

Prologue

Mike Scanlon was a big man. He stood a little over six feet tall and weighed in at two hundred and five pounds, about five pounds heavier than when he was riding bulls and broncs on the rodeo circuit down in Texas over twenty years ago. Since he purchased this property just outside Tombstone Arizona, the town that is too tough to die, which he thought applied to him as well, and started ranching, he lost the extra twenty pounds he had put on around his waist sitting behind his desk in Hollywood. His hair was still a light sandy brown but was beginning to show gray along his temples. He was told it made him look distinguished. People around Tombstone had started calling him Big Mike and he liked it.

As his horse picked up a trot, he looked over at his son, Mike Jr., sitting on his Bay gelding next to him. It was hard for Big Mike to believe that his son was seventeen years old. It seemed like it was yesterday that he brought him home from the hospital, a red faced squawking little runt. Everyone called him Little Mike. He wasn't little any more. He was nearly as big as his father. He had grown into a fine young man. Big Mike was proud of him. He was doing well in school and had joined the rodeo team and was getting pretty handy with a rope. He had mentioned that he might want to try the pro rodeo circuit when he graduated from high school this coming spring. His mother was adamant that he go to college first. It was an argument Big Mike didn't feel like getting into as he tended to side with Little Mike. Oh well, it was just another in a long string of disagreements he seemed to be having with Rachel over the last few years of their marriage. They met in Austin Texas in August of 1937 and six months later they were married and on their way to Hollywood. In 1937 he won the All Around Cowboy Award for the third year in a row. No one else had ever done that, before or since. A Hollywood stuntman by the name of Cody Baker saw him ride and asked him if he would be interested in working for him doubling for the many Hollywood actors who played the role of cowboys on the big screen and who really didn't know how to ride. They were too valuable to have them risking their lives doing the dangerous stunts that were needed to be done on the sets. Big Mike jumped at the opportunity and he knew that Rachel had thoughts about breaking into movies so she was excited to leave Austin and test the waters in Hollywood as well.

Those dreams were quickly dashed as she became pregnant with their son, Mike Jr., who was born nine months later. Rachel never seemed to forgive Big Mike the fact she had to give up her dream of being in the movies to raise their family but she settled in being a mom. He had to admit, she did a pretty good job as they never had any trouble to speak of out of Little Mike.

Rachel was Austin's Rodeo Queen the year they met and she caught the eye of just about every cowboy north of Eagle Pass up to Brushy Creek. Her long blond hair was offset by her alabaster white skin. She was and still is a beautiful woman. A tiny lady, barely over five feet tall, yet she possesses more stamina and strength than most grown men. Big Mike pulled up with Little Mike next to him and looked over the two thousand acres filled with Rose Trees, prickly pear cacti, and a mixture of wheatgrass, mesquite and bullgrass. He bought this land from the widow of long time Tombstone resident, Jack McLaury, purported to be a nephew of one of the McLaury's killed at the OK corral in a gunfight with Wyatt Earp, Doc Holiday and Wyatt's brothers. With his two thousand acres along with a long term lease with the Federal government for the adjoining ten thousand acres he had ample forage and water to run his thousand head of Corrientes beef, or Criollo as his Mexican Vaqueros called them.

The Corrientes can be traced back to the first cattle brought to the new world by the Spanish in 1493. These cattle are a hardy breed chosen because they could withstand the ocean crossing and adapt to their new land. When Big Mike inquired as to what kind of cattle would be the best to raise in Tombstone, he was told the Corrientes as even a green horn like himself would have a difficult time killing them.

Big Mike loved Tombstone and was glad he made the decision to leave Hollywood and come here to actively run his cattle ranch. He had spent the past nineteen years in show business, starting out as a stuntman and working his way up to bit parts in B movies and an occasional big hit, until he saved enough money to buy his own studio.

When he ran into a cash flow problem due to a strike by the unions trying to get a foot hold in the movie industry, he had to go to some questionable people for an infusion of cash to get him through a rough period. They required a minority ownership in his company in turn for the money they gave him. He regretted his decision to partner up with them almost from the minute he signed the papers. It was soon apparent that they were nothing more than street thugs who took their orders from the mob in Chicago. He gradually lost control of his long time dream, the company he started. He sold out his remaining interest at a below market price just to get away from the group that now was calling all the shots.

He packed up and headed for Tombstone where he found out he would be dealing with a different breed of criminal, rustlers and desperadoes from all walks of life and from both sides of the United States/Mexican border as well as crooked local politicians, coyotes and mountain lions, local mining interests and occasional squatters. "Looks like some dead horses down there, Mikey."

Mike eased his big roan gelding down the arroyo past the big prickly pear cacti and trotted up to the dead horses. There were six of them, mustangs, some of the many that roamed his property, and from looking at the color of the blood oozing onto the dry desert floor they were killed recently.

He dismounted and bent down to inspect the wounds more closely. It looked like they were shot with something pretty big, probably a 30-06. Most of the local ranchers hated these horses that dated back to when Spanish Explorer Hernando Cortez, first landed in Yucatan Mexico in 1575. He brought with him this hardy little horse that the Mexicans call the mestengo, or the wild one, and who the local residents call mustangs. It was the first horse to set foot on American soil in over ten thousand years.

The ranchers claimed the mustang ate all the forage and drank the scarce water that was meant for their cattle but Mike Scanlon left them be and let local ranchers know these horses were welcome on his property. They considered Mike an outsider and figured he was crazy and didn't know what he was doing but as long as the mustangs stayed on the S Bar S Ranch, they could care less. But if they wandered onto their property, it was well within their rights to shoot and kill these pesky little varmints.

But Big Mike thought they were great horses and they made the best ranch horse. They could cut out a calf in half the time it took one of the big Quarter Horses the other ranchers rode and the price was right, they were free. All he had to do was catch them and get them under saddle. That wasn't easy.

"Mikey, come take a look at this," he said, pointing at the many tire tracks that were surrounding the dead carcasses of the mustangs.

His son rode over and looked down at what his father was pointing at. The flies had already found their meal for the day and were giving off an incessant buzzing sound as they took off and landed on every orifice on the dead horses.

"They must have been chasing these horses with trucks and just killing them for the helluva it. Sorry, dad, I didn't mean that," Little Mike never swore in front of his dad and let this slip without thinking.

Mike smiled, "that's alright, Mikey. Whoever did this must have seen us coming and took off in a hurry. Let's see where they went."

Mike got back in the saddle and reined his horse to the north in the direction of the vehicle tracks. Mikey was riding next to him as they picked up a fast trot. Soon they pushed the horses into an easy lope as they rode along the plateau and a gulley that became a small stream when it rained.

Next to the dried up stream bed there was a corral with an old pickup truck parked next to it. The pickup had a stock trailer hooked up behind it and was backed up to a chute leading out of the corral.

"Let's head down there Mikey," Big Mike said as he spurred his horse into a trot.

Little Mike fell in beside him and they rode toward where the mustangers were standing around. A rifle shot rang out through the canyon and Mikey fell from his horse. That was the last thing Big Mike saw as another shot immediately knocked him out of the saddle. He was dead before he hit the ground.

Chapter 1

It had been over six months since a bloodied and sexually mutilated Jimmy The Peanut Booth was shot and killed by Detective Chet George but not before he brought much carnage and pain on the City of Neighborhoods, Milwaukee Wisconsin, the Beer Capital of the World. He raped and murdered at least three women in the Milwaukee area before Homicide Detective Emily Williams singlehandedly came close to removing his scrotum in mortal hand to hand combat in the bedroom of her house. The Milwaukee Police closed in on him and set a trap to catch him. That trap included me, because I met The Peanut through a mutual friend, and the beautiful Homicide Detective Emily Williams was used as bait. I introduced The Peanut to Detective Williams and she lured The Peanut into her bedroom while her partner, Homicide Sergeant Detective Harry Marshall and Detective Chet George waited outside her house. When the dust settled Jimmy Booth was shot dead with his scrotum hanging by a thread and Harry and I were in Milwaukee County Hospital recovering from broken bones, a torn spleen and contusions suffered at the hands of that monster.

A month later I was still pissing blood but able to get around. I used my two season tickets for the Milwaukee Braves games to get a couple of seats behind the third base dugout for the 1957 World Series against The Bronx Bombers, the New York Yankees. That year, Hank Aaron of the Braves hit forty-four home runs, had one-hundred thirty-two runs batted in and batted .322 in only his fourth season in the major leagues. During the World Series he hit .393 with three home runs and seven runs batted in as the Braves beat the Yanks in seven games. Those phenomenal statistics would normally have won him the most valuable player award, except Braves pitcher, Lew Burdette, won three games, two of them shutouts in one of the most phenomenal performances by a pitcher since Christy Mathewson did it fifty years earlier in 1907.

Prior to game seven, the Milwaukee media asked Lew Burdette about pitching on two days rest. He replied, "I'll be all right. In 1953, I once relieved in sixteen games out of twenty-two. I'm bigger, stronger and dumber now."

I can relate to that and Lew immediately became my idol.

It seemed as though most of the fans sitting around me missed most of the action as their eyes were riveted on the cleavage which was so generously revealed by my girlfriend at the time, Thelma Thieland. She insisted on wearing a skin tight dress that was cut so low her belly button showed.

After celebrating the obligatory three weeks for the Brave's victory over the Yankees, I settled into a quiet winter life at my new cabin on Pewaukee Lake, a small town west of Milwaukee.

My neighbors were an eclectic group headed by Eisel Kanirf, who retired after thirty years in Ashland Wisconsin as the city's only disc jockey at its only radio station. He decided he had enough of the cold wind blowing off Lake Superior and decided to move south where he could sail and bask in the warm sunshine on the Florida coast. He left with his new red 1957 Studebaker with his Sunfish sailboat lashed to the top. He only made it as far as Pewaukee, where he stopped to visit his older brother, Kim, a retired dressmaker. When Kim died of ptomaine poisoning from some bad Lutefisk, something Norwegians eat to kill internal parasites, Eisel inherited Kim's house next to mine where he now resides with a huge telescope propped up on his porch aimed at a widow's bedroom window in a cottage across the lake. He has been after me to come over and join him for a meal of this Lutefisk, this parasite and brother killing and disgusting Norwegian dish of raw fish soaked in lye, while we watched the merry widow perform her nightly striptease. Eisel claimed she was aware of her audience. So far I have been successful in putting him off, feigning dizzy spells from my beating at the hands of The Peanut. These spells kept me from venturing out at night as well as being on a strict diet set up by my attending physicians. He seemed to buy into that story.

Gary Hassy and Tom Winterburg, both crotchety old German bachelors who lived to fly fish, tie fishing flies in a ramshackle shack behind their cabin and complain about the Republicans and anyone and anything else they didn't agree with, lived on the other side of my quaint little cabin. Every night I can hear them ranting and raving about republicans ruining the fishing in the state of Wisconsin. They also hated anyone from Illinois who ventured across the state line to pollute Wisconsin's lakes and litter the forests along with the highways.

This is the quiet retreat I bought into when I purchased the cabin and six acres with the money I received from my book advance for the novel I was writing about Jimmy The Peanut Booth. This is where I currently keep my horse along with my good friend Hap's and where I thought I would get away from the wild and raucous life in the city. Hopefully Eisel will stop asking me over to share in his Lutefisk and Hassy and Winterburg will get their wish and a democrat will win the governorship in the next election so I can have some peace and quiet. Thelma had just left for Miami. She promised she would be back next summer for the Braves opener but I wasn't holding my breath. She was a gorgeous young blond who kept a smile on my face for three months. She enjoyed making me happy and for that I will always be appreciative. My ex-wife would always close her eyes when we made love because she couldn't stand seeing me having fun. One thing I can say about Thelma, she loved to see me have fun.

I knew Thelma would find a younger better looking muscle bound beach bum with a better tan and more money than I possessed. He would turn her head and change her mind to stay in the sunshine state where she could show her abundant charms on the beaches wearing her yellow polka dot bikini instead of returning to Wisconsin to sit in a fishing shack in the middle of a frozen lake wearing a winter parka and ski pants and Aboriginal Mukluks.

I was still a little lost and depressed after Thelma left and I stopped in to see my friend Dan Ciorrocco, the proprietor of Rocco's Pub, my home away from home and my office away from my office.

"Rocco Man." I said as I sat down, picking up the brandy manhattan on the rocks he had poured me as soon as he saw me walk in the door, "What do you think about me getting a boat? I will be able to cruise Pewaukee Lake and maybe those two commie neighbors, Hassy and Winterburg, will show me how to fly fish. I have to do something to get my mind off Thelma and all her special talents that I already miss."

"Max, I'm going to give you some advice my dad gave me before he kicked my ass out the door when I was sixteen. He said, 'Danny', he's the only guy to call me Danny, 'if it flies, floats, or fucks, rent it.' My old man couldn't find two dimes to rub together and he was a first class asshole, but he sure had that one right.

"Don't get a boat. You'll spend more time taking care of that damn boat than you will floating in it."

“If you are having trouble coping with your love sickness, I suggest you go see Dr. Lorraine Lundgren, my shrink. She is good and she cured me of everything that bothered me.”

I doubted that as I know Rocco; he’s just in denial.

“I thought you stopped seeing her?” I asked.

“I did. I go to lie on her couch and fantasize about her. Every time I stretch out on her couch and look over at her legs my dick goes into a cadaveric spasm.”

“What is a cadaveric spasm and aren’t you afraid she will read your mind? Shrinks can do that you know.” I said shaking my head.

“I wish she could,” Rocco Man replied. “Cadaveric spasm is premature rigor mortis. You get the connection?” He said breaking out in a laugh.

“Dr. Lundgren said she thinks I have a case of Klismaphilia.”

“What in the hell is that? I asked.

“That’s when you get pleasure from getting enemas. I do kind of enjoy those things but I don’t think it’s a disease, do you?” He asked as he walked away not waiting for my answer. I was beginning to think Rocco was making some of this stuff up just to see how I would react.

It was during my convalescent period, that I met my neighbor, Miss Hilma Heller, who lives next to the Fly Tying Commie Fishermen. She is a spinster high school English teacher whose niece, Candy Kane, left for school one day about three weeks ago and has not been seen since. Miss Heller filed a missing person’s report with the Pewaukee Sheriff’s Department and the Milwaukee Police Department but so far they haven’t been successful in their attempt to find her.

Miss Kane came to Milwaukee and moved in with Miss Heller about a year ago after her mother and father, a wealthy Atlanta Georgia attorney, were found shot to death in their home in Buckhead, a posh neighborhood in North Atlanta. Miss Kane wasn’t home at the time as she was enrolled in the University of Georgia’s School of Art when her parents got whacked. So far the Atlanta Police haven’t solved that case and she moved in with Hilma Heller, her only living relative.

Miss Heller requested that I use my detecting skills that I honed while pursuing Jimmy The Peanut and see if I could track down the whereabouts of Miss Kane.

I told her I was still recuperating from my injuries received from The Peanut and on doctor's advice, I was still convalescing. I didn't want to tell her that I was still basking in the local fame I achieved for the part I had in his apprehension and wasn't ready to go back to work at this time, especially when no money was offered. Plus Hap and I had planned a little fishing trip up north in Copper Falls Wisconsin. I called a friend of mine, Horace Greenberg, a guy a little light in the loafers whose job at the Milwaukee Sentinel, Milwaukee's morning newspaper, he landed because of me and the contacts I had with the powers to be there, and I asked him to do a little investigative reporting on behalf of Miss Heller. I knew he would love to dig into it as he did an admirable job for me investigating Jimmy The Peanut Booth. In fact, he was instrumental in finding what haunts The Peanut hung out at and us finally trapping him with the luscious Detective Emily Williams. I told him to contact Miss Heller with any information he dug up.

I was doing this as a favor for Miss Heller and to be honest with you, she was kind of intimidating and I wanted to stay on her good side, just to be safe.

It was during this period, during a recent poker game that I received word from a relative of an acquaintance from the past that changed my serene life and put me in the crosshairs of danger and into the lap of an old flame.

Chapter 2

“What are those things on your feet?” Rocco asked.

Hap looked down and said, “Oh, those are shower shoes.”

“They have rhinestones on them.”

Hap looked down again and said, “Yeah, I guess they do. I didn’t notice that.”

“Where are your shoes, Hap?” Rocco asked.

“I don’t know. I was running late and couldn’t find them and didn’t have time to look.”

“You weren’t at your place, were you?”

“Nah, I was at Pearl’s. This was all I could find in her closet.”

“She didn’t have any high heels? Never mind; if I recall correctly,” the Rocco Man said, “you couldn’t find your shoes last Wednesday and then on Saturday as well. What would Florshiem do without you?”

Hap shook his head in defeat. “Anyway, I’m here. Who’s waitressing tonight?”

“Harriett and Suzie should be in shortly. Dottie is in the back putting the silverware together with Buck. I’ll leave it in your capable hands Hap,” Rocco looked down once again at the rhinestone flip flops. He looked at me shaking his head. “Lord help me.”

“Okay, Max and I are waiting on the boys to come in. We will be playing some poker before I sign in tonight,” Hap said as he turned and followed me to the back.

Chapter 3

“I’ll raise you fifty cents.”

“Come on, Max, how many times we have to tell you, it’s a twenty five cent limit on the opening bet. Once someone opens, then you can raise fifty cents,” Hap explained to me for what he said was the umpteenth time.

Tonight I just couldn’t get my mind around our Wednesday night poker game. Once a month, I played poker with Hap Schultz, my former roping partner when we were in the rodeo business, and part time bartender here at Rocco’s Pub, John Diamond Dietz, a local attorney who bails me out of jail whenever I need it, if he isn’t chasing ambulances, Richard Chance Marcus, who would sell an insurance policy to anyone who can still fog up a mirror and sometimes to people who can’t even do that, and Fred Killer Kowalski, a marketing executive at Pabst Brewery, who comes up with some really wild marketing schemes, like flavored beer. Why he thought someone would buy something as disgusting as that I have no idea.

“Max, phone call; take it in the back by the ladies room,” Rocco Man yelled from behind the bar. As a favor to me he fields many of my calls. We had known each other since I returned to Milwaukee back in the fall of 1937, over twenty years ago. We pumped iron down at the Milwaukee YMCA together while Hap sat next to us and watched. Sometimes I think Hap worked up a bigger sweat just watching us than Rocco and I did lifting the weights.

We were playing our poker game in the back of Rocco’s Pub; we kept it legal by keeping money off the table. We only showed poker chips. We settled up later at the bar when we used our winnings to buy the losers the drinks for the evening. Kind of a reverse philosophy thing; I didn’t complain as I was usually the one receiving the free drinks unless we roped William The Raja Bennett into playing. Then we all feasted on his chips.

I got up and walked back to the pay phone. The place was pretty empty even for a Wednesday night. There were a couple of old guys sitting at the bar sipping on a draught and a few couples scattered around at the tables eating an early dinner. Rocco had three waitresses on duty tonight and Hap was scheduled to work the bar starting at ten and then he would close the place.

Knowing Hap, if there was a single girl, or even an unescorted married one around at closing, he would end up taking her home with him or end up going to her place to help her with the dishes, or with something else. He'd use any excuse he thought would work that would get him closer to her bedroom where he could perform his herculean feats as he added another scalp with the others he had hanging on his lodge pole. I just hope whoever he ends up with tonight has a better selection of shoes than Pearl has.

"Yeah, Max Fly here, how may I help you?" I barked into the phone. "Hello, Mr. Fly, my name is Hilda Scanlon. Miss Bates at your former office said I would be able to reach you at this number, so I called. Is this a bar?"

I looked around and said, "Well, it appears to be. What can I do for you?"

"I am in need of a private investigator and you were recommended. What I have to ask is very confidential and I would rather not discuss it over the phone, if you don't mind. I am with my attorney. Are you available to meet with us?"

I looked at my watch and back to the poker table and the few chips piled in front of where I was sitting and said, "Sure, when would you like to meet?"

"The sooner the better Mr. Fly can you meet right now?"

"Right now? Okay, do you know where Rocco's Pub is located in Wauwatosa? It's on the corner of Highway 100 and North Avenue."

"Actually, I know where that is Mr. Fly. We are across the street and can be there in less than a minute."

"Well, I'll be damned. You knew it was a bar."

"There is no need to swear, Mr. Fly. It's a sign of an uneducated person with a weak vocabulary when one has to resort to profanity to express one's self and, yes, I know it's a bar."

"Yeah, you're right Miss Scanlon; my vocabulary is very weak and my tongue gets away from me once in awhile, well, quite a bit actually. I'm sorry and please, call me Max."

"We'll be right over Mr. Fly." She hung up.

I walked back to the table and said, "I have to cash in my chips, guys."

"What chips?" Hap asked. "You haven't won a game all night. You bet like an old woman playing the slots. I'm surprised you still own your shirt."

"That's 'cause nobody would accept it," Chance injected.

Shaking my head, I picked up the few chips I had and walked to the bar and gave them to the Rocco Man to record and sat down to wait for Miss Scanlon.

I was sitting at the bar sipping a brandy manhattan when the door opened and a couple stepped inside. They stopped to look around. I assumed it was Miss Scanlon and her attorney so I waved them over. She was a rather portly lady who looked like she was pushing sixty, wearing a plain navy skirt and a white button down blouse with thick glasses dangling from her neck by a thin metal chain. Her body was pear shaped from her neck down to her knees with rolls of flesh along her sides, more than likely being pushed up by an unseen girdle. She had dishwater blond hair that hung in strands straight down the side of her head and touched the top of her shoulders. She wasn't wearing any jewelry that was visible and she had a grimace on her face that gave her the appearance of someone suffering from constipation, or perhaps being pinched by a girdle.

I stood up and introduced myself.

"I'm Max Fly," I said, "are you Miss Scanlon?"

"I am, Mr. Fly, and this is my attorney, Mr. Joe Foss."

Joe Foss was an average size man with a medium build. Pretty plain looking until he smiled. His smile reminded me of a Cheshire cat and he had a gold encased eye tooth that glistened in the sparse light of Rocco's Pub. He was wearing a dark suit with a white shirt and blue tie and a blue pocket square. He was carrying a black briefcase.

I extended my hand and we shook all around and I suggested we move to my table in the back.

Chapter 4

As we got comfortable I asked them if they would care for something to drink.

Hilda Scanlon declined but her attorney, Mr. Joe Foss, ordered a Chivas and water.

Our waitress, Harriett took our order and walked back to the bar. I took a deep breath as I gave an appreciative glance at her retreating backside. I shook my head in appreciation of well formed womanhood.

“So, how may I help you Miss Scanlon? I said taking a sip of my manhattan and getting down to business.

Mr. Foss placed his briefcase on the table in front of him and snapped open the latches opening the lid. He pulled out a manila folder before closing the case and placing it back on the floor next to his chair.

“Mr. Fly, Miss Scanlon is the paternal aunt of a past acquaintance of yours who has been brutally murdered along with his young son. The local sheriff’s department has been unable to find their killer or killers since the unfortunate incident.

We read about your success here in Milwaukee helping the police capture a serial killer who was terrorizing local women and we decided to come and ask for your help.

The serial killer he was referring to was Jimmy ‘The Peanut Booth who was raping and decapitating young and not so young women in the greater Milwaukee area. I was pretty badly beaten up by The Peanut and needed about six months to recuperate before going back to work. I was curious who this past acquaintance was and why he was killed.

“Mr. Fly,” Miss Scanlon said quietly, putting on her glasses and leaning over the table in my direction. We stared at each other. She scowled. I scowled.

“We have reason to believe that the mafia might be involved. From reading about you it appears you have experience dealing with them.”

“What Miss Scanlon means to say,” Mr. Foss said and I turned to face him, “is that the articles we read about your success in solving the serial killer case, is that you had to deal with the mafia and there is a distinct possibility that they may be involved in her nephew’s murder.

