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**THE REMNANT BETWEEN TWO RIVERS**

**JAMES LIBBEY**

BETWEEN ITS FLOWING RIVERS  
LIES A CITY STEEPED IN SHAME  
ITS LOFTY, STEEL LINED TOWERS  
SCREAM TO THE VERY SKY  
THAT HIDDEN 'NEATH ITS MANTLE  
IS A TRUTH THAT WILL NOT DIE

Anonymous

## CHAPTER 1

*There was something intriguing about the man just turning the corner. At first glance he seemed pretty average: just over six feet tall, average build, sandy hair, rugged complexion. His eyes, though, were captivating for anyone who chanced to look. The irises were a deep blue, and the stark white surrounding each gave off the discerning impression that in a staring contest you'd very likely be the loser.*

*His clothes set him apart too: Harris Tweed sport coat, tan Daks, and tassel loafers, topped off with a blue button-down Dockers shirt worn open at the neck. One might say a bit much for the corner of 47th and Broadway.*

*Michael Finley stopped for a moment, looked up at the rusty clock hanging precariously in the window of Louie the Loser's Bailbond office, wondering whether he was still making book for Angelo Leguine. Shit, it was only 9:45 and already he'd had more than his share of New York City at its finest.*

*He let his mind race through the inventory of events since leaving his loft on West 38th. "Let's see, I've been propositioned by a couple of working girls suggesting we play a fast game of Sandwich, smiled at by a limp wrist floating by, spit at by Martha, the bag lady, cursed out by a cabbie, and hit on by a coked-out*

*junkie. All in all, just an average morning stroll through the Big Apple!"*

*He nodded to Benny the Janitor and dropped a coin in a blind man's bucket, wondering if the guy spent lunch hours reading the Wall Street Journal. But the way Michael figured it, if, on the outside chance the guy was legit, he'd done his good deed for the day. Right?*

*As he climbed the stairs to his office, he kicked a roach off the top step and had the pleasure of seeing it cascade down into the bowels of the building. It would be a long time before that sucker got up there again.*

*Momentarily placing his coffee and doughnut on the mop bucket Benny'd obviously left behind, he let himself into his office, walked over to his desk, and deposited both items next to his secretary's typewriter. He wondered where she was, then remembered, of course, school picnic.*

*For a moment his eye caught the license mounted on the far wall. It was put there to let anyone who gave a shit know that he was a bonified PI, registered by the State of New York.*

*As he pried off the coffee lid with his teeth, letting the wonderful aroma slide past his nostrils, he shook his head in agreement,*

*"Yep, 'Chuck-Fuller-Nuts,' best damn cup of coffee in this*

*whole friggin' town, and their doughnuts are right up there too."*

*When the cup was empty he dropped it in the basket, picked up a file, swung his chair around so that he was facing the outside world and started to review his present case. He nodded to the cute secretary in the office across the street, who smiled and blew him a kiss. "Mike, you'll have to check that out sometime". Then turning his eyes back to the file, he went into his usual routine.*

*Okay, so maybe it was weird; his buddy, Gene Crepps, sure thought so; this habit of talking through his cases aloud, as if speaking to some unseen audience. Like now for instance.*

Okay. So what you came here for was to find out why at least half of City Hall, from Councilmen right up to His Honor the Mayor, wanted a piece of me and my friend, Detective Gene Crepps. Or perhaps you're just curious why I got involved in this case in the first place. A case that, if Gene and I hadn't been able to nail it down, could have taken out the entire administration that just happens to be occupying City Hall at the moment. And all of this just because one of our local funeral directors developed a case of sticky fingers.

Interested? Thought you might be.

Before we get started, I guess I'd better introduce myself. Name's Michael Patrick Finley, but do me a favor, forget the Patrick. And I guess I should tell you up front that I don't consider myself just your average Private Investigator.

Hold on! That's not conceit talking; it's just that I consider my circumstances to be somewhat different. Take my secretary for instance, sexy, she's not. In fact, she's a senior at the local high school a couple of blocks away. But she sure can type, and she runs my office like a pro. And yes, I finally kicked the butts, don't wear my hat in the office, and seldom take a 'bit of the Irish' until the sun's gone down.

