

## Chapter 1

### **The Barrel Mystery**

The room felt like the bottom of a grave. It was damp, low ceilinged, windowless and – on this raw-boned New York night – as chilly and unwelcoming as a policeman’s stare.

Outside, on Prince Street in the heart of Little Italy, a fine drizzle slanted down to puddle amid the piles of rotting garbage strewn along the edges of the road, leaving the cobbles treacherous and greasy. Inside, beneath a hoarding advertising lager beer, a featureless cheap working men’s saloon stretched deep into the bowels of a dingy tenement. At this late hour – it was past three on the morning of 14 April 1903 – the tavern was shuttered– up and silent. But in the shadows at the far end of the bar stood a rough-hewn, tight– closed door. And in the room behind that door, Benedetto Madonia sat eating his last supper.

The place was advertised as a spaghetti restaurant, but it was in truth an eating–house of the most basic sort. An old stove squatted against one wall, belching fumes. Musty strings of garlic dangled from the walls, mingling their stale odour with the smell of boiling vegetables. The remaining fittings consisted of several rough, low tables, a

handful of ancient chairs, and a rusting iron sink that jutted from a corner of the room. Gas lamps spewed out mustard light, and the naked floorboards had been scattered with cedar sawdust, which, at the end of a busy day, coagulated in a thick mix of spit, onion-skins, and the butts of dark Italian cigars.

Madonia dug hungrily into a stew of beans, beets and potatoes, hearty peasant food from his home province of Palermo. He was a powerfully built man of average height, handsome after the fashion of the time with a high forehead, chestnut eyes and a wave of thick brown hair. A large moustache, carefully waxed until it tapered to points, offset the sharp slash of his Roman nose. He dressed better than most working men, wearing a suit, high collar, tie and well-soled shoes – all signs of some prosperity. Exactly how he earned his money, though, was scarcely obvious. If asked, Madonia claimed to be a stonemason. But even a casual observer could see that this was a man unused to manual labour. His 43-year-old body had begun to sag, and his soft hands – neatly manicured – bore no trace of an artisan's calluses.

After a while the solitary diner, sated, thrust his bowl aside and glanced across the room to where a handful of companions lounged against one wall. Like him, they spoke Sicilian – a dialect so rich in words drawn from Spanish, Greek and Arabic that it was scarcely intelligible, even to other Italians – and, like him, the jewellery and the clothes they wore were quite at odds with their supposed professions: labourer, farmer, clothes presser. Yet there was no mistaking the fact that Madonia was an outsider here.

Immigrants though all those in the restaurant were, the others had become New Yorkers, and now felt quite at home amid the teeming streets of the Italian colony. Madonia, on

the other hand, had first come to Manhattan just a week ago, and still barely knew the city. He found it disconcerting that he required an escort to find his way round Little Italy. Worse, he was growing increasingly alarmed at the way these men he barely knew muttered together in low voices, and spoke so elliptically that he could not grasp the meaning of their words.

Madonia had little chance to grapple with this mystery. The Sicilian had barely finished his meal when, with a click that echoed loudly through the room, the solitary door into the restaurant swung open and a second group of men appeared. In the sickly flicker of the gaslight Madonia made out the face of one he knew: Tomasso Petto, an oval-faced hulk of muscle and menace whose broad chest, strong arms and limited intelligence had won him the nickname of 'The Ox'. Behind him, another figure lurked, silhouetted momentarily against one wall of the saloon. It was that of a man of slender build and middling height, his eyes twin drops of jet, like black holes bored into his skull. The newcomer's face was expressionless and gaunt, his skin rough, his chin and cheeks unshaven. He wore his moustache ragged, like a brigand's.

The Ox stepped instinctively aside, allowing the slight figure to step into the room. As he did so, a spasm of anxiety ran through the other figures in the restaurant. This was their leader, and they showed him fearful deference. Not one of the half-dozen others present dared to return his gaze directly.

Madonia himself was not immune to the terror that the black-eyed man inspired. The newcomer's voice, when he spoke, was parched, his gestures undemonstrative and

minimal. Above all, there was the disconcerting way he kept the right side of his body swathed in a voluminous brown shawl. The arm that he kept hidden, was – Madonia knew – appallingly deformed. The forearm itself was stunted, no more than half the length of any normal man's. Worse still, its hand was nothing but a claw. It lacked, from birth, the thumb and first four of its fingers. Only the little finger, useless on its own, remained, like the cruel joke of some uncaring deity. Black eyes' name was Giuseppe Morello, but his maimed appendage had earned him the nickname 'Clutch' or 'The Clutch Hand.'

Morello wasted little time on ceremony. A single gesture from his good left hand sufficed; two of the men who had been lounging along the wall jerked up and pinioned Madonia, each seizing an arm as they dragged the diner to his feet. Their prisoner struggled briefly but without effect; grasped none too gently by his wrists and shoulders, he had no chance of escape. To shout out was hopeless; the room was too far from the sidewalk for even a full-blown scream of terror to be audible. Half standing, half supported by his captors, he writhed helplessly as the black eyed man approached.

