

BLOOD
OF OUR
FATHERS

by

Sonny Girard

Author's Note:

During the course of reading this manuscript, you will come across conversations or thoughts of characters written in Italian. Sometimes those words have been spelled correctly and are grammatically correct as well. In other instances words or colloquial expressions have been purposely misspelled to indicate their phonetic sounds, which are more easily recognizable to those who have no background in that written language. For example, the word *compare* is not nearly as familiar to most people as its phonetic, Americanized, slang version of *goombah*, which is how it is spelled in this book, or the name *Vincenze* instead of the correctly spelled *Vincenzo*.

S.G.

The Five New York City Mafia Families

CALABRA FAMILY:

BOSS: Don Vincenze Calabria

“Little Vinnie” Calabria (Don Vincenze’s son)
“Muffin Face”
Anthony Erice

UNDERBOSS: Joseph Augusta

SOLDIER: “Buster” Alcamo

ASSOCIATES: “Mickey Boy” Messina
Richie DeLuca
“Chink” Agrigento
“Butch” Scicli
Guido Vizzini

SOLDIER: Vito “The Bug”

ASSOCIATES: Freddie Falcone
“Dinty Moore”

SOLDIER: Charlie Sciacca

ASSOCIATES: Carlo Conte

SOLDIER: “Charlie Bones”

PALERMO FAMILY:

BOSS: Don Peppino Palermo

UNDERBOSS: "Blackie" Palermo

SOLDIER: Ronnie Belice

SOLDIER: Mario Piazza

ASSOCIATES: "Slippery"
"Johnny Crumbs"
"The Polack"

LENTINI FAMILY:

BOSS: "Tom Thumb" Lentini

UNDERBOSS: "Rock" Santoro

SOLDIERS: "Spike" Bagheria
Jimmy Del Comiso
Danny "Trap" Trapini
Ray Menfi

DIGIOVANNI FAMILY:

BOSS: "John-John" DiGiovanni

UNDERBOSS: Sammy "The Blond" Termini

SOLDIERS: Jack "The Wop" LoPresti
"Junior" Vallo
"Sally The Soldier" Vallo
Tony Giarre

FAVARA FAMILY:

BOSS: "Benny Brown" Favara (In Prison)

ACTING

BOSS: "Petey Ross" Rossellini

ACTING

CONSIGLIERE: "Sonny" Fortunato

ACTING

UNDERBOSS: "Ralphie The Eye" Burgio

SOLDIER: "Crazy Angelo" Gangi

ASSOCIATES: Georgie "The Hammer" Randazzo
"Skinny" Malone

SOLDIER: Nicky "The Cat" Catapano

ASSOCIATES: Morris Vlasowitz

SOLDIERS: Anthony Mussomeli

"Johnny Pumps" Mussomeli

John Nicosia

Prologue

May22: Brooklyn

The phone was picked up before the first ring had finished. “Yeah.”

“It’s me,” the caller stated. “Is everything taken care of for tonight?”

“All done.”

“Are your people where they’re supposed to be?”

“Hundred percent.”

“Where’s Mickey Boy?”

“Out for dinner with some ‘young lady’ early, then he’ll meet his partner, Richie, at Pastel’s.”

“Who’s the girl?” the caller inquired.

“His kid brother’s ex-girlfriend. That’s why he’s leavin’ her early to go whorin’.”

“What if he changes his mind, will you know where he is?”

“No problem. Somebody’ll be on him all night.”

“I don’t have to tell you how important tonight is...that meeting’s the beginning of everything, and we must know where everyone is...especially him. If you have to, go grab him yourself. I don’t want to do it that way, but if we’re left no choice...”

“Don’t worry, you could count on me.”

PART I

ONE

May 22: Flatbush, Brooklyn

Michael “Mickey Boy” Messina held the pay phone’s receiver to his ear, but his attention was riveted on the hazy blue-gray quality of the Brooklyn twilight. All the gold and magenta sunsets he’d seen while upstate in prison couldn’t compare to the polluted glow that ushered in the most pleasurable part of his day here at home.

On the other end of the line his partner, Richie DeLuca, argued that Mickey Boy should never have made an appointment with Laurel. “...All she could be is a pain in the ass. You shoulda ran the other way when she said she wanted to see you.”

“Nah, Rich, I couldn’t do that,” he said while running a hand through his thick chestnut waves. “What was I gonna tell her, I just called to say hello after six years, but no I won’t meet you for a cup of coffee? That’s not me.”

Mickey Boy glanced at his watch. “Just give me about two hours. I’ll waltz’er in an’ outta some joint around here an’ have her home before she knows what happened.”

When Richie continued to nag, Mickey Boy interrupted him. “Yeah, yeah, I know. I’ll meet you at the back of the bar. Lemme go an’ get this over with. See ya later.”

Time had changed more than just Mickey Boy’s personal situation; his only family (a widowed mother, Connie, and a half brother, Alley) had moved to Massachusetts, and his immediate mob superior, Sam LaMonica, had died only days before Mickey Boy’s release from prison. In the scant three months he’d been home he’d become acutely aware of the eroded code of honor and a totally dead sense of obligation among his peers; the “me” generation seemed to have overtaken the mob, and it equated Respect only with dollars. Richie’s attitude about Laurel was just a small example of those differences that irritated him and detracted from the joy of his homecoming.

