

## DEBTS AND DUES

By: Jake Ott

### I.

An old blue Chevrolet sat in the parking lot of one of the many abandoned apartment buildings in Newark. It was the only car within sight, and the exhaust filled the parking lot with smoke, like it often does on cold winter mornings. The inside of the car was also filled with clouds from Janzen's breath. Janzen looked down at his watch which was now foggy from his breath too.

"Where the fuck is he already? That son of a bitch said that he'd be here at four forty-five on the dot. I should'a known it was bullshit." Just as Janzen shifted his car into gear, he saw a set of headlights emerge at the end of the road. "That better be him." He parked the car again.

As the headlights got closer and closer, Janzen knew something was wrong. The vehicle behind the headlights was a big white van, not the silver four-door Ford Taurus that Janzen had been expecting.

"What the fuck is this?" Janzen reached under his seat, pulled out a small snub-nosed revolver, and as he got out of the car, tucked it into his waistband. He stood in front of his car trying to look confident, trying not to look as scared as he actually was.

The van's passenger window rolled down. "Janz! What's a good-looking guy like you doing in a shitty dump like this?" He was trying to be charming, and it wasn't working.

"What the fuck's going on here, Schmidt? You said you'd be here at four-forty-five. It's five. You said you'd be in the Silver Taurus, and this don't look like no silver fucking Taurus. You know, I'm ready to say fuck this whole job and leave here now."

Schmidt jumped out of the van. "Whoa whoa whoa. Ease up man. Things didn't go as planned. We just had to do what we could."

"You also said you'd be alone, and it looks like someone else drove you here. Was I not clear enough when I said that no one, except you, is ever supposed to see my face?"

"Janz, Janz, it's fine. He's fine. The big guy wouldn't let me come without backup."

“Well, I don’t work for the big guy, and I don’t have to play by his stupid fucking rules. I’m out of here. This whole thing is already too fucked up for me to be taking so much risk. I don’t know this fucking guy. He could be an undercover. They say they’ve got more undercovers in this city than they got real cops. I’m out of here, Schmidt. Good luck with your thing.”

Schmidt threw himself in front of Janzen’s car door. “Come on man. Trust me. He ain’t no undercover. I know this guy. I’ve had dinner at his mother’s house. She made lasagna and prosciutto. I sat on their brown shag carpet and played Mario Cart with his kid brother. He’s cool.”

“I don’t give a fuck, Jimmy,” Janzen said. “Now get out of my way. I’m starting to feel nervous, you not letting me leave and all.”

“I’m not trying to stop you. Just...” Schmidt paused for a moment, and the false charm drained from his face. “Listen, I told the big guy about what you could do. I mean, I really played you up like a pro and whatnot. I can’t go back empty handed. Ever since we got out, you and I, I ain’t really been able to carry my weight the way I could before I got locked up. But then when this thing with you started falling into place, suddenly the big guy started taking notice, started buying me drinks, giving me more work. If it falls through, I don’t know what I’ll look like.”

“Sad story, Schmidt, but it’s not my problem. I told you, I haven’t worked since we got out, and this was a one-time job for a friend, but I’m not playing this fast and loose. Next time, when someone says be here, be here ten minutes early, in the right car, and alone. Now, get the fuck out of my way. I’m out of here.”

“Come one, Janz. I don’t wanna do this, but you kinda owe me. Think’a all those times I saved your ass inside. Every time that I coulda just let some big mook fuck you up or even just fuck you. Did I ever give you this shit? Did I ever pull this ‘not my problem’ bullshit? Come on, whatever happened to paying your debts. What about that?”

Janzen looked at Schmidt for a long moment with a dead face. “Fuck. Fine. What’s the fucking job?”

“I knew you would.” Schmidt jabbed Janz in the arm and put back on his “charming” face. “The big guy’ll tell you all about it back at the shop. Hop in the van.”

“You’re either gonna get me killed or arrested, aren’t you?”

“Nah.” Schmidt waved away the idea with a swipe of his hand through the air. “You’re gonna be fine. You’re my guy.”

So, Janzen climbed into the van, eyeballed the driver, who didn’t look or say anything. Janzen figured he had heard their discussion about him and his family.

“Back to the big guy’s place, fast as this piece of trash can go.” Schmidt drummed his hands on the dashboard with excitement.

“No, drive the fucking speed limit. I’m not getting clipped with a couple known felons for speeding. We’re still on parole, dumbass.”

## II.

The sun heated the Atlantic City Boardwalk melting ice cream cones and turning pale skin to a toasty red. A bench overlooking the Atlantic Ocean was being painted by a man dressed in a pair of white painter's overalls and a white baseball cap. The man had steely blue eyes that felt icy cold as they darted back and forth. His slightly shaggy black hair tumbled out from under the baseball hat.

The painter dipped a paintbrush into a can of white paint and made another streak on the bench. He was obviously preoccupied. There is plenty to preoccupy a young man like him on the Atlantic City Boardwalk. Pretty girls in tiny bikinis. Loud vendors pushing hotdogs and pretzels. Performing street artists barking at tourists. So, the casual passerby might mistake his distraction as the distraction of a young man with other things on his mind. The casual passerby would be wrong though. Under the hat and behind the blue eyes was the mind of a mature, disciplined man, and more importantly an agent. Charlie had worked as an undercover for a few years and felt like he was an old hand. Today was a simple detail. Just a simple observe and report mission. He had his target and his instructions. He liked the certainty behind this type of a job.

Charlie was looking at everyone passing on the boardwalk, until he saw a thin man with rimless glasses buying a hotdog from one of the street vendors. When Charlie saw the thin man, he suddenly became more interested in the bench he was painting. Charlie still occasionally looked up to track the thin man.

He stopped, took out his phone, and typed a text message to a contact in his phone labeled Home Base. This was his Comm Team. They scoped out the area from a remote location to make sure Calabrese was alone.

"Eyes on Skinny."

He put the phone back into his pocket and returned to his painting.

The skinny man in the rimless glasses slowly made his way toward the handrail at the water's edge of the boardwalk. A kid riding a tricycle with a balloon tied to the handlebar was riding in circles and rolled in front of the skinny man, rolling his front wheel over the man's shoes.

"I'm so sorry." The child's mother rushed over to the thin man. "Michael, apologize to the nice man for running him over with your trike."

"I'm sorry." The kid's face began to get red and droopy warning about an incoming fit of tears.

"Oh, no, no, no. It's okay, buddy," the thin man said. "Hey you, over there." The man signaled to a balloon vendor across the boardwalk. "Give me those balloons." The vendor approached with his bouquet of floating colors.

"How many balloons you want mister?" The vendor asked.

"Didn't you hear me? Give me all of 'em." The thin man pulled out a wad of twenties and peeled a hand-full off the top.

"Sure thing, buddy." The vendor suddenly perked up as he handed over the balloons.

The thin man turned back to the kid on the trike and tied the entire set of balloons onto the kid's handlebars.

"See there, kido. It's okay. We're like friends. No harm," said the thin man.

The kid's face morphed from nearly crying to amazement at the balloons, and finally to a giggling smile at the pile of balloons blocking his view of the road. The kid's mother thanked the thin man, but he just waved her away and told her to enjoy the time with her son.

The thin man walked to the boardwalk's railing and looked out over the ocean, as if he were biding his time. Then, Charlie's phone vibrated inside his overalls. He pulled it out and read the text message silently to himself.

"Make contact," it read.

Charlie, who had considered himself a pro moments earlier, began to sweat like a cold glass of water on a hot day. His last job had gotten hairy to say the least, but orders were orders.

“Nice thing ya’ did there.” The thin man looked at Charlie as if he were being disturbed. “You know giving him the balloons and all.”

The thin man looked back out at the New York skyline on the horizon.

“You gotta be good to your people. That’s something you kids have forgotten. You’re all so distracted by taking pictures of yourselves and all those assholes on the internet that you don’t pay attention to the people around you like you need to. You know, when they finally pinned one on Gotti his whole borough rioted out front of the courthouse. That’s the way it should be.”

“You know I met the guy once... Gotti. Me and my girl were at a Cracker Barrel off the turnpike, you know, workin’ off a hangover, and, BAM, in walks Gotti and two guys. When you see a guy like that, you try not to stare, but it’s like seeing a lion in the wild. You’re terrified, but also curious, you know?”

The thin man was now listening to Charlie, with amusement. “Gotti in a fucking Cracker Barrel? Get out of here with that bullshit.”

“No, I swear it.” Charlie laughed as he told the story. “The hostess said that he loves the place. Goes there three times a week like clockwork.” The thin man was still shaking his head in disbelief. “Look, I was as surprised as you are mister, but that’s what the lady told us.”

“I believe you, son.” It’s just hard to picture the dapper don surrounded by Amish rocking chairs and oversized checker boards.”

“You ever meet Gotti?” Charlie asked.

The thin man, who had started warming up to Charlie, got out a cigarette and lit it. He spoke without looking at Charlie. “No, never. How long you been painting benches for the city, kid?”

“Not long.” Charlie kept mindlessly brushing white paint onto the same spot as he talked. “Just started painting. I was on roadkill duty for the last two months. Then, this came up. It’s been a dream job compared to that. The occasional group of Bettys will walk by on their way to the beach. Nice breeze coming in off the water. Can’t beat it.”

“Oh, it can be beaten,” the thin man said. “Imagine a job where you do anything you want, anytime you want. I mean it, anything. So long as you do what your boss says, when he says it.”

“Isn't that basically any job?” Charlie asked.

“If those Bettys come walking by, can you go get your prick sucked if you want?”

“No. I gotta stay with the paint can,” Charlie said.

“My point.” The thin man reached into his pocket and pulled out a business card. He wrote the name Malone on the back and a phone number underneath it. “Take this card. If you ever need a better line of work give it a call. Tell Jerry you met me at the boardwalk, and I told you there was some work for you.”

Charlie took the card and looked at it like it was the last golden ticket to the chocolate factory.

“Would that be one of those ‘do anything you want’ type of jobs?”

“Not yet.” The thin man smiled. “But it’s the first step in that direction.” The thin man looked at his watch. “Looks like it’s my time to go. Call that number, will ya’?”

“Yeah, I will, Mr...”

“Tom Calabrese.” Tom turned around and walked down the boardwalk until Charlie lost sight of him. Charlie painted until Tom disappeared. Then, he took his phone back out and sent a message.

“Contact made.”

### III.

Manhattan is the noisiest place on planet Earth to have a conversation with another person. Which is exactly why Nicki Calabrese decided to meet there. He didn't know who he was meeting, he was told that he would know them when he saw them. So, he took a seat at a table in the middle of Time Square and waited.

His uncle had given him a package. Nicki wanted to know what was inside the package but was forbidden from looking. On the drive into the city, he felt up the package like it was his first girlfriend. He was pretty sure it was money or drugs. His uncle had a deadly serious policy concerning drugs. Don't do them, don't sell them, don't even look at someone who sells them. So, Nicki bet seven-to-one that it was a thick wad of cash.

An old lady came up to Nicki's table. "Do you mind if I share this seat with you?" she asked.

"No. Sorry lady, but I'm meeting someone." Nicki propped his feet on the other chair and looked at her with the passionate anger that the youth holds against the aged. Nicki was just barely twenty years old, and he was itching for any type of excitement or confrontation.

"Yeah, you're meeting me, you little shit." She knocked his feet off the chair and sat down. "Didn't your uncle tell you?"

"No." Nicki stared at his shoes, ashamed. "Sorry, he didn't tell me who. He just said I'd be meeting someone, and I'd know them when I saw them?"

"You don't remember me?" She lit a cigarette and blew the smoke into his face. "Great Aunt Missy? You met me at your uncle's wedding?" she said.

"Nah, I was six, I don't remember any of that other than my cousin Sal sneaking me a beer," he said.

"Yeah, you were sloppy drunk for a kid." She blew another breath of smoke in his direction. "So, where is it?"

Nicki took the manilla envelope out of his coat and stuffed it into the open purse on the table.

“Good boy,” she said. “But you ever put your hand in my purse again and I’ll cut it off.”

“So, how’re your guys doing? What you guys into?”

Missy looked at him with one eyebrow raised and blew a mouthful of smoke straight up into the air above her. “Your uncle straighten you out yet?” she asked.

“No, I think I’m ready, guys have made bones without half the work I’ve done, but he says that I gotta earn it twice, seeing as how I’m his nephew. He doesn’t want anyone to say it wasn’t earned.”

“That uncle of yours is sharper than a Sunday suit. You listen to him, and you’ll make it through,” she said.

“Yeah, I’m just ready though. You know?”

