

# Sins of Our Sons

*The Thrilling Sequel to  
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

## *December 8: Acireale, Sicily*

In a dank, dreary wine cellar, two men sat facing each other across a wooden table fashioned from an upended barrel. In the center of the table a single candle flickered, illuminating the items around it: a seedy, brown leather Bible with half its pages torn out; a Moorish dagger; a large, clumsy, automatic pistol.

“These, *figlio mio*, are your destiny...” the small, bald man whispered in Sicilian dialect while waving his hand over the crude table top, “...if you can overcome what stands in your way.”

He opened the Bible and laid his hand on the first remaining page, yellowed with age and curling at the edges.

“This is the page that will burn in your palm,” he continued in Sicilian; his voice remained low and conspiratorial.

Turning his attention to the knife, the old man said, “This dagger has been in *la mia familia* for centuries, and has drawn the blood from generations of Mafiosi hands; a symbol of Sicilian blood that was shed to drive the invaders away.” He looked at the pistol and shrugged, “Just a gun, probably lifted from one of Il Duce’s puppet clowns, but a symbol of how we live and die.”

Across the table from the old man, Little Vinnie Calabria sat silently, watching the old man’s shadow dance eerily large on the stone wall behind him. Little Vinnie’s heart thumped with a mixture of excitement and contained rage. His fists clenched into tight balls and his mouth felt sour and dry.

The old man, Don Genco Salso, Mafia boss of Acireale and all of Catania Province, gathered up the three items into a piece of black velvet cloth. “But until you solve the problem with your half brother,” he said, “there is nothing I or any of us in *la cosa nostra* can do for you. We are honor bound to respect his word and wishes, as he was designated heir by my dear friend, your father, Don Vincenze, before being taken from us, *può si riposa nella pace*...may he rest in peace.

Don Genco grabbed Little Vinnie’s hand and held it tightly in his, the strength of his grip surprising the younger man.

“I’ve told you that the only way I could bring you into our thing is with his permission. What I did not tell you, and will deny ever letting pass my lips, is that if he should pass away his wishes will be buried with him. *Finito! Tu capisce?*”

Little Vinnie nodded. Mickey Boy had to die!

### *December 12: Todt Hill, Staten Island*

Mickey Boy Messina slipped one hand underneath Laurel's breast to cradle its bare flesh. Each tiny sucking motion seemed to vibrate through his hand, connecting him with the lifeblood of both Laurel and their four month old daughter, Hope, who, eyes closed, fed steadily from her mother's erect nipple. So overcome with passion for these two females in his life was Mickey, that he wished he could draw the milk from his wife's body himself and deposit it directly into their baby's little mouth. Instead, he squeezed Laurel's breast, his regulation of Hope's diet through the increased stream of fluid serving as a small substitute.

It amazed him how much life could turn around in such a short time. Just one year before he'd been a miserable emotional wreck, having lost Laurel, who'd fled to Florida because she'd been disgusted with his mob lifestyle. One year ago he'd been lonely, filled with bitterness and pain that had led to periodic violent explosions.

In between those rages, the ruggedly handsome Mickey Boy had been depressed and introspective. He'd questioned years of dictums drilled into his head by neighborhood mobsters, surrogates for the father he never knew. Already past thirty, he'd wondered what he really had to show for his years. A prison term for something he hadn't done? A few lousy dollars? Some respect among street guys who were fast losing an understanding of what honor and respect really meant?

But Laurel had returned, and life had improved. At least that part of his life; the personal part, having nothing to do with mobs or mobsters, with danger or responsibility for almost everyone he came in contact with. Even now, while permeated with affection, Mickey was still a miserable wreck, feeling trapped by the very lifestyle he'd almost lost Laurel over. He had realized only too late that his shiny vision of the underworld had been tarnished from the first. Thank God Freddie Falcone, his reliable pal and consigliere had promised to find a way to get him out – eventually.

"Gotta go," Mickey Boy finally said with a sigh. He bent and kissed Laurel's breast, stretched taut and swollen with mother's milk, then planted a kiss on Hope's head. The smell of baby lotion in her reddish hair, twisted into a single curl, made him smile. He nuzzled his lips along Hope's scalp, feeling the fontanel, that fissure of membrane in her soft skull that would soon heal closed. Knowing how vulnerable the infant was both

frightened him and flooded him with a fierce protective love. "I wish I didn't have to," he said then shrugged, adding, "but..."

