

WILD BILL

a novel of crime

BY

DANA KING

WILD BILL

By

Dana King

ALSO BY DANA KING

The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of (2014)

Grind Joint (2013)

A Small Sacrifice (2013)

Worst Enemies (2012)

-

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2011 by Dana King

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1505864083

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing is a solitary occupation, yet no book is written by the author alone. A lot of resources were hungrily and gratefully devoured as I have worked on my writing, but a few stand out. All of these people must bear some of the credit (or responsibility) for this book.

The Chantilly Writers Group, notably Mary Ellen Gavin, Betty Hyland, Clif Berry, Rich Katchmark, Jim Harkin, Denice Jobe and John Stipa, for listening to this story unfold, chapter by chapter, twice a month for almost a year. Their counsel, good nature, and support have been invaluable.

John McNally, for accepting me into his writing workshop and showing me crime fiction was not a ghetto by treating me as he treated the more “literary” members of the workshop, as well as for his continued support and friendship.

Elizabeth Bruce, Vineeta Anand, Nick Kocz, Susanna Jech Paul, Melanie Hatter, and the late (and sorely missed) Jim Munford, who kept John’s workshop alive through monthly meetings at Jim’s house and were never less than gracious in their support and comments.

Pam Strickler and Barbara Braun, for their willingness to take a chance on me when they had revenue-producing writers under contract already. Our inability to interest traditional publishers is due to the writing and the market, not the quality of representation.

My parents, who have told me for as long as I can remember I could do anything, though they will be appalled by the language.

My Beloved Spouse and first listener extraordinaire, who heard each chapter in its roughest form, before it was fit even to show to a writers’ group, and stayed, anyway.

For Rachel and Corky, who make me look forward to every day.

WILD BILL

PROLOGUE

The ceramic tile felt cool and dry against Gianni Bevilacqua's cheek. A thread of drool ran from the corner of his mouth to the tile like the first strand of a spider web. Less pain in his left arm and chest now, but Gianni knew he'd die as sure as he'd known he was coming last night with Connie Tortorella.

Rosalie told him not to eat so many cannoli. "Eat some pizelles," she said every night after dinner. "The cannoli are too rich for your cholesterol." Cholesterol didn't scare Gianni. He'd lied, cheated, manipulated, and killed to get to the top of the Chicago Outfit. He usurped authority and took down every tradition that didn't suit him until he ran the whole operation. A pair of .22s behind his ear figured to get him long before cholesterol.

Gianni alone in the big house, Rosalie at Mass again, praying for his soul. Lot of good that did him, lying on the floor, eight in the morning, barely breathing. She should have prayed for something useful, like a tasty, low-fat cannoli.

Gianni's soul didn't interest him. The priests taught him young, everyone was on this earth to suffer for their greater reward in heaven. So be it. Gianni went about God's work with a clear conscience, doling out suffering as he thought appropriate, sending some to their rewards even faster than God intended. He'd do what he had to if the invisible prick wanted him to suffer in the afterlife, too. How'd the saying go? Heaven doesn't want me, and hell is afraid I'll take over. A smile flickered in Gianni's eyes, too weak to move his lips.

He'd had taken over before. Broke in with Momo Giancana, busting up policy wheels on the West Side before he was twenty. Saw Momo become the front boss, thinking he was the real thing, waving it in people's faces. The man John Gotti only dreamed of being. Dated a McGuire Sister, fucked the president's girlfriend, banged Marilyn Monroe on the side. He hung out with Sinatra, for Christ's sake. Can't get more big time than that.

Momo's problem was, the Outfit didn't go for flash. Tony Accardo had the big house; everything else, low profile. Momo got sent to Mexico to hustle señoritas in semi-retirement until his ego couldn't take it anymore. He came back to be boss and the Outfit put him out of their misery in his own basement one night.

Gianni had more smarts than that. He stayed tight with everyone: soldiers, street bosses, all the big shooters. Greased skids, arbitrated disputes, made sure things worked like they were supposed to. Everyone thought he was on their side, and he was, when it suited him. When it didn't, he had a story. It couldn't be helped. The fat prick lied. They got to him first. I did what I could. I'll make it up to you.

Luck is where preparation meets opportunity, and Gianni Bevilacqua had been preparing his whole life. When Carmine Aliquo died while consiglieri Frank Ferraro served three federal years, Gianni became the de facto boss. He added crews, promoted his supporters to street bosses, Gianni Junior to underboss. Ferraro came back from Lewisburg a true consiglieri: a counselor, in charge of nothing. Gianni Bevilacqua alone ran Chicago and points west.

Ferraro didn't get to be consiglieri by letting things slide. Gianni made cosmetic changes and excuses to keep Ferraro off his back, all the while telling Junior he was being groomed for the top spot. For almost two years he maintained equilibrium between Frank and Junior, giving each only enough slack to keep him quiet. He'd sort it out sooner or later.

Now it was later, and nothing was settled. Gianni tried to lick the strand of drool from his lip. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. Junior thought he was next in line; Ferraro would never stand for it. After seventy years of peaceful transitions, the Outfit would fight over turf like those babbos in New York. Just because Gianni couldn't take it with him didn't mean he had to leave anything behind.

CHAPTER 1

The room held a dozen people, if they were in decent shape. Will Hickox counted eighteen from his spot in the doorway, not including himself. Special agents, lawyers from Justice, technicians, a couple of suits who called themselves media liaison specialists. An old joke came to mind. What do you have if you put eighteen government employees in a room with eighteen lesbians? Thirty-five people who don't do dick. Thirty-five because the woman in the far corner talking to Mike Satriale might count for both sides.

Will held up a hand to stop Ray Fa'alepo going in. "Nothing happening here. Let's get to the cemetery before the rush starts." Will worked some funerals, the feds and cops going in made a longer procession than the mourners. He also wanted time to make sure the kid knew what to expect. Pushing thirty, Fa was a kid only to Will, who thought anyone in pre-school when he started in the FBI would always be a kid.

Waiting for the elevator Will said, "You ever work a funeral before?" Knowing Fa hadn't, three weeks in Chicago Organized Crime after two years in Montana wondering why white supremacists couldn't play Nazi somewhere a Samoan wouldn't freeze his ass off. Will asked because he remembered how much he enjoyed unsolicited advice at Fa's age. Fa reminded Will of himself, so he probably needed a lot of advice, solicited or otherwise.

"No." Fa looked at Will like it was a trick question.

"It's easy. Just watch and pay attention to who talks to who. You see a couple of guys say more than hello, get a picture. Make a note. How long did they talk? Who did most of the talking? What kind of talk was it?"

"What kind of talk? You mean I'll be close enough to hear them?"

The elevator stopped and three people got off. Will waited for Fa, then pushed the button for the lobby. "You don't have to hear. Just watch. Do they look friendly, or is someone getting pissed? Whatever. We'll compare notes later, like the Kremlinologists used to do on May Day."

"What's a Kremlinologist?" Ray ten years old when the Iron Curtain slid off the rod.

"Never mind." Will made a mental note: Twenty-First Century references only. "Keep an eye on Frank Ferraro. Him and Junior Bevilacqua

are going to butt heads about who's in charge. Get pictures of everyone comes up to him, whether they talk or not, but keep track of who he talked to, who he didn't, and as much as you can about how the conversation went. Or didn't go. I'll keep an eye on Junior." They went through the back door into the parking lot.

Outside, Fa said, "You think there might be trouble?" Will recognized the look, Fa thinking maybe this funeral gig might not be so bad after all.

"Today? No. Funerals are off limits. If this had been a hit, even the guys who whacked him would show up and throw a flower in the hole."

"But you think there's going to be a war."

"Has to be." Will threw the keys to the government-issue Ford over the hood to Fa. "The Prince did a lot of maneuvering—"

"The Prince?"

"Gianni's nickname. Like the book by Machiavelli. No scheme was too low or too tricky if Gianni thought it would get him what he wanted." Will waited for an interruption that didn't come. "Anyway, the Prince did a lot of maneuvering to put Junior in line to take over. Now Junior thinks he's the natural heir. It doesn't work that way. Ferraro won't stand for it."

"How do you know all this?" Fa pulled the car onto Roosevelt, west toward Mt. Carmel Cemetery. Good thing Will knew him a little. For all the more expression his Easter Island face showed, a lot of guys would consider the comment a challenge.

"The usual ways. Google searches. Talk to shoeshine guys at the airports. Society gossip page in the Trib." Will waited for Fa to look over. "I have a source in the Outfit."

"You have a snitch inside? Does the Bureau have someone under cover?"

"Don't wreck the car. We're going to Gianni's funeral, not mine." Will made a show of adjusting his seat belt. "There's always a couple of guys that'll talk to us. They don't give anyone up and they sure as hell don't testify. The one we're talking about just confirms things. Org charts. Rumors. Stuff like that."

"And you trust him?"

"He has no reason to lie."

"Didn't you tell me last week these guys will lie about the time of day just to keep in practice?" It was like having a kid, or what Will thought

having a kid would be like. Question after question, and Fa remembered everything Will ever told him, not afraid to point out perceived inconsistencies.

“He does it because he wants something, and he knows he won’t get it if I catch him in a lie. No one in the Outfit ever does anything without a selfish motive. This one needs a favor once in a while.”

“I still don’t get it.” Fa took a few seconds to craft the question while negotiating his way around a delivery truck. “These guys hang out together, they eat together, drink together, pull jobs together. And this one decides to talk about his friends to a Fed. Is this how he’s getting to the top, feeding you tips to put away the competition?”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself.” Fa put on the wipers and Will pulled a face. Cold and rainy for standing around outside all day. “First, these guys don’t have friends, just associates. You can’t call someone who might put an ice pick in your ear a friend. Second, he never tells me anything I can use in a case. It’s all background. I hear things, he confirms them. This guy’s given us two-thirds of what’s on that bulletin board in the office.”

Will put three fingers on Fa’s right arm before he could interrupt. “Every so often, someone gets jammed up and we help him out. No one walks, but favors get done. For example. Three years ago a guy named Bruno D’Addario—everyone called him Big Daddy—took a fall for wire fraud. Nothing dramatic, but he’d do a nickel of federal time, no question.

“My guy asks can I help Big Daddy out. His mother’s sick, she won’t last five years, and there’s no way she can get to a federal pen for visits. I talk to Satriale, he talks to Chicago police, and we hand them a dead bang bookmaking case. Big Daddy will plead, if they send him to Stateville, twenty minutes from Mom’s house. His brother took her out every week. Big Daddy drew three years state time, got out in twenty months, home six weeks before she died. Everyone’s happy. Big Daddy gets to see his mom. CPD gets a free bust, so now they owe us a favor, too. My mole knows I’ll stand up for him, so he’ll do things for me. Show me a problem there.”

Fa worked the gum hard. He had an argument, wasn’t sure he knew enough to say something he’d have to live with. Will liked that. Most agents Fa’s age weren’t as smart as they thought they were. Fa wasn’t as smart as he wanted to be.

“But it blurs the line.” Fa said. “I don’t want to sound naïve, but aren’t we the good guys and they’re the bad guys?”

“Yeah, but.” Teaching opportunities this good not that common, Will wanted to get it right. “It’s not that straightforward with these guys. You want to chase crooks and put them away, be a cop. Or transfer to Bank Robbery. Guy steals something, you catch him, lock him up. He might walk—hell, he probably walks—but you did what you could.

“You’ll never get near the top working organized crime like that. It’s been tried. We’ve built this RICO case two years now, probably have two more to go. Gianni dying might hold us up, or it might help us. No way to tell. The only consistent thing is, we deal in information. Would I rather get it from a priest, or a doctor, than get it from a wiseguy? Sure. Except they don’t have what I need to know.”

Fa signaled for a right turn onto Wolf Road. Will held up a finger. “Go on past, pull in by the maintenance building here on Roosevelt. We’ll come in the opposite side from the hearse, I’ll show you where to park away from the plot where we’ll still be able to see. Some of these people are legitimate mourners. No point making a bad impression.”

Fa flipped the indicator back, turned in where Will pointed. “How long you been working here in Chicago?”

“Twenty-three years.”

“Can I get a snitch this good if I stick around that long?”

“You could. Or you could call the cemetery office like I did this morning.” Fa made a face like he should have known better. Will said, “Park here. We’ll wait in the car until they show up.”

They sat in the car for twenty minutes not talking until Fa worked up the nerve to ask the question. “How come everyone calls you Wild Bill?”

Will said, “I prefer Will,” and nothing else until the hearse arrived ten minutes later.

CHAPTER 2

Junior Bevilacqua stamped his feet, turned up the collar on his black cashmere coat for the thirtieth time that hour. He hated April. Worst month to be in Chicago. Cold all winter, should be warming up now, and the rain's starting to freeze, getting inside the coat and down his neck.

Most people were gone; his sister Maria took Mom home five minutes ago. A few stragglers remained, people who hadn't seen each other for a while and weren't going to the house after, catching up. Frank Ferraro stood twenty yards away, head down, talking with that fat fuck Vinnie Dominos and Sal Enna. Bunch of Mustache Petes, didn't even shave since the old man died. Tradition, they said. Fuck tradition. Those old goombahs would still sell bootleg booze, anyone would buy it. They were still selling it, sneaking carloads into dry counties in Kansas and Arkansas for a few bucks a load. Junior shook his head and spat.

It's not right, Frank making him wait. Sure, he came by to show respect when Ma was here; what else could he do? Junior shouldn't have to go looking for him like some kid. Not that he actually had to look for him; man was standing right there. Frank should come to Junior, he was boss now. It wasn't like he'd make Frank kiss his ring, but Frank could kiss his ass if this went on much longer.

The old bastard finally looked up, made eye contact. Said something and Vinnie and Sal left. Gave them time to get out of earshot and walked over. Junior let him get close and positioned himself for a hug, a little put out when Frank didn't give him one.

Frank said, "Dion says you want to see me." Dion being Eammon O'Banion, the last mick worth mentioning in the Outfit.

"We need to talk." Junior not looking at Frank, tit for tat over the missing hug. "Not here. You know, like sit down somewhere. Soon though. Keep things moving."

Frank looked at Junior like he hadn't spoken yet.

"I'm gonna need a good consiglieri," Junior said for the hell of it. "I don't have the experience someone like you has. I could learn a lot."

Frank gave no sign he'd heard. "Look, Junior, I'm sorry about your father, but we have to get things running the way they used to be. I've been

out two years now. Carmine's gone—rest in peace—but Vinnie Dominos is a good man. Make a good boss, with a little help. You're the perfect guy to keep the day-to-day shit from piling up while Vinnie gets settled and you learn how to take over when the time comes.”

Junior waited until Frank finished, and then some. “First, I'm not Junior any more. You can call me Gianni from now on.” Junior knew the soldiers called him Little Prick behind his back. They could come up with something different, too. “Second, my old man set me up to run things, and I'll run them. There's a place for you if you want it. A good one.”

“That's not how it works here,” Frank said. “Some of those jagovs in New York want to hand things off to their kids, let them. You see what it got them. Look at the Gambinos since Gotti took it over and give it to his kid. No offense. I'm not saying you're another Junior Gotti.” You're not saying I ain't, either, Junior thought.

Frank looked over Junior's shoulder, across the grave. “You're awful young, is all. What are you, thirty-three, thirty-four? You want a higher profile, you could be front boss. It's a good job. You'll learn what you need to know, make a lot of money, still take care of a lot of the day to day stuff. Sal could be underboss, carry some water for you. A lot of people expect you to take over, anyway. It's made to order.”

Junior half expected this, Frank offering him some figurehead job to draw fire away from his guys. “Made to order for thirty years on a RICO beef, maybe. Uh-uh. If I'm gonna take the boss's heat, I'm gonna be the fucking boss. My old man was the boss. He died. Now it's my turn.”

“This isn't like being king.” Frank's voice rising, a little red on his cheeks. “And it ain't a baseball game where everyone gets his turn. This Outfit we got here has stayed on top because no one man is ever too important. The big decisions got made together. Everyone on the same page.”

“Way I see it, it's you got off the page.” Junior into watching Frank suffer, his strength eating the old man up. “You want stability? Here's stability. My old man made me underboss. The top spot's open. The underboss moves up. That stable enough for you?”

“You know what's stable?” Frank said. “Income. Money is stable. Who makes the most money runs the show. What've you ever done as a soldier

or a street boss? Dick. Don't tell me how much you make. Your living is the street tax. You got nothing else going."

"That's mostly what the underboss does, collects the tax." Junior getting the red ass now, Frank's agita not as much fun as he'd expected. "When's the last time you had something of your own going?"

"Kid, I got money coming in while we're standing here. Books, loans, construction, couple a hijack crews. Plus the tax. What, you think that chickenshit meth scam you run counts for actually being in business?" Junior didn't think he gave much of a face, but Frank caught it. "Yeah, I know about that. I know about the coke you almost got busted for last year, too. Against the rules, you know that."

It was against the rules to whack some old fart pain in the ass at your father's funeral, too. Junior considered it all the same. "Look, Frank, you got a lot of good points. I learned my lesson with that coke. This is why we gotta sit down and talk. We need an orderly transition, what with my old man croaking like he did." Junior gestured toward the grave with his head. Two guys with a backhoe stood at what they thought was a discreet distance, balancing waiting in freezing rain against pissing off a guy who'd kill them as soon as tip them. "I'll move up like the old man wanted. We can build around that once everything's settled down."

"I don't give a fuck what your old man told you he wanted, or what you think he wanted." The red in Frank's face from more than the cold and wind. Standing close, inside each other's space. Junior a little red himself, pissed off, Frank standing up to him like this. "He's dead, and it's just as well, way he was fucking things up. While he was busy playing king, new Soldier Field got built and we didn't get dick out of it. We should've pulled ten percent of that for ourselves. Your old man—who made a lot of money in his time, rest in peace—was too fucking busy playing crews against each other, starting new ones, chasing nickels and dimes so he could say he was in charge, and maybe set you up to run things when he was gone."

Junior cut Frank off when he came up for air. "That's right. He was in charge, and he did set things up for me to take over. You want such a orderly fucking transition, here it is. Anything else is a disruption."

Frank's lower lip quivered and Junior remembered the stories he'd heard. How Accardo named him "Frankie Blur" because of how a victim's

face looked in the crime scene photos after Frank finished some bat work. Word was Frank had outgrown it. Right now Junior not so sure.

Frank's voice stayed tight and cool. "All right. We'll talk. Get everyone in a room, let the street bosses decide. It's good you respect your father like you do, really. Here's the thing: this ain't about blood. It's about money. Never forget that. Money will decide how this goes."

Frank didn't shake, turned around and walked over to his car where Anthony Antofuermo held the door open. Junior watched him go. Lot of balls, talking to Junior that way. Junior knew about money. He knew about blood, too. He'd enjoy seeing Frank's.

CHAPTER 3

Time was, Francis Albert Ferraro would have Junior Bevilacqua dead by the end of the week. Way Frank saw it, he did the right thing, reaching out to Junior, even though Frank was senior. The mourning son shouldn't have to extend himself, no matter what the topic, or how much of a backstabbing prick he was. Still, for Junior to respond that way, like it was his due, no appreciation of Frank's consideration, not a good thing. Next he'd want Frank to kiss his ring like in the movies.

Anthony Antofuermo waited for Frank to clean some ice off his shoe before he closed the passenger door. Frank liked Anthony for a driver. Good kid, didn't ask stupid questions, always where he was supposed to be. Grooming him to be a street boss, maybe more, not for a few years yet. Anthony not much younger than Junior, but he understood he was years away. Junior thought he was boss now. He'd never even run a real crew.

Frank opened the window and hawked up his opinion of Junior Bevilacqua. Anthony pulled the black Town Car away from the grave, past the two feds who thought they were invisible there under the tree, still taking pictures. Wild Bill Hickox and some spook, looked like; a younger guy Frank didn't know. The Town Car not as nice as Frank's Caddy, but the Caddy was midnight blue, not proper for a funeral. Joe Avellini loaned Frank one of the cars from his limo service for free. Least he could do, light as the take had been last couple of months from the book Joe ran behind the office.

A thought flickered across Frank's mind to let Junior be boss, he wanted it so bad. Income down all around from the upheaval Gianni called sound business practice. A lot of the Outfit's cash still came from exposed sources: gambling, loans, protection, street tax. Things the cops could hurt when they wanted to, and that federal investigation was starting to pinch. No arrests—bastards would wait years before they started bringing people in—but they were always there. With wires, looking for snitches. Used to be every Fed wanted a blue Brooks Brothers; now they all thought they were Donnie Brasco.

“You want something to eat, Boss?” Anthony knew what Frank wanted before Frank did half the time. Especially food. Could be because Anthony

was always hungry, five-ten and already over two hundred pounds, another Vinnie Dominos in the making.

“Yeah, I could eat,” Frank said. “I don’t feel like talking. Take us someplace different.”

“How ‘bout Greek Islands? Long time since you been there.”

Frank gestured with his hand, that’s fine. Get some arniournou, and a plate of cold calamari and shrimp in that olive oil marinade he liked. Anthony slid the car onto the Eisenhower Expressway. Gianni Bevilacqua had made the Chicago Outfit a force to reckon with again, the stupid bastard. Years spent dropping off the radar wasted. No hits. No stories of enforcers breaking legs or pouring acid on slow pays. The Outfit was dead as far as the average jerk walking the street knew.

Frank would have smiled at the memory, had he been a smiling sort of guy. A lot of work had been done to infiltrate the Outfit into what passed for legitimacy in Chicago. True, they no longer ran the First Ward like their personal kingdom, and the union and construction rackets had been hit hard. The number of made guys way down, too. Frank had no problem with that. Weeded out the chaff, and it wasn’t like they had to run want ads looking for recruits. The Outfit an iceberg when Frank went away, ninety percent of it below the surface.

Then Carmine died and Gianni took over. Frank talked Vinnie Dominos out of a fight. Said Gianni would see reason when they talked face to face. So they talked. Every fucking week they talked. Gianni always agreeable. I know, Frank. You’re right, Frank. It’s not the time, Frank. Pinning Gianni down like putting handcuffs on a squid.

Now Gianni was dead and Frank could stop pretending to respect him. New York wanted generations of Gottis and Persicos in the life, let ‘em. Made guys in the Outfit were supposed to want better for their kids. Frank’s were all respected professionals. Michael a lawyer—not some mouthpiece, legitimate—writing wills and trusts, doing environmental work on the side. Cherie the veterinarian, and Jimbo at the Mercantile Exchange, in an office, not sweating like a pig on the trading floor.

Junior’s aspirations went no farther than the Outfit; he didn’t know anything else. That made him dangerous, not understanding what everyone else risked. Killing him would bring even more attention when Gianni’s reign had already reminded the public the Outfit was still an issue. The

situation had to be resolved or the Feds would get them all, even if that meant making an accommodation with Junior. At least for now.

Frank picked up some baklava on his way out. Annabella had craved it whenever she was pregnant; now it reminded her of those times. Said she felt like the kids were still in the house when she ate it. He knew she worried, and some baklava would make her happy. That or some cannoli, and Frank wasn't taking any cannoli home. It was cannoli started all this trouble in the first place.

CHAPTER 4

Madeline Klimak sat up in bed, pulled the sheet over her bare shoulders. She didn't mind Will Hickox seeing her naked—she loved the way Will looked at all of her, not just the traditional areas of male attention—but he kept the bedroom window open a crack. The draft crawled across the floor, crossed the empty space in the bed, and snuggled up against Mad until her nipples were hard. Mad's preferred method of nipple erection had just flushed the toilet in the adjacent bathroom, so the bedclothes would have to do.

“As much as you complained about being cold today, you might want to keep the window closed,” she hollered in the direction of the bathroom.

“You know I'm never cold when you're around.” Will massaged his scalp coming out of the bathroom. The Bureau said he needed to lose fifteen pounds; Mad Klimak disagreed. She loved how the extra weight softened him without costing him any strength. Her husband was rail thin, all angles and joints. Screwing Mitch was like doing it on a hardwood floor.

“Are you really cold?” Will said.

“See for yourself.” Mad flipped down the sheet and cupped one breast to display the hard nipple. “I'm freezing.”

“I can fix that.” Will dove onto the bed and burrowed under the covers to tickle her.

“You're too goofy to retire,” Mad said when she caught her breath after laughing. “Retired people are mellow. You're a whack job.”

“You really think so?” Will sat up, back against the headboard, left arm around Mad, pulling her close. He still got amorous quickly as ever, though it took longer to show any physical manifestation. “That might be a good thing.”

She turned her head toward him. Something he wasn't sure about telling her was coming, or he would have left himself in her line of sight.

“I turned Allstate down yesterday.” Vice president of security, a job that would set them both up for life, along with his pension.

Mad kept her voice neutral as possible. “How come?”

“It's not a good fit. You know that. The plan is to get as far from Mitch as we can when we make the break. Northbrook's half an hour away.”

“We could live in Wisconsin.”

“So it’s an hour. I thought we were talking Florida, or Arizona. Someplace like that. Utah’s nice. You could be close to Marty.”

Being close to her older son appealed to Mad. She expected a phone call from Marty and Emily any day now, didn’t know if it would be to tell her they were getting married or having a baby.

“It would be nice to be close to Marty. I can be close to Mike in Northbrook.” Mike her other boy, twenty-one now. “Even in Wisconsin.”

“Still have to figure Mitch into it if we stay that close.”

“Oh, please.” Mad wrapped her arms around herself and gave Will her best mock glare. “You don’t care about Mitch and it’s not the money. We can hang out a shingle anywhere we want and make money. A retired gangbuster and experienced insurance investigator? We’d have to hire someone just to schedule the new client appointments. This is all because you don’t want to retire yet.”

“It’s not like I’m putting you off. The papers are filled out in my desk at work. All they need is my signature and a date and we’re all set. It’s just...” Will cocked his head, made a vague gesture with his free hand.

“It’s just that you don’t want to leave this investigation until you put someone away. You thought you were close to Gianni Bevilacqua, then he died on you. Who’s next? Frank Ferraro? Junior? That fat one—what’s his name?—Vinnie Papa John’s?”

“Vinnie Dominos.” Will laughed. “Last week you called him Vinnie Backgammon. You know who’s who.”

“Yeah, but you like correcting me. And I like a little correction once in a while.” Mad turned to rub a still hard nipple against Will’s chest. Slid a hand down his belly to see if anything interesting had turned up. “Tell me again about the SOG and sacks. You know how cop talk turns me on.”

“S-A-C. Not sack. SAC.” Will pulled Mad’s head onto his shoulder. “Call the Special Agent in Charge a sack and pack your warm clothes.”

“What about SOG? Tell me about SOG and I’ll bet I get wet.”

“Seat of Government. Washington, DC. The home office. Where all edicts, dumb and dumber, come from. The place where field agents go to die. The elephant’s graveyard of investigations.”

“Mmmm.” Mad’s mouth slid over Will’s shoulder onto his chest. “Tell me more.”

“RICO. Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations. How we’re going to put them all away. Ferraro. Junior.” Will paused as Mad passed his navel, heading south. “Title III. Wire taps. Three-oh-two forms. Surveillance. Uh, arrest.” The terms getting simpler now as she got more of his attention.

Mad crawled on top of Will, legs on either side of his head. “Cat got your tongue?” She pulled back the covers. Something interesting had turned up after all.

CHAPTER 5

“I watched those assholes all day, with their cameras and video and microphones that can hear a fly fart a hundred yards away. Acting like the rain’s a fucking insult. Only dumb flatfeet should get wet, like they should have some kind of force field around them. Fucking guys make me sick.”

Mitch Klimak watched Donna Romanowski get dressed while he talked. Standing around a funeral all day the worst part of working Organized Crime for the Chicago Police. Guaranteed to piss him off. Freezing rain and having to pee the whole time at the grave site added insult to injury. All he wanted was to warm up, relieve a little tension. It wasn’t like Mad was ever home to help with that any more, working some bullshit workman’s comp case like it was national security. Real criminals didn’t file workman’s comp claims. The guys who did weren’t hurting anyone; hustling a few bucks from an insurance company wasn’t like stealing, not really. Now Donna’s getting dressed and he hadn’t been here twenty minutes.

“What’s your problem?” Mitch said. “You got someplace to be?”

“No, but there must be someplace else I could be.” She pulled her jeans up over her ass like she wanted to rip them.

“What, now? I asked could I come over, you said okay. I just got here and you can’t wait to get rid of me. What I do?”

“It’s what you didn’t do, Mitch. Jeez, you been hitting on me for weeks. I thought you’d want to have some fun, thought you’d be some fun, and you’re done ten minutes after you got here. Now it’s ‘get me a beer, you got any cigarettes.’ You’d a treated me better if I was a whore.”

“Jesus Christ.” Just what Mitch needed. An IHOP waitress with an attitude. “First of all, I never paid for it in my life. Never will. I got to get off that bad, that’s what my wife’s for. I thought it was pretty good. Didn’t you?”

“It sure was quick.” Donna pulled a bulky knit sweater over her head. “This is my place, you know. If I’m getting dressed to go out, maybe you should take a hint.”

“You’re leaving? You want to get something to eat?”

“I ate already. I wanted sex.”

“We had sex.”

“No, you had sex. I got fucked. Maybe Becky will want to see a movie or something.”

“What the fuck did I do that pissed you off so fast?” Mitch genuinely confused, sitting on the edge of the bed now watching Donna collect what she needed to go out. Watch, keys, purse big enough to carry a dog in.

“Gee, Mitch, that’s a tough one.” Donna stopped fussing, stood arms akimbo, keys dangling from one finger. “You hardly said hello, didn’t even bother to bring some wine. Cheap wine would have been okay, you know, something. I ask how you’re doing and you got your tongue in my mouth and one hand on my tit and I’m thinking ‘ooh, this might be fun,’ and you back me into the bedroom and tell me to get undressed. Don’t ask, don’t do anything on your own, you tell me to get undressed. Then you’re on and off me like I got some time released disease and start bitching about how much it sucks being a cop. No wonder your wife’s never home.”

Good thing for Donna Mitch had some respect for women. Lot of guys would have slapped the mouthy bitch by now. “That’s what’s bothering you? Get back over here. I never said I was done.”

Donna looked at him like his ear had moved between his eyes. “No. All you said was about what assholes the feds are, how you hate those Bevilwhatsis guys and some other guy named Ferrari. Lots of fun. I thought you came over to get away from work, not make my day as shitty as yours.” She tossed the purse onto her shoulder, jangled keys. “Get dressed. We’re leaving.”

Mitch fished around for his socks. “Where are we going?”

“We aren’t going anywhere. I’m going out. You are going someplace else. You’re leaving first.”

Mitch pulled on his socks and underwear, thinking this broad better not have any outstanding tickets. “Fine. I’m out. Remember this next time you wonder why your tips are down.”

“Right. Like you’re my sugar daddy taking me away from all this.” Donna put her hands on her hips hard. That pulled down the sweater and accentuated her breasts, which reminded Mitch why he was there in the first place.

“Hey, Donna, take it easy. I’m sorry. Let me make it up to you.”

She leaned forward a couple inches and stretched the sweater a little more. Maybe she did it on purpose, though she still looked pissed.

“You’re right.” Mitch thought fast, hoping to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. “I shouldn’t a come empty handed like I did. You want a nice bottle of wine? We could drink it in bed, talk about something besides my work, fool around when we got a nice buzz. Whaddaya think?”

Donna made herself busy with something in her purse he couldn’t see. “Wel-l-ll.” Mitch knew she’d go for it. He’d be gone already if she really wanted him out. “A bottle of white zin would be nice on a cold day like this. Snuggled up under the covers. Not the cheap stuff. I want Beringer’s, anyway.”

“Whatever you say.” Mitch pulled his wallet from the pants hanging at his knees. “Here’s twenty. Pick up a bottle of wine, and bring back some chicken while you’re out. There’s a KFC around the corner, right?”

It seemed a reasonable request; she was already dressed. Mitch’s head hurt all day where her key chain hit him.

CHAPTER 6

Vincent “Vinnie Dominos” Agrigento hauled his three hundred twenty pounds out of the Cadillac STS with the grace of a walrus climbing stairs. Putting on weight an occupational hazard for Vinnie, eating five meals a day like he did. Breakfast at home, lunch with the crew. Mid-day business pasta with Frank Ferraro, back for supper with the wife and kids. Another meal with whoever else hit the clubs that night.

Food and business were linked like sex and pregnancy in Vinnie’s life; one couldn’t occur without the other. His first hit, the one that got him made, happened because of food. Guido Amoroso sold protection to escort services and ran a cartage business on the side. His number came up when he shorted his kick one time too often. The cheap prick saw it coming and ran for cover; no one could get to him. Vinnie just a kid then, twenty-two, found out where Guido went to ground. No one thought of a way in until Vinnie spotted a pizza delivery guy a block over. A tap on the head from a sap rented the car with the pizza sign, a ball cap with the joint’s name, and one of those insulated bags that keeps the pizza warm. Guido didn’t order any pizza. Vinnie figured someone dumb enough to think he could stiff the Outfit and get away with it might open the door, anyway. Guido did, saw a kid on the stoop looking confused. Not half as confused as Guido looked when Vinnie pulled a gun out of the pizza bag and shot him twice in the chest, then twice more in the head while he laid on the floor wondering where the pizza was. After that, Vince Agrigento was Vinnie Dominos. Forget it wasn’t even a Dominos guy he ambushed.

Junior Bevilacqua sat in a back booth at Cappelletti’s, slurping down Italian wedding soup so loud Vinnie heard him at the bar. Cappelletti’s was Sal Enna’s place. So-so food, great privacy, since hardly anyone but wiseguys ate there. The booths had high backs and low lights, so nothing got seen or heard by anyone not involved in the conversation. Backroom held at least a dozen for formal sitdowns. Management had a “no reservation” policy: if Sal wanted the place cleared, he had no reservations about throwing everyone out, finished eating or not.

A waiter took Vinnie’s order for a Chianti before the booth stopped creaking. Vinnie waited while Junior put him in his place by finishing his

soup before acknowledging him. He considered getting pissed off, got over it. Worse things had happened.

Junior put the bowl aside and wiped his mouth with a napkin the size of a bed sheet. “Vinnie Dominos. What can I do for you?”

“You called the meeting, Junior—sorry, no disrespect—I mean Gianni.”

Junior dropped the napkin on the seat beside him, waved away Vinnie’s apology. “Forget about it. Junior’s fine. I don’t know why I was such a prick with Frank the other day. Grief, probably. It’s okay, being reminded I’m named after my father. You’ve known me all my life, called me Junior since I was shitting my pants. We’re going to change now?”

Vinnie didn’t know which was worse: Junior acting like a prick, or pretending not to. “Thanks. I appreciate the courtesy. I’m still not sure why you wanted to see me.”

Junior paused while the waiter served Vinnie’s wine, dropped off a basket of bread, and brought fresh olive oil. Vinnie ordered a plate of linguini marinara to hold him over till supper.

Junior said, “You talked to the other street bosses.”

He probably thought it was old-fashioned to say capos, like letting your beard grow for a funeral. Vinnie clean shaven now, he wouldn’t mind growing a beard for Junior. “Yeah,” Vinnie said. “I don’t see a clear conscientious. They think maybe we should all get together, talk things out. You know, exchange ideas.”

“That’s good with me. I don’t know what you and Frank think, but I want a peaceful transition as much as anybody. Maybe you can help out with that.”

“What do you got in mind?”

“I need to talk to Frank.” Junior stopped again while the waiter placed Vinnie’s salad, brought another glass of wine for each of them. “I didn’t handle it right at the funeral. I see that now. I think maybe if me and him talked before the street bosses got together, we could make it easier to reach, you know, a consensus.” Couldn’t help himself, one year of college and he acts like he rigged the trash bid at Fermilab. “I want you to set it up. We got what they call a protocol issue here, Frank and me. No one wants to go first. We need you for a go-between.”

“No offense, Junior, but why me? I’d think you’d trust Sauce or The Jap for something like this.” Sauce being George Ragusa. The Jap was Angelo

Caccamo, the only guy in the Outfit drove a Lexus.

“I do, but that don’t mean I don’t trust you, Vinnie D. You’re a stand up guy. It’s Frank I don’t think trusts Sauce and The Jap so much. So I reach out to you. You been doing this a long time. You know what’s right.”

Vinnie forked in a load of salad, chewed while he waited for Junior to say something worth answering. They sat like that while Vinnie ate and Junior tried to look like he wasn’t waiting. Vinnie almost said something, get it over with, changed his mind. Treating Junior like an equal already better than he deserved. No point kissing ass.

Junior started to say something, had to wait when the waiter brought Vinnie’s linguine. Vinnie stalled him some more by ignoring him through the pre-meal ritual: tuck the napkin inside the shirt collar, last sip of wine, position the plate, get the first forkful twirled in the spoon just right, suck it down with enough noise to show satisfaction. Vinnie enjoyed this more than he expected. Junior could wait, or repeat himself and lose face. Now they were even for the soup thing.

“So?” Vinnie said. A strand of linguine stuck to a dab of tomato sauce at the left side of his mouth.

“I want Frank to see me,” Junior said, faster than he should have, getting it in before the food reclaimed Vinnie’s attention. “Just the two of us.”

“I go back to Frank and say ‘Junior wants to talk,’ he’s gonna say, ‘Is he lonely? Tell him talk to his wife.’” Most of another load of pasta went into Vinnie’s mouth. “What do you wanna talk about?”

“Peace.” Junior said it like he might follow up with an end to hunger, and a cure for AIDS. Vinnie’s vocabulary didn’t have much room for words like “pretentious,” but that’s what he was thinking, if he’d known what to call it.

Junior still talking. “Yeah, we could get the street bosses together and see what’s what. Me, I think it’s risky. That many people in a room, the wrong thing gets said, somebody gets the red ass, pretty soon there’s a war. A war’s bad, right? Never been one in Chicago since that Valentine’s Day thing. No need to start now.”

Vinnie had a fork load ready to go when Junior came up for air, made him wait again. Chewed, wiped his mouth, then, “So what do you want to talk to Frank about to keep this tragedy from happening?”

“If Frank and me could agree, we’d tell the street bosses together, you know, so there’s no argument. They’d have to go along, out of respect.”

They might, Vinnie thought. Until Junior suspected Frank wasn’t paying attention. Or one of those other goofballs Gianni promoted got a bug up his ass. In a better world, Vinnie would tell Junior to shit in his hat. In a perfect world, he’d clip him right here and finish his meal in peace. Frank wanted Vinnie’s opinion, so he had to listen. Vinnie also had to consider the possibility Junior might win. He pushed his plate aside, showed Junior his full attention. “What kind of understanding you got in mind?”

“Frank’s right. I don’t have the experience for the white collar shit like unions and construction contracts, but I could learn. From him. We’d need a third guy, help us settle disputes. You could do that, Vinnie, and I think Frank would be good with it.”

Vinnie finished his wine, wiped his mouth, thinking. Saw Junior sitting three feet away, sincere as a twenty-dollar whore. A meeting might not be so bad, if this cafone thought Vinnie Dominos Agrigento was dumb enough to fall for his half-assed story. Frank would have Junior agreeing to shit, Junior with no idea how bad it would be for him down the road until after he and Frank told the capos.

Vinnie put the napkin aside. “Where? And when?”

“Frank can pick if he wants.” Junior made with the apologetic hand gestures, like he didn’t want to be presumptuous. “I was thinking about Tutto Italiano, over on Wells. You know, by the post office there on Congress. Nice place, good food, not connected to anyone. So it’s like a neutral site, you see? Thursday night. Say eight o’clock. We both bring a driver, he waits outside.”

Just one shot, right through his fucking nose, Vinnie thought. Instead he pulled his lips together for a face that could mean, “Okay,” or, “Why’d I waste my time?” Made a non-committal gesture and said, “I’ll see what he says.”

Vinnie dragged himself out of the booth. Chatted a minute with Paulie the bartender on his way out, asked about his kid. Football player, had a chance for a scholarship. Nice to see a guy keep his kid away from the business. Not like Gianni, raising Junior like he was handing him US Steel or something.

Vinnie pulled the Caddy into the street, wondered what Stella had planned for supper.

CHAPTER 7

Junior liked the way Gina Petrino tasted. Not that he'd ever tell her. He saw that Sopranos, the one where Tony found out Uncle Junior liked to dive a little muff. Everyone treated Uncle Junior like a fanook until he finally had to ditch the broad. Gina liked it—Junior didn't want to think he might be good at it—so he pretended he put up with it for her, good boyfriend and all. Junior couldn't afford Gina bragging to her girlfriends at the beauty parlor about his taste for beaver. Then she'd have to go, just like the old broad Uncle Junior was fucking, whatever her name was. Not bad looking for an older piece.

Junior—Bevilacqua, not Uncle Junior, Junior Bevilacqua wondering if there was any significance, having the same name, both of them eating pussy—wanted Gina to stay around. He liked her attitude, the way she talked back to him sometimes. Giving enough sass to keep things interesting. Junior's wife, Marla, good mother, halfway to her Italian grandmother black dress weight, put up with everything. He'd come home late, miss dinner, Marla put the kids to sleep. Supper on the table at seven, he didn't eat, she'd seal it up, ready to microwave if he came home hungry. Great girl, his mother loved her like a daughter, never wanted anything for herself. Junior knew how lucky he was, a guy like him with a wife like Marla. He appreciated her, and he loved her as his wife and the mother of his children.

But he did enjoy fucking Gina. And Barbara Grissom before her. Annette DiGirolomo. He wondered what Annette was up to, maybe interested in a one-nighter for old times' sake. Then he realized Gina was talking. Had been, from the sound of it.

“So, it's like you don't have to listen to anybody now, right? You're the boss, everyone listens to you.”

“Yeah, sort of. I mean everyone listens to the boss, but it ain't like I'm automatically boss now.”

“Wait a minute.” Gina rolled onto her side to face him, one heavy breast pressed against the mattress. Her arm positioned to push them together, holding Junior's attention. “You told me you'd be the boss if your father died. Okay, so he died. I'm sorry about it and all, but I don't see the

problem.” Gina not a complete bimbo. How much she put out depended on how much Junior was willing, or able, to put up. The wrong answer could lead to a decrease in his privileges, something to be avoided.

“The thing is, that’s not the way it’s been. There used to be this group of guys, like a board of directors, ran things. I mean, one guy was boss and all, but he worked close with the consiglieri and underboss so everyone was on the same page. Someone died, whoever was left brought in a new guy and re-organized. That’s what Frank Ferraro thinks should happen now, except there ain’t no board no more. It used to be my old man, Frank, and Carmine Aliquo. Frank went to jail, Carmine died, my old man went ahead and did what he wanted. When Frank come out, he thought the old man and him would go back the way it was, maybe make Vinnie Dominos the third man. I’ll give my old man credit, he had a pair like cassavas on him. No fucking way he’d share power with anyone”

“What about you?” Gina slid across the satin sheets to cup Junior’s marble-sized pair in her hand. Got a close look at them, tongue running over her lips. “I mean, they’ve not cassavas, but they’re not bad.”

“What are you saying?” Junior getting the red ass, sensing an insult.

“You father took what he wanted, didn’t he?” Her head rested on Junior’s thigh six inches below Little Junior. “Did he ask Frank Ferraro if he could be boss when Frank was in jail and the other guy died?”

“Hell, no. He just told Frank how it was.”

“Why don’t you do that?”

“It ain’t the same. Frank kind of had to take the old man’s word for things when Carmine died, being in the can like he was. Besides, my old man was running things day-to-day as underboss, what with Carmine so sick. It wasn’t like he was stepping up or had to grab for nothing. He was already pretty much doing it.”

“Which is now already pretty much yours.” Gina gave his boys a little massage. “You going to let him take it away?”

“Frank Ferraro ain’t taking nothing away from me.” Junior shifted in bed, an awkward position, trying to sit up so he could look down at Gina, not move so much she’d stop playing with his balls. “It’s got to be done right is all. Sal Enna and that fat fuck Vinnie Dominos are both tight with Frank. I got Sauce and The Jap with me, but that’s a close fight. No telling how it would come out.”

Gina let go of Junior's balls and sat up, her legs over his thighs, facing him. Made no effort to cover anything, showing Junior he had more at stake here than just who ran the Outfit. "So you're going to let Frank dictate to you because you're afraid you'd lose a war? Why don't you just offer to be his driver, bring him sandwiches and kiss his ass?" Shifted her weight back to expose more of her sex, hooded her eyes. "Maybe if you suck his dick he'll buy you something nice."

"Shut your fucking mouth!" Junior moved too fast for Gina to react. He leaned forward and took a handful of her hair and dragged her back to the head of the bed beside him. Junior didn't want the word out he ate pussy; no way he'd stand for her calling him a cocksucker, no matter what she'd let him do to her in bed. "Frank Ferraro is scrambling for crumbs now, for whatever I give him. I run this fucking show, and I run this—" he jerked her hair up hard, made her look in the mirror at the head of the bed—"fucking show, too. You got a better deal, take it. There's plenty of chicks be happy for a piece of what you got here, you ungrateful bitch."

