

THE OUTSIDER: SCOOP

By B. R. Flynn

I gratefully acknowledge the work of Scott Vaughn in the creation of this character and this world.

Chapter One, "The Outsider Strikes"

November, 1933

Empire City - Along the East Coast of the United States

Doyle looked up at the sky, eyeing the grey clouds above with suspicion, if not outright contempt. It looked like it was going to snow. Wouldn't that be just great? Here it was the middle of the night, he was standing at the end of a cold dock, freezing air drifting up from the water, and it was probably going to snow. Winter was certainly upon the City.

It was just after Thanksgiving - the Christmas season in full swing now - but Doyle didn't feel like giving thanks to anyone at the moment. He was short and looked out of place wearing the suit of a

tough guy. The hat he wore didn't seem to fit right: it always seemed to slide down his head. No fitting seemed to work properly. He often felt like a boy dressing up in his father's clothes. But he wasn't a boy, he was thirty and even wore a mustache to prove it. Sure, it never seemed to fill in the way it should have but it was a mustache, and he was proud of it.

Brother, was it cold. It was the kind of cold that crept down the walls and fell out of the sky and found its way into every little nook and cranny in one's clothes and body. Doyle rubbed his hands together. No matter what he did, he couldn't get warm. Even bundled up in his big coat, he could feel it, pricking him, poking at him.

The wind picked up and Doyle tucked his hands under his armpits, trying to keep warm. A newspaper came tumbling down the dock and got caught on his shoe. It was the *Tribune*, one of the inner pages, and Doyle could see the headline of a prominent article:

IS GHOST STALKING UNDERWORLD CRIME?!

The byline read, "Nat Scarlet". Doyle had read the article earlier in the day and it had given him goosebumps, adding gasoline to the fire of rumors that had been making the rounds in his circle. He was something of the suspicious type, a product of his Irish-American upbringing: Catholicism on the one hand, old folktales on the other. The newspaper freed itself from his shoe and flew past him, heading towards the water and oblivion.

He checked his watch. They were late. He sighed, his warm breath visible in the cold air around him. Doyle had a stray, even perverse thought: it looked like his own soul escaping his body. As if the simple act of breathing reminded him of his unholy work. He shook his head, sent the strange thought out of his mind, and went to check the rigging he had set up at the end of the dock. He had checked it three times already and the work was solid, but one could never be too careful, especially when Coll was involved.

As he pulled on the chain dangling from the tall, sturdy wooden post - the sound echoing eerily across the still and silent water - he heard the sound of a car approaching. He turned and walked up the dock to meet it. The car was big and long, a sleek black Packard: stylish and expensive. The wheels clattered along the wood slats of the dock. Doyle had to stifle a laugh: it was the contrast between the elegance of the vehicle and the rough, utilitarian construction of the dock. This car simply didn't belong here and Doyle smiled as he approached it.

The car came to a halt and the suicide doors opened on both sides. It looked like the wings of a bat unfolding, awakening from its slumber to search for prey. Meehan and McGrath got out first. Both of them were tall, their hats, suits and coats grey, expensive but not too flashy. They both held Tommy guns. If it weren't for the toothpick that Meehan munched on between his crooked teeth, Doyle

wouldn't have been able to tell them apart. They looked like twins. They weren't, as far as Doyle knew - not even related - but they looked so much alike it was uncanny.

Tully got out next, giggling as he sidled out of the vehicle. He pulled a young woman out with him. She was a slim, pretty blonde. Doyle racked his brain and came up with her name: Penelope. She was one of Coll's kept women. Doyle winced: she was wearing nothing but a white slip. He could almost see through it. If he was cold, all bundled up as he was, how must she have felt right now?