Laurel placed one hand behind his neck and drew him to her for a kiss. Her tongue licked a circle around his lips. "You know, I really believe that," she said, "and it really makes me feel good."

When their eyes met it sealed once more unspoken understandings; a sort of telepathic communication they'd developed in their eight month old marriage, which continuously sealed an agreement to always be together. Now, nothing would keep them apart.

Gone were Frank Sinatra's songs of lost love, like *Only the Lonely* and *Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry*, that had seemed to have been specifically targeted at him. Now, in Mickey's mind, Old Blue Eyes gently crooned *You're So Right*. Yes, Laurel was right for what was wrong in his life, and did fill every void.

Mickey propped the white eyelet pillows behind Laurel – the whole room was like a cloud: white furniture and fluff, white carpet – kissed her again; breathed in the clean fragrance of her dusty blond waves; drew warmth from her. He soaked in the motherly look of her, wishing he had a camera to capture that perfect moment forever.

"What about Christmas Eve?" he asked. "Did my mother say she'd come for sure?"

"Yes..." Connie Messina had said she would take a break from caring for Alley and his family, in Boston, and spend a few days. Laurel went on, "...And my parents, and the Buster family, and half of New York City. The only one who won't come is your brother," she said with a smirk.

Just as well, Mickey thought. Though he and Alley had come to a truce over his having married Laurel, Alley's onetime girlfriend, it was a cold truce that made everyone concerned uncomfortable.

"And we got plenty of food ordered?" he asked, brushing back his thick dark hair, which had already begun to turn silvery at the temples. "...Fish, white wine?"

"Yes, we even have enough of everything for the half of the city that wasn't invited," Laurel teased. "...Just in case they decide to drop by too. And, before you ask, the decorations will all be in today – mechanical Santa, Rudolph with the nose that lights up for the roof, singing elves – the whole works."

"You know, I really wish I could stay; make sure they do it right. Or, better yet, do it myself." He sighed. "Wait for me to get time, though, an' Christmas might go out of style by then."

Laurel moved Hope to suckle the other breast. "Get out of here," she said, smiling. "Just make sure you're around on Friday, like you promised, to go shopping uptown...and dinner at Rockefeller Center."

"How about we lock in for the day instead?" I'll cook, you take it easy."

"Mickey!" Laurel said, her voice climbing an octave. "My whole life is taking it easy. I want to get out!"

"Well, then, how about we take a room at the Plaza or the Waldorf...don't tell nobody where we are? Dinner by candlelight, the works."

"Mickey!"

“Just kidding. I know you need to break out of this joint,” Mickey Boy said, accepting defeat. “Rockefeller Center...I already made the reservation.” Another thing he’d have to remind Freddie Falcone to take care of.

Mickey Boy Messina started toward the shower, truly annoyed at having to leave his wife and child and the comfort of his home. He stopped before entering the bathroom and slipped a Chipmunks Christmas tape into the bedroom’s stereo.

“She knows,” Mickey said, turning back to face Laurel and Hope as Alvin’s voice squeaked out *Jingle Bells*. “She knows it’s for her. You know, they say that whatever you play for a kid when they’re little, they come back to it later, after they go through the rock and roll stage.” He smiled and headed for the shower again.

“Great,” Laurel called. “One day we’ll have a thirty-two-year-old woman addicted to the Chipmunks the way you are to Sinatra. I can’t wait.”

“Hey, don’t talk about Old Blue Eyes that way; it’s his birthday today.”

Despite not wanting to leave the house, Mickey Boy showered with a smile on his face. Yes, life had turned around pretty good, he told himself – especially for someone who was home from prison less than twenty-four months. Instead of bitching about the bad parts, he thought, from now on he would be thankful for the good.

Warm water ran over his face and into his mouth as he said, “*You’re so right...for what’s wrong...with my life.*”

### *December 12: Laurentian Mountains, Canada*

Knee-high in snow, Joe Augusta looked with satisfaction at the glowing wreath in the window of the chalet he'd rented in St. Sauveur des Monts. His eyes moved upward to the smoke drifting out of the stone chimney. Nothing in the world could give a warmer feeling than those cottony white streamers against a chilling gray-blue sky. Too bad Chrissy couldn't see it, he thought, his face frozen in a taut smile beneath his beard – full and black and streaked white with suffering. *My poor darling, Chrissy*, he told her as well as himself, *first Christmas in Heaven*.

