

CHAPTER ONE - CLEANING UP

They never intended to become gangsters but somehow it happened anyway. Tony Carmenucci and Bob D'Amico had grown up as normal kids in Pittsburgh's Carrick neighborhood. They had gone to school, neither failing nor scoring particularly noteworthy marks, played a little bit of baseball in the summers, and were generally regarded as good kids by their parents and neighbors. That would all change forever by the end of the summer of 1962.

Both boys were sixteen years old, and yearned for the freedom that owning a car would give them. No longer would they be limited in going only to places they could walk to, nor would they have to depend on getting a ride if they needed to venture farther. Tony even had his car picked out already. It was a blue 1957 Chevy Bel Air that had been on Mark Smallman's Used Car lot for weeks, despite the rather low asking price of \$450.00. Naturally, Tony didn't have the funds to purchase the vehicle, so he asked his father for a loan to help him do so.

"That's just what you need, a fucking car." Tony Sr. replied to his son's request. "What do you think I am, made of money, Mister?"

With help from his family a non-option, Tony began looking for a job, and found one at a nearby grocery store. It was grueling work, mainly stocking shelves and cleaning up, but it paid a dollar thirty-seven an hour. The store needed more help, so he got Bob a job as well.

"So, when do you get it?" Bob asked as they walked down the sidewalk on their way to work.

"Right now, it looks like sometime in August."

"Shit, by then Smallman will have sold that car! It's too good to sit on that lot for long."

Tony turned and faced his partner. "You think I don't already know that?"

Bob looked at Tony. He was about to open his mouth and say something, but Tony's look made him stop. He knew better than to mess around with Tony when he looked serious. A bloody nose last year had taught him that lesson.

"Sorry, Tone. Just giving you a little shit, that's all."

"Well, cut the shit out. I'm in no fucking mood for it."

They walked in silence for a block and a half, and then turned the corner on Rosedale Street. From there, they could see the big red letters of Martin's already, and it was still two blocks away.

At least I'll see her today, Tony thought.

In addition to the car, Tony also had his eye on a cute blonde named Bridget Palmer. She was about five-foot three, with incredible blue eyes and a body that Tony found irresistibly attractive. He wanted so much to ask her to go out for a pizza or a movie or a milkshake, anything, but was restrained by his instinct for survival. Bridget Palmer was going out with Derek Smythe, the quarterback for Tony's High School football team. Messing with Bridget

would probably have resulted in Tony being beaten to a bloody pulp, and he had no desire to spend the rest of the summer in the hospital.

Tony thought for a moment about Smythe. He remembered how he would walk down the halls with his smug attitude; giving everyone he could as much trouble as he could. Back in grade school he was always the schoolyard bully, and the basic attitude still had not changed.

Someday soon, I'll get you, Jocko! I'm gonna hurt you real bad. The thought made Tony smile slightly as he trudged along toward the market. I'm gonna take you out, then the girl will be all mine.

Bob broke the silence. "So, it's Saturday. What are we doing tonight?"

"Probably go hang out in front of McDonald's like always."

"We could do worse."

Tony's look changed. He now looked friendly and excited. "When I get that car we won't do that shit anymore. No way. We'll be cruisin' around, picking up all the girls we can see. It'll be real cool, Bobby Boy."

They walked through Martin's parking lot, past the Buicks and Fords to the front door of the store. Bob pushed the glass door open and they stepped inside.

"Okay, boys, where the hell have you been?" Jim Jackson called from his office. "It's twelve after nine. Punch in and get your little asses up here!"

Tony and Bob knew they were in trouble. Mr. Jackson was a stickler for being there on time, all the time. The last time they were late he docked them fifteen minutes pay for every ten that they were late, and said the next time it would be twenty. This was the next time. It was also the last.

Tony stuck his card into the clock on the wall next to Jackson's door, then placed it back in the holder. Bob did the same, and they stepped into the office.

"Close the door," Mr. Jackson said in a low, calm voice. "I don't want the customers to hear me chew you little punks out."

Bob eased the door silently closed, and looked at Jackson. He could hardly keep from shaking, knowing what was coming next. He glanced at Tony, who was standing next to him like a statue. Always Mr. Cool, Tony was. Bob wondered how he did it.

"Boys, do you remember our last conversation about your being late?" Jackson asked in an almost pleasant tone, the one that a father might use right before beating the hell out of a kid for doing something stupid. Bob looked at Mr. Jackson sitting at his desk, and he looked really mad.

"Yes sir," Bob answered in a quiet, wavering voice.

"Well, this time I'm gonna have to be a little harder on you knuckleheads. Not only am I docking you two minutes pay for each minute you were late, I also have a special project for

you.”

Jim Jackson stood up from his desk. He wasn't very big, only five and a half feet tall, 165 pounds, but he had that look that communicated that he wouldn't take any crap. A look that said, "I've been around the block a few times, and if you mess around with me, I'll knock your block off."

Jackson opened the door. "Follow me, boys," he called back as he walked out. Tony and Bob followed him out of the office, through the shelves of spaghetti and macaroni, past the meat counter, and through a pair of large metal doors marked "Employees Only." They followed Mr. Jackson outside to the dumpsters.

"Boys, these dumpsters need cleaned up. The trucks came by last night, so they are empty. I was going to have that new kid Clemson do it, but he showed up on time, and you boys were late." He pointed to a beat-up bucket with a pair of scrub brushes in it. "Be done in an hour."

Jackson walked back into the store to take care of other business. He knew that these boys would hate his guts for making them clean three smelly dumpsters, but they'd get over it. Besides, the experience might teach them a lesson that would help them later in life. These two had a lot of potential, far more than Martin's Super Saver could ever take advantage of, but they needed a shot of discipline. Otherwise, they would probably end up working as laborers in a steel mill or something, and that was not what Jackson had in mind for them.

Tony looked at the empty Dumpster. "That bastard has it in for us," he mumbled. "Anything to fuck with us. Who ever cleans a Dumpster, anyway?"

"I dunno," Bob replied. "Let's get this shit over with."

Bob walked over and picked up the bucket and carried it over to a hose. He filled it with water, added a shot of detergent, and brought it back to the first Dumpster. "Tony, you want the inside or the outside?"

Tony climbed in. The smell was almost an overpowering blend of rotten meat, vegetables, and other assorted garbage. I think I'm going to puke, he thought as his stomach began churning. This is fucking disgusting. Bob handed him a brush, and ten minutes later the smell was almost gone. Bob did the inside of the second dumpster, which took a little longer because of a heavy build up of scum at the bottom. They shared the third, and had it done in seven minutes.

"That wasn't too bad," Bob remarked as they climbed out of the steel box. Only took forty minutes to do all three of 'em." He looked at Tony. Again, Tony had that scary look on his face.

"He's gonna pay for this, Bob." His voice was low and serious. "One of these days, we'll get him for this."

"Yeah, right. What do we do? Beat him up in the parking lot or something?"

"Not a bad idea. We could take him easy."

"And end up without a job and in jail or something."

“It would be worth it.”

Tony emptied the bucket into a storm drain. Someday, Jackson would be sorry he had made Tony Carmenucci clean a Dumpster. He didn't know when, but sooner or later he would get the man.

Frank Scalaro was a businessman. Ostensibly, his business was repairing cars damaged in accidents, with a detailing shop off to the side. This business was modestly profitable, and completely legitimate, which gave him a marvelous cover for his far more lucrative, and illegal, pursuits. The true business that Frank conducted from his South Side garage was wholesale trafficking in stolen late-model cars.

Frank was a made member of the Pittsburgh Family of an organization that called itself *La Cosa Nostra*, or “Our Thing.” Most referred to it as the Mafia. Contrary to popular legend, it wasn't exactly a glamorous lifestyle, and being a member did not automatically bring him any money. He had to earn everything he got, and turn over a third of what he made from his illicit businesses to the Family every week. For his money, he had access to various resources that the Family had, and used them to his advantage in building and running his stolen vehicle business.

The idea was rather simple. Being illegal as it was, Frank preferred it that way, as it made mistakes which could get him sentenced to a very long stay in a Federal prison less likely to happen. Naturally, he paid his associates very well, both out of appreciation for the work they did and to better secure their loyalty. That was the carrot. He also had a stick. Disloyalty to Frank was a sure-fire ticket to an early grave, and had been on more than one occasion, although he hadn't needed to use that option in nearly five years.

There was a knock at Frank's door, and he looked up to see his chief mechanic, Carmine Carbone standing in the doorway. Carmine always looked the same, fat, and wearing a slightly dirty T-shirt and nondescript workman's pants. “Hey, Frank, can I ask you something?” he asked.

“Yeah. Go ahead.”

“You think we can get some more help around here? You know, a couple a kids to do detailing and shit like that? Things are really picking up and I ain't got the bodies to get them done on time. It would really help, and maybe we can train them on the mechanical shit too.”

The idea appealed to Frank. Having two or three kids around would really be an asset, he thought. They would work for lower wages, be less likely to be undercover cops, and could be trained as mechanics or car thieves over time. He approved Carmine's request on the spot. “Yeah, okay. Put out a sign.”

“Thanks boss.”

“Just make sure you get some good ones.”

After cleaning the dumpsters, the rest of the day went pretty smoothly. Tony and Bob stocked shelves with cereal, meat, and all kinds of other foodstuffs. Mr. Jackson was even almost nice to them. He figured that the boys had paid their price, and the matter of being late was over with.

Five o'clock came quickly, as none of the tasks they were assigned to were even remotely as difficult as their first had been. The boys took off their dirty aprons, hung them on the wall, and punched out. They walked toward the doors at the front of the store and were about to leave when Tony saw her.

Bridget was working behind the cash register at the end of Aisle Two. She was busy reading price tags and punching the numbers into the register for a customer with a whole cart full of groceries. She looked so pretty, with those big blue eyes, long blonde hair pulled into a ponytail, and wearing a thin summer dress that showed every curve of her body. She saw Tony, and her lips flashed him a slight, almost imperceptible smile. Tony flashed one back as they left the store.

"That girl wants you," Bob said after the glass door had closed behind them.

"I'll get her one of these days. After I get the car."

The walk home was uneventful, and the boys chatted about girls, cars, and getting even with Jackson. They reached Tony's house. It was a two-story brick structure, much like the rest of the houses in the neighborhood. There was a silver chain link fence in front of the front yard, which itself started only seven feet from the front porch. Tony opened a gate in the fence, and the boys stepped inside. He closed the gate and they went into the house.

"Bobby Boy, we are going to raise some hell tonight."

Three hours later the boys were standing in line at McDonald's. It was the place to be on Saturday nights. Everyone was there, or at least all the kids who didn't have cars to cruise around the park in. Tony knew that soon he and Bob wouldn't have to stand in line for a couple of burgers and shakes. They would use the drive-through in a '57 Bel Air convertible.

Tony placed his order for two hamburgers and a chocolate shake. He paid the girl behind the counter and slipped into a booth that only seconds before had been occupied by a couple of rich kids. He didn't know them. Probably went to another school or something. Tony unwrapped a burger and quickly forgot about the rich kids. Bob sat down across from him.

"Hey Tone, I was just talkin' with that new kid from the store."

"Who," Tony said around a mouth full of ground beef and bread. "Clemson?"

"Yeah. Johnny Clemson. You know what he said?"

"No. Why would I know what that pizza face has to say?"

"Hey, keep it down. He has his dad's car tonight."

"So. Who gives a shit."

“You should, if you want to go for a cruise.”

“Why should we cruise with him? In ‘daddy’s car?’”

Bob leaned over the table and opened his jacket a little bit, just enough so that Tony could see what he had under it. Tony looked and his eyes opened up. A pint of Jack Daniel’s always got his complete and undivided attention. “Don’t want to get busted drinking this in the parking lot, do ya?”

“Where the hell did you get that?” Tony asked in amazement. Usually he was the one who scored the stuff, and it was usually all he could do to come up with a six-pack of beer or something.

“My dad keeps a half gallon of it under the sink in the kitchen. He wasn’t home tonight, so I filled up this bottle and hid it in the bushes until I left to go to your house. Figure we can use this to get a little action going.”

“Now you’re thinking, Bobby Boy.” Tony sipped on his shake. “Any chicks going?”

“That’s your job. I got the booze. Clemson got the car. You can get the girls. You’re good at that.”

“When’s Johnny leaving?”

“Pretty soon.”

Tony stood up and took a walk in the direction of the men’s room, looking for some girls who looked like they wanted to go for a little ride. He didn’t have to look for long. A redhead in a pair of tight - really tight - jeans and a black leather jacket gave him a little look. She was sitting with a couple of other girls, sharing a small mountain of fries in the middle of the table. They were all giggling about something.

Tony recognized the redhead from school. Her name was Bonnie or Connie or something. He’d heard stories about her. Guys he knew said she was an easy lay. He’d never talked to her before, but from the stories going around, that didn’t mean anything. What the hell, he thought, let’s get a party going. He grabbed a chair, swung it around, and doing his best cool routine said “Hi.”

“Hi.” the redhead said. “Want some fries?”

Tony helped himself to a fry. “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it,” the redhead said. “Plenty to go around.”

Tony looked at her chest. There sure was plenty to go around. All of the girls were packing thirty-eight’s or better. And they were laughing about nothing. “So, what are you girls up to?”

“Just hanging out,” one of the redhead’s friends, a blonde, said. “What are you up to?”

“Taking a cruise.”

“I like cruises.” the redhead said. “Can we go with you?”

“If you want.”

“Hey Connie,” the blonde said to her friend with the red hair, “You gonna introduce me to your friend?”

“Sure.” Connie pointed at the blonde. “This is Betty.” She then pointed at a brunette sitting next to Betty. “And this is Mary.”

“I’m Tony. Nice to meet you.”

Ten minutes later Tony, Bobby, and Johnny piled into Mr. Clemson’s 1960 Buick. So did Connie, Betty, and Mary. Bob and Johnny sat in the front seat, with Betty between them. Tony was in the back, laughing with Connie and Mary on either side of him.

“Nice car,” Betty said, looking at Johnny. “How fast does it go?”

Johnny said nothing. Instead he floored the gas and the big Buick screamed and squealed out of the parking lot, leaving a cloud of smoke for the other kids still in the McDonald’s lot to applaud. They always clapped and screamed whenever someone laid rubber. And Johnny had just left a couple of nice strips.

“Yeah!” Bob screamed. “Way to go!”

“Connie,” Mary said to her friend in the leather jacket, “You’re gonna get me in trouble again.”

“Come on, Mary,” Connie replied, “You usually get me in trouble.”

“Well, we got enough trouble for everybody,” Tony said. “Bartender, how’s about a drink for me and my friends?”

“Comin’ right up.” Bob pulled the pint of whiskey from under his jacket, opened the cap and took a quick swig. Damn! This stuff is strong, he thought as he swallowed. The bourbon burned all the way down to his stomach, where it started a warm glow. Good stuff.

Bob passed the open bottle to Tony in the back seat. He too took a hit from it. Mary and Connie joined in then passed the bottle to their girlfriend Betty. Betty’s nose told her not to drink it, but the thought of her girlfriends chastising her for not drinking with them was too overpowering, and she took a sip.

Johnny Clemson watched. This was too cool. He decided to hold off from hitting the booze, at least for a little while. Besides, he had a surefire leg spreader in his pocket for later.

The party rolled on down the highway for about half an hour. Even Betty was feeling a bit tipsy. That stuff ain’t too bad, once you get used to it, she thought. She could feel the giggles starting to come on, and tried to hold back. Then she saw a sign that said Welcome To something or another. Betty started to laugh.

“You okay?” Bob asked.

“Just peachy,” Betty giggled and turned around. Connie and Mary were saying something to that guy back there. What’s his name again, she wondered. Then it came to her. Tony. What a strange feeling...everything seems to be going so fast but slow at the same time. Is this what it’s like to be drunk? And where are these boys taking us?

“Johnny, where are we?”

Clemson looked over at Betty. “Cruising.”

“Oh. All right.” Betty started giggling again.

Bob took yet another small sip from his bottle. Everyone seemed to be having fun, and there was still almost a quarter of the bottle left. This high-octane stuff really gives you some good mileage, he thought.

Mary wanted to ask Johnny something, so she leaned over the back of the seat. Johnny almost swerved off the road when her hair touched his face. Mary forgot what she wanted to say, but didn’t want to sit down again. She was afraid that if she did, she’d remember what she wanted to ask, and have to lean over again. Then she remembered. “Johnny, where are we going?” she asked.

“To the country. My uncle has a trailer we can use for a little bit. He’s out of town, and I have the keys. We can hangout there for a while.”

“Oh. That sounds like fun.”

Even Betty thought that it might be fun. Of course, Tony and Bob knew what Johnny Clemson was up to. Get the girls in the trailer, and have some real fun. Maybe play a game of strip poker or something. Tony had a feeling that he would finally get to use his poker on one of these girls. Probably Connie. She seemed like the wildest of them.

Johnny turned the big Buick down a narrow dirt road and followed it for a quarter mile. He pulled off into the driveway of his uncle’s trailer and killed the engine. The trailer was not very large. It was twenty by seven feet, with a body of unpainted aluminum. It was sitting on stacked cement blocks, but still wore its tires for the time that it would be moved.

“Let’s go in.” Tony suggested. Bob and Johnny opened the doors and everyone piled out of the car. The girls were all giggling now. Johnny walked to the door of the trailer and opened the door. He turned on a light as the crew piled in.

“Aren’t you afraid that your uncle will show up or something?” Bob asked. He may have been slightly drunk, but he wasn’t so far gone as to be caught drinking with three girls. His dad would kill him if this ever got out.

“Not a chance. He only comes up here when he goes fishing. He has to work at the mill tomorrow, so he has to be sleeping at home.”

Tony looked at the crew he had gathered. These girls were wild. He knew that much by the way they were acting in the car. For half the ride up, that redhead Connie had been touching him

all over. Once she had even brushed her hand across his dick. She wanted it, Tony was sure of it.

Mary was another wild one. She had long black hair and big green eyes, and was wearing a really thin knee high dress cut low enough in the front that the tops of her breasts were just visible. Tony really wanted to see those tits hanging free. They looked pretty tasty.

Tony looked at the blonde, Betty. Sure, she acted like the Miss Goody Two Shoes of the bunch earlier, but now that she had a few belts of Bobby's whiskey down that shit was over with. She was giggling still and whispering something in Bobby's ear. Bobby handed her his bottle, and she took another drink.

Tony looked at Johnny. Working at the store, he never would have guessed that this guy could have had this kind of potential to party. He took the bottle from Betty and took a long drink, then another. Tony was impressed. The guy had just taken almost an inch of whiskey from the bottle straight down. Now that he had those ugly glasses off his face he even looked kind of cool, even though he still had a few zits to take care of. Tony heard that girls were good for taking care of them. Maybe this Johnny guy would have his skin cleared up tonight.

"Anyone here smoke?" Johnny asked.

"Yeah," Mary answered. "I have a pack of Pall Malls in my purse. Want one?" She opened her purse and reached inside for her cigarettes.

"Not cigarettes." Johnny had a grin on his face. Like he was planning something. Something big. His hand went into the front pocket of his Levi's, and came out with a small box. He opened the box and pulled out the crudest looking home-rolled cigarette anyone in the room had ever seen. "Anyone want to hit this?"

Tony and Bob looked at each other in surprise. The look on each of their faces said almost the same thing. Dope! Neither would have guessed that Johnny was a dope fiend. This guy was just full of surprises. Tony wondered what was going to happen next.

Tony got another surprise. Betty pulled a pack of matches from her purse. "Light it up. Let's get high," she said.

Johnny lit the joint and took a deep hit. Tony and Bob watched as he did it. They had never seen anyone smoke dope before, and wanted to see how you did it. No need to look like they didn't know what they were doing in front of the girls. Johnny held the smoke in for a long time, and then blew it out slowly.

What a strange smell, Tony thought. It's kind of like oregano or something. He wondered what the taste was like.

Betty and each Connie took big drags from the joint then Connie handed it to Tony. "Want some?"

"Yeah. I'll take a hit." Tony took the burning dope from Connie's fingers and sucked on the joint, inhaling the weird tasting smoke into his lungs. He almost coughed, but managed to hold it in check. He held the smoke in his chest until it felt like it was going to burn a hole

through his ribs to get out. He blew it out, tasting the burned herb.

Mary was next. At first she protested, saying that she was Catholic and couldn't do anything like this, but a little heat from her girlfriends was all it took. She took a deep hit, and did it so well that everyone in the room knew that this was not her first time. Not by a long shot.

Bob was the last to take a hit. Mary passed it to him slowly and deliberately, like someone might pass an expensive piece of crystal. Bob took a hit.

The joint made another round through the group. Tony could already feel it starting to take effect. It was the strangest thing he had ever felt. Kind of like being dizzy, but not quite. His skin was tingling all over. Sounds began retreating into the background, and everything looked somehow different but the same.

"Wow." Mary said, "That's some good stuff."

"Yeah." Johnny said. "I only get the best."

Even though he was really messed up, Tony still realized that he was in the middle of one of the best situations to get laid in that he had ever seen. Three wild girls, three boys and everyone was messed up, and feeling the way he was. The room was a powder keg of sex ready to blow up. Tony made a spark.

"Johnny, got any cards around here?"

Johnny was taken back a bit by Tony's request. "What?"

"Cards. You know, the things you play a game with. I want to play a game of cards. Poker or something. How about you, Bob, you want to play cards?"

Bob looked at Betty. He guessed what Tony was up to. "Only if she does."

Tony looked at Betty, sitting back in the chair, gazing at nothing at all on the ceiling. "Want to play a game, sweetheart?" he asked.

"Sure. I like games."

"Anyone else who wants to play, sit around the table."

Johnny retrieved a pack of Bicycle Playing Cards from a drawer next to the small kitchen sink, handed it to Tony, and took a seat next to Mary at the table. Tony opened the pack, and began shuffling the cards.

"What are we playing?" Connie asked.

"Poker. Five-card draw. Deuces wild."

Tony started shuffling the cards. He wasn't very smooth about it, but no one noticed. Everyone in the room was sufficiently blown out on booze and dope that Tony's skill with a deck was not very high on their lists of things important. He got them mixed up a little bit, and

started dealing them out.

Tony won the first hand, and Mary won the second. That's when the game started to heat up. Bob wanted to see these girls get naked. "You know," he said, barely coherently, "We need to start betting. Can't play poker without a bet."

"What do you want to bet?" Connie asked him, giggling. "Winner gets to make someone drink?"

"Nah," Betty said. "We don't have enough to drink for that."

"How about we bet clothes?" Tony asked.

"I like it." Johnny said.

Bob registered his opinion. "Me too."

"I don't know." Betty said. "I don't think it's a good idea."

"Afraid you're gonna lose?" Mary asked. She was kind of interested in playing for clothes. She'd never played strip poker before, and wanted to know what it was like. Besides, maybe she'd get to see that Tony guy take his clothes off.

"No. I just don't think it's right."

"You're too Catholic," Connie laughed. She was laughing a lot since they had smoked that joint. "Tell ya' what - if you do anything sinful, you can go to confession tomorrow."

It took a couple of minutes, but eventually Betty came around to the same thinking as the rest of the card players. Somehow, she won the first hand, drawing a flush off the top. "Okay, you guys wanted to play this game. Take it off."

The losers took off a shoe and the game went on. The girls' getting more and more naked with each hand must have either distracted Johnny, or else the weed was hitting him really hard, because he didn't win a single hand. He was quickly down to just his underwear.

Johnny's luck changed with the next hand, and for once he got to keep something on. He looked around the table, checking out the competition. Tony and Bob still had their jeans on. Betty and Connie had on their jeans and bras. Mary was the closest to his situation, wearing only her bra and panties.

The boys had to wait to see Mary's breasts. She won the next hand. Now everyone except Johnny was down to undergarments only. Johnny was sitting close to the table, suddenly very modest about being naked in the presence of three girls who were almost that way. Plus, he had a raging hard-on.

After two more hands, Tony was the victor of the game. At least he was the only one still wearing anything. "I guess you win," Connie said.

"Yep. What do I get for it?" Tony said, looking directly at her. God, he thought, what a

body. I want that. Now.

Connie leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. “How’s that?” she asked. Tony thought it was good, but not good enough. He took hold of Connie by the shoulders and kissed her lips. Connie’s hands began exploring his body and his hands hers. When Tony squeezed her breasts, she began to breathe harder. Tony’s hands roamed lower and lower, and settled between her legs, eliciting a slight moan.

The Tony and Connie show broke the thin ice remaining in the room. Connie couldn’t believe it was happening. She knew that she had a bit of a reputation, but even she had never done anything quite like this before.

Johnny couldn’t care less who else was there. He had one hand on Mary’s chest and another between her legs. He’d been waiting all summer for a chance to get lucky, and now that the opportunity was at hand, he wasn’t about to let an audience deter him. Johnny eased Mary’s legs apart and slid into her.

“I don’t know about this,” Betty sighed into Bob’s ear. Then Bob slid his hand between her legs. Resistance melted away. She wanted him - now. “Oh, yes,” she whispered in his ear, “Just like that.” Slowly they descended to the floor of the trailer. When Bob entered her, he almost came immediately. Somehow, he managed to hold off, and began pumping away furiously.

A good time was had by all.

CHAPTER TWO - NEW JOBS

Bob saw the sign on the garage and went inside to inquire about a job. Wow, he thought, this place is something else. Scalaro Auto Body was housed in a large warehouse-type building, and most of the floor space was dedicated to storing vehicles that were supposedly in for work. Bob noticed Cadillacs, Lincolns, BMWs, Mercedes, and other makes that he didn't recognize but which looked very expensive. A few showed collision damage, but the vast majority appeared to be spotless.

Carmine saw him and immediately put down a wrench and went over to greet Bob. Bob told him he was interested in the job, so Carmine took him upstairs to Frank's office to discuss the matter. Frank saw them in the doorway.

"What's up Carmine?"

"Kid here is interested in the detailing job."

"Come in," Frank said, gesturing with his hands. "Have a seat right here."

Bob sat in a chair in front of the desk. He looked around the office, and at first it looked very ordinary. There was the desk and chairs, a couple of pictures on the wall, a business license, and a clock. Then his eyes settled on a black object on the corner of the desk. A gun.

Frank saw him looking at the piece. "What you lookin' at?"

"Just wondering why you have a gun on your desk, that's all," Tony said.

"Protection. Never know when some nigger's gonna come in here and try to rob the place. Right Carmine."

"Right Frank."

"So what's your name, kid?"

"Bob D'Amico."

"Ah, good Italian kid. You from the neighborhood?"

"Nah. I live up in Carrick."

"Nice place. I got a few friends up there." Frank decided to switch to business. "Anyway kid, I need a couple of guys to detail cars. We get a lot of cars in here for work, and I always like to give them back perfectly clean. It's kind of a little bonus that people get for giving me their business, and some of 'em come back just for the detailing jobs. That's the job, and it pays two-fifty an hour, plus a bonus of thirty cents a car. That's to start. How's that sound?"

"Wow. That sounds really good!" Bob could barely contain his enthusiasm. It was more than double what he was making at the store, and seemed pretty easy to boot. He knew how to clean cars – his father had made that one of his weekly chores since he was old enough to do it.

“Great. When can you start?”

“When do you want me to start?”

“Tomorrow if you can, say around ten in the morning.”

“Sure thing, Mister.”

“Hey, the name’s Frank. I don’t go for any of that ‘Mister’ crap around here. We’re a family.”

“Okay, Frank.”

“Hey, you got a buddy or two that need a job?”

“Yeah. I think my friend Tony would want one.”

“Bring him with you tomorrow if he wants to work.”

“Okay, Frank, I will.”

“Good. See you tomorrow Bob.”

Carmine gestured to Bob that it was time to go. Bob rose from the chair and followed Carmine out of the office. Carmine spoke first. “Hey kid, Frank seems to like you. This is a great place to work, and maybe you’ll learn how to do mechanical stuff too. What do you think about that?”

“Wow. That sounds real good.”

“Yep. That’s how we do it; we keep things in the family around here. Anyway, I gotta get back to work. See you tomorrow.”

“Okay, see you then.” Bob found the door and went to find Tony and tell him about the new job and ask if he might want to do it too. Of course, at double the pay of the store, Tony was certainly interested.

Mrs. Carmenucci made one of her favorite dinners – roast beef with potatoes and carrots. It’d taken over three hours to cook, but the results were worth the time. She took the meal from the oven and transferred it to a large serving bowl, then called her husband and son to the dinner table. Tony Sr. led the family in saying grace then everyone filled their plates from the main serving bowl. Soon thereafter, Tony mentioned the job that Bob had told him about with Frank.

Tony Sr. was not impressed. “You’re gonna work in a garage?”

“Yeah. The owner wants someone to detail cars and work on them.”

“Where did you learn how to work on a car? You don’t know a piston from a fan belt. How

you gonna work on a motor?"

"Bob said the owner would teach us how."

"I think it sounds like a bunch of bullshit. No one hires a mechanic who doesn't know shit about cars. What kind outfit is this anyway?"

"That's the way he does it, trains his own guys. Figures he can pay less that way. I guess."

"Maybe. How late you gonna be there?"

"Don't know. Depends on when the owner wants us to stop, I guess."

"Well, you watch out. I know these garage types. Don't take a check from the bastard. Cash only. Those bastards will screw you over in a heartbeat. Fuckers took me for a couple extra hundred when I had to get my car fixed last time. Bastards changed a head gasket when all the car needed was a fan belt. Watch out, boy."

"I will."

"What you need another job for, anyway? You get fired from the store?"