Tully was short - though not as short as Doyle - with wild, unkempt yellow hair. He wore no hat, letting the wild hair go crazy in the wind. It looked like it hadn't been washed in about a week. Doyle shook his head. *Put on a damn hat*, he thought. The man had a sick grin on his face. He was actually enjoying this, enjoying holding the freezing woman, a gun pressed into her side. As Doyle watched, Tully tugged on her hair, eliciting a yelp. He cackled and drug her along the dock.

Finally, Coll himself got out. He was around fifty years old, big and wide, and also wore no hat. In this case, Doyle knew the reason: no hats would fit him. His big, wide head was simply too large for most hats. Something Doyle and his boss had in common, though reversed. Coll's red hair was thinning and he tended to comb it over, holding it in place with some substance that Doyle didn't recognize, some kind of Devil's elixir, he assumed. Probably imported.

The boss approached and Doyle could see the dock lights glinting off the large man's lips. His lips were always wet, no matter the temperature, hot or cold. It was utterly bizarre to Doyle. Coll pulled a cigar from his coat with one hand, a cigar cutter with the other. He clipped off the end of the smoke and stuck it in his mouth to light up. Doyle was struck, as he always was, by how small the man's hands were, in contrast to the rest of his body. His suit and shoes were immaculate as always. They probably cost a fortune.

That only left Saoirse in the car. She was driving, as usual. Doyle shot her a glance and she eyed him back, all malice and sinister presence. She was dressed in a kind of stylized chauffeur outfit, sexy and a little revealing. Once, not long after she started driving for Coll, Doyle had made a crack about women drivers. Saoirse had smiled wide and slapped him across the face, actually leaving a mark. She was one tough broad. At the moment, she stayed in the car, which suited Doyle just fine.

"Boss," Doyle greeted Coll. "The meeting with Boss Featherstone go well?"

Coll shrugged. "Well enough."

And that was all. Doyle knew that Coll didn't like to talk about business above him to underlings like Doyle but the young man couldn't help but poke at him a little, his own small defiance. Such were the minor joys of being in the Irish mob.

"That's good," Doyle said.

"Is everything ready?" Coll asked.

"Yes, boss. I have it all rigged up at the end of the dock here. Follow me."

Coll sighed but followed Doyle as the young man walked down the docks to the rig. Tully and the girl followed as well, a little behind them. Meehan and McGrath stayed where they were, between the car and their boss. They looked about, making sure there was no one around, watching.

Doyle had screwed a metal pulley system to a tall, sturdy post at the very end of the dock. On the end of the chain, clanging against the post, were a pair of handcuffs, empty at the moment. Coll inspected the handcuffs, fingered them with his small hands, and nodded.

"And here..." Doyle said and pointed into the freezing water. On the other end of the chain, a large piece of raw meat - beef - was attached. It was just below the surface of the water, bleeding out, turning the water red, like a sacrificial victim. Coll nodded again.

"Good," he said.

He gestured to Tully, who laughed and dragged the girl with him as he came. The harsh headlights of the car backlit them, an odd couple if there ever were one. Silhouetted as they were, they looked like mad players in a shadow play to Doyle, some kind of brutal domestic drama played out on a cheap, tiny stage for cackling madmen.

The pair reached them and Doyle had to stifle another wince. The girl was freezing, her teeth chattering, her hands held together and shaking. He felt for her. Coll approached her as Tully laughed, manhandling the girl.

"You're gonna take a swim!" Tully said. "Dunk dunk, a swim in the water!" It was a sing-song voice, as if he were making up a song on the spot. "Dunk in the water, dunk in the water!" That laugh again.

Coll shot him a look and he shut up but there was still a broad smile on his face. He licked his lips as Coll grabbed hold of the girl by the neck.

"This is what happens to dames that disappoint me," he said. "Do you understand?"

She didn't answer at first. The headlights illuminated the tears in her eyes. Her lips quivered, whether from the cold or from fear, Doyle didn't know.

"Do you understand?" Coll repeated.

"Yes," Penelope managed to get out.

