ONE

1973

I hated my father. That's the first thing. To see a man humiliated . . .

He served in Garibaldi's Legion in Italy in 1866. They gave him a medal for valor and a lifetime pension. Two dollars a month.

Me, I served myself.

My old man came over to America in 1893 with my brother and two of my sisters. Two years later, he sent the rest of us eight dollars for passage from Calabria, where I was born. I was three, four years old. My mother put me in a sailor's suit, and we got on the boat, me, my mother, my sister, and this big cast iron pot the old lady dragged across the ocean because in her illiterate peasant's mind it was the most valuable thing she owned. I always say I slept in that pot on the boat, but that's just one of the stories I tell at dinner with friends at some pricey East Side joint. It's a lie.

My father got himself a job. They handed him a shovel and a pickax, and he went up to Westchester to do road work, digging ditches, working for pennies. One day he headed home with his pay in his pocket, and he got robbed of it all, robbed and beaten by a gang of tough Irish who called him a dirty wop. He showed up at the cold-water tenement apartment on 108th Street in East Harlem where we all lived—me, my sisters, my brother Ed. He stood at the front door holding a bloody rag to his face, and he told us he had no pay, his pockets were empty, and there was nothing he could do.

So you wonder why I hated my father. I hated him because he was weak.

But I was strong. I never looked in the mirror and saw a boy. I always saw a man.

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My old man with blood on his face—that's what comes back to me. Sixty, seventy years later, that's what I see when I close my eyes. You'd think maybe it would be other things, but it's not.

It's not the empire I built during Prohibition, not the money flowing in, not the speedboats that outran the Coast Guard or the fleet of rusty ships bringing in the booze, not the warehouses where we cut the booze with rot gut from the street, not the sea plane that kept a lookout on our boats, not the office at 405 Lexington Avenue where we ran the whole operation. It's not the thousands of slots everywhere in New York bringing in pennies and nickels from speakeasies and candy stores, not the cops that were on the payroll, not me getting a taste of most of the bets laid down in the whole damn country, not me having half the judges and Tammany bosses in my pocket.

It's not the feel of the thick roll of hundreds in the pocket of my $300 suits, not the waiters doing somersaults at the Waldorf or the Copa or all the other fancy joints. It's not the look on Bobbie's face the day I married her at that church on the West Side, a Jewish girl, not much more than a girl, but she stuck with me, and I stuck with her though no one gives me credit for that. It's not everything I got from Thelma—my mistress, my girlfriend, whatever you want to call her—lying down with me in our place on Fifth Avenue where the doormen called me Mr. Martin even though they knew who the hell I was because everyone in town knew who the hell I was.

It's not the judges and congressmen and captains of industry who treated me like I was legit, or how I kidded myself to think that they respected me as we sat together in the steam room at the Biltmore sweating in our fat and our towels. Because that wasn't respect. It was fear.

A lot of people had to die for me to be me. I've said that before and it's true, but it's also true that a lot more people would have died if it hadn't been for me. You can ask anybody who knows.

Here's what happens. One day you make a decision, and later you think that it was that one decision that brought the world down on your head, that one mistake. But then you realize that that one decision was of a piece with all the decisions you made, and together they show the world what you don't want them to see—what is weak inside of you, weak where you thought you were strong. And what you remember then is all the mistakes.

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TWO

1943

It's hard to know what's happening to you while it's happening. You can write that down and keep it in your wallet.

I didn't know what was happening to me that morning in 1943 when I picked up the paper and saw that some son of a bitch I'd never heard of was shot dead on Fifth Avenue and Fifteenth Street. This man—Carlo Tresca—published an anti-fascist newspaper in Italian that nobody who mattered in New York bothered to read.

But then, the next morning, Lorenzo told me that the Tresca thing was Vito's job.

We were standing in the hallway near the barbershop at the Waldorf, which was my place. You might say everyone there was on the payroll.

Lorenzo was a good-looking kid who used to panhandle on Fifth Avenue in front of St. Patrick's. When I found out he was from Calabria where my people are from, I put him to work, dropping things off, picking things up, carrying messages, keeping an eye on certain things. He was the type of young fellow who could put on a suit and come to see me at the Waldorf and not look like maybe he was going to rob the joint.

"Tresca was going after Mussolini in his newspaper," Lorenzo said, "so Vito did a favor for Mussolini."

That figured because Vito—my old friend Vito Genovese—needed Mussolini's okay to run the business Vito had going over in Italy. The business was heroin.

Me and Vito went back to Prohibition days down at the Curb Exchange on Kenmare Street across from police headquarters where the

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cops could see us in broad daylight making the deals, trading cases of gin for cases of bourbon or whatever the other fellow needed. The cops didn't care because they were all on the take.

