

37 The Expeditor

Hidalgo told Whitte he was an expeditor, whatever the hell that meant. “So, where you want to go?”

Whitte was eating a plate of rice and beans with friend plantains on the side.

“Anywhere but here,” he said wiping his mouth.

“In the Caribbean?”

“Si,” Whitte said, trying to sound like he knew the man’s language even though he could barely recall a handful of words from high school Spanish. “But not The Bahamas.”

Hidalgo consulted a hand-written chart, moving down a row and a column until he found a perfect intersection. “I’ve got a freighter that goes to Trinidad and Tobago and then up the chain with stops in Grenada, Barbados, St. Lucia, and Dominica before returning here?”

“Perfect,” said Whitte.

“Leaves next Wednesday,” said Hidalgo the expeditor.

He was two hours away from Genesis Cay. They would continue to search the waters around the island but would soon expand their search, if they hadn’t already. It was only a matter of time before they figured out how he had escaped.

“I need something a little more immediate.”

“Well, my friend, you’re in luck. The freighter docked now will depart in two hours.”

“To where?”

“Antigua. It’s loading tobacco. Once done they leave.”

“Okay. How much?”

“Dollars?”

“Si.”

“One thousand.”

Whitte shook his head, always the bargainer. “I’ve got five hundred.”

The expeditor thought about this figure. It wasn’t enough to pay the captain and make a healthy profit. “Seven-fifty. No less. Plus no immigration problems when you arrive.”

“Got yourself a deal.” Whitte said, pushing back his plate. “Gracias for the food. It was much needed.”

“I will tell my wife that Americans like her cooking.” He thumbed through papers bound on a clipboard and made a notation. “I can take you on board in an hour. Until then you can remain here.”

“Gracias.” Whitte closed his eyes. He had felt so out of control since the morning he had sat in the manager’s office of Atlantis. Now, a little more than a week later, he finally felt that he was being proactive. “Anything to drink in this town?”

Hidalgo smiled, opened a cabinet and pulled out a bottle of rum. “I’ll join you my new friend.”

The backhand across her face was no less painful than had Cordero pressed her cheek to a sizzling griddle. Defiant tears welled up in her chocolate brown eyes. “You’re a bastard,” Britannia Morgan whispered through a bruised lip.

Cordero turned, rubbing the knuckles of his left hand, and walked to the panel windows overlooking the bay and his *La Araña*, basking in the late afternoon sun. “I think it is time for you to leave. Mr. Wright will escort you to Antigua where you can catch a plane to wherever you would like to go.” He turned back to her and waved her out. She sneered as she quietly left. Cordero turned to a smiling Frank Wright who was floating by the windows.

“What are you smiling at?” Cordero huffed.

Wright shook his head. “I never suspected you had that much passion.” Wright finished drinking bottled water with a giant gulp. “A masterful performance, though. You out-acted her.”

Cordero turned back to the room and beamed at that and bowed his head slightly. “Gracias.”

He strolled to a desk in the corner of the opulent suite that sat atop the Genesis Cay resort. He retrieved a Cohiba Espléndidos from the desktop humididor and clipped the end and licked around the end to smooth out the rough edges. Daniel Wentworth held out a lit lighter. Cordero sucked the flame into the tobacco until it took hold. “Gracias.” He turned back to Wright with a puff of smoke. “I was a little angry that she didn’t leave with Whitte. Would it not have been beneficial to learn who this mysterious CIA agent is?”

“We’ll find out anyway. I left her cell phone on her bedside table,” Wentworth

explained. “She’ll check it and see that it now can call out. There is no doubt what her first call will be.” He smiled at Wright, “You’ll have your opportunity to find out what agency is investigating us and what they know.”

Wright nodded. “I’ll take her tomorrow. Whitte should be there by mid-morning. I’ll have a chance to make sure the RFID chip is working.”

Cordero walked back to the windows. “I’m concerned that Whitte won’t do what we want him to.”

Wentworth shrugged, “I’m not.” He bit on the corner of his index finger nail.

“How do you know?”

“I know Jack Whitte,” Wentworth smiled, spitting the clipping out. “And if he doesn’t, we at least have an idea where he would be going.”

Cordero frowned. “How so?”

“I am working another source. Mr. Whitte will only serve to confirm it.”

“So you know where he is heading?” Wright asked.

“Soon.”

Wright looked perturbed. He paced toward the sitting Wright. “I’m still concerned that he’s not going to lead us where we want. What if he gets picked up?”

