

I Never Did Make It Back Home

A Prequel to The Three Lives of Richie O'Malley

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Introduction:

This is the back story of Vinny Gentile, one of our favorite characters from the novel *The Three Lives of Richie O'Malley*.

After you read this short story, we've included a sample chapter from the full book to give you a better taste of who this guy really is.

Thank you for reading and enjoy!

Miami, Florida—1986

The morning's air was hot and slimy-damp and thick. A hard, sticky wind blew in off the Atlantic. Down at the waterfront the warehouse was a scene of confusion, and that confusion was scattered and colored the scene in every direction.

Furious orange and red flames poured through exploding windows, mixing with thick and greasy, toxic smoke. Shards of glass flew in every direction at once, like a deadly web. The stench and plumes of thicker smoke engulfed some idling semi-trucks. Gasoline and diesel oil fires burned everywhere, commingled with random explosions from every corner. Helicopters filled the air, adding an intimidating noise to the chaos and a palpable thump felt in the chest, even from a sidewalk a half mile away.

From a safe distance, breathless reporters standing outside news vans screamed events as they unfolded and jammed microphones in the faces of bystanders and anyone who walked past them on the sidewalk, while camera crews filmed and recorded the cacophony.

The world watched on TV, transfixed.

If you took a step back from the chaos and carnage, it all looked almost staged.

On a corner, to the north side of the red brick building, stood an assembly of local cops, FBI, DEA and some federal agents in plainclothes. Out of a door, a flash of blue uniforms and a hurried band of handcuffed men ran out the door and into waiting vans. One of the men was the notorious New York mobster, Vinny Gentile.

It was always quite a spectacle when the US Government decided to seize the moral higher ground.

United States Federal Penitentiary Marion, Illinois—1996

The gray sky released a hundred-year flood that slammed into the ground with the ferocity of a machine gun. Big drops attacked the dirt in the yard, creating puddles everywhere, like tiny bombs dropped from the sky. The puddles converged to form small ponds as the yard faded from view.

Inside, behind a myriad of locked doors and electronic switches and alarms, the two-foot thick concrete walls are painted gray. The cement barrier is broken every twenty feet by a barred window that someone decided to cover in diamond shaped expanded metal grate. The bars and the grate are gray.

Wearing a gray jumpsuit, sits a gray-haired man in a gray folding chair. His hands cuffed to a gray metal table. A guard in a gray and black uniform cradles a rifle. A young federal agent wearing horn-rimmed glasses and a dark blue three-piece suit with a red tie sits across from the gray old man. Another man in a shiny maroon suit sits next to the handcuffed man. Apparently, an attorney.

The older man sits in silence, grinding his teeth, small beads of sweat appear on his forehead. The federal agent and the lawyer are talking in hushed tones, perhaps under the misconception the guard doesn't hear and absorb every word. As they talk, they shove papers across the gray table at each other.

The fed finally stops pushing papers around and talking to the lawyer. He turns to the gray-haired man, Vinny.

The federal agent finally speaks, "Mr. Gentile, you have served ten years of a thirty-year sentence in a maximum-security facility. With a small amount of cooperation on your part, we can get this reduced to another year served in a minimum-security facility, back in New York State, for you. Closer to family and friends. Day passes, work release, family visits. A minimal amount of cooperation. No one will say you flipped or that you're a turncoat. We want you to answer some questions honestly. Then you appear before a judge, show remorse for the crimes

you've committed, and I'd say by spring 1998 you are a free man and back in New York City, still a young enough man to enjoy a good life. What do you think about that?"

Vinny speaks, actually grunts first. Looks around the room, looks hard at the guard, then the suit sitting next to him, then the federal agent.

"When I eat sausage, I never think about the dead pig."

He half climbs out of his seat, still in handcuffs. "Fucking remorse? Fucking remorse, you realize that me and the people like me who were busted in that raid in Miami were all working for you fuckers. You know that you fucking know that!

"The reason I sit here alive today is I kept my word to my crew, my family, my troops. I never ratted, I ain't about to rat. Fuck you!"

He sits back down, still in rage, not so much retreating as realizing handcuffed he has nowhere to go.

"Do either of you two assholes know why you never whistle in prison? They say it makes incarcerated men think of birds and flowers and life on the outside. You know what I miss, PUSSY! That's all I fucking miss, pussy and a nice meal, my mom's cooking, but she's dead, so just pussy. I'm a lucky man. I had enough pussy in my thirty-five years on the outside, I got plenty of memories to keep me happy now. I fucking whistle whenever I want to. Fuck birds and fresh air.

Addressing the young, handsome federal agent, Vinny laughs. "You assholes think I'm afraid of retribution from my friends I do business with. Let me assure you, J. Edgar Hoover, I've never lost a minute of sleep worried about my guys and my connections from the old neighborhood. Nah, it's you fucking feds I fear. You were probably in high school when I first went up. Mob, feds, FBI, CIA, Congressmen, state cops, judges, everyone, fucking everyone, was in on our game. There is more blood and dope and dirty money in and on the hands of your bosses than any of my crew ever dreamed of. Jesus, the dope, money and pussy. It was like

paradise until some of you assholes got scared and blew everything the fuck up. You know the official story of the warehouse fire in Miami where I was taken into custody.”

Vinny stands again and points a finger as best he can, in the short cuffs. “YOU fuckers did that! No mob, no organized crime, no racketeers, you feds did that!”

“I’m not in prison here, locked up. I’m locked up to be safe from you assholes. That deal was cut,” and he looks down at his lawyer’s son, “by your fucking old man, when he still had a pair of balls, to keep me quiet and alive. Even in here, I expect a hit one day.

“The last time I saw any of my family I was sitting in my ma’s sister’s living room. My mom and dad was long since dead. Aunt June had these couches and chairs in that room all covered over with plastic. All the god-fucked ugly flower patterned furniture covered in clear, slippery plastic. You went in there on a hot day in the summer and your sweaty ass would slip right off. I remember being in that room, alone, knowing I was going and never coming back. I stared down at the carpeted floor, more god-fucked ugliness, and I noticed the tracks and dirt ground into her fancy rug. I thought of all of us, Ma, the old man before he bought it, my cousins. We could never sit in that fucking room; we was only allowed to pass through. I saw the damage the years had done in that ugly carpet, then I looked up and into a mirror and I saw the years in the creases of my face too. I was ground down and worn out from a young age.

“We all took the deal, all us boys, me, Eddie G, those of us that was in that warehouse that morning in ‘86, to keep you motherfuckers from our families. You cocksuckers are dirtier than any mob, and you fucking know it.

“We took the deal as it was offered. We took the heat so you feds could stay free and keep living your lives and driving your big cars and drinking the top shelf booze and fucking the top shelf whores, while we took the hit. We took it and you left our families alone. That was the deal. That was the only fucking deal.

“Now you want to break that deal, too.”

“But you know what? It’s fine. I’ve taken to reading and writing poetry. I’m studying ancient Chinese philosophy. This life leaves a lot to be desired, but I’m safe in here, for the time being, safe from you assholes. I’ve got a couple of friends who have all the information on this whole scam. Any moves against me or a few others in lockup and half the US government from the mid-1980s till now is front page news.

