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World Gone By

Written by Dennis Lehane

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Prologue

December 1942

BEFORE THE SMALL WAR BROKE THEM APART, they all gathered to support the big war. It had been a year since Pearl Harbor, and they came together in the Versailles Ballroom of the Palace Hotel on Bayshore Drive in Tampa, Florida, to raise money for troops stationed in the European Theater. It was a catered affair, black tie, and the evening was mild and dry.

Six months later, on a muggy evening in early May, one of the crime beat reporters for the *Tampa Tribune* would come across photographs from the event. He would be struck by how many of the people who'd been in the local news lately for either killing or being killed had attended the fund-raiser that night.

He thought there was a story in it; his editor disagreed. But look, the reporter said, *look*. That's Dion Bartolo standing at the bar with Rico DiGiacomo. And over here? I'm pretty sure that little

guy in the hat is Meyer Lansky himself. Here—you see that guy talking to the pregnant woman? He ended up in the morgue back in March. And there—that's the mayor and his wife talking to Joe Coughlin. Joe Coughlin again, in this one, shaking hands with the Negro gangster Montooth Dix. Boston Joe, rarely photographed his entire life, but that night, he was photographed *twice*. This guy smoking a cigarette by the dame in white? He's dead. So's that guy. The guy out on the dance floor in the white dinner jacket? He's crippled.

Boss, the reporter said, they were all together that night.

The editor mentioned that Tampa was a small town disguised as a medium-size city. People crossed paths all the time. It was a fund-raiser for the war effort; those were the *causes de rigueur* for the idle rich; they drew everyone who was anyone. He pointed out to his young, excitable reporter that plenty of other people who attended that night—two famous singers, one baseball player, three voice actors from the city's most popular radio soap operas, the president of First Florida Bank, the CEO of Gramercy Pewter, and P. Edson Haffe, the publisher of this very newspaper—were all quite unconnected to the bloodshed that had erupted back in March and stained the city's good name.

The reporter protested a bit longer but found the editor intractable on the subject and so went back to researching rumors of German spies infiltrating the Port Tampa waterfront. A month later he was drafted into the army. The pictures remained in the photo morgue of the *Tampa Tribune* long after anyone who was in them had passed from the earth.

The reporter, who would die two years later on the beach at Anzio, had no way of knowing that the editor, who would outlive him by thirty years before succumbing to heart disease, was under orders to end the paper's coverage of anything to do with the Bar-

tolo Crime Family; Joseph Coughlin; or the mayor of Tampa, a fine young man from a fine Tampa family. The city, the editor was told, had already been tarnished aplenty.

The participants that night back in December had all been engaged, as far as they understood it, in a wholly innocent union of people who supported the soldiers overseas.

Joseph Coughlin, the businessman, had organized the event because so many of his former employees had enlisted or been drafted.

Vincent Imbruglia, who had two brothers in the fight—one in the Pacific and one somewhere in Europe, no one would confirm where—ran the raffle. The grand prize was two front-row tickets to a Sinatra concert at the Paramount in New York at the end of the month and first-class carriage on the Tamiami Champion. Everyone bought rafts of tickets even though most assumed the wheel was rigged so the mayor's wife, a huge Sinatra fan, would win.

The boss of bosses, Dion Bartolo, showed off the kind of dance moves that had won him prizes in his adolescence. In the process, he gave the mothers and daughters of some of Tampa's most respectable families stories to tell their grandchildren. ("No man who dances with such grace can be as bad as some have claimed.")

Rico DiGiacomo, the brightest star in the Tampa underworld, showed up with his brother, Freddy, and their beloved mother, and his dangerous glamour was outdone only by the arrival of Montooth Dix, an exceptionally tall Negro made taller by the top hat that matched his tuxedo. Most members of the Tampa elite had never seen a Negro pass through a party without a serving tray on his palm, but Montooth Dix moved through the crowd of white people like he expected them to serve him.