But later on—in '37—Vito had to run away to Italy because the DA had him on a murder rap. It was a little thing, a gambler in Brooklyn who was shot dead when Vito got greedy, but Vito always went for a small score. So he got on a boat to Italy with a suitcase full of cash, maybe $250,000, maybe $750,000, maybe a lot less. People said his wife—she was a piece of work—went to see him every year with another suitcase filled with more cash. Maybe that's true. But you never can believe what you hear about these things because the people telling you the stories, they're all liars.

"Do me a favor," I told Lorenzo. "Go downtown and talk to Vito's people."

"Okay, Frank."

"And pay attention because what Vito's people know might not be what they say."

But I wasn't the only person looking into the situation.

The DA had a dead body, and he wanted to know who shot this nothing newspaper publisher Carlo Tresca in middle of Fifth Avenue. The DA was Frank Hogan with his degree from Columbia, which was across town from where I grew up on East 108th Street. Columbia University? I could have walked over there when I was a kid to scare the college boys and take their pocket change, but that was another world, and you don't walk to the other side of the world.

After a while, Lorenzo came by the Waldorf to see me again.

"The Tresca thing wasn't just about Mussolini," he said. "Tresca got wind of what kind of business Vito was running in Italy, so Vito shut him up. But I got a name for you, Frank," Lorenzo said. "Carmine Galante."

We both knew that if Carmine Galante shot Tresca, it was definitely Vito's job because in those days Galante was one of Vito's boys. Galante had that look in his eye that told you he was a killer. Charlie Luciano—Charlie Lucky like we called him—had that look too, but he tried to hide it when he was with certain people. And Vito, he had it more than any man I ever knew. When Vito gave you the hard stare . . .

There was something like that in my eyes too, something I couldn't shake. So I talked gentle, I never raised my voice. I have trouble with my

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voice anyway on account of a procedure I had on my vocal cords that gave me what people call a gruff way of speaking.

So I was always polite, and maybe that made people forget about what they saw in my eyes, or maybe they just wanted to forget.

It didn't take the cops long to pick up Carmine Galante for shooting Tresca because Galante drove his own car to do the job. Then Galante drove his car—the same car that every cop in the city was looking for—when he met with his parole officer.

But the police couldn't pin the Tresca hit on Galante because they weren't as smart as they thought they were, but no one is, right? The cops didn't know enough to know that Galante worked for Vito, so they figured maybe I was the one who ordered the hit, me who barely heard of this Carlo Tresca until I read his name in the *New York Times*. But that didn't matter, because now Frank Hogan had the excuse he needed to go after me.

Hogan knew that Tresca put it in his paper that my pal Generoso Pope, who published *Il Progresso*, was a fascist. Pope was my good friend, and there was a war going on over in Europe. It was an insult, a slander, to call Pope a Mussolini man, an enemy of America.

So Hogan told the judge, You know what? Maybe Frank Costello ordered the hit on Tresca to protect his buddy Generoso Pope. Let's find out. And the judge said, Sure, put a tap on that gangster Frank Costello's phone.

So now—thanks to Vito Genovese who sent Carmine Galante to take out Carlo Tresca—Frank Hogan was listening to every phone conversation I had, and if you listen to a man's private conversations . . .

It was August 26, 1943. Thomas Aurelio was on the phone, Aurelio the magistrate who, thanks to me, was now the Democratic and Republican nominee for the Supreme Court of the State of New York. I put the whole thing together.

Pretty soon, everyone in New York knew what Aurelio and me said to each other that morning once Aurelio knew for sure that he was a lock to get his judgeship. They knew because it was in all the papers. Frank Hogan put it there. He did it to show me who was boss. It was the DA's gang against my gang, that's the way it works.

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"Good morning, Francesco," Aurelio said. "How are you and thanks for everything."

Those were the first words out of Aurelio's mouth. So then, bragging like the fool I was—but also just telling the goddamn truth—I said what I said next, and it became one of the most famous things I ever said in all my life.

"Congratulations, it went over perfect," I told Aurelio. "When I tell you something is in the bag, you can rest assured."

"That's fine," Aurelio said, "but right now I want to assure you of my loyalty for all you have done. It's undying."

Undying? I wonder if I believed Aurelio when he said that word. I wonder if I was fool enough to think that a man like Aurelio knew the meaning of loyalty.

A few weeks later, I picked up the *New York Times* and—thanks to Frank Hogan—the headline on the front page said, "Gangster Backed Aurelio for Bench, Prosecutor Avers." There was a picture of Aurelio with his greasy hair slicked down over his bald head, and he was looking over to the side like he just robbed a bank and was waiting to get caught. America was in the middle of the war, but this goddamn story still made the front page. Underneath the headline it said, "Leaders Shocked," but that was an absolute lie. The newspaper men didn't understand how things worked. The leaders of Tammany Hall weren't shocked. They understood what was going on.

