



THE ELEPHANT TREE

RD Ronald

A short sampler

The Elephant Tree

Mesmeric Revelation

'I completely devoured this book. I couldn't put it down. I had to know what was going to happen next.'

Night Owl Reviews

'I just finished this book and the last page blew me away. I'm usually the type of person who can predict fairly accurately who 'did it' in a murder mystery or any type of media. So when I say the end is fairly surprising, enough said.'

My Love Affair With Books

'The Elephant Tree is a well written and original novel with an engrossing plot. Moreover there is more depth to it than might be apparent for the first time. Though this is one of those books which sucks you in right from the first page, it also takes a step away from the usual whodunnits. It's hard to believe that this is the author's first novel.'

Elite Magazine

'The plot and characters were hypnotic and spellbinding.'

The Stamp of Approval

'The Elephant Tree is definitely worth the read. There are great characters, a great plot, and everything fits together in a great timeline with a great pace.'

Suite 101

'The Elephant Tree benefits from R D Ronald's unique intimate knowledge of the underground hierarchy and the inner monologues experienced by many of those involved makes this a provocative read not just for crime fiction readers but also for those interested in true crime.'

The Elephant Tree

The next morning Scott woke up and felt like his tongue had been velcroed to the roof of his mouth and he had porcupine quills embedded inside his skull.

Squinting against the harsh morning glare coming through the bedroom window, he realised that at some point last night the curtain rail had been pulled off the wall, which was now the reason for the inappropriately bright bedroom.

His thoughts ran like a chased rabbit as he tried to piece together the fragments of memory from the previous night. Firstly, he was clothed so that was probably good. Gingerly turning over he recognised Angela's shoes on the other pillow, and presumed it was her feet still inside of them. So she'd stayed over but was also clothed, which was a relief. Apart from the promise he'd made to her dad, Scott felt that with all the other complications he had in his life right now, a serious relationship would only end badly, even if it was with Angela. Shaking her gently by the ankle resulted in a groan from the bottom of the bed, followed by a clunk as an empty wine bottle rolled out from under the quilt and fell to the floor.

Scott eased out of the bed avoiding another empty wine bottle, an overflowing ashtray and a generous scattering of empty beer cans. The ground seemed to lurch toward and then away from him as he

tried to maintain balance; like standing in a small boat on uneven waters. Angela's face poked out from underneath the quilt, and he could see his unease of footing was at least providing a source of amusement for her.

'Coffee,' Scott mumbled as he tentatively made his way towards the kitchen, the rustling of bedclothes behind him indicating that Angela had probably decided to follow.

The mess in the bedroom had apparently just been a warm-up act for the carnival of disarray that lay within the confines of the kitchen. Every surface and the majority of the floor were decorated by empty bottles and cans of various sizes and colours. Pieces of broken glass also adorned the scene like sprinkles on cake. Scott guessed they must be from drinking glasses after checking to make sure all the windows were intact. The room was freezing as the back door stood wide open. Scott wondered if the three visible sleeping occupants in the room had caught pneumonia during the night.

Stepping over the debris as best he could, Scott made his way to the kettle and filled it up at the tap. Hearing the clatter of dispersed cans on the bench, Boris came trotting back in from outside, seemingly quite happy at the new open door policy allowing him the freedom to come and go at will. Seeing the dog and broken glass in close proximity, Angela quickly began to scoop up all she could find into an empty cardboard box that had

previously been used to carry in some of last night's liquor supply.

He took a bottle of aspirin out of the cupboard next to the kettle and fetched that and the two coffees to the bench outside and shook out a couple of tablets for each of them.

'Here,' he said, handing a cup and aspirin to Angela as she sat down. 'It's strong and sweet.'

Angela put the cup on the floor, flipped open her mobile phone and turned it back on to check messages, as she took a drag from a freshly lit cigarette held between shaky fingers.

'Three missed calls from Steph late last night. I texted to tell her about the party when she didn't show up at work, I wonder why she didn't just come by.'

