

# Lethal Ladies



# Charlotte Mayo



An "Adult TV" Novel



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For information address  
Reluctant Press  
P.O. Box 5829  
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413  
USA

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# LETHAL LADIES

BY CHARLOTTE MAYO

## Chapter One

Chicago, 1952

So, I'm standing with a .44 Triple Lock Smith & Wesson in my hand and the women are looking at me, their faces wrapped in abject, wide-eyed horror. I feel powerful; to my right I can see the silver barrel of Betty's gun – or should that be Bob? It shakes slightly in his hand whereas mine is rock steady (or so I think). The women look from one to the other: bewildered, terrified, disbelieving. Is this really happening to them? They're in a state of shock. There's about ten of them, including a couple who are still in the cubicles. Boy, did they choose the wrong time to go to the bathroom! Serves them right for going *en mass*. Betty and I have been waiting for the restroom numbers to creep up; a group of four women who were chattering inanely as they sashayed to the toilet in their long, flowing frocks and high heels was the final signal. Of course, they must wait a while for cubicles to become free – well, there's always a queue in the ladies' and that was what made 'the job' so lucrative. The more the merrier we say. It ain't easy being a woman and going for a pee: what with the corsets and girdles and those great long evening dresses. And then

there's the nose powdering and lipstick re-applying and hair combing and gossiping... dearie me. It all takes a time - its stuff only a woman would understand or maybe a transvestite or whatever they're called or a female impersonator, like me and Betty, dressed to do a job. That is all. THAT IS ALL.

"Do as we say, and no one gets hurt," Bob, masquerading as Betty, says. He uses a feminine voice to keep up the pretence. I smile hearing his *en femme* voice giving out such life-threatening orders.

"You cannot be serious," one of the older, perhaps braver (or more stupid) ladies says.

"We are deadly serious, Ma'am," I say, trying to sound as feminine as possible. There's a new actress on the block, a blond bombshell called Marilyn Monroe. I try to sound like her, all sexy and wispy and a little husky.

"This is a stickup, lady," Bob says, letting his vocal disguise slip slightly. "Now my pretty friend is going to hold a bag out. We want you to put all your jewellery in it and empty your purses and handbags."

"Gee, even my wedding and engagement rings?" Another brave soul shouts, touching her expensive diamond necklace and thereby drawing attention to it.

"No, you can keep your wedding and engagement rings." Bob says, showing an uncharacteristically charitable side.

"Now, move it, we ain't got all day." He waves his gun to and fro. He's getting impatient. He is tapping the toe of his high-heeled black court shoe, and I can see beads of sweat on his carefully powered forehead.

I pull out the brown sack bag I've been hiding and hold it in my hands, forming a hoop with the material. I walk closer to the women, aware that my steps are curtailed because my feet are perched on very high heels, my stomach is restricted by the tight,

waist clincher I wear, and the weight of the full, netted skirt restricts my movement.

I approach a nervous blond who has been as skittish as a cat on a hot tin roof; she tugs at her diamond bracelet and drops it into the bag and then her ear-rings pop in and her necklace. She gives me a look of complete scorn and for a moment I feel like a real heel, but my conscience is soon eased by the jewellery that is being thrown into the bag by ladies keen to oblige us. My gun is now pointing to the floor, but I know that Bob has the ladies covered. There's a pounding on the door and shouts of male voices.

“Prudence, what’s happening in there? Why have you been so long?”

“Eileen... please hurry up... there’s a dance on and it’s that new one – you know by Frank Sinatra – ‘Why Try to Change Now’?”

A female voice: “Glenda? Are you in there? Please, I know what you ladies are like but there’s a queue here...hurry up, why don’t you? I’m positively bursting.”

“What’s happening in there?” A panicking husband shouts as he rattles the door handle so vigorously, I think the door, which we have held fast with three thick rubber stoppers, will come off its hinges.

“Is everything all right?” Another shouts.

Some of the women look towards the wooden door and I know they want to answer the pleas from their anxious husbands and beaus for the night. Some make a move to speak, to scream. I lift my gun and Betty lifts hers too. I shadow the women with the barrel. One of the women makes to talk and as quick as a flash I reverse the gun in my hand so I’m holding the barrel and I clump her with the butt. Hard. She screams but it’s a lesson learnt for all of them. Inside the bathroom there is silence, but the door pounding continues, and the cries and screams are getting louder and more panicked. The lady I have whacked has fallen to the floor; a

mass of red chiffon, a river of blood forms on the corner of her mouth and trickles down her porcelain chin. It drip drops onto her dress. I feel powerful. Strong. The lady's attire I wear doesn't stop me from being a man and acting like one.

"Next time it's a bullet, lady," I say, pointing my gun at her head. I hope she, and the others, get the message. This ain't no game playing. We are The Mob. We are all powerful.

Fortunately, they believe me. Why shouldn't they?

One woman goes to speak and then sees Bob's waving gun and she stops herself. Her face is bright crimson: I can see her heart pound beneath the tight embroidered pink bodice she wears.

I am on to the fourth, fifth, sixth person. Then the seventh and eighth and ninth. Then the ladies who have come out of the cubicles. My act of violence has stifled any dissent.

"Quicken it up," Bob says, now losing all pretence of femininity – I know the women are shocked by this. Not only are they being held up in the lady's room but one of the 'ladies' is in fact a man (although reports in the paper the following day seemed to show that the victims still believed they had been held up by two women and I am sure I am not suspected of such a heinous crime! I believe the women were too frightened – or too stupid – to compute that Bob wasn't 'Betty'.)