The next thing I knew, Aurelio, Mr. Undying Loyalty, issued a statement.

"During my brief acquaintance with Mr. Costello of approximately six months standing, I knew him to be a businessman of good repute, and I definitely disavow any knowledge of his criminal background."

Undying loyalty died pretty fast.

It wasn't easy to help Aurelio in the first place. Before he came to me like I was the Pope of Rome who could grant him sainthood or pardon his sins, Aurelio met twice with our mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, to beg for the job. But there was no way that little bastard LaGuardia was going to help Aurelio become a Supreme Court judge. So now Aurelio was desperate, and desperate people knew how to find me.

But my phone number wasn't listed with the Better Business Bureau. So Aurelio went to Sarubbi, Dr. Paul Sarubbi, my personal physician who

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was also—it's nice the way things work out—district leader for the First Assembly District. And Dr. Sarubbi told Aurelio to pay me a visit. Because if you wanted in in New York City in 1943, you came to me. Aurelio knew who I was. He knew who he was talking to.

Then one morning, there was Aurelio in my apartment waiting until I finished my breakfast and used the toilet. When he came in to see me, I was sitting there in my dressing gown like he wasn't even big enough for me to bother putting on a suit and tie.

"Dr. Sarubbi said I should come and see you," he said.

I gave him nothing back, so he started in about how honest he was, and how he was a proud Italian, and how important it was to have our people on the court. And I got the feeling I always had when men came to me bowing and scraping. I felt like I was a count in an old Italian village—the rich man living up on a hill in a big house high above Lauropoli where I was born, that little penniless town in Calabria with its tiny houses, old stone hovels piled one on top of another on narrow, hilly dirt streets where the peasants and street urchins scratched out their lives.

"I don't know what to do," Aurelio said, which was his way of saying he was helpless like a little boy. When a man makes himself weak that way, he's offering himself up to you.

So I said, "Maybe I can help"—which Aurelio knew meant that from then on, we had a relationship.

That afternoon, I called Mike Kennedy, Congressman Kennedy—who had come to my apartment the year before to shake my hand so that I would give the okay for him to become boss of Tammany Hall. Kennedy had this pale white, puffy Irish face and two chins dripping down over his collar. I told Kennedy to help Aurelio, so I figured Aurelio was in, and I didn't think any more about it. But then, maybe two weeks later, Dr. Sarubbi called and said, "Mike Kennedy's going back on his word. He's getting pressure from Washington."

"FDR?"

"Roosevelt has someone he wants for the job," Sarubbi said.

I knew all about FDR. Forget that fancy way he talked on the radio, he was one tough old pol.

"Kennedy gave me his word," I said.

"I know, Frank, but that was before he heard from the big guy."

I thought about that for a minute or two.

"Frank? You there?"

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“The question is, who does Kennedy care about—me or the guy in Washington.”

So that was it—I wasn’t going to back down. Why should I? I knew FDR, I mean I shook his hand in Chicago in ’32 when he got the nomination to be president the first time. I was there for the Democratic convention with Charlie Luciano. We stayed at the Drake Hotel. Charlie was sharing a room with Albert Marinelli, the head of Tammany back then. It was Marinelli who introduced me to FDR. Marinelli told Roosevelt that I was a New York businessman who’d done a lot for the campaign. Roosevelt was sitting down when we shook hands, but I looked him in the eye and I knew he was thinking, What the hell am I doing shaking hands with this swarthy bastard in his fancy suit who everybody is scared of? Or maybe FDR recognized the name, maybe he knew exactly whose thick, hairy hand he was shaking.

The thing about power is that you have to use it carefully. You don’t overstep. You don’t push unless you have to. But if it’s important enough, you push all the way because you can’t afford to lose.

So I wasn’t going to let Kennedy back out on the promise he made to give Aurelio his judgeship. Looking back, like I said, I only see the mistakes. I see that taking on FDR was a foolish thing to do. But that’s what power does to a man—it makes you crazy. Aurelio was just one judge, and I had plenty. And who wants a fight with the president of the United States?

But I wouldn’t give in, so I went to see Mike Kennedy myself. Right away, as soon as I showed up at his New York office, Kennedy understood that I was not happy because Frank Costello didn’t go out of his way for anybody. They came to see me.

“Look, you made me a promise,” I told him. “Are you as good as your word? You’re the leader of Tammany Hall. Are you going to act like it?”

I didn’t have to say anything else, I never did. I turned and I walked out of his office, and I called Sarubbi and told him it was taken care of.

But Sarubbi wanted to be sure it went the way we wanted it to go. So he sent a message to the other boys at Tammany who were having a meeting to figure out what to do about Aurelio. He told them that if they didn’t give the job to Aurelio, maybe they should think about getting out of town. When the Tammany bosses got a message like that, they knew it came from me.

