“I’ve been wanting to do you something for some time.”

But he realized that he would have hit one of those innocent bystanders.

The gas station proprietor realizing the danger of a gunfight so close to his gas station shouted at them.

“We don’t want any gunfights here.”

He rushed inside to call the police.

Meanwhile the two combatants, realizing that the fight was over, returned to their respective car.

“I’ll catch you again, Ruddy. You think you got away? You’re just lucky,” Ken shouted and drove off.

“You can go on talking, I’m sorry these people had to part us,” Ruddy yelled defiantly after him as he too drove off.

Chapter Sixteen

Ruddy took a sip of the whiskey and relaxed at his table, the incident with Ken earlier today completely forgotten. He knew, however, that the next time they met out here, they would be shooting it out, so he had better go armed from now on. For a Friday night the Outer Edge wasn't as crowded as he had known it to be in former years. Nevertheless, he still rated it as the number one nightclub on Red Hills Road. Donnette was in the bathroom freshening up her make-up.

In the late afternoon he and Betsy King had lunch at the Blue Seasons restaurant on Melmac Avenue in Cross Roads. She told him that this was the first time she was dating another man besides her husband. She also told him that her secret in looking so young and sexy was lots of exercise plus she ate no red meat and slept a lot. She told him of her intention to leave King and join her daughter in Cayman. He told her that he was due to visit there in another six weeks or so. She had given him her daughter's address and telephone number.

He looked at the door to see a stunningly beautiful girl on a man's arm just floating through the doorway. He recognized the man as Fred Billings, the woman was Johanna McFarlane. She had won some beauty contest, but he wasn't sure what it was or the year.

Rumor had it that it was another beauty queen Fred had gotten into that fight over. Then a big bald head man came through the door with a woman. Gus McCreed! What would he give to put a bullet into that fucker's heart, he thought? McCreed and the woman came and sat down at the table with Fred and his girlfriend. Several persons whom he assumed to be foreigners, were also in the crowd that was now simply pouring into the Outer Edge. A girl was coming towards his table; it was Marie Deslandes.

She had on a pair of white shorts and matching white blouse. He couldn't help but admire her beautiful legs, round hips and firm breasts.

"Ruddy, it's been a long time since I've seen you. When did you come out?"

"Marie, what's going on? I've wanted to call you, but it seems I lost your number," he said, standing up and seating her.

"Are you alone? One of my friends is looking for a date."

"I'm here with Donnette, but give me your number again and I'll give you a call before I leave the island. Give me your friend's number too."

The voluptuous girl took out a piece of paper, wrote down the numbers and gave them to him.

"I have to go now, my boyfriend must be wondering what happened to me."

She got up and walked away.

He took some more sips of the whisky, then he spied Donnette coming towards their table. He noticed several men turning to gawk at her and smiled at his luck.

She was dressed in a pair of blue shorts and had on a body hugging blue blouse.

"What took you so long, Donnette?"

"I met two of my girlfriends and we stopped to have a chat."

"I ordered the drinks already."

She pushed up her chair and picked up the Canei drink. She took a few sips and took the cigarette, her man offered her.

"Who was that girl I saw you talking to?"

"It's a girl, I know from the country. She just stopped to say hello."

"Oh," she interjected as reggae music began to blast out. Both of them left their table to join other couples on the dance floor.

When they were finished and returned to their table, she looked at him in a concerned way.

“Ruddy, do you know that bald head man over there? He keeps looking over here.”

“That guy over there,” he replied and peered in the direction she mentioned. It was Gus McCreed.

“I don’t know him, maybe it’s you he’s looking at.”

She didn’t reply, but took another sip of her drink.

“Ruddy, you haven’t told me about your plans. We can’t go on like this. I’m twenty-six and you’re twenty-nine. It’s time we start thinking seriously about the future. I’ve met lots of men, who would gladly make me their wife, but I have to turn them down because of you.”

He took a sip of his drink.

“You know I want to make some good money so that we can live comfortably. We don’t have to rush things, baby.”

