

27 An Apple a Day

It was stirring; they jumped in lockstep—commanded by some inner force that Whitte did not quite understand—and shouted their approval. Whitte downed the T&T in one gulp. When the jubilation had died down and the people began to move around the room, looking for the next activity, Brita turned to Whitte. “So what did you think?”

“An enema up your ass can be cleansing.”

She cocked her head and narrowed her eyes.

Whitte tumbled his glass, the ice cubes rattling, and waved her off. “Never mind.” He moved the glass to his lips, trying to extract the very last drop of the gin.

“Well, I found it rather uplifting,” Brita said, not sure if she believed what she had said or not.

“I suppose,” he said looking at the glass in disappointment, “If you’re a kite.”

Again he was met with a cock of her head, quizzically searching for some meaning to what he was saying.

“Look, it doesn’t matter what I think. I need another one of these,” he said, setting down his glass on the table next to his uneaten tart. “And I need a real cigarette.”

She chuckled and grabbed his arm. “Let’s go mingle.”

Whitte scrunched up his face and did his best impersonation of a small child. “Do I have to?”

They did mingle. Whitte was concerned that, to say the least, he would become a freak show, a barbarous man who slaughtered innocents on display, but for the most part, they acted as if he were some Shmoe off the streets. He didn't engage in their discussions of Bolo's delusion: content to listen, hoping not to be dragged into their fantasy world.

After the speech, they had been ushered into a reception area with floor to ceiling windows that overlooked the bay. Whitte noticed that *La Araña*, Salvador Cordero's massive black yacht, was no longer nestled in the cove. When he heard Cordero's name mentioned from a group to his left, he turned and broke in: "I was hoping to meet Mr. Cordero this evening."

A man who Whitte didn't recognize turned to him, apparently aghast that someone would interrupt him, and snobbishly announced that Señor Cordero had been called away on business. He then turned back to his group, dismissing Whitte as an interloper. Whitte smiled and plucked his T&T from the waiter's tray as he drew near.

Brita was hanging on him, quite literally at times, her arm cocked through Whitte's bent arm, and she would chuckle with the various social groupings they moved through. While Brita was engaging, he stood to the side, a slight smile plastered on his face, dispassionate but polite. One group they moved to was discussing oil prices and supplies and, with the disturbances in the Middle East, the difficulties of moving shipments through the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. Finally something Whitte knew about however, as he was about to engage, a slender man with slicked back hair and pinched nose and dressed in full tuxedo appeared at his side.

“Pardon the intrusion,” he whispered to Whitte, “but Mr. Bolo would like to make your acquaintance.”

Brita tensed for a second but then resumed her playfulness. “Go. I’ll be waiting for you when you get back.”

Whitte was quietly led down a wide, well-lit, elegant wood paneled corridor with doors on either side. He assumed these doors led to suites. The guide remained speechless. As they moved deeper down the hall, Whitte believed they had exhausted the length of the main resort and were now moving into a cavern that must have been excavated into the mountain behind the resort. The atmosphere seemed to change as the temperature was cooler and the air seemed to be stale. After a few turns in the corridor, they reached a closed double mahogany door. The guide stopped and discreetly rapped on the door. A man dressed in a white tuxedo jacket, red cummerbund, and black trousers pulled the door open and nodded.

The light in the room was muted. On either side were ornately carved floor-to-ceiling bookcases stuffed to capacity with, of course, books. Ladders hung on rails in front of the bookcases and around the room were several small sitting areas with empty wingback leather chairs and small tables between them. At the far end, a large fireplace with stone hearth and glowing embers inside completed the atmosphere of the private all-male club to which all the finest gentlemen belonged. Stuffy came to mind and about as far removed from a tropical paradise as it could be.

To the right of the fireplace, however, was a small stage, no more than a foot elevated from the floor. This is where old-English snobbery met sleazy strip joint. The stage was backlit with subdued spotlights from the front. A long, slender pole stood in the middle of the stage as well as a brunet woman dressed in what could only be described as the skimpiest of women's power suits with a V-neck to expose her well-endowed cleavage. She moved slow and methodical in a very sensuous elegance born of only the finest of God's creatures. She moved to a hushed Ravel's *Boléro*, which seemed to emanate from everywhere at once.

In front of the stage were several more seating areas with paired wingback chairs with a table between them. Next to the fireplace sat Bolo in the left chair. He was scrunched down in the chair, his bare feet resting lightly on an ottoman in front of him. There was another woman dressed in a tight fitting nurse's outfit kneeling beside the ottoman, administering a foot massage. Whitte held back the bile that was being forced into his throat.

"I find this relaxing." Bolo hissed.

"And stimulating, no doubt," Whitte responded.

A plastic smirk edged across the pruned lips of Bolo. He reached over, his hand slightly shaking, and patted the arm of the vacant chair beside him. White moved in front and began to sit. Bolo snapped his fingers and within a few seconds, a waiter appeared from behind the far right bookcase with two glasses on a tray, one with a rich amber liquid over ice and the other an unmistakable T&T, a lime sitting on the glass' lip. Whitte took the proffered drink and delicately squeezed the lime and stirred it with the glass swizzle stick

provided. He carefully set it down on a small silver tray sitting on the table. He noticed an ashtray and took his cigarettes from his inner-breast pocket and lit one, not bothering to seek permission from the decrepit bag of flesh haphazardly dropped on the chair next to him.

