

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL AND MURDER



A Mystery in
1970 South Brooklyn

Novel by Billy Warren

Available wherever you purchase books.

Dear Readers

While I suggest you first read my debut novel, *Fathers and Sons and Other Village Idiots*, it is not absolutely necessary to enjoy the whodunit challenges of *Beyond Good and Evil and Murder*. This whodunit was written to be complete and solvable on its own.

Set the year before, the *Fathers and Sons* story is a journal of a 20th-century Polish immigrant, Kazimierz Baranski. In it, Kazimierz describes locations and characters in more depth than will occur in this novel.

I can say that reading this novel first will not ruin the plot or climax in *Fathers and Sons*. They are meant to be very different reader experiences: one an inspirational mystery and one a murder mystery. Both with some light literary themes.

I hope readers enjoy both on their own merits as the third novel in this series, *Zakopane Truth*, will be completely different from the first two—more of an international mystery thriller, and yes, many of the plot lines for *Zakopane Truth* are first suggested in *Beyond Good and Evil and Murder*.

Enjoy!
Billy Warren

DEDICATION

*This story is dedicated to
those who respect
life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness
for all
and not just those
who look, think, and love
like everybody else
in the neighborhood.*

ŚPIĄCY RYCERZE - THE SLEEPING KNIGHTS



Śpiący Rycerze, *The Sleeping Knights*, is a wood engraving carved in 1914 by Władysław Skoczylas, the founder of the modern Polish school of printmaking. Carved before the First World War, it represented the Polish peoples hopes for regaining their desired independence.

The scene illustrates a centuries old Polish folklore about the Archangel Michael keeping vigil over an army of knights who sleep beneath the Tatra mountains, awaiting a call to fight for Poles during their darkest hours.

*There is an old illusion. It is called
good and evil.*

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
a German philosopher
who wrote
Beyond Good and Evil in 1886

Who's Who

Agnieszka – housekeeper and recent Polish immigrant
Alphonso – backup bartender at Eagle tavern
Anthony Baranski – son of Otto, the bartender
Basil Adamato – subway motorman
Betty Smith – girlfriend of Frankie, the 1st victim
Edward (Eddie, Ox) McCormick – Catholic priest
Ernie – detective partner of Numbnuts
Eugene Flowers – resident of big red house
Felix – brother of Hector
Francesco Leonardi – oldest son of Tony, the 2nd victim
Frankie Galenski – bookie who died October 25, 1969
Georgios (Georgie) Kronos – owner of Melting Pot diner
Gloria – Otto's deceased wife and sister to Stella
Hector – local boy from 23rd Street who was killed in drug buy
Henry (Hank) Baranski – younger brother of Otto
Izzie – local resident
Joey D – mob captain and Frankie's boss
Kazimierz (Kaz) Baranski – father of Otto and Henry
Leo – soldier of Verdi, the mobster
Louise Baranska – ex-wife of Henry
Manuel – subway tagger in Coney Island
Margarita (Margaret) – housecleaner, former prostitute
Marysia Baranska – deceased mother of Otto and Henry
Matteo – soldier of Verdi, the mobster
Mickey – ?
Mike O'Brien – detective from South Brooklyn precinct
Nelson Baranski – ostracized gay son of Otto
Numbnuts (Sidney) Hyman – detective from Coney Island
Orsmyski – funeral parlor director at Eagle
Otto Baranski – owner of Polish Eagle tavern
Ron – telephone switchman
Sagart – friend of Eddie
Stan Kiren – neighborhood cop
Stanley (Stas) Banks – deceased husband of Stella
Stella (Ciotka) Banks – sister-in-law of Otto
Tony Leonardi – bookie who died March 17, 1970
Verdi (Mr. Green) – mob captain and Tony's boss
William (Duke) Baranski – son of Henry serving time in Iowa

