

CHAPTER 1

It is amazing that a ringtone can sometimes be as alarming as a grenade tossed through a window.

Frankie cracks an eye as his cell-phone insistently rings for the third time. He checks the clock on the bed-stand. Three forty nine. It is still quite dark.

“Who the hell is that?” he mutters to himself, as he props himself up on an elbow and puts the phone to his ear.

“Is this Frank Fiore?” a voice asks.

“Who’s this?” asks Frankie suspiciously; not recognizing the voice.

“Sorry to wake you so early. My name is Jim Vangall. I’m an orderly at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility hospital in Ossining New York.”

“I’m familiar with it.” Frankie says. “What’s this about, at four in the morning?” he asks.

“Mister Fiore, we have an inmate here by the name of Aloysius Rollo who’s been asking for you. He gave me your number to call.”

An alarm immediately goes off in Frankie’s head. He hadn’t heard from or seen Biff since he got out of Rikers,

“Biff, yeah I know Biff. He asked for me, hah? Something wrong? It’s been a while since I talked to him, why did he ask for me?”

“I don’t know all the details, but they told me he’s in a bad way, what I mean is... it’s like a last request. The doctor here doesn’t think he’s going to be around too much longer.”

Frankie swallows hard to overcome the lump in his throat. “Who else did you call?” he asks.

There is a moment of silence on the phone. "Who else did I call?" asks Vangall.

"Yeah, who else did he ask ya to call?" insists Frankie.

"Nobody, he just asked for you."

Frankie searches for his voice. "How long has he got?" he manages.

"The doctor doesn't know exactly, he said it could be any time," says Vangall

"If I come up there, how do I find him---Biff---mister Rollo?" asks Frankie

"Just ask for him by name at the front reception desk and give them this number. Do you have a pen?"

"Yeah, hold on a second," says Frankie as he scrambles for a pen. Vangall then reads Biff's prison number to Frankie and hangs up.

Frankie sits up on his bed and digests the content of the call. It has been almost two years since he last talked to Biff, and truth be told, he hadn't thought very much about him in that time. He had too much going on in his own life, he tells himself, especially his eighteen months at Rikers. He can't control the visions racing through his head, though, visions of the recent past, of his time with Biff and the strong impressions this man has left on his life. Biff taught him more about life than even his own father, not to mention that he saved Peggy and Jana's lives, as well as his, in the showdown with Sonny and Max.

Frankie logs onto his laptop and searches the airlines for a flight to an airport near Sing Sing leaving from Raleigh. He decides the best he can do is book to JFK and rent a car for the thirty mile drive to Ossining. That being taken care of, he books a Hampton Inn for four nights close to the facility. He logs off, shuts down the computer and checks his watch--- almost five

o'clock. He punches in a number on his cell-phone---at the other end a sleepy voice greets him.

"Frankie?"

"Yeah. Good morning, Peg. Sorry to wake you so early, hon, but something important came up."

"Something wrong?" Peggy asks.

"Yeah, but not something I didn't expect," Frankie says. "It's Biff. It sounds like he's ready to check out.---I wanna be there before he does."

"I'm so sorry to hear that. Who called you?"

"Some intern from the hospital up there. Biff asked him to call me."

"Who else is going to be there?"

"Nobody." says Frankie

Peggy sounds surprised. "Nobody?" she asks.

"That's right, he didn't ask that anybody else be there," says Frankie, his voice cracking.

"Oh, Frankie, I'm so sorry. Do you want me to go with you?"

"Thanks, but no. This is something I need to do myself---besides you have your job and Jana to worry about. I already made reservations. I'm gonna leave for Raleigh around seven, the flight is at eight-fifty."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I guess that's up to Biff."

Frankie checks his watch.

"I'm gonna hafta run babe, if I'm gonna make that flight. Tell Jana goodbye for me."

"I will, Frankie."

"See you soon, babe... Love ya."

"Love you too," says Peggy.

The rush hour hasn't yet begun, and the roads are empty as Frankie gets on I-540 toward Raleigh's RDU airport as morning dawns. He ponders the toll, cancer has probably taken on Biff's body. How will he look? He recalls how he already looked drawn and thin when he last saw him. Will he be able to hide his feelings?

Raleigh airport is relatively quiet when he arrives. He parks his Caddy in the airport lot and takes the shuttle to terminal 2 for his Delta flight to JFK.

The line through security is short and goes quickly. His flight is scheduled to take off on time.

Frankie buckles up for the one hour and ten minute flight to Kennedy airport in New York. He lays back on the headrest and closes his eyes, trying to relax, but the unconscious mind won't let him. Scenes of his time with Biff, when they both worked collections for Jimmy Provitera permeates his thinking. Frankie quickly learned and it was Biff who taught him, that in contemporary crime organizations, when money is involved, there is no such thing as honor among thieves, although the word honor is often thrown around. Frankie recalls how his father, Louie, had warned him about Jimmy. He winces now when he thinks of the scars that Louie bears for protecting him when he was on the run and Jimmy was hunting for him. The only good thing that came out of his days with Jimmy was finding Dunnville North Carolina, and the best of that was finding Peggy and her daughter, Jana.