Exactly what passed between Madonia and the Clutch Hand is uncertain. There may have been a brief but angry conversation. Most likely the word *nemico*, enemy, was used. Perhaps Madonia – aware, far too late, of the lethal danger he was in – begged uselessly for mercy. If so, his words had no effect. Another gesture from the black eyed man, and the two associates restraining the prisoner dragged him swiftly across the floor towards the rusty sink. A rough hand seized Madonia by the hair, yanking his head back and exposing his throat. At this, a third man lunged forward wielding a stiletto – a thin–

bladed dagger, honed to razor sharpness and some 14 inches long. A second's pause, to gauge angle and distance, and the blade was thrust home, sideways on, above the Adam's apple.

The blow was struck with such brutal strength that it pierced Madonia's windpipe front to back and continued on till it struck bone. The men holding the captive felt his frame collapse, limbs rubbery and unresponsive, as the weapon was withdrawn. Using all their strength, they hauled the dying man back to his feet as Petto the Ox stepped up, his own knife in his hand. A single sweeping slash from left to right, so fierce it cut right through Madonia's thick three-ply linen collar, severed both throat and jugular vein, all but beheading the prisoner.

Shocking though this violence was, it was premeditated. As life left Madonia in gouts, the men gripping his arms forced his head over the sink so that each succeeding pulse of blood drummed against the iron and gurgled down into the drains. The little that escaped fell onto the victim's clothes or was soaked up by the sawdust underfoot. None reached the floorboards to stain them and leave lasting evidence of the crime.

It took a minute, maybe more, for the awful flow of blood to ebb. As it did, thick fingers reached around Madonia's gashed neck and tied a square of gunnysack around his throat. The coarse fabric absorbed the dying trickle from the wounds as the corpse was doubled, lifted bodily, and carried to the centre of the room. There other hands had dragged a barrel, three feet high, of the sort supplied by wholesalers to New York's stores. A layer

of muck and sawdust, scooped up from the floor, had been spread inside to absorb any remaining blood, and the dead man's body was forced with uncaring savagery inside.

One arm and a leg projected from the barrel, but that was immaterial; Morello and his men had no interest in concealing the body. Madonia's corpse was meant to be discovered, and the savage wounds it bore were a deterrent. Still, there was no point in chancing premature detection. An old overcoat, its labels carefully removed, was spread over the protruding limbs and the barrel wrestled and manoeuvred back into the saloon and thence through a door that opened on an alley. A decrepit one-horse covered wagon stood there, waiting in the darkness. Several of the Sicilians combined their strength and heaved their burden onto it; two men, hunched now in heavy cloaks, climbed on. And, with a creak of springs and clop of hooves, Benedetto Madonia embarked upon his final journey.

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An hour or so later, shortly after dawn, a cleaning woman by the name of Frances Connors left her apartment on the East Side and set off to the nearest bakery to buy rolls.

Her neighbourhood was desperately impoverished. Connors's tenement stood between a failing livery stable, its business proclaimed in peeling paint, and a collapsing row of hoardings buttressed with iron scrap. To her right, as she turned out of her apartment, the East River slopped a tide of stinking effluent against crumbling wharfs. To her left, a warehouse full of cackling poultry leaned hard against a factory. And directly ahead,

where East 11<sup>th</sup> Street met Avenue D, her route to the nearest bakery took her past the scarred exterior of Mallet & Handle's lumberyard.

Mallet & Handle's was just as filthy and decrepit as East 11<sup>th</sup> Street itself. The yard smelled sourly of refuse, and its walls were pocked with unwashed windows swathed protectively in chicken wire. Most days deliveries piled up haphazardly outside, forcing passers-by to pick their way through ragged piles of timber. This morning, though, another obstacle blocked Connors's path. A barrel, covered with an overcoat, sat squarely in the middle of the pavement.

The lights were coming on in nearby tenements and the rain had all but ceased, but it was still too early for the stevedores and sweatshop workers of the neighbourhood to be about. No-one saw Mrs Connors chance upon the barrel. No-one watched her size up the obstruction, or lift a corner of the cloth to peer inside. They heard the Irishwoman, though. What Connors saw brought a scream to her lips so full of terror that heads came thrusting out of windows up and down the street. The cleaner had exposed the right arm and the left leg of a corpse. And below them, peering out from sawdust dark with blood, a face with a high forehead, chestnut eyes and thick brown hair.

Connors's cries brought the local watchman running. He, in turn, ran for the police.

Patrolman John Winters, who hastened up from his post nearby, pulled away the coat and saw at once the man in the barrel was dead; his gashed throat and the chalk pallor of his skin was proof of that. Long blasts on the policeman's whistle brought reinforcements

rushing to the scene. One man was sent to phone the men of the Detective Bureau while the others set about examining their find.

It was a horrific job. Everything that Winters touched was sticky with gore; the face and body of the dead man were spattered, the clothes saturated; blood oozed between the barrel's staves. But there was little to show how the corpse had found its way to East 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Rain had wiped out traces of the covered wagon's journey; footprints had dissolved to mud, cart tracks had been obliterated. And though Sergeant Bauer, of the Union Street station house, had passed the lumber yard at 5.15am, and was quite certain that the barrel had not been present then, door-to-door enquiries along both sides of the street failed to reveal a single person who had seen the wagon as it rumbled down the street, or had any idea how it could have been unloaded by Mallet & Handle's without anybody noticing.