“How did you enjoy my speech?”

“Illuminating,” replied Whitte.

Bolo smiled. “I detect a hint of sarcasm?”

“You do.” Whitte imagined slipping his hands around the fleshy neck and squeezing as tight as he possibly could.

Bolo’s eyes never left the woman who was quietly disrobing. He took a sip of his drink and set it down beside him. Then he glanced to Whitte. “I think I will join you.” He lit a cigarette and greedily sucked on it. As the smoke escaped his mouth he said, “I just recently took up this pleasure. Seeing that I’m at the end of my life I suppose it doesn’t matter. But you, you’re still a young man.” Whitte didn’t respond. “Well, life’s not worth living if you don’t take advantage of some pleasures once and a while, yes? Moderation, however, is key.” He turned to Whitte, looking at him full on. “You find me repugnant.” It was a simple statement.

“In everyway imaginable,” Whitte declared. Then Whitte returned the glare. “I’m guessing there’s a reason I was summonsed?”

Bolo nodded. Despite engaging Whitte, he seemed to be merely speaking to him as an offshoot from his conscious mind, just something to do while concentrating elsewhere. “I asked you to join me because I’m curious as to what intrigued you most about my talk.”

“Awful full of yourself to presume I was intrigued.”

“Not really. Everything I say is intriguing and controversial in some manner to everyone. It all depends upon one’s perspective.” He motioned for the woman massaging his feet to move up to his calves. “Do you believe in God, Mr. Whitte?”

“Yes. I believe in something greater than me.”

“I used God as a metaphor in my speech.”

“What? For insanity?”

“No. Our group.” He took a sip from his glass. “I personally do not believe in God. Only humanity and its progress toward perfection.”

The brunette’s breasts were now fully exposed, her silk blouse loosely hanging over her shoulders, and she began to unsnap her tight fitting skirt. The whole experience was surreal.

“I met your father once, long time ago.” Bolo grimaced and the masseuse stopped. “He shared my love of philanthropy. It’s a shame he is missing.”

“My father is dead.”

“Where is the body?” he chuckled.

Whitte wanted to thrust his hand into the Bolo’s chest and pluck his beating heart from his body so he could watch it as he died. “I suppose if I had to point to one thing in your diatribe,” Whitte said, changing the subject back, “it was your infatuation with controlling the so-called truth.”

“Yes, the flow of information is terribly important. There is too much information today. The common man...”

“You mean the sheep.”

Bolo chuckled. “Yes, the sheep. They receive conflicting messages. Most are delivered from a particular bias that is harmful to their wellbeing. Witness the unrest throughout the world: the Middle East and Europe; it’s even spread to the United States. When there is unrest there are wars and when there are wars, people suffer needlessly. If information can be harvested and fed to them in such a way to comfort them then the suffering can be minimized.”

“You are talking about controlling the Internet.”

“Not controlling. Heavens no. Feeding the beast would be a better metaphor.”

Whitte took a sip from his drink and lit another cigarette. “So, to feed the beast, you need new technologies, something like, say, a product my company has developed?”

“You’re speaking of your Mirage system.”

Whitte nodded.

“A very intriguing system.” At that moment Bolo looked up to the stage. The woman was now fully unclothed and a fiery redhead had appeared. The brunet was now undressing her, softly kissing her neck. Bolo frowned and clapped his hands violently. “I don’t care for the homosexuality right now,” he stated. The two women stopped. The brunet reached for a silk robe and put it on.

Bolo then struggled to his feet. He shot an annoyed glance at Whitte. “I’m tired,” he mumbled. His feet scuffled to a door on the other side of the fireplace and exited, the brunet following him. Whitte sat there, a confused look on his face. *What the fuck?*

As Whitte rose to leave, the redhead smiled at him. Whitte returned the smile but it

wasn't inviting and the redhead shrugged her shoulders as if to say *your loss* and turned to follow the old man and his young prize.

"Can he even get it up?" Whitte asked, more out of curiosity than any other reason.

The redhead puckered her lips and blew an imaginary kiss toward Jack. "You would be amazed at what pharmacological assistance can achieve."

"Yuck," Whitte replied scrunching his face.

She winked, "Tell me about it."

When Whitte had exited the library the same pinch-nosed man was waiting for him and guided him back to the reception area. Brita was nowhere to be found, which suited Whitte just fine. He cast a fleeting glance around the room—there were fewer people milling about than before—and made his escape from the main building.

His shoes sunk into the powdery sand so he removed them and his socks and began the hike toward his lonely cabana. The moon shone brightly and reflected off the gentle waters. He was tired. His mind ached from his encounter with Bolo and all he wanted was to strip and collapse onto his bed. He even said a little prayer, bargaining that he would change his ways if he could just wake up in his home in Houston and the events of the past week were just a dream; a bad dream used to make him change his course in life.

He stomped up onto the porch and dusted off his feet. The moon cast slivers of light through the open window. He tossed his shoes to the ground and striped. As he made his way to the bed, he realized he was not alone. Brita, obviously naked beneath his sheets,

glowing from the moon outside, smiled at him, examining his naked body.

Oh, God, will this never end?