So I move amongst the group collecting jewellery, rings and bracelets and necklaces. I can feel the bag getting heavier as it gets fuller. I know we have about ten minutes for the task and the watch is ticking. Yet with the adrenalin rush it seems longer. Every sinew of my body is awake, my heart is pounding. I feel alert and alive. Blood pumps through my veins. I feel animated. I feel excitement pace through me.

Finally, Bob instructs the women to line up, turn around, and face the row of sinks. All apart from the women I've whacked who lies on the floor a pile of tears and chiffon and blood. We

leave her. The sinks are below frosted windows. He orders them to count to fifty without turning around so we can make our exit.

“We have a sniper over the road who is watching this place.”

He points to the blackened window which is over the sinks with his gun.

“He has a night vision scope which can see through frosted glass. US Army issue. Also, we’ve fitted the place with a mike and receiver, so he’ll hear you too. Any moves or shouts and he’ll take the pretty head off the first one his sight falls upon. So, it may not even be the lady who has gone for glory. Understand?”

A few women mumble.

Bob reinforces the point. “Any movement, any shouts and a head comes off like a ball hitting a coconut in a shy. Got it?”

There are some murmurs of acquiesce.

It’s all bullshit, of course. There is no mike and receiver and there is no scope that can see through frosted glass and there’s no such thing as a nighttime vision scope and there’ll never will be or at least not one with the accuracy Bob’s claiming. And we don’t have a sniper on the roof of the building opposite. But just think like this for a mo – you’re one of those unlucky ladies held up at gun point in the bathroom by one lady and one near lady and the more feminine of the duet has probably broken the jaw of one your friends. Would you believe the two braggers? Of course, you would! Fuck me you’d do as you’re told, and then some! That’s the power of the gun. The brilliance of The Mob.

So it’s no surprise the women are as obedient as they are foolish and they hold hands and start to count, some crying as they do so. Then Betty takes a deep breath, puts his gun into his bodice, carefully removes the rubber stoppers, pulls back the lock and opens the door of the bathroom. I drop the sack into my large handbag along with my gun. I walk out. I brush past anxious



women and men – my head held high. Bob closes the door behind him.

“Is Prudence in there? What’s going on?”

“No idea, Sir,” I say as I flounce past him, Bob in my wake. He holds the door closed for a while whilst I pass by the numerous guests in their dinner jackets and evening attire. There are now more folks by the bathroom and the foyer than there are on the dance floor. I can hear the gentle strains of the band and I can hear the compere cracking a weak joke as the song comes to an end. He must be wondering what the Hell is going on. They all must be. The doorman even gives me a polite nod of the head and says ‘Goodnight, Madam’ as I walk past him. Then I am walking down the steps. The cold Chicago air is chilling my bare legs (well, I have stockings on but that don’t keep the Chicago cold off). My trim ankles are exposed too as are my high-heeled sandals. The heavy full skirt I’m wearing is buoyed up with what seems like a hundred miles of tulle. It sways in the breeze and with the movement of my corseted body. Then dead on time, a false plated ‘taxi’ pulls up with a screech of brakes. I don’t rush. Never rush. My feet pace the ground easily. I can hear Bob a few steps behind me. I am waiting for the screams. The shouts. The alarm. My spine tingles. This is my first job for the Mob and I want to show them I’m calm, reliable, available. I’m only seventeen but as I walk down the steps of the Caledonian Hotel, I feel a lot, lot older. I feel mature, manly, despite my attire. I hear the breath of Bob as he hurries now. Anxious. I’m still calm. Seventeen. Remember that. The Mafia; remember that too. I am in The Mob and proud of it. We have each other’s back. We look out for each other. We kill for each other...

The doors of the taxi are open. I don’t know the driver but I can see Sid the Skewer in the passenger seat with his hand on the back seat, watching with pride; his dark eyes drinking in the scene – two pretty young women descending to the steps of the Caledonian Hotel to the waiting car.

“Wait!” someone shouts.

“Wait, it’s them! The ladies that robbed us!” a female voice shouts. “Call the cops.”

But we ain’t waiting, lady, we ain’t waiting for nobody.

Then we are in the car and I am shuffling along the seat pulling my skirts around me as Bob gets in too. Then the door closes and our chauffeur screeches off. The doorman tries to give chase but it is hopeless and he soon waves his arms in the air as he gives up. I feel excited. I feel elated. I feel the tops. I feel like I’m sitting on top of the fucking world, baby. In a gentle gesture, Sid takes my gloved hand as he leans over the seat and drinks in the scene before him.

“Well done, Frankie, well done, that was cool. Real cool.”

I hand the bag of loot over to him and then I pull off my wig, clean off my makeup and dress, and pull on a suit. Bob does the same. Finally, the stolen taxi is ditched up an alleyway and we make our way to another street and Bob and the chauffeur get into one car and Sid and I in another. Sid drives off.

“I bet you could do with a beer after tonight,” he says. Then he adds softly. “Welcome to the Mob, Frankie, welcome to The Mob,” and he pinches my cheek.

## **Chapter Two**

Of course, it was all Bob’s idea, the robbery I mean – I suspect he was a transvestite – or was before he died in a hail of gunfire - but I get ahead of myself. I guess you wanta know how comes I wanted to join The Mob and wanted to be part of organised crime? I guess you wanta know the whole backstory stuff like people like to tell in books and all that jazz. Where they boast about how difficult their fucking lives were and how they made it big through sheer hard work and determination. Well, I’ll tell you. About me. Shortened version because I don’t know about you but to me all that ‘look at me, I’m the big fucker, I am’ crap is as boring as Hell.