Now I'm not just blowin' smoke when I tell ya' I've had my share of some pretty good cases since I got my private papers a few years back. One of the better ones you might recall involved the granddaughter of one of our local Dons, as in Mafia. It seems a couple of hoods from a rival family resented a decision he'd made and kidnapped the little girl. (That's something that would have been unheard of in the old days!) For all his clout on the street, the man kept coming up with zilch.

This Don, name of Anthony Peroni, had heard about me and enlisted my help. I got lucky with the help of my team. (I'll tell you more about them later.)

Anyway, I found the kid and returned her to the old man. When I walked into his home holding the little girl in my arms, his reaction was down right embarrassing. First he hugged me, then kissed me on both cheeks, and finally shoved five big ones into my pocket. That part wasn't embarrassing!

The money pretty much brought me up to date; a great feeling after having spent the last couple of months sneaking down back

stairwells or across roof tops just to avoid the landlord. And Ma Bell's frown has now turned to a smile. Plus, my secretary got a new ribbon for our typewriter and a raise in her allowance.

There was also a fringe benefit that I hadn't even considered. I had suddenly become one of those select individuals who could now wander around any neighborhood, day or night, without having to worry about anyone bothering me. I was now under the old goat's protection. When you think about it, that's not a bad place to be, considering my line of work.

But to get back to what could loosely be called my qualifications. I'm a bust when it comes to that karate stuff. Oh, I guess I can throw punch as well as the next guy, but that might only happen when I find myself in a local watering hole and some jerk has just called DiMaggio a bum, or said he's glad Boston's giving it to the rest of the League.

Sounds pretty boring, right? Well, much of the time it is. Every once in a while it can get pretty damn exciting too. Like this case I'm gonna' tell you about right now.

Oh yeah, before we go on, you could say I do have one claim to fame. If I could purchase a sport's coat with only one sleeve and save money I would, 'cause my left arm and I parted company some time ago.

On the plus side, it's a great introduction for any party I happen to be invited to; at least at first. I hardly get inside the door before someone hands me a drink, looks at where the arm

should be, and goes into that usual spiel.

"Korea?"

"Nope."

"Vietnam?"

"No way."

"Industrial accident?" (That's the one I always like.)

"Ya' might say so. I got it caught in the wringer of a washing machine."

For the next few minutes, I can usually count on having plenty of space. Of course, I never tell 'em I was half loaded at the time. I figure that might spoil my image.

But I'll always remember what a buddy of mine said when he visited me in ICU a couple of days after it had happened.

"Ooooooh, that musta' stung!"

Enough already, Finley. They didn't come here to listen to your war stories. Hey, as a matter of fact I was in the war. I was a PFC in the medical corps at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. Or doesn't that count?

*"Michael Finley!"*

Yes, Mom. I know. Stick to the script. Right?

Anyway, to get back to the case at hand. It seems that the family of this dead guy...

*"A nicer word would be 'deceased,' Michael."*

Okay, Mom. The family of this deceased man had decided to

send their father off in style. They had carefully selected his very own Eve St. Laurent sport's jacket for the trip. It was a double-breasted, navy blue blazer, complete with brass buttons and hacking vents. You know, like equestrians wear. However, the entire event took a wrong turn when someone discovered during the viewing that the old man was not decked out the way they'd planned. Oh, the jacket was navy all right, but not double-breasted and definitely not Eve St. Laurent.

The problem was immediately brought to the attention of the funeral director, Charles Adderson, who promised to correct the situation right away. He ushered everyone out of the room, assuring the family the oversight would only take a few minutes to correct.

Unfortunately for him, it took more than a few minutes. And a family member who just happened to be looking out the window saw the man scurrying back across the parking lot, carrying something under his arm that looked to all the world like a navy blue blazer. The family talked it over and decided to let it wait until after the burial. Then they'd come down on him like ten tons of mud.