“So, please, go fuck yourselves.”

Then he looks to his left at his attorney. “What, did your old man retire? I can’t believe he had the fucking balls to set me up like this with his candy-ass son. You tell your old man to go fuck himself too.”

Vinny turns his gaze to the guard, who is fighting hard to hold in a grin. “What do you make as a prison guard in 1996, Officer Artie? What, twenty, twenty-five grand a year?”

Looking back at the fed he says, “What the fuck, you think this is some kind of bubble here in this room? You think Artie here is above a couple of hundred stuffed in his pocket to spill what was discussed here? Do you think I’m stupid? Do I look stupid? Yeah, I’ll be out in the spring of 1998 and dead on the street before summer. Me, Eddie G, a few others and some boxes of papers are all that hold this whole shit show in place. You should be showing some gratitude. Take us out of the equation and the whole carnival ride collapses.”

He stands, kicks his chair from under him. The seat flips over backward and slams into a wall.

“Artie, get me the fuck away from these pigs.”

Vinny Gentile never ratted, his legend in the mob and on the street secure for eternity. He was transferred in late 1996 to ADX Florence, in Colorado. The highest security prison in the United States federal prison system. In 2008 He was transferred to the step-down facility Florence-High. Vinny Gentile died in Florence-High in 2016. The official story was he died of a heart attack in the shower while masturbating. He never spoke to his lawyer or federal agents again.

A Black Dirt Farm, Upstate NY—1960s

An ancient 1937 Chevy pickup with a wooden flatbed drives a narrow path alongside a field of onions, their shiny green tops swaying in the afternoon sun like ocean waves in the breeze. The bed of the truck is missing a few boards and the stink of gasoline exhaust mixes with the stink of sweat and the stink of chemicals that have saturated the rich black dirt for many, many summers. The truck is filled to overflowing with migrant farm hands and empty wooden fruit baskets and a beaten to death Coke cooler, still mostly red with white letters and filled with ice and Ballantine beers. Slowly they snake along the dusty path that by someone's standard passes as a road. At times, the truck comes precariously close to driving into the wide and snake filled drainage ditches that line each field. When you are bent over and weeding by hand in the ninety-degree sun, the endless rows of Orange County onions each seem one-hundred miles long. The hot morning's humidity rises off the black expanse of fields. Dirt the color of coal and tall green onions rise and run as far as the eye can see in any direction. Soon the air will almost sizzle in the sun.

The truck stops and the farmhands jump off, causing small clouds of dry black dust to rise and cover shoes and dungarees. A woman emerges from the cab of the Chevy. She wears dirty work boots, dirty white socks and a cotton dress, faded and a threadbare sky blue. A boy about three years old sits in the cab next to the man.

The woman, smiling and speaking Spanish with an odd accent, gathers her crew around her. As the sun inches higher in the sky, you can feel it's going to be one of those summer days where the air hits eighty before 7am and keeps going. The woman and crew join hands and say a quick prayer before each of them take an onion row, bending down and beginning their task.

The woman, Estelle, is first generation American-Polish, as is her husband Nicolas. People call him Micky. The boy is named Vincent. Micky and the small boy climb from the cab. An older Mexican man, named Enrique with heavily creased dark brown leather skin, evidence of too many years in the hot sun, joins them. The men rest their forearms on the wooden flatbed. The boy picks up small half rotted onions and throws them down the path and into the ditch.

Enrique pulls a dirty yellow and blue bandana from his dungaree back pocket and says, “Too early for the piwa, Micky. But soon enough my boys will want some of that cold Ballentine on this hot day!”

Mickey turns; both men look down the long rows of onions as the crew picks each individual weed and tosses it into a bag. At the end of the row, the bag is emptied into the ditches.

Enrique comments, “Your wife, Miss Estelle, she starts every field we work with a prayer, and she works as hard as any two men.”

Mickey smiles. “She is tough and kind. That’s how I want the world to see my boy,” and the tall thin man rustles the boy's hair.

Enrique, looking across the field, says, “Mr. Mickey, you and your wife, you are good to us, you never call us ‘wets,’ you don’t curse at us. You work right alongside us. That means a lot, sir. More than you know.”

“My family, and my wife’s family, Enrique, we came from immigrants like you. From Poland, both our families saw what the Nazis did to people and their lives. I never want to see that again. I want a better world for my boy and your children and grandchildren too. We are not so different, you and I, we come from hard work and discipline and good, god-fearing people. I don’t want our kids to have to work this hard.”

Mickey died later that fall, after the onion harvest was in, after Enrique and his crew followed the harvest south and back into Texas. An early autumn snowstorm blanketed Route #1 in north Jersey in a squall of ice and heavy snow. The B61 Thermodyne Mack and trailer full of onions jumped a small guardrail and careened down a mountainside. Mickey was ejected from the cab and found split open over a sharp stone. Estelle kept the farm going. Enrique and his family came back from Texas saddened to hear the news, but Estelle was a tough, driven woman. The farm and her boy was all she had.

Four years passed before she would allow a gentleman to ask her on a date. A man appeared about this time, 1964. He seemed kind enough at the outset. He was cold and distant to the boy. Vincent didn't like him much. In 1966 the man, who Vincent only ever called Mr. Gentile, married Estelle. Mr. Gentile was a farmer too with his own fields a few miles away on the other side of the county known as the drowned lands. Vincent didn't like Mr. Gentile. The man would often slap the boy if he misbehaved or talked back. In 1967 he became the boy's father, but the boy refused to take the man's last name. None of this, from his father's death to his mother's re-marriage to his adoption, set well with the boy. Vincent acted out his anger in school. Daily starting fights with the other kids. The school would call the house at night. The phone call would result in a beating at the hand of Mr. Gentile. One day, Vincent struck back. The result of his defense was something near carnage. Mr. Gentile caned the boy so severely in the face and head Vincent lost sight in one eye. Soon after this, Estelle stopped praying. She stopped going to church. Enrique, just back in Orange County from Texas, expressed his concerns to Mr. Gentile, who informed the farmhand that his wife and her well-being was of no concern to some 'fucking wetback.' The tone of life on that farm had changed and turned dark. It died it seemed with Mickey that night in the B Model Mack.

Estelle became very ill and passed away later that spring, just as the onion tops were starting to break through the rich black soil.

Vincent lived on the farm, as Mr. Gentile's son, until the summer of that same year 1969, before killing him one night in his sleep.

His original plan was to strangle the man by hand and watch him die, but he decided a shot gun was a surer thing. He walked into the room where his stepfather slept, almost breaking into a sweat each time a floorboard creaked in the quiet darkness. Vincent looked out the bedroom window and marveled to himself how beautiful was the expanse of green onion tops waving in the soft evening breeze, how the onion tops almost sparkled and danced in the moonlight.

Standing a good distance away, by the door frame, probably fifteen feet from the bed where Mr. Gentile slept on his side facing the boy, Vincent aimed the double barrel. The intent

was to waken the man in searing pain and make sure he saw the young boy's face before killing him.

The first blast was a gut shot that woke the sleeping man screaming and wincing and holding his belly. Mr. Gentile's blood soaked the sheets. He stared at the young boy as he held his stomach and intestines in. The boy smiled and said, "Not bad for half-blind, huh?"

