

The Venetian Haul, Chapter Two

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Chapter Two of the Venetian Haul. Deep in the canals of Venice lies buried a secret so valuable that people die attempting to obtain it.



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It turned out to be a three hour session with Glory, who owned more sexual apparatus than Jack had seen in his entire life. 1/2 Eventually he managed to untangle himself from her arms, legs and various other body parts and make it to the airport just as his brother's plane was landing.

Bobby was dressed in short sleeves, jeans and two hundred dollar Italian shoes. 1/2 He was laughing with one of the stewardesses as Jack pulled up to the curb. 1/2 She was handing him something Jack was pretty sure was a business card, a cell phone number or both. 1/2 Bobby waved to the stewardess as he got into Jack's car.

"New acquaintance?" Jack asked.

"People in the south are so friendly," Bobby answered as the car started out. 1/2 "You ever notice that?"

"How is Los Angeles?"

"There's an old saying about Los Angeles," Bobby replied. 1/2 "When it's 103 degrees in New York, it's 78 in Los Angeles. 1/2 And when it's 23 degrees in New York, it's 78 in Los Angeles. 1/2 But there are eight million interesting people in New York. 1/2 And 78 in Los Angeles. 1/2 How's Harry?"

"Harry is in some pretty deep shit," Jack said, pulling out on to Highway 110. 1/2 "Murder one right now and they're calling for the electric chair. 1/2 He's been on the front page of every paper and the lead on every local TV show. 1/2 Vegas is giving odds on whether he'll last the weekend. 1/2 Personally, I'd take the under." 1/2

Bobby nodded. 1/2 "Did you mention the Venetian Haul?"

"I did."

1/2 "What he say?"

"He said exactly what we thought he would say."

Bobby leaned back and looked out at the Louisiana landscape passing them by. 1/2 There weren't a whole lot of houses along the main strip and the ones that were there didn't look too inviting. 1/2 Katrina may have devastated New Orleans but Baton Rouge suffered as well. 1/2 All state and federal money that was going into the area suddenly got diverted to New Orleans, leaving Baton Rouge without some much needed capital. 1/2

"So what's next?" Bobby asked.

"We meet with the mayor himself. 1/2 One of the big congressmen here owes Harry a favor and set it up. 1/2 It's not going to help but it might make us feel better."

"When?"

"That's where we're headed right now."

Bobby glanced at his watch. "Now? Isn't it a bit late for a business meeting?"

"Apparently not in Baton Rouge."

They pulled into the crowded parking lot of The Stuffed Pig around 11pm. Country music blared from speakers high above the two story restaurant and if people nearby minded they were reluctant to say anything, probably because of the four or five patrol cars parked there every night. Bobby looked questioningly at the wood sided establishment and then back to his brother. "We're meeting here?"

"That's what the man said," Jack replied and got out of the car.

A large bosomed hostess with big hair and a mouth full of teeth greeted them as they entered.

"Well, howdy, ya'll," she yelled, somehow making herself heard over the music. "This your first time at The Stuffed Pig?"

"Believe it or not, yes." Jack answered. "We're here to see Mayor Langley."

She nodded understandingly. "You want the back room then, sugar. You go up those steps in the back, make a right past the mechanical bull, a left at the popcorn machine and knock on the door. I think they're waiting for you."

"You get all that?" Jack asked as he and Bobby walked inside.

"She lost me at mechanical bull."

After a few mis-turns the brothers found themselves at the late night impromptu office of the Mayor of Baton Rouge, one Theodore "Teddy" Langley. They were ushered in by a large uniformed policeman who looked as if he hadn't smiled in ten years. A fully stacked bar stood off in one corner, maintained by an equally stacked red-headed female bartender. Teddy Langley sat behind a large oak desk, a phone in his ear. He waved them in as he continued his conversation. Sitting next to him was a tall, lean man with intelligent eyes. He gazed over Jack and Bobby sharply as they stood waiting for the mayor to conclude.

"And I'm telling you, if they don't get that mess cleaned up by the end of the weekend, I am going to personally come down there and shove it up their collective hillbilly asses! You got that? This ain't Mobile, Alabama, for Christ's sake!"

