

The Icing on the Cake – (September 2019 h/work)

The twenty men who occupied the Regal suite in the Grand Hotel Chicago eyed each other with barely concealed hostility. They were enjoying a free meal supplied reluctantly by the management. All but one of them was a dyed in the wool hoodlum, with multiple assaults murders and other heinous crimes linked to their names. The one exception was me because I was an undercover agent for the FBI tasked with infiltrating the mobsters and gathering enough evidence to put them behind bars for life.

It hadn't been easy being accepted by Pat "Machete" Moran and his outfit, the scourge of the East Side. You name it they had a dirty paw in it. Speakeasys, brothels, protection rackets all bore their hallmark. I had had to "kill" a policeman to get accepted. Of course it was all a set up the cop in question had a phial of pig's blood under his shirt and I fired blanks at him but it looked very real and Moran fell for it, lucky for me.

He had eight of his closest henchmen with him for protection. The other ten men were from a rival gang led by a particularly nasty piece of work Vincenzo "fingers" Minelli. He was of Italian descent as his name implied, a small, wiry man with jet black hair, cold eyes and a scar across his forehead. Word on the street had it that Minelli got his nickname because he had cut off every finger of the punk that gave him the scar and kept them in a jar in formaldehyde on his desk as a warning then the poor unfortunate got fed to the pigs on Minelli's brother's farm. I could never verify the veracity of that but knowing Minelli it wouldn't surprise me.

The reason for this tense stand off was to come up with a solution to a problem that was vexing both Moran and Minelli and it concerned, strangely enough, a woman. Maria Mercado had been a gangster's moll. Not a particularly successful gangster and he had managed to get himself shot by Moran as he was suspected of being a snitch. Of course I kept quiet when he professed his innocence as I reasoned it was him or me. Anyways after the funeral Maria came to see Moran demanding some financial restitution. She was all raven hair and flashing eyes and you gotta give her credit, that girl had gumption. She said she would be destitute without the income from her man. Moran gently took her hand, put his hand in his pocket and looking into her eyes put a shiny 10 cent piece in her palm and folded her fingers over it. He then turned her round, kicked her rear end and told her to earn her living on her back. He said if he saw her again she would get the same as her snitch boyfriend.

Well it seemed that this broad didn't take too kindly for being given the bum's rush so to speak and was made of stronger stuff. She recruited a few hoodlums, ones who had scores to settle with either Moran or Minelli and trained them up. In lightening raids the long black cars would pull up at a speakeasy, or a gambling den for instance, shoot their way in, grab whatever they could and disappear into the night. At first, Moran blamed Minelli and likewise Minelli blamed Moran and a full scale war erupted. A lot of damage was done to both factions until one night a foot soldier of Moran's happen to get a glance of one of the fleeing raiders and recognised Maria. He told Moran and he then telephoned Morelli, told him the score and arranged this meeting.

It looked like the feasting was about to end and Morelli was tapping his spoon on a glass calling for quiet when the big double doors at the far end were opened by the two gorillas stationed there one from each camp who had frisked everyone as they came in. Then a trolley covered with a white cloth was wheeled in by two heavy set waiters. On the trolley was a three tier iced cake with pink flowers piped around it's edges. "Compliments of the Grand Hotel gentlemen" called one of the waiters over his shoulder as they both retreated through the doors.

Murmurs of appreciation ran round the room but I was uneasy. There was something wrong here I thought. I stood up slowly and pushed my chair back and started for a side door. "Where you going Curly?" asked Moran. He called me that on account I was losing my hair and he knew I was sensitive about it.

"Just going to the john, got a stomach ache"?

He waved at me dismissively then turned back to the table.

I made for the stairs, started down them two at a time, then suddenly stopped, as a federal agent wasn't it my duty to prevent cold blooded murder? But wouldn't the world be a better place without such evil men it? Then the decision was taken out of my hands as a huge blast ripped through the building. All the windows on the stairwell shattered and I was showered with tiny shards. I rushed on making for the emergency exit smoke billowing out behind me. I pushed open the heavy door and stumbled into the street gulping in the delicious fresh air.

Weeks later I was sitting facing my senior officer. He confirmed that no-one had got out of that room alive. And that there was, as I had thought, a bomb in the cake. "But what I want to know Dwight is what tipped you off?" he asked me.

"Well sir, the first indication was the waiters not hanging around for a gratuity, that made me suspicious so I looked carefully at the cake. On the top of it the icing had been disturbed, it looked as if something had been pushed into it then it had been smoothed over again. Then the clincher was on the side of the top tier, placed gently into the icing and shining in the lights was a ten cent piece. That's when I knew for sure."

"So young man, it seems you owe your life to the icing on the cake!"

"Yep sir, I sure do!"