

## 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?'

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