



## **FRANKIE REVETTA'S FAVORITE CHAIR**

*By Debbie Kuhn*

**Joe Sullivan could easily understand why the bar was called the Hideaway Inn. He'd heard that the place had been the favorite hangout of a number of Chicago gangsters back in the 20s and 30s – and no wonder: It was pretty damned hard to find.**

**The dense foliage along the pitch-dark country road made it even harder for him to see the scarce landmarks he had been told to look for.**

**"Man, where are you taking us?" asked Lou, from the backseat of Joe's Bronco. "We goin' on a cross-country tour, or what?"**

**Joe laughed. "Keep your panties on girls. We have to be getting close now."**

**"Yeah, well, we better be," Howie said, his voice strained. He was sitting next to Lou. "I gotta piss like a racehorse – and lose about fifteen pounds."**

**Joe suddenly made a sharp right turn onto a gravel road, causing his corpulent friend Ray to slam into his side.**

**"Whoa!"**

**"Watch it!"**

**"Give us a break, man!"**

**"Sorry guys. This is it – up here on the left."**

Joe pulled into the small, crowded lot and parked on the far right side, underneath a giant maple. The four men stepped out of the air-conditioned Bronco into the humid August night and headed over to the two-story frame building's dimly lit entrance.

"Man, you mean to tell me we drove thirty-three miles outside Chicago for this dump?" Lou asked, shaking his head.

Joe punched him in the arm. "Look, give it a chance, will ya? The place has *atmosphere*."

Howie groaned and farted. "It better have a toilet – that's what it better have."

Joe opened the heavy oak door and they trailed into the bar single file. It was warm and stuffy – only a little less uncomfortable than the weather outside.

The place was packed with suspicious looking characters, either playing pool or shuffling cards. A light gray cloud – a mixture of cigarette and cigar smoke – hung thick in the air at eyelevel. The antique jukebox on the other side of the narrow room was booming out a ballad by Brenda Lee.

She was *soooo* sorry.

"Yeah, I tell ya what I'm sorry about," Ray said, yawning, "we've come all this way and they ain't a babe in sight – and not one frickin' free table either. I can't drink standing up, ya know."

Howie scrambled up the open staircase on their right, following the restroom signs.

"Relax, Ray," Joe said, grinning. "I see a table in that far corner over there. You guys grab it and I'll order up some beers."

Joe worked his way through the maze of cluttered tables and leaned on the mahogany bar. The middle-aged bartender looked even shadier than his customers. He was built like a gorilla, and was almost as hairy. Joe figured he'd been a bouncer in the past.

Probably still was.

The bartender set down a tall glass he'd been about to dry and gave Joe's average, slender frame the once-over.

"I'm Mel, the owner, in case there's any complaints," he said, sounding bored. "So, Red, what'll it be?"

"The name's Joe, actually. Four Coronas – if you have it."

"Course we do. Do you think we're all hicks out here?"

"Sorry."

Joe paid the tab and carried the beer bottles – two necks in each hand – over to the table his friends now occupied. His work boots made a *schlick-schlick* sound the whole way.

“Man, looks like you’re gonna have to cop a squat on this mucked-up floor,” Lou said, smirking. “We couldn’t find another chair.”

Howie looked relieved and apologetic. “I just beat you back from the john.”

“What about that chair up there?” Ray pointed to the oak-paneled wall behind Joe. “Nobody seems to wanna use it.”

“I will.” Joe passed out the beers. “Hell, it’s the fanciest seat in the house.”

In fact, it looked out of place. The antique seemed to be made of rosewood, and had intricately carved arms and legs. The seat and back were covered in crushed red velvet.

A plank sticking out of the wall supported the seat. Feeling a little guilty, Joe lifted the chair off and set it on the floor next to the table.

Somebody unplugged the jukebox and Connie Francis died a slow, agonizing death.

“Hey, Red! I wouldn’t sit in that chair if I was you.” Mel’s swarthy face wore a bulldog expression.

The bar fell silent. Everyone turned to stare.

“Why not?” Joe shot back. “Is it priceless or something?”

Mel put his beefy hands on his acre-wide hips. “That was mobster Frankie Revetta’s favorite chair. Nobody was allowed to sit in it but him.”

“So? He’s dead now, right?”

“Since ’36. Little Guy Campo was standing right where you are now when he filled Frankie’s gut full of holes. That chair’s been cursed ever since.”

Lou snickered. “Better watch out there, Joe. If you sit in that chair, your dick might rot clean off.”

Ray and Howie burst out laughing.

“Well, I think I’ll take my chances anyway,” Joe said.

Mel glared at him. “If you sit in *that* chair, you’ll be dead in twenty-four hours, guaranteed.”

Ray and Howie stopped laughing.

Lou whistled a shortened version of The Twilight Zone theme song.

“Do you actually believe that superstitious garbage?” Joe asked Mel.

