

The Unlucky Thirteen

by TimChambers

They were working on the factory floor when they died, the auspices of mayhem filtering out to a host of ravens gleaning the neighboring fields. Clouds of them fled the scene around the time of the incident turning the day into twilight, but no one made the association until a patrolman passing by spotted a corpse on the loading dock. His mayday call was what roused me. He wouldn't go in without backup. Among the dead was a young woman garrotted with razor wire. The men, who might have come to her aid, died of multiple gunshot wounds. Others were hunted down and shot, point blank, where they hid. Exactly what they were doing there, no one in the know would say.

"What's your assessment, Deputy?"

"Looks like a hit to me, sir. It's pretty clear they came for the girl, that someone caught them in the act, and they had to shoot their way out."

"That's the way it looks to me, too. You got any leads on the girl?"

"Nothing promising, yet."

He was young and eager. Some said too eager. Always making more of things than appearances warranted, passed over for promotion twice. Into all the latest toys that make short work of digging skin deep, he tapped a few times on his tablet. "According to her Facebook page, she used to work at Lehman Brothers. Seems like she and her Dad," he closely inspected the photograph, "looks like the one over there... were running a vulture capital firm."

"Strange we never got a call."

"Say what?"

"Surely someone had a mobile phone."

"They might've used a jammer. That's what I would do."

To our surprise, the Sheriff, who had no interest in law enforcement, was next upon the scene, ahead of even the forensics team. He was huffing and puffing his ego up as he emerged from the rear of his vehicle. It had come to stop right beside us as we waited outside for the evidence crew. Noticing the suit and tie, he spoke to me first, looking down his nose, as he did so, to the name plate on my breast pocket.

"What's the situation here, Mossberg?"

"Would you like to have a look for yourself, Sir?"

"You know how I feel about corpses. Just the executive summary, please."

"There was one young woman singled out for a hit. Her neck was severed with razor wire. Maybe because of her banking background. The rest appear to be collateral damage."

The look on his face said he wasn't pleased, like he wanted something he could use and I wasn't giving it to him. He was running the county executive in a tight Congressional race, and it was ten days before the election. He glanced towards the uniform, his visage reflecting the blackbird sky.

"What does your partner here think?"

"His name is Jefferson Mowbray, sir. I merely answered his call for backup."

"Regardless. What does he think?"

"With all due respect, sir, why don't you ask him yourself?"

"It might have been a union job. They had motive and opportunity, Sir."

He blurted it out without being asked. It was almost inevitable. He had concerns about his career, and needed to solve a big case in a way that would please the bosses. Seeing the Sheriff's face light up, it was plain it would be no use mention that the union people were all in jail after that morning's demonstration. The Sheriff had supervised the arrests and the head bashing that went with them. It was the only part of his job he relished. Common criminals were read their rights.

"I like the way you think, Son. What did you say your name was?"

"Mowbray, Sir."

"You were the first on the scene, Mowbray. That makes you the lead investigator. Just keep spinning that union angle but mum's the word on the headless chick until the election is over."

Sensational as the news was in Allentown, PA, once word got out to the national press, the media ginned the story up as the first shots fired in a class war, a tale tailor made for the wing nuts in the upcoming national election. A blogger, somehow, got the real story, but it didn't have the same impact without the major media behind it.

