

FATHER DIVINE'S BIKES

By Steve Bassett

Chapter 1

It was almost nine o'clock on a Monday morning when Police Lieutenant Nick Cisco and Sgt. Kevin McClosky pulled up in their unmarked cruiser in front of the Broome Street tenement. The meat wagon from the morgue was already there, its rear doors wide open to accept the latest human jetsam to be scraped from the Ward's streets.

The stiff, a Negro man probably no more than twenty-five, was sprawled across the pavement, feet on the lower tenement step, his head a few feet from the gutter. The killing was not high profile enough for Coroner Walter Tomokai to handle so an assistant was given the thankless task of collecting the necessary forensic evidence.

A brown wooden handle above the man's chest stood strong against the mid-morning breeze indicating where an ice pick had skewered his heart. Blood that had pooled around the body had already begun to harden at the edges. About a dozen onlookers, young and old alike, displayed the indifferent curiosity common to those who have seen it all before. A uniform cop stood between them and the body.

"Jesus Christ, it's Frank Gazzi. So this is where they buried him," McClosky said as he switched off the ignition and stepped out to the street.

"He's still got his badge," Cisco said. "Come on, let's get started."

The two homicide detectives examined the body while the ghouls from the morgue snapped their pictures. McClosky turned to Gazzi, "Frank, you the first one at the scene?"

"Yeah. I was around the corner when I heard a woman scream, so I came running. Took about thirty seconds. When I got here he was still breathing, coughing up blood, but breathing.

Two uniforms got here a few minutes later,” Gazzi said nodding over his shoulder to the police cruiser. “They’re upstairs now.”

“Good luck with that,” Cisco said. “Doubt if they’ll get much. Whatever it is, we’ll want it.”

“You heard a woman scream, so there’s a witness,” McClosky said. “Where the hell is she?”

“What you see is what I found,” Gazzi said. “Beats hell out of me how quick these people can run and hide.”

It took Cisco and McClosky less than an hour to wrap it all up. Nobody heard a scream. Nobody saw anything. And nobody knew the victim’s name or where he came from. That was remedied when they emptied his pockets. There was forty-seven dollars in his wallet along with a U.S. Army ID card stating that Staff Sergeant Wilbert Locklee was honorably discharged at Camp Kilmer only two weeks earlier. A 1942 driver’s license had been issued to Locklee in Clarkdale, Mississippi. There was an unopened pack of Camels, ninety-two cents in change, and a Zippo lighter emblazoned with the crest of the 92nd Infantry Division.

“I’ll be damned,” Cisco said. “This guy was a Buffalo Soldier.”

“Buffalo Soldier?”

“Yeah there was a big article in LIFE magazine, how the 92nd, an all Negro division, went all the way back to the frontier Indian wars. Did pretty damn well this time around in Italy. Quite a history.”

“So what do you think?” McClosky said.

“Hunting for poontang,” Cisco said. “What else would get him up here on the hill. He had plenty of green, just picked the wrong pussy.”

“My guess, it was her pimp,” McClosky said. “They love the ice pick. When his whore screamed, they panicked and hauled ass. Left behind a stuffed wallet and wristwatch.”

“We’ll contact the cops in Mississippi, see if there’s a Locklee family still living in Clarkdale.”

“Poor son of a bitch. Put his ass on the line for Uncle Sam and ends up this way.”

They watched the meat wagon pull away with Locklee’s body, then turned to Gazzi and the other two uniforms.

“Tell me what you’ve got,” Cisco turned to the two patrolmen. “Your names....”

“James DeAngelo,” the older one, probably about thirty and clearly in charge, said. “My partner’s Dave Hurley.”

“Come up with anything worthwhile?” Cisco was aware of a common tendency of street cops to embellish their reports in order to put themselves in the center of homicide investigations. He had been there himself.

“The same old shit,” Hurley said. “Everyone was deaf, dumb and blind.”

“How long have you had a badge?” McClosky said. “Got it all figured out, do you.”

“Long enough to know there aren’t any niggers in this Ward talking to cops,” Hurley said.

“Hell, we almost had to kick-in some doors to get them out in the hall to talk at all,” DeAngelo said.

“Life can be a bitch,” Cisco responded sarcastically. “Just let us know, do you have anything?”

