

“We’ll know our disinformation plan is complete when everything the American public believes is false.”

- William J. Casey, Director, Central Intelligence Agency, 1981

## PROLOGUE

ESTACIÓN DE MADRID ATOCHA

PLAZA DEL EMPERADOR CARLOS V

MADRID, SPAIN

MAY, 1979

“Can I get a gelato, daddy?”

Bruner looked down at his daughter and smiled.

“Of course you can, sweetheart.”

Bruner reached into his pocket and pulled out some *pesetas* and handed a bill to her.

“Thanks, dad!”

“Honestly,” said Bruner’s wife, Janie as soon as Molly was on her way to the Gelato stand at the far side of the train station. “You spoil her.”

“It’s the first time I’ve seen you guys in five months,” said Bruner. “Of course I’m going to spoil her. Look at her,” he said, pointing at his nine-year old daughter as she walked across the train station. “She’s perfect! Have you ever seen something so cute?”

Janie took Bruner’s hand and pulled him closer, smiling at him.

“Oh, go ahead,” she said. “You’re right – she *is* perfect. Why not?”

The explosion ripped through the train station with apocalyptic fury. The bomb – a suicide jacket worn by a seventeen-year old Saudi Arabian - was detonated inside a T-shirt shop next to the gelato stand. Anything and everything within fifty feet was blown to shreds in a horrible moment of noise and blackness. The ground itself shook, air pushed out and anyone not

in the immediate blast zone was suddenly blown backwards, including Bruner and his wife.

Bruner reached his hand out as he was punched by the hot air, reaching for the fire and noise and smoke, reaching for his daughter.

“*No.....*” he cried, but his word was lost in the cruel wind.

**DIRECTOR'S OFFICE**

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

**LANGLEY, VIRGINIA**

**JUNE, 1981**

William J. Casey, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, stepped into his corner office on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. Casey was short and nearly bald. What hair he did have was in a loose ring around the back and sides of his head, white and long. He wore thick glasses, a dark suit, and did not acknowledge the man who was already in the room. Casey carried a manila folder. He walked slowly, with a pronounced limp, and sat down on one of the two beige-colored leather couches in the large office.

A visitor was already seated on the other sofa. He watched as Casey approached, a blank expression on his face. He'd been waiting nearly fifteen minutes, despite the fact that he was the United States Secretary of State. He did not attempt to hide his displeasure at the slight.

“Good morning, Al,” said Casey in a clotted mumble. “I apologize for making you wait.”

Alexander Haig practically spilled over the couch. He was large, but he accentuated his size by leaning forward, as if expecting to be called upon to tackle someone. Haig had a block of neatly combed brown hair fringed with gray.

“A simple call from your assistant would have been nice,” said Haig. “I've been sitting here for fifteen minutes.”

“I know,” said Casey. “It wasn’t intentional. I was in the bathroom. I fell down. I’m afraid my arthritis is getting worse. Nobody came in for quite some time and I had no way of reaching you.”

Haig grinned sheepishly.

“I’m sorry, Bill. I didn’t know.”

Casey waved his hand and gave a rare smile.

“There’s no way you could’ve. Anyway, I’ll keep it short.”

Haig leaned back and crossed his legs.

“Do you want me to get someone to fetch you a cup of coffee?” asked Casey.

“No,” said Haig. “Just tell me why you wanted to meet.”

Casey leaned forward and placed the manila folder on the glass coffee table. He flipped the cover back. A black-and-white photo sat atop a thin pile of paper. He lifted it up and handed it to Haig. The photo showed the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, a few moments before John Hinckley stepped forward in a failed attempt to assassinate him. Several hand-drawn red marks dotted the photo.

Haig studied it for a few moments, then set it back down on the table. He looked at Casey, expecting Casey to begin. But Casey remained silent, watching Haig. Finally, Haig grew uncomfortable with the silence.

“What’s the point?” asked Haig.

“Notice anything wrong?” asked Casey.