Forensic science was still in its infancy in turn-of-the-century Manhattan; fingerprinting, just introduced by Scotland Yard, had yet to be adopted by the NYPD, and the notion of preserving a crime scene was unheard of. Not bothering to wait for the detectives of the 14<sup>th</sup> Precinct to appear, Winters prised Madonia's body from the barrel – a difficult job, as it was wedged firmly inside – and stretched it out amid the puddles to examine it for further clues. No effort was made to protect the body from the elements, but the patrolman did observe two details of importance: the coat that had covered the barrel was only slightly wet, despite the drizzle of that night, and the body beneath it remained warm to the touch. Plainly the butchered corpse had been abandoned only recently, and man himself had not been dead for long.

It was left to Detective Sergeant Arthur Carey to start a systematic search. Carey – the first policeman with experience of murder to reach the spot – tagged the contents of Madonia’s pockets; they consisted of a crucifix, a date stamp, a solitary one-cent coin and several handkerchiefs, one of them, small and drenched with perfume, evidently a woman’s. A watch chain dangled from the corpse’s waistcoat, but the watch was gone; there was no wallet, and no name sewn anywhere into the clothing. Even the labels in the victim’s underwear had been removed. “There was,” the detective conceded, having checked, “not a scrap of information on the body to establish identification.”

Carey felt more confident in guessing the dead man’s nationality. The corpse’s looks were clearly Mediterranean. More tellingly, a brief note, written in Italian in a woman’s hand, had been found crumpled in a trouser pocket. Both earlobes had been pierced for earrings, a practice commonplace in Sicily, and the stiletto wounds on Madonia’s neck also looked bloodily familiar. In the course of his career, the detective had examined the victims of several Italian vendettas. Most likely, he concluded, the man had died in one of the murderous feuds common in Little Italy.

Not all of Carey’s colleagues were so certain; in the first hours after the murder, some officers were working on the theory the dead man might have had his throat cut by a vicious robber, or was even the victim of a deranged crime of passion. The possibility that the corpse was Greek or Syrian was also mooted. Most policemen, though, concurred with the sergeant’s swift deductions. There were, after all, dozens of murders every year in the Italian sections of the city, and most were the products of exactly the sort of deadly

feuds that Carey was so familiar with. Few cases of this type were ever solved; New York's police (nearly three-quarters of whom were Irish) did not pretend to understand what went on in Little Italy, and – faced with witnesses and suspects who rarely spoke much English and seldom sought to involve the authorities in their disputes – detectives found it almost impossible to solve even incidents in which the murderers' identities, and the reasons for the killing, were common knowledge in the immigrant community.

It was clear from the outset, though, that this murder would not go uninvestigated. The brutality of the assault, and the unprecedented circumstances of the barrel's discovery, had the makings of a great sensation; by the time Carey had concluded his initial examination, at about 6.15am, the sidewalks outside Mallet & Handle's were already clogged with gawkers who milled about in the hope of glimpsing the now shrouded body. A squad of police reserves, summoned from nearby station-houses, had to link arms to keep back a crowd that quickly swelled to several hundred people. The first newspapermen appeared as well, scrawling down their shorthand summaries of what was known about the case. Bloody murder was always front-page news.

By breakfast time, indeed, the fresh whiff of sensation had brought a gaggle of inspectors all the way up from Police Headquarters. Among the senior officers keen to reap the attendant publicity was George McClusky, the head of the Detective Bureau, who took full charge of the investigation. A tall, good-looking man, with handsome hair and thick moustaches, McClusky had served more than a decade with the Bureau, and possessed so much swagger and self-confidence that he was universally known behind his back as "Chesty George." But the Inspector's high opinion of his own abilities was not matched

by the reality. McClusky was a clumsy investigator, too certain of the rightness of his own opinions and lacking the subtlety and intuition of the best detectives. He tended to be over-hasty, too, and all too often rushed into premature arrests. A genuinely baffling case – which Arthur Carey already feared the barrel mystery would turn out to be – might easily confound him.

Fortunately for the police, Carey had already taken steps to remedy the situation. His tentative identification of the barrel victim as a Sicilian had prompted him to call for help, and within the hour it arrived in the unlikely shape of a squat man in a shapeless overcoat, his face half-hidden beneath a derby hat. The newcomer was Sergeant Joseph Petrosino, born in Padula, south of Naples, but now New York's great expert on Italian crime. Quite possibly the most recognisable officer in the entire Police Department, Petrosino was smallpox-scarred, strong-featured to the point of ugliness, and short even by the standards of the day – he stood a mere five feet three and customarily wore lifts in his shoes to augment his height. The detective's diminutive stature, though, was as deceptive as the look of blank-eyed stupidity that he often wore upon his face; the sergeant tipped the scales at close to 300 pounds, and much of that bulk was muscle. "He had," a member of the District Attorney's office who knew him well once wrote, "enormous shoulders and a bull neck, on which was placed a great round head like a summer squash. His face was pock-marked and he rarely smiled, but went methodically about his business, which was to drive Italian criminals out of the city and the country."

