

32 The Great Escape

Whitte returned to the casino. It was still early and the last thing he wanted was to arouse attention by turning in before midnight. He played Black Jack while nursing a T&T. This time, the game played normal; he lost more than he won. After an hour, he sauntered to the bar and sat with his back to the casino. Gustavo greeted him.

“Buenas tardes, señor.”

“Back at you, Gus,” Whitte smiled, holding up his empty glass. As Gustavo was pouring in the gin, Whitte asked, “So, Cordero is ferrying his guests out tonight. Which airport?”

“Kingston,” but as soon as he had said it darkness swept away his lackadaisical smile. “Oh, señor, please don’t tell anyone I just said that. It’ll be my job.”

“No, that’s okay, Gus. My fault.” Whitte accepted his glass and squeezed in the lime. “So, Jamaica?”

“Señor, please.”

“Say no more, Gus.” Whitte took a sip. So, they were at least close enough to make it to Jamaica and back in one day. Whitte glanced toward the casino, making sure no one had heard Gus’ transgression and spotted Inara walking among the guests. When she looked up, he nodded. She shot him the briefest of smiles and returned to the guests.

The stool next to Whitte was pulled back and Brita sat down. “Hello, Jack,” she said as she pecked him on his cheek.

“I was wondering where you had gone off to. Cordero told me you were busy.”

“No, Salvador didn’t want me at dinner tonight, that’s all.”

“Do you always do what Cordero tells you?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “Can I have an absinthe?”

“Whoa, going Fitzgerald on me?”

“No, not really. It wasn’t around back when I drank so I thought it might be something good to try.” She turned toward him and offered a weak smile. She was wearing heavy makeup and when she turned, Whitte noticed a dark splotch just under her left cheek.

“Hey, let me take a look.” He gingerly touched her chin and turned her head so he could examine it closer. “You fall down? Drop the soap in the shower?”

She drew her lips in and offered a weak smile. “It’s not what you think.”

“Did *he* do it to you?” meaning Cordero.

“It’s nothing.”

“Bullshit. The bastard.”

Gus set down a glass with a lime wedge on it. “I’m sorry señorita, I can only give you non-alcoholic, tonic with lime.”

“Gus, I’d like to try an absinthe,” Whitte ordered. He returned with a reservoir glass with an ounce of the yellow liqueur, an absinthe spoon, a small pitcher of water and a sugar cube. Whitte, remembering seeing it on TV sometime ago, placed the spoon over the reservoir glass, placed the sugar cube on the spoon and slowly poured the water over it. “I think that’s how you do it,” he said, pushing the drink toward Brita.

“You’re contributing to the delinquency of a minor,” she smiled. She took a slow

sip. “Yuck,” she said with puckered lips, “tastes like licorice.” She handed it to Whitte who took a sip.

“You’re right.” He pushed it aside. “Look, you ought to get on his boat and hightail it to Jamaica with the rest.”

She shook her head. “He owns me.”

“No body owns anyone else. That’s ludicrous.”

“No, he rescued me. And in return,” she said with a sarcastic smile, “I am his arm candy whenever he wants. To make a long story short, I can’t get work in Hollywood anymore unless I go through his people. I don’t think you understand how many bridges I burned when I flamed out.”

It was complicated and Whitte didn’t need complicated so he gave her a sympathetic smile and a pat on the knee.

“You want to go back to your place? I mean after he leaves?”

“I can’t,” Whitte said. Her eyes dimmed. “I’m sorry.”

She leaned forward and gave him a peck on the cheek and then nuzzled close to his ear. “Take me with you,” she whispered and then pulled back.

Whitte stared into her glassy eyes. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“You are. I saw you wandering the island. You’re planning an escape.” She winked. “If you’re bustin’ out, I’m going too,” she said warmly.

“I have dinner plans with Cordero tomorrow. I think it’s important that I stay.”

Whitte took a swig from his glass and set it down. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it, trying like hell to keep from tipping his hand with his eyes.

“Well,” she said almost too low for him to hear, “if you aren’t going to leave then you’re a damn fool. You see that guy over there?” She nodded her head toward a man with military-cut blonde hair; he filled out the tuxedo he was wearing with pure muscle. “His name is Wright. He works for Cordero. He came in this morning.” She turned back to him and glanced to make sure Gustavo wasn’t lingering. Speaking a bit louder, “He’s in his security detail. I think he might be FBI.”