Would you believe the poor jerk had tried to rip off a family who's son happened to be with the DA'S office? That's how I got into the case. I'd done some work for that office in the past and someone had remembered my name.

My investigation was rolling along just fine. The way I had it figured, I'd just tie up a couple of loose ends and Mr. Sleeze

would be ready for delivery in a couple of days. He'd no doubt lose his license, maybe even do some time. See, his jacket switch was only the tip of the iceberg!

This guy's entire operation was a scam. It covered everything from used prayer cards, to kick backs to clergy, to charges for burial services never performed. And his game with the caskets? You don't even wanna' know about that!

Remember what I said before about this case ending up on the steps of City Hall? Well, what I forgot to mention was that before it was over six innocent people would be dead, and my relationship with Gene Crepps stretched almost to the breaking point.

I felt I had all the pieces necessary to make a very tight case and was about to present it to the family when something happened that put everything on hold.

I came in about ten one morning; had to catch up on some filing. (Did I forget to mention that my sweet little secretary didn't "do filing," like some maids "don't do windows?") And there was Adderson half-standing, half-sitting, with his back up against my glass door! It might be more exact to say he seemed to be spread across it. His smashed and bloody hand jammed between the knob and the door frame was probably the only thing keeping him from falling all the way down.

Now, I've seen a lot of guys beaten up over the last twenty years. A good many while I was still on the force, and a time or three since I've had private papers. But I gotta' tell ya', this

guy took the prize!

As I stood back to get a better look, the only word that came to mind was disaster. There wasn't a part of him that hadn't been either bent, broken or bloodied. And unless you looked real close, it was hard to tell where the man left off and disaster kicked in.

I didn't know what part to grab first as I half-carried, half-dragged him into my office. I'd never seen anything quite like him. Dried blood and bits of loose skin hung from everywhere. His right eye, left ear and his nostrils looked like they'd been worked over with a roto-rooter. The fingers of his left hand had been smashed so hard that they looked almost webbed. His pants were ripped open at the crotch. I didn't even want to think what that could mean.

Whoever had done this was a real pro with a buddy or two to share the fun. They'd stopped just this side of killing him. But that didn't make any sense. Why not finish the job? Unless, maybe someone didn't want him dead, but an example to others. Or try this on for size: maybe the beating wasn't for something he'd done, but for something he knew.

As I moved closer, I got a real shock! The poor bastard was actually trying to get up off the chair. What's that bit about how much the human body can stand? Well, this guy was proving it. Staggered up would have been a better word, but even to attempt it in his condition was some kind of a miracle.

Holy Shit! He was even trying to speak. So okay, maybe the

words didn't come out too clearly, but a mouthful of missing teeth and lips torn in half a dozen places will tend to hamper ones diction. I just caught him as he collapsed toward the floor, his body feeling like a wet sponge under my hand. Damn. Looking down, I realized I'd joined him in his blood bath. But working with only one arm, I tend to be somewhat clumsy at times. The front of my jacket now looked like someone had been practicing finger painting on it, and my new forty dollar slacks? Forget 'em!

I set him back on the chair and leaned forward to better hear what he was trying to say. I had to snap my head to one side as a couple of teeth engulfed in a mouthful of blood shot past my right ear.

"Missha' Finy. Pease elp 'ee." The words, garbled and indistinct, were fumbling out of a mouth surrounded by what must have been one hell of a lot of pain. Just for a second, I had a crazy thought. Could all of this be some sort of ploy to get me to ease up on the investigation? But another look at what was left of Adderson and I knew the answer to that was a no.

As he unsuccessfully tried to wipe away the blood and torn pieces of skin from his mouth, he tried again, "I'sss got information about City Hall that you'll want to 'ear."

Best I could make out of the rest was that he wanted me to meet him that night and he'd give me more. Then, he simply staggered to his feet, fell more than walked out the door of my office and disappeared.

I sat there for I don't know how long trying to figure out what in the hell had just gone down. A man walked into my place half-dead from a beating by a person or persons unknown, drooled a gallon of the red stuff all over the carpet one minute, then in the next sets up an appointment for me to meet him at his place later that day. And what was that business about City Hall? I couldn't wait to hear the rest of this one.

