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This image depicts a BOAC Super VC10 Type 1151 G-ASGA on final approach for landing. Frank Abagnale was flying in this type of plane as he returned from a Swedish prison to face American justice. Not wanting to risk more time in prison, Abagnale—who knew about a potential escape mechanism on the VC10—planned what he would do just before the transatlantic flight landed. Image online, courtesy aerofligh.co.uk website, via BAE Systems.

Agonizing over what would happen to the young American if he were released to the Italian police, a Swedish judge made a decision that would help Frank Abagnale turn his life around.

Tonight, young man, I called a friend of mine in the American Embassy and made a request that violates your rights under Swedish law. I asked him to revoke your U.S. passport, Mr. Abagnale. And he did.

Shocked, the young man on his way to the Italian justice system couldn't figure out what was happening:

You are now an unwelcome alien in Sweden, Mr. Abagnale...And I can legally order your deportation to the United States, regardless of any extradition requests pending. 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 have been made. (Catch Me, pages 262-263)

The judge explained that FBI agents would pick up the young prisoner at Kennedy Airport. Abagnale would, undoubtedly, spend time in the American prison system but would never be extradited to a foreign country to atone for his crimes. U.S. law prohibits such actions.

Onboard the VC-10 to New York, Frank traveled without police supervision. Sitting near the front of the plane, he was supervised by the crew. But breaking the promise he had just made to a judge who used his power to help him, Abagnale planned his escape. He didn't want to meet Joe Shea or any other FBI agent when he landed in New York.

From a conversation he'd had with a BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) pilot, Frank was very familiar with the design of the British VC-10. The plane would touch down in New York at night. Ten minutes before landing, while the flight attendants were distracted with other duties, Abagnale used the lavatory. He lifted out the self-contained toilet and saw what he knew would be there: an escape mechanism.

I waited. The plane touched down with a jolt and then slowed as the pilot reversed his engines and used his flaps as brakes. At the end of the runway, I knew, he would come to almost a complete stop as he turned the jet onto the taxi strip leading to the terminal. When I judged he was almost at that point, I squeezed down into the toilet compartment, opened the hatch and wriggled through, hanging from the hatch combing by my fingers, dangling ten feet above the tarmac. I knew when I opened the hatch that an alarm beeper would sound in the cockpit, but I also knew from past flights that the hatch was often jarred open slightly by the impact of landing and that the pilot, since he was already on the ground, usually just shut off the beeper as the hatch being ajar posed no hazard. (Catch Me, page 265)

Frank Abagnale's years of posing as a Pan American pilot had served him well. Dropping down to the runway

(see pages 265-266), he ran to freedom.
Or so he thought.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-DARING-ESCAPE-Catch-Me-If-You-Can>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-DARING-ESCAPE-Catch-Me-If-You-Can>

Media Stream



BOAC - VC-10

Image online, courtesy pilotfriend.com website.

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BOAC - VC-10 on Final Approach for Landing

Image online, courtesy aerofligh.co.uk website, via BAE Systems.

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