

Catch Me if You Can

by Frank W. Abagnale

(Adapted book. Advanced Level)

CHAPTER ONE

The Fledgling

A man's alter ego is nothing more than his favorite image of himself. The mirror in my room in the Windsor Hotel in Paris showed my favorite image of me - a handsome young airline pilot, looking perfect with a smooth skin and bull shoulders. Modesty is not one of my virtues. At the time, virtue was not one of my virtues.

Satisfied with my appearance, I picked up my bag, left the room and two minutes later was standing in front of the cashier at the hotel reception.

"Good morning, Captain," said the cashier in her warm tone. The markings on my uniform identified me as a first officer, a co-pilot, but the French are like that. They often make a mistake in rating everything too high except their women, wine and art.

I signed the hotel bill she handed me across the counter, started to turn away, then turned back, taking a payroll check from the inside pocket of my jacket. "Oh, can you cash this for me? Your Paris night life left me without any money and it'll be another week before I'm home." I smiled sadly.

She picked up the Pan American World Airways check and looked at the amount. "I'm sure we can, Captain, but I must get the manager's approval of a check because it is large," she said. She stepped into an office behind her and was back in a moment, showing a pleased smile. She handed me the check to sign.

"I think you want American dollars?" she asked, and without waiting for my reply counted out 786.73 dollars in Yankee currency and coin. I pushed back two 50 dollars bills. "Please, take care of the necessary people, since I was so careless," I said, smiling.

She beamed happily. "Of course, Captain. You are very kind," she said. "Have a safe flight and please come back to see us."

I took a cab to Orly, instructing the driver to stop at the TWA entrance. I passed the TWA ticket counter in the lobby and presented my FAA license and PanAm ID card to the TWA operations officer. He checked his manifest. "Okay, First Officer Frank Williams, a deadhead to Rome. Fill this out, please." He handed me the familiar

pink form and I wrote the necessary data. I picked up my bag and walked to the customs gate marked "crew members only." I started to lift my bag to the counter but the inspector recognized me and let me through.

A young boy watched me as I walked to the plane, looking with admiration at my uniform with its polished gold stripes and other decorations.

"You the pilot?" he asked. He was English from his accent.

"Nah, just a passenger like you," I replied. "I fly for Pan Am."

"You fly Boeing 707s?"

I shook my head. "Right now I'm on a different plane." I said. I like kids. This one reminded me of myself a few years ago.

An attractive blond stewardess met me as I stepped aboard and helped me to put my things in the crew's luggage section. "We are full this trip Mr. Williams," she said. "You won the jump seat that two other guys wanted to take. I'll be serving the cabin."

"Just milk for me," I said. "And don't worry about that if you get busy. Deadheads can't have anything more than the ride."

I went into the cabin. The pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer were pre-checking their takeoff equipment but they paused courteously at my entrance. "Hi, Frank Williams, Pan Am, and don't let me interrupt you," I said.

"Gary Giles," said the pilot, offering his hand. He nodded toward the other two men. "Bill Austin, number two, and Jim Wright. Good to have you with us." I shook hands with the other two pilots and dropped into the jump seat, leaving them to their work.

We took off within twenty minutes. Giles checked his instruments, spoke with the Orly airport and then stood up from his seat. He examined me casually and then pointed at his chair. "Why don't you fly this bird for a while, Frank," he said. "I'll go back and speak with the passengers."

His offer was a courtesy gesture toward a deadheading pilot from a competing airline. I dropped my cap on the cabin floor and sat into his seat, understanding very well that I was given custody of 140 lives, my own included. Austin, who took the controls when Giles left his seat, passed them to me. "You got it, Captain," he said with a wide smile.

I quickly put the plane on automatic pilot and hoped to hell the gadget worked, because I couldn't fly a kite.

I wasn't a Pan Am pilot or any other kind of pilot. I was an impostor, one of the most wanted criminals on four continents, and at the moment I was doing my thing, playing a super trick on some nice people.

I was a millionaire twice before I was twenty-one. I stole every nickel of it and blew the money on fine clothes, delicious foods, luxurious apartments, fantastic girls, big cars and other nice things. I had parties in every capital in Europe, relaxed on all the famous beaches and spent good time in South America, Asia and Africa.

It wasn't quite a relaxing life. I didn't exactly keep my finger on the panic button, but I had to make a lot of escapes through side doors, down fire escapes stairs or over roofs. I left more wardrobes in five years than most men buy in a lifetime.

It may seem strange but I never felt like a criminal. I was one, of course, and I was aware of the fact. I was described by news reporters as one of this century's cleverest check swindlers, and fraud artists, who deserved Academy Award. I was a con man of astonishing ability. I sometimes astonished myself with some of my impersonations and tricks, but I never at any time deceived myself. I was always aware that I was Frank Abagnale, Jr., that I was a check swindler and an impostor, and if and when I were caught I wasn't going to win any Oscars. I was going to jail.

I was right. I did time in a French small jail, in a Swedish prison and cleaned myself of all my American sins in the Petersburg, Virginia, federal jail. While in the last prison, I volunteered to pass a psychological test. The criminologist-psychiatrist from University of Virginia spent two years giving me various written and oral tests, using truth-serum injections and polygraph examinations.

The shrink concluded that I had a very low criminal threshold. In other words, crime wasn't my natural quality.

One of the New York cops, who had worked hardest to catch me, read the report and laughed. "This head doctor must be kidding us," he said angrily. "This swindler deceives several hundred banks, steals everything except the sheets from half the hotels in the world, uses every airline in the skies, including most of their stewardesses, produces enough bad checks to cover the walls of the Pentagon with them as wallpaper, supports his own damned colleges and universities, makes half the cops in twenty countries look like idiots while he's stealing over 2 million dollars, and he has a low criminal threshold? What the hell would he do if he had a high criminal threshold, rob Fort Knox?"

The detective faced me with the paper. "You deceived this shrink, didn't you, Frank?"

I told him I had answered every question as truthfully as possible, that I had done every test as honestly as I could. I didn't convince him. "No," he said. "You can fool these feds, but you can't fool me. You tricked this shrink." He shook his head. "You would trick your own father, Frank."

I already had. My father was the first one in my score. Dad had one necessary quality for that - blind trust, and I robbed him for 3,400.1 dollars was only fifteen at the time.

I was born and spent my first sixteen years in New York's Bronx. I was the third of four children and had my dad's name. I was the product of a broken home, for Mom and Dad separated when I was twelve.

The person most hurt by the divorce was Dad. He was really in love with Mom. My mother, Paulette Abagnale, is a French-Algerian beauty whom Dad met and married during his World War II army service in Algeria. Mom was only fifteen at the time, and Dad was twenty-eight, and though the difference in ages didn't seem to matter at that time, I've always felt it had an influence on the breakup of their marriage.

Dad opened his own business in New York City after the war, a stationery store. He was very successful. We lived in a big, luxurious home and if we weren't extremely rich, we were certainly quite rich. My brothers, my sister and I never needed anything during our early years.

A kid is often the last to know when there's serious trouble between his parents. I know that's true in my case. I thought Mom was happy to be a housewife and mother and she was, up to a point. But Dad was more than just a successful businessman. He was also very active in politics. He was a member and president of the New York Athletic Club, and he spent a lot of his time at the club with both business and political friends.

Dad was also a fisherman. He was always flying off to Puerto Rico, or some other place on deep-sea fishing expeditions. He never took Mom along, and he should have. And one day Dad came back to find his home empty. Mom had packed the things and moved herself, us three boys and our sister into a large apartment. We kids were a bit surprised, but Mom quietly explained that she and Dad decided to live apart.

Well, she had decided to live apart, anyway. Dad was shocked, surprised and hurt at Mom's action. He begged her to come back home, promising he would be a better husband and father and that he would stop his deep-sea expeditions. He even offered to give up politics.

Mom listened, but she made no promises. And it soon became obvious to me, if not Dad, that she wasn't going to change her mind. She went to a dental college and started training to be a dental technician.

Dad didn't give up. He came to our apartment at every opportunity and begged her. Sometimes he lost his temper. "Damn it, woman - can't you see I love you!" he cried.

The situation had its influence on us boys, of course. Me especially. I loved my dad. I was the closest to him, and he started to use me in his fight to win back Mom. "Talk to her, son," he asked me. "Tell her I love her. Tell her we'd be happier if we all lived together. Tell her you'd be happier if she came home, that all you kids would be happier."

He gave me gifts for Mom, and instructed me how to break down my mother's resistance. But my mother couldn't be tricked. And Dad probably failed because Mom was angry that he was using me in the role of a chess piece in their game of marital chess. She divorced Dad when I was fourteen.

Dad was broken. I was disappointed, for I had really wanted them to live together. I can say this about Dad: when he loved a woman, he loved her forever. He was still trying to win Mom back when he died in 1974.

When Mom finally divorced my father, I chose to live with Dad. Mom didn't like my decision, but I felt Dad needed one of us, that he shouldn't live alone, and I persuaded her. Dad was grateful and pleased. I never regretted the decision, though Dad probably did.

Life with Father was a different game. I spent a lot of time in some of New York's best bars. Businessmen, I learned, not only enjoy lunches with martini, but they are ready for scotch and soda dinners. Politicians, I also noticed quickly, were more sincere talking of world affairs and more generous to spend state budget money after a few drinks. Dad did a lot of his business and political deals close to a bar, with me waiting nearby. My father's drinking habits alarmed me at first. I didn't think he was an alcoholic, but he was a drinker and I worried that he had a drinking problem. Still, I never saw him drunk.

After living with Dad for six months, I was streetwise and smart, which is not exactly the kind of education Dad had in mind for me, but it's the kind you get in bars.

Dad had a lot of political influence. I learned this when I started missing school and hanging out with some lazy kids from my neighborhood. They weren't gang members or anything like that. They weren't into anything really criminal. They were just guys with a bad family situation, trying to get attention from someone. Maybe that's why I started hanging out with them. Perhaps I was seeking attention myself. I really wanted my parents together again, and I thought at that time that if I had any problems, it might be a reason for them to make peace.

I was much more mature than my companions, and much bigger. At fifteen I was physically grown, six feet and 170 pounds, and I guess people who saw us thought I was a teacher with some students or a big brother looking after the younger crowd. I sometimes felt that way myself, and I was often irritated at their childishness.

What bothered me most was their lack of style. I learned early that style is always admired. Almost any fault, sin or crime is taken easier if there's a touch of class.

These kids couldn't even steal a car with any style. The first set of wheels they stole, ended up in the police station.

Dad not only got me out, but he made all mention of my part in the incident disappear from the records.

Dad wasn't angry with me. "We all make mistakes, son," he said. "I know what you were trying to do, but that's not the way to do it. Under the law, you're still a child, but you're man-sized. Maybe you should start thinking like a man."

I stopped hanging out with my street friends, started going to school regularly again and got a part-time job as a shipping clerk. Dad was pleased - so pleased he bought me an old Ford, which I transformed into a real fox trap. For girls.

If I had to blame anything for my future dishonest actions, I'd blame the Ford.

That Ford destroyed every moral fiber in my body. It introduced me to girls, and I didn't come to my senses for six years. They were wonderful years.

At fifteen I knew about girls, of course. They were built differently than boys. But I didn't know why until I stopped at a red light one day, and saw this girl looking at me and my car. When she saw she had my attention, she did something with her eyes, shook her front and her behind, and suddenly I was lost in my thoughts. She broke the barrier. I don't remember how she got into the car, or where we went after she got in, but I remember she was all silk, soft, warm, sweet and absolutely delightful, and I knew I had found a contact sport that I could really enjoy.

Women became my only pleasure: I couldn't get enough of them. I woke up thinking of girls. I went to bed thinking of girls. All lovely, leggy, fantastic and charming. I went on girl hunting at sunrise. I went out at night and looked for them with a flashlight. Don Juan was a mild case of the hots compared to me. I was obsessed with foxy women. I needed a way to get money for my obsession.

I went to Dad, who was not totally unaware of my discovery of girls. "Dad, it was really great of you to give me a car, and I feel like a fool asking for more, but I've got problems with that car," I begged. "I need a gas credit card. I only get paid once a month, and what with buying my school lunches, going to the games, dating and stuff, I don't have the money to buy gas sometimes. I'll try and pay the bill myself, but I promise I won't use your trust in the wrong way if you let me have a gas card." And I was sincere. Dad thought for a few moments, then nodded. "All right, Frank, I trust you," he said, taking his Mobil card from his wallet. "You take this card and use it. I won't pay anything to Mobil from now on. It'll be your card, and it'll be your responsibility to pay this bill each month when it comes in. I won't worry about it."

He should have. The arrangement worked fine the first month. The Mobil bill came in and I paid to the oil firm. But the payment left me without any money and once again I found myself in a trap in my constant search for girls. I began to feel frustrated. After all, the pursuit of happiness was an inalienable American privilege, wasn't it? I felt I was deprived of a constitutional right.

Someone once said there's no such thing as an honest man. He was probably a con man. It's the favorite logic of any con man. I think a lot of people imagine themselves a supercriminal, an international diamond thief or something like that, but

these fantasies are only daydreams. I also think a lot of other people are actually tempted now and then to commit a crime, especially if they think they won't be caught. Such people usually resist the temptation. They have an inborn knowledge of right and wrong, and common sense wins.

But there's also a type of person whose competitive instincts dominate reason. They are challenged by a given situation in much the same manner a climber is challenged by a tall peak: because it's there. Right or wrong are not factors, nor are results. These people see crime as a game, and the goal is not just the money; it's the success.

These people are the chess players of the criminal world. They generally have a genius-level IQ. They never expect to lose. They are always astonished when a cop with average intelligence catches them, and the cop is always astonished at their motives. Crime as a challenge? Jesus.

But it was the challenge that led me to my first fraud. I needed money as usual. I stopped at a Mobil station one afternoon and saw a large sign in front of the station's tire display, "put a set on your mobil card - we'll put the set on your car" the sign read. It was the first time I realized that the Mobil card was good for more than gas or oil. I didn't need any tires - the ones on the Ford were practically new - but as I studied the sign I suddenly thought of a scheme. Hell, it might even work, I thought.

I got out and went to the owner of the station. We were casual acquaintances.

"How much would it cost me for a set of tires?" I asked.

"For this car, 160 dollars, but you got good ones," the man said.

He looked at me and I knew he felt I was going to make an offer. "Yeah, I don't really need any tires," I agreed. "But I need money. Tell you what I'll do. I'll buy a set of those tires and charge them on this card. Only I don't take the tires. You give me 100 dollars instead. You've still got the tires, and when my dad pays Mobil for them, you get your share. And when you sell the tires, the whole 160 dollars goes into your pocket. What do you say? You'll make best profit, man."

He studied me, and I could see the greed in his eyes. "What about your old man?" he asked cautiously.

I shrugged. "He never looks at my car. I told him I needed some new tires and he told me to charge them."

He was still doubtful. "Let me see your driver's license. This could be a stolen card," he said. I handed him my junior driver's license, which had the same name as the card. "You're only fifteen? You look ten years older," the station owner said as he handed it back. "I'll have to call into Mobil and get an approval - we have to do that on any big purchase. If I get an okay, then it's a deal."

I left the station with a hundred in my wallet.

I was crazy with happiness. I hadn't yet had my first taste of alcohol, and I couldn't compare the feeling to a champagne, say, but it was the most delightful feeling I'd ever experienced in the front seat of a car.

In fact, my cleverness astonished me. If it worked once, why wouldn't it work twice? It did. It worked so many times in the next several weeks, I lost count. I can't remember how many sets of tires, how many batteries and other automobile stuff I bought with that charge card and then sold back for a part of value.

Then the first month's bill came. I threw the bill into the wastebasket. A second bill mailed two weeks later also went there. I thought about facing Dad and confessing, but I didn't have the courage. I knew he would find out, sooner or later, but I decided someone other than me would have to tell him.

Eventually, a Mobil investigator found Dad in his store. The man spoke as if apologising.

"Mr. Abagnale, you've had a card with us for fifteen years and we prize your account. You've got a top credit rating, you've never been late with a payment and I'm not here to blame you about your bill," said the agent as Dad listened with a puzzled expression. "We are curious, sir, and would like to know one thing. Just how in the hell could you spend 3,400 dollars for gas, oil, batteries and tires for one 1952 Ford in three months? You've put fourteen sets of tires on that car in the past sixty days and bought twenty-two batteries and several tons of gas in the past ninety days."

Dad was astonished. "Why, I don't even use my Mobil card - my son does," he said when he recovered. "There must be some mistake."

The Mobil investigator placed several hundred Mobil charge receipts in front of Dad. Each had his signature in my handwriting. "How did he do this? And why?" Dad almost cried.

"I don't know," replied the Mobil agent. "Why don't we ask him?"

They did. I said I didn't know anything about the swindle. I didn't convince them. I expected Dad to be very angry. But he was more puzzled than angry. "Look, son, if you tell us how you did this, and why, we'll forget it. There'll be no punishment and I'll pay the bills," he offered.

My dad was a great guy. He never lied to me in his life. I told the truth. "It's the girls, Dad," I confessed. "They do funny things to me. I can't explain it."

Dad and the Mobil investigator nodded with sympathy. Dad put his hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry about it, boy. No one can explain it," he said.

If Dad forgave me, Mom didn't. She was really upset over the incident and blamed my father for my guilt. My mother still had legal custody of me and she decided to remove me from Dad's influences. Worse still, she put me into a private school for problem boys.

The school was like a summer camp. I lived in a neat cottage with six other boys, and except for the fact that I was not allowed to leave campus and constantly controlled, I didn't have any difficulties. We attended classes from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., from Monday to Friday, but the rest of the time was our own to do what we liked.

Still I looked on my limitation in the school as punishment, which I didn't deserve. After all, Dad had forgiven me and he was the only victim of my crimes. So what was I doing in the place, I asked myself. What I disliked most about the school, however, was its lack of girls.

I became even more depressed when I knew what had happened to Dad. He never went into details, but while I was in the school he got into some serious financial difficulties and lost his business. He was forced to sell the house and his two big Cadillacs and everything else he had of material value. In a few months, Dad went from living like a millionaire to living like a postal clerk.

That's what he was when he came to me after I had spent a year in the school. A postal clerk. Mom agreed to my living with Dad again. I was shocked at the change of his life. But Dad didn't not allow me to blame myself. The 3,400 dollars I'd stolen was not a factor in his business failure, he told me. "Don't even think of it, kid. That was a drop in the bucket," he said cheerfully.

He wasn't bothered by his sudden drop in status and finances, but it bothered me. Not for myself, but for Dad. I wanted him to explain the reasons. "What about your friends, Dad?" I asked. "I remember you always helped them. Didn't any of them offer to help you?"

Dad just smiled. "You'll learn, Frank, that when you're up there're hundreds of people who'll call you a friend. When you're down, you're lucky if one of them will buy you a cup of coffee. If I could start it again, I'd select my friends more carefully. I have a couple of good friends. They're not rich, but one of them got me my job in the post office."

He refused to speak about his misfortunes, but it bothered me, especially when I was with him in his car. It wasn't as good as my Ford, which he'd sold for me and placed the money in an account in my name. "Doesn't it bother you at all to drive this old car, Dad?" I asked him one day. "I mean, this is really a drop from a Cadillac. Right?"

Dad laughed. "That's the wrong way to look at it, Frank. It's not important what a man has but what a man is. This car is fine for me. I know who I am and what I am, and that's what matters, not what other people might think of me. I'm an honest man, and that's more important to me than having a big car... As long as a man knows what he is and who he is, he'll do all right."

Trouble was, at that time I didn't know what I was or who I was.

Within three short years I had the answer. "Who are you?" asked a pretty brunette when I sat down on Miami Beach beside her.

"Anyone I want to be," I said. And that was true.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pilot

I left home at sixteen. There was no pressure on me to leave, although I wasn't happy. The situation with my family didn't change. Dad still wanted to win Mom back and Mom didn't want to be won. Dad was still using me as a peacemaker in his attempts to win Mom back, and she was still angry about his using me in this role. I disliked it myself. Mom graduated from dental technician's school and was working for a dentist. She seemed satisfied with her new, independent life.

I had no plans to run away. But every time Dad put on his postal clerk's uniform and drove to work in his old car, I felt depressed. I couldn't forget how he wore branded suits and drove big expensive cars.

One June morning of 1964, I woke up and knew it was time to go. Some remote corner of the world seemed to tell me, "Come." So I went.

I didn't say good-bye to anyone. I didn't leave any notes behind. I had 200 dollars in a checking account at the bank, an account Dad had opened for me a year before and which I had never used. I took my checkbook, packed my best clothes in a suitcase and caught a train for New York City.

In New York I met a boy my own age an hour after I got off the train and tricked him into taking me home with him. I told his parents that both my mother and father died, that I was trying to live on my own and that I needed a place to stay until I got a job. They told me I could stay in their home as long as I wanted.

I had no ideas at the moment where I wanted to go or what I wanted to do. But I had a clear goal. I was going to be successful in some field. I was going to make it to the top of some mountain. And once there, no one or nothing was going to push me from the peak. I wasn't going to make the mistakes my dad had made.

The Big Apple quickly proved to be less than attractive, even for a native son. I had no problem finding a job. I had worked for my father as a clerk and delivery boy and was experienced in the operation of a stationery store. I started going to large stationery firms, presenting myself truthfully. I was only sixteen, I said, and I was a high school dropout, but I was well experienced in the stationery business. The manager of the third firm I visited hired me at 1.50 dollars an hour. I was naive enough to think it a good salary.

I lost illusions within the week. I realized it was impossible to live in New York on 60 dollars a week, even if I stayed in the cheapest hotel and ate hot dogs from street automats. Even more disappointing, I was left with the role of spectator in the dating game with girls.

I analyzed the situation and came to this conclusion: I was paid a low salary not because I was a high school dropout but because I was only sixteen. A boy simply couldn't get a man's salary.

So I aged ten years overnight. It had always surprised people, especially women, to learn I was still a teenager. I decided that if I looked older, I might be older. I was good at graphic arts in school. I changed the birth date on my driver's license from 1948 to 1938. Then I went out to test the job market as a twenty-six-year-old high school dropout, with proof of my age in my wallet. No one questioned my new age, but the best offer was 2.75 dollars an hour as a truck driver's assistant. Some prospective employers honestly told me that it wasn't age that mattered to a worker's salary, but education. The more education he had, the more he was paid. It occurred to me only later that diplomas, like birth dates, are also easily faked.

I could survive on 110 dollars a week, but I couldn't live on that money. The girls I was dating were costing me a lot more.

I started writing checks on my 200 dollars account whenever I needed money for my dates with girls. I cashed a check for only 10 dollars, or at most 20 dollars, and at first I did all my check deals in the Manhattan Bank. Then I learned that stores, hotels, and other business firms would also cash personal checks, if the amount wasn't too large and proper identification was presented. I found out that my driver's license was suitable identification, and I started to cash 20 or 25 dollars checks at hotels and department stores. No one asked me any questions. No one checked with the bank to see if the check was good. I simply presented my faked driver's license with my check and the driver's license was handed back with the cash.

It was easy. Too easy. Within a few days I knew I had the overdraft on my account and the checks I was writing were no good. However, I continued to cash a check whenever I needed money to finance a date with some beautiful chick. I was soon writing two or three bad checks daily because New York has more beautiful chicks than any country farm. I quit my job and began to support myself on my faked checks. I didn't keep track of the number of these checks, but my standard of living improved extremely. So did my standard of loving.

After two months of writing bad checks, however, I faced myself with some unpleasant truths. I was a swindler. Nothing more, nothing less. That didn't bother me too much, for I was a successful swindler, and at the moment to be a success at anything was the most important factor in the world to me.

What bothered me were the professional risks of being a check swindler. I knew my father had reported my absence to the police. Generally, the cops don't spend a lot of time looking for a missing sixteen-year-old, unless a crime is suspected. However, my case was an exception. The police, I knew, were looking for me as a thief, not a missing teenager. Every storekeeper and businessman I'd deceived had also reported on me, I supposed.

In short, I was hot. I knew I could escape the cops for a while, but I also knew I would eventually be caught if I stayed in New York. The choice was to leave New York, and the prospect frightened me. That remote corner of the world suddenly seemed chilly and not friendly at all. In Manhattan, despite my independence, Mom and Dad were just a phone call or a short train trip away. I knew they would be loyal, no matter what my crimes were.

I was practiced in only one art, writing fraudulent checks. I didn't even think of any other source of income, and to me that was a matter of importance. If I went to Chicago, Miami, Washington or some other remote city, the prospect seemed depressing. Could I fool people in another city as easily as I had fooled New Yorkers? In New York I had an actual checking account, and a valid driver's license, which together allowed me to do my thing. But they were useless in any other city. I had to change my name, get fake identification and open a bank account under my alias before I could operate. It all seemed difficult and dangerous to me. I was a successful swindler. I wasn't yet a confident swindler.

I was still fighting with the problems of my situation several days later when the solution came right out of the hotel doors. As I was walking along the Forty-second Street near the hotel entrance, an Eastern Airlines flight crew appeared: a captain, co-pilot, flight engineer and four stewardesses. They were all laughing and excited, full of a joie de vivre of their own. The men were all handsome, and their uniforms with gold emblems gave them an adventurous look. The girls were all lovely, as graceful and colorful as butterflies. I stopped and watched as they boarded a crew bus, and I thought I had never seen such a beautiful group of people.

I walked on, still impressed by their glamour, and suddenly an idea occurred to me so bright and adventurous, that I astonished myself. What if I were a pilot? Not an actual pilot, of course. I didn't want to waste time on years of study, training, flight school, and other dull traps to become a man for a jet liner's cabin. But what if I had the uniform of an airline pilot? Why, I thought, I could walk into any hotel, bank or business in the country and cash a check. Airline pilots are men who are admired and respected. Men who are trusted. Men with money. And you don't expect an airline pilot to be a local resident. Or a check swindler.

I shook off the charm of the idea. It was too risky to consider. Challenging, yes, but foolish. And then I was at Forty-second and Park Avenue and saw the Pan American World Airways Building over me. I looked up at the high office building, and I didn't see a structure of steel, stone and glass. I saw a mountain to be climbed. The top managers of the famous airlines were unaware of the fact, but at that moment Pan Am got its most expensive jet impostor.

I sat up all night, considering my actions, and fell asleep just before dawn with a plan in mind. I woke up shortly after 1 p.m., took the Yellow Pages and looked up Pan

Am's number. I dialed the switchboard number and asked to speak to someone in the purchasing department. I was connected at once.

"This is Johnson, can I help you?"

"My name is Robert Black and I'm a co-pilot with Pan American, based in Los Angeles." I paused for his reaction, my heart was beating very fast.

"Yes, what can I do for you, Mr. Black?" He was courteous and formal and I went ahead.

"We flew a trip in here at eight o'clock this morning, and I must be out of here this evening at seven," I said. I invented the flight times and hoped he wasn't familiar with Pan Am's schedules. I certainly wasn't. "Now, I don't know how this happened," I continued, trying to sound upset. "I've been with the company seven years and never had anything like this happen. The thing is, someone has stolen my uniform, or at least it's missing, and the only uniform I have is in my home in Los Angeles. Now, I have to fly this trip out tonight and I'm almost sure I can't do it in civilian clothes... Do you know where I can pick up a uniform here, or borrow one, just for this trip?"

Johnson laughed. "Well, it's not a big problem," he replied. "Have you got a pencil and paper?"

I said I did, and he continued. "Go down to the Well-Built Uniform Company and ask for Mr. Rosen. He'll fix you up. I'll call him and tell him you're coming. What's your name again?"

"Robert Black," I replied, and hoped he was asking simply because he'd forgotten.

