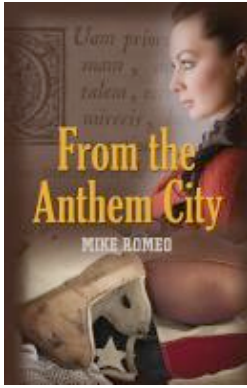


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From the Anthem City

MIKE ROMEO



When the prize money from a long-forgotten football tournament resurfaces, private investigator Clint Ronson gets the assignment to find out who won. Ronson's investigation quickly runs into a maze of dead-ends with off-beat characters, and danger, at every turn. Then, he receives a set of cryptic verses. Do they contain clues that point to the winner? Or, do they hold a secret that has shaped the results of football games for decades?

From the Anthem City

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FROM THE ANTHEM CITY

Mike Romeo

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2013

First Edition

Dedicated to:

my parents, Al and Mary Lou,

my wife, Gail,

and Jordan, Matt and John

Prologue

Friday, January 29, 1988

Seven hours waiting for a call. Clint glanced at the telephone on the hotel nightstand for maybe the thousandth time, watching the phone as if looking at it would make it ring. Seconds passed. Nothing happened. He resumed reading the newspaper:

*Critics and the cognoscenti will no doubt scoff at this book.
But readers looking for a fast-paced mystery with a thought-provoking twist won't be disappointed.*

Those sentences triggered two thoughts for Clint. First, he wished he had a book to pass the time, or a magazine. All he had was the newspaper that had been placed outside his door while he slept. Waiting for the call, Clint had read, skimmed or perused every article and advertisement in the paper. He had just finished the last one, the book review in the Weekend section.

Second, what in the hell were the *cognoscenti*?

Three days after leaving the army, Clint was in Pittsburgh. He was searching for the woman who had once saved his life. The last time he saw her she was a detective, happy to be back in her hometown and excited about her new career. Clint didn't see her name in the phonebook, so he took a chance and called police headquarters. He said he was a military acquaintance and wanted to say hello. Police officers were always sympathetic to military personnel. They recognized a similar breed.

It had been a few years. Was she still on the force? If she was, would this officer know her? She might have gotten married and changed her last name.

The desk sergeant sounded like Clint's call was one of a dozen things he was juggling. Not rushed, but trying to handle it with efficiency and detachment.

“Let me see if she's in. Hold on,” he said in a deadpan voice.

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So far, so good, Clint thought. He recognizes the name.

A minute later the sergeant was back.

“She’s out of the office. I don’t know when she’s returning. I’ll leave a note for her. How can she reach you?”

Clint gave him his hotel phone number.

“What’s your name?”

“Clint Ronson.”

“Okay, Mr. Ronson. I’ll let her know you called. If you don’t hear from her, you might try a place called Pennington’s later on. Her section likes to go there for Happy Hour.”

Clint waited and read. He didn’t want to leave the room and risk missing her call. He waited and read some more. He turned the TV on for background noise; watched the maid straighten the room and change the towels; ordered room service for lunch. After a few hours, he wondered why she hadn’t called. Maybe she was still out of the office. Maybe she had returned but had a bunch of urgent things to deal with. Maybe the note got buried under other paperwork. Maybe she wasn’t interested in talking to him.

Clint sat the newspaper aside. He checked his watch. It was 5PM - time for drink special.

Pennington’s was a bar and restaurant, recently remodeled but decorated to look like it had been around for years. At Happy Hour, no one was eating. The place was dimly lit, noisy and filled wall-to-wall with drinkers. They were young, professional types - women in smart business suits and men wearing jackets and loosened ties. They stood in tight circles, drinks in hand, feeling relaxed after a week of work; laughing and talking loudly over The Bangles and Belinda Carlisle on the sound system.

Clint ordered a beer. “Big turn-out tonight,” he said to the bartender.

“We’re always extra busy before the Super Bowl,” she said. “It’s like a holiday weekend.”

“I heard police detectives come here for Happy Hour,” Clint said. Maybe the bartender would know their favorite table.