"Gianni, I'm sorry," Gina said, figuring what came next. "I didn't mean —"

"Fuck you. I'll tell you what you mean. You mean you don't think I got the balls to face down Frank Ferraro." He jerked up on her hair again, saw the fear in her eyes, scared for real, not like when they played their rape game. "You want to fuck Frank instead, be my guest. Fucking guy don't sleep with no one but his wife. Never has. He'll throw you out like the cheap whore that you are."

"You want to see who got balls? Frank and me are scheduled to have a nice dinner next week. Talk about whatever he wants, weather, business, he can bullshit about the Bears for all I care. Frank should take his time, enjoy the meal, because it's the last one. Ask me then if I have the balls to run things, you ungrateful cunt."

Gina's eyes, always big, opened until white showed completely around each iris. Her lower lip trembled and her mouth opened. Junior spoke first.

"Dumb bastard thinks the place is safe because it's neutral turf. The shooters will be on the Ike before he's done twitching. Vinnie Dominos and The Grill won't have no choice but to come with me. Ask me then about my balls, Gina. In fact, ask me now."

They played the rape game. Except it wasn't a game, and Gina didn't enjoy it at all. Junior did, though. A lot. Worth a do-over next time someone got out of line.

CHAPTER 8

Ed Whitaker loved driving his truck. Not his truck, really, belonged to Reinhardt out of Wisconsin, but Ed took care of it like his own. People at Reinhardt seemed to appreciate it. Treated him well, never jerked his pay and time off around like some joints he'd worked. Another couple of years, Ed could get his own tractor, if he didn't come up sick or get Betty pregnant again. Still drive for Reinhardt as a contractor—no thought of leaving—hire a couple of guys to drive for him. With more than one truck on the road Ed could cherry-pick his runs, spend more time at home.

He thought about how he'd enjoy being home more as he walked across the Travel Center parking lot. Lamps clustered four to a pole cast otherworldly light. Pebbles glistened in one place, shadows dark as a cave three feet away where trailers interrupted the beams. Ed not sleepy now, the shower and fresh food that had never suffered a warming light all he'd needed. Running ahead of schedule, already through Chicago headed north from Louisville. Catch a few hours' sleep at the TA in Hudson, Wisconsin, make the delivery in Minneapolis bright and early tomorrow. Then four days at home in Waukesha, taking down storm windows and playing ball with his two boys.

Thinking about the boys and the two baseball gloves the guy at the Louisville Slugger factory gave him kept Ed from paying attention to the man walking ten yards behind him. Another trucker, if he registered at all, shoes grinding on parking lot pebbles. The Mack Pinnacle Sleeper rumbled quietly, like a dog snoring. Ed cleaned a speck from the left front fender with his handkerchief. He knew he was lucky to get this truck. Reinhardt had drivers with more time who wanted it, Jeff Greenbaum gave it to Ed to show what Reinhardt thought of him.

The man with the gun stepped out of nowhere.

“You know how long I been sitting under that trailer? You take a fucking vacation in there?”

Ed knew the drill; He'd been hijacked before. Don't resist, give them what they want, Reinhardt's insured. He wondered about his chances of getting this cab back once he gave it up, knew they were nonexistent.

“Step on down and give me the keys.” Another voice, behind Ed, the guy he hadn’t thought twice about when he walked over. “It’s not your truck. Nothing in there is yours. We don’t want to hurt you and you don’t want to get hurt. All we want are the keys and your license.”

Ed turned toward the voice and his heart sank. Four of them, backlit by the light towers, stray hairs like sparks around their heads, faces invisible. The one with the gun a few feet away, in a shadow so only the gun reflected any light. Not that Ed would identify anyone. A smart—cooperative—driver had little risk in a hijacking. They’d take the keys and his license and leave him here.

He stepped off the running board, hands away from his sides. “My license is in my wallet, in my back pocket. I’m going to reach around and get it. I’m not going to try anything. Please don’t hurt me. I got kids.”

“You’re doing fine,” the second voice said. The voice that hadn’t shown a gun. Yet. “You’re going home in one piece. No one wants you to get hurt.”

Ed dropped the wallet taking it out of his pocket; shook right out of his hand. He picked it up and brushed grit from the leather. Michael gave him this wallet, his youngest. Said Daddy’s old wallet had holes in it, and he didn’t want the money for candy to leak out. Jesus Christ, Mister, don’t hurt me. I want to see my kids again. I want to kiss my wife.

The man behind the second voice took Ed’s keys and license, turned so the laminated card caught what little light strayed from the lot. “Edward Whitaker. Whitehall Street. Waukesha, Wisconsin.” The man cocked his head and Ed heard movement behind him. The man with the gun.

“Step away from the truck,” the second voice said. “Just a couple of feet. That’s good. Now we’re going to do you a favor.”

Ed tried to relax; nothing for him to do now. He hoped it wouldn’t hurt too much. Heard the airy swish of the sap, and the thunk as it hit him behind the right ear. Saw stars, didn’t go all the way out. Strong hands lifted his armpits.

“Move him over there.” The second voice sounded a hundred yards away, though Ed could hear every word. “I don’t want anyone to find him for a while, but I don’t want him run over, either. He held up his end. We’ll hold up ours.”

Ed felt himself being dragged, then damp grass and soft dirt touched his head where the sap hit. It felt good, cool and soft on the sore spot. He heard his truck slide into gear; something fell on him. Then staying awake became too much work.

Two baseball gloves were on his chest when he woke up. And his wallet. The only thing missing was the license.

CHAPTER 9

Mad Klimak twisted in the driver's seat trying to stretch the oblique muscle she'd pulled working out the night before. A big-boned woman who tended to softness if she didn't work out, Mad was always conscious of her size. She grew young, even for a girl: five-ten in seventh grade, a fraction over six feet when she graduated. Even now, at forty-five, she only admitted to 5-11½. Red hair that fell in loose natural curls and cornflower blue eyes made Madeline Shea Klimak a focus of attention anywhere she went.

Six feet tall and a pulled oblique made sitting behind the steering wheel waiting for Walter Whitney to do something incriminating even more tedious than usual. Whitney claimed a compressed lumbar disc caused muscle spasms so severe he couldn't walk, barely breathe sometimes. Forget about working. These spasms had incapacitated poor Walt off and on for eight months now after the slip and fall at work. It wasn't the longevity of Walt's discomfort that triggered the insurance company's suspicions; his doctor's name came up on their computer screens more often than "Microsoft."

Walt seemed more lazy than hurt to Mad. For a week she watched him run light errands, visit the neighborhood bar, and go into his house to do things she couldn't see. Never showed any pain or distress. He also never did anything Midwestern Casualty could use as conclusive evidence of fraud. So Mad sat and waited for Walt Whitney to build a deck or change a tire or try out for the Bears.

Waiting not Mad's natural preference; Will said once she fidgeted enough to churn butter. Her parents called her Maddy when she was a baby, until a memorable display of temper got the name permanently shortened when she was four. Tired of waiting for her brothers to get ready for a family outing, Maddy threw a four-year-old's fuss until her brother taunted her, called her a crybaby and Mad put ten stitches in his forehead.

How she got into a profession where waiting was a prime requirement for employment struck her as ironic. She'd been a cop—how she met Mitch the Asshole—and didn't want to stop working completely when the first baby came. She had no patience for the politics of desk work and staying on the street meant working shifts. Mad hated to leave her boys with a sitter

and Mitch was no help at all. A friend hooked her up with Midwestern so Mad could work from home sometimes, pick her hours most of the others. She stayed with it while her boys grew into men, and now she didn't know what else to do with herself.

She met Will Hickox when he worked an Outfit connection to a workman's comp scam and came to the Midwestern office. He knew she was married—told her he looked at her left hand the second he saw her—and never made anything like a pass at her. They worked together, then had coffee, lunch, a drink, dinner. Things stayed that way six months before one day they looked across the table and knew the other was thinking the same thing; just a matter of who'd break the ice. She'd never cheated on Mitch, and still didn't think of it that way. She was with Will now; it felt like cheating when she was with Mitch.

Whitney came to his front stoop, checked the mail. Took a quick look up and down the street. Considerate of him to look her way long enough for Mad to snap a couple of pictures, more to check focus and light than capture anything incriminating. She wanted to be ready if Whitney started doing handsprings. He went back inside and Mad resumed her daydream.

Will Hickox volunteered things about himself she couldn't have squeezed out of Mitch with a hydraulic press. How he wanted to be a G-man as long as he could remember. Actually said "G-man," like in some Pretty Boy Floyd movie. About his wife dying in a car wreck coming to meet him after he worked late on a bank robbery case in LA. He got worried—Sheila never late for anything—no cell phones then. Will backtracked the route he thought she'd take in case she had car trouble. Found her still belted in, impaled on a piece of road construction equipment she drove into, right through the windshield, skid marks leading to it like she turned to avoid something else. No evidence of another car swerving or stopping fast. A deer maybe, or a coyote. Her eyes still open when he found her, staring right through him.

A squad car cruised past. Mad ignored it. She'd told the Eighth District shift sergeant she'd be here in advance, to avoid any "move along" requests. Standard procedure for a surveillance like this. Mad knew a private dick, got himself arrested on a stalking charge when a neighbor phoned him in as a peeper.

Heat built up through the windshield. It kept Mad's sore side loose, made her thirsty. No help for that. Men could carry an empty drink cup or Gatorade bottle to pee in. Alas, the world was not her urinal. She chewed gum and pretended the saliva made her less thirsty.

Mad knew Will loved her when he told her why people called him Wild Bill. She knew they did, of course, swore to herself she would never ask. He laid it out for her one day about four months after they started sleeping together, the whole story, during dinner. Not right after sex or anything. Like he'd thought about it for a while and made a conscious decision he wanted her to know this today, his shameful secret, though it was neither. How serious he looked telling her, making sure she knew he wasn't like that anymore, practically apologizing for having been a young man and a hero to boot.

She rested her head against the half-open driver's window where it met the door frame. A breeze rustled new leaves in the trees, white noise. Half dozing, she'd admit to herself later, that being a more palatable explanation than sheer carelessness for what happened.

A strong hand grasped her hair and pulled up hard. Mad's back arched at an awkward angle, pulled oblique screaming at her. She tried to turn, see who was behind her, but her head was halfway out the partially open window, like he might pull her out that way. Mad scratched at the hand that held her, not armed—workmen's comp cases rarely get physical—her hip twisted under the steering wheel. Pepper spray in her purse, on the passenger seat, unreachable.

The door opened and she half fell, half was dragged into the street. The hand held her head between the window and door frame so she fell on her coccyx and yelped in pain, the first sound she'd made. It reminded her she was on a residential street, people coming and going, help could be anywhere.

Mad screamed.

The hand released her hair only long enough for her head to come free of the window. A right hand gripped her throat and jaw in the crook of its thumb and forefinger and stood her up before she could gather herself to retaliate, the heel of the hand pressing against her windpipe to quiet her. She choked and the man's other hand backhanded her across the face.

“Shut the fuck up.” Not shouting, menace conveyed more by what might come next than volume of sound. “Stand still and you don’t have to get hurt.”

The man an inch shorter than Mad, fifty pounds heavier, and strong. She didn’t think he’d rape her on this residential street where help could be anywhere, never mind none had made an appearance yet. He could hurt her, kill her even, in far less time.

They stood that way, the hand slowly choking her, looking at each other. It only took a few seconds for Mad to recognize Junior Bevilacqua. She knew him better by reputation than by sight, Will and Mitch full of stories about him. What she knew scared her, and her cop training taught her never to show fear, any weakness at all. Predators live by the weakness of others, and Chicago had few predators in Junior Bevilacqua’s class.

So Mad kicked him in the shin, tried to knee his groin. And Junior beat her.

First he punched her face. Not a bitch slap, a full fist shot to the cheek that buckled her knees. Then a hard right to her abdomen. Air ran out of her like a balloon with the end cut off, took whatever fight she had in her with it. Only the hundreds of sit-ups she did four times a week kept her from puking. Mitch had hit Mad a few times, stopped when she kicked his ass for him after the boys moved out. This was an Outfit enforcer plying his trade, a man who knew what would hurt, and how to make it hurt worse. He hit her face and midsection, vicious punches to her breasts. No matter how she tried to cover up, Junior found a hole. Mad didn’t know which was worse: the beating, or the tears that proved she was overmatched.

Junior stopped when Mad sagged against him, his body all that held her up. He stepped back and she slid down the side of the car to her knees, legs folded under her, sobbing.

Junior squeezed her cheeks between a thumb and index finger and forced Mad to make eye contact. “That man in there,” he pointed to Walter Whitney’s house, “he don’t interest you. He has a bad back, and he don’t need any nosy cunts making things harder than they already are. You understand?”

Mad nodded, afraid to speak for fear she’d bawl, that restraint the only dignity left to her now. She leaned against the car and sobbed while Junior

took all the time he wanted walking to his car. On a residential street, people coming and going. Help could be anywhere.

CHAPTER 10

Eamonn O'Banion liked being called Dion; insisted on it when he could. He claimed the famous Chicago florist/gangster, Dion O'Banion, as his great-great-uncle. With a few drinks in Eamonn, a promotion to great-grandfather could be arranged. The new Dion even fronted his activities with a florist shop. A DNA test would likely prove them no more related than anyone else named O'Banion.

Small matter. Dion the younger didn't earn his place in the Outfit through genealogy. His crew handled gambling, extortion, and loan sharking. Commercial construction—mostly windows and concrete—forget what the mayor said about the eradication of organized crime in the building industry. Dion the last non-Italian crew boss, the others replaced as Gianni Bevilacqua squeezed out those who placed loyalty to the Outfit before loyalty to him.

Dion resisted Gianni's best efforts to demote him with smarts and the Outfit's ultimate trump: money. Much as Gianni hated him, he liked his taste of Dion's proceeds more. Junior watched his old man bring everyone else to heel and didn't understand why Dion got a pass. To Junior's way of thinking, that was reason enough to distrust Dion. No offense taken. Dion trusted Junior even less than he'd trusted the old man, who he hadn't trusted enough to ask the weather if they were both standing in it. Now here's Junior walking into the flower shop like he owned the joint.

"Dion, my man, let me see you." Junior crossed the floor, arms open. Dion stepped out to meet him, made a face when Junior hugged him and kissed his cheek. Junior a great one for pulling out wop customs when it suited him, bitching about the old Mustache Petes holding things back the rest of the time.

"I feel like I should look for my wallet every time you do that," Dion said. He tried to make it sound like a joke, knew he failed. Junior laughed, anyway. So he wanted something.

"You big mick. Always the kidder. I just come by to thank you for the beautiful spread you sent for my father, may he rest in peace. Not just what you picked out for me, but what you sent yourself. Very generous."

Dion made no effort to show sincerity with his voice or his smile. “There’s always a chance for repeat business.”

Junior’s smile looked like it was chiseled on his face. “Not for a long time, I hope. No offense. You’d still make a nice buck without any big funerals for a while, I think.”

“Not to rush you, or show any disrespect,” Dion said, “but there is a big funeral tomorrow. Monsignor Hanrahan, over to St. Elizabeth’s. Went night before last.”

“I don’t want to keep you, then. You got business.” Junior took Dion by the elbow to turn him around. No threat or aggression in the gesture. Still, this was Dion’s shop. He held his ground, stared at Junior’s hand on his elbow, didn’t speak. Junior paused, saw where Dion was looking, and let go. Made a face as close to an apology as Dion could expect. “You got a minute? It won’t take long.”

Dion told his niece behind the counter he’d be back in a few, led Junior to a workroom. Not Dion’s office. They stood to talk.

“You been around longer than me,” Junior said.

“Everyone’s been around longer than you.”

“This thing between me and Frank Ferraro. I want to know how you think it should come out.”

“I’ve known you since you were breaking into parking meters. This is the first time you ever asked me anything except to do something for you.”

Junior’s voice showed more strain than his face, “All I want to know, is how you’d like this to come out. My way, or Frank’s? There’s a lot riding on how the street bosses feel. Decisions have to be made.”

Yeah, like whether you’ll clip me now, or later. “This is about business to me. I’m never going to run anything, so I’m just a neutral observer. I’ll let the money decide.”

“Agreed. No question. The money has to be there. The question is, who do you think is going to help you make the most money? Frank? Or me?”

Dion thought back to Gianni, Sr.’s time on top. The Prince ran the Outfit like a stockbroker’s boiler room: make your number or you’re gone. Frank Ferraro inspired no love or trust in Dion, though he remembered what things were like when Frank and Carmine Aliquo were in charge. Big scams came in, and the crews were left to run them. Dion himself rigged the bids

for the Chicago Public Schools janitorial contract ten years ago. Good, steady income, still paying off on its second renewal.

Junior stood in Dion's work room looking at tools, flower stems, vases. Everywhere but where he should have been looking, which was at Dion, the man whose opinion he suddenly valued so desperately. Dion wondered how long Junior would wait for an answer before he got frustrated.

Not long. "Look, Dion, I know I'm a younger guy. You been around. I could learn a lot from you. I don't want to make a critical mistake, miscalculate, maybe ruin things for everyone. I'm supposed to see Frank next week, sort things out. I need to know where the street bosses are so I don't overstep or nothing."

That was all Dion needed to hear. He knew Vinnie Dominos and Sal Enna were Ferraro's men, no question. They'd been with him since they came out of The Patch together forty years ago, the last of the serious wise guys to come from the West Side neighborhood that used to cough up talent for the Outfit like the Dominican Republic produced shortstops. Old school hoods who knew how to get what they wanted.

Junior had Sauce Ragusa and Angelo "The Jap" Caccamo. Guys in their thirties, already street bosses, no thanks to how they earned. They'd be no match for Vinnie and Sal's crews in a prolonged war, but they'd have a puncher's chance if they moved quick enough.

Dion had no illusions. If he went with Frank, they'd have to kill Junior sooner or later, because he'd never let it rest. Ragusa and Caccamo wouldn't listen to reason until Junior was in a hole. If Dion went the other way, there would be no reason to keep him around once Junior got the top job.

Dion said, "I got no problems with you or Frank. I'm willing to listen to whatever the other street bosses have to say. For now, I just hope the two of you can work it out without us. I'm good with whatever you two can agree on."

Junior stopped looking around the shop. Showed Dion the poker face of a three-year-old offered an ice cream cone. Dion suppressed a smile when Junior said, "That's fair. That's all I can ask. Look, I know you're busy, and I didn't mean to keep you. Talk to some of the other guys, get a feel for what's important to everyone. You're the impartial one here, be the voice of reason. No one wants a war, Dion. No one. Least of all me. Ask around."

No hug this time. Dion took a minute to consider the possibilities of Junior's visit. No one wants a war. Choose me, and there won't be one. Choose Frank, and...

Junior definitely had to go.

CHAPTER 11

Time was, Mitch Klimak would have slapped Mad around, coming home all beat up like this. Mitch didn't like distractions, used to rough her up if dinner was late. Coming home beat up would rate more serious consequences, since he'd feel like he have to spend his valuable time tightening up whoever did it.

Easy for Mad to avoid him last night. They'd slept in separate rooms since Mike left for college, so she made sure to be in bed before he got home. She left before he got up this morning. Now, home for supper, he saw the bruises and asked what happened.

She told him about Junior. He tensed like when he used to hit her. Mad pushed her chair back so she could stand in a hurry and he calmed down, like he always did since she broke his nose three years ago.

"Explain to me what the fuck you were doing anywhere near Junior Bevilacqua in the first place," Mitch said.

"I was working, Mitch. How was I supposed to know the guy belonged to Junior?"

"You're supposed to be the hot shot investigator."

A flush started on Mad's face, the redhead's curse. "It's a workman's comp scam. These guys are losers too lazy to work. They slip and fall and think they won the lottery. It's not what anyone would call a high-risk environment."

"Do you know how much money organized crime makes from insurance fraud?" Jesus, now he was going to recite crime statistics. The only thing Mitch liked to do more than act tough was to act smart. She'd rather he took a pop at her, spoke up before he got rolling.

"Yeah, a lot. I work at an insurance company, remember? Do you know how much of that fraud is organized crime related? About eleven percent." Mad had no idea what the number was, but she knew the best way to derail a know-it-all is to know more. Or at least act like it. "About one out of every nine cases. I've been doing this twenty years, and this is the first time I've ever had a problem."

"You said yourself eleven percent of the time. You been pushing your luck for twenty years. Especially with a guy like Junior Bevilacqua. He's an

animal. Stay away from him.”

“I would have, Mitch, if I’d known Whitney worked for him.”

“That’s what I’m saying, you shoulda known.” Jesus Christ he was frustrating. Mad had a vivid imagination and a detailed knowledge of investigative techniques. Mitch owed his life to her concern for her immortal soul.

He opened a beer, took some leftover casserole from the refrigerator. Mad didn’t want any, wouldn’t have minded a chance to say no. “You shouldn’t be out at night so much is all I’m saying. I don’t mean anything by it—you take care of yourself okay most of the time—but it wouldn’t kill you to be home once in a while.”

“This happened at three o’clock in the afternoon. Right on the street.” Five years with Will and Mad still sensitive about how she spent her free time. “And why do you care if I’m home at night? It’s not like I ever see you unless I’m up late and catch you sneaking in stinking of booze or pussy or both.”

He got that look again, like he wanted to belt her. Go ahead. I would have given Junior more than he bargained for if he hadn’t surprised me like he did. Mad still upset over how Junior scared her, willing to take it out on Mitch if he didn’t let things be.

Mitch gave a dismissive wave, forked some casserole into his mouth. Will never made gestures like that, never acted condescending. She stayed away from him last night, knowing Wild Bill sometimes rode again when his blood was up. Mad didn’t want him to do something stupid with Junior.

“Never mind,” Mitch said. “I’m not looking to start a fight. My wife got beat up. That would piss anyone off.” He chewed the mouthful of casserole. The noodles must taste like cardboard, he didn’t even bother to microwave it for a couple of minutes. “What do you want to do?”

“About what?”

“You know. Junior.”

She hadn’t thought about it much. No point filing a complaint. No witnesses, Junior guaranteed to have an alibi. A complaint would require an investigation that could hurt, help, or have no effect on Will’s task force. It never occurred to her Mitch might have something going on, even though he’d worked OC for ten years.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Nothing, I guess. It’s not enough of a beef to bother a guy like Junior.”

“You’re probably right. I’ll talk to the boss about it. We can at least jerk his chain. Course, we wouldn’t want to fuck up anything the feds are working on, with their ten-year surveillances and wires and satellite photos. Don’t you know that one, Hickox? Worked that other OC fraud scam a few years ago? Why don’t you ask him if they have a problem with it? I’ll bet he remembers you.”

“I’ll call him.” Mad used to offhand comments from Mitch about men noticing her. Never beautiful, she’d learned how to show herself to best advantage. Her size, coloring, and skin tone drew eyes everywhere she went. At first she enjoyed Mitch’s possessiveness, the idea that he’d would fight anyone who wanted her. After they were married she recognized his jealousy for insecurity, how he accused her of sleeping around any night she worked. Then he got rough. The accusations stopped with the beatings once Mad showed him a fight went both ways.

“Nah,” Mitch said. “Fuck it. I’ll talk to the loot. We’ll take care of it.” He swallowed the last of his beer and dropped the empty casserole container in the sink. “I’ll take care of it.”

CHAPTER 12

Vinnie Dominos Agrigento's third meal of the day was takeout Chinese from a joint on Wolf Road that knew deliveries to the Mannheim Hunt Club took place in the street. No comee in, no lookee around. Takee money and get the fuck out. China Palace was good with it. Place in a ten foot wide storefront on Mannheim Road, calls itself China Palace, takes its customers as it finds them.

Frank Ferraro still conducted business here most days. Scrubbed the building for bugs twice a month, did walk and talks up and down Mannheim when he felt antsy, more often now that he'd spent three years in the joint because someone else got careless.

Vinnie liked coming to the Hunt, felt comfortable. Nostalgic, even. The back room's outside door and windows probably hadn't been open since Frank bought the place, twenty-five, thirty years ago. Smells of wine, smoke, and man sweat hung in the air, worked their way into the furniture and walls like wood stain. He made his button here, him and Sal Enna the same day, Frank sponsoring them both. Garroted Sal Campagna in this very room, Sal thinking he was about to get made, unaware Carmine Aliquo knew about him skimming from the Vegas skim. The Outfit hated thieves.

The Outfit also hated rats, troublemakers, slow pays, no pays, cheats, and anyone didn't automatically know how high when a boss said, "jump." Falling into one of those categories didn't always mean someone got clipped. Public hits were bad publicity, bad pub cut down on the cash flow, and the Outfit was all about the money. More honest than any priest in that regard, they never claimed it was about anything but the money. The phonies in New York thought they were fooling people with that man of honor Godfather shit. Money talked in Chicago, and everyone listened.

The thing about hits, they reminded people organized crime still existed. Left to their own devices, ninety percent of Chicago voters would think Eliot Ness got the last gangster when he took down Capone. Which he didn't do, either. The cops didn't need reminding. Sneaky pricks worked day and night to entrap guys trying to earn a living. Vinnie pretty sure they didn't want to wipe out the mob, no matter what they said. Eliminate the

Outfit and they'd have to get real jobs, live without a government paycheck and guaranteed pension.

No pension for Vinnie. He had money out working for him, and he'd keep an eye on it for as much of forever as he could last. Most of it hidden; his will only accounted for a third of his true worth. That would take care of Rose and let her send some to the kids and grandbabies when his time came. Vinnie between comares since Betty Watkins found work as a trophy wife. He was in no hurry to replace her. Dealing with Junior's agita kept his heart pumping. He'd find a new one when he had time to relax.

Frank came out of the men's wiping the backs of his hands on his slacks. Sat down and drained the inch of wine left in his glass, poured another. Vinnie sipped his water. He couldn't drink when he ate Chinese any more, not even beer, no matter how much MSG they claimed wasn't in the food. His doctor said it might be an ulcer, he could take care of it. Vinnie said good luck letting anyone with a knife come near him while he was unconscious. He'd drink water.

Frank said, "What do you think we ought to do about Junior?"

"Fuck him," Vinnie said through a mouthful of General Tso's chicken. "Put him in a hole."

"Just like that?"

"He's gonna have to go sooner or later. I vote sooner." Vinnie took a drink. Frank waited for him.

"Two ways this could work out. One, is you put together another group at the top, like it used to be. You told me yourself he won't settle for front boss; he wants to run things. So it's you and him and someone else. How long you think that's gonna last before he remembers he's Gianni's kid and makes a move?"

Vinnie swallowed the mouthful of chicken and rice, washed it down with water. No one else ate General Tso's from China Palace; too sweet. For Vinnie, the perfect compromise between bland and acid reflux. He scooped another load onto his chopsticks and went on.

"So Plan B is you roll over and let him be boss, you're the full-time consiglieri. We both know you're not gonna do that. What's left?"

"Junior in a hole."

"My point. Sauce and The Jap could be a pain in the ass if there's war, but I think they'll see reason if Junior's gone. You could make one of them

front boss if you had to, shut him up. I just don't see no way Junior don't come for you—come for us—if he don't get what he wants. Thinks it's his fucking birthright.”

“Yeah, you're probably right.” Frank swirled the wine around the glass. Vinnie knew he was dying to dip the end of a cigar in the wine and light up, that simple pleasure denied him since his doctor found a spot on one lung. Fucking doctors. Tell you shit with that smirk, like they know you're a wise-guy and do whatever you want everyplace else, but they make the rules in that little room. Stick their fingers up your ass and say if you'll live or die like it was up to them.

Frank said, “We have to get back to the way it was. What we got now is fucked up. Gianni cared more about whose dick was bigger than he did about making money.” He shook his head, tapped two fingers against his lips, old smoker's habit. “Now Junior wants to run things, and he ain't half the man his old man was, and he was no more than a third of what we used to have running things.”

Frank's face clouded, lips disappearing into white scars around his mouth. Vinnie'd seen that face before, back when he and Frank were starting out, shaking down porno shops for protection money. Some straight asshole sideswiped Vinnie's car. Beautiful Caddy, you could comb your hair in the reflection off the hood. Vinnie got out, argued with the guy, who couldn't take a hint. You cut me off, he said, like it was Vinnie's fault. Vinnie not made yet, but close enough that it couldn't have been his fault, not between him and some straight guy. They went around until Frank got out of the car and looked at the damage. His lips got like they were now and without a word he took out the sap he used on slow pays and beat that prick unconscious. Then he broke every piece of glass in the car, even the mirrors and those little vent windows Sixties cars had. Never said a word.

“If I stay consiglieri,” Frank said, “who would you pick for underboss? If Junior wasn't around, I mean.”

“Underboss? Who's gonna be boss?”

“You.” Done deal, the way Frank said it. “Who's the other?”

“Dion,” Vinnie said, looked up while he chewed to see how Frank reacted to the Irish name.

“Yeah. Me, too. Maybe we should talk to Dion.” Frank picked up a handful of jelly beans from a jar, shook a few into his mouth. “I'd thought

you'd say Sal. We been together a long time."

"I love Sal, you know that. He's a worker, though, not a thinker. Dion, he sees things. Sal got what they call a limited vision."

"Good point." Frank shook a few more jelly beans into his mouth. His sweet tooth famous, actually stopped once at White Hen for Jolly Ranchers with a body in the trunk. "I like the idea of someone who's not paizan helping to run things. People forget, the Outfit made a lot of money with Murray Humphreys and what was he, Welsh?" Vinnie nodded. "Tell Junior I'll meet him for dinner on Thursday. That'll give us time to talk to Dion and Sal. We'll string Junior along, let him think I'm old and I just want to save some face. Give him the idea you'd be willing to work with him if you want. We'll get Dion and Sal lined up and take Junior when we're ready."

"I'm on it," Vinnie said, stood up.

Frank spoke with Vinnie halfway to the door. "One more thing. Did you talk to Carl Swisher about hijacking trucks and not paying the tax?"

"Yeah. Couple a weeks ago. What's wrong? He holding out again?"

Frank nodded, swallowed the last of the jelly beans, rubbed his hands together. "His crew took down a load of sporting goods a few days ago. Nice work, but he did it on his own. I heard he moved the whole thing already, but I ain't seen dime one out of it. He come to see you?"

"Not for no sporting goods. I got a taste of some local job he did. Took down a Kraft truck. Said the cooling things was fucked up and a lot of stuff spoiled, so my cut was light. This is news to me."

"You think it's Junior, busting balls?"

Vinnie thought about it first. "Could be. Can't say for sure."

"You'll take care of it?" Why Vinnie loved Frank. Gianni told him to do things, made it an order, always reminding everyone who was boss. How Junior would do if he got the chance. Frank showed the respect of assuming Vinnie would know what was wanted.

"Sure, Frank. I'll take care of it myself."

CHAPTER 13

The girl acted hard sitting in the interrogation room, left leg crossed over right at the knee, chewing gum like she'd seen in a movie that's what tough broads do. Her eyes gave her away, glancing at the door, around the room, trying not to look at her watch, a nice Piaget. Good looking, dark hair, skin so smooth it looked like water would bead up on it. Built like Mad but shorter, with a first rate rack Mitch Klimak would bet was factory equipment. Not used to sitting in windowless eight-by-ten rooms behind a table scarred with cuts and cigarette burns, a rail attached to the wall three feet off the floor to handcuff less cooperative tenants.

He watched through the two-way glass for half an hour after she'd had forty-five minutes to baste. A friend of his at the booking desk recognized her name and gave Mitch a call. Two cops drinking coffee in their squad saw her blow a stop sign talking on her cell. She mouthed off and they gave her a field sobriety test. Good news was, she passed. Bad news, she spilled her purse and a little vial of soda fell out into plain sight. At least that's how they told it.

It came to ten and a half grams when they weighed it at the station. More could always be found in another evidence bag that wouldn't be missed to put her over the fifteen gram threshold where the serious penalties kicked in. That should get Mitch what he wanted.

He opened the door six inches and waited, like someone had called him back for a second. Gave her time to look to the door, get her act together. Mitch wondered how much she used, how bad she'd want a toot by now. Then he opened the door the rest of the way and went in, didn't sit. "So you're Gina Petrino. Is Junior's dick really as small as they say?"

"Fuck you," Gina said, ratcheted up her tough act to give Mitch a hard face. "I want to talk to a lawyer."

"You suck his tiny little dick with that mouth?" Mitch pretended to look at the report, flipping through it to make her wonder. "You're not under arrest. You don't need a lawyer. Yet."

"Then I can leave."

"Soon. We have a few questions first."

"Such as?"

“Such as why you had distribution weight of cocaine in your purse.”

“That’s a lie and you know it!” The girl came out of her chair, tears in her wide eyes. Not crying, scared. Or pissed. Both, probably. “I know where the line is. I had less than ten grams, I know it. If you say I had more than fifteen, then you planted it.”

“Or you need a new scale. Maybe you shouldn’t be high when you weigh it.” Mitch gave her some time to ponder how far he’d go with this. “Doesn’t matter to me. I can kick you loose or jack you up. Your choice.”

“So you’re going to offer me a deal.” The girl’s chest heaved with suppressed anger, thinking what her options might be. Fine by Mitch. She was in over her head, so any thinking she did probably helped him. And he had no objection to watching her chest heave. “Let me guess. You’ll let me go if I tell you something about Gianni. I hate to disappoint you, but he doesn’t tell me anything. We’re friends. I don’t know his business.”

“How long you been here? An hour and a half?” Mitch said. Gina nodded. “Let’s take a walk. You want a cold drink?” He opened the door, gestured for Gina to go on out.

“I want a Cosmo,” she said.

“Settle for a Coke. Come on.”

They walked through the station, down a flight of stairs to what passed for a lounge. Block walls, linoleum floor, Coke machine, candy machine, and another with packaged pies, cupcakes, and caramel corn. Mitch bought a Coke for himself. Gina let him buy her a Diet when she saw he was serious about getting a cold drink. He led her down the hall to another room, similar to the first. The key on a large ring, in the lock. Mitch opened the door, hung the ring over the knob, pointed to the table in the middle of the room. This one not as marked as the other, no handcuff bar along the wall. Gina took a seat, wrinkled her nose at the stale, subterranean smell.

Neither spoke for two minutes, the only sounds when someone swallowed or Gina set her can on the table. Mitch slouched against the wall near the door.

“Better?” he said when he thought she was ready. “I’m not a prick all the time. I have a job to do, and I don’t like getting jerked around while I do it. Take a look around the room.” He gestured from floor to ceiling. “No two-way glass. No windows. No cameras. You have to take my word there’s no microphones. Everything we say here is off the record.”

Gina sipped her Diet Coke, pretended not to look around the room. Her right foot jiggled against the floor. “Okay. We’re off the record. How does that help me?”

“It means anything you say stays with me. No report, no transcript. Our little personal confessional. I’ll even go first. I promise you, right now, no charges from that traffic stop. They’ll have to cite you for the stop sign, but the cocaine was never there.”

“Okay,” she said. Slow, waiting for the other shoe to drop. “And what do I have to do?”

“Not a damn thing.” Sipped his Coke. “Not have to, that is. If you want to, fine. I’ll use it as background information, see if it fits with anything else. Our little secret.”

Part of a smile cracked Gina’s lips before she could stop it. “What if I don’t want to tell you anything?”

“I’ll be disappointed. Still won’t lock you up. A deal’s a deal.”

“If I tell you I don’t have anything to say, I can go? Just like that?”

“Just like that.” Mitch snapped his fingers, loud in the block walled room. “If you’re sure that’s what you want.”

“Why wouldn’t I be sure?” she said, looking anything but. “You say I can walk away from the coke?”

“That’s what I said.”

“No charges?”

“Except the stop sign.”

The foot stopped jiggling. “What’s in it for you?”

“Not a thing. I’m just a loser. I really thought you’d know how to show your appreciation when someone did you a favor.”

“Are you asking for a blow job or something? The way you kept talking about it in the other room, I figured that’s what you had on your mind.”

Mitch held his position, slouched in the corner, kept his voice level. “Did I say a word to you about anything like that? Ask you? Even hint at it? No. I thought you might want to show me you’re not as bad as that lowlife you sleep with. I’ll get over it. I’ve been wrong before.”

Gina stood up. Didn’t look too sure of herself, started for the door like maybe she’d get out before Mitch remembered he was a cop. Mitch let her come, put his hand on hers when she took the doorknob. She looked straight

ahead at the door. He leaned in until his lips almost brushed her ear, his torso touching the side of her right breast.

“Of course, Junior’s going to wonder how you walked away from almost twenty grams of blow without so much as a call to a lawyer. Then, when we raid his little clubhouse and let slip he talks in his sleep, who’s he going to come looking for?”

It worked even better than Mitch had hoped. He felt her inhale at the same time her shoulders slumped. Color ran out of her face like sand from a broken bag. “You wouldn’t,” she said, voice more air than sound.

“How much do you feel like betting on it?”

Gina still looking straight ahead, “Do you have any idea what he’ll do to me?”

Mitch shook his head. “I bet you do.”

Now she looked at Mitch. “Please, don’t do this. He won’t kill me. It’ll be worse. He’ll ruin me, my face. Leave scars on my body. He’ll hurt me so it never goes away. No one will want me.”

“Tell me something.”

“But I don’t know anything!” Tears now, Mitch saw terror in her face that made him wonder how bad things might have been for Mad the other day. “We don’t talk about stuff like that!”

“You expect me to believe he hasn’t said a word about what’s up with him and Frank Ferraro? He doesn’t bitch, he doesn’t complain. You don’t know about his scores. Fine. Tell me what’s on his mind lately or find out what’s on it when he hears you gave him up.”

“I’m begging you,” Gina said. “I’ll do anything you want, take it anywhere you want to put it. Please don’t make me talk about Gianni.”

Mitch opened the door. “Get out.”

Gina pulled the door shut before Mitch could push her out. Put her hand on his crotch, rubbed him with her thumb. “Please. Anything. I’m good. I promise.”

Mitch felt himself getting hard, opened the door a crack. “Uh-uh. I get all I need.” He started to ease Gina out.

“Thursday night,” she said, braced her hands against the jamb like Mitch was pushing her out a window.

“What about Thursday?”

She didn't answer right away. He leaned on her, his weight forcing her out the door.

“Some Italian restaurant by the Eisenhower. I forget the name. Gianni and Frank Ferraro are supposed to meet, but Gianni's not going to show.”

Mitch stopped pushing. “Why isn't Junior going?”

“They're going to kill Ferraro. It's all a set up. Please God, you can't let Gianni know I said anything. Please please please.” She leaned against Mitch, her face in his chest, sobbing.

Mitch shut the door and took Gina by the arms. “Don't worry. There's a hundred ways we coulda got that. He'll never know.” Gina looked up with something like hope in her eyes. Mitch slid her hand back to his crotch. “Since you brought it up, a blow job might not be a bad idea after all. Might as well make use of what's under your sweater while you're at it. Can't be too careful making sure Junior doesn't find out.”

CHAPTER 14

Mike Satriale knew Ben Borowski would have something to say after Satriale told his team Chicago PD had a hot tip for them.

“CPD hasn’t had a hot tip since that asshole Klimak stuck his johnson in a car’s cigarette lighter.” Ben liked Chicago cops less than he liked the Outfit. At least he had some professional respect for the made guys. A defective self-censoring switch made Ben an interdepartmental incident waiting to happen. An opportunity like this couldn’t be passed up, Amanda Dalrymple sitting next to him or not.

Other choice comments floated through the room until everyone settled down to hear what Will Hickox had to say.

“Just for the sake of argument, let’s assume this story about Junior Bevilacqua hitting Frank Ferraro Thursday night is accurate.” Will waited for the secondary buzz of derision to pass. “Just suppose, is all. Why would they tell us?”

“Good question.” Satriale tolerated backtalk a lot of FBI supervisors wouldn’t. He had a special group, made accommodations as long they produced. “I had the feeling Ed Obradovich was protecting a source. Someone undercover, maybe.”

Borowski couldn’t resist. “CPD doesn’t have anyone undercover in the Outfit. The Outfit has people undercover in CPD.” More laughter, Satriale included.

“I got nothing to say to that.” Satriale forgave Borowski more than anyone except Will. No one sat surveillance like Ben. He’d wait in a roasting or freezing car, no air or heater, as long as it took, amuse himself and his partner with constant banter. “A wire, maybe.”

Borowski said, “Next you’ll tell us they got it from Junior’s bimbo.” Hoots, and a couple of borderline anatomical references to Gina’s outstanding attributes.

Satriale held off until Will took the floor. Years of these meetings had taught him the others wanted to hear what he had to say, and Will kept their interest high by making them wait. “I doubt they’d get anything this good from a wire. Have to get a Cook County judge to sign the warrant. Junior’d know about it before they had a chance to install it.”

“Also probably true,” Satriale said. “The point is, we have information from a reliable source that Frank Ferraro goes down the day after tomorrow. We have to tell him. Will, who do you want to take with you?”

“How confident are you about the time?” Will said.

“Junior has a reservation at Tutto Italiano Thursday at eight.”

“The source had the restaurant and everything?”

“Not the name. Only knew it was convenient to the Ike to give the shooters a clean run out of town. Amanda poked around and found the reservation.”

A murmur of approval went through the room. Amanda blushed. She was a good cop, busted her ass trying to fit in, tolerated everything Borowski threw at her with good cheer. Never quite pulled it off. A fraction too slow to get the joke, too late to reply in kind, no grasp of the things men talked about when they weren't talking about work. The veterans viewed her as the little sister. Even Fa was moving in that direction, Amanda five years older, seven years more time in the Bureau.

“Okay,” Will said. “That means we have a couple of days. I'll take Fa by Frank's house tonight. It'll do him good to see how the other half lives.”

The meeting wound down. Will took Satriale aside as the room cleared. “You're sure about this? All kidding aside?”

“I know. Obie's okay, but it must have killed his team to give this away for free. They must have that one jagoff—what's his name, Klimak?—sedated.”

“Why do you think they gave it to us? Straight up.”

“I think they wanted to protect a source. Really. They knew someone had to tell Ferraro, and they didn't want to burn a resource over something with no benefit to them.”

Will rubbed a finger along his nose, thinking. For once, he had nothing to add. Said he'd take Fa by around ten, call right away if anything noteworthy happened. Asked for someone to keep an eye on the place so they'd know Ferraro was home. Then Will left to give Fa the setup. Satriale didn't know whether to be happy or disappointed that Will didn't have more for him.

CHAPTER 15

Vinnie Dominos sat in his Caddy and watched Carl Swisher walk toward the panel truck Swisher thought was full of razor blades. Stealing a truckload of razor blades doesn't sound too sexy to Joe Straight Guy. Vinnie knew better. Swisher probably had a couple of discount stores ready to take the whole load tonight. Those four blade vibrating jobs were expensive. Men loved how they shaved, hated paying for them. Swisher might figure to clear ten grand from this load. Not much compared to last week's bats and gloves, but this job came to him on a silver platter.

The blades and the silver platter were old news to Vinnie. He'd fed the job to Swisher through a dispatcher who was into one of Sal Enna's shylocks for big money and needed help with this week's vig. The truck would be left unlocked while the driver went in for something to eat. Common procedure, even if the job wasn't a give up. No driver wanted to risk getting a good look at a hijacker.

Vinnie knew something Swisher didn't: no razor blades. A test run to see if Swisher would tell Frank Ferraro or Vinnie he had something going down, and about how big it would be. No need for specifics. The Outfit rarely cared about anything more specific than "how much?" A quick job this size just the kind of thing to slip Swisher's mind if he was holding back on his street tax. And it had.

A car pulled up beside the truck with the rest of Swisher's crew. One man got out, impact wrench in hand, in case the driver forgot and locked up. Swisher opened the door and Vinnie heard him say, "Jesus Christ!" from thirty yards away when Bruno Ponti pointed his gun at him, Bruno on the floor of the truck since before it was parked.

Swisher's outburst got enough of his crew's attention for Vinnie's guys to take control of the situation. Vinnie got out of the car and walked toward the truck while his guys moved Swisher's crew toward the back. More noise from Swisher when he saw the inside was empty, then everyone climbed in.

Beautiful, clear night. Vinnie's steps on the gravel echoed between the sides of parked trucks, not a sound from the back of the panel van. Vinnie

turned the corner and saw Swisher's face drop as he recognized him and guessed what came next.

Two of Swisher's guys held him by the arms. The fourth man stood to the side, covered by a couple of Vinnie's. Bruno stood behind Swisher, gun down along his leg.

Time passed to allow the gravity of the situation to sink in before Vinnie spoke to Swisher. "You know who I am?"

Of course Swisher knew who he was. He'd been paying Vinnie off after (almost) every job for seven years. This was not the time to smart off.

"Yeah, sure, you're Vinnie—"

"Shut the fuck up." Vinnie paused a beat to be sure Swisher really had shut the fuck up. "I didn't ask you my fucking name. I asked if you knew who I was." Swisher nodded.

"You know what etiquette is?" Vinnie said. Soft, his voice still filled the van.

Swisher gave confused, stammered, "Etiquette? Sure, Mr. Agrigento, etiquette's like being nice to people. Polite, you know, like holding doors for old ladies and —"

Vinnie raised a hand and Swisher stopped. "Pay attention. Etiquette means you don't even think about taking off a fucking diaper truck without you let me know something's going down so I can get my taste. You understand me?"

