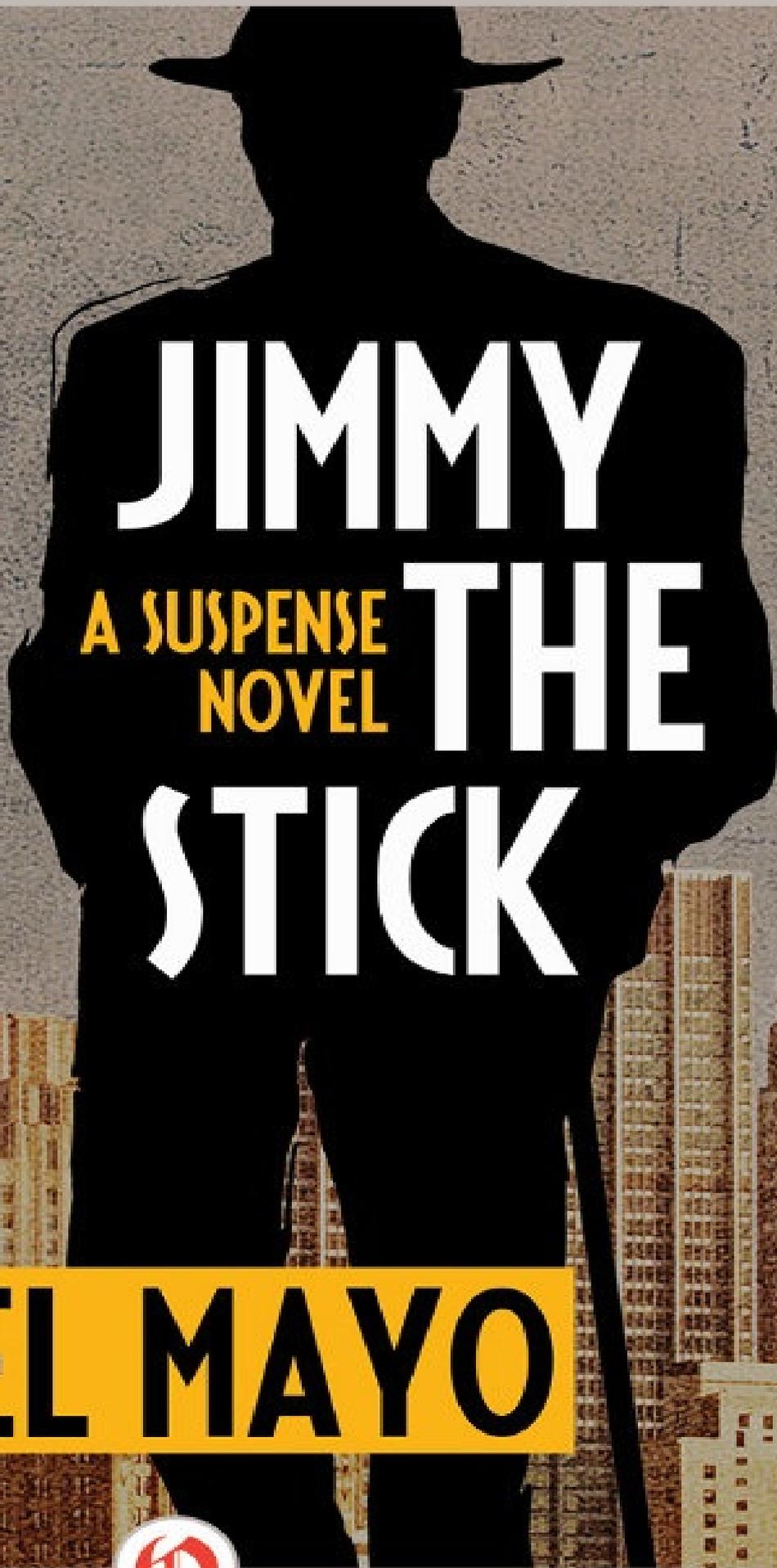


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JIMMY

**A SUSPENSE
NOVEL**

THE

STICK

MICHAEL MAYO

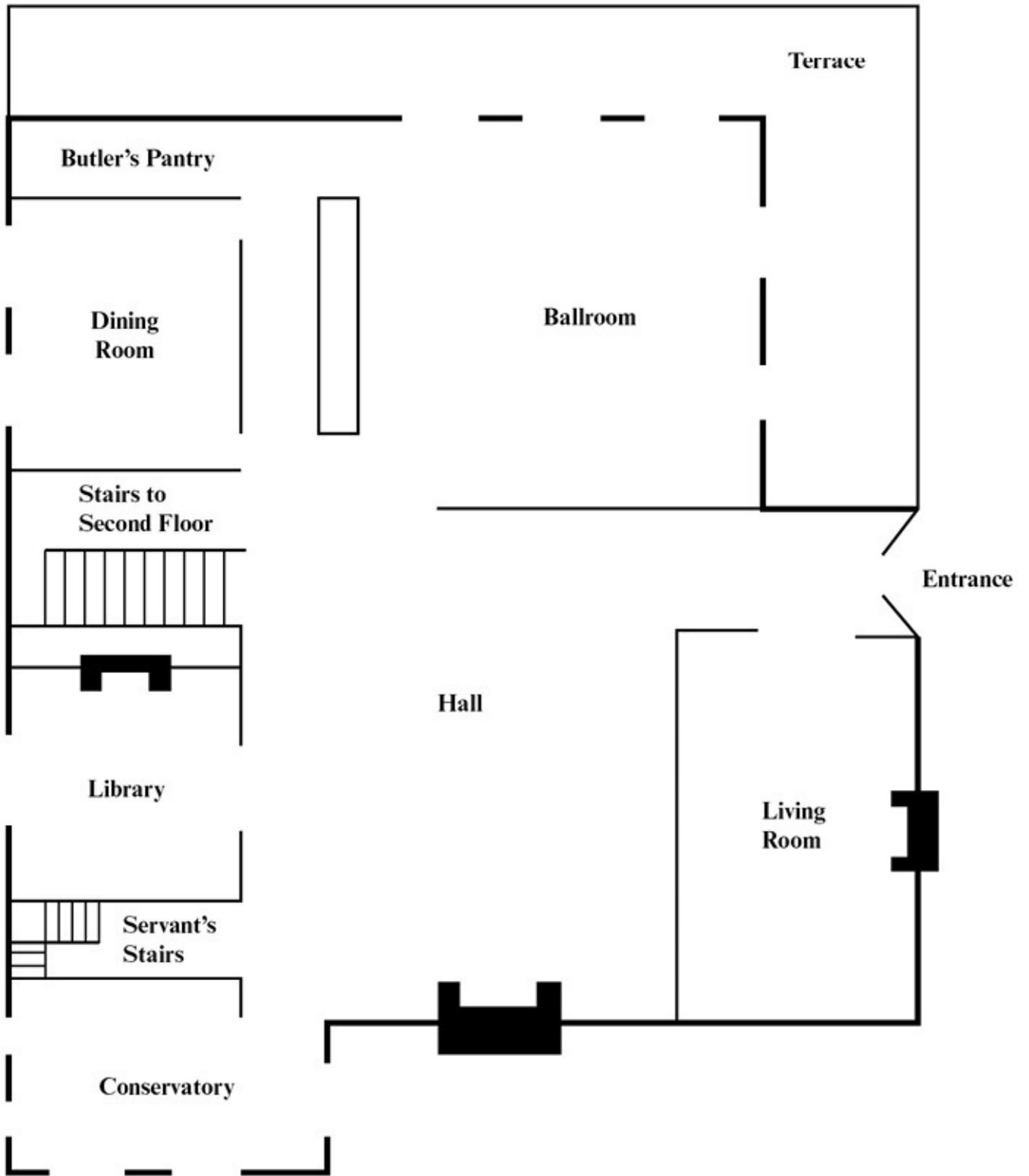


JIMMY THE STICK

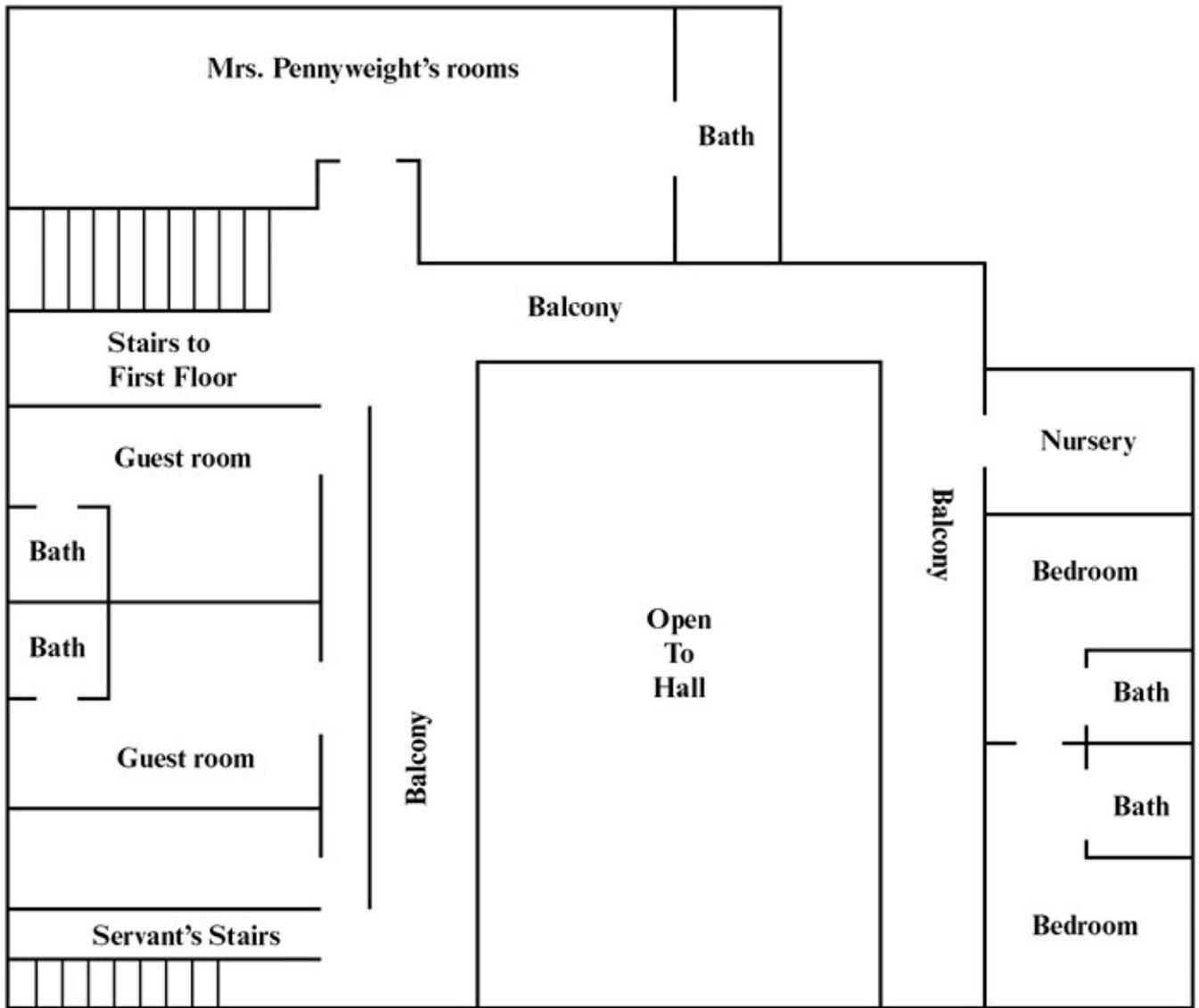
A SUSPENSE NOVEL

MICHAEL MAYO

A MysteriousPress.com
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Ebook



**First Floor
Pennyweight House**



**Second Floor
Pennyweight House**

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Author's note

This novel is built around events that occurred during the first week after the Lindbergh kidnapping. The details of news reports, police actions, and weather are real. So are the Liberty Bond scam, the meeting between Arnold Rothstein and Meyer Lansky, Charlie Lucania (later Lucky Luciano), the Egg Harbor knockover, Chink Sherman, and the death of Vincent Coll and Vine-Glo. Other real people include Owney Madden, Frank Costello, Charlie "The Bug" Workman, Longy Zwillman, Dutch Schultz, Joe "The Boss" Masseria, and Dixie Davis.

Chapter One

My name is Jimmy Quinn. I've been a thief, a bootlegger, a bagman, and the proprietor of one of New York's better gin mills. I helped corrupt dozens of cops and politicians, and I was in on the fix of the World Series. It's been a good life.

But there is one part of it that was so screwy I'm not sure I believe it myself, and it happened to me. I don't really know how to tell it either. It started on a Sunday in February, 1932. Actually, it was after midnight, so I guess it was Monday. You see what I mean about not knowing how to tell it.

I was standing naked at the window of my room in the Chelsea Hotel looking down at the traffic on Twenty-Third Street. Connie was still in bed. She was naked, too. The only light came from the little bedside lamp. She was flushed and sweaty with the pillows stacked up behind her back, her hair loose, the sheets kicked away from her legs as she tried to coax me back into the sack. And I was thinking that maybe I was up to a second round. It happened a lot with her, but then I glanced across the street and saw Vincent Coll, bold as brass, stepping out the front door of the Cornish Arms.