Haig paused, glanced at the photo, then looked at Casey.

“Other than the president is about to get shot?” said Haig facetiously.

Casey smiled giddily and slapped his hand on his knee.

“I knew you’d see it!” said Casey.

Haig grinned.

“Honestly, Bill, where are you going with this?”

Casey’s grin cut hard to a cold, almost bitter look.

“He was about to get shot,” snarled Casey. “And what’s going on? *Nothing.*

Incompetence. Sheer, utter incompetence. There was no intelligence. But most worrisome, was there anyone prepared to step in front of the president? Anyone to take the bullet? The only ones who stepped in front of that psycho Hinckley were Brady and Ahearn, a press officer and an advance man, respectively. *This was total and complete mismanagement by the Secret Service agents there to protect him!*”

Haig nodded in agreement.

“No doubt,” said Haig. “I understand Knight is being fired.”

Casey waved his hand dismissively.

“Window dressing! It wasn’t his fault. It’s a structural issue, Alexander! We have the leader of the free world being protected by glorified security guards. They don’t know what they don’t know.”

Haig sat up. He didn’t know Casey well, but he knew him. He knew the moment always came, the moment when Casey cut to the chase and put forward an idea that half the time was crazy and the other half was brilliant.

“What are you thinking?” Haig asked quietly.

“A covert program,” said Casey. “Housed inside State, because State’s so big we can hide it there somewhere, budget-wise I mean. An added layer of protection for the President of the United States in a climate of increased threat and specifically in the aftermath of an

assassination attempt that came very close to succeeding. We cull its members exclusively from CIA paramilitary, Delta, and SEALs. ”

“Interesting,” said Haig.

“It’s a pure strike force - more capable, lethal, and autonomous than anything the U.S. has.”

“Strike force?” said Haig. “That’s beyond the parameters of protecting the president.”

“Is it?” asked Casey.

Haig sat back, thinking.

“Without the restrictions of the CIA or the Pentagon, the unit could operate anywhere, including inside the U.S.,” said Haig, thinking aloud.

“We’ll stick it inside some ubiquitous but irrelevant office,” said Casey. “I was thinking Consular Operations.”

Haig bit his lip, his initial skepticism morphing into excitement.

Casey continued.

“We recruit the country’s most elite soldiers, top operators out of Coronado, Bragg, and the Farm. Protecting the President in a changing and increasingly violent world. They’re embedded in the immediate envelope of the president and are ready to engage at any moment. It also means they’re free to take certain pre-emptive measures.”

“What do you mean by ‘pre-emptive measures?’” asked Haig.

“There are some threats that need to be dealt with long before any bullets are fired,” said Casey.

“Are we talking about a kill team?”

“That’s right,” said Casey. “Black on black. Best of the best. Protecting the most important asset America has, its leader.”

Casey sat back, crossed his legs, and folded his hands. He looked at Haig.

“How many operators are we talking about?” said Haig.

“We keep it small. A few dozen at most. They’ll get access to intel so that things like John Hinckley don’t happen ever again. Most important, we get guys willing to take a bullet. Young Turks with balls of steel.”

Haig nodded, a shit-eating grin on his face.

“I fucking love it,” said Haig.

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Two doors down from Casey’s office, a man was seated at his desk. Other than a pair of telephones, the only thing on the desk was a photograph. It was a photograph of a girl. She was smiling widely and enthusiastically despite the fact that both front teeth were missing. Long brown hair was tied in ponytails. She wore a blue dress with white piping around the collar. The photo was a tad yellowish and a little faded from age. The man stared at it until finally he picked it up and placed it in a cardboard box behind the desk.

He was tall and handsome, with neatly combed brown hair. At thirty-six, Charles Bruner retained the healthy physique of the athlete he had once been, the Special Forces operator he had once been, the CIA paramilitary officer he had once been. But his eyes were dark, including the skin around them, whether it was from age, a chronic lack of sleep, or some undiagnosed disease, it gave him a haunted, vaguely demonic look.