Swisher nodded twice, quick. "Sure, Mr. Agrigento. I didn't mean nothing. This just come up so fast, you know, there wasn't time to get it to you. I got a fence already, I was gonna come by to see you tomorrow, honest to God I was."

"Shut up. Tell me what etiquette is."

"Etiquette," Swisher said, like a kid repeating the word before he spells it. His eyes pleaded with Vinnie, afraid to look at him, even more afraid to look away, praying Vinnie brought the whole crew to throw some fear and not to administer his idea of adequate punishment for last week's sporting goods. And the small appliances last month. The bootleg DVDs Swisher boosted from the Chink importer the month before that. "Etiquette means I always tell you before I pull any job. Always. No exceptions."

Vinnie took a step to his right. "You think you can remember that?"

A look that might have been hope came into Swisher's eyes. "Sure, sure, Mr. Agrigento. I can remember that."

Vinnie said, "Bruno, make sure he don't forget," and Bruno shot Swisher once in the back of the head. Blood and bone and brain flew from a fresh hole in his forehead, smacked against the wall. The smell of urine mixed with cordite as one of the guys holding Swisher lost control.

Vinnie suppressed a smile watching the two mopes hold Swisher's dead weight between them like there might be something else planned. "You can let him go now." They let the body fall. It laid on the floor like a bag of laundry.

"You," Vinnie said to the one who pissed himself. "What's etiquette?" Bruno cocked the automatic.

"Please, please, Mother of God, don't kill me! I didn't know Carl wasn't paying the tax, I swear on my life I didn't know! Please don't kill me."

"Bruno," Vinnie said and Bruno pushed the muzzle of his gun into the soft spot at the back of the pussy's head. "Last chance. What's etiquette?"

"Etiquette—oh Jesus Christ I don't want to die—etiquette means I should never pull any kind of job and not tell you first. I swear I won't ever, Mr. Agrigento. I won't pull any more jobs if you say so, just don't kill me."

"Shut the fuck up." Vinnie turned to the other man who'd held Swisher. "Your turn."

This one didn't cry, didn't beg, didn't wet his pants. His eyes met Vinnie's, flicked once to Swisher's body, then back. His voice level and calm. "Etiquette means I never pull any job unless I tell you something's going down first, and I make sure you get your taste. The way it should be."

Vinnie made a mental note to keep an eye on this one; he had potential. "What's your name?"

"Jimmy. Jimmy Barra."

"What do they call you?"

"The Elephant."

Barra had some size on him, nothing dramatic. Maybe he has a trunk in his pants, Vinnie thought. "What about you?" he said to Swisher's remaining guy. "You understand what happened here?" Nods and sounds of affirmation. "Get lost. All of you."

Bruno policed up his brass, left the gun next to Swisher's body. Couple of guys helped Vinnie down from the van.

“Bruno, put a buck in his mouth.” Vinnie’s sign for a tax cheat. Then, to the others, “Leave the door open a foot. I want him found, just not right away.”

Vinnie watched them do exactly as he said, a benevolent foreman supervising a well-trained crew. When the dollar and the door were properly positioned, Vinnie led his guys to their cars. “Anybody hungry? There’s this joint couple miles from here on Golf Road. Makes the best fucking meatball subs anywhere. Let’s go. I’m starving.”

CHAPTER 16

Will Hickox found Ben Borowski and Amanda Dalrymple parked a half block north of Frank Ferraro's house in Oak Park. He pulled alongside cop style, driver's side to driver's side.

"He in there?" Will gestured with his head toward the house.

"Yeah. About an hour." Ben jerked his thumb toward a dark, late-model sedan parked the same distance south of Ferraro's house, on the other side of the street. "He's not the only one with somebody watching him."

"There's one more you probably can't see," Will said. "Behind me the other side of that tree. Fa spotted him coming in."

"That's where he went? Both of them came about twenty minutes after Frank got dropped off. Mandy thinks we made them nervous." Amanda gave a face like maybe she did and maybe she didn't, but she was too smart to get sucked into a Ben Borowski conversation with no exit strategy.

"Maybe Frank's not as copasetic about Junior as he lets on," Will said. "You two want to split?"

"Nah. Might as well make sure you come back out again. Putting your head in the lion's mouth like you are," Ben said.

Will shook his head to acknowledge the sarcasm and pulled across the street to park halfway between Ferraro's house and the other car. He was more likely to be killed by a meteor than come to harm visiting Frank Ferraro on official business. He told Fa to wait then walked back to the other car—it was a Lincoln, a year-old Town Car—and knocked on the window. Flashed his badge for the two no necks he didn't recognize in the weak light. The driver slid down the window, kept looking straight ahead.

"We're going to knock on Frank's door, have a word. That's all. It's not a pinch. Capisca?" The window went back up.

Will motioned for Fa to join him on the way past. The house newer than it looked, styled to avoid confusion with the McMansions over in Oak Brook. Two full red brick stories with no-nonsense Midwestern lines. Class hung off it like vines. A doctor or lawyer's house; Judge Oberholzer lived in a smaller version a few blocks away. Security lights went on when the two feds came within fifty feet of the front stoop.

Frank Ferraro opened the door before Will rang the bell. Frank's size always surprised Will close up. He seemed big in photographs, even at Gianni's funeral standing next to a bruiser like Junior. Up close he was small, almost frail-looking, wisps of thin gray hair twisting from the sides of his head as though looking for lost comrades.

This was why Will brought Fa, let him see what the biggest mob boss in the country looked like up close. Albert Petrone in New York got more pub. So did Guido Tanella. About the only people who really knew about Frank Ferraro were involved in crime in some way. Ask a guy on the street about Frank Ferraro, he'd like as not say his wife ran for vice president in '84.

Ferraro was a legend to those on the inside: hoods, cops, select reporters. Will wanted Fa to see a man he could bust in half and not break a sweat, who could order someone dead without saying a word. Frank Ferraro could make eye contact with Vinnie Dominos Agrigento or Sal Enna, nod, and you'd never be seen again. A different nod and you're left as an example. Or you're cool. You'd never know how close it was.

Ferraro known as "The Diplomat" in the Bureau and by a few less-experienced journalists and Outfit associates. Mellowed as he aged, rather talk than fight now. He could afford to mellow. The stories were still available, his days as Frankie Blur. The common story that Accardo named him that for his bat work wasn't completely true. Will sat a surveillance his first year in Chicago and watched Frank beat a slow pay who showed some attitude. Dumbass took a swipe at Frank—must have been drunk, no one sober is that stupid—and Frank used him for a workout. Footwork, breathing, everything, like in a gym. His hands stuck in Will's mind. Always moving, too fast to see when they struck, working the deadbeat's face like a speed bag. To Will, Ferraro's hands were the source of Frankie Blur.

"Special Agent Hickox." Ferraro had a mellow baritone voice, rough around the edges. Inclined his head an inch to show respect. "How long has it been? Five years?"

"Hello, Frank. Closer to six, actually." Will never called a hood Mister. He showed every outward sign of the respect due to a man who had risen to the top of his chosen profession. He just refused to get carried away, Frank's chosen profession so intricately involved with the supply side of the funeral industry. "This is Special Agent Fa'alepo."

Ferraro seemed to recognize Fa, probably from Gianni's funeral. He didn't miss much. "Fa'alepo, is it? Is that Hawaiian?"

"Samoa..." The word tapered off, Fa unsure if he should say "Frank," or "Mr. Ferraro," or nothing. Will felt his discomfort, a kid meeting the principal away from school, not sure how to act.

"Frank, can we have a word?" Will said. "Won't take a couple of minutes."

Ferraro reached a coat off a rack next to the door. "Mind if we take a little walk? My wife's reading in the front room. I don't want to disturb her." He stepped back, said something into the house. Closed the door quietly, led them down the walk to the street. Will made a motion for Fa to lay back.

They turned left at the sidewalk. "I'm guessing you aren't here to arrest me, or you'd have the cuffs on me already," Ferraro said. Little clouds of breath formed for him to walk through as he spoke.

"I wouldn't embarrass you in front of your wife like that."

Ferraro nodded. They walked as far as the corner before he spoke. "So what does bring you here tonight?"

"Junior Bevilacqua is going to kill you Thursday night."

Ferraro responded as though Will had told him Thanksgiving fell on a Thursday this year. "You looking for a reaction?"

"I know better than that. I just had to tell you."

"That means you have what you think is a reliable source. Not some junkie trying to make a deal, or some whore who knows a guy who knows a guy who thinks he heard something."

"You tell me. You planning on having dinner at Tutto Italiano eight o'clock Thursday night?"

The reaction this time no more than a pursing of the lips, an acknowledgement of good work. "If I did, I don't now. Is there anything else you have for me?"

Will peeked over his shoulder. Fa followed twenty feet behind. Thirty feet behind him, the Lincoln kept pace, Ben and Amanda three car lengths farther back. Like little ducks trailing the mother. "No one wants a war, Frank. I know you don't, we sure as hell don't. Junior, I'm not so sure about."

"Junior's my problem."

“Any information you give us could keep something bad from happening.”

Ferraro gave Will a look. The corners of his mouth turned up; the smile didn't reach his eyes.

“Just like that, huh? You feds are too much. Come to my house, tell me something may or may not be true—no offense, I don't think you'd lie to me, Hickox, but I know a guy was in Iraq and says the G doesn't always get it right. So you bring me what might be, for all your good intentions, bullshit. Something that might not happen even if it was true when you heard about it, and that I might know already. For this I'm supposed to talk out of school, throw my reputation away. Too fucking much.”

Will listened, smiling inside. He had no thought of turning Ferraro. You turned soldiers to get to guys like Ferraro. Still, he cultivated sources for a living. He couldn't resist the challenge. “It is what it is. You think it's worth anything, we'd listen. Give us something we could use, things can be worked out.”

“How long you been around now, Hickox? Twenty years? Twenty-five?” The corners of Ferraro's mouth still turned up, bantering with Will, neither taking anything seriously since Will mentioned the threat. “Got to be thinking about retirement pretty soon.”

“I'll wait for you, Frank. We'll go out together.”

“Don't be too sure. I've been around since before you got here. I'll be around after. You got a nice government pension to look forward to. I got no place else to go.”

“What about the house in Scottsdale? I see you spending more and more time there once you get Junior out of the way. Maybe even if you don't. Let him have the headaches. You just collect your cut.”

“What, you mean like your pension? Who's shitting who? There's no pensions in my thing. We work for a living. No one punching a clock here.”

“Hey, Frank, I'm working ten-thirty on a Tuesday night. You think I'm punching a clock?”

“You came to warn me about a threat on my life.”

“Because it's my job.”

“You saying you only come out here for the money? You trying to hurt my feelings?” Ferraro glanced once in Will's direction, lips still upturned. Maybe smiling, maybe not. He moved his eyes forward again. “Seriously,

you should be proud. You might not know it, but you got a lot of respect on my side. What you might call a worthy adversary.”

High praise, from Frank Ferraro. They walked several yards in silence, turned the last corner to take them back to the house.

“I appreciate you coming by. Seriously.” Ferraro’s hands in his pockets, clouds of breath coming faster now. “It’s your job, so I ain’t offering anything for it. I know you do favors for guys, and I heard about Big Daddy’s mother, rest in peace. I’m just saying favors are always open to question. Did he do enough? How long’s it been? He didn’t look like he wanted to do it. Fuck that. Cash. No misunderstandings, no hard feelings. Cash.”

“You saying cash solves everything?”

“Enough of it solves what cash can solve. Makes old men’s nights warmer. Everyone should think about his future.” They stood at the head of Ferraro’s walk, Fa holding his place twenty feet back. “Except maybe Junior Bevilacqua.”

“Should I go over to his place next? Warn him?”

Ferraro coughed a small wad of phlegm, spat it into the grass starting to shine with frost. “No one’s looking to clip Junior. That would start a war, and like you said, no one wants a war. Thanks for the warning, even though you were just doing your job.”

Will watched Ferraro walk to his house. The floods came on at fifty feet, casting what looked like sparks on the ends of wisps of hair fluttering in the breeze. The door closed and the lights went out. Will gestured for Fa to catch up, waved good-night to Ferraro’s boys in the Lincoln, again to Ben and Amanda as they drove past.

The car still warm when Will and Fa climbed in and fastened their seat belts. Will put the key in the ignition, didn’t turn it. Sat back in the seat, rested his hands on the steering wheel.

Fa let him sit a minute before he asked. “What are you doing?”

“Trying to figure out what just happened.”

CHAPTER 17

Just as well Will didn't need to go to Junior Bevilacqua's place to warn him about a hit; Junior was with Gina Petrino. Fucking her brains out, as a matter of fact. Junior wasn't sure what go into Gina, aside from the coke he'd brought with him. She hadn't been this enthusiastic since she talked him into playing Centurion and the Slave Girl. Junior didn't know if she wanted to make up to him for ruining their last visit, or if it was something else. He didn't care. Junior never argued with first class poon tang.

He called it an early night, left at 12:30. Paused at the entry door to her condo's building in Lincoln Park to look up and down the street. Junior didn't have anyone with him, not to see Gina, not with that fat boob Vinnie Dominos selling the dinner idea to Frank Ferraro. Junior still had to work out his alibi for Thursday, make sure he was seen by disinterested observers, unavoidably detained on his way to the dinner, holy shit that could have been me there instead of Frank, funny how things go sometimes. Junior chuckled. To him, it was funny.

The cold air hit him as soon as he opened the door. Not the bitter cold of February—Junior would make Gina blow the weatherman on Channel 5 for a night like this in February—too cold for April. He pulled the collar of his coat up and walked toward his car, hoped he wouldn't have to scrape ice off the glass, his gloves at home.

Walked almost to Diversey before it dawned on him he'd parked closer than this. Walked back, no car. Went almost as far as Wrightwood, looked on both sides of the street, clicking the keyless entry so the lights would come on. Nothing.

It took a second for the realization to sink in, standing in the middle of Orchard Street, looking at clouds of his own breath. It was disorienting. Junior wasn't the person things were stolen from. No one had taken anything that belonged to him since the year he spent at the U of I, when that kid with the guitar and pullover sweater took Michelle Ruffalo to the Michigan game. The guy lost interest in Michelle when he got out of the hospital.

The motherfucker stole his car was never coming out of the hospital.

CHAPTER 18

“There’s no way you’ll be able to flip Frank Ferraro.”

Jarod Goodfriend was, officially, the Assistant United States Attorney in charge of Operation Fallout, this decade’s attempt to exterminate organized crime once and for all. To Will, he was a pud. An exchange officer from Scotland Yard described Goodfriend as a wanker. Will liked thinking of him that way, sitting in his office, back to the door, wanking away while thinking of career advancement techniques that only included convicting criminals as a last resort.

“I’m not talking about flipping him. I think he wants to flip me. The way he talked about my retirement, not doing favors, keeping everything cash. I think he wonders if I can be bought.”

The three of them in Mike Satriale’s office, door closed. Satriale sat with a thumb hooked under his chin, forefinger rubbing his nose, studying the pictures of his kids on the desk. The wall to his left had his father in front of a barbershop wearing a smock, the photograph surrounded by pictures of the made guys Mike helped put away.

Goodfriend looked through papers Will saw weren’t related to the investigation. Rumor had it he had his eye on moving to an upcoming counterterrorism task force that could be a career maker, organized crime too Twentieth Century for him.

Satriale spoke first. “I think you’re reaching. Ferraro’s too smart to try something like that.”

“I think he’s too smart not to try. He thinks I’m vulnerable. Why, I don’t know, but he does. He talked like he had an idea of pitching into my retirement account. What’s our risk? I approach him and he doesn’t make the offer, nothing lost. I approach and he does, well then we take a few payments and add bribing a federal officer to the RICO case.”

“I don’t see how it helps with the RICO case,” Goodfriend said, about the time Will assumed he’d stopped paying attention. “I suppose you could try it as a standalone charge, just against Ferraro, then use the indictment and the threat of jail time to try make him a cooperating witness, but it’s not part of the ongoing conspiracy.”

“I thought you said we couldn’t flip him,” Will said.

“I don’t think you can. I only mentioned it because that’s the only value I see in attempting to get a bribery charge. I still don’t think it will work.”

“I don’t see why it can’t help with RICO,” Satriale said. “It fits the definition of a predicate act.”

“It’s just Ferraro, alone,” Goodfriend said, still reading. “It doesn’t advance the conspiracy.”

“Corruption is a racketeering activity,” Satriale said. He sat up straighter and focused on Goodfriend, who he didn’t like any better than Will did. “We’re building cases for bribing union officials, city and county employees, and giving kickbacks on construction bids. A federal officer might be the cherry on top of the sundae.”

Goodfriend slid the papers into a manila folder he took from under his arm. Gave a theatrical sigh before he spoke. “Look, I’m sure all the other agents are impressed with your detailed knowledge of RICO. I’m telling you now that we’re not opening any new avenues of this investigation. We’ve been chasing this down for two years, and you’ve keep telling me we need at least one more. Now you want to start up something new that will just push the end back even farther. It’s time to start tying up loose ends, not adding more threads.”

“How many RICO cases have you tried, Jarod?” Will stepped forward, Satriale too slow out of his chair to get between them. “One? Two? Any? I’ve testified in fifteen, here and in New York. A few thousand years in sentences. How about you let us do our jobs, then you go into court and win the slam dunk case we give you.”

Goodfriend forced what he must have thought passed for a smile and spoke with the assurance only the truly shallow can muster. “How about you do your jobs, then, and investigate what you’re told? Our job here is to get convictions, not to spin off make work investigations so FBI agents don't have to meet any arrest numbers. That’s why the Department of Justice focuses investigations, and the FBI follows orders. The bribery angle's a dead end. We’ll get Ferraro when everyone else goes down, if you can ever find a way to wrap up this endless investigation. Get someone to correlate the transcripts from all these Title IIIs you have running so we can focus on what’s going to bear fruit and free up some manpower for more lucrative investigations. Show me results by next week. I don’t want to hear any more about bribery and Frank Ferraro.”

Will almost said something. Satriale caught his eye, passed the palm of his hand over the front of his shirt, a gesture Will knew to mean Not now, or else. Goodfriend left. Satriale pointed for Will to close the door.

“Don’t argue with him.” He kicked a chair in Will’s direction, gestured for him to sit. “You can’t win. You know how those Trinity guys are. Come in here with the ink on their diplomas still wet, learn the secret handshake, and they know all there is to know about investigations.”

“He’s going to fuck this up, Mike,” Will said. “I can feel it. I think he wants to pull the plug on Fallout.”

“I worry about that myself. I wonder if he realizes he could be Chicago’s Rudy Giuliani if he pulls this off.”

“Even if he did, he doesn’t have the patience to wait it out. He’s going to bail and go to trial with what he has.”

“He can’t. We don’t have anything like enough for a full RICO case.”

“You heard him the other day.” Will felt the frustration build. Thought about going after Goodfriend, knew Satriale had him shut the door and sit down to keep Wild Bill from making an appearance. “Goodfriend wants in on that counterterrorism thing. He thinks he’s going to be the guy who busts a cell planning to blow up the Sears Tower.”

“So he goes. We do our part right, anyone can finish Fallout and take the case to trial.”

“He’s afraid he’d miss the good pub when the convictions roll in. Uh-uh. The irony is, he times it right, he’ll stay just long enough to see this case blow up in his face because he hurried us.”

Satriale resumed his thinking pose, thumb under chin, finger along his nose. Swiveled his chair back and forth. Will sat back, heard the chair creak with his weight. The urge to chase Goodfriend died as soon as Satriale went into ponder mode. Will trusted him like no one he’d ever worked with.

They stayed that way for five minutes. Two friends who’d worked together so long they could sit together, not say a word, and come to the same conclusion. Will’s mind was settled. Now he watched Satriale and waited for him to catch up.

“You know I want these guys as bad as you do.” Satriale stopped the chair’s motion, left his hand where it was.

“I ever tell you about my old man?” They both knew he had. Satriale pointed to the photo on his wall before he went on. “Giovanni Satriale.

Can't get more of a wop name than that. Joe Sat, everyone called him. Took us for a week at the beach every year. Not the local places like Coney Island or Brighton; we went away. One year Cape Cod. Myrtle Beach, Daytona. All the way to Miami once. Did that and paid for half of three kids' college out of a two-chair barber shop in Staten Island. No one believed he could make a living out of that little dump, him and Sam Parrotta in there six days a week. 'You running a book out the back?' they'd say. 'Can you get me a hot television?' Like he was in on it, you know, Italian in an Italian profession.

"Lot of wiseguys lived on Staten Island then, and word got around my old man cut the hell out of hair. Pretty soon, he's the ace barber of what was left of the Lucchese family. It didn't help his reputation that Gaspice Casso got his hair cut there. What was the old man supposed to do, tell him no?"

Will had heard this speech, or a close variation, at least ten times. He didn't interrupt and did his best to look interested. Nothing to distract Satriale's soliloquy, Mike winding himself up to put his ass on the line.

"The worst was when Vito Scalzo got whacked coming out from a haircut. Vito was Gambino family, but he lived on Staten Island. I was there that day, twenty years old, sweeping up to help the old man out over summer vacation. The whole neighborhood thought my dad fingered him. Stupid, right? They never should've killed him there, at a place they all used. A couple of big mouths kept at it, kept at it, until one of the Gambinos finally believed them and burned out the shop. The insurance saw it was arson and figured my father did it himself. No legitimate way for an Italian to make money in a little two-chair barber shop, right? Took them eight years to pay. It ruined my father, and I know it killed him. Fifty-eight years old, never smoked, drank a little wine, no heart trouble in the family, and he dies from a heart attack."

The thumb and finger came away from Satriale's face. "You need a wire?"

"No," Will said. "Not right away. If he's ever going to frisk me, it'll be the first time or two. After that, it shouldn't be a problem."

"All right. Take some backup and a GPS. Make sure they know every place you plan to be so they can come for you if anything goes wrong."

"He's not going to do anything to me, Mike. Worst case, he just won't approach."

“Humor me. We’re both sticking our necks out here. If you get killed, I have to face Goodfriend by myself. It’s the least you can do.”

Will let out enough of a laugh to show Satriale he appreciated the thought. “It’ll take me a couple of days to figure the best way to get word to Ferraro. Can I use Ben and Fa for backup?”

“Take whoever you want. You that comfortable with Fa already?”

Will nodded. “He has a lot of potential. A little serious sometimes, is all. Some exposure to Ben might be just the thing.”

“And here I thought you liked the kid.” Satriale stood to walk to the door with Will. “Keep me posted. If we’re going to show Goodfriend up, it has to be worth it.”

CHAPTER 19

Vinnie Dominos loved going to Mangia. Little hole in the wall, fifteen tables for four, red and white checked tablecloths. Push them together for larger parties. He found the place thirty years ago, working with Frank Ferraro to encourage bar owners to use only their machines. Arcade games just getting started, Space Invaders and Asteroids, nothing as complicated as Donkey Kong yet. Frank and Vinnie way ahead of the curve there, worked themselves into the distribution network so smooth the parent companies never knew what a competitive advantage they had in Canaryville.

Vinnie first came to Mangia to see about putting in a machine—it might have been Missile Command—or to arrange for suitable compensation if the owner really, truly didn't want a machine or three. The owner had a daughter, beautiful girl named Angela Toscana. Vinnie hadn't met Rose yet; he thought of Angela as more than comare material.

Mangia didn't want any machines. In fact, they were already being shaken down, which would be okay except Canaryville belonged to the 26th Street crew. Others could earn, but they had to get permission, and they had to pay the tax. Vinnie, Sal Enna, and Frank waited for the bag man one day and put the fear of God into him. When that didn't work, they put three bullets into him, then put him in the river.

By then Vinnie felt protective about the place, and Angela. They found out about the cancer a few months later. She died in six weeks, twenty-two years old. He often thought about her, dying of a cancer routinely cured today, getting it thirty years too soon.

Vinnie felt her death almost like a member of the family, and did something he'd never done before, or since: claimed Mangia as his, and never collected. The same family still owned the place, Pete Toscana dead ten years, his wife Anna making rare appearances. Angela's brother Michael and his wife Betty ran things now, always made oversized portions for Vinnie, never charged him. For his part, Vinnie never conducted business in Mangia. Anna, Michael, and Betty were his straight friends, as far as the friendship went. Word traveled without being spoken: Mangia was off limits.

Michael led Vinnie to his favorite table in the corner, away from the kitchen. The window behind overlooked the Dan Ryan Expressway, romantic views not part of Mangia's ambience. Michael said the veal was the best he'd seen in three months. Good veal hard to come by since the pain in the asses at PETA started treating cows better than the people who ate them. Vinnie ordered a double portion of veal escalopes with cheese. Only his second meal of the day, and it had to last. His mid-afternoon chats with Frank no more than snacks lately, Frank watching his cholesterol since Gianni Bevilacqua put himself in a hole eating too many cannoli.

Vinnie felt good. The weekend had been quiet after Junior tipped his hand and Frank cancelled last Thursday's dinner. Junior laying low now to see what Frank would do. Let him wait. Frank Ferraro wouldn't draw out a hit to make the guy suffer while it was going down. He didn't mind the mark laying awake nights wondering when and where and how it was coming.

* * *

Fernando Escalante knew Vinnie Dominos' importance the moment he saw him. Just the way he walked, big man, fat really, lacked the self-conscious movements fat people sometimes had. Fernando knew, he tended to be heavy himself, and always felt as though people judged him, especially the girls. Vinnie walked in like he owned the joint, which in a way, he did, unknown to Fernando, who'd worked at Mangia less than three weeks, his first real job.

"Fernando, venido aquí, por favor." Michael Toscana gestured for the boy with three fingers of his left hand. Fernando left a tray of dirty dishes on the first flat surface he saw and hurried over. He knew how lucky he was to have a boss who spoke some Spanish and respected him enough to use it politely.

"See the gentleman that just sat down in the corner?" Mr. Toscana said. "That's Mr. Agrigento. You can call him Mister A, it's all right, he likes it. He's a special guest here. Make sure his water and wine glasses are always full and be nice if he talks to you and he'll take care of you. Might even slip you twenty dollars when he goes."

Twenty dollars was more than Fernando made working all evening sometimes after school, which was where he should be now, to tell the truth. He hustled back to the station, picked the carafe with the coldest water, took it straight over. Almost two o'clock, the lunch crowd about gone, Fernando would make sure Vinnie Dominos—had he known that's who it was—got whatever he wanted.

“Would Mr. A like some water?” Fernando sure to use the name; Mr. Toscana told him people like personal service. “It's good and cold.”

“Sure, kid.” Vinnie held out the glass. “Fill it up for me and keep it coming. I like lots of water when I eat.”

“I'll make sure, Mr. A. You'll call me if you need anything?”

Vinnie gave a crooked grin. “What's your name, kid?”

Fernando smiled. No customer had asked his name in three weeks. “Fernando Escalante.”

“Okay, Freddy. Us big guys got to stick together. You take care of me, and I'll take care of you. Comprende?”

Fernando comprende'd just fine. He found a spot where he could see Vinnie's water glass and made sure he was ready. If Mr. Toscana was right, today Fernando would have enough to buy the sneakers he'd been saving for, even after his mother got her half.

* * *

Chummy Imperatore saw Vinnie go into Mangia and not come out after five minutes, so he wasn't shaking them down. Vinnie kind of a big shot to collect personally from such a dump, but you never knew with these older guys. Maybe he got a blow job there once.

Chummy nudged Donnie Salvano. They got out of the car and walked across the street to Mangia. Vinnie Dominos sat in the far corner, bullshitting with the bus boy. Chummy looked up and down the street, didn't see anyone who looked like they might be with Vinnie. No one sitting next to him in the restaurant. Pretty fucking dumb, if you asked Chummy.

* * *

Vinnie saw the two guys come in as he took a drink of water. The one on the right looked familiar, Donnie Something. Vinnie couldn't keep all these younger guys straight. Gianni made them so fast Vinnie wondered if some of them bought their way in.

He dipped a piece of bread in the plate of olive oil, ran it around the edges to soak up as much as possible. Had a big piece in his mouth when he saw the two newcomers split up, move to opposite walls. It flashed through Vinnie's mind he should have had someone with him, but he and Frank both thought Junior had been cowed, and everyone knew Mangia was off limits, period.

Moving faster, the two young guys turned at the walls, kept walking. Now he saw the guns along the sides of their legs and pushed the table away. Vinnie had a piece—he might be alone, but he wasn't a complete jamook—and reached for it in his jacket pocket. The two shooters picked up their pace as he stood.

* * *

Fernando didn't think anything of the two men who came in together. He thought a lot, and fast, when Vinnie Dominos stood and pushed the table away. Not knowing what was wrong and definitely not wanting to blow a chance at twenty dollars, Fernando went right over to see if there was anything he could do.

* * *

Chummy saw Vinnie go for his piece and throw the table away. The older man quicker than Chummy expected, made him rush a little. Vinnie moving away from the table, gun coming up. Motion on Chummy's right, a white shirt, the bus boy. Chummy fired before Vinnie got his gun all the way up; Donnie shot a half second later. Chummy's bullet a clean miss, shattered the window on its way to the Dan Ryan. Vinnie grunted—Donnie must have hit him—got a shot off, so close Chummy heard it pass his ear.

The old man knew what he was doing. Moving fast, keeping to the wall, shooting as he went. Donnie shot again and Chummy fired three quick ones. Someone yelled. People screaming, movement behind him. Vinnie

shouted something, staggered, and went down. Another voice, the bus boy next to Vinnie, that fast. Chummy saw the kid and yelled for Donnie to wait, watched the kid's head explode when a shot meant for Vinnie caught him instead.

Everything speeded up. Sounds became noise became pandemonium. Chummy stepped over an overturned chair to where Vinnie reached for the gun he'd dropped. Blood soaked his shirt, dripped to the floor like water. Chummy shot him three more times. Donnie did the same. Vinnie jerked like a puppet with a spastic holding the strings. Chummy stepped up and pushed the muzzle of his gun into Vinnie's mouth, blew the top of his head all over the wall.

He looked at Donnie, who wasn't hit, then back at the bus boy. The kid's head like an open coconut, eyes staring over Chummy's shoulder. He looked back to Donnie. "It happened how it happened. Nothing we could do." They left their guns with Vinnie and ran to the stolen car.

* * *

Veal sizzled on the grill. No other sounds. Everyone but Fernando Escalante realized what was happening and stepped back into the kitchen for safety and plausible deniability. No one saw the faces of the two men. Michael Toscana would always regret saying anything about Vinnie to Fernando. He thought he was doing the kid a favor.

CHAPTER 20

Chicago takes pride in its even-handed response to crime and scandal. New York's tabloids scream with end-of-the-world headlines every time a cop lifts an apple. Chicago considers virtually all corruption as the price of doing business.

Not this time. The shit hit the fan with such velocity the mayor put the word out in time for the Six O'clock News: business as usual was suspended until Fernando Escalante's killers were found. The formal statement contained the "for attribution" version. The police would deliver more personalized messages.

The Southside Voice spoke for everyone:

Yesterday's brazen murder of Vincent "Vinnie Dominos" Agrigento, 62, and Fernando Escalante, 16, marks the city's second and third mob-related murders in less than two weeks. The two unidentified shooters who came looking for Agrigento were not deterred from cold-bloodedly shooting an unarmed boy, who had earned no nickname, and wanted nothing more than to save enough money to matriculate at UIC in the fall.

Never mind that Fernando was a junior in high school and had no more thought of going to college than he had of becoming King of England. Or that Donnie shooting him was, strictly speaking, the kid's own fault. He should have run for the kitchen like everyone else. The cops understood how it must have gone down. Still, the Voice spoke well enough for the rest of the city.

Later in the editorial:

Following close on the heels of last week's execution-style slaying of Carl "Jump Shot" Swisher, the double murder in Canaryville may presage a period of mob violence, feared since the death by natural causes of Gianni "The Prince" Bevilacqua. Chicago's underworld, long a monolithic structure where profits trumped violence, may be headed for the kind of criminal war the so-called "Outfit" is said to deplore. It remains to be seen if local law enforcement has the wherewithal to stop this nascent wave of indiscriminate violence before it reaches tsunami proportions.

Three "violences," one "nascent," and a "tsunami" in the same paragraph wasn't bad for a struggling paper trying to get noticed in a city where it

ranked no better than fifth in circulation. La Raza held a vigil in front of Mangia. A local clergyman—who a month ago praised the Toscanas for hiring Mexicans and Asians—vilified Michael for not protecting the boy. A rally—or riot, depending on who described it—in front of the Ninth District station on South Lowe sent three Mexicans to the hospital overnight. One copper was treated and released. No arrests were made.

After shit hits the fan, it rolls downhill. Ed Obradovich and his Organized Crime team were near the bottom, but there was still one level below them. Obradovich had his Come to Jesus meeting at 8:00 the next morning.

“First things first. All leave is cancelled.” Groans and random obscenities floated toward the podium. “Suck it up. Overtime is approved for twelve-hour shifts and six-day weeks until further notice. See me, and me only, for emergencies, weddings, funerals. Second, the homicide investigation belongs to Area One. It’s not our problem, not directly. This is Organized Crime, and we are to stress these pricks any way we can. My new asshole still hurts where the mayor reamed it; it's time they felt the love, too.

“You have your team assignments. Hit the streets, roll up on social clubs, meeting places, popular restaurants, wherever you usually find wiseguys. No lights and sirens, no tac backup. Just go in and talk to them. Tell them normal operations are shut down until we get who did this. You know a bookie joint, hassle it. Roust their shylocks if you find them. Anyone hanging around a no-work job is a vagrant until further notice. Vice will handle the escort services.” More hoots, calls of favoritism. Obradovich ignored them. “I’m making it my mission in life to shake loose whatever we need to get these guys.”

Not quite true. The mayor had made it Obradovich’s mission in life, as well as the Violent Crimes Lieutenant in Area One, him being the poor bastard who had this heater drop in his lap. Briefings morning, noon, late afternoon, and night, coincidentally timed half an hour before the day’s major televised news broadcasts. Sparing no effort to find Fernando Escalante’s killers would be wasted if the public wasn’t made constantly aware no effort was being spared.

No one in the room with Obradovich really expected the case to be cleared. Chicago solved Outfit murders as often as it held World Series

victory parades. The Feds were more likely to break it as part of a larger investigation, which wouldn't be any time soon. Fernando was Chicago's problem for the time being, and the pressure would stay on until something else captured the media's attention. A crotch shot of Britney Spears going into family court, maybe. OJ Simpson arrested for shoplifting.

Mitch Klimak listened to the rest of Obradovich's speech with half his attention. He'd already arranged to be assigned to a squad tasked with giving Junior Bevilacqua's street operations a bigger pain in the ass than Obradovich was giving Mitch. They'd cruise around until they found Junior's bagmen, then follow them everywhere they went, right into the collection, if necessary. No cash would change hands.

The Outfit would feel it within a week. No matter how much money had been set aside, theirs was a heavy cash flow business, both in and out. Cops, judges, aldermen, court officials, general contractors, union leaders, and thousands of other fringe players had bills to pay, too. They'd start bitching when their envelopes came up light. An unhappy recipient of graft always a danger to bite the hand he expects to feed him. The Feds would be trawling before the week was out, looking for someone who could be pushed off the fence for a few hundred bucks or a reduced sentence.

Mitch knew it was all bullshit. The guns were clean, the car was stolen and wiped down. No one in Mangia was dumb enough to be an eyewitness. Mitch reconciled himself to the new work schedule and thought of what he'd do with all the overtime pay. He prided himself as being someone who could make chicken shit into chicken salad; there was going to be enough to feed an army.

CHAPTER 21

Things weren't quite as dreary over at 2111 West Roosevelt. Sun shining through the glass walls, Chicago Police feeling the heat at the bottom of a public relations compost heap. Almost like being in love for Ben Borowski.

He showed it in his own way. "I actually feel sorry for those poor bastards in CPD. This is a true no-win situation."

"How do you figure?" Fa said. Will stopped reading the transcript in his hand to see how Ben would reel Fa in. The kid still had much to learn.

Ben stood to see Fa better over the tops of their cubes. "Everyone—the press, the mayor, garbage men—will be on them like stink on shit until they catch these guys."

"So they catch them," said today's unintentional straight man. "Problem solved."

"If they catch them—which I must point out is not a foregone conclusion—they'll ruin their perfect record of never solving an Outfit murder. I mean, I'm sure it sucks to be them right now, but throwing away a streak that long should not be done casually. It's like Cal Ripken taking a day off for a stiff neck."

"Come on, Ben, they must have solved one," Fa said.

"Name it." Ben raised his voice to fill the office. "Anyone. Off the top of your head. I got twenty bucks says you can't do it."

"Harry Aleman." Amanda Dalrymple's answer shocked everyone. Not because she spoke. She always tried to have something to say, to fit in. This time she might have scored. "You remember. For that Teamster. Logan."

"Mandy, you know I love you like no other stakeout partner I ever had," Ben said, "but we did that one, us feds. Aleman went down in the Gambat operation."

Mike Satriale walked in, gestured to get Will's attention, spoke to the room. "Pay her, Ben. We busted Aleman for street tax in Gambat. The locals took him down for the Logan hit."

"You sure?" Ben prided himself on his knowledge of Outfit history. He also knew enough to listen to Satriale. "I thought he beat that case."

"He beat the fixed case and they retried him. State's Attorney argued double jeopardy didn't apply, since he was never in jeopardy in the first

place, what with the case being fixed. They got him the second time.”

“No, I thought they—ah, shit.” Satriale had him and Ben knew it. Reached in his hip pocket for his wallet. “All I have are ones, Mandy.” He counted out fifteen before Will stopped him.

“What’s this? You stopping at Heavenly Bodies on the way home again? They make change there, you know.”

Ben counted out the fifteenth one, then held up a five so Amanda saw the bill and Will saw his middle finger. “I’m a federal officer. I am prepared for any eventuality.”

Amanda made a show of forcing the pile of bills into her wallet. Satriale leaned on the top of Will’s cube to see the entire room, asked, “Any word on what happened with Vinnie Dominos?”

Will shook his head. “I think Junior had it done, but I couldn’t tell you why I think so. Maybe just to hurt Ferraro, if he really is going to war. I can think of better reasons for Ferraro to clip him. We picked up some buzz that Junior reached out to Vinnie as the go-between for him and Frank. They go way back, but what if Frank thought Vinnie set him up?”

“Maybe Junior blamed Vinnie for the sit-down falling through,” Satriale said.

“Did your informant call in yet?” Fa said. “You know, the big shot you told me about at the funeral.”

Will kept most of the frustration out of his voice. “Agrigento was my source. I don’t have anyone else with that kind of juice. The only other capo-level guy I had is semi-retired in Arizona. He’s pretty much out of the loop and doesn’t have any reason to talk to me, anyway. Right now I don’t have dick.”

“Could someone have found out Agrigento was talking to you?” Amanda said.

“Sure, maybe. I never lost a source before, but there’s a first time for everything. Pretty damned ironic if this is the time, though.”

“How come?” From Fa.

“Vinnie never said a word about any of this. Not about seeing Junior, what he set up between Junior and Frank, and definitely nothing about the hit.”

“How’d you hear about Junior reaching out?” Satriale said.

“Got lucky with a low-level source. Guy tends bar at Sal Enna’s joint, saw Junior there with Vinnie about a week ago.”

Satriale did his thing with the nose and chin, rubbing a finger along each. Thinking. “So we don’t know if this is Junior’s way of starting the war, or if someone found out Vinnie talked to you.”

“Or if Frank Ferraro thought he’d turned on him,” Will said.

Satriale pondered for ten seconds. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Will said. “Fuck.”

Ben said, “Fuck.”

Fa looked around like this was a test he’d better pass. “Fuck.”

Amanda’s turn, everyone waiting to see if she’d take it.

“Fuck,” she said.

The men all laughed except Ben, who blew Coke out his nose and choked himself purple. “Don’t ever do that to me again, Mandy. That’s the closest I ever came to dying on the job.”

“What did I do?” Amanda scanned all the faces. “What?!”

No one spoke until Will took pity on her. “Amanda, don’t take this the wrong way. You’re a good agent. That was outstanding work, finding out which restaurant Junior and Frank were going to. Frank knew I wasn’t bullshitting as soon as I told him where and when. I’d take a door with you at my back any time. But don’t try to swear. Some people just can’t do it. Mike can’t hit a baseball. I can’t swim. Ben can’t keep his mouth shut. You can’t swear, and you’re just going to have to learn to live with it.”

Amanda looked at each man in turn. Short nods all around. “Aw, shit,” she said, and laughed with them.

Will pointed to Satriale when the room calmed down. “I’m going to work. I’ll catch you up tomorrow.”

“You want some company?” Fa said. Will loved this kid, he always wanted to learn.

“Next time.”

“You’re going to see a source aren’t you?”

Will shook his head. “I’m fresh out of sources, Fa.”

“Then where are you going?”

“Shake the tree. You never know when one might fall out.”

CHAPTER 22

Junior Bevilacqua spent one year at the University of Illinois at Champagne-Urbana. He passed three courses, each with a C; failed four. One incomplete. The first time he was arrested an old townie man dined him for pissing on the guy's lawn. The second came six days later, when Junior marked his territory on the same man's porch and front door. The third bust was for the sweater-wearing guitar player who took Michelle Ruffalo to the Michigan game. He originally thought Junior—or someone who looked a lot like Junior—put him in the hospital. After his concussion cleared up he remembered he'd fallen down some stairs and had never met Junior at all, honest to God, can I go now, Officer? Charges dropped.

Junior could have made a straight life for himself if he'd studied for class the way he swallowed *The Sopranos*. He knew the brand of watch Tony wore, what he ate, that he liked to leave on his wife-beater when he screwed. Most of all, Junior knew how Tony handled cops, him and Uncle Junior, the rug muncher.

That was why Junior and Dion O'Banion were together at Junior's doctor's office. Junior called that morning to complain of diarrhea and cramps, could they see him right away? Sure they could, and did, until Junior brought Dion into the examining room with him and told Doc Steiner to fuck off.

"I'm sorry I got you sneaking around like a common criminal, Dion," Junior said, never thinking Dion was anything but a common criminal. "No disrespect intended."

"None taken." Dion acted like he'd never seen a doctor's office before. He played with the forehead thermometer and blood pressure cuff like it would kill him to pay attention while Junior shared his version of current events. "Fucking cops are everywhere. They come into the shop in shifts, hang around making paying customers feel uncomfortable, and they don't buy shit."

"Same with us. Couple of hard-ons tailed one of my collectors all day. Didn't make a fucking cent. They follow you here?"

"Does it matter? Even if they know we're both here, what good's it do them?"

“You’re right. Fuck ‘em. They’re chasing their tails right now. I got word. They don’t know who clipped Vinnie, or why.”

“Neither do I,” said Dion, now tapping himself on the knee with the rubber reflex hammer. “I thought maybe that was why you called. To tell me.”

“To tell you?” Junior took the hammer from Dion, laid it on the counter. “I called you to ask you. I got no fucking idea.”

Dion looked like he might pick up the hammer again. “Well, if you didn’t do it, I guess that pretty much leaves Frank. I just don’t see him clipping Vinnie. They been together longer than sliced bread.”

“Frank’s been jumpy since my old man passed. Like he thinks I’m gonna take a run at him. All I wanna do is talk, but Frank’s out there killing people. It was him did Jump Shot Swisher, you know.”

“I figured that. They warned Jump about taking down trucks and not paying the tax. I knew Frank was pissed. I didn’t think they’d kill him, is all.”

“That’s the point. They shouldn’t a killed him. Frank’s always going on about how bodies in the street are bad for business. He has a point. Things quiet down, the newspapers find something else to get people worked up about, our thing gets a pass. Then, boom! Frank don’t get his taste and clips a good earner. Now we’re in the papers. Week later, boom! Vinnie Dominos gets his. Now every cop in town is crawling up our asses.”

Dion thumbed through a year-old People magazine. What was it with this fucking mick; he’s never seen a doctor’s office before? This was why Junior’s old man had phased these losers out. Broads paid attention better.

“I’m thinking Frank didn’t give Vinnie the word on Jump Shot,” Dion said, still looking at the magazine. Angelina Jolie stared upside-down at Junior from the page. “Vinnie free-lanced it, or took it farther than he should.”

“You think Frank clipped him for that?” Junior said. “Could be, if it’s true. Fact is, even then he’s wrong. I’m boss. The okay to clip Jump Shot should have come through me. No one else.”

Dion stopped flipping through the magazine for a second, started again. Like he found something might interest him, then changed his mind. “Jump Shot wasn’t a made guy, and he was taking food out of a made guy’s mouth. Maybe Frank figured he didn’t need to go any higher.”

“What do you think?”

“I ain’t saying I think anything, Junior. I don’t know enough to think.”

You’re telling me, Junior thought. “We agree Frank put the hit on Vinnie Dominos?”

“If that’s what you’re telling me. I got no reason to argue.”

“They go way back. You think he did him for that thing with Jump Shot? Or something else?”

“I don’t think Frank would clip him for making a mistake, assuming pushing the button on Jump Shot was a mistake. If Frank did have him killed, he must’ve thought Vinnie was going around behind him. I don’t care how far back they go, Frank Ferraro ain’t taking it up the ass for nobody.”