Coll nodded, seemingly satisfied. Doyle knew the truth about what had happened. It was on a particularly boozy evening of late night work in the boss's office. Coll had Doyle working like a madman going over the day's events and planning upcoming schedules, and he kept ordering rounds of drinks which Penelope would fetch. On perhaps the tenth or so round, the girl had dropped a glass. It didn't even spill on Coll - staining his expensive suit - but merely crashed to the floor, shattering the

glass.

The girl had been horrified and apologized again and again. Coll had looked at her, not saying anything, but Doyle could see those eyes, could see the rage behind them, the murder in them. And her fate was sealed right there in the office. No trial was held, no extenuating circumstances - exhaustion on the part of the girl, for one - were entered into evidence. It was simply over for her, and Doyle knew it the very moment that Coll looked into Penelope's eyes. He knew something like this was coming.

But what could he do? An enforcer for the Irish mob wasn't exactly the kind of job one could just quit. No, you either were eventually arrested or killed in the line of duty. It was that simple. Some could live to old age in relative comfort, their only worry being that little nagging voice in their head telling them that any one of their friends could turn on them at any moment and stab them in the back. And that's the way it would usually end.

"Ah, there he is," Coll said. He was poking his head over the edge of the dock.

He grabbed the girl by the hair and made her join him, her cheek uncomfortably close to his own. A fin circled in the water below them. It was greyish white, predatory. Doyle found himself swallowing hard. This sudden - though paradoxically expected - visitor gave him the creeps. It glided through the water and, as they watched, reared slightly out of the water and bit down on the raw piece of meat. Its head was T-shaped, a Hammerhead, that most alien-looking of sharks.

"I love Hammerhead sharks," Coll said with a smile. "Specifically Hammerheads. They're fascinating. Do you know that, during the day, they run in schools? Packs, you know. But at night, they hunt alone. Solitary. I like that. I like to think I'm the same."

Doyle frowned. Since when had the boss been a solitary hunter? In fact, when was he alone at all? At home, in bed? That was all that Doyle could come up with. Tully laughed, though. Coll shot the man a glance and he shut up.

"We're going to chain you up here," Coll said.

Doyle sighed. This was his cue. Earlier, Coll had actually told him what to do when he said this, like they were rehearsing some kind of Gothic play staged for the criminally insane. But he did it. He walked the girl over to the post. Grabbed hold of her hands and raised them above her head.

There was a horrible moment when he looked into her tear-soaked eyes as he closed the handcuffs around her wrists. He had to look away as he heard the click of them latching successfully. Her pitiful, pleading gaze was too much for him. All the while, Tully kept his pistol trained on the girl, as if she posed any kind of real threat. Any one of them, Doyle included, could have killed her with their bare hands, able to strangle the very life out of her if she tried to make a break for it. It smacked of drama, show business, theater.

Doyle had to shake his head again, unable to restrain himself. Luckily, Coll didn't see it. He was busy looking at the shark, smoking away at his cigar. Behind them, Meehan and McGrath scanned the horizon, seemingly disinterested in what was going on at the edge of the dock.

"Saoirse," Coll called to the car. "Have a look at this."

Doyle had seen the chauffeur's name written down once on a note that Coll had written and had done a double take. He had always assumed that her name was spelled the way it sounded - Seersha, he supposed - and couldn't square up the name with its sound. Irish names, he thought. Always a little strange.

Doyle himself was born here in the States, so he wasn't quite used to these exotic names. Saoirse was born in Dublin and only came over stateside five years ago.

Now, on the docks, she got out of the car carefully, a tall, beautiful woman with strawberry blonde hair, shoulder-length. At the moment, it was curled up under the cap that she wore. She walked down the docks to them, her hips swaying from side to side as if she were moving to music. Doyle didn't know if her movements were meant to attract or if they were predatory like a snake, ready to strike at any moment. She stopped next to Coll, and rested an elbow on the man's shoulder.