Over the next hour I broke Finley's famous rule - Never take a belt until the sun goes down - not once, but three times. But a 'bit of the Irish did seem appropriate. After all, how often does a half-dead visitor arrive on your doorstep just after breakfast?

By the time noon surfaced, I still hadn't done any filing. But the stuff in the amber-colored bottle had dropped a level or two.

"Enough Finley!" I ordered. As I closed the jug and set it down, a woman's voice screamed in my ear. I spun around. Damn! The bottle had landed against the power button on top of the TV.

I leaned back against the desk, my eyes clamped on the picture tube. A blonde with teeth too perfect to be anything but a great capping job was reporting something about an automobile accident.

"Just an hour ago, there was a hit and run at the corner of 7th Avenue and 47th. The victim, Charles Adderson, a local funeral director and member of New York City's Real Estate Advisory Commission, died instantly."

The rest of her words were lost to a bottle of bourbon that

fell off the TV, smashing into a dozen bits and pieces. It took me a minute to register what she'd just said. Adderson dead? Shit, it must have happened right after he'd left my office. Why in the hell hadn't I gone down and put him in a cab?

This was no accidental hit and run!

I had to find out exactly what had happened. I made a call to a buddy at the nearest precinct. If you're smart, in my business you never let yourself get very far away from official contacts. My former colleague confirmed that Adderson had been hit just a few buildings up from mine. He also gave me something Little Ms. T.V had not mentioned. There had been a witness.

A kid playing stick ball across the street had just gone up for a high one when his eyes focused on the accident. He'd seen a body tossed in the air just as a big white Caddy shot by. Coincidence? I doubt it.

Being involved in a hit and run just minutes after leaving my office could mean just one thing. Adderson had been seen coming into my building, so obviously he had to be silenced.

But a large question mark made its appearance. How had a scam artist like Adderson become a member of the Real Estate Board in the first place? Just warming a chair? That didn't make sense. What did was that perhaps he'd been put there by someone to vote favorably on a particular issue. Then, for some reason he had tried to back out.

Whatever the reason, sleezeball or not, no one deserved to be

beaten half to death in the morning, then run over an hour later. If I didn't owe him anything, I owed it to myself to try and find out exactly what had happened.

Look at it this way, coming to my office had made him my client hadn't it? And I wasn't forgetting his words about City Hall. It brought a lot of interesting possibilities to mind, like graft, corruption, dirty politics and influence peddling to name just a few. But the one thing that kept cropping up was that this poor bastard had been a member of the present administration. In a city the size of ours, just being there was no small accomplishment!

*Letting his eyes drift slowly across the room, Michael Finley reached up and vigorously massaged the hard stump protruding from his left shoulder, as he'd done a thousand times before.*

*"Finley," he said to himself, "looks like you've got a real puzzler."*

## CHAPTER 2

The next morning, I just happened to drop by a local watering hole that I knew was the off-duty hangout for many of New York's finest. It was called Spanny's. The owner, one Spanny O'Donnell, had once been a cop himself, so it just followed that the boys in blue would be more comfortable in his sort of place. Maybe I could get a lead on the hit and run. At least it was a place to start.

It was still early, so except for Spanny, himself, the place was deserted. We just sat at the bar, having a couple of cold ones and kicking the Mets around. Why not? Everyone else was doin' it. After a few minutes Spanny got up, said he had to check on some inventory, leaving the place in the capable hands of yours truly.

I was just beginning to rehash the events of yesterday and trying to figure what I should do next when it happened.

One moment silence, then that roar I'd heard more than a few times over the years! There is nothing more shattering than the sound that erupts from the barrel of a 12-gauge, and you can damn well bet it usually introduces a corpse.

I gotta' tell you though, my reaction time is still pretty good. In less than three seconds, I'd dropped to the floor and tried to crawl under the bar stool. Quite an accomplishment if it had worked. But it hadn't, for the simple reason that my legs wouldn't move.