Mr. Fly, does the Scanlon name sound familiar to you?”

I continued to look at him for a moment and then turned to Miss Hilda Scanlon who was still scowling at me and I gave her another scowl and said, "To be honest with you, there are some mornings my name doesn't sound familiar to me."

"It sounds like you have a drinking problem Mr. Fly, are you an alcoholic?" Miss Scanlon asked.

I was beginning not to like her. "It's only a problem if you admit it's a problem, Miss Scanlon, and I'm not at that point yet and no, I'm not an alcoholic, I'm a drunk. An alcoholic goes to meetings. I go to parties.

"Alcohol is not the answer, Mr. Fly."

"Maybe not, but it makes you forget the question," I replied.

"Now who is this nephew of yours and from where do I know him?"

"I find you to be rather disagreeable and offensive, Mr. Fly, but I am a person who will do whatever it takes to find the person responsible for the tragic deaths of my nephew and his son. I will withhold judgment of you and proceed. It seems you and my nephew had quite a rivalry some twenty years ago on the rodeo circuit and that included the affection of my nephew's wife, Rachel."

"Your nephew is Mike Scanlon?" I asked incredulously.

"Was, Mr. Fly. He is definitely deceased now and what was left of him and his son when they were found was not very pretty."

I shook my head as I recalled Mike Scanlon and his wife Rachel. In 1937 I was on an incredible run winning every event I entered on the pro rodeo circuit up until the last event that is. An ornery old bull by the name of Casper did a number on me that wasn't matched until Jimmy The Peanut Booth just about dismembered my entire body. Anyway, I lost out on winning the All Around Cowboy Award in 1937 to Mike Scanlon and ended up in the Austin State Hospital for a month before Hap convinced me to quit riding bulls and return to Milwaukee. I had a date lined up with Rachel Leigh, the Austin Rodeo Queen in 1937 before I was taken out by Casper. When I woke up I heard she and Mike Scanlon hooked up and old Max was on the outside looking in with no chance of going on that date with Miss Leigh.

"I didn't know they got married," I said. "I lost track of them both after the 1937 season when I quit rodeoing and returned here. That's a shame, a real shame. So, tell me what you know."

Mr. Foss opened the manila folder he had removed from his briefcase and removed some pictures. The first ones were of Mike and his son, Mike Jr. taken at the coroner's office. I didn't look at them very long. Miss Scanlon was right, what was left of them wasn't very pretty. The next couple of pictures were of two men who were obviously thugs. I mean they had faces that even their mother's would have a hard time loving.

"Who are these mugs?" I asked.

"The big guy is Frankie Ears Giaccana and the other one is Tony Little Tuna Annatoli. They are former business associates of Mike's from his days in Hollywood" Foss replied.

"He owned a movie production company with them. Mike said he found out after taking them on as partners that they were connected to the Chicago mob. Mike sold his share to them before moving to his ranch in Tombstone Arizona."

"Is that where this murder occurred?" I asked.

"Yes, he and Mike Jr. were found on their property in a burned out pickup truck. They had been shot and blown up in that truck. As you can see from those pictures, they were burned beyond recognition. To me it looked similar to how the mob treats someone who crosses them." Joe Foss said.

"Mr. Fly," Miss Scanlon said, "I have to tell you, I am not comfortable with the idea of hiring you because you are a reporter as well as an investigator and having my family's private matters publicized is something I will not tolerate."

"Well, now," I said, trying to hide my disappointment, "I respect my clients' privacy and only write about cases if I'm given permission up front. If you would like me to keep the matter private, I will certainly honor that."

Joe Foss added, "Hilda, the newspapers are going to be digging up every piece of dirt they can. It could help us tremendously to have a forum where we can get our version of the story out; especially if the mob connection from Big Mike's days in Hollywood comes out. And trust me, Max's column," if I may call you Max, he said as he turned to me and I nodded my head, "carries a lot of weight in law enforcement circles."

He could call me anything if he kept talking about my writing like that. It was the first time that I heard my written word referred to as carrying weight with the law enforcement world. I wonder what my friend Detective E. J. Williams would say if she heard what Joe Foss said about my writing. She wouldn't even take a check I signed.

"You've had your client's permission for all of the cases you've written about?" Hilda Scanlon asked.

"That's right," I lied. I didn't mention that I didn't have many clients and those I had ended up dead, but hell, they weren't around to complain.

"And you think you can solve my nephew and great nephew's murder?"

"I'll do my best."

She wavered for a moment before saying, "I hope your best is good enough."

She finally agreed to hire me and also agreed to let me write about the case. She wrote me a check for eight thousand dollars. It was a lot more than I expected or would have asked for. She got up to leave and shook hands with me and then hesitated before walking out the door.

"Mr. Fly," she said, "If you find out who killed Mike and his boy, I'll pay you a bonus of ten thousand dollars."

Mr. Foss got up and escorted Miss Scanlon to the door. Before leaving he turned and said, "Keep track of your expenses and turn in the receipts."

I nodded my head and sat at the table for a few minutes sipping my brandy manhattan and staring at the check I was just handed, contemplating what I just got myself into. It was nice that people began to recognize my name from my newspaper column, or my detective work. The only problem was I now had a reputation to live up to and I hoped I was up to the task.

I walked back to the table where Hap and the boys were just cleaning up the table where our poker game was held. Hap was finishing up another of his jokes;

"...perplexed, Adam asked, 'What's a woman, Lord?'

God replies, 'A woman will be the most intelligent, sensitive, caring, and beautiful creature I have ever created. She will be so intelligent that she can figure out what you want before you want it. She will be so sensitive and caring that she will know your every mood and how to make you happy. Her beauty will rival that of the heavens and earth. She will cook and clean for you and do everything that you ask without ever complaining. She will provide every sexual fantasy you will ever think of and meet all of your sexual needs. She will bear your children and raise them without complaints. This woman will be the perfect companion for you.'

'Wow! That sounds great,' exclaimed Adam.

'Where is she?'

'Not so fast,' said the Lord. 'A woman this fantastic is going to cost you.'

'How much,' asked Adam.

'An arm and leg,' God replied.

Adam thought about this for a moment, and then replied, 'What can I get for a rib?'

"And the rest is history." The table broke out in laughter.

As they started to go to the bar to buy the losers their drinks I grabbed Hap by the arm and said, "Hap, I have an idea. Instead of fishing at Copper Falls, why don't you and I head to Arizona and do a little camping in the desert? It would be something different. Plus it would be an all expense paid vacation for you while I do a little work."

Hap glanced at me with an unbelieving look in his eye and asked, "Does that mean it won't cost me anything?"

I nodded my head saying, "That's what all expenses paid means."

Hap replied, "Hell, we can go fishing anytime. I haven't been to Arizona in years. What's the occasion?"

"You remember Mike Scanlon from Texas? I asked and Hap nodded.

"Well, he was murdered and his family has employed me to look into it and help put those responsible behind bars."

"No kidding? I'll be damned, Max. Are you beginning to get a reputation or what?"

"Guess I am Hap, guess I am. Be ready to leave Saturday morning."

"Hell, I'm ready now." He said.

Chapter 5

The first stop I made after we arrived in Tombstone Arizona and checked into a motel was at the S Bar S Ranch to speak with Mrs. Rachel Scanlon. I told Hap to settle in at the motel while I went out and met with Rachel and asked her some questions to get up to speed on the investigation of Mike and their son's murder.

I was as nervous as a hooker in church. I wondered if she remembered the date we were supposed to go on the night after I was thrown into another life by one mean and vengeful Corrientes Bull. She skipped town the next day with Mike Scanlon, sending me packing with a broken heart.

She probably wouldn't remember. I doubt the impression I made on her was even close to the one she made on me. She was all I thought about from Austin to Milwaukee. Well, I had a few thoughts about seeking revenge on Casper the bull too, but that was different.

I had called ahead and got the housekeeper who spoke to Rachel. I could hear a muffled conversation in the background before she said Rachel granted me permission to come out and speak with her.

I wonder why she didn't want to come to the phone.

The ride was short and quick, no traffic.

I drove up a long drive and passed over a cattle guard. Off to the south side of the house was a big bunkhouse that looked as big as an army barracks. In the back, I could make out the top of a large barn. The entire place was fenced in with four board fencing.

I drove up to the big two story stone and log house that looked like it was close to a city block long. There was a veranda, what we call a porch in Wisconsin that wrapped around the house.

I walked up to the door and pushed the door bell. After a moment it chimed the William Tell Overture instead of just a ding dong sound as most door bells make. I do have a couple of friends whose doorbells play a rendition of the Beer Barrel Polka, the number one song for the past seventy years at weddings and funerals in Wisconsin but most people just have a regular door bell or door knocker.

The door opened and I recognized her immediately. It was as if time stood still for the past twenty years.

Chapter 6

She was stunning in tight jeans and a yellow fitted top and a bright red scarf around her neck. She looked like she still fit nicely in a size two. Her blonde hair was laced with grey, which was barely visible and blended in well with her natural color. The sun had tanned her skin a light brown and looked as soft as satin. How a woman like her could keep her skin like that and still work a ranch was beyond me. All I could think was that it took a lot of time and more money than I could shake a stick at to look that good.

“Max, oh my God. It has been a long time. How have you been?” She said extending her hand which I took. She pulled me into the house and I knew I stepped into a different culture than the one I lived in. The foyer was huge and decorated in a southwestern motif and the ceiling looked like it was at least twenty feet over my head. There was a crystal chandelier that looked like it cost as much as an entire year’s budget for the state of Wisconsin.

On the wall was a wooden rack where a couple of gun belts hung with colt .45s holstered in them.

I looked at her for a moment and immediately could tell she hadn’t changed. She was high strung, and possibly, just plain crazy; in other words, a typically beautiful woman.

“I have been doing pretty well.” I said. “You still are a very stunning lady, Rachel. Ranching seems to agree with you.”

“Well, thank you. You are kind Max. I feel so old. Please, come in. I was just going to have something to drink. Would you like to join me? Would you like some sweet tea or something stronger?”

“What are you going to have Rachel?”

“I was going to have a brandy.”

“That sounds fine with me.” I replied.

“Good, I recalled you favored that so I made sure we had some for your visit. Won’t you follow me?” She asked.

As she led me through the house I couldn't help but marvel at how huge it was with exposed beams in the ceiling which was a good nine feet high. Off to the right there was a bear rug spread out on the floor in front of a large stone fireplace and a head from a big horn sheep was mounted above the mantle which was filled with pictures of Mike and Rachel with their son at various stages in their lives. Next to that was a bar with shelves filled with different types of booze lined up, rising close to the open beam ceiling. This lady's liquor cabinet would have made my friend Rocco Man proud.

We passed through the dining room that had a table that looked like it could seat twenty five people easily. It stretched from one end of the room to the other. There was also a huge stone fireplace in there as well.

As we entered the kitchen the floor changed from hard wood to Italian marble. I noticed that there was a stone fireplace with a tripod and cooking pot suspended over it. Everything about Mike and Rachel Scanlon seemed huge. There were copper pots and pans suspended from the ceiling over a cutting block situated in the middle of the room.

"Do you cook over the fire, Rachel?" I asked.

"Big Mike would. He loved to cook. He would barbeque a rack of ribs or cook up a special soup. He missed his calling. He was a great cook."

"It appears he did alright at ranching too." I replied.

"That he did. He was blessed with many talents. I miss him," Rachel said once again, dabbing at her eyes with a small white hanky as she started to sob silently.

"Look, are you sure you want to do this Rachel?" If now is not a good time, it's no problem for me to come back later."

"No Max, I'll be fine. Let's get this over with," she said taking the hankie and dabbing her eyes one more time before blowing her nose.

"Come on, the view is beautiful out here," she said taking my hand and leading me out the back door to a porch area which had a huge stone fireplace just off the side on the deck of a huge swimming pool.

I was in awe of the wealth and opulence of the place and told her so.

"Rachel, this is a beautiful place."

"Thank you Max, it is beautiful but now it's so quiet and lonely. I don't know if I can stay here any longer. The memories..." her voice drifted off.

Rachel stopped speaking as a young Mexican girl, who she called Consuela, brought out a tray containing a bottle of Martell XO Cognac and two glasses. I hope Rachel didn't see my jaw drop. Most of the time when someone offers me a glass of their brandy it's from a bottle of Christian Brothers or Paul Masson not from a bottle of one of the best cognacs in the world. I don't even know of a bar that carries Martell XO.

"Thank you Consuela. You may go now," Rachel said, dismissing the young girl.

Rachel picked up the bottle of cognac and poured two stiff drinks in glasses that must have weighed more than she did. I figured there was more lead in the crystal glass holding my cognac than they had in the surrounding silver mines of Tombstone Arizona.

"Hilda told me she hired you to look into Mike's death and I am so glad. Gosh, it's good to see you Max. You haven't changed a bit over the years," she said, switching gears faster than moonshiners on the run from the revenuers.

"Listen to me; I'm rambling on like a school girl. He was burned you know and Mikey, poor Mikey. He never hurt a soul. Why would they kill him?"

"...and now I just don't know what I'll do. I miss Mike and my son so much. They were my life."

She was beginning to unravel and her speech was rambling all over the place and she hadn't taken a drink of her cognac yet. I knew I had to take over this conversation quickly or I would never get her to answer a single question.

"I'll do whatever I can to help find who killed them Rachel. I know it's going to be difficult for you, but I need to ask you some questions. If now isn't a good time, I can come back."

"No, now is as good a time as any, I guess," Rachel said as she touched my arm.

She just kept looking at me like she was frozen. Her mind was elsewhere I was sure and I had to get her back.

I set down my glass and took out my pen and notebook.

She noticed my gun under my jacket and said, while nodding at my shoulder, "You carry, Max?" "Yes, it has come in handy at times. Now, I will try to be as delicate as I can Rachel as I don't want to cause you any more discomfort than I have to. Some of the questions may seem a little, uh, intrusive, but there is no way I can get around it."

“I started to carry too, Max; earlier this year. I felt like someone was always watching me.

“Did you notify the sheriff?” I asked.

“Of what, that I thought someone was following me? It was just a feeling. I didn’t see anyone. I couldn’t give him a description. Do you ever get that feeling Max, that someone’s following you or watching you? It’s horrible to think that. It’s so intrusive.”

I sipped my cognac and looked at Rachel and smiled. “I can imagine. Thank you for the drink, by the way. This is very good.

“I’m glad you like it Max.”

“Let’s go on, shall we?” I said.

“Anything you can tell me about the past few years, enemies Mike might have, money owed, anything, will help.”

“Mike was a loving husband and a good father. I don’t know why anyone would want to kill him. I know that he had some problems with the union in Hollywood with our production company, but that was a few years ago and we sold it and no longer have any connection with it at all.”

“How about here in Tombstone?

“We were active in Mikey’s school and PTA. He was such a good boy,” she said as her eyes began to well up with tears once again.

“Is there anyone who is not happy with you moving to Tombstone?” I asked.

“I don’t think so. At least not enough to kill us. There is this group of beatniks who camp on our land off and on and Mike had to continually chase them off but they are really harmless. They just look for a quiet place to smoke peyote and any other drugs they can find. Mike was always afraid that they might start a wildfire or hurt themselves.

Then there is a mining consortium that is interested in our property. They think a silver vein leads from a couple of their mines into our property and they want to dig around and find it.. They threatened to squeeze Mike out and make him sell. Mike told them they could go to hell. He never liked anyone to tell him what to do. But I don’t think they would go so far as to kill Mike and our boy.

Then we had some disagreements with a couple of the ranchers who are our neighbors. I mean they are a couple of miles away, but out here they are considered close neighbors. They think Mike didn't know what he was doing and of course, being an outsider, Mike never was accepted into the inner circle of the local Cattlemen's Association. I mean we don't get involved in politics and we both don't go into town and party and run around with a fast crowd, if you know what I mean? I did know what she meant but it appeared that a pretty long list of potential suspects existed.

I ignored her question and plowed on.

"This next question may upset you Rachel, but I have to ask it, was Mike seeing another woman?"

Her eyes got hard as she stared at me before looking down at the floor and saying, "When we were in Hollywood Mike had a couple of affairs. That was one of the reasons we left. To start over fresh in a new town. Leave the sordid past behind. But that was years ago and was over know."

I was thinking this brings in another potential killer, a jilted lover or a jealous husband, as I wrote down, 'check on past paramours' that the wife is always the last to know.

"Do you remember seeing anyone hanging around, besides beatniks, who you hadn't seen before?"

She thought for a moment and nodded her head before saying, "I do remember seeing two people sitting in a car outside our front gate a few weeks back. They were parked off to the side in a stand of trees. I could easily see them. They weren't hidden very well so I didn't think they were trying to keep from being seen."

"Tell me about the car they were in, Rachel."

"Let me see, it was dirty and beginning to rust."

"Where was the rust?"

"On the trunk lid and one of the doors."

"What door?"

"Front, driver's side."

"What color was it?"

"Two tone blue I think."

"I need more."

"No, it had a white top and the rest was blue."

"What was the make and year?"

"Chevrolet, I think. Maybe 1953 or 1954."

"Give me more."

“I remember some kind of stickers in the rear window when it pulled out to leave.”

“Did you see the license plate?”

“Out of state I think,” she replied. “I didn’t think to read the numbers. I was getting my mail.”

“Did they see you pulling up?”

“I think so. They were leaving. Driving off as I got out of my car.”

“Did you get a look at what the people looked like?”

“No, they were too far away and to be honest, I just wasn’t interested. I mean, there was no reason to be at that time.”

“Okay, it’s something to go on at least. Are there any locals such as other ranchers that might have it in for Mike and want to have him out of the way?”

“I don’t think so; at least I don’t know of any who would be angry enough to kill him. But we are in Tombstone so I guess if anyone had a mind to kill him, they wouldn’t hesitate and someone did.”

I wondered what she meant by being in Tombstone. Was Tombstone still an untamed Wild West town where disputes were settled by a gun instead of in a court of law? Maybe it was.

“I am going to meet with the sheriff tomorrow morning and ask him for some of the information he was able to gather. Did you tell him about the two people and the car?”

“No, he didn’t ask.”

He didn’t ask? I thought. You should have volunteered this to him.

“Well, I’ll pass this along to the sheriff for you Rachel when I see him tomorrow. Is there anything else you can think of?” I asked.

“No.” She said. “He is a slimy shyster of a sheriff,” she said with a sneer on her lovely face.

“Nice alliteration, Rachel,” I smiled.

She stared at me with a puzzled expression on her face before continuing, “I don’t think he can find his way across the street without the help of one of his deputies,”

“Why do you say that, Rachel?”

“Because he is in the pockets of the old time ranchers in Cochise County. The ones whose families have been ranching here since before Arizona became a state. You may think the Sheriff is the law in town but it’s the ranchers who really run the show.”

“I see,” I replied thinking of how I would broach this subject with the sheriff.

“I had better be going now Rachel. It was great seeing you again and I’ll keep you posted on our progress.”

“Do you think the sheriff will mind you intruding on his territory?”

“I’m not sure. I intend to dazzle him with my brilliance. If that doesn’t work, I’ll cover him with buffalo shit.”

“You may have to,” she replied. I wondered what she meant by that.

Chapter 7

I stepped out of the hot Arizona sun into the air conditioned office of Sheriff Manny Alvarez.

It wasn't a very impressive place. In fact, it was pretty ordinary and it didn't look anything like I thought a western sheriff's office would look, with old western artifacts and pictures and rifles hanging from gun racks on the wall and old sweat stained Stetson hats lying all around.

A pretty young lady with dark brown skin and long black hair, who I thought might be an Apache, was sitting behind the counter that separated the entrance of the building from the rest of the office. She was wearing a khaki shirt with an embroidered badge on her right shoulder and a name tag with "Red Eagle" printed on it. Strapped around her waist was a Colt .45 revolver and a cartridge belt. It didn't appear that any of the cartridges were missing.

From what I had seen so far, my .38 caliber Colt Belly Gun was no match for the fire power they were packing in Tombstone.

"Good morning Miss, is the sheriff in today," I asked.

She looked up at me and stared for a moment before saying, "May I say who is calling?"

"Max Fly," I replied.

"You're serious?" She smiled. "I mean, Max Fly is your name?"

"Yes ma'm, that's what my momma named me," I lied. I didn't think it was necessary to go into the reason I changed my name. Maybe later if we got to know each other a bit more intimately.

With that, a smile spread across her face and she stuck out her hand and introduced herself.

"I'm Deputy Red Eagle, Debbie Red Eagle.

"Debbie, not something I would think of being an Apache name." I replied not letting Miss Red Eagle off the hook on the name game.

"I'm Yaqui, not Apache. My father named my sisters and me after his old girlfriends."

"He really named you after his old girlfriend? What did your mother have to say about that?"

"Good riddance, when he died!" She laughed. "I'll go check to see if the Sheriff has time to see you. His name is Manny Alvarez."

“Thank you Deputy Red Eagle.” I said with a smile thinking a Yaqui lady was one you wouldn’t want to mess with. I enjoyed watching her as she turned and walked to the back office. I couldn’t help but notice how nicely her khaki pants fit her and how her hips swayed suggestively as she disappeared down the hall.

Looking back, she caught me staring and smiled. “You can call me Debbie,” she said, as she turned and proceeded to walk down the hall provocatively swaying her hips.

She wasn’t wearing a wedding ring so I assumed she was single and I immediately wondered how long it would be before Hap came sniffing around.

I went to the far wall and looked at the wanted posters that were displayed. The faces staring back at me looked like characters right out of the eighteen hundreds.

After a few minutes I heard someone say, “May I help you?”

The deep voice startled me out of my thoughts and I turned to see Manny Alvarez standing behind me.

He was a tall thin man who appeared to have spent most of his fifty or so years out in the Arizona sun. His hair was black and had a touch of gray along his temples giving him a distinguished look. He also had a colt .45 strapped to his hip. I noticed he had a couple of empty loops in his ammo belt. He probably used the rounds on some meddling outsider I thought.

“Morning, name’s Max Fly. I’m a friend of Rachel Scanlon out at the S Bar S Ranch.” I said, sticking out my hand.

He looked at my hand and then at me and said, “Zat so? What can I do for you Mr. Max Fly?” he reached out and grabbed my hand in an iron grip.

“Well, the Scanlon’s asked me to help them find out who killed Mike and his son.” I didn’t think it was necessary to tell him Mrs. Scanlon wasn’t the one who hired me.

“They were killed out on their ranch. I was wondering if you might have a few moments to go over some of the information you have on their murder.”

“I remember that murder, a tragedy. A young boy and his dad ambushed while out riding on their ranch. Max Fly, now why is that name familiar to me?”

“I’m not sure why it would be familiar to you sheriff. I am here from Milwaukee, the place Schlitz made famous. This is my first trip to Tombstone. Have you ever been to Milwaukee?”

“Don’t think I have,” the sheriff replied. “Where’s Milwaukee?”

“In Wisconsin; I spent a few years in Texas back in the ‘30’s on the rodeo circuit. That’s where I met Mike and Rachel Scanlon. Maybe that’s where you heard my name,” I said.

“It’s possible Mr. Fly; although, I never was much for rodeos. I know it seems strange coming from an old cowboy, but I just never was interested in that stuff. Grew up on a ranch in New Mexico and my daddy raised cattle and what you boys did for pleasure, I did as work and it was hard work; didn’t have much time to play. Come on back. From what I can recall, we don’t have much on that murder. But, we’ll take a look.”

As we entered his office he said, “Take a seat Mr. Fly,” pointing at a chair in front of his desk. He walked around and took a seat facing me across his desk.

“You folks have some mighty powerful fire power down in this neck of the woods,” I said, eyeing a couple of Winchester rifles, a shot gun and a pair of Colt .45 revolvers hanging from a gun rack behind his desk.

