

13 Stung

The dancing cell phone on the bedside table awaked him. His eyes flew open and it was dark. For a brief moment, the quivering he felt in his heart drew him to Belize and that all of the intervening time between was just a bad dream. He still felt the softness of her lips from when he kissed Abigail before they parted and it comforted him. He smiled and glanced over at the phone.

Then he lurched for the phone. He had a sinking feeling that something was wrong. Phone calls in the middle of the night were rarely good. It bothered him that he hadn't heard from George Crosswell and the whole business of him not being available when the suit had been filed didn't fly true. He took the call without looking at the Caller ID.

"You okay Jack?" It was Mo Boucher.

"Yeah, Mo. I was asleep. You okay?"

"I am. And I don't even want to know why you're in bed at eight o'clock in the evening. I'm sure I wouldn't approve."

Damn. He was supposed to meet Abby at eight. "What do you need, Mo?"

"Right to the point, eh?"

"Sorry, I have to meet someone now."

"Well, I wanted to go over some of the stuff that Laura Menzinger and I discussed today. I figured you'd be out and about so I was going to leave a message to set up a time."

Whitte rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. “Have you heard from George?”

There was a pause. “No, not really.”

“What do you mean, not really.”

“Just what I said.”

“No you didn’t get in touch with him or no you didn’t try?”

“No. When I called this morning Latoya referred me to Mary Catherine. I guess I didn’t even ask where he was.”

Whitte thought for a moment. “When is hunting season in Wyoming?”

“Depends. There are a couple of things you can hunt in August but for the most part October and November and then some into the spring.”

“There’s no hunting going on now?”

“Of course not.”

What the hell was George up to? “Latoya told Mary Catherine he was hunting in Wyoming. I’m not a hunter,” Whitte offered up as an excuse for not picking up on it earlier.

“You sure she said hunting? Maybe Mary Catherine got it wrong. Maybe he went fishing.”

“Yeah, could be.” Mary Catherine Dawson was meticulous with related information but it was also absurd for Jack to believe his friend, who had no relationship with Whitte Industries, would know where the hell his corporate counsel was.

“So, Jack, you want to go over my notes from the meeting?”

“Not now.”

“Okay, when you coming back?”

Jack didn't respond.

"You met someone, didn't you?"

"No. Well. Yes but it's not going to last." He could sense Mo shaking his head on the other end. "Listen, can you do me a favor? Try to find George for me. Have him check in." The hotel phone began ringing. "Gotta go, Mo. See you whenever." He disengaged his cell and picked up the hotel phone on the third ring.

"Where the hell are you, Jack?"

"I'm sorry Abby. I fell asleep."

"I've been waiting down here for thirty minutes. I thought we were going to eat?"

She was irate.

"I'm sorry. You wore me out."

"Maybe you *are* too old for me. I'll meet you in the restaurant," and then she hung up.

The Bahamian Club was the resort's signature restaurant with its nautical themed décor. The maître d' showed Whitte to the table where Abby sat with her back to him. Her golden hair was pulled into a tight bun and her sunburned skin actually accentuated the stunningly simple black, strapless cocktail dress and the loosely hanging locket around her neck. She looked like she was in tremendous pain. He surprised her by kissing her on the neck and she pulled back with obvious anger in her eyes.

"Sorry," he said of his kiss, "but that was easier than me telling you I told you so. I thought you didn't burn?"

“Well, I guess I do. I’ve been waiting down here forever.”

He noticed that she had a bottle of wine in front of her and it was almost empty. “Starting without me,” he asked rhetorically. “I’ll take a T&T,” he told the hovering waiter.

They ate quickly and spoke little because they were hungry. Jack saw the downside to this new love of his life: she got pissed off easily. Well, so did he so that was a wash.

He talked her into the casino where she lost a thousand dollars playing five-dollar slots over an hour. White pulled her over to the blackjack table where he won \$25,000 rather quickly. She had no luck whatsoever and this seemed to make her even more irate. He realized she was as competitive as he. The sunburn wasn’t helping her disposition either.

“Do you dance, Jack?”

“No, not really.”

“Well, you’re going to tonight.”

He laughed but realized she wasn’t kidding. He wanted the soft, sweet Abby back so he followed her, willing to do whatever she commanded.

It was eleven-thirty when they were admitted to the Aura Club. There was no one there that approached Jack’s age and he felt his decrepitude. He wanted to go somewhere quiet where they could continue their previous banter—there was a jazz club near the casino floor—but he also realized she was not the same woman of the past two encounters. She needed to regain control and he was at least selfless enough to know it.

