

19 Run

Somewhere in the darkness he heard a tune, a soft tune, one from Louis Armstrong. He almost started humming along with it until he realized it was his phone lying on the bedside table. It was 9:39 and it was dark outside. Johnson sat up quickly and without recognizing his surroundings, grabbed the phone.

“Huh.”

“Johnson?”

Horse pulled the phone from his head and looked at the Caller ID number. It was a 242 area code. “Yeah, who’s this?”

“It’s Simmons.” The Bahamian cop whispered.

“I can barely hear you, can you speak up?”

There was a pause and then, “Is this better? I went into the John.”

“Yeah.”

“Whitte’s gone missing.”

“How so?”

“He left the station yesterday with a woman who we suspect as a smuggler. She’s associated with the lawyer Whitte had a conference with. He never returned to his suite at Atlantis and one of my men found out he had been seen at the British Colonial. The smuggler had a room there. I’m guessing he had some assistance in leaving the country.”

In a way, this actually gave Johnson some comfort. His worry was that Whitte would be mistreated in the Nassau jail, especially since his guilt was now in question. He didn't comment to Simmons.

"Listen, we're not provincial cops without resources. I also viewed the surveillance video and I IDed the girls." There was a pause then he added, "They got one."

"You mean the jazz singer?" Johnson replied. "I know."

"No, the one that looked like the victim. They got her."

"What do you mean they got her?"

"She's dead man. They shot her an hour ago."

"Who shot who? And who the hell are *they*?"

"Listen up fuck head. I'm not bull shitting ya," Simmons said, his dark, rich Caribbean accent hissing out under pressure. "And I don't know who *they* are but there's always a *they*."

Johnson sat up and swung his legs on the ground. "Simmons, give me a minute."

"You're not getting this. You don't have a minute. Neither do I." There was a pause. "You were right. This thing's fucked up. I'm going to take a vacation, if you know what I mean. Ya need too as well. Like right now."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"To answer your question: no I wasn't allowed to examine the girl's body. I was called into my boss' office with a guy who said he was with the girl's stepfather, the governor."

Horse sat up. "What guy? What did he look like?"

“Stocky, dark hair, crew cut with sunglasses. You know the saying about the duck? The one that goes if they walk like a duck and quack like a duck?”

“Yeah,” Horse responded, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

“He was a fucking duck, man. I think he was Agency. He looked like some of the guys I’ve dealt with on anti-terrorism drills.”

“Did he look like the guy on the security tape?”

“Yeah, could have been. Listen, I’m doing you a favor.” There was a long pause. “They’re coming for you, okay. You’ve got to leave.”

“Who’s coming for me?” asked Johnson.

“They’ll ID themselves as FBI or state police but they’re not. They’re trying to make us disappear.”

“Wait…”

“No. I gave you a heads up. You got no time. Walk away. Wherever you are, walk away. Take nothing. Leave your cell phone, your computer. Take nothing they can track you on. They’re big time.” The line went dead.

“Hello?” He was met with silence. He thought about calling him back but what use would that be? Johnson searched the Recent Calls menu on his phone and clicked the number of Mike Chambers. “Hey, Mike this is Horse.”

“Yeah, Horse I was just about to call you.” There was a pause. “Look, we found your person of interest. She killed a trooper and my guy had to shoot back. She didn’t make it.”

Johnson’s eyes frantically searched the room as if to find a threat. His mouth was

dry and no words came through.

“Hey, Horse. You there?”

“Yeah.”

“Where are you now?”

“I’m at the Embassy Suites in Fort... Who wants to know, Mike?”

“It’s nothing Horse. My Section Chief wants you to come in for a debrief. He wants to know why you wanted this girl.”

“I told you why...”

“Look, I can have a car there in ten minutes. We have a station just down the road from where you...”

Johnson flipped the phone shut before Chambers finished the sentence. He tossed it on his bed and dug through his luggage until he found a well-worn pair of black jeans, a black tee shirt, and a black baseball cap. As he dressed, he powered up his computer. He downloaded the surveillance video and all of his notes from the investigation onto a flash drive and then formatted the computer and tossed it into the trashcan inside of the bathroom. He also pocketed the original disk that the Atlantis security manager had provided. Though fully dressed, he felt naked without a gun. He also felt naked without his cell and computer.

Of course, Chambers wanting him to come in made sense: proper law enforcement procedure. But on the heels of Simmons’ call he decided to act. Besides, he had no more use for the FDLE.

He grabbed a small backpack that he used as a carry-on and glanced in: the only

item he had that served as a law enforcement tool was a pair of handcuffs. Shit. No gun, no knife, no nothing. He tossed in a couple of pairs of underwear, some socks, a couple of tees, and then his shave kit. He glanced at his cornet case and struggled with whether to take it. He shook his head and pulled on his navy blue tennis shoes, not bothering with socks.

Johnson cracked open the door. No one. He walked briskly from the room to the emergency stairwell and leapt down the stairs two at a time till he reached the ground floor. He paused and then slowly pushed the door open. It spilled into a well-lit parking lot.

