

## 14 Sledgehammer

The ringing of the phone was like a hammer crushing onto an anvil that was his head. Whitte's mouth stuck together, gagging because it was dry and his eyes were pasted shut. The sledgehammer continued to strike and finally his eyes opened but it was only a gray light that refused to focus. The phone continued ringing. It was a struggle to move and when he did, the pain throughout his body was excruciating. With each ring of the phone, another hammer crashed into his skull.

Finally, it stopped. The silence was beckoning him to unconsciousness again but he fought it and tried to pull himself up. There was carpet under him, for that he was sure, but little else. The gray light came from his suite's balcony through the sheer curtains. Focus was nearly impossible and the sickness in his stomach could not be settled. He found the edge of a couch and pulled himself up and onto it.

He was naked and his clothes were strewn all over the room. Realizations began to enter his head and he looked for Abby. There was no sign of her. He called out but only silence met him.

As he rose, he almost fell back to the floor. He ambled to the bathroom and looked into the mirror. His face was gray and as he turned his head, nausea overcame him and he threw up into the toilet. He reached for a towel on the rack above him and wiped away the remnants.

The phone started ringing again. He grabbed a damp towel and wrapped it around his torso and gingerly picked up the receiver.

“Uh,” he croaked.

“Mr. Whitte?”

“Yeah.”

“This is Nicola Papas,” the voice echoed a Greek accent and struggled to move forward. “I am the General Manager of Atlantis. I have to ask you to come down to my office, please. It is a personal matter.”

“What? Why?”

“I’m sorry, I cannot discuss this matter over the phone. Can you please come down now?”

“Fuck.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m sorry. Yes. I can come down. Give me thirty minutes to shower.”

“Yes. That is fine. As soon as you can, please. I will have someone waiting for you in the lobby. Thank you.” The phone went dead.

He glanced at the clock. It was 10:08. *Great. What the fuck did I do last night?*

His body felt abused, much more so than after the usual night of drinking. He looked around the room again. Where the hell was Abby? He couldn’t remember even coming back to the room. There was a haze, vacant memories of gambling, dancing, eating, and drinking. He showered but barely had the energy to do much else. He put on a pair of shorts and a tee shirt, his sandals and a baseball cap along with his Ray-Bans.

Downstairs, a well-manicured, diminutive man in a gray suit was waiting for him as he tentatively exited the elevator and was escorted by the man to a security door and down a hall until he arrived outside an office. In the anteroom were two chairs opposite a secretary's desk. In one chair sat a uniformed police officer that ignored Whitte as he entered the room. The man who escorted him opened the door into the executive office, which was finely appointed with lightly stained wood, and then retreated, closing the door behind him. Behind the desk, Whitte assumed, sat the general manager of the resort. In front of him sat a black man in a tan pair of pants and dark shirt and straw fedora perched on his head. The general manager rose, holding out his hand.

"Mr. Whitte, I'm Nicola Papas," he introduced himself in a heavy Greek accent, "and this is detective Ralph Simmons of the Royal Bahamas Police Force."

Whitte nodded at both.

"Can I get you some coffee?"

"Yes, please. Very strong if you don't mind."

Papas nervously laughed, "Is there any other kind?"

"Yes. Americans drink watered-down coffee, don't they Mr. Whitte?" intoned Simmons.

Whitte looked at the detective but did not reply. It hurt to think, let alone speak.

"So," Papas seemed at a loss of words, noting Whitte's apprehensive appearance, "I suppose you should sit?" It seemed more of a gesture on Papas' part to lighten the situation, whatever that was.

Whitte took a seat next to the detective. He rubbed his head in his hands and slowly

removed his sunglasses, revealing extremely bloodshot eyes. “Gentlemen, forgive me. I took too much advantage of the nightlife last night.”

“Mr. Whitte,” began Simmons, “what exactly *did* you do last night?”

“Well, I ate dinner, gambled some and then, I must admit, went a little overboard in the nightclub. I’m guessing I had a great time, based on the hangover I have now and the fact I’m sitting here with you two.”

At that moment the secretary came in with a carafe of coffee and three cups. She poured Whitte his and offered the others, both politely refusing. She left the tray on the side of her boss’s desk and left. Whitte took an exaggerated sip from the scalding liquid and set his cup down. He pulled his cigarettes out of his pocket and motioned toward Papas, asking if it was okay if he smoked. Papas nodded his approval and, as if on cue, took a cigarette from his own pack and lit it.

“And who were you with?” asked the police detective.

Whitte narrowed his eyes, taking a drag from his cigarette. He glanced at Papas, who seemed to be uncomfortable, and then back to the detective. To Papas he asked, “Can you tell me what this is about? I mean I sure as hell hope I didn’t do anything stupid last night. Did I get in a fight? I feel like it. I’ll certainly pay for any damage if I did.”