It took Petrosino only a few minutes to examine the yard, the body, and the handful of effects that had filled Madonia's pockets. Then he and Carey turned their attentions to the

barrel in which the dead man had been found. It had been cheaply-made, without hoops, and – now that the corpse had been removed – the detectives could see that a three-inch thickness of sawdust coated its base. Taking turns, the two men reached inside and sifted through the blood-saturated cedarwood, discovering a hairpin, onion-skins, and several black cigar butts that Petrosino said were of Italian make – detritus, the detective noted, from a restaurant floor. Carey, running a finger along the inside of the staves, felt tiny granules grind against his skin. Several lodged under his fingernail; lifting his hand to his mouth, the sergeant touched the tip against his tongue and tasted sugar. That suggested the barrel had at one time been the property of a candy store, a pastry shop or a café.

It was only as the morning brightened into daylight that the most important clue emerged. Peering for the first time at the barrel's base, Carey made out the faint marks of a stencil. There, in muted ink, he read the legend "W&T". And, stamped along the side of a stave, was a faint serial number: 'G.223.' The two detectives glanced at each other. Here at last was a lead worth following.

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New York's principal sugar refineries sat bunched together on the Long Island side of the East River, belching smoke along the waterfront. Carey spent the remainder of the morning and part of the afternoon trudging from one to another, until at last he found a factory where clerks recognised the stencil marks. W&T, the detective was told, were the initials of one of the refinery's customers: Wallace & Thompson, a grocer on Washington

Street. G.223 was the number of a recent consignment consisting of six hoopless barrels of sugar.

The man at Wallace & Thompson was just as helpful. He recalled the order and told Carey that all six barrels had already been sold. Half of the consignment had been broken up and disposed of in 10-pound lots, but the other three barrels had been sold entire.

“Have you got any Italian customers?” Carey asked.

“Only one,” replied the clerk. “Pietro Inzerillo, who has a pastry shop in Elizabeth Street.” Inzerillo had purchased two barrels of sugar for his Café Pasticerrea, a popular meeting spot for working class immigrants that stood just around the corner from the Prince Street saloon.

Sending word for Petrosino to join him, Carey hastened off to Little Italy.

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An ambulance brought Madonia’s body to the city morgue midway through the morning. The coroner’s surgeon, Dr Albert Weston, was waiting; he performed a quick, efficient autopsy, noting a physical description, listing wounds, and informing the police that their anonymous victim had died sometime between 3.30 and 4am. The examination uncovered several other clues as well. The scarcely-digested Sicilian meal that Weston

found in the man's stomach was the first firm evidence McClusky had as to Madonia's nationality and to what he had been doing at the time that he was murdered.

The autopsy complete, Weston laid the corpse on a bed of ice. In this way the remains could be preserved, at least for several weeks, while attempts were made discover its identity. Soon after lunch, the first in a long line of policemen and potential witnesses began calling at the morgue, sent there by McClusky in the hope that someone would recognise that striking face; in time, over a thousand people would file hopefully past the body. Weston even allowed a photographer from William Randolph Hearst's muck-raking *New York Journal* to snap a picture of the cadaver as it lay on the slab. That sort of thing was usually frowned on, but the *Journal*, with its screaming headlines, simple text and ample use of illustrations, boasted a larger circulation among the immigrant community than any other New York paper. By evening half a million of its readers would have seen the dead man's face. Surely one of them would recognise it.

McClusky fed Weston's information to his men. Nobody could say that the police were not making every effort to solve the case; hundreds of detectives from precincts all over the city had been pulled off their normal duties to question informants and to hunt for leads, and virtually the whole of the uniformed force was sucked into the investigation, too; even long-serving Manhattan crime reporters could scarcely remember a time when so great a proportion of police resources had been devoted to a single case. Yet by mid afternoon – Carey and Petrosino aside – not one of the NYPD's thousands of officers had come up with a worthwhile lead. The mystery man in the rickety barrel seemed to have sprung from nowhere; no-one had seen him loitering around the city, noticed anything

suspicious, or had the least idea how a well-dressed Sicilian with chestnut eyes might have come to such an awful end.

No-one, that is, but a man sitting in an anonymous Wall Street office who had glimpsed Madonia just once, the day before the murder.

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The most attentive reader of the evening papers sprawled behind a desk in Manhattan's Treasury Building, leafing with growing interest through pages dense with coverage of the barrel mystery.

William Flynn was chief of the New York bureau of the US Secret Service, which made him the most important agent in the country outside Washington. A native of Manhattan, the son of an Irish immigrant, and educated in the city's public schools, Flynn did not look much like anyone's idea of a government man. He was 36 years old and tall, close-cropped and bullet-headed, with the powerful build of the semi-professional baseball player that he had been in his twenties and a face that too much desk-work was just beginning to turn jowly. Flynn had an unlikely background for a Secret Service agent, too; he had left school at 15 to be a plumber, and later worked for several years as a warder in a New York jail. But he was a great deal cleverer than his bland looks and sausage body might suggest. In the six years since he had joined the Service, Chief Flynn had blazed such a trail through New Orleans, Washington and Pittsburgh that John Wilkie, the agency's Director, had personally selected him to tackle the toughest posting

that the Service had to offer. Now here he was on Wall Street, the US government's most senior detective.

