

Chapter 1

He looked at his watch. It was 8:00 p.m. He just arrived home. It was a long, tiring day in court for Christopher Kane.

He was able to get an acquittal on a technicality for his client, Darrell Shotgun Mason, the man behind the scenes of just about every major crime in the state of Georgia. Shotgun Mason was the Don of the Dixie Mafia and one of the most feared men in the state. If you crossed him, or if he thought you crossed him, the next time anyone would see you would be in the morgue, with a shotgun blast to your face, making a visual identification virtually impossible.

Christopher Kane was a criminal lawyer, one of the best, if not the best, in Georgia. Most of his clients were notorious for the way they brutally enforced Omerta, the mob's word for the code of silence, which they lived by. If he wasn't busy in his high-rise office, which encompassed the entire top floor in one of the tallest buildings in downtown Atlanta, one of his clients would be calling him on his private line in his home office at all times of the night. That's because most of their business were conducted under the protection of darkness. If they required his assistance, then the darkness of night didn't provide the protection they needed from local law enforcement.

They paid him well and they expected him to be there for them when they called. His job kept him busy around the clock, seven days a week. It was a price he paid for the benefits he received. He was very wealthy, one of the wealthiest men in the state.

He was glad to be at home. He was glad his wife, Helene, had already gone upstairs to bed. He was tired. He made himself a sandwich from the leftover meatloaf, Rhonda, their maid, had cooked earlier in the day. He hadn't been home to share a meal with his wife, Helene, in years. She didn't care and neither did he.

He took his plate and grabbed the Wall Street Journal off the counter and walked to his study. Their marriage had turned into just an arrangement. A comfortable arrangement for both of them. Neither one asked anything from the other outside of him giving her enough money to appease her every need, or, to put it more precisely, her every want. He just wanted her to leave him alone. He didn't have time for her anymore. He told his colleagues that as soon as he gave her a ring, her body changed and her face got lumpy. He didn't enjoy looking at her and she just wasn't very smart. Her interests were completely foreign to him and; he supposed, his were to her.

They lived in a beautiful mansion, less than a block from the Governor's Mansion in Buckhead, the wealthiest neighborhood in Atlanta. The mansion came with a manicured lawn, two tennis courts and a pool the size of the local public pool. Christopher never set foot on the tennis courts nor did he ever use the pool. He employed two-yard boys to care for his lawn and shrubs. A four car garage housed Christopher's Ferrari Dino 246 GT, named to honor Enzo Ferrari's deceased son Alfredo. Christopher had had this car built to his specifications.

He met Enzo Ferrari right after World War II and they became close friends. Christopher was a top notch pilot in the Army Air Corp, known as an ace, and Enzo was fascinated with flying and respected those who did. The Ferrari logo was a personal emblem of Francesco Baracca, a highly decorated Italian World War I pilot, who had it painted on the fuselage of his aircraft. The Baracca's allowed Enzo Ferrari to use the Cavallino Rampante, the Prancing Horse, symbol. He adopted it as the logo for his racing car, placing it on a yellow shield in honor of his hometown of Modena and he topped it with the Italian tricolor.

Both Enzo and Christopher shared a love for big engines, power, and speed plus the appreciation of wealth and what came with it.

Christopher kept a quote of Enzo's on a plaque in his downtown office; "Think As A Winner And Act As A Winner. You'll Be Quite Likely To Achieve Your Goal."

The garage also housed his Bentley and Helene's Cadillac as well as a yellow Corvette.

Helene bought a new Cadillac Fleetwood Convertible every year. One of the many gifts he pampered her with.

Every day, she drove her Cadillac to the Cherokee Town and Country Club, a club Christopher helped draw up the Charter for in 1956. It was recognized as one of America's premier private clubs, designed and built on the Grant Estate on West Paces Ferry Road in Buckhead, located within walking distance from their house. Neither Helene nor Christopher would dream of walking anywhere, let alone to their private prestigious country club. Also, they never set foot on the beautiful golf course. They didn't golf. It was a place to socialize for both of them. To be seen. Helene met friends every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for a round of bridge and a few martinis.

Christopher's personal driver, Nicholas, also served as his bodyguard. He was armed with a

.22 caliber Ruger Standard semi-automatic pistol, known for its reliability and accuracy. He was an alternate on the 1956 United States Olympic Team in the 25M 60 shot rapid fire competition. He didn't miss. He transported Christopher around town in his Bentley. It had been months since Christopher drove either the Dino 246 GT Ferrari or his bright yellow Corvette. He didn't have time.

Always in the back of Christopher's mind was the concern about what would happen to him if he ever failed to get the charges against his clients dismissed. It wasn't just the loss of his income he worried about, it was the potential loss of his life. He knew too much. It was Nicholas' job to make sure nobody suspicious was lurking around the places Christopher went. Nicholas also checked the undercarriage of the Bentley every morning for bombs. Christopher knew he knew too much and he did not trust his biggest client, Darrell Shotgun Mason, in the least. Lately, he felt his days were numbered.

After turning the light on by his leather recliner, Christopher set the paper down on the end table and walked behind his desk to the credenza where he kept his liquor; grabbing a crystal decanter filled with a single malt scotch, he poured a couple of fingers of the amber liquid into a matching crystal tumbler. Next he opened his cherry wood humidor and removed a cigar, a Cohiba, and walked back to his recliner to sit down. He clipped the end of the cigar and struck a match, turning the cigar slowly in his mouth while he drew in the smoke. Relaxing, he closed his eyes and turned his head toward the ceiling and exhaled. The cigar had a perfect draw.

The scotch looked inviting and he took a sip before removing his reading glasses from his shirt pocket. He picked up the Journal to check how his investments were doing. This was his favorite time of the day.

Did the floor in the hallway creak?

"Helene?" he called.

No answer.

"Hello?" Still no sound.

Taking another sip of his scotch and then another draw on his cigar, he went back to the paper.

He heard it again. Definitely a creaking of the hardwood floor. Was that in the hallway?

"Helene, is that you?"

What a stupid thing to say. Who else could it be? Their daughter, Candi, no longer lived with them. She had her own apartment off Peachtree Street about three or four blocks from the Georgia Tech Campus. It was only Helene and himself in this house. He put down his paper and placed the cigar in the ashtray before standing up.

He heard it again.

"Who's there?"

Still no answer.

Why did he let Helene talk him into selling his gun, a .38 caliber Ruger revolver? She was afraid that Candi would get her hands on it and hurt herself. At the time, Candi was a toddler and Christopher thought it wasn't a bad idea and a good safety precaution. But that was then. She was grown and out of the house now and there was no reason why he shouldn't have another revolver for protection. His profession certainly brought him in contact with some pretty rough characters. His .38 caliber had been a safe choice, easy to use and, if Helene had ever wanted to learn how to shoot, it was small enough for a woman to handle safely.

Peering down the hall, he saw nothing. It was dark.

He heard it again.

"Who's there?" he asked. Now he was worried.

He walked toward the kitchen where he thought the noise last came from. He reached up to flip on the light switch when he felt something tighten around his neck. A thin rope. He grabbed it with his left hand. It was being pulled tight from two sides, cutting off his air. He fought frantically to get his fingers between the rope and his neck. He couldn't do it.

He twisted around and saw Charles Hogjaw Johnson, a hit man who was on Darrell Shotgun Mason's payroll tightening one end of the rope that was around his neck. Holding the other end and pulling it tight, was Billy Bob Mason, the son of Darrell Shotgun Mason.

They continued to tighten the rope and he was beginning to lose consciousness.

A hand shot out and struck him under his left eye, splitting the skin. He felt the blood drain down his cheek. There was, at least, three of them. Who just hit him?

He tried to speak but the rope was too tight and all he could get out was a gagging sound.

Someone roughly grabbed his right arm and brought it up behind his back, bending him over. His feet were kicked out from under him and he hit the floor hard, causing him to black out for a moment.

His left arm was roughly brought up behind his back and his wrists were handcuffed. Handcuffs?

"What is going on? What do you want?" He croaked.

From behind him, a deep voice responded, "Shut up." It was a voice he immediately recognized.

With brutal force, he was lifted to his feet and pushed back into his study.

He saw his glass of scotch and smoldering cigar sitting in the ashtray next to his chair. He wondered if he would be able to finish his cigar. What a stupid thing to go through his mind at a time like this.

They threw him down on the couch facing his desk. He looked up and for the first time he got a good look at his attackers.

Hogjaw Johnson and Billy Bob Mason continued to keep the pressure on the rope around his neck, while Atlanta Police Officer, Tommy Richards stared down at him with a sneer on his face. His arms were hanging at his sides with a set of brass knuckles on his right hand. Richards was a detective in the vice squad and was on Shotgun's payroll. He was as crooked as a snake. Richards had broad shoulders, a barrel chest, and thick forearms; sitting in the chair behind Kane's desk was Shotgun Mason.

"Darrell? What's this about? I'm your lawyer and friend. Why are you doing this?" He croaked.

Tommy Richard's fist smashed him in the nose. He heard the cartilage break and felt the blood flow into his mouth.

He was surprised that there was no pain. He had never been hit in the nose before. He thought it would hurt, but everything was numb.

"Friends don't steal from friends, you fuck, so shut up," Darrell snarled. "I'll be asking the questions and you had better be giving me the answers or you won't be anyone's mouthpiece anymore, you got that, you prick shyster?"

"I came here tonight to get two things and I ain't leavin' until I got 'em. First of all, I want that book you are keeping that names all my special friends, you big piece of shit; and then you are going to tell me what you did with my money. Do you think I'm stupid? Before you open your trap and try to lie your way outta this, your little weasel of a partner, Lou Crowson, ratted ya' out. I knew one of you was stealin' from me. I honestly thought it was Louie, but I guess it was you all along. So tell me, how are you going to pay me back? Free legal advice? Shit.

"I want my money, Kane. You couldn't have spent all of it, so where are you hiding it? Hand it over."

"Lou told you I stole money from you? Really Darrell? Lou was in charge of dealing with the banks and handled all the money. When you had some problems I was the one who dealt with the courts. I don't know why Lou would tell you that, Darrell. What book? Do you really think I am dumb enough to try to take money from you, Darrell? I don't know what Lou told you, but he is mistaken if he implied that I have your money and keep a book on your associates."

Shotgun nodded and Tommy Richards grabbed Christopher's hair, pulling his head back, he slammed him in the stomach. The brass knuckles added to the power of his punch, causing Christopher to gag and bend over in pain.

"I'm not going to ask you again."

"Honest, Darrell," he gasped, "I don't know what you are talking about."

Shotgun Mason snorted, "Honest? That's a joke coming from a shyster lawyer."

Christopher was having a difficult time catching his breath. His stomach kept cramping up on him and they continued to apply pressure on the rope that was around his neck.

Then there was a high, piercing scream that came from the doorway behind them. They all turned around and standing in the door to the study was Helene Kane. She was wearing a pink cotton nightgown with pink slippers and her hair was up in pink curlers. Reading glasses were perched at the end of her nose. Her terror was visible. Tommy Richards walked over and grabbed her arms and threw her down on the couch next to Christopher.

Shotgun Mason had a menacing look on his face. He stared at Helene and snarled, "You don't know me lady and you don't want to. Now you shut your mouth and just sit there and you won't get hurt. No more screaming, do you hear me?"

“Oh, I know who you are. I have seen your face plenty of time; on television and in the newspapers. You don’t scare me, Darrell Shotgun Mason.”

Christopher looked at her in amazement. Was she crazy? Nobody talked to Shotgun Mason like that.

Shotgun nodded his head and Tommy Richards swung and slapped Helene in the face with the back of his right hand, the one that had the brass knuckles on. Her head snapped to the side. Her glasses flew across the room. A trickle of blood ran out of her nose.

Her eyes teared up as she wiped the blood from her face with a trembling hand.

“Listen lady, you just might live through tonight, but the only way that is going to happen is if you keep your trap shut. Do you understand me? ‘cause I won’t tell ya again.

“Now, Kane, where was we? Oh, yeah, you was goin’ to tell me what you did with my money?”

“Darrell, I don’t have your money. If Lou told you I do, then he is lying. I don’t know why he would say that unless he took it and wanted to put the blame on me. Get him here and have him tell you that while I am in front of him. As I told you before, I handle the courts and Lou handles the financial side.” Christopher’s voice was getting raspy from the tension of the ropes around his neck. He hoped he was convincing.

He could get about any jury to believe whatever he told them and he hoped that Darrell Mason would believe him. He had to or both he and Helene would be dead before the night was through. Christopher knew, from his many years of being a lawyer in adversarial situations, not to underestimate your opponent and he knew Darrell Shotgun Mason was a helluva lot smarter than he looked.

“That weasel of a partner of yours took off for Charleston, South Carolina, last week. He had one of my girls with him. Jesus, you lawyers are sure dumb. Did he think she was in love with him? I set them up. She was telling me all his little pillow talk stories. I know he was skimming from me too, and I took care of that. They got sharks in that harbor in Charleston ya’ know, and them sharks think all you lawyers taste like chicken.

“Oh, and I got my money he had in his little suitcase, but it ain’t all of it. So cough up the rest Kane; and I want all the information you recorded on my friends too, ya hear me?”

“Darrell, this is crazy...”

Shotgun nodded to Tommy Richards and said, “Give him his cigar, Tommy.”

Richards picked up the cigar and took two big puffs, making the end glow a bright red. He turned and put the end against Christopher’s left cheek.

Christopher screamed. The pain was excruciating and the smell of burning flesh made his stomach heave and he threw up what remained of his dinner of meatloaf and mashed potatoes that he had eaten a few hours earlier.

“Give them the money and the tape,” Helene blurted out. “Chris, don’t be stupid, he’ll kill us if you don’t.”

“Tape? What tape? What the fuck ya’ talkin’ about, lady?”

Shit, they weren’t aware of the tape. Christopher wished he had never told Helene about the tape. Helene also didn’t know he gave the tape to Candi. He gave it to her so she could turn it over to the FBI if something happened to him. Shotgun Mason owned every badge in the South so it had to be the FBI.

He kept the notebook in the safe in his office and he was willing to give that up to save his hide knowing he still had the tape but now it didn’t matter.

“She doesn’t know what she is talking about, Darrell. She means the book.”

"We'll see." He nodded again to Richards who ripped the front of Helene's nightgown exposing her pale chest. He put the hot end of the cigar against her left breast. She screamed. Tommy Richards then burned her right breast. He continued to torture her with the hot end of the cigar.

Finally, Christopher Kane could no longer sit by and listen to his wife's screams.

"Okay, okay, stop, Darrell. The book and money are in the safe behind the desk."

"What about the tape?"

"My daughter Candi has it."

"Your daughter, huh? You finally is gettin' some smarts. Now, what's this combination for your safe? You give me that and we'll be leavin'."

Christopher Kane gave him the combination.

"That's a good boy. Now tell me where I can find Candi so I can get this tape."

"Don't hurt her, Darrell. I'll tell her to give you the tape."

"Sure you will. Now, what's her address?"

He gave them the address of a rental house he purchased recently off Collier Drive near Piedmont Hospital. Candi wasn't there. He hoped Helene would keep her mouth shut.

Then Darrell Shotgun Mason nodded at his son, Billy Bob and Hogjaw Johnson.

They increased the tension on each side of the rope. Christopher Kane's eyes started to bug out of his head and the color of his face went from its normal pasty white to red and finally to a dark purple before his bowels released and he slumped forward. He was dead.

Helene screamed one last time.

"Lady, you seen too much," Tommy Richards said.

He put his gun to her head and pulled the trigger, shooting her in the left temple. Pieces of her skull mixed with her brain and blood splattered on her dead husband slumped next to her. She fell to the side and slid to the floor. She was dead as well. Shotgun Mason looked down at Christopher's dead body, "Now we're leaving, cocksucker."

Chapter 2

It was the beginning of another splendid fall day. The leaves on the trees lining the street were starting to turn color and the ground was damp with the early morning dew. A chill was in the air. Dark clouds gathered over the houses along North Fratney Street, foreshadowing the darkness that lay ahead for the city of Milwaukee.

A group of seven-year-old boys, Bobby Waters, Ray Palermo, Darwin Raymore, Anthony Hem and Davy Steckbower, started their Monday a little earlier than usual. Mr. O'Malley, the owner of O'Malley's Corner Store where they met and hung out before school each day, told them he would be putting out his new shipment of Topps Baseball Cards first thing Monday morning. They wanted to be at the store when Mr. O'Malley opened to buy as many packs of cards as their allowance, and the money they got from chores they did around the neighborhood, would allow. They were looking for the elusive Stan Musial card, the star right fielder of the St. Louis Cardinals. Not many were printed so anyone who was lucky enough to find it in his package of baseball cards, was a lucky guy, someone who would be looked on with envy by all his friends. They would also be offering to trade just about any baseball card they had to get the one with Stan Musial on it.

Topps put five baseball cards along with a slab of stale bubblegum in each package. Mr. O'Malley sold them for five cents apiece. Each card had a picture of a major league baseball player on one side and his career statistics along with a short biography of his life on the other side.

The boys had been friends since they were able to walk, sharing each other's lives in this small community in Northwest Milwaukee. They were like brothers. Bobby Waters loved rock and roll and had memorized the words to just about every top ten song of 1960. He lived in a walk-up apartment over McCoy's Hardware store with his mother and father and three sisters. It was crowded and he hated it. Every day, as soon as he could, he would high-tail it out of there and not return until it was time to eat supper. He was always singing one of his favorite songs. His friends called him the Bopper, after rock and roll legend The Big Bopper. Raymond Palermo, who always wore white socks with hand-me-down pants that were too short, was called Socks. He was the oldest in a family of seven. His mother and father owned a bakery and a butcher shop where he was expected to work on weekends and during the summer when school was out. Anthony Hem was a quiet unassuming boy. His father worked at Grede Foundry in Waukesha. He was a foreman on the second shift, so Anthony rarely saw him. He was glad because his father had a bad temper and usually got in a few whacks to the back of Anthony's head for no apparent reason whenever he saw him. Davy Steckbower, the oldest of the group by six months, was also the smallest, and they called him Little Davy. His father was in advertising sales for WTMJ Radio. They lived in a house known in Milwaukee as a Polish flat. The Steckbowers lived on the lower level and rented out the top level to his friend, Darwin Raymore's mother. Darwin's father was listed as missing in action in the war and they survived on his government benefits. Darwin's mother raised chickens in the backyard and sold fresh eggs to Mr. O'Malley and other stores in the North Milwaukee area to supplement their meager income. Darwin wished he knew what happened to his father.

The boys sat cross-legged on the ground, drinking the soda their mothers told them they could not have, but they purchased anyway at O'Malley's that morning. Their bikes formed a circle around them. Some didn't have kick stands so they were lying on their sides in the dirt by their riders.

A dog barked somewhere down the street. They didn't hear it as they tore into their pack of cards, hoping that today would be the lucky day; the day they all were hoping for. The day they saw the smiling face of Stan Musial, wearing his St. Louis Cardinal's baseball uniform and hat, with his bat resting on his left shoulder, looking back at them behind that slab of stale bubble gum.

Little Davy Steckbower let out a loud burp after he drank the last swallow of his grape soda.

"I didn't get him."

His next burp was louder, dropping the gauntlet.

"Top that."

And the gas war was on. First it was Darwin who gathered gas from deep in his stomach and let out a long, reverberating belch that caused Mr. O'Malley to look up from the morning newspaper he was reading at the front counter in his store. Then it was The Bopper joining in and it wasn't long before Socks Palermo and Anthony Hem were a part of the cacophony of belches resonating in front of the store.

They started to laugh as each one of them confessed that the elusive Stan Musial wasn't in their packs either.

Mr. O'Malley stepped out the front door of his store and placed his hands on his hips before yelling, "You little hooligans get going before you run off all my customers. School's about to start. Now go and don't forget to pick up all your trash." The boys scrambled to their feet and dropped their gum wrappers in the barrel next to the front door where Mr. O'Malley was standing. They put their bottles on the counter so they would get their two cent return deposit.

Mr. O'Malley's wife had died five years before and he didn't have any children, so he liked having the boys around. He looked out for them to make sure the trouble that they got into was never anything serious and he made sure they left his premises in plenty of time to reach school before the bell rang.

He smiled as he watched the boys laboriously peddle their bikes down Auer Avenue toward their school. He hoped they would stop in after school for another soda before they went home. He would make it a point to give each of them a couple of pieces of their favorite penny candy. They were good boys.

Chapter 3

"Let's play marbles before the bell rings," Socks yelled.

"Okay, let's go," the rest called out in unison, grabbing their bags of marbles and dropping their bikes where they stood. Those whose bikes were still sporting kick stands didn't bother to kick them down. They raced to the back of the playground where they had dug holes in various strategic places for their daily marble tournaments.

The Bopper came to a sudden stop as did the rest of the boys as they caught up to him

They were staring toward the back of the playground by the time Socks arrived.

"What are you looking at?" Socks asked.

Darwin shuddered, "I think it's a girl, but she looks weird. She's just lying there."

“Where?”

Darwin pointed. “Down where we play marbles behind those trees.”

“I can see her too,” Little Davy whispered.

“I wonder what she is doing here. School won’t start for an hour,” Bopper whispered.

All the boys were staring, their mouths open.

“She ain’t moving,” Anthony said. “I think she’s dead.”

The Bopper looked at his friend and scoffed, “You’re lying. I’m going over the fence to see. You guys coming?”

“I guess,” Socks stammered.

The boys climbed over the chain link fence, the same fence Mr. Gruhlke, their principal, caught Socks and Little Davy scaling to retrieve a baseball that was hit off the playground during recess last Wednesday. When the principal caught them, he had grabbed each boy by his arm and picked up a baseball bat. He then called all the boys over and told them to ‘listen up.’ He brought the bat up to Little Davy’s crotch taping his testicles, which made Socks cringe in fear thinking his sack was next in line for the bat. Mr. Gruhlke told them not to crawl over the fence because they might slip and get their water works hung up on the spikes that were sticking up on the top. Little Davy was still nervous about disobeying Mr. Gruhlke; so while he was straddling the fence, he gave a quick glance toward the school and Mr. Gruhlke’s office, before jumping to the ground.

“Oh crap, Socks, I think she’s dead; look at the blood.” Darwin cried.

The boys stared at the vacant eyes and the purple blotches covering her face and noticed cuts and swelling on the left side of the girl’s head near where her eye should be. Both eye sockets were empty.

Darwin threw up his grape soda pop.

“Someone beat her to a pulp,” Socks whispered, quickly glancing back with fear in his eyes, hoping whoever did this wasn’t lurking in the shadows of the playground.

“We gotta call the cops,” The Bopper yelled. “You keep watch while I go tell Mr. O’Malley

“I ain’t stayin’ here I’m coming with you,” the rest of the boys replied in unison, their voices filled with terror.

“Okay, let’s go,” they turned and ran as fast as they could mounting their bikes, they rode toward North Fratney Street and the light shining, like their beacon of safety, in front of O’Malley’s Corner Store, where they knew the kindly Mr. O’Malley would still be standing at the front counter reading the Milwaukee Sentinel.

Mr. O’Malley looked up from his paper, surprised to see the boys returning to the store. They threw their bikes on the ground and ran up to him; fear was in their eyes.

Chapter 4

My name is Max Fly, I’m a private investigator. Actually, my real name isn’t Max Fly; it’s Gunther Hjerstedt which means heartland, or something to that effect, in my native country, the Kingdom of Sweden. I say Kingdom of Sweden because the Hjerstedt’s are descendants of King Gustav I and originally came from Jarstad, about seventy-five miles southwest of Stockholm.

Stockholm is, an archipelago, a city that is composed of a chain of many islands. This is where many of Western Wisconsin’s sturdy Scandinavian pioneers originated.

I am told we are an independent, liberty-loving people although I'm not sure how sturdy I am.

I changed my name to Fly because I was tired of spelling Hjerstedt every time I met someone. I know most people can spell Fly, even my close friend Homicide Lieutenant Harry Marshall. If I am anything, I am thoughtful. I want to make life as easy as I can for my friend as I can see his job wearing him down more every day.

I was born in south central Wisconsin in a paper mill town located on the Wisconsin River, called Wisconsin Rapids, but I never saw a rapids. My father was a profligate frontier type who never held a job long, drank everyday, played poker every night, womanized when he could and fought when provoked; these were his good qualities. He was around for a few years after I entered this world but I can't remember much about him. I am told, however, that I did inherit some of his more colorful traits.

So far my life has been about as stable as a woman going through menopause. I spent time in the South Pacific during the war and then on the rodeo circuit as a roper and a bull rider down in Texas where one old bull and I seemed to have had a running feud going; that is until he finally put me in the hospital. It was then I decided it was better to concede defeat and move on to another line of work.

I signed on as a reporter for the Milwaukee Journal, the Beer City's evening paper, before moving on to a failing rag in the small Midwestern town of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. Those few years in Beaver Dam were like a lifetime anywhere else. After several fortuitous forays into crime solving, I decided to hang up pen and paper and strap on a piece and become a private dick.

My love life has been as stable as my career path. My first wife left me for a guy in Kenosha who tightens lug nuts on Nash Ramblers. It seems the only thing my wife and I had in common was her vagina. Women get rid of me about as often as they change a pair of shoes. Some of my friends call me a Jack Weed, so I don't care to know what I'm called by those who don't like me. But I'm at the stage of my life where I don't really care.

I have a part-time partner who makes himself available to assist me whenever I need it. His name is Hap Schultz. He was my roping partner down in Texas. He was the header and I was the healer. He convinced me I was through with rodeoing so I swore off riding anything more dangerous than a city bus. He said he was going to hang up his spurs too. He returned to Wisconsin with me to keep me from getting in too much trouble. The truth of the matter is, Hap has a greater penchant for finding trouble than I do.

When Hap isn't involved in his full-time profession of chasing skirts, he is helping me track down criminals that I have been asked to find. I go after anyone from cheating husbands to bail bond jumpers to murderers. Hap, however, prefers to not be actively involved with the murderers or cheating husbands. Hap appreciates what the cheating husbands are looking for and feels like he is double-crossing them when he helps me trap them in the act, he feels murderers are too dangerous to mess with. If they killed once, they most likely will kill again, and Hap doesn't want to be the next victim. I can't blame him.

Hap carries a few more years on him than I do and it shows in the lines on his grizzled old face. When he walks, he looks like someone took the horse out from between his legs without telling him. But the girls take a real liking to him and keep him busy just about every night of the week. He has a regular group of young ladies that come around to see him while he tends bar at Rocco's Pub.

“They don’t come around to get a piece of that old cowboy,” Harry says. “They come for free drinks and a laugh.”

I have to admit, it’s funny as hell watching him as he tries to go from one end of the bar to the other on those scrawny old chicken legs bowed out like he was relieving himself while still walking.

This particular morning I woke up and found myself at Lorraine’s again, draped over her couch. That’s Dr. Lorraine Lundgren, one of Milwaukee’s leading sex therapists. We have been seeing each other romantically for the past few months. My life seemed to be running on empty before we met. There were times I felt like a turd in a punch bowl but she makes me feel much better.

She provides me with a reason to wake up in the morning in spite of the fact that she told me my own amorality and self-interest are the cause of most of my troubles; plus I drink too much.

She told me drinking didn’t solve anything. I disagree.

I told her it solved sobriety and sometimes that’s all I needed to get through the day. “If your life is all about screwing things and getting hammered,” she said, “then congratulations, you’re a tool.”

“Thanks, Doc,” I said, “You are probably right, and now I am going to be a screwdriver.”

“Did I include infantile?”

“I don’t think so but we can add it to the list later.” I grabbed her hand and led her to the back bedroom where we made love and she yelled like a Tourette’s patient. I felt like I was back in the rodeo again and, for that moment, I forgot all the Freudian hangups she claims I have.

I always tell myself, “Max, if you’re going to do something tonight that you’ll be sorry for tomorrow morning, sleep late.”

I didn’t sleep late enough, so I went back to sleep and she went to work. Later, still suffering through the worst hangover in my life I turned to God for help.

“Please God,” I begged, “I’ll never drink like this again if you will make this pain go away.”

He heard that prayer a few times before and sometimes I had the feeling He didn’t want to answer me; so I had a backup plan, just in case.

I walked in the bathroom to relieve myself and threw water on my face.

I wondered what I was doing to myself and Doc wasn’t there to give me an answer. I walked to the kitchen. Lorraine had left a half pot of coffee along with a little love note and a hard boiled egg.

I read the note while I filled a cup half full of coffee and reached into the cabinet above the sink and pulled down a bottle of my backup plan, Paul Masson brandy, and added a couple of fingers to the cup.

Lorraine’s note was nice. She asked me to return for a repeat performance that evening. A triumphant smile spread across my face as the memory of Lorraine lying provocatively in bed crossed my mind. She had a nice enough body, built more for comfort than for speed. Her breasts were nice, her ass was even nicer.

I sipped and smiled.

I grabbed a bottle of aspirin. I rated my previous evenings by the number of aspirins I took the morning after and this morning was a four tablet morning.

I washed the aspirin down with my second cup of coffee and brandy.

A few swallows later, I could feel God’s helping hands, with a little goose from His friend, Paul Masson, finally brings their calming influence over me and I felt renewed.

It was time for me to go. I looked for my shirt and shoes. Somehow they ended up under the couch last night along with Dr. Lundgren's panties and one of my Cohiba cigars.

My pants were balled up next to her fireplace. I shook them out and pulled them on. Nothing incriminating or unseemly fell out.

I staggered back to the bathroom and stared at my reflection in the mirror. I looked like the loneliest guy I ever met. The bags beneath my eyes appeared heavier than usual and my eyes were accusive, glaring at me with a look of disgust and humiliation. They were streaked with bloody red lines that twisted wormlike around the whites of my baby blues, the results of the debauchery I was involved in the previous evening. I wasn't too impressed with what I saw. I can see why Lorraine thinks I should make a change in my lifestyle.

My skin had a gray pallor to it, accentuating a scar running along the left side of my lower jaw ending behind my ear. That scar was a souvenir from a mean son of a bitch who told me I had a smart mouth after I asked him if the woman in the corner of the bar was his wife or did someone put a dress on the jukebox. The next thing I remember is this big fella looking down at me apologizing saying, "Sorry, I should have told you I was going to hit you."

"That's all right," I replied. "Your wife should have told you she was going to get fat."

He hit me again and this time, I went halfway through the bar room window and ended up with a six-inch sliver of tempered glass sticking out of the side of my face.

Once again my honesty got me in trouble.

After brushing my teeth and splashing on a little English Leather cologne the doctor keeps around for when I start to get a bit gamey, I moved to the kitchen and brewed another pot of coffee.

I washed the dirty dishes and then I left.

My Edsel fired up on the first try and I pulled out of her driveway and out of Brookfield heading toward Pewaukee Lake and home.

I should be happy like the rest of America but, I'm not and I'm not sure why. It could be the hand writing on the wall, informing me I have reached middle age.

It's 1960 and the end of the Dwight David Eisenhower years. He negotiated an armistice in the Korean War during his first six months in office, turned the economy from an \$8 billion deficit in 1953 into a \$500 million surplus. The country is now cruising into a new decade on an interstate highway system he dreamt up plus he was finally able to shut up Wisconsin's obnoxious Senator Joe McCarthy. Not bad for a guy armed with only a golf putter. Now we were waiting for a changing of the guard. Ed Gein was in the news again. Like a bad penny, he keeps turning up. He is Wisconsin's most notorious criminal, next to Senator McCarthy. Gein decorated his house in the small town of Plainfield with human body parts. He made skulls into bowls and jewelry and upholstered chairs with human skin. The coup de grace was the human lips hanging from the ceiling. He was indicted in 1957 and was deemed too crazy to stand trial. His Den of Death was a human slaughterhouse. Neighbors smelled the foul odors. They heard the power saw buzzing in the dead of night. But they never imagined the horrors happening right next door. They thought he was just another industrious German working away in the wee hours of the night.

He was being transferred from the Central State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Waupun, Wisconsin, to the Mendota State Hospital in Madison. Gein is a certified nut job and he will fit in nicely in Madison, the state capital, with the rest of the nut jobs running the government there.

Lorraine and I were up late last night discussing Ed Gein and what the psychological motivations were that made someone like him achieve some form of sexual gratification from brutally murdering women.

Lorraine said, "There is a police officer in San Leandro California who has written a paper while attending the University of California at Berkeley, chronicling the parallels in abnormal psychology and criminal psychology. He terms the rituals displayed by repeat killers as their signature. He claims the patterns they display become obsessive and the sexual gratification that they seek are fulfilled by repeating these specific acts over and over again. Very fascinating and I will be presenting at the same seminar that he will this upcoming week."

"What do you mean by their 'rituals'?"

"Rituals are things we do every day, taking a bath can be a ritual; setting up a Christmas tree can be a ritual. He claims a 'signature' is the same thing. It is created in the mind of the offender years before his first crime is committed. As the offender starts to daydream, he begins to create a fantasy of what he would like to do with a victim, what the victim would say, how he would inflict wounds, how the body would be displayed. He claims, and it makes perfect sense to me, that over time, the fantasy becomes solidified in the mind of the offender, and all of the events that he had fantasized about will take on an almost religious significance to the offender. These are things that have to occur in a certain order for the crime to be as similar to the fantasy as possible. It becomes an obsession and without them knowing it, they are leaving behind clues for law enforcement to use in tracking them down."

"So I should stop taking a bath every day?"

"You are proving my point that you are infantile too. You don't bathe every day anyway."

"Have you told this to Harry?"

"That you don't bathe every day?"

"He knows that. I mean about this signature thing?"

No, I haven't. Many law enforcement officers are still close-minded and skeptical of anything to do with studying the mind of criminals to use in the process of apprehending them."

"Well, Harry is pretty open-minded."

"So you say. I don't see that at all."

"Okay, Doc, but I'm going to mention it to him anyway and see what he thinks."

"Good luck."

I do enjoy these late night chats we have, especially when they end up with her Tourettes imitation.

But I still didn't sleep well... I kept dreaming of lips smiling down at me from Lorraine's ceiling.

I feel miserable and it's not Paul Masson's fault. I think the underlying cause is I just turned forty. I can't seem to shake the feeling of being close to the end.

Paul Masson and I commiserated the Milwaukee Braves' loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers as they blew another chance to go to the World Series.

It was their seventh season in Milwaukee. Over that time span, they drew over ten million spectators, more than any other team in the major leagues. They ended the National League regular season in a first-place tie with the Los Angeles Dodgers. They played a special best-of-three tie-breaking series to decide the National League Championship for the World Series. The Braves lost in two games and the Dodgers went to the World Series.

Maybe that isn't the only reason I feel like hell. Maybe it's because a little Yaqui Indian deputy sheriff in Tombstone, Arizona named Debbie Red Eagle, tore my heart out and stomped on it.

I needed to get back to work or get back somewhere, anywhere but where I was.

My head was throbbing. I needed to go to Rocco's Pub.

After I left Lorraine's, I stopped at home to feed Bear, a big mongrel dog who adopted me, and to check on the horses that were grazing in the pasture. I cleaned their water trough. I made a mental note to ride them later in the week.

After everything was in order, I went to my office which is located at a back table in Rocco's Pub.

"Morning Rocco."

"Hiya Max. Did you get to throw a leg again last night.?"

"Might have."

"You with my shrink?"

"Yep. I just can't understand that woman, Rocco. Hell, I can't understand any woman."

"Don't fret about it Max. I don't know anyone who understands women, except maybe bisexual hairdressers."

"You know many of them?"

"Not really. She didn't talk about me, did she?"

"Who?"

"Come on, Max."

"She did say something about a sexual deviation called frotteurism. Do you think she was referring to you?"

"Nah, that one's about my customers rubbing up against one another for sexual gratification. That's all she said?"

"This time."

Rocco has been seeing Dr. Lundgren for the past few years, trying to straighten out his convoluted sexual deviations. He worries she will spill the beans on him.

Rocco's Pub is located on the Northwest corner of North Avenue and Highway 100 in Wauwatosa, a suburb on the West side of Milwaukee. Dan Cirrocco opened the place fifteen years ago. We go back a few years. We met at the Milwaukee Turners, sort of a local boys club, located in downtown Milwaukee. It was started by two German immigrants, named Turner, around 1900, to provide a place for boys to learn gymnastics and the fine art of boxing. It was the birthplace of some pretty famous local pugilists. I have been in a lot of fights that didn't have a positive ending. I was bullied and learned early on to stand up for myself. The only way I could do that was through fighting and most of those I ended up on the short end of the stick. So I joined the Turners.

Danny and I trained under a scarred up ex-professional fighter whose eyes bulged like a terriers. He had cauliflower ears and a busted up nose and went by the name of Mad Dog Coogan. Mad Dog wasn't his birth name but his mind was scrambled and he couldn't remember what it was, so he was always Mad Dog to everyone at the Milwaukee Turners.

George Orwell once said that by the age of fifty, every man has the face he deserves. So we assumed Mad Dog deserved to look like road kill.

Mad Dog told me I was a rubbish fighter due to my inexperience. He showed me some tricks that weren't necessarily sanctioned under the King of Queensbury rules.

His pep talks during my fights went something like, "When you die you want to look dead. Not now!" He was an awesome motivator.

The Chinese have a saying "When two tigers fight, one limps away horribly wounded, the other is dead." There were many times when old Mad Dog jumped into the ring to call the tiger off my prone, rumped and flattened body.

But Danny? Oh boy. He had a pair of quick hands. He did a pretty good job of knocking me and others around.

We would always fight the Jews. It seemed that every Jew in Milwaukee wanted to be a boxer in those days and some of them were really good.

