

1 IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Florida

Staring at the clear aqua water in the swimming pool surrounded by palm trees, Bogie McGruder tried to relax as he stretched out on his chaise lounge and inhaled the scent of the freshly mowed grass. This was his 'One' Party – one cigar, one drink, one hour - his time to enjoy Johnnie Walker Blue, puff on a Cuban cigar and listen to Frank Sinatra sing:

The song is ended.

But the melody lingers on

You and the song are gone

But the melody lingers on...

It always made him want to cry, and it allowed him time to submerge himself in self-pity while he thought about the woman he loved, the one who broke his heart. What was she doing this fine, sunny morning? Was their little daughter happy? Did Isabella know he existed? Bogie puffed on the Cohiba and looked over his empire.

Four years earlier this place was an eyesore in a residential neighborhood. Three dilapidated, twelve-unit apartment buildings surrounded a damaged swimming pool. The pool was filled with chicken wire and debris to remind the crack addict residents that they

shouldn't think about diving into an empty pool. In front sat a tiny house about the size of a guard shack. It served as the rental office.

After Bogie bought the property dirt cheap, he slowly made it his own. The small structure facing the street was demolished and replaced with a large one-story building with wide glass doors in the front and back offering perspective renters and the neighbors a view of the centerpiece of the property—the reconstructed pool lit up at night. There was an enormous lobby that held pastel colored leather sofas and overstuffed chairs. Marble-topped tables were placed near the chairs and a large round clear glass coffee table separated two facing couches. A good-sized office was located on the right. Beyond the office was a hallway leading to the living quarters that consisted of his master bedroom, his daughter Amanda's room, two bathrooms and a small guest room. The kitchen was no more than a kitchenette since Bogie didn't have time to cook, and his teenage daughter had no interest. Getting her to clean her room was a battle. Since he usually worked on his computer in the evening, Amanda had the run of the lobby to entertain her friends. They were both happy with this arrangement. It gave Amanda the illusion of independence while Bogie believed he was able to keep close tabs on her.

Bogie broke open a vitamin E capsule and ran it down his chest. He thought the scar was almost gone although Amanda insisted the scar only lived in his mind. He thought of Amanda and grew angry again. This was his Sunday morning pity party, and Amanda was ruining it. Where the hell was that girl? He waited all night half sleeping, half pacing and fully pissed off. But every time he thought of her, he remembered a different Amanda. Sometimes he envisioned the beautiful eighteen-year-old who thought she was 'rocking' with her extra short shorts and thin tee shirts that showed off her

Victoria's Secret underwear. He'd flash back to Amanda the baby with large dark eyes, black curly hair and a wide toothless grin every time he lifted her in the air. He'd remember the scared little girl crying while he held her hand as they walked to school for her first day. He had a flash of the adolescent Amanda with arms and legs too long for her body, followed by the moody teenager Amanda. He loved each one of those Amandas, but wanted to smash *this* Amanda's cell phone which she shut off whenever it suited her.

When he saw the Palm Beach County Sheriff's patrol car pull up in front of the glass doors of the front building, Bogie jammed his lit cigar in the rocks glass and yanked the ear buds out leaving Ol' Blue Eyes alone to lament:

You and the song are gone

But the melody lingers on.

Bogie moved quickly toward the unlocked gate in the chain link fence surrounding the pool rather than charging through the glass doors of the building. He came around the side of the garage as the young raven-haired woman reached over and gently touched the blonde man's cheek in a last good-bye gesture. When she opened the passenger door, she was smiling. But the smile froze when she saw her father's jaw turn rigid and his light blue eyes glisten with rage.

"Get inside!" Bogie said through his teeth.

Amanda McGruder knew the look. She said nothing. She just slammed the car door and walked toward the front building.

Before the driver could pull away, Bogie walked in front of the cruiser and motioned for the young man to lower the window. As he stood next to the car, Bogie

placed both hands on the open driver's window. He glared at the deputy and asked, "How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-four," Randy Carpenter answered softly.

"And you know she's just a kid in high school don't you?" Bogie asked angrily.

"Yes, sir, but she's almost nineteen."

