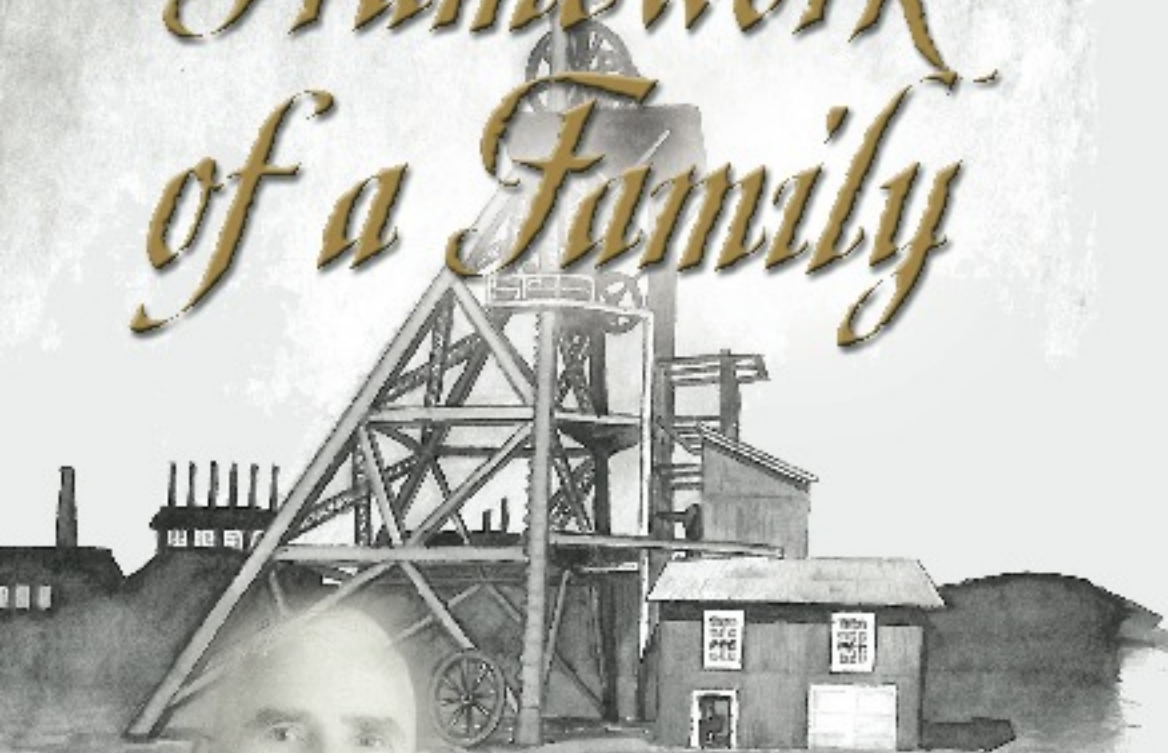


Darlene Matule

*Framework
of a Family*



Tony, FAMILY PATRIARCH



Ever wanted a "quick fix" to solving a problem? Needing one himself, Tony Duggan is propelled into the position of being the family "fixer" when his grandparent's will designates him as the Head of the Family. Soon after, a beautiful woman comes to him with a bombshell secret involving his cousin. In the ensuing years, Tony's influence-and expertise-is felt from Butte, Montana to Boston, Las Vegas, Croatia, and back again.

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Chapter One

This last week's been pure hell, Tony Duggan thought as he slowly followed the rest of his family up the aisle after the funeral Mass. *I'm not ready to go out and face more.*

Breaking off from the group, he sat heavily in the last pew, closed his eyes, bent over, and cradled his head in his hands.

Why can't I cry?

Guilt, he answered himself. *I'm guilty as hell.* Tony knew his Grandma Marija would never have been in the car accident that killed her if he'd stopped the union thugs from rolling the scab's baby-grand piano into the street. He didn't even have the excuse of believing in the union like his Uncle Joey did. He'd driven the union gang to the scab's house for money.

Money! The single word seared his soul as if he'd lit a match to the hundred-dollar bill he'd been paid.

"I am so sorry!" he said aloud.

Tony waited for peace. It didn't come.

