

Chapter the First.

*In which a damsel is discovered
in a most compromising position.*

AUGUST 25TH, 1882, 9:00 PM

IT HAD BEEN A PARTICULARLY SWELTERING SUMMER IN NEW YORK CITY, the hottest summer on record (and, not coincidentally, the first summer on record). By all accounts this evening promised to be yet another in the long progression of dog days that oozed like a piece of soft, runny brie served with a hunk of moldy French bread and washed down with a mug of room-temperature Clamato. Each day melting into the next with an excruciatingly, sluggishly slow excruciating monotony. The Santa Ana wind hissed as it blew through the narrow, rough-hewn, cobblestone, gaslit, historically accurate streets, and then it giggled down Fifth Avenue, baking the leaves on the mango and banana trees lining the fashionable boulevard into crisp, brittle parchment. Indeed, the summer of 1882 was nearly as tedious as my first paragraph has been, and I thank you for your patience.

On Twenty-third Street, the sun was setting over the newly built concrete-and-steel Flatiron Building, named for its innovative shape (and coincidentally after its insane architect, José Emmanuel Flitarron). It was the tallest building in Manhattan in

1882, though within a year it would be dwarfed by the Pan Am Building, which was already well under way. The street was strewn with paper streamers, confetti, shredded balloons, and discarded wooden legs. Sanitation workers ran around like madmen, heads upturned, arms flailing, chasing the last of the floating feathers that hovered like small ghosts, refusing to drift within arm's reach. The feathers were castoffs from the annual Mummer's Day parade, which had ended only an hour before. Occasionally two sanitation workers would run into each other and a vicious slap fight would ensue.

A block east, in a nondescript brownstone, the killer put the final touches on a letter addressed to the *Evening Post*. He licked a stamp commemorating Thomas Edison's triumphant electrocution of Jumbo the Giant Elephant, sealed the envelope with a wax crest depicting a skull and crossbones in a bowler hat, and placed the correspondence on top of his stack of outgoing taunting mail. He donned his black overcoat and top hat, grabbed the carpetbag in which he carried his instruments of death—as well as his workout clothes for later—and snuffed out the candle. (Whale oil prices had skyrocketed ever since the sinking of the *Pequod*, and he hadn't paid his bill in months.) Then, with a spring in his step and a song in his heart, he headed out into the dark and steamy night.

Across town, in the "unfortunates' district," there was a ramshackle hovel with nothing more than a bed, a woodstove, and a framed tintype depicting a cat hanging by its paws from an iron rod. The caption read, "I Most Humbly Request That You Hang in There, Baby," a bit of inspiration for the occupant, who sorely needed it. She was a broken-down prostitute by the name of Sally "Old Toothless Sally" Jenkins, and she readied herself for another long night's work by lacing up her worn-out boots, shifting her heavy skirt so that it faced the right direction, and

dousing her underarms with turpentine. She caught her reflection in the mirror and cackled, "Well now, ain't you a pretty one!"

Her cackle was quickly overtaken by a wet coughing fit. The gross hacking seemed to last forever. Neighbors pounded on the walls. Finally, Sally expelled a huge wad of phlegm that shot from her lungs and blew across the room like a cannonball, landing with a *plop* in a pan of simmering porridge atop her stove.

"Oh bother," she said, lighting the end of a half-smoked cigar, "I got phlegm in me porridge." And with that she collapsed back onto her bed.



AT AROUND NINE O'CLOCK, BROADWAY FILLED WITH THEATER PATRONS stepping out at intermission for a breath of stale air. In the poverty-stricken neighborhoods, indigent children opened fire hydrants and splashed about in the filthy gutters, contracting cholera, while uptown the more posh types like the Vanderbilts, the Bloomingdales, and the Trumps sipped their mint juleps, made fun of poor people, and frolicked on their private beaches along the East River, also contracting cholera.

On this night Mark Twain twirled his rope at Lincoln Center, Houdini performed his straitjacket trick at Avery Fisher Hall, and John Merrick, the Elephant Man, did his song and dance routine for a handful of potheads at the band shell in Central Park. All the rummeries and brothels were overflowing, and the restaurants were filled to the brim.

At Delmonico's, Mayor Teddy Roosevelt sat finishing his boiled cabbage and hind-quarters pie. His guest for the evening was Caleb Spencer, chief of police for the NCNYPD.¹ The two

1. The Nineteenth-Century New York Police Department.

were celebrating the arrest, earlier in the day, of Dandy Dan, the Water Man. For months now, he had terrified young couples in Central Park. Whilst a romantic tryst was under way, the culprit would hide in the bushes, growling and gnashing his teeth. When the moment was right, he would spring out on all fours, lift his leg, and urinate with great force on the young lady's fine evening frock.