“No, you’re not. You just think you’re ready. Your uncle will tell you when you’re really ready, and it’ll mean more if you have to wait for it.”

“I know. He keeps saying that making guys quick is what led to the whole clamp down, The Commission trial, and all that.” Nicki stood up. “Well, I gotta get uptown before this fucking guy’s shop closes. It was real good seeing you Aunt Missy.”

Before Nicki could turn around and walk away, a big dumb touristy looking guy wearing a Colorado State shirt came up to Missy with a camera in hand. “Would you take a picture of me and my daughter?”

“No.” Missy swatted him away with her hand. “Get the fuck away from me.”

The man turned and started to walk away, but he whirled back around to face Missy with a Smith and Wesson .38 Special. He fired twice at Missy’s head. The first shot hit her point blank above her left eye. Her head recoiled back, so that the second shot missed her head.

Before the first shot rang out, Nicki had already pulled out his piece and started firing into the guy with the Colorado State shirt. He shot him in the stomach until his revolver’s hammer started making a clicking noise instead of the echoing claps of fire.

He looked down at his Great Aunt Missy who was missing a significant piece of her skull. This wasn't the first time that Nicki had seen brain matter, but he had never seen so much of it still intact. It looked as if the bullet had peeled away her skin, muscle, and skull bone, without touching her brain. If it had been in a movie, Nicki would have said that the special effects looked fake, but there were no special effects.

Nicki grabbed the envelope out of Missy's purse and ran. He put the empty gun into his waistband for the time being. Once he got a few blocks north, he hailed a cab to the Hudson. When he got there, he hopped out of the cab, tossed the gun in the river, and told the cabbie to head to New Jersey. He wanted his uncle to get the news from him, not from some shit eating FBI agent or slimy newspaper reporter.

#### IV.

“Big guy! Look at you. You look so fucking good today. What have you been doing? Lifting weights or does the missus got you on Atkins or something?” Schmidt was trying to charm Tom Calabrese, or as he liked to call Tom, the big guy.

Tom didn’t hesitate to shut down the false praise. “Tone it the fuck down. Will ya, Jimmy?” Tom looked at Janzen for a long moment, sizing him up. “Jimmy says you know your bugs. Is that true...Jason, right?”

“Janzen,” Janzen said, “and yeah, I know them. I’ve been out of the business for the last few years though.”

“Why? What have you been doing instead?” Mr. Calabrese stared at Janzen like he had just admitted to being an undercover cop.

“Well, I was in Northern State for three years, up until nine months ago. Since then, I’ve been keeping my nose out of the business. This is sort of a one-time thing for me.”

“No, it’s not. If you do this job you’ll be working for me 24/7, and you’ll be available for more jobs just like this, anytime I need in the future,” Calabrese said.

“With all due respect, Mr. Calabrese—” Calabrese cut Janzen off immediately.

“Fuck any respect you think I’m due.” Tom stood up, walked out from behind his desk, and sat on the front of it, so that he was closer to Janzen and Schmidt. “If you’re as good at this stuff as Jimmy thinks you are, all I want is a number for you. A fucking price tag. Because, once we start talking about this job, you’re either my guy or you’re not.”

This put more fear in Jimmy Schmidt’s face than in Janzen’s. Jimmy knew that if Janz turned out to be anything other than a polite and helpful friend, Jimmy would be in just as much trouble as Janzen.

“Come on, Mr. Calabrese,” Jimmy said. “He’s my guy. I’m your guy. So, he’s basically your guy. You can trust him. Right, Janz?”

“Yeah, you can trust me. Not cause I’m Schmidt’s trained mutt or something. You can, cause I’d get worse for whatever we’re doing than you, sir. You got lawyers and cash to blow on your freedom. Anything goes south, I’m stuck with a public defender fighting my third felony, which I’ll be committing while I’m still on fucking parole.”

“Okay, sounds like you’re the guy,” Tom said. “So, then. Price tag?”

Tom agreed that he’d pay ten grand for the initial job. Then, another five grand anytime Janzen had to go back in to adjust where mics were or to add bugs. In addition, he’d get two grand a month, every month that Mr. Calabrese wanted him on call.

Once this agreement was met, Mr. Calabrese went over to a chair, stood on it, and reached into the ceiling tiles. He retrieved a stack of money six inches tall, split it in half, and handed the rest to Janzen.

“This should cover the first job, a couple adjustments, and your monthly payments for the next year,” Calabrese said. “Only rule is this: you two do nothing. You watch. You listen. That’s it. Capisce?”

Janzen’s eyes magnified at the sight of the money. He had been working at a lumber yard since he got out. Working long hours, doing hard work, getting paid shit. This was a life changer.

“I’m your guy,” Janzen said. “So, where are they going?”

The next day, Janzen and Schmidt were walking into St. Michael’s Hospital dressed in scrubs.

“You know, I don’t like being dressed like some puffy murse, like this?” Schmidt said.

“What the fuck is a murse?” Janzen didn’t look at Schmidt when he talked. He looked straight ahead of the cart he was pushing, which had a television set sitting atop it.

“You know, a murse. A guy that’s a nurse, it’s like the words male and nurse pushed together,” Schmidt said.

“Clever. You just come up with that?”

“What? No. That’s like a thing. People been saying it for years.”

“Huh. I never heard it before,” Janzen said. “So, third floor, room 308.”

They pushed the elevator button and went up to the third floor, where they found a police officer standing outside room 308.

The sight of a badge and a blue uniform was enough to make Janzen turn around. Before he could get the cart turned around, Schmidt grabbed it and spoke softly to Janzen.

"It's okay. Why the fuck do you think the big guy paid you so much for the job?"

"No one told me he was under police protection," Janzen said. "What if he finds the bugs?"

"He won't." Jimmy looked over at the cop, then back at Janzen. "Look, they're already hidden inside the new TV and that stuff, right?"

"Yeah."

"Then, the only way he'll find them is if he smashes the stuff to pieces. You think a beat cop is going to start breaking a repairman's shit? I don't think so."

"Yeah, I guess you're right." Janzen took a deep breath and thought about the stack of money he had already been given. "Alright, let's go."

They pushed the cart up to room 308 where the officer was standing. His badge said Officer T. Manford. He had a regulation weapon on his waist and a regulation haircut on his head. The stare he shot at Schmidt and Janzen seemed to say, *I know what you two are up to, and the second I can I'm going to bust your asses*, but when he spoke, they got a different vibe.

"Hey there guys." A Latina nurse with a figure that was more plump than shapely walked by and the cop's head followed her halfway down the hall until he almost fell flat on his face. "Jesus almighty. Can you imagine the things you could do to an ass like that?"

"I got some ideas involving Vaseline, peanut butter, and a whole lotta ludes," Jimmy said.

"We're here to replace the TV," Janzen said.

Officer Manford opened the doors on the cart they were pushing and looked around inside for a second. "You giving the big celebrity a new TV so he can see himself in high definition?"

“Nah,” Janzen said “This place isn’t the ritz ya know. We’re getting rid of the old TVs one at a time. Every month we get a few new ones and replace what we can. We didn’t even know this guy was on TV. What is he a sitcom star or something?”

“No,” Officer Manford said, “I can’t believe you haven’t heard about this guy. He’s all on the news and in the paper. He just woke up out of a coma. Sixteen years. Can you imagine? His daughter was five years old one day. A couple of wanna be wise guys try to clip him. Next thing he knows, he’s waking up with a hell of a headache, a wife married to another guy, and a twenty-one-year-old daughter.”

“For fucks sake,” Jimmy said. “Poor sap.”

“Yeah, but, you know, maybe some TV will cheer him up,” Janzen said.

“Good luck.” Manford was distracted as the same Latina nurse walked past him going the other way. “All day I have to put up with this fucking temptress.” Officer Manford stepped out of the way and let Janzen and Schmidt enter room 308.

It was a standard hospital room. It smelled like sanitizer, yet it felt infected with filth at the same time. A woman in scrubs was leaning over the patient in the bed. She was portly and completely obstructed Janzen’s view of the patient. As the acres of purple scrubs pulled back like the curtain at some sinister freak show, they saw their target. It was the man they were instructed to monitor.

“This the only patient in this room?” Jimmy asked out of confusion.

The man in the bed was supposedly out of a coma, but the two career criminals couldn’t tell by looking at him. As far as they could tell he was still comatose. It was a man in his late-fifties, maybe early-sixties, who had the typical pale complexion that long term hospital patients have. There was a prominent stream of drool flowing from the side of his mouth down his chin and pooling up on the breast of his hospital gown. He only moved in occasional jerks one way or another.

“Mr. Granzen do you need any pain medicine?” the purple mass of hospital scrubs said to the patient.

“Gauhum....gau...gau...” Mr. Granzen responded with a series of guttural grunts and gasps. It was all unintelligible to Janzen and Schmidt.

“Hi, ma’am,” Janzen said. “Were putting a new TV in this room.”

“Jesus Christ,” Jimmy said. “Is that all the noise this fucking guy can make?”

“Yeah, Mr. Granzen was in a coma for sixteen years. All of his muscles have atrophied. Which means that they got weak. That includes his vocal cords and even his tongue, but we’re getting better. Every day he does hours of physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy...” she said.

Mr. Granzen reached over and knocked his glass of water over onto the floor where she was standing. Janzen and Jimmy laughed.

“Looks like he got enough muscle back to tell you he doesn’t like your physical therapy,” Jimmy said.

Janzen was already standing on a chair unplugging the old TV.

“Hey, take this old one.” Janzen handed Jimmy the hospital’s TV. “And give me the new one.” Jimmy handed him the new TV which Janzen had already installed with three recording devices. Janzen plugged in the TV and hopped off the chair.

“Alright, Mr. Granzen.” Janzen walked over to the drooling patient. “Here’s your new remote.” The remote was the part of this job that Janzen was the proudest about. There was, of course, a camera with a live video feed inside of the television set, but Janzen had the idea of putting two recording devices in the TV’s remote too. It’d always be closer to Mr. Granzen and because of that it’d pick up his voice a lot better. His only concern was power. The bugs in the TV would draw their power from the wall, like the TV. No problem. But the mics in the remote would have to drain the batteries in the remote, and he was secretly concerned that if the remote was constantly dying it might draw some attention to it. He wasn’t going to share this concern until it became a real problem though. “Now, Mr. Granzen these new remotes drain the batteries a little more. So, if it’s not working, you just tell your nurse here to replace the batteries for you.”

“Yeah, you tell your nurse to replace the batteries,” The lady in purple scrubs said. “Just don’t tell me, cause I’m your doctor, not your nurse.”

Janzen and Jimmy suppressed their laughter and left the room. When they got back out of the hospital Schmidt took out a crappy cell phone, one that he’d probably throw away before the night was over, and called Two-Tone Malone, Calabrese’s underboss and old driver.

“Hey there.” Jimmy listened. “Yeah, yeah, it’s done, but I don’t know if the big guy knows that this fuck can’t even talk, so the mics ain’t gonna do no good.” He listened again. “Okay, yeah, just let me know.”

“So, we done here?” Janzen asked.

“For today, we’re done.”

## V.

“Yeah, is he?” Charlie held a phone close to his ear and paced back and forth in front of the FBI’s Newark office. “That’s great. I know.” He listened. “Yeah, I said I know, babe.” He listened again. “Okay, look, I gotta go. I’ve got a meeting in five minutes and I still gotta get upstairs.”

Charlie went into the federal building. It was clearly more expensive than any of the local government buildings where he and the state police worked. He stood in the elevator, watching the numbers light up as the elevator car climbed up to the nineteenth floor. As the elevator rose, he tried to be happy about today. All he had ever wanted to be was an undercover investigator. To him, it was the best thing anyone could aspire to become. Not only did he get to protect the city, but he also got to be a criminal, in a way.

He had never gotten a job like this before, though. He had done a couple undercover drug and gun buys. He did one operation where he went under with some cops that were taking bribes. Now, he was being called up to the majors. The mob. The Federal Bureau. It was like a movie he would have watched as a kid.

Only a few select agents had ever gone undercover in the major New York crime families. The most known agent was Joe Pistone. The Bonannos were ready to make Agent Pistone a made guy by the end of his operation. After that, the mob got a bit more secretive, more cautious. A handful of undercover agents had disappeared since the Pistone infiltration. Charlie had heard that the Bureau quit putting undercover agents inside the families after the fifth agent disappeared. Without undercover agents, the investigation against the families was essentially nonexistent, other than a cork board with pictures pinned to it.