“I’m not rushing anything but I can’t bother with this long distance relationship. If I don’t call you, you won’t call me.”

“But I’ve already shown you how things are, most of the times I’m on the road. Don’t worry, baby, everything will soon be all right.”

“Every night I miss you, Ruddy. I have to think that you have so many women over there that’s why you don’t want to call me.”

“It seems as if I have to come out here more often.”

“One of these times you’re going to come and find that I’ve gotten married.”

“Sweetie pie, I know that you don’t mean that. I’m sure that you don’t want me to go crazy.”

“Don’t sweetie pie me up. I’m very serious, before you go back, you and I have to come to some understanding. As I told you already, the next time you come out you’re going to have to find a another girlfriend.”

“Anything you want, baby. You know that I’m willing to give you.”

Just then a calypso started playing and both of them joined other couples on the dance floor. They danced two more songs before returning to their table. They were there having drinks when Fred came over and sat down.

“Ruddy, what’s going on? I thought you were still in the States, I’m really glad to see you.”

“I just came out for a little holiday.”

“So what’s happening? Aren’t you going to introduce me to your fiancée’?”

“Sure, Donnette, meet Fred Billings.”

Both of them shook hands as Ruddy finished the introductions.

“You remember Gus McCreed? He’s over there. He wants to talk about what happened to you the last time. We don’t know who could have wanted to do that to you.”

Ruddy looked at him and then over at the big bald head giant and realized the mistake he had made. From the moment he saw McCreed enter the nightclub he should have left.

“What are you saying? You don’t know anything about it? You don’t know who shot me? I don’t have anything to say to Gus McCreed except to use my gun on him.”

“What? Are you threatening us? You want to bet that you don’t leave here tonight,” Fred in turn threatened. He got up and walked away.

She was staring at him.

“Who is he, Ruddy? Why was he threatening you? What do they want with you?”

“I don’t know, they have some artists they want me to promote but I told them that I’m not interested. They still want me to, but they can’t force me.”

“The bald head man is still looking over here.”

**“Let’s leave, this could lead to bigger things and I don’t want you to get hurt.”
He called the waiter and settled the bill. Then they got up and left the club.**

Donnette lay in bed beside a snoring Ruddy. She wanted to know what was going on in his life. He was shot last year supposedly by gunmen or so he claimed.

Was he involved in drugs? She had better find out fast, those two men at the Outer Edge didn’t look like the type of men to mess around with. She would try to get Ken’s number and give him a call. If she called one of Ruddy’s friends he would just gloss it over; it would be better to hear from one of his enemies. She had been meaning to kick him out of her apartment for some time now and throw his things out after him. If she found out he was involved in drugs she wouldn’t let him spend a minute more under her roof.

Ruddy lay in Donnette’s bed in her upscale apartment. It was a Saturday morning and she had gone to classes. She told him she would be stopping by the supermarket to get some groceries for her mother and to bring home, so he didn’t expect her back until early evening. He noticed how withdrawn she was in bed last night. She hardly mentioned anything about what had taken place at the nightclub. They didn’t make love that night for the first time in many nights. Then just as she drove out, the telephone rang. It was Marie Deslandes. During their conversation she told him that she had to be helping out, running her boss’ business as he had to be hiding from gunmen. Although he had memories of their past liaisons he decided against asking her over. He thought of other women he could check, but would have to be careful as Donnette seemed to be watching him by her constant calls to the apartment. Right now he needed a bath so he doused his cigarette in the ashtray, stood up, went and took his bath and put on a sweat suit. He would take a taxi down to the Mall, look around and probably grab a bite. He heard the doorbell ring and wondered who it could be. He went and opened the door and saw two men.

“Are you Ruddy Brown?” one of the men asked. Before he could answer the man had pulled a gun on him!

Desperately, he tried to close the door. The other man kicked him in his knee and as he fell they pushed open the door.