Bruner's eyes were drawn to the glass wall that looked out at his assistant. The stooped, slowly-moving figure of William Casey came into view. A few moments later, there was a gentle knock on the door.

"Come in," said Bruner.

Casey opened the door and stepped inside, then shut the door behind him.

"Hi, Charlie," said Casey enthusiastically.

"Hi, Bill."

"Mind if I sit down?" asked Casey.

"By all means."

Casey moved to one of the chairs in front of Bruner's desk and sat down. He flashed Bruner a rare, slightly awkward, heartfelt smile.

"So, you're really doing it?" said Casey.

Bruner nodded, yes.

"Yes," said Bruner.

"You're going to be bored out of your mind," said Casey. "You're thirty-six years old. Charles."

"Well, I feel like I'm eighty-six."

"I'm going to ask one more time," said Casey. "For God's sake, don't do it. Take a month. For chrissakes, take a year. But I want you back."

Bruner had a troubled look on his face.

"She was ten years old," said Bruner. He stared at Casey. "She'd be twelve now. Why was she even there, Bill? Why did I let them come for a visit?"

"Oh, Charlie," said Casey.

Casey stood and walked around the desk to Bruner. He placed his hand on Bruner's shoulder, trying awkwardly to console him.

"You can't blame yourself," said Casey. "She was your daughter. Of course you should have her there with you. It wasn't like you took her to Tehran. It was Madrid. Stop beating yourself up, son."

Bruner paused and slowly started to nod.

"I know," he whispered.

"Stay and help defeat these crazy Muslims," said Casey. "Channel your anger. As hard as that is to think about, use that hatred you feel for the jihadis who killed Molly."

"I've tried," whispered Bruner. "It doesn't work. You know it better than I do. Congressional oversight, rules of engagement, red tape. I wish I could channel it, but it's impossible, even here at Langley, even running NCS."

Bruner looked at Casey and for a moment Casey seemed to sit up and flinch, as if seeing something darker than what he expected in his deputy.

"Honestly, Bill, I'm afraid of what I might do. I shouldn't be here."

Casey handed Bruner a manila envelope. On the cover was a small label:

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**ECT: 7**

**EYES ONLY: DCIA CASEY/DNCS BRUNER/DDCIA MALONE**

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Bruner opened the folder and started reading. After a few minutes, Bruner looked up.

“Why are you giving this to me?” asked Bruner.

“I want you to run it,” said Casey.

“It’s a bunch of glorified bodyguards,” said Bruner. “No, thanks.”

“Keep reading.”

Bruner looked back at the document. He quickly skimmed the five page document.

**ORDER 6** establishes a secret paramilitary unit to act as an added layer of protection for the President of the United States in a climate of increased threat and specifically in the aftermath of an assassination attempt on President Reagan that nearly succeeded. **(FINDING US.SCP F776390)**

**ORDER 6** is a pure strike force and counterterrorism unit, more capable, lethal, and autonomous than anything the United States Government has. **(GSI 90-86Y)**

**ORDER 6** members are selected exclusively from CIA paramilitary, Delta, and SEAL Team 6 (DEVGRU) **(US HIE/DOD 65.32X)**

**ORDER 6** members are not encumbered by the restrictions of the CIA or Pentagon. **(WHS 45)**

**ORDER 6** can operate anywhere, including inside the U.S.A. **(GSI 142.29)**

**ORDER 6** members are embedded inside the White House and near POTUS. U.S. Secret Service, White House Advance Team, and U.S. State Department are primary assignments for unit agents, but they are also embedded elsewhere, such as the White House mess and press corps. **(POTUS DIR540.46.8)**

**ORDER 6** recruits are selected based on a set of criteria having to do with physical and mental strength. All recruits are unmarried, thus capable of operating without any sort of external personal emotional and financial attachments. **(REG US 120.M-45)**

When he finished, he looked up.

“So we get the best operators,” said Bruner, “embed them near the president as an extra layer of protection, but we can also go after potential threats and enemies?”