Scott shook his head and lit a cigarette.

'I'll call her back later, once I'm more together.'

'I'm gonna go see Twinkle today. Find out what he was talking about.'

'Really? Is that such a good idea, Scott?'

'I'll just hear him out, that's all.'

By midday the rest of the stragglers had left and Scott had cleared away the remaining party litter from around the house. Angela had showered, and then left in the last car load into the city driven by Neil, who was still sullen after discovering Gemma had left with someone else by the time he'd made the trip back from the ATM last night. Angela had a shift that afternoon, although Scott didn't know

how the hell she'd manage that after the night they'd had.

They hadn't counted up their profits, but the thick roll Neil had handed to him before leaving indicated that it would be good. Breakages had been minimal, mostly glasses and cups, nothing expensive. Not that Scott had much in the way of valuables anyway, but he was glad the windows and especially the TV had made it through the night without incident and his uncle's various ornaments seemed to have been left unscathed as well.

Turning his phone back on there was a message from Jack: 'Hey Scott, we haven't caught up for a while. If you're in town today then call in and see me, we need to talk.'

Scott deleted the message. It was pretty rare to hear from Jack, so he wondered if there was anything wrong. He could drop by the bar and see Angela as well he supposed, Jack's apartment was only a ten minute walk from there, and then there was Twinkle as well. He hadn't known he was going to go and meet him until he heard himself say it to Angela. Apparently his subconscious had been mulling over the dilemma while he had gotten wasted. Three coffees and a sobering shower later, he hadn't changed his mind so he grabbed his iPod and phone and headed out for the bus.

Avoiding the busiest shopping streets, Scott made his way to his brother's apartment block. The sky

had begun to cloud over and looked like it would rain soon, which only seemed to fuel the afternoon shopping frenzy. Jack's penthouse was in an exclusive block positioned in the heart of Garden Heights. He'd moved there just before Scott turned eighteen, although the year before the brothers had rarely run into each other despite still living under the same roof.

Jack had always been a driven personality but seemed to throw himself even more completely into his work following their uncle's death. No matter how busy he always seemed to find time to take on new ventures. Scott was glad that his brother was doing well and he enjoyed his own company, so didn't much mind the long hours spent alone at the house.

Jack's career in the design business had begun when Scott was still at school. He got a job working for a moderately sized company designing posters and flyers for various outlets mainly in the entertainment business. Being a stickler for attention to detail, Jack would often follow up his design jobs by going to visit the various venues where his work was on display to see the impact it had on

creating new custom. This earned a level of respect from the bar and club managers. Realising the commitment Jack had for his work they would start to request him specifically when placing new orders. Moving in these circles and making friends,

Jack started to learn the business from the inside. During an infrequent conversation with his brother, he had voiced his desire to own a string of bars and clubs himself one day. With a small amount of money he'd managed to save up Jack formed his own company, Zebra design, and took a number of clients with him. He already deejayed at club nights around the city and a while after began to host regular weekend spots on local radio. His different enterprises went hand in hand and furthered the popularity of each other, enabling Jack to buy the penthouse shortly after. Scott had been taught the ropes of designing some of the more basic artwork from his brother and had earned a modest but steady income from Zebra design ever since.

He recognised the concierge on duty as Eddie. Eddie was mid-thirties, had short brown hair, was close shaven to the point that it looked to irritate his skin and wore the standard blue uniform and cap. They'd chatted a couple of times previously when Scott had visited. Eddie let him go straight up while he buzzed ahead to announce his imminent arrival. Scott crossed the polished marble floor of the foyer in the direction of the bank of lifts. He moved his hand over the sensor to summon one just as the doors to his left sprang open. As he turned to enter, a young woman in a sharp grey suit, carrying an attaché case, stepped off and walked past him before Scott recognised that it

was Stephanie.

'Hey Steph, small world,' he called after her. 'Are you here on business or pleasure?'

Stephanie stopped and turned to face him.