He was disoriented but quickly established that he should move along a path of darkness, to his right, along 19th Street until he got to US 1 and cross. Surprisingly the road was dead which was never a good thing when on the run for the trick is to blend into life. He looked both ways and saw no cars and so he held his head down, shielded by the baseball cap and backpack, and scooted across the road and into the neighborhoods on the other side where there was relative darkness and he could move in shadows. He prayed that some old lady wouldn't call in the suspicious black man stalking the neighborhood.

He followed 4th Avenue until it intersected with 13th Street and turned, crossing US 1 again and made it to Tiffany Mark's home without incident. How long before they came for him there? Maybe 30 minutes, an hour, maybe never.

He slid in through the back sliding door, closed it and pulled the latch down to lock it and laid his backpack and baseball cap on the counter next to the sink. There was enough moonlight coming through the glass to make the layout of the kitchen.

He opened the pantry door and felt around for the flashlight he had seen earlier. Placing his hand over the light as a shield, he walked to the anal-retentive bitch's bedroom. He slid into the chair in front of the computer and turned it on. First, he needed to get an email off to his boss in Austin—nothing too revealing, only enough to know he was on the move. Second, he needed to do a search for an ATM where he could clean out his savings; it would have to be near a well-traveled highway so he had options to run—the pursuers would have to cover the surrounding neighborhoods as well as consider that he was able to hitch a ride. Third, he needed to figure out where he could go to bush—underground and hidden until he figured out what to do next. The Internet could provide all the information he would need.

While he waited for it to boot, he realized he was hungry and thirsty. He wouldn't take the time to eat at the apartment but he would stock up his bag with bottled water and whatever else he could find in the pantry.

As he neared the kitchen, he felt a breeze. Had he closed the door? Yes. He distinctly remembered closing and locking the sliding glass door. He froze and began to block out all of the night noises he heard such as crickets chirping, cicadas singing, dogs barking, a distant car driving by. Now, his attention was solely on the silence of the room. Maybe he had felt the air conditioning switching on. No. It was a swirl of warm summer stickiness that flowed from the kitchen. Then a creak of a door. Where did that come from?

Was someone looking into the pantry?

Suddenly a light flashed. Shit. He crouched down behind the wall and waited; ready to pounce once he had a target. He looked down on the carpet and saw that the moonlight was peering from the bedroom behind him and his shadow could be seen at the edge of the kitchen. He concentrated on complete stillness. It seemed like minutes dragged by but it wasn't but a few seconds when he heard scuffling on the linoleum floor. He dared to move his head slightly. A man, short in stature, stood in the doorway with a long barreled, silenced pistol pointed at his head.

“Hey man, don't shoot,” Johnson said. “I just found the door open and...”

A beam from a flashlight struck him in the face.

“Hey, just shut the fuck up,” came a male voice.

“The girl's not here,” Johnson said.

“Yeah, I know. We already got her. I'm here for you nigger.”

“It don't need to be personal, you know?”

“You've been poking around quite a bit. Why didn't you just go back to Texas like a good boy and stay out of this?”

Johnson didn't answer.

“Man you're black as can be. Thank God I've got the flashlight or I couldn't see you at all!” he exclaimed with a snort. “Okay, you move your nigger ass over there toward that couch, nice and slow. You try to stand and I'll shoot you dead.”

“Okay, man. Just be cool. I'm not doing nothing but helping you out. Whatever you want, I'll get done.”

The man repositioned his weapon so that the barrel was trained directly on Johnson's forehead.

"Okay, boy," the trigger man repeated, mockingly in an "Uncle Tom" voice, "Yous'a been a bad boy and I'm a gonna have to put you down."

It happened quickly. There was the *first round pop* or *FRP*. Movies always portray a shot from a suppressor as a soft *piffi*, like a baby's sneeze. Reality begs to differ. In this case, the assassin was carrying a Ruger 22/45, a basic design from 1911 that shoots a .22 LR. With the smaller caliber, the sound is greatly diminished from, for example a large .40 Glock 22 that's standard issue for law enforcement—which had this guy been a cop, he'd have a Glock and claim self-defense. The Glock will take off your head; the Ruger will punch a hole in it. Either way, the subject is dead. The Ruger explodes with 160 decibels—a rock concert, by comparison, comes in below 140 decibels—and much less than the Glock. Using a suppressor diminishes the sound to about 130 to 145 decibels, still quite discernable from a baby's sneeze and the FRP is louder than subsequent rounds because the barrel is still cold.

Even with the silencer, Horse's ears were assaulted first. Then a burning sensation in his left arm as it was cleaved by what felt like molten iron. He crumpled onto the ground as the limp body of the shooter fell on top of him. There was someone else in the room, scurrying around. He heard a distinctive clank on the floor and the other person bent over the crumpled mass of male flesh on the ground and quickly retrieved the silenced Ruger and flashlight from the assassin. The figure, silhouetted by the moon, moved quickly and efficiently and retreated to the corner by the kitchen to Johnson's right. His senses returned

quickly, blocking the pain somewhat, and he took inventory of the actions that had happened in rapid succession. The new player was short, shorter than the assailant; he had caught a glimpse as the person had moved through the moonlight. Now, the person was somewhere in a shadow, no doubt taking inventory as well.

