

Forward

The name Milwaukee is believed to come from the Ojibwe word *ominokwaiing*, meaning gathering place, or gathering by the water. Milwaukee has at least three different nicknames. One is the Beer Capital of The World. This came about when most of the major brewers in America were located there and still produced beer. Another name, Cream City, which comes from the color of the bricks that were used to make the buildings (there was also a Cream City Brewery) It is also known as the City of Neighborhoods and to this day it consists of many neighborhoods where they have their own churches, schools, restaurants and bars and the residents maintain a strong sense of belonging.

Another distinctive trait that you will find in Milwaukee is what is known as Polish flats. These are two family homes with separate entrances, but with the units stacked one on top of another instead of side by side. This arrangement enables a family of limited means to purchase both a home and a modestly priced rental apartment unit. Since Polish American immigrants to the area prized land ownership, this solution, which was prominent in their areas of settlement within the city, came to be associated with them.

Mader's Restaurant in Milwaukee is famous for its German food and German art collection. It is worth the trip to Milwaukee just to go to Mader's.

It is outside this city in a western suburb named Brookfield, where I grew up and spent my youth. There actually was a Judge's Beyond The Reef in Brookfield on the corner of Calhoun Road and North Avenue. The history of this restaurant described in this novel is true to the best of my knowledge.

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It is Rocco's Pub, however, that I took the liberty to move to Milwaukee. It is Max Fly's favorite hangout and is actually located in Jasper, Georgia. Even though Rocco's doesn't have a favorite booth back by the ladies room reserved for me, you can frequently find me there, enjoying great food and an occasional brandy and listening to fantastic bands pound out some of my favorite tunes . Rocco's chili has been voted the Best Chili in Georgia eight times and probably would have been nine or more but Dan Ciorrocco, the proprietor, decided to give the rest of the population a fair shot at the title and no longer enters the competition.

Most sane people will realize that this novel is pure bull turds and all the characters have to be fictional; although, I don't suppose too many sane people would take the time to read more than this interesting introduction.

In no way have I intended to portray anyone living or dead, while telling this story. I have taken the liberty to use the names of individuals who have crossed my path over the years and made my life fuller.

I hope you enjoy reading this novel half as much as I enjoyed writing it.

David Hesse

Prologue

It was dark, very dark. The clouds kept any stars that might have been in the sky covered and the moon was nowhere to be seen. The dark figure, hiding in the bushes next to the house, couldn't have asked for a better night. For him to do what he had planned, he needed it dark. He was wearing what he always wore at night, his uniform du nuit, black gloves, a black watch cap, black turtleneck sweater, black pants and black rubber soled shoes. It wasn't long before a light went on in the bedroom of the house. It was her bedroom. Soon she walked to the window wearing the same V neck blue blouse she was wearing earlier when he saw her on the museum steps. The blouse revealed a deep cleavage and a promise of something special waiting for him to take. He noticed that she had already removed the black slacks she wore as she reached up and pulled down the shade. He was still able to see her silhouette as she lifted her shirt over her head. He walked to the side of the house and was able to peek into her room between the window sill and where the shade had stopped, just short of covering the entire window. She should have been more careful he thought with a grin. Her back was toward him, her shirt off and she was wearing black panties and a black bra. Her hands were unhooking the clasp of her bra. She shrugged her shoulders forward and her bra fell into her hands. Next she bent over and removed her panties, turning toward the window unknowingly exposing her to him as she tossed them onto the bed. The beauty of her body caused him to catch his breath. He feared she may have heard him. That was crazy. There was no way she could have heard him. His breathing got heavier as he watched her stretch out to remove her bathrobe from the closet. She turned as she slipped her arms into the robe and turned off the light, walking out of the room.

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He withdrew his glass cutter and started to work it on the top window pane next to the latch. When he cut through, he lightly punched the circle of glass causing it to fall in and break on the bedroom floor. He waited a moment to make sure the noise hadn't alerted her. It hadn't. He had done this so many times he could do it in his sleep. He reached his right hand in and opened the latch and pushed up the window. It was open. Again he paused, waiting. Nothing. He put his hands on the window ledge and pulled himself up. Now he was in. He crouched by the window listening. He started to perspire and sweat began to form on his neck and roll down his back. He could hear the water running in the tub in the bath down the hall.

He waited, listening. He could hear her splash in the tub. He walked to the dresser against the far wall, removing his flashlight. He pointed it at the floor and turned it on, bringing the beam of light up to the top of the dresser; scanning its contents for anything that might be of value.

“Just junk here. I wonder where she keeps the good stuff.”

He started pulling out the drawers one by one. When he opened the drawer containing her undergarments, he picked up each piece, gently caressing them. He brought each one up to his face and inhaled deeply, savoring her scent. She had a sachet in the drawer that gave everything a very pleasing smell. In the back, under some lacy bras, she had hidden a small jewelry box. He pulled it out and put it on the dresser top. It was locked but the locks on these boxes could be opened with a butter knife. He reached in his pocket and took out his switch blade. Snapping open the blade, he stuck it in the lock's opening and snapped the locking mechanism and the lid opened easily. Inside were a couple of diamond necklaces and bracelets and some very attractive looking emerald rings. One cocktail ring had what looked like a huge ruby stone surrounded by smaller diamonds with matching ear rings. This will be easy to fence for cash he thought.

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Next he walked over to the chair by the side of the bed and picked up her purse and pulled out her wallet. “One hundred dollars in cash. Wonder what she was planning to buy with this,” he thought as he folded the bills and stuffed them in his pocket. He pulled out her drivers’ license and read the information softly out loud, letting her name slowly slide off his lips, Kathryn Reilly. She was five foot one inch tall and weighed one hundred and five pounds. She had black hair, brown eyes and was twenty two years old. He couldn’t stop looking at her face. She was so beautiful. He wondered who her boyfriend was and where he might be at this moment. Was he thinking the same thing about Kathryn Reilly as he was? Probably. If he had a girlfriend like this, he would be thinking about doing what he had in mind doing to her now, every night. Surely these same thoughts went through Kathryn’s boyfriends mind. Maybe she didn’t have a boyfriend. Maybe she was too stuck on herself to give herself to someone else. He didn’t see her with a boyfriend for the past week that he had been following her. She met a couple of girl friends. They shopped and shared a lunch or two and that was it. Not a very active social life for such a pretty girl. That’s good for him he thought. That meant he could take his time with her and really enjoy her.

He went to a trunk under a window and searched through it for valuables that might be hidden.

Bull’s eye! An envelope containing close to three thousand dollars in one hundred dollar bills was stashed in the bottom of the trunk. “This is going to be a great night,” he thought, as he closed the trunk lid and sat on the bed. He counted the money one more time to make sure he counted correctly the first time. He had. He couldn’t help but smile. He wanted to stand up and shout but that would ruin the surprise he had for her. He turned off his flashlight.

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He pulled out his switch blade knife and placed it on the night stand next to the bed. Then he took off his watch cap and placed it on the bed. Then he stood up and pulled his sweater over his head folding it neatly. He untied his shoes and slipped them off and then he stuffed one sock in each shoe. Next came his pants, which he folded as well and then his boxer shorts. He was ready.

He reached out and grabbed his switch blade as he leaned back on the soft pillows stacked against the head of the bed to wait for her arrival. It wouldn't be long now. She would smell good. The thought of her being next to him got him aroused. All he had to do was wait for her.

Finally he heard the water start to drain from the tub. He imagined her standing, naked in the middle of the tub, toweling the water off her young nubile body. He thought of her lingering on her breasts as she gently dried each on, bringing her nipples erect. Next he thought of her bending over and slowly drying her legs, starting at her small rounded calves, moving languidly up her thighs until she reached the core of her being, her womanhood. He was sweating again.

Her shadow preceded her as she walked down the hall from the bath to her room. He sat up as she turned in and reached up and switched on the light.

Her hand flew to her mouth, stifling a scream. Her eyes were wide with fright.

He brought his finger up to his lips signaling for her to be quiet.

She turned to run but he was too fast. He was on her in an instant, lifting her off her feet and throwing her on the bed, landing on top of her, pressing her into the mattress.

She was no match for his size and strength. She wasn't much larger than a child and he was a full grown man and very strong.

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He ripped her bathrobe down off her shoulders, pinning her arms to her side. He feasted on her breasts as her chest heaved with exhaustion from her fight for survival. Now she screamed. It startled him and he brought his fist up and slammed her hard on the left check, snapping her head to the side. He hit her again, and again and again. Her eyes rolled up in her head and she slumped silently on the bed.

He continued to work on her and finish what he had been planning to do for the past week. When he finished he got up and stood at the side of the bed, looking down at the beautiful young Kathryn Reilly who was still unconscious. The welt on the side of her face was swelling and beginning to turn a darker red. She would have one helluva a shiner he thought.

He casually walked out of the room to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator door. Not much in here he thought. He pulled out a Schlitz beer that was stored in the door. Rummaging through a drawer he found a church key and punched open the lid. The beer fizzed and foamed out of the opening and he brought his lips down to suck the cold liquid down his throat. When he finished he let out a loud belch and crushed the empty can against the counter and threw it on the floor.

I'll do her one more time before I get outta here. As he walked into the room he saw her stagger to the dresser and lean down with her back to him. He was infuriated. How dare she get out of the bed without asking him?

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“You bitch,” he screamed as he picked up the chair next to the bed and delivered a stunning blow to the back of her head. The chair shattered and she screamed out in pain and fell to the floor. He grabbed his knife and a pillow and straddled her on the floor. He stifled her screams with the pillow. Then he finished his work with the knife by grabbing her still wet hair and yanking her head back he cut her from ear to ear. He could feel the knife going through the cartilage and the head coming loose in his hands, which were slippery from all the blood spurting out of the gaping wound in poor Kathryn’s neck. The artery as well as all the cartilage was completely severed. The only thing still keeping her head attached to her body was the brain stem and he would finish that shortly. He stood over her lifeless body staring down at his work as the blood pooled around her shoulders. His chest was heaving as he was close to hyperventilating. This always happened to him. It took a few minutes for him to get his breathing back to normal. He looked around him and saw the blood splatter all over the dresser and the walls. He picked up Kathryn’s lifeless body and noticed her skull was crushed when he struck her with the chair. He carried her to the bed and gently laid her down, crossing her arms across her chest resting her hands on her pubis.

He walked out of the room and entered the bathroom, starting the shower. When the water was hot he stepped in, letting the water cascade over his body. The water was a bright red from Kathryn Reilly’s blood that he washed from his body and he watched as it circled the drain. He grabbed a bar of soap and scrubbed his hands, arms and face until they were almost raw. He was a bright red from the heat and scrubbing when he stepped out of the shower and dressed. He left through the same window he entered leaving Kathryn Reilly’s lifeless body lying on her blood soaked bed without her head. He took that with him.

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Chapter 1

I wrapped the leather strap around my wrist until it was good and tight. My hat was pulled down as far as it would go and I adjusted my chaps. I was known for my hat always being on my head at the end of my rides, something I was proud of.

It was 1937 and I was leading in points for the all around cowboy award with only two more events to go before the end of the season. Barring any unforeseen accidents, I was a shoo in to beat Mike Scanlon who had won the title three years running. I looked forward to getting the silver buckle, silver studded saddle and bridle as well as the nice check that was waiting for the winner. Saying nothing about a chance of crawling in the sack with that little rodeo queen from Austin who was sitting in the crowd today.

It was Austin Texas and it was hot. Austin is a rodeo town, a breeding ground for the rodeo, not just for animals, but for the men who ride them as well. I am an outsider, from Wisconsin and nobody from Wisconsin had won this title. I am going to be the first.

I wiggled my seat around on the back of the big two thousand pound Corrientes bull named Casper, squeezing his sides with my legs to let him know I am taking over today. The bull rolled his eyes back and looked up at me the best he could in the tight chute as if to say, "I'm ready for you. Everyone else thought they could stay on me for eight seconds but nobody has lasted more than two and you won't be any different."

What Casper didn't know was that I had been studying him all season. Oh, he is one tough son of a bitch alright, but I noticed that every time he shot out of the chute, he turned to the right and dropped his head and gave one helluva twist then he would surprise everybody and turn back to the left; but I would be ready for it today; it didn't take much to outsmart a dumb ol' bull. Eight seconds to fame. It doesn't sound like much time but when you are on the back of a beast like this, it feels like an eternity.

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I looked up and scanned the area in front of me. The little rodeo queen from Austin was sitting in the front row off to the left of the chute and next to her was former President Teddy Roosevelt and the famous Chief Quantah Parker, both big rodeo fans. I also noticed the three rodeo clowns standing behind the barrels in the middle of the arena chatting with one another. I looked down one last time and checked my wrap and smiled at Hap Schultz, my team roping partner and header, who was standing on the railing next to me.

“Give ‘em hell Max. It’s been one helluva season. One these damn Texans will never forget.”

I didn’t say anything, but turned toward the front of the chute and nodded to the boy at the gate. He slipped the latch and ol’ Casper burst out like someone had just put a hot poker up his ass. I was leaning to the right, anticipating his first move when he surprised the ever lovin’ crap outta me by turning left. He dropped his head digging his nose in the dirt and twisted his massive body, bringing his hindquarters nearly up to his nose.

Before I knew it I was flying off his back with my right wrist still securely wrapped around the leather strap that surrounded his girth. My feet hit the ground like they were shot from a cannon. My hat flew off my head for the first time that season but that was the least of my worries as I felt my wrist snap. I was bouncing along with Casper, my feet touching the ground every time his hindquarters landed and lifting off every time he kicked up. I kept pumping my legs running as fast as I could, trying to keep up with him and keep myself from falling. If I fell, he would drag me around the arena and I would end up shredded like a head of lettuce.

Then Casper lived up to his reputation of being one mean son of a bitch as he slammed me up against the wall right in front of the little rodeo queen from Austin. Not once, but three times, breaking my ribs and busting my nose. It was as if he knew I had my eyes on that gal and he was letting her and me know that I wasn’t that tough cowboy I thought I was. Where in the hell are those damn rodeo clowns, I thought as Casper slammed me one more time for good measure. I felt my left eye swell up and close.

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The last thing I remember was my wrap finally loosening up and me high flying it in the air over the arena and looking down at the astonished look on the face of that little rodeo queen from Austin and me wondering if I ever would end up in the sack with her.

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Chapter 2

I woke up in the Austin State Hospital with a damn bottle of something hooked up to my left arm and the liquid that was dripping from it into me wasn't brandy. Bandages' were covering what I thought was my entire body. Every time I took a breath I thought someone was sticking a knife in me. I could only see out of my right eye and my head felt like someone had stuck it in a vise and left it there.

I noticed what was left of my hat sitting on top of my jeans and shirt on a Naugahyde covered chair next to the bed with my Dan Post cowboy boots neatly lined up underneath it.

"Well, you fucked up big time, pardner. It was Hap, his grizzled old face smiling down at me.

Damn Scanlon got the check and that little rodeo queen from Austin you were so hot to trot over."

"What are you doin' here? I asked. Why don't you go find a nurse to ride and let me sleep?" Hap chuckled and shook his head. "I already done that. I ain't here to see you. I need the truck keys; can't go nowheres without 'em. I figured I would load up the riggin' and horses and come back an git your sorry ass and head north. You sure don't have the money to lay up in here and have all them pretty nurses scrubbin' your back since you lost that big check to Scanlon; and you sure ain't going to be ridin' nuthin' for a long time, pardner. Doc said you broke your wrist along with a half dozen ribs. Ya' got a concussion that probably made your brain all mush and a broken nose and a swelled up eye that is as black as Bill Pickett."

Bill Pickett was a black cowboy from Texas. He devised his own method of bulldogging steers. He jumped from his horse to a steer's back, bit its upper lip, and threw it to the ground by grabbing its horns. Soon, there were enough imitators doing the same thing that the event was added to the rodeo circuit.

"I say we head back to Milwaukee and git ourselves a real job and quit this shit." Hap said.

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I sure as hell wasn't in any condition to argue with him. If Hap was ready to hang up his spurs, then maybe it was time. He was one of the best ropers around and had been winning most every time he went out this year. I was his partner in the team roping event. I was the heeler and Hap the header. That meant Hap got after the calf as soon as he shot out of the chute and I would follow and loop my rope around the back legs of the critter after Hap had lassoed its head. I was left handed and nobody wanted to team up with a left handed roper, but Hap didn't seem to care. He could have been a serious contender if he had a different heeler but he said he liked it the way it was. Nobody could drink brandy like I could and he liked that. We did alright but didn't finish in the money enough to be considered a threat to anyone of importance.

"Guess you're right Hap. You want to get that doctor in here to get this shit outta my arm so I can get dressed?"

Heading north on highway 183 out of Austin, heading toward Brushy Creek, I turned to Hap who was chewing on a piece of straw, listening to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio singing *The Cowboy's Prayer*, which was the number one hit in 1934 by Goebel Reeves. "If you are going to keep singing all the way back to Milwaukee, the least you could do is stop up here and get me a bottle of brandy; anything to put me outta my misery."

"You got enough money to buy a bottle, Max?" Hap asked with a grin on his face.

"Probably not; that's why I brought you along Hap. Not for your singing."

After paying the hospital and doctor bills my wallet was so flat it could hide under a snake.

"Alright, I know it ain't my singin' that's gottcha hurtin' and it ain't ol' Casper either. You are just pissed 'cause Scanlon bested ya' once again, and I don't mean by getting' the buckle. I mean that little rodeo queen from Austin. That hurts, don't it? Well Max; don't lose any sleep over her. She's about as exclusive as a mailbox."

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I looked at Hap and shook my head and said, “You are an abomination, Hap. I don’t know why I keep you around. Just get my bottle, will you?”

“Ha, you know you can’t make it through a week without me being there to pick up the pieces of what’s left of ol’ Max Fly after he messes up. It’s inevitable. Anyway, we’ll burn that bridge when we come to it. I’m getting’ some food. I gotta eat if I am doing all the driving and listening to you complain for fifteen hunnert miles. As we pulled back on the highway after feeding the horses some oats I took my first drink. As the amber liquid warmed my insides, I lifted the brandy bottle in front of my face and stared at the label and said. “Next to you Hap, I guess these Christian Brothers are my best friends.”

“You’re probably right, Max. You’re crazier than an outhouse rat and not many folks can stand to be around you for long and I ain’t lyin. Me? What do I know? I’m just an abomination, whatever that is.” I figured that didn’t deserve a reply so I just leaned back in the seat and pulled my hat down over my face and tried to catch some shut eye.

After listening to the tires hum along the highway for a couple of hours, Hap turned and said, “I been thinking, Max.”

I pushed my hat up with my finger and sat up and grabbed the bottle and said, “Wait a minute that requires a drink. That thought must have been on a long lonely journey Hap.”

Ignoring my remark he grinned, “What do you think about becoming a rodeo clown? You don’t want to spend the rest of your life hooked up to bottles in a hospital do you? I mean I don’t mind waitin’ on you or nuthin’. There sure are enough nurses to keep me occupied until you can sit up and take nourishment; just a thought.”

“Rodeo clown, eh?”

After mulling that over for a few moments, I said. “Damn Hap, did Scanlon really take that little rodeo queen from Austin home with him?” changing the subject back to something that was irking the hell out of me.

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Hap shook his head and stuck the piece of straw back in his mouth and smiled and began singing another Goebel Reeves song *Blue Undertaker's Blues*,

“I went down to the undertaker
Saw my best little woman laying there.
Stretched out among them snowy white linen,
So sweet, so still, laying there.
When she gets them wings of an angel,
Let her flit and fly while she can.
She will never get satisfaction
From the words of no one man.”

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Chapter 3

Hap and I arrived in Milwaukee in 1937 during a September snow storm. It was so cold my nuts shriveled up like a pair of raisins, making me question Haps wisdom of wanting to quit the rodeo scene back in Texas and come back home. Luckily the snow melted the next day and we experienced a mild fall.

Hap still had to have something between his legs beside a horse so he hooked up with a fast growing company by the name of Harley Davidson in north Milwaukee that made motorcycles. He worked the third shift and slept most of the morning so we didn't see much of each other until the weekends.

I, on the other hand, thought I could lengthen my life span by getting a job where I sat behind a desk instead of on the back of a crazy horse or raging bull, so I took an offer from the Milwaukee Journal, the flagship newspaper of the Beer Capitol of the World also known as the city of neighborhoods. I started as a copy boy but took advantage of the early demise of their crime scene reporter, Sammy "Snuffy" Schultz who arrived at a shooting scene a few minutes too early and caught a .38 caliber slug in his gut.

It wasn't long before my heart took a big leap and I married this little cooze I met up in the Town of Brookfield. She was a bartender/waitress at the Railroad Inn and was packed with a top that made you drool long before the salads were served. I swear she was taller lying down than she was standing up. Unfortunately, she believed I was something I never professed to be and when the truth got out, so did she, moving to Kenosha, hooking up with some guy tightening lug nuts on Nash Ramblers as they left the assembly line, leaving me hurting like Casper never came close to doing.

As usual, Hap was there for me when I fell, showering me with his words of wisdom.

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“When are you going to learn, little buddy, when you see a women like that who has tits from here to eternity, you got to climb off once you reach the top because there just ain’t no more mountains to climb. Look at me; you don’t see none of this crap happen’ to me, do ya?”

“Hap, that’s because you’re so ugly, you couldn’t date a chimpanzee.”

“That may be true, Max, but at least I won’t be paying alimony from now until Jesus returns.”

I smiled as I held my head in my hands and groaned, “Hap, why do you have to be so damn smart after the fact when it doesn’t do me any good?”

Hap threw back his head and laughed. “Hell Max, then you wouldn’t be fun to be around.”

It wasn’t long before the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor and Hap and I decided our country needed our considerable talent at fighting, so we joined the Army Air Corps. Hap going to Europe and I ended up in the South Pacific. Luckily for all the women in Milwaukee, we both came back without any visible scars. We both got our old jobs back and life was clicking on all cylinders.

Hap was working with an ex-fly boy by the name of Sam Galbraith who seemed to fill Hap’s head with some new scheme every night. The newest one was to buy an airplane and start a charter business. Evidently he had a line on a plane that he could get for a song and a few thousand dollars that he didn’t have. Since they worked the third shift, Sam reasoned they could fly business executives or cargo during the day and get back in plenty of time to cover their shift at Harley. The plane was a Model 17 Staggerwing Biplane that had the top wing staggered behind the bottom wing. It was manufactured in 1934 by Beech. It was specifically designed for business travel which was unusual in that era. This particular plane had powerful radial engines rated at more than seven hundred horsepower which made it faster than most military aircraft at the time. This plane also was the one that famed aviatrix, Jacqueline Cochran used when she won the Bendix Trophy Race in 1937.

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When Hap finished telling me their plan and the fact that they got the interest of some guy by the name of Ralph Mills who was developing property in Menomonie Falls and points north and who evidently had more money than sense to throw in with them, I decided to take the money that was hiding in my whole life insurance policy that my ex took out on me and give it to Hap before she could get her hands on it. I figured if I died, it would end up hers anyway. My thoughts were I might as well spend it now and Hap was the closest thing I had to family so I might as well spend it on him.

So far I haven't seen a return on my investment but Hap told me he has been receiving some nice dividends.

"You ever do it in a plane Max?" he asked.

"Do what in a plane, Hap?"

"Come on Max, you know what; get laid."

"No I haven't. I have a hard enough time getting laid on the ground, so doing it while I fly over Wisconsin hasn't been high on my list of things to do."

"Well, I'm here to tell you little buddy, it is an incredible experience. All I can say is I am glad I was five thousand feet up because the screaming that little filly did would have brought the whole damn Milwaukee Police Department down on me if I was riding her at my place."

"I'm happy for you. For some reason I felt I might have wasted my money investing in this flying bordello, but now I can see that's not the case."

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If you factored out that investment, life was moving along pretty well for me and I was settling into a routine that seemed to fit my life style. I was sitting at my favorite booth in Rocco's Pub, working the days' crossword puzzle wearing my work clothes, a brown corduroy jacket, hiding my shoulder rig that held my .38 caliber Colt Detective Special belly gun, a Wisconsin Badgers sweatshirt, blue jeans, with my rodeo belt buckle from my second place finish in overall points for the All Around Cowboy Award I won in 1937, and my Dan Post cowboy boots, when a squad car shot by with its siren screaming, lights flashing and tires squealing. I jumped up leaving a couple of bucks on the table which more than covered the cost of my coffee, providing a generous tip along with my half finished crossword puzzle for Eloise, my regular waitress and main squeeze. She had been working at Rocco's Pub for as long as I had been hanging out there which was quite awhile.

I ran to my car, a 1941 Nash 600 Ambassador Convertible Coupe that I parked at the curb. I jumped in and noticed a parking ticket under my windshield wiper. "Damn, I cursed, another one." I reached out, grabbed it, and threw it on the front seat next to a half dozen others.