Anyway, here goes: I grew up in a rough part of town. We lived in an apartment on the tenth floor of a tenement. The place was riddled with druggies and roaches and dropouts – this was the late Forties and early Fifties when everything was supposed to be good. Not for us it wasn't. My dad worked on the Chicago docks; he was a tough man and tough on mum and the kids too – the kids being me and my little sis, Cissy and tough in the way that he liked to settle things – like minor indiscretions which all kids commit. It was always with his hands or else with a thick leather belt that hung on the door. In other words, he liked to give my sister and I a right good whooping and mum too if she stepped out of line. One time Cissy knew she was going to be in trouble for something or other so she took dad's belt off the door hook and hid it... dropped it in the bin I think - not a good move, sis, not a good move at all. Dad located it... well, the whopping she got would have awoken the comatose druggies in the basement. His temper was made worse by the fact that he'd wanted to join the Marines during the war and do his bit to save good old Uncle Sam from the Nazis but he'd failed his medical due to alcoholism, a continuous hacking cough, and general poor health. That pissed him off and then some! Especially as all his friends went and fought and some called him 'yellow' for not joining up.

Of course, I didn't know nothing about the Mob at the time. I just saw some real flash guys getting out of these real nice soft sprung Cads and the like and wearing sharp two-piece suits and having real attractive women with them - women who wore heels and tight skirts and makeup during the day. Sometimes we didn't have nothing to eat and we'd go hungry but those guys? Well, they seemed like they were well-fed and fit and healthy. I went to the normal Illinois State school, you know the type; it wasn't great, and I didn't care for it too much. I was a loner. Always on my own and daydreaming. I wasn't particularly smart and I wasn't particularly good at sport or anything really, so I was bullied. Dad's view was simple:

“Stick up for yourself, you fucking fag. If they hit you, you hit them twice. Only harder.”

He tried to teach me to box but it was no good. I was an under-nourished wimp.

Going to school got me down. Big time. I hated it. I hated the other kids, I hated the teachers, I hated the lessons. Then I saw them. I was about thirteen or fourteen. The Mob I mean; they were pushing this guy into a car and were flashing pieces in his direction as he sweated like a pig in a heatwave and swore like a trooper. They didn't see me. I was out on my paper delivery round and at the top of some steps but when I emerged onto the walkway They must have guessed I'd seen all the action and one of the Wise Guys come up to me.

“You didn't see nothing, kid. You didn't see nothing.”

I shook my head. “No Sir, I didn't see nothing.”

The Wise Guy smiled and I smiled and that's when I knew I was in. It was the first time anyone had ever smiled at me. Treated me with respect. He patted my shoulder.

“You're a good kid, keep it stum. Remember, keep it stum.”

He smiled at me again. Went to his pocket and took out a roll of C- notes and slipped one into the top pocket of my checked shirt.

It was like a small kindness, something someone does for you which you don't expect. I didn't get no love or nothing at home but here was a complete stranger – a guy in a sharp suit and dark shirt and tie giving me the smile and even a wink and a C note and thereby binding me to him with niceness.

It was probably two years later that I saw him again – his name was Sammy the Scissor Man as he had stabbed some bastard five times in the stomach with a pair of scissors and then cut from one wound to another just so all the wounds married up. He was eating a burger in a fast-food place with an enormous great lump who I got to know as Dan the Dagger AKA Fats. Everyone was being real nice around them both like they were sort of King

Pins. I knew by then they were The Mob. The Mafia. I don't know if he remembered me or not, but I went up to him and I says, acting all confident, "You remember me, Sir, that day I was out delivering papers and I saw you... get in the car and you give me a C note, Sir."

Sammy laughed.

"I get into a lot of cars kid, and I give a lot of money away being a bighearted, generous type of guy; I don't remember one time any more than another. Is this some fucking gag, kid?"

Of course, I didn't like to spill that they'd been kidnapping someone who had probably been pistol whipped and who was probably now part of the concrete in a bridge over Interstate 94.

"Sorry, Sir," I say, all nervous and talking fast. "But it's just that I never forget that kindness you showed to me. I never forget how you were to me, Sir, and even though I don't know you and never meet you again that kindness has always stuck with me, Sir, even though it was only for a few seconds, Sir, and probably means nothing to you."

I went to walk away, feeling like a right schmuck but Sammy he grabs my arm. My friends were looking and wondering by then and probably thinking *what the fuck is he doing?* Messing with the fucking Mob! Is he loco?

"Wait."

Maybe then he did remember.

"Sit down with us. What you having, kid? A shake? An ice? A dog? A burger? What you want?"

So, I sat down next to Danny the Dagger AKA Fats. Me with the Mob. Sixteen years old. My mates got bored and drifted but a banana shake and a 'dog' came my way and soon Sammy was talking.

He asked me where I lived and what I did for a living. Like I had a living! He said if I wanted, I could be his ‘eyes and ears’ and ‘run a few errands’ for him.

“It’d be like a runner,” he said and Fats laughed.

“Yeah, sure, kid and we’d give you a something in recognition – some more of them C notes you cherish so much.”

So that’s what I did. It was small stuff. Sometimes running to a bookie to get the bet on a race that had already run so a Wise Guy could come in later and collect the winnings; sometimes passing on messages to smartly dressed guys in diners or on park benches or sometimes acting as a look-out or a decoy. But I was paid and I was in. Sammy took a shine to me and treated me like one of his own. By this time Dad was as suspicious as a curled-up snake and he beat me with his belt as he questioned me about where I got the money, but I didn’t mind and didn’t say nothing. I told Sammy who patted my cheek and told me I’d go far.

