

“SPIRIT”

LIVES

EXCERPT

CHAPTER ONE

December 7th
A Ski Resort in Germany

The ski resort was abuzz, not only because it was the weekend and eight beautiful inches of powdery white snow had fallen in the last two days, but because Gerhard Franz, “the people’s” Prime Minister of Germany, was taking a well-deserved holiday here. It also meant that security was extra tight.

Franz was the most popular Prime Minister Germany had in decades. His platform of anti-nuclear weapons and economic reform - along with a charismatic, engaging personality - completely won over the people of Germany and granted him the victory over the incumbent Prime Minister by the largest margin ever recorded.

He was here with his wife and his 17-year-old daughter to participate in one of his many passions, skiing.

There was a crowd, standing twenty-five deep lining the stairs and the platform of the ski lift, waiting their turn for the ride up to the top of the mountain. When Gerhard and his party arrived, they parted like the waters of the Red Sea to allow the popular German leader to pass. The lift the group approached was two-tiered; the upper tier was for going up the mountain, and the lower was for those coming down. Each conveyance consisted of two side-by-side chairs attached to a pole which mechanically hooked onto the line that, in turn, descended with a push from one of the platform attendants at a 25-degree angle for about thirty feet before it engaged and locked onto the motorized main line going up to the mountaintop. Conversely, for those coming down there was a juncture that automatically disconnected the chairs from the main line and allowed them to descend onto the lower tier for dismounting. Admittedly, there was a bit of jolt when the line connected and disconnected. This was why the resort had attendants at each platform to make sure that the people going up were securely

fastened in their chairs and to safely stop the momentum of those coming down.

After signing a bunch of autographs, Gerhard and one of his security men were seated in their chairs with his wife and daughter to follow in the next conveyance. Each one of them had his or her own security guard. The guards seated themselves on the outside and to the right of their assignment, and additional security personnel were stationed at set intervals all the way up the mountain.

The setting posed a security risk no head of security liked to think about, and each guardian knew the danger of exposing his assignment to a scenario such as this. Yet all they could do was prepare as best they knew how for any emergency and accede to the wishes of the Boss, the Prime Minister of their country. Every employee at the resort was checked out beforehand; all came up clean. The security detail reconnoitered the surrounding area for miles around, and all seemed clear there, too. As for the crowds, there were some of their own people scattered throughout the throngs of people, and nothing irregular had turned up.

As the two tall, blond-haired, athletically built attendants secured the security guard and the Prime Minister into their chairs, a commotion began about halfway down the stairs. An old, gray-haired woman had either fallen or was accidentally pushed and was now yelling and screaming incoherently in a thickly accented, gravelly toned voice. Everyone turned his or her head toward the woman, attention momentarily diverted from the departing Prime Minister.

Within that very short time frame, the two attendants used the element of surprise --all of their individual strength to violently twist and snap the necks of the Prime Minister and his bodyguard. Then, giving their seats the necessary push, sent them down the decline. At the juncture of connection to the main line, the jolt caused the insecurely fastened seatbelt of the dead Prime Minister to slip, the body falling 20 feet to the ground below. His bodyguard continued on up the mountain with his head obviously slumped to one side.

The fall, while unplanned, was actually fortuitous because it created a panic of screams, pushing and shoving as security personnel scurried to attend to the Prime Minister. The ensuing chaos allowed the two attendants to quickly and unobtrusively leave the area, virtually undetected.

The repercussions of the death of Gerhard Franz would be felt throughout the free world.

December 10th
La Pergola Restaurant
Managua, Nicaragua

The meeting was arranged with the two Israeli industrialists for the purpose of buying their factory in Mexico City. The factory manufactured farm machinery equipment and could very easily be converted to manufacture all-terrain military vehicles which would turn a very lucrative profit should the grander plan succeed.

Herman had chosen Nicaragua because his son had a factory here, and he wanted the meeting to be away from Mexico yet not far enough away that it would be too inconvenient for them to make the trip. The chosen spot was about an hour's plane ride, give or take, from Mexico City.

Isaiah Arbin and David Flesch, the factory's owners, did not want to meet with the old man, but Herman knew they had a standard rule between them. When in business, you never knew where the next deal would come from, so every possible situation was investigated. Herman could tell from their body language that they were fast becoming bored after two hours of small talk. It was time to get down to business.

"So David, how much will it take to buy the factory you and Isaiah own on the outskirts of Mexico City?" In his thick German accent, the question was more a statement than anything else.