Thursday night was fight night at the Abraham Lincoln House, located on Milwaukee's Ninth and Vine Streets. It was like a Jewish Community Center. When we entered we could hear a lot of Yiddish and the old Jewish men admonishing their sons, "A box-fightah? So that's what you become? For this, we came to America? So that you should become a box-fightah? Better you should be a gangster or even a murderer. The shame of it. A box-fightah!" Then they would slap their boy along the side of his head and say, while looking in our direction, "Kill that gentile."

The auditorium held 300 people, standing room only, with the ring in the middle. There would be a person standing in the middle of the ring and he would ask for the next fighters. There was no weight class, height was the only factor. There was one fight after another. Each fight was two rounds and the winner was declared by the amount of applause he received after each fight. It was rare for a gentile to get more than a few claps from the crowd of rabid Jewish spectators so the only chance for us gentiles to win was to knock a Jew out. Rocco would only get boos and plenty of them. Every Jew in the place wanted to see him killed in the ring.

Rocco would mock them. When they were standing in the middle of the ring before the bell rang, he would say things like, "Hey Finklestein, you're a piece of shit. The last good Jew was Jesus. They don't make 'em like Him no more. I'm going to see what you got and then I'm gonna knock that last nut right outta your grille!"

Most of them didn't appreciate being called Jew Kid or someone saying Jesus was the last good Jew so they would lunge at Rocco and try to land a couple of punches before the bell even rang. That's what Rocco was after. He would laugh and dance away while the referee restrained his opponent.

Rocco wanted them hopping mad so they would want to kill him and forget what they learned about boxing. He told me, "If the fight is going well, you might be walking into an ambush. Ya' gotta get 'em off their game."

I seldom left the auditorium with a victory. Most nights I was hit more times than a hockey puck, but I always left happy with blood flowing out of my nose. I didn't feel the punches. The adrenalin made me immune to pain. It was the next day I suffered. Rocco was a knockout puncher; a knockout puncher with a glass jaw. Most of his fights ended in a knockout. Either he stopped them or they stopped him. He loved duking it out toe to toe with anybody who wanted a piece of him. If it wasn't for that jaw, he might have made it to the mill; the big match.

When Rocco opened the Pub, I hung around a lot. I figured if I have to pay for a drink, I might as well pay a friend instead of someone I didn't know. I became a daily customer. Soon my clients began to meet me at the Pub.

The phone rang.

"Max, phone call; in the back," Rocco said, throwing his thumb over his shoulder toward the ladies room behind the bar where he had an extension.

"Thanks, Rocco," I took my notebook out of my jacket pocket and grabbed the receiver, "Hello, Max Fly, Private Eye, confidential investigations." I heard Rocco hang up the extension.

"Max, it's me, Horace," the excited voice on the other end yelled.

I pushed the receiver away from my ear. Horace is Horace Greenberg, a gay reporter for the Milwaukee Sentinel who flames all over the city of Milwaukee.

I met him while I was squirreled away for a few years working for the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen. He worked in the mail room with aspirations of becoming a reporter. I ended up in Beaver Dam after I was fired from my job as a beat reporter at the Milwaukee Journal for slugging the city editor. I helped Horace land a job with the Milwaukee Sentinel after he helped us nail a serial killer named Jimmy The Peanut Booth. He proved himself a very capable investigative reporter so I keep his number on file in case I need some discrete snooping done.

"Hi Horace, what's happening?"

"You have to get here, quickly," he yelled.

"Where?"

"Behind Auer Avenue Elementary School; it's located at 2319 West Auer Avenue.

They found the body."

"I know where Auer Avenue Elementary School is. What body?"

"What body? Whose do you think? Candi Kane's, did you forget? You asked me to help Hilga Haller find her niece."

"That's right. I almost forgot."

"Almost forgot? You did forget. What's wrong with you, Max? If your memory was any worse, you could plan your own surprise party."

Horace was getting hysterical as he shouted into the phone. He had this habit of yelling. He always yelled when he was excited. It was very annoying.

"Please get over here," Horace yelled again before hanging up.

What I almost forgot was that I asked Horace Greenberg to help one of my neighbors, Hilga Haller, find her missing niece, Candi Kane. Candi disappeared after leaving her apartment. She moved to the area from Atlanta, Georgia, after the death of her parents. She was attending Layton School of Art, taking classes toward a commercial art degree. She lived with her aunt before moving to Milwaukee to live with two classmates.

I didn't know Miss Haller that well outside of the fact she was a spinster and an English teacher at Brookfield High School. She read about me and the role I played in the apprehension of the notorious rapist and killer, Jimmy 'The Peanut' Booth, in Milwaukee last year and found out we were neighbors. She told me her niece was missing and that the police were unable to find out anything on her whereabouts so she pleaded with me to help her.

At the time, I was packed and ready to head to Tombstone, Arizona to help find the killer of an acquaintance of mine, so I made a call to Horace Greenberg, asking him to help her out in my absence.

It had completely slipped my mind until I got this call from Horace and now I found myself speeding to the scene of another murder. I didn't know the world was filled with so much hate and violence until I got into this line of work. My old nemesis, Casper, the Corrientes bull, who nearly killed me twenty years ago, wasn't looking that bad anymore. At least, he had a reason for hurting people. That's more than I could say about some of the human population.

Chapter 5

I turned the corner and rolled to a stop at 2319 West Auer Avenue, in front of Auer Avenue School. It was a dreary building constructed of weathered dark brown bricks. It is located on the Northwest side of Milwaukee and had been around for a long time. I actually spent my first two years of school there before my mother packed me into the family car and moved us to Brookfield, at the time, a small town situated west of Milwaukee.

I parked my Edsel convertible behind one of the unmarked squad cars. Next to the squad cars was a rusted out yellow Volkswagen bus that belonged to Horace Greenberg. I got out of my car and noticed Horace standing near Harry's partner, Detective Paulie Menjou; it appeared he was trying to eavesdrop while the detective interrogated a pretty young lady. I waved at Horace as I started to walk across the asphalt to the dirt playground in the back. Harry was kneeling beside a body as I approached. Harry and I met in the third grade after I moved to Brookfield. The first time we were in the lunch line he slugged me in the stomach for no apparent reason. I sized him up at the time and decided it would be in my best interest if I befriended the big goof instead of fighting him. He was at least twice my size. Now he's three times my size and it looked like he was still growing.

Harry was vigorously sucking on a Lucky Strike as he stared at the body on the ground. He looked up as I approached.

"What in the hell are you doing here?"

"You called me, remember?" I lied.

"Sure I did. Don't let anyone hear you say that. Come here."

He looked old and tired. His suit looked like he slept in it. I noticed his shirt was missing a button and his brown tie was tied too short again. It reached down to mid chest, stopping above his ample belly that was comfortably hanging over his belt. He said he hates ties.

"Do you know what's with all these holes?" Harry asked pointing at the holes scattered around the playground.

"Marbles."

"Marbles?"

"Yeah, at Auer Avenue Elementary School we shot marbles; kids shoot marbles into the holes. It's called a pot. The first one to get all his marbles into the hole wins the pot, which consists of all the marbles in the hole. I used to play it every recess."

"It's good to know you went to school. So this is where you lost all your marbles?"

"Actually, I did. Who's the bird?" I asked, pointing in the direction where his partner, Paulie Menjou, was questioning a young woman. She was wearing jeans that fit like a second skin and a sweater that fit her about the same, and from where we stood, she looked to be sizzling hot. I noticed, Harry's partner was well aware of her attributes as well.

Harry looked up in the direction of Paulie Menjou and said, "Some girl from Atlanta who says she's the half-sister of the vic. Paulie is getting a statement."

"And an eyeful. What happened?" I asked, turning back to Harry after I got my fill of staring at the lady's assets; they still had the attention of Detective Menjou.

"She was killed."

"You don't say. Do you know how?"

"A knife to the chest and a wicked gaping wound to her neck would lead me to believe she was stabbed to death, that along with about fifty other holes over her neck and chest. The coroner will have to confirm that. It looks like they sliced her throat to make sure she didn't squeal. Then they cut out her eyes and threw her in the weeds. Whoever did this wasn't too concerned about having us find the body. They didn't even try to cover it up."

"Maybe they were in a hurry."

"Could be."

"The mob?" I asked.

"It's possible. The mob is known to cut or shoot out the eyes of someone they think is a squealer, but she doesn't look like the type that would be hooked up with the mob. Her clothes, if those are hers, look too expensive and conservative to be a hooker and she's young. But, yeah, it's possible.

He was referring to a torn blouse and a skirt that looked like it was haphazardly tossed near the body.

Harry looked at me for a moment.

"Who is that roly-poly little Leprechaun?" He asked, nodding in the direction of Horace Greenberg. He flipped the butt of his Lucky Strike into one of the surrounding marble pots that had puddled with water that faintly resembled urine.

"Horace Greenberg. You remember him. He's a reporter with the Milwaukee Sentinel."

Harry shook his head.

Paulie and the young girl started to walk in our direction. Horace followed them.

"Does the vic look like that girl you have been looking for?" Harry asked, pointing at the mutilated body.

"It looks like her. She's a little paler than the last time I saw her, but then she had more blood and I never saw her naked. I guess that would make a difference, wouldn't it? I think she had blue eyes."

"You're a smart ass, Max. Keep your trap shut on this until we have a chance to notify her next of kin, or they will be drawing you in chalk. I would hate for her family to find out about this on the 5:00 p.m. news, or from some affectless newspaper reporter. You don't know someone like that, do you Max?"

"How would I? I don't even know what affectless means."

Harry gave me his finger once again and said, "Something like this is hard enough for someone to take when they are properly notified. I don't want them to be blindsided."

I gave him a thumbs up and said, "I got it."

"One other thing, she had this in her hand, and you better keep this quiet too," Harry said, showing me a blood stained sheet of paper he was holding with tweezers. The note had BLUE MAGIC written in capital red letters.

I stared at it for a minute before Harry put it back in his evidence bag.

I shrugged and asked Harry, "What do you suppose that means?"

"I'll tell you what it means. The mob used to run illegal booze before the repeal of prohibition, Since then..."

Before he could continue, Paulie and the young girl walked up with Horace following.

Harry stopped them before they reached the body.

Paulie gave an inquisitive look in my direction before turning to Harry and saying, "Lieutenant, this is Pearl Podvin. She says the dead girl is her sister. I thought she could do a quick ID before we went downtown and took her statement."

Harry nodded in Horace's direction, "Get him outta here."

Paulie turned and escorted Horace back up the hill.

Horace had his pen and notebook out and his head turned in the direction of the crime scene and was vigorously writing as Paulie led him away by the elbow.

"What are you doing here Pearl?"

"People call me Medusa."

"Okay, what are you doing here Medusa?"

"I'm here to see if that's my half sister."

"How'd you know we had a dead body?"

"Police scanner. I have one in my car."

"Most people don't have police scanners."

"I'm not most people."

Harry stared at her.

"I see. Is that your Dodge parked up there?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, I'm sorry you have to see this." Harry stepped back, allowing her to get a clear look at the deceased girl on the ground.

"Is that your sister Medusa?"

"Half sister," she replied. "Yeah, that's her."

She seemed nonplussed and glanced at me as she turned away.

"We found these scattered on the ground by her wallet; three different ID's. Do you know why she would have three different names and contact information?"

"No."

I looked up at her. That was a quick denial. I wondered if she was hiding something. Paulie had returned from escorting Horace back to his VW.

"Can we go now?" she asked, looking at Paulie.

He looked at Harry.

"The only reason I can think of for someone to change their name three different times is that they are running from something. Was your sister running from something?"

"Half sister. I don't know."

Harry paused and looked her in the eyes.

After a moment, he said, "Right. Ok, take her downtown and get her statement Paulie, and don't leave town miss."

"Oh, don't worry, I won't."

"Here," I said, handing her my card. "In case you need anything while you are in town."

She looked at it for a moment before shoving it in her pocket.

Paulie took her by the elbow and led her across the playground toward his squad car. She shrugged out of his grip.

"Smooth Max. This is a crime scene for Chrissake."

"Hey, she's a young girl in a new place and her sister was just found murdered."

"Half sister."

"Yeah. She may need a private investigator."

"She has the police."

"Yep, that's what I said, she may need a private investigator."

Harry gave me the finger.

"She's hiding something," he said.

I turned and noticed he was watching her depart. "Nice ass."

I nodded and asked, "What's with the three ID's?"

"Wish I knew. Guess I'll have to figure that out."

"Guess you will."

Chapter 6

After the medical examiner took the body away, Harry and I walked to our cars. Harry leaned against his squad car and pushed back his hat and hooked a boot behind the other, he lit another Lucky Strike, his third since I arrived.

"This is the fourth murder in the past three months and this one is going to give me ulcers. This smells different. I don't think it's the same perp who's doing the others."

"Others?"

"Yeah, the Menomonee River Parkway murders. There have been about a half a dozen of 'em; another in Brookfield that might be by the same guy."

The radio in his squad car squawked.

"Hell, what now?"

He reached in the passenger side window and answered, "Two Hotel, over."

"We have an 872 at 3270 North 91st Street. Shots fired."

"Roger, is anyone on the scene yet? Over."

"Negative."

"Okay, I got it. I'm on the way. Out."

"What's up, Harry?"

"A shooting about six blocks west of here. You up for a ride?"

"Sure, why not."

"Good, we can play good cop bad cop. I get to be the good cop."

"That'll be a first."

We arrived at a cream colored brick two story building, situated on the corner of North 91st Street and Humboldt Avenue in a run down neighborhood. Weeds and old tires littered the front lawn. A couple of rusted old cars were jacked up on cinder blocks. They looked like they hadn't been worked on for quite some time.

A group of six women was clustered around across the street as we approached Harry had the siren blasting and parked at an angle in front of the crowd, causing them to back up.

"What's happening? We were told shots have been fired."

"That's right officer," an older woman with graying hair answered, "Across the street. I'm pretty sure it's on the second floor. The back apartment. I was out front getting the mail when a dark figure walked by and ran up the stairs."

"A negro?"

"No, I mean he was wearing dark clothes."

"Okay, continue."

"Later, I was hanging wash in the back and I heard shots. I ran into my apartment and called the cops and then came back outside."

"How long ago was that?"

"About twenty minutes. It sure takes you coppers a long time to get to a crime scene."

Harry ignored her.

"Have you seen anyone leaving the building?"

"No, but they could have gone out the back."

"Okay, stay here. Come on Max, I'll need your help on this. Are you strapped?"

I nodded and Harry walked toward the building. I followed.

"Stay close to me. It will give them someone else to shoot at."

"Thanks."

"Now when we get close and if you are in doubt, empty your clip."

"I don't have a clip. I have a revolver."

Harry looked at me. "Whatever."

We walked up the stairs. Harry first, his back against the wall, his gun pointed toward the ground at his side. I followed him.

My leather holster dug into my shoulder. I hated it when it did that. After being smacked against a wall by a two thousand pound bull, my shoulder always ached. My doctor said the discomfort would eventually fade, but he never felt a bull's horn rip through the muscle and sinew of his shoulder. The discomfort never goes away. When we reached the top, Harry nodded his head toward the door. I knew what he wanted. I put my hand over the peephole while he positioned himself in front of the door with his gun extended.

He nodded once more before kicking the door beneath the lock.

“Aw shit, that hurt,” Harry said, grabbing his knee.
The door didn’t budge
I looked at him. “You want me to do it?”
“Fuck no; stand back.”
He kicked it again. This time, it swung open and banged against the inside wall with a loud crash.
Harry jumped in, sweeping the room with his gun. I did the same.
I ducked.
Harry looked at me. “What ya’ duck for?”
“I thought somebody might be in here. I learned in the Army that incoming fire has the right of way.”
“I’m glad you learned something.”
The stench made us both gag.
What a shit hole; a Murphy bed built into the wall to our right was down and in a filthy mess. A small kitchenette with a miniature stove and refrigerator were to the left. An open can of spaghetti sauce and cigarette butts littered the floor. Flies buzzed everywhere.
A pile of soiled clothing lay on the floor by the side of the bed. A navy suit with a Johnny Walker’s label, the discount clothing store, not the scotch, was crumpled on top of the pile.
There were signs of a struggle next to the bed.
We holstered our guns and stepped forward. Nobody was in the apartment. Nobody alive, that is.
We saw the source of the smell. The body was slouched in a chair across from the door. His head leaned back with a slit across his neck, running from ear to ear. It looked like a grinning clown.
Blood stained his shirt. Someone put a third eye in his forehead.
“He’s dead,” I said.
“Ya think? You’re gonna make a helluva detective some day, Max.”
“Whoever did this damn near decapitated him. I can see the vertebrae of his neck.”
“Looks like a .357 caliber eyeball. Insurance, I guess.”
“Shit, this is going to ruin my day.”
“Who is this guy?”
“I dunno, but I’m gonna find out.”
There was no identification on the body so we started pushing around the trash to see if there was a letter, bill or envelope with a name on it.
I found a plane ticket, round trip to Atlanta.
“Harry, look at this.”
Harry bent down and picked it up.
“Looks like his name is Arnold Iaconni.”
“Do you know him?”
“I’ve heard of him. He goes by the name of Ice, runs the vending machine business for the Milwaukee syndicate. He is known as Ice The Pinball Man. He’s a punk; a local wise guy. He has a rap sheet as long as Bob Hope’s nose. He’s hooked up with Rugs Rugliero, the consiglieri of Romeo Butticci’s group.”
“Romeo‘Butt Itchy’?”
“It’s spelled B-u-t-t-i-c-c-i, pronounced Butt Itchy. Don’t make fun of his name. He isn’t one you want to mess with, plus he lacks anything that even slightly resembles a sense of humor.

“What’s with all the shooting and the dying?”

“I don’t know, Max. Maybe it’s something you can catch, like a virus,” Harry replied as he turned and headed for the door.

“You learn that in detective school, Harry?”

I don’t know if he heard me.

Chapter 7

It snowed later that night. The flakes continued to percolate from the heavy clouds as the morning light broke over the dark waters of Pewaukee Lake. They were large and wet; the kind that packed well and made great snowballs; also, the kind that caused heart attacks in old men shoveling it off their walks and driveways. It was

beautiful, but beauty never lasts in this world; God, man, and my dog, Bear, see to that.

The snow had been dropping off and on for the past three days and I was questioning the wisdom of my decision to leave Texas and move back to my ancestral state of Wisconsin.

It was only the twenty-ninth of September; a hell of a fall.

I swung my legs out of bed and stood on the cold hardwood floors, the cold traveling from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head. I pulled on my red John Henrys and buttoned up the front and the flap in the back. I pulled on my woolen socks and looked around for my snow suit.

I heard whining. It was coming from under the bed. I bent over and lifted the duster. There it was. Bear, my black tongued, big headed, large pawed mutt was sleeping on it.

Bear is a Saint Bernard mix with a little Chow and Golden Retriever and, according to Hap, a bit of Chihuahua as well. From the smell coming from beneath my bed, there must be skunk lurking in his family tree as well. I don't know where the Chihuahua came into play, but Hap insists that Bear is bi-lingual. He says he barks in Spanish. One morning I saw a brown clump in the stall between my horses legs. It wasn't what I thought it was at first because it moved. It would have to be a pretty big worm to get a pile of manure to squirm like that. It was a small brown puppy. It looked like a teddy bear. He was shivering and started to whine when he saw me. I picked him up and brought him into the house and cleaned him up. He had big paws so I knew he would be consuming a lot of food if I kept him and he might grow to be as big as my horse; like my horse, he was pretty cute and I didn't have the heart to turn him out.

He has the large cranium, red eyes and the white and brown face and sloppy jowls of the Saint Bernard, but he lacks their nobility. His coat and body are the light golden brown of a Golden Retriever. He also has the sweet disposition of a Golden Retriever, which means you can pull and push on him until you are blue in the face and he won't get angry or annoyed. He also won't move.

He farts and drools a lot. He weighs close to one hundred and seventy-five pounds and he is still growing. He became my canine, freeloading canine roommate, who just showed up one day and never left.

He had pulled my snowsuit under the bed and used it for his sleeping accommodations. If he hadn't slept on it, he would have climbed up with me on the bed, eventually forcing me on the floor. He pretty much does as he pleases; and, as I said, he won't move until he is good and ready to move, so maybe there might be some mule in him as well. The mule was showing now as I tried to extricate my snow suit from under his body. He growled in Spanish.

Dogs are supposed to be fun, loving and loyal. I'm not so sure about Bear. He loves to ride in my Edsel. He gets excited when I put the top down; if I don't, he will continue to paw the passenger side window until I lower it. He will ride with his head stuck out in the wind, with drool running down the side of the car. On extended trips, when it is too cold to consider lowering the window and he realizes his scratching isn't going to get him anywhere, he will move close and lean into me, all one hundred and seventy-five pounds of him. If I push him away, he will sit there looking at me with his Saint Bernard eyes before starting in again with his leaning routine. After fifteen minutes of this, we call a truce and he moves over and leans his head on my shoulder for a moment before slipping it to my lap where he stays while looking up at me with those soulful eyes. I take it as a loving look, but to him, it's most likely the stare of the

victor. Bear has cheated death at just about every turn and some day, I fear, I will come home and find him laying dead in the back yard. His demise most likely will be at the hands of some angry neighbor or another jealous male dog that catches him in full mount, covering his favorite bitch.

Bear is the ruler of the cabin and the surrounding pasture. He vandalized the horses' barn, but the horses never seem to mind. They love to chase him around the pasture. They are fun to watch.

I finished zipping up my snow suit and pulled on my boots, knit cap, and gloves and walked outside into the cold Wisconsin morning. My breath steamed around my head like smoke from a campfire. The snow was slushy, melting from the warmth of the still unfrozen Wisconsin September turf. The sloshing sound of my boots echoed in the still morning air. Bear was bounding by my side, his black tongue falling out the side of his mouth, his breath making little puffs of smoke around his face. He stayed close. I was wearing his bed and he wanted to make sure I took care of it.

It wasn't long before something caught his interest. He barked. I watched him as he lumbered off toward the lake before finally losing sight of him in the pre-dawn darkness.

I hooked the snow plow up to the front of the Jeep and set out once again to plow the snow from the driveway. In September.

More snow flurries began to fall and Bear reappeared, running along the fence line with the horses chasing him.

A winter wonderland in Wisconsin, It's supposed to be the fall.

I needed a drink.

...and another day begins.

It was early Thursday evening and Rocco's was beginning to twitch. I was at the bar warming up for the night. The first shot of brandy cut my throat like a hatchet so I ordered another along with a Blatz draft to keep it company.

After awhile, Hap came over and put down another Blatz. "That beer looks as flat as my little sister."

"You don't have a sister."

"I know but I did know that chick's sister one night," he said, pointing to a shapely blond sitting at the far end of the bar. "I banged her like a loose screen door in a hurricane. Want me to send her your way? I think she's desperate."

I looked in her direction and caught her eye. She smiled and I smiled back. I turned to Hap and said, "Why not? There's nothing like a girl with a plunging neckline to perk up a man's spirits."

I was still sipping brandy when she sat down next to me. I noticed she was drinking manhattans.

Hap walked over and placed two manhattans in front of us. I guess I was drinking them too.

"On the house," he said, and walked away.

She was a two o'clock beauty queen and, it was only ten o'clock. She was an English teacher from Wauwatosa High School. We hit it off immediately.

I told her, if I can make a lady laugh, I can get her in bed. She giggled so I knew I was using the right bait.

I convinced her it would be a thrill for her to ride in a new convertible. I put her in the Edsel and took the top down and turned the heat up and began burning up the road. We went to her place.

By the time we got there she was shivering and her nose was red and the rest of her was a bad shade of lavender. I thought she might have frozen to death but then her lips moved; she was saying something about her roommate being gone for the evening.

We went inside and she turned on her record player. I held her close and we stumbled around the room, swaying to some of her Johnny Mathis records. Johnny Mathis is powerful when it comes to melting a lady's resistance, but I prefer listening to a few Ray Price or Marty Robbin's gunfighter ballads, I'm a friendly kinda guy and I like to get along with the woman I am with at the moment, so I listen to the music they prefer. Sometimes, a few actually like the songs I like, or at least, they claim to.

I know from past experience, that English teachers prefer a well-read man; I was lacking in that regard, so I tried to make up for it in other areas. Evidently, I passed her test.

When I woke it was early morning and very dark outside. My English teacher was sitting at the kitchen table in a bra and half-slip, casually puffing on a cigarette. I propped myself up in bed, looking out past the living room and through the half-open kitchen door. A cup of coffee sat on the table in front of her, the steam rising from it lazily. Her legs were crossed, and she wore high heels with ankle straps. Nylon stockings were stretched taut against the curve of her leg, and I wondered why any girl in her right mind would wear stockings like that. I also wondered what her name was. I didn't really give a damn because the circular saw inside my skull captured my entire attention. I couldn't remember much about last night. But it seemed to me that I should, at least, know who I spent the evening with.

I swung my legs over the side of the bed, and the circular saw went to work again. I stopped in the bathroom to relieve myself. I went to the sink and tried to spit but I had no saliva. I cupped my hands under the faucet and drank greedily of the water. It made me feel a little better. I spit.

I was in my bare feet, but the rug was thick, and I didn't mind. I walked into the kitchen as the girl set another steaming cup of coffee down on the table. She was tall, with blonde hair and a round face. Her eyes were a pale blue, with skillfully darkened lashes and lids. She wore pale orange lipstick that accentuated her blondness and added just a touch of color to her full lips. My eyes studied her face, and the first impression I had was she never could be a model. She smiled and lifted one eyebrow, glancing at the coffee cup.

"Oh, thanks."

"Where are your pants?"

I looked down, "I dunno. Did I have them on when we left Rocco's?"

She smiled. "I've got to be leaving soon."

I tried to think of something appropriate to say, but I only came up with, "So soon?"

She grinned knowingly. "I have to earn a living, you know."

I sipped at the coffee and looked out over the rooftops. Occasionally, I glanced at the girl's face, and my eyes strayed down to the firm cones of her white bra. When you aren't wearing shorts it's kinda hard to hide what you are feeling.

The girl's dress was neatly folded over one of the kitchen chairs. The clock on the wall said six-twenty, and that meant she would have to leave soon if she was going to get to school on time.

"...who I am, do you?"

I looked up quickly. "Huh? I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I said you don't even remember who I am, do you?"

I grinned and opened one hand in a futile gesture. "I'm sorry, honey, but I was juiced to the ears."

She smiled a warming smile. "That's all right. My name is Linda."

"Oh, yes, Linda."

"You still don't remember."

"No, I guess I don't."

"Rocco's Pub? At the bar? Hap Schultz? He introduced us"

"Ah, Rocco's," I said, nodding. "A nice place. You know Hap?"

"Uh huh."

"Interesting."

"Johnny Mathis and Chances Are."

"A nice song. A great singer."

"You were drinking brandy," she said matter-of-factly.

"I was?"

She nodded, "Shots and then you switched to Manhattans," and the smile got bigger.

"Uh-huh. After your third one, you were pretty shellacked and you put your hand on my knee and said, 'Baby, you and I should...'"

"I remember," I said quickly.

"When we got here, we drank a little of the cognac you keep in your roadside safety kit in the trunk of your Edsel, in case of emergencies, you said. I didn't have anything to drink in the house stronger than milk and you said that made it an emergency.

She stared at me for a moment.

"Well, I've got to run. School you know..."

She sighed and shook her head. "It's been real nice, Max. I enjoyed it."

"I guess I did, too. How about a shower before you go?"

She looked at me and smiled, shaking her head no, "I don't think so. I will be late."

I grabbed her hand and said, "Come on. I'm what makes a shower hot," and led her to the bathroom. Her bra and half slip didn't make it that far.

While we were showering, I was able to teach her a few exercises that loosened her up for her job.

After she toweled off and replaced her bra and half slip, she stood up and reached over for her dress. She ducked her head, and the dress slid down the curves of her body. She pulled it over her hips, smoothed it, and then fluffed her hair.

"My lipstick all right?" she asked.

"Fine. Very nice."

She smiled. "Lock the door behind you when you leave and tell Hap I said hi."

"I will."

I walked her to the front door, and she reached up and patted my face, her hand lingering there for an instant. "Goodbye, Max."

"Linda," I said.

I finished a light breakfast consisting of toast and coffee. I put in a shot of cognac. My ass was dragging and I know hers was too; I think her students were in for a nice surprise today.

I ran my hand across my face and realized I needed a shave. I found a can of shaving cream and decided to use her razor. I was leaning on her bathroom sink, staring in the mirror. My skin had a gray pallor to it. I looked like I spent the night inhaling embalming fluid. I continued to stare at my face and I knew I wouldn't be asked to model either.

The shaving cream was beginning to dry. I decided I shouldn't wait much longer so I brought the razor up to my left cheek and drew it downward. I drew blood; I hated this ritual.

I got dressed. I couldn't find my shorts so I had to free ball it.

I guess Linda got a trophy too.

It was 10:00 a.m. by the time I arrived at my place; my face was covered with tiny pieces of toilet paper preventing me from bleeding out.

I walked in the door and looked down at my dog.

Bear was staring at me with those baleful Saint Bernard eyes that he inherited from one of his mother's lovers. He began to whine.

I forgot to leave the pet door open; poor guy.

I patted his massive head, "Sorry pal, I'll let you out."

He got excited and started to turn around in circles. I don't know what it is about circles with this dog. I know there were times when I had to go so bad that I thought I was in heaven when I finally was able to let a stream loose; so I felt for my best friend and immediately opened the door. He shot out like a bullet and ran toward the nearest tree and lifted his leg. I didn't think his stream would ever end.

I was walking back to the bedroom to change clothes when the phone rang.

Aw hell; who could this be? I thought.

"Yeah?"

It was Harry.

"You busy, Max?"

"No, I'm not busy. I was just sitting here wondering what to do with little leftover pieces of soap."

“Do you want me to tell you?”

“No, save your breath. I have an idea what you’d say.”

“If you want a change of scenery, come down to the Pfister Hotel, the sixth floor, room 6233.

“If I want a change of scenery, I’ll go stand in my closet.”

“Your choice, wise guy. There is someone you might want to meet. I got another stiff. Pfister Hotel, sixth Floor. Look for the blue parade out front. Sgt Sadowski is at the cage. He’ll let you up.”

Chapter 9

I threw on my coat and went out to brush the snow off my Edsel and head downtown to Lake Michigan and the Pfister Hotel not knowing exactly what was happening. Two murders in two days in Milwaukee? Must be something in the water. It started to rain and then snow and then rain and snow, or sleet as Wisconsinites call it.

By the time I pulled onto state Highway 18, it had turned into a light mist; not enough to require the windshield wipers to go all the time. So I had to turn them on and off which only caused the light film of dirt that had accumulated on my windshield to turn to mud and smear as the wipers passed over it making it difficult to see. I kept my defroster running full blast to keep the mist on my windshield from freezing into a brown muddy film of ice. I hate Wisconsin winters and it isn’t winter yet.

Police cars were parked all around the hotel. I pulled my Edsel in behind a black and white and threw my press card on the dash. I opened the door and ran across the front steps and into the lobby of the Pfister. The press card didn’t mean much. Most times the cars with the press cards were the first to be towed. Since it was a new Edsel, I figured the boys in blue would admire it instead, while drinking their coffee and eating donuts.

The Pfister Hotel is located three blocks from the shores of Lake Michigan. It was built in 1893 and billed as The Grand Hotel of the West. It’s been the premier joint in downtown Milwaukee ever since.

It started to get a little shabby beginning in the early 1950s before being purchased by a guy named Ben Marcus who said he would bring it back to its glory years.

I have to admit it’s looking nice but I won’t go near the place. People have claimed to have heard and seen strange things, such as pounding behind the headboard of their bed, to seeing apparitions of the hotel’s founder, Charles Pfister, walking down the halls; and, if you want to believe all of the stories, some goats and dogs walking around as well. I think the goats were seen by some Arabs and my friend Allen Dupont.

I saw a uniform standing by the elevator turning people away. I recognized him as Sergeant Jimmy Sadowski from the Ninth Precinct. He knows Harry and I go back many years and he usually allows me to get into restricted areas others are banned from. Today, I knew Harry told him to let me pass.

“Hiya, Sarge,” I say as I approach him with my right hand extended for a friendly handshake. He grasps it and nods at me, taking the ten spot I have hidden there.

Even though today I don't need to make the bribe, I figure it never hurts to make one of Milwaukee's finest feel a little better whenever the opportunity arises.

"Sixth floor, Max. Lt. Marshall and Detective Menjou are up there sniffin' around. They'll be happy to see ya'."

"I bet they will. Thanks, Sarge." I pushed six and the door of the gilded cage closed behind me. I looked up at the intricately designed ceiling as the elevator groaned and moaned, taking me up to the sixth floor, where I entered the scene of another killing. The first thing that came to mind was, ghosts or goats?

When I arrived, Harry and Paulie were standing in the far corner of the room looking at a body lying on the floor next to a large ornately carved bed. I started to look around when a uniform grabbed my arm.

"Careful there, chum. Don't touch nothin'. We ain't had a chance to dust everything yet."

"Sorry. Chum? That's fish bait isn't it?"

"It is. He has you pegged already." Harry nodded at the uniform to let me pass. I walked into the room and stood behind Harry.

"You busy?"

He looked at me with a wary smile. "Come on, let me show you a well-dressed cadaver."

I followed him.

The stiff was laid out and covered with a white sheet. He already had been tagged. His huge frame displaced much of the small room.

The floor was covered with a brown and blue Persian Rug, which would have been beautiful if it wasn't for the stiff's body lying in the middle of it.

It was obvious whoever this was had been feeding his pet stomach.

"Who is it?"

"His name is Charles Johnson. You ever heard of him?"

"No, who is he, somebody famous? It looks like he got a warning shot right between the eyes."

"He's nobody anymore. It looks like they used a knife on him before they shot him with a big gun. A .357 or larger. They also cut off his dick I guess so he couldn't enjoy any romantic evenings in his afterlife if he has one. You won't believe where they put it," he said turning the body on its side.

I saw a bloody piece of mangled meat dangling out of the victim's ass.

"Now that's making a statement, Harry."

He nodded. "I am really getting tired of these mutilation homicides," Harry said.

"What kind do you prefer?"

"Just the regular kind. You know, with a bullet behind the ear. Quick and easy. Just regular toe tags."

"I don't suppose you know who did this."

"Not yet. We found this on the floor." Harry held up a .44 Magnum with a pencil he stuck between the trigger guard, to avoid messing up any possible fingerprints. "A lot of firepower."

"Is that his?"

"We think so. It hasn't been fired recently."

"How'd you know he was here?"

"Anonymous tip. We think it was a woman staying in the next room. Paulie talked to her."

"She said she saw two men enter the victim's room last night. She might be able to ID the perps and she's not the only one that mentioned seeing two men with this guy.

"The son of a bitch pissed on the carpet," Harry said staring down at a dark spot that was on the carpet by the crotch of the corpse.

Harry pushed back his hat, rubbing his lower back.

"I'm waiting for the Medical Examiner and then I gotta leave.

"Follow me. We'll wait for the body snatchers out in the hall and I'll tell you what's happening," he said, as he walked out into the hallway and pulled out a Lucky Strike, sticking it in the corner of his mouth.

I took out my Zippo Lighter with the Army Air Corp insignia and spun the wheel, sparking the flint and sending a flame shooting into the air. I put it to the end of Harry's cigarette.

"Damn, Max, turn that thing down a little will you? You singed my eyebrows and with that flame, you might torch our crime scene here."

Harry inhaled deeply, bringing a bright glow to the end of the stick before blowing smoke rings into the air over his head.

"I'm up to my eyeballs in death."

"Up to your eyeballs in death? What in the hell does that mean?"

"That means we have a bunch of dead people, Max. This stiff on the floor is Charles Johnson, from Atlanta, Georgia. Paulie just finished interviewing some of the Pfister employees, including the night bartender. The bartender said that Mr. Johnson has been a regular here for a few weeks and was sitting at the bar recently when two men came in and sat down next to him. They addressed Mr. Johnson as Hogjaw. Cute nickname, don't you think? The bartender said one of the guys was called "Lefty" and the other guy was extremely fat and had very bad body odor. Does anyone come to mind who might fit that description, Max?"

"You and Big Maxie Greenbaum?"

"Fuck you but you are on the money. We checked downtown to see who we have on file with the nickname Lefty. Turns out the other piece of shit is none other than James "Lefty" Franks. The bartender identified him immediately."

Harry continued, "So they get into this argument, see, and a fight ensues and Lefty Franks and Big Maxie Greenbaum start beating on Hogjaw Johnson until a couple of patrolmen arrive and pull them apart. Big Maxie and Lefty are hauled off to the slammer while Hogjaw Johnson, who is out like a light, is thrown on a gurney by the medics and taken to Milwaukee General Hospital for observation. He's released the next day.

A few days later the house peeper says he sees him in the same bar with a young woman who matches the description of this dead girl, Candi Cane, also from Atlanta, Georgia, who, you know, we found stabbed to death on the playground at Auer Avenue Elementary school. We wonder, is there a connection between this Candi Kane chick and Hogjaw Johnson, who is now lying dead on the sixth floor of this hotel, or is it just a coincidence they are both from Atlanta and just so happen to turn up dead in the same city over one thousand miles away from their home? You know how I feel about coincidences."

I nod.

