“In thirty years, I only ever had one body that wouldn’t stay buried.” That’s what I said to the curious little man who came to the cemetery one day this past summer. He was a short man almost as big around as he was tall. His newspaper editor up in Chicago, or Shikawgo as he said it, sent him to report on the Davies story. *Why don’t Yankees mind their own business?*

It was a typical summer morning. Typical for Biloxi, that is. The church bells just finished ringing 9 AM, and the sun was already turning my fat little friend into a puddle.

“Whew! Is it always this hot down here?” Asked Angelo Falcone, foolishly dressed in a gray pin striped silk suit.

“It’s going to be as hot as the devil’s kitchen. There’s humidity in the air, a sure sign that a storm’s brewing out in the gulf.” Shaking my head at him, “You’re a might overdressed, don’t you figure? I’d be willing to wager that you’ll be dropping clothes along the way like a two bit hooker in front of a five dollar bill.”

He ignored my jibe and asked for water, mopping his brow with a monogrammed hankers chief.

“There’s water in that thermos, but easy does it, we have a long day ahead of us.”

I pulled on a pair of well worn gardening gloves. “You want to make sure you wear gloves. There’s nothin worse for the hands than diggin dirt all day in the hot sun.” I picked up my shovel and a small step ladder and hefted them onto my shoulders. I told Falcone to bring along the pick axe if he wanted to ask me questions. My boss told me to give him an interview, he never told me to stop working to do it.

“You’ve been working dis cemetery for 30 years?” He asked struggling to lift the axe. It was going to take a spell to catch onto the unusual accent. Everything was Dis, Dat and Dere.

“This cemetery had been in the Funderburke family for generations. A couple of years back, my greedy brother sold it to some Yankee cemetery outfit. They agreed to let me keep my job, on account that I know where all the bodies are buried.” I said giving him a wink.

I started walking down the path towards today’s grave site. Falcone was struggling to keep up and was now dragging the axe behind him. We were quite the contrast. I just turned sixty-two and was all lean muscle; the sun had tanned my white skin a golden brown. Grecian formula was one of my little secrets. As for Falcone, one too many meatballs made it difficult to figure out his age. His hair was like a bald spot on the lawn. A few tufts of hair combed over to feed his vanity.

“Hey!” He called out to me hoping I would slow down. “What did you mean back there when you said you only had one body that wouldn’t stay buried?” I knew he was asking about the Davies story, it had been in all of the papers. The Sun Herald even had a picture of me standing by the grave.

“Come along Mr. Falcone, if you want to hear the story you have to keep up.”

He decided to change tact, “How do you like working for the new owners Mr Funderburke?” He asked wheezing. Well, at least he did his home work. I can respect that. I slowed the pace and tuned back to him. His little Gucci loafers were coated with fine Mississippi mud.

“It’s a pretty good job, if you don’t mind diggin in the hot sun. Pay’s not much to holler about, but I ain’t got much to spend it on anyway. Other thing you need around here is how to mind your Ps and Qs. So when they asked me about meeting with a “reporter” from up north, I said yes suh.”

“Can we talk about Davies?” I heard him say behind me as I picked up the pace again. *If he has a heart attack I can just roll him into an empty grave.*

After another few minutes, I stopped and pointed to a spot off to the left. “You see that knoll over there, just past it is where we’re headed. The graves are all marked out for us to dig. Off to the left there, that there is called Babyland. I hope you can figure out why. It pains me to think about it. I never had any younguns of my own, but my sister done lost one about five years ago. Funny thing. It was screaming its little head off, and then nothing. Doc Foster said it had died from something called sudden death or something.

“What’s that area by the church? The part that is all fenced off?”He asked puffing, bending over to catch his breath. He was pointing to a place off to the right.

“That’s what they call the unconsecrated land. We call it Black North. It’s where we bury the bodies of those killed by their own hand.” I looked over at the area remembering. “One of those was Cheryl Sampson. Doc Foster ruled it was suicide, but most people around these parts feel she was killed and it was made to look like a suicide. No, she shouldn’t have been buried there.” But I don’t make the rules anymore, do I?”

On our way up the knoll I pointed out a couple of special spots. “You ever heard of Mary Jane Lewicki, Mr. Falcone?” He didn’t have the breath to answer, so he shook his head. “Well she died a few years back. Young girl, she was just 13 years old. She disappeared from class one day on the way to the washroom. Some cop found her body lying naked in the Tchoutacabouffa River while he was fishing. She had been brutalized and stabbed in the back. Apparently the killer called the cop and said there would be more murders. Even with that, they never caught the man responsible. He must have been too smart for them.”

“That’s horrible. You sure seem to know a lot about ...how dese people died.’

“Well, a person hears things I guess. Take this grave over here.”The headstone read Rochelle Martinez and said that she had lived from 1956 to 1976. “This girl died just after she gave birth to a baby girl. She was working at a convenience store one night and just disappeared. They found her body the next day all trussed up like a hog in a mud hole in Wolf Creek. Town had to make a fuss to get her buried here, on account of her being Latino.