“Again, there is a reason I chose Antigua.” Wentworth went to work on another nail. “No one is going to recognize him and no one cares. We allowed him to successfully board a ship for Antigua. The captain will assist Mr. Whitte with the next leg of his journey and,” he continued as he spit out another nail clipping, “he will find that traveling by cargo ship is the way to go: no immigration hassles. Plus, within the next three days there are

ships departing Antigua with destinations to every port in the Caribbean.” Wentworth reached for a cigar from Cordero’s humidor and lit it, letting the smoke ebb from the corners of his mouth. “Wright’s little toy keeps tabs on him and we’ll have the knowledge of what boat he’ll eventually board from the captain’s network. It is, as they say, in the bag.”

Cordero asked, “We are sure that his destination will be somewhere in the Caribbean?”

Wentworth nodded.

“I’m going to need advanced warning of where Whitte will end up so I can set up my team,” said Wright.

“You’ll have your notice, don’t worry.” Wentworth turned mildly green as he coughed. Slightly embarrassed, he set the cigar down. “I’d like to know about this Bennetti fellow you brought in.”

Cordero mulled this line of questioning in his mind as he stood and, cigar in hand, head bowed, paced toward the desk and sat on its corner.

“What’s to tell?” Wright answered. “He knows his shit and everything I’ve given him has exceeded my expectations.”

“Do you trust him?”

“I don’t trust anyone but I set him on the Spencer girl last minute, so there was no time to think. He killed her and got her body to the beach. After the cops took their pictures, he got it into a coffin and bound for the U.S. all before they even brought Whitte in. And he was able to apply some pressure to the Bahamian cops—claiming national security and all

that.”

Cordero stood and paced back toward the back of the couch that Wright was occupying.

Wentworth nodded. “The one aspect of this plan that I do not have control over is the people you are using.” He bit another nail.

“With all due respects, *Dan*,” Wright said, using the name Daniel detested, “I’ve been stretched. Had you told me the whole plan from the beginning, I would have allocated resources differently.” Wright looked to Cordero, “I’m concerned about having to chase down ghosts that can’t come back to haunt us.”

“You’re speaking of the dead OIC operatives?” Cordero asked, with a slight sympathy to his voice as he looked down on the top of Wright’s head. He glanced up at Daniel.

Wright didn’t know whom the sympathy was for. “Yeah. There was no reason to kill any of the ground operatives,” he said straining to look back at Cordero. “They were too far removed from the actual operation.”

“It was to protect you, Wright,” Wentworth explained as he spit out another fingernail clipping.

“But they didn’t know I was the lead.”

“You let the Ranger get involved. That changed everything,” Wentworth said in a commanding voice that surprised even him.

“Out of my control,” Wright countered with a growl.

“And here I thought you controlled the governor.” Wentworth spat out another nail

and went to work on a rough part of skin. Cordero stood and paced back to the desk.

Wright glared at Wentworth. “That was a Group mistake, made back when they selected him to marry the Spencer woman.”

“And that is why you were assigned to him.” Wentworth tried the cigar one more time. Cordero nodded.

Wentworth added, “And it’s why you were in the position to correct that mistake.” The thought that he had constructed the perfect plan and it was now flowing the way he envisioned, even with the Neanderthal Wright running the ground game, puffed up the chemicals swirling in his system. He was invincible. He spat out the piece of callus he had clipped off with his teeth.

Wright glanced over to Cordero.

“Spilt milk, Frank,” Cordero said holding up his hands, palms up. “No one is blaming you.”

Wright nodded then returned his glare directed at Wentworth. Cordero stood and walked away, as if he didn’t want to get hit if laser beams shot from Wright’s eyes.

Returning to the subject of the turned former CIA agent, Wright said “I have Bennetti tracking down the Ranger and the girl.”

“Pull him off. I have other plans for those two.”

Wright frowned. “Where do you want me to send him, then?”

“That’s your concern.” After a moment of thought, he added, “Send him somewhere where we can get him back into the game quickly.”

“Why?”

Wentworth shrugged. "I have plans."

Cordero tapped his cigar on the ashtray on the coffee table in front of Wright.

"Frank, why don't you go make your arraignments for your trip in the morning. I've called in the PBY and it'll fly the two of you there in plenty of time before Mr. Whitte arrives."

Wright nodded, gave Wentworth a curt smile and left.

Cordero studied Wentworth for a few moments from the safety of the couch. "Why are you antagonistic toward Wright?"

"He's the weak link in my plan. I don't trust this Bennetti he brought into the equation?"

"Why not? We both approved of his inclusion on Wright's team."

"I've learned a few things since."

"Such as?"

"He was once married to the woman who is now with this Texas Ranger."

Cordero cocked his eye. "When did you learn this?"

"Just this morning from my own source inside OIC." Wentworth pushed his pinky finger to the edge of his mouth and nipped at the nail with his teeth.

"So, you believe him to be a plant?"