Standing next to him was Sammy Spats Spatola. There they were, the two biggest shitheads I ever knew. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

These days, not too many people remember "Mad Dog" Coll, but at that particular time, he was about as famous as anybody in New York. He'd been on the run for a month and everybody thought he'd left town. The long and the short of his story was that he'd been in a war with Dutch Schultz over who was going to control the beer business in New York. Lots of guys had been killed in their wars, women, too. But everything changed when Coll gunned down a little kid. That's when he picked up the "Mad Dog" moniker. They arrested him and put him on trial but he got off.

He may have walked out of court a free man in the eyes of the law, but not with the rest of us, so he disappeared. Any sane person would have got as far away from New York as fast as he could, but that wasn't Vinnie, I guess, not even with a \$50,000 price on his head, courtesy of all the top gangster guys in the city. The word was out that if you saw Vinnie Coll, you got in touch with Owney Madden right away. A lot of guys had personal reasons to hate Vinnie, and Owney was at the top of the list. He was right behind him. Nobody gave a good goddamn about Sammy Spats. Not then.

So I told Connie to stay where she was, threw on some clothes, grabbed my stick, and went downstairs as fast as I could. Didn't even take time for my hat or my pistol. At the hotel's phone booth at the front desk, I tried to get Owney at the Cotton Club, but the line was busy, so I called Big French DeMange at the other office number.

"Frenchy," says I, "Vinnie Coll just went into the London drugstore on Twenty-Third."

Sounding surprised, he answered, "The hell you say! The prick is on the phone with Owney right now. He's threatening to snatch me again if we don't cough up another thirty G's. The son of a bitch

crazy. But you're sure? It's him. The London Chemists on Twenty-Third."

"Hell yes."

"We got him then. Thanks, Jimmy."

The little drugstore was almost next door to the Chelsea. As I got there, Sammy Spats came hurrying out and almost knocked me down. To this day, I don't know if he saw me, because right about then, a big sedan pulled up to the curb and three men got out. I didn't know any of them. Two stayed with the car. The third, a guy in a big overcoat, pushed through the front door of the pharmacy. I was right behind him.

The phone booths were at the back, past the soda fountain. That late, there weren't more than four or five people in the place. From where I was, I could see everything that happened. Vinnie had jammed himself into the first narrow booth. He was kind of smiling and snarling into the mouthpiece, talking real fast. You couldn't tell if he was happy or angry. But hell, that's the way it usually was with Vinnie. He looked really bad that night—poorly shaved, red hair wild around his red face.

The guy from the car stopped in front of Vinnie's booth and pulled out a Tommy gun from under his overcoat, not rushing anything. A woman nearby yelped in surprise. I could hear other customers hurrying away. The gunman said in this calm, deep voice, "Keep cool now."

Then he pulled the bolt back to cock the piece and Vinnie noticed him and realized what was happening—just like it had happened to all the guys he had killed. But I doubt Vinnie was ever as smooth as the man who got him.

I saw Vinnie's hand come up behind the glass door, and I heard the roar of the gun filling the store, the glass exploding and the muzzle flash giving the bloody scene a white glare.

The guy knew how to use a chopper, I'll give him that. He squeezed off three fast bursts, and every bullet hit Vinnie. Fifteen shots with steel-jacketed .45s. Even that close, you've got to know how to control the piece to be that accurate.

I got out of the drugstore right behind the shooter and saw him climb back into the car. Off he went. A couple of police detectives showed up, and a patrolman jumped on the running board of a car to chase the sedan up Eighth Avenue. They arrived so quick you had to think they'd been tipped off. But I don't know anything about that. All I know is that the guys who shot Vinnie got away clean.

When Owney told the story later he'd say that he kept Vinnie on the line while he traced the call, like he was the goddamn phone company or something. He didn't mention me, and I never asked about the fifty thousand, either.

Not that it really mattered. I went back to the Chelsea and found Connie still in bed with more lights on. She'd heard the shooting and the cops and so she was worried that something might have happened to me. Maybe she was a little scared, too. I took off my clothes again, got back into bed, and explained what happened and who Coll was while she warmed me up. That night, the second round was better than the first.

After Coll got himself killed, things settled down for a couple of weeks. Then, about nine thirty or so on a nasty Tuesday night, a big cop came into my speak.

I was at a table in back with my notepad, the *Daily News*, the *Mirror*, the *Times*, and probably three or four others. I read all the papers in those days. At first I really didn't pay much attention to the guy except to note that he was the twenty-seventh customer of the night. He was a barrel-bellied bastard in a derby and a loud brown plaid suit. About forty, give or take, clean-shaven, a drinker with a wide, rosy face. He ordered a King's Ransom, tossed it back, and ordered another. He turned around, hooked a heel on the rail, and aimed his plug at the spittoon. The second scotch went down in two drinks. Something was familiar about him.

That Tuesday was cold and gusty and wet, the kind of night when you might stop by a place for a quick belt to warm the way home but not to stay, not even in a place as inviting as mine was. That kind of night, you wanted to get where you were going and settle in, and so there had been twenty-six paying customers since sundown. When business was slow, I kept count.

My speak was in a brownstone just off Broadway on Twenty-Second Street. We had a polished mahogany bar along one side of the room. Behind it was a big painting of a coy naked young woman stretched out and peeking over her shoulder. Most women giggled and laughed the first time they saw her. Guys tended to be studious. There were six booths on the opposite wall, with tables in the middle and a dance floor that nobody used. The two main things about the joint were good booze and a quiet atmosphere. The gang guys and the cops knew that it was neutral ground, no weapons. Everybody was welcome, but if a discussion became an argument that became a fight, you went outside and around the corner. The neighbors wanted it peaceful and so did I.

Fat Joe Beddoes was working the door and waiting tables. Frenchy Reneau, not to be confused with Frenchy DeMange, was behind the bar. He could mix any drink you might name, but there were some that he simply refused to associate with. His wife, Marie Therese, handled the coatroom and sold cigarettes and served drinks. Connie had been in earlier. When I saw what the night was going to be like, I told her she could take the rest of the evening off. She winked at me and mouthed "See you later" and left. Don't I wish it had been so.

As the big cop went to work on his third scotch, I realized where I'd seen him before. He'd been in with a bunch of fellow cops from the Bronx and their girlfriends and wives. They sat at the eighth top table. Had a grand time, laughed a lot. Tipped poorly.

He wasn't laughing that Tuesday. Instead he checked his watch so often I got the idea something was up, something I wasn't going to like. You run a speak, you learn to recognize that kind of thing. He looked over toward my table a couple of times without meeting my eyes. As the man drank, his face flushed and his chest heaved and his breath quickened. The next time he looked over, he pushed back his hat, locked eyes with me, and let his anger show. He pulled out his shield and yelled in a loud cop voice, "Everybody out. The place is padlocked." The regulars, thinking this was a joke, didn't

move.

I reached for my cane. What the hell? The guy wasn't a fed. Fat Joe knew the feds on sight and wouldn't let any of them in. I had taken care of the guys who needed to be taken care of. The beat cops, their sergeant, his captain, the boys downtown at City Hall, they'd all gotten their envelopes of cash, hand-delivered by me. It couldn't be a normal raid, then. Had to be something else.