“We never knew that you were here, Ruddy,” Premba told him, pushing himself inside. The other man followed and slammed the door behind him. He had never seen these men before.

“Who the hell are you?”

His own gun was hidden away in a drawer. Could they be McCreed’s gunmen or had King found out about his wife and was seeking revenge?

“Hey, guy, you’d better pack your bags and come with us,” Premba ordered.

“You’d better get out of here, I’m not going anywhere with you.”

Premba looked at Lance, who sprang into action at once. He held a long switch blade knife at the man’s throat.

“If you move I’ll cut your throat,” he warned.

Ruddy saw the futility of struggling. He would stand no chance against these heavily armed men.

“Who sent you?”

“Just pack your bags and don’t ask us any more questions,” Premba warned.

“Start packing,” Lance ordered, the knife still at the playboy’s throat.

Both men accompanied their captive into his bedroom where he began to pack his bags.

The two gunmen had obviously been watching his movements, he thought. He was glad that Donnette wouldn’t be home before five o’clock.

If he could only get his gun he would show these two amateurs something.

Lance and Premba were gazing out of the window when Ruddy's hands closed around the butt of the gun. His fingers caressed the trigger. Slowly he drew it out of the drawer and without aiming, fired at Premba. The bullet tore through his shirt sleeves; startled he dropped his gun. Lance, who was out of the line of fire, reacted instantly by flinging the opened switch blade knife which embedded itself in the shoulder of Ruddy's gun arm before he could fire again. The playboy cried out and dropped the gun. Premba dived for it, spun around and fired from the floor, hitting him in his right side and he fell to the floor.

"Idiot, trying to shoot us," Premba swore, looking down at the wounded man.

"He's not dead, you should let me stab him up some more," Lance argued. He took two steps, bent over and jerked the knife out of the man's shoulder.

"He got the bullet in his side," Premba replied.

"Hey, guy, I should kill you. If you tell the police that it was us, who shoot you, you won't live to come out of the hospital. I don't know how you are so lucky," he said, realizing that they had done a careless job on their victim.

"We have to move, Lance. People might have heard the gunshots and called the police."

"We're going after his friend, G.C next," he told Lance.

Ken was at his woman's house in Linstead that Saturday afternoon. Patsy had gone to the market in the rental car along with Roger, their four-year-old son. He was sitting on the porch smoking a cigarette and observing vehicles going up and down the busy streets when the telephone rang. He went inside to answer it. It was Donnette.

"How did you get my number?"

"A little bird gave me."

"So what's going on? It's a long time since I've seen you or Ruddy. Is everything all right?"

She answered him in the affirmative.

"Ken, I want to ask you about some people. You know Fred Billings or Gus McCreed?"

"Those men are big time gangsters, they run drugs out here. If you want to live don't mess with those people. Is Ruddy in trouble with them?"

"We were at a nightclub and they were threatening him."

"You know that we aren't friends. I'm warning him that if he wants to live, he'd better stop fooling around with those guys."

"Did you know that they shot him in Ocho Rios last year?"

"I heard that it was some gunmen, who were trying to rob him. There's a lot more things I have to tell you."

There was a pause.

"Ken, hold on, don't hang up yet, I'll soon be back."

He heard when she put down the phone.

There was a lot of talking in the background. He went to get a stout out of the refrigerator when she came back on the line. She was crying and sounded hysterical.

"They've shot Ruddy."

"Is he dead?"

"I don't know, I have to leave now to go to the hospital. I'll call you later."

What the hell, he thought. Well, at least they couldn't say that it was he who had done it.

G.C was worried, it was nearly nine-thirty and Ruddy should have called him for them to go down to the Double-Six bar at the top of Hagley Park Road, for a few drinks.

He had gone down to the bar, but there was no sign of the man. He decided to go down to his apartment to check on him. He came down to his car, opened the door and got in and was turning on the ignition when something hard jammed him in the back.

“Make one sound and you are dead. See that car over there you just follow it,” Lance ordered.

“Who the hell are you and how the hell did you get into my car?”