Flynn's job was to keep the biggest city in the country free from counterfeiters and forged bills. Although best known today for bodyguarding the American President, the Secret Service was, and remains, a department of the Treasury. It had been founded, after the Civil War, at a time when nearly half of all the cash in circulation was counterfeit, and its first duty has always been to maintain robust public confidence in the value of the dollar. The agency came by its close protection role by accident – one of Flynn's predecessors in the New York office had actually been demoted for informally assigning men to guard President Cleveland – and even in 1903, after the assassination of McKinley had forced Washington to take that problem much more seriously, nine-tenths of Secret Service manpower, and practically all its budget, was devoted to the war on counterfeiting. The work demanded men of unusual ability; forgers rarely committed messy, headline-grabbing crimes, they could work from almost anywhere, and were noted for their brains. Tracking them down and procuring evidence against them called for patience, thoroughness and cunning. In all these qualities, Flynn excelled.

The counterfeiting problem in New York was particularly bad. Large quantities of fake notes and bad coins were in circulation. A few of these were first-rate forgeries; most counterfeit currency, though, consisted of badly-printed notes on poor quality paper and crudely-struck half-dollar coins and quarters. These unskilful fakes were never intended to fool bankers or Treasury men; they were put into circulation by small-time crooks known as "queer-pushers", who bought them at a discount from the men who forged

them and took their chances palming them off on harassed bartenders and shopkeepers. Queer–pushing was far easier when practised in poor immigrant districts, where crowds were dense and the locals unsophisticated. It was for this reason that counterfeiting was especially common in the Jewish and Italian enclaves of New York — and for this reason, too, that Flynn had spent the evening, a day earlier, loitering outside a butcher’s shop on Stanton Street in Little Italy.

The Secret Service had been aware ever since the spring of 1899 that Sicilian forgers were passing bad money in New York, and over the years its agents had arrested a number of queer–pushers who were agents of the gang. Half a dozen of these small fish had been convicted and given sentences of as much as six years; most recently, on New Year’s Eve 1902, a group of Italians had been caught in Yonkers passing counterfeit \$5 bills drawn on the Iron Bank of Morristown, New Jersey. Three of the members of this gang were convicted a month before the barrel murder and had gone to jail tight–lipped — much to Flynn’s frustration — refusing to reveal either the names of their suppliers or the location of their printing works.

It had taken the Secret Service 12 weeks, and a large expenditure of effort, to solve the mystery of the Morristown fives. In the end, however, long hours of covert observation and the careful cultivation of informants drew agents to a dingy butcher’s shop at 16 Stanton Street, a two–minute walk from the spaghetti restaurant where Madonia would meet his death. The store, Flynn learned, had changed hands in the first days of April. Its new owner was a large and powerful Sicilian named Vito Laduca.

The trail that had led Flynn to Stanton Street worried the Secret Service chief considerably. For one thing, the previous owner of the butcher's shop — the man who had agreed to sell the store — had vanished on the day the sale was due to be completed, and the police could find no trace of him; they were increasingly convinced he had been murdered. For another, Laduca himself had been arrested for counterfeiting some weeks earlier. He had been picked up in Pittsburgh early in January on suspicion of passing the same forged \$5 bills that were now circulating in Manhattan, and though the Pennsylvania authorities had been unable to make the charges stick, investigation had established that Laduca's New York associates were not the sort a law-abiding man would choose as friends. Some, such as the confectioner Pietro Inzerillo — whose café stood just round the corner — had no police records but were of growing interest to the Secret Service. Others were known criminals. Of these, by far the most daunting was the counterfeiters' leader, a slight man of nearly 40 from Corleone, south of Palermo. He had a criminal record on both sides of the Atlantic, having been arrested for a double murder in Sicily and in New York for forging bills. He also had a maimed right hand and jet black eyes.

William Flynn had built his reputation on a formidable ability to catch the most elusive forgers; in the course of his six-year career he had set out on the trail of dozens of counterfeiters and failed to convict only one. But Giuseppe Morello and his men had proved to be formidable adversaries. Two months earlier, in February, Flynn had asked one of his Italian informants to infiltrate the gang, but the Sicilians were clannish and shunned approaches from strangers. In March, trying a different tack, Flynn ordered a

second stool pigeon to strike up a business acquaintance with Messina Genova, who kept a store of his own a little way down Stanton Street. Giovanni La Cava, the most reliable man the Chief had in Little Italy, made the approach with an offer to sell real estate at bargain prices, but Genova haughtily rebuffed him, remarking that Sicilians had had enough of being cheated by crooks from mainland Italy. “La Cava is a good man,” Flynn wrote despairingly to Washington, “but he won’t connect with [them]. It seems next to impossible for an outsider to break into this gang.”

La Cava’s failure was a blow to Flynn, who found himself forced to resort to far more time-consuming measures to gather evidence against the counterfeiters. With no man on the inside of the group, long hours of covert observation would be needed to deduce the size and hierarchy of the gang. It was a decision that the Chief would rather not have taken; keeping watch in Little Italy was no easy task, and it placed a huge strain on his limited resources. At least three operatives were required to monitor a single location, and he had only nine agents to deploy across the whole of New York. But, beginning early that April, Flynn’s men took up positions on Stanton Street and began to take careful note of every man who went in or out of the butcher’s shop.

