

A deadly rivalry of one.

Susta

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Susta

A novel

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Prologue

December 29, 1935

Christmas was hardly over and Ethel Grimsby was flustered. So much to do and now the New Year celebrations! Not that the office was very busy at this time of year or in these times. Business in all was slow except for morticians and some criminal lawyers. Seems crime and death were abundant commodities at this time of year, and crime was especially rampant around the holidays. Of course you could blame a lot of those problems on the depression.

She always thought about poor Benton Smithy at this time of year, Mr. Cantwell's partner, well ex-partner now. So young and with such a promising future. Fortunately he was not yet married, not that he had any difficulty finding pretty women to date. That old bridge at the Miller's Creek crossing was what took his life. A rickety old wood structure that was too narrow even when all that crossed it were horse drawn wagons.

The most outstanding fault of the bridge was not actually the bridge itself but the fact that a car had to turn 90 degrees from the road to get onto the fool thing. No wonder people went off the edge every once in a while. It was only a fourteen foot drop to the creek bed but what was called a creek was surely deep enough and plenty wide enough to be a river.

Jimmy Joe Fuller, head of the Liberty County Highway Department had been warning the Board of Supervisors that it needed replacement for the past three years. The county just did not have the financial recourses to take on such a big project without a substantial contribution from the U.S. Government. Seems Washington had other things to do with taxpayer money. They could not seem to believe that some little old bridge on a backwater road in Georgia rated any kind of priority.

Ethel looked up at the big wall clock in the small waiting room. The hands had not moved a fraction since the last time she looked up. Time was standing still in a most stubborn manner and she had so many things to do. Lordy! I sure hope Amos sends me home early, she thought to herself. Almost four o'clock anyway and she'd have to leave by then. She never called him by his first name when other people were in the office, but she always addressed him as Mr. Cantwell when there were clients present.

Her reverie was interrupted by a knock on the door that opened to the street. How strange she thought, rising and walking toward the door. Why would a person knock on the door of a

business or professional office? Maybe it wasn't a knock she was thinking as she unlatched and opened the massive oak slab and was astounded to see an old black man standing there, holding something that resembled a hat in his hand and some sort of package under his arm.

"Yes sir! Can I help with something?" she asked politely, thinking that surely this person was in the wrong place.

"Yes' m'am. Ah was lookin' fo' Mr. Amos. Dis be da place o' he business?"

"Why yes! Please come in . . . Mr.?" The old man just stood there and after some hesitation walked in, fidgeting and very uncomfortable, unaware that the lady was waiting for an answer to her question.

"Can I tell Mr. Cantwell who is calling sir?"

"Oh! . . . Dez. . . . Tell him it be Dez." The accent was surely Old South, definitely from around these parts.

"Just a moment and I'll let him know you're here. Did you have an appointment? I don't have anybody scheduled for Mr. Cantwell at this time, but I'll....."as she knocked on a closed door, opened it and said, "Mr. Cantwell, there's a gentleman here to see you. A Mr. Dez. Can you see him now?"

"Mr. who?" was the reply.

"Mr. Dez is what he said. Do you know a Mr. Dez?"

Amos thought for a moment and then it registered. Old Dez, the man who sold the fish and crabs from time to time around town. "Yes! Sure send him in."

Amos stood as was his custom on greeting clients and walked toward the man just entering his office. "Well hello there Dez and what brings you into town at this late hour of the day?" He offered his hand which was grasped and firmly shaken by the old man.

"Hello Mr. Amos. Ah didn' know iffing y'all would remembah ol' Dez. Been a while since Ah seen you. Not since de funeral o' Mr. Ben. Sure was sorry 'bout dat nice young man. He was right nice ta me. Knowed him since he was a li'l feller. Use' to come out the bayous ta do some fishin' from time ta time. "

"We all miss him Dez. Come in and have a seat. Now what can I do for you?"

"Well, Mr. Amos" as he backed onto a chair facing the lawyer, "Ahm a gittin' along in years and jes' cain't hardly does de work no more. Got a uncle over ta Little Rock say Ah kin go stay ta he place, he got hisself a lunch room dere, do a little cleanin' up for m' keep. Fish smoking

an' sellin' gittin' too hard f' me to keep up. Ahm wantin' ta sell out. Wondered iff'n y'all kin hep me out ta git rid de lan' my pap lef' ta me down by the Sound. Kin y'all hep me out any?"