The big cop pushed away from the bar and yelled, "Clear out. Now." He turned to me, his face clouded, eyes wide and crazy, and yelled even louder, "You first."

Knocking over tables and chairs, he bulled his way to the back. He pulled something pale and fist-sized out of his coat pocket and smacked me with it twice. I learned later that it was a sap made from the foot of a silk stocking filled with sand. He kept it in a knotted white sock. Hurt like hell, and he could slug you a lot harder with that thing than he could with a regular spring steel sap. Hit a guy that hard with a steel sap and you'll kill him, punch a hole in his skull. This way he got me across each temple. Two more blows to the back of the head laid me facedown into the newspapers. My cane clattered to the floor and he went to work on my ribs and kidneys. He wanted to hurt me bad and I didn't want it to show. The place cleared out pretty quick after that.

Frenchy reached for the hog leg under the bar but thought better of it, and stepped back without touching it. You don't shoot cops, not even crazy cops.

By the time the guy was finished, I was barely conscious and everything looked foggy. My good leg was weak, and the bad one had become useless. He grabbed me by the belt, hauled me out the door and up the steps to the street, and threw me into the backseat of his car. He tried to book me at the Forty-Seventh Street station, and even though I was still half screwy from the beating, I knew we were in the wrong precinct. So did the desk sergeant. He frequented my place, but he wasn't going to argue with the angry detective. While the big guy wrote up the arrest report, they took me to the back for fingerprints and pictures. The mug shot showed black hair, dark eyes, a thin crooked nose, and a necktie skewed to one side. I saw it later. Like most mug shots, it made me look sullen and stupid. I was neither, but a good beating can do that to a guy. They took their time, and when we were finished the big detective had disappeared without another word to anyone. The cops who knew me were apologetic.

The desk sergeant held the messy arrest report between a finger and a thumb like he didn't want to touch the paper, and said it was too late to do anything about it. "I called the guys at Thirtieth Street, where you shoulda been brought if this was a serious beef, which I don't think it is. They don't know nothing either. Thing to do," he said, "is just wait here, if that's OK with you, Jimmy. I guess we gotta hold you for a while. Anybody you want to call?"

"Nah, Frenchy'll call my mouthpiece, Jacobson. He'll call the station house and work it out. I'll wait for them. Who the hell was that guy?"

"Never seen him before and I can't even read his goddamn name. Did things get out of hand

your place tonight?"

"No. One minute it's a quiet Tuesday night, the next that big son of a bitch is flashing a badge and cracking my head." Fatigue rolled over me and I couldn't think.

The sergeant shook his head. "Go figure. Look, you want a holding cell or the interrogation room? Personally, I use the interrogation room to catch my winks. It's got a bench you can sleep on and nobody'll bother you there. You want something to eat?"

The windowless room also had a wooden table, an ashtray, a goose-necked lamp, and three straight-backed chairs. The desk sergeant brought me a dry baloney sandwich and a cup of coffee. He said not to worry, they were taking care of things. I thanked him for the coffee and the sandwich and worried. None of it made any damn sense at all. But the room was warm and dark and it didn't smell too bad. So I folded my suit coat into a pillow and paid no attention to the muted buzz of activity on in the hall. As I sank into sleep, I saw the ghost of Mother Moon floating up in a sweet coil of opium fumes, and heard her sharp witch's laugh of a voice saying, "It's a crazy world, Jimmy my boy, and there's nothing to be done for it."

Hours later another cop, a younger guy I didn't know, brought me a second dry baloney sandwich and cold coffee. If I had been firing on all cylinders, I'd have noticed how preoccupied the kid was. I guess I ate the sandwich and went right back to sleep, because I don't remember anything else, and I never sleep that long at a stretch. The young cop woke me again at seven thirty Wednesday evening and said that I'd been sprung. My lawyer was waiting out front.

Trying to make myself presentable, I straightened my tie and buttoned my wrinkled double-breasted before I gimped through the busy station and down the steps to the cold, rainy street.

Outside, I expected to find my mouthpiece Ira Jacobson, but he wasn't there. Instead, Dixie Dav was standing on the sidewalk next to his car, an idling Packard with a driver at the wheel. That's when I got the first glimmer that I was involved in something bigger than a crazy cop locking down a righteous speak.

Befitting the best mob lawyer in the city, or at least the most expensive, Dixie was decked out in a gray overcoat with a white silk muffler neatly crossed beneath the velvet collar. He wore a homburg and leather gloves.

He didn't smile, but he sounded friendly enough. "Good to see you, Jimmy, given the circumstances."

Dixie showed up at my place every now and again. He and Schultz and his other clients were usually seen at flashier joints, but if he just wanted a drink of good whiskey, straight off the boat, and a place to talk in private, he came to Jimmy Quinn's.

"When Jacobson told me you'd been shut down, I called the Thirtieth Street station and they said you'd been brought here. They didn't know anything about a raid. It took most of the day to chase down the paperwork. All of the pertinent information on your arrest report was incorrect, but don't

worry, it's being taken care of."

"What's his name, the cop who brought me in?"

"The signature on the report was illegible."

"This is nuts. I think he's from the Bronx. At least I'm pretty sure he was in my place before with some of the guys from the Bronx."

Dixie was unconcerned. "We'll figure it out. Don't worry."

Seemed like everybody was telling me that, not to worry.

Dixie went on. "In light of everything else that happened last night, it wasn't too difficult to get all of the charges swept under the rug. Still, might be a good idea to lay low for a day or so. Make sure there's nothing else going on before you open up again."

"Wait a minute, what do you mean 'everything else that happened last night'? You mean something besides the bust-up at my place? And what are *you* doing here, Dixie? Where's Jacobson?"

"I think your driver will explain everything. . . ."

Driver? What driver?

"Walter Spencer hired me. He's been looking for you. He called Jacobson and when he learned that your place had been shut down and Jacobson couldn't contact you, he came to me."

"Spence is behind this?"

Dixie nodded and took a cigarette out of a silver case. "He wanted to find you as soon as he could."

A long, dark Duesenberg J pulled to a stop and double-parked beside Dixie's Packard. The chauffeur got out, carrying an overcoat and a cane. When he walked in front of the headlights, I saw that he was dressed in a black uniform with two rows of buttons on the jacket, polished boots, black cap, the whole megillah.

He stepped up onto the sidewalk and smiled. "Hiya, Jimmy, long time no see. Whassamatta dontcha recognize me in this damn monkey suit?"

I looked more closely at the face under the cap. "Oh Boy? What the hell?" We shook hands. I'd grown up with Oh Boy Oliver, but it had been more than three years since I'd seen him. Since before Spence's wedding.