Vincent let Mr. Gentile lay there bleeding and crying and begging him to go get help for most of the night. If the man started to scream, Vincent would bash him in the head with the butt of the shotgun, not enough to knock him out. Just enough to hurt. About four in the morning, a little before sunrise, he said "Don't worry, Mr. Gentile, I won't blind you. I want you to see the kill shot coming."

Finally, Vincent raised the barrel of the gun from his lap, pointed the barrel at Mr. Gentile's face, dropped the gun one last time, and carried it closer to the bed. "Do you believe in God, Mr. Gentile?" The weakened and bleeding man whispered a soft, "Yes, boy I do." Vincent put the barrel an inch from the man's face and said, "Well, fuck you and the god that made you!" He squeezed the trigger. A large chunk of the man's skull bounced off the bedroom wall.

Vincent busied himself going through dresser drawers taking jewelry, the man's wallet, cash he found in an old shoe box. He took the watch from the dead man's wrist and a St Christopher's medal from around his neck. He found some jewelry of his mom's and he carefully put that in a separate box. The thought crossed his mind to set the house on fire, but he decided he'd let the man rot. Vincent would be long gone by the time the body was found.

Walking from the house with his clothes and the spoils from Mr. Gentile's room and the rest of his earthly possessions in grocery store bags, he walked toward the farm's '37 Chevy pickup. In the early morning light, he saw Enrique was awake and outside his trailer with a steaming cup of coffee in his hand. The older man smiled and waved at Vincent. The boy joined the farm foreman in the cool morning air and approaching dawn. Enrique went inside and emerged with a second cup of coffee for the boy. The man asked, "Are you ok, young Vincent? It looks like you are taking a trip. I heard some noise up in the house. I was worried the old man was beating you again."

Vincent looked at Enrique and said, “For the first time since mama died, I am alright.” Vincent thanked the older man for the coffee and said, “I need the truck and I’d appreciate if you’d say you’ve not seen me;”

Enrique smiled a sad grin and said, “Seen who?”

With that, the boy turned away, climbed into the old pickup with the dangling FARM license plate on the back, shifted it into gear and left the black dirt life behind him.

Somewhere in New York City—1969

Scared of being alone, missing his mother and terrified at what he’d done to Mr. Gentile, not so much the act of killing but the possible ramifications, the twelve-year-old Vincent drove himself down NY’s Route 17 and into New York City. For a boy who’d never left Orange County or the black dirt onion fields, it was as if he’d somehow flown in space to another planet.

Tall buildings and people who didn’t seem to care if he was crying or bleeding or hungry or sleeping in his truck parked on a side street gave the boy a sense of isolation and autonomy and anonymity. This helped to sooth his fears and guilt that raged inside him when he was alone in the dark, sleeping on the bench seat of the Chevy, staring up into streetlights and space and stars through the dirty windshield.

Very early one morning, about 5am, three or four days after the killing, Vincent was walking down a street where his sense of smell was smacked awake by the sweetest thickest, aroma he’d ever encountered. It was a smell so good he could taste it. He found himself outside a bakery, Bruno’s Italian Pastries. He opened the solid pane glass door and an ‘OPEN’ sign popped side-to-side in the quick breeze. Inside, the glass counters and display cases were filled to overflowing with a confounding assortment of cookies and cakes and pastries and cannoli and pies and things young Vincent had never seen. The man behind the counter was built like a

boxer, not the pudgy old man the boy expected to be working in a shop like this. He was burley with thick black curly hair and a thick mustache covered his upper lip and a day-old beard covered his face. The baker took a long look at Vincent and spoke, "Are you the boy who has been sleeping in the truck down the street? You smell like you have been sleeping in a car for a few days. Come here, sit."

He pulled out a chair and came back with a cup of coffee and a plate full of donuts. Bruno, the baker, said, "I'm going to make myself some eggs and sausage. You sit. I'll be back."

Upon his return, the baker was surprised and pleased to see the coffee and pastries gone and the boy's face covered in sugar. The plate of eggs and sausage hardly touched the table before the boy was shoveling the breakfast in his mouth. The baker asked, "When was the last time you ate, boy?"

Between bites, Vincent offered, "A couple of days, I guess."

The baker countered, what are you running from? Why are you here? Did you kill a guy?" And he laughed. The expression on Vincent's face shocked the man. He went to get another cup of coffee for the two of them. He sat again and asked, "Where are your family, your parents?"

Vincent muffled "Dead," through bites of egg and sips of coffee. Bruno was no longer amused. "What happened to your parents?" Vincent said. "My dad, he was an onion farmer and a truck driver, died in a crash in Jersey when I was a baby. My mama, she died of that cancer shit. Her new husband, well, see, I can't see out my right eye, because he beat me so bad, mister he used to beat me all the time, worse after my mama died. So last week, I shot the son-of-a-bitch with a double barrel, and I watched him die."

Bruno took a Lucky Strike cigarette from a pack rolled in the sleeve of his white and flour covered t-shirt. He lit the smoke, pulled a long drag down his throat and offered one to the boy. Vincent took it, lit it, and nearly choked to death on the smoke. The two of them sat and laughed. It was the first time the boy had laughed since Mickey died.

Bruno's expression turned serious. He looked at the boy. "I'll give you a job. I have a small room off the kitchen with a cot and a small bathroom. You can wash your smelly ass in there. If you lie to me, if you steal from me, I'll beat you so bad you'll wish you were home with the man you killed!" He grabbed the boy's collar. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?" The shaking boy started to cry and buried his face in the big man's chest and sobbed for a very long time.

It took some time for the boy to become acclimated to living in the city. To him, it was a busy, noisy, complex, and confusing world. He found himself often wishing to be alone, away from everyone. In the city, it seemed the distance between people was always measured in feet, not miles. He missed the woods, where he could sneak off to after weeding or harvesting or grading. Only sixty miles from his onion fields, but it could have been on another planet.

Bruno was a kind and tough man. He had a daughter named Isabella, long dark hair and olive skin. Vincent thought she was the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. She was older than him, maybe sixteen. He carried knowledge that any moves on Isabella would result in him losing sight in his other eye, or his life. Vincent weighed the risks and rewards of the idea of fucking Isabella.

The boy was learning to become a pretty good baker. Working side by side with Bruno, learning the craft. Keeping the shop spotlessly clean and up to his new boss's standards. There was mention of enrolling the boy in school, but both Vincent and Bruno knew this would lead to a lot of questions and few good or easy answers.

Winter finally came to the city, and again, it made Vincent miss home. The endless expanse of the black dirt fields covered in an ocean of white as far as you could see in every direction. The city snow was short-lived and dirty and quickly turned to slush. It had been nearly six months of living in the bakery back room, eating meals Bruno or his wife Maria or Isabella brought to him. The family had developed a genuine affection for the boy. He'd come to see Isabella, he called her Bella, Italian for beautiful, as an object of his deepest desires. Feelings and thoughts that were strange and frightening to him, but he knew Bruno would kill him if he touched her and so he kept a safe distance.

