

The Grizzly Maraca

1

The telephone rang. There was no way to take it back. Harry understood this, and he rolled over toward the receiver, less with the desire to answer and more with the need to make the sound cease. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

The voice on the other end told Harry that his war buddy Martin had died in his sleep at the tender age of sixty-five. Martin had once told Harry he dreamt that he would die by the age of thirty-two and be buried in a green polyester suit. This anecdote tells you equally of both Martin and dreams. Martin had shared his premonition — as he called it — while beside Harry in a foxhole, enemy fire whizzing overhead. Martin viewed this as some reassurance that he would survive the war. Harry was sure they'd both be dead by the age of twenty-one and buried in who-gives-a-damn.

Harry was reliable like that. He believed in nothing after death. He often shared his thoughts on the life-eternal and they were always with disdain and disgust. Harry just couldn't wrap his mind around an entire planet's worth of people believing in a "cloud-kingdom" as his mockingly called it, where you could play cards with Joe Dimaggio and get your rocks off with Marilyn Monroe. When you were gone, you were gone. *Poof*. Martin said he believed, but he didn't. He just didn't want to upset his mother with the truth. A young infantry trooper by the name of Jethro once said he had been visited by an angel. This rubbed Harry wrong, but he didn't say anything because how do you tell someone they hadn't been visited by an angel? Harry felt content leaving Jethro to his delusion. After all, Harry thought, Jethro would soon be dead. And Harry was right.

Jethro was his the boy's real name, by the way. Harry always resented it in movies about the war when everybody and their damn dog had some kind of clever nickname. Harry didn't know one damn person with a clever nickname, except Jethro, whose real name was ridiculous enough to pass for a nickname. Harry called Martin "Marty" once, but Martin soon corrected him. "My name is Martin, you dumb Polack." Martin said to Harry, who was of Polish decent. Harry didn't take offense to this because one: he never had much use for his heritage and two: this was common practice among dogs of war. If a boy was Italian, he was a dago. If a boy was Irish, he was a potato-peeler. If a boy was black, he was a spook. This is one of the minor costs of war. Sensitivity was nil.

The world hadn't changed all that much. Back home Italians were still dagos, the Irish were still potato-peelers, blacks were still spooks — and much worse. The Japanese had a particularly hard time getting back into the good graces of soldiers. In fact, Harry hadn't spoken to his daughter, Christine, in several years because she decided to make her nest with a Jap. This wasn't in Harry's nature to hate a man based on the genetic accident of his birth, but after the things Harry had seen, he just couldn't reconcile with the yellow bastards.

And now this was the life Harry was leading — bitter with bitters in a watery cocktail, made so by the ice melting while Harry dosed off in front of a small, metal oscillating fan that produced heaven in five second bursts. Now Martin was dead. Harry felt sadness for him because he knew it was the last time Martin would ever exist. That was worth taking a moment of reflection. But when the fog of momentary mourning passed, Harry was left wondering why he would receive this particular phone call. He hadn't seen or spoken to Martin in years. They were close, sure, as close as two people in a foxhole can be, but it was hard for Harry to imagine that he would be on Martin's shortlist of people to call when he had gone to the great nowhere. And who was calling? It didn't sound like family. No phlegm was being discreetly sucked up into nostrils, no cracks in the voice. In fact, the voice was rather calm and

professional.

“May I ask who’s calling?” Harry said.

“This is the Cedarwood Crematorium.” the voice responded.

“The what?”

The voice proceeded without clarification, but it did explain to Harry that Martin had died, his body had been cremated and that his remains were ready to be picked-up by none other than Harry M. Dubiki.

“You want *me* to pick them up?” Harry asked, shocked.

“Yes, sir. You are the only name we have for Mr. Rosenbaum.”

Harry was dumbfounded.

“I thought Jews didn’t believe in cremation.” Harry abruptly submitted.

“Sir?” the voice responded.

“It’s against Jewish law or some such thing.” Harry persisted.

“Sir, it is my understanding that Mr. Rosenbaum left the faith some time ago and in his final wishes requested to be cremated and have the remains bequeathed to you.”

Harry thought on this for a moment. He wanted to hang up. He didn’t want Martin’s ashes. But why didn’t he? And why would Martin want Harry to have Martin’s ashes, was the better question. Harry looked down at his feet. He wanted to make sure this wasn’t some kind of whiskey nightmare. All ten toes were there and they were evenly proportioned — for Harry anyway. This wasn’t anything other than reality.

“Sure. Fine. Okay.” Harry finally said into the receiver.

“We’ll be expecting you, sir.” The voice said before the line went dead. Just like Martin.

2

Harry stumbled into a foyer of black marble. He could see a small, dim reflection of himself in the marble. He decided that he looked better in marble than in mirrors.