"Nah. I just need some more money to buy a car."

"That's all you need. Shit, you'll get in even more trouble if you have a car. Well, mister, you get yourself into something, you better get yourself out of it, cause I ain't coming down to bail you out."

"I know." Every time he talked to his father, he always kept saying how he wouldn't come bail him out. It was if he assumed Tony was going to get arrested for something. Every time.

"All right, that's enough of that," Tony's mother called from the dining room. She had already set out the roast on the table. "Come in here and eat your dinner."

Tony followed his father into the dining room and took a seat at the table. The roast was good. Mrs. Carmenucci was a good cook. Tony couldn't remember the last time she made something that wasn't good. He ate two helpings of the roast then helped his mother with the dishes.

The shop had been closed for half an hour, but that didn't mean that either Carmine or Frank could go home quite yet. The Mercedes had to be sent to Darkie in New York later that night, and they hadn't even begun to do their work on it. The first step was changing the Vehicle Identification Number, commonly referred to as the VIN. Carmine selected the appropriate blank and set of punches, and ten minutes later a brand new VIN tag had been created. It varied only in a couple of digits from the original, but that was enough. Next, the license plate was removed, bent in half, and heated with an oxy-acetylene torch until it was reduced to a molten blob of aluminum. A new plate was then fitted to the car, and Carmine proceeded to change numbers stamped on various other vehicle components. It wasn't easy, but had to be done. After all, someone might notice the inconsistent numbers and start asking questions which might

eventually bring in a brigade of cops, and they surely did not want that to happen.

While Carmine was changing the numbers on the car, Frank was in his office doing his part of the work. Instead of a punch and a hammer, Frank used a typewriter to create a very authentic looking vehicle registration card and title. It was actually pretty easy, as he had quite a few blank ones in an envelope locked in his safe and a lot of practice in how to fill them out properly. The process took only half an hour.

By ten o'clock, the car was ready to roll and seventeen-year-old Walter Kaczinski closed the door and turned the key to start the engine. He would drive all night to New York, deliver the vehicle to Darkie, and catch a bus home. With him on the return trip would be an envelope stuffed full of hundred dollar bills, and also any information and further orders that Darkie had for vehicles.

Exhausted after a long day of work, Frank and Carmine left the shop at ten-thirty.

Bridget and Derek had gone out together for months. At first, dating the captain of the football team had seemed like a dream come true. He had a red Corvette that his parents had given him for his birthday, always wore nice clothes, and was big, strong, and handsome. Back then, she felt like her whole body was jelly whenever he was around. Nowadays, she only wanted to be as far away from him as she could get. She couldn't stand the way he always flirted with every girl who came around, and acted like she was nothing more than a doll to be shown off to his friends. She couldn't say or do anything when they were out together without Derek's permission, and knew what would happen if she did.

Bridget had learned about Derek's dark side on one of their Saturday night dates about a month after they had started seeing each other. They had just come out of the theater after watching a John Wayne movie, and she had to go to the bathroom. So, she went. On the way back, she stopped for a second to chat with a couple of girls she had met at the store.

When she returned to Derek he was standing in the foyer of the theater, and he said nothing. Derek had grabbed her arm, roughly, and escorted her quickly out to his car. As soon as Bridget had closed the door, she turned her head to look out the window, and then heard a thump and saw a bright light as Derek smacked her across the back of the head.

"Don't ever, ever, do that shit to me again, bitch!" he screamed. "What do you think I am? Some piece of shit you can walk away from whenever you want?"

"Derek, I..."

Slap! Bridget saw stars as Derek's open hand slapped her cheek.

"Shut your damn hole or I'll knock your fucking teeth out!"

Bridget remembered being dazed and confused. Everything after that was a blur for a while, as Derek started the car and roared down the street. She didn't know how far they had gone or where they were when he pulled the car over to the side of the road and turned off the ignition.

But she vividly remembered what happened next.

Derek opened his door and got out of the car. He quickly went to Bridget's door and yanked it open. Somehow, she remembers him pulling her out of the Corvette and standing her up against it. He pinned her in place and looked straight in to her eyes. Then, suddenly, his face relaxed a little. Still holding her in place he backed away slightly, never breaking the eye contact.

"Honey, I'm sorry," Derek said in a calm, even voice. "You just can't do that to me. Otherwise, I'll have to punish you. Understand?"

Bridget didn't know whether or not it was safe to say anything, and besides she was sobbing a little bit, small tears rolling from the corners of her eyes. So she shook her head 'yes.'

"Well, say something."

"Yes," Bridget remembered saying, in a voice like a little girl. "I understand."

"Good. Now say that you'll never do it again."

"I'll never do it again."

"Good."

Derek said nothing else. He released Bridget and got back in his car. She remembered not wanting to get back in with him, but she looked around and didn't know where she was or how to get home so she got in anyway. Derek started the car and drove back to Bridget's house. The whole way back he kept telling her how it was her fault, she had made him do it, and somehow he made her believe it.

Bridget remembered trying to sneak back in to the house without her mother seeing her, but had failed. The moment she saw the mark on Bridget's face, she had hauled her daughter in to the living room and grilled her relentlessly to find out what had happened. Bridget had not told her mother about what Derek had done. Even so, her mother knew, and managed to get through to her that it wasn't her fault. She also barred Bridget from ever seeing Derek again.

It almost worked. For a week, Derek kept stopping by the store and calling her, and every time she told him she was busy or not interested. After a while, though, she finally relented and went back out with him. The date was nothing like the last one. He lavished her with attention and took her to an expensive restaurant. Bridget began to believe once again that it had been her fault, that Derek was really a good guy, that she had made him hit her. So she decided to do what he wanted. And Derek didn't hit her again.

Bridget had made her decision to be with Derek. After all, she was the one who had been wrong, and he'd just reacted to what she had done to him. Then, one about two weeks before making her date with Tony, she was walking through the park on a Sunday afternoon. It had been a beautiful day, and she had called Derek to see what he was doing, but he wasn't home. So, Bridget decided to go out and get some air. She walked through the park for an hour and a half, then saw Derek's car in the parking lot.

He must have come out here to see me, she remembered thinking. So, she walked up to the car and looked in. She saw Derek in there all right. He was in the passenger's seat, on top of Jenny Vishinski, having sex with that slut like there was no tomorrow. He never saw Bridget running away with tears in her eyes.

Lying in her bed sleepless, Bridget thought about the situation and how she could change it. Her mind wandered back to that cute guy at the store, Tony. There was just something about him that was incredibly attractive to her, but she wasn't quite sure what it was. One thing she was certain about was that sooner or later they would end up together, and that when it happened he would not be like Derek Smythe.

Working for Frank Scalaro wasn't exactly easy, but then again it was much better than the store had been. For two weeks Tony and Bob arrived at the shop to find Carmine or Frank waiting for their arrival. After a minute or two of small talk, they would be given their assignments for the day, and would soon find themselves meticulously cleaning an expensive vehicle of one sort or another. Of course, the details were never good enough for Frank, and they would then spend two more hours cleaning parts of the car that they never knew existed, let alone thought to clean. However, they learned quickly, and by the end of the third week even Frank was having a hard time finding anything they had missed.

Just after their third full week on the job, Tony left the detailing area and entered the main garage to get a bottle of Coke from the machine. He saw Carmine working inside a Mercedes Benz, and noticed that the entire dashboard had been disassembled and was lying on the floor next to the car. He thought that he might learn something, so he walked over to watch Carmine.

Carmine was in the middle of a real rush job and had to get the numbers on the Benz changed immediately. There wasn't time to wait for the shop to close, so he'd started just after lunch and had the VIN tag nearly changed when Tony showed up to check out what he was doing. He already had a cover story in case the kid got too nosy, and besides, it might not be a bad idea for him to learn how to do the VIN changes anyway. It was a lot of work and he could surely use help with it, especially when they had a batch of five or ten cars to do in just a couple of days.

"Hey, Carmine. What are you doing there?"

"Changing a VIN plate. Sometimes they get fucked up and you need to put on a new one."

"What's a VIN plate?" Tony asked, peering in to take a closer look at the task.

"This little metal thing with a number stamped on it. It's kind of like the car's serial number."

"You mind if I watch?"

"Nah. I'll even show you how to do it."

Carmine continued on the task of swapping the VIN tags. Tony generally tried to stay out of the way, but still he asked more than a few questions during the procedure. Although Carmine

was pressed for time, he nonetheless answered each question, and within an hour Tony was very well educated on the process of how to change the car's main number. He explained how changing the tag wasn't the end of the job; it was just the beginning. Other numbers, such as the ones stamped into the engine block and differential had to be changed as well. These were considerably more difficult to do, as they required welding up the metal, grinding it back down again, and stamping new numbers in the place of the old ones. Finally, he would apply chemicals to rust the metal to match the remainder of the part. Carmine had been doing it for years, but it still took quite some time to complete the process. When he was finished, the car was practically untraceable, especially when it was combined with Frank's paperwork.

Obtaining the vehicles for his customers was the most risky part of Frank's business. Naturally, he was far too old and well off to do the dirty work himself. Instead, he had two very skilled car thieves in his employ. At least, he did until the owner of a new Buick spotted the pair attempting to jimmy his car's door open. First, the owner called the police from his bedroom, then grabbed his shotgun and went down to confront the thieves. Instead of doing the smart thing and running as far away from the scene as they could, one of the boys decided to shoot it out with the owner. The ensuing melee resulted in a slightly wounded owner and very two dead thieves.

Luckily for Frank, the dead car thieves didn't have any recognizable ties to the shop. They were just local punks who were never interested in any type of legitimate employment. Indeed, they were more or less free-lancers who would do jobs for Frank or any other dealer in stolen vehicles who had an order for them to fulfill. Unluckily for Frank, their loss meant that he was going to have a very difficult time acquiring vehicles.

It was time to test the new boys he'd hired. Naturally, he wouldn't just come straight out and ask them to go out and grab a car for him. To do so would be far too risky, and Frank hadn't gotten to where he was at by taking stupid risks. A more gradual approach was needed and was in fact already underway, as Frank had learned when Carmine reported to him Tony's interest in changing the VIN tags.

In the month that the boys had been working at the shop, Frank had been deliberately giving them the worst jobs he could think of and been very critical of their work to see if he could make them snap. Although Tony might occasionally be heard complaining about it, both of the boys still came through beautifully. Frank knew that they would work hard. Now he needed to appeal to the sense of greed that everyone possessed, but few would admit to having. He would also have to instill a true fear of crossing him.

Before he could get them into stealing cars he would first have to initiate them into some smaller-time stuff. That way, in addition to appealing to their pockets, he would also have some leverage over them. Fear of the possibility of going to jail or getting killed would make the prospect of stealing vehicles much more palatable to the boys.

Tony and Bob cruised slowly through Downtown in Bob's parents' car. They had their week's pay in their pockets, and were looking to spend some money and have a good time. Bob

turned left and wheeled down Liberty Avenue. "Let's go to a peep show or something," he suggested. After that party at Clemson's trailer, he was addicted to girls.

"Yeah," Tony replied. "Good idea. Park somewhere and we'll take a walk around."

Bob found a space just big enough for the Chevy, and parked. The boys got out of the car and started strolling down Liberty Avenue. Signs of "NUDE GIRLS" were everywhere. It was just what they needed. "Hey, look over there," Tony said.

"What?" Bob asked.

"Over there. In the alley."

Bob looked. He saw two girls standing there. They were wearing tight skirts and skimpy tops. Hookers. Better than a peep show. At least with the hookers you got to slam your dick in them. "Yeah. Let's go talk to them."

The boys managed to cross the street without getting run over by a taxi, although it was close. They strolled up to the hookers. "Hey boys, how yinz doing?" one asked.

Tony took a look at the girls. They looked pretty young. And sexy! Long legs, big tits, and lots of skin showing. One was blonde, the other brunette.

"We're doing good," Tony said. Bob looked at him. Always Mr. Smooth. How the hell does he do it, Bob wondered.

"You boys want a little party?" the brunette asked, running a finger up and down her left leg.

"Yeah. We want a little party."

"Well," the blonde cooed, "For ten dollars, we can have a really nice party at my place."

Ten bucks. What the hell, Tony thought. "I think we can swing that. What're your names?"

The brunette spoke first. "I'm Tisha and her name is Candy. You boys look like you want some candy. You ever done it yet?"

"Yeah, we've done it before." Tony reached in his pocket and withdrew a twenty that Frank had given him not more than an hour before. "Got change for this, babe?" he asked.

Candy's eyes lit up. She was certainly interested in that much money. "Yeah, sweetheart. We gotta get your change out of our purses though. Follow us back here."

The boys followed the whores into the alley. The girls turned around and dug around in their purses, giggling and whispering to one another. As they dug around, they kept lifting their skirts, showing the boys what they wanted to see. They turned around slowly, purses in hand. Too late the boys saw the purses arcing towards their heads.

Tony saw a brilliant flash of light as Candy's purse caught the left side of his face. He heard Bob grunt as Tisha planted the top of her foot solidly against his crotch. Bob grunted again as a

purse loaded with a brick slammed against his head. The boys fell to the pavement; heads pounding as the girls kicked them nearly unconscious. The whores then rifled their pockets and took every dollar there.

“See you later boys,” Candy said sweetly, bending over to kiss Tony’s forehead. “See you around,” her partner called as they ran from the alley. Tony tried to stand and chase them, but found that all of a sudden his legs had no strength, that his head was pounding and his stomach felt like it was about to turn inside out. Even breathing hurt. The best he could do was stumble a quarter of a step before falling back to the pavement.

Tony dragged himself to the side of a building, and managed to pull himself to a sitting position. He put his hand to the left side of his face, and noticed it felt wet. He looked at his palm. It was covered with blood. He looked at Bob and saw that he too was bloodied up pretty badly and lying on the pavement, holding his crotch and moaning in agony.

“Those fucking whores ripped us off!” Tony said. “They fucking took all the money!”

Bob groaned in response.

“We’re gonna get them for this, Bob. They are gonna pay big time for this shit!”

“You’re right, Tone. We gotta get them for this.”

“Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

Tony awoke at 7:30 am Tuesday morning. As soon as he moved, a surge of pain shot through his body. The pain was so strong that he saw double. He remained still for a moment, and the pain receded somewhat. Thoughts of revenge filled his mind.

After a minute or so, he very carefully and slowly slid his left leg out of the bed and then managed to pull himself to a sitting position. His head was pounding, his ribs felt like they were on fire, and his balls felt like someone had put them in a vice and squeezed them flat. In short, everything hurt, and the more he moved, the more it hurt.

Finally, after what seemed to be an eternity of agony, Tony stood up and shuffled in to the bathroom. He looked in the mirror for the first time since his run-in with Candy and Tisha. He couldn’t believe what he saw. Both of his eyes were black, and remnants of dried blood still clung to his cheek and the bottom of his nose. A two-inch long gash ran down his left cheek. Tony took off his shirt and looked at his chest. He could see black and blue marks up and down his chest where Candy had kicked him. No wonder, he thought, it hurts when I breathe. At least nothing seems to be broken.

After surveying the damage to his body for a minute or so, Tony stepped in to the shower. The hot water soothed the bruises a little bit, but made the gash in his cheek hurt more. As soon as he had washed off, he got out of the shower and walked over to the medicine cabinet. He wiped the mist off of the mirror, and then pulled it open to get out a couple of bandages and a bottle of iodine. Tony applied the iodine to the gash on his cheek, and the pain that caused almost made him pass out. He held his breath for a few seconds and rode out the wave of agony.

Finally, it subsided and he covered the wound with two bandages. He reached back in to the cabinet and grabbed a bottle of aspirin and took four of them. He put the iodine and aspirin back in the cabinet and closed it.

Tony wrapped a towel around his waist and went back across the hall to his bedroom. He dressed quickly in jeans and a white T-shirt, and then went downstairs to call Bob.

“Oh my God!” Tony’s mother nearly screamed when she saw Tony’s face. “What happened to you?”

“I got in a little fight last night with some punk,” Tony replied. “You should see what he looks like!”

“Well, you know how I feel about fighting...”

“Mom, I know! This guy just walked up out of nowhere and ‘Bam!’ he decks me, and I had to do something...”

“Bullshit.” Tony Sr. said from the doorway. “I’ll bet you were trying to pick up his girlfriend or something and he beat the piss out of you for it. I know you, Mister.”

“Now you know better than that...”

“Damn straight I do. You probably also called him an asshole. Just remember what I always say. ‘You get yourself in to it...’”

Tony cut his father short. “You get yourself out of it.”

“What’s for breakfast?” Tony Sr. asked his wife, apparently forgetting about his son as he picked up the morning edition of the Press. Tony took the momentary opportunity to slip out of the kitchen while his dad explained how he wanted his eggs fixed that morning. Tony didn’t know it, but on the front page, in letters half an inch high, were the words “Car Stolen At Gunpoint From Man’s House.”

Slowly but surely, the aspirins he had taken began to have an effect, and the pain subsided far enough in to the background that Tony was able to walk around without too much pain. He went to the living room, picked up the phone, and dialed Bob’s number. To his surprise, Bob answered on the second ring.

“Hello.” Tony noticed Bob’s voice didn’t sound too good.

“Wake up you candy ass.” Tony said. “We gotta go to work in a half hour.”

“You go, Tone. I already called off.”

“You tell Frank why?”

“I told him I was sick.”

“All right. Well, I’m going anyway. I’ll talk to you when I get home.”

“Bye.”

Tony couldn't get his parents' car that day, as his father needed it to go to his job at the mill. Instead, Tony had to walk to the store and catch a bus there. It was not easy, with half his body a solid bruise. Every step reminded him of the savage beating the hookers had inflicted the previous evening and strengthened his resolve to make sure that they paid for it someday.

There would be at least a ten-minute wait for the bus, and Tony decided to get a bottle of Coke to cool off with. He walked over to Martin's and dropped a dime into the machine in front of the building. He pulled a bottle from the machine, popped the lid off with the machine's built-in bottle opener and while taking a swig turned to head for the bus stop. He met with an unexpected resistance, and reached out just in time to catch Bridget before she fell.

“Sorry about that. I didn't see you back there.”

“That's all right I... what happened to you?”

“It's a long story.”

“Yeah, well I'd like to hear it.” Bridget replied. Tony looked in her eyes. There was a look there, but he wasn't sure what it was. Was she showing an interest in him, or was she just concerned about his physical condition? Tony figured there was only one way to find out.

“Yeah. Well, if you really want to hear about it, how about meeting me tonight at McDonald's?”

“Okay. I'll see you at eight.”

“Yeah. I'll see you then.” Tony said as Bridget turned and walked into the store to start her shift.

It took a moment for it to sink in, and when it did, all the pain went away. Tony had a date with Bridget. The pain of his injuries suddenly didn't seem quite so important.

The bus arrived right on schedule and Tony boarded it. Fifteen minutes later, he hopped off at the corner of 18th and Carson in the South Side. He walked the few blocks down to Frank's shop. He opened the door and walked in.

“Holy shit!” Carmine exclaimed when he saw Tony. “What the hell happened to you?”

“I got in a little fight,” Tony explained. “You should see what the other guy looks like!”

“Kid,” Carmine replied, “I don't care what the other guy looks like. You look like shit. Next time you get in a fight, just kill the motherfucker. It's easier that way. Anyways, Frank is waiting for you in the office. Better go up there, he's in a hurry.”

Tony made his way to Frank's office and opened the door. Frank waved him toward a chair without looking up from the paperwork he was expertly forging. “Carmine tells me you're getting interested in the mechanical stuff now.”

“Yeah. Figure the more I learn the better it is, right?”

“Good answer kid. It’s always good to want to learn new things.” Frank completed typing in the VIN number for a Cadillac that would soon be on its way to New York. He looked up at Tony and lost his train of thought.

“What the fuck happened to you? You get in a wreck or what?”

“Got in a little fight last night. It’s nothing.”

Kid’s tough, Frank thought, I’ll give him that. He looks like he got in a fight with a truck and lost, but he still came in. Tough and loyal - maybe this just might work out after all. Let’s see. “Gotta be over a broad or money.”

Tony was amazed at how accurately Frank had seen the cause of his injuries. Of course, he wasn’t about to tell him that it had been a woman who had beaten him up and then robbed him. He decided to just go along with Frank’s assessment of the situation. “Yeah. This dickhead kept bothering my girl, and we got into it. You should see what he looks like.”

“I knew it. Always a woman involved. Was Bob with you?”

Tony hadn’t thought the story through all the way yet, and wasn’t really sure how he should answer the question. He decided to tell a little bit of the truth. “Yeah, he was with me. Guy’s buddy suckered him when the fight started and Bob got his ass kicked a little bit. But he came back and kicked the other guy’s ass pretty good.”

“That why he ain’t in today?”

“Yeah. Guess he got it a little worse than I did.”

“You know who these guys are? I could help you get even if you want.”

“Nah, I’ve never seen them before.”

“Okay, well if you do you come see me before you do anything, *capice*? Nobody fucks with anyone who’s with me and gets away with it.” Although Tony didn’t understand it at the time, the words “who’s with me” were far more significant than one would guess. Frank had made up his mind to bring the boys into the Family.

Frank gave Tony his assignments for the day, then turned his attention to other work. He didn’t make any moves to bring the boys into the fold for a week.

CHAPTER THREE - BUDDING ASSOCIATES

Even though he'd been a criminal his entire adult life, Johnny Spinoza had never been officially made a member of the Family. Promises of "someday" had never been fulfilled, and after a while he didn't even worry about it. He was still making money hand over fist with his after-hours club, and was generally treated like a made man by the rest of the Family. Occasionally he thought about opening up the brothel he'd operated on the third floor of the building, but realized that he was too old and too busy to seriously consider it. Besides, his payoffs to the local cops would have to be increased substantially for them to overlook its presence.

Johnny had been open an hour and the place was empty as usual. Except for the occasional dinner patron, nobody came to an after-hours social club before midnight, and these "early birds" were few in number. He only opened early to give at least some illusion of the club being a legitimate business. The club's real business started when the legitimate bars closed their doors at 2:00 am. People who weren't yet done with their drinking would whip out their membership cards and a two-dollar cover charge for the privilege of carousing until the sun came up.

The buzzer signaling somebody wishing to enter the Club buzzed. Johnny went to the door, and was surprised to see Frank Scalaro standing there with two kids. Frank only came by on rare occasions, not like the old days when he would be in the club until after closing time every night. He was getting older and Johnny knew that the hangovers at his age were much worse than when he'd been a younger man. He opened the door.

"Frankie! Good to see you!"

"Hey, Johnny. How's business been?"

"Never better. Had a couple hundred in here this weekend."

"Good. Hey, could we get a table?"

"Sure thing, Frankie. Right over here." He led trio to a table in the main hall. At night it was always opened up for dancing, but earlier in the evening he kept a dozen tables set up for dinner patrons. Frank motioned for Tony and Bob to take seats then took one for himself. "What's the special tonight?" he asked.

"You picked a good night, Frankie. Chicken cacciatore with cheese tortellini and garlic bread. I'll have Kelly bring you back some menus and a bottle of wine. I just got some in from the old country that's to die for. These two of age?"

"They're old enough. Johnny, this is Tony and Bob. They work over at my shop. Boys, this is Johnny Spinoza."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Spinoza," Bob offered his hand.

"Shit, kid, just call me Johnny. Everyone else does. Excuse me guys, I'll go get Kelly for you." Johnny Spinoza turned and headed for the kitchen area.

They didn't have to wait long. Almost immediately, a waitress entered the room carrying a

tray with three glasses, a bottle of wine, and three menus. Tony saw her and her appearance held his undivided attention as she walked across the room to their table. Tony really appreciated her outfit, a thin white blouse with the top three buttons open and a short black skirt that showed a large portion of her thighs.

“Hi Frank!” she greeted as she reached the table. “What brings you by tonight? I haven’t seen you here in ages.”

“Figured I’d bring the boys down for a little dinner after work. They’ve been busting their butts lately, and I wanted to show a little appreciation.”

“That’s so sweet,” she replied as she set the wine glasses before the three of them. “So who are these two handsome devils?”

Frank pointed to Bob. “This is Bob, and this,” he pointed to Tony, “Is Tony. They work for me at the shop.”

“Nice to meet you. My name’s Kelly.” She reached out to shake first Tony’s then Bob’s hand, then looked at the bottle of wine. “Ah crap! I forgot the corkscrew. I’ll be right back guys.” Kelly turned and hurried back to the kitchen for the forgotten corkscrew.

Frank noticed the look on Tony’s face. “Hey, don’t go getting any ideas there. That little broad is Johnny’s niece.”

“And that means exactly what to me?” Tony replied. Carmine and Frank both erupted into laughter.

“Hey Frank,” Carmine bellowed. “This fucking kid has some huge fucking balls. Gotta love him, eh?”

“Yeah. Reminds me of old Horny Bill Cirrelli. Remember him?” Frank asked.

“Yeah. Didn’t some broad whack him out?”

“Nah. You remember, he dropped over from a heart attack while he was screwing his Capo’s wife. Good thing he did, cause if Carmen had found out he was fucking Mary every night he would have whacked him out slow.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Fucking guy couldn’t keep his dick in his pants for five fucking minutes. Kid, you better be more careful than that fucking guy. Guys sometimes do crazy shit when they catch you fucking their daughters and wives.”

Little did any of them know just how little Johnny Spinoza cared about family – either his own or the Cosa Nostra. If they would, it would have avoided a lot of problems in the future.

Two weeks after taking the boys to dinner at Johnny Spinoza’s place, Frank was in a real bind. The death of the punks who had been providing him with vehicles had put a serious damper on his stolen car business, and the body shop wasn’t generating anywhere near enough income to cover expenses. Something had to be done immediately to raise some cash, and he

knew exactly what it had to be. He left word with Carmine to send the boys to his office when they came in. It was time to turn them from detailers into car thieves.

The boys now knew that Frank's operation wasn't quite legitimate, and it didn't seem to bother them a bit. They had learned the process of changing numbers well from Carmine, and seemed to be eager for some action. They were going to get some.

It was ten minutes after the boys were supposed to arrive for their detailing shift, and Frank was starting to wonder where they were when they finally came in. As instructed, Carmine sent them to the office.

"Hey, Frank," Tony greeted him. "What's up?"

"Have a seat boys." Frank waited for them to sit before continuing. "You guys have been here for a while, and know a few things about the business, right?"

"Yeah Frank. Changing the numbers and stuff."

"Well, then you can guess that the real business of this shop isn't fixing cars that idiots slam into phone poles, right?"

"Yeah, we kind of figured that something's up. Why?"

"Well, I'm gonna give you boys a chance to make some real money. Had to test you out for a while, and you seem ready. How's two hundred a day sound?"

Both boys were floored by that amount. Two hundred dollars! They both thought the amount was huge.

"Sure Frank. What do we have to do?"

"Sure you want to know?"

"Yeah!"

"Okay, now before I start I gotta tell you that none of this ever, ever, ever leaves this room. I find out that you ran your mouths about it, and I'll personally whack your asses out. Can you deal with that?"

Both boys thought about it for a second, then nodded in the affirmative that they were on-board whatever Frank was about to propose. Bob then asked, "What you need us to do, Frank?"

"I got a little job for you two. I need a blue '62 El Dorado with a white interior. Know where to find one of them?"

"I think I saw one over in Shadyside," Bob answered. "Sitting in some guy's driveway. Seen it last week on my way to church."

"Good. I want it."

"How we supposed to get it? Bust in and hot-wire it?" Tony asked. He'd seen it done in

the movies, and figured it wouldn't be too hard to do.

"No, you little shit. Use this." Frank opened his desk drawer and pulled out a handgun. He tossed it to Tony.

Tony examined the weapon. It was a big, heavy revolver. On the barrel it said "Smith & Wesson." On the other side it said ".357 Magnum Ctg."

"Here's one for you, too." Frank handed Bob a similar gun, only his was a .38 Special. "You boys know how to use those things?" he asked, leaning back in his chair.

"Yeah," Tony said, still examining his gun. "My uncle took me out shooting last year."

"Good. Now, here's how it works. You take that gun with you, and when you find the car, you put on a ski mask or something, walk up to the driver and point your piece at him. He'll give you the car with the keys in it, or you threaten to blow his brains all over the windshield. Works every time. Think you can do that?"

Bob looked at Tony. Tony had that look on his face, the look he got when he was really interested in something. The serious look. "Yeah, I can do that. How about you Bob?"

"Guess it beats trying to hot-wire something."

"That's right. And you don't fuck up the ignition or anything. Makes it a lot easier to sell the car afterwards. No work needed inside. Just change the VIN numbers, a new plate, maybe a shot of paint, and it's outta here." Frank said. "Now the best part. You bring me that Caddy before tomorrow, and there's an extra hundred in it for each of you. How's that sound?"

"Sounds good," Tony said. Bob noticed that he was still messing around with his gun. Like he was all of a sudden really interested in pointing it at someone, and maybe even pulling the trigger. Bob was starting to become more afraid of Tony than even Frank.

"Well, then get out there and bring me that car."

While Frank was busy introducing the boys to their new jobs, Ron Goldberg was busy eating dinner with his family at their home in Shadyside. He'd had to work late that day at the bank, where he was Vice President of Public Affairs. The bank was planning to start a new promotion of savings accounts, and he'd spent all day and half the night in meetings with his advertising staff to hash out the final details of their radio ads. Too much work, he thought, just for a lousy thirty-second spot on KDKA. But it was his ass if something went wrong, and he hadn't risen to become a VP by letting stuff go wrong.

"Daddy, can I take the car out tonight?" his daughter Lynda asked. "I want to go to a movie tonight with Brenda and Lori."