A night in early December, the family appeared at the door to the boy's room. Vincent was scared. He was always scared. Scared was his general state. Every emotion and thought was a reaction to and or a result of being scared. Maria was a high school teacher. She knew enough of the boy's story to know he couldn't be enrolled in school. She didn't ask a lot of questions, but at her insistence, conveyed through Bruno she was going to make it her job, with Isabella's help to see to it that Vincent received as close to a complete high school education as possible. Vincent had hated school back in the black dirt, but he figured as long as it was just a few hours a night and he got to be with Isabella, it wouldn't be so bad.

The storage area at the back of the bakery was a local gathering place. Men, most well dressed in nice haircuts and wearing aftershave, and some in fine and expensive suits, would meet there daily and discuss 'business.' Vincent paid no mind to anyone's business but his own. He almost never made eye contact with these men. In fact, other than Bruno's family, he never looked up or directly at anyone. The room was dimly lit with no windows, a small kitchen was setup off the side, with an oven and stove and refrigerator and a sink. A man named Sal, older graying with a big belly and a chest full of thick white hair, cooked lunchtime meals there every day. Vincent became the assistant cook. Sal treated him well, and he taught the boy how to make some Italian dishes. Vincent seemed to like to cook, and he enjoyed the companionship of the older men. His other job was the runner. He'd run and get groceries and produce from the local bodegas, or booze, newspapers, and cigarettes. Sometimes he'd be told to go somewhere and pickup 'a package.' The boy did all his tasks without complaint or asking any questions.

The Bowery 1972

The years ground away, and Vincent was accepted as a member of the group. Some called him family. Bruno came to care deeply for the boy and thought of him like he was a son.

Vincent was almost sixteen when he met Eddie G. Eddie was eighteen, tall, thin, a perpetual cigarette hanging from his lips. He dressed in fine Italian suits, wore his hair in a

pompadour that was at least a decade out of style. He was the coolest guy Vincent had ever met. Eddie was known in the back of the bakery and on the street as 'The Mechanic,' he fixed things. If something needs to be fixed, Eddie G. fixed it. Eddie put off a frightening vibe. Even the older men didn't fuck with Eddie. About twice a week, a man and his driver came to the bakery. His name was Mr. D. that was it, and all anyone ever called him.

When he showed up, the tone of the back room changed. Mr. D. was impeccably dressed, a big, thick gold watch on his wrist and cuff links and fine shoes. A man named Sammy was his driver. The driver never left his side.

Vincent wanted to be a mechanic too, like Eddie. Mr. D. Seemed to like Eddie G. a lot. Vincent wanted to be everything Eddie was. When Bruno heard this, he was quick to say, "No, you don't. You have no idea what that means."

Eddie G. was instrumental in bringing the young boy out of his shell and into the world outside the bakery. It took a while but soon the boy was spending most of his free time with Eddie. Learning to be a 'mechanic.' Bruno took Eddie aside and asked him to go easy on Vincent. He was still young, and he'd had a rough time of it. Eddie G. didn't seem phased. He said life was tough. Why was this kid anything special? When Eddie asked Bruno what made his story different from anybody else's, Bruno said it wasn't his story to tell, but it was a tough story, he should ask the boy himself.

Months rolled by. Vincent was always respectful of Maria and Isabella. He worked hard for Bruno. The older man wasn't happy or sad to see Vincent hanging out with the older neighborhood boys. To Bruno, as in his own life, this was all simply a rite of passage. Most of the boys from the neighborhood, just this side of the Bowery, worked their way into the businesses of the older men, and in this case all those businesses seemed to all involve Mr. D. Vincent moved from errand boy, running for their food and booze to Eddie G.'s right hand.

One day that summer, Vincent had been out with Eddie riding in his 1970 Plymouth Barracuda. It was a very fast car and Eddie handled it with skill. Eddie said once, "I don't run from much, but if I have to, I want to get the fuck gone fast. Some days, Vincent, the best we can hope is to live to fight another day."

The pair had been out collecting money, Eddie was in the protection business, and Vincent was following in his steps. Eddie liked the young boy, he seemed fearless and didn't mind intimidating people reluctant to pay. He didn't just not mind, Vincent seemed to enjoy it. Like he took his power from it, beating up store owners, he called it 'dusting them off,' or breaking a finger or two, whatever it took to get the job done and collect.

A small grocery store owner, a small-framed man, maybe in his early fifties, bald with glasses, from a neighborhood a little uptown from the bakery came up short this one afternoon. Only a few hundred dollars short, but enough that Eddie took it as an insult. This didn't sit well at all with Eddie's mercurial temper.

Eddie grabbed the older store owner and dragged him into the warehouse, and then into a small office that was only a desk and a TV and a small grimy window. Eddie was punching the bald man and screaming, beads of sweat forming on both men's foreheads. Blood ran from the man's nose and Eddie's knuckles on his left hand. Eddie's spit covered the guy's face as he screamed.

Eddie, turning to Vincent, screamed, "Can you fucking believe this shit? All we do for these people," with that he pushed the guy to the ground and his glasses came flying off, and kicked him hard in the gut and ribcage. Vincent, without a word, jumped in and joined. Actually, he took over the beating. Eddie had to pull him off. "Fuck it, kid, don't kill him. You kill him, we won't collect on him again. You got to be smart, like me. Make them fear you like are the devil himself, but don't kill them. Only if you have to. It's bad business!"

Word of Vincent's love of the fight and violence and non-existent remorse was, in fact, making the boy a name for himself. He'd sometimes go out on other jobs with the other men from the back room, but he was known to all as Eddie's right hand.

He started to earn a small cut of the money he was collecting. He went into Manhattan with Eddie, and they bought the boy a couple of nice, but not expensive, suits and some shirts and shoes. Vincent was starting to feel himself quite at home in this adopted life.

Sitting in the back room of this bakery just on the west side of the Bowery in New York City, the boy found his place and purpose. It was a world a long way away from his kind sweet mama and the black dirt fields.

One night one of the crew, a bit drunk, said to the room, “We know this fucking kid, what, two years now, I don’t even know his name or where he is from.” Eddie looked to Vincent and said, “Yeah, you know I don’t know you as anything other than Vincent. Who the fuck are you? You don’t look Italian, maybe northern Italian. Where is your family? What’s your last name?”

Vincent stood, his head just missing a light fixture dangling by a wire. He put his hands on the table and said in a strong and loud voice, “My name is Vincent Wojciechowski.”

The room exploded in laughter. One of the boys, a fat guy named Joey Falcone, was drinking a beer, and he laughed so hard the sudsy foam blew out of both nostrils. Still laughing, he yelled to Eddie G. “You are running with a polock! We ain’t never had no polock on this crew!”

Vincent continued, “We was black dirt onion farmers. My dad, my real dad he died in a truck wreck when I was just a boy. My mom married this asshole named Mr. Gentile and then she got the cancer and she died too. Anyway, her new husband was a real piece of shit. He beat me so bad, that’s why I’m half blind still here in my left eye,” he said, pointing with his finger. So, I killed the motherfucker in his own bed, and he saw it coming. He knew it was me. He needed to see death coming for him. I made sure he did.”

