

PROLOGUE

10:11 p.m. Sunday, 28th October

By nightfall, the heavy rain in New York City had become a faint drizzle. A thin veil of tiny droplets whipped in the vigorous, whistling winds. The interior of the Corvette had the entombed potency of smoky birch-tar leather and sour damp. In the peacefulness of the nighttime drive, Herrick continued to fidget in the passenger seat. The cocaine chased through his bloodstream and kept him somewhere between lucidity and delirium. Though his mind was racing with the memories of his latest and by far his greatest sin, Herrick somehow remained in heavy slumber. His eyelids gradually fluttered open as the noise of the great city gently surrounded him again. Herrick remained still and dozily transfixed on the stream of lights emerging from the distant end of the bridge. The soft lights cascaded over the windshield and out of sight, like flares shot over the distant horizon.

The low and unsteady hiss of the car's radio static gave the impression of a tidal ebb, swaying him to rest with its hypnotic and fizzy rhythm. The Corvette crossed over to Manhattan.

Downtown was surprisingly quiet. Even for a Sunday night, the eerie stillness was strange for the city that never slept. Herrick looked out his passenger window, moving his gaze across the broad panorama of silent, dark streets. There was barely anyone to be seen.

The longer he contemplated the chaos of the night and sat stained in blood, the greater the need he had to throw up and cry. Luckily for

his driver, Herrick was running dry on all accounts and quite simply had nothing left to bring up. *So much for New York's finest.*

"Where are we headed?" Herrick asked.

"North," the driver eventually replied, coolly focused on the road ahead.

"How long till we get there?"

"A little over an hour if we're lucky. And we ain't stopping till we get you out of the city."

Herrick closed his eyes again in an attempt to preserve his energy for the confinement of his new limbo.

The rising buzz and crackle of the car's radio slowly grew in volume as the driver twisted the dial-up. Herrick suddenly opened his eyes. A high-pitched, tinny female voice filled the car's interior and progressively became clearer and louder through the noise of shifting frequencies.

“. . . That the New York Police Department confirmed that Lucio Tetro was one of seven bodies found murdered in cold blood tonight in his place of residence here in Long Island. Along with the other five bodies that are yet to be identified by the authorities, his six-year-old daughter Patience Tetro was among the victims in this tragic attack. Reasons for the murder of the Italian industrialist, who earlier this year was under FBI investigation for drug trafficking allegations through Tetro Industries, remain unclear. We'll be bringing you more. . .”

The driver turned the volume back down to a faint, inaudible crackle as he looked over at his passenger's twitching leg. "You need to stay calm."

He couldn't. Herrick began to think about the two-year operation he and Captain Calvor had just abruptly ended. *All that hard work for*

what? Did we even get justice? He felt his chest rise and fall with more speed. He focused again on his breathing, taking comfort that it was in his captain's best interest to hide him away from the Tetro family, and the NYPD, before burying the case. No one would be looking for Herrick. Not by name, anyway. It was time to bury his head in the sand and wait.

He remained aimlessly staring out his side window as they left uptown and turned onto the I-87 highway. The dizzying, urban heights of the city gradually became the open sprawl of the countryside.

"Where are we going, exactly?"

"The Witch's Hole," The driver replied ominously, never taking his eyes from the road.

Herrick became increasingly paranoid. In his mind, the nightmarish vision of both the law and the mob loomed ahead of his getaway. "End of the line for me, right?"

"Not quite," The driver replied with a sly smirk. "We'll hang there for a spell and carry on once the coast is clear."

Herrick took a gulp, in yet another attempt to swallow the eternal drip in the back of his dry throat. He tried to control his heaving chest with long and steady breaths, focusing on the natural rhythms around him: the steady, humming purr of the car engine, the low whooshing sounds of passing objects, and the gentle airy pops of the rain pattering on the glass. He drew in a long and steady breath every three seconds, following the cadence of the rubber blades that swept across the front windshield with whooshing sounds. Herrick looked suddenly to his driver with newfound dread. *Tetro's men got me. I'm a dead man.*