This is why Charlie volunteered to head up the Organized Crime division for the city police. If he actually went undercover, he would have to ditch the rest of his team at the city police. With a group that big someone was bound to have a mob connection. He had to do this on his own. So, he personally took the initiative of dressing up like a municipal bench painter on the boardwalk. He had put himself in the

vicinity of Tom Calabrese a few other times, but never got the opportunity to make contact. Now, he not only made contact, but he got an invite to do some work. He only needed the Federal Bureau's approval... and budget. Tom Calabrese, even though technically the boss of the biggest family in New York, lived in New Jersey, which created all sorts of jurisdictional problems for any state investigator like Charlie, since the investigation would cross state lines countless times. While this was possible, it would require a lot more legal maneuvering, and if one thing was done wrong, Calabrese's team of attorneys would tear apart any arrest. Charlie needed federal approval to go any further.

He got off at the nineteenth floor and followed the signs to room 1936. He knocked and was invited to enter by a receptionist.

"Hi, I'm supposed to be meeting with agent," Charlie pulled a business card out of his pocket and tried to read the name Caoilfhionn, "Cow-Cow-il-hine?"

The receptionist, Clark, stopped him, already knowing who he was there to meet. "It's pronounced like Kay-Lynn, but most people call her Agent Koi, you know like the fish." Clark was an Asian American kid about five years younger than Charlie, wearing glasses with thick black rims and a button up short sleeve shirt.

"Why does everyone call her that?" Charlie asked.

"I don't know," he said. "You'll have to ask her that. She knows you're here. She'll be out in a minute."

Charlie sat down in the waiting room and waited. He picked up one of the Business Week magazines and flipped through the pages pretending to read it. Finally, Agent Koi came out and called him into her office.

"So, Charlie, what's going on? You said you had some information on the Genoveses for me?" Agent Koi sat down behind her desk and waved a hand inviting him to sit down across from her.

"Well, not really any information yet, I just need your approval on something," Charlie said.

“Of course,” she said. “When you state guys come in here it’s always quid, but no pro quo. Well, what the fuck do you need Charlie.”

He reached into his pocket and removed the business card that Tom Calabrese had given to him. He turned it over in his hands. “I’ve got an in with Tom Calabrese. I want to go inside his family, deep inside.”

Agent Koi immediately lost interest in what he was saying. “No.” She started filling out paperwork on her desk, as if she were ignoring him now. Without looking up. “No, you’ll get killed. Wouldn’t want your perfect wife to lose you now.” She had done some digging into Charlie.

“But I already made contact with him,” he said. “Tom Calabrese himself invited me to come do some work for one of his guys. You see, this is his fucking handwriting, right here.”

“Charlie, are you listening to me? They will figure out who you are and put a bullet in your head. We don’t let agents go inside the five families anymore.”

“So what? We’re just going to let these wise guys go unchecked?”

“Of course not.” She still wasn’t looking up at him. “We have more undercovers than ever, but we just don’t put them inside the mob anymore. I mean, are you serious? You know the first thing they’ll ask you to do? Kill someone. Because they know that it’s the one thing an undercover can’t do. Then, your whole cover’s blown.”

Charlie thought for a moment. She was right. Several agents that had tried to infiltrate the families since the Pistone infiltration had been asked to kill for the family right away. The wise guys got wise and figured out that no federal agent could kill anyone, even when undercover.

“Couldn’t we set something up? Like a movie, you know? How about we make it look like I shoot someone before they even ask me to do it? Then, they’ll feel like they can trust me right off the bat.”

Agent Koi looked up at him for a long moment with a serious stare. “I don’t know, Charlie. It’s an idea.”

“Come on, I can do this,” Charlie said.

She let out a deep exhale of coffee breath that wafted over the desk into Charlie’s personal space. “Fine. Go ahead, but you report to me, and me alone. I’ll send a transfer order to your superiors. They’ll think that you’re moving to another state while this operation goes on. I expect you to be here in my office once a week, every week. You understand?”

Charlie nodded his head and tried to hide his smile. “Thank you, we’re going to get this done.”

“Don’t get me wrong Charlie. I’m only giving you permission because if I don’t you’ll go under by yourself without any agency support,” she said. “I still think you’re going to get yourself killed, though.”

## VI.

Tom and Lisa clinked their glasses together and toasted to another year together. It was their fifteenth anniversary. A landmark in any marriage. They had pawned their two kids off on Lisa's grandparents, so that they could have the night to themselves.

"Tell me how we met," Lisa said.

"What? You don't remember all of a sudden?" Tom asked.

"No. I remember. I just like hearing you tell it."

"Okay," he said. "One day when I was..." he acted like he was counting on his fingers. "Oh, about seventeen years younger, I went to the boardwalk with some guys to visit a friend of mine. Your father. We had some business with his souvenir shop. But the second I walked in I saw an absolute paramour behind the counter." Lisa laughed, pleased with this part. "When I asked her where her father was, this little spitfire of a beauty stared straight through me and said, 'What? Tough guy like you afraid to deal with a strong woman?' And that was it. I fell in love."

"See, that's a good story," she said.

"It's not half bad." Tom took another sip of champagne.

"I better check on the pansotti in the oven." She turned back when she got to the kitchen door.

"Stay in this good of a mood all night. Okay, hun?"

Tom chuckled. "I'll try." He walked over and gave her a tender kiss. She walked into the kitchen.

Tom took out a cell phone and dialed Two-tone Malone's phone number.

"Malone? Everything go okay?" He listened. "What do you mean there's no sound? The mics don't work?" He listened. "He can't talk? Why not?" He listened. "Oh for fucksake. How long will it take for him to learn to talk again?" He listened. "You don't know?" He whispered, but his anger betrayed the muted volume of his voice. "How about you find someone who does know and call me back. God damn it." He thought for a moment. "Wait, no don't call me back. Not tonight at least. It's my night with Lisa. Just figure it out, and I'll touch base with you tomorrow."

Lisa came back into the living room with a board of cheese and meat. She came in just in time to see his phone go back into his pocket. “Now, I thought we said no phones tonight, Tom.”

“I know,” he said. “But it was kind of an emergency.”

“I’ll let that one slide.” She smirked at him. “But one more time and I might just whack you.”

“If I’m lucky.” Tom grabbed her waist and pulled her close for a long, deep kiss.

Their kiss only gave them a brief moment of romance before they were interrupted by a banging on the door. Tom’s first instinct in response to such a loud bang, bang, banging on his door was to think ‘cops.’ When he tiptoed over to the door and looked through the peephole, he saw the distorted magnification of Nicki his nephew and soldier.

“God damn it.” He turned to his wife. “It’s fucking Nicki. Why the fuck would he be here?”

“Nicki?” Lisa said. “Well let him in.”

Tom opened the door and Nicki rushed inside speaking a million miles a minute. “Tom. Tom. Tom. They clipped Missy right in front of me. I didn’t know what to do. I gave her the package, but this big fucking guy just asked for a picture. I didn’t even think, but her brain was out, and I dropped my piece in the Hudson. This fucking tourist. Can you believe it. It’s just right there, time square and all.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” Tom put his hands on Nicki’s shoulders and looked him straight in the eyes. “Calm down for a second. I can’t understand you when you’re rambling like this.”

“What happened to Missy?” Lisa asked.

“Yeah, so take me through this. What happened? Some guy clipped Missy?”

Nicki walked them through the series of events step by step. “...and I had the cab drop me off at the gas station on the corner, so I could walk here.”

“Oh my god.” Lisa was crying. “Aunt Missy. Who would want to kill her?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll find out. Nicki, I need you to call everyone. We’re having a family meeting at that warehouse we got from the mick. The one on the harbor. Tell everyone to be there now. I don’t

care if they're in the middle of nutting. I want them to stop whatever they're doing and get to the warehouse."

"Okay, Tom. I'll let the guys know," Nicki said.

"Hey Nicki," Tom said, "you did good here. You know?"

"Yeah, thanks."

Tom had one more thing to deal with, Lisa. He let Nicki out of the house. When he turned, Lisa was sitting on the couch staring off into empty space. Tom went and took the spot next to her.

"You okay?" He rubbed the nape of her neck with his hand. "What am I saying. Of course you're not. Someone you love just got murdered. What kind of lowlife piece of shit would do a thing like this?"

She looked at him, with a less than loving look, and he got the point. Who would do something like this? Tom would. In fact, Tom had certainly killed countless aunts and uncles. Not to mention, the aunts and uncles Tom had ordered to be killed.

"We're going to find this fucking guy, and whoever was behind it. I swear, Lisa."

Lisa's cellphone in the kitchen began to ring. "I better get that," she said. "It could be the family finding out about this. God, her kids are going to be devastated."

She went to the kitchen and Tom could hear the muffled sound of her talking. He started getting ready to leave for the warehouse. There was a sculpture of two kids holding hands while jumping rope. He picked up the sculpture and unscrewed the bottom of it. He took out a gun and a handful of rolled up hundred-dollar bills. After he threw on his jacket, Lisa rushed back into the room. She looked distressed.

"Missy's in the hospital. She's still alive."

"Thank god," Tom said. "Of course they couldn't kill that old warhorse. Come on, we'll go to the hospital."

"No," she said. "I'll go to the hospital. You go to the warehouse and get to work."

## VII.

Walking out of a Starbucks in Midtown, she dropped her change into a beggar's cup.

“Hey, guuurl.” Janet paid no attention to the homeless guy with the coffee cup full of change yelling at her. “Why don’t ya bring that thang over here?” She kept walking. “Stuck up bitch.” He started counting the change she’d added to his cup, but Janet had already stopped walking away from him.

She came back and stood over him. He looked up at her, not sure if she was going to kick him or take him up on his erotic offer. She bent over, getting his hopes up, but she simply plucked her change back out of his cup.

“What the fuck lady?”

“At least I’m a lady now, and not a guuurl.” She mocked him.

She went uptown to see her dad in the hospital for what felt like the first time ever. She remembered vague scenes of him from when she was five and six. Other than those memories, she only ever knew her father as a lifeless body. They’d visited with her mother a lot in the first few years, but as a year turned into five, they came to see her father less and less. Part of her felt guilty for that. The other part of her resented him for not being there.

She walked into the hospital and took the elevator up to his room. While she waited for the elevator to rise. She imagined what she’d say, and she feared what he’d say. What if he was conscious the whole time? Some coma patients are aware of their surroundings even though they can’t move. What if he was one of those? Her father would probably be just as upset with her as she was with him. Suddenly, the walls of the elevator seemed to close in on her. Her chest got heavy, and she felt as if her skin was too tight. She tried to take a few deep breaths, but she had trouble getting enough air. Her heart was starting to race like she was jogging. Just as she felt like she was going to faint, the elevator doors opened.

She saw Charlie standing on the other side of the open doors. To her he was just a young police officer in uniform guarding her father’s room. When he saw her about to collapse, he rushed into the elevator to catch her. “Careful ma’am. Let’s get you a seat.” She stuck out her palm, stopping him.

“I’m okay. I was just having a panic attack.” She reached into her purse took out a prescription bottle and took a pill from it. “See all better, Officer...” She squinted to read his badge, “Charlie Shermer.”

“Okay.” Charlie looked at her suspiciously.

What she had just taken was a breath mint. She kept a prescription bottle full of breath mints to convince those around her that she was treating her recurring panic attacks with medication. In reality, she’d refused to ever try them. She hated her little episodes, but she didn’t feel right getting rid of them, as though she would wash out a part of herself if she did. This trick worked on most people, but most people weren’t experts in identifying prescription medication by sight. Charlie was just such an expert. He didn’t say anything though.

“What room are you looking for? I can point you in the right direction,” he asked.

“Oh, yes... that.” She took a deep breath. “I’m here to see my dad... in there.” She pointed at the room behind Charlie. Charlie looked half-confused for a moment, then put the pieces together.

“You’re the daughter?” His demeanor suddenly became much less casual, and he stood up at attention. “Your dad’s such a hero of mine. The work he did on the five families is the reason I became a cop in the first place. He’s a legend. I’ve been trying to get someone to switch shifts with me all week so I could guard his room.” He paused. “Look at me. I’m blathering on, keeping you from seeing your dad for the first time in forever. I’m so sorry. Go ahead.” He stepped out of the way.

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye. “No, you’re fine. It’s good to remember how amazing he was at one time.”

“The things that Jack Granzen did for this city will always make him amazing to me.” Charlie sat down and went back to his newspaper.