"Don't worry, Mr. Black. Rosen will take good care of you," Johnson said cheerfully.

Less than an hour later I walked into the Well-Built Uniform Company.

"You Officer Black?" Rosen asked and, when I said I was, he pointed a finger. "Come on."

I followed him past a lot of different uniforms, apparently for several different airlines, until he stopped beside a display of dark blue suits.

"What's your rank?" Rosen asked, looking at jackets.

I knew none of the airline terminology. "Co-pilot," I said, and hoped that was the right answer.

"First officer, huh?" he said, and began handing me jackets and trousers to try on for size. Finally, Rosen was satisfied. "This isn't a perfect fit, but I don't have time to make changes."

I suddenly noticed the uniform jacket and cap each lacked something. "Where's the Pan Am wings and the Pan Am emblem?" I asked.

Rosen shrugged. "Oh, we don't have those. We just manufacture uniforms. You'll have to get the wings and the emblem from Pan Am's stores department."

"Oh, okay," I said, smiling. How much do I pay you for this uniform? I'll write you a check."

Rosen shook his head. "Can't take a check or cash, either," he said. "I have to charge this to your employee account number and it'll be taken out of your payroll check. That's the way we do it here."

He handed me a form. Opposite the space for my name were five small connected boxes, and I assumed that they were for an employee's payroll account number. Five boxes. Five digits. I filled in the boxes with the first five numbers that came to mind, signed the form and pushed it back to Rosen.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Rosen," I said, and left, carrying the lovely uniform. If Rosen answered, I didn't hear him.

I went back to my room and dialed the Pan Am switchboard again. "Excuse me, but I was referred to the stores department," I said, as if confused. "What is that, please? I'm not with the company, and I have to make a delivery there."

The switchboard girl was most helpful. "It's in Hangar Fourteen at Kennedy Airport. Do you need directions?"

I said I didn't and thanked her. I took an airport bus to Kennedy and was really frightened when I found myself in front of Hangar 14. Whatever stores Pan Am kept in Hangar 14, they had to be valuable. The hangar was a fortress, surrounded by a tall fence and its entrances were guarded by armed soldiers. Each entrance had a sign "employees only."

A dozen or more pilots, stewardesses and civilians entered the hangar while I was watching from the bus stop. I noticed the civilians stopped and showed identification to the guards, but most of the uniformed personnel, pilots and stewardesses, simply walked through the gate, some without even a glance at the guard. Then one turned back to say something to a guard and I noticed he had an ID card attached to his breast pocket.

It was a rainy day and I had a raincoat with me, a black one similar to the ones some of the pilots were wearing. I had my pilot's uniform in a small bag. I went into one of the airport toilets and changed into the uniform. Then I left the terminal and walked directly toward Hangar 14's nearest entrance.

The guard stood with his back to me. As I came near the gate, I put the raincoat over my left shoulder, hiding the left side of my jacket, and took off my hat. When the guard turned to me, I was combing my hair with my fingers, my hat in my left hand.

I didn't stop. I smiled and said, "Good evening." He made no effort to stop me, although he returned my greeting. A moment later I was inside Hangar 14. It was,

really, a hangar, a huge office structure containing the offices of the chief pilot and chief stewardess, the firm's meteorology offices and dozens of other rooms. The place had human traffic. There seemed to be dozens of pilots, a great number of stewardesses and a lot of civilians walking around.

I hesitated in the lobby. Suddenly I felt like a sixteen-year-old and I was sure that anyone who looked at me would realize I was too young to be a pilot and would call the cop.

I didn't turn a head. Those who glanced at me showed no curiosity or interest. There was a large map on a wall with the names of departments and signs pointing the way. Stores department was down a corridor to my left. A tall young man with his name on the right side of his shirt stood up from a chair in front of a large desk as I stopped at the counter.

"Can I he'p ya?" he asked slowly. It was the first real southern accent I'd ever heard. I liked it.

"Yes," I said with a sad grin. "I need a pair of wings and a hat emblem. My two-year-old son took mine off my uniform last night and he won't, or can't, tell me what he did with them."

The storekeeper laughed. "We got more wings on kids and girls than we got on pilots, I suspect," he said. "We replace a lot of them, anyway. Here you are. Give me your name and employee number." He took a form from his desk and put it on the counter with a pair of golden wings and a Pan Am cap badge.

"Robert Black, first officer, 35099," I said, fixing the emblem on my hat and the wings on my jacket. "I'm out of Los Angeles. You need an address there?"

He grinned. "No, damned computers need nothing except numbers," he replied, handing me a copy of the purchase form.

I tried to mix with the crowd before leaving the building. I wanted to pick as much information as possible on airline pilots and airline operations, and this seemed a good opportunity. Despite the number of pilots in the building, they all seemed to be strangers to one another. I was especially interested in the plastic-enclosed cards, obviously identification of some sort that most of the pilots wore on their uniform jackets. The stewardesses, I noticed, had similar ID cards but had them on their bags.

Obviously, I realized as I left the building, I needed more than a uniform if I wanted to be successful in my role of Pan Am pilot. I would need an ID card and much more knowledge of Pan Am's operations than I had at the moment. I put the uniform away in my closet and started going to the public library and bookstores, studying all the material available on pilots, flying and airlines. One small book proved especially valuable. It was the story of a veteran Pan American flight captain, with a lot of photographs, and containing airline terminology.

However, I felt I must know a lot of the things that were not in the books or magazines I read. So I called the Pan Am office again. "I'd like to speak to a pilot, please," I told the switchboard operator. "I'm a reporter for my high school newspaper, and I'd like to do a story on pilots' lives - you know, where they fly, how they're trained and that sort of stuff. Do you think a pilot would talk to me?"

Pan Am has the nicest people. There was a captain who was happy to help. He was delighted that young people showed an interest in making a career in the airline field. I introduced myself as Bobby Black, and after some formal questions, I started to ask him the questions I wanted answered.

"What's the age of the youngest pilot flying for Pan Am?"

"Well, that depends," he answered. "We have some flight engineers who're probably no older than twenty-three or twenty-four. Our youngest co-pilot is probably in his late twenties. Our average captain is close to forty or in his forties, probably."

"I see," I said. "Well, would it be impossible for a co-pilot to be twenty-six, or even younger?"

"Oh, no," he answered quickly. "Some of the other airlines have a lot of younger co-pilots, I've noticed. A lot depends, of course, on the type of plane he's flying and his experience. Everything is based on experience, that is, how long a pilot has been with a company."

"When do you hire people? I mean, at what age can a pilot go to work for an airline, say Pan Am?"

"If I remember correctly, you can come on the payroll at twenty as a flight engineer," said the captain, who had an excellent memory.

"Then with six or eight years' service, you could become a co-pilot?" I tried to press him.

"It's possible," he agreed. "In fact, I'd say it wouldn't be unusual at all for a capable man to become co-pilot in six or eight years, even less."

"Are you allowed to tell me how much pilots earn?" I asked.

"Well, again, that depends on experience, the route he flies, the number of hours he flies each week and other factors," said the captain. "I would say the maximum salary for a co-pilot would be 32,000 dollars, a captain's salary around 50,000 dollars."

"How many pilots does Pan Am have?" I asked.

The captain laughed. "Son, that's a difficult question. I don't know the exact number. Probably eighteen hundred. You can get better figures from the personnel manager."

"No, that's okay," I said. "How many places are these pilots?"

"You're talking about bases," he replied. "We have five bases in the United States: San Francisco, Washington D.C., Chicago, Miami and New York. Those are cities where our aircrews live. They report to work in that city, San Francisco, say, fly out of that city and eventually finish a flight in that city. It might help you to know that we are not a domestic carrier, that is, we don't fly from city to city in this country. We're an international carrier, serving foreign destinations."

The information helped me a lot. "This may sound strange to you, Captain, and it's more curiosity than anything else, but would it be possible for me to be a co-pilot based in New York City, and you to be a co-pilot also based in New York, and we never meet?"

"Very possible, even more so with co-pilots, for you and I would never fly together in the same plane," said the helpful captain. "There're so many pilots in the system, in fact, that no one pilot would know all the others. I've been with the company eighteen years, and I don't think I know more than sixty or seventy of the other pilots."

The captain's words were lighting up all the lights in my little head.

"I've heard that pilots can fly free, I mean as a passenger, not as a pilot. Is that true?" I asked.

"Yes," said the captain. "But we're talking about two things, now. We have a privilege to travel somewhere by air with the family. That is, if there's room, we can occupy seats, and our only cost is the tax on the tickets. We pay that. Then there's deadheading. For example, if my boss told me tonight that he wanted me in L.A. tomorrow to fly a trip out of there, I might fly out there on Delta, Eastern, TWA or any other carrier that could get me there on time. I would either occupy an empty passenger seat or, more likely, ride in the jump seat, generally used by deadheading pilots."

"Do you have to help fly the plane?" I questioned.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I am with another company's carrier, you see. You might be offered a control seat as a courtesy, but I always refuse. We fly on each other's planes to get somewhere, not to work." He laughed.

"How do you go about that, deadheading, I mean?" I was really excited. And the captain was patient. I think he liked kids.

"You want to know it all, don't you?" he said friendly, and continued to answer my question. "It works this way. Say I want to go to Miami on Delta. I go down to Delta operations, show them my Pan Am ID card and I fill out a Delta form, stating my destination and giving my position with Pan Am, my employee number and my FAA pilot's license number. I get a copy of the form and give that copy to the stewardess when I board, and that's how I get to ride in the jump seat."

"What's a pilot's license look like?" I asked. "Is it a certificate that you can hang on the wall, or like a driver's license, or what?"

He laughed. "No, it's not a certificate you hang on the wall. It's hard to describe, really. It's about the size of a driver's license, but there's no picture. It's just a white card with black printing on it."

I decided it was time to let the nice man go back to his comfortable seat. "Thank you, Captain," I said. "You've been really super."

"Glad to help you, son," he said. "I hope you get those pilot's wings, if that's what you want."

I already had the wings. What I needed was an ID card and an FAA pilot's license.

I looked in the Yellow Pages under identification, picked a firm on Madison Avenue (any ID company with a Madison Avenue address had to have class, I thought) and went to the firm dressed in a business suit.

"I'd like to see one of your sales representatives, please,"

The sales representative had the confident appearance and manner of a man who would refuse to talk about a single ID card, so I hit him with what I thought would best get his attention and win his respect, the prospect of a big account.

"My name is Frank Williams, and I represent Carib Air of Puerto Rico," I said quickly. "As you probably know, we are entering the continental United States market, and we at present have two hundred people at Kennedy Airport. Right now we're using only a temporary ID card made of paper, and we want to go to a formal, laminated, plastic-enclosed card with a color photograph and the company logo, similar to what the other airlines use here. We want a quality card, and I understand you people deal only in quality products."

If he knew that Carib Air existed and was entering the US market, he knew more than I did.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Williams. Let me show you what we have," he said enthusiastically, leading me to his office. "Now, most of the airlines we serve use this card here," he said, showing a duplicate of Pan Am's ID cards. "It has employee number, base, position, description, photograph and, if you wish, a company logo. I think it will do perfectly."

I nodded. "Yes, I think this is the card we want," I said. It was certainly the card I wanted.

"Can you give me a sample?" I asked on impulse. "I'd like to show it to our top people." I studied the card. "This is fine, but it's blank," I said. "Why don't we fix this up, so they'll have an idea of what the finished product looks like? We can use me as the model."

"That's an excellent suggestion," said the salesman, and led me to an ID camera that produced ID-sized photographs within minutes. He took several photographs, we selected one. He then filled out my fake name, rank (co-pilot), employee number, height, weight, coloring, age and sex and handed it to me with his business card.

"I'm sure we can do a good job for you, Mr. Williams," he said.

He already had done a good job for me, except for one detail. The lovely ID card lacked Pan Am's logo and firm name. I was thinking how to solve the problem when a display in the window of a hobby shop caught my eye. There were a lot of model planes, among them a beautiful Pan Am jet with the firm's famous logo on its tail, and the company legend name, in the copyrighted lettering used by the airline, on the fuselage and wings.

The model came in several sizes. I bought the smallest, for 2.49 dollars, and hurried back to my room. I threw the plane parts away. Following instructions in the kit, I put the logo and lettering in water until they separated from their base. Both the logo and the company name were of very thin plastic. I laid the Pan Am logo on the upper left-hand corner of the ID card and carefully fixed the firm legend across the top of the card. It was perfect. An exact duplicate of a Pan Am identification card.

As a fake pilot, however, I was still grounded. I recalled the words of the captain I had interviewed: "Your license is the most important thing. You must have it on your person at all times. You'll be asked to show your license as often as you're asked for your ID."

I considered the issue over for days, but could think of no solution. I started searching through bookstores again. I wasn't sure of what I was looking for, but I found it.

There it was, a small advertisement in the back of one of the books placed by a plaque-making firm. The firm offered to duplicate any pilot's license, engraved in silver on a handsome eight-by-eleven-inch plaque, for only 35 dollars. All a pilot had to do was supply the information, including his FAA license number and ratings, and the firm would return a silver duplicate of his license, suitable for display anywhere.

I wanted one of the plaques, naturally.

I was excited with the idea. I didn't write the firm, I called their office. I told the salesman I wanted one of the plaques and asked if the transaction could be done by telephone.

He showed no curiosity why I was in such a hurry. "Well, you can give me all the necessary information over the telephone, but we'll need to have a check or money order before we actually make up the plaque. It'll be 37.50 dollars, including postage." said the man.

I didn't argue. I gave him my alias, Frank Williams. I gave him my faked age and my correct weight, height, color of hair and eyes and social security number. A pilot's license or certificate number is always the same as his social security number. I gave myself the highest rating a pilot can reach and told him I would have a money order that same day. I had the money order in the mail within an hour, in fact. It was the only valid transaction I'd done in several weeks. The plaque arrived within a week. It was gorgeous.

I took the plaque to a small print shop in Brooklyn and spoke to the head printer. "Look, I'd like to get my license reduced down so I can carry it in my wallet, you know, like you would carry a diploma. Can it be done?" I asked.

The printer studied the plaque with admiration. "I didn't know pilots got this sort of thing when they learned to fly," he said.

"Well, an actual license is a certificate, but it's at my home in L.A.," I said. "This is something my girl gave me as a gift."

He reduced it to actual size, printed it and handed it to me. The whole process took less than thirty minutes and cost me five bucks. I laminated it with two pieces of plastic myself. I'd never seen a real pilot's license, but this sure as hell looked like one.

I put on my perfect pilot's uniform and caught a bus to La Guardia Airport.

I was ready for flight duty. Only if someone else flew the plane.

CHAPTER THREE

Fly a Crooked Sky

There is charm in a uniform because it marks the one who is wearing it as a person of rare skills, courage or achievement.

I felt great in my Pan Am pilot's uniform as I walked into La Guardia Airport. Men obviously looked at me with admiration and respect. Pretty women and girls smiled at me. Airport policemen nodded courteously. Pilots and stewardesses spoke to me or lifted a hand in greeting as they passed. Every man, woman and child who noticed me seemed warm and friendly.

It was strong stuff and I loved it. In fact, I became immediately addicted. During the next five years the uniform was my alter ego. Whenever I felt lonely, depressed, rejected or doubtful of my own worth, I dressed up in my pilot's uniform and sought out a crowd. The uniform bought me respect and dignity. Without it, at times, I felt useless and dejected.

I mixed with the crowd in La Guardia's lobby that morning, taking great pride and pleasure in my crooked status. I intended to get aboard a flight to a distant city and start operating my check swindles there, but I delayed my decision. I was having too much fun enjoying the attention and respect I was receiving.

I became hungry. I stepped into one of the airport's many coffee shops, dropped onto a chair at the counter and ordered a sandwich and milk. I almost finished eating when a TWA co-pilot sat down beside me. He ordered coffee and a roll, then looked at me with mild curiosity.

"What's Pan Am doing here at La Guardia?" he asked casually. Apparently, Pan Am did not fly out of La Guardia.

"Oh, I just deadheaded in from Frisco on the first flight I could catch," I replied.

"What kind of equipment you on?" he asked, eating his roll.

My brains turned to ice cubes. Equipment? What did he mean, equipment? Engines? Cockpit instruments? What? I didn't remember if I had heard the word before in connection with commercial airlines. I searched for an answer for it was obviously a normal question for him to ask.

The TWA pilot was looking at me, waiting for my reply. "General Electric," I said hopefully. It was obviously not the right answer. His eyes went frosty. "Oh," he said, his voice lost the friendliness. He returned to his coffee and roll.

I understood I wasn't prepared for deadheading, despite all my previous work and research. It was obvious that I needed a better knowledge of airline terminology,

among other things. As I was leaving the terminal, I noticed a TWA stewardess carrying a heavy bag. "Can I help you?" I asked, reaching for the luggage.

She agreed readily. "Thanks," she said with a grin. "That's our crew bus just outside there."

"Just arrived?" I asked as we walked toward the bus.

She grimaced. "Yes, and I'm pretty tired. About half the passengers were whiskey salesmen who'd been to a convention in Scotland, and you can imagine what that scene was like."

I could, and laughed. "What kind of equipment are you on?" I asked on impulse.

"Seven-o-sevens, and I love them," she said as I lifted her suitcase aboard the bus. She paused at the bus door. "Thanks much, friend. I needed your muscles."

"Glad I could help," I said, and meant it.

So equipment was an airplane, I thought, walking to my own bus. I felt a little stupid, but halfway back to Manhattan I burst out laughing as a thought came to mind. The TWA first officer was probably back in the pilot's cabin by now, telling other TWA crewmen he'd just met a Pan Am fool who flew washing machines.

I spent the next few days in the research. In the past I'd found my best sources of information on airlines were airlines themselves, so I started calling them. I represented myself as a college student doing a paper on transportation.

Usually I was referred to the airline's public relations department. Airline PR people love to talk about their airline. I quickly found out that my aviation education was elementary, but within a week I had passed high school and was working on my bachelor's degree.

As my knowledge of airlines and airline terminology grew, my confidence returned. I opened a checking account in the name of Frank Williams, with a post-office box address, and when my order for two hundred personalized checks arrived, I tried cashing a few checks as an airline pilot.

It was like going on safari. Cashiers couldn't get the money out of the cash registers fast enough. Most of them didn't even ask for identification. I showed my phony ID card and my faked pilot's license in their faces anyway. I didn't want my handiwork to go unnoticed.

I started hanging around La Guardia regularly, not with any intentions of catching a flight, but to meet airline personnel and to listen to airline talk. To test my vocabulary, so to say. I avoided Kennedy, because Pan Am operated out of there. I was afraid that the first Pan Am pilot I met at Kennedy would recognize me as a fraud.

Some books are judged by their covers, it seems, and in my uniform I was an immediate best seller. I walked into a coffee shop, where there usually were a dozen or

more pilots or other crewmen taking a break, and someone always invited me to join him or them. I never took a drink in the bars, because I had never tried alcohol before and wasn't sure how it would affect me, but no one questioned me about this.

I didn't do a lot of talking at first. I usually listened to the flow of conversations around me, monitoring the words and phrases, and within a short time I was speaking airline language like a native. La Guardia, for me, was the language school of the air.

Some of my language books were absolutely gorgeous. I guess the stewardesses didn't often see a really young pilot of their own age. "Hel-looo!" one-said passing, and the invitation in her voice was quite clear. I was soon dating several of the girls. I took them to dinner, to the theater, to the ballet, to the symphony, to night clubs and to movies. Also to my place or their place.

I loved them for their minds. The other parts of them were wonderful, too. But for the first time I was more interested in a girl's knowledge of her work than in her body. I didn't object, of course, if the one came with the other. A bedroom can be an excellent classroom. I was an excellent student.

Stews are good people. I have very pleasant memories of those I met. I recall one clearly. She was a Delta flight attendant whom I'd met during my early studies of airline jargon. She had a car at the airport and offered to drive me back to Manhattan one afternoon.

"Would you drop me at the bank there?" I asked as we walked through the lobby of the terminal. "I need to cash a check."

The stewardess stopped and pointed at the dozens of airline ticket counters that lined every side of the huge lobby. There were more than a hundred airlines that had ticket offices at La Guardia. "Cash your check at one of those counters. Any one of them will take your check."

"They will?" I said, surprised but trying to hide the fact. "It's a personal check and we don't operate out of here, you know."

She shrugged. "It doesn't matter," she said. "You're a Pan Am pilot in uniform, and any airline here will take your personal check as a courtesy. They do that at Kennedy, don't they?"

"I don't know. I've never had occasion to cash a check at a ticket counter before," I said truthfully.

American's counter was the nearest. I walked over and faced a ticket clerk who wasn't busy. "Can you cash a 100 dollars personal check for me?" I asked, checkbook in hand.

"Sure, be glad to," he said, smiling. He didn't even ask me for identification.

I had occasion to cash checks at airline counters very often after that. I worked La Guardia like a fox on a turkey farm. The number of the airline counters was so large

that the risk was minimal. I cashed a check at the Eastern counter, for instance, then went to another section of the terminal. I was cautious. I never went back to the same counter twice.

Encouraged by success and ease with which I presented myself as a pilot, I decided I was finally ready for "Operation Deadhead."

I'd lived in the small apartment under the name Frank Williams and I'd paid my rent on time and in cash. The landlady thought I worked in a stationery store. None of the other residents knew me and I'd never appeared around the building in my pilot's uniform. I had no telephone and I'd never received mail at the address.

When I packed and left the flat, there was no trail to follow. I took a bus to La Guardia and went to Eastern's operations office. There were three young men working behind the counter.

"Yes, sir, can I help you?" one of them asked.

"I need to deadhead to Miami on your next flight, if you've got room," I said, producing my fake Pan Am ID.

"We've got one going out in fifteen minutes, Mr. Williams," he said. "Would you like to make that one, or wait until our afternoon flight? The jump seat's open on both flights."

I didn't want to delay. "I'll take this flight," I said. "It'll give me more time on the beach."

He pushed a pink form toward me. I'd never seen one before, but it was familiar because of my interview with the helpful Pan Am captain. The information needed was minimal: name, company, employee number and position. I filled it out, gave it to him and he handed the top copy back to me. I knew that was my boarding pass.

Then he picked up the telephone and asked for the FAA tower, and my stomach was suddenly full of yellow butterflies.

"This is Eastern," he said. "We've got a jump passenger on Flight 602 to Miami. Frank Williams, co-pilot, Pan Am... Okay, thanks." He hung up the telephone and nodded toward a door outside.

It was a 727. Most of the passengers had already boarded. I handed my pink form to the stewardess at the door to the aircraft and turned toward the cockpit like I'd been doing this for years.

"Hi, I'm Frank Williams," I said to the three men inside. They were busy with what I later learned was the take-off equipment, and ignored me except for nods of greeting.

I looked around the cabin and the butterflies started flying again. I didn't see a jump seat, whatever a jump seat looked like. There were only three seats in the cockpit and all of them were occupied.

Then the flight engineer looked up and grinned. "Oh, sorry," he said, closing the cabin door. "Have a seat."

As the door closed, I saw a small seat attached to the floor. I sat down into the small seat, feeling the need for a cigarette. And I didn't smoke.

"How long have you been with Pan Am?" asked the captain, and I was aware from his tone that he was just making conversation.

"This is my eighth year," I said, and wished immediately I'd said six.

None of the three showed any surprise, however. It apparently was a position compatible with my rank. "What kind of equipment are you on?" asked the co-pilot.

"Seven-o-sevens," I said.

Although I felt like I was sitting on a bed of hot coals all the way to Miami, it was really very easy. The conversation was indifferent and mostly among the three Eastern officers. At one point the co-pilot, who was handling traffic, handed me a pair of earphones and asked if I wanted to listen in, but I refused, saying I preferred a rock station. That brought a laugh. I followed their talk, monitoring the slang phrases that passed among them and noting how they used the airline jargon.

I thanked the flying officers before leaving. They casually wished me luck and the captain said the jump seat was generally available "anytime you need it."

I'd never been to Miami before. I was impressed and excited by the colorful tropical palms around the terminal, the warm sun and the bright, clean air.

I was inside the terminal before I realized I didn't have the slightest idea where Pan Am housed its people in Miami. Well, there was an easy way to find out.

I walked up to the Pan Am ticket counter and the girl behind the counter, who was busy with passengers, stepped over to face me. "Can I help you?" she asked, looking at me curiously.

"Yes," I said. "This is my first delay in Miami. I'm here on a replacement status. I normally don't fly trips in here, and I came in such a hurry that no one told me where the hell we stay here. Where do we stay over here?"

"Oh, yes, sir, we stay at the Skyway Motel if it's going to be less than twenty-four hours," she answered. "Well, it's only a short distance," she said. "You can wait on the crew bus or you can just take a cab over there. Are you going to take a cab?"

"I think so," I replied. I knew I was going to take a cab. I didn't want to get on a bus full of real Pan Am flight people.

"Wait a minute, then," she said and stepped over to her station. She opened a drawer and took out a card and handed it to me. "Just give that to any of the cab drivers. Have a good stay."

Damned if it wasn't a ticket for a free cab ride, good with any Miami cab firm. Airline people lived in the land of milk and honey, I thought as I walked out of the terminal. I liked milk and I knew I was in the right place when I checked in at the motel. I registered under my phony name and put down General Delivery, New York, as my address. The registration clerk took the card, glanced at it, then stamped "airline crew" in red ink across its face.

"I'll be checking out in the morning," I said.

She nodded. "All right. You can sign this now if you want, and you won't have to stop by here in the morning."

"I'll just sign it in the morning," I replied.

I didn't see any Pan Am crewmen around the motel. In my room, I changed into casual clothes and called the Eastern stewardess at the number she'd given me.

She picked me up in her friend's car and we had a ball in the Miami Beach night spots. I didn't put any moves on her. I was so excited about the success of my first adventure as a phony pilot that I forgot about it. By the time I remembered, she'd gone home.

I checked out at 5:30 the next morning. "Can I get a check cashed?" I asked as I signed the check.

"Sure, do you have your ID card?" he said.

I handed it to him and wrote out a check for 100 dollars, payable to the hotel. He copied the fictitious employee number from my fake ID card onto the back of the check and handed me back my ID and five 20 dollars bills. I took a cab to the airport and an hour later deadheaded to Dallas.

I wasn't aware that Pan Am didn't fly out of Dallas. I was aware that deadheading pilots were always on business.

"What the hell are you going to Dallas for?" the copilot asked in casually curious tones. I was searching for a reply when he gave me the answer. "You are on a charter or something?"

"Yeah, freight," I said, knowing Pan Am had freight service all over the world, and the subject was dropped.

I stayed overnight at a motel used by flight crews of several airlines, cheated the restaurant with a 100 dollars hot check when I left in the morning and deadheaded to San Francisco immediately. It was a usual pattern I followed, with variations, for the next two years. Modus operandi, the cops call it.

My modus operandi was a ready-made fraud, one for which the airlines, motels and hotels set themselves up. The hotels and motels around cities or international airports considered it just good business, of course, when they set up agreements with as many airlines as possible to house flight crews. I know from numerous conversations on the subject that the flight crews liked the plan.

The deadheading arrangement between airlines everywhere in the world was also a system based on good business practices. It was more than a courtesy. It provided a maximum of mobility for pilots and co-pilots needed in emergency or other situations.

However, airport security was minimal at that time. Terrorist raids on terminals and plane hijackings didn't yet become the trend. Airports and small cities had a low crime rate, with theft the common problem.