"You read about this whack job we have who is picking off young lovers along the Menomonee River Parkway, right? I know you can read a little since I now know you attended Auer Avenue Elementary School on a marble scholarship. The creative writers, like your roly-poly little shit kicker Horace Greenberg, over at the Sentinel and

even the Milwaukee Journal crew have started calling the killer the Midnight Rider because he strikes late at night. Catchy name don't you think? And they go to college to learn all of this shit?"

Harry was building up steam and hardly took time to take a breath before continuing. "Ever since they put that freak Gein's picture on the front page of the newspaper all the sickos come out wanting attention so they can be famous just like him. They are killing like there is no tomorrow and I don't have enough detectives to handle it all." He inhaled again and blew out a series of smoke rings before he continued.

"Then we get a couple who were parked behind the clubhouse near the 18th green out at Westmore Country Club in Brookfield. They miraculously survive their night of terror and we hope they can get their heads straight and give good descriptions of their attacker that match. When we talk to them it's like they were attacked by two different guys, one a negro and the other a deeply tanned white guy.

"So there you have it," Harry said, putting his cigarette butt out in the sand of an ashtray situated by the door of the elevator.

"You know it's rumored that the Pfister is haunted. Maybe this Hogjaw guy walked in on a couple of ghosts in flagrante delicti or maybe it was you and that hot doctor you have been plugging that he walked in on. Anything is possible at this point."

"It's not possible it was me. I couldn't afford to stay in the lobby let alone in a room here," I replied.

"Yeah, well, we found this in his pants pocket, Do you know where he might have got it?" He handed me a business card.

I looked at it. It was my business card.

Chapter 10

Harry was at his desk, reviewing a stack of reports when he heard someone walk in. He looked up and smiled.

"That suit makes you look like you spent the last ten hours in a dryer, Harry," Captain E.J. Williams said as she walked in and sat down hard on one of the chairs in front of his desk.

Harry gave Captain Williams an appreciative visual going over. "You look nice, too." Only he meant it. He always liked the way a uniform looked on her.

Captain Williams had taken to wearing her dress uniform since she was promoted over him from detective to Captain in charge of the Milwaukee Police Force's Homicide Division. Harry thought she had become political and she seemed to be bucking for a promotion to the next level. She was ambitious and he felt she would stop at nothing to achieve her goal. They had been friends, actually more than just friends, for years but that didn't mean she wouldn't throw him to the wolves if it meant it would further her career.

Her white blouse was buttoned to her neck with her brass name tag hanging auspiciously over her right breast and her navy dress slacks hugging her hips like they hugged no other on the Milwaukee Police force.

"Just give me what you have so far. Start with the Midnight Rider Murders so I can pass it along to the Chief. He's been trying to get me transferred ever since he took over. I think he hates women."

“Want me to introduce him to Max’s frolicsome neighbors?”

“Max’s frolicsome neighbors?”

“Yeah those two fruits that live in the Rainbow Towers next to Max.”

“Just tell me what you have on these murders,” she replied, shaking her head.

Harry smiled as he picked up his blower and punched in a number. He stared at EJ as he waited for someone to pick up.

“Hey, find Taylor and get your asses in here. The captain wants an update on the Midnight Rider case.” Harry heard Detective Chet George moan.

George hated the name the Milwaukee papers gave to the person killing young lovers along the Menomonee River Parkway over the last few months.

EJ was about to say something when Detective Chester George and his partner, Marty Taylor, walked in and sat down and positioned their chairs so they faced Captain Williams. “Morning, Captain.”

“Good morning, detectives. Why don’t you start?”

Detective George began to read what they had gathered up to that point.

“It all started when we got a call on a double murder, which involved a young couple, a Richard Craig and Sandra Moore, from Brown Deer, who happened to be out late, necking along Menomonee River Parkway. They were both beaten to death with a blunt object, believed to be the butt end of a revolver. She was also sexually assaulted.

Menomonee River Parkway connects with Hoyt Parkway, Park Ridge Avenue, Keefe Avenue, Concordia Avenue, and West Auer Avenue. Close by is the Wauwatosa Stone Quarry. It was purchased a few years ago by a firm called Best Rocks from a Walter Hartung, an old farmer whose family had owned the property since they ran the Indians off. It is secluded. During the day, it is a quiet and peaceful place to walk and enjoy the day, but at night, it is a place where young people go to be alone and do what young people do.

A week after Craig and Moore were killed, a young woman, named Lynn Olsen, was walking her dog down Watertown Plank Road when she was attacked and dragged into the woods where she was raped and left for dead. Her boyfriend found her when he stopped by her apartment and found her dog sitting on the front porch shaking. He knocked on the door and when no one answered, he went inside and found it empty. He went looking for her and heard her moaning in the woods and called the Elm Grove Police.

This shit has sent the town of Elm Grove into a state of panic. It gets dark and the city locks down. The police patrol the streets and neighborhoods. Most businesses have lost customers at night, but the stores that carry guns sold out of them along with ammunition, locks, and other protective devices. Then rumors began to fly around, ranging from the killer was caught, or that a third and even fourth double-homicide had been committed.”

“When was this?” Williams asked.

“About four weeks ago.”

“Okay, continue.”

“Then the rumor came true; we had another double-homicide, involving a Paul Taylor and Betty Jo McDonnell in the same Park. It occurred exactly five weeks after the first murders.

“We questioned a guy named Ewell Simmons from Kenosha. Have you heard of him, Captain?”

Captain Williams shook her head no.

George continued, "He's a known criminal with a history of counterfeiting and auto-theft. He was seen in the area around the time that young girl Candi Kane was murdered. Her body was found at the Auer Avenue Elementary School on the playground in the back of the school. Auer Avenue, by the way, continues on into Wauwatosa and becomes West Auer Avenue and connects with the Menomonee River Parkway area.

"The MO on the Kane murder doesn't even come close to the MO on the Menomonee River Parkway murders so we doubt there is a connection here beyond where Auer Avenue is located.

"Since there is no evidence linking Simmons to Menomonee River murders or any murder, we had to cut him loose. We couldn't charge him with anything except being a sleazebag and a creep and we couldn't hold him on that so he is gone. We told him he's still a person of interest so don't leave the state and make us go looking for you. I think Ewell kinda fancies that name 'Midnight Rider.' He was smirking when he left. "A week later, Marty here," Detective George nods in the direction of his partner, Marty Taylor, sitting to his right, "gets a call from the Waukesha Sheriff's Department. Sheriff Terry Freeman reports that a couple was assaulted behind the clubhouse by the eighteenth green at the Westmore Country Club in Brookfield. A guy named Virgil Thomas and a lady named Katie Jackson."

"I guess he was attempting to get a hole in one," Harry interjected.

Captain Williams rolled her eyes. "Cute, Harry."

George and Taylor both laughed.

George continued, "Anyway, Captain, Sheriff Freeman telexed their report over to us. The couple was parked behind the clubhouse around one in the morning when someone attacked them."

He looked down at his notes. "The couple arrived at the scene around 1:00 a.m. After about ten minutes, a man walked up to Thomas' driver-side door and flashed a flashlight in his face, blinding him. Thomas thought it was a prank and told the man, 'Bud-dy, you've got me mixed up with someone else. You've got the wrong man.' The man had a pistol and told him something like, 'I don't want to kill you pal, so do what I say' and ordered them to get out of the car. They both got out through the driver-side door. The man told Thomas to take off his pants. Jackson said she pleaded with Thomas to take them off, believing that if he did they would not be hurt, but, after Thomas removed his trousers, he was struck twice in the head with a heavy, blunt object, most likely the gun. Jackson said that the noise was so loud she thought he had been shot, but she learned later it was the sound of Virgil's skull cracking. Katie Jackson then picked up Thomas' pants and pulled out his wallet. She told the assailant, 'He doesn't have any money.'"

Harry chimed in, "She probably was wondering what she was doing out with a guy who didn't have any money."

Captain Williams glared at Harry. "Will you shut up? Continue, Detective."

"The assailant told her she was lying and that she had a purse. Jackson told him that she did not and he knocked her to the ground. She said she felt like she was hit with an iron pipe. The assailant ordered her to get up, and, when she did, he told her to run. She stated that while she was running, she heard Thomas groaning and that the man continued to beat and stomp him. She was having trouble running in her high heels. Soon the assailant ran after her. She saw an older truck parked further up the road facing the clubhouse. She quickly looked inside to see if anyone could help her, but after seeing no one, she began to run and was overtaken by the attacker. She

said she knew he was going to kill her. He knocked her down and assaulted her sexually. Jackson stated, 'he did not rape her but abused her terribly.' We found out later from medical reports the assailant sexually assaulted her with the barrel of his gun.

"We think she was too embarrassed to admit she was sexually violated. She said she managed to get up and pleaded with the assailant to kill her. He didn't and she ran half a mile, believing she was being chased. She ended up at the residence of a Howard Gallatin, 1485 Byerly Street, where she screamed for help and banged on the front door. She said a car passed and she yelled but it did not stop. She then ran to the back of the house where she was finally able to wake up the Gallatins, who then notified the sheriff's department. Waukesha County Sheriff Terry Freeman and three other officers arrived at the scene, but the attacker had already left the area. They found Thomas' pants 100 yards away from where he was attacked.

"Thomas had made his way to Highway 18 and was able to flag down a passing motorist, who contacted a local funeral home ambulance. The ambulance took him to the hospital. Thomas thought the attacker may have been scared off by some dogs barking nearby.

"Thomas was treated for minor cuts and received stitches for head wounds. He spent three days in the hospital with three skull fractures.

"We told Sheriff Freeman that we would like to speak to the two victims. He agreed with that and when we interviewed Katie Jackson, she stated that she asked the attacker to kill her because she would rather have been dead than to be touched or abused. She also explained that she did not understand why sheriff's officers did not believe her when she told them she believed the attacker was a negro and that she did not know who he was. She said officers attempted to coerce her into stating that she knew the assailant.

"I don't know why they would do that, Captain, and we asked her why and she just shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

"Jackson described her attacker as a man with a white mask over his head, with cut out places for his eyes and mouth.

Because Thomas was blinded by the flashlight before being beaten, he did not notice a mask. Although Thomas believed the guy was a dark-tanned white man, Jackson believed he was a light-skinned negro, and I quote, 'because of the way he pronounced the curse words he growled.' They both agreed he was about six feet tall.

"Somehow, Horace Greenberg of the Milwaukee Sentinel got a hold of the details of the attack and wrote an article that was published on the front page of the Sentinel with the headline 'Midnight Rider Strikes Again, Beats Waukesha Man and Woman.'

"So far we are not aware of any developments that have been made by the Waukesha Sheriff's Department, but they are continuing to investigate the attack and we asked them to keep us posted on any developments. They think it's an isolated incident but we feel there are similarities between the attacks around the Menomonee River Parkway area and that one at Westmore Country Club in Brookfield. They are located pretty close together. Somewhere between seven to ten miles.

"Katie Jackson has moved to Oconomowoc to live with her aunt and uncle. We drove out there on two separate occasions to question her and after talking directly to her, we still feel there are some similarities between the murders we are looking into and the incident with her and Thomas.

"Later, in an interview with Horace Greenberg again, Thomas and Jackson stated that their attacker was the same person who killed the other five victims found along

the Menomonee River Parkway. Now Thomas was quoted as saying he was attacked by a young white man; under thirty years old. I guess Thomas just finished a psychology course because he claims his assailant is crazy because of the crazy things he said. Thomas said he told the deputy sheriff and city attorney in Brookfield right after he was attacked, that that man was dangerous; a potential murderer and the next person he gets will be killed.

"A week later, a Michael Starks was found dead in the ditch along the Menomonee River Parkway. He had been beaten to death with a blunt instrument

"Two bodies were found Wednesday out in Wauwatosa on Menomonee River Parkway again. Death by bludgeoning with a heavy blunt instrument. We think there are three people alive today who escaped from that man. The woman who is in the hospital now, Lynn Olsen, and Katie Jackson and Virgil Thomas."

"Holy shit, is there anything else?" Williams asked.

"On the Midnight Rider case? We aren't sure, Captain, we might have more; seems like the gift that keeps on giving."

George turned the page and continued reading from his notes.

"A Walter L. Griffin, age 29, and his girlfriend of six weeks, Polly Ann Moore, age 27, were found dead in Griffin's 1958 Oldsmobile sedan on Sunday morning, between 8:30 and 9:00 by a passing motorist. The motorist saw the parked car on Hoyt Parkway near Concordia Road about one hundred yards south of Menomonee River Parkway. The motorist, at first, thought that they were asleep. Griffin was found between the front seats on his knees with his head resting on his crossed hands, and his pockets were turned inside out. Miss Moore was found sprawled face-down in the back seat. Griffin had been shot twice while still in the car and both had been shot once in the back of the head and he was fully clothed. Moore's underpants were on the floor of the back seat and her purse was beside her. It contained the photo of her that was used in the morning, Sentinel. The motorist contacted the Elm Grove police who then contacted us. According to their report, which was written by Officer Thomas Tackett, Moore was killed on a blanket in front of the vehicle before being placed back inside. Evidence of a sexual attack was on the blanket."

"Okay, thanks, detectives. I want you to make this a priority, you hear me? The chief has the mayor and every city councilman breathing down his neck and he is doing the same to me and I hate the smell of his breath. So solve these murders and do it yesterday. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, captain."

"You can go now."

After Detectives George and Taylor left, Captain Williams turned to Harry and said, "What about these other murders, Harry?"

"I answered a call of a shooting at North 91st Street and Humboldt Avenue. A run-down housing complex. It was one of Romeo Buttici's boys, Arnie Ice Iaconni. He had a round trip plane ticket from Milwaukee to Atlanta. He never got to use it.

"His throat was slit from stem to stern; got a good look at his neck vertebrae. He had a .357 caliber slug in his forehead. An insurance policy I guess.

"Then we get another one and it is a doozy as well, Captain." Harry pulled out a Lucky Strike and lit it, blowing a stream of blue smoke in the air.

He reached into his pocket for his notebook and flipped it open. Leaning his elbows on the desk, he continued.

"Okay, Captain, earlier this week we found a Mr. Charles Johnson, A.K.A. Hogjaw Johnson, from Atlanta, Georgia, stabbed and also shot to death with a .357 in his

room at the Pfister Hotel. He was also mutilated. His tallywhacker was removed surgically with a very sharp knife and inserted up his rectum.”

“His what?”

“His what, what?” Harry asked.

“Don’t be a smart-ass. Tallywhacker?”

“His dick, penis, you know?”

“No I don’t know, but continue.”

“We got ourselves an eye witness, sort of. An old lady staying in the room across the hall. She sort of identified two guys that fit the description of one Maxie Greenbaum and Jimmy Lefty Franks, two bottom feeders who sometimes run errands for the Buttucci gang. If it ever goes to trial, we will make sure it’s a 100% identification by her.

“Anyway, I can’t imagine those two bumbling idiots cutting off a guy’s prick and stuffing it up his ass.”

Harry closed his notebook and put it back in his suit coat pocket and opened the file folder in front of him. He began reading the report on Candi Kane.

“Now here is what we have so far on this Candi Kane. Some young boys found her early Monday morning when they arrived to play on the playground before school started. Candi is a young woman, mid to late twenties, brown hair, slender body. She had multiple stab wounds about her arms and chest. Defensive wounds on her hands. She was badly beaten about the head and body. Some purple bruises on her chest and legs as well as her face; split lip and a crushed right orbital socket. Both eyes removed and a long gash in her neck. Pretty apparent that she was stabbed to death. Similar to the type of beating gangsters give their members who talk too much or who they are trying to extract information from.”

“Both eyes removed?”

Harry nodded, “The only thing EJ, is her profile doesn’t fit. Even though we found three different ID’s on her. She’s a student at Layton School of Art and lived with two classmates in a small apartment on Ogden Avenue. Before that, she lived with her aunt out in Pewaukee. No priors. Not even a parking ticket.”

Harry continued reading, “The coroner estimated that the corpse had been dead for about two days. There was not much else he could determine without a thorough examination. We are still waiting for his final report.”

“Atlanta seems to be a common denominator in all of these killings, doesn’t it?”

“Yep.”

“A lot of knife work along with the shootings. That’s unusual,” Williams said. “It is pretty obvious then that she wasn’t killed on the playground. The kids would have been playing around the corpse Thursday and Friday if she was,” Captain Williams said, shaking her head.

“Yeah, shortly after we arrived, we had people gawking trying to see what all the excitement was about. We questioned all of them; nothing much from that. We had a couple of uniforms go door to door asking people in the surrounding neighborhoods as well as the local store owners to see if anyone saw or heard anything out of the ordinary the last couple of days.

That turned out to be a dead end. Down in that neck of the woods nothing is out of the ordinary I guess.

A preliminary examination of the clothing found at the scene revealed little. Some change and the usual odds and ends, a comb and hair brush, barrette and some Bobbi pins and this,” Harry pulled out the note with the words BLUE MAGIC written on it. We are keeping this quiet.”

“Heroin?” Captain Williams asked.

“Yep, and not too many coeds know those are the code words for it. It’s something new. Also, we found this worn leather wallet with three one dollar bills and this inside.”

Harry spilled the contents on his desk which included the three different driver’s licenses.

“There must be a reason that a young woman her age would change her name. I mean besides getting married. And, look at this,” Harry continued, pointing at a space at the bottom of the card classified “In Case of Accident Notify...” And next to it were the words “Hilga Haller, 1163 Highway 60 Pewaukee, Wisconsin.”

“Atlanta Georgia? And Pewaukee? Why is she here in Pewaukee and why is this Hilga Haller the one to be contacted in case of emergency?” Captain Williams asked.

“She’s her aunt.”

“I see. Do you have a theory yet as to why she was killed?”

“I’m still working on that, but she must have known something, Captain. There was a young lady who walked onto the crime scene, also from Atlanta. She identified the body. She said she is the half sister of the victim and that she has been looking for her for over six months. Paulie has her in the interrogation room now taking her deposition. She says her name is Pearl Medusa Podvin. She goes by Medusa.”

“She has a thing for snakes?”

“Huh?” Harry said.

“Never mind. At least, that gives us something to start with,” Williams said.

Harry nodded his head, “She told Paulie that Candi’s parents were shot execution style in their home last year. They lived in Buckhead, a tony neighborhood in North Atlanta. The murders are still unsolved. Maybe she knew why they were murdered or saw who did it and they wanted to silence her. To clean up the loose ends.”

“How do you think they found her up here; I mean Milwaukee, saying nothing about Pewaukee? Both cities are pretty much off the grid from Atlanta. Someone had to know she was here.”

“We are going to have to answer that if we want to solve her murder and we may have a line on it.”

“You’d better get in touch with the Atlanta police and see what they know of this Candi Kane and Medusa girl. Also, check with this Hilga Haller and see what she can tell you about Candi’s activities on the last day she saw her. She might know who some of Candi’s friends are. Have someone interview whoever you can locate and try to pinpoint where this young girl spent most of her time while she was here in the lovely Beer Capital of The World.”

“We are a step ahead of you Captain. We are on it.”

“I figured you were, Lieutenant.”

“I also thought you would be interested to know that your friend, Max Fly, appeared on the scene,” Harry said with a smile.

Captain Williams wasn’t smiling, “What was he doing there; just happen to be in the neighborhood?”

“No, actually Horace Greenberg gave him a heads up.”

“What was Horace doing there and why call Max, they a number now?”

“Max lives a few houses down from this Hilga Haller on Pewaukee Lake and she asked him to help find her niece. Max was heading to Arizona chasing a skirt or on another case, or whatever he does to occupy his time, so he asked Horace to help find Candi.

I thought I would take Max with me to ask this Hilga Haller some questions after we broke the news to her about her niece. Since Max is her neighbor and she did ask him to help find the girl, she might be more apt to open up and talk to us. Hopefully, she can give us a time line on what Miss Kane was doing on the last day before she checked out.”

A dark cloud passed over Captain William’s face. She stood and bent over to look Harry directly in the eyes before commenting, “Harry, the human body has seven trillion nerves. Did you know that?”

Harry was wondering where she was going with this and was about to tell her that he didn’t give a rat’s ass how many nerves were in the human body, but Captain Williams most likely knew that, and didn’t care if he knew the answer to her rhetorical question or not; she didn’t give him a chance to respond.

“Well, that friend of yours, Max Fly, has managed to get on every fucking one of those seven trillion nerves of mine. Tell him that the only reason he is alive is because it is illegal for me to shoot him. Keep a leash on him, do you understand me?”

“Yep. I’ll try but it won’t be easy.”

“Do more than try because that won’t fly with me, okay? And that’s not a pun. Just do it.”

“Okay Captain,” Harry replied. “I’ll use him and pump him for what information he has and then kick his ass back to Rocco’s Pub.”

Captain Williams remained leaning on Harry’s desk for another thirty seconds, not moving. A malevolent stare was on her face and she directed it at Harry just so he knew she wasn’t in the mood for any more of his wiseass remarks.

“Anything else?” Captain Williams asked.

Harry looked up at her and gave her one anyway, “Her bra size is 34B,” he smiled Captain Williams straightened up with a quizzical look on her face, “Whose bra size?” she asked.

“The vic’s.” Harry looked up from writing his report and glanced over the top of his glasses at Captain Williams and gave her the Groucho Marx eyebrow wriggle.

“I hope that’s important,” she said, shaking her head in disgust.

“I guess you have some work ahead of you, don’t you, Harry? How is Paulie working out?” she asked, changing the subject as she started to walk out of his office.

“He’s all right for a guy born with a stick up his ass but I’m getting it out of there; slowly but surely. His tits are smaller than my old partner’s.”

She put her hands on her hips and puffed out her chest and said, “You a tit man, Harry?”

“You know I am, Captain.”

Harry wondered if she puffed her chest out to remind him that she was way past the 34B point and had been for a long time.

He could never tell with her and now that she was his boss, he was afraid to ask. He shook his head in admiration. “Oh yes, Captain, yes I am.”

“I know you are,” she said softly.

“Now listen, I am serious. The chief has been trying to get me transferred since he took over. He doesn’t like women and he sees these murders as another chance to get rid of one-me; and I won’t let that happen, even if it means I have to get back on the streets to solve them.”

“I have always had your back, Captain, and I have it now. We’ll get these mopes off the street. Don’t worry.”

“I do worry; it’s my job. Now get back to work.”

Harry watched her leave before he picked up the phone and called Detectives Chet George and Marty Taylor back in his office.

“Candi Kane that body we just found at Auer Avenue School? She’s originally from Atlanta. The address we have is 1150 Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta. I agree with you, I don’t think she is tied in with the Midnight Rider killings you guys are working on, but I need you to check in with the Atlanta Police Department and see what they have on her.”

“Atlanta, Georgia?” Detective Taylor asked.

“Is there another Atlanta?” Harry said shaking his head, writing Candi’s information on a notepad. He tore off a sheet and handed it to Detective George. “I’ll be heading out to Pewaukee Lake to let the aunt know that we found her niece while you guys are following up with Atlanta.”

“Okay Lieutenant, we got it,” Detective Taylor replied. They turned to leave Harry’s office and Harry yelled after them, “Something is going on in Milwaukee and we better find out what it is and squash it before this becomes a living hell for all of us.” They both nodded and left.

Harry knew that this was just the beginning of something that more than likely would turn into a nightmare, or as they say in the Army, a clusterfuck; not only for him and the Milwaukee Police Department, but also for the entire city of Milwaukee and, if his intuition was correct, the city of Atlanta. And anytime there was a nightmare on the horizon, he was sure to find Max Fly nearby.

He picked up the phone again and dialed a number he knew by heart.

A deep voice answered. “Rocco’s Pub.”

“Rocco, this is Harry. Is Max there?”

“Yep, he and Hap have just about put all my customers to sleep with their bullshit stories.”

“Well, tell him to stay put. I’m coming down and I need to talk to him. Have a brandy manhattan waiting for me and put it on Max’s tab. Aw hell, you might as well make it a double. I need it.”

Harry hung up.

He grabbed his suit coat off the back of his chair and pulled his gun out of the top right hand drawer of his desk, clipping it on the back of his belt before slipping his arms into his coat and walking out the door to the interrogation room to get his partner, Paulie Menjou, and the young girl from Atlanta who calls herself Medusa. Jeez, this younger generation, where do they get the ideas for these crazy names. Max and Hap are going to enjoy meeting this one, Harry thought, chuckling to himself, as he opened the door to Interrogation Room #3. It’ll be fun watching those two old coots scratchin’ and bitin’ each other to try and score with the young lady behind door number three.

“Let’s go, both of you. We are going to dip the bill.” Then looking at Pearl Medusa Podvin, sitting at the table across from his partner, he said, “And I have some people I’d like you to meet. I think you might find them interesting; one’s that private investigator who was at Auer Avenue School earlier and I’m still not sure what the other one is.”

“A pain in the ass,” Paulie added.

Chapter 11

I saw the sign as I turned off Highway 100. It brought a smile to my face. Rocco's Pub is like many neighborhood bars, it provides comfort for those who frequent it on a regular basis and I have frequented it about as regularly as anyone can.

It's like home. Over the years, it has provided more comfort to me than Dr. Lundgren's couch. I don't think the doctor would understand that even if I tried to explain it to her. But then again she is a therapist...

I have to admit, I looked pretty good when I walked in the Pub. I was wearing a gray suit and a dark gray snap-brim fedora. I wasn't wearing a tie, I don't own one, and I was still in need of a shave. I didn't trust putting a blade close to my neck this morning because my hands shook like a cat shitting on a sheet of ice.

My light gray Dan Post cowboy boots were buffed and looking fine. I was sporting my belt buckle for being the first runner-up for all around cowboy on the state of Texas' pro rodeo circuit in 1937. That and a dime gets me a cup of coffee at Rocco's.

My .38 caliber Colt Belly gun was tucked snugly in its rig under my left arm. Lorraine left me with a smile on my face that I smugly wore as I strolled through the door. I needed something to keep my mind off my troubles and I knew getting to work and finding out more about Candi Kane's murder would help with that. It seems that murder and mayhem always help get me out of any funk I might be in at the time.

I glanced around. Rocco was in the middle of telling one of his jokes.

"One Saturday afternoon, this guy was sitting in his lawn chair, drinking beer and watching his wife mow the lawn. The neighbor lady from across the street was so outraged at this that she came over and shouted at him, 'You should be hung.' He calmly replied, 'I am. That's why she cuts the grass.'"

There were four guys and a young woman sitting at the bar sipping drinks and they all broke out in laughter. I sat down next to them. I knew them all, Sam Galbraith was a flyboy with a reputation for shooting down more seagulls than Jap Zeros during his time in the South Pacific in World War II, flying off the aircraft carrier, *USS Enterprise*. He looked pretty serene and calm, a neat trick to pull off since he has been married three times before. Allen Dupont was a former goat herder, and horse breeder now raising chickens on a large poultry farm off Burleigh Road in East Brookfield. We met Dupont in Colorado when we were buying bucking stock for the local rodeos in the midwest. He is a distant relative and black sheep of the Dupont family, who made part of their fortune compounding chemicals; he moved to Wisconsin when he married Sam's sister, Gertrude.

Then there is Ralph Mills, a land developer from Menomonee Falls, who will marry any woman who is still breathing if she is crazy enough to say 'I do.' If he sees a patch of green anywhere, he will build something on it. The last guy sitting at the bar was a surprise. William Bennett, whose stage name is Raja, which means King in Hindi he used to perform at Rocco's about a year ago before he got a job at the Golden Nugget Casino in Las Vegas. He was still wearing his signature lime green pants, pink shirt and yellow sports coat that he wore while singing renditions of Frank Sinatra's favorite hits every weekend here at Rocco's. He resembled a giant ice cream cone. I would hate to see what he has hanging in his closet. With him was his singing partner, a blonde torch by the name of Barb E. Dahl. She told me Raja has seven sets of the same outfit hanging in his closet, a clean one for each day of the week. Today she was wearing a lime green pantsuit. She hooked up with Raja while he was singing in a supper club just outside her hometown of Madison Wisconsin years ago. No one is quite sure of what she sees in him unless she has a special liking for a small harmonica, that Raja plays while doing his set of country songs. She was sitting on the left side of him, as far away from Ralph Mills as she could get. I assumed for her own safety.

I tipped my hat. Ralph was sitting next to Sam Galbraith. He was bent over a glass of Crown Royal with his elbows resting on the bar. He looked like someone had just run over his dog. Pure dejection.

"What's up, Ralph?"

"You don't really want to know, Max."

"Give me a shot," I said. I figured I could venture out into his crazy little world for a few minutes. Just as long as the vortex of hell that appeared to be sucking him down didn't grab me as well.

He looked up at me. His eyes were already bloodshot and watery and his skin was looking a bit gray.

"My banker called me in his office last week to tell me they were repossessing my Corvette. When I tried to negotiate an extension on the payment he outright refused to listen to anything I had to say. He was a rude son of a bitch and I told him so. I also told him his brain was the size of a California snap pea and he exploded. Rejection stamps on all my future requests to finance any building projects passed before my eyes. I have been through four wives and every one of them took something from me. The last one just walked out with the coconut head that hung in my office. I got that from my first wife on our honeymoon in Tarpon Springs. I have gone through two gut-busting bankruptcies, a six-month stint at Alcoholics Anonymous, listening to ten other red eyed, loose skin trembling addicts tell me how they are able to stay away from the bottle after which I go home to drink away their droning voices. I survived one near fatal shooting when I attempted to evict one of my deadbeat tenants. But I have to tell you, I haven't felt better.

"Hap, pour me another shot of Crown?"

"Haven't felt better? Yeah, I can see that. Well, hang in there, Ralph. Things will turn around. You're like a rubber ball, you'll come bouncing back."

"Sure I will. Have a drink on me. I gotta spend what money I have left before those blood suckin' bankers come and take it."

"Rocco, it appears this is my lucky day," I said, lifting my hand and pointed down the bar doing a head count of my four friends.

"Set up four Rocco."

I received a handful of middle fingers.

Rocco finished filling the cooler with some long necks.

"it's a little early in the morning to start out lining up the brandy, isn't it?"

"I guess you're right. How about a coffee, black? Don't tell me that squirrely guy wearing that yellow sports coat is going to be singing here again. This week has been bizarre enough."

Rocco is Dan Ciorrocco, the proprietor of Rocco's Pub.

I greeted the singing duo. "Welcome home Raja; it's great to see you again Ms. Dahl. How is Mr. Bennett's little harmonica doing?"

Barb E. Dahl smiled, "Oh, it's doing just fine, Max, just fine. He keeps hitting the right notes."

"He's lucky he has her for a partner and manager or he would be another one sitting at my bar waiting for free drinks. I already have enough of you guys. At least, if I pay him to play the piano and sing, I'll get some of my money back. Coffee, black," he said as he wiped the bar in front of me.

"Yeah, you guys wouldn't know good music if it bit you in the ass," Raja yelled down the bar. "I picked up the accordion while working Vegas and it was a big hit with the older women down there. I put a couple of polkas in my mix and they go wild."

"That's true," Barb E. Dahl added. "They really get excited when he starts out counting, a-one, a-two, a-three."

"They're probably surprised he can count," Sam added.

William Bennett showed him his chewed up middle finger.

"They thought I should get a bubble machine just like that Lawrence Welk guy has on his television show."

"No bubbles in here, Raja." Rocco set down an empty coffee mug in front of me and filled it with steaming hot black coffee.

"Go ahead and give it a pair of balls; put in a little Paul Masson, Rocco, pretty please."

"Such will power you have, Max. I haven't seen you around lately; you watch the Braves game last night?"

I pushed back my hat while sliding forward on the stool. "Unfortunately, I did. You should give Harry your recipe for your coffee. The crap he makes eats a hole through the lining of your stomach," I replied, taking a slow sip of the piping hot coffee.

"Yep," I continued, "the Braves stunk up the stadium last night."

"You can say that again; they should be going to the series again this fall. They definitely have the best team. Hell, maybe next year."

"Well, don't put your money on it, Rocco. Spahn and Burdette are getting a little long in the tooth and I don't see any pitchers coming up to take their place. They used to have a good farm system, but lately, they haven't brought up anyone with enough talent to stick. I gotta a feeling that prick Lou Perini and his Chicago friends are shopping the team to a major market; I hear rumors it may be Miami or Atlanta."

"The hell he will! The Braves pack in more fans in Milwaukee than any other team in the major leagues. It wouldn't make any sense to move them," Rocco replied, getting a little steamed when anything negative was said about his beloved Milwaukee Braves. The back of his bar looked like a shrine in honor of the team's past seven years in Milwaukee.

Rumors had been floating around for awhile about the Braves moving and I didn't like hearing it either.

"You're being naïve, Rocco. It's what these bastards get behind the scene that counts. Businesses in a larger market can offer them more than Harley Davidson,

Blatz, Pabst, Schlitz and Miller and the rest of the big boys here are willing to fork out. If another city is hungry enough, they'll give them enough tax incentives to get them. Everything is about money to that fuckin' Perini."

"That much I'll give you. These old beer families have their heads up their collective asses. I'd be surprised if they are still in business ten years from now. They are all living on their old man's blood, sweat, and tears."

"I hope we're wrong, Rocco. We don't need the Braves packing up and leaving Milwaukee to add to the rest of the misery in this city. I caught a case of a missing coed who just turned up dead and now Harry has found another stiff that looks like he might be tied into this young lady. To make it worse, Harry thinks the guy is a hit man for the Milwaukee Syndicate."

Rocco shook his head, "This city has become a cesspool and it starts in City Hall. He turned to leave. "I can't waste more time listening to this sorry bunch this morning. I gotta finish packin' the cooler in case I finally get a paying customer in here. I'll check on you in a bit. Hap is in the back and should be out in a minute."

Hap and I found each other while spending time in seedy back alley Cantinas, one of many that are scattered around the southern part of Texas. We both enjoyed chasing wild señoritas at night while they twirled around the bars and chasing wild horses and bulls during the day while they twirled in the hot Texas sun in every cow town north of the Mexican border. Hap had a positive attitude and a winning philosophy, "Drink 'til she's cute, but stop before the wedding." By following that philosophy, we both got out of Texas unscathed; well, hardly scathed.

Hap was making good time with a little lady named Mariana when he decided to hustle a couple of beaners in a game of pool when a fight broke out. I was sitting at a booth in the back with my hand up the skirt of a little señorita named Carmelita when I noticed four of the beaners beating up on Hap. The odds definitely were not in this gringo's favor. I looked around and Hap and I were the only white faces left in the joint so I figured I better lend him a helping hand.

When I came to, I was on my back in the alley behind the bar with Hap still out like a light lying beside me with Mariana applying a wet cloth to his bloodied and smashed up face. Carmelita was no where around.

When Hap came to, he lifted his head and smiled at Mariana before he looked over at me. He nodded his head. "Thanks for your help little buddy; I just wish you were a little bigger and knew how to fight."

We found out we were both from Milwaukee and that we both liked the same thing, brandy and women. It was a friendship that was made in heaven. From that day forward, we drank and caroused in cantinas as we rode our way through the state of Texas all the way back to Milwaukee.

Now Hap tends bar at Rocco's on a part-time basis. He uses the job to meet lonely women.

I finished filling out a report on my expenses I accumulated while doing some work recently for Northwest Mutual Insurance Company when Harry and Detective Menjou waltzed through the door. They had the young lady with them who was at the murder scene at Auer Avenue School where Candi Kane's body had been found.

Now that I was able to get a closer look at her I could see she was stacked like a locomotive. When she removed her coat, I noticed her arms and I could see she was sporting an interesting tattoo on the right forearm. It looked like a snake; a Cobra, coiled and ready to strike. I wondered if she was a biker's 'old lady.' They seemed to fancy getting tattooed, in more ways than one.

A lot of times, they wore those tattoos like cattle wear brands, allowing other gang members to know who they belonged too. I doubted this chick was with any biker gang, but you never know. She didn't look rough and used up like most of those women do; in fact, just the opposite. She carried her coat over her left arm and had a camel colored leather purse, hanging from a strap on her left shoulder. A white short sleeve V-neck sweater accentuated her assets in a virtuous and wholesome way. "There is nothing like a well-endowed woman wearing a low cut sweater that keeps a man on his toes," Hap whispered in my ear.

She pointed in my direction and I heard her ask Harry, "Isn't that the guy who was at the school where Candi was found?"

They sat down to my right with her sandwiched between the two cops. She smelled good, sort of a musky fragrance and I am not referring to the fish.

"That's Max Fly. As you can see, his fashion sense is a bit behind the curve. He thinks a hat makes him look dapper." Harry replied, looking at me with a smile. "Most people who know him, believe he has a slight mental disorder. He's currently seeing a shrink. Of course, Rocco here is seeing the same shrink, so it might have something to do with what Rocco serves in this place. Seems like the whole crew sitting at this bar is a little crazy. So's the bartender."

Hap smiled.

"I think Rocco feels sorry for Max," Harry continued. "He lets him spend time in here. Max is helpless, hopeless and sometimes homeless as well as harmless unless you happen to be a female. Then he is just annoying. You can usually find him sitting there drooling on the bar and mumbling to himself; most folks just ignore him. I suggest you do the same."

"Well, I find most men annoying. The rest are dead. How can you have a slight mental disorder? You either have one or don't have one. But I like my men a little crazy anyway," she said with a wink while waving Hap over with her index finger.

I smiled at her remark before replying. "My life is so basic, it hardly requires my presence."

She looked at me for a moment before turning to Hap, "I'll take a brandy and coke."

"You got it. What's your name?"

"Pearl."

"Pearl? I like it."

"Good, most people call me Medusa."

Hap looked at her like she had something on her teeth, "That's nice," he replied, turning toward Harry mouthing, "Where did you find this one?"