My first thought was, "Oh shit, I've been shot in the spine.

Great, Finley, first the arm, now this."

I forced myself to try and turn my body, at the same time looking down at the rest of me. Mother of God, no wonder I couldn't move! There was someone stretched across my knees, and already I could feel blood seeping through my trousers and onto my skin.

As I tried to yank free, I could see the guy was still breathing. The dumb things you say at a time like this. I yelled out, "You okay?" Of course he wasn't okay, Finley, the poor bastard was obviously bleeding to death!

Correction, by the time Spanny had pulled me out from under him, he was dead. And no wonder! The hole in his back stretched from shoulder to shoulder. The coat and shirt were in shreds and we found ourselves looking at what had been his backbone; now just a mass of splinted vertebrae, pieces of skin and blood. Lots of blood.

It didn't take a genius to figure out what must have happened. The guy, whoever he was, had walked in here and gotten only a couple of feet beyond the entrance when somebody popped him good. The force of the impact threw him in my direction and we must have both hit the floor at the same time, me on the bottom, him on top. Leaving one very dead customer and myself a bloody mess. Damn, this was becoming some sort of a habit, and one I sure as hell wouldn't mind breaking!

Spanny's 911 got us quick action. But why not, the Fiftieth

Precinct had personal stake in this place. So in a couple of minutes I was up to my kazoo in blue uniforms. The three striper started to hit me with the usual name, rank and serial number bit. But everything changed for the better when Spanny told him I'd once been "one of the boys."

This business about, "once a cop, always a cop," you can take to the bank. Or as mom might have said,

*"It's us against the bad guys, Love."*

Then a Gold Shield arrived and I was home free; for the man now taking charge was an old friend, Detective Lt. Eugene Crepps. A good cop, honest, hard working and smart. If he had one fault, it was that he was not a team player. So the word on the street was that he'd gone about as far as he ever would.

Guess it's not much different in law enforcement than it is on Madison Avenue or Wall Street. You were either a team player or eventually you'd find yourself shoved into some corner.

That's probably why, since our first meeting some years earlier, we'd always gotten along just great. For I was never, "one of the boys" either. Only difference was that I'd only been a street cop with no clout. So I guess you could call us a couple of lost souls. I was out and Gene was frozen in grade.

I gave him what I had, which wasn't much, and I could see he was finding it sorta' hard to swallow. But I couldn't blame him under the circumstances. I'd have felt about the same way if I'd

been in his shoes. Look at it from his standpoint. Here I was just sitting in a bar off Seventh Avenue, mindin' my own business, when a perfect stranger walks in and "pfft" he's hit and showing every indication that it was a professional job.

"Crepps," I thought, "I can see where you're coming from."

Then all of a sudden a sort of alarm went off in my head. It dawned on me that two people who had crossed my path in the last twenty-four hours were now both dead. And that sure as hell was no coincidence!

I held that back from Crepps for the moment, but I did ask him to call me when he found out just what this guy had done for a living. Down deep I was betting I already knew.

I changed my bloody trousers, throwing them into Spanny's garbage and borrowing a clean pair. When I got home, I stripped and hit the shower. I must have reduced New York's water level by a good two feet before finally getting out. But can you blame me? It takes a lot of scrubbing to wash off somebody else's blood.

I did at least a hundred push-ups; my prescription for getting the old brain back on track. That workout was really necessary. Even after twenty years, having someone die while laying across your legs can be a damn nerve wracking experience.

Now my loft's always been a drafty place at best, but today the chill felt good. And when I finally did roll up into the chair and let my head fall back I had a very disturbing thought, "Finley, you've sure got a hell of a lot of questions and no answers."

*"But Love, isn't that what your detective business is all about?"*

Yes, Mom.

Soon I could feel my entire body start to slow down. I didn't fight it. As my kid sister, Magin, might have said, "Just go with the flow, Big Brother, go with the flow."