“What’s this ‘if’ shit? I thought we agreed Frank whacked Vinnie.”

“I’m just saying, is all. Like for the sake of argument, let’s say Frank killed Vinnie. Thinking out loud, why he might’ve done it.”

“Why he did do it.”

“All right, Jesus Christ, Junior, why he did do it. You happy now?”

No, Junior thought. I ain’t. He’d made all the arrangements to get things straight with Dion, see where he stood, and the mealy-mouthed paddy wanted to play word games. Once he got Frank squared away, Junior would see what he could do about Dion. For now, he needed him.

“I just want to know where you stand, Dion. We talked before. You know I been reasonable about this. I said me and Frank should work it out. I even set up a meeting with him, just the two of us. He cancelled. We ain’t had a hit in Chicago in four years till Frank put down two in two weeks, and fucks one up to boot. It’s a delicate situation. I need to know if you’re with me or against me.”

“I don’t see where it concerns me one way or the other,” Dion said. “I ain’t gonna be boss, and I don’t wanna be. You or Frank can take it. I just want to know who I kick up to, is all.”

Dion was the kind of guy, you asked him his favorite color, he’d say “you mean like paint, or for a shirt?” Junior already had enough uncertainty in his life. “You saying you’re gonna sit this out?”

“If I can. I’m here to make money. That’s all. I got no scores to settle. Business is suffering right now from all the heat killing that kid brought down. They’ll back off, they always do. It’ll happen sooner if we can quit

waving our dicks around. All I want is for everyone to zip up so we can go back to work.”

A small part of Junior’s mind thought he’d do the same thing in Dion’s situation, not knowing who’d come out on top. Junior’s mind only played a small part in his decision making, so a small part of that small part could be ignored.

The key decisions in Junior’s life were glandular, and his glands wanted to know where Dion stood now. Not knowing was like an itch you couldn’t reach. Except an itch like Dion would go away, if you scratched it hard enough.

CHAPTER 23

“You talk to Junior lately?”

Frank Ferraro didn't believe in crawling around like a cockroach afraid of the light. No bogus doctor appointments for him. He wanted to talk to Dion O'Banion, he sent for him to come to the Mannheim Hunt Club like any other day. They stood next to the sink behind the service bar in the back room, both the water and the garbage disposal running.

“I saw him this morning,” Dion said. His weight on his arms, leaning back on the countertop next to the sink. “He told me you put the contract on Vinnie Dominos.”

“What do you think?”

“I think Junior Bevilacqua would lie about the weather while you were both standing in it.”

“You're saying you think he did it?”

“I'm saying I don't believe him when he says you did it. The only two things I know for sure are Vinnie's dead, and I didn't do it. Everything else...” Dion hunched his shoulders.

Frank recognized Dion's fence-sitting as Gianni Bevilacqua's gift from beyond the grave. Dion a stand-up guy, as far as it went. It didn't go nearly as far as it used to since Gianni made his career playing both ends against the middle.

Dion didn't wait for Frank to say something. “You and Vinnie went way back. If you clipped him—if, I said—it must've been something serious. Jump Swisher, maybe. I wonder if that was Vinnie's job, and he went too far.”

“You're half right.” The disposal starting to irritate Frank, made too much noise to talk over in a normal tone of voice. “I sent Vinnie to straighten out Jump Shot, and I wanted it done permanent. Jump was a good man, but he was mostly Junior's. He'd do a job in Vinnie's area once in a while, maybe two-three a year, and he always kicked up. Last couple of months before Gianni croaked, Jump starts working more and more on Vinnie's side of the Kennedy, and he's not paying the tax. Gianni dies, and a big load goes down Vinnie and I don't hear nothing about. I'm thinking, is

this Junior busting my balls? Been a long time since someone went down, and, yeah, I know, things were quiet with the cops and the news people.”

Frank turned off the disposal, lowered his voice a notch. “A lot of sloppy work got done, too. No discipline. Gianni jerked people around, changed street bosses, boundary lines, everything. Even guys who wanted to pay their kick didn’t know who to give it to half the time. Perfect situation for money to fall through the cracks. You know how it works, Dion. A lot of things can fall through the cracks and no one cares. Money ain’t one of them.

“Here’s something else to think about.” Frank worked up now, talking faster, one hip against the counter, a finger pointed in Dion’s direction. Not at him, in his general area. “Even if I had popped Vinnie—rest in peace—you think I’d a sent a couple amateurs to take out a goddamn innocent bystander? Give me some credit.”

“Cards on the table, Frank.” Dion stood, leaned one hip against the counter in a mirror image of Frank, but with his arms crossed. “This has Junior written all over it. When Gianni was alive, Junior’d blow his nose on my shirt if I’d let him. Gianni dies, and there’s a question about who takes over. All of a sudden I got Junior wiping my ass. He wants my opinion, wants to know if I’m with him or against him.”

“You don’t mind me asking, what did you tell him?”

“I told him I’m with me, same as I’m telling you. Business has suffered enough. Gianni and Junior pissed on my head and told me it’s rain for ten years. Fuck him.”

“But you left out that last part with Junior.” Dion nodded. “You gotta watch your back around him now. You know that.”

“I been watching my back around Junior since his mother put her tits away. Now that we’re baring our souls, there is one question I’d like to ask. It’s none of my business, so if you don’t want to answer, don’t.” Frank nodded. “Junior told me you and him had a sit-down scheduled. He said you didn’t show. Is that true?”

“Yeah.”

Indecision flickered across Dion's face. He spoke as soon as it passed. “Why not?”

Ready to take a side, getting right down to it. Frank knew Dion's preference would be anybody but Junior. He also knew Dion had as good a

head for business as anyone left, except himself. Losing Vinnie hurt. Dion on his side of the fence would put Frank back on top.

“The only meeting I was going to was with St. Peter. Junior had a hit set up.”

“How do you know?”

“Wild Bill Hickox came to my house one night and told me himself.”

Dion exhaled slowly. “That would do it for me. I hate that prick, but he’s good. Probably why I hate him.” A chuckle died before it took root. “He didn’t get it from Vinnie, did he?”

“No. Him and Vinnie talked once in a while, you know, doing that dance the Feds like so much. ‘Information gathering’,” Frank said, making quote marks with his fingers. “Vinnie would tell Hickox shit we didn’t care if he knew. It made Hickox a big man with the G. Once in a while we’d call in a chit. That’s how Big Daddy got to do his bit at Stateville. Uncle had him dead to rights, but Vinnie traded him down to state time. Said it was so Big Daddy could see his dying mother.”

“His mother really was dying, wasn’t she?”

“Sometimes things work out. All I know is, it was a lot easier to keep that stock wire running with him thirty miles down the road than it would have been if he was in Atlanta or Lewisburg.”

Dion smiled and Frank knew he had him. Junior would never have the vision to look three moves down the road like Frank did, or Carmine Aliquo. Joey Doves and Joe Batters before them. The Chicago Outfit showed as much of itself as it wanted. There were bumps along the way, and things weren’t like they used to be, but the principles were still valid. If they could get back to them.

Dion said, “How do you think Hickox found out? About the hit, I mean. Do they have a source with Junior?”

“Chicago cops told them.” Dion didn’t look convinced. “I have a guy in the OC squad there. He didn’t know how they got the tip, just what they did with it. There was a lot of bitching and moaning about giving information to the Feds for nothing. This is what worries me, Dion.” Frank relaxed, let his arms come away from his sides. “We’re not careful, we could get as bad as law enforcement. No one trusts anybody over there.”

“Must be a hell of a way to live. Looking over your shoulder all the time.” Both men laughed, the war forgotten for a second. Just two guys

talking.

“Dion,” Frank said when they were done. “I got something you should think about.”

“You’re not going to ask me if I’m with you or against you, are you?”

“Nothing like that. Just something to take with you. If this thing goes Junior’s way, you know what’ll happen, especially to guys like you. You know it won’t be that way if I come out on top. We’re going to need some stability when this is over. Someone who’s been around, knows things. Underboss, consiglieri, maybe.”

Dion looked at Frank like he wanted to see the words come out of his mouth. Frank met his stare and they held it, two men used to exchanging meanings without words. Frank knew Dion wouldn’t ask as well as Dion knew Frank wouldn’t say it, so he skipped to what came next.

“No promises. No one knows what might happen.” Dion nodded half an inch. “But you’ve known me a long time. And you know it ain’t what a man says, it’s what he does. We straight on this?”

“As an arrow.” Dion extended his hand. “Nothing else to be said right now.”

They shook. Frank turned off the water, watched Dion walk through the room. Went to the door and asked Anthony Antofuermo to bring in a bottle of red. Sat at the table Vinnie used to share with him every day and drank a glass straight down, poured another.

Time was, Vinnie would come about now for their regular meeting. Frank missed Vinnie. They’d been friends over forty years. Even did their time together, twenty months in Menard for busting up a bar whose owner wasn’t as afraid to call the cops as they thought. Ten of them around the bar disguised as drunks when Frank and Vinnie got there. Frank smiled, remembering the look on Vinnie’s face, not fat then, strong as a randy bull, when he realized all these guys were cops, here just for them. Vinnie’s parting shot to the bar owner, hands cuffed behind him, walking out to the wagon. “I must’ve been crazy, thinking this was a bar. Only place gets this many cops is Dunkin fuckin’ Doughnuts, you sneaky prick.”

Now Frank drank alone. Che peccato. He wondered if Will Hickox missed his chats with Vinnie. How much did a Fed make? What kind of retirement plan did they have? Frank meant what he told Hickox that night walking around the block. No favors. Cash money. That way there were no

misunderstandings. Hickox was feeling him out before Vinnie got clipped. He'd be back now, looking to replace Vinnie, and the one making the approach was always vulnerable.

CHAPTER 24

Mitch Klimak lived for moments like this. The look on Junior Bevilacqua's face when he first saw his car in the impound lot. Walked in with that Outfit roll they get, weight shifting from leg to leg, making the world create space for him. How Junior paused when he saw the car. Didn't stop, more of an interruption in his flow, then came on like he expected it.

No windshield, side, or back windows. Stuffing pouring out of leather seat backs and headrests like open wounds. Side mirrors hanging by their cords. Tires slashed. A three-month-old Cadillac CTS. Forty thousand dollars sticker, not that Junior paid anything like that for it. Now not worth what it would cost to haul it away.

Mitch let Junior soak it in before he spoke. "Sugar in the gas tank, too," he said. "Don't be so cheap next time. Pay for the security system."

"Took you long enough to find it," Junior said, never looking away from what used to be his car. "You did your job, it might not be this bad."

"Hey, Junior," Mitch said. "Do I look like some Property Crimes hump? I work OC. I bust primates like you for a living."

Junior looked at Mitch for the first time, took a second to place him. "Klimak, right? You're the hard-on from CPD likes to play games. Rubbed dog shit on Sal Enna's car door handle a few years ago. What are you doing here?"

"I'm giving you back your car." Mitch gestured with an open hand toward the hulk like Vanna White showing off a picture of Cancun. "See the officer in the shack about the towing charges and impound fee. There's probably a parking fine, too."

Junior confused now, looking from Mitch to the car to the shack and back to Mitch. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Delivering a message. You know why it took so long to get this back?" Mitch didn't wait for an answer. "Because you are not a citizen. The Chicago Police Department does not work for you. We live and let live as long as you keep a low profile. You fuck up, and you have to make amends one way or another. Do you remember beating up a woman last week? Tall, red hair?"

"Not saying I did or I didn't. What about it?"

“That was my wife. My. Wife. Mine. If I hear she even saw you in traffic, I’ll make sure you’re in the car the next time this happens.” Mitch jerked a thumb toward what was left of the Caddy.

“Hey, I didn’t know she was your wife. I wouldn’t a gone near her. She had her nose in my business is all. A message had to be sent. I would a let it slide, I knew she was with you.”

“That’s why we’re having this discussion here in the fresh air, no bars between us. Now you know. Who she is, and what’ll happen if you make the same mistake again.”

Junior raised his hands to his shoulders, palms out. “No argument. I was out of line, putting hands on a cop’s wife. Tell her no offense. Call it a business misunderstanding.”

Mitch gave nothing but a flat-eyed cop stare; he had one of the best. Junior let it ride a beat, then turned and rolled toward the shack. Mitch wanted Junior to look back at the car, turn his head to catch it in the corner of his eye. Junior walked to the impound shack the same way he’d walked into the lot, the Big Man. Never let a cop know he got under your skin.

I should’ve burned it, too, Mitch thought.

CHAPTER 25

Jimmy Webster had run his own business on the West Side for twenty-seven years. A mile from the old Stadium, now the United Center. Most profitable book Sal Enna had, and the barbershop in front did enough business to keep up appearances, though there weren't a lot of appearances to be kept up, as many people as Jimmy paid to leave him alone. After he took care of his pad and kicked up to Sal for street tax and protection, Jimmy had enough for a nice house in Palos Park and a little place in the Wisconsin Dells for summer weekends.

Too cold for the Dells now. Chicago warming up, still a month before the cabin would be comfortable for him and his wife. Martha hated the cold, bitched about living in Chicago from October till May. In June she switched her thermostat over, and bitched about the heat until September. She liked the Dells, so he let her go as much as she wanted. She said she could spend forever there, her ashes sprinkled on Mirror Lake. Jimmy wanted his wife to be happy, hoped she wouldn't have to wait too much longer.

Martha still in Palos now, which meant Jimmy worked long hours. Tough to do, with no football and the college basketball tournament over. Too early for much baseball action, and no one bet hockey. The pro basketball playoffs were all Jimmy had going for him, and those were slow, what with the cops coming by every day. The size of his pad prevented any raids, but they kept things so slow in back that Jimmy came out and actually cut hair a couple of hours a day.

He'd finished a flattop for a retired Marine and parked himself in one of the waiting chairs when two cars pulled up. All the doors opened together and eight guys without a neck between them got out. A couple had baseball bats held along their legs. Jimmy closed the Newsweek he'd been about to read and nodded to Gene Fitzpatrick sweeping hair off the floor, said, "Call Sal." Fitz rested the broom against one of the barber chairs and went in back.

The eight walked into the shop and Jimmy stood up, shook out a cape like he was welcoming customers. "Gentlemen, welcome to Jimmy's. We have three chairs available. Who wants to go first?"

The first one in line pushed Jimmy back into the row of chairs. The guy behind him took his bat to the Paul Mitchell display, shattered every piece of glass shelving to sizes that wouldn't clog a sink drain. Jimmy hadn't sold any Mitchell in three years; it wasn't that kind of shop. He only carried the stuff because some broad told him all classy shops had Mitchell. Jimmy much more upset about the shelves, which set him back a pretty penny. He'd talk to Sal about that.

The group moved through the shop, breaking mirrors, cutting the barber chairs, dumping supplies. Jimmy sat with Don Gleason and let them. Don was an honest to God barber and didn't know what to think. Jimmy had seen this before and knew exactly what to do, and he was doing it.

Fitz got caught in the doorway when the crew made it to the back of the shop. Looked confused more than scared. He must have been one or the other, or he would have moved. "Hey, what the hell?" was as much as he got out before the guy who'd done the Mitchell display swung the bat. No reason for it—Fitz didn't put up a fuss—just to hit someone, Jimmy supposed. Fitz got his arm up in time to save his face; Jimmy saw it bend as the bat broke it. The first guy threw Fitz in the corner and went in back, where Jimmy made his book. Five more went with him.

Crashes and sounds of falling file cabinets, torn paper, broken glass, and running water wafted through the door and the two hard-looking wanna-bes standing in front of it. Jimmy nodded to one of them, a Central Casting tough guy dressed in a sport coat and black tee shirt, his face as smooth as the moon. The guy made eye contact and Jimmy looked toward Fitz cradling his arm in the corner. Crater Face nodded back and Jimmy and Don arranged Fitz's broken arm in his lap with some towels and waited for the invasion to end.

The crew took their time wrecking the place and laughing. Jimmy heard at least one of them lake a leak, which irritated him because there was no toilet in that room. They came out after about ten minutes and broke the one mirror they'd missed, stood over the three barbers hunched in the corner.

"I don't know what you're paying for protection," said the leader. "You ain't getting your money's worth. You pay us from now on. Any questions?"

Jimmy knew better than to ask. He had no idea how he got in the middle and this wasn't the time or place to try to find out. Sal would be by soon

enough and Jimmy could see how things stood, decide whether it might be time for a few weeks in the Dells, cold or not.

Only Jimmy faced the right direction to see motion outside the shop door. Don and Fitz had their heads down; the bust up crew was too pumped up to notice the chime when the door opened. They did notice the sound of a shotgun being charged.

“Turn around slow.” Sal Enna stood in the doorway with three members of his crew, a twelve-gauge pump gun leveled at the group’s center of mass. Sal’s nickname “The Grill,” because he sometimes roasted parts of slow pays and other offenders on his backyard Weber. Hands, mostly; occasionally a face. He broiled Rudy Czarnicki’s johnson like a bratwurst once, but he was in the process of killing Rudy, so no hard feelings.

Sal nodded toward the window and a guy in a red pullover shirt closed the blinds and flipped the sign in the door from “Open” to “Closed.” Sal’s guys all came heavy: two nine millimeters and a .357 behind the shotgun. They spread out across the front of the shop in a loose fan.

Sal gestured with the shotgun toward Fitz. “Who did that to his arm?” Jimmy gave two seconds for someone to do the right thing before he pointed.

“Carlo,” Sal said, “take his bat. You,” he said to the soon to be victim, “hand it to him, handle first.”

“Fuck you,” the guy said. Sal stepped forward quicker than anyone thought he could and hit him across the jaw with the stock of the shotgun. The bust up crew all took a step forward. Sal’s guys leveled weapons. The bust up crew all took a step back.

“Okay, Babe Ruth,” Sal said, shotgun leveled at his middle, “now give Carlo the bat.”

Carlo took the bat by the handle, flipped it once and caught it by the head, again to take the handle, showing off. Then he held it down by the knob and swung like Babe’s ribs were a hanging curve ball. Babe’s hands were up to protect his face, left his midsection wide open. He doubled over and Carlo caught him square on the left cheek with the next swing.

“Show me your arm,” Carlo said. Babe shook his head like he was clearing it, didn’t move. Carlo hit him high on the left arm, then again to break the fingers of Babe’s right hand when he grabbed at it. Babe cradled his fingers in his left hand and Carlo worked his way down the arm. The

elbow splintered like a chicken wing. Forearm looked dented after three swings. Six solid strokes to the kidneys finished the beating. The only sounds in the room were the grunts as Carlo pitched and Babe caught the beating.

Sal waited until Carlo finished and said, "Who's in charge here?"

No one spoke again until Jimmy pointed to the one who'd pushed him twenty minutes ago that seemed like a week now. "Him, Sal. With the bowling shirt."

Not really a bowling shirt. A casual button-down with short sleeves, black with a wide cream-colored stripe on each side of the buttons that ran from the peak of the shoulder to the waist, a pattern in each stripe. Jimmy's description close enough for Sal.

"What's your name?"

"Fuck you."

"Who sent you?"

Bowling Shirt said, "Fuck you," again and Sal shot him in the knee. The shotgun scattered pieces of meat and gristle on the two closest thugs and the wall behind. Bowling Shirt screamed, fell, and made sounds humans haven't made in three or four million years.

Sal pumped the action and turned the gun on the man next to Bowling Shirt, the acne-scarred soldier who'd let Jimmy help Fitz. "Your turn," Sal said. "Who do you work for?"

"George Ragusa," Crater Face said, looking Sal in the eye.

"All right, then," Sal said. "The rest of you got one minute to get these two pieces of shit out of here, or I'll take them home for a barbecue. And you," he said to Crater Face, "take a message to that fanook cocksucker Junior Bevilacqua. Tell him next time he sends people to bust up one of my places, I'll send them back well-done. You understand? Now get the fuck out before I lose my patience."

The six ambulatory members of Sauce Ragusa's crew picked up the other two. "Hold it," Sal said. "Whatever money you got on you stays. Most of it belongs here, anyway. The rest is damages. Just empty your pockets and leave the cash on the first chair."

No argument. The quietest barbershop in Chicago held only the sounds of bills rustling and Bowling Shirt's shock-induced whimpers. His crew carried him and Babe out to their cars and left without a sound.

Sal went to Jimmy, peeled ten Cs off a roll. “Get his arm taken care of and fix the joint up. I’ll come by tomorrow. Everything will be copasetic in back by then, you got it? You have this book up and running when I come back, I’ll drop off another grand for his arm and repairs. You don’t, I’ll find someone who can.”

Jimmy watched Sal and his boys leave, the blinds still down, the “Closed” sign on the door. He waited until he heard their car start and pull away before he handed Don his keys and asked him to get the car so he could take Fitz to the emergency room at Stroger. He called his wife from the car, said he’d have to work late, probably all night. Sal wasn’t kidding about wanting things up and running in a day. It could’ve been a lot worse. At least he caught Sal in a good mood.

CHAPTER 26

No point bothering with a wire. Frank Ferraro would pat Will down before he said more than hello, and this operation couldn't stand too much internal scrutiny. Getting a wire required more red tape than a shooting. All it would take was some brown-nosing career seeker to tell Goodfriend about it and Satriale and Will would chase seal poachers in Alaska until they retired.

The night not bad for the end of April. Too chilly to stand on the exposed point behind Adler Planetarium for long, but Frank wouldn't be late. Two things about the lakeside path were worth it: unexpected guests either had to come up Solidarity Drive or swim.

Frank came into view at 10:58. Will made no move to approach. They didn't shake hands. Didn't say hello. Nodded and turned to face the emptiness of the lake.

Frank lit a cigarette and took a long drag. "I quit a year ago. Four a day I can have." Took another quick hit, held it in. "I don't hear from you in six years, now it's twice in a month. If you got me out here to tell me Junior wants to kill me again, I know that already."

"I thought you might have something to tell me, Frank," Will said. They stood a foot apart, barely visible in each other's peripheral vision, eyes focused like they were trying to see Michigan. "Junior running the Outfit into the ground the way he is. We're not saying officially who did Vinnie, but I can't believe you'd send guys who'd let a busboy walk into the crossfire. Now I hear Sal Enna had to straighten out one of Sauce Ragusa's crews the other day. Must be getting expensive."

"I handle my own business," Frank said. "Ask all the leading questions you want. I know you don't think I came out here to stand in the wind in the middle of the night to incriminate myself."

Will turned to Frank, opened his coat. "You want to pat me down? Look for a wire? Be my guest. I'm not even carrying a piece tonight. Didn't think I'd need it with you."

Frank turned, not quite far enough to see Will eye to eye. "You say you're clean, you're clean. I'm not going to insult you looking for a wire."

"That's nice to hear, Frank. A man in your position who trusts a federal officer."

Frank faced Will head on. "Federal officers are assholes. I'm trusting you. We have history with you, Hickox. I told you that before. I know you and Vinnie used to get together. He told me you were stand up, as much as a Fed can be."

"You knew about Vinnie and me."

"That's not why he's dead," Frank said before Will could ask.

"Junior, then," Will wondering how far Frank might go on a first date.

"Junior probably has his reasons. If he did it. I'm not saying, either way. I don't know, and I'm sure as hell not going to guess in front of a federal agent."

"Not even one you trust as much as me?"

"I said I trusted you more than other feds. That's not saying much."

"What's the word then? Off the record."

They'd gradually turned their gazes back toward the lake. Now Frank broke off eye contact altogether. "Give me a break. I know what you and Vinnie talked about. No first hand information, all what the lawyers call hearsay. You want someone at the top to talk out of school, go find that mick from Boston. I hear he's in Italy."

"That guy back east never had a situation like you have here." Will knew not to speak Whitey Bulger's name to Frank. Mostly for how he screwed over Boston's LCN chapter, but some for having no more honor than a boar in rut. Worked his way to the top as an FBI informant. "Open warfare, police pressing you on every side. Being a rat was his way to take over, getting us to take the competition off the street for him."

Frank brought his gaze to bear on Will. Heat filled his voice. "So you're saying you'd go into the bag for me? So I can be boss? Like saying you want me to win?"

"Not in so many words, but if someone has to run the Outfit, everyone's better off if it's you."

"Buy me dinner."

"Excuse me?"

"I said, buy me dinner. You want to fuck me, you think I'd give it up so easy, least you can do is buy me a nice dinner."

Wind picked up, blew the smell of a fish kill across the open point of land. "Come on, Frank. That's not how it is, and you know it. I'm not offering get out of jail cards like they did in Boston. I'm saying information

flows, and things get done. Sometimes our interests intersect. When they do, everyone benefits.”

“I see,” Frank said, still giving Will the eye. “I deliver information, then maybe I can get a favor from time to time. Like with Big Daddy and his dying mother.”

“Maybe not exactly like that, but sure.”

“Fuck that. I told you at my house, no favors. If I want something from you, I’ll pay for it.”

“Do you want something from me, Frank?”

Frank flipped his butt toward the rocks at the edge of the lake. “You reached out to me, so I figure it’s you wants something. What do you make a year? Eighty, ninety grand? Standing in the cold, middle of the night, talking to someone you’d rather lock up than give the time of day? No offense, I understand. I got things I’d rather be doing right now. How many years you got in?”

“Twenty-six.” Will saying as little as possible, waiting to see where Frank took this, thinking he was past first base already.

“You could retire now, if you wanted, couldn’t you?” Will nodded. “I’m not gonna ask why not. I know why not. You want to bring in one more big case. You fucking Feds are more predictable than a woman’s period. The ones that aren’t punching a clock all want to be Elliott fucking Ness, bring down Al Capone. Here’s a history lesson for you. Ness never touched Capone. He was a nuisance, like a fly buzzing around a horse’s ass. Fucking accountants got Al. All Ness got was a TV show.

“You must a had offers by now. Corporate security jobs, consultant work. Six figures, easy. And here you are, Mister Civil Service, talking to a known felon while the rest of the world is home watching Leno or getting laid. Don’t tell me you don’t want something, standing out here in the cold. And don’t give me some bullshit like world peace. Just say it.”

Will not really sure where Frank was taking him. Sometimes the girl did put out on the first date; she’d just been waiting to be asked. And sometimes she teased, to make it that much harder when you found out you never had a chance. Will knew as much about Francis Albert Ferraro as any man alive, probably even more than the late Vinnie Dominos. He’d studied Frank the way biographers studied presidents. How Frank spent his days, who he ordered killed, and who he’d probably killed himself. He knew Frank’s

favorite restaurants and what he liked to eat in each. He knew his kids' names, and the respectable professions each had gone into. He knew Frank's father's and mother's stories, as well as those of his wife, Annabella. He knew Frank rooted for the White Sox, not the Cubs, even though he lived in Oak Park now. Everything Will knew about Frank said he wasn't a tease. A thief, a killer, a liar, and a destroyer. Not a tease.

"What do I want? I guess that depends on what's available." Will leaning in ninety percent of the way for the kiss; making Frank come the other ten.

"You'll have to find out for yourself. Thursday, three o'clock in the Field Museum." Frank gestured with his thumb toward the building on the other side of the planetarium. "By the big dinosaur. You have access to a lot of information that interests me. Bring something worth buying, and I'll make sure you're not sorry."

Will felt light headed. Things that seemed too good to be true usually were. This qualified. Scenarios played in his head, how Frank could be setting him up, other angles, knowing Frank didn't think of this just to move the meeting along. He wanted something and saw Will as vulnerable. Why he thought that, Will didn't know. A source, maybe. Will didn't think anyone in the local FBI office was compromised, but the law enforcement grapevine was as fertile as the underworld's. He wanted time to think. To be sure. And not to look too easy.

"I need to consider this a little, Frank. It's, uh, kinda unexpected."

"Take your time. I didn't figure you'd put out the first date." It bothered Will how much he and Frank thought alike. "I'll be there on Thursday. I won't be alone. You will be. You're not there by three-oh-five, I leave. No harm done. I think you're setting me up, nothing will happen. You know me. It's not like I'm going to hand you a bag full of money next to the dinosaur's tail."

Common sense tempered Will's enthusiasm. Nothing Frank said so far was evidence in any sense of the word. Two guys talking, all it was. Will let Frank walk west on Solidarity Drive until he was out of sight, then went that way himself. He wasn't sure what just happened, but Uncle paid him good money to find things out.

CHAPTER 27

Chummy Imperatore felt pretty good. Too bad about the kid and all, but getting the contract to clip Vinnie Dominos made Chummy a big man. Wouldn't surprise him if he stepped up, maybe even run the crew when The Jap moved up once Junior took over. With Vinnie gone, Sal The Grill would have to shape up or they'd find a hole for him, too.

Chummy and Donnie Salvano kept a low profile after the shooting. Not too low; it wouldn't do for them to be the only two guys the cops couldn't find. Stayed out of their normal places unless other guys they trusted were around. Ate their shit from the cops, didn't have to look over their shoulders for some old school asshole with a vendetta coming to get even for Vinnie.

Listening to the cops even kind of fun. They had nothing on him. Chummy knew they only busted balls because they had to make it look good for the news people, that busboy getting killed like he did. No one liked—what's the Army call it?—collateral damage, but Jesus Christ, what was that kid thinking, jumping in the middle like that? Go in the kitchen, crawl under a table, jump out the window, you had to. Something. Might have been just as well. Kid too dumb to amount to anything, doing something like that. Saved everyone from supporting another welfare case.

Chummy thought about all this while he drove to meet The Jap, down the South Side. A swag warehouse off 115th Street, near the Bishop Ford Freeway. Pretty May day, breeze hinted at summer like a girl wearing a sun dress for the first time that year. Chummy looked forward to summer, catch a few games at Comiskey, US Cellular, Sox Park, whatever they called it this year. Hang by the beaches, girls in bikinis barely covered their nipples and bushes, might as well wear signs, "Will screw for dinner and bling." The beach Sal's favorite place to recruit that year's comare. He got a new one every year; any longer and they started thinking like wives, a real pain in the ass. Get me, take me, buy me. For a year they were appreciative. Then Chummy went back to the beach.

Couple of cars parked outside the warehouse. The Jap's Lexus, of course, and a Crown Vic looked like Donnie Salvano's. No one knew why he drove that piece of shit, like he wanted to be a cop. Might be a good

nickname for him. Donnie “The Cop” Salvano. Confusing as hell on the wiretaps. Be good to see Donnie, they hadn’t talked since the hit at Mangia.

Chummy pulled in behind a car he didn’t recognize, went up four concrete stairs to the walk-in door next to the big roll-up for the trucks. Knocked twice, once, twice. Door opened, not all the way. Chummy went in.

It took his eyes a few seconds to adjust to the dim warehouse. When they did, he saw The Jap standing next to Guido Coroglio. Guido had a gun pointed at Chummy. Other guys he didn’t recognize right away, the gun holding his attention for the time being.

“Hey, what the fuck? You guys didn’t know it was me?” Chummy appraising the situation, calculations not coming into focus as quickly as he’d like. “Put that gun down, Guido, before something bad happens.”

Angelo Caccamo, The Jap, spoke. “Sorry, Chummy, I really am, but that hit was fucked up. I know it was Donnie killed the spic, but it was your contract.” Angelo gestured with a gun Chummy hadn’t noticed till now. Donnie Salvano sat against the wall, mouth and eyes hanging wide open. Blood covered the side of his face.

“Too much heat,” The Jap said. “Fucking cops are up our assholes. I’d a liked to just give ‘em Donnie and call it even. But they know it was two shooters, and we can’t take the chance a witness would look at some mope and say he ain’t the one. No hard feelings, hey?”

Chummy thought about going for his piece, knew there was no point. Thought maybe if he took it like a man they’d leave his face unmarked for the funeral. Then Guido stepped forward and Chummy never thought again.

* * *

Squadrols already had the street blocked when Mitch Klimak got to Mangia at 7:45 the next morning. Word floated up through three different channels yesterday: Imperatore and Salvano were the guys. No proof, never was. The Organized Crime team assumed the Outfit was helping them close the case without actually solving it. It had been done before.

Not like this, dumping what was left of Imperatore and Salvano on the front steps of the crime scene. No question now Junior ordered the hit.

Frank Ferraro never would have been that stupid. Of course, Frank Ferraro wouldn't have sent two guys didn't know how to do a proper hit, either.

Mitch stood outside the crime scene tape, watched the techs work. Nothing for him to do here but think. Area One's problem, your basic double homicide. Organized Crime would do intel work, help out where they could, until the case withered and died. The life expectancy of investigations into Outfit killings about the same as a fly's. Fernando Escalante had been avenged. The public would lose interest as soon as the next outrage occurred, which in Chicago meant lunchtime, two o'clock at the latest.

The police were a different matter. Only they—and the politicians—were allowed to call off an investigation. The privilege was protected as fiercely as any gang's turf. Junior Bevilacqua's education needed remedial work.

CHAPTER 28

“Did he actually offer you money?”

Mike Satriale too excited to do his usual thumb-under-the-jaw, finger-along-his-nose thinking posture. He straddled the corner of his desk, leaned toward Will.

“Not in so many words,” Will said. “He said I wouldn’t be sorry.”

“That could mean he won’t kill you,” Satriale said. “There’s a lot of room for interpretation between ‘I’ll pay you’ and ‘you won’t be sorry’.”

“I know. That’s why I have to go.”

“With a wire this time.”

“I can’t. Same reasons as before. Guaranteed he’ll search me if anything’s going down.”

“Then I want a team there with equipment. We’ll get some kind of recording.”

Will shook his head. “He said he’d have people there to watch. They’ll be good. This isn’t Junior dumping bodies like a human sacrifice, thinking it makes everything all right. Frank’s going to cover all the angles if he’s planning to make a move.”

“And what if he’s not?” The thinking pose was back. Satriale never stayed excited too long about anything other than his kids and the Bears.

“Then not having a wire won’t matter.”

Satriale went behind his desk to sit. Looked at the rogue’s gallery on his wall like he was sizing up where Ferraro’s picture might fit. “Just once I’d like to be there when you find something out, so you won’t be ahead of me when we talk about it. All right, we’ll skip the wire. This time.” Looked at Will an extra second. Fine with Will. Looks were free. “The paperwork’s still a problem, anyway. Someone’s bound to tell Goodfriend. We can get recordings later if anything comes of it.”

“That’s my next question.” Will in the chair across from Satriale, unable to sit back, leaned across the desk, left leg jiggling. “What can we give up to keep him coming back?”

“Something we don’t need and don’t mind him knowing, but he’ll think is a big deal.”

Will held his look on Satriale, showing what he thought of the reply.
“Like?”

“Oh, you only run the meeting until you don’t have an answer, then I’m in charge. I always knew you were a sandbagger.”

They brainstormed, two old friends unafraid to say anything. Will came up with something too valuable to part with. Satriale countered with information Frank wouldn’t think was worth having. Back and forth, making adjustments too far on the other direction. Spent ten minutes like that, then got quiet. Looked at the wall, the desk, the window, the door. Anywhere a disembodied hand might find space to write something to solve their problem.

Will spoke after a couple of minutes. “What about the mike in The Jap’s clubhouse, down 26th Street?”

“The transmitter went bad a couple of months ago.”

“Any reason to think he knows about it?”

“No.” Satriale sat forward, elbows on the desk. “No, he doesn’t. And it’s not like Frank can walk into the Jap’s joint and check it out right away.”

“Which means we can use it more than once.”

“Possibly.” Satriale paused, pursed his lips. “I wonder if it might be better to give him something physical. So he can see it with his own eyes, not just take our word for it.”

“Yeah, probably, but what can we afford to give up?” Nothing, and Will knew it. “What if we tell him something he already knows, but would have no reason to think we know?”

“Like?”

“We know Vinnie Dominos got together with Junior at Sal Enna’s joint. I got that from the bartender. We could tell him it came off the wire at the Jap’s place. Caccamo’s the logical guy to get the contract, so Junior talking to him about it at his own place makes perfect sense.”

“All right. That’s not a lot, but it’s a start. He wants more, make him show you something. Then maybe you can tell him about the wire we’re planning to drop in his club.”

Will almost fell out of the chair, he sat so far forward. “You really going to put a wire in Mannheim? How come I didn’t hear about it?”

Satriale smiled the tight-lipped grin he got when he knew he got one over. “I just thought of it. He cleans the place too often for it to do us any

good, but I'll plant one if he's willing to pay you to find out about it."

Will got a laugh as far as his throat when Jarod Goodfriend stuck his head into Satriale's office. Stick up his ass straight arrow could kill the buzz at Woodstock.

"Good, you're both here." Goodfriend's voice sounded like it hadn't changed yet, occasionally slipped into random registers that drew hysterics from the agents. "May I come in?"

"Your head's in already, Jarod," Will said. "Does the rest of you add any value?" Satriale shot him a look and Will turned his chair to face Goodfriend as he came in and shut the door. Will knew better than to try to get under Goodfriend's thin skin. He'd made an exception because he also knew Goodfriend never asked permission of anyone he considered subordinate unless he'd already decided to do whatever it was he'd asked about.

"Mr. Flanagan wants a complete summary of where we are, what's on the horizon, and what it will take to close the loops and bring this to trial, and he wants it by tomorrow morning." Goodfriend always referred formally to the United States Attorney, as if Douglas Flanagan had wires of his own in every office in the building. Which no agent thought was out of the question.

"What's wrong with the summary we sent him last week?" Satriale said.

"That showed where things are now. He wants your input on how we can start to wrap this investigation up."

"Wrap up what?" Will said. "You mean Fallout?"

"Have you spent two years and twenty million dollars on any other investigations?"

"Is Flanagan sure about this?" Satriale said. "I mean, yeah, we're two years and twenty million into this, but it's two years and twenty million down the drain if we pull the plug too soon. The average guy loves the idea of sending hoods to prison just because they're crooks, even if we can't prove anything specific. Put them in a jury box and everything changes. Frank or Junior sits at the defense table, and all of a sudden they're real people, not just names in a newspaper. Now some shift manager at Denny's has to decide if they go away for forty years. He looks at Frank, sixty-some years old, and knows it's a death sentence. He wants to be sure before he drops the hammer on something like that."

Goodfriend had brought out his patient face when Satriale got to, “if we pull the plug.” Will knew what it meant and couldn’t resist putting in his two cents. “Judges are more careful, too. The defense will contest everything you put up there. If they see a hole between two pieces of evidence—hell, if they see a perforation—they’ll jump on it. I know these cases look big and cumbersome, but they’re like matchstick houses. Take out the wrong piece and the whole thing falls apart.” Then he got ready to listen to what always came after The Face.

“Thank you, gentlemen. Having the law explained to me by laymen always brightens my day.” Time now for Will’s version of The Face, shifting his body and turning his head to pretend to keep his disgust from showing. Few things irritated Will more than being called ignorant by a know-nothing political hire—never mind Goodfriend’s wasn’t a political position. Hearing it delivered in the prosecutor’s adenoidal voice added insult to injury.

“The Justice Department does not exist so the FBI can conduct investigations. Our job—and yours—is to put criminals in prison. The investigations are a critical means to that end, but they are not the reason the taxpayers pay our salaries. You investigate so we can get criminals off the streets by convicting them and sending them to prison. This circus has become an end of its own and has gone on well past its original mandate. Mr. Flanagan thinks it’s time to cut our losses and take what we can get with what we have so far.”

Will’s expression changed from pretending to hide his disgust to genuine disbelief. “Is this Flanagan’s idea, or yours? I can’t believe he came up with that ‘take what we can get’ bullshit on his own.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Goodfriend said. “Those are his orders. He’s right to be impatient. You started this operation two years ago to take down Gianni Bevilacqua. He died of old age and you carry on like you’re no closer to finishing than you were when you started. Use what you have to arrest the peripheral characters and move on.”

“Peripheral characters?” Will looked at Goodfriend straight on, forced himself not to shout. The cords in his neck stood out like cables. “You think Frank Ferraro and Junior Bevilacqua are peripheral characters? Goddamn it, these guys – ”

“Agent Hickox, you know I object to that kind of language. Let’s keep this professional.”

“It’s Special Agent Hickox, Jarod, and fuck you. No professional would think of Ferraro and Junior as loose ends to clean up after the real crooks are put away.” Satriale leaned forward as if to say something, saw the look on Will’s face, the shock on Goodfriend’s, and sat back. “Frank Ferraro might be the most dangerous criminal in the country. The only reason he’s not on the Most Wanted list is because he shaves and doesn’t wear a rag on his head. Ninety-five percent of the people in Chicago won’t recognize his name, but he controls more crime right now than anyone. Period. Unless Junior kills him and takes over. Then he will.”

“Bevilacqua was never the primary target,” Satriale said, his voice quiet compared to Will’s. “The Outfit was. Still is. I’m going to want to deliver this report to Flanagan myself.”

Goodfriend shook his head, a smug smile on his face, the school tattletale showing how tight he is with the teacher. “Mr. Flanagan’s on US Airways at 5:45 from O’Hare. He expects your report before he leaves.”

Will had several things lined up to say to Goodfriend; only a matter of deciding which came first, and how crudely to phrase it. Now that Satriale had rejoined the conversation, Will looked his way for a cue.

Satriale glared holes into Goodfriend, then turned toward Will when he realized Will was waiting for him. Years of working together came through the look they exchanged and Will sat back, his list unspoken.

Goodfriend gave no sign of noticing the byplay. “I’m meeting him at O’Hare at five o’clock in the morning. I’ll have your report with me.”

“You’ll have me with you, too,” Satriale said. Goodfriend looked as though he might argue, then showed his best supercilious smile and left.

No one spoke until Goodfriend disappeared around the corner outside the office. Will let Satriale have the last word for a change, thought he might appreciate the acknowledgement of who was boss. It didn’t happen that often.

“I can finesse this,” Satriale said. “Go see Frank tomorrow. Get me something I can use when Flanagan gets back.”

CHAPTER 29

Frank Ferraro watched Will Hickox come through the South Entrance and take his time walking through the main hall of the Field Museum toward Sue, the Field's showpiece Tyrannosaurus Rex. Frank stood near the Sue Store on the upper level, Sue the attraction for all but the most dedicated museum visitors. The Field used her name as often as a respectable institution dared before some arbiter of taste flagged them for pandering.

The Field Museum was Frank's refuge. He started bringing his kids here as soon as they were old enough to understand what he read to them from the placards describing each exhibit. It was important for the Ferraro children to grow up, understand, and feel comfortable in the upperworld. Frank didn't whine about choices he never had; he chose from the ones he did, and been more successful than anyone could have expected. The point was, Frank's children would have better options to choose from.

He knew his father was a small-time hood as soon as he understood what "small-time" and "hood" meant. Nights missing, phone calls and visits from the police. Hiding things and watching detectives tear the house apart, his mother gripping the search warrant so tight it tore. Angelo Ferraro provided for his family when he could, and felt like it. The planets rarely aligned to allow for both.

Becoming a criminal was Frank's choice, no argument. A logical decision, given his father's contacts and Frank's prospects for higher education. What Frank learned from his old man wasn't that crime was no way to support a family; being a shitty criminal was no way to support a family.

He shielded his children from his occupation as well as he could. The kids were grown when he did his three in Lewisburg; by then they all knew the score, if not certain details that might have been too much even for them to overlook. Earlier episodes with law enforcement had been dressed up as business trips. By the time the kids were old enough to question overnight absences, Frank drew enough water not to have to put up with any. He spent one night in jail in the fifteen years before his arrest. State trooper pulled him over on a trip to an Indian casino for an expired license tag. The driver had an outstanding warrant and the cop searched the car. Some pot was

found, less than an ounce, mostly seeds. A bullshit charge—a go-getter bucking for promotion—but Horse Face Ramirez couldn't get to Bumfuck, Wisconsin in time to find accommodations where the toilet and bed weren't in the same room.

Now he spent a couple of hours every month walking the halls of the Field Museum. Looked at the new exhibits, read every placard, and revisited familiar old ones. The perfect place to meet this Fed who might be setting him up. No tail would think twice about Frank Ferraro going to the museum; he did it all the time. Knew the Field Museum better than most of the employees. He'd see anyone watching before they'd know he was looking.

Will Hickox reached the base of Sue's pedestal at 2:59. At 3:03 Frank nodded to Tom Czakalski, standing near the entrance to the Corner Bakery, where you could eat your Corner Combo looking up a dinosaur's ass. Czakalski leaned over, whispered something to a little girl standing with him, and pointed toward Hickox. The child walked to the agent, a Sue balloon tied to her wrist with ribbon. She pulled on Hickox's sleeve, handed him a note when he looked down. Hickox read the note, looked to see where she came from. Frank smiled, Czakalski already in the Corner Bakery. Hildy knew to wait until the man walked away before going back to her daddy. Hickox scanned the area—looked right at Frank, didn't see him—and went to the staircase near the Customer Care Center.

Frank walked to the south side of the building, used the stairs nearest the Grainger Gallery to the lowest level. Took his time past Bushman the gorilla and the man-eating lion of Mfuwe, until he found Will Hickox beside the vending machines near the Siragusa Center.

Hickox started to speak, Frank cut him off. "Go into the handicapped restroom. There, on the right." A "closed for cleaning" sign hung on the door handle. "Harry knows what to do."