Spencer had apprehended the felon *his way*. Not trusting the officious Detective Thomas Byrnes and his roundsmen with such a high-profile case, he had gone undercover, alone. He disguised himself as both a man and a woman. It was an elaborate costume, but it worked: a man in a tuxedo on one side, a woman in a ball gown on the other. When he twirled rapidly about, you'd swear he was a pair of young lovers doing a steamy, down-and-dirty tango. (Well, maybe *you* wouldn't swear, but it was enough to fool a man who spent the better part of the day hiding in the bushes.) It also displayed a bit of creative thinking on Caleb's part—something of which Detective Byrnes was incapable. Byrnes and Spencer had endured the police academy's rigorous training together, but their strained and often competitive relationship had only further deteriorated after Caleb's quick rise within the department. He was now Byrnes's superior and Byrnes didn't like it.

Roosevelt tapped a glass with a spoon. "I say, my good man, tell me exactly how you managed to corner the dastardly malefactor! I always love a good story."

"Well," Caleb began, "I had just drawn my 'lovely partner' toward me, when I saw this gentleman on his hands and knees, barking. I thought to myself, 'Now, that is highly unusu—'"

"Bully!" interrupted Roosevelt.

Caleb sighed. The mayor loved a good story, but only if it was his own.

"My dear Mr. Spencer, have I ever told you about the time I slept in a hollowed-out four-day-old water buffalo carcass?"

"Yes, I believe that you have, Mayor, several times in fact, but as I have never paid any attention, you may proceed as if you have not."

"Jolly good then!" And with that, the jovial mayor launched into another boring story of his exploits. Caleb was amazed at how his sarcasm flew straight over Roosevelt's perfectly round head. Insulting Roosevelt without the mayor's realizing it had become a game for Spencer's own private amusement. (Spencer had always been a bit of a loner, and he enjoyed nothing more than playing with himself.)

At thirty-three, he was already a seasoned veteran of the force. Having joined when he was a mere five years of age—to work the badge-polishing machine—he rose quickly within the ranks, making lieutenant by the time he was six. His hard-nosed, no-nonsense, look-at-me-indecently-and-I'll-kick-your-posterior-from-here-to-China approach had impressed the older, fatter, and even more incontinent coppers. Upon his appointment as chief, the young crime-fighter garnered a reputation not only for being a good cop, but also, according to an editorial in the *Evening Post*:

... for having looks and appeal so devastatingly dashing as to make any proper woman of childbearing age swoon with delight at visions of the strapping young police chief, buck naked except for a cowboy hat, dancing in her head.

However, much had changed since those words were penned. For starters, he had stopped dating the *Evening Post's* star reporter, but the times had also been hard on him. Three short years presiding over the most corrupt, crime-ridden city in the world had

aged him. His hairline had begun to recede, and what remained was going quickly gray. To make matters worse, Roosevelt had ambushed him at the scene of Dandy Dan's arrest and insisted that he come to dinner, and Spencer had had no time to change out of his disguise. So there he sat, wearied by the night's ordeals and the mayor's long-winded diatribes, with half a blond wig hanging precariously askew, still bedecked in the now filthy tuxedo and torn ball gown, and scented, faintly, with the pungent effluvium of wine. He looked less like a dashing police chief and more like Bette Davis in *Hush . . . Hush, Sweet Charlotte* after being flattened by a steamroller.

"Oh my, look at the time," he announced, returning his pocket watch to the shiny sequined purse that he clutched to his feminine side. "Mayor, I thank you for a lovely evening. Your self-indulgent anecdotes were both egocentric on the one hand, and long-winded and pointless on the other, but now I must be on my way."

"Let's us two have a toast!" the mayor roared, lifting his goblet of Umbria Vittiono '54, a robust merlot aged with a fine mix of red grapes from the Napa Valley and the essence of pure heroin (which was perfectly legal in the Age of Innocence, and was referred to as "God's Own Medicine").

Caleb was uncomfortable with congratulations of any kind, and he knew that the toast would be in his honor. So, to get the embarrassment over with, he quickly raised his flaming dry martini, laced with uncut cocaine and liquid arsenic (both also perfectly legal, and known as "God's Own Snuff" and "God's Own Rat Poison," respectively).

