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*O*ur story begins hundreds of miles away and several days before finding me on a boat with my feet resting in a bucket of concrete.

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*M*y office address is officially listed as 149 Union Avenue L6, which means I occupy office 6, located just off the lobby of *The Peabody Hotel* – Memphis, Tennessee. I actually would consider my address to be 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue – not Union, but the address has its perks.

The location itself is quite handy. All my phone calls come through the hotel operator before reaching my secretary, Marcie. I eat lunch and breakfast in the employee dining room at a great price. I have a beautiful lobby to greet potential clients - and please don't forget the duck show, it happens twice a day. Aside from the perverts who hang out in the lobby restrooms, I can't find a lot of fault with my office arrangements.



Besides, these are the 60's and people are accustomed to the modern ways of doing business. Appearance is everything, or at least a close second to whatever is first. The new real estate buzz is 'location, location, location' – I think I have one of the best.

The hotel directory and telephone yellow pages show L6 occupied by *The Drake Detective Agency*. That can definitely be confusing, because the name on my office door reads:

## **Carson Reno – Private and Confidential Investigations**

I am Carson Reno and always have been. There has never been a Drake working from this office, or any other in Memphis, that I'm aware of. However, when I opened the agency I just could not find any rhyme or rhythm in 'The Reno Detective Agency'. Besides, everybody who has watched Perry Mason knows Paul Drake, and who knows, people may think this is a branch office or something! A little free publicity and promotion never hurt any business, just as long as they call or show-up with money.

A large number of my clients consist of damaged spouses looking for dirt and evidence on their unfaithful partner. It is possible that infidelity has made me what I am today – not a rich man, but I can pay my bills. Occasionally, I get some insurance investigation work – searching for someone who has successfully snookered the insurance company for their own goodwill, or some poor schmuck who filed false claims and skipped. But, mostly I deal with the underbelly of our society – where you find some very bad people and never make friends with anyone.

When I'm not specifically working on a case, I try to spend as much time as possible in or near the office. Another advantage of the *Peabody* is having access to restaurants, bars, shops and the downtown activity. So staying close is never a problem.



Afternoons and early evenings will usually find me at the *Starlight Lounge* – just off Winchester. Not only is it a good place to ‘hang-out’, it is a great place to look for clients or, in fact, look for those my clients have hired me to find! The *Starlight* has live entertainment starting at noon daily. Yes, I said noon. Every day it’s loaded with housewives who use the early part of the afternoon and evening to visit The *Starlight* for some drink and dance before the husband comes home from work. They cook dinner early, put it in the oven and dance on over to the *Starlight* for an afternoon of wine and martinis at the ‘tea dance’. I have a friend who calls the place “Club Menopause” – I think that is an appropriate name.

Of course with the ladies come the men, generally just in search of some companionship, but sometimes in search for much more. Regardless, these are my clients, or potential clients, and I see no harm in getting to know as many of them as possible.

Rita is the head hostess at the *Starlight* and works some unbelievable hours. In fact, I don’t remember a time when she wasn’t the first to greet me – regardless of the time. She was once crowned Miss Memphis, and as I understand, had a brief acting career. Rita always provides ample opportunity for me to ‘meet and greet’ those who are in ‘distress’ and could perhaps need my services. She’s good, and I make sure she gets tipped properly whenever I get the opportunity.

## DOWN UNDER BAR

My other hangout is home, or close to it. Home is a 12th floor, one bedroom apartment at the 750 Adams Complex on Manassas Avenue. A great place to call home - they have a small grocery/deli on the ground floor and a little bar in the basement called the *Down Under*. Regardless of your condition, it's always just a short elevator ride home, and sometimes that makes good sense. Every weekend they offer live entertainment to a usually packed house. Being small, space is always limited. But, my friend, 'Andy' the bartender, can always seem to find me room.

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*I* have two associates working with me at the *Drake Detective Agency*, or maybe a better count would be one and a half.

Joe Richardson is fulltime, and a valuable member of my team. He's only been with me a short time, and still considers himself to be in training. But, I dismiss that and regard him as an important asset - one that I certainly couldn't do without.