And that's just what I did. For the next few minutes I just let my body relax and my eyes wander around my loft. I really love this old place. It had a lot of advantages too. For instance, you didn't have to be especially neat. It is so large that if you threw something in the corner, there's a pretty good chance that eventually it would simply disappear. And speaking about size; how many places do you know where you can jog an eighth of a mile and still be inside your own home?

Of course there were disadvantages too. After all, it is above a warehouse, so from time to time I'd get visits from those furry little guys that always seem to be lookin' for something to eat. But you could say that's an advantage too. I didn't have to worry about any crumbs I might drop. They can always be counted on to clean-up after me.

I must also admit that when New York's weather turned really cold, my place felt like a meat locker. However, if I was on a roll, I could usually find someone to help keep me warm. And if I struck out; well there was always the electric blanket. But,

this being August, that problem was still well down the road.

*Finley's Castle on the Hudson*, as I liked to call it, had other disadvantages too. Like, not too many people were willing to come all the way across town, dodging winos, bag ladies or even an occasional mugger, just to spend a few delightful hours with yours truly. Also some people seemed to resent my odd habit of collecting many of the cities pathetic strays, as in felines, not humans. There was seldom a time when there weren't at least a dozen disreputable-looking cats, etc. roaming around the place. The etc? That covers my experience the time I had to babysit a 25 pound chimpanzee that belonged to a client. I'll tell you about it some time.

All those strays took orders from Tom the Terrible, who just happened to be one of the largest, and when the occasion arose, meanest, Alley Cats this side of any jungle.

Obviously the word had gotten out around the cat population, "If you're ever in the neighborhood, be sure and drop by." Even those poor creatures too skittish to come close to any human were not forgotten. They were taken care of out behind the warehouse by the simple means of sending down that day's entrees on a large tray hooked up like a Bosun's chair. Lets face it, in my business you can never tell when you may need some help from The Man Upstairs. So feeding some of his unfortunates might just give me a few needed Brownie points. Make sense?

This was the time of day I liked best. The gang had all been fed, Two Ton had just finished his own personal snack; most likely a family size can of tuna, so the next order of business was nap time. Tom, of course, was lying across my lap, vigorously kneading my legs for exercise.

I had just drifted off when my Austrian grandfather's clock (What a joke! The only part of the Black Forest this thing's ever seen was some back alley garage on the corner of Canel and Varick.) let me know it was still working. Six o'clock, give or take a half hour.

I had just returned from the arms of Morpheus, wishing instead it was that little blond that worked in the DA's office.

*"Michael Finley!"*

Mom, I know you wish I'd find a nice girl and settle down. But I've been through that bit, remember? And for some reason guys like me just can't seem to make it work.

Then another big question mark seemed to perch itself out there on the end of my nose. How in the hell could a case that had started out to be nothing more than a scam investigation get so damn ugly?

First, a guy comes to me for help and ends up the victim of a hit and run. Then that poor sucker at Spanny's Bar ends up looking like someone had cleaned the back of his jacket with a rusty shovel. It didn't make sense, at least not yet.

Tom complained bitterly as I rolled him to one side and reached for the phone. Just as I did, the damn thing went off in my hand.

It was Crepps. "Mike, where the hell have ya' been? I've been callin' ya for an hour?"

"No way!" Then I looked up at the clock. Shit, I musta' fallen back to sleep. "Sorry, friend, conked out".

Ignoring my excuse, he dove right in.

"That guy at the bar? He was a real estate broker, involved in the big stuff. Ya' know, shopping centers, land developing, etc."

Before I could ask, he hit me with, "Did a lot of work around City Hall."

"Bingo!" I yelled into the mouth piece. My demand that he come over right away at first met with resistance, but I guess my tone must have convinced him it was urgent.

"Be there in an hour."

I hung up, put Tom down on the floor, picked up my hand exerciser and started to pace. Before long I heard the big steel door on the lower landing slide open. (Crepps was the only other person that had the key to my loft.) I was just starting to line up my thoughts when I heard the elevator start its creaky climb up to my place.

And yeah, I know, Crepps, "Why in the hell don't I oil the damn thing?"

"Well, I tell ya' Gene, I like it that way. I kinda' think of it as my security blanket."