"So you think it's okay to take an eighteen-year-old girl, excuse me, an almost nineteen-year-old girl out on a date and bring her home the next morning?"

"Mr. McGruder, I...we..."

"For God's sake! Can't you speak up?"

As Bogie watched the young deputy's face redden, he noticed movement from behind the car. Bogie glanced up as a large barrel-chested man wearing a white robe and flip flops walked toward them.

"Stay out of this, John!" Bogie called out. "This is between me and your son."

With his hand in the robe's pocket, John Carpenter came closer and warned, "Get away from the car and keep your hands where I can see them!"

Bogie lifted his hands off the car and backed up almost a foot. Without saying a word he pivoted and extended his long leg in one motion. In less than a second, his foot struck John Carpenter's chin. John fell backward into the street, his robe splayed open. Bogie bent down, grabbed the taser out of John Carpenter's hand and said, "If you ever try a stunt like that again, I'll ram this down your fuck'n throat!"

The cruiser door opened at the same time Amanda rushed out the front screaming, "No!"

Randy stopped with his hand on the door while Bogie stared at his daughter.

“Don’t! Dad! Please!”

Bogie glanced from Amanda to Randy Carpenter and back then pointed to the man on the ground. “Take your bodyguard home!”

He walked inside the lobby and inhaled a deep breath of cool air. Bogie then stared out at the chaise lounge and shook his head. A waste of a good cigar and a shot of Johnny Blue!

Amanda watched as Randy helped his father to his feet. John Carpenter kept sputtering “son-of-a-bitch”, “asshole” then “cocksucker” as if they were blessings over a meal.

“Okay, Dad!” Randy finally said. “That’s enough! It’s over.”

“It’s over?” John Carpenter said incredulously. “It hasn’t even begun!”

“Cut the shit!” Amanda McGruder yelled. “You’re the one who started it! You came on our property!” She turned to Randy and pointed. “And *you* used the panic button, didn’t you?”

He tried to look away, but she insisted, “You did, didn’t you!?”

John Carpenter shouted, “That’s why he has it! I worked all night and came home to get some rest. Do you think I enjoy getting two hours sleep then coming out in the street to make sure your father doesn’t hurt anybody? I was trying to stop him from—“

“From what?” Amanda demanded.

“From killing somebody,” John said defensively.

“Kill who? Your son? Listen, you asshole, my father’s not walking around with a taser in his pocket. You are!” She turned to the young man. “And you! Grow a pair!

You need your father to fight your battles? You make me sick!” She looked at the sparkling new diamond that had been placed on her third finger hours earlier and took it off. Throwing it at the baby-faced deputy, she said, “Here! Shove it up your ass!”

Randy’s face lost all color. “Mandie.”

“Fuck off!” she yelled and ran inside the lobby.

As Bogie slid open the glass door to return to the pool, he saw his cell phone light up on the chaise lounge. He walked by the pool, picked it up and looked at the caller ID. It was Rose Jones, his best friend and business partner. The corner of Bogie’s mouth twitched into Bogie’s version of a smile. But all vestiges of the smile disappeared as Rose brusquely said, “I tried to call you and didn’t get an answer, I tried to talk to Mandie twice and she hung up on me. What the hell’s going on there!?”

“Just fighting with the neighbors.”

After a moment’s silence, she asked, “John?”

“The son-of-a-bitch came over here and tried to tase me!”

“He came to your home and tried to zap you for no reason?”

“He thinks he has a reason.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m the one who’s living across the street from that asshole. I couldn’t imagine being a part of his family! But I’m sure you didn’t call for an update on the Hatfields and McCoys. What’s up?”

“Bud was killed last night!”

“What?! What?! What happened? Did his wife finally shoot him?”

“We don’t know what happened. He was shot last night--right in downtown--on Washington Street.”

“Was he on duty? What was he doing there?”

“I don’t know much more. Mother McGruder’s flipping out and your sister’s off the wall. You’d better come home.”

“What about his wife? Does Jeannie even realize that this happened?”

“She’s too drunk to talk right now.”

“That sounds about right. Christ! What a mess! What time did it happen?”

