

CHAPTER 20

Abel sits at a functional, gray table with his elbows on the surface, his face in his hands. He still looks shell shocked as he stares down vacantly at the table top. The police interrogation room is dull and claustrophobic, the gray and magnolia colors on the walls coming from some out-dated catalog of economy office paint systems.

Detective Hendry stands in the corner of the room, not far from the door. She watches Abel closely, as Detective Powell conducts the interview. He struts around the small room like he owns the place, clearly loving the power of being in control, especially in his own environment.

“So Ace, you certainly know how to show a girl a good night out,” he says, turning to smile at Hendry.

“One thing's for sure, you won't be making the top ten dates list in GQ magazine any time soon.” This is what he was built for, and he's loving every single second of this interrogation.

“Come on Powell, give the guy a break,” Hendry says, trying at least to show some compassion. Powell just smiles at her and continues on with his insensitive, verbal battering.

“So what really happened out there tonight Ace? You decide to show off in front of your D.A. girlfriend and play the big hero?” he jibes, leaning over the top of Abel.

“She's my fiancée,” Abel says quietly, as Powell moves round to Abel's side.

Powell unexpectedly brings both hands down on to the table top with a bang, making Abel jump and look up at him. He leans in even closer to Abel's face.

“I don't give a crap if she's the Queen of England, ass wipe. A man's dead, your,” he pauses and makes a sarcastic face, “fiancée's, lying in a coma and you seem to be the one who caused all this frickin' carnage tonight.”

“I was just trying to protect her,” Abel says, as he looks up at Powell, his eyes pleading for even the smallest piece of mercy from the in-human cop, but knowing that he really hasn't a hope in hell of getting any.

“Well you sure did a real good job there Ace, don't you think,” Powell quips, grinning like a fool. Abel looks verbally beaten, his chin drops to his chest as he stares back down at the table.

“So, come on, let's hear your side of this total mess then,” Powell demands. “And remember, this isn't one of your news stories, we only deal in the truth here, okay?”

“He just came at us. I should have just given him my watch and wallet.” Abel talks quietly down in to the table top, trying to work things out, more for himself, almost ignoring Powell. “I tried to get in front of Cassie and, and just talk to him...”

“And they say reporters are smart,” Powell laughs, cutting Abel off. “Jesus, have you ever gone and snuffed out that rumor pretty damn good now, Ace.” Powell circles round Abel at the small table like a shark playing with its prey. “Come on, what the hell really happened?” Powell steps up his verbal attack now. “Some guy bumps in to you and your fancy piece of ass, and you decide to teach him a lesson and show her what a big, powerful man you are? Only the guy has a gun to protect himself and your show-boating turns in to a scene from The Wild Bunch?”

"No, no, he jumped us, we were just going for a quiet meal," Abel desperately defends himself.

"Yeah right. I think your big reporter ego got the better of you and caused this whole mess, and now you're feeling more than a wee bit guilty," Powell sneers.

"I didn't intend for any of this to happen," Abel says, trying to convince himself more than anyone else.

"That's it Ace, you let it all out now," says Powell, feigning compassion and doing it badly. Then, not able to hold back any more, he snaps, "Okay, cut the crap, just tell us what really happened, what you did to cause all this!"

Abel stands up aggressively at the table, knocking the chair over heavily, it hits the floor with a loud smack, his face is red and angry.

"I told you Powell," Abel spits out. "I tried to get in front of Cassie to protect her and the mugger just shot at us." Powell moves in powerfully, getting almost forehead to forehead with Abel. Powell's face looks like a snarling Rottweiler just about to attack, all drool and fangs. Abel stands his ground, not caring in the slightest what Powell does to him now.

Suddenly there's a knock at the door, breaking the deadlock and Powell furiously swings his head towards the sound. Hendry gives the two testosterone fueled pit fighters a mocking smile, walks over and opens the door. She goes out into the hallway, leaving the door just slightly open. For a few seconds Powell and Abel, still standing in front of each other, but now both looking at the door, listen to the muffled voices of someone talking with Hendry in the hallway.

"Okay, thanks for that," says Hendry as she comes back in to the room and closes the door carefully behind her. She looks over at the table and the two men staring at her in wild eyed anticipation.

"Okay Joe, what the hell is it now?" Powell snorts impatiently, his hands tightening in to gnarled fists.

"Looks like you're a very lucky man Mr. Stark," Hendry says, looking past Powell at Abel. "Several witnesses came forward and told our officers that they saw a couple being mugged in Riverview Avenue tonight." She pauses to look at Powell now, then smiles. "And, that the man acted out of self defense to protect his girlfriend, sorry fiancée." She looks back at Abel. "Seems that our friendly neighborhood mugger also had a record. One much longer than Detective Powell here's temper I'm afraid. So I think we can let Mr. Stark go home for now. He's had a very traumatic evening, and we can talk to him again later. What do you say?" Hendry looks back at Powell who slams his hand down hard on the table again, then looks intensely at Abel, square in the eyes.

"Don't think you can just walk away from this like nothing happened ass-hole. You so much as throw a gum wrapper on the side walk and I'll be all over you, you got that. I'm your best buddy now Ace and I'll be watching you, twenty four/seven." Powell storms out of the room, his purple face unable to hide his uncontrollable anger.

"Sorry about the pit-bull, he's very dedicated to the job. Here's my card," says Hendry pressing her card in to Abel's trembling hand. "We will need to talk again, but maybe you should go and check in on your fiancée for now." Hendry walks over to the door and opens it for Abel. "I'll get a squad car to take you to the hospital. Or home, if you'd like?"

"Thanks very much for your concern Detective," Abel smiles at Hendry. "I really do appreciate it, but I've been in enough police cars and ambulances for one night. I'll just get a cab."