"In all my years as mayor, I've been privileged to witness several heroic acts of bravery perpetrated by our fine constabulary."

Okay, here it comes, thought Caleb.

"But nothing that could compare with what I faced when

leading a handful of ragtag, battle-weary soldiers on that fateful charge up the great San Juan Hill.”

“The Spanish-American War doesn’t even happen until 1898,” Caleb snapped. “If you are going to force me to endure your stories, at least get your facts straight.”

Roosevelt looked hurt. “Are you calling me a liar, Mr. Spencer?”

Caleb sighed. The worst part of his job was dealing with the sensitive emotions of the city’s rich and powerful. Still, he preferred Roosevelt, who was merely pompous, to some of the more nefarious types he had to deal with, like J. P. Morgan, the Rockefellers, or the worst of them all, William “Boss” Tweed. He had dined with Boss Tweed on more than one occasion, and he had always left the meal feeling quite dirty all over. Roosevelt, for all his long-windedness—and chronic flatulence—was his only ally against Tweed and his dreaded Tammany Machine.

“Not at all, Mayor. Please, continue.”

“There I was atop my trusty steed Bully Boy, bugle in one hand and saber outstretched in the other. All around us—in every direction—bloodthirsty Indians as far as the eye could see . . .”

If this was going to end in a toast to Caleb, it was going to take a while. He sneaked another look at his timepiece. It was now 9:23. The hands blurred and dissolved as Caleb’s eyes glazed over. The hypnotic, rhythmic pounding of Roosevelt’s garbled voice droned on and on and on.



ON TENTH AVENUE, OLD TOOTHLESS SALLY HAD FINALLY GOTTEN IT TOGETHER and was out hawking her goods.

“Hello, gov’nor. Care for a quick bibble in the old bobble?”

A quick bibble in the old bobble cost an even sixpence, while a “wet waggie” cost a ha’penny or two. “A fish in a dish, with

tartar sauce on the side” was a full tuppence. If someone wanted an all-night “dilly-wonker” or a “triple wraparound digger,” that was extra, and Sally always made it clear up front that she wasn’t into anything weird.



At approximately 9:20, a morbidly obese albino man coming out of the original Original Ray’s Pizzeria on Eleventh Avenue witnessed Sally waddling up Eighth Street. He later said that she belched, picked something out of her ear, hawked up a loogie “of unbelievable size,” and then turned onto Ninth, heading east.

It was the last time she would be seen alive, for at that exact moment, the killer walked through the Five Points district of lower Manhattan. He walked warily; even for him, this neighborhood was dangerous. It was populated by large street gangs with unusual names like the Flapjacks, the Garlic Knots, the Venti Caffè Lattes, and the Toasted Bialys with a Schmeer. Often these packs would engage in ultra-violent, riotous brawls that could last the whole night long and would inevitably end with at least one gang member running home in tears. Tonight, however, the killer was lucky. It was all quiet in the Five Points. He made his way up Broadway, where he paused to buy a cup of mayonnaise from a street vendor. In 1882 a man named Hellmann had just invented this oil-and-egg delight, but he wasn’t yet sure how to market it. He started with street carts, selling it like ice cream. New Yorkers were so crazy about the new treat that they were more than content, at present, to eat it from a cup with a spoon, or perhaps on a sugar cone with chocolate sprinkles.

After finishing his mayo, the killer picked up his pace. The need to murder, maim, and mutilate began to boil up in his veins.

He quickly strode the three blocks to Herald Square, where he hoisted up his woolen trousers and waded through the waist-high manure. Back then there were no cars, and the buggy horses left behind copious amounts of waste. Herald Square's bowl-shaped topography (it was actually below sea level) had made it the repository for most of the city's excrement, as well as most of the city's missing persons.

He was now just one block away from the history books, and ahead, at about ten yards and closing, Old Toothless Sally Jenkins was just one high-pitched cackle away from becoming the first unfortunate victim of Jack the Jolly Thwacker.



“. . . AND THAT'S WHEN I DECIDED THAT THE ELEPHANT'S FOOT WOULD make a bully coffee table!" Roosevelt exploded with a boisterous laugh that shook Caleb back to reality.

"So here's to me," bellowed Teddy. "Long may I live. Chin chin, my good friend!" Caleb and the mayor clinked glasses.

"I'll second that, gentlemen," said a woman's voice.