"No, not necessarily," he said removing his finger. "Bennetti's a sociopath—my estimation—which begs the question of how he ever made it into the CIA."

"He hid it well."

Wentworth shrugged his shoulders and looked up to the ceiling. "Perhaps." He stuck his pinky back in his mouth and bit at an exposed edge of the nail. "This *War on*

Terror made a lot of strange bedfellows. I believe they welcomed him with open arms but once it had begun to wind down some, they pushed him into OIC, and it became obvious; he became reckless.” His eyes fluttered and he lost focus. “It’s true that the director wanted to wash him out but it’s almost too neatly packaged,” he mumbled to himself. He closed his eyes. “But that would mean they know of this plan and that is impossible,” he whispered. He sat up. “I’m concerned that he will kill his former wife if given the chance.”

“Why?”

“Because she rejected him.”

“And why don’t you want her dead?”

Wentworth smiled. “There is something about her that doesn’t add up. She isn’t as low-level as I assumed.” He reached back for his cigar and lit it again. “I want her alive. I would like her brought here when we bring Whitte back.”

“Why?”

This time he tried to concentrate at keeping the smoke in his mouth and not sucking it into his lungs. “Leverage,” he said with a small stream of smoke. “I think she knows something I don’t know yet. I’d like to get to know her,” he said, paused then added, “Intimately. And, it is possible that Whitte developed strong feelings for her and even after he knows he was setup, he will do anything to keep her alive.” He shook his head. “Yes, I believe she is too valuable to kill just yet.” Wentworth let thoughts course through his mind, disorganized blobs floating in the ethereal world. They coalesced. They became one. Yes, he had made the perfect plan and it was working well. Then he announced to Cordero the Rook he used to take the Queen on his chessboard in his mind.

“I just had the director taken out. I believe he is starting to piece together too much of this operation. And it served two purposes. The woman and the Ranger were meeting him. They will have lived through the attack, which will make them more desperate. I think the woman will serve as a redundant factor in tracking where Whitte will go and, hopefully, why.”

Cordero leaned forward from his seat on the couch, tapped his cigar on an ashtray and sat back and crossed his legs. He stared long and hard at the monster he had a hand in creating. The man was beginning to frighten him, the way he could simply order executions with no empathy for the executed. Cordero was an expeditor, the man who helped make the Group’s ultimate goals become reality. Death and destruction was not his field. Yes, he hit women. And he hit men as well. All were objects to him, sheep in a herd to be kept in line but certainly as a shepherd, they were to be taken care of, empathized with, coddled. But yes, death was inevitable for all men. He would just rather someone else soil their hands.

He stood and meandered back to the windows overlooking the sparkling bay, the furthest point away from where Wentworth sat behind his desk. With a long exhale of smoke that bounced along the window and dissipated, he asked, “When would you like for Brighton to bring his wife?”

“When is the press conference set for?”

“Next Wednesday, in Houston. Nino Brighton should be ready to go by then.”

“Nino Brighton is a putz.”

Cordero laughed and turned toward Daniel. “Certainly didn’t inherit his intellect from his father. But don’t ever tell Ali I said that.”

“You don’t plan on being here when Ali arrives, do you?”

Cordero pondered his response carefully. He turned back to the window and looked down at *La Araña*. He did not like the operation. It was something that Ali Al-Fa’sad had ordered six months prior. Wentworth had provided, in his opinion, a truly inspired plan that was terribly complex but addressed all of the problems that the Group had experienced with the Texas operations. The operations had been run carelessly, starting almost thirty years ago.

They had allowed Robert Whitte to out flank them. Robert’s son would pay that price. They also had allowed Ryan Richardson to develop grand illusions of his own importance and he had paid the price. Yes, Wentworth had taken care of all of their problems. But even Cordero who did not have the taste for blood believed the easier solution was to simply kill them all—just so long as people like Wright did the killing—and abandon Whitte Industries and the pathway of fifty million dollars it gave them and start over. It’s not like the dozen other companies they controlled couldn’t pick up the slack.

No, this was done purely on revenge and irrespective of the plan, revenge was hatred, and hatred was emotion, and when emotion entered into their operations they always failed. This would be no different. He was asked to be the expeditor in this matter and he had fulfilled his obligations. If Al-Fa’sad was going to crash and burn, that was his prerogative but Cordero was not going to allow his operations to go down with him. The unfortunate thing was that it would probably take Daniel. But that could be a positive. Daniel had a lovely wife and Cordero would like nothing more than to console a grieving widow.

“No, Daniel,” he said while continuing to face the window. “I have duties elsewhere. I would like for you to come with me.”

“You know I can’t.”

Cordero nodded. “Yes, I know.” *Tal es la guerra.*