Janet went into her father’s room. He was lying there unconscious, just like he’d been for most of her life. She looked around the room, searching for anyone else. The room was big enough for two hospital beds, but her father had been given the entire room to himself for his recovery. The walls were

washed white with a dark purple runner around the floorboard. Mr. Granzen's bedside table was piled with junk. There were pamphlets for physical therapy exercises, empty Jell-O cups, and the remote to his TV. Hospitals were always so cold and smelly, she thought. She couldn't place that hospital smell, but she had to breathe deep to avoid going into another panic attack from thinking about the smell.

She didn't know what to do. Everyone had said that he was awake, but he didn't look very awake. He looked very much still asleep. As she shut the door behind her, she saw him stir and it sparked something in her. "Dad?"

Her dad jerked awake and opened his eyes at the sound of her voice. He tried to speak, but his vocal cords were still too atrophied to make any noise. So, he just mouthed. "Janet?" He looked at his adult daughter with so many questions. Was she married? Children? What did she do? How was her childhood? How did his coma affect her? What sort of woman had she become?

For the moment though, he didn't care about any of that. He just wanted to be with his little girl. So, he smiled at her and made a feeble attempt to point to the chair next to his bed.

She took the seat and started talking to her long-lost father. The moment she started, the floodgates opened, and she stayed there all night telling him about her whole life. His inability to speak made that first conversation measurably easier for her.

Mr. Granzen had a communication chart that he'd use from time to time. It had a spot for yes, a spot for no, and the alphabet. Mr. Granzen would point to things on the board. It was cumbersome for him to try to communicate anything other than yes and no. His muscles still didn't have the stamina to spell out most words, much less any whole sentences.

After three hours Janet started to worry that she may have been wearing out her father. So, she asked if she should let him get some rest and return the next day. As quickly as his feeble finger could move, it slid over to "No." He even spelled out "S-T-A-Y."

So, she stayed and kept talking about herself. You would think that it would be a one-way conversation, but her father would respond to her with facial expressions. If something didn't make sense, he'd furl his eyebrows in confusion, and she'd explain.

"So, he told me it was a later-gram, but I don't believe him. Why would you go out to a club in the middle of the week?" Janet said.

Mr. Granzen gave her a confused look. "Oh yeah, Instagram. It's like twitter, but for pictures." He looked more confused. "Twitter is like Facebook... no. It's this app on your phone where you can post pictures for your friends to see."

Mr. Granzen still looked confused. He spelled out "A-P-P-?"

"Right." She shook her head at her own stupidity. "You never had a cellphone." She pulled her phone out of her purse and held it up. "So, this is a phone... and a computer." Mr. Granzen still looked slightly confused. "It's a little crazy, everything that's changed in the last 16 years, but you'll catch up."

Janet stayed and talked to her father until he passed out from exhaustion. Even his sleeping face contained the purest smile any man's face had ever held. Janet left a note telling him she'd return the next day, and she did return the next day and every day after that.

As she left her father's room, she stopped to thank Charlie. Little did she know, Charlie had overheard the whole conversation. He hadn't tried to snoop on her, but he couldn't help but overhear the long conversation. So, now he knew her almost as well as her father knew her.

"Keep him safe. Okay?"

"Of course, ma'am. I hope it went well. I know they said he can't really talk yet."

"He can't," she spoke under her breath, "but you know what? It was kind of nice. I was so nervous about what he'd say, that it was nice to be able to just talk."

"Well, I'm glad. Your family has been through enough."

"Will you be here tomorrow night? I'm coming by after work," she asked.

“Uh...yeah. Will you?” He was lying. He knew that Officer Manford was scheduled to guard Mr. Granzen’s room on weekday mornings, but Charlie knew he could twist Manford’s arm.

“Well, I’ll bring you a coffee then. It’s the least I can do.” She smiled at him. “How do you take it?”

“I’ll be happy with whatever you bring me.”

## IIX.

Janzen and Schmidt pulled up to a New York-New Jersey Rail warehouse. Janzen didn't like the look of the place. "What the fuck are we doing here, Jimmy?"

"How should I know. The big guy said all hands on deck. Including you."

Inside, the warehouse was more like a clubhouse. Janzen saw a roulette table shoved into the corner and noticed a group of guys having drinks at a poker table. He pieced together that this was a casino operation most of the time. Janzen counted roughly 150 low level thugs in that building. Everyone seemed to be preparing for something. Jimmy seemed to know everybody. He'd grown up in the Calabrese family. His father had served the don before Tom and served Tom after that. So, he introduced Janzen to people as they walked through the crowd.

"Dats Jerry Dee and Johnny T, they're from Arizona. They hit a bunch of banks down there by strapping C-4 to their chests and walking right up to the counter. It worked until they got in a car wreck running away from one of the banks. They had to come out here and get a new start."

"Mario!" Jimmy waved to someone across the room. Mario rolled his eyes. Jimmy dragged Janzen over to Mario. "Hey, how's business, Mario?"

"Get the fuck away from me, Jimmy."

"Aaaah, this fucking guy. Always busting my balls." Jimmy nudged Janzen with his elbow. Janzen didn't react. Jimmy went to hug Mario.

"If you touch me, I'll fucking gut you right here." Jimmy stopped. "You got the money you owe me yet?"

"What money?" Jimmy's shoulders bounced up and down as he spoke. "You talking about that thing from the Irrera heist. I mean that was so long ago. Who can even remember how much you were supposed to get? I'll tell you what I'll get you five large to cover whatever you should have got-" Jimmy didn't get a chance to finish.

Mario grabbed Jimmy by the throat and got so close that their noses almost touched. “You owe me 20 grand from that job you slimy little shit. You’re going to get me every last dollar of that or I’m going to cut off your prick. Got me?” Jimmy nodded, unable to speak with his windpipe in Mario’s hand. Mario let go of him and walked away with his group of guys.

“Why don’t you just pay the guy already?” Janzen asked. “Calabrese just gave you a wad of cash. You could do it.”

“Eh. That money’s gone. Already spent it last week. Anyways, he’s just messing with me, he don’t really mean it. I went to middle school with Mario. He’s a good guy, just been kind of a hard ass since he got made. He ain’t gonna do nothing serious though. I don’t think he would.” Janzen didn’t press Jimmy on the topic because he noticed the entire room go silent. He looked at the front of the room and saw why. Tom Calabrese had entered with Two-tone Malone. He stopped and took a quick look around the room, surveying everyone. Then, he began to speak to the whole room.

“Listen up. Someone clipped Missy. They shot her in the head in the middle of fucking Time Square, and they did it right in front of Nicki. Nicki, any idea who he might work for, what did this fuck look like?” Nicki emerged from the crowd.

“I don’t know... um, he was a tall fucker like six-one, six-two. Fat like a tourist and...” he looked at Tom. “I don’t know what else to say.” Nicki was clearly still shellshocked from seeing Aunt Missy’s brains.

“That’s good, kid.” He patted Nicky on the shoulder and resumed. “So, I want every one of you stepping on everyone you can, until we find out what the fuck this is about. We haven’t had one of ours clipped like that in over ten years, and I want to know what the fuck happened. Last time one of ours was killed out in the open like this was when the Gonzo brothers got mowed down at that strip club after they stole the CDL contract out from under the Luccheses. I want to know what this is about by tomorrow. You guys hear me?”

“I got you, boss.” Tom heard an unidentifiable soldier in the back of the room shout. Tom ignored him and went into his office in the back of the warehouse with Two-tone Malone. Tom’s office was as bare bones as it got. He had a cheap steel desk, three folding chairs, and a file cabinet. Malone closed the door behind him.

“Any guess who would’a done this shit?” Two-tone Malone had got his name from the large birthmark on his right cheek that wrapped around his chin. He was Tom’s most closely trusted confidant in the family. In fact, tonight was a rare occurrence. Tom usually limited his interactions with the foot soldiers to a minimum, usually letting Malone handle all of that.

“I don’t know. I find it hard to think any of the other families would’a done this. Things been good for everyone. We’ve never had a period of peace this long before.” Tom thought for a second. “It could even’a been some soldier that thought he’d make his bones if he just did it on his own.”

“If that’s the case, they should deliver that fuck to our doorstep. It’s not like he killed some guy on the street. This was basically your Aunt.” Missy was Lisa’s great aunt technically. “I mean we gave them little Ricci a few years ago when he got in that fight and killed one of their members, and I remember him being a good earner for us.”

“Yeah, he was.” Tom was staring off into the wall. “I hope it can be fixed that easy this time around.” Tom snapped out of his trance. “I met this kid on the pier the other day. Seemed like a reliable guy. I think his name was De Luca. You heard of him?”

“Nah, what’s he into, we could use a guy to run guns out west.” Malone lit a cigarette.

“He don’t do anything like that yet. Just paints benches for the city by the looks’a it.” Tom waves some smoke out of his face. “Would you put that shit out. This rooms like a goddamn hot box as it is.” Malone stomped out his cigarette.

“Yeah, that rings a bell now that you mentioned it,” Malone said. “Think that kid even left me a message the other day.”

“God damn it, Malone.” Tom slammed the desk. “You gotta get these guys as soon as you can. This isn’t some guy from the neighborhood that’s waiting for a job. You gotta call them back right away. Get him in here.” Malone nodded and silently left, calling Charlie back on his way out of Tom’s office.

## IX.

“It’s very easy for an officer to get drawn into the appeal of criminal life. In order to protect oneself-” Charlie was sitting back in the Newark FBI office, watching his first set of instructional videos about being an undercover officer. He was only four hours into what felt like torture when his phone rang. Only it wasn’t *his* phone. It was De Luca’s phone ringing. Malone was calling. He looked around, paused the video, and answered.

“Yep. De Luca.” He tried to sound aloof.

“Hey, you called about some work the big guy wants you to do for us. You met him down at the pier. Think he said you was paintin’ benches or somethin’,” Charlie was relieved to hear back from Malone. It’d been almost a week since he’d left his message, and he’d started to give up on hearing back.

“Yeah, Yeah, I remember him. He said somethin’ about a better line of work for me. Even said somethin’ about gettin’ my prick sucked. Sounds like a good gig.”

“I don’t know nuttin’ about that, but if you’re interested, we got some entry level work for you.”

“Yeah? What kinda work we talkin’ ‘bout here?”

“The kind we don’t talk about over the phone. You know Jim’s shoe shop on 59th?”

“Yeah, I know the place.”

“Good. Be there at ten tomorrow.”

Charlie calmly told him that he’d be there, ready for work. On the inside, Charlie was panicking. He didn’t know what he’d do if they asked him to kill someone. He started to wonder if maybe Agent Koi had been right. Maybe the families had figured out a fool proof method to catching undercover cops like him. If they asked him to kill tomorrow, his cover would be blown. They’d need to speed up their plans. Instead of staging the murder in a few weeks, they’d need to do it tomorrow.

He turned the old box TV off and went down the hall to Agent Koi’s office. He didn’t knock or ask the assistant at the front desk if he could go in. He just opened the door. Agent Koi was in the middle

of changing tops. He got a glimpse of a naked back and some sideboob as he came in the room. Charlie immediately shielded his eyes.

“Shit, I’m sorry. I’ll just give you a minute.”

“No, no, no. Come on in. What do you need?” She turned around as she was buttoning her new shirt, showing Charlie her bare chest. She smirked. He fingered his wedding ring and looked away again.

“Malone, the Calabrese family’s number two just called me. He wants me to meet him to do some work tomorrow morning. I think we’ve got to speed up the plan.”

“You don’t mean speed it up to tomorrow morning?” She buttoned up the rest of her shirt. “We can’t get all of the pieces in the right place by tomorrow morning. If we really want it to look like you’ve killed someone, we need everything to go just right. If one thing goes wrong, they’ll see right through it. Then, what?”

It was a good question, but it didn’t change anything. It took a while, but Charlie eventually convinced her that it had to be done the next day. So, they got down to work planning everything.

They spent the better part of the workday going over the logistics. Charlie went through undercover officers, picking actors for their upcoming production. Koi made calls to get Hollywood blanks for Charlie’s gun and squibs for Charlie’s victim. The squibs were remote detonated poppers that would make the appearance of gunshot wounds.

They planned exactly where it would happen. They interviewed their actors over the phone. They even rehearsed. Until Charlie noticed that it was 5:45pm. “Shit. I gotta go. I got a shift at the hospital.”

“What the fuck? Are you working as a nurse or something?”

“No, I just picked up a shift watching Jack Granzen’s room down at the hospital.”

“Are you retarded?” She stared at him blankly. “You can’t work as a uniformed officer anymore. What if someone from the Calabreses see you there?”

“Look, it’s important to me. This guy’s a hero of mine, and I told his daughter I’d be there.” Agent Koi sat down behind her desk.

