

## **Mystery Meat 10: Bullets Over Brooklyn Grill**



Bullets blew through the shotgun dining room at Brooklyn Grill, grazing the ear of a patron biting into the Buggy Seigel buffalo burger and landing in the back of a busboy clearing up a Lucky Luciano chicken Caesar wrap.

It was the first time since I had been investigating the The Fox Valley Butcher restaurant attacks that I witnessed a hit. Spray from the wound splashed the pews, brick walls, and added color to the muted 1920s artwork and hanging wrought iron. Spatter rose as high as the tin ceiling and a few drops bled from the blade of a slow turning fan. The poor kid crumpled at the knees and went down in a pool of blood and Leinenkugel's Red.

A frenzied waitress garbed in a gangster fedora and necktie screamed. The quick courteous staff that had been ministering to the weekday usuals was in disarray. Lights from the Brooklyn Bridge twinkled in a façade behind the bar. I made mental notes of the scene so I could play dumb when the cops arrived. I slowly dipped one of the restaurant's signature chips, a puffy potato cloud with a slight crunch, into my peppery clam chowder.

All the dishes have names that salute the heyday of organized crime. The Mobster Salad is built like your typical mafia organization. A foundation of Romaine and vegetables are the goombas that get the job done. The apples and peanuts add a little something different like a cute gangster moll might liven up a poker game. Thai sesame dressing adds foreign flair echoing Far East money-laundering syndicates. The broiled lime ginger chicken breast is the Big Boss sitting on top of the whole operation. Anyone who has a problem with their salad is treated to the "You Look'in at me" Turkey Club Wrap before being served the cheddar and cod Swimming With the Fish Sandwich.

Honey mustard poultry strips are called Five Finger Discount Tenders, battered mushrooms are Breaded Bullets, there is a Dutch Schultz Salad, Bonnie or Clyde Burgers, and a Chicago style hot dog known as the The Al Capone.

The food is great and the service is just fine, but in most restaurants with a theme, I do everything I can to avoid playing along. The catchy names make it hard to place a straightforward order without some degree of complicity in the shenanigans.

“What’ll you have?” the waitress asks.

“I’ll take your cheese sandwich with chips and salsa.”

The waitress cocks an eyebrow, “What’s that?”

I point to a selection delineating a hoagie stuffed with provolone, cheddar, mushrooms, peppers, onions, and ranch dressing. I point to another option detailing tri-colored tortillas in Monterey Jack with guacamole on the side. Lord, let her understand.

“Come again?”

I relent and hiss between my teeth, “The Staten Island Sting and Nasty Nick’s Nachos.”

When the boys in blue arrived to cordon the crime scene and take statements, there was a fair amount of confusion.

“Let’s get this place under control. I want some handcuffs and nightsticks!” said the first officer through the door.

Within minutes he was presented with a plate of onion rings called Beer Battered Handcuffs and won-ton wrapped mozzarella logs in marinara identified on the menu as Nightsticks.

He waived off the waitress, “There are a lot of holes in these walls. Looks like the perpetrator had a Tommy gun.”

“One Tommy Gun coming up,” the waitress sighed and slunk back to the kitchen to fill the order for a juicy Angus burger covered in Swiss cheese and sautéed mushrooms on a lightly toasted Kaiser bun.

The witnesses were interviewed and sent home. Seems everyone saw a flash of motion and a piece of the puzzle, but no one could identify the killer. The final composite drawing looked something like Nude Descending a Staircase meets Otis from the Andy Griffith Show with a wild case of delirium tremors.

“What’s the description?” asked the lead investigator.

An officer flipped his steno pad, “We got a shortish-tall fellow with blondish-brown hair. He’s on the fat side of thin. It appears he was dressed. I’d venture most likely in clothes. One observant witness noted that on his feet was some manner of footwear, be it sandal, shoe, or boot.”

The lead investigator shook his head, “You sure he wasn’t a redheaded dwarf dressed in a tutu with bunny rabbit slippers?”

When it was my turn to talk, I shrugged and played gee-wiz-it-all-happened-so-fast games. I languished over my tiramisu. The light layering of mascarpone cheese, chocolate, hazelnut liqueur, and whipped cream scooped over lady fingers was sweet enough to loosen a tooth when washed down with Sprecker root beer.

I had seen something. Right after the shooting, a man in a black and red checked jacket jumped in a pick up truck with a getaway driver. I saw a flash of bright blonde hair. The obvious culprits were The Logger, a prime suspect, and his ex-girlfriend, a waitress named Betty.

This fellow seemed slither and more agile than the woodsman I had tailed for weeks. There was something snappy and crisp in his walk. The squared shoulders of the coat sloped down towards his elbows. He appeared to stumble in oversized boots. And why would the woman who convinced me she was running from him become an accomplice?

“Listen, I don’t know what the odds are of a private investigator just happening to drop in for dinner when a crime takes place,” an officer said, leaning over the table, “I’m going to ask you one last time. Did you see anyone suspicious?”

“No, just a Boot Legger and the entire Italian Underworld,” I said, pointing to abandoned plates of chicken on foccacia and a criminally named bacon cheeseburger.