Had things been that much different before he went away? he wondered lately. Or had he just been too caught up in the life to see its faults? If jail’d had a positive effect, he reasoned, it was to make him think, and to make him take a step back and see things clearly.

But eating himself up inside or complaining to deaf ears wouldn’t accomplish anything. The only thing that counted, that would make a difference, was to be at the top. Then people would have to listen, he told himself as he pulled his white Mark VII away from the curb.

As Mickey Boy drove slowly along the tree-lined street, a brown Oldsmobile 98 pulled into the spot by the phone that he’d just abandoned. The Oldsmobile’s passenger

door opened, and a burly, well-dressed man went to the phone. He picked up the receiver, deposited a coin, and dialed without losing sight of the white Lincoln.

Mickey Boy stopped at the familiar brick house and honked his horn. He flipped open his glove compartment and rummaged through the various Sinatra tapes that filled it. Would the mellow moods of his *Point of No Return* album be too intimate? The upswing beats of *Come Fly with Me* better? Maybe *Ol' Blue Eyes*? He was about to press the horn again when his jaw dropped and his mouth hung open; *Ol' Blue Eyes is Back* remained clenched in his fist. Mickey Boy sat mesmerized, watching Laurel on her way to his car – hurrying, smiling, waving.

“Mickey, hi!” Laurel squealed excitedly when she entered the snow-white interior. She bounced off the seat and threw her arms tightly around his neck, engulfing him in her tawny mane and Calvin Klein scent. Her skin felt like cool satin against him; his cheek burned where she kissed it. The sensation of touching her flesh through the flimsy fabric of her dress shot up his arms, leaving him barely enough strength to push her back to arm’s length.

“You’re a woman,” he muttered, more to himself than to her.

“I certainly hope so,” Laurel said. She settled into her seat and tugged at the hem of her dress, which had hiked enough to expose her upper thigh. “I would have been sorely disappointed if I had grown up to be a man.”

Mickey Boy’s eyes stayed glued to her hemline as she tried to pull it down. “No, that’s not what I meant,” he replied. “It’s just that everybody else – me, my mother, Richie – we all look the same. I guess I expected you to also.” Looking up at her, he added, “I don’t think I could call you ‘kid’ anymore.”

Laurel’s gray-green eyes shone, reflecting her obvious pleasure at his reaction to her. She straightened up and primped her hair, her dress stretching over her breasts to display their form as thoroughly as if she were nude. “Six years makes a big difference when you start out at sixteen, like I did. Remember, you were what, twenty-five, twenty-six when you went away?”

“Twenty-six.”

“That’s why you look pretty much the same,” she explained, as if to one of her third graders. “Except, maybe a little thinner,” she said, studying him as she spoke. “Am I right, you lost weight?”

“Well, you know how it is in jail, having to fight for your life every day, back against the wall. Wanna see my scars?”

“Stop, silly.” Laurel giggled and playfully slapped his arm. Even that nonsexual but feminine gesture electrified him. He turned the air-conditioner vents directly on himself, wishing he could lower the temperature without seeming either ill or foolish.

Mickey Boy kept glancing at Laurel as he drove: manicured crimson nails; silky blue and green print dress; navy high heels. The last time he’d seen her in heels she was wobbling off to Alley’s prom looking like a foal saddled in pink chiffon. A kid – his kid brother’s girl. Scrawny, stick-people Laurel. Now her effect on him was intoxicating and distracting, rendering him oblivious to the car that followed two lengths behind.

“Instead of eating around here, I figured we’d go uptown for dinner,” Mickey Boy said as he steered onto the Manhattan bound entrance of the Belt Parkway. “My friend

Freddie's got a great place up there; you'll love it." He looked at Laurel again. She reminded him of a picture in one of those high-class fashion magazines – why, she even wore pearls. "I can't get over it," he said, "...a woman...a twenty-two year old woman."

"Please keep your eyes on the road, Mr. Messina," Laurel teased, an impish, sexy, self-satisfied glow in her eye. "I'd like to become a twenty-three year old woman someday."

The brown Oldsmobile stayed a short distance behind and one lane to the right of Mickey Boy and Laurel.

"Where the fuck is he taking us?" the driver snapped. "He's supposed to be stayin' in the neighborhood."

His more patient associate looked at him and smiled. "Maybe she's kidnapping him," he joked.

"She musta done something," the driver growled. "She's definitely not his type...not sexy enough."

"Classy though...and nice legs. I wouldn't exactly throw her out of bed."

"Or knock myself out to get her there either." The driver cut in front of a red Pinto, ignoring the honking and upturned middle finger directed at him. "My taste is more hot...more sexy-looking."

"You mean trashy-looking."

"Call it whatever you want, but I know what I like." The driver cursed again as he followed the Lincoln past the brightly lit Verrazano Bridge.

Because he was seven years older than Alley, and especially because they were both fatherless, Mickey Boy had hovered over him and, as a result, Laurel. He was her champion when a local teen gang tried to shake her down at school, her chauffeur when Alley was still too young to drive, and her Santa Claus when he delivered her a snowball of a new kitten after Missy had disappeared.