No one, apparently, except extreme situations, ever checked out the pilot's bona fides. The deadheading form consisted of an original and two copies. I was given the original as a boarding pass and I gave that to the stewardess who was responsible for boarding. I knew the operations clerk always called the FAA tower to inform the tower operators that such-and-such flight would have a jump passenger aboard, but I didn't know that a copy of the pink pass was given the FAA. Apparently, the third copy was kept in the operations files of the airline. An airline official who made a statement to police concerning my tricks offered what seemed to him a logical explanation:

"You simply don't expect a man in a pilot's uniform, with proper credentials and obvious knowledge of jump procedures, to be an impostor, dammit!"

But I have always suspected that the majority of the jump forms I filled out ended up in the wastebaskets, original and both copies.

There were other factors, too, that gave big chances in my favor. I was not at first a big operator. I limited the checks I cashed at motels, hotels and airline counters to 100 dollars. It always took several days for one of my worthless checks to go to New York, and by the time the check was returned stamped "insufficient funds," I was a long time gone.

The fact that I had a legitimate account helped my success also. The bank didn't return my checks with the notice "worthless," "fraudulent" or "forgery." They simply sent them back marked "insufficient funds to cover."

So it's not too amazing that I could operate so freely when you consider the last two factors. The National Crime Information Center did not exist as a police tool during the period. If I had to compete with the computerized police system, with its huge bank of criminal facts and figures, my career would probably be a lot shorter. And lastly, I was pioneering a fraud that was so unbelievable, so seemingly impossible that it worked.

In the last months of my adventures, I met a captain with whom I had deadheaded a couple of times. It was a tense moment for me, but he relaxed it with the warmth of

his greeting. Then he laughed and said, "You know, Frank, I was talking to a Delta stewardess a couple of months ago and she said you were a phony. I told her that was crap, that you'd handled the controls of my bird. What did you do to that girl, boy? Threw her out of bed?"

My adventures. The first few years that's exactly what they were for me, adventures. Adventures in crime, of course, but still adventures.

I kept a notebook, a secret journal in which I wrote down phrases, technical data, names, dates, places, telephone numbers, thoughts and a collection of other data I thought was necessary or might prove helpful.

It was a little black book, textbook, diary and airline bible, and the longer I operated, the thicker it became.

Little things mean a lot to a big phony. The names of every flight crew I met, the type of equipment they flew, their route, their airline and their base went into the book as some of the more useful data.

For example, I'm deadheading on a National flight.

"Where you guys out of?"

"Oh, we're Miami-based."

A secret look into my notebook, then: "Hey, how's Red doing? One of you has to know Red O'Day. How is that Irishman?"

All three knew Red O'Day. "Hey, you know Red?"

"Yeah, I've deadheaded a couple of times with Red. He's a great guy."

Such exchanges made my image as a pilot stronger and usually stopped the mild cross-examinations, which I had to pass at first.

Just by watching and listening I became an expert in other things that improved my impersonations.

I had to improvise a lot. Whenever I deadheaded into a city not used by Pan Am, such as Dallas, and didn't know which motels or hotels were used by airline crews, I simply walked up to the nearest airline ticket counter. "Listen, I'm here to work a charter that's coming in tomorrow. Where do the airlines stay around here?" I asked.

At intervals I holed up in a city for two or three weeks for logistics purposes. I usually opened an account in, say, a San Diego bank, or a Houston bank, giving the address of an apartment I had rented for the occasion, and when my little box of personalized checks arrived, I packed up and went to the airways again.

I knew I was a hunted man, but I was never sure how closely I was followed those first two years. Any traveling con man occasionally feels panic, thinking he's going to be arrested, and I was no exception. Whenever I got this fear, I tried to go to earth like a fox.

Or with a fox. Some of the girls I dated thought I was marriage material. I had a regular invitation from several to visit them in their homes for a few days and get to know their parents. When I felt the need to hide out, I dropped in on the nearest one and stayed for a few days or a week, resting and relaxing. I got on well with the parents in every case. None of them ever found out they were helping and assisting a juvenile criminal.

When I felt the situation was cool again, I took off, promising the girl that I'd return soon and we'd talk about our future. I never went back, of course. I was afraid of marriage.

Besides, my mother would not have permitted it. I was only seventeen.

CHAPTER FOUR

If I'm a Kid Doctor; Where's My Jar of Lollipops?

National Flight 106, New Orleans to Miami. A routine deadheading deception. I had grown confident in my cockpit jump seats. After two hundred illegal flights, I occupied a jump seat with the confidence of a Wall Street broker in his seat on the stock exchange.

I even felt a little nostalgic as I stepped into the flight cabin of the plane. My first fraudulent flight had been on a National carrier to Miami. Now, two years later, I was returning to Miami, and again on a National jet. I thought it a good sign.

"Hi, Frank Williams. Nice of you to give me a lift," I said and shook hands with the cabin crew, Captain Tom Wright, aircraft commander, forties, First Officer Gary Evans, early thirties, and Flight Engineer Bob Hart, late twenties. Nice guys.

All three officers had headsets, and none of the three had offered me a set for monitoring. If you weren't offered, you didn't ask. The cockpit of a passenger plane is like the captain's bridge on a ship. Protocol is strictly observed.

The conversation between the three and the tower was short and careless, rather uninteresting, in fact, as most such one-sided exchanges are.

Suddenly it became really interesting, so interesting that I started to worry.

Wright and Evans exchanged surprised looks, and Hart was suddenly looking at me with strange expression. Then Wright turned around to face me. "Do you have your Pan Am identification card?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah," I said and handed it to him, feeling uneasy as Wright studied the artistic fake. "This is National 106 back to tower... uh, yes, I have an ID card here... Pan Am... looks fine... Employee number? Uh, three-five-zero-nine-nine... Uh, yeah. M-mm, just a moment."

He turned again to me. "Do you have your FAA license?"

"Yes, of course," I said, trying to look puzzled and keep myself under control.

Wright examined the forgery closely. He was the first real pilot to inspect the illegal license. He handed back my ID card and the license, his face reflected a mixture of disappointment and apology. "I don't know what that was all about," he shrugged, and did not ask me if I had any ideas on the subject.

I did, but I didn't like any of them. I tried to convince myself that nothing was wrong, that the tower operator in New Orleans was just too formal, or doing something he thought he should be doing. He was the first tower operator who observed the FAA regulation in my experiences. It was obviously an unusual incident for Tom Wright, too.

The three officers seemed to forget the matter. They asked the usual questions and I gave the usual answers but I was very nervous all the way to Miami.

Wright had just landed in Miami when the unpleasant one-sided conversation started again while the plane was going to the dock.

"Yeah, we can do that. No problem, no problem," Wright said in answer to some question from the tower. "Take the controls, I'll be right back," he said to Evans, getting out of his seat and leaving the flight cabin.

I was sure then that I was in trouble. There was no doubt in my mind that I was the subject of the conversation.

I was not surprised at all when the jet door opened and two uniformed Dade County sheriff's officers stepped aboard. One took up a position blocking the exit of the passengers. The other entered into the flight cabin.

"Frank Williams?" he asked, his eyes passing from man to man.

"I'm Frank Williams," I said, getting out of the jump seat.

"Mr. Williams, would you please come with us?" he said, his tone was courteous.

"Certainly," I said. "But what's this all about, anyway?"

It was a question that also interested the three flight officers and the stewardesses. All of them had curious expressions. None of them asked any questions, however, and the officers did not satisfy their curiosity. "Just follow me, please," he instructed me, and went out the exit door. His partner was behind me.

They didn't put handcuffs on me. They didn't touch me or give the impression that I was under arrest. But I had no illusions. It was my complete failure.

The officers escorted me to their patrol car.

"Will you get in, please, Mr. Williams. We have instructions to take you to the sheriff's office."

The officers said nothing to me during the ride. I remained silent myself, showing puzzled indignation. The officers were clearly uncomfortable as if they weren't really sure of their role.

I was taken to a small room. One of the officers sat at the desk while the other stood in front of the closed door. None of the men made an effort to search me, and both were very polite.

The one behind the desk spoke nervously. "Mr. Williams, there are some questions as to whether you work for Pan Am or not," he said, more in explanation than accusation.

"What!" I exclaimed. "That's crazy! Here's my ID and here's my FAA license. Now you tell me who I work for." I threw the phony documents down on the desk,

acting as if I were accused of selling nuclear secrets to the Russians. He examined the ID card and the pilot's license with obvious embarrassment and passed them to the second officer, who looked at them and handed them back with a nervous smile. They both gave the impression they'd just arrested the President for jaywalking.

"Well, sir, this really isn't our deal. The people who asked us to do this will come soon," the one behind the desk said.

"Okay," I agreed. "But who are these people?" He didn't have to tell me, I knew. And he didn't tell me.

One of them left for a short time, returning with coffee, milk and sandwiches, which they shared with me. There was little conversation at first. Oddly enough, I became relaxed and confident as time passed.

I told a couple of airline jokes and they started to relax, too, and ask me questions about my experiences as a pilot and the types of planes I flew.

One of the officers was a private pilot himself, and at the end of thirty minutes he looked at his partner and said, "You know, Bill, I think someone's made a mistake here."

It was almost midnight when the "someone" arrived. He was in his late twenties, wearing an Ivy League suit and a serious expression.

"Mr. Williams? FBI. Will you come with me, please?"

I thought we were going to the FBI offices, but instead he led me to the next office and shut the door.

"Mr. Williams, I was called over here by the Dade County authorities, who were contacted by the federal agency. We really don't know what the problem is, but apparently there's some question as to whether you work for Pan Am. The problem is, the employee records are in New York and the Pan Am offices are closed over the weekend." He paused and grimaced. Like the policemen, he wasn't sure he was doing right.

"I work for Pan Am, as you will learn when the offices open Monday morning," I said in an indignant tone. "Now, what do you do? Put me in jail? If you intend to do that, I have a right to call a lawyer. And I intend..."

He stopped me with a raised hand. "Look, Mr. Williams, I know what the situation is, if you're a real pilot, and I have no reason to believe you are not. Listen, do you have any local colleagues we can contact?"

I shook my head. "No, I'm based in L.A. I just deadheaded in here to see a girl, and I was going to deadhead back on Monday. I know a lot of pilots here, but they're with other airlines. I know several stewardesses, too, but again they're with other carriers."

He inspected the two documents and returned them with a nod. "Tell you what, Mr. Williams," he offered. "Why don't you give me the names of a couple of pilots you know here, and the names of some of the stewardesses, too, who can confirm your status."

I took out my book of facts and names and gave him the names and telephone numbers of several pilots and stewardesses, hoping some of them were home and remembered me as an actual pilot.

I spent an uneasy forty-five minutes in the room alone and then the agent came back. He was smiling. "Mr. Williams, you're free to go. I have confirmation from several persons as to your status, and I apologize for the inconvenience and embarrassment. I'm really sorry, sir."

A Dade County sheriff's officer was behind him. "I want to add our apologies, too, Mr. Williams. It wasn't our fault, I'm just sorry as hell about it, sir."

I reached out my hands in a peace gesture and smiled. "Hey, don't worry about it. I understand, and I'm glad you guys are doing your job."

"We appreciate you were so nice about it, Mr. Williams," said the policeman. "Oh, your bag is over there by my desk."

Obviously it wasn't searched. There was more than 7,000 dollars in currency at the bottom of my bag, among my underwear. "I gotta go, gentlemen," I said, shaking hands with each of them. "I've got a girl waiting, and if she doesn't believe this story, I may be calling one of you."

The FBI agent grinned and handed me his card. "Call me," he said. "Especially if she has a beautiful friend."

Outside, I caught a cab and asked the driver to take me to the bus station. I went into the bus station rest room and changed my uniform, took another cab and went straight to the airport. The earliest flight leaving Miami, was a Delta flight to Atlanta. I bought a one-way ticket and paid cash for it. But I totally relaxed only when I boarded the plane.

There was a girl in Atlanta, an Eastern stewardess. In any city, there was always a girl. I told this one I was on a six-month holiday. "I thought I'd spend a couple months in Atlanta," I said.

"I'm transferred to New Orleans in thirty days. But you stay here until then." she said.

It was a very pleasant and relaxing month, at the end of which I rented a truck and moved her to New Orleans. She wanted me to stay with her there, but I didn't feel comfortable in New Orleans. My instincts told me to get the hell away from it, so I went back to Atlanta, where I felt hidden and safe.

One of its advertisements in the Atlanta Journal caught my eye. It presented River Bend, located near Atlanta, a spa-like center of apartments with a golf club, an Olympic-sized pool, saunas, tennis courts, a gym, and game rooms.

I don't smoke. I've never had a wish to try tobacco. I didn't drink at that time. I didn't have any troubles with alcohol or its users. My one fault was women. The River Bend ad showed it as a "fascinating" place to live. I could see it crowded with girls, most of them young, leggy, lovely. I immediately decided that I wanted to be a bull in this garden.

River Bend was both expensive and selective. I was given a large application to fill out when I told the manager I wanted to rent a one-bedroom apartment for one year. The form demanded more information than a prospective mother-in-law. I decided to stay Frank W. Williams because all my phony identification was in that name. I paused at the space for occupation. I wanted to put down "airline pilot," for I knew that the uniform would attract girls.

On impulse, nothing more, I put down "medical doctor" as my occupation. I left the space for relatives empty and said I'd like to pay six months' rent in advance. I put twenty-four 100 dollars bills on top of the application.

The assistant manager who accepted the application, a woman, was curious. "You're a doctor?" she asked, "What type of doctor are you?"

I thought I'd better be the kind of doctor that would never be needed around River Bend. "I'm a pediatrician," I lied. "However, I'm not practicing right now. My practice is in California, and I've taken a leave of absence for one year to work on some research projects and to make some investments."

I moved in the same day. The one-bedroom apartment wasn't too large, but there was enough room for the action I had in mind.

Life at River Bend was fascinating, delightful and satisfying. There was a party in someone's place almost every night. I was usually invited to be a part of the scene, whatever it was. The other residents accepted me quickly, and made no effort to find out details about my personal life or affairs. They called me "Doc," and, of course, there were those who didn't know the difference between doctors. One guy had a complaint about his foot. The other had pains in his stomach. There was a brunette who had an "odd, tight feeling" around her upper chest.

"I'm a pediatrician, a baby doctor. You want a podiatrist, a foot doctor," I told the first man.

"I'm not licensed to practice in Georgia. I suggest you talk to your own doctor," I told the other one.

I examined the brunette. Her bra was too small.

However, one Saturday afternoon I felt a sudden wind that quickly grew into a tragicomic storm.

I answered a knock on my door to face a tall man in his middle fifties, casually dressed but still looking perfect. He had a smile on his pleasant face and a drink in his hand.

"Dr. Williams?" he said, and thinking he was correct, spoke to the point. "I'm Dr. Willis Granger, chief resident pediatrician of Smithers Pediatric Institute and General Hospital in Marietta."

I was too astonished to reply and he went on with a grin, "I'm your new neighbor. Just moved in yesterday. The assistant manager told me you were a pediatrician. I couldn't help but come up and introduce myself to a colleague. I'm not interrupting anything, am I?"

"Uh, no-no, not at all, Dr. Granger. Come in," I said, hoping he would refuse. He didn't. He walked in and settled on my sofa.

"Where did you go to school, here?" he asked. It was a normal question for doctors meeting, I suppose.

I knew only one college that had a school of medicine. "Columbia University in New York," I said, hoping he wasn't its graduate.

He nodded. "A great school. Where did you serve your internship?"

Internship. That was done in a hospital, I knew. I'd never been in a hospital. I'd passed a lot of them, but the name of only one stuck in my mind. I hoped it was the kind of hospital that had interns. "Harbor Children's Hospital in Los Angeles," I said and waited.

"Hey, terrific," he said, and then dropped the personal line to my relief.

"You know, Smithers is a new hospital. I've just been appointed to head up the pediatrics staff. It'll be a seven-story hospital when it's finished, but we've got only six floors open at the moment, and not too much traffic as yet. Why don't you come up and have lunch with me some afternoon and let me show you around the place. You'll like it, I think."

"That sounds great, I'd love it," I replied, and soon he left. I was suddenly depressed after his visit, and my first impulse was to pack and get the hell out of River Bend, if not Atlanta.

If I stayed, it would be only a matter of time before he would know I was a phony, and I doubted he'd let it go at that. He'd probably report to the authorities.

I was tired of running. I'd been on the run for two years, and at the moment I didn't recall the excitement, glamour and fun of it all; I just wanted a place to call home, a place where I could be at peace for a while, a place where I had some friends.

River Bend had been that place for two months, and I didn't want to leave. I was happy at River Bend.

A sudden anger replaced my depression. To hell with Granger. I wouldn't let him force me back to the fraud scheme. I'd just avoid him. If he came to visit, I'd be busy. When he was in, I'd be out.

It wasn't easy. Granger was a pleasant and friendly man. He started showing up at the parties to which I was invited. If he wasn't invited, he would invite himself. And he was soon one of the most popular men in the community. I couldn't avoid him.

I started to relax around Granger. In fact, I started to look for his enjoyable company. He preferred talking about lovely women he'd met at River Bend, and the fun he was having with them. Or he talked politics, world affairs, cars, sports, ethics and anything else. I knew, however, that the subject of pediatrics would appear sooner or later, so I started spending a lot of time in the Atlanta library, reading books by pediatricians, medical journals with articles on children's medicine. I quickly obtained a general knowledge of pediatrics, enough knowledge, I felt, to deal with any casual professional conversations.

I felt informed enough, after several weeks of study, in fact, to accept Granger's invitation to have lunch with him at the hospital.

He met me in the lobby and introduced me to the receptionist. A similar introduction was made during the tour around the hospital. We visited every department. I met the hospital administrator, the chief radiologist, the head of physical therapy, the head nurse, interns, other doctors and dozens of nurses. We had lunch in the hospital cafeteria and from the number of doctors and nurses who joined us, it was obvious Dr. Granger was a popular and well-liked man.

I returned to the hospital often, mostly because of Brenda Strong, a nurse I had met there and started dating, but also because the hospital had a large medical library with the latest books, journals and medical magazines dealing with pediatrics.

"Most of the doctors think you're pretty sharp, because you try to maintain your professional competence even though you're on a leave of absence," Brenda told me.

"I think you're pretty sharp, too."

She was thirty, a sexy brunette with a power for making love. I sometimes wondered what she might think if she knew her lover was an eighteen-year-old fraud. However, I never thought of myself as a teenager anymore, except for rare occasions. When I looked in a mirror, I saw a mature man of twenty-five or thirty and that's how I felt about myself, too. I had been just an adventurous boy when I changed my chronological age, but my mental clock, during the past two years, had changed, too.

After several visits to the hospital, my fears disappeared, I began to enjoy my role as a doctor. I felt the same pleasures, the same ego encouragement, I'd known as a fake pilot.

I had no problems at all until one afternoon, after lunch with Granger and Brenda, I was leaving the hospital when John Colter, the administrator, stopped me.

"Dr. Williams! May I see you just a moment, sir." Without waiting for an answer, he went to his office. I followed him.

"Doctor, have a seat, please," said Colter. I relaxed immediately. He was still addressing me as "doctor," and his manner was polite.

Colter, in fact, seemed embarrassed. "Dr. Williams, I'm going to ask you for a very big favor, a favor I have no right to ask," Colter said with a grimace. "I think you're the man who can solve my problem. Will you help me?"

I looked at him, puzzled. "Well, I'll be happy to, if I can, sir," I replied cautiously.

Colter nodded and his tone became energetic. "Here's my problem, Doctor. On my night shift, I have a resident doctor who supervises seven interns and about forty nurses. He had a death in the family this afternoon, a sister in California. He's left, and will be gone about ten days. Doctor, I've got nobody to cover that shift. Nobody. I can't find a doctor to replace him, and I can't do it myself. I'm not a medical doctor, as you know."

His voice became pleading. "Dr. Williams, could you come up here and just sit around for ten days from midnight to eight? You won't have to do anything, I assure you. Just be here, so I can satisfy the state's requirements. I need you, Doctor. We'll pay you well, Doctor. As a bonus, I'll even put Nurse Strong on the shift for the ten days. If you refuse me, I don't know what the hell I can do."

The request astonished me, and I objected quickly. "Mr. Colter, I'd like to help you, but there's no way I could agree," I protested.

"Oh, why not?" Colter asked.

"Well, in the first place, I don't have a license to practice medicine in Georgia," I began, but Colter interrupted me with a shake of his head.

"Well, you wouldn't really be doing anything," said Colter. "I'm not asking that you actually treat patients. As for a license, you don't really need one. You have a California license, and California standards are as high as Georgia standards, and recognized by our medical association. What do you say?"

Reason told me to refuse. There were too many dangers involved. But I was challenged.

"Well, if there's not that much difficulty involved, and if it won't take a lot of my time, I'll be happy to help you out," I agreed. "Now, specifically, what will be my duties?"

Colter laughed. He was obviously relieved and happy. "Your duty? Just be here, Doctor. Walk around. Show yourself. Play poker with the interns. Hell, Frank - I'm gonna call you Frank because you're a friend of mine, now - do anything you want to do. Just be here!"

My first shift set the tone for all my next "duty tours." I was aware from the moment I accepted Colter's request that there was only one way I could carry out my bluff. If I was going to fake out seven interns, forty nurses and dozens of hospital personnel, I had to give the impression that I was something of a clown of the medical profession. I decided to project the image of a happy, easygoing, always-joking guy who didn't care whether the rules learned in medical school were kept or not. I started to show that image the minute I arrived for duty the first night and was met by Brenda. She was smiling.

She took me to the sixth floor of the hospital. It included the nursery, with about a dozen newborn babies, and three wings for children recovering from illness, injury or surgery, or children for diagnosis or treatment. There were about twenty children, from two to twelve months, in my charge. Fortunately, they weren't technically under my care. My role was strictly a supervisor's or observer's role, although I was expected to be the medical doctor available for any emergencies. I hoped there wouldn't be any emergencies, but I had a plan for such an occasion. I spent the first night observing the interns. All of them wanted to be pediatricians, and the sixth floor was an excellent place to practice. They seemed to me, after several hours of watching them, to be as competent and capable as some of the staff doctors.

The first shift was lazy and pleasant until about 7 a.m., when the nurse in charge of the sixth-floor contacted me. "Doctor, don't forget before you go off duty that you need to write charts for me," she said.

"Oh, yeah, okay, get them ready for me," I said. I went up and looked over the charts ready for me. There was one for each patient, noting medication given, times, the names of the nurses and interns involved and instructions from the doctor. "That's your space," said the nurse, pointing to a blank area on the chart.

I noticed the other doctors involved had written in Latin. Or Greek. Or maybe it was just their normal handwriting. I sure couldn't read it.

I didn't want anyone to read what I wrote, either. So I wrote some hieroglyphics all over each chart and signed my name in the same manner in each space.

"Here you are, Miss Murphy," I said, handing back the charts. "You'll note I gave you an A."

She laughed. I got a lot of laughs during the following shifts for my funny remarks.

But I knew I was on thin ice, and about 2:30 a.m. at the end of my first week, the ice started cracking. "Dr. Williams! To Emergency, please. Dr. Williams! To Emergency, please."

I had avoided the emergency ward before, and it was my arrangement with Colter that I wouldn't have to handle emergency cases.

I hate the sight of blood. I can't stand the sight of blood. Even a little blood makes me sick. I once passed near the emergency ward and saw them bringing in an accident victim. He was all bloody and weeping, and I hurried to the nearest toilet and vomited.

Now here I was in the emergency room. I used the toilet first. Then I used the stairs instead of the elevator. I knew my delay might be harmful to the one who needed a doctor, but it would be just as harmful if I rushed to the emergency ward. I didn't know what to do once I got there. Especially if the patient was bleeding.

This one wasn't, fortunately. It was a kid of about thirteen, with white face, lying on the table and looking at the three interns around him. The interns looked at me as I stopped inside the door.

"Well, what do we have here?" I asked.

"A simple fracture of the tibia, about five inches below the patella, it looks like that," said the senior intern, Dr. Hollis Carter. "We were just getting ready to take some X rays. Unless we find something more serious, I will put him in a walking cast and send him home."

I looked at Carl Farnsworth and Sam Bice, the other two interns. "Dr. Farnsworth?"

He nodded. "I agree, Doctor. It may not even be broken."

"How about you, Dr. Bice?"

"I think that's all we've got here," he said.

"Well, gentlemen, you don't seem to have much need of me. Carry on," I said and left.

I had other emergency-ward calls, and each time I let the interns handle the situation. I usually went in, asked one of them about the nature of the illness or injury and then ask him how he would treat the patient. Then I addressed the other interns who were usually present. If he or they agreed, I nodded and said, "All right, Doctor. Carry on."

I didn't know what the interns thought about such incidents, but I soon found out. They loved it. "They think you're great, Frank," said Brenda. "Young Dr. Carter especially thinks you're terrific. I heard him telling his friends how you let him get real

practice, that you just come in, get his comments on the situation and let him carry on. He says you make him feel like a practicing doctor."

I smiled. "I'm just lazy," I replied.

But I realized after the first shift that I needed some help. I hid a pocket dictionary of medical terms in one of the empty closets on the unfinished seventh floor, and when I heard the interns or nurses mention a word or phrase, the meaning of which I didn't know, I went upstairs and looked up the word or words. Sometimes I spent fifteen or twenty minutes in the closet just looking through the dictionary.

On my last night shift, Colter found me. "Frank, I know I've got no right to ask this, but I have to. Our doctor isn't coming back. He has decided to stay and practice in California. Now, I'm pretty sure I can find a replacement within a couple of weeks, so could I ask you to stay that long?" He waited, a pleading look on his face.

He caught me at the right time. I was in love with my role as doctor. I was enjoying it almost as much as my role of airline pilot. And it was much more relaxing. I didn't write bad checks because the hospital was paying me a 125-dollars-a-day "consultant's" salary, payable weekly.

"Sure, John," I agreed. "Why not? I've got nothing else to do at the moment."

I was confident I could carry the fraud scheme for another two weeks, and I did, but then the two weeks became a month and the month became two months, and Colter still hadn't found a replacement.

I maintained my informal, to-hell-with-rules-and- regulations manner with the interns, nurses and others under my nominal command, and the night shift staff continued to support me loyally. The interns were proud to be on my shift. The young doctors respected me. They thought I was crazy, but competent. "You don't treat us like the other staff doctors, Dr. Williams," Carter said. "When they come while we're treating a patient, they say 'Move aside'. You don't. You let us go ahead and handle the case. You let us be real doctors."

I sure as hell did. I didn't know a damned thing about medicine. Those young doctors didn't know it until years later, but they were the only reason I was able to keep on my medical show.

Fortunately, I was never faced with a life-or-death situation, but there were risky occasions where only my clown's mask saved me. Early one morning, for example, one nurse called for me. "Dr. Williams, we just delivered a baby, and Dr. Martin was called across the hall to do a Caesarian section. He asks if you'd be kind enough to make a routine examination of the child."

I couldn't refuse. I was chatting with two nurses on my shift at the time the request was made. "I'll help you, Dr. Williams," volunteered one of them, nurse Stern

who was attending medical school herself and hoped to be a pediatrician specializing in newborns.

It was a baby boy, still red and wet from his passage through the narrow channel of life. He looked at me with a sad expression. "Okay, kid, take a deep breath," I commanded in a military tone, starting to apply my stethoscope to the baby's chest.

Nurse Stern grabbed my arm, laughing. "Doctor! You can't use that stethoscope on a newborn! You use a pediatrics stethoscope." She returned with a smaller version of the one I held. I didn't know they came in sizes. "Will you stop fooling around, please? We've got a lot of work to do."

I stepped back and waved at the baby. "Tell you what, Dr. Stern. You examine the boy. I'd like to check your style."