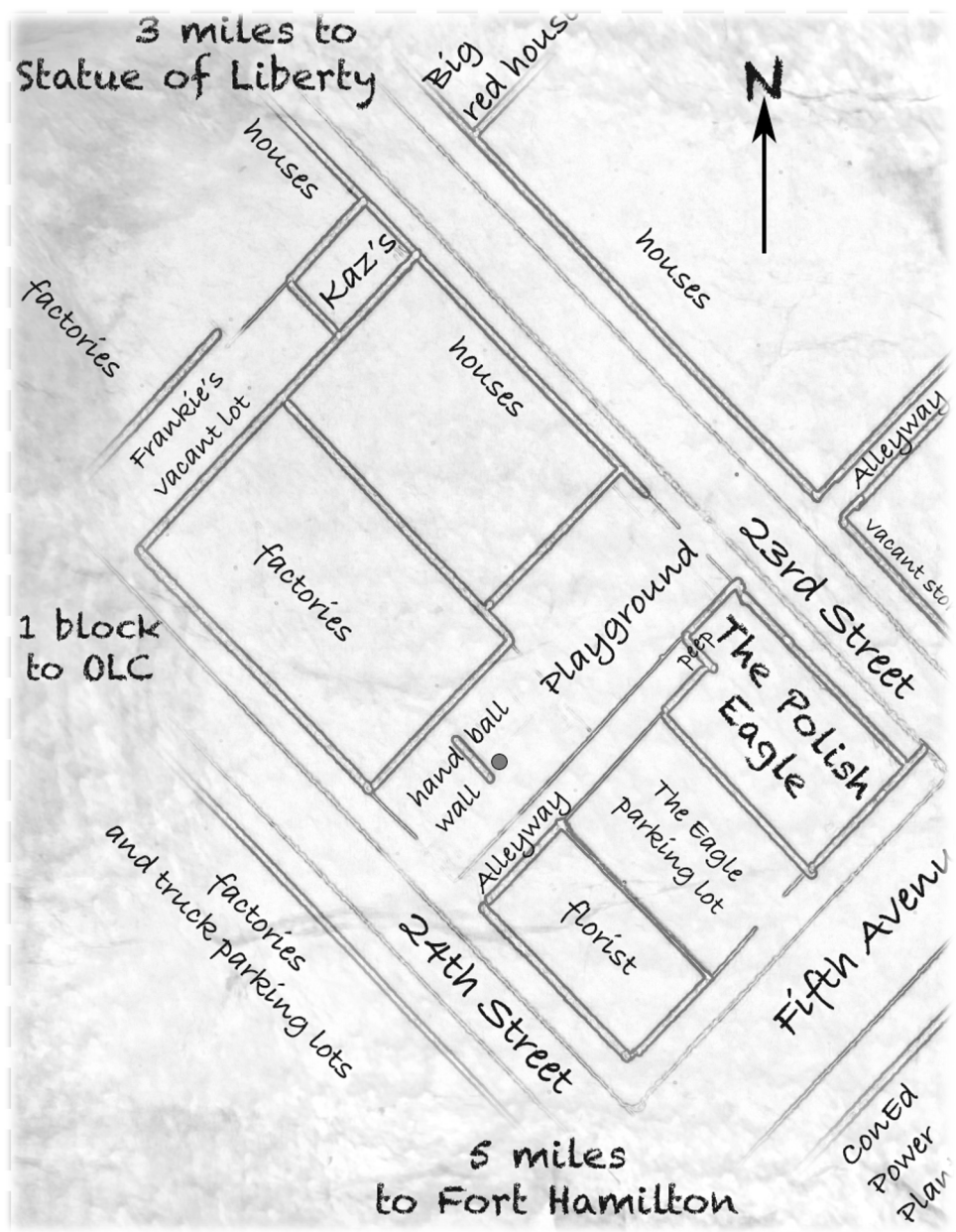
Where's Where



1700 Dutch map
from the Brooklyn Public Library – Brooklyn Collection

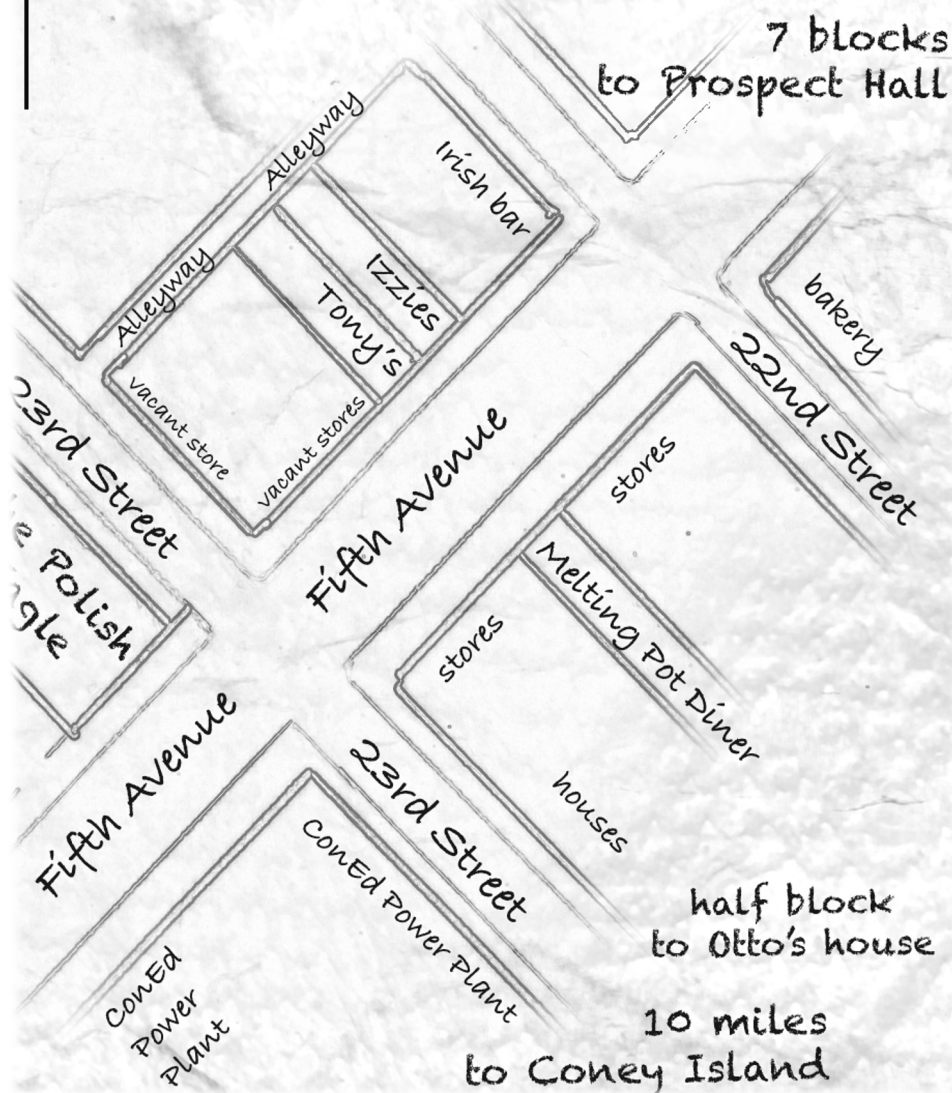


- the location of the Polish Eagle Tavern



Father Ed's map of the neighborhood

The Neighborhood



What makes Brooklynites so mean?

Twenty-one millennia ago, an uninvited immigrant pushed its way from the north. Brooklyn declared it would go no farther. The remnants of the glacier's attempt can still be seen throughout borough in the form of a glacial moraine and erratic boulders. The retreating invader made one last gesture when its melted waters blew out the land bridge connecting Brooklyn and Staten Island, thus creating the Narrows waterway and Upper New York harbor.

Indigenous peoples thrived for centuries around these bountiful waters until the Dutch arrived in 1600 and forced the mass migration of the Lanape tribes from their lands. The legitimate purchase of the lands was a myth spun by the vanquishers.

As it always does in Brooklyn, *what goes around, comes around*, and by 1700, the Dutch were forced out by the British. Only a few Dutch remained in a small village called Breukelen—the marshlands.

1776—another battle with the landlord. The largest war machine in the history of mankind descended upon New York to obliterate an insurrection. With an larger-than-life uprising for freedom from tyranny, the Battle of Brooklyn was inevitable. The British were not victorious. The King could not subdue.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, wave after wave of refugees came to Brooklyn to escape famine, exploitation, and persecution. Southern Blacks, Chinese, Irish, Jews, Germans, Poles, Italians, and more came to inhabit the gentle slope that ran down to the harbor below.