"Herman, the factory is not for sale. Look, Isaiah and I enjoy what we do and have no intention of selling anything for a good number of years. If our children don't want our business when we are ready to retire, then we will sell it. In about twenty-five years."

At that, David and Isaiah chuckled at one another.

Herman wasn't amused. He had offered the men twice what the factory was worth, and he was not used to being rebuked.

"I am offering you twice what it is worth. Why won't you take the money?" Herman pressed, attempting to maintain a calm disposition.

"That's another curious thing, Herman. Why would you offer us so much money?"

"Because it is a working factory, and it is located exactly where I want it to be. I don't have to bother going through the difficulty of locating the property, building the building, dealing with the governments, hiring the people, etcetera, etcetera. It's actually worth more than what I offered you not to have to go through that. How about I increase the offer by 50 percent again? That's what? Thirty million? How about it?"

“I’m sorry, Herman, but we are just not interested in selling,” Isaiah said.

“I am sorry to have to break this up, Herman, but we have to catch a plane to Mexico City in an hour, and we must get going. If you want, we will gladly pay the check for the lunch,” David said.

“I wouldn’t hear of it,” Herman replied. “Question, though, before you go. God forbid, but if something ever happened to both of you guys, what would happen to that factory?”

This question obviously unnerved Isaiah by the pause he gave and the wary look Herman received before he answered. “We’ve prepared for that. David’s brother-in-law is an attorney in New York and handles our affairs. He would sell the property for our widows. That is precisely why we don’t usually travel on the same plane or go anywhere together. This meeting has been our only exception.”

Herman looked at them, smiled ingratiatingly, and bowed. “I am honored, gentlemen. Please have a safe trip back.”

As the gentlemen left the restaurant, Herman dialed his cell phone.

A tall, athletically built man with long blond hair standing in the baggage loading area at Managua airport answered his cell phone after two rings.

“Deliver the package,” was the message from Herman.

“Ya vol,” was the response. The blond man then turned to one of the airport baggage personnel, handing him a medium-sized suitcase and a very thick manila envelope.

“¿Sabe lo que tienes que hacer?” he asked in the native tongue.

“Si, señor,” the skycap responded, stuffing the envelope in his shirt and taking hold of the suitcase.

The tall man smiled, nodded his head and walked away.

Herman’s next call was to an attorney in New York City. After a short conversation, he decided to enjoy the pool outside his bungalow-type hotel room, smoke a cigar and have a Saki cocktail on the rocks. After all, he was at the famous La Mercedes Hotel in Managua, Nicaragua. How many times would he have the opportunity to enjoy the pleasantries of this hotel? Besides there were a few young girls in bikinis he’d noticed tanning at poolside.

As he sat and ogled the firm young bodies lying on the chaise lounges and walking up and down the poolside, he allowed his thoughts to drift to Martin. He was supposedly killed in his factory here in Nicaragua, though the location of the factory had never really been confirmed. Martin had had

the grand plan all set up, too. He was smart. It all started to crumble when that hooker had been killed. He would have had half the U.S. Government in his pocket by the time he was through, had he succeeded. *“Well, we aren’t going to be as sophisticated Martin or as patient, but we’ll get them all and then some.”* The thought was a promise Herman made to Martin and himself.

December 11th
Figaro’s Restaurant
Tampa, Florida

A tall, athletically built gentleman with shoulder-length blond hair entered Figaro’s restaurant and stood patiently near the cashier’s stand. Dressed in a pair of casual slacks and shirt with a black raincoat, he nonchalantly reached into the glass bowl containing the after-dinner mints and took four or five, popping them into his mouth. While innocently looking around the restaurant, he took full notice of the meeting taking place in the back room.

The rear portion of the restaurant was separated from the rest by a slatted partition. It looked like the wall of a screen porch; the bottom portion was solid but only came up about two and a half feet. Instead of a screen in the upper portion, it had slats that could be opened or closed for privacy. The slats, at this point, were open. There was a doorway, but no door was evident, so it was obvious the room was also used to seat customers depending upon how busy the restaurant was or the priorities of its owner.

There was a slightly built man with grey hair by the name of Santo Piconi leading the meeting. This surprisingly small man was the reputed Mafia Don of Florida. The five other men at the meeting were associates. The man to Santo’s right, giving his report, was Piconi’s Lieutenant, John Falcone.

As the blond man watched, one of the other men at the table rose from his seat at a gesture from the Don and went into the kitchen. In seconds, he came back out followed by an older, gray-haired, balding man about 5'7" tall. Of stocky build, dressed in a long-sleeved white silk shirt with an open collar and neatly tailored gray slacks, the man carried himself with an air of dignity and self-confidence. He walked directly to the man at the front.