She couldn't resist the temptation. "Well, I can do it," she said, as if I'd insulted her, but still obviously pleased. She took the stethoscope and started to manipulate the baby's arms, legs and hips, looked into his eyes, ears, mouth and anus and ran her hands over his head and body. She stepped back and looked at me with a challenge. "Well?"

I kissed her on the forehead. "Thank you, Doctor, you've saved my only son," I said in a sentimental tone.

The baby lost his sad look. No one is really certain if newborn infants have thoughts or are aware of what is going on around them. No one except me. That kid knew I was a phony. I could see it in his face.

I examined several newborns after that. I never knew what I was doing, of course, but, thanks to Nurse Stern, I knew how to do it.

But I still spent a lot of time in my seventh-floor linen closet.

There were times, I'm sure, when my practical jokes irritated people. Like the night, in the eleventh month of my impersonation, when a nurse ran to the room where I was writing my hieroglyphic comments on charts. "Dr. Williams! We've got a blue baby in 608! Come quickly."

Oddly enough, in the eleven months of my experience as a doctor, I'd never heard the term "blue baby."

"I'll be right there," I said, "but first I've got to check the green baby in 609." When I made no move, she rushed off, shouting for one of the interns. I consulted my medical dictionary. I learned a blue baby was one suffering from lack of oxygen in the blood, usually caused by a heart defect. I took off for Room 608, and was relieved to find one of my interns there. He was fixing a portable oxygen tent around the infant. "I've called his doctor. He's on his way. I'll handle it until he gets here, if it's all right with you, sir."

It was all right with me. The incident shook me. I realized I was playing a role that had reached its limits. I suddenly knew some child could die as a result of my impersonation. I was determined to speak to Colter and resign.

"Well, Frank, you can go back to being a playboy," he said cheerfully. "We've got a new doctor. Got him from New York. He'll be here tomorrow."

I was relieved. I came to the hospital the next day to pick up my final paycheck and wasn't at all disappointed when I didn't meet my replacement. I was leaving the hospital when I encountered Jason, the elderly janitor on the night shift.

"You're coming to work a little early, aren't you, Jason?" I asked.

"Working a double shift today, Doctor," said Jason.

"You know, Jason, I won't be around anymore," I said. "They finally found a replacement."

"Yes, sir, I heard," said Jason. He looked confused. "Doctor, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, Jason. Anything." I liked him. He was a nice old man.

He took a deep breath. "Doctor, you never knew it, but I always spent my relaxing time up there on the seventh floor. And, Doctor, for nearly a year now I saw you go in a linen closet up there. You never went in with anything, and you never came out with anything. I know you don't drink, and, Doctor, there is nothing in that closet, nothing! I searched it a dozen times. Doctor, my curiosity will drive me to drink. Just what did you do in that linen closet, Doctor? I won't tell anybody, I swear!"

I laughed and hugged him. "Jason, I was contemplating my navel in that closet. That's all. I swear it."

But I know he never believed me. He's probably still inspecting that closet.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Law Degree Is Just an Illegal Technicality

A week after I left the hospital, I decided to leave Atlanta. There was no obvious reason for me to go; at least I felt none, but I thought it unwise to stay. The fox who keeps to one place is the easiest catch for the hounds, and I felt I had stayed too long in one place. I knew I was still hunted and I didn't want to make it easy for the hounds.

I later learned that my decision to leave Atlanta was a clever one. About the same time, in Washington, D.C., FBI Inspector Sean O'Riley was ordered to drop all his other cases and concentrate on me. O'Riley was a tall, strict man with the appearance of an Irish bishop and the determination of a hound, an extremely efficient agent dedicated to his job. I admired O'Riley, even when I made every effort to destroy his mission and to embarrass him professionally. If O'Riley has any personal feelings to me, I am sure hostility is not among such emotions. O'Riley is a very honest man in all respects. Of course, I had no knowledge of O'Riley's existence at the time I left Atlanta.

I decided to hole up for a month or so in the capital city of another southern state. As usual, the reason for my choice was the fact that I knew an airline stewardess there. I didn't have a more delightful influence on my actions than a lovely woman then.

Her name was Diane and I had known her for about a year, and she knew me under the alias Robert F. Conrad, a Pan Am first officer.

I was forced to maintain the *nom de plume* with her, because we developed a close and pleasant relationship, during which, at first, she had gone into details of my personal background, including my educational history. Most pilots have a college degree, but not all of them majored in the aviation sciences. I told Diane that I had taken a law degree but had never practiced, because a career as an airline pilot had seemed not only more exciting but also much more profitable than law. She readily accepted the idea that a man might prefer the cockpit to the courtroom.

A few days after my arrival in her city she took me to a party arranged by one of her friends and there introduced me to a pleasant fellow named Jason Wilcox.

"You two must get along. Jason is one of our assistant state's attorneys," Diane told me. She turned to Wilcox. "And Bob here is a lawyer who never practiced. He became a pilot instead."

Wilcox was immediately interested. "Hey, where did you go to law school?"

"Harvard," I said. If I was going to have a law degree, I thought, I might have one from the best university.

"But you never practiced?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I got my Commercial Pilot's License the same week I took my master's in law, and Pan Am offered me a job as a flight engineer. A pilot makes 30,000 to 40,000 dollars, and I loved flying. Maybe someday I'll go back to law, but right now I fly only eighty hours a month. Not many practicing lawyers have it that good."

"How did you do at Harvard?" he asked. I felt he was leading up to something.

"Pretty well, I guess," I replied. "I graduated with a 3.8 average. Why?"

"Well, the attorney general is looking for lawyers for his staff," Wilcox replied. "Why don't you take the bar here and join us? I'll recommend you. The job doesn't pay an airline pilot's salary, of course, but it pays better than unemployment. And you'll get some law practice, which sure as hell couldn't hurt you."

I almost refused immediately. But the more I thought about it, the more it intrigued me. The challenge again. I shrugged. "What would it mean for me to take the bar examination in this state?" I asked.

"Not much, really," said Wilcox. "Just take a transcript from Harvard to the state bar examiner's office and apply to take the bar. They won't refuse you. Of course, you'd have to know our civil and criminal laws, but I've got all the books you may need. Since you're from another state, you'll be allowed three attempts at the bar here. You shouldn't have any trouble."

A transcript from Harvard. That might be difficult, I thought, since the university and I were strangers. But then I'd never had any pilot's training, either. And I had a valid FAA pilot's license in my pocket stating I was qualified to fly passenger jets, didn't I? My instincts began to drive me.

I wrote to the Harvard Law School and asked for a fall schedule and a law school catalogue, and within a few days the requested material was delivered in my mailbox. The catalogue presented a list of all the courses necessary for a doctor of law from Harvard, and it also had some lovely logos and letterheads. But I still didn't have the idea of what a college transcript looked like.

Diane was an Ohio University graduate, who had majored in business administration. I casually started a conversation about her student years.

"You didn't do much studying," I said joking.

"Oh, yes, I did," she objected. "I had a 3.8 average. You can have fun and still make good grades, you know."

"Oh, come on! I don't believe you had that average grades. I need to see your transcript to believe that," I protested.

She grinned. "Well, I just have one," she said, and returned from her bedroom a few minutes later with the document.

The transcript consisted of four legal-sized sheets of lined paper and was, in fact, a certified photocopy of her four years of college work.

The first page had the name of the university in large, bold letters. Then came her name, the year she had graduated, the degree she had received and the college awarding the degree. Other pages were filled, line by line, with the courses she had taken, the dates and her grades.

I put the structure of the transcript to memory before handing it back. "Okay, you're not only sexy, you're also clever," I apologized.

I went shopping the next day at a graphic arts store, a stationery store and an office-supply firm and bought everything I needed to produce a document, including some legal-sized bond paper, some letters in several different types, some artist's pens and pencils, a knife, some glue, a right-angle ruler and some gold seals.

I started by simply cutting out the Harvard Law School logo and sticking it at the top of a bond paper. I then attached the school seal, also taken from the catalogue. Next I filled in my name, year of graduation, degree and then, using the right angle and a fine artist's pen, I carefully lined several pages. I didn't know whether it looked like an actual Harvard transcript. The test would come when I presented the phony document to the state bar examiner's office.

I spent three weeks reading the books in Wilcox's office library, finding law a much easier, but duller subject than I had thought, and then presented myself at the state bar examiner's office. A law student acting as a clerk made a copy of the phony document and handed my original counterfeit back to me. While I was filling out the form, he looked through a calendar and called someone on the telephone.

"You can take the exam next Wednesday, if you think you're ready," he said, and then grinned trying to encourage me. "It should be very easy for a Harvard graduate."

I failed. To my astonishment, however, the notice that I had failed was attached to the test I had taken, which reflected the answers I had correctly given and the questions I had missed. Someone in the examiner's office obviously liked me.

I went back to Wilcox's library, and concentrated on the sections of the test I had missed. Wilcox himself acted as a teacher for me. After six weeks I felt I was ready to attempt the test a second time.

I failed again. But again my test papers were returned to me, showing where I had made mistakes. In fact, I was delighted at the number of correct answers and I was determined to pass the examination on my final try.

I took the third examination seven weeks later and passed! Within two weeks I received a handsome certificate stating the fact that I could take the state bar and was licensed to practice law. I burst into laughter. I hadn't even finished high school and had never been to a college campus, but I was a certified lawyer! However, I

considered my actual lack of academic qualifications simply a technicality, and in my four months of legal practice I learned the law is full of technicalities. Technicalities are what destroy justice.

Wilcox kept his promise. He arranged a job interview for me with the state attorney general, who, on Wilcox's recommendation, hired me as an assistant. My salary was 12,800 dollars annually.

The senior assistant was Phillip Rigby, from an old and established local family. Rigby considered himself a southern aristocrat and I was an example of his strongest negative stereotypes. I was a Yankee, but even worse, I was a Catholic Yankee! He gave me the role of 'go for coffee, go for this or that book, go for anything he could think of'. I was the highest-paid delivery boy in the state.

I was popular with the young bachelors in the division. I still had over 20,000 dollars in my illegal account and I spent it freely on the friends, inviting them to dinners in fine restaurants, riverboat trips and evenings in expensive night clubs.

I intended to give the impression that I was from a rich New York family. I lived in a luxurious apartment overlooking a lake, drove a leased Jaguar and collected a wardrobe worthy of a British duke. I wore a different suit to work each day of the week, partly because it pleased me but mostly because my rich wardrobe seemed to irritate Rigby.

If my wardrobe filled Rigby with indignation, it was approved by others. One day in court, during a short delay in the case, the judge leaned forward on his bench and addressed me:

"Mr. Conrad, you may not give much to legal expertise to the case in this court, but you certainly add style, sir. You are the best-dressed lawyer, and the court praises you." It was a true reward and I was pleased, but Rigby nearly had an apoplectic seizure .

Actually, I was satisfied with my delivery-boy role. I had no real desire to try a case. There was too much danger that my basic lack of knowledge of the law would be discovered.

Basically, my position was an ideal hiding place, which was hard to be detected by the hounds. When you're looking for a criminal, you don't often think to look for him on the attorney general's staff, especially if you're seeking a teenage high school dropout.

Several weeks after I joined the court staff, Diane was transferred to Dallas. I was sad at losing her only for a very short time. I was soon dating Gloria, the daughter of a high state official.

Gloria was a member of a Methodist family and I often accompanied her to church. It was a gesture of respect on my part that was appreciated by her parents, and

actually I enjoyed it. In fact, I developed a close friendship with the young pastor of the church and he persuaded me to become involved in the church's youth programs. I participated actively in building several children's playgrounds in poor areas of the city and took part in several committees carrying out other youth projects. It was a strange time for a con man, but I had no real sense of hypocrisy. For the first time in my life I was giving unselfishly, with no thought of any return, and it made me feel good.

There was a real Harvard graduate in one of the committees. Not just a Harvard graduate, but a Harvard Law graduate, and he was delighted to meet me. He was practically crazy with joy and rushed on me immediately: When had I graduated? Who had my instructors been? Who were the girls I knew? To what club had I belonged? What pubs had I gone to? Who had my friends been?

I successfully ignored him at first, pretending to concentrate on the committee business. But he sought me out at every opportunity. He called me to have lunch. He dropped by my office. He called me to invite me to parties, to play golf or to take part in some cultural event. And always he started talking about Harvard. What buildings had I had classes in? Didn't I know Professor So-and-So?

I couldn't avoid him, and, of course, I couldn't answer many of his questions. He got suspicions and began to build a *res gestae* case against me as a phony Harvard man if not a phony lawyer. It became *res judicata* for me when I learned he was making numerous requests into my background, seriously questioning my honesty. I understood I had to disappear.

I had pretended to be a doctor for almost a year. I had played the role of lawyer for nine months. While I was leading my life during those twenty months, I hadn't passed any bad checks or done anything else to attract the attention of the authorities.

My escape from my "Harvard colleague" turned into something of a vacation. I traveled around the western states for several weeks, touring Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Wyoming, Nevada, Idaho and Montana, delaying wherever the scenery intrigued me. Since the scenery usually included some very lovely women, I always stayed intrigued.

Although the image of myself as a criminal started to disappear, I had no hopes for justification. In fact, looking to the future, I stopped long enough in large cities to equip myself with dual identities as a fictitious airline pilot.

Using the same procedures that had enabled me to assume the alias of Frank Williams, a first officer for Pan Am, I created Frank Adams, a co-pilot for Trans World Airways, complete with uniform, fake ID and FAA pilot's license. I also produced a set of false documents that would allow me, as Frank Williams, to be a pilot for either Pan Am or TWA.

Soon I was in Utah, a state famous for its college campuses. I had a couple of college degrees, and so I thought it would be only fair if I at least look at a real

university campus and I visited several Utah colleges. There were so many lovely girls on one campus that I was tempted to become a student.

Instead I became a teacher.

While I was sitting in my motel room one afternoon, reading the local newspaper, my attention was attracted to the news about a lack of summer instructors at one university. The faculty dean, Dr. Amos Grimes, was very concerned about finding summer replacements for the school's two sociology professors.

A vision of myself in a classroom with a dozen beauties took my imagination, and I couldn't resist. I rang up Dr. Grimes.

"Dr. Grimes, Frank Adams here," I said. "I have a doctor's degree in sociology from Columbia University in New York. I'm on holiday here and I see by the newspaper that you're looking for sociology instructors."

"Yes, we're certainly interested in finding some people," Dr. Grimes replied cautiously. "Of course, you understand it would be only a temporary position, just for the summer. I assume you have some teaching experience?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "But it was several years ago. Let me explain my position, Dr. Grimes. I am a pilot for Trans World Airways, and I am on a six-month holiday for medical purposes. I'm looking around for something to do, and when I saw the story in the newspaper it occurred to me that it might be pleasant to get back into a classroom again. I was a professor of sociology at City College of New York for two years before I joined TWA."

"Well, it certainly sounds like you're a likely candidate for one of our positions, Dr. Adams," said Dr. Grimes, now enthusiastic. "Why don't you come by my office tomorrow morning and we'll talk about it."

"I'd be delighted to do that, Dr. Grimes," I replied. "Since I'm a complete stranger in Utah, could you tell me what documents I will need to apply for a faculty position with your college?"

"Oh, just a transcript from Columbia will do, really," said Dr. Grimes. "Of course, if you can get a couple of letters of recommendation, it would be desirable."

"No problem," I said. "I'll have to send for both my transcript and the letters of recommendation, of course. I came here unprepared, since I didn't even think of a temporary teaching position until I saw the story."

"I understand, Dr. Adams," replied Dr. Grimes. "I'll see you in the morning."

I wrote Columbia University that afternoon, requesting a complete catalogue and other brochures on the school.

My meeting with Dean Grimes was a very pleasant one. He seemed immediately impressed with me. Dr. Grimes, like many men with permanent jobs, had a romantic view of airline pilots. I had more than enough anecdotes to satisfy his abstract interest.

"I have no doubt at all that we can use you this summer, Dr. Adams," he said on my departure. "I'm personally looking forward to your being here on campus."

The materials I had requested from Columbia University arrived within the week, and I drove to buy the supplies necessary for my current counterfeiting venture. My finished "transcript" was a beauty, giving me a 3.7 grade average and presenting my doctoral dissertation on "The Sociological Influence of Aviation on the Rural Populations of North America."

Then I sat down and wrote myself two letters of recommendation, one from the University office and one from the head of the sociology department. I was cautious with both letters. They simply stated that I had been a sociology instructor during the years 1961-62 and that the faculty committee had given me very satisfactory marks.

Dr. Grimes only glanced at the documents when I presented them to him. He introduced me to Dr. Wilbur Vanderhoff, assistant head of the sociology department, who also didn't examine the documents carefully before sending them on to faculty personnel for filing. I was hired within the hour to teach two six-week semesters during the summer at a salary of 1,600 dollars per semester. I was assigned to teach a ninety-minute freshman course in the morning, three days a week, and a ninety-minute sophomore course in the afternoon, twice weekly. Dr. Vanderhoff provided me with the two textbooks.

"Any other supplies you might need, you can probably find in the bookstore," said Dr. Vanderhoff. He grinned. "I'm glad to see you're young and strong. Our summer sociology classes are usually large ones, and you'll earn your salary."

I had three weeks before the first summer semester started. I pretended I wanted to refresh myself, so I audited several of Dr. Vanderhoff's classes, just to get an idea of how a college course was given. At night I studied the two textbooks, which I found both interesting and informative.

Vanderhoff was right. Both my classes were large ones. There were seventy-eight students in my freshman class and sixty-three students in my sophomore course, the majority in both classes were girls.

That summer was one of the most enjoyable of my life. I enjoyed my role as a teacher very much. So did my students, I'm certain. My courses were taught by the book, as required, and I had no difficulty there. I just read one chapter ahead of the students and selected what parts of the text I wanted to speak about in details. But almost every lecture I went far from the textbook in both classes, speaking on crime, the problems of young teenagers from broken families and the influences on society as

a whole. My departures from textbook, which were taken from my own experiences, unknown to the students, always led to hot discussions and debates.

At weekends I relaxed by visiting one or the other of Utah's wonderlands, usually accompanied by an equally wonderful companion.

The summer was gone very quickly, and I felt real regret when it ended. Dr. Vanderhoff and Dr. Grimes were delighted with my work. "Keep in touch with us, Frank," said Dr. Grimes. "If ever we have a permanent position for a sociology professor, we'd like a chance to tempt you down from the skies," said Dr. Grimes.

At least fifty of my students sought me out to tell me how much they had enjoyed my classes and to wish me good-bye and good luck.

I didn't want to leave that Utah Utopia, but I could find no valid reason for staying. If I stayed, my past was certain to catch me up, and I did not want these people's image of me to be destroyed.

I traveled west to California. There was a storm in the Sierras when I crossed the mountains, but it was nothing compared to the tornado of crime I soon created myself.

CHAPTER SIX

Swindle Is Also a Technicality

The former police chief of Houston once said of me: "Frank Abagnale could write a check on toilet paper, covered by the Confederate States Treasury, sign it 'U.R. Hooked' and cash it at any bank in town, using a Hong Kong driver's license for identification."

There are several bank employees in Eureka, a small town in California, who would confirm that statement.

Eureka, for me, was my start as an expert forger. I was already an advanced student of check swindling when I arrived, of course, but I took my master's degree in forgery in California.

I didn't intend to make Eureka a stage in my criminal career. It was only a pit stop on my way to San Francisco, but the girl appeared and I stayed for a few days.

I knew I needed to leave the country because I felt that FBI agents, sheriffs and detectives were hard on my heels. There was no obvious reason for such fears. I hadn't fooled anyone with a bad check in two years, and "Co-pilot Frank Williams" had been in the closet for the same period. I should be feeling reasonably safe, but I wasn't. I was nervous and doubtful, and I saw a cop in every man who gave me more than a casual glance.

But my bad feelings calmed down because of the girl and Eureka after a couple of days.

One absolutely fascinating feature of Eureka, to me, was its banks. It had more money houses for a city its size than any large city I'd ever visited. And I needed money, a lot of it, if I was going to be an emigrant swindler.

I still had several packs of worthless personal checks. But it occurred to me that the personal check fraud wasn't really that great. It was the easiest fraud, but too risky from too many points, and the criminal punishment for passing a phony 100 dollars check was the same as that for 5,000 dollars.

I felt I needed a better type of check. Like a payroll check, say. Like a Pan Am payroll check, naturally. No one would ever be able to say I wasn't a loyal thief.

I went shopping. I obtained a book of blank counter checks from a stationery store. Such checks, still in wide use at the time, were ideal for my purposes, because the payer had to fill in all the details, including the respondent bank's name. I then rented an IBM electric typewriter with several different printing types. I located a hobby shop that handled models of Pan Am's jets and bought several kits in the smaller sizes. I made a final stop at an art store and bought magnetic-tape numerals and letters.

Thus supplied, I returned to my motel room and started to work. I took one of the blank counter checks and across the top fixed a Pan Am emblem from one of the kits. Below I typed in the airline's New York address. In the upper left-hand corner of the check I applied the Pan Am logo, and in the opposite right-hand corner I typed in the words "expense check". I made myself "Frank Williams," the payee, of course, in the amount of 568.70 dollars, a sum that seemed reasonable to me. In the lower left-hand corner I typed in "Manhattan bank" and the bank's address. Below the bank name, across the bottom left-hand corner of the check, I laid down a series of numbers with magnetic tape. Such numbers are very important to anyone cashing a check and much more important to a hot-check swindler. A good swindler is operating a numbers game and if he doesn't know the right ones he's going to end up with an absolutely different set of numbers across the front and back of a state- issued jail shirt.

The manufacturing of the check was hard work, requiring more than two hours, and I was not at all happy with the finished product. I looked at it and decided it was not a check I would cash if I were a teller and someone presented the check for payment.

So I invented an expensive fur cover for the rabbit-fur check. I took one of the windowed envelopes, supplied it with a Pan Am logo and Pan Am's New York address, stuck a blank piece of paper inside and mailed it to myself at my motel. The letter was delivered the following morning, and the local post office had assisted me in my scheme. The clerk who had stamped the envelope did such a perfect job with the postmark that it was impossible to tell where the letter was mailed from. I was delighted with the man's carelessness.

I put on my Pan Am pilot's uniform, placed the check in the envelope and put it in the inside pocket of my jacket. I drove to the nearest bank, walked in and presented myself to the teller, a young woman. "Hi," I said, smiling. "My name is Frank Williams and I'm on holiday here for a few days before reporting to Los Angeles. Would you please cash this check for me? I think I have sufficient identification."

I took the envelope from my inside pocket, pulled the check and laid it on the counter, along with my phony Pan Am ID card and my FAA pilot's license. I dropped the envelope, with its Pan Am logo and return address, on the counter.

The girl looked at my faked identification documents and glanced at the check, but she seemed more interested in me. Commercial airline pilots in uniform were obviously a rare person in Eureka. She pushed the check back to me for signing, and while she counted out the money she asked chatty questions about my work and the places I'd been.

I was careful to take the envelope with me when I left.

I was certain that she noticed the envelope with its symbols, and it had clearly raised her trust in the check. The transaction also confirmed a suspicion I had: it's not

how good a check looks but how good the person behind the check looks that influences tellers and cashiers.

I went back to my motel room and produced more hot checks, all in the amount of 500 dollars, and the following day I successfully passed all of them in different banks. Based on my knowledge of the check-routing procedures used by banks, I calculated I could spend two more days in Eureka before the first one was returned as a counterfeit.

But an identity crisis, which I experienced periodically, forced me to change my timetable.

I never took my assumed identity completely and I never forgot I was really Frank Abagnale, Jr. In fact, in casual situations with people, where I felt no need to play a role, I always presented myself as Frank Abagnale, an independent fellow from the Bronx.

It was no different in Eureka. Away from my motel, where I was registered as Frank Williams, I was simply Frank Abagnale, Jr. Up to a point, my actual identity became a refuge from the pressures and risks of impersonation.

In Eureka I met a fisherman in a seafood restaurant. He stopped at my table to tell me he had personally caught the fish I was eating, and then sat down to chat with me. He was a car fan and I told him about my old Ford and what I had done to dress up the car. "Hey, that's what I'm trying to fix up now, a 1950 Ford convertible," he said. "You don't have any pictures of your car, do you?"

I shook my head. "I do, but they're all back in my room at home," I said.

"Give me your address in New York and I'll send you some pictures of my wheels when I'm finished with it," he said. "I might even drive to New York and see you there."

It was very unlikely that he would either write me or come to New York to see me, and also unlikely that I would be there to receive his letter, so I searched my pockets for a piece of paper. I took one of the blank counter checks. I borrowed a pencil from a waiter and was writing my name and New York address on the back of the check when the fisherman was called to the telephone. He talked for a few minutes and then waved at me. "Hey, listen, Frank, I gotta go back to the boat," he shouted. "Come tomorrow, will you?" He left before I could reply. I gave the pencil back to the waiter and asked for my bill. "You need a better pencil," I said, pointing at what I had written on the back of the counter check. The words could be hardly read.

I put the check back in my pocket instead of tearing it up, an action that was both foolish and fortunate. Back in my room, I dropped it on top of the open book of counter checks, changed clothes and called the girl. We spent a pleasant evening at a fine restaurant. It was such a pleasant evening that I was still recalling it early the next morning when I sat down to create three more phony Pan Am checks. There were only

three banks left in and around Eureka that didn't have one of my artistic frauds, and I didn't want to miss any of the three. I was charmed with my new scheme. All my fears of cops behind me were forgotten. I had also completely forgotten the young fisherman of the past afternoon.

Finished with the checks, I put them into the now well-used envelope. By mid-afternoon I was back in my motel room with 1,500 dollars.

That night I told the girl I was leaving the following day. "I'll probably be flying out of L.A.," I lied. "So I'll be back often."

She believed me and suggested we go down to eat seafood. But in the middle of the meal I looked out the window, saw a fishing boat coming to the dock and remembered the young fisherman. I also remembered I had put down my real name and my New York address, my father's address, on the back of one of the counter checks. What the hell had I done with that check? I couldn't recall.

Back in my room, I searched for the blank check but couldn't find it. I had to conclude that I'd used that blank check as a Pan Am expense check and had passed it at one of the three banks.

I sat down on the bed and forced myself to recall the events that had resulted in the situation: I had dropped the check on top of the open book of counter checks, I had picked it up first the next morning, when I produced the three counterfeit expense checks. And I had placed it in the phony envelope, so it had been the first of the three cashed. And I now recalled the teller who'd cashed the check for me. I'd given her lots of attention. Too much, it seemed.

I suddenly felt hot. I started thinking again of leaving the country, jumping the border into Mexico. Or even more warm climate. But this time I contemplated the idea reluctantly. In Eureka I'd invented what I considered a great new theft scheme, one that really paid back in a crap game. I had intended to work my counterfeit check scheme from coast to coast and border to border.

But did I have to give up the game? Had I blown my cover at this point? If I hadn't noticed the words on the back of the check, maybe no one else had, either.

There was also a good possibility the check was still in the bank. If it hadn't left the bank, perhaps I could get it back. I was sure I could invent a good story if the check was still in the bank.

I packed and paid my motel bill before calling the bank the next morning. I asked for the head teller and was connected with a woman who identified herself as "Stella Waring".

"Mrs. Waring, a Pan Am pilot cashed a check in your bank yesterday," I said. "Can you tell me..." She interrupted me before I could say more.

"Yes, a fraud check," she said with indignation and without asking my identity or my reason for calling. "We've informed the FBI. They're sending an agent for the check."

I wasn't challenged. I acted on impulse, I had to protect my real identity. "Yes," I said. "This is the FBI. I wanted to tell you that our agent will be there in about fifteen minutes. Do you have the check, or is there someone else he should contact?"