Brooklynites assumed their perpetual identity of being fierce and stubborn underdogs to irresistible forces, but they always remained the downtrodden stepchildren to Manhattanites. Even the borough's professional baseball team, which was founded in 1883, was the perennial loser in their sport for seven decades. When *dem bums* finally won their first World Series in 1955, they needed to go. They deserted Brooklyn in 1958.

In the 1960s, the mass immigration from the Caribbean Sea overwhelmed New York City. As before, these newcomers were not warmly accepted, even by the immigrants who had just arrived only

decades before. There was a sentiment that seniority mattered, so pay your dues. Despite the fact most Brooklyn ethnicities practiced Christian beliefs, the earlier refugees did not seem to remember the tenet of charity towards the less fortunate. Frictions ensued.

For self-perseveration, all ethnicities coalesced into their own clans of worship, socialization, and commerce. It wasn't the wonderful melting pot peddled by politicians as an accomplishment, but more a lumpy stew that didn't want to assimilate. One had to stick with one's own or perish. Even criminal organizations and corrupt police banned together for fraternal protections.

By 1970, it was very partisan *us* against *them*. If you were not us, you were a threat to us. Love of clan—a fundamentally good thing—spawned the opposite—evil. Malicious doings against thy neighbor, even so far as murder, was rationalized as necessary and good.

Brooklyn is a tough place for good people to live. It's why Brooklynites curse a lot, fight a lot, and never give in to a bully, even if they need to die in order to resist.

Part I -

good and evil

*No man chooses evil because it is evil;
he only mistakes it for happiness,
the good he seeks.*

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)
the British feminist philosopher
who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Chapter 01

A TIMELY & NEEDED DEATH

Coney Island

Saturday night

October 25, 1969

Frankie deserved to die. Not even Betty, his girlfriend, could argue about that. It was his time.

As the West End Line subway #475 descended from its elevated tracks into a mist-filled train yard basin, Basil Adamato, a subway motorman, could smell the salty aroma of the nearby ocean blowing in with the fog.

Within the basin, dozens of motionless trains were parked for the night; the 475 was about to join them. At every track intersection, red or green signal lights reflected off the steel rails, each marking danger or safe passage. Farther back in the yard, a lone train rumbled into the maintenance shed where its graffiti would be temporarily removed.

In the center of the yard, the concrete administration building had a spotlighted sign on its roof—Coney Island Transit Yard. Over the sign was a clock—nine o'clock. The 475's motorman and conductor were never late on this train's last run of the night. Though the train was speeding along at full mainline speed, Basil nudged the throttle up a smidge. It was especially important to the motorman that night, but someone else was also counting on his punctuality.

The West End line track skirted along the western perimeter wall of the basin. Above this wall was a terrace of abandoned factories and vacant lots. Only a narrow ledge separated the terrace above from the train tracks twenty feet below. A man waited by that ledge.

For years, Basil had made this train's last run to the end of the line at Coney Island. When everything went well, within a half hour, he

could discharge the remaining passengers and park the train in its nightly bed.

About a dozen miles away, a neighborhood tavern party was to start soon. If Basil rode the subway home on the few trains remaining in service, it would take over an hour. On this day, he had thought ahead and drove his car to work. He'd be able to drive back in about twenty minutes—plenty of time.

Outside the motorman's right side cab window, a brick wall rushed by it. As he slid the window down to let in some damp air, a piercing light from above lit up his cab. *Goddamn punks*, he thought. It wasn't a sign from god.

With his left hand, Basil shielded his eyes from the glare and saw a pair of legs hanging over the ledge. Just before his train could pass safely beneath them, the legs slid forward. The body of a coatless man dropped through the train's headlight beams and crashed onto the tracks. An overcoat followed more slowly and wrapped itself around the speeding train's windshield. The train rumbled slightly as it passed over the landing spot, like a car driving over some insignificant twigs.

Basil slammed on the brakes—pointlessly late—and the train slid forward. The horrible squealing of the steel wheels skidding along the rails filled the basin. In the administration building, the yardmaster looked up from his control room and saw sparks flying off the train's undercarriage. Frankie's was a needed death. It was his time. While it was long overdue, it was executed that night with flawless timing.

Chapter 02

MANUEL

Coney Island

five months later

a few minutes before 9 p.m.

From his hiding place on a creek embankment, Manuel, a skinny Puerto Rican boy, heard a car coming from Stillwell Avenue. He watched it reach the deserted street, but it turned away from him and parked at the other end of the street—the deadly end.

A lone person—dressed in an overcoat and wide-brimmed hat—got out from the driver’s side and stepped towards the rear of the car.

Manuel shifted his footing slightly, which caused some pebbles to roll down the embankment. He ducked down and held his breath. He didn’t dare raise his head. He only listened. To his relief, there were no sounds of footsteps approaching him. This was good—he didn’t want to wade across the sticky creek behind him to escape.

From down the street, he heard the car trunk popping open. Manuel heard voices but couldn’t tell whether they were male or female. The trunk slammed closed.

By the time the boy had enough courage to lift his head again, there was no one in sight, only the lone car remained. He got up and ran silently towards his quarry.

Chapter 03

TONY'S TIME

South Brooklyn
the next morning

As Otto Baranski walked down 23rd Street towards his tavern, he thought about the fun of the previous night's party.

My value to the community is unappreciated. At least that's what he thought.

Otto's tavern provided drinks for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or even minimum age. He'd serve anyone with the twenty-five cents needed for a mug of beer. About the only exclusion that he would make was sexual orientation, which, he felt, was part of his service.

This homosexual ban included his own son, Nelson, who had been outed in his senior year of high school a few years before—the repercussion of that for Nelson was his being kicked out of Catholic high school. Otto agreed with the punishment and also banished his son from his house, his bar, and the entire neighborhood. Otto's wife, Gloria, was no longer alive to forbid these cruelties.