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I was turning the ignition before I even closed the door praying that the engine would turn over and fire one more time. I have been threatening to get rid of this car and get a new one but never got around to doing it. In its day, she was a beauty. It was the first mass-produced unibody automobile made in the United States. It got better gas mileage than its competitors because of its lighter weight and lower air drag. It's equipped with overdrive and I can go about 600 miles on a tank of gas. In other words it gets 30 miles per gallon and in my financial condition I need to save anywhere I can. And it is made a little south of Milwaukee at Nash Rambler in Kenosha, Wisconsin which is a plus; as I said, Nash employs my ex's new boyfriend and that keeps her off my back about late or missing alimony checks. The odometer reads close to two hundred thousand miles and it has served me well over the years. I taped a couple dozen pencils together and attached them to the metal rod sticking out of the floorboard where the accelerator used to be. I lost the pedal awhile back trying to lose an irate husband who I was taking some photos of with a young bimbo leaving the Bluemound Inn, west of Milwaukee in the small town of Brookfield. The guy was an ex Green Bay Packer who was washed up before his career started but that didn't matter in Wisconsin. These guys eat, drink and sleep for free and they expect everybody to kiss their ass. His wife knew he was running around on her but couldn't prove it. That's where I came in. I caught him red handed; unfortunately, he caught me red handed catching him red handed and he came after me with a vengeance as if I was a scrawny halfback. If he had shown the same ferocity he showed coming after me while he was playing for the Pack, he might have lasted longer than the six years he spent riding the bench. While getting away from him, I mashed the accelerator to the floorboard with an overwhelming fear that I was soon to meet my demise, causing the brittle rubber to break into a dozen pieces. I have been meaning to replace it but just never seemed to find the time. The fee I received from the ex Packer's wife went to my ex and the rest I split between

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Rocco's and getting a cracked tooth fixed, which is another story. I had to wire the passenger door shut after some whacko side swiped me down on Juneau Avenue last year while I was covering a double homicide. It would take a couple months pay to get it fixed and I could never get the cash together. This baby was like home to me. It might have felt that way as I spent most nights sleeping in the back seat, either alone or, on some occasions, with Eloise, when for some reason, she didn't want me over at her place. I rented a flat over a plumbing supply shop down off Kilbourn Avenue. I couldn't afford any furniture so all I had in there was a single cot from the Army Surplus store and an old couch and chair my sister gave me two years ago before she took off for California with her new husband. For end tables, I used a couple of crates that some pipe came in that I took out of the dumpster behind the building. I had one old lamp whose shade was torn and yellow from age. I had a hot plate and a refrigerator. The refrigerator came with the place and quit working when it pleased and that seemed to be whenever I put in a quart of milk and some cheese. I brought Eloise home one night and the refrigerator must have cut off in the morning as the place smelled like a rendering plant. It doesn't take a scientist to figure out maybe that's why Eloise would join me in the backseat of my Nash but not at the flat. The flat was situated where a breeze couldn't circulate through to cool the place so it was always hot in the summer and the smell from the grease on the plumbing pipes would waft up through the ceiling making it rather unpleasant to sleep at night. It was a cinder block building with no insulation so in the winter, the cold air would leak in from the walls, the floor and the ceiling and the place was always cold. Every time I flushed the toilet it sounded like the building would collapse. I rented it from my ex's older sister who was a plumber. She couldn't stand my ex and did it just to spite her. I think she hated my ex about as much as my ex hated me. This was a family feud that I liked. She charged me fifty dollars a month and that included electricity as she didn't want to go through the trouble of

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calling the electric company and having them come out to install another meter. The reason I continue to call this place home is that I need a place to store my stuff. If I kept it in my car, I wouldn't have anyplace to take Eloise on those occasions when the heat rises from our loins and takes over our better senses.

Whenever the urge to get another car hits me, I either don't have the money or the stomach to go to a used car lot and put up with some shyster trying to sell me a lemon for twice the amount of money it is worth.

I was lucky the engine fired and started to purr. Well, I call it a purr. Most people would call it an intermittent chug, burp, cough and sputter. I let out the clutch, which was beginning to slip a bit, and slammed the pencils to the floor. The old Nash lurched into traffic, belching blue smoke out the exhaust pipe amid the blaring horns of the cars I cut off as I started my pursuit of the police car. I changed lanes to get around a slow moving Cadillac filled with a group of elderly ladies. This was unusual as I was the one usually being passed by annoyed commuters heading to work or wherever they were headed as they entered the city. As I reached the first curve in the road, I could feel the chassis sway back and forth. This baby had independent coil spring front suspension when it was new but the past fifteen years it has been driven pretty hard. Well, at least for the last five years that I've had it.

Once I reached the straight away I punched the pencils again with all the force I could muster with my right leg as if that would make it go faster. I could hear the engine whine and groan, wishing I would ease up a bit and be more considerate of her advanced age. I could still see the flashing lights in the horizon but I was losing ground rapidly. I lost the last police cruiser I chased and I sure as hell wasn't going to lose this one. I was desperate for a story. A story? Yeah, that's right, a story. You see, I'm a part time beat reporter for a small town newspaper called the Daily Citizen.

My editor, Francis Wentworth, from THE Wentworth's on Lake Shore Drive, in Beaver Dam, was losing patience with

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me and threatened to replace me with a pencil necked geek by the name of Horace Greenberg, who was currently working in the mailroom. Horace was a pain in the ass. Every time he passed my desk, he would stop and look over my shoulder to read what I was typing. He would make some comment like "You know, you should put a comma after door."

"I'll put a comma up your ass if you don't get outta' here, you piece of shit!" I'd tell him and he would run off with his tail between his legs until the next time he delivered the mail. It wasn't like this job was that great. I mean the money sucked. I could make more money waitressing at Rocco's, if I had legs like Eloise. I guess I just enjoyed sticking my nose in other people's business and then writing about it. Sometimes it didn't even seem like a job. Just something I did to pass time between beers and Eloise. But then ol' Francis would get in my face and I would have to go to the corner drugstore and load up on more antacid.

So, I have been chasing squad cars for this daily rag in the town of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin and its' fourteen thousand, five hundred busy Beavers, for over five years.

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After I returned from the war in forty five, I got back my job as a beat reporter for the Milwaukee Journal. As I said, I enlisted in the Army Air Corp and spent a lot of time in the South Pacific and saw a lotta shit happen. People tell me when I die, I'm going to hell, but I'm here to tell you, you don't have to die to go there. I was there. So I didn't want to put up with any more shit from my city editor who sat with his fat belly hanging over his belt and whose idea of a horrifying event was seeing some old Pollack whack his wife over the head with a kielbasa. One day we had a disagreement that caused me to make a career change. This disagreement landed me on the obituary page. I mean as a writer. It might have been better if I landed there in an article. After I plastered my editor's nose across his face, when he gave me crap about not showing enthusiasm for my job, I decided my career needed some adjustment. I spent the next couple of weeks discussing my options with my agent, Tommy Hanson, the bartender at Hepfner's Bowling Alley on North Avenue. Whenever I wasn't at Rocco's assessing Eloise's legs and backside, I was giving advice at Hepfner's to anyone who would listen, and there weren't many, on who the Braves should get at second base and leftfield that would make them a cinch to win the '57 World Series. They had unloaded one of my favorites, Jack Ditmer, who started at second base and did a good job. He was a solid player. Not flashy like some of those guys, but he got the job done. You could count on him hitting .270 to .280 every year. Not bad for a second baseman. Since they traded him, I said they should get Albert "Red" Schoendienst from the Saint Louis Cardinals. A perennial All Star and future Hall of Famer who the Cardinals thought was reaching the end of his career. The guy could hit. He had a lifetime batting average over .300. Red is just what we need in the number two spot hitting before Eddie Mathews, our All Star third baseman and Henry Aaron, who says he gets his lumber from Banner Lumber and who hits more bad balls than Liberace's chin. Since they moved Henry from leftfield to right, the Braves hadn't been able to find anyone who could play leftfield

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without getting hurt or with any consistency. If Joe Adcock, the big six foot four inch, two hundred and twenty pound first baseman can recover from his knee surgery, the Braves would have a lineup that would scare the bejesus out of any pitcher. Last year Rueben Gomez, the Puerto Rican pitcher for the New York Giants hit Adcock with a pitch and Joe took off after him with his bat. He chased him all around the outfield and into the Giants dugout. Gomez refused to come out and the Giants had to put in another pitcher and Adcock was ejected from the game.

Anyway, getting back to my dilemma, Tommy, the wise sage that he is, suggested I should seek employment in another city, especially if I wanted to stay in the writing racket.

“Racket? Whaddya’ mean by racket, Tommy?”

“Well, you can’t call it a job Max, he said. I see you in here just about every day and Eloise says she sees you more than she does Rocco. What about rodeoing? Isn’t that rodeo clown gig working for you?”

“It’s working for me, Tommy, but it’s only on weekends during the summer and I need more than that and I’m not going on the circuit anymore. I’m too old and busted up to get into that again.”

“What about that horse trading business, or that airline you and Hap and those other two goofballs own? Hell, you’re a renaissance man, Max.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

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"I'm not sure," Tommy replied. "I heard someone call a guy that once." So, ignoring Tommy's advice, I went to work for a buddy of mine who had a small private investigative agency, named Marcello and Associates. Associates turned out to be a portly old spinster, named Mildred Bates, who cleaned houses for rich Jews on the East side of Milwaukee on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of every week. Tuesday and Thursday she opened Marcello's mail and answered his phone, when it rang. She wore her hair pulled back in a bun so tight that it caused her to have a perpetually painful look on her face. She was a short woman with thick glasses and a slight mustache over her upper lip. From what I could tell, her legs never saw a razor. They looked like the poster boys for Smith Brothers of the cough drop family.

Marcello was an ex fed by the name of John Marcello, a stocky Italian with a barrel chest and graying curly hair, who needed to get out of the house to save his marriage. So he got his license and hung out his shingle.

He said: "What the fuck you wanna do this for? You'll end up gettin' your nuts shot off by some broads' husband or dropped in the Milwaukee River by some Guinea from Chicago."

I convinced him he needed me and he agreed to split any fees he got for cases I handled for him. After a year I got my PI license and my name after his on his office door. So now Associates include a fat old Jew cleaning woman and a Swedish loser small town newspaper beat writer/private investigator/rodeo clown who changed his name from Hjerstedt to Fly. I changed my name because it's a pain in the ass spelling it every time someone asked me my name. When I first told Marcello that I changed my name to Fly he was glad. He said it would cost too much to have Hjerstedt painted on the door and he didn't want to have to spell it and pronounce it every time someone would ask. I agreed with him.

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Marcello had some good contacts with the Milwaukee Police Department so he was kept busy doing background checks on potential industry leaders and politicians and to help them with their backlog on warrants and repos. He didn't trust me yet with anything heavy, so I got to do repos and chase horny husbands, like that ex Green Bay Packer.

Needless to say, I wasn't making a lot being Marcello's stooge, so I got this job at the Daily Citizen. Actually, I invented the job. I suggested to Francis that they needed a crime reporter covering the crime scene in Milwaukee and I had the experience and the time. I suggested I would work for peanuts and he took me up on it. I get paid a bit more than peanuts, but not much. My pay situation is why I hesitate on replacing this old Nash.

Today I was lucky; I caught up with the police car. The responding officers were Detective Sgt Harry Marshall and Detective Emily Williams, of the homicide division. My friendship with Detective Marshall went back eleven years when we both mustered out of the Army Air Corp together. He went back to the Milwaukee PD and picked up his job as a homicide detective he had before he enlisted. He now has twenty years under his belt, most of it leading the homicide division. Detective Williams was the first female detective on the Milwaukee Police force. She was damned good. She had to be or she would be back at some precinct slapping it out with an old Remington typewriter and putting up with sexual attacks from the beat cops riding out the rest of their time before they retired. She was also hot!

Harry and I have had our moments over the years, but most of them have been pretty good. It seems I have a way of getting under his skin at times, but it's my job. When he can get over my tenaciousness, he says it is over the top obnoxiousness; he can tolerate me as long as I don't step over that line. That line is always changing it seems, so I have to continually assess how he feels at the moment.

Chapter 4

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They were standing on the front lawn of a Polish Flat, a typical four room dwelling common on the south side of Milwaukee. As soon as the mortgage was paid on these flats, the Pollack's would raise them on posts and add a semi basement underneath and the owner would then rent this out. Once this second mortgage was paid, the place would be converted back to a single family home. This particular flat did not have a semi basement added. As I approached Detective Marshall and Detective Williams, I could tell that this was going to be one of those moments that Marshall would tolerate me. He looked much worse then he normally did, but Detective Williams still looked hot. Harry sported the same flat top hair cut he had when he got out of the army and had a prominent chin, along with cauliflower ears. His hair line started behind those ears. He stood just over six feet tall and his waist line was beginning to grow from the long hours he spent behind the wheel of his squad car or behind his desk eating too many Polish sausages. He was standing with his legs slightly spread and his shoulders slumped down. Over the years, during the good times, Harry and I shared many a bottle of Brandy and he confessed his love of the job despite all the crap he had to deal with from the brass. He said it was as bad as the army. He dreaded retirement and it was approaching faster than he cared to admit. He didn't know how much longer he could last as all the crime in the city was wearing him down. He was only forty five, but looked sixty five, it was the eyes. They had seen a lot over the years. He was married once with no kids, but that was all he would say about that episode of his life.

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Detective Williams, known as EJ by her closest friends, wore her light brown hair stylishly short and stood about five foot eight inches tall. Not thin, not fat, but solid. She had what could only be described as bedroom eyes, where the eyelids seductively droop half way over the eyes. She has nice sized breasts and a small waist. She was a sight to see when she was in the uniformed division with that Sam Browne belt cinched tight around her waist accentuating her breasts. She is what made covering the crime beat enjoyable. Civilian clothes didn't take anything away from her either, now that she was in the plain clothes division, that's for sure. Her jacket was neatly pressed with darts, which brought attention to her magnificent curves and her pants were always clean and freshly pressed. She undoubtedly never left home without her makeup applied and a hair out of place or a wrinkle to be seen.

In contrast, the khaki colored suit Harry wore was wrinkled and looked like he had slept in it, which he probably did. His yellow striped tie was sporting a stain from drippings of sauce from a previous lunch and was hanging loosely from the collar of his blue oxford shirt, which was frayed at the neck. I shouldn't be talking about the way Harry dresses as neither Harry nor I would be asked to enter Milwaukee's Best Dressed Men contest. His hound dog eyes were bloodshot and seemed to be held on his face by the multiple bags of skin plastered above his cheeks. Harry's nose was bent to the side from an altercation he had at "The Cuffs", a favorite off duty hangout for officers from the eighth precinct, when some new uniformed patrolman made a crude remark about Detective Williams' magnificent breasts. Detective Williams' likes to let everyone know she could have taken the punk down by herself. But she is gracious enough to let everyone who asks know, that Harry "beat the ever lovin' shit outta the dirt bag, saving her the trouble."

"What are you guys doing taking a call way out here?" I asked.

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The baleful look Harry had, gave me the feeling that I would get some inside information regarding what just went down. "We were riding by, headin' back to the precinct when the call came in and I told the dispatcher we would take it." "A 187," he volunteered, which is police code for a homicide, as I pulled out a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes. They changed their package back from the olive drab green, red and black design they adorned during the war years to the red, white and black that they originally had. I tapped the bottom of the pack to push one out so he could grab it. I snapped open the lid of my Zippo lighter with the United States Army Air Corp insignia on it and put the flame to the end of the cigarette. He inhaled deeply, filling his lungs with the acrid smoke and releasing it slowly in the shape of little O's. Detective Williams turned her face in disgust waving her hand in the air to move the smoke away. Harry didn't know that I didn't smoke. At least if he did know, he didn't let on that he knew. I carried the Lucky Strikes because I knew they were his brand of preference.

"This is a bad one Max, he said, his hands shook. He was visibly shaken. A lady cut to pieces in there. There's blood all over the place. The perp cut off her head. Man, it's missing. Are you here as a private dick or for that daily rag up north?" He knew what I was there for; he was just pulling my chain. "What's missing?" I asked, ignoring his question and staring at the profile that Detective Williams was giving me. "The fuck you thinks' missing? The lady's head. The Chief put out an APB on it in case anyone runs across it. Can you believe that shit? A fucking APB on a missing head? Don't know what she looked like, but what is left of her is really something. "Shut up, Harry", Williams said, her voice dripping with disgust, looking like a Norwegian who just found out someone stole her lutefisk. "Shit, pretty soon every fuckin' reporter north of Racine monitoring police calls tonight will be in my face." She groaned.

"Geez, I can smell the blood out here," I said.

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“Any chance of me taking a look?”

I was hoping Harry would let me see the crime scene. Since he was the senior officer, Williams didn't have a say. If it was up to her, she wouldn't be talking to me, let alone letting me step into her crime scene.

I had my Brownie camera in the glove box and I could snap some shots of the body. I knew they wouldn't be professional but at least they would be something. That would be a real scoop. If Francis didn't want them, I might be able to sell them to the True Detective Magazine. Maybe I could convince Francis to give me a little bonus for getting exclusive photos of what could turn out to be one of Wisconsin's most gruesome murders.

“Yeah, I'll letcha in there,” Harry said, “but don't touch nothin' or I'll cut your balls off. Then get the hell outta there before the chief and coroner arrive. I'll meet you at Rocco's when I finish up here. You can buy me a couple of Christian Brothers with Blatz chasers. You might consider throwing in a steak and fries too.”

“You got it, Harry,” I replied.

“How about you Emily?” I knew she didn't like me addressing her by her first name. The scowl on her face when she turned to say “Go fuck yourself Max”, confirmed it. I walked toward my car. “Let me get my camera and then I'll run in and out quick before anyone gets here.”

“The hell you will,” Harry yelled.

“No pictures! You wanna get me fired? Think they won't know who gave you access to the scene? Just get in there and get the info you need for your story and then get your ass outta there!”

I put my hand on his shoulder and said “I'll be careful Harry. Thanks a lot. I owe you.”

“Damn right you do!”

“Aw shit, Harry, you're gonna' get our asses fired one of these days you keep on doin' these things for that loser,” Emily yelled.

“Come on, EJ, you love me”, I said on my way into the house.

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Detective Williams raised her right hand and thrust her middle finger in the direction of my retreating backside. I had no idea I was about to get involved in what was to become the biggest case I ever covered and which, at the least, almost cost Harry his job and me my PI license and my job with the Daily Citizen as well as our lives. Not to say anything about the indelible mark that was put on my relationship with Detective Emily Williams.

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Chapter 5

As I stepped up on the first step of the front porch, the coppery stench of blood hit me like a wet blanket, causing bile to rise up in the back of my throat. I reached in my back pocket for my handkerchief to cover my nose. This wasn't going to be easy. I walked through the front door into the hall of the small flat and saw the white legs of the body sticking out of the back room to my left. I walked forward, careful not to touch anything and when I reached the room, I saw the headless corpse, laying face up. Well, I guess you couldn't say face up since the face and head was missing. But front side up with her arms and legs spread open wide. Harry was right; whoever this woman was she kept herself in good condition and had a body to kill for, which someone obviously had. There wasn't a stitch of clothing to be seen. The room where the body was laying was obviously a woman's bedroom. The curtains were white with ruffles. The bed was rumped with the white satin sheets pulled off and laying on the floor at the head of the body, or where her head would have been. They were soaked in blood. It was obvious the lady bled out in this room. The lamp on the bed stand next to the bed was knocked on the floor casting an eerie pall over the room.

I moved around the body careful not to touch anything as I looked for anything on the floor that Harry might have missed. Bending down, I lifted up the duster around the box spring to see if there was anything under the bed. I saw a pair of black pumps and a lacy red bra and panties. Nothing else. Where's her purse? What kinda lady doesn't carry a purse? Eloise has more stuff in her purse than I have in my entire apartment. Women can't survive without their purse. If the killer wanted to rob her, he would only take her cash and jewelry not the entire purse. And why take her head? Maybe they didn't want her identified. Geez, this was really a weird one."

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The closet door was slightly open so I walked over and looked in. It was empty. That was strange. Not even a single coat hanger. Somebody must have cleaned this place out before they left or this lady was a visitor. I heard a noise behind me and jumped. I turned around, it was Harry.

"Aw Jesus Harry, you scared the livin' shit outta me."

"Yeah, well get over it Max. I want you out of here. I hear the sirens and the chief will be here any minute."

"You notice there aren't any clothes in the closet?"

"Yeah, strange, isn't it? There's a pair of shoes and bra and panties under the bed and that's it. I'd say she didn't live here. There isn't much in the bathroom either; some men's toiletries and a box of Tampons. Unusual combination, wouldn't you say?"

So Harry did check under the bed. "Could be some guys fuck pad."

"Yeah, we'll check into that. Now get the fuck outta here before I lose my job."

"Where do you suppose her purse is, Harry?"

"Good question. Before you go, here is another bit of information. This isn't the first victim we found who had their head missing. A young lady named Kathryn Reilly was found last week not far from here, killed in her own apartment."

"How old was she, Harry?"

"Young, early twenties from what we can tell from what is left of her. Chief Meier will be informing the press about her later today. Now get outta here."

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I side stepped around the blood and walked out of the room down the hall toward the front door, looking into the kitchen and living room as I left. The place was sparsely furnished that's for sure. Either the guy, if it was a guy, lived like me or he didn't do much entertaining in this place; at least not outside the bedroom. There was no couch or end tables in the living room. The kitchen had a Formica table and four folding chairs. That was it. I walked in the kitchen and covered my hand with my handkerchief as I opened the refrigerator. It was empty except for a six pack of Blatz Beer. At least whoever lived here had good taste in beer. I'd have to ask Harry about what they found in the other bedroom in the back. That door was open but the light was out so I couldn't see and I didn't want to push my luck with Harry by snooping around anymore.

I received a nasty sneer and a dismissive shake of the head from Detective Williams as I walked down the steps.

"Get the hell outta here, Max. If you ever cost me my job, I'll personally come looking for you and make you wish you never lived."

"I love you too, EJ. Wanna join Harry and me at Rocco's later? I'm buying."

The look in her eyes convinced me she was serious as a heart attack, which I would prefer having than her beating on my head with the BB loaded sap attached to her belt.

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I no sooner got to my car and opened my one good door when, the police chief's car came roaring around the corner from South Kinnickinnic Avenue screeching to a halt about two feet from the rear of my Nash, scaring the crap out of me once again. I was going to have to change my shorts tonight before meeting Harry at Rocco's. The driver's door opened and a big Negro patrolman stepped out and walked around the car and opened the rear door. Before he got there, Hymie Gerlach, a big German, the chief's main body guard, stepped out of the passenger side. He had red hair and was about six feet five inches tall and weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds. Hymie never smiled and was always looking around for something. Maybe he got word that someone wanted to take the chief out and they were willing to do it anywhere. Chief Frank Meier stepped out onto the curb. He was about five foot eight inches tall, about two hundred pounds and about as ugly as one man could get. He was definitely overweight; well, pudgy would be a better description, and he had pasty white skin. He looked like he bathed in milk every day. His eyes were set back in his face and he had a constant squint. One never lingered long looking at those eyes as you were immediately drawn to his hideously thick bright red lips. They were out of proportion with the rest of his face and looked like he was constantly wearing lipstick. They looked rather cartoonish and he always had a half smoked cigar stuck between them. He was the city's first Jew to serve as the Chief of Police. He went to the University of Wisconsin and then to Marquette University's Law School. It looked like he was here for a parade as he was wearing his dress uniform with all his ribbons and medals hanging from his left chest. I guess he was planning on holding a press conference soon. Meier was a good old boy who had been around since the mid thirties and it has been rumored that he was responsible for letting the Chicago mob get a foothold into the Milwaukee economy. It was also rumored that he was preparing to make a run for the mayor's office.

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He sure lived a lavish lifestyle for a public servant. He had a house in Shorewood, a wealthy Jewish community, about a block from the shore of Lake Michigan. He had just dumped his wife of thirty years for a beautiful young lady who danced down at Spencer's Lounge, located along the banks of the Menomonie River on the northeast side of the city. I was surprised that I didn't see her exit the chief's car after him as she usually stuck to him like glue. Instead, it was his chief of staff, Bob Chimilewski, a little blond Polish guy whose face was covered with pimples that were red from him constantly picking on them. Meier kept him around to garner the Polish vote on the Southside. With this little crew, it looked like Meier had the Jews, Pollacks, Krauts and Negros all covered for his run for mayor.

Chimilewski walked up to me and I could see blood oozing out of a freshly picked pustule and he said: "What are you doing here Max? I didn't know you were still chasing sirens. Aren't you working for that Wop Marcello?"

"Yeah, but I also cover the city for the Daily Citizen."

"Wow, I'm impressed. Hey, why don't you stick around? The Chief will be releasing a statement to the press in a few minutes." Chimilewski replied.

"Is that why he is wearing all those medals? Thanks, but I think I'll catch it on the ten o'clock news."

I didn't want to tell him that I probably knew more about this murder than the chief did.

"You better be careful how you talk, Max. Your mouth is going to get you in some serious trouble one of these days."

"Why, what'd I do, Ski?"

"You have always been a loser, Max. I enjoy watching your career going down the toilet. Couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

"I appreciate your concern, Ski, it's nice having friends in high places. Give Frank my best."

"I'll do that, Max; just watch your back and your mouth."

"Are you threatening me Ski?"