Five minutes later Hickox came out wearing sweatpants, a tee shirt, and sneakers at least two sizes too large, the way he shuffled his feet. Frank gestured with his head and they walked to the play lab, pretended to watch the kids. Hardly anyone around this late in the afternoon.

"What's with the wardrobe change, Frank?" Hickox sounded aggravated, hitching up the sweats to keep them from falling off his hips. "If your boy'd tried to cop my joint I'd a shot him."

“With what? You know better than to come heavy to something like this.” Frank watched the kids, actually paid attention to them. The younger ones made him feel peaceful.

“Frisking me is one thing, maybe even strip down. Why make me change clothes?”

“First of all, no one made you change clothes. You wanted to wear what you had on, you shoulda left it on. You had a choice: change clothes and meet with me, or leave them on and learn about Egypt.

“Why’d I ask you to change? You Feds aren’t half as smart as you think you are, but you’re sneaky. A new wardrobe’s the only way I can be sure you don’t have some button microphone, or a wire sewn in your lapel. Your clothes will be there when you’re ready.”

“Maybe I’m ready now.” Hickox gave irritated more than angry. Frank didn’t look over, kept his focus on the kids, confident the tough talk was show. Hickox hadn’t come this far, put up with the clothes change, to walk away empty handed.

“Go, then.”

“You called the meeting. Said it would be worth my while to come. Okay, I’m here. Now what?”

“I think I said you wouldn’t be sorry.” Frank adjusted his sport coat, felt the envelope of hundred dollar bills heavy in the inside breast pocket. First man to make a move lost. If Hickox asked for the money—any kind of recompense—it was entrapment and Frank could do what he wanted. If Frank offered money unsolicited, it was jail, maybe forever at his age. “You can have a nice time here. Learn something maybe.”

“I thought you were here to learn something.” Hickox definitely pissed now. “Maybe this is one of those misunderstandings you keep talking about.”

“I’m always willing to learn something.” Frank wanted a cigarette. Playing these games always tried his patience. “Walking over here just now I learned the Zambian government wouldn’t let a village kill a lion that ate six people. Only pay safaris can kill a lion there. That’s how governments work. They tell the world they’re saving the lions, so everyone—other governments, do-gooders, those jagoffs from Greenpeace—will think they’re great conservationists.

“So the lion’s eating their people, and nothing happens. Finally some asshole from Oregon pays them to let him kill the lion. Pays them to get permission to kill a lion ate six people. This proves two things: their government didn’t give a shit what happened to those people, and it’s only against killing lions if there’s no money in it for them.”

“What does this have to do with us?”

Frank wanted to turn toward Hickox and tell him how the government was only against gambling when it couldn’t get its taste. How it allowed lenders to sell people mortgages they had no more chance of paying than they had of fucking the Scarlett Johansson, then keep the money already paid and take the house. The G into everything the Outfit was into, taking their cut, paying who had to be paid, except with them it was with feel-good laws to protect the sanctity of marriage while kids who can’t vote died of things that shouldn’t have kept them out of school for more than two days.

What he said was, “You came here to tell me something.”

Hickox didn’t answer right away and Frank gave in, looked at him for the first time since they started talking. Saw the emotions play out across his face as much as any cop would let them. Hickox was clean, or Harry would have said something. That didn't mean he was off the clock, but it made it a lot more likely.

“Do you want to know how we knew Junior was going to kill you?”

“Look at how you’re dressed if you want to know how much respect I have for your technicians. I thought maybe you read Junior’s lips from a satellite or something.”

Another pause before Hickox spoke. “Good guess, but it was closer than that. We have a wire on The Jap.”

“Good for you.”

“Junior set the hit up though Caccamo. We also know it was Vinnie Junior reached out to when he wanted to call the meeting.”

“Where’s the wire?”

“Caccamo’s joint on 26th Street. In the chair molding behind his favorite table.”

“How long’s it been there?”

“I’m not a hundred percent sure. At least six months. The first piece of info I heard from it was something about Jump Shot Swisher expanding his operations.”

Could be, Frank thought. The time was about right, when Swisher started to move his hijackings into Vinnie's area. The Jap dumb enough to let a wire stay in one place that long, too. This had potential. Hickox still had to go first.

"That's good," Frank said, "but it's not like The Jap and I get along so well I can walk in and check it out. What else do you have?"

"What else do you have, Frank?" Hickox moved to stand between Frank and his view of the play lab. "You get me down here, make me strip, and ask me to give up sensitive information. Things have to run both ways. What do you have for me?"

"What do you want?"

"What are you offering?"

"Nothing yet. Maybe never."

Hickox's face filled with color from the neck up. Frank met his eyes. Now was the time to see who had a pair, if one backed away, or if both took this wherever it went. He broke the brief silence before the moment passed. "Stop playing, Hickox. Do you want money for the information you have?"

A flicker of doubt. No more than a second. Then, "Ain't nothing free, Frank. You know that as well as I do."

Close enough. Frank reached into his inside pocket, took out the thick envelope. "I'm going to give you everything here, not that you earned even half of it. Next time you have something, how much you get will depend on how much you tell me I didn't already know." He held the envelope by a short end, let it flap into Hickox's open hand. "There's an email address in there. You want to meet, send a message with the time. Someone will meet you by the dinosaur. Don't get carried away with what great evidence the email is. You'll never get a reply, and it won't be me checking the box. We straight?"

To his credit, Hickox didn't count the money. Held the envelope along his leg while he walked back to the handicapped john, other hand holding up his pants. Pretty comical, Frank thought. Of course, he'd just paid ten thousand dollars for information he either already knew, or couldn't verify. Someone got hosed here. Too soon yet to tell who.

CHAPTER 30

Junior left Gina's at ten-thirty for a few drinks, maybe shoot some pool with Sauce Ragusa over at Alworth's. See what kind of week Fuzzy Alworth had with his one-stop shopping book and shylock service. Stepped out the front door of the building, saw Richie Castiglione in the driver's seat of the new Escalade, the Tony Soprano Special, left unattended only in Junior's garage. Richie didn't see him right away, probably screwing with the radio. Thought he was going to be a music producer someday, couldn't tell hip-hop from a polka from a chain saw.

Junior stepped between two cars at the curb into the street. Trotted across to get there before Richie looked up, scare the shit out of him. Saw motion in the corner of his eye. Richie looked up and his eyes got big as saucers. Yelled something, hard to tell what through the glass. Noise behind Junior, shoes on pavement, someone running. Richie opened the door, gun in his hand. Something zipped past Junior's ear and Richie's shooting, for Christ's sake! Only time to say, "What the fuck, Richie?" before Richie pushed him through the open driver's door. Richie sent two more shots across the street. Junior facedown over the seat, ass hanging out, and it dawned on him this was a hit. First time he'd ever been shot at. Done a couple himself; this was different. Not much risk popping two in the back of a guy's head, or shooting his eyes out while the crew held him down. The adrenaline rush started and calm flowed through him like milk. Reached for the gun under the dash as the driver's window blew out. Richie crouched against the door, keeping between Junior and whoever was across the street. More shots, two guys—funny, Junior with the presence of mind to recognize differences in the guns' sounds—all in only a couple of seconds. Junior pulled the gun loose, wheeled to aim through the shattered window. First time he'd faced death, not sure what the big deal was.

* * *

Vern Schoenstein hunched behind a small evergreen next to Gina Petrino's building. Watched Junior come out alone, let him pass as far as the sidewalk. Nodded to Vic Kariotis behind a holly bush on the other side.

Catching Junior on the fly like this not their choice, but he got careful after the Vinnie Dominos hit. Never alone, usually at least one other car with him. Dumb luck Phil Izzo drove right by him taking his mother to bingo. Phil called Sal Enna, Sal called Vern, and here they were.

Vern stood , shaking stiffness from his hamstrings as he moved away from the shrub. Vic started up the sidewalk to get an angle on Junior. Vern pulled the Glock from his pocket ready to shoot. None of that racking the slide movie shit. He knew the gun was loaded, he loaded it himself not an hour ago, one under the hammer. Tilted his head to keep both Vic and Junior in sight and Junior started running. Vern rushed into the street. The driver's door opened with Junior five feet away. Someone came out with a gun and Vern realized for the first time that Junior had a new car. Phil'd only seen him cross the street, not in a car, and sure as hell not with someone else. And here's this prick Vern didn't know about shooting at them.

Vern let go a quick round before he was ready. The guy from the Escalade threw Junior into the car, fired twice. Vern heard Vic shoot and realized he was in the street, no cars between him and Junior's partner, who seemed to know what he was doing. Vern fired twice and glass shattered. He dove between two cars.

Shots behind him, Vic still moving up the street. Vern turned on his belly between the two cars, found decent cover. Shot twice, then again when he saw Junior's man still shooting toward Vic. A grunt from Vic's direction. A clatter in the street, maybe a gun. Vern shot three times fast to keep the other shooter's head down. Yelled for Vic to get back. Two guns shooting at him now. Looked up, saw Junior back in the game, shooting through the broken window. Vic not in sight. Three more quick ones and Vern crawled backward to get car bodies between him and the two shooters. Time to find Vic and get the fuck out. Trying to remember how many rounds are left. Too many things to keep track of at once.

Parked cars between him and the Escalade now, Vern rested his elbow on a hood. Shot twice. Vic walking down the street, hand to his chest, blood all over him. His gun in the street, reflecting darkly in the dim light. Vern moved down the sidewalk toward their car, yelled for Vic to get to cover. Vic angled toward the car, taking a stroll, like he was going for cigarettes or something. Vern gauged the distance Vic had to travel, saw Junior and his

man outside the Escalade, perfectly lined up with him and Vic. They raised their guns. Vern screamed for Vic to get down. Muzzle flashes, the sound of two shots. Vic oblivious, cradling his mangled hand, two fingers hanging like torn cloth. Both bullets zipped past, missing Vic, missing Vern, missing everything. Moved a car length closer to Junior, burned five rounds to cover Vic. Pulled him behind a car and duck walked away, firing back over his head. Left Vic's gun in the street, an untraceable work piece.

He shoveled Vic into the passenger seat. Rammed the car behind him backing up. Burned off half a tire making a U-turn, sideswiped a car across the street. None of that mattered. The car stolen just for this job, untraceable as the gun. Vern needed a pay phone, see what could be done about Vic's hand, give Sal the bad news.

* * *

Junior and Richie didn't follow. They'd hit one—Junior figured he did it, he was a good shot—and knew pursuit could draw them into something worse if they weren't careful. Junior had learned a lot about careful the last few weeks.

He took inventory. A few small cuts on his left arm, probably from broken glass. Richie said he was fine. Watched the other car crash into parked vehicles, running like a couple of amateurs. Sat back in the driver's seat, wished he hadn't quit smoking. He felt good. Not "alive" like they say in movies—like you'd feel anything but alive if you weren't dead. More like, alert. Heard tires squeal, the shooters' car turning onto Wrightwood. Saw things more clearly, felt the hair on his arm brushing against the blood from the cuts. Tasted salt on his tongue from licking his lips. Smelled the cordite mix with the fresh night breeze off the lake. Everything magnified. Let Frankie Ferraro send the whole fucking Outfit after him. Junior could handle it.

CHAPTER 31

“Maybe I should just arrest you and get it over with. You ain’t told me shit in six weeks.”

Mitch Klimak had a love-hate relationship with his snitches: he loved it when they hated him. Mitch’s ability to recruit and cultivate informants rivaled Will Hickox’s, a neat trick when the resources were considered. Will had Witness Protection and the possibility of a reduced sentence in a prison system without parole. Mitch’s greatest asset was fear. He found guys he could twist and drained them. He could never stop looking because he wasn’t always as careful to protect his sources as he’d been with Gina Petrino. Of course, Mitch didn’t have many snitches he wanted to blow him, either.

Take Pete Taylor, the weasel currently under his thumb. Master car thief, word on the street was Pete Taylor could steal a car before the driver had a chance to lock it. They met when Pete stole a car with a broken taillight and some religious fanatic rookie cop hit the lights to pull him over. Pete decided to outrun him—the Porsche could do a buck-and-a-half on the open road—and would have if the owner hadn’t spent his gas money on car payments. A valuable lesson learned: Germans are precise. When a Porsche’s gas gauge reads “empty,” that fucker’s empty.

“Come on, Klimak, you’re squeezing me too hard.” Taylor’s accent had the long, flat vowels of the upper Midwest. Wisconsin, or possibly Minnesoh-ta. His eyes looked everywhere at once, a valuable skill for someone willing to drive one-fifty in traffic. “People are starting to talk. I can’t just walk up and ask some wiseguy if he killed anyone this week. Shit has to come to me. When it does, you get it.”

“Hermits get more information than you the last month.” Mitch bored today, and horny. Not in the mood for putting up with Taylor. Maybe he’d roust a hooker later. Not some street tramp, class cooz who worked for an escort service he had on his list, keeping Vice off them so he could get on them once in a while. Whores not his preference, but Mad was never home and awake when he was, and Donna Romanowski took her break every time he walked into IHOP.

“Maybe you need a few days in the city lockup,” he said to Taylor. “See if anyone there knows you ratted on them. There must be a couple, even if I have to remind them. I’ll give you a week.” Mitch cracked his knuckles. “Aw, what the hell. Let’s go now. At least get the paperwork done.” He reached behind him for his handcuffs.

“What? You’re arresting me?” Taylor not sure whether to laugh or run.

“What do you think? I use handcuffs for two reasons, and you’re not my type to cuff to a bed.” Mitch stepped forward, snapped a bracelet over Taylor’s right wrist.

“Hey, Klimak. Hey! Hey!” Taylor twisted his body to keep his left wrist out of reach. He knew Mitch’s rule: once the cuffs were snapped shut, he only opened them in the station. “Goddamn, man, okay, don’t be such a hard-on all the time. There might be something. I didn’t say about it before because it sounds weird and I didn’t want it coming back on me if I was wrong, but if you’re going to be a dick, I’ll tell you now. Just don’t hold me to it.”

Mitch held the open cuff poised, stopped reaching for Taylor’s free hand. “What?”

Taylor hemmed and Mitch grabbed his left wrist before he could haw. Taylor gave it up before Mitch could seal the deal. “Frank Ferraro, the Outfit guy? Word is he owns a cop.”

“That’s all?” Mitch said, but he didn’t close the cuff. “Frank Ferraro owns more cops than Michael Jordan owns basketballs. I know there’s at least one on my squad, maybe two.”

“Not just any cop.” Taylor eased his hand out of the unsnapped cuff. “I hear this is a Fed.”

Mitch relaxed his hand, gave Taylor some breathing room. Only the Outfit hated feds more than Mitch Klimak. Maybe. Feds lived to take down cops, walk into court like a Untouchable to send the corrupt local meat-eater away to live in solitary for twenty years, general population not safe for a cop who might have put one of them—or a friend, or a relative—away. Taking a Fed down had serious appeal to Mitch.

“Who?” he said. “The name.”

“No name yet.” Mitch slid the cuff back over Taylor’s wrist. “Hey, come on, I honest to Christ don’t know. I told you, I just heard about this. Give me a little time. They’re going to hold this pretty close.”

They would. No point getting Taylor killed, though car thieves were a dollar a gross. Taylor spoke English, not as rare in car thieves as cab drivers, still nothing to ignore. He never hid from Mitch, so he had balls. That was worth something. Showing too much interest could spook either the Fed or the Outfit. Taylor would need time, and Mitch had other sources he could tap to make sure he wasn't being bullshitted.

Mitch Klimak didn't ask for much from The Job. Steady paycheck, pension when it was time, and a license to treat whoever he found under rocks pretty much how he pleased. Having a Fed to hang on the wall would take the chill out of an old man's long winter nights. He'd given up thinking Mad would do it.

CHAPTER 32

It felt good to Will Hickox, wearing clothes that fit to walk through the Field Museum. His own clothes this time, Frank Ferraro finally satisfied Will wasn't taping after meeting three times in sweat pants God only knew who else had worn. The bodyguard gave him a good patting down, then left them to their regular tour. Frank occasionally pointed out something of interest, or stopped for closer examination.

Will had a nice time. He loved irony, and the truth was, it didn't matter anymore if Frank stripped him down. Ben Borowski knew a guy at Homeland Security, who knew a guy at an agency he refused to name. The nameless agency had a cadre of electronically gifted civil servants who needed to field test gadgets they devised for the never-ending struggle to keep America safe from incriminating conversation.

Frank took Will's watch the first time they met, never again, even when he still made him wear the sweats. Will asked about it their last get-together, watching kids play while he held up his pants.

"I see guys at the airport, carrying those laptop computers," Frank said. "The guards don't even make them turn them on. Same thing with cameras. If they're not worried about something that size pulling double duty, your watch isn't going to send me away."

The random naïveté of criminals a constant source of amusement to Will. Walking back from a meeting a few years ago—still in the old building 219 South Dearborn—he saw two agents from the bank robbery squad complaining about not having enough for an arrest; they needed a confession. The robber was a vicious guy, added injury to injury by beating people up while he waited for the money, his partner covering the teller. Liked to show his contempt by spitting on the threshold of the bank on his way out.

Will asked if he could have a try. Went in, said he had a DNA match from all the spitting. Which was bullshit, they couldn't identify one glob of spit among the other shit on the floor, and they had no control sample of the guy's DNA in the first place.

Will made a show of running his hands over the suspect's forearms when they brought him in, then cleaned his hands with a sanitary wipe, the kind

of thing KFC passes out for the goodness you can't quite lick off your finger. Handed the used wipe to another agent, mumbled something the robber couldn't hear, sent the agent on his way. Pretended to interrogate the guy for half an hour or so until the other agent came back and mumbled something the suspect couldn't hear. Then he handed Will a yellow copy of some form that printed its own duplicates, like hospitals and medical labs used.

Will scanned the form and smiled. "It's time you stopped bullshitting me." He held up the paper, too quick to see what was on it. "This proves you're the guy. You see me wipe my hands after I touched you? They got your skin cells off that wipe. Perfect DNA match with the spit at the banks." Which they didn't have, either.

The crook watched enough TV to make a go of it. "Bullshit yourself. Your skin would be all over that wipe."

"True," Will said. "But they have my DNA on file, for elimination. And," he said, rubbing his hands together, "the old man you beat up at the job on LaSalle died. That makes it felony murder and a hot shot." This while the old man in question sat patiently in the line-up room to identify the robber.

"I want a lawyer right now," the crook said. "You didn't tell me the old man died. I mean, he looked pretty healthy. I never meant to kill nobody." Will loved telling the story of how he got a confession out of a hand sanitizer and a trip ticket from the cable company.

Frank Ferraro was smarter than that, though his education was still mostly street. It never occurred to him Ben's friend's friend could get Will a watch with a microphone built into the pin that held the face to the band. The antenna woven into the band itself could broadcast half a mile in good conditions. It drew power from the watch battery and had more than enough range to reach the van in the parking lot.

Will expected a pleasant meeting. Frank's electronics team had found the wire Satriale planted in the Mannheim Hunt Club, making Will a valued member of the team. So he got to keep his clothes.

"I might have something on Junior for you next week," Will said. "I'm not on that unit, but we share. I get anything you can use, I'll send you an email."

“He’s a pain in my balls,” Frank said. “Thinks he’s the Crown Prince, inherits whatever he wants. Sends a couple amateurs to kill Vinnie and they ice some kid shoulda been in school. Then he drops the shooters on the restaurant’s steps like a cat with a dead bird, thinks that ends it. And he wants to run things. It’d be funny if it wasn’t so fucked up.”

“I’m not going to lie to you, Frank. The FBI’s job is to put the Outfit out of business.” They stopped walking so Frank could read the placard for a crow. “You and I both know that’s not going to happen. Even if it did, someone would step up. Russians, Mexicans, Jamaicans, whoever. At least you have a clue how to run it like a business. The Russians will eat Junior for lunch.”

“A lot of them Russians were KGB, right?”

“Some, sure. The others ran operations right under the secret police’s nose. They’re animals, but they know how to run a organization.”

“Yeah, well, they pass down what they learn. How it’s supposed to be. Look at that.” He pointed to a line drawing, comparing the crow’s pelvis to Sue’s. “Says dinosaurs were related to birds. Who the hell thinks of that stuff? Amazing.” He shook his head, started walking again.

“Junior’s problem is no one taught him anything worth knowing,” Frank said. “Gianni spread knowledge around like fish food, absolutely no more than you needed to do what he wanted. Now the kid knows as much as Gianni told him, which ain’t a hell of a lot.”

They walked through taxidermist’s heaven, birds stuffed in every posture. Eyes as lifelike as birds’ eyes could be. Frank stopped at a particularly eerie tern. “It’s a big mistake, letting our kids get involved in this. I’d a busted them up good, either of my boys even looked bent.”

Will had Frank on tape from years ago, talking about how bringing kids into the business was a New York thing. Something Genovese, Persico, and Gotti would do, looking down on Frank Calabrese and Gianni for bringing in their sons. Saying it was a New York thing meant bush league to Frank, the Chicago Outfit better than that.

“What about your dad, Frank? He was connected, wasn’t he?”

Frank turned to face Will, real fire in his eyes. “My old man was a douche bag. Best thing ever happened to me was when the Big Tuna whacked him.”

“Tony Accardo had your father killed?” News to Will. No secret about Frank’s dad getting clipped. No one knew Accardo ordered it. “And you worked for him, knowing that?”

“I didn’t know, like know for sure. Not right away. Didn’t matter. The best thing anyone ever did for me was kill that bastard.”

Will gave Frank all the time he wanted.

“My old man came home when he was in the mood. Gave my ma money when he had it, and felt like giving it to her. Didn’t mind coming home when he was broke, and didn’t want to hear any shit about it. Said if he had any cash he’d brought it. Except he never brought much home even when he did have some.

“I started pulling small jobs to help pay the bills. Told Ma I was working the back room of some grocery a few miles away because I knew she’d never go there. Started skipping school, got in with some other guys my age. Thought we were hard cases, fifteen-sixteen years old.

“One day Vinnie Agrigento and me—this was before we started calling him Vinnie Dominos—knocked over a liquor store. Vinnie got away, but I got pinched. Spent the night in jail because I wouldn’t call home. No point, right? The old man wouldn’t come for me, and I didn’t want to break my mother’s heart.”

The museum busy that day, school groups on field trips, college students, retirees. No one paid attention to two middle-aged men, the older dressed casually, younger in a suit.

“Next morning I’m kicked loose, no one says how, just ‘get the fuck out, kid, and don’t come back.’ Charges dropped, witness already said he made a mistake. I get outside and there’s Accardo, standing outside his car. Opens the door and says get in. He wants to know what the fuck I’m up to, fifteen years old, armed robbery. I tell him we need the money. He asks a few questions, but mostly he listens. We talk for half an hour or so, and he says he’ll have a word with my old man, but –” Frank paused and raised a finger, “– I have to go back to school, keep my nose clean.

“I tell him me and school come to a parting of the ways. They won’t take me now, even if I wanted to go. Thinking back, I can’t believe I told him that. Fifteen years old, about three hairs on my balls, telling Tony Accardo no. At least I called him Mr. Accardo.”

“What did he do?” Will felt like a historian getting things never committed to a letter or a diary straight from a president's mouth.

“He looked at me kind of funny for a few seconds, then he said okay. Told me to lay low for a couple a weeks, then go see Marshall Caifano. Tell him Tony sent me. Sounds corny, now. ‘Tony sent me.’ Then, it felt like getting the call to the big leagues right out of high school.”

“What about your father?”

“Accardo told me he’d explain family responsibilities to the old man. He was big on that, Accardo, never fooled around on his wife, made sure he was there for his kids. He knew most guys had broads on the side, that’s the way of the world, but families had to be taken care of. Not that he had a soft spot or anything. It was good business. A wife who’s not getting taken care of is more likely to talk out of school, and we couldn’t have that.”

“But he had him clipped instead?”

Frank pursed his lips, shook his head. “No. He really did have that talk. I wish I had pictures of the old man when he got home after the Tuna sent for him. Did everything but kiss my bare ass for forgiveness. Brought everyone presents. New couch, bigger television. Lasted about six weeks. Then he started backsliding. Home less, less money when he did come home. Then one day he didn't. Couple city workers found him in the trunk of his car with his pockets turned out. Deadbeat. Except he never missed a payment to the Outfit, always kicked up his share. Word got around about how Tony expected guys to take care of their families.” Frank chuckled under his breath, a sound no one would want to hear in a tight spot. “They found my old man November twenty-seventh. Lot of families had good Christmases that year.”

Will stopped walking, genuinely confused, touched Frank’s arm to stop. Gently. “You drove Accardo for years. People said no one was closer to him than you. And he had your father killed.”

“Like I said, my father was a douche bag. Only reason I don’t piss on his grave is out of respect for my grandmother, may she rest in peace. She loved him till the day she died, even knowing what a bum he was. Her little boy.” Frank made a short and sloppy sign of the cross, his hand moving no more than three inches from where it started. “Everything I learned worth knowing I learned from Tony Accardo. Without him, with my old man to raise me, I’d a pulled a hard twenty before I was twenty. Tony Accardo

made me what I am today. The only thing my old man did right was being such a fuck up that Accardo took notice. I hope he's burning in hell."

No anger in Frank's voice. The bitterness so deep in him now, he accepted it the way people didn't think twice about having brown eyes, or whether their second toe was longer than their big toe. Will had talked to more hoods than he could remember, from bosses to soldiers to wanna-bes who never got closer to being made than watching Goodfellas. He'd never heard a story like that before; he had no doubt it was true.

And it was all on tape. Along with everything else Frank Ferraro said that day, including acknowledging the extra money in the envelope, and a couple of random comments that would fit nicely into the jigsaw puzzle of RICO predicates a skillful prosecutor could build. Possibly even Jarod Goodfriend. Operation Fallout was back in business.

CHAPTER 33

Ben Borowski had the blues.

“You gonna tell us what’s up, or not?” Will tipped back his chair, heels on the desk. Eleven o’clock, and Ben hadn’t said ten words all day. Will had mixed emotions about drawing Ben out. Most days he’d be thinking up a fake call to get him out of the office, shut him up for a few minutes. “What happened? One of the dancers at Heavenly Bodies say you looked like her dad?”

The look from Ben stopped Will rocking his chair. He suppressed most of a grin, gave anyone in the office who wanted to listen time to gather. “Come on, Benny. Out with it. You know we’re not going to let it rest until you tell us.”

Ben glanced around the room, saw the usual suspects. Amanda Dalrymple. Fa, already turning a chair around so he could lean on the back to listen. Couple of guys from the Sal Enna team, in to compare notes. Will waved to Mike Satriale, on the phone in his office. Satriale ignored him, already in an animated discussion. Will extended his right arm in Ben's direction, wagged three fingers toward himself.

“Last night’s my night to take Shannon to dinner, right?” Ben divorced a year; his four-year-old daughter lived with the ex. “We go to Fuddruckers so she can mutilate her food and eat half an ounce of meat. Her mother’s on a vegetarian jag this month and it’ll piss her off when she hears where we went. So we walk out and there’s this Starbucks across the street, and Shannon wants one of those cookie things—what do they call them?—biscottis? Something like that. I think they taste like stale bread, but she loves them. I say, fine, I’ll get a hot chocolate, get her some milk to wash the thing down. We’ll be ten minutes late getting home. Not a crisis.”

“Why’d you get hot chocolate?” Fa said. “It was eighty degrees yesterday.”

“What else am I going to get? Coffee’s just as hot.”

“Iced coffee, Ben.” Amanda tilted her head, made a “yummy” face. “That iced shaken coffee is to die for.”

“Or iced tea, even,” Fa said.

“Or pop.” Will enjoyed having help to agitate Ben. Amanda and Fa were working out just fine. “Don’t they sell pop there?”

Ben faced all three for a second each, not sure where to start. He chose Will. “Not like you mean. They have stuff they call pop, but it’s not like anything I ever drank. I like hot chocolate, okay? If it makes you feel any better, let’s say I had an iced tea. Now can I tell the story you couldn’t live without?”

“Iced tea and biscotti?” Fa learned fast. “You serious?”

“I’m not eating the fucking biscotti. Shannon is. I’m just getting something to—”

“You’re not going to eat anything?” Will said.

“I just ate at Fuddruckers. Do you want to hear the story or don’t you?”

“Yes, we want to hear the story,” Will said. “You’re just doing a shitty job telling it, is all.”

Ben waited for quiet, checked every face in turn. The two agents from the Enna squad stood against the wall with semi-suppressed smiles. Ben’s stories were legend, especially with Will to disrupt them.

“We’re in there, Shannon’s eating her cookie—with some cold, white, whole, Vitamin D milk,” Ben said, glaring at Will when it looked like he might interrupt. “I’m drinking my hot chocolate—I mean iced tea—and this little girl from the next table starts talking to Shannon. I don’t pay much attention—it’s two little girls, they’re getting along—then the mother turns around to see what the kids are up to, and she’s hot. Long, black hair, beautiful face, pouty lips, nice, snug sweater over a great rack. I’m thinking she might be a little young, then I’m thinking she’s old enough to have a kid the same age as mine, what the hell?”

“I start talking to her, work it around so she knows I’m with the Bureau—nice, stable, profession, background check already done—and I find out she works at Hooters on Wells Street. I start to say she’s perfect for it, but I catch myself in time.” This spoken to Amanda, who nodded approval.

“Turns out she’s seen me in there, recognizes me once we get to talking.”

“She should,” Fa said. “You’re probably there more than she is.”

Everyone laughed but Ben. “So we talk. She’s a graduate student at DePaul, English Literature or English History. English something, I don’t remember.”

“I bet you’d remember if it was written on her sweater,” Amanda said. More laughter. Amanda blushed like a kid saying something clever her first time at the grown-up table for Thanksgiving. Ben started to weaken. He was in trouble if even Amanda could tee him up.

“So I ask what she’s doing in Starbucks, and she says she’s waiting for her mother so mom can sit the rug rat while Shelley—that’s the young mother’s name, Shelley—goes to work.”

“Thanks, Ben,” Will said. “I was about to offer twenty bucks if you could remember her name.”

Ben flashed him the finger. “Just then grandma walks in. Nice looking woman. I guess she would be, with a daughter who looks like this girl I’m talking to. We get introduced, and I’m thinking this is great. I get a chance to be nice to Mom, show some respect, this is moving right along.”

Ben stopped, tasted some of his cold, not iced, coffee. Blew his nose. Tied a shoe. Then the other one.

Will said, “Ben.”

Ben said, “So Grandma looks at me kind of funny, and says, ‘Ben Borowski? Are you with the FBI?’ And I’m thinking, sweet, somehow she knows I’m a respected law enforcement professional—” loud coughing from the audience, including the two visitors “—this can’t help but be a good thing. So I say, ‘Yes, that would be me,’ and Grandma says, ‘You don’t recognize me, do you? You took me to my sorority dance at Northwestern when Danny Connolly got sick at the last minute. We were both juniors.’”

The room erupted. Agents came from other rooms to see what all the noise was about, stood with confused faces while Ben’s audience wiped tears from their eyes.

“I tell you,” Ben said, “if that’s not a dick shriveler, nothing is.”

More laughter. Satriale stuck his head out of his office, waited for things to quiet. Pointed to Will and gestured for him to come in. He started before Will warmed the seat.

“That was first-rate work with Frank Ferraro. Excellent, really. Getting him to trust you, recording it like that. I’m putting you in for a commendation.”

Will nodded his thanks. Satriale expected first-rate work. He rarely went out of his way to compliment someone one-on-one.

Satriale looked at papers on his desk while he spoke. “Keep after him, see what you can get. We’ll work the other warrants until they expire.”

Silence in the room until Will realized it was his turn. “Until they expire? No renewals?”

Satriale’s voice was flat. “I just got off the phone with Flanagan. Fallout is over. He wants us to start working on the indictments.”

Will felt the slow boil start. “That’s it?”

“About half our resources will be assigned to counterterrorism. It’s up to me who stays and who goes. You and Ben are safe. I’m trying to keep Amanda and Fa, but I need to keep people on every team.” He caught Will’s eye for a second, didn’t hold the look when he spoke. “I’m sorry, Will.”

“You know we’re not ready, right?” Will still mostly cool, proud of himself for it. “I mean, I know you know. Do they know?”

“They’ve been told. What we have here is a—” Satriale consulted his notes, “a—re-assessment of priorities.”

Will ran a hand through his hair. Private sector jobs he’d turned down made random appearances in his mind. “There hasn’t been a counterterrorism arrest in Chicago since Padilla.”

“Probably due to a lack of investigative resources.” Satriale put up a hand. “That’s what they said when I mentioned it.”

“I should have known that fucker Flanagan would pull something like this. Goddamn career builder.”

“To be fair to Flanagan, I think this came straight from SOG. He bought us some time when he went to those meetings a while back. I guess he didn’t convince anyone who drew enough water to make a difference.”

Will sat, numb. Looked into a high corner of the room like a plan might be hidden there.

Satriale kept his back to the picture wall. “I’m calling an all hands in fifteen minutes, before people start leaving for lunch. I wanted you to hear it first.”

Will mumbled something he hoped sounded like, “Thanks.” There was a time when Satriale could have gone to his superiors in the Bureau and made a case to keep Fallout alive. The FBI virtually an autonomous branch of government when Hoover ran it, reported only to the Attorney General. Or the President. Or not, if he didn’t feel like it. Then Hoover died and DOJ lifers he had the goods on were free to cut their pounds of flesh from the

remaining agents. The dynamic changed forever. Now it was Keep an eye on those FBI assholes. They talk the talk, but they do what they want and bring you what they feel like prosecuting. Now the Department kept everyone on the same page, even if it was blank.

Will didn't stay for the meeting. He called Mad for a lunch date, so she could talk him down. This was not the time for Wild Bill to make an appearance.

CHAPTER 34

Mitch Klimak positioned his face to catch the sun through the car's open window in the parking lot at 2111 West Roosevelt. Parked where he could see the front door, he'd be shit out of luck if Will Hickox left another way. This was a one man operation until Mitch had more to go on.

It took Pete Taylor the car thief a couple of days to find out Frank Ferraro supposedly owned a relatively senior Fed. Possibly Will Hickox, though his reputation argued against it. Hard to pin down because Taylor was working the grapevine, rumors and hearsay and things misheard in the first place repeated inaccurately.

Mitch chose to sit on Hickox because he wanted it to be him. Take down the most prominent feeb, they'd all lose some of that attitude for a while. Hickox spent more time with members of the Outfit than every other agent combined, unless they had one undercover. His snitches talked to him alone. No one thought twice about it.

Hickox came out at 11:20. Kicked something on the sidewalk, went to what must be his personal vehicle; the G didn't hand out Saabs, even to special agents whose shit didn't stink. Mitch slid a hand in front of his face as Hickox drove by. Waited until he cleared the parking lot and followed.

He almost lost contact when Hickox made an immediate left on Damen. Stayed on Damen under the Ike, then right on Warren, north on Ashland. Mitch laid back as far as he dared, no idea where they were going. Hickox seemed unconcerned about a tail, stayed on Ashland over the Kennedy and the river, turned left on Fullerton. Didn't slow down, speed up, push any lights. Crossed the Kennedy, right on California, crossed the Kennedy again. Maybe a little more careful than Mitch originally thought. Took California almost to the end, right on Montrose, left on Ravenswood, left again at the El station. Left on Damen, past Budacki's hot dog joint, right on Seeley. At Giddings Mitch had to pull directly behind him at the stop sign before Hickox turned right onto Damen again. Looking for a place to park, maybe. Traffic heavy enough to keep Mitch closer than he liked. Lost him when he turned left on Leland and a truck cut Mitch off. Took ten minutes to find the Saab where Winchester dead-ended. Empty.

Hickox had to come back for the car sooner or later. Mitch might be missing what he spent all morning hoping to see, but nothing could be done about that. Time to make the best of it, and a dog and fries from Budacki's would make the wait easier, even if it meant leaving the Saab unattended for ten or fifteen minutes. Such is life; if he lost him, he lost him. No point wasting the whole day on this asshole.

CHAPTER 35

Will shook his head, turned right on Damen, walking to Budacki's. Driving from the Bureau office on Roosevelt was a straight shot north on Damen. He'd made enough turns to give the GPS voice a stutter, so used to looking for tails, protecting his informants, he couldn't bring himself to drive a straight line, even to the Jewel for groceries. Only car seemed out of the ordinary a Chevy Caprice he might have seen more than once. Something a plainclothes cop would drive, but he wasn't even sure it was the same one. Not that a cop would have reason to follow him. If it even was a cop. Or if it was following him. Goddamn job was driving him crazy.

Mad had latched onto one of the few tables in Budacki's, around the side from the counter. Will gave her a kiss and ordered a couple of dogs, two Cokes—diet for Mad, a real one for him—and a half pound of fries. Not that he was that hungry; fries at Budacki's came in half-pound increments. The menu promised no trans fats were used in cooking the pommes frites. Will wondered about that as he watched them dump the fries into the bag, decided not to worry about it. That's what statins were for.

He wanted to ease into telling her; Mad knew him too well to let him get away with it. Waited only long enough to get their food set out before she asked. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Do I have to have bad news to want to see you for lunch?"

Mad bit into her dog, shook her head as she chewed. "Uh-uh. Rule Twenty-Seven: only the woman can say 'nothing' when the other half asks what's wrong. I'm glad to see you for lunch, but that's not why you called."

Will took a big enough bite of his dog to buy time to appreciate what a perfect partner Mad was. Six foot, blue-eyed redheads weren't the answer to all a man's problems, but they were as good a place as any to start looking. This one was funny, she knew everything to know about him and still loved him. And she was too smart to try to bullshit.

"They're shutting down Fallout. Mike got the word an hour ago."

"Oh, Will, I'm sorry." Mad reached out a hand, entwined her fingers in his. "I know what that meant to you. What happened?"

"Careers are easier to make in counterterrorism than in OC. Never mind that terrorism is a form of organized crime."

He stopped himself before Mad had to. She knew which buttons to push to make him shut up but not feel chided. Her patience would be tested today, tomorrow, over the next several weeks. No point wearing her down right off the bat.

Mad said, "How much time do you have?"

"It'll take weeks to shut everything down. Two, probably closer to three months, anyway. Everything we have warrants for will be monitored until the warrants expire. Following up grand jury leads could take another year. Then we'll have a ton of paperwork, since Jarod couldn't write a decent indictment if the suspect confessed in the grand jury room. Not that any of it will matter."

"Why not?"

"They'll walk. We'll piece off a few associates, maybe a made guy or two. Junior will walk. All the street bosses. The original plan was to get Gianni, then Frank Ferraro. Gianni's dead. We might be able to get to Frank through those payoffs, but I don't know if it'll hold up as a predicate act. It's him, alone. Plus, this goddamn war hurts a lot of the RICO contentions."

"Because the police shut them down for a few weeks? That's already letting up."

Will sucked through the ice in his Coke. "It's going to be a lot harder to convince a jury that Frank and Junior are in the same criminal conspiracy when they're shooting at each other every couple of days."

"Then you'll have to lower your expectations. Take what you wanted to use for predicates and try to get case-by-case convictions." Mad's brow pulled together when she thought, the red eyebrows seeming to grow up from the edge of her nose. "Can you use the same acts as principal offenses and RICO predicates?"

"Maybe. I don't know." Will sucked on the straw, got bits of chipped ice into his mouth. Shook the cup to try again. "Flanagan's our best shot, if he'll take the case himself. He might be able to talk the grand jury into it. That little putz Goodfriend couldn't talk a hooker off a corner. It's just, if I thought they were going to screw the pooch like this, I would've taken one of those jobs I keep turning down. You and I could be out of here already. No one wants me right now."

“Wrong, G-man.” Mad covered Will's free hand with both of hers. “I want you. You'll get more offers. And we can always go into business for ourselves. Hickox and Hickox, Investigative Consultants. Now let me get you a refill before you suck the bottom of the cup into your mouth and choke on it.” Already halfway to her feet when she took the cup.

Will turned his head as she passed, looked back to his food when she went by. Mad told him over and over about Irish bad luck, watching someone leave, even if you knew they'd be right back. Will always afraid she'd never be back every time they parted. Nothing about her; he trusted Mad more than he'd trusted anyone in his life, more than even his mother. Things happened, was all. No one ever really knew anything, not for sure.

* * *

What happened to Mad was, she turned the corner at Budacki's—head down, taking the lid off Will's drink—and walked into Mitch paying for his food. They stared at each other a few seconds while their minds fitted the familiar face into the unexpected background.

Mitch said, “Mad,” and she dropped Will's cup to the floor, spraying ice over both their feet. Did it on purpose when she felt the blush come. The fear and shame of seeing Mitch unexpectedly, so close to Will—all her husband had to do was look around the corner to see her lover with an extra meal in front of him—brought a flush to her face before she could react. She had a good story ready before she stood up. True, even, if he didn't press her. The dropped cup created a mild scene in the busy restaurant to account for what was left of her blush.

“Mitch!” She said it louder than she needed to so Will could get to the men's, or a back door—if Budacki's even had one—in case he'd decided to follow her for ketchup or more napkins. “I'm sorry. Stand still. I'll brush the ice off your shoe.” Keeping her head down, letting some of the blood run from her face.

“Leave it alone,” Mitch said. “Those shoes have seen worse. What are you doing here? You working?”

Mad stood, presented the cup to the server, who filled a clean one with ice. “Diet Coke, please.” Then, to Mitch, “Depositions. For that case with the dry cleaner. You know, selling the clothes and saying they were already

picked up. The lawyer's office is on Lawrence." She made it sound right around the corner when it was three-quarters of a mile away.

"You here by yourself?" Mitch said.

Oh, shit, don't let him invite himself to join me! "With the lawyer's secretary. This young guy, really nice, but too gay for words. Said he'd always wanted to eat here, but only if someone big came in with him." Still true, more or less. The secretary was small and gay. She prayed Mitch's homophobia hadn't gone into remission.

Mitch let his face convey his opinion of the company she kept. "I gotta go. I'm working. You home tonight?"

Mad took the full cup of Diet Coke, thanked the server. "Sure, this is all I have today. There's something new on my desk, but it'll wait for tomorrow."

"All right," Mitch said, and left.

* * *

Will took a sip, made a face. "What's this, Diet Coke?"

"Drink it," Mad said. "Mitch was standing at the counter. I had to pretend it was mine."

"Oh, shit," Will said, and meant it. The first close call in five years with Mad. It had to happen sooner or later. Even in a city the size of Chicago, law enforcement knew the same places, especially sharing a field like organized crime. "Christ, Mad, I'm sorry. This could have waited."

"No, it couldn't. You would've gone all Wild Bill if you stayed in the office. Wouldn't you? Come on..."

Only Mad could call him Wild Bill and not get a reaction. He watched her look at him, eyes almost comically blue. No one had eyes that color, except Mad. He saw it now, the fine line between dedication and selfishness, how things he rationalized as professionalism affected those with nothing to gain by his accomplishments. She never complained, not really. Pointed out once in a while how he didn't have to wait, she'd live anywhere with him, change jobs if she had to. Whatever it took.

"I'm not afraid of Mitch, you know," she said, anticipating his thoughts. "I'm more worried about what he could do to your career. I can take care of myself."

“I know you can. You shouldn’t have to. Not for as long as I’ve made you do it.”

“Take it easy, G-man. You never make me do anything.” A flirty wink. “Well, there was the thing we did that weekend in Vegas, but I’d always been kind of curious, anyway.” She let his smile linger a few seconds. Probably waiting for his undivided attention, knowing the weekend in Vegas would distract him.

“I’m exactly where I want to be. I could’ve left Mitch any time, but he was a good father, in his way. He loves our boys. So I stayed. Then the boys grew up and I could’ve moved out, but you and I were together then, and I didn’t need Mitch roaming free to harass us. At least while we’re married, I know pretty much where he is.”

Will pointed over his shoulder toward the counter. “You think that was a coincidence?”

She sipped her drink, nodded. “He looked as surprised as I was. He has that poker face, but you learn a few things living with someone over twenty years.”

It took a few seconds for Will to say what was on his mind. “Okay, if you’re comfortable with it. Just so you know, I have some decisions to make, and—”

Mad was tall enough to reach across the table, press a finger to Will’s lips. “And none of them need to be made today. You’re as practical and level-headed as any man I know, Will Hickox. Just not right away. Take your time. See how things go. It might not be as bad as you think.”

It probably wasn’t. The longer Will talked to Mad, the less bad it seemed. Not better; less bad. Not like two hours ago, laughing about Ben Borowski’s shriveling dick. It would never be like that again. Accommodations would have to be made.

CHAPTER 36

Willard Nathaniel Hickox resented neither of his namesake grandfathers. Nat Hickox died before Will was born, forty-five years old, lungs as black as the coal he mined for twenty-nine years. Hard anthracite coal, backbreaking work in the part of northeastern Pennsylvania where beautiful Pocono forests gave way to thickets of bleak towns that popped up around the mines. Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, Pottsville. Carbon County named after it, where anthracite was discovered. Grandma Hickox told Will about Nat's life, the old woman a walking oral history of local coal mining back to the time of the Molly Maguires. Will used to wonder what it was like before them, bad as Grandma described things after.