"Well, by golly almighty! Look what the cat dragged in!" Roosevelt bellowed. He stood up, and the tablecloth, tucked into his trousers, pulled up with him, emptying the contents of their glasses into Caleb's lap. This time, the long-suffering police chief didn't even bother to sigh, but merely dabbed at his wet crotch with a handkerchief.

"Why, if it isn't the charming Elisabeth Smith, columnist *par excellence* for the *Evening Post*," Roosevelt schmoozed while taking her hand.

She was the last person Caleb wanted to see, especially in his current condition.

"Oh, Mr. Mayor, you're much too kind."

"On the contrary, miss, I am not kind at all. But I am as strong as a bull moose and you may use me to the limit!" With that the mayor clicked his heels and kissed Elisabeth's hand.

"I have no idea what that means," she said, still smiling.

"But I thought you were on assignment somewhere in Japan," said Roosevelt.

"Close; Egypt, to be precise. I was following the exploits of Mr. Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon. They were excavating old houses belonging to the slaves who built Ramses the Sixth's tomb. It was all quite boring really, until they reached a door that they couldn't seem to budge. They claimed that something wonderful was on the other side, but by then I was simply fed up with all the sand and all the dirt and grit. It was finding its way into—" She paused, as if looking for the right words. "Every orifice that I have." She paused again, frowning, as if those weren't the right words at all. "I mean, I just had to get back home, and so here I am."

"And we're all the better for it," cooed the mayor. "Tell me, did Mr. Carter and Lord Carnarvon ever get the door open?"

"Beats me. Who's the trannie?" Elisabeth asked, referring to Caleb.

"My apologies. Police Chief Spencer, may I introduce Miss Elisabeth Smith." Caleb reluctantly stood, staring forlornly at his crotch.

"Hello, Liz," he muttered.

"Caleb!" said a surprised Elisabeth. "Why, I'm sorry. I didn't recognize you in drag. Yes, I was reading all about your adventures with Dandy Dan, the Water Man, on the plane back from Cairo." She offered her hand to be smooched.

"That's all right, Liz," said Caleb, making a show of only

shaking her hand. "I'm actually, you know, only half in drag." He slunk back into his seat.

"Pardon me, but do the two of you know each other?" asked Roosevelt.

"Well, you might say we do, from a former relationship that ended very badly." Liz frowned again, as if she had meant to be more subtle, then shrugged and gave Caleb one of those remember-the-great-sex-we-used-to-have smiles.

Caleb couldn't help but notice how great Liz looked. Her thick brown hair was pulled away from her face, revealing a perfect neckline, which brought the eye straight down to her shapely hourglass figure.

"Bully! Then you'll join us for an after-dinner drink! You are just in time. The evening's entertainment is about to begin. If you sit here beside your mayor, you'll have a perfect view."

Caleb suddenly spoke up: "You know, I really should be going—"

"Nonsense," said Roosevelt. "Don't be rude. Miss Smith, please sit."

"Well, I suppose for just a few minutes."

"Marvelous!" hailed Teddy, as he helped her to her chair. "How 'bout dessert?"

"No thank you. I'm on a diet. Trying to keep myself shapely for all those young gentleman callers who seem to be constantly knocking down my front door." She shot Caleb a look.

"Yes, yes, you're quite right. I should abstain, myself." Teddy patted his big stomach. "Why don't you just apply it directly to your thighs, Theodore?" He erupted in a buoyant laugh. Smith giggled, but Spencer sat glumly. He hated the mayor's catch-phrases almost as much as he hated his stories.

"What can we get you to drink?" inquired Teddy.

"Maybe something light. Caleb, dear, what was that delightful drink we used to order at Hurley's?" She was looking directly at the police chief, but he wasn't looking back. "Oh yes, I remember. I will have a powdered opium and liquid ether frappe, with a shot of pure laudanum."

"Waiter!" cried the mayor, "One God's Own Enema!"

Caleb rolled his eyes. It was going to be a long night.

A voice cried out, "Ladies and gentlemen. Back for a return engagement here at Delmonico's, please welcome that slaphappy duo of disgruntled lowlifes, forever embroiled in the dismal world of lugubrious matrimony . . . the two and (hopefully) the only . . . Punch and Judy!"

"Oh goody!" declared Teddy. "They're my favorite!"

The patrons applauded as a stubby woman with a big putty nose limped to the center of the room. She was dressed in a red costume, with bells on her shoes and hat.