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"Wouldn't do that to you Max. If anything happened to you, I would be devastated. Then I'd have to read comic books to get my laughs for the day."

"You'd have to learn how to read first, Ski."

"What did you say punk?"

I ignored him.

"I feel better knowing I'm loved. Keep it in your pants, Ski," I replied.

I flipped him off. It didn't have the same effect that being flipped off by Detective Williams did but it made me feel good. I'll have to work on that.

"Smart ass!" With that, Chimilewski left to join the chief and the rest of his entourage as two black and whites pulled up blocking access to the front of the house.

I got in my Nash and fired the beast up.

As I was driving out, I passed the coroner's wagon as it was pulling onto the street when it hit me that the person laying dead on the floor was somebody's little girl. She had dreams and aspirations like everyone else and now she was mutilated and part of her body was missing. Why? What could she have done that would cause someone to brutalize her like that? And what about that other lady, Kathryn Reilly?

There are some real sickos in this world, no doubt about it.

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Chapter 6

I pulled over at the first phone booth I saw and dropped in my last nickel and dialed Marcello and Associates.

Mildred picked up after the first ring, indicating how busy she was.

"Marcello and Associates, private investigations. How can I help you?"

"It's 'How may I help you?' Mildred, is the Wop in," I asked.

"Watch your mouth, Max, he is your boss," she said, contempt dripping from her voice.

Jeez, another one telling me to watch my mouth; everyone worrying about ol' Max's dental hygiene.

"Marcello", the gruff voice said, again after one ring. Guess I was the only one at the firm who was busy.

"Hey John, it's me, Max."

"What's up Max?"

"I just left a homicide scene that would curl your toes. It was over at 346 South 28th Street. Can you find out who owns that place? It's one of them Polish flats you see all over the place down there. A woman decapitated and obviously deceased."

"You're shittin' me? Who's the lead on it, Max?"

"Marshall." I replied.

"Is that hot detective still working with him?"

"Yep, Detective Williams and she's still hot." I said

"Are you getting a scoop on this, Max? When was the last time you got to scoop a story?"

I ignored the last question Marcello asked and replied. "I can get the scoop on this if I move fast, but Chief Meier is there and he is going to give a statement to the press at ten o'clock and I want to have this thing put to bed by then. I would like to call the guy who owns the place and see what I can find out about that lady."

"Okay, I'll get on this. It might take me a while as I will have to persuade a few people to put in some overtime."

"Thanks John, I appreciate it. Oh, by the way, Harry said this isn't the first beheaded woman in the area."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"Holy shit, what's happening down there? Makes me glad I retired. Just remember to put in a few words about the Marcello Agency in your article. We could use the publicity. Things have been kinda slow here lately."

No kidding, I thought to myself.

"You got it." I replied.

"Oh, and Max, quit calling me a Wop. It upsets Mildred. She's a sensitive type."

"What is she doing working for us if she's sensitive?"

"She ain't working for 'us' Max, she works for me."

"Oh, right. I'll try to remember to hold my tongue and be a little more sensitive.

"Hey, has she shaved her legs yet? I bet Harry she would do it before the summer. He said she never will. We got a saw buck on it so keep me posted, will ya?"

"Good bye Max."

The next thing I heard was the click of the phone as Marcello hung up.

The next person I called was Francis Wentworth, my editor. Horace Greenberg answered.

Just as I figured, he said Wentworth had already left for the day.

"Hey Horace, call him at home and have him call me at Rocco's as soon as he can. It is critically important, you hear? Here's the number, 414-782-9413. You got it?"

"Why should I do that?" Horace whined.

"Because if you don't, I'll come up there and kick your ass from Main Street down to Fuzzy's Place."

Fuzzy's Place was a biker's bar on the outskirts of Beaver Dam and Horace knew he wouldn't last five minutes after he walking through the door. He just wasn't their type.

"Are we clear on this, Horace?"

"Yes, I'll call him."

"Read that number I gave you back to me." He did.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“Okay, if I have to drive all the way up there to get him to hold the presses, I promise you I am going to make a stop at your sorry ass apartment and kick your butt all the way down to Fuzzy’s and knock over every Harley I see in the parking lot and push your scrawny neck into the face of the first biker I see and tell him you didn’t mean to knock those bikes over. You got that?”

“I got it, Max, I got it.”

“You’re a good boy, Horace. Just don’t let me down on this. I don’t have time to waste.”

I hung up.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 7

As I drove up to Rocco's I noticed Marshall's squad car parked in my space. Normally I would have been ticked off, but I was hoping Detective Williams had a change of heart and decided to join us.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

Harry was sitting at a booth in the back of the bar already nursing a Christian Brother's brandy sweet manhattan on the rocks.

Eloise walked up as I sat down. She gave me a quizzical look. I shook my head to let her know that now was not the time to ask questions.

"Where have you been, Max? Marcello called and asked me to give this to you."

It was the name and the number of the guy who owned the flat where the lady lost her head.

"Harry has been here waiting for you for thirty minutes. We were going to have to cut him off if you didn't arrive pretty soon. Dan only allows Harry to run a short tab. And by short, I mean no more'n two drinks.

Harry looked up over the top of his glasses and snarled, "You kiddin' me Eloise? I should close this shit hole down."

Eloise, being the seasoned barmaid she is, ignored Harry's surly remark and turned to me and asked.

"You drinkin' the same, darlin'?"

Whenever she called me darlin', she had something special in store for ol' Max Fly. I would have to type fast tonight and go light on the manhattans.

"If they're doubles I am," I replied eyeing Marshall with a skeptical eye and already giving up on the "going light" idea.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"You got it, Hon." With that Eloise walked toward the bar with an extra little sway to her hips that I just knew was meant for me. I was sorry I was going to have to disappoint her tonight. I had this story I had to get to bed before the ten o'clock deadline for the Daily Citizen. If I didn't have it in by then, it wouldn't make the paper that hit the streets by sunrise. I was really looking forward to scooping the Milwaukee Sentinel and the Milwaukee Journal, the two big Milwaukee papers.

"She's got a nice ass Max."

"Nice legs too, Harry." I replied.

"I think she just shook it for me so I wouldn't close this rat trap down. Who else would hire her? She is so damn ornery sometimes I'm afraid to order for fear of her kicking me in the balls. She and Emily must have evolved from the same egg. I thought women were supposed to be the fairer sex?"

"Those two have the sex but they don't play fair, I said.

Speaking of Detective Williams, where is she?" I asked Harry.

"I sent her back to the precinct to get some background info on that property where our headless lady friend was at. When I am done here, I am going back and it looks like it will be an all nighter. We really want the guy who did this, Max.

I was glad Marcello jumped on the phone and was able to get the name of the owner of that property before Detective Williams started her search. If he hadn't, he may not have been able to pry it out of his source.

Harry continued, "I'll try to send EJ home to get some rest but I doubt she will go. That means she will be a real bitch all day tomorrow.

If you run across her, just keep that in mind or you may find yourself flat on your back looking at the stars."

I have envisioned myself being flat on my back with Detective Williams, but not in the context Harry meant.

"I'll watch myself. Listen, let me make this call and I'll be right back."

"Hell, take your time. Just be back in time to pay the bill."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

When I returned I had another manhattan while Harry had two more and the steak and fries I promised to buy him earlier in the evening. He also ordered a steak and fries to go for Detective Williams; on my tab, of course.

Eloise was still her sweet self right up until the time we left. The tip I left told her I got her earlier hint. When she brought back my receipt, there was another note from her as well. This time she slipped it into my hand.

It read: "Pick me up in back at 1:30 a.m. don't make a lady wait. I mean it Max."

By the time I walked out the front door the palms of my hands were already sweating.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 8

The call I made at Rocco's Pub was to a Jim Secetarski in Miami Florida. He was the owner of the house where that woman was decapitated and killed. He retired from Allis Chalmers and moved to Florida as fast as he could plow the snow out of his driveway. He said he rented the house to a Paul Godfrey. Mr. Godfrey gave him a cashiers' check to cover the first years rent. And no, he never met him and didn't care to as long as he kept paying his rent on time. It was better that he prepaid it.

"What about the utilities"? I asked.

"What about 'em? They are in my name. The money he paid me covered them as well," he said.

"Did you get any references or previous places where Mr. Paul Godfrey lived?"

"No sure didn't. My brother still lives in Milwaukee and if Godfrey failed to live up to the lease agreement, he would see that he was evicted. That's the least he could do for me as I let him and his fat wife freeload off me for two weeks every winter down here in Miami."

"What's this all about anyway?"

I hung up without answering his question. It felt good to be on the other end of a hang up for once.

Sounds like a loving family, I thought to myself.

I would call Mildred in the morning and have her see what she could find on anyone named Paul Godfrey in Milwaukee.

At least that was a starting point.

I was sure Harry knew who owned the flat already but I decided to call him and check.

I had his direct number into the homicide division. Emily Williams answered on the second ring and showed her usual love and concern for my well being as soon as she recognized my voice.

"Damn Max, we are busy now. Can I ignore you some other time?"

Everyone has to be a wise ass it seems.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"I'm just trying to help EJ. I found out who owns that flat and was going to pass that along."

"Max, quit calling me EJ. Only my good friends call me that and you definitely don't fall in that group. We know who the owner is and we know you already talked to him so go back to bed."

The next thing I heard was the dial tone; another person who likes to hang up on me.

Well, at least she didn't slam down the receiver.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 9

Staring down the barrel of a 9 MM Beretta is a chilling experience.

Why did I have to come here? I should have gone straight to my apartment and just ignored the gnawing hunger pains that consumed me. They started while I was finishing my story. I didn't want to break for anything until I had put it to bed.

Now I was returning from the Western Union Office where I sent my story into the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen in time to make the cutoff for the morning edition, when I passed George Web's Hamburger place.

George Webs' is a twenty four hour joint located around the corner from my apartment and the delicious smell of freshly grilled hamburgers with onions was just too compelling to ignore.

I could already feel the grease hardening on the roof of my mouth as I walked in the door.

Immediately, I felt something just wasn't right. The old guy, Frank Meinberg, who has been working behind the counter forever or at least since the first German set foot on Wisconsin soil, was acting extremely nervous. His eyes kept going back and forth between me and the counter to his right.

"Hey Frank, how's it going?" I said as I slid onto the stool directly in front of him.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

It was then I saw him. He was crouched behind the counter with his gun pointing at Franks' crotch. He stood up as soon as I sat down. A small kid, about sixteen or seventeen years old. The first thing that came to mind was that he looked like a rodent, maybe a ferret. I don't know, is a ferret a rodent? His eyes were close together and deep set in his face above a small nose. His hair was greasy and swept back in a ducktail, which was the rage of all the cheap punks of the day. He had a slight overbite and he was nervous. He had a tick in his left eye that caused it to twitch. This tick was similar to something you would see in a drug addict in need of a fix. He continued to look around to make sure nobody else came in with me. He was the type of guy who most likely was bullied all his life and now he was trying to make himself believe that he was actually tough and worth noticing. The Beretta was his support group. The way his hand was shaking it was apparent that he now knew he wasn't as tough as he thought he was. This is the most dangerous type of person to meet on the wrong end of a gun.

"If you're doing drugs, get in a program. Do something for yourself, not this. Don't be bothering Frank and Willie here. They have enough problems without you adding to them, I tell him.

What's your name? Put that gun away."

I looked around. I don't want to die in a place like this, I thought.

He walked around the counter and started pushing the barrel of his gun into my side, indicating with a nod of his head the direction he expected me to go.

I stumbled over my feet as I moved out. He continued to jab me, trying to get me to move faster, but the faster I move, the more my feet get tangled and I trip and fall face first onto the floor.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“Okay, you can’t keep on waving that gun around here anymore. It may go off and hurt someone,” I say. His hand was shaking like a dog shitting razor blades and it made me scared as hell. This would be a helluva a way to end my life. I made it through three years of fighting the Japs in the South Pacific only to come home and die at the hands of a nervous, sniveling, pimply faced kid? This can’t be happening.

I looked into his eyes. It was like looking down a deep dark chasm and seeing to the depths of hell. A cold shiver went up my back.

I am the only customer in here and I am being forced to join the black cook, Willie Jones, who was missing most of his teeth and who must have been pushing seventy years old, and Frank, back in the kitchen.

I am wearing my shoulder rig under my jacket and I feel the butt of my Colt Detective Special belly gun pressing against my side. This gun was manufactured to be most effective at close range, for firing into the belly of an adversary and if I ever had an adversary, this kid would have to be on top of the list.

I decided to keep talking to this punk to get him to calm down. He was way too nervous. Maybe I could give him some suggestions on how he could get the money and get out of here without getting caught. Not actually being his accomplice, but making sure myself and the other two back here would survive the night.

“Look, I said, take what you want. Just put the weapon down, please. You can go out through the back door and when you get into the alley, turn left. That will bring you out on North Avenue and one block up is a bus stop. The bus runs until two a.m. and it will take you out to West Allis and from there you will be home free.”

“You know what really gets to me? You trying so hard to get me to drop my gun. I just want to pull this trigger and kill you so shut the fuck up. He locked his eyes on me.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

You keep trying to distract me but it's not going to work. You think you are smart. I don't need no advice from you. One more squeak outta ya and I'll put a hole in your head that you'll be able to whistle Dixie through."

I'm not too fond of Dixie, so I say to him:

"Alright, calm down. I was just tryin' to help."

"I don't need no help; especially from you. Now get the fuck back there against the wall with that other prick and don't say nuthin', ya hear me?"

"Okay, okay, I'm going." As I passed the counter I noticed a knife on the metal table that they used to cut the buns with. It wasn't very big but I could probably do enough damage with it to cause him to drop that gun and then the three of us could subdue him until we could call the police. Either that, or wait for an opportunity to draw my Colt.

How long would it take for me to reach into my coat across my chest and take out my gun straighten my arm and fire? I ran the scenario over and over again in my mind hoping I could somehow cut down on the time it took to do it by even a fraction of a second. Should I chance it?

I have practiced a lot and now I am really good with this gun. I just don't know if I am fast enough and I'm not ready to find out.

Seeing as my friends being held at gunpoint with me totaled over one hundred and forty years in age and probably couldn't see more than six inches in front of their noses, I decided to wait on my Colt. The punk would have to take his eyes off me eventually and that is when I would draw down on him. I didn't want to get George Web's two employees hurt and I sure as hell didn't want to whistle Dixie either, so I had to make sure the time was right before I made my move.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“Get over here old man and open this safe,” the punk said waving his gun in Franks’ face. Frank shuffled over still holding his hands straight up over his head. When he reached the safe, the kid pushed him down. Frank hit his head on the edge of the counter, opening up a gash above his right eye causing blood to run down his face. As they say in the fight business, he was in need of a good cut man.

“Open it,” he screamed at Frank.

“Hey kid, take it easy,” I yelled.

“Don’t call me kid. I ain’t no kid. Another word outta you will be your last.”

“Okay, okay. There’s no need to hurt Frank. He’s doin’ what you asked him to do. Give him a chance.”

The punk ignored me and turned to Frank and said, “I ain’t goin’ a ask ya’ again, open the damn safe and now,” pushing Frank forward again.

This time Frank was ready and braced himself with his hands as he fell. Kneeling before the safe, Frank began to turn the dial on the safe door. I decided this was as good a time as any for me to draw my piece. The kid was staring intently at the back of Franks’ head apparently forgetting that Willie, the cook, and I were still here.

I reached inside my corduroy jacket and across my chest with my right hand to my shoulder holster that was hanging under my left arm pit. I unsnapped the Colt and slowly cocked the hammer hoping the clicking noise went unnoticed.

It did. I raised my arm, pointing the gun straight up at the ceiling. I glanced over at old Willie and the whites his eyes were as big as saucers. I took my left hand and put my finger to my lips indicating for Willie to be quiet.

Then I screamed; “Hey punk, drop that fuckin’ gun or I’ll blow a hole in your head the size of a bowling ball.”

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I then pulled the trigger and the sound was deafening. As I stood there with the plaster from the ceiling falling on my head, the punk dropped his gun and turned around screaming as he headed out the front door at a pace that would have made Eddie Tolan, also known as the Midnight Express and the world's fastest human after winning the 100 and 200 meter dashes at the 1932 Summer Olympics, envious.

I turned around and noticed tears running down Willie's face as he sat slumped against the wall and old Frank was laying face down moaning in front of the safe.

I could tell Willie was alright. All he needed to do was go home and put on a clean pair of pants, but I was worried about Frank. He took a mighty hard bump to the head when he fell against the counter and he wasn't sounding too good either.

As I walked over to him I asked Willie if he would be able to call the police and tell them what happened.

Willie just nodded and walked to the pay phone hanging on the wall.

"Mister, I ain't got no nickel." He said.

Shit, I thought to myself. "Just dial "O" for the operator, Willie. She'll connect ya."

"Okay, I do that." He replied.

Frank was looking a little grey and his pupils appeared to be dilated. So in my best educated medical opinion, I figured he had suffered a concussion. Remember, I'm a crime reporter, a rodeo clown and a private dick, not a medical doctor.

I turned to Willie and yelled, "Hey Willie, tell 'em to call an ambulance. Frank will be needin' medical attention.

"Yassir," Willie answered.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I rolled my eyes and turned back to tend to old Frank. Willie was one of the many black people who moved to Milwaukee from the south years ago, one who immediately went to work as a kid to make money to help support his family instead of going to school to finish his education. I guess he thought Milwaukee was heaven as he could use a white guy's john without worrying about being lynched. Only here he is, sixty years later, flippin' burgers for \$0.75 an hour. Little did he know that Milwaukee was one of the most segregated cities in the 1950's.

I went to the cooler and took out a handful of ice and wrapped it in a rag I found laying on the counter. I applied it with some pressure directly on the gash over his eye until the cops and ambulance arrived.

They came in together and one would have thought they drove in the same vehicle.

The two uniforms, one tall and lanky and the other short and stocky, looked like they were right out of the academy, and they probably were. If you had seniority on the force, you usually got first dibs on which shift you wanted and the graveyard shift was the shits. Not only did the most heinous of crimes occur at this time, but it screwed up your sleeping routine something fierce.

The tall cop bent down next to me and asked me what happened.

I noticed his name was Bieber. I looked closely at him and noticed Mildred had more hair on her legs than this kid had on his entire face. Not only that, his breath smelled liked a dusty old fart.

I bent my head back so I didn't have to breathe in the foul air and told him. "Some young kid was in here tryin' to rob the place. The punk pushed old Frank and he fell and hit his head on the counter."

"Can you give us a good description of the perp," he asked?

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

While I was giving Officer Bieber a description of the little ferret, the emergency people were bandaging Franks' wound and helping him to his feet. They were insisting on taking him to Milwaukee General but Frank didn't want to go "I'll be alright." he kept on repeating but he didn't resist as they gently led him out to the ambulance. I secretly hoped he would be alright.

Willie the cook was sitting on a stool at the counter and the other uniform had his pad out and was getting a statement from him. The white of Willie's eyes were still as big as saucers and I bet he wouldn't be getting to sleep for another week.

Officer Bieber asked. "Who shot the hole in the ceiling?" "I did, I replied. I'm licensed to carry," I said as I reached around to my back pocket to get my wallet where I kept my license.

Officer Bieber's right hand instinctively went down to the butt of his revolver while he grabbed my arm with his left and said, "Slowly, move your hand slowly."

"Okay, no problem," I said as I removed my carry permit from my wallet.

Officer Bieber relaxed his grip on my arm as he read my permit. He handed it back to me and said.

"Okay Mr. Fly, why don't you start from the beginning and tell me exactly what happened here. Oh, by the way, where did you learn to shoot?"

I looked at him "Smartass I said to myself. Everybody has to be a smartass."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 10

I took a shower to wash the plaster from George Web's ceiling out of my hair. As I was drying off, the phone rang. I wrapped the towel around my waist.

"Yeah," I said in my usual amiable tone, not being in the mood for any presumptuous conversation.

"I hear you shot a ceiling tonight. Where'd you learn to shoot?"

"Whadda ya want Harry?" I replied.

"Just checking in with you to make sure you are alright and to let you know Robbery wants your fat butt down here tomorrow morning to go through some mug shots to see if you can ID the perp."

"The ferret was just a kid. Probably have to look for his picture in a high school year book. What time do they want to see me?"

"As soon as you can crawl outta that piece of crap you call a bed, or are you bunking with Eloise tonight?"

"I'll be down around nine," I said.

"Any head way on our lady friend?"

Ignoring my pun, Harry replied, "Detective Williams tracked down the guy who owned the place where the body was found. Some Polack living in Miami now, who leased it to a guy named Paul Godfrey. Seems nobody has seen or heard from this Godfrey for the past few months. We got an APB out on him so if he is in the area, we'll find him. Chief Meier is all over me on this one. Guess he is already catching some heat."

"I already talked to the guy in Miami."

"Yeah, he said some asshole already called him," Harry replied. "I figured it was you as you're the only asshole I know."

"The Chief has contacted the Cleveland Police Department to get the name of the guy who did the blood analyses at that Sheppard trial to see if he can read the spatter pattern of the blood."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I wish the bastard would have left something like finger prints or bite marks for us to follow up on. If he is smart, he would have disposed of the clothes he was wearing by now. Of course, these deficient half wits aren't always the brightest bulbs on the tree. So maybe we'll get lucky, who knows?"

The Sheppard trial Harry was referring to was coined "The Trial of The Century, the murder trial of Dr. Sam Sheppard, a wealthy surgeon in suburban Cleveland Ohio, who was convicted of murdering his wife back in 1955. It was the first case where blood analysis was used to help convict someone of murder.

"Yeah, well, good luck. Marcello has Mildred checking on rumors that Godfrey was spotted down in Chicago. She has been in touch with Marcello's ex partner and asked him to do some looking around. Hopefully he can dig something up. I'll keep you posted. See ya tomorrow." I hung up before he could respond. I knew that would irritate him as he always enjoyed being the one to hang up on me, usually while I was in mid sentence asking him a question.

I threw down my towel and slipped on a fresh pair of blue jeans and t-shirt. After strapping on my shoulder rig, I put on my jacket and slipped into my Dan Post boots and walked to the car. Crossing my fingers, I turned on the ignition and started to pump the pencils. The old girl fired up right away and I pulled out into traffic heading to Rocco's and Eloise, thinking about what kind of guy would do something like beheading a woman and why. There was the famous Black Dahlia case in Los Angeles back in the late '40's. That one was never solved but it is highly unlikely that the same guy did this. Or was it? From what I could recall from that case, the body was found in a field but the body hadn't bled out there, meaning she was killed somewhere else and dumped there. This lady was definitely killed in that bedroom. There was enough blood on the floor to satisfy a vampire convention. I would welcome a warm body next to mine tonight; a warm live body that is.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 11

It was a restless sleep. I couldn't get the sight of the headless woman out of my mind. I tossed and turned so much that Eloise threatened to send me home if I didn't stop. So, I got up and started some coffee. As I sat at the kitchen table looking out at the flashing lights from the all night Laundromat across the street, I tried to think of what would drive someone to commit such a heinous assault on another person.

The sun was barely up when Eloise's phone rang. It rang about six times and stopped. I didn't feel right answering it and Eloise slept right through it. A testimony to my bedroom stamina I guess.

It wasn't long before the phone started to ring again. This time I couldn't stand listening to it ring as it was causing my head to throb. I picked it up on the tenth ring.

"Yeah?" I answered, keeping any hint of friendliness out of my voice.

"Max?" It was Harry.

"Who were you expecting?"

"You don't want to know."

"Yeah, right." I replied.

"I thought you might be interested in knowing we just caught another one. A headless woman on the Southside. Not far from where we found the last one. I am heading down there now. A patrolman who got the call said it is obvious that she had been dead for awhile from the stench coming out of her apartment. It's at 2146 Howard Ave. Guess you owe me another steak dinner."

This time he hung up on me.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"Who was that?" It was Eloise. She was standing behind me wearing my t-shirt and not much else. Her hair was tousled and her eyes puffy from sleep. She stretched her arms over her head, causing the t-shirt to rise revealing her robin's egg blue panties. She sure looked beautiful in the morning. I was torn between going back to bed with her and going to the scene of this new headless woman. I have to be honest here, given the choice, I prefer my women to have heads.

I stood up and put my arms around her, drawing her close. I brought my lips down to hers. She lifted her head and parted her lips as we kissed in the kitchen. I took her hand and led her back into the bedroom. I reached down and grabbed the hem of my t-shirt and slowly lifted it over her head.

Cupping one of her breasts in my hand, I said, "I need my shirt. That was Harry. Something has happened and I have to go."

"Go? It's only six in the morning. Where do you have to go this early?"

"I'll fill you in when I get back," I replied as I sat on the bed pulling on my boots.

Eloise had grabbed her bathrobe from behind the door and was clutching it to her chest.

"You're a shit Max.

Is there any coffee left?" She asked flatly walking into the kitchen.

I followed her like a beat puppy and said, "Yep should be a couple of cups left. I'll be back as soon as I can and I'll make this up to you. I'll take you to Mader's for a nice German dinner tonight, how's that?"

