

Where Are They?

The Missing Men
from Marlowe
Mansion

DAVID COCHRAN

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THE ANNIVERSARY

The unsolved case that baffled retired Stillwell PD detective Harvey Hawkshaw for two decades was the farthest thing from his mind as he waited impatiently for his microwave to tell him that dinner was ready. He stared at the old kitchen TV as if it wasn't there and half listened to Channel 8 News reporter Heather Compton recap the news of the day. When she broke into a story about the missing Marlowes cold case, he perked up, ignored his microwave buzzer, and turned up the TV volume. "My case," he said to his cat, Fluffy, as if she cared. The Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, and overcooked peas could wait. Twenty years had gone by since those three men went missing from the Marlowe mansion, and Heather Compton commanded his full attention.

"Good evening. I'm Heather Compton reporting to you live from Quarry Road in Stillwell. Behind me, you can see the infamous Marlowe mansion, where 20 years ago today, March 15th, three men associated with the Marlowe family inexplicably disappeared within a short time of each other. Two were members of the Marlowe family, and one was a family associate.

The scene of the crime, if indeed there was a crime, was the Asa Marlowe homestead, where Asa built a fortune as a health guru—selling books, conducting seminars, and peddling what some called 'snake oil' remedies to his over 100,000 followers. He died many years ago... presumably of ill health. (She chuckled.) Sorry, I couldn't resist that one. His son, Asa Marlowe II, is also known as Junior, and he was the first man to disappear. Junior invested his father's fortune in local real estate and lived comfortably in the mansion. His son, Asa Marlowe III, is called Three, and he disappeared shortly after his father. The third man, Roscoe

Savini, is believed to be Junior's son from a previous relationship, and he disappeared around the same time as three.

Here is what retired Stillwell Police Department detective Harvey Hawkshaw had to say about the case 18 years ago when he was the lead detective on the missing Marlowes case at the time. He was being interviewed by the late Channel 8 reporter Sylvia Ronstadt."

Harvey moved closer to the TV and sat in the counter chair. He put his hand over his mouth as a younger, leaner version of himself appeared on the screen.

"Detective Hawkshaw, the Marlowes have been missing for two years. What progress are you making on finding them?"

"Well, Sylvia, I wish I had good news to report, but we still have no solid leads, and we haven't heard from any of the men."

"Do you think they are alive?"

"I don't know, but we've talked to a lot of people, including the two women who lived in the mansion. I think they're the last to see them alive. We keep hitting brick walls. But mark my words, Sylvia. Somebody knows where these men are, and I won't give up until we solve this case."

The camera came back to the live coverage with Heather Compton. "Well, Detective Hawkshaw retired last year without reaching his goal, but I understand that he is now a private investigator still working on this case. We reached out to Detective Chapman Chan of the Stillwell Police Department, who filled Detective Hawkshaw's shoes, and he is with me today."

The camera panned to the short, thin, Asian detective with black hair dressed in a neatly tailored suit. He looked like a man on a mission, eager to be somewhere else as he talked.

"Detective Chan, can you tell us about the progress being made in the Marlowe case?"

"As you know, Heather, I can only give you a general

update. This is an ongoing investigation, so I can't tell you anything that would compromise this case. We still receive information from time to time, but we have no strong leads on any of the missing men."

"So where do you start, Detective? It's been a cold case for a long time."

"Well, Heather, my mentor, Detective Hawkshaw, spent years trying to solve it without any luck. I agree with what he said in that clip you played. We know that someone around here knows something about what happened to these men. We urge any person with information to contact our hotline at 1-800-555-1212. As far as we can tell, the men disappeared around the same time, but we don't think they disappeared together."

"So, these are three unique events?"

"Possibly, Heather."

"Any new clues?"

"No obvious clues from the Marlowe mansion or its current residents, the three women associated with the missing men."

Heather raised her eyebrows. "Three women? I heard Detective Hawkshaw mention two women."

"Things change over time, Heather. This case is confusing because we have so little information and so many people that have connections to the Marlowes. We've put thousands of hours into this case over the years, and it's still a cold case."

"That must be frustrating."

"It sure is. Everything we've tried to figure out all these years ends up with no leads, no suspects, and no victims. We think we know the motive, and we believe whoever was involved had the means and opportunity to carry out these events. We have our suspicions but no solid proof. It's a mess."

"I guess that explains why this case has been cold for so long. Detective Chan, thank you for your time."

"Well, folks, there you have it, such as it is. Where

are they? Maybe you can find them. There's still a \$150,000 reward for anyone who provides information that results in the resolution of this case. So, put on your double-brimmed, Sherlock Holmes caps, grab a magnifying glass, and help find the missing men or their perpetrators. You just might solve this cold case and pocket that \$150K reward."

The TV cut to a commercial break, and Harvey said aloud to his cat, who was always close by at mealtime, "Same as it was 20 years ago, Fluffy. I thought those biddies did it, but I couldn't crack that case. Cold then and cold now. Where are they, Fluffy?" He reached into the microwave, pulled out his dinner, and smiled. "Wouldn't it be great to get all that money?" Fluffy meowed, wanting some of his food.

TOOTIE'S CAFÉ

Harvey ambled into Tootie's Café at eight o'clock the next morning to have some breakfast and catch up on the local gossip. The reminder of the Marlowe case was still fresh on his mind.

"Mornin' Harv," Tootie said with her usual big smile.

"Saw you on TV last night. Quite a looker in your younger version."

Harvey yawned. "Yeah. Younger and skinnier. I was just a kid then."

"Who you kidding, Harv," Rexie said. "You weren't a kid then, and you're definitely not one now." Rexie Jackson was a short man with unkempt hair, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt, and looking like he was ready for a vacation. He always started his day at Tootie's when he was in town. No one knew where Rexie got his money, but he never held a job. He lived what he called "a freelance lifestyle."

"Be nice to Harvey," Alice Gemmel chimed in. "That must have been stressful for you to see yourself looking so young and not having that potbelly, Harv." She winked at Harvey. Alice owned the U Nique Boutique just up a few stores from Tootie's on the square that defined the center of Stillwell. Middle-aged and single, she always started her day with the gang at Tootie's before opening up the boutique at 10:00 a.m. She could hold her own in this group that was characterized by quick wit and jibes.

"Ooh. Zing. You be nice, Alice," Oscar Rhinehart said. Oscar, like Harvey, was a retired detective from the Stillwell PD. Tall and gray-haired, he had worked on the Marlowe case from time to time and shared Harvey's frustration that it was still a cold case.

"Here you go," Tootie said as she put a cup of Joe on the counter for Harvey.

"Thanks, girlfriend," he said, displaying his first smile of the day. Harvey liked Tootie's Café. Everything

about Tootie's was comfortable, like an old, worn shoe. Unpretentious. He and all the "regulars" treated the café like a second home, and Tootie treated everyone like they were her best friends. She always asked them if they wanted some "Joe" when they walked in and always had menu suggestions that matched their eating style. She treated all her customers like guests.

Tootie's Café had been a landmark for more years than Harvey had been alive. It was established by Ernie Gringwald, who named the Café after his wife, Gertrude. He and Gertrude had one child, also named Gertrude, who everyone called Tootie. She grew up in the café, and when she became an adult, she took over the business, running it much as her father did.

The bell attached to the front door, which opened onto the town square, jingled to let Tootie know a customer had arrived, and Jeb Wheeler, an English professor at Jefferson County Community College, walked in. He was tall and always wore a tie and jacket, even when he wasn't teaching. Jeb arranged his classes so that he could have what he called "quality time" every morning at Tootie's.

"You can start now," he said. "Sorry, I'm a little late. Got busy reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and forgot about the time."

"*The Tempest* sounds like our group," Rexie said. "Like a tempest in a coffee pot."

The group gave a weak laugh. They didn't want to humor Rexie too much, or he'd get carried away.