Joe lifted the collar of his red plaid mackinaw against the wind and bent to shovel a little closer to the home-built brick barbecue that peeked out of one of last night's drifts. Steaks would taste a hell of a lot better grilled in the open air now than in the summer, he told himself, trying to shake the image of the once lively sixteen-year-old he'd finally buried on a slope overlooking the lake.

Yes, those steaks would certainly taste good, Joe thought, while tossing another shovelful of snow to his left.

But much as the former director of the Shore Haven Funeral Home and ex-underboss of the Calabria Crime Family tried to focus his thoughts elsewhere, the knowledge that Christmas was near forced him back to think of Chrissy. Chrissy, his poor innocent child, the life blasted from her before she'd had a chance to live. He, as much to blame as the others.

"Where's *Don Vincenze* now?" he asked his dead daughter, seeing her virginal glowing face and ebony curls as clearly as if she were perched on the barbecue before him.

"*Gone Vincenze* is more like it." Chuckling, he said, "Get it, Chrissy? Get it? *Gone Vincenze*?"

Joe smiled, remembering himself up on the roof, watching the front of the church across the street, feeling his hear beat fast when the doors opened and Don Vincenze Calabria stepped into the sunlight. He could see the don as clearly as if the man were still alive, taking his last breath in the crosshairs of his Weatherbee .270; could see the don't head rock back from the bullet's impact; could see the red splatter all over God's fancy doors; could see him die once again.

But killing that bastard, Vincenze, hadn't settled the score. Nor excused Joe himself. No, there was still Richie DeLuca, awaiting trial for Chrissy's murder in Brooklyn's House of Detention...and whoever else was involved in the shooting...and, yes, that other bastard...all to be taken care of. Only then would he be able to end his own purgatory and join Chrissy in Heaven. Only then.

Once more foregoing the snow-blower that sat inside the wooden shed, Joe committed himself to more punishing work with the shovel.

*Good woman, your mother,* Joe silently told Chrissy when, having cleared the path required to manage dinner, he entered the main room of the chalet.

Marie Augusta sat curled around their nine-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, in a corner of the brown tweed sofa, reading to her from a book of Robert Frost's poetry:

“...They cannot scare me with their empty spaces;  
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.”

Never complains once, he thought. Just does what she's gotta do.

Still talking silently to Chrissy, Joe went about his before dinner chores. He dragged kindling from beneath the wooden porch then carried it up and stacked it near the fireplace. He tasted the venison he'd been curing in his makeshift smokehouse. He checked his guns.

With some time still left, Joe Augusta plodded down the winding path he'd cleared to the mailbox on the main road. Not that he got mail that often. Outside of one person back home, in Brooklyn, no one he knew had any idea that the name Leone scratched on the black box referred to either him, Marie, or Lizzie. Only a monthly rent statement from the property's French-Canadian owner, an occasional advertisement from a local business, or the daily newspapers from Montreal and New York ever brought the inside of the cold metal container to life.

Once again the *Gazette* and the *Times* were the only occupants of the mailbox. Maybe tomorrow the letter he was waiting for would come. Maybe the next day. Maybe never.

Given a choice, he wouldn't trust anyone. But with both the authorities and every half-assed mob guy in New York looking for him, it was either have faith in someone else or remain totally out of touch. Faith was the answer. Faith. Faith that Chrissy would help him accomplish his mission.

Joe had just retrieved the papers and tucked them under his arm when he heard a sound coming from around the curve of white-capped firs behind him. Moving quickly, he dug into his mackinaw for the .45 automatic that was as much a part of him as his flesh, and, having nothing to dive behind for cover, he rolled around to the back side of the mailbox post, hoping it might deflect a bullet if need be.

“*Ca va?*” yelled the old man, Andre, who lived in the castle at the top of the mountain. Dressed in a navy peacoat and a knit longshoreman's cap, Andre was being dragged along the winding road by his golden Labrador, DeGaulle.