“Fine. Guess I’m not the only girl you’ve got eyes on today.” Agent Koi didn’t look at Charlie again. She focused her line of sight on her computer. Charlie stood there for a moment, wondering if their conversation would continue. When it didn’t, he turned to leave. As the door closed behind Charlie, Agent Koi looked at him and rolled her eyes.

Charlie got to the hospital just in time to apologize to Officer Manford who wasn’t happy about working ten minutes late because of Charlie. “Fuck man. I was starting to think you were gonna stand me up, ya asshole.”

“I’m really sorry. I was in Newark working on this...on this thing with my cousin. Lost track of time,” Charlie said.

Officer Manford’s eyes followed an overweight nurse as she walked by the two of them. “You’re lucky there’s enough eye candy around to keep me entertained.” He gathered his empty coffee cup, newspaper, and glasses. “You have a good night. I’m going home to get some sleep.”

“See ya, Manford.” Charlie sat down in the plastic chair next to Jack Granzen’s hospital room and began to pick at the crud underneath his fingernails. After an hour and forty-two minutes, the elevator doors opened, revealing a much less panicked Janet Granzen. She had two tall Starbucks cups and a smile on her face.

“Here you go, Officer Shermer.” She extended one of the cups of coffee. He took it.

“Thank you.”

“No. Thank you. I want to make sure you’re awake and alert. Especially when it’s this late. I don’t know how you guys stay up all night like that. I’d be dead.”

“Ah. It’s not that hard. Most guys are used to working night shifts on the streets. So, somethin’ like this isn’t too tough.”

“Well, good. Will I see you tomorrow too?”

“No,” Charlie said. “This’ll be my last shift here at the hospital.”

“What?” she asked. “Why?”

“Well,” Charlie thought for a moment about how to explain it. “I just got a new job.”

“You’re not leaving the police force, are you?”

“No, no, no. Nothing like that. I just have a different, sort of position.”

“I recognize that tone of voice.” She stared at him like she was cracking a safe. “My dad always used that voice when there was something he couldn’t talk about.”

Charlie chuckled, impressed by her perceptiveness. “Yeah. Sorry I can’t say anything else.”

“Trust me,” she said. “I understand more than most.” She went into her father’s room, where she stayed for four hours. On her way out, she stopped and gave Charlie a folded-up scrap of hospital notepad paper.

“It was nice to meet you Officer Shermer. Hopefully, it’s not the last time.” She boarded the elevator and went down to the lobby. When the elevator doors closed, Charlie unfolded the note. It had a phone number, presumably her phone number, written on the inside. Under it, she’d written “call me.”

Charlie smiled to himself. Then he looked at his wedding ring and threw away the piece of paper.

That was the last time that Janet saw Officer Charlie Shermer sitting outside of her father’s hospital room, but she would return everyday with rare exception. She didn’t get so cozy with any of the other officers guarding her father’s room. She never brought them coffee. She never chatted with them. She never gave them her phone number. She did get to know her father in a way she never thought she would. Even though he couldn’t speak, she could tell what he thought by the look on his face, or from the limited gestures he could control.

Nine days after Charlie stopped watching Mr. Granzen’s room, Janet and the muted Jack were watching television. On the six o’clock news there was a story about a recent Salmonella outbreak, a dog who saved his owner when she was having a heart attack, and a story about the Calabreses.

“There’s controversy over a recent donation made to the Newark Boys and Girls Club on Avon Avenue. The controversy surrounds the man giving the donation... Tom Calabrese. Calabrese has long been alleged to be the head of Genovese Crime Family, although his attorneys insist these are all just

rumors.” The television flashed a picture of Tom Calabrese. When Mr. Granzen saw the image of Tom, he went into a fit. He threw his head back and forth, groaned, and tried to point at the TV. The whole time, he never took his eyes off it. Janet didn’t know how to react. At first, she tried to hold him down, thinking he was having a seizure or something. Then, once she realized he was trying to communicate something she gave him his alphabet board so he could tell her what he needed.

His fingers jumped around the letters as quickly as he could. He spelled out T-O-M.

“T-O-M.” She read along as he spelled it out. “Tom who?” She looked back at the TV. “Tom Calabrese? The mob guy?” Jack nodded his head, letting her know she was on the right track. Janet’s face tightened around the lips and her eyes got very narrow. “Let me guess, you want to catch him.” Jack groaned. “I can’t believe you. You go through all of this...We go through all of this, and first thing you want to do is go back out there and get yourself killed by the mob.” Jack groaned louder and banged his fingers across his alphabet board again. T-O-M. T-O-M. T-O-M. “Well, if that’s what you want to do, I can’t stop you, but I’m not going to sit around and watch it happen again.” Janet got up, grabbed her purse, and started to leave the room. She stopped at the door and turned around to face Jack who was still spelling out Tom on his board. “Maybe mom was smart for moving on. Guess that’s why she still hasn’t been down here to see you. She knew who you really were.” Janet slammed the door behind her. Leaving Jack sitting in his room alone spelling three letter words to himself and groaning to get someone’s attention. On the board he kept spelling two words over and over: T-O-M C-O-P. T-O-M C-O-P. T-O-M C-O-P.

## X.

Charlie Shermer was dead for all intents and purposes. At least he got to keep his first name in his new posthumous life. He was now Charlie De Luca. Charlie De Luca and Charlie Shermer were similar in as many ways as one could manage. He went to the same high school as officer Shermer. He had the same shitty jobs Officer Shermer had after high school. That's where the paths of Charlie Shermer and Charlie De Luca deviated. Where Shermer went to the police academy and married his wife, Charlie De Luca got clipped for stealing cars and spent 18 months upstate.

Charlie De Luca was starting a new job today too. Like any new job, he was nervous about it, but just for different reasons. He showed up ten minutes early to Jim's Shoe Shop and waited out front, smoking. Halfway through his cigarette, an older beige Cadillac pulled up in front of the shoe shop, double parking. Two low-level guys named Mario and Tommy D. jumped out first and looked around. Then, one of them ran around to the passenger side door and opened it for Two-Tone Malone.

"You Chuck De Luca?" he asked.

"Yeah." Charlie stomped out his cigarette on the sidewalk. "You the guy I was talkin' to on the phone?"

"Yeah, I'm the guy." Malone waved Charlie on inside the shoe shop as he entered. "Come on, let's get inside."

The shoe shop must have been a hundred years old. Inside, it still looked like a classy place. The walls were lined with dark oak shelves for new shoes. In the middle of the room were stands where customers could sit and have their shoes repaired or shined. In the back of the shop was a cash register on top of a glass top counter. Behind the counter, the owner of the store, an old balding Italian man with an ink black mustache was talking to a customer.

Malone walked right around the counter and into the back office. Only breaking to mumble.

“How you doin,’ Jimmy?”

In the office of the shoe store, Malone sat behind the desk, put his feet up, and pointed at a chair for Charlie. He sat.

“So, the guy said I could maybe do some work for you guys. What are we talking about here?”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow down there. I don’t know this guy from Adam and he’s sittin’ here tellin’ me ‘bout work?” Malone looked around to the other guys. “This ain’t the movies kid. You ain’t watchin’ The Sopranos here.”

“With all due respect, Mr. Malone, if I ain’t here to earn, I don’t know what the fuck I’m doin’ here.”

“We’re just gettin’ to know each other,” Malone said. “You come wit’ me today. Just follow us, keep your mouth shut, and do what we say. If you can manage that, you’ll earn a little somethin’ at the end of the day. But you ain’t workin’ with us yet. We like to test drive you kids out before we buy ya.”

Charlie agreed, not knowing what the day would involve. He followed them out of the shoe shop, where Charlie Shermer’s plan was set in place. Another undercover cop was waiting down the street. Waiting for the crew to come out of the shoe shop. That’s when he started to walk by Charlie, Malone, and the other two guys. The other cop was Cameron Hagerty, a middle-aged guy dressed like a lawyer.

“This motherfucker.” Charlie saw Hagerty. He broke away from the other guys and made a beeline for him. When Charlie got close to him, Hagerty started to run, but Charlie caught up to him and grabbed him by the nape of his neck. Then, he whirled him around and sent him tumbling into a pile of trash bags in a side alley. Charlie reached under his shirt, pulled a snub-nosed revolver out from under his waistband, and pointed it at Hagerty’s face.

Of course, this was all planned and rehearsed. Haggerty made it look real though. Charlie was a little afraid that he might have actually hurt Hagerty’s back tossing him into the garbage like that. Malone and the other guys were convinced from the get-go. They were exactly the type of guys that would chase

down old enemies in broad daylight. But when Charlie pulled out the revolver, Malone ran over and wrenched it away from him, shoving it into his own pocket. He got very close to Charlie and whispered.

“What the fuck are ya’ doin’? You can’t just shoot a guy out here in the middle of the day. There are cameras everywhere, not to mention the people. What the fuck did this guy do anyways?”

“This son of a bitch was my public defender, and he wasn’t worth the shit stain he came out of. Then, he had the balls to shake my mother down for three grand while I was locked up. Malone... my mom didn’t have three large to spare. So, she borrowed it, begged for it, stole it. Cause he said if she could pay it he could get me out in 18 months. Only thing he didn’t tell her was that my sentence was only 18 months. The slimy fuck.” Charlie pretended to kick Hagerty in the side.

“Hey,” Malone turned to the other two guys, snapped his fingers, and pointed to Hagerty laying in the trash. “Throw him in the car. We gotta take him someplace.” For a brief moment, Charlie and Hagerty exchanged a look of terror and confusion. This wasn’t part of the plan. Mario and Tommy D. came over, grabbed Hagerty by both arms, and tossed him in the back seat of their old Cadillac.

“Where are we going?” Charlie asked.

“We got a place where we do things like this.” Malone put his arm around Charlie. “Don’t get me wrong kid. I like the passion you showed there.” Malone slapped him affectionately on the chest. “That’s a sign of real character, but like I was tellin’ you, this ain’t the movies and this ain’t the old days. We’re not the motherfuckin’ untouchables. That don’t mean that we can’t still take care of business though.” Charlie got in the car with no idea where he was going or how he would get in Malone’s good graces without actually killing Hagerty now.

They drove through the Lincoln tunnel and around the New Jersey turnpike, until they were back in Newark. The whole ride took about forty-five minutes. As they got farther and farther out of town, Hagerty’s face got more and more nervous. Charlie wasn’t sure if Hagerty was acting or actually getting nervous. If he was acting, he was doing a damn good job of it.

“Ya’ know Chuck. New Jersey looks so beautiful in the winter. The rest of the year, it gets a bad rap. In the fall, everyone wants to go to Connecticut. In the summer and spring people want to be in the city, but the winter was made for New Jersey,” Malone said.

“Yeah,” Charlie didn’t know what to make of this conversation. “I always thought so too.”

“What’d’ya think?” Malone asked Hagerty.

Hagerty looked stunned for a moment. “Y-y-yeah, real beautiful.”

“Real good for you then. Cause its’ the last city you’re gonna see.” Malone broke out into a hysterical laugh. The two low-level guys in the front laughed along with him as though he’d made some great joke.

The usefulness of laughing wasn’t clear to De Luca but he joined in anyway. This joke made Hagerty even more nervous. He tried to nudge Charlie’s leg to signal something to him. Malone saw him nudge Charlie though.

“Hey, what the fuck are you pokin’ him for?” He put his finger in Hagerty’s face.

“I was just-I was just...” Hagerty had no words.

“What? You was just hopin’ that he’d save you?” Malone broke out into another fit of laughter. “You should be poking me instead. That guy wants ta kill ya’. I’m the one who saved your life back there. What do you think Chuck? You wanna save this guy?”

“Yeah,” Charlie looked at Hagerty long and hard, “I’ll save ya. Save ya a lot of pain and suffering by making your life nice and short.” Malone and the other two guys reared back with uproarious laughter once again.

“How do we wanna do it, boys?” Malone asked the group of guys. “Do we cut him and leave him somewhere to bleed out real slow? Or should we just shoot him in the head and toss him in the river? Or, even better yet, we could go old school and chain him to some cinder blocks. *Then*, we toss him in tha’ river.”

“I wanna shoot him.” Charlie said. “I wanna look him in the eyes and shoot him with my gun.”

Malone gave Charlie a long hard stare. “We’ll see.”

They finally pulled up to an old warehouse: the New York-New Jersey Rail warehouse.

## XI.

Janzen and Schmidt rented a studio apartment just across the street from St. Michael's Hospital, where they could monitor the devices, they had planted in Jack Granzen's room. Their apartment consisted of a few folding tables covered with monitors, mixing boards, and antennae. They had a cheap metal futon on the other side of the room, where they could sleep between shifts of monitoring the hospital room. Part of their deal had been 24-hour monitoring of the conversations. Janzen had forgotten how cumbersome such a job could be. He was essentially listening to Jack Granzen's room 12 hours a day, usually in two 6 hours shifts.