"Sure, sweetie. Just be in before eleven. I don't want you out too late."

"I will," she said. Little did Lynda know that she wouldn't be going anywhere that night.

Outside the Goldberg's cozy house, Tony and Bob were cruising the streets of Shadyside as the sun began to set. Bob couldn't remember exactly where he had seen the car, but he thought it couldn't be far. So they kept riding around the neighborhood, looking in every driveway for a blue Cadillac.

"Tony! There it is!" Bob screamed over the radio. "There's the car!"

"Great! Pull over a block or two away. We'll walk back and get it!"

"All right."

Bob eased the big Chevy past the Goldberg's home and parked around the corner. "So, how do we do this?" he asked, a slight quiver in his voice.

"Just like Frank said. We point the gun, we get the keys, and we leave. Let's go."

Tony and Bob exited the Chevy and walked quickly to the house with the Caddy parked in the driveway. As they climbed the steps, they put on their black ski masks, and pulled their revolvers from beneath their shirts.

"Ready?" Tony asked, looking at Bob.

"Yeah. Let's do it!" Tony pressed the button next to the door and heard muffled chimes ring somewhere inside the house.

"Who the hell is that?" Ron Goldberg asked.

"I don't know," his wife replied. "Maybe it's the paper boy. He hasn't been by to collect yet this week."

"That's probably it," Ron said. He put his fork down on the side of his plate. Guess the steak will have to wait, he thought as he stood. Ron walked through the living room to the front door, and pulled it open. He saw a man standing there in a black ski mask.

"What the..." Goldman muttered. Then he saw stars as the butt of a revolver slammed him in the face. Pain rushed through his head as he staggered backwards and fell to the living room floor.

"Where's the keys?" Tony asked loudly. "Gimme the fucking car keys asshole!"

At first Goldman didn't understand the question. He was dazed from the shock and pain, and couldn't say anything. Everything was spinning. All he could see was a black blur and flashes of a gun. A big gun.

"Daddy, what's going on?" Lynda asked from the dining room door. His wife also came to see what was going on. The women stepped into the living room and found themselves staring down the barrel of Bob's pistol. Both mother and daughter screamed.

"Shut the fuck up!" Bob commanded. "Shut up or I'll shoot you!" The women shut up and stared at the scene, as Tony placed his magnum to Ron's forehead and thumbed back the

hammer to full cock.

“Now, do what we say and you won’t get hurt any worse. Don’t fuck with me, mister. Where’s the keys? The keys to the fucking car!”

At last Ron began to understand what these punks wanted. He managed to mutter, “Hanging up by the door. On a key chain.”

“Now that wasn’t so hard, was it mister?” Tony said, removing his gun from the man’s face. He lowered the hammer and stood up. “What you cunts looking at?” he said, pointing his weapon at Goldman’s wife and daughter cowering in the doorway between the living room and the dining room.

“Come on!” Bob yelled at his partner in crime. “I got the keys. Let’s get the fuck outta here!”

Tony looked at the women, then at Ron. “Listen here, all you assholes. Don’t do nothing for ten minutes. Don’t call the cops, don’t do shit. Cause I’ll be watching you. You fuck up, and I’ll come back and blow you all away. Understand?”

“Yes.” Ron groaned. “Take the car. Just don’t hurt my family. Please don’t hurt us.”

Tony was out the door in a flash, slamming it closed as he left. Bob tossed him the car keys as they jumped down the front steps of the house and into the driveway. Tony jerked the driver’s side door open and climbed behind the wheel. The big El Dorado started with a roar as Bob climbed in beside him. Tony put the car in gear and pressed the accelerator pedal to the floor. The car roared out of the driveway, smoke pouring from the tires as he pulled on to the street. Tony rounded the next corner, pulled the Caddy next to Bob’s car, and stopped for just long enough for Bob to jump out. “See you at the shop!” he yelled as Bob slammed the door closed.

Again Tony floored the gas. He drove straight for the shop, with Bob following only a few car lengths back. He had his mask off now, but kept the gun between his legs as he drove, just in case any police officer tried to stop him. He was kind of scared, but exhilarated nonetheless. He had never done anything this crazy before. But the power he’d had over that guy was awesome. There was simply nothing like seeing that guy beg and plead like he had. “Don’t hurt me,” Tony mocked. It was great. Power. Tony had it, and now he was driving the guy’s car.

The pair pulled up to Frank’s shop, and Tony blew the horn. What’s taking so long? he thought, waiting for the door to open so he could get the car out of sight before anyone saw it. The door creaked open, and Tony drove the vehicle inside. Bob followed him in, and Carmine slid the door closed behind them.

“Holy shit!” Carmine said. “You boys set a fucking record or something! I ain’t never seen someone come back with a car that fast. Frank’s gonna be real happy to see this.”

“Yeah. Well I hope he has the money. We had to beat the hell out of a guy to get this ride.” Tony said.

“What?” Carmine asked. “What the fuck did you guys do?”

“Took it right out of the guy’s driveway. At his house.” Bob said. “Tony smacked him in the face with his gun and pointed it at his wife and kid until the guy gave up the keys.”

“You guys have some big fucking balls,” Carmine said, almost amazed. No one had ever done it that way before. At worst, the other thieves had caught people in a parking lot or street corner. Never someone’s house. That took a lot of guts.

Frank stepped out of his office. “Come up here, boys. Carmine, how’s that car look?”

“Perfect. Brand new, not a scratch on it. And it’s just what you said you wanted.”

“Well, change the numbers and plates quick. Cops are looking for that one real bad. I heard about it on the radio already.” Frank looked at the boys as they climbed the iron stairs to his office. “You boys are famous. You made the news.”

“Bet the cops are looking for us, huh?” Tony asked.

“You ain’t shittin’ they are. That took some balls, stealing a car from a guy while he’s at home eating dinner. A lot of balls. Don’t ever do it again!”

“What do you mean, Frank?” Bob asked.

“That was fucking stupid! He could have had a gun or something. Plus he’s right there next to the goddamn phone. What do you think, he’s gonna wait around with his thumb up his ass while you two drive off in his new car? Shit, that bastard was on the phone to the cops by the time you got out of the driveway.”

“Sorry, Frank,” Bob said. “We won’t do that again.”

“Yeah, well it’s done now. Come in the office. I gotta pay you for the job. Good work. Just don’t be stupid like that again. And leave the guns on my desk. I don’t need you punks packing those around right after pulling that job.”

“Good idea, Frank.” Tony said. They put the guns on the desk as Frank pulled a thick wad of bills from his pocket. He counted off four one hundred-dollar bills and handed each of the boys a pair of them.

“Now, go down and help Carmine change the numbers on that car.”

Being a car thief was far more lucrative to the boys than any of their previous, honest jobs had ever been, and the money started to go to their heads a little. However, for Tony, more important than the money was the sense of power he’d felt over Goldberg while taking it. He realized that power was everything, and had been denied to him his entire life. Now it was in his grasp, even if only briefly. Like a drug, it addicted him immediately.

Bob was somewhat more pragmatic about the affair than Tony was. In his eyes, the money was the key. He didn’t really get a rush from victimizing others, but realized that it was the only way to generate the kind of income that Frank had given them. Therefore, he went along with the situation and decided that no matter what happened, he would not talk about it with anyone,

ever.

Bridget made it home at 5:30. She walked in to the living room and went directly to her bedroom to pick out some clothes for later on that night. She wanted to look good for Tony. He was too cute; the way he walked and talked just set her on fire. She didn't know why, but he'd had that effect on her ever since she had first seen him at the store. Now, she had a chance to be with him instead of that jerk Derek.

Bridget and Derek had gone out together for months. At first, dating the captain of the football team had seemed like a dream come true. He had a red Corvette that his parents had given him for his birthday, always had nice clothes, and was big, strong, and handsome. Back then, she felt like her whole body was jelly whenever he was around. Nowadays, she only wanted to be as far away from him as she could get. She couldn't stand the way he always flirted with every girl who came around, and acted like she was nothing more than a doll to be shown off to his friends. She couldn't say or do anything when they were out together without Derek's permission, and knew what would happen if she did.

Bridget had learned about Derek's dark side on one of their Saturday night dates about a month after they had started seeing each other. They had just come out of the theater after watching a John Wayne movie, and she had to go to the bathroom. So, she went. On the way back, she stopped for a second to chat with a couple of girls she had met at the store.

When she returned to Derek he was standing in the foyer of the theater, and he said nothing. Derek had grabbed her arm, roughly, and escorted her quickly out to his car. As soon as Bridget had closed the door, she turned her head to look out the window, and then heard a thump and saw a bright light as Derek smacked her across the back of the head.

"Don't ever, ever, do that shit to me again, bitch!" he screamed. "What do you think I am? Some piece of shit you can walk away from whenever you want?"

"Derek, I..."

Slap! Bridget saw stars as Derek's open hand slapped her cheek.

"Shut your damn hole or I'll knock your fucking teeth out!"

Bridget remembered being dazed and confused. Everything after that was a blur for a while, as Derek started the car and roared down the street. She didn't know how far they had gone or where they were when he pulled the car over to the side of the road and turned off the ignition. But she vividly remembered what happened next.

Derek opened his door and got out of the car. He quickly went to Bridget's door and yanked it open. Somehow, she remembers him pulling her out of the Corvette and standing her up against it. He pinned her in place and looked straight in to her eyes. Then, suddenly, his face relaxed a little. Still holding her in place he backed away slightly, never breaking the eye contact.

"Honey, I'm sorry," Derek said in a calm, even voice. "You just can't do that to me."

Otherwise, I'll have to punish you. Understand?"

Bridget didn't know whether or not it was safe to say anything, and besides she was sobbing a little bit, small tears rolling from the corners of her eyes. So she shook her head 'yes.'

"Well, say something."

"Yes," Bridget remembered saying, in a voice like a little girl. "I understand."

"Good. Now say that you'll never do it again."

"I'll never do it again."

"Good."

Derek said nothing else. He released Bridget and got back in his car. She remembered not wanting to get back in with him, but she looked around and didn't know where she was or how to get home so she got in anyway. Derek started the car and drove back to Bridget's house. The whole way back he kept telling her how it was her fault, that she had made him do it, and somehow he made her believe it.

Bridget remembered trying to sneak back in to the house without her mother seeing her, but had failed. The moment she saw the mark on Bridget's face, she had hauled her daughter in to the living room and grilled her relentlessly to find out what had happened. Bridget had not told her mother about what Derek had done. Even so, her mother knew, and managed to get through to her that it wasn't her fault. She also barred Bridget from ever seeing Derek again.

It almost worked. For a week, Derek kept stopping by the store and calling her, and every time she told him she was busy or not interested. After a while, though, she finally relented and went back out with him. The date was nothing like the last one. He lavished her with attention and took her to an expensive restaurant. Bridget began to believe once again that it had been her fault, that Derek was really a good guy, that she had made him hit her. So she decided to do what he wanted. And Derek didn't hit her again.

Bridget had made her decision to be with Derek. After all, she was the one who had been wrong, and he'd just reacted to what she had done to him. Then, one about two weeks before making her date with Tony, she was walking through the park on a Sunday afternoon. It had been a beautiful day, and she had called Derek to see what he was doing, but he wasn't home. So, Bridget decided to go out and get some air. She walked through the park for an hour and a half, then saw Derek's car in the parking lot.

He must have come out here to see me, she remembered thinking. So, she walked up to the car and looked in. She saw Derek in there all right. He was in the passenger's seat, on top of Jenny Vishinski, having sex with that little slut like there was no tomorrow. He never saw Bridget running away with tears in her eyes.

Well, Derek, she thought as she came back to the present, you can have her. Two can play that game. Bridget began dressing for her date with Tony.

Tony had just made home and was still in the doorway when the phone rang. He ran over and answered it. "Carmenucci Residence," he said.

"Tony, it's Frank. I got another job for you. Want it?"

Tony forgot about his date with Bridget. "Yeah, Frank. What do you want?"

"Never over the phone. Come by the shop."

Tony attempted to reply, but the line was already dead. He flashed the hook and dialed Bob's house. Mrs. D'Amico answered the phone, and Tony asked for Bob.

"Hi, Tone. What's up?"

"Frank just called again. Said he has another job for us tonight. He wants us to come over to the shop as soon as we can."

"I'll get my dad's car and pick you up in a few minutes."

"All right. Just beep the horn when you get here."

"Bye." The line went dead again.

Ten minutes later, Tony heard Bob blow the horn. He nearly ran out the door and jumped in the Buick. They then drove to Frank's shop. Bob blew the horn, and Carmine let them in. They sprinted up the rickety iron stairs and walked in to Frank's office. Frank was at his desk, as usual, smoking a cigar and going over some paperwork. Also as usual, the .45 was on the corner of the desk. Frank didn't look up at them. "Close the door," he said.

Bob closed the office door as Frank began to speak. "I got another job for you. Needs done right away. Interested?"

"Yeah, Frank. We're interested," Tony answered.

"Good. I need you two to get me a tow truck. I got all these cars that need moved, and can't rent one without someone asking questions. So, get me a truck." Frank opened his desk drawer and handed the boys their pistols and masks, then waved them toward the door.

"By the way, be careful on this job. Lots of those tow truck guys carry guns. Don't get shot."

Great, Bob thought. Now, not only do I feel like I got hit with a truck, I gotta worry about someone shooting me for a lousy hundred bucks. Oh well, might as well get it over with.

"We'll see you in a little bit," Tony said to Frank as he concealed his .357 under his shirt. "Come on, let's get a truck."

The boys made their way out of the office and the shop. They drove up to Carson Street to a

gas station. “Tony, how are we gonna get a tow truck?” Bob asked as he parked the Buick.

“Easy. We’ll call them on the phone, and when the guy pulls up, ‘Bam!’ we pull our guns and make him give us the truck.”

“And what if he has a gun?”

“We shoot first.”

Bob didn’t like this job a bit. It was too dangerous, stealing a tow truck in broad daylight. It was especially bad knowing that the guy they were about to rip off very well might be armed. This shit’s getting out of control, Bob thought.

Tony got out of the Buick and walked to a pay phone. He flipped open the phone book and looked up towing services. He selected a name and called the number listed. “Alan’s Towing Service,” a female voice answered on the second ring.

“Hi. I need a tow truck. My car just broke down,” Tony said in to the receiver.

“Okay. What’s your name, and where are you at.”

“Jim Pancera’s my name. I’m on 15th street, just below Carson.”

“We should have a truck in the area. He’ll be there in ten minutes.”

“Thanks.” Tony hung up the phone. “Let’s go!” he said to Bob. They got back in the Buick and parked it on 15th Street, half a block from Carson. Bob opened the hood, and the boys put on their masks, put their heads under the open hood like they were examining the engine, and waited.

The truck arrived a minute later. Adrenaline hit Tony and Bob’s systems as it pulled up. “You the guys looking for a tow,” the driver asked.

“Yeah. This piece of shit just broke down on us,” Bob said without bringing his face around to where the driver could see it.

“Okay. I’ll pull up in front of you.”

“Great!”

The driver pulled his truck in front of the Buick. Tony quickly went to the driver’s door before the truck was even completely stopped. He drew his gun and jumped up on the running boards. Bob did the same on the passenger’s side.

“Get out of the truck!”

While Bob watched, the driver pushed his door open violently, knocking Tony off the truck. Tony was not expecting such a maneuver and he landed hard on his side. Bob saw the driver pointing something out the now open door.

“Tony! Watch out!” he screamed.

Tony saw the driver point a sawed-off double barrel 12-gauge shotgun in his direction. He saw fire leap from the muzzle of the gun and felt the concussion of the explosion as the truck driver fired. Dust flew from where a load of buckshot hit the concrete inches from his head. Tony swung his pistol in the direction of the truck driver. Everything seemed to be going in slow motion as the truck driver prepared to fire again.

Bob brought his .38 to bear on the driver. He didn't have time to think or aim, he just fired. The bullet shattered the passenger side window of the truck, but missed the driver. It did save Tony from being obliterated by a shotgun blast, because the driver spun to face the new threat. Bob fired again.

This time the bullet found its mark. The truck driver flinched as the slug slammed in to his chest. His shotgun discharged, blowing the windshield out of the truck. Bob watched in amazement as glass and blood flew in all directions. The driver convulsed for a moment, then slumped over the steering wheel.

Tony reached in and pulled the unconscious man out of the truck and on to the sidewalk. He then jumped in to the cab of the truck, started the motor, and put the truck in gear. Bob jumped off the side and ran to his car. They drove like maniacs toward the shop. It was only a few blocks away and the traffic was mercifully light.

Tony blew the truck's horn. It seemed to take a year for the door to open. “Come on!” he screamed at the door. “Open the fucking door!” The door suddenly began opening. Tony drove the truck in.

Carmine took one look at the truck's blown-out windshield and shattered passenger side window. “Mother of God!” he screamed, “What the hell happened?”

Tony slid out of the truck. “The fucker had a gun! He almost blew my brains out!” A horn sounded outside. Carmine went to the wall and pressed a button, opening the door for Bob. He pulled in next to the truck and quickly got out of his car. He was shivering uncontrollably.

“Frank!” Carmine yelled. “Frank! You better come down here!”

“What?” Frank's voice echoed from his office.

“We got a big problem with this truck!”

Frank emerged from his office and looked down at the truck. “Holy shit! What the fuck happened?”

“Kid said the driver had a gun! There's blood all over the interior!”

Frank bolted down the stairs and approached Tony. Tony's face was bleeding from where it had hit the sidewalk, and his shirt was red with the blood of the truck driver. Frank was sure he was hurt badly and didn't know it yet. “Kid, you hurt?”

“No. He took a shot at me and missed. Bob had to shoot back.”

“Go upstairs and wash all that blood off you. Carmine! We gotta get this truck fixed up fast! Cops are gonna be all over this one.” He was no longer concerned about having a truck to move his other merchandise with. Rather, he wanted to get rid of the evidence linking him to the shooting. If anyone found the truck before it was fixed up, the whole operation was done, and everyone involved would go to prison for a long time. Frank turned to Bob. “Anyone see you come here?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You better hope so. If someone saw you, there’s gonna be more cops here in two minutes than you ever seen in your whole life! Where’s your gun?”

“In my car”

“Wrap it up in a paper bag and throw it off a bridge. Make sure your fingerprints are off it, for Christ’s sake. Throw it off a bridge near a nigger area, too. That way if they do find the gun the cops’ll think it was a couple of jigs that did this. It’ll throw them off us.”

Now Bob was really scared. He hadn’t considered that possibility yet, and the gravity of what had just occurred was just now beginning to sink in. Holy shit! he thought, I just killed someone! I’m a murderer! They’ll send me to the chair for this! “Okay, Frank” he said, his voice beginning to quiver.

Frank turned on the shop’s radio. He wanted to know what was going on, and KDKA’s news was the best way to find out. They were always on top of shootings or plane crashes or other sensational stories and could find out better than anyone what happened.

Carmine was already working on making a new VIN plate for the truck. Gotta change the numbers NOW! he thought. He didn’t want to be caught with this truck. Everyone could do serious time for this one. Pittsburgh cops didn’t take too kindly to auto theft rings, especially when they killed someone for a vehicle. The heat is gonna be unreal on this one, he thought as he selected the punch for the letter “G”.

Tony emerged from the rest room. He looked considerably better than when he went in, but there was still blood on his clothes and he still looked bad from the beating the hookers had given him. Frank looked over at him. “Kid! Go over to the locker room and grab some overalls! Cover up that fucking blood!”

“Right, Frank.” Tony went to get the overalls.

“Bob, start cleaning up the inside of that fucking truck,” Frank ordered. “I gotta talk to someone and get new glass for this fucker!”

Bob selected a rag. He then filled a bucket with soapy water, went back to the truck, and started wiping up the blood. There sure was a lot of it. This guy has to be dead, he thought. Has to be!

Half an hour later, the truck was spotlessly clean and the VIN number was different. The license plate had been melted with an oxyacetylene blowtorch and replaced with a new one Frank had already acquired for the purpose. Frank sent Carmine to Ace’s Auto Glass with \$500

to get all new glass for the truck's cab. Ace's was owned by Frank's cousin Al, and he knew Al would keep it quiet that he had just bought windows for a '56 Ford tow truck.

"A shooting happened in Pittsburgh's South Side today," the radio announced. "A tow truck driver who police refuse to identify was shot in an apparent hijacking of his truck. Details are still sketchy, and the driver's condition has not yet been released. The thieves stole a white 1956 Ford tow truck, license plate number TWX-103. Police believe this may be related to the case of the brutal beating and car theft last night from a Shadyside family, and are seeking any information you might have regarding the shooting or the truck. Anyone who has any information about the shooting or has seen the truck is encouraged to call Pittsburgh Police at 381-1234. We will continue to follow this breaking news story and bring you more details as they become available."

"You fucking kids are getting famous," Frank said. "Too fucking famous. We're gonna have to cool it down for a while after this job. You just lay low and do what you usually do. Go watch a movie with your girlfriend or something tonight. I'm gonna finish this truck up and when that's done we'll be in the clear. Just get rid of that fucking gun and don't talk about none of this stuff with anybody and you'll be okay." Frank reached in his pocket and counted off some bills. "Here's seventy-five bucks for each of you. I won't pay the full hundred because of all the work and heat this is causing. And if you ever do this again," Frank pointed at the truck, "I'll throw your asses in the fucking river! Now get the hell outta here!"

An hour later Tony was back home. They had carried out Frank's order and tossed Bob's .38 in the Monongahela River near the Hill District. Then they drove back to the neighborhood. Bob dropped Tony off at home.

Tony looked at the clock on the wall. 7:30. He still had time to change clothes and shower for his date with Bridget.

"And where have you been, Mister?" Tony Sr. asked.

"Down at the shop. Frank was teaching us how to do detailing work."

"You hear about that fucking tow truck shooting?"

"Yeah. Isn't that something?" Tony replied.

"Damn world is going crazy," his father replied. "Friggin' crazy. You watch yourself in that neighborhood. Seems like it's getting pretty rough down there."

"Yeah," Tony agreed, "Pretty rough. Did Bridget call?"

"Who the hell is Bridget?"

"She's just a girl from the store. I have a date with her later tonight."

"Well, she didn't call here. Don't mess around and knock her up, mister. You get yourself into that kind of trouble and you better get yourself out of it. I ain't paying for anything you do

with your pecker!”

“I know. I won’t do anything.”

“Don’t bullshit me, boy. When I was your age I fucked anything I could!”

“Can I use your car tonight?”

“Yeah, okay. Just don’t mess it up. And bring it back with a full tank of gas.” Tony Sr. said, tossing the keys to Tony.

Tony went upstairs and closed the door to his room. He pulled the gun from under his shirt and placed it under his mattress, then took a quick shower and got dressed. He looked at the clothes he had been wearing and decided he had better get rid of them before his mom noticed the blood on them and started asking questions. He went downstairs and got a garbage bag, then returned to his room and put the clothes in the bag. Tony then put on a light leather jacket and concealed the .357 under it. After the incident with the whores, he was serious about never walking around without the cannon again.

Tony went downstairs. “Bye!” he said to his parents.

“Be home by midnight!” his dad replied. Tony went to the car and put the bag of clothes in the trunk. He then slid behind the wheel and fired up the big V-8 engine. He put the car in gear and headed for McDonald’s. He still had five minutes before he was supposed to meet Bridget, and he didn’t want to be too late, even though he was sure she would be. The big Oldsmobile followed Tony’s every turn of the wheel like a dream. Tony liked driving it, but not as much as he knew he would like driving the Chevy he still had his eye on.

Tony arrived at McDonald’s at five minutes past eight. The parking lot was already half full of kids out cruising. Tony found a parking space easily. He decided not to carry the gun inside. It was pretty safe in there, and having it under his seat was close enough. After stashing the piece under his seat Tony opened the car’s door and walked to the restaurant. Bridget was already there, and she waved to Tony as he entered the room. Tony walked across the room to her.

“Hi,” he said.

“Hi.”

Tony looked at Bridget. Wow, he thought, she’s even prettier than at the store. Her long blonde hair was now down, and she had some makeup on. Tony thought she was absolutely stunning. And more than the fact that she was so beautiful, there was something in the way she looked at him that just made his heart melt. Tony knew that she was the girl for him, no matter what. And if Jocko gave him any crap, well he knew how to take care of him.

“You hungry or anything?” Tony asked.

“Yeah. I haven’t eaten since lunch.”

They sat in a corner booth, and then Tony stood and walked to the counter. He ordered two burgers, orders of fries, and Cokes. He paid for it and carried it back to where Bridget sat. They

unwrapped their burgers and began nibbling on them. Neither of them was really all that interested in the food. They were far more interested in each other.

They talked about nothing for a few minutes. “Tony,” Bridget asked, “You promised to tell me about what happened to you.”

“Well, it’s really nothing,” he replied.

“Come on. You can tell me.”

“Okay. It’s pretty stupid. I got in a fight last night with a guy messing with Bob’s car. I saw him doing something with the lock and ran over and decked the bastard.”

“Oh, you should be more careful. What if he was one of the guys pulling all these car robberies? They shot someone today. He could have had a gun and killed you!”

“I thought about that,” Tony said. “After I beat him up. It was a pretty hard fight, but I knocked him out. Then we got in Bob’s car and got out of there before the cops showed up.”

“Serves him right if you ask me.”

“Want to go for a cruise?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

Tony led Bridget to his car. He opened the door for her and she sat in the passenger seat. Then a drunken voice from behind yelled. “You fucking slut!”

Tony turned to face the voice and saw Derek Smythe walking toward them. He wasn’t moving like he did in school or at a football game. He appeared to be staggering a little bit as he approached. He yelled again, this time at Tony. “What you doin’ with my girl?”

“I’m not your girl, Derek!” Bridget screamed from inside the car. “Not anymore.”

“Hey, buddy. You want to leave my date alone?” Tony challenged. He had the look in his eyes that Bob was always afraid of.

“You little shit. I’ll squash you like a little bug. Trying to fuck my girlfriend. I’ll teach you!” Derek charged Tony. He saw the football player approaching and moved just a moment before he would have hit. Derek missed Tony and tripped. He stumbled into a car, denting a fender. He fell to the ground but quickly tried pulling himself back up. Tony didn’t give him the chance, delivering a hard kick to Derek’s stomach. Derek fell again, and again tried to stand. He made it up this time and swung a sloppy punch at Tony’s face. Tony easily blocked it and punched back, smashing Derek’s nose with his fist. Derek’s head snapped back from the force of the blow and Tony punched him in the stomach. Derek bent over in pain. Tony brought his knee up to Derek’s face again. The kick knocked three of his front teeth loose and nearly knocked him unconscious. He fell to the ground again.

Tony was pissed off. He rolled Derek over and planted his knee squarely in the middle of the big quarterback’s chest. “Listen here, asshole!” he yelled. “You ever mess with me or her

again and I'll fucking kill you. You understand?"

Derek mumbled something unintelligible. Tony smacked him hard across the face. "I said 'Do you understand me?' Do you asshole? Do you?"

Derek couldn't take any more. His whole body hurt. "Yeah," he groaned.

Tony got off his chest, kicked Derek again, and went to his car. He got in, started the engine and drove off as Derek's buddies helped him up. He looked at Bridget. "I don't think we have to worry about him any more," he said.

Bridget was stunned. She couldn't believe how brave Tony had been, taking on Derek like that. Derek outweighed Tony by at least 50 pounds. What she didn't realize was how intoxicated Derek was. He didn't stand a chance against a cub scout, let alone a guy like Tony who had been through enough in the past two days to be ready for a chance to kick someone else's ass. They drove on for a few minutes without speaking. Tony followed the road without any plan of where he was going or what to do when he arrived. Soon they were at the entrance to South Park.

"Tony, I can't believe how brave you were back there," Bridget said as they rounded the corner into the park.

"It wasn't nothing," Tony replied, trying to sound cool and mostly succeeding. "I ain't taking any crap from a guy like him. Besides, he might have tried to hurt you. I can't let anyone do that."

Bridget's heart melted. Her body turned totally to jelly. It was the same feeling she remembered having right after meeting Derek, only a lot stronger. She didn't know why, but the feeling was just too much for her to take. She reached out and took Tony's hand. It felt wet. She looked down as they passed under a streetlight and saw blood.

"You're hurt. Let me make it better." Bridget brought Tony's hand to her lips and kissed it. Then she kissed it again. And again. Tony pulled the car off the road and parked it. He pulled his hand away from her lips and kissed her. He'd only meant it to be a quick peck, but it turned in to a lot more. Their lips didn't part. Tony's tongue slipped into her mouth and hers into his. Tony felt his whole body tense up, yet relax at the same time. His hands felt down the length of her body. He felt her breasts and Bridget's hands began moving up and down his back. The kiss seemed to last an hour.

"I want you right now," Bridget whispered.

Tony didn't say a word. His hands went up Bridget's sweater and under her bra, lightly massaging her breasts. Bridget moaned softly. Her hands found his belt and she began trying to unbuckle it. Tony removed his hands from her body and he slid his pants down. Bridget softly pushed him back and looked down. He was at full attention. She liked what she saw and bent down for a closer look.

Tony felt her lips around his penis. An electric chill ran through his body, and any lingering pain from the abuse his body had taken over the past few days was instantly gone. His hands explored her back again, and then he slid his left one around and felt her leg. The skin was soft

and warm and just felt so good. He slid his hand up her leg slowly and under her skirt. Bridget's excitement grew stronger. It was the first time anyone had ever touched her like that, and it felt so good. When Tony's hand found her panties they were already getting wet.