She was the only person Doyle had ever seen act this way around Coll. She had the familiarity of a lover but Doyle knew for a fact that Coll had never slept with the woman. He knew every woman that his boss took to bed with him, it was part of his job, really. So they weren't lovers. Their bond was based on something else entirely.

"Have a look at that," Coll said pointing at the shark with his cigar. "Ever seen something so beautiful?"

"I've seen a thing or two," Saoirse said in her thick Dublin accent. "Seen a fair few sharks, too. But it is lovely, I grant ye."

Coll reached out and patted her on the shoulder. "Back to the car."

Saoirse nodded. She took a moment to look at Penelope, smiled with malice, and headed back towards the car. Both Doyle and Tully couldn't help but watch the woman's behind sway back and forth as she left. Tully caught Doyle's look and smiled wickedly. Doyle's eyes widened and looked away.

"Back to work," Coll said and turned to Penelope. "When we drop you over the side," Coll said, "you'll trade places with the meat. And the Hammerhead will have nothing to eat but you. How does that sound?"

The girl didn't answer, just lowered her gaze to the wooden slats of the docks below her in defeat. Tully laughed but a look from Coll quieted him. Doyle was watching the girl intently - wishing he could do something, knowing that he couldn't - and saw something strange. Her gaze still averted,

looking down, Penelope's eyes widened in surprise, as if she had seen something. She looked up quickly, glanced around to see if anyone noticed. Doyle made sure to look away as she did, not alerting her to his knowledge. But he took a moment to look down, as well. There was nothing, just the wooden slats of the dock. Doyle could see through them, could see the network of wood below holding the dock up and, below that, the water. Nothing else. What had she seen?

"Get ready, Doyle," Coll said.

Doyle took a few steps forward and put a hand on the girl. He moved her into position, the chain her handcuffs were attached to clicking on the pulley system above her. He made ready to push her over the side. All the while, he couldn't look her in the eye and kept telling himself that this was his job, that he had to do this.

"On my mark," Coll said.

That was when they heard the voice. It was a deep voice, full of power and authority. It seemed to echo across the dock but without any real sense of where it came from.

"Five men to take care of one woman," the voice said. "Must be one tough broad."

"Who's that?" Meehan said.

"Where in blazes is he?" McGrath said.

"Everybody shut up!" Coll said. "Who's there? You dare interrupt my work?!"

"You know who I am," the voice said.

"Boss," Tully said. "It's The Outsider!"

He looked crazed, scared even. He whirled around, trying to aim his pistol in every direction possible in the space of about two seconds.

"Smart man you have there," the voice said.

His voice seemed to bounce around the dock. Doyle had just about pinpointed the source of it, coming from his right, below them, but now it seemed to be coming from behind them. They all whirled around to look but there was still nothing but the girl and the water behind her. Then the voice came from up the docks and they whirled back around. Doyle didn't know if this intruder was a ghost or whether he was just throwing his voice.

"I heard he's a ghost," Meehan said, chewing on his toothpick with extra vigor.

"Nah, he's just a man," McGrath said. "A real troublemaker!"

"I don't know," Meehan said. "I heard he scared Carbone over with the Italians so bad that he doesn't even leave his stronghold anymore."

"I heard he can't be beat in battle," Tully said.

"Everything you've heard is true," The Outsider said. "I am a ghost. And I can't be defeated in battle."

Anthony Carbone was so afraid of me, his hair turned white!"

Doyle took his hand off the girl and let it rest on the pistol in his coat, tucked under his arm. He didn't pull it, though. It seemed futile. If this voice really did belong to a ghost, what good would bullets do?

Coll backed up, the cigar falling from his lips and hitting the dock. It rolled until it came to a gap between slats, where it fell, hitting a few lengths of wood before dropping into the water below. Coll inched past Meehan and McGrath, heading for the car. Past him, Doyle could see Saoirse in the car. She had poked her head out and was looking around. She looked excited, elated, even. What was wrong with her? In contrast, Coll looked terrified and he grabbed Meehan by the shoulder as he passed him.