The Mob was like my family; they took care of me, they fathered me, they mentored me. ‘Course they all had children themselves and families, and being Italian and Catholic, they looked after their families. Made sure things were good for them. Unlike my family where Dad took all the money and spent most of it on drink, which left little for food for me and my sister and mum which meant she had to go out and do menial jobs like cleaning the latrines to get by. No, the Mob were good, they looked after their own. And I was one of their own.

So, I dropped out of school and the day I left that hated establishment Sammy bought me a nice, cool double-breasted suit. All black with grey pin stripes running through the wool mix. And shoes too and a shirt and tie. When I dressed up at home and posed in front of the mirror, Mom said, “Where did you get that suit, Frankie? You look like a fucking Mobster!” And that was the nicest thing my mother ever said to me!

“You gotta look the part to play the part,” Sammy always said. “You gotta look the part to play the part.”

And that's what I said to Mom. She thought I was talking gibberish.

And I did. Looked the part, I mean. I started doing more jobs, low level stuff at first. Tagging along when some numbers were needed. Helping the Shylocks and Bagmen. Picking some scraps. Look, I ain't never been a big guy, in fact I was – excuse me - *I am* – a weedy fucking specimen of a male – even more so now what with my illness taking over and all but also with my strict dieting but I will come to all that later in my story. Back then I was short and all bony with not much muscle definition. And I guess that's what Bob saw - a skinny, weedy kid who wouldn't look out of place in a frock.

Looking back, I guess Bob was one of those transvestites. You know the type? They get a thrill from the wearing of women's clothes: all the silks and satins and chiffons. I guess they like the feel of the nylons on their shaved legs, the softness of the panties around their private parts, the smoothness of satin skirts and dresses as they brush them down, how the high heels make their ankles ache but by the same token give them a real sexy walk. That's what I'm guessing anyways as I'm not one of them and my cock don't stand to attention at the sight of some frillies. No Siree! That is not my game at all! But it was Bob's, that's for sure.

I guess Bob was locked in the closet and frightened to come out. It was like homosexuals. No one mentioned it back then – I'm talking the early Fifties. You know the type? They swish around and act all feminine and do jobs which are for women like the hairdressing and the tailoring and the shop working and they're into fashion and looking nice and they wear a lot of eau de cologne, and they don't act like men. Not real men, anyways. Hey, did I not say that this was the early Fifties? Chicago? Well excuse me! Sorry about that if I didn't mention it before but that's where and when my story takes place – or least ways this part of it. As you will see, it carries on for a bit and then some; in some ways it's still going on to this day, only now the egg timer of life is running out on me and I ain't got too long left. People

won't believe it when I set it all down on paper and that's why I want to do it. A kinda legacy.

I am in an expensive hotel in Oceanside on my way back to Mexico at present. The French windows, which lead onto the balcony, are open and as I type this on an expensive portable typewriter I am looking down on the swimming pool; the families, the attractive girls in their swimsuits, the well-muscled guys. They look healthy and fit, unlike me, but I'm just trying to get it all down... like what happened as it's a real strange story and to be honest I don't think anyone is going to believe it. I'm not much for this writing crap and I'm only doing it now to set the record straight so someone in the future will know my story and maybe, just maybe, they will believe it. Believe that Frankie Fitzgerald is telling the truth! You will see why later, then you can make your own mind up. They say fact is stranger than fiction, well my story is a right up there on the strange-o-meter, I can tell you! But as I say, I ain't had no formal education or not much so if the grammar and the words are all fucked up then excuse me, Sir! I'm self-learnt, self-taught through reading books as you'll see later as well if you get that far. That's just the way it is. No one knows I am writing this. Again, you will see why later and then perhaps you'll understand that no one edited it or helped me with it. It is as it is. True, God help me. Every single fucking word is true. So, if this is badly written and makes fuck all sense, then I apologise, I really do, but I'm a Wise Guy, not a fucking writer.

Well, back to my story. It happened like this, I was sixteen - going on twenty-five. Being in the Mob meant I could go anywhere and do anything - doors were literally opened for me. If I wanted a double Scotch on the rocks, I got one. No barman would ever ask me for ID and nine times out of ten, it was free. I just said, "I'm a friend of Sammy's."

Everyone knew Sammy and what was lucky for me was he liked me because he was a godfather, a capomandamento, don, capocrimine - whatever you want to call him. He was powerful. People respected him. Women - or goomah - were attracted to



him. Men bowed down to him. Sammy was a good guy to know, a very good guy indeed.

Anyway, coming back on track, as I say, Bob was a Wise Guy too. Only he was quiet and got on with the job, lapping up to Sammy's butt the whole time like some little pooch that ladies carry around in their handbags.

"Yes, Sammy, no Sammy, three bags fucking full Sammy. You want four? You got it, Sammy."

Then one night we were all in this casino called Jacksons, sitting around and having a few drinks and suddenly Bob says, "I've got an idea."

Well, it was so unusual for Bob to have an idea and even less for him to voice such an idea, the whole table went as quiet as a room full of praying nuns. Everyone looked at Bob and Bob looked at me. I felt a little uneasy but I was next to Sammy and knew if any disrespect was shown to me, it would lead to Sammy giving it the third quarter.

"I've been kinda thinking," Bob said again as if we ain't heard the first time and he kinda rubbed his chin.

"That's unusual," The Skewer piped up.

"Look, it may be nothing – just an idea – but why don't we..."

Bob then went on to give one of the craziest Goddam ideas I have ever heard and has probably ever been voiced up in the whole history of crime. "Why don't we..." (and by 'we' he's meaning me and him) "Why don't we dress up as a couple of chicks and shake down the lady's room at The Caledonian whilst the City Ball is going on and every fucking big wig and super big cheese and stale cheese is giving it the old bounce around the dance floor and their good lady wives and mistresses and girlfriends have dived deep into their safes and vaults and jewellery boxes to bring out the most sparkly, most large, most expensive jewellery they can find.