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So that's what I did to help Aurelio, that's what started all the trouble.

But let me explain something else. The reason I was able to call the shots at Tammany Hall—to become the Prime Minister of the Underworld like they called me, the gangster who could talk nice and had the connections—was that when the so-called reformers like LaGuardia and FDR got in, they cut off the patronage. Tammany was like any political organization, it lived off of patronage—money, jobs, and favors coming out of City Hall into the clubhouses. When the patronage stopped, there was a vacuum. Me and the people I knew, we filled the vacuum. We filled it with the cash we had thanks to Prohbition.

A district leader needed money for his clubhouse, we helped out. The ones who worked with us, they got the envelopes. On Election Day, the boys in the clubhouses had plenty of cash to help their voters with their problems, money for the rent or food, whatever they needed—and the leaders got the votes they wanted. When our friends needed bodies to hang around the polling station and break heads if that's what it came to, we took care of that too. And we sent our boys around asking for contributions to our friends' campaigns, and these weren't the type of fellows anyone would want to say no to.

In other words, we helped where we could, and we got what we wanted. We got judges, assemblymen, congressmen, friends who looked the other way so we could do our business. Simple as that. People say that we got what we got because of fear, because we had the muscle, and that was true. We had guns, sure, but we also had plenty of cash. Fear is a powerful thing, but so is greed.

What I did for Aurelio was just business as usual. But it became a story courtesy of the DA Frank Hogan, and after that, I became what you might call a widely known individual. And in my business, that's a bad thing to be.

Before Aurelio, I had a certain amount of peace of mind. I was fifty years old more or less, I called myself a gambler, and it was only two years before that that the papers called me a "sportsman." That was the exact word they put in about me in the *New York Times*—a paper I read every morning, and you can't say that about Charlie Lucky or any of my other so-called associates. I happen to know for a fact that Charlie

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couldn't make his way down a column of print on the front page of the *Times*, couldn't figure out the point of what he was reading. Me with my third-grade education, I couldn't talk like I was supposed to, but I forced myself to read the *Times*. Ask my wife. I was always trying to improve myself.

Right after the press got ahold of the conversation between me and Aurelio, Mike Kennedy had the nerve to tell the papers that he had no idea I was involved with Aurelio. Mike was lying, but I understood why.

Next thing I knew that little rat LaGuardia jumped in to say that this was "one more illustration of the combination between politics and the criminal elements." He said he was going to take away Aurelio's job as a magistrate. All because the son of a bitch talked to me on the telephone.

That's all they had on me—one goddamn phone call.

I didn't do nothing illegal, even Hogan admitted it. He said right there in the paper that there was "no commission of a crime." But Hogan said it was "an affront to the electorate and a threat to the judiciary." And then one morning I picked up the newspaper and saw that Hogan said, "At the present time Costello is on the blacklist of a federal agency as one who finances illicit narcotic transactions." But that's what prosecutors do when they can't make a case—they humiliate you in public. They try to get you one way or the other.

"They're painting me as a dope dealer," I told my wife when she came back upstairs after taking the dogs out for their walk.

Bobbie was a good wife, but she didn't understand—or maybe she didn't want to understand—certain things.

The Jews, I always say, they stank in the nostrils of the Protestants just like the Italians. So when I met this little Jewish girl Loretta Geigerman—everyone called her Bobbie—she felt familiar to me.

"I'm going to sue," I told Bobbie. "You can't say I'm a dope peddler and me not say anything back."

"Don't make it bigger than it is," Bobbie said, but Jewish people always think that way. She worried too much. It was a sickness with her, but it's a sickness with her people. They don't want to call attention to themselves because they're afraid. It's like they think the Christians are coming for them.

"I can't make this bigger than it is," I told Bobbie. "It's on the front page of the damned newspaper. What's bigger than that?"

"Hitler's bigger than that, the war's bigger than that. No one will remember this in a few days, Frank."

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“Hogan’s not going to forget. The narcotics people aren’t going to forget. You gotta hit back or they run over you.”

“You never listen to me,” Bobbie said.

That’s what women do, they try to make you feel bad for everything you do in your life that isn’t exactly the way they want it. But Bobbie understood the deal we had without a contract or either of us saying a word. It was an understanding, the same way that men of power understood me, what I wanted, without me spelling it out for them. It was understood.

Bobbie was happy enough to live where she lived on Central Park West and out in Sands Point on Long Island where I had my garden and my golf and she had her friends and her card games. And she was happy enough to shop at Bonwit Teller on Fifth Avenue, which was run by Mr. Walter Hoving who also ran Tiffany’s and who I knew personally. Bobbie was happy enough to spend my money and eat in the best joints in town where we were treated like movie stars, and she was happy enough to look the other way when she knew what I did in the afternoon across the park over on Fifth Avenue with my girlfriend.