'Hello Scott,' she said, with a minor reshaping of her lips that could perhaps be interpreted as a smile. 'Either there's only room for business these days or the two have become one and the same. Sometimes it's hard to remember.'

'Angela was expecting to see you out last night.'

'I had hoped to get away but then there was someone I had to see unexpectedly,' she said, and briefly looked genuinely sorry.

'I didn't realise you knew Jack.'

'I've been personal assistant to the manager at Aura's for the last few months, so our paths have crossed, yes.'

'You look a lot different to Angela's friend with the braided hair I used to see out clubbing at Blitz years back,' he said grinning.

'Yes, well the braids don't really go with the suit,' she said stiffly. 'Nice to see you again Scott, but I have to be going.' He watched as she cut across the foyer towards the revolving door, the tock-tock-tock from her departing heels echoing around the marble foyer like the inside a giant clock. Eddie seemed to recognise her and tipped his cap as she passed by, making Scott wonder if she was a regular visitor to the building.

Slightly surprised by her presence, but more so by

her sharp attitude in their exchange, he turned back and entered the lift. Scott pressed for the top floor and made the smooth ascent in silence, trying not to look directly at the polished chrome in the elevator that reflected the high intensity lighting as brightly as the inside of a jewellers window. His eyes still felt overly sensitive following the previous night of excessive consumption.

The lift doors opened out onto a wide carpeted hallway that seemed to glow from recessed lighting hidden away in the ceiling. Taking in a deep breath of the alpine scented, warmly conditioned air, Scott walked around to the door of his brother's penthouse apartment; one of eight on the uppermost floor of the Walker building. The name had always struck Scott as fairly ironic, the Walker building. No doubt named after the architect who designed the structure or whoever financed it.

Placement of the 30-storey smoked glass and chrome monolithic structure was so central in Garden Heights, that any desirable location could be arrived at in no time on foot, but any resident who could afford to live within those exclusive walls would certainly never be seen to arrive in such a fashion. Jack himself drove a black, convertible Lexus that spent the majority of its life swapping one security patrolled underground car park in the city for another. At least that's what he drove the last time Scott saw him. Cars were replaced almost as frequently as girlfriends, so by

now both of those positions had probably been refilled.

Arriving at the front door Scott found it had been left ajar, no doubt in expectation of his arrival. He entered and as there was no sign of Jack in the open plan living area, he walked across the polished, French oak floor (so he'd been informed by one of Jack's previous girlfriends) to look into the kitchen, but glancing across the balcony he saw his brother outside taking a phone call. Judging by his animated body language and stern expression, Scott decided not to interrupt and instead took a seat on one of four white sofas arranged around a spotless square black glass table in the centre of the room. He resisted the urge to put his feet up on the table and light a cigarette. A few minutes later the sliding glass door whispered as Jack eased it open and came in from the balcony.

'Hey Scott,' he said, his deadpan expression giving no clue as to the intention of their meeting, and walked over to a decanter on a small granite table by the far wall. 'You want one of these?'

'Yeah thanks I will,' Scott replied, and Jack poured a few fingers into each of their glasses. Swallowing a mouthful from one, he topped it up again and brought the glasses over and put them down on the table Scott had avoided putting his feet up on. Jack settled into the sofa opposite with a sigh and again reached for his glass.

‘So how are things with you, little brother?’ Jack asked, this time taking only a sip from his glass. Not being much of a whiskey drinker, Scott also took a drink and resisted the urge to wince as the golden liquid slid down his throat leaving behind a trail of fire. His brother would no doubt take offence as this was bound to be some impeccable vintage single malt, so Scott faked an expression of impressed surprise, which appeared to please Jack, before answering.

‘Pretty much the same as ever, really. Same shit, different day,’ Scott said with a grin. ‘I heard you on the radio last week, good show.’

‘Thanks. The shows are being syndicated now so they’ll go out to most of the country.’

‘Your celebrity status being etched into the minds of the listening public far and wide,’ Scott quipped, but his attempt at humour washed over Jack leaving no trace of an impression.