“Sometime between ten and eleven o’clock.”

“Why didn’t you call me last night?”

“I got a call from Matt about two o’clock this morning. I didn’t think you wanted me to wake you up with news like that. I thought I’d hit you with it first thing this morning.”

“What’s Matt MacDonald got to do with this?”

“He’s the one who found Bud. He called it in.”

“Ah, that’s right! Always together, joined at the dick! Was he there when Bud got shot?”

“No. He showed up later.”

“He just happened to be walking down Washington Street at eleven o’clock at night and tripped over Bud?”

“I told you, I don’t have all the details. Ann could tell you more, but don’t call her until later. Apparently the doctor stopped by the house and gave both Ann and Mother McGruder sedatives. I’ve got you and Mandie booked on Jet Blue. You’ll be

flying out of Palm Beach tomorrow at 1:10 and you'll get to Boston at 4:12. It's Flight 424."

"Tomorrow?" Bogie asked.

"I didn't think you'd be in a rush to get here and wasn't even sure if you'd come. If you're not coming, I'll cancel the reservations. Otherwise, I'll pick you up at arrivals. Just call me when you get your luggage. Oh, Bogie...I'm sorry."

Bogie hung up wondering who would want to kill 'Officer Bud', the PR face of the Boston Police Department. Bud wasn't a street cop, and the general public, who really didn't know him, liked him. Poor Ann, poor Herself and poor Jeannie. No, scratch that, Jeannie was better off without that philanderer making her wretched life more miserable. Should he feel sad although he couldn't stand Bud?

"Are you okay?"

Surprised, he turned and looked at Amanda. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"Sure, I'm fine, Princess."

"What did Aunt Rose want?" He told her, and she quickly said, "Oh, my God!" As Bogie reached out to comfort her, she asked, "Do we really have to go?" When his eyebrows shot up, she continued, "C'mon, Dad, it's not like you liked him or anything."

"He's dead. It's not about him. It's family. Funerals are for the living not the dead. We're going for your Aunt Annie and your grandmother."

"I know. I know. It's just that this is a bad time." A tear rolled down her cheek.

Bogie put his arm around her shoulders and walked her inside. They sat on one of the large leather sofas they'd picked out together. More tears rolled down her cheeks,

and she brushed them away with the back of her hand. Bogie studied her and asked, “What’s the matter, Princess?”

She covered her face with both hands and wept. When she moved them to her lap, Amanda sniffled and said, “I’m pregnant!”

Bogie sat stunned. “Holy shit!” He’d barely come to grips with the fact that she was turning into a woman. And now pregnant! It was definitely Randy Carpenter who, Bogie believed, would make a better poet than a cop! He’d seen that look on their faces every time they came near each other. Bogie wondered why birth control didn’t enter into the equation, but said nothing. Since he had a daughter he’d never met living with her mother in Boston, Bogie didn’t believe he was qualified to play Monday morning quarterback.

He asked, “So, what are you going to do?”

She shrugged. “Randy...asked me to...we were supposed to get married.” She started crying again.

“What! You’re only eighteen! You’re still in school!”

“So?”

“What do *you* want to do?”

“I thought we’d get married after graduation. But then he acted like such a...”

The tears flowed.

They were interrupted by Carlos, the construction supervisor, as he charged through the front door. The broad mocha-skinned man wearing a tight black tee shirt and white shorts breathlessly asked, “Hey, Boss, what’s happening? Margarita called and said she saw you fighting with that cracker and his son outside.”

“It was nothing, it’s over.”

“So why’s she crying?”

“We just found out my brother’s dead. We have to fly to Boston tomorrow.”

“Sorry, Boss,” Carlos Aragon said softly as he crossed himself. “What can I do to help?”

“Just keep things moving along here.”

Carlos nodded and studied Bogie. “So...everything’s okay here?”

Amanda wiped another tear from her cheek, got up and walked to her room.

Bogie stared at the empty hallway, wondering how Amanda was going to deal with a pregnancy and a child when she was little more than a child herself.

When he didn’t receive a satisfactory answer, Carlos asked, “What’s going on here? What’s she really crying about?”