



January 1, 2013

Happy New Year, kiddo. Pour yourself three fingers of something brown and let me tell you about what turned out to be quite a year for this gumshoe.

It was January when she walked in. Walked in on the kind of stems the 1940s wouldn't have been able to shut up about. "Mike Wood" she said, caressing my name with her tongue like a nerd saying 'laser disc', "my sister is missing. Daddy says you know a thing or two about wayward girls." In this town there are only a few places daddy's little girl on the lam can wind up. I have a tab behind the bar at all of them, so I took the case.

In February, March and April, I leaned against lamp-posts in the rain. Smoked like a chimney. Drank like a Kennedy. Wore out three trenchcoats. (All standard business expenses)

It was Spring before I finally spotted the elusive little bird. Any clothes at all might have been a better disguise. Seems she'd put her getaway sticks to good use and left home to be a dancer. Daddy didn't approve, and I could see why -- curves to kill for, and breasts in all the right places.

Looks weren't all she left home with. I gave her my hankie, then my spare hankie, as she told me she'd come to town with some of her old lady's jewellery -- and now the jewellery was gone. I don't normally take to that kind of sob story, but her lips made a strong argument and those gams backed her up. I promised I wouldn't rat to Daddy. He'd already paid me anyway. The doll's pearls were stolen and I was going to find that necklace, or failing that, give her one.

Late in July it hit me like a stepfather on his fourth Maker's Mark: one of the other dancers must have taken those pearls. Probably sold 'em to pay for a habit. Deep under cover, I smoked a lot of hashish in a lot of dens before October rolled around. I found the jewel-thieving dish in a dark room at the corner of Skid Row and Nowheresville, reclined in a corner wearing nothing but a smile. I slapped her to wake her out of her dopey haze. I slapped her again to no effect. Then I turned her around and slapped her face, and that did the trick.

She came clean, like they all do. While we showered she told me where she fenced the jewels. Negotiations with the fence were handled by my closest associates, Smith & Wesson. I didn't even have to squirt metal.

As I tossed my client her pearls, she said "I don't know how to thank you." Before I could unzip she said "I mean, I could take care of you." Before I could unzip she told me she could broil a steak, fry an onion, mix an Old-Fashioned, and throw a mean left hook. I won't bore you with details (like how I found out her name is Stephanie), but I did call the sign painter and I am waiting on new business cards. "Wood & Wife, Investigators" sounds pretty good to me.

May the coming year bring you easy cases, loose lips, and many pleasant surprises.

*Mike Wood.*