

Detective Sergeant James “Jimmy” Cole

The warm embrace of his soothing dream made the first stinging slap of awareness that much more jarring. Or maybe it was just that he’d been “awakened” by a bucket of cold saltwater to the face. Given the softening up he’d already received, that was just like pouring salt... Jimmy stopped himself; pursuing this line of thought was exactly what they must be hoping he’d do.

No, he needed to focus. Go through the facts. He let out a small breath and tried not to think about the stinging pain. Ok, first off, it was obvious now that his predicament was not just a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. No, this was much worse. The thick, no-necked goons cracking their knuckles and putting on a pretty big show of preparing for the next little scene in this farce were obviously here under orders.

Amid surroundings shrouded in darkness, a bright, narrowly focused light nearly blinded him. The light was unavoidable, coming as it did from opposite the door, squarely in the center of the limited field of vision his nearly immobilized head afforded him. Whoever had ordered him grabbed must want something big. Big enough to warrant this special treatment and his relocation to someplace remote enough that the goons would have all the time in the world to do their work.

No help was coming for him, if anyone even knew he was missing. Even if someone did and was in the mood to

help out, just one insider could keep a lid on the whole scheme. With the money they had to be throwing around to get this done, there had to be at least one “someone” inside.

After all, Jimmy had no illusions about the Boston police force. There was no shortage of dirty cops who needed a fix, or were in with the bookies, or were simply greedy little bastards. Nope, this time Detective Sergeant James Cole was on his own. Or would be, for as long as it took his captors to decide he didn’t know whatever it was they would shortly be asking about.

And that brought up the next question. *Did* he know what they were going to ask about? A betting man might say, “Look at the most recent cases you’ve been working on.” Of the half a dozen odd cases he’d picked up in the previous week, the Carmody murder was the standout. A mob hit on a high-ranking member of the Gustin Gang.

It looked good from that angle, but Jimmy liked to consider all the angles, and that’s when the cracks started showing. This kind of response—a private, out-of-the-way location, some serious manpower, and, no doubt, a confab with the other families about the kidnap and murder of a cop—took considerable time and effort. Not the kind of thing that’d be thrown together over the weekend. And really, the Carmody murder wasn’t anything mysterious. All the players knew what had happened; there was very little Jimmy could add that they didn’t already know.

So, he started thinking about his other cases. He’d had dozens of run-ins with upward of a hundred mobsters

from a score of different families throughout his years on the force. It came with the job. Oh sure, some cops took a payoff. (Who was he kidding? Most did.) Still, if you took the job, you took the risk.

But there used to be an understanding. They tried not to kill cops, especially those not on the take. 'Cause that brought attention from the Feds. And everyone in Boston, cops and robbers alike, agreed that they didn't want the Washington pencil-pushers nosing around in their business. So, whatever this was had to be pretty darn important for them to risk having the Feds crawling around in their business. The way Jimmy saw it, it would have been easier for them to buy everyone's silence or, if absolutely necessary, "off" a couple of witnesses.

Ok, while he'd been busy running over the basics in his head, a new playmate had shown up. The bullyboys in front of him had done a pretty good job of covering up the newcomer's presence, but something in the air had changed. Maybe it was that the thugs were no longer quite as confident of their role in this little play, or maybe it was that, for all their muscle and weapons, they knew a predator when they saw one. Whatever the case, they'd been relegated to window dressing to the newcomer's lead actor.

They let Jimmy stew a few minutes more, trying to let the atmosphere do its job before they got down to business. Unfortunately, the wait had the opposite effect for Jimmy, whose attention to detail allowed him to figure out who he was about to meet.

First off, these were hard men, capable of committing terrible atrocities against their fellow human beings. So for them to react to the newcomer this way meant he was capable of frightening even them. Not an easy thing to do in most cases, but in this situation, where violence was taken as given, it was especially telling. Their reactions weren't those they'd have to a typical killer or assassin; those men were professionals with reputations for being cool and methodical. Whoever the newcomer was didn't fit that description. And despite what the newspapers might have the average reader believe, mad dogs were few and far between. There were, at most, three to four men who might conceivably fit the bill in the entirety of the Northeast.

While that narrowed down his choices a bit, the true giveaway was something these mobsters had done on purpose. There hadn't been a lot of traffic in the area (not really surprising given what they were about to do to him). While that gave them privacy, it also meant that he could easily hear any errant noises from within or without. Each was revealing. Inside, he'd determined that there were definitely only two goons in the room with him. And outside, the distinctive roar of a certain year and model of Indian Motorcycle allowed him put it all together. Mad dog killer who drives an Indian. He was about to be confronted by Christopher "The Chopper" Marianni. The nickname came from both his vehicle and his penchant for dismembering his victims. The Chopper was currently one

of Filippo Buccola's boys. But if the rumors were true, he was about to try and take the old man's job.