"The usual Hap," he said, ignoring his question.

"Okay. What are you having, Paulie?"

"Cutty and water."

Pointing his thumb in my direction, Harry said, "Max is getting these and you might as well make mine a double since I am an avid reader of Ernest Hemingway and a solemn believer in many of his simple philosophies of life such as, 'Always do sober what you said you'd do drunk. That will teach you to keep your mouth shut.' So, tonight I get drunk so I know what to do tomorrow."

Hap looked in my direction. "What did he say?"

"I'm not sure and I'm not sure he does either. He's confused, but I think he said he's getting drunk. I have it covered so we can see what the old walrus does tomorrow."

“And, you shall be with me tomorrow, as you are soon to find out,” Harry said, pointing in my direction with his manhattan in his hand, already sloshing brandy on the bar. It was going to be a messy night.

Hap started wiping up the spilled brandy in front of Harry and looked up at Harry and smiled, “Have you heard the one about this married couple?”

“Probably, but why do I get the feeling you are going to tell me anyway?”

“So,” Hap continued, after nodding at Paulie and smiling at Medusa, “this guy is watching a movie with creepy organ music in the den and suddenly he yells out, ‘Don’t enter that church, you damn fool!’ At this point, his wife walks past and asks him, ‘What are you watching?’

“The husband replies, ‘Our wedding film.’”

Everyone at the bar broke out in laughter, except Medusa, who said, “That’s real fucking funny. That woman is obviously an imbecile for marrying that shit hole.”

That comment silenced the group sitting at the end of the bar and they all turned and looked at her.

“Gotta go,” Ralph said, dropping some bills on the bar.

The rest of the group finished their drinks in unison and got up and left.

Paulie turned toward Medusa and said, “It’s a joke,”

“Of course, it is,” she replied while turning toward Hap, “I hope your drinks are better than your jokes. I’ll have another brandy and coke.”

Paulie shook his head.

Hap just smiled “Life is like a penis, soft and hanging freely. It’s women that make it hard.”

He pulled down a bottle of St. Remy’s from behind the bar and poured a healthy shot into a glass while filling it with Coca-Cola.”

Medusa gave him the finger, and smiling she said, “You wish.”

“Yes I do, honey,” Hap replied.

“Don’t get him started,” Harry warned.

“Have I had any calls?” I asked, hoping to diffuse this situation before someone got hurt.

“Nope, it’s been pretty quiet so far. But hell, the night’s young,” Rocco replied looking at Medusa with a wary eye.

I noticed Hap was already leering at her so the fact that she didn’t find his joke funny didn’t hurt his feelings.

“You have people call you in a bar?” Medusa asked.

“He’s a keyhole peeper,” Hap smiled.

“Keyhole peeper? Now that’s interesting,” she said with a smile and another wink.

Hap thought that was funny and I was beginning to think she might have something in her eye.

Harry said, “Max couldn’t find a clue the size of a wash tub even if it was painted a bright pink. He gets in everybody’s way but sometimes even a blind squirrel finds a nut.”

I gave Harry the appropriate gesture he was looking for. It appeared they were all speaking the same language at Rocco’s today. Pick on Max; but hell, I could take it. I was married once.

“People say nothing is impossible, but Max does nothing every day,” Hap added. “He’s also great in bed. He can sleep for days.”

“Well, I might be able to give him some help, not in bed, necessarily, but you never know,” she winked at me again. “I happen to be in the same line of work.”

“And that’s why you have a police scanner in your car?” Harry asked.

“That’s right, detective.”

I was about to ask her what kind of help she was willing to give me when Hap asked,

“And you answer to the name Medusa?”

“That is correct,” she replied, batting her long lashes at Hap, which, I was pretty sure she did to set him up for a free drink.

It worked as he poured her third brandy and coke. I noticed mostly brandy and little coke.

“This one’s on me,” Hap grinned while patting her hand.

I try batting the eyelashes with Hap at times, but without much success.

“Haps my name; short for Happy.”

“And you are always Happy?”

“Every day I wake up I’m Happy. It says so on my driver’s license. You should watch out. Max gets himself in some peculiar predicaments from time to time and most of them are pretty dangerous. A vulnerable young thing like you should be careful out there. You might need a man like me around who can provide the protection you need.”

That was the wrong thing to say. She glared at him. “First of all, I’m not a thing nor am I vulnerable. I’m focused, crude and opinionated and a crack shot. I sleep with a gun in my hand. I never trust a man that doesn’t like horses, dogs or women. You can throw in snakes too. I’m also vigorous-minded and hard. I hate unfairness, injustice, and cowardly underhandedness. I stand for a fair deal in all things and I’m willing to fight for them. I’m not squeamish or prudish. I admire the good in men. I’m not a sentimental or gushing sort of emotional woman. Nor am I hysterical but I am responsive to the thrill of danger, the stirring exhilaration of clean, swift, hard action and I’m always pulling for the right guy to come out on top.” She paused for a moment and took a long pull on her drink. “And I like sex.”

We all stared at her transfixed by what she said, wondering if we heard her correctly.

I know both Hap and my ears perked up when she said, ‘I like sex.’

“Now if you believe all of that shit give me another drink,” she laughed.

Hap did and said, “Little lady, that was a whole lot of shit coming out of that little mouth of yours. Here’s your drink.”

She leaned forward on the bar and looked down in my direction, “Max, is that short for something?” she asked.

“No, just Max; Max Fly, Private Eye,” I said, reaching into my pocket and sliding a business card in her direction. I touched the brim of my fedora, before taking a slug from my brandy. I saw Humphrey Bogart do that in a movie recently and I thought that was a pretty suave thing to do and decided to give it a try.

“I like your boots.”

“Thanks. Where did you pick up the name Medusa?”

“Didn’t you ever go to school, Mr. Fly?”

“You can call me Max. Yeah, I went to school, but it was so long ago I can’t remember much about it.”

“He went before pens were invented,” Hap injected.

I gave him the stink eye hoping he would butt out of this. If he did, I knew it wouldn’t be for long. I knew Hap was about to give me some competition for the attention of this young woman.

“Medusa is a mythological Greek God of War,” she replied. “She had the body of a serpent and hair made of writhing snakes.”

"Sounds inviting," Hap said.

She ignored him. "Medusa could also stop anything in its tracks and so can I," she said, staring right at Hap. I believed her. I think Hap did too as he walked down the bar to pour a glass of Blatz.

Harry turned to me and said, "I need you to ride with me tomorrow morning when I go to inform Hilga Haller about Candi's murder. I need to get a timeline on Candi's activities along with some background information. Hope you are up for it?"

"I guess I could break away. I'll check my schedule. What time?"

"Schedule? What have you ever scheduled? First thing tomorrow morning. We aren't releasing Candi's name until we get the Coroner's report back and that isn't expected until sometime tomorrow. He hoped he would be finishing it up later tonight."

"Yeah, I suppose I will go. Do you want me to meet you there or are you going to pick me up?" I asked.

"I'll pick you up around 10:00 a.m.," Harry said as he drained his drink and lit up a Lucky Strike cigarette.

We hung around for a few more drinks before packing it in. Harry and Paulie had to take Medusa back to Auer Avenue Elementary School to pick up her car and I needed sleep badly so I drove directly to my cabin. I passed up spending another night with Dr. Lundgren as I knew that wouldn't be too restful.

I noticed how she was leering at my ass the last time I left her place and after last night's English lesson, I wasn't sure I could last another round, especially with a heavy weight like the doctor. To be honest, I'm not as young as I used to be.

Chapter 12

Harry arrived well before 10:00 the next morning. He said he had called Hilga Haller and set up the meeting for eleven o'clock. He wanted a mug of my coffee. It came with a couple hooks of Paul Masson brandy and was guaranteed to chase the morning chills from your bones and whatever else might be ailing you.

We drove to Haller's cottage which is three houses down from where I live; but due to the size of the lots, it is still over half a mile away.

We arrived early.

Her place is pretty much like mine, only it's not; it's nicer. Her small two bedroom cottage with Cedar Shake siding was built in the mid-1940s after World War II. Most of the cabins started out as some guy's one room fishing shack, but over the years, many, hers included, expanded into a two bedroom house that could accommodate a small growing family or at least a spouse. Some of these cabins became permanent residences for people working around the Milwaukee area.

The trees lining her driveway had lost their leaves and snow was neatly piled along its sides. So much for Wisconsin's colorful fall.

The driveway had been plowed recently, so there was only a light covering from last night's snow. Her sidewalk leading to the front porch was clean. I wondered if she did it herself or if she found someone local to come out and do it for her. If she did, I needed to find out who. I made a mental note to ask her before we left today.

We got out of the squad car, our breath bursting out in white clouds as we walked.

Harry said, "After you do the introductions and niceties, I'll take over and ask the questions. You just sit there and look pretty."

"I'm good at doing that."

"Sure you are."

Harry knocked.

It took a moment before we heard the shuffling of feet inside and the door opened. A middle-aged, overweight, myopic looking woman, a little over five feet tall, peered at us through thick lenses on a pair of black plastic framed glasses. She graciously welcomed us and we were ushered inside.

As we were led into the living room, I noticed that the linoleum covered floor had a slight slant to it just like mine did.

The main living area had a fireplace against the back wall with a throw rug in front and two chairs and a sofa facing a blazing fire. There was a wall clock hanging over the mantel. It was warm in the room.

She offered us coffee and rolls.

We gave her our condolences for the loss of her niece and we spoke briefly about Pewaukee Lake and how it was growing and changing with more and more permanent residences moving out from Milwaukee and the surrounding area. Then Harry took over.

"I know this is difficult but we need to ask some questions." Harry placed a file folder on the coffee table and folded his hands.

"Can you give us a little background on your niece, Miss Haller?"

She tried to smile, "She was enrolled at the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee on Jefferson Street, near Prospect Avenue. I'm sure you know where it is."

We nodded that we did.

"Well, it is a beautiful school; in fact, Yousuf Karsh, a great Canadian photographer visited recently and said, 'I had heard your school was the most beautiful art school in the United States. Now that I have seen it, I must say that the previous report sounds like typically British understatement,' he has such a charming wit about him, don't you think?"

We nodded again.

"Tell us about the last few days of your niece's life, as much as you know," Harry said, trying to get her back on subject.

"Sure; Candi moved in with college friends recently, but she checked in with me about every other week like clockwork. She would bring me up to date on how she was doing at school, how her job was going and about any new boy she might have met that she thought was cute or who she might have dated. Mostly everyday things that we didn't get to talk about since she moved out to be on her own. Candi turned twenty-four and I guess she felt it was time to be on her own. I hated to see her go because I enjoyed her company. Just having another person present in itself is comforting. Do you know what I mean, detective?"

Harry nodded before continuing with his questioning.

"Do you know why Candi would have three different ID's? Harry spread out the three different driver's license's that were found on Candi at the murder scene.

"At Layton School of Art, she was enrolled as Candi Kane with an Atlanta, Georgia, address. At Aliota's Restaurant, where she worked, her check stubs say she was Carla Kroner from Pewaukee Lake.

"Then we found this other ID showing her as Carmen King from West Allis Wisconsin. If someone changes their name three times, it leads us to think they are hiding from something. Was she, and if so, can you tell us who or what she was hiding from?"

Miss Haller sat staring at the identification cards lying on the table in front of her. She took a deep breath and sighed.

"Candi was a good, hard working girl. She had been through a lot with her parents being murdered. She was afraid for her life. Afraid that the same people might be looking for her. That's why she changed her name to Carla Kroner. We did that legally. She had already enrolled in school under her real name before the name change to Carla Kroner was finalized. Next semester she would have changed all her records over to Carla Kroner."

"What about the Carmen King name?"

"This is the first I heard of that name. I don't have any idea why she would need another name."

"Hmph," Harry said, apparently wondering why Candi would have the additional name as well.

"Candi was seen going into the Pfister Hotel on numerous occasions. We wonder what she was doing there. She was never registered there, at least by any of these three names. I don't know how to ask this delicately but could she have been moonlighting as a working girl?"

Miss Haller was visibly upset by that statement and her voice showed it.

"She didn't have to do anything like that. She inherited quite a bit of money from her parents after they were killed. Money wasn't a concern for her." Hilga replied.

"Okay, do you think she was meeting a boyfriend or a girlfriend for a drink?"

"I would only be speculating, detective. I've never been to the Pfister Hotel and don't even know where it is. I do know it is close to Lake Michigan in downtown Milwaukee somewhere. To be honest, I don't know why Candi would have been going there."

"Well, a couple of days after she was seen at the Pfister, another person from Atlanta Georgia was found murdered in his room. A coincidence? Maybe, but I'm not a big believer in coincidences, Miss Haller."

"What was this person's name?"

"Charles Johnson. He went by the nickname, Hogjaw. Have you heard of him?"

"No, never."

"Christopher's business clients weren't what you would call the pillars of society."

She let out a soft sigh and then looked at me as her eyes teared up.

"They found her real fast, didn't they? I wonder how."

I didn't respond. I continued to sit there looking pretty. I turned to Harry.

Harry just stared at her.

"I don't know, but we are going to find out." He took a sip of his coffee before continuing.

"Why don't you tell us about her family in Atlanta?"

There was a long period of silence before she spoke.

"Where to begin? I guess at the beginning, huh?"

"I think that would be a good place to start," Harry replied, as he sat back and crossed his legs.

"Candi called me after my sister, Helene, and my brother-in-law, Christopher, were killed. She said that she was in fear for her life and wanted to know if I knew of a safe place in Wisconsin where she could hide for awhile; at least until these people tired of looking for her. She said she was working with the authorities to help capture the men responsible for Helene and Christopher's brutal murders.

"I told her of course, you can stay with me; my home is safe.

"She didn't want to come here at first for fear that I might be hurt or killed if they found out where she was hiding. I told her not to worry about that and I was finally able to convince her to stay with me.

"Everything was going along smoothly. She enrolled in the Layton School of Art in Milwaukee, as you know, majoring in commercial design. She was very talented and it was something she really loved; and even though she inherited a lot of money from her parents estate, she said she wanted a job. So she and one of her friends found work waitressing one night during the week and on the weekends at Alioto's Restaurant, also in Milwaukee. Have you heard of it?"

We nodded. We didn't tell her of suspected mob ties the owner, Papa John Alioto, had with the Rockford Illinois and Chicago Syndicate.

She continued. "Then we heard from her older half-sister, Pearl, and everything seemed to come unraveled. She came up from Atlanta and told Candi that the people who had her parents killed, found out that Candi was living with me and she had better pack her things and move out until they tired of looking for her. At that point, Pearl thought it would be safe for Candi to return here. So Candi got an apartment with some friends." She paused.

"This is rather embarrassing, but I guess it will all come out anyway. There is no one left to hurt. Also, Candi already knew that I had an affair with Christopher. We were both young and it happened a year before Helene and Christopher got engaged. I became pregnant.

Harry and I both looked at each other.

"Go on," Harry replied.

"I went away and had the baby and put it up for adoption and then returned to Wisconsin to continue with my teaching career. That baby is Pearl Podvin, Candi's half sister. She is thirty-five now. I regret not being there for her while she was growing up, but it was best for everyone. Helene never knew.

"Pearl found out that Christopher and I were her parents.

"I let Christopher seduce me I guess. I wanted him to. I was lonely, young and foolish and thought I was in love. I was a romantic back in my youth and I thought of myself as Rebecca from the classic, *Ivanhoe*, and Christopher was my *Ivanhoe*.

"Are you familiar with *Ivanhoe*, Sir Walter Scott?" She asked looking back and forth between Harry and me.

I felt like I was back in school again and hadn't done my homework and I was looking for someplace to hide so I wouldn't be called on to answer a question. I was lucky. She returned to her story not waiting for an answer. Harry just stared at her.

"I teach English literature and *Ivanhoe* is one of my favorite romantic stories of all time. I don't know what I was thinking at the time. Christopher and I would discreetly meet; but oh, he was a looker that Christopher. He was very pleasing to look at, that's for sure. He was a slim man; refined, dark, mysterious and graceful. A complete gentleman and so intelligent. Very well read. He knew all the classics very well." I wondered how someone could betray a sibling like she betrayed the love and trust of her sister Helene.

She continued. "When Christopher walked into a room or down the street, women would stop to stare. He cut quite a figure and I was smitten, I admit. I got pregnant after one dalliance, with that very virile and handsome man. To this day, I am so ashamed. I cringe whenever I think of what I did to my sister. I prayed she would never find out. And to the best of my knowledge, she never did. It was a secret Christopher took to the grave with him and I was willing to do as well. Such a brave and gallant man."

Right, I thought. Gallant man? She was most likely out of his mind as soon as he was out of her vagina. I wonder what she named the land of nod her brain lived in. "Do you read literature? English literature to be more specific?" She asked, looking at Harry. This old bat was going all over the place, like a drunk trying to ride a bicycle. She probably figured out she would be wasting her time asking me a question like that.

"I do," Harry replied.

I knew he did. Harry was a reader. If something was written on a roll of toilet paper, he would read it before he would flush it.

"Have you had a chance to read *Ivanhoe*?"

"Yes Miss Haller, I have. It was a long time ago. In high school."

"How about you, young man?" She asked, turning her myopic eyes on me. I guess she was looking for an uneducated audience and she assumed she would find it in me.

"Never," I said.

"I thought not; well, it's a beautifully written romantic triangulated love story of sisters Rebecca and Rowena and *Ivanhoe*; a masterfully written drama by a wonderful writer, Sir Walter Scott. In the last chapter, Rebecca winds up saved from the Templars by *Ivanhoe*'s bravery against Bois-Guilbert."

She pronounced it Bow-ah Guil-bear. That was nice, I thought, more "romantic" than Bose GilBert. I noticed she had her hands clasped to her chest looking at Harry, as she spoke. It is a good thing I was along for this interview or Harry would be lucky to get out of here with his pants on and I would be forever subjected to listening to his farfetched tale of how 'gallant' he is.

"But instead of going to thank *Ivanhoe* in person for this courageous rescue, she slips away unnoticed," she continued as she stared into the fire, her mind obviously going back in time.

"Rebecca wants to forget all about romance and dedicate her life to medicine. In my case, education, English Literature, to be more precise. She is so committed to leaving love behind that she doesn't seek out *Ivanhoe*, her hero, but instead goes to find

Rowena, her sister, her rival. While Scott never discloses why Rebecca is so reluctant to see Ivanhoe at the end, I think that it's probably because she knows she has no hope of marrying him. Seeing him would just cause her more pain. I hate to speak ill of the dead, especially my dear sister, Helene, but she was a bit spoiled and uneducated and used to getting her way, just like Scott's Rowena. She left school without finishing her degree. Rebecca has a lot of depth as a character. She is well educated and skilled in medicine as I am in the education of the classics."

She thinks she is Rebecca? I glanced at Harry and he rolled his eyes at me.

"...and Christopher," she continued with eyes closed and her head tilted back, as if no one else was in the room with her, "oh my, what can I say? He was a brilliant man and a brilliant lawyer and so successful and he had a true appreciation for the arts and, of course, my extensive knowledge of the classics. He loved to listen to me recite Shakespeare and Shelly.

"We would talk for hours about our favorite novels. His was *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe. It's an adventure story about a sailor abandoned at sea," Mr. Fly, "all alone on an uninhabited Island off the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the fictitious Oroonoke River. The poor soul was cast ashore by a shipwreck, where all the men perished but himself. He was at last, and strangely, delivered by pirates. She continued as if we weren't in the room, "*Ivanhoe*, *Frankenstein* and *Robinson Crusoe* are required readings for my students every fall. Young people don't have the exposure to the English classics like they used to. Most teachers don't know how to teach them properly, but as I said, they fall within the area of my expertise."

"That's nice, Miss Haller, but what happened to your child Pearl and how did she find you?" Harry asked, looking in my direction to see if I was taking notes.

I wasn't taking any on her English literature dissertation; I was just looking pretty; but I would start with the notes again once she got on the subject of Candi and her family.

"That was 1935 and people frowned on the type of behavior Christopher and I engaged in, more so than now. So, I put the child up for adoption."

I started scribbling.

"I found out Pearl was my daughter when she arrived to see Candi. She worked in Christopher's office as an investigator."

She continued, "Needless to say, all of this is quite a shock to me. Going from a childless, quiet existence, to having two young ladies enter my life and now losing one so tragically.

Miss Haller didn't seem too fond of her biological child, Medusa. "I have grown quite attached to Candi and I think I will grow fond of Pearl as well if given the chance. I mean she is my daughter but she is a little strange in some ways. Rather rough around the edges; I suppose it is my fault for not being with her in her formative years. I haven't had a chance to get to know her yet like I did Candi. I guess I should get back to Candi. She said she was going to finish the year at school before making any decisions about her future and the last I spoke to Candi, she said she was going to stop at the bank on her way to school and then work until 10:00 p.m. at Alioto's Restaurant. It's a nice place. Have you ever eaten there?"

We both nodded we had and hoped she wouldn't head in another unrelated direction. She didn't.

"Candi said she would come here to see me after work and spend the night. She would be here by midnight or a bit later and she didn't want me to stay up for her. Of course, I did. I was excited to see her again. As I said, I have become quite fond of

the young lady. By one o'clock she still wasn't here and I went to bed thinking she was busy and would arrive when she could.

She never arrived and I never heard from her again. I called her roommates the next morning. They said they didn't know where she was. She never came home. I wasn't too concerned at the time. She is twenty-four and a grown woman. But after a whole day passed and she hadn't contacted me to explain why she didn't show up as she promised, I knew something was wrong. She was a considerate young woman and would never leave me wondering about her well being. She would have called."

"Do you have the name of her friend who she worked with at Alioto's?"

"Yes, I do. I have her number here as well. I told Candi I needed a name in case I had to find her. In the case of an emergency."

"How about any of her other friends? Did she have a boyfriend?"

"I have the names of two other girls she goes to the theater and restaurants with on the nights she isn't working. There was one boy that she was seeing off and on, but it wasn't anything serious. At least, she told me it wasn't. She met him through one of her girlfriends. I think he went to school with her at the Layton School of Art."

"Okay, if you can get us that information, that will help. It will give us a place to start," Harry stood up to leave. I followed.

She walked out of the room and returned a moment later with the information Harry had requested. "You can call all of these people, but I already have."

"It never hurts to double check. They might remember something that they failed to tell you. I want to say again, Miss Haller, we are sorry for your loss and we will keep you posted on our progress. Please feel free to call with anything else you might remember," Harry said handing her his card.

"Thank you, detective, you are very kind," she replied while dabbing her eyes with a white lace hanky that she had tucked into the left sleeve of her blouse.

I thought it was strange. That's where my English teacher kept her hanky too; maybe it was a requirement to become an English teacher. I wondered where Linda kept her hanky.

As we walked to the car Harry looked at me and shook his head. "Can you believe her, Max? One of those intellectuals living in outer space in their own world where reality is nonexistent. I wonder what she would do after spending a day with the muggers, rapists, prostitutes and transvestites down at the 16th Precinct?"

"Yeah, Sir Francis Scott didn't write about them."

"Sir Walter Scott."

"Yeah, that's what I meant. She's a nut case."

"I think you're right. Let's go."

I forgot to ask her who plowed her driveway.

Chapter 13

I followed Harry back to the precinct. On the way we stopped at George Webb's on the corner of 15th Street and Wisconsin Avenue about a block from the 16th Precinct, the precinct Harry worked out of and about three blocks from my old apartment located over the plumbing wholesale shop my former in-laws own. We picked up four hamburgers with fried onions and one black coffee for me and a chocolate malt for Harry to go. My stomach couldn't take any more of that acid Harry brews in his office that he attempts to pawn off as coffee.

A few years ago, I walked in on a robbery in progress at this George Webb's Restaurant. I ended up chasing a drugged up little prick out the back door after he struck the manager, Frank Meinburg, who is still working behind the counter, in the head with the butt of his revolver. Willie Jones, the cook, who is still working in the kitchen flipping burgers, was traumatized and had his life pass before him as he stared down the barrel of the little asshole's 9mm gun. The three of us became friends and I became a late night regular. Hell, we became like an eclectic extended family. For some reason, I feel responsible for these two old guys' safety. I spoke to Harry about having a patrolman stop by a couple of times a night to look in on them.

When we arrived at the precinct, I ate one of the four hamburgers and Harry ate the other three.

When he finished eating his three, Harry let out a loud belch and slurped down the last of his chocolate malt before picking up the phone.

"Get your ass in here," he yelled.

Soon Detectives Chet George and Marty Taylor materialized in the doorway and flopped down on the chairs in Harry's cramped office, making it uncomfortably close. I could smell what Taylor had for lunch and it didn't smell good. He probably thought the same about my George Webb's hamburger with the fried onions.

"The Candi Kane case. We just left the vic's aunt's house. She gave us this, along with a lecture on English Literature," Harry said, sliding a sheet of paper containing the names and telephone numbers she handed him while we were leaving her cabin.

"Sorry we missed it," Detective George said as he looked down at the names and telephone numbers. He passed it over to Taylor. He didn't bother to look at it.

"Go to her school and Alioto's Restaurant and ask questions of everyone who knew her or saw her in the past few days. Then contact everyone on this list that you didn't

meet while you were at her school. I want a detailed report back by the end of the week.”

He slid another sheet of notebook paper across his desk. “This is where Candi told her aunt she would be going the last day they spoke. Follow up on it. Get back to me as soon as you know something.”

Both Detectives rose, “Will do boss.”

Harry yelled after them, “Hey, also check with your sources about who might be running Blue Magic in this area.”

“Blue Magic? We heard that name last week when we busted a couple of negroes down on West Center Street. They were loitering around North Division High School. Parents were complaining about nobody responding to their calls to get them off the premises. Chet and I picked them up and hauled them to the twelfth precinct. They were two homeless guys who had been sleeping behind the cafeteria. They had a couple of bags of cocaine with the name Blue Magic written on them. When we interrogated them about the source, they said they got it from their cousins who came up from Chicago last week. They claim they don’t know where their cousins went. Most likely back to Chicago.

“We hadn’t heard that term, Blue Magic, before that. Where did you hear about it, Harry?”

“Candi Kane had a note in her possession with it written on it in red ink. We are keeping this from the press and public so I want you to keep a lid on it.”

“Got it. She was doin’ coke?”

“Don’t know. See what you can find out.”

They nodded and left.

“So what’s with this Blue Magic stuff?”

“It’s a name that the mob gives to the cocaine they are importing from South America and selling on the streets up here. It started out in Miami and New York but has spread to Chicago and now, I guess, up here as well; it’s supposed to give ‘em a quick high.”

“How is Blatz Beer supposed to compete with that stuff?”

“Good question; probably won’t.”

“Well, Harry, I’m outta here. I’m going home.”

“Home home, or Rocco’s?”

Chapter 14

The phone rang. I sat up in bed, disoriented, not knowing where I was. I hadn't spent much time in my own bed lately and it took a little getting used to again.

I grabbed the phone after the fourth ring, "Yeah."

"Get down to the clubhouse; we are about to brace Big Maxie Greenbaum." It was Harry.

"Who?"

"Big Maxie Greenbaum," he said before hanging up.

Big Maxie Greenbaum was a low life, a low-level thug, who was a tough guy wanna-be whose body odor could best be described as smelling like a backed up sewer. I hadn't heard his name for a long time. The last time I ran across him was down in Beloit where he was arrested for trying to unload a truckload of stolen shoes.

By the time I arrived downtown it was already 2:30 p.m. I saw Lieutenant Marshall and Detective Paulie Menjou, hanging around the coffee machine speaking in low voices. Harry saw me walk in and threw his cup in the metal waste basket and motioned over his shoulder with his thumb telling Paulie to get lost. Paulie nodded his head and threw his half finished cup in the basket and left.

"How are you, Harry?" I asked.

He turned and looked at me, "My balls are sagging and I found out I'm asthmatic and I can't hold a whole note while I'm singing in the shower like I used to and my prostate is so large when I take a pee I have to wear rubber boots; otherwise, I feel like shit. Thanks for asking."

"Don't mention it. So, what's up?"

"What's up? Come on, I'll show you. This is something you just have to see and even then you are not going to believe it."

We walked back to the holding tank, where they kept the newly arrested nonviolent offenders. There was a group of six teenaged boys with their heads between their legs sitting along the back wall of the cell. They looked up as we approached.

Harry said, "This group of porch climbers isn't smart enough to play dumb. They broke into a north side home and took a bunch of stuff, including jewelry, some silver flatware along with, are you ready for this? The cremated remains of the victim's father which they mistakenly assumed were narcotics."

Harry started to laugh, "According to this report," he said as he shook a piece of paper in my direction while continuing to look at the boys, "these mopes were caught tasting and sniffing the cremated remains thinking it was cocaine. The two uniforms who were called to the scene found their footprints in the muddy backyard and followed them to a vacant building about a block away where they were drinking beer while smoking and sniffing the vic's old man. They were playing like Hansel and Gretel leaving bread crumbs for the uniforms to follow and this was before they started sniffing the old man up their nose. The patrolmen said the kids were talking like they were brain dead versions of Maynard G. Krebs, you know, that Beatnik from that TV show, The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis?"

"That's Dobie, yeah, I watch that show once in awhile. Dobie lusts after young women. An all-American boy," I said smiling. "Maynard is largely clueless but he is kind-hearted. Where are these kids from?" I asked.

"Your hometown, Brookfield. You know, the city with the best school system that money can buy? One of those Einsteins," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder at the six young men, "After being told that they were smoking a guy named Curtis Smith, said, 'I thought that cocaine was a little sticky.' Shit, I hit him upside the head and it still didn't knock any sense into him."

"Didn't they run into any bone chips? I thought there were little pieces of bones left in the remains once someone is cremated."

Harry didn't respond.

"Come on, let's go, that's enough of the funny stuff for one day," he said, pointing back toward the interrogation rooms.

As we walked I asked Harry, how his new partner, Paulie Menjou was working out. I knew Harry had a hard on for his old partner, E. J. Williams. I told him I thought Detective Menjou was wound a little tight.

Harry turned to look at me and said, "He's all right. I found out from E. J. that he worked with her in vice before he got fucked over. He was doing pretty well and seemed to be on the fast track for a promotion when he was sent undercover to a hotel above a gay bar on Pulaski Avenue. He had an interesting assignment. One I know you would have enjoyed. He would sit having a drink until a man made a pass at him."

"Sounds like an interesting assignment," I replied.

"I thought you would like it. He would go upstairs with the guy to a room where backup had previously drilled a peephole so they could rush the room once the suspect made a move. One of the first suspects Paulie nabbed, had him down to his boxers. It was Barry Meyer; that name mean anything to you, Max?"

"Chief Frank Meyer's son?" I asked. I knew it was.

"Bingo, one and the same. Captain Williams said a couple of detectives spoke to Paulie in the parking lot a day later asking him if he could do something for the kid, meaning Barry Meyer. Paulie said no. Then another set of detectives asked him. When he refused again, he found his ass in the good ol' United States Army marching and doing pushups, pulling KP. You remember those days, don't you Max?"

They drafted him just like that,” Harry said snapping his fingers. “He was ordered to report the next Monday.”

“I’m surprised they let him return to the force when he got back,” I said.

Harry smiled, “I guess they figured he learned his lesson. Surprise, he didn’t. I like the kid. He’s a straight shooter and honest as the day is long. Come on, follow me; Paulie is going to grill that tub of lard, Maxie Greenbaum. He’s waiting for us.”

“How’d you get Big Maxie to come in here?”

“A couple of uniforms busted him for putting slugs into a pay phone. A phone company investigator was watching a phone booth on the corner of Capital Drive and Burleigh Road yesterday when they spotted someone who he first thought was stuck in the booth but then the investigator saw him plunking in four quarter-sized washers and two fake dimes to make a long distance call. He grabbed him and brought in a couple of uniforms.

“Then Big Maxie ran and they got him on a drunk driving charge. He had a fake I.D. that showed his name as being Jake Baker and listing an address that turned out to be an abandoned chicken ranch. He also had \$2000 in his wallet and a \$5000 deposit slip. The stupid son of a bitch. He has all this money and he gets busted trying to screw the phone company out of a buck and change. It doesn’t make sense, does it?”

“One of the uniforms recognized him right off and cuffed him and then brought him down here. Now we will have a chance to squeeze him a little to see if we can find out what his connection is, or was, with Charlie Hogjaw Johnson from Atlanta.

“Come on, Paulie has him in there now.”

Harry opened the door and entered with me right behind. He dropped a file folder on the table and sat down. I sat down next to him.

Detective Paulie Menjou was sitting across from Big Maxie Greenbaum. Big Maxie smelled like he had something dead in his pocket. I was beginning to regret coming down to sit in on this event.

They made it uncomfortable for Big Maxie by turning the thermostat up, making it very warm and close in the small room. Unfortunately, it made it uncomfortable for all of us plus it intensified the smell. Sweat was already beading up on Maxie’s forehead and his body odor was gagging me. I didn’t know how long I could last cooped up in this small space with this guy.

Big Maxie Greenbaum had removed his checkered sports jacket and put it across the back of his chair. He was wearing green suspenders over a white shirt with a frayed collar. He had loosened his tie and it hung over his massive stomach. Perspiration stained the fabric of his shirt a dark yellow under each armpit. His sweat had already plastered his thin mousy brown hair to his skull and his face looked like a road map with red veins covering each cheek. He weighed well over three hundred pounds. His imposing belly kept him a good two feet away from the table. He had multiple chins. I lost count after four.

“How ya’ doing, Maxie? We haven’t seen you in a long time,” Harry said, in a friendly tone.

“I’m doing fine. Why am I here?” He replied looking down while fiddling with the end of his tie.

“You were brought in because you were caught putting slugs into a public phone booth and then you tried to avoid arrest by running away so they got you on a drunk driving charge and resisting arrest; not too smart Maxie.”

“I weren’t drunk. That stupid cop arrested me because I couldn’t recite the alphabet. Hell, if they arrested everybody in Milwaukee that couldn’t recite the alphabet, they

would have to arrest the whole fuckin city; and I didn't put no slugs in nothin'. I was fishin' around for some change ta call my wife. All I had in my pocket was some lint. Those slugs was already in that phone."

"Well, that's good. You can tell it to the judge. Now Detective Menjou here is going to ask you some questions about another matter and we are going to record it. You alright with that?"

"You're in homicide, right? What does drunk driving have to do with homicide? I didn't hit no one."

"Let me explain to you how it will be going here, Maxie. We'll be asking the questions. You'll answer them. It's that simple. We'll just have a friendly little conversation. You have the right to have a lawyer present. Do you want one? If you do, it might take us awhile to get you to a phone. We are real busy and short handed. You know how it is, right?" Harry asked.

"Fuck I need a lawyer for? You can ask me whatever you like. I got nuthin' to hide."

"I'll take that as a no, then," Detective Menjou said.

"I don't give a damn what you take. You can take a shit for all I care."

Paulie ignored him and continued, "Okay, we'll be recording this. It's for your benefit as well as ours. Are you still okay with this?"

"Yeah, yeah, let's get this party over with. After listenin' to youse guys I gotta take a crap myself."

Harry looked at Paulie and Paulie shook his head. "Oh no, I'm not going in a bathroom with that big tub of shit."

"I can hold it. Just push the fuckin' button on that machine," Big Maxie whined.

"Go ahead and start, Paulie. I'll sit back and listen to what he has to say." Harry said.

Detective Menjou looked at Greenbaum and asked if he was ready.

Greenbaum just glared at him.

"Okay," Paulie said, "let's start. State your full name for the record please?"

"Maximillian P. Greenbaum ."

"What's the 'P' stand for?"

"Phineas."

"Phineas? Are you serious?"

"Yeah, I'm serious."

"After the mayor of Doodyville?"

"Doodyville? Where Howdy Doody lives? Are you kidding me?" Then he looked at me and said, "And you are Inspector John J. Fadoodle, America's number one private eye, I suppose."

I smiled.

"I'm glad you keep up with the current television shows, Maxie. Do people call you Big Maxie?" Paulie asked.

"I suppose my good friends call me Big Maxie."

"I'll take that to mean a yes. What is your occupation?"

"I'm a ragman."

"You sell clothing?"

"That's what I said."

Paulie looked over at Harry with an exasperated look on his face and rolled his eyes. Harry just nodded indicating that Paulie should ignore the wise remarks and continue with the questions.

"You and a James Franks, who goes by the nickname Lefty, entered the Pfister Hotel on Saturday, April 30, and beat up a man named Charles Hogjaw Johnson, didn't you?"

"Who says?"

"To begin with the bartender ID'd you," Paulie replied.

"There was some kind of thing there, yeah..."

"Who hired you to beat him up?"

"Nobody hired me. I beat him up because he's an asshole."

"Why did you assault him?"

"What are you talking about? We was just arguing."

"You and Lefty hit him over and over again, didn't you?"

"I know I hit the son of a bitch. I don't know who else did."

"Apparently the bartender thought you both hit him. He called the cops and you were fined let's see," Paulie said, as he opened the folder and started paging through Big Maxie's file containing his rap sheet.

"Here it is. Three hundred dollars and Lefty was fined five hundred."

"Then I musta hit him less."

It was here that Detective Menjou changed direction with his questioning.

"Are you engaged in bookmaking?"

"I am not engaged."

Paulie paused and glared at Big Maxie before continuing, "Do you use Ciro's Restaurant to conduct business?"

"I use Ciro's to eat at. They got good food. You oughta try it sometimes. I'll even buy ya' a pizza."

Paulie ignored him.

"Are you accustomed to making phone calls from Ciro's?"

"Not any more than any other customer."

"You came to Ciro's in your own automobile on April 20, didn't you?"