“Yep, sure do. We still use the old six shooter, just like in the olden’ days; leavin’ five beans in the wheel while leaving the hammer at rest over the sixth for safety. Old habits are hard to break,” he replied, eyeing me curiously. “You carrying Mr. Fly?”

“I have a permit,” I said, reaching in my pocket and handing it over, “but I left my gun in my suitcase back at the motel.”

The sheriff looked it over and grunted before handing it back to me.

“Well, let’s see, Big Mike had money and an attitude,” he continued as he clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair.

“Those two things can lead to trouble, especially the attitude. Throw in booze, greed and dames and sooner or later something bad was bound to happen.”

“You saying Mike was a ladies’ man, Sheriff?” I asked.

“Let me put it this way, Mr. Fly, Big Mike had a reputation. Some of it was good, but most of it wasn’t. Nothing against the law, mind you, but it was like his moral compass was skewered.”

He seemed to have it all, a lovely wife, great son, home in Hollywood, a ranch in Arizona, a private plane and about three million dollars in the bank, which now goes to the lovely wife.

He and his son were found shot and blown up in a burned out chassis of a 1956 Ford truck, or what was left of them. It was pretty gruesome. They were burned pretty bad and parts of their bodies had been blown off by the explosion. It was determined that dynamite was used.

Probably four sticks, possibly six. They wanted to make sure most of the evidence was destroyed. The truck was stolen. We were able to run the registration number. It was stolen off a car lot in Phoenix about two weeks before they were killed.”

“Didn’t you find that strange? I mean finding their bodies in a stolen truck seeing as they rode out on their horses?”

“Yeah, we wondered about that?”

“And...?”

“And what? We didn’t find any answers to that.”

“What happened to their horses? Were they ever found?”

“Nope.”

“How about their saddles?”

“Them neither.”

“Well, it seems like there are a lot of unanswered questions Sheriff.”

“Yep, that’s why we call it an unsolved murder. We questioned one of them beatniks that was squatting on federal land out there but he was so drugged out he didn’t know his pie hole from his ass hole. Anyway, we had him in the interrogation box for over five hours and he couldn’t tell us nuthin’. He’s on the table now.”

“The table?” I asked.

“The morgue. Seems like some of that stuff he was smokin’ wasn’t clean. Killed himself trying to find peace. I guess he finally did.”

“We get a lot of drug traffickers coming through here, Mr. Fly. Take Highway 80 South out of Tombstone for about thirty miles and you’ll find yourself in Agua Prieta, MEXICO where you can get just about anything you want, pretty women, not so pretty women, guns, drugs, legal or illegal, depending on which country you are in when you are caught with them in your possession.

Factor all that stuff in and add the fact that Big Mike bought the McLaury spread that butts up to the old Lucky Cuss and Toughnut Silver Mines and you have another dog in the hunt.

So, let's add up those dogs why don't we? First, let's throw in the mob from his days as a big movie studio executive. They pretty much ran him out of Hollywood. Then let's throw in drug smugglers since we know they come up from Mexico and cut through Big Mike's property. Third, let's throw in the Tombstone Mining Consortium, LLC who has been after Big Mike to sell his ranch because they believe a good portion of the remaining silver vein from the Lucky Cuss and Toughnut Silver Mines runs right through his property. They had been fussin' at each other off and on ever since Big Mike arrived in Tombstone. Fourth, we have what we call squatters, or dropouts, the dregs of society, who Mike had been running off his land every year. It seems they can't make it in the real world and just plunk their collective asses down on other hard working people's land and call it a commune, where they beg and steal and raise fuckin' jack rabbits for food and get an occasional fix from the Mexicans on their way through Tombstone every week smuggling dope up from Agua Prieta. Then we have what are known as mustangers, fellas who go after the wild horses and take them to rendering plants so they can be ground up for dog food. Most people around here let those mustangers be as them damn horses are pesky things that don't do nobody no good, 'cept eat what little grass we have here on the desert that's meant for our cattle. For some reason, Big Mike liked them little horses and was always complaining to me about the mustangers trespassing on his property and wanted me to do something about it. It wasn't an easy thing to do, catching those guys in the act. There's thousands and thousands of acres out there and I only have so many deputies and we have more important issues to deal with here in Cochise County. I have to make this county safe as our number two industry, behind ranching, since silver was mined out, is tourism and tourists won't come if they don't think it's safe in Tombstone. And last, but not least, we have the little widow lady who has quite a bit at stake in the game, a couple million clams. So, as you can see, there isn't a lack of potential suspects that we could look at, just evidence linking someone to this bizarre double murder. And let me tell you up front, Mr. Fly, we talked to them, one and all, and came up with zilch. Of course the mob just sneered at us and looked at their mouthpiece for advice before uttering a 'no comment'. Never could understand why someone had to pay a fucking lawyer to tell them to say 'no comment'. But then, what do I know? I'm just a dumb country sheriff. But I'll tell ya what Mr. Fly; education never did have anything to do with intelligence. The damn country has living proof of that in

Washington D.C.”

Not for a moment did I think this guy was ‘just a dumb country sheriff. My antenna went up when he said that Rachel was a suspect because of inheriting all that money. There must have been more than a big inheritance to have the sheriff looking in her direction.

“Do you really think Mrs. Scanlon would have her husband and son killed?” I asked.

“Coulda’ been she hired a hit on her husband and didn’t know they were going to kill her son,” he replied. “I seen some strange things done to people over the years and the little ladies don’t have to take no back seat to the men when it comes to butcherin’ someone.”

“Sheriff, you seemed to have left out the local cattle ranchers as potential suspects. Is there a reason for that?”

He stared at me for a moment before answering.

“Mr. Fly, most folks around here have been living in Tombstone most their lives. They pretty much get along. I know we have a long history of violence here, dating back before Wyatt Earp and his group and the Clanton’s and McLaury’s tried to resolve their differences at the Ok Corral. Since I have been Sheriff, the crime rate has fallen significantly and I take pride in that and maybe, just maybe, that’s why the good folks of Cochise County keep reelecting me as their Sheriff.

Anyway, Mr. Fly, I have known most of these ranchers all my life and each and every one of them is an upstanding law abiding citizen.”

“I’m sure they are Sheriff, but do you think one of them might have had a squabble with Scanlon over, say water, and decided he would end it by killing Big Mike and his boy?”

“Sounds like you been readin’ too many dime store novels, Mr. Fly. Ranchers in these here parts don’t kill others over water no more. We got the BLM who takes care of those issues.”

“The who?”

“The BLM, Bureau of Land Management, part of the Department of Interior. I guess the Feds don’t think we locals can handle these things ourselves and we need their meddlin’. Bull shit I say! We got along fine without ‘em for over one hundred years and we can do it now.”

“Okay so water’s not an issue.” I said. “What sort of evidence did you find sheriff?”

“Mr. Fly, as I told the Feds when they came in here, I don’t have squat.”

“Why are the Feds involved?” I asked.

“Damned if I know. They don’t give, they just take. But I suspect it might have something to do with Big Mike’s dealings in Hollywood.”
“I see. “So, did you have any evidence that was of interest to them?” I asked.

“As I said, we have squat. Do you know how long tracks last in the desert sand, Mr. Fly? Mrs. Scanlon didn’t report her husband missing until he was gone for three days. She said her husband and son usually spent a couple of nights out on the desert when they checked on their cattle. By the time we got word that they were missing, pretty much everything was gone blowin’ in the wind. We found traces of dried blood but couldn’t determine if it was human or animal. We found a couple of burned out gas cans next to the truck with the bodies of Mike and his son inside and a couple of mustang carcasses that the coyotes didn’t completely finish yet. Whoever done this knew what they were doing and cleaned up pretty good after themselves.”

“How’d you know the carcasses were mustangs?” I asked.

“They had them Roman noses and their manes and tails were all knotted and windblown. Pretty obvious they weren’t somebody’s saddle horses. People take good care of their horses out here.”

“I see,” I replied. “Can you point me in the direction of some mustangers I can talk to? I’d like to hear what they have to say. They might be more willing to talk to me than they would to the law.”

“Mustangers speak to a stranger? What have you been smokin’ Mr. Fly, peyote? Sure, have yourself a ball. I’ll have Deputy Red Eagle show you around. Help you in any way she can. Good luck,” he said and with that the sheriff got up and walked around his desk and out into the hall. I followed him to the front desk where Deputy Red Eagle was typing out reports.

“Deputy Red Eagle, Mr. Fly here needs some assistance in his *“investigation”* into the Scanlon murders,” he said, making quote marks in the air with his hands. “Would you mind pointing out some of our counties finest citizens to him, a local mustanger or two? Then maybe take him out and show him where the Scanlon’s were found. Maybe he can find some more evidence that will help close this case and get the Feds off our back so we can get back to doing our jobs.”

I was wondering what their job consisted of if it didn’t include solving this double homicide but I didn’t want to say anything to upset the sheriff, seeing as he was being pretty cooperative with me up to this point.

“Oh sheriff, Rachel Scanlon said she saw a couple of individuals sitting in what appeared to be a blue and white 1953 or 1954 Chevrolet with out of state plates. It was rusted on one door and the hood and had some travel stickers in the rear window. She thinks they were following her. You may want to keep an eye out for it,” I said.

He looked at me for a moment and turned to his deputy and asked, “Did you get that Deputy Red Eagle?”

“I did, Sheriff. Let me finish this traffic report and I will grab my gear and I will take you to see a real mustanger. Is that okay with you Mr. Max Fly?” she asked as a smile crossed her face.

“I do appreciate it Deputy. I’ll wait outside your office,” I replied feeling the excitement well up in me in anticipation of spending the rest of the day with the lovely Deputy Red Eagle. I guess Tombstone wasn’t going to be so boring after all.

Chapter 9

“Okay, Mr. Max Fly, are you ready to go?” Deputy Red Eagle asked as she stepped out of her office and into the mid day sun. She was wearing reflective sunglasses and a white straw cowboy hat. She put her hands on the small of her back stretching the kinks out before stepping off the porch onto the sidewalk next to me.

“Ready when you are, Deputy Debbie,” I replied with a teasing smile. My mind followed my eyes to her chest as she took a deep breath. It was good I had my sunglasses on as well.

She looked at me and shook her head and said. “Deputy Debbie? You are something else, Mr. Max Fly. I think we can find who you are looking for at the Papago Café which is located next to Fly’s Boardinghouse,” she said looking in my direction. “Relatives of yours?” she asked with a smile.

“I don’t believe so,” I said. “I didn’t see any boarding houses in my family tree the last time I looked. A couple of bordellos, but we try to keep that quiet.”

Deputy Red Eagle laughed. “That is probably a very interesting tree, Mr. Max Fly. Maybe if we have time, I can give you a little history lesson on Tombstone and the real story behind the infamous OK Corral gunfight and Fly’s Boardinghouse. The most famous gunfight in the west and the main reason all these tourists come to Tombstone. Casmus Fly’s Boarding House was right in the middle of it.”

“Casmus Fly?” I asked.

“That is right Mr. Max Fly. Casmus Fly.” She replied.

“I am ready for a lesson now. Anything you want to teach me Miss Red Eagle will be greatly appreciated,” I said as I held the door open and took another glance at her backside as she passed me by.

She turned back and caught me looking and smiled. “You can call me Deputy Debbie,” she laughed.

“If you really want to know then I will tell you. The Gunfight at O.K. Corral was actually a bloodletting on Fremont Street in Front of Camillus Fly’s Boardinghouse and photo gallery near the corner of Fremont and Third streets.

People overheard the McLaurys and Clanton’s make threats that they were going to kill the Earps and informed Virgil Earp of this. They met in the street and started shooting. They never made it to the corral”

“Does Hugh O’Brien know this?” I asked.

She laughed. “He comes here to sign autographs and have his picture taken with tourists in the Okay Corral. It would break his heart, or his wallet, if he found out.”

We walked in the Papago Café, which was more like a bar than a café. In Wisconsin we would call it a bar that serves food. Actually we wouldn’t call it a bar at all; more than likely we would call it a supper club.

Deputy Red Eagle pointed to the back of the room and said, “The short fat guy sitting at the table in the back can usually be found at a rendering plant with a trailer load of mustangs every month,” she said. “He goes by the name of Rocky Mountain Dick. His given name, according to his rap sheet, is Richard Swenson. He hires about a half dozen locals or goes to Agua Prieta for some vaqueros, or to be more precise, pistoleros, to go out with him and round up some horses.”

“What are pistoleros?” I asked.

“Roving bandits, hired guns.”

“I see.” I said.

“Mustangers usually operate during the early morning or late afternoon hours when the horses come in to the watering holes. They divert them to the corrals they set up and then load them up and take them to slaughter. Sometimes they just shoot the horses and haul them out dead.”

“I know Rocky from my old rodeo days,” I said.

Deputy Debbie looked at me and said, “Well, Mr. Max Fly, I sure would not boast about that. The best thing I can say about Rocky Mountain Dick is that he is one.”

“One what?” I asked.

“One big dick.” She replied with a mischievous grin.

“Ha, that’s the way we felt too. What did he say when the sheriff questioned him?”

“He admitted being out on Scanlon land and shooting the horses but he denied seeing either Scanlon or anyone else for that matter. He said they did not set up any corrals that day. He said they shot about a half dozen mustangs and loaded them up on the truck and were gone before the sun went down. We figured that was not true as we came across the carcasses of about a half dozen mustangs left rotting in the sun waiting for the coyotes to come and clean the bones. He said he did not see a soul out there and definitely did not see the two Scanlon men who were killed.”

“Do you believe him?”

“If he did not see anyone, why would he leave the mustang carcasses to rot? I would not believe him if he wore a clerical collar. In my opinion, he and those like him are the scum of the earth for what they do to those poor horses; not only that, he smells too.”

“Well, that in itself is a hanging offense, right deputy?”

“Wait until you smell him. You decide.”

I laughed at her humor. “How many more mustangers do you have around here that take the wild horses to slaughter?”

“There are not too many anymore. The sheriff has put a deputy in the area of the land most of the wild horses roam but the area is just too big. We cannot cover it all and they know it. Some of the ranchers shoot and kill the mustangs and we let them be. They are just protecting the grass and water for their livestock. But we do not want any outsiders coming in and using this land as their private hunting grounds. Also, we have a growing segment of the population who want to preserve these little horses. They figure the mustangs are an integral part of our American History and should be given a safe place to live. You know who Frank Hopkins is?”

I nodded my head yes.

“Well, he said that the mustang is the most important animal in North American History and many folks agree. It gets a bit heated at some of our county board meetings when the subject is brought up. ”

“I met Hopkins before one of his endurance rides down in Texas on one of those little mustangs. I believe he rode to Boston that time. He was an amazing rider. He never lost a race and he raced in fifty milers up to three thousand miles all on mustangs and he won every one. It’s amazing. What do you think about the mustangs, Deputy Red Eagle?”

I asked.

“I am a sheriff’s deputy; I am not supposed to think. But personally, I agree with him. I think some sort of compromise can be made. Just cannot figure out what.”

“Let’s go see your friend Dick,” she said with a sneer as she started over to the table in the back where Rocky Mountain Dick was sitting by himself, of course, finishing off his meal.

As we got near it was clear why he was sitting in the back and by himself. Maybe the way he smelled **was** a hanging offense, I thought as I took a deep breath, at least in his case.

“See what I mean?” Deputy Red Eagle said with a grimace on her face.

“A sure way to find him is to stand down wind of him.”

Rocky showed no signs of prosperity. He was potbellied, unkempt, and filthy and red eyed. His face was deeply lined from years of abusing nicotine and alcohol. If I remembered correctly, he had a slow mind and a brutal lack of self confidence but a set of powerful stubby arms that served him well.

“I will leave you two boys alone to hash over old times. I will be in the office when you are done, Mr. Max Fly,” Deputy Debbie said.

So much for spending the rest of the day with Deputy Red Eagle, I thought. Oh well, business before pleasure, unless your name happens to be Hap Schultz.

“Well, if it ain’t ol’ Max Fly, bronc rider and bull shitter. Where you been all these years. She ain’t callin’ you Max yet?” He said, pointing at Deputy Red Eagle who was staring at him as if a miasmic cloud was rising from the table he was sitting at.

“Sounds like you lost a step in your old age pardner. That little filly looks younger than my last pair of shoes so an old fart like you would most likely be wastin’ your time anyway; but it would be worth the effort,” Rocky Mountain Dick rambled on with a leering smile aimed directly at Deputy Red Eagle’s chest.

She shook her head in disgust as she turned to leave us old cowboys with our memories and lust to ourselves.

I took a closer look at Rocky Mountain Dick and could see the years hadn’t been kind to him. His clothes were not only dirty, but well worn. He was sporting what appeared to be a week’s growth of whiskers that were coming in gray and sparse. He grinned at me and his teeth, what was left of them, were broken and yellow and green. He had a ring of black and gray greasy hair circling his head, hanging in scraggly strands below his ears down to his shirt collar. The top had gone completely bald. He began by filling me in on what happened in his life since I last saw him.

It weren't long before my life went tits up, Max, and I ended up doing rope tricks at a local Studebaker dealership for a dollar a day. I lived on Pecos Strawberries for about a year. In case you forgot, that's bacon and fried beans. Then I went to work for one of those work programs that commie Roosevelt started. That was the best job I ever had. Then I enlisted in the navy and when I got out after the war, the alphabet soup jobs were gone and Studebaker wasn't hiring so I started hauling rodeo stock; broncs mostly; 'member them broncs we called the Sunfishers? Well, I met me a breeder down in El Paso who bred mustang's he gathered from the panhandle area; every last one of 'em would buck and turn their damn belly to the sun. I swear to God. They was really rank bucking stock and I ain't lyin'. I had me a twelve horse stock trailer and I would load them stallion's right up next to each other. I'd shove Vicks salve up their nostrils so's they couldn't smell each other and then for good measure, I'd clip a clothes pin on their cod sack. Kept 'em thinking about their dobber instead of what was next to 'em. Every time I would stop to fill up with gas I'd go back and put the clothes pin on the other sack; keep 'em guessing, ya know?"

"The old man up and died and so did my job haulin' Sunfishers."

"I remember those broncs. We called them Weavers. They were mean and you hoped you never got one in the draw. But when it happened, you placed a call to the local hospital to reserve you a room."

"Ain't that the truth? Seems my whole life's been spent making a living off the back of horses one way or another. A bit different now than when I was roping steers down in Austin. But a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do to eat, right? Hey Max, you know why they have you keep your head down while you ride a bull? So you can't see the folks laughin' at ya. Ha, ha, ha. That's a good one, ain't it?" He asked.

"Yep, that's pretty funny Rocky." I replied.

He sat staring at me and the silence was getting heavy.

"I heard you and Hap went home and you was hiding behind barrels making fools of yourself being a clown."

"I was on weekends. My ex wife said I was a natural. Hap stuck to roping and still does a little, at least when he isn't chasing women. But I got to tell you, those clowns saved my bacon many a time and now I have done it for some others as well. Your ass was probably saved a time or two as well by one of those painted fools in a barrel."

“Yeah, you’re right. Those boys got some mighty big balls that’s for sure. That’s why I was surprised you was doin’ it. Hey, I remember Hap was pretty good at roping. I also remember you being more of a catcher than a roper.” Rocky rambled on.

“You have a pretty good memory there, Rocky. I figured it didn’t matter how you got ‘em, just as long as you got ‘em.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right as long as the judge agreed. So, what do you want to know? I know this ain’t no social call ‘cause you haven’t bought me a drink yet. You still drinking that sissy shit brandy?”

“I am. What are you drinking these days Rocky?”

“Chicken wine,” he said.

“Chicken wine? What in the hell is that?” I asked.

Wild Turkey; it jacks me up real good. It will curl your toes and make your ass whistle. But since you will be buying and I got some work to do later I’ll get Jack on the rocks, a double.”

I smiled at that and wondered what kind of work he would be doing after consuming a couple shots of bourbon. It had probably been years since he had a shot of Jack Daniels, if ever, especially a double, but I sprung for it anyway. Hell, I was on an expense account so I waved the waitress over and placed our order.

After Rocky took a couple of swallows of his drink and finished looking around at the few women who were in Papago’s, I asked him; “You remember Mike Scanlon, Rocky? He won the all around cowboy award three years running, 1935 through 1937. Beat me out for that damn buckle the last day of the season in ’37, left me hanging high and dry in traction in the Austin State Hospital while he headed out to California with that little Austin Rodeo Queen, a Miss Rachel Leigh, who was supposed to be going out with me that night to celebrate my victory that never happened.”

“Hell, everybody knowed Mike. He was a damn legend as much for being heartless and self righteous as for rodeoing. What about him?”

“He’s dead.”

“No shit. How’d that happen?”

“He and his boy were ambushed out on his ranch just East of Tombstone here. Sheriff thinks it mighta been mustangers rounding up horses on his place and he ran across them in the act and they shot ‘em both deader than a ‘possum lying flattened on the highway. I’m wondering why you don’t know anything about that since the sheriff told me he talked to you.”

“I didn’t think it was none of your business. Anyway, what the hell you sayin’, Max? I ain’t never killed nobody in my life.”

“Sheriff might think otherwise, Rocky. Says you have been known to get some of your stock you take to those rendering plants in Agua Prieta off Big Mike’s property. He thinks Big Mike might have caught you and you two had a disagreement and a fight broke out. Big Mike would have torn you a new asshole if he got his hands on you, so you would have had to use a gun to even the odds a bit.”

“You’re crazy man.” Rocky said, while his eyes scanned the restaurant for any lawmen or maybe some of Mike Scanlon’s friends.

“I might grab a few head off Scanlon’s property every now and then, but I never shot nobody. When I round up them hosses, I make sure nobody’s around. Hell, they are damn dangerous enough by themselves. I sure as hell don’t need nothin’ else to worry me while loadin’ them devils.”

“So you knew you were on Scanlon’s land when you were taking those horses? You acted like you hadn’t seen Scanlon in twenty years and here you had been poaching horses on his land all along.” I said while taking a sip of my drink.

“Max, why don’t you just git the hell outta my face? I don’t have to talk to you no more. Anyway, you are blowing smoke up the wrong asshole here my friend.”

“I have to tell you Rocky, it’s not me. It’s the Sheriff. If you want to talk to him again, or the Feds, it’s no skin off my ass. I’ll just head out and go on my way. Big Mike’s family has asked me to look into his death and that is just what I am doing. If you don’t have anything to hide, you would be much better off telling me now. I can do some digging around and clear your name while nailing the person who did it. If you don’t talk to me, well, then you might want to get your life in order because I think the Sheriff plans to drop your ass behind bars unless you have enough money to lawyer up.”

“Hell, you know I ain’t got no money, Max. Never have. Shit, I just want to get by. I don’t want to hurt no one and I sure as hell don’t want no one to bother me. If I tell ya what I know, will you put a word in for me with the Sheriff?”

“Consider it done, Rocky. Now, what do you have?”

“Well alright then, I went down to Agua Prieta and got me some real good Vaqueros to help me with the round up. Ain’t no better cowboys around then them Prieta boys, I’m tellin’ ya. Anyway, we was driving north on Highway 80 and we turn off onto Big Mike’s property. I heard Big Mike was outta town and wouldn’t be back until next week. But I heard wrong. We no sooner dropped about a half dozen head when Big Mike and his boy come ridin’ down on us with their rifles drawn tellin’ us to git the hell off their land. Mike threatened to kill me if he ever seen me on his property again; he recognized me, Max. He sure in hell did. He knowed I’m on hard times now; jist tryin’ to git on my feet. He didn’t care. So’s we packed up and skedaddled it out of there. Left the damn horses we shot layin’ right there. It weren’t long and we heard a shitload of gunfire. Figured Big Mike and his boy run up on some more mustangers. It would have been unusual, but possible. I was wondering who else was going after my horses.” I looked at him and wondered how he figured they were his horses. “We looked back and saw a pickup truck coming over the plateau and we floored it,” he continued. “Didn’t know who it was or if they was comin’ after us or shootin’ at Mike. We sure weren’t figuring on stickin’ around to find out.”