“Yes,” said Casey. “Anywhere in the world, including here at home.”

“Without oversight?”

“There will be some, but it’ll be buried inside state,” said Casey. “Haig already agreed to it. There’ll be some level of notification and re-approval every year but that’s it. We turn the bureaucracy on its head – *you* turn the bureaucracy on its head. We use the bureaucracy to hide it.”

“It’s a kill team,” said Bruner.

“Precisely,” said Casey. “Pre-emptive, off-the-grid, utterly and totally lethal, undocumented, outside the lines. Black on black. In fact, if there was a color that was darker than black, this would be it.”

Bruner nodded and leaned back in his chair, picking up the folder again and looking at the cover sheet.

“Take your time deciding,” said Casey, standing up. “But I’ll need to know sooner rather than later.”

Bruner eyed Casey.

“I’ll do it,” said Bruner.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **YATES FIELD HOUSE**

### **GEORGETOWN**

### **WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Dewey Andreas was lying on his back. He stared up at the steel bar above him, his hands holding it loosely. At each end of the long steel bar sat two fifty-pound barbells. Two-hundred pounds in all. With the bar itself, he was looking at a two-hundred and thirty-pound lift.

“You sure you should be doing this?” asked Rob Tacoma, who was standing behind Dewey, ready to spot him. “You’re not supposed to do any heavy lifting. That’s what Hector told me.”

Dewey leaned his head back and looked upside down at Tacoma, shooting him an icy stare.

“From this angle it looks like you were just smiling at me,” said Tacoma.

“You mind shutting the hell up?”

Dewey clenched his hands a little tighter around the bar. He took several deep breaths. He pushed up on the steel bar, feeling as it moved with a slight wobble up into the air, his arms straightening. The pain in his right shoulder went from a dull ache to electric, like a sharp object was inside the shoulder. He grunted as he lowered the bar slowly down to his chest, pausing a half-second, then pushed it back up.

“Not bad,” said Tacoma absent-mindedly as he watched Dewey struggle to push the weight back up. “You’re using your legs too much, though.”

After several wavering seconds, Dewey's arms were straight above his head. He locked his elbows and breathed rapidly. The pain in his shoulder was intense. Yet as much as it told him to stop, he knew he needed to keep going. He had a hundred pounds to go until he was back to the strength level before Sirhan el-Khan stabbed him in the shoulder.

"Please, Rob, shut the fuck up," Dewey groaned.

Tacoma smiled.

Dewey was the first individual Tacoma had ever met who made him understand what it was like to have an older brother. He knew there was no question who was in charge, but that was the way he wanted it, the way he liked it. Sure, there had been other mentors in his life; upperclassmen on the UVA lacrosse team; older SEALs who took him under his wing; after the Navy, other agents within Special Operations Group who helped him out, who showed Tacoma a trick or two. But Dewey was different. He was the first operator Tacoma had ever met who he knew he could not defeat in battle, unless luck was involved. He was the first man who'd ever made him wish he had an older brother.

The last month had been a blast. Katie was off in Rwanda, spending six weeks volunteering along with a group of six other CIA agents, working to create a more secure route for food shipments into the region. Katie was his business partner, and her hiatus had given Tacoma time to hang out and help Dewey recover from the nearly fatal knife wound to his shoulder.

Dewey enjoyed it, too. The problem was, at certain times Tacoma acted like that little brother Dewey never had. Little brothers sometimes couldn't resist the temptation to make things difficult for their older brothers.

Dewey let his arms bend and lowered the barbell down, where it touched his chest, harder this time, slamming against his breastplate. He pushed up, grunting loudly, the entire barbell wobbling as if it might at any moment drop like a ton of bricks on top of him.

“Have you ever considered getting a Llama, Dewey?” asked Tacoma. “I hear they make great pets.”