‘Listen Scott,’ Jack said leaning forward, ‘there was an incident in the club on Friday.’

Scott guessed from the look on his brother’s face that this was going to be something to do with the reason he’d wanted to see him today.

‘OK, well it was a Friday night, I expect that’s not so unusual. So what happened?’

‘A guy was shot in the club,’ his brother said, ‘so yeah it was pretty unusual. Maybe that sort of thing happens at those seedy fucking rock bars you hang out at, but not where I work, Scott,’ he

said, putting his glass back down hard enough for some of its contents to slop over onto the pristine table.

'OK Jack, calm down, I get it's a big deal but what's this got to do with me?'

'Your friend was in last night with that Dominic thug.'

'Who, you mean Twinkle?'

'Yeah.'

'That hardly means anything, there were probably three thousand other people there too. Why is Twinkle being there a problem?'

'The shooting happened in an area just out of the cover of the closed circuit cameras,' he said and paused, holding Scott's gaze looking for a reaction.

'I still don't get it, Jack. What are you trying to tell me, or ask me or whatever it is you're doing?'

'Everyone goes through the archway, you know the metal detector, coming into the club so there's no way to get a gun in undetected.'

'Right yeah, it's the same pretty much everywhere these days, so?'

'So someone got one in and managed to use it to good effect avoiding cover of the cameras. There's no way that could be done without help from at least one person from the club, presumably the door staff. It's no secret that Dominic is at close quarters with Paul McBlane, and has been known to get his hands dirty when it's needed. The door staff at Aura and half of the other bars and clubs

in the city are employed through McBlane's security company, and nothing ever happens on one of his patches without serious consequences.'

'So you're saying it couldn't have had anything to do with Twink and Dominic?'

'No, I'm saying it very much looks like they were involved, and with McBlane's blessing.'

'But why would he be involved if it's gonna make his security company seem inept? No-one would want to use them if that's the case.'

'Some of Garden Heights more high profile venues have been sold on to outside investors recently, and the rumoured amounts involved are a long way short of what you'd expect. No names have been mentioned as the investors buying in are doing it through offshore holding companies. McBlane's made no secret in the past of wanting to be more involved in the business than just minding the door while the owners get rich.'

Scott thought he could now see where his brother was going with this but kept quiet and allowed him to continue. Jack finished the contents of his glass and sat back on the sofa, exhaling heavily through his nose.

'The guy who was shot last night was the owner's brother, Scott. The circumstances surrounding the attack and the target can't have been a coincidence. I know what you get up to, and I know you're pretty close with that Twinkle guy, so I want to know if you knew anything about it.'

'No, I still have my doubts that Twink would get mixed up in something like this, even if it is true,' Scott said, although he didn't know how much of the statement he believed himself. With the wrong company, and the right drugs, Scott had no idea how far Twinkle could be manipulated. Maybe he had been right to worry

last night when he'd seen Twinkle and Dominic out drinking together. 'Whether I'm right about this or not, you'd do well to distance yourself from these people. There can be no happy ending for someone like you in all of this.'

'Alright Jack, I appreciate the heads up, but really, don't worry about me. I'll check with Twinkle next time I see him but I doubt he'd be that stupid,' Scott said, and drank the remaining whiskey from his glass, this time making no effort to mask his distaste. 'I have to go,' he said, standing.

Jack got up too, still holding Scott's gaze. This time it didn't look like suspicion in his brother's eyes, but Scott couldn't tell what it was.

'What I've told you here goes no further, Scott. Understand? If I'm even half right about this then the information alone is dangerous. I just told you my suspicions to persuade you to back off.'

Walking towards the lift, Scott pulled out his phone and started to text Neil. He wouldn't say any of this over a phone call or a text, but he made it clear he needed to see his friend at home before they went back into the city that night.

Moving through the revolving doors from the warm interior of the lobby into the cold street outside felt like making the transition from summer straight into winter. The temperature seemed to have dropped dramatically during his short visit, but Scott wasn't sure if it was the weather or the news he'd received that had chilled him the most.

