

*J*oe was in Mississippi working a fraud case for our client *Black Diamond Insurance*. Lydia was searching for a missing husband who had skipped on his alimony payments. Marcie, my secretary, had taken the day off to join her Sunday school class on a fieldtrip. Consequently, I decided that the best place to spend my Tuesday afternoon was at the *Starlight Lounge* and the daily ‘tea dance’. It seemed appropriate.

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*R*ight on schedule Rita delivered a fresh drink without intruding on my thoughts. I was busy relaxing, listening to the music and seriously considering a medium-rare T-bone steak to round out my very demanding day. What could be better?

Staring at the giant dance floor where a live band was entertaining the crowd, I smiled and watched all the mismatched couples dancing across the floor. The young with the old, the short with the tall, some wearing evening gowns, some wearing jeans and some wearing old sweat suits – nobody matched. This was the afternoon ‘tea dance’ at the *Starlight Lounge* and those were my clients – or potential clients.

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*U*nfortunately my daydreaming got rudely interrupted when someone walked up, grabbed a chair from my table, turned it around and sat down – before folding their arms on the chair back and showing a big grin. My visitor was a fellow named Rainbow Benny, and not someone I wanted around to spoil my relaxing afternoon.

“Hi yah,” he said hurriedly after getting settled in his chair that faced the wrong way.

Rainbow Benny was one of those unique characters that fit in well at the *Starlight Lounge* and the afternoon ‘tea dance’. But, unlike his name might suggest, Rainbow Benny was not easy on the eyes – in fact it was quite the opposite.

A gaudy madras sport coat complimented a white shirt, tan slacks, plastic shoes and an equally gaudy bowtie. His Delmonico skimmer hat sat on a head full of unruly blonde hair. And it seemed



too much hair for someone whose head was not much larger than a cantaloupe. I always suspected there might be a wig under the hat, but never had that confirmed.

Rainbow had bushy eyebrows and extra-large brown ‘mule’ eyes – also much too big for his small head. And I don’t believe he had eyelids, or at least any that he ever used, because I never saw him blink or close those big brown eyes.

An almost invisible nose sat above oversized fish lips, which appeared to get bigger when he spoke.

As I said, he was not easy on the eyes.

“Rainbow,” I said with a little attitude, “I don’t recall inviting you to my table. Did I miss something?”

“Ah, cum’on Reno – you know you wanna talk to your ole’ buddy Rainbow. I always bring you interesting stuff.”

“What I know is that I want to be alone this afternoon and enjoy my drink and dinner...that’s what I know.”

Of course, he ignored me.

“Did ya hear about Big Ed...Big Ed Torrio?”

“No, what should I have heard.”

“Well, you know he died...kissed off a couple of weeks ago – bad ticker is what the newspapers said. It was big news...it’s always big news when one of them mafia fellows finds his way below ground. When they go horizontal it’s a big deal, whether natural or otherwise. I’m sure you read about it – it was in all the papers.”

Well, he had me there - I didn’t read the newspaper. Except for the funnies and sometimes the sports section, I never indulged. Marcie put one on my desk every morning and I put it in the trash soon after. Fake news, lies and somebody else’s opinion simply didn’t interest me. Newspapers had the nasty habit of leaving the reader disillusioned or disappointed – certainly not informed. Besides, if I really needed to know something I would simply ask a bartender – I knew several. Their information was a lot more accurate than any newspaper I’d ever read.

“Rainbow, I must have missed that story. But I bet you’re going to tell me all about it...right?”

“Reno, him going to room temperature was big news. But what’s going to happen next is even bigger news.”

I took a sip from my drink and stared at him. “Okay Rainbow I’ll bite...what’s going to happens next?”

“It seems that Big Ed’s passing might not have been so natural after all – like the papers reported. Now the District Attorney suspects there might have been some foul play involved, and he’s gonna go dig up Big Ed and have a formal autopsy performed.”

“And just how would you know that? Where are you getting your information – off the restroom walls?”

“I got...I got connections in the DA’s office and they swear that’s what’s gonna happen. I got connections...you know.”

“What kind of ‘foul play’ does the DA suspect?”

“They ain’t sayin’, but my connection believes that some of the Philadelphia boys weren’t happy about the way things were being

handled down here. And when they ain't happy – ain't nobody happy."

"What kind of 'things'?"

"They ain't sayin', but my connection believes it has to do with some information that got mishandled. You know – not keeping secrets the way they're supposed to be kept."

"Okay Rainbow...but how does an unnatural death suddenly become natural?"

"Ah Reno...you know – that's easy. For enough money you can get a doctor or coroner to say anything. You ought to know that."

"And just who put the bug in the DA's ear about all these dirty deeds?"

"They ain't sayin', but my connection believes it might have been somebody real close to Big Ed. You know...like family maybe."

I took another sip of my drink and watched Rainbow for a moment.

"Rainbow, I appreciate you bringing me up to date on all the information and current events. But what's your reason for telling me this?"

"I'm just...just spreadin' the word around...you know. Just spreadin' the word."

"Humph," I grunted.

"I know...I mean I know you're plugged into a lot of things happenin' around Memphis, and I thought maybe you might find this information useful. And then again, maybe not."

"What you're really doing is 'spreading rumors around' and that's not always healthy. You should know that."

He stood, turned the chair around and slid it under my table. "I just thought you might find the information useful...that's all. If not, that's okay."

"Information is always useful, provided it is real information and not repeating rumors. Anyway...tell Rita to add a couple of whatever you're drinking to my tab. Will that be okay?"

He tipped his skimmer hat at me, and then disappeared into the crowd.

I signaled the waitress for another drink, and also told her to put me a T-bone steak on the grill. I intended to enjoy the rest of my afternoon, and hopefully without any further interruptions.

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Stopping by the *Down Under* bar, I got a drink to go and took the elevator home. Andy had a full crowd and I'd had enough of crowds for the day. I was also avoiding my bookie, Max Gimbecki. He was on a losing streak that would have embarrassed even the Chicago Cubs - and when Max was on a losing streak, then so was I. My wallet was in to Max for a hundred bucks, and I just wasn't in the mood to deal with him this evening.

Listening to a John Coltrane album, I went out on to my twelfth floor balcony and enjoyed my drink and nightly cigar.



Recent weather in West Tennessee had been strange and interesting. It was late summer - August. And for some reason the warm air seemed to be leaving early and allowing fall to creep in where it didn't belong. Normally this part of summer was brutal - so hot that you could actually hear the Bermuda grass growing. But that wasn't happening this year - 1962.

Looking at the western skies, the lights from downtown Memphis seemed unusually bright this evening, perhaps it was the cool air and brisk breeze blowing in from across the river.

I had no plans for tomorrow – preferring to let Joe and Lydia handle business, allowing me to catch up on my favorite habit of doing nothing.

However, that wasn't going to happen. My tomorrow was going to send me off on an adventure full of danger – and that's not to mention a lot of crazy characters, mysterious clues, exhumed bodies, the mafia and a web of blackmail that covered all of Memphis. The innocent would be difficult to find.

Thankfully I got a good night's sleep. I was definitely going to need it.