

Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Chapter 1

It was a cool, dank morning and some drizzly rain was falling from the ugly-looking, grey skies as the funeral procession meandered slowly through the quiet streets of the little Hamlet in the Hamptons. What few bystanders that were present were hidden under their umbrellas. The people who happened to be on the streets as the funeral procession passed them by stopped to bow their heads in respect as the hearse sedately transported the coffin of Daniel Bonetti on its short journey from his home to St. Martha's Cathedral. The sudden death of Mr. Bonetti from a cardiac arrest had only been announced the previous Monday and his death had come as a great shock to his friends and family. So much so that his wife had to be heavily sedated and because of her unfit condition she was under her doctor's orders not to attend the funeral, despite her protestations.

The line of expensive limousines contained in the funeral procession accommodated a number of somber-looking '*business associates*'. Also, bringing up the rear, but remaining at a respectable distance from the last car in the procession, was an unmarked police car containing two detectives assigned to take photographs of all the funeral's attendees.

Over the years, the New York Police Department had been trying to nail Bonetti on various charges ranging from murder and abetting to murder, loan sharking, protection, assault, money laundering and financial misdoings. Until recently they had continuously failed in their attempts to find sufficient evidence to convict the slippery customer. A few weeks ago, however, Mario Simpson and his team of detectives charged Bonetti with abetting a murder, unfortunately, even though they have a witness that incriminated him, the evidence was considered flimsy at best and his expensive lawyer was able to arrange bail. However, a related investigation is currently underway involving fraudulent dealings which looks almost certain it is about to finally put Bonetti behind bars.

As the procession approached the magnificent St. Martha's cathedral, the hearse slowed down and came to a sedate stop beside the steps leading up to the entrance. The cars behind all followed suit, with the exception of the unmarked police car, which slowly overtook the procession and came to a stop a respectful 50 meters ahead of the hearse. The passenger in the vehicle climbed out of the car and began snapping photographs of everyone in the procession as they too began exiting their vehicles.

Six burly men, who were to act as pall bearers, walked over to the rear of the hearse as the funeral director opened the doors and began slowly rolling out the coffin. The wreaths were ceremoniously removed from the top of the coffin and placed inside the hearse. The pall bearers, all dressed in raincoats,

had obviously rehearsed this aspect of the funeral and they began to assume their positions and reverently lifted the heavy coffin to rest on their shoulders. They began shuffling backward a few steps, stopped, turned, and as one, they began slow marching towards the few steps that led up to the doors of the cathedral. All the passengers from the procession of cars began to form an orderly line behind the coffin. At the front of the line, immediately behind the coffin, was a lady elegantly dressed in black with a black hat supporting a black veil that hid her face. She was being escorted behind the coffin by the chauffeur of the lead car who was holding up an umbrella to protect her from the rain.

The lady and her escort came to a stop to provide sufficient time for the leading pair of pallbearers to negotiate the first step at the church. The second step was carefully made and as they climbed the third step the second pair of pallbearers encountered the first step. Once the second pair had climbed the second and third steps the final pair of pallbearers hit the first step. Unfortunately, hit was the operative word and the rear pall bearer on the left-hand side of the coffin slipped on the uneven, slick concrete of the step. The loss of support on the stricken pallbearer's side of the coffin caused it to tear away from the grasp of the other pallbearer at the rear and ironically for the man in the coffin, who was able to defy the laws of the land during his lifetime, was unable to defy the laws of gravity in his death.

Had you later asked any of the observers, they would have said that the faux pax appeared to have occurred in slow motion as the coffin began falling unceremoniously toward the concrete steps. The other pallbearers were powerless as gravity wrenched the heavy box away from their grasp. The rear corner of the coffin hit the steps with a splintering crash and the lid flew away from its clasps revealing the inside of the casket. A woman in the procession fainted and a few other people gasped as the casket, now on its side, began to expel its contents, a collection of stones, the weight of which would probably have equaled the mass of Daniel Bonetti.