"Just tell him to see me, sir, I'll have the check," Mrs. Waring replied. "Of course, we'd like a copy of the check for our records. That is all right, isn't it?"

"Of course," I assured her. "I will instruct Mr. Davis to provide you with a copy."

I was at the bank within five minutes, dressed in a blue business suit.

"Mrs. Waring, I'm Bill Davis of the FBI. I believe my boss called you earlier?" I said.

She nodded with a grimace. "Oh, yes, Mr. Davis," she said. "I have the check right here." She did not ask for credentials or seem suspicious of my status at all. She simply handed the check to me. I examined it in a professional manner, since I was the manufacturer. On the back, was my real name and my father's address.

"Have you made a copy of this yet?" I asked.

"No, but there's a copying machine right there in the corner, it'll only take me a minute," she said.

"I'll do it," I said, and walked quickly to the machine before she could object. I copied only the front of the check, a factor she didn't notice when I put it on her desk.

"Let me sign this and date it," I said, picking up a pen. "This copy is your receipt. You understand we need this original as evidence. It will be in the custody of the U.S. Attorney. I think this is all we need at the moment, Mrs. Waring. We certainly appreciate your cooperation." I pocketed the damned original and left.

I learned later that I left the bank only five minutes before the actual FBI agent arrived. I also learned later that Mrs. Waring herself was more than a little upset when she learned she was fooled, but FBI agents have a certain romantic image of their own and a woman doesn't have to be young to be impressed by a glamorous figure.

Pretending to be a FBI agent was not the smartest move I made at that point in my criminal career. Federal agents are generally highly efficient officers, but they are even more efficient and determined when someone impersonates an FBI agent. I had delayed for a while the disclosure that Frank Williams, pilot imposter, was in reality Frank Abagnale, Jr., but I gave O'Riley a fresh trail to follow and after that time it was hound and hare to the end.

However, I was still in a learning stage as a forger, an advanced student, and I tended to take risks which an experienced check swindler would try to avoid. I was an

independent actor, writing, producing and directing my own scripts. I did not know any professional criminals and I didn't seek out criminal expertise.

The people who assisted me in my fraudulent schemes were all honest, respectable people whom I forced to help me. In reality, my total autonomy was the biggest factor in my success. The usual criminal sources of information for the police were useless to them in their search for me. When my true identity was established, the trails collected by police were all after-the-fact trails. I was always several days gone by the time the crime was detected, and officers were never able to pick up my trail until I struck again, usually in some far-off city.

Once I started producing fraudulent checks, I realized I had reached a point of no return. I had chosen fraud as a profession, my means of surviving. That's why I decided to perfect my working skills. I studied check transactions and banking procedures as hard as any investor studies the markets. I went to libraries and read banking magazines, journals and trade books. I studied financial publications and created opportunities to talk with bank officials. All my illegal techniques, in short, were polished with legal wax.

Of course, as someone once observed, there is no right way to do something wrong, but the most successful check swindlers have three factors in their favor, and any one of the three, or the combination of the three, can pay back.

The first is personality, and I look on personal appearance as part of one's personality. Top con artists are well dressed and have an air of confidence and authority. They're usually as charming, courteous and seemingly sincere as a politician seeking reelection.

The second is observation. Observation is a skill that can be developed, but I was born with the ability to pick up details and facts the average man ignores. Observation, as I will illustrate later, is the only necessary requirement for successful innovative con scheme.

The third factor is research, the big difference between the ordinary criminal and the super con man. A criminal planning a bank robbery might succeed, but in the end he depends on his gun. A con artist's only weapon is his brain. I knew as much about checks as any teller employed in any bank in the world and more than the majority. I'm not even sure many bankers had the knowledge I had of checks.

Here are some examples of the things I knew about checks and most tellers didn't, little things that enabled me to trick them.

I said earlier that the good check swindler is really operating a numbers game, and he is. All checks, whether personal or business, have a series of numbers in the lower left-hand corners, just above the bottoms. Take a personal check that has the numbers 1130 0119 546 085 across the bottom left-hand corner. During my career as a swindler champion, not one out of a hundred tellers or private cashiers paid any

attention to such numerals, and I'm convinced that only a few people handling checks knew what the series of numbers meant. I'll decode it:

The number 11 denotes that the check was printed within the Eleventh Federal Reserve District. There are twelve and only twelve Federal Reserve Districts in the United States. The Eleventh includes Texas, where this check was printed. The 3 after the 11 tells one that the check was printed in Houston specifically. The 0 denotes that immediate credit is available on the check. In the middle series of numbers, the 0 identifies the bank (Houston) and the 119 is the bank's identification number within the district. The 546 085 is the account number assigned to the customer by the bank.

How does that knowledge help a check swindler? For example, such a man presents a payroll check to a teller or cashier for payment. It is a fine-looking check, issued by a large Houston firm, payable at a Houston bank, or so it states on the face of the check. The series of numbers in the lower left-hand corner, however, starts with the number 12, but the teller or cashier doesn't notice that, or if she or he does, she or he, doesn't know the meaning of the numbers.

A computer knows. When the check goes to the bank, usually the same night, a computer rejects it, because, while the check says it's payable in Houston, the numbers say it's payable in San Francisco and bank computers read only numbers. The check, therefore, is sent to the Twelfth District, San Francisco in this case. In San Francisco another computer rejects the check because the bank identification number doesn't match, and at that point the check goes to a bank clerk. Usually, the clerk looks only at the face of the check, sees that it is payable at a Houston bank and mails it back, thinking its arrival in San Francisco a computer mistake. In any event, five to seven days have passed before the person who cashed the check is aware he or she has been swindled, and the swindler has already gone.

I became rich because of the ignorance of bank personnel concerning their own numerical codes and the cashier's lack of knowledge of checks. In San Francisco, where I stayed for several weeks after leaving Eureka, I manufactured several dozen of the phony Pan Am expense checks and passed them in San Francisco banks, at the airport and in banks or hotels in surrounding communities.

My envelope was still an invaluable help in cashing the fake checks, but I used it so much that it started to come apart. I needed a new one.

And why not a real one? I thought. San Francisco was one of Pan Am's bases, and I was a Pan Am pilot, wasn't I? Hell no, I wasn't, but who would know that? I went to the airport and walked into the Pan Am operations complex. "Say, where can I get some writing paper and envelopes? I'm a stranger here," I asked the first person I encountered, a radio operator.

"The stockroom, around the corner there," he said, pointing. "Help yourself."

I did. Since there was nobody in the stockroom, I grabbed a pack of envelopes and other stationery with Pan Am's letterhead.

One day I returned after a regular raid on money houses to find there was no space in my suitcase and bag. They were both full of bills. I was stealing faster than I could spend. I took 25,000 dollars, went to a bank, rented a safe-deposit box under the name of John Calcagne, paid three years' rent in advance and put the cash in the box. The next day I went to another bank and repeated the procedure, using the name Peter Morelli.

Then I went back to San Francisco and fell in love.

Her name was Rosalie and she was a stewardess for American Airlines. Rosalie was one of the loveliest women I'd ever met, and I still think so. She had frosted blond hair and, as I learned quickly, something of a frosted nature.

As a companion, Rosalie was delightful. We shared an enjoyment of music, good books, the ocean, skiing, the theater, travel and other pleasures. Rosalie was very religious, and like me a Catholic, but she did not insist that I attend church with her.

"Why don't you speak to me about my sins?" I asked her in a joking tone one day.

She laughed. "I don't know that you have any, Frank," she replied. "You sure don't have any bad habits that I'm aware of. I like you as you are."

I found myself getting closer to Rosalie each time I was with her. She had so many good qualities. She seemed a woman most young bachelor's dream of finding for a wife: she was loyal, neat, intelligent, balanced, helpful, lovely and she didn't smoke or drink.

"Rosalie, I love you," I said to her one night.

She nodded. "I love you, too, Frank," she said quietly. "Why don't we go to my parents and tell them about us?"

Her parents were nice people. They welcomed me warmly, and when Rosalie told them we were going to be married, they were enthusiastic and congratulated us warmly. For two days all I heard was wedding plans although I hadn't actually asked Rosalie to marry me. But it seemed taken for granted that I had, and her parents obviously approved of me.

But how could I marry her? She thought I was Frank Williams, a Pan Am co-pilot with a bright future. I knew I couldn't maintain the image if we were married. It would be only a matter of time before she learned I was really Frank Abagnale, a teenaged swindler with a phony front and a dirty past. I couldn't do that to Rosalie, I told myself.

What started as a pleasant visit turned into a terrible and painful experience for me. I felt I really loved Rosalie, and I felt I really wanted to marry her, but I didn't see how.

However, Rosalie thought she was going to marry me. And her parents thought she was going to marry me. They happily set the date, made up a list of guests, planned the reception. I took part in the discussions, outwardly happy, but inwardly totally miserable because of guilt and shame.

One afternoon Rosalie and I went bike riding. We were sitting under a huge tree in a park, and Rosalie, as usual, was chattering about our future - where we'd live, how many kids we'd have and so on. I looked at her as she talked and suddenly I felt she'd understand, that she loved me enough to not only understand but to forgive. One of the features I loved most in her was her compassion.

I put my hand over her mouth. "Rosalie," I said, and I was surprised at my calmness. "I need to tell you something, and I want you to try and understand. If I didn't love you so much, I wouldn't tell you this at all, for I've never told anyone what I'm going to tell you. And I'm telling you, Rosalie, because I love you and I want us to get married. Rosalie, I am not a pilot for Pan American. I'm not twenty-eight, Rosalie. I'm nineteen. My name is not Frank Williams. My name is Frank Abagnale. I'm a crook, Rosalie, an impostor and a check swindler, and I'm hunted by the police all over the country."

She looked at me, shocked. "Are you serious?" she finally said. "But I met you at the airport. You have a pilot's license. I've seen it! You have a Pan Am ID card. You were in uniform, Frank! Why are you saying these things, Frank? What is the matter with you?"

She laughed nervously. "You're kidding me, Frank!"

I shook my head. "No, Rosalie, I'm not. Everything I've said is true," and I told her everything. I talked for an hour, watching her face. Her eyes expressed horror, disbelief, agony, hopelessness and pity and then were full of tears. She was weeping uncontrollably. Then she took my handkerchief, dried her eyes and face and stood up. "Let's go back home, Frank," she said quietly.

"You go on, Rosalie," I said. "I need to be alone for a while. And Rosalie, don't say anything to anyone until I get there. When your parents learn about this, I want them to hear it from me. Promise me that, Rosalie."

She nodded. "I promise, Frank. I'll see you later." She left, a lovely woman reduced to a lonely figure at the moment. I got on my bike and rode around, thinking. I really didn't know what she was thinking, or what her reaction would be when I appeared at her home. Should I even go back? All I had at her house were some sports clothes, a couple of suits, underwear and shaving kit. I'd left my uniform in my motel room in San Francisco, and I had my fake ID and phony pilot's license in my pocket.

I arrived at her home from a side street and just before reaching the corner I stopped, and walked along a neighbor's garden. There was an L.A. black-and-white

cop car parked in front of Rosalie's home. A uniformed policeman in the car was watching the street.

My lovely Rosalie had reported on me.

I went back to the bike and rode off in the opposite direction. When I reached the downtown district, I parked the bike and caught a cab to the Los Angeles airport. Within thirty minutes I was in the air, returning to San Francisco. I was bothered with a feeling I couldn't identify, the unclear emotion stayed with me as I packed, paid my motel bill and returned to the airport. I bought a ticket to Las Vegas, using the name James Franklin.

I still had the odd feeling during the flight to Las Vegas. It wasn't anger. It wasn't sadness. It wasn't guilt. I couldn't understand it until I stepped off the plane in Nevada. Then I identified the emotion. It was relief. I was happy to have Rosalie out of my life! The knowledge astonished me, for not six hours ago I'd looked for a way to make her my wife. Astonished or not, I was still relieved.

It was my first trip to Las Vegas and the city was everything and more than I'd imagined. There was a crazy, electric atmosphere about the whole city, and the people, visitors and residents seemed to be rushing around in a state of crazy excitement. New York was slow and calm compared to it. "Gambling fever," explained a cab driver when I mentioned the dynamic atmosphere.

"Everybody's got it. The only winners in this town are the casinos. Everybody else is a loser. Take my advice - if you're gonna play, play the girls. A lot of them are hungry."

I followed his advice and played the chicks. He was right about the girls. Most of them were hungry. Actually hungry. Famished, in fact. However, as the Bible says: He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.

I was feeding a famished girl. She lived on casino free lunches for three days while trying to contact a brother in Phoenix to ask for money on bus. "I blew everything," she said while eating a huge steak. "All the money I brought with me, all the money in my checking account, all I could raise on my jewelry. I even cashed in my return airline ticket. It's a good thing my room was paid in advance."

She grinned cheerfully. "Serves me right. I've never gambled before, and I didn't intend to gamble when I came here. But the damned place gets to you."

She looked at me with a doubt. "I hope you're just acting nice, buying me dinner. I know there're ways a girl can get things, but that it's not my style, man."

I laughed. "Relax. I like your style. Are you going back to a job in Phoenix?"

She nodded. "I am. But I may lose a job if I'm not back by Monday."

"What do you do?" I asked. She looked the secretary type.

"I'm a check designer for a firm that designs and prints checks," she said. "A commercial artist, really. It's a small firm, but we work for a lot of big banks and business firms."

I was astonished. "Well, I'll be damned. That's interesting. What do you do when you design and print a check?"

"Oh, it depends on whether we're making up ordinary checks or special ones; you know, the kind with pictures, landscapes and different colors. Anybody could do it, really, with a little training."

Her name was Pixie. I leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. "Pixie, how would you like to go home tonight, by air?" I asked.

"You're kidding me?" she couldn't believe.

"No, I'm not," I assured her. "I'm an airline pilot for Pan Am. We don't fly out of here, but I have deadhead privileges. I can get you a seat to Phoenix on any airline that serves Vegas from there. All it'll cost is a little white lie. I'll say you're my sister, okay?"

"Hey, all right!" she said delightedly and gave me a big hug.

While she packed, I bought her a ticket, paying for it in cash. I took her to the airport and pressed a 100 dollars bill in her hand as she boarded the plane. "No arguments," I said. "That's a loan. I'll be around to collect one of these days."

I got to Phoenix, but I made no effort to contact her. If I had, it should be not to collect money but to pay back, because Pixie let me into the mint.

The next day I sought out a stationery printing supply firm. "I'm thinking of starting a little stationery store and job printing shop," I told a salesman.

I ironed out Vegas like a bed sheet. I visited nearly a hundred casinos, bars, hotels, motels, night clubs and other gambling spots. No cashier showed the slightest hesitation about cashing one of my phony checks. "Would you cash this and give me 50 dollars in chips?" I asked, and he handed me 50 dollars in chips and the balance in cash. I usually stayed in a casino for twenty or thirty minutes, playing the tables, before going to the next place, and much to my fun I hit the casinos that way, too.

I won 300 dollars playing the slot machines. I won 1,600 dollars playing blackjack. Without the slightest idea of the game, I picked up 900 dollars playing roulette, and I won 2,100 dollars at the dice tables. In all, I hit Vegas for 39,000 dollars! I left Nevada driving a rented Cadillac. I had it for nearly three months.

I made a tour of the Northwest and Midwest, maintaining the role of an airline pilot on vacation. Since I didn't want to leave the hounds a trail that could be too easily followed, I didn't exactly throw my counterfeits like confetti but I stopped to cash them now and then. I picked up 5,000 dollars in Salt Lake City, 2,000 dollars in Billings,

4,000 dollars in Cheyenne and I conned Kansas City banks for 18,000 dollars before ending up in Chicago, where I simply parked the Cadillac and walked away.

I decided to hole up in Chicago for a while and give some serious thought to the future, or at least to the place where I wanted to spend the future. I was again thinking of leaving the country. I wasn't too worried about my current security, but I knew that if I continued to operate in the U.S. it would be only a matter of time before I was arrested.

I rented a nice apartment, using the name Frank Williams. A week later, I dropped into a bank and opened a checking account for 500 dollars. I identified myself as a Pan Am pilot, and gave as my address for the checks that of a mail service firm in New York.

"You see, the reason I want an account here is because I'm in and out of Chicago all the time on company business and it's much more convenient to have an account in a local bank."

The bank officer agreed. "You'll receive your regular checks in about a week, Mr. Williams. In the meantime, here're some temporary checks you can use," he said.

Observation. A great value for a con man, I've said. I had observed a very lovely teller when I entered the bank. Her image remained in my mind after I left the bank, and when she stayed in my thoughts over the next few days I decided to meet her. I returned to the bank several days later to make a deposit and was filling out a deposit form I had taken from a counter in the middle of the lobby when an even higher power of observation took command of my mind.

In the lower left-hand corner of the deposit form there was a box for the depositor's account number. I never filled in the box, for I knew it wasn't required. The cashier put a deposit form in the machine that printed stamped receipts, and the machine was programed to read the account number first. If the number was there, the amount of the deposit was automatically credited to the account holder. But if the number wasn't there, the account could still be credited using the name and address, so the number wasn't necessary.

There was a fellow beside me filling out a deposit form. I noticed he didn't give his account number. I spent nearly an hour in the bank, watching those who came in to deposit cash or checks. Not one used the space provided for his or her account number.

I forgot about the girl. I secretly took a pack of the deposit forms, returned to my apartment and filled in the blank boxes on each form with my own account number.

The following morning, I returned to the bank and put them back to the counter in the lobby. I didn't know if my trick would succeed or not, but it was worth a risk. Four days later I returned to the bank and made a 250 dollars deposit.

"Your balance, including this deposit, is 42,876.45 dollars, Mr. Williams," the cashier said.

Just before the bank closed, I returned and drew out 40,000 dollars in a cashier's check, explaining I was buying a home. I didn't buy a home, of course, but I sure feathered my nest. The next morning I cashed the check at another bank and that afternoon flew to Honolulu, where a pretty Hawaiian girl greeted me with a kiss and put a flower garland around my neck.

During the next two weeks I produced a 38,000 dollars garland of fraudulent checks, spent three days hanging it around the necks of banks and hotels, and then flew to New York.

CHAPTER SEVEN

How to Tour Europe on a Crime a Day

I developed a fraudulent scheme for every occasion. I modified the American banking system to suit myself and pumped money out of the banks. My numbers game was the perfect system and I always had a week's running time before the hounds picked up the trail. I learned later that I was the first check swindler to use the routing numbers racket. It drove bankers mad. They didn't know what the hell was going on. They do now, and they owe me.

I worked my schemes overtime, all over the nation, until I decided I was just too hot to cool down. I had to leave the country. And I decided I could worry about a passport in Mexico, since all I needed to visit Mexico was a visa. I obtained one from the Mexican Consulate in San Antonio, using the name Frank Williams and presenting myself as a Pan Am pilot, and deadheaded to Mexico City on a Mexican jet.

When I jumped the border into Mexico in late 1967, I had illegal cash assets of nearly 500,000 dollars. I did not take the whole amount of my crime activity with me. Like a dog with access to a butcher-shop, I buried my loot all over the United States, in bank safe-deposit boxes from coast to coast and from the southern to the northern border.

I took some 50,000 dollars with me into Mexico, hidden in the lining of my suitcases and the linings of my jackets. A good customs officer could find the cash easily, but I didn't have to go through customs. I was wearing my Pan Am uniform and was passed along with the crew.

I stayed in Mexico City a week. Then I met a Pan Am stewardess, enjoying a five-day holiday in Mexico, and accepted her invitation to go to Acapulco for a weekend. We were on the plane when she suddenly said a bad word.

"What's the matter?" I asked, surprised to hear such language from such lovely lips.

"I meant to cash my paycheck at the airport," she said. "I've got exactly three pesos in my purse. Oh, well, I guess the hotel will cash it."

"I'll cash it, if it's not too much," I said. "I'm sending my own check off tonight for deposit. How much is it?"

I really didn't care how much cash was involved. A real Pan Am check! I wanted it. I got it for 288.15 dollars, and put it carefully away. I never cashed it, although it brought me a fortune.

I liked Acapulco. It was crowded with beautiful people, most of them rich, famous or successful, sometimes all three. We stayed at a hotel used by airline crews, but I never felt danger. Acapulco is not a place where people talk business.

I stayed on after the stewardess returned to her base in Miami. And the hotel manager became friendly with me, so friendly that I decided to tell him about my problem.

"Pete, I'm in trouble," I risked.

"The hell you are!" he exclaimed in concerned tones.

"Yeah," I replied. "My supervisor in New York just called me. He wants me to go to London on the noon plane from Mexico City tomorrow and pick up a flight there because the pilot is sick."

Pete grinned. "That's a problem? I wish I had your troubles."

I shook my head. "The thing is, Pete, I don't have my passport with me. I left it in New York and I must have it with me all the time. I can't make it back to New York in time to get my passport and get to London on schedule. And if the boss learns I'm here without a passport, he'll fire me. What the hell am I gonna do, Pete?"

He whistled. His face took a thoughtful look, and then he nodded. "I don't know if this will work, but have you ever heard of a woman named Kitty Corbett?"

I hadn't and said so. "Well, she's a writer on Mexican affairs, an old lady. She's been down here twenty or thirty years and is really respected. They say she has influence from the Presidential Palace in Mexico City to Washington, D.C., the White House even, I understand. I believe it, too." He grinned. "The thing is, that's her at the table by the window. Now, I know she plays mamma to every American, and she loves to do favors for anybody who seeks her out wanting something. Makes her feel like the queen mother, I guess. Anyway, let's go over and buy her a drink and cry a little. Maybe she can find an answer."

Kitty Corbett was a kind old woman. And sharp. After a few minutes, she smiled at Pete. "Okay, Pete, what's the matter? You never sit down with me unless you want something. What is it this time?"

Pete threw up his hands and laughed. "I don't want a thing, honest! But Frank here has a problem. Tell her, Frank."

I told her the same story, except I tried to make it more tragic. She looked at me when I finished. "You need a passport very much, I'd say," she commented. "Trouble is, you've got one. It's just in the wrong place. You can't have two passports, you know. That's illegal."

"I know," I said, grimacing. "That worries me, too. But I can't lose this job. It might be years before another airline picks me up, if at all. I was on Pan Am's waiting list for three years." I paused, then exclaimed, "Flying jet liners is all I ever wanted to do!"

Kitty Corbett nodded, lost in thought.

Then she said. "Pete, get me a telephone over here."

Pete signaled and a waiter brought a telephone to the table and Kitty Corbett began talking to the operator in Spanish. It took several minutes, but she was connected to whomever she was calling.

"Sonja? Kitty Corbett here," she said. "Listen, I want to ask a favor of you..." She went on and told her my story and then listened as the other replied.

"You don't have your birth certificate with you, do you?"

"Yes, I do," I said. "I carry it in my wallet."

Kitty Corbett nodded and turned again to the phone. "Yes, Sonja, he has a birth certificate... You think you can handle it? Great! I owe you. See you next week."

She hung up and smiled. "Well, Frank, if you can get to the American Consulate in Mexico City by ten o'clock tomorrow, Sonja Gundersen, the assistant consul, will issue you a temporary passport. You've lost yours, understand? And if you tell anyone about this, I'll kill you."

I kissed her and ordered a bottle of the best champagne.

I boarded the flight to Mexico City next morning. In Mexico City, I changed into my Pan Am pilot's uniform and walked into Miss Gundersen's office at 9:45 a.m.

Sonja Gundersen was a sharp, energetic blonde and she didn't waste any time. "Your birth certificate, please."

I took it from my wallet and handed it to her. She scanned it and looked at me. "I thought Kitty said your name was Frank Williams. This says your name is Frank W. Abagnale, Jr."

I smiled. "It is. Frank William Abagnale, Jr. You know Kitty. She had a little too much champagne last night. She kept introducing me to all her friends as Frank Williams, too. But I thought she gave you my full name."

"She may have," agreed Miss Gundersen. "Anyway you're obviously a Pan Am pilot, and part of your name is Frank William, so you must be the one."

I walked out of the consulate building fifteen minutes later with a temporary passport in my pocket. I went back to the airport and changed into a suit and bought a ticket for London at the British Overseas Airways counter, paying cash.

I was told the flight was delayed until seven that evening.

I changed back into my pilot's uniform and spent six hours supplying Mexico City with my decorative stuff. I was 6,500 dollars richer when I flew off to London, and the Mexican feds joined the group of hunting grounds on my tail.

I stayed only a few days in London. I was beginning to feel pressure on me, the same uneasiness that had bothered me in the States. I realized in London that leaving

the U.S. hadn't solved my problem, that Mexican police and Scotland Yard officers were in the same business as cops in New York or Los Angeles - that of catching crooks. And I was a crook.

I was now living by simple logic: I was the hunted, the police were the hunters, so, the police were the bad guys. I had to steal because I wanted to survive and to finance my constant flight from the bad guys, and for that reason I was justified in my illegal means of support. So, after less than a week in England, I filled Piccadilly with some of my production and flew off to Paris, proud of the irrational theory that I'd turned to fraud again in self-defense.

A psychiatrist would explain my actions differently. He would say I wanted to be caught. Perhaps I was seeking to be caught. Perhaps I was subconsciously seeking help and my subconscious mind told me the authorities would offer that help, but I had no such clear thoughts at the time. I was fully aware that I was on a crazy carrousel ride, an uncontrolled carrousel from which I seemed unable to get off, but I sure as hell didn't want cops to stop it.

I spent only three hours in Paris when I met Monique Lavalier and entered into a relationship that both opened new illegal opportunities but also destroyed my lifestyle. Looking back, I owe Monique a lot of thanks. So does Pan Am, although some of the firm's officials might argue the idea.

Monique was a stewardess for Air France. I met her in the Windsor Hotel bar, where she and several dozen other Air France flight-crew people were giving a party for a retiring captain pilot. If I saw that captain, I don't remember him, for I was charmed by Monique.

She had all of Rosalie's charms and good qualities and none of Rosalie's frosted nature. Apparently I affected Monique the same way she affected me, for we were unable to separate during the time I was in Paris and on later visits. Monique, if she had any thoughts of marrying me, never mentioned it, but, three days after we met, she took me home to present me to her family. The Lavaliers were delightful people, and I was especially intrigued with Papa Lavalier.

He was a job printer, operator of a small printing shop near Paris. I was immediately caught with an idea for improving my check-swindling involving phony Pan Am vouchers.

"You know, I have some good connections in the Pan Am business office," I said casually during lunch. "Maybe I can arrange some printing business for Pan Am for you."

Papa Lavalier beamed. "Yes, yes!" he exclaimed. "Anything you want, we will try and do, and we would be most grateful, monsieur." Monique acted as an interpreter, for none of her family had the slightest knowledge of English. "Whatever you want

printed in English, my father and my brothers can do it," Monique said proudly. "They are the best printers in France."

I still had the actual Pan Am payroll check I took from the stewardess in Mexico. Studying it, I was struck by the difference between it and my imaginative version of a Pan Am check. My products were impressive, certainly, but one placed next to the real thing clearly shouted "counterfeit!" I was lucky to avoid disclosure presenting them. Obviously the tellers who'd accepted them had never dealt with a real Pan Am check.

It occurred to me, however, that European bank tellers might know Pan Am checks. Now I had another thought. Maybe Pan Am had a different-type check, maybe a different-colored check, perhaps, for different continents. I thought it best to check on the theory before carrying out my plan. The next morning I called Pan Am's Paris office and asked to speak to someone in the business office. I was connected with a man who sounded very young and very inexperienced, and soon proved he really was. I was becoming convinced that Lady Luck was my personal switchboard operator.

"Listen, this is Jack Rogers at Freight Forwarding," I said. "I got a check here, and I think your company had sent it to us by mistake."