"I'm sorry you had to wait. My name is Fredrico. How can I help you, sir?" he asked with just a hint of an Italian accent.

"Oh, that's okay," the blond man replied, his own accent lightly European. "I wanted to set up a dinner party for this evening for about fifteen people. Can you accommodate that?"

"Most certainly, sir."

"Is it possible we can use the room in the rear, which will give us a bit of privacy?"

"I think we can arrange that, sir."

"I mean, will it be available?" With that he gestured with his hand at the fact that it was now occupied.

Fredrico smiled, "Be assured it will be available Sir. That meeting won't last more than another half to three-quarters of an hour. And what name shall I put the reservation under, Sir?"

"You can put it under Bendesky, Serge Bendesky. And thank you. I will see you this evening. Is eight o'clock too early?"

"No, Mr. Bendesky, that will be fine. We will be ready for you."

Fredrico stuck out his hand and Bendesky shook it. It was a firm handshake. He calmly turned and left the restaurant.

Once outside, Serge smiled and quietly said to himself. "Thank you, Fredrico; you gave me all the information I needed and the time to do what I have to do. Although I doubt that you will be ready for *me*.

At that, he went to the trunk of his car, took out what looked like a doctor's black bag, and went to the side of Santo Piconi's gold Mercedes that was away from the door of the restaurant. Dropping to his knees, then onto his back, he slid himself under the car. It took him about twelve minutes to set the explosives and prepare the method of ignition. Still smiling, he rose carefully to his feet, made sure no one was around, got into his car and left.

At the end of the meeting Santo was relating to his associates about his vacation, complaining about how his son threw up all over the back seat of his car on the way home from the Keys and how it had left a terrible odor in the car.

“Why don’t you let me take it to my cousin’s place, Santo? He has a detail shop and will get it cleaned up for you. You’ll have it back by this evening.”

“You sure it’s no bother, John?”

“Nah, not at all. Besides, he owes me big time.”

“I’d really appreciate that. Thanks. I’ll just hang out here at the restaurant until you get back.” At that, Santo flipped him the keys.

John took the keys and left. He got into the car, turned on the ignition and headed out of the parking lot. Just as he cleared the lot and turned onto Dale Mabry, the bomb went off.

The explosion was not only heard inside the restaurant; it also rocked the building. Santo went running outside to the street along with his men. Seeing his car in flames, he knew what had happened. It was Thomas who immediately pulled him back into the restaurant, drawing his pistol and shielding the Don with his own body while looking around to see if whoever made the hit might have stuck around to make sure the job was done. The others searched the area but found nothing. Knowing that there was nothing else they could do, they went back into the restaurant and waited for the police.

Santo was very unnerved and very, very angry. He was so angry that he was perfectly calm. He knew John Falcone’s death would be avenged.

December 17th
A Suburb outside of
Langley, Virginia.

Knowing full well that having a habitual routine of any sort in his line of work could be deadly, he finished his evening three-mile walk. The circle in his subdivision measured 6/10 of a mile around; he had clocked it with his

car one day. He walked it five times on this cold December evening with the frosty air biting at his nose.

The gated community of pricey homes afforded very little security. The only lighting on the tree-lined streets came from the homes themselves, which, strangely enough, made him feel secure. Having lived here for 30 years, he knew every shrub, hedge, nook and cranny of the neighborhood. He knew everyone here and everyone knew him. He knew every car, truck, SUV and mini-van that was supposed to be there. If anything or anyone out of place appeared, his trained eyes would surely pick up on it and increase his guard. The silent communicator he carried in the pocket of his sweat pants would notify his office, and his people could get out here in minutes. Yet he was no fool. He knew full well that in the minutes it took them to get there, he could also be dead.

His philosophical and fatalistic outlook came with age. In his field of endeavor, he rationalized that, at 72 years of age, he had probably outlived any enemies he had. So, five nights a week he took his three-mile walk.

The solid steel, telescopic police baton he carried as he walked, combined with the .32 Beretta holstered in the waistband of his sweat pants, gave him a bit of mental security, if nothing else.

His neighbors knew he worked for the government. They would never have guessed that this slightly built almost bald, sweet, mild mannered man was one of the Deputy Directors of the CIA. In their wildest imagination, they couldn't conceive that he'd planned strategies during the Cold War that took the lives of Russian and East German agents, not to mention the thousands of other culpable, as well as innocent, people. *"Strategies that cost the lives of some of our own agents, written off as acceptable losses compared to the gains in intelligence and the disruption of our enemy's schemes and systems,"* he thought cynically.