"I'm all a flutter, Max. You sure know how to make a girl feel special. You might want to call first to make sure I'm here." She grabbed her cup of coffee and turned and walked into the bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

"Shit," I said to myself. Eloise had a way to make me feel slimier than boiled okra.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I ran out of her apartment, pulling my arm through the sleeve of my corduroy jacket and praying once again my car would start.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 12

The place was a duplex one of many dotting the north and south side of Howard Avenue. Detective Sergeant Marshall and Detective Williams were standing in the doorway, comparing notes. I hoped Detective Williams would be in a better mood than she was the last time we met. I didn't know if my constitution could take another woman going off on me. "Oh hell, Max! Harry, did you call this son of a bitch? You are straight up stupid. I'll be in the squad car." She brushed past me deliberately striking my shoulder knocking me off balance. So much for my wishes.

"Hey EJ, I might have an opening tonight at my table at Mader's, if you're interested?"

Once again, she saluted me with her middle finger before slamming the squad car door.

Women seemed to enjoy slamming doors in my face too.

"What's the deal on this one Harry?" I said as I reached in my coat pocket and took out my pack of Lucky Strikes. I tapped the bottom pushing out a couple of sticks, making it easier for Harry to grab one.

I opened my lighter and brought it up to the end of the cigarette as Harry inhaled and blew smoke rings in the air. He glanced over at Detective Williams who was pouting in the car before looking down and opening up his notebook.

"To make my day a little easier, I ain't lettin' ya in to see this one, Max. Geez, just look at her in there, would ya? She sure has a hard on for you Max. I wish you would at least try to make nice to her and quit aggravating her. I am going to have to listen to her piss and moan all the way back to the precinct, which by the way, is where you are supposed to be in two hours. I told Lieutenant Halloran you would be in there at nine.

"I'll be there; you got my word Harry."

Harry rolled his eyes and turned to walk away.

"What is it with EJ? I asked. Every time I walk near her I cringe at the possibility of being bitch slapped."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Harry turned back to face me and took another hit on his cigarette and blew out a stream of smoke before saying; “A couple of years ago, when she was working vice she took on an undercover assignment to clean up downtown of the prostitution trade. Once again our city fathers thought it was time to end sex for pay, which nobody has been able to do since the beginning of time.

Anyway, EJ would walk the street with the whores. She developed a pretty good working relationship with the girls and some of them would share their corner with her. They knew if she got an arrest she would be tied up for hours with reports and they could make money uninterrupted by the vice cops. She was good, real good.

Well, when an officer is solicited for an act and a price is given, they have to accept the quoted price. There is no negotiating. One night a Mexican named Hector pulled up to her on her corner and asked for a blow job and said; ‘I pay you twenty five cents now and the rest on payday.’

EJ slapped the cuffs on him and hauled him in to the precinct. She had to go to court and testify that Hector had asked for a blow job and offered to pay her a quarter.

After that, every time she walked into the precinct some wiseass would yell out “here comes the two bit whore.’ The first couple of times she let it pass but after a week of putting up with that shit, she hauled one dick’s ass out of his chair and cold cocked him. He was out for five minutes.

Needless to say, that pole climber learned to keep his mouth shut but the vice captain thought it was time EJ moved on and here she is, sensitivity and all.

I know better than to mouth off to her and you should as well.”

“Well I’ll be damned,” I said as I looked over at EJ stewing in the squad car.

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"Okay, here's what we got, Harry said; the body of a Miss. Sally Hammonds was discovered in the bedroom of her apartment by a concerned coworker at approximately 12:00 p.m. Miss. Hammonds was brutally murdered. The backdoor to her apartment was partially open when her coworker arrived. There were no obvious signs of forced entry into the apartment. Miss. Hammonds appears to have been deceased for some time prior to her body having been discovered. The coroner estimates that the murder could have occurred sometime between June 12th and June 15th. Miss. Hammonds was wearing bed clothes at the time of her death and her apartment is in disarray and several items appear to be missing.

Her body was wrapped in a blanket and tied with a rope. Her head is missing and the body's chest has a hole measuring about eight inches by five inches and her left lung and heart are missing. That's it. Now I gotta run.

"Whoa, wait up a minute Harry," I said as I ran trying to keep up with him.

"Her heart and left lung are missing?"

"Yep."

"Who was first on the scene?"

"Officers Petruska and Blomberg. Both seasoned cops who don't like reporters. There, you have been warned."

"You got the name of the coworker?"

"I do." Harry replied as he turned and walked to his car.

"What was the coworker doing there?" I yelled.

He looked up before opening the door and stared at me standing on the sidewalk.

"Oh, since it doesn't appear that Detective Williams will be meeting you at Mader's for that German dinner, you can count on me. I have never been there. They serve brandy manhattans?"

I knew he wasn't going to answer my question so I answered his. "Whaddya think, this is Milwaukee, isn't it? Brandy flows everywhere, even in the sewers. By the way, if I'm lucky, Eloise will be joining us."

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“The more the merrier he replied as he flipped the butt of his cigarette in a puddle next to his front tire. I’ll let Detective Williams know Eloise is coming. That might make her change her mind knowing you will have to keep your hands to yourself. She hates it when she has to draw down on a guy in a crowded restaurant, which only happened a couple of times that I am aware of.

What time?”

“Let’s make it eight o’clock. I’ll call Val and see if she can get us a nice quiet table.”

“Yeah, good luck. Don’t forget Lieutenant Halloran is expecting you.”

“Hey, Harry, where did Hammonds work?” I yelled.

He shook his head and slipped behind the wheel and took off without answering me, spinning his tires, making the rubber scream like a five dollar whore asking for a twenty dollar tip.

As they passed, I noticed Detective Williams sneering at me out the side window as she lifted her middle finger in my direction one more time just in case I missed the first one.

All I could think about was Sally Hammonds.

Did she piss someone off at work?

Did she meet her killer at a bar? A party?

Did anyone see her with someone new in the past few days?

It was 7:30. I had an hour and a half before I had to meet with Lieutenant Halloran so I thought I would get on the phone and see what I could dig up on Ms. Sally Hammonds and find out where she worked and who the coworker is who found her.

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Chapter 13

Rocco's was empty as I slid into the booth. Dan Ciorrocco, the owner, walked over and dropped a manila envelope on the table along with a brandy sweet manhattan. "An older lady stopped by early this afternoon and left this package for you Max. Whoever she is, she really needs to shave" he said before turning around and walking behind the bar.

It had to be Mildred. I wondered what could be so important that it got her out from behind her desk to drive down here and drop this package off for me.

I had spent the entire morning down at police headquarters going through mug shots with Lieutenant Halloran and a Sergeant Wilson. I was unable to find a picture that even came close to what the little ferret looked like. They said Frank Meinberg was released from the hospital and should have a full recovery from his head wound. At least that was good news.

Before I left the precinct, a uniform stopped by Halloran's office with a warrant for my arrest for outstanding parking tickets. Seems I have failed to respond to the traffic courts various summons over the past two years and a Judge Sebastian Rodgers had had about enough.

The officer turned me against the wall and slapped a pair of handcuffs on me.

"Hey man, not so tight," I yelled.

"Relax; they're tight because they're new. They'll stretch after you wear them a while," he said as he led me down the hall to a holding cell.

Another smartass in a uniform, I said to myself.

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They allowed me to pay the outstanding fines plus interest and penalties so I was able to walk out. Unfortunately, my checking account was about two hundred bucks lighter when I left, but at least I was able to keep the city of Milwaukee running for a few more days. I worried about my dinner date at Mader's this evening. If Harry showed up, not to mention Detective Williams, the bill would about wipe out what little cash I had left. I just deposited my check from the Daily Citizen so I had two weeks before I got paid again. I might have to hit up Eloise for a short term loan. She was never too happy when I asked her to float me some cash until the next pay day. I would remind her I would do the same thing for her if she needed it. She would reply that she never needed it and there wasn't much I could say to that.

I noticed a strange looking guy sitting at the end of the bar. He had on lime green pants and a bright yellow sports coat over a pink shirt.

"Who's that at the end of the bar? I asked. He must be color blind."

"That's a friend of Ralph Mills' named William Bennett. Goes by the name of Raja." Rocco replied.

"Raja?"

"It means king in Hindi."

"King, huh? I wonder what Elvis has to say about that?"

"Ralph said he has been in and out of as many married women's bedroom windows as he has."

"That's a lot." I said.

"Sure is. You oughta see the chick he has singing with him. She goes by the name of Barb E. Dahl. He said she is from the Dahl family that owns an automobile dealership in Madison. They didn't approve of the Raja and told him to get out of town. Guess their little Barb E. Dahl enjoyed the night life and went with him.

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He had a gig playing the piano at the Commodore, a supper club up there that has a pretty good reputation. He's not a bad singer as long as he keeps it in the shower. I told him I would give him a go here but he had to promise not to start singing until after ten. I figure by then whoever is in here is too far gone to give a shit what he sounds like. They are usually hanging on to each other for support on the dance floor while they get turned on rubbing up against one another. My shrink calls it frotteurism. Makes me wonder why I got in this business in the first place."

"For the food," I replied. "What in the hell is frotteurism?" Rocco looked at me and smiled, "It's a mental disorder in which a person derives sexual pleasure from rubbing their genitals, against another person."

"I can relate to that. So that's a mental disorder?"

"That's what my shrink tells me. That makes everybody in this place fuckin' mentally ill. At least Barb E. Dahl provides some eye candy for those too drunk to get up and dance."

"I thought you said that shrink was a blond Nazi sociopath and that you were through seeing her?"

"I did. But she's cute."

Rocco left and I tore open the manila envelope and emptied the contents onto the table. One of the pieces of paper landed in some water left from the moisture of my manhattan glass. I dried it on my shirt and turned it over to read what was written.

It was a copy of a teletype from the Chicago police department on a homicide down there last Thursday. The victim, a Paul Godfrey, most recently from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was found head down, literally, in a trash dumpster behind a Motor Inn on Calumet Avenue. Some dumpster diver looking for food noticed the legs sticking straight in the air from the middle of his dinner plate. The report said Godfrey was beaten so badly that it looked like somebody put his face in a blender. Next I looked at copies of the crime scene photos that were sent along and I had to admit Godfrey didn't look so good.

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A torn off sheet of notebook paper was clipped to the police report. It was from Marcello which said, the Chicago Police strongly believe it was a mob hit and have brought in the FBI to assist in finding the culprit, or culprits, responsible for the murder. The note read, Call me!

Dan came over with the bottle of Christian Brothers and started pouring, "You having anything to eat?"

"Can't Rocco," I replied.

"Gotta run. Here's for the drinks. Can you get me a couple of nickels for the phone?"

"Be right back."

"Thanks," I said as I bent my head to look at the pictures of what remained of Paul Godfrey, wondering if his murder was connected to, not one beheading here in Milwaukee, but three. I had a strong suspicion it did.

I finished my brandy and was feeling pretty good, when I scooped up my change and the manila envelope containing the information on Godfrey's murder, and walked to the pay phone back by the johns. I don't know why Rocco put the phone back here. I guess he figured it was convenient to make a call and take a piss all at one time. The only benefit I could figure was that you could get a glimpse in the ladies room whenever someone went to powder their nose.

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Chapter 14

I decided to call Mader's Restaurant. I was lucky as Gus' daughter, Val, was taking reservations. I decided to sweet talk her first, hoping she would put us at the Stammtisch table.

"Val, its Max. How are you doing tonight?"

"I'm fine, thank you," she replied. "Max who?"

"You're kidding, right? Max Fly. You got on your lederhosen?"

"Now I remember you. Are you calling to make reservations?"

Seeing as I wasn't getting anywhere with my charm, I decided to get to the point.

"Listen Val, I would like to make a reservation for eight o'clock tonight. There will be four of us."

"Table for four? You must not be the Max I was thinking of.

The one I know doesn't have three friends."

"I'd like the Stammtisch Table if it's available." I said ignoring her sarcasm. A Stammtisch in Germany is a table reserved for regulars at a restaurant or pub, designated by a reserved sign at the center of the table. Initially, it was where the people of higher status in a town gathered together. There are

Stammtisches for languages, Stammtisches for members of the same professions, Stammtisches for philosophy or politics or cooking or music or knitting. There are even Stammtisches for men who like beards. But none for Ol' Max Fly, I guess.

"You're a stitch Max. Like that would happen. Table for four eight o'clock, nice view of the men's room. See you then."

Val hung up on me.

Next I called Marcello.

"Marcello and Associates private investigators, how can I help you?" Mildred answered.

I decided not to correct her grammar this time.

"Mildred, it's me, Max. Hey, thanks for dropping that package off at Rocco's for me. I appreciate it."

"Mr. Marcello asked me to. What do you want, Max?"

So much for the niceties.

"Is the Wop in," I asked?

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The line went dead and then I heard it ring three times before Marcello's gruff voice barked.

"What took you so long to call me, Max?" Not waiting for an answer, he continued, "Agent Steckel from the Chicago FBI Office called me to ask what our interest was in one Paul Godfrey. Seems he has been flying under the radar of the organized crime unit down there for the past couple of years. He dropped out of sight for the past four months before taking a dive in that dumpster off Calumet."

"So, are they making the connection to our headless lady here in Milwaukee," I asked?

"After getting off the phone with me they are. He will be calling Detective Marshall tomorrow morning to get the particulars. Harry won't be too happy with me so you might want to give him a warning."

"Aw hell, I'm having dinner with him tonight. I owe him for letting me in on another grisly beheading on the south side."

"You're kidding me Max?"

"Why would I be kidding you Pizza?"

"Max, it's a figure of speech."

"Oh."

Whenever I go into a long conversation with Marcello, I usually end up calling him Pizza, the name he went by when we were kids.

"The woman's name is Sally Hammonds and one of her co workers was worried when she didn't show up for work the last few days and went to check on her. This one is a real doozy. Whoever took her head also took her heart and left lung, leaving an eight inch hole in the left side of her chest."

"If it's the same guy, he is escalating the violence," Pizza said.

"Yeah looks that way Pizza. You think you could see what you could find on this Sally Hammonds for me? I gotta send my story up to the Daily Citizen and get cleaned up for my dinner tonight. I am hoping a few brandies will loosen Harry's tongue a bit and he will give me some more information."

"Yeah, I'll see what I can dig up. Where you goin' to eat?"

"Mader's," I replied.

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"Hell, where you getting the cash for that, Eloise?" Marcello laughed.

"Very funny, but I might have to. I got caught for some back parking tickets I have been collecting and had to pay out a couple of C notes to leave the precinct this morning. Plus Detective Williams might be coming with Harry as well."

"No kidding? That would make for some nice scenery, Williams and Eloise.

Speaking of Mader's, I just got off the phone with Gus. Someone stole his pork shanks and he isn't real happy with the Milwaukee Police Department's attitude toward his report of a break in and someone heisting his shanks. He said he had a couple of thousand pounds in that meat locker. He wants us to help find the culprits as he is mad as hell at the cops who responded."

"Yeah, who took the call?" I asked.

"A Sergeant Dave Turner and Detective Jack Miller. A pair of jerk offs if there ever was one. The department should give IQ tests before they hire these monkeys." Marcello replied.

"I heard of those two. I hear Sergeant Turner is gayer than a bouquet of pansies.

I gotta go," I said and hung up.

I dropped another nickel down the slot and dialed Eloise.

"Hello?" Eloise answered on the first ring meaning she was probably sitting on the couch watching an afternoon soap opera waiting for my call.

"Hiya Babe, you ready to go to Mader's for dinner tonight?"

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Chapter 15

Mader's was crowded for a week night. If you wanted good German food in Milwaukee, you could go almost anywhere; but, if you wanted great German food, you went to Mader's. Gus Mader is the consummate restaurateur. He can cook and prepare food and present it so it looks like a million bucks. The German atmosphere in Mader's makes the many German American residents in the Milwaukee area feel like they are back in the Fatherland. Gus' father, Charles, opened the place in 1902 when he purchased a building on W. Water Street. He called it The Comfort. It was the era when Bucket Boys toted pails of beer from office to office selling Cream City Beer for five cents a glass. After the depression, Charles turned the operation over to his sons, Gus and George. George's wife does much of the cooking and people flock from all over the world to taste Mader's Sauerbraten, Veal Rouladen or Pork Shanks. In fact, Gus has a standing challenge to anyone who can finish a whole pork shank by himself; if they can, the second one is on Gus. Once you finish the main course, if there is still room, their Old Fashioned Baked Cheese Cake is world renown. The fact that Gus puts his cute little daughter, Valerie as a hostess, in lederhosen makes guys want to yodel while walking to their table. Beer and brandy flows and schnitzel and strudel covers the tables. It is a festive place.

"Val, it's me Max; how ya' doin'?"

"I'm doing fine Max and very busy. These damn lederhosen are making me sweat like a dog in a Chinese Restaurant. So I don't have time for small talk."

"Well, you look like a million bucks Val. Is our table ready?"

There will be four of us, Eloise and I as well as Detective Marshall and Detective Williams who are on their way."

Val patted me on the cheek and said. "Follow me you sweet boy. You don't have the stamntisch but you are close. Well, at least you can see it if you stretch your neck.

Where's the Pisano Marcello tonight, at some Italian joint slopping down some spaghetti?"

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"He threatened to come but I told him he would have to cover the tab. As soon as I said that he disappeared."

"Well, tell him I said hi and that he should stop by sometime with his wife. It's been too long since I have seen him. Come on Eloise, follow me. As soon as I heard you were coming, I got you a nice table. Normally my dad likes to put Max at one of the tables near the restrooms as most customers believe we only cater to classy clientele and we don't want to change their perception. Plus we save the best tables for better tippers."

Eloise couldn't hold back a laugh at that. She knew my tips were usually skimpy.

"Thanks Val," I appreciate this.

"Please send Harry and EJ back when they arrive won't ya'?" I said.

"I'll do that Max," Val said as she turned and looked at Eloise.

"You look lovely tonight Eloise, too bad you're wasting it on Max. If you ever are interested in waitressing here let me know. Dad has said numerous times how much he would appreciate your donning lederhosen and work in here."

"You're sweet Val, I'll keep that in mind. Thank you."

"I'll send that big lummox and EJ back when they arrive. I wish I could join you guys tonight, but duty calls. I'll send a waitress back too. See ya' later."

"She is really nice, don't you think Max?"

"Yeah, she is a beauty alright. Sometimes I actually think she likes me. What would you like to drink Eloise?" I asked as I saw our waitress approach. She would be hard to miss as her hair was dyed the color of a traffic cone.

"A Pink Squirrel."

"A what?" I said.

"You heard me Max."

"Hi, my name is Claudia and I'll be your waitress tonight. May I get you something to drink?"

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Claudia is what you would call a real dicke frau. She is so big she could flip a bus bench but I wouldn't tell her that to her face. Her arms were the size of Ted Kluszewski's, the first baseman for the Cincinnati Reds who tore the sleeves off his uniform so everyone could marvel at the size of his biceps. "How about a Pink Squirrel for the lady here? Make that two and two double brandy manhattans on the rocks please." I said politely; very politely.

"Coming right up." Claudia snarled as she sauntered back toward the bar.

"Thought I would order for Harry and EJ." I told Eloise.

As Claudia turned to walk back toward the bar, I saw Harry and EJ approach. Harry looked very dapper, like he must have just stopped off at a clothing store and purchased a new sport coat and pants as they were clean and freshly pressed and so was his white button down shirt. His yellow tie was knotted and pulled up to his neck. I couldn't recall the last time I saw Harry look so clean. His flat top gleamed with butch wax and was sticking straight up. I had to admit he cleaned up pretty well. One thing he couldn't hide were the bags under his eyes. He had been putting in some long hours the past few days and they were going to continue for quite some time unless he could solve the murders of the three headless women.

EJ looked very stunning and professional in a navy pant suit with a red silk bow neck blouse. I knew all the bulges under her designer jacket weren't coming from guns. Many heads turned as she walked back to our table.

Harry pulled out the chair next to Eloise and EJ sat down and immediately picked up a conversation with Eloise as if it was a continuation of one they had earlier in the day. She refused to acknowledge my presence.

As our waitress Claudia placed our drinks on the table, I told her to give us a few minutes before coming back for our food order.

When Claudia turned to go, EJ grabbed her hand and said "What's this Claudia?" pointing down at the drink that was placed in front of her.

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"A Pink Squirrel, EJ." Claudia replied.

I guess these two have a history together, I thought.

"What in the hell is it doing in front of me? Give it to that little rump ranger over there," she said pointing at me.

"Bring me a double bourbon on the rocks."

"Jim Beam?" Claudia asked as she picked up the Pink Squirrel and gracefully slammed it down in front of me spilling some of the light pink liquid on the table.

"Yes, thank you," EJ said, all sweetness now that she was able to let me know where I stood this evening.

It wasn't long before I saw Gus Mader making his way through the crowded restaurant, talking to patrons along his way toward our table.

"Good evening, Gus." Harry said.

"My pork shanks! They stole my pork shanks, the sons of bitches.

I don't have enough to make it to the weekend. If I ever get my hands on whoever did this, I will castrate 'em and serve their nuts up on my menu as Rocky Mountain Oysters."

He stopped to stare at Eloise and said. "Hi pretty lady. It's nice to see you again. I wish you would consider working here for me. You would have all the boys lined up outside just to see you. I might need that if I don't get my pork shanks back."

"Who responded to your call?" Harry asked.

"A Sgt Turner and detective Miller. They acted like it was no big deal and wondered why I would give a shit that someone stole my pork shanks. I'll tell you why," his face turned red as he yelled, "it was a couple of thousand bucks of pig I had in that meat locker, that's why, you worthless public servants. Sorry detectives, not you. No offense meant."

"No offense taken. Do you mean Sgt Dave Turner and Detective Jack Miller?" EJ asked.

"Yep, that's who I mean."

"Those two losers haven't closed a case in over a year. I think they are biding time until retirement."

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"I can believe it. That's why I am asking Max here to look into it for me. Come by tomorrow and we will get into the details. I talked to Marcello and he said you weren't working on anything now and had a lot of free time."

"Claudia, bring this table a round of drinks on me next time, will ya'?"

He turned back to our table and continued. "I have Sam Galbraith flying out to Denver Thursday to pick up some more pork shanks from the Colorado Beef Company."

"Colorado Beef Company? What are they doing with pork?" I asked.

"Like everybody else these days, they are diversifying."

"I was supposed to get with Sam and go look at some bucking stock in Loveland Colorado, just outside of Denver. I'm nervous to fly with that guy. The last time I was up with him the gauges weren't working on that damn Model 17 Staggerwing biplane. When I pointed it out to him, he said a good pilot doesn't need a gas gauge.

Hell, that might be true, but I would feel much better if they worked. How does he know how far he has flown? That plane has a range of 785 miles and it is 780 miles from the Palmyra Airport where Sam has that piece of crap hanging to the airport outside of Denver that he puts her down in. He said it is safer to put 'em down when there is no fuel in the tank, in case he miscalculates."

"Yeah, Sam's a good guy but kinda crazy when he gets into high altitude." Gus said.

"You may be right Gus, but I can't figure him out some of the time, I just don't feel right being around him, damn Republican."

"He has a Staggerwing biplane? Those babies have radial engines on 'em. They are rated over seven hundred horsepower. They cruise at over 200 mph." Harry said, surprising everyone with his knowledge.

"Yeah, well, if they cruise at 200 mph Sam flies 'em helluva lot faster." I said.

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Chapter 16

I learned a lot that night at Mader's. One of the things was that Jim Beam was probably the only guy who had a chance of getting the upper hand on Detective Williams. There is nothing like a little booze to loosen the tongue of a woman, among other things. Also, I didn't know that Detective Williams could hold her bourbon as well as she did. I believe she finished off close to an entire bottle of Jim Beam by herself. I never saw her stagger on her numerous trips to the ladies room. Of course by the end of the night, I wasn't able to see much of anything.

I had pumped her and Harry all evening for inside information on my three headless lady friends, Sally Hammonds and Kathryn Reilly and Jane Doe. While Harry and I sipped on a glass of Courvoisier V.S.O.P and Eloise was sipping on a glass of white wine and EJ was throwing back one more double bourbon, I asked her one more time why she wouldn't allow me to stop by the office in the morning to confirm some information I heard on the street about Sally Hammonds. She rose out of her chair like the second coming of the Phoenix and pulled out her gun grabbing the lapels of my coat while overturning Eloise's wine and what was left of her double Jim Beam, Harry and I were able to save our cognac, she yelled; "Max, I'm going to hit you so hard, your kids are going to be born dizzy if you don't get out of my face."

I don't know why she was so upset. I am usually able to loosen tongues of most cops after plying them with enough drinks but with Emily it seemed like she just got surlier.

I was just glad she didn't threaten harm to my organ that made having kids possible. Not that I am considering having any, but I would prefer to keep that organ safe from physical harm.

Gus came running over trying to assure surrounding customers that the nice lady wasn't really going to shoot the poor guy sitting across the table from her.

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After Harry was able to calm Detective Williams down, she threw back one last double bourbon before walking out with Harry into the cool night. I paid for our dinner and grabbed Eloise's hand and left the restaurant to the stares of surrounding diners.

I noticed the stammtisch Table was empty. Wonder why Val didn't seat us there?