The other boys stopped laughing. Eddie commented, “Jesus, that’s fucked up! So, you are on the run for the kill. You never once said shit about this! Vincent simply replied, “I took our farm truck, drove it to here, not sure why I ended up here other than I ran it out of gas. I met Bruno and here I am.”

The boys in the back room changed their attitude toward Vincent. He was no longer the errand boy, but more of the crew. As his seventeenth birthday approached, Vincent and Eddie had driven down to a bar near the Brooklyn bridge to collect some money. A small job, nothing

major was anticipated. As soon as the pair walked through the door, a violent confrontation ensued. Shots were fired. Out of a dark corner of the small dingy storeroom, the walls lined with cases of beer and booze, a man dressed all in black wearing a Panama hat came for Eddie G with a long switchblade. Vincent grabbed a chair from the desk and broke it over the hat and slammed it into his head until he saw blood flow. The man dropped the blade. Vincent picked it up and buried it in his neck until you could only see the fine bone and pearl handle. Eddie pulled out the .38 he wore in a holster inside his suit jacket and pointed it at the man they'd come to see still sitting in the chair at the desk and screamed, "Open the fucking safe!"

Eddie handed the pistol to Vincent, as he grabbed the man's shirt collar and pushed him to his knees and ordered him to open the safe.

Eddie G.'s eyes bulged. There must have been one-hundred thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills on the shelves inside. Eddie took off his jacket and made a bundle for the cash with his coat. He looked at Vincent and said, "This is enough, let's go."

It wasn't enough for Vincent. He took the butt end of his pistol and smashed the bar owner in the temple. The man's legs wobbled as he fell to the floor. Grabbing him by his feet, the young thug dragged the man from the office and through his bar, as a few patrons and the young girl bartender looked on in horror! Eddie followed yelling. "Let's get the fuck out of here," as he ran past his friend. Opening the door to the street he looked back to see Vincent unload his .38 into the body of the bar owner. Blowing holes in his chest and skull, the body responded and squirmed and jumped to the incoming lead. Cold as ice, the boy smiled at the pretty bartender and walked out to the street to join Eddie G. already in his car and ready to get gone.

In the car Eddie said, "What the fuck, man, that was unnecessary!" and they drove away in silence, not even happy about the big stash of hundred-dollar bills on the back seat. Vincent, looking out the passenger window broke the quiet. "I like to watch as the bodies dance. Its nice, you know?"

The young two-man crew of 'mechanics' were starting to gain a reputation for cold-blooded cruelty and mayhem that even made the rest of the bakery crew and Mr. D. take notice.

Soon they were robbing drug dealers, shaking down other mob's protection 'clients,' bookies, pimps and whore houses. They particularly enjoyed driving over into Newark and shaking down other mob's turf. This put Mr. D. in danger and Mr. D. was not a happy man in danger.

One cold, rainy night, on the Outerbridge Crossing coming back from a raid in North Jersey, Eddie G's car was surrounded by five others, blocking him in. Two cars in front in each lane, one in the side with Sal pointing a pistol right at them and two cars behind them. They all rode like this together, all across Staten Island and the Verrazano Bridge. Eddie got the message, and he backed off. The eighteen-year-old Vincent was unfazed. When they got back to the bakery, Eddie G. suggested they get back in step with the rest of the crew. Vincent exploded and attacked him in the kitchen. A short, fast, bloody battle for both boys. It was ended by Rocco and a Louisville slugger across Vincent's back. The bat broke a few ribs. All this accomplished was to piss off Vincent a little more. He was never fully seen as a member of the crew after that. He was used for muscle and Rocco still trusted him, but he was seen as a loose cannon.

News spread of the brutality of the young man's nature. Some of the older folks from the neighborhood began to fear him, they'd not look at him, or they'd intentionally duck into a store or shop when they saw him walking, more like swaggering, down the sidewalk. He'd developed an aura. Vincent lived in a very clearly disconnected reality. You could see it in his eyes. They were cold. Even when he was talking directly to you, face to face and one on one, there was a sense he wasn't there. Like he was never fully participating. Everything was just a motion to get to the next moment.

May 31, 1975

An odd-looking man had been walking about on the street outside the bakery for about a week. He was older than Eddie, maybe late twenties. He wore sunglasses all the time, dirty jeans, and a leather biker jacket with a wool hat every day, no matter how hot or cold it was outside. Eddie said he figured the guy was either dealing drugs, a pimp or a narc. Eddie said, "Drugs and

hookers is our turf. If he's a cop, we'll need to carefully end him." Rocco noticed the guy, but true to his style, he didn't say anything. He just observed.

May 31st was a Saturday. A warm sunny morning, with the new summer bursting at the seams. Eddie and Vincent were drinking coffee from paper cups and sitting on two lawn chairs, each dressed impeccably outside the bakery. Eddie jumped to his feet, finished his cup, crumpled it and threw it on the ground, and ran in a flash across the street. Vincent followed. His slippery leather dress shoes were not designed for this sprint.

Eddie reached the strange man first. Planting the palms of both hands in the chest of his leather jacket, he back against the steel chain-link fence that surrounded a small city park. Vincent was behind the man, pushing him back toward Eddie G. The man went limp in his body, like they were pushing a standing rag doll.

Vincent spoke first. "Hey, you, asshole, our boys, we noticed you hanging around here. You a fucking narc?"

Eddie grabbed the man by the jacket collar and threw him into the fence. The metal structure shook at the force of the impact.

Vinny spoke again, "Look asshole, our boss told us to make sure you leave. You understand? You got no business here. This is your first and last warning." The man was still silent. With Vincent and Eddie panting, the man still against the fence, his arms stretched out across the top pole like he was about to be crucified. The three stood there, looking at each other. The man in the leather jacket reached his hand into Eddie's shirt pocket and pulled out his pack of Marlboros. He shook the pack until a cigarette popped up. He put it in his mouth and looked to Eddie and said, "Got a light, asshole?"

Eddie reached into his pocket for his .38 and stepped back about two feet, but Vincent stopped him. "Mr. D. Said to find out what's up with this guy. We need his story, then he's all yours!" Vincent slapped the cigarette from the man's mouth.

The man spoke. “My name is Pearlman. That’s all you need to know. I was sent here to find some guys to work with. We’ve heard good things about your crew, but fuck that. All I see is some fucking outfit out of a cartoon. Like you want to be mobbed up when you get to be big boys.

“Recruit this crew; that may be the funniest fucking thing I ever heard. I know you, your boss Mr. D., your father figure Rocco. I know you are all low-level mob. A couple of made guys. You, Eddie G, the ‘mechanic,’ you think you’ll be a made guy one day, huh, and you, Vinny boy, poor little pollock, you’ll never be one of the elite squad, huh?” And he laughed.

Vincent looked at Eddie and back at the bakery. He saw Rocco behind the counter looking out the window, then back at Eddie. Eddie G. finally spoke, his eyes almost popping out of the sockets. “What the fuck, you’re a cop?”

Pearlman laughed and again took the cigarettes from Eddie’s shirt. “I’m serious, give me a light!”

Eddie, still with the .38 in his hand, said, “The balls of this fucking guy! I’m almost impressed, but I’m not!”

To Vincent’s shock, Eddie actually offered Pearlman a pack of matches. The man smiled and said, “When we get to be pals, you can call me Bob, but we ain’t pals yet, ok?”