Now Bridget felt an electric chill. She knew that they were going to go all the way. There was no way she could stop now even if she wanted to. And she didn't want to. Just feeling him in her mouth was not enough. She stopped sucking and leaned back. Tony put her right leg over the back of the seat and she put her right on the dashboard. Tony went down on her, licking through the soft silken panties for what seemed an eternity. He was pleasantly surprised. All the guys were always joking about it smelling like fish. Not Bridget. He slid his finger around the side of his panties and inside her. "Yes!" she moaned. "Take my panties off. Take them off!"

Tony obliged her, sliding the silken garment down her legs and over her feet. Bridget put her legs back where they had been and Tony slipped on top of her. He felt the soft warmth of her and got his dick in the right position. He started to push, but it wasn't going in. She was too tight. "You're my first time..." she moaned. Tony pushed as hard as he could. Bridget winced as he slid inside her and she gasped in a moment of pain. God, she thought, it feels so big in there!

"Does it hurt?" he asked.

"Yes... but it's a good hurt. Don't stop!"

Tony pumped away in earnest. Bridget's pain melted away in to a sweet, hot pleasure. She moaned, softly at first, but louder and louder with each stroke. It was just too good. Her body began to tense up little by little until an orgasm exploded over her entire body. She shook uncontrollably for a few seconds, and then relaxed for a moment. Tony never stopped. The feeling came again, even stronger. Just seeing her getting off excited Tony even more and he felt the pressure start to build. He slammed in again as far and as hard as he could and felt his own orgasm. He collapsed on top of Bridget.

"MMMM," she whispered in his ear. They kissed again and Tony held her in his arms. She knew that there was no one else she would ever want again. Tony was it.

He realized where they were. Any second a car could come by and see them. Tony sat up and hastily pulled up his pants and zipped them. "What's wrong?" Bridget asked.

"Nothing. We just can't stay here. Someone could come by and see us."

Bridget rearranged herself. She looked for her panties, but they were nowhere to be found. She didn't worry about them.

They cruised slowly for an hour or so, talking about nothing in particular but growing even closer by the second. When they reached Bridget's house, Tony didn't want to let her go. They kissed again, passionately. Tony promised to see her the next day. Bridget opened the door, walked to her porch, and was gone. Tony stared at the door for a few seconds, then put the car in gear and drove home. He couldn't believe how alone he suddenly felt. He wanted her back already.

CHAPTER FOUR - MAKING THEIR BONES

Frank decided to let cool things down for a while. After the two jobs Tony and Bob had pulled for him in one day, he knew that both the Pittsburgh City and Pennsylvania State Police had to be going absolutely nuts trying to figure out who was committing the violent armed robberies of vehicles. Also, the fact that someone had been shot and nearly killed in the process meant that the heat was really on. He couldn't risk doing any stolen car business at all.

He also had to decide what to do about the kids. They had shown that they have guts, but in his business you also needed brains to survive. Frank had known way too many tough guys who went either to prison or a grave because they didn't think before attempting a stupid job. He hoped these kids learned that lesson before they ended up the same way. If they got arrested, Frank certainly wasn't going to pay for a lawyer for them. Rather, he would whack them before they could finger him. He was way too old to do a twenty-year sentence on a stolen car rap. But, he thought, no need to be paranoid. No one knows who the kids are, and no one knows that I have anything to do with any of this.

Bob had roughly the same thoughts, but his were not as sophisticated as Frank's. Mainly, he was concerned with not saying anything to anyone about what had occurred in the past few days. He knew that when they threw away the gun that they had ensured that there was no evidence that he had been the shooter, and without fingerprints or anyone seeing his face and knowing who he was the cops wouldn't be able to do anything. So, he concentrated on putting on the appearance of doing everything he normally would - go to work, hang out at McDonald's, and so forth. He called Betty and they had gone out a couple of times, but without the booze and drugs they really couldn't connect with each other. The chemistry just wasn't there.

Tony, on the other hand, was already eager for another score. He was addicted to the power he was wielding with his gun. When he pointed it at someone, he was God; he had the power of life and death over them. It was the most incredible experience he'd ever had. Not even the night in the park with Bridget could compare with it. He just couldn't get wait to do it again, and the waiting was extremely boring.

The only thing he had going on that was really interesting to Tony was his relationship with Bridget. Ever since the first date, a bond that was as indescribable as it was strong connected them. Every time he'd see her he just wanted to hold her in his arms and not let go, and she felt the same way. Also, they had both noticed a major shift in Derek's attitude since the altercation in the parking lot. He was no longer the swaggering, cocky football player. He was now very cordial to Bridget, and stayed as far from Tony as he could. Even drunk and beaten up, as he was when Tony had threatened to kill him, the message had sunk in and would not soon be forgotten. Besides, he thought, I can always get other dates. What do I need a bitch like her for?

Frank's strategy of waiting for the heat to die down took a turn for the worse when, one month after the tow truck hijacking, Carmine was arrested. He'd been towing a partially dismantled BMW with the stolen truck when a Pittsburgh cop pulled him over for running a stop sign. Since the Bimmer didn't have a plate on it, and the new registration for the truck had not yet come back from the Department of Transportation, the cop had decided to run the VIN number of the BMW. The car had been destined to be scrapped, so none of its numbers had been changed, and it came up stolen. Carmine was arrested for Grand Theft Auto and Receiving Stolen Property, and lodged in the Allegheny County Jail. This was bad, but could be taken care

of. The real problem came when the police had impounded the truck. Carmine had been in a hurry when he changed the numbers on it, and the VIN did not match numbers stamped on the engine block and axle. From the short numbers on those parts, the cops learned that the truck was the one Tony and Bob had stolen. Now Carmine was facing more charges: Attempted Murder, another Grand Theft Auto count, and a misdemeanor charge of Discharging A Firearm within the city limits.

Because he was driving the truck and towing another stolen vehicle at the time, he was facing at least 30 years behind bars unless he talked and gave up the ringleader. The brutality of the theft of the truck, and all the publicity surrounding it, ensured that there was no way he could plead to lesser counts or get probation. No way at all. It was hard time he was facing, and a lot of it. Knowing that Frank would kill him in a second if he ratted anyone out, Carmine didn't say a word, sticking to his cover story that he'd bought the truck from a guy in the Hill District and didn't know anything at all about the BMW.

It took several days, but finally Frank had arranged, through Carmine's wife Camille and his business attorney Richard Clarkson, to post Carmine's bail and get him out of jail. His preliminary hearing on the charges was scheduled for September 3, and he was released on \$50,000 cash bail. No one thought to question where the money came from.

Frank's paranoia curve was rising fast. He would ensure that the case never went to court or that Carmine was never questioned about it again. He'd heard of guys facing a lot of time snap under the pressure and try to save their own skins by turning State's Evidence and bringing down the whole operation. Frank couldn't let that happen. He had worked too long and hard building his empire to let anyone threaten it, let alone cause him to worry about doing time. He needed to take Carmine out of the picture immediately.

He thought about how to do it, and a plan quickly materialized. Now, he thought, who do I use? The best choice he could see was those two kids, Bob and Tony. They had not hesitated to use force on the jobs he'd sent them to do. Hell, he thought, Bob had already shot a man for a truck. He was sure that once they understood that Carmine was likely to cause them to go to prison for decades that they would go along with the plan. Frank picked up the phone and dialed Tony's number.

"Hello, Carmenucci residence," Tony answered the phone.

"Is this Tony?" Frank asked.

"Yeah." He recognized the voice. "What's up, Frank?"

"I got a little job I'd like you and your partner to help me out with. Can you come by the shop tonight?"

"Yeah. I think so."

"Good. See you later." The line went dead. As usual, Tony called Bob and they decided to head down at 7:30 that night.

When the boys got to Frank's shop, Frank himself let them in. They both noticed that the shop was considerably emptier than it was had been the last time they were there. Frank had

gotten rid of all but one of the stolen vehicles that used to fill the garage area, as well as the tools for creating new VIN tags. He had to get rid of the evidence and put on an image of being just another body shop. He couldn't be careful enough.

"Come up to my office," Frank said, "We've got some big problems I need to talk to you about."

"Okay, Frank." Tony said.

The three of them walked up the creaky steel steps to Frank's office. His comment scared Bob badly. He didn't know what the problems were, but his imagination was running wild. He suddenly thought that somehow Frank had heard rumors that the cops knew that they were the ones who had stolen the Caddy and the truck. In the movies, when the boss knew someone was about to be arrested, he had them killed. Bob was suddenly sure that was the situation. With each step toward Frank's office, his legs grew more and more rubbery.

Tony, on the other hand, was interested to find out what kind of problems Frank was talking about. Maybe he needed more help getting rid of the last couple of cars or something. He didn't think for one second that he would be killed.

The trio reached Frank's office. Frank sat behind his desk and motioned for the boys to sit in two of the chairs facing it. They sat.

"What's going on," Tony asked.

"Like I said downstairs, we got a big problem. Carmine got pinched a few days ago in that truck you got for me. It's bad. They have him by the balls, and if he talks, we all go down."

"How'd he get caught?" Bob asked. He was surprised that his voice wasn't shaky. His body sure was.

Frank filled the boys in on the story of how Carmine had gotten arrested. "Stupid shit," he said, "Just stupid shit. He shoulda been more careful, and now we're in deep shit because he wasn't. We gotta take him out before he decides to talk."

Oh my God! Bob thought. This crazy bastard is talking about murder! He wants to kill Carmine!

Tony was somewhat less blown away. Actually, he was somewhat excited by it. Real gangster stuff, he thought. We're gonna be big-time! "What do you want me to do?" he asked Frank.

"I need you boys to do the hit," Frank explained. "Carmine likes you, he trusts you. Right now, he's scared shitless about these charges. In a couple days he's coming by here for a little meeting with me. I'm gonna tell him that everything is taken care of, that we paid off the DA and he's not going to jail. The next night, we're all gonna be here, and I'll tell him we're goin' out for a little dinner and get all our stories straight in case anyone starts asking any questions. So we'll go have dinner, maybe a couple of drinks. Then we tell him we're coming back here. Carmine's gonna drive, in his car. You two are gonna get in the back seat, and I'll sit next to Carmine in the front. When we get halfway back, I'm gonna have Carmine pull over at a gas

station so I can take a leak or get some cigars or some shit like that. When I open my door, he's gonna be jumpy as hell, thinking it's all a setup or something, and he'll be watching me. Now, as soon as I'm out of the car, boys, that's when you pop him. Don't piss around. You both shoot him twice in the back of the head and then get the hell out of that car. I'm gonna be parked around the corner. After you take care of Carmine you walk - don't run - over to it and we'll come back here. Got it?"

"Yeah," Tony replied. "I got it."

Bob looked at Tony. He saw the look in Tony's eyes. They were hard and intense, like some kind of animal. He didn't see any way out of this situation. After his first meeting with Frank, he knew that anything he said against Frank's plan would probably result in his brains being blown out on the spot. And Tony looked like he'd help Frank, maybe even pull the trigger himself. "I got it," he said, resigning himself to his fate. "Count me in."

"All right," Frank said. "Be back here the night after tomorrow, about 6:30 or so. If anything changes, I'll let you know. And kids..."

"Yeah?" Bob replied, looking at Frank.

"Don't fuck up. Don't run your little mouths or anything. You do that and you'll be going to jail for a long time for the tow truck job. Hell, I'll take you both out myself if you fuck me on this."

"You can count on us, Frank," Tony responded to Frank's threat. "Hey, its our asses too."

"You ain't shittin' it is. Now get the hell out of here."

"Right, Frank. Come on, Bob. Let's go."

Frank watched them leave his office. He knew that he now had his hit team ready to go. Bob had seemed a little bit shaky about the deal, but almost everyone is their first time around. Tony, on the other hand, was solid as a rock the whole time. Frank's mind wandered for a second. "Mr. Cool," he thought. "Tony Cool." He liked the sound of it. The name would follow Tony for the rest of his life.

There was only one problem with whacking Carmine. Frank didn't have permission to do it yet, and getting it might be a little bit tricky. If he were to do the job without permission from the boss, Frank knew that he would himself be hit. It was one of the main rules in Cosa Nostra, one of the first ones the boss himself had told him when he became a made guy twenty years before. The problem with getting the permission was that Carmine's cousin, Big Eddie, was a made guy in New York City. Frank couldn't remember whether he was the Gambino family or the Colombos, but his *capo* would be able to find out. It was critical that they were sure that Big Eddie wouldn't take issue with his cousin's death. If he did, it could start a war, and no one needed that.

Frank stood up, tucked his .45 in the small of his back and put on his suit coat. He then walked to the door, turned off the office lights, and walked downstairs. He pressed a button on the wall and the garage door slowly moved up. He let it go all the way then pressed the "STOP" button. Frank opened his car door and drove outside, then exited the vehicle. He walked back to

the garage area, pressed the “DOWN” button, and the garage door began moving down. He ran through, and the door closed behind him.

Frank got back in his Cadillac. Unlike the ones he sold his customers, this one was not stolen. He knew better than to tool around in a hot vehicle. It was just common sense. He needed to portray the image of a successful, honest businessman. A two-year old Sedan DeVille was just the ticket for doing so. He put the car in drive and headed off to meet his boss to get Carmine’s execution officially sanctioned.

His boss lived in Upper Saint Clair, a prosperous neighborhood ten miles south of the shop. Rush hour had passed more than two hours before and the traffic, although not exactly light, was not particularly bad either. He made it to Sam’s house within twenty minutes. He parked in the driveway, dropped his gun under the Caddy’s seat, then exited the vehicle, and rang the doorbell. Within a minute the door opened.

“Hi, Mr. Scalaro,” Sam’s son Jason said. “My dad’s downstairs.”

“Thanks Jason.” Frank stepped inside the foyer.

“Who is it?” he heard Sam’s voice call from somewhere downstairs.

“It’s Mr. Scalaro,” Jason yelled back.

“Hey, Frank! Come on down.”

Frank walked downstairs to Sam’s game room. It was a beautiful place, very tastefully decorated by Sam’s wife, Jenny. Frank knew that it was her work. There was no way Sam could have ever done this by himself. It was just too nice.

Sam Ciccione was sitting on the couch in dress pants and a sleeveless undershirt. He had a glass of beer in his hand and a newspaper spread out on the table in front of him. He looked like any executive relaxing after a hard day at the office. Except for his face. Although they had faded over the years, the scars on his cheeks from a brutal slashing he had taken during his second hit still showed. He’d come up through the ranks the hard way. Anyone who looked at him knew that despite the manicures and Italian suits, Sam Ciccione was not someone you ever wanted to say “no” to.

“Frankie! Have a seat. I ain’t seen you in a while. Want a beer?”

Frank looked around the room. As usual when he arrived, Sam’s wife and kids were nowhere to be seen. Sam had taught them to stay far away whenever he discussed business, and Frank showing up unexpectedly always meant business.

“No. Thanks anyway.” Frank sat on the couch next to Sam. He lowered his voice and said, “I need to get permission for a piece of work.”

“Carmine, right? I read about his getting picked up in the paper. Things that bad?”

“Yeah. He’s facing 30 years, sure as shit. His only way out is to finger us.”

“I’ll tell the boss. I don’t expect any problems.”

“Yeah, but you know about his cousin. Big Eddie?”

“What about him?”

“He’s a made guy up in New York. I think he’s with the Colombo family. We don’t want to go starting no wars, right?”

“Don’t worry about him. The boss will take care of all that.”

“Thanks, Sam. I want to get this done the day after tomorrow. Think I can get an answer by then?”

“I don’t see any problems there. The boss knows you, Frankie. He knows you ain’t gonna piss around and if you say you need a piece of work done, it needs to be done.”

Frank felt a tiny bit of relief. He’d been a little nervous about even asking, due to the possibility of a war with Big Eddie’s family. Whacking the relative of a made guy without his acquiescence could cause major problems, and a lot of people could be killed as a result. Sam seemed confident, however, that this Big Eddie would go along with the plan. Hell, he thought, what would he do in my situation?

“So, Frankie, you got your hit team picked out yet?”

“Yeah. I’m using some new kids I got over at the shop.”

“Kids? You should use an experienced shooter for this.”

“These kids are all right. Hell, they are already experienced.”

“Okay. It’s your show. Do it however you want. I’ll let you know when the boss gives it his blessings.”

“All right. I’ll see you later, Sam. Thanks for taking care of this.”

“Don’t mention it.”

Frank stood and walked upstairs, then out the door to his Caddy. He got in, turned the key and headed home for the evening. There was nothing he could do except wait for Sam to deliver the boss’s answer to his request.

Tony was exhilarated. The conversation with Frank had given him a chance to prove that he wasn’t just some little kid, not any more. He saw very clearly that helping to get rid of Carmine was his ticket to the big time. In his mind, he kept going over how he expected things to happen. He could see Carmine sitting in front of him, and Frank opening the car door. Tony could see the gun come up in his hand and pulling the trigger. He went over it so many times that he could almost smell the gunpowder.

Bob was not nearly so excited to be part of the conspiracy. He didn't see any glory in being part of a cold-blooded murder. He understood Frank's point, and wasn't really desirous of spending the next thirty years in jail because Carmine screwed up and got himself caught. He just hoped Frank knew what he was doing, and didn't turn possible robbery charges in to first-degree murder charges.

While the boys were thinking about the upcoming hit, Frank was busy working to make it happen. He still had not received official permission to do it, so he couldn't call Carmine to set him up to be executed. Still, he had the basic sequence of events planned out rather well. He was only waiting for the "go ahead" from Sam to proceed. He knew that it could take a little while. First, Sam had to take the request to the boss. Then the boss had to send someone to New York to talk to someone in the Genovese family, who in turn had to take it to his boss, get the approval to talk to someone in "Big Eddie's" family and get that boss's permission. Then the process had to work in the reverse direction. That is if all went well. It was very much a possibility that the New York people could nix the idea, putting John LaRocca, the Pittsburgh boss, in a position of either going along with their wishes and denying Frank's request, or approving it anyway and risking a war. There was a lot more to getting permission than most people knew – including most members of Cosa Nostra.

Frank hoped it didn't take too long. The cops might "lean" on Carmine and offer him a deal, and there was always a chance when that happened that he would take it. Then Frank would be arrested himself, and then Sam might want to have him whacked. Time was the enemy in cases like this.

Actually, Frank's worries about a timely reply turned out to be unfounded. Sam had gone to LaRocca the next morning and passed on Frank's request. Unlike Frank, he was not concerned about this "Big Eddie," so he conveniently forgot to tell the boss about him. Since it was a straightforward hit with a good reason, and since Carmine was just an associate, the boss gave his approval on the spot.

The call came in shortly past 3:30 p.m. Frank answered the phone and heard Sam's voice. "It's all taken care of. Go ahead and do the work we talked about the other day." On the phone, they always talked in some sort of unofficial code. It was important to do it that way. Cosa Nostra members always ran the risk of tapped phones, so they wanted to make sure that any time they talked on one that anything which turned up on tape later sounded like a normal, and legal, business transaction.

"I'll let you know when I get it all done. Talk to you later."

The phone went dead and Frank hung up. He knew that he now had the official go-ahead from the Boss to kill Carmine. He was thankful that it had come back so quickly, and never took a moment to think that maybe it had come back a little too fast.

Frank picked up the phone and dialed Tony's number. Mrs. Carmenucci answered the phone, and called Tony. It seemed to take forever for him to get to the phone. Finally, he heard Tony's voice. "Hello?"

"It's Frank. Listen, what time can you and Bob be over at the shop? I need you two to work tonight."

“We can be right over in a little while,” Tony answered.

“Good. I’ll see you then.”

Next, Frank called Carmine. “How ya’ doing?” he asked.

“Not so great, Frank. This shit is pretty bad. I got in a big fight with the missus last night about the whole jail thing. She don’t know what I do for a living, you know.”

“Yeah. Hey, I got some ideas that can help you beat this thing. Why don’t you come by the shop tonight, say around five or so.”

Carmine reacted the way Frank knew he would. His voice noticeably perked up a little bit. “Sure. You think it’ll help?”

“Sure. Listen, I talked about this with some attorneys I know, and they gave me some really good stuff for you to use. You’ll walk away from this without even a parking ticket.”

“Must be some damn good attorneys. My attorney says I’m pretty much fucked.”

“Yeah. But he doesn’t know some of the stuff that I told these guys. And they have a few more connections, if you know what I mean. They get things done.”

“Okay... I’ll drop by about five or so.”

“Good. I’ll see you then.”

Frank hung up the phone. The tricky part was now over. He just hoped that Carmine didn’t get paranoid and realize that the whole thing was just a setup for his execution. It had happened before, and the would-be killer ended up being the one killed. Then Frank thought about it for a second longer.

“Nah,” he muttered, “Carmine is too fucking stupid to figure it out. He’ll be here.” Since there was time to kill, Frank turned his attention to some paperwork. He needed something to do while waiting for the boys to show up.

Tony had called Bob while Frank was speaking to Carmine. They couldn’t get either parent’s car at that time of day, so they ended up taking a bus to the shop. That process took an hour and a half. They arrived at the shop at 3:15 p.m. Tony opened the side door, and they walked up the stairs to Frank’s office.

“Hi, Frank.” Tony announced from the doorway.

“Have a seat, boys. I want to go over this shit with you to make sure everything goes right tonight.”

Tony and Bob sat. Frank looked at them and paused for a second before continuing. “All right. You know why you are here today?”

Tony answered the question. “Yeah. I know.”

“Have you changed your mind about it?”

“No.”

Frank turned slightly and faced Bob. “And you?”

“I’ll do it.” It was the only thing Bob could say. This whole crazy thing with Carmine was going to happen no matter what he said. He just wanted to make sure it didn’t happen to himself, and backing out now would surely make that happen. There was no turning back now – he was stuck.

“Good. Now, we got about an hour and a half or so before Carmine shows up to talk about this ‘legal shit’. I told him we need to get our stories straight. That way, any cops come around asking questions, we would know how to answer them and not make things any worse than they are. When he comes in, you two are not going to do anything. Remember what I told you yesterday, about how we were gonna do this thing?”

“Yeah. We remember.”

“That’s good. Because we can’t fuck up on this. It’s gotta happen real smooth. He comes in, we bullshit for a while about this legal shit. Then I ask if anyone is hungry, and we leave in that Oldsmobile downstairs. That car is hot, but the plate is good – cops won’t know it’s stolen until after they find Carmine in it. Anyway, we go and eat a big dinner, spaghetti or something like that, get Carmine to maybe drink a little wine to loosen him up a little, whatever we have to do. After we take Carmine to dinner, we’re gonna pull in to that gas station a couple blocks up the street from the restaurant. Now, when we get to the gas station, I’m gonna get out of the car. That’s when you two are gonna whack Carmine out. Here.” Frank opened his desk drawer and removed two new revolvers. “Use these. They are clean and can’t be traced back to us. Anyhow, after you whack out Carmine, run around the corner and meet me at my car. Make sure you bring those pieces with you, cause we’ll have to get rid of them right after. We can’t just leave them in the car because your fingerprints are gonna be all over them. So, you got it? Any questions?”

“I got it,” Tony answered. This is great, he thought.

“Me too.”

“Good. Now go downstairs and put those guns under the front seat of the blue Oldsmobile in the garage. Don’t go packing them around. Then go look busy detailing the car until I tell you it’s time to go.” The boys did as Frank ordered. They hid the pistols under the seat of the Oldsmobile, one on each side of the car. Then they started washing the car and awaited Carmine’s arrival. It seemed to take forever.

Bob nearly jumped out of his skin when the side door creaked open and Carmine walked in to the garage area. He was dressed in his normal attire – a formerly white T-shirt and blue jeans. He seemed to take little notice of them and walked directly up the stairs and in to Frank’s office. The door closed.

Inside the office, Carmine sat down. “What did this lawyer guy have to say?” he asked.

“You can beat this thing,” Frank replied. His voice was relaxed and friendly. “Even though you were caught with the truck, that doesn’t mean shit. You can just say that you bought it and didn’t know it was hot. They’ll still probably get you on the stolen property charge, but all the other shit goes right out the window. Probably just end up with probation.”

“That’s not what my attorney says.”

“Yeah, but who the fuck is he? I mean, Clarkson is a good with business stuff, but he doesn’t do a lot of criminal cases. It’s a whole different ball game.”

“I guess...”

“No. You know! Come on, have I ever steered you wrong?”

Carmine didn’t answer right away. He was too busy processing what Frank had just told him. On the surface, it made sense. Of course, the fact that he couldn’t say where he bought the truck or what he was doing with the other car he was towing with it pointed to him as at least being involved with whoever had actually stolen the truck. But he’d been with Frank for a long time. If Frank said he could win, then maybe he could. Carmine began to feel a little better for the first time since the whole thing started.

“Okay. So, what do I have to do?”

“I’m not completely sure, but Jimmy, the lawyer, says the first thing is for us to all get our stories straight. That way, he can call us as witnesses that you were talking about buying a truck, and that someone you know told you about a deal on one. It really doesn’t matter what story we use, it just has to be the same from all of us.”

They talked over the details of what Carmine’s story would be, and by the time they were done he actually almost believed it himself as being the truth. All the details were hashed out, and Carmine was really thinking that it would all be okay. He didn’t realize that he was being played.

“Now,” Frank said, “I’m getting hungry. Let’s go get something to eat.”

“Sounds real good. Where do you want to go?”

“I think the Club would be good. Johnny’s always bugging me to come down and eat.”

“Yeah. He has good food there.”

“All right, we’ll go there.”

Frank stood up and went to his office door. He opened it and loudly asked, “Hey boys! Is the car done yet?”

“Yeah!” Tony shouted back. “It’s all done!”

“Good. Get in it, we’re going to get something to eat.” He turned to Carmine. “Let’s go.”

Ten minutes later, the four arrived at The South Side Social Club. Open until 4:00 am, it

was generally thought of as an “after-hours” place to drink after the legitimate bars were forced to close. However, it also had a very good kitchen, and the prices were very reasonable. The owner, Johnny Spinoza, was constantly asking Frank to drop by for dinner, but that wasn’t the real reason why Frank had picked the place. He knew that he could count on Johnny to never mention that any of them were there that night.

Inside the club, the four sat at a table in the rear dining room. Johnny himself came out to greet them. “Hey, Frank! Glad you could come by. The veal tonight is to die for.” Bob almost choked on Johnny’s choice of words. “And Carmine! I ain’t seen you in ages. How’s it going?”

Carmine related the basic story to Johnny. “Hey, I’ve been there. You ain’t got to worry about anything. They always make it seem worse than it is. Try to wear you down so you don’t fight them. Oh, and Frank, who are these two? They friends of ours?”

“They’re friends of mine,” Frank replied. “This is Tony, and this is Bob. Good guys, work hard.”

“That’s good. You have to work hard to get anywhere in life. You guys listen to Frank. He knows his stuff, if you know what I mean.”

“We will.”

“Hey, Frankie, I got some good wine in from the old country. Just came in this week. You want to try some?”

“Yeah. Sounds real good.”

“I’ll have Kelly bring up a bottle.” Johnny waked off to the kitchen area. Two minutes later Kelly, Johnny’s niece, came by with the wine and four glasses. Tony looked at her. He was impressed. Very pretty girl, with long brown hair, big eyes, and really nice tits. She was wearing a summer outfit that showed most of her legs and a large portion of everything else, too. She set them on the table, uncorked the bottle, and filled the glasses. When that was done, she handed the guys menus and walked off.

“Holy shit.” Carmine said in a low voice. “Where did Johnny dig her up?”

“Hey, don’t get any ideas.” Frank answered. “That’s his niece. And what you talking like that for? You’re a married man.”

“Don’t mean I can’t still look,” Carmine said with a chuckle.

Frank laughed and picked up his glass. “Here’s to being able to look! *Salute!*” The other three lifted their glasses and sipped the wine.

Tony wondered what the big deal was with the wine. It surely didn’t taste that good to him.

“Hey, kid!” Carmine said, noticing the look on Tony’s face. “That’s good wine, huh.”

“I guess.” Another round of laughter followed.

Bob looked at Frank and Carmine. God, he thought, are we really going to kill him? One

minute we're eating dinner, drinking wine and laughing and the next I'm supposed to shoot him? It's insane!

Kelly returned. "You guys figure out what you want yet?"

"Yeah!" Frank answered. "We're all gonna have the veal. Your uncle said it's pretty good."

"It's the best."

"And bring us up another bottle of that wine."

"Okay." Kelly made a few notes on a pad and left to get the wine.

"If I wasn't married..." Carmine said.

"Yeah, right. Like you got a chance at that." Frank replied.

"Hey, a guy's gotta dream a little."

"Hey, Tony! I think that little chick is checking you out a little. Giving you the eye."

"Yeah, right."

Carmine chimed in. "Oooh. She takes you home and you do it all night..."

"Next thing you know, we're going to Tony's wedding. 'Here comes the bride...'"

The table again erupted in laughter. Shortly thereafter, Kelly returned with the food and another bottle of wine. Again, the glasses were filled all around. Frank held his glass up, "A toast!" he bellowed. All eyes turned toward him. "Here's to Carmine beating these bullshit charges and coming back to work for us in a couple of weeks! *Salute!*"

Glasses clinked and everyone drank. The conversation was far more subdued now that the food had been served. It seemed that everyone was more concerned with eating than joking. Bob glanced around the table. Although he wasn't exactly eager to commit murder, the wait to do it was starting to get to him a little. He just wanted to get things over with. Maybe then the knots in his stomach would go away faster. He looked over at Tony – he was relaxed and eating his veal like this was just like any other dinner. He could see how Frank was able to appear totally at ease, having probably done this many times in the past. He just couldn't see how Tony could do it. After a few seconds, Bob decided to just do the same thing everyone else was doing and turned his attention back to his veal.