"More Joe, Harv?" Tootie asked with a coffee pot in hand.

Harvey nodded, still not alert.

"Josephus Daniels," Jeb mused. He liked to throw out names and phrases that people didn't know.

"Who the hell is Josephus Daniels?" Rexie said.

"You and your obscure facts, Jeb,"

"Former Secretary of the US Navy."

"And you're saying this because?"

“That’s who they named coffee after. Joe. Joe Daniels.”

“That’s important information, Jeb. Thanks for sharing that with us. I knew his brother, Jack.” Rexie tried for another laugh but got head shakes instead.

“Hey. You never know when trivial things can help you. Something we say here might help Harvey solve his case.”

“Yeah,” Rexie responded. “Like a killer named Joe.”

Alice joined in. “So, you still think it’s those ‘biddies,’ as you call them, had something to do with the disappearances? And by the way, Harv, those biddies aren’t much older than us.”

“I probably shouldn’t have said that,” Harvey responded. “I’m finding myself with a looser tongue now that I’m not in the department.”

“I know an ear, nose, and throat doctor who could tighten things up, Harv,” Alice said.

“You mean an otolaryngologist, don’t you, Alice?”

“Shut up, Jeb. You know how to ruin a joke.”

“You still think those ladies up at the mansion did it, don’t you Harv?” Oscar asked.

“Actually. I’m not sure. Not as sure as I used to be,” he replied. “It seemed obvious that they were involved, but the more I talked to them, the more I had doubts.”

“We need something to turn this case, Harv,” Oscar said. “You know, like new information.”

“Where am I going to get that?” Harv said. “I have been looking for that for years.”

“What about that third woman in the mansion that Chan mentioned in that TV interview?”

“Old news, Oscar. I knew about her. Carmela, Three’s wife or partner or whatever she is. She came and went from the mansion over the years but seems to be there more often in the past two years. I think she was running out of money. But she’s been no help.”

“How ‘bout Junior’s wife? I think she’s been there

the whole time,” Rexie said.

“Ever talk to her, Rexie?” Alice said. “A real charmer. She talks like she drinks vinegar for breakfast.”

Harvey smiled. “Acid tongue. I think she’s fermented.”

“I hear she’s pickled most of the time,” Rexie said.

“I know there’s another one that they keep locked up in that turret,” Oscar said. “I forget her name.”

“Rapunzel,” Jeb replied. “Rapunzel. Rapunzel. Let down your hair,” he said in his most dramatic voice.

The group laughed. “I don’t think she’s locked in that tower,” Harvey said. “She’s very quiet, reclusive. A loner who needed a place to live after Roscoe disappeared.”

“That’s right,” Tootie said. “I always forget about that one. Never seen her. She’s certainly never been in here. What’s her name?” She looked at Jeb. “I know it isn’t Rapunzel.”

“Felicia. Felicia Savini,” Harvey replied. “We called her an associate of the family because we aren’t sure of Roscoe’s real relation to Junior. It could be his son. Junior might also think he’s Roscoe’s father, but he really isn’t. I don’t think anyone did a paternity test, and DNA wasn’t around when Roscoe was born. He’d be about 40 now. Same age as Three.”

“So, Harv, if you had to pin this on someone or a couple of someones, who would it be?” Tootie asked.

“I honestly don’t know, but it would be a big payoff in more ways than one.”

“What do you mean, Harv?”

“Well, Tootie, money is one thing, but finally solving this case would be a big deal.”

“From what Heather Compton said last night, it would be a \$150K payoff,” Alice said. “Not bad.”

“A \$150K puzzle. You know how I like puzzles,” Jeb said.

“You are a puzzle, Jeb,” Rexie said.

The group laughed.

“Seriously, when you’re doing a jigsaw puzzle, you can easily get the outside pieces because they’re obvious. Straight edges, often the background color, like a blue sky.”

“So, what’s your point, Jeb?” Rexie asked.

“I always reach a point where I get stuck. There are a bunch of pieces that look like they might fit in, but I can’t see the connection. I turn the pieces every which way, but I’m stumped. Then, I move on to a different piece, often one I haven’t picked up before. I find where that piece fits, and bingo, it suddenly becomes obvious where the other piece fits.”

“So, again, what’s your point?”

“If I were trying to solve this mystery, which I’m not because I’m busy writing my bestselling novel, I’d stop looking at the piece that is getting me nowhere and start looking at the new pieces.”

“I hear you, Jeb,” Harvey said, “But we’ve done that over and over. We’ve gotten nowhere with new leads.”

“You’re a PI now, not a detective, Harvey. You’ve got some new freedom to talk to people and explore some new pieces of the puzzle. You may not even know they fit into the puzzle until you start looking at things from a different perspective.”

“Thank you, Professor,” Rexie said. “I couldn’t have said it better myself.”

“You couldn’t have said it at all, Rexie,” Alice said.

The group laughed again.

“It’s trite to say, Harv,” Oscar said, “but he’s saying think outside the box. You’re not in the SPD box anymore, so you aren’t constrained by department rules.”

Harvey nodded in agreement. “You’re both right. Thanks, Professor, my old colleague. I need some new leads from a new source.”

“You know what that whispering voice said in Field of Dreams, Harv?” Jeb said.

“If you build it, they will come,” Harvey replied.

“And Shoeless Joe Jackson showed up.”

Harvey smiled. He understood Jeb's point. "I've wanted this badly for a long time. Maybe it's time for me to start whispering for help."

"If you need help reaching Shoeless Joe Jackson, let me know, Harv. According to my genealogist, he's a distant cousin of mine." Jeb grinned.

Alice threw her balled-up napkin at him, and the whole group laughed.

THE NIGHT VISITOR

After he left Tootie's, Harvey ran errands around town, and everywhere he went, he ran into people who recognized him. "Saw you on TV, Harvey," they said. Or, as the more insulting commenters would say, "You sure were skinny 20 years ago." It was an exhausting day.

"What did Thelma think about the interview, Harv," Burt Arnold, owner of the Happy Hammer Hardware store, asked when Harvey went in to pick up some screws to fix his deck.

"Didn't see it. The wife's out of town again."

"Helping Grandma?"

"Yeah, Grandma thinks she's in her 20s instead of her 80s."

"Still ice skating?"

Harvey nodded his head and smiled. "Collar bone this time."

Harvey picked up his screws and thanked Burt.

"Happy bachelorhood, Harv."

Harvey waved to Burt as he headed out the door, looking forward to a relaxing evening.

After yet another TV dinner, Harvey sat in his favorite recliner and turned on a March Madness game. It could have been the Metropolitan opera or a Bugs Bunny cartoon for all the attention he paid to it. All he could think about was that cold case that would never end. It wasn't long until he was fast asleep with visions of reward money dancing in his head.

Later that night, Harvey was still in his recliner, snoring at full throttle. The TV on low volume showed an Asian man twirling sharp Ginsu knives and telling anyone listening that these utensils could slice and dice like no other knives. Harvey was oblivious to it all. Dead to the world.

The doorbell rang, playing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game!" Harvey awakened with a start, sputtering

saliva. “Wha?” He shook his head, trying to figure out what was happening. He heard the same seven notes again as the doorbell rang a second time.

“Knives. Where am I? What the...? What time is it anyway?” He pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and groaned. “Two o’clock! Who rings doorbells at two in the morning?”

He pushed Fluffy off his lap, maneuvered his stiffened body out of the recliner, and stretched. “Man, I must have fallen asleep.” He yawned and started for the door, promptly tripping on the leg of the coffee table and falling to the carpet atop Fluffy, who let out a shrill yowl as she bolted from beneath him. “Leap’n Leana. What’s going on here?”

Harvey slowly ambled to the door, rubbing his elbow to soothe the carpet brush burn. He was awake enough to remember he was a private investigator, so he turned on the porch light, making sure he didn’t open the door as if he was welcoming a long-lost friend. Carefully, he looked through the glass panel next to the door but saw no one. When he turned on the front floodlights, he saw the tail lights of a dark vehicle go out of his driveway, turn in the cul-de-sac, and leave the neighborhood.

