

### ***Valentine's Day Excerpt***

Frank was visibly shaken with fear, the realization of what he'd just done becoming clearer with his every step. This was Al Capone, the greatest mob leader in organized crime. He had a successful bootlegging business, earning tons of dough, while carrying out murders left and right, and successfully avoiding his own demise at the hands of rival mob leader Bugs Moran. Any deep involvement in the mob business was dangerous. Not only was he jeopardizing himself, but he was putting Margaret and Ruth at serious risk. What the hell was he thinking?

The emphatic thump of his heart beat in sync with his and Yorkie's footsteps as they walked the cobbled sidewalk toward Capone's headquarters. Frank looked around nervously. There was a musty grittiness to this part of town unseen anywhere else in Chicago, emphasized by overturned garbage cans, scraps gathering at the brim, and the occasional screech of a cat. The bleakness of the surroundings was unsettling to Frank. It was quiet. And empty.

They approached the headquarters, part of a gargantuan brick building that monopolized the otherwise barren appearance of the street. Capone's office was hidden among a cigar shop and a seemingly reputable dentist, judging from the fresh appearance of the sign on the exterior of the building, his name proudly stenciled in above his bright, boldfaced occupation. For obvious reasons, there was no sign for Capone – but those who knew him... they knew this was his place.

Frank felt a bead of sweat fall down his forehead as he climbed the flight of stairs toward Capone's office. He felt trapped; the murky brick wall and faint faucet drip that

surrounded him acting as some sort of symbolism to parallel the dark territory he was entering.

They reached the top and Frank peered into the office through a single glass panel alongside the door. He noticed a gruff, booming man slide a black satin bowling hat over the front of his face, shielding his eyes from view. “You’ll stay out here,” Yorkie instructed. “Boss doesn’t like communicating with the rookies directly. He says ya gotta *earn* your right to look Scarface straight in the eye. Prove yourself.”

The door shut abruptly as Yorkie entered the room, and soon after, Yorkie pulled a floppy manila curtain over the glass panel, to ensure complete privacy. Amid the faint murmurings audible to Frank from behind the glass, he imagined Capone: his dried, wilting cigar dangling from his thick, bottom lip; a faint mustache curling at his lipline, his hot breath emitting the stink of pastrami and Swiss as he spoke, the pungent aroma permeating through the room. Frank heard fragments of the muffled, but deep, booming baritone, interspersed with the occasional “Yes” or “Uh huh” from Yorkie, which Frank figured was most likely accompanied by a subconscious head nod.

It was another few minutes before Yorkie came out. He spoke with a tinge of excitement as he relayed to Frank what Capone told him in the office. “So, here’s the skinny. Bugs Moran’s been after the boss for years, shootin’ at him on many oh-cassions, hopin’ to bump him off. *So,*”—he cocked a slight smile as he continued—“we’re gonna bump off Bugs and a few of *his* gang members. The 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine’s Day, right across the street, Moran’ll be there with his gang. We’ll show up there, they’ll think it’s a bum’s rush, and then... we’ll snap.” Frank felt a hush come over the room as Yorkie pulled a shining black pistol out from behind his back, holding it in his palms. “We’ll all be

gettin' roughly 100 clams in exchange for our, uh, services." He said the last word with a demeaning chuckle. "And, Mr. McGee," he finished, his smile widening and arms outstretched, "Boss wants *you* to pull the trigger."