After everyone was finished eating, Frank leaned back in his chair and lit a cigar. "Shit," he said.

"What's wrong, Frank?" Bob asked, wondering if something was really wrong.

"Ah, just ran out of cigars. Gotta pick some up on the way back."

Kelly returned. "How was dinner?" she asked.

"Great." Carmine replied. "Best veal I've had in a long time. Just like mother used to make."

"Carmine, don't bullshit her. Your mom couldn't boil water without burning it."

The wine Tony was drinking nearly became aerosol as he joined in the sudden laughter around the table. It took nearly a full minute to die down. Finally, Kelly was able to ask if anyone wanted anything for desert.

"No, but thanks," Frank answered. "After all that veal, I don't know where we'd put it."

"Okay. Want this on your tab, Mr. Scalaro?"

"Yeah, honey."

"Okay." She walked off to make some notations. In fact, Frank would never actually pay the bill for dinner. Johnny always took care of the tab so that there was no bill. He owed Frank enough favors over the years that a dinner here and there was the least he could do for him.

Frank stood, and everyone else followed suit. They walked toward the front door. Johnny was waiting for them. "How was the veal?" he asked.

"Johnny, that was the best veal I've had in a long time," Frank answered.

"Glad to hear it. Come back again, Frankie. You don't come around like you used to."

"Hey, I ain't as young as I used to be, either. Know what I mean?"

"Yeah. Well, it's still good seeing you."

"Good seeing you, Johnny."

With the good-byes out of the way, the foursome left the club and got in the car. The seating arrangement was identical to what it had been on the ride in. Carmine started the car, put it in gear, and drove around the block. He turned right on Carson Street and headed toward the shop.

"Hey, Carmine stop off at Cirelli's. I need to get a couple more cigars."

"I don't know if he's open, Frank."

"He'll open up for me."

"All right."

Bob thought Carmine didn't sound all that convinced. His mind began racing. What if Carmine figured out what was going on? "What if-s" began to fly around inside his head. His eyes focused on Carmine, noting every detail about the man as he drove, looking for any telltale sign that he knew. He saw none, but that didn't mean anything. Maybe Carmine was playing it

really cool, waiting for just the right moment to blow them away. The paranoia curve was rising fast. Bob wondered if Carmine could see anything in the back seat. He didn't think he could, so he slowly slid his right foot under Frank's seat and slid his gun out. At that moment, the car banked sharply as they pulled in front of Cirelli's store.

"I'll be right back," Frank said as he opened the door. The boys both noticed that Carmine was looking at Frank, just like Frank had predicted. Tony reached under his leg for his gun as Frank closed the car's door.

"What the fuck!" Carmine screamed, turning quickly toward Tony and grabbing the gun as it came up. There was an ear-splitting blast as the .357 Magnum discharged a bullet straight through the windshield. The world went in to slow motion for Bob. His hand dropped to the floor between his feet and found his gun. He could see Carmine turned completely around, holding Tony's gun hand in both of his. He was trying to point the gun back at Tony. Bob's gun slowly came up. Carmine turned to deal with the second threat, but a second too late. Bob pulled the trigger and there was another blast. He wasn't sure exactly where the gun was pointed, but saw Carmine's body jerk with the shot. He fired again. Carmine lost his grip on the gun. Tony got it pointed straight at Carmine's face and fired. This bullet was the fatal one for Carmine, catching him just below the left eye. Instantly the windshield was sprayed with blood from the exiting slug. Tony fired again and Carmine fell sideways across the car's bench seat. He was quite dead.

For a couple of seconds, the boys were unable to move. "Holy shit!" Tony screamed. "We gotta get out of here!" Bob didn't respond. Tony shook him. "Bob! Come on! Let's get out of this fucking car!"

Bob returned to reality. He reached for his door handle and couldn't find it at first. "Where is the fucking handle?" he screamed. The search seemed to take an hour, although in reality it was only a second. After an apparent hour of searching, he managed to get the door open and jumped from the vehicle, with Tony right behind him. Out of reflex, Tony slammed the door and they started running from the scene.

"Over here!" Frank's voice called out from behind them. In their haste to get away, they had headed in the wrong direction. They ran to Frank's Cadillac, parked half a block down from the scene of Carmine's demise. First Tony then Bob piled in to the back seat and Frank floored the gas while the door was still closing.

Time returned to normal. "Holy shit!" Bob exclaimed. "I thought we were goners!"

Frank's voice was totally calm. "Sometimes that happens. You get him?"

"Yeah," Tony said. "I got him good."

After that, there was no more conversation on the way back to the shop. The job had been completed. Tony Carmenucci and Bob D'Amico had earned their bones. They were now murderers.

CAPTER FIVE - FALLOUT BEGINS

Murdering Carmine had ensured that the police would never be able to trace the stolen vehicles back to Frank and the boys. However, when getting permission to do the job, Sam Ciccione had not mentioned Carmine's relationship to a certain "Big" Eddie Carbone, who lived in the New York borough of Bensonhurst and was a long-time soldier in the Colombo family. Because of this error of omission, Frank would end up with far more serious problems than Carmine could ever have caused.

The phone rang in Carbone's office in the back of his warehouse, the same as it did a hundred times a day. He reached out one of his massive hands, which used to cut meat in the neighborhood butcher shops, and which now sported four gold and diamond rings, and picked up the receiver.

"Carbone's" he announced.

"Eddie, its Jimmy."

"What's up, Goombah?"

"You better sit down."

What the hell is going on? Carbone thought. He noticed the serious tone of Jimmy's voice. It dawned on him that this was not a social call. "I am."

"I've got some real bad news. It's about your cousin... the one down in Pittsburgh..."

"Carmine? What happened?"

"Well..."

"Come on, Jimmy. Spit it out." Carbone said, although he didn't think he wanted to hear what was coming next.

"Shit, Eddie. Someone whacked him last night. In a car down in Pittsburgh. They fucking shot half his head off. Man, I'm sorry to have to tell you like this... I know you two are close."

"Thanks Jimmy..." Sadness and anger were already beginning to boil in him.

"Hey, if there's anything I can do... well, you know. I'm there for you."

"Thanks Jimmy. I'll... I'll call you later." Carbone said before hanging up the phone.

As soon as the receiver was put back in its cradle, Carbone went crazy. He couldn't believe that his own cousin had been brutally executed in a car on a Pittsburgh street. He had grown up with Carmine, been the best man in his wedding, and loved him more than his own brothers. He vowed to make whoever was responsible for Carmine's early demise pay with their lives. Then things got even worse when the phone rang again.

"Eddie! It's Camille." Carmine's wife. "Eddie! They killed Carmine last night!" He

could hear the pain in her voice.

“Who did it?”

Camille couldn't answer right away. She was too caught up in the emotions going through her head to think clearly. After a few seconds she answered Eddie's question. “He went out last night to meet with Frank about this bullshit case...”

“What case?” Camille wasn't the only one who wasn't thinking clearly at the moment.

“You know, the cops trying to say that Carmine was involved with this big car theft thing...”

“Yeah... now I remember.” It all came to him in a flash. He knew who killed his cousin. That bastard Scalaro! Eddie had met Frank a few years previously, shortly after Carmine and Frank started working together.

Carmine thought of the situation. Scalaro! He should have known that Carmine would have never talked, but he killed him anyway! That son of a bitch! Carbone knew that he would be going to Carmine's funeral soon, and maybe he would stay in Pittsburgh for Frank Scalaro's too.

He talked to Camille for over half an hour, trying to comfort her, reminiscing about what a great guy Carmine was, making arrangements for him and his wife to come and stay for a while to make sure she was all right, and what funeral arrangements they were going to make. He also assured her that he would make sure that the kids would be able to go to college, and that she would be financially taken care of for the rest of her life. Big Eddie Carbone always took care of his family. He couldn't wait to get his hands on Frank Scalaro and take care of him as well.

Finally, he said goodbye to Camille. He called in his General Manager and told him that he would be away for a few weeks and to run the business in his absence. He then walked out to his Lincoln and drove home to tell his wife the bad news. After an hour at home hastily packing his suitcases, he went to visit his Capo, Salvatore Russo.

Russo listened to Carbone's request to kill Frank Scalaro for the murder of his cousin. They both knew that he could not authorize such an action on his own. That had to come from the top. They went to visit the Boss, who listened to the story, listened to Carbone tell him how great of a guy his cousin was, and listened to Carbone's request for permission to kill Frank Scalaro. He did not give an answer at that time. Instead, Big Eddie was to go to Pittsburgh, attend to Camille, and wait for an answer there. Carbone was not happy with that answer, but the boss was the boss, and he had to obey his orders without question.

Edward and Gina Carbone drove out of New York City at 2:30 that afternoon and arrived at Carmine's house in Pittsburgh roughly eight hours later. The whole way Big Eddie's rage intensified.

While Big Eddie and his wife were driving to Pittsburgh, Tony and Bob got a call from Frank asking them to come to his shop immediately. Tony mentioned that they didn't have a car, so Frank came and picked them up at Tony's house himself. Tony knew that something big was

happening.

Once in the car, Frank filled the boys in. “We have to talk to the Boss himself,” he said. “He wants to hear how the hit went last night from you two.”

“What?” Bob asked, incredulous. So far he had no idea that anyone other than Frank was involved in their operation.

“Don’t ask no questions, kid. Just do what you’re told.”

“Okay, Frank.”

“Oh, yeah. Here’s something for you two.” Frank pulled two envelopes from inside his suit coat. “Good work.”

Tony opened the envelope Frank handed him and found himself looking at twelve one hundred dollar bills. “Wow!” was all he could manage to say. Frank said nothing else about it.

They didn’t drive to the shop. Instead, Frank took them to an ordinary looking house in the West End of town. He parked his car half a block away and led the boys to the front door. He knocked and a lady who, to Tony at least, appeared to be older than dirt answered the door and let them inside. She offered coffee, and Frank politely accepted a cup. “John’s downstairs,” she said.

“Thanks.” Frank said, taking the coffee from her.

“Oh, don’t mention it at all.”

The trio descended the stairs to the basement. Tony saw two men there who he didn’t recognize. One was Sam Ciccione, and the other was John LaRocca, Boss of the Pittsburgh Family of La Cosa Nostra, commonly referred to as “The Mafia,” or “The Mob.” Tony and Bob were about to learn just what they were part of.

“Hey, Frank.” Sam greeted them as they entered the room. “Are these the kids who did the work last night?”

“Yep. This one’s Tony Carmenucci, and this is Bob D’Amico. Boys, this gentleman is Sam Ciccione, and over to his right is John LaRocca.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Bob said, suddenly aware that his voice wasn’t all that strong.

“So how did it go last night?”

Frank started to answer, but stopped when LaRocca waved his hand at him. “No…” he said, “I want to hear it from them.”

“Well, we went over to Frank’s shop and he had us clean up a car. Carmine came in and went upstairs to talk to Frank, and we waited for him to come down so we could all go out and eat dinner.”

“Frank, what happened in your office?”

Frank answered LaRocca’s question. “I told Carmine that we had a new lawyer who would get him off, that he wasn’t going to jail, the normal bullshit. He bought it all the way. Then I asked him to go to dinner down at Johnny Spinoza’s place.”

“All right, Tony, what happened next?”

“Yeah... we went to dinner and Frank ordered veal and wine for everyone. Carmine was laughing and seemed to be pretty happy. Then we got in the car and Frank told Carmine to pull over at this place and he was going to get some cigars. So Frank got out of the car and I got out my gun. But Carmine saw something and grabbed it.”

“So I shot him a couple of times through the seat,” Bob added.

“Yeah... anyway, when Bob shot him, Carmine lost his grip on the gun and I shot him in the face twice, then we got the hell out of there.”

“How’d you feel about it?”

Bob answered first. “Well, I didn’t like doing it, but I guess it had to be done.”

“About the same here. I kinda liked Carmine.” Tony was lying through his teeth and knew it, but he had a feeling that it was the right thing to say. He didn’t want to come across as an out of control murderer.

“Well, that’s the right attitude to have. You’ll never get used to it, if you have to again. It’s not easy to kill someone, but you understand that sometimes it has to happen, right?”

Both of the boys nodded their acknowledgement.

“Sounds like a good piece of work. Frank, Bob, Tony, thanks for your service to the family. We never forget who our friends are. Oh, and after this, never, never, never talk about it with anyone, even the people in this room. If the cops get a hold of you and say that they know you did it and they’ll go easy if you tell them about the other guys, you don’t say nothing, you don’t know what the fuck they’re talking about. You do a piece of work, it’s over and done. If you tell anyone, and I mean anyone, you’re probably gonna end up in prison or dead sooner or later. So keep your mouth shut and forget this ever happened. *Capice?*”

“Yeah.” Tony said.

“Yes sir.” Bob answered as well.

“Great. Hey, would anyone like a drink or two?” Ciccione asked.

“I think that would be great, Sammy,” LaRocca said. Ciccione went upstairs and returned with five glasses of ice and a bottle of Scotch. He filled all the glasses halfway and passed them around. When everyone had a glass, LaRocca lifted his in the air. “*Salute!* To a job well done!” Everyone else raised their glasses and drank.

No one actually told Tony and Bob that they were now officially in the Pittsburgh Family of

La Cosa Nostra as associates of Frank Scalaro. It was not necessary to do so. The work they had already done for Frank, and the hit on Carmine, was enough. Meeting LaRocca and Ciccione was merely a confirmation as to what they were involved in. Frank looked at the boys sipping their scotches. “Welcome to the mob,” he thought as he tipped his glass in their direction and sipped his whiskey.

Sam had one last question. “By the way, Frankie, did you get rid of the pieces right away?”

“Yeah. I wiped ‘em down real good and pitched em out the window somewhere up in the Hill District. Maybe some monkey up there’ll pop another one with the fucking things. Never know, it might throw off the cops. Make the fuckers chase niggers instead of us.”

Camille and Big Eddie arranged for Carmine’s funeral to be held at noon the next Saturday at the Lafayette funeral home, with a burial at Holy Souls Cemetery immediately afterwards. Due to the nature of Carmine’s death, it would have to be a closed-coffin affair. There was no way anyone would want to remember Carmine with two huge holes in his face and the entire back of his head gone. It just wouldn’t be right at all.

The three days before the funeral were sheer hell in the Carbone house. Camille only stopped crying when she was so exhausted from it that she literally passed out. Even in her sleep she dreamed of Carmine. Countless times she would awake in tears she could not control. Her loss was total. Carmine had been her life for twenty-seven years, ever since the day they had met in school and married a month after graduating. Now he was gone, and Camille Carbone felt totally alone in the world for the first time in her life. Gina did her best to comfort her, but knew that there really wasn’t much she could do. The only thing that would help Camille was time.

The days passed slowly. Saturday morning Camille put on her best black dress and tried to distract herself by doing her makeup. Just like I used to for Carmine... she thought and tears welled up in her eyes again, causing the mascara she’d just applied to run down her cheeks in black streams. She blotted at the tears with a tissue. Big Eddie walked in to the room and saw her. The sight of Carmine’s beautiful wife, now a heartbroken widow, caused the fire in his guts to burn hotter yet. He couldn’t wait to make Scalaro pay for all the pain he caused. He went downstairs and called Russo.

“I just heard back.” Russo said from New York.

“Yeah?”

“You’re not gonna like the answer. The boss himself said no way.”

Actually, the boss had said “There’s no way in hell we’re going to war over this piss ant! I don’t give a shit if he’s related to one of our guys or not! Nobody in this family is gonna touch anyone in Pittsburgh over this! End of discussion!” Russo figured that Carbone didn’t need to know that part, at least not at the moment.

“You mean...”

“Yep. You can’t do shit about it right now. Just go to the funeral, take care of the wife, and

come back home when you're ready. We'll figure something out that we can do later."

"Bet on it. Thanks." Carbone hung up the phone. Rage burned in him at the thought of not being able to touch Scalaro. He silently vowed to take care of the situation later. A week, a month, a year, a decade if necessary. He would never let the bastard get away with killing a member of his family. I never forget, he thought. He went back upstairs to try helping Camille get ready for the funeral, but Gina was already there. Big Eddie realized that Gina would be better for Camille than he could anyway, so he left the room and went downstairs to stare at the walls and dream of the day he'd get his chance to nail Frank Scalaro.

It seemed to Big Eddie that he sat there for an eternity, going over hundreds of scenarios, all of which had the end result of Frank Scalaro lying dead at his feet, when he heard the sound of the women coming down the stairs. Time to go, he thought. He stood and looked at the women. His wife looked as beautiful as ever in her black dress, even with the see through black veil over her face. Camille also looked good, but one glance at her eyes and he could see the utter devastation there. It seemed as if the wonderful woman she had been ever since Carmine had brought her by the house the first time was gone. He wondered if she would ever come back.

"You ready to go?" he asked.

"As ready as we're ever going to be," Gina replied, her voice barely louder than a whisper. Camille nodded as well.

"Okay. I'll get the car."

Half an hour later they were at the funeral home, greeting Carmine's friends and associates as they filtered in to pay their respects. Most of the men in attendance gave Camille a small hug, and said something on the order of "If there's anything I can do..." They usually also handed her a plain white envelope with at least a "C-Note" in it. They may have had no respect for Carmine while he was alive, but in death they were honor-bound to show some to him and his new widow. After all, they were part of the same family.

Big Eddie and Gina stood near Camille, not exactly at her side, but close enough that they would be there if she needed them. He watched the various "mourners" as they greeted her with general disinterest. That was, until Frank Scalaro showed up.

Frank stood facing Camille and asked how she was doing. Eddie's rage grew stronger with every word. God, he thought, I can't wait to whack this bastard. Despite the inner fire he was feeling, he somehow managed to keep it from showing to the outside world. He continued to listen to Frank talk to Camille about how Carmine's death was such a tragedy, how they were like brothers, and so on. The only term Carbone could use to describe Frank's words was "bullshit".

Although in reality Frank had only spoken with Camille for a minute or so, to Big Eddie Carbone it seemed like an eternity. He was certain that at any moment during the exchange that he would lose control and physically pummel Frank into the carpet. Finally, he watched Frank give Camille a hug and little kiss on the cheek, and pass the obligatory envelope to her hand. Frank then walked slowly away and took a seat. Another couple came to Camille. Eddie barely noticed them. He was dreaming of the day he would watch Frank Scalaro die – preferably in a

very slow and painful manner.

CHAPTER FIVE - A NEW BUSINESS

Tony and Bob went shopping while Frank was paying his “respects” to the late Carmine Carbone. It was time to get a car. They drove directly to Smallman’s lot and inquired about the Chevy that Tony still wanted. It hadn’t been sold yet, they were told. That changed when Tony handed Smallman four of the hundred-dollar bills he’d received as payment for bringing about Carmine’s demise.

The paperwork only took a few minutes, and Tony proudly drove his 1957 Chevy Bel Air convertible out of Smallman’s lot. Bob followed in his father’s car. They drove home, dropped off the D’Amico parent’s vehicle, and departed again in Tony’s Chevy.

They cruised around the city, Tony checking out the performance of his vehicle and enjoying the beautiful summer day. After three hours, they decided to head Downtown to catch a movie or something – no real plan, just head down and see what looked like fun and do it. The advantage of having a car was that they could do that now whenever they wanted to.

Tony made a left turn on Liberty. Traffic was a little heavy, so their progress was rather slow. He was too busy watching the traffic and protecting the paint of his “new” car to see what Bob did.

“Holy shit, Tone!” Bob screamed.

“What?” Tony asked, a bit startled by Bob’s sudden outburst.

“Look over there! In the doorway!”

Tony turned his head and was amazed at what he saw. Two women, one blonde, the other brunette. They were wearing skimpy outfits and waving at passing cars. The whores! His day just got even better.

“Is that them?” he asked Bob, incredulous at seeing them.

“You’re fucking right it’s them!”

“We’re getting those bitches right now!” Tony said. He turned his head forward and was suddenly glad he did. He drilled his brakes hard and slid to a stop inches away from the rear bumper of a taxi that had stopped to pick up a fare. He had just caught his breath when he spotted a parking space just ahead of the cab. The cab began moving forward and Tony guided the Chevy off to the space. He reached under the seat and grabbed his pistol. Bob did the same with his. They tucked the weapons under their shirts and walked toward the girls.

The boys saw the hookers were talking to a man. He reached in his pocket and handed them something, and a few seconds later the three of them disappeared into the building they were standing in front of. The boys ran across the street and reached the doorway just in time to see a leg disappear around the top of a landing. Bob jerked the door open and they raced up the steps, again just in time to catch just a glimpse of a high-heeled shoe disappear around the landing for the third floor. They heard a door close. It only took a few seconds to reach it. Tony peered through a small glass window in the door and saw a long, somewhat dingy hallway. The door of

a room near the end of it closed. Within seconds they were at it.

Tony put his ear to the door. What he heard was muffled, but he could make out a few grunts and a female squeal. Rather than involve the guy, he decided that they should wait until he came out, then go in and “talk” to the hookers about the brutal robbery they had committed against the boys.

Bob looked around and saw that the hallway doglegged to the right. He motioned to Tony and they stood around the corner, waiting and listening for the door to open. Twice, they heard it, only to peek around and see that it was not the room they were interested in. It seemed like they waited forever. Finally, they heard the sound of a closing door. Tony looked around the corner and saw the man walking down the hallway alone. That was a very good thing, because it meant the hookers were still in the room. He held up his hand to Bob and drew his gun.

The man reached the end of the hallway, opened the door, and was gone. Tony gave him about ten seconds longer, then motioned for Bob to follow him. They walked to the door and knocked. The door creaked open.

Candy’s jaw dropped at the shock of seeing the boys. Actually, the shock of seeing them standing there holding large black revolvers was the biggest surprise. Tony walked in to the room and put his gun to her head just as Tisha stepped from the bathroom. Bob covered her immediately.

“Remember us?” Tony asked.

Neither girl replied.

“Where’s our money?” Bob asked.

“Wha.. wha... what money?” Candy asked. She was a bit in shock and tried to deny her involvement in the brutal robbery she had performed just a few weeks previously.

Tony saw red. It was one thing for them to steal from him, it was another to try lying about it. His free hand immediately came up and across her face with a loud slap. The force of the blow sent Candy sprawling across the floor. She started to get up, but Tony was already there. He kicked her in the stomach.

Bob was so amazed at seeing Tony beating Candy so brutally that he didn’t keep track of Tisha. She was halfway out the window before he even knew what was going on, and there was no way that he could stop her from going down the fire escape. No matter, he thought. We’ll just work on this one until we get our money back.

“Damn, it, Bob! You let the other one get away!” he screamed as he picked Candy up by her hair and delivered a hard punch to her midsection.

“I couldn’t help it,” Bob answered.

“Yeah, well hold this bitch for me. I ain’t done with her yet.” Tony pushed Candy roughly toward Bob. He caught her under her arms and held her up. She started to struggle wildly and he had to hold on tightly to keep her from getting away. Tony approached and she attempted to

kick him. Tony responded with a slap to her face.

Tony was a mad man. He physically pummeled Candy for over fifteen minutes. She was nearing unconsciousness when the door exploded inward. Tony turned to look at what was happening.

“That’s them!” he heard Tisha’s voice exclaim. “Do something about them, Jerome!”

A huge black man was standing in the doorway wearing the ugliest clothes Tony had ever seen. He had on a light brown suit, a pink silk shirt, and a dark hat with a too-big brim. He yelled at Tony.

“Whatchoo doin’ motherfucker? You don’t be slappin’ my bitches around like that!”

“Fuck you.” Tony replied, kicking Candy yet again.

“I’m gonna enjoy carving your white ass up, motherfucker!” The pimp reached in his pocket, drew a large switchblade and activated it. Tony and Bob heard the “click” of the knife and turned to look at the pimp again. He took a step forward into the room and closed the door behind himself.

Tony reached under his shirt and drew his pistol. It came up in one motion and he pulled the trigger. The pimp dropped the knife as blood and brain tissue covered the door. Bob ran to the door, pulled it open and dragged a now-hysterical Tisha in to the room.

“It’s your turn now, bitch!” Tony screamed. He put his gun away and began pummeling Tisha the same way he had been pounding on Candy.

Bob was amazed at how easily Tony had killed the pimp. His paranoia curve started rising fast. What were they going to do? Didn’t anyone hear the shot? The cops had to be coming any second. They had to get rid of the pimp’s body. Maybe Frank could help them out!

“Tony!”

“What?” Tony stopped beating the hooker and turned to Bob.

“We gotta get Frank! He’ll know what to do with this dead nigger!”

“Yeah... go get him.” He tossed the Chevy’s keys to Bob.

Bob ran to the car and drove directly to Frank’s shop. Frank had just returned from Carmine’s funeral and was a bit surprised to see him there.

“Hey, kid, I ain’t buying no cars for a while.”

“Frank! I’m not here for that. This is Tony’s new car. We need some help!”

“What now?” Frank laughed. “You boys shoot someone or something?”

“Yeah! Tony’s downtown in a hotel room with a dead nigger and he’s beating up a couple

of hookers!”

“What?” Frank asked, incredulous. He wasn’t sure he heard that right.

“Yeah. See, Tony and me found these hookers who robbed us a few weeks ago and followed them up there and Tony started beating them up to get the money back and then this big nigger showed up and Tony blew him away and now...”

“Okay, okay. I got it. Get the hell in here. We gotta make a phone call.”

They ran to Frank’s office. Frank picked up the phone and dialed a number. A few seconds later he said, “Hey, Jimmy. It’s Frank. Listen, I got some garbage I need picked up downtown.”

A pause.

“Yeah. Not sure where. Hey kid, where’s that at?”

Bob didn’t know the address but he described the area as best he could. Frank translated the description in to a rough address.

“Great. See you in half an hour down there.” He hung up the phone and turned to Bob. “We gotta go down there. The garbage man is coming to take care of the dead nigger for you. You boys are gonna owe me big for this one!”

Bob took Frank to the hotel where Tony still was. They went up the stairs to the room and entered it. Frank looked around and saw the scene pretty much as Bob had described it. He looked at the blood and the obviously dead body on the floor. He could see one unconscious girl on the other side of the room, and could see Tony beating on another in the middle of the room.

“Tony!” he screamed. “Stop hitting your merchandise!”

“What?”

The plan still wasn’t fully formed in Frank’s head as he spoke, but it materialized quickly. “You just killed their pimp. These whores work for you now and you can’t send them out on the street all fucked up. So stop hitting them!”

After Jimmy “The Garbage Man” Carbone had taken care of the dead pimp’s body, the question of what to do with the hookers still needed to be resolved. Frank took them and the boys back to his shop to figure it out. He wasn’t worried about the hookers knowing where he conducted his business, or really all that much about his involvement with the boys. They knew he was a bad guy to mess with, and besides, it was still very much in the air whether or not they would still be alive the next day. After all, they were eye witnesses to the violent death of their pimp at Tony’s hand.

The first order of business was to secure the girls so they would not get loose and call the police. That was accomplished by tying them to a support beam in the garage area. Frank watched and made sure it was done right. Once this task was accomplished, he took the boys to

his office.

“Okay...” Frank said, “First off, you boys owe me two grand for getting rid of that dead nigger. Garbage men ain’t exactly cheap, you know.”

“Yeah... thanks Frank.” Bob replied, reaching in to his pocket for his half of the money.

“Hey... don’t worry about it yet. I know you two are good for it. Besides, we got some bigger things to worry about right now.”

“Like what?” Tony asked.

“Well, for one we gotta figure out what to do with the two broads tied up in my fucking garage.”

“You said earlier that they work for us now, right?” Tony asked.

“If we want them to. Shit, they are serious trouble right now. In case you forgot, they both saw you blow that nigger's brains all over the door in that room. They could send you up for life buddy.” Frank answered. “Of course, it would just be their word against yours... two no-good street whores saying a couple of clean-cut schoolboys beat them up and blew away a pimp... know what I mean.”

“I think so...”

Frank leaned back in his chair and lit one of his trademark cigars. “Then again, I have seen guys go to the chair with less on them...”

Suddenly, Bob started to feel a little uneasy about the whole situation. It was just beginning to dawn on him that maybe he and Tony would become the next Carmine. Tony felt none of that unease.

“What to do... what to do...” Frank thought aloud. He remembered that Johnny Spinoza used to have a big operation running whores. He had a place he called a “massage parlor” over the club... Frank wondered if Johnny might not mind opening back up with new partners. He picked up his desk phone and dialed Johnny.

“Hey, Johnny, it’s Frank. How ya’ doing?”

“Great. Things are going really good.”

“Glad to hear it. Hey, I got an idea I want to talk to you about. Can you come over to my office?”

“Yeah. Club ain’t gonna be busy for a few hours. I can let Kelly run it ‘till I come back.”

“Great. See you over here.” Frank hung up the phone.

“What are you thinking?” Bob asked. He was painfully aware how shaky his voice sounded right at that moment.

“Got a guy coming over who used to run some hookers. You remember him, Johnny Spinoza from the club. He may be interested in getting back in the business, and you two need a partner to show you how to do it. So I’m gonna see if he’s interested.”

“Sounds like a good idea, Frank.” Tony said.

“Glad you like it. Now, until the two grand is paid off, I get three-quarters of your end. After that, I get a quarter of it. What do you think of that?”

“I can live with it.” Tony answered.

“Sounds good to me,” Bob answered. His voice was starting to come back to him. He realized that Frank wasn’t going to have him killed. There was too much money to be made.