"Here." Oh Boy handed over my overcoat and stick. "Walter told me to go to the Chelsea and get your things. He needs you to come to his house."

"What the hell is going on? This doesn't make any . . ." I stammered, more confused than ever. "Why does Spence need to see me?"

Oh Boy sighed and said, "Oh boy, oh boy, because the Lindbergh baby has got snatched."

Chapter Two

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 1932

NEW YORK CITY

“You’re pulling my leg. Sure, I got my brains scrambled, but I’m not falling for this crazy story.”

“It’s the truth, Jimmy.” Dixie pulled a copy of the *Times* from under his arm and handed it to me.

It was just like in the movies, with headlines spinning around like they were going to fly right off the screen into your lap. That’s what happened to me when I opened the paper.

LINDBERGH BABY KIDNAPPED FROM HOME
OF PARENTS ON FARM NEAR PRINCETON;
TAKEN FROM CRIB, WIDE SEARCH ON

As I read, it felt like the ground was shifting under my feet. I gripped the familiar handle of the cane and leaned on it. In that moment, everything changed. Later, people would be able to tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing when they learned about the kidnapping. I remember it fine, but for other reasons.

Not that I knew what was coming. First there was the impossibility of it. Lindbergh was the most famous man in the world. Something like this simply couldn’t happen to him. He was too different from everybody else, too important.

I remembered when they held the big parade after he returned from flying solo to France, how the crowds filled the sidewalks, how all of swanky Fifth Avenue was closed off with all the confetti and ticker tape falling like snow. I also remembered how foully I cursed him then. I was supposed to make deliveries for Rothstein that day—payoffs to two important guys in the mayor’s office and at police headquarters. I had four good routes I could use when I carried cash to those addresses, and none of them would work with the huge crowds. That meant using the subway or the El, both confining and a lot riskier. And when I finally did make it to my delivery points, nobody was there. Because the whole town was watching the damn show on the street. I called Lindbergh every name I could think of, and I was well after dark when I made my last payoff.

But still, how could you not feel a little admiration for the son of a bitch for what he’d done? And then he married that beautiful, classy dame. The guy was made of gold. Kidnapping was something guys like Vinnie Coll did when they needed quick cash. It just didn’t happen to Charles Lindbergh. And nobody kidnapped children. The world, as I knew it, didn’t work that way.

I stared at the headlines, still unbelieving, until a loud car horn sounded in the street. Some guy

a Ford was pissed about the way Oh Boy was blocking traffic with the Duesy.

Dixie's driver stormed out of the Packard and had a quick talk with the guy in the Ford. Gear gnashed as the man shoved into reverse and backed down the street.

Dixie ground out his cigarette. "Look, Jimmy, I don't know why Walter wants to see you. That's his business. You want me to find out about this Bronx cop, I'll ask around. Dutch is thick with guys at the Morrisania station. Maybe they know something. Call me in a day or so."

Dixie got in the backseat of the Packard and it nosed smoothly past the Duesy and into the street. Like the trained chauffeur he had become, Oh Boy went to the rear door and held it open for me. I said, "Who the hell do you think I am?" and got in the front seat.

Oh Boy pointed the big car south and then west, making his way carefully to the tunnel. I thought it probably was some time since he had been in that part of town and so now the narrow street bothered him. Why not? The Duesenberg was a one-car parade. Or maybe he was worried that some guy would chuck a rotten apple or a brick at us on general principle. After all, the car cost more than an ordinary Joe could expect to earn in a lifetime, even if he could find a job.

Oh Boy turned and stopped at the brightly lit tunnel plaza at Broome Street, and it was crazy, like nothing I'd never seen. Cops with flashlights and pistols were stationed at all eight tollbooths. More cops strode suspiciously through the clogged traffic, opening doors and trunks and rousting some people out of their cars. Oh Boy said, "You see. They're checking for the kid."

We eased forward. When we reached the gate, a plump patrolman held up a hand. I rolled down the window and said, "Top of the evening, Officer Lonergan."

He shined a flashlight at us. "Jimmy Quinn, how the hell are you? Heard there was some trouble at your place last night. Nothing serious, I hope."

"We're taking care of it. Come by this weekend."

His partner shined his flash into the deep backseat. Lonergan waved us on through and said, "No need to look in the trunk. See you soon, Jimmy."

Oh Boy rolled forward, paid his fifty cents, and accelerated quickly down into the tunnel. He relaxed once we were inside. The set of his shoulders softened and he eased back in the seat. "The cops really gave me a going-over on the Jersey side when I came in. Opened the trunk and everything. That's what they're really working on, all the people coming into the city."

"What do they know about this kidnapping? Gimme the whats and whens and wheres."

Oh Boy concentrated on the road and didn't turn his head as he spoke. "Happened last night at this place they built down south. I don't recall the name of the town. They weren't in the Englewood house. Just Lindbergh and his wife and kid and a couple of people who work for 'em. Maid goes upstairs to look in on the kid, and he's gone. They found a ladder and some tracks in the dirt around the house. They say there's a ransom note, but the cops deny it. Crazy, isn't it, something like that happening."

“So why does Spence want to see me?”

“I dunno. Flora, Mrs. Spencer, got the screaming meemies when she heard about the Lindbergh. She thinks that the same guys are gonna come after her kid. Or somebody else will do something, or boy, I don’t know.”

“Spence has a kid?”

“Yeah.” Oh Boy smiled. “Little Ethan, and that’s why Flora is so upset. You listen to her for five seconds, you’d think that her and Anne Lindbergh were goddamn sisters.” He affected a woman’s high-pitched tone, “We went to the same school. She and Charles danced at our wedding . . . and the kinda stuff. Personally, I never saw no Lindberghs at the wedding, but what the hell do I know.

“Anyway, Walter’ll tell you all about it. But you gotta understand, Jimmy, that she’s got him by the balls. Whatever Flora wants, Flora gets.”

Nothing too strange about that, I thought, and said, “What’ve you got to drink in this jalopy?”

“Jalopy, my ass.” Oh Boy sniffed. “If you sat in the back like you’re supposed to, there’s a full bar back there, crystal, ginger ale, cracked ice, the works.” Oh Boy always had a strong sense of the proper order of things.

“Then give me some of the Jameson you’ve got in your flask.”

I could see Oh Boy’s hint of a smile in the light reflected off the white tiles. He pulled a pewter flask from under his coat.

I had a long, warm sip. Moments later, we emerged at the plaza on the Jersey side of the river.

To one side, I could see construction work. I thought at first it was another tall office building like the ones going up in Manhattan. But then I realized I was seeing huge square concrete columns supporting a cantilevered span of steel girders looming more than a hundred feet tall. Welder’s torches sparked high above us. “What the hell?” I leaned forward to see as much as I could. The structure stretched on into the night ahead of us. “What is it? An El?”

Oh Boy paid no attention. “More like a bridge, but for cars and trucks. When it’s done, you’ll be able to come out of the tunnel and go straight to Newark without stopping. Not like it used to be.”