Then he remembered. “The video doorbell. Just installed. Great.” He reached into the pocket of his flannel lounge pants covered with Steelers football images and pulled out his phone. He opened the video doorbell app and the most recent file.

“Well, I’ll be,” he said. “Looks like one of my friends left me a present.” On the stoop, he saw a bright red, medium-sized suitcase with several tags and scuff marks on it. He was really curious now, but he couldn’t just open the suitcase. *What if it has a bomb in it*, he thought. *Here today and gone a minute later. Maybe one of those biddies saw me on TV and wanted me to disappear like the Marlowe men.*

Harvey wasn’t a pessimist, but in his line of work, anything could happen. After all, he was a well-known

detective in the Stillwell Police Department until that “catastrophe,” as he called it, a few months back accelerated his retirement. He rescued a cat from an icy tree, ending up needing to be rescued himself. As he was just getting back in shape after physical therapy for his broken leg, he was offered an irresistible early retirement package. But his new lifestyle didn’t work for him, so after two boring months, he went back to what he did best, reinventing himself as Harvey Hawkshaw, Private Investigator.

As his sleep fog cleared, he mentally reviewed the latest cases he was working on and got no help in figuring out why someone would anonymously leave a suitcase at his doorstep. *Can’t rule out a bomb*, he thought again.

He looked at the video from his doorbell again, more carefully this time, and saw a man take a suitcase out of the back of his SUV and bring it to the front door stoop. The man wore regular street clothes with a dark jacket and a knitted ski cap. He slipped on the black ice that had accumulated on the lawn and sidewalk and then placed the suitcase on the stoop (very gently, Harvey thought), rang the doorbell twice, quickly walked back to the SUV, and drove away. “Suspicious,” Harvey said aloud. “Better be careful.”

Cautiously, he opened the door and stepped outside to give the suitcase a closer look. “I see why that guy slipped,” he said to no one. Black ice was a typical March event in Stillwell. He had a quick flashback, perhaps a premonition, about the incident with Binky, the rescued cat. Harvey no sooner stepped out on the stoop when his feet slipped, and he went headlong toward the red suitcase. Instead of having it break his fall, he pushed it onto the icy lawn. He grabbed the railing to avoid cracking his back on the steps. He spun, tumbled, and ended up atop the mysterious red container just off the sidewalk on the slick, frozen grass with his foot caught in the handle.

“NO,” he yelled as he heard a ticking sound coming from the now horizontal suitcase. “It’s going to explode!” He tried frantically to get up, but the black ice on the slope

in his front yard prevented him. As he slipped and slithered on the shiny grass, he realized he had wrenched his back and landed on his shoulder. He couldn't move anywhere, and his foot was still trapped in the ticking bomb container that had so rudely interrupted his nap. His butt stuck up in the air as he again tried to get up. He laid still for a minute and then tried to get up, unsuccessfully once more. He lay immobile for several minutes, which seemed like an hour.

Soon, he saw a flash from a camera and wondered why anyone was on his lawn at that hour. "Help," he yelled and saw his neighbor, Bob Gilpain, a reporter for the Stillwell Gazette, holding his cell phone out, taking pictures of him.

"For God's sake, Gilpain, help me."

"I already called 911. Help is on the way. It's too slippery for me to reach you," he said as he continued to snap pictures.

Harvey continued to hear the ticking and had more thoughts of the Marlowes' revenge. His breathing became harder as he panicked. "Call (wheeze) 911," he said aloud as he started to hyperventilate. He tried to reach for his phone in the left pocket of his lounge pants and yelled as the sharp pain increased. He finally reached underneath his prone body with his right hand. It took a couple of tries for him to wriggle the phone out. With his butt in the air and his head down to minimize injury if the bomb exploded, he pushed the emergency button on the phone to dial 911.

The 911 dispatcher, Darla Machem, answered immediately. "911 Dispatch Center. What is your emergency?"

Harvey was cold and still hyperventilating. He wheezed and sputtered and couldn't get a word out.

"Sir, I have your address, and someone just called this in. But state your problem."

He took a deep breath, almost passing out, and replied. "Suitcase bomb (wheeze) on my lawn. Help."

"We have contacted EMS, and I will now contact the

bomb squad. I'll stay on the phone with you. Where are you?"

"(Wheeze) Lawn. On the lawn next to the bomb."

"Good Lord," she said. "Move away. Move away immediately."

Harvey attempted to heed her orders, but each time he tried, the pain in his back and shoulder prevented him from going very far. Every time he moved, the suitcase moved with him.

"Are you away from the bomb?"

"(Wheeze) No." He paused to catch his breath. "Bomb's following me!"

"Sir?"

"Oh, man, (wheeze). The foot caught in the handle. I move, and it moves. (Wheeze)"

"Don't move. Pray."

"Pray? Oh no. I'm gonna (wheeze) die!"

Just then, he heard a siren in the distance. And then he heard another and another. It sounded like all of Stillwell was under nuclear attack.

Three police cars arrived first, followed shortly by the EMS. The police didn't park at his house but kept the cars across Azalea Court, closer to the end of the cul-de-sac, in case they were called off to another emergency.

Police Chief Milton Jenkins, a good friend of Harvey's, got out his bullhorn.

"Harvey, are you okay?"

"What (wheeze) do you think, Milt? I'm laying (wheeze) injured on the ground with a (wheeze) bomb about to blow me to (wheeze) smithereens! Get me outta here."

"Chill out, Harv. Bomb squad is on the way. Hold on a while longer. Hey, I saw you on TV tonight. Of course, you were 18 years younger and 30 pounds lighter. Gotta shed some of that weight, Harv."

"Ho-ho-hold on, Milt. Get my foot outta this thing."

"I hear the bomb squad siren. They'll be here in a minute, and we can take care of you after they take care of

the bomb. Don't want too many casualties.”

“(Wheeze) Casualties? That's what I am? (Wheeze) I'm a frigging casualty!”

Donnie Nutkiss, aka Donut, backed the ambulance into the driveway and walked up to where Milt was talking to Harvey.

Seeing Donnie, Harvey yelled. “Oh my God, it's Donut. He (wheeze) wears Velcro shoes 'cause he can't tie his (wheeze) shoelaces right.”

“Evening, Harvey,” Donnie said. “Got yourself in a real pickle, don't ya?”

An emergency medical technician was slowly creeping toward Harvey. He threw Harvey a thin rope and told him to pull it toward himself. Harvey wiggled on the ground until he got to the end of the rope and found a paper bag clipped to it. He unclipped it and looked inside. Nothing. The bag was empty.

“What? (Wheeze) What's this, a bag for me to pack my (wheeze) lunch?”

“Put it over your mouth, Harvey,” Donnie yelled. “Breathe into the bag.”

“(Wheeze) Where'd you guys do your EMT training, Donnie, (wheeze) at the takeout deli?”

“You're hyperventilating, Harvey. You're breathing out too much carbon dioxide, and your blood flow to your brain needs more carbon dioxide. Nervous system stress. Put the bag over your nose and mouth and take some deep breaths. NOW!”

Harvey called Donnie a name between gulps of air but realized that his wheezing was slowing down, and he could breathe more comfortably. “Better,” he said. “Much better.”

Chief Jenkins checked in with Harvey. “You okay now, Harvey?”

“Sure, Milt. I'm not having mental stress, except that I'M HOOKED UP TO A TICKING BOMB! Geez.”

An SUV hauling a trailer with a large, blue, metal

barrel marked EOD pulled right up on the lawn. Two men wearing thick green suits that made them look like a cross between the Jolly Green Giant and the Incredible Hulk came toward Harvey.

“Who are these guys in space suits? They think I’m an alien?”