**"My grandfather believed it, my father believed, and I believe it – because it's true. I've seen shit happen with my own eyes. Why do you think I hung that chair on the wall in the first place? I was too afraid to destroy it."**

**Joe crossed his arms. "Twenty-four hours, eh? Are you willing to bet on it?"**

**For a few seconds, the room got so quiet Joe could hear his own breathing.**

**Howie coughed nervously and rubbed the sweat off his bald spot. "Uh, Joe, buddy, maybe this ain't such a good idea."**

**"Yeah, why tempt fate?" Ray added. "Working on skyscrapers is dangerous enough."**

**"Tomorrow is Sunday." Joe sank into the chair and stretched out his legs. "And just for the record, people, I sat down at exactly a quarter after ten."**

**"This is nothing but a big, fat load of bullshit," Lou said. "Everybody place your bets."**

**"Okay, okay." Mel waved his arms. "I tried to warn you smart-ass, narrow-minded little pricks, but you didn't want to listen. So here's the deal: If Red here ain't dead in twenty-four hours, I'll give him this whole damned bar – lock, stock and barrel."**

**\*\*\*\*\***

**Twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes later, Joe Sullivan still counted himself among the living. He pounded on the door of the Hideaway Inn at ten o'clock sharp.**

**The bar closed early on Sundays.**

**Joe waited another minute and then banged on the door again.**

**"Knock it off – I'm coming." Mel unlocked the door and swung it open. His face registered surprise. "You. I'm surprised you're still around."**

**"I've never felt better, and I just thought I'd prove it." Joe gestured past him towards the deserted room. "Can we talk business?"**

**Mel stepped aside without a word. Joe strolled in and looked around.**

**Yeah, he could get used to owning a place like this. It would be a healthy supplement to his construction job. Maybe he'd be able to retire from the grind a little early.**

**Mel continued where he left off – clearing tables and stuffing extra-hefty garbage bags.**

**Joe noticed that the antique chair had been mounted on the wall again. He'd definitely put up a fight if Mel tried to renege on their wager. A whole roomful of witnesses had seen them shake hands on it.**

Joe checked his watch. "Seems like you're going to lose that bet for sure, but look on the bright side: I'll still need a bartender."

Mel stared at him in a way that made the hair on the back of his neck start to quiver.

"You should be dead. The curse has never failed before." Mel shook his head. "I just don't understand what went wrong."

Joe smiled. "I don't believe in curses – maybe that's what went *right*."

Mel let go of the bulging garbage bag and straightened his back. "A deal's a deal, then. The deed to the place is around here somewhere. I'll find it later."

"Good." Joe rubbed his hands together. "I'll have my lawyer get in touch with you first thing tomorrow."

"I'll be around."

Joe turned his back on Mel and headed for the door.

"Hey, Red. One more thing."

Joe looked over his shoulder in time to see Mel swing the chair.

Then everything went nauseatingly black.

\*\*\*\*\*

The pain soon melted away and Joe felt like he was floating. He didn't have a care in the world – and no sense of time or place.

But then, suddenly, he started to see things. He began to hear noises: people talking and laughing. Sometimes he could hear music. It all seemed far away at first, but gradually something – some unseen force – pulled him closer and closer to the action.

Until one day...

"Hey, kid, snap out of it, will ya? You're as dead as a mackerel – get used to it already!"

Joe tried hard to focus. He saw his legs first. He had on jeans and a bright red T-shirt – the same clothes he'd been wearing the night he...died?

He was sitting on a chair – *the* chair. It was still hanging on the wall.

Joe looked around the empty, dimly lighted room.

"Over here, kid," said the gravelly voice.

A short, stocky man in a double-breasted pinstriped suit was leaning back against the bar, fanning himself with a matching blue fedora.

**“Jeez, I thought you’d never materialize. It’s been over three months now since...well, you know.” The man sighed. “That schmuck Melvin Campo is just like his great-uncle. Never could think things through. Little Guy should-a known my boys would bump him off for clippin’ me. And now Mel is headed to the Big House.”**

**Joe decided he could probably talk. “If you’re Frankie Revetta, then that means I’m really dead.”**

**Frankie gave a short laugh. “Worse than that, kid. You’re in limbo. Just like me. Although my future’s lookin’ up – or down, whatever the case might be. All I know is, it won’t be boring no more.”**

**Joe stared at the floor. “How do I get down from here?”**

**“The same as if you was alive: jump.”**

**Joe grinned sheepishly. His landing was soft.**

**He approached the smiling, craggy-faced gangster. “Okay, I’m dead. I accept that. Now when do I get to move on?”**

**Frankie lifted a shoulder. “That’s just it, kid – you don’t. I gotta admit, you gotta bum deal. I mean, at least I deserved those slugs I took in the breadbasket. I was screwin’ around with Little Guy’s old lady, and I whacked a few of his relatives, too.” He shook his head. “But you? A lamb to the slaughter.”**

**Joe stared at him. “You know, I wouldn’t have been murdered if you hadn’t cursed that chair.”**

**“Believe you me, if I’d known I was gonna be tied to it for this long, I would-a kept my stupid trap shut.”**

**“Are you telling me we’re both stuck here for eternity?”**

**“Not exactly.” Frankie put on his fedora and turned down the brim. “I’ve already done my time. The chair has a new owner now.”**

**The gangster’s form started to waver and fade.**

**Joe panicked. “Wait a minute – you can’t just leave me here alone. I don’t know what to do next.”**

**Frankie vanished, but Joe heard his gravely voice one more time.**

**“There ain’t nothin’ you *can* do, kid. The chair is yours.” His disembodied laughter filled the room. “I’m outta this joint.”**

**END**