

PROLOGUE

Grenada

December 31, 1982

Showtime!

Peta Whyte struck a Bob Fosse dance pose in front of the brooding edifice that was Richmond Hill Prison. Despite the tension of the moment, she smiled at the strange juxtaposition. The two-hundred-year-old fortress, with its view of Grenada's harbor and the crystal blue Caribbean, was a perfect symbol of the harsh reality that now controlled her island, an island that had long been considered the jewel of the West Indies.

The U-shaped harbor and surroundings looked like a miniature Monte Carlo. A rainbow of brightly colored tin and wooden houses, small hotels, and provision stores which stocked little more than the necessities of life—rum, rice, cigarettes, and beer—meandered from the top of several hills down to the business and restaurant district which fringed the water. Fort George, like Monte Carlo's famed Castle-Fort, crested the top of the right-hand hill. Below it, hidden from view on the far side of the hill, lay the central marketplace. Looming over that, at the top of Church Street, stood a cathedral whose bells pealed melodically and often. At the top of the opposite hill, replacing Monte Carlo's Casinos, was a gun

emplacement which surrounded and essentially hid the island's only radio station from view.

From where she was standing, Peta could hear her Rasta friend Jimmy and his buddies playing soca on the steel drums that lined the fringes of Tanteen Park, which lay directly below her. In her mind's eye she could see the familiar scene at the bottom of the hill. Across the street from Jimmy, in front of the entrance gates to the docks, a series of booths sold food, smokes, and fireworks. Outside the neighboring fishery, old ladies, unmindful of the country's unrest, were sitting at open grills, cooking corn and jacks, the long silvery fish so abundant in the waters around the island. The jacks looked like overgrown sardines and, even grilled to a crisp and eaten bones and all, tasted like kippers.

Between the bountiful waters and the fruit and vegetables available all year just for the plucking, the only reason anyone went hungry on the island was out of sheer laziness, Peta thought, wishing that she could be among the vendors and musicians, acting like a carefree teen instead of someone with murder on her mind.

Only, if she were, her mentor and friend Arthur Marryshow was as good as dead, and it would be as much her fault as it was the Communists' who had imprisoned him.

Obedient to her instructions, Jimmy continued to play. His beat wafted up the slope on Grenada's sunset trade winds, heralding the end of the old year and the start of the new. Any excuse was good enough for a party. And why not? Tomorrow would be time enough to return to politics; tomorrow, when everyone had slept off the rum and the beer and the ganja. She had told Jimmy to keep playing loudly for at least an hour or until she returned, whichever came first.

It occurred to her now that he would have played on anyway, and that a more intelligent instruction might have included telling him what to do if she didn't come back, like calling her next of kin.

Such thinking was, she knew, counterproductive. She stopped herself and glanced up at the small window of the cell where Arthur was being held in solitary. His crime: suspected espionage against Grenada's Cuban-backed New Jewel Government. If her

friend and mentor was watching, her pose would send him a message, a reminder of their trip to New York three years ago. The trip had been her thirteenth birthday present—and his thirty-first.

Peta had been a precocious thirteen. Her mother had been working several jobs since her father's untimely death four years earlier, so Peta was left to take care of her younger siblings. Saved from feeling sorry for herself by natural intelligence and a streak of innate pragmatism, she'd managed to be practical, popular, and a good student.

All of which Arthur rewarded in as many ways as he could, including the trip to New York. They'd seen *All That Jazz*, and declared the movie's risk-taking protagonist to be their hero. Later, they'd eaten dinner at a place called Danny's Seafood Grotto, and vowed to return there every year. On New Year's Eve.

A good plan, Peta thought. Except that someone should have told the Cubans not to interfere with Grenada and told the New Jewel Movement to disband. Instead, a hunger for power and for the blood of the enemy, whoever that might be, had turned her island into a madhouse.

This was a small island. Half the people were related, and the rest knew each other's business. Which was how she knew that William, her cousin's husband, would be on guard duty outside the prison tonight.

She rubbed her shoulder, bruised from the heavy backpack she'd lugged up Richmond Hill for William and his partner. William was a militant, sadistic bastard who, for the last few years, had hit on her at every opportunity. He'd be happy to see her, and easy to convince that the real reason she'd trekked up St. George's highest hill to spend New Year's Eve at the island's only prison was that he was, finally, irresistible.