Nelson moved over to East Greenwich Village in Manhattan. This glacier between father and son had been firmly in place for years and showed little sign of thawing. This was in spite of their being forced closer together the previous year.

On this cold, drizzly March morning, the day after Saint Patrick's Day, even the non-Irish adults of the neighborhood had hangovers. All part of Otto uniting his community, at least for one day, with a common misery.

As he approached the corner's curb at 5th Avenue, he encountered an icy puddle surrounding it. The street sewer was clogged again and

partially froze overnight. Across the avenue was his bar. There was a pungent odor in the air.

Hungover himself, he wasn't being careful. He glanced left up the avenue towards Bay Ridge and saw a lone yellow cab racing in his direction.

I can make it across.

He took a leap over the icy water and landed dry, then turned to look the other way. What he saw down the avenue, distracted him—strobing blue and white police lights. The patrol car along with an unmarked police car were both parked in the bus stop zone near 22nd Street. With Otto still looking the wrong way and walking too slow, the taxi closed in on him.

The cabbie easily avoided hitting Otto by slightly tapping on the brakes and steering around him. The sounding of the horn was more an expression of the cabbie's annoyance that he had to slow down at all. The horn's blare startled Otto.

With his upraised hands, he made imploring gestures for the fleeing vehicle to return. He yelled, "Come back, you bastard."

Otto was a middle-aged but large man and still quite capable of doing some damage to someone's face. The cabbie chose to continue on his way with a grateful passenger staring through the cab's rear window at him.

Otto's attention diverted next to a crowd in front of Tony's barbershop. A uniformed policeman stood guard at the front door. Otto's frown reflected his apprehension.

What the hell are cops doin' in my neighborhood at eight-thirty in the mornin'?

Stepping between two parked cars, he approached another large man leaning against a fender. The man had thick rimmed eyeglasses hanging midway on the bridge of his nose. His probably natural red hair had long since turned a silvery-white. A cane rested by his side. This man watched the cluster of bodies all vying for better viewing positions in front of the shop window. The policeman stood in the shop's doorway with the store's security grating partially pulled open to one side. A padlock with its shank severed was on the ground.

The morning's chill had encouraged the fender man to keep his overcoat fully buttoned up, which effectively concealed his attire. That didn't matter—everyone local knew what Edward McCormick did for a living.

"I see you have your cane again, Eddie. That sucks for you," Otto stepped up from the gutter and gestured with his head. "What's goin' on in there?"

Eddie partially turned towards the voice before muttering back, "The police seem to be searching Tony's for something. Maybe he lost his hearing aid again. Concerning my cane, I hadn't needed it in months, but weather's changing and my knees are hurting like a sonofabitch.

Turning back to his interest inside the shop, he added, "And lastly Otto, if you please, on the streets, it's still Father Ed to you." Father Ed was an Irish priest who spent most of his career assigned to the Polish Catholic church of Our Lady of Czestochowa, a parish better known to locals as OLC.

Last fall, he had retired unexpectedly and negotiated with the local bishop to be given permanent use of a cottage behind the church. This arrangement distressed the current Polish monsignor, but the bishop had a fondness for a fellow Irishman.

Otto took an adjacent spot on the fender and glanced around to be sure no one else was in earshot, then whispered, "Save your malarky for the congregation, Eddie. I've already told you that I'm not in the market for your religious crap anymore." Otto grinned his attempt to be witty.

Ed noticed. "Too bad that cab didn't hit you. I'd love to be the one to give you last rites." Ed adjusted his coat collar to better keep out the cold.

A silence fell between them, which made Otto shift a bit on the cold fender. It was unusual for the priest to be that blunt. Even more quietly, Otto added, "You know very well that I only use Eddie when no one else hears me."

"Even your father never called me Eddie." He looked over to the bartender for a response and he got it quickly.

"I'm not my father and like makin' that distinction from the dead old fool. And when he was alive and could still swear out loud, he called you and your god far worse." Otto again seemed quite pleased with himself on that retort. Ed ignored his grin again.

"I'm aware, Otto, that for many years, your father said some pretty nasty things about me, but not in the end. In the end, I think everything worked out for your father and me, as God had intended for it to be." Otto got closer to the priest.

"You ever gonna to tell me what really happened durin' those days last Christmas when the two of you went missin'?"

"Get to heaven and let your father tell you himself. If I told you now, you'd think I was full of malarky, as you put it." Otto frowned and he returned to watching the shifting bodies before him. He walked across the sidewalk to get a better look inside, then returned to the fender.

As he returned, he said, "You know Tony never made it to the Eagle last night."

Ed nodded. "Yeah, been thinking about that. What did you see inside?"

"The shop seemed pretty normal except for the four cops in it, two of them, plainclothes detectives, all wearing gloves. They're searchin' for somethin'.

"Floors swept, clean linens on the counter, dirty laundry bag near the rear doorway. Tony did a normal cleanup yesterday, but there aren't any newspapers in the paper rack. He ain't been here today yet."

"You certainly have a good eye, Otto. Maybe you missed your calling to be a detective." Otto reacted indignantly.

"I ain't corrupt enough. Dem bastards in there don't care about this neighborhood like I do. They won't die for it."

Ed smiled. "Probably true, but let's hope it doesn't come to that for you."

Ed was an even bigger man than Otto. As a child, growing up near Dublin, he was called Ox by his chums. Back then, nobody was

stronger or more stubborn than the Ox. The nickname did not follow him over the ocean, but the temperament occasionally resurfaced.

In early 20th-century New York City, life offered the former Ox only two restrictive futures—priesthood or policeman. While he was still a rough-and-tumble sort of guy who never backed away from a good brawl, his ethics guided him into a seminary—a third option of a career in crime was never seriously considered.

Upon his ordination in 1916, there was a glut of Irish priests in the Brooklyn diocese, so he was assigned to a Polish congregation in South Brooklyn. OLC parishioners embraced the young priest, possibly because the monsignor didn't. This pattern of dislike by the monsignor continued, which often led Father Ed to be occasionally reassigned elsewhere in the diocese. For whatever reason that even he didn't recognize as love, he always petitioned to return.