The gun dug deeper into his back, he heard a click and his body tensed.

“I can drop you right here, you want it here? You’d better drive; somebody wants to talk to you.”

G.C knew the futility of attempting anything there and then, and he didn’t even have his gun on him. He started the car and drove off. Who the hell were these men working for? Had King double-crossed him or was McCreed on to him? At least that could account for Ruddy’s no-show. The weak heart fool had tripped himself up and had probably fingered the whole organization.

King, Jack and Brad were about to spend their first night at the warehouse and none of them was showing any liking for it. They had arrived there in a car that the latter man had rented for the week.

Brad had hastily carted off his wife and their three kids to stay with his mother.

“My wife must be wondering where I am and worrying over me.”

“You can say that again, my woman must be wondering if I am at some other woman’s home,” Jack stated.

King reflected that Betsy had left for the Cayman Islands yesterday. He wasn’t sure when she would return.

“You still have a choice guys, you can walk out of here now, but don’t expect any of these guys to follow you.”

“Go to hell, King. Lex was right about you, you don’t have what it takes to be a leader. I don’t know why I ever listened to you. You’re still afraid of McCreed. It’s because of you why G.C and Ruddy both got shot and are in hospital,” Jack said bitterly.

King saw red.

“What are you dealing with, Jack? Are you blaming me for what happen to those two men?”

“The syndicate is finished, King. Brad and I are bringing in Gaskell Burke and some other men. They say they don’t want to work with you.”

“What is he talking about, Brad? Wonder if I am hearing right? The two of you are turning against me?”

“You’re blasted right. If it wasn’t for me, all of us would be dead already. Marie Deslandes, who works for me, phoned to tell me that she had met Ruddy. I was sleeping with her, well, I pressed her and she told me that he was at the Outer Edge on Friday night,” Brad stated.

“I called to tell him to leave her alone. When I didn’t get any answer, I went down to his apartment, forced myself inside and found him on the floor. He was shot in his side and he had lost a lot of blood. I called the police and an ambulance, then I ran out and called both of you.”

“So what happened to G.C?”

“He was shot and pushed out of a car. A passing motorist took him to the hospital. I think it was after they shot Ruddy that they went after him,” Brad replied.

“Are you hiding anything from me?” King asked.

“We aren’t hiding anything from you. We want to make sure that you go and join Betsy and your daughter,” Brad told him.

Just then there was a knock on the door. Brad went and opened it to reveal Dickson Lunan! Lunan’s arrival shocked King into action.

“So that’s how it goes, you damn traitors,” he shouted reaching for the gun in his pocket and shouting for his men to help him.

“What the hell is Dickson Lunan doing here? I swear to God that I’m going to kill him.”

King whipped out his gun and fired at Dickson. The bullet flew past the man’s right ear, but before he could fire again, Jack sprang on him and wrestled him to the floor. Before he could wrestle the gun from him, he fired again kicking up dust at Dickson’s feet. Dickson threw himself on the floor and grabbed the gun away from King.

Brad had in the meantime drawn his gun, but didn’t fire for fear of hitting Jack and now Dickson.

The men came running onto the scene, but no one made any attempt to help their boss.

“You guys take care of these three idiots for me,” he shouted desperately.

Jack stood up, brushing off his clothes, he motioned to the men and two of them came forward to grab King. They then produced rope to tie his hands before setting him in a chair to face his captors.

“We’re dead serious, King. McCreed knows that you’re no match for him. Look how many of our friends have either gotten killed or seriously injured because of your failure to stand up to him. We just can’t let you run the syndicate any longer,” Jack stated.

“Wasn’t it all of us running it? So how come you’re blaming me alone? It’s a trap they set for Ruddy and G.C, it’s not my fault. I told them to watch what they were doing. It’s they who are to blame, not me. Burke and Ken want to join us. Ken has a lot of contacts in the States and he’s better than Ruddy.”

But his words fell on deaf ears.

“Those men don’t want anything to do with you. We and them are going into partnership,” Jack replied.