The party was just respectable enough to be attended without regret and just dangerous enough to be worth remarking on for the rest of the season. Joe Coughlin had a gift for bringing the beacons

of the city into contact with her demons and making it all seem like a lark. It helped that Coughlin himself, once rumored to have been a gangster and quite a powerful one, had clearly evolved past the street. He was one of the biggest charity supporters in all of West Central Florida, a friend to numerous hospitals, soup kitchens, libraries, and shelters. And if the other rumors were true—that he hadn't fully left his criminal past behind—well, one couldn't fault a man for a bit of loyalty to those he'd known on the way up. Certainly if some of the assembled tycoons, factory owners, and builders wished to settle any labor unrest or unclog their supply routes, they knew who to call. Joe Coughlin was the bridge in this town between what was proclaimed in public and how it was achieved in private. When he threw a party, you came just to see who'd show up.

Joe himself conferred upon the festivities no further significance than that. When a man threw a party where the upper crust mingled with street thugs and judges chatted with capos as if they'd never met before, either in court or in a back room, when the Sacred Heart pastor showed up and blessed the room before imbibing with the same gusto as everyone else, when Vanessa Belgrave, the pretty but icy wife of the mayor raised a glass of thanks in Joe's direction, and a Negro as fearsome as Montooth Dix could regale a group of stuffy old white men with tales of his exploits in the Great War, and not a cross word or drunken faux pas was witnessed by anyone, well, that party was not only a success, it was quite possibly the success of the season.

The only sign of trouble occurred after Joe stepped out on the back lawn to get some air and saw the little boy. He moved in and out of the darkness at the far edge of the back lawn. He zigzagged back and forth, as if he were playing tag with other boys. But there were no other boys. Judging by his height and build, he was about six

or seven years old. He spread his arms wide and made the sound of a propeller and then of a plane engine. He made wings of his arms and careened along the fringe of the tree line, shouting, "*Va-roooooom. Va-roooom.*"

Joe couldn't put his finger on what else was odd about the kid, other than being a child alone at an adult party, until he realized his clothes were a good ten years out of date. More like twenty, actually, the kid was wearing knickerbockers, Joe was pretty sure, and one of those oversize golf caps boys wore way back when Joe himself had been a boy.

The kid was too far away for Joe to get a good look at his face, but he had the odd sensation that even if he were closer, it wouldn't have made a difference. Even from this far away he could tell the boy's face was irrevocably indistinct.

Joe walked off the flagstone patio and crossed the lawn. The boy kept making airplane sounds and ran into the darkness beyond the lawn, vanishing into the stand of trees. Joe heard him buzzing, somewhere back in all that darkness.

Joe was halfway across the lawn when someone off to his right whispered, "Psst. Mr. Coughlin, sir? Joe?"

Joe slipped a hand a few inches from the Derringer nestled at the small of his back, not his normal gun of choice but one he'd found suitable for black-tie events.

"It's me," Bobo Frechetti said as he came out from behind the great banyan tree along the side of the lawn.

Joe dropped his hand back in front of himself. "Bobo, how's the kid?"

"I'm okay, Joe. You?"

"Tip-top." Joe looked at the tree line, saw only darkness. He couldn't hear the kid back in there anymore. He said to Bobo, "Who brought a kid?"

"What?"

"The kid." Joe pointed. "The one who was acting like an airplane."

Bobo stared at him.

"You didn't see a kid over there?" Again, Joe pointed.

Bobo shook his head. Bobo, a guy so small no one had much trouble believing he'd once been a jockey, took off his hat and held it in his hands. "You heard about that safe got opened at that rock-crushing place in Lutz?"

Joe shook his head even though he knew Bobo was talking about the safe that had been robbed of six thousand dollars at Bay Palms Aggregate, a subsidiary of one of the Family's transport companies.

"Me and my partner had no idea it was owned by Vincent Imbruglia." Bobo waved his arms like an umpire calling a guy safe at home. "None."

Joe knew the feeling. His entire path in this life had been determined when he and Dion Bartolo, barely out of diapers, unknowingly robbed a gangster's casino.

"So, then, no big deal." Joe lit a cigarette, offered the pack to the little safecracker. "Give the money back."