He reached for the flask, drank, and passed it back. “Remember that night?”

I took another slow sip. No need to answer.

There had been ten of us in three cars. Spence, Oh Boy, and me in the lead. Meyer Lansky, Siegel, and Charlie behind us. Frank Costello, Vinnie Coll, Sammy Spats Spatola, and a guy I didn’t know in the third. We’d left Lansky’s garage as soon as it was dark, heading for Egg Harbor, New Jersey. Spence and Oh Boy had shotguns for the close work. I was the best pistol shot so I had a Detective Special and a pocketful of bullets. Damn, that was a hell of a night. I was full of piss and fire, and felt like I was completely alive for the first time in my life, like I could do any damn thing I wanted. And that night I did. I was twelve years old.

I looked up at the strange new steel structure, thinking about how long it had been since I’d been

out this way. It was a long time since I'd been out of the city at all. Spent all my spare time with Connie. Connie! Hell, that was the first time I'd thought about her since that business with the big cop. Marie Therese must have explained what happened. I told myself she'd understand, but I didn't really believe it.

And that was when I first realized how much I missed Connie. I missed being in bed with her, sure. But just as much I simply missed her, and wanted to talk to her, not on the phone but in person. I wanted to tell her about the cop in the ugly suit, and this madness with the Lindbergh kid, and find out what she was going to do the next day. The sudden strength of feeling surprised me. Troubled me. I'd never experienced it before.

I took another slow slug of whiskey and said, "How long till we get there? I gotta make a call."

Oh Boy gave the car some more gas, speeding smoothly along the wide road to Newark. "Little more than an hour, probably, depending on traffic. We've got paved roads for this sweetheart all the way."

Past Newark the streetlights thinned out but the road was still familiar. I'd been there before plenty of times, delivering booze with Spence for Longy Zwillman after he partnered up with Meyer and Charlie. Longy ran things in that part of Jersey. As often as not when we were working for him we had a police escort. Longy didn't want anything to gum up the works when we were supplying the swells' parties in Morris and Somerset Counties.

Oh Boy drove through little towns with the occasional restaurant or gas station still open, and I saw a police car at most of them. Oh Boy kept his speed at the limit, neither fast nor slow enough to attract attention. The cops noticed us but didn't approach the expensive car. I guess they figured the kidnapper would be driving a Duesenberg J. We were almost to Morristown when we turned at a white metal sign that read: VALLEY GREEN BOROUGH 2 MILES. Oh, yes, I thought, Valley Green.

The big headlights revealed woods on both sides, white rail fences, and finally a stone wall. Yeah, I remembered that. The road curved, and the tall overhanging trees seemed to merge with the black asphalt to suck up the light. I guess that's what they meant in fairy tales about the forest being a dark and scary place.

Oh Boy turned at a stone gate and followed a gravel drive between rows of tall narrow trees. When lights appeared I could feel my neck stiffen. What the hell? Why was I getting all wound up about seeing Spence again? Walter Spencer was my friend, a pal who had invited me to join him at this very place years ago. If I'd said yes then, everything would have been different. But I didn't.

A large Tudor house loomed up ahead, though I've got to admit I didn't know the term "Tudor" at the time. It had steeply peaked roofs, dark timbers, light-colored stucco, and lots of chimneys. I thought the place looked like something in a movie where people get bumped off one at a time by a phantom killer.

Oh Boy pulled up at the front doors, where a white ambulance was parked. Spence and two other

men stood beside it. They were in the middle of an intense conversation, maybe an argument. One guy was a tall, lean number with short blond hair and eyebrows, hollowed cheeks, and the thickest pair of glasses I'd ever seen. Beneath his overcoat, he wore a white medical smock with a stiff collar. The second guy was shorter and rounder and, to judge by his wide smile, happier. He was dressed in a dirty canvas coat and muddy rubber boots, and carried a single-shot .22 rifle snugged in the crook of his arm. A battered fedora was pushed back on his head, and he was smoking a curved briar. He had a bushy forked black beard, merry eyes, and apple cheeks.

When Oh Boy saw them, he muttered "Oh boy," in that worried way of his.

Spence hadn't changed much. He was still every inch the hero—tall, broad-shouldered, alert blue eyes, all of him brimming with confidence and strength. As long as I'd known him, he looked like Gary Cooper, even kept his hair combed the same way. He wore wingtips, a nubby tweed suit, light blue shirt with a white collar, maroon tie. Gary Cooper playing the country squire.

He recognized his Duesenberg and hurried over to pull me out. "Goddammit, you crazy Black Irish bastard, it's good to see you."

I was engulfed in a massive bear hug and then held up for inspection. He was about twice as big as me. Always had been. Embarrassed, I pulled loose and settled on my stick.

The goggle-eyed geek came closer, peering down at me like I was a mildly interesting insect pinned to a board. I had a sudden desire to belt him but Spence turned back to the guy. "I'll contact you as soon as I return. If we run into complications, I'll call." The man in the medical whites nodded and rubbed his pale, bony hands together as he got into the ambulance. When the car turned around the driveway, I saw the medical snake symbol and the words "The Cloninger Sanatorium" on the door. The wild-looking little guy with the rifle had disappeared.

Spence wrapped a thick arm around my shoulder and guided me to the front doors. "Come on inside, Jimmy. Oliver, take his things to the guest room upstairs, the good one. Goddamn, it's good to see you."

So Spence called him "Oliver," not "Oh Boy" or even "Mr. Oliver." I guess that explained the monkey suit.

Inside, Spence led me across a wide L-shaped room with dark wood paneling and broad stairs at the back. Dark red and brown Persian rugs with complex patterns covered the floor. A couple of ornate black chairs and a matching table against one wall looked like they might have come from an old church or castle. An open balcony ran along three walls on the second floor, with a round wrought-iron chandelier hanging from the tall, arched ceiling. There was a massive fireplace, cold and dark, built into one wall. Across the room, in front of two closed doors, stood an older, stoop-shouldered guy with a walrus mustache. His watery eyes blinking rapidly, he clutched a Purdey shotgun by the barrels and stood straighter as we approached.

Spence took the gun and said, "That'll be all, Mears. Make sure that Mrs. Conway has prepared

the room upstairs. My friend will be staying with us.”

Mears nodded, then shuffled away. Spence slid open the doors and ushered me into the library. There were more intricate blood-red carpets, walnut paneling, walls lined with sets of books that looked like they'd never been touched, a fireplace banked down with a couple of logs, brown leather club chairs facing the fire. And a kid sleeping in a crib next to the desk. He was tightly tucked in, with the taut covers moving when he kicked and punched fitfully. Spence said, “Don't worry, he's out for the night. Dr. Cloninger gave him something.” He leaned the shotgun against a wall and went straight to a cabinet that opened to reveal a fancy bar. He dumped chipped ice and whiskey into two crystal tumblers, giving each a splash from the soda siphon.