Yesterday, when she had insisted on seeing him he'd felt that her motive was to take advantage of that past relationship and cry on his shoulder about her split with Alley. He had been uncomfortable at the thought, but felt obligated to accommodate her. Now he found himself surprisingly eager to hear her side, to hear her affirm his disbelief of his half brother's version, and he prodded her into discussing it.

Most of what Laurel told him he already knew: how close she and Alley had been; of the plans they'd made for a future together. What was new to him was how alley had distanced himself more and more from her during his time at Harvard. Weekend visits home had been eliminated so he could "study" in the dorm, vacations cut shorter and shorter each semester.

She was at the end of her synopsis as they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge. The famed New York skyline, romantically luminous before them against the indigo night, was lost on her as her eyes stared at the felt inside the car's roof. "...What he neglected to mention was that the family he was interested in was his roommate's sister, Ellen, who was a sophomore at Wellesley."

“That’s it?” Mickey Boy asked, sure there was something more she wanted to say, but was holding back.

Laurel stared at him, her lips drawn taut. For a brief moment she appeared ready to blurt out whatever it was. Instead, she turned her head and said in a flat, emotionless voice, “What else is there to say? Brooklyn yuppie goes to Harvard, meets high-class Wasp girl, dumps low-class Brooklyn girl.”

“I’m sorry –“

“Don’t be,” Laurel snapped. Her face burned scarlet. “He did me a big favor...made me take a step back and take a good look at myself...made me make some changes.”

Unconsciously, Mickey Boy reached a hand out to comfort her. Laurel responded by wrapping her long tapered fingers firmly around his. The strong sexual and emotional impulses he felt in her presence, the urge to reach out for her, were tempered only by his memory of their former link.

“You know how these educated guys are – all book learning and no smarts,” he said. “If it was me, I woulda never let you go for nothing.” Feeling awkward with that last statement, Mickey Boy tried to lighten his tone. “At least not for some Wasp broad from Boston. Maybe a nice Puerto Rican, but not a Wasp.”

“Oh, you,” Laurel cooed. She dug her fingernails into Mickey Boy’s palm.

The light pain she inflicted felt exquisite, the delicate stab of each nail sending vibrations through the muscle between his neck and collarbone and down to his nipples; he squeezed his thighs together unconsciously as he drove.

Seemingly more relaxed, Laurel continued her tale of her shattered romance. “Up until about four months after he was married I was really screwed up. Then one day I just said, ‘Fuck him!’ Oops, cover your ears.” She giggled girlishly while turning on her hip and bringing her free hand to his ear.

Mickey Boy smiled, then frowned as he had to slow to a halt behind stalled traffic. He turned toward Laurel, who slowly drew the backs of her fingers down the length of his jaw. The tingling in his neck resumed, nearly causing him to shudder. He tried to focus beyond her, on the dancing lights reflecting on the East River like thousands of glittery gems, but couldn’t. As if by magnets, he was drawn to look directly into her doe-soft eyes. At that instant Mickey Boy knew he was lost.

Neither one spoke for the remainder of the trip.

In the brown Oldsmobile the passenger removed the pistol digging into his waist and slipped it into the glove compartment. He settled back, resigning himself to a long evening.

Arm in arm, Mickey and Laurel left the parking garage. They snuggled close together as they crossed the narrow side street and turned northward onto Second Avenue, the Roosevelt Island tram cables traversing their horizon. Halfway up the block, Mickey said, “There it is,” and pointed to a green canopy whose fluorescent white letters announced Ristorante Numero Uno -- #1.

When they stepped through the entrance into the restaurant's small but cozy bar area, Freddie Falcone had his pin-striped back to them, inking a new reservation into an open appointment book.

"We'd like a table for ten, right now!" Mickey Boy demanded loudly.

The silver-haired owner began to turn, his mercurial temper on the rise. "Hey, where do you think – sonofabitch!" he cried.

The men hugged and kissed each other on the cheek.

"Boy, you look great!" Freddie said. "I think I should check in there for a rest myself, but not for six years like you." Grimacing, he pinched a thumb and forefinger together. "Maybe like a half a calendar or so."

"Six months?! You don't even have to take your shoes off for a skid bid like that. You gotta do at least a year to even rate a shower."

Freddie hugged Mickey Boy again. "Boy, am I glad to see you finished with that shit. You know, things are a hell of a lot different from before you went away."

"Tell me about it," Mickey Boy lamented.

"I'm talking about problems: law, law, and more law," Freddie whispered. "But what am I telling you this for now?" He motioned at Laurel, who stood quietly off to the side. "I see that tonight's strictly R&R."

"Oh, Freddie, this is Laurel."

"A real pleasure," Freddie said while extending a hand to her. "Well, how you kids like the joint?"

Mickey looked around at the stucco and natural brick walls, antique gas-style lamps, and fresh floral arrangements that gave Numero Uno an understated elegance. Between the restaurant's ambience and Freddie's gushing reception everything was perfect for the impression he wanted make on Laurel...and one look at her told him he'd succeeded.

"Beautiful," he answered Freddie while still turned toward Laurel, his gaze fixed on her. Catching himself staring he quickly added, "You must get some pretty high class clientele here."