Papas rose to his feet. “Detective Simmons, is it necessary that I remain?”

Simmons was watching Whitte closely as if Papas wasn’t there at all. He waved his hand at Papas, dismissing him, and Papas stabbed out the just lit cigarette.

“Mr. Whitte, please feel free to sit in my chair,” Papas offered as the last bit of courtesy he could muster.

Simmons rose and walked around the desk to Papas' chair. "Don't mind if I do," he said in his thick Carib accent.

Papas closed the door to a fleeting glance from Whitte.

"So, again, I ask you, Mr. Whitte. Who were you with last night?"

"I was with a young lady by the name of Abby."

"Abigail Spencer?"

"I don't know. She never gave me her last name." Why was that name familiar and why didn't he know Abby's last name? He had asked but hadn't noticed that she had skirted his inquiry.

"I see. When did you first meet Abby?"

"I met her night before last, here at Atlantis. I was having a drink at the bar in the casino and she struck up a conversation with me."

"What happened with her that evening?"

"I'm not so sure that's any of your business." He paused, seeing that Simmons would insist. He cut to the chase. "We had a couple of drinks and then she left. I returned back to my room alone. Why?"

Simmons leaned back in Papas' chair with his hands folded behind his head.

"So, you went back to your room Monday night by yourself? Is this correct?"

"Can you please tell me why we are having this conversation?"

Simmons sat forward and frowned. "Mr. Whitte, if you can just answer my questions now, we can then get to the whys later, okay?"

"No," Whitte said, sitting up in his chair, "that's not okay."

Simmons' expression lightened. "Please, Mr. Whitte. Just humor me for a moment. Sit back, relax, have your cup of coffee."

Jack pinched the cup handle tight and took a drink, momentarily retreating from his stance. Yes, he definitely needed coffee and a new head, for that matter.

"Now, Mr. Whitte. You went back to your room, *alone*, and then what did you do next?"

"I awoke yesterday, ate breakfast in my room and then went into town. I came back around one and then went to the beach," Whitte said, stamping out his cigarette.

"So, when did you meet with Ms. Spencer again?"

Ms. Spencer? Abigail Spencer? Abby? He had been with her last night and did they come back to his room? Abigail Spencer? Why was that name burning into his mind like he must know whom she was? Had she been arrested? Shit. The white pill flashed into his mind. "Okay," he sighed, gathering his train of thought though not easily, "I met her again when I was renting a jet ski. I rented one for her and we drove them around for a while."

"Down by Cabbage Beach?"

"I don't know where Cabbage Beach is but if it's where all the Jet Ski rentals are, then yes, down by Cabbage Beach." He rubbed at his forehead, trying to wipe away the gray. "After that, we went to the poolside bar and had a couple of drinks. She went back to her room and I went back to mine. We had plans to go eat last night but I fell asleep when I got back to my room. She called much later. She had been waiting for me so I quickly got ready and I came downstairs and we ate dinner at the restaurant."

"Which one?"

Jack thought for a moment. “It’s the Bahamian Club. Then after dinner, we went to the casino. We gambled for a while.”

“Was she with you that entire time?”

“Yes.” He thought about it for a second. Wait. She had left for about thirty minutes while he was playing blackjack. “No. I remember we played for about an hour and then she left. I think to go to the bathroom and then she came back.”

“And then you went to the discothèque?”

Stay composed, Jack. “Yeah, we went to the nightclub.”

“And then?”

Jack took another drink from his coffee and lit another cigarette.

“Inspector...”

“Detective.”

“Detective, sorry. All I remember is going in there and drinking quite a bit,” he left off the bit about taking the drug and, oh, shit... The women’s bathroom! “Detective. I drank way too much last night. My memory really gets fuzzy about the time we had been at the club for, oh, maybe an hour? After that, the next memory I have is of waking up in my room with the phone ringing.”

Simmons sat back, again with folded hands behind his head. Then he glared at Whitte again.

“Mr. Whitte, can you please come with me. I would like to take you back to my office in Nassau to ask you some more questions.”

Jack stood up. “Whoa. Wait a minute. That’s not going to happen until you tell me

what's going on?"

"Please, Mr. Whitte. It is a request right now."

"Wait a minute. Where's Abby?"

"We can discuss that in my office."

"No... I'm not going to let this happen."

"What is that, Mr. Whitte?"

Jack took another drag from his cigarette. "I'm not going anywhere with you until I know what is happening. What has happened to Abby? Was she arrested? I'll help her out if that's the case."

"Mr. Whitte, Ms. Spencer is dead."