"Oh woe. What donkey work is this blessed conjugal life," Judy began, and already the audience was booing her. "I hope my helpmate has found suitable employment today, for we need food and have not the means to buy such." The crowd hissed.

Then a huge barrel of a man entered. He was dressed in the same silly red outfit, only his was way too tight for his body. The audience went crazy, pounding the tables and hooting and hollering. Punch was obviously their favorite. "Matron, I am home!" he announced. "Is there a fine meaty banquet for me to partake of? For I am famished and need most assuredly to sup!"

"No, my lord, and master, we have only rotting grub. You have not a craft that pays earnings to buy such fancy edibles!" A hush fell over the audience. They seemed to know what was coming next. Punch pranced about, rolling his eyes and working himself up into a red-faced frenzy. Then he pulled out a long "slapstick" (a doweling rod with a paddle bolted to one end).

"Well then, gentlewoman," he said, "I will have to teach you a lesson!"

"Oh, no! No! Please good sir, no!"

Punch chased Judy all around the dining room, crawling underneath the tables and sometimes jumping on top of them. The crowd was in hysterics. Roosevelt was laughing so hard his face was turning red. Caleb looked like he was about to fall asleep.

Elisabeth leaned toward Caleb. "You suppose that's what our married life would have ended up like?" she whispered.

"Except you'd be holding the paddle," he retorted.

"Well, obviously."

"Why are you really here?" he asked her.

"My dear Mr. Spencer, what *are* you implying?"

"I know you. You would not have left Egypt if there weren't a story brewing."

"You insult me, sir. How do you know I am not back to rekindle the lingering embers of our love?"

"I assure you there are none."

Elisabeth leaned away. "And I assure you there are none on my end, either, Chief Spencer, so you may divorce yourself of any illusions you have in that regard. I am of course here for a story."

The sound of church bells erupted from Caleb's pants. He and Elisabeth looked curiously at his lap.

"Excuse me," he said, and pulled out a large wooden box and placed it on the table. The teak and mahogany frame was decorated with intricate inlaid designs and was marked "Edison" in gold script on the front. Caleb opened a little door in the rear of the box, lit a match, and poured kerosene into the mobile phone's loading funnel.

"I see you use Edison," observed Liz. "I use Bell. The reception is much better and I don't have to wait 'til midnight to call long distance."

"Excuse me again," said Caleb, getting up to move away from the noise of the show.

"Now I have you, you ungrateful ugly wench!" Punch announced, and he swung hard the big slapstick. There was a sickening thud, and a spray of blood hit Roosevelt in the face. The mayor laughed so hard that he nearly exploded.

"Take that!" yelled Punch as he continued to bash Judy with the paddle. The genteel nineteenth-century audience could not get enough of the carnage. Punch bowed to a standing ovation, and two waiters dragged his unconscious wife away. Punch would only have an hour or so to revive her before their next show.

"I gotta tell ya," said Teddy, turning back to the table, "I don't know how many times I've seen that, and it just gets funnier and funnier every time!"

Spencer returned to the table. "That was the precinct. It seems there's been a ghastly murder. You must excuse me."

"Hold on there, Chiefy," roared Teddy, "I believe I'll tag along with you."

Spencer sighed. That was the last thing he wanted.

"My apologies, Miss Smith," said Roosevelt, again kissing Liz's hand, "but I'm afraid what promised to be a most . . . stimulating evening will have to be postponed. Duty calls!"

"You know, Mayor, it's really my duty that calls, not yours. You should stay here and enjoy the rest of this . . . 'show.'"

"Nonsense my boy, I shall assist you in all ways possible. Let us away!"

Caleb bowed to Liz. "Good night Miss Smith, and . . . good-bye." His farewell was cold, and there was a definite permanence to his words. With that, he and the mayor hurried out of Delmonico's to a waiting carriage below.

"Good night to you, Chief Spencer," Liz said softly. "Though I am sure I'll be seeing you again shortly."

THE SHROUD OF THE THWACKER

19



AT APPROXIMATELY MIDNIGHT, THEIR CARRIAGE BOUNCED DOWN THE cobblestones on Ninth Street and pulled to a stop in front of the crime scene, between Seventh and Broadway. The police had barricaded the entrance to a dark alley and were now enjoying some well-deserved coffee and “yeast rings.”

“What do we have?”

“Jelly, powdered, and cream-filled,” said the sergeant in charge.

“I’m talking about the crime,” said Caleb, doing a classic slow burn.