Over the heads of those in front of the barbershop window, Ed continued to observe much of the action inside. The police were, for lack of a better phrase, rushing cautiously, and they were continually checking their wristwatches. With each time check, their haste intensified. This all came to a halt when one cop glanced to the street to see the crowd of faces staring back at him. His obscenity could be heard through the windowpane and across the sidewalk back to Otto and Eddie. A few in the crowd chuckled. Otto grinned once again. Ed, in turn, smirked at Otto's enjoyment.

Each cop stood up and looked around to one another. Finally, two of them grabbed some barber linens and ran forward to cover the windows. Chief Detective Mike O'Brien rushed up to the closed glass door, shouting to the uniform outside, "Jesus Christ, Johnny, keep these people moving along." As other curses could be heard from inside, the view was obscured by the sheets being held in place with tacks from a nearby bulletin board.

The cop at the front door dispersed the crowd standing in front of the window. Once cleared, he stepped towards the curb, but Otto and Ed remained on the fender. Ed opened up his overcoat collar to remind the patrolman whom he was dealing with. The cop assessed the two old men and decided he wasn't going to bother. The window was covered.

What the hell, the cop thought.

“Just stay away from the window,” he ordered and resumed his position by the door. This encouraged a third much smaller man to come onto the curb. It was Georgios, the owner of the Melting Pot diner across the avenue. He squeezed himself between Otto and Ed on the fender, and they had to shift away to make room.

“I know something that you don’t know,” he said in an almost singsong lilt. Otto was quick to respond.

“You really know or just blowin’ smoke up our asses again.”

“Otto, please no vulgarity. There is a man of the cloth over there. I don’t believe in his god either, but please show some respect for his righteous ears. Anyway, I’m not blowing smoke. I do know but not gonna tell you now.”

Ed and Otto waited patiently because they knew Georgios couldn’t keep a secret. He was, after all, the neighborhood gossip and desired to be the first to know and reveal anything. Within a minute, he relented and said he learned that Tony the barber had died the previous night at the same place that Frankie had the previous October—the Coney Island train yard.

“Two neighborhood bookies dying in the same spot only months apart. What are the chances? Maybe there’s a new boss in town killing off competition. Or maybe Tony’s death was just payback time for Frankie’s. Payback can be a bitch.” Georgios immediately seemed to regret his last word as he peeked over to the priest. Ed didn’t react, but Otto’s face tensed up.

Another mob war ain’t gonna be good for neighborhood. Even if mobsters were killin’ each other off, innocent bystanders could get hurt.

Many years ago, Otto’s wife, Gloria, had been one of those innocents killed during a supermarket holdup. Maybe Tony was only the latest causality in these street wars. Nobody said anything so Georgie continued.

“I can’t believe that Tony is dead. Just last night, I was watching him in there when we were both closing up our shops for the night.” Georgios stared at both men to see if they were listening to him.

“Whadya see?” asked Otto in an as uninterested a tone as he could muster. Georgios noticed and directed his answer towards Ed.

“Father Edward, every night, about seven, I sit at my front window table to have my dinner. I’ve watched Tony many times doing his shop closing cleanup. There was one thing that was different last night. When he was done, he pulled his security grating closed and locked it from inside the shop then left by the backdoor. Maybe he was taking some garbage out to his can in the back alley.”

“Today wasn’t garbage day. Why would he do that last night?” challenged Otto. Georgios turned back to Otto.

“I’m only guessing about the garbage. Maybe he had a sardine sandwich for lunch and wanted the garbage out of the store for the night. I don’t know.”

“That’s right, you little shit, you really don’t know what you’re talkin’ about and maybe should keep your stupid mouth shut.”

To break the tension between the two men, Father Ed interceded. “Georgie, I need to take a leak and might not be able to make it home in time. May I use your facilities?” Ed noticed Otto’s smirk again, but this time, it was at the priest’s crude choice of words.

Georgios quickly refused, explaining that his toilet was clogged up. He was on his way to the plumbing supply store to buy a plunger when he noticed the crowd. He thought that some teenagers, who had been eating in the diner earlier that morning, had panicked when the police first arrived. Georgios said he didn’t want a plumber pumping up drug bags from his toilet.

“Who needs police asking questions? These days, police around here are rarely anyone’s friend.”

With that, Otto offered to open the tavern for Ed. As they stood up to leave, a cop inside tore a linen down from the window as another opened the door and stepped out. Ed and Otto saw inside that Detective Mike held a book in his hand, as a uniformed cop next to him made an unsuccessful grab for it. Ed and Otto sat back down on the fender.

As events unfolded inside, a black Plymouth Satellite drove up and double parked behind Ed and Otto. Johnny shouted from inside, “He’s

here.” With the distraction, the detective put the book into his pants pocket. As the door remained open, the cop stated, “We still need to settle this.”

“Yeah, but not now,” Mike snapped.

Two more detectives got out of the double-parked car. Otto recognized one immediately. It was Sidney Hyman, the Coney Island detective who had been in charge of Frankie’s homicide investigation a few months ago. His first press release tried to attribute the death to a suicide, but the DA didn’t buy that. After a month of investigation, it was agreed to leave the case open as a possible organized crime hit. Mob involvement was often a finding for Brooklyn police on many unsolved violent crimes. Often, it was the correct one.

Hyman examined the scene before him. Cops from another precinct coming out of his crime scene. A uniformed cop at the door. Three old guys sitting on a fender. As he walked across the sidewalk, he said to Johnny, “Get those people out of here,” referring to the fender trio.

“Sir, one’s a priest.” With that Hyman turned to look more closely at them and recognized them all with his smirky smile. He decided to single out Otto.

“Well, Baranski, how’s that faggot son of yours doing these days.” Otto remained silent, but his body shifted on the fender and his crossed arms tightened.

The detective turned back to Johnny and said, “I’m Jewish and don’t give a crap about priests. Get them outta here.” When Hyman tried to go through the front door, the cops walking out refused to yield. None of them wore their gloves anymore. Hyman recognized the detective who had pocketed the contested book.

“Well Mike, did you find what you were looking for at my crime scene?”