"Max, you may know ponies and you may know typewriting but you don't know shit about people," Eloise said as we strolled along to where I left my car.

"If you want to get information from Detective Williams, you have to treat her with respect and quit leering at her. My God Max, if your eyes were sex organs she would have been raped tonight. And I don't like you looking at her like that either. Take me home Max."

"Eloise, you know I have the utmost respect for you ladies. I just appreciate a fine looking woman like most men appreciate fine wine."

I didn't see the slap coming but it sure as hell brought me back to the present.

By the time I recovered my senses, or what I thought were my senses, Eloise was already opening the door and getting in the car. I slept alone in the Nash that night.

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Chapter 17

"Ray Palermo."

That was all Marcello said.

I stared at him with a blank face.

Mildred had called me and said John Marcello wanted to see me in his office as soon as I could get there.

"What's it about, Mildred?" I asked.

"Max, Mr. Marcello wants to see you, I don't. Just get over here."

"Thanks Mildred. Have you been busy today?" I asked. She hung up on me.

"Does that name ring a bell, Max?" Marcello continued.

"Yeah, I know who Palermo is," I replied.

"Tampa" Ray Palermo is a mean son of a bitch who was an under boss to Frank Nitti in Chicago in the '30's and '40's before movin' up here to Milwaukee."

"That's right, Max. They moved into Milwaukee and Madison to control gambling and local labor. After Nitti committed suicide, Paul Ricca took over as Chairman of The Board and Tony Accardo took over as The Boss."

Well, Accardo and Palermo don't see eye to eye on many issues, so Ricca told Palermo to take over the Milwaukee and Madison businesses which include gambling, prostitution and labor racketeering.

Palermo's two top lieutenants are, or were, Joe Piscotta and Paul Godfrey. You getting the picture here Max? Paul Godfrey-prostitution-beheaded women? Follow the dotted line."

"Yeaaaah." I said, drawing out the word wondering where he was going with this.

"Paul Godfrey ends up face down munching garbage in a trash heap as soon as the authorities start looking at the mob. What do you think they would do to you Max? Do you think they would spare you so they could continue to read your column in that Daily Rag in Beaver Dam? I don't think so.

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And this Joe Piscotta is one sleazy turd. You just better watch your ass Max. This thing is heatin' up and you may want to consider backing off and leaving the digging to Marshall and that hot partner of his. That's why they get the big bucks. Just keep in mind the St. Valentine Day Massacre in Chicago Max. These guys don't mess around."

"Pizza, they aren't going to line me up and shoot me like they did those guys. Don't they have bigger fish to fry than a small town newspaper reporter?"

"Max, they don't give a rat's ass how big the fish is. If it stinks, they will take it out. And to be frank with you Max, you are beginning to stink a bit, so keep your head down. Besides, you may be a small time reporter, but you work for an impressive private investigation firm headed by a former fed who personally put some of their pals behind bars or under the ground as plant food. If for some reason they thought they were getting back at me by snuffing you, it would just be frosting on the cake for them."

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Chapter 18

I found my bank account trying to slither under a rock and was sitting at Rocco's hoping to figure out how I would make it until next payday when a shadow fell over my chili. Rocco had won the Best Chili in Texas contest eight years running even though he wasn't in Texas. He'd bring a couple of his cooks with him and make the trip south and set up his pot and start cookin'. Every Mexican and Texan north of Chihuahua Mexico would stand in line just to get a taste. The competition didn't stand a chance. They finally changed the rules and said you had to live in Texas before you could enter the contest.

I made it a habit to have at least one bowl a week. It was better than taking vitamins and a lot tastier.

I looked up to see two guys who were built like beer trucks hovering next to my table.

"Mr. Palermo would like to see you, Mr. Fly", the darker of the two growled.

"Well, have him come over. I'll be here for awhile. I am going to finish my Blatz and have one more before I take off."

"You don't seem to understand, Mr. Fly, Mr. Palermo requests your presence outside."

I ignored them and continued eating for awhile before I noticed beer truck number one nod at beer truck number two before they both grabbed an arm and effortlessly lifted me out of my chair and escorted me to the door. Beer Truck number two pulled my gun from its holster and stuck it in his belt as they dragged me across the sidewalk

There was a long black Lincoln Continental limousine parked outside next to my Nash, making it look a little under nourished and in bad need of physical care.

Beer Truck number one bent down and opened the back door while Beer Truck number two pushed me in head first.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

The smell of garlic overwhelmed me as my head landed next to a pair of highly polished black Brunori Italian loafers. Next to the loafers I noticed a nice pair of legs, covered in nylon stockings that went up a long way. I lifted my head to see just how high up they went when one of the highly polished loafers came down on the top of my head forcing my face back into the carpet covering the floor. “Behave yourself, Mr. Fly. Your reputation precedes you so don’t embarrass my lady friend here, you capisce?”

It was hard to say anything with my mouth filled with soiled carpet but I was able to nod my head a bit and that seemed to appease the man wearing the loafers, a Mr. Tampa Ray Palermo to the point where he released the pressure from the back of my head and I was able to turn my face and breathe easier.

“Now sit up and say hi to Thelma here and make nice.”

I got up and sat in the seat facing Tampa Ray and Thelma trying to make nice. It was difficult as my eyes immediately went to Thelma and noticed her dress with an opening in front that dipped down to where I earlier noticed her nylons ending, revealing a generous cleavage. Tampa Ray was wearing a black Giorgio Armani suit, which cost more than I made in a month, with a starched white shirt and red tie.

I stared at Thelma and said, “Miss Thelma, I am pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Max Fly, Private Eye. Here is my card.” I reached in my coat pocket and placed it in her outstretched hand. I made her bend a bit in my direction affording me a better view of her cleavage. I just couldn’t help myself.

She smiled back and uncrossed her legs showing me the reason for man’s existence.

“Mr. Fly, don’t be a putz. Look at me, please,” Tampa Ray said with a scowl on his face. His dark complexion, hair and eyes were the norm for most people from the southern part of Italy. He had a smarmy look on his face accentuating his sinister appearance. That along with his reputation for violence got my attention.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“I don’t know what makes you so stupid Mr. Fly, but whatever it is, it really works. Now please, leave Thelma be and listen to me or I will have Anthony and Gino take you outside and teach you the proper etiquette that should be used when you are in my presence.” I noticed that Anthony, Beer Truck number one, and Gino, Beer Truck number two, were sitting in the front seat facing forward but the window separating the back of the limousine from the front was opened.

“Of course, Mr. Palermo,” I said bowing my head in his direction in an act of unfelt contrition.

“Good, you can call me Ray. Now I have noticed you have been investigating the death of a young lady on the Southside of Milwaukee who lost her head. This is most unfortunate, but it has nothing to do with me or any of my businesses even though she was found in the bedroom of a house one of my associates, Mr. Paul Godfrey, was renting. Mr. Godfrey, who is no longer with us, cannot answer any questions as to how she ended up there and how he was involved, if at all. I can assure you his death had nothing to do with this young lady’s.

So, while you are diving in trash heaps, or wherever you go to find your information, make sure you keep my name and my businesses out of your story, capisce?”

The next thing I knew I was laying face down on the sidewalk and the long black limousine was heading south. My Colt Belly Gun was lying next to me.

I thought, at least they gave me my gun back.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 19

“What’s happening with the headless women, Max? There hasn’t been much about it in the Milwaukee Papers. Hap said you got a scoop on the first lady they found but I don’t get the Daily Citizen so I haven’t read it.”

“Maybe you should get it Sam. I did get the scoop on that but not much more information is being released. It’s getting so political that Harry is pretty tight lipped and Detective Williams wouldn’t so much as release a fart in my direction let alone any information.”

“You know Max, I don’t know if this will be of any interest, but that last girl I was dating was really into some crazy stuff like that bondage shit. I didn’t mind tying her up but there is no way I trust a woman to tie me up. She has this brother who gave me the creeps every time I went to their house to pick her up. She said he did some really bad stuff to animals in the neighborhood when they were growing up. He is so big that whenever he opened the door I couldn’t see anything behind him. Nothing! And he would just stare at me before moving. I swear there have been a couple of times he almost made me crap in my pants.

I mean, I’m no cactus expert, but I do know a prick when I see one.

Even though the sex was great, I had to stop seeing her and one of the reasons is her brother. I tell you, I sleep a lot better since I got out of that relationship. In my opinion, he’s the type of guy who wouldn’t hesitate to chop off someone’s head just to see what it felt like.”

“Well, there are times I feel like chopping some heads off myself, I replied. Some people seem to be put on this earth solely to annoy me and get in my way of accomplishing my life’s work.”

“What’s your life’s work Max?”

“I’m not sure; how much longer until we get there?”

Sam turned back to peer at the gauges and said, “About a quarter of a tank.”

“Shit Sam, will you quit that? How many miles?”

Sam ignored me, not out of rudeness, but because he didn’t know.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“How many broncs are you going to buy this time Max?” Sam asked.

“Probably five; a guy in Manitowoc called me last month and said he would take two if I had them and that Ojibwa Indian, Chipa Wolfe takes three every year.

“You and Hap coming back to haul them to Wisconsin?”

“No, I think we will wait until Coonass and O.D. Reynolds drive out to get a load and have them bring them back with what they pick up.”

“I don’t blame you. It’s a long ride when you are in a truck pulling livestock.

Who is this Allen DuPont guy we are going to see?” Sam asked as he banked the plane to the north and we dropped altitude.

“Allen DuPont breeds bucking broncos out in Loveland.”

“I know that, Max. Is he one of the DuPont’s from that Chemical family?”

“I’m not sure. I heard he’s a distant cousin or something. He supposedly got in some trouble up in Connecticut and to get the heat off the family, they shipped him down to one of their farms in Florida. Somewhere around Gainesville, I believe. Anyway, he didn’t last long down there either.”

“What happened?”

“Rumors were flying that he was getting a little too friendly with some of the goats he was raising, if you know what I mean.”

“You’re kidding?”

“I wish I was, but that’s the story I heard. They figured he would have a harder time mounting a bucking bronco so they sent him to Colorado.”

“Jeez, that’s disgusting.”

“I know. That’s why I want you to ride out there with me. To watch my back, if you get my drift.”

“I get your drift, but who’s got my back?”

“Don’t worry about it Sam.”

Sam shook his head and looked back out the window at the approaching mountains.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

We rode the rest of the way in silence. Sam probably thinking how he could keep himself face up to Allen DuPont and I was worrying about the engines on his aircraft sputtering and not clearing the approaching mountains.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 20

The Christian Brothers were waiting for me at the bar as I walked into Rocco's. It was raining something fierce outside and my raincoat sprung a leak awhile back and I never got around to patching it up. I paid the price for that tonight. As I stood shaking the water off my coat, Rocco came over with a note for me.

"Max, you should quit giving girls this number to call if they want to reach you. You know Eloise answers the phone whenever she is around. She'll punch your clock if she knew you were messing around on her."

"Yeah, I know, Rocco," I said as I took a big gulp of my Christian Brothers feeling the warmth course through my body, "but they have a better chance of reaching me here than they do at my office."

"That's what I am told." Rocco replied

"What are you doing here?" I asked as I pulled out a stool and sat down.

"I thought you vampires had to be home before dark?"

"It's not vampires Max, its werewolves and it's not before dark its before dawn.

I'm about to head out as soon as Hap Schultz comes in. He's running a little late."

"He is probably attending the birth of his next wife", I said.

"That might be so," Rocco laughed. "And speaking of your phone call, that lady sounds like pure silk. If she looks half that good, she would be worth any risk.

Here's Hap. I gotta go; the drinks on me Max. Take care of yourself."

"Thanks Rocco Man, I'll see ya around."

He waved back as he walked out the back door while Hap Schultz walked behind the bar tying his apron around his waist.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"Where you been, Max? Missed my ol' drinkin' buddy the past few weeks. I had a couple of hotties the other night and no one to share them with. One of 'em, a little blonde, said she heard of you and was excited about meeting you even after I told her you were a sleazy goody two shoes who acts like he is a choirboy but orders women to do bad things in French maid outfits while eating Boston Cream Pies. I think she was game. She said she is into kinky. Too bad you weren't around for the final bell."

"It only seems kinky the first time Hap. Where'd you find these bimbos?"

"At the Railroad Inn down in the village. They're regulars there and I told 'em I'd haul your puny ass down there sometime soon. Names are Elvira and Pearl. Pearl's mine, the blonde's name is Elvira. "

"Thanks for thinking of me Hap, but remember, that's where my ex used to work," I said as I reached in my back pocket to take out my wallet and pull out a dollar bill.

"I am afraid to even drive past the place, let alone walk through the door.

Speaking of women, I need to return this call. Get me some nickels for the phone, will ya Hap?"

"Be right back," he said as he scooped up my bill.

I said good bye to the Christian Brothers as I threw back the rest of the amber liquid in my glass and picked up the change Hap left on the bar.

"Thanks Hap. I'll be right back," I said as I went to find out who it was that called me.

The phone rang three times before it was picked up.

A man answered. "Judges Beyond The Reef."

"Some lady called for me and gave me this number to call her back," I said.

"Just a minute."

"Hello?" The next voice on the other end was pure honey and Rocco was right, if she was half as gorgeous as her voice was seductive I was in for a real treat.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"Well hello, my name is Max, Max Fly. I was told you called me."

"That's right, Max, this is Thelma."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 21

"You do remember me don't you?" She asked.

I would have said yes to anything she asked with a voice like that. But I did remember her as well as some of her most interesting attributes that she revealed to me while my head was being squashed on the soiled carpet of that Lincoln Continental Limousine a couple of nights ago.

"Absolutely, how's Tampa Ray doing?" I replied, trying to be nice.

"This call isn't about Tampa Ray; it's about a poor girl who was killed who I knew very well. Can you meet me tonight, say around ten o'clock?"

"Of course, where would you like to meet?"

"Do you know where Judge's Beyond The Reef is located?"

"Yeah, it's just down the road from Hepfner's Bowling Alley on the corner of North Avenue and Calhoun Road in Brookfield. I have been there a few times. They make a pretty good brandy manhattan."

I didn't tell her I had spent about three hours one night watching a client's wife smear lipstick all over a local high school football coaches' face while I was slamming down those overpriced manhattans.

"I'll see you at ten then?" She asked.

"You'll see me at ten then Thelma."

She hung up on me.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 22

Judges' Beyond The Reef was Wisconsin's Polynesian restaurant du jour. It was billed as a Supper Club; in the Midwest you have supper instead of dinner. So a supper club is a classy restaurant; not a place a guy goes to if all he wants is a shot and a beer.

It originally opened as a log cabin dance hall, exactly when, I don't know. But Bob and Peggy Judge, two Wisconsinites who wanted to live in Hawaii but couldn't get their feet unstuck from the Wisconsin cheese curds and Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer, decided to bring Hawaii to Brookfield. They added an A frame entrance onto the log cabin and had two palm trees put on each side of the front walk along with two gigantic Tiki statues. This added a dash of Polynesia and I guess it worked for some folks, it didn't for me. When you stepped into the restaurant you were met with a dimly lit dining area. The light came from table lamps that were filled with candles. It was light enough so you wouldn't fall on your face, but dark enough to hide, in case your wife walked in looking for you. It had a sail boat called a Hukilau where you could get your salad and condiments in the Banyan Tree Room, or what I call the dining room. I guess some would call it romantic, if they were the romantic kind.

Harry told me this place made him feel like he was on a Hawaiian vacation. To me it was just another local bar with high priced drinks like the Sneaky Tiki, Kona Breeze and the Fog Cutter all priced at a buck seventy five each. My brandy ran less than a buck but I could get the same brandy up the road at Hepfner's Bowling alley along with some pretty good pretzels, if the owner's son, Glen, didn't try to stretch an old bag into another week, for half of what I paid at Judge's. I walked in at exactly five minutes before ten because I was excited to see what Thelma would be wearing. The young hostess who greeted me wasn't anything close to what I had in mind a Polynesian beauty would look like even though she was wearing a flowered skirt.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

People in Wisconsin tend to be a pale white most of the year, unless they lost all their marbles and lay out in the winter time in the Wisconsin snow, trying to brown up a bit, which this girl hadn't done.

"Good evening sir, do you have reservations tonight?" she asked.

I looked around before answering and noticed that most of the tables were empty so reservations obviously weren't needed. This was no Mader's. To be fair, there are a helluva lot more German's in Wisconsin than there are Polynesians.

"No, I am meeting someone here. I guess I will wait at the bar."

"What's the name of your party that you are meeting? When they arrive, I'll send them back."

"Her name is Thelma. She's a tall blond lady."

"Thelma Thieland? If that's who you're meeting, she's at the Reef Bar with Jimmy The Peanut."

"Wait a minute, you give names to your bar snacks?" I asked. Evidently she didn't think that was funny as she didn't crack a smile as she said, "No, that's his nickname. His real name is Jimmy Booth."

So I tried again.

"The Reef Bar? So what's beyond the reef?"

She just stared at me with a blank look.

I gave up and nodded to her as I walked back to the Reef Bar. There was a mural painted on the wall as you walked back. It was a beach scene with a sailboat floating by on what was supposed to be the bay in front of the Judges place on Kihei Beach on the island of Maui. Nice touch I thought.

I was familiar with the bar area. As I mentioned, I spent some time here staking out a high priced wife messing around with a high school coach. I had been working for one of Milwaukee's titan's of industry who wanted to catch his wife in the act of cheating so he could get rid of her without having to pay her any alimony. I knew where he was coming from but I couldn't help but feel sorry for the lady.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I noticed Thelma sitting at the far corner of the bar. There was a big guy behind the bar bending over talking to her. If his butt was in proportion with the rest of his body, he was one big guy.

She saw me and immediately waved me over.

The bartender straightened up and turned to see who she was waving at. He was big. One of those two in one guys, a bartender and bouncer rolled into one package of muscle.

"Max, Thelma cried, as she snuffed out her cigarette in the ashtray in front of her.

"Over here." She said.

No kidding, I thought.

"Hiya Thelma, you look gorgeous." I said walking around the bar and pulling out a stool next to her.

If I'm anything, I am truthful. She was gorgeous. She had on a red dress that was so tight that I thought it was her skin. At first glance I thought she had mistakenly put it on backwards, as I swear it was cut so low I could see her navel again. I was beginning to wonder about this girl and where she shopped for her clothes. Wherever she went I didn't want her to stop. She held out her hand for me to shake, I guess. But being the gentlemen I am, I clasped it and bowed my head and kissed the back of it.

"Oh, Jimmy, did you see that? Mr. Fly is such a gentleman. I am flattered by your attention, Mr. Fly. Please make the acquaintance of my good friend, Jimmy.

Jimmy held out a ham that I assumed was his hand and I grasped it hard. I figured he wouldn't be as pleased as Thelma was if I kissed it.

Only problem he squeezed mine much harder than I squeezed his. I tried to hold back the tears but it was difficult to do as I swear I could hear my metacarpals crack under his grip.

If I thought Thelma's dress was tight, Jimmy might have done her one better. His flowered Hawaiian shirt left no doubt in my mind that he packed a helluva lot of muscle and wasn't to be messed with.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Luckily our handshake ended before I passed out and I was able to recover my composure and, with tears welling in my eyes from the pain, I asked Thelma how long she had been there.

"I arrived around nine, didn't I Jimmy?" she asked.

"Yeah, a bit before." He said. "Whatcha drinkin'?" He asked.

"Christian Brothers on the rocks." I replied.

"You got it." He said as he turned back to his work.

"He's pretty big. Does he work for Ray?"

"Tampa Ray? My gosh, no. Jimmy sat next to me in homeroom in high school."

"He goes by the name of peanut?" I asked.

"That is such a funny story." She yelled, "Jimmy, Jimmy, tell Max how you got your nickname."

Jimmy was pouring my brandy and looked our way and shook his head. He stood up and grabbed a bar rag and dried his hands. He picked up my drink and walked our way.

Placing the drink on the bar in front of me he said. "It's on me Max.

When I was a little kid I liked sticking stuff in my nose. One day I was sticking peanuts in my nose and my ma told me to quit. Of course, I didn't and I got two stuck up there. One in each nostril. My ma had to take me to the emergency room to get them removed. The next day in school Thelma called me Jimmy The Peanut and it stuck, no pun intended. By the end of the day, everyone was calling me that. Twenty five years later here I am, Jimmy The Peanut Booth. I kinda like it now so I don't know what I would do if nobody called me that no more."

"Yeah, I know what you mean." I replied even though I didn't.

"Listen, you had anything to eat, Thelma?"

"Yes, Max, I have. Let's take our drinks and go to the table in the corner so we can talk. Jimmy, will you keep an eye on our drinks and bring us another round when they get low?"

"I got my eye on you Thelma, don't worry."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I slid into the booth next to Thelma and she moved back toward me so her thigh was brushing against mine. And I thought this was going to be a rough evening. Now, why am I here I thought?

I looked around to make sure none of Tampa Ray's goons were lurking in the corner somewhere.

"Max, what are you worried about?" she smiled as she reached in her purse and pulled out a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes.

Very perceptive lady I thought. I dug in my pocket for my Zippo United States Army Air Corp Cigarette lighter and flipped it open. Spinning my thumb on the wheel, I sparked the flint igniting the flame. Thelma leaned into me, placing her hand over mine to steady it from shaking. I couldn't help but notice how her chest expanded as she inhaled the smoke deeply into her lungs. She turned her head up as she blew the smoke in the air. Wow, why was that so sexy when she did that and not when Harry did it?

"Well, your boyfriend does have a reputation for rubbing people out who cross him. Maybe that has me sweating a bit but, otherwise, I am okay with this."

"Are you planning on being naughty?" She smiled coyly at me.

She didn't wait for my answer and said, "Or good?"

I wondered what she meant by 'good'.

"With me naughty and good are one and the same." I replied.

"I bet they are. I was rude before, I should have asked if you are hungry Max?"

"No, brandy fills any void I may have. What about you?" I said.

"I'm fine." She replied.

I was glad we moved on as that conversation was getting a little steamy and I was afraid of where it might have led us. I don't care what she said but a woman who looks like Thelma would never be far from Tampa Ray's reach.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"What did you want to talk to me about, Thelma?" I inquired. I didn't want to rush the evening but I was curious as well as nervous.

"Ah, right to the point, huh? I thought we might take this time to get to know each other a little before we got down to business." She said.

"Alright, what do you want to know?"

"And here I thought Ray was a crass ass." She giggled.

Boy that hurt. It was at this point I decided I might not be as suave as I thought I was.

"Look Thelma, I am sorry, but I have these images of headless women swimming through my mind and I can't seem to shake them. If you have any information that might help in finding out who might have done this please let me know. I will protect you as my source. I promise."

"Oh Max, you don't get it do you. I am not afraid. Tampa Ray has nothing to do with this. I know, or knew Sally Hammonds. She was my roommate for the past three years. She moved out last April and I have only seen her a few of times since. She told me that she was seeing a guy who was a little kinky but very nice. He was well connected and she thought he was the ticket for her to get out of her situation. She was so sweet."

"What situation, Thelma?" I asked.

"What do you think, Max? Being broke, being used by men, not seeing any way out of being used.

Thelma lowered her head and her shoulders shook. I could tell she was crying. I put my hand on her shoulder and in my best Max Fly way, I attempted to comfort her.

She threw her arms around my neck, burying her face in my shoulder as she started to sob.

I wasn't prepared for this and didn't know how to react. I looked around again to make sure none of Tampa Ray's beer trucks were lurking in the corner someplace before I put my arms around her and brought her closer to me and said,

"That's alright, that's alright. We'll find out who did this."

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

I put my index finger under her chin and lifted her head up so she could look into my eyes.

Her eyes were a bright green, what I would call cat's eyes; very sexy.

"I promise Thelma, I won't let this drop until we get the guy who did this to Sally."

Her lips trembled when she replied. "I know you will, Max, that's why I called you." She nuzzled her face deeper into my neck.

"Where did Sally work?" I asked.

"Harley Davidson. She worked in their bookkeeping department."

She pulled back and looked into my eyes.

"Is your name really Max?" She asked, dabbing at her eyes.

"That's what my momma told me. Why?"

"I don't know, I was wondering if it was short for something like Maxwell or Maximilian.

"No, my mother said she named me Max because it sounded like a hard name. I didn't have a dad, at least one I knew, and she thought I needed a tough name to survive. She thought I would end up being a carpenter or a pirate."

Thelma laughed at that. "Are you a pirate Max?"

"Only on weekends; I bring out my eye patch to impress the ladies."

"You don't need an eye patch to do that, Max."

She lowered her eyes and then looked up at me with those cat green eyes of hers. "Have you ever been married?" She asked.

I looked at her a moment before replying. "Nope I haven't, Thelma, I lied. From what I have been able to observe, marriage always ends badly...divorce or death and I'm not ready to face either right now."

She laughed and shook her head and then reached into her purse.

I felt the sweat bead up on my forehead as I thought she was reaching for a gun. I just don't trust women.

"Here, this is Sally's diary," she said.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

It always amazes me how much stuff women can shove in their purse.

"She left it at our apartment when she moved out. I always meant to get it back to her but one thing led to another and I never did.

I looked at it and there are some disturbing things in there that I think you should read.