“Of course you are, sir. My apologies. Victim is one Sally Jenkins, alias Old Toothless Sally, sixty-three years old, prostitute out of the Mulberry Bend, no family to speak of. She was found by that gentleman over there.” The officer pointed to the morbidly obese albino man. “Just about forty-five minutes ago.”

“No yeast twists?” asked Teddy.

“Sorry, Mr. Mayor. Them were the first to go.”

Caleb was writing in his small notepad. “Who was the last to see her alive?” he asked.

“That would be him, sir.” The sergeant pointed to the same morbidly obese albino man.

“You’re telling me that the last person who saw her alive and the first person to discover her dead are one and the same person?”

“No sir,” said the sergeant.

“But it would seem to me—”

“No sir. *That* morbidly obese albino found the victim. While *this* morbidly obese albino man was the last to see her alive.”

Caleb adjusted his glasses. He had not realized there were two of them.

"Are you twins?" he asked.

The morbidly obese albino on the left huffed. "I've never seen him before in my life."

Caleb snapped shut his notepad.

"Sounds like an open and shut case to me!" said Teddy. "Let's get back to Delmonico's."

"You're welcome to return alone if you so desire—"

"Sir, if I may be so bold," said the sergeant. "If you take a look at the body, you'll see that neither of these boys could have done the deed."

"I'll be the judge of that, Sergeant," said Caleb.

"Yes, yes, of course you will, sir," muttered the sergeant. "After all, you're the chief of police, which makes you my superior, and who am I? I'm just a lousy flatfoot, twice your age, who's been passed over for promotion year after year because of a so-called drinking problem, which once, just once, mind you, and it was after a long, thankless day of hard work, may have, and I repeat *may have*, resulted in a minor incident of so-called obscene conduct with my nightstick. Why should anyone listen to me? The crime scene is right down that alley, gentlemen."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

There was still a bit of resentment from the police force about having to report to a young upstart like Spencer, and when he and Roosevelt turned their backs the sergeant stuck his tongue out at Caleb.

Roosevelt and Spencer lifted the rope, bent over, and entered the alley. Caleb picked up an oil lamp and struck a match on the wall. Suddenly the match exploded in a huge fireball that singed his eyebrows.

"Weehoo!" exclaimed the barrel-chested Roosevelt.

"Delightful," hissed Spencer, who knew all too well what the

mayor's weehooing meant. "I don't know which I love more, Mayor, your stories or these little . . . outbursts."

"Well, fear not, young Caleb. I've a million of them both." Roosevelt slapped his belly.

"I'm overjoyed. Now, if you would kindly step back, I need to examine the crime scene."

"I've seen my fair share of violence, young man, like the time I was hunting giant iguanas in the dusty outbacks of Australia. The females can get quite feisty, and—"

"Now is not the time for stories, Mr. Mayor!"

"You're just jealous because you've never seen a female iguana swallow a fully grown wild Aborigine. Now that, my boy, will put hair on your chest."

"Gentlemen," called a familiar female voice, "why don't we put our testosterone back in the old billiard pockets for the time being and observe the crime scene, shall we?"

"Oh, hell," muttered Caleb.

Elisabeth Smith stepped out of the shadows. "I'm quite sure there will be ample opportunity later for the two of you to compare your . . . best . . . um . . ." She concentrated. This time she was going to find the perfect phrase. ". . . muscular protuberances." She sighed. *Oh, Liz*, she admonished herself, *why do you even bother to open your mouth?*

"How the hell did you get in here?" Caleb demanded.

"Don't talk to the little lady that way," said Roosevelt, stepping quickly to her side. "But how the hell did you get in here, honey? This is supposed to be a sealed-off crime scene."

"The officers were kind enough to let me in. I simply explained to them how much you required my assistance."

"Very resourceful," said the mayor.

"Yes, well, we are not in need of your help," Caleb said, "and

I'll thank you to leave now, so we—that is, *I*—can get down to work."

He took Elisabeth by the arm and started to escort her out of the alley.

"T. R.," she pleaded, "there isn't any harm in my observing, now, is there? I would absolutely love to watch a top-notch investigative team at work."

"We are not a—" Caleb began.

"The young lady might learn something, Chief Spencer."

"She might learn what your weehooing means."

The mayor whispered into Caleb's ear, "But she's a hot tamale." Then he turned to Liz and wagged his finger. "Just swear you won't print anything you see here, tootsie roll."

"You have my word, Your Honor," she said.