It was tedious and unrewarding work that required a keen eye and a memory for faces. The surveillance began each day at 8am and ran until after dark. Flynn’s agents, disguised as labourers, hung about in doorways and had to be careful not to say too much, for fear of giving themselves away in a district in which everybody spoke Italian. They rotated duties where they could, relieving each other every few hours to reduce the

chances of attracting notice and working usually in pairs, so there was a man available to tail a suspect and another to maintain the watch.

The results of the first two weeks of work were mixed. Several of the most frequent callers to the shop proved to be well known to the Secret Service; in time, with tips and help provided by informants, the operatives put names to almost a dozen members of the counterfeiting gang. But seven or eight others could not be identified, and on 13 April, after work, Flynn decided to travel up to Stanton Street himself to make a personal assessment of the situation.

It was a cold and blowy evening, threatening rain, when the Chief alighted from his streetcar on the Bowery, downtown Manhattan's great thoroughfare. Laduca's store stood several hundred yards away, down a busy street clogged with pushcarts thrust hard up against the pavements and peddlers sending up a cacophony of Sicilian slang as they hawked everything from hardware to vegetables from their stalls. Despite the weather, the sidewalk and the street were thronged with men hastening home from work and women dressed in black hunting for bargains, and everywhere there were gangs of rough-clad children, playing in between the carts or scavenging food or change that had fallen in the dirt. Flynn, cocooned in an overcoat and with his head bowed against the wind, forced his way through the crowd until he picked out the first of his agents, Operative John Henry, who was skulking against a doorway across the road from the butcher's store. Henry had been hanging around in the vicinity since 1.15pm. Now, he rapidly explained to Flynn, Morello and two of his associates were holding a discussion of some sort in Laduca's shop. A fourth Italian, a stranger Henry had not seen before, had

left the store a little earlier. He was now lounging, smoking a cigarette, against a street lamp down the street.

Flynn and Henry kept watch as the sky darkened and the conversation in the butcher's store grew more heated. They felt sure that the counterfeiters had not seen them. But, after a while, one of the men inside 16 Stanton Street broke off from the conversation and came to the door carrying a hammer and a curtain. He tacked the cloth across the entrance, barring the interior from view as the muffled voices drifting from the shop rose higher still.

Unable to see or hear anything of importance, Flynn switched his attention to the stranger smoking down the street. In the gathering twilight it was difficult to make out his face. Light from the flickering street lamp slanted down, throwing most of the Italian's features into shadow as he pulled hard on his cigarette. Still, the Chief was able to get a long look at his suit — brown, it seemed in the fading light — and profile. He felt certain he would recognise the man again.

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The evening papers, when they arrived at the Treasury Building next afternoon, led with lengthy coverage of the barrel mystery. The *Brooklyn Eagle*, the *Sun*, and the *Evening World* all reported in the same shocked tones the discovery of the body on East 11<sup>th</sup> Street and described in vivid detail the wounds that it had borne. Enterprising newsmen had sought out and interviewed Frances Connors and buttonholed Inspector McClusky,

who told them that the murder was most likely an act of vengeance. In the absence of an established motive, the rival papers speculated wildly as to who had killed the victim and why. “Death by torture seems to have been the fate of the man,” the *World* suggested, with an almost audible rubbing of hands. “There were no bruises to the body, [and] it appeared as though the man had been held by the arms and legs... This is one of the most interesting murders that has mystified New York in many years.”

Sitting alone in his office at the end of the day, Flynn leafed through these reports with interest. The detective in him enjoyed absorbing the details of the case and puzzling over what the newspapers agreed was the most baffling of its mysteries — the problem of the dead man’s identity. Beyond the likelihood that the victim was Italian, none of the dozens of journalists and the hundreds of patrolmen who had been scouring Manhattan had any real idea who he was. The *Eagle* focussed most of its attention on the torn slip of paper that had been found in the dead man’s pocket, which McClusky thought might have been a note sent to lure the man to his death, but the fragment was not much of a clue: “It was exceedingly hard, because of the fact that it was blurred, bloody and burned, to decipher the writing,” the newspaper confessed. Only the *Mail and Express* had come up with anything more promising. “An employee of the Street Cleaning Department, named Zido, called at the station and saw the body,” it informed its readers. “He said it looked like a man whom he had seen peddling fish on the East Side.” But Zido was the only man among several hundred East Siders, sent by the police to shuffle past the cadaver, who thought he recognised that face. “Twenty hours of zealous searching by three sets of detectives and by many reporters have failed to reveal any clue to the identity of the murdered man,” confirmed the *Evening World*.

Thus far, Flynn had no reason to suppose that the barrel victim, found on an Irish East Side street, had any connection to his own investigation. It was only when the Chief opened that day's *New York Journal* that he sat up with a start. Hearst's daily had secured the only photograph of the dead man lying on the slab. Its picture had been hurriedly composed and poorly shot – it had been snatched from a low angle and showed the corpse's face only in profile. But there was something deeply familiar about those features.