“Don’t fucking move.” It was a female’s voice.

“Hey, like I told the guy before you: I’m not moving until you tell me to.”

There was a pause and then a beam of light hit Johnson in the face. The beam moved over the mess on the floor and then settled back on Johnson’s sweating brow.

“You’ve been hit.” It was a declaration and not a question; there was a tremble in the voice.

“Yeah. It hurts pretty bad. First time I’ve been shot.” He groaned. “Got hit in the face by a frying pan once but never...”

“Stop rambling,” the woman said, her voice still quivering. “I took out that guy with a iron skillet too and now I’ve got his gun.”

“Yes, ma’am. You sure do.”

Moments passed and Johnson began to suspect that this female was struggling with what came next. “Okay, here’s the deal,” Johnson said. “We can’t stay like this all night.”

“The hell we can’t,” she pronounced excitedly.

She was spooked. He had to relax the situation. Get her mind off the danger he might pose; let the adrenalin coursing through her begin to dissipate.

“Now you know that’s not really an option. What do you say we introduce ourselves? I’m Texas....”

“I don’t give a fuck who you are. What I need for you to do is stay still for a while.”

He could sense some movement behind the light and then the light’s angle changed as the female moved toward the kitchen’s entrance. The light remained in his face and he could not see her anymore but now he could tell that she held the suppressed weapon in her left hand and the flashlight in her right, over the gun just like a target laser. She was law enforcement trained.

“Can you feel if the guy’s got a pulse?” she asked, a measure of calm returning to her voice.

Johnson carefully pulled his right hand from underneath the gunman and felt toward his neck. He tried to find the carotid artery but there was no beat.

“You’ve done finished him off. Hope I’m not next.”

“You won’t be if I get you’re cooperation.”

“Cooperation’s my middle name.”

“I told you I don’t give a fuck what your name is.”

She showed a little humor. *Okay, she’s regaining her composure now.*

Then there was nothing for a couple of moments. Johnson felt that she might be trying to decide something. She came here for something and she wasn’t going to get it unless he was secure.

“Listen, I can make this a lot easier. In that bag on the counter, just inside you’ll find a set of cuffs. You can give them to me and I’ll put them on and then you’ll feel safer.”

There was a pause. “I’ve got a better idea. I’ve seen people in cuffs in frantic

situations before and I know how quickly the table can turn. You stay where you are and I'm going to back out of here. I'll leave the way I came in and if I see your face, I will blow it off."

"Now wait." Johnson shifted slightly. "You came in here for something. You can't get it unless you can get by me. I'm injured and I need some help. You can't leave me here with this ape on me. Hey, look, like I said, I'm law enforcement and all I'm doing here is investigating the death of Tiffany Marks. I'm not here to cause nobody no harm and if you want, you can make me leave out the front door and I'll walk away, no questions asked."

There was another pause. "Okay, Ranger. This is what we're going to do. Move back to where you were, laying flat on your stomach. I want you to push both of your arms underneath you and I want your palms up and grabbing your pecker."

"That's going to hurt my arm."

"Deal or no deal? I don't care."

Johnson maneuvered the best he could, allowing a slight moan despite the searing pain.

She moved closer to him and placed the light on the floor, still blinding him. She reached out with her right hand, pistol firmly in her left, arm fully extended and pointed directly at his back. "When I say go, you slowly—and I mean really slow—roll toward me while I pull."

He did as instructed and the weight on his back was removed. Relief.

"Okay hold it right there." And Johnson did as was told. "Now I want you to roll away from me and I want your head facing the front door and I want your legs facing me

and if your body raises more than two inches off the ground you won't have a head.

Understand?"

Johnson completed the maneuver and then she instructed him to get into a crawling position.

"Now I want you to slowly crawl backward toward me. Real slowly."

Johnson began his crawl using only his right arm and knees, maneuvering around the body and into the kitchen.

"Okay, stop. Back down on the ground and I want your hands, palms up, under your body again." She chuckled slightly. "I want you to get real familiar with your package."

With each movement, Johnson wanted to scream. The pain was searing like a hot iron rod puncturing his flesh, descending from his shoulder and to his left wrist. He could hear movement behind him but he dared not look back. There was a clank next to his head.

"Okay, reach for the cuffs and cuff yourself through both handles of the refrigerator."

"Man, that's going to be tough with my arm hurting and all."

"Suck it up pussy or I'll put one in your forehead."

Johnson complied, grunting all the way.

"Do you have a weapon?"

"No, ma'am."

"I thought you pricks in Texas carried cannons. Where's yours?"

"Back in Texas," he sighed.

“Sucks to be you.”