“Then we saw a black sedan and an old beat up Chevy headin’ past us but didn’t think much of it. We stopped at a little cantina south of Tombstone on the way back to Agua Prieta for a couple of beers and play with the señoritas. Let ‘em fondle the ferret, if you know what I mean.” He stared at me waiting for an answer. When he didn’t get one, he continued.

“Well, we wasn’t there for more’n hour and we noticed that black sedan pull into the parking lot next to my rig. Four of the biggest mother fuckers you ever saw got outta them cars, Max. I swear, they blocked out the sun. They came in and sat down at a table behind us and ordered some food and drinks and kept lookin’ at us. I could see ‘em in the mirror behind the bar we was sittin’ at. They scared the shit outta us just starin’ like that. My Vaqueros were pissin’ their pants. They thought they was Feds but I knew better. I figured they was some friends of Mike’s from California. I mean the way they dressed, they weren’t no cowboys. I paid the bill and we hightailed it outta there as fast as we could. Never did look back. I never saw them again, thank God.”

“Where was the pickup truck that you saw? Was it in the parking lot with them?”

“Nope, sure weren’t. Didn’t see it out there at all.”

“What about the Chevy?”

“Nope didn’t see that either.”

“What year and color was the Chevy?”

“Looked like it was blue or green with a white top. I would guess it was a 1953 Superglide.”

“I see. Think you would recognize them if you saw them again, Rocky?” I asked.

“Oh shit yeah,” he replied. “Bigguns like that are easy to spot.”

“But I’ll tell you who the sheriff should take a look at, Tommy Lee Barker. A burned out army vet who works for the Scanlon’s at the S Bar S.”

“Burned out army vet who works as a what?”

“A handyman. He ain’t no good at ranchin’. Can’t ride a fuckin’ horse.”

“Why would Mike hire him if he can’t ride?”

“Good question. That’s why the sheriff should take a look at him.”

Rocky Mountain Dick said.

I looked around for our waitress and got her attention.

“Give Rocky here another double on me, I gotta go,” I said as I dropped some bills on the table and stood up.

“I believe you Rocky. I don’t like your line of work but I don’t think you would kill anyone. I wouldn’t skip town if I was you until this was finished though. I’m sure the Sheriff is going to want to sit down with you and confirm all this at a later date. Leaving wouldn’t look good and you don’t want to cross state lines or head into Mexico, even if it’s only to have a comfort woman fondle your ferret. It just would look bad, you know?”

“Yeah, I know. Don’t forget to tell the Sheriff that you think I’m innocent. ‘cause I am.”

“I will Rocky. Take care of yourself and take a bath.”

“Fuck you.”

“You bet,” I replied walking out into the hot Arizona sun once again. I took a deep breath of much needed fresh air. Rocky Mountain Dick sure did have an air about him.

At least I had some interesting information to share with Deputy Red Eagle and I hoped she would reciprocate and I couldn’t get the name of Tommy Lee Barker out of my mind. Why would Mike and Rachel hire a ranch hand that couldn’t ride a horse? It didn’t make sense.

Chapter 10

“Hi Rachel, may I come in?”

“Of course Max.”

She led me back to the living room and we sat next to each other on the huge leather couch. She didn't offer me another glass of Martell XO.

I turned toward her and asked; “Rachel, do you remember a guy by the name of Rocky Mountain Dick?”

“No, why, should I?”

“Not necessarily. He rodeoed with us down in Texas. He also gathers wild horses for a living and has been taking them off your ranch for the past few years. Mike and Rocky had a couple of encounters that's all.”

“Oh,” she looked pensive for a moment. “Mike never mentioned him.”

I continued; “What kind of life insurance did you have on Mike?”

“That's rather personal. Is that important?” she asked.

“Well, it could be, if it was substantial.”

“What are you saying Max?”

“I'm not saying anything, it's what the sheriff is saying. An overly large policy could be seen as a motive to have Mike killed.”

“Well, it's disgusting and I even hate to comment on it.”

“It would help if you did comment on it. We have to get all of this out in the open and cleared up so we can go on to other possibilities. By ignoring it you are only making it fester.”

“I was a person in love, Max. Mike and I had a wonderful, loving relationship and from that relationship, we had a beautiful son.”

She continued to drone on about how great their life had been since they left Austin and settled in Hollywood and then here in Tombstone. She found it convenient to ignore the million dollar life insurance policy she took out on Big Mike when they left Hollywood and the three million clams they had stashed in the bank. If she didn't bring all of this into the open and explain it, the sheriff, not saying anything about the district attorney, is going to be looking a bit closer at her and her activities over the past three years.

“Rachel, they know about the life insurance policy you took out on Mike before you moved out here. They know how much money you have in the bank. That makes you a wealthy woman and a prime suspect in Mike's killing.”

Switching gears I asked, “Is Tommy Lee Barker here?”

“What? What does Tommy Lee have to do with anything?”

“Nothing that I know of, but I need to talk to him. What kind of work does he do around here Rachel?”

“He’s a handyman, a ranch hand. He does whatever we ask him to do, why?”

“Well, I heard he can’t ride a horse and that is highly unusual for a ranch hand.”

“Well, Tommy Lee is real good at doing other things. He just went in town for supplies. I don’t expect him back for a couple of hours. Tommy Lee is a hard working and a nice young man. I can’t imagine him having anything to do with Mike’s murder.”

“I didn’t say he did, Rachel. I just need to ask him a few questions, that’s all. I’m just doing my job. What Hilda Scanlon has hired me to do. I’ll come back another time to talk to him.”

“Is there anything else Max?” Rachel asked as she stood up facing me.

“I guess not Rachel. Thank you for your help.”

“You’re welcome,” she icily replied, as she held open the door for me.

As I drove back to the motel I was thinking that the atmosphere got cold quickly when Tommy Lee Barker’s name came into the conversation. It made me wonder; was anything going on between Rachel and Tommy Lee?

Chapter 11

“Well, Hap,” I said as I closed my overnight bag, “I’m going to Hollywood and see what the big deal is about that place and while I’m there I will be talking to a Mr. Frankie Giaccana, the new CEO of Scanlon Productions. I don’t look forward to speaking with another Goombah so soon after my run in with Mr. Ray Palermo, but it’s part of the job.”

“You want me to go along and cover your back?”

“I don’t think that will be necessary, but thanks. I figure you can keep an eye on things around here. Just don’t run up too big of a bill.”

“Am I on an expense account Max?”

“Yeah, but it’s limited,” I replied as I walked out the door.

I walked into the beautifully appointed office and approached the desk of the receptionist. The name plate said she was Angie Cullen. She was a young twenty something platinum blond with a dark tan wearing a snug white dress that dipped low enough in the front to reveal a cleavage from, what my friend Hap would say, ‘here to eternity’.

“I have a two o’clock appointment to see Mr. Frankie Giaccana,” I said unabashedly staring at her chest with what I thought was an award winning smile on my face.

“May I tell Mr. Giaccana who’s calling?” she replied, nonplussed by my eyes traveling over her body like it was a Ouija Board. She must be used to it, I thought.

“Max Fly,” I replied.

She stared at me with a questioning look on her face as if she didn’t hear me correctly. “Did you say Fly?”

“I did,” I said.

“Okay,” she replied as she picked up the phone and punched a button. She looked at me with an amused smile on her face while she waited for Mr. Giaccana to pick up his phone while I continued to stare at the beautiful slopes and valleys of her well developed body.

She broke her stare and said, “Mr. Fly is here for his appointment Mr. Giaccana. Yes sir, I will.”

Miss Cullen rose from her chair tugging at the hem of her dress, she said, “Follow me, Mr. Fly. Mr. Giaccana will see you now.”

When I walked into Frankie Giaccana's office my jaw dropped at what I saw. I thought I walked into an African jungle. There were stuffed water buffalo, lions, two huge elephants and a couple of monkeys swinging in a banana tree, even a water fall. Next to the water fall were two guys. Both had dark complexions. It was apparent that they were the local muscle. They were seated in matching chairs, smoking matching cigars and looked like twin baboons.

Rocco's shrink would have a ball analyzing the bozos in this place. Talk about male testosterone. It was seeping out of the walls and onto the floor. Their eyes along with mine followed the beautiful Miss Cullen and her rounded bottom down the hall.

Frankie was sitting behind his desk. He was a big guy who looked like he participated in a lot of fights. Due to his size, I figured he must have won most of them but his face said otherwise. First of all, his nose was flat with a big bump toward the top right between two beady eyes, indicating he must have broke it and it wasn't set properly or not set at all. He had scar tissue over his right eye and a long scar on the left cheek. In other words, Frankie had the kind of face that would make a rattlesnake sweat.

He had both of his hands on his desk and I noticed how huge they were and that the knuckles were fat and swollen and looked like they landed on some rather hard surfaces with some velocity. His lips resembled Al Capone's, thick and red and he had a stub of a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth. He had two of the biggest ears I had ever seen. They looked like he might have taken them off one of the elephants he had standing stuffed in the back of his office. Ears like that are usually seen on some boxers and wrestlers developed after years in the ring and on the mat. Because most people see the similarity between the ears and a head of cauliflower, they are known as cauliflower ears. He was wearing a Hawaiian flower patterned shirt under a dark olive green suit with thick, dark curly hair on his chest protruding out of the top of the shirt; buried in that fur were about a half dozen gold chains, enough to interfere with any radio reception in the area; and he was wearing spats. My God, I hadn't seen spats in over twenty years.

"Sit down," he commanded in a gravelly voice, pointing at a chair in front of his desk. He got up and walked to a Tiki Bar he had setup next to the water fall and poured himself a stiff drink. He didn't bother to offer me one.

"Angie, get me some ice," he yelled.

I could tell this guy never learned the meaning of ‘please’. Niceties just weren’t part of his upbringing.

He pointed in the direction of the two goons seated by the waterfalls and said, “These guys are my boys, Jimmy Petrocelli and Augie Antonelli. Meet Mr. Max Fly.”

They just nodded their heads a little and mumbled something, acknowledging my presence. That was probably the sum total of their vocabulary. Obviously they weren’t his biological boys. I mean they were ugly enough, but their ages put them in the vicinity of Ears’ age. When Angie returned and put the ice bucket down on the bar, Frankie said, “Now get out and close the door behind ya,” which she did.

I hadn’t said anything since I walked into his office. I thought I would let him bluster himself out before we got down to business.

“Let me tell you something, Max, I can call you Max, right? You can call me Ears. All my friends call me Ears.”

“Yeah, you can call me Max, Ears,” I replied, trying not to stare at them. It was hard to think of cauliflower being more than just an ear when you were in the presence of this goon. He took the meaning of the word ‘ugly’ to a whole new level.

“Good! So, you want to know about the Scanlon’s? You want to know if Big Mike’s on someone’s clip list. Okay, I’ll tell you about the Scanlon’s. Rachel Scanlon was a scourge on this lot. She wanted to be a star and she would stop at nothing to do it. We finally had to threaten to have her thrown off the lot because she was impeding business. She also liked Melanzana. Do you know what that is Max? It’s black meat, nigras.”

“I thought it was egg plant,” I replied.

He ignored me.

“She was a disgusting whore with money.”

I tried to get back to what I needed to know. “What would she do that would ‘impede’ your business, Ears?”

“What wouldn’t she do? If she saw a director or a producer walking off the set she would stop them; tell them she was Mike’s wife and ask them if they had any new projects coming up that she could audition for.”

“I mean, she is a great looking broad; but this town is filled with great lookin’ broads they come a dime a dozen here and if you are great lookin’ and want to get in show business, it helps to have some talent. If you don’t, ya do porn.”

“Are you telling me Rachel did porn movies?”

“I ain’t telling you nuthin’, Max,” Ears replied. “I’m teachin’ ya history.”

“Now Big Mike weren’t no saint neither but he weren’t on no clip list that I know of.

He had problems, that’s for sure. He couldn’t resist the sins of Hollywood, especially the broads. He liked them young girls and he let ‘em know if they wanted to get somewheres they better play ball with him and by playing ball I mean they better audition on his fuckin’ couch, and by that I am bein’ literal, ya’ know what I mean by literal?” he asked, like he had just learned the meaning of the word literal and wanted the world to know he really wasn’t as illiterate as he sounded. He continued without waiting for my answer.

“Every day he was seen in the presence of another young chippy. I don’t have no clue where he found most of ‘em. He would take ‘em into his office for a personal ‘interview’ and then send ‘em on their way saying he would call ‘em when sumthin’ came up, like his dick. Ha, ha, ha,” he laughed at his own joke. I was glad he was enjoying this because I sure wasn’t.

“Young broads in this town cut their teeth on some producer’s or studio owner’s couch, but Big Mike took it to an excess, if that’s possible,” Ears continued. “He had a good thing goin’ here but he and his missus was screwin’ it up. I come along just in time and I saved his bacon and this studio and when he continued to fuck up, I told him he and Rachel should pack their bags and go someplace else and let me tend to da’ business. Reluctantly, but willingly, he left. Most folks said good riddance. Me? If he woulda learned to keep his dick in his pants and wife at home, he was welcome here and I told ‘im that. I mean, all us guys like a little dalliance now and then, right? Some strange stuff keeps our blood flowin’ and a spring in our step; gives us energy to keep on bobbin’ and weavin’ avoidin’ that final knockout punch. You’re a guy, you know what I mean, right Max?”

I just nodded my head wondering what he meant by ‘reluctantly, but willingly’. I waited, not knowing what this goofball was going to tell me next, that Big Mike was socking it to Marilyn Monroe? “Yeah Ears, I’m with ya’ on this.” I finally replied.

“I thought so. I’m a good judge of character and I can tell when a guy is a player and you look like one to me Max. Ain’t nuthin’ wrong with bein’ a player as long as it don’t interfere with business. Money comes first around here. It’s what keeps this town hoppin’ and all them young broads comin’ here hopin’ to make it big.

I decided to step in here and try to bring this conversation under control and get this big medieval moron of a movie mogul to talk about the studio and the union troubles Big Mike was having before he stepped in to save Big Mike's "bacon".

"I thought Big Mike was the president of Scanlon Productions and that he pretty much ran the show. I was told he brought you in as a junior partner because he was strapped for cash and the union was putting a squeeze on him and he didn't have any other place to go. You were his last resort."

If looks could kill, I would be laid out on a slab and sent to a crematorium as Ears glared at me.

I guess I worded my question wrong by the glare on Giaccana's face and I was beginning to regret what I said when Ears picked up his glass and, without a word, took the last swallow of the amber liquid before standing up and going over to the Tiki bar to pour himself another drink.

"You want sumpin' to drink Max?" he asked.

"You have any brandy?" I replied.

"Some VSOP. Is that good enough for you?"

"Sure, that will do just fine. I'll take it neat." I said, just in case this Neanderthal considered fouling such fine liquor with ice. I was beginning to wonder if everyone drank cognac out here instead of just plain old brandy like Christian Brothers or Paul Masson as us poor folks from Wisconsin did.

When Ears sat down after pouring our drinks he stared at me for a moment before continuing with his history lesson.

"Do you know what VSOP stands for, Max?"

"I do, officially it stands for 'Very Superior Old Pale' but some folks refer to it as 'Very Special Old Pale'. But whatever; it's Cognac that's been in the barrel for at least four years and not sweetened or colored by the addition of sugar or caramel. High quality stuff; thanks for sharing it, Ears. Salud," I said, lifting my glass in his direction before taking a drink. Boy, it was smooth. Not as good as the Martell XO Rachel shared with me, but neither was Ears, so what did I expect.

"Salud," he replied, throwing back his drink and looking at me with a smile, or what passed as a smile, on his battered face. "I'm impressed Max. You seem like a smart guy, but I know looks can be deceiving." No shit I thought looking at him and wondering when was the last time he looked in a mirror.

“So I’ll lay this out for ya’ so there’s no misunnerstanding.” He continued. “When I go inta business with somebody, I go in as the boss. Period! Not as a fuckin’ junior partner. Ya got that? I got investors who expect to make money on their investment and I give ‘em my word that they will and I don’t let no jerkoff get in my way. Not with the unions or in the big office with the fuckin’ couch. They impede my business and you won’t be seein’ ‘em around the building no more. Big Mike couldn’t get that union chief, Harry Head, in line, so he comes to me for help. Hell, the union was squeezing Mike’s dick so hard he was hemorrhaging out his ass. I come along and put a plug in it. Thank you very much.”

“Harry Head? Are you shittin’ me Ears?” I asked.

“Why would I shit you, Max? That’s the guy’s name. In fact, once you get to know him, you find out he is a very nice guy; easy to get along with. He is just lookin’ out for his boys just like I look out for mine.”

“I give ol’ Harry a small piece of the action and tell ‘im this is for keepin’ his boys in line. If he don’t, I will bring my boys in and they will do it for ‘im. Big Mike just couldn’t see the big picture, Harry Head could. That’s why we have a Harry Head and no Mike Scanlon no more. So you see, Mike may have been president, but I weren’t no fucking junior nuthin’. I am the Chairman of the Fucking Board and if that asshole says different, I’ll push his ugly mug inta a trash heap so he knows what my armpit is gonna smell like when I grab him around the neck to choke the fuckin’ life outta his worthless body he ever calls me junior anything.” He was yelling and the veins in his neck were popping out and his face got real red. I thought he was about to have a stroke. I looked over at his two boys sitting next to the waterfall and it looked like they were either already dead or fast asleep. I guess they have heard all this shit before and just got bored to death.

“Well Ears,” I said. “You won’t be pushing Big Mike’s mug in any trash heap.”

“Yeah, and why’s that, smartass?”

“It’s Max, remember? Because someone punched his ticket and he won’t be calling anybody Junior or anything anymore either. So, you can relax.”

“So that’s why you wanted this meet about Big Mike? Because someone offed him? No one’s pinning that one on me, that’s for sure. I got me a string of witnesses a mile long who will swear I was here all week.”

“I bet you do, but Big Mike was rubbed out close to a year ago now. I’ll give you the date the Sheriff thinks he was killed if that will help you, Ears.”

“Yeah, and why will you do that Max? ‘Cause we are on a first name basis?”

“No, because I don’t think you had anything to do with it and I might need your help nabbing the person responsible.”

“You think you giving me the date he was offed will soften me up and I’ll give up someone you think might have done it?”

“Yes, that’s about right, Ears.”

“Ha, ha. Let me get Angie to show you out, Mr. Fly. I hope you enjoyed your drink.”

“It’s Max, remember?” I said as Angie miraculously appeared by the door.

“Good bye, Mr. Fly,” Mr. Frankie Giaccana said as I stood up and took one last look at his two goons and the monkeys swinging in the tree. I somehow felt a kindred bond with them, the monkeys swinging in the tree that is.

I walked out of his office, following the gentle sway of the lovely Angie Cullen’s provocative hips to the front door, thinking that this was a wasted trip.

Miss Cullen didn’t even say good bye.

Chapter 12

I just returned from California and my interview with Frankie Ears Giaccana. I was with Hap eating dinner at the Papago's Cafe going over the case when Hap pointed out the window at a Town Car with what looked like two occupants heading out of town.

"Lookit that black limousine, Max.; haven't seen that thing around here before. Who do you think it is?"

"I'm not sure but let's find out." I said throwing cash on the table and sliding out of the booth.

Hap was running out the door putting his arm in the sleeve of his jacket and a piece of chicken in his mouth when I yelled, "Hurry up man, they're getting away. Let's go."

I put the Edsel in gear and turned out into traffic. I could see that the black Lincoln Town Car was picking up speed and the tail lights were getting smaller as they headed out of Tombstone.

"Can you still see them Hap?"

"Yes. Keep going and I'll let you know when to turn."

We hadn't followed them for long when Hap pointed out the window to his right and screamed, "Turn now!"

"Shit," I cursed as I whipped the steering wheel to the right and the Edsel squealed around the corner, rocking up on two wheels.

"It would be nice if you gave me a little more warning next time, Hap." I said.

"Sorry, Max, I wasn't paying attention. It won't happen again. There they are. Up ahead in the left lane; looks like they are getting ready to make a turn again. Is that Jefferson Street?"

"I think so," I replied.

"That'll take 'em South toward Mexico. It turns into highway 80. There isn't a thing on that road for miles Max. Just sand and cactus and a strip joint on your left."

"How do you know that Hap, we just got here a few days ago?"

"When you were talking to the sheriff, I went out and got the lay of the land, pardner."

"You got the lay of the land alright. Most people go places and look for museums, and historical points of interest. You? You go to strip joints. You had better stay away from those ceiling gazers Hap. They are going to have you dripping all the way back to Sheboygan."

Hap was silent for a moment, so I asked him, "How was it?"

“Not too bad. Some pretty nice little señoritas showing off their tacos.”

“What’s her name?”

“Who?”

“The señorita you left with, that’s who.”

“Oh, Aurora and she has a sister who is almost as cute and works at the same club. She had the evening off so she made us some pretty mean tortillas when we got to their hacienda. Her sister said she can’t wait to meet you and she has all the qualities you look for in a woman, divorced, childless, wild and very cute.”

“Aw jeez Hap. I can’t be doing this stuff anymore.”

“Hacienda? When did you start speaking Spanish?” I asked.

“That evening. Aurora is a great teacher. She has this special way of helping you remember the meaning of different words and when did you stop ‘doing this stuff’? Nothing ever stopped you before Max?”

“What’s her sister’s name?” I asked ignoring his question.

“Adoncia, it means sweet in Spanish.”

“Well, is she?”

“Is she what?” Hap asked

“Is she sweet?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t set you up with someone who wasn’t, would I?” I shook my head. “Set me up?” I stared at Hap in disbelief. “Is she really cute?” I asked, trying to concentrate on driving while visions of a beautiful little Mexican girl danced across my mind.

“Cute is an understatement. Max! If she is as good in bed as Aurora is, then you’d be a fool not to come along with me tomorrow when I go visit the señoritas.”

“Damn Hap, if I leave you alone for a minute you end up poking some young thing. You get an erection when the wind blows. You are one dangerous guy.

“Watch out!” Hap yelled as an old beat up car pulled out in front of us, cutting us off and forcing us off the road.

I veered toward the right, going through the ditch and up the other side and into a field littered with bottles and cans and filled with cactus and sand and then we went up another embankment before coming to a stop.

“Get us the hell out of here Max, they’re getting away!”

“Yeah, well shit. This stuff is soft and I don’t want to start spinning my wheels. I gotta take it slow or we will be here until Jesus returns,” I said as I threw the car in reverse and slowly backed up.

“Was that a Chevrolet?” I asked.

“Yep, blue with a white top.” Hap replied.

“It was hard to see,” I replied. “The top was white, that’s for sure. I couldn’t make out the other color. It happened too fast to see much of anything but flying sand. You’re sure it was blue?”

“Yep, I’m sure.”

By the time we got back on the road the Lincoln Town Car was disappearing in the horizon and the mysterious Chevy was nowhere to be seen, so I put the accelerator to the floor and felt the Edsel kick into overdrive and the tires started to hum. The white lines in the highway began to blur and the prickly pear cacti went flying by the windows so I knew we were going fast, but I was surprised when I glanced down at the speedometer and saw our speed was exceeding one hundred miles an hour. This Edsel was a fine riding automobile.

In a few minutes we banked into a curve and saw the Town Car pulling off on a small dirt road and stopping. I slowed down and drove past. Hap looked out the window and said, “Keep going Max. That road looks like it goes on forever. There’s a gate about one hundred yards in. Pull off the road up here. We can get out and come back on foot. You got a flashlight?”

“Look in the glove compartment. The batteries should be good. I just got them.”