And just in case his ego was on vacation, she'd brought ganja and the sweetness of the birthday cake and ...

It had all sounded so simple in the planning that she hadn't had time to be afraid or to indulge herself in prayers or wishful thinking. Besides, above all else, she was a doer. Even were that not her nature, she'd be a doer now. She was damned if she was

going to let them put Arthur Marryshow up against a wall and shoot him.

Dead.

Or take machetes and hack him into pieces as a lesson to others who might be thinking of not toeing the line. Rumor had it Maurice Bishop and his Commie henchmen planned to do one or both of these things on the first day of the New Year.

Tomorrow.

With that sobering thought and the renewed realization that she was the parrot fish, the designated decoy, Peta took a last look at Burns Point and at the Lagoon which lay adjacent to the harbor. She could see the *Assegai*, Fredrick “Frikkie” Van Alman’s 120-footer, anchored in the Lagoon. The schooner rocked gently and Peta wished that she were there, too, lying safely in the warm waters of the Caribbean.

Trusting that her partners in this rescue attempt, Frik and his ex-Green Beret buddy Ray Arno, already had their asses in gear, she put on a dash of lipstick and adjusted the backpack. She hiked her short skirt level with her panty line and tuned in to Jimmy’s calypso. Never more aware of her physical beauty, and determined to use everything that good genes had given her, she set her body into deliberately sensual motion. Dancing around the corner of the stone façade of Grenada’s fortress prison, she prayed for this exercise to be over fast, as planned. It was one thing to play tease; it was quite another to have to deal with fully aroused male libidos.

“Hey, Joe. You see what I see?” Her cousin’s husband and his Soviet-made submachine gun leaned in a triangle against the wall. He touched the weapon as if to reassure himself that it was still there, removed his dark American shades, and grinned at Peta.

“I see it but I don’t believe it.” His buddy, squat and ugly as a blowfish, grinned back. “Whatchou doin’ here, girl?”

Peta danced into the circle of their lechery. She took off the backpack, dug into it, removed the ganja, and threw it to William. “Natalie says happy New Year.”

“You telling me you came all the way up here to give me this?” From his breast pocket he pulled out a packet of rolling papers and removed one. Reaching into the plastic sandwich bag filled with marijuana, he removed a couple of dried buds and rolled them

between his fingers, which caused the bits of leaf to fall into the paper, while the seeds and stem remained in his fingers.

“I need you to do me a favor, Willy,” Peta said as she watched him roll the ganja-filled paper into an expert joint.

“Anything.” William licked the end of the paper, rolled his tongue at her, and lit the joint. “Almost anything.” He drew deeply, then offered it to her. She took it and toked, drawing less deeply than it appeared, and passed it to Joe.

“It’s my birthday,” she said, taking the boxed cake out of the backpack.

Joe opened the box and pulled matches out of his pocket. He counted the candles. “Sixteen candles,” he sang out, jiggling himself. He put his arm around her and kissed her full on the mouth. “You legal now, girl.”

Peta pulled away. Grinned. Felt like throwing up. “I got a friend inside.”

“You want to go inside and celebrate with him?” Joe asked. “We not good enough for you?”

Willy laughed. “Sir fucking Dr. Arthur Marryshow, right?”

Happy birthday, dear Arthur, Peta thought.

“How about we light a fire under that cocksucker and turn him into a candle?” Joe said.

Animal! Peta thought, deliberately feeding on Joe’s callousness to harden herself for what lay ahead.

“Great shit.” William took another toke from the joint. “Bring anything else, sweetface?” He rummaged in the backpack and found the beers. “Let’s party.” He opened one of the bottles and slugged down the contents. “You too good to us, girl.” He belched loudly. Joe roared with laughter.

Their noises covered the sounds for which Peta had been waiting, three in succession, Frik’s practiced imitation of the distinctive, deep-throated howl of the Mona monkeys he’d often hunted for his dinner pot. She looked at the sky. In the way of the tropics, darkness had quickly and suddenly come upon them.

“Tell you what,” William said. “We’ll save the good doctor a beer and a couple pieces of cake in case he’s alive in the morning.”

“How about some for the other guards?” Peta asked, ignoring the loud beat of her heart in her ears.