When he finally left the self-imposed darkness of his meditation and opened the church door to go outside, the bright sunlight of a cloudless September morning blinded him. His mind traveled halfway across the world in a flash to 1944. He remembered Ljubica opening the door to his dark cellar prison, heard her beautiful Croatian voice saying, "Toné". Almost felt her touch. But with the remembrance of the woman he loved, the woman who was not his wife, came more guilt.

A heavily-accented voice calling "Toné" brought him back to the present. Startled, he looked to the left and saw, not Ljubica, but old Mrs. Yankovich, the gossipy neighbor who'd lived next door when he was a kid growing up in McQueen.

"I'm sorry for your trouble," the old woman said. "Everyone loved your grandparents. They never forgot their old-country roots even though they got rich running Gus's all those years. Ah, Gus's! I loved eating at the restaurant. And my Tommy.... He hoisted many a

beer at the bar. Did his share of gambling there too.” She sighed and continued, “Can’t believe they’re both gone. Dying on the same day—it’s an omen of some sort.” She kept on with her litany.

Tony said a silent “Thank God!” when the undertaker arrived and hustled the family into limousines for the long trip out Harrison Avenue to the cemetery.

When they arrived, he saw his uncle, Father T.J., standing under a tent that had been set up over the double grave.

After the ritual prayers, Tony saw the two caskets being positioned for burial. He motioned to his children and said, “Vince, Shirley, come here.” Tony handed his son a single long-stemmed red rose and watched the nine-year-old place it at the foot of the grave of his Grandpa Gus. He repeated the process with seven-year-old Shirley who carefully laid a bouquet of violets at the foot of Grandma Marija’s resting place.

At that moment, above the gentle murmur of the crowd, the loud voice of Mrs. Yankovich cried out in surprise, “Ljubica—violets! I’ve never seen violets in September. It’s a sign!”

Tony no longer tried to hide his sorrow; tears flowed freely down his cheeks.

Chapter Two

Tony Duggan arrived five minutes late at the law offices of John Whitley in the Hennessy Building for the reading of Gus and Marija Leskovec's will. He felt guilty. *I'm always on time*, he chastised himself. Sweat beaded on his forehead as he sat down.

"Whiskey?" the attorney asked.

Looking around the room, a surprised Tony saw all the clan sipping drinks, even his mother who had almost fallen down the church steps as she headed for the hearse after the funeral. *My God! All she needs is more liquor!*

Taking the shot glass of whiskey and water, no ice, Tony tried to be inconspicuous as he sat in the chair farthest from Whitley's leather-topped mahogany desk.

Besides his mother, Tony saw only his three uncles—Father T.J., Nick and Joey, and Nick and Joey's wives.

Where are the other grandchildren?

The attorney began, "Gus and Marija gave me very explicit instructions that only you seven be present for the reading of their will."

Six pair of eyes turned and looked straight at Tony. He could see *Why Tony?* written on their faces.

Whitley continued, "Others will receive bequests. However, Gus and Marija wanted notification of those recipients done separately.

"Also, please note, I'm reading their Last Will and Testament as a dual-will since they both died on the same day."

The attorney stopped a moment as if waiting for comment.

Silence pervaded the room.

Then, Whitley cleared his throat and began reading....

"Being of sound mind, we, Gus and Marija Leskovec, do hereby designate the following to be our Last Will and Testament. To each of our eleven great-grandchildren, we bequeath a hand-picked silver dollar, one earned at Gus's on the day they were born and packaged in a sealed silver container engraved with their name and date of

birth. We did this to let each great-grandchild know they were special to us and to remind them that the financial security we enjoyed came directly from Gus's, the business we owned and operated since 1906.

"Besides the silver dollar, we bequeath each great-grandchild one year's full expenses paid to the college of their choice. We believe that single year will serve to whet their appetite for higher education. However, since we firmly believe that something obtained through no personal effort tends to be taken for granted, we refuse to take the joy of earning the rest of their way through school from any of our great-grandchildren.

"We congratulate each of them on the success they will attain in their lives.

"To each of our six grandchildren, we leave 100,000 shares of Anaconda Company stock, because we believe Butte's financial base is now and always has been the Company. We bequeath stock in lieu of cash, hoping that each of their lives will be strengthened by our gift and that they in turn will show their faith in the future by retaining at least a portion of the stock to watch it grow and thus see Butte continue to prosper."