He leaned back on the fence and spoke. “I’m no cop, not a drug dealer, as you’d understand, anyway. We deal in street drugs and pharmaceuticals and insurance and judges and elections and whatever politician is for sale at the moment.

“I work for the people about five steps above your boy Mr. D. See fellas, this world is like a big, thick five-layer cake. You think you are all mobbed up big shots on the top layer. Actually, you are the paper plate underneath the cake. I work for the icing on top. Your Mr. D. works for the guys who work for the guys who work for the guys I work for. There are four critical commodities in this ugly ass little world now: money, sex, guns and drugs. We have a hand in all of it. It all works together. It’s a big-ass machine. You nit-wits are shaking down

bodegas for pocket change. I'm shipping missiles to places you never heard of, so the drug lords there can keep our supply lines open. I need some help down here, so they sent me slumming.

“See, you boys are simple profiteers. Working around the system, getting busted or shot up. Going to jail. Cops, lawyers, judges. All stupid bullshit. Me, I work in the system. I am the system.

“You are like fire, Vinny. I'm like a soft summer breeze. I'm no tornado. I'm no hurricane, just a soft breeze. When something gets in my way, I just go around it and nobody notices. That's where I operate. I don't operate outside the law; I operate in the space between the laws. I do the shit for the ones who make the laws who'd never admit I exist under oath.

“I operate in that little realm that no one ever notices. They call me the wind because I'm constantly moving. I'm everywhere, but you don't see me. No one ever sees me unless I want to be seen. I can't believe it took your crew a week to notice me. Either I'm too good at what I do or you flat-out suck at what you do.

Pearlman finished his smoke and crushed it under his boot. Eddie and Vincent looked confused. Pearlman again spoke, “Look, I know you both think you operate in the shadows and no one knows what you are up to. That's hilarious. I know what you had for dinner last night. I know you want to fuck sweet little Isabella, Vincent.” He said, looking at the young boy. “And what kind of gangster name is Vincent Wojciechowski? You got to fix that shit. You boys think your little club is a secret. Your words are in the air. You talk to people, you brag to your friends, your friends are assholes. Speak a word to anyone and it's there in the air forever. I need ruthless motherfuckers to work for me. I know killing don't bother you, Vinny, yeah, Vinny, I like that. That's your new name. How many Vinny four or five? And it don't bother you? That's good. I need that. And you, Eddie G. I know you are a ruthless motherfucker. Come on, let's go tell Rocco and Mr. D. that you boys are being drafted. You're going to work for the most connected and vicious mob that's ever existed. You're in the government now. Yup, a couple of patriotic motherfuckers I got me right here!”

The trio walked across the street and into the bakery. Rocco had a look in his eyes, like he knew what was going down. Pearlman led the group that had grown to four now into the back room kitchen area.

One day, a day like any other day in the back room of the bakery, the crew was assembled for lunch. Between bites of Sal's delicious stuffed shells and sausage, Pearlman walked over to Mr. D., smiled and said, "I'm taking a few of your boys to work for my company now. I know that's ok with you. The people in the Icehouse said you'd understand."

The room was silent. No one ever spoke to Mr. D. unless they were given permission to speak.

Mr. D. finally spoke. "Yes, of course. Whatever you need. Of course. Please send the men in the Icehouse my regards."

No one in the back room had ever seen Mr. D. like this. It shook the crew. Sal, the cook, shook his head and went back to preparing an antipasto salad.

Pearlman grabbed a steak knife from the table. He motioned for Vincent to sit in a chair before him. He took off his leather jacket and threw it on the floor. Vincent sat as Eddie looked on. The others, including Rocco and Mr. D. stood and then walked backward toward the door that separated the bakery from the back room.

Pearlman sat on the table in front of Vincent. Pearlman took off his t-shirt and said, look at my scars. The man's chest and neck were covered in thick dark tissue from many cuts. He held open the palms of his hands, showing them to the boy, too.

Pearlman took the steak knife and opened a wide cut in his palm. Staring into the boy's eyes, he said, "Vinny, this is the day of your new birth. Today you will take the name of your first kill. It was your stepfather. What was his name?"

Vincent looked at the man sitting before him. "Gentile, sir." Then a look washed across his face of "where the fuck did 'sir' come from?"

As the blood dripped off Perlman's hand, he offered it to Vincent. "Drink!" and the boy buried his face in the older man's hand and took a mouthful of his blood.

Pearlman said, "Now you need a scar. These scars will bind us. Do you fully understand this is the last day of your life? Vincent Wojo-whatever-the fuck is no more. You are not a spy, that's childish fantasy. You will work for me and with me in a world without rules or accountability. If I decide you are not worthy of my trust and bond. I'll kill you. It is that simple. Now sit still."

Pearlman takes the knife, his hand is still bleeding, and puts his left hand on the boy's neck, feeling his jugular vein. "Don't move. If you move an inch, I'll cut you and you'll bleed out." He took the knife and carved a line down Vincent's throat, not a half inch from the artery that fed the boy's brain. When the blood began to flow, Pearlman pressed his mouth to the boy's neck and swallowed.

He pulled his mouth away. He stood up and said, "Get your shit, say goodbye to your friends and meet me in the park across the street."

Pearlman looked at Eddie G. and motioned for him to sit. Eddie let out a nervous laugh, said, I think I'll pass. And ran through the bakery and out the door.

Pearlman stood, took his leather jacket off the floor, and said to the room, "Better to find out he's a fucking pussy now." And he walked out of the room to wait for Vincent across the street.

Vincent stood, his neck still bleeding, looked around the room and said, "Vincent Wojciechowski was the name I took from my father. My father was a hardworking, honest farmer. Honesty, fairness, and hard work killed him, and he and his legacy have nothing to do with who I've become. I live now by a code that is mine alone. I am no longer any part of my father or that boy who came here cold and scared so many years ago. Vincent is dead. From today forward, my name is Vinny Gentile."

Rocco put down his fork, Mr. D. Looked at him. Rocco began to speak. “Gentile was the name of your stepfather. I don’t get it, Vincent.”

“Vinny!” the boy fired back. “From now on, no more Vincent, got it? I took the name of the first man I killed. The first but not the last. He is who made me the man I am today.”

The crew finished eating in relative silence other than the occasional “Delicious, Sal!” or “Pass the salt...”

Free Sample from The Three Lives of Richie O'Malley:

Chapter Four

Returning to the past. It was mid-summer, New York 1978...

The sun was setting, my eyes squinting to see the street through its orange glare. Pictures of this street tell me it used to be alive: shiny cars and young women, some pushing babies in carriages, shopping bags around their arms. The trees were full of leaves framing the life that lined the sidewalks, hugging the view of a bright, young sky. The buildings were painted, as if by design, in subtle palettes of warm, earth tones.

Then we came to this town, this street, like a virus-invisible, deadly. Unnoticed, we attached ourselves to its life, and over time we sucked the life out of this street. The young women took their babies away, and the cars grew dull and started to rust. Paint peeled from buildings, and trees filled with rot until they toppled over onto the pavement. Even the concrete of the street began to bubble then crumble. The death of this world, its metamorphosis to gray and lifelessness, was our work, our masterpiece.