My other associate, Lydia Longstreet operates her own detective business and has her own set of clients, albeit some strange ones. When she's not searching for a missing pet, or a purse left on the city bus, I get her to assist with our investigations. In fact, I've even set her up in an office next to Joe - just to keep her handy. Joe insists I did that so I could keep an eye on her, and he might be right - she's not bad to look at. However, after her sister, Lilly, lost her life working with me on a case I call *'Dead End'*, I just

somehow feel responsible for Lydia's safety. Regardless the reason, Lydia has proven herself and I am glad to have her around.

Lydia Longstreet is a beautiful woman, much like her older sister but in different ways. Lydia is taller, probably by more than an inch, and has a figure that places more emphasis on her breasts – she'd gotten what Lilly had missed. Soft tan skin, piercing dark eyes and coal black hair are always appropriately highlighted by dark clothes – offering the observer a 'sexy, but dangerous' appearance. The little .32 she keeps strapped to her left leg is always threatening, plus handy and nice to have around.



*T*he lobby door to my office opened suddenly, revealing a young woman - short with dark hair, hazel eyes and seemingly a little confused. She was dressed in a gray herringbone suit, black heels and a hat matching the suit. She remained in the doorway while looking first at me and then around the office.

“Excuse me,” she said in a quiet and questionable tone. “I was looking for the *Drake Detective Agency*. Could you please point me in the right direction?”

I stood up before speaking. "This is the *Drake Detective Agency*, so you've found your destination. Please come in and tell me how I can be of assistance."

She paused for a moment, looked at what was written on my office door, then back at me. "But the sign says **Carson Reno – Private and Confidential Investigations**. I'm looking for the *Drake Detective Agency*, and would like to speak with Mr. Drake...if he's available."

"Do come in and sit down," I offered with some assurance. "You are at the right place. My name is Carson Reno and I own the *Drake Detective Agency*. I know that can be confusing, but I assure you it's not an interesting story. My associates and I are here to provide nothing but the best in confidential and discreet investigation."

"Oh," she mumbled, before taking a few steps further into my office and continuing to look around. "There was no one at the desk outside, so I thought it would be alright to open the door and ask directions."

Carson, the English bulldog raised his large head from his sleeping spot on my couch, grunted an approval and absence of danger, then returned to his nap. My new guest glanced at the noise, but seemed to ignore his presence. Her eyes were focused on me and I could feel her uneasiness.

"I'm sure my secretary, Marcie, has just stepped away for a few moments." I walked from behind my desk and offered one of my padded office chairs. "Please sit down, make yourself comfortable and tell me how the *Drake Detective Agency* can help."

Reluctantly she took my offer, but maintained a rigid posture when she finally sat down – folding her hands across her lap and clutching a small black purse.

I closed the office door before returning to my desk and taking out a pad and pen. "Now please tell me Mrs. ... Mrs.? I'm sorry but you haven't given me your name."

“Baxter...Julie Baxter...Ms. Julie Baxter – but I really would like to speak with Mr. Drake, if he’s available. I feel more comfortable sharing my inquiry with the person in charge. I mean...I’m sure you’re a fine detective Mr. Reno, but...but I would just feel more comfortable speaking with Mr. Drake. Is he available?”

I could see this was going nowhere, so I decided to take a different approach with my new friend.

“I’m sorry Ms. Baxter, but Mr. Drake is no longer with us. He passed a few years ago and left the business to me. It just seemed a shame to remove his name...you know, memory and all.”

“Oh how awful,” she appeared to relax a little. “I hope nothing violent.”

“Gout,” I answered with a straight face.

“Excuse me?” Her pretty face wrinkled with her question, those hazel eyes opened wider and I finally knew I was talking to a real person!

“One of the worst cases ever reported, at least that’s what the doctors said. Thankfully his suffering is over.”

“How terrible,” she was still frowning slightly and shaking her head - giving me the chance to get a better look at Ms. Julie Baxter.

I guessed her age to be late twenties or early thirties, but I’m not a good judge of age. She had a flawless complexion with makeup and lipstick not overused and applied with good taste. Thick dark hair was tucked under her hat, but my guess it was longer than most women would want if they were going to wear a hat. Her suit was appropriate, complimented with a slightly starched white blouse and small scarf showing underneath the jacket. She seemed easy with her style of dress, and I suspected the suit was something she wore regularly – not just for her visit with Mr. Drake.