"I'm getting out of here," he said. "Make sure the girl dies."

"You got it, boss," Meehan said.

Coll rushed to the car now, as fast as he could. Coll watched his boss, mouth agape. This behavior was so out of place for the man. He had never seen his boss afraid before, not even during prohibition, when there had been almost a year-long war between the Irish and the Italians over the control of whiskey coming south from Canada. It was truly shocking.

The Outsider laughed as Coll ran to the car. It was a big, hearty laugh, full of genuine humor, dark as it may be.

"Go ahead and run, Coll," The Outsider said. "I'm not going to bother you tonight. You deserve something a little more special."

Coll reached the car, threw open a back door and practically jumped inside. Doyle could hear him frantically telling Saoirse to drive and soon the car was alive and made a three-point-turn and headed up the dock. It reached the road and turned, escaping away into the night.

"Doyle," Meehan said. "Throw her over the side."

Doyle was frozen, still shocked that his boss had fled, like a coward, leaving his men to face this alone. He had served the man for nearly a decade and yet he had left him here on the docks with a possibly supernatural threat? True, he didn't exactly see their relationship as friendship but he expected some kind of concern to come creeping through every now and again. But this apparently wasn't the case.

"Doyle!" Meehan said.

Finally, Doyle shot the large enforcer a glance. It was not a happy look and Meehan approached him with menace. He took hold of him by the lapels of his jacket.

"Throw her over the side!" he repeated.

Doyle nodded. Slowly, he approached the girl, nervous and scared, and took hold of one of her

shoulders. He averted his gaze for as long as he could then looked into her eyes. She looked back at him, pleading silently. Doyle sighed and turned to Meehan. He shook his head.

"I can't," he said.

"Yellow bastard," Meehan said, enraged.

"Where is the ghost?!" McGrath said. "Haven't heard him since the boss left."

"Maybe he's gone," Meehan said. "He said that he wasn't going to bother us tonight."

"No," Doyle said with grave seriousness. "He said that he wasn't going to bother the boss. Didn't say anything about us."

"Ah, for Pete's sake," Tully said, "I'll throw her over the side!"

He charged towards the post, pushed Doyle aside and grabbed hold of the girl with both hands. She yelped as he took hold of her and then screamed as the small, wiry criminal shoved her over the side of the dock. Her screams blended with the sound of the chain rattling as she fell, creating a macabre symphony on the cold air. The girl descended towards the water as the large chunk of meat ascended out of it. The Hammerhead opened its jaws and tried to chase the meat out of the water, missing it by less than an inch.

There was a low, whistling sound - something fast moving through the air. Doyle felt it fly by his cheek, missing him by less than the shark had missed the meat. There was a thunk in the wooden post as whatever the object was slammed into it, catching the chain through the hole in a single link.

Penelope came to a stop immediately, hanging near the water, her feet just out of the shark's bite. Doyle blinked and shook his head. The object that had come whistling through the air was a knife. It vibrated in place, adjusting to becoming an unmoving object instead of a flying thing of the air, free and dangerous. It was like no knife Doyle had ever seen before, long and thick, about half the size of a machete. The handle was long and sturdy, made for fighting: it could be used as a bludgeon. Colorful bands crisscrossed the handle: yellow, green, brown, red. It looked tribal to Doyle.

He shot a glance at the girl. She was hanging from the chain, scared, trying to climb up the dock only using her legs. The shark bit at her, just missing her toes with each strike. She was covered in sweat, eyes wild. But she wasn't dead. That was something, at least.

As Doyle watched her, a single snowflake drifted into his view. It danced on the air for a moment, turning in place, putting on a private show just for him, then the wind kicked up and blew it past him up the dock. Doyle turned to watch it and then stood in place, mouth agape in shock. The sky had opened up and the snow had started to come down, soft at first, but that wasn't what had shocked Doyle. Up the dock, standing twenty feet away, was The Outsider. It was he who had thrown the knife, of course. He who had saved the girl.