Just thirty miles away from Langley, Virginia, and the home and offices of the CIA, Bret Cameron was now about to retire for the night. It was 11 p.m. and his day was over. But before turning in, he succumbed to another routine habit, checking his e-mail.

Dressed in his pajamas and slippers, Bret plodded from his bedroom on the second floor down the stairs of his two-story ranch home and headed for his office in the basement. Passing through the spacious living room and kitchen, he momentarily stopped and took notice of the kitchen, just recently been remodeled with all new appliances and a newly tiled floor. The color scheme his wife Edna picked out was blue and white. She was thrilled. He hated it, but as long as she was happy, it was fine with him. He chose the

basement for his office because he was able to sound proof it and block out the goings on upstairs in the house. It afforded him the privacy he needed.

The office was simply furnished with a modest wooden desk, a big old comfortable executive's leather chair with the high back, and an electric massage pad that supported his aching and arthritic back. Pictures and posters of the many countries he and Edna had traveled to adorned the four walls. A picture of Pavarotti during a performance of *La Bohemme* at the La Scala Opera House was his favorite. The history and the intimidating presence of the grand old building held him in awe.

Four old, lockable gunmetal file cabinets were lined up against one wall. An old Halogen pole lamp that stood by the entranceway and a florescent desk lamp provided his sources of light. His "piece de resistance" was a state-of-the-art computer system provided by the "The Company." Turning on the halogen lamp and closing the door behind him, he sat down and moved the mouse. He entered his password and found he had four messages. Three he recognized. The fourth he did not. He opened that one first. It had no subject and was from a "Friend" at Yahoo.com. When he opened it, he got the surprise of his life. Sweat started to form on his upper lip. His hands started to shake, and a strange feeling crept into the pit of his stomach.

"SPIRIT" Lives - will be in touch," it read. That was it, nothing more.

Bret Cameron couldn't believe his eyes.

"This is impossible!" he exclaimed aloud to the empty room.

The e-mail was received at 10:45 p.m. He immediately called his office and got the technician on duty. He gave the technician the necessary information, ordering him to trace the e-mail and have the source on his desk first thing in the morning. It always thrilled him to know that the CIA was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"How could this be?" he questioned as he hung up the phone and sat back in his chair.

The funeral was just five months ago in Florida, and he'd attended. Bret had to admit to himself, however, that if the funeral was a fake, "SPIRIT" was one of only a handful of people he knew who could pull it off. But he was old and sickly. He knew that first hand. *Unless, the e-mail came from an impostor! A pretender that found the code!* The insidious thought wormed its way into his rapidly clicking mind.

That raised even more questions. Could "SPIRIT" have passed on the information? He knew he could not return the e-mail. He was sure that it was

sent from a generic computer station such as a library, a computer retail store, or something like a Kinko's copy center. He would just have to wait.

As a Deputy Director of the CIA, patience was his forte. But the older he got he seemed to have less *of* it, and the more he had to wait. It was venerably one of the detriments of his position. He had waited for communication from "SPIRIT" on his last operation in Brussels and the one before that in Amsterdam. Even though that was several years ago, he would wait for this one, too.

His mind started to wander, his imagination conjuring up all sorts of scenarios and possibilities.

"Why did he contact me? Why now? What is going on? Or worse yet, what is about to happen?"

He knew enough to know that "SPIRIT" would never contact him at home so blatantly unless it was something of extraordinary importance. This was about to drive him nuts. His instincts started to click in. Old feelings started to re-emerge. Adrenaline started to flow. He started to come alive again.

The desk job he had been given two years ago, along with his title, was really an honorary position for services rendered. He had been taken out of the field operations unit and put in a position to wait out his retirement, scheduled for six months from now. His forty-two years of service to "The Company" had earned him that, along with the respect of several directors and Presidents. He was both well liked and most importantly well respected. He was efficient and an innovator, implementing changes of policy, as well as upgrading "The Company's" systems to take advantage of new technology.

Bret was an expert in the ever-evolving field of surveillance technology and was retained more as a consultant than one with a position of authority. He accepted his new position because it gave him more time to spend with his wife Edna and put fewer demands on him. It was also a whole lot less stressful than previous years. But he had to admit he was not really happy. Even at the age of 72, he missed the "juice" and excitement of days gone by.

As he exited his office and locked the door, he murmured, "Well, here we go again!" A smile crossed his face as the words left his mouth and he trudged up the stairs. Meanwhile, he knew he would not sleep well tonight.