“Wouldn’t surprise me,” she said. “Everybody’s here.”

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Clint leaned back against the bar. He'd try to scan over the people from here. First, pick out a group that looked like detectives; a group that was a little older, conservatively dressed, more serious-looking. Then sort through the faces. How much had her appearance changed in thirteen years? Did she still have short, blond hair? The athletic build? What about the eyes? Clint knew he'd recognize those eyes if he saw them again.

Scanning wasn't working. The crowd was too dense, the room too dark. Clint started threading his way between the circles. He held his beer close to his chest, his elbow tight against his ribs, to avoid having it jostled. He glanced at faces in the circles as he eased by them. He noticed a pretty blond - not the one he was looking for - and a talkative redhead. A friendly-looking brunette made lingering eye contact with him. Normally that was all the encouragement he needed to introduce himself. Not tonight. More blonds caught his attention, all of them too young to be her.

Clint made it around the bar, slowly picking his way through the crowd. He didn't see a group of detectives. He didn't see anyone who matched his memory of the blond. Maybe they had a quick drink and left. Maybe they hadn't been there at all.

Someone grabbed his arm as he passed by a table. Clint turned. He saw a big guy sitting alone holding a folded newspaper. His head was tilted back and he was squinting, as if he was examining Clint through the bottom of his large glasses. His mouth was partly open in a smirk. The man let go of Clint's arm and pointed at him.

"I know you!" he said. The man sounded surprised and excited, like he had sighted a celebrity among the patrons at Pennington's. Clint recognized him, too. He wasn't eager to get reacquainted.

The man wagged his finger at Clint. "You were the one doing that investigation." He pointed from Clint to an empty chair. "Have a seat. You won't believe what I got to tell you."

Probably not, Clint thought. He placed his beer on the table and sat down. The man laid his newspaper to the side and leaned across, arms tucked under his chest, getting almost face-to-face with Clint. He made wary glances to the left and right. He whispered something.

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“I can’t hear you,” Clint said. The man took a breath and glanced left and right again. He looked back at Clint, his large head tilted to the side.

“I said, you remember those quatrains?”

“Quatrains?”

“You know, those cryptic verses that Russian lady gave you.”

“Yeah, sort of,” Clint said.

“How you thought they contained clues about your case, but we couldn’t figure them out?”

Clint nodded. The man looked away momentarily, then leaned in closer. He locked eyes with Clint.

“I know who those verses are about,” he said. “I know who the prince untrue is.”

The prince untrue. Clint felt strange to hear that phrase after so many years. Wasn’t his identity a key to deciphering the verses?

“I see it’s coming back to you,” the man said. “You know what else?”

“What?”

“I was right. Those quatrains are prophetic.”

Chapter One

Monday Morning, September 9, 1974

“Look! It’s Steve McQueen! Where’s my autograph book?”

Karen was leaning forward at her desk on tightly crossed arms, a teasing smile on her face. She was a slender brunette, barely out of her teens, youthfully good-looking and full of nervous energy. Clint was surprised she wasn’t popping chewing gum. He didn’t know what Michael Walsh had seen in Karen when he hired her. She had a lot of rough edges to work in a law office, even as a receptionist. Clint thought she was too sure of herself. She seemed to believe she could get by forever with looks and a flippant attitude in place of poise and knowledge and everything else.

“Well, you look just like him. Same rugged face. Same deep-set eyes under long, thick brows. Same small mouth.” She bracketed the corners of her lips with her thumb and forefinger. “Same creases here,” she said. “But I think you’re taller. How tall are you?”

“Almost six feet.”

“I don’t think he’s that tall. It’s hard to tell in the movies. They make ‘em stand on boxes and stuff to look taller. And you have green eyes, not baby blues like he does. And your hair’s brown. Do you ride motorcycles? I saw a picture of Steve McQueen riding one.”

“Too dangerous for me.”

“Hey! Did you hear about Evel Knievel trying to jump that canyon yesterday?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought he was going to use a motorcycle. He used a rocket.”

“It was a rocket-powered cycle.”