They sat at a bar where he ordered a T&T and she a Cosmo. He tried to talk to her but neither could hear each other so they sat and watched the gyrations coming from the dance floor. Red, green, and blue lights flickered throughout the nightclub while music—Jack likened it more to a hedonistic tribal rhythms than music—bombarded his senses. He watched as people danced in ways he wasn't sure he could perform; they were obscene in their movements as they groped each other. There were men dancing with men and women with women and he wondered if homosexuality was now this open, not that he cared. He felt like a four-year-old, standing on the side of a swimming pool with his floats on each arm, scared shitless to jump in. Finally, Abby grabbed him.

“Come on you old fart!” she screamed over the music.

Jack sarcastically held his free hand up to his ear but Abby just laughed and pulled him into the sea of humanity. She still moved gingerly because of her sunburn but the booze was numbing.

At first Jack felt like a fool. He was awkward in any kind of dance, even a waltz as he was taught when his mother had forced him to do junior cotillion so many years before. Abby fell in line with the rest, gyrating around Jack's stiffness but the gin was deep into his system now and he felt the intoxication using his body and he began to move with more ease. If he had listened to the music for entertainment value only, it was horrid, but as a drug, it infected him; it pulled him into a rhythm where his insecurities crowded out the emptiness of existence and was replaced by a total intoxicant that was foreign but transforming. People doing what he was doing—expressing lust, insecurities, and needs but certainly not love—surrounded him. His body fell into a spell and became absorbed with Abby's movements and after a short time his movements were in direct

response to hers. They were having an erotic conversation between themselves and the bass beats tore through his cloths and up his spine and down into his groin. His body was controlled by the beat and he found himself completely high by Abby and her body.

All of these bodies were sharing a space in a spastic orgy but what it became was a space unto themselves and he felt his body drive rhythmically into hers. He wanted her then and there. Thirty minutes later, Jack could no longer continue. He was sweating profusely under his sports jacket and he could see beads of perspiration on Abby's red forehead. She motioned that she was going to go to the bathroom and he pointed to where he would wait. He needed a drink and she said she'd get it for him.

After ordering a Cosmo and another T&T for Whitte, Abby found her way to Jack and handed him his drink.

"I absolutely love you, Jack Whitte!" she screamed over the vibrations of the music.

He reached down and kissed her hard. She pulled him closer, balancing her glass in her left hand, and nibbled on his lower lip and then pulled back from him and sipped her drink. He felt over his lower lip with his tongue and tasted iron, no doubt his blood. This was wild for him; that's all he could think but he wanted more.

Abby opened her small handbag and pulled out an oblong shaped white pill and threw it into her mouth and swallowed with a hard drink from her Cosmo. She turned to Jack and started to put a pill in his mouth but he stopped her hand.

"What the hell is that?" he screamed.

"Trust me, Jack," she replied.

Why, he would never recall, but he hesitantly released her hand and she placed the drug into his mouth. He swallowed hard with a belt from his gin. He had let go and hell may come and he could care less.

Slowly, he felt a warmth come over him; it was a welcoming shower of bliss and he closed his eyes and felt a peace he had never felt before. She reached out for him and drew him near and they kissed long and hard. After they finished their drinks, they returned to the dance floor.

The rhythm seemed softer now, slighter in its pull and he felt himself growing closer to her, her body against his as they moved among the sea of people. Suddenly the music became more violent and their bodies reacted; now they grinded heavily against each other. His hands caressed her body and he grabbed her and pulled her toward him tightly. She jumped into his arms and grabbed his face, pulling it closer to her and they kissed sloppily.

It had been different last night—even that afternoon—where he had felt a reserved innocence. Now, there were no hesitations for this was primeval. This was born in the moment and *for* the moment and tomorrow be damned. As she took his hand and led him to the back corner of the bar through the twisting bodies that seemed content in hell, he knew he would take her with no hesitancy. It was purely animalistic lust and he would give into the rage deep inside. Yes, even if she protested, though he knew she wouldn't, for innocence was now sleeping and would never wake again as they disappeared into the women's bathroom.

Horse Johnson, as well, was feeling it. The coronet sang true and despite the drummer's inadequacies, he covered for him and actually pulled the beat along by force and the bassist reacted and was set free. Melody sang soft and sweet and Horse watched her eyes shut and he knew she was now painting. It was an incredible feeling, being able to take over a group of people and lead them to sweetness in the language of music. It was midnight when he retired—with Melody stumbling along—to his room.

It was his second mistake.