I looked to the west. I liked this street. It fit me. My eyes lingered on a storefront with huge glass windows and big signs announcing some crap, or another was on sale. Out in the front were rows of fruits and vegetables, but even they lacked the luster of years past. I made my way inside and walked navigating worn, pine planks and breathing in the aroma of a bygone era. Scents of hot ground coffee, ripe oranges, freshly baked bread, newspaper, and cooked hams and sausages filled my nose. The store was a refuge from the ugly, gray street.

Mr. J. stood guard at the cash register like a lonely sentinel. The only way to get to the back was through him. He glanced both ways as if to say, "the coast is clear," before allowing me passage to the dimly lit back room. A few pictures, a faded couch that somehow survived from the fifties, and a small wooden desk and chair were its only decorations.

In the chair sat Vinny.

Vinny was always straight up, letter-fucking-perfect. He never wore a hair out of place and always dressed up in a suit with a tie. Nice suits too, not the shit I got for funerals at J.C. Penny's for twenty bucks. Even out on a job at night, even in leather or jeans, Vinny never settled for Levi's and Wranglers, only designer. My style was old, greasy motorcycle jackets like vintage Brando in *The Wild One*. Vinny's style was a grand or more of handcrafted, Italian leather out of some store up on Fifth Avenue.

The only time I ever went to Fifth Avenue was to steal shit.

Vinny had jet black hair that looked slicked back but was never oily. Not that he'd let me touch it, but I just knew. We all knew. He got it styled at some salon along with his fingernails. They were always manicured and clean. Mine were stained with blood or with grease from my Mustang, but not Vinny's. His face never had a stubble either. I swear he was one of those guys who shaved twice a day. Me, I was lucky for twice a week, unless I had plans to put my face between some young girl's legs. Eating pussy-that might be the only reason to shave more than twice a week.

Vinny didn't acknowledge I had walked in the room. I sat down on the couch, folded my hands, and stared at my shoes. Vinny didn't make a sound. Waiting there, waiting on Juan the silence, it was deafening.

Where the fuck was Juan?

Five minutes later, the door opened. In walked Juan and a guy I knew from those streets as Eddie or "Big Eddie G." They joined me on the couch. When we were all settled, Vinny began to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said. He pointed at Juan, then Eddie, then back at Juan. "Who the fuck is this guy?"

"Eddie. He's cool," said Juan.

Vinny stared at Juan for half a second and then he was off the chair, across the room, and an inch from Juan's nose. "Cool is when some bastard's gun is pointed at your skull, and you

don't shit your pants. You plan that motherfucker's death. Cool is when, after a beating, you keep your fucking mouth shut when the cops are all over your shit. Is your friend here that cool, or some bullshit, cool?"

Juan looked at Eddie and then at me. I sighed.

"I can't answer for Eddie," I said. I glanced at him. "Maybe you better wait outside."

Eddie didn't even flinch. He got up, nodded at Vinny, and closed the door behind him. Vinny looked at Juan and said, "That was your first fuck up. One more and I'll kill you myself."

Then it was back to business. That's how it was with Vinny. He got the shit out of the way, laid it out in no uncertain terms, and moved on to the next order of business. As I got to know Vinny, this part of him amazed me. He could look you in the eye and say, "I just fucked your wife, shot your father and, oh, I fucked your sister too. Now, the reason I asked you all to meet me here was..."

No bullshit, no pulled punches. That was how business was done with Vinny.

There was a poetry about him that I admired. Juan pointed out that Vinny was the brains, while we did the dirty work, cleaned up the blood. I didn't care. Vinny played his role so perfectly. He was a cliché, a character, and yet I always got the sense that there was nothing about this guy that wasn't genuine.

He wore jewelry, all gold, all the time. Gold watches and cufflinks, chains around his neck. The first time I saw him I said to myself, "Is this guy a hoodlum or a fucking pharaoh? For Christ's sake."

He wore a gold and diamond earring in his left ear. It was, in his words, "A declaration of my love of pussy, and a warning to not go wagging your dick in my business. I'm the cock here, don't confront me."

On Vinny's neck, there was a long, wide scar. I asked him about it one time. He smiled and said, "I hate tattoos, they are for little bitches and punks. This scar, I *earned* it. I fucking bled

and nearly died for it. You need to go and get some of your own scars. Anybody can lay down a few bucks and get a tattoo to tell the world he's a tough guy. But get a cut like that on your fucking neck, a half inch from your jugular vein? Now, you tell me who's the real deal and who's a punk bitch. Nobody will ever challenge your scars."

That's how it was with Vinny, every day. He was as real as it gets.

The yellow light in the room cast a dark shadow across that scar on his neck. It reminded me of what Vinny always asked of us, what was at stake.

"I heard about the job you two did last month," he said. "Killing nine guys was not part of the plan, but I'm told you two did what had to be done. You kept your mouths shut and finished the job. I like that. I admire that." He rubbed his hands across his chin, gold rings shining despite the dusk of the room. "So...I have a job I'd like you two to do for me."

Juan and I looked at each other for less than a second and said at the same time, "Whatever it is, we're in."

Vinny gave us a rare smile. "You two have balls. I like that. Those balls will keep your asses alive and all of us out of prison." He went to the door. We heard him tell Mr. J., at his post behind the counter, that no one comes near this door until we all walk out.

Juan and I looked around the room. If we were nervous, we didn't show it. My eyes settled on the pictures in the room. One of them was the pope. Another was a family photo, gray and starting to fade. I tried to make out if one of the young kids in the photo was Vinny, but I couldn't tell.

Vinny came back in the room with three glasses and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Scotch. He placed the glasses on his desk, poured some whiskey into each one, and handed a glass to Juan and I. We sat there for a long time in silence. Then Vinny took a drink and put his glass down. "So," he said, "I hear you two got into it with the Korean Mob. That was a good operation. I know who you worked for. I've known him for years. How the fuck did you two get in so deep with the Koreans?"

Juan's grip on his glass tightened. "Your friend got greedy," he said. "It's that simple. He had a good deal going, being the US side of that brokering deal, bringing those hot, sweet Korean girls into the country. Everyone was making good money. Everything was cool; then your friend got greedy." Juan paused, taking a sip of his drink before he continued. "He put us in a bad situation. He was skimming money off the top. He was taking girls, getting them to his own pimps, lying to the Koreans. Then he put us in the middle of all the shit.

"We went to pick up some girls-the Koreans were there. They were pissed. They wanted their girls and their money. They attacked us. We killed them all, all nine. It was a fucking bloodbath. We let the girls go, but they saw our faces, the girls. We ran off with the money into the woods out there in Long Island. I know the cops found the bodies. We've been laying real low ever since." Juan's eyes never left his glass as he said this.

Vinny finished his scotch, poured himself another, and refilled our glasses. He looked me in the eye and said, "How are you with this killing business? From what I've heard, you seem to enjoy it. I can't use a guy who thinks this is a sport. When these situations come up, I need a guy who will do anything he can to *avoid* killing. I have no desire for any more time inside."

"I fucking hate it," I said, returning his gaze. "It's part of my work, that's all it is, but I fucking hate it."