Because what kind of a man can stick with one woman for his whole life? I don’t trust that kind of a man. It’s unnatural. But I don’t respect a man who’s all over town with his mistress. You didn’t bring your girlfriend into Toots Shor’s. Toots would throw you out.

“What do you always say about Al Capone?” Bobbie said.

When she went on like that, I didn’t really listen. What she was saying might as well have been a Yankee game on the radio in the background, a ball game I didn’t have any money on.

“You always say Al Capone got his name in the papers,” she said, “and once they start reading about you in the papers, you’re done for. You say that, don’t you?”

“Capone’s different.”

“They sent him to Alcatraz. Do you want to go to Alcatraz, Frank?”

“I’m not going to Alcatraz,” I said, and then I went into the next room and called a lawyer.

George Wolf handled a tax situation for me back in ’39. He was a Jew. What other kind of lawyer was going to take on the likes of me? Not the Protestant firms on Park Avenue or Wall Street. So we all went with the

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Jews. Charlie Lucky and Meyer Lansky had Moses Polakoff, a Jew from the Lower East Side. Me, I wanted my own smart Jewish lawyer. I needed someone with a chip on his shoulder, someone who wasn't a part of the people who ran things.

So Wolf came over to see me, and he sat in the living room in his gray suit that didn't fit right, and he looked around, taking it all in for the first time. He'd never been in the inner circle before. My place was in the Majestic, Seventy-Second and Central Park West, and you couldn't get any better than that if you weren't living in the Waldorf like Charlie Lucky did, but who the hell wanted to live in a hotel with out-of-towners in the lobby? What kind of life was that? It wasn't for a married man, a man like me who wanted to live a normal life, get up in the morning and make his own coffee and toast with margarine and then read the paper.

Wolf took in the big piano that I couldn't play, and then he walked over to look at the view of the park from up on the eighteenth floor. He was sizing the place up, and maybe he was thinking that it wasn't gaudy like he probably figured it would be. It was like Wolf had an adding machine in his head and he was figuring out how much cash I invested in the place. That's something Jews do, I've noticed, and it doesn't make any difference to me, but they're merchants by nature, right? Retailers and wholesalers, and they measure a man's worth in numbers, dollars and cents, which you might argue everyone does. I don't mean anything by it, it's just an observation.

Wolf took a look at the painting of a lady we had hanging over the fireplace.

"Who's that, Frank?"

"It's not anybody, it's a painting by that fellow Christy, Howard Chandler Christy."

"The society painter?"

"What's the matter, you surprised by that?"

"No, no, not at all. This is an elegant home you have here."

Wolf walked over to the slot machine hanging there on the wall.

"True Mint Novelty Company," he said, reading what was written on the side of the thing.

"Who else? True Mint, that's mine. Go ahead, give it a shot, Counselor. Maybe you'll get lucky."

So he reached into his pocket, pulled out a nickel, and sure enough it paid off. He smiled and gave me a look of delight because most people

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have an idea about themselves that maybe they're lucky. Maybe I was fool enough to believe it about myself. But I should have also known standing there in my own living room, even then, that my luck was changing, and I'd need the services of a man like George Wolf and other lawyers too, even pricier lawyers, for the rest of my life.

"Nobody loses in my house," I told Wolf. It was just bragging, a standard piece of business for me like the patter of a magician.

Then we sat down, and I told him how Aurelio came to me, and I set things up with Mike Kennedy and Tammany Hall for Aurelio to become a judge, and how everything was fine until FDR got involved.

Wolf wanted to know why Mike Kennedy would listen to me.

"He's a friend of mine," I said, because that's how I liked to put things—like politics was just business between friends, but what I was really doing was daring Wolf to ask more questions.

Now Wolf's eyes were getting opened up. It's like there was a secret history in New York, a history he might have thought was there, but now he was finally hearing it from the source. And Wolf was hooked. He loved being inside, loved the idea of being my guy, my lawyer, because even though neither of us said it out loud, we both knew I was the boss. He knew that after Tom Dewey put Charlie Lucky in the penitentiary and Vito ran off to Italy, I was number one. So being with me, Wolf was taking a big step up in class.

"You know Mike Kennedy?" Wolf said.

"Yeah, he's my friend. I've got a lot of friends at Tammany Hall."

"A lot of friends?"

"Enough," I said. "I put plenty of judges on the bench in New York City. I call 'em 'my boys.'" Wolf was shocked to hear me say that because it wasn't well known at the time how many friends I had in the courts. "Did you read that story about me in the *Times*?" I asked him. It's something I liked to find out anyway, whether a person reads the *New York Times* because it told me what level of individual I was dealing with.