Ten minutes later, the office door opened, and Johnny Spinoza walked in. “Hey Frank, what’s with the two broads tied up in your garage?”

“Johnny, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. How do you feel about going back in to business.”

“I’d love to, but you know, I’m kind of busy with the club and all. Besides, I’m starting to get a little old for that shit now.”

“Hey, no problem. I got a way around it for you.”

“Yeah?” Johnny asked.

“A partnership. You get half, and Tony and Bob get the other half. You set them up, show them what to do, and let them deal with the day to day shit. You take half and they split their half with me.”

“Not bad...” Johnny said, thinking as he did so. “Fifty percent, no split out of that with anyone, not a lot of work... we got a deal. Course... we ain’t gonna have them out walking the streets. That ain’t my style, you know.”

Tony and Bob watched the exchange in total silence. They were amazed at how easily Johnny had gone along with it. For the first time, they were beginning to learn how much power Frank could wield without resorting to violence.

“So, we got a deal?” Frank asked.

“Yeah. We got a deal.” Johnny answered. He held his hand out to Frank and Frank shook it. Frank motioned to the boys, who held their hands out to Johnny. He shook theirs as well.

“Well, you guys better get busy. Get those broads out of my garage, please. They’re stinking up the place.”

“Come on, kids. We got work to do.” Johnny turned and left the office. Tony and Bob followed closely behind.

“You boys want to learn how to run whores?” he asked.

“Yeah.” Tony replied.

“It’s really pretty easy when you get down to it. You gotta have a place, you gotta have whores, and you gotta get customers to come to your place and fuck your whores. That’s eighty percent of it.”

“What’s the rest?” Bob asked.

“Well, you gotta pay off the cops to leave you alone, and you gotta keep the broads in line. That’s the hard part. They ain’t like regular girls. Most of them are fucked up on dope half the time and they do the craziest shit you ever seen. Gotta keep them afraid to fuck up, but not so afraid they want to run away. It’s a real pain in the ass chasing them down.”

The trio descended the iron stairs from Frank’s office to the garage area. They approached Candy and Tisha in silence. The girls looked at them with wide eyes. They were certain that they were going to die there.

“What’s your names?” Johnny asked.

“C-C-Candy.”

“Tisha.”

“Well, you two look like you had a rough day.”

The girls said nothing, but continued to stare at the three men.

“You remember this day. You work for me and Tony and Bob here now. And if you ever do anything to fuck us over or piss any of us off, you’ll wish you were never born. Got it?”

“Yeah.”

“Yes sir.”

“Good. Now, so long as you are good girls, we’ll be real good to you. No walking the streets or any of that shit. We’re gonna put you up in a nice place, respectable. You won’t be whores no more and you’ll make good money. You like that idea?”

Both girls nodded in the affirmative.

“Good.” Johnny turned to the boys. “Untie them and bring them to the Club.”

The boys loaded the girls in to the back of Tony’s new Chevy and drove to Johnny’s club. Johnny was waiting for them when they arrived and motioned them to a door on the side of the building. Bob entered right after Johnny, then the girls, and Tony brought up the rear. They climbed a flight of stairs. At the top of the steps, Johnny pulled a large ring of keys from his pocket and opened a large metal door. It swung open with a loud creak. He turned stepped inside and motioned them up.

The upstairs was surprisingly nice, although a thick coating of dust showed how long it had been vacant. Immediately upon entering, there was a large room with pictures on the walls and two leather sofas. There were two more doorways in the room. One lead to a hallway with four rooms on each side, and the other to a small office.

“Well, here we are.” Johnny said. “The old house. Ain’t really been used for a couple of years, but it’s still ready. Needs cleaned up a little.” He looked at the girls. It would take them two or three weeks to heal. Plenty of time for them to clean the whole area to perfection. It also gave Johnny time to get the word out that the South Pittsburgh Health Spa was back in business.

“Bob, Tony, the office is yours. There’s even a little apartment back there. It ain’t much, but you got someplace to sleep. You girls, go back there,” he pointed at the hallway, “and pick out a room. That’s gonna be your new home for a while.”

Candy looked around. The place was nice, much better than the hotel room she had been sharing with Tisha for the past three months. She knew that these guys wouldn’t kill them. She started to rationalize that even the beating Tony had laid on her earlier was her fault, not his. After all, they had stolen from the boys. And Jerome shouldn’t have pulled his knife out anyway. Maybe this was all a good thing, a blessing in disguise. She started checking out the rooms. Tisha did the same.

“Only problem with this business is that at least one of us has to be here all the time. You gotta make sure that the girls aren’t doing dope, and not trying to sneak out on you in the middle of the night. They want to quit, that’s one thing. If they don’t owe you nothing, you let ‘em go. Otherwise, they gotta stay until they work it off. You boys getting all of this?”

“Yeah.” Bob replied.

“Good. You also gotta remember to get supplies all the time. You know, rubbers, oil, garbage bags, all that kind of shit. And lots of clean towels.”

“Towels?” Tony asked.

“Yeah, fucking towels. The girls need something to clean up the jizzum. Who wants their dick wiped with a towel that already has ten other guy’s stuff on it?”

“I wouldn’t.” Bob answered, shivering a little at the thought.

“So get lots and lots of clean towels.”

“All right. We need some cleaning shit right now. Gotta get this joint in shape.”

“We’ll get it,” Tony said.

“Okay. I’ll see you when you get back. Oh, here,” Johnny said, pulling his key ring out of his pocket. He took off a key and handed it to Bob. “That’s your key to the place. Don’t lose it.”

“I won’t.” Bob put the key on his own key chain. The boys went down to Tony’s car.

“Holy shit, Tone! I don’t believe this!”

Tony slid behind the wheel of his Chevy. “Why not?”

“It’s all happening so fast.” Bob still didn’t realize what being an associate of Frank Scalaro’s was all about. Frank was a powerful, connected member of the Pittsburgh Family. There was talk going around about him becoming a Capo someday. Also, there was already discussion at high levels about the boys. The Boss himself liked the way they did the job on Carmine. He wasn’t sure yet, but he had confided in Sam Ciccione that the boys had the right qualities to be made full-fledged members of the family in the not-too-distant future. They were building their own power and didn’t even realize it.

“Hey, Frank makes things happen quick, that’s all. He knows everyone. I think we’re gonna make big money here.”

“I hope so. We gotta pay Frank two thousand. That’s a lot of money, Tone.”

“Or it’s one job, remember.”

Good point, Bob thought.

Frank could afford to let the boys slide a little on the two grand. The money he had given them for whacking Carmine was a lot less than he’d have to give a professional hit-man, and they were less likely to end up talking to the police about the job. Plus, the two thousand dollar debt gave Frank another hook, a favor that he could call in someday. It never hurt to have a few of those.

An hour later the boys returned to their new place of business. They went up the stairs and found Candy and Tisha sitting on one of the couches, eating a pasta from the club below. Johnny was no where to be seen. They dropped the cleaning supplies in the middle of the floor.

Tony looked at the girls. They had obviously been taken care of since his departure. They had new clothes on, and bandages on the open wounds they received from Tony’s beating. They still looked pretty badly beaten up. Tony began regretting doing that. It would delay opening for business.

A door opened in the hallway. Tony expected to see Johnny, but instead his niece Kelly stepped out. She waved to the boys and walked over. “Where’s your uncle?” Tony asked.

“He has work to do in the Club. He sent me up to help you out.”

“Oh. Okay. Guess we should start cleaning up, huh?”

Kelly licked her lips. “Yeah... in a minute. But first...” She took Tony and Bob’s hands. “I want you to check something out back here...” She turned to Candy and Tisha. “You two, start cleaning up this place. I want this room spotless when we come back.”

Kelly led the boys down the hallway to an open room and gestured for them to step inside. She followed and closed the door behind her. She started to undress. Tony and Bob stood still, awestruck. “Hey, stop!” Bob exclaimed. “Your uncle will kill us if he catches us up here with

you like this.”

“No he won’t,” Kelly replied as her dress fell from her shoulders. “He sent me up here just to take care of you guys. I’m one of his top girls.”

Tony was incredulous. His own niece! Fucking Spinoza was letting his own niece be a hooker! It didn’t make sense. And he sent her up to do us? The thought was cut short when he felt Kelly’s hand slide inside his pants. He was already starting to get hard and her caress got it all the way there in seconds. She looked at Bob.

“Don’t just stand there. Take your clothes off.”

The job of cleaning up their new place of business was a lot more difficult than it had appeared at first glance. Two years of near abandonment had resulted in more than just a coating of dust. The roof had sprung a leak some time in the past, and although it wasn’t difficult to fix the leak itself, the water damage was another story. Walls had to be painted, beds replaced, and every square foot of carpet had to be ripped out and replaced. The smell of must and mold also had to be addressed.

Candy and Tisha did the bulk of the work under Kelly’s watchful eye. Indeed, they did so much work that they could have gotten jobs as maids or construction workers by the time it was finished. However, Tony and Bob had to pitch in on the portions of the job that the women were unable to do, and there was a lot of those.

It wasn’t all work, however. The boys spent a considerable amount of time in the club, talking to Johnny and meeting more than a few other players in the Family. They both noticed that the older gangsters were always very cordial and respectful when meeting the boys, and they couldn’t figure out why. The reason was that Johnny, without getting in to specifics, had mentioned to a few key players that the boys had “done work” for the Family. He figured it would help his position in the Family for the right people to know that he had some “muscle” as his partners. It worked like a charm, and provided another bonus – the number of altercations in the club dropped drastically.

Things weren’t all roses, however. The amount of time that the boys were away from home caused Mrs. Carmenucci to become a little suspicious. She couldn’t put her finger on why, but she started to get the feeling that Tony was involved in something he shouldn’t be. His stories had small inconsistencies, he wasn’t keeping a regular work schedule, and the new car and clothes didn’t look like anything he should have been able to afford working in a garage.

It all came to a head a week and a half after the boys had formed their partnership with Johnny. Tony’s father had been checking out Tony’s car and found a .357 shell on the floor. Since he didn’t own a gun, he asked Tony about it. He didn’t buy Tony’s explanation that it had been there when he bought the car. The argument that ensued resulted in Tony leaving the house in anger. Having no place else to go, he took up residence in the back apartment of the “spa.” He persuaded Bob to move in as well.

Candy and Tisha healed remarkably quickly, and by the time the whorehouse was ready for business, so were they. It was made very clear to them that they wouldn’t be giving five dollar

blow jobs. This was a lot classier, and therefore expensive, way of doing things. Kelly had given them enough stories about the “old days” to seriously whet their appetite for what was coming.

Meanwhile, Johnny was discreetly getting the word out that the upstairs operation was back in business. The price for a half-hour at “The Spa” was \$40.00, and the first night they were open for business they brought in \$880.00. Of this, the girls got 35 percent, or \$308. Johnny and the boys split the remaining \$580. Tony and Bob each netted \$35.00 after giving Frank his 75 percent of their end, \$220 to be exact.

By the end of the week the operation had grossed \$5800. Of course, they had some expenses to cover as well. There was around \$10 in utilities, \$40 in condoms, towels, and other supplies, and \$500 in payoffs to a certain police lieutenant to ensure that the cops would ignore the South Side Health Spa’s existence. Still, that left \$5250 in gross profit to be distributed. The girls split up \$1837.50, Johnny put \$1706.25 in his pocket, Frank got \$1279.69, and the boys each ended up with \$213.28. The second week in business was equally profitable, and the boy’s “garbage bill” was paid in full. Now they would get the bigger piece, and Frank would get 25% of their end.

The operation was wildly successful, and by the time Frank’s debt was retired, three more girls had joined up. There was still a line to get in every night, and Johnny took advantage of it. Two months after opening for business, he upped the price to \$50.00 per half hour, without telling his partners about doing so, and pocketed the extra \$10.00 every time someone went upstairs for a “special massage.” Unfortunately for Johnny, he couldn’t keep it a secret forever. Billy Sparks, a regular customer, complained about the price to Bob.

“What do you mean?” Bob asked. “It’s only forty bucks.”

“No it ain’t,” Sparks replied. “Johnny has been charging fifty for the past month!”

Tony was furious when Bob told him about Johnny’s unofficial price increase. Here he and Bob were, working every night, making sure the place was clean, and putting up with Kelly and five other moody hookers, while Johnny was downstairs robbing from them all. He was lucky to get away to see Bridget two nights a week, while his “partner” was pocketing more money and doing less work. It wasn’t fair. He grabbed his gun and started for the door. Johnny Spinoza was about to become extinct.

Bob managed to stop Tony before he got to the bottom of the steps, and convinced him to talk to Frank about it instead of blowing Johnny away on the spot. They had to make their weekly payment of his 25% anyway, so Tony relented and went with Bob to Frank’s office.

Immediately after handing over an envelope containing \$587.00, Bob filled Frank in on what they had learned about Johnny. Since his end of the business came from what the boys received, Johnny was stealing from him too. He figured Johnny’s scam was netting him around an extra grand each week, half of which should have been shared with the boys and him. Nobody could be permitted to steal from Frank Scalaro. He decided that Johnny needed a quick lesson in honesty to his partners.

“Boys, go down to the garage and grab a couple of tire irons. We’re gonna go talk to Johnny about this.” Frank said evenly. Of course, Frank wasn’t going there to hear what Johnny had to say. Rather, it was time to “renegotiate” the deal. He stood and tucked his trademark .45

automatic in his waistband, then went downstairs.

“Boys, put those irons in the trunk of my car. We have to talk to Sam before we visit Johnny.”

“Why? Sam’s not involved in this.” Tony stated.

“The hell he ain’t!” Frank answered. “Sam’s our captain, and we gotta get permission before we visit Johnny. Otherwise, Johnny might try to have us whacked for this shit, and I am not gonna let that happen. So put the irons in the trunk and get in the fucking car!”

Half an hour later, Frank and the boys were sitting in Sam Ciccione’s downtown office. Frank quickly explained the situation to Sam.

“That stupid son of a bitch,” Sam laughed. “He runs a scam on guys who he knows is with you? With me?”

“Yep.” Bob answered. “I just found out yesterday.”

“So whatcha gonna do about it?” Sam asked.

Tony answered. “I wanna kill him.”

“You want to whack the guy over, what, a couple hundred bucks?”

“Yeah. I’m busting my ass and he’s ripping me off.”

Sam thought for a moment before responding. “Kid, I can understand your being pissed at him. But you can’t just take a man out for a couple of bucks. What do you think this is, a fucking movie?”

“Why not?”

Sam’s laughter stopped abruptly and his face grew serious. “Because, it ain’t worth it. It ain’t a big enough deal to risk going up for life, that’s why. You don’t just go around blowing guys away for small shit.”

“Well...” Bob asked, “What can we do then?”

“Ask Frankie. He’ll tell you.”

“Frank?”

Frank understood Sam’s message. “I think Johnny likes being able to walk.”

“Right.” Sam replied. “Just make him think that he won’t be walking so good if he doesn’t do right by you. That’s all you gotta do. Who knows, maybe out of the kindness of his heart he’ll give the boys a bigger cut of the action now. How could he refuse?”

Tony began to see through his anger. He realized that Sam was right, that Johnny’s dishonesty wasn’t enough to kill him over, but needed to be handled nonetheless. Taking a

bigger piece of the action was a great way to punish him.

“What if he does it again?” Bob asked.

“Let me worry about that,” Sam replied. “Now, if that’s it, I got a business to run here.”

“Thanks Sam.” Frank said, standing.

“Don’t mention it.”

“Come on, boys. Let’s go see Johnny.”

CHAPTER SEVEN - ANOTHER HIT

Johnny Spinoza immediately took off two weeks from the Club and Spa businesses to tend to a leg that was injured in a so-called “fall down the stairs.” At least that’s what Tony and Bob told the regulars at the Club. In actuality, Johnny had been a bit hesitant to admit his thievery, so Frank himself had brought a tire iron down across Johnny’s left shin. Immediately afterwards, he readily gave in to demands for an extra 16% of the true revenues of the upstairs operation, and a quarter of the gross revenues of the Club as well.

Meanwhile, the repercussions from Carmine’s hit were about to begin. After returning home from Carmine’s funeral, “Big” Eddie Carbone began making discreet inquiries to various “business associates” he had. The inquiries were all aimed at finding a crew willing to visit Pittsburgh and exact his revenge on Frank Scalaro, despite the fact that the boss had nixed the idea previously. It wouldn’t be the first unauthorized hit Carbone had ever ordered.

Luckily for Frank, and unluckily for Carbone, Frank still had a few friends in New York from the “old days.” One of them was a certain gangster named Danny DiArco, who everyone called “Darkie” despite his very light skin.

Frank and Darkie had been part of a smuggling ring during Prohibition. They illicitly brought hundreds of gallons of Canadian whisky across the border for “Dutch” Schultz every week for a nearly three years. Eventually Prohibition ended, and with booze now legal again there was no need for a business that smuggled the stuff across the border. They tried their hands at a few other rackets, namely gambling and loan-sharking, but nothing they did was nearly as successful as “rum running” had been. Their partnership, but not their friendship, dissolved when Darkie was arrested by the FBI for a litany of charges related to the gambling racket they were running at the time. He was sentenced to ten years, and Frank decided to leave New York for a safer neighborhood named Pittsburgh. He kept in touch with Darkie over the years, and when Darkie got involved with an auto smuggling ring selling hot vehicles out of the country, Frank began to supply him with expensive late-model cars.

Carbone did not know about the relationship between Frank and DiArco. If he had known, he would not have made the mistake of soliciting Darkie to join in the plot to kill Frank. When asked, Darkie immediately told Eddie that he would be part of the conspiracy, that it was a shame how his cousin had been murdered for such a trivial reason.

Ten minutes after meeting with Carbone, DiArco called Frank and filled him in on the plot. Frank immediately took the information to Sam Ciccione, who took it to John LaRocca. LaRocca approved a hit on “Big” Eddie Carbone immediately. As a courtesy, he sent word to the Colombos that Carbone was planning an unauthorized hit on one of his people.

Frank knew that he could not personally be involved in “Big” Eddie’s demise. Carbone knew him, and Frank’s presence anywhere near New York would immediately give away the plan. It was time to send the boys on another hit. Frank found them in the Club learning to play pinochle with a couple of older guys from the neighborhood. They appeared to be losing badly.

“Boys, we got a major problem,” Frank said. “Can we talk out back for a minute?”

“Yeah, sure Frank,” Tony answered. Any time Frank said there was a problem he was all

ears. The boys stood and followed Frank to their upstairs apartment.

“What’s up?” Tony asked.

“I just got word from my buddy in New York that someone wants to whack all three of us.” Frank knew that Carbone didn’t know anything about the boys. He knew that he was the only target of Carbone’s rage, but needed the boys to do the hit. There was no better motivator than self-preservation.

Bob was instantly stunned. New York? Who there would want to kill me? Shit, I don’t even know anyone who lives there. He was unable to speak for a few seconds. Tony spoke instead.

“What the hell for?” Tony asked.

“Carmine.” It was a name he didn’t think he’d ever be hearing again.

“What?”

“It’s Carmine’s cousin, ‘Big’ Eddie Carbone. He’s a made guy up there with the Colombo family. He’s pretty pissed off about what we did to his cousin, and now he’s coming after us! We have to do something right fucking now or we’ll all be dead in a month.”

“Shit!” Bob said. He was aware that his voice was not as steady as usual. Somehow this looked like one of those conversations where he ended up being sent out to kill somebody. He was right.

“You boys leave tonight for New York City. I got an old friend up there who’ll help you out. His name’s Danny DiArco, but everyone calls him ‘Darkie.’ He’ll know how to get to this Big Eddie character and how to take him out.”

“Shit, Frank, this is awful sudden,” Tony protested. “How do we know it’s for real? It could be just a rumor.”

“No fucking way it’s a rumor. You have a guy in New York who’s a heavy hitter and is looking to hit you and me and Bobby here too. He’s mad and nothing’s gonna stop him from doing it unless you get up there and get his ass first. I can’t go. He knows what I look like, but you two are just names to him right now. He don’t know your faces. You can get to him. Darkie will show you how.”

“You sure we can trust this Darkie guy?”

“Yeah. Who do you think bought all the cars I was dealing out of here? Locals? Darkie and me go way back to the days when we was smuggling booze across the border from Canada. That’s a long fucking time and he never screwed me over once. Shit, how do you think I heard about Big Eddie’s plan?”

“Okay Frank,” Tony said. “We’ll do it.”

“Great.” Frank then filled them in with the particulars about where to find Darkie. He then called Darkie, informed him of the boys’ immanent departure, and had him book a hotel room

for them. Darkie was in the construction business and had to book guys into rooms constantly. Some projects were too far to have his guys commute to.

They left that night at 3:00 am, drove in four-hour shifts, and fourteen hours later, Tony's Chevy entered New York City. It took another hour to find their destination in Brooklyn, but soon they were parked in front of DiArco's office.

"This is the address," Bob said.

"Yep."

"Guess we should go up, huh? Frank said the guy would be waiting for us."

"Let's go." The boys closed and locked the Chevy and entered the front door of DiArco Construction Company's headquarters. A cute blonde woman at the front desk greeted them.

"Good afternoon. May I help you?"

"Yeah," Tony answered. "We're here to see Mr. DiArco."

"Can I tell him who you are?" she asked sweetly.

"Tony Carmenucci and Bob D'Amico. Frank Scalero sent us over to talk to him about some work."

The receptionist picked up the phone and spoke briefly in to it. She assumed, incorrectly, that the boys were looking for some summer construction work. She was very surprised when Danny told her to send them in immediately.

"Mr. DiArco will see you now. Second door on the right."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

The boys proceeded to Darkie's office. The door was open. "Come in, boys, come in. Any friend of Frankie's is a friend of mine." They stepped inside the office. DiArco motioned to Bob that he should close the door, and Bob complied.

Darkie looked at the boys for a few seconds, evaluating them. They seemed awfully young for such a big job. I sure hope Frankie knows what he's doing, he thought. "Have a seat, guys. Can I get you anything? Coffee?"

"No, thanks." Tony answered. "We're fine."

"Any problems finding the place? It's not exactly on the main drag, know what I mean?"

"No problems at all," Bob answered. "Frank gave us really good directions."

"Good. Just like him. You know, me and Frankie go way back. Known him my whole

life.”

Tony changed the subject. “So... I guess we’re here to take care of a guy.”

“We’ll get to that a little later,” Darkie said, changing the subject back to something innocent. Stupid punk, he thought. Then he remembered when he’d been just a stupid punk himself. He stepped over to Tony and whispered, “Not here. Never know who’s listening.”

Tony nodded his understanding. “Frank’s really a good guy, all right.”

“I got a great idea,” Darkie said. “Let’s all go to lunch. There’s a little deli down the street where we can shoot the shit a little, get some lunch, get to know each other and all that happy horse shit. Know what I mean.”

“Sounds good.” Tony replied. “I’m a little hungry after driving all morning.”

“Let’s go.” Darkie grabbed his overcoat and the boys followed him out the door.

Tony thought he saw the receptionist staring at him as they walked past her. She sure is cute, he thought. Not as cute as Bridget, but not bad at all. Visions of seeing her naked body appeared in his mind.

Bob barely noticed the girl. His thoughts were focused on “Big Eddie,” whoever he was. All Bob knew is that he was here to kill the man, and that Darkie was supposed to help him do it. How the hell did I get myself in to this mess, he asked himself mentally. He knew how it had happened. The worst part was that there was no way out of it.

Two blocks away from DiArco’s office stood Mancini’s Delicatessen. Salvatore Mancini, an old associate of Darkie’s, ran it. Sal’s main claim to fame was his “Triple Decker” sandwich – capicola, pastrami, salami, cheese, pickles, onions, and enough shredded lettuce to feed the average rabbit for an entire week. His lesser-known, but much more profitable, product was high-quality heroin smuggled in from the Middle East by his cousin Paulie and distributed in multi-pound quantities to select customers. The delivery scheme was incredibly simple. Once the customer paid for the “merchandise,” he would simply come in for a “take out” order. There would be a sandwich in the bag, and under it a large package of brown powder.

To Darkie, the place was a perfect setting to eat lunch and discuss the upcoming hit on Carbone. It was very secure, despite being rather out in the open. Any stranger in the deli would be immediately noticed, and “business” conversations suspended until he or she was long gone. The place was too noisy to bug, and its location ensured that any photo surveillance would be too noticeable to be able to gather anything useful.

Sal saw Darkie and the boys. He greeted them immediately.

“Hey, Darkie. What’s up cump?”

“Just popped by to pick up some lunch. These boys just drove in from out of town and I figured they might be a little hungry. Know what I mean?”

“Yeah. They friends of ours?”

“They’re friends of Frankie S’s.”

Sal immediately knew that the boys were not full-fledged members of a Family. However, they were associates of a made member and were therefore to be treated with respect, despite their apparently young ages. Some people started in the life early.

“Hey, any friend of Frank’s is a friend of mine, too. You boys try my triple-decker sandwich. Best in the whole city.”

“That would be great,” Tony replied.

“Jenna! Get me three number ones over here.” Sal called out to the girl working behind the counter.

“Right away, Sal.” Jenna went to the kitchen.

“Only be a minute, guys.” Sal announced.

“Thanks Sal.” Darkie replied.

“Don’t mention it. Let me get you some drinks. What do you want, some Cokes?”

“Please.” Bob answered.

“Me too.” Tony said.

“Make it three.”

“Coming right up.” Sal slipped behind the counter and began drawing three fountain Cokes into paper cups. While he was doing so, Darkie motioned the boys to sit at one of the tables along the far wall of the deli. Sal brought the drinks and excused himself to check on their sandwiches. He guessed that they wanted to discuss some business, and sometimes the less he knew about the things the other guys in the Family planned the better off he was personally.

“Hope you boys like to eat. Sal’s sandwiches are freaking huge, know what I mean?”

“I’m pretty hungry,” Bob answered.

Darkie thought for a moment about how to get Carbone. It was still too early in the planning stages for him to have a good plan together, but he did know a few of their target’s habits. Big Eddie liked to eat dinner, and occasionally lunch, at an uptown joint called The Brasserie. He had taken Darkie there a few times, most recently to ask him to sign on as part of the plot to whack Frank. It was a nice restaurant, but very busy. Many of Eddie’s friends and associates were there at random times, and the sound of a gunshot would get a lot of attention in a very short time. The shooter would have more to worry about from the wiseguys there than he ever would with the police. A gun was out, unless it was very efficiently silenced. He could get one of those easily enough, but maybe a lower-tech solution was in order.

The Colombo family did not officially sanction big Eddie’s demise. Darkie thought that it might be a good idea to make it look like a random robbery instead of a mob hit. It made sense. Even made guys occasionally fell victim to the same street crimes as anyone else. It would take

the heat from the Family away from the real killers, and focus it instead on looking for a street punk who he would conveniently pin the whole thing on. He had the right guy, too. A young punk named Jack Davidson owed him two grand on a shylock loan, and hadn't made a single payment. Darkie thought it was a very elegant way to kill two birds with one stone.

"So, what are we supposed to do?" Bob asked.

"I'm still working on it, kid. But I got an idea. Let's eat first, then I'll tell you what I'm thinking."

"Fair enough."

Darkie considered the venue for the hit again. Whacking Big Eddie in the restaurant itself was probably not a good idea. There would be way too many witnesses around. However, the restroom was a different story. It was big enough for three or four guys to be in there at one time. It also had a big stall where the body could be dumped. That would give the boys time to get out of the place before anyone realized that Eddie was taking too long back there. Yeah, he thought, perfect. Take Big Eddie to the place, he'd feel safe there with all his boys around. Wait for him to take a leak, and have the boys follow him into the can. Once the door was closed they could pull knives and slit the son of a bitch's throat, then take his wallet and jewelry and leave him in the stall. Perfect.

The food came quickly. As advertised, the Triple Decker was a huge sandwich. Even hungry as they were from the road, Tony and Bob still wondered if they would be able to finish it, but they would sure try. Darkie took the top slice of bread off his sandwich and liberally applied Frank's Hot Sauce to the meat. It was an old habit. He never ate one of Sal's sandwiches without it. He even got Sal to start doing it himself a few years back.

"Okay, guys, I think I have a plan," Darkie said finally. He quickly detailed the plan to the boys, then asked, "Got any problems with it?"

Wow, Bob thought. This guy can talk about stabbing the hell out of a guy while eating lunch. The thought sent a chill down his spine.

"I don't know about this knife thing. From what I hear the guy's pretty big. He might fight and beat us." Bob didn't say that he thought it was a pretty barbaric way of doing it. Shooting Carmine had been hard enough. Actually sticking a knife in someone was a repulsive thought to him. He didn't know if he could bring himself to do it. He wondered for the millionth time since Frank had come to them about the whole affair whether it was really a good idea to do it, but he knew that he was committed. There was no turning back now.

"Nah. Big Eddie is big alright, but he's fat and slow. You boys are smaller, but a lot faster. He'll be stuck four, five times before he even knows what happened. Shit, his fucking guts'll be laying on the floor before he even turns around. It'll work."

"So when do we do this?" Tony asked.

"Tomorrow night, maybe the night after. I got to set up a bullshit meeting with him first, and he may not be free for a couple of days. No hurry, he ain't moving against Frank till after he

talks to me, know what I mean?"

"So what do we do next?" Bob asked.

"Swing by my office tomorrow, around five or so. I'll talk to Eddie and get things set up. I'll know the time we do this thing then." He stood up. Sal immediately came over.

"So, what'd you boys think of the sandwich?" he asked.

"Man, it was incredible," Tony answered.