“Just names.” DeAngelo said. “Had to pry one of them out of the landlord. Seems a gal named Ruby West was nowhere to be seen this morning. He unlocked her first floor flat to give us a look-see.”

“And....” McClosky said, his impatience evident. “Is this Ruby West a whore or not?”

“With all the trappings,” Hurley said. “Big fancy bed, velvet sofa, big pillows all around and even carpets on the floor. Beer in the ice box, gin and rye. Not the best, but pretty good stuff. Fancy duds, his and hers in the two closets.”

“This bitch looks like a real moneymaker with a live-in pimp,” DeAngelo said.

“Whatever you’ve got put it in writing, then get it down to homicide by tomorrow,” Cisco said.

“Frank, it’s good to see that you’re still kicking,” McClosky said. “Hang in there.”

The two detectives drove away. Their first stop would be the Tenderloin to see if Ruby and her pimp also worked the downtown streets. Their curbside space was taken by a Fire Department truck. Two firemen had already begun unwinding a high pressure hose to flush blood off the sidewalk and down a storm drain with other gutter debris.

They were waiting for the light to change on Waverly when Cisco broke open a fresh pack of Chesterfields, tapped one out for McClosky and lit up for both of them. Cisco took a deep drag and exhaled. “You know, I’ve just been thinking about Gazzì, from wop golden boy to rousting voodoo scam artists along the black belt.”

“He’s been around a long time, longer than me, and just as long as you,” McClosky said. “Clue me in. How was it that he fucked up?”

“Goes back to when the goombahs started flexing their muscles downtown,” Cisco said. “Gazzì linked up with Tony Gordo’s bunch from Messina. He saw how Richie the Boot and

Longy had divided the city. Learned real fast how the game is played, and when to put the blinders on. It seems he took his blinders off at the wrong time and the wrong place.”

“I heard it was a simple vice bust,” McClosky said. “That he had picked up a whore. Jesus Christ, if that’s all it was, he’s really paying big time for it.”

“It didn’t end there,” Cisco said as the squad car pulled to the curb in front of the Picadilly. “In fact, there was a second bimbo, the same thing, wrong time, wrong place.”

Website: <https://stevebassettworld.com/>

OTHER WORKS BY STEVE BASSETT:

Payback – Tales of Love, Hate and Revenge, Book 2 of the Passaic River Trilogy. Winner 2020 Reader Views Literary Award, First Place Mystery/Thriller.

Adultery, three murders, a revenge driven madman, rogue cops and politicians intertwine in this noir thriller that defines urban corruption. It chronicles a time and place rarely touched in fiction or non-fiction, the immediate post-WWII years when the seeds for today’s inner-city decay and corruption were planted, and hardly noticed amid the euphoria that followed war-time victory. Two mutilated bodies were pulled from the putrid Passaic River, and the sawed-off arm of a third man was found neatly wrapped and tied at the city dump. Police Lieutenant Nick Cisco and his partner, Sergeant Kevin McClosky, two experienced homicide cops, quickly realize they are in over their heads as they grapple with ambition, greed, racial tension, international intrigue, and a powerful church on the take.

*REVIEW: [5.0 out of 5 stars](#) This is a must-read crime fiction read of 2019!
Reviewed in the United States on December 24, 2019*

A phenomenal story of grisly murders, tensions from a long-fought and gruesome war, and so much more take center stage in this truly wonderful novel. The story echoes the great days of crime fiction and noir style storytelling, highlighting an era of upheaval and change in the United States and around the world in the wake of the Second World War.

The novel focuses heavily on story through characterization. The book is filled with rich and diverse characters, each bringing their own set of problems and history that enhance the overall story and make the ongoing investigations and actions of other characters have much more emphasis on the overall story. Combined with the theme and genre of the story, this characterization draws the reader in immediately and gets the reader hooked on the action of the novel throughout every chapter.

Golden Ghetto: How the Americans and French Fell In and Out of Love During the Cold War. Non-fiction. Considering the suspicions, jealousies, bigotry, and crass opportunism inherent whenever one foreign power occupies another, award-winning journalist Steve Bassett's "Golden Ghetto: How the Americans and French Fell In and Out of Love During the Cold War" pieces together an improbable love affair that ended in betrayal by French President Charles de Gaulle. It is a Cold War tale of birth, growth and death of a huge U.S. Air Force base as relived through the here 5.0 out of 5 stars This is a must-read crime fiction read of 2019!