"We tried." Bobo took a cigarette and a light from Joe, nodded his thanks. "My partner—you know Phil?"

Phil Cantor. Phil the Bill because of the size of his nose. Joe nodded.

"Phil went to Vincent. Told him about our mistake. Said we had the money and were gonna bring it right back. Know what Vincent did?"

Joe shook his head, though he had an idea.

"Chucked Phil into traffic. Right on Lafayette, middle of the fucking day. Phil bounced off the grille of a Chevy like the one ball off a hard break. Hip's shattered, knees all fucked up, jaw's wired

shut. Vincent tells him, as he's lying in the middle of Lafayette, 'You owe us double. You got one week.' And spits on him. What kind of animal spits on a man? Any man, Joe? I'm asking. Never mind one lying on the street with parts of him broken?"

Joe shook his head, then held out his hands. "What can I do?"

Bobo handed Joe a paper bag. "It's all there."

"The original amount or the double Vincent asked for?"

Bobo fidgeted, looking around at the trees before he looked back at Joe. "You can talk to these people. You're not some animal. You can tell them we made a mistake and now my partner's in the hospital for, I dunno, a month? And that seems a high price. Could you float that?"

Joe smoked for a bit. "If I get you out of this soup—"

Bobo grabbed Joe's hand and kissed it, most of his lips landing on Joe's watch.

"*If.* " Joe took his hand back. "What'll you do for me?"

"You name it."

Joe looked at the bag. "Every dollar is in here?"

"Every single one."

Joe took a drag and then loosed a slow exhale. He kept waiting for the kid to return or at least the sound of him, but it was clear those trees were empty.

He looked at Bobo and said, "All right."

"All right? Jesus. All right?"

Joe nodded. "Nothing's free, though, Bobo."

"I know it. I know it. Thank you, thank you."

"If I ever ask you for anything"— he stepped in close—"fucking *anything,* you hop right to. We clear?"

"As a bell, Joe. As a bell."

"If you welsh on me?"

"I won't, I won't."

"I'll have a curse put on you. And not any curse. Witch doctor I know in Havana? Motherfucker never misses."

Bobo, like a lot of guys who'd grown up around racetracks, was highly superstitious. He showed Joe his palms. "You won't have to worry about that."

"I'm not talking about some garden-variety hex, kind you get from an Italian grandmother and her mustache in New Jersey."

"You do not have to worry about me. I will honor my debt."

"I'm talking a Cuba-by-way-of-Hispaniola curse. Haunt your descendents."

"I promise." He looked at Joe with a fresh coat of sweat on his forehead and eyelids. "May God strike me dead."

"Well, we wouldn't want that, Bobo." Joe patted his face. "Then you wouldn't be able to pay me back."

VINCENT IMBRUGLIA WAS SET to get bumped up to captain, even though he didn't know it yet and even though Joe didn't think it was a great idea. But times were tough, strong earners were getting rare, some of their best off in the war, so Vincent was getting his promotion next month. Until then, though, he still worked for Enrico "Rico" DiGiacomo, which meant the money that had been stolen from his stone-crushing company front was really Rico's.

Joe found Rico at the bar. He slid him the money and explained the situation.

Rico sipped his drink and frowned when Joe told him what had happened to poor Phil the Bill.

"Tossed him in front of a fucking car?"

"Indeed." Joe took a sip of his own drink.

"There's just no style to a move like that."

"I agree."

"I mean, have a little fucking class."

"No argument."

Rico gave it some thought as he bought them another round. "Seems to me the punishment's already fit the crime and then some. You tell Bobo he's off the hook but not to show his face in any of our bars for a little while. Let everyone cool down. Broke the poor fuck's jaw, huh?"

Joe nodded. "What the man said, yeah."

"Too bad it wasn't his nose. Maybe it could have got, I dunno, restructured, stop looking like God got drunk, put Phil's elbow where his nose was supposed to go." His voice trailed off as he looked around the room. "This is some party, boss."

He told Rico, "Ain't your boss anymore. Ain't anyone's."