Tony fidgeted like an eight-year-old kid as he asked himself, *Why am I here? Should I leave now that my part is over?*

Whitley continued...

"To our two daughters-in-law, Priscilla and Annemarie, we bequeath our jewelry, except for Marija's amethyst wedding ring which is to be held by Father T. J. Bartolji until such time and place that he sees fit to pass it on. We tried to divide these items as equally as possible. A list is attached designating the disbursement. Please feel free to have the men's pieces remounted.

"To our daughter, Letty, we leave the remainder of our stock portfolio."

Everyone gasped.

The attorney hurried on.

"This stock is to be held in trust. The income will be managed by the Trust Department of the Metals Bank and made available to Letty on a monthly basis in an amount that will be determined by the Trustee to allow her to maintain a pre-designated standard of living.

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“This interest income is a separate and personal bequest to Letty, with community property rights specifically denied to any spouse.

“Furthermore, upon the death of Letty Bartolji Duggan, the entire stock portfolio shall be presented to the Diocese of Helena with the stipulation that the interest income be used in perpetuity for the education of diocesan priests.

“To our sons, Nick and Joey, we leave the knowledge that we treasure their families and that their personal accomplishments have given us abundant parental pride in our old age.

“We hereby acknowledge that each of them has become a successful man who climbed to the top of the ladder in his individual career and feel that making a monetary bequest to them would be like adding a second layer of icing to a cake.

“We *do* make separate, individual bequests to Nick and Joey as follows....

“To Joey, we give the full and total collection of mining memorabilia on exhibit at Gus’s as well as the roll top desk from Marija’s office at the restaurant.

“To Nick, we give the full and total collection of books in our home library to include the first editions itemized in the attached list. Also to Nick, we give Gus’s desk which is located in his Meaderville office.”

Tony stared straight ahead. He felt vibrations pulsing through his body. Yet, when he looked at his hands, he saw no movement. Even before the attorney finished, he knew.

The attorney continued....

“We bequeath to our grandson, Tony Duggan, full ownership of Gus’s—the business and business real estate—as well as full ownership of our home on Gold Street, excluding only items specifically mentioned heretofore in this Last Will and Testament.

“It is our mutual feeling that Tony is the one best suited to carry on the heritage of our family. We have faith in his ability and know he will always carry out his business duties with extreme honesty and compassion. We want all to know our love for him is unconditional and eternal.”

Love, thought Tony. *Even when no one else loved me, they did.* He remembered one of the last things Grandpa Gus told him. "... your grandmother loved you for you, with no reservations. I thought you might want to know how very much she loved you."

Tony wiped away a tear. The combined worth of Gus's and the mansion Gus built for Marija paled in comparison to the public expression of love his grandparents had given him.

Tony choked as he said loud enough for all to hear, "Thank you!"

"The reading of the Last Will and Testament of Gus and Marija Leskovec is now concluded. You are welcome to read the lists mentioned.

"Oh, one last thing—Nick, Joey, Letty—your parents were adamant that it's your responsibility to personally pass on the bequests mentioned in their will. They wanted their gifts to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren to be more personal than merely hearing words read by an attorney like me. The continuation of family meant more to them than anything else. Please honor their wishes."

Letty Duggan let out a squeal, rushed over and put both arms around her son.

Tony cringed. *She's a little late to start hugging me now.* He extricated himself from her clutches as politely and quickly as possible.

His eyes scanned the room. He worried; *Will the rest of the family be jealous?*

When Joey, who'd fired Tony from his job with the Miners Union just days before—after the fiasco at the scab's house when Grandma Marija's car collided with the piano—approached, Tony cringed. But when Joey gave him a hearty slap on the back and said, "It couldn't have happened to a better man," Tony's heart eased.

Father T.J. said, "Congratulations!" and gave him a big hug.

Even Nick and Tony's wives seem happy for me. He grinned from ear to ear.

At last, Nick approached. Extending his right hand, he said, "I couldn't be happier for you, Tony."

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“They came to me right after you got home from England after the war. It’d been bothering them for quite a while—what to do about passing Gus’s on. Gus didn’t let on to most people, but I knew he’d been having heart trouble for several years. It preyed on their minds, not having things settled. They asked me if I thought you could handle the responsibility.