King chuckled at this.

“The two of you are going into a partnership with Gaskell and you’ve brought in Dickson. It’s a death sentence both of you are looking. If it wasn’t for me, both of you would be dead a long time ago. So cut out the damn foolishness and take these ropes off me.”

Brad looked at him.

“Move from here, King, a car is around the back. We are going to give you your papers. They are made up already and your ticket is bought too. A flight is leaving here at ten o’clock tonight, so that should give you enough time to return home and pick up your things. When you reach the airport, just park the car and we will send one of our men for it. This is your last chance and you’d better take it or else we are going to hand you over to McCreed’s men.”

“You can’t do this to me, this is still my organization.”

“Cut the ropes men, he’s leaving here now because he isn’t worth living,” Jack stated.

The ropes binding him were pulled and he began to flex his muscles.

“Give him back his gun, Jack, and let me and him shoot it out. I’ve heard it in Miami, New York and several other places, how I betrayed him and let Mc Creed beat him.”

“Yes, you two fucking traitors, give me back my gun and let me face this other traitor.”

Both Brad and Jack shook their heads. They weren’t going to trust Danny King with a loaded gun.

“Give him a gun and he would turn it on us,” Jack opined.

He threw the car keys plus a stuffed envelope at him.

King bent and picked them up. He tore open the envelope and took out its contents, which included an airline ticket to the Cayman Islands.

“Just go home and pack your bags and leave. Down here will soon become too hot for you,” Brad told him.

“Go and join Betsy and your children,” Jack warned.

“How do I know that the car isn’t booby trapped or you don’t have men on the road waiting to kill me?”

“You can believe anything you want, King. But you’d better take this chance we are giving you, because Gaskell wants us to kill you,” Brad snapped.

King looked at his former colleagues, at the fighters he had recruited; their faces were expressionless. Slowly he got up and moved towards the door.

“You dirty traitors; you won’t live long without me. Gus McCreed will wipe out all of you.”

“And just remember that weed is mine. I’ll kill all three of you before I let you claim it.”

“It belongs to the three of us, King. I know that you got the money for the weed you sold. You’ll get your share when we sell what’s there and deduct our share of that first shipment,” Brad told him.

“I haven’t gotten the money from those guys yet. And in any case the bulk of the money was to pay the poachers, rent for the warehouse plus other costs.”

Jack aimed his gun at the man’s chest.

“Get out of here, before I get any angrier.”

Around the back of the yard King found the Dodge Avenger. He opened the door and got in. He switched on the engine and revved it up before reversing out of the driveway, one of the guards opening the gate for him. He was sure that Brad, Jack and Dickson would be inside watching him. He decided to drive down Warrenton Avenue and on to Retirement Crescent. He had to reach his home to pick up some things before he left, but if those three guys and Gus McCreed thought they were seeing the last of him, they were making the biggest mistake of their lives. He just wanted to get in touch with Gaskell.

Shower saw the Dodge Avenger pass and recognized Danny King in it.

He lowered his binoculars.

“That’s Mister King, who just passed in that Dodge Avenger,” he shouted to Niah and Gungoo who were on duty with him.

“Let’s go after him and capture him, the boss will be pleased,” Gungoo told them.

Shower went for the Ford Escort and Niah and Gungoo got in with their guns in shopping bags. He drove off in pursuit of King’s car.

“Hear their car take off, they’ve taken the bait,” an excited Brad Elliot shouted over the wall to the four men in the Triumph, parked down the avenue.

“It’s your turn now boys, you’d better make it good. After this McCreed will know that we mean business,” Jack stated.

The Triumph roared up the avenue and went in search of Shower’s car.

Shower caught up with King’s car just as the stoplight was still showing green.

King pulled away and didn’t see the other car which was five vehicles behind him. He spun the car around and went down Retirement Road.

Shower was caught in the slow moving traffic as the red light came on.

“We’ll never catch him again,” Niah said.