"I read the *Time*s every morning," he said, and I thought, Of course you do, you're Jewish and it's a Jewish paper, so it's only natural that the Jews read the *Times* like they read the holy books they keep rolled up at the front of their synagogues. I knew about synagogues because two or three times I let Bobbie bring me to a bar mitzvah, which struck me as being something like a big Italian wedding except the food wasn't good and the wine was sweet and nobody knew how to dance.

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"Did you read where they said I was in the narcotics business?" I asked Wolf.

"I saw that. They said you fund it."

"I don't fund nothing," I said, but I couldn't tell if he believed me or not. "I want to sue the paper, and I want to sue that son of a bitch Hogan. Let them prove it. Let them prove in open court that I peddle dope. To me, that's the lowest business there is."

"I'm going to be straight with you," Wolf said. "If you want me to be your lawyer, that's the least you can expect. You've got enough troubles with this Aurelio situation. They're not going to let it go. You don't need more trouble. A man like you has to live with the things people say."

"I don't gotta live with nothing."

"Well, that's my best advice. A libel suit opens a can of worms. It'll cost a lot of money, and it's hard to win, especially with a public figure like yourself."

"A public figure? Is that what I am?"

"If you weren't one before, you're one now. You can thank Frank Hogan for that."

Wolf was selling himself to me like he was the type of fellow who wasn't afraid to tell me the truth. But Wolf wanted in, and it wasn't just about the money to be made off of me. So I told him he was hired, and I'd be in touch, and he walked out of the apartment trying not to show how pleased he was with himself.

Next thing I knew, Frank Hogan wanted to disbar Aurelio, and he issued me a subpoena to testify at the hearing.

I always look at motivations. Why was Hogan getting involved? Was it to get publicity for himself? Yes. Was it to block Aurelio? Yes. But what was the biggest reason? He went after Aurelio so he could go after me. It's just the way a man like Hogan thinks.

Hogan saw that Tom Dewey put Charlie Lucky away, and now Dewey was governor of New York. So Hogan figured that someday maybe he'd be Governor Hogan, though I don't know why anyone would want to leave New York City and move to Albany where it's cold and you can't get a decent meal and there's nobody to talk to but a bunch of political hacks.

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After I got the subpoena to testify, I told Wolf to meet me at the Waldorf for lunch. By the time he got there, I was already sipping a scotch, King's Ransom, which was my brand since Prohibition because I had a piece of the distillery in England. The maître d' walked Wolf over to my table, giving him those extra smiles. "Right this way, Mr. Costello is waiting for you." And I saw that Wolf was eating it up because who wouldn't want to be treated like a new planet circling around the sun, which is what it must have been like to walk into certain places in New York and say, I'm here to meet Frank Costello.

The people eating their food at the Waldorf couldn't help looking at Wolf because he was with me, and they were trying to figure out whether or not he was a gangster. But anyone who wasn't blind would have seen that Wolf had nothing of the street sticking to him. And it wasn't just the cut of his suit or those thick black glasses that he wore. It's the way he moved through a room. This was a guy who wasn't scaring anyone, not the way I scared them or the way a man like Vito Genovese scared them, which was different, something more . . . primitive, you might say.

"Tell me this, Counselor," I said. "Where do you live?"

"On Long Island, on the North Shore."

"Really? I've got a place in Sands Point—somewhere to go to on the weekend."

Now Wolf was worried, like maybe I was going to invite him over to my house or my club for a round of golf. So he changed the subject, and he told me he thought it wasn't a problem for me to testify under oath at the hearing that was looking into the situation with Aurelio.

"You didn't do anything illegal," he said. "You just helped a candidate who was running for office. That's democracy, that's not breaking the law. The only thing they can get you for is perjury. So if you tell the truth, they can't touch you."

We went back and forth, but I wasn't buying it, and I started wondering how smart this fellow was.

"They're after me, waiting for me to slip up," I told Wolf. "I'm hot right now. I go down there and testify, I get headlines. I don't need headlines. Al Capone got headlines and look what happened to him. Charlie Lucky got headlines, and they put him away."

But Wolf said if I didn't testify, they'd get me for obstructing justice.

"What about my rights? What about the Fifth?

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"Hogan will give you immunity."

"Doesn't make sense to me."

"Talk to your friends," Wolf said like he had all the confidence in the world and he didn't need the case. "Ask them what they think you should do."

It was a good bluff and I had to respect that.

So who do I trust? Right away I headed over to Toots Shor's on Fifty-First Street. It was like another second office for me—like the Waldorf. And Toots's place wasn't the type of uptown joint that a man like Vito Genovese would come to. It was only the best of the best.