Rico acknowledged that with a flick of his eyebrow, looked around the room some more. "Still a hell of a bash, sir. *Salud*."

Joe looked out on the dance floor, at all the swells dancing with all the former debs, everyone polished to a shine. He saw the kid again, or thought he did, the boy appearing between the swirl of gowns and ruffled hoop dresses. The boy's face was turned away, the back of his head sporting a small cowlick, no hat on him anymore but still wearing the knickerbocker pants.

And then he wasn't there anymore.

Joe placed his drink aside and vowed not to have another for the rest of the evening.

In retrospect, he would look back on it as the Last Party, the final free ride before everything slipped toward that heartless March.

But at the time, it was just a great party.

Chapter One

In the Matter of Mrs. Del Fresco

IN THE SPRING OF 1941, a man named Tony Del Fresco married a woman named Theresa Del Frisco in Tampa, Florida. This was, unfortunately, the only slightly amusing thing anyone could remember about their marriage. He once hit her with a bottle; she once hit him with a croquet mallet. The mallet belonged to Tony, who'd brought it over from Arezzo some years before and had placed wickets and stakes in the Del Frescos' swampy backyard on the west side of Tampa. Tony repaired clocks by day and cracked safes by night. He claimed croquet was the only thing that settled his mind, which, by his own admission, was filled with a permanent rage made all the blacker for being inexplicable. Tony had two good jobs, after all, a pretty wife, time on weekends for croquet.

However black the thoughts in Tony's head may have been, they all leaked out when Theresa caved in the side of his skull

with the mallet early in the winter of 1943. Detectives concluded that after delivering the initial, incapacitating blow, Theresa had stepped on her husband's cheekbone, fixed his head to the kitchen floor, and swung the mallet into the back of his skull until it looked like a pie that fell off a window ledge.

By trade, Theresa was a florist, but most of her true income derived from robbery and the occasional murder, both crimes usually committed on behalf of her boss, Lucius Brozjuola, whom everyone called King Lucius. King Lucius paid the necessary tribute to the Bartolo Family but otherwise ran an independent organization with the illicit profits laundered through the phosphate empire he'd amassed along the Peace River and the wholesale flower business he owned in the Port of Tampa. It had been King Lucius who had trained Theresa as a florist in the first place and King Lucius who financed the flower shop she opened downtown on Lafayette. King Lucius ran a crew of thieves, fences, arsonists, and contract killers who operated under only one concrete rule—no jobs performed in their home state. So Theresa, over the years, had killed five men and one woman, all strangers—two in Kansas City, one in Des Moines, another in Dearborn, one in Philadelphia, and finally, the woman in Washington, D.C., Theresa turning to shoot her in the back of the head two steps after passing her on a soft spring evening in Georgetown, on a tree-lined street that ticked with the remnants of an afternoon shower.

In one way or another, all those killings haunted her. The man in Des Moines had held a picture of his family in front of his face, forcing her to fire the bullet through it to reach his brain; the one in Philly kept saying "Just tell me why"; the woman in Georgetown had let out a plaintive sigh before she'd crumpled to the wet pavement.

The one killing that didn't haunt Theresa was Tony's. She only wished she'd done it sooner, before Peter was old enough to miss his

parents. He'd been staying with her sister in Lutz that fateful weekend because Theresa had wanted him out of the line of fire when she kicked Tony out of his own house. His drinking, whoring, and black moods had been spiraling out of control since the summer, and Theresa had finally reached her limit. Tony hadn't reached his, though, which is how he came to hit her with a wine bottle and how she came to crush his fucking head with a mallet.

At the Tampa City jail, she called King Lucius. Half an hour later, Jimmy Arnold, house counsel to King Lucius and his various corporations, was sitting across from her. Theresa was worried about two things—going to the chair and finding herself unable to provide for Peter. Her control over whether she was electrocuted up in the state penitentiary at Raiford ended with her husband's life. As for securing Peter's future comfort, however, she'd been waiting on payment for a job from King Lucius himself, a job that had harvested so bountiful a profit margin that her 5 percent stake would ensure that the stomachs of Peter, Peter's children, and Peter's grandchildren never rumbled for anything but a second helping.