“What was the big deal? We sent men all the way to the moon in a rocket. He couldn’t even get across a canyon. And it wasn’t even the Grand Canyon, like he said.”

“He couldn’t get permission to jump the Grand Canyon.”

“He’s Evel Knievel. What’s he need permission for? Oh well, at least we got football next weekend. The Steelers are playing the

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Colts. We should win big. The Colts aren't any good any more. I'm putting my money on the Steelers."

"I heard Gilliam might start," Clint said.

"I like Hanratty, but Noll always goes with Bradshaw." Karen's eyes flung open, as if surprised by the realization that Clint might be there on business. "Are you here to see Michael?"

"Do you think I came to talk about Evel Knievel and the Steelers?"

Karen picked up the phone and pressed one of the buttons along the bottom. Her voice suddenly became coolly professional. Maybe this was a glimpse of the potential Walsh saw in her.

"Tell Mr. Walsh that Mr. Ronson is here to see him." A pause. She pressed the button again and looked up at Clint. "He'll see you now."

Michael Walsh, former JAG officer, always projected a crisp air of authority. About eighteen months ago, Walsh had been a guest lecturer in one of Clint's criminal justice classes. He had each student stand up and explain their motivation for entering the law enforcement profession. After class, Walsh called Clint over. "I could use someone with your background," he said. He handed Clint his card. Clint called him. Walsh told him how to get licensed as a private investigator. He put him on his payroll and assigned him as many cases as he could handle with his school work. Clint was in business for himself now. He still got most of his work from Walsh.

Walsh introduced Clint to the others in the office. Anthony Prentiss, Jr., late sixties, wore a gray sports coat over an open-collared shirt. Prentiss had been standing in front of a wall with his arms crossed, examining Walsh's plaques and framed documents – his law degree, his farewell gifts from his army assignments, his Legion of Merit citation. Thomas DeAngelo, mid-thirties, was fit and tanned. DeAngelo was dressed in a navy blue pin-stripe suit with wide lapels and a fat tie. His thick black hair was meticulously styled. "Be careful around DeAngelo," Walsh once told Clint. "He's a shrewd lawyer. He'll charm you; get you to drop your guard. But he'll play rough if he needs to."

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“Clint Ronson, I’m pleased to finally meet you.” DeAngelo gripped Clint’s hand, then drew closer and placed his left hand on Clint’s elbow. “Michael speaks highly of you,” he said quietly, as if his words were meant only for Clint to hear. “You were Army CID, weren’t you? Thank you for heeding your country’s call in its time of need.”

The handshake that was more like an embrace, the warmth in the voice, the nice words - Clint momentarily felt a fuzzy rush. Walsh was right. DeAngelo could turn it on when he wanted to.

DeAngelo changed his tone to that soft, consoling way of speaking that people use when talking to the bereaved. “I’m here on behalf of City Councilman Stephen Harris,” he said. “Councilman Harris’ great-uncle, William Harris, was a friend and colleague of Mr. Prentiss’ father. When he saw the obituary, he asked me to extend his condolences to the family and see if they needed any assistance.”

Clint nodded and opened his notebook. He took a seat in the semi-circle of chairs in front of Walsh’s desk.

“Clint,” Walsh said. “Mr. Prentiss...”

“Call me Tony,” Prentiss said. “I like to keep things informal.”

“Okay. Tony asked me to settle the estate of his father, Anthony Prentiss, Sr. It looks pretty straightforward. There’s just one thing I need from you. I’ll let Tony explain.”

Tony Prentiss cleared his throat and shifted in his chair.

“In the early 1900s, my father was the business manager for a newspaper called the *Pittsburgh Sentry*. William Harris was the publisher. The paper organized a football tournament around 1905 or 1906. Somehow the cash prize was left at the newspaper’s office. My father held it, thinking he’d quickly get it to the winner.”

Clint wrote “Pittsburgh Century” as he jotted notes in his pad.