“That Triumph car is following us,” Gungoo told them.

They turned into Union Square to try and lose the Triumph.

The men in the Triumph turned into Union Square and followed Shower out onto the plaza firing at his car. It was then that he realized that it was a trap. He grabbed frantically at the radio, but it was dead.

“It’s a trap!” Gungoo shouted as Shower turned the car and roared up Old Hope Road with the Triumph hot on their heels and the fighters pouring lead into their car. Niah and Gungoo were returning the fire. One of Shower’s car tires burst and he swerved violently to avoid hitting an oncoming truck. He kept pressing the gas pedal; they had to escape.

The men in the Triumph now stepped up their shooting and Niah was shot in the head. Shower was shot in both shoulders and Gungoo in the leg. The out of control car hit a wall and then a light post. Shower and Gungoo managed to crawl out of the car. Two of the men in the Triumph had been hit, but their car spun on to Oxford Road and roared away; intending to put enough distance between them and the accident scene. They were on to Half Way Tree Road before firemen and policemen reached the accident scene.

Ardez sat in his house smoking marijuana. The boss had given him no time to think. Instead, he had bellowed out his orders. Shower, Niah and Gungoo hadn’t followed instructions. Niah was dead while the other two were in hospital.

He had given strict instructions to the men, who went to watch the warehouse that they should report all suspicious movements to him and await further instructions. He had scheduled a meeting at the Factory for seven o’clock. Thanks to Shower, Niah and Gungoo, the fugitives had escaped with the weed.

When Premba, Grosset, Lance and Bendoo arrived at the warehouse in response to Shower’s call to the Factory for help, it was empty. The marijuana was gone as well as Brad, Jack and their gang.

It seemed that Jack and Brad were forming a syndicate. Now they would have to start all over in trying to find the two men and their gang. Two guys like them wouldn’t last long before they paid the ultimate penalty of opposing Gus Mc Creed.

As Niah had no form of identification on him and the car was stolen, he doubted whether the police would be able to identify him. He knew that the two wounded men would not talk.

Personally, he thought yesterday was one of the worst days operationally for the gang. The whole camp was in low spirits at the loss of Niah and the wounding of Shower and Gungoo. He thought he had better go for a walk.

Bendoo lay in his hammock enjoying the cool air of the mountains.

Delbert had a lot of questions to answer. He had told him about the warehouse, so why was it not put under twenty-four-hour surveillance? Why had they allowed Brad and Jack and their gang to escape with the marijuana? He felt sorry for Niah and the two wounded men. He’d been told that any man who was killed in action usually had his family taken care of. Niah had loved his woman and four kids, the eldest of whom was nine years of age. They thought he was in the country working when they didn’t see him, but he had supported them very well. He had often taken him to visit them on his motorcycle. He wondered about his woman, Cherry. How would she ever know that he was dead? Shower had told him that he was from Aenon Town in Clarendon and had a woman in Dalvey, St. Thomas. Gungoo, he knew was from Top Mountain in St. Elizabeth. He had told him that he had a woman and a little girl in August Town near Papine but he had never met them.

He couldn't class the three men as gunmen as they were mostly around the camp and he had never seen them going on any raids. Sometimes late at nights he and the three men would be talking and partaking from the marijuana pipe, that Shower had built.

"Bendoo, I started smoking weed since I was just a youth. It was Mister Jimmy, who introduced it to me. I'm sure you remember him," Niah lectured him.

Bendoo nodded, still trying to clear his head from having partaken in their latest drug smoking.

"You see this herb, Bendoo, it is a wisdom plant. Since I started smoking it, I've gotten wiser. That's why they outlawed it. They don't want us to get wise," Niah continued.

"That's true, they don't want us to get wise. They just want us to continue killing off each other," Shower stated.

Gungoo, the most sedate of the three, replied.

"Herb never did anything to me and I've been smoking it since I was a little boy."