We got out and ran back to the dirt road where the Town Car disappeared.

“Be careful for snakes Hap. They come out at night,” I said.

“The hell you say. What kind of snakes Max?”

“Don’t ask.”

“Aw shit. Why didn’t we go trout fishing at Copper Falls instead of coming to Tombstone? Even the fucking name gives me the heebie jeebies. Remember back in Austin when I told you it was time to stop riding broncs and bulls and settle down to a safer lifestyle? Well, chasing killers in the fucking desert isn’t a safer lifestyle Max.”

“Shhh. I hear something Hap. Get down.”

About fifty yards on the other side of the gate we could see two men get out of the Town Car. They were wearing dark suits and hats, not cowboy hats. Something most people don’t wear in the desert in Arizona. One of them opened the back door and a third man got out. He was wearing an outfit that matched the others.

“That thug is Jimmy Petrocelli by the passenger side and it looks like Augie Antonelli on the driver’s side. I met them in Frankie Giaccana’s office in Hollywood.”

I didn’t recognize the other one. Maybe he was one of the monkeys that was swinging in the banana tree next to Giaccana’s Tiki Bar.

I figured Ears wasn’t being truthful with me when he said he didn’t have anything to do with Mike’s murder. Why else would his boys be out here in the desert in the middle of the night I wondered.

It wasn’t long before we found out.

“Max, get down, here comes someone.”

Pretty soon a white pickup truck appeared with its lights turned off. It pulled up next to the black Town Car. Soon a beat up blue and white Chevy SuperGlide drove up and stopped next to the pickup truck.

Augie Antonelli walked to the driver’s side of the Chevy and a hand reached out the window and handed him an envelope. Augie glanced around before putting the envelope inside his jacket pocket.

He spoke to the driver for a few moments before nodding his head and rapping on the hood of the car before turning and walking back to the black limousine.

The driver of the Chevy punched the accelerator and the tires spun, spitting up sand as the car fishtailed and bucked over the rutted road while heading back the way it came.

Augie walked over to the white truck and stood there for a few moments watching the Chevy disappear before bending down and speaking to the driver of the truck.

After a few moments he stepped back and the truck left in the same direction as the Chevy.

Hap and I watched as the red tail lights disappeared into the night before Hap said; “What the fuck you think that was about Max?”

I didn’t want to say because I didn’t know but I thought Rachel might have a few of the answers.

“Let’s get out of here. I want to talk with Rachel. I need to ask her some questions.” I said as we turned and ran back to the Edsel and headed back to Tombstone.

Chapter 13

“Max, you see that white pickup truck behind the barn? It looks mighty familiar, doesn’t it?”

“It sure does Hap. Go feel if the hood is still warm.”

Hap got out of the car and went over to the truck and placed his hand on the hood. Looking in my direction, he nodded his head and came running back.

“The hood is not just warm, it’s hot! It was just parked there and it looks a lot like that one we just saw off Highway 80. What are you going to do, Max?”

“I don’t know. Let’s see if Rachel can enlighten us a bit.”

Rachel answered the door after the first stanza of the William Tell Overture. After introducing her to Hap she invited us in. We sat on a couch facing Rachel who sat facing us in a big leather chair.

She looked at Hap and then at me before asking; “What’s this about, Max?”

“Well, Rachel, we have been seeing some strange goings on around Tombstone lately and one of the things pertains to a white pickup truck.” I waited for her to say something and when she didn’t I said, “Who was driving that white pickup truck that is outside behind the barn Rachel?”

“I’m not sure, why?”

“You’re not sure?”

“That’s right, I’m not sure. What’s this about Max?” She asked again, first looking at me and then Hap before glancing out the window.

“We would like to talk to your help if we could. We saw a white pickup truck similar to the one outside exchanging something with some thugs I met at Scanlon Productions the other day. Then a Chevy, similar to the one you said you saw out by your mail box a while back, drove up and spoke with them as well. Who has access to that truck?”

“Scanlon Productions? What would they be doing in Tombstone?”

“That’s what I am going to find out,” I replied. “Who has access to that truck outside, Rachel?” I asked again.

“Well, just about everyone that works on the ranch has access to that truck. They take it to town to get supplies and on the weekends they go in town to blow off steam. Most of our workers don’t have their own vehicle so as long as they take care of it and don’t cause any trouble they are welcome to use our truck.”

“Where was Tommy Lee Barker tonight?”

“I don’t know, why?”

“We’d like to speak to him if he is here.”

“Let me call back to the bunkhouse and check. Excuse me,” she said as she got up and walked out of the room and into Big Mike’s office. I could hear her speaking into the phone. A moment later she came back and said; “Tommy isn’t here. He went into town with his sister, Callie tonight.”

“Where does his sister live?”

“California now. Tommy Lee and Callie were born and raised in Tombstone. Big Mike hired them to do work for him at Scanlon Productions and when we sold it and told everyone we were moving to our ranch in Tombstone, Tommy Lee asked if he could sign on as a ranch hand. I guess he wanted to come back to Tombstone to live. California isn’t for everyone. Do you want me to have him call you?”

“That would be nice,” I replied. “Do you know where Callie is staying while she is in Tombstone?”

“No, I’m sorry, but I don’t. You can ask Tommy Lee.”

“We will. Hap and I are staying at the motel by Patagonia Lake. Hap needs to dip his line in the water every once in a while so he isn’t so cranky and being close to a lake can relieve some of the pressure that builds up in him from time to time.”

“The fishing is supposed to be pretty good out there from what I hear. I will tell Tommy Lee to call you when he gets back.” She said.

“Thanks Rachel, let’s go speak with your ranch hands.” I stood and grabbed my hat.

“Follow me,” Rachel said.

We walked back to the bunkhouse which was about one hundred yards behind the main house. It was made of logs and was about the size of the main house.

Rachel rapped on the door and soon a Mexican Vaquero opened it. His small frame was silhouetted with a soft yellow light coming from within the room. I could see a fire blazing in the big stone fireplace and four men were sitting around a table playing cards. There were three other men lying on their bunks reading magazines. All of them were Mexicans.

“Hola, Lazaro, these gentlemen would like to ask you and the rest of the boys some questions, if you don’t mind.” Rachel informed him.

“Si, Senora,” he replied stepping away from the door and waving us in.

“I think I will leave now.” Rachel said as she turned toward me and Hap. “It was nice meeting you Hap,” she said with a soft smile. “You boys can find your way out when you are done, I trust.”

“We can. Thanks Rachel.”

She nodded and left, closing the door behind her.

I stuck out my hand in the direction of the Vaquero named Lazaro and said, “Hola, my name is Max and this is mi amigo Hap,” I indicated by nodding my head in Hap’s direction.

Lazaro’s callused hand grasped mine and then Hap’s and said, “Hola, amigos.”

“Lazaro, which one of you was driving that white pickup truck out front tonight?”

“Nadie, señor.” Lazaro replied. “Senor Barker had the truck tonight.”

“We would like to speak with him,” I said.

“We did not know he was back. Maybe he is in his room. Come, follow me.” He said as he walked to the back of the bunkhouse and rapped on a door that led into a private bedroom.

“Tommy has his own private room?” I asked.

“Si señor, he does.”

He must be the head wrangler. Rachel didn’t mention that. A head wrangler that can’t ride a horse? That in itself is very strange. Or else he was receiving special treatment just because he is a gringo which wouldn’t surprise me either.

I tried the door. It was locked. I knocked on the door and yelled.

“Tommy Lee, you in there?” Nothing.

“Something smells fishy here, Max.” Hap said. “Lazaro, is there a window in this room?”

“Si señor.”

“I’m going to walk around to the back and look in the window and make sure he isn’t passed out or something.” Hap said.

Hap returned a moment later shaking his head. “Nothing Max. I could see the bed and it hasn’t been slept in.”

We thanked Lazaro and left.

Hap and I stood by the car while we assessed the situation.

“What do you think, Hap?” I asked.

“Something just doesn’t feel right, Max. Maybe Tommy Lee’s sister followed him back to the ranch and then took him back to her place.

I nodded my head. I wasn’t sure if Rachel was involved in this murder but I got a funny feeling something just wasn’t right around the S Bar S Ranch.

“I think you’re right; let’s get some sleep,” I said. “I’m dead tired.”

Chapter 14

I woke to the sound of feet crunching on the gravel in the parking lot outside my room. I sat up thinking it might be Hap retuning from going to see his new girl Aurora. I listened again but didn't hear anything. I got out of bed and pulled on my pants and grabbed my gun out of my holster and walked to the window and slowly pulled back the curtain. I looked at my watch. It was close to midnight. I couldn't see anything so I slid off the chain and slowly cracked the door looking out into the darkness. It was foggy and through the haze I noticed the moon was full. I glanced at my car and it appeared untouched. I listened again and then heard the sound of someone running along the side of the motel to my left. I quietly headed in the direction of the person running, keeping close to the side of the building as I went. I tried to quiet my breathing. When I reached the end of the motel I peered around the corner to make sure nobody was waiting for me. It was clear. I moved along the wall until I reached the back of the motel which overlooked Patagonia Lake. I saw a shadow, no; it was two shadows, running along the shoreline toward the boathouse. I decided to follow them.

Crouching low so I would be covered by the hedge of bushes, I scurried toward the dock and the boathouse. The two shadows had disappeared around the far side of the building. After a few moments I heard a powerful motor begin to cough and sputter before it fired up. They were getting away in a motor boat. I picked up my pace and ran to the boathouse and looked out onto the dock that reached like a large finger into the lake. The dock was filled with boats and I saw a Chris Craft idling near the end. There was a figure standing on the stern of the boat. It looked to be a boy or a small woman.

I heard a sound behind me and turned around.

A fist struck me like a cobra, almost unseen as it landed flush on my jaw, knocking me back against the wall.

Whoever it was immediately jumped on me and started pummeling my body with lefts and rights so fast I was unable to react. I dropped low, hoping to lift him and throw him to the ground but to no avail. He was strong as an ox and seemed about as big.

He lifted me up and slammed me against the wall one more time before bringing back his fist and walloping me in the left eye.

I dropped to my hands and knees and tried to bite him in the leg. He kicked out, knocking me to the ground.

My world went black when his boot landed again, this time in my right kidney. I heard him say in a voice that could have been used as paint remover, "Get the hell outta' Tombstone, Mr. Fly. If you come back, this will seem like a Sunday School picnic to you compared to what I will do to you next time we dance."

That was the last thing I remembered before he hit me with something behind my ear that felt like a brick and then the lights went out for good.

When I woke I saw a concerned Hap, wearing his red long handles, looking down at me.

"Max, you look like shit from your eyes down. Are you alright?"

I looked at Hap trying to get my bearings. "If I felt any better, they would have to change my medication." I said, trying to sit up.

"Hell Max, I thought you were dead. I sure in hell am glad you came around. I don't know what I would have done if I had to do some CPR on you. I called Deputy Debbie just in case. She's on her way now."

I tried to sit up, but was unsuccessful.

"Well, let's not tell her I came around yet. I need a little affection about now that would help relieve this throbbing behind my ear." I moaned.

"Man Hap, how could I be so stupid to allow myself to be cold cocked like that?"

"You aren't stupid Max; you just have bad luck when thinking."

"I guess you're right," I said. "How long have I been out?"

"I'm not sure. I found you here about five minutes ago. When I got back from Aurora's I went in and changed my clothes and when I came out to say good night, I noticed your room door open and you weren't around. I figured you got yourself into trouble again. Hell, I can't leave you alone for long before something bad happens to ya."

It was at this point I noticed the red flashing of squad car lights bouncing off the boathouse wall behind me and it wasn't long before Deputy Red Eagle approached.

"What happened here?" she asked.

I closed my eyes and Hap said, "Max's out like a light, Deputy Debbie. It looks like he took a pretty bad beating."

"Yes it does. When did this happen?" She asked.

"I'm not sure but he has got to stop doing this. Ol' Max was born in 1919 and, in case you didn't know it, no parts are available for that model anymore," Hap said and he proceeded to fill the deputy in on the chain of events that lead to my beating as he knew them. He stopped and scratched his head and said, "It seems to be pretty rough around here, deputy. I don't think Jesus would last long enough to be crucified in this town."

She gave Hap a scowl that was meant to make him stop. It didn't work.

Hap continued, "You might consider giving Max some CPR. I was thinking since he's never kissed a deputy before it would make him as happy as a puppy with two tails."

I opened my right eye, as my left was swollen shut, and looked at Deputy Red Eagle while she stared at Hap. She then shined her flashlight in my face, making me wince.

"You two are incorrigible," she said. "What happened to you Mr. Max Fly?"

"Someone beat me up."

"I can see that. How did it happen?"

"Last time this happened he was almost beaten to death by a chicken leg," Hap interjected. "I saved him that time. Tonight I got here a little too late."

"Damn Hap, that wasn't a chicken leg, it was a turkey leg. Those drumsticks are big. That one weighed about two pounds."

"Will you two cut it out and get back to what happened here? I have work to do and I cannot waste my time listening to you two wise guys joking around."

"I can promise you, being knocked out by a turkey leg is no joke, deputy, it was frozen." I whined.

"Okay, okay, did you see who did this to you?"

"Not so I could recognize them. It all happened so fast. I was following two shadows and then I heard a noise behind me and I turned around and immediately started getting whacked. I could describe the guys knuckles, if that would help."

"Just tell me what happened, Max and start from the beginning please," she said shaking her head.

After I told Deputy Debbie about hearing someone outside my motel room and following them down to the dock and seeing the Chris Craft boat, she closed her notebook and said, "What do you think they are after?"

"Well, it sure couldn't be his car, it's an Edsel." Hap replied.

I gave Hap my 'That's enough' look before replying, "We have been asking around about Big Mike's murder." I said. "Maybe we stirred something up. I figure they were about to do something bad when I scared them away. Unfortunately, I let my guard down and let the dirt bag sneak up on me and flatten me out on this pier."

"What are you two doing out here in the first place? I thought you were staying in town?"

"We thought we would get in some fishing while we were here," Hap replied.

"I almost believe you," Deputy Debbie said. "I think you should come with me Mr. Max Fly. I will take you to the hospital so you can get some stitches in that cut over your eye. When they are done we will get your statement and then I can bring you back here"

Leaving the hospital three hours later with a pocketful of pills and stitches over my left eye and one helluva headache, Deputy Debbie turned to me and said, "You ready to go home Mr. Max Fly?"

"Yeah," I said, "I've had about all the excitement I can stand for one night."

"Do you still want to go out to the crime scene tomorrow? We can post pone it until you are feeling better."

"Yes, nothing has changed. I found out years ago that what doesn't kill you will just hurt like hell.

If anything, I'm more determined to find out who killed Big Mike because now they are making it personal."

"Do you think it might be time to forget about finding Mike's killers and leaving it to me and the sheriff?"

I shook my head. "I can forget about everything but grudges Deputy Debbie and I now have a grudge to settle," I said.

"Who do you think it is who did this to you Mr. Max Fly?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out and when I do, I will return the favor I received tonight."

She shook her head and said, "When tempted to fight fire with fire Mr. Max Fly, remember that the Fire Department usually uses water."

"Is that some more of your Indian wisdom, Deputy Debbie?"

"I will see you in the morning Mr. Max Fly."

She smiled and got back in her cruiser and drove away.

"Good night Deputy Debbie Red Eagle" I replied.

Chapter 15

When I woke the next morning my head was pounding. I went and looked in the mirror and was surprised at what I saw. I shouldn't have been, considering the beating I took the night before. The skin around my left eye looked jaundiced and was swollen but not shut. My right eye was still puffy and the black stitches looked like little hairs sticking out of my forehead.

There was a soft knock at my door. When I opened it Deputy Red Eagle was standing there smiling and wearing a pair of tight jeans and a red and white checked blouse. She looked cheerful and lovely after her night shift.

"Come in," you look great." I said unable to hide my fascination at how beautiful she looked so early in the morning after protecting the good people of Tombstone Arizona all night.

"Why thank you Mr. Max Fly."

"When did your shift end?" I asked.

"A few hours ago. I got a couple hours of sleep before coming over here." She said, looking around at the mess in my room.

"Here," I said, picking my dirty clothes off the chair and throwing them on the bed.

"Thank you. Your stitches look nice. How are you feeling?"

"Better, thank you. A little throbbing behind my ear but a couple of aspirins should take care of that."

I bent over to pick up a clean shirt and the pain in my side made me cry out and wince.

"Here, let me help you with that," Deputy Red Eagle said getting up and walking over to me. "Are you sure you want to do this today?"

We were going out to visit the crime scene where Big Mike and his son were killed and Deputy Red Eagle generously offered to take us on her day off.

"I'm sure, deputy." I said while she stepped in front of me and started to button my shirt.

I looked into her eyes and our bodies almost touched as I struggled into my shirt.

“You can call me Debbie,” she breathed softly, looking up at me as a smile formed on her lips. I felt some tingling below my belt, so I knew the beating last night didn’t cause serious damage to the most important organ in my body. I gently grabbed her hands and bent down to kiss her. Her lips were soft and yielding and our bodies came together and her arms went around my neck. She smelled of lemon. Her lips parted as I drew her close and our tongues met. I gasped in pain when I crushed her body into mine.

“Are you okay?” She asked pulling away.

“Yes,” I said drawing her back into my arms, “but you have to be gentle with me.”

She laughed and laid her head against my chest and put her arms around my waist. “I will Mr. Max Fly, but we better go. Your friend is probably waiting.”

“That’s okay. If we don’t show up, he’ll just go fishing.” I said.

She laughed and walked to the door and stopped. She turned and said, “I will be in the truck.” and then walked out, closing the door behind her.

Deputy Red Eagle drove and I rode shot gun while Hap dozed in the back. We were pulling a trailer filled with three horses and we drove into the desert until we ran out of road, then we unloaded the horses and rode for two more hours. In places, the trails were so rutted and rocky, I was afraid we would lame up our horses.

“What kind of kava’i do you have Mr. Max Fly?” Deputy Red Eagle asked.

“What kind of what?” I asked.

“Kava’i is horse in Yaqui.” She said.

“Oh, I have a mustang” I said.

“Where did you get this mustang?”

“I got her from a guy named Allen Dupont up in Loveland Colorado. He raises bucking stock. I saw this little lady in the back pasture the last time I went out there. Dupont said he was sending her to the feed lot. There was just something about her that caught my eye and I asked him if he would sell her. He said he would give her to me so I took her and brought her back with the string of other horses I bought. She has turned out to be one of the best horses I have owned. Smart as snot.”

“Smart as snot? And how smart is that?” She asked.

“Smart enough to keep me out of trouble and that’s good enough for me. I give her free rein and I always end up back home and usually still in the saddle. She takes good care of me. Now, if I could teach her to cook, I’d marry her.”

“You are one wild and crazy guy, Mr. Max Fly,” Deputy Red Eagle laughed, shaking her head either at my stupidity or my uncanny horsemanship.

I was riding a little sorrel gelding and Hap was riding a bay Morgan mare while the Deputy had a black and white Paint gelding. Our saddles were outfitted with a leather scabbard loaded with a Winchester rifle. Deputy Red Eagle was sporting her .45 caliber side arm as well. I had my .38 caliber Colt Belly Gun strapped under my arm and Hap had a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He never did carry a gun. We weren’t sure what we were going to run into, if anything, but it felt good to have the weapons with us.

“I made some soup last night and brought it along for lunch,” Deputy Red Eagle said as we headed into a dried creek bed toward a stand of jack cacti.

I could see a smile spread across Hap’s face as he always worried about missing a meal and, since we didn’t know how long we were going to be out in the desert today, he was glad to find out he wouldn’t starve.

“What kind of soup?” Hap asked, turning in his saddle and looking back at Deputy Red Eagle.

“Wakavaki. It’s a traditional Yaqui soup. I think you’ll both like it.”

“What’s in it?” Hap inquired.

“A little onion and garlic, cooked in olive oil, some short ribs, garbanzos, carrots, corn, cabbage and zucchini.”

“Do we have to wait deputy? Let’s pull up here. That Wakavaki stuff sounds mighty good.”

“We might want to wait until we get to the watering hole where there is a little more shade. It will be more comfortable eating there than sitting under this sun.”

“I guess you have a point. How much longer ‘til we get there?” He asked.

“It should be coming up here in about a quarter of a mile or so.

There’s not much there and all we will probably see is the mustang carcasses.”

“When you first processed the crime scene what were you able to find, Debbie?” I asked.

“The winds blew away any tracks that might have been there within hours after whoever did it left. We followed the road out to Highway 80 where there were too many tracks and we had no way to sort those out. There were no spent cartridge shells and the charred gas cans were your typical red gallon cans you can get at any hardware store or gas station from Phoenix to Dallas. As the sheriff told you, we traced the VIN number on the burned out pickup truck to a car dealer in Phoenix who reported the truck stolen a few days before. Poor Mike and his son looked like overdone barbecue. It was terrible, just terrible. I have never seen anything like it.”

We rode in silence until we reached the water hole where Deputy Debbie pulled up and said; “Now we rest the horses and grab a bite to eat.”

“Fine with me Deputy,” Hap replied, getting down from his horse and stretching out his back.

Deputy Debbie pulled out a blanket and a thermos and some small bowls and spoons from her saddle bags and started handing out steaming Wakavaki to Hap and myself.

“Boy, that smells good deputy,” Hap said rubbing his hands in anticipation of eating this new delicacy.

“Yaqui’s say a man smells of what he eats so you will smell good to the mountain lion after you finish eating, Mr. Hap Schultz, so stay alert,” Deputy Red Eagle said with a laugh.

“Also, warm soup is good to eat in the desert. You will feel better after you eat this.”

“Is that true Deputy Debbie? I mean smelling good to a mountain lion.” Hap asked.

“Yes it is. I say it is.”

“Okay, if you say so, then it must be so,” he said with a smile. “You must carry a lot of power with your people Deputy.”

“Yaqui are a maternal people. Mother’s are all powerful and make the important decisions.”

“Are you a mother?” I asked.

“No, Mr. Max Fly. I am not, but I am a Good Spirit Woman and that is almost as good.”

“What is a Good Spirit Woman?” Hap asked.

“A Good Spirit Woman is a Spiritual Healer. I share sacred teachings. I create space for sacred energies within my people.”

I thought we had grilled her enough about her special powers and I didn't want her to take off leaving Hap and myself to our own resources to find a way out of the desert. It was just too damn hot to take that chance. After awhile, Deputy Debbie said, "Mr. Max Fly, let me tell you a little about your friend, Richard Swenson, or, as you know him, Rocky Mountain Dick. He has quite a colorful background," she continued, as she pulled out a police report she was carrying in her shirt pocket. "Let me see," she said as she ran her index finger down the page. "In 1923, while in California, he was arrested for stealing a man's watch that he swears was slipped into his pocket by two young ruffians. Then he took off with \$55.00 from his employer's store when he decided to go visit a girlfriend in Oregon, if you can believe a girl would actually befriend someone who smells like he does. While up there he decided to take up bootlegging. He was busted twice for that. The second time the judge fined him \$100 and ordered him to leave the state. Rocky Mountain Dick went to Montana and signed on with a ranch outside of Bozeman where the foreman was impressed with his horse knowledge and asked him to purchase some mules and horses for the owner of the ranch. He decided to keep one of the horses and that landed him in a Montana State Penitentiary for horse stealing. He denied stealing the horse saying he purchased it. He was lucky he didn't end up at the end of a rope. He then went back to California and got a job as a stunt rider in the movie industry. That lasted until the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department arrested him once again for horse stealing. He was convicted again for horse theft and sent to a California State Prison. When he was released he got a job with one of the work programs that FDR set up and worked there until he enlisted in the navy in 1942. He ended up fighting in the Pacific where he more than likely stole some sea horses, but we will never know will we? When he was discharged, honorably, which in itself must have been a miracle, Rocky Mountain Dick went to work for a horse trader out of El Paso Texas, hauling horses to rodeos. The old man upped and died and old Rocky Mountain Dick found himself unemployed and on the road again looking for work. So he decided to enter a new line of business, train robbery. Like everything else he tried, he was amateurish from the start. He derailed the train and walked through the cars without wearing a mask, robbing the passengers of their cash. He netted about four hundred dollars. But, what seems to be typical of Rocky Mountain Dick's Modus Operandi, he ignored the express car, which is the main target of train robbers and get this, he left his coat with his name in it,

lying by the tracks and he did not have a getaway plan. He had to hitch a ride into the nearest town where he took the next train to Cody Wyoming. While in Cody, he met up with a hooker and told her his next destination, Phoenix Arizona.