Jimmy Arnold assured her that on both counts the outlook was rosier than she presumed. In the first matter, he'd already informed the Hillsborough County district attorney Archibald Boll of her history of being beaten by her deceased husband, beatings that had been documented on the two occasions Tony's fury had put her in the hospital. The DA, a very smart and politically conscious man, would not send an abused wife to the death chamber when there were plenty of German and Jap spies Old Sparky would be glad to host first. As for the monies due her from the Savannah job, Jimmy Arnold was authorized to say that King Lucius was still in the process of finding a buyer for the merchandise in question but as soon as he'd done so and the monies had been received, she would be the second participant to get her cut, after King Lucius himself, of course.

Three days after the arrest, Archibald Boll dropped by to offer her a deal. A handsome middle-aged man in a coarse linen suit and matching half-fedora, Archibald Boll's eyes carried the playful light of a grade school mischief maker. Theresa concluded fairly quickly that he was attracted to her, but he was all business when it came to discussing her plea. She would agree before the court that she had committed voluntary manslaughter with extenuating circumstances, a plea that would normally ensure someone with a criminal record as extensive as her own twelve years in prison. But today and today only, Archibald Boll assured her, the district attorney's office of the city of Tampa was offering sixty-two months, to be served at the women's wing of the state prison in Raiford. Which was the location, yes, of Old Sparky, but Archibald Boll promised Theresa she'd never see it.

"Five years." Theresa couldn't believe it.

"And two months," Archibald Boll said, his moony gaze gliding up from her waist to her breasts. "You make the plea tomorrow, we'll have you on the bus out the next morning."

So tomorrow night, Theresa knew, you'll pay your visit.

But she didn't care—for five years and a chance to be out in time for Peter's eighth birthday, she'd fuck not only Archibald Boll but every ADA in his office and still consider herself lucky not to have a metal cap placed to her skull and ten thousand volts of electricity sent surging through her veins.

"Do we have a deal?" Archibald Boll asked, eyes on her legs now.

"We have a deal."

In court, when the judge asked how she pled, Theresa answered, "Guilty," and the judge conferred upon her a sentence of "not more than one thousand eight hundred and ninety days, less time served." They took Theresa back to the jail to await the morning bus to Raiford. Early that evening, when her first visitor was

announced, she expected to see Archibald Boll enter the gloamy corridor outside her cell, the tent already pitched in his linen trousers.

Instead it was Jimmy Arnold. He brought her a meal of cold fried chicken and potato salad, better than any meal she'd have for the next sixty-two months, and she wolfed down the chicken and sucked the grease off her fingers without any pretense of dignity. Jimmy Arnold took no interest in any of this. When she handed the plate back to him, he handed her the photograph of her and Peter that had sat atop her dresser. He also handed her the drawing Peter had made of her—a featureless and misshapen oval on top of an askew triangle with a single stick arm, no feet. He'd drawn it shortly after his second birthday, however, and by those standards it was a Rembrandt. Theresa looked down at Jimmy Arnold's two gifts and tried to keep the emotion from her eyes and her throat.

Jimmy Arnold crossed his legs at the ankles and stretched in his chair. He let out a loud yawn and dry-coughed into his fist. He said, "We'll miss you, Theresa."

She ate the last of the potato salad. "Back before you know it."

"There're just so few with your talents."

"In floral arrangement?"

He watched her carefully as his chuckle died. "No, the other thing."

"That just takes a gray heart."

"There's more to it." He waved a finger at her. "Don't sell yourself short."

She shrugged and looked back at the picture her son had drawn.

"Now that you're on the shelf for a while," he said, "who would you say is the best?"

She looked up at the ceiling and out at the other cells. "At floral arrangements."

He smiled. "Yeah, let's call it that. Who's the best florist in Tampa now that you're no longer in the running for the title?"

She didn't have to think long on the subject. "Billy."

"Kovich?"

She nodded.

Jimmy Arnold took that into consideration. "You consider him better than Mank?"

She nodded. "You see Mank coming."

