

Flim Flam



Chapter 5

Levon Gets His Lunch

The top news story in Monday's edition of the *Sun Journal* was a summary of the police investigation into the slaying of Scott Decker. It included the statement that "Levon Pelletier had produced no alibi for the night of the murder," the obvious implication being that he was considered a suspect. So, I was a bit surprised, the night before, when Levon agreed over the phone to an interview. His suggestion that we meet at a local steakhouse seemed odd at first. *Why in a public place?* When I discovered that he expected me to pick up the tab, it morphed from *odd* to *weird*. The only explanation that occurred to me was that Levon wasn't fretting about his legal situation and had decided to cash in on his celebrity, albeit a single carnivorous lunch at the Rib Eye with a private investigator.

I arrived at the restaurant ten minutes late. The bridge on Pleasant Street over the Little Androscoggin River had iced over, and a sloppy four car pileup stalled traffic for almost half an hour. Levon was annoyed by my tardiness, and when I explained the cause for the delay, he supplemented his displeasure with a tirade about stupid Maine drivers and the friggin' weather, all the while staring through me as if I were barely in the same county. The prospects for a cheerful dining experience seemed remote.

The Rib Eye looked strangely out of place in Mechanic Falls, a marginally upscale, twenty-first century eatery nestled in a small rustic town that had stubbornly resisted change for the better part of two hundred and fifty years. There were plenty of empty tables near the register, but Lucy, our waitress, led us immediately to a quiet booth in the back, which, given the appearance and disposition of my guest, was probably the right choice.

In the first act of *Julius Caesar*, the Roman emperor takes Mark Antony aside and remarks, "Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look. He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous." The bard might just as well have been describing Levon Pelletier.

Levon's gaunt face hadn't seen a razor in the better part of a Shakespearean fortnight, unlike the top of his half-balding head, which appeared to have been buzzed within the week. His eyes, like vacuous pools, registered little of what was actually happening in the material world and, at the same time, created a translucent buffer between social convention and his hyperactive mind.

“What can I get for you to drink?” our waitress asked.

Before the last three words were out of her mouth, Levon blurted out, “I’ll have a Bud,” while stroking the stubble on top of his scalp and not looking up from the table.

“Make that two, *please*,” I replied, after making eye contact with her and grimacing a silent apology for my companion’s rude disposition.

Lucy left us with our menus and our dysfunction.

“Thanks for seeing me on short notice,” I offered.

Levon hunched his shoulders and rocked quickly back and forth, though it was unclear what his movements intended to convey—if anything.

“How long have you lived in Mechanic Falls?” I asked.

“Bawn heyah,” he replied curtly, in a strong Down East accent.

“What do you do for a living?”

“I thought we came to talk about Scott Deckah?” he snorted.

“Oh, sure. Just thought we could get acquainted first. But it suits me fine to get right to it. Who do you think killed him?”

“Well, t’wasn’t *me*,” he said forcefully.

“The *Sun Journal* indicated that you don’t have an alibi for the night of the murder.”

“I don’t *need* an alibi. I didn’t do it.”

When our beers arrived, Levon ordered the steak and shrimp dinner. I decided to go with the salad bar.

“How do you want your steak cooked?” Lucy asked.

“Rayah,” Levon replied.

Then turning to me and pointing across the room, she said, “You can help yourself. The bowls are over there.”

I did exactly that and was back at the table in a couple of minutes.

“All right, Levon,” I said, after taking my seat. “Tell me about the burglary. What exactly was taken, and why do you think Scott was involved?”

“Scott and I wehn’t friends to begin with, but we did get to know each othah at the militia meetings up to Otisfield. A couple of yeahs back, aftah a weekend retreat, my truck wouldn’t staht. It was late on Sunday evenin’, and theyah was no way to get it fixed, so I asked him fah a lift home. He had to come right through heah on his way back tah Ahbun.”

Levon scratched the side of his head and said, “Nevah did get that truck back on the road. Anyways, I had no wheels fah months. Scott would pick me up whenever the Patriots met. I’d pay fah the gas or get him some...*things*...to keep it sqwayah.”

He hesitated briefly on the word, *things*, and his eyes widened, so I asked him, “What kind of things?”

He cut me off abruptly with, “Nevah you mind,” and then rolled on. “One time last summah, on the way home, we picked up some pizza in Oxfahd and brought it to my place. I showed him around.” Levon smirked and then added, “Now I’m sorry I did that. Two weeks latah, I was robbed.”

“The paper said some guns and other valuables were taken.”

“That’s right.”

“What kind of guns were they?”

“He took an AR-15, a shotgun, and a 9mm Glock.”

“Did they have serial numbers?”

“The shotgun didn’t; it was made befoah 1968. But the othah two had numbahs.”

“Did the police search Scott’s place for the guns?”

“Shuwah. But he wasn’t going tah keep them in his home.”

“What would Scott do with those guns?”

"You tell me," he growled.

"I never met him," I replied. "But those weapons are perfectly legal and, other than the shotgun, require serial numbers. Why would a successful businessman steal traceable weapons when he could just as easily purchase them online?"

"We'll nevah know. Dead men don't have much to say."

Levon was a piece of work. Sure, he was coarse and blunt, but beneath the crusty veneer was a man who was doing what he could to get by and have a good time. Obviously, he had graduated from the school of hard knocks, but in the moments when he managed to set aside life's disappointments, he could be witty and almost lovable. I did what I could to bring out the better side of his nature as I continued with my questions.

"Do you still go to meetings of the Down East Patriots?" I asked.

"Sometimes. We meet at one o'clock on the fuhst Sunday of the month."

"Do you have to join, or can you just show up?"

"You just show up."

"So, they're meeting this Sunday. Will you be going?"

He eyed me suspiciously and asked, "Why do yah want to know that?"

"Just curious."

"Ah... No. Can't go this week. Got a job to do."

Levon's meal arrived. He salted his sirloin until the sodium chloride crystals glistened in the light of the overhead chandelier. Then he cut off a chunk and bit into it as though he hadn't eaten in days. Neither of us said another word until his last shrimp was down the hatch. Levon then raised his arm and waved it back and forth until he got Lucy's attention. She came right over.

"I'll have another beah," he said.

Lucy nodded politely, then turned to me and asked, "How about you?"

"No thanks," I replied, and she left.

"Levon, you don't have to admit to it, but I suspect that the other stuff that was taken from your home was drugs. I don't care about that. I'm trying to solve a murder."

His only response was a smirk.

"Over the past decade, Scott Decker was arrested for a number of things, but not for drugs. His mother told me that he never used them at all, not even marijuana; she was adamant about it. Do you know otherwise?"

"Well..." he stammered, "I nevah saw him loaded, but how did he make his money? As fah as I could tell, he hadn't done any wehk in yeahs."

"I hope to find out. Even his parents don't have an answer for that. Were you ever in Scott's home?"

"*Nevah*," he replied, in a loud voice. "He had some pahties, but he didn't invite *me*."

Levon's second beer may have wet his whistle, but it didn't lubricate the conversation. He became thoroughly distracted by the patrons who entered and left the restaurant, and barely responded to any of the remaining questions I posed for him. When his bottle was empty, we were done. He'd gotten his free meal, and I had gotten my money's worth. Despite the absence of pleasantries, it was time well spent. I couldn't totally eliminate Levon Pelletier as a possible suspect, but he was now at or near the bottom of my list. He had made no attempt to conceal his disdain for Scott Decker or show remorse for his demise. If Levon had killed him, why not fake some concern or sadness? Of course, this could have been an inspired use of reverse psychology, but that level of performance seemed a notch or two above his pay grade.