One day, while Schmidt was sleeping on the futon, Janzen was watching and listening to Jack and his daughter Janet. They were watching the 6 o'clock news when Tom Calabrese was mentioned for the first time. The news had mentioned some donation that Tom had made and it was apparently starting a fight between the old cop and his daughter. Janzen tried to wake up Schmidt. He couldn't reach the futon without taking off the headphones. So, he threw a few loose AA batteries at Schmidt, finally catching him in the eye with the third toss.

"Hey, they're talking about Calabrese. I'm not sure what they're saying, but it's something about going after him." Schmidt stopped whining about his eye upon hearing this, grabbed a seat next to Janzen, and put on the second pair of headphones.

"Those fucks." Schmidt punched his fist into his hand. "They're talkin' about goin' after the big guy?"

They listened to the conversation end with Janet scolding her father for wanting to go after Tom Calabrese again. "Maybe mom was smart for moving on. Guess that's why she still hasn't been down here to see you. She knew who you really were," she said.

Schmidt got up and grabbed his gun from one of the folding tables. "Fuck that. I'm'a off that pig fuck. I'll show the boss how to end an investigation before it starts." Jimmy tucked the gun into his waistband behind him.

“No, you’re not.” Janzen got up and blocked the door. “Don’t you remember what Calabrese said? Do nothing? You really wanna piss that guy off?”

Schmidt was frustrated, but he agreed. He knew if he disobeyed Tom Calabrese that he would regret it. So, they settled on calling Tom and telling him about what they had overheard, like they were supposed to do.

“Okay. Fine.” Schmit put the gun back on the table. “But I’m’a ask the big guy if I can just go do it.”

Janzen dialed the number Tom had given him for just such occasions.

“Come on. Let me hear. Put it on speaker phone.” Schmidt tried to grab the phone, but Janzen ignored him and wrestled it away from him. After four rings, Tom’s tired voice came across the other line.

“Yeah? What is it?” he said.

“Mr. Calabrese, it’s Janzen the guy-” But Schmidt cut off the conversation.

“And me too boss. It’s me Jimmy Schmidt.”

“Tell that little fuck I said hi and to take it back a notch. It’s late. What is it?”

“Well, we were monitoring that old cop’s room, Jack Granzen.” Janzen waited to hear something on the other line to confirm that Tom knew what he was talking about, but there was a long pause as if Tom Calabrese was bracing himself for some bad news. So, Janzen went on with his story. “And we heard him and his daughter fighting about you.”

“Did you now?” Toms voice got calm and lifeless. “Tell me Janzen, what exactly did you hear?”

“Well,” Janzen didn’t know why, but he was terrified all of the sudden. “They saw the 6 o’clock news, ya’ know, where they were talking about the donation and all that.”

“Yeah?” Tom prompted him to continue.

“And, then it sounded like the old guy started to freak when they put your picture on the TV. His daughter yelled some shit about ‘why would you go after the mob again.’ From the sound of it, the coma didn’t scare the son of a bitch off.” That’s when Jimmy couldn’t help but intervene.

“Just let me go over there, boss. I’ll put an end to this fuckin’ thing real quick. No coma shit this time.”

“Did you hear that?” Janzen asked.

“Yeah,” Tom said, “give that sack of shit the phone.”

Janzen gave Jimmy the phone and could only hear Jimmy’s half of the conversation.

“Yeah, hey...well, I was just... oh okay... no I don’t want that... I got you boss. I’ll just wait... okay. You got it big guy.” Jimmy handed the phone back to Janzen.

“We’ve got everything we need,” Tom said. “Your job’s done. Pack everything up. I’ll give you an envelope for the completion of the job, but this is the last time we’ll talk, unless I need you again.”

“No problem. You’re the boss.” Janzen hung up the phone.

They started packing, but Jimmy turned it into a sort of last day in the apartment party. They started drinking and Jimmy called a couple of girls. They came over. Janzen couldn’t remember their names all night. He knew one was something with a G, like Gina or Gisselle. They spent the rest of the night up with the girls, drinking, smoking, and doing an impressive amount of coke.

At 4:32 am, Janzen was coming back to the apartment with a bottle of Amaretto, when he saw Tom Calabrese sitting outside the hospital smoking. Tom didn’t see Janzen as he rounded the block. Janzen stopped and hid behind the corner. Jimmy and he were supposed to leave right away, and they didn’t want the boss to catch them partying in the same room where there was evidence they were surveilling a cop who was nearly murdered by the mob. He figured that Tom wouldn’t be too happy with them about that. He watched as Tom flicked his cigarette into the garden behind him and enter the hospital.

Janzen didn't understand why, but he rushed back up to the apartment. The two nameless girls were still in the apartment with Jimmy. His hand was stuck up one of their skirts, when Janzen busted back into the apartment. "Sorry girls, but you two really gotta go." Janzen grabbed the girls by the arms as gently as he could and started to escort them out of the apartment.

"Janz, what the fuck are you doin'?"

"Yeah, how are we like even supposed to get home," one of the girls said.

Janzen peeled off a handful of 50-dollar bills from his pocket and handed it to them. "There ya' go. Get a fuckin' limo home for all I give a fuck."

"Man, I'm never doing coke with you again, Janz. You didn't tell me you got so fuckin' paranoid."

Janzen ignored Jimmy and started plugging the surveillance equipment back into the wall. Jimmy continued to protest.

"Come on man, talk to me. What are you doing? The boss said we were done."

Janzen turned on one of the monitors just in time to see Tom Calabrese walking into the hospital room of Jack Granzen. When Jimmy saw the image on the monitor, he jumped up and joined Janzen at the folding table. "Oh shit. The big guy must'a wanted to do this job himself. You know rumor is that the big guy is the one that shot that old cop in the first place. I think they said it was how he made his bones way back when. He probably feels like he has to finish the job."

Janzen wasn't so sure about that. The way Calabrese walked into the room didn't look murderous. "What, you think he's gonna shoot him in a hospital with a guard sitting right outside the room?"

"Come on, he's prolly got that guy in his pocket."

Janzen and Jimmy stopped arguing and just watched the rest of the scene between Tom Calabrese and Jack Granzen. Tom tentatively walked up to Jack's bed. Jack was asleep. He stood there for a moment and took a long look at the unconscious Jack Granzen. After a long moment, Tom grabbed Jack's

hand. Causing Jack to stir for a moment. He looked up and saw Tom standing above him, immediately breaking out into tears.

“Hey there, old buddy,” Tom said. “I’m so sorry. You’ve lost so much.”

Jack reached for his alphabet board and spelled out the word M-O-B-?

“Yeah, I’ve been inside for 16-years,” Tom said. “You were the only one that knew I was undercover. So, when they clipped you, I couldn’t get out.”

Jack spelled out the word B-O-S-S-?

“Yeah, I’ve worked up the ranks. It wasn’t something I ever meant to do, but 16 years is a long time, and I didn’t know if I would ever get out. Someone told me that most people don’t make it out of a coma if they’re in longer than a year. So, I figured this was my life now.” There was a long pause. Jack didn’t have to spell out anything else on his alphabet board. Tom knew exactly what he wanted to know. “I’ve had to do some pretty bad things, some terrible things, Jack. I didn’t have any other option though. I’ve never let a civilian get harmed though, only guys in the business.”

Jack and Tom stayed up for another two hours talking about things. Some of it was just Tom retelling old cop stories. He and Jack had been partners ever since they were at the academy. When Jack got promoted to the state Bureau of investigation, they hatched a hair brained scheme to raise Tom’s status in the ranks as well. They would implant Tom with one of the five families, and they wouldn’t tell anyone. Jack would be the only contact and the only one who even knew that they had an undercover operation. At the time, state law enforcement was so corrupt that anytime they started an undercover investigation, someone would tip off the mob. The only problem was that once Jack went into his coma, there was no way to prove that Tom was a cop and not the low-level gangster character they had created at the time.

“The thing is, Jack, it’s been so long that I’m not sure I—” he looked at the ground while he spoke. “I’ve got a family, and I mean a real family, a wife and a bunch of in-laws. What am I supposed to do, go back to being a cop? I couldn’t do that now. Who am I kidding? If it came out that I’d been

undercover this whole time, I wouldn't live out the day. On top of that, the whole city knows me as this guy now. Who would believe I'm a cop? It's just not fair. I tried to do the right thing and it turned me into this monster. I accepted that I have to be this monster, but then I heard that you were awake. Not only were you awake, but you remembered me. I thought, maybe Jack'll know how to get out of this, that's when I realized, I didn't want out. So, Jack, I just need to know if you're going to tell anyone who I really am."

## XII.

“Can we just get out and shoot this motherfucker already?” Charlie asked.

“God damn it, Malone.” Mario, one of the low-level made guys turned around in the front seat, so he could talk to Malone and Charlie. “Look how eager this guy is to get his rocks off. He almost got us all pinched back there shooting this guy in the middle of the city.”

“Ah” Malone waved away Mario’s concerns. “He’s just a kid. Isn’t that right? Just too eager to work and too excited by video games, movies, and shit like that.”

“I still say he’s too risky. We gotta be more careful nowadays, like the boss says.”

Malone’s face turned red and he exploded. “When I give a fuck what you have to say, you’ll know it cause I’ll take my cock out of your mouth first. Until then, shut the fuck up and be a good boy. Got it?” Mario was fuming with embarrassment, but he just turned around and gazed vacantly out the windshield. “Now, as I was saying, before you assholes started getting all excited. We just gotta get him inside and we can do whatever we want with this poor son of a bitch.”

They took Hagerty out of the car and started to make their way into the New York-New Jersey Rail warehouse where the whole family had met after Aunt Missy was shot. As they were about to go through the heavy steel door, Charlie got a chance to whisper to Hagerty.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got a plan.” He didn’t. He was lying because Hagerty was getting visibly nervous, and Charlie didn’t want him yelling out that he’s a cop to protect himself. From the look on Hagerty’s face, it seemed to have worked.

The warehouse looked different now because it was empty. The gleaming concrete spread out far enough to fit a small airplane with some room to spare. Charlie looked up and saw steel supports in the rafters. There were about twenty large tables covered in tarp spread across the room. Although Charlie didn’t know it, they were card tables, roulette tables, and craps tables. This warehouse was used as an underground casino at night. In the back was a door with a tinted window next to it. That was Tom Calabrese’s main office, although Charlie didn’t know that either.

Malone told Mario and Tommy D. to tie Hagerty to a chair and stick him in one of the corners so his blood wouldn't get on the tables. "You said this guy was a lawyer, right?" Malone asked.

"Yeah, he's a shitty one though."

"Ah, that don't matter." Malone turned to Hagerty. "You hold tight for a second. I want you to take a look at something." Malone started walking towards the back office.

"Hey," Charlie reached out an open hand, "can I have my gun back."

Malone laughed and shook his head. "I like you kid. I like you." He kept Charlie's gun in his jacket pocket though.

Tommy D. and Mario finished tying Hagerty to a chair in the corner, sat at one of the tables, and started smoking. Malone came back with a folder full of paperwork.

"You see, my mom's been having trouble with her Medicaid. They keep sending her all these goddamn letters, and I can't figure the fucking things out." He pulled out a piece of paper and held it in front of Hagerty's face. "What does this shit mean?"

Hagerty was stunned. He looked to Charlie who was just as surprised. "I-I-I don't really know."

"Okay. Kill the fuck then." Malone handed Charlie his gun back, and Charlie gladly unloaded three blanks in Hagerty's direction. The squibs were connected to the gun wirelessly so that they would go off at the same time. Three spots of blood appeared on his torso and three holes appeared on his button up shirt.

Charlie looked at Malone and the other two guys to see their reaction. None of them were very interested. They had all the excitement of someone making copies or sending a fax.

"Alright, cut him up boys." Malone gestured to Mario and Tommy D. "Make it quick. We got a thing back in the city at one o'clock." Malone's two lackeys went to a closet and pulled out a dark green army bag and started unloading tarps, saws, ropes, and trash bags.

"What are you guys doing?" Charlie asked.

“We’re getting rid of the body. What the fuck do you think?” Malone didn’t look up from picking the dirt underneath his nails while he spoke.

“What about just tossing the fuck in the river like you said?”

“Nah, Nah, Nah. We can’t do shit like that anymore. There you go again with that movie shit. New boss wants all hits cut up and spread around the state. It’s too much work if you ask me.”