Finally, The Chopper decided Jimmy'd waited long enough. As he moved from the doorway, but before the no-necks stepped aside to let him pass, Jimmy welcomed him. "I start asking questions, and they send 'The Chopper' to deal with me," he said in as jovial a tone as he could muster.

The Chopper stopped and chuckled lightly to himself. "They told me you was a smart cop, that you didn't miss a beat. Shoulda listened to 'em." If Jimmy had any doubts about the identity of the newcomer, the voice made it obvious. The Chopper nodded at the two goons while ordering, "go on outside; don't interrupt unless it's *real* important. Got it?"

As they left, Jimmy fired off another comment: "I know Phil isn't stupid enough to order a cop killing. So, maybe this is just some freelance work. Eh, Chopper?" He let the question hang in the air. They all knew that "freelancing" was usually the precursor to a major change in mob management.

"Straight and to the point," The Chopper said, ignoring the implications and as much as affirming Jimmy's suspicions. "I like that. So here's how this'll go. You tell me everything you know about the MacCleary murders, and maybe you keep breathing a bit longer. You don't cooperate or you get cute and, well..." To punctuate his point, he pulled out a burnished silver .45 and pressed it, hard, against Jimmy's head.

Jimmy eyed the thug dangerously. Certainly his life was at stake here, but he was positive he'd die whether he talked or not. If he could get Chopper talking, maybe he'd have time to look for an out. After all, Jimmy was observant, and in addition to knowing The Chopper's reputation for brutality, he also knew the man was not noted for his great brainpower or subtlety.

"Go Spit." He'd spoken barely above a whisper, but with a deadly serious tone that both men knew and implicitly understood. Meanwhile, he prepared himself for the reaction. It happened almost immediately and was exactly what he'd expected.

The Chopper pulled the gun away from Jimmy's temple and, swinging it back quickly, cuffed him upside the head with its butt. Not particularly hard by most standards, but more than enough to get Jimmy's attention. Or it would have, if Jimmy hadn't grown up referring to that particular action as a "love tap." His old man had done it to him at least once a day until he'd left home. So it had far less effect on Jimmy than Chopper expected.

Again, Chopper reacted exactly as predicted. Tossing the gun aside, he balled up his meaty fists and went to work. With a loud "CRACK," Jimmy hit the floor, though it was difficult to say whether his head or the chair had made the louder sound.

In an instant the big man was on him and raining down blows. As it had far too many times in the past, Jimmy's mind went elsewhere to ignore the pain.

Zachariah MacCleary was the first thing he thought about. Husband, father, all-around good guy. No priors, no criminal record to speak of, not even a parking ticket. That was how the MacCleary murders had originally been brought to his desk. The beat cops who'd arrived at the scene saw the body lying on the floor in the living room and called it in.

So it was Jimmy who first saw that in addition to Zac, his whole family—a wife and three children—had been gunned down in cold blood. Interestingly, this had happened just after a mob shooting two blocks from their house. But both cases were several months old already. Worse, both cases had gone cold, as most mob-related killings do in Northie. As far as Jimmy knew, no one outside himself was interested in trying to solve them.

It had all begun with the earlier murder in Northie. (Actually, there had been over a dozen murders, but most were of bystanders who'd just been in the wrong place when a rival gang decided to spray a storefront with bullets.) As far as that case had gone, all the loose ends were tied up. Or at least, as well as they could be, given that no one in Northie would talk to the cops about it.

Jimmy hadn't caught that case, but you'd have to live under a rock not to have heard about it. He didn't get involved till the next day.

The beat cops had been alerted by some of MacClearys' neighbors (who wished to remain anonymous) when they saw him lying on the living room floor. Most

folks just assumed the family had been caught in the crossfire of the first shooting somehow.

But when Jimmy started looking around, he noticed some odd things that didn't make sense. For instance, the family was murdered just hours after the mob hit, and their killing's style had all the same earmarks. So his best guess was the killer or killers had waited in their house after the first hit, while cops were looking around the area, and then once the cops had moved on, had killed them all.

At the scene, officers told him they thought the killer had waited for Zac to get home. When Jimmy had asked why, one of the officers proffered the suggestion that, perhaps, he was looking for a getaway vehicle. But it didn't make sense. Even though his keys were missing, why take the risk? The killer must have already known he'd need a vehicle. Why not have one already waiting? And even if the getaway vehicle stopped working, he'd have been far better off just grabbing one he found while fleeing.