“*Ca va bien,*” Joe called back. His voice trailed off to a whisper as he repeated, “*Ca va bien.*” Suddenly, his insides seemed to collapse. Couldn't go on like this too much longer, he told Chrissy. Had to take care of business soon. Had to get his satisfaction...*their* satisfaction...from Richie DeLuca; from Buster Alcamo and that kid,

Butch something-or-other; and, most of all, from Don Vincenze's blood – from his son, Little Vinnie, and from his other bastard offspring...from Mickey Boy Messina!

### *December 12: Todt Hill, Staten Island*

Mickey Boy's consigliere, or mob advisor, Freddie Falcone, waved a piece of paper as Mickey Boy entered his car. Freddie's tightly drawn lips and set jaw belied his normally humorous nature.

"Taxes! Fuckin' taxes!" Freddie yelled. "Hard-ons wanna indict me on a misdemeanor for not filing in the last quarter, before I sold the restaurant."

"Did you file?"

"No, but that's not the goddamn point. If it was John Shpeeliabeep they wouldn't even bother, but 'cause it's me they wanna make a fuckin' federal case."

"Yeah, but you ain't John whatever-you-said. You're a big-time gangster now," Mickey Boy teased, enjoying the bright pink flush of Freddie's face against his silver hair. "You're an important catch."

"Important, my cock! If they knew all I did was hold your little prick when you pee they'd laugh me off the FBI blotter." Laughing himself, Freddie crumpled up the paper and tossed it over his shoulder onto the backseat of his Mercedes. "Fuck'em. I like being a gangster."

Despite his mood having soured once again at having to leave his home, Mickey Boy laughed along. Freddie had always been able to do that – make him laugh. Freddie's dream to be a stand-up comic had been squashed early on by old time neighborhood Mafiosi, who had looked on entertainers as degenerates. Young, and in awe of those whose values shaped much of the area's youth, Freddie had let himself be steered to other paths, some legal, some not. As a result, he had been the funniest bartender, the funniest restaurateur, and the funniest mob associate Mickey Boy had ever known. Even now, as consigliere, though he'd toned down his humor and taken to wearing lightly tinted glasses that made him look more dignified, the grey fox could tickle Mickey Boy's laugh mechanism at will.

None of that humor, however, took away from Freddie's wisdom and insight into mob life or his seriousness about handling Calabro Family business. More important, Mickey Boy believed, was Freddie's unswerving loyalty to him, not only as his superior, but as a human being – one with extraordinary problems.

“You know,” Freddie said, “come to think of it, the only thing the government ain’t taxed yet is my prick. An’ that’s probably because ninety-five percent of the time it’s out of work, three percent of the rest of the time it just hangs around, and the last two percent of the time it’s in a hole. Besides,” he added, laughing at his own joke, “it’s got two dependants, an’ they’re both nuts!”

As usual, Mickey Boy laughed more at Freddie’s comically distorted faces and wild hand flourishes than at the joke, which, also as usual, he’d heard many times before.

When his laughing subsided, Mickey Boy slipped one of Sinatra’s *Capital Years* albums into the tape player, raised the volume to interfere with any listening devices that might have been planted in Freddie’s car, and turned to matters at hand.

“What does the old bastard want now?” he asked, referring to Don Peppino Palermo, the seventy-nine-year-old boss of the only clan comparable in size and wealth to the Calabria Family, which Mickey Boy now headed.

“Who knows?” Freddie replied.

“Maybe he’s got some money to cut up from that office building we’re doing together on Broadway?”

“Sure,” Freddie answered with a smirk. “Know how he cuts up money? He throws it all up in the air. Whatever sticks to the fuckin’ ceiling is yours; whatever comes down is his.”

“Love that old man.”

A half hour later Mickey Boy and Freddie entered Don Peppino’s musty, overstuffed den: red-on-red flocked wallpaper; antique-style gaslights; oil paintings of Sicily. *Typical greaseball*, Mickey Boy thought, while shuddering inside.

Don Peppino, frail as a dry wishbone, greeted both men effusively, hugging and kissing first Mickey Boy then Freddie. Though age clearly showed on the don – translucent, wrinkled skin; hunched back; wispy white hair – his eyes remained penetratingly dark and alert. And mean.

“*Sette ca*,” Don Peppino said, waving toward two red armchairs. He shuffled to his desk, where he opened a black leather attaché case that had been sitting on top. Inside: state-of-the-art electronic equipment to detect government listening devices.

