

The Empty Threat

A novel

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Prologue

The Caribbean August 28, 1977

Less than an hour ago a solitary figure had stood placidly on the beach. He had watched the crystal blue green waters of the Caribbean as they lapped continuously, relentlessly against the retaining walls of de Calin Resorts. The power and resulting effects of the constant assault of the sea water was shown clearly in the decay of the once beautiful walls. But there was another power evidenced in the graceful decadence of the resort. The power of money.

Expensive wrought iron gates stood ajar beside the wide overgrown driveway. Marble statues, some standing, some fallen were there for the eye to ponder. Yes this resort had once been something, really something.

Until recently the hotel de Calin had been a deserted, abandoned building. Many years ago it had been a place where wealth and power had convened to enjoy a little privacy in the warm island sun. A place where the rich had gathered to impress both themselves and others by the sheer fact that anyone would afford it. That had been the apex of de Calin Resorts, over thirty years ago. It had gradually lost its clientele to the other side of the island which was now a maze of casinos, neon and middle income tourists. That had led to the closing of the Hotel de Calin for good. Or so people thought.

Recently there had been winds of change on the island, powerful people wanted to reopen this side of the island to tourists. The wealthy ones in particular. One of the real movers and shakers behind this idea had purchased the resort and begun the restorations.

Now this man sat behind his desk in his office. A few nights ago he had received a phone call, a frightening phone call and now he was a virtual prisoner in his own hotel. He did not know whoever it was who had called him but it was obvious that they knew him. They had known enough about him and his questionable activities for him to grant them sight unseen, access to the grounds of de Calin Resorts for an unspecified amount of time. How much longer he would remain in the windowless, stuffy office he had no idea.

Outside of the steamy office the palms swayed gently in the dusk winds so thoroughly enjoyed by the one on the patio. The man sat down and reviewed his mornings work.

Two small square tables had been placed in the exact center of the spacious patio. About five feet away sat another lone table. Placed precisely around the two tables sat five chairs, one at the end and two on each side. The table by itself had received one chair facing the other two

tables. A large tent had been placed over the peculiar arrangement and a partition had been hung separating the one table and the other two. The rest of the outdoor furniture had been stacked neatly against the rock walls that surrounded the patio.

Satisfied that the setup was correct the man nodded to someone on the third floor through his black hood and entered the Hotel.

In room 311 a man in his late fifties sat in the bedside chair and acknowledged the nod with a wave of his hand. His features were full, well rounded and had a relaxing countenance to them. He exuded a peaceful air and his face looked young and fresh except for the scar that began its winding course below his left eye and disappeared into the starched collar of his Botany 500 shirt. It was a tell tale scar, probably the only one like it in the world. Hundreds, perhaps thousands knew of this man and would instantly recognize him. He was not a famous man he just held a high profile job. Professor of sociology at New York university. This job had earned him few admirers, even fewer followers and he had only found one man that he trusted implicitly.

That man now stood behind the mirrored doors of the patio and scanned the lobby of the hotel for anything unusual. In his hand the tie down stakes of the patio tent had been replaced by a MAC-11 machine gun with a silencer. A deadly weapon for a deadly young man. Behind the hood was his face. His face was hard, and currently void of emotion. A taut mask which would have looked quite at home sitting around a Vegas card table playing poker for high stakes and running an unbelievable bluff. He and the man upstairs were about to do just that.

His name was Frank Rashid, at least that's what all his American friends called him. His real name had other roots, and Akar didn't sound American enough for anybody he knew. He allowed himself a slight grin as he glanced towards the office which held the owner of the place as a captive. That guy was definitely an American, and a wimp! He would never be able to play games of chance with Akar. Akar had bluffed his way out of death and into life many times before, this man did not scare him. But he was showing a little guts now.

"You better let me out of here now! I have had enough of this!"

"The door is not locked my friend. You may come out at any time." Akar punctuated his remark by sliding the bolt back on his MAC-11. The echo reverberated off the marble and granite floors of the lobby with a deadly metallic sound. The door did not open.

Akar walked to the door. "The rules are simple my friend, you stay in there until we are gone and you live. You come out and you die. If you make noise after this, you die. We will be having guest and we don't wish to be disturbed. Do you understand?" The voice behind the door folded. "Yes."

The game continued for Akar and his mentor in room 311. The student and the teacher. Their bond was one of mutual trust, and need. The student sought knowledge and wisdom, the teacher needed the vitality and ambition that can only be found in the young and willing. The two of them together had come a long way for this moment. Akar had learned well, the teacher had his reward and sat in waiting upstairs.

The teacher stood up and walked to the window overlooking the patio. He was fairly erect for his age and bodily condition. A badly damaged knee led him to limp a little to the left. A hopelessly twisted and painful back did not help his gait. Then there were the scars. The scars that made others grimace to even think about due to their placement.

The scars had been inflicted upon him at a much younger age. A time of madness for him and others. He had once roamed the streets of war torn Beirut with the Aja-Kull. Until the day he found Akar. That was a day that changed his life again. It was funny he thought to himself, how life had unseen twists and turns in it. One death had driven him mad, another had given him back his sanity. Strange.

Today would also be strange. Today he would dig back into those memories of madness and relive them with others. Then he would give them all the key to their wildest dreams. He wondered if his screening had been efficient. Was the prize big enough? would they come?

The guests came one by one. Approximately fifteen minutes apart they arrived in rental cars and drove through the dilapidated gates of De Calin Resorts. They were met in turn by Akar who escorted each of them to their seat inside the tent. After all five of the men were in the tent the tension was unbearable.