He looked like no ghost Doyle had ever heard of but there was something ghostly about him nonetheless. He was dressed all in black. A long, swirling trenchcoat covered black boots, black pants and shirt. He wore gloves and a cloth face mask under a black hat. To Doyle, he looked like Death. The Irish mobster was frozen in place as the rest of the men moved.

"There he is!" Meehan said. "Light him up!"

The submachine gun fire was deafening. Meehan and McGrath stepped forward, bringing their Tommy guns up, already firing. Doyle didn't see The Outsider move at first: one moment he was standing up the dock, the next he was gone, ducking and rolling out of the way of the gunfire. He swung off the dock and under it, into the maze of wooden planks that held the dock up.

Bullets peppered the wooden planks of the dock, splinters filling the cold air, jumping this way and that. None of the shots hit The Outsider. He was gone before they could. Doyle caught one last look at him dangling off the side of the dock, his coat wide, exposing a vest that Doyle hadn't seen at first. It was multi-colored in contrast to the rest of him, the same bold colors that adorned the handle of the knife.

Meehan and McGrath walked forward, up the dock, still firing even though they could no longer see their target. Doyle had seen the two men clean out whole rooms of people like this, wiping everyone out with a spray of gunfire but now it was doing no good. The Outsider was gone.

The two enforcers stopped: both their firing and their walk. Smoke filled the uncertain air as they looked around. Doyle also looked around, and listened, too. But there was nothing: no hint of where the ghost was.

"You hear him?" Meehan asked.

"Nah," McGrath said. "Nothing."

Behind Doyle, Tully walked cautiously towards the post. He grabbed the knife sticking through the chain with shaking hands, then took a deep breath to settle his grip. He started to pry it out of the post but it was dug in pretty good. Below him, dangling from the chain, Penelope looked up, terrified but defiant. All of a sudden, Tully stopped and let go of the knife.

"I hear something," he said.

"What?" Meehan asked.

"You can't hear bupkis, Tully!" McGrath said.

"Quiet!" Tully insisted. "It's over here, close to the edge. Think he's trying to get to the girl!"

Frantically, Tully dropped to his knees and looked over the side. The girl looked up at him still. But there was something different about her now: she was smiling. Tully frowned, cocked his head to one side quizzically like a confused dog, his mouth open.

A hand whipped out from under the dock and grabbed him by the hair. The Outsider was under the dock, hanging on, hiding. Tully screamed as The Outsider pulled him over the side and dropped him into the water. Tully wailed as he fell, splashing into the water. He kept himself up for a brief moment before he was yanked under, the shark - hungry and ready for dinner - pulling him down. More blood filled the water as Tully was eaten alive.

"Jesus, Mary, Mother of God," Meehan said.

He and McGrath raised their Tommy guns once again and fired at the edge of the dock. Doyle dropped to the floor, getting out of the way as fast as he could. Gunfire pelted the edge of the dock and just above Penelope's head. She screamed as bullets ricocheted off the chain just above her bound hands. One chink in the chain started to give way and the girl desperately grabbed above it, trying to hold on.

After a moment, the two enforcers stopped firing. The Outsider was gone once again. Their show of masculinity was worthless, an empty display.

Meehan turned and walked up the dock, stepping lightly, quietly. McGrath stayed where he was, at the edge of the dock now. Doyle kept his head to the dock - head covered with his hands, one eye peeled on the madness around him - not wanting to get in the way, not wanting to get shot.

McGrath looked over the side, more cautiously than Tully. The shark was gone, taking Tully with it. McGrath smiled despite the situation. Penelope had her legs wrapped around the post now and was trying to climb up the dock.

Meehan continued to walk up the dock, keeping his eyes to the ground, watching for movement. His efforts paid off: he saw a black shape move quickly through one of the numerous bullet holes in the wooden planks.