"And on whose shift should this happen?"

She didn't follow the question. "Shift?"

"Detectives," he said.

"You mean locally?"

He nodded.

"You . . ." She looked around the cell, as if to assure herself she was still in it and of this earth. "You want a local contractor to handle a local contract?"

"I'm afraid so," he said.

That went against two decades of King Lucius policy.

"Why?" she asked.

"It must be someone the target knows. No one else could get close enough." He uncrossed his ankles and fanned himself with his hat. "If you think Kovich is the man for the job, I'll make inquiries."

She said, "Does the target have reason to suspect his life could be in danger?"

Jimmy Arnold thought about it and eventually nodded. "He works in our business. Don't we all sleep with one eye open?"

Theresa nodded. "Then, yeah, Kovich is your man. Everybody likes him, even if no one can understand why."

"Let's next consider the question of police jurisdiction and the character of the detectives who are working on the day in question."

"What day?"

"A Wednesday."

She ratcheted through a series of names, shifts, and scenarios.

"Ideally," she said, "you would want Kovich to do it between noon and eight in either Ybor, Port Tampa, or Hyde Park. That would ensure a high likelihood that Detectives Feeney and Boatman respond to the call."

His lips moved silently over the names as he fussed with the crease in his trouser leg, his brow furrowing a bit. "Do policemen observe holy days?"

"If they're Catholic, I suppose. Which holy day?"

"Ash Wednesday."

"There's not much to observing Ash Wednesday."

"No?" He seemed genuinely perplexed. "It's been so long since I've practiced the faith myself."

She said, "You go to mass, the priest makes the sign of the cross on your forehead with damp ash, you leave. That's it."

"That's it," he repeated in a soft whisper. He gave his surroundings a kind of distracted smile, like he was a bit surprised to find himself here. He stood. "Good luck, Mrs. Del Fresco. We'll be seeing you."

She watched Jimmy Arnold lift his briefcase off the floor, and she knew she shouldn't ask the question but she couldn't help it.

"Who's the target?" she said.

He looked through the bars at her. Just as she'd known she shouldn't ask the question, he knew he shouldn't answer it. But Jimmy Arnold was famous in their circles for an interesting paradox at his center—ask him the most innocuous question about any of his clients and he wouldn't answer if you set fire to his scrotum. Ask him the most salacious details about anything else, however, and he was all hen.

"Are you sure you want to know?" he asked.

She nodded.

He gave the dark green hallway a glance both ways before he leaned back into the bars, put his lips between them, and said the name.

"Joe Coughlin."

IN THE MORNING SHE BOARDED the bus and it carried her northeast for two hundred miles. Inland Florida was not the Florida of blue ocean, white sand, and crushed-white-shell parking lots. It was a land sun bleached and sickened after too many droughts and wildfires. For six and a half hours they bumped along back roads and bad roads, and most of the people they saw, white or colored or Indian, looked too thin.

The woman chained to Theresa's left wrist didn't talk for fifty miles and then introduced herself as Mrs. Sarah Nez of Zephyrhills. She shook Theresa's hand, assured her she was innocent of all the crimes for which she'd been convicted, and went another twenty-five miles before she moved again. Theresa rested her forehead against the window and looked out at the broiled land through the dust the tires kicked up. Beyond fields so dry the grass resembled paper, she could identify swampland by the smell and the green fog that rose from the far edges of the blanched fields. She thought about her son and the money she was owed to provide for his future, and she hoped King Lucius would make good on his debt because she had no one who could collect if he didn't.

Speaking of debt, she'd been stunned last night when District Attorney Archibald Boll failed to show up at her cell. She'd lain awake with a grateful body but a racing mind. If he hadn't expected her to repay him sexually, why had he offered such a sweetheart deal

in the first place? There were no acts of kindness in her business, only acts of cunning; no gifts, only delayed bills. So if Archibald Boll hadn't wanted money from her—and he certainly hadn't given any indication he expected any—then that left sex or information.