Having Nathaniel as a middle name spared young Will ever having to answer to it. His maternal grandfather saved him from being called Willard, made him proud to be Little Will. Big Will Palahniuk walked a beat in Scranton until he was sixty-five, swinging a nightstick against his leg and taking a free apple every day from Schertzinger's Grocery because Fritzie Schertzinger thought it kept up his beat cop's image. Big Will sometimes parked his grandson on a corner while he walked patrol, his beat as tough as any in Scranton. Knew the grapevine would protect the boy better than a shotgun. Taught Will never to fear a situation under control. Big Will lasted forty-two years as a cop, never fired his gun; drew it twice. Sent many a hell-raiser to Mercy Hospital with the nightstick. Added a notch every time he used it instead of his gun.

Little Will wanted to be police when all his friends' dreams had moved on from cop and fireman to baseball player and rock musician. Waited with mixed emotions as Big Will's retirement approached, not sure which was better: going downtown to hang with the old man, or having more time to talk with him when he finally hung the nightstick over the coat hook in the hall for the last time. He wept bitterly, not knowing why his heart didn't break, when Big Will died two months later, never finding the peace in retirement he'd found on his beat. Will was seventeen.

Big Will lasted long enough to teach his grandson that the beat cop polishing stray apples was a thing of the past. Police patrolled in cars, and too many of them saw the inhabitants of their beats as potential perpetrators

instead of friends who'd watch your back if you watched theirs. "If you're going to be a cop, be one where you can work something that belongs to you and make sure it comes out right," Big Will told him a week before the stroke took him in his sleep.

Will met Sheila at Penn State, married her as soon as the Bureau released him from training at Quantico. They sent him to Los Angeles, the Bank Robbery Capital of the World. The need for agents there so great a newbie could get a glamorous posting right out of the chute, so long as he didn't ask for it.

He sifted evidence and sat stakeouts for eight months, made a couple of arrests. He was celebrating the closing of a case the night Sheila died driving into town to meet him. His supervisor had more robberies than agents to work them, said staying busy would be the best way to get over it. Will didn't disagree. He knew he was good and wanted to be better. He'd work with anyone, learned what not to do from lesser agents as quickly as he learned better techniques from the others. He and the boss were wrong about one thing: the work didn't get him over Sheila. He developed a "what the hell" attitude. Not suicidal; not thinking much of consequences, either.

No one but him noticed it until the day he and Kenny Dignam cruised Wilshire Boulevard trolling for the Milquetoast Bandit. So many bank robbers in LA, agents gave the regulars nicknames to tell them apart. Milquetoast the most unassuming bank robber in the world. Practically begged for the money. Weak voice, small build, "either a queer or a librarian," according to Kenny. Still, he used a gun to take money. Queers and librarians could be felons, too, if they put their minds to it.

Profiling in its infancy then, but cops knew about patterns. Educated guesses were made that Milquetoast would score somewhere in Century City that week. LAPD was to forward any bank alarms in the vicinity. Will and Kenny drove a random route close by and would try to get Milquetoast before he left the scene.

The call came at 2:47. Dumb luck the bank was two blocks away. Kenny didn't even use the siren, just pulled up outside and left the car at the curb. The two agents waited in the bank's vestibule to escape hundred-degree heat. Milquetoast had to walk past on his way out. Each would take an elbow, walk him to the car. Case closed.

He and Kenny were positioning themselves on either side of the vestibule when a man standing inside the bank wearing a balaclava leveled a shotgun at them. Kenny said, “Oh, shit,” and stepped back into the street to call for help. Exactly what he was supposed to do. Even the “Oh, shit.” So his partner would know something was up.

Will heard Kenny, saw the pump gun, threw himself to the floor and rolled before glass exploded all around. Adrenaline and twenty-seven-year-old reflexes drew his weapon and fired three rounds before the robber could jack another shell into the chamber.

Pandemonium. Men and women screaming, bank employees ducking, customers on the floor. Another hooded robber came out from the manager’s office carrying either an AR-15 or an M-16. Will shot him twice before it made a difference.

It looked like he’d stumbled onto a prominent bank invasion crew—Space Invaders, the agents called them—serious badasses. Put half a dozen people in the hospital already. Any advantage from surprise gone, a hostage situation if he left. With two down, there should be two more. What’s the worst that can happen? he thought, and went in.

He should have died right there. Another hooded man stood on Will’s side of the bulletproof glass, bag of money in one hand, handgun in the other. Will turned the corner and there he was, so close Will could see the lands and grooves in the barrel of the gun.

“Please don’t shoot me,” the robber said.

“Drop the gun,” Will said. The crook dropped the bag of money instead and Will shot him.

One man to go. At least one round left. Maybe as many as three; he lost count shooting the second man. Moved in combat posture, whispering to customers Stay down, asking about the other robber. Will turned an angle in the tellers’ windows and saw him standing at the end of the row. They locked eyes for a second and the robber laid his assault rifle on the deck, raised his hands.

“You got me, Dirty Harry. It’s just money. Shit ain’t worth dying over.”

The Bureau would liked to have fired Will for that adventure, but he was a hero. What they did was give him a medal and banish him to stakeouts and protection duty, hammering down the nail that stuck up. That’s why he was sitting in a car five months later with Walter Briscoe, watching people

not come or go from a house in Encino. A fugitive someone thought he saw on “America’s Most Wanted” might be in there.

At dusk a car pulled up and a guy who looked a lot like the face on the flyer got out. Briscoe ready to make the call—had his hand on the microphone—when the subject reached across the seat and dragged out a young woman, pushed her into the house.

Briscoe keyed the mike. Will pushed his thumb away, asked what he was doing.

“Calling it in. We got a hostage situation in there.”

“Not until we surround the place and he goes barricade, we don’t. Give me a minute.” Briscoe stared like Will was unzipping his face, but he didn’t make the call.

Will looked both ways in the street and the luck that saved him in the bank came by in the form of a pizza delivery man, driving too fast up a residential street, back in the days when your pizza was free if you didn’t get it in half an hour. Will stepped into the middle of the street, held out his badge and gun for the driver to see, never flinched when the brakes screamed and smoked.

“What the fuck are you doing?” the driver said.

“FBI. You got any pizzas in there?”

“Yeah. Can’t you Feds eat doughnuts like every other cop?”

“This is an emergency. I need your car.” Will opened the driver’s door.

“Is this like in *The French Connection*?” the kid said.

“Yeah, something like that.”

“Bitchin’. Here, dude, you better take my hat and vest. You don’t look like no pizza man I ever seen in that blue suit.”

Will ditched his coat and tie, put on the stupid hat and allegedly one-size-fits-all vest. Dumped a pizza out of its carrier, slid his gun in its place, drove into the driveway and parked blocking the car.

The suspect opened the door on Will’s second ring. “I didn’t order no fucking pizza.”

“This is 2853, isn’t it?” Will tapped the metal numbers nailed to the door frame with his right hand, the insulated delivery bag’s flap already up.

“Someone here owes me thirteen bucks.”

“I told you, I just got here. Now clear out.”

“You eat yet?” Will said. “This pizza’s hot.”

A sound came from inside—the girl, maybe—and the suspect turned. Not much, but who thinks of the pizza guy as a threat? Will slid his hand inside the bag and had his gun under the guy's chin before he turned his head back.

The Bureau couldn't fire him that time, either, but the LA Field Office wasn't putting up with any more of that shit. He requested Philadelphia—Sheila was buried in Wilkes-Barre—so they banished him to Chicago.

First day, Will presented his records jacket to the SAC. “Oh, yes, I heard about you. Wild Bill Hickox. We have plans for you here in Chicago, Special Agent Hickox. You'll never need to pull a weapon again. This is not LA.”

They put him in a van, monitoring wiretaps, helping with transcriptions. He loved it. His grandfather told him to find something he could stick with, and if investigating organized crime in Chicago wasn't a long-term gig, nothing was. Will learned how snippets of information on one tape fit with a random sentence from another. Listened to other squads' tapes on his own time, looking for relationships. Moved into informant recruitment, his detailed knowledge of all things Outfit making the sources trust him more and quicker than anyone else. Even used his pizza delivery connection with Vinnie Dominos, kindred spirits working opposite sides of the street. Other special agents only dreamed of Will's contacts. The annual class he taught at Quantico never had an empty seat.

That didn't mean Wild Bill was gone. Hidden, controlled, the personality traits that created him held in remission, not dead. Mad knew, and kept Mitch's worst transgressions from him. Not afraid for herself; certainly not for Mitch. Scared for what form Will's what-the-hell attitude might take if he felt the need to protect her.

She had no idea.

CHAPTER 37

Will drove straight down Damen going back to 2111 West Roosevelt. His usual pattern didn't include being evasive when returning from a meet; he didn't want to change now just because Mitch Klimak might be following him.

The guy in the Caprice was good. No surprise if it was Klimak; he had to be good for anyone to put up with him. Will doubted someone with less experience would notice the tail. Hell, he wouldn't have noticed if not for the near-miss at Budacki's. The Caprice stayed back, closed only enough before a light to ease through when it had to. Will made it easy for him. Stopped at all yellows. Did everything he could to lull the other driver to sleep. He had seven miles to shake him if he wanted.

Mad was right again. Will made good decisions, not right away. He needed to step back, let things play out until he saw where he stood, then decide. He'd learned to do that, to wait, long nights with a thermos of coffee and earphones, peeing into empty Gatorade bottles, listening to conversations between virtual illiterates discussing everything from food to gambling to pussy, hoping for five minutes of incriminating conversation. Plenty of time to think, to accustom himself to the rhythms of working organized crime, where investigations were measured in quality of arrests and numbers of years of preparation. Geologic time, compared to what Big Will dealt with on Scranton's streets.

So he waited. And Mad waited. Five years now, ready to leave on a word. Will knew she wasn't afraid of Mitch. She'd kicked his ass once before, she'd face him down again if she had to. It was the idea of Mitch looking over their shoulders that dogged them both, never knowing when he'd pop up to jag them. A jab here, a comment there, enough to let them know he was still around and couldn't be ignored. The kind of guy who'd leave a rabbit boiling on the stove for a joke.

Wasting Mad's life the worst of it. Will's ego didn't keep him from admitting she was smarter. She could have been as good an investigator as he if she hadn't preferred to be a better mother. They'd do well in business together; their abilities and interests dovetailed perfectly. Chicago the easiest place to start, where they knew everyone and everything, but their

skills would transfer. Will was known and liked throughout the Bureau, the supervisors who hung the Wild Bill moniker on him long since retired. His frequent trips to Quantico gave him contacts everywhere there was law enforcement, not just in the United States. Mad would have her own learning curve, but people liked and trusted her. Will's name on the license would bring business in; Mad's personality and work ethic would keep and build it.

He crossed Diversey, the Caprice still behind him. Not close enough to get the plates or see the driver's face. Will assumed it was Mitch now. No harm done if he was wrong. Twice as much to worry about if he was right. Running into him during a meet with Frank Ferraro could queer that deal, too. Will knew he could lose him; he'd aced the evasive driving course at Quantico. Let him be for now.

Money would be a problem at first. Will's retirement a nice supplement; it wouldn't pay for much of a life, not if luxuries like his house and meals were included. Starting their own business, especially in another town, would take front money, and a lot more cash flow than they could expect to generate right away. Wait. Work some contacts. Get with Mad, decide on the city. Lay the groundwork.

Will pounded the steering wheel, cursed. The horn sounded twice, the car swerved left, then back as he regained control of his temper. He didn't want to wait. He'd waited for things his whole life. It went against his nature. Will could make himself wait if he had to; the key words were make and had to. Every time someone complimented him on his gift for delayed gratification he wanted to scream It's not patience, it's discipline! Circumstances made him wait to spend more time with his grandfather; Big Will died before he got more than a frustrating taste. He told Sheila new agents always got the shit schedules. Be patient, build up some time in service, then they could do what they wanted, not just what his schedule allowed. She died coming to him for some of the time his schedule allowed; he couldn't even meet her halfway.

Now Fallout. He hadn't stayed for the money. Not a money-driven person, why it hit him so hard right now, the first time in his life finances kept him from doing something. He stayed for the busts, to stand on the dais next to Mike Satriale while Flanagan read the press release. Frank Ferraro always the one he wanted, Will's white whale. The smartest hood in

the country, who only did his three years because someone he trusted intimately pulled life for trafficking and rolled over into Witness Protection.

Will wanted Ferraro, and he wanted Junior because he was a maniac, no better than some of those assholes shooting up civilians because they wore the wrong color jacket on the wrong street. He wanted to see the face of that sadistic prick Sal Enna when they brought his grill into court as evidence. Fire it up, drop on a burger or a brat, let the jury imagine a man's face or Rudy Czarnicki's pecker sizzling there.

All that was screwed now. The Caprice still behind him, crossing Grand, heavy traffic for mid-afternoon. Will could get Satriale to ask Obradovich why one of his boys was tailing a Federal officer. He would if he had to. No point showing rabbit ears too soon. This could be a casual exercise on Klimak's part, nothing to do with anything. Complaining might make him wonder why it bothered Will, the surest way to encourage a prick like him. He wasn't hurting anything back there. Yet.

The trials would still go on. And be lost. Fun in the arrests—Satriale would let Will do Frank—then watch them make bail in half an hour. Suitcases of cash delivered to bondsmen by Horse Face Ramirez or one of the other mouthpieces. A year later they'd swagger into court, mug for their paisans and make jokes only loud enough for the prosecutor and gallery to hear, not the judge. Then they'd walk out, maybe even skip putting on a defense if the judge wasn't satisfied with the predicate offenses.

If the RICO case even went to trial. It was flimsy without the background of the extra year or two of surveillance. The lawyers would motion them to death. Most mob lawyers in Chicago were former Federal prosecutors, including Horse Face. They knew the system top, bottom, inside, outside, and diagonally. The case could be gutted before it ever saw a jury.

Will moved over a lane, turned left onto Polk, lost Klimak in the traffic around Stroger Hospital without making it look like he'd done anything at all. Circled around on Harrison toward CPD's Area Four headquarters to be sure. Left on Western and came back to the office from the other side. Stayed only long enough to park the Saab and sign out an unmarked Crown Vic for Wild Bill's drive south.

Yee-haw.

CHAPTER 38

Hoosier Daddy's sat back from the west side of Calumet Avenue, south of 45th Street in Hammond. Not much else on the fringes of the industrial park except for truck depots, warehouses, and about a fifty bare breasts, no more than twenty of them factory equipment. Will drove without a map or directions, not because he frequented strip joints, but because he knew Junior Bevilacqua went there every Friday afternoon around two. Stayed until three, three-thirty—sometimes later—depending on whether he needed to “audition” a new dancer.

The State of Indiana listed Mario Guigio as sole proprietor. He signed the tax and license forms and might be able to find the place with a GPS; he hadn't been there in sixteen years. Sauce Ragusa ran Hoosier Daddy's. Strip joints perfect for disposing of cash earned through businesses less savory than naked women and friction dances. Not to mention the blow the dancers went through to stay thin and on the move. A slight buzz handy for getting up close and personal with the less attractive—and less hygienic—customers.

The doorman wore a tux, hair to the jaw line, and arms the size of hams. Will badged his way through the cover, asked where Junior was. Junior who? Don't know him. Haven't seen him. Will showed him the badge was Federal, not local, and the Incredible Hulk pointed to the VIP Lounge on the left. Had to turn his whole body to do it.

A waitress said something as Will went by, then a bouncer intercepted him in front of the beaded curtain separating the VIP Lounge from the main floor.

“I'm sorry, sir, there's a special charge for entering the VIP Lounge. Tiffany here can make all the arrangements for you.” He gestured to the waitress in white fishnets and teddy, a satin ribbon around her throat.

“Make a hole, or I'll have a special charge for you.” Will flashed the badge again. “It's not a raid. I just want to talk to him. No offense, Tiffany.”

Tiffany said, “None taken,” and the bouncer stepped aside. Will went through the curtain, eardrums pulsing with every bass drum note from the sound system. Saw Junior Bevilacqua in the opposite corner, his head rolled

back, eyes closed. A blonde wearing six-inch platform heels and a garter bobbed her head over his loosened pants.

Will tapped the girl on the shoulder as politely as he could and still get her attention. "Sorry, honey. Business calls. It's a freebie anyway, right?"

The girl rose with a start and Junior sat up like someone had taken a bite out of his genitals, which was entirely possible. "What the fuck are you doing!?"

"Sit down and put that away." Will looked at Junior as he zipped up. "I see the legend's true."

"Fuck you," Junior said. "You got no business coming in here hassling me."

"Do you know who I am?" Will leaning in so Junior could hear, the music loud enough to deafen a jet mechanic.

"Yeah. You're the Fed. Hick-cox." Junior held back the second syllable to make it a word of its own.

"That's the kind of quick thinking that's going to make you a crime legend. Explains a lot about why Frank Ferraro's kicking your ass. Buy me a drink."

"Get the fuck out."

"Junior." Will stood straight, fists on his hips. "Don't make me go wandering around looking for probable causes. Think of the upside for a change. I'm someone who wants to talk to you and might actually be able to help you."

Will didn't think Junior got all of that through the noise. He must have got enough to pique his curiosity. Finished putting away Little Junior and motioned for Will to follow him like it was his idea.

Junior drank scotch and water; Will had a Coke. Bartender a skinny guy, looked like a hype, zombie complexion and a collar that barely touched his neck. He placed Junior's drink neatly on a napkin, slid Will's to him with an empty inch of glass showing.

Will waited for the liquid to stop sloshing around and said, "Some of your staff has a better handle on customer satisfaction than others." Jerked a thumb toward the bartender, his head toward a blonde rubbing up against another bar patron. Business not bad for early in the day. A few sales types already into happy hour around the main stage, dancers drifting that way like sticks in a current, damming up around an obstruction.

“I was about to be a satisfied customer until you fucked it up. Tell me what you came for, or drink your Coke and get out. I don’t need no small talk.”

“And people say you don’t do witty repartee.” Will took a sip, toyed with the idea of having some fun with the “small talk” comment. “How goes the war?”

“Fuck you. You must be out of your fucking mind, you think I’m saying a fucking word to a fucking Federal officer about anything might be fucking illegal.”

Will let his eyes wander across the horseshoe bar to a tall, lean girl giving the brass pole on the main stage the thrill of its life. “Junior, please. I’m no prude, but five ‘fucks’ in, what, ten seconds? It’s excessive. I’m here to talk business. I’ll tell you what. I’ll even go first, put your mind at ease. I’m here to sell you my services.”

“Sell me what? Raffle tickets to the FOP dance?”

“I’m Federal, Junior. We don’t do FOP.” Will finished his drink, slid the glass across the bar for a refill. The bartender looked to Junior. Junior nodded and Will got a full glass this time.

“Don’t you have any better looking bartenders? The place is crawling with hot women.” Will pointed to the girl on the main stage, slithering on her belly to suck a dollar from between a salesman’s fingers. “And you a big shooter. He’s the best we can do?”

“You said you came to sell something. All you’ve done so far is bust balls.”

“I’m here to set ground rules. I’m willing to help, but we need to establish who’s on top here. You treat me right, maybe I’ll give you a reach around.”

The light of Junior’s intellect glowed dimly in his eyes. Will guessed no more than sixty watts. “Butch,” Junior said to the bartender, “trade with Carmen.”

“Fuck him, Mr. B,” Butch said. “I’m your regular guy.”

Junior reached across the bar, grabbed a handful of loose shirt front and twisted. “You’re my regular guy because you don’t give me any shit and you tell me what these goofy cunts are up to. Trade with Carmen before I make you sweat out a cure.”

Butch took his time getting Carmen. Will took a quick look along the bar, saw the blonde leading the other patron toward the lap dance area. “You don’t have to say. I know it’s not going so well.”

“You’re so smart, tell me how you know it’s not going so well. Not that it ain’t. Just your say so.”

“With you, it’s hard to know where to start.” Will slid his straw through a hole in an ice cube. Studied it. Ate it. Gave it his full concentration. No hurry. Junior had to earn his full attention. “How’s your new car? You get the glass replaced okay? Windshields are easy, places will do that wherever the car is. Windows are a pain. You got to take it in, they have to take the door apart, lot of work involved. You carry comprehensive on your car, or do Outfit members get special bullet hole coverage?”

Junior did a slow burn, slugged back the rest of his drink. Pushed the glass across the bar. Carmen not there yet, everything working for Will since he made this move. He took a full swallow and relished it to remind Junior he had no drink of his own. Will was good; Wild Bill was lucky. Lucky in the bank that day, lucky with the pizza delivery, and lucky with putting Junior in his place. Good is nice; lucky is sometimes better. Good and lucky can’t be beat.

“What happened to your other Caddy, the CTS? I heard it got pinched and came back all fucked up. I’ll bet that never happened to Tony Accardo or Carmine Aliquo. Or your old man. You think anyone ever stole Frank Ferraro’s car and got away with it?”

“Carmen!” Junior turned halfway toward Will, raised his hand. “What I got to do to get a drink, stick my tongue up that big ass of yours? Chivas and water.”

Carmen hurried to make the drink. Average height, brown hair done in a pile, held with a toothed clip. Wore the same uniform as Butch with no tie, her shirt open to show the swell of her breasts, and why she might be tending bar and not dancing. Will risked a peek when she reached for the scotch. Nothing wrong with her ass.

“It’s been a tough few months for you, I know,” Will said as though nothing had happened. “Two cars, and the counts must be way off, the way the locals cracked down after your boys clipped that kid. That was nice work. Where’d you find those guys? Unemployment office after The Sopranos shut down?”

Junior took the drink from Carmen before she had a chance to set it down. Waved off her apology. She moved far enough away to imply privacy, close enough to see when Junior needed a refill before he'd have a chance to ask.

Will kept talking. "Whose brilliant idea was it to drop the two hitters off for the police? I gotta tell you, Junior, hearing that made our day down at Roosevelt. Chicago police are experts at deflecting heat from unsolved hits. They've been doing it for ninety years. Last thing they need is you reminding everyone they never solve any."

Junior breathed like he might answer. Will cut him off.

"Not that it's all your fault. I don't figure you to pick the shooters for Vinnie Dominos. The Jap would handle that. Who picked the commando unit that tried to break up Jimmy Webster's barbershop? I hear they weren't quite up to The Grill's standards. They're lucky he didn't barbecue them."

"All right! Enough." Carmen moved another five feet away. "What's your fucking point?"

Will sipped his Coke, timing when he'd finish it to get maximum effect when the conversation stopped for Carmen to refill the glass. "You need some help, is all. Call it adult supervision. I blame your father. I know he only told you what he wanted you to know. Maybe he planned to teach you more and ran out of time. He really should have cut back on the cannoli."

"You here to talk about me or my old man?"

"You." Another sip. "Aren't you the least bit curious how we knew you were going to clip Frank at Tutto Italiano? It was me who told him, you know."

Junior started to ask, made himself wait. Will having a ball, watching the kid try to act like he had a clue how to handle the situation. The Bureau should just arrange for Frank and Junior to have a sit-down. Frank could talk Junior into killing himself, make Junior think it was his idea in the first place.

"Someone talked. I have a couple ideas about who."

Will shook his head dismissively. "Someone talked, but not to us. We got it straight from The Jap. There's a wire in his clubhouse. In the chair rail molding. Go check it out if you don't believe me."

Junior turned only his head, gave Will what must have been his intimidating look. Will had seen better. "I will. Why are you telling me

this?”

“Everyone gets old, Junior. Even you, if you’re lucky. I’ve been chasing guys like you and Frank Ferraro, Sal Enna, over twenty-five years. I’m too old for this shit, sitting in vans listening to you talk about red sauce and pussy. Standing in freezing rain at a funeral to see who talks to who. I’m retiring. Justice is wrapping up the investigation too soon. We don’t have all the RICO predicates tied down, so they’re going to have to indict people on individual acts and try to flip them.”

“So?”

Will finished his drink, waggled a couple of fingers toward Carmen for a refill, told her what it was when she asked. The Cokes good props for him, giving ways to pace the conversation to his advantage, but he'd have to pee soon if he kept this up. He turned halfway around to watch the two girls on the main stage rub against each other while the salesmen hollered and waved like teenage boys with fake IDs.

Carmen returned his Coke and Will thanked her, gave her the “you’re hot enough to hit on but I won’t embarrass myself and make you uncomfortable” smile. She looked at Junior’s glass, then at Junior. He ignored her and she resumed her waiting position.

“I passed up a lot of nice work to chase you guys around,” Will said. “You know what we make. I need a nest egg.”

Interest crawled out of Junior’s pores like sweat. He probably thought he played it as cool. “How much?”

“Ten grand.” Junior started to relax. “A week. For three months or so. Long enough for me to keep you out of the investigation as much as possible.”

“It’s gonna take longer than that. I know how these things work.”

Not yet, but you’re about to. “That should be enough time for me to lay it out for you. Get some inside stuff your lawyer can use. Lose a few things, make a few key additions. With luck you won’t even get indicted. It’s been known to happen. Of course, I get a bonus if there’s no indictment.”

“You’re a greedy prick, I’ll say that for you.”

“Maybe you’re just stingy. Think about it. How much are you taking out of here today? Got to be three, four times that, or you wouldn’t make the trip. Ten grand a week to you isn’t that much. Not for your freedom.”

“My freedom don’t mean anything if Ferraro whacks me.”

“Jesus Christ, Junior. You want a bodyguard, too?”

Junior threw back the rest of his drink. Carmen started over, stopped when he held up a hand. “I want to know what he’s up to. I know you can find out. For a price.”

Twenty-five years of training and discipline kept Will from smiling. “Probably. I mean, I have access to those records. It’ll be slow. We can’t do it too often, you moving on Frank before he can move on you. No one will believe you got that smart that fast.” Junior got a look and Will held up a hand. “No offense. Face it, Frank’s been a step ahead of you the whole way. It has to look right. I’m no good to you if they bust me.”

“For ten large a week, you better be pretty fucking good.”

“I will be, but you have to let me handle it.” Both drinks gone now. The men’s expressions and voices such that Carmen made no move for refills. “What do you think?”

“I think you’re gonna fuck me, and then what am I supposed to do? Kill a Fed?”

Will turned to face Junior directly. “Listen, dumb shit, you do this right and you’re the safest asshole in town. If anything heats you up, you roll on me. Name a cop—or a Fed—who wouldn’t cream for a chance to put away someone like me. Look at that Martorano guy in Boston. Confessed to twenty murders and got out in fourteen years because he gave them two Feds.” Will left out Martorano also hung nineteen murders on Whitey Bulger. Junior didn’t figure to know much about East Coast mob history beyond *The Departed*.

Junior twisted his glass in his hand till it squeaked. Will watched the dancers on stage help up the next two, girls perched on six-inch platform heels, steady as eight-year-olds on stilts coming up two steps to the stage. Salesmen whooping, girls on their laps, four o’clock in the afternoon. Will wondered what a Saturday night must be like, decided he was too old for this shit, too. Sorry Mad had to stay home tonight. Be nice to take her for a pizza, see a dumb romantic comedy. She couldn’t get enough of them, kept copies of *Pretty Woman* and *Notting Hill* at his place. He put up with them so he could watch her watch them, the look on her face after dealing with her husband or staking out some con artist all day, beaming like a kid while everything came out all right, at least for a couple of hours.

Junior interrupted his reverie. “All right. Here’s the deal. Tomorrow I’ll check out this wire you say you have on The Jap. If it’s there, I’ll meet you here next week, and we’re on.”

“Kiss my ass, Junior. You think I came all the way out here to work on spec? You’re asking for a freebie, just like the hummer I walked in on.”

“I said I’d pay you for it. If it checks out.”

“And then you’ll want something else, and I’m always a week behind.”

“Think of it as incentive to keep you around.”

“Understand something. I’m here on an impulse. Sooner or later common sense will take over and I’ll regret this. You don’t close the deal now and I walk out that door, the next time you see me you’ll have bracelets on.”

“You said it yourself. I got you by the balls now. I can just turn you in.”

“For what? There’s no crime until money changes hands. You try that story and I’ll say I was recruiting you as an informant. It’s my job. Who are they going to believe, a decorated agent with twenty-five years’ service, or some half-assed wiseguy who can’t even pull off a hit on a old fat man? I leave here with cash, or I leave here forever.”

The hundred hundred-dollar bills felt like bricks in Will's pocket.

CHAPTER 39

Life returned to normal over the summer for the Outfit. Fernando Escalante's unfortunate murder was forgotten in the confluence of good weather, both baseball teams in contention, and an alderman caught with two—count 'em, two—hookers in his office late one night. He claimed they were constituents, come to him for help with a landlord dispute. Almost got over with it, until a janitor told the Reader both women were chowing down at the time, and the wood in the Honorable Mr. Stevenson's hand wasn't a gavel.

So the business of crime and its relative suppression went on as usual. The city couldn't afford to keep paying the police overtime. The cops needed a break. The public was prepared to be distracted by good baseball and a sex scandal after satisfying itself with a show of righteous indignation. Fernando Escalante rested in peace.

The truth, no one really wanted rid of the Outfit. Politicians needed something to trot out in election years to run against when their own records wouldn't bear scrutiny. The police had a weird tapeworm and host relationship with them; who was the tapeworm depended on who you asked. There would be no need for real police without crime, and the Outfit was the best kind of crime to have. They rarely injured taxpayers—sorry, Fernando—and provided the good, healthy vices every city needs: gambling, prostitution, and drugs suburban white people were afraid to buy from blacks. A lot of people would be out of work if the Outfit went away. Mitch Klimak would be pounding a beat in Bronzeville, breaking up Colt .45 -induced domestic fights. Mitch would rather freeze on stake-outs every night for a year than have some fucked-up spook puke on him, or worse.

The sun bored through the windshield until Mitch felt like a bug burning under a sadistic kid's magnifying glass. Air conditioning didn't work in his unmarked Caprice with only 120,000 miles on it. Still had that new piece of shit smell by cop standards. He fidgeted, trying to keep out of as much of the sun as possible without losing his prime vantage point.

The tips that Frank Ferraro had a Fed on the line had kept up all summer. Mitch followed them as well as he could without sharing. Still thought it was Hickox, couldn't prove it. Hickox was too good, impossible to follow

solo, and Klimak didn't want to share this collar with anyone. He knew there had to be a collar in it. Why else would Hickox be so careful about being followed?

Ferraro was easier. He didn't seem to mind if Mitch tailed him most of the time. Probably figured no one would clip him with a police escort. Mitch also less reluctant to get help; there were a hundred reasons he might want to tail Frank Ferraro. He sent his wingmen back to State Street when Ferraro's driver took him to the Field Museum for the second straight week. If something went down, Mitch wanted it for himself. He knew Ferraro had a thing for the museum, but Jesus Christ, two weeks in a row? Ferraro's driver got cute, too, pulling all the usual tricks to keep from being followed. Mitch couldn't have done it without two other cars and radio communication.

He parked near the South Entrance; Ferraro's driver on the north side. Mitch thought anyone Ferraro might meet wouldn't come out where someone looking for Ferraro might see him. Not if Ferraro was going to this kind of trouble to keep the meet private.

Mitch passed the time by bitching. Didn't matter no one else was in the car, he was perfectly capable of providing his own validation and sympathy. He didn't make a sound while the litany of grievances played through his head like close captioning for assholes.

The overtime and extra money had been nice, though with no interests beyond The Job and sex he rarely spent any of it. He'd told people he liked working overtime for the money for so long he'd come to believe it himself. Didn't want anyone to know he'd work for free, or they'd let him do it, and that wouldn't be right. Even though Mitch had nothing he'd rather do than work, he was willing to deny himself that pleasure to prevent someone taking advantage of him.

His sex life slumped like the Cubs in August after that cow Donna Romanowski threw him out back in April. He'd resorted to shaking down the escort service for random strange on the cuff. Forty-five minutes into his museum wait he'd already determined another run was in the offing. He only had to decide whether to take a shower first or let the whore deal with the residue of his long day in a hot car—it was just a whore, not like he had to make an impression—when Will Hickox walked out the South Entrance and Mitch almost choked on a wad of saliva.

A lack of imagination and a strong desire for Will to be guilty led Mitch to conclude the only reason Will could have been in the museum at the same time as Ferraro was because they'd been together. The grapevine was usually accurate to a degree, if you knew how to read it. Simple logic for Mitch. Ferraro had a Fed on the string; Ferraro and Hickox had been evasive about being at the same place at the same time; Hickox was a Fed; ergo, Hickox was the Fed Ferraro had hooked.

Mitch wanted to confront Hickox now, but he had no warrant, virtually no probable cause, and he'd put Hickox on notice if it didn't go just right. He'd been almost impossible to pin down when there was reason to suspect Mitch was on to him. One chance was all Mitch would get.

The plan came together watching Hickox walk across the parking lot. Obradovich would want more than this brief visual to approve a surveillance. Even then he might consult one of the Feds; Obie didn't get his job by being adventurous. Time to call choir practice, get a few hard asses he'd befriended over the years to work some free overtime. Follow this high and mighty Untouchable like he'd been following Ferraro: multiple cars, radios. See how good Hickox was then.

It would take time. Days off and shifts would have to be arranged. Difficult; not impossible. Pull this off, and he'd celebrate with a five-hundred-dollar girl. Mad might even notice.

CHAPTER 40

Bruno Ponti tapped his fingers on the wheel of his Chrysler 300 in time to the music. Nirvana. He liked how they sounded, knew a lot of people said the lyrics were deep. Bruno knew zip about deep, cared less. He liked the beat. Why anyone cared about lyrics written by someone fucked up enough to kill himself was beyond Bruno.

A lot of things were beyond Bruno. Like why the remnants of Carl Swisher's crew had gone back to hijacking trucks north of the Eisenhower six weeks ago. Bruno pulled the trigger on Swisher himself after Vinnie gave his little etiquette speech and took everyone out for sandwiches. Too bad about Vinnie. He was a good boss. Not like some of the stories Bruno'd heard about that psycho prick Sal Enna.

Now Bruno was boss of Vinnie's old crew. All right, acting boss. Way Frank Ferraro put it, Bruno could get rid of the "acting" part, he took care of this piece of business today. Send a message, Frank said.

"Here's the thing," Bruno said to Ralph West, sitting beside him. "You'd think blowing Jump Shot's head off in front of them like that would of sent a pretty strong message, you know, like we're not fucking around here."

"You'd think," Ralph said.

"But I guess not, since they're jacking trucks north of the Ike again. So Frank wants me to make sure it's something they don't forget this time."

"Me, I'd remember that wad of brain come flying out of Jump Shot's head. I mean, it wasn't me the message was for, and I got it." Ralph paused to let his brain catch up with his mouth. He knew just enough to know he didn't know much, which was more than enough in his line of work. "So Frank wants us to clip them all this time?"

"Uh-uh. Sal says Frank don't want too many bodies piling up. We're just gonna disappear one of them. Sal says get creative. They're looking for someone to step up. I do this right, maybe it's me."

"Be a good move for both of us. I like working with you."

"Me, too. Way I figure it, we'll do Barra."

"Which one's that?"

"Remember the guy, held Jump Shot while I shot him? The quiet one, didn't piss himself."

“Yeah. Thin guy, didn’t say more than he had to.”

“Right. He’s running that crew now, he’s the one has to go. Same set-up as last time, except we’re gonna take our time. Give the others something to think about.”

Ralph looked at Bruno with new respect. “You know how to do that? I mean, not just the usual two behind the ear?”

“Sal give me some ideas. Said Vinnie’s problem was he lacked creativity. Easy for Sal to say. He likes that shit.” Bruno blew his nose out the open window. Allergies, nose broken three times, pain in the ass this time of year. “Fuck Sal. He wasn’t there. You know what they say about hindsight. Six of one, half a dozen of the other.”

“Fucking A on that,” Ralph said.

No one said anything for a minute. Ralph watched trucks go past, looking for theirs. Bruno breathed white noise through his mouth.

“You know what Vinnie’s real mistake was?” Bruno said. He knew Ralph didn’t, so he went on. “Getting clipped. That’s why we’re sitting here tonight. Vinnie was still around, they’d a never tried this shit. They’re testing me, what it is.” Bruno getting himself ready. “Cocksucker thinks I’m too busy holding the pieces together, can’t keep track of the stray truck here and there. Fuck him.”

“Yeah. Fuck him.” Ralph straightened, then slouched as a panel delivery van pulled into the parking lot. “That’s the truck, isn’t it? Graebner Electrical?”

“Yeah. Sit tight.” They watched a man get out, walk within two feet of the Chrysler on his way to the diner behind them. Scratched his forehead as he went by. “We’re all set. Dickie’s gonna take a leak and come out the other door, move around back. Walkman’s on the floor, ready to go. Should be any minute now.”

“We sure they’re coming?” Ralph said.

Bruno nodded. “I got a guy inside. Remember the one pissed himself when I did Jump Shot? He got the message. Knew they were on borrowed ice, pulling this shit. He’ll give the high sign when it goes down, so we can get ready.”

“What’s his end?”

“He walks away.”

Bruno and Ralph sat together five minutes. Bruno dying for a cigarette, knew he couldn't light one. Disguised the fidgets by balancing his cell phone on his fingers to show how steady they were. Scanned the parking lot to make sure everything looked right.

He saw the motion to his right before the cell vibrated with the signal. Made sure for the eighth time that night the dome lights were disengaged and motioned for Ralph to get out. Left the doors ajar an inch. Spread apart twenty feet as they walked, guns held down along their thighs.

Four men next to the truck. Bruno recognized Barra right away. The inside man couldn't stay still, Bruno hoping the fairy didn't give the whole thing away, dancing around like he might piss himself again. Maybe he'd whack that fanook after all. Close enough now to hear their conversation, using the hood of a Peterbilt for cover. Someone pulled open the door to the Graebner truck. Bruno and Ralph stepped forward at the same time Walkman sat up in the cab and pointed his piece at the lead man.

"Everyone's hands up." Bruno saw no need to shout, the whole crew within ten feet of him. "Dickie, get their pieces."

"Aw, fuck me, not again," someone said. The inside man.

"In back. Let's go." Ralph waved his gun, a little theatrically for Bruno's taste, but what could you do? Poor guy's IQ matched the late Vinnie Dominos' waist size, thought that's what he was supposed to do. They led Barra's crew around back of the truck, told Barra to open it. He released the catch, grabbed the strap and let the counterweight pull the door up.

Lights, bright as floods, came on as the door slid up. Bruno shielded his eyes too late to avoid a few seconds of blindness.

A voice spoke from inside the truck. "Keep the hands up while Rocco takes your pieces." Bruno's eyes adapted slowly to the realization that Angelo Caccamo and three others stood in the hold of the truck with shotguns leveled. The only sounds the buzz of the lights and the laughter of Bruno's inside man.

"That fat fuck Vinnie Dominos shoulda asked why they call me the Elephant," Barra said to Bruno. "It's because I never fucking forget. Get in the truck."

CHAPTER 41

“You’re into me almost a hundred grand and this is the best you can do?” Frank Ferraro not used to getting less than what he considered full value for his money. The badge in Will's pocket the only thing keeping him vertical. “I pay and I pay and you tell me shit. Now I got four guys dead, two of them top earners. Guy I wanted to replace Vinnie with—gone. Christ, pretty much the whole fucking crew’s gone. It doesn’t do me any good to stay out of prison if I lose this war.”

“Frank, I’m not arguing with you, but you gotta keep your voice down. People are starting to look.”

“Fuck ‘em. Let them look. I talk where I want. The fuck are you looking at?” he said to a middle-aged, librarian-looking woman leading around half a dozen grade school kids. “You shouldn’t be down here with this Egypt shit, anyway. Kids love dinosaurs. Take ‘em upstairs and show ‘em some fucking dinosaurs.”

The woman’s complexion grayed, her jaw dropped behind a closed mouth. Will stepped forward, placed two fingers on her arm. “Please excuse my father,” he said, head turned so Frank couldn’t hear. “Early Alzheimer’s. It acts like Tourette’s Syndrome sometimes. He can’t help himself. He doesn’t even know he does it. He’ll feel terrible when I tell him later.”

“Oh, please, then don’t say anything.” The woman snuck a peek over Will’s shoulder at Frank, studying the hell out of a placard on the exhibit across from her. Her hooked nose and small, abrupt movements reminded Will of a bird. A sparrow, maybe. “You’re a good son to get him out like this. Don’t think twice about it. The children are getting bored with mummies, anyway. Dinosaurs might be a nice change for them.”

She gathered the kids the way she might in a burning building, straining to stay calm so they wouldn’t be scared, but making sure they moved now. Will waited until he and Frank had their corner of the Egypt exhibit to themselves. “I thought you were supposed to be the diplomat.”

“I’m gonna be a dead diplomat if you don’t get me some information I can use.” The edge gone from Frank’s voice now, not the urgency.

“I know, and I’m sorry. This was as much a surprise to us as it was to you.” Bruno Ponti, Ralph West, Dickie Smulyan, and Richard “Walkman”

O'Day were found propped against the front door of Sal Enna's restaurant early the previous morning. Each had his driver's license in his lap; shotguns hadn't left enough of their faces to be recognized. "You know I'd have told you if I had a suspicion. Hell, we'd have teams out to see Ponti, everyone, if we knew. Remember how you and I got together last spring? We're required to notify anyone if we even strongly suspect a hit's in the works."

"I know. I know." Frank touched Will's shoulder to turn him away from a couple entering the room. "This is getting serious. It's like the Roaring fucking Twenties here anymore. Sal Enna wants to fire up the grill, feed some of these fucks to his dogs. Literally. Business is way off and now the spooks and the spics are starting to cut out little pieces for themselves."

"That's mostly South Side, isn't it?"

"That's the one saving grace of this whole cluster fuck. Most of my stuff is north and west. I got a few problems around the United Center, that area. Nothing major. I want to talk to a few of the dark types, see if maybe we can work together on some things. At least until the Junior situation is over. You know what happens if he wins, right?"

"Better than you know." Will had assumed Junior would lose, that Frank would get to him before things came to a head. Now he wasn't so sure and Junior's actions the past few weeks showed what life might be like if he won. "I owe you one. Keep your money this week. Let me see what I can find out. I'll let you decide whether to pay me next time."

Will recognized his mistake before the words registered in Frank's ears. "You'll let me decide? If I pay? That's real goddamn white of you. Let's not forget something here, Mr. Wild Bill Hickox. I'm paying you. That means you work for me. Don't let this Special Agent shit go to your head. We both got a lot at stake here."

"I apologize. I was wrong. That wasn't how I wanted that to sound at all." Since Will wasn't actually bent, Frank didn't have the juice he usually had with a crooked official. Still a mistake to show the attitude. "What I meant to say was I don't expect to get paid unless I get you something of real value next time. It's always your choice if you pay, or how much. You know I know that. We've both been around too long to have any doubts. I'm sorry."

Frank gave half a nod and Will felt better. He knew enough gruesome details about Frank Ferraro to scare a terrorist, but he'd also come to respect him through their meetings in the Field Museum. Even like him a little. Learned a lot, that's for sure. Frank knew something, usually quite a bit, about everything in the museum. Some of their walk and talks lasted almost two hours. Frank would get absorbed in a new exhibit, stop to read the placards, tinker with a demonstration. Show a kid how something worked. It didn't surprise Will any more, seeing how comfortable kids were with a man who'd probably been responsible for more deaths than he could remember.

No more than fifteen years between them. Will looked much younger, full head of hair only now turning gray, complexion and eyes clear from no smoking and light drinking. Frank looked wizened more than thin, sallow cheeks and hair thinning evenly on his head. Sometimes Will wondered if he had something wrong with him. Frank was a mild drinker—by Outfit standards he was practically a teetotaler—and he smoked fewer than five cigarettes a day. Still, he looked unhealthy, like someone who spent too much time indoors watching what he ate, knowing it wouldn't help.

“The lawyers are wrapping up the investigation. I've already lost two agents on your team. It'll probably only be me and one other guy when we go to the grand jury. That means I won't get as much street info, but I'll have more of an excuse to talk to the agents on the other teams, see their evidence. I'll try to scare up some information on what Junior and his boys have been up to. We both know how this needs to come out.”

“Yes, we do.” Frank's voice soft, not inviting any bullshit. Looking right at Will now, first time all day. The lines in his face softened for a minute and Will saw why the kids were unafraid. “I come out the other end of this on top—no indictments, no Junior—you might as well take your retirement. That happens, I got my money's worth. I never believed in getting blood from a stone. Make it come out right, and I'll take care of you when you ride off into the sunset.”

Will wanted to ask how much of that separation pay came in Brooklyn Bridge stock. Liking and respecting Frank Ferraro was one thing. Trusting him?

CHAPTER 42

Will knew things were different as soon as the doorman let him in to Hoosier Daddy's. A waitress met him with a drink halfway across the floor. He didn't see Junior at the bar, asked where he was.

"Mr. Bevilacqua is—well, he'll be right with you." The girl pulled out a chair for Will at the nearest table, strategically bending to give him a look at her navel if he peeked down her cleavage.

"Look—what's your name?"

"Brenda."

"Look, Brenda, I know you're just doing what you're told, but Mr. Bevilacqua and I have a standing meeting Fridays at three. Please make sure he knows I leave at three-oh-five."