"Glad you like 'em. You got to have a lot of good meat on a sandwich, maybe some cheese and pickles. That's a sandwich."

"You ain't kidding," Tony answered.

Sal laughed. "Hey Darkie, this kid's all right."

"Of course. Frankie sent him here. Frankie wouldn't send a piece of shit to see us, know what I mean?"

"Yeah. Hey, you boys tell Frankie I said hi. Tell him to come up and see me one of these days."

"We will," Bob promised.

"All right, I got to get back to the office. Got a fuck load of work to do, know what I mean. Come by tomorrow night. Oh, here's the key to your room." He handed a brass key to Tony. "Room 227 at the Excelsior. Go get some rest. You're gonna need it.."

"See you." Tony called out as Darkie left with Sal close behind. The boys stood and left the deli. They walked to Tony's car and drove off toward the hotel.

"Big" Eddie Carbone was all smiles for the first time since the death of his cousin. It felt like he was actually getting somewhere in his quest for revenge. To Eddie, it looked like he now had Darkie on his side, and that was always a good thing. He also had other reasons to be happy. One of those was the envelope on his passenger seat. He reached over and picked it up, admiring the weight of the package. He looked inside and his mood improved again. There was just something about \$37,000 in cash that never failed to give him a little pick-me-up.

The money was the one of the spoils Eddie received in his union protection business. Eddie had long before become friendly with a gentleman named Jack Holt, who managed, with some help from Eddie and his friends, to become the shop steward for Local 253 of the Teamsters union. In this position, Holt could realize a major profit for himself, and Big Eddie in the process, by using his influence in the right manner. He did so with a vengeance.

The scheme was relatively simple. First, Big Eddie would target a trucking company and pass the word to Holt to "turn up the heat." Holt would then pass the word to all foremen in the Local that the company was either non-union or planning to "break" the union and hire cheaper

non-union labor. That never failed to get the foremen to pass the word to their underlings that it was time to make life difficult for that company. The way they would accomplish this goal was to use harassment. Every time one of the targeted company's trucks would arrive at a union shop, it would not be allowed to load or unload until it was given a long and very meticulous "safety inspection." Then, if it managed to pass the inspection, which sometimes a brand-new truck might fail, the driver's union credentials would be examined in detail and called in to the Local, which would of course wait at least an hour to call back and confirm the driver's status. Finally, the truck would be loaded, but slowly. Once the driver was under way, he could expect similar treatment at his next stop. The end result was that the company's productivity, and therefore profit margin, would fall dramatically.

The executives of the targeted company were usually at a loss to explain the sudden problems they were experiencing with the union. Repeated inquiries to the Local would be either unanswered or hostile. Eventually, the executives would be desperate for assistance. That is where Big Eddie would come in.

Big Eddie would have one of his "Salesmen" call the president of the affected company and tell him that he heard that the company was experiencing problems with the union. He would then get the president to confirm the situation, then offer his services in correcting the problem. A meeting would be set up, and the representative of Business Services, Inc. would explain his expertise at diagnosing and correcting union problems. Of course, such expertise was not inexpensive. The initial retainer fee demanded was \$50,000, but would usually be negotiated down to \$40,000. After that, BSI would receive a \$1,000 monthly maintenance fee for the account. Since the company targeted would lose more than the retainer fee in two days, the management would normally agree to it on the spot. One week later, the BSI representative would return with a twenty-five page "Strategy Document" which detailed very basic common-sense policies for the company to implement. Most of the time, the companies were already following these steps under their union contracts, but the document also suggested that the company promote that it was taking the steps. The plans were almost without exception implemented immediately.

Once the check was cashed, Holt would receive \$20,000 in laundered cash from Big Eddie. He would then call together the foremen and declare victory against the targeted company. The foremen would then pass along the word to the rank-and-file to cease the harassment campaign. Corporate profits would then return to normal levels and the management team at the affected company would breathe a major sigh of relief.

Eddie thought the idea was flawless. It was extortion without anyone ever making even an implied threat or demanding a payoff. The company was always free not to hire what Eddie privately referred to as "Bullshit Incorporated's" services. No violence was ever permitted, either. BSI even maintained a sales and secretarial staff in its fashionable offices in the financial district. The money was easily laundered through bogus employee commissions and all involved reaped huge rewards.

Eddie's car pulled up to the Local hall. It was time to give Holt his share of the loot.

Tony awoke with a nasty hangover at ten o'clock. "It's all Bob's fault," he thought. He and

Bob had been sitting in their room when Bob wondered if they could get a drink in the Excelcior's bar. They then decided to try and went down to the bar. The bartender was at first reluctant to serve them, but when Tony handed him a fifty instead of a driver's license the bartender decided they had to be of age and began serving them any drinks they wanted.

"What time is it," a female voice groaned next to Tony.

Tony looked at the clock. "About ten." What was her name again? Jenny? No, Jeannie, he remembered. Now he remembered meeting the girl. She'd been sitting at the corner of the bar drinking a glass of wine when Tony spotted her. He walked over and started a conversation, and the next thing he remembered she was sticking her tongue down Tony's throat in the middle of the dance floor. After that, Tony remembered nothing.

Tony wasn't really sure what to say to her. It wasn't the first time he'd awakened to find a woman next to him, however it was the first girl he didn't know before taking to bed. It was a slightly uncomfortable situation. Tony looked over at Bob's bed and saw two forms in it. Looks like Bobby scored too, he thought.

"You got any coffee?" Jeannie asked groggily.

"Not here. I can get it," Tony replied. He picked up the phone and dialed 123.

"Room Service."

"Yeah, hi. Could you send some coffee up to Room 341?"

"Sure. It'll be up in a few minutes. Would you like something else, sir?"

"No thanks." Tony hung up the phone and Jeannie stirred next to him. She laid her head on his chest.

Johnny Spinoza finished struggling with the decision that had been bothering him all week. He should have known better than to go into business with Frank and the kids. Especially after what they had done to Carmine. He resolved to get out immediately, and knew what he would have to do to pull it off.

Danny DiArco was not having a very good day at all. It had started out on a bad note when he awoke half an hour late, got worse when he couldn't find a matching pair of socks, and continued to deteriorate when he spilled half a cup of hot coffee all over his suit on his way out the door. Naturally, traffic was a real mother the whole way to the office, too. He walked through the door at 10:15 a.m. He did get one good nugget of news, however. His receptionist handed him a note from Ed Carbone. Big Eddie wanted to meet him for lunch. He went into his office to call the boys. With any luck, Carbone would not see dinner time.

Officer Mike O'Neil of the Pittsburgh Police Department took his weekly envelope from Johnny Spinoza. It was the payoff for keeping the heat off of Johnny's club, and he would pass it around to some other key guys in the Zone Three precinct. Captain Wilson would get a piece of it as well. They all knew what Spinoza was doing, but the money was a great supplement to their paychecks, and besides, Spinoza was low-key and not really hurting anyone. It was easy to rationalize being corrupt in this case.

"Thanks Johnny," O'Neil said as he tucked the envelope into his uniform.

"Don't thank me yet. I'm gonna give you a tip that'll solve a murder case you guys are working on."

"No shit." A tip on a murder case could help any cop's career big-time. Mike O'Neil was all ears.

Jeannie moaned as Tony entered her. God, she thought, it's even better than last night. So hard... so fast... the feeling of bliss spread through her lower body like a tidal wave and grew stronger and stronger. She knew that she was going to come soon.

"You mean, the guys who took out this Carmine character are trying to muscle in on you?" O'Neil asked, incredulous. He'd known that Spinoza was a little bit of a dirty bastard, but had no idea that any real organized crime was involved in his operation. "No fucking shit!" He shook his head again. "What were their names again?"

Jeannie's scream awoke Bob with a start. He quickly looked over at the action in Tony's bed and a laugh formed immediately. That Tony was something else. He wondered if Tony had ever stopped screwing her since he'd passed out with Marcia last night. Jeannie screamed again, much louder. It almost drowned out the sound of the phone ringing.

Tony answered the phone on the fourth ring. "Yeah?" he panted.

"Hey, kid, hope you got some rest. Ready to come in to the office? That... job is ready for you, know what I mean?"

"Yeah. We'll be right over."

"All right. See you in a few."

Tony hung up the phone and dismounted the girl. Sex was fun, but he really wanted to take out this Big Eddie guy. He reached down and picked up Jeannie's dress and threw it to her. "Sorry, but we got to go."

Bob looked over at Tony, surprised how he'd just been so mean to a girl he'd been screwing five seconds before. Then it hit him who it had been on the other end of the phone. He felt his stomach churn with sudden nervous energy.

Two hours later O'Neil began filling out Criminal Complaint forms on Frank Scalaro, Tony Carmenucci, and Bob D'Amico. The charges were Murder, Aggravated Assault, Prostitution, Extortion, Grand Theft, Auto, and a whole slew of Conspiracy counts for good measure. He did the math in his head. Life plus thirty-odd years, if they were lucky. He knew that he didn't have much actual evidence, but knew that he would soon enough. There was a long enough delay between an arrest and trial to ensure that he could dig up dirt on the Pope himself if he wanted to, or have it manufactured if it was really necessary. He had no problem with bending the rules to serve the interest of Justice.

Johnny had told him that Carmenucci and D'Amico were out of town for a few days. He decided to wait for their return before taking down the whole ring. Arresting Scalaro right away would only tip off his partners, and he wanted them all. Besides, since Spinoza had told him about the whorehouse they forced him to open up over the club, even breaking his leg when he resisted, their presence there would let him take out that operation as well. He decided to get the District Attorney's approval for the arrests before he proceeded any further. It was the type of case that a cop's dreams were made of, and just maybe he would make sergeant way ahead of schedule.

"Okay, I think this is it. Remember the plan from yesterday?" Darkie asked.

"Yeah," Bob answered DiArco's question. His voice wasn't very loud.

"Good, 'cause that's how it's gonna happen. Big Eddie wants to meet me for lunch at this fucking Brasserie joint. Whatever you do, don't fuck it up. And for Christ's sake, get the fuck out of town right after and head home. Don't hang around admiring the sights like a couple of fucking tourists. Know what I mean?"

An hour later the boys got their first look at "Big" Eddie Carbone. Holy shit, Bob thought, they ain't fucking kidding about this guy. He must be three hundred pounds and seven feet tall! How the fuck are we supposed to kill him with a fucking knife? Bullets would probably bounce off him! Tony felt none of Bob's fear. He was too angry that the bastard wanted to kill him to care how big he was.

Big Eddie barely noticed the boys as he walked past their table. To him, they looked like a couple of rich kids hanging out in a restaurant with their Dad's credit card and trying to look cool. The danger was waiting for him at the table. Planning an unauthorized hit was always a risky business.

The boys pretended to study their menus as Darkie and Big Eddie embraced and kissed at their table across the room. Tony still wasn't used to that old Italian custom. To him, it looked way too homosexual for his taste. Guys just weren't supposed to kiss each other.

The waiter came to their table with two glasses of water and a basket of bread. Tony asked for another minute before ordering. The waiter walked off to take care of other customers. Tony looked at the bread basket, reached out and took the knife. It was bigger than the one in his pocket, and he thought it might not be a bad idea to use it instead.

Darkie and Big Eddie sat down. "I'm glad you were able to make it," Eddie said to Darkie. "I know you're a busy guy, and I appreciate your seeing me on such short notice."

"Don't mention it," Darkie replied, and sipped his water. "Family business always comes first, know what I mean."

"Don't hear that attitude too much any more. All these fucking young punks ain't got no respect for anything nowadays."

"Yeah. It ain't like the old days. At least back then people had respect. Or else..." Darkie smiled.

"I remember back in the old days when some punk bastard didn't show respect we used to pound 'em in to the ground. Now, we ain't allowed to do nothing. I'm telling you, where is our thing going? No respect for the rules any more."

Darkie wondered if Big Eddie saw the irony in what he was saying. Here he was planning an unauthorized hit on a made guy in another family, violating one of La Cosa Nostra's biggest rules, one with an automatic death penalty, and he is complaining about lack of respect for the rules? Darkie thought it would have been funny if it wasn't so serious.

"Well times change." Darkie reached out for the bread and selected a slice. He spread butter on it and tore it in half. Big Eddie watched him and reached out for a slice of his own, then realized with a start that he'd forgotten to wash his hands. He never ate without washing his hands first. He pulled away from the bread and excused himself from the table.

Tony watched Big Eddie stand up and walk toward the back of the restaurant. He glanced over at Bob and saw that he was staring at Big Eddie as he walked. He stole a quick glance at Darkie sitting across the room. Darkie saw him looking, nodded once, and looked away.

"Come on, Bob. Let's get his ass."

Tony slipped the bread knife under his shirt, stood and walked toward the bathroom. Bob followed him, his legs a bit wobbly at first, but gaining strength with each step. His nervousness began to melt away as the time when he would kill again drew closer. The passage of time began to slow down dramatically.

Johnny Spinoza smiled to himself. Revenge is sweet, he thought. Motherfuckers want to break my leg, eh? Let's see how tough they are in prison. He reached in his pocket for a joint and lit it. He sucked the smoke deeply into his lungs and held it. He blew it out and took another hit, then passed the joint to Jack. The swimmy feeling started to fade in already, and his cock began stiffening in his pants. He hoped Jack would give it to him hard and fast. It always

felt better that way.

Big Eddie turned on the water and held his hands underneath the spigot. The door creaked open behind him and he instinctively glanced up at the mirror over the sink to check out the situation. Just a couple of kids, the ones he'd seen when he walked in to the restaurant. He reached up for the soap and rubbed it on his hands. He started to rinse the lather off and...

The pain in his back was incredible, the strongest he'd ever felt in his life. For a split second, Eddie's entire body stiffened at the sudden invasion from Tony's bread knife. Instinct for survival took over and Eddie spun around to face the threat. Another knife stabbed into his gut as he lashed out with his fist.

The impact sent Bob sprawling across the floor. He lost his grip on the knife as he fell and it clattered to the ground and disappeared from his sight. His head slammed hard into the wall and he felt a sudden dizzy sensation. He tried to stand but his body didn't want to respond. He saw Tony dodge Big Eddie's next punch by jumping straight back, the knife held out in front of him. The blade was red with blood. Tony struck again, the knife plunging into Big Eddie's abdomen to the hilt, followed immediately by Big Eddie's fist smashing into Tony's face. Tony somehow kept his grip on the knife as he staggered backwards.

Bob found his knife and stood again. Eddie was too focused on Tony to notice and Bob was easily able to slip right behind him. He brought the blade of his knife across Eddie's throat. Blood sprayed in all directions, more blood than Bob had ever seen in his entire life.

Big Eddie felt his entire body become suddenly weak and cold. The pain in his back and gut and neck faded away to nothingness as he fell to the floor. Bob stared at the body with a strange feeling of fascination, watching the blood squirt from the gaping wound in the neck, covering the walls in a new, and very messy, red coating. Suddenly the squirting stopped and only a trickle of blood came from the wound. Big Eddie Carbone was now dead.

"Holy shit, Bob!" Tony said in a frantic tone. "We gotta get the fuck outta here." Bob didn't hear him. He was too engrossed in the macabre scene before him that he couldn't notice anything else.

Al Russo joined Darkie at the table. He too had been summoned by Big Eddie to meet for lunch, and had been running a little late. He asked about Big Eddie's whereabouts.

"Ah, he's in the can washing his hands. Won't eat until he does that first."

"Fucking guy is half nuts."

"He'd have to be to plan this Scalaro thing, know what I mean." Both Darkie and Russo laughed for a few seconds.

“Bob! Come on!” Tony nearly screamed, shaking his partner’s shoulder. Finally, Bob came around.

“Yeah! Let’s get the hell out of here!”

“Wait, we gotta make it look like a robbery. Remember what Darkie told us.”

“How the fuck do we do that? He’s cut up like a Thanksgiving fucking turkey, Tone! Let’s just fucking go!”

“Hold on..” Tony reached down and took a heavy gold bracelet from Big Eddie’s wrist. “Help me out, Bob! This fucking ring won’t come off.” Bob reached down and held the hand, noticing the strange feeling of dead flesh. It felt like a normal hand, but was totally limp. Bob thought the feeling was disgusting. He wanted to get as far away from it as he could. Tony got the ring off and put it in his pocket. Tony patted Big Eddie’s jacket, felt an envelope in the breast pocket and removed it. He reached under the body and felt a wallet. He motioned to Bob to help him turn over the body. Together they managed to flip Big Eddie over, and Tony took the wallet from his back pocket.

“Let’s put him in the stall!” Tony ordered. Due to Big Eddie’s weight, nearly 275 pounds, it was an order easier to give than to carry out, and they were nearly unable to do it. However, they managed to sit Big Eddie’s body on the toilet.

“Now let’s get the fuck out of here!” Bob demanded. Both boys ran to the door and straight out of the restaurant, creating instant confusion among the diners near the restroom. It wasn’t often that two people ran out of there covered in blood and carrying knives. The confusion worked to their advantage, however – everyone was too surprised to get a good description of them, let alone chase them. Ten seconds later they were in Tony’s Chevy and immediately headed for home. Tony wanted to be out of the city before anyone had time to call the cops. He didn’t succeed, but he was far enough away by the time it happened that the police had no idea where to look, or even what they were supposed to look for.

While Tony drove, Bob inspected the stuff they had taken from Big Eddie. The first thing was the jewelry, a heavy gold bracelet and a gold ring encrusted with diamonds in the form of a letter “C”. Next was the wallet, which contained \$374 in cash and a few uninteresting articles such as a driver’s license and a Social Security Card. Finally, Bob opened the envelope and received a very pleasant surprise. It contained the money Big Eddie had kept as his share after paying Holt. Bob had never seen so many \$100 bills at one time in his entire life. It took a while to count it, and when he was finished he couldn’t believe the final tally. They had just come in to \$16,500 in cash. Little did they know that they would need it very soon.

CHAPTER EIGHT - PINCHED

The District Attorney was reluctant to take the case at first. There really wasn't that much evidence, just the one witness, Spinoza, who had seen the victim having dinner with three people whom he claimed subsequently forced their way into his speakeasy by breaking his leg, and opened a house of prostitution upstairs. It was pretty shaky stuff, but the officer swore to the reliability of the source, and he decided to proceed with the full gamut of charges. If the murder rap didn't stick, he was certain that he could at least get convictions for Aggravated Assault, Prostitution, and the related conspiracies. All it would take was to get this Spinoza character on the stand to send away three really bad apples for a very long time. Besides, one of the actors may just get sufficiently shaken by the arrest and the possibility of a life sentence to take a partial immunity deal in return for his testimony against the other two. It wouldn't be the first, nor the last, time that had ever happened.

Of course, the possibility of one of the actors attempting to intimidate the witness had to be taken into account as well. Protective custody, either in the county jail or in a hotel, was an option. Of course, all the people known to be dangerous to the witness would be locked up as well. They couldn't be very intimidating from jail cells, could they? The DA decided to take a compromise course of action. As long as the defendants were safely locked up, he would not commit the witness to protective custody, but instead he would do so the moment any of them was out on the street. After all, protective custody was hard on a witness, and had been known to be as intimidating as the criminals could be.

The District Attorney signed off on the entire list of charges for all three defendants. He couldn't take the chance of leaving these violent characters on the street a second longer than necessary.

Tony and Bob reached Frank's office shortly after 8:00 a.m. the next morning. As usual, Tony blew the horn in front of the garage door, and within a minute it rolled up to allow them to enter, then closed behind the Chevy. Tony turned off the motor and stepped out of the car.

"So, how'd it go?" Frank asked.

"Great!" Tony replied. "We got him."

"Come up to the office. Let's talk about it up there." Frank turned and headed for his office, and the boys trailed slightly behind him. They had changed their clothes and washed off the blood in a gas station Men's room on the trip back. There was nothing in their appearances to betray the fact that they had only hours before brutally murdered a man in a New York City restaurant's bathroom. They reached Frank's office.

Frank spoke first. "How'd you do it?"

Tony answered. "Darkie set the whole thing up. First, he got the guy to go to lunch at this place called 'The Brasserie,' and then we got a table across the room from them. Then, this Eddie guy gets up to go to the bathroom, and we follow him in there. I walk up behind him –

he's at the sink – and stick a bread knife right in his fucking back.”

“Yeah, but he didn't go down,” Bob answered. “The fucker started swinging and knocked us both around pretty good. Then Tony stuck him in the gut, and I got behind him and sliced him right across the throat. Then we took his wallet and jewelry and put him in the stall. Figured we would make it look like a robbery or something.”

Frank laughed. “You left him on the fucking shitter? That's fucking great!”

“Why?” Tony asked.

“It shows no respect, that's why. Fucking guy is killed and left on a shitter! Would you want to be found that way?”

“I guess not,” Bob answered. The thought of it happening to him sent a terrible chill down his spine.

Officer Mike O'Neil was outranked. The major case that he had uncovered had taken on a life of its own, and a couple of detectives from the Homicide division had taken over the case. Just as a show of appreciation, they decided to let O'Neil in on the planned raid. After all, he had uncovered the lead that blew things wide open.

The officers gathered in a large briefing room in the Zone Three police station. All of them, except for Detectives McNally and Polansky were in full uniform. The detectives wore their normal business suits. McNally was the ranking Detective, so he stepped behind the podium.

“Quiet, quiet everybody!” he shouted. When the hubbub in the room subsided somewhat, he continued. “We are about to raid three gangsters and arrest them for murder, prostitution, and a whole shitload of other charges. Listen up so you know what to do. I want all of you to go home afterwards.”

The boys were almost surprised when Sam Ciccione showed up without LaRocca. After their first debriefing, they assumed that the Boss himself always wanted to know the details of how the hit had gone. That was not an entirely incorrect assumption, however, sometimes he would let the *Capo* of the hit crew fill him in instead of getting the details personally from the killers. After all, he was a very busy man.

Sam listened to the boys tell the story about how they had taken care of Big Eddie. He was very impressed by how easy it had seemed to have gone. After all, Eddie was a big, tough guy. Killing him with knives was a pretty gutsy maneuver. Not many guys would have attempted it. He made a mental note that when the Family was ready to add some new members that both of the boys should be made immediately. He would mention it to LaRocca himself when he briefed him on the boys' New York trip.

Frank also had some news. “I just heard from New York that the Colombos found a guy who they think hit Big Eddie. He was some wannabe bozo from the neighborhood, and they

caught him coming out of his girlfriend's place. Too bad the broad was with him at the time, cause they had three guys with machine guns. Guess one of the rounds missed and took off half her head. What a shame. They say she was a real looker.”

Johnny Spinoza was nervous as hell, and it was beginning to show. If anyone saw him here, he was a dead man. He stubbed out his cigarette and immediately asked the undercover cop sitting next to him for a light. McNally sensed Spinoza's state and gave him one without another thought. He realized he'd be nervous if he were in Spinoza's shoes, having to point out two cold-blooded killers so they could be arrested.

McNally hoped that there wouldn't be a lot more cigarettes lit before the boys showed up at the Club. The inside of the van would take a week to air out at Spinoza's smoking pace.

The boys decided that the Club probably wasn't a very good place to keep the money. Between the hookers and Johnny, the risk of it disappearing was almost a certainty. Bob decided that his parents' house basement was a good place for it, and Tony agreed with him. He still had a key to the house, so they went there and hid the bulk of the cash in the ceiling above his dad's workbench, keeping only \$700 each for pocket money. Once the deed was done they headed for the Club. After all, they were both exhausted from all the driving. Sleep was looking very attractive to both of them.

Tony's Chevy parked half a block away from the Club and the boys got out of the car. They headed toward the Club and Johnny pointed them out to McNally. The boys began to climb the stairs to their combination apartment and whorehouse.

McNally keyed the radio. “Pigeon to Cat, Pigeon to Cat. Actors identified and heading inside. Prepare to move in on my mark.”

Twenty-seven cops heard the dispatch and gave their weapons one last check. More than one shell was ejected from the breech of an already cocked shotgun in the process.

The Judge was really working up a sweat. He'd been going at it with Kelly for nearly twenty minutes, and for some reason had more endurance than usual. He didn't mind the exertion at all, not with a girl who looked like her. The forty bucks was nothing compared to how he felt each week when he was with her.

McNally reached the bottom of the stairs the suspects had gone up just minutes before. He keyed his radio and shouted “Pigeon To Cat, Go! Go! Go!” Within seconds, police officers filled the streets in front and behind the South Side Social Club. Most were carrying shotguns and the rest had their revolvers drawn. They were going after killers and were taking no chances.

McNally and two uniformed officers ran up the stairs. McNally knocked on the door and announced "Police!"

The uniformed officers did not wait for a response. They immediately kicked open the door and barreled inside with McNally barely a step behind them, and twenty-five other officers hot on his heels. They spread out, startling the people in several rooms who found themselves suddenly looking down the barrel of a gun. McNally heard a man scream in pain and disregarded the sound. Someone must have given one of the officers a little trouble. In under a minute, the entire building was secured and the suspects were brought, in various states of undress, into the main reception area.

"This one had a gun on him," the officer holding Bob remarked to McNally. "Think it's the murder weapon?"

"It might be." McNally turned to Bob. "Boy, your ass is in some big time trouble."

"Do you know who I am?" the Judge asked the officer who had rudely barged in on him and Kelly in mid-stroke.

"No, and I don't give a shit, either!" Officer Jim Simpson replied, bringing a nightstick sharply across the Judge's back. The Judge screamed. Simpson hit him again and again as Kelly struggled out of the bed. Simpson then struck her across the stomach with his stick and Kelly dropped to the floor. Simpson handcuffed both suspects and dragged them out of the room.

"Get your fucking hands off me!" the Judge demanded.

"Shut up, asshole!" Simpson brought his stick across the Judge's midsection, doubling him over in pain. McNally noticed the action and turned to see what was going on. The Judge straightened up and Simpson punched him in the jaw. McNally recognized the Judge and ran over. He pushed Simpson into the wall.

"Stop it, you fucking shithead!"

"Hey, I ain't letting any fat fuck like that give me any shit!" Simpson replied.

"Yeah, well you better. That's Judge Diller."

"Oh shit." Simpson's bravado faded away into cold fear.

"Don't just stand there, moron. Uncuff these two and go do something useful!" McNally ordered. Simpson complied with the order.

"Your honor, I'm sorry if we inconvenienced you in any way. You and your girlfriend might want to get out of here before the reporters show up."

Frank Scalaro was surprised by the sudden turn of events. Sixteen hits without even the suspicion of his involvement ever coming up, and suddenly he's arrested for whacking out

Carmine. He didn't even pull the trigger this time. Frank wondered if maybe he had left a fingerprint inside the car. He hoped that was the case, as it would be easy enough to explain that away.

Frank thought over the situation as he sat handcuffed at the Detective's desk, answering basic questions such as his name, address, Social Security Number, and other mundane details. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a commotion on the other side of the room, but couldn't make out what was going on or who was involved.

He wondered if Tony and Bob were all right. He might need their help in getting out of this situation.

Tony had never been arrested before in his life, and had no idea how he was supposed to handle it. Therefore, he decided to try to be as tough as possible. He didn't answer any questions, and indeed even answered "Fuck you," to one question McNally asked him. This prompted three uniformed officers to proceed to use him as a punching bag for three minutes straight. Even nearly unconscious, Tony remained defiant as they dragged him in to the station for booking.

Although Bob didn't try to put on quite the show of bravado that Tony did, he didn't fare much better in police custody than his partner. Since the cops had found a gun on him when they came through the door, and he happened to be holding a several hundred dollars to boot, they decided he had to be guilty of something and meted out a little unofficial justice of their own. Bob realized that they didn't care what he said or did. He was going to get it anyway, so he decided to bite the bullet.

Neither of the boys had an easy time with the interrogation process, but despite the savage beating and psychological pressure the cops put on them, neither of them told the officers anything about the night with Carmine. They were both too afraid of what Frank would do to them if they did so to even think of it for a second.

Finally, tired of the sheer physical exertion of beating them, the cops disgustingly threw the boys into a holding cell and locked the door. Both boys picked themselves off the floor and, when they looked up, had cold chills run down their spines. They were looking right into the eyes of Frank Scalaro.

"Oh shit. They got you too!" Frank groaned. "How the fuck did this happen?"

"I don't know," Bob answered. "But I hope we find out soon."

"Bet on it, kid. Sit down. You look like shit."

CHAPTER NINE - SITUATION HANDLED

Richard Clarkson didn't specialize in criminal law, but he knew the basic procedure well enough to handle the early stages of the case. After his visits with Frank and Jay Ellis, the Assistant District Attorney handling the prosecution, he was at a loss as to exactly what the grounds for Frank's arrest had been. All they said was that a witness had seen Carmine with Frank before the murder, and that wasn't much to base a murder case on, was it? It didn't make sense to him why Frank would do such a thing in the first place. After all, Frank had retained him at considerable expense to defend the victim just days before his demise.

Sam Ciccione didn't need to talk to Frank to know that the situation wasn't good. It was all over the morning papers. Someone had talked to someone about the hit on Carmine. How could the boys be so stupid, he asked himself. It just didn't make sense.

Then again, maybe they didn't talk to anyone. Maybe someone else knew about their involvement in Carmine's demise. Ciccione made a mental note to himself to find out if anyone saw anything. He had a big crew full of guys who knew a lot of people, and it usually didn't take too long to find out an answer to any question he might have. One came to him immediately. Something was weird about the whole thing... but what?