“Sit, sit,” the don said again, pointing to the two provincial chairs that looked as if they had more memories than everyone in the room combined. The air stank of years of DeNobili cigars poisoning it.

Mickey Boy wondered how many times his father, Don Vincenzo, had sat in that room; how he’d felt about the smell; what he’d thought of the withered old sonofabitch who looked as out of place checking the modern electronic equipment, twisting dials and reading meters, as a horse riding a man. What went on inside that seventy-nine-year-old’s head? Could it leave Laurel a widow and Hope to be raised by a single mom? If only his father had prepared him for all this, Mickey Boy thought, instead of remaining in the shadows of his life, never letting him find out he was his father until it was too late; until after the don’s brains had been splattered over the church steps and Connie’s lap by one of Joe Augusta’s rifle shells.

*The shot came out of nowhere, just as we stepped out of the church. Could still feel it whizzing past my ear. Heard the screams...death screams, from behind me. Screams that made my balls shrivel up into my body.*

*Dropped the crutch and fell over Laurel...dragged her down and covered her...tried to protect her from other bullets while yelling for everybody to move back into the church.*

*...No more bullets came.*

*And I saw it.*

*Fuckin' blood everywhere...from the back of his head...all over my mother's dress; the cream-colored dress with lace by the chest. The dress she bought for what she called the happiest day of her life: my wedding. His blood soaked through the lace onto her skin. Even on her face...around her mouth.*

*...And her screaming at me. "Help him, Mickey! Help him please...he's your father!*

*He's your father...*

*He's your father...*

*He's my father.*

Returning from the lapse into his memory, Mickey Boy unconsciously rubbed his leg, the one he'd hurt stopping Joe Augusta's first attempt on Don Vincenze's life – before he'd known it was his own father he was diving in front of. He shook his head once to clear it. Freddie shot him a quizzical look. Don Peppino had been too involved in his detection equipment to notice.

Seemingly satisfied they would not be overheard, Don Peppino poured hot espresso into three tiny cups then seated himself in the recliner, taking his own cup with him but not serving Mickey Boy or Freddie.

"So, how you been?" Don Peppino asked, a smile on his lips but not in his eyes.

"You know I'm still on parole. They could give me a problem for being here."

"Don't worry," Don Peppino replied, chuckling. "I got no record. The *dizgraziata* in charge of you might yell a little, but his teeth can't bite...at least not for you being in my company." The don sipped his coffee then pointed to the other cups. "Go, take, take."

Mickey Boy was about to get a little dig in at the old man by declining the coffee when he caught Freddie's eyes motioning *no*.

Freddie poured one cup for himself then served another to Mickey Boy.

"You know, it musta been a year, no, maybe more, that *a buon oumo*, your father, sat here with me in this room," Don Peppino began. "We made plans then, me an' him – a lot of plans; plans for you; plans for *la cosa nostra*."

Mickey Boy's foot tapped impatiently on the red floral carpet. He hated the greaseball way of talking, beating around the bush before trying to stick it in your ass.

"Unfortunately, for all of us, he passed away before we could put those plans to work." Don Peppino swept one hand in front of him as if brushing crumbs off an invisible table. "But that was yesterday," he said coldly. Seeming to realize he'd triggered anger in Mickey Boy, he returned to a more sympathetic tone, saying, "After he died, I didn't want to put too many things in your head – you know I always been behind you one hundred percent." Dragging out his words in an almost singsong manner, he continued, "But now you're all settled in, an' it's time to do what we gotta do."

"And that is...?"

Don Peppino went on to explain to Mickey Boy and Freddie that both he and Don Vincenze had been convinced that five mob families in New York were just too many; that there was not enough manpower being groomed to support the setup they'd maintained since the Lucky Luciano days; that at least two of the families would have to be disassembled and absorbed into the remaining three.

"Just like that?" Mickey Boy asked, snapping his fingers. "Who's gonna give up their crew without a fight?"

"My *goombah*, Giacomo..." Don Peppino said, referring to his close friend, Giacomo "Jack the Wop" LoPresti. The Wop, who was nearly as old as Don Peppino and had come to America from the same hometown in Sicily, had become leader of the old DiGiovanni Family after his two previous bosses had been murdered within eight months of each other. Mickey Boy had later found out that both murders had been carried out at Don Peppino's and Don Vincenze's shared behest.