"I got him!" he said.

McGrath stood up, whirled around, Tommy gun at the ready. But The Outsider was already on the dock now, sure-footed, fists at the ready. He dealt a wicked right hook into Meehan's face. The gangster reeled back, dropping his weapon. It clattered to the ground and rolled off the side, dropping into the water.

The Outsider kept on the other side of Meehan, keeping the man between himself and McGrath, and dealt punch after punch into the body and face of the man. McGrath was aiming but didn't want to hit his friend.

"Drop!" McGrath shouted. "Give me a clear shot!"

The Outsider suddenly danced around Meehan, putting himself between the two enforcers. McGrath smiled wide. He had a clear shot. As he put pressure on the trigger, The Outsider actually turned to

regard him for a moment. Then the gunfire erupted out of the Tommy gun.

Doyle, who had a good vantage point on the situation from the ground, saw what happened, even though it all went by so fast. The Outsider dropped to the ground just as McGrath fired, getting out of the way of the gunfire. The bullets beat a path out of the weapon to their target. But their target was gone and all they found was Meehan.

The man was pummeled with machine gun fire, at least ten rounds, and the toothpick in his mouth dropped to the dock. A moment later, he did the same thing, dead before his head hit the ground. The Outsider was gone again, out of sight.

"Oh, shoot," McGrath said. "Jesus."

He took a few steps forward, concern for his friend overriding his judgment. He didn't get far. As the snow started to fall a little more heavily, The Outsider swung from under the dock once again, this time on the opposite side, and caught McGrath with a hard right across the face. McGrath teetered on his feet for a moment but didn't fall over. A left uppercut from the Outsider made the enforcer drop his Tommy gun but he still maintained his footing. His face smeared with blood from his now-crooked nose, McGrath growled in anger and came at The Outsider.

The spectre dodged out of the way with ease and countered with a devastating body blow. McGrath had the wind knocked out of him but he kept coming, kicking out wildly with his right leg and managing to knock The Outsider off balance for a moment. It wouldn't last long, he knew, so he followed that up with a hard right, connecting with the spectre's face.

To Doyle, watching from the ground, it looked like the man was hitting stone. The punch connected, yes, but there was no give. Doyle didn't know if The Outsider was some kind of supernatural being or if he just knew how to take a punch. Either way, he was a formidable opponent.

The Outsider delivered a kick to the inside of McGrath's left leg. There was a sickening crack as something broke there and McGrath screamed out in pain. The spectre delivered a shattering left to McGrath's mouth, breaking several teeth: they went flying out of the enforcer's mouth with a string of blood. The man teetered on his feet once again. His hands were still up, he was still in a fighting stance but his eyes were unfocused, like he was looking off into the water and concentrating on the crashing waves way out there.

The Outsider looked at him for a moment, then dropped his own fighting stance. He reached out and simply pushed McGrath in the chest. The enforcer toppled over, falling to the ground in a heap, unconscious.

Doyle watched as the spectre took off McGrath's coat then turned him over. He produced rope from his coat and tied the man up, hands behind his back, feet as well. He slowly stood up and walked down

the dock, taking the coat with him. As he passed Doyle, he stopped, towering over the small man on the floor.

"You're not gonna give me any trouble, are you?" he asked.

Doyle shook his head.

"Turn over," The Outsider said.

Doyle did as he was told and rolled over onto his back. The Outsider wasn't too tall - just over six feet, Doyle estimated - but he was imposing. He cut a striking visage standing over Doyle, incredibly strong and more than a little scary.

"You had a chance to throw the girl over the side," he said, "but you didn't."

Doyle hesitated. He looked the spectre up and down, taking in every little detail that he could. The multi-colored vest definitely matched the colors on the handle of the knife. It looked old and worn, as if it had been passed down through decades at the very least. Doyle saw hidden pockets that one would only be able to see this close up. What did this spectre carry in those pockets, Doyle wondered.