I took a sip. Canadian rye. The best. You never could fault Spence on his whiskey. I put the drink down on the desk beside the sleeping child and took the shells out of the shotgun. I've never been comfortable with loaded weapons around little kids. Even when the kids are doped up.

Spence was studying me. “I guess you're wondering what this is all about.”

“You're about to tell me.”

He started to say something but stopped. Then he said, “Where have you been, Jimmy? Why don't you come out here? I asked you more than once. Before the wedding and after. Don't blame your leg. I know it's not that.”

He had me there. “I don't know, somehow it just didn't seem right. You left. You found what you wanted, and then there was this.” I slapped my useless knee. “And then I had my place to run.” I shrugged. “Whenever I thought about coming here, I thought about something else.”

“For three years you thought about something else?” Spence tried to sound wounded, but it didn't wash.

“Has it been that long? And now you're completely legit and legal?”

Spence nodded. “Everything I saved when we were working for Meyer and Charlie and Longy invested in Pennyweight Petroleum. I only see Longy when Flora decides to throw a party and we need extra liquor, but lately I haven't even seen him then. He's got a place near here but he's busy. Did you hear about that actress of his, the blonde? Jean Harlow? Yeah, Longy's putting the spurs to her.”

“Yeah, I know. They've been in my place.” I could tell that surprised him. “She's not bad, but to tell you the truth, she looks better in the movies. You and Longy always did have a way with the ladies. Both done pretty well for yourselves too.”

Spence poured more whiskey and we sat in the chairs facing the fire. He said, “You remember the first day we came out here?”

Of course I remembered. That was the day everything changed. We'd taken one of the small trucks from the Newark warehouse around noon on a spring Saturday, 1928. Longy told us that the always wanted the best. We had to make sure that everything went smoothly, and we had to get payment in full before anything came off the truck because Mrs. Pennyweight was notoriously slow

settle up.

It was a hot day, and we both took off our suit jackets to keep them from getting wrinkled and sweaty. Whenever we were dealing with important customers, we tried to look like we belonged wherever we were going. No overalls, no loud colors or flashy suits, just businessmen's clothes. Made everybody more comfortable.

We drove out to Valley Green and turned at the long driveway. But well before we got to the house, we saw a sign that said DELIVERIES, directing us to a narrow road that brought us to the back of the place. The house was at the top of a slope leading down to a lake and the woods. There was a two-story boathouse at the water's edge, and the lawn between the two was filled with canopies, tables, and umbrellas. A bandstand and dance floor had been set up near the boathouse. It was a hell of a nice spread, maybe not as grand as some of the joints we supplied out in Great Neck, but not bad.

A harried woman seemed to be in charge. She told me to unload the liquor behind the table at the big white canopy, but was unsure about who would be paying. I told her we had to take care of money before anything else. While she was dealing with me, half a dozen other people were wanting decisions about this and that. Sometime in there Spence wandered off and I waited thirty minutes before Mrs. Pennyweight herself showed up and took over. She was clearly a woman used to being obeyed, standing taller than she actually was in a light pleated dress, a wide hat, and sunglasses.

She held out an envelope of cash but demanded to see the invoice, checking off each case against it and opening the cases to make sure there were no broken or missing bottles inside. She kept me busy for the better part of two hours, more than enough time for Spence to wander up to the big house and meet her husband, Ethan Pennyweight.

The master of the house didn't hold with the damn fool parties his wife threw, so he and Spence hit it off right away. They were both war veterans, Spence of O'Ryan's Roughnecks and Pennyweight of Roosevelt's Rough Riders, and they both liked to drink.

Spence said to me now, reminiscing, "While she played hostess, we got drunk as lords in the very library. Ethan told me he'd never read any of these goddamn books. He didn't need no library when he had mineral rights. God, did we ever get plastered."

"I know. I was the one who tried to wake you up." And when I finally gave up and left him and drove the truck back to Longy's warehouse, I was about as pissed off as I'd ever been.

Spence said, "I stayed the night. The next day I met Ethan's daughter, and even as hungover as I was, I still fell for Flora. Fell hard."

That part, I remembered clearly. Two days after I left him at the Pennyweight mansion, Spence showed up, shamefaced as hell. He tried to act like he was sorry for getting so damn drunk and leaving me to handle all the work. But that wasn't really what he had on his mind. He said, "I've met the girl," as if that one sentence explained everything, and I guess it did. "She's young, beautiful, rich, and she's built in a way I can't describe." He had a dreamy look I didn't understand. After that, he spe-

most of his time in Jersey.

“Ethan approved,” Spence told me now. “I think he knew what was going to happen before I did. Six months later we got married. You know that, too; you were invited but you didn’t come.” He sighed heavily. “A year after that the goddamn stock market collapsed.

“I’d put everything I had into Pennyweight Petroleum, and Ethan and I worked like crazy to keep the company running. We were hurt by the crash just like everybody else, and I know the strain took its toll. Ethan had a stroke and spent the rest of his days with Cloninger’s sawbones poking at him. He died at the sanatorium. Now I’m in charge, and we’re about to open three new parcels in Louisiana and south Texas. That’s why I brought you here. Look at all this.”

He went behind his big desk and rummaged through papers and unrolled maps that were weighed down at the sides. He held up two handfuls of official-looking documents. “Hydrologists’ reports, leases, deeds, contracts. I don’t understand half these goddamn things, and I’ve got to use them to make decisions that will keep this company going. Or ruin us.” He shook his head and sighed again.

“I’m going to fly down to supervise the exploratory wells. I’d planned to leave this morning but Flora got hysterical when she heard about the Lindbergh kidnapping. She’s convinced that we’re next. And the only place little Ethan will be safe is here in this room, where the windows are all barred.”

“That explains the duffer with the scattergun.”

Spence rolled his eyes and nodded. “Flora believes that with her family’s prominence and wealth and my ‘underworld connections,’ Ethan is the perfect target. I tried to tell her that nobody I knew had anything to do with the Lindbergh business. But by then she’d gotten herself so worked up, there was no talking to her. It got so bad, I had to call Dr. Cloninger to give her something to calm her down.”

“Her and the kid?”

“The man’s a genius. He’s perfecting compounds with sedatives and stimulants that no one else is even thinking about. But she still demanded that I stay to protect them both, and I can’t. I’ve got to go to Louisiana and Texas. Nobody else can handle this end of the business. I’m responsible, and I can’t put it off. So I’m asking you to stay here and make certain that nothing happens to my family.”

“The hell you say. You don’t understand, I’m not ‘fast Jimmy Quinn’ anymore. I’m a saloon keeper with a bad pin.”

“You’re the best shot I’ve ever known, and you’re the only man I’d trust with my wife and son. You’ve got to do this for me, Jimmy, it’s too important.”

