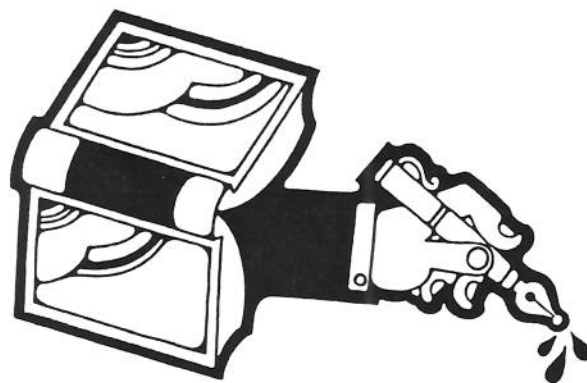


GREG PODOLSKI - POISON 101

"The Mystery Begins"



It was the kind of night you only thought you would see in the horror movies. It was the kind of night that made your skin crawl and the hair on the back of your neck stand on end. But more than that - it was the kind of night that was just right for murder.

I'll never forget that night, the night of April 15, 1934. I had been a private dick for four years then, great work if you like doing dirty jobs for enough pay to buy bread, water, and roach condo to live in. I only took the job because when I was released from the Army, money was a little tight and it was the only job you didn't need any type of degree. I'm just glad to see that my parents didn't live to see the kind of work I do.

I can see the picture now..."Hey Mom, Dad, guess what - I went into business for myself as a private detective in Chicago." My dad would probably grunt and go back to drinking ten year old beer or flip the page of the newspaper, things he always did when he didn't give a hoot about anything. My mother would probably flip out, though. She would lecture me on how stupid that decision was or how I could make something more of my life. About the only thing she wouldn't mention was the fact that you need money to make something of your life, something I didn't have then and something I only have a little of now.

But getting back to that night. So there I was, a thirty-eight year old, slightly overweight private detective walking side-by-side with the only man on the Chicago Police Department who could stand to be around me. I guess it was about 8:30, anyway it was dark, and we were walking down a lonely road with more holes in it than a spent mine field. We were talking about the usual things that people in our line of work talked about: who killed who, did we shoot anyone lately, the latest mob hit, and our life in general.

It was then that we noticed the warehouse door. I had just made a comment about how I wouldn't have kids if you paid me a hundred bucks when Ron noticed the door to the lumber warehouse slightly ajar. From that point on everything is as clear as the morning dew on a freshly cleaned window.

"Hey Nick, look at the door to the warehouse.", my poly-poly companion said in a hushed voice.

"Yeah, so it's open. So what?"



"Look, you may be used to dealing with murders and guys who always seem to clean up things just right. But in the police force, they teach you to investigate anything that you feel is out of the ordinary."

"Look, I'm all for checking that stuff out, but a door with not enough space between it and the wall for a starving fly to buzz through is not out of the ordinary. Some idiot probably left in a hurry and forgot to lock up. But if it makes you feel any better, I'm sure he didn't do it just to worry you," I said, laughing at my own little joke. But even with the humor at the end, Ron still didn't seem satisfied. And so, preferring fighting with fists rather than words, I reluctantly agreed to accompany him into a seemingly wild-goose chase.

Ron cautiously lead the way into the warehouse, gun drawn. At least there was one good thing about this, if someone shot at us, Ron's body could absorb fifty bullets easy. As we entered the warehouse, it was just as I expected, quieter than an audience watching an opera. Ron must have realized this too, because though he continued, he holstered his gun. We moved, Ron in front of me, down the long aisles of lumber, packed so high I expected to see an angel look down from one. As we turned around the sixth corner we noticed a faint light at the end of it.

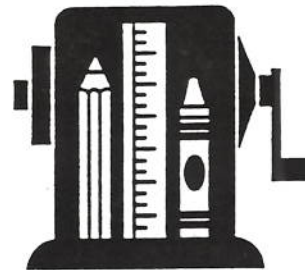
GREG PODOLSKI - Chapter 6

"Detectives in Danger"

I took a cab back to my office and had the driver take the longest route possible to make sure I wasn't being followed. I had him drop me off in front of the parking lot and he drove away with five of my dollars. I went down the little driveway and into the parking lot with my gun out.

When I reached my car, I found out that my tires had been slashed, the two back ones. Okay, so they knew what my car looked like. I only had one spare, so I broke open somebody's trunk and replaced their spare tire with a twenty. I changed the tires and drove away. I didn't like the way this case was going.

I decided I'd try the club that Charles used to hang out at and go from there. I arrived there at about 4:30 PM. The place was a smoke filled dump. There was a small radio in one corner that was playing some music that was drowned out by the constant yelling and the sound of a pool game. There were about fifteen men in the bar, all of them looked like they had enough beer in them to give half of it back. The bartender was a big burly man with a few wisps of hair



on the back of his head that were drowned in oil. I went up to him and ordered a whiskey.

I took a sip and sat it down on the counter, it tasted more like colored water than whiskey.

"Hey, bartender, ever know a guy that used to come around here who called himself Charles Thomas, maybe?"

"I used to, but..... "

"But what?"