"Well?" The Outsider asked.

"What?" Doyle said. "Oh, yeah, I couldn't do it. Couldn't throw the girl off the side."

The Outsider nodded.

"Lose your gun," he said.

Doyle reached for his pistol.

"Carefully," The Outsider said.

Doyle pulled the gun slowly out of his jacket and tossed it over the side of the dock and into the water. The Outsider pointed at him. Behind him, the snow continued to cascade down. It was mighty cold out.

"Stay there," he ordered. "Don't give me any trouble, now."

Doyle nodded. The Outsider walked the rest of the way down the dock until he reached the post. Taking hold of the chain with one hand, he worked on the knife with the other, pulling it free after a moment. Doyle watched as the spectre sheathed the knife in a hidden holster attached to his right shin. He pulled on the chain and leaned out, a hand extended over the side.

A moment later, he had the girl, who had been slowly making her way up the pole. She looked awful - her hair and face a mess, her nails all broken and splintered, her legs scratched up from the climb, her whole body shivering and her teeth chattering from the intense cold - but she was alive. So very alive.

The Outsider picked the handcuffs with a small tool, freeing her shaking, swollen hands. After that, he put McGrath's coat around her. Immediately, she wrapped her arms around the spectre. It was awkward for a moment: The Outsider didn't pull back but he was clearly uncomfortable with the

contact. But after a moment, he relented and hugged her back. Then it was over. The girl stepped away from him.

"Thank you," she said.

The Outsider nodded. "Your name is Penelope?"

"Yes."

"There's a shelter on Freemont. Know it?"

The girl nodded.

"Good," The Outsider said. "Go there. I've made sure that there's a bed and a warm meal for you. But this isn't free, do you understand?"

Penelope reached out for him with one tender, wounded hand. "Whatever you want from me..."

The Outsider caught her hand out of the air like he was catching a snake that was about to strike. It wasn't painful but it was forceful.

"You misunderstand," he said. "You owe me your life. I've given you a new life away from these kind of people. Take it. Don't waist it. But one day I may come to collect on your debt."

Penelope nodded.

"Now go," The Outsider said.

The girl started away, up the dock. She got about half way before stopping and turning back.

"How will I know it's you?" she asked. "I mean... I imagine you don't always go around dressed like that."

"Imagine all you like," The Outsider said. "But you'll know it's me."

Penelope nodded, then escaped into the night, the coat wrapped tightly around her small frame. Doyle watched her leave. *Freemont's close, thank God*, he thought. When he looked back at The Outsider, he jumped slightly. The spectre was standing over him again. Looming over him.

"What are you going to do to me?" Doyle asked.

For a moment, The Outsider didn't answer. Doyle felt the fear clench around his heart. He had never had a heart attack before but he imagined that this was what it would feel like.

"Nothing," the Outsider said.

Doyle blew out a sigh of relief. He sat up and cradled his face in his hands.

"Thank you," he said.

"Don't thank me!" The Outsider said.

He grabbed Doyle by the neck of his shirt and hauled him to his feet. He pushed his black, cloth, featureless face close to Doyle's. The Irish mobster was scared once again.

"Mob scum," The Outsider said. "I want you to deliver a message to your boss, Coll. I want you to

tell him that I know what he did to that colored family in the Heights. I know about his little collection. I want you to tell him that."

"Okay," Doyle said. "All right!"

"And I want you to tell him that I'm coming for him. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Now go. Police will be here soon and, sometimes, they're worse than your lot."

And he let go of the man. Doyle stumbled back a few feet, still not taking his eyes off the spectre. Then he was off, not running but certainly moving fast, up the dock, towards his own car, parked a little ways down. He reached the end of the dock and turned back to look one last time at The Outsider. But the ghost was gone, blown away with the snow as it started to come down harder now.

Swallowed up by the shadows.

To Be Continued...

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