Brenda didn't want to give Junior an ultimatum any more than she wanted cellulite. Young girl, had the looks to dance once in a while when a regular couldn't make it. Pretty face, not hard. Yet. It didn't have to get that way. A lot depended on how bad she needed the money. Her eyes darted toward the VIP Lounge while the rest of her tried to get Will to take a seat, look at her, anything to keep from telling Junior to get his ass out here.

Will looked across the room, saw a better option. "You know what? Forget about it. I'll sit at the bar and wait for him. Anybody asks, you did great." Her smile showed more relief than gratitude.

Will sat at his regular stool, raised a hand, pointer extended, for Carmen. "That bouncer, other side of the stage, by the wall. See him? Is that Mike Simonetti?" Carmen nodded. "I know Mike from way back. Could you get him to come over for a minute?"

Carmen liked getting Simonetti not much better than Brenda liked going after Junior. Made a point of serving the bar's only other customer before she went across the room. Talked to a waitress and a couple of dancers on her way over, finally got a tall brunette in a silver teddy to go for him.

Will watched and waited. No hurry. The point wasn't that he had someplace to be; it was that Junior couldn't be allowed to make him wait.

Simonetti rolled over in the official LCN white guy pimp walk. Slight bow in his legs, built like a mud slide, if mud slides took steroids and

benched four hundred pounds. He stopped a foot short, turned his head so he could only see Will in his peripheral vision. “Yeah?”

“Remember me, Mike? Special Agent Hickox, FBI?”

“Yeah.”

“Junior’s in the VIP Lounge, isn’t he?” Simonetti shrugged. “Getting a blow job?” Another shrug, smaller. “Get him.”

Simonetti caught himself before he turned to face Will. “Fuck you. Get him yourself.”

“Mikey, if I’m not talking to Junior Bevilacqua in two minutes, I’ll violate you. Illinois loaned you three years, and you know you’re not supposed to consort with known felons.”

“So what? You can’t violate me. That’s Illinois’ problem. You’re Federal.”

“And they’re going to deny a request from a respected Federal agent.” Will made shooing motions with the backs of his hands. “Go on. Be a good goon and get him for me.”

Will made a good living knowing what tone of voice worked best with his badge to get what he wanted. They played the expected ritual for thirty seconds. Neither spoke. Simonetti looked everywhere but at Will or the VIP Lounge. Enough time passed for him to save a little face. He cracked his knuckles, said to Will without looking at him, “What time is it? He wanted me to get him at three.”

Will said, “How convenient,” to Simonetti’s back, already on its way to Junior. Finished his Coke, gestured to Carmen for another. Slid a five across the bar when she brought it.

She slid it back. “Your drinks are on the house.”

Will pushed toward her again. “It’s a tip.”

Carmen folded the bill in half, put it in Will’s breast pocket. “Uh-uh. Not from you. Nothing personal. Mr. Bevilacqua wouldn’t like it.”

Will returned the fin to his wallet. “There’s no trick to it, Carmen.” He spoke only loud enough for her to hear, still pretty loud to get the words through the NASCAR volume of noise. “Predators sense fear. Don’t show them any.”

“That’s easy to say when you have a badge and you know he’s not going to break your nose for talking back.”

“He ever put a hand on you?”

“Not like that,” she said. “But I’ve seen it, and I’ve heard stories I don’t want to find out about.”

“You don’t have to put up with that.”

“You don’t think so? I wear my shirt like this so guys can look down it when I serve drinks, and I make sure I lean so they see what they want. They figure the rules aren’t as strict about taking me home, not like for a dancer, so they’ll try to get on my good side, show me what a great guy they are. If I tease them just right I can clear a thousand bucks on a good week. I had two kids by the time I was nineteen and the stretch marks to prove it, so you’re not gonna see me up there.” She nodded toward the stage. “Where else can I make that kind of money working days? And stay vertical? Tell me that.”

Will didn’t have an answer ready before Junior dropped into the chair beside him and draped an arm over his shoulder. “Carm, get me a Scotch. How’s it goin’, Wild Bill? You sure Carmen can’t sweeten that drink a little for you?”

Will gave his best cop stare, eyes flat as a shark’s, looking at a point several feet past Junior’s head. Not as good as some cops with beat experience, good enough to bring most men up short. Years in interrogation rooms taught Will the eyes told a subject more than any words. Play good cop or bad; didn’t matter. The eyes didn’t care if you took the deal or not. Take the fall or roll over; all the same to the eyes. The good cop/bad cop thing only helped to determine whether it went easy or hard. It was going, either way.

“Junior.” Will stared at the foreign arm draped over his shoulder. Didn’t speak until Junior broke the contact. “Don’t ever touch me again. Don’t ever call me Wild Bill again. My friends call me Will. You can call me Special Agent Hickox.”

Confusion flicked across Junior’s face so quickly he probably didn’t notice it himself. The swagger returned in full force, though he didn’t touch Will again.

“Who’s paying who here? Seems the employer gets some rights, too.”

“I don’t like repeating myself,” Will said. “You are not my employer. You are a hood, plain and simple. Not even a very good one, the way you’re fucking this war up.”

“Me fucking up? We just put four on the board, and the exact four we needed.”

“What you did,” Will said, his mind flashing to his latest chat with Frank, “was turn this into the Roaring fucking Twenties. This is not Al Capone’s Chicago, and it’s not the gunfight at the OK Corral. I’m trying to keep you alive and out of prison. Meet me halfway and try not to drop bodies in public places four at a time.”

“I needed to make a move. I made one. Those were the guys clipped Jump Shot Swisher, who worked for me. That’s a hit shoulda been cleared with me. I’m the boss, people should tell me things before they do them.”

Will wondered if Junior had any concept of what a horse’s ass he was. “Fair enough. Here’s what I’m telling you. You brought down a lot of heat right as things were cooling down. Business will suffer again. Your business, Frank’s business, even my business. It’s a lot harder to get you what you need when every cop in town is looking for an excuse to put the screws to someone. I need cooperation on your end.” Will thinking what he needed most was a straitjacket and a muzzle.

“Here’s the thing,” Junior said. “You’ll do whatever the fuck I tell you to do. I fucking own you. Sitting there like your shit don’t stink. You’re no better than any other meat eater. Say you’re gonna put me away, but you take my dirty money just like everyone else.” He threw down the bottom half of his drink with a flourish, slid the glass across the bar for Carmen. “Don’t kid yourself. You’re no better’n a whore. Worse, even. Least a whore knows what the deal is. You’re like one a them trophy bitches rich guys marry. Act like they got class and natural tits. All they’re doing is fucking older guys for money. It’s dishonest, and so are you, my friend, Will Hickox.”

Perfect. A lecture on dishonesty from Junior Bevilacqua. “You don’t want my help, don’t take it. I’ll bet Frank Ferraro will be happy to pay for what I know.”

“Don’t be too sure. What I hear, Frankie got his own Fed. That’s the only reason I fucked with you in the first place. To keep things fair. So far, the only benefits I seen I got for myself.”

“You don’t think that microphone in The Jap’s joint was worth knowing about?” Will turned his head so Carmen couldn’t make out what he said. “How about who Ferraro planned to step into Vinnie Dominos’ place? Sure

made it convenient for you when you clipped him.” He finished his Coke, placed a napkin over the glass so Carmen would know he was finished. “You don’t want my help? Fine. You’ll be in jail within a year. If you live that long.”

Will stood and Junior grabbed him above the elbow. Small dick or not, it took effort for Will not to show it hurt. “Like hell. Pay attention, Will. You took my money, so you’re my get out of jail card. You said it yourself. Cop or another Fed even asks me what time it is, I say, ‘Hey, you wanna hear some stories about me and Wild Bill Hickox?’ How’s that gonna go over?”

“They won’t believe you, and you know it.”

“Maybe not right away, but they’ll check it out. That’s how careers get made. Remember that Fed in Jersey? What’s his name, Delcarmen? DelVecchio? Something like that. You’re a lot like him, Wild Bill, trying to see how much you can get away with. The difference is, you really are bent.”

Liquor floated behind Junior’s eyes. Four in the afternoon, no telling how much he’d had, or how drunk he was. Outfit guys drank a lot, even early in the day, usually only wine before dinner. Junior had scotch in his hand, not his first. How much of this outburst was booze, how much bravado, and how much was Junior being Junior, the fuck-up’s fuck-up?

No way to tell. Will’s book on Junior a pamphlet compared to what he knew about Frank Ferraro. What book there was said it was hard to know what Junior might do; Junior didn’t know himself. A profiler once said he showed signs of both ADD and bipolar. Good combination for a guy with size and a violent nature, in a profession where mayhem built resumes.

“Lemme tell you something else, Wild Bill.” Will turned off his emotions as best he could. Damage control. Stay out of the hole Junior insisted on digging long enough to regroup for next time. “You’re about to become the world’s most dedicated government employee. You ain’t never gonna retire, know what I mean? I win the war, I get a pass on an indictment, that’s this time. You Feds, you’re always around, looking for a pinch. Well, you’re always gonna be around for me. I’ll pay—it’s what’s right—but I’ll get what I pay for. As long as I want.”

A girl with breasts the size and shape of honeydews walked by. Junior extended an arm to gather her. He buried his face into her chest, grabbed a handful of ass. The girl laughed professionally, like she’d been here before.

Rubbed against Junior, started to lead him to the back until he pulled her up onto his lap for a grind.

Will caught Carmen's look as he turned to go. Just two more members of the hired help.

CHAPTER 43

Mitch opened the Caprice's windows to catch the air. Still a summer breeze in the day, nights getting chilly. The car pulled next to Al Valchek's Crown Vic cop-style, so they could talk to each other through the drivers' windows.

"He came all the way out here for a titty bar?" Al said. "We must a passed ten of them. Within a few blocks, anyhow."

Mitch swallowed a comment; he needed Al's help. He could say anything he wanted to Clark Freamon, parked on the street outside Hoosier Daddy's. Al more sensitive, required some finesse.

"You know whose joint that is?" Mitch knew Al didn't, or he wouldn't have asked such a dumbass question. "Sauce Ragusa. See that Escalade? Junior Bevilacqua." Mitch paused to savor the memory of what happened to Junior's previous ride. "You think this dirty Fed comes way the hell out here to Bumfuck, Indiana just to look at tits? There's money changing hands right now, while we're sitting here."

"You that sure?"

Mitch flicked a dead butt across the Crown Vic's hood. "Has to be. No one sneaks around like he does unless he's dirty. Or cheating on a broad, and Hickox ain't married."

"So he'll have the cash when he comes out. No chance to stash it."

"Even money."

"Then let's grab him. We've been following this asshole on our own time for weeks. If this is a career making bust, then let's make some careers."

Mitch wished he was talking to Clark; Al dumb enough to be a crook himself. "We're in Indiana, Al. We got no jurisdiction to arrest him here. Anything we find gets thrown out because of the bad arrest." Narcotics Al's usual gig. Tireless and dogged, not a high level thinker. The new breed of cop, spent half his time in uniform pulling slingers off corners, the other half doing paperwork. Moved into Narcotics and worked buy-busts to keep the statistics up. Nice enough guy, a great one to have your back. He couldn't run an investigation if it came with a diagram.

"When, then?" Al a little whiny, upset Mitch was right and he was wrong. Again. "Peg's giving me hell. I tell her I'm working overtime and she don't see any extra cash. She thinks I got a broad."

Mitch almost as tired of waiting as Al. “Next time at the Field. Shouldn’t be too long, he goes almost every week. I want to stay tight on him, but if you want some time with Peg, I can hang by the museum a day or two alone. Or with Freamon.” Hurried on when Al breathed to speak. “I’d call you when I saw him go in.” Mitch didn’t care if Al was in on the bust, spent time with his wife, or screwed Paris Hilton on the pitcher’s mound at Wrigley Field. Anything to shut him up.

Then the perfect thing to shut him up walked out of Hoosier Daddy’s. Will Hickox looked pissed; no other way to put it. Walked head up, not looking at anything so much as through everything. Straight line to his car, moving fast. Left the Saab’s door open five seconds after he got in, then slammed it so hard the frame shook.

Al idled the Crown Vic away. Mitch slumped in his seat, let the sun reflecting off the windshield keep Hickox from seeing him as he drove by. They knew each other mostly by reputation, but they had met a few times. Good cops remember people they met casually for ten seconds, and, like him or not, Mitch knew Will Hickox was a good cop. So was he. Better even, since it would be Hickox going down when the time came.

Hickox drove off the lot, gravel crunching under his tires. The speaker hissed static. Al’s radio check, in position. Ten seconds later Clark’s voice came on, low and measured. “I got him north on Calumet. He’s going back to the highway.”

“Let’s follow him home,” Mitch said. “Just for the hell of it.” Man, he loved this job.

CHAPTER 44

Mad got to Connie's Pizza in Westmont early to make sure she was there before Will. New haircut, a blouse she knew he liked, hoping he'd relax a little. The constant erosion of his Fallout team wore on him; he lost two more agents that week.

She suggested Connie's because they had their first "date" here. Will said, "Okay," like it didn't matter to him one way or the other and she knew something was wrong. Any other time she'd suggest Connie's, he'd say, "Looking for a little sausage with your pizza?" Their joke from the first time they slept together, Mad trying to break the ice. They both knew it was time, it had to happen sooner or they'd explode before it got later. Will still bashful about asking her home that first time, five years ago that might as well have been forty when she thought of the size of the hole he filled in her life. The thought made her smile; no one but her would ever think of Will Hickox as bashful. She finally made the worst joke she could think of, digging through the deep dish pizza like she was looking for something, waiting for him to ask.

"What's wrong?" he finally said, when her dinner looked like it had been through a blender.

"No sausage," she'd said.

"Did we order sausage?"

"I like a little sausage with my pizza." Then she reached across the table and took his hands in hers and drew him in with those blue eyes. "Can you help me?"

But Will just said, "Okay" when she suggested Connie's last night. A lesser woman might worry he'd found someone else, younger, prettier. Not Mad. There was a time, sure. Not now. She knew she and Will Hickox would be together for as much of forever as they were allowed to share. It never crossed her mind to worry about that. Not with Will.

She sat where she could see him come through the entry door in the corner of the dining room. The building Mexican-looking to Mad, with its peaked façade, red and green awnings. Watched him pause after he came in, like he always did, never walking too far into one of their meetings before finding her.

He kissed her cheek and slid into the booth. "Sorry I'm late."

"You're not," she said. "I'm early."

"Well, you still had to wait."

"I knew I'd have to wait when I decided to come early."

"I'm still sorry you had to wait."

"I wanted to wait. That's why I came early."

The waitress came. Mad ordered white zin; Will had beer. She waited for the thrust of the conversation to dawn on him.

He said, "Why would you want to wait?"

"So I could watch you come in."

"Because..."

"Because I wanted to see you come in."

"And you wanted to see me come in..."

"So I could see you when you didn't know I was watching. You've twisted yourself into a knot every time we're together for weeks now."

"That time last week was your fault. I told you we were too old for the position in that book."

"Willard..." Her eyes smiled and Will was doomed. Mad knew he couldn't resist her when she scolded and smiled. Only a matter of time now.

"Where's the waitress?" Will said. "I've been waiting for this beer since three o'clock."

On cue, the server came by, gave them their drinks. "I think we're ready now, Miss," was all Will got out.

"I'll be right back. Just let me drop off this order." Then she was gone.

"Nice." Mad said. "You tried changing the subject. The waitress didn't help you. Now you'll sandbag me until she comes back for the order. That's okay. We can wait until she leaves, or you can tell me now, because we both know you're going to. Don't we Willarrd..." Gave him the eyes again and Will laughed. Genuine, not forced; not the good one, either. Not the one that showed her what he must have looked like when he was a kid. Mad hadn't seen that laugh in a long time.

"It's Fallout," he said. Left the comment alone to see if she'd do anything with it.

"It's more than that."

"Yeah, it's the job in general. The work I turned down. I have no leads at all on another job right now."

The waitress came back before Will got ramped up. They ordered their pizza—no sausage, that came later—and any forward momentum left with the server.

Mad sipped her wine and peered at him over her glass. Tapped one nail against the rim irregularly. Will nibbled his beer and looked around the room like his reprieve would be permanent. Dummy.

“You’ve known about Fallout for a long time. The job prospects are nothing new, either. It’s more. You know I never ask these things. Never. You get—we get—as much space as we need to work things out for ourselves. If one of us decides we need help, then we talk.”

“And I will. Honest to God. It’s okay right now.”

“No, it isn’t. I know you. I can tell things about you that I don’t even know how I can tell. And you’re not okay. You haven’t been. I can’t decide what scares me more, that something’s wrong, or that you’re afraid to tell me.”

Will drained his glass, swallowed, wiped his mouth. “I’ve never been in a situation like this before. Last Wednesday made twenty-six years. I thought I’ve seen it all, but there are things about this investigation—I don’t know what to think.”

His evasiveness bothered her less than his refusal to say he wasn’t scared. Will never lied to Mad. She was so confident he wouldn’t, she never worried whether she could tell if he did. “Maybe I’ll have an idea. I didn’t just start working cases yesterday, you know.”

The smile around his eyes carried more love than any diamond. “Trust me. You’ve never seen anything like this.” Mad started to interrupt. “I know, only you can know that. Point taken.” The waitress came by, pointed to his empty beer glass. Will nodded. “You know what we’re doing with Frank Ferraro.”

“Letting him pay you. Taping the conversations and booking the money. So you have something to fall back on if the RICO charges don’t hold up.”

“Right. Well, Frank is twice as smart as Junior, so we figured—I figured—if it worked on him, it should be easy with Junior.”

Both Mad’s elbows on the table now, arms extended forty-five degrees toward Will. She stifled an urge to reach the rest of the way and take his hands.

“So I went to see Junior at a joint Sauce Ragusa owns over in Hammond. Caught him getting a blow job. Great lives we both have. Watching and waiting for people to do things they shouldn’t be doing.”

“Is it really as small as they say...?” She let the question fade off.

“Yeah.” Will chuckled and paused for the waitress to deliver his second beer. He let it sit. “Things didn’t go quite as well as we—I—expected with Junior. I’m not sure what happened, but somewhere along the line I messed up.”

“Did you say something you shouldn’t have? I know how close to the line you like to play it.” Something in his look gave him up. Not on his face—Will too good for that—his eyes changed luster. No more than a second. “How serious is it?”

“Let’s say that because of our talks, Junior knows things he shouldn’t know. Stuff he wouldn’t know if I hadn’t slipped. And it could cause a problem.”

“Did you push too hard and entrap him?” Mad could see that happening. Will pressured for results on one side, frustrated with Junior on the other, and Wild Bill does something rash. “So he catches a pass on the bribery sting. You probably have a better RICO case on him than you do on Ferraro, anyway. I mean, he can’t have been as careful.”

“It’s not entrapment.” He picked up his knife, put it down right away, pushed it aside. “Entrapment would be an embarrassment, but I could live with it.” His hand reached for the fork before pushing it away, too. “This could screw up the retirement.”

Mad fought to keep her show of concern on track. She didn’t know what Will could have done to damage his career so badly his retirement was in jeopardy, and she didn’t care. Not about the retirement. They would both have to work when he left the Bureau, though she made enough for them to get by on if they had to.

What worried Mad was how whatever he’d done affected Will. Not his finances or his career; him. She’d never known him to flounder like this. Not sure what to do, sure. She’d helped him make up his mind how to handle things, on the job and off, a hundred times. Always he moved forward. Her advice only helped steer his momentum.

Now, for the first time since she’d known him, Will didn’t know where to turn. He’d probably figure a way out. She knew they could do it together,

if he'd let her help. She wanted in, to help, because she loved him and he'd never locked her out before. It wasn't the exclusion that bothered her. They needed to think of something before Wild Bill took matters into his own hands.

“What did you tell him?” Reached across now, took his hands in hers. “Something that could help him win the war? Could it get someone killed? You can fix it. Just go to them, like you did with Ferraro last spring.”

Her cell rang; Mitch's ring tone. She paused long enough to recognize it, then turned her attention back to Will. Something in his look. His eyes only aimed her way, not actually looking at her. “Or did someone get killed. Oh, Will, not the four last week, at the restaurant...”

Will said, “No, not them,” and Mad had never felt less convinced by anything he'd ever told her. Knew Will would never do anything like that deliberately, at the same time knowing he pushed the envelope to get informants to give him what he needed. Her mind flashed to the Boston agents caught in bed with Whitey Bulger. How the Bureau hunted them down years later, supposedly safe in their retirements.

But that wasn't Will. The Boston agents worked hand in glove with Bulger for years, practically part of his crew. Will made a slip of the tongue. It couldn't be more than that. Worse than entrapment, but still an honest mistake, an embarrassment. They'd make him retire instead of letting him. No jail time, not without proving malice.

Then the downside of being so knowledgeable about law enforcement kicked in. She thought of the FBI agent in New Jersey who got caught in a career-building prosecutor's sights. She couldn't remember the name; he worked high-profile cases for years. His career maybe not as good as Will's, still a decorated veteran. Cost him years and thousands of dollars to clear his name, as much as any name can be cleared after that much public scrutiny is placed on it.

The pizza came and she let him off the hook. The conversation took other turns: her boys, the possibility of an early winter. Safe subjects two workplace acquaintances might talk about standing in line at Starbucks. The topic never changed for Mad. Her mind turned it over through the evening, on her way home after she and Will made love, then all night alone in bed. She appreciated how he tried to protect her, though all he had accomplished was to leave her as much at a loss as he was.

CHAPTER 45

The weather made a comfortable stakeout impossible. Perfectly clear, cold as an auditor's introduction; a touch of February in early November. Mitch opened the windows and froze. Closed them and roasted. He almost compromised—open the windows and run the heater—didn't want anyone to notice the car's exhaust while he waited outside the Field Museum to arrest Will Hickox.

Clark Freamon reported Frank Ferraro's entry half an hour ago. Mitch saw Hickox go in himself. Freamon and Al Valchek were positioned so they could see both the South Entrance and Hickox's government Ford. No need to watch the North Entrance. Mitch didn't care if Frank Ferraro killed thirty people inside. He was here for Hickox

Will walked through the door and bounced down the stairs toward them like a man who just got laid. Mitch keyed the mike, told Valchek and Freamon to get ready. Watched Hickox walk to his car, close the door, adjust his seatbelt. Not at all like the other day in Hammond. Mitch told his team to move up slow to the spots they'd picked earlier, let his car idle along the row behind Hickox. The Ford's back-ups came on and Mitch hit the lights and gave one burst of the siren. Pulled in directly behind. Jumped out with his badge in one hand, gun in the other.

"Put your hands on the steering wheel where I can see them! Hey! I said put your fucking hands on the wheel, asshole, or I'll shoot you right through the window!" Valchek and Freamon squealed in to sandwich the car and block any foot escape.

Hickox's expression would give Mitch wet dreams for months. Color drained from his face as fast as the sweat leaked out. He tried to stammer something. Mitch tapped on the car window with his gun sight.

"Hands still while I open the door!" Mitch still hollering, though Hickox made no protest. A few people who'd been on their way into the museum stopped to see what the fuss was about. "Do it now!"

Hickox put his hands on the wheel at ten and two. Mitch yanked open the door and pulled Hickox out with the other hand almost in the same motion. Hickox's left ankle caught on the rocker panel and he stumbled. Mitch let him fall as far as one knee before jerking up again.

“Get up,” he said. “I know you’re not bent and a drunk.” He half-dragged Hickox toward the back of the car, pushed him across the trunk. “Hands on the trunk and spread ‘em. You know the drill.”

“You’re making a big mistake here.” Hickox recovering quickly, his voice almost sure of himself. “I’m working.”

“So am I.” Mitch nodded for Freamon to cover Hickox so he could pat him down. “And I wish I had a dollar for every time I made a big mistake like this. For fifty bucks I’ll sell you a newspaper to cover your face for the TV cameras.”

A small crowd gathered, school kids and chaperones going back to Wisconsin after a day with Sue the T-Rex. Mitch didn’t play to them; didn’t exactly ignore them, either. Ran his hands under Hickox’s jacket, heard the oohs and aahs when he pulled the gun from the belt holster and stuck it in his waistband.

“Hey, Al.” Calling for Al because he was still near the Ford’s hood. Projected his voice more than necessary to make sure anyone within fifty feet heard him. “Look here.” Pulled a plain white envelope from Hickox’s inside pocket. “How much, you think?”

“Five,” Valchek said.

“Clark?” Mitch said.

Hickox let his chin sag toward his chest. Spoke only loud enough for Mitch to hear. “You ignorant asshole. You have no idea how much damage you’re doing.”

“Sure, I do,” Mitch said, just to him. Then, louder: “How much, Clark?”

“Five’s a lot,” Freamon said. “I’ll say three.”

Sirens sounded from the north. Some good Samaritan must have heard “gun” and called it in. Even better, now that the bust had gone down. An audience.

“I don’t think you guys appreciate what a big shot we have here.” Mitch jerked back on Hickox’s wrist to pull him up, slammed the cuffs home with a flourish. “This is Wild Bill Hickox, toughest lawman east of the Mississippi. Uncorruptible. A living legend. Let’s see what the going rate is for an untouchable.” Sirens louder now, around the other side of the museum, several cars. “These are hundreds.” Mitch thumbed through the bills. “All of them. Christ, there might be ten thousand dollars here. Take

this ten grand, maybe ten more from Junior in Indiana. Pretty soon we're talking real money."

Three dark sedans squealed tires stopping around Mitch's little phalanx of cars. Doors burst open and suits with Federal badges jumped out every door.

The one from the passenger side of the lead car was a big Polynesian, hair cut shorter on the sides than on top. He pulled an automatic off his hip and leveled it at Mitch's nose. "Special Agent Fa'alepo, FBI. The man you're holding is an FBI agent on official business. Release him to me right now and we might forget about this."

"Fuck you. He's dirty, and he's my prisoner." How nine Feds arrived in less than five minutes unnerved Mitch a little. Maybe Hickox was spreading it around. This was Chicago, after all. Always enough for everyone. "He's going to State Street. You want to bail him out, you can follow us. But he rides with me."

All the feds had guns now. Two each focused on Valchek and Freamon, the rest on Mitch. The big Hawaii Five-O-looking dude did all the talking.

"You are in the middle of a surveillance. You are jeopardizing an ongoing, long-term investigation. If you walk away, we might be able to keep charges off you. But you better do it right now."

Another siren, from the south this time. Finally, the cavalry. "Kiss my ass, Chin Ho or Wo Fat or whatever the fuck your name is. I've been following this man for weeks." Mitch felt Hickox sag. "He meets regularly with organized crime figures. He just spent forty-five minutes with Frank Ferraro and came out with ten grand on him. Ferraro's prints will be all over this." He brandished the envelope stuffed with hundreds.

The siren grew louder. The Fed tried to keep his game face on, couldn't do it. "You dumb Polack, that's his job. Turn him loose right now or you'll spend the rest of your career in the property room sweeping up rat turds."

The car with the siren slammed to a stop as close to everyone as it could get, cut off Mitch's equally witty reply. Mitch recognized the man getting out, couldn't place the name. Gave a good professional stare storming through the rows of drawn weapons to pull Hickox's manacled hands up near his mouth.

"Agent Kiraitis, roll that tape back to the beginning of this episode and get your ass out here with it." Dropped Hickox's hands, stepped over to

Mitch and snatched the envelope of hundreds away, gun be damned. “I’m Special Agent Michael Satriale. You’re disrupting a Federal investigation.”

“That’s what your boy said.” Mitch gestured toward Fa. “And I’m telling you—”

“You aren’t telling me anything except ‘I’m sorry,’ and you damn well will be when I’m through with you. Give me the keys or I’ll kick your ass right here. I’ll get away with it, too. Trust me.”

Mitch had seen enough bluster to know Satriale had something on him. “Calm down. We have a legitimate investigation here. I have documented evidence on your boy.” Not really, but Obradovich would have to back him up if it came to it. Which it appeared it would.

A young guy ran up, wearing the Federal uniform of the day, without the jacket. Handed a small tape recorder to Satriale, who held it in front of Mitch’s face. “Listen to this first, then tell me if you want to go to jail.” Then he pushed a button.

Mitch had to admit, the Feds had good gear. The sound quality was great. Heard a car start, then sirens, and Hickox’s voice get as far as “What the fuck?” Tapping, not unlike a gun sight on auto glass. Then his voice, somewhat muffled. Put your hands on the steering wheel where I can see them. Hey! I said put your fucking hands on the steering wheel, asshole, or I’ll shoot you where you sit!

Satriale pressed Stop and Mitch felt slightly ill. “I can let it play so you can relive your moment of glory, or I can rewind so you can hear about the cake Ferraro’s grandson had for his birthday. Your choice.”

CHAPTER 46

Satriale's office door muted Ed Obradovich's voice. Mike gone for a toilet break and cold drink, and to leave a chunk of Mitch Klimak's ass for Obie. Satriale didn't ream people often, knew the fun lasted longer if he spread it out over shorter sessions instead of burning himself out on one long burst. Having Obradovich to pick up the slack let him space things out even more.

A small crowd found excuses to be in Will's work area, closest to the office. Figures could be seen through the wavy glass wall. Body language served better than words, let everyone build their own stories.

Will stared in the general direction of Satriale's door. He should have enjoyed this. The rest of the office celebrated an early Christmas gift, agents coming in from the field to listen to the construction of Klimak's new asshole. Chicago cops were often disdained; Klimak was reviled. Ben Borowski once said the Pope would call him a cocksucker. He'd made Mad's life miserable for years, and there was no doubt he'd haunt them even after she finally "Dear Mitch" him.

Fa wheeled his chair alongside, spoke so only Will could hear. "Man, this is a great story. Whole room wants to hear you tell it. I tried, but you know how I tell stories. Ben can't do it, he wasn't there. Come on, it'll make their day, you telling them how this asshole got transferred to Traffic."

Will took his time to answer, eyes on the door. "Maybe in a few days. It'll be funnier than hell then."

"Then? I was there. Once I knew we weren't gonna get shot, Mike showed up and started talking into your watch, it was funnier'n'hell then."

Will forced a grin he hoped looked natural. "It was pretty funny, wasn't it?" Twisted his torso to stretch his back. "I fucked up, Fa. Klimak's good, but there's no way he should've been able to follow me like he did. Three months, almost, and I never suspected." He looked at Fa, then away before they made eye contact. "I'm feeling old is all. Give me a couple of days."

Fa did something no other agent in the office would have done: he left Will alone. No rancor, no pat on the shoulder, you'll get 'em next time big guy. A short nod, then wheeled his chair back to his own desk.

What Will said about himself was half true. He was pissed for missing the tail. Not because of what happened; because of what might have happened. Klimak knew about Junior. A problem, but Will could finesse it. Did he know about Mad?

Probably not. Klimak not the kind of guy to hold something like that back. He would have mentioned it when he had Will on the trunk of the car, spreading his legs and cuffing him. Whispered it in his ear. "Now you've been fucked by me and my wife." Something clever like that. He hadn't, so Mad was safe. For now.

Will propped one leg against the side of his desk and stared at the door of Satriale's office like it was close captioned. His sense of irony appreciated the situation. Klimak's fuck up might actually give him more flexibility handling Junior. Allow him to explain his trips to Hammond. Satriale knew Will's methods too well to question him.

Klimak himself was the wild card, like as not to follow Will on his own time, looking for any way to undo his humiliation. That would force things to a head with Mad. Just as well. She'd been patient long enough. Now they could give Mitch the word, start their new lives right away. Klimak's reputation would keep the cop gossip bearable. The false arrest at the Field Museum written off as the product of a jealous vendetta. The Bureau and CPD would work a compromise: Will would retire, and Klimak would be warned off. Then Will would go anywhere Mad asked.

That left Junior. Klimak's raised voice behind the door diverted Will. Something about how Obradovich might appreciate good police work better if his nose wasn't stuck between Satriale's ass cheeks. A real diplomat.

The voices quieted and Junior regained Will's attention. Will always understood something would have to be done about him. Even sitting in Hoosier Daddy's that first day, laying down the law, he knew Junior would never let him out. All the noise about their arrangement ending after the investigation was just talk. No one retires from deals like that.

He'd always assumed Frank Ferraro would handle it. Will had seen things shake out close up, figured Junior had at best three months to live. Probably where he got the thirteen weeks idea. True, Frank missed one opportunity, thanks to dumb luck and Junior's new car. Will couldn't imagine he'd miss twice. If he got the chance.

Junior's hit on Bruno Ponti's crew was inspired, something the old man would have been proud of back in the day. Frank would have handled the media aspects better—stupid to leave the bodies so the papers had art for the morning editions—though the end result was the same. Four guys at once, and the exact four he wanted, not just some random jamooks.

Worse than that for Will—even worse than the farce in the parking lot—was seeing the fear in Ferraro's face that afternoon in the museum. Will heard it in his voice a week ago, Frank asking when he'd get some benefit for his money. Today it was visible. Not just afraid; he looked unwell. Dropping weight, the collar of his buttoned polo shirt loose around the neck. Will couldn't imagine Frank Ferraro losing his nerve. Before today.

Which gave Junior better than a puncher's chance to win. He and his crew bosses lacked the insight and access to pick up on Frank's vulnerability, but they only had to get lucky once. Dion O'Banion would sit things out as much as he dared, but he'd have to stand up for Frank in the end. He hated Junior with a passion good Irish lads usually reserved for the English; Junior returned the sentiment. If Frank lost, Dion's would be the next box Junior checked. Sal Enna was key. He had unlimited access to Frank, and would feel the same vibe Will had. He'd flip in a heartbeat if he sensed a loser, and that would be that.

Junior had to go.

CHAPTER 47

Pete Taylor looked forward to seeing Mitch Klimak for the first time in the three years he'd known him. After being squeezed all summer, Taylor finally had what Klimak wanted: the name of the Fed on Frank Ferraro's pad.

New venue for this meeting, not around the Loop like usual. Taylor had to ask where the Cal Harbor Restaurant was: 115th and South Forrestville, yellow awning. Eleven o'clock in the morning, place was full, Taylor there early so Klimak couldn't bitch about him being late. Ordered coffee, starving from the smells of meals being served all around him by the time Klimak showed up.

"You got anything for me?" Klimak's version of "Good morning." He slid into the booth across from Taylor.

"Are you hungry?" Taylor said. "Smelling these hash browns is driving me crazy, and they got this thing called an olive burger I might need to check out."

"You want to eat, eat." Klimak ordered coffee, pushed away the menu. "You know about some burglaries down Altgeld Gardens?"

"You mean the projects?" Taylor gave confused. Why would an OC cop care about nickel and dime break-ins? "Who'd live in Altgeld Gardens if he had anything worth stealing?"

Klimak made a face to show Taylor he had less patience than usual, no mean feat. "Riverdale, Eden Green, Golden Gate. You know, that whole area. Someone's breaking into those mansions while the residents are out cashing their welfare checks. Fucking neighborhood association's bitching to the alderman, he bitches to the mayor, and I'm out busting my ass looking for some hump's toaster."

"What's it to you?" Taylor said. "The Outfit can't be doing anything down there."

"They've spent more on cops' salaries than the total value of the burglaries, probably. What they should do is wait for this yo to knock over the wrong flat, let the Molotov Mafia cap his ass."

Taylor felt his moment slipping away. "Klimak, what the fuck? Forget about that. I found out who Frank Ferraro's paying. The Fed, I mean."

Didn't say who, wanted to draw it out, make Klimak ask for it.

"If you tell me it's Will Hickox, I'll throw this coffee in your face."
Klimak's face removed any doubt he meant it.

"What? You know? But I thought—"

"Hickox is clean, genius. I know all about it. The Feds have this big sting operation worked out. They didn't tell me everything, just enough to know whatever you heard about Hickox is bullshit."

"I didn't hear about an investigation."

"Not much of an investigation if every swinging dick in town knows about it."

Taylor's felt even hungrier as he realized he couldn't afford an olive burger if Klimak didn't pay him. "Look, there must be something there. I got this from a good source. This guys knows shit."

"You're right; he knows shit. Frank Ferraro, Will Hickox, organized crime don't interest me anymore. I'm working Property Crimes. If you have anything worth knowing—which would be a first—bring it to the Area Two station on 111th Street. You got any more of this OC shit, tell your story walking. I got work to do."

"Hey, Klimak, wait a minute." Taylor's whole day circling the toilet on its way down. "What the hell you mean, you don't work OC anymore? I thought you were their boy. I mean, seriously, you're the best cop they got there. What happened?"

For a second he thought Klimak really would throw the coffee in his face. "This fucking city. It ain't about who's good police; it's about whose ass you tongue. I put together a good case. I mean I watch this motherfucker go in and out of places to get paid, and I get my bust all set up. Does anyone bother to tell me about his undercover work, about his sting operation? Fuck no." A retired black couple in the booth across the aisle gave him a look. Klimak gave them the finger. "So Will Hickox shits sixteen carat gold and I get sent to fucking Siberia to chase jigs up and down stairs in the fucking projects." Said it loud enough for the older couple to hear. Taylor no bleeding heart, still thought Klimak was an asshole.

"So, what? You're saying all the time this Hickox is setting Ferraro up? He's turning the money in?"

“Fuck yeah, he’s turning it in. Gets everything on tape. Wears a goddamn Dick Tracy wrist radio, transmits everything back to the fucking Bat Cave, or wherever the hell the Feds keep their cool toys. Hell of a job hushing up the arrest to keep Ferraro from catching wise.”

So far, Taylor thought. He bummed five bucks of guilt money for an olive burger. Played Six Degrees of Frank Ferraro while he ate it, thinking of who might know someone who might know someone who might know someone.

CHAPTER 48

The whole thing pissed Mike Satriale off. First Justice, in the form of that smarmy pud Jarod Goodfriend, cut Fallout short. Now the fallback to Fallout maybe hosed because that dumb Polack Klimak decided to play Lone Ranger and arrest his best agent. For a man who burned like Satriale, it was a week of Maalox and Tums.

“You have to call it off.” Goodfriend stood with his back against the office door. Probably to keep Will Hickox from barging in. “You’ve got all you’re going to get. Ferraro probably knows already. If he runs you’ll never catch him.”

“Ferraro’s not going to run.”

“He has to if Hickox has everything you say he has. He does, right? This isn’t another example of Hickox sandbagging us to pull some harebrained scheme.”

Satriale stared for a beat. He’d never heard an actual live person say “harebrained scheme” before. “I showed you the money, Jarod. We didn’t make up the money. Frank Ferraro gave it to Will, and he told him stuff we couldn’t get from ten wire taps.”

“And now it’s over. Hickox is never going to see him again. If Ferraro heard about what happened in the parking lot the other day, he’s gone. And we both know he heard. Hickox is never going to see him again.”

Satriale heard him the first time. The headache locked in behind his eyes as soon as he heard about Will’s arrest. He didn’t remember driving from 2111 West Roosevelt to the Field Museum. A three mile drive through town, five minutes from seated at his desk to putting his finger in Klimak’s face. Now here was Goodfriend, advising him how to run an investigation. He felt his heart beat in his temples. A tumor, he hoped. Disability retirement. If he killed Goodfriend, would a PTSD defense work?

Goodfriend still talking. “And he has the connections and money to go deep underground. Whitey Bulger’s been in like Flynn for over fifteen years now, and he didn’t have half the resources Ferraro has.”

That got Satriale’s attention. “What did you just say, Jarod? In like Flynn?”

Goodfriend stopped in mid-reply to regroup. “Uh, yeah. You never heard anyone say that before?”

“Yeah, my mother, and not in that context. How do you figure Whitey Bulger’s in like Flynn?”

Goodfriend looked like a kid who swears he didn’t take the car, even though it’s out of gas and one mirror is broken off. “I meant, in like Flynn. You know. Free. No one knows where he is.”

“In the wind. He’s in the wind, Jarod. And that’s Bulger. Frank Ferraro won’t run. His pride won’t allow him to do anything that reminds anyone of Bulger. He’ll use his money and connections to try to beat the case. If he loses, he’ll bide his time while Horse Face Ramirez works on the appeal. This is Chicago. Federal case or not, he has pull.”

Goodfriend crossed his arms, breathed once through his nose. Satriale wished he’d just get pissed off and get it over with. All this put-upon indignation would look even worse in court. Why should Ferraro run? Ramirez would have Goodfriend washing his car for him by the time he was through.

“I know you don’t like me.” Goodfriend’s preppy tone, the rich kid who got beat up again but knows you’ll be cutting his grass in twenty years. “And I know you don’t respect me. But you will respect the office, and you will have Frank Ferraro in custody by the end of the week.”

Satriale stared at the spot on his wall where he’d decided to put Ferraro’s arrest photo while Goodfriend talked. Turned that intensity on Goodfriend when it came his turn. “Whoa, Jarod. I’ll make you a deal.” Goodfriend swallowed at the perceived insubordination. Satriale gave him a beat to get over it. “We’ll get on him. Ferraro. If he puts a overnight bag in his car, or makes four left turns in a row, he comes in.”

“You’ll lose him.”

“No, we won’t. Let’s say he does know about Will and Klimak. Help me get a warrant for some wires. Home phone, Mannheim Hunt Club, surveillance on both places, pen registers. Let’s see who he talks to, if he changes up on anything. This can be a good thing if we don’t panic.”

Goodfriend's posture and voice showed his weakening. Defense lawyers should pay his ABA dues, just for the privilege of trying cases against him. “He’ll be gone before we get the paperwork finished.”

“Then you’d better get busy. Try FISA. Tell them Ferraro’s your lead on a dirty bomb. You’re the lawyer, make stuff up. I’m telling you I’m not picking him up until I see what else I can get. Stressing him might not be the worst thing that could happen.”

CHAPTER 49

Junior Bevilacqua pulled his leather coat tight. Wind flattened the lake in random places, blew glass-sharp drops off the water. Thursday night, almost midnight, standing on Navy Pier, freezing his balls off. This meeting so fucking important it couldn't wait for tomorrow. Everyone knew Friday was Junior's regular day at Hoosier Daddy's, where he could take a meeting and get a drink. A blow job if he felt like one, which he usually did. Anyone pass up a hummer from a stripper probably gay, Junior's opinion. Might as well be gay.

At least he'd be warm at Hoosier Daddy's. Fucking freezing here, standing right next to the lake, wind blowing like a hurricane—not really, Junior in full self-pity mode now—waiting for some asshole worked for him, Junior, not the other way around. Not like in the old days. Junior bet Frank Ferraro never had to stand in the cold waiting for some cafone. About time people started showing the proper respect. Here he stood, pulling his collar up to keep what might as well be rain from getting down his shirt. Just another mortadella showing his ass, all it was, because Junior hurt his feelings. Che peccato. Boo fucking hoo.

Everyone else at that new joint Sauce opened off Rush Street. Making legitimate money, lots of nice-looking broads, most of them on the make. Junior ready to take his pick now, tired of Gina's moods, her all clingy and shit lately. Probably knew her gravy train was near the end of the line. Might have to get a real job for a change, not that part-time department store model and demonstrator thing she was doing when Junior met her. Turn tricks if she wanted, still had the looks and could suck a honeydew through fifty feet of garden hose. Georgie Rumbaugh used a lot of girls like Gina. He'd be happy to keep her working until the next meal ticket came along.

A gust of wind forced a "fuck" under Junior's breath. Looked up and saw movement where Illinois Street emptied onto Streeter Drive. One guy, first sign of life in the ten minutes he'd been standing there. Better be him. Who the hell else would it be, all the outdoor shit closed this late in the year, with cause. Polar bears don't ride the Ferris wheel.

The guy strolled along the pier like it was July or something. Stopped to look back at the skyline. Busting balls. Junior stood on the corner near the end of Festival Hall, away from anyone taking a romantic stroll up from Charlie's Ale House, not that anyone would tonight. Halfway along the Hall, this stroonz stops, leans over, ties his shoes, one after the other. Ought to throw him in the lake, he ever gets around to dragging his ass this far.

Junior pulled his hands out of his pockets, lit a cigarette. Started smoking again after they almost killed him coming out of Gina's place that night. Didn't need one now, lit it so he could blow smoke in this asshole's face when he got a chance. Looked at his watch. Ten after twelve. This better be good.

* * *

Wind bit into Dion O'Banion's face. Clear night, not too cold, kind of pleasant, fresh, except for the wind. A mist too fine to see carried off the lake, an excuse to keep his collar up and head down, hide his face without being obvious. Saw Junior Bevilacqua up by Festival Hall, not close enough to recognize, but it had to be him. Size and posture were Junior's, and who else would be standing out here on a night like this?

What little Dion could see of Junior from this distance didn't look happy. Junior not a happy man; never had been. Did everything with a chip on his shoulder, like it was an imposition. Took no joy from anything. Probably didn't smile even when he got laid. Mostly entertained by someone else's bad luck. Only laughed at his own jokes. Junior thought he was a riot.

Dion halfway along the Festival Hall's length, almost close enough to make out Junior's features. Kept his head turned, turtled into his coat, happy for the wind's excuse. Dion found the good in life. Everyone at the top of the Outfit made money; enjoy it. Dion loved his flower shop, spent hours there sometimes trimming stems, making arrangements. Good at it, too. He watched and learned from Midge Fuller the whole two years he was banging her, asked questions, practiced. A man needed a hobby. All Junior did for fun was drink and chase tail, and he acted like he had to sign a time sheet to do those.