“Anyway, shortly after the tournament ended, William Harris died,” Tony said. “The paper went bankrupt. Its creditors went to court to see what they could recoup. My father did not reveal the existence of the cash. The ledger showed it had been withdrawn for the tournament and everyone believed it had been awarded. He said he intended to quietly present the prize to the winning team after the

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case was settled. The problem was he didn't know who won the tournament. He opened a personal savings account and deposited the money for safekeeping. Time passed. My father became busy with other things in his life. The money remained in the bank compounding interest. My father told me he always regretted not finding out who won and awarding them their rightful prize. He regretted it so much that he made it a provision in his will."

"Let me read it to you," Walsh said. He picked up a document from his desk. "All surviving members of the football team that won the tournament organized by the *Pittsburgh Sentry* shall share and share alike the full amount in the savings account in my name..." Walsh looked up from the will. "He lists the account number and the name of the bank here." He resumed reading. "If no survivors can be located, an existing team, organization or concern which has a direct connection to the winning team will receive the full amount. If no such team, organization or concern can be located, the full sum shall be shared and shared alike by the charities I previously specified."

"How much was the prize money?"

"The account shows an original deposit of eight thousand dollars," Tony said.

"Now it's almost sixty-four thousand," Walsh said.

"So you want me to find out who won?" Clint said.

"And who was on the team," Walsh said. "And if any are still alive, how do we get in touch with them?"

"There are agencies that specialize in tracking down people," Clint said. "I'll contact one when I get the roster of the winning team." Clint looked over his notes. "What does he mean by an organization or concern with a direct connection to the winning team?"

"My father said teams back then often had an athletic club or a company for a sponsor. If the team no longer exists, which is likely, its sponsor may still be in business."

"Tell me everything you know about this tournament," Clint said.

"I already have."

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“Do you know where it was played? What teams were involved?”

“I assume it was played in Pittsburgh or its vicinity since the *Sentry* was the organizer. I don’t know anything about the teams.”

Clint closed his notebook. “If a newspaper organized it, I’m sure they reported on it,” he said. “That would be the place to start.”

“Do you have any more questions for Tony?” Walsh asked.

“No,” Clint said. Prentiss seemed to be out of answers. No sense putting him on the spot.

DeAngelo said, “With Tony’s permission, I request you keep me updated on the progress of your investigation and share your findings with me before anything goes public, as a courtesy to Councilman Harris.” DeAngelo glanced at Prentiss. Prentiss gave an uncertain nod, like he wasn’t expecting the request.

“The execution of a will is a private matter,” Clint said. “This isn’t a probate case. There’s no need to make anything public.”

“True,” DeAngelo said. “But public notices will be required to find surviving football players. If any are located and they get their prize money, they’ll go straight to the press. Or their families will. This has the makings of a great human interest story.”

“Why does Councilman Harris care about a football tournament played almost seventy years ago?” Clint said.

“This could be historic,” DeAngelo said. “He wants to know what role his great uncle played. And he’s a football fan.” He gave Clint a sly smile, like he was sharing an inside joke. Work with me, he seemed to be saying. You’re a guy, I know you get it: being a sports fan justifies any kind of excessive behavior.

Clint wasn’t going to be won over so easily. Councilman Harris’ interest in the whole matter seemed out of place. According to Tony, Harris the newspaper publisher died almost seven decades ago. Yet the councilman sent his personal attorney to offer condolences and assistance to the family of his great-uncle’s friend. Why the great esteem for such a distant relationship? Who even remembers things like that? Unless there has been something on-going between the Harrises and the Prentisses.

“Tony, how well do you know Councilman Harris?”

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“Just what I’ve heard in the news. I don’t know him personally.”

So much for the enduring relationship, Clint thought. DeAngelo’s presence had nothing to do with Prentiss. He tipped his hand when he was too quick to ask for updates. DeAngelo was here because Harris was interested in the investigation, which could only mean he was interested in the money. How does he even know about it? Did Walsh let DeAngelo see the will? Does Harris know it’s sixty-four thousand dollars? If Councilman Harris believed he had a legitimate claim to the money, maybe because he was related to William Harris, why not bring it up now? Why wait to see where the investigation led? Clint wanted to tell DeAngelo to come clean; to tell what Harris knew and how he knew it and why he was trying to interject himself into the investigation. Walsh wouldn’t approve of the demand. Anything about Harris was outside the bounds of his assignment. Still, he wanted to put DeAngelo on notice. He wasn’t buying all the innocuous-sounding explanations. Clint looked straight at him.