The mayor slammed the phone down and looked up, almost apologetically. "People don't realize how much of my job is sanitation. Have a seat, boys. Brandy, get these youngsters something to drink."

Jack asked for a scotch on the rocks, which Bobby repeated. They sat down in two wooden chairs across from the mayor as Brandy served them their drinks. Mayor Langley was in his early

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sixties. A stout, mustached man, used to living on deep fried cooking and beer, he presently wore a ten gallon hat, black pants with a silver buckle and a cowboy shirt.

How he got to be mayor was something of an urban legend, although Jack had it on good authority that most of it was probably true. Langley won his first election in 1982 despite trailing in the final weeks by double digits. That lead shrank considerably when his opponent's head was found floating down the Mississippi River. The body itself was never recovered. Since then 'Teddy' - as he was known in the community - enjoyed a minimum amount of competition come election time.

"Jack and Bobby, huh? Your parents must have had a sense of humor."

"It's even funnier when you consider that they were Republicans," Jack said.

"Look, I know why you're here," the mayor said once they all had drinks. "Any friend of Congressman Conway is a friend of mine. And I wish I could help you. I hold no grudges, none at all. To tell you the truth, I never even liked that bastard nephew of mine, not from day one. The only reason he made it to the force was my sister nagging me all the time. I'm surprised the idiot didn't get himself killed sooner. But my hands are tied."

Jack nodded towards the thin man sitting to Langley's side. "Who's he?"

The thin man pursed his lips sourly. "I am the Assistant Deputy Mayor and also the personal legal attorney for Mayor Langley. My name is Lionel Hempstead. I am here to inform you that this conversation never took place, that whatever is said here has no legal bearing in a court of law and that you may not use the information you receive here in any way against the mayor, his staff or the city of Baton Rouge."

"Our uncle never killed anyone," Bobby said.

"His fingerprints were on the murder weapon," Hempstead pointed out.

"The 'murder weapon' was thrown thirty feet in the air, in a pitch black room, by a seventy year old man who had just been shot," Jack countered. "You couldn't duplicate that feat again in a million years."

Langley held his hands out in a defenseless gesture. "Be that as it may, we've got one dead police officer, one attempted burglary, fingerprints on the cutter and your uncle left holding the bag. The people of this city would expect me to hang this man whether that moron was my nephew or not. His being kin means there's no way I can cut him some slack. Now, I'm sorry, I really am, you tell the Congressman that. Your uncle's gonna swing and there just ain't a damn thing I can do."

Jack looked over to his brother, who gave a small shrug. The two rose.

"Thanks for the drink, Mayor," Jack put his glass down on the Mayor's oak desk. "Guess there's nothing more to say for the moment."

"Well, that's not exactly true," the Mayor intoned slowly. His eyes were no longer friendly and Jack saw for the first time what a dangerous man he could be. "See, Mr. Lionel Hempstead here ain't what you call much fun at parties. Hell, nine times out of ten he bores the crap out of me with his legal mumbo jumbo and all that, but what he's good at...I mean, really good at...is digging up stuff on folk. There he's a pro. What I know about you boys I don't like. What I don't know about

you I like even less.½ One thing I'm aware of is you pulled off some of the slickest capers I ever did hear of.½ I tip my hat to you.½ But I don't care how smart you are, or who you're connected to, you come making any sort of trouble in my town and I'll stick you off in a place so remote the Lord God Almighty won't be able to find you.½ Do I make myself clear?"

Jack hesitated for a moment, then smiled.½ "We'll be in touch."

½

As they were leaving the Stuffed Pig Bobby looked back to see whether or not they were being watched and was not surprised to find out they were.½ "That went well," he commented.

"Didn't expect it to go much better, did you?" Jack asked as they got into the car.

"So what's the next step?"

Jack slipped the car into reverse and headed out into the hot Louisiana night.½ "Now we put together the team."

"Who first?"

Jack thought about it for a second.½ "Frankie.½ I think Frankie first."

½

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