"I guess. When I drive there I usually drive my car. I'd have to check my social calendar to see if I was there on the 20th. As I said, they got good pizza."

"The 20th was the night of the shooting that you were involved in. How could you forget that?"

"Okay, I guess I was there."

"You guess? You don't remember being shot at?"

"Yeah, I said I was there. I was there on the twentieth."

"What kind of car do you have?"

"A Cadillac."

"Were you driving?"

"How else could I get there? The car didn't drive itself."

Harry stood up. "Turn the machine off, Paulie," Harry said as he walked around the table and slapped Big Maxie Greenbaum in the face

"Hey, what the fuck?" Maxie whined grabbing his cheek. "You can't hit me."

"The hell I can't," Harry hissed. "I just did and I'll do it again. Any more smart shit comes rolling out of that pie hole of yours I'll close it for good. You got that?"

"What's with the catchy questions? I don't understand. I drove myself. The man is trying to trip me up."

"Nobody is trying to trip you up, Maxie. We'd never be able to pick you up off the floor."

Maxie extended his middle finger at Harry and Harry bent it back, forcing Maxie to his feet and out of the chair screaming.

"Holy fuck. What'd you do that for?"

"Next time I'll shove it up your ass. Now answer the questions."

Maxie sat down, massaging his finger.

"Now, let's get to the deceased, Charles Hogjaw Johnson from Atlanta. Do you know him?"

"Deceased? What deceased? Lefty and me had a few words with this guy but I don't know nuthin about deceased. Who's deceased?"

"We are talking about the body found at the Pfister."

"That's the guy that got whacked?"

"Yes it is."

"Detective, you ain't goin' to lay a pinch on me for that murder."

"We'll see. Do you call him Hogjaw or Charlie?"

"I don't call him nuthin'."

"Alright, we will call him Hogjaw."

"Call him whatever you like."

"Had you ever seen him before in your life?"

"Not to my recollection."

"Isn't it a fact that you had conversations with him prior to that night?"

"Nah!"

"Have you ever threatened Charles Hogjaw Johnson?"

"How could I threaten him, I never had no conversation with him."

"Weren't you with Mr. Johnson at Ciro's Restaurant on April 20th when two masked men came in and opened fire on your table?"

"I remember being shot at by a couple of guys that looked a lot like camel fuckers. I don't recall no Hogjaw, or whatever his name is, there."

"The guys looked like what?" Paulie asked, incredulous at Maxie's description.

"You know, camel fuckers. Those guys who wear those funny things on their head and look like they never bathe or nothin'. Their skin was pretty dark but they weren't no niggers."

"Geez Maxie, you're a sick sack of shit," Paulie said.

"Yeah, well fuck you too."

"You were looking at Mr. Johnson at the time the shots were fired in Ciro's and you two were carrying on a conversation, weren't you?"

"When the shots was fired I didn't look at nobody, I ducked under the table. I thought I heard four or five shots."

"Did it sound like bang, bang, bang, bang?"

"I don't know. I don't call out cadence at a time like that."

"How long did you stay under the table?"

"Hell, I don't know. I heard running and all that and when it sounded like nothing was there no more, I got up."

"You didn't see anything?"

"Nah, it is dark in the restaurant and I am under the table. What's there to see? I'm trying to figure out if I'm shot."

"Where was Mr. Johnson at this time?"

"I don't know. Maybe he was under the table next to me. Maybe we was holding hands. Where do ya think he was? I don't know where he was."

"What is the next thing you did?"

"I went and took a piss."

"You didn't call the police?"

"I don't call the police at no time."

"You've done some time, haven't you Maxie?"

"Listen, am I being accused of something here or what?"

"We think you killed Charles Hogjaw Johnson," Paulie said. "We think he crossed you and your friends..."

"Okay, that's it. I'm done. Either charge me with sumthin' or I'm walkin'."

"We have a woman who said she saw two men go into Mr. Johnson's room on the night he was killed. She thought they might be faggots from the way they were dressed.

"She heard loud voices and then she said she heard something fall; maybe a nightstand or something like a body.

"She saw the two men leave the room about an hour later.

"We showed her a picture of Lefty and you, Greaseball, and she thinks it was you two she saw leaving," Paulie said.

"Well, she's mistaken."

"She said she was about 70% sure, but don't worry, she'll be 100% sure by the time we go to trial. Once we get the facts, then we can distort them as we please."

"Fuck you."

Harry stood up. "Go ahead, take a walk, but we'll be watching you. You'll be in front of a judge soon to answer for your DUI charge. Who knows, you might get lucky; maybe the phone company will drop the charges against you. You can always hope, right? Someone like you doesn't do well in prison Maxie. You don't get much to eat for one thing," Harry said as he picked up the file folder and said to me. "Let's go. I gotta get outta here. I got a hemorrhoid the size of an Idaho potato and it's hurting like hell. He walked out of the room.

I followed.

Detective Menjou turned off the recorder and packed it up and followed us out, leaving Maxie Greenbaum on his own to find his way out of the precinct.

Later, when we walked out into the late afternoon sunshine, we saw Maxie standing on the steps making a statement to the press.

"You folks got yourself one screwed up city. The cops just accused me of bumping a guy off and what do they do? They turn me loose. They just wasted two hours of my time for nuthin'."

Harry shook his head. "Let's go."

We went to Rocco's.

Chapter 15

Harry arranged to meet Detectives Chet George and Marty Taylor at Rocco's and go over the information they gathered on Candi Kane's activities on the last day of her life.

We were sitting at the bar, watching the Rocco Man wipe down the counter and fill the ice trays and condiment bowls, getting ready for another day, when the front door opened and daylight sliced through the darkness of the pub, casting two black silhouettes that proceeded the two detectives as they walked toward the bar.

"So what were you able to find out today outside the fact that sugar donuts are a nickel a piece?" Harry asked, as he stuck a Lucky strike in the corner of his mouth while he fumbled for a match in his coat pocket.

"Here, boss," Detective George said, "handing Harry a book of matches."

Harry opened the book and read the advertisement on the inside. I could see the caricature of Charles Atlas from where I sat, flexing his muscles and saying how taking his body building course will keep you from being bullied.

"You must be tired of guys kicking sand in your face, George. Charles Atlas body building? So, you exercising now? I got some advice for you if you are being picked on and it's easier than exercising and requires a lot less sweat. If somebody is picking on you, just shoot him with your throwaway."

Harry laughed. He bent a match over and struck it against the front striker. A flame shot up and he held it against the end of his cigarette, blowing smoke across the bar in the direction of his two detectives. He handed the booklet back to Chet with the expended match still attached. Chet removed it and dropped it in the ashtray in front of Harry and returned the book to his coat pocket.

"Well, give me what ya' got, guys."

"We spent the day in Milwaukee talking to Candi's friends and acquaintances and didn't get too much information beyond what we already knew.

"At George Web's we ran into Horace Greenberg, the guy who works for the Milwaukee Sentinel and dresses like a leprechaun. He said around 10:15 the morning Candi died, he saw her downtown. Judging by the time her wrist watch stopped, she was killed four hours and 20 minutes later. Greenberg confirmed that Candi lived with her aunt on Pewaukee Lake before moving to an apartment on Ogden Avenue, but we already knew that.

"She was enrolled at the Layton School of Art and waitressed at Alioto's Restaurant downtown. She just moved in the apartment last month. It's located near the school and she lives with some friends from school, which we also knew.

"He didn't know who the friends were or what the street number of the apartment on Ogden Avenue was. That strange little bird was still scratching around for information or he was lying to us. Most likely both.

"We found Candi's roommates, a Kathy McCarty, and Jeri Mullany. The address of their apartment is 1725 Ogden Avenue. The last time Kathy and Jeri saw Candi was the morning she left the apartment. That was around 8:30 a.m. She said she was going to run some errands at the bank and pharmacy before going to class. Miss McCarty and Miss Mullany left for school shortly after that and Miss Mullany returned for lunch around 12:30 to find their apartment tossed. She called the police and the 12th sent out two detectives from their robbery division, Detectives Isador Source, and Louis Esquillen, to go over the scene. Detective Source said every room was thoroughly trashed but it appeared the intruders seemed to be more interested in

Candi's room as they searched it more thoroughly. Not only were all the clothes thrown on the floor, but all the underwear was unfolded and the hanging clothes had all the pockets turned out and the carpeting on the floor was pulled up and the mattress and box spring were upended and the bedding was strewn all around. They even cut up the pillows. Evidently there were feathers all over the place. Source strongly believes that whatever they were looking for is something they think Candi had and he thinks they might go to Hilga Haller's place next if they find out Candi was living there before moving to Milwaukee."

"Call the sheriff in Waukesha County and let him know about this and ask him to have his people keep an eye on her place."

"Okay boss."

Detective Taylor picked up the conversation. "We spoke to her fellow students at the school and nothing much there. They said she never made it to class. So far no motive and no suspects except clients of her late fathers back in Atlanta."

"What about a boyfriend? Someone from her past in Atlanta not connected to her father?"

"No serious boyfriend. We spoke to one guy she dated off and on this past year, nothing serious. His alibi checks out. We have been on the phone with the Atlanta Police Department and they are sending up what they have. We should be getting it any minute now."

"The coroner sent over his findings. He set the time of death as Tuesday afternoon. The victim had been strangled and stabbed multiple times. He identified 12 stab wounds, some of which had perforated vital organs including the heart, liver, lungs and kidneys. Of course, her eyes were missing. She was also beaten with a blunt object. It could have been the butt of a revolver. She was sexually assaulted. He found bruising on her breasts and her inner thighs," Detective Taylor said.

"Going with the timeline that was given by Greenberg, we're slicing things pretty thin," George said thoughtfully. "If Candi's watch was correct, she was picked up, killed and driven three miles to Auer Avenue School and dropped on the playground—all in the space of four hours and twenty minutes after Horace Greenberg saw her on a downtown street. Her watch was broken at 2:35; and to throw a monkey wrench into the mix, a woman came up to us and said on Tuesday, about 5 o'clock, her eight year-old daughter told her she saw Candi come out of Alioto's Restaurant carrying a briefcase as the girl entered with her mother. They were there to meet the father for dinner. She said she saw Candi get into a car with a man who looked mean."

"Could she describe the car at all?" Harry asked.

"Only that it was a coupe. I questioned the youngster at length but what she said just didn't add up. I believe she must be mistaken. Unless the killer was shrewd enough to reset Candi's wristwatch and then deliberately break it, she had been dead for several hours when this child thought she saw her."

"And don't overlook the medical report," Taylor remarked. "Analysis of her stomach contents indicate she died within three hours after eating her last meal which would have been around noon."

"We can't get around that," Harry admitted. "But I do have a hunch about the watch. Marty, call Hilga Haller to see if she knows if Candi was in the habit of winding her wrist watch in the morning before she left for school. Hilga told us Candi usually left by seven like clock work every morning when she was still living with her so I doubt she would change just because she moved to another house. I'm going to phone officials at the Bulova Watch Company and ask them if it would be possible to check

the spring tension of a watch and find out how long it has run since last being wound? It's a long shot, but it might work. If it had run seven and a half hours, the time of death would be confirmed. If longer, then the killer is cagier than we think. What else?"

"Candi did not turn up for classes at Layton School of Art so her classmates notified her aunt who in turn notified the Waukesha Sheriff's Department and Sheriff Freeman contacted us. Everything kinda jibes with what you got from Candi's aunt. That's about all we have at the moment, boss," Detective George replied.

"Okay, thanks. You guys are doing good. Keep it up."

Harry thought for a moment, "Shit."

I looked over at Harry. "Shit?"

"Yeah. We are missing something here and I can't put my finger on it."

"I am going to talk to Marcello and see if he has picked up anything on this killing."

Marcello, a former federal agent, taught me most of what I know about being a detective, although I doubt he would admit it.

Harry stared at me. "Bring me back one of Mildred's donuts."

Chapter 16

I sped past the Wisconsin Gas Light building on the lower east side, located on the corner of E. Wisconsin Avenue and North Van Buren Street. I turned onto North Van Buren and drove two blocks. I pulled up in front of a cream brick building, number 2167. The sign painted on the door said Marcello and Associates, Private Investigations, and below were the names John Marcello, William Steckel, and J. A. Miller. Miller was a new one. I would have to see who that was.

Next door was a Chinese Laundry that once scorched a few of my shirts. It is owned by a cranky chink by the name of Lee Lee. I always thought he was joking with that name, but you never know.

I opened the door and walked into the reception area of Marcello and Associates. They had a little bell, suspended from the door frame from a piece of metal that bent and snapped back when you opened the door, causing the bell to ring. I told Marcello that it reminded everyone who came in of the Salvation Army. He said he didn't care, Mildred liked it. Mildred was Mildred Bates, his Jewish secretary, receptionist and righthand man. She was sitting in a corner toward the back of the front room, bent over her typewriter, typing up a storm. She is living proof that they don't make Jews like Jesus anymore. The cue Jesus is waiting to see before He returns I believe is a smile on Mildred's aging face so I figure there is plenty of time to repent before the rapture. If He is taking Mildred with him, I think I'll just stay behind.

I expected to see smoke coming out of her ears shortly. She lived a methodical and cataloged life and didn't like it disturbed. We had a hostile relationship. She considered me a nuisance. For some reason, I rankled her. When I worked there I would hide her files. She couldn't prove I did it, but she knew.

She hadn't changed. She looked the same. The hair on her legs was still as thick and dark as an Austrian forest. It was matched by the hair under her nose.

Her tongue was bent over her upper lip as she concentrated on whatever it was she was typing on her old Remington typewriter.

"Yes?" she said in an annoyed tone.

I looked at her and thought there was no way I could drink that woman pretty.

"I'm here to see the Wop."

Her hands stopped in midair. She recognized my voice and my nickname for her boss. She didn't like it. Without trying to disguise the contempt dripping from her voice, she asked, "The donuts are gone, Max. What do you want?"

"I think I asked to see Mr. Marcello."

"He's in his office. Think you can remember where that is?"

"Yes. It's nice to see you too, Mildred."

She let out a small grunt before she went back to bitch slapping her typewriter with a vengeance.

As I walked back to Marcello's office, I passed the empty donut tray. Harry was going to be disappointed. I wet my finger and picked up the remaining crumbs. One thing Mildred could do was make a decent donut.

The door was open. I saw Marcello sitting at his desk reading over what appeared to be reports. His sports coat was hanging over the back of his chair exposing his rig and .357 caliber handgun that hung under his left arm. His black hair was grayer than it was the last time I saw him. He had a barrel chest and his white shirt stretched over an ever-growing paunch. He played football while he attended the University of Wisconsin and was pretty good. Upon graduation, he became a G-Man and worked for J. Edgar Hoover's organization for twenty years before retiring and opening up his own agency. A few years later, his former partner, Bill Steckel joined him. They had a close relationship and understanding with local law enforcement agencies throughout the midwest as well as federal law enforcement officers. This made for a lucrative arrangement for the two of them.

I rapped on the door.

He looked up and put down what he was reading.

"Hi Max, you stop in for some donuts?"

"Yeah, but I see I was too late."

"Got to get up a little earlier to get the worm or the donut."

"Especially around here. You have a moment?"

"No, but come in and sit down."

"Thanks who's the new guy on the door, Miller?"

"A former robbery detective with the MPD."

"I know him. Isn't he a half-breed?"

"Chippewa, from what I'm told. The Milwaukee cops call him Chasing His Horse. I guess he was trying to get in the Mounted Police. He fell off his horse and then the horse ran over him. I guess he had to chase the crazy thing for a half a mile before he was able to catch him. His close friends, whoever they are, call him Buffalo Hump, but we can't bring ourselves to translate his Indian name around Mildred. It's Po-cha-na-quar-hip, which means 'erection that won't go down' so he tells us. That's one origin I don't want to travel back to."

"Yeah, I hear his girl friend's name is Little Bear with Big Canyon."

"Yeah? Why do I think you are full of bull shit?"

I smiled. "So he retired from MPD?"

"Yeah, he's helping us cover some of our local cases. As hard as it is to believe, since you left, we have been swamped and we needed help. I've considered sending some of the business your way but I am afraid your quality of work may shed an unsatisfactory light on our firm."

"Yeah, thanks for the vote of confidence. From what I heard of Miller's cogitation process, it is a bit diminished; his ideas come slower than a frigid woman."

"Maybe, but you take what you can get. Steckel has him under his wing. We hope to correct some of the amateur mistakes he made when he was with the MPD. At least, when Steckel bungles things it's always in a talented and professional manner. We hope Miller can be upgraded so we can maintain what sets us apart from other agencies and defines our firm."

Before I could respond, Bill Steckel and Jack Miller walked in the door, both stuffing their mouths with cream filled donuts. I now knew where the rest of the morning's donuts had gone.

"Max stopped by for some donuts. Any left?"

Steckel looked at me and held out was left of his. His face was covered with powdered sugar and cream. I didn't want to tell him what it looked like, but it diminished my appetite.

"Here, you can have the rest of mine," he said. "I should watch my weight."

"Thanks but I'll pass."

"You know Jack Miller?"

"We've met. How are you, Jack?" I held out my hand. He grasped it in his. It was soft and moist.

"I'm doing well, Max. Mildred and I cleaned out the mess you left in your old office. I hope you didn't want to keep any of that stuff. Those girls posing in the foldouts from the old Playboys are now grandmothers. Time to get some new ones."

"They were vintage, but that's alright. I date girls now. You ought to try it."

His faced turned a bright red.

"So, what is it that brought you in here, besides the donuts," Marcello asked, leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his neck.

"I'm helping Harry with this murder case involving that young girl from Atlanta named Candi Kane. The case seems to have a mob connection to it, extending down to Atlanta, Georgia and the Dixie Mafia. Harry and I met a guy named Arnie Ice Iaconni. He had a third eye planted on his forehead and a round trip plane ticket to Atlanta which he never got to use. I was hoping you could give me the name of someone connected in Milwaukee that I might speak to without the fear of getting whacked? I don't see this hit being done by anyone local, but if they didn't authorize it, some shit may be hitting the fan soon."

"And what are you getting out of this by helping Harry?"

"Just a few headaches and indigestion. Maybe a few manhattans. The girl's aunt is my neighbor."

"And you knew you could benefit from my keen insight and perspicacity of the local crime culture, didn't you?"

I didn't know what perspicacity meant.

He looked at Steckel, who didn't have a clue what it meant either. Steckel said, "You need to speak with Romeo Butticci to find out about Ice and if the Milwaukee Syndicate had approved the hit on this Candi girl. His consigliere is Eddie "Rugs" Rugliero. A real badass."

"Butt Itchy?"

"It's spelled B-u-t-t-i-c-c-i, pronounced Butt Itchy. Don't make fun of his name."

"Who me? Never."

"I'm serious, Max. You might want to speak with your friend Dan Ciorrocco. I think they took communion together. A lot of good it did either of those blockheads. Butticci owns Giovanni's Italian Restaurant across the street from the Pabst Brewery. When I was still with the Bureau we raided it for gambling and we caught the Mayor and the Police Chief and a few more big shots in it. So be careful he has some pretty impressive connections."

When I left I stopped at the Donut Hole and picked up a couple of jelly- filled. They were good but couldn't compare to Mildred's.

By the time I reached Rocco's Pub, I had strawberry jelly stains on the front of my Badger sweatshirt and the crotch of my Wranglers. Dr. Lundgren would have to get that out when we met later that evening.

Rocco's was pretty quiet as most of the lunch crowd had left and the only customers that remained were old neighborhood dogs, either kicked out of the house or just too drunk to go home.

"Rocco Man, do you know Butticci?"

That woke a few of those sleeping dogs up.

"Who, Big Butt Itch? Yeah. We ran together. I dated his sister for a few years before she grew a mustache and he turned mean. He owns Giovanni's Restaurant down on Juneau Avenue. Most of us Guineas push belly timber, you know. Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering if you could set up a meet. I gotta talk to him without worrying about getting myself whacked."

"I can't guarantee you won't get whacked, but I can get on the blower and give him a call. When would you want to meet?"

"Tomorrow."

"In a hurry, huh?"

"You know me, instant gratification takes too long. Harry and I ran across one of their boys, Arnie Ice lacconi wasted in his hole holding a round trip plane ticket to Atlanta. Gotta find out if he authorized the Dixie Mafia to come into his territory and snuff out that young coed from Atlanta or if there is some kind of retaliation going on between the two. It seems like more than a coincidence that Ice would be planning a trip to Atlanta right after the murder of that girl."

"Always helping out Harry, aren't you Max?"

"Yeah, well you know, quid pro quo."

Rocco nodded, "Just be careful," and picked up the phone. A few moments later he hung up.

"It's set up for 3:00 p.m. tomorrow afternoon. You good with that?"

"Yep, thanks, Rocco. I owe you one."

"Yeah, quid pro quo."

Chapter 17

The Pabst sign spans Juneau Avenue at 10th Street, connecting the malt house on the southwest corner with the brewhouse on the northwest corner. German immigrant Jacob Best and his sons established the Empire Brewery, which was to become Pabst Brewery, in Milwaukee in 1844. In 1876, it won a gold medal at the Centennial Celebration and in 1882, they began hand-tying a blue silk ribbon around the neck of each beer to identify it as a first-place winner. By 1892, they were hand-tying close to one million feet of blue silk ribbon around the necks of bottles per year.

Across the street from the brewery, a building defiantly displays a lighted brown and white, Schlitz The Beer That Made Milwaukee Famous sign, over its front door. In each of the two front windows, two more Schlitz signs, both in red neon, blink in the eye of its main competitor across the street. The building has a gray and tan multi-colored tar paper siding and is the home of Giovanni's Italian Restaurant, owned by Romeo Butticci who has an ongoing feud with Pabst, the family that purchased the brewery years ago from the Best family.

The building looked dark and foreboding. Piles of dirty snow are piled along the side of the sidewalk leading to the restaurant. I had been here before but was unaware of the Butticci and syndicate connection. I remember the food being somewhat tasteful and the atmosphere being mysteriously dark. Now that I know that at least three bodies may be connected to the restaurant's murky owner the mystery only deepens. I walked up the three stone steps lined with a wrought iron railing that led to the double red door entrance. The door on the left had a hand-lettered paper sign taped next

to the door handle. It read "Please Use Other Door" with an arrow conveniently pointing to the other door. So I did.

There was a hostess stand off to the left and behind it stood a big goon in a tux. I knew he was a big goon because he looked like one.

He looked at me and smiled showing a big gap where his left incisor and molar were supposed to be and said, "May I help youse?"

I was taken back for a moment. I didn't know if he was supposed to be the maitre'd or if he was pulling my leg. When I finally told him I was Max Fly and I was there to see Romeo, he told me to wait where I was and he left.

I stood there for a couple of minutes before he returned with another goon who could have passed for his brother, or, at least, a second cousin. They were both the size of a telephone pole. I was frisked by the second goon.

I thought he spent a little too much time fondling my little ferret; but what do I know, I had never been fondled by a big goon before.

When he was through, he looked at the other telephone pole and said, "He's clean, boss."

I was pleased I passed his personal hygiene inspection.

He smiled at me.

I smiled, but I didn't let it reach my eyes. I was afraid he was attempting to strike up a special friendship.

As we walked into the restaurant we passed tables covered with white cotton tablecloths. A small glass vase was placed on every table with a daisy, delicately situated in each one. Candles were lit and planted into empty Chianti bottles. Luckily the candles were already lit for the evening arrivals. If they weren't, my friendly escorts and I might have been bumping into things as we strolled to the back of the restaurant.

"Park the body, Mr. Fly," a deep baritone voice called out, floating from what looked like a pocket-sized apparition dressed in black, sitting at a corner table in the back of the dimly lit dining room. The apparition belonged to Romeo Buttici.

He was coatless and wearing a white short sleeved shirt. I noticed a Playboy-style rabbit head with a cocked left ear tattooed on his left arm. His right arm, well, he didn't have a right arm. I heard he lost it in a bread dough machine while working in a bakery as a young man.

He grew up on Milwaukee's South Side; living with his Polish mother, Adelajda Olszewski, who came to Milwaukee from Poland in 1912. She met and married his Italian father, Anthony Big Tits Buttitcci against her parents wishes when she was only sixteen. She married him the year before Romeo was born and divorced Big Tits three months later. Romeo never met his father. His mother gave him her Polish surname, which he dropped as soon as he was legally able to do so, which happened to be one day after he planted her in the ground. While friends and relatives were at his small south side home, celebrating his late mother's life, he was at the county courthouse having his name legally changed back to Buttici. As much as I can understand why someone with a name like Olszewski would change his name, I think Romeo should have shown a bit more decorum and waited until the ice cream melted on the late Adelajda's favorite carrot cake her older sister, Walentya, had baked in her honor.

Romeo played the role of gregarious host at Giovanni's, the restaurant he opened in 1956. He also played the role of tough guy very well. He was short and weighing 265 pounds, he was quick to threaten violence, and hinted at being a made man in the

organized crime family headed by Joseph Alioto. Old acquaintances thought it was a show, a front he had created for himself. Little did they know he would soon be running the show.

His record was squeaky clean until he was arrested in 1952 for peddling stolen cheese at a Chicago Pizzeria. He was given two years on probation. Then in 1953, he was sentenced to three years at Waupun State Prison for assault with a deadly weapon. He beat his neighbor with a Louisville Slugger because his dog's barking kept him awake.

Romeo's criminal mind lacked logic. If you add booze and drugs into the mixture, which he did, you've got a slug reduced to his most base instincts. A desperate person willing to do harm to his fellow man.

He was no more than a punk with a gun but I didn't want to be the one to tell him that.

"Rocco said you wanted to speak with me, so speak."

It was apparent that Butticci didn't believe in foreplay so I went right to the meat of our tet a tet.

"I was hoping you could shed some light on why a guy from Atlanta, named Charles Johnson, would come all the way to Milwaukee to rub out a college coed. Mr. Johnson goes by the name Hogjaw."

"How should I know? Maybe she gave bad head? Do I look like the Welcome Wagon Lady to you?"

I looked at him and was certain nobody would ever mistake him for the Welcome Wagon Lady.

"No, you don't Mr. Butticci, but I do know that you are highly respected and nobody does anything in Milwaukee without first getting your permission."

"And what's it to you, Mr. Fly?"

"The young lady's aunt is very distraught and asked me to find out what happened to her niece. Her body was found on a school playground on Auer Avenue a couple of days ago."

"Distraught, huh? I'll tell ya' this much, and if any of this information starts circulating you and your pal Rocco will regret it very much. Capice?"

I nodded.

"Okay then, we sent over a couple of boys, Lefty Franks, and Big Maxie Greenbaum, to talk to that Hogjaw guy. Told him he was disrespecting me for not coming by and asking me before he carries on business in my house. It's disrespectful."

"That's why Hogjaw Johnson got roughed up by Lefty Franks and Big Maxie Greenbaum?"

"They talked to Hogjaw and told him we didn't want him messin' around in our town. They told him they recommend that he pay me a visit."

"Did he?"

"Yeah. When he stopped by I asked him, 'Did you contact anyone from the Chicago Syndicate? The Rockford Syndicate? He said his boss, some Jar guy talked to Tony Accaro in Chicago.'

"I told 'im Tony don't run Milwaukee, I run Milwaukee. This is my home. Did your boss call me? No."

"Who? What jar guy?"

"That Mason Jar."

"You mean Shotgun Mason?"

"Whatever I guess that's his name. He said Tony told his boss his boy should stop in and see me first."

"Did he?"

"He said he was going to. I asked him what the fuck took him so long?"

"He said he had to find out for sure if the girl was up here and that he weren't given a bum steer."

"I tell him the next time he comes into my house he asks first. I think he got the message. He came to see me the next day and apologized. He said the person he was looking for was here in Milwaukee and he asked if he could take care of his problem. I said yeah, but then he better get the fuck outta town."

"He came back a few days later and said he took care of the problem and he was leaving."

"He never made it," I replied.

"Yeah, too bad. That wasn't my doing. I resent the Chicago Outfit guys sending someone to my town and never bother to pay their respects to me. We got that straightened away. Now you can go kiss a duck."

I got up. "Thank you, Mr. Butticci. By the way, do you know Ice Iacconi, the Pinball Man, is dead?"

His jaw dropped. "Arnie?"

Evidently this was news to him. I thought it might be.

Now I kissed a duck.

Chapter 18

We knew Medusa was still grieving the death of her sister, or half sister, but we convinced her that it might do her good to get out for a while. It was Friday night and Hap and I invited her to join us at Rocco's Pub. A popular band from Marty Zivko's in Hartford, called The Legends had been booked by Rocco for the weekend.

We picked Medusa up at 8:00 p.m. at the Bluemond Inn. She came out after one toot of the Edsel's horn. She was voluptuous, tantalizing and dressed to kill. She was wearing high heels and a tight gray skirt and a very tight pink V-Neck sweater and a lot of cleavage. Hap and I were wearing a smile.

"She is a nice piece of real estate," Hap said.

I nodded.

Hap got out and opened the door and Medusa slid across the front seat and sat between the two of us. Her skirt slid up making it difficult for Hap to decide if he should stare at her chest or her thighs.

I looked over at him and it appeared like he was nodding his head yes as he went from her cleavage to her legs.

She tugged at the hem of her skirt trying to cover up a little of her leg. She wasn't successful.

Hap looked at me and then Medusa, "You smell nice."

"Thank you Hap," she replied.

"There will be some great music tonight. I think you will have some fun."

Rocco's was crowded, even for a Friday night.

Hap grinned and said, "The ladies in Wauwatosa know I'm not behind the bar tonight. They know I'll be working the floor looking for someone to tap."

"Tap?" Medusa rolled her eyes.

We walked up to the bar and ordered our drinks. Two young dolls came up to Hap and one sat on each side of him. He smiled and gave each one of them a peck on the cheek and said, "Not tonight ladies I'm just here to get drunk."

"Oh, no, Hap," they chimed in unison, disappointment unrestrained in their voices.

After a few minutes of flirting, they grabbed their drinks and walked back to the other side of the bar.

"I guess they are here for you. You must be quite the lover Hap, having two young girls trying to hustle you?" Medusa asked.

He smiled, "I got a few years on me now but I can still kick it back a bit. Those two skirts are a little young, plus I dated the mommy of one of them for a while."

"Hap's usually two girls short of a threesome," I said. "When we get our drinks, let's find a table."

"Did I hear you were bullfighters?" Medusa asked.

"That's bull riders. Max was. I'm too smart to throw a leg over something that large."

"Tell me about bulls."

"Well, if a bull is looking one way, they are probably going that way. That's all there is to know about it."

She smiled, "I'm sure there is more. Have you ever been married, Hap?" Medusa was now showing an interest in Hap's romantic side.

"Done that once. All she ever did was complain about my drinking; couldn't understand why I got drunk all the time. I told her I could be available in sober, but she would have to do something about her appearance. You see she sorta let herself go. She turned forty and her breasts were sagging and her hair was thinning and growing out at the roots and to make matters worse, her ass fell like a bag of dirty laundry. I told her she ought to sue the quack who remodeled her."

"I can't imagine why that relationship didn't last, Hap."

"We had nothing in common. She didn't read, or couldn't. She didn't drink. She could turn a straight man gay."

We could hear a ruckus just down from us. A drunk was harassing a couple at the bar not far from where we were standing. The drunk was about five feet nine inches tall and over two hundred pounds.

The couple finally had enough of him and walked away through the crowd toward the dance floor.

“Asshole,” Medusa muttered.

We walked past him as we went to find a table. Medusa saw him leering at her breasts, which just about everyone else in the place was doing, but he wanted to make it personal.

“Hey, are those real?” he asked

“Why don’t you go nail your balls to a tree and fall off backwards?”

“Oh, little Miss Fucking Sunshine, aren’t you?”

The people around him laughed.

“Easy now, honey. In case you haven’t heard, I’m giving free mustache rides tonight. You want to be the first? I’m a registered orgasm donor.”

Medusa looked him up and down with a sneer on her face, “I’m not your type. I’m not inflatable.”

Some of his friends thought that was funny and laughed. Obviously, he didn’t like being made fun of. He puffed out his chest and strutted his stuff for his friends standing at the bar. He wiggled his tongue at Medusa.

She turned on him, balling her fists, “Yeah, you’re real cute, all three hundred pounds of hot jello. Just what I’m looking for to complete my life. You would never get laid if it weren’t for the pity fuck.”

I grabbed her arm and tried to pull her away. “You don’t seem to like him, do you? Let’s not start something in here. If we end up breaking anything, Rocco will make me pay for it.”

“I’m not starting anything and the only thing I’ll break tonight is his face,” she said, pulling her arm out of my grip.

“What did you call me you self-righteous commie carpet muncher.” the drunk asked.

“You couldn’t handle me even if I came with instructions. Go find a bucket to stick your head in you sleazy turd.”

He stepped in front of her.

Oh boy, tonight his life was filled with mistakes and this was just another in a long list that was to follow.

“If you don’t get out of my way, I’m gonna kick your ass so hard you are going to be wearing it as a collar.”

“Oh, you are a feisty little broad, ain’t ya? I get real horny when you lesbians get all worked up. It makes it more fun when they put up a little fight.”

He reached out with his index finger and tickled her under her chin.

“Little fight? Right!”

He wasn’t ready for what followed

She responded with a blow; not a bitch slap; a real punch. His nose exploded in a blood spray like a claymore mine, and he fell against the rail and dropped to his knee. The blow stunned him.

Staggering to his feet, he came at her. He grabbed her in a bear hug and lifted her off her feet. I could hear the air escape from her lungs as he squeezed and her face turned red. He laughed as he increased the pressure and his face puckered from exertion.

She bit down on his ear and I could see blood oozing out the side of her mouth. She had done some serious damage to this man's face and head.

He let out a blood-curdling scream as he tried to extricate his ear from her mouth. Next, she clasped her hands together and brought them down on the bridge of his nose. I could hear the cartilage snap as he let out a moan. He released his grip around her waist and she dropped to her feet.

Before he could recover she was raking the side of his face with her fingernails, leaving five squiggly and bleeding tracks in their path.

He let loose with another scream and grabbed his left cheek. That was his next mistake as it gave her the opportunity to grab the front of his shirt, tearing it down the front, buttons popping in all directions, bending him over as she brought her knee up into his swollen and bleeding nose. Then she stepped back and delivered a kick that landed directly on his testicles.

That took whatever fighting spirit he had left, completely out of him.

She was getting ready to send another record-setting kick into his face, but Bubba, Rocco's three hundred pound bouncer grabbed her arm and dragged her away, her breasts heaving beneath her tight pink V-Neck sweater; the sweater that had started this whole altercation in the first place.

We looked down at the victim. He was breathing in short rasps, the front of his shirt was torn away exposing a hairy chest that was heaving in and out. He pawed his left ear where the lobe had once been. He also had a purple mouse under both eyes and a swollen and bruised lower lip and his nose was pouring out blood and blood was still oozing out of the scratches that ran down the left side of his face.

"That isn't exactly what I had in mind when I said I think you will have some fun tonight," Hap said. "It looks like that bonehead was attacked by a pack of wolves."

"Yeah, he probably would have been better off if he had. Are you all right?" I asked her, just to be polite, as she didn't have a scratch on her.

"Yeah I'm fine," she replied, her eyes blazing and her chest still heaving, much to the pleasure of the rest of the patrons who had gathered around to watch the trouncing of the loud mouth who was now being helped to his feet and escorted out the door by a couple of his friends.

"Thanks for your help."

I looked at Hap and we both shrugged.

"Didn't look like you needed any," Hap replied. "Do you hate men?"

"Why would I hate men? Damn, I've got blood all over my new sweater and this is the first time I have worn it."

"Ice cubes," Hap said.

"What?"

"Ice cubes should get that out. Hey Bubba, can you get me a glass of ice? I need to do some rubbing on a pink sweater."

He nodded, "I'll be right there."

"Where did you learn to fight like that?" I asked.

"An old friend taught me to get the first punch in and, if it didn't look like things were going my way, I should get the hell out fast, but this fat ass was a piece of cake. He also told me if I found myself in a fair fight, I didn't plan properly."

"Good advice."

"Have you lost any?"

"What?"

"Fights."

"Not yet."

"I didn't think so."

"But I'm still young."

"That you are."

"What did your mama teach you?" Hap asked.

She looked at him and smiled, "She told me to make sure I keep my panties up and my skirt down. She also said not all men are annoying; some are dead."

"Well, you almost added one to the dead column tonight," Hap replied.

She opened her purse and pulled out a silver cigarette case. She snapped it open and removed a cigarette. I noticed a gun at the bottom of her purse but she snapped it shut before I could get a bead on the caliber and make.

I pulled out my Zippo lighter and leaned over to light her cigarette. She pulled back and said with a scowl " I worked in a morgue before I became a private dick. I was in charge of cremating the bodies, so I think I can light my own cigarette."

"Okay, just trying to be helpful."

"I know how to handle my own cigarette. Don't worry, I won't hurt myself."

Hap turned to me and said, "Look Max, she's so cold the ice cube didn't melt."

The rest of the night was mostly uneventful compared to Medusa leveling that nasty tub of jello, except for when Medusa and I lit up the dance floor doing our rendition of that new dance they were calling the twist Hap wasn't anything to sneeze at either when it came to shaking it out. He had a young filly he was swinging around the dance floor as well.

Bubba had flashed the lights on and off a couple of times indicating the last call. The band had called it quits and was packing up their instruments.

Hap was nuzzling the cleavage of one the young blonds who was flirting with him earlier. I guess she wasn't the daughter of his old flame. She joined us even though Hap was only here to get drunk. She didn't seem to care. She just enjoyed his company. Every one enjoyed Hap's company.