“How would you know?”

“A movie I worked on once. I had an affair with one of the technical advisors. He was ex-CIA. He showed me how those who have received training hold themselves.”

“What do you mean?”

“See how he’s standing? Very erect. See how his feet are stationed, wide apart? That’s so they are ready at all times. And his eyes? They’re always searching, always calculating who is in the room, where are the escape points, who might be an ally, who might be an enemy,” she smiled. “Plus I overheard a conversation.”

Whitte laughed. “I’d say you’ve seen too many movies but that would be stating the obvious.”

“I’m serious. If he’s here then Salvador is expecting trouble.”

“Why do you think I’m the trouble he’s here to fix?” Whitte asked while keeping his eyes on the man.

“I’m guessing. But he had something to do with the governor who just killed himself?”

“Richardson”

“Yes. I think he had something to do with him.” She drew closer to Whitte’s ear. “I know how to contact my friend.”

“What friend?”

“You know, the one that used to be in the CIA.”

Whitte thought about that for a moment. Could the guy help him? Maybe but he couldn’t take the risk. He had to rely only on himself.

“He told me about a case he had worked once,” Brita continued, “about some secretive group that had plants in different governments.”

“Conspiracy theories,” Whitte chuckled. “I’ve always found them ludicrous. It takes too many people in power to work the inside, and if the conspiracy is that much of a threat, then those running it have to be intelligent. Have you ever met an intelligent politician or bureaucrat?”

“I’m being serious, Jack,” her smile gave way to a pout.

“I’m sure you are but there aren’t any secret societies.”

“What do you call what’s going on here?”

“A club of self-important pricks who think they can rule the world.” He tossed back the last bit of absinthe with a wince.

“He told me that he had been trying to find where they hold their meetings.” She drew closer to Whitte, glancing toward the bartender to make sure he couldn’t hear her. “He recruited me.”

Whitte narrowed his eyes.

“I think he can help us.”

It was midnight when Whitte stumbled, like a drunk, into his cabana. It was all an act for anyone who might have been watching him. As soon as he was behind closed doors he sprang into action. He removed two plastic trash bags that he had stuffed into his pants—absconded from a bathroom in the main building. He then stuffed in two pairs of shorts, underwear, shirts, a pair of chinos, and a pair of tennis shoes. He then stuffed in his knapsack, checking first to make sure his furtive funds were still hidden. Then he stripped down and took a long hot shower. Once done, he pulled on his swim trunks and a sports shirt, slipped on a pair of sandals and slipped out to the back pier.

La Araña was gone. At least he didn't have to worry about Cordero for the time being. However, there were two 52-foot generic looking yachts—as if there could be a generic yacht—that were moored in the shallows. While Cordero must have taken some back to Kingston, or wherever they had headed, he estimated there were still about 20 attendees left and he hoped they were early risers. He was counting on the confusion of guests leaving to occupy the attention of anyone patrolling the security perimeter. On his ventures around the island, he had counted four boats with two guards apiece that were within eyesight of the entire shoreline of the small Genesis Cay. His plan was to divert at least two of them. He returned inside to wait until it was time to move.

One o'clock passed, then one-thirty. His heavy eyelids began to distract his thoughts and his dreams licked at his consciousness. Suddenly he was jarred awake.

"You like?" whispered Brita, who had slipped into the cabana and gently nudged him. She had chopped off her hair and died it stark black. It was uneven, from what he could see in the moonlight. "I found a maid that had hair dye. I've never had my hair dyed black before so no one will recognize me. At least I hope not." Whitte imagined walking down a street on some Caribbean island and people getting a two-for-one celebrity sighting. Who would they recognize first?

The plan was crazy but then again, the whole circumstance in which he found himself was insane. His escape could have been much easier without the British bombshell but when he had turned up missing in the morning, she would know, and who knows what Cordero or his hired ape Wright was capable of. If only he were back in Houston, waking up and realizing this had been some sort of psychotic break with reality and not what his life had become.

Brita held a small trash bag in her hand. "See, I travel light."

This was crazy. He would be discovered missing almost immediately but that was what the diversion was supposed to cover.