Ciccione grabbed the paper again. "...Arrested in the raid was Anthony Carmenucci (17) of Carrick for prostitution, murder, Aggravated Assault, Criminal Mischief, Conspiracy to Commit Murder, and other charges; Robert D'Amico (17) of Carrick for Murder, Aggravated Assault, Criminal Mischief, Conspiracy to Commit Murder, Carrying a Concealed Weapon, and other charges; Candice Chamberlain (23) of Buffalo, NY, for Prostitution and Criminal Conspiracy; Jason Porter (37) of Bethel Park on a single charge of Prostitution; and Jennifer Flores (24) for Prostitution and Criminal Conspiracy charges. Also arrested separately was Frances Scalero (58) of the South Side on charges of Murder, Aggravated Assault, Criminal Mischief, and Conspiracy to Commit Murder. All suspects are scheduled to be arraigned before Judge..."

No Spinozas anywhere on the list. Isn't that convenient? Sam thought, Johnny not being at the place when it just happened to be hit the same day the boys who had his leg broken returned from a little trip. It had to be him. Frank had even mentioned that they had stopped by his place for dinner right before whacking out Carmine. All indications were that the leak was Johnny Spinoza, but Sam still wasn't quite sure. After all, it could have been a coincidence, and maybe Spinoza had just been lucky. It'd happened to Sam a couple of times, narrowly missing being clipped in bar raids by sheer stupid luck. He decided to find out what was going on, and to do so immediately.

"Chainsaw! Get in here," he bellowed at his office door.

Billy Rizzo appeared in Sam's office seconds later. He had earned his nickname of "Chainsaw," the hard way, using one to torture and kill a man at Sam's orders when he was only twenty years old. Chainsaw was a big man, but not particularly intelligent. He was a perfect enforcer for Sam – too stupid to question orders and tough enough to get results.

"Yeah?" he asked. "What's up?"

“You seen Johnny Spinoza around anywhere?”

“Not since I went to his club last week.”

“You know where he hangs out, you know, when he ain’t at the club?”

“I don’t, but I’ll bet Frankie does.”

“I can’t ask Frank, he’s in the fucking joint. I’m asking you. Find out and tell me. And don’t let anyone know that you’re looking for him.” Fucking moron, Sam thought. Gotta tell him everything.

“Sure. Anything you say, Sammy.”

McNally had twenty men out on the street looking for more evidence against the trio he had just arrested. Even though he was sure the testimony of Spinoza would put them away on all the charges, he was experienced enough to know that sometimes cases could suddenly turn very bad very quickly, and when that happened the best thing to have was a mountain of evidence against the bad guy.

The phone on McNally’s desk rang for the twentieth time that day, and for the twentieth time he answered it. “Homicide. McNally.”

“McNally, Sergeant Boltz down in Ballistics. How you doin’ today?”

“Depends on what you have to say.”

“Well, I got good news and bad news.”

“Good first. I need a some today.”

“Okay, we got your murder weapon, the one for the Carbone case.” McNally’s ears perked up at that news. Yes! He thought. I’ve got the bastards now! How bad could the rest be?

“And the bad news is?”

“It ain’t either of the ones you brought in with your suspects. This piece was found on one, let’s see, what was the name again... one Tyrone Rufus Jefferson, arrested two weeks ago for dealing dope up in the Hill District...”

Motherfucker! McNally thought. It can’t be right unless... unless the bastards dumped the murder weapon up there. They must have, but good luck convincing a jury of that one with a defense attorney tearing the theory to pieces. Maybe there was still a chance, however.

“What about the weapons we brought in with the suspects from the whorehouse? D’Amico and Scalero?”

“Completely clean. No matches to any pending cases, and not reported stolen anywhere

either.”

“Okay, thanks.”

“Don’t mention it.”

McNally hung up the phone. Okay, he thought, the guns are a bust, but they couldn’t really damage his case, could they? They couldn’t if no one knew about the murder weapon being found on a dope dealer. A couple of guys in Narcotics owed him a favor or two. It was time to use one of those favors to make a piece of evidence against Tyrone Rufus Jefferson disappear forever.

Johnny Spinoza breathed a huge sigh of relief when he learned that Frank and his little henchmen were being held without bail. With them safely locked away in the Allegheny County Jail he didn’t have to watch over his shoulder every second. He looked over at Jack.

“You know, this calls for a celebration. Come on, let’s head over to the Club and have a couple of beers.”

Johnny opened the door and they left Jack’s apartment, turned left on Carson Street, and headed for the Club. Neither of them noticed a blue Pontiac pass them from behind, but the driver did notice them. Chainsaw looked at his watch and the street sign and made a note to report what he’d seen to Sam. He then continued on his way to meet up with Jenny for lunch and a quick piece of ass at her place.

“Tony, did you do it?” Bridget asked.

“Hell no! I can’t believe you could even think that I did. Now you’re turning against me too.”

The memory of his last visitor was still very fresh in his mind. Tony’s father had come to see him, not to offer any sort of support, but rather to completely disown him. “You’re a piece of shit, Tony!” he’d screamed. “I’m gonna forget that you were ever my son! Not even eighteen and already in jail for murder and prostitution? No fucking way I brought you up like that. You got yourself into this, mister, get yourself out.” Even though they hadn’t been getting along so well lately, Tony was surprised at his father’s reaction.

Bridget’s reaction was the complete opposite of his father’s. Tears welled up in her eyes as she looked at Tony through the glass partition separating them, she held them back, but only by the slimmest of margins. “I believe you, Tony! I just needed to hear you say it, that’s all.”

“At least someone’s on my side. When I get out of here, we’re gonna have a real special night.”

“I hope it’s soon. I can’t stand seeing you like this.”

The guard's voice prevented Tony's response. "Carmenucci! Visit's over. Time to go back to your cell."

"I'll see you tomorrow," Tony stated. "I gotta go."

Bridget lost her composure totally.

It'd been almost a week since the arrest, but already Sam had put together a whole lot of information about Johnny Spinoza. Thinking about everything he'd learned made him want to vomit. Here he was, thinking that Spinoza was only a little bit dishonest to his partners, and now the truth was worse than he could ever have imagined. He'd learned that Spinoza was a dope-smoking, swindling, disrespectful fucking rat bastard who had even sold his own niece into prostitution. Sam didn't make many moral judgements (in his line of "work" how could he?) but Spinoza's behavior was so alien and disgusting to his sense of family that it proved to him that Spinoza was just no good. He'd never seen anyone do something that sick and disgusting. After all, he thought, if he would sell his own niece into prostitution then what would stop him from selling his partners up the river? Spinoza had to go immediately. All he had to do was get the Boss's permission and Johnny Spinoza was a goner. The permission was granted within seconds of Sam's request.

The District Attorney was not a happy man. The judge assigned to the Carbone case had suddenly taken very ill, and was in the hospital for who-knows how long. Therefore, the case was shuffled off to another judge, one who he knew was a real stickler for procedure and hard evidence, and who rarely believed a witness's story without strong corroborating evidence. It was quite possible that the defendants could get bail from Judge Diller. Then he learned from McNally that Diller had been at the scene of the raid and quietly released after an overzealous officer had physically abused the judge.

The DA knew that he could attempt to have Diller removed from the case, however, doing so would give the cops and the judge a major black eye. It was doubtful that the judge would be removed from office over something of this nature, especially since the police had kept no official record that he'd actually been there, and any future cases he took before the judge would not be pleasant ones, that was certain. Shit, he thought, I'm stuck with a pissed-off judge and my evidence is drying up fast. Something had better break quickly or we're gonna lose this one. I should have known better, damn it! He opened his desk and took a quick swig of Jack Daniel's from the bottle he always kept there. Sometimes it helped.

Clarkson was no longer the lead counsel for the boys and Frank. That honor had gone to Irving Kersey, a former judge who had decided to use his considerable influence and legal expertise to make a fortune as a criminal attorney, mostly representing "alleged" gangland figures in high-profile cases. His fees were exorbitant, but he got results more often than not. Clarkson was eager to work with him and hopefully learn a few things that could help him justify an increase in his fees, as were the lawyers representing Tony and Bob.

Kersey reviewed the evidence and was incensed. His clients were being held without bail on capital charges without even a single piece of physical evidence or a single witness corroborating this Spinoza character. Who was the DA blowing to pull this one off, he thought. He would have thrown the murder and all related charges out at the preliminary arraignment due to insufficient evidence. He couldn't believe that he actually had to go through a preliminary hearing for this weak of a case, but then again, he didn't mind doing so one bit. After all, he was billing by the hour.

Still, there were other counts that he had to deal with. The most serious was this prostitution thing. He decided that the best course of action was to point the finger at the witness, this Spinoza character. After all, it was his building, and Frank had assured him that the charges were just Spinoza trying to get himself out of a bunch of trouble by pointing the finger at two lackeys and an uninvolved third party who he alleged to be a big-time gangster. It actually made sense, and Kersey was certain he could convince a jury of twelve good people that it was the truth. All he needed was reasonable doubt and the DA needed to prove more than he did. At least in theory.

It had been nearly a month since the raid, and Johnny Spinoza discreetly opened up the downstairs club for business. He knew that the cops would not bother him there, as he was the star witness in a major, big-headline murder case. Of course, he couldn't open up the upstairs whorehouse, but that was no big deal. It was too much trouble being around all the women.

The first few nights were naturally a little slow, but soon word got out that the South Side Social Club was back in operation and the late-night crowds began pouring in. Like always, there were a few family guys around, but Johnny smoothed them out with a few drinks and then gave them his version of things. All were sympathetic to his position, or so they said. Little did he know that most of them would have loved to whack him out on the spot. Rats were never good to have around, and they all knew it. But there was no need to let him know they thought that way. It wasn't their job to get vengeance for Scalero and the kids. Besides, they liked the club.

Chainsaw entered the club at 3:30 a.m. with two women and over a case of beer already in his system. He wasn't packing heat, there was no need for it. He wasn't whacking the guy yet. "Hey, Johnny, how ya doin'" he slurred as he stumbled through the doorway.

"Great. Just great. You look like you're having a good night, Billy."

"You bet your fucking ass I am!"

"Well, get something to eat. It'll give you more energy for these ladies later on."

"Good fucking idea! C'mon girls, let's get some fucking pizza." Chainsaw and the ladies headed into the club. Fucking drunk piece of shit, Johnny thought. No class at all, that guy. He wondered why he even let him in the door.

For his part, Chainsaw had a marvelous time, sucking down a quarter bottle of gin in two and a half hours, plus half a pizza, beer nuts, and half a dozen bottles of beer. The girls kept up with him pretty well, at least in proportion to their size. By closing time, they were all

staggering a bit. It wasn't all just partying, however. Chainsaw occasionally looked over at Spinoza and watched who he talked to, looking for any patterns of behavior that he could later exploit. He didn't notice much, other than the fact that Spinoza seemed a little friendlier to the one bouncer than the others. He wondered if the kid was his cousin or something as he staggered out the door with Jill and Sabrina. Fuck it, he thought. I got better things to think about right now.

Chainsaw paid for it the next day. He awoke around noon with a pounding headache and a sore stomach. He wondered for a moment if either of the girls would be walking too well later on. It'd been one hell of a workout. He wondered if Jill had any aspirin in the bathroom.

Frank was starting to get restless. It wasn't his first time behind bars, but it was the first time that it appeared that the cops might just have the story straight. He knew in his mind that they didn't have any real evidence linking him to either Carmine's demise or the boys and their prostitution thing. So why couldn't the lawyers get him out? He hoped that the hearing coming up in two days went well. Maybe then he could make bail. After all, it was far easier to fight a criminal charge from the outside than the inside of a cell.

Frank was also worried about Tony and Bob. They didn't have his experience level and he wondered if the stress and natural fear of being behind bars might make one of them snap and spill his guts to the cops. He sure hoped not. If that happened, they were all done.

The humming started again. Frank wished the guy in the next cell would cut it out. It reminded him too much of where he was. Too bad I can't just reach over and smack the nigger, he thought.

"Hey! Cut that shit out!" he screamed.

"Fuck you." The Hummer replied. The humming started again twice as loud. Frank vowed to whack the guy out as soon as he got the opportunity.

Chainsaw had been watching Spinoza carefully for three days, and thought he had the guy's schedule down pretty well. The hard part had been finding out where he stayed, and was surprised to learn that it was with that bouncer from the Club. Then again, Chainsaw thought, with his broken leg maybe he was having trouble getting around, and the apartment was close to the Club. He figured that it was just a convenience thing.

Spinoza seemed to start his day around two o'clock in the afternoon, appearing from the front door of the building with the bouncer and going down the street to get something to eat at a local diner. Then it was over to the Club for a couple of hours, probably to check inventory and count the previous night's receipts. Then the liquor store, where they would pick up a couple of cases of booze for the late-night crowd. Spinoza would drop the stuff off, then they would head back to the apartment, probably to catch some sleep before heading back to the Club until it closed at 5:30 the next morning.

Spinoza was really predictable. This hit's gonna be a real piece of cake, he thought. He put

his car in gear and went to see Sammy and tell him what he had learned. Sammy always liked to be kept informed of everything.

Ciccione listened to Chainsaw's detailed story of Johnny Spinoza's daily routine. Stupid fucker, he thought, doesn't even realize that he was about to be whacked out. Then again, the guy would have to be stupid to turn on the Family by ratting out Frank and the boys. Ciccione gave Chainsaw the final go-ahead for the hit, but insisted that he take his brother Gino with him. Gino was older and had been on a few more hits than Chainsaw had, and being Sam's brother, was completely trustworthy. Even though he knew Chainsaw was completely up to the task, Sam didn't want to take any chances, just in case Spinoza's shadow boy was around. You just never knew what might happen on a hit, and sometimes an extra gun could really come in handy. They would only have one shot at this one, and if it didn't work, then just the attempt itself would give Spinoza an incredible amount of credibility in court and earn more protection than President Kennedy had.

Three hours later, Chainsaw and Gino were parked half a block from the apartment Johnny and Jack shared. They didn't speak. Their job was too serious, and they both preferred to focus more on the task at hand than idle conversation. God, Gino thought, I hate this waiting shit. Can't the fucker just come home so we can get this over with?

It took two more hours of waiting before Spinoza and the kid arrived and climbed the steps to their apartment. Gino looked at his watch and noted the time, 9:32 p.m. A minute later, Chainsaw saw the second floor light of the apartment come on, and saw Spinoza at the window for a second before the curtains closed. He reached for the door handle.

"Hold on," Gino ordered. "Give 'em a few minutes to settle in. Then we can go."

"Okay," Chainsaw answered. He checked his gun again and made sure the silencer was properly attached and that there was a round in the chamber. He'd already checked it ten times already, but he just couldn't help himself. He knew how important the hit was.

Johnny hit the joint again as he reached over to stroke the bulge in Jack's pants. "Are you ready yet?" he asked his lover. He sure was.

"Yeah." Jack's voice had a dreamlike quality that Johnny just loved. Johnny unzipped his pants and stood as best he could. Jack peeled the garment down his legs. As usual, he had some difficulty with the cast, but he was getting used to it. It only slowed him down by a second at most. Johnny took his own shirt off while Jack began disrobing. Johnny sat back down on the couch and Jack approached him. Johnny reached out and opened his mouth.

The waiting was even more unbearable than it'd been before. Now, with the rat bastard close enough to smell, both Chainsaw and Gino were starting to sweat a little bit. Gino looked at his watch again. 9:44 p.m.

“Okay, let’s get the fucker,” Gino ordered. He opened his car door and stepped in to the street. Chainsaw did likewise. It took all of the self control either of them could muster to calmly walk to the front door of the building without running or showing any hint of nervousness to the few passers-by on the street. They were professionals, but some tasks were still very difficult, and this was one of them.

Chainsaw reached for the door handle and turned it, half expecting it to be locked. It wasn’t and the door opened with barely a squeak from its hinges. The pair entered the hallway and quietly closed the door. They then climbed the stairs to the second floor and found the door to the apartment they had been watching from the outside. The door was numbered 207. Chainsaw reached for the doorknob and lightly turned it. Again, the door wasn’t locked. He signaled to Gino and they both drew their pistols from beneath their shirts. Chainsaw turned the knob again and pushed the door open. They entered the apartment and were too stunned to react for several seconds.

The first thing Chainsaw noticed was the bouncer’s back, then his bare ass. Then he noticed another set of legs around the bouncer’s. They weren’t a woman’s legs. Then the odor of marijuana. Gino noticed the sex act at the same time as Chainsaw, and a feeling of total disgust filled his guts. He raised his gun and fired three rounds. Die faggot, he thought.

Johnny felt Jack’s whole body stiffen and shudder, then felt something wet on his face. That’s strange, he thought. How could he come on me when his dick’s still in my...? Then Jack fell to the ground and Johnny saw that his chest was covered with blood from three huge holes that had just been blasted through it. His face wore a strange combination of surprise and pain, but only for a moment. Johnny looked up and saw Billy and Gino from the Club standing in the doorway. There was a cloud of smoke in front of Gino. Then he noticed the guns. Holy shit was the only thought that came to him at that moment.

Chainsaw spoke first, and he was out of control. “You sick motherfucker!” he nearly screamed. “Die motherfucker!” He brought his .380 automatic to bear on Johnny and pulled the trigger, but it was a moment too late. The bullet plowed through the back of the couch exactly where Spinoza had been just a fraction of a second previously, sending a few tufts of cotton stuffing into the air but doing no real damage to anything or anyone. Johnny had already bolted over the back of the couch and was headed for the window. Chainsaw pulled the trigger again – and nothing happened. The gun was jammed open. Chainsaw dropped the gun, pulled a switchblade knife from his pocket and pressed the button. The knife clicked open. Gino had Johnny in his sights, but held his fire. The faggot deserved to be tortured a little bit before they killed him. Gino closed the door behind them and turned the lock as Chainsaw approached Johnny.

Even with a broken leg, Spinoza was surprisingly quick. He dodged Chainsaw’s first and second strikes and was halfway across the room when the knife plunged into his back. Still, he fought back as best he could, slamming his arm into his assailant’s nose with enough force to draw blood. However, instead of stopping Chainsaw, the pain only infuriated him further. He grabbed Spinoza’s shoulder and spun him around, then slammed the knife into his stomach and pulled up. Johnny screamed as the knife slit his abdomen open and he stumbled backwards. Then Chainsaw really went crazy, stabbing and cutting and stabbing some more until Gino had to pull him off.

“Enough!” Gino exclaimed. “He’s as fucking dead as he’s gonna get. Stop it already.”

Chainsaw’s rage began to subside, and even he was somewhat appalled by his own handiwork. He couldn’t find a part of Johnny Spinoza that hadn’t been cut in some way.

Chainsaw and Gino examined the scene and Gino quickly had a thought of what else they needed to make it better. Gino wiped his fingerprints from the gun and put it in Johnny Spinoza’s dead hand, and had Chainsaw do the same with the knife and Jack. They stood back and admired the scene. Two fags who had a quarrel that turned deadly, with blood everywhere and knives and guns and drugs involved.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here.” Gino said. Chainsaw was only too happy to obey the order. He couldn’t stand to be around the fags any longer than he had to, even if they were stone cold dead. Later, the thought of seeing Johnny Spinoza giving the younger man a blow job would make him puke.

Assistant District Attorney Jay Ellis was waiting eagerly for McNally’s arrival in his office. The case had not been going well from the start, and now it had really taken a huge turn for the worse. All he had to do was look at the morning edition of the Pittsburgh Press to know that they were in serious trouble. The only real bright spot in the whole mess of a case they had been working so feverishly to turn around was now not only dead, but thoroughly discredited as well. He could already hear the defense attorneys attacking the late Johnny Spinoza. After all, being found naked and dead in a room with drugs and an apparent homosexual lover was not exactly the type of thing to endear a person to a jury. Add in the way Spinoza made his living running an illegal speakeasy and you had pretty much the ultimate impeachable witness. Plus, a dead man could not testify in court.

Frantic investigation was underway to learn the exact circumstances of Spinoza’s demise. If only they could prove that he’d been murdered on the orders of any of the defendants, or even on their behalf, then he could file charges against them for his death. However, it wasn’t looking too good. Not one witness had been found who had noticed anything unusual, nor had one been found who had even heard anything at all. His boss wasn’t too happy either.

Ellis’s phone rang and he answered it. His secretary’s voice announced that Detective McNally had just arrived, and Ellis immediately had her send him in. McNally entered the room.

“Please, have a seat.” Ellis ordered. McNally did so without delay. There was not going to be any small talk in this meeting. “I assume you know why I asked you here.”

“The Carbone case? I know it doesn’t look too good right now, but...”

Ellis didn’t let him finish. “But what? Let’s see, I’m supposed to go to court tomorrow and attempt to convince Judge Diller that these two kids and this Scalero character murdered Carmine Carbone. Now, I have absolutely no physical evidence to link them to the crime, not one witness who can get up on the stand and say that he saw them together in the vicinity of the crime at the time it happened, or anything else whatsoever. Now, I have to do this with a defense attorney who’s one of the best in the state opposing me. All I have are the statements of a known

criminal who was found dead after he had some sick lover's quarrel with his boyfriend. And this quarrel happened while he was stoned out of his mind on marijuana when the boyfriend went berserk and cut him up with a knife before he managed to shoot him with his last breath. Not looking good? Shit, I have nothing. Zero. Zilch. I have to drop these charges before I get laughed out of court!"

McNally still thought there was a chance to get them on something. "What about the prostitution charges?" he asked.

"Thank you for asking. Do we have an officer who ever saw money being exchanged for sex in the fucking place?"

"Well, no..."

"Do we have a credible witness who can testify to prostitution going on in the establishment?"

"No..."

"Then we have nothing again there. Shit, even if we did, the defendants could turn around and say that the whole operation was Spinoza's baby. It's his fucking building and he ran an illegal bar in the downstairs portion of the place for years. How the hell am I supposed to convince twelve good people that these two seventeen-year-old kids were running a goddamn brothel? That they broke the legs of a known felon to force him to let them use his property to do it? And how the fuck am I supposed to link Scalaro into this whole mess? You tell me."

The room was silent for several seconds. McNally knew that there was no chance of any kind of substantial conviction coming for any of the defendants. He had to give them credit - they were good.

"Well, if I can prove they had something to do with the murder of Johnny Spinoza that might help. I mean, there's no way those two killed each other. The physical evidence just doesn't..."

Ellis cut McNally off again. "I don't think you understand. Those two killed each other, end of story. You know, the District Attorney. He is not about to deal with the fucking press circus that any allegation that this wasn't what I said it was before would cause. Now, I do have one more question."

"Yes," McNally replied. He was totally dejected, and it showed in his voice.

"Who the fuck is Tyrone Jefferson and why was he found with one of the murder weapons? And why didn't you tell me about it?"

Now McNally knew that the shit had really hit the fan in a big way. "Well, I..."

"Well, you what?"

"I thought that he probably just picked the gun up after the killers disposed of it..."

"That may well be. Actually, I'm inclined to believe that is exactly what happened myself."

But I'm still charging the nigger with the murder of Carmine Carbone, and you're lucky I'm not charging you with an obstruction of justice count. As for the rest of them, the only thing I have is a possible very weak prostitution charge on Carmenucci and D'Amico, and an underage firearms possession on D'Amico as well. That's it. Just a couple of minor misdemeanor counts. You should have done a lot more investigation before arresting them. Now all possible evidence is gone, the only witness is gone, and we're fucked. Pure and simple they will be walking tomorrow. And more likely than not, so will you – writing traffic tickets after the Chief busts you so low you'll have to get a ladder to see over your fucking shoes. That's all. Get out of here. I have work to do on the prosecution of Mr. Jefferson.

“Your honor, in light of recent evidence which has come to our attention, the People wish to withdraw the following charges against the Defendants: Frances Scalaro, all counts. For Robert D'Amico and Anthony Carmenucci we withdraw our prosecution on the counts of Murder and Aggravated Assault.” It was the most embarrassing thing Jay Ellis had ever said in court, and he blamed every word of it on the former Detective McNally.

“What are your grounds?” Judge Diller asked, knowing that he would approve dropping the charges no matter what they were. He wanted this case to be gone worse than anyone. After all, he had a lot to lose too if word ever got out that he'd been a regular customer of the defendants'.

“Your Honor, we have direct evidence that another person committed the murder of Carmine Carbone, and that the Defendants are totally innocent of that crime. Also, our investigation has discredited the original complainant who alleged the Aggravated Assault. We cannot prove that the Defendants are guilty of these crimes and wish to avoid wasting the Court's time prosecuting in such circumstances.”

“Motion granted. All charges against Frances Scalaro are hereby dismissed without prejudice, and the counts of Murder, Aggravated Assault, and all related Conspiracy counts against Robert D'Amico and Anthony Carmenucci are hereby dismissed without prejudice as well. At this time, in light of the change in the severity of the remaining charges, this Court can find no reason why bail should be denied to either Mr. Carmenucci or Mr. D'Amico, and I hereby order that the defendants be released immediately on their own recognizance.”

The Judge brought his gavel down and it was official. It was a huge load off the backs of all three defendants. Frank walked out of the courtroom immediately after the hearing, as he wasn't charged with any crimes whatsoever at that point. The boys had to wait a little while longer, as they still had minor charges pending, and that meant paperwork had to be prepared and signed. Still, two hours later they walked out of the courthouse. They were not yet entirely free, as there were still criminal charges hanging over their heads, but it was infinitely better than being locked up in the county jail. That was a place neither of them wanted to return to again.

CHAPTER EIGHT - FREEDOM

Frank's first official act after getting out of jail was to go home and make love to his wife Maria for two hours straight. His second was to pay Sam Ciccione a visit to learn what had happened in his absence. Even though he had gotten some news while he was in jail, there were still a lot of details that he did not know.

The meeting took nearly two hours. When it was over, Frank knew everything regarding Spinoza's demise. Good riddance, he thought. Tony was right – we should have whacked him when he stole from us. It would have saved everyone a lot of trouble.

Bridget finally worked up the nerve to tell Tony the news that had been tearing her apart since just a few days after his arrest. She had been reluctant to put the extra pressure on him while he was in jail, but now that he was out she felt that she had to. After all, there was no way she could hide the news for too long anyway. As soon as he'd been released he checked into the Edison Hotel downtown, and she had come to join him and make love. He should be in a good enough mood to take it, she thought. Bridget walked out of the bathroom and faced Tony.

“Tony, I think I'm pregnant.”

Bob retrieved the money from his parents' house at roughly the same time that Bridget broke the news of their child to be to Tony. It was all there. Of course, the attorneys were going to take a big chunk of it, about \$6,000 total, but that still left almost \$5,000 for each of them. At least they could afford to get a couple of apartments for a while until Frank gave them some jobs to do. It might be a while with all the pressure they were getting from the cops.

Special Agent Jason Harrison of the FBI's Pittsburgh office was assigned to investigate the death of Johnny Spinoza. Ordinarily, the Bureau would not have taken much of an interest in such a case. However, the fact that Spinoza had died such a brutal death just a day before he was to take the stand as the key witness in a murder case was just too coincidental to be chalked up to mere chance. Also, since the local police and prosecutors were very reluctant to look into the case for political reasons, the Bureau decided to look into it as a Federal matter. Attorney General Robert Kennedy had made organized crime investigations a top priority, and this murder, if that's what it was, was exactly the kind of case the FBI was now charged with investigating.

Harrison looked at the photographs of the crime scene, noting the position of the bodies, shell casings, blood stains, and other physical details. Let's see, he thought, blood over by the couch here, consistent with the location of the shell casings found over here. He then looked at where the shooter had to have been standing and found nothing. No blood. That's strange, he thought. He then turned to the coroner's report on Simons, the victim killed by gunshot wounds. The report showed that the victim had, with no doubt whatsoever, been shot three times in the back with a large caliber handgun, and that he died within seconds, as one of the slugs had torn

directly through his spinal cord and heart before exiting the front of his chest.

If Spinoza had been cut and acting in self-defense, and he fired from here, Harrison tapped a location near the door with his finger, then why was there no blood on the floor? And even if he crawled to here, he traced a line from the door to where Spinoza's body had been found, there should be a pretty nasty trail of blood. He leaned back in his chair and called out to his partner.

“Hey, Bill, come check this out.”

Special Agent Bill Nelson reviewed Harrison's work and came to exactly the same conclusion as he had. It was time to officially open an investigation into the murder of John Spinoza and Jack Kaminski. Both agents knew the two had been murdered, and that it more likely than not was related to the murder of Carmine Carbone. Now came the hard part – finding out who did it and prosecuting them. While the agents knew it would not be an easy task, neither of them realized just how difficult it would be either.

The news hit Tony like nothing he had ever heard. A baby? The thought overloaded his already stressed brain and left him unable to respond for nearly fifteen seconds. It wasn't a bad thing, he thought.

“Are... are you sure?” he stammered.

“Yeah. I'm sure.”

Tony looked at Bridget. We're having a baby, went through his mind for the thousandth time that second. She looked so beautiful, but afraid. Tony felt a wave of emotion sweep through his entire body. He reached out, took her hand and pulled her close. The hug seemed to last forever.

Tony and Bob had proven themselves to Frank like nobody ever had. First, they had killed for him, and then kept quiet even as the cops tried to beat information out of them. Added to this was the fact that they were smart and proud. The combination told Frank that these two kids were natural-born gangsters, and he hoped very much to one day have them made full-fledged members of the Family.

However, such thoughts were for the future. Frank's immediate problem was coming up with a business plan that would generate cash flow. He couldn't risk the stolen car business so soon after getting out of jail, as he knew the local police and probably also the FBI would be watching him very closely for some time to come. The way the cops had raided Spinoza's place, and the fact that the proprietor was now quite dead, meant that Tony and Bob's little prostitution business was pretty much a dead deal as well.