

The Janus Clan, Book Three

**«The first twenty years - Book Three»  
The years 1975 - 1976**

# **Birds Flying in the Dark**

**By**

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## CHAPTER ONE

It was another gray day. The clouds hung low over the land. It was raining hard, and the snow that had fallen just a few days before was washed away. On a stretch somewhere in the English countryside, there was a cluster of modern buildings. They had been unnoticed for quite a while. They belonged to the government, possibly the army. Tall, barbed wired fences surrounded the property. Soldiers guarded the place, both inside and outside the fences. No one knew what went on inside, even though many had some ideas. No one spoke about it. One didn't speak about such matters. Dots of mist drifted between the dark buildings, away from them, and through the many-layered electrical fences.

Reaching for the red car turning off the main road. The icy water covered the asphalt like a blanket, flowing through the air behind the car. On several turns the car was just a notch or two from ending up on the field. The man behind the wheel - Mark Stewart - smiled grimly. He saw patrol cars everywhere. They were stationed along the road, along his route like ants. He hoped they would stop him, making him show them, them and the people in the dark buildings how things had changed.

His years in hiding were at an end. Those in power had no longer anything they could use against him. He decided his own fate from now on.

The car drove on ever-smaller roads. The exception was the last stretch. It was broad as a main road, even though it was just covered by gravel. He saw the buildings. It was as if the sky above them was even darker than usual. This was one of the Masters' places of power.

It had stopped raining. He was glad for that, at least. In front of the main gate had gathered a crowd. People with notebooks, cameras and tape-recorders. Several TV-cars were placed at strategic spots on the terrain. He observed his eyes in the mirror, his excited, glowing eyes. And that, too, pleased him. He wanted to cause a stir, wanted to herald his return to life.

Behind the gate a dozen soldiers with expressionless faces stood straight and unmovable. They were unarmed, a state of being clearly created for the «benefit» of the present journalists.

Stewart stopped well before the gate. The pack of dogs rushed towards him in an uneven stream. He departed the car and jumped up on its hood. He stood there, as they gathered in front of him, as they fired question after question at him, as all semblance of intelligible words drowned in

the buzz from the many voices. There was no reply. He just stood there, waiting, good-humored and seemingly infinitely patient.

The voices eventually quieted, as they finally got the point. They even stopped taking pictures. Stewart looked at his watch, waited ten seconds of silence before speaking.

– Listen up, he said forcefully. – You’ll get everything you came here for.

And then he smiled enigmatically.

– And more. Much more.

There was a quiet buzz, then, of excitement and expectation. They knew he was in control, and they accepted it, because of everything they stood to gain by it.

He took in their heat, used it and multiplied it, knew he could stand like this for hours, unhampered by the cold and freezing of limbs.

This was the end, the end of the years of forgetting and loneliness.

– Mr. Fontaine...

– Stewart, he corrected, – Mark Stewart.

– Mr. Stewart, when you left this morning you refused to speak to us. What made you change your mind?

– Let’s say I was a bit more... vulnerable then.

– So... the confirmation has come? All charges have been dropped?

A paper glowed in the light from the flashes. There was a murmur surging through the gathering.

– My secretary will give you copies later.

Stunned silence greeted his words.

– I was kidding...

More stunned silence followed by uncertain laughter. He played them, played them like he would a fiddle.

He pulled a pile of sheets from his coat, and began distributing them among the crowd. There was a lot pushing and muffled protests as they scrambled to get the first look, but everything eventually calmed down. He calmed them, with small gestures and reproaching glances. They turned from a pack of wolves to tame dogs eating off his hand.

– That’s better. He nodded. – I’ve had enough bullshit lately.

– From various government representatives?

A man in the front picked up the cue in an instant.

– You hit that one right on the head, Stewart grinned ironically. – They were quite angry with me, especially because of the public spectacle I’ve made of all this. They wanted to give their own, balanced version of it all, I guess.

– Does this have a connection to the fact that the youths are being treated in such a remote facility, in a military hospital?

That was one of the Americans. Probing journalism was quite popular there these days. He did his best to ape Stewart's ironic voice.

– You should ask the decision-makers that question...

They laughed. They «liked» Stewart, especially these days when he was the flavor of the day.