"Lord ha' mercy, Dez, ain't much call for land around here these days. Besides, I'm a lawyer not a real estate agent. I could handle all the legal work, but I am not equipped for the sellin' part. Have you tried any of the real estate agents in town?"

"Well sah, Ah would be willen' ta turn it all over to y'all and jes' give me what's lef' after you takes out y'all's bill. Y'all's de ony one Ah knows in de law bidness. Don' know no real 'state folk. Iff'n' y'all interested Ah jes' turn over the lan' ta y'all. Dat's some nice lan', Mr. Amos, lots o' fishin and crabbin' back in dem bayous. Dey's even a cabin fer ta stay out fo' a time, iff'n, any folk takes a notion."

"I just don't know. Let me think about it over night Dez, and I'll go out and take a look tomorrow. I remember going out there fishing years back. How much land is there? Do you have a survey of the property?"

"My pap say they's 'bout seventeen acre. Tens is on good dry lan'. Dat what my pap say. Ah brung all de papers, Mr. Amos. Don' know zactly how much lan' be out der exact for sho', jes' what Ah tol y'all. But she big, Ah knows dat. Cain't y'all tell from dem?" Thereupon Dez handed over a worn out old leather notebook case.

When Amos opened it he was amazed at the apparent age of the papers. Looked like birth certificates, some letters, a crude sketch of what might be the property and what seemed to be a legal description on two tattered yellowed pages of probably what was the land in question. "This looks like some sort of deed and a letter explaining the borders of the old Spiller Sugar and Salt Company land. Have you ever read this? Do you know where the boundary lines are Dez?"

"Mr. Amos, sah, Ah ain't never had no schoolin'. Never did learn ta read and write, so Ah don' know what all dem papers say. Ah kin make y'all a very good price ta take it and do whatever y'all want wid it. All Ah needs is a little add vance so's Ah kin head fer Little Rock. Bus ticket costs 'bout \$6.70, man down ta bus station tol' me. Iff'n' y'all could spare a little money, Ah kin jes' leave it wid y'all and head fo' Little Rock. Y'all send me the money by an'by."

"Hold on there, Dez. You are getting way ahead of me here. I am not in the market for any land just now. Best I can do is go out there and have a look. Besides I don't have any extra cash to invest in anything speculative at this time. Just supposing I found somebody that was interested. How would I be able to get in touch with you over in Little Rock? How could you cash a check if you can't read and write?"

“Oh. Ah kin writes mah own name Mr. Amos. Miss Liz over da courthouse, she done show me the way ta write mah own name. Yes sah! Ah kin sho’ nuf do dat.”

“I would need your uncle’s address. Be sure I’d have that. Can your uncle read and write, so he could keep you informed of any communications I might need to have with you?”

“Yes sah. Ah believes so.”

“Well then, you come back about two o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Can you do that?”

“Yes sah. Mr. Amos. Ah be right here, dat time. Yes sah. Y’all can count on ol’ Dez.”

The following morning Amos finished a few things at his office and then headed out to Weller’s Inlet. He had studied the papers Dez left with him and after going over everything several times he believed he had a clear picture of the property. The picture brightened considerably once he reached the most seaward limits of the land contained therein.

What he saw was some of the most pristine savanna he could imagine. There were several parts of the entire property that were just plain swamp, and salt marsh, interspersed with bayous, some of which appeared to be spring fed. Then after walking up a short steep incline he was standing on a large hummock that extended back to where the old shack was located.

Turning to the east was a panorama he could not imagine ever existed in this part of Coastal Georgia. It was absolutely gorgeous! The view extended over St. Catherine’s Sound and he could actually see blue water. It was indeed a very big surprise.

He returned to his office and after a quick review of the paperwork Dez had left he called Ethel into his office. His instructions to her were: to go over to the courthouse with the deed, legal description and sketch of Dez’s property. She was to show all the documents to Liz Downey who he was certain could trace the chain of title and all other pertinent information about the property, including any back taxes that may have accumulated. Then she was to go to the tax assessor’s office to get the current assessment of value.