Flynn felt certain he had seen the man before. Where, though? The Secret Service man closed his door, lit a cigar, and searched his mental files of suspects. After a while it came to him. The face of the man in the morgue was that of the stranger he had watched the previous night slouching against a street lamp in Stanton Street. He had the same hair, the same straight nose. Folding up his copy of the *Journal*, the Chief summoned Operative Henry. Get down to the morgue as soon as possible, he said. Call back when you have seen the body.

Henry left Wall Street flanked by two other agents who had kept the watch on Stanton Street, and it was past 6.30pm when they phoned in. All three, Henry explained, believed they recognised the dead man from Laduca's store. But there was still at least a little room for doubt. The face of the barrel victim greatly resembled that of the man who had loitered under a street lamp the previous evening, but his clothes seemed different. The man in Little Italy had been clad in a brown three-piece suit. The barrel victim was wearing blue.

Henry's call bothered Flynn. He thought it highly unlikely that the dead man had changed his clothes in the few hours that separated his appearance on Stanton Street from his violent death. After mulling the problem over for a moment, though, it struck him that he and his operatives might have been the victims of some optical illusion. The man they had watched on Stanton Street had been standing almost directly beneath a slanting electric light that had made it almost impossible to make out the details of his clothing.

The possibility needed to be checked, so Flynn called the East Side precinct house where the body had been taken and arranged to have the dead man's clothes sent over to his office. While he waited for his package to arrive, the Chief rigged up a light over his desk to simulate the street light by Laduca's store. He carefully adjusted the fitting so that it shone down at the same angle as the lamp in Stanton Street, then turned off the other bulbs in the office. Soon enough there was a knock at the door and another agent entered with a package that contained the bloodstained suit. Flynn tore off the wrapper and thrust the brown bundle under the slanting light. He stood well back and squinted.

The cloth looked blue. He reached for the phone on his desk and placed an urgent call to Inspector McClusky.

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Meanwhile, up in Little Italy, Sergeants Carey and Petrosino had found the Café Pasticceria. Its owner, Pietro Inzerillo, was scrawny, almost illiterate, and much older

than the other members of Morello's gang — he was a greying 44 years old, and sported a formidable, unfashionable moustache. Grudgingly, the confectioner escorted the policemen to his cellar and allowed them to inspect his stores. It did not take Petrosino long to spot a barrel full of sugar that was practically identical to the one that had appeared on East 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Squatting to examine it more closely, the detective noticed that it bore precisely the same markings: “W&T” stencilled on the base and “G.223” stamped along the staves.

Inzerillo freely admitted that he had purchased two such barrels from Wallace & Thompson, and seemed unperturbed when Petrosino wanted to know what had happened to the missing one. When it was empty, the shopkeeper replied, he had taken it upstairs and dumped it in an alley with half a dozen others. He had then sold the lot. Three or four men had come to pick the empty barrels up, but he could not describe them. It was the common practice in the district; barrels were useful things and he was happy to let his fellow Sicilians purchase the ones that he had finished with.

Petrosino scribbled Inzerillo's statement down. But he did not believe it.

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Thanks to Carey, Flynn and Petrosino, the police now knew a good deal more about the barrel victim than they had that morning. They had learned he seemed to be a stranger to New York and that he had links to an important counterfeiting gang. They knew he had been seen, hours before his death, in the company of several dangerous criminals. They

also believed that they had traced the barrel he was found in. But one vital piece of information was still missing. They had absolutely no idea of the dead man's name.

At midnight, responding to Chief Flynn's call, Inspector McClusky arrived at the Treasury Building with two other senior policemen for a briefing on the Morello gang. For the best part of an hour, Flynn ran methodically through everything the Secret Service had discovered about the forgers: their names, their records, and the nature and the scale of their operation. Morello, he warned McClusky, was a dangerous individual: cunning, intelligent, and — unlike the great majority of counterfeiters — perfectly willing to use violence. His friends Laduca and Genova were ruthless too, and the remaining members of the gang were almost as formidable. Among the other members of the group, Flynn pointed out, were Joseph Fanaro, a red-bearded giant of a man — 6 feet 4 inches in his socks — who Secret Service operatives had seen escorting the barrel victim around Little Italy. Fanaro, the Chief thought, had been assigned to watch over the stranger and ensure that he did not slip away.

It was almost 1am by the time that Flynn had finished and the conversation turned to strategy. McClusky — headstrong as ever — was only too aware that his superiors wanted evidence that he was making progress. The press, too, would be expecting action. Now was no time to wait and see how things developed; he and his men, he said, would round up all the members of Morello's gang next afternoon, confident that at least one of them would talk under interrogation. The fact that the arrests would take place in time to feature in the next day's papers was not mentioned, but it was scarcely incidental to the inspector's thinking.

Flynn was utterly appalled. His own investigation would be fatally compromised, he urged, and, anyway, it was too early to be talking of arrests. Likely as it was that Morello and his men knew all about the barrel murder, there was as yet no shred of proof that they were actually involved — and, hence, a real chance that the killers would go free for lack of evidence. The best way forward was further observation, which would almost certainly produce new leads. At present, the Chief pointed out, Morello did not know that he was being watched. Arrests would simply put the whole gang firmly on its guard.