– But if I'm allowed to speculate, and I am, I would say that the expression «out of sight, out of mind», applies here. Almost all members of the Abraxas Omega are also members of The Thousand Feet, a respected organization in today's world, respected members of the so-called elite. They can't cry wolf this time, because there's hardly anybody but perceived white sheep currently filling up the prisons around the world. By placing the visible, tangible part of their problem, their embarrassment out here they hope that the electorates will eventually forget about this, too... and unfortunately, they're correct.

They wrote so fast that pens seemed to fly over the paper. Cameras clicked and hummed.

– You may quote me word by word on this, he added sweetly.

But there wasn't a mild-mannered man standing there, before them, by any stretch of the imagination. A lifetime of frustration and rage was exposed this day, raw and uncompromising.

– A persistent rumor claims your hair and eye color has changed. That was an Englishman, clearly a man more government friendly inclined. – The same rumor says you're not the real Mark Stewart...

Loud and spontaneous and true laughter erupted across the gray and white landscape.

– It's not that difficult to say where this rumor originates from... is it? More laughter from the spectators, louder and friendlier.

– The government claims it has weighty reasons for treating the patients out here. It was the same Englishman. – That they're in dire need of protection, and that this is the best place for that.

– There is danger, no doubt, even though this particular world-spanning branch of the Abraxas Omega has been pretty much dismantled. But most of the threat comes from the government itself. Basically, the «patients» don't need more protection than most others. They need rest, and true healing. Not to be surrounded by public servants disguised as physicians.

– You're implying that certain parts of the government are using the situation to... learn something?

– Implying, yes...

It was like the sun broke through the clouds, even though it clearly didn't. They looked up at the sky, and it was still the same, gray ceiling. But down here, right in their midst, was the fire. Later, many of them swore they had seen shadows in the others' faces.

– Are you a communist? Mr. Stewart?

A thin voice from the crowd, completely devoid of the usual condemnation.

And at that moment it turned silent, everything. They imagined they actually heard the snow melt.

– I'm very pleased to get the opportunity to answer that question», he mocked. – I expected that. No, I'm not a communist.

– But you're quite critical towards our society and its government?

– And I'm therefore a communist, right? How typical, how sad.

Stewart shook his head in contempt.

– I'm far more radical and critical than those pretenders.

He moved a bit, took a long, hard look at them all, and began speaking.

– Communism and Capitalism are, to put it simply, merely two sides of the same coin. Or two almost identical coins in a world where there shouldn't be any coins at all. Both are based on power, hierarchies not very different from other dictatorships throughout history. The only difference between a democracy and a dictatorship is that in a democracy people are fooled into believing that they have a say in how things should be done. A democracy is a clever dictatorship, nothing more. Overt dictatorships are on their way out. It's bad for business. Today's tyrants are sneakier, far more dangerous than all of history's Hitlers and Victorias and such. Law and Order are hailed as the triumph of free will and humanism while they're nothing of the sort. Law and Rule are made by the rich and powerful to benefit the rich and powerful, against those who have little or nothing. We're living in a totalitarian society unparalleled in history, and this is being hailed as progress. And that is, of course, how the people above want it. They are, for the very first time, close to being master of all they survey, but they still aren't content. They want total control. Not a single drop of rain shall fall without their control. So they're constantly seeking to improve their system, and learn even more about ways to pacify unruly subjects, learn better behavior control and such. And people are fooled all the time.

– And your alternative is?

It was a guy with a Scandinavian accent, clearly agitated.

– There are literally thousands of alternative ways for humans to live. Stewart shrugged, deliberately, very deliberately. – One of the truly great achievements, seen from the tyrants' point of view in today's world, is

that they have succeeded to such an uncanny degree at convincing people that there are no alternatives. To most people today reality isn't much bigger than a television set, and that's just the half of it. The Sixties showed some of it, some temporary progress, but it's all being squandered already.

– *Squandered?* What about women's rights, colored people right's to vote in United States and everything?

– One step forward. Ten leaps behind.

Stewart grinned then, and the journalist had difficulty breathing, hiding his anger.

– It's strange, he spat. – Nothing I've read about you... and I've read a lot, even suggested you were political.

– One thinks. Stewart shrugged again. – One lives. One learns. One's biding one's time. And now...

There was a rush in the crowd.

– ... the time is nigh.