“May I smoke?” She asked, pulling a cigarette from her purse and lighting it before I could object.

“Certainly,” I answered, having no other choice. “Would you like some coffee? I can have room service send some over.”

“I would prefer a Martini...vodka, dry and with an olive – if that’s possible.” She blew a mouthful of blue smoke out into the clean air of my office.

“Martini,” I mumbled quietly before looking at my watch. Well, it was almost lunch, and I hadn’t had a Martini lunch since...well actually I don’t remember ever having a Martini lunch. But, it’s never too late to learn.

“Absolutely,” I said reaching for the phone and pushing the interoffice button for Marcie’s line. “Let me see if my secretary has returned and I’ll have her speak with room service. I’m sure it can be arranged.

Marcie answered immediately and began speaking before I could say anything. *“I know, I know...I’ve been away from my desk and I didn’t tell you. But, my pantyhose developed a huge runner this morning and I simply could not go a minute longer without doing something about it. So, I ran over to Goldsmith’s, got a new pair and everything is okay. I’m back now.”*

I didn’t say anything.

*“Carson, I was only gone a few minutes. And besides, you probably didn’t even know I’d left the hotel.”*

I didn’t say anything.

*“Carson, say something. You called me...remember? Would you like me have some coffee sent over?”*

“Marcie, would you ask room service to send over a shaker of vodka Martinis? Make it dry and have them add a few olives.”

She didn’t say anything.

“That’s vodka Martinis, dry and with olives...did you get that?”

*“Carson, is your health okay? You’ve probably never had a Martini in your life, and now you want one for lunch!”*

“Actually I have a visitor, a Ms. Julie Baxter, and she has suggested Martinis rather than coffee.”

There was a moment of silence on the line before Marcie hung up without speaking.

“Our Martinis will be over shortly,” I offered with a nod and a smile. “Now tell me how the *Drake Detective Agency* can be of assistance?”

Using the ashtray on the corner of my desk, she crushed out her cigarette and gave me a long stare before speaking. “I need you to find my brother. He’s missing and I’m afraid something terrible has happened.”

I returned her stare – her eyes told me she was serious and frightened.

“Okay, let’s start at the beginning. What is your brother’s name and why are you afraid something has happened?”

“Jake...Jake Furman. My brother’s name is Jake Furman. I haven’t heard from him in over three weeks, probably longer, and that’s just not like Jake. I mean...sometimes he goes away for long periods of time, but he always stays in touch. It’s been a month and not a peep, not a word, not a phone call – nothing.”

“Your name is Baxter and his name is Furman. How does that happen?”

She stiffened her posture and lit another cigarette. “Why does that matter? Why is that important?”

“It may not be important at all – just my curiosity.”

“I...I was married a few years ago. After we divorced I just decided to keep using my married name - Baxter. Is there something wrong with that?”

“No, no not at all...it just seems unusual. When most women get rid of a man they want to get rid of his name too.”

“Look Mr. Reno, it ain’t complicated. Jake...well Jake has been in and out of trouble most of his life, and he’s got some friends that...well let’s just say I wouldn’t want them to know that he had a sister. It just seemed the safe thing to avoid the ‘Furman’ name until Jake found some nicer friends.”

“I see,” I said for no reason.

“Jake was okay with it; in fact it was really his idea. He’s always taken care of his little sister.” I think I saw a tear, a small one.



She crushed out her cigarette just as my office door opened admitting a room service waiter carrying a tray with a Martini shaker, two glasses and a saucer of olives riding on top. Marcie was right behind him.

“Hello Ms. Baxter,” Marcie extended her hand. “I’m sorry I was away from my desk when you arrived. Did you have an appointment, or did I just happen to overlook it?”

Julie Baxter ignored Marcie’s outstretched hand. “I didn’t make an appointment and wasn’t sure I even needed to be here at all. But, Mr. Reno and I have talked and I think perhaps he will be able to help me.”

“I see,” Marcie grunted. “Enjoy your Martinis.”

The waiter poured both glasses full, added an olive and then stepped away. “I hope they are to your liking,” he said before walking out the open door following Marcie, and then closing it behind him.

“Cheers,” I offered after taking a sip, and not knowing anything else to say.