"How many?" asked Vinny, swirling his drink.

"Six. Five Koreans are mine," I downed the scotch, "And my father."

Vinny sucked in air looking from Juan to me. "Your fucking father?"

Juan looked up. "His father was a real asshole," he said. "He deserved it. So, he beat him to death and burned the body."

"That's fucked up. You're fucked up." Vinny shook his head. "It's badass, but fucked up."

We finished the scotch in silence. Vinny gathered our glasses and placed them on his desk. He went back around the other side and sat down. Pulling open a drawer, he took out a pencil and an empty business envelope.

"We're going to rob a bank," he said. "A big a bank in New Rochelle, up north. I know you two have been involved with hitting trains, jacking ammonium nitrate, other chemicals..." He pointed at me, "I heard you had ties to Boston and the IRA. That's your business, not mine. I'm about making money. Fuck politics. This should be easy, but if we're met with any resistance... Well, we can't be sloppy, and we can't leave any witnesses. That's where you two come in. This is way above grand theft. This will set a record.

"Some Saudi billionaire asshole has been smuggling money into this country for over a year now. He has a system and people. They bring in gold, cash, and jewelry. The fucking Feds, the CIA, they want this asshole brought here. I got in early, running his shit out of JFK airport to that bank. He's got almost a half billion here now, but his supply is about to run dry. This guy, the Saudi prince or whatever the fuck he is, will be coming here soon. He'll be under witness protection, and he'll live nice a and comfortable life and be a rat for the CIA.

"Now, as I said before, I don't give a fuck about politics. I just want some of this asshole's cash. The last run, the one we're hijacking, will be to the bank with the last of this prince's money. We have people there who will have fifty million ready for us. That's what we're taking. There's another job going on the same night, a big heist of a jet plane, and I have my fingers in that too. It will be a nice diversion while we grab the *real* money. Everything we do needs to look official. You two will be 'security.' Don't dress like the slobs you are. Be presentable. When we get to the bank, you two will get to work."

Vinny began to draw a picture of the bank and the route from JFK with every detail he could give us. He spoke of guards and gatekeepers who could be trusted or bought and the ones who could not. Juan and I might have to take care of those men. I guess we were the killers now. I told myself, sitting there, that I wasn't a killer, that accidents happen. The Koreans were an accident, but my father... Well, that was flat-out cold-blooded. But now, to be a hired killer, that

was different. I wish he'd call us "insurance" or something like that. Killer... hired killer... that was going to take a while to get used to.

The plan was simple and well thought out. It was obvious to Juan and me that a lot of time had been invested in this way before we were brought in. Vinny's skill at acquiring inside contacts should have made this an easy job, but two people still couldn't be trusted. They were the close associates of this prince, and it was likely they would cause problems for us. Those two were the ones that Juan and I would have to handle. Other than that, the biggest risk was making sure that the inside people Vinny had lined up didn't do anything stupid.

"Anyone fucks up? Kill them," said Vinny. "There's a lot of risk in this job, but a lot of rewards."

Fifty million dollars in 1978 was a lot of fucking money. If everyone did their jobs, this was easy money, retirement money. Juan and I were both twenty-two years old; we were ready to retire. Beaches in another country, booze, drugs, and pussy for life.

I could kill two more men for that.

Vinny picked up the envelope with everything he had written on it and tore it into little pieces. "This goes down on December 11," he said. "That's the date the prince flies in. We do this job, and we all go and have a nice Christmas. Probably in the Caribbean somewhere. Ever been to Costa Rica?" He laughed, and his voice cracked. It wasn't every day you saw Vinny laugh.

Juan and I got up to leave. Vinny might've been the first person that ever made Juan nervous. As Juan shook Vinny's hand, he almost bowed as we walked through the door. I just shook his hand. I didn't bow to anyone.

Summer was fading fast, and we had about three months to wait before this went down. This gave me three months to think about killing two more people.

Eddie met us out on the street. He was a simple guy, no bullshit, a straight shooter. He did have an affinity for Korean hookers, but could you blame him? His time with us running

those Korean girls was probably the best time of his life. He still talked about this one, Cindi. Juan and I think he might have been in love with her. He was supposed to be with us that night when all Hell broke loose, but he didn't make it. He was in a hotel fucking Cindi. We broke his balls about it.

Eddie asked a few questions about the job. I put my arm around his shoulder and told him he was sitting this one out. I saw the relief on Big Eddie G's face. A part of me envied him.

I was beginning to think this violence could be mine, my violence, my weakness. The excitement was sexual, the violence making me feel alive and on fire. *Invincible*. Juan had that connection to the violence too. We both knew it, and we couldn't explain it.

So how could we ever atone for it?

Books By William Lobb Available on Amazon.com

The Three Lives of Richie O'Malley

<https://www.amazon.com/Three-Lives-Richie-OMalley-Thriller-ebook/dp/B087SRJP38>

As he lay there surrounded by the cops, bleeding, he must confront the horrors of his past... Richie O'Malley was a lifelong mob hitman. A brutal and unforgiving tool of his Mafia bosses. Now at the end of his life he must delve into the past, from his sickening childhood that shaped him to the violence that painted his hands red in adulthood. For decades, he has gone almost unnoticed, blending in. Just an old gangster nobody questions, enjoying retirement wrapped in the simple facade of normality. But now one of his old buddies has decided to testify all he knows, bringing the gruesome terrors of Richie's past back to haunt him. The Three Lives of Richie O'Malley is an award-winning and engrossing crime thriller that will have your eyes glued to the pages. Step into his blood stained shoes, load his .38 Smith and Wesson Police Special and experience the savage life of this lethal mob hitman today.

The Truth is in the Water

<https://www.amazon.com/Truth-Water-William-Lobb-ebook/dp/B08BCNZRMF>

Water is the most powerful force on earth.

It's the underlying theme that drives the book.

Charlie let his only son drown in the Atlantic Ocean, off Sandy Hook, NJ, about 35 years ago. He's a kind of Everyman, trying to even his score with God for his belief that he is a hopeless coward.

His best friend, Sugar Ray, "Shug," a former boxer, is Charlie's guide through this life. Shug works to show Charlie that his desire to settle his score with God/The Universe is pointless.

The Truth is in the Water is a study in friendship, guilt, fear, addiction, revenge... and in the end, a shaky peace.

Get your copy!

The Third Step

<https://www.amazon.com/Third-Step-William-Lobb-ebook/dp/B077669NJ1>

My first published novel: One man's journey into the dark recesses of his own soul.

The Third Step is the story of Frankie's struggle to survive the addictions that are trying to kill him, and come to terms with the inevitable he will face in the end.

Dark, gritty, and riddled with back alley characters, it's a complex, fast-paced, at times funny and at times terrifying journey.

COMING SOON! The Berry Pickers

An aging man returns to his bucolic roots, hoping to find and tell the story of his humble ancestors, the berry pickers. Instead, he uncovers a cult of bible tyrants, disinformation, corruption, brainwashing, abuse, and torture.

The once amusing antics of a handful of moonshiners, conmen and snake-oil salesmen devolve over time to a national movement that pulls at the tenuous fabric that holds American society together. Truth itself is no longer an absolute, just another part of the narrative.