"I want to thank you for coming." The voice came from behind the curtain. Every man there tried to assign the voice to something. They were all unsuccessful. It was too polished, too smooth to give away anything about it's owner.

Muhammad Kilttek spun at the sound of the voice. "Who are you? Why do you bring us here?"

Akar leveled the MAC-10 toward the mans head.

From behind the curtain the voice spoke for the first time. "I am a brother to you Muhammad, as you are a brother to the others here. Why do you yell at me?"

"Because, all of my brothers I can see, except you! Why do you not show yourself, are you afraid?"

"Nacal et ite vue."

Muhammad Kilttek froze. The Englishman knew Arabic. And a very old dialect. How was that possible, who could possibly know that...

"No my brother I am not afraid. The man before you with the weapon is my guard, not yours, you are all unarmed and here alone even your personal bodyguards are not here. I ask you Muhammad, why should I be afraid?"

"That was very old Arabic my friend, how is it that a Englishman like you should know that dialect?"

"Muhammad, I am a learned man, I study these things. I studied all of you, that's why you are here. If I had misjudged any of you, it would be to my own detriment. I did not. The prize is worth the risk is it not?"

Muhammad looked at the others. They gave condescending glances. "Yes, but I still do not like not seeing your face. How can we know that we may trust you?" he said with a cheshire cat smile which was lost on no one present. This after all was not a game where there was much trust to be had.

"If you desire the prize you will have to. But I can tell you something to ease your mind my friend. Do you remember Tel Avis? It was ten years ago, and you were standing on a hill right outside of the city. You had just lost ten men inside of a Government building."

A sweat broke out on Muhammad's forehead. How did this man know? They wouldn't have died, if the operation had been done on time, if he had been on time, ten minutes late, that was all....it wasn't even his fault....

"Do you realize how close your men were to detonating that device? Do you know that even today the Israelis and the Americans will not admit to such a thing? Muhammad, if the schedule would have been followed exactly as laid out by the strategic planner of the Aja-Kull it would have been done! Tel Avis would be gone!"

"How do you know this? Who are you?" He stood, which only served to get him closer to the end of the MAC-10. He withdrew and sat down.

"I am the one who planned it. I am the strategic planner from the Aja-Kull."

There was a murmur that went up around the table. The planner of the Aja-Kull! Everyone thought the man was dead. Killed years ago in Lebanon. He was a legend to these men. His plans were precise and deadly. Freedom would have surely been gained by now if he had not died.

"My death must remain as truth for the rest of the world. If my identity was to be found out now, by anyone, and that includes you my friends it would endanger not only myself, but those who know. You are safer if you do not know what I look like now. I will rest better knowing that even if you are interrogated they will not be able to get that information from you. That is why I will not show myself to you or anyone else here. This entire plan must be executed with my anonymity as a top priority or else it will not work. Remember Tel Avis, ten minutes may seem like a small thing, but it is not. Every detail is of utmost importance and secrecy between us is for our own good."

One of the others spoke now. "How do we get the nuclear weapons Siskar?"

"Things are changing in the world my friend. Some things in America are changing for our benefit."

"We have very few contacts in America. You know that."

"The number is not as important as the quality my friend. And the quality of the people I have in mind is above reproach."

Los Angeles October 1996

Warm and mild was the forecast for the weather and the group was enjoying it immensely. Even though it had taken years to accomplish their goals they were now about to embark on the last leg of their self appointed mission, so they had met on the beaches of Los Angeles to celebrate and to say good-bye to each other for a while, maybe for the rest of their lives. Their work together was done.

They realized that what they were about to do would be considered high treason by their governments but they believed they held a higher ideal, a ideal they were willing to die for. If they were successful the world would definitely change, perhaps radically but they had no idea about the way the world was fixing to change, even though they were to be a large part of it, and yet were to have nothing to do with it.

To the privately hired waiter these people seemed to be nothing special, he looked on from the makeshift bar. Before him was a mix of old coots, two women and some of their kids playing in the water while the adults sat around a round table sipping champagne and steadily munching on finger foods.

He had been at private parties for movie stars, rock stars, the President, people who were somebody. The only one here he even recognized was the host, he was some professor at Berkeley who got on T.V. every once in a while. Harry, Harry something, his train of thought was broken as silver met crystal and Harry something prepared to make a toast.

Harry stood very quietly for a moment and looked out across the ocean, over the horizon and perhaps past the sunset, maybe past the sun itself. "To the sands of this and every other beach, to all the oceans, to the forests and the mountains. To the old, but particularly the young of every nation. To you, my dear friends here and to all of God's creation on this planet. We have dedicated the past ten years of our lives, to these things. Now my friends I dedicate this moment to you and all that we have accomplished and hope to accomplish. Godspeed on your journeys."

One by one the others stood up with a quiet reserved "Here, Here." and the glasses clinked together.

The waiter watched with an ill at ease feeling. These people were definitely different, not movie stars, not rock stars not hardly anybody, but he had the feeling he had just witnessed something very important, an end and a beginning, something big. Most toasts he had seen were merry little affairs with little giggles or loud raucous laughter

accompanying their conclusion. That was often the reason there were small spills from time to time. These people had spilled a little champagne too, but not from laughter, from solemn faces and shaky hands. And with the champagne on the table, not distinguishable from looking but only from having seen them run down, a few tears laid quietly, yet boldly as they were evaporating in the warm California sun.

The waiter shook the possum off his grave and moved toward the table to wipe up the champagne...and the tears.