Dewey’s face suddenly contorted as he tried not to laugh, but it was no use. The barbell dropped as his arms went weak. It sank rapidly. Just as it was about to land on top of his chest, Tacoma leaned down and grabbed it. With relative ease, he lifted it and set it back on the brackets.

Dewey’s eyes were closed, his face was bright red and he fought to catch his breath. Finally, he opened his eyes and looked at Tacoma.

“You’re an asshole, you know that?”

Dewey sat up, still trying to catch his breath. He clutched his shoulder.

Tacoma eyed Dewey warily.

“Sorry.”

“I’m hitting the showers.”

“Want me to wait?”

“No.”

“Well, actually, Hector wanted me to wait and make sure you went to that appointment.”

Dewey glared at Tacoma.

“Oh he did, did he?” snapped Dewey.

Tacoma’s eyes took on a slight edge, an edge Dewey knew all too well. Beneath Tacoma’s disheveled, frat boy exterior lurked an altogether different person: An ex-Navy SEAL

with martial and paramilitary skills that were rare; a cold, deadly serious, brutally tough individual who'd twice saved Dewey's life.

“Yeah, he did. I'm just the messenger.”

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **INDIAN PURCHASE FARM**

### **POOLESVILLE, MARYLAND**

Bruner's pants were wet with dew as he moved along a foot path that crossed the twenty acre field near his home. He watched overhead as a flock of Canadian Geese cut across the blue sky, flying in a near perfect triangle to the south. He stopped walking several hundred feet away from the main house. In the morning light, the rambling, meticulous mansion looked ageless, as pretty as it probably had looked when it was built in 1820. He knew that someday photos of it would be in history books.

There were many reasons Bruner had chosen the path he was now on.

The fields leading up to the home spread in a wheat colored swath, the long grass fluttering as a slow wind came from the west. Winter was almost here. The field would need to be cut soon. A white horse fence demarcated the boundary between high grass and lawn.

Bruner had on a thick but worn pair of Filson tin pants, handed down by his father. If Bruner had had a son, they would have become his. He thought about that son he never had, especially at times like now. He thought about the grandson that his son would have given him. Would he have been out here this day with him? Would he have been standing right beside him at this moment? Would his grandson be to his left, pushing through the high grass with the dogs scampering ahead, a wild smile on his face as he learned the raw joys of nature and the physical world, grass and brambles, soil, streams, rainstorms, and the sun?

Then he thought about the daughter he did have, the daughter he lost so long ago.

Bruner shut his eyes. He reached to the brow of his nose, squeezing.

“Don’t think about her,” he whispered aloud.

*Everything I do is for you, sweet Molly. You will see what a father will do to avenge the death of a daughter. The world will see.*

The large, circular driveway in front of the house was lined with automobiles.

Bruner glanced to his left, where his yellow lab, Ranger, was standing still, tongue out, panting. He was looking at Bruner with a face Bruner knew was a combination of delight after a morning’s hard run, and the anticipation of a meal.

“Are you ready for breakfast?” asked Bruner, kneeling slightly and reaching out both hands to touch the dog.

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Several minutes later, Bruner followed his dog inside the house. He heard conversation coming from the den and walked toward the room, pausing just outside, where a servant stood behind a table. On top of the table was a silver coffee service.

“Hi, Abe.”

“Good morning, sir.”

He handed Bruner a cup of coffee.

Bruner stepped into the room. He stood near the double doors, casting his eyes across the room. A fire was burning in the hearth. The room’s walls were covered in bookshelves. In front of the bookshelves were about a dozen large, deep, comfortable-looking chintz upholstered

armchairs. Closer to the center of the room, three big, old green leather chesterfield sofas. Every seat in the room was occupied.

The voices went silent. Bruner took a sip from his cup as he scanned the eyes of the men. He stepped to the large stone fireplace and placed his cup down on the mantel. He turned to the room.