"Well, Mr. Rogers, why do you say that?" he asked.

"Because I got a check here for 1,900 dollars, sent from your New York office," I replied. "But I can't find any record of anything for your company. You got any idea what this check's for?"

"Well, Mr. Rogers, are you sure the check's from us?"

"Well, it seems to me it is," I said. "It's a regular green check with Pan Am in big letters across the top and it's for 1,900 dollars."

"Mr. Rogers, that doesn't sound like one of our checks," the fellow said. "Our checks are blue, and they have Pan Am - Pan Am - Pan Am wording all over the face, along with a global map of the world. Does yours have that on it?"

I was holding the stewardess's check in my hand. He had described it perfectly, but I didn't tell him that. "Who's it signed by? What's the comptroller's name?" I asked.

He told me. It was the same name appearing on the check in my hand.

"What's the series of little numbers across the bottom?" I pressed.

He read them off to me. They matched the numbers on the stew's check.

"Nah, that's not the guy who signed this check and the numbers don't match," I lied.

So I had a valid check, which I displayed to Monique's father in his shop. He was delighted to see me, and we had no trouble speaking between the French I had learned from my mother and the English of his young printer.

"I talked to our business-office people," I said. "Now, we are printing these checks in America, a pretty expensive process. Do you think you can duplicate this check in payroll-book form? If you think you can, I have the authority to give you an order of ten thousand, if you can beat the New York price."

He was examining the check. "And what is your printer's cost for these in New York, monsieur?" he asked.

I didn't have the slightest idea, but I named a figure, which I felt, wouldn't insult New York printers. "Three hundred and fifty dollars per thousand," I said.

He nodded. "I can provide your company with a quality product that will exactly duplicate this one, and at 200 dollars per thousand," he said proudly. "I think you will find our work most satisfactory."

He hesitated as if embarrassed. "I know you and my daughter are close friends, and I trust you, but we usually receive a pre-payment of fifty percent," he said in apologizing tone.

I laughed. "You will have it this afternoon," I said.

Papa Lavalier finished the order within a week. He provided me with gorgeous real Pan Am checks, and was pleased that I was pleased.

"I hope we can do more work for your company, my friend," he said.

"Oh, you will, you will," I assured him. "In fact, we're delighted with your work."

Papa Lavalier never questioned anything I asked. From the time he delivered the 10,000 Pan Am checks, he was the printer of any counterfeit document I needed or desired, an innocent victim who felt grateful to me because I opened the door of the "American market" to him. I learned later that he never really understood what he was printing when he did jobs for me, but worked with a blind trust in my integrity.

I showered Paris with the phony checks, and rented a safe-deposit box, for a five-year period paid in advance, to store my loot.

I was astonished myself that my new operation was so easy and smooth. I rented a car and while Monique was flying I drove around France, cashing the checks in every village bank. I have never confirmed the suspicion, but I often thought in later months and years that the reason I was so successful with those phony Pan Am checks was because Pan Am was paying them!

Papa Lavalier received a lot of business from me. I had told the Lavaliers that I was in Paris as a special representative of Pan Am, doing public relations for the firm. A month after meeting Monique, however, I told her I had to return to flying status, and caught a plane to New York. But New York made me nervous. I felt I should move to a foreign climate again, but I couldn't decide whether to return to Paris and Monique or visit some new and exciting place.

While I was debating with myself, I flew to Boston, where I got into jail and robbed a bank. The first event was a shock, like an unplanned pregnancy. The second one was the result of an impulse I couldn't resist.

I went to Boston simply to get out of New York. I thought it would be as good as any place, and it also had a lot of banks. On arrival, I put my bags in an airport locker, and visited several of the banks, exchanging some of my Pan Am false checks for actual currency. I returned to the airport early in the evening, intending to catch a flight as soon as possible.

I walked up to the local airlines counter. "When's your next connecting flight to Miami?" I asked the ticket agent on duty. I had changed into my pilot's uniform.

"You just missed it." He grimaced.

"Who's got the next flight, National, American, who?" I asked.

"No one," he said. "You've missed any flight to Miami until tomorrow."

I sat down in one of the lobby chairs, thinking the situation over.

My contemplation was interrupted by two chilling words:

"Frank Abagnale?"

I looked up, trying to calm panic. Two tall Massachusetts state troopers, in uniform, stood over me.

"You are Frank Abagnale, aren't you?" demanded one of them with a frosty voice.

"My name is Frank, but it's Frank Williams," I said, and I was surprised at my calm tone that had come from my throat.

"May I see your identification, please?" he asked. The words were spoken politely, but his eyes said if I didn't immediately produce my ID, he was going to pick me up and shake it out of my pockets.

I handed over my ID card and my fraudulent FAA pilot's license.

"Look, I don't know what this is all about, but you're badly mistaken," I said. "I fly for Pan American, and these documents are sufficient proof."

The trooper studied the ID card and license, then passed them to his partner. "Why don't you stop the crap, son? You're Frank Abagnale, aren't you?" said the second one, almost gently.

"Frank who?" I protested, pretending to be angry to cover my growing nervousness. "I don't know who the hell you're after, but it's not me!"

The trooper grimaced. "Well, we aren't gonna stand around here and argue with you. Come on, we're taking you in." he commanded.

They didn't ask where my luggage was, and I didn't volunteer. They took me outside, placed me in their patrol car and drove me directly to the state police offices. There I was taken into the office of a lieutenant, who, I assumed, was the shift commander.

"What the hell is this?" he demanded in irritated tones.

"Well, we think it's Frank Abagnale, Lieutenant," said one of the troopers. "He says he's a pilot for Pan Am."

The lieutenant studied me. "You don't look very old to be a pilot," he said. "Why don't you tell the truth? You're Frank Abagnale. We've been looking for him for a long time. He's supposed to be a pilot, too. You match his description perfectly."

"I'm thirty years old, my name is Frank Williams and I fly for Pan Am, and I want to talk to my lawyer," I shouted.

The lieutenant sighed. "Take him over to the city jail, register him for vagrancy and then let him call a lawyer. And call the feds. He's their business. Let them deal with it."

"Vagrancy!" I protested. "I'm no vagrant. I've got nearly 200 dollars on me."

The lieutenant nodded. "Yeah, but you can't prove you're employed," he said. "Get him out of here."

I was taken to the county jail in downtown Boston, and was passed on to the sergeant.

"Damn me, what did he do?" he asked, looking at me.

"Just register him as vagrant. Someone will pick him up in the morning," said the trooper.

"Vagrant!" the sergeant seemed surprised. "By damn, if he's a vagrant."

"Just register him," said the trooper, and he and his partner left.

"Empty your pockets," the sergeant said, pulling a form from a drawer. "I'll give you a receipt for your goods."

I started placing my things before him. "Listen, can I keep my ID card and pilot's license?" I asked. "Company regulations say I must have them at all times. I'm not sure if arrest is included, but I'd still like to keep them, if you don't mind."

The sergeant examined the card and the license and pushed them toward me. "Sure," he said kindly. "I'd say there must be some kind of a mistake here. I'm glad I'm not involved."

A jailer took me upstairs and placed me in a dirty cell. I was suddenly depressed, miserable and frightened. The game was over, I had to admit. The FBI would pick me up in the morning, I knew, and then it would be just one courtroom after another, I

guessed. I looked around the jail cell. Jesus, this was a rat hole. And I didn't have a prayer of escaping. But then no man has a prayer, I thought with regret, when he believes in a swindler's god.

Even a swindler's god, however, has a legion of angels. And one appeared to me now.

"Well, what the hell might you be doing in here?" he asked smoking the cigar.

I didn't know who he was. He didn't look like anyone who could help me. "Vagrancy," I said shortly.

"Vagrancy!" he exclaimed, examining me with his sharp eyes. "You're a pilot with Pan Am, aren't you? How the hell can you be a vagrant? Did somebody steal all your planes?"

"Who're you?" I asked.

He threw a card to me. "Aloyius James 'Bailout' Bailey, my high-flying friend," he said. "Bail bondsman. The cops bring them, I spring them. You're on their territory, now, pal. I can put you on mine. The street."

"Well, I'll tell you the truth," I said cautiously. "There was this guy at the airport. He was pretty unpleasant with a girl. We had a fight. They arrested us both for fighting. I can lose my job if my commander finds out I'm in jail."

He stared at me, unbelieving. "What the hell you saying? You don't have anybody to bail you out? Call one of your friends."

I shrugged. "I don't have any friends here. I flew in on a charter cargo job. I'm based in Los Angeles."

"What about the rest of your crew?" he demanded. "Call one of them."

"They went on to Istanbul," I lied. "I was going to deadhead to Miami to see a chick."

"Well, goddamned! You are in trouble, aren't you?" said Aloyius James "Bailout" Bailey. Then he smiled, "Well, my fighter-pilot pal, let's see what we can do to get you out of here."

He disappeared and was gone for an agonizing ten minutes. Then he appeared in front of my cell again. "Damn, your bond is 5,000 dollars," he said in a surprised tone. "Sergeant says you gave the troopers a hard time. How much money you got?"

My hopes came back again. "Just 200 dollars, maybe not that much," I sighed.

He paused to think. "You got a personal check?" he asked suddenly.

"Yeah, that is, the sergeant downstairs has it," I said. "Why?"

"Because I'm gonna take your check, that's why," he said with a grin. "You can write it out when the sergeant lets you free."

The sergeant let me go thirty-five minutes later. I wrote Bailey a check for the standard 10 percent, 500 dollars, and handed him a hundred in cash. "That's a bonus, I said, laughing with joy.

He drove me to the airport after I told him I was taking the first flight to Miami.

This is what happened later. I have it on true sources. O'Riley, excited with joy to demand my pilot's license himself, showed up at the jail.

"Bring Abagnale in!" he commanded.

"He made bond at three-thirty this morning," volunteered a jailer.

O'Riley was close to apoplectic seizure. "Bond! Bond! Who the hell bonded him out?" he finally shouted.

"Bailey, 'Bailout' Bailey, who else?" replied the jailer.

Outside, a Massachusetts detective turned to O'Riley. "We can send out information on him."

O'Riley shook his head, "Forget it. That bastard is five hundred miles away. No Boston cop's gonna catch him."

But I stayed in Boston. As soon as Bailey had dropped me at the airport, and was gone, I grabbed a cab and checked in at a nearby motel.

The next morning I called the Bean State National Bank that had a branch at the airport. "Security, please," I said when the switchboard operator answered.

"Security."

"Yeah, listen, this is Connors, the new guard. I don't have a uniform for tonight's shift. My damned uniform got in an accident. Where can I get a replacement, lady?" I spoke in indignation.

"Well, we get our uniforms from Beke Brothers," the woman replied in apologizing tones. "Just go down there, Mr. Connors. They'll outfit you with a replacement."

I went first to Beke Brothers. No one questioned my status. Within fifteen minutes I walked out with a complete guard's outfit: shirt, tie, trousers and hat, the name of the bank over the breast pocket and on the right shoulder of the shirt. I stopped at a police-supply firm and bought a military belt and holster. I went to a gun shop and picked up a copy of a .38 police special. It was harmless, but only an idiot would ignore it if it were pointed at him. I then rented a station wagon with a sign "SECURITY - BEAN STATE NATIONAL BANK" on each door.

At 11:15 p.m. I was standing at attention in front of the night-deposit box of the Bean State National Bank Airport Branch, and a beautiful sign decorated the safe's depository: "night deposit box is out of order, please MAKE DEPOSITS WITH SECURITY OFFICER."

There was a container in front of the depository.

At least thirty-five people dropped bags or envelopes into the container. Not one of them said more than "Good evening" or "Good night."

When the last shop had closed, I fixed the top of the canvas bag and began pulling the loot to the station wagon. I became stuck in the exit door because the container was just too heavy.

"What's going on, buddy?"

I twisted my head and nearly lost my senses. Two state troopers were standing less than five feet away.

"Well, the box is out of order, and the truck broke down, and I've got the bank's station wagon out here," I said, grinning.

The older one, a red-faced redhead, laughed. "Well, hell, let us help you with it," he said, stepped forward and grabbed the handle of the box. With three of us pulling, it came easily. They helped me to the station wagon and assisted me in lifting the heavy cargo into the back of the car. I shut the car door and turned to the officers.

"I appreciate it, boys," I said, smiling. "I'd offer the coffee, but I must get this little fortune to the bank."

They laughed and one lifted a hand. "Next time, okay?"

Less than an hour later, I had the loot in my motel room and was sorting out the cash. Bills only. I threw the change, credit-card receipts and checks into the bathtub.

I counted 62,800 dollars in currency. An hour later I was on a flight to Miami. I had a thirty-minute delay in New York. I used the time to call the manager of the airport in Boston. I didn't get him but I got his secretary.

"Listen, tell the Bean State Bank people they can get the majority of the loot from last night's depository theft in the bathtub of Room 208, Rest Haven Motel," I said and hung up.

The next day I flew out of Miami to Istanbul.

I had a short stop in Tel Aviv.

I had my code of honor. In my whole career, I never fooled a square John as an individual.

I sought out a branch of an American bank. And laid dollar bills on the counter before a teller.

"I want a 5,000 dollars cashier's check," I said.

"Yes, sir. And your name?"

"Frank Abagnale, Jr.," I said.

"All right, Mr. Abagnale. Do you want this check made out to you?"

I shook my head. "No," I said. "Make it payable to Aloyius James 'Bailout' Bailey, in Boston, Massachusetts."

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Small Crew Will Do - It's Just a Paper Airplane

An escort is expected of some people. The President. Queen Elizabeth. Frank Sinatra. Muhammad Ali. Most celebrities, in fact.

And airline pilots.

"Where's your crew, sir?" asked the desk clerk in the Istanbul hotel. It was a question I'd encountered before.

"I don't have a crew with me," I replied. "I just flew in to replace a pilot who became sick." It was my standard answer to such questions, which were much more numerous in Europe and the Middle East than in the United States. Continental hotels, obviously, usually housed air crews. A lonely pilot arouses curiosity.

And curiosity arouses suspicion.

I needed a crew, I thought that evening while dining in a Turkish restaurant. I wasn't wearing my uniform. I now wore it only on special occasions when checking in and checking out of a hotel, passing a check or having a free ride.

The matter of a crew had entered my mind before. In fact, it entered my mind each time I saw a command pilot surrounded by his crew. His status was not only more believable than mine, but he also always seemed to have much more fun than I. My fantasies of an aircrew of my own, of course, were driven by more than just a desire for companionship. An aircrew - and I thought only of stewardesses - would make my role of airline pilot really valid. With a crew behind me, I could cash the phony checks in great numbers.

The next day I flew to Paris to visit the Lavaliers. "I wish you flew for Air France. I could be a member of your crew," Monique said at one point during the visit. The remark convinced me that an aircrew was a necessary thing.

But how could a pilot without portfolio, who didn't know how to fly, get an aircrew? I could not simply gather a few girls and offer, "Hey, kids, wanna go to Europe? I've got this great scheme for passing worthless checks..." And since I had absolutely no connections in the criminal world, American or European, I couldn't look for help there.

I was in West Berlin when a solution presented itself. Pan Am had always provided me with the ideas. If the carrier wasn't my parent company, I was in a sense its bastard child, and this was an issue demanding proper loyalty. I'd let Pan Am provide me with a flight crew.

I flew to New York and on arrival called Pan Am's personnel office, representing myself as the placement director of a small western college, Prescott Presbyterian

Normal. "I'm aware that you people send employment recruiting teams to various colleges and universities, and I wondered if you might possibly have our school on your schedule this year?" I said.

"I'm sorry, we don't," said the Pan Am personnel officer who took my call. "However, we will have a team on the University of Arizona campus during the last two weeks in October, interviewing students for various positions, and I'm sure they'd be glad to talk to any of your students who might be interested in a career with Pan Am. If you like, we can mail you some brochures."

"That would be nice," I said, and gave him a fictitious address for my unreal college.

I had a plan that demanded the courage of a mountain climber.

I sat down and wrote a letter to the director of the University of Arizona placement office. Pan Am, I said, was starting a new recruiting scheme this year. In addition to the regular personnel recruiters who would visit the campus in October, the letter stated, Pan Am was also sending pilots and stewardesses to interview prospective pilots and flight attendants, since actual flight crewmen could offer a better idea of what a flying position with Pan Am would require and could also consider the applicants more carefully.

"A pilot will be visiting your campus on Monday, September 9, and will be available for three days to interview stewardess applicants," the false letter stated. "Under separate cover, we are sending you some brochures and employment application forms which you might wish to give to students."

I signed the name of Pan Am's director of personnel to the letter and placed it in a Pan Am envelope. I packed the brochures and application forms in one of the large folders. Then I went to Pan Am's office building, sought out the airline's mail room and dropped the envelope off with a young clerk, ordering to send it by air mail.

On August 28 I called the University of Arizona and was connected with John Henderson, director of student placement.

"Mr. Henderson, this is Frank Williams, a co-pilot for Pan American World Airways," I said. "I am scheduled to visit your campus."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Williams," Henderson sounded enthusiastic. "We're looking forward to your visit and we have received your material. In fact, we've posted it about campus, and you should have a good number of applicants."

I appeared on the University of Arizona campus at 8 a.m., Monday, September 9, and Henderson greeted me warmly. I was, of course, in uniform. Henderson prepared a small room for my use during my stay. "We have thirty applicants to date, and I have scheduled them to appear in groups of ten each day," he said. "I know, of course, you'll

be talking to them individually, and you can set your own daily schedule, if you wish. But the first ten will be here at 9 a.m."

"Well, I think I'll talk to them as a group at first, and then interview them individually," I said.

The first group of ten students was, collectively and individually, simply lovely. More than ever, looking at them, I saw the need for a crew of my own. The ten of them stared at me like I was Elvis Presley.

I chose a businesslike tone. "First of all, ladies, I want you to know this is as new to me as it is to you. I'm more accustomed to a cockpit than a classroom, but the company has assigned me this task and I hope I can carry it out successfully. With your help and understanding, I think I can.

"I say 'understanding' because I don't have the authority to say who will be hired and who will not. My job is just to select girls who I think would be most suitable as flight attendants and to make a recommendation.

"There is also this - it's unlikely any of you will be hired by Pan Am before you graduate. But if you are selected as a future stewardess, it's our policy to give you some sort of assistance during your last year in school so that you won't be tempted to take some other job. Am I making myself clear?"

I was. The girls said so.

I then began interviewing them individually and by the afternoon of the third day I reduced the list to twelve candidates.

I spent a couple of hours studying the files of the twelve on an individual basis, recalling my own interviews with them and my impressions of them, before I chose eight. I was leaving the records room when I invented a funny trick, one that took me less than thirty minutes to satisfy. When I left the room, Frank Abagnale, Jr., a native of Bronx, had transcripts showing him to have both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in social work.

The next morning I delivered my decision to my eight finalists. The girls were excited. "Calm down, please, calm down," I pleaded. "You haven't been hired as stewardesses."

The words achieved the desired shock. And immediate total silence. Then I grinned and threw it on them. "That's because you're all juniors and we want you to finish your education before joining Pan Am," I said.

"I think I mentioned before that the company likes to assist approved stewardess candidates during their last year in school, and I have the authority to make you eight girls an offer I think you'll find interesting. I am informed that the company intends to hire a number of girls as summer interns for the coming year, and these girls will be sent to Europe in different groups to act as advertising representatives and public

relations people. That is, they'll be used as models for photographs for Pan Am ads in various world publications, and some will be used as speakers at schools, civil group meetings, business seminars and that sort of thing. It's a tour and usually we use real stewardesses or professional models dressed up in flight-attendant uniforms. But this coming summer, we're going to use girls who've applied for stewardess positions and it will serve as sort of a training period for them. I personally think it's a good idea for several reasons. One, it will allow our ad people to use pictures of our own personnel in cities we serve, and secondly, we won't need to pull actual stewardesses off the flight line when a photo situation calls for an actual stewardess. Now, if any or all of you would like to take part in the program this summer, I have the authority to hire you. You'll have an expense-paid tour of Europe. You'll be paid the same salary as a starting stewardess, and you'll dress as stewardesses, but you won't be stewardesses. We'll supply your uniforms. Also, you'll be given a letter of employment, which is very important in this case. It means that those of you who decide to become stewardesses after graduation will apply as former Pan Am employees, and you'll be given advantage over all other applicants. Do I have any volunteers among you?"

They all volunteered.

"Okay," I said, smiling. "Now, you'll all need passports. That's your responsibility. I'll also need your addresses so the company can keep in touch with you. I'm sure you'll have your letters of employment within a month. That's it, ladies. I've certainly enjoyed meeting you all, and I hope that if and when you become stewardesses, some of you will be assigned to my crew."

I informed Henderson of the offer I'd made the girls, and he was as delighted as they had been. In fact, Henderson, his wife and the eight girls all invited me that night to a delightful dinner party around the pool in the Hendersons' house.

I flew back to New York and rented a box with mail-answering service that had offices in the Pan Am Building. It was the perfect cover, since it allowed me to use Pan Am's own address in exchange of letters I had with the girls, but all their replies were directed to my box with the mail-service firm.

After a week or so, I sent a "letter of employment" to each of them, along with a covering letter signed by myself (as Frank Williams) informing each of them that - surprise! surprise! - I am assigned by the company to head up the European operation with them, so they were going to be my "crew" after all.

Then I turned to getting ready for the tour myself. The passport I had was only a temporary one, and in my real name. I decided I needed a regular passport that I could use as Frank Williams and decided to take a chance hoping that the passport office in New York was too busy to play cop.

I walked into the office one morning with my temporary passport and ten days later was issued a regular passport. I was pleased to have the document, but it was,

after all, issued to Frank W. Abagnale, Jr. It was not a passport that would serve "Pan Am First Officer Frank W. Williams". I started looking around and found what I needed in the hall of records of a large East Coast city. It was the death notice of Francis W. Williams, age twenty months, who had died at that young age on November 22, 1939. The archives told the infant had been born on March 12, 1938, in a local hospital. I obtained a certified copy of the birth certificate for 3.00 dollars by presenting myself to one of the clerks as the same Francis W. Williams. It seemed logical to me, and I'm sure it would seem logical to anyone else, that anyone named "Francis" would prefer to be called "Frank."

I took the copy of the birth certificate to the passport office in Philadelphia, together with the necessary photos, and two weeks later had a second passport, which matched my Pan Am uniform. I was now ready to "command" my crew.

I spent those months preparing to complete my fantasy. I knew the name of the Hollywood fashion firm that designed and manufactured all of the stewardess uniforms for Pan Am. I flew to Hollywood and, wearing my Pan Am pilot's outfit presented a phony letter of introduction to the woman in charge of Pan Am's account and told her the details of the fictional public relations tour of Europe.

"We'll have the uniforms ready in six weeks," she said. "I assume you also want luggage for each of the girls?"

"Of course," I said.

When the uniforms were ready, I picked them up personally, driving a rented station wagon with counterfeit Pan Am logos on the doors, and paid for the uniforms.

In May I sent each of the girls a letter with an airline ticket for each - tickets I'd bought and paid for with cash - and telling them to arrive at the lobby of the Los Angeles airport on May 26.

The gathering of my birds was one of my brightest and most courageous shows. I went to one of the most luxurious hotels near the airport and booked a room for each of the girls, and also booked, for the day after their arrival, one of the hotel's conference rooms. I made all the bookings in Pan Am's firm name, although I paid cash.

On the morning of the girls' arrival, I put on my Pan Am pilot's uniform and visited Pan Am's operational department at the airport, seeking out the manager of the carrier's car park.

"Look, I've got eight stewardesses coming in at two p.m. today on a special mission, and I need some transportation to get them to the hotel," I said. "You think you can help me out?"

"Sure," he said. "I've got a regular crew wagon available. I'll pick them up myself. You gonna be there?"

"I'll just meet you here at one-thirty and go with you." I said.

The girls showed up on time and were impressed with the Pan Am crew wagon. The manager of the car park and I loaded their luggage and he drove us all to the hotel, where he again assisted in unloading their luggage and getting the girls settled. I offered to buy him a drink after we finished, but he refused. "I like your kind of duty," he said, grinning. "Just call me anytime."

The next morning I met the girls in the conference room. There were more cries of joy when I gave the details of the tour: London, Paris, Rome, Athens, Geneva, Munich, Berlin, Madrid, Oslo, Copenhagen, Vienna and other European capitals. I calmed them and spoke in a tone of a strict father.

"Now, this sounds like a lot of fun, and I hope it will be, but we're on serious business, and I won't allow any nonsense," I told them. "I have the authority to dismiss any one of you for bad acts or mistakes, and I will send you home if I have to. Let's get one thing straight - I'm the boss and you will live by my instructions and follow them. I think you'll find my rules pretty fair, and you should have no trouble following them, and therefore no trouble at all. Does anyone have any questions?"

No one did. I smiled. "Okay, then, you're on your own for the rest of the day and the night. But get a good night's sleep. We leave tomorrow for London."

And we really did, using tickets that had cost me a small fortune in cash. We landed in London on a rainy morning and I instructed the girls to change into their stewardess uniforms before we went to the hotel.

The girls slept until nearly noon. Then I allowed them to walk in the town by themselves, telling them I had "set up a photo session" with the local Pan Am office. What I did was to go through the London telephone book until I found what I was looking for, a commercial photography firm. I called the company and identified myself as a Pan Am public relations representative.

"I've got eight girls at the Royal Gardens, stewardesses, and what we need is some color and black and white photos suitable for advertisements and promotion brochures, beautiful stuff of the girls at Piccadilly, some of them at the Thames bridges, that sort of thing," I said. "Do you think you can handle it?"

"Oh, quite!" the man to whom I spoke was very enthusiastic. "Why don't you look at some samples of our work? I'm sure we can do business, Mr. Williams."

The firm's representative and I had lunch and worked out a deal. I'd picked one of the better firms in London, it seemed. They'd even done some work in the past for Pan Am.

"Well, this is a little different, something new we're trying," I said. "One thing you'll like, I'm sure, is that you'll be paid in cash at the end of each day. Just give me an invoice for the amount. We've got a heavy schedule and can leave soon, so just send the invoices to the public relations and advertising department of Pan Am in New

York. If they decide to use any of your pictures, you'll be paid again at your normal commercial rate for each picture selected."

He whistled and raised his glass of beer. "That is a different way of doing things, and I like it," he said, grinning happily.

The next morning, a three-man camera crew in a passenger van loaded with photographic equipment showed up the hotel and picked up my eight fledglings. I didn't go with them, but simply told the chief cameraman to use his own imagination and return the girls in a reasonably proper condition.

"Gotcha, boss." He laughed and led the girls into the van.

I had business of my own. I had started this tour well supplied with sinful stuff: counterfeit cashier's checks (products of my own handiwork), Pan Am expense checks and regular paychecks (Papa Lavalier's artwork) and Pan Am check forms (stolen from Pan Am's own stores department). There were a lot of factors in my favor. London, and most of the other major European cities had branches of major American banks.

We flew to Rome that afternoon, where, over the next three days, the procedure was repeated. The hotel cashier in Rome, too, was doubtful about the amount of the expense checks, but was satisfied with my explanation.

"Well, I'm sorry about that," I said. "But we're on an eighteen-day tour of Italy, and, of course, you can give me change in lira if you like."

He liked, since it meant a personal profit of some fifty American dollars for him.

I decided against traveling around Europe by air, not because of the expense but because it would present the girls constantly to other airline crews. That was my biggest problem in my scheme - hiding the girls from other airline people. The girls cooperated perfectly in that respect. And I rented a comfortable, almost luxurious Volkswagen bus for our tour around Europe. At times my scheme seemed more like a lazy vacation than a criminal venture, we often spent days, sometimes a week or more, in colorful little out-of-the-way places in this or that country and during such delays I stopped my crooked activities. It was not part of my plan to deceive the peasants.