"Please, all of you, I prefer to work alone. My . . . solitude is of great value to me, and—"

"Now, hold on there, buckaroo banzai, I think there's only one mayor standing here. And as far as I know, mayors outrank police chiefs. It goes mayors, bookies, leg-breakers, ice cream, then police chiefs. I say the little lady stays!"

The mayor seldom pulled rank with him, and Spencer stood still, not sure of his next move. He didn't like being told how to run his investigation, didn't like the mayor being there, and definitely didn't want his snoopy ex-girlfriend hanging around. But what could he do?

"Okay, just stand to the side and keep your trap shut, understand?"

"Oh, we're feeling bossy, aren't we?" Liz replied. "As per usual."

Spencer ignored her, lit his lamp, held it up, and illuminated the horrible scene.

The three stood slack-jawed. At first glance, the bizarre display in front of them appeared more like a tableau from a wax museum than a crime scene. The body was standing (not lying face-up with an embroidered pillow under the head, hands folded neatly over the chest, and legs crossed in a ladylike fashion, which was the customary way to leave a murdered prostitute in a dark alley in that era). Rigor mortis had set in early, allowing the killer the ability to manipulate the body like a fully articulated doll. He had even propped it up, using a stick and a wooden box for a stand.

"It's an atrocity," said Caleb.

"Ritual murder," Liz whispered.

"Shark attack!" exclaimed the mayor.

Old Toothless Sally Jenkins, the poor unfortunate victim, had not only been murdered (clubbed from behind, possibly by a bag of apples), but the killer had taken the time to do some rather outlandish things to her body.

Spencer took out his new Edison tape recorder and turned its crank several hundred times. Then he spoke into its horn-shaped microphone in a professional, unemotional manner.

"The victim's dress has been cut, and the hemline raised a good fifteen inches above the knee."

"That isn't the way the ladies wear their skirts today," Liz interjected.

"Quiet!" Caleb admonished. "In addition, numerous brightly colored, round pieces of cloth . . . I would say about two inches in diameter, have been meticulously sewn into the garment, creating a random polka-dot pattern. It looks like her boots were removed by the killer, resoled, painted white, polished, and returned to her feet.

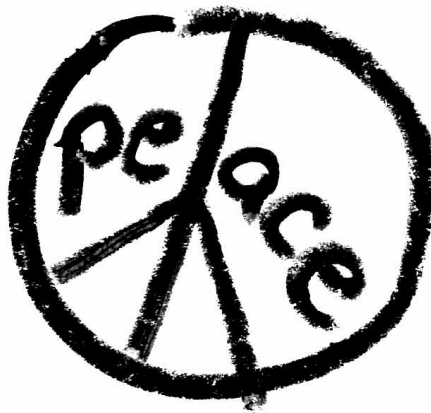
"The victim's, um, intestines have been removed and placed

atop her head. They have been fashioned into a hairdo shaped like a . . . beehive?" This staggered him for a moment, and he switched off his tape recorder and turned to Liz.

"Why would he do such a thing?" he whispered. Liz shrugged.

"I've never seen a hairdo like *that* before."

The killer had also made his mark on Sally's face: a small incision under her jawline allowed the jowls to be pulled up and pinned back behind her ears, giving her essentially what we would today call a face-lift. Liz observed that the heavy mustard and lard makeup that Old Sally was accustomed to wearing had been wiped away, and a fine layer of a makeup of exquisite quality had been applied in its place (Max Factor Light Foundation Number Two, actually, according to a "friend" of mine who, um, knows a lot about makeup). Her lips were painted shocking fuschia, long black eyelashes were glued to her still-open eyes, and a strange insignia had been inscribed on her cheek with an eyebrow pencil. None of the three could identify the sign. It consisted of a circle bisected by a straight vertical line and two opposing radials extending from the center point to create two acute angles.



"Pey-ah-cey," Roosevelt said, sounding out the inscription on the symbol. "What could it mean? Do either of you know Latin?"

But something else had grabbed Caleb's attention: her smile. Anyone who knew Old Toothless Sally knew of the brown, rotting nubbins that had given her the nickname. But now the prostitute's frozen mouth displayed a set of gleaming white Hollywood choppers. The killer had capped her teeth!

Taking into account the last time Sally had been seen alive, outside the original Original Ray's Pizzeria, until the time that the second morbidly obese albino discovered her dead, plus all the fine tailoring and extensive dental work, Spencer determined that the encounter between Sally and her killer had to have lasted at least three minutes.