“It’s the County Explosive Ordinance Disposal team, Harvey,” Chief Jenkins said over the bullhorn. “They’re better known as the bomb squad. They’re wearing blast suits. You know, so they can withstand the pressure of a bomb blast and shrapnel...”

“Stop,” Harvey interrupted. “I don’t want to hear this.”

The two people walked up to Harvey and gingerly wiggled his foot from the handle of the suitcase. But as his foot was released, his leg muscle twitched, and he kicked the suitcase, popping it open.

The EOD guys dove to the ground as far away from the suitcase as they could get. Harvey yelled, “Goodbye! Take care of Fluffy.” he covered his head and tried to wiggle away from the suitcase.

Nothing happened. No one except Harvey moved for what seemed like an eternity. When they thought it was safe, the EOD team got up and headed toward the suitcase. Harvey continued his painful crawl across the icy lawn, teeth chattering, and other EMTs left the security of their warm ambulance and headed toward Harvey.

As the EOD looked in the suitcase, a dark van pulled up, and a man dressed in dark clothes wearing a knit cap got out. “What’s going on?” he asked Chief Jenkins.

“Possible crime scene. Bomb. Better get back. We’re still not sure if it’s safe.”

The man laughed. The more he looked at the mayhem on Harvey Hawkshaw’s lawn, the louder he laughed. “Can I just go get the suitcase?”

“You crazy? Want to get blown up?” Officer Boileau said. “Say, what do you know about that suitcase?”

“I put it on his stoop.”

Chief Jenkins stepped back, put his hand on his holstered gun, and motioned for two other officers to come over to him. “This guy says he put the suitcase on the stoop. Go verify it with Hawkshaw.”

An officer talked with Harvey, nodded his head, and then returned.

“He’s the guy. Harvey has him on video dropping off the bomb.”

“Bomb? You guys have a good imagination. I would have been blown up already if it was a bomb.”

“But it’s ticking,” an officer said.

Another officer came over to Chief Jenkins, holding something in his hand. “Here’s your bomb, Chief. Just got it from the bomb squad.” He opened his hand to reveal a small, old-fashioned travel alarm clock ticking away. “They also told me bombs don’t tick anymore. They’re digital.”

Officer Jenkins turned to the suspect. “So, who are you?”

“Alonzo. Alonzo Bilken. The delivery guy. I came back because I realized I had put the suitcase in the wrong house. I moonlight for East-West Airlines, delivering suitcases that don’t arrive on the same flights as their owners. Pretty good money, but you have to work in the middle of the night.”

The officers looked at each other and then burst out laughing. “Poor Harvey. An evening of overtime for us at his expense.”

The EODs told Harvey his bomb was a clock and assured him he was never in danger.

“Geez,” he said. “All that for nothing except a racked-up body.”

The ambulance backed closer to Harvey on his lawn. “What are you doing?”

“Protocol, Harv,” EMT Tony Fribish said. “Whenever you get hurt, and you have the police, EMS, and bomb squad on the scene, you need to get checked out at

the hospital.”

“Oh, no,” Harvey said. “I’m fine. I’ll call my doctor later.”

“Sorry, Harvey,” Tony said. He motioned for the other EMT to take care of Harvey. Before he knew it, he was strapped to a board, lifted onto a gurney, and put into the back of the ambulance.

“Who’s driving this rig?” Harvey asked.

“I’ll be with you in the back,” Tony said. “Got your favorite driver up front.”

“Donut?”

“Yup. He’s the only one who likes to come out in the middle of the night to drive. He’s usually up half the night playing video games, so he’s ready to go... wide awake.”

“Oh no. I’ve seen him in action. Just like a video game. I’m not sure I’ll make it.”

“You’ll be fine. You won’t be in the ambulance long, Harv. I guarantee you. Lead foot and empty roads make for a quick trip.”

As the ambulance rolled out of the neighborhood to take Harvey to Stillwell Medical Center, the lights were on in all the houses, and many neighbors were standing in pajamas and winter coats, talking about the terrorist attack that occurred in their quiet cul-de-sac. Bob Gilpain called in his story and sent his pictures of Harvey to the Stillwell Gazette so they could make it in the morning edition. Heather Compton arrived on the scene in time to get some video for Breaking News on Channel 8.

Even though there was no one on the road and the hospital was less than a mile away, Donnie had the siren wailing the whole way, waking up half of Stillwell.

“Thank God,” Harvey said when they pulled into the Medical Center complex. “Didn’t think I’d make it here with Donut at the wheel.”

THE ER

As the ambulance pulled into the bay at Stillwell Medical Center, Harvey had a strange thought as he looked around. “Looks familiar. Seems like only a few months ago, I was here. Oh, that’s right, I was here, only I had a real reason to be here. Injury, not protocol.”

Tony Fribish laughed, “You’ll be just fine, Harvey. Sorry, we have to put you through this, man; we have to make sure you’re okay. Capiche? After all, you’re still recovered from that cat rescue.”

“Don’t remind me. First, that cat mess, now this. The guy with the suitcase makes a mistake, and I end up floundering like a walrus on ice. But I’m not suing anybody unless my lawyer tells me to.”

Tony laughed again. “Some scene. I won’t forget this call for a long time.” He laughed again.

“You weren’t there for the whole mess, were you?”

“No, but Don Gilpain, the reporter, was there. Had video rolling on that cellphone much of the time.”

“Always nice to have somebody nearby to capture every scene you hope will be forgotten.”

“Yeah, Don doesn’t miss much. He’s like a roadrunner when he hears a siren or something come over the police radio. He monitors that 24/7. This time, he only had to walk next door. Heather Compton arrived, too. That’s how they got Breaking News coverage so fast.”

“Geez, so it’s on the news already? How lucky can a guy get, having the media right at his doorstep!”

Tony laughed again, then got serious. “Oh, Harv. I forgot to tell you. We brought you in as a trauma patient.”

“What?”

“They might treat you a little more aggressively than if you were coming in with a tummy ache.”

“What? What do you mean more aggressively?”

“Uh. Well. You know, they have their protocol, too.”

They'll cut your clothes off first and then probe all your orifices."

"Get out of town. Nobody's probing me. Not my orifices. I got Constitutional rights. Life, liberty, and the privacy of my orifices. Tell them I'm fine."

"I can't stop them, Harv. Protocol."

"At least save my Steeler's pants."

"It's out of my hands, Harv. Sorry."

The ambulance came to a stop and backed into the bay to unload its cargo. A team of people in scrubs and white coats was standing at the bay like vultures alongside the highway, waiting for the traffic to clear so they could dig into the roadkill. They opened the back door and whisked the gurney out. Its wheels popped down so fast that Harvey couldn't imagine what was going on.

"I hope you know what you're doing," he yelled as four pallbearers in white coats pushed and pulled the gurney down the crowded hallway at high speed. No one else said a word except Harvey, who yelled "slow down" incessantly.

He was wheeled into a brightly lit examining room. "Who are these dudes?" he asked as he gestured toward the eleven people assembled in the room who looked like they were ready to perform surgery.

An older man, who appeared to be in charge, smiled at him and said, "Mr. Hawkshaw, these are residents at Stillwell Medical. They're here to observe how we help our trauma patients, and they will participate in your examination."

Then he turned to the residents. "Doctors, Mr. Hawkshaw has been here before. It seems he tried to rescue a cat, which I understand he did, but he ended up with two broken intermediate leg bones, his tibia, and fibula. His femur was fine. He's still in recovery from that, so that's part of the reason he is being treated as a trauma patient."

"I'm not a trauma patient. I'm a doof who slipped on some ice and couldn't get up. I'm fine. See."

He tried to get up and was immediately pushed down

by two of the white-coat guys who looked like bouncers at the Starlight Lounge. “Relax, Mr. Hawkshaw. We’ll just relieve you of some of your clothes, examine you, and then maybe run some tests.”