“Hymie, there was no crime committed here, so I don’t know what you’re talking about.” With the two locking eyes, he added, “and you took your goddamn time getting down here, so once word got to the 72nd this morning about our poor friend, Tony, we came to secure the premises. I didn’t expect your precinct would send you down again, given how you screwed up the last murder you had in Coney Island of

a citizen from my fine neighborhood. Your sergeant want another whitewash?"

Hyman did not respond immediately because the other cops closely encircled the two men. It wouldn't do for two NYPD detectives to be seen scuffling in public. Hyman didn't take the bait anyway.

"Very nice of you, Mike. Always worried about my career. Just leave this uniform," gesturing to Johnny, "with me and take off. This is my case from here on. My forensics will be here soon, but it seems you probably already fucked that up for them." With that dismissal, Hyman turned back to Otto, Ed, and Georgios. Johnny was listening in to determine who he was taking direction from.

With a harsher stare into the patrolman's face, Hyman repeated, "Keep this sidewalk clear." Mike gave a slight nod for the uniform to do so. As Mike stepped farther out onto the sidewalk, he spoke directly to Otto, but loud enough for Hyman to hear.

"Mr. Baranski, if this Jew continues to harass you or your fine family, you let me know." With that, he and the others walked towards their police cars, still disagreeing with each other in lowered voices.

Back in front of the shop, Johnny moved across to Otto and Ed again. This time, he would not take no for an answer. Otto stood up and turned to walk towards the Eagle. Ed wasn't going to make it that easy. Without moving, he sat and watched Georgios, who was already following closely behind the departing policemen.

Down the sidewalk, Detective Mike and one of the others abruptly stopped to argue further. In order not to get too close, Georgios turned off the sidewalk and stepped between two parked cars. There he stood and listened, while he pretended to be trying to jaywalk across the avenue. With a grin, Ed appreciated the bold nosiness of the man.

The two uniformed cops were not going to let Mike and his partner leave with the book. One uniform grabbed at Mike's upper arm and spun him around. Mike shrugged off the grip and stared into the man's face. Finally, he reached into his pocket, took the book out, ripped it in half along the spine, and handed a half to him. He said something that seemed to satisfy everyone. Ed couldn't hear what was said but perhaps Georgios had. The two detectives got into their unmarked car and drove away. The patrol car did the same.

Back in front of the barbershop, Johnny was poking Ed with the end of his nightstick to get moving. The priest joined Otto, and they walked to the Polish Eagle on the corner.

Chapter 04

AGNIESZKA & MARGARET

The Polish Eagle on the corner of 23rd and 5th

Otto's Polish Eagle Tavern resided in a three-story red brick building that had chiseled in its decorative roof cornice 1889. It was built before all the other houses and stores of the neighborhood. By 1970, the only older structure in sight stood miles away on an island in upper New York Bay—the Statue of Liberty.

The tavern portion of the enterprise resided on the corner. A larger social hall stretched down 23rd street toward the harbor. The social hall was built as a Polish meeting place to rival the German social hall a few blocks away on Prospect Place. The German hall burnt down mysteriously in 1900 and was rebuilt to a much higher level of elegance and posh. It became known as the Grand Prospect Hall. The Eagle was relegated to become a second-rate neighborhood bar.

For blue-collar Polish immigrants, during the first four decades of the twentieth century, the Eagle was their social center outside of church. In 1940, a Polish American society bought Prospect Hall, which further usurped the focus of Brooklyn Polish Americans away from the Eagle. By 1970, with the neighborhood's fast changing demographics, the Eagle continued its slide into oblivion.

During prohibition, the Eagle was a speakeasy, but instead of running the operation in the basement, a typical location of illegal bars of the era, the owners ran it in the windowless second floor. The building, being so solidly built with its brick walls and solid oak beams and floors, was nearly soundproof to the outside. A false wall was built before the stairway that led up to it.

To watch for pending raids, spotters manned three peepholes installed in the boarded-up windows on the second floor. When police cars arrived, the power on the floor would be shut off. Clients quietly

drank at their candle-lit tables until the raiders departed. The plan worked for years until a disgruntled customer alerted the authorities, who closed the operation down. This foolish customer vanished from the neighborhood a few weeks later. The rumors were his bones still lay in the muck of the nearby Gowanus Canal. The Eagle remained closed until the end of World War II, when Otto returned from fighting Nazis in Europe and bought the building.

Otto purchased the Eagle with money loaned from Stanley, the deceased husband of his sister-in-law, Stella. No one quite knew how Stanley had accumulated such wealth during both a depression and a world war. Everyone knew never to ask. By 1970, Stanley was dead, and Stella lived alone in a three-story mansion along Shore Road.

By 1947, Otto, along with his father, Kazimierz, and his brother, Henry, resurrected the tavern and social hall. Within a few short years, Otto paid off his loan and purchased the adjoining building along 5th Avenue, where he opened a funeral home.

Otto became too fond of saying that his tavern was the dash between the two dates on a tombstone. It welcomed new Polish Catholics into the world at their baptismal parties in the hall, carried them out dead at the other end through the doors of his funeral parlor, with constant drinking at the Eagle separating the two events. Kazimierz painted the front door red and carved into it a Polish Eagle—the coat of arms of Poland. He painted the bird white.

With Ed anxiously watching from behind, Otto unlocked the tavern door's multiple deadbolts. He had to remember which ones he had locked the night before. He thought that by not locking them all, it would slow down would-be burglars.

Once the heavy wooden door creaked open, the stink of tobacco and spilled beer poured out. The night before had been a boisterous one. St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the Eagle always were with patrons attempting to dance jigs and polkas on a small dance floor. Otto and family often played referee and peacemaker to keep the scuffles to a civil level, which only meant a lack of profuse blood. All it often took was a free beer to satisfy the offended parties, but, sometimes, a bit more muscle was required. Brawniness was an attribute all of the Baranski men possessed in their youthful prime. Kaz

was the first to lose his after his bout with cancer and a throat surgery that left him skinny and mute.

With the doorway cleared, Ed rushed by Otto into the dark stink. He hurried through the bar room and around the bar to a hallway that led to the bathrooms. Otto turned on a few lights and followed him down a picture-lined hallway. He needed to retrieve the previous night's receipts from a wall safe hidden behind an autographed photo of Bobby Vinton. He watched Ed scurry towards the bathrooms, when Ed halted to stare at a different photo. When Otto shifted his weight, the wooden floor beneath him groaned. This got Ed moving along and into the bathroom.