Teddy Roosevelt threw up his arms. "What the hell are we supposed to do?" he bellowed. "The way I see it, our suspect is a skilled surgeon, dentist, cobbler, tailor, and makeup artist—and he enjoys styling ladies' hair! Jesus H. Christ! There's got to be at least a thousand guys like that in this city."

Spencer was trying desperately to contain himself.

"Plus, he can't spell." Elisabeth said, drawing their attention to a corner of the alley. As if the killer hadn't left enough clues already, there on the brick wall he had scrawled a cryptic message in chalk:

*da mummies are da wonz dat dont get blamed and
wees da wonz dat get thwacked. Im no dandy dan the
water man, yooz can just call me Jack. Jack The Thwacker
cause lze like to thwack.*

The End (I hope you like my poem)

Roosevelt clenched his fists. His eyes turned red with what looked to his companions like rage. Thick, oily liquid from his

pupils condensed into round droplets that spilled over his eyes, onto his hot cheeks, and—in the suddenly chill night air—became a fog upon his spectacles. The big teddy bear was crying.

“That has got to be the most beautiful poem I have ever read,” he whimpered as he pulled out his snot rag and blew a loud foghorn into it. “Weehoo,” he added half-heartedly, the blowing effort having shaken something loose.

“Okay, that’s it! I can’t take this anymore! I want both of you out of my crime scene, now!”

“Caleb, stop!” Elisabeth ordered, then her tone changed from admonishment to one of urgency. “Listen to me. We have a major clue here. The killer mentions Mummers in his poem.”

“Yeah, so? The clowns that dress up like birds and run around drinking beer?”

“Not exactly,” Liz said. “The Mummers are about more than an annual parade. They are an ancient secret society that has its origins in Sussex, England, hundreds and hundreds of years ago. The word ‘mummer’ refers to a person who is mumming. It comes from the Greek word ‘mommo,’ meaning ‘mask.’ Wearing masks and costumes became quite popular in the fourteenth century. Besides dressing up, performing plays, and holding parades, the Mummers also worship pagan gods of fertility.”

“Sound like my kind of gods, if you get my drift,” said the mayor, gesticulating wildly with his pelvis.

“But what does all this mean?” Caleb asked.

“So now you admit you need my help?”

“I admit your insight at this particular moment might save me some time, yes—”

“Bully!” cried Roosevelt. “Then the tamale is on the team.”

“There’s no team!” Caleb exclaimed.

Roosevelt looked as if he might cry again. “No . . . team?”

Liz furrowed her brow. “I don’t know exactly what it means,

but the annual Mummers Day parade was held here today, downtown. I say we head down there and start putting the pieces together." Caleb seemed about to protest. "You'll need me on this. My father was a Mummer, so I might spot something."

He could not argue with that logic, but he was not comfortable with the situation.

"And if this killer does any more styling, you'll need my feminine wiles."

Roosevelt whispered into Caleb's ear, "Plus, if things get rough, we might get to see her with her shirt off!"

"All right. Let's go," Caleb finally said.

"Bully!" shouted you-know-who. "Now I am a 'happy camper!'"

Liz suddenly became extremely animated. "Caleb, listen to me: every year, members of the secret society of Mummers hold their convention here in New York. If our killer is a Mummer, he's probably still here. But only for one more day. We have no time to waste."

"Right," said Roosevelt, finally comprehending the direness of the situation. "Let's hurry back to Delmonico's and quickly finish our after-dinner drinks!"



THE NEWLY FORMED INVESTIGATIVE TEAM HAD DONE SOME EXPERT ANALYSIS. In fact they were ahead of their time in terms of deciphering forensic evidence, but in their exuberance to follow the Mummer lead, they had ignored one blatant clue left behind by the killer: the position of the prostitute's body! Was it something they just missed? Or was it something they just couldn't understand?

Yes, Old Toothless Sally was left standing, but she was also

posed with one knee up and both arms extended, her hands bent down at the wrists. Considering the way the killer had arranged the entrails into a lovely bouffant hairstyle, as well as the white boots, the makeup, the polka-dot miniskirt, the body position, and the peace sign on her cheek, the picture couldn't have been clearer. But, of course, it could never be clear to someone from the nineteenth century. It was obvious to me in the twenty-first century that the tableau the murderer created with Sally Jenkins was unmistakably that of a late-1960s go-go dancer!

A week or two later, it occurred to me that there was definitely something out of the ordinary going on.



"Shark attack!" exclaimed the Mayor.