"Most of the time we do," Freddie replied. "But then once in a while we get a real *jedrool*, like our illustrious U.S. Attorney, who just left."

"He eats here? That rat! Just let me in the kitchen for about two minutes when he orders his next meal," Mickey Boy joked. "I'll fix him something he'll never forget."

"I wouldn't mind making him a little *pasta della morte* myself, but business is too lousy." Freddie exaggerated a sigh then said, "Right now I can't afford to lose any customers...not even him. Besides, I couldn't even afford the poison to make the sauce." He hooked an arm in Mickey Boy's, whispered something in his ear, and led him toward the dining room. Laurel was left to follow a few paces behind while the two men engaged in private conversation.

Mickey suddenly turned and looked for Laurel. When he saw her annoyed expression he reached out a hand to her.

"Listen, Fred, we could go over that anytime. Right now me an' Laurel got a lot of catching up to do. I think you understand." Laurel's smile of appreciation warmed him inside.

Freddie slapped his own face comically. "Sorry, I guess I just got carried away." He raised Laurel's free hand to his lips. "Sorry again," he told her, "but you're probably

gonna lose him one more time before you get to sample our fabulous food.” Freddie straightened up and explained to Mickey Boy, “Remember my friend Eli, the meat guy that you did that favor for before you went away? Well, he’s here, and will probably want to say hello.”

Eli Kantor, a kosher provisions distributor from Bridgeport, had contracted Mickey Boy to convince a fortune seeking beau of his daughter, Eleanor, that it would be wise to find greener...and healthier...pastures elsewhere. One conversation with the stubby barrel of Mickey Boy’s .38 Smith & Wesson pressed against his nose convinced the young lothario to abandon not only his design on Eleanor, but his local bartender’s job and rented room as well.

“Let’s get it over with so I could spend a little time with my girl,” Mickey said, not aware of the possessive term he’d used until Laurel squeezed his hand affectionately. He felt more comfortable and at ease than at any time since his release, some ninety days earlier.

Freddie was only partially correct. Not only did Eli Kantor pay his respects, but Laurel lost Mickey Boy twice more – once to Numero Uno’s resident bookmaker, a Lou Costello look alike dubbed Dinty Moore, then to the telephone when Mickey called to cancel his appointment with Richie.

“It’s really nice to see how much your friends think of you, but...” Laurel said when Mickey Boy finally sat down.

“I know, and I’m really sorry. I should have figured it would be like this on my first night up here.” Mickey shrugged, and with a sheepish smile added, “I guess I wanted to impress you, but next time I promise to find us a hideaway...that is if you want there to be a next time?”

“Only if I don’t have to wear a pinstriped suit to get your attention.”

“Nah, I wouldn’t change a thing about the way you look...no more ‘Dungaree Doll.’”

“I told you before, I took a good look at myself,” Laurel said with a distinct edge of bitterness. “I worked hard at the changes I made.”

Mickey could have kicked himself. He made a mental note not to give her any more openings to bring up her split with Alley. The breakup seemed to have scarred Laurel deeper than he would have expected to a girl her age. He felt sorry for her, and wished he could say something to help. Freddie saved him when he appeared with his tuxedo-clad maitre d’.

“Kids, this is Renato. He’ll take your order. Renato, these are personal friends of mine, Mickey Boy and Laurel. Make sure that that *strombolato* in the kitchen makes everything *perfetto*, *perfetto* for them, or down the stairs he goes...headfirst, like the last chef. *Capisce?*”

“No problem, Mr. Fred.” Renato turned a dazzling set of Chiclet-size caps on the seated couple. “*Signor* Mickey, *Principessa* Laurel, would you like a menu, or would you allow Renato to suggest?”

“Could you imagine,” Mickey Boy said after the maitre d’ had left with their order, “having a clown like him for a hack in jail? ‘*Skinnyours* and *Skinnyourinis*,’” he mocked. “Not that most of the guards ain’t clowns anyway.”

“I know prison’s no joke, and it’s fresh in your mind, but it seems to pop up in every part of your conversation...and it comes out very bitter,” Laurel said. “Was it a very painful experience? I mean, like physically?”

Mickey Boy laughed. “No, nobody raped me or beat me up, if that’s what you want to know.”

Laurel blushed.

“Yes, it was bitter...and boring,” he said while toying with his fork. “I learned when I was growing up, though, that when people ask you how’s everything, or how’re you feeling, the best way to chase them away is to tell them.”

“Try me,” Laurel said in a near whisper. She crossed her ankles with his. “Tell me how it was.”

Mickey Boy toyed with a soup spoon, studying it to mask his uneasiness. He’d never articulated his emotions to anyone before, especially about jail. Being glib about his prison time was usually part of the macho image he liked to project to girls at discos. With Laurel, however, he didn’t feel like he needed a front. He believed she was truly interested, and he wanted to tell her.

Laurel nodded and gave his ankles an encouraging squeeze.

Staring into her eyes for support, Mickey said, “For six years I lived every day by itself. I couldn’t think about yesterday ‘cause I’d get mad, an’ didn’t think about tomorrow because it seemed too long to wanna think about.”

“I don’t know how you did it. I know I couldn’t.”