I looked across the table at Medusa who had her eyes closed and a smile on her face and was swaying to imaginary music; imaginary to the rest of us, but not to her, evidently.

She opened her eyes and caught me staring. Luckily for me I had just finished staring at her chest and was now concentrating on the soft features of her face; finding it hard to believe that only a few hours before she was in the middle of beating the shit out of some fat two hundred and something pound asshole who was insulting her.

I now knew she was hard boiled, high heeled, tough talking and cynical to the bone. But at the moment, she was emotionally damaged and drenched in brandy.

Medusa smiled and asked, "Are you hitched?"

I looked at her for a moment before replying, "Not anymore. I don't really trust women well enough to make a long-term commitment,again."

"Again?" She raised her eyebrows. "Well, that's one issue we agree on; we both distrust women."

"Didn't H.L. Mencken say that?"

"Most likely; he talked a lot."

"Perhaps before the evening is over we'll find a couple of other issues we can agree on."

"Perhaps."

We stared at each other.

She smiled at me. "I'm getting a little tipsy. This brandy is even making you awesome."

"That's about the only thing that will. He is kind of a cute little critter, ain't he?" Hap said.

I scowled at him but smiled at Medusa.

She pushed back her chair and gazed at me. She was a little wobbly. She held out her hand. "Come on tonight I need a friend, a close friend."

I got up and grabbed her arm; she didn't pull away.

"Are you going to take your mama's advice tonight?"

"I can't seem to remember what she told me."

That made me smile. I was hoping she wouldn't remember her daddy's advice either.

Chapter 19

It turned out she didn't remember much of anything.

I wasn't too sure of her stories. I wanted to pick her brain to learn as much as I could about what happened in Atlanta. Since she was Candi's older half sister and worked for Kane's law firm, I figured she could provide some of the background on Christopher Kane's dealings with the mob and how all of this tied into Candi being killed in Milwaukee.

She said she didn't know who her daddy was until she was eighteen years old. She was adopted

"You might say I started life with a crooked cue. Demitri and Pearl Podvin were my adoptive parents and they were assholes. "

"Were?"

"I guess. For all I know they could be dead and I could care less. I haven't heard from them for years. Demitri lost interest in me when I reached puberty and I don't think Pearl ever was interested in me. They adopted me so Demitri would have a little play thing. He didn't keep off the grass. I was fingered by the age of five but I wouldn't let him get my cherry. I was saving my virginity for marriage, or at least high school, but that didn't happen either. Turns out I couldn't wait. I met this guy who really turned me on plus he had a big 1950 Buick Roadmaster Convertible, black with a black cloth interior. Beautiful car, nice radio. The back seat was bigger than my bedroom. It happened the summer before I started high school. He was big and bad with eyes like black fire and a tongue like a lizard. He was eighteen and I was fourteen. Our first kiss included his tongue in my mouth, his hand on my ass and he made my nipples hard and it was all over. I wanted him as much as he wanted me. From then on I couldn't get enough of him. We spent almost every waking hour together. He dropped out of school that November and joined the Marines. School was the one thing he wasn't good at. I never saw him again.

"By the time I was fifteen I was living on the streets. I went to school at night and got my GED.

"I knew life was hard and I knew it was harder if you were stupid."

"I guess you didn't heed your mama's advice about keeping the hem of your skirt down and your panties up, huh?" I smiled.

She smiled.

"My stepmother wasn't someone you would want to take advice from. She told me by the time she was sixteen she had a thirty-nine-inch rack and that was when she started entertaining servicemen around Fort Gillem.

"You know, Max, some people just suck the nice right outta ya and that is what my stepmother did to me.

"She named me Pearl, after herself of course. That's why I started calling myself Medusa. Since I love snakes, and hate her. I thought it appropriate."

"Absolutely appropriate. I was going to rename myself Poutsa but my ex-wife was against it. She said it was vulgar."

"What does Poutsa mean?"

"Poutsa is Greek, too, and it means something that can please women from all walks of life; much like a penis but far superior."

She smiled.

"Hmm, I guess your ex-wife should know."

I blushed. "Probably. She seemed to think she knew everything but she was colder than a frozen margarita. The only thing she gave me was grief; unless you count the case of crabs in '53."

Medusa laughed. "You're bad, Max."

"I agree. Maybe you would like to weigh in on whether or not I should rename myself Poutsa?"

"I don't usually offer an opinion after one taste."

I smiled.

She sat up and straddled me, "Let me get another taste. Then I will let you know what I think." When we finished she propped her head up on her hand and gazed into my eyes. Her light brown hair was tousled and her cheeks were flushed and glistening with sweat.

She smiled. "That was nice, Poutsa."

I smiled.

Chapter 20

I did something I normally don't do; I made breakfast. I flipped some pancakes, fried some bacon and treated Medusa to some of my special toast that I slather in real Wisconsin butter and top with cinnamon sugar; my grandmother's recipe.

I poured us both a cup of coffee and added a shot of Martel Cognac. Bear was sitting by her side looking at her with his woeful St. Bernard eyes. She couldn't resist. She kept feeding him pieces of her bacon.

Bear farted.

"Most dogs bark when they beg, he farts."

She gave him more bacon.

"Ewww, he stinks."

"Yes, he does. That's what happens when you feed him table scraps. I'll take him outside."

I led Bear out the back door. He looked back at Medusa. I pushed him out and closed the door behind him.

I could hear him whine and scratch at the door. I ignored him.

After we cleaned up the dishes, I poured another shot of Cognac in our coffee and we retired to the living room and sat down on the couch in front of the fire.

The sun was coming up and melting the snow. I hoped the temperature would stay above 32 degrees for a few days.

I put my arm around her.

She sighed and put her head on my shoulder.

"I'm gonna go take a hot shower. It's like a normal shower, but with me in it."

"Mind if I join you?"

"I was hoping you would."

When the hot water was finally gone, we got out and started to dry off.

I asked her, "How did you get in this racket? Private detective work, I mean."

She smiled.

"I was enrolled at Georgia State University, at night, I worked part-time jobs waiting tables in some of Atlanta's finest bars. There I met a man who offered me a job working in Christopher Kane's Law Offices. I didn't know it at the time, but Christopher Kane had tracked me down. I found out later, the reason he tracked me down was because I am his daughter. He had a fling with my birth mother, his sister-in-law, Hilga Haller, and knocked her up. They decided not to tell the sister, his wife Helene. Hilga had me and immediately put me up for adoption and returned home to Wisconsin.

"I started by learning the job of a law clerk. One day a client of Christopher's, a Bail Bondsman, needed some work done finding a young woman who failed to show up for her court date and skipped on her bail. Christopher asked me to see if I could find where she went. I found her and talked her into turning herself in. That impressed Christopher and from there I became a skip trace professional.

"It wasn't long before I started doing skip traces for some of the Bail Bondsmen in Atlanta and Christopher and his partners began to use me for the majority of their investigative work. I was good at it and I knew Christopher was proud of me; and not just because he gave me a nice raise, but, by the way he looked at me. I could see it in his eyes. I wanted to please him, to make my father proud, so I worked hard; harder than anyone else.

"I was in the office, working late when he called from Hogansville, a small town located southwest of Atlanta. He asked me to pull some files for him that were located in his private office. His client was the mayor of Hogansville who was accused of illegal gun sales; he was nothing but a gun runner, running guns for Darrell Mason throughout the southern part of Georgia as well as the panhandle of Florida. He was one of the many mayors in south Georgia that Darrell Mason had on his payroll. The papers Christopher wanted were in the file cabinet behind his desk. When I was looking for the files, I noticed a folder with my name on it. When I opened it up I found a copy of my birth certificate along with all this information on me. He was keeping tabs on me ever since I was adopted. I guess his conscience was finally getting the best of him when he offered me a job.

"During the summer, Candi would come home from the University of Georgia in Athens and work as a file clerk in Christopher's office. We got to be pretty close even though I was ten years older than her. I knew we were related but I don't believe she had a clue. I considered asking her if she knew we were sisters, but I thought it was best not to do anything that might jeopardize my job. I loved working there.

"Some of the law partners were nitwits. A couple of the older ones would hit on me, but I quickly squared them away.

"As an investigator for the law firm, I was privy to a lot of information most office employees would never know about. It wasn't long before I knew that the firm was engaged in some pretty shady business: gambling, bank robbery, bootlegging, narcotic trafficking, prostitution, riots and general lawlessness. They didn't just defend the criminal element, they actually were a part of it, or, at the very least, they dabbled in more than just the fringe and that eventually drew the attention of local and federal law enforcement. The FBI began looking into some of their dealings with the Dixie Mafia.

"I learned that Christopher and his partner, Lou Crowson, viewed the law as something to be manipulated for profit and power. The people they worked with made the streets dark with something more than night.

"I learned to scrape the top off life and I saw the whole enchilada and when I did' I have to tell ya' that I was disillusioned by what I saw. My eyes were opened to the illicit connections between crime, business, and politics that exist, not just in Atlanta, but, I believe, in all American cities.

"They destroy people's hopes and create in them a weakness of character. I've seen it, Max; I've seen it in my father, even in the lowly shoeshine boy who shined Christopher's shoes every morning.

"So, when Christopher was killed, was I surprised? Not entirely; I was sad because he really did treat me like a daughter most of the time.

"I told him he should keep an eye on a couple of useless lollypops who, when I met with them, came off as extremely pissed at Christopher over something he did. What was it? I don't know. I couldn't get it outta them.

"Christopher just scoffed at me and told me I shouldn't worry about it and that he had an ace in the hole that would protect him.

"I didn't know what that ace was; he never told me. However, I didn't think anything less than the United States Attorney could protect him from Darrell Shotgun Mason if he wanted him dead, and even then he might still be vulnerable.

"I followed Lou Crowson to one of the sleaze bars he frequented that was owned by Shotgun Mason. The firm was laundering money for Mason and I saw Crowson put cash in his coat pocket on different occasions before he left the club. I took pictures from across the street with a telephoto lens.

"He always met this one hooker there that he had a thing for. She was a real tramp, but then again, Crowson was one too. I think Crowson rode her for free, compliments of Shotgun Mason.

"After some heavy necking, followed by a session of fellatio performed professionally by that skank, they got up and left.

"I followed them to a motel. It was a cut rate place with one of those Magic Fingers machines sitting on the table next to the bed; a dive for pimps, chicken hawks, and hookers. The rooms cost five dollars an hour; ten dollars if you want clean sheets." I didn't interrupt her, but I wondered how she knew about the Magic Fingers machine and the cost of the rooms.

"I wanted to do something to let him know someone was on to him. So after they did whatever it was they did, they drove away and I picked the lock to the room and left a playing card, an ace of spades, on his pillow just to mess with him. I was looking for the address book and the money he had been skimming, so I could prove it to Christopher.

"I couldn't find them, the book or the money, or any trace of them.

"I got trapped in the bathroom when he returned with that woman.

"When Crowson saw the card, he was scared. I could hear it in his voice I had to suppress a laugh.

"She came in to take a pee. She did her business but she left without seeing me.

"Crowson was a little shit, about five-foot nuthin' and one hundred twenty pounds soaking wet with a hard-on. He came in to take a pee as well and I have to tell ya' Max. What that man had in his hand didn't impress me one bit. It would take a helluva lot more than two hundred grand to get me in the sack with him and that little pee pee of his."

I wasn't going to ask her how she knew what he weighed with a hard-on either, so I let her continue.

“That skank was nothing. She was a fake screamer. Hell, I could do better than what she put out there when I was just a kid trick or treatin’ in my neighborhood.

“I knew about the book that Christopher was keeping and Crowson knew too and I thought he got his hands on it some way. I was worried that Crowson was setting Christopher up to take the fall for the skimming he was doing and one way to back his story was to let Shotgun know about the book.

“When I heard Christopher and Helene were killed, I was distressed and I knew that Crowson had to be involved in some way and I was determined to find out exactly how.

“Then Crowson ups and disappears with no trace. The cops think he is fish food somewhere in the Chattahoochee River.”

Chapter 21

The next morning, I watched the snow gently fall outside my front window. I had a fire going, hoping to burn the chill out of my bones.

The early winter was staying with us. I was wrapped in a blanket sitting in my favorite chair in front of the fireplace, going over last night with Medusa, filling in some of the missing pieces to make sense of Medusa and what she told me.

I plowed out the driveway in the morning. The third time in five days. I had been sitting for a few hours, drinking and thinking. I poured a glass of Martel Cognac from the bottle given to me by a former lady friend, Rachel Scanlon. She gave it to me in appreciation for finding the killers of her husband, Mike and their son, Little Mike, in Tombstone Arizona. In my right hand, I held a hand rolled Cuban that I reclaimed from the ash tray. It was one I had started the night before but fell asleep before I could finish it.

The half empty bottle was sitting on the table next to me. Bear was farting at my feet. Once again I was feeling melancholy and it had nothing to do with Bear farting nor the Milwaukee Braves baseball team. With the Braves, hope springs eternal every February when they start spring training. With Bear, every day his farts spring eternal. That’s not a good thing but he can’t help himself. I have tried everything. I chan-

ged his diet, I let him out for a few hours every night before letting him back in the house. Nothing seems to work.

My mind was drifting back and forth reminiscing about last night with Medusa and then to Dr. Lundgren and finally I wondered what Deputy Debbie Red Eagle, the little Yaqui Indian who stole my heart back in Tombstone was doing. It was surely warmer in Tombstone Arizona than it was in Pewaukee Wisconsin. Even in a teepee, or whatever, she lived in. I never did find that out. I didn't get that far. I let out a long sigh, wishing she was wrapped in this blanket with me. She is a Yaqui Indian and they are tough, so I figured Bear's farts wouldn't bother her.

I even thought about the English teacher I met a few nights before. I just couldn't recall her name. I was sure it would come to me.

There was a soft knock at the door. Bear lifted his head and looked at me with his bloodshot eyes.

"Well, go see who it is," I said.

He got to his feet and ambled into the foyer.

"You're supposed to bark."

He let out a soft, "Woof."

"Nice Bear, real nice. That's sure to scare whoever is out there."

I looked at my watch wondering who in the hell would be calling at this time of the night. It was 10:30 p.m. and it was snowing again. I knew Hap hooked up with a waitress in New Lisbon and was spending the weekend with her and Dr. Lundgren was in Los Angeles speaking on men and their dysfunctional sexual habits that affect their ability to be intimate with women, so I knew it couldn't be either of them.

I grabbed my Colt .45 caliber Belly Gun out of its holster from the hook it was hanging on next to the fireplace mantel and walked to the door.

My legs were wobbling. I guess I drank more cognac than I thought.

I grabbed Bear's collar, in case I had to hold him back, or up, whatever the case may be, and opened the door. The frigid Wisconsin air hit me in the face, again making me wonder what in the hell I was doing here.

Standing on the porch under the light with the hood of his parka tied tightly around his head and with snowflakes furling around him, looking a lot like Sasquatch, was none other than Harry holding a bottle of St. Remy's.

We were both speechless as we stood and stared at each other, neither one saying anything or moving.

Bear was excited to see him. His tail was fanning the floor.

Finally, I said, "What's up?"

"Does something have to be up for me to stop by?"

"Yes; now answer my question."

"Nothing."

"Well then make it quick, I'm busy."

"Just let me in, you prick. It's colder than a witches tit out here"

"And you would know," I said as I stepped aside and Harry walked into the foyer and removed his parka. He let it fall to the floor. Bear sniffed it and decided it was clean enough to lay on so he did. He closed his eyes and let out a soft fart. Harry looked down at him and shook his head.

"Damn right I would know; that guy's a beast," he said pointing down at Bear. "Why don't you keep him in the barn with your horses?"

"He's my watch dog," I replied.

"Humph," he said, scratching behind Bear's ear.

"You look good."

"Liar."

"You're right. You look like shit."

Harry didn't bother taking his boots off. He walked over to my chair tracking snow across the floor and sat down. "What's that thing hanging over the fireplace? Sure, ain't no white tail."

"It's a mule deer. The previous owner left it. Why don't you just make yourself at home?" I sat in the chair facing him.

"I will. Have you been thinking about me?"

"Hardly," I replied.

"Well, the hell with you then. That Cuban Tree looks a little gamey. Winston Churchill said cigars are gamier when resurrected."

"I thought he said that about women."

"Them too, I suppose. If I knew you were drinking this swill cognac," he said, picking up the Martel bottle, "I would have brought a bottle of Glenfiddich for myself. But hell, the way I feel, St Remy's will do just fine. Damn, what's that smell?" He asked sniffing the air.

"Bear. He's been dreaming about you," I replied.

"At least, somebody has," he said.

Oh, oh, something was wrong. Harry was seldom, if ever, this despondent. I have been around this man for just about all of my life and I can count on one hand the number of times he has let something get him down like he apparently has tonight. In the past, it was a woman. I had a feeling...

I gave him a glass, actually an old Welch's Grape Jelly jar. It was all I had that was clean but it was glass, and he poured about three fingers of St Remy's into it and downed it in one swallow with a slight grimace. He refilled it and held up the bottle. I shook my head no.

"Suit yourself," he said, setting the St. Remy's Brandy next to my Martel on the table.

"Fire's nice," he said.

"Thanks. You didn't stop by to admire my fire did you? I asked you what's up?"

"You sure are observant, Max. You would make a great detective. You ever consider getting into that line of work."

"It's crossed my mind."

"Good, because you would be good," he said looking down at his Welch's Jelly jar, swirling his St Remy's in circles.

"The last time you were here we reminisced about the crazy things we did when we were young and foolish."

"Now we are just foolish. Like what stories?"

"Well, one was about that time we were going to take your old Harley to visit two chicks in New York."

"Oh yeah?"

"It was in the spring of 1931. You lost your driver's license for the second time, but that didn't stop us. We planned to take a trip to that private all girls school in Purchase, New York, Manhattanville College, to make a couple of coeds very happy by surprising them for spring break."

"I have no recollection of that."

"I don't believe you. I was dating a girl who just moved to Elm Grove from Schenectady, New York. I hooked up with her for a couple of years. Her best friend was na-

med Pinky and she lived around Chicago somewhere and would come up for the weekends. You don't remember that?"

Harry had a blank look on his face but I wasn't sure if he really couldn't remember or if it was due to the St. Remy's Brandy.

"I introduced you two and before I could pull out of her driveway, you were steaming up the windows of my car."

"Sure we were. You are full of shit."

"So what? You don't have to believe me if you don't want to but that's the way it happened. I think she was just too fast for you."

"Don't bear false witness, Max, or God will strike you dead."

"I speak the truth and you know it. Those girls were good Catholic girls. Well, the Pope wouldn't call them good, but we would. Of course, you and I have different criteria for what we consider good girls than the Pope.

"They didn't realize they were dating a couple of unprincipled, depraved libertine and overly titillated Wisconsin boys.

"We apparently started thinking with our alternative heads because we decided to visit them in New York during spring break, only we didn't have a car, so you had this hair brain idea to take your motorcycle, that old Harley. I couldn't control the bike with your two hundred pounds of lard latched to my ass so we went back to your house and parked it in the garage.

"You went to the house and down in your basement and pilfered one of your dad's bottles of Old Forester which we took to the barn back in the lane and drank to our spring break vacation with the girls. We got drunk."

"I don't remember that."

"It was probably the Old Forester's fault. You drank more of it than I did."

"I must have liked Pinky better than you liked Kathy."

"I don't think so."

"It was my bottle. You are lucky I was willing to share it with you."

"It was your dad's bottle."

"Same thing; I guess that was the end of our romance with those two?"

"I think so. Kathy hooked up with a guy she met at Fordham University that spring and I think they finally got married. Man, that was a long time ago."

"It sure was because I can't remember a Pinky from Chicago."

Bear farted. I guess he was tired of hearing the same old stories and it was his way of getting us to stop.

"So now you show up unannounced during a snow storm. Are you planning to plow my driveway?"

"No, tonight I just need a friend."

I stared at him.

"Yeah? Well, I have always been your friend and I always will be. What's up?"

"I called Kathy," he said, keeping his eyes on the Welch's Jelly jar.

Kathy is his ex-wife. I stood up in their wedding. It was so long ago, I can't recall much about it. I blame the lack of memory on the amount of brandy I consumed at the reception. I hooked up with a bridesmaid, whose name escapes me, and we ended up going on a little honeymoon of our own that lasted about three days; the wedding was in Elm Grove at St. Edmunds Episcopal Church.

When Harry returned from the war he had to deal with some issues. All of us did and unless you lived through that hell you wouldn't understand. Plus Harry piled on all the

misery that comes with being a homicide detective. He never complained. He lived with it but Kathy couldn't.

When she left, he said he felt like a gutted carp.

His demons became too much for Kathy to hold and she left him after twenty-some years of marriage and four kids.

"What did you call her about?" I asked.

"Our life. One day you wake up and you can't remember where you left all those pieces you tried so hard to hold on to or why you worked so hard at trying to hold on to them. I caused her great pain and she embraced it with a strength I didn't know she possessed. Why is there so much heartbreak behind it?"

"Behind what?"

"My life, what I did. How I treated her. I thought it was the price of the ticket."

"What ticket?"

"The ticket for life; for what we want; happiness, family, job until the lights are turned out."

He paused and took a slug of his brandy.

"I told her I loved her. She said she believed me but that I loved my job more."

He lowered his head and put it in his hands and shook it back and forth.

I thought he might be crying, but I heard nothing.

"I told her I wanted to come home."

I was speechless. I didn't know what to say.

We sat there for a few minutes, Harry looking at his jelly jar and me at the fire that was beginning to die out. My cigar already had.

Bear farted to break the silence.

I got up and threw another log on the fire along with the rest of my cigar. They quickly caught and the flames roared back to life.

"What did she say?" I asked, sitting down in my chair.

Again, silence.

We sat there. The fire crackled. Bear farted. I was tempted to open the window, but it was just Harry sitting with me. Anyway, it was too cold.

"She didn't say no," he said. His lips quivered.

I looked at him. He still hadn't taken his eyes off the liquid in his jelly jar. He took another drink.

I thought for a minute. I wasn't good at this, giving advice about women. I knew I should say something' but what?

I stared at the fire. Bear farted.

Damn.

Harry didn't move.

Finally, I came up with something to say. "Well, that's a good thing, right?"

He finally looked up at me. "I guess," he said.

"How are the kids?"

"Good, they are all good; they are smart. They take after Kathy."

Finally, he was talking. I knew Kathy was smart, but so was Harry. Very smart. In fact, he tested out a genius. Every time I was with him, I learned something.

Being a genius would have meant something if he cared.

His memory was amazing. Latin was his second language and he could sing opera and quote Shakespeare.

I spoke passable English.

Breaking out of my reverie, I asked, "What did Kathy say?"

He looked up at me and tipped back his drink finishing what he had left in the jelly jar. He refilled it with more St. Remy's.

"She said she would think about it."

I stared at him. Bear farted.

"That's a good thing, right Harry?"

He scowled at me. "Damn, Max, can't you think of something else to say? You have been banging that shrink for the past few months and all you can do is ask me if that's good? Of course, it's good. Haven't you picked up any knowledge from that doctor? Plus that fucking dog needs to see a vet."

"Yes, he does. The vet is coming out next week to pull a Coggins on the horses and I'll talk to him about Bear's problem.

"Good. What do you and that shrink talk about when you are together?"

"Well, she told me women let men rule their empires but women rule their balls."

"That's it? Any guy that's been married knows that."

"Actually, my relationship with Dr. Lundgren is mostly physical, Harry. Sex. She doesn't confide in me regarding what she does but she freely evaluates my neurotic life; obviously her words, not mine; and yes, I admit, I'm not good at this. I wish I knew what to say that would help you, but I don't think anyone but Kathy can do that. We spend our lives searching for heaven in this world and then when we find it, we fuck it up. It's what men do. When it comes to women, I don't know a thing about them. I don't know what they are thinking from one minute to the next; and frankly, I don't care as long as I can convince them to sleep with me. I do think you took the right step by asking her if that is what you really want."

Harry stared at me. "Finally, some worthwhile shit from you. Of course, it's what I really want. I wouldn't have asked her if it wasn't. I want her back. I have been thinking about this for a long time now. I was having a difficult time figuring out how I should approach her. I finally decided, fuck it, just ask her."

I looked at him. "I think that was a smart move."

He stared at me. "Of course, it was. Thanks, Max. That means a lot. It really does. Now, what do you have to eat here besides dog food?"

Chapter 22

Harry and I were sitting in his office having a cup of acid, that Harry was trying to pass off as coffee.

"I heard you got lucky with an English teacher the other night. Is that true?"

"What do you think?"

"I hope you aren't still using that same tired old line you used when we were kids."

"Which one are you referring to, Harry?"

"That one where you tell the woman to act like her feet hate each other."

"I forgot that one. No, I didn't need to."

Detectives George and Taylor stuck their heads in the door.

"We have something for you, Lou," Detective George said, "You want us to wait around until you finish?"

"Naw, come on in and sit down. What do you have?"

Detective Taylor looked in my direction.

"He's alright," Harry said.

He nodded and began, "Okay, we spoke with an Atlanta Homicide Captain by the name of Greg Dorfmeier, a German boy who happens to have relatives living in the Sheboygan area. He brought us up to date on their investigation into the murder of Candi Kane's parents, Christopher, and Helene."

"I know Dorfmeier," I said. "We served in the South Pacific together. He was my company commander, Captain Greg Dorfmeier. He went to school at Point."

"Stevens Point?" Chet asked.

"No, West Point."

"What in the hell is he doing in the Atlanta PD? Shouldn't he be a General or something?"

"You would think."

Harry interrupted, "Come on, let's continue with your report, Detective,"

"Ok, Christopher was the managing partner of the firm and it was one of the top law offices in Atlanta. Dorfmeier Telexed us a copy of their report a few minutes ago.

"According to their source, they think the murders were orchestrated by the Dixie Mafia, spearheaded by a guy named Darrell "Shotgun" Mason who splits his time living in Atlanta and Albany, Georgia, a town a couple a hundred miles southwest of Atlanta. He is Georgia's gangland kingpin who owns a string of motels and nightclubs along an area known as "The Strip" in Atlanta that doubles as illicit dens for gambling, prostitution, and drugs; a place where some of Atlanta's finest go to get their steam released, compliments of a southern style head job.

"Mason's boy, Billy Bob, who goes by the nickname Junior, ran the operation along with a punk named Bobby Joe Millen. They are close friends and partners in crime.

"Mason has club owners carry messages, hold loot, hide fugitives, fence stolen property, and underwrite the expenses for this loose-knit band of criminals in exchange for a piece of the action.

"Shotgun and Junior have been linked to a string of killings that have left twenty-five people dead in six different states over the past four years. They are a couple of bad hombre's and as slippery as a couple of greased pigs.

"What the Atlanta Police have been able to gather so far is that Christopher Kane's Law firm, Kane, and Crowson, LLC, was the mouthpiece for Mason. They got paid hefty sums of money to get Mason and his cronies off the hook on everything from prostitution to drugs, and murder raps.

"Their investigation so far has turned up some interesting facts about Mr. Kane and his law partner, Lou Crowson. Most of their clients were the kind that was in need of criminal defense. Those with the most money were those whose gains had been ill-gotten through vice and corruption. The Kane & Crowson Law Firm seemed to thrive on these low life's.

"Kane and Crowson didn't simply view their criminal defense work as "just a job," they seemed to move comfortably among the figures of this shadowy underworld. They were well-liked, respected, and welcomed into the fold. Crowson particularly seemed fascinated by this underground culture, according to the information they uncovered so far.

"Since they were paid a very substantial amount of money, they were expected to deliver the goods and most of the time they did. After Kane and Crowson got their clients off the hook, most of them would go out and commit another one. Evidently Kane started to wrestle with his conscience over what he was involved in, but unfortunately, Crowson wasn't experiencing the same pangs of guilt.

"The Atlanta PD believe that it wasn't long before the firm was laundering drug and prostitution money brought in by the strip clubs. They believe Kane found out his partner was up to his nuts in dirty laundry and they think his partner believed Christopher Kane was going to go to authorities, so he arranged to have him taken out. Christopher Kane was killed with a rope, two men, one on each end tightening it, trying to get information out of him."

"I would think it would be difficult to talk with that rope strangling you."

"You think? That's why you are a crackerjack detective, Max nothing gets by you," Harry said.

"They also believe, that two years earlier a large chunk of the money Mason had been laundering through the Kane & Crowson law firm turned up missing. About \$500,000, according to their sources, though they now believe the amount is closer to \$200,000. A lot less than they were led to believe.

"Evidently they have a snitch in the Dixie Mafia who told them a meeting was held at a local motel between Mason and Crowson and several other of Mason's associates, among them Bobby Joe Millen, who happens to have a long rap sheet that includes everything from extortion to attempted murder. When Mason asked Crowson about the missing money, Crowson denied any responsibility and blamed it on Christopher Kane. A hit was then ordered on Kane, and the Atlanta Police think Billy Bob Mason and our buddy who is now toe-tagged in the morgue, Charles Hogjaw Johnson, did the dirty work. They brought along a local cop, Tommy Richards, who has been on the take for a long time and who the local Federal Bureau of Investigation's Atlanta Office has been following closely for the past year.

"We got this information from a federal agent who we spoke with later. It seems Dorfmeier wasn't too forthcoming when it involves one of Atlanta's finest.

"The fed said that after the Kanes were killed, the local United States Attorney offered the daughter, Candi, a place in the federal witness protection program."

"Really?" Harry asked. "What happened?"

"She refused. He said they can't force someone to enter the program so their hands were tied and then she vanished.

"So, it turns out, the Atlanta Police and FBI believe Mason didn't think it was only Kane who took his money. He figured Crowson had his hands in his honey pot too and told his son, Billy Bob, to take out Crowson as well. Of course, this is conjecture on their part.

"The day after meeting with Crowson, Billy Bob Mason called Hogjaw Johnson and told him that he had a contract hit on Lou Crowson. That was as much as their source could offer, but it was plenty. At least enough to move the investigation forward in a specific direction.

Crowson hasn't been seen around Atlanta, or anywhere for that matter, for a long time now. Crowson has a place in Charleston South Carolina and they had the local police there check it out. They said it has been locked up tighter than a drum for months.

"Everyone suspects foul play and it is a good possibility that Crowson ended up in some garbage dump or as a floater in the Chattahoochee River, a popular spot to dispose of bodies in Atlanta.

"So the feds conducted a raid on the Tres Chic Club, a strip joint in Northeast Atlanta., whose owner, on paper, they purportedly change nearly as often as the tablecloths. The FBI and the Atlanta Police Department know that place is a front for Billy Bob and ultimately Shotgun Mason and the Dixie Mafia but haven't made a move on it yet.

"What they found, besides strong evidence of prostitution, were silencers, a roll of foam, the type normally used in silencers, an address book with Lou Crowson's unlisted phone number in it, and a phony stock certificate from a scam Mason concocted and that was drawn up by the Kane & Crowson Law Firm. It was likely done by Christopher Kane; they don't think Lou Crowson had the smarts to draw up a scheme as complex as that.

"Shotgun's associates would sell the phony stock and they would have "Road Dogs", or runners, pick up and deliver the scam money.

"The fed said they feel the connection between Crowson and the other suspects in the murder-for-hire plot now appear to be conclusively established. The pieces were finally fitting into place.

" Their source told them that Kane's book about Mason's dealings with local politicians and business executives didn't turn up and there are a whole lot of nervous people down south of the Mason Dixie line. Evidently, Kane did this for his own protection. Unfortunately, for him, it didn't keep those bad guys from choking the life out of him.

"The book didn't turn up in the search of Kane's office or his private residence."

"They think Mason got his hands on it?" Harry asked.

"Yep. They also believe that Kane's daughter, has additional damning information that Mason is looking for but they had no clue where she was; that is, until recently.

"I love that name, Candi Kane," Detective George said. "She up and disappears and now turns up dead in our lovely city.

"She was the sole survivor of a family killed in a horrible and grizzly murder.

"Until they heard from us, the police wondered if she was dead or on the run? They just didn't know. They had two people dead and two others missing.

"But now they know where one of the missing is; in our morgue," George shook his head.

" She was on the run but evidently Mason's goons caught up with her.

"That's about it, Lou. You still need us?" George asked.

"No, good job; write it up and have it on my desk before you leave for the day."

After they left, I stood up to leave. "I think I'll head down to Atlanta and sniff around a little, see what I can dig up, Harry. I'll ask Hap if he wants to go on another fishing trip. Atlanta has that big river running right through it. I think I'll pay a visit to my friend Dorfmeier and see if he will be willing to talk a little more openly with me since we spent a few months sharing a foxhole, dodging incoming rounds in the lovely Pacific Island of Guam a few years back. I'll ask John Marcello to grease the wheels for my visit with the Feds down there as well."

Harry looked at me for a moment before shaking his head, "You better not withhold anything from me, you little pisser or you'll wish you stayed in Atlanta."

"Me withhold information? Come on, Harry," I smiled.

"By the way, the ballistics just came back on Ice Iaconni The Pinball Man. That .357 that got him was the same one that nailed Hogjaw Johnson."

"Coincidence?"

"Yeah, coincidence."

"I'll get Hap and call Sam Galbraith to crank up that old plane of his and take us down. He hasn't been doing much lately since he hooked up with that proctologist in Whitefish Bay."

I didn't tell Harry I got about as much information from Medusa in my shower as Detectives George and Taylor were able to get from the Atlanta Police Department. She's a smart lady. I wonder where she gathered all of her information

Chapter 23

“Hap, you want to go fishing?”

“Yeah, hold on and I’ll let Rocco know I’m leaving.”

“Don’t you want to know where?”

“Okay, where?”

“Atlanta, Georgia.”

“Alright, let me tell Rocco.”

“Not yet. I need to ask my two neighbors at the Rainbow Towers to take care of Bear and the horses.”

“Those two neighbors the ones who are a little light in the loafers, Gary Hasse, and Tom Winterberg?”

“Yes, and quit calling them that.”

“You have to remind them to stop feeding Bear whatever it is they are feeding him. It’s giving him gas and makes him stink; do they know your friend, Horace Greenberg?”

“I don’t know, why do you ask?”

“I overheard them talking about the Castaways, that gay bar down by the Dick Dock on Lake Michigan where all of those guys like to hang out.”

“The Dick Dock?”

“That’s what it’s called. It’s a night trysting place for gay men. I heard it’s actually a queer’s mating ritual to meet there to consummate their relationship.”

“Anyway, I thought they might be able to help each other out, that’s all,” Hap began to whistle as he walked into the back cooler.

I shook my head. Hap is a real piece of work. I watched him return carrying a case of long necks and load the ice tray. He picked up the phone and dialed Sam Galbraith’s number and handed it to me.

It took a while before a sleepy Sam Galbraith picked up the phone.

“Hullo?”

“ I thought we would fly to Atlanta if that pile of nuts and bolts of yours still flies.”

“Who is this?”

“It’s Max. Do you know what time it is?”

“Are you calling to ask me what time it is?”

“Naw. I need your plane.”

“Take it. The keys are in it. Just have it back by next week. I have to fly some wax people from SC Johnson Company down in Racine to Kansas City for some cleaning convention.”

“You know I don’t know how to fly. I need you to fly the thing.”

“Atlanta, huh? Okay, I haven’t been there for awhile. Does this have anything to do with Hap?”

“Yup, he wants to fish.”

“I knew fish had to be in there some place. When do you want to leave?”

“Day after tomorrow.”

“Okay. I’ll have my baby fueled and ready to go by 8:00 a.m. Thursday.”

Sam Galbraith purchased a Model 17 Staggerwing biplane a few years ago and talked some of us into investing in his fledgling company, Galbraith and Associates, Transport and Charter Express. It turned out to be very successful and Sam ended up buying us out, one of the few times I actually made money on an investment. Now it is just Sam and Hap flying goods and girls around the upper midwest and points south. He said that he can fly 785 miles on a tank of fuel in that thing. I checked, the shortest distance by air from Milwaukee to Atlanta is 669 miles’ so we’ll have a few miles to spare. The way Sam flies, we will need it.

Sam flew P-40B Warhawks off the USS Enterprise in the South Pacific during World War II, or as those of us fighting in the Pacific knew it as, Hirohito’s War. The Enterprise, known as the Big E, participated in more major battles against Japan than any other US ship and Sam was flying off her deck in every one of them.

He was and still is fearless. He and a fellow flyboy named, George Welch, are credited with seven kills between the two of them. Sam’s friends like to rib him and say that he set more P-40B’s in the water than on the deck of the carrier and that he holds the Army Air Corps record for shooting down the most seagulls, but, no matter how you cut it, he is still one helluva pilot, if not a scary one. The last time I flew with him was a flight to Denver and the gas gauge wasn’t working. The distance from the Palmyra Airport to Denver is 780 miles, I checked. This left the old World War II ace a five-mile fudge factor. Not having the fuel gauge working left for some tense moments but miraculously we made it.

Chapter 24

Thursday morning the alarm went off at 4:30, exactly what I set it at the night before. With my eyes closed, I rolled over and hit the top of the clock, a little harder than I had to. I reached an arm out to the side and felt something hairy. I hoped it was Bear. I have ended an evening with an ugly woman once, on more than one occasion. I opened my right eye and was relieved it was Bear I saw staring at my face with his bloodshot eyes and drool running from his massive jowls.

He farted.

“Thanks, what a pleasant way to start my day.”