Every two weeks I paid the girls with a counterfeit payroll check, then had them back to me in return for cash. Since I was paying all their expenses, most of them bought money orders and sent them home to their parents or their bank.

The girls were absolutely innocent, of course. Not one, during the summer, ever had a suspicion she was involved in a criminal venture. Each thought she was legally employed by Pan Am. They were completely fooled by my con plan.

When we visited Paris and I sought Monique out, and she informed me our relationship was finished. "I'll still be your friend, Frank, and I hope you'll still help Papa in his business, but I want to settle down and you don't," she said. "I've met another man, a pilot for Air France, and we're pretty serious about our future."

I assured her of my understanding and, in fact, was rather relieved. I also assured her that her father would continue to get "Pan Am business," although that statement was a lie. I was beginning to feel some guilt concerning my dishonest use of Papa Lavalier, and decided to stop using him as a chess piece in my dishonest game.

The girls and I ended our tour of Europe in Copenhagen, where I put them on a plane for Arizona. I delivered them back to the States with roses in their arms and a flowery speech designed to calm any suspicions that might appear in their minds in coming weeks.

I had had a wonderful time, all things considered. If the girls put a lot of gray hairs on my head, they also put a lot of green stuff in my pockets. Something like 300,000 dollars in all.

"Keep your uniforms, keep your ID cards and keep your check receipts (I'd always returned a check receipt when I cashed a check)," I instructed them. "If the company wants the uniforms and IDs back, you'll be contacted. Return to school, because we're not going to hire you on a permanent basis until you graduate, and then you'll be contacted by a company representative."

The girls really heard from Pan Am, as a matter of fact. After three months of a regular flow of photographs, from dozens of European cities and all showing the same eight girls in Pan Am stewardess uniforms, advertising managers of Pan Am started an investigation. Eventually the whole matter ended up in O'Riley's hands and he analyzed it and informed the carrier's officers and also the girls.

I understand all eight of them took it gracefully.

I stayed in Europe for several weeks after I separated with the girls, then returned to the States, where I moved around like a gypsy for several weeks, never staying in one place for more than two or three days. I was becoming nervous and depressed again, and the knowledge that I would probably always be a man on the move, a fox constantly hunted by the hounds, was beginning to press on my conscience, affecting my conscious life.

I practically stopped my check-swindling activities. I was afraid the hounds were very close. Only rarely was I challenged to display my creative criminal talent.

One such time was in a large midwestern city. I was sitting in the airport restaurant after arrival, enjoying lunch, when I became interested in the conversation, an exchange between an elderly man and a very young companion, apparently an employee. I understood from the conversation that the older man was a banker, on his way to a convention in San Francisco, and from the remarks he made to the young man it was clear he expected his bank to make money in his absence. He was obviously proud of his high status, and later when he was checking in I learned his name. Jasper P. Cashman.

That afternoon I did some investigation into Jasper P. Cashman's background, using a local newspaper's library. J. P. Cashman was a famous man in his community. He started as a teller in his bank when it had assets of less than 5 million dollars. He was president now and the bank's assets reached 100 million dollars.

I went to the bank the following day. It was a new large building. Tellers on one side, junior officers across an opposite wall. Senior officers in separate offices. Cashman's offices on the third floor. J. P. Cashman didn't believe in close contact with the employees.

I rented a car, drove to a modest distant city and opened a checking account for 10,000 dollars with a counterfeit cashier's check. Then I returned to Cashman's town and the next day came to his bank. I wasn't really interested in the money involved in my swindle. Cashman's manner had irritated me, and I simply wanted to cheat him.

I was the picture of the rich businessman when I entered the bank. Gray three-piece suit. A leather brief-case, slim and elegant.

Cashman's companion at the airport was one of the junior officers. His desk was neat. His nameplate was new. He obviously was promoted not long ago. I dropped into the chair in front of his desk.

"Yes, sir, can I help you?" he asked, impressed by my dress and manner.

"Yes, you can, as a matter of fact," I said easily. "I'm Robert Leeman from Junction, and I need to cash a check, a rather large one. I have all the proper identification and you can call my bank to verify, but I don't think that'll be necessary. J. P. Cashman knows me, and he'll verify the check. You can call him. No, I'll do it myself, since I need to talk to him anyway."

Before he could react, I picked up his telephone and dialed Cashman's correct number. Cashman's secretary answered.

"Yes, Mr. Cashman, please... He isn't... Oh, yes, he mentioned that last week. Well, listen, would you tell him when he returns that Bob Leeman dropped by, and tell him Jean and I are looking forward to seeing him and Mildred in Junction for the hunt. He'll know what I mean... Yes, thank you."

I replaced the telephone and stood up, grimacing. "Doesn't look like my day," I said sadly. "I really needed the cash. I can't get to Junction and back in time for this deal. Well, good day, sir."

I started to turn and the young officer stopped me. "Uh, how big is the check you wanted to cash, Mr. Leeman?"

"Pretty large," I said. "I need 7,500 dollars. Do you think you can take care of it? I can give you the number of my bank in Junction." Without waiting for a reply, I dropped back into the chair, quickly wrote out a check for 7,500 dollars and handed it to him. As I expected, he didn't call the bank in Junction. He stood up. "Sir, I'll have to

talk to Mr. James, the vice president, to confirm the check, which I'm sure he will. I'll be back in a moment."

He walked into James's office and said (as I later learned) exactly what I'd forced him to say. "Sir, there's a Mr. Leeman here from Junction and he needs to cash this rather large check. He's a personal friend of Mr. Cashman, and he wanted to see Mr. Cashman, but as you know Mr. Cashman's in San Francisco."

"A personal friend of the old man's?"

"Yes, sir, business and social, I understand."

"Cash it. We sure as hell don't want to irritate any of the old man's friends."

A minute later the young officer was handing the phony check to a teller. "Cash this for the gentleman, please. Mr. Leeman, I'm glad I could help you."

But I wasn't pleased with the swindle. In fact, I didn't enjoy it at all. I left town that day and several days later stopped in a remote village to do some reflection. My thoughts were depressing. I was no longer living, I decided, I was surviving. I had got a fortune with my dishonest impersonations, swindles and crimes, but I wasn't enjoying the results of my hard work. I concluded it was time to retire, to go to earth like a fox in a remote and secure place where I could relax and start a new and crime-free life.

I reviewed the places I had been on the map of my mind. I was astonished at the number of places I visited, recalling my trips of the past few years. I had crisscrossed the globe from Singapore to Stockholm, from Tahiti to Trieste, from Baltimore to the Baltics, and to other places I had forgotten the names.

But one place I hadn't forgotten. And its name kept coming into my thoughts as I sought a safe refuge. Montpellier, France.

Montpellier. That was my safe refuge, I finally decided. I have made the decision, and I didn't give it a second thought.

I should have.

CHAPTER NINE

Does This Check Include the Tip?

The vineyards of Languedoc produce more wine than the other three great French wine departments combined. With one or two exceptions, the wine of Languedoc has a taste of a really bad juice. I learned all about wine culture in Montpellier. The first thing I learned was not to drink the local wine.

I was probably the only water drinker in town. However, I didn't go to Montpellier for either the wine or the water. I was there to hide. I had passed through Montpellier, driving from Marseille to Barcelona, during one of my first bad-check trips through Europe. Outside of town I had parked under a huge olive tree and picnicked on cheese, bread, sausages and soft drinks I'd picked up in the city. I felt comfortable, easy, almost happy. As if I were home.

In a sense, I was. This part of southern France was my mother's native land. She had been born here. After the war in Algiers, her parents had returned here with their other children. My grandparents, several uncles and aunts and a set of cousins still lived within an hour's drive of the olive tree.

I had never forgotten that calm, enjoyable stop near Montpellier. And when, at the old age of twenty, I decided to retire from my life as a counterfeit person, I chose Montpellier as my refuge.

Montpellier, in many ways, was ideal for my purpose. It was not a tourist attraction. It was situated far from the Mediterranean, yet close enough to reach it by car. It was large enough so that an American as its resident would not excite curiosity, yet too small to have an international airport or large hotel operators. There were no Hiltons or Sheratons in Montpellier and its tiny airport served only light aircraft. The lack of air service or expensive hotels was an advantage in my favor. There was very little chance of meeting a pilot, a stewardess or a hotel employee who might recognize me.

I presented myself in Montpellier as Robert Monjo, a successful screenwriter from Los Angeles, "successful" in order to explain the large account I opened in one of the local banks. I didn't deposit all the money I took with me to Montpellier because I didn't want to arouse any curiosity about my actual income.

I bought a small cottage, a charming little house with a tiny back yard surrounded by a high fence, where the previous owner had a small garden.

I bought a Renault, one of the most comfortable models but not luxurious enough to attract attention. Within two weeks I felt at home, secure and happy in my new home.

And if God had deprived the Mediterranean Languedoc of good grapes, He rewarded it with the people. They were friendly, courteous and kind, quick to smile and to offer any assistance. The women in my neighborhood were always knocking on my door with gifts of cakes or fresh baked bread. My neighbor, Armand Perigueux, was my favorite. He was a huge man of seventy-five and he still worked in a vineyard, riding to and from work on a bicycle.

He came the first time with two bottles of wine, one red and one white. "Most of our wines do not suit American tastes," he said in his loud, yet kind, voice. "But there are a few good wines in the Languedoc, and these two are among them."

The people of Montpellier drank more wine than any other liquid. A lunch or dinner was not served without wine. I have even seen wine at breakfast. Montpellier was a good place to learn about wines, Armand said. "We have the Wine University of France right here in our city," he said proudly. "You can go there and study."

I never visited the university because I had no taste for wine, although I drank it on social occasions. I was satisfied with the information given by Armand. He was a good teacher. He never gave tests and he never graded me.

It was difficult for me to stay busy. Doing nothing is hard work. I spent a lot of time driving around. I drove to the coast and spent a few days on the beach there. At the end of the first month, I drove to the small village where my grandparents lived and spent three days with them. My grandmother wrote letters regularly to my mother, and she was aware of all the events at home. My mother was well, my sister and brothers were well, too. My father was still trying to win my mother back, and my grandmother found it funny. My mother had apparently told my grandmother that I was "hitchhiking" all around the world, seeking a goal and attempting to decide my future, and I tried to confirm that impression during my visit.

I did not tell my grandparents that I was living in Montpellier. I told them I was on my way to Spain, with the thought in mind of entering one of the Spanish universities. I visited them a second time during my stay in Montpellier. I told them on that occasion that I hadn't found a Spanish college that challenged me and was returning to Italy to look for the university there.

As I became more satisfied with my life in Montpellier, I actually thought of my education. I also started thinking about getting a job or opening some kind of small business, perhaps a stationery store, since I was tired of the lazy, luxurious life I was leading.

I was still considering the idea of registering at the university, and of finding some useful employment, when both issues became doubtful. Four months after settling down in Montpellier, I learned a bitter truth: when the hounds have help, there is no safe place for a fox to hide.

I shopped regularly at a small (by American standards) market near Montpellier. This occasion was one of my scheduled shopping trips. Returning to the counter, I saw four men at the checker's stand with no customers or clerk around. They had guns and pistols. My first thought was that bandits were robbing the store and that the employees and customers were on the floor.

But as I turned to seek cover, one of the men shouted, "Abagnale!"

Three other men in uniform came at me from all sides, all pointing a weapon at me.

"Hands up!"

"Hands on your head!"

"Face down on the floor!"

I had my hands up. I didn't know which of the other commands to follow, but I sure as hell didn't want to be shot. And the officers were holding their weapons in a manner that scared me.

"For God's sake, don't shoot," I shouted. "One of you tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it."

A tall thin man pointed his pistol at me. "Get on the floor, facedown!" he ordered. I did as he instructed. Some hands twisted my arms behind my back and other uncaring hands put steel handcuffs around my wrists.

I was driven directly to the Montpellier police station. No one said a word.

At the station, the strict detective and two other officers got straight to the point, but didn't read out any rights a criminal may have. I don't think a crook has any rights in France.

"My name is Marcel Gaston, of the French police department of criminal investigation!" said the officer. "You are Frank Abagnale, are you not?"

"I'm Robert Monjo," I said in indignant tones. "I'm a writer from California, an American. I'm afraid you gentlemen have made a very serious mistake."

Gaston beat me with a sharp, painful blow. "Most of the mistakes I make, mister, are serious mistakes, but I have not made a mistake in this case. You are Frank Abagnale."

"I am Robert Monjo," I said, searching their faces for a sign of doubt.

"We could beat it out of you, but that isn't necessary," he said. "I have all the time in the world, Abagnale, but I don't intend to waste too much of it on you. We can hold you for a very long time, or at least until we find witnesses to identify you. Until then, unless you choose to cooperate, I am going to place you in the cell for criminals. You can stay there for a week, two weeks, a month, it makes no difference to me. You will have no food and water until you decide to confess. Why don't you just tell us what we

want to know right now? We know who you are. We know what you have done. You will have a lot of inconveniences. I promise you."

I looked at Gaston and knew he meant every word he had spoken.

"I'm Frank Abagnale," I said.

I never really gave them the kind of confession they wanted. I never volunteered any details on any of the crimes I'd committed in France. But if they knew this or that event and presented the details of it, I nodded and said, "That's how it happened, or, "Yes, that was me."

Gaston wrote a document, which was a list of my crimes in France, the circumstances of my arrest, and let me read it. "If that is correct, you will help yourself by signing it," he said.

This document also gave the details how I was caught. An Air France stewardess, visiting relatives in Montpellier, saw me shopping a couple of weeks ago and recognized me. On her return to Paris, she told her captain of her suspicions. The captain called the police. I never learned which Air France stewardess reported on me. No one told me. I hoped it wasn't Monique, but to this day I still don't know the informant's identity. I don't think it was Monique, however.

I was kept six days in Montpellier, where several lawyers offered their services. I selected a middle-aged man whose manners and appearance reminded me of Armand, although he said he didn't believe he could win me my freedom. "I have looked over all the police documents," he commented. "The best we can hope for is a light sentence."

A week after my arrest, to my astonishment, I was removed to Perpignan, a town near the Spanish border, and the day after my arrival there I was brought to trial in a court of a judge, two prosecutors and nine local resident jurors, who had to decide my guilt or innocence.

It wasn't much of a trial, really, it took less than two days. Gaston read a list of my crimes and the evidence he'd gathered to support the accusations. There were many witnesses against me.

I was found guilty. But at that time I thought with joy that my lawyer had lost a battle but won the war. The judge sentenced me to only one year in prison.

I was returned to Perpignan's prison, the "House of Arrest," a dark stone fortress built in the seventeenth century, and only after I stayed a few days there I realized what this light sentence really meant.

I was received by two guards who ordered me to take off all of my clothes and then escorted me, still naked, to a narrow corridor. The guards stopped before one of the metal doors, unlocked and opened it. The door produced a sound reminding that from a horror movie, and the guard pushed me inside the dark cell. I fell forward,

striking my head against the wall of the cell. I had not noticed the two steps leading to the floor. I never actually saw the steps. I was in total darkness. A wet, chilling, frightening darkness. I stood up to search for the light switch and hit my head against the steel ceiling.

There was no light switch. There was no light in the cell. There was, in fact, nothing in the cell but a bucket. No bed, no toilet, no wash basin, nothing. Just the bucket. The cell was not a cell, actually, it was a hole, five feet wide, five feet high and five feet deep, with a ceiling and door of steel and a floor and walls of stone. The ceiling and door were chill to the touch. The walls wept chilly tears constantly. I waited for my eyes to get accustomed to the darkness. No light came into the cell from any source. My eyes did not get accustomed. The eyes do not get accustomed to total darkness.

I fell on the floor, shaking and feeling like I was buried alive. Panic added to my shaking. I tried to calm myself by analyzing my situation. Surely, I told myself, this was not the cell I would occupy during the whole year. Probably I was in here for observation. I left the theory immediately. Anyone observing me in this cell must have X-ray eyes. All right, then, I was given a taste of what could happen to me. Certainly no civilized country would permit such cruel punishment.

France does. Or did.

I was not fed my first day in Perpignan's prison. Several hours later, cold, hungry, embarrassed, frightened and lonely, I lay down on the hard floor and fell asleep. I slept twisted, for I am six feet tall.

The sound of the door woke me up. I sat up, feeling pain caused by my uncomfortable sleeping position. The guard placed something on the steps inside my cell and started to close the door.

"Wait! Wait!" I shouted, "Why am I kept in here? How long will I stay in here?"

"Until you complete your sentence," he said, and shut the door.

I fell back, astonished by the horrible truth. A year? I must live in this rat hole a year? Without light? Without bed? Without clothes? Without toilet? And without God knows what else? It was impossible, I told myself. No man could live in such darkness, under such conditions, for a year. He would die, and his death would be slow and terrible.

I was suddenly scared. I did not know how I could survive a year in this prison. I still have nightmares from my stay in Perpignan's House of Arrest.

I never left the cell. I was not allowed to write letters, and if any of my relatives knew I was jailed at Perpignan and wrote me, I did not receive the mail. My requests to contact my relatives, my lawyer, the Red Cross, or the American consulate were ignored except once.

On that occasion, the guard hit my head with his huge hand. "Don't talk to me," he said. "It is not permitted. Don't talk, don't sing, don't whistle, don't make any sound or you will be beaten."

The menu in Perpignan prison never changed. For breakfast, I was served bread and water. Lunch consisted of a weak chicken soup and bread. Supper was a cup of black coffee and bread. I had no means of telling time and I soon lost track of the days. My weight was 210 pounds when I was received at Perpignan. The prison food did not contain enough calories to maintain me. My body began to feed upon itself, the muscles destroying the stored fats in order to fuel my heart and my circulatory system. Within weeks I was able to connect my fingers around my biceps.

The bucket was my toilet. I was not given any toilet paper, and the bucket was not removed after use. I soon got accustomed to the horrible odour, but after a few days the bucket was full and I had to move around and sleep in my own excrements.

I was not allowed to shave. My hair was soon below my shoulders, and my beard reached my chest.

I had no doubt that many of the men in Perpignan were mad, driven to lunacy by the cruel manner in which they were treated. I was certain after a few weeks that I would lose my own clear mind. I lost the ability to understand what was real and what was unreal, and began to hallucinate. I imagined myself back in the Royal Gardens, surrounded by my lovely "crew," having a delicious dinner in a restaurant, or walking along the golden beaches, my arm around Monique.

In my fantasies, I was anyone I wanted to be, much as I'd been during the five years before my arrest, although I added new roles to my Perpignan impersonations. I was a famous surgeon, operating on the President and saving his life with my medical skills. A great writer, winning the Nobel Prize for literature. A movie director, making an Oscar-winning movie. A mountain guide, saving unlucky climbers trapped on a dangerous mountain. I was worker, clerk, Indian chief, baker, banker and talented thief.

Still, time passed. And one day the door opened, letting the light that was the first light I knew in prison.

"Turn around, face the back of your cell and shut your eyes," a voice ordered. I did as instructed, my heart beating. Was this the day of my release?

"Do not turn around, but open your eyes slowly and let them get accustomed to the light," the voice instructed. "I will leave this open for an hour, then I'll be back."

I slowly opened my eyes and found myself surrounded by a bright, golden light, too bright for my weak eyes. I had to shut them again. Finally I was able to look without pain. Even so, the cell was still dark. An hour later the guard returned, or at least the voice sounded the same.

"Close your eyes again," he instructed. "I am going to turn up the lights further." I did so, and when he instructed me, I opened my eyes slowly and cautiously. I felt scared and sick as I looked around. The walls were wet. The ceiling was wet, too. The floor was covered with excrements and worms. I vomited.

It was perhaps another hour before the guard returned. This time he opened the door. "Come with me," he ordered. I moved from the dirty cell without hesitation, experiencing pains in my neck, shoulders, arms and legs as I straightened up for the first time since my arrival. I could hardly walk. He led me downstairs and into a large room.

"Stand here," he ordered, and disappeared. I turned, inspecting the room, and then stopped as I suddenly saw the most disgusting creature I had ever encountered.

It was a man. It had to be a man, but God in heaven, what manner of man was this? He was tall and thin, his dirty twisted hair and beard reached his waist. He was naked and his dirty body was covered sores and scabs. The nails of his fingers and toes were grown out and curved. I shuddered as I looked at the creature. I shuddered again as I recognized the man.

I was facing myself in a mirror.

I was still horrified at my appearance when the guard returned, with the clothes over his arm and a pair of shoes in his hand.

I recognized the clothes I was wearing when I was received in the prison. "Put these on," said the guard.

"Can't I have shower and shave first, please?" I asked.

"No, put on the clothes," he said, looking at me with disgust. I hurried to put on my clothes, which were now several sizes too large for me.

Almost immediately two gendarmes appeared, one of them carrying chains. He fixed a thick leather belt around my waist while the other attached heavy steel chains around my ankles. They then put handcuffs and a long steel chain around my neck and connected it to the handcuff chain and the chain on my leg. They didn't say a word as they worked on me. One then pointed toward the door and gave me a light blow as his partner led the way through the exit.

They drove me to the railway station.

I did not know where we were going. I had no sense of direction at the moment and I thought it would be useless to ask about my destination from the gendarmes.

Our destination was Paris. I was driven to the jail in Paris, and only there an officer escorted me to a shower, where I washed myself clean of my dirt and odour and then was shaved. I was escorted to a cell, a tiny room in reality, but absolutely luxurious compared to my previous prison hole. But I was unaware of my circumstances. I didn't know whether I would be brought to trial again in Paris,

whether I would complete my term here or be handed over to some other government. All my requests were ignored.

I didn't stay in Paris, however. The following morning I was taken from my cell and again put in chains like a wild animal. The gendarmes placed me in a windowed van, my feet attached by a chain to the floor, and started on a route that I soon recognized. The car was driving to Orly Airport.

At the airport I was taken from the van and escorted through the terminal to the Scandinavian Airlines Service counter. My progress through the terminal attracted a maximum of attention and people even left cafes and bars to stare at me as I passed, my chains making metal sounds. The passengers looked at me in horror and shock as we passed among them, some of them stepped back in disgust as they detected my heavy odour.

I recognized one clerk behind the counter. She'd once cashed a phony check for me. I couldn't now remember the amount. If she recognized me, she didn't show it. However, the man she'd cashed a check then had been a strong two-hundred-pounder, tanned and healthy. The chained prisoner before her now was a sick, pale-faced skeleton of a man.

"Look, it won't hurt you to tell me what's going on," I pleaded.

"We are waiting for the Swedish police," one said. "Now, shut up. Don't speak to us again."

He was suddenly faced by a small pretty young woman with long blond hair and brilliant blue eyes, smartly dressed in a blue suit. She carried a thin leather case under one arm. Behind her was a younger girl in a similar dress also with a case.

"Is this Frank Abagnale?" the woman asked the gendarme on my left. He stepped in front of me, raising up his hand.

"That is none of your business," he protested. "Anyway, he is not allowed visitors. If this man is a friend of yours, you will not be allowed to talk to him."

The blue eyes flashed. "I will talk to him, Officer, and you will take those chains off him, at once!" Her tone was demanding. Then she smiled at me and the eyes were warm and kind.

"You are Frank Abagnale, aren't you?" she asked in perfect English. "May I call you Frank?"

CHAPTER TEN

Send Out an APB - Frank Abagnale Has Escaped!

I stood staring at the lovely angel who demanded to release me from my chains and who seemed determined to take me from my tormentors.

She reached out a slender hand and placed it on my arm. "I am Inspector Jan Lundstrom of the Swedish police, the national police force," she said, and pointed at the pretty girl behind her. "This is my assistant, Inspector Kersten Berglund, and we are here to escort you back to Sweden, where, as I am sure you are aware, you face a criminal proceeding."

As she talked, she took out a small leather folder from her pocket and opened it to display to the French officers her credentials and a small gold badge.

The gendarme, puzzled, looked at his partner. "He is her prisoner," he said with a shrug. "Take off the chains."

The crowd applauded, an ovation accompanied by a whistling. Inspector Lundstrom drew me aside.

"I wish to make some things perfectly clear, Frank," she said. "We do not normally use handcuffs in Sweden. I never carry them myself. But our flight makes a stop in Denmark. We will be on the ground only an hour in Denmark, Frank. But I have a responsibility to the French Government, to the Danish Government and to my own government to see that you are brought to Sweden in custody, that you do not escape. Now, I can assure you that you will find Swedish jails and prisons far different from French prisons. We like to think our prisoners are treated humanely.

"But let me tell you this, Frank. I am armed. Kersten is armed. If you try to run, if you make an attempt to escape, we will have to shoot you. And if we shoot you, Frank, we will kill you. Do you understand?"

The words were spoken calmly, much in the manner, in fact, of giving directions to a stranger, cooperative but not really friendly. She opened the large purse and showed a pistol. I looked at Inspector Berglund. She smiled like an angel and pointed at her own purse.

"Yes, I understand," I said.

Inspector Lundstrom turned to the clerk behind the ticket counter. "We're ready," she said.

Except for the clothing I was wearing, we looked like just three more passengers. And from the lack of interest in my appearance, I was probably considered as just another hippie. We had a longer delay in Denmark than was expected, two hours. The two young officers escorted me to one of the terminal's restaurants and ordered a lunch

for the three of us. Before we boarded the plane again, they bought me several candy bars and some English-language magazines.

During the trip they treated me as if I were a friend rather than a prisoner. They insisted I call them by their given names. They talked with me as friends, asking about my family, my likes, my dislikes and other usual subjects. They didn't mention my criminal career, only asked about my horrible treatment in Perpignan prison. I was surprised to learn I had served only six months in that hell hole. I had lost all track of time.

The plane landed in Malmo, Sweden.

Jan and Kersten led the way to a police car, a Swedish black-and-white, parked in the terminal car park, a uniformed officer near it. He helped load our luggage - the girls' luggage, really, since I had none, and then drove us to the police station in the village of Klippan, a short distance from Malmo.

I was intrigued by the Klippan police station. It seemed more like an old inn than a police office. A smiling sergeant of police greeted us, Jan and Kersten in Swedish, me in only slightly accented English. He shook my hand as if he were greeting a guest. "I was expecting you, Mr. Abagnale. I have all your papers here."

"Sergeant, Frank needs a doctor," said Jan in English. "He is very ill, I'm afraid, and needs medical attention immediately."

It was nearly 9 p.m., but the sergeant nodded. "At once, Inspector Lundstrom," he said and turned to me. "Follow me, please."

I followed him in astonishment. If this was the treatment of criminals in Sweden, how did they treat honest folk?

I was shocked when I stepped inside. This was no cell, it was an apartment, a huge room with a great window overlooking the village, a large bed and a separate bathroom with both a bathtub and a shower. Pictures of gallant scenes from Sweden's past decorated the walls, and tasteful drapes, drawn at the moment, allowed privacy from outside passers-by.

"I hope you will be well soon," said the sergeant in his accented English before closing the door.

"Thank you," I replied. I didn't know what else to say, although I wanted to say more.

After his departure, I inspected the room closely. The windows were thick glass and could not be opened and the door also could not be opened from the inside, but no matter. I had no thoughts of escape from this prison.

I didn't get to sleep in the bed that night. Within minutes the door opened again and Jan came with a pleasant and very efficient doctor. He examined me carefully.

"This man is suffering from severe malnutrition and vitamin deficiency, but worst of all, he has, in my opinion, double pneumonia," he said. "I suggest you call an ambulance, Inspector."

"Yes, Doctor," said Jan and ran from the room.