Dion paused, checked his watch. Twelve-oh-nine. Went to one knee, tied his right shoe. Switched and tied his left. Two dry taps floated to him on the

wind, like someone rapping their fingers hard into a flat palm. Dion finished with his shoe and stood up.

Junior Bevilacqua lay face down on the pier. One arm folded under him, the other extended beyond his head. A fresh cigarette smoldered between his head and the outstretched arm. Nick “The Greek” Vodopalas on his knees nearby, picking something off the ground.

Dion stepped up his pace. Not running; no point taking longer than necessary for what came next. Got to The Greek—Lithuanian, really, his name just sounded Greek and guys didn’t make such fine distinctions—saw two shell casings in his gloved hand, one steaming as though it breathed.

“Nice work,” Dion said. “Turn him over.”

Vodopalas reached across Junior’s back to pull on the ribs under the extended arm. Steam drifted from two neat holes in the back of Junior’s head, carried toward Chicago by the wind.

Junior sighed when Vodopalas flipped him onto his back. The air trapped in his lungs steamed, too, more than the two holes in his forehead. These holes not as clean as the others, blood and brain and little bits of gore clinging to flaps of skin. Dion looked at The Greek’s hand. Nine millimeter. Good. A .22 would be cleaner, the bullets rattling around inside the head, chewing up brain instead of exiting. This job called for some mess.

“Don’t forget the eyes,” Dion said. “Frank wants to send a message.”

He walked away, heard the sounds again—more like gunshots this time, closer to him—didn’t turn back. A minute later a gun-sized splash hit the water.

So much for that. Dion walked to his car on Illinois Street. Wondered if Frank would make him underboss or consiglieri. Not that it mattered.

CHAPTER 50

Getting Junior alone on Navy Pier in the middle of the night was a lot easier than getting Frank Ferraro to do anything about it.

Will knew Junior felt his balls growing by the day. Convincing him Will could finger Ferraro for a hit was easy as selling a teenage boy on the idea hot women wanted to meet him now at 1-900-727-3963.

Frank was a different story. Approaching him directly exposed Will to a conspiracy charge, but who else did Frank trust and Will had access to? Sal

Enna perfect if Will could be sure he hadn't already taken up with Junior. Sal suspiciously quiet for several weeks. Smart money said he'd find a way to back the winner, whoever it was. Talk to Sal, he tips Junior, and Will's in a drum at the bottom of the lake, Fed or not.

That left Dion O'Banion. Officially neutral, conventional wisdom said Dion would rather torch his flower shop than work with Junior, who'd move on him as soon as he consolidated power. Dion's best interests argued in favor of Frank, all the way.

Will parked across the street from O'Banion Floral early Wednesday morning. Saw Dion through the glass front, working the register, helping an old biddy pick out a funeral wreath. Will had a soft spot for Dion, knew he loved the business, thought anyone who'd spend that much time to help an old woman pick out a fifty-dollar bouquet couldn't be all bad. Downplaying the half dozen murders Dion had committed personally, and another dozen he'd ordered. No one's perfect.

Dion left the shop at 11:30, about the time Will started to feel sorry he skipped breakfast. He let Dion get out of sight around the corner, walked across the street to the store.

The woman behind the counter looked up and smiled when the bell tinkled to announce Will. Cute, early twenties, looked like a college girl working between classes, or a recent graduate. Strawberry blonde, blue eyes, almost transparent freckles. It figured, here at O'Banion's.

Will made a mild show of looking around the shop before he walked to the counter and gave his best "I'm not a cop" smile. It would work if she was straight. Anyone bent would laugh in his face.

"Dion around?"

"I'm sorry. You just missed him." She was sorry, too, written on her face, one of those who hopes everyone gets what they want, and blames herself if they don't. Her eyes even flicked toward the front door, in case Dion might come back for something. Will guessed she had a long life of romantic disappointment ahead of her. "Can I help you? I mean, I don't know as much as Uncle—Mr. O'Banion, but I've been working here over a year now? He says I have a good eye for color?"

"You can do it. My aunt's in ICU at Michael Reese. I need a basket, something small. Nice, but not too elaborate. I have to carry it around in the car for a couple of hours, so I want something I can sit on the floor and not

ruin it. And not too expensive. To tell the truth, I don't really like her that much. You know how some old ladies get kind of sweet and grandmotherly when they get old? Aunt Sophie just got bitchy. I shouldn't say that, but, you know?" He shrugged. Aunt Sophie wouldn't mind, ten years dead, and everything he said about her was true. "I just want to make Mom happy."

"I see," the girl said. "The good son."

"Exactly."

She flipped through generic displays in the FTD book, showed him a few prepared samples. Will picked one off the shelf for twenty dollars plus tax. She made all the proper salesclerk sounds. Aunt Sophie will like that. You have a nice eye for color. I guess she's not so bad if you picked that. Will thought it looked like Dr. Seuss's idea of nuclear winter.

She wrapped it and he paid cash. Took his change and asked if she knew when Dion would be back. She gave the face again, added a little pout this time. "He's usually gone an hour and a half or two hours? He goes out every Wednesday about this time, you know?"

Will knew all about Dion's regular Wednesday lunch with Tommy Sullivan of the Caterers' Association. Knowing everything about everyone paid off in unexpected ways. Will pretended to think, tried not to smile. "That's okay. See, we go way back, and I have something for him. If I give it to you, will you make sure he gets it as soon as he comes in?"

Will guessed anyone who worked here must be used to people dropping things off for Dion, and would know better than to look inside. "Sure, I can do that," she said. "Is it something big? I could, you know, find some room back here?"

"Just this." Will drew a plain white envelope with "Dion O'Banion" laser-printed on the front. "I really appreciate it."

"Who's it from? I'm really sorry, I should have asked your name before."

"Don't worry about it. He'll know what to do when he opens it."

* * *

Dion O'Banion laid the single piece of laser-printed white paper on the table in Frank Ferraro's breakfast nook.

Frank said, "She say who dropped this off?"

Dion shrugged. “Just some guy. ‘Older white guy,’ she said.”

“How old?”

“ ‘Older’ was all she said. To her, that’s anything between thirty-five and sixty. My niece, Arlene. My sister Audrey’s kid. You met her at Mickey Donnelly’s wedding. Nice girl, pretty, sweet disposition. I’ve sold flowers smarter than her.”

Frank pressed his hands against the paper to flatten the creases. Took reading glasses out of his pocket, paused, put them on. An inner circle of trust had to be reached before Frank Ferraro let someone see him wearing glasses. Dion already impressed Frank had told him come to the house.

“He didn’t say nothing else?” Looking at the paper like something about it might change.

“Nothing. It says what it says.”

What it said was:

Junior Bevilacqua alone at Southwest corner of Festival Hall.

Thursday night midnight.

He expects someone who’s not coming.

“Pretty corny, this midnight shit,” Frank said. “You think it’s legit?”

“I think it’s worth finding out.”

Frank read it again, picked up the paper and turned it over, looked at the blank side like he was reading it. “Someone ends up in the lake if this is a setup.”

“I thought about that.” Dion getting worried; he expected Frank to be making plans by now. “I think we can cover ourselves.” Frank looked over the top of his glasses, so Dion went on. “Nick Vodopalas is just the guy.”

“The Greek, right?”

Close enough, Dion thought. “He’ll wait somewhere until the leaves change color if he has to. He likes it. Says it builds self-discipline. He wanted to be some kind of Special Forces guy, but they wouldn’t take him.”

Frank kept looking, didn’t speak. Dion said, “He’ll get there early, before anyone Junior might send. A lot of things are closed this time of year, so there’s places he can wait where no one will see him, but he’ll see everything. Lets himself into the beer garden when he’s ready and waits for

midnight. I don't think too many guys from any of Junior's crews recognize him. You know, they don't spend much time with us Irish chappies."

"The Greek's not Irish."

"Everyone in my crew is Irish to Junior."

"How's he get out of the beer garden to do it?" Frank said over the top of his glasses.

"He leaves a way when he goes in. Cuts a lock or a chain, I don't know. We have time tomorrow to look it over. I'll walk up a little after midnight. Junior's supposed to be expecting somebody, so that'll draw his attention enough for Nick to step out and cap him."

"What if it is a setup?"

"Nick sees anything, he lays low, gets out if he can. Sends me a text message if it looks wrong, so I'll know not to go."

Frank looked at the paper again and Dion let him think. Not optimal conditions for a hit—the situation not as controlled as he'd like, the preparation rushed—but you took what luck gave you. They'd tried to set Junior up for weeks. He changed his habits, moved around, showed more smarts than either Dion or Frank gave him credit for. Dion wondered if Junior had found some adult supervision.

Sal Enna's name came to mind. If Sal had flipped, Dion would kill him personally. No better than an enforcer, that psycho "Grill" reputation all he had going for him. That and no conscience. Frank gave him jobs he didn't want Vinnie Dominos around, rewarded him more than appropriately. If Sal had switched, he was worse than Junior.

"What about this guy?" Frank tapped the paper with a middle finger. "The one giving us Junior. Who is he, you think?"

"Junior's done dirt to a lot of people. Fuck over the wrong guy, he decides Junior's word is no good, and you got a friend you didn't know about." Sal's face in Dion's head again, a deal gone wrong maybe. Sal not wanting Frank to know he'd talked to Junior in the first place. Stranger things have happened.

"I don't like it, Dion. A lot could go wrong. On the other hand, we get this one right, we win the game. What do you think?" Frank's mind still not made up and time was wasting.

"I say what the hell, we go. Me and the Greek. I trust him to cover us if it is a setup. If it's not, this is too good to pass up. I had lunch with Tommy

Sullivan today. He got a subpoena. So'd a couple of his other guys. The Feds are getting serious about this case they're putting together. We can't fight on two fronts at once, Frank. We got a chance to take Junior out, we gotta go."

Frank carried the paper into the kitchen. Lit it with a wooden match, let it burn half way, dropped it in the sink.

"Tell the Greek make it messy. Send Junior's little friends a fucking message."

CHAPTER 51

Cappelletti's a nice enough place, once Pete Taylor got past the fact all the customers he could see were wise guys. Maybe they had another room for civilians; everyone in here either made or connected. Not that he knew them all by sight. Taylor had enough time in the life to know someone who'd been straightened out when he saw him.

He was at Cappelletti's to work on the third degree of separation between him and Frank Ferraro. So far, things had gone better than expected. The afternoon after meeting Mitch Klimak and discovering olive burgers, Taylor caught up with Sam Pasqualone at his chop shop. Sam hooked him up with Charlie "The Tuna" Tutelo; all it cost Taylor was a promise to tell Ferraro about Sam's good work and closed mouth, in case the Outfit needed another source of cheap car parts.

Tutelo was a pimp, though he preferred to be called an "entrepreneur of intimacy." Collected from all the porn shops north of Madison as far west as the city limit. His area spread across crew boundaries, a courtesy granted for years of good earnings and service. His entrepreneurial umbrella also covered half a dozen escort agencies. Charlie the Tuna's menu started with girls who cost \$150 for one hour or one orgasm, whichever came first. His team of trained professional service providers could also hook you up for \$500 to \$1,000 an hour, the night, the weekend, or someone to take on a trip around the world, no pun intended. Tutelo didn't make porn flicks himself, but anyone who wanted to make one in a vaguely defined Chicagoland area paid for his girls. Whether any were requested—or sent—didn't matter.

Tutelo had a relationship with Sal Enna. Sal had no love for pimps, but Tutelo's money spent like anyone else's, and his kick was never short. Sending the cash over with a girl worth half a grand an hour as a tip didn't hurt Sal's appreciation.

It was Tutelo set Taylor up with Sal, why he was in Cappelletti's early. He knew better than to keep The Grill waiting. He also wanted some time to build up his comfort level with the whole idea. Taylor knew the stories, and meeting Enna anyplace that might have a grill nearby—like a restaurant—almost made him look elsewhere for his introduction.

Halfway through his first Bud, Enna took the next bar stool and said, "Charlie Tuna says you're looking for me."

The lack of any introduction threw Taylor a little. No talk about the weather or the Bears, or even a “you must be Pete Taylor.” He took a swig from his bottle when he saw Enna coming, to show he wasn’t intimidated. Figured he’d take a quick swallow while Enna said hello, then answer, one man of the world to another. He swallowed too fast when Enna quick-pitched him. Choked once, had to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand before he spoke to make sure he didn’t spray beer on a man who’d leave grill marks on someone’s face over late payment of a hundred dollars. Very worldly.

Enna waited for Taylor to get control, not long enough to hear what he might say. “The Tuna says you want to see Frank.”

“Yeah, Mr. Enna. I got some—some information he’s gonna want to hear.”

“Tell me.” Enna looked at him, not like he saw him. Just looking at whatever sat on Taylor’s bar stool. Could have been a dog, a fish, a hammer for all the interest he showed.

“Well, the thing is, this is kind of sensitive and all. Not the kind of thing I’d want to get around if I was Frank.”

Enna raised an eyebrow a sixteenth of an inch. “You know what Frank wants and don’t want?”

“No, no, no, I didn’t mean that all Mr. Enna. It’s just that—”

Enna said, “You know what Frank wants and don’t want?” again and Taylor realized it was a rhetorical question. He stayed quiet and let Enna tell him.

“What Frank wants is information, delivered by people he trusts. He don’t need bums coming to him every day with hot tips, looking for favors. He’s a busy man with a lot on his mind. You might a heard about Vinnie Dominos. Now everything comes through me. I decide if you see him, so what you tell me better be good.”

Taylor wondered about the penalty for wasting Enna’s time, chose not to think on it too much. “Okay, right, I understand. Good idea, screening who gets to see Mr. Ferraro, busy as he must be.”

“I’m glad you think it’s a good idea,” Enna said, though he didn’t sound glad at all. “Now you tell me, and I’ll tell you if talking to Frank is a good idea. Then, maybe if I’m lucky, you can tell me if that’s a good fucking idea, too.”

“Right. Please don’t misunderstand me, Mr. Enna. It’s not like I was saying it was a good idea like you might not know, or like I was passing judgment, Christ, no. I was agreeing with you, kind of another way of saying, like, ‘I understand,’ something like that, if you know what I mean.”

“Then just say ‘I understand.’ I don’t got a hell of a lot more time to waste than Frank, and you ain’t told me dick so far.”

“Right, yes, you’re busy, too, and I really appreciate you taking the time to see me about this. It was great of The Tuna to make this introduction for me, and...” Enna shifted in his seat, raised his line of sight over Taylor’s head. Losing interest.

“The thing is, word’s out that Mr. Ferraro’s paying a cop, some Fed. Guy’s name is Hickok or Hickox, something western like that. I hear he’s been doing it for a few months now, milking the guy for information and keeping himself clear of some big investigation the Feds have going.” Taylor didn’t know anything except what he’d heard from Mitch Klimak, who only knew money changed hands, there was an investigation, and he’d been transferred to his idea of the Chicago gulag for screwing with it. Still, it couldn’t hurt to sound authoritative. Enna might not know even that much.

“You think Frank don’t know this already?” Enna’s eyes still looking past Taylor. “Him being the one making the payments and all?”

“Right, you’re right, I mean, he knows he’s paying. But what he don’t know is, the Fed’s setting him up. He’s recording everything Mr. Ferraro says through some kind of recorder in his watch, and turning the money back into the G after every meeting.”

Enna looked at him now. “You know this how?”

“This Chicago cop, Mitch Klimak, worked OC for years. Maybe you heard of him?” Enna tilted his head half an inch. “Klimak was on this Hickok guy for weeks, I guess. Picked him up coming out of the Field Museum and every Fed in the world came down on him. Now he’s working burglaries way the hell down Altgeld Gardens.”

“This cop told you himself.” Enna looking at him close now. Taylor liked it better the other way, when he wasn’t sure Enna was listening.

“Yeah, just the other day. He was bitching about the transfer, about he was being punished for good police work, and in Chicago all that mattered was whose ass you kissed.”

“And he just picked you off the street to tell all this?” Taylor watched Enna give him the once-over and realized the jackpot he was in. Cops don’t tell crooks anything unless the conversation went both ways. Not the first impression Taylor wanted to make on a guy like Enna.

Sal didn't give him time for a lot of thought. “Take off your shirt.”

“My shirt? I mean, okay, but you want me to do it like right here?”

“Take off your fucking shirt. I don’t say where or when, I mean here and right the fuck now. Unless you want Dominic to take it off for you.”

Taylor fumbled with the buttons, opened the shirt, pulled it out of his pants. People eating their dinners twenty feet away. Slid it off, piled it on the bar.

“Okay, Mr. Enna. I don’t mean nothing by it, but I don’t understand. Why—”

“Tee shirt.”

“Tee shirt?” Taylor looked down like he was surprised to find one. Did made guys not wear tee shirts? It was some trust thing? He touched it, palms up, not even sure enough of what Enna expected of him to ask the question. Dropped his hands as soon as it occurred to him he looked like a stripper showing off her rack. The two other customers and the bartender found something fascinating to occupy them at the other end of the bar.

“Take it off. The tee shirt. Now.” The tee over Taylor’s head before Enna finished saying “now.” “Spin around once on the stool.” Taylor got half way around, caught his toe on the chair leg, started over.

Enna gestured to someone standing behind Taylor. “Dominic, take his watch.” Taylor didn’t know whether to shit or tie his shoes. His mother bought him that watch, and he loved his mother, who still thought Taylor worked for a finance company as a repo man. He wanted to say no, you don’t want to talk, don’t, not sure this wasn’t some prelude to a hit, a way to make the body harder to identify. Dominic made his decision easier by sliding the watch off Taylor’s wrist while he made up his mind.

“Take it over there by the door,” Enna said to Dominic. Then, to Taylor, “You’ll get it back. You said Hickox had a wire in his watch. Maybe you do, too.”

“A wire? Holy shit, Mr. Enna, I didn’t come in here with no wire. I just wanted to get some information to Mr. Ferraro is all. Here, I’ll take off my fucking pants, you want me to.”

“Relax.” Enna waved him off, palms downward. “I ain’t looking for your dick, check for no antenna sticking out your ass. Now tell me what you want from Frank.”

“Nothing. Really, I just want to make sure he knows.” Enna’s face clouded and Taylor remembered no crook does anything for free. “I mean, I thought if I told him this, something he’d want to know, then he’d figure I could be trusted. Check around. I been doing good work for years, kicking up with the street tax like I should, making a nice living. Only got jammed up once, did eight months at Centralia. In case he was looking for associates, people who could do some work for him. That’s all. I just want a chance to earn.”

He had Enna’s attention. “What kind of work you do?”

“Cars,” Taylor said. “Mostly family type cars. You know, like Hondas, Fords, SUVs. Chop shop stuff. I do some custom work once in a while, when someone needs a specific BMW or Lexus. I’d like to do more of that work, if I could.”

“You any good?”

“I can steal your car—not your car, you know, like any car you wanted—drive it around, bring it back, you’d never know it was gone unless you checked the mileage. I ain’t no smash and grab asshole. I take pride in my work. Why I’m here today. Show you I’m a professional.”

“You know, Mr. Professional, I might could have something for you. Stay in touch. About this message for Frank, I’ll tell him. You don’t say nothing to no one. Anyone guided you to me asks, tell ‘em Sal’s taking care of it. That’s all. You did a good thing here. Don’t fuck it up.”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Enna. Thanks a lot. I’m always looking for work.”

“That’s a good attitude. Dominic, give him back his watch. Paulie,” he said to the bartender, “give him a menu. Whatever he wants. He earned himself a good meal.” Enna stood, pulled a roll of bills from his pocket. Peeled off five hundreds for Taylor. “I ain’t what no one would call a generous man, but I pay what people earn. Do what I tell you, and there’s more where this come from.”

He left as suddenly and without announcement as he’d come. Taylor ordered chicken parmigiana, the only Italian food he could stand. Sal Enna said, “eat,” he ate.

CHAPTER 52

Frank Ferraro backed out of his driveway into the street. He had a driver—all bosses did, a wonderful training ground—preferred to drive his midnight blue DTS to the Mannheim Hunt Club himself. He missed this fifteen minutes of daily solitude during the war, the Caddy in the garage while Anthony drove him everywhere, cars full of men front and back. Thank God that was over and Frank could drive the big car by himself again.

Going to work early today. Sal Enna had something he said couldn't wait, wouldn't talk about it on the phone. Sal wanted to come over the house, said he'd be there right away. Frank put him off. Didn't like to do business at home unless it was life or death. Junior's death, for example. Sal didn't say anything over the phone that sounded like it was worth disturbing Frank's evening. This morning at the club would be fine.

Ten-thirty in the morning, light traffic driving west out of Oak Park on Lake Street. Beautiful day. Cold—week before Thanksgiving, damn right it was cold—not a cloud in the sky. Breeze too light to shake the empty tree limbs. Take a run to Toys 'R' Us on Cermak after lunch, start looking for the grandkids' Christmas gifts. He insisted on buying their toys himself. All was right in Frank Ferraro's world.

Outfit business coming along nicely with Junior out of the way. Dion O'Banion showed he had a good head and could be trusted, so Frank made him consiglieri. His way of rewarding Dion without making the capos Gianni promoted bitch about taking orders from a mick. They'd get over that prejudice, that only Italians could be boss, soon enough. They learned it from Gianni, they could unlearn it from Frank. Or they wouldn't. Either way.

Sal Enna a good choice for underboss. Any questions Frank had about his whereabouts toward the end of Junior's life moot now that Frank had the power. Worst case, Sal had been hedging his bets, doing what he could to come out on the winning side. Now he could keep everyone else in line, look after day-to-day stuff, collect the tax. Things he was best at.

Crossing 25th Street in Melrose Park the car behind flashed a blue light, gave one siren burst. Frank pulled over and put his car in Park, rested his hands on the wheel. The other car pulled in away from the curb, classic

traffic stop position. Another dark sedan angled in front to cut him off. All the activity set Frank back a little. Cops felt like they had to bust balls sometimes; maybe that's all it was. Or they had something to tell him, like the night Hickox came to the house.

A gloved hand knocked on the driver side window. Young guy, familiar from somewhere. The Samoan agent with Hickox that night. Frank rolled down the window and the cop said, "Francis Albert Ferraro?"

"Yes."

"I'm Special Agent Ray Fa'alepo of the FBI. Will you please shut off the ignition and hand me the keys, sir?"

Hickox should have said something about this, stopping him like some mope. He killed the engine, handed out his keys. No reason to worry. The car was clean, not like that time in Wisconsin.

"Thank you. Please step out of the car, sir. This will just take a minute."

Getting out of the car was a bit much. Polite or not, they were treating this like a garden variety roust. Frank got out of the car as a third Fed sedan pulled up behind the Fed. The front doors opened.

The young agent said, "If you'll please turn around and place your hands on the roof of the car." Frank said, "What the fuck?" and a familiar voice said, "It's okay, Fa. Mr. Ferraro's not armed."

Will Hickox walked up from the third car, stopped next to Fa'alepo. "You can put the cuffs away, too. He won't be any trouble."

The burn started in Frank's neck when he saw the handcuffs, realized what this was about. Maybe Hickox was as surprised as he was, though he shouldn't be. Frank had already paid the greedy bastard over a hundred grand.

The young agent talking again. Big SOB, except for the hair he looked like one of those football playing Samoans with the apostrophes in their names and hair like the Wild Man of Borneo. Frank thinking all this while the kid talked, when he should have been listening.

The kid got his full attention when he said, "...placing you under arrest for violations of 18 United States Code, Chapter 96, Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, engaging in an ongoing criminal conspiracy..."

Son of a bitch. Frank knew they'd been after him. Fucking Junior and his war made it easy for someone to get careless. Talk on the phone, do some

other dumbass thing. Too busy keeping from getting their asses shot off to worry about prison. Hickox told him to be careful, made it sound like Junior's crews were the main target. The heat spread from Frank's neck into his face. Tightness grew in his chest.

The young Fed still talking. "...and 18 United States Code Section Two-oh-three, bribery of a Federal officer – ”

“Bribery? Fuck you.” Frank stepped past Fa’alepo to confront Hickox directly. “What the fuck is going on here? You bring a whole fucking platoon for—for what? What’s this bribery bullshit?”

Hickox kept the smile off his face, couldn’t hold back the glee in his eyes. The emptiness hit Frank’s stomach when Hickox took a small tape recorder from his pocket, pressed a button.

Hickox’s voice said, “What about your dad, Frank? He was connected, wasn’t he?”

Frank heard himself say, “My old man was a douche bag. Best thing ever happened to me was when the Big Tuna whacked him.”

“Tony Accardo had your father killed? And you worked for him, knowing that?”

“I didn’t know, like know for sure, not right away. Didn’t matter. The best thing anyone ever did for me was kill that bastard.”

Hickox pressed a button, put the machine away. Something came across Frank he hadn’t felt in years. More than anger, a physical force. He’d felt it when he killed Phil LaCanfora for molesting a twelve-year-old girl. Frank hated sexual deviancy in any form; he did Phil himself. Planned to make it clean and simple—two in the head and walk away—until Phil said the girl wanted it, she’d been egging him on for weeks. Twelve years old. Frank younger then, still a capo, beat Phil with his bare hands until bits of brain flecked his knuckles and the brick wall of the warehouse they were in. No one associated with the Outfit had touched a girl under twenty since, twenty being Frank Ferraro’s unofficial age of consent.

The same heat grew in him now. Just him and Hickox here, Frank would’ve killed him, cop or not. The eruption built, had no physical release. He stepped to within a foot of Hickox. Other agents closed. Hickox waved them off.

“You have a tape? You son of a bitch, you taped? How? I stripped you naked, did everything but put a light up your ass.”

Hickox held up a wrist between their faces. “The watch, Frank. I even offered to take it off the first time I wore it.”

“We took the fucking watch off you the first coupla times.” The growing realization made Frank’s stomach hollower as his face grew hotter.

“I lived without it the first couple times.” Hickox turned up one corner of his mouth. “You know it’s nothing personal, Frank. This is my job. Get in the car. It’s freezing out here.”

Frank glared into Hickox’s face, took one step away toward the car before it overcame him. “You motherfucking cocksucker!” Leapt toward Hickox, arms reaching, fingers curled into fists. “This is entrapment! Entrapment, you lousy bastard!” Fa’alepo and two other Feds grabbed Frank’s arms, pulled him away. “I’ll fucking kill you. I’d kill your whole fucking family if you weren’t too fucked up to have one! I hope your girlfriend dies of cancer of the cunt, you cocksucker! I’ll piss on your grave. I swear to Christ and on my children’s heads I’ll piss on your fucking grave!”

Fa’alepo forced Frank’s hands behind his back and cuffed him. A miniscule smile leaked from Hickox’s lips.

“You want to piss on my grave, Frank? Be my guest. Just hope they bury me in the exercise yard at Marion. You’re going to be there a long time.”

CHAPTER 53

On balance, a good year for Will Hickox. He felt bad about Junior, except for the dead part. No question the world was a better place without him. Will never thought of what happened as vengeance for beating Mad. That was small potatoes in Junior's list of transgressions.

Will felt worse about taking Junior's money. Shaking Junior down was Wild Bill run amuck. It jeopardized Fallout and his life with Mad; what he cared about most. She'd been right all along: the money didn't matter. Fifty-nine thousand five hundred dollars parked in a Bahamian bank, thanks to Uncle Sam's first-rate money laundering training, and Will had no idea what to do with it.

Mad didn't know about the money or Junior. The Junior secret was easy to keep if he left the money alone. Bringing the money out would make Mad wonder where it came from, a conversation he'd rather not have. Plus, he didn't much want the money anymore. Blood money, it had almost cost him everything. Better to leave it. Even giving it to charity risked exposing where he got it in the first place.

Today not the day to worry about any of that. Retirement papers filled out, perfectly centered on his desk blotter at 2111 West Roosevelt. Drop them off tomorrow, be out by year's end, with luck. Try to negotiate a good package as a consultant while they wrapped up Ferraro's case, get paid to come back and testify. Give him time to start the business with Mad, and some free pub to help launch it.

He stepped out of the shower, paused in his toweling off to think how good any sentence that ended "with Mad" sounded in his head. Tonight was special: the first time they would spend the night together without a cover story for Mitch. Tomorrow would be the first time he'd wake up with the sun and see her sleeping next to him in their bed. Their bed. All he had to do after that was file his papers and drive Mad home. Pick up as much of her stuff as they could while Mitch worked; nothing would be worth taking after he found out. Will would wait in the car while she told Mitch they were through, his cell number queued up on her phone. Mitch did anything threatening, she'd push Call and Will would be there. Then they'd come back here. Their home. Finally.

Will combed his hair, went to the closet for Mad's favorite shirt. Tired, but invigorated. Running on four hours' sleep, at the office past midnight interviewing Ferraro and doing paperwork. Back at seven to get ready for the arraignment. Horse Face Ramirez ate Jarod Goodfriend's lunch, talked the judge down from no bail to a hundred grand, which Horse Face just happened to have on him. Will knew the judge was straight. Horse just that much better than Jarod.

He'd buttoned the shirt and was stepping into his pants when the doorbell rang. Mad's flowers. No time to get them after work, he called and ordered delivery here to give to her at dinner. First time he'd ever given her real flowers. She always had to go back to Mitch; what would she do with flowers?

Tucked his shirt in walking to the door. Went back to the kitchen island for his wallet. Fished around for a ten to tip the delivery as he opened the door. Came out with the money and looked up in time to see the gun, not the face of the man who shot him through the chest.

He turned to move away as he recognized the danger. The impact made him stumble. He slipped on a throw rug. Fell hard on his side, rolled onto his back. His chest felt like a hot skewer pinned him to the floor. He tried to stand, get to his gun on the nightstand in the bedroom. His brain sent all the right signals; no movement. Tried to raise himself on one arm, crawl away. His arm moved, not enough to get to his knees. Drag himself, then. Get my gun. No thought of what the shooter was doing. No situation was hopeless unless he gave up. Big Will taught him that. He'd be okay—he could even get up—if he could catch his breath. Everything seemed to work. It hurt where the skewer went through, but his lungs still filled and relaxed. Where was the air? Don't think about what the shooter's doing. No control over that. Worry about what you can control. Get up! Tried. No good. Forget the gun. What's handy? Not time to quit yet.

A sound caught his attention. He lay back for a few seconds to listen. Rest, just for a second. Try to catch his breath. What the hell was that? Like a basketball with a bad valve, leaking air. When he breathed. He looked down. A froth of pink bubbles foamed on his chest. The bubbles turned redder as he watched. Aw, shit.

* * *

Mitch Klimak stepped inside, pulled the door shut before Will finished falling. The house on a residential street, people coming and going. Help could be anywhere. Could be; Mitch knew it wouldn't. Most people not home from work yet. School kids, housewives, and old-timers the only ones around. No one would recognize an isolated, unexpected gunshot if they didn't see any sign of the gun or a victim. He was off the stoop before anyone had a chance. Someone walking by ten seconds later would never know he'd been there.

Hickox lay on the floor, looking toward the back of the house. Mitch had to give it to him, he was a tough son of a bitch. None of this whining, begging, I can't believe you shot me shit like in the movies. No doubt in Mitch's mind Hickox was going for his piece; it's what he'd do. Doesn't matter who shot you. Rules are the same: do what you can to get out, take him with you if possible. Who shot him wouldn't matter to Hickox yet.

It mattered to Mitch. He saw the foam on Hickox's chest and knew he had him down. A .44 at that range knocks a lot of wind out of a man. Mitch waited for Hickox to recognize help might as well be in Alaska before he spoke. Stood over him, gun dangling from the trigger guard.

"Don't get the wrong idea, Wild Bill. This ain't about ruining my career. I can arrest niggers as good as wops. Easier, even. No more three year investigations waiting for something to happen. These fucking guys must want to get caught, dumb as they are."

Hickox's eyes weren't focused. Mitch recognized the signs of a man drawing into himself, mustering all the strength he had left. Once he even saw a guy pull it off. That one didn't have bubbles on his chest getting redder with every breath.

"I'll bet you and Mad laughed your asses off, thinking that dumb Polack has no idea what we're doing. I didn't, either. I figured Mad for a lot of things, but not a slut. I tailed you because I thought you were dirty. I still think you're dirty, but you're smarter than me. That's why I never looked in on you when we followed you. Had my partners do it."

Hickox's breath rasped, his mouth open. The bubbles redder and fewer now. "But Mad, she sticks out. I'd send one of my guys in to see where you were, make sure you didn't slip out, and often as not he'd tell me we could pack it in, you were with some broad. Till that night we followed you back

from the titty bar in Indiana. You drove to Connie's and Al saw the woman and we went down the road for a few. Al, he has an eye for women, which is pretty amazing, you look at his wife. He starts talking about this tramp he always sees you with, this big redhead with blue eyes. Curly hair."

Hickox's body shuddered with effort. Got halfway to his elbows, sank back.

"So we go back to Connie's and he stands outside that window under the awning by the front door while I call her cell. I knew she wouldn't answer when she saw it was me. I just wanted Al to see her look for her phone, and she did.

"How long's it been? Five years, I'll bet, since you worked that fraud case. You probably saw more of her pussy than I did all that time. Well, I figured, what the fuck? Five years, what's a few more weeks? So I put out the word about your sting, and you arrested Ferraro for me right away. This'll look like an Outfit job when I'm done. I guess I laugh best."

Mitch had more to say; Hickox wouldn't wait. His lights almost out when Mitch leaned over and thumbed back the hammer. Slid the muzzle into Hickox's mouth. He had to hurry his big exit line a little or he'd be talking to an empty room.

"I'll tell Mad you can't make it tonight."

CHAPTER 54

Mad pulled through the gates of Resurrection Cemetery with the staff coming in to work. She'd picked Will's plot herself. He had no arrangements, and she wouldn't have him in Mt. Carmel or Queen of Heaven with all the wise guys. They got too much of him before. This one time, Mad kept Will Hickox where she wanted him.

She parked where she could see both ways along the drive closest to Will's grave, side mirror angled to see back a couple hundred yards. Placed some flowers, brushed away dead leaves and cleaned up a few tufts of scruffy grass hanging over the ground-level stone.

Sat in the car three-and-a-half hours before the Cadillac DTS drifted over the low rise that marked her horizon. Didn't play the radio. Didn't read. Didn't nap. Mad, whom it killed to wait for anything, didn't fidget or look at her watch. She was close to Will. She had no place better to be.

Didn't think about much. No happy memories, regrets over things unsaid. She'd told Will everything she ever wanted him to hear when he could still hear it. Anything said or thought now wasted, sappy appeals to sentiment she didn't have time or energy for. Will found reservoirs of strength when he lost Sheila; Mad learned from him.

He left her everything, including almost sixty thousand dollars in a Bahamian bank she'd had no idea about. His 401(k) was hers. The house, the car, and his part of some property he owned jointly with his brother, who—she was surprised to hear—knew all about her.

No way to be sure Ferraro would come today. He could have been there any time over the past year, done his business and left no sign she'd ever know about. Will taught her about Frank, their idea of pillow talk, sharing work stories, the contrast to their situation reinforcing their happiness. She didn't think he'd come unless it was to close the books once and for all. Mad would have come today anyway, for the anniversary; the trial's end yesterday a convenient coincidence.

* * *

The Caddy slid quiet as a submarine along the winding pavement. Frank let Anthony Antofuermo drive today. Too uncomfortable for Frank to sit still more than a few minutes at a time anymore, a year and a day after the Feds busted him in Melrose Park.

Carl Piunti sat in back, speaking only when the quiet got to him, which seemed like every two minutes. Nice day. Not much traffic. The Bears suck this year. All the cemeteries he's been to, never seen this one before. Asked if they could drive by the gate where Resurrection Mary bent the bars. Chicago's most famous ghost. Frank wished he'd brought someone else. Like taking a kid to the zoo, bringing Carl to a cemetery.

Frank knew where they were going, sent Anthony a longer way to avoid passing by the plots he and Annabella had already paid for. His final gift to her, so she wouldn't have to visit him in what she called a "gangster cemetery" like Mt. Carmel. He'd be back soon enough. He finally saw a doctor three months ago about his weight loss and fatigue. Pancreatic cancer. In six to nine months Frank would check in for an extended stay at Resurrection Cemetery.

The bar to clear before anything is considered good news pretty high with something like that hanging over you. Yesterday managed. Judge Arnold Weinberg—a Federal judge, not some Cook County hack with fifties in his pocket to make change for the fix—dismissed the RICO and bribery charges. Didn't even make Horse Face put on a defense. Frank smiled, thinking how disappointed old Horse looked, watching maybe a thousand billable hours fly out the window. Every lawyer moves for dismissal after the prosecution rests. It's like the full-court shot at the end of a close basketball game. You know it's not going in, but it's free to try. Yesterday the first time Frank ever saw it work. That old Jew judge who looked like Central Casting answered a request for an Old Jew Judge reamed the white bread wonder boy AUSA for five minutes. Called his case everything but a piece of shit. The bribery charge fell flat without Hickox; the RICO case came out of the oven half-baked. Frank thought the kid might cry, tripping over a career stepping stone like that.

He guided Anthony around a bend to the right, using a blue minivan for reference. The undisputed boss now. Dion at his right hand; Sal Enna enforced his will. Sauce Ragusa and The Jap Caccamo came to him with shopping bags full of money, pledging undying loyalty. Swearing Gianni

and Junior led them astray. Outfit rules: blame belongs to the dead, or those who are about to be.

Sal would take over when Frank came back to Resurrection. Dion's Irish blood created a glass ceiling not even Frank could break. He hoped Sal would listen to Dion; Frank learned every day that Dion was smarter than anyone gave him credit for. If Sal didn't listen, the next RICO beef would take them all. Whoever replaced Goodfriend would have a hard-on for everyone with a vowel on either end of his name.

A woman got out of the minivan with the Caddy a hundred yards away. She walked across the grass, looking in Frank's direction a couple of times. Anthony pulled in facing the minivan and the three of them walked across the grass to where the woman stood, next to Hickox's grave.

Frank looked her over as he approached, her scarf and top coat snapping in the wind. Not bad looking. Big, not just tall; not fat. Corn fed, they'd say in Iowa. Carl reached out a hand when Frank stumbled; Frank muttered to leave him the fuck alone. Closer now, the woman had an ordinary face that would dress up nicely. The blue in her eyes obvious at twenty feet.

She didn't speak, watched Frank and his crew approach. He stopped a yard away. "You must be the girlfriend. The cop's wife."

"Ex-wife." She had a husky voice, no edges. Sultry, Frank thought. Where he came from, calling a woman a broad didn't have to be an insult. She looked like that kind. "I divorced him the day I figured out what he'd done."

"I should probably thank you. Turning him in, proving we had nothing to do with this." Frank nodded toward Will's grave.

"You did enough." She didn't look any more afraid than if she was meeting a grocer. "I know why you're here. He told me what you said."

"And you knew I'd come today?"

"It's exactly a year, and you just beat the case yesterday. I didn't think you'd waste much time."

I don't have much time to waste, Frank thought. "You been here all day." Not a question.

"Since they opened the gate."

A memory sparked in Frank's mind. "You're the one Junior beat up."

"Yeah," she said. "I'm the one."

“That was wrong. He had no call to do that to a woman. I apologize for him.”

“I’m touched.” This really was a tough broad, not some bimbo playing at it. Frank almost smiled. “I won’t let you do it,” she said.

“No?”

“No.” She opened the flap of her purse. Carl and Anthony opened their coats.

“You can’t really stop us,” Frank said, to see how far she’d take it.

“Not all of you. But I can stop you.”

Carl stepped forward, said, “You want me to move her, Mr. Ferraro?”

“Let her be.” Frank noted Anthony standing firm, not provoking. He’d have to get Anthony his own crew before it was too late. He’d learned well. Time to start moving him up.

They stood like that for a minute. Three men looking at the tall redhead, her eyes flicking from one of them to another like a Sergio Leone movie. Mostly she looked at Frank.

Her eyes clouded. The right hand moved up, then rested on her purse while her left hand wiped her face. Her attention never wavered. Frank. Anthony. Frank. Carl. Frank. Change the pattern every so often. The corners of Frank’s mouth turned up as he watched her.

“You say no, huh?” She nodded, her eyes welling over. “You love a dead man that much?” Another nod. Tears leaked across high cheekbones to drop on her top coat like rain. “Then—for you—I say go with God. No one will touch his grave. I swear.”

She looked at Frank only, blinking fast to clear her eyes. “Just like that?” she said, her voice husky with emotion.

“Yeah. Not just like that, but yeah. It’s nothing to him now. Not like it’ll ruin his day, looking down from heaven while I water his flowers. It’s an empty gesture, just so I can keep my word. You know what my word means to me, or you wouldn’t be here. So you know what it means when I say I’ll let it go. Not for him, but not to show you any disrespect. You are a classy lady.”

She nodded, whispered, “Thank you.” Rubbed her eyes, still with her left hand.

“Anthony, Carl, go back to the car. I’ll be a minute.” Frank waited until they were out of earshot. “Another reason. You remind me of someone. My

daughter, Cherie. She's straight, like you, good job working as a vet at Brookfield Zoo. Don't look at all like you. Five-foot-nothing, a hundred pounds with a brick in each hand. Never took shit from me, not one day in her life. She knows what I am, still brings her kids around to play with Poppy. She only stays enough to make it look good for the kids. So they don't think less of me."

Took some time to think of what to say next, her eyes on him like handcuffs. He looked away without turning his head, saw cars passing on Archer Avenue. Then he looked back toward Hickox's grave.

"I'll put out the word: nothing happens here. All I ask is you do me one favor, Miss—Miss—"

"Shea," she said.

"Miss Shea." A woman Dion could get used to in a hurry, except she'd never have anything to do with him. "I'm not asking you to balance out everything I ever done with this one thing any decent person would do. I just want you to remember that Frank Ferraro knew how decent people acted, and," he smiled, "when confronted with it, could do it himself. Maybe tell someone sometime, if it came up."

Her voice still a whisper. "Sure."

Frank pursed his lips, bowed his head a few inches. "Then I'll say goodbye." He stopped in the middle of turning. "You know all that shit they say about regular medical check-ups? You should do that."

He put his hands in his pockets and walked back to the car. Carl already had his door open.

* * *

She knew the Caddy was him the second she saw it, promised herself she'd shoot Ferraro if it came to that. The gun in her purse an old .38 Police Special Will said belonged to his grandfather. Didn't think about what would happen next; no point to it.

She watched three men get out of the car, a lump in her throat as they all came up the low rise to the grave. Recognized Ferraro right away. Thinner than she remembered, his hair even wispier. She wondered what to say as they walked, decided to let him go first.

You must be the girlfriend. The cop's wife.

She said “Ex-wife” faster than she meant to, as much to wash the idea of Mitch from her mind as to remove herself from the casual meaning of “girlfriend.” She’d never thought of herself as Will’s girlfriend. They were lovers even before they kissed.

Mad didn’t want to talk to Ferraro; she certainly didn’t want to be thanked for anything she might have done that helped him. She drew her line in the sand and saw how he played it. Put up with his bullshit chivalry, apologizing for Junior the breath before his implied threat. You can’t really stop us.

But she did. Ferraro had his own reasons for not pushing it; none would have applied had she not been there. She cursed the weakness of her tears, not sure she heard right when he promised no one would deface the grave. “Thank you” came out before she thought about it, probably because she meant it.

She didn’t know why he talked about his daughter. Mad didn’t care about Cherie Ferraro; she just wanted Frank to leave her alone. Why he thought it would matter, this one decent gesture, who’d she tell? Just go, she’d thought, and when he finally did the grass between him and the car seemed to stretch as she watched, it took him so long to get there.

The Caddy turned and drove away. Mad waited until it crested the little rise and dropped out of sight. Then she gathered her coat under her and sat, bending her legs to wrap her arms around them. Turned her head toward the marker and rested her cheek on her knees. The wind blew and dark clouds came and went, then came and stayed. She didn’t cry. Didn’t talk to a dead man who’d hear her thoughts as well as words if he could hear anything at all.

She looked at Will’s headstone and thought of what her grandmother told her as a child, when her great-grandmother died. Tears are for things you wish you had done differently, when it’s too late to make them right.

Mad sat on the cold ground and looked at Will’s grave until her hair was stuck to her cheeks with rain and water made little canals of the etchings in the stone.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dana King has worked as a musician, public school teacher, adult trainer, and information systems analyst. His novel, *A Small Sacrifice*, featuring Chicago private investigator Nick Forte, was nominated for a Shamus Award as Best Indie PI Novel for 2013. Another Forte novel, *The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of*, was released in 2014. Other novels include the Penns River series (*Worst Enemies* and *Grind Joint*), based in a small, economically depressed town in Western Pennsylvania.

A short story, "Green Gables," was published in the anthology *Blood, Guts, and Whiskey*, edited by Todd Robinson. Other short fiction has appeared in *New Mystery Reader*, *A Twist of Noir*, *Mysterical-E*, and *Powder Burn Flash*. He lives in Maryland with his Beloved Spouse and The Sole Heir.