“Now hear this,” Bob said, leaning forward like he’s suddenly the fucking Wise Guy in charge of the family. “Hear this, me and Frankie, well, with his youthful looks and me – well – I ain’t saying I done this before or anything like it, well, I know we could pull this off.”

“What, prance around in chicks’ clothing?” Scissors snapped.

“Yeh, that’s what I mean but for a job. I mean it’s a cool idea, don’t you think?”

Sammy just looked at him as if he were cuckoo. Well, who’s ever heard of such a harebrained scheme? Then he starts to laugh.

“You’re crazy,” he says.

“I know it sounds nuts, but it could work,” Bob insists.

Then Sammy takes a drink and looks at him more closely. Considers it like. “I guess it might have legs.”

“Really?” Fats voices.

“For sure. What the fuck, those fashionable chicks ain’t going to carry and there’s no harm done if it goes down the pan.”

“How’s you plan to get away?” Charlie the Ice says. He got that nickname as he’d once locked a rival in a freezer overnight.

Bob had that base covered. “We block the door and then we hold it shut on the way out.”

“How you get in?” Sammy, ever practical, asked, looking at the finer details like the real fucking expert he was – Sammy knew how to pull off a job. No question. Sammy was the best. I looked up to the guy, like a father. Not like my own father who worked long hours for next to nothing and got drunk and angry the whole time and took his belt to me and Sis and Mom. No,

Sammy was a real cool guy and he wanted to know all the ‘ins’ and ‘outs.’

“Well, I’ve been dating Nancy and she’ll be doing the waitressing and she’s got the gig at the Caledonian on the night of the ball. You know how it is; she pulled a few strings and said she’s captivated by those glamorous dames in their lovely dresses. Women are a sucker for that sort of tale and, well, her boss, she kinda give Nancy the OK to work.” Bob picked up a toothpick and started getting bits of meat out of his incisors with it. He felt cool, confident, in control. He had a plan. And as anyone will tell you, well, everyone likes a plan that’s gonna make them money, so he carried on. Sammy and the rest of us were all ears - especially me as he’d said this little harebrained scheme was going to involve yours truly. I wanted to be in with Sammy more than anything so I knew I had to wait and hear Bob out before I put out my objections like a proper Wise Guy and not some fucking wimp guy who was too yellow to pull off a job.

“Well, Nancy,” Bob said, “she gets us in by unlocking the fire escape and then shutting it after – it’s on the first floor – so we just come down the stairs like we’ve got a room for the night, and we’ve been dressing. Maybe our men got bored with waiting for us to dress in all our finery, so they’ve gone off to the bar. Then we just mingle. She’d wanta cut, of course.”

Bob continued to do the toothpick job whilst Sammy looked at him – all white-faced and thinking. Not giving one thing away about what he thought and whether he’d really give it the big go ahead.

“And you think the two of you can hold up these classy dames in the powder room?”

“The gunpowder room,” Sid the Skewer joked.

“If we have to shoot our way out, then we’ll do it,” Bob said which I knew was just bravado – or least I thought I knew.

Sammy leaned back in the chair and watched as the white jacketed waiter nervously placed a Scotch on the table in front of him, the ice jingling against the sides.

“I can see you’ve thought about this, Bob. I can see you’ve thought about it real hard, but do you really have to be dressed as chicks?”

Bob stopped picking his teeth and blushed. “Look neither me nor Frankie want to dress as chicks – of course we don’t – we ain’t fucking fags but we’d be more likely to get away with it if we’re dressed up like ladies who were part of the invited guest list. Far less questions for a start and how else will we get to the lady’s room without any suspicion falling on our heads?”

Sammy took a sip of Scotch, his dark eyes never left Bob as if he was trying to read his thoughts.

“It seems to me that the danger will be once you’ve left the ladies room and are walking away. What about the doormen and the men?”

“One of us holds the door whilst the other walks away with the loot and then the other one follows. Hopefully, whoever is in front with the jewels is far enough away to be able to avoid the heat when it eventually comes. The second guy turns around and covers the door with his piece to make sure there ain’t no heroes who want to challenge us.”

Of course all the facing the sink and counting and night scope and mike bullshit came afterwards when we started thinking it through proper but at the time this was Bob’s big idea – he’d make sure I got away by keeping the dames and the guys covered with a piece.

“Umm,” Sammy breathed. “I can see that.”

“And let’s face it, there’s gonna be a lot of confusion,” Bob said. “No one will expect it. That’s the key. The lady’s bathroom is close to the entrance so it’s just about getting through the door

and down the steps and back onto the sidewalk. We may have to draw but we'd be out of the door when we do. A car will be waiting and we'll be away."

Sammy eyed me and Bob.

"And you want young Frankie in on the job?"

Bob looked from Sammy to me. "Yeah, he's got the youth and the looks and will look good as a woman, plus we have to blood him. He needs to start earning for the family and not freeloading."

Well, that really got my hackles up, I can tell you! I nearly threw the table over and launched an attack on Bob. But I didn't. Instead, I just sat still but inside I was seething like a volcano that was about to erupt.

Sammy looked at me.

"You in on the plan?"

To be honest it sounded like the most pie-eyed nonsense I'd ever heard in my life. I looked down at my lap, trying to think of something to say. I knew the Mob had to blood me, I knew I had to be game and just in that moment I could think of not one thing that was wrong with the plan. Not one! My mind was completely fucking blank.