Within thirty minutes I was taken to a private room in a small, clean and efficient hospital. I was there a month, recovering, a uniformed officer outside my door at all times but seeming more a companion than a guard.

Each day, either Jan or Kersten, visited me, and each time they brought me something, flowers, candy, a magazine or some other little gift.

I was returned to my "cell" at the end of the month, before lunch, and at noon the sergeant brought me a menu. "We do not have a kitchen," he apologized. "You may order what you wish from this, and we will bring it from the cafe. It is very good food, I assure you."

It certainly was. Within a month my weight was back to two hundred pounds.

The day following my release from the hospital, Jan came and informed me in a very official manner, "The law says you have the right to a lawyer, and your lawyer must be present at all times during your interrogation. Since you have no funds to hire a lawyer, the government of Sweden has appointed you a lawyer. Her name is Elsa Kristiansson and she will meet with you later today."

Mrs. Kristiansson was a tall, calm and courteous woman of about forty, I judged. Together with Jan she started immediately to question me about my criminal activities in Sweden.

I avoided answering their questions directly during the first two interrogative sessions. Either I refused to answer or I replied "I don't remember" or "I can't say."

On the third day Jan became irritated. "Frank! Frank!" she exclaimed. "Why are you so defensive? You're here, you're going to go to trial, and it would be much better for you if you are honest with us. We know who you are and we know what you've done, and you know we have the evidence. Why don't you want to talk?"

"Because I don't want to go to prison for twenty years, even if it is a nice prison like this one," I replied.

Their reaction was totally unexpected. They burst into laughter, the loud, tear-producing laughter. I sat looking at them in surprise.

Jan calmed herself somewhat, but still shaking with delight, she looked at me. "Twenty years?" she asked.

"Or five years, or ten years, or whatever," I replied defensively, irritated at their attitude.

"Five years? Ten years?" Jan exclaimed. "Frank, the maximum punishment for your crime is one year, and I will be very surprised if you receive that much time, since you are a first offender. Frank, killers and bank robbers rarely receive over ten years in this country. What you did is a very serious crime, but we consider a year in prison a very serious punishment, and I assure you that is the maximum sentence you face."

I gave her a complete confession, detailing what I could recall of my transactions in Sweden. A week later I was brought to trial in Malmo before a jury of eight men and women who had to determine both my guilt and my punishment, because my confession didn't raise any question of innocence.

Yet I almost won the case. Or Mrs. Kristiansson did. She surprised me by challenging the whole proceedings. The accusation against me was "serious fraud by check," she told the judge.

"I would point out to the court that the instruments introduced here today are not checks, as defined by Swedish law," she argued. "They are instruments he created himself. They never were checks. They are not checks at this time. Under Swedish law, Your Honor, these instruments could never be checks, since they are counterfeits. Under the law, Your Honor, my client has not really forged any checks, since these instruments are not checks, but simply creations of his own, and therefore the accusations against him should be dismissed."

The accusations weren't dismissed. But they were reduced to a lesser crime, the equivalent of obtaining money by fraud, and the jury sentenced me to six months in prison. I considered it a victory and sent my enthusiastic thanks to Mrs. Kristiansson, who was also pleased with the sentence.

I was returned to my cell in the Klippan jail, and the next day Jan appeared to congratulate me. However, she also had bad news. I was transferred from my Klippan comfortable and home-like apartment to the state prison in Malmo.

"You will find it very different from the prisons in France. In fact it is very different from any of your American prisons," Jan assured me.

My bad expectations disappeared when I was delivered there. There was nothing of a prison atmosphere about the place - no fences, no guard towers, no electronic gates or doors. It was, in fact, a completely open place similar to that in Klippan.

The prison rules were relaxed with small limitations. I could wear my own clothes, and since I had only one set, I was escorted to a clothing store in the city where I supplied myself with two changes of clothes. I was given freedom to write and receive letters or other mail, and my mail was not examined. Since there were only one hundred prisoners, and it was not economical to have a kitchen, food was brought to prisoners from outside restaurants and the prisoner prepared his own menu to his taste.

The prisoners had the freedom inside the building between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m., and they could receive visitors between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. daily. They were locked into their rooms at 10 p.m.

Swedish prisons actually attempt to improve a criminal. I was told I could, during my term, either attend classes at the university or work in a parachute factory situated on the prison grounds. Or I could simply serve my time. If I attended classes, the Swedish Government would pay for my education.

Escape could be easy, but it never entered my mind. I loved it at Malmo prison.

The six months passed fast, too fast. During the fourth month, Mrs. Kristiansson appeared with alarming news. The governments of Italy, Spain, Turkey, Germany, England, Switzerland, Greece, Denmark, Norway, Egypt, Lebanon and Cyprus, in that order, had all made formal requests to extradite me. I must be handed over to Italian authorities when I complete my term, and Italy would determine which country would get me after I do my time in Italian jail.

We started a campaign to prevent my extradition to Italy. I bombarded the judge, the Minister of Justice and even the King himself with petitions, asking to allow me to stay in Sweden after my release, or at the worst, to deport me to my native United States. I pointed out that no matter where I went, if I wasn't given refuge in Sweden, I would be punished again and again for the same crime, and I could be handed from prison to prison for the rest of my life.

All of my petitions were rejected. It seemed I couldn't avoid extradition to Italy.

The night before Italian authorities were going to take me into custody, I lay in my bed, unable to sleep and thinking over plans for escape. I didn't feel I could survive any prison term in Italy.

Shortly before midnight, a guard appeared. "Get dressed, Frank, and pack all your things," he instructed me. "There're some people here to speak to you."

He escorted me to a police car. A uniformed officer in the back seat opened the door and gestured me to get in beside him. "The judge wants to see you," he said.

They drove me to the judge's home. The judge's wife led me to his study, "Sit down, Mr. Abagnale," she said pleasantly. "I will bring you some tea, and the judge will be with you shortly." She spoke perfect English.

The judge, when he appeared a few minutes later, also had perfect English. He sat down opposite me after greeting me and then looked at me in silence for a few minutes. I said nothing, although I wanted to ask a dozen or more questions.

Finally the judge started speaking, in a soft, careful manner. "Young man, I've had you and the background and your case on my mind for the past several days," he said. "You are a bright young man, Mr. Abagnale, and I think you could be very useful

to society, not only in your own country, if you had chosen a different career. I regret that you have made the mistakes that you have made."

He paused.

"Yes, sir," I said, hopeful that I was here for more than a lecture.

"We are both aware, young man, that if you are returned to Italy tomorrow, you might face a prison sentence of up to twenty years," the judge continued. "I have some knowledge of Italian prisons, Mr. Abagnale. They are very much like French prisons. And when you have served your sentence, you will be handed over to Spain, I understand. As you pointed out in your petition, young man, you could spend the rest of your life in European prisons."

"I know, sir," I said, my hopes started to disappear. "I would like to stay here, but I understand I cannot."

He rose and began to walk around the study. "What if you had a chance to start your life again, Mr. Abagnale?" he asked. "Do you think you would choose a different life?"

"Yes, sir, if I had the chance," I replied.

"Do you think you've learned your lesson, as the teachers say?" he pressed.

"Yes, sir, I really have," I said, my hopes rising again.

He sat down again and looked at me, finally nodding. "I did something tonight, Mr. Abagnale, that surprised even myself," he said. "Tonight, young man, I called my friend in the American Embassy and made a request that is against your rights under Swedish law. I asked him to put an end to the validity to your U.S. passport, Mr. Abagnale. And he did."

I stared at him, and from his grin I knew my astonishment was obvious. I was really puzzled at his action, but not for long.

"You are now an unwelcome foreigner in Sweden, Mr. Abagnale," the judge said, smiling. "And I can legally order your deportation to the United States, despite any extradition requests. In a few minutes, Mr. Abagnale, I am going to order the officers outside to take you to the airport and place you on a plane for New York City. All the arrangements are made."

"Of course, you should know that police of your own country will be waiting to arrest you when you leave the aircraft. You are a wanted criminal in your own country, too, sir. The FBI is informed of your flight number and the time of your arrival."

"I'm sure you will be taken to court in your own country. But at least, young man, you will be among your own people and I'm sure your family will be present to support you and to visit you in prison, if you are sentenced to prison term. However, in case you aren't aware, once you have served your term in America, none of these other

countries can extradite you. The law in the United States doesn't permit a foreign nation to extradite you from the land of your birth."

I wanted to hug and kiss him. Instead I shook his hand and promised him that I would make something to improve my future. It was a promise I broke within eighteen hours.

The officers drove me to the airport, where, to my delight, there was Jan. She had a large envelope containing my passport, my other papers and the money I had earned in the prison parachute factory. She gave me a 20 dollars bill for pocket money before handing over the envelope to the pilot. "This man is being deported," she told the plane commander. "Officers of the United States will meet the plane in New York and will take him into custody. You will hand over this envelope to them."

She turned to me and took my hand. "Good-bye, Frank, and good luck. I hope your future will be a happy one," she said seriously.

I kissed her, to the astonishment of the pilot and a watching stewardess. It was a gesture of sincere admiration. "I will never forget you," I said. And I never have. Jan Lundstrom will always be a fine and kind person, a lovely and helpful friend, in my thoughts.

It was a nonstop flight to New York. My seat was near the cockpit, where the crew could keep an eye on me, but I was treated as just another passenger and I had the freedom of the passenger sections during the flight.

I do not know when I began thinking of escaping, or why I felt I need to deceive the judge's trust in me. Perhaps it was when I started thinking of my short visit to the Boston jail. Certainly it was luxurious compared to Perpignan's prison, but I didn't want to do time in American prisons. My six months in the Klippan jail had spoiled me.

From past flight experiences, I knew the jet would land on Kennedy's Runway and that it would require about ten minutes for the aircraft to drive to the terminal.

Ten minutes before landing, I rose and went to one of the back toilets and locked myself inside. I reached down and felt for the handles I knew were located at the base of the toilet, pulled them out, twisted them and lifted out the whole toilet instrument, to open the two-foot-hatch cover used to service the aircraft on the ground.

I waited. The plane touched the ground. At the end of the runway, I knew, the pilot would come to almost a complete stop when he turned the jet to move to the terminal.

When I thought he was almost at that point, I opened the hatch and twisted through, hanging from the hatch by my fingers, my body only ten feet above the runway. I knew when I opened the hatch that an alarm button would sound in the cockpit, but I also knew from past flights that the hatch was often open slightly by the

impact of landing and that the pilot, since he was already on the ground, usually just shut off the alarm signal.

We had landed at night. When the huge jet slowed almost to a stop, I released my hands and ran across the runway in the darkness. Later I learned that the method of my escape was unknown until an angry O'Riley and other FBI agents searched the plane and found the lifted-out toilet.

I didn't go home. I felt both my mother's apartment and my father's home would be under police observation, but I called Mom and then Dad. It was the first time in more than five years that I had heard their voices, and in each case, both Mom and I and Dad and I ended up crying with tears. They both pleaded to come to one of their homes and give myself to officers but I refused. Although I felt ashamed of myself for breaking my promise to the Malmo judge, I felt I'd had enough of prison life.

I caught the train to Montreal because I had 20,000 dollars in a Montreal safe-deposit box. It was my intention to pick up the money and take the soonest flight to Brazil, where I intended to go to earth. You pick up some interesting information in prison, and there I had learned that Brazil and the United States had no extradition agreement. Since I hadn't committed any crimes in Brazil, I felt I would be safe there and that Brazilian authorities would refuse extradition even if I were caught in that country.

I picked up the money but I never made the flight. I was waiting at the Montreal airport to buy a ticket when someone touched me on the shoulder. I turned to face a tall, muscular man with pleasant features, in the uniform of the Royal Canadian Police.

"Frank Abagnale, I am Constable James Hastings, and you are under arrest," said the Mountie with a friendly smile.

The next day I was driven to the border and handed over to the U.S. police officers, who passed me over to FBI agents, who took me to New York City and placed me in the federal detention center. I was kept there under a 250,000 dollars bond waiting for a prosecutor's decision as to where to bring me to trial. Two months later the U.S. attorney in the Northern District of Georgia won, and I was transferred to the Fulton County Jail, Georgia to wait for my trial.

The jail was a hole, a real rat hole. "It's bad news, man," said another prisoner I met in the day room of our dirty cellblock. "The only proper place in the jail is the hospital, and you have to be dying to get in there."

The only proper thing in the day room was a pay telephone. I dialed the desk sergeant. "This is Dr. John Petsky," I said in confident tones. "You have a patient of mine as a prisoner, one Frank Abagnale. Mr. Abagnale is a diabetic, and I would appreciate it, Sergeant, if you could transfer him to your medical ward where I can visit him and provide proper treatment."

Within thirty minutes a guard appeared and escorted me to the hospital ward, the other prisoners who had heard my conversation were grinning in admiration.

A week later I was transferred to the Federal Detention Center in Atlanta to face trial. It was from this prison that I carried out what was later called one of the most astonishing escapes in the prison history. At least I thought it was funny, and I'm still amused by the event, although there're several others who still hold an opposite view.

Actually, my escape wasn't so much an escape, it was a cooperative action, which became possible because of the time and the circumstances. I was placed in the detention center during a period when U.S. prisons were strictly observed by civil rights groups and various committees and investigated by Justice Department agents. Prison inspectors were working undercover and produced dislike and hostility of prison administrators and guards.

I was brought into this atmosphere under exactly the right circumstances. The officer who delivered me to the detention center in Atlanta had no official papers for me, but had strong suspicions about my undercover mission.

The prison administrator accepted custody of me reluctantly. He really had no choice.

"Another damned prison inspector, eh?" said the guard who escorted me to my cell.

"Not me, I'm here waiting for trial," I replied truthfully.

"Sure you are," he laughed, shutting the cell door. "You bastards think you're clever, don't you? You people got two of our guys fired last month. We've learned how to detect you."

So, if the guards here wanted me to be a prison inspector, that's what I'd be. I contacted a still loyal girl friend in Atlanta. The prison rules were not very strict, and once a week we were allowed to use the telephone in privacy. I got her on the phone when it was my turn.

"Look, I know what it usually takes to get out of here," I told her. "See what you have to do to get in, will you?"

Her name was Jean Sebring, and she didn't have to do much to get in to see me. She simply identified herself as my girl friend and she was allowed to visit me. We met across a table in one of the large visiting rooms. We were separated by a three-foot-high glass. The guards were in the room, but could not hear our conversations. "If you want to give him something, hold it up and we'll nod if it's permitted," one guard instructed her.

I had invented a plan before Jean arrived. It might prove to be simply an intellectual game, I knew, but I thought it was worth a try. However, I first had to persuade Jean to help me, for outside assistance was very important for my scheme.

She was not difficult to persuade. "Sure, why not?" she agreed, smiling. "I think it would be funny as hell if you get out of here."

"Have you met an FBI agent named Sean O'Riley or talked to him?" I asked.

She nodded. "In fact, he gave me one of his cards when he came around asking about you," she said.

"Great!" I exclaimed enthusiastically. "I think we're in business, baby."

We really were. That week, Jean, pretending to be a freelance magazine writer, went to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C., and arranged an interview with Inspector C. W. Dunlap, on fire safety equipment in federal detention centers. She carried it out beautifully, but after all Jean is not only talented, she is also smart and lovely, a woman to whom any man would like to talk.

She turned at the door as she left. "Oh, may I have one of your cards, Inspector, in case some other question comes to mind and I have to call you?" she asked.

Dunlap handed over his card at once.

She gave me the details of her success with laugh during her next visit, then she held up Dunlap's card, and when the guard nodded, she passed it over the barrier to me.

Her visits only proved the guards' belief that I was a Bureau of Prisons undercover agent. "Who is she, your secretary, or is she a prison inspector, too?" one guard asked me as he returned me to my cell.

"That's the girl I'm going to marry," I replied cheerfully.

Jean visited a stationery print shop that week. "My father just moved into a new apartment and has a new telephone number," she told the printer. "I want to present him with five hundred new personal cards as a house-warming gift. I want them to look exactly like this, but with his new home telephone number and his new office number." She gave the printer O'Riley's card.

O'Riley's new telephone numbers were the numbers of pay telephones in an Atlanta shopping mall.

The printer had Jean's order ready in three days. She passed me one of the cards on her next visit, and we talked over the details of our plans.

"Okay, we'll try it tomorrow night," I said. "Let's hope no one wants to use those phones around 9 p.m."

Shortly before 9 p.m. the following day, I spoke to the cellblock guard. "Listen, Rick, I need to see the lieutenant on duty. You were right about me. I am a prison inspector. Here's my card." I handed him Dunlap's card, which had only his Washington office number. If anyone decided to call the Bureau of Prisons, they'd be told the offices were closed.

Rick scanned the card and laughed. "By God, we knew we were right about you," he commented. "Come on." He led me to Lieutenant Combs' office.

The lieutenant was also pleased to learn about my role, as he also had suspected, that I was a prison inspector. "We knew it all the time," he said friendly, throwing Dunlap's card on his desk after looking at it.

I grinned. "Well, it will all come clear on Tuesday anyway," I said. "And I'll tell you now that you people don't have anything to worry about. You'll like my report."

I saw a pleased look in Combs' face and I continued with my gamble. "But right now I've got some necessary business to take care of," I said. "I need to contact this FBI agent. Can you get him on the phone for me? He'll still be at his office, I'm sure." I handed over the card with O'Riley's name, his position with the FBI and the two phony telephone numbers.

The lieutenant didn't hesitate. He picked up his telephone and dialed the "office" number. "I've read about this guy O'Riley," he remarked as he dialed. The "office" phone started ringing. Jean answered on the second ring. "Good evening, Federal Bureau of Investigation. May I help you?"

"Yes, is Inspector O'Riley in?" he said. "This is Lieutenant Combs at the detention center. We've got a man here who wants to talk to him."

He didn't even wait for "O'Riley" to answer. He just passed the phone to me. "She said she'll get him for you," Combs told me.

I waited a few seconds and then started my part in the gamble game. "Yes, Inspector O'Riley? My name is Dunlap, C. W. Dunlap, with the Bureau of Prisons. If you've got your list, my code number is 16295-A... Yes, that's right... I'm here now, but I've told these people who I am... I had to... Yes..."

"Listen, Inspector O'Riley, I've got some information on that Philly case you're working, and I need to get it to you tonight... No, sir, I can't give it to you over the telephone... it's too private... I have to see you, and I have to see you within the hour... Time is important... Oh, you are... No, it'll only take ten minutes. ... Wait a minute, let me talk to the lieutenant, I'm sure he'll agree."

I looked at Combs. "Boy, he's working undercover on something and doesn't want to come inside," I told Combs. "If he parks out front, can I go out and talk to him in his car for about ten minutes?"

Combs shrugged. "Sure, we'll let you meet O'Riley. Hell, spend an hour with him, if you like."

I went back to the telephone. "O'Riley, it's okay... Yeah, out front... a red-over-white Buick... Got it... No, no problem. These guys are okay. I really don't know why you're so damned cautious. They're on our team, too, you know."

Rick brought me a cup of coffee and stood by the window while I drank it and chatted with Combs. "Here's your Buick," Rick said fifteen minutes later. Combs rose and picked up a large ring of keys. "Come on," he said. "I'll let you out myself."

There was an elevator, used by guards only, behind his office. We rode it down and he escorted me past the guard and unlocked the doors. I walked through as the guard watched me curiously but without comment, and went to the parked car. Jean was behind the wheel, her hair hidden under a man's hat and wearing a man's coat.

She laughed as I got in beside her. "We did it!" she exclaimed.

I smiled. "See how fast you can get the hell away from here," I said, grinning with absolute joy. I kissed her good-bye when she drove me through Atlanta to the bus station. Jean went home, packed and moved to Montana. She was never connected with this incident.

It was a very embarrassing situation for the prison officials.

I knew I would be the subject of a hot hunt, and I decided again to move to Brazil, but I knew I needed to wait until the hunt for me cooled. For the next few days, I was certain, all points of departure from the United States would be under observation.

My escape was on the front page of New York newspapers. "Frank Abagnale, known to police all over the world as the Skywayman and who once escaped through an airline toilet, is free again..." the story started.

I didn't have any money in New York, but Jean had given me enough to live on until the hunt for me died down. I holed up in New York and, two weeks later, took the train to Washington, D.C., where I rented a car and checked into a motel.

I went to Washington because I had several secret deposits in banks in Virginia, and Washington seemed to offer a safe refuge, with its huge population. I didn't think I might attract any attention there at all.

I was wrong. An hour after I checked into my room, I looked out of the window through the drapes and saw several police officers running to take up positions around this section of the motel. I learned that the registration clerk, a former airline stewardess, had recognized me immediately and had telephoned the police.

Only one thing was in my favor, and I didn't know it at the moment. O'Riley, when he was informed that I was detected, had told the officers not to enter the motel until he arrived. O'Riley wanted to arrest me himself.

But at the moment I was in panic. It was late at night, but both the front and back of this section of the motel were well lighted. I didn't think I could make it to the safety of the darkness beyond the lighted parking areas.

But I knew that I had to try. I put on my coat and went out the back door. I turned round the corner of the building trying to keep a natural walk. I took only a few steps, however, when two officers appeared. Both pointed pistols at me.

"Freeze, mister, police!" one shouted in a command like in a television police drama.

I didn't freeze. I kept walking, straight at their guns, taking out my wallet as I walked. "Davis, FBI," I said, surprised at my own coolness and the confidence of my voice. "Is O'Riley here yet?"

The pistols were down. "I don't know, sir," said the one. "If he is, he's around front."

"All right," I said. "You people keep this area covered. I'll check and see if O'Riley is here yet."

They stood aside as I passed them. I didn't look back. I walked on into the darkness beyond the parking lot.

Epilogue

Frank Abagnale, alias Frank Williams, alias Robert Conrad, Frank Adams, and Robert Monjo, was one of the most hunted con men, fraudulent check writers, master forgers in history and the world's greatest impostor. Fake airline pilot, assistant state attorney, pediatrician, college professor, FBI agent, Abagnale was known by the police of twenty-six foreign countries and all fifty states as "The Skywayman."

Even the cleverest fox can not escape from the hounds forever, especially if the hunt is constant, and Frank Abagnale was constantly hunted by very angry hounds of the law. Insult one policeman and you have insulted all policemen. Frank Abagnale, for years, had insulted and embarrassed police everywhere regularly. And so police everywhere sought him day and night, without rest.

Less than a month after Abagnale avoided arrest in Washington, D.C., two New York City policemen detected him and gave him into custody of FBI agents.

Within weeks, Abagnale was accused of forgery, passing worthless checks, swindling, using the fraud mails, counterfeiting and similar crimes, maintained by authorities in all fifty states. Although the cleverness and intelligence Abagnale had showed during his criminal career was obvious, he had been too open to the public. A lot of witnesses were able to identify Abagnale in one or the other of his roles and accuse him of one or the other of his illegal actions.

In April 1971, Frank Abagnale appeared before a federal judge and pleaded guilty in "all crimes, known and unknown," that he had committed in the continental United States and was sentenced to ten years on each of seven counts of fraud, the terms to run at the same time, and to two years on one count of escape, the term to be served after the main term.

Abagnale was ordered to serve his twelve years in the Federal Prison in Petersburg, Virginia, where he served four years of his term, working as a clerk in one of the prison factories. Three times during that period, Abagnale applied for parole and each time was rejected. "If we do consider you for parole in the future, to what city would you like to be paroled?" Abagnale was asked at one point during his third appearance.

"I don't know," Abagnale confessed. "I would not like it to be New York, since I feel that would be an unhealthy place for me, because of past events and circumstances. I would leave it to the parole authorities' decision as to where I should be paroled."

Shortly after that, he was paroled to Houston, Texas, with orders to report to a U.S. parole officer there within seventy-two hours of his arrival and, if possible, to find employment within the same period of time.

Frank Abagnale quickly learned, as do most freed prisoners, that they can also suffer from a post-prison punishment. The employed ex-prisoner is the first to lose his job during economic difficulties. Too often, the very fact that he is an ex-prisoner is the reason for firing.

Abagnale's first job was as a waiter, cook and managerial trainee in a pizza restaurant operated by a fast-food chain. He did not inform his employer about his criminal background when he applied for the job because he wasn't asked. The job was dull and unexciting. Abagnale was fired after six months when company officials checked more closely his background in preparation for appointing him a manager of one of the chain's shops, learned he was a federal prison parolee. Abagnale within a week found employment as a grocery salesman with a supermarket chain, but again didn't tell his employer that he was an ex-prisoner. After nine months, Abagnale was promoted to night manager of one of the firm's stores and top management officials began to pay personal attention to the young man who seemed so dedicated to company affairs. Abagnale's career as a grocery guru, however, ended after the disclosure of his bright past and he again was fired.

This pattern became too familiar to Abagnale in the following months, and he began to contemplate a return to his former illegal lifestyle, as do so many ex-prisoners frustrated by similar situations.

Abagnale might have returned to his criminal career, but he didn't for one reason. He took a serious and deep look at himself, his situation and what the future might or might not offer him.

"I was working as a movie projectionist at the time," Abagnale recalls today. "I was making good money, but there I was, five nights a week, sitting in this small room, with nothing to do, really, except watching the same movie over and over again. I thought to myself that I was smarter than that, that I was ignoring and wasting real talents that I had."

"I think I have as much knowledge as any man alive concerning the methods of forgery, check swindling, counterfeiting and similar crimes," Abagnale told the parole officer. "I have often felt since I was released from prison that if I used this knowledge into the right direction, I think I could help some people very much. For example, every time I go to the store and write a check, I see two or three mistakes made by the clerk or cashier, mistakes that a check swindler would use in his favor. I have concluded that it is simply a lack of training, and I know I can teach people who handle checks or cash vouchers how to protect themselves against fraud and theft."

Abagnale addressed a bank director, told him what he had in mind and described his background as a master check swindler of banks. "At the moment I have no slide presentations or anything," said Abagnale. "But I'd like to give a lecture to your employees for one hour after closing. If you think my lecture is worthless, you owe me nothing. If you think it is useful, you pay me 50 dollars and make a couple of calls to

friends you have in other banks to tell them what you think about my talk and what I'm doing."

His first appearance as a "white-collar crime specialist" led to another appearance at a different bank, and then to another and yet another. Within months Abagnale was in great demand by banks, hotels, airlines and other businesses.

Today, three years later, Frank Abagnale is one of the nation's most popular crime authorities, with offices in both Houston and Denver, a highly-trained staff, and profits reaching 3 million dollars. He still leads a life on the fly, constantly crisscrossing the country to present seminars, give lectures or to appear on various television shows. Frank Abagnale leads a very satisfying life.

More importantly, he now realizes why he first started his criminal voyage and why it is over now.

"If I did not do what I do today - if I had stayed a pizza cook, a grocery manager or a movie projectionist - I might be back in prison today," Abagnale thinks. "Why? Because there's no glamour, no excitement, no adventure and nothing to satisfy my ego in those jobs.

"What I do today, on the other hand, satisfies all my needs. I face thousands of people, and I know they're listening to what I say. That's an ego trip. I appear on dozens of television programs every year. To me, that's a glamorous life. It's an adventure life, because I'm constantly challenged by white collar criminals who invent new methods to fool clients.

"Actually, I haven't changed. All the needs that made me a criminal are still there. I have simply found a legal way to satisfy those needs. I'm still a con artist. I'm just in a positive con business today, as opposed to the negative con I used in the past. I have simply changed the direction of the talents I've always had. Today, if I walked into a crowded room and wanted to impress the people there, I could impress them more by saying, 'I'm Frank Abagnale, the impostor,' than if I were the old Frank Abagnale, a fake pilot, a fake doctor or whatever."

- THE END -

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