“Don’t touch me. Don’t mess with my Steeler’s pants. You understand? I want my clothes on, and I want out of here.” His comments fell on deaf ears.

What happened next was like a piranha feeding frenzy. Nurses with scissors cut his shirt and pants, ripped them off, and threw a sheet over him to protect his self-esteem.

Next came one of the residents donning latex gloves, who checked Harvey’s body from head to toe, poking and prodding in places where few would want anyone else to put their hands. Meanwhile, the assistant was explaining his every move to the residents in far more detail than Harvey wanted to hear.

When the check was over, the attending physician spoke to him. “Harvey, we don’t find any problems, but we’d like to take some CT scans to make sure you don’t have any hidden issues.”

“Hidden schmidden,” Harvey yelled. “I don’t want any tests. I’m fine.”

“Ah, but that’s how people always get into trouble. They feel fine, but they don’t realize that there is something more sinister going on inside. If they don’t address the problem, big danger, even death, could be lurking around the corner.”

The grim reaper knew he had a platform with the residents, so he continued talking to the residents about Harvey as if he wasn’t there. “Patients often deny their conditions. Even when they are presented with evidence, they want to fall back on their old beliefs. Take Mr. Hawkshaw, for example....”

“Don’t take Mr. Hawkshaw anywhere for anything,” Harvey interrupted. “Look, Doc, I know you don’t want to get sued because you missed something, so I’ll sign off on

the testing. No tests, no problem. Deal?” Harvey lifted his arm up to give the doc a high-five, but Doc didn’t reciprocate. The bouncer pushed his arm down.

The doctor looked at the residents. “This is where we enact Protocol 99, which says that the ER doctor has the right to determine whether or not it is in the patient’s best interest to have a test.” He nodded at the bouncers, who smiled like NASCAR drivers just before a race. Lickety-split, they whisked him down the hallway for a CT scan.

By the time the testing was over and Harvey was returned to the ER, all the individual rooms were full, and there were patients wherever they could put a gurney. Harvey’s gurney was parallel parked between two other gurneys. One held a groaning old man and the other a teenager who kept saying it wasn’t his fault. Maybe it wasn’t, but no one knew what he was talking about.

A nurse in blue scrubs came up to Harvey. “Ok. Mr. Harvey. We have to get you into a gown.” An older woman right across the aisle from Harvey was glaring at him. She didn’t look happy, but Harvey thought he recognized her. Her face was ashen, and she looked exhausted. He couldn’t tag a name to that face.

“Where am I going to change?” Harvey asked the nurse.

“This is like Macy’s at Christmastime in here this morning. You change where you are. If you want me to hold a sheet up, it might give you more privacy. Remember, the gown’s open in the back.” She had an impish smile. “If you want, I can put the gown on you.”

“No, no. I’ve had enough southern exposure for one day.”

“Open in the back. Undies on,” the nurse said as she turned away to tend to the old woman.

“Yeah, yeah.” Harvey immodestly followed orders.

The nurse saw that the woman across from Harvey was awake. “How are you doing, Mrs. Marlowe?”

Harvey’s eyes widened, and he looked toward the old

lady. *Mrs. Marlowe? THE Mrs. Marlowe? Wife of the missing Asa Marlow Jr.? She's really aged since I saw her last.*

The sullen Mrs. Marlowe, with glazed eyes, stared at nothing in the distance.

When the nurse walked away, Harvey cleared his throat to break her trance. "Hello. Mrs. Marlowe. I heard the nurse use your name."

Without looking at him, she said, "Eavesdropping. I could tell."

"Well, I wouldn't call it that. You can hear a lot more than you want in these tight quarters."

Mrs. Marlowe had no response.

Harvey used his most casual voice. "Say, you wouldn't happen to be related to the Marlowe family up on the mountain, would you?"

"Why would you care?"

"Are you related to Asa Marlowe Jr.?"

"None of your business. What are you, a cop?"

Was I a cop? Harvey thought. *I was the lead detective on the Marlowe case 20 years ago, but she doesn't remember me.*

"Well, not anymore. I'm just curious. You know, you can take the cop out of his job, but you can't take the metal out of an old copper like me."

"Cut the comedy, Seinfeld."

Harvey gave a fake chuckle to humor the old lady.

He tried again. "Say, you wouldn't be Asa Jr.'s wife, would you?"

"Still none of your business. Don't you get it? I don't want to talk with you."

Just then, a woman wearing a clerical collar came up to Mrs. Marlowe. "Hello, Eunice," she said. "I'm Chaplain Nancy. I know this is a difficult time for you. It's been 20 years since your husband disappeared. And now this."

Harvey was all ears. *This is? What's going on? Come on. Tell me more.*

"No surprise, Chaplain," Eunice said. "Long gone... years ago. Just didn't know where he was or if we'd ever find

him.”

“How long were you married?”

“Counting the years, he was missing? 25.”

“Oh, so you weren’t married that long before he disappeared.”

“Not to him. If he’d lived, it might not have been much longer, either.”

Harvey was all ears as the chaplain continued.

“So... uh... is Three your son?”

“No, thank goodness. Another bum. He was the only child of Asa and his first wife. What was her name? Valerie, no Vanessa. He must be 40-some now. A bum, just like his father.”

“Are you feeling okay, Eunice?” the chaplain continued.

“I’m fine. They thought I was going to have a heart attack when I heard that they found Asa, so they brought me here.”

Harvey’s eyes widened. *Found Asa?*

“No heart attacks. That’s good news, Eunice,” the chaplain said.

“No heart attack and no Asa either,” Eunice replied. “Mark my words. Don’t know who the unlucky person was that they found up on that mountain, but it wasn’t Asa.”

“Oh, that’s interesting. The reports say it’s him.”

“They’re wrong. Dead wrong. I wish it was him, but I know it isn’t. They’ll find that out soon enough.”

The chaplain didn’t know how to respond and stood silently next to the gurney. Eunice’s cynical smile spoke volumes to Harvey.

A nurse came up to the chaplain and Eunice. “Doctor discharged you, Eunice. Said you were in great shape and expressed his condolences. Your ride is waiting at the ER entrance.”

“Forget the condolences; send money,” she said.

Two bouncers wheeled her gurney out of the ER, and that was the last Harvey saw of her that night.

Harvey rang the buzzer three times for the nurse to come to him. It seemed like forever, but when she arrived, Harvey got right to the point. "I need to get out of here," he said. "I want out like Mrs. Marlowe."

"You have to be discharged by a doctor, Mr. Hawkshaw," she said.

"Then, can you get me a doctor? I've got an appointment soon."

"It's 4:00 a.m., Mr. Hawkshaw. Who are you meeting before sunrise?"

"I got friends that are vampires. I got to see them before the sun comes up."

The nurse rolled her eyes and started to walk away. "I'll see what I can do," she said as she continued walking.

Harvey picked up his phone and called the only person he thought would pick him up. The phone rang and rang until a very groggy voice answered.

"Who's this?"

"Me, Donut. It's me, you know, Harvey. I'm going to need a ride soon."

"Where are you?"

"Where you left me, wingnut. At the ER."

"You discharged?"

"Not yet."

"Call me when you're discharged." He hung up.

Every 15 minutes or so, Harvey would buzz the nurse, and she would eventually arrive at his gurney. He would ask where the doctor was, and she would always say, "Busy with other patients." This went on for a while, and then the nurse stopped coming to him.

Finally, at 6:30 a.m., the doctor showed up and told him that his CT scan did not show any major problems but that he needed rest and some medication for anxiety.

"So, does this mean I'm discharged, Doc?"

"Well, yes. But it will take a while for me to complete the paperwork before you can leave."

"You need help? I was a cop. I can do the

paperwork. I'm fine, so I can help you."

"Not that easy. We need records in case there are questions later."

"Here we go again. CYA. Don't let anyone sue us."

The doctor didn't want to hear about Harvey's theories of medical practice or malpractice, so like the nurse earlier, he said, "I'll see what I can do" as he walked away.