"I guess," I said slowly. Adding, "I ain't sure it will work but if it doesn't, we'll just shoot our way out as Bob says. It's no big deal taking down a few well-heeled chicks," I added, trying to imitate Bob's bravado.

"OK, fine," Sammy said, shrugging. "Set it up."

## Chapter Three

So, its 1952 and I'd never heard of the word 'transvestitism' and barely heard the word 'homosexual' but I kinda knew it was a bad thing and not something good honest people wanted to be associated with but let me say this and get it off my chest – Bob was a transvestite. That was why he'd come up with such a ludicrous fucking plan. He wanted to dress as a woman and he wanted the Mob to pay for it. He was a crafty bugger like that, was Bob and I guess on some level he wanted to be accepted too, as a transvestite I mean. He wanted Sammy to see him as a woman and approve it, even it even if was as part of a hit. Of course, Sammy had no clue that Bob was one of those limp-wristed types who flit around and act all feminine. Of course, back then we all thought guys that dressed as girls were homosexuals. There was no difference; the fruits and the transvestites were one and the same.

Anyway, Bob's girlfriend Nancy bought us outfits and wigs and what she couldn't buy Bob stole from a theatre one night when a play was on! Once we had all the bits and pieces, we went to his apartment on Fifth and practised and practised. I could tell right away that Bob had a yearning for women's clothes. It was like he had no abhorrence about putting on all that female finery, like it didn't make him feel physically sick like it would most normal guys. No, Bob was one and no mistake and he had no sense that it was wrong and against the Catholic church and the Scriptures and all that. Now I don't know much in regard to religion but I go to church sometimes and I pray. I believe in God and I know that all that cavorting around in women's clothes is wrong, just as The Bible makes it clear that men should not like other men in a physical way. I couldn't understand Bob because he liked the women's clothes but he had a girlfriend who he seemed real sweet on and that made no sense to me at all. But Bob was making a monkey of himself, no mistake and he had no idea at all about how foolish he looked. And Nancy seemed to get a kick out of it too. That was the strange thing. I never believe a woman would like a man who pranced and pansied around in frillies but that Nancy seemed to enjoy planning outfits for us

and preparing all the makeup and painting our faces like it was no big deal. I couldn't get my head around the pair of them. It was so bizarre! Talk about a couple of weirdos!

The reality was Bob liked it while protesting all the time that he didn't like the fine chiffons, the nets, the full skirts, the tight bodices, the stiletto-heeled shoes and that just made him look even more of a goon in my book. The truth was Bob was in his element, and he liked the fact that he had yours truly as a cover for his perversion. With me alongside he had his patsy, you might say. No one could question him, not that anyone would. Wise Guys don't think that way. There're not like other men. No Wise Guy was ever a fag or a transvestite – that is except for Bob - or a child molester or whatever. Wise Guys were men's men and ladies' men. Wise Guys are tough. Macho. So, no one would ever question Bob. No one. And me? Well, I was starting out. I needed to be bloodied. I needed to show the Mob I was one of them and I'd do whatever it fucking took to prove I was up to getting the sauce when Sammy said we needed it.

The Mob was my home, my family. That's why I wanted in. That's why I wanted to be a Wise Guy more than anything. So, if my first job was to be dressed as a fucking dame and hold up a bunch of well-heeled chicks, then so be it! So, let me take you back to the very beginning and I'll describe the time I was around Nancy and Bob's place and she dressed me as a woman for the first time in my life so you get what I mean.

“You need to sit on the bed and scrunch the stockings up,” Nancy said when I'd dropped my trousers to show her my newly shaved and scratched legs.

She was soft-voiced, feminine with a streak of Pittsburgh steel. I sat on the bed and did as she said, left leg, then right. I stood up and the dammed things started to ease to the floor.

“They're no good!” I spoke.

Nancy laughed.

“You need a suspender belt, silly!”

Suddenly, Bob emerged from the bathroom looking like Mother Fucking Goose in a white corset and rouged and powdered face.

“How’s it going?” he asked.

“Good,” Nancy replied.

He disappeared back into the bathroom. He clearly needed none of Nancy’s help to get ready except to help finish off the makeup around the eyes and lips and adjust the wig.

Nancy passed me the belt and, after trial and error, and with Nancy’s nimble fingers working the poppers, I got it on. I never knew being a woman took so much effort!

“Let’s get rid of those horrible white cotton pants, shall we?”

I guess I should have protested and said, “What does it matter? No one’s gonna see my underwear under the dress!”

But I didn’t.

Bob had this thing, like you were an actor and to act the part you had to *feel* the part. You had to *feel* like a woman, even if it was only for a brief period. So I took the fancy purple French knickers all edged with black lace and went to the bathroom and put them on over the suspender belt tucking my manhood in like Bob had shown me one night in the casino when we’d gone to the men’s room together.

“There,” Nancy said. “You’re beginning to look a lot like a woman.”

Then she got this horrid white thing and wrapped it around my waist – a waist cincher she called it. Boy, was it uncomfortable. Bob emerged from the bathroom again wearing a white polka dot



dress all full-skirted and summery and he swished the skirt about a bit and flounced here and there, asking Nancy how he looked.

Nancy said he looked ‘cool,’ then turned back to me. A cantilever bra was affixed to my chest and two breast forms added. I’d never felt anything like it. It just felt so uncomfortable, so unnatural. I couldn’t believe that women walked around with the weight of two water-filled balloons attached to their chests. Then a pink Nylon slip was pulled over my head.

Did I regret not protesting about the scheme? Of course I did! But I was trapped. I had no place to go. I had to see the job to the end to get in Sammy’s good books.