No, as far as Jimmy was concerned, it'd be sheer stupidity to wait around for a few hours in the exact place the cops would be looking for you. Especially while you were holding hostages, any one of whom could escape and bring the cops right to you. Even if, as some had suggested, the killer was holding the kids hostage to keep Mrs. MacCleary in line, having her throw off any suspicions by answering the door as if nothing were wrong, it still seemed pretty flimsy. There were simply a dozen or more plans that were simpler and posed less risk. And yet, here was a murdered family.

In the end, nothing had come of it: no arrests, not even any suspects. The best he could do was follow up on some vague rumors tying the original hit to Frank Morelli and the Providence mob. And now, after it seemed there'd never be any resolution, The Chopper was here to heat things back up.

After what felt like an eternity, Chopper had spent himself. Jimmy noted with some interest that time, it seemed, was catching up with the "mad dog." Well, time and a slight limp from some earlier fight.

Chopper lifted him back upright, the chair creaking significantly as he did so. Coughing a bit, Jimmy started right where he'd left off, as though the beating had had no effect on him. "You must really want this information badly," he said offhandedly. "Now, I might be tempted to believe you were just some concerned citizen trying to do what was right by that poor family. But we all know that you're in deep enough that you already know who pulled the trigger, and probably who ordered it, too." He continued almost as if he were speaking to himself. "So if you wanted to do right by these folks, you'd have already done it."

Chopper, who had no talent for talking things out, found that, despite their positions, he no longer had control over this interrogation. To try to regain the upper hand, he used the only tool in his kit, punching Jimmy in the mouth as hard as he was able.

Again, Jimmy and the chair went down. Though unbeknownst to Chopper, this time the chair had a little

help, as Jimmy rolled with the punch to minimize the impact.

While picking him back up, Chopper said dangerously, “You shouldn’t oughta get me angry—you might not survive it.” After that he stepped back, and Jimmy was able to get a short but good look at the expression on his face. He was frustrated, angry, and feeling helpless. For the first time in his life, this wasn’t going his way, and he didn’t like the feeling. That was something Jimmy could use.

“Now, where was we?” said Chopper, trying desperately to salvage his plan. Jimmy, who wasn’t the least bit intimidated despite the bruises and blood, responded, “I believe we were discussing why you needed this information so badly. As I said, it wasn’t because you wanted to do right by the MacClearys, or that would have already happened. And it’s also not because you’re trying to tie up loose ends. After all, neither your name nor your boss’s ever came up. Quite the opposite, in fact. I heard Frank Morelli was behind it.

“So, given there’s no love lost between Frank and Phil, you’d really have no reason to be asking about this. Unless...” Jimmy trailed off as his mind began working its way through the information he’d just gleaned.

It was possible Chopper was trying to get in good with Morelli. Maybe he believed Frank was going to come out on top in the end and decided to switch sides. Problem was, this wasn’t a very good way to get in with Morelli, since the case was already cold, it was doubtful he’d ever be prosecuted for it.

But what if he wanted to use this against Phil? After all, children had been murdered in Northie (Phil's back yard). If word got out that he was now whacking innocents, it would seriously damage his reputation. The light turned on in his brain as Jimmy looked over at Chopper. "You want to know what I have so you can use it to pin this on Phil. You're going to..." Jimmy never got a chance to finish, as Chopper bull-rushed him, slamming into him with his whole body. Having been unable to prepare, Jimmy went down hard.

His head reeling, he vaguely realized he was in serious trouble as he briefly, and gravely, considered whether he'd just suffered a concussion. The entire attack was surreal. Disoriented, Jimmy tried to make sense of what was happening beyond the fact that he was confused. His arms were splayed out at his sides, and it occurred to him that the chair he'd been sitting in was broken, but he couldn't figure out how capitalize on that. Somewhere above him a dark figure loomed, but Jimmy couldn't will himself to stand up to meet it.

Back in reality, Chopper had finally lost his patience. This whole thing had been a huge waste of time. Not only had he learned nothing from this cop, but somehow the cop had learned everything about his own plan. But there was a way out. Chopper had always planned to put Jimmy in Phil's pocket. Killing the cop just meant one less witness around who could finger him.

Looking around the darkened warehouse, Chopper found the gun he'd thrown down earlier. He briefly

glanced over at the cop, who was still lying on the floor, nearly unconscious, before turning back to the gun. Pulling the slide back slightly to ensure it was loaded, he called back over his shoulder, "Time to end this, Jimmy."

...