That might give him some insight as to what the property was worth. “Also stop by the bank and ask Jeb Harris if my line of credit is still open and check our balance in the checking account. Need to make sure we have a current balance and that there are no outstanding checks. I’m not inferring that your balance is incorrect, Ethel. Just want to make sure we are in agreement with the bank.”

When Ethel returned she had mostly good news for Amos. The title looked good and the only problem was that the taxes had not been paid for the past five years. Since it was rural property and that times were tough to say the least, the County Assessor had not taken any legal

action against the owner of record, one Desmon Boudrie. The county was experiencing financial difficulties due to many other good citizens not paying their taxes either and no foreclosure proceeding were enforced against the properties of any individuals who were in the throes of financial difficulty due to the onset of the Great Depression. The county was not going to pursue legal action against Desmon Boudrie for a mere \$348.56, interest included.

Dez was not only on time but about thirty minutes early. After a short wait, Amos called him into his office. "Well Dez, I have walked over a good portion of your land and I do like what I saw. Now I can't think of anybody in the market, least not that I know of, for any acreage at the moment. According to the assessor's office, land down in your area is worth about \$100. per acre. Now as you know some of it isn't much use, being it's swampy and could even get flooded from time to time. I figure there are about nine, ten usable acres. Do you agree with that?"

"Yes sah, Mr. Amos. Ah reckon dat's 'bout right. My pap figured dat much."

"You know there are unpaid property taxes on your land too. It amounts to \$348.56."

"Well sah, Ah know Ah ain't paid no taxes fo' a good while," was Dez's response. "Ah reckon dat be de correc' numbah."

"I am prepared to offer you \$1,000 for the whole parcel, Dez. And I'll pay the back taxes. Only problem is, that just now I do not have that much ready cash on hand. If you are willing to take a little down payment and a couple of additional payments in say, six months and the final payment in a year, then I could work it out. Are you willing to go along with this idea?"

"Yes sah, Mr. Amos, dat be fine wid me. Jes so's Ah kin git a little cash ta git ta mah uncle's place. Ah be okay den."

"How are you going to handle the money if I give you a down payment of say, \$200. Will you be able to hold onto all that cash? Have you got someplace for safekeeping that much money?"

"No sah. Ah ain't never had no bank 'count or nothin'. Ah reckon Ah hafta carry it aroun'. Lordy dat be a lot o' money for ol' Dez ta be cartin'. No sah, Mr. Amos, Ah sure don't have no place ta keep 'er safe."

"Well, here's a thought. I can keep most of it in the law firm's trust account. That means that nobody can use it or do anything with the money without your knowledge. It will actually be in a bank account and you will own the money. When you want it you let me know and I will write a check and send it to you in Little Rock. I'll give you enough cash to go to your uncle's place and some for just walking around. You won't be reckless with it will you Dez?"

“No sah! Ah don’ need but twenty-fi’ dollar. Dat be enough ta make mah trip. Yes sah. Dat be real good!” Amos stood then, acknowledging the meeting was over. They shook hands and Amos walked him to the street door.

“All right then. You be here around nine o’clock in the morning. I’ll have all the paperwork ready for you to sign. Also, I’ll have \$50. cash for you. Just don’t let anybody take it away from you. Being as it will be New Year’s Eve, the court house will be closing early and we’d like to be out of here early too. I want to make sure everything goes on record and we get the entire transaction done before the holiday weekend”

“Yes sah, Mr. Amos! Ol’ Dez be here den. Thanks Mr. Amos. Y’all been mighty good ta me.”

“Very well, Dez. Happy New Year to you. See you in the morning.”

Everything went as planned. Dez got his money and signed his own name on all the documents just like Liz Downey had taught him. The meeting took a few hours due to Amos explaining everything to Dez, step by step to be sure he understood what each document meant. Ethel was there for the entire meeting, notarizing and witnessing at all times required to keep everything nice and legal.

Later that morning just as Ethel was about to take all the documents that needed recording over to the courthouse, Bertram Grimsby, Ethel’s husband and the Chief Deputy Sherriff of Liberty County, Georgia, entered Amos Cantwell’s office and said to his wife, excitedly, “Ethel, I have got to see Amos immediately! Is he in?” Whereupon, Amos came into the small waiting room, to see what all the excitement was about.