Gathered before him were the chosen few. Each man had been carefully selected, vetted, approached, and ultimately brought into Bruner's inner sanctum. All had sworn allegiance. Before him sat two members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, three cabinet secretaries, and more than two dozen high-ranking officials inside the administration of President J.P Dellenbaugh. But they all shared a secret loyalty, a darker allegiance. It was to Bruner and, more importantly, to Bruner's America, a country they all believed needed to re-assert its utter strength and supremacy across the globe. This was the shadow government, sowed over a painstaking period of time – more than two decades – and now ready for its bloody harvest.

“The time has come,” said Bruner. “Today, we begin the process of saving the United States of America.”

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MAYEWELL HUNTING CAMPS**

#### **OSSABAW ISLAND, GEORGIA**

The Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Lowell Benson Trappe Jr., climbed out of a mud-covered silver Ford F-250 pick-up truck and scanned the gray horizon above the ocean. It was 5:10 A.M.

Trappe was dressed in hunting apparel. It was well worn and fit the way it was meant to; a Filson coat that had been his father's, a pair of thigh high L.L. Bean boots, canvas pants from Carhartt. At six foot tall and two-hundred sixty pounds, Trappe was on the heavy side. He looked older than his fifty-six years, though his hair remained thick and brown and his face ruddy and wrinkled with character. He'd been in the U.S. House of Representatives since age twenty-five and elected speaker at forty. The Speaker of the United States House of Representatives made \$223,500 a year, but Trappe, like all speakers, lived like a king.

The three day duck hunting trip to Ossabaw Island was a typically high-end respite from the capitol. The private lodge was small but lavish in its own way, a camp of sequestered log cabins with bold ocean views, room service, and even a nightly tuck-down by maids who were known to spend more than a few minutes with the guests. This was Trappe's 11<sup>th</sup> visit to Ossabaw and every time it seemed to get better. The ducks were more abundant, the food more delicious, the women more beautiful. It wasn't a trip that even a billionaire could arrange. It was the reward for being speaker. The fact that the camp was owned by Georgia's largest electric utility was inconsequential. Trappe had backed them and opposed them so many times

over the years it was hard to keep track. Pundits and idiots said that money could buy influence, but in Trappe's case it wasn't true. Trappe knew a politician who allowed his or her decisions to be purchased by the highest bidder was, in fact, of little use to most special interests seeking assistance. What money did buy when it came to Lowell Trappe was honesty and a straightforward, no bullshit way. People, companies, other politicians, reporters – they all knew where Lowell Trappe stood and they knew why.

The utility's chief lobbyist, Will Scranton, climbed out of the other side of the truck. Like Trappe, Scranton looked at home in his hunting apparel. Scranton stood by the truck staring off to the shore line, a cup of coffee in one hand. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes, took one out and lit it. After a couple of drags, he pointed the cigarette to the shore.

“Looks like Schaller's Bluff'll be good,” Scranton said in a deep Southern drawl. “Surf ain't too high this morning, Mr. Speaker.”

Trappe nodded.

“You got better eyes than me, Will.”

“I know how much you like to shoot from there, Mr. Speaker.”

“Yes, I suppose that's true, isn't it?”

They went to the back of the pick-up and pulled a pair of duffels toward them.

Two dog crates were also there, each containing a white Labrador Retriever. The dogs stood at attention, barely making any noise, though their excitement was obvious by the *whack whack whack* of their tails swinging against the crates.

“So what do you think?” said Trappe, sipping from a stainless steel coffee cup.

“It's early,” he said. Scranton had a deep western Georgia accent.

“You're the one who wanted to get up at four.”

“I mean it’s early in the season. It’s been warm up north. I’m not sure what we’re gonna see, Mr. Speaker.”

Trappe smiled and put his hand on Scranton’s back.

“That’s why I like you, Will. You’re just who you are. You don’t shine people on.”

“Thanks, sir, I try not to. But that being said, we might get lucky. My father put down seven last week over there.” He pointed. “You’re a pretty good shot. I mean what the hell, even if we don’t get anything it’s not like we’re up in Washington, right?”

Trappe laughed. He reached to his pocket and took out a copper flask. He unscrewed it and offered it to Scranton.