Julie Baxter sat her full glass on my desk, lit another cigarette and continued talking.

“The last time I heard from Jake he told me something had come up and he would be out of town for a few days – but he didn’t say a month, he just said a few days.”

“Okay, I understand it’s been a while since he spoke with you. But why do you think he might be in trouble?”

“It’s this Robin Murat thing. Haven’t you been reading about it in the paper?”

Well, she had me there. I didn’t read newspapers, except for funnies and sometimes the sports. The rest of that junk wasn’t worth the ink and paper used to put it in print. I entrusted the gossip, politics and fake news they printed for somebody else to worry about. However, sometimes that left me a little uninformed.

“I haven’t seen today’s edition,” I lied. “What is the latest?”

“The police are looking for him everywhere, including the Wolf River. Most people believe the mob finally caught up with him and the body may never be found. But, I think they’re wrong. I think he’s just hiding out until he can safely slip out of town.”

“You seem to be well informed about the matter.”

“I just know what I read in the papers, it’s been quite a news item for the past few weeks. And since Jake has been missing...well I’ve just been keeping up with the story...that’s all.”

“How does your brother tie in with Robin Murat?” I was as lost as a Priest at a Baptist Revival, but I wasn’t going to let her know that.

“Look, I’ve never met Robin Murat and have no desire to do so. I just know he was one of those ‘friends’ of Jake that I told you about earlier. According to Jake they were ‘business associates’, but from what I hear the only business Robin Murat ever had was with the mob. I just don’t think Jake was into that kind of thing...at least I hope not.”

Julie Baxter crushed out her cigarette and finally took a sip of her Martini. I wanted to ask her how it tasted, but somehow I figured it was time to end the small talk.

“Ms. Baxter, I’m confused. Why do you associate the disappearance of Robin Murat with the disappearance of your brother? Is there a connection...something you’re not telling me?”

She paused for a long moment before answering. “I don’t know, I mean...I’m not sure. I guess it’s just a hunch or a feeling that somethings not right, and Robin Murat is responsible for whatever has happened to Jake.”

Ms. Julie Baxter was leaving something out of her story, and it was apparent she didn’t want to share that something with me.

“Have you been to the police?” I asked after a short pause.

“No, and I’m not going to the police. That’s why I’m here to see you. They wouldn’t look for him anyway, unless they wanted to arrest him, and that’s not what I want.”

I sat silently for a moment, sipped my Martini and watched Julie Baxter. She took a couple of small sips, played with the olive, then quickly drank the whole thing.

“Another,” I offered, reaching for the shaker. But she beat me to it, picking up the shaker and emptying it into her glass.

“Olive,” I picked up the saucer and extended it in her direction. She hurriedly grabbed a couple and dropped them into her drink.

“Where does your brother live?” I helped myself to the last olive and returned the saucer to the tray.

“869 East Beale Street - apartment 4, it’s a dump. Somebody cleaned up an old motel and converted it into apartments, but they forgot to convert the neighborhood. I don’t know how Jake stands it, but he doesn’t complain.”

I scribbled the address on my note pad and paused before speaking.

“What do you do Ms. Baxter? I mean, what do you do for a living?”

“Yes Mr. Reno I can pay your fee,” she snapped. “I wouldn’t be here if I couldn’t. I came out pretty good from my divorce, and my job at Tri-State Bank pays well. It’s nothing glamorous, but keeps me in clothes and housing.”

And Martinis, I wanted to say.

“That’s not why I asked Ms. Baxter – it was just for information.”

“Yes, but you thought it.” She downed the rest of her Martini along with the olives.

“I’m going to need a description of your brother and a recent photograph, if you have one.”

“Jake isn’t a big man, but he is overweight. Sometimes he has a mustache and beard – sometimes not. Other than that I don’t know what to tell you. I’ll look around for a photograph, but I’m not sure if I have anything. You can check the police mugshots, their pictures will be more up to date than anything I might come up with.”

Interesting, I didn’t say.

“Where do you recommend I start looking...any suggestions?”

“His apartment I suppose. I haven’t been down there, the neighborhood scares me. You could also talk to some of those thugs that hang around Beale Street, I’m sure they all know him.”

“I see,” I said for no reason.