“Amos, you are needed at the courthouse immediately,” was blurted out by Chief Deputy Bertram Grimsby. “They’s been a shootin’, some young ‘urns all liquored up come into town on a wild spree. I have arrested the whole lot and put ‘em in a cell to cool off a bit. One of ‘em is asking for you at the jail. Kid got banged up a little in the ruckus. Name like Slugg or Sloke or some such. Looks bad, Amos. Really bad! Judge Albright wants you over to the courthouse right quick!”

Amos quickly donned his coat and hat, both black, the hat being one of those styles that the European diplomats and royalty types wore, a Homburg or Hamburg, or some sort they were called. It made him look “in charge”, at least he thought so. His wife considered it a bit clownish but never dared to mention her opinion publicly. All during the short walk Amos wondered what Jonathon Albright thought was so urgent. The Chief Deputy and his wife Ethel were in close company with Amos and she also was agonizing over what was happening at the courthouse.

That became apparent the moment they entered the massive front doors. Yelling of the swearing variety and other loud noises were emanating from the second floor and seemed to be coming from the area near the recording clerk's office. As they headed for the grand staircase they were met by Deputy Banks who blurted out the story.

Seems that when he and another deputy were bringing the six drunken prisoners up to Judge Albright's chambers for a good talking to, one had bolted into the clerk's office and refused to come out until his attorney arrived. There was a protracted scuffle between Deputy Banks and the young ruffian named Garrett Skokes, that made the clerk's office look like Armageddon had arrived much earlier than the forecasts made by several prophets including Nostradamus.

Early afternoon December 31, 1935

Judge Jonathon Albright looked down from his high perch in courtroom B of the Liberty County Courthouse. He glared through his thick glasses at six bedraggled young men who had been on a drunken shooting spree on the outskirts of town, but close enough to attract the attention of one of the more astute members of the Liberty County Sherriff's Department. Deputy Homer Banks just happened to be on patrol in that area when he heard several shots that he assumed were hunters until a 1932 Ford truck passed him going in the opposite direction.

He spotted two men in the cab and four or five, he couldn't tell at first glance, were riding in the back, shooting shotguns or rifles into the sky, an obvious harbinger of the forthcoming midnight jovialities that customarily greeted the New Year, every December 31, from about 9PM onwards. The difference that day was that it was only eleven o'clock in the morning, further reason for the deputy to be concerned due to the county ordinance that prohibited the discharge of fire arms within 500 feet of any residence or business.

Deputy Banks made a quick U-turn, flipped the on switch of his siren and flashers, beginning pursuit of the offending truckload of scofflaws. Being as he was somewhat outnumbered chasing several armed men, he called into headquarters asking for backup, whereupon the remaining two patrol cars driven by the other two deputies closed in on the offending group and forced them to a stop, conveniently just two blocks from the county jail, located in the basement of the courthouse.

Homer Banks had just finished his heroic story for the benefit of those present in the courtroom, and Judge Albright, in a very disgruntled mood was about to address the slovenly group of still somewhat inebriated miscreants.

“The whole lot of you should go to jail for lord knows how long. Every one of you has at least six charges pending against you! Not only was your activity illegal, but you could have endangered innocent citizens with your reckless behavior. And you Skokes,” pointing to an especially grubby looking individual, “have been in here far too many times in the past few months for me to let you off with any more warnings, and empty promises from you to behave.

“I have a good notion to lock you up and let you stew in a cell for a good long spell. Now, I am only going to ask you this once, and if I hear any stupid answer I will do just that. Where did you get the pistol? Do you know it is unlawful to possess a handgun without registering it in this county?

“Um. . . Ah din . . jes found . . . somebody done tho’wed it in the woods . . .when Ah was a-huintin’ over Jenkinsville.” Garrett Skokes was in a drunken stupor, almost unable to stand unassisted.

“Stand up an’ show some respect when the judge is speakin’ to ya’ll,” interrupted Deputy Banks, punctuating his demand with a prod to the back of the prisoner.

“Amos, are you representing this boy?” The judge acknowledged Amos Cantwell for the first time since he entered the courtroom.