“Mornin’, Mr. Beam,” Scranton said to the flask, then raised it to his lips and took a big gulp, then hissed as he swallowed.

*“Ah-oooh-ga!”* he yelped.

Trappe smiled and took the flask back. He downed a large chug then put the flask back.

“So any things you guys need up there?” Trappe said. “Been here two days and you ain’t said shit ‘bout nothin.’ What do you got?”

Scranton took the flask and threw back one more.

“No, sir,” said Scranton, shrugging. “Session’s almost done and we got pretty much what we wanted, which was to be left the hell alone. Besides, let’s not ruin a good hunting trip with that stuff. We know you got our back, Lowell.”

Scranton let the two dogs out of the crates.

They walked for about a quarter mile along a dirt path that led to the rocky shore, the dogs trotting along behind them, scouring the horizon. Eventually, the path opened up to a

crescent shaped inlet, a rough, pretty stretch of coastline, the black sea bared in flecks of foamy white. In the distance, an orange hue was visible at the horizon as sunrise approached.

“You take the bluff,” said Scranton, pointing to the small inlet, a magnet for birds. “I’ll go up to Widener’s. I’ll see y’all at breakfast round eight.”

Trappe nodded.

“Sounds good.”

Scranton whistled twice. One of the dogs leapt toward him as the other moved to Trappe’s side.

“Good girl,” said Trappe.

Trappe walked the final hundred yards to the water, setting his shotgun down on a rock. He took a sip of coffee, then one more swig of bourbon. He picked up his shotgun, plopped a shell in each barrel, then slammed the gun shut. He moved to a low, flat rock at water’s edge. In the water directly in front of him was a latticework of reeds. Even if he’d been a trained operative, he probably would not have noticed that one of the reeds was not a reed at all.

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The frogman was beneath the surface of the water. He’d been in the water since midnight.

The killer had spent two days studying the hunt from a rise to the east, up the coast. He assumed the other man, Scranton, would give the speaker the best hunting spot on this, their final day on the island.

Two devices stuck up from below. A breathing apparatus, like a straw, and a pencil-sized camera. Both blended into the reeds.

He watched as Trappe stepped down along the craggy water line. He also observed the dog. He would not have been surprised if the dog picked up his scent through the oxygen tube. Dogs were remarkable. He didn't need or want the dog alerting Trappe that something was amiss. He reached to his wrist and pressed a small button, shutting off the tube, initiating a closed-loop oxygen system that would enable him to breathe underwater for a time. Not long, perhaps ten minutes, but that would be more than enough time.

The dog's eyes darted about wildly.

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"What is it, Bodie?" Trappe said to the agitated dog. "You excited?"

Trappe saw the ducks cutting like a shadow across the eastern sky. They were disorganized, mainly because there were so many of them. His heart raced. He raised his shotgun.

But before he could fire, he felt his left boot slip off the rock. He dropped the shotgun into the water, scrambling to catch himself before he fell, but what he thought was a slippery patch of rock was, in fact, a pair of gloved hands, grabbing his ankle and pulling him below the ocean's surface.

Beneath the water, Trappe opened his eyes, looking for something to grab onto. Instead, he found himself staring straight into the black tint of a scuba glass.

Trappe swung at the dark figure, grazing his chin with a slow-moving punch, which did little to the frogman, who clutched Trappe with vise-like hands below the water. Trappe struggled, kicking with his free foot, but it was futile. The diver was too strong. Trappe screamed, even though he knew he couldn't be heard. He made a final, desperate lunge for the frogman's mask, trying to pull it aside, but the killer knocked his arm away. A few seconds later, Trappe had no choice; he needed oxygen. He inhaled. A deluge of water poured down his throat and into his lungs, drowning him.

The diver eased his hands from Trappe's ankle and let the corpse float slowly toward the surface. He watched for a few extra moments and then swam quietly away, the only sounds that of a barking dog and the patter of small waves slapping against the rocks.