By 8:00 a.m., there had been a shift change, and a new nurse approached Harvey.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Chenille. But you can call me Chenille!" She chuckled.

"Oh boy. A comedian. Where were you when I needed you? Can you check to see if I'm being discharged anytime in this century?"

Chenille looked down at her iPad and found Harvey's name. "Hmm. Says here that you could be discharged at 7:00 a.m."

"It's 8 o'clock now."

"So, you're overdue. I'll get your clothes, and we'll wheel you right out of here. Got a ride?"

"Yeah, but I got no clothes! They mutilated them when I came in."

"Ooh. That's right. You came in as a trauma patient. You call your ride, and I'll find you something. We have what we call loaner clothes."

"Do I want to know who loans clothes to a trauma unit?"

"No. Just wear them home and then burn them," Chenille said. Then she giggled. "Just kidding. They're fine. Old, but clean. The previous owners don't need them anymore."

Harvey shook his head in disgust and got right on his phone. Donut picked up on the first ring this time. "Where you been, Harvey?"

"Don't ask. They forgot about me. Hurry up. Come to the ER entrance. As soon as they find me some clothes,

they'll wheel me out."

"Ambulance?"

"No. Definitely no ambulance. A car is fine."

The nurse returned with well-worn sweatpants, a stained sweatshirt with the logo of Gerber baby food, and Harvey's slippers, the only thing the piranhas hadn't destroyed. "Looks like these should fit you," Chenille said. "Don't worry. We washed these cadaver clothes."

Harvey looked pale. "What? Cadaver clothes?"

Chenille shrugged her shoulders. "You can recycle the clothes, too. We don't want them back. Just go home, get cleaned up, and catch up on lost sleep. This is no place to get rested."

"You got that right, Chenille. But I'm not going home."

"What, are you crazy? After all, you've been through?"

"Got to see my homies. I think they're counting on me showing up for breakfast and stories."

"You've sure got a story to tell."

"More than one!"

BACK TO TOOTIE'S CAFÉ

Donut pulled into the parking lot behind the café.

“Let me buy you a coffee and donut... uh, Donut.”

Harvey laughed. “Do you eat donuts, or is that like cannibalism to you?”

Donut shook his head. “Guess you’re feeling better, Harv. Sorry, I can’t stay. Work, you know. The boss won’t understand if I show up late with donut dust on my face.”

Harvey thanked him for the ride and walked into the rear entrance to Tootie’s Café. He was greeted with cheers, hoots, and high-fives as he walked through the dining room up to the U-shaped counter near the front entrance to the café. His breakfast friends were all smiling when Harvey arrived.

“Little late, Harv.” Tootie greeted him with a big smile. “Actually, I didn’t expect to see you at all today. You doin’, okay?” Tootie and everyone else in the café knew all about the bomb incident from the Breaking News on Channel 8 and the Stillwell Gazette, the morning newspaper.

“Yeah,” he muttered in a low tone. “Been better, though. A lot better.”

“Nice clothes, Harv,” Oscar said. “Did you stop by the clothes bin over by the Quick Stop on the way here?”

Everyone laughed.

“Nah. It’s a long story, but I got my cadaver outfit on.” He swept his arm the length of his torso and legs like a model on a runway. “Cadaver sweatshirt, cadaver sweatpants. At least they let me keep my slippers.”

“Ooh, gross.” Alice shivered at the thought of wearing a dead person’s clothes. “Where are the clothes you wore to the hospital?” she asked.

“Probably in the incinerator. They cut them off me before I knew what had happened. Even my Steeler’s pants. They brought in Edward Scissorhands on the graveyard shift to do the dirty deed.”

“Oh, no, Harv,” Alice said. “Your favorite loungewear.”

“So, you haven’t been home?” Tootie asked.

“Nope. I need some Joe and seeing normal people if you could call yourselves that.”

Tootie poured a cup of Joe black and put it on the counter. Harvey reached for his wallet.

“Oh, no, my friend. You’ve been through the mill. On the house. And the refills, too.”

Harvey smiled at her. “How do you know what happened, Tootie?” he asked.

Rexie overheard Harvey’s conversation from two seats down the counter. “You asked how does she know, Harv? How could she not know? You’re all over the media in Stillwell.”

“And that picture in the Gazette,” Alice said, and then she giggled. “You really had that butt sticking up in the air. You’d make a good plumber, Harv!”

“You didn’t see the Channel 8 News morning edition?” Rexie asked.

Harvey shook his head. “You kidding? I’ve been busy having my orifices probed and having photo shoots of my innards.”

“You really have to see the coverage,” Rexie said, and then he started to laugh. “In your case, we’d call it poor coverage. I really like the part where that EMT throws you a rope, and you have a hissy fit ‘cause he won’t come over to help you.”

“Hysterical, Rexie. Really funny,” Harvey scowled at him.

“But the best part,” Alice said as she continued to giggle. “The best part was when those bomb guys go up to the suitcase, and you kick it over.” She giggled again. “They dove to the ground, and you all thought it was going to explode. Great scene. Better than a made-for-TV movie.”

“And check this out,” Oscar said as he held up a copy of the Stillwell Gazette. “Just came out this morning,

Harv. Bobby Gilpain's shot seen all around Stillwell!"

There on the front page was a big picture of Harvey, butt in the air, foot entangled in the suitcase, and his hands covering his ears.

"Oh no," Harvey said.

The café erupted in laughter.

"Let me see that," he said as he reached for the paper. He shook his head as he read Bob Gilpain's account of what happened. The article was filled with quotes as well as an event-by-event reckoning of the bomb event. "How'd he gets all that information? Must have stayed up all night writing that article."

As he went to hand the paper back to Oscar, his eye caught another story on the front page. He pulled his arm back quickly as he grabbed the paper, knocking over his half cup of Joe. It was a painful reminder that his shoulder was sore from his fall on the lawn.

Tootie quickly came to the rescue with a towel in hand, mopping up Harvey's mess.

"Time for another Joe, Harv?" Tootie's question didn't require a response as she set a fresh cup of coffee to his right and threw him a dishtowel to dry his counter stool.

"Sorry, Tootie," he said as he soaked up the Joe. "I just saw this other article, and it got my juices going."

"Yeah, Harv. That's your juices all over the counter," Rexie said. "Some things never change. A regular Inspector Clutz-o."

Harvey gave Rexie an evil look and turned his attention back to the Gazette. The headline read: Skeleton Found As Marlowe Cold Case Marks 20th Anniversary. "You see this other headline, Rexie?"

"How could I? Your body takes up half the front page." Rexie laughed.

"Seriously, the article is all about my Marlowe case."

Harvey scanned and paraphrased the article. "It says that Marlowe was a rich guy who lived up the mountain in an old Victorian-style mansion. True. It was built as a

vacation home in the 1890s by a rich dude who wanted to get away from it all. The first Marlowe bought it in the 40s, that's the 1940s. He was the father of the guy they think they just found, Marlowe II, the guy they call Junior. He was your age, Rexie, ready for retirement, but he didn't work either, so he didn't need to retire. Kind of like you. Says here that he was an heir to the Marlowe fortune. Old news. We all knew that 20 years ago."

"Well, what I've heard is that the old man, Marlowe Senior, was a real shyster. Made his money as a self-appointed health guru," Rexie said. "Would sell you a cure for whatever ails you. But the old man was a shrewd one. Could sell sand to nomads in the Sahara Desert."

Good stuff, Harvey thought. Information from a new source. "How do you know all this, Rexie?" Harvey wanted to know. "I thought you were just a dumb schmuck that hung out here at Tootie's."

"Well, I am, and I do hang out here with other dumb schmucks. But I've been listening to a lot of gossip over the years, and after a while, you begin to know what's true and what's not."

"So, what have you heard about how the old man made his money?"

