

CHAPTER ONE

HARD LUCK HARTZELL

It was late morning—very late, about eleven thirty. A bloodshot eye dared to open as the sound of barking dogs pierced an alcohol-induced stupor. With impunity an audacious beam of sunlight blazed through open window shades, causing the ocular lids to snap shut. Sensitive nerves relayed to a foggy brain interpreting the effect as sandpaper scraping the eyeball, but in reality cigarette smoke residue and dehydration were causing the undesired irritation. Screeching epithets struck eardrums, inducing the brain to react like a secondary coil. Ordinarily, this induction would cause the brain to send electrical messages to various parts of the body, initializing a protective response from the extreme audible unpleasantness. Unfortunately, five scotches on the rocks, four shots of bourbon, three boilermakers, three shots of tequila, and eight beers had rendered an otherwise normal brain from functioning properly. At best, an assortment of muscle groups could only spasm, causing twitching and tremors within the essential appendages needed to respond to the protestations of a finch amazon parrot named Mango. Barking persisted from outside. Avian screeching ceased but was replaced with a repetitive “Shut up” each time a very hungry German shepherd named Lady and a Catahoula hound