“What are you not telling me?”

“What are you talking about?”

“My gut says there’s more to know about this case.”

“Mr. Ronson, there’s only one more thing to know – who won the tournament? It’s your job to find out.”

Chapter Two

Monday, Late Morning, September 9, 1974

Forget about DeAngelo and Harris, Clint thought. They're outside your lane. Whatever their motives, they're Tony Prentiss' problem. This assignment was easy money. Clint figured he could wrap it up quickly. All he needed was an independent source that named the tournament winner. An article from the sports page of a 1906 newspaper would do the job. His first stop, probably his only stop, would be the newspaper and periodical archive in the library of one of the local universities - Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon, Duquense. Clint picked the closest one, the one that was the legacy of the steel baron. He turned off Forbes Avenue onto the grassy campus. He crept his AMC Javelin past the cream-colored, brick Beaux Arts buildings, keeping it in low gear, until he found a parking spot.

Clint didn't care for this kind of work. He didn't like the tedium of sifting through files looking for a nugget of information. Even so, a big part of his job involved piecing together paper trails. Surveillance wasn't much better; lots of waiting and watching. Until he got the pay-off of catching the subject red-handed in the viewfinder. Clint liked site visits where he went to a location to collect information or reconstruct events. He also liked interviews – the human interaction, the give and take, trying to tease an answer out of a subject, catching an inconsistency in their words.

The archive was a windowless room with rows of gray metal file cabinets under hanging fluorescent lights. The cabinets held reels of microfilm. A table with three microfilm viewers sat against a wall. The archivist looked as dreary as the room. He was a pale man with a gaunt face and penetrating light blue eyes behind wire-frame glasses. Probably not much chance for human interaction with him, Clint thought. Clint said he wanted to see the *Pittsburgh Century*. After a moment of confusion and a brief chuckle, the archivist politely corrected Clint. He then directed him to the drawer containing the *Pittsburgh Sentry* microfilm. Inside, Clint found a tray with eleven small boxes. Each contained a reel that preserved the page images of

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three months of newspapers. The last box was labeled “July to September 1906”. He would start with that one and work backwards.

Clint loaded the film. The newspaper’s nameplate caught his attention. The words *Pittsburgh Sentry* were printed in bold, Germanic-looking letters. Beneath them in smaller font it read “Always Vigilant.” The *Sentry* seemed a strange name for a civilian newspaper. The *Century* was too, but it sounded weightier than the *Sentry*. Now the motto made *Sentry* sound perfect. It said this newspaper was like a soldier pulling guard; always alert, always watchful of the public interest. Clint smiled approvingly.

He began to scroll through the pages. Almost immediately Clint came across an announcement for the tournament: \$8,000 winner-take-all prize; all collegiate, amateur and professional teams invited; the staff of the *Sentry* will select the best sixteen entrants; no entry fee; each team is responsible for its travel, room and board; first and second rounds to take place on Saturday and Sunday, September 15 and 16, at the Fayette County Fair in Dunbar; semi-finals and championship the following weekend at the Westmoreland County Fair in Greensburg. The *Sentry* billed it as The World Championship of Football. Clint wrote down the number of the page image and the headline so he could get it printed.

He continued to scroll. In the September 9 edition Clint found the first article. “For the first time since the Madison Square Garden World Series of 1903, there will be a competition to determine the true champion of all of football,” the article began. Then it described the format for the tournament. If sixteen teams had entered as intended, the format would have been straightforward: eight games with the winners advancing to the second round, then four games, then two, followed by the championship. But only eleven teams were listed, so the tournament officials had to be creative with the first and second rounds. Five games would be played on September 15. The top-ranked team would get a bye until September 16. The second round would feature four games involving the five winners, the top-ranked team, and the two teams that lost by the smallest margins in round one. The four winning teams would then advance to the third round on September 22. The championship would be the next day.