That is where the sheriff of El Paso finally caught up with him and he was extradited back to Texas where the passengers easily recognized him and he was convicted of train robbery. He spent seven of his ten year sentence in state prison before being released for good behavior. More than likely his fellow prisoners petitioned the state to get him out of there because he smelled so bad.

All in all he is a seven time loser. At his trial where he was convicted of train robbery, the judge ordered a competence hearing, brought on by the fact so many people thought he must be crazy to even try holding up a train by himself, saying nothing of not having a mask or a getaway plan.

“I knew that boy was driving with only two wheels in the sand and that proves it.” Hap said.

“What do you think happened out here, Deputy Debbie?” he asked.

“What I think happened Mr. Hap Schultz, is that Mike scared Rocky Mountain Dick off his land. Dick left the dead mustangs and came back later to get them and found Mike and his boy dead and their horses standing around with expensive saddles. So, they loaded them up and took them to Mexico and sold them. They made more selling a well broke saddle horse and tack then they would selling a dead mustang carcass to a slaughterhouse.”

“Do you think he could have killed Big Mike and his boy?”

“I really doubt it. He would be more likely to shoot himself in his foot than shooting Mike in the head. But anything is possible, I guess.”

We spent the next hour scouring the area while Deputy Debbie showed us around the crime scene, although there was nothing to see but sand and cactus and a few rattlesnakes which Hap stayed far away from.

We rode out when the sun was high and made it back to the truck before sunset. We loaded the horses and headed back to Tombstone, none the wiser on who shot Big Mike and his boy.

Chapter 16

I called the Tombstone Mining Consortium to set an appointment with their president. I let them know I was investigating the death of Mike Scanlon and his boy and would appreciate a few minutes to inquire about their interest in Mike's property and where that stood at the moment.

The Tombstone Mining Consortium's office was down on Fremont Street. It was housed in a nondescript building in the middle of the block not far from Casmus Fly's Boarding House.

I was only kept waiting for about ten minutes in the lobby of the office before a young woman came down and said, "Miss. Griffin will see you now."

"Who?" I asked.

"Miss Griffin. She is ready to see you now. Please follow me."

When I called to make the appointment with the President of the Tombstone Mining Consortium I was told I would be meeting with President Griffin at nine in the morning. I just assumed it would be a man. I wondered how many other unsuspecting people were surprised when they found out they would be meeting with a middle aged woman.

The name plate on the front of the desk identified her as Miss Suzanne Griffin.

Miss Griffin rose from behind her desk as I entered and extended her hand to shake, which I did. Her handshake was firm, cold and dry and nicotine stained. She was wearing a long sleeve denim shirt with a red scarf secured around her neck by a turquoise slide. Her blue jeans hugged her slim hips for dear life and she was wearing a mighty fancy pair of cowboy boots. Her hair was as black as the night and was matched by her dark piercing eyes. She was rail thin, wrinkled beyond her years and wiry. She looked to be as tough as nails.

"So you are investigating the Scanlon murder?" she asked in a raspy voice.

"Murders, there are two of them and yes I am." I replied.

"Why isn't the sheriff doing this?"

"He is but I have been hired by the Scanlon family to, how can I say this delicately, move it along a little faster than it seems to be going."

"I see. How long have you been in Tombstone, Mr. Fly?"

“Just a few days. You have quite an interesting town. The deputy has been giving me a little history lesson on how and where the real fight at the OK Corral came about.”

“I hope you are paying attention, Mr. Fly. History is very important to know. Someone said that ‘those that don’t understand history are doomed to repeat it.’ I have always kept that in mind.

Mr. Fly, I have to run out to Goose Flats to the Lucky Cuss mine. We had a little problem come up after you called yesterday that I need to deal with. You may ride along and ask your questions if you wish and I can give you a history lesson on silver mining. You will make your momma proud as you leave Tombstone an educated man.”

“I appreciate it. That would be interesting, although my mother wouldn’t believe it. She would think I cheated again somehow. I don’t mean again. ”

Miss Griffin shook her head obviously not interested in hearing about my miscreant youth and said, “Come along Mr. Fly. Do you smoke?”

“No I don’t, Miss Griffin.”

“Too bad.”

As we rode out to the Lucky Cuss Mine in Miss Griffin’s new Cadillac Eldorado, she lit up her first Camel cigarette before we left the parking lot. After inhaling deeply, she started in with her history lesson and talked incessantly about the mining industry between chain smoking her cigarettes. She would light one with the smoldering butt of the one she was finishing before dropping the butt into an ashtray overflowing with ashes and lipstick stained Camel cigarette butts.

“The term mining indicates excavation or extraction of a substance from the soil, or in our case, rock, from a location inside the earth.”

She explained in her raspy voice. “The way silver is mined depends upon what it is found with. Some silver mining happens in open pits, like copper mining. Our silver mining takes place underground. The opening of a mine that leads into the ground is called the headframe, the headgear, hoist frame or the gallows. Attached to the headframe is the hoisting pulley which lifts and drops people and carts into the mine shaft. Shafts usually refer to a vertical descent, although some shafts are arrived at through a horizontal opening if the shaft entry is farther into the interior of a mountainside. The Lucky Cuss has a vertical descent,” she said as she filled her lungs once again hot smoke and she proceeded to cough. The red end of her Camel was close to one quarter of an inch long as she continued to suck and inhale faster than the tobacco could turn to ash.

When her coughing spell was finished she continued with her history lesson, "Mining operations require electricity and we own our own power plant at each mine. These power plants generate enough electricity to operate the entire mine and surrounding outbuildings," she growled through thick smoke drifting out of each side of her mouth.

"The silver is extracted from copper and lead ore. Ours is extracted from lead. The lead ore is first crushed and then smelted. Smelting is done by using heat and a chemical reducing agent, usually carbon. This smelting separates the metal from the ore. In our Toughnut Mine we extract the silver through an electrolytic process. We do this by passing an electrical current through the ore and this separates the bonded compounds. Now Mr. Fly, you know enough about silver mining where you can buy a donkey and a pickax and head out into the desert and become a rich man like Mr. Ed Schieffelin." She paused long enough to roll down her window and cough and spit up some phlegm before lighting up another Camel and stubbing out the old butt.

I took the opportunity, in the lull of her lecture, to ask her who Ed Schieffelin was while she was busy coughing and sucking on the end of a new Camel.

"Ed Schieffelin was the original owner of the Lucky Cuss and the Toughnut Mines. He is also the founding father of Tombstone. He and his brother, Al, sold out their interest in the mines in 1880 for six hundred thousand dollars. Their partner, Richard Gird, took his share in company stock and eventually made about forty million dollars which would be about one billion dollars at today's value. She laughed her dry raspy laugh and said, "I don't fool myself into thinking my stock will soar that high, but I can tell you Mr. Fly, we have a viable vein that we struck and we are still in the process of finding out just how far that vein goes. Your Mr. Scanlon missed an opportunity to ride the wave of success. Well, maybe his missus will see the light.

We're here," she said as she slammed the gear shift into park before the Eldorado came to a complete stop and stepped out into the hot sun.

"You can wait for me in that little shack over there. I will be along shortly. You know women aren't allowed down in a mine? Hell, I'm the President of this outfit and I can't even go down and inspect what I am in charge of. I have to send one of my men down for me. Shit, ignorant assholes" she cursed, as she turned and walked toward the headframe of the Lucky Cuss Mine.

When Miss Griffin returned I figured I had enough history for this trip and decided to get down to the nitty gritty and find out what was going on between her company and Big Mike Scanlon.

“As I said on the phone, Miss Griffin,” I began, pulling out my notebook and pen, “I have been hired by the Scanlon family to look into the recent murder of Mike Scanlon and his son and see if I can help solve their murders. I heard that you, or rather your company, had an interest in his property and I hoped you could shed some light on what you and Big Mike discussed and whether or not he expressed any interest in selling to your company.”

“I’m not sure I see how our discussions about his property and our interest in it would have any bearing on his murder. We told him we were willing to offer him a very fair price for a parcel of his land. Beyond that, what we discussed was confidential and I would have to refer you to our attorney if you wish to know anything else. You might have heard of claim jumpers Mr. Fly. They are people who come in behind people and try to file a claim before the person working the land can do so. This still happens today although it is a bit more sophisticated. So we cannot disclose what was discussed and we had Mr. Scanlon and his people sign a non disclosure agreement as well. I heard Mr. Scanlon was an ex bull rider and no bull rider has any sense left after those bulls finish with them and it was apparent that we were wasting our time talking with him and broke it off after two meetings.”

I was an ex bull rider too. I thought it might be better to keep that to myself while speaking with Miss Suzanne Griffin, President of the Tombstone Mining Consortium. My actions usually give my lack of intelligence away soon enough. No sense in speeding the process along by admitting to my past profession.

“Do you think there is a significant amount of silver still in the area even after all these years of mining, Miss Griffin?”

“Why would we still be putting money and manpower into these mines if we thought there wasn’t any silver left? As I said, Mr. Fly, if you wish any more information on our dealings with Mr. Scanlon, you will have to discuss that with our attorney and I doubt he will disclose much more than I already have. But you can surmise what you wish.

Now, if you are ready, we can head back to Tombstone,” she said as she lit another Camel before she stood up, discarding the old butt in an ashtray overflowing with ashes and lipstick covered butts on her desk.

“I have work that needs to be done before I leave for another meeting.”

She walked around her desk and opened the door to the shack letting it close in my face just as I reached it.

During our ride back into Tombstone, Miss Griffin opened another fresh pack of Camel Cigarettes and finished off three cigarettes before coming to a screeching halt and slamming the gear shift in park again before the big Eldorado came to a complete stop while stepping out onto the parking lot behind their building.

“Thank you for your time, Miss Griffin.” I said.

“Good day Mr. Fly,” she replied before turning and leaving behind me.

Chapter 17

I was sipping on a glass of Paul Masson on ice looking out at Patagonia Lake thinking about what Miss Griffin told me this afternoon. I didn't get the feeling that anyone from that company had anything to do with the Scanlon murders. They just seemed too entrenched in their own business to have much time for anything else.

The phone rang. I picked it up.

"Hello?" I said.

"Mr. Max Fly, this is Deputy Red Eagle. I am on my way to a crime scene that contains a dead body that we believe might be of interest to you."

"Who's we?" I asked.

"Sheriff Alvarez and Dr. Amy Applewhite, the County Coroner and of course me, Deputy Debbie."

"Sounds like an interesting crew. Where's this body at?"

"1135 Freemont Street. Just down from the Fly Boarding House. Ever hear of that place?"

"Absolutely! But you're kidding me, right?"

"No I am not. See you there Mr. Max Fly." She hung up.

It didn't take me long to drive into Tombstone from Patagonia Lake in my new rental car. By the time I got there people were standing all over the front lawn of Casmus Fly's Boarding House. I located Deputy Red Eagle and Sheriff Alvarez standing on the front porch. Deputy Red Eagle was writing furiously in her notebook as Sheriff Alvarez was nodding his head and pointing in the direction of the OK Corral while talking a mile a minute.

I approached them and they looked up as I neared the walk way.

"You might as well come in Mr. Fly," Sheriff Alvarez said. "It appears this individual might be of some interest to you. His name is Mr.

Tommy Lee Barker, age 33. He had thirty three dollars on him. Seems thirty three wasn't this boy's lucky number. His driver's license gives his home as Lancaster California although Dr. Applewhite said he was born and raised here in Tombstone. He also has a Screen Actors Guild membership card. Guess he was a movie star or something. I never heard of him, have you?"

"I've heard of him, but not in the capacity of an actor. He works for the Scanlon's, at the S Bar S Ranch; or he did." I replied.

“Well, the only role he could play now would be in a horror film. It looks like someone took a can opener to him. The coroner is in there now checking things out. Should be done shortly and then the deputy here can go in and examine the crime scene and see what she can find.”

“How was he killed?” I asked.

“It’s hard to tell. He’s really a mess. From the way he looks I’d say someone wasn’t too happy with his acting or something. Hell, they should leave the critiques to the critics; don’t you agree Deputy Red Eagle?”

Deputy Red Eagle snapped her notebook shut and put it in her left chest pocket where the book was lying almost horizontal to the ground due to the swell of her breast. She buttoned her pocket before replying. “Whoever did this disliked him for more than just his acting. His tongue is missing. Maybe more parts as well. I will find out when I get in there and take inventory. As Sheriff Alvarez said, when Dr. Applewhite gets through we will check him out and get a better feel on just what happened.”

“If you stay behind the deputy here and out of her way, I’ll let you follow her in. Don’t touch nuthin’ either, Mr. Fly.” Sheriff Alvarez said as he pulled out a red bandanna from his rear pocket, wiping the sweat off his brow before replacing his white cowboy hat on his head and walking toward his car.

“Have a nice evening folks,” he said. “I hope you enjoy yourselves. I’m going home.”

It wasn’t long before Dr. Applewhite called to Deputy Red Eagle and we went into the Fly Boarding House. I followed closely behind the lovely deputy just as the sheriff suggested. What I saw in there was not a pretty sight. I did as instructed and did not stray far nor did I touch anything.

“What do you think killed him, Dr. Applewhite?” Deputy Red Eagle asked.

“He was shot in the left eye probably with a .22 caliber gun and that did him in.”

Deputy Red Eagle interrupted her and said for my sake “Killers use .22 caliber pistols at close range because they are not so loud as to alert neighbors or people who might be passing by. They might think the pop is from fireworks or something, not a gun shot.”

“Is that what killed him?” I asked.

“There is a stab wound in his chest that pierced the left ventricle of his heart but he didn’t feel that as he was most likely already gone after being shot.” Dr. Applewhite said.

“The wounds aren’t that deep so I would guess the attacker isn’t very strong or else was squeamish about sticking a knife into someone. Then his skull was crushed from blunt force to the back of his head. It appears to have been a club or a baseball bat. They clubbed him before shooting him for some reason, possibly at another location to subdue him. They tied him up and brought him here and then shot him. There are ligature marks on his wrists, ankles and around his neck. He was hog tied by someone who knew their knots. No reason to tie him after he is dead, is there? It appears whoever did this had an arsenal of weapons with them, gun, knife, club, and rope. Maybe they wanted to try out each one to see what it would do to the human body. Pretty sick if you ask me.”

“Do you think his killer could be a woman?” Deputy Red Eagle asked. “It’s a possibility, either a woman or a small man or a person that wasn’t comfortable stabbing someone. When someone is hesitant to kill someone with a knife they don’t strike with the rage and velocity of someone who enjoys it or has done it before. The problem with it being a woman is that I have never heard of a woman mutilating a victim before. Women have been known to kill in a rage but I haven’t heard of one killing in a rage and mutilating her victim. But anything is possible I guess.”

“A woman scorned by a younger lover, perhaps; a woman who started to have feelings of remorse while stabbing the body?” Deputy Red Eagle asked looking at me to see if I got the implication of her remark. She didn’t wait for a response.

“Look at these scuff marks,” she said, pointing at blood stains in the hall, leading to the room where Mr. Barker was sprawled out on his back. “It looks like somebody dragged him in here right through all that blood. Probably to get him out of the way so they would have more privacy while cutting out his tongue and stabbing him in the heart. They probably stabbed him to make sure he didn’t get up and walk away before they finished what they had planned for him.”

A strange sense of humor Deputy Debbie has, I thought to myself. I liked her. A few years ago my friend, Homicide Detective Harry Marshall, said, 'it doesn't matter how many of these grisly scenes you see; the next one still affects you.' He said, 'we joke around to relieve the tension that comes with dealing with a particularly brutal death. It helps us get on with the task at hand, which is processing the crime scene.'

"They either tired out before getting him all the way in the room or else somebody or something spooked them and they high tailed it out of here before finishing whatever they had in mind to do. I am thinking out loud here, Mr. Max Fly." She said.

"Murderers in Tombstone seem to prefer to do a little extra carving up on their victims bodies." I remarked. "You would think shooting someone would be enough, would you not?"

"A little overkill, would you agree, doctor?" the deputy asked.

Before Dr. Applewhite could answer, Deputy Red Eagle said. "Stay over there, Mr. Max Fly, while I process this area of the crime scene." She walked around to the other side of the bed.

"I spotted a shell under the bed that I need to get." Deputy Red Eagle bent down and reached beneath the bed and came out with a brass shell casing on the end of her pen.

"A .22 caliber just as I thought. Plenty of .22's around this neck of the woods. We will run it through ballistics and see what we can come up with. So much for the theory of being shot somewhere else. The slug must still be in the skull as it isn't embedded anywhere around here that I noticed. The casing might have fallen out of someone's pocket. Well, well, well, look what we have here a bloody foot print. See that Mr. Max Fly?" Deputy Debbie said pointing to blood coagulating on the floor next to the bed. "That is a Cat's Paw boot sole, something that you find on nice boots. It looks like it would be from a size six to possibly a size seven. I am putting my money on a six. What do you think?"

I looked at the sole of my boot to make sure I didn't have a Cat's Paw sole and breathed a sigh of relief when I confirmed I didn't. "I'm not sure, Deputy Debbie, small for a man, but my guess would be closer to a size seven. But I wouldn't put my money on it."

"Not a betting man, Mr. Max Fly?" she asked.

"It's against the law to bet. Isn't it deputy?"

"You are right. Come on, stay close to me and let us see what we can find on the other side of the bed; now watch where you step."

I was happy to stay close to the deputy as we checked out the crime scene. She smelled good which I welcomed after breathing death for the past half hour.

Against the far wall, Deputy Debbie found about five feet of rope that was covered in blood.

“I am willing to bet that this is what was used to tie Mr. Barker up; that is if it was legal to bet, Mr. Max Fly.”

“I’d have to agree with you on that Deputy Debbie.”

She smiled as she picked up the rope and placed it in her evidence bag and continued to case the scene. She was a seasoned pro in spite of her young age. She was taught well.

Afterward, as we stood on the front lawn of the Fly Boarding House after processing the crime scene Deputy Red Eagle asked me to follow her to the sheriff’s office as she had something to show me.

Chapter 18

“I pulled this out of our victim’s wallet. It says in case of emergency to call Callie Barker, a sister, who lives here in Tombstone. That is a good place to start.

I find it amusing, actually not amusing, but interesting, that this Tommy Lee Barker’s name is mentioned by you Mr. Max Fly as a person of interest, and a couple of days later he ends up dead. Not just dead, but mutilated and dead.

Please sit down Mr. Max Fly and take a look at this report,” Deputy Red Eagle said, pointing at a report sitting on the edge of her desk. I sat down as instructed by the lovely Deputy Debbie and picked up the report and started reading. It was a rap sheet on Tommy Lee Barker filled with petty crimes he committed along with time served in the county jail.

“I was interested in Tommy Lee Barker so I pulled his history here in Tombstone. It looks like Mr. Barker was busy while growing up in Cochise County. It says he was arrested for a B&E, stealing a car, assault and battery and numerous disturbing the peace arrests from discharging a fire arm to tipping over trash cans.

“No wonder he doesn’t know how to ride a horse, he didn’t have time to learn as he spent most of his time in jail.” I remarked.

“While we were checking on Mr. Tommy Lee Barker, we ran Callie Barker through the system as well. You probably won’t believe this but her record is pretty much close to his. Mostly drunk and disorderly with a couple of assault and battery charges; on one of those she just about beat a girl to death who started dating her boyfriend. The report said her boyfriend was afraid of her. Evidently she threatened to kill him if he continued to see the other girl and he believed she would. She has a juvenile record as well while she lived in Tombstone but that is sealed.

They were raised by a single mother who worked at menial jobs around Tombstone, waitressing, short order cook and cleaning jobs at different motels. She seemed to expect Tommy to be the father figure for Callie and from what neighbors and friends have said, little Callie could do no wrong and whatever Callie wanted Callie got and if they did not have it, Tommy would get it or her mother would make sure he did.

We went over to Callie Barker's apartment several times the past few days but she was not there. We got her phone number and called her as well and there has been no answer. Sheriff Alvarez has now requested a search warrant and hopefully we can get it so we can access her place. Until we find her or her whereabouts, we can not release the name of Tommy Lee to the public or the press will be all over us. So, do not leak anything Mr. Max Fly or we may have to arrest you for obstruction of justice."

I looked at Deputy Red Eagle I could see she was serious.

"I sure won't say anything Deputy Debbie, but I think Rachel Scanlon is going to be able to put one and one together and figure out the butchered body the sheriff found could very well be that of her missing ranch hand, Tommy Lee Barker. He was supposed to be back at work yesterday so she just might be filing a missing persons report with you pretty soon."

"What did Mrs. Scanlon say about Mr. Barker? Was she upset with him for any reason?"

"Not that I know of." I replied. "She actually became upset with me when I suggested that it was strange that they would have a wrangler on their ranch who couldn't ride a horse. She came to his defense and said he was a nice guy and a very hard worker. She said he could do just about anything else beside ride a horse. Why, are you thinking a woman did this?"

"It has crossed my mind, a woman killer. That is interesting, Mr. Max Fly, a wrangler that cannot ride a horse."

"I wonder how they got tied in with the Scanlon's. I think I will take a ride out and have a talk with Mrs. Rachel Scanlon. Would you like to ride along, Mr. Max Fly?"

"Yes I would. Thank you Deputy Debbie."

Chapter 19

After Deputy Red Eagle finished the inquisition of Rachel we were driving back to Tombstone when she turned to me and said, “Would you care to join me for a bite to eat at Papago’s Café?”

I couldn’t imagine eating anything after viewing what was left of Tommy Lee Baker at Fly’s Boarding House as my stomach was still churning but I really enjoyed Deputy Debbie’s company so I eagerly accepted her invitation.

As we finished our meal, which consisted of a plate of mule deer stroganoff and tortilla shells, which I washed down with a Christian Brothers and water while the lovely deputy sipped on a Coca Cola, we reflected on the grisly murder scene we just left.

“Somebody was angry with Mr. Tommy Lee Barker for some reason and that anger spilled into an uncontrollable rage. I smell like death. I do not like it. I need a shower.”

“You can use mine at the motel, Deputy Debbie. I have an extra bar of soap.”

She smiled at me as she stood up and said, “Let us go take that shower.”

Chapter 20

“Mr. Max Fly? This is Deputy Red Eagle. We got the warrant for Callie Barker’s apartment and conducted a thorough search and found some interesting items that we sent off to the state crime lab for analysis. Some of the items, like clothing, appeared to have some blood on it. She had a pair of size six boots in her closet with the Cat’s Paw Sole. Would you care to come to our office and go over some of this evidence?”