Rexie tapped his spoon on the counter as he recalled the Marlowe story. "He called his 'practice' the Marlowe Health System. Of course, he liked his name on it, and calling it a practice sounded like it was real medicine. People bought it big time. If you bought his health books, you became part of his cult. Of course, he never called it a cult. Then he'd sell you more books or have you taken courses at his private university."

"Sign me up, Rexie. I wanna get healthy," an eavesdropper yelled from the back of the café.

"Sure. Just give me \$25 per book in 80-year-old dollars. A real bargain when it comes to your health. By the way, that's over \$400 each for his books in today's dollars."

Alice brought the conversation back. "That's

interesting, Rexie. So how many of these cult followers bought his books?”

“I’ve heard over 100,000, maybe more. Not bad, huh?”

Harvey started to fill in the gaps in the story. “I’ll just give you the abbreviated version. So, the old man, Asa Sr., is going like gangbusters on his health business, and then he dies. He was a widower, so Asa Junior, his only child, got all his money. Junior marries Vanessa and has a kid they name Asa Marlowe III. They nickname him Three. Meanwhile, Junior finds another girlfriend. Vanessa wants no part of that, so they get divorced. You following me so far?”

“Just keep going, Harvey. If you want, I can give you a marker to draw a family tree,” Alice said. The group laughed.

“Ok. Then Junior marries his second wife, Eunice. You’ve heard of sweet and charming Eunice, I’m sure.”

“Sweet like a lemon,” Jeb said.

“It continues. We think Junior has a kid with his girlfriend and names him Roscoe. But Roscoe has a different last name. Roscoe Savinni. I guess Junior’s girlfriend had another boyfriend. Very confusing. Then five years later, all of a sudden, Junior disappears. Woosh! Vanishes like a lady behind a sheet in a magic show. Then Three leaves town, and so does Roscoe.”

“And none of these guys were ever found?” Tootie asked.

“Nope. Spent a lot of time on that case. Way too long. I guess that accident I had was a wake-up call.”

All of a sudden, Rexie started laughing, and his laughter got louder and louder. Tears flowed from his eyes.

“What’s with you, Rexie? What’d I say?”

“Your recent accident, Harv. Your ‘catastrophe.’ Rescuing that cat in the tree.”

“Since when are broken bones and bruises humorous?”

“I remember you hobbling in here on crutches with

a cast on your leg.” He started laughing uncontrollably again.

“Ignore him, Harv. Remind us how you were injured,” Tootie said. “I know you retired because of your injury.”

“Injured in the line of duty,” Harvey replied.

“Line of duty! Ha.” Tears streamed from Rexie’s eyes.

“Wasn’t it an animal rescue, Harvey?” Alice asked.

“Well, yeah. I guess you could say that.”

“Tell us the straight scoop, big guy,” Oscar said.

“Well, a call came in on 911 from just up the street from my house. I was just getting off duty and on my way home, so I stopped at the Cavendish house. I knew them. Thought they were okay people. They sent me to the backyard where there was a cat meowing up about 20 feet in the tree.”

“I heard it was 10 feet, Harv,” Rexie chimed in and then laughed again. “Story gets better each time you tell it.”

“Whatever. They had a ladder up to the tree, and I figured I could climb up, stand on a branch, and grab the cat by the scruff of the neck to bring it down.”

Harvey paused as if he didn’t want to tell the rest of the story.

“So why did you fall down?” Tootie asked.

“Well, I went up the ladder to almost the top rung. No big deal. I used to be a volunteer firefighter back in the day. I reached for the cat and tried to grab his neck. But Binky, that’s the cat’s name, jumped to avoid me and landed on my neck. He dug in with his claws, causing me to lose my balance. Before I knew it, Binky and I were victims of gravity. I hit the ground first and buffered Binky. He just jumped off me and scampered away. The Cavendishes were squealing with joy as I lay motionless on the ground.”

“But you were hurt.”

“Hurt ain’t the word for it, Tootie. I was a train wreck. Bruises, broken bones, you name it.”

“That was a few months ago, right?”

“December 23, at 4:30 p.m. to be exact, Alice. A date that will live in infamy.”

“Not original, Harv, but dramatic. I think President Roosevelt beat you to that line when Pearl Harbor was attacked,” Jeb said.

Harvey glared at Jeb and continued. “I thought I would be back on the job in a couple of weeks, but I decided that I had 25 years in with SPD, so I could retire with bennies. I talked with my family, and they thought I should stop the crazy work schedule and retire.”

“But there’s a murder to solve, Harvey,” Oscar said. “Paper says they found Junior.”

“We know they found a skeleton, but we don’t know yet who it is or if it was a murder,” Harvey replied.

“Ok, so you’ve been a train wreck for a while, and now you’re thinking about getting on the train again,” Oscar said.

“Choo choo,” Rexie said. “All aboard. Chug-a, chug-a, chug-a, chug-a.”

“Back to the crime,” Oscar said, staring at Rexie. “Enough busting, Harv.”

Alice tried to turn the conversation back. “This guy you call Junior all of a sudden disappears. Did anyone see him that night?”

“Nobody did, or at least nobody’s saying they did. It was early spring. Kind of like now. Cool nights, warmer days. Eunice says she was out, but she can’t remember where. Three, the spoiled playboy, said he was out ‘somewhere.’” When Eunice comes home, Junior’s nowhere to be found.”

“Oh yeah,” Tootie said. “There were lots of questions about that case. You used to come in here frustrated. Said everything was too neat. Said there was no evidence like somebody scrubbed the place, so there’d be no clues.”

“Yeah, so I talked to Mrs. Marlowe very early this morning.” Everyone perked up.

“Get out of town. How could you?” Alice was

surprised.

“She was in the ER when I was. A real charmer. She didn’t remember that I was the detective on the disappearance, and I didn’t tell her. She figured out I was a cop by the questions I asked. I just told her I was retired now.”

“What did she say about all this?” Alice continued.

“Nothing to me, but I couldn’t help but hear her talking to the chaplain who stopped in to see her. I was surprised by her comments.”

“What did she say, Harvey?” Alice persisted.

“You know me,” Harvey said. “Even though I’m not a detective, I am a PI. I consider this an active case for me, so I can’t say anything that might ruin a lead.”

The group issued groans of disappointment.

“You and your leads,” Harv,” Rexie said. “I remember when you said you thought Junior was murdered by Professor Plum with a wrench in the library. But you didn’t have a clue.”

The group groaned again.

“What do you guys think?” Harvey turned the conversation away from himself. “Junior goes missing, and 20 years later, a skeleton turns up in a hole on his own property. Way up on the hill near where the old limb maker lived.”

“Limb maker, Harvey? You making this stuff up?” Jeb said. “I’m the one that’s supposed to know this trivia.”

“You probably haven’t been up on the mountain on the Marlowe estate. There’s a stone foundation of an old house where they said a limb maker used to work. He made prosthetics for people after the Civil War. He was there before the mansion was built, and when he died, the house went to ruins, and nobody cared.”

“The paper says some kids were digging behind this place and found the skeleton,” Alice reported.

“Inside job,” Rexie said right away. “Has to be.”

“Yeah, but who was on the inside? Eunice, Three,

Roscoe, Three's wife Carmela, Felicia. Who else?"

"You been to the mansion, Rexie?" Tootie wanted to know.

"You think I'm a suspect?"

Everyone laughed.

"Any of you been up there to the mansion? Can't even see it from the road except in winter. It's off Quarry Road." Harvey said.

"I only know about it from people talking around town, but you know who lives near there?" Alice said.

Harvey shrugged his shoulders.

"Noah."

"That's right," Harvey said. "Otto. Otto Zark. With a name like Zark, everybody calls him Noah."

"Cute. Harvey. Noah Zark!" Rexie said.

Another collective groan came from the regulars.

"He used to work for the Marlowes. Maybe he still does, but I haven't seen him in a few years. I talked with him about the case years ago, but a fresh conversation might help. Thanks, Alice."