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The article named the eleven competitors. McCann's Fighting Irish of Homestead was the top-seed. The others were, in alphabetical order, Ambridge FC, Clairton AA, East Liverpool (Ohio) AC, Ford City AA, Monessen Terrors, Mount Lebanon AC, New Kensington AC, Waylan AC, Weirton (West Virginia) AC, and the West Virginia Collegians.

Eleven teams, not sixteen like the *Sentry* had announced, and all from no more than a hundred miles from Pittsburgh. Some world championship. Clint noted that with the possible exception of the Fighting Irish, the two teams in the championship would be playing games on consecutive days on back-to-back weekends. Football must have been a different game in 1906. He couldn't picture teams playing that type of schedule today - no time to recover physically from one game before playing another, no time to build a game plan for the next opponent.

From September 11 through the 15th, the *Sentry's* sports pages featured the build-up to the tournament. On Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday the paper ran articles about two of the teams. On Thursday, it printed articles about three teams.

The articles sang the praises of each of the teams, touting their credentials as a contender for the world championship. They identified key players and coaches. They glowingly described past accomplishments. All but one of the articles included a team roster. For most of the teams, the articles listed favorable won-loss records from previous years and scores of important games. Clint read things like "Ford City upset Kittanning by the score of 12 to 10 to become the dominant team in Armstrong County." For a few of the teams, Clint noticed there was no mention of past seasons or big games. The articles only identified notable players and where they had played before, such as "George Cannella anchored the fabled Latrobe line for three years before joining Mount Lebanon." Were these new teams? He wondered if they were organized for the sole purpose of competing in the tournament.

The article on West Virginia was the one without a roster. It began: "From Morgantown come the West Virginia Collegians. Last year, West Virginia University posted a record of eight wins and one

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defeat...” The rest of the article was an account of the games and scores of the 1905 WVU season. Clever opening, Clint thought. Were the Collegians actually the university football team? Why weren’t they called the Mountaineers? Why no roster? Were the identities of the players intentionally omitted since they were amateurs playing for prize money?

Every article ended with the same teaser: “The (fill in the team name) expects several college players of renown to join them for this world championship tournament.” If the line-up of teams and talent wasn’t enough to draw spectators, maybe the prospect of seeing “college players of renown” would be.

Beginning on Sunday, September 16 and continuing over the next five days, the *Sentry* ran stories about the nine first and second round games. These were not the usual dry, factual accounts of games. They were lengthy, vivid narratives; a daily chapter or two in the serialized saga of the World Championship of Football. Each story set the stage with descriptions of the weather and the excited crowds. Then the two contending teams were introduced, essentially summaries of the information reported the previous week. Next came the game action, written in prose that was full of color and hyperbole and quotes. Critical moments in the games were breathlessly dramatized into events of epic proportion.

Clint scrolled through the week, pausing to sample a few of the paragraphs from each of the stories. He learned that Ambridge, Clairton, Monessen, New Kensington and Waylan won their first round games. The Collegians and Mount Lebanon also advanced to the next round since they had the closest losses.

The first round winners were seeded in round two based on their margins of victory. The top-seed Fighting Irish played their first game against the Collegians, who lost their first round game by more points than Mount Lebanon. Waylan, played Mount Lebanon. Third seed New Kensington played sixth seed Monessen, and fourth seed Ambridge played Clairton. The second round winners were Ambridge, the Irish, the Terrors, and Waylan.

The edition of Saturday, September 22 provided a preview of the third round games to be played that day. The Sunday edition reported

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the results of Saturday's games. The lead story provided the expected lavish account of the win by McCann's Fighting Irish over the Ambridge Football Club. But the second game warranted a single sentence under the heading *Monessen Wins*: "In a third round game of the World Championship of Football tournament, the Monessen Terrors defeated the Waylan Athletic Club."

Strange, Clint thought. Big stories about every game so far, but nothing about a semifinal game. Maybe this game ended too late to file a complete story. The full report would probably be in Monday's paper.