“Walter!” She shrieked his name as she pushed open the doors. “You absolutely cannot leave now! You promised me!”

Spence jumped up at the sound of that loud, panicked voice.

His wife was even more beautiful than the pictures I’d seen, and she was damn near naked.

Chapter Three

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 1932

VALLEY GREEN, NEW JERSEY

In newspapers, she looked slender with a long, oval face, light hair, and the moony expression favored by wedding photographers. The rotogravure didn't come close to the truth. She was sixteen when she got married, and in three years she'd filled out sweetly under a loosely unbuttoned top of silvery satin. She was tall and she had a faint spray of freckles across her nose and cheekbones. Her face was glistening with fevered sweat, maybe from the spooky doctor's joy juice, and she was barefoot beneath loose pajama pants.

"Walter, they could be here." Her voice had a whispery quality. "Right now, they could be right outside." She grabbed her husband's coat sleeves at the biceps, her fingers digging in and twisting the material.

For the first time, I understood what had happened to Spence. I couldn't take my eyes off the woman.

"Don't worry, darling, I've taken care of everything. This is Jimmy Quinn, my old friend. I've told you all about him."

She turned and stared intently while I tried not to look down her loose pajama top.

"Will you protect little Ethan? Do you understand the danger he faces now? I'll have to trust you with my only son. Do you swear to me that you will do it? Do you swear that?"

At the time, I thought it must have been the dope that was making her lay on the drama so thick. It was wrong.

Spence put his arm around her shoulders and led her out of the room. "I'll explain everything to you in the morning, dear. Go back to sleep now. Jimmy's here, he's going to stay with the baby all night. There's nothing to be concerned about, nothing at all."

I poured another splash of rye and laid a log on the fire. A few minutes later, Spence came back in and sat behind his desk. "She'll be fine now. She was just more upset than Dr. Cloninger thought she was." He loaded a briefcase and rolled the maps into cardboard tubes. His voice took on the offhand tone he always used when he was trying to talk me into something.

"Look, Jimmy, I know this all sounds kind of crazy, but we don't know what's happened with Charles and Anne. You'll be doing me a great favor if you agree to stay here for few days and keep an eye on things. From what Dixie told me, your place is going to have to stay closed for a bit, so what do you say? I'll make it worth your while. That's a promise."

I stared into my whiskey, stalling for a few seconds. But by then we both knew what the answer

was.

I finished the drink and said, "Why the hell not," and the deed was done.

Spence came around the desk and clapped me on the shoulder. "Good man."

"Where's the phone? I gotta make some calls."

Spence gestured to the telephone on his desk. "Use this line. I'll look in on Flora, and here . . .

He opened the top right-hand drawer and took out a little Mauser .25 automatic. "You'll want this."

As soon he left, I popped the clip out of the pistol and worked the slide to clear the chamber. Nothing there. I put the clip in the coat pocket with the shotgun shells, the pistol in the other. I dialed the operator and gave her the number of the Utley Hotel, where Connie stayed. The night man there told me that Miss Halloran wasn't in. I left a message with Walter's number. Then I called the Chelsea. She wasn't there, either.

I hung up the phone, pissed off and disappointed. Where the hell was she anyway? It was goddamn ten o'clock. She might be with Marie Therese and Frenchy, but they didn't have a telephone.

I took a slow drink, tried to calm down, and thought back to the first day that Marie Therese brought Connie in. It had been right before Thanksgiving last year, midafternoon when things were always slow. Marie Therese came out from behind the bar to hand me a cup of coffee. She sat down at the table and lit a cigarette, waiting for me to put down the newspaper.

"Jimmy," she said, "I'm going to do you a good turn today. I'm going to introduce you to your marvelous new waitress."

"Another marvelous new waitress? Didn't you say that about Dinah? And, before that, Gaby. They lasted less than a week between them. And what's-her-name, Bridgid something." Marie Therese was one of those kind souls who attracts strays. She brought in my marvelous new waitress and dishwasher every month or so.

She waved the names away with a plume of smoke. "They weren't serious, you know. They're not like Connie's different. She's a good girl. She's new in town."

"And wait till you get a load of her porch," Frenchy interrupted. "This one's really put together."

She glared back at him. "Pay no attention to my pig of a husband. Trust me, you will like this girl, and you know how busy we're going to be between now and New Year's. We need the help."

"OK, I'll talk to her. Tell her to come by."

Marie Therese called out, "Connie," and a girl came in from the front hallway, where she'd been waiting.

She was about five-foot-three, just my height, and Frenchy hadn't exaggerated about her shape. She was nice, very nice. I saw a dark-blue coat and skirt, bobbed blond-brown hair under a hat, and a nervous, uncertain, hopeful smile. She worried a small purse with both gloved hands.

Marie Therese pulled out a third chair. "Come over here, honey. Have a seat. I told you, you don't

have to worry about Jimmy. He won't bite. Unless you want him to." The girl blushed.

I liked her right away. But then Marie Therese knew I was a sucker for the girls she brought around. She wouldn't bring them if she didn't know that my speak was a good place to work. Things were tough then. There were a lot of places where guys would assume that any girl working there was a whore. But not mine. I hired nice-looking young women because they helped bring customers into a speak that didn't have a floor show or a dance band or ice to piss on. Instead, we had the best brand name liquor from Canada and England, wine from France and Italy, and, when I could get it, beer that hadn't been needled with ether. All at top-drawer prices.

"What's your name?"

"Constance. Connie Halloran."

"Where're you from?"

"Yonkers."

"Are you an actress? You're pretty enough."

Another blush. "Oh, I don't know. I've thought about it and I sang in school."

"That's not why you came here? You're not planning to become a showgirl?"

"No, at least . . ." She shook her head, "No, I'm not a showgirl."

Marie Therese fired up another smoke. "Her boyfriend kept pushing her to settle down and she's not ready."

"Have you ever worked in a speak?"

"I was a waitress at the New Ideal diner last summer."

Marie Therese said, "She can start tonight."

She did. For the next two weeks, Connie Halloran showed up on time every night. She worked extra shifts whenever one of the other girls wanted time off. She didn't take any guff from the idiot drunk or sober, and still did fine with tips. She volunteered to help me close up when Frenchy and Marie Therese left early on Christmas Eve. And then, to my happy surprise, she spent that night at the Chelsea Hotel with me. It was the best Christmas I ever had.

So now I asked the operator to call the private line at my speak. Frenchy picked up. "Boss, where the hell are you?"

"It's a long story. I'm in New Jersey, and it looks like I'm going to stay here for a while. What's going on?"

"Fat Joe and me came in this afternoon and cleaned up. There's not a lock or a seal on the door, so Marie Therese and I opened up late but only to regulars. No real business. What the hell went on last night?"

"I don't know. Dixie Davis sprung me and he said the paperwork on the bust was hinky. Did you recognize that guy? I think I remember him coming in with some other cops from the Bronx."

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