She writes in there that B.M is a real shit."

"Bowel Movement?" I ask.

"Max, B.M. is the initials of her paramour."

Paramour; this guy is a step up from a John at best and Thelma's calling him Sally's paramour?

At this point I wondered if Thelma was smart enough to be a house plant.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 23

I left Thelma at the bar with Jimmy “The Peanut” and headed to Rocco’s. I offered her a ride home but we both decided it was better if she left with The Peanut.

I was really intrigued with how I would get her out of that tight red dress without using some butter and the thought of that almost made me change my mind. Then I recalled those Italian loafers pushing my face into the carpet of that limousine so I decided to leave the butter in the refrigerator and leave the red dress dilemma for another day.

Anyway, I wanted to take in some of William Bennett’s act; anyone who had the balls to wear lime green pants and a bright yellow sport coat over a pink shirt in public and refer to himself as the Raja, had to be something else. He obviously didn’t have any shame to his game.

It was after ten so he would be singing and I wanted to hear for myself if he was as bad as Rocco said.

The Raja; where did he come up with that name?

Also, I didn’t want to be alone when I read through Sally Hammond’s diary. It made me feel dirty snooping in her private life. I knew my good friend Ralph Mills would be hanging out at Rocco’s tonight and nothing made him feel dirty. When his first wife caught him kissing another woman, with a straight face he said, “I wasn’t kissing her, I was whispering in her mouth.”

He was the perfect guy to join me to go through Sally Hammond’s diary. From what Thelma told me there was information in there that might lead us to her killer. I figured enough people have lost their heads due to some creep and it had to stop. Now that I knew where Sally Hammonds worked I would ask Marcello to go there with me to see if we could shake down some information on her that might give us insight into her social life and who this “B.M.” character is. I bet he really is a shit.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Harry and Detective Williams felt that all the murders were done by the same guy. They didn't get into the specifics why and I didn't push them especially after EJ drew down on me at Mader's the other night. If I learned anything that night, I learned never to get on the wrong side of a lady full of Jim Beam and totin' a gun.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

Chapter 24

Rocco's was packed when I arrived. The smoke was so thick it was hanging from the ceiling like cobwebs.

I did hear some growling that was coming from the back of the dance floor that might have passed for singing, if I had already had three or four manhattans, but I stuck to only one while I was with Thelma. I did that for a couple of reasons; one, I didn't know if I would have to pay for her entire tab which I would have been hard pressed to cover with what I had in my wallet; and two, I become putty in the hands of beautiful women, or any women for that matter, when I have too much to drink and I just didn't trust myself with Thelma and that red dress.

I noticed Ralph sitting at a table with Eloise and I walked over and sat down. Eloise immediately got up and said. "I'll get that Crown on the rocks for you Ralph." She walked away without saying a word to me.

"Well, you pissed her off big time. Ralph said. I was just going to find out from her what you did when you walked in. I guess I could find out from you but somehow, I don't think it would be the same as if Eloise told the story."

Ralph Mills was a successful land developer in Menomonie Falls, just North of Milwaukee and a partner with me in Sam Galbraith and Hap Shultz's cargo airline. Unfortunately, Ralph wasn't as successful in marriage as he was in developing land. He had been married four times and divorced four times and that pretty much soured him on women and long term relationships. He considered anything over six months long term as that is how long his last marriage lasted.

He said he would try being gay except he didn't want to have to dress like William Bennett, wearing lime green pants, pink shirt and bright yellow sports coat. Even for someone like Ralph, that was a bit much.

"You got a minute?" I asked.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

“Not much more than that. Pretty soon Eloise will be back with my drink and whatever you have to say won’t be more important than what Eloise and I were talking about before you interrupted us.”

“Yeah, yeah, just give me a minute here. I need someone like you to decipher some codes in this diary that was given to me.”

“Whose is it?”

“It belonged to one of the women who lost their head on the Southside of Milwaukee recently. Sally Hammonds.”

“No kidding. Well, let’s take a look.” Ralph said.

He turned as Eloise walked up and gave her a lascivious smile as she bent to place his Crown Royal on a napkin on the table in front of him.

“Thanks, hon.”

“You’re welcome, Ralph.” Eloise patted him on his shoulder and turned her gorgeous hazel eyes on me and threw darts in my direction before walking off.

“Come on, Eloise. Look, I’m sorry. Will you bring me a brandy manhattan on your next trip back? Please?” I yelled, pleading to her retreating back as she disappeared into the crowd of people swaying on the dance floor.

“Boy, she has some great legs,” Ralph said.

“There are two theories about arguing with a woman Max, neither one works. Let’s see what you got there”, Ralph said as he slid his chair around to my side of the table.

I gave Ralph a quizzical look as I wasn’t about to take any advice regarding relationships with women from Ralph, considering his track record.

A half an hour later Ralph reached over for his drink and realized that he hadn’t touched it and the ice had melted. I realized that Eloise hadn’t even brought mine yet and that she probably wouldn’t.

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What we found out was that Sally Hammonds was an active young lady and that she liked to draw lots of hearts and flowers. Her diary looked like it contained just about every letter in the alphabet; but B.M. seemed to be taking up the spaces on most of the pages. One time he was the sweetest person and brought her candy and flowers and the next time he would be mean and ask her to do something that she really didn't want to do but she did it anyway just to please him. A couple of places in the diary a P.G. is entered right after B.M. One time she wrote, "Right after B.M. arrived there was a knock on the door. B.M. went to answer it and let P.G. and B.C. with the MPD in even though I was sitting on the couch without a stitch of clothing on. I was so embarrassed. P.G. and B.C. kept leering at me and I tried to cover up with the small throw pillow I picked up off the couch. All those pimples on B.C.'s face turn my stomach."

Then there were times when she and B.M. would be involved in some sordid activity with a B.C.

I wondered if the initials P.G. stood for one Paul Godfrey. Who was B.M.? B.C. had to be my good friend Bob Chimilewski. The pimples gave him away.

MPD? Milwaukee Police Department? Interesting.

Thelma said she doesn't know who B.M., P.G. or who B.C. are but I wondered if she was being honest with me. She said she wanted to find Sally's killer but was that true, or only as long as it didn't involve someone she knew. I could ask Mr.

Palermo but he already told me Paul Godfrey wasn't involved in the murder. Was he being honest with me as well? Why should he be? I was no threat to him. He could have me rubbed out and only a handful of people would care, I think they would care. I thought confronting Tampa Ray might be an option better left to EJ and Harry. Their badges probably would keep them from having their faces smashed into the carpeting of Tampa Ray's limousine.

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"I gotta make a call, I said, standing and sliding my chair back. Think you could persuade Eloise to bring me a brandy manhattan on the rocks? Better make it a double. I think it could be my last."

"Who you calling?" Ralph asked.

"A little dick drip up in Beaver Dam who I want to do some investigative work for me. I'll be right back."

The phone rang ten times before a sleepy Horace Greenberg said, "Hello?"

"Horace, get up and brush the moss off your teeth. I have a job for you."

"Who is this?" he whined.

"Who do you think it is? It's Max."

"Max? Do you know what time it is? It's after eleven o'clock at night."

"I know what time it is. I'm the one who is awake. It's time for you to get up and get on the phone and call some of your acquaintances in Milwaukee and do a little investigative reporting. What do you say to that?"

"At eleven at night? Nobody I know is up this late."

"You'd be surprised. I want you to find out all you can on the Milwaukee Police Chief, Robert Meier and his family. I want to know who they hang around with, what synagogue they go to, the clubs they belong to and anything else you can find. One point leads to another and where it ends is where I want to be at; and see what you can dig up on Ray Palermo too while you are at it."

"Meier? The police chief? He is the leading law enforcement officer in the city and one of the most powerful men in southern Wisconsin. He has been at the forefront of every major arrest of any importance for the past fifteen years. He has been after organized crime since the early 1940's. He has never done anything illegal. You think he is hanging around with Ray Palermo?"

"I don't know who he is hanging around with, I said, that's why I am asking you to find out."

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You don't think he has ever done anything illegal? That's like believing in honest lawyers and leprechauns. Just see what you can dig up and if you can find anything that you think just might be of interest to me, and if it pans out, I will give you a by line on my article when the story I am working on breaks."

"Are you serious Max? You'd do that for me?"

"You're damn right I'm serious and while you are digging, throw out the name Paul Godfrey and you might as well see what my old buddy Bob Chimilewski has been doing in his free time as well. Look at the babe angle. The kind you pay big bucks for. Escort services, high end call girls. See if you can uncover anyone with the initials B.M. and I'll tell you right now they don't stand for bowel movement."

"Oh man, you're gross Max."

"I know, I can't help myself. I also want you to dig around for anyone with the initials of P.G. or B.C. Now get going and start earning a name for yourself. You do a good job on this and you are on your way to the big time."

"Wow, thanks Max. I'll see what I can do and get back to you as soon as possible."

"Horace, get back to me sooner than that."

I hung up on him.

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Chapter 25

I woke up to the staccato beat of someone hitting on the pipes downstairs in the wholesale plumbing shop over which my apartment is situated. Lifting my head off my pillow, I turned and looked at the clock on the nightstand next to the bed. It read one o'clock. I knew that couldn't be correct as the second hand hadn't moved for the entire time I stared at it. I brought up my right wrist to view the time on my wristwatch which read nine. I assumed it was nine a.m.

I left Rocco's Pub last night after pouring over Sally Hammond's diary with Ralph Mills for over an hour. Ralph has a short attention span, as shown by the length of his four marriages, so he left me to find the next girl of his dreams.

He was weaving around the dance floor to the crooning of the Raja's rendition of *The Tennessee Waltz*. The lady whose ass Ralph was grasping onto for dear life looked like she was someone's blowup doll that wasn't fully inflated. Her hair looked like a patch of grey fuzz attached to a melon and her skin had the pallid appearance of someone who hadn't seen the light of day in years and her eyes were sunken deep within their sockets. She wore a faded cotton dress, large enough for two of her. Her bare arms and legs looked like brittle sticks. She had a cigarette hanging out the side of her mouth and was breathing like an old truck with a leaky head gasket with every step they took. She was a good six inches taller than Ralph and he had his head on her shoulder with a dreamy look on his face when I left. I guess what they say is true; beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.

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Eloise never did bring my drink last night so I woke up for the first time in a long time without a hangover. I recalled reading over Sally Hammond's diary two more times before falling asleep. I also wanted to go to the office and talk John Marcello into taking a trip with me over to Harley Davidson's Corporate Offices on Juneau Avenue. He had a special relationship with one of the founders, Walter Davidson's granddaughter, Diane. I had a crush on Diane for two years but that never went anywhere. One of the last things she told me was to leave her alone. She said I was destined to spend my life sitting out in the street collecting pigeon shit. I guess she was looking for something better. Considering how our relationship ended, I figured Marcello had a better chance of getting some inside information on Sally Hammonds and her co-workers than I did.

The sky was steamy and there wasn't a breeze to be found as I opened the door to my Nash and started my daily ritual of cranking the bitch until one of the spark plugs felt sorry for me and fired. Today it fired right away. This could be my day, I thought; no hangover and this old lady turned over for me on my first touch. I decided to drop her top and enjoy the day. Mildred was busy bitch-slapping her typewriter when I walked in. Her legs looked like they were ready to explode through the heavy support hose she was wearing. The hair on her legs were poking through in every direction and her lips were pursed so I couldn't tell if the hair over her lip originated from her nose or was her mustache.

"Hi Mildred, is the wop in?"

She looked up with a scowl on her face, pushing her glasses up on the bridge of her considerable nose and nodded in the direction of Marcello's office; then turned back to beating the hell out of her Smith-Corona. I figured I got as much conversation out of Mildred that I could expect for the rest of the day. So I ended the pleasantries and walked back to John's office picking up the last donut on the tray that Mildred provided every day. I told John he better stop eating all those donuts or else he would turn into Mildred's twin.

Max Fly Private I A Head Of The Game

"Morning Pizza, what's on your agenda for today?" I inquired.

"What are you doing here, Max," he asked? "It's only 11:30 in the morning. I didn't know you kept morning hours."

Ignoring his jab, I said: "Why don't you buy me a burger at Rocco's and then take a ride out to the Harley plant on Juneau Avenue and have a talk with Diane?"

"And why should I do that," he asked?

After I filled him in on what I had he was interested enough to buy my lunch and risk the wrath of Diane Davidson by bringing me along with him to her office. He called her to set an appointment for one thirty that afternoon. She said she was more than happy to see the Merry Wop.

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Chapter 26

After enjoying lunch, which consisted of Rocco's famous Danno Burger with a side of fries and a couple of Blatz beers, we left for the Harley Davidson Plant and what would be my first encounter with the lovely Diane Davidson since she left me on the street corner years ago collecting pigeon shit on my head. I leaned back and closed my eyes, enjoying the comfortable ride down to the corner of Juneau Avenue and Thirty Eighth Street in Marcello's new Cadillac convertible to where Harley Davidson was located.

In 1910, Harley Davidson had expanded their factory from where it originated on Juneau Avenue to wrap around the corner onto Thirty Eighth street covering two city blocks and where they have been producing the "Hog" for motorcycle enthusiasts ever since.

William Harley drew up his first plans for an engine to put on his bicycle in 1901 because it was difficult for him to peddle his bike to his favorite fishing hole. Along with his friend, Arthur Davidson, they manufactured their first cycle in Harley's garage. That power cycle had difficulty conquering Milwaukee's hills without pedal assistance so they scrapped it and started building one with a larger engine. They manufactured the first prototype in a shed in the Davidson's backyard. They later enlisted the help of Arthur's brothers, William and Walter and it wasn't long before the world's most famous motorcycle manufacturer was in business.

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Soon after the receptionist announced our arrival, Diane Davidson had her escort us back to her spacious corner office. As we stood in the doorway, Diane rose from behind her desk with a beautiful smile that seemed to light up the room and approached John to shake his hand. That made me relax a little as I now knew she wasn't armed. As they were pumping it up I was looking at all the pictures on the walls. Diane had been a pretty busy woman since the days we were an item and she requested I get out of her life. There were pictures of her with her father standing alongside the mayor of Milwaukee and then there were some of them standing with Frank Meier, Milwaukee's Police Chief with a bank of shiny new Harley's behind them with a motorcycle cop beside each bike. Then there was one of her and a big strapping handsome man speaking with President Dwight David Eisenhower. There was the degree from the University of Wisconsin and pictures of the Badger's football team and another one of people dressed in Badger red with their arms around each other laughing it up. The picture must have been taken after a Badger football game. Some of the people looked familiar, like John Marcello but I wasn't able to put a name to many of the faces.

"John, it's so nice to see you again," Diane beamed. She turned to me and flatly said, "Max."

I nodded at her afraid to say anything that she might construe as being out of line.

"So, what brings you here today?" she said, smiling at John.

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I let John do the talking. "Max and I have a client who may have some information regarding these horrible killings that have occurred on the Southside of Milwaukee recently. One of these unfortunate ladies, Sally Hammonds, as you are aware, worked for you and we have been given some information by a source, who wishes to remain unknown, for obvious reasons, who knew Sally Hammonds. Another one of your employees found Sally's headless body when she went to Sally's apartment to check on her when she failed to show up to work for three days and didn't answer any of her phone calls. This much the police have released to us. What they haven't released to us is the name of your employee who found Sally's body. We really need to speak to her, Diane, to see if she can verify or shed some light on some information we have that may break this case wide open before we turn it over to the police. We promise that we will respect her desire for anonymity. We would appreciate any help you could give us in getting her to talk to us."

Diane furrowed her brow and looked in my direction before looking up toward the ceiling and taking a deep breath that expanded her considerable chest, before expelling a lung full of air. I was mesmerized.

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She looked down and scowled in my direction, as if she was reading my mind, before turning to John and saying; "I'll go speak to her and tell her what you have just told me. I can't promise that she will talk to you and I surely can't make her. I want you to know John, I am doing this for you because we have been friends for a long time and I trust you. Stay here while I go find her. If she is willing to meet with you, I will let you use my office. I have a meeting with our accounting department and my office will be vacant." She then swiveled her head in my direction and arched her eyebrow before standing and walking to the door. She stopped and spun around and looked in my direction and said, "You had better treat her with respect, Max. She has been through a lot and is scared to death and rightly so. This is her first week back to work since she found the body and we are watching her closely to make sure she doesn't have a breakdown."

I raised my hands in a supplicating gesture and started to say, "Di...

She stopped me and said, "Please, don't say anything. I can always tell when you are lying Max, your lips move." She shook her head and waved me off before turning and stomping out of her office.

John sat there chuckling and shaking his head. "Max, it's always a pleasure to be in the presence of one of your ex-girlfriends. I just never know what they are going to say. You must really have some great lines, 'I can always tell when you are lying Max, your lips move.' That's a good one. I can't wait to tell that to Mildred. She will get a kick out of it." There wasn't much I could say to that so I sat there with my mouth shut staring at all the awards and pictures on Diane Davidson's office walls.

Ten minutes later Diane returned with a small mousey woman, about twenty or twenty one, in tow. John and I both stood.

"John, this is Beverly Screwowski, she has agreed to speak with you but you must promise not to reveal her name to anyone."

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She looked in my direction and said, "That goes for you as well Max."

I nodded in agreement, afraid if I moved my lips she would think I was lying.

Diane turned back to face John and said, "I told her you were a former FBI agent and that I trusted you to keep your word and she said that is good enough for her. I'll leave you alone now. I have my meeting and I'll be back in thirty minutes.

Beverly, if you need anything, anything at all, buzz Holly and she will get it for you."

"John" she said in closing as she walked out the door

"Diane", he replied as we watched her go. She closed the door behind her leaving a hint of gardenia as she left.

"Miss Screwowski, we really appreciate you speaking with us today and I assure you we will not divulge your name to anyone. We just need to ask you some questions regarding some entries in Sally's personal diary. Are you okay with that?"

"You found Sally's diary? Oh my God. Where was it?"

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Chapter 27

Beverly Screwowski wore her hair severely pulled back and rolled up on the top of her head; pretty much in the same fashion that Mildred wore hers. She wore no makeup, no lipstick, no jewelry and rimless glasses that made her look like a librarian. Her cotton dress was a dark blue with a white flower pattern. It reached to her ankles, which she had demurely crossed as she sat with her hands in her lap. She was nervously twisting a facial tissue between her fingers as she looked down.

"Can you tell us what you know about Sally and the men she dated?" Marcello asked.

It flowed out of her as if we had turned on a faucet. It gushed forth without any coaxing from either John or myself.

"Sally was so beautiful and so nice. We used to have our lunch together every day at work. She would talk about all the important people that she was meeting through her new boyfriend. Sometimes she would call me at home after one of her dates and tell me where she had gone that evening and what they had done. Sometimes she would say how embarrassed she was. She didn't call me to fill me in on the date she was going on last Saturday night. She said he told her it was going to be something really special. Sally said she would tell me what it was the next day. She never did. That's why I knew something was wrong and why I eventually went to her house because she always kept her promises."

I asked her, "Do you know the name of her boyfriend?"

"Only his first name; it's Barry."

"Barry?" Marcello and I both blurted out at the same time.

One of the names that John and I both thought about when we discussed the initials B. M. was Barry Meier, the police chief's son. Could it be?

"Yes; he promised to get her a new apartment and set her up where she wouldn't have to work no more. She already had a new mink coat and a new dress and shoes he bought her. She was so happy."

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"Did you give this information to the police?" Marcello asked. "I did," she said demurely. "That big detective asked me if I was sure and I said 'Of course I'm sure, I wouldn't lie about something like that. That woman detective just stared at me as if I had something on my teeth. She made me real nervous.'" I didn't tell her that Detective Williams made me real nervous too; especially after pulling her gun on me the other night at Mader's. Now it made sense why Harry wouldn't give me any information on Beverly. This grisly murder could be getting very political.

Marcello and I glanced at each other. I pulled out Sally's diary and put it on the table in front of Beverly and opened it to one of the pages I had marked that had most of the initials we had come across.

"Do any of these initials make any sense to you? Do you know anyone with those initials or did Sally mention anyone with those initials?" I asked.

She lowered her head and a scowl fell across her face. "Well, you know these could belong to anybody, but B.M. just might be Barry, but I can't say for sure. I know she mentioned someone named Paul a couple of times and a Robert and Bobby. I would have to think."

"Take your time, Beverly," Marcello said kindly. "As you know, this could be very important."

"You don't think Barry had anything to do with her murder, do you?"

"We don't know. We just want to verify a few things before we turn this over to the police. I have to tell you that you can expect Detective Sergeant Marshall and Detective Williams to be back here asking you some more questions after we turn this over to them. We all want to find who did this and I want you to know we really appreciate your help."

"I figured as much. They said they would be getting back to me soon. I suppose with this diary they will think I know about everything that Sally wrote in there. Well, I don't."

"Did you ever hear Sally mention the name Meier?" John asked.

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"Meyer?"

"M-e-i-e-r." John replied spelling it out.

"Oh, I'm not sure. She might have. I just can't remember. Is that Barry's last name?"

"We're not sure. We are just asking. Did she ever talk to you about any of the dates she went on with Barry that was special?"

"Let me think." Beverly put her right index finger to her chin and lifted her eyes to the ceiling. After a moment she said, "She did mention a formal dance she went to awhile back. Barry went with her to buy her a dress she said. She said it was very revealing, the dress." She looked at me to make sure I understood what was revealing. I nodded at her.

"Showing cleavage you know." She lowered her eyes to her lap and her face turned a deep red.

"Yeah, we know. John said quickly, probably worried about what my response would be.

"When was this dance, do you know?"

"February, I think."

"Did she say what the occasion was for the dance?" I asked.

"No, just that there were a lot of police and important people there. She said she felt out of place and didn't have much fun. Barry was nice to her but she said he spent a lot of time talking to some men. She said they left early and went to Barry's place. That's all I know"

John and I exchanged glances.

"Okay, thank you Beverly. Please give us a call if you can think of anything; especially regarding the initials in Sally's diary."

John replied as he stood up.

Beverly stood and said, "I will." She turned and opened the door and walked out.

John looked at me and said, "An odd friend for someone like Sally to confide in, don't you think?"

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"Not really. I replied. Sally probably considered her safe. Someone she could confide in and trust. She is really mousey and I doubt she has many friends. Sally was probably someone special to her. She probably considered Sally her best friend. What do you think about that dance with cops and important people? Do you know of any big banquet or celebration or anything with the mayor and the police department?"

"Not off hand, but I'll find out. Harry probably knows. You can ask him."

"That's a good idea. Let's go before Diane comes back." I said.

"Why?" It was Diane. She was standing in the doorway and was listening to the end of our conversation.

Something unusual happened. A dark red crept up from my shirt collar and covered my face. Trying to be suave, I merely said "Because I don't want to waste any more of your valuable time."

"Max, I haven't wasted any time, valuable or otherwise, on you for years." Turning to John, she added. "I hope it was beneficial. Beverly is a sweet girl and she is really having a difficult time dealing with this. I know I would if I walked into a bloody scene like that and the fact that she was a close friend of Sally's makes it that much worse."

"You're right Diane. She is dealing with a lot right now. She was very helpful. We'll be turning this stuff over to Harry Marshall and Emily Williams later today. More than likely they will be here to speak with her in more detail. This is looking like it could be a big mess. I'm glad I don't have to deal with politicians any longer. They make everyone's life miserable and this is looking like it will explode big time and I really feel sorry for Marshall and Williams for catching this case. We've taken up enough of your time" He said, as he bent over and kissed her on the cheek.

"Bye John. Max," she said flatly as she walked behind her desk.

As John and I walked back to the car I said. "Did you see the way she looked at me?"

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"I think she wanted to step on you Max."

"Really? Think she wears stilettos?"

"You're an idiot Max."

"Nah, that's just my cover." I replied.

"Get in the car." John said as he slammed the door and started the big engine of his new Cadillac. We headed back to the office wondering if the police chief's son could be involved in what could very well be one of Wisconsin's most horrifying mass murders.

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Chapter 28

After John and I returned I walked back to my office and I called Detective Williams. I told her I had obtained some information relating to the headless women that have been popping up around Milwaukee. EJ said Harry was out of the office and she was about to leave.

“Max, if what you have is important to this case, then meet us at the precinct tomorrow morning at 8:30 a.m. and don’t even think about being late.”

“EJ, I would never think about being late for a date with you.”

“Max, this isn’t a date, it’s an appointment.” She hung up on me.

Mildred rang my office.

“A Mr. Greenberg called for you Max. He wants you to call him,” Mildred said before hanging up on me.

I immediately dialed the Beaver Dam Citizen’s mailroom.

“Hello.” Horace answered on the first ring.

“Horace, what do you have for me?”

“Max, you aren’t going to believe this. Where are you?”

“I’m not going to believe where I am? What are you talking about?”

“No, Max, I was wondering where you are and that you won’t believe the information I gathered for our article on the mass murders in Milwaukee. We need to meet.”

“Our article, huh? Okay, I’m on my way to Rocco’s Pub, do you know where that’s at, on the corner of North Avenue and Highway 100 in Wauwatosa? If you’re headin’ to Milwaukee to see your buddy stop in and I’ll buy you a Pink Squirrel and we can go over what you got.”

