

Chapter 1 – Carnage on Carnaby Street

In 1964 the narrow brick canyon that was London's Carnaby Street, for good or bad, was the very center of the world. Pop culture, which was the only culture that seemed to matter at the moment, revolved around the British rock bands, whose music and fashions had begun to change the ways of the youth of the Western world. It was as if the British could again think of themselves as an Empire of sorts, but one established by boys with guitars rather than by armies of red-coated soldiers and fleets of billowy-sailed warships.

The so-called British Invasion had infused life into the wounded psyche of the people of the United States, which had been shaken to its core by the unimaginable horror of the mysterious regicide that had occurred in Dallas, Texas, the previous November. The feeling of unreal euphoria that emanated from the small bejeweled and sceptered isle was almost enough even to make everyone in the West forget for a while that the Damocles sword of nuclear war was hanging over the entire world. It seemed almost like magic, this welcome dose of fizzy unreality.

On one particular bright blue, late autumn afternoon, if you were walking on Carnaby Street, you would see streamers of Union

11

T.B. CRATTIE

Jacks, alternating with pennants emblazoned with the heavily mascara-rimmed eyes of the sticklike model Twiggy, flapping in the stiff breeze. A steady flow of tiny Minis, sleek Jags, diesel-exhaust-spouting black cabs, and even stately Bentleys rattled along the brick street. The latest pop masterpieces blared from shop fronts. And as the fashionably and outlandishly dressed lad and ladettes paraded past, you might think that you had somehow slipped into Tir na nOg, the fairyland of eternal youth.

And Percy Mortimer certainly felt that way, no easy feat for a man in Percy's line of work, with his heavily lumbered conscience, such as it was. In spite of his relatively tender age, he dealt in a very weighty business, matters of men

and of the earth and, most important of all, large quantities of Sterling. He was an investment banker, a mover and shaker in the world of men much older and experienced than himself. Percy, though, could rival any of those mossy-backed old boys in hard-nosed ruthlessness. His main line of business was financing arms deals for the dictators of recently decolonized countries south of the equator, deals that were conveniently brokered by one of his school chums who worked in the security services.

Percy was not yet thirty years old. Educated at Harrow and then Bedales after he'd been tossed out of Harrow in his second year, he went on to earn a First in history at Oxford. Somehow this very good, very expensive liberal education had primed him for a career of making huge sums in investment banking and in connecting respectable arms merchants with the power-mad men who needed to keep their own people down in the dirt and well under control.

But that afternoon Percy wasn't working. He was out squiring his dolly bird, the actress Letitia DeStyles, on a post-coital lunch and shopping stroll. The weather was just a tad nippy for the length of his girl's dress, a mini he'd bought for her at Mary Quant's shop on the King's Road. But she was wearing white tights and boots, and a

12

LAND'S END: TO SAVE THE REALM 2

fur jacket. And the day was going to warm up. By God, it was great to be alive. At that moment it seemed to Percy like he was chugging along in a happy, powerful engine that turned the world on its axis. At this moment, there was no Vietnam, no US and Russia at each other's throats, no government-induced famines killing millions of people in China and Africa. All was sunlight and sound, laughter and cleverness, color and movement, and the preternaturally large clear eyes and flashing white teeth of youth. Middle-aged businessmen, grey-faced, some wearing bowlers and carrying tightly rolled brollies, threaded through the colorful throngs as if they were phantoms. The stern Bobby issuing a ticket to a Rolls parked in front of Lord Kitchener's Valet may as well have been the invisible man.

A gang of four boys in Italian-style suits and boots with Cuban heels came clapping down the sidewalk with the clear expectation that everyone make way and admire them as they passed. And, generally, this is what happened. The boys were laughing and shoving each other. Percy thought, “Where did they get the presence and confidence from? They were clearly working class. Why weren’t they toiling, then, in dull, dead-end jobs somewhere?” Then he recognized them. They were a Mod band he’d seen earlier in the year at the Railway Hotel in Harrow. They were currently number two on Top of the Pops.

Midway down the block, in front of Merc Clothing, Terry Bell, the famous fashion photographer, was shouting instructions at the new It Girl, Priscilla Vine, who was writhing around like a great, exotic snake inside a red phone box. Percy’s girl saw this and stopped some yards away to watch. She shouted to Percy, “Look, there’s Terry!” The photographer framed his shot. Priscilla was now wrestling with a feather boa, very near naked. Her micro mini looked like a billowy white peasant shirt. She was absolutely luminous today. Long straight blond hair floated like filaments of light around her face, and her hazel eyes and thin lips worked somehow with her high cheekbones. Her smooth, freckled legs never seemed to quit. Through the lens, in

13

T.B. CRATTIE

the background, the photographer spotted Letty and that ass Percy Mortimer coming up the street toward him. He testily waited until they were out of the frame, then he began to shoot again, giving rapid-fire instructions to Priscilla to move about a bit, which didn’t give her a lot of options, being inside a phone box and all.

But then, something went horribly wrong. Percy Mortimer was frantically grabbing at a piece of wood that was sticking out of his neck. The feathers at the end of the shaft indicated to anyone who might be so unfortunate as to observe this monstrous scene that it was an arrow. Its razor-sharp point had sliced his jugular vein, and he was positively pumping crimson life right out into the bright British sunlight. Letitia began a mad hopping dance and then fell to her knees screaming and covering her eyes.

Terry kept working. He was a pro, and before he'd gotten into fashion, he had been a combat photographer in Malaysia with the Paras. He'd seen blood and killing before, but not in a place like this. He rapidly shot three frames of Percy, eyes wide, arms thrown up toward the sky, as the dying man fell to the sidewalk beside the unhinged Letitia. Then instinct made Terry look up to the buildings across the street, scanning the rooftops for the assailant. And there he was. A man holding a bow stood calmly on the roof, looking down at his handiwork. He didn't seem victorious, though, nor hurried a bit. He turned his gaze to Terry and gave a grim salute. A rugged, handsome fellow, he was, with long ginger hair blowing around his face. Terry raised his camera up and got a shot before the man turned and disappeared. That pic was going to be worth a fortune to him when the comics bid on it. For he'd just taken a snap of Lord Jack Torbryan, soon to be known far and wide as a notorious murderer.