“You have to make yourself,” he said. “If you can’t do that, you just can’t do the time. That’s why you read sometimes that guys hang up. I seen a few guys try to kill themselves. They couldn’t stop feeling, couldn’t shake the outside world.”

“But don’t you need the outside, the support of loved ones?” Laurel asked.

Mickey shifted his gaze to Laurel’s mouth as she spoke, wondering what it would have been like to have her waiting for him during his years in prison; how it would have been to kiss those pouting lips goodbye after each visit and go back to a barren cinderblock cell. Deciding that his time would have been even more miserable than it was, he continued. “Jail is the whole world when you’re there. It has to be. Other places are just figments of your imagination. As a matter of fact, the hardest time guys have is when they either get a visit or call home. I guess it makes them realize they’re away, that there really are people they love...but somewhere else.” Mickey sipped his drink. “I’m rambling on like a lunatic, right?” he asked with a grin. “Once you wind me up, I don’t stop.”

“No, no,” Laurel said. “Please, I want to know all about how you feel. It’s the real human being inside the tough guy everyone else sees. I feel privileged.”

Mickey wanted to tell her as much as she wanted to know; the catharsis felt good. “Well, bottom line is (a), yes, I feel bitter about going away, especially since I didn’t deserve it. Oh, I wasn’t a complete altar boy; I was a little involved at the end, but I wound up looking like I was the main guy in the whole operation and carrying the weight for somebody else.” The memory of how he’d been set up made his head throb and his skin flush. “...But that’s another story for another time. Anyway, (b) is the other end: I feel just like the kid I was before I went away...especially with you.”

Laurel looked away.

Mickey was puzzled by her sudden change of mood. "I'm really happy you asked for us to meet," he said, hoping his honesty would become contagious. "I probably would have been dumb enough to hang up and never see you."

"Meeting may have been a mistake."

"Mistake is my middle name. Remember, I'm the same guy you used to know," Mickey Boy said. He leaned over the small table and raised her hand to his lips. "Only smarter. No more jails for this guy."

"I certainly hope not," Laurel whispered. She brushed her fingertips over his cheeks then under his chin, practiced fingers that knew each of his most sensitive spots. "You should have learned your lesson by now...and I'd hate to see you leave again."

Mickey Boy smiled. Did Laurel really think he'd sacrificed six years of his life just to become a shoe salesman like her father? His jail time was just another rung on the mob ladder he'd stepped onto in his early teens. Once he'd gotten over his early folly about becoming a lawyer it had been straight ahead, no detours. "Don't worry, hon," he said. "I ain't going no place but up."

Freddie was back, this time with two waiters. While the waiters served an array of mouthwatering dishes from a rolling silver cart, Freddie presented Laurel with a long white beribboned gift box. "I'll have you know this hoodlum of yours made me send somebody all the way to Lexington and Fifty-eighth for these," he told her.

Mickey was pleased at how unnerved Laurel became, blushing and fumbling with the pink satin ribbon until she finally exposed the dozen long-stemmed American Beauty roses he'd ordered. Thankfully, whatever was troubling her earlier seemed completely gone. He chuckled to himself, realizing the only other living person he'd ever bought flowers for was his mother.

Laurel became the teenager he remembered again. She jumped from her chair and, still clutching the roses, kissed him full on the lips. "Oh, Mickey, thank you. They're beautiful!"

Instinctively, Mickey brought his hand to Laurel's hip then pulled it back as though it had been seared and jammed it back in his pocket.

"I think we just lost another one to the fairer sex," Freddie whispered to his waiter, just loud enough for Mickey to hear.

TWO

May 22: Bensonhurst, Brooklyn

Just as the Seville rolled into the darkened back lot, the building's steel door swung outward. While one of his underlings inspected the premises, Vincenzo Calabria, one of just two of New York City's five Mafia family chieftains to bear the title of don, surveyed the outside to be doubly sure. Five feet eight inches tall with a swarthy complexion and thinning silver hair, only the facial puffiness usually attributed to good living and a mottled nose that widened each year belied the fact that Don Vincenzo had been a handsome man in his younger days.

After receiving an all clear signal from his man, the husky sixty-seven year old don slid from the car's interior and stepped onto the pavement. The only movement on his otherwise stony face came from dark, piercing eyes scanning the area as he limped toward the unlit entranceway. With a wave of his Avanti cigar he dismissed his bodyguards and went in.

"How are you tonight, Joseph?" the don asked after kissing on both cheeks the man who waited in the shadows. "And how's everybody at home, especially my lovely godchild, Christina?"

Joseph Augusta, publicly the proprietor of the Shore Haven Funeral Home and privately the underboss of the Calabria Family, answered while he rebolted the mortuary's door, "We're all good. As a matter of fact, I just called home to check up on Chrissy and make sure she gets there by curfew. I'll tell you, it's no picnic raising girls, especially when they're sixteen-going-on-thirty, like Chrissy. You know, years ago, when *a buono* my father-in-law used to get mad at my wife, he'd say, 'Instead of having kids I shoulda raised chickens. At least when they aggravate me, I could cook'em an' eat'em.'"

Both men laughed.