Next, Nancy led me by the hand to the dressing table and I sat down on a stool. Then she started to apply make-up. I couldn’t believe how feminine it made me look. First it was the foundation and then the powder and then the rouge and the lipstick and eye makeup. There was no doubt about it; Nancy was very good at her job and she went about her work like Van Gogh painting a picture onto canvas and I could not believe what was emerging in front of me in the mirror. It was like it wasn’t me at all but a real chick! And she kept winking and smiling at me whenever Bob wanted her attention which I guess was her way of telling me that in fact I was prettier than Bob and I made a damn fine looking woman.

When she had finished, I got up and then it was the netted under-skirt, the dress and wig which she styled and combed. Then when she had finished, I slipped into black high-heeled stiletto shoes and was given a matching handbag. The transformation probably took over three hours that first time and when Nancy had finished, I looked like a woman. I didn’t even recognise myself, I looked so good. My heart started to palpitate, and I felt... I don’t know how I felt. It was neither good nor bad. It was kinda strange, like I’d never felt like before. I felt trapped but at the same time it wasn’t an unpleasant feeling. I am going to be honest and say that. It wasn’t unpleasant. I looked in the mirror and saw my reflection – a beautiful young woman – and no, it wasn’t



an unpleasant feeling at all. But I didn't have too long to reflect...

Bob was ecstatic, he grabbed my arm and said,

“Hey Frankie, Frankie, you look as pretty as a picture.”

And I could see Nancy was pleased with her handiwork too. Of course, the canvas was good. Let me take a minute to describe myself: I was about 5 foot and 5 inches tall and I weighed in at 120 lb., a result of not having enough to eat. Ever. And I had fine bone structure. Bob wasn't the first person to say I looked like a girl. A teacher had said it to me and a girl I fancied too and an auntie and the nurse when I got my flu shot. You get the picture? I was a pretty feminine-looking guy and that maybe, just maybe, was one of the reasons why I wanted to join the Mob. Prove my macho credentials – that's what a shrink would say I guess if I ever laid on a couch, but I wasn't about to lay on a couch. I was about to pull off a hit.

After that I returned to Bob's apartment again and again and again and each time Nancy made us up and we practised, voices (which Bob had mastered 'cept when he got nervous or angry) and walking in great high heels which pinched your toes and pushed you forward (which Bob had mastered too) and all sorts of other stuff which Bob had become skilled at which is why I say he'd been at this dressing game a lot, lot longer than he was letting on to everyone.

“Hey, Bob, if I didn't know you better, I'd have thought you'd done this before!” I said one day when I was feeling more confident. I noted the look on Nancy's face.

Bob put his finger to his lips and smiled. “I been practising for this job, kiddo. It came to me as such a great hit, I knew Sammy would be real pleased. Just think, kiddo, if we can pull this off, we'll be big shots, made men, really part of The Family.”

And he bent down to pull up his skirt; his bald head looked incongruous with the makeup he wore.

But it wasn't just for the job and I knew it. I suspect he knew I knew it and Nancy did too. I don't know if there was anything sexual there or they were just good friends but Nancy seemed to like guys dressed up as dames. It was a surprising thing to me. Something I'd never taken time to consider before. It just seemed so strange but there was no doubt that Nancy was a big encouragement and I know if it hadn't been for her cajoling and teaching and tutoring and getting all the things, I would have bailed out and told Sammy the job was a no go. Looking back, I guess I was a 'yes man' – I went along with stuff because I wanted to fit in. I guess a lot of kids are like that. I was so desperate for The Mob to look at me as one of their own I'd do anything and that meant even dressing as a dame.

So, as the weeks passed we tried on different outfits and built up courage to leave the apartment and go for a walk after dark, headscarves on our heads, swinging handbags and looking like a couple of chicks. As Bob said, we needed to be confident. We needed to be certain in ourselves that we looked the part. We did that a few times. Sometimes we even got cat calls and wolf whistles and one time the driver of a station wagon sat at traffic lights shouted, "Hey, ladies."

We loved that. It made us feel good. Bob said it showed that we'd 'passed' by which he meant no one had figured out that we were really a couple of guys.

Meanwhile, the Ball was fast approaching. We went on a shopping trip with Nancy one Saturday afternoon and another time the three of us went to a diner and sat on high stools, kicking our legs out as we drank shakes. It felt real strange as some guys were giving us the eye and Nancy had to tell them to 'go shove it'. It was kinda weird, a girl doing that for two Wise Guys. Like normally we'd look after the chick and at the first sign of any trouble we'd be ready to get nasty, but dressed as a couple of dames we just couldn't do that kinda stuff. We even surprised Sammy and the boys by coming into The Jackson which was our regular watering hole, dressed up to the nines like two proper dames. I can still remember the look on the face of the coloured

bartender as he dried a glass on a white cloth. He wanted to tell us we couldn't come in and then he wanted to know who we were with but when Bob said, "Surprise! Its Frankie and me!"

He dropped the glass he'd been cleaning on the floor.

Crash! Glass everywhere.

The boys really laughed at that. We were made to sit down and they told the coloured guy to get us all drinks and there were wolf whistles and pats on the bum and a whole lot of humour at the set-up but the boys were impressed, very impressed. They all thought we looked good (especially yours truly) and they believed we could pull off the job and that was the reason for the trial and the practises.

"You sure have put a lot of work into this one, Bob," Sammy said. "I just hope it comes off and you clean out those dames."

Fats agreed. "Don't get any ideas, you two. This is a job, not a fucking fag show. We're The Mob, not a bunch of sissy boys who prance around in makeup. Pull it off and get cleaned up and don't do it again."

From that you'll gather that Fats didn't like the whole guy dressing up as a dame gig but Sammy did and it was his voice that counted.