“And why are you asking me? You’re the detective. Isn’t that what you do?”

“I’m just gathering information Ms. Baxter. The more I have the better I can do my job and locate your brother.”

She stood up, ignoring my comment. “I’ve got to get back to work, I’ve already used more than my lunch hour. I assume you will be in touch?”

“Please leave your contact information with Marcie; she’s the lady you met when you met the Martinis. I’ll be back in touch as soon as I have something to report.”

Ms. Julie Baxter turned and left my office without speaking. I hope her job at Tri-State Bank didn’t let a few Martinis get in the way of a full day’s work!

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*I* finished my Martini and leaned back in the chair waiting on what I knew was going to happen next. It did.

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*M*arcie was talking to herself when she entered my office through the inside door. “Martinis in the middle of the day...humph! How is a person supposed to get any work done around here when the boss starts drinking before noon!”

“I thought it was a nice touch,” I chuckled. “A little change from one’s routine is never a bad thing.”

“You didn’t change your routine, you just changed your drink,” she snapped.

I ignored her comment. “Did you get Ms. Baxter’s contact information?”

“Yes, along with a home phone, a work phone and a check for \$500. You think it’s any good?”

“If it’s drawn on the Tri-State Bank, I would suspect that it is. Bouncing checks with your employer never looks good on a resume.”

“So I assume we have a new client? One that drinks Martinis for lunch then goes back to work handling other people’s money. No thanks, I’ll keep my meager savings somewhere else.”

“Where are Lydia and Joe?” I changed the subject.

“Joe is on his way back from West Memphis, I expect him at any time. Lydia is...well...I’m not sure where Lydia is. She left just before lunch and hasn’t returned yet.”

“When she gets back from wherever I need her to check out our new client, Ms. Julie Baxter. Have her dig as deep as she can during the next few hours and then let me know what she comes up with. I don’t think she was lying about anything, perhaps just leaving out things she didn’t want to tell me - but it never hurts to check.”

“Okay, what else?”

“I need Joe to visit his contact with the Memphis Police and get me a mugshot of Mr. Jake Furman. Also find out what he can about Mr. Furman’s troubles with the law – it might be a long list.”

Marcie smiled. “Okay I can handle all that, but where are you going to be while everyone else is working?”

“Having lunch with Jack Logan if you can find him for me.”

Marcie headed back to her desk to call Jack and I waited on the phone to ring. I wasn’t sure he would be available, but he was definitely the person to bring me up to speed on the story surrounding the missing Mr. Robin Murat.

Jack Logan is my lawyer and partner; he’s also a good friend. He’s not ‘officially’ my partner; however, we do work together on a number of cases, and the business he brings the *Drake Detective Agency* is always welcomed.

Jack's law practice is small when compared to most of the firms in Memphis, but he's always busy. Because it's small, Jack is able to provide the kind of personal service that the larger firms can't, and that was important. Besides, he's also a damn good lawyer.

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*I* picked up the phone receiver before it stopped ringing and spoke without saying hello. "Can you meet me for lunch – I'm buying. I've got a new client and need to ask you about someone who may be important to the case."

There was silence.

"Hello," I shouted into the phone. "Are you there?"

*"Yes...yes I am here,"* It was Marcie. *"I'd love to have you buy me lunch, but somebody needs to stay around here and do some work."*

I paused for a moment. "I thought you were getting me Jack Logan on the phone. What happened?"

*"What happened was he was with a client. But, I spoke with his secretary and she said he would meet you at the Rendezvous in fifteen minutes. Will that work?"*

"Yes that will work. Have Joe and/or Lydia join me if they show-up before I get back from lunch."

"Should they join you for lunch or run off and complete the assignments you instructed me to give them? Regardless of what the Martinis say, it would be difficult for them to do both."

Again, I ignored her comment. "Let's do lunch first, that way I can fill them in on our new client."

*"Will do,"* Marcie hung up and I headed to the Rendezvous.



**T**he waiter has just delivered my second beer when Jack entered, walked down the stairs and took a seat at my table.

“The secretary said it sounded important so I hustled over. But talk fast, I’m awful busy today.”

“What can you tell me about a guy named Robin Murat?”