Tommy D. started untying Hagerty from the chair. “Hey, this guy’s still moving.”

Of course, Charlie knew he was alive and capable of movement. “Yeah, I shot him in the gut. I was hoping we’d toss him in the river, and he’d bleed out for a couple hours. I wanted him to suffer.”

Malone got up and put his arm around Charlie. “Goddamn it, kid. You’re my type of guy.” That’s when Malone’s old flip-phone rang, and when he saw the name on it, he let out a miserable groan. “Hold on, Chuck. I gotta take this.” Malone got some distance from Charlie, as he spoke on the phone, even though Charlie could still hear the whole conversation at full volume. “Yeah, what’d’ya need this time? I don’t got time for... Bullshit, don’t even say shit like that.... How do you know? ... No shit? ... I swear before god and the Virgin Mother Mary, if you’re lying, you fuck, I’ll cut off that little prick of yours... Okay. I’ll be right there. Don’t you tell anyone else about this. You hear me?” Malone put his phone back in his pocket. “Mario, Tommy, forget about that. He can take care of it. We got an emergency we gotta handle.”

“What happened?” Tommy D. asked.

“Would you just get in the fucking car?” Malone looked at Charlie and shook his head, as if to say *can you believe these fucking kids*. “I swear I got a 12 and a 15-year-old, both girls, and they listen better than these two fucks.”

Charlie said. “Your girls probably have bigger dicks than them too.” Malone let out into a fit of laughter that turned into a coughing fit halfway through. He lit a cigarette to catch his breath and left, still chuckling to himself.

Charlie looked around, realizing that he was alone in one of the biggest hangouts for made guys in the tristate area. “Can I get up now?” Hagerty asked.

“No, there are cameras in the rafters. I don’t know if they’re always on or if they’re just for the casino, but you better stay down. I’m going to check out that office though.” Charlie went into the office containing a steel desk and filing cabinet. He made a beeline for the filing cabinet. When he went to open it, he discovered that it was locked. He went to the desk and started rifling through the drawers. He found what you would expect, a bottle of Elijah Craig, a handgun, a ton of money, cigars, but what Charlie found interesting was in an accounting book and a folder in the bottom of one of the drawers.

He went through the book, the pages mostly containing numbers. Charlie guessed that they were either loans, bets, or dues that still needed to be kicked up to the boss. There wasn’t anything useful there, but in the folder was a lease signed by Tom Calabrese. Charlie noticed that next to the signature Tom had scribbled four digits, 1804. Charlie recognized the habit because he had the same bad habit.

Charlie frequently went to sign a credit card receipt at a store and instinctively jotted 7485 next to his signature. Whenever he gave the receipt back to the clerk, they’d always look at him sideways and ask, “What’s this number?”

Charlie would usually smack his palm on his forehead. “Sorry, that’s my badge number. I’m a cop. It’s just a habit.” This was a habit that, even 16 years after being a police officer, Tom couldn’t shake either. Charlie’s head began to swirl. How could Koi hide this from him? If anyone knew, it was her. She even gave him that whole speech about how no one can effectively go undercover with the families. Charlie shoved everything back into the desk so that his search wouldn’t be noticed.

“Come on, we’ve got to go.” Charlie dragged Hagerty’s limp body out of the building, down the block, and, eventually, into an unmarked squad-car.

## XII.

Jimmy Schmidt was paying for a hotdog from a food truck painted like the Taj Mahal that also served falafel and gyros. A lot of the guys in the Calabrese family were originally New Jersey guys, but not Jimmy Schmidt. He was as New York as they came. Jimmy was the fourth generation in his family to serve in the Genovese organization, which Tom now ran. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all proud New Yorkers, and before that the Schmidts were from Italy. The first Schmidt had come over with the Ellis Island refugees, like many of the original members of La Cosa Nostra, and had been given the very un-Italian name of Schmidt. The family's original name had been Paglia, but they were stuck being Schmidts now.

As Jimmy walked over to a bench, he was picking onions and peppers off his hotdog and complaining. "These motherfuckers think I want all this shit on my dog?"

"That's a New Jersey dog. You're in New Jersey. What'd you expect?" A familiar voice came from behind Jimmy. He turned around and saw Two-Tone Malone.

"Yeah, but who wants all this shit? And look at this bread, this is a fucking mess." Jimmy went to throw away the hotdog, but Malone stopped him.

"Whoa. What're you doin'? I'll eat that if you're not gonna." Malone snatched up the dog and took a mouthful before continuing to talk. "So, this thing. You said you've got a video of it?"

They sat down at the bench. "Yeah, Malone you wouldn't believe it. The big guy's a cop, or at least he was. I'm not so sure what the whole situation-" Malone smacked Jimmy.

"Would you shut the fuck up?" He looked around. "Don't say that sort of shit out loud. Don't even think that shit too much. You know what happens if you're wrong." Jimmy just waited with a blank face. "We both end up disappearing."

Jimmy took out a blue flash drive with a Phyrexia pharmaceutical label on it. "It's on here. Watch it for yourself. The big guy says it all." Malone took the flash drive.

“All I can say is I hope you’re right. Cause you know what I gotta do if you’re not, and I really don’t want to do that, Jimmy.” Malone meant it too. He could remember a time when little Jimmy Schmidt hit his first ever in-the-park home run in T-ball. Hell, he could even remember smoking cigars at the clubhouse with Rob Schmidt, Jimmy’s dad, the night Jimmy was born. Malone really didn’t want to hurt Jimmy, or have anyone else hurt him, but he knew he would, if he had to do it.

Malone got in the car with Mario and Tommy D. in the front seat, Mario driving. They drove Malone back to his house. “Why you goin’ home in the middle of the day? You never do that,” Tommy D. asked.

Malone barely acknowledge the question. “Eh... I gotta take a shit.” They pulled up to Malone’s colonial brick house with eggshell white pillars. Once they got parked in the driveway, they all got out of the car. “Whoa. What are you guys doin’? Get back in the car. You’re not coming inside. Just-just wait out here.” Mario and Tommy D. slowly got back in the car.

Malone opened the heavy white door to his house and his wife heard his entrance. “Oh, honey. You’re home? It’s so good to see you.” She came running in from the living room where he could hear a soap opera playing. “What brings you home. You lookin’ for a little afternoon delight, huh?” She grabbed the lapels of Malone’s jacket and rubbed against him, her lips begging for a kiss. He pushed her away from him.

“Nah. I gotta do some work. I just need my computer. Where is it?”

“Oh, it’s up in the bedroom.” She went up and got it for him. Malone sat down at the kitchen table and opened the laptop. His wife’s Facebook page and an Amazon cart were already open, already on the screen. He closed them and put the flash drive in the port. Then, he looked over and Kristen, his wife, was staring at the screen with him. Malone blew a gasket.

“Can’t I do anything without you looking over my goddamn, motherfucking shoulder the whole time!” He got up from the table with the laptop in hand. “Fuck!” He kicked the kitchen chair across the

room, obviously hurting his foot. Malone stormed into the upstairs bathroom with the laptop and locked the door behind him.

He sat on the toilet and balanced the laptop on his knees. It took Malone twenty minutes and a serious amount of frustration to finally open the flash drive and get the video playing. Once he got it playing, he got frustrated because it was nothing but Jack Granzen sleeping. After watching Jack sleep for fifteen minutes, Malone's frustration boiled over the top.

"Fuck this. That little shit must'a been makin' shit up." Malone got up and started to close the laptop. "I should'a known the big guy wasn't a fuckin' rat." Just then, Malone saw Tom open Jack's door and sit down next to his hospital bed. "No fucking way..." He sat back down on the toilet and watched the video. He saw and heard the same conversation that Jimmy and Janzen had overheard.

When Malone finished watching the video, he quietly closed the laptop took out the flash drive and put it in his inner breast pocket. He sat there on the toilet for a moment wondering what to do, but the decision was already made for him. He was just wondering if there was another way, but there wasn't.

He was so distracted by the shock of the video that he didn't notice the shadow underneath the bathroom door. He would usually be paranoid enough to notice such a thing as his wife listening at the door, but not this time.

He hid the flash drive in a vent under the sink, came out of the bathroom, and Kristen jumped a little. She was putting towels in the narrow closet next to the bathroom door. Malone's face got murderous.

"What the fuck did you hear in there?"

"Ew." She rolled her eyes. "You think I wanna listen to you while you're in there. I know you well enough to know you're either shittin' or whackin' off. Either way, I've hear enough of those noises already."

Malone went into his den and pulled a section of wood paneling off the wall. From it he removed a large green duffle bag. From the duffle bag, he took out a hand full of cash, two pistols, and after

looking at it for a moment, a grenade. He shoved it all into a black leather satchel, handing a wad of money to Kristen, who had begun to watch him.

“If I ever disappear, there’s a life insurance policy buried in the backyard behind the petunias. It should be enough to bury me and take care of you.”

Most wives would get hysterical and ask what was happening, but Kristen had been a mobster’s wife for too long. She just nodded her head, kissed him, and let him go down the stairs and out the door. The hysteria would be an act at this point anyway, she knew what was happening. Her husband was taking over the family.

#### XIV.

Charlie had never been madder than he was as he waited for the elevator to climb to the sixth floor of the New Jersey FBI Field Office. The elevator dinged, the doors opened, and Clark the smiling twenty-two-year-old, Asian American intern they had manning the desk smiled at Charlie. Charlie ignored him completely and walked straight past him towards Agent Koi's office.

"Oh, uh, sir. You have to sign in and wait to be-" Clark gave up and buzzed Agent Koi's phone.

Agent Koi, sitting in her office, pressed the intercom button on her phone, letting Clark's voice come through the speaker. "Uh, Miss Koi, someone's on their way back to see you. I tried to stop him, but he wouldn't-" The doors to her office slammed open.

"Just what the fuck do you think you're doing? Hagerty almost got killed out there today. You know that?"

"I don't understand, Charlie. You knew this was extremely dangerous. If you recall, I tried to talk you out of it."

"Oh yeah? Bullshit. I know you've already got a man inside the Genoveses. Why wouldn't you just tell me from the beginning?"

"Charlie, you're really not making any sense. Would you just sit down and-"

"No! I'm not listening to it anymore. I know. I put it together, you've had Tom Calabrese inside this whole time. That's why you didn't want anyone else going inside, you already had a guy at the top. I mean fuck, Koi."

"Have you lost your mind? Calabrese isn't one of ours? We've spent 20-million dollars investigating him. I can show you the receipts, why would we do that if he were one of ours?"

Charlie visibly began to lose steam, but he still wanted an outlet for his rage. "You swear you're not lying?"

"I swear, Charlie. I wish I were, but I'm not. What made you think this?"

“I saw a signed lease by Tom Calabrese, and he accidentally put down a badge number next to his name and scribbled it out.”

“So? What does that mean.”

Charlie laughed. “That’s right. You never patrolled, did you?”

“No,” she sighed.

“Well, I have this habit of putting my badge number after my name, cause you do that on all of the paperwork for the precinct. All the other guys used to say they’d do the same thing.”

“And that’s why you think the biggest organized crime figure in the tristate area is actually a police officer? Come here.” She pointed to a chair next to her desk. “Come on. I want to show you something.”

Charlie was reluctant, but he came over and sat on the steel seat. “What do you want to show me?”

“This,” she pulled a folder out of her bottom drawer, “is the folder of the crimes I hope... or maybe it’s more like a dream, but these are the crimes that I think Tom Calabrese is responsible for ordering.” She opened the folder. First, was a picture of a man in a suit without a jacket, shirt sleeves rolled up to his forearms. “This was Rick King. He made a successful bid for a construction job that Tom Calabrese wanted. He wouldn’t withdraw his bid, and he was found like this.” Agent Koi flipped to the next picture. It was a picture of the same man with his throat slit. “Next, we have Sean Clemente.” The next picture showed a man coaching a little league baseball game. “Mr. Clemente had a wife and three kids, he ran a carwash for twenty-three years, until one day Calabrese had his underboss, Malone drop in and inform him about the new arrangement. He was going to have to start kicking up 15% of his profits to the Calabrese’s, and when he couldn’t afford to do that anymore...” She flipped to the next picture. A picture of a dead woman in a kitchen, even Charlie, who had seen so many dead bodies that he was usually able to identify the cause of death on sight, couldn’t tell how she had died. All he could tell was that it had been messy and painful. “He had Clemente’s wife and oldest son killed right in his house. They

left Clemente alive, so that he could keep earning money for them, and they let his youngest son live, so they could still have leverage over him. Something to threaten him with still.” She turned to the next page, a picture of an elderly woman selling flowers from a sidewalk storefront. The lady reminded Charlie of his grandmother on his mother’s side. “This is Liddy Abeles. She was a staple of the Bronx for 45 years, until the Calabrese’s decided—” Charlie cut her off.