Otto unlocked the safe and reached in for the bank deposit satchel. When he removed it, he noticed a gun that he had confiscated from a drunken customer years ago. The customer never returned so he tossed this Saturday Night Special into his safe. He hadn't moved it since. When he reached in to touch it, he noticed his hand was shaking and quickly withdrew. He locked up the safe and started to walk back to the barroom but decided that he wanted to see which photo had caught the priest's attention. It was the group photo taken in the Eagle the night of Father Ed's community party the previous October—the night that Frankie had died.

By the time that Ed came back out, Otto was behind the bar placing dollar bills into the till. What didn't go into the till was placed into a Dime Savings Bank deposit satchel. Later in the day, someone in the family would slip out and go downtown to make the deposit. For the remainder of the morning, the satchel would be in the safe.

Ed returned, thanked Otto for use of the facilities, and left without saying anything else about the morning's events. Otto thought that odd. Unlike Frankie, who was hated by most in the neighborhood, Tony was beloved and would be missed.

Through the bar room windows, Otto noticed that Ed had not turned left down the street towards his home below 4th Avenue. Instead, he crossed the avenue and went out of Otto's sight.

Otto retrieved the photo that caught Ed's interest and, in the better light behind the bar, counted the number of heads in it. Excluding

himself, nineteen stood before his bar. All good people he knew. Father Ed wasn't in it because he had taken the photo.

In the photo, on the wall behind the bar, all six of the Otto's cuckoo clocks showed nine o'clock. Nine o'clock was the exact time of Frankie's death over ten miles away in Coney Island. It was great alibi for all of them—one that Detective Hyman had to accept. Otto knew better.

Otto knew that someone in that photo had just committed the perfect murder of Frankie. He scrutinized every face to determine whether someone appeared too happy or maybe too nervous. He could always tell a liar when he saw one, but everyone seemed their normal selves.

Somethin' doesn't add up. Why was Tony killed in Coney Island durin' a party here, just like Frankie?



*The Eagle tavern
later that morning*

Agnieszka, Otto's tavern cleaning lady, arrived at ten and brought along her new helper, Margaret. Both women, recent young immigrants, had pretty faces and a smile for everyone they encountered, despite the fact that life hadn't been gentle to them.

Along with her smile, Agnieszka's angelic soul could melt anyone's heart, even the stone inside Otto's chest. Last summer, Father Ed had introduced her to Otto's father, Kazimierz, and, in exchange for use of his vacant third-floor apartment, she cleaned his house. Otto had to pay her wages for her cleaning of both the tavern and his house. She was hardworking and soon expanded her cleaning business to the point where she needed an assistant to help.

Margaret, who came from the Dominican Republic, was one of the hardest working single mothers that one could ever meet. She was barely eighteen and appeared somewhat undernourished. Being deserted by her husband at the docks and penniless in a new world

with two children, she had turned to prostitution in order to feed her two children. A few months ago, Agnieszka offered her alternative employment.

Margaret lived in the big red house across the street from Agnieszka's apartment. It had been a difficult transition from her former profession with former clients coming to her door still seeking her services. Father Ed was working on getting her out of her current apartment. In the interim, other residents in her building needed to come to her rescue more than once. Margaret was committed to her new occupation and was proving to be an asset for Agnieszka.

On the other hand, Agnieszka's past was much less clear to all but one person, the formidable Stella. Somehow, a surprisingly quick trust developed between those two very different women, one so wonderful, and the other, not so much. Stella could be most kindly described as biting caustic. Nevertheless, since their first meeting last July, these two had become very close.

Henry, Otto's brother, showed up at the Eagle much later in the morning. Because he was late and still hungover, Otto assigned him to clean the bathrooms.

The foursome set to work. With an industrial size fan pulling nauseating vapors out the back alley doorway, the Eagle became tolerable enough to allow customers to enter in the front. At noon, the half-dozen Polish cuckoo clocks announced the top of the hour. Basil was the first to walk in.

Chapter 05

BASIL

Around the Eagle's community table

Once word got out that Basil was in the Eagle, the neighborhood flocked in behind—within a half hour, the place was almost as packed as it had been the night before.

Basil had the best alibi of anyone for the night of Frankie's murder. He drove the subway train that ran over the bookie. For months after, he milked that story for all it was worth, which earned him quite a few free beers to keep his whistle wet and his lips loose. While he didn't witness Tony's death the night before, he showed up at the Eagle hoping to mooch a few beers from what he did know.

Otto, in seeing an opportunity to have a busy afternoon, telephoned a local pizza parlor for a dozen pies. He put a handmade sign over the bar raising the price of beer to forty cents—no one balked. At that time, he thought, *I shoulda made it fifty*.

With the growing crowd and a beer before him, Basil was ready to hold court once again. Everyone squeezed around him, and it was Georgios who started the questioning.

"Basil, didya go and run over another bookie last night?" Basil just shook his head, as he swallowed a half a mug in a single gulp, then burped to punctuate his contentment. Basil was never known for his refinement. His physical appearance complemented that persona. Pretty much, he was a walking, unkempt bed.

"Then what do you really know about last night?" inquired Father Ed, who had come in with the crowd.

"I know plenty." Basil finished his first drink and pushed the empty glass to someone nearby. He felt he had died and gone to his personal heaven.

“I was pullin’ the graveyard shift last night because someone called in sick, so I left Coney Island about midnight. As I did, I saw dem cops with their spotlights all over at the edge of the train yard where Frankie died.. By eight this morning when I returned, I found out what happened.” When he was satisfied that he had everyone’s attention, he continued.

“Boys, our little Tony jumped in front of a subway train last night from the same terrace, in front of the same West End train, and in fact, the same time, as Frankie. There was only one difference.” Many in the crowd leaned in to hear better. Basil was playing his audience and paused a few more moments. The dozen weather-worn men’s faces waited. “The motorman told police Tony was standing on the ledge above, and that he clearly jumped. Tony’s death was suicide. Me, I’d still swear Frankie was pushed.” More of the standing crowd squeezed on the bench seats around the Eagle’s community table.