Bob and I were ready.

## **Chapter Four**

So, we did it! We pulled off our first raid dressed as women. That night we hit the big time and Sammy was as happy as could be and Bob was made-up and I was too.

"It's a new piece to our list," Sammy said. "Pulling off hoists dressed as dames."

When the jewels had been fenced out to Sammy's friends in New York, we were surprised by how much we'd stolen. We had thought they were just trinkets, but they turned out to be worth a whole lot of fucking money and no mistake. It was a good return and bigger than most shakedowns.

"I want you guys to do it again," Sammy said one day down The Jackson as we sipped Southern Comfort and Scotch and reminisced. "Bob, organise it. You and Frankie work well together and it's something the other families don't know about so there ain't no sub-divisions. The money we get is all ours."

Well, Bob didn't need telling twice, I can tell you! In fact, it was exactly the kinda news he wanted to hear.

Fats just looked at the ice cubes in his whiskey glass and hummed and ha'd; he knew he couldn't overrule Sammy. Bob knew it too and the smile on his laughing chops was as big as a Cheshire cat's! And of course, there was no way for me to back out of it! So, it was back to Bob's place and more stockings and suspenders and garters and brassieres and breast forms and petticoats and tulle and dresses and jewellery and makeup and nail varnish and wigs. My God! When I thought about it, I could not believe it. Period. Not believe how much there is for women to do clothing-wise just to leave the house in the morning! So, there was me dressing as a chick as regular as you like around Nancy and Bob's place and sometimes we'd go a for a drink or a meal to get the practice right – never of course wearing the outfits and wigs we'd use for the shakedown. No, poor Bob had to do another theatre raid to get us a new stash of merchandise. That one even made a small column in the paper:

*"Phantom wig stealer strikes again."*

Bob and I laughed at that – they'd had had to cancel a production of *Guys and Dolls* as all the wigs had gone missing. The male ones we sold to a barber we knew – he had to buy them whether he liked it or not. We told him his haircuts were so fucking bad they should come with a free wig. We set the price – OK, maybe a bit more than they were worth - we even took the

money from the fucking till for him so he could remain sitting in his barber's chair with Bob's piece pointing at his forehead and yet he was grumbling and saying that we were 'thieving punks' as we left the joint. I tell you; some people have got no appreciation and gratitude when you comes to doing them a favour.

So, we did it again. A gala at a country club right out of town. Taxi waiting. Stolen. False plates. You know how it works. It was as easy as apple pie. I liked it. The adrenalin rush. The feeling of power. On that second occasion, Bob and I laughed like a couple of hyenas when we got back to the car. It was like hysterical laughter; relief that we'd got away with it. Again. That second time we stopped into the woods and got changed. We saw the cops racing to the scene, their sirens blaring away. The backward cops always a few steps behind the bad guys. We stood in the woods having a piss and laughing at them as they sped past – they must have sent every car in Cook County to the Park Forest Country Club. Fuck me, the night sky was ablaze with blue flashing lights.

"They're in a hurry, wonder who they're after," Bob said as he shook his cock dry. And we laughed some more. We played the old three-car trick and kept low for a while and then it was down The Jackson for a bourbon and a few beers and a big powwow with the other Wise Guys. Bob loved it. He kinda came into his own. Whereas he'd been kinda shy and quiet and nervous around Sammy and the others, he started to open up and told of the raid with much embellishment.

"Frankie got his stiletto heel caught in a drain cover and I was yelling at him to remove his fucking shoe."

"What? Not when Nancy paid five bucks for them!" I laughed.

It was almost true. The truth was I didn't want to run bare-footed and had kinda gotten used to the heels and could walk and even run in them.

So, the hold-ups continued. They had to. Sammy loved it. It was easy money. The press even had a nickname for us – ‘*The Lethal Ladies*’ and our photos were in the paper – in drag of course. I collected all the papers and hid them in a case under my bed in the small apartment I’d moved into with Sammy’s help. He’d negotiated a half-the-normal-rent deal with the landlord and instead of Mr Spredeal expecting me to pay a deposit, he waved it which was very big hearted of him and said he’d sort out the gas and electricity. As I say, very generous hearted was Mr Spredeal. Very generous indeed. But I had my own place which I was mighty pleased about. The room even had a small sink and cooker which meant I could cook in the room if I wanted, although I had to share the toilet and the bathroom.

But the robberies, I tell you, it was like fame. It was being *someone*, not just a fucking average schmuck but a Wise Guy, an infamous guy. Unfortunately – and we didn’t mean to do it – but one time we had to let lose some lead. A woman had a small .25 Baby Browning in her handbag and shot me. Fortunately, her aim wasn’t so good, and the bullet passed right through the full-skirted dress I wore. Bob shot her. Dead. That’s what got us the ‘Lethal Ladies’ tag. Of course, we knew that meant a trip to the electric chair if the cops or the Feds ever gotta hold of us and that made us more reckless as we had nothing to lose. One time we did a bank together. We were in the queue as if we didn’t know each other but when it was our turn, we walked up to the tillers and pointed guns at them. Of course, the beauty of the female disguise was you could vary it and change wigs, shoe heights, wear flats instead of heels, maybe bulk up a bit, maybe tighten a corset a bit. We got to see how easy it was to change our appearance. One paper compared me to the latest starlet Marlyn Monroe (something I’ve got to say I was more than a little pleased about) and then said, “*Monroe look-a-like may be wearing a wig!*” Who’d ever thought it! But what the press never guessed that we were two guys.

“I love it,” Sammy said one day, laughing like a fucking hyena. “I absolutely love it.”