His tail started to wag and thump on the bed. He put one of his giant paws on my neck and started to whine. His tongue lapped my cheek and his breath smelled worse than his fart. I wondered what he ate last night when he was having dinner at the Rainbow Towers with my merry neighbors.

“Ok, I’ll let you out. Our two friends said they will take care of you while I am gone. Now don’t forget to exercise with the horses because they feed you fattening food. Nothing like the stuff I give you.”

Bear looked up at me and whined. I don’t know if he was agreeing with me or if he really needed to go.

I got up and walked him back to the kitchen. He beat me there and had his front paws resting anxiously on the door.

“Before you go over there, stop back and say goodbye.”

I opened the door.

With a soft, “ruff,” Bear took off running into the early morning darkness in the direction of the Rainbow Towers.

I walked back to the bedroom to pack for my trip to Atlanta. I pulled out my duffle bag and threw in a change of socks, underwear, another pair of Wrangler’s and a couple of shirts along with a box of .45 caliber shells for my Colt Belly Gun and a quart of Paul Masson Brandy.

Bear never did return to say good-bye.

As I drove to the Palmyra airport to meet Hap and Sam for our flight to Atlanta, I visualized Bear sitting at the kitchen table with those two squirrels, Hasse and Winterberg, eating fresh eggs and bacon and most likely, freshly baked pastries.

My stomach let out a growl. Maybe I should have stopped over to say good-bye before I left. I haven't had one of their pastries in a couple of weeks. The fresh apple turnover is one of my favorites.

By the time I rolled into Palmyra, the sun was a bright red-orange, rising high in the sky to the East of the airport, the clouds extending from its sides like thin, pink strings. It promised to be another beautiful chilly day in the Dairy State.

I pulled up to the terminal, a small metal Quonset Hut, left over from the war and converted into an office and lounge. There was a large wooden sign hanging over the door, Palmyra Plane Rentals and Sky Diving painted on it in big red letters.

Directly to the side of the office was the hangar, another metal Quonset Hut, only much larger. I saw Sam had already pulled the Beechcraft D17 Staggerwing Biplane out of the hangar and a fuel truck was alongside, filling it up for our trip. I looked past the plane at the dirt runway. The takeoffs and landings were always a bit rough at the Palmyra Regional Airport.

I was wearing my Stetson hat and jeans with the belt buckle I won for placing second in the all-around cowboy competition on the Texas Rodeo circuit in 1937. My corduroy jacket was buttoned, hiding my Colt Detective Special, .45 Caliber belly gun. I had the barrel on the Colt cut down to two inches. The hammer had been dehorned, the trigger guard cut away in the front and the grip shortened. It was great for the purpose intended, firing an attacker at very close range. I had it secured snug under my left arm in my shoulder rig.

I wasn't planning to stay long in Atlanta. Medusa told me the humidity there was chicken choking bad. I don't like humidity. It curls my hair.

I saw Sam and Hap talking to a group of people. I grabbed my duffle bag and crawled out of the car and walked toward them. As I drew closer, I saw who they were and my stomach did a flip.

There was Hap's young lady friend, a Swede from New Holstein, very blonde with giant breasts, named Hannah Holmstrom. She looked to be close to eighteen. Dr. Evelyn Doodiddle, Sam's latest girlfriend, the proctologist from Whitefish Bay, who always wore a smile, a tight skirt and a stethoscope around her neck, was also there. William, The Raja, Bennett and his little singing partner, Barb E. Dahl, from Madison, Allen Dupont, with his wife, Sam's younger sister, Gertie and Ralph Mills.

Before I could ask what they were doing there, Raja said, "We would like to tag along. We can help you. We aren't professionals like you, Max, but we can take care of ourselves. We have talent. I used to box a little and I took Judo while we were in Vegas. I never got beyond a white belt but I am pretty good and we all will pitch in to help pay for the fuel; and, I hear Sam is still pretty good with a gun."

"Pretty good?" Dr. Doodiddle interjected, looking lovingly at Sam. "He hits the bullseye every time."

Dr. Doodiddle's voice was filled with awe and it made me wonder if she was talking about Sam shooting a gun or something else they had experienced together.

"I shot expert in basic training in the Army Air Corp," Sam added, "and I try to get to the practice range once or twice a week. I have my Ruger holstered beneath the Captain's seat. Oh, and Evelyn will be sitting second seat on this flight."

I nodded. Sam had to come along. Hell, he was flying the plane, I hoped. I found out Dr. Evelyn Doodiddle had never flown anything in her life, not even a kite. This was her maiden flight, so to speak.

"We know connected people in Atlanta," Barb E. Dahl beamed. "After leaving Vegas, Raja and I had a gig in Atlanta for awhile; actually Smyrna, which is close enough to

Atlanta to count. There is a small lounge and dance hall, called Charlie's Place, located outside the East gate of the Naval Air Station on Highway 41. Every weekend we performed Charlie's Place was packed with National Guardsmen. They are the nicest people. Real polite. Always called me ma'am, 'Yes ma'am, no m'am.' I just love their little accents. Some of those boys might help us if we end up needing it. One said his second cousin's sister in law's brother was married to the Governor's personal secretary. Don't they have guns in the National Guard? They have pretty uniforms."

I looked at her innocent blue eyes and knew why the Raja stayed with her; she was a real blonde.

Finally Allen Dupont joined in and said, "I'm tougher than I look, Max."

I hope so, I thought. I think he saw the doubt wash over my face.

"No, I mean, I can handle myself and I also spent a lot of time in Georgia when I was selling goats. It's a farming state, and you will need someone who knows his way around the area. The streets in Atlanta are all fucked up; every one of them either starts or ends with Peachtree. If you aren't sure where you are going, you start at a place called Five Points. It's where the five major streets in Atlanta converge. One of those five roads will get you where you need to be. Oh and I lift weights."

"Good," I said, "you can carry the luggage."

I looked over at Gertie.

"She wants to see a Peach Street," Allen continued. "There are a lot of them down there. As I said, almost every one of the streets in Atlanta is 'Peach Something.'

That's why she's here, otherwise she was going to see her mother in Fish Creek."

That might have been a better choice, I thought.

Standing off by the plane was Ralph Mills. He looked dejected.

"What about you Ralph? What are you doing here?"

Ralph looked up from inspecting the right wheel of the airplane. "Since the bank repossessed my Vette and cut off my credit I have nothing else to do, plus Barb E.

Dahl said she is going to set me up on a date with a girl she met down at a joint they were performing at in Atlanta. She's supposed to be a real looker."

"Hooker?"

"Looker, Max."

"That's nice, Ralph. You need to blow off a little steam. You haven't done that in what, twenty-four hours?"

"I have a lot of nervous energy"

I looked at Hap and his young friend.

"We're going fishing," he said.

I lifted an eyebrow.

"Oh?" I asked, interest all over my face.

"She's going to bait my hook."

What in the hell did I just get into? What sort of crew just signed on to help me?

"Okay, we're cleared for takeoff; everyone get on board," Sam yelled. I noticed he was wearing a life jacket.

"Are we flying over water, Sam?"

"No, why do you ask?"

"Never mind."

Chapter 25

We arrived at the Fulton County Airport, which is located on the Westside of Atlanta. We made it in good time, a little over three hours. I was a little wary about this group making it safely to Atlanta, but we did.

Relief washed over me when we touched down.

On the way no one but me seemed to be concerned about the malfunctioning gauges or for that matter, their safety. Of course, Bloody Marys had been passed around during the flight and that might have had something to do with the lack of fear and the jocular mood of all the passengers, as well as the pilot and his co-pilot.

After his second Bloody Mary, Hap started the singing. He is a big fan of Goebel Reeves and loves all of his songs from the 1930s. Ironically, Goebel was a favorite of Barb E. Dahl's as well. They did a duet of Gobel's number one hit in 1934, The Cowboy's Prayer, accompanied by William Raja Bennett on his harmonica. Hap tried matching Goebel's yodeling, but failed miserably.

By the time we began our descent to the Fulton County Airport, they were starting on the second verse of Doug Clark and the Hot Nut's popular song, Barnacle Bill The Sailor, that was currently being played on most college campuses across America, at least the ones they weren't banned from.

I relaxed when Sam finally refused a tipsy Dr. Doodiddle, who offered him a fourth Bloody Mary and said she wanted to land the plane as we approached Atlanta.

Our drunk and boisterous entourage staggered into the terminal en masse gasping from the suffocating humidity of Atlanta that hit us like a wet blanket as we deplaned. Everyone was carrying their bags and stripping off their winter clothes as they approached the terminal counter.

A startled look crossed over the face of the young lady in charge who was standing by the coffee pot, pouring herself a cup of coffee.

She probably thought she was being invaded by a group of aliens wearing wool jackets, knit hats, scarves and official Ojibwe Mukluks.

When she walked toward us, her back was straight her breasts out and her buttocks tight. A young woman who walks like that either is or was a beauty contestant at one time.

I noticed her eyes were liquid and her lips full, and her breasts were loosely holstered and swinging as she approached the counter. Her perfume was more intoxicating than the Bloody Marys we consumed in Sam's biplane.

She was dripping of southern charm and caught everyone's attention, especially Ralph's. She smiled a bright smile. Her teeth were large and white. Hap whispered in my ear, "I think I could tile a swimming pool with her teeth."

I elbowed him to keep quiet.

"Well bless my heart, aren't y'all cute. May I help you?" she asked in a polite southern lilt.

"Where's that Chattahoochee River that's supposed to be running through Atlanta?"

Hap asked, getting the important things out of the way first.

"Right behind you, sir," the young lady said.

Hap turned around. "I don't see it."

"Well, it's back there you'll just have to take my word for it. The river runs through the whole state so I doubt you will have a hard time finding it."

"I came down to see a Peachtree Street," Gertie Dupont squealed.

"Well, bless my heart, aren't you sweet, darlin'?"

With all the blessing her heart was getting, I was convinced it was certain to make it to heaven.

"You can count on seeing a peach street, that's for sure. We have a Peachtree Road, a Peachtree Street, a Peachtree Boulevard, and a Peachtree Lane, a New Peachtree and an Old Peachtree Street; and then March 9 of last year, the state of Georgia chartered a Peachtree City. So, you can have your pick from many Peachtrees, my dear. May I suggest that you see them all?"

"You mean you didn't have a Peachtree City until 1959 and you had all these Peachtree Streets?" Gertie was incredulous.

"What's your name?" It was Ralph. He was seeing a bright future here, for himself.

"Ellie Mae Lauder milk."

"Ellie Mae? Well, Ellie Mae, my friends," he said, nodding his head in the direction of William Bennett, and Barb E. Dahl, who happened to be busy at the moment, applying a fresh layer of lipstick. She looked up when she heard her name mentioned.

"They are entertainers and are friends of this guy who owns a bar out in Smyrna, and we were going to head out there, once we got settled. We will get something to eat and then do some dancing. I thought you might want to join us. What time do you get off work?" His voice had an undertone of hope to it.

Ellie Mae ignored him and looked at Barb E. Dahl, "I like your name. How do you spell it?"

Barb E. Dahl stumbled through the letters, B-a-r-b E for Ellen, D-a-h-l.

Ellie Mae nodded, "What's the name of your friend and his bar in Smyrna?"

"Charlie Moffitt. He owns Charlie's Place on Highway 41."

"I know Charlie. I went to high school with his boy, Skeeter. What time y'all going? I'll bring my roommate, Betty Lou."

Ralph's eyes lit up.

After they arranged all the details, Sam was able to get Ellie Mae's attention away from Ralph long enough to get a couple of rental cars lined up and his plane secured. Hap and Hannah needed a car for their fishing trip, Allen and Gertie would be

taking Ralph with them while they looked for Peach Streets before meeting up with Ellie Mae and Betty Lou at Charlie's Place. Sam, Dr. Doodiddle and I would share the third car.

I had a 3:00 p.m. appointment already arranged with Captain Gregory Dorfmeier of the Atlanta Police Department's Homicide Division. They were going to drop me off at the precinct while they went to a department store named Rich's, that Dr. Doodiddle heard about from a fellow proctologist.

Ralph said he would tag along with Allen and Gertie in her quest to find streets named Peachtree something; maybe even go see the new city named Peachtree City. First we checked into our motel, located on Fulton Industrial Boulevard, about a half a mile from the airport; then we met for lunch in the motel where I asked them to try to be back before six that night. I might have jobs for my assistant private investigators.

We then split up, each group going their separate ways. I had my doubts that this was going to end well.

Chapter 26

The first thing I wanted to do while I was in Atlanta was talk to Kane's neighbors to see if they recalled anything they may have seen the night of the murders. Sometimes a little time can do wonders for a person's memory.

I arrived in Buckhead and was amazed at the size of the houses. They were million dollar mansions. I drove up to the one next to the Kane mansion. The mailbox told me that 'The Club's' lived there.

I rang the bell. A few moments later an elderly gentleman with a shock of white hair opened the door. He was wearing a blue cardigan sweater and khaki pants. Tennis shoes covered his feet. He was trim, tanned, and stood close to six feet tall.

I introduced myself and told him I was working for Helene Kane's sister and I was trying to gather information on the murders. He said his name was Al Club and he didn't believe me. I gave him Hilga's number in Pewaukee and had him call. I waited on the steps. A few minutes passed before he reappeared.

"Ok, I guess you are legitimate. I saw a guy named Darrell Mason and his boy, Billie Bob, along with a cop I recognized, enter Kane's home the evening they were killed. A dark Ford drove up to Christopher's house. I got a glimpse of the driver. He was an Atlanta policeman in plain clothes. I recognized him as one who had stopped me for a traffic citation a few years earlier."

"Why didn't you report this to the police?"

"I did, later, at Kane's funeral, to Captain Dorfmeier, but the cop who came up to my door during the murder scene investigation was the same one I saw driving the car. I was too scared to confront the cop with what I saw, so I kept silent. I don't know the

cop's name but he was over six feet tall, between 200 and 225 pounds, with brownish black hair parted in the middle, a thin beard and wearing glasses and, as I said, I passed that information along to Captain Dorfmeier, at the funeral. Wait a minute." He turned and walked back in the house. When he returned he was carrying a metal box. He handed it to me.

"What's this?"

"Candi Kane stopped by before she left Atlanta and gave it to me for safe keeping. It's a strong box. I told Hilga Haller about it and she asked that I give it to you."

"What's in it?"

"I don't know, it's locked and I didn't feel I should open it, even after I heard she was killed. I don't trust the Atlanta Police."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Club. I'll see that Miss Haller gets this."

I opened the car door and slid behind the steering wheel. I dropped the strong box on the seat next to me. I turned on the ignition and grabbed the gear shift and was about to put the car in gear when a thought crossed my mind. Mr. Club's statement had shed some light on why this case seemed to be dragging along in the slow lane. A crooked cop isn't uncommon but having one involved in the crime end up being an investigator of that very same crime would have a tendency to cause witnesses to clam up. And why did Candi give the strong box to her old man's neighbor instead of the police? A lack of trust? I needed to speak with Captain Dorfmeier and that was my next scheduled stop; but first, I wanted to see what was in the box.

Every private eye has a lock pick. Every good private eye is good at picking locks. Occasionally, I get lucky and can open one. I get nervous at times and my hands perspire and slip off those little picks. This time, I was lucky, the lock was a snap. I was able to stick in a pick and push the lever over and the top popped open.

"Holy shit," I sputtered aloud. It was filled with money, hundred dollar bills, wrapped in stacks of a thousand dollars each. I pulled them out and started counting. There were twenty-five stacks. A quarter of a million dollars. That was a lot of money no matter how you folded it.

Below the money there was a smaller stack of stock certificates. They bore the Coca-Cola logo across the top. I had no clue what the stocks were worth, but I did know that Coca-Cola was a main cog in the Atlanta economy. I turned them over and they were in Pearl Podvin's name. Medusa. Wow!

I placed the stock certificates on the seat next to the stack of money and pulled out a brown manilla envelope. It was closed with a string wrapped around a brown button on the back. I opened it and pulled out a stack of legal documents, the wills for Christopher and Helene Kane.

I skipped all the legalese and read the meat of the documents. As expected, Christopher and Helene bequeathed all of their worldly possessions to Candi, and there was a boatload of stuff, including a house in Key West, Florida, an office building on Peachtree Street, which had to be prime real estate in Atlanta, along with close to one million dollars worth of stock in Coca-Cola, Delta Airlines and the Atlanta Journal Newspaper.

Then my jaw dropped once again. The will continued to read that all their worldly possessions were to go to Pearl Podvin if their daughter, Candi, was to precede them in death, or to die before their will could be probated. I put the papers aside. Again, wow, Medusa was one of the wealthiest young women in the country. Then a thought occurred to me; this box, if you factor in the houses, contained over five mil-

lion reasons to kill somebody. Was she aware this will existed? Did Christopher tell her?

I was about to put all of this back when I noticed a legal size envelope lying at the bottom of the box. It was addressed to Pearl Podvin. I picked it up and stared at it. I thought, what the hell and tore open the seal. It was a letter from Candi telling Pearl how glad she was that they found each other and they both were now very wealthy women and could do whatever they pleased. It went on to say, if Pearl was reading this letter, Candi was dead. I decided to keep this information quiet for the time being. I stuck the box under the seat of the car and drove to the Atlanta Police Department to see my old army buddy, Captain Greg Dorfmeier.

As I walked into the Atlanta Police Headquarters I thought for a minute I was in a bar; just about every desk had a bottle of some kind of liquor sitting next to the phone, mostly whiskey and bourbon; no brandy to be seen. This wasn't Wisconsin, the largest consumer of brandy in the United States.

Greg walked out of his office to greet me. He looked the same as he did fifteen years ago when we processed out of the Army at Fort Lewis in Seattle, Washington. He was tall, trim and bald. He was bald by the time he was twenty-five when we were fighting Japs in Guam. He had to keep his head covered for fear the reflection off the top of his head would alert the enemy of our location. We started talking of all the fun we had had dodging incoming rounds, bugs, and dealing with toe fungus from all the rain and moisture on the island; then I told him why I was there.

"I figured you were in the middle of something, Max. It appears you are well thought of by the Milwaukee Police Department. A lieutenant in the homicide division with the Milwaukee Police Department spoke highly of you and said you would readily share all the information you gathered from my office with his office. I did pass along information to a couple of their detectives a few weeks ago. We don't have much more that's worth sharing at this time."

"I have been hired by the aunt of Candi Kane the young woman recently murdered in Milwaukee. Everything in her murder so far connects to the murder of her parents here in Atlanta and people who were clients of her late father, Christopher. Client's like Darrell Mason. Anything you can provide me would be appreciated."

"You do know that Darrell Mason is a well respected business man in Atlanta and all of Georgia for that matter, don't you?"

"That's what we heard, but also a crooked well respected business man who had many politicians in his pocket and on his payroll."

"You've done your homework, Max."

I nodded. "You provided most of the answers."

"Look, we had a surveillance team on the Mason's for about six months. Darrell is the head of the Dixie Mafia. In a meeting with his oldest boy, Billy Bob Mason, we overheard Pickens County Sheriff, Dudley Wilson, admit he shot and killed an unsuspecting runner of Billy Bob's. This guy was a charter member of the Southern Aces, a biker club out of Chattanooga Tennessee.

"Billy Bob ran moonshine, heroine, prostitutes and child pornography out of Dalton, Georgia. He employs the Southern Aces and about a half a dozen red necks to do his work. This biker failed to give Sheriff Dudley what he felt he had coming; his cut on a couple of heroine deals Billy Bob closed in Jasper and that just didn't happen up there without someone getting hurt. Billy Bob was used to doing whatever he pleased ever since he was a young boy, and he didn't plan to stop no matter what a local Sheriff said and Sheriff Dudley ran Pickens County with an iron fist. He didn't

have second thoughts about taking a little cash from some of the good ol' boys as they passed through on their way to Atlanta running their white lightening or blue magic, especially since they were manufacturing some of it under his nose and receiving his protection in his county.

"Well, the Mason's didn't like the local sheriff interfering with their local enterprises so they gave Sheriff Dudley a warning shot right between the eyes.

"The shot about blew the ear drums out of my detective monitoring the tape."

"You had them on tape shooting a Sheriff? So, why didn't you arrest them for murder?"

"This is where it gets a little sticky; unfortunately, we couldn't use the evidence because we acquired it conducting an illegal wire tap. So this is where you might be able to help us, if you're willing, Max."

"Me, what can I do?"

"You can drop some child pornography and drugs, which we can provide for you, in Masons car. You include the book that Mr. Kane made where Mason implicates himself, his boy and some of his influential friends, in graft, prostitution, drug trafficking and the murder of witnesses who were going to testify against them. Then bust out one of his tail lights. We'll take it from there."

"A traffic stop?"

"Yep. Works every time."

"Sounds like you have done this before."

"Yep. Look, guys like Shotgun have shyster lawyers like Kane bending the law to their advantage and tying our hands when we try to lay a dime on 'em. What's good for the goose is good for the gander as they say.

"Max, we need that book to be able to wrap this whole operation up in one neat package to present to the DA. That book names names. Names of people who in the past have been untouchable. They are bad people and have profited from good people's pain and misfortune.

"We had a confidential informant that we got paroled out of the slammer after serving eighteen of a twenty-year stretch for sticking it to underage girls. He was a mid-level dealer with his ear to the ground. If someone was moving drugs through the city, he would know about it; plus he was tight with the Masons. We dropped a nickel on him and it paid out. He told us where the book is located. We just don't have probable cause to go get it."

"Where is it?"

"In Masons office in a warehouse he owns. Someone with balls could just walk right in there and walk out with it."

"Who is this CI who gave you this information? May I speak with him."

"It'd be hard to do."

"Why?"

"He's dead."

"He's dead?"

"I hope so. They buried him six months ago. His name was Constance Calabrese. Went by the name of Connie. The Columbus Police caught a floater on the Chattahoochee a couple of months ago. It turned out it was Connie. He told us he was going to be the next floater we picked out of the river, so he took a hike. Guess they caught up to him down in Columbus.

"He owned a men's salon and wig shop one block down from the Tres Chic Club. The guy was a mess; he had more illnesses than a zipper has teeth. His shop served

as a 'drop,' a collection place for betting slips and money. As a kid he was nicknamed 'Bug Eyes' for his protruding eyeballs. I think it's called exophthalmos, whatever the hell that is. He had a stare where the eyelids retract upward more than they normally should. He also suffered from what is known as lid-lag, supposedly gave him problems tracking objects downward with his eyes the same looking upward, I guess. So he wore sunglasses all the time. If he didn't, you would get the heebee-jeebees. He was also a psychotic with wind blasting between his ears.

"About a week after Connie's demise, we struck gold. We hauled in a sandhog, a digger at a local rock quarry on Howell Mill Road, by the name of Wilson, Little Pinky, Jackson. Little Pinky was caught soliciting what he thought was a two bit whore down on Peachtree Street; she turned out to be one of our undercover vice cops. Little Pinky happens to do framing work on the side in Mason's office at the Tres Chic Club and does some building out in a warehouse that Mason owns in northwest Atlanta. He moonlights as a Red Dog for Shotgun's business as well."

"What's a Red Dog?"

"Red Dogs pick up and deliver scam money. Little Pinky corroborated Connie's story that Shotgun and his son were paging through a book that is kept in Shotgun's office in that warehouse. It's in the middle drawer of the desk. Connie said he saw a book in there and now Little Pinky confirmed it. So we are pretty sure it is there and if we can get our hands on it, we can pinch that bastard, Shotgun and hopefully all the high rollers from here to Albany who he has in his pocket. Shotgun Mason draws a lot of water in this town, so you better be careful. He's a bad hat and has a lot of influence. You'll never see him without a deadpan close by watching his back and somebody watching the back door. You can bet your life they are both heeled. If you decide to help us with this, beware, that place is like a rattlesnake's den. They're mean rednecks. They scratched a cop in Albany that the Albany cops have been trying to pin on Mason for a long time now. So far, they haven't had any luck.

"You cross him and he'll send a wrecking crew out to pay you a personal visit."

"What does he look like?"

Captain Dorfmeier did more than give me a description, he gave me a picture. "He's got this broad, a flame top, who is hanging on him all the time. That'll help you pick him out if it's dark. His son, Bobby Joe, is usually around and is a real rooster. So be careful. "

"You're willing to blow an investigation to do that?"

"It's the only way. If I can save some innocent lives by setting up a known killer like Shotgun, I'm going to take that chance. So, are you in, Max?"

"Let me think about it. I'll get back with you, Greg."

"I gotta hear from you soon. We have to move on this."

"Okay. By the way, I spoke with Christopher Kane's neighbor earlier. Mr. Al Club. He passed along some information to you at Kane's wake. He said the description he gave you of the cop fit the description of a Fulton County narcotics detective named Tommy Richards."

"It did."

"And?"

"And he's dead. He was found floating in the same river as Connie, the Chattahoochee; only up river a bit in Forsyth County, just below a dam on Lake Lanier."

"A lot of floaters in this city."

"You don't know the half of it. An easy place to dispose of trash and bodies. Let it float to Florida and let them worry about it."

I had to let Hap and Hannah know so they could find somewhere else to fish.
“I’m meeting Little Pinky at the rock quarry to sweat him for a few minutes; do you want to come along?”

Chapter 27

I didn’t have anything else planned before I was going to meet the gang at Charlie’s Place so I agreed to take a ride with Dorfmeier to see Little Pinky. It turned out that Howell Mill Road was about a twenty minute drive from Dorfmeier’s office. We turned off onto a gravel road and rolled down to the guard shack. It was unattended and we continued on until we came to a rusted trailer parked to our left, overlooking a deep hole where they had been cutting out rock for the past ten years. An old beat up red Chevy pick up truck was parked in the front. It looked like someone had spent hours throwing rocks at it. The sides were filled with dents, the windshield was

sporting a crack from one side down the middle to the other side. The tail gate was bent in the middle like someone had driven a piece of equipment into it. A stream of yellow light was visible in the window of the trailer. There was a hasp opened on the door with a paddle lock secured off to the side. A sign on the door said Office.

We walked up two grated metal steps. Dorfmeier looked around before he rapped on the door. A large black man opened it and invited us in. He was as bald as Dorfmeier and twice as big. How he ended up being called Little Pinky was beyond me, unless it referred to something of his that wasn't visible to most people.

I looked around. There were file cabinets against the far wall and a table holding a coffee pot and dirty cups and a gray metal desk with two folding chairs sitting directly in front of it. Little Pinky walked around and stood behind the desk, motioning for us to sit in the chairs.

Dorfmeier got right to it.

"Listen, Little Pinky, I think you know something and you're scared, so I'll make a deal with you. If you tell me what I want to know, I won't arrest you for trying to sell me an ounce of Blue Magic."

His eyes shot wide open. He looked at me.

I shrugged.

"I didn't try to sell you nothin'."

"Who do you think they are gonna believe? Me or you? Especially when I find drugs in your pockets after I search you."

"Fuck you, man. I don't want none of this."

"You don't have a choice. Sit down and let's dig in and share a few family secrets. What happened? You put your dick in the wrong hole or something?"

"Yeah, or something."

After Greg mapped out how Little Pinky was going to help him set up Shotgun Mason to take a fall, we left a shaken man when we drove away.

"Do you think he will leave the warehouse door unlocked and the alarm off Saturday when he leaves?" I asked.

"Oh yeah. He knows I wouldn't hesitate to throw a pinch on him for carrying. I already did it to a friend of his."

"Aren't you worried about retaliation?"

"You kidding me? A black man retaliate against a white cop in Atlanta? Shit the Klan would be all over him like white on rice and that boy is more scared of the Klan than he is of the Atlanta PD."

"Why not have Little Pinky pick up the book and then have someone else plant it in Shotgun's car?"

"We could do that but I don't trust that book in Little Pinky's hands. It's too valuable. Everything we have been working on depends on us getting that book. We need someone we can trust and I know I can trust you, Max. You and I went through a lot together and we are here today because of that. The Japs would have had you if I didn't pull you under those dead bodies. All you got was a little bit of a cut from the bayonet going through that dead GI lying on top of you. I know you got my back as well and I'll be there for you if you ever need me."

We rode in silence for awhile.

"Okay. I'll do it." I was surprised I didn't feel dirty.

"Great. I appreciate you helping us, Max. Little Pinky leaves that warehouse around 6:00 p.m. tomorrow night. The alarm will be disengaged. He is going to tape the lock on the front door open. Just walk in and get the book and leave. Take the tape off the

door latch and it will self-lock. Don't try to set the alarm. Little Pinky will be back to work again the next morning and will reset the alarm when he leaves.

"Now, here is where you need to take that book, along with a few pictures of kiddie porn we'll get you. Shotgun owns a 1959 black Lincoln Town Car. It has tinted windows. He keeps it parked in the alley in the back of the Tres Chic Club. The club is down on the corner of Piedmont Road and Lindbergh Avenue. It's a huge place. You can't miss it. It has lit torches at night lighting the walkway.

The only problem you might encounter is the driver is instructed to never leave the car and this is where we come in. We will send a squad car to the back to ticket Shotgun's driver for parking in a no parking zone. It's a bogus charge and he knows it; but he will have to sit and take it. This is when you put the incriminating evidence under the front seat of the car and bust the left rear tail light. We'll follow them when they drive away and pull them over and ticket them again for having their tail light out. Then we search their car and find all the goodies that can legally be placed into evidence. Shortly after that, the streets of Atlanta and cities south will be cleaned of all the sewer rats who have been feeding off the good citizens of our state and you can sleep comfortably at night knowing you did your good deed. I know I will sleep like a baby."

"Since I am doing this for you, Greg, perhaps you can help me out a little. What do you know about a Pearl Podvin? She worked for Christopher Kane."

Greg stared at me for a moment and then a big smile broke out across his face. "You didn't? Of course, you did. Max, you're still an old dog, aren't you?"

I didn't answer.

"The Snake Woman. Goes by the name of Medusa which comes from Greek I'm told. She's a piece of work. She did some skip tracing for Kane's firm and from what we could gather she didn't do it lightly. A lot of bail jumpers returned with lumps on their heads, scratches down their faces and necks; some even with bullet wounds. She's a hellcat. Every Bondsman in Atlanta wanted her to go after the skipper's. She didn't hesitate to pull the trigger. She lived by the old wild west's bring 'em in dead or alive. None were dead, but most who resisted were barely alive. From what I've heard, she's as mean as she is beautiful, and she is downright gorgeous.

"A couple of years ago a two-time loser for rape was found shot to death downtown and Medusa was seen in the area and identified by a couple of hookers. We brought her in for questioning. Of course, she denied everything and then the two hookers recanted their stories and that was that. The shitbag that was shot wasn't worth any more of our time. We have more pressing cases involving upstanding citizens that take up all of our time. We put the murder on the back burner, way back. What is she up to now?"

"She turned up in Milwaukee looking for Candi Kane, who turns out to be her half-sister. She also seems to have a history with Charles Hogjaw Johnson who she said was sent to Milwaukee to kill Candi. Both Candi and Hogjaw are dead and she's still standing."

"I knew Hogjaw; he was a real asshole. Candi Kane's half sister? How?"

"According to Helene Kane's sister, she and the father were participating in some extracurricular activities when one of the little fellows swam past the protection and impregnated the aunt. The aunt put the baby up for adoption but evidently Christopher kept an eye on her as she grew up and eventually hired her."

"Well, I'll be damned. You learn something new every day."

"That's for sure; especially if you are a detective. So, you think she is capable of murdering somebody?"

"I think she murdered that piece of shit in South Atlanta. Damn straight I think she could murder somebody. Anyone up there killed with a .357?"

"Yes, Hogjaw Johnson and a local wise guy named Arnie Ice The Pinball Man Iaconi. He is connected to the Milwaukee syndicate. Milwaukee PD said the slugs were fired from the same gun."

"It could just be local mob business, but I'd like to see the ballistics on that and see if there is a match with ours."

I nodded. I thought about the strong box Al Club, Kane's neighbor gave me. "I have something I want to show you later; but first, I have to go pick up my partner at a bar in Smyrna."

"What's the name of the bar?"

"Charlie's Place. It's outside the gate of the Naval Air Station on Highway 41."

"I know Charlie's Place. It's so bad you wouldn't want to see your ex-wife walk into there."

I looked at him for a moment. "No place can be that bad."

Chapter 28

I walked into Charlie's Place in Smyrna. It was busy for a week night. A few Naval Airmen and a whole lot of rednecks.

I never saw so many rednecks, white socks and blue ribbon beer in one place before.

Hap and Hannah were sitting at the bar. Hap had his tongue stuck in her ear again. It was 9:00 p.m.

"Where is the rest of our group?"

"Back at the motel. They are worn out from all of the traveling."

"Just as well. We don't need any of them tagging along with us tonight. Let's take Hannah back to the motel and I'll fill you in on what we have to do."

"Alright with me as long as we are back in time for me to go fishing in the morning."

"That's another thing. You may want to re-think fishing in the Chattahoochee River. Captain Dorfmeier said it has more floaters in it than fish."

Hannah scrunched up her face and said, "Ewwew, that's gross."

"Don't worry, Hannah, we'll find someplace else. Maybe there's a lake close by."

"Okay, it's time to go."

"Where're we going?"

"A warehouse on McArthur Boulevard. Darrell Mason owns it. I need you to cover my back while I do a little snooping around his office."

We dropped Hannah off at the motel and headed out.

"Where's McArthur Boulevard?"

"Dorfmeier said it is just off Chattahoochee Avenue. It's a dead end two lane road next to a residential neighborhood. It's not a boulevard at all. I guess at one time they planned to rezone the area and expand the road to be able to handle all the big rigs that would be hauling goods to the area. Dorfmeier said it is a good area for Shotgun to carry on his illegal activities. It is real secluded."

"I don't like dead ends, Max. They don't lead anywhere."

"I guess that's why they call them dead ends. We will be alright, trust me."

"I can't believe you said that."

We drove South down Chattahoochee Avenue and turned right onto Huff Road, a small two lane black top road lined with small shotgun style houses built before World War II. At the top of the hill we came to a four way stop and turned right once more. We were on McArthur Boulevard. It wasn't much bigger than Huff Road. There were no houses on McArthur Boulevard, only empty fields, overgrown with weeds and empty food containers, liquor bottles, old tires and discarded mattresses. The road took a sharp turn to the left and came to an end. There was a turnaround area in front of a chain link fence that enclosed the lone warehouse on the boulevard. I pulled up and stopped. Hap got out and opened the gate. I drove through and stopped, waiting for Hap to close the gate and get back in the car.

"So far so good," I said.

We parked around the back and got out of the car. A dog barked. It sounded like he was on the next block. The sky was overcast making it very dark.

"You got a flashlight?" Hap asked.

Every private eye has a flashlight. Every good private eye keeps his on him. Mine was in the glove box of my car in Milwaukee.

"It's in my car."

"Oh, that's going to do us a lot of good here, isn't it?"

"I have my Zippo lighter."

"Now I feel much better," Hap replied.

"Let's go and get this over with."

We walked around the side of the building to the front door. Just as Little Pinky promised, the latch was taped open and we walked in like we owned the place.

The inside was not only dark but musty as well. There was water dripping somewhere in the back. The sound echoed through the empty warehouse. I flipped open my Zippo and spun the wheel which struck the flint igniting a flame. I held it over my head as we crept along the wall. A fat pipe ran the length of the ceiling as far as we could see, which wasn't far. Also an air duct snaked along beside it. We came to a door. My hand trembled as I tried the door knob. It turned and opened into what looked like a broom closet. It contained a mop and bucket and cleaning supplies. There was also a sink. I held up the lighter and rummaged through the shelf. Bingo! A flashlight.

I snapped the lid on my Zippo closed and turned on the light. It illuminated the room much better than the Zippo.

Hap grabbed my arm. "Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"A shuffling noise."

"Probably just rats," I said.

"Rats? There's nothing for them to eat in here."

"Well, maybe they come in to keep warm."

"There it is again. Did you hear it?"

"No, Hap, I didn't. Let's go. I want to get out of here."

"So do I."

We walked along the wall for about another one hundred feet before we came to a hallway on our left. There was an exit sign lit up in red at the end of the hall. We walked toward it. As we approached we saw a stairway to our right going up. We took it. At the top we encountered a door and stopped. There was a sign on the door that said Private, Keep Out, but I knew it didn't mean me. I reached out to open the door.

"Shhh; did you hear that?"

I dropped my hand. "Hap, what's wrong with you?" I whispered. "Nobody is here but us."

"I heard it again, Max. I think someone is here."

"Cut it out. Let's go."

The door opened to a hallway leading to restrooms. It was illuminated by a bare, forty watt light bulb suspended from the ceiling by an electrical cord and another red exit sign over the rear door leading to the back of the warehouse.

Hap turned around to make sure nobody was following us before we continued. We passed by the men's room and went to the back door. I pushed it open and the cool night air mixed with the putrid smell of something rotting struck me in the face.

"Man, something's dead back here."

"It's probably the body of the last guy who was caught snooping around in here," Hap said, looking behind him once again.

I closed the door. The beam of light fell on another door off to our right. The top half of the door was made of frosted glass with the words Office printed on it.

"This is it, Hap; follow me."

"Who else would I follow?"

We entered the office and I scanned the room with the beam of the flashlight. The far wall was all glass windows overlooking the warehouse floor below. In front of it sat a big desk covered with scattered papers. There was an ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts and a half filled bottle of Jack Daniels and two empty glasses. I filled them both and handed one to Hap. We held out our glasses and downed the amber liquid. In a hushed tone Hap said, "There, I heard it again." He flipped the light switch on. The room exploded in bright light from the overhead fluorescent bulbs.

"Hap, turn that off."

"Why, if nobody is in here but us what difference does it make?"