It was five in the afternoon when I walked in, and the big circle bar was already jammed. Judges, cops, ballplayers, newspaper men—you saw everybody at Toots's joint. Half the people there were famous or thought they were famous, and the other half were there to look at the famous people. Even the sportswriters and other hacks started to think they were famous. Me, I'd sit against the wall on the side just watching, and Toots made sure that no one bothered me. Me and Toots went back to when he worked at speakeasies around town—Owney Madden's joint the Silver Slipper, Billy LaHiff's Tavern on West Forty-Eighth, the Five O'Clock Club. You'd see Toots everywhere. Back then, Toots was a bouncer, a big strong Jewish kid from Philadelphia who'd stand up to anybody.

"I'd keep my mouth shut if I were you," Toots said. He had a kind of a squeak of a voice, not what you'd expect from a big fellow like he was. But you could trust him to tell you what he thought. "I can't see what you get by testifying. You might end up saying more than you want to say."

Next, I sent word to Meyer Lansky, a fellow who never got his name in the paper, that's how smart he was.

I was at the Waldorf barbershop getting a shave like I was every day. My regular girl was taking care of my manicure. Marco the barber had his razor at my throat, and he was scraping back up towards my chin because my beard is as thick as they come. Marco was a silent old man like you see in a small Italian village. If someone came into his shop, and I pulled out a gun and shot the man dead, Marco would tell the police he didn't see nothing. He was pushing seventy, maybe eighty for all I knew. He was probably the only man in the world who could put a blade on Frank Costello's throat without soiling his pants. The man knew what he was doing, and I tipped him enough to send his grandson to Harvard.

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It was widely known that the barbershop was my place. I never used the phone there, but if someone wanted to talk business, they came and sat in the hall and waited until I was ready. But Meyer Lansky didn't wait for anybody, so he walked right in, and he said, "What's up, Frank?"

"Excuse me," I said when Marco was done. "I have to talk to this gentleman."

You talked like that—you said please and thank you and beg pardon—and people respected you. It's like when a prize fighter gives you a soft handshake. Graziano, Willie Pep, Joe Louis—they don't got to prove they're tough guys.

Me and Meyer stepped out of the barbershop and stood in a corner in the hallway that went into the lobby. You'd think the people waiting there would have stared at Frank Costello and Meyer Lansky having a talk. But they didn't dare to look our way, not a glance, that's the power we had over them.

"Why do you wanta come here every day? This was Charlie's place," Meyer asked me because, like I said, Charlie Lucky lived in the Waldorf for a long time. Charlie spread his money around all over the joint, but that didn't stop the goddamn chamber maids from testifying against him in court. They called Charlie "Mr. Ross" when he lived in the Waldorf. Ross, which struck me as funny because anyone could take one look at Charlie and know he wasn't Jewish.

"Let's take a walk," I said.

Me, I walk everywhere, or I take a cab. No driver, no bodyguards, they're always the ones who turn on you anyway. So me and Meyer went out on Park Avenue and headed uptown like we were two businessmen with jobs in an office heading to some Midtown joint for a few drinks and lunch, then maybe back to the office.

Meyer was not a man who liked to talk, and the effect he had on me was that I clammed up around him. He had a strict look about him. You never saw Meyer trying to impress anybody or get himself known around town. He was short, but he gave off some kind of special strength like he could just whisper an order and millions of dollars would move across the country or maybe across the ocean. Later on, they said he was a genius with money like he was J. P. Morgan, but that was just something people wanted to believe. I can't say why.

Finally, I got to the point. "What do you think, Meyer? Should I put my hand on the Bible and answer Hogan's questions?"

Meyer took his time like he was some kind of rabbi, which was

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probably the way he saw himself. You never know how highly people think of themselves.

"I wouldn't do it," he said. "They're talking about you already. Why give them more to talk about?"

"Bobbie agrees with you. She said, 'Remember what they did to Al in Chicago.' "

"Capone was not a smart man. My friends in Chicago say he's like a child now that he's out of Alcatraz. He can't use the bathroom without help. It's a terrible thing the disease he has from going with all those whores. You remember what Paul Ricca told me in Atlantic City back in '29? You were there. Remember what he said?"

Ricca was someone Meyer respected like he respected all the fellows who took over from Capone in Chicago—Tony Accardo, Jake Guzik who they called the Greasy Thumb, Murray Humphries who they called the Hump, all of them. Meyer always said they ran a tight ship.

"How the hell should I remember what Paul Ricca told you in '29?" I said.

"Ricca took me aside and he said, 'Keep your name out of the papers and build your own organization.' You know what else he said? He said, 'Accardo had more brains before breakfast than Capone had for a lifetime.' When Ricca talked, I took it in."

"You shoulda been a Hebrew school teacher," I said.

Meyer was always a little full of himself. He was a member of the Book of the Month Club. He read biographies of Napoleon, and he once told me he admired Gandhi in India, which almost made me laugh because Gandhi was a guy who told his people not to pick up a gun to get what they wanted. Meyer didn't like to remember it, but he was pretty good with a gun in the old days. He and Ben Siegel worked security for my deliveries early on during Prohibition.