"Right now any University you go, you see professors lighting up their pipes. Herb must be smoked, but through this wicked system, they beat it down. They don't want to see us smoke herb, because they want to keep us in submission. Every time we smoke herb and rebel against the system they shoot us down," Niah declared.

Bendoo had been feeling too sleepy to reply, but he heard Shower and Gungoo replying as the three of them continued their condemnation of the system.

They had also gone to dances all over the island along with some of the other gang members. He was fearful of policemen raiding these dances. At some of these dances there were sound clashes and some top deejays also performed. Now that Niah was gone, he felt a bit easier but he was still in the dark about the Brad Elliot and Jack Marriot's organization. It was early and he felt like taking a walk down to Premba's shack. So far he had heard that Raider's woman, Yasmin, was still staying with Rattigan and Camilla. He also understood that Premba's woman, Bridget, had threatened to kill both him and the girl if she found out that they were lovers.

Chapter Seventeen

Gaskell Burke and the other members of his syndicate were awaiting the arrival of Brad Elliot and Jack Marriot.

They were therefore surprised to see Dickson Lunan.

“What the hell are you doing here, Dickson?” Burke asked.

Dickson saw that both Burke and Ken Stone had drawn their guns.

“It seems that you had a hot reception awaiting my two friends.”

“Nothing like that. It’s just that we are surprised to see you here. What happened to Brad and Jack?” Burke asked.

“I’m surprised that you haven’t asked me how I knew where to find you guys,” Dickson told them.

“You still haven’t told us about Brad and Jack,” Ken stated.

“I’ve partnered with them. I was driving behind them when the police stopped their car. The last I saw was that they were in handcuffs. It means that they arrested them, but I don’t know the reason.”

“It could be for what happened on Old Hope Road,” Ken stated.

“Well, King escaped, but I heard that they held him at the airport,” Dickson told them.

“So you’ve come to join us, Dickson. I think they are going to hold those two guys for murder. We can’t wait for them.”

“So tell me about your plans, Burke,” the man requested.

“We’re bringing down two top notch fighters from the States on a three week contract. These two men are war veterans, they’ve fought all over the world.”

“They’re going to train the recruits. We’re paying each of them twenty five thousand dollars. It’s a lot of money, but when I read their resume, I feel they’re worth it,” Burke further explained.

Dickson shook his head.

“That’s a lot of money, I hope they’re worth it. Are you sure you can make enough money off this deal to pay yourselves and them too?”

“Those men don’t work for small money. You have to pay them if you want them to work for you. They were charging fifty thousand dollars, but I managed to get them to cut it down,” Ken replied.

He looked at Burke, who nodded in agreement and looked at his watch before surveying the room.

“I heard that Ruddy got shot and is in hospital,” Burke said.

“It’s McCreed’s gunmen, who shot him, it appears as if G.C is also in hospital too. He was shot and thrown out of a car. Lucky for him a passing motorist saw what happened and rushed him to hospital,” Dickson told them.

His listeners soaked up the information he was providing them.

“Ken did a good job and he has more contacts than Ruddy. I want you all to know that we’re sharing equally. This means that every man will get an equal cut out of the cake. Anybody, who has any objections, can raise them now,” Burke declared.

“I still feel that Brad and Jack should split half between them, Burke. You just remember that the weed belongs to them,” Dickson stated.

“What’ll they be doing to deserve so much out of this deal?” Wally asked.

“That’s what they agreed to. If it wasn’t for them, none of you would be here. Are you trying to double cross them, Burke and steal their weed?”

“Are you calling me a double crosser and a thief, Dickson? I might have told them so at first, but now things have changed. These men will be doing most of the work so I don’t see why you’re objecting if I say I’m going to cut them in. As for the weed, if it wasn’t for us they would have lost it,” Burke replied.

“I hope you accept what Burke just said. I think you are unreasonable to just want Brad and Jack to sit back and each pick up a quarter of the money while we get a half of that,” Benny stated.

“Those men have no idea what we’re up against, operating in the States. They don’t have that kind of problem out here,” Ken put in.