"Get out of here, I don't think I like you."

"Calm down, grizzly. I'm a private detective." I showed him my license.

"Now I know I don't like you. Get out before I throw you out."

"I'm not leaving until I hear what you were going to say."

"That's it!" He took a wild swing at me with an arm the size of a tree trunk, but I dodged it and pulled out my Luger.

"All right, now tell me what you were going to say before I make a couple of holes for all that fat to spill out of you, it's a guaranteed way to lose all that weight."

"Hey, I was just joking around with ya. Sure I'll tell ya anything, just tell me what it is ya want to know."

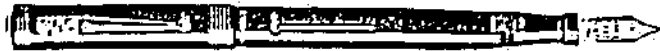
"Look, don't play dumb with me, I've had a bad day."

"All right, fine. I was just going to say that Charles Thomas changed his name to Zachary Burt about a year ago. That's all."

"Thanks." I started to turn around and then turned back, "If I were you, I'd buy myself a gun and shoot the guy that made that whiskey." This time I turned all the way around and headed for the door. I hadn't taken three steps when a chair came crashing down on my back. I fell face first onto the garbage covered floor. I turned onto my back in time to catch a blackjack right on my forehead. After the hit, a black fog engulfed me and I was out.

When I opened my eyes, the first thing that came to my attention was the stabbing pain in my head. When my vision cleared, I could see that I was laying in the back seat of a moving car with my hands and feet bound with rope. There were two men in the front that were dressed in black suits. I looked out the window and saw nothing but farmland as far as the eye could see. When I turned my attention back to the front seat, I grunted and one of the men turned around. He saw me awake and pulled out a gun, he used the butt of this to make that black fog come back.

The next time I awoke, I noticed that I had two stabbing pains in my head. My feet were still bound, but my hands weren't. Then I realized it was because my arms and chest were tied to the back of a chair on which I was sitting. I was sitting in the middle of a barnyard looking straight into the face of a cow. A hole in the roof let the



light of the full moon come in, giving the barn an eerie bluish light.

All of a sudden a door opened behind me; it had been a rusty squeak that all barn doors make. Then the same two men came in carrying a lantern, I winced at the thought of some new instrument coming crashing down onto my already badly beaten skull. But to my surprise, they didn't hit me. Instead, they got a chair from a corner and placed it in front of me; this chair was soon occupied by the body of a man dressed in a very nice suit.

He had on the same type of suit as the other guys, but he didn't wear a hat. He looked to be in his mid forties, thin, and starting to show off more of his forehead. He had a slight bulge under his arm. When I noticed this I realized that my gun was missing. He spoke first.

"Well, I see that you got here alright."

"Yeah, if you call being beaten over the head with everything but the kitchen sink alright."

"Aw stop complaining. You're alive aren't you?"

I don't know, give me a minute and I'll get back to you."

"Well, while you're finding that out, listen to me."

"I will once I get this ringing to stop."

"Just shut up and listen. You think you're real funny don't you?"

"Above average." I got a fist to the face for that one.

"Now, as I was saying. I want you to do me a simple favor."

"What's the favor?"

"I want you to leave me and my associates alone. Don't kill any more of them. I don't like it."

"Listen Mr. --"

"Angelo"

"Listen Mr. Angelo, I haven't killed anybody that you know. And while I'm still talking, could you please remind your boys that it isn't polite to shoot apart a man's office for no reason."

"That, Mr. LaKoc, was a failed attempt that was not ordered by me. And believe me, the party responsible was properly eliminated, quickly and quietly."

"Thanks."

"You're welcome. Well, then I guess this concludes our business, Mr. LaKoc. I'll be seeing you."

"Wait a minute, aren't you going to untie me?"

"No." With that, he left. I heard the door close behind me and realized that he meant what he said. I started working at the ropes and quickly untied them; his mugs couldn't tie a decent knot if their lives depended on it. I went over to the door and tried it; locked. I then looked up at the hole in the roof. It was about twenty feet off the ground, a long way up. I looked around for some

rope, but there wasn't any. I stood there in the middle of the barn just thinking, racking my brains out trying to think of a way to get out of there.

Then it dawned on me, the cows. There were about seven cows in this barn with me. If I could get them riled, they would probably bash the door down for me. There were plenty of sticks around; I could get one and beat the back cows and get them to start the other ones going. When they were all running I could climb up onto one of the stacks of bailed hay until they were clear. I decided to try it.

I found a nice thick stick and made my way to the back of the barn. It was about ten feet from where I was standing to the hay which was stacked about four feet off the ground; I could easily make the run. I started to beat the rumps of the two cows in front of me. They quickly went from annoyed to angry. When I kept beating them, they mooed and started to hit the other cows until finally they were all running wildly towards the door.

I ran for the hay and jumped up on top of it in a single bound. The cows ran straight through the doors and off into the night. I jumped down off the hay and listened. The wild noise that had just made this barn sound like Grand Central Station was quickly moving off. I walked out into the cool night air and looked around. Nothing but farmland. Well, a little hike never hurt anybody, so I started down the dirt road toward civilization, I hoped.