When the moon ducked behind a long cloudbank, Whitte and Brita sneaked out of the cabana and made a dash for the jungle. Breathing heavily, they stopped fifty yards in and quickly knelt down and waited ten minutes. When nobody had come for them, they continued on. Whitte explained the plan to Brita along the way. She kept interjecting, saying she had been in movies and what Whitte planned would just not work. "This isn't a movie,

damn it,” he countered.

By the time they had circled to the other side of the bay, it was nearing three-thirty in the morning. From the safety of the jungle, Whitte spotted the floating dock that the supply boat would pull up to in about three hours. A patrol boat was nearby, idling about fifty yards offshore. He turned back to Brita.

“Okay, you got it, right? Stay here behind this tree until I return. No matter what you hear, no matter where that boat goes.”

“And if you don’t come back?”

“Then you’re on your own,” he told her with a squeeze of her arm. “Stay low. No noise.”

He left the trash bag containing his knapsack with Brita and began running back down the path the way they had come, being careful not to trip on any of the roots growing into the path. When he reached the trailhead leading to the small beach in the inlet, he tucked the other trash bag with his clothes behind a tree and then walked out onto the sand. The full moon had cleared the cloudbank and was shining bright, making the water shimmer. He would be easy to spot. He walked out into the water and began to swim. Twenty yards out, he spotted the patrol boat responsible for that quarter of the shoreline. He stopped and treaded water. He listened to see if the boat was idling but he couldn’t tell. He hoped to God they were paying attention. He counted to three: *Okay, here it goes.*

He splashed his hands hard against the water and then stopped, listening. Nothing. He splashed again and then coughed loudly. He heard the boat’s motor rev slightly. It began a slow coast toward his vicinity. He coughed again. Suddenly a spot light hit him

square in the face. “Stop where you are!” came a shout from a bullhorn. Whitte turned and began a frantic swim back to shore. The boat gunned it. He was already getting winded—*damn it I’ve got to stop smoking*—and then his knee hit the sandy bottom. He rose and began running through the water. The light beam from the boat flared up on the beach ahead and moved slowly toward him. He tried to dodge it as he made it to shore but it struck him in the back. “I said stop!”

Suddenly rapid-fire explosions sounded behind him. *Shit, they’re shooting at me*, he thought as he ducked low, his feet sinking into the powdery sand. With the absence of sand flying around him, he realized they must have been firing into the air. As he neared the jungle, he ducked low, grabbed the bag he had hidden and turned to the left, toward the cliff. He hadn’t taken into account that he’d be running up hill and he panicked, knowing they’d have no problem catching him. He heard the boat below power up and stop and then, as he calculated, they beached it. He risked turning his head back and saw small light beams dancing on the brush behind him then suddenly, another gear kicked in and he felt like he was flying through the jungle as he neared the top of the ridge.

He stopped for a moment, listening for the guards then heard a rustling on the other side of the ridge—someone coming up from the resort area. A flashlight almost struck where he was and he turned toward the cliff.

“Stop right there, Mr. Whitte!” the guy was a hell of a lot closer than he thought.

“Heinrich, up here!” The guard glanced down the hill and saw one of the guards from the boat making it up the hill. “He went to the cliff.” They both stopped and held their breath, listening. They heard it, something like crumbling rocks.

“Quick, he’s trying to climb down the cliff!” screamed out Heinrich.

“Wright is going to have your ass. You were supposed to stop him before he got up here,” spat the huffing guard that had come up from the main building. They veered out of the jungle and just as they both turned into the opening they heard a crack. Heinrich shone his light to the edge of the cliff. “There he is!”

Whitte was just disappearing over the edge of the cliff. “Stop him. He’s going to get himself killed!” Heinrich lunged toward the cliff but suddenly a boulder to his left groaned and rolled off the cliff, right over the spot Whitte had disappeared.

“Fuck!” Heinrich leaned over the edge in time to see something bounce off one of the large rocks at the edge of the shore and then a huge blast of water shot up. He shone his light down. All he could see was a trash bag being thrown up against the shore by the waves crashing over the rocks. Heinrich said hopefully, “He might have made it.”

“The guy splattered. Nothing but broken bones and bloody flesh.” The man turned back to the trail. “Shark food. Stupid mother fucker.”