“I don’t care what you say, but you just can’t come in and take over like that. It was they who set up everything so they should get something for that,” Dickson opined.

The gun that appeared in Burke’s hand took them completely by surprise.

Dickson hands shot up in the air.

“You’re the boss, Burke. I will go ahead with what you’ve said. Remember, I’m just a messenger. I’ll pass your message to Brad and Jack.”

Running footsteps, shouting and knocking on the door could be heard.

“What’s going on Mister Burke? We heard loud talking,” Churchill shouted as Burke let him and three other men into the room.

“I had to draw my gun on this guy, but everything is okay now.”

“Okay, boss, we are around, if you need us, just shout,” Churchill said as he and the others marched out of the room.

“Anybody else who has anything to say might as well say it now.”

When no one volunteered, he continued.

“I’m going to the warehouse. You guys have to come with me.”

“I’m going as Brad and Jack’s representative,” Dickson told them.

“Why does Brad and Jack need a representative?” Ken asked.

Dickson chuckled.

“Listen, Burke, you little guys are nothing to the type of guys I used to run with when I operated out here.”

“But Danny King said that you betrayed him,” Burke told him.

“I pulled out because he was no match for Mc Creed. I see you have some of his best men.”

“He shot at me twice down there. Lucky for me he missed, I even challenged him to a gunfight.”

“Why did you return to Jamaica, Dickson?” Burke asked.

“What the hell do you want to know that for?”

“Okay, I came back because Jack and Brad invited me.”

“Were you going to revive your syndicate?”

“I was just going to help them streamline operations. They thought that King wasn’t moving fast enough.”

Burke doubted what Dickson told him, he nodded.

“Are you joining us?” he asked.

“I’m only protecting Jack and Brad’s interest.”

Burke pointed the gun at him again.

Dickson laughed.

“Listen, Burke, I’m not that simple. Brad and Jack were fools to give you a copy of the keys to their warehouse. I don’t know why they thought they could trust you. You should know my brother, Weston Garth. He knows that I’m here.”

Ken looked at Burke as did Wally and Benny.

Burke lowered his gun. Weston Garth operated out of Waltham Park Road and he was head of the Practical Crew. They controlled most of the area and surrounding communities.

Gus McCreed sat at the head of the table in the boardroom at the Factory where he often held meetings with his lieutenants. Around the table sat Grosset, Premba, Ardez and Rattigan. Mc Creed had just doused his cigarette into the ashtray. The atmosphere was tense. The time was seven o’clock in the evening.

“Two simple guys like Brad Elliot and Jack Marriot could never do something like that. It must have been somebody else.”

“I still believe that it’s only Brad and Jack, who are left though,” Ardez opined.

“Those two must be out in the country somewhere. Seems to me that the stuff was moved before Premba and the others got there,” Rattigan remarked.

“Our fighters walked into a trap, but what’s done is done. We have to recruit some more men to replace the man who was killed and the men who were wounded.”

“I heard that some men have escaped from the Remand Center. Men like Mallards, Decker and Troja,” Premba stated.

“I know those three, they’re real bad men, we have to get them to join us,” Ardez told them.

“You let them know that we pay good money. As I said we don’t want any idiots, its pure wicked men we want.”

“We’re going to post guards up at my house. Anybody who has taken over from King will be trying different tactics. We have to be ready for anything. We have to warn the men out in the country about what’s going on. They have got to be on the lookout for them.”

“It’s a pity those guys never followed instructions. It looks as if they’ve left their hiding places, but we’ll find them,” Ardez assured the gathering.

“And they got away with all that weed. If they manage to ship it, they’ll be rich for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, maybe they haven’t sold it yet, but what’s money to dead men anyway,” Mc Creed remarked.

“When we catch up with those two men and anybody else, who’s working with them, they’re going to wish that they were never born,” Ardez warned as he moved to join Mc Creed and the rest as they moved out of the room.

**End of part one, readers can go on to read part two. Please visit my blog at :
stredwick.blogspot.com**