"So, let's think about another lead," Alice said.

"What did Junior do when the old man died?"

"Got rich the old-fashioned way," Oscar said. "He inherited it. Gobs of it. The old man owned hundreds of acres up on the mountain. I heard he was going to build a thousand houses there for people who believed in his health system. But that never happened."

"Why not?" Tootie asked.

"Probably died of poor health," Rexie said.

"Don't be stealing Heather Compton's jokes, Rexie," Jeb said. "I heard her say that last night on the news."

Harvey continued. "Marlowe Sr. croaks, and Marlowe Jr. is now rich."

"I heard he got into real estate. Junior used his inheritance to buy up everything imaginable around the area," Rexie chimed in.

"Asa Sr. was smart and put the money in Wall Street.

When the market fell and everyone was selling, he was buying. I heard he bought stocks that survived the Great Depression in the early 1930s,” Harvey said.

Oscar smiled. “I heard the old man bought into the good stuff like movie production companies, Coca-Cola, Standard Oil, US Steel, and many more. By the time Junior got the money, the whole market was way up. Then it was time to sell. Junior used the money to buy cheap properties around Stillwell and sat on them. As they doubled and tripled in price, he sold them.”

“So, did Three get all this property when his father went missing?” Alice asked.

“He had enough to live on, but it wasn’t long until he disappeared. Junior’s wife, Eunice, can draw on the trust. That’s probably how she’s survived in the mansion all these years. I think Three had money, plenty of money that he got from Junior.”

“Did Three and Eunice get along?” Oscar wanted to know.

“What do you think?” Harvey replied.

“I heard Three is a playboy,” Alice chimed in. “He married somebody named Carmela. She’s not from around here. A lot of shenanigans were going on in that mansion.”

“So now we’ve got this married playboy with a lot of money partying in a big mansion, and he suddenly disappears,” Harvey said.

“That’s two,” Alice said.

“No, he’s Three. Two is also missing,” Rexie said and laughed.

“You know what I mean, Rexie.”

Harvey clarified the rumors. “Three didn’t disappear like we’re gonna find him in the next fort kids build. No, he’s sending postcards from the Caribbean and who knows where else.”

“Postcards, Harvey, really?” Alice asked.

“Not literally. I think he’s alive and can be found with a little work.”

“We already did a lot of work,” Oscar said. “We need a break, in this case, to pull some of the clues together.”

“I thought you were retired, O,” Harvey said.

Oscar smiled. “Just like you are.”

Tootie flashed back to Junior’s disappearance. “I remember Junior. He used to come in here and just hang out. It was like he wanted to get away from the mansion.”

“Did you meet Eunice?” Harvey asked.

Tootie rolled her eyes. “Memorable. Nasty. Customers used to call her the Wicked Witch of the North.”

“Played by Margret Hamilton in the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. 1939.”

“Thank you, Jeb,” Tootie said. “I remember one time Junior and the Wicked Witch came in here together. Big mistake. They couldn’t agree on anything and ended up yelling at each other. I encouraged them to calm down and get takeout.”

“I remember when Junior disappeared. I was in here for lunch,” Oscar said. “The Café was buzzing with gossip. The place was full of armchair detectives trying to figure out where Junior was.”

“Detectives like you, Harvey, only you would have probably fallen on the floor and spilled your coffee if you tried to get out of your armchair!” Rexie said. The eavesdroppers erupted with spontaneous laughter.

“So, nobody knows anything or says anything for twenty years? I think it’s safe to say someone knows something.” Harvey said.

“You may find this harder than you think,” Jeb chimed in.

Harvey smiled. “We failed the first time. You remember Oscar?”

Oscar nodded.

“But mark my words; I’m not going to fail again. I may not have the answers, but I have more questions this time. And I may not know who to ask now, but I will out. I need to dig deeper into this.”

“Go get ‘em, Clouseau!” an anonymous voice yelled from a table in the back.

The Café filled with laughter again, and Harvey smiled. He surprised himself with his own words.

FLYWHEEL

“Sounds like party time here,” a voice said as a 45-year-old black man sauntered up to the counter at Tootie’s. “Flywheel,” Oscar said, extending his arm for a high-five. “Where you been, man? Haven’t seen you since Hector was a pup.”

Jeb couldn’t resist. “In Greek mythology, Hector was the son of King Priam of Troy and his second wife, Hecuba. He participated in the siege of Troy.”

“You never give up, Jeb,” Oscar said.

“My uncle had a dog named Hector, and he wasn’t Greek,” Rexie said. “Liked olives, though.”

Flywheel shook his head. “So, I see things haven’t changed much here.”

“Nope,” Rexie said to his old high school buddy. “How you been, Fly? You’re looking skinny as ever.”

“You know me, always snoopin’ for metal. Puttin’ the pedal to the metal.” He smiled his big toothy smile.

“You know Harvey?” Rexie continued.

“Sort of, but not really. You’re a cop, right, Mr. Harvey?”

“Harvey Hawkshaw, former cop, now a private investigator. Call me Harvey.”

“You can call me Flywheel, just Flywheel. No first name or Mr. or any of that stuff. Former delinquent, full-time upcycler.”

“Upcycler?” Harvey asked.

“Yup. Collect old metal and sell it. Kind of like recycling, but classier... upscale... but just metal, no dirty cardboard.”

“We were just talking about the missing Marlowes. Remember that case?” Oscar asked.

“Sure. Couldn’t forget that bunch. Messed up. Used to pick up metal at the Marlowes all the time. Let’s see. First, there was Vanessa. The nice lady who deserved better than

Junior. Then there was Eunice. Ugly. Not her looks... her personality. She'd spit at you as soon as look at you. Never saw her smile. Not once."

"How about the other women at the house?"

"Woman, not women. Felicia. Quiet. Kept away from people up in the turret. Like Rapunzel locked up in her tower."

"Hey. Now you're stealing my lines, Fly," Jeb said.

"Wasn't there a third woman?"

"Well, let's see." Flywheel stroked his chin. "Three's wife, Carmela, would come and go, and then she left and didn't come back. Three didn't either. I guess if you count her, there'd be three."

Harvey nodded. "That's helpful to know, Mr. Flywheel."

"Flywheel... No, mister, remember?"

"Oh yeah. Sorry."

"What's all the interest in the Marlowe gig all of a sudden?"

Harvey explained that a skeleton had been found, and the police thought it might be Junior. "I don't remember talking with you 20 years ago," Harvey said.

"That's 'cause I wasn't talking to cops. Last people on earth I wanted to talk to, especially then."

"I'm not a cop now, just a PI trying to solve this case."

"Think there's a difference? Cop. PI. Still got the law on your side."

"You seem to know about the Marlowes and this case."

"Doesn't mean I'm gonna tell you what I know."

"I think you might be interested in talking with me, though."

"Fat chance."

"Ok, what if I contact you, and we talk about the old days?"

"Not my old days."

“No, no. The old days at the Marlowes. Your old days with them.”

“If it’s their old days, I’m cool with that. My old days are in the vault. Sealed tight.” He made a motion like he was zipping his lip.

Harvey extended his right hand to seal the deal. Flywheel pulled his hand back.

“Just one question, Harvey,” Fly said. “Why are you so interested in this case?”

“Why do people rob banks?”

Fly shrugged his shoulders.

“For the money, Flywheel. Money, moola. You know?”

“Now that sounds good. How much?”

“Big reward on this one.”

“How big is big, Harvey?”

“We can talk about it soon, but not here.”

Flywheel smiled a big, toothy smile as he handed Harvey his business card. “Come by soon. Money sounds good to me.”

“We’ll be in touch.” Harvey smiled.

Flywheel talked with Tootie and got an order to go. Harvey slowly got off his stool and groaned as he awakened his sore shoulder and healing leg. He started to leave when he turned back to the counter. He’d forgotten something.

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