"But me," Joe Augusta continued, "I wouldn't give up a minute of the pleasure that *sfatcheem*'s brought me. Not that I'm not crazy about my Elizabeth too," he explained. "It's just that with Chrissy being the first and so much like me, well, you know what I mean?"

Don Vincenzo smiled knowingly. "You forget, Joseph, that I raised two daughters. Maybe not as spirited as your little flower, Christina, but still girls."

The two Mafiosi walked through the funeral home's elaborately decorated lobby toward the front office. Joe Augusta trudged ahead, his broad shoulders hunched forward while the older man paused to admire the splendor of his possessions – gold-flocked foil,

red floral carpets, and huge crystal chandeliers surrounded him. He smiled then puffed out a cloud of anise-scented smoke into the room.

“You look tired, Joseph,” Don Vincenze said when he had settled into a leather armchair across the desk from the funeral director/underboss. “So business must be very good.”

“You know the old joke, Vincenze, ‘People are dying to get in.’ But, all jokes aside, we are doing very well.” Joe Augusta reached under his desk and brought up a black leather attaché case, which he pushed across the top toward the don. “We made a good investment when we bought this place.”

“No, we made a good investment when we put you here, Joseph,” Don Vincenze responded. He appreciatively fingered the supple calf, his five-carat diamond ring sparkling in spite of the room’s dimness then slowly opened the case. After riffling through the currency for an instant he closed the case and locked it.

“You’ve done an excellent job, Joseph. Better than anybody else could’ve done.” Don Vincenze shook his head slowly from side to side. “Who would have thought that the young man who made so much use of a pistol would have turned into such a good businessman?” he said with a chuckle that hinted of some remorse.

“Unfortunately, that’s the only future I see for us now,” the underboss said. At forty years old, Joe Augusta’s face was etched with lines that bespoke weariness beyond that of physical labor, and which made his prematurely graying temples appear to be taking over the dark brown balance of hair on a proper chronological schedule. “The old days are gone forever,” he said with what had become his permanent funereal expression: lips turned down at the corners, eyes joylessly blank. “That’s why I believe John-John’s got the right idea about tonight. It’s a shame –“

“I know how you feel,” Don Vincenze said abruptly, his jowly features tightening into a hard glare. He spat a small piece of cigar tobacco onto the rug then added, “Let’s not get into that again now. Just remember, what’s right is not always important...what’s best for us *is*.”

Joe Augusta grimaced. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat before asking, “All right, what about tonight? Are we going to take care of the list I got here: Mickey Boy; his partner, Richie; Carlo Conte?”

“No, forget about that for now. I’ll take care of them when I’m ready,” the don said. “You *did* take care of that other problem tonight though...right?”

“Buster’s got two guys on him.”

“Good. For now, let’s just concentrate on what we gotta do here, okay?”

“Whatever you say,” Joe agreed. “I wonder if John-John and Petey will react the way you figured.”

“Don’t worry, Joseph,” Don Vincenze said. “I know them better than they know themselves...*all* of them...and especially our young friend, Mr. Petey Ross,” he added disdainfully. “Now, have you got everything in order for our guests? Peppino and Blackie should be here soon.”

Joe Augusta smiled. “Of course. Let me put your briefcase away for now, and I’ll show you.”

With Joe Augusta leading the way, the two men descended a stairwell that led to another, smaller lobby area. After momentarily fumbling with his keys, Joe unlocked and opened one of two ornately carved wooden doors and stepped into the darkness.

A flipped switch instantly revealed a funeral chapel devoid of its traditional trappings, and redone for a very private banquet. In the center of the room an elegantly appointed rectangular table stood proudly. Ten place settings of bone china and crystal stemware, one for each of New York's five mob family leaders and their underbosses, glistened on a white damask tablecloth. Off to the right a longer, narrower piece of furniture strained under the weight of a row of shiny silver chafing dishes; small blue flames warming their innards. There were enough breads, condiments, and desserts for a small wedding. The only reminder of the true location of the scheduled feast was a mocha-colored, brushed metal casket that sat on a platform at the far end of the room, as peaceful and unnoticed as its occupant.

While Joe Augusta retreated upstairs to greet their fraternal guests, Don Vincenze remained downstairs in the newly created dining room. Limping slowly around, he stopped and touched each lavish item he found: a Rosenthal goblet, a Lenox dish, a bottle of Brunello '64. He lifted a white cambric dinner napkin, held it a moment, then finally brought it to his lips, luxuriating in the way it skimmed over them without so much as one fiber catching on the rough skin. *You came a long way from fishnets, Vincenze*, he thought – and smiled.

The appearance of Don Peppino Palermo abruptly awoke Don Vincenze from his reverie.

At seventy-eight years of age, Don Peppino was the senior member of the elite gathering that Don Vincenzo was about to host that evening. Hawk-faced and frail, he was a staid, colorless plodder, an immigrant who'd never turned in his old country ways for American style. His dress was old fashioned and simple: dark wool suits that might have been new or twenty years old and tieless white-on-white shirts buttoned to the collar – and he ran his *borgata* the same way; his crew being the only one where each member was required to kick in a fifty-dollar "sign of respect" to the boss each week, regardless of how broke any one of them was. All the other Family bosses had given up the practice of a tithe years before, and only took shares of moneys their members earned, which Don Peppino also did in addition to the fifties he collected.