Meyer held himself above the rest of us. Maybe because as a Jew he didn't feel at home here in America. He and his people came from Russia. They ran for their lives. Meyer had the stories. But me and my people, when we came here, no one was chasing us. That's the difference. And maybe we fit in a little bit more than the Jews because our churches have crosses in them like all the other churches.

In other words, an RC church is a lot like an American church, a Protestant church, but a synagogue is a different thing. So I'd say that's where that extra caginess came from with Meyer, from feeling that he didn't really belong. It was like he thought that if things got tough, the

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Jews were going to get chased out of America. And knowing what was going on in Germany at the time—knowing what was happening to his people—that weighed on a man like Meyer.

“So what are you going to do, Frank?” Meyer asked me.

“I don’t know. I gotta think. I might just tell the truth like Wolf said I should.”

Meyer gave me a harsh look like I was a fool ignoring his advice.

“With a little salt,” I said. “I’ll tell ’em the truth with a little salt.”

Meyer smiled, but it was almost like he was smiling to himself at something he didn’t say out loud. That’s all you ever got from him. He wasn’t one for making wise-guy remarks, which was strange enough. And he never really laughed, which was even stranger.

We said our goodbyes, and Meyer turned like he was going to walk away, but then he thought of something else.

“Remember what Dewey did to Charlie,” he said, “when Charlie put himself up on the stand.”

This is what Meyer was talking about.

Back in ’36, before Tom Dewey ran for president, he made a name for himself as a prosecutor when he locked up Charlie Luciano for organizing the whorehouses—what they called compulsory prostitution. Like I said, Charlie called himself Charlie Lucky. Charlie Lucky? Come on. Nobody’s lucky. But Charlie thought he could outsmart Tom Dewey, so he took the witness stand in his own defense, and Dewey took Charlie apart like Joe Louis taking care of one of those so-called Bums of the Month.

I always knew that’s how it would end for Charlie if someone didn’t take a shot at him some day. And if any of us were honest with ourselves, we’d say we knew that’s how it would probably end for us too. But none of us were any more honest with ourselves than we were to the cops, the newspaper men, or the women who slept next to us in our beds.

Charlie always said, “I ain’t afraid of nobody.” It was like he thought he was still the toughest kid on the block, but Charlie wasn’t living on the Lower East Side anymore. And maybe Dewey looked like a fool with that mustache and his eyes so wide apart and his hair parted straight down the middle like the groom on the wedding cake like someone said about him. But it turned out that Tom Dewey wasn’t afraid of nobody either, and he was a smart son of a bitch.

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Up on the stand, Charlie lied like he was still out on the street, but he didn't understand where he was—that he was uptown, he was in America. And it was easy for Dewey to make him look like a fool. Charlie's lies were stupid lies. When Dewey asked Charlie if he was fairly well acquainted with Al Capone, Charlie said no. What about the phone records showing calls from Charlie's suite at the Waldorf to half of the gangsters in the country? Charlie said someone else must have used his phone. That was the best he could come up with. He said he'd never met any of the other pimps and gangsters he was indicted with except for one fellow, but Dewey had the maids from the Waldorf saying they'd seen Charlie with them all. And Dewey had all the whores singing for him. So that was it. It was as all over for Charlie Lucky.

Back then, we all said Charlie wouldn't stoop to running whorehouses, it was small potatoes, a dirty business. I said the whorehouses in New York were as organized as a flea circus. But we all knew Charlie had been a big whore man since he was a kid. He went to whores and bragged about it. That's just a fact. He was telling half of the truth when he told Dewey that when it came to whores, he gave, he didn't take. But he took, too.

The whole prostitution racket was run by Charlie's guy, Little Davey Betillo. Davey was a pimp, plain and simple, nothing but a pervert who sometimes liked to dress like a broad. He was a depraved character, but that's who you'd expect to run a business like that. Later on, Davey was Charlie's cook when both of them were doing time upstate in Dannemora.

When that whore Cokie Flo testified that Charlie said he wanted to organize the whorehouses like they were the A&P, I wasn't surprised. That's the way Charlie talked—he wanted to think he was running a legit business. These cathouses were run like factories. The whores had punch cards like they were shoveling coal into a furnace. They had to prove how many men they'd been with each night. The doctor came once a week, every Monday, to check for the clap, and if any of the broads were knocked up, the doctor took care of it.

It wasn't something I liked to think about, those young broads with animals jumping on and off them five, six times a night, but Charlie didn't care. Most of the whores were dope fiends, and Dewey knew that, and he knew how to use that to make them talk. Frank Hogan was there the whole time working for Dewey, seeing how Dewey got the job done. The whores needed their junk, and if they cooperated with the DA, they got

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