“Just like dem cops did to me last fall, that motorman was interrogated by everybody and his uncle. First, transit cops, then NYPD, then that SOB, Hyman, who’s probably the dimmest wit of the bunch.” Basil glanced around to see if the detective was in the crowd. To his relief, he didn’t see him. Basil pushed an empty mug to another captivated face. He waited for the beer before he resumed talking.

“Yeah, Numbnuts is on this case again. I saw him this morning, up in the office confiscating the train yard tapes. I tell you boys, if this was somehow another murder, the fix will be in on this one too. There ain’t gonna be any arrests.” Basil seemed to lose his thought. No real surprise, considering how much beer he already drank on an empty stomach.

“Where were you at nine last night?” shouted out an aggressive voice from behind the motorman. Basil did not appreciate the tone and spit back a two word expletive.

Everyone turned to the voice. Maybe there would soon be a fight in the back alley. Unfortunately for Basil, the voice belonged to Detective Numbnuts. He had slipped into the room unnoticed. Beside him was his partner, Ernie. Several at the table stood up and tried to leave.

Chapter 06

SIDNEY & ERNIE

The Eagle tavern

A voice barked out. “Everybody sit down. I’ll tell you when you can leave.” Ernie blocked the path to the front door. Sidney Hyman walked before the table to face Basil. “Now, let me ask this question another way. Can anybody confirm you were home at nine?” Given Basil’s clearly foggy mental state, maybe the detective was hoping for some incriminating statement.

“Maybe.” Basil searched his brain for something witty to say. The only thing he came up with was, “Where were you?” Someone made a nervous laugh. Hyman’s partner wasn’t happy and went straight for Basil and spun him around in his chair.

“Well, jackass, for your information, Detective Hyman and I were at a policemen’s party over in Prospect Hall. Plenty of people saw us there. You see, schmuck, that’s what’s called an account of whereabouts that we can prove. So, again, asshole, can anyone confirm you were home at nine?”

“No,” he spat back at the detective.

“Well, putz, that’s too bad for you because you just made the top of our suspect list.”

“Me! Why me?” Basil said in disbelief.

“Because you know about that terrace over the train yard. You know train schedules. You knew Tony and probably owed him money, and you don’t have any alibi.” Hyman flashed a look of annoyance at his junior partner and pulled Ernie away. Just then the front door opened and in walked a boy carrying six boxes of large pizzas. All turned to him, then back to Hyman.

Hyman said with disgust, “Adamato, you’re too drunk for me to interview now.” “Get the hell out. And stop shooting off your mouth

about this case or I will arrest you for obstructing my investigation. Now!" Basil jumped out his chair and moved towards the door.

"In fact," Hyman reconsidered, "most of you can leave." First up was Georgios. "All except you," pointing at Otto, "and you," at Henry, "and where's that son of yours?"

"I'm over here," answered Anthony from behind the bar. The detective turned.

"Not you—the delicate one—the homo." Hyman's eyes searched through the fleeing crowd, but Otto's gay son, Nelson, was not in it.

The pizza boy put the boxes in a nearby table and ran out, saying to come by the pizzeria later to settle up. The front door slammed closed behind him. Only Otto, Henry, and Anthony remained inside with the two detectives. Even Father Ed had fled.

The five men stood close to each other in a small circle. Otto barked at the detective, "Nelson don't work here, so whadyawant with us?"

"Where were you all at nine last night?" In turn, they all answered in the Eagle. "So, you're all vouching for each other. That's useless to me and you." To Henry, "Where's your son? Duke, was it?"

"It's William," answered Henry, "and he's in Iowa serving."

"Iowa? What the fuck. "Army?" Hyman studied Henry's face.

"No. Conscientious objector." Hyman's face turned sour.

"Draft dodger, eh? Little commie prick." At this point, Anthony pushed past his father towards the detective. Hyman was caught by surprise, and, at first, staggered a bit. Ernie restrained his partner, as Otto and Henry did the same with Anthony.

Anthony yelled over his father's shoulder at the detective, "You're pretty brave with that badge in your pocket and gun in that holster, aren't you, shithead?"

Hyman tried to step around his partner, but Ernie's grip held firm. The junior detective knew any information that might be gained from an interrogation, such as this, would not be usable in court.

I need to keep Sid out of another physical confrontation during an interview. This would be his third.

Ernie knew the local DA would probably much rather take away his partner's badge than solve this crime. Firing the Jew from the force would be a preferred outcome for the Irish DA.

After Ernie muscled his partner out of the tavern, the three inside watched the two detectives exchanging words on the sidewalk. Eventually, they left in their unmarked police car. After that, Anthony stormed out of the Eagle, leaving Otto standing in the middle of the tavern with his hands shaking again. Henry grabbed a slice of pizza and another beer. Otto poured himself a whiskey.

Chapter 07

BENT COPPERS

Still in the Eagle

By 4 p.m., Anthony had cooled off and came back to the Eagle to give his father a dinner break. Otto went home without much said between father and son.

Otto entered his home vestibule and started shuffling through the mail he picked up from the floor below the mail slot. He was about to toss the envelopes onto the foyer table when a folded piece of paper fell to the floor. He recognized the paper. It was from a notepad he kept near the payphone at the Eagle. He pulled out his reading glasses from his shirt's chest pocket and started to read the note.

POLISH EAGLE TAVERN



23RD ST. & 5TH AVE.
HYACINTH 9-4908

*DANGEROUS TIME. WE NEED TO TALK SOON BUT IT
CAN'T BE TODAY.*

*TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT, YOU NEED TO GO TO
YOUR ALLEY PEEP HOLE. DON'T GET CAUGHT LOOKING OR
YOU COULD END UP LIKE TONY.*

*FOR NOW, SHUT YOUR STUPID FACE AND JUST
WATCH AND LISTEN.*

DON'T TRUST ANYONE.

Otto didn't recognize the writing. It seemed like a warning that a friend might send, but why was it unsigned? Otto flipped the note over but there was nothing written on the back. He couldn't ignore it but wondered if someone wanted him to be alone at midnight.