“Yes, your honor, to my surprise. I have not represented him in the past but have been appointed by the Court to act as Public Defender for his father, a few years ago. I have only spoken to him briefly and I am not yet aware of all the charges pending against him. Seems he or they, were heading over to the community hospital where his girlfriend just gave birth. That was supposedly what the celebration was all about. To the best of my knowledge he has no means to pay legal fees, Your Honor. May I indulge the Court to appoint me as Public Defender for him at this time?”

“So granted,” the judge responded. Then to the bailiff, “Please make a note of that John.” Then turning back to Skokes the judge asked him another question.. “Is that your girlfriend . . . you are not married to this woman, Mr. Skokes, the girl who just had a baby?”

“She’s. . . um . . . mah woman’s all.”

“Hardly a woman at age sixteen, from what I have gathered from Deputy Banks,” the judge suggested, with some disgust.

“I guess . . .”

Another prod, almost a punch delivered by Deputy Banks, followed that statement. “You say ‘sir’, when you talk to the Judge, ya hear?”

“Yes sir, judge!” Barely audible and cringing from the blow to his kidney, Skokes tried to stand up straighter, assuming the position of ‘attention’ as he had seen in movies about the military.

The judge glanced at some papers and then spoke to Amos. “Well, the charges are likely to be: resisting arrest, possession of a handgun without a permit, drunk and disorderly conduct in public, discharging a firearm in violation of County Ordinance 708.5, destruction of public property, assault and battery on Miz Liz Downey, pushing her into a file cabinet and nearly fracturing her skull. I can think of a few more charges to go along with that, probably enough to put him away for a few years, Amos. I don’t know what to do with this fella. He’s been a public nuisance of late.”

“May I suggest that he be allowed to visit his newborn after he sobers up, and then we let him cool off in the jail over the holiday weekend? That way he will stay out of trouble. I will personally escort him to the hospital with Chief Deputy Grimsby, later on this afternoon. I will take responsibility for getting him back to the jail not later than 6PM today if that’s agreeable with Your Honor?”

“So be it. What was it, a boy or a girl?” Jonathon Albright asked nobody in particular.

“A boy, your Honor,” came the reply from Deputy Banks.

That afternoon, while at the community hospital with Garrett Skokes and Chief Deputy Grimsby, Amos dropped in for a short visit with Liz Downey, the Clerk of the Court, who was recovering from a very hard bump on the head. She had been sitting on her new roll-around-chair, busy with her usual chores when Garrett Skokes burst into the recording office, followed closely by Deputy Banks, who had played left tackle on the high school football team. Remembering his skills from the gridiron, he did proceed to use a flying tackle on the fleeing suspect, subsequently knocking over a table loaded with documents.

The scuffle that followed inadvertently resulted with Garrett Skokes falling headlong in the direction of Miz Downey, who was attempting to roll back from her desk at that very moment. Skokes, thrusting his arms forward to break his fall, pushed Miz Downey, accidentally of course, causing her to proceed backward at high speed to a nearby filing cabinet, slamming her head on the corner of said obstruction. The impact sent Miz Downey into a state of unconsciousness, whereupon she toppled to the floor.

While the injury suffered to the elderly lady was serious, and after having been advised by the doctor in attendance that she would need to rest for several days, she took advantage of the situation by concluding after lengthy deliberation of twenty minutes, that she had had enough.

Once she had regained her senses and after pondering the events of the day, she decided that upon her complete recovery and discharge from the hospital, she would travel to Atlanta to stay with her daughter, who had been urging her mother to retire from her lifelong public service, after 35 years. The visit would be permanent.

While Amos was visiting Miz Liz Downey, another event was taking place simultaneously in the maternity/nursery ward of the same hospital. As previously arranged by Amos Cantwell, Chief Deputy Benton Grimsby had escorted prisoner Garrett Skokes, hands cuffed behind his back, to view his newly born son and to call on, for short duration, his presumed sweetheart, the mother of his offspring.

The proud mother, one Flo-Eva Akers, was sitting up in bed, breast-feeding her baby. She had interrupted the feeding to uncover the child so it could be fully viewed by its father, who was not very complimentary in his remarks about the infant, who at birth was 7 pounds 9 ounces and 27 inches in length. The conversation that followed was later related to Amos, by Chief Deputy Grimsby.

“Looks like a snake, ain’t never seed a baby chil’ that long,” remarked Skokes.