Maybe, she told herself, he'd softened her up with the light sentence and now he'd let her stew on it a bit, let her sense of obligation grow. Then he'd come visit her at Raiford sometime this summer to collect on the debt. Except that DAs didn't work that way—they dangled the easy sentence in front of your eyes, but didn't give it to you *until* you'd done their bidding. They never gave you the easy sentence up front. Made no sense.

What made even less sense was the contract on Joe Coughlin. No matter how hard she tried—and she'd been trying all night—Theresa couldn't wrap her head around it. Since he'd stepped down as boss ten years ago, Joe Coughlin had proved a bigger asset to the Bartolo Family and all the other families and crews in town than he'd been when he'd run things. He embodied the highest ideal of a man in their business—he made money for his friends. Therefore, he had a lot of friends.

But enemies?

Theresa knew he'd once had a few, but that was ten years ago, and they'd all been erased in a single day. The police and the public knew about the bullet through the throat that had ended the hopes, dreams, and eating habits of Maso Pescatore, a bullet Coughlin was rumored to have personally fired. But no one but people like Theresa and her associates, people in the Life, knew about the dozen men who'd gone out on a boat to throw Joe Coughlin overboard only to never return, mown down by machine guns and close-range .45s. They'd then been tossed overboard into the Gulf of Mexico, turned into shark chum on a day already hot and uncharitable.

Those victims, and a long dead policeman, were the last enemies

anyone knew Coughlin to have had. Since stepping down as boss, he'd stayed away from the heavy stuff, taking cues from Meyer Lansky, with whom he owned several concerns in Cuba. Rarely photographed and, if so, never with others in the Life, he apparently spent his days dreaming up new ways to make everyone even more money than he'd made them the year before.

Long before the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor and war broke out, Joe Coughlin had advised all the major players in the Florida and Cuban liquor concerns to begin stockpiling industrial alcohol to convert to rubber. No one knew what the fuck he was talking about—what did alcohol have to do with rubber and, even if it did, what did that have to do with them? But because he'd made them so much money in the '30s, they listened to him. And by the time the Japs had taken over half the world's rubber-producing regions in the spring of '42, Uncle Sam came running to pay top dollar for anything the government could use to make boots, tires, and bumpers, hell, even asphalt, Theresa had heard. The crews who'd listened to Coughlin—including King Lucius's—made so much money they didn't know what to do with it. One of the few men who didn't listen, Philly Carmona in Miami, took such an ill view of the guy who'd advised him against the deal that he shot him in the stomach.

Everyone in their business had enemies, yes, but as she drifted in and out of a lazy doze on the bus, Theresa couldn't put a face to any of Joe Coughlin's. Talk about killing a golden goose.

A snake slid through the dry gully outside her window. The snake was black and as long as Theresa. It slithered out of the gully and into the brush and Theresa drifted into a near-dream in which it slithered across the floor of her bedroom in the Brooklyn tenement where she'd lived upon first arriving in this country when she was ten. She thought it might be a good thing to have a snake in that room because rats had always been the real problem in those

tenements, and snakes ate rats. But then the snake vanished from the floor and she could feel it sliding up the bed toward her. She could feel it but she couldn't see it and she couldn't move because the dream wouldn't allow it. The snake's scales were rough and cold against her neck. It knotted itself around her throat and its metal links dug into her windpipe.

Theresa reached behind her and gripped Sarah Nez's ear, gripped it so hard she could have pulled it from the woman's head if she'd had enough time. But she was already running out of oxygen. Sarah had used the chain that united their wrists. She made small grunting noises as she twisted it tighter, working that chain like a winch.

"If you accept Christ," she whispered, "if you accept Christ as your Savior, He will welcome you home. He will love you. Accept Him and fear not."

Theresa turned her body in toward the window and managed to get her feet pressed to the wall. When she snapped her head back, she heard Sarah's nose break and she pushed off the wall at the same time. They ended up in the aisle and Sarah's grip loosened long enough for Theresa to croak out something approximating a scream, more like a yelp really, and she thought she might have seen one of the guards moving toward them but everything was fading. Everything was fading and then faded and then black.