Clint was already congratulating himself for finding the information so quickly, and it wasn't as tedious as he expected. Two teams remained - McCann's Fighting Irish of Homestead and the Monessen Terrors. Who was the winner? They played on Sunday. Monday's edition would carry the full story. He scrolled ahead, turning the knobs quickly, anticipation building. Page images flashed by.

Suddenly the screen showed nothing but white light. No page images for the edition of Monday, September 24, 1906, or any subsequent edition. The rest of the microfilm was blank. Clint checked the tray in the drawer to see if a later reel had been misfiled. They were in perfect chronological order. The one he looked at was the latest. He checked with the archivist.

"The last edition of the *Sentry* was September 23, 1906," the archivist said. He had delicate way of speaking, carefully enunciating each syllable. "The paper folded." The archivist smiled faintly. "Pardon the pun. I meant it went out of business."

"What was the major daily newspaper in Pittsburgh in 1906?"

"There were several back then." The archivist placed a folder on the countertop and turned it so Clint could see. It contained a list, several pages long, of the newspapers the library stored on microfilm. "You can try the *Chronicle Telegraph*, the *Daily Dispatch*, the *Leader*, the *Post*, the *Press*, the *Sun-Telegraph*, *The Gazette Times*, the *Times*. No, the last edition we have of the *Times* is from April 1906."

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“You’ve got to be kidding,” Clint said. “Those are all major dailies?”

“The print media was a flourishing business in the early 1900s,” the archivist said. “Remember, it was the only media at the time. No TV. No radio. It wasn’t unusual for a city to have multiple daily newspapers.”

“Okay. We’re do I find them?”

The archivist ran his finger down the side of the page. “See these numbers? They’re the file cabinets that contain the microfilm for these newspapers.”

Clint started with *The Gazette Times*. He quickly scrolled to September fifteenth, then slowly moved page by page to the end of September. No mention of the tournament. He looked at the September twenty-fourth edition. Still nothing. Clint was about to quit when page one of Tuesday, September 25 rolled onto the screen. He didn’t do so much as glance at the page, but somehow his eye picked up the word “Sentry”. The full subheading was *Sentry Ceases Publication*. Above it, in larger font, was the actual article headline - *Publisher Found Dead*. Clint read it quickly, then reread it to absorb the stunning story: the body of William Harris found in the Monongahela River on Monday morning; wedged between the river wall and a barge; gunshot to the head; a night watchman reported hearing a shot on the Panhandle Bridge around two in the morning; he didn’t see anyone leaving the bridge; police investigating; the financially-troubled *Sentry* immediately ceased operations.

Clint leaned back in his chair, trying to assess this new information. Tony said Harris died soon after the tournament. Clint took that to mean days, maybe weeks, later. It was only hours later, and he was shot in the head. Murder? Suicide? Was his death somehow related to the tournament, or was the timing tragically coincidental? Clint went back to the microfilm reader and scrolled through a few more editions, hoping to find a follow-up article. He stopped. The police investigation might take weeks. There might not be a follow-up article. In any case, this piece of information was peripheral to Clint’s investigation. He wrote down the page image number.

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It was the same story for the other six newspapers. Nothing about the tournament. Front page stories about the death of William Harris and the end of the *Sentry*. Clint took the slip of paper and the reels of microfilm to the archivist. For fifteen cents per sheet, the archivist would print the requested articles.

"I'm trying to find out who won a football tournament organized by the *Sentry* in 1906," Clint said. "The championship game was played on the same day the newspaper went out of business. I thought one of the other major dailies would've covered it. It was billed as a world championship, but it was more like a regional championship."

"It doesn't surprise me," the archivist said, waiting for a sheet to emerge out of the printer. "The competition between so many newspapers was intense, as you can imagine. In its short existence, the *Sentry* always struggled to find enough readers to be profitable. It began as a respectable newspaper but it turned to sensational stories. Anything to improve circulation. Today, we would call it a tabloid. My guess is that the tournament was another ploy to attract readers. Competing papers would have ignored it. Otherwise, they would essentially be promoting a rival's publicity effort."

"Where else could I look?"