“Okay. I get the point.” He shut the folder for her, afraid of what the next image may hold in store. “Maybe I was just a little too worked up from today. Things got really sticky out there.”

Charlie went on to debrief Koi on the day’s events. He told her about how much Malone seemed to like him. He told her about how they almost made him dismember Hagerty’s body. Then, he told her one last thing.

“Oh yeah, and I found this while I was going through Calabrese’s office.” Charlie reached into the black leather satchel bag he carried with him and pulled out a box. He sat the blue cardboard box on Koi’s desk. “He had it hid up above the ceiling panels. I found it just as I was about to leave.” He removed the blue lid, revealing rows of mini-cassette tapes.

“Have you listened to them yet?” Agent Koi asked.

“I thought we could share the honor.”

Tom Calabrese had no idea that so many people were circling his greatest secret. He had lived the lie for so long that he had almost started to believe it himself. He and Lisa had carved out another night as a do-over for their ruined anniversary. She had planned everything, of course, and all that Tom was required to do was show up, smile, and say sweet things to her.

So far, he was behaving splendidly, and she was enjoying the time she got to spend with him. Lisa got so little time with Tom since most days he was busy with business. They had just finished their dinner and were getting into their movie. They were watching *Serendipity*, a movie that Tom would normally consider corny, but it held a special place in his heart. It was the first movie that he and Lisa had

ever seen together. As they began to ignore the movie and pay more attention to one another, their passions were halted by a banging at their door once again.

“Son of a bitch,” Tom jumped up from the couch. “Somebody better have gotten shot in the fuckin’ head again.” He went around the couch, down the hall, into the living room, and looked through the peephole. It was Nicki and some kid friend of his that Tom hadn’t seen before. Tom honestly didn’t know if he had seen him before. He could have been one of the new kids working for the family. The family was getting so big that Tom lost track sometimes. He didn’t like the look of the kid though. There was something vacant behind Nicki’s friend’s eyes. It was either heavy drugs or a serious chemical imbalance in the brain. Either way, Tom planned to scold Nicki and tell him to never come to the house unannounced again. Tom swung open the door, and just as the dark night air peeked through the door, a single barrel shotgun shoved its way through.

The skinny kid shoved the door open with his foot, revealing himself. He had a shotgun in his right hand pointed at Tom and a pistol in his left hand shoved in Nicki’s gut. “Ain’t ya’ gonna invite us in, Mr. Calabrese?” The kid didn’t wait for Tom to respond. He stepped in stamping mud spots all over Tom’s chalk white carpet. Tom opened his mouth to say something. “Let me guess?” The kid held the shotgun level with Tom’s face. “This is the part where you say, ‘I don’t know who I’m messin’ with.’ Then, you tell me all the bad things that will happen to me if I do anything to you or little Nicki over here. Well, let me save you some time big guy. I. Don’t. Care. Your whole family’s gonna be dead before the Superbowl, and you’re going to be first.”

“No, son. I wasn’t going to say that.” Tom took a deep breath and swallowed. “I was just going to ask what you wanted? Money? Drugs? Girls? Power? Whatever you want, and I mean whatever, I can get it for you. You obviously know who I am, so you know that.”

“Look, Mr. Calabrese,” Nicki said, “this guy ain’t no use tryin’ a talk to. I tried the whole way over here, and he didn’t listen. He’s got like shit for brains or somethin’?” The kid smacked Nicki in the

mouth with the cylinder of the revolver bring blood out of his mouth instantly. He returned the revolver to its spot in Nicki's side.

"Shut the fuck up," the kid said, "and as for you, Calabrese, I don't need anything you have." Tom could tell that there was no use talking the kid down from what he'd decided to do. It was that vacant look that Tom had recognized through the peephole. That dazed look of someone bent on the destruction of another man. Tom heard the gun go off first, but he didn't feel the slug hit him. A hole formed in the middle of the kid's head, and he collapsed onto the floor motionlessly, dropping the two guns along with him. Tom checked himself for bullet holes, but he hadn't been hit.

It took Tom a moment to realize what had happened. Lisa was standing in the hallway with a 9mm Ruger in her hands. She was breathing heavily but didn't look panicked. "Are you okay, honey?" She handed the gun to Tom and rushed over to Nicki to nurse his bloody mouth.

"Yeah, I think so." Nicki was holding the bloody spot on his head. "That motherfucker didn't have to hit me though."

"Oh, I know he didn't. You poor baby." Lisa escorted Nicki into the kitchen to clean off the blood.

Tom took a step out of his already open front door. He looked around and didn't see anybody. Surely one of his neighbors had heard the gunshot, but he wasn't worried about them calling the police or anything like that. He knew them. They knew him. This was Tom's neighborhood after all. He was trying to see if the spastic kid had a follow car or backup of any sort. It looked like he didn't.

Tom shut the door behind him and looked at the kid's lifeless body with a quarter-sized hole where the bridge of his nose and left eye used to meet. Tom covered the kid with a cheap blanket and joined the others in the kitchen.

Nicki was sitting on a stool at the island, holding a paper towel full of ice cubes up to his busted lip. Lisa was busying herself making a sandwich for Nicki.

"What the fuck was that about, Nicki?"

“I’m real sorry, boss. They didn’t give me much choice though. They caught me comin’ out of the titty bar and brought me right over here.”

“What do you mean, they?” Tom asked.

“Well, when they picked me up there were like four guys, and they all grabbed me. You know, they probably knew that just one of them wouldn’t be able to take me. Ya’ know?”

“Oh, I’m sure that was it,” Tom said.

“But in the car, they were talkin’ the whole time about killin’ the family. They were sayin’ shit like they’d might just poison our favorite bar or blow up the warehouse out by the rail.”

“Did you recognize them?” Lisa asked.

“Nah, but they made it clear, like that kid said, they want to just wipe out the whole family.”

“Instead of going to war they’re just going to commit genocide.” Tom caught Lisa’s eyes. She looked calmer than him. Her eyes gave him the support and strength he needed to smother his panic and focus on the problem at hand. “Was there anything that they said or did that indicated who they might be with? Bonannos maybe?” Lisa slid the plate and sandwich in front of Nicki.

“Nah, not really. They just talked a lot of shit to each other about killin’. That twitchy kid dropped the rest of the guys off uptown, and then he brought me here.”

“Where did he drop them off?”

“Ah, I don’t know. It was just somewhere uptown.” Nicki took a bite out of the sandwich.

“You gotta do better than that. If we drive around could you take me back there, where he dropped the other guys off?”

“Yeah, probably, but why would you wanna do that? It’s not like it was their house or anything. It was just some bar.”

“Just get in the fucking car.”

“But I’m not done with my sandwich.”

“Bring it with you.” Tom was already in the other room making a call on his phone. In fact, he made several calls. The first call was to Malone. Tom told him to send a couple guys to his house to clean up the kid’s body and a couple more to watch after Lisa. Then, he called the four underbosses of the four other families and told them that he needed a sit-down with all five families. He expected pushback. The five bosses hadn’t met in one place in nearly ten years. To Tom’s surprise, each underboss he called, seemed to want the meeting as much as he did. When he called Vinny, the Lucchese’s second in command, the conversation got almost hostile.

“Vinny, I need a sit down with all five families. One of the families is making a big move, and I mean too big. We all gotta talk this out before things go nuclear.”

“Oh yeah? I bet you’d love to get Boss Palermo and the other three bosses all in one place at the same time. You’re goin’ around killin’ all our soldiers and next thing you want to meet the boss face to face. I don’t think so,” Vinny said.

“Well, all the other families are going to be there. I suggest he at least sends a representative. If no one shows up from the Luccheses, I’m going to be very suspicious about that. You understand?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. We’ll send someone. Maybe I’ll come if I’m feeling a little crazy that day.”

Tom kissed Lisa goodbye and gave her back the 9mm Ruger. “Now, I got a few guys coming over to clean up the kid and watch out for you. So, just don’t go shootin’ them when they come over. Anyone else, put another hole in their fuckin’ head.” He kissed her once again, this time on the forehead, and left.

As Tom and Nicki started to leave Tom’s neighborhood in Newark, it didn’t take Nicki too long to realize that they were traveling away from New York.

“Hey Tom. You realize that I meant they lived uptown in the city, not out in Yonkers or nothing. Right?”

“You said you didn’t really know where they lived.” Tom didn’t take his eyes off the highway in front of him.

“Yeah, like I said, I don’t think they lived there, they just picked a couple guys up from some abandoned building—”

“A crack house.”

“Yeah, proolly.”

“I don’t need you to point out the crack houses in uptown to me. I’m more than aware of them.”

“So, where are we goin’ then?”

At this point they were getting onto I-87 heading north across the state line into upstate New York.

Tom was silent and serious the rest of the drive. Nicki tried to turn on the radio. Tom turned it off. He tried to light a cigarette. Tom threw it out the window. A couple hours into the drive, he decided to try to talk, but Tom wasn’t very interested in doing that either.

“Look, I know that I messed up bringing those kids to your house, but I just didn’t think I had a choice. I mean they were gonna blow my fuckin’ head off, and I knew you wouldn’t want that, right?” Tom didn’t answer. “And you know I wouldn’t have ever let anything happen to you or Aunt Lisa. I would have laid down my life if that’s what it took.”

As they passed Albany and turned down one of the darkest country roads Nicki had ever seen, he began to beg for his life.

“Please, don’t do this. I’m a loyal guy. I’ve always been loyal. If you let me live, I’ll be the best earner and most loyal guy you ever seen.” They entered the tiny town of Tomhannock, which was made up of a couple farm houses and one giant water reservoir, the Tomhannock Reservoir. They pulled down a dirt road and drove past a farmhouse towards the reservoir. As the roads became darkened by the surrounding trees, the only light on the road was from the headlights of Tom’s Range Rover. They stopped at a dirt landing at the edge of the reservoir, which looked more like a lake. Tom put the car in park and turned it off.

“Get out of the car,” Tom demanded without an ounce of emotion.

“Please, Tom. Don’t do this.” At this point, Nicki’s voice was cracking through his tears, although he was still trying to hide it.

“I said get out of the fucking car.” Tom hadn’t looked at Nicki once during their three-hour drive. So, when he snapped his head at Nicki and gave him a glare, Nicki got out of the car immediately.

At the edge of the reservoir was a small dirt footpath, too small for a car, but big enough for them to walk along. The dirt path was just above the water, and they could see that it led to a little island in the middle of the reservoir. As they walked down the path, into the middle of the water, Nicki reconciled his soul and conceded himself to death.

Once they got to the island and got past the first line of trees, there was a small cabin tucked away in the middle of the wooded area, unable to be seen from across the reservoir.

“Tom, I know I don’t even deserve it, but just for my family and Aunt Lisa, can I make one request.”

“No.”

“Oh, okay. I was just gonna ask, anyway, if you could shoot me in the stomach or something. I know they say it takes longer and all that to die, but I don’t want my mom to see my face blown off or nothin’ like that.”

Tom was now unlocking the door to the cabin.

“Shoot you? What the fuck are you talking about?” He opened the door and waved Nicki in behind him. “Your punishment’s gonna be a lot worse than that.”

Inside the cabin was Nicki’s Aunt Missy. From the smell of the cabin, she’d been chain smoking cigarettes while she recovered from her gunshot wound. Medical equipment littered the cabin, from the hospital bed she was laying in, to the boxes of gauze, bandages, and pain meds.

“You’ve got to watch after your Aunt Missy.”

“You’re going to make me live with this fucking kid?” Aunt Missy blew smoke in their direction. “What the fuck did I ever do to you?”

“You two are the only ones in the family that are related to Lisa by blood. I’m guessing that’s why these crackhead kids targeted you guys first.” Tom turned to Nicki. “Lisa would never forgive me if I let anything happen to the two of you. On top of that, we need someone to take care of Missy while she recovers.”

“I was doing just fine.”

“Really? Look at this place?” Tom gestured at the mess that had accumulated in the small cabin. There were cigarette butts and ashes everywhere, trash was piling up under Missy’s hospital bed, and every dish in the cabin seemed to be in the sink covered in filth. “That hole in your head’s going to get infected if you keep living like this.”

“Wait, so you’re going to make me play nurse to her? Tom, with all due respect, that’s not fair.”

“Nicki, you just brought some asshole with a shotgun to my house. I don’t give two fucks about what you think is fair. You’re going to stay here with her. That’s that.”