"There might be windows going to the outside and someone might see the light in here and get suspicious."

He turned them off and it went dark once again, with only the light from the flashlight lighting the room.

I walked around to the back of the desk and sat down. I tried to open the desk drawer. It was locked. I pulled out my lock picks. My hands were sweaty and trembling. I dropped them on the floor. "Shit, damn, Hap, I have lost my touch."

I picked them up and inserted one in the lock. It clicked open and I pulled out the drawer and there, sitting on top, was the book Greg Dorfmeier described to me. The book that would put Shotgun Mason and all the crooked politicians on the take, behind bars.

Now I heard it. The shuffling noise Hap had heard earlier. My breathing became shallow and ragged. I turned off the flashlight.

"Hap, I hear it now, do you?"

"Damn straight I do. Do you have your gun?"

"Yes."

"Good. I feel a little better. Give me the flashlight. I can use it to crown the first person who comes in the door."

I handed him the light and drew my Colt .45 Belly Gun from its rigging. My hand was trembling and I began to sweat.

We heard the shuffling sound again. It was getting closer and it was heading toward the office.

I tapped Hap on the shoulder and he jumped.

"Shhh, get behind the door," I said, gently shoving him in the direction I wanted him to go. "I'll get behind the desk."

"You will, will you?" A deep voice resonated from the dark. Then the light switch was thrown on and the fluorescent bulbs burst on once again illuminating the office.

There were two burly guys standing in the doorway. I was temporarily blinded and that was all the time they needed. The first guy stepped forward and knocked the gun from my hand. I heard it slide along the cement floor just before a big fist landed on the side of my face. I fell over backward, landing behind the desk. The big gorilla was on me in a flash. He moved surprisingly fast for a big guy.

Out of the side of my eye I saw Hap jump out from behind the door and swing the flashlight at the other monster as he was heading my way. The blow glanced off his shoulder. Hap never had a good aim.

I put up my fists ready for the bruiser to attack me again.

He stopped and grinned and put up his dukes and we circled each other wearily. My movement was blocked by the desk behind me. I had nowhere to go.

He sent out a jab with his left hand. I ducked and it glanced off my right shoulder. He continued to circle me, throwing left jabs at my head. I continued to bob my head avoiding the blows. He was taller than I was and I needed to find an opening to close in on him to land a blow. He wasn't making it easy on me. His left arm shot out again, this time striking me on the right side of my jaw. I staggered and momentarily saw stars before gathering my senses and balance. I didn't have them for long.

The animal backed me in a corner and was all over me, hitting me with those big mitts of his. All I could think of was that I wished Medusa was here or that I had a Louisville Slugger in my hand.

Remembering what Mad Dog had told me the last time I was getting the shit beat out of me at the Abraham Lincoln House, by a young Jewish boxer by the name of Rappaport, "Clinch and bite." Ducking my head I grabbed him around his arms, pinning them to his side. I opened my mouth and latched on to his left nipple. He let out a blood curdling scream. Then I remembered the Jack Daniels bottle sitting on the desk to my left.

Releasing my grip on his arms I let go of the big dope and grabbed the bottle, swinging it up with a perfect backhand. The bottle shattered against the side of his skull. Surprise. His eyes got large. He staggered back and I danced away. A coppery taste flushed my mouth.

I spit out blood.

Once again he came at me; his left hand shot out, but this time I was able to slip the punch by ducking under his arm and pushing it up, spinning him around and landing two quick left jabs to his kidneys. I heard the expulsion of air. I knew it hurt him. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Hap and the other mope rolling around on the floor like a couple of dust balls.

Now the guy in front of me kept his arms in close, protecting his sides. Blood was pouring out of the wound Jack Daniels inflicted on the side of his head. The area on his shirt around his left nipple was turning red. I drew blood. Thanks Mad Dog, wherever you are. I got his attention and the upper ground. Closing in, I threw rapid lefts and rights to his body. He brought in his elbows to protect his gut and kidneys. I threw an upper cut that connected with his jaw. He went down and I jumped him, continuing to throw lefts and rights to his head. My hands began to hurt from the beating I was giving him.

I opened my eyes and saw that he was out cold. I didn't realize my eyes were closed. Standing, I straddled his prone body, shaking my hands. They were numb. I was breathing rapidly, sucking in air. I reached out and sank one hand into his crotch and the other into his hair and dragged him behind the desk.

Picking up my Colt Belly Gun, I walked over to where Hap was getting beaten half to death. Both Hap's eyes were almost completely swollen shut.

Raising my arm. I brought down the butt of the gun along side the ape's head. I heard a loud crack and I thought I might have cracked his skull. I didn't care just so it wasn't the white pearl handle on my revolver. He dropped down and I rolled him off Hap.

I reached out a hand to help Hap up. He took a swing at me

"Relax," I told him, "I'm the good guy."

"Oh shit, Max, what took you so long? I think I saw Jesus."

"I can't imagine Jesus visiting you Hap. Let's get that book and get the hell out of here."

We tied the two apes up with an extension cord we found in the closet and we both kicked each of our attackers in their nuts so they wouldn't forget us. Then we left.

Chapter 29

We hauled our sorry beaten tails back to the motel. I helped Hap to his room. When Hannah saw his face she wailed, "Oh my God, you almost killed him. What did you do? He looks dead."

I didn't want to tell her that I had seen him worse so I just left.

I called Greg Dorfmeier and told him I thought we had been set up; that there was someone waiting for us when we got to the warehouse.

"Shit. Little Pinky gave you up. We found him filleted and impaled on a post at the bottom of the rock quarry. It looked like he was tortured before he was sent packing to a better place."

"That answers my question. Okay, I'm on the way to the Tres Chic Club to give the gift that will keep on giving to Shotgun. Hap took a pretty mean whuppin' so I'll be going it alone."

"Don't worry, I have a patrol car in the area that will remain on call. Give me a call when you are ready and I'll send the officer into ticket Shotgun's driver."

Don't worry? Right. So far this caper has gone about as smooth as sandpaper.

The Tres Chic Club was about twenty miles East of our motel. It was located on Piedmont Avenue. It was a big place with a semi-circular drive, like these clubs all, have now. I pulled up and gave my keys to the valet. He was a rough looking young Mexican. He took my keys and sped off in my rental. I hoped he didn't dent it. I opted out of taking the insurance. I started down a long walkway with a line of torches on either side that made the leaves of the shrubs gleam like metal. The Tres Chic was made up as some sort of chateau. Beneath the chateau facade, you could see it was just a big brick shed, but the facade was nice, and I passed two doormen and walked into a foyer.

The carpeting was burgundy. Through the entrance to my left, I saw a coat room and a hat check girl at the counter.

I asked her where the phone was and she pointed to a bank of phones along the wall by the restrooms.

I walked back and picked up the receiver and dropped in a nickel. I dialed the number Dorfmeier gave me and told him I had arrived and I was about to go do my thing. He said give him five minutes, so I looked around the place. I wasn't the only guy there not in a suit, but a dinner jacket would have been better. At the end of the dance floor sat an orchestra in gold tuxedos. In front of them stood a colored girl with a mouth like a cut plum, singing very softly about something that couldn't be helped. I went around a corner to the bar; it was carved out of dark wood and ran lengthwise along one wall of the big room. Behind the bar was a long mirror tinted gold. I ordered a brandy. The bartender commented on my beat up face and then told me they didn't have any, so I had to settle for a Crown Royal. I put it away in one gulp and walked to the back toward the rear exit.

They conveniently had placed an illuminated sign over the back door that said exit in red so I knew I was headed in the right direction.

I opened the door and was met by the cool night air. It was dark. I turned around to make sure nobody had followed me. I couldn't see anyone; so far so good. Our plan just might work.

I looked to my right and then left. Nothing. My adrenalin was flowing for the second time this night and my heart started racing. I reached into my coat pocket to get the kiddie porn magazine, and a couple of bags of Blue Magic that Dorfmeier had given me and the book I heisted from Shotgun's middle desk drawer. I also had a surprise for both Shotgun and Dorfmeier, the recording Christopher Kane made that everyone was looking for since Jesus lost his sandals.

My palms were sweaty and I wiped them on my pants. To my left about ten yards down behind a dumpster I saw the glow from the end of a lit cigarette. It was Shotgun's driver. I could see the outline of the black limousine. I flattened against the wall and inhaled a shallow breath and then struggled for another.

Suddenly a siren sounded and I about jumped out of my skin. The red lights from the cruiser was bouncing off the wall behind me. I felt the sweat running down my back. I turned again to make sure nobody was behind me.

I watched as the cop escorted the driver to his squad car and put him in the back seat.

"This is bullshit," the driver said. "There ain't no law against parking in this alley. I done it every night; ain't no sign up either."

I snaked along the wall until I reached the rear of the limousine. I picked up a rock and punched the left rear tail light. Nothing. I hit it again. Still nothing. Damn, what's with this? Finally, I hauled off and smacked it a good one and the red plastic broke. I froze. I thought it sounded like a canon going off. Nobody was around and the driver was still sitting in the back seat of the cruiser. I reached in and busted the bulb. I crouched down and walked along the side of the car and opened the rear door. I slid all my goodies under the back of the driver's seat just where Dorfmeier requested.

There it was done. Now you can roast in hell, Darrell Mason.

I scurried back to the door that I entered the alley from. It had locked when it closed. I couldn't get in. I had to think fast. The driver would be finished getting his ticket soon and would be coming back to the car. I had to find a place to hide. My throat went dry and my fingers went numb and my knees began to shake. I felt like I was back in Guam. I ran to the dumpster and slid underneath it and lay still.

Soon I heard the squad car pull away and the driver returning to the car, mumbling to himself, "Dumb motherfucker. Giving me a fucking ticket for no reason. What the fuck was he doing back in this alley anyway?"

I heard the springs of the car give a small squeak as he got in behind the wheel. I heard the car door slam. Then silence.

My breathing was short, quick and raspy. I was afraid it was loud enough for the driver to hear.

Then I heard the door to the alley that I went through open with a bang as it struck the wall. There were two voices. They were laughing about something. I saw four feet pass by me and get in the limousine. The car started up and slowly pulled away. I let out my breath, unaware I was holding it.

I slid out from under my hiding place and watched the one red tail light slowly disappear down the alley and make a left hand turn on Lindbergh Avenue.

A moment later I heard the siren. I knew Dorfmeier got him. I ran to the end of the alley and down Lindbergh toward the flashing red lights. There were two squad cars and one unmarked detective's car. Dorfmeier's.

I walked up and said, "Well, how did it go Greg?"

"Like a charm. You wouldn't believe what we found in this maggot's car."

"You framed me, you pig," Mason yelled out over his shoulder.

Shotgun Mason was cuffed and being lead to a squad car when a shot rang out. It sounded like an echo of a car backfiring across the road. The bullet broke Shotgun's bottom left incisor and tore through his palate, just above his upper teeth. It proceeded to punch through the lower bone of his eye socket and busted through the skin just in front of his right ear. He staggered back and then sat down. His face showed the pain that was shooting through his head. The blood dripped warmly down his cheek. His right eye wouldn't focus.

But he was alive, for now.

Dorfmeier and the other officers were crouched behind their cars with their weapons drawn. They were attempting to see where the shot came from. Then we heard the squeal of tires as a car fled at high speed down Lindbergh, and then made a left down Piedmont heading south.

Dorfmeier was on the radio calling in backup and giving the location of the fleeing car. Next he called for an ambulance.

We were packed up and ready to leave. I sent the group on to the airport. I had to give my regards to Dorfmeier and say goodbye.

I walked into his office and he was all smiles. He gave me a cup of coffee and asked if I wanted a little something in it. I thought it was a good idea. He pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels and laced the steaming java with a generous pour.

"Mason is going to make it. We have 24 hour security in his hospital room. We don't know who shot him but whoever did it, either feels like they have a lot to lose if Mason starts talking, or they have a vendetta against him. When word gets out that we have a book listing all the people Mason was making illegal payoffs to, the cockroaches will be scurrying to find someplace to hide. We will give this to the Constitution and the Journal and when it hits the front pages it will give birth to the sworn enemy of politicians everywhere since the dawn of man-illumination.

"By the way, we found something else under the seat of the limousine; something we weren't expecting to find. A tape recording made by Christopher Kane. He taped Dar-

rell Mason and his boy, Billy Bob, admitting to killing Sheriff Dudley up in Pickens County. You don't know anything about it, do you?"

I didn't say anything. I took a long pull on my Jack laced coffee and placed the cup on the edge of his desk. I stood up and held out my hand and said, "Nope."

"I didn't think so. It was nice seeing you Max. I'll look you up when I go to Sheboygan. Have a safe trip back."

Chapter 30

Harry was in his office reading over the report I compiled. It contained the details of my recent trip to Atlanta and what I learned about the events that lead up to the murder of Candi Kane. I poured two cups of coffee and made them drinkable by adding a couple of fingers of Paul Masson Brandy, and slid one across the desk to Harry. He continued reading.

Christopher Kane taped Darrell Shotgun Mason and his son, Billy Bob, as they discussed their illicit businesses with him. Whether his partner, Lou Crowson, was aware of this is not known. Kane apparently did this for his own protection.

When Shotgun Mason told the power brokers he was in business with, that Christopher Kane made a tape, they wanted Kane killed and the tape destroyed. Kane's wife just happened to be there at the wrong time, so she was just collateral damage.

Mason was Georgia's gangland kingpin who owned a string of motels and nightclubs along "The Strip" in Atlanta that doubled as illicit dens for gambling, prostitution, and drugs. His oldest boy, "Junior" was his partner in crime. They put the names of some of their buddies, who still hadn't acquired a rap sheet consisting of felonies, as owners of these clubs.

These "club owners" carried messages, held loot, hid fugitives, fenced stolen property, and underwrote the expenses for Shotgun. In exchange,, they received a piece of

the action. Mason has been linked to a string of killings that have left 25 people dead in six different states over the past four years. He was one bad hombre.

Christopher Kane's Law firm was the mouthpiece for Mason and they got paid hefty sums of money to get Mason and his cronies off the hook on everything from prostitution, to drugs, and murder raps.

Some interesting facts surfaced about Mr. Kane and his law partner, Lou Crowson. Their clients were the kind that were in need of criminal defense. Those with the most money were those whose gains had been ill-gotten through vice and corruption. Their law firm had seemed to thrive on these low lifes.

They didn't simply view their criminal defense work as "just a job," they seemed to move comfortably among the figures of this shadowy underworld. They were well-liked, respected, and welcomed into the fold. Crowson, particularly, seemed fascinated by this underground culture, according to Dorfmeier.

Since they were paid a large sum of money, they were expected to deliver the goods and most of the time they did. After Kane and Crowson got their clients off the hook, most of them would go out and commit another murder. Evidently Kane started to wrestle with his conscience over what he was involved in but, unfortunately, Crowson wasn't experiencing the same pangs of guilt.

Pretty soon the firm was laundering drug and prostitution money. Kane found out his partner was up to his nuts in dirty laundry and his partner found out Christopher Kane was going to go to authorities, so he ratted him out and had him killed.

Earlier, a large chunk of the money Mason had been laundering through the firm had turned up missing. About \$500,000, according to certain sources, though later Dorfmeier put the amount closer to \$200,000. A meeting was held at a local motel between Mason and Crowson and several other of Mason's associates, among them Bobby Joe Millen, a local thug with a long rap sheet that included everything from extortion to attempted murder. When Mason asked Crowson about the missing money, Crowson denied any responsibility and blamed it on Christopher Kane. A hit was then ordered on Kane, and Bobby Joe Millen and another career killer, our boy Charlie Johnson, also known as Hogjaw, was contracted to do the dirty work.

At first, Mason didn't believe Kane took the money and, instead, blamed his partner, Lou Crowson. The day after meeting with Crowson, Mason's boy, Billy Bob, called Shotgun collect and stated the problem Crowson, was dealt with. That was all that was revealed on the tape, but it was plenty. Enough to move the investigation forward.

Dorfmeier, along with the FBI was busy rounding up City Councilmen, mayors, cops and even a couple of State Senators.

In that tape, Shotgun and his son, Billy Bob, named names and talked about killing the Sheriff in Pickens County because he tried to cut in on their profits from the illegal businesses they were running in North Georgia. Shotgun Mason had one thing to say to anyone who wanted to gamble, make moonshine or run girls in Georgia, 'You do business with me and don't try to cut into my territory, or you die.' He backed it up.

The Mason's liked to brag and make themselves look more important than they really were. That tape is what everyone was looking for because, like most blowhards, they drop names of influential people who they know and, in this case, controlled, at least to some extent. Those people they claimed to control did not want people to know what kind of nefarious business practices they were engaged in, saying nothing of the FBI, United States Attorney, and the few honest law enforcement officers

that are left in the state of Georgia. The people mentioned in the tape, supposedly, are some of the area's leading citizens and the makers and shakers of the region, stretching from Albany, Georgia, to Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The Masons were also trying to get back the money they thought Christopher skimmed from them.

Big Maxie Greenbaum and James Lefty Franks had nothing to do with the murders of Hogjaw Johnson or Candi Kane.

Romeo Butticci took a disliking to Hogjaw and decided to beat him up to teach him a lesson for not clearing it with him before he fulfilled a contract on someone in Butticci's territory; but they didn't kill him. Someone else did.

Hogjaw Johnson was hired by the Dixie Mafia to do a contract hit on Candi Kane and get a tape from her made by her father that contained admissions by two mafia leaders, Darrell Shotgun Mason and his son, Billy Bob, of their involvement in prostitution, moonshine, murder, drugs, gun running, extortion and money laundering.

When Harry finished, he looked up, "Anything else?"

"The way I see it, Harry, somehow, Hogjaw found out Medusa was going to Wisconsin and he figured she was his best bet to lead him to Candi Kane. When he found Candi he killed her. So, what happened to that tape? Candi left it in the safe keeping of her parent's next door neighbor, Al Club."

"Good work, Max. That only leaves a few loose ends like who iced Hogjaw since your friends Big Maxie and Lefty Franks are in the clear?"

I took the last swallow that remained of my coffee and stood up.

"Good question, Harry. I don't know,"

I lied.

"I gotta go. I have some expenses to turn in so I can get paid and buy some groceries this week. I'll be talking to you later."

"Yeah, I'll have Rocco pour you a hooker of Paul Masson on me. Drive safe."

"Thanks, I will. Here, this is for you."

I dropped a copy of the tape I found in Candi's strong box. Greg Dorfmeier didn't know I made it. I doubted he would care.

"Is this one of your porn tapes?" Harry asked.

It was my turn to shrug my shoulders.

My mind was racing. I had a good idea of who it was that iced Hogjaw Johnson and Ice, The Pinball Man, Iaconni, but I wasn't about to tell Harry; at least not yet.

I needed to have one more conversation with someone and hear what they had to say. I knew where to go.

Chapter 31

I saw Medusa sitting alone at the end of the bar sipping on a drink. Rocco was at the other end filling a cooler with long necks. I pulled out a stool next to her and sat down.

She didn't look up or say anything.

"That brandy?" I asked.

She looked at her glass, "I honestly don't remember."

I stared at her for a moment.

Rocco stopped filling the cooler and walked over.

"Afternoon Max, you want a St. Remy's?"

"Nah, I'll take a Blatz draft. I'm not feeling that well."

Rocco nodded and went to pull a draft.

Medusa continued to stare at her drink.

"I'm surprised to see you up so early," she said, swirling her drink around in her hands.

"I couldn't sleep. I had too much on my mind."

She looked up in my direction, "Yeah, like what?"

"You and your family; some things just don't seem to add up."

Rocco put down my beer along with a bowl of pretzel.

"It looks like you could use some breakfast too."

I nodded at him. "Thanks, Rocco," I picked up the Blatz and sipped off the head.

"Nothing about my family ever added up," she said.

I stared at her for a minute before telling her what I thought happened.

"My guess is that you knew when Christopher and Helene were killed, who was responsible and that they would have to come after Candi as well. You watched them draw a bead on Candi and you let it happen."

I took another pull on my beer and put it down. I shook my head.

I waited for her to say something. She didn't, so I continued.

"A dangerous thing to do, Medusa, just to save you and solidify your connections. It caused Candi to lose her life. Was it worth it?"

She sat there staring down at her drink. She didn't respond.

I stared at her, waiting.

After a moment, she looked up at the ceiling and I could see the tears welling up in her eyes before spilling over and running down her cheeks.

"You know, the world sucks, just plain sucks."

"If the world didn't suck, we'd all fall off," I said.

"You're a laugh a minute Max; here's a quarter," she said sliding the coin in front of me, "buy yourself a clue."

I wasn't in a jocular mood, so I continued, "The one thing I hope is that you weren't the one who tipped them off where Candi was hiding. Tell me it wasn't you. Tell me you didn't make the call so that they could send Hogjaw Johnson to kill her like that. She was your friend... and your sister."

She looked at me, her eyes blazing, "They raped me and threatened to kill me if I didn't give up Candi," she screamed.

"Who is they?"

"Billy Bob Mason and Hogjaw Johnson; they raped me not once but multiple times over a period of a week while they held me captive, tied up naked in one of their fleabag whore houses that they pass off as a motel.

"It was after a week of having them stick their filthy cocks in me wherever and whenever they wanted, that I devised a plan. I could save my own skin and Candi's and still get my revenge without them knowing. I told them that my mother might know where Candi was, but she wouldn't tell anyone but me because she was protecting her. I told them that I would go up to Wisconsin and I'd find Candi and bring her to them and they could find out what she did with the tape.

"They both laughed at me and asked why I would do that. I told them money. I wanted ten grand and I would disappear. For good.

"They agreed but then raped me again, before they turned me loose, the bastards.

"Then Hogjaw Johnson said he would go with me. I didn't have a choice in the matter. He was a hard number; I'll give him that.

"We drove up in separate cars but he made me stay in his room. He treated me like I was his twist. He did with me as he pleased. Each night after he was finished, I sta-

red at the ceiling, laying out a plan; what I was going to do and how I was going to save Candi from this worm.”

She turned to look at me; for the first time her face softened, and tears, rolled down her cheeks.

“You think you are so smart. Save myself, Max? You don’t have a clue The pricks messed around with the wrong girl and got what they deserved. I knew I could nail the bastards. I had the goods on them but nobody in Georgia cared. I had to catch them in the act outside of Georgia because they owned every badge north of Jacksonville, Florida.”

I stared at her and waited. I could tell there was more.

“You still don’t get it, do you?” she asked.

I had finished my beer. I put my elbows on the bar and looked into her eyes. They were vacant, dark and haunting and they caught part of the reflected light from the Blatz Beer sign in the window to our left.

I shook my head.

She continued, “Let me start from the beginning, Max. Candi finally found out I was her half sister. She was cool with it and told me she always wanted to have a big sister and here she had one all these years and didn’t know it.”

I thought about Pearl’s birth certificate in Candi’s strong box.

“We started going to lunch together and then we would go to some bars after work on Friday night. We genuinely enjoyed each other’s company despite the age difference.

“One night, after we had a few glasses of wine, she told me some guy attacked her, beat her up and attempted to rape her after breaking in her apartment at the University of Georgia in Athens. The police knew who did it, but didn’t have enough evidence to arrest him.

“I asked her if she would like to get revenge on the low life bastard. She said she did.

“We found out he was from Macon, so one weekend we went down and paid him a visit. He lived in front of this cow pasture west of town off Highway 129 in a closed up gas station his family used to run. We snuck up on the place after dark. The screen door was swarming with flies. Inside, the place wreaked of stale smoke, rotten food and diesel fuel. In one corner stood a busted up cigarette machine. Above it hung a Rainbow Trout and a life-size cutout of Jayne Mansfield with an oil-stained hand imprint on her left breast. The cheap black and white linoleum floor was yellowed and stained and had chipped away against the far wall. The door to the bathroom was open and the lid to the rust stained toilet was up and dirty towels littered the floor.

The mirror over the sink was cracked and dirty. An old condom machine was hanging on one corner of the wall. On the other side of the room was a counter made of cheap pine, and it bristled with splinters and rusted nail heads and an old cash register. Just the thought of that place makes me sick.

“He was sleeping in the back room on an old army cot. He was covered with a filthy sheet. A pile of soiled clothing lay by the side of the bed along with an empty Thunderbird wine bottle and a well used Playboy Magazine. He looked as filthy as the sheet and smelled worse. I never in my life saw a place as filthy as the one he was living in, not even one of the Mason’s flop houses in downtown Atlanta.

“We snuck up on him as he slept in his bed. He was snoring so loud I couldn’t hear myself think so I stuck my .357 magnum in his mouth.”

My mind went to the shooting death's of Ice, The Pinball Man, Iaconni, Hogjaw Johnson and that pimp in Georgia. Pretty soon Harry would be asking her for her .357 to compare with the ballistics results.

Medusa continued with her story. "I bent over and whispered in his ear, Rise and shine honey bun, momma has a surprise for you and boy was he surprised.

"Now I gotta emphasize the fact that I ain't a guy and this wasn't downtown New York. This was Macon Georgia and I wasn't going to put up with his crap, him trying to rape my sister. So I taught him a little, you know what I mean? A whacked him on the side of his head.

"It was night and very dark. I talked to him, not man to man, but holy ass terror to man. Candi was standing next to me. I could feel her shaking. I told her it was alright and held her hand as I stuck my gun in this parasite's ear and asked him if he wanted to sneeze, if he felt a sneeze coming on.

"Hell, he pissed himself. The guy's a burglar, for Chrissakes, and not a very good one at that. I whacked him again, hard on the side of the head and he dropped like a bag of Georgia peanuts. I left him there bare ass naked and told him I would ice him the next time I saw him, so he better stay out of Atlanta.

"Candi painted his little dick with my tube of lipstick. You can bet I threw that tube away when she was done.

"That evening sealed our friendship. We started doing everything together and she confided in me about her family; things that she made me swear I would never breathe a word of to anyone.

"She said she had a tape that she wanted me to keep. She said Christopher gave it to her a couple of months before he and her mother were killed.

"She had made copies and gave me one.

"She asked me if I would put it in a safe place; that it was the only thing that could protect her; that her safety deposit box was compromised. I am not sure what she meant by that but evidently, somebody found out she had one. Maybe the cops, I don't know."

"This tape is what Billy Bob and Hogjaw were trying to find?"

"Yes."

"And you had it all the time?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be a son of a bitch. Did you listen to it?"

"No, she asked me not to."

I looked at her with skepticism.

"Well, okay, I listened to it once or twice."

"What was on it?"

"Information about Christopher's partner, Lou Crowson, and his dealings with Shotgun Mason and the Dixie Mafia. The law firm was always representing them whenever Mason or one of his goons got caught doing something illegal, which was pretty much a daily thing. The Masons talked about killing a sheriff and it named names, people on the take. Lou and Christopher were talking about all this money, \$200,000, that they were receiving from Millen, the guy who owned a string of bars and strip clubs, most down on the Southwest side of Atlanta and a couple of high class clubs in Buckhead. He worked for Shotgun Mason. I guess Christopher and Lou received it from him and were supposed to launder it. Mason was mad as hell and wanted to get his hands on some of this money real quick.

“Evidently, Lou didn’t put it in the specified accounts he was supposed to. He claimed he no longer had it. Christopher knew he diverted the money to cover his drug and prostitution addictions. Christopher was furious. He told Lou that Lou had signed their death warrants.

“About two weeks later, I stayed late doing research and overheard Christopher talking to a woman who was seeking a protective order from her husband. Christopher told her that he too had been threatened. He said; ‘Would you believe that in the past two weeks, I’ve had an out-of-state threat on my life and an in-state threat on my life? And I know where it’s coming from. But I’ll see myself in the pits of hell before I’ll be afraid of these people.’

“I knew who he was talking about and I was worried they’d get him. He never told anyone. I decided to cover his back whenever I could; but when he was killed, I was out of town working a case. When I got back everything was falling apart. Christopher and his wife were dead and Lou Crowson was missing and so was Candi. That was when Billy Bob Mason and Hogjaw Johnson paid me a visit. I decided the only thing I could do was contact my birth mother up here and see if she knew where Candi was.

“Look, I didn’t intend for Candi to get hurt. I had a bead on Hogjaw and knew he was about to make a play. I just didn’t know he was going to do it so quick. I was supposed to be with Candi when he confronted her and then I was going to plug the bastard. But he changed the plan. He said he had to because Ice Iaconni, a made guy with the Milwaukee mob was muscling in on his action, asking for a cut. So he decided to work out a deal with Candi. He stood there with a sneer on his face and a .44 caliber Remington Magnum pistol hanging by his side.

“He said, ‘I got her to meet me at the Pfister bar and convinced her to come to my room, that I had some damning evidence on her father that she needed to see. When she was in the room I told her that her days were numbered and that I was the one chosen to take her out but that if she paid me five thousand dollars, I would tell that fat prick Shotgun Mason that I took care of the problem, meaning her, and let her walk.’ “

“That way Hogjaw would collect on both ends and could pay off Iaconni?” I asked.

“Yes. He said Candi laughed and told him to stuff himself so he took her out without me knowing.

“Shit, it wasn’t supposed to go down that way. I was supposed to be there and Candi wasn’t supposed to get hurt. I asked him why he didn’t wait for me. He said he didn’t need me. He had already gotten what he needed from me.

“I said, ‘Really?’ “I waved the tape in front of his fuckin’ face. He had no clue I had it all along.

“He said, ‘So she wasn’t lying. I wasted a good piece of ass for nothing.’

“That put me over the edge. I was boiling.

“So, I looked at him, smiled and said, ‘No she wasn’t lying,’ and I shoved my shiv up under his chin and into the roof of his mouth. His eyes got real wide but his mouth opened wider and I could see his tongue wagging around on the end of my knife like a little worm. Blood shot out all over the place.

“You should have seen the look on his face. He lifted his .44 Magnum but I shot the son of a bitch four times in the head before he could even squeeze the trigger.

“Are you surprised? He was amazed. His eyes were as big as saucers as his blood gurgled out of his mouth. Before he died I told him I was going to cut off his dick and feed it to the fish. By that time, he was too far gone to care.

"I did cut his dick off but I shoved it up his ass instead. Why risk poisoning some innocent fish? It took me forever to get the stench of his shit off my hand; but killing that creep was worth it."

"What about Ice, The Pinball Man, Iaconni?"

She finished her drink and slid the glass along the bar and shrugged, "I don't know. I never met the guy," a smile spread across her face.

I stood up and looked at her. I now knew she was a cold hearted killer. Taking a wad of bills out of my pants pocket, I dropped them on the bar.

"You know, you are right, she wasn't supposed to die," I said.

She looked up at me but she wasn't there. There was that emptiness in her eyes that I had seen before.

"Why did he dump her body on the school playground on Auer Avenue?" I asked.

"He said he was taking her body to that place where all those people are getting killed. The Milwaukee River Parkway or something."

"Menomonee River Parkway," I corrected.

"Sure, that place. But he ran into a bunch of squad cars responding to another murder in the area and he thought they were coming after him. So, he pulled onto Auer Avenue and threw her in some weeds and then took off. I guess because it was convenient, but only Hogjaw Johnson knows and he ain't talking. He deserved to die, Max."

I didn't argue with her because she was right, but it wasn't her place to decide that; but who am I to cast stones? I wasn't much better. As Hap said; "Sometimes good people do bad things and sometimes bad people do good things."

"How did my business card get in Hogjaw Johnson's pocket?"

She stared at me and smiled.

"Did you kill anyone else? No, don't tell me. I don't want to know," I said.

She glanced around the bar.

I truly felt sorry for her and I turned to leave. I felt dirty.

"Harry is no dummy. He's going to figure this out. They are running ballistics on the slugs they pulled out of Ice Iaconni and Hogjaw Johnson. It's no secret you own a .357. The same caliber that iced those two creeps as well as another badass in Atlanta; and then there is the attempted murder of Shotgun Mason. It's only a couple of hours on a plane from Milwaukee to Atlanta. The cops will start to connect the dots. I suggest you pack your things and find another place to land, Medusa."

She turned and gave me a cold stare. It caused a shiver to run down my spine and it had nothing to do with sex. I got up to leave. I knew if I stayed around I might be next on her shopping list.

"Where are you going, Max?" she smiled.

"I don't know. Tombstone I guess."

"Tombstone?"

I shrugged. Suddenly, I was missing Deputy Debbie Red Eagle and her Wakavakia soup.

Then I remembered Candi's note inside my jacket pocket. "Here, this is for you. Maybe your friends will let you live." I said, placing it on the bar next to her drink.

She pressed my hand and looked into my eyes with a pleading look.

Her skin was warm. I could feel her pulse beating rapidly.

She continued to stare at me for a moment.

"Don't go," she whispered.

Slowly, I pulled my hand away and shook my head. I don't know if I felt pity for her or disgust.

I left her sitting there, alone at the bar with her drink and her guilt.

Chapter 32

I never saw Medusa again, after that afternoon at Rocco's. Harry put out a "Person of Interest" alert for her in connection with the murders of Arnie Iaconni and Charles Johnson, but she never turned up.

She inherited one of the largest estates in the history of the state of Georgia and was a very wealthy woman. She had the financial resources to go anywhere in the world she wanted. She would be wise to stay away from Milwaukee and Atlanta.

Both Arnie Iaconni's and Charles Johnson's murders are still listed as unsolved and kept in an open file at the 16th Precinct.

Darrell Shotgun Mason recovered from his gunshot wound and was convicted, along with his son, Billy Bob Mason, and Tommy Richards, for the murders of Christopher and Helene Kane.

I never questioned if I did anything wrong the day I planted that stuff on Shotgun Mason. Before that, a little flimflam was the worst thing I ever did. I might have put a frame on a few and all that would have got them was a five spot. The Kane murders and the killing of the Sheriff will get Mason and his boy the juice at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary

Given the chance, I'd do it again and sleep just fine the rest of my life. The system needs someone like me to make it work.

In real life, it's more complicated than right and wrong; in real life, there is so much shit that when you stick your hands in you wonder if the stench will ever vanish.

Planting evidence on a slime like Shotgun Mason was something that had to be done.

Anyway, as Hap said, "Sometimes good people do bad things and bad people do good things."

I guess sometimes I'm good, and sometimes I'm bad, and sometimes I just don't give a shit.

Epilogue

Two bodies were on the ground covered in white sheets. A new, white Chevrolet Impala convertible with red interior, was parked along the side of Menomonee River Parkway, with its top down.

Hap and I were watching Harry and a guy from the Milwaukee Police Department's crime lab, named Cal Davis, pour some white liquid on the ground.

Hap asked, "What are those?"

"Moulages," Harry answered.

"What are moulages?" Hap asked.

"Plaster castings. Unfortunately, these are too rough for identification. But, we can still tell from the size and depth of the footprints the murderer is tall and heavily built but that's about all."

Harry bent over and pushed aside the tall grass, growing alongside the freshly poured moulages. He took a pencil out of his pocket and stuck it in a shell casing.

"Hmm, a .243. The killer must have dropped it."

"What's it used for?" I asked.

"Varmint hunting, Coyotes mainly. A lot of kids and women use it for deer hunting because it has less recoil than the .30-06 or the .30-30. It's popular with small-framed hunters like you and women, Max. It doesn't cause over penetration. Some of our training officers have been testing it in the Browning A Bolt .243."

"So, how many does this make?" I asked.

Harry wasn't listening. "What?"

"I said, how many murders does this make that you attribute to the Midnight Rider?"

"Come on, follow me. We'll let Cal here finish up."

Hap and I followed Harry back to the road.

"Nice wheels, don't you think? Only 150 miles on it. If you look closely, you can see a shitload of blood on the red vinyl seats but don't touch nothing. The blood has already dried and turned black."

Neither Hap nor I had any intention of getting a closer look. We took him at his word. Harry pulled out a package of Wrigley's Spearmint gum and unwrapped a piece and stuck it in his mouth. "Kathy made me quit smoking and now my teeth are going to rot out from all the sugar in this fucking gum; plus I gained ten pounds."

"It looks good on you," I lied.

He looked at me and frowned, "Sure it does. To answer your question this couple makes numbers seven and eight but there is a slight difference. They were shot from a distance and then dragged out of their car. It looks like the girl was sexually assaulted. We found her with her panties next to her body and her skirt hiked over her head. Finger marks along the side of her neck leads us to believe she was strangled. She was also shot in the right shoulder. My guess? He wanted her alive while he played with her. Her boyfriend was shot once in the face. Whoever it is, he's a pretty good shot. Cal will get a trajectory and distance so we can scour the area for any evidence. Maybe he dropped a Twinkie's wrapper or something. I'm surprised we found that shell. Uncharacteristically sloppy on his part, if it's the same guy, but I have my doubts. This is a first involving a rifle. The only things that match are the location, the time of the attack, and the fact the girl was sexually assaulted."

"Isn't there any other place around here for young people to park? Don't they read the papers or listen to the news?" Hap asked.

"Good question. I don't know. By the way, Max, Dr. Lundgren stopped in to see me yesterday. I can see why Rocco lies on her couch and lets her manipulate his mind. She is hot."

"She doesn't manipulate minds, Harry. She tries to get patients to come to terms with issues that cause them to have certain fears mostly sexual in nature."

"She must have fun with you."

"What was she doing in your office? Did you arrest her for jaywalking?"

"No, but I might do that, just to get another look at those legs. She said she attended a seminar in Los Angeles where a cop gave his theory about why some of these nut jobs like Ed Gein commit the atrocities over and over again. Evidently, in their sick minds, they have to perform the same rituals every time they kill their victims. She thinks his theory has some validity to it. If she's correct, we may have two killers here."