To the meeting that night Don Peppino brought his nephew and underboss, Blackie Palermo, a tank-shaped ex-boxer who constantly wore dark glasses to hide the false eye that replaced the one he'd lost in the ring.

Don Vincenze stepped forward to embrace and kiss his old compatriot, saying, "*Peppino, fratello mio, come sta?*"

Don Peppino returned the warmth. "*Bene, grazie. E sta, Vincenze?*"

"*Molto bene,*" Don Vincenze answered. Then, pressing his lips close to Don Peppino's ear, he whispered, "*Stasera sta la notte...tonight's the night...our night.*"

During the next hour, at precise twenty minute intervals, three more late-model automobiles shuttled through the Shore Haven Funeral Home's back lot. Each car discharged a pair of white male passengers, paused until the men entered the building, then continued on its way. Each twosome was welcomed by Joe Augusta. They exchanged fleeting somber-faced embraces, slight kisses on both cheeks, and whispered words of greeting before they were brought downstairs to meet with the two dons.

The first to arrive was the silver-coiffed, deeply suntanned Giovanni “John-John” DiGiovanni, with his next in command, Salvatore “Sammy The Blond” Termini.

The dapper, polished John-John’s appointment to the top spot of his Family had been based more on his reputation for good management skills than on his street smarts or strength of character. Since becoming boss he spent half his year in Palm Beach exercising control over a steady flow of runners and messengers from New York, and satisfying his penchant for young, blond would-be actresses and models.

Don Vincenze and Don Peppino, heirs to the two largest Families, and therefore the most powerful bosses in the city, greeted John-John and Sammy The Blond together.

“It looks like life in Florida is pretty good,” Don Vincenze told John-John after they had hugged. He eyed everything from John-John’s navy crocodile loafers to his blue plaid sport coat to his lapis lazuli cuff links and ring. “I should try to get down there for a while myself.”

“Anytime you can make it, Vince, you’ll be my guest. I got a beautiful private estate and the cream of the crop, as far as young ladies go,” John-John replied.

Gonoude bastard, Don Vincenze thought, but only smiled. He then turned to Don Peppino, who was talking to Sammy The Blond, and joked, “I think our friend John-John wants to kill me. He just offered me a young floozie if I go to Florida.”

Don Peppino answered without looking at John-John, “What’s worse is that before those *putanas* kill you they’ll destroy your brain. We seen it happen to too many of our friends, eh, Vincenze?”

John-John laughed with the two dons despite the rebuke in Peppino’s remark then excused himself to inspect the colorful variety of foodstuffs. Soon afterward, the next guest filled the doorway.

After a brief pause to survey his surroundings, Tomasso “Tom Thumb” Lentini stepped into the room. Tom Thumb’s hulking four hundred pound body dwarfed an otherwise normal-size head that had been poorly endowed with small, dark, beady eyes, one thick Neanderthal brow, and a nose that nearly hooked into his mouth. As Machiavellian in nature as he was repulsive in appearance, the oversize Mafioso allowed no one except his underboss, Rock Santoro, whom he had practically raised, and who escorted him that evening, to become an intimate of his.

Tom’s underboss, Rocco “Rock” Santoro, was another ex-pug, whose short-cropped hair and stony features brought to mind a model for ancient Roman coins. “The Rock from Ridgewood,” as he’d been known when he’d fought in the ring, and Don Peppino’s nephew, Blackie Palermo, had been inseparable childhood companions who’d boxed in the same clubs, married first cousins, but were recruited and *made* by two different crews. However, they still remained best of friends and were, in fact, godparents to each other’s children.

Unfortunately, Tom Thumb didn’t share his underboss’s fondness for members of Don Peppino’s Family.

“How are you, Don Vincenze?” Tom Thumb asked after a violent fit of coughing.

“I seem to be fine,” Don Vincenze replied. “The question is, my friend, how are *you*? Between your lust for food and all those cigarettes you smoke, you’re pushing yourself to an early grave. Not that we couldn’t use the business here, but I’d hate to see you go, my friend. Besides, I don’t know if Joseph could find a coffin big enough to fit you.”

“That’s what Rock always says; right, Rock?” When he received no reply, Tom Thumb turned to see his underboss in a friendly huddle with Don Peppino and Blackie Palermo. Tom’s eyes glistened with embarrassment. “Oh, well,” he said, his fleshy lips pulled tight, “when do we eat?”

Don Vincenze patted the giant mobster reassuringly on the arm. “As soon as Petey Ross gets here. Be patient, Tomasso, he should be here any minute.”

The seven Mafiosi were exchanging small talk when Joe Augusta ushered in the final two guests.

At forty-six years of age, Pietro “Petey Ross” Rossellini was the youngest chieftain of any of New York’s five crime families. Movie star handsome, with coal black hair and ice blue eyes, he attended the meeting that night as acting boss, subbing for Benedetto “Benny Brown” Favara, who was being held without bail in the Federal House of Detention on an assortment of charges dating back nearly fifteen years.

The only thing to mar Petey’s otherwise perfect features was a furrow-like scar on his chin which was the result of a jealous girlfriend who happened to own a .22 caliber automatic.