“What kind o’ thing is that ta say about yer own son, Garrett? Ain’t y’all got no pride? This here is yer family, me and him,” Flo-Eva retorted indignantly.

“Cain’t hep it, looks like one of them snakey critters, that slinks around down by the crik, somp’n like snakes. Them skink things!” Skokes was insistent in his views.

“You louse! You wasn’t even here when Ah needed ya most, out gittin drunk and now goin’ ta jail,” she sobbed, “when Ah needs ya most. Who’s gonna hep me care for this here baby with y’all in jail? An’ ya said ya loved me. Now y’alls insultin’ yer own chil’, and me too. Ya have done broke mah heart, Garrett. Ya are a louse!”

It was a sad day for Miz Flo-Eva Akers, age sixteen. Her joy of giving birth to a darling little creation of God had been dampened by its own father, a father who did not seem to care for the baby or mother, and who was also going off to spend a long stretch in jail.

The man-child, well fed and satisfied, lay asleep in his mother’s arms, yet un-named. Flo-Eva Akers was still in a state of upset over the brief interview with her probably ex-boyfriend. The nerve! She certainly would not name him after his worthless father, not Garrett Skokes Jr.

A brainstorm struck Miz Flo-Eva Akers at that instant and the naming of her son was easily decided. Glancing down to her midriff, she was happily surprised to see her recently bloated belly to be relatively flat, at least while lying mostly on her back. It had been gargantuan during her late pregnancy. After all, a diet of Hostess Cupcakes, Nehi Double Chocolate Soda and Cracker-Jax would tend to make a person rotund. Her stomach had been as big as Mt. Everest,

one onlooker had observed. 'That's it. Everest! That would be a perfect name. Imagine, that rat of a Garrett sayin' he looked like a skink

Somehow that skink name would hang on and this little baby would, in the not too distant future, be known all over Liberty County and environs, as Skink Skokes. Very few people aside from his mother had ever heard or even knew that his real Christian name was Everest. He was possibly the first child in the history of Liberty County, Georgia, to be named after the world's highest mountain.

Amos would remember this day for the rest of his life, perhaps one of the most hectic timeframes in his memory. Certainly nothing like the events of the past 24 hours had ever happened to him during a single day. In fact he could not recall a month in his entire legal career when this many unexpected proceedings had occurred. Yes, life could be filled with surprises.

It is said that Fate is the hunter and also by some, that she is a four letter word. Sometimes she brings good fortune and at other times she can be the messenger delivering small or great difficulty, even tragedy. The events that followed that day at the jail and at the recording clerk's office were soon forgotten. Those very events would many years later be the cause of serious consternation for several people who never knew Dez Boudrie, Amos Cantwell, Ethel Grimsby, Liz Downey or Garrett Skokes.

Happy New Year 1936!

“I want nothing more to do with you either personally or in business. So you buy me out or I’ll buy you out, but this partnership is over, and I emphasize that word *over*! You are a scoundrel of the lowest variety. I do not trust you nor do I ever want to set eyes on you again. You think it over. If you give me my rightful share of my investment here, I’ll settle with you peacefully. If not, then it’s war. Do you understand?”

He nodded in agreement. “I will make it generous. I’ll instruct my lawyer to draw up an agreement and you can take it to whoever you want to represent you. Let’s get it over with quickly, because I am equally disgusted with you and your behavior in public and what I suspect goes on in private between you and whoever you pick up in your travels.”

“Look who’s talkin, Mr. Goodie Two Shoes. I know for sure you have been shacking up with some hussy you have suckered into believing your line of bullshit. Nobody had to snitch on you; I can tell you have been cheating on me for quite some time. So shut your big mouth about my behavior.”

“Word gets around about you on the dance floor. I have witnessed your outrageous conduct in public, intentionally doing your high kick routine without your G-string, and showing off your hairy crotch to attract men. You have done it in front of me too many times, so if you are advertising for new meat, what do you need me for anyway? I have been humiliated enough. It is no accident of your drunkenness either. In fact it happened with regularity for the past few years and you can give your ass to a different guy every night, even more than one for all I care. You turn my stomach.”