“According to the papers the police are looking for him everywhere, but the reason for their search is a little fuzzy.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean is the police aren’t saying why they’re looking. However, word on the street is that he ran off with a suitcase full of the mob’s money and the mob wants it back.”

“So, the police want to catch up with Robin Murat before the mob does...right?”

“That’s what I figure, and maybe the police will also have some juicy questions about the money and where it came from.”

“How long have they been looking?”

“Carson, why don’t you read the newspaper once in a while? Not everything they print is bullshit. If you did then you might know what’s going on in our beautiful city.”

I just looked at Jack and remembered something Mark Twain wrote many years ago. *‘If you don’t read the newspaper you’re uninformed. If you do read the newspaper you’re misinformed.’*

After a few moments I asked again. “How long have the police been looking?”

“A few weeks, and I’m very surprised they haven’t found him yet – either dead or alive.”

“Hmm,” I mumbled.

“Carson, what is this all about?”

“Grab a beer and I’ll tell you about my new client.”

“Just one, then I’ve got to get back to my office.”

Over a quick beer I told Jack about Julie Baxter and her missing brother, Jake Furman. He listened without asking questions.

“I don’t get it,” he said when I finished. “Why would she believe the missing Robin Murat has anything to do with her missing brother?”

“I don’t get it either.” I sounded a little frustrated. “There’s something she’s not telling me. Maybe I’ll learn what that is before I find her brother and maybe not until I do. But, it will come out eventually.”

Jack stood up. “Sorry buddy, I’ve got to run. Give me a raincheck on lunch and call me if you need anything else. You could just read the paper for yourself and save us both a lot of time.”

I offered a brief smile and watched Jack climb the stairs and exit the Rendezvous. The waiter appeared at my table and I ordered another beer along with a rib sandwich for lunch. Hopefully Joe and/or Lydia would show up before I finished.

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*H*alfway through my sandwich both Joe and Lydia walked down the stairs and joined my table. Neither spoke.

“Where have y’all been?” I said to both of them.

“Boss, I’ve been cleaning up that investigation in West Memphis. Our client has been advised of the situation and seems happy with the results,” Joe was nodding and smiling as he spoke.

I looked at Lydia.

“Carson, I’ve been getting my nails done. You certainly can’t expect me to deal with clients when I have fingernails that look like I’ve been washing dishes and working in the garden.”

“Absolutely not, dishwasher hands and dirty fingernails are never impressive to our clients,” I answered, shaking my head and returning attention back to my rib sandwich. “Order yourselves some lunch and I’ll tell you about our new client.”

Both ordered a beer and the lunch special. I finished my sandwich and told them both about my meeting with Julie Baxter and the circumstances surrounding her missing brother, Jake Furman.

“Marcie told us what you wanted us to do,” Joe added when I finished. “We’ll both jump on that this afternoon.”

I thought for a moment before speaking. “Joe, when you get that mugshot, see if they have one of the missing Robin Murat too. It might come in handy.”

“Okay, anything else?”

“Yeah, check with the morgue and see if they have any ‘John Doe’s’ that match the Jeff Furman photo. It’s not likely, but we still need to check.”

“Anything else for me?” Lydia asked.

“No, just find out what you can about Julie Baxter. I suspect most of what she told me was true, but she is hiding something.”

“You think she knows more about how her brother and Robin Murat are linked?”

“Probably, and I’m pretty sure she knows I’ll find that link. But, for some reason she didn’t want to talk about it.”

“Where are you going to be?” Joe asked.

“I’m going to visit Jake Furman’s apartment and take a look around. He might be easier to find than we think.”

Joe and Lydia looked at each other.

“You do realize that is not a very nice neighborhood,” Joe nodded. “You think going there alone is a good idea?”

“I’m not thrilled, but I’ll be alright. However, it is a visit I want to make during the daylight and not after dark.”

“Boss, what do you figure?” Joe asked. “Do you really think that Jake Furman missing has anything to do with the disappearance of Robin Murat?”

“It certainly doesn’t add up, but Julie Baxter seemed convinced that the two are connected. Obviously she knows something that she isn’t telling. I need to find out what that ‘something’ is.”

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**W**e finished lunch and walked back to the *Peabody*. Joe and Lydia went inside to check with Marcie – I went to search for Spider Webb and a taxi ride to 869 East Beale Street.