To offset his youth and relative inexperience in mob political matters, Petey Ross appeared with his grandfatherly *consigliere*, sixty-seven year old Antonio “Sonny” Fortunato.

“Well, well, my friends,” Don Vincenze began. He spread his arms as he spoke. “I think a little food would be nice before we discuss our business. Unfortunately, I thought it would be wiser if we had no outsiders present, and so we have no waiters.”

A round of sniggers filled the room.

“I hope you don’t mind if we serve ourselves. *Mi casa, su casa. Buon appetito.*”

After brief huddles among the separate duos, the five bosses seated themselves at the dinner table while their companions went to assemble their meals for them.

When he was done serving Don Vincenze, Joe Augusta excused himself to phone home and check up on his sixteen year old daughter, Christina.

THREE

May 22: Bull's Head, Staten Island

“Hello, Mama? Hi, it’s me,” Christina Marie Augusta said while trying to control her speech through clenched teeth. Her catlike eyes, almond shaped with huge golden brown centers, squeezed shut in concentration. “What, Mama?” She hurriedly covered the receiver as a moan escaped her. “Ooh, ooh, stop.”

Male lips pulled at Christina’s bare, distended nipples, sending rapturous spasms up and down the length of her body. She spoke into the phone again, rushing the words out. “Yes, Mama, I’ll be home byonebeforehegetshomegoodbyeIloveyou.” She barely hung up in time for her mother to miss her cry as a broad finger drove up between her parted legs.

“Oooh. God, do I love you.” Christina clung tightly to her lover’s muscled frame while he mounted her. “Oh, Georgie, don’t stop. Oh, yes,” she whispered as he bucked back and forth, jamming his pelvis into hers.

A while later, spent, he rolled off to her side, still tightly embracing her.

“I wish we could stay like this forever, Georgie.”

Christina’s lover brushed away the few black ringlets that perspiration had pasted to her forehead then planted a gentle kiss there. “If I don’t get you home before your old man walks in, we *will* be like this forever...only in one of his boxes.”

“He’d never hurt me, silly.”

“Sure, he wouldn’t hurt you. But do you know what they’d do to me?” He swung his legs off the bed and reached for a cigarette. “I’d wind up with this thing you like so much stickin’ outta my ass – bloody end up!”

“But you’re so tough and strong,” she teased, hugging him from behind. Her firm young breasts crushed against his back, sending more thrilling sensations through her.

Georgie reacted to her teasing with genuine concern. “Strong, my ass, Chrissy. My own people would do it to me. They’d say I was outta my mind sleepin’ with Joey A’s sixteen year old daughter. An’ you know what? They’d be right.” He started toward the bathroom, leaving her pouting on the mattress. “Maybe they should put me out of my misery, ‘cause I am nuts,” he yelled through the open doorway.

Suddenly he dashed toward the motel’s bed and leapt onto it, grabbing a surprised Chrissy as he landed. She playfully tried to elude his grasp. “Yeah, I’m crazy...crazy about you.” He kissed her lips with a loud smacking sound.

“And I’m crazy about you, Mr. Randazzo, even if you are a scaredy-cat,” Chrissy giggled. She looked at him sternly. “What kind of daddy are you going to make for all our babies when we get married? We’ll have all little scaredy-kittens.”

“Only half of them,” Georgie answered, kissing her again. “The other half are gonna be little airheads like their mommy...that is, if I live long enough to make any. If we don’t get our asses outta here fast, your old man is gonna bury me an’ put your cute little body in a convent. That means *no* little airheaded kittens.” He released her and bounded off the bed.

“I am not an airhead!” Chrissy shouted after him. “And you’re still a scaredy-cat!”

Georgie “The Hammer” Randazzo primped himself in the mirror, running a metal comb through his coarse ebony hair. Assuming his best John Travolta pose, he checked his silk shirt to make sure enough buttons were open to expose the three gold chains and eight charms that lay in the hairless valley of his chest. He looked at himself sideways, ignoring the too-big nose that ruined an otherwise perfect profile, flexed a bicep, then reached for the black leather jacket that he had carefully draped over one of the room’s chairs earlier that evening.

Georgie had earned his *nom de guerre* at the tender age of nine, when he’d dented his brother Mario’s head with a ball-peen hammer. Now, at twenty-two years of age, he made sure his reputation in the neighborhood kept pace with his nickname by doing collection and other strong-arm work for “Crazy Angelo” Gangi, a soldier with Petey Ross’s Family.

“C’mon, baby. Seriously, I gotta get you home before I wind up as ground up meat in a *sopresata*. An’ I really gotta meet Skinny soon. We got something important to take care of.” He leaned over, ruffled his hand through Chrissy’s dark curls, and pecked her on the cheek.

“All right, all right, here I come,” she said, and with an accompanying burst of giggles threw her arms around his neck and pulled him back onto the bed.

These free opening pages set the stage for a finely threaded story of manipulation, violence, love, and revenge. Three sets of lovers, each seemingly unconnected to the others, slowly come together at the center of a bloody mob war that explodes, engulfs, and permanently scars each one. This is not for the faint of heart or the sexually squeamish, with matching realism in both murders and sex.

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