TWO WEEKS LATER, she still couldn't speak properly; all that came out was a gnarled and clogged-up whisper. The bruises that ringed her neck had turned from purple to yellow recently. It hurt to eat, and a cough could bring her close to tears.

The second woman who tried to kill her used a metal tray stolen from the infirmary. She hit Theresa on the back of the head

with it while Theresa was taking a shower, and the blow felt far too reminiscent of some of Tony's. The weakness of most people in a fight—men and women—was that they paused. This woman was no different. The force of her first blow knocked Theresa to the floor, and the sound of it seemed to surprise the woman. She stared down at Theresa too long before she dropped to her knees and raised the tray again. If she'd been any good—if she'd been Theresa, for example—she would have followed her victim to the floor immediately, tossed the tray aside, and bludgeoned her against the tile. By the time the woman got to her knees and raised her arms, Theresa had made a fist and turned the knuckle of her middle finger into a point. She drove that point into the center of the woman's throat. Not once, not twice, but four times. The tray fell and Theresa used the woman's body to stand as the woman gasped for oxygen that wouldn't come in the middle of the shower room.

When the guards arrived, they found the woman turning blue on the floor. The doctor was called. A nurse showed up first, and by that point the woman had begun taking gasping, desperate breaths. Theresa watched all this calmly from the edge of the room. She'd dried off and changed into her prison blues. She'd bummed a cigarette off one of the girls; in exchange, she promised to teach the girl how to do to someone what she'd just done to Thelma, which, she'd learned, was the failed killer's name.

When the guards came to Theresa and asked her what happened, she told them.

One of them said, "You know you could have killed her?"

"Apparently," she said, "I've slowed a step."

The other guards walked away and she was left with the one who'd asked the question, the youngest of them.

She said, "Henry, right?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Henry, do you think you could get me a little of that gauze the nurse has in her satchel? My head's cut."

"How do you know there's gauze in there?"

"What else would be in there, Henry? Comic books?"

He smiled and nodded at the same time and went and got her the gauze.

Later that evening, after lights out, Henry came to her cell. She'd been in prison before so she'd been expecting it sooner or later. At least he was young and nearly handsome and clean.

Afterward, she told him she needed to get a message to someone on the outside.

"Oh, now," Henry Ames said.

"A message," Theresa said, "nothing more."

"I don't know." Henry Ames, less than two minutes removed from the end of his virginity, now had cause to wish he'd held on to it a little longer.

"Henry," Theresa said, "someone with a lot of power is trying to have me killed."

"I can protect you."

She smiled at him. She caressed the side of his neck with her right hand and Henry felt taller, stronger, and more alive than he'd ever felt in his twenty-three years on this earth.

She placed the razor blade to his ear with her left hand. It was double-edged, the kind Henry placed in the brass razor his father had given him when he graduated high school. These days, with the restrictions on metal, Henry used a blade until it was as dull as a spoon, but Theresa's appeared to have never been used until she flicked it lightly under his earlobe. Before he could react, she pulled the handkerchief from his shirt pocket and dabbed at the cut.

"Henry," she whispered, "you can't even protect yourself."

He never saw where she hid the blade; it just wasn't in her hand

anymore. He stared into her eyes. They were wide and dark and warm.

"Now," she said gently, "if I don't get word to someone about my predicament, Henry, I won't last a month in here. And my son will grow up an orphan. And that I cannot fucking abide. You hear me?"

He nodded. Theresa continued to dab at his earlobe. Much to his surprise and shame, he felt himself growing hard again. Henry Ames of Ocala, Florida, a farmer's son, asked Female Prisoner 4773 who she wanted the message to go to.

"Go to the home office of Suarez Sugar on Howard Avenue in Tampa and tell the vice president, Joseph Coughlin, that I need to see him. Impress upon him that it's a matter of life and death. His and mine."

"I *can* protect you in here." Henry heard the desperation in his own voice, but even so, he wanted her to believe it.

Theresa handed his handkerchief back. She stared at him for a while.

"That's sweet," she said. "Now remember—Suarez Sugar. Howard Avenue in Tampa. Joe Coughlin."