“I said, ‘Sure do. And I think you should start him managing Gus’s *now*. Give him the benefit of learning the ropes from experts—the two of you.’ But they didn’t have time. Gus had his heart attack. You know the rest.”

“I appreciate the good words,” Tony said. “It’s a complete surprise to me. I really haven’t digested it yet.

“But I’ve got to tell you, I’ve never been so happy! Especially since you and Joey aren’t upset. I would have bet money that one of you would get it all.”

Nick laughed. “It’s no secret Joey and I don’t see eye to eye on much. But we do agree on one thing. Neither of us would have time to run Gus’s.”

Tony went down in the elevator with Nick and Priscilla.

“Want a ride home?” Nick asked.

“I think I’ll take you up on that,” Tony said. “But this will be the last time I’ll ever bum a ride. Tomorrow I’m going downtown and buy a car. I can’t get home fast enough to tell Nancy and the kids!”

Chapter Four

Who the hell am I? Tony agonized. In less than a month, my whole life's turned upside down.

He remembered working in the mines in the thirties, hating the job so much he enlisted right after Pearl Harbor even though he had a wife and two kids, and would have been exempt if he'd stayed a miner.

When I heard the news over the radio that Sunday, I felt like a bomb exploded in my head. I told myself, 'This is my chance to bail out.'

His thoughts went back to boot camp.... The sea voyage to England... His promotion to Captain.... Colonel Danvers sending him on a secret mission to find Tito in Yugoslavia.... Being wounded....

Then the memory he'd been trying to forget for almost a year surfaced.

Ljubica.

Nothing will ever be the same after the four months I spent with Ljubica. Nothing!

He rose, bolted his door and closed the window blinds. Slumping in his chair, he folded his arms and put his head down.

Then, thirty-four-year-old Tony Duggan sobbed like a little boy.

Much later, Tony awoke when he heard the grandfather clock in the corner chime four times.

Tony remembered his first days back from the war.

Nancy surprised him when he found out she worked at Woolworth's. "God damn it, Nancy!" he'd shouted, though he prided himself on holding his temper no matter what.

"What are you trying to do? Embarrass me in front of the whole town by getting a job? Butte wives only work if they're married to failures."

“Well, I’m not going to quit! I love working. Besides, we can use the money with you out of work.”

“Can I help it if the mines are shut down? Did I start this strike?”

“I’m not going to argue with you, Tony Duggan, but...”

“What you’re not going to do is go to work tomorrow,” Tony ordered. He stood up. Moved toward her.

“Try and stop me!” Nancy said as she slammed the door.

Tony hated confrontation. His mother had boozed. His father had gone from one chippie to another. They fought constantly.

He spent the entire day thinking about Nancy, his kids. When she got home that night they made up. Sort of. She cooked his favorite dinner. They listened to Fibber McGee on the radio after they ate. Their problem hid under the couch like a dust bunny.

In the days that followed, the impossible happened. His grandparents died within twelve hours of each other, and Tony inherited both their business and their mansion.

Now the banker at the Metals Bank told him, “You’ll never have to work another day in your life. You don’t have any experience running a place like Gus’s. Sell the place. You’ll make a mint.”

It would make good business sense, he told himself. But....

Grandpa Gus and Grandma Marija could have just given me money if they wanted to make me rich quick. But they didn’t. They gave me Gus’s. And....

Tony remembered the words in the will verbatim: “Tony is the one best suited to carry on the heritage of our family.”

The thought behind the words had daunted him even as the attorney read the will. *But I have time, he’d told himself. Time to learn the ropes.... Time to gain the wisdom I need to walk in my grandparents’ shoes....*

Today’s visit by the Tyler woman changed everything.

I’ve run out of time.

Tony walked over to the window and looked outside. In the distance he could see the gallus frame that marked the entrance to the Leonard Mine.

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In his mind's eye, he could see himself standing on the church steps after his grandparent's funeral. Looking up the Hill, he saw dozens of gallus frames, strong and mighty, the symbol of Butte.

He remembered overhearing a little old lady talking about his grandmother, saying, "Marija was truly the framework of her family."

"It's my turn now," Tony said aloud. "God, help me do a good job!"



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