“I’m on my way Deputy Debbie,” I replied as I grabbed my shirt and stuck my arm through the sleeve as I ran out the door to my rented car. “From what we can gather, Big Mike Scanlon wishes to call off the affair he is having with Miss Callie Barker but she does not want it to end. She thought that Mr. Scanlon was going to divorce his wife and marry her. When she finds out that is not going to happen she tries to hire her brother to knock off Big Mike. When Tommy refuses she hires some goons who work for Ears Giaccana that she met while working for Scanlon Productions. Also, we found some incriminating evidence on Mr. Rocky Mountain Dick. It appears he was only too happy to help Miss Callie put away Mike, the big cowboy who embarrassed him so many times over the years by revealing just how incompetent Rocky Mountain Dick really is. So we will want to speak with him once again to have him explain his relationship with Miss Callie Barker. When her brother finds out she is involved in Mr. Scanlon’s death he confronts her and threatens to tell Sheriff Alvarez. Now she knows she has to kill him. This she does not seem to mind doing as she is still upset with her brother for not doing the killing as she requested. This is all conjecture on my part but solid conjecture. Miss Barker is a lady who is used to getting her way and will not allow anyone to stop her from getting what she wants. At this point she is a person of interest so if you see her, do not play hero and try to apprehend her as I do not want to take you to the hospital again, Mr. Max Fly. Call us.”

Chapter 21

It was close to nine o'clock at night as I drove back to my room. There was no moon or stars to be seen in the dark sky. It was pitch black out. The kind of night you dreaded to walk home alone in when you were a kid.

As I approached the motel I saw what looked like a 1953 blue and white Chevrolet Super Glide pull into the parking lot and roll to a stop at the end of the building. This looked exactly like the one I had been looking for the past few weeks and finally I was going to find out who the mysterious person was who was stalking Rachel and who ran Hap and me off the road.

A small figure got out of the driver's side of the car and turned to close the door. It was a small woman with short dark hair. I knew it had to be Callie Barker. What was she doing here?

Next the passenger door opened and out stepped my old friend Rocky Mountain Dick.

Were they going to try to kill me again, I wondered?

I didn't care so I called out, "Callie, wait a minute, I need to speak with you."

She turned and looked in my direction before sprinting toward the dock and the lake behind the motel with Dick running behind her.

I took off after them determined not to let them get away this time.

Deputy Red Eagle's words echoed in my mind about not trying to be a hero and trying to apprehend Callie by myself, but my instinct's just kicked in. Anyway, I had a score to settle with that smelly Dick.

It was apparent that Callie was a very good runner and she is much younger than I am so that's my excuse on why I wasn't able to catch up to her. But Rocky Mountain Dick is a different story. Hell I could have walked and caught up to him. But I didn't. I ran full out and jumped on his back. He fell face first into the bushes next to the walkway going down to the lake. I reached under my left arm and removed my Colt .38 caliber belly gun and swung it hard against the Dick's head. The loud crack must have been heard all the way down to the dock as I saw Callie stop and look back in our direction. I could tell the Dick was down and out for the count so I got up and raced to catch up to Callie before she could take off in her boat again. I reached her just as she was casting off the last rope securing her boat to the dock.

I dove at her legs and we rolled across the deck of her Chris Craft Cruiser into the water with her flailing away trying to find me in the murky depths.

Her hand came out of the water as we broke the surface and her fingers were extended like cat's claws coming right at my eyes. I quickly turned my head and my cheek bore the brunt of her attack. It stung like hell as she raked my skin. I could feel the blood pouring down my cheek. I pulled back my fist and let her have it straight in the jaw and she went back down under water like a sack of shit.

I thought I should pull her out and save her so the state could put her to death later, so I reached down and got a handful of her hair and pulled her up.

She cried out in pain and grabbed my hand with hers as her head emerged from the water. She was a little thing so it was pretty easy to throw her up on the dock, even with her water logged clothes on. She swung her leg out at me and her foot caught me square on the chin knocking me back in the water. By the time I emerged from the water she was sprinting along the dock toward the boat house.

I jumped out of the water and started after her again. My breathing was labored as I hadn't been running in about thirteen years. Luckily for me, my legs are longer than hers so I made up ground rather quickly. This time I reached out and grabbed her around the waist and lifted her up and body slammed her to the ground. I could hear the expulsion of air leave her lungs and I saw the fight leave her eyes. She was through fighting for the time being.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Are you Callie Barker?"

"What the fuck's it to ya; you a copper?" She spit out.

"No a clown. Now get on your feet." I said, yanking her to her feet.

"It figures. A copper, a clown, what's the difference, a dick's a dick."

"That's what my wife used to tell me."

"You're married? Who the fuck you kiddin'?" She replied.

"Was, we aren't close any more. But we aren't here to discuss my married life. Listen, you better behave. I don't want to hurt you anymore than I already have, but it's still on my list." I said.

"Now, what are you doing here Callie? Do you know Rachel Scanlon?"

"What the fuck are you talkin' about? My name ain't Callie and I don't know no Rachel Scanlon."

"Don't lie to me. Your name is Callie Barker, isn't it? You and Rocky Mountain Dick killed your brother, Tommy Lee, and you hired two mugs to kill Mike Scanlon and his boy and you are going to fry."

“You don’t know shit, puss face. Rocky Mountain Dick didn’t have the balls to do in nobody. Scanlon and me was gettin’ married as soon as he could get rid of that old cow he was married to.”

“Big Mike was going to marry you?” I asked incredulously.

“That’s right Pie Hole. What are you dea? That’s what I said. Mike and me got it on real good. He said I could spin his head in circles and that I made him feel like a young man again. He said nobody could come close to doing what I could do to him and that’s the truth because I’m as good as a pro.

I bet you are, I thought. In fact, you probably are a pro.

“He wanted me more than just a couple nights a week. He said he wanted my lips on him every night of the week and he was going to tell that old cow he was married to, to take a hike.”

“That two headed snake lied to me. Nobody lies to me”

I believed her, that he lied to her, but I couldn’t imagine Big Mike calling Rachel an old cow. Rachel was still a classy looking woman and definitely no old cow.

“Okay, so why did you have to kill him? Couldn’t you find someone else to make miserable?” I said.

“Ask my lawyer when he sues your puny ass.”

“You are not acting like a little lady.”

“Who said I was a lady? Now let me go before I kick ya’ in the nuts.”

“You’re not going anywhere and you definitely are not going to kick me in the nuts,” I said.

I saw the shadows of red from flashing lights bouncing off the boathouse walls. I turned around and saw Deputy Red Eagle running down the pathway toward the lake with her baton drawn. I didn’t know who was going to be in more trouble, Callie Barker or me, for disobeying the deputy’s order to call her instead of attempting to apprehend Callie.

“Here comes Deputy Red Eagle and she will take good care of you,” I said.

“Oh great, a lady molester. I wonder what she is going to ask me to do to her to get her off.”

“You have a filthy mouth for such a young girl. Hell, you have a filthy mouth for anyone and if she’s a lady molester, you have nothing to worry about.”

“Fuck you clown face.” She said with a sneer.

I shook my head and turned toward Deputy Red Eagle as she bent down and slapped her handcuffs around the wrists of Callie Barker.

“Be careful of this one Debbie. She has a filthy mouth on her and she is pretty tough. You’ll probably want to practice using your baton on her a few times. Just to soften her up a bit. She’s a hard nut. I feel like I just finished wrestling a bobcat in a sewer. I have enough scratches on me to qualify for a purple heart.”

“You are lucky I do not put my other pair of handcuffs on you for disobeying a direct order from the Cochise County Sheriff’s Office Mr. Max Fly.

“I think you should use that pair on Rocky Mountain Dick. He’s in the bushes over by the boat house and I think he has a big goose egg on the side of his head.”

She looked in the direction I was pointing and said, “Did you assault one of our upstanding citizens Mr. Max Fly? Maybe I should call for backup to bring you into the station as well. My squad car is going to be pretty crowded and I am not sure it would be a good idea to put you in the backseat with these two. They might try to exact revenge on you. You can sit in the front seat next to me and we will stop by the hospital and get a tetanus shot for you. Hard telling where her nails have been.”

“I have a pretty good idea and I hope a tetanus shot is strong enough to kill whatever she has. Seems she and Big Mike were an item. What he saw in her I don’t know. Once she opens her mouth nothing but pure filth pours out. Maybe that’s what he wanted. I don’t know.”

“So you are saying Big Mike and her were having an affair? Why would she kill him?”

“She said he told her he was going to leave Rachel for her so she could live the good life; be a rancher’s wife and when he didn’t follow through, she lost it and put Big Mike away for good. Unfortunately, his boy was with him and got in the way. He was just collateral damage.”

“What a shame. I don’t think Big Mike would risk half of his fortune for a tart like her. There is no meat on her. She must smoke peyote.” Deputy Red Eagle said.

I was beginning to wonder what this peyote is that everyone talks about. It sure must be potent if it can screw with so many people’s minds and make them do crazy things to each other.

“Well, I guess I better get her up and get her scrawny little tush back to Tombstone.” Deputy Red Eagle said, as she bent down to pick up Callie Barker. “I think I will leave questioning this one to Sheriff Alvarez. He will thank me. Arizona has not executed a woman since 1930. If she becomes the next in line, the sheriff will become part of Arizona history. Come along with me Mr. Max Fly. You can help your friend to my squad car. I do not look forward to smelling him in my car. I will drive with the windows open.”

Chapter 22

I stopped over at the S Bar S Ranch and filled Rachel in on Tommy Lee Barker's death at the hands of his sister, Callie, because he refused to kill Big Mike. She thought Big Mike had done her wrong by not getting rid of Rachel and marrying her. She then hired Augie Antonelli and Joe Petrocelli to kill Big Mike and Little Mike just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I hated to have to be the one to tell Rachel her husband had been cheating on her, but according to Ears, he did it at every opportunity he got and he made sure he had as many opportunities as he could. So, more than likely, Rachel was aware of it, even if she didn't want to admit it.

I figured she was going to learn about it sooner or later from the Sheriff or Deputy Red Eagle or the press and since we had a history together, as short as it was, I thought it was best she heard it from me. Actually, she took it quite well. After a couple minutes of crying and sniffing, she brought out the Martell XO and we toasted both Big Mike and Little Mike before she called Hilda Scanlon and told her the news.

Hilda was ecstatic that I was able to wrap this up so quickly. "Mr. Fly," she said, "please send Mr. Foss your expenses and I will have him send reimbursement along with the balance of the eight thousand dollars I owe you for fulfilling our agreement. Also, I will have him mail a ten thousand dollar bonus check to your home address as promised. This will seal the deal we made in Milwaukee at your bar. I owe you an apology. You are as good as your reputation Mr. Fly. Thank you again." She hung up.

I didn't know what to say. I was speechless.

I hoped Gary Hassy and Tom Winterburg were remembering to pick up my mail. I planned on calling them when I returned to the motel. When I got up to leave, Rachel walked over to the liquor cabinet and handed me a bottle of Martell XO. She gave me a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

"This is a little something to remember me by Max. If you ever return to Tombstone, I do hope you come to see me. I will be forever grateful for what you have done."

Chapter 23

I went in town to the sheriff's office before returning to the motel. I wanted to wrap things up with Sheriff Alvarez and Deputy Red Eagle. We all sat in the conference room going over the evidence we had gathered and listened to the confession Deputy Red Eagle was able to extract out of Callie Barker.

“Max, Sheriff Alvarez said, “this Barker woman is a piece of work. She is one sick woman. Something is going on in her head that only she knows about. I sure in hell don't.”

Deputy Red Eagle took over. “Callie thought of herself as special. Her mother and brother had always bailed her out and she never had to take responsibility for herself. She felt that Mike should have to give her anything she wanted. She needed constant attention and demanded it. She is what you men call high maintenance. She also demanded unqualified love. She had married her high school sweetheart and stayed with him long enough to have a son, but got tired of them both. So she left him and her boy to find a better quality of life. What she felt she deserved. She met Mike while she had her eye on someone else, but it looked like Mike could give her whatever she wanted so she went after him.

He had money and as soon as she could convince him to divorce Rachel, she was quite sure he would marry her.

It wasn't long before she tried to talk Mike into a suicide pact. It was at this time that Mike realized that he had hooked up with a crazy woman and told her to get lost. Unfortunately for Mike and ultimately his boy, she did not. She got revenge; not only on Mike Scanlon, but her brother as well because he refused to do her bidding one last time. No one turned Callie Barker down. So she enlisted the help of Mr. Richard Swenson, A.K.A. Rocky Mountain Dick by offering him sexual favors and promises of riches beyond his wildest dreams in return for him helping her kill her brother. He whacked Tommy Lee over the head with a thirty four inch Louisville Slugger, Duke Snider model, that put him down and out so Callie could put the gun to his head and pull the trigger. Then she stabbed him for old times' sake. Sisterly love and all of that. Dick said he and Callie had sex in the same room where her dead brother laid bleeding out. A pair of real sickos.”

“The FBI picked up Joe Petrocelli and Augie Antonelli on their way to California. They were picked up with five thousand dollars each in their coat pockets. Callie paid them the five thousand each out of fifty thousand bucks Mike Scanlon paid her to keep her mouth shut about their affair and to leave town. She was not planning on leaving so easily. She wanted to extract more from Big Mike.

The Feds are curious whether or not Frankie Giaccana will pony up for lawyers for these two seeing as they seemed to be doing this hit on their own. There was no reason Frankie needed to have Big Mike killed, let alone, Little Mike.” Sheriff Alvarez said.

We all sat quietly for a few minutes, contemplating what and why these senseless murders were committed.

Finally Sheriff Alvarez stood up and said, “I’m going home. If you ever want to get into law enforcement Max, consider Tombstone where you will have a job waiting. You are real thorough. I enjoyed working with you,” he said as he offered me his hand.

“Thank you Sheriff. I enjoyed working with you as well.”

“I will walk you out, Mr. Max Fly,” Deputy Red Eagle said.

As we stood on the front porch melting in the blazing Arizona sun, she asked, “When do you leave?”

“Tomorrow morning. Hap is saying good bye to a friend tonight so whenever he gets back we will head out.”

“And where is this friend that your Hap is saying good bye to?”

“It’s a young lady he met while we were here. She lives off Highway 80 on the way to Agua Prieta.”

“I see, she is a senorita. Hap has many lady friends?”

“I guess he does. Hap is very, how I can say it, personable? He can charm the rings off a raccoon’s tail.”

“Well, you have a safe trip Mr. Max Fly. I too enjoyed working with you.”

“Thank you Deputy Debbie. You are one amazing law enforcement officer; and, if you don’t mind me saying so, you are the most attractive deputy sheriff I ever met.”

She blushed and smiled, saying, “and kissed” before standing on her tip toes and kissing me on the cheek, before turning and walking back into the office.

Chapter 24

Hap had just left to say good bye to Aurora and I was putting the finishing touches on my report to Hilda Scanlon when there was a knock on my door.

It was Deputy Red Eagle with a thermos of Wakavaki.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, holding up her thermos.

I stared at her for a moment before moving aside and motioning her inside the room.

“I guess I could use some nourishment. Come in deputy.”

I cleaned off the table and she put down her picnic settings and we ate. She actually took a couple swallows of my Martell XO that Rachel gave me.

When we finished she stood and put away her thermos and cups and said, “May I spend the night, Mr. Max Fly? Maybe we can take that shower?”

I was stunned. “Are you sure that’s what you want to do, Deputy Red Eagle?”

She nodded her head and I took the glass of Martell XO from her hand and drew her close, softly kissing each of her eyelids. She looked up and her lips parted and I lightly caressed each of them with my fingers.

I picked her up and took her to the bed and gently laid her down. I calmly sat on the edge of the bed, carefully removing the comb on the side of her head which released her hair, allowing it to tumble down her shoulders. My fingers trembled as I began to undo the buttons on her shirt. She began to help me. When we finished I looked down at her and marveled at how beautiful she was lying there waiting for me.

“I thought about laying you down and making love to you for a long time, Deputy Red Eagle. What do you think of that?”

She put her index finger to my lips and said, “Debbie, please call me Debbie.”

“Debbie,” I obediently repeated.

“I wanted you to lay me down, Mr. Max Fly, ever since I first laid eyes on you. Please hold me close and love me.”

It wasn’t long before we both had shed the rest of our clothes and I did what she asked. A tremor passed through her body when I started exploring forbidden places and I could tell she had never been this far before.

“Max, please promise me you will let me stay with you tonight. It feels so right. I think I am falling in love with you,” she said as she breathed on my skin and pressed her lips to mine.

I could feel her heart beating as I held her close to my chest.

As I tasted her sweet kisses I wondered if she could hear the echo of my thoughts passing through the night. But I knew she had no way of knowing that tonight I would love her more than I ever loved anyone before.

Later she said, “After nau to ote we should smoke cigarettes, is that not right Mr. Max Fly?”

“If you say so, Deputy; what’s nau to ote?”

“Sex,” she replied.

“Oh.” After pausing for a moment, I said, “I thought everyone in Tombstone smoked peyote.”

“You forget that I am a Good Spirit Woman I do not need peyote.”

“So that’s why everyone smokes that stuff, to get a vision? A vision of what?”

“Each vision is different, Mr. Max Fly,” she said as her finger slowly traced a line down my chest and continued under the sheet until she found what she was looking for. She rolled on top of me and we started to enjoy nau to ote once again.

Soon I heard her whimper and her body started to quiver before she collapsed on my chest and fell fast asleep. I figured she saw a vision. Somewhere in the middle of the night the moon that had been drifting through the gentle swaying of the trees, disappeared and it began to rain. I could hear the rain drops beat softly against the window. I kept staring into the darkness wondering how I could tell this woman lying in my arms what I was feeling inside.

Soon she woke, startled, not knowing where she was.

“Good morning beautiful Debbie, how was your night?”

“It was wonderful with you by my side, Mr. Max Fly.” I held her tightly and we both watched in silence as the rain fell in sheets on the sandy Tombstone soil. The thunder and lightning moved to the south and was gone by the time the sun rose in the morning, bringing with it an unfamiliar humidity to Tombstone. It didn’t last long.

“Now you can say you not only kissed a deputy but felt one up as well. You will have much to brag about when you go back to your Milwaukee town, Mr. Max Fly. Are you as happy as a puppy with two tails?” she asked as a small smile began to grow on her face and sadness appeared in her eyes.

“Yes I am,” I replied, “I’m a fortunate man. You aren’t sorry, are you Debbie?”

“No, Mr. Max Fly, I am not sorry.” She said sadly.

“I don’t believe you,” I said.

“Believe me,” she answered back, throwing her arms around me and burying her face in my neck.

“Why don’t you come with me then? You can live in my lodge.”

She shook her head slowly and turned and sat on the edge of the bed, her beautiful long black hair cascading down to her waist. She picked up her clothes and turned to look at me. I saw tears welling up in her eyes as she got up and went into the bathroom.

When she returned her hair was up and she was dressed in her uniform. She sat down and stared at me. I didn’t like the sad look on her face as she said she was leaving. “I do not like brandy but if I stay longer, I think I will grow to like it. Well, if not like it, at least tolerate it and I do not think I want that to happen.”

“Sort of like me and Wakavaki?” I asked.

“Yes, like you and Wakavaki. There are two ways you become an Indian Mr. Max Fly; you are born into it or you live with them. You do not want to be an Indian. Let us just be glad for the time we had together. You have made me a happy woman and I wish we could stay together for awhile, perhaps forever. But I know it cannot be. The joy we share is like none I have known. I will never forget you and your sweet memory will stay with me forever. When your hair has faded and silver takes its place, will you think of me Mr. Max Fly?”

“Debbie, please don’t. There are many ways I could say what I want to say to you, in songs and poems of promises and dreams that might come true, but I don’t know what will happen tomorrow. I just know I started loving you and I don’t want to stop.” I said.

She bent down and kissed me softly and I felt a warm tear strike my face. She straightened up and looked at me with a sad expression.

“May your journey be straight and swift Mr. Max Fly. Forever you will dance in my heart.”

She turned and walked out the door, leaving me with a hole in my heart I would never be able to fill.

Chapter 25

I was drinking heavily and still a little lost and depressed after leaving Debbie Red Eagle. My friend Dan Ciorrocco, the proprietor of Rocco's Pub, my home away from home and office away from my office, suggested I see his shrink, the lovely Dr. Lorraine Lundgren. He said she was real good at her job and cured all of his ills.

I doubted that as I know Rocco; he's just in denial.

"I thought you said that you weren't going back to her anymore?"

"I did, but she is knockout gorgeous. I go just to lie on her couch and fantasize about her."

"Isn't that dangerous?" I asked. "Shrinks are supposed to be able to read your mind."

"I wish she could," the Rocco Man replied.

The phone started ringing and Rocco went to answer it.

When he came back he said, "Max that was Jack White Ford. They said to tell you your new Edsel is ready to pick up. They will be open until seven tonight. Why in the world would you buy another Edsel?"

Nobody buys an Edsel. They will be giving them away next year. I think Chevrolet planted a spy at Ford headquarters and had them design and manufacture that piece of shit."

"Come on, Rocco Man, I love that car. It's the best automobile I ever owned."

"Yeah, well, what do you have to compare it to, a 1941 Nash; not much there either. Nash will be out of business soon. Mark my word, if Ford keeps on making that piece of shit, they will be following in Nash's footsteps."

I picked up my new 1958 Ford Edsel from Jack White Ford on Highway 100. They had many to choose from so I picked the one with the most options. They gave me a great deal as they were trying to reduce their inventory and move them off the lot. I was happy.

My insurance company came through big time on my cash settlement. The Edsel I settled on was a beautiful robin's egg blue with a white convertible top. The carcass of my last Edsel, which was torched in Arizona, was still sitting in the parking lot of the motel by Patagonia Lake, not far from Tombstone. I believe Callie Barker was responsible for torching it, but I could never prove it. Anyway, I decided I should celebrate my purchase so I called Hap but he was working until 10:30 at Rocco's Pub. He said Sam Galbraith and Ralph Mills were both at the end of the bar with their new wives. Allen Dupont and his wife flew in from Colorado for the weekend and they all were enjoying William Bennett, The Raja, and his girlfriend, Barb E. Dahl, sing a duet of something; he thought it was "Ivory Tower" by Gogi Grant, but he wasn't sure.

Since those guys were unavailable, I decided to call my friend, Homicide Detective Harry Marshall. He was home in bed fast asleep until my phone call woke him; it was only 7:00 p.m. The tone of his voice when he replied to my request that he join me made me think he may not be the right person to be with to celebrate my purchase at this moment, especially when he told me to 'fuck off' before slamming down the receiver.

So, I ended up by myself at Ciro's Italian Restaurant that night, enjoying a plate of spaghetti and meat balls when I met her.

She was sitting with an older gentleman at the table next to me. She was wearing a tight black dress, belted at the waist which brought attention to her perfectly rounded breasts and slim waist and narrow hips. The hem of her dress ended just below her knees and she was wearing a string of white pearls around her delicate neck. She was showing just enough cleavage to attract one's eyes. Her white gloves came up over her elbows, one of which was placed on the table holding a cigarette that was smoldering in a cigarette holder held delicately in her hand. A trail of smoke went from her mouth up through her nostrils and then out of her mouth again, sort of recirculating the smoke through her lungs, nose and mouth.

Her hair was long and black, and she had it swirled around on top of her head held in place by what appeared to be a long white needle. A loose tendril of her hair hung down softly on her left cheek. Her oval eyes were the color of almonds and she had petite features that reminded me of Audrey Hepburn. The main difference I immediately noticed between her and Audrey was that she had breasts close to the size of Elizabeth Taylor's; the best of both worlds, I thought.

I was soon to find out that she had the mind of an Einstein as well as the temper of a Nikita Krushchev.

She was arguing with her companion. I could hear them as their voices grew louder and then the man reached for her as she pushed back from the table. Her hand grabbed the white table cloth and pulled it toward her bringing the contents on the table closer to her. Quickly she grabbed the glass vase holding a floral arrangement the restaurant had placed on the tables to provide an added bit of ambience to the dining experience for its patrons, and slammed it into the gentleman's face. That tactic stopped him in his tracks. He stared at her for a moment before placing both hands on the table while his legs began to buckle. The little lady struck him again with the vase; I believe to make sure he got the hint, this time on the top of the head.