"...He wants to go with me," the old don continued about Jack the Wop. "He'll be my consigliere. Your father knew about it."

If he thought he could get away with it, Mickey Boy would have spit in the old man's face. What did Don Peppino think, that just because he was young he could make a fool of him?

"My father was just gonna give you a whole crew, an' take nothin'?" Mickey Boy asked. Though he'd overcome his initial difficulty in saying the word "father" in connection with the man he'd barely known, an internal strangeness persisted; his mind would snap to every time the double syllable passed his lips; a chill continued to attack his spine. "Sounds like a helluva guy – just not like him."

There was a lot Mickey Boy didn't know about Don Vincenze, Don Peppino said, his soft, patronizing tone cutting sharply. Then he cackled, as if at some private joke. "No, no," he said. "But don't worry, your father gave nothing away; he gave *ghiaccio l'inverno*...ice in the winter."

The deal, as Don Peppino explained it, was that Rock Santoro was to bring his group in line with the Calabra Family and he given a top position – underboss or consigliere – within the newly combined *borgata*.

The last family, leaderless while its previous chieftain was being held without bail on enough RICO counts to sentence him well into the Twenty-fifth Century, would be split equally between the two remaining crews – Don Peppino's and Mickey Boy's.

"But he's dead, right?" Mickey Boy asked when Don Peppino had finished speaking.

"*Chi?*"

"My father," Mickey Boy answered, "And that means all bets are off?"

A cold stare hardened Don Peppino's hawk-like features. "Agreements in our life go beyond anybody's living or dying," he said. "It's just too easy to die...if you know what I mean?"

"I know," Mickey Boy replied, struggling to keep from exploding over the veiled threat. "That's why I gotta feel good about whatever we do, right?"

"*Naturalmente*...of course."

"So why don't you give me a little while to think about this; time to talk to Freddie, some of my other men," Mickey Boy said. He'd already made up his mind to reject the don't proposal.

“Mah, sure...take your time,” Don Peppino replied. He leaned forward and in a hard, determined voice, added, “But hurry up. Good leaders make decisions, they don’t just sit still an’ hope things take care of themselves. They got balls...an’ if they’re wrong, they pay the price.”

If there was one thing Mickey Boy was sure of, it was that he wasn’t wrong; about Don Peppino; about anything. There was no way he’d take a turncoat like Rock Santoro, who had reportedly risen to power after breaking a long time taboo and murdering his last boss, into his inner circle. Mickey Boy might “pay the price,” as Don Peppino had threatened, but if he did, it certainly wouldn’t be for stupidity.

Calling on all the patience and control he could muster to remain gracious, Mickey Boy spent another half hour with Don Peppino. They discussed the negative influence of black ghetto life on white youth, the prospects of an unusually warm winter, the right wing bent of the Supreme Court as it affected organized crime. They purposely avoided any mention of issues that could bring them into direct confrontation: a freeze on making new members, common legitimate business interests, the previously mentioned melding of the five families into two.

Before leaving, Mickey Boy kissed Don Peppino on both cheeks.

“*Statte buona, Miguuto,*” the old don said. “Take good care of yourself.”

“Yeah, you too. Stay well,” Mickey Boy replied, while thinking, *Fuck you, you old prick.*

Don Peppino remained in his den after Mickey Boy and Freddie Falcone had left. He closed his eyes, lay his head back against his leather La-Z-Boy and thought. He mulled over the entire conversation, word for word, nuance for nuance, and faial expression for facial expression. He reviewed the talk until he felt a reaction to what had happened rather than coming to an intellectually formulated point of view. Then he decided: this bastard son of Don Vincenze Calabria was no better than his father. It was time to do what he would have had to do anyway if Don Vincenze had lived, but with a better tool than he could ever have hoped for under those past circumstances. Times had changed. There was no longer room for even two families in New York. There would only be one to survive beyond his lifetime: his.

Dragging himself from his chair, Don Peppino went to his desk, pulled out a fresh sheet of parchment-type stationery, and penned a sentence in Italian: *Preparisi per venire a casa – presto!*...prepare to come home – soon! When he was done he posted it to Charles Leone in a suburb of Montreal, Canada.