“A Pink Squirrel, yech, I got terribly sick one night with Ricky when we had, well, I lost count after ten, of them. I’ll have a slow gin fizz. I can be there in about an hour, okay?”

“Okay,” I said and hung up on him.

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I was thinking about what Horace might have unearthed from his weird friends and how it might tie in to this case when I decided I should talk with Thelma again. I put a call into Judge's Beyond The Reef, hoping to speak with Jimmy The Peanut so he could give me Thelma's telephone number. I needed some background information on Sally Hammonds and she might be the quickest route to get it. A pretty voice answered on the first ring; "Judges Beyond The Reef, how may I help you."

Not only was I impressed with the young lady's sexy voice, but grammatically correct English as well.

"Hello, I replied, is Jimmy The Peanut there?"

"He won't be in for another hour. May I take a message for him?"

"You sure may, sweetie, tell him to call Max Fly." I left Rocco's number and hung up.

I scooped up my notes on the headless women and left the office. The rays of the afternoon sun sliced through the office buildings lining Milwaukee Avenue making me squint as I stepped onto the sidewalk in front of Marcello and Associates office. I saw my Nash 600 baking in the heat in the parking lot across the street. I looked both ways before crossing, as my mother taught me, and hurried toward my car. My mind was wrapped around Thelma and the information gathered from her roommate's diary when from out of nowhere a black sedan came barreling down on me. Luckily I looked up in time and was able to dive between two beat up old fords parked along the curb barely avoiding a nasty accident. I scrambled to my feet to see the tail end of the sedan turn on 21st Street heading south toward the Milwaukee River. Whoever that was, they obviously tried to kill me. That was no accident, it was a deliberate attempt on Ol' Max' life.

Who would want to kill me? I mean, not counting my ex wife and a few other ladies whose paths crossed mine over the years.

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I never saw a woman drive like that so I doubted it was one of my female acquaintances. So I figured it had to be someone who wanted me to back off this headless woman story I was working. But who, one of Palermo's goons? Did he find out I met with Thelma at Judge's? Maybe the killer? Was I getting close to him? If I was closing in on the killer, why run me down in broad daylight in the front of an ex-FBI agent's office? That was a risky thing to do. I figured the car was probably stolen and whoever was driving it probably would ditch it. But he would also try again so I had better stay alert.

I bent over and picked up my briefcase and checked out my pants and coat for any rips and tears. Luckily my wranglers were tough and didn't tear and my corduroy sports coat was just a bit dirty from my well executed tuck and roll maneuver.

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Chapter 29

Hap Schultz was working behind the bar when I walked into Rocco's. Let me rephrase that. Hap was leaning on the bar talking to a pretty young lady who was either completely smashed or completely eaten up with Hap's line of bullshit.

"Hiya Hap," I yelled as I walked toward my booth in the back corner near the ladies room.

"How 'bout bringing me my usual when you can break away from Miss America there?"

"In a minute Max," he replied without taking his eyes off his prey.

It was four and the happy hour crowd was just beginning to arrive and the noise level was beginning to pick up. Eloise's shift didn't begin until eight so I would be spared her scathing stares and open hostility.

It wasn't long until I spotted Horace Greenberg walk through the door. He was wearing brown trousers with a bright green sport coat yellow shirt and a matching bright green bow tie with a brown derby hat perched at an angle on top of his pointy little head. He looked like a giant leprechaun standing there looking around as his eyes adjusted to the darkness in the pub. The way he was dressed he looked like he could be a stand in for The Raja. He looked in my direction. I waved and he walked over.

He was all flushed either from the effort of walking to the back of the bar or because he was excited to dispense with the information he gathered.

"Well, what did you find that will help us with the story we are working on, Horace?"

"I found out some very juicy stuff on Mr. Barry Meier, the police chief's son, and some of his twisted friends.

Are you ready?" he asked.

I nodded.

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“Evidently he took a train to Chicago with seven hundred dollars in his pocket. He stopped for some adult company at a Windy City whorehouse, Swede Annie’s. After an all night bacchanal, he awoke with a hangover and no money. He retaliated by robbing the brothel and its customers of close to seven thousand dollars in cash and jewels.”

“Bacchanal?” I asked, shaking my head.

“Yes, a drunken revelry, an orgy. From Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, also known as ...

“Alright, I get the picture. Now get on with your story.”

“...Dionysus” he continued, finishing his Greek history lesson.

Okay, it seems he isn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer and was apprehended shortly after leaving Annie’s by a couple of Chicago’s finest, who happen to be personal friends with Tony Ricca and one Raymond Tampa Ray Palermo, who resides in Milwaukee. These fine and upstanding officers also happen to be open to accepting financial gratuities from time to time and Tampa Ray, the smart investor that he is, decides it would be in his best interests to intercede on Barry Meier’s behalf and get him the hell out of Dodge as fast as he can.”

“Dodge?”

“That’s an historical allusion, Max.”

“Okay, I’m following you. So where is this going?”

“Do you think that act of kindness by Tampa Ray ingratiates him to Chief Meier? I think so.

“That’s just the beginning. It seems that this Barry Meier is quite a spoiled character going back to his days as a kid at Shorewood High School and before. I won’t bore you with that because it’s the rest of the stuff that is really juicy.”

“Horace, where are you getting all this information?”

“You know I can’t divulge my sources Max. Reporters have to protect them or their sources will never trust them again.”

“Horace, you are a mailroom clerk for crying out loud, not a reporter.”

“Not any more, Max. I am your assistant, right?”

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“Horace, if I want an assistant, I’ll get married again.”

“Max, do you want to hear the rest of this?”

“Of course, Horace, go ahead and continue.”

“I’m your assistant, right?”

“Aw shit, alright, just for this story. Then I’ll put a good word in for you with Wentworth and maybe he will put you on the street covering yard sales in Beaver Dam.”

“No Max, I want you to put in a few good words for me with the editor of the Milwaukee Journal.”

“You gotta be kiddin’ me. You know they fired my ass don’t you?”

“I’m well aware of that. I just need to get myself in front of the editor and I can take care of the rest.”

Wow, where did Horace find the balls? Maybe he would make it as a reporter.

“Okay, you got it. Now let’s get on with what you found on this Barry Meier character.”

It was at this point that Dan Ciorrocco walked up and said; “Call for you Max. You can pick up back by the ladies room.”

“Thanks Chili Man. Would you bring me another drink and something for the Leprechaun here?”

Dan looked at Horace and stuck out his hand. “I’m Dan Ciorrocco, what are you drinking?”

Horace held out his hand palm down and replied, “Horace Greenberg, pleased to meet you. I would like a slow gin fizz, please.”

“Coming right up,” Dan looked at me and rolled his eyes as he turned to fill the order.

I picked up the receiver as I watched the pretty young thing Hap was cultivating for his evening of fun swing her bottom in my direction as she sauntered into the ladies room. “Max Fly,” I said.

“This is Jim Booth. I was told you called me?”

“Jimmy The Peanut, I’m Thelma Theiland’s friend. I met you at Judge’s last week.”

“Oh yeah, the private dick; how’re you doin’?” All the warmth and charm from our previous meeting was missing from his voice.

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“I’m fine, Jimmy. Hey can you give me Thelma’s number? I need to talk with her, it’s important.”

“This is her number. I’ll give her the message.” He hung up on me. Thelma and I seemed to have another thing in common; we both took our calls at a bar.

I noticed Horace was sipping on his second slow gin fizz as I walked back to the booth. “Slow down there pardoner or you won’t be able to make it to the door. Those things pack a wallop.”

His eyes already had a glaze to them. I was hoping I wouldn’t have to drive him home. I didn’t need that address on my list of places to forget.

“Okay, where did we leave off?” I asked.

Horace grinned and said, “I was about to tell you about The Castaways, a nice little place in Cudahy where some very interesting people tend to gather for, shall we say, some discreet encounters.”

“The Castaways? Cudahy? I never heard of the place. I heard of Cudahy, I mean I never heard of The Castaways.”

The Cudahy Brothers Company, a meat packing company, gave birth to the origins of Cudahy, Wisconsin, just south of Milwaukee, Sometimes called the "city with no streets" because most are named avenue. Patrick Cudahy chose to build his meat packing plant on the land along the shore of Lake Michigan, originally known as Town Lake, because of its proximity to both water and the railroad and another small town sprung up on the outskirts of the city of neighborhoods.

“So where is this Castaways located in Cudahy?” I asked.

“It’s located on East Layton Avenue in one of those new motor lodges that are going up around the country. It’s about a block from where the Cudahy Meat Packing plant is located. Many of the employees stop there after work.”

“And you know this because?”

“My friend Ricky works at Cudahy Meat Packing. He often goes to The Castaways with a friend named Jim that he works with.

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He said that Barry Meier is a regular there as well as Bob Chimilewski his dad's chief of staff. And listen to this, Horace whispered as he leaned across the table in my direction. The place is a front for some nefarious activity, none of which can get much worse than this, S&M and SM&B.

“Those are acronyms for Sadism and masochism and sadism, masochism and bondage.

It's big time Max, big time there. They have special rooms in the back that you and your partner can rent by the hour. They have hand cuffs attached to the walls and you can buy whips and leather hoods, belts, collars and feathers. Everything. I love feathers. Very erotic don't you think?”

“I don't think. So, how does your friend know this? Has he rented one of the rooms?”

“He said he went once but it was a little too physical for him. He prefers to pretend as opposed to actually inflicting pain or having it inflicted on him.”

“I see. So did Meier and Chimilewski go there as a couple?”

“Ricky said they met a couple of girls at The Castaways and then they rented a room.”

“Ricky knows this because...?”

“Ricky and his friend were at the front desk finishing registering for their room when Barry and Bob Chimilewski came in with their girl friends. Ricky said he thinks someone sets them up with the girls as he sees them meeting these same girls everytime they come into The Castaways, which is often. It's like the girls are regulars, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I do. So Ricky has another main squeeze and you are okay with that?”

“Ricky is bisexual. He likes boys and girls and he was there with a girl and so was his friend Jim. Ricky and I have an understanding, if you know what I mean.”

“I don't know and don't want to know. Does Jim have a last name?”

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“I’m sure he does, but I don’t know it. Ricky said Jim is a big guy who hooks the cows carcass after it is killed and puts it on a chained conveyor as it bleeds out going down the line in the slaughter house; just gross. You have to be big and strong to handle that job and Ricky said nobody is bigger and stronger than Jim. He said he is bigger than anyone on the Green Bay Packers.”

“Why don’t you ask Ricky for Jim’s last name? I asked.

“I did but he is afraid to tell me.”

“Afraid to tell you, why? Does Ricky still frequent this place?”

“He said secrecy is big with this Jim friend of his and yes, Ricky still goes there from time to time.

I went to The Castaways with him once but I just wasn’t into it. We haven’t been back since.”

“I see. So this place caters to normal couples as well as fags?”

“Max, that is so insensitive. I haven’t told many people about Ricky. I told you because we are partners and I thought I could trust you with my secret and that you would be a little more civil and understanding and because this information is going to help us solve this terrible situation Milwaukee is in the midst of and it will help sell our story.”

“Okay, Horace, I’m sorry. Fag just slipped out I guess. So, what do you call yourselves if not fags? Queers? Gay?”

“We call ourselves lovers, which we are. Can we move on Max?”

“I wish we would.”

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Chapter 30

After Horace finished giving me the information he had gathered and making sure I would keep my promise about sharing my byline with him, he left to find Ricky and do whatever they do together.

I paid the bill and walked to the back to make a phone call to Detective Sergeant Harry Marshall to see if he had some new information on our headless ladies.

He said he wanted to talk to me and wanted to talk to me now.

It took me about thirty minutes to drive to the precinct. I walked through the bullpen area and looked to see if any reporters were sitting at the desk homicide has set up for their favorite news reporters. There were none.

I entered Harry's office and he had his head buried in papers that were scattered all over his desk. How he could work like that is beyond me.

Without looking up, he lifted his hand holding his pencil and pointed to the chairs in front of his desk, motioning me to sit down.

Continuing doing whatever it was he was doing, Harry said, "We brought in Bob Chimilewski, Chief Meier's chief of staff, and Meier's pansy son, Barry yesterday. We grilled 'em for a good four hours each. Seems they go to this place in Cudahy near the meat packing plant called the Castaways. I guess it's a heavy make out place as well as a favorite of the S&M crowd."

"Never been there, but sounds like fun," I replied, not revealing the fact that Horace Greenberg already filled me in on the workings of the place.

"Yeah, I figured it would be your kinda place, Max. They both mentioned this really big, I mean really big muscle bound guy who comes in there with this blond bombshell of a woman who has a body that is outta this world. It seems this guy has a reputation for liking to hurt the women and seems to be heavy into the sadistic-masochistic and bondage scene.

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Apparently he was beating this one girl pretty badly and it took three bouncers to subdue him and throw him out. The Cudahy police had him as a guest at their Hotel of Sexual Desire until the morning when that blond bombshell came to bail him out.

What really has our interest is that we have witnesses that report seeing a large man lurking near Sally Hammond's house the night before she was murdered.

There is a good possibility that this is our man.

By the way, does the name Thelma Thieland mean anything to you?" Harry asked.

"Ray Palermo's woman," I replied.

"That's right Max and apparently she knows you."

I just stared at Harry and didn't say a word.

After a minute Harry said, "Aren't you curious how we know that?"

"Not really," I answered.

"Well, I'm going to tell you. E.J. had her in the interrogation room for three hours yesterday. We kept looking for one of Palermo's mouth pieces to show up, but they never did; couldn't figure that one out. Anyway, she said she knows you and in fact, she thinks you are nice. I don't know if she thought that would win her brownie points with E.J. or what."

"Did it?" I asked.

Harry snorted and said; "Hell Max, the only time anyone would score brownie points with E.J. is if they said they shot you.

So, beside her confessing to knowing you, she admitted she liked being tied up while having sex and this Castaway's place has rooms already set up for an evening of that sort of pleasure.

I came up with an idea and I ran it past the captain yesterday to see what he thought of it and he gave me the okay to go ahead with it.

The hard part was convincing E.J. to go along with it. Finally, I convinced her it might work."

"I suppose you are going to tell me what that idea is Harry or you wouldn't have called me in here to share this great coffee and your precious time with me. By the way, who makes this shit? You must get the water straight from the Milwaukee River."

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“If you don’t like it, next time bring your own.”

I ignored his sarcasm and asked, “So what is this great idea you came up with that didn’t sit well with your partner?”

“We are going to put an undercover team into The Castaways to see if we can get close to this Jimmy The Peanut Booth to see what he is all about. There is something about that Peanut that has our interest up. We have a witness who saw a huge guy lurking around Kathryn Reilly’s place the night before she was murdered and this Peanut is huge, if he is anything.”

“Sounds like a pretty good idea. So what does it have to do with me?” I asked as I was beginning to get nervous as to what he had in mind and how it might affect me.

“I thought you were smarter than that, Max. It should be pretty obvious. You already know The Peanut so an introduction from you to an undercover officer would be easy for you to do. Once we have an officer alone with The Peanut we can monitor the action and bust in and get him in the act of a felonious assault.”

Immediately I shook my head no and said, “There is absolutely no way you are going to get me in that dive. Harry, you know what they do in there. I could get hurt.”

“Yes Max, I know what they do in there and you won’t get hurt.

“And this officer I am going to introduce to The Peanut is...?” I asked.

“This should make you happy Max, its EJ.”

“You gotta be kiddin’ me, I said. EJ? And she agreed to this?”

“Reluctantly, very reluctantly; it wasn’t the assignment but who was going to be on the assignment with her that she was uncomfortable with. But we, or I, convinced her that due to your friendship with the suspect this was the best and most expeditious way to collar the perp.

Actually, she was concerned about your well being, that you being a civilian and inexperienced in undercover work and all that we would be putting your life in jeopardy; but I convinced her that it just might work to her advantage and she had nothing to lose. I also reminded her that undercover work was your specialty.”

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“What do you mean my specialty?” I asked.

“Wasn’t it you who caught that Green Bay Packer cheating on his wife? Anyway, I reminded her if we made a successful collar it would be great for her career and if it went south; well, how can I say this delicately, she wouldn’t have Max around to bother her anymore.”

“Thanks Harry. You are getting more like a politician every day. Before you know it you will be the next chief of police.

Now please tell me, why would I want to do this again?”

“It should be pretty obvious to you Max. First, it will make you a famous private investigator after it is known that you helped the Milwaukee Police Department capture Wisconsin’s most notorious murderer. Second, you will have the exclusive story which, when sold, will make you a wealthy man who will then be able to buy me many steaks and manhattans at Rocco’s Pub; and, last, but not least, you will get to be alone with in a dark bar and have a few free drinks with EJ and, if you are careful, you could even sneak a few peeks at her cleavage, but don’t tell her I told you that.”

“You’re a coward, aren’t you Harry?”

“Yep, I am. Now, can you be ready to pull this off by next Thursday? We want you and EJ to arrive at The Castaways around 4:00 p.m. at the start of their Happy Hour. We will have the place staked out starting around noon. We will have a team in the alley as well as one across the street in a parking lot. Then around 5:00 p.m. another team will enter the bar. That will be me and Detective Chet George. We will be sitting at the bar; you in?”

“You really think I will see some cleavage?” I asked.

“Max, damn it, this is serious. Are you in or not?”

“Yeah, Harry, I’ll do it for you and for the opportunity to buy you more drinks and steaks at Rocco’s with the fortune I will make from writing a book; but I gotta tell you, it’s the cleavage that sealed the deal.”

“Good bye Max. I got work to do.”

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I rose from the chair and walked back into the bull pen area of the Milwaukee Police Department's Homicide Division, glancing around to see if Detective Williams was working so I could congratulate her on her upcoming assignment where she would be working closely with me in an effort to apprehend a serial killer who is creating mayhem on the streets of Milwaukee. She wasn't in.

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Chapter 31

We arrived at The Castaways at four p.m. the next Thursday. This was supposed to be a busy time for them; a happy hour from four until six p.m. with all the first shift personnel from Cudahy Meat Packing Plant just getting off work.

When we opened the door, we were hit with a wave of stale cigarette smoke and moldy beer. It was dark and the only lights were from the flashing Schlitz and Gettlemen Beer signs behind the bar and the red lights in the ceiling which were situated over fish nets that were strategically cast over the sides of what looked like fishing skiffs that were cut in half and stuck in the walls which were covered with what appeared to be old barn wood. Pictures of tropical islands and fishermen in fishing villages and bare breasted island girls were strategically placed over every booth and table. There was drift wood scattered about the wall and nailed to posts giving one the feeling that the place just washed ashore from the Milwaukee River. It didn't come close to replicating Judges Beyond The Reef where I had first met Jimmy The Peanut.

The bartender was another dickie frau, a big breasted blond German lady with a black dog collar with protruding chrome spikes secured tightly around her neck. She was clad in a pair of large shiny black leather pants that looked like they could cover an entire cow and a red tank top exposing her ample midriff which hung in folds over the top of her skin tight pants. She was polishing a beer glass that she had just picked up from the wash tank behind the bar while carrying on a conversation with a couple of grey haired gentlemen in business suits sucking on a couple of fat cigars and sipping on a shot and beer. There were two waitresses sitting at the end of the bar smoking cigarettes waiting for the first wave of customers to arrive. One, a petite brunette smashed out her cigarette in the ashtray and stood up and walked toward us.

“Classy place, Max; I’m surprised you haven’t been here before,” Detective Williams chided.

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“Now that I know it’s here, I’ll put it in my tour book. I replied. May I call you EJ, just for tonight? I know you don’t want me to call you detective.

“Dammit Max, cut it out. Yes, call me EJ.”

I smiled as even a small victory is important in my ongoing battle with the formidable Emily Williams.

“How many,” the little brunette asked as she stepped in front of us.

“How many what?” I asked.

She looked at me as one would a stool sample, “How many in your party?”

EJ had had enough of my sarcasm and stepped in front of me and said. “Don’t mind him, he’s an ass. There’ll just be the two of us.”

The little brunette rolled her eyes and said to EJ, “Aren’t they all?”

“You got that right, honey.”

“My name is Claudette, what would you like to drink?” She said as she wiped off the table with a rag that at one time must have been white but now was a light brown and was just pushing a sticky residue around the top of our table.

“I’ll take a boilermaker, Old Forester with a Blatz back.” EJ replied.

“You got it. And you sir?” She asked turning in my direction.

I’ll have a brandy manhattan on the rocks. Just use your well brandy.”

“Yes sir, I’ll be right back,” she said. She turned to EJ and smiled before walking back to the bar.

“Max, for a guy who thinks he is manly, you drink a pretty weak drink. Brandy sweet manhattan? My God, I drank those in high school. Now I understand why you ordered those Pink Squirrels at Maders the other night.”

I wasn’t in the mood to argue with her so I just sat there and took the verbal abuse like a man.

When Claudette returned with our drinks she had a bowl of pretzels on the tray as well.

We thanked her and told her we would be ordering a sandwich after a couple a rounds of drinks.

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As I nibbled on some pretzels and sipped my manhattan, I looked over the rim of my glass at EJ. She had taken a couple of swallows of her Blatz beer and had lifted up her glass of Old Forester Bourbon and was eyeing it up. I was curious on how she was going to attack it seeing as we were on an undercover assignment and, this being my first; I wasn't sure how I was supposed to consume alcohol.

EJ brought the shot glass up to her nose and took a sniff before dropping it into her glass of beer. She picked up the glass of Blatz and watched the bubbles rise to the top before tilting her head back and chugging the mixture of bourbon and beer. She slammed the empty glass on the table and wiped her full red lips with the back of her hand.

"Man, that was good," she said.

"I'm impressed EJ, I crooned. Just the way the big boys do it."

"You oughta be impressed, Max. There isn't a big boy who can keep up with me. I could do this for a living."

I didn't want to remind her that was what she was doing so I just sat there and smiled as she grabbed a handful of pretzels and, in an unlady like fashion, stuffed them in her mouth and said, "Now we get down to business." She waved her hand at Claudette and when she got her attention, she circled her arm around our table indicating she wanted another round.

As Claudette approached she eyed EJ and said: "Arlanda, our bar manager, said she'd like to buy you the next round." Claudette placed the second round of drinks on the table in front of us.

"Well, let Arlanda know I appreciate the offer and that I am ready for the next one already," EJ said as she waved at a smiling Arlanda who was leaning over with her elbows on the bar showing us, or I should say EJ, her ample cleavage.

"Shouldn't we take it kinda slow?" I asked; I wasn't appreciating the fact that so far all the ladies in the bar were ignoring me and paying attention to EJ, who was supposed to be my date.

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EJ ignored my question and looked over in the direction of the bar and picked up her glass of beer and took a big swallow before dropping in her shot of bourbon. She raised her glass to Arlanda, threw back her head and downed her second drink in four gulps
“Get over next to me, Max, we have to make this look good, she said wiping the froth from the beer off her lips.

Remember, this is work and doesn't go beyond that. Strictly business, do you understand?”

I nodded my head yes as she put her hand behind my neck and brought my face close to hers and planted a long slow wet kiss right on my lips.

The pressure from our lips colliding caused them to part so, being the opportunist that I am, I decided to insert my tongue and do a little exploring. Was that a soft moan I heard escape from EJ's throat? I guess she really did enjoy her job.

That thought barely cleared my mind when I felt EJ's teeth clamp down on my tongue. The pain was unbearable but I couldn't communicate that to her, so there we sat, face to face with my tongue stuck in her mouth and her teeth clamped down on it. I looked in her eyes and what I saw caused a chill to run down my spine. She just might bite it off, I thought.

Tears started to roll down my face from the pain and I grabbed her shoulders and pushed her back. Luckily she released my tongue or I might have lost it; or at the very least, it would have been stretched out by a foot.

“Geez EJ, why'd you have to go and do that for?” I asked.

“Max, don't you ever go anyplace on my body without asking me first, do you understand? That kiss was for our friend Arlanda's benefit. Not yours. I don't want her getting any ideas about me either.”

I sat there nodding my head in agreement while blotting the blood off my tongue with my cocktail napkin thinking this assignment wasn't going to be as much fun as I thought.

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The door opened and people from the first shift at Cudahy's Meat Packing Plant started to file in for their nightly shots and beer along with a bunch of strange looking people dressed in latex, leather, PVC, corsets, fishnet, velvet and outfitted in vampire, medical, chain mail, body armor, kinky drag, bondage, Lolita, burlesque costumes, and other subculture subhuman expressions. But so far The Peanut hadn't been one of them.

"EJ, what is this place, Lair De Sade?" I asked.

"Max, I think I just found a home for you." She laughed.

It wasn't long before Harry and Detective George arrived; they stopped in the entrance looking like, well, looking like detectives looking around; I noticed a slight nod from Harry, indicating he saw us sitting in the back of the room.

They went to the end of the bar and sat down. Pretty soon Arlanda approached them to take their order.

Light from outside filled the front of the bar as the door opened wide once again, but the light didn't stay long as a gigantic figure strolled in and stopped to look around. I recognized The Peanut immediately. Who wouldn't? I have never seen anyone that large before, except maybe Andre The Giant and I actually haven't seen him in person.