That seemed to finish him off as his hands slipped off the table and his face dropped with a loud thud into a plate of linguine before he slid down and collapsed on the floor.

By the time the waiter and maître'd arrived, the man was laying face down on the floor while the little lady was seated at the table quietly sipping her wine as if nothing had happened.

My curiosity was aroused, among other things, so I got up and walked over to her.

"Excuse me, Miss," I said.

She looked up from staring at her glass of wine and said, "It's doctor."

"Excuse me?"

"It's doctor. I'm a doctor."

"Please forgive me, doctor," I replied, "I am curious, who is that man you just assaulted?"

She glanced down at the man before she looked up and replied. "I didn't assault him, he assaulted me. I was just protecting myself. I guess he thought he had the right to touch me inappropriately because he bought me a plate of linguine and a salad."

"If he bought you steak and potatoes, would that make a difference?" I asked, trying to impress her with my wit and charm.

She looked up at me and cocked her head to the side and smiled before saying; "You're funny. Maybe; it depends."

"Depends on what?"

"On how good the steak was. Well, with him it wouldn't make a difference. He's an ass."

"Well, I'm impressed. You did an admirable job of defending yourself. Where did you learn to fight like that?"

“My father. He taught me in everything I do, go for the weakest point and the weakest point on most men is their testicles. On him,” she motioned with her head toward her companion laying out cold on the floor, “it’s his head as well.”

“Hmmm,” I said.

“Hmmm, what does that mean?”

“It means, hmmm.”

“What’s your name?”

“Max, Max Fly.”

“You’re kidding me. That’s a real name?”

“It is,” I lied, hoping she wouldn’t ask me why I was named Max.

“Are you going to sit down or stand there all night, Mr. Fly? Or may I call you Max?”

“Max works for me,” I said, as I picked up the chair that was knocked over during her altercation with the jerk that was buying her linguine and a salad and pushed his prone body to the side with my Dan Post boot so I could sit down. Two kitchen employees soon came out and assisted him to the front door.

“You bitch. You are going to regret this. Bob is right, you are fucking crazy and the only time I like crazy is when Patsy Cline is singing it you asshole!” He yelled as the front door nearly hit him in his ass as they tossed him out into the cool Milwaukee night.

“Tsk, tsk,” she said, shaking her head. “He definitely needs some help in anger management.”

“Who’s Bob?” I inquired as I stared at her, impressed with her cool and nonchalant, ‘I could care less attitude’.

“My Ex,” she replied.

“And you are?” I asked.

“Lorraine Lundgren, Dr. Lorraine Lundgren.

I don’t know if she noticed my jaw drop but she surely must have. Rocco Man had been talking about his therapist for years and was trying to talk me into seeing her. He said her name was Dr. Lundgren. This had to be her. How many Dr. Lundgren’s could there be in Milwaukee?

“Well, maybe you can help me. I have been thinking that nostalgia isn’t what it used to be. Is there something wrong with me?”

“Probably but it doesn’t have a thing to do with nostalgia. You’re trying to be funny Max, aren’t you?” she said, seeing through my childish charades. “I’m a psychotherapist, a sex therapist. I specialize in helping women work through some issues they may have in their personal and sexual relationships with men. I do work with some male patients who experience sexual performance problems and I help them work through their insecurities as well; but mainly, I work with women. When it comes to sex women need a reason to have it. Men just need a place. I want to change that. I want to level the playing field.”

“Me too,” I said. But what’s your point Doc?”

“My point is most men are priapean bores and women are predisposed to put up with their diffident insecurities.”

“That’s interesting. What does Priapean mean?”

“Do you really want to know?”

I nodded.

“It comes from the Greek word Priapos. Let’s just say it deals with masculinity problems and leave it at that.”

“It appears we have much in common as I am pretty good at helping women work through sexual issues as well.”

“Really? I am inclined to think you might be full of shit and actually are the cause of some of those ‘issues’, Max.”

“You might be right as I have been a little off my game recently. Since we have gone this far may I call you Lorraine?”

“If you’d like.”

“That’s great. What kind of sexual issues do women have, Lorraine?”

“Are you sure you want to hear this? It might be a bit more than you bargained for.”

“Well, since we already covered the masculinity issue and we are on a first name basis we might as well get to the good parts. Anyway, women fascinate me.”

“Fascinate you? Ha, ha I bet they do. Well, you may not believe this Max, but most women have never experienced an orgasm.” She gazed at me for a moment and smiled before continuing.

“Does that embarrass you because you are turning red? Men don’t seem to care or possibly, they are just ignorant of the fact.”

Thank God for giving us shrinks so we can make sense of the things us men do or are responsible for that make women miserable, or at the very least, unhappy, I thought.

“Let me see if I get this straight, when a woman is unhappy her husband or boyfriend should be more attentive, more understanding or less of a bore and be more aware of this woman’s needs. When a man is unhappy he should just suck it up, be a ‘man’ and get over it and grab his club and go back out and find food for his mate, is that what you are saying Lorraine?”

“Would you like me to go on Max? I seem to be causing you to become a bit defensive and I sense a little false bravado about you and I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“No, Lorraine, I can handle this. I think what you are about to tell me is in my best interest to know. Otherwise, you wouldn’t tell me, correct?”

She smiled that wicked smile so I quickly located the flower vase just to make sure I was safe in case she was back in her attack mode.

“Okay then, Max Fly. In the 1800’s Female Hysteria was a common medical diagnosis given to women who exhibited an array of symptoms including insomnia, headaches and even the desire to make love. The list of ailments attributed to Female Hysteria is a long one Max. Almost any ailment could fit the diagnosis. Obviously this is a totally bogus medical condition and is no longer recognized by modern medicine. However, what’s interesting is that it led to the invention of the vibrator.” She looked at me with that wicked smile.

Now my face was really hot. I didn’t want to admit that she really did embarrass me but my face must have turned a deep red. I felt discussing this with a beautiful woman who, at the moment, was leaning toward me, putting her elbows on the table while placing her chin in her hands and smiling seductively in my direction, was making me a bit chafed.

“You’re blushing Max. Does this conversation make you uncomfortable?”

“Naw Doc. Not in the least,” I lied. “Please proceed.”

“It’s Lorraine. You see, the common treatment for hysteria was to give the woman experiencing ‘symptoms’ an orgasm. Of course, manually stimulating all these women would have been a lot of work, so along comes the vibrator, no pun intended, to make the doctor’s job easier.” Wow, now my face was as red as a baboon’s butt. I could feel sweat break out on my forehead.

To break the tension that was building, at least on my side of the table, I said, “I can only imagine the lines outside the doctor’s office back then.”

“You are probably right Max. Of course, I wouldn’t know. What I found interesting was the basic treatment goal for hysteria was to relax the woman and what better way to relax a woman than giving her a mind blowing orgasm,” Dr. Lundgren said, while a mischievous grin spread across her face once again. It was obvious she was enjoying my discomfort and I was beginning to feel like I might have been better off trading places with the guy she just hammered over the head with the flower vase.

“Are you alright Max? You appear to be a little warm and possibly about to get sick? Perhaps I should leave?”

“That’s not necessary, Doc. I am fine, a little enervated perhaps, but I think I am fine. Thank you for asking.”

I knew I was sitting across the table from a dangerous woman and I could feel the excitement coursing through my body.

As she reached into her purse I brought my hand up under my coat and felt the butt of my Colt .38 caliber Belly Gun that I had snuggling under my left arm pit.

“What are you afraid of Mr. Fly? There is no need for you to pull your gun on me,” she said with a coy smile spreading across her beautiful face again.

“Max remember? You can call me Max. Anyway, that's just part of my wardrobe. I hardly ever shoot anybody with it. How did you know I had a gun?”

“I noticed the bulge under your arm when you sat down and most men I’m with end up with a bulge in a different part of their anatomy, not under their arm.” she replied as she pulled out a gold cigarette case with matching lighter and handed them across the table to me.

The case and lighter were both engraved in script with an L. Classy. I opened the case and offered her one of her cigarettes, which she took. I snapped the case shut placing it on the table in front of her while rolling the wheel on her gold plated lighter, sparking the flint until it flamed. I held it to the end of her cigarette.

I watched her inhale deeply and lift her head while blowing blue smoke in the air over our table.

She cocked her head to the side and smiled at me waiting for my reply.

“Maybe we can show each other our bulges, Doc?” I replied.

“It’s Lorraine. That might be fun Max and I look forward to it, if, or when that might happen.”

“So do I Doc.”

“It’s Lorraine, remember?” she said shaking her head as if waking from a dream and picked up her glass and finished off what was left of the red wine. She lifted her arm and snapped her fingers and the waiter appeared in a flash out of nowhere. The maître’d had probably stationed him close to the table in case the lovely doctor got it in her head to assault this new table guest of hers.

“Yes Doctor Lundgren, how may I help you?”

“Another bottle of Pinot Noir, Robert, 1937 please. You will join me, won’t you Max,” she said as she cocked her head to the side once more as a teasing smile crossed her face. “1937 was a very good year for the Pinot Noir grape.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It wasn’t too good a year for me,” I said as I recalled my last bull ride on Casper who sent me to the Austin State Hospital for a month in 1937.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she replied with no intention of asking me why it wasn’t a good year for me as she looked down and stamped out her cigarette in the glass ashtray blowing smoke in my direction. I could detect a slight odor from her lipstick in the smoke. It was acting like an aphrodisiac on ol’ Max.

“So,” she said as she sat up straight and looked me in the eye, “What is it that you do Mr. Max Fly?”

“I assume you mean what I do for a living?”

“You are funny, aren’t you Mr. Fly. Are you flirting with me?”

“I could ask the same thing of you Lorraine, and it’s Max, remember?”

“Do you know Max, that when men and women are friends, there is always a sexual element present? Are we friends Max?” She placed her chin in her hand again, which seemed to be a favorite ploy of hers, and cocked her head to the side once more and smiled. I was beginning to wonder if she had some water stuck in her ear and was just trying to drain it out or something.

Before either of us could say anything more the waiter returned with the wine. He showed the bottle to Dr. Lundgren and waited for her to nod her approval before pulling the cork.

After pouring a swallow into a new glass, he presented it to Dr. Lundgren.

“Let my new friend taste it and see if he approves Robert.”

“Of course, doctor, whatever you say,” Robert replied, extending the glass in my direction.

I downed the bright red liquid and did the obligatory swishing around my mouth to coat my pallet before smacking my lips. I looked up at the ceiling, as if I was getting the answer from God whether the year 1937 was really good for the Pinot Noir grape, as the doctor said, or, if it experienced a year similar to mine. For me a wine was good as long as the alcohol content was listed in double digits on the bottle. I didn't want the good doctor to think I didn't know the difference between a good wine and a glass of Kool Aid so I said; "Robert, I think you picked the right bottle. It is delicious."

Dr. Lundgren smiled at my theatrics which made me happy and said, "That settles it, please pour Robert."

"Yes, doctor," he replied, as he bent over and picked up a glass and poured the Pinot Noir for the doctor before replenishing my glass.

"Where were we? Oh, yes, I asked what you did for a living."

"I'm a reporter Doc, as well as a private investigator. On weekends I fill in as a rodeo clown around the state."

"It's Lorraine, remember? A reporter, a private investigator and a rodeo clown? That doesn't leave you with much time to get in trouble, does it Max?"

"I suppose not, but I seem to fit it in from time to time."

"Well, I didn't know being a clown was a profession. I thought it came with the penis."

I was beginning to realize this doctor could be mean.

"We men seem to have a tendency to be a clown whenever we are in the presence of beautiful young women, I'll give you that, present company included," I responded, lifting my glass in her direction, as I gallantly attempted to defend my fellow penis carrying pals.

She brought her glass up next to mine and we 'clinked' them together.

"You aren't trying to set me up for a night of intercourse, are you Mr. Fly?"

"I'm a long time fan of intercourse, Lorraine, and I thought it was supposed to be Max?"

"It was, but I think in order to protect my honor, I had better go back to Mr. Fly."

"I'm hurt Doc. I have the utmost respect for a lady's honor. I treat all ladies like a doctor does a patient, doctor client confidentiality and all that stuff, you know?"

"It's Lorraine, and yes, I do know about 'all that stuff', but I still think it would be best that I call a cab before it's too late."

“Too late? I’ll tell you what, Doc, no intercourse after we leave the table and I give you a ride home and a walk to the door and you don’t even have to offer a good night kiss to reward my chivalrous act.”

She eyed me over the top of her half empty glass of Pinot Noir and shook her head. “You should have been an attorney Max. You are persistent and so full of bull shit. I love kissing, Max, kissing a lot. So, let’s not rule that out just yet.”

“So, it’s Max again, is it? Does that mean you are going to take me up on my offer?”

“Yes, Max, it means I am going to take you up on your offer. Just remember what happened to my friend and the linguine,” she replied as she bent down and picked her purse off the floor.

She looked up and added, “And you didn’t buy me steak and potatoes yet either.”

“Are you hungry?” I asked.

Before I could suck in a breath, the good doctor had a thirty eight pointing in my direction, and I’m not talking about the ones in her bra. This one, from Smith and Wesson, a Model 638 Shrouded Hammer Revolver, miraculously appeared in her hand before I could blink an eye. She quickly shoved it in my crotch.

“So, you did have a gun in your bag. I should have known that someone with your advanced degrees would have more than just a flower vase to protect themselves with,” I chirped with embarrassment from allowing her to get the drop on me.

“I found that cold steel against warm nuts calms down even the most evil of men, Max.”

My eyes must have looked like Buckwheat’s as Dr. Lundgren started laughing. “Oh Max, I am so glad I got to meet you. I loved that look you got on your face when you saw my thirty eight. Let’s go. You can take me home now,” she said as she replaced her revolver with her makeup case and patted her cheeks with rouge.

Now I wasn’t so sure I wanted to leave with her. Being alone with her might be dangerous.

The Milwaukee night air blasted us with its typical winter chill as we walked out of Ciro's to my new car parked in the far corner of the parking lot in front of a snow bank. I backed it in so I could get out onto the highway much faster if needed. A habit I had gotten into ever since I started my career as a reporter and private investigator. Being first at the scene of a crime many times made a difference on how much information you could squeeze out of the responding officers. Once their superiors arrived at the scene, they pretty much shut down the information channel.

"What kind of car is this? It is the ugliest thing I have ever seen." Dr. Lundgren said.

"I'm hurt, Doc. If you think this one is ugly, you should have seen my other one. This is an Edsel and it's named after Henry Ford's only son, Edsel Bryant Ford."

"It's Lorraine, remember? How could they do that to the memory of his son? The front of this thing looks like it is sucking a lemon."

"Well, I like it. It's a great handling car and it has some nice features," I said as I bent down and opened the door for her.

"Here, get in and I'll show you."

To make an immediate impression on the doctor the first thing I demonstrated was the electric front seats that converted into a comfortable bed.

"Oh, isn't that convenient, Max?"

"It is," I replied. I spent many nights in my last car, a 1941 Nash Unibody 600 Convertible Coupe. I would still have her but I got up one cold morning last December and she refused to turn over for me. I had her hauled into a mechanic friend of mine who had been tinkering with her for ten years and he told me he had done pretty much all he could do. It was time to let her go. The only good thing that came out of it was when I cleaned it out before turning her loose. I found an old deposit I was taking to the bank about five years ago and lost, well, misplaced. There it was, under my old baseball glove and bowling ball on the floor board in the backseat.

"You men and your cars; you speak of them like they are women and many times actually treat them better," she said as she yawned, either with boredom or fatigue, I wasn't sure which, possibly both. Anyway, I didn't have anything to say about that as my track record with women, as with cars, wasn't all that good.

"Which way, Doc?" I said as I slid behind the wheel.

“It’s Lorraine, remember? Turn left on Hwy 18 and go to the first stop light. That’s Brookfield Road. Turn right and go approximately seven miles and turn right onto Fieldcrest Drive. I live at 2455 Fieldcrest Drive. My house will be on the left.”

I pulled into her driveway and drove up a hill toward a very large home overlooking the fields of Brookfield. I was impressed with the size of her estate. I hoped that size wasn’t all that important to the beautiful young doctor.

I put the car in park before putting my arm around her, drawing her close to me. My lips sought out hers like a bull buffalo in rut.

After a moment, Lorraine placed the palms of both her hands on my chest and gently pushed me away.

“Wow that was quite a kiss, Max. But I must tell you, I already had my tonsils removed, thank you. I will have to catalog that kiss and put it in my file for comparison purposes a little later,” she breathed.

“There’s more where that came from Doc.”

“It’s Lorraine, remember? I bet there is, but I think I better call it a night before it’s too late.”

“My mother told me it’s never too late for something good to happen Lorraine.”

“Your mother must have been a saint, Max. We will have to discuss her in more detail the next time we get together. Have you ever heard of Dr. Freud,” she said with that wicked smile again.

Before I could answer she said, “Will you walk me to my door now Max?”

I stared intently into her eyes, losing myself into the lovely liquid almond orbs before turning and opening my door. I went around the car to help her out. I said, “Doc, you scare me but maybe that’s why I like you. I live my entire life on the edge, spitting in the eye of danger and relishing the fact I survive. So, I look forward to our next encounter.”

“It’s Lorraine, remember Max? And what makes you think you will survive? And please don’t spit in my eye.”

When we got to her door, she looked down in her purse and I began to get nervous again but she came up with her house keys.

“Please kiss me good night Max, something to remember you by until next time.”

I did and our tongues began to dance. When she pulled back my knees felt like they would buckle and my head was swimming. I was so weak walking back to my car; I considered calling a cab to take me home.

That was my first encounter with the quixotic doctor and I couldn't wait to get back to Rocco's Pub and let the Rocco Man know I finally took his advice and went to see his shrink. I still hadn't made it to her couch but I was getting close.

As I drove away I thought about Ebert's Beer Depot on the corner of North Avenue and Calhoun road in Brookfield. Why Ebert's Beer Depot? Well, when I was a little boy, I would go to Ebert's whenever I had an extra dime or quarter and I would spend a lot of time looking at all the penny candy they displayed behind a glass counter. I had a difficult time making up my mind. There were red gummy dollars, two for a penny, black licorice, red licorice and root beer barrels, Tootsie Rolls, Lik-a-Maid, just to name a few of the many choices of candy they had for me to choose from. I loved them all, but I didn't have enough money to buy them all, so I had to make a choice. Now that I was older, I found myself still making a choice, this time between beautiful women.

I couldn't stop my mind from drifting back to Deputy Red Eagle and my last night with her. Now, here I was, three months later, lusting after another beautiful woman. Is that normal? Well, I now had a friend who could help me with that question, Dr. Lorraine Lundgren, a noted psychotherapist specializing in sex. How could it get any better?

Chapter 26

“You are good Max. I’m exhausted. Would you open the drawer in the night stand next to you and get a cigarette for me? You’re a love.”

I reached in and pulled out a pack of Camels and a Zippo Lighter. She was lying on her stomach and I offered her a stick and then lit it.

She turned over and sat up against the headboard of the bed. The sheet fell exposing her breasts. I looked down at her and smiled. She shook her head and blew smoke in the air.

“That was wonderful Max. You are a good, gentle lover. A take charge kind of guy. I like that. I’m impressed.”

She paused for a moment and stared into space before asking, “What do you think of me, Max?”

Oh, oh, I thought, I had better tread lightly here as this could be a set up.

“I like you a lot Lorraine. You have all the attributes that I look for in a woman, rich, divorced, wild and crazy and very, very cute.”

“Ha, ha. I should shoot you but I can’t reach my gun. I suppose you have many beautiful women sitting by their phones waiting for your call.”

Boy, for a psychotherapist she sure missed that one. All I could think about was my ex wife who left me for a car mechanic in Kenosha and Eloise, who got tired of sitting by her phone waiting for me to call before finally leaving me for a bartender. And then there was Thelma Thieland, who took off for Florida and parts unknown after sharing my bed and my World Series tickets last fall, looking for someone a bit taller, more muscular with a better tan and more money. Finally there was Deputy Debbie Red Eagle who felt the culture gap between us was too much to overcome. She was still burning a hole in my heart but was over a thousand miles away in Tombstone Arizona. Not a good track record when it comes to women for ol’ Max. Maybe this doctor can do what Rocco Man had suggested all along, help me in my relationships with women. I was always proud of my willingness to push the envelope when it comes to danger, but when it comes to women, well, I have to admit, they scare me.

“Lorraine,” I said. “To me the beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she carries, or the way she combs her hair. The beauty of a woman is seen in her eyes, because that is the doorway to her heart, the place where love resides. True beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul. It's the caring that she lovingly gives the passion that she shows and the beauty of a woman only grows with the passing years.”

I use this line the first time I end up in bed with a lady, it isn't polished yet, but I am working on it. I read that quote in Look Magazine a year ago when they did an interview with Audrey Hepburn. I was surprised how many women didn't read it or just simply forgot it. I have been meaning to drop Audrey a line and thank her for sharing her insightfulness into the fairer sex. It has proved to be very beneficial for Max Fly.

Lorraine stared at me and a tear rolled out of the corner of her eye. She reached up and softly touched my cheek. “Oh Max, that's beautiful. I heard you are a heartless, deceptive and self righteous asshole and those are your good qualities. Maybe that rumor isn't true.”

“You must have been talking to my ex wife.” I said.

She hit me. “You're insufferable, Max. I thought you were just another sexual predator, looking to put another notch on his gun by bedding another lonely woman.”

“I'm hurt Doc. Are you lonely?” I said, putting on my pity me face while thinking, if you quit knocking guys over the head with flower vases, you might not be so lonely, to say nothing about pulling a pistol and shoving it in their nuts while dining in a crowded restaurant.

“It's Lorraine. Sometimes I'm lonely. I'm sorry Max; let's not get all maudlin here. Anyway, I jumped to the wrong conclusion about you and for that I apologize.”

I haven't had many women apologize to me. In fact, she was the first, so I replied “Apology accepted Doc.”

“Lorraine,” she said.

“Well, it's time to quit apologizing and start showing contrition,” I said.

I grabbed the cigarette out of her hand and stubbed it out in the ashtray and turned off the light before pulling down the sheet and rolling over on top of the good doctor to start again with Max Fly's magical mystery tour.

Epilogue

“Max, phone call,” Rocco called out. “Take it in the back.”

“Thanks Rocco,” I replied as I walked back toward the ladies room where the phone was located.

“Hello, Max Fly, Private I,” I said, as I heard Rocco hang up the extension.

“Max, it’s me, Horace,” the excited voice yelled.

I pushed the receiver away from my ear. Horace is Horace Greenberg, who worked in the mail room at the Beaver Dam Daily Citizen before I helped him land a job as a beat reporter with the Milwaukee Sentinel.

“Hi Horace, what’s happening?”

“You have to get over here, quickly,” he yelled.

“Over where?” I asked.

“Behind Auer Avenue Elementary School, 2319 West Auer Avenue. They found the body.”

“What body?”

“What body? Whose do you think, Candy Kane’s, that’s whose? Did you forget? You asked me to help Hilma Heller find her niece.”

“That’s right. I almost forgot.” I replied.

“Almost forgot? You did forget.” Horace yelled into the phone.

Horace had this habit of yelling. He always yelled when he talked. It was very annoying. “Please get over here.” Horace yelled again before hanging up.

What I almost forgot was that I had asked Horace Greenberg to help one of my neighbors find out what happened to her niece who had disappeared after leaving the house on her way to school at the Layton School of Art, where she was taking classes toward a commercial art degree. She had recently moved in with her aunt, Hilma Heller, in her Pewaukee Lake cabin, which was located about three houses down on the same side of the lake as mine. I didn’t know Miss Heller 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 serial 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.

I was packed and ready to head out to Tombstone Arizona to help find Mike Scanlon's killer 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, I thought. At least he had a reason for hurting people. That's more than I could say about the human population.