"You said it was a regional tournament? A county or small town newspaper might have covered it if they had a team involved. They weren't competing with the Pittsburgh papers, so they might not have cared that it was the *Sentry's* tournament."

Clint went back to the list and found a newspaper from Allegheny County, which covered Homestead, the town of the Fighting Irish. He also found a Westmoreland County paper, which covered Monessen, the other finalist, and Greensburg, the site of the tournament championship. These papers were weeklies and only a few pages long. Scrolling through them would not take much time.

Like the Pittsburgh papers, the Allegheny paper didn't mention the tournament. One edition of the Westmoreland paper contained an announcement about the county fair and listed the tournament as one of the attractions. The next edition ran a brief article recognizing the Monessen Terrors for winning their first two games. Clint noted the

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paper called the competition “the *Pittsburgh Sentry’s* football tournament,” not “the World Championship of Football.” He didn’t find a follow-up on the Terrors’ results in games three and four.

“Dammit,” Clint said to himself. He thought he had hit the mother lode on this first try, all those stories in the *Sentry*. Now reality was setting in. After hours of scrolling and reading, he was so close, so tantalizingly close. All those stories, all that information about teams and games, but not the one piece of information he needed. Clint squeezed his eyes shut. “Dammit!” he said again. He looked over his shoulder at row upon row of gray file cabinets, all of them full of newspaper microfilm. Was there anything else here worth checking into? Anything he had overlooked?

“Any luck?” The archivist was looking over Clint’s other shoulder.

“None.”

“I have one other suggestion. There’s a young man who’s sort of an amateur football historian. I think of him as the football nut, although I would never say that to his face. He comes in here occasionally to research old football topics - games, teams, what have you.”

“Someone likes doing this?”

The archivist let the comment pass. He said, “The next time I see him, I could ask him to give you a call.”

“How often does he come in?”

“It’s hard to say. Sometimes two or three times a week. Sometimes I don’t see him for a month or more.”

Clint wrote his name and phone number on a piece of paper and gave it to the archivist. He wasn’t going to wait to hear from this guy, especially if it might take a month. He would continue to research it. He was still hopeful about finding the answer quickly.

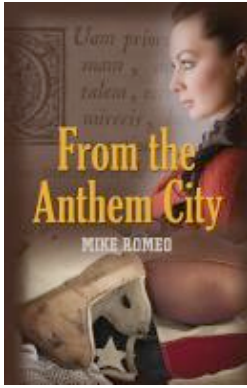
Back in his apartment, Clint made some phone calls. To hold his expenses down, he didn’t keep an office. If he needed to see a client, he arranged to meet them in a public place - a restaurant, a library, a mall, whatever suited them. Most of his investigative work required him to be out in the city or suburbs. All he needed an office for was

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to make and receive telephone calls, write reports and keep files. He could do those things in his apartment.

First, Clint called the sports department of Pittsburgh's remaining daily paper. He asked a staff researcher if there was any information about the tournament in their historical file. After ten minutes on hold, the staffer said he couldn't find anything. Next Clint called the main library of Fayette County. The university archive didn't have microfilm of the county's newspapers in its collection. By now, a county or small town newspaper seemed like a longshot to Clint. He hoped the Fayette County residents of 1906 had shown special interest in the tournament since the first two rounds were played at their fair. If they had, maybe some newspaper covered it to its conclusion. The Fayette County librarian referred him to the historical society. No one answered at the society's number. Clint guessed they were closed for the day.

He tried again the next day. An elderly-sounding lady cheerfully offered to look through the society's old newspapers for him. She called back a few hours later. Just like in the Westmoreland County paper, she had found an advertisement for the fair that listed the football tournament as an attraction, but no game results. Another dead end.



When the prize money from a long-forgotten football tournament resurfaces, private investigator Clint Ronson gets the assignment to find out who won. Ronson's investigation quickly runs into a maze of dead-ends with off-beat characters, and danger, at every turn. Then, he receives a set of cryptic verses. Do they contain clues that point to the winner? Or, do they hold a secret that has shaped the results of football games for decades?

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