“Did they catch her killer?”

“No, and he left enough clues too. He started calling the other employees from the store and threatening them.”

“Could it be the same guy? The dates are not far apart.”

“He used a different technique, so probably not.”

“Maybe he was just trying to throw off the cops. Do you think Funderburke?” We are now just Falcone and Funderburke. Any pretext of politeness lost in the heat.

We finally arrived at the area marked for the graves. Relieving Falcone of the pick axe I positioned myself over the first site. With my eyes firmly on him, I swung the axe high in the air, bringing it down mightily into the earth. If you know how to swing an axe properly, it makes kind of a thunk sound as it slices into the earth. “I don’t remember anyone here ever having been killed by a pick axe.” I said giving him another little wink. He was lying on the grass with his silk suit and mud encased faggy shoes. After a few swings I had loosened the earth enough and switched to the shovel.

“Can we talk about the Davies case now?” He asked persistently, like a baby wanting a toy.

“Tell you what, you come over here and dig for a spell, and “I’ll” sit on the grass and answer your questions.” I could tell by the look on his face that this was not a welcomed suggestion, but he eventually dragged himself up and took the shovel. The stupid idiot still had his suit coat on. Spitting into his un-gloved hands he dug into the lose earth. *Some people just never learn. The first blister will show up shortly.* I hurled a gob at his feet, aiming for the shoes, but falling short.

I waited a minute of two. He was tiring himself out and way too winded to ask questions. I decided to help him out. “Catherine Davies, a pretty girl. I think she was barely fifteen when she got taken on the way home from school. Once again the killer didn’t keep her long, she was found hanging by her neck from the swing set. It was at the park right across from her home so her Mama could see it from the kitchen window the next morning while sipping her coffee. You’d think that the cops would be able to figure that one out.”

Falcone stopped shovelling and said, “The District Attorney, puff, recently came across new evidence, puff, got a court order to exhume the body. There is something new called DNA.”

Here we are getting to the nub of why he was here. “Well, good luck to him. It’s mighty hard to do without a body.” I said in a dismissive tone.

“It seems so convenient. Like you said, the only body these past thirty years that wouldn’t stay buried is the body that could prove who a murderer is.” He said leaning on the shovel.

“I don’t know anything about that. I came to work one day and found the empty grave.”

“What do you think happened, Funderburke?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”*How stupid was this guy?* When he didn’t answer, I said,” the guy probably carried the body off someplace. He’s probably has it in the trunk of his car. He’ll probably string it up again in the same park.”

“One guy? We‘ve been slaving away on dis hole for 20 minutes and it’s barely a foot deep. Wouldn’t it take a couple of guys at least? I mean like all of dat in one night?”

When I didn’t answer, “so do you think it’s the same killer who killed the others?” When I still didn’t answer, “maybe if we dig up the bodies we’ll find some DNA that implicates the killer. What do you think Funderburke?”

“That might be a good idea. Is that what you are going to write in your newspaper?’

He remained silent for a moment or two, “I’m not a reporter.” He said grinning at me. I own an Italian bakery in Jackson. Spend all my time working myself up, kneading the dough.” He made a kneading motion with his hands and laughed as if we had shared an inside joke.

“I know you’re not a reporter, I spotted that phony accent a mile away. Besides I called the Chicago Paper and they’ve never heard of an Angelo Falcone. What do you want?”

“You’re pretty smart. You were right about the trunk of the car. As for what I want? The cops are closing in, and it’s only a matter of time before they figure out what we both know, and dig up the other graves.” I got the idea when I saw your picture in the paper. If anyone looks like a serial killer, it’s you, you bony assed sick fuck.” Falcone threw the shovel down and pulled a revolver out of his suit pocket.

We stared at each other for a long moment, “How are you going to explain my death?” I said.

“That won’t be a problem. You see I have a permit for this little peashooter, and I was out here making innocent conversation about the Davies case, when you came at me with an axe. I HAD TO SHOOT YOU, YOU’RE A FUCKING MANIAC.”

I knew I had the physical advantage and an element of surprise on my side. “They won’t believe you, the body in the trunk remember.” I said moving a little closer.

“Good point. I think I’ll take your suggestion and string her up again. Just imagine her Mama’s reaction this time.”

“Aren’t you worried about shooting me in front of witnesses?” I said motioning back the way we came. He gave the slightest look back, just enough for me to charge and go for the gun hand. We landed in the shallow grave, wrestling back and forth for control of the gun. He was strong, but in poor shape. Then, the gun went off.

Standing up I looked down at Falcone, blood spurting from the wound in his cheek. *The fat bastard is going to live*. *Then the cops would come with all of their questions. They’d dig up all the other bodies; figure out the DNA, figure out there was more than one killer. There’d be a trial, Falcone would plead insanity, and he would have to be after what he did.* I thought long and hard about what to do next.

I picked up the pick axe.

I swung the pick axe over my head.

This time it made more of splurt sound.