“I don’t need you for anything you bastard! You have humiliated me too! You have deceived me! You have lied through your teeth! You are a fucking low life, and I am finished.” She could not contain her anger and stormed out of the office, slamming the outer door so hard it shattered the glass.

After considerable bickering and many interrupted meetings a structured settlement was finally reached granting Millie a large payment up front, and a substantial sum per year, based on the assumed income she would have had from the project profits as a full partner. She was seen celebrating at most of her favorite night spots in Savannah and Charleston for several weeks after the settlement.

Chapter 26

The street was dark and nearly deserted, except for the sign indicating that she had just parked her BMW convertible in front of Shanty Malone's Bar and Restaurant. It was in the heart of the industrial district, many warehouses, wholesalers and distribution centers for countless companies she had called on at one time or another. She had eaten lunch here on several occasions, but never had been in this neighborhood at night. Shanty Malone's was a well known and very popular watering hole and eating establishment, known for good food and good value.

She locked the car and entered through the front door of the establishment, holding tightly to the clutch purse, wherein was concealed her Berretta .25 pearl handle semi-automatic, with elaborate etchings on the silver plated gun barrel. It was a little beauty, and she had all the necessary permits to carry it anywhere.

She looked around as she walked through the barroom, sparsely populated at 9:20 PM. The bartender was familiar but she saw no patron who she thought she knew. She took a booth at the far end away from the front door, preferring to not be seen by any casual passerby. The bar man was at her table at almost the same instant she sat down. "Good evening Miss, what'll ya have ta drink?" was his first question, as he handed her a menu.

"Make it a double Johnny Walker Black on the rocks with a splash of soda and a lemon twist And I'll have the corned beef and cabbage if you have it tonight."

"Two great choices Miss. I'll have your drink in a moment and your dinner in just a few. Is there anything else I can do for you now?"

"Yes. Do you know a guy named The Crusher or something like that, who comes in here? He was a professional boxer or wrestler. I have met him once when I came in for lunch with Doug Friedman a while back."

"Sure lady, that's Crusher Malloy, he is having dinner in the back room. I'll let him know you want to see him, if that's your wish. As for Doug Friedman, he was shot dead in a card game several months ago. I think I remember you coming in here for lunch with him a few times."

"I'm impressed with your memory" She sounded a little sarcastic. "What's the deal with Doug? I never heard anything about it."

"He was hanging with some mob guys. Got into gambling heavy and he thought he was being cheated in a card game. The guy he accused pulled out and thirty-eight and shot him dead. Too bad. He was a nice guy, got caught up with the wrong people."

"Well, you can ask Crusher to come see me when he finishes his dinner. Nothing important. I just want to chat for a moment or two."

The drink was strong and she had hardly taken a sip when her food arrived. It was the best corned beef in town. She had a leisurely meal and was just lighting up a cigarette when a very large man came to her table and asked. "Did you want to see me about something honey?"

"Yes. I was introduced to you by Doug Friedman a year or so back. You may not remember."

"I never forget a looker like you honey. What would you want to see me about?"

"Have a seat." She motioned at the space across from her. "Let me buy you a drink. What would you like?"

"I'll have what you're having." Millie signaled the bar man for two of the same and he responded quickly. She raised her glass and said "Cheers." Then began her pitch.

"I have an ex-boyfriend who I want roughed up. I was wondering if you knew anybody I could contact to do the job for me. Just want him given a good going over, nothing permanent, understand?"

Crusher did not answer immediately. "Two timing ya?"

"Probably three or four timing me. I just want him to get his due. He is a louse and he deserves it. He has cheated me out of a lot of money too. A first class heel."

"I know just the right guys for the job, Honey. It'll cost ya five aces upfront. Got that much on ya?"

She opened her clutch purse so that he could see the gun and removed some bills, counting him out five hundreds.

"Now I need a name and a recent photo," Crusher stated. "Got that with ya too?"

"Sure do" She slid a photo across to the big man. "This was taken a month ago. Here is some information about where he lives, travels and when. The bars he hangs around. Your guys shouldn't have any trouble finding him."

The Crusher studied the photo for a few minutes. "I remember this guy. The football player, right? Sure, he is well known in these parts. Not a problem. When ya want the hit?"

"Sooner the better." He nodded and she rose as did he. She left without another word and disappeared into the night.

A deadly rivalry of one.

Susta

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