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Chapter 32

It was approaching six o'clock and last call for Happy Hour was just made. Claudette stopped by our table and asked us if we wanted another round. It was last call.

EJ said yes, but I told Claudette that I would pass on this one.

EJ said; "Suit yourself Max.

As Claudette returned to the bar to fill her orders, EJ said "That must be Jimmy The Peanut,. Damn, he is huge. I bet his mother kept her legs together after she delivered that."

She slammed down what remained of her boiler maker. "Let's get to work."

I noticed a thin line of sweat appear on her upper lip. I figured she was keying up for a fight.

"Go talk to him Max. Try to get him to join us. You can tell him this is your first time here and your date loves this place. That should make him want to meet me."

I got up from the table and walked to the bar with my empty glass. After setting the glass down, I looked up at Jimmy with a surprised look on my face like it was the first time I had seen him.

"Jimmy? Hey, how are you?" I said, reaching out my hand and immediately regretting it as memories of our last handshake flashed through my mind.

"Max Fly," I said, in case he forgot who I was.

"What are you doing here?"

Jimmy looked down at my hand before grasping it. This time his grip was a little limp. I guess he wasn't trying to impress me anymore.

"Just looking my friend, just looking," he said.

"Well, come over to our table and I'll introduce you to my date and buy you a drink."

Jimmy didn't say anything as he looked down at me like someone would look at a bug before they squashed it with their shoe.

"You got a date? Where?"

I pointed at EJ sitting at our table and when I turned back I watched as Jimmy's lips peeled away exposing his pearly white teeth.

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“Well, what’s takin’ you so long? Introduce me,” he said as he placed one of his giant hands in the middle of my back pushing me across the floor toward our table.

“Jimmy, this is EJ Williams,” I said.

He leered down at the cleavage EJ so thoughtfully made available.

Her trap seemed to be working.

“What does the EJ stand for, extra juicy?” He asked.

“It doesn’t matter. You are a big one aren’t you,” she said.

That brought a big smile to The Peanut’s face. “That I am little lady, that I am. Do you like big ones?”

I could see EJ’s eyes smoldering as she batted her eyelids and

replied. “I haven’t met one that big that I didn’t like,” she cooed.

The Peanut reached in his pocket and pulled out some change. I was afraid that he was about to offer EJ a quarter for sex and then all hell would have broke loose. But he said, “Here you go little lady, why don’t you go throw some silver down the slot and play us a little love song?”

If EJ wasn’t seething before, I bet she was now.

“I’ll do that Peanut. Do you have a favorite song you’d like to hear?”

“Naw, you just pick ‘em and I’ll toss you around on the dance floor, okay?”

“Oh boy, I can hardly wait,” she said as she went to the Wurlitzer against the far wall and started to rapidly drop The Peanut’s nickels down the slot.

We both watched EJ’s retreating backside in mutual admiration when Jimmy turned to me and said. “You don’t mind me hitting on your lady friend here do ya Max? I mean, I can feel the sparks fly. We seem to have that certain chemistry that only comes along but once in awhile between two people and when it does, you just have to take advantage of it. You know what I mean?”

Chemistry? This guy doesn’t know how to mix sugar in his coffee so what does he know about chemistry? But I just nodded my head and said; “Jimmy, I can tell she likes you. You have gotten further with her in the past few minutes than I have all afternoon.”

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Unfortunately, that was true. In all fairness, I should have shown him the open wounds EJ left on my tongue.

“I gotta go see a guy about a horse. I’ll be right back,” I said when I saw EJ walking back to the table as Pat Boone started singing *Love Letters In The Sand*.

I heard The Peanut say, “I like this guy too,” as he got up and walked toward EJ.

I was thinking he probably didn’t know Pat Boone from Daniel Boone. He grabbed EJ’s hand and led her to the dance floor. I looked back to see The Peanut bent over with his cheek pressing against EJ’s and his big meaty hands on her other cheeks pressing her against his body. This guy wastes no time, I thought as I disappeared into the men’s room hoping Harry and Chet were keeping a close eye on EJ.

The Peanut was right about one thing, there were sparks flying between them but they were sparks from EJ that was meant to burn a hole in The Peanut’s heart and cause him immense pain.

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Chapter 33

The way Jimmy was leering at EJ all night made me believe he would try to make her his next victim, if he was our killer and Harry believed he was. Maybe he wouldn't try to jump her tonight. But he would tomorrow, or the next night, or the next. I knew he wanted to make EJ his next conquest, if not his next victim. I just knew it.

The Milwaukee Police Department would have to keep a watch on EJ all the time until Jimmy made a move or he was apprehended or cleared of the decapitations of at least three women, if not more, in the Milwaukee area.

Harry had called EJ and told her that Jimmy had followed us out of The Castaways and was about three cars in back of us.

"I see him, Harry," EJ replied.

When we pulled in to EJ's driveway we saw Jimmy's car slowly drive past.

"Okay, get off the floor Max and let's go inside before he comes back.

We walked through the house and into the kitchen. EJ offered me a drink, which I declined.

She poured herself a shot of Old Forester and threw it back. She went to put her glass in the sink. She turned away and turned off the light and walked into the living room. I watched her as she stretched and then turned off the living room lights and turned to walk down the hall. She stopped and looked back toward the kitchen. "Did you hear that Max?

There was a strange noise out there. Sometimes I can feel it when I'm being watched; a sixth sense."

Hearing that sent a chill up my spine and I registered that information in the back of my mind for future reference. I would be treading lightly around EJ from now on.

She turned and proceeded down the hall and I saw the shadows from a light being turned on in the bathroom.

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EJ walked into her bedroom and it wasn't long before she reappeared dressed in a long green flannel night gown decorated in flowers. No flimsy teddy for this detective.

I noticed bulges that most women didn't have under their bed clothes and I knew they came from her weapons of preference, a Smith and Wesson .38 caliber police issue revolver and more than likely her ever present BB filled sap that she had more than once threatened to introduce me to.

"Harry and Detective George just pulled up, I said. Are you able to get them on your mike?"

"I already talked to Harry and everything is set," she said.

"Good, I would hate to have to face The Peanut alone."

"Alone? You think you have to face him alone? I am the one who will be alone with that monster and I am going to knock him silly. I look forward to it. If you are afraid Max, just leave. Right now, if I had a choice between having you or Jimmy The Peanut in my bedroom, I am not sure who I would choose. So now's the time for you to take a hike if you want. I can do this alone."

"Easy, EJ, I'm just nervous. This guy can snap your neck with his bare hands and he is capable of doing it in a heartbeat. The guy is so damn big it's going to take a dump truck to dispose of his body once you finish with him. That's what's making me nervous."

"Yeah, right; get in the closet and shut up. I'm going to turn off the lights and lure him in here. When I scream you had better get your scrawny little ass out of the closet with your little gun drawn and ready to get that monster off my body. The only thing I dread more than the thought of you touching me is this monster breathing on me. Harry, can you hear me?" EJ said as she pulled down the top of her night gown speaking into the mike concealed in her bra.

"Hear you loud and clear," Harry replied.

"Okay, it's a go; everyone get in position it's crunch time," EJ whispered.

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As I stepped into EJ's closet she turned off the lights and I heard the springs of her bed creak as she crawled under the covers. I left the door cracked open so I could watch the door to her bedroom so I would be ready to pounce when The Peanut entered, if he entered. EJ's radio softly crackled. It was Detective George.

"I think I see movement in the bushes along the side of the neighbor's house. Maybe it's my imagination, but then again, maybe not. So stay alert."

"Roger," EJ responded.

I pulled my Colt Belly Gun out of my shoulder holster and held my breath.

It wasn't long before a dark figure filled the doorway to EJ's bedroom. From the size of it, I knew it was The Peanut. He was on EJ before she knew it, tearing her night gown off with one quick powerful swipe of his massive hands throwing it on the floor.

I flew out of the closet and yelled, "Freeze Jimmy or I'll shoot."

If Jimmy is one thing, he's quick. Well, two things, he's huge as well. He turned on me and ran at me full speed, slamming my body against the wall beating me about my head and body with both hands.

I lost my gun in the barrage of his fists raining down on me. I brought up both my hands alongside my head with my elbows pressed close to my sides to fend off blows to my kidneys and ribs. I saw my Colt belly gun on the floor next to the night stand well out of my reach.

When someone over two hundred and fifty pounds runs full force into your midsection, it doesn't matter how strong your stomach is, you are going to have the wind knocked out of you and that is exactly what happened to me. I don't think my lungs filled with air for over a minute since our first contact.

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The Peanut lifted me from the floor with ease like I was a mere dust ball and brought back his right fist. Before he could unload on me, EJ, clad only in her bra and panties, jumped on his forearm, her weight, dragging it down. The Peanut pushed her off like a fly. I put my hands together and brought them over my head and down as hard as I could on The Peanut's left arm that was holding onto what was left of my shirt causing him to lose his grip. I was still too groggy to maintain my feet and I just slid down the wall.

I was unable to see due to all the blood flowing into my eyes from the cuts and lacerations The Peanut so graciously put all over my face. When I placed my hand on the floor, attempting to get up, the pain from what must have been a broken wrist bone shot up my arm causing me to fall back down again.

It was at this time that I heard the front door crash open and in burst Harry and Detective George yelling in unison, "Police, freeze mother fucker."

They were on The Peanut before he could react with Harry putting a choke hold on him and Chet pulling out his hand cuffs and snapping them on one of The Peanut's massive wrists.

Detective George and Harry each grabbed an arm but the strength of Jimmy was too much for them as he broke loose. With a mighty swing of his right hand he caught George along the side of his head throwing him against the wall. I watched him fall to the floor. Jimmy turned his attention on Harry and started to beat the living daylights out of him until Harry too lay sprawled on the floor in the doorway of the bedroom.

The Peanut stood up and saw Chet coming at him and with his right hand he delivered an uppercut to the bottom of Chet's chin, lifting him off the floor and into the wall knocking him unconscious; a picture of what looked like EJ's old homestead fell down, shattering on top of Chet's head, adding insult to injury. He didn't move.

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Harry was on his feet again and rushed The Peanut grabbing him around his knees and lifting him up and body slamming him onto the floor. Harry was using some of the moves he learned in his high school wrestling days and it looked like he might have The Peanut subdued when, with a mighty burst of strength, The Peanut broke his arm free of Harry's grasp and smashed him time after time in the face rendering him helpless and opening a cut on Harry's cheekbone and, as my new assistant Horace would say, blood flowed like red wine at a bacchanalia bash. The Peanut took advantage of Harry's momentary immobility and scrambled to his feet, lifting Harry like a damp dish rag; he threw him against the dresser. Bottles of EJ's lotions and potions fell over hitting the floor. Whatever was glass shattered upon impact. Harry slowly slid down the front of the dresser until he found himself sitting in a puddle of Channel No. 5. I needed to get my gun. I shook my head, trying to remove the cob webs. When Jimmy threw me against the wall, I hit it with such force I swear I heard my ribs crack and possibly my skull. I was having a difficult time sucking in air and I was seeing double. Off to the left I noticed a white blur flashing by me. It was EJ heading toward Jimmy who had proceeded to beat the living daylights out of Harry as he lay sprawled in the doorway. EJ had her sap raised above her head, her magnificent breasts rising and falling with every step she took. She was on Jimmy The Peanut as quick as a Wisconsinite can order a bratwurst and struck him in the left temple with her sap. The Peanut hit the floor like the sack of shit he was. EJ bent over him with her hands on her thighs gasping for air

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I sat dazed unable to move, looking over at EJ. Her hair was disheveled and her lipstick smeared across her face; she lunged at The Peanut again, slapping him with her sap. He grabbed her wrist to fend off her blows and effortlessly threw her on the floor. EJ rolled over and scrambled to her knees. Stretching out her hand, she grabbed his scrotum and began squeezing as hard as she could and digging in her fingers as they fell and wrestled for supremacy on the floor. He suffered a wide tear on his scrotum, part of which had been completely torn loose from his body. The Peanut was in agony but he was able to pry his scrotum free of EJ's clenched fist, at which point he ran out the door covered in his own blood.

I watched through my rapidly swelling eyes as EJ bent down and gently lifted Harry's head and pressed it against her rising and falling chest, rocking him back and forth and stroking his cheek all the while telling him he would be alright.

I knew cops were close to their partners and would do just about anything for them. They were like extended family, but this seemed more than that. EJ was displaying a feeling I had never seen her display before and to be quite honest with you, it was very touching. My eyes welled up with tears either from the immense pain I was feeling or from thinking how lucky Harry was to have someone who cared that much for him.

I heard a gunshot and looked up. I saw a bloodied Detective George standing in the doorway with his revolver pointed toward the floor. "I shot the son of a bitch," was all he said before he fell to the floor unconscious.

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Chapter 34

Harry had his right leg in a cast as well as his right arm which was bent and the cast went up to his shoulder. Both were in traction. His left eye was swollen closed and his jaw wired shut. What was left of him that wasn't covered in bandages was black and blue. The Peanut had done a job on him.

EJ was lifting a glass of liquid to Harry's lips and Detective George was standing on the other side of the bed reading the Milwaukee Journal as I stepped through the door.

"Harry, you look like shit from the eyes down." I said as I limped into the room leaning my cane against the wall and flopping down on the last empty chair in the room.

"I feel like shit too," Harry mumbled.

"What?"

"He said he feels like shit too." EJ repeated.

EJ was sitting on a chair next to the bed. Her left eye was black and her jaw was swollen but otherwise she fared the best of us in the brawl that was more of a free for all than an arrest attempt.

Harry and I had been admitted to Milwaukee County Hospital two weeks ago after nearly being killed by Jimmy The Peanut before EJ came to our rescue by almost removing The Peanut's scrotum with her right hand causing him to run screaming into the street where Detective George dropped him with one shot ending what was the worst nightmare in the city of neighborhoods history.

"How are you feeling, Max?" EJ asked.

I couldn't believe she asked. After the shock wore off I replied, "I hurt like hell and I keep pissing blood. I think I'm about a quart low now. I hope it stops soon."

"Well, we want to thank you for your help Max. We didn't think it would turn out the way it did. But at least none of the good guys got whacked." EJ said.

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It was nice knowing she now considered me one of the good guys. I don't know how long that will last, probably until she caught me leering at her chest again, but, after seeing what she did to The Peanut, and now knowing she had a sixth sense when it came to someone looking at her, I didn't think I would be doing any leering any time soon. Plus my tongue still hurt like hell where she bit down on it while we were kissing at The Castaways Bar.

"You just missed Eloise," EJ said. She stopped by to see how Harry was doing. She said she has a new job."

I hadn't seen Eloise for the entire time I was recuperating and I figured she was through with me. The only visitors were Marcello, Rocco and Hap. Marcello stopped by with a get well card and a plate of Mildred's cookies and her wishes for a speedy recovery. I was touched.

Rocco and Hap smuggled a pint of brandy in to help ease my pain. I guess they didn't want to add to it and tell me that Eloise was gone. Hap told me Casper was still waiting to see me whenever I was up and around again.

"They went through The Peanut's house and came away with a couple of boxes of stuff he took from his victims," Detective George said.

"They were digging near a shed in his backyard and uncovered a couple of severed heads that more than likely will be tied to our victims.

It's in the Journal Max. I'm surprised you didn't write about it, he said. We released it to all the papers. The Sentinel will have it front page tomorrow morning."

Chet set down the paper and smiled at me.

"I'm on a leave of absence Chet," I replied.

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“I couldn’t type if my life depended on it.” I realized I just left myself open for a jab but nobody took it. Of course Harry had his jaw wired shut and for some reason, EJ was being nice to me. I would savor it while it lasted. I’m sure it wouldn’t be long before I said or did something that set her off on ol’ Max once again. But for now it just felt good to be considered one of the good guys by these cops, which I always considered myself to be anyway.

“Oh, we also found Tampa Ray Palermo’s body behind Ciro’s Italian Restaurant on Bluemound Road this past Tuesday. He was shot up pretty good. He was lying there in the garbage. It must have been some sight when the cook found him,” Chet said before he turned and walked out of the room.

I was getting tired of watching EJ fawning all over Harry so I left as well.

I drove to Rocco’s to grab a drink and see what I missed the past couple of weeks.

When I walked in the door I noticed Hap leaning on the bar talking to another young lady who looked like she was young enough to be his daughter. I pulled out a bar stool and laid my cane on the bar and took off my coat. I wasn’t wearing my Colt Belly Gun as it hurt like hell when it rubbed against my sore body. When Hap saw me he kissed his young friend on the cheek and whispered something in her ear that made her laugh and he walked over to me at the end of the bar. He started pouring me a brandy manhattan on the rocks and said, “How ya’ doin’ pardner?”

“Just fine, Hap, just fine.”

“Great, welcome back. I have a sweet little thing over there waiting for me to get off work and then we are going to her place to watch The Ed Sullivan Show. She has a cute roommate if you want to join us.”

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“Not tonight Hap. I think I still need some time to recover. If I took off my shirt, the little lady might faint, and not because of my muscles and flat belly, but because of all the black and blue skin. Casper would be envious of the number The Peanut did on me.”

“Alright, suit yourself little buddy. It’s good to have you back.”

“Thanks Hap.”

As I took the first sip of my manhattan, The Raja Began singing Johnny Mathis’ *Chances Are* a favorite song of Eloise’s that we used to make love to. It brought back sweet memories.

I leaned back and closed my eyes and smiled.

It was good to be home again.

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Epilogue

I saw my friend Harry Marshall and Detective EJ Williams leaving one of those new roadside motels off Bluemound Road, holding hands. Normally I would have pulled over to see what they were investigating and hope to get a scoop on another murder. But today they sure didn't look like they were leaving a crime scene. Well, I mean it might have been a crime scene knowing Harry, but not a crime scene in the sense that it would require an official visit from Milwaukee's homicide detectives. EJ was looking mighty fine and still had the bulges under her jacket that could or could not have been her gun, but seeing as Harry wasn't wearing his jacket and no gun was visible and he had his hair combed and a slight smile on his face, well, I'll leave the rest to you. I waved and was surprised that they both waved back. EJ didn't flip me off.

Detective Chet George is still working for the Milwaukee Police Department's homicide division. He received a commendation from the mayor of Milwaukee for shooting The Peanut and for saving an elephant by getting it out of the Milwaukee River. That's a long story that I just don't feel like getting into now.

Robbery detectives, Dave Turner and Jack Miller, retired and never did solve the mystery of who stole Gus Mader's pork shanks. Gus didn't get around to hiring me to find out either.

Barry Meier was struck and killed by a drunk driver down by Lake Michigan the night before Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Frank Meier kept his job as Chief of Police after he went out and publicly campaigned for the current mayor of Milwaukee who promised to support Chief Meier in his bid to become the next mayor of Milwaukee.

Bob Chimilewski was relieved of his duties as Chief Meier's Chief of Staff and got a job as a feature writer of the Milwaukee Journal. He still doesn't like me. That's okay. I still don't like him either.

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Frank Meinberg recovered from his head wound and went back to flipping burgers while Willie Jones washed the dirty dishes at George Webb's. Both will likely die of old age working in that place. The ferret who tried to rob them that night never was apprehended. Hap Schultz is still riding Harley's and tending bar at Rocco's Pub. He started performing on the Wisconsin Rodeo circuit. He swears he saw old Casper still tossing cowboys up in the air at the Spooner Wisconsin Rodeo. Hap won a belt buckle for calf roping. I don't know what he will do with it as he doesn't seem to have a belt as he has a difficult time keeping his pants up in the presence of beautiful and not so beautiful and sometimes downright ugly women. In any event, I can't remember seeing him happier.

Speaking of ugly women, Ralph Mills surprised everyone by getting married again. He thinks her name is Velvet. She is the tall skinny woman he met on the dance floor that night we went through Sally Hammond's diary at Rocco's Pub. He said he felt the love rising from his toes while swaying to the sound of The Raja, singing the popular song by The Four Preps, *Twenty Six Miles Across The Sea*, proving some guys won't quit until they marry every available woman they can find. What Ralph is looking for is anyone's guess. Dan, Rocco Man, Ciorrocco, my good friend and owner of Rocco's Pub, my home away from home and office away from the office, is thinking about starting a chili cook off contest in Wisconsin. He was thinking of including Illinois in it as well until I reminded him how downright crooked and unethical our friends to the south of us are. He had to expand in the back to add a larger dance floor as it seems that all the Krauts and Polack's in the Milwaukee area love The Raja, and his blond girlfriend, Barb E. Dahl. Their number one requested song is the *Beer Barrel Polka*.

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Eloise decided that I wasn't worth waiting for, so she stopped serving me manhattans at Rocco's, to don lederhosen and go to work for Gus Mader, making him forget about the theft of his pork shanks for awhile. He now has his beautiful daughter Valerie and Eloise showing off their wares in lederhosen. I heard Eloise is happy and dating the new bartender at Judge's Beyond The Reef. I still haven't had the pleasure of sitting at the Stammtisch table but I keep trying. Diane Davidson is still the head of the accounting department at Harley Davidson down on Juneau Avenue. I see her every once in awhile riding around town on her little Harley Scooter with her English riding helmet. She is too cute to be a Hell's Angel.

Tommy Hanson, my sometime personal advisor and full time bartender at Hepfner's Bowling Alley, quit his job to go on the Professional Bowlers Association Tour. He currently is number ten in the money standings.

Sam Galbraith quit working at Harley Davidson and started flying full time transporting pork shanks and other cargo around the Midwest. On one of his trips to Colorado he ran into Alan DuPont and actually struck up a friendship. He stood up at DuPont's wedding; and, no, DuPont didn't marry one of his ponies, or a goat either. Sam said his wife actually is pretty nice. In fact, he is currently dating her sister. He was pretty shaken up when he learned his former girlfriend's older brother was the serial killer who was chopping off ladies heads around Milwaukee. Sam paid Ralph Mills and me our money back along with a hefty profit but kept Hap on as a partner. He said Hap was needed to find pretty girls in case they decided to add a couple of stewardesses to serve their corporate clients on some of their island junkets.

Mildred Bates actually shaved her legs and quit cleaning houses for the rich Jews in Shorewood and went to work full time for John Marcello and Associates.

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Harry hasn't made good on our bet about her shaving her legs and he hasn't mentioned it as he seems to be a bit preoccupied at the moment. I won't bring it up. Anyway, it seems all the publicity Pizza received from the part I played in capturing the serial head thief, caused the phone to ring off the hook as well as causing the local postman some serious back problems from carrying all the mail he received from people wanting to use Marcello's PI services. His ex partner at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bill Steckel from the Chicago office, retired and moved to Milwaukee to go in partnership with Pizza. Marcello and Associates is definitely growing. I am still available to assist whenever Pizza needs me, but right now I am on a leave of absence. The Peanut really did a number on my kidneys and other internal organs that my old friend Casper never came close to doing. My doctor told me I need to take time off to let everything heal.

My ex-wife and her live in boyfriend stopped by Rocco's on their way to her home town, Neenah, to get married. He is still making a decent living tightening lug nuts on Nash Ramblers in Kenosha. I wasn't there but the Rocco Man said she wanted me to know there were no hard feelings on her part and hoped we could stay friends. Horace Greenberg became pretty famous after his name appeared beneath mine on all the articles relating to Milwaukee's most gruesome and sensational murders. He actually ended up as a reporter for the Milwaukee Sentinel, the morning paper in the city of neighborhoods. He and his friend, Ricky, moved in together close to the Cudahy Meat Packing Plant. Across the street, The Castaways is still doing a hefty business. I was told that bondage stuff never gets old.

My boss at the Daily Citizen in Beaver Dam, Francis Wentworth, sold his paper to his son, and moved to Egg Harbor in Door County to enjoy his retirement years. The last I heard he had started a very popular Lutefisk Eating Tournament that is drawing hundreds, if not thousands, of Norwegians from as far away as Fargo North Dakota.

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As for ol' Max Fly, I am recovering nicely. I wrote a book about the murders in Milwaukee and actually found a publisher willing to advance me some cash for the rights to publish it. I moved out of the apartment I rented over the plumbing supply store and used some of the money from the advance I got and put it into a nice house in Pewaukee, a little country town west of Milwaukee. The house is small and in need of some work but it is on a lake so I can catch fish and have some peace and quiet while I write. I have about six acres of adjoining pasture land where I plan to put up a small barn and get a couple of horses to ride during my leisure time.

Thelma Thieland, after finding out her long time friend Jimmy The Peanut Booth was a serial killer and after learning that her boyfriend, Tampa Ray Palermo, ended up dead and buried head first in a dumpster like the late Paul Godfrey, decided she needed to change the way she chose her men and figured she would go to Miami to enjoy the warmth of the Florida sun and evaluate her life. She asked me if I would go with her. She said she had these fur covered hand cuffs she wanted me to use on her. I told her it was best if we remained in Wisconsin where it was cold and where the fur on her hand cuffs would be appreciated more.

Hell, the Braves won the National League Pennant, just as I predicted, and will face the New York Yankees in the upcoming World Series. I talked Thelma into moving in with me at my place; at least until after the series. I had two tickets and I told her she could have one. I would rather have her sitting next to me than Hap and I still wanted to figure out how to remove that skin tight red dress. She said she would show me.