Flynn pleaded, but McClusky would not be budged and the truth was that the Secret Service had no jurisdiction in a murder case; indeed, the Chief's only role in the operation that was being planned would be to point out the members of the gang to the police. The discussion went on for nearly half an hour, but, in the end, the only concession that Flynn could wring out of Chesty George was a promise that his men would be allowed to search Morello's home after his arrest.

By the time McClusky and his colleagues left the building, it was past 1.15 on the morning of 16 April. The Chief stayed just long enough to draft a note to Wilkie explaining what had happened. Ten minutes later, he, too, headed home.

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Flynn's operatives were back on duty seven hours later, maintaining their usual watch on Stanton Street. Other agents were posted outside Morello's apartment on nearby Chrystie

Street and opposite Inzerillo's café; two more loitered on the Bowery. Each group was accompanied by twice the number of plainclothes police detectives, which reassured the Secret Service men but made it hard for them to remain inconspicuous.

The police plan was certainly ambitious. It called for almost a dozen members of the counterfeiting gang to be spotted, individually, by Flynn's agents, then followed as they moved about New York until the whole gang was in the authorities' grasp. To add to the danger that something would go wrong, McClusky was adamant that Morello himself should be the first man arrested. His capture would be the signal for the other teams to move in on their targets — a decision almost as difficult to implement, given the communications available at the time, as the task of following a large number of wary Sicilians around New York for half a day or more without being noticed. To make matters worse, as Flynn had warned, the counterfeiters would certainly be armed.

April 15 proved to be a challenge such as the New York bureau of the Secret Service had not faced before. Almost every agent in the city had been pulled off their usual investigations and stationed south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street, while Flynn himself took up position at police headquarters to help co-ordinate the operation. The members of the counterfeiting gang were nightbirds and not early risers, but the first of Morello's men was spotted as early as 10.45am, and others were acquired one by one until, by mid-afternoon, Flynn's operatives had five under observation. Snatched phone calls to police headquarters kept the Chief informed of progress, but there was no sign whatsoever of Morello. Flynn and McClusky waited, growing gradually more apprehensive, as the afternoon dragged on and the members of the gang flitted to and fro between their homes, Laduca's store, the

bar on Prince Street and the Café Pasticerrea. Abetted by frequent showers of rain, several of the Clutch Hand's men lost themselves in the teeming streets, only to be picked up again anxious minutes later.

Flynn's luck held through the long afternoon, but by sunset Morello was still nowhere to be seen. Since there was little prospect of continuing surveillance after dark, McClusky began reluctantly preparing to abandon operations for the night. Then, at 7.10pm, the inspector's office door flew open. Standing on the threshold was John Henry, who had run over from Elizabeth Street. Morello had appeared in Little Italy, he said.

The news that Henry brought was critical. The counterfeiter, spotted on Elizabeth Street, had been followed until he entered the Café Pasticerrea, where he fell into a long conversation with Inzerillo. McClusky and Flynn had debated what to do in this event, and concluded that it would be dangerous to arrest two armed men within the crowded confines of the little café. Better to let Morello conclude his business and leave for home. Better to seize the two men independently.

The lights were coming on across the city as Henry and Flynn hurried out onto a damp Mulberry Street. While Henry hastened back to resume his watch at Inzerillo's, Flynn made instead for the entrance to Delancy Street — a spot he knew, from weeks of observation, Morello would pass on his way back to his apartment. The Chief splashed through the puddles on East Houston and jogged down the Bowery until he found two more of his operatives and four burly detective sergeants standing against some hoardings on the corner.

The seven men waited impatiently for Morello to appear, but he had not yet left the Café Pasticceria. Flynn's resources were stretched so thin by McClusky's operation there was no chance of freeing any agents to carry messages, and so no way of getting warning that their man was on the move. The resultant uncertainty made the watch a nervous one, more so as the wait stretched to three-quarters an hour. It was not until 8.00pm that the Clutch Hand turned into Delancy Street, his slight figure silhouetted for a moment against the bright lights of the Bowery. Flynn signalled frantically to the detectives. As he did so, a second man rounded the corner and the Chief saw that Morello had a companion. Petto the Ox was accompanying him home.

The two Sicilians had no chance; McClusky's men were on them in an instant. The four muscular policemen hurled themselves bodily at the counterfeiter, knocking the Clutch Hand to the pavement. Petto, taller and stronger, received a punch between the eyes, swayed for an instant, and then went down as well with two detectives on top of him. The winded counterfeiter tried to reach for inner pockets, but the policemen knocked their arms away.

Breathing a little heavily, the detectives hauled Petto and Morello to their feet and handcuffed them. Then they began to search their prisoners. Both men proved to be heavily armed. The Ox carried a pistol in a holster and a stiletto in a leather sheath, and his boss was concealing a fully-loaded .45 calibre revolver in his waistband and had a murderous-looking unsheathed knife strapped to his leg. "A cork," Flynn observed – sounding impressed despite himself – "fixed on the point of the blade prevented it

scratching his leg and allowed him to bring it into play with a single motion much more readily than had he carried it in a sheath.”

Forcing their way through the crowd of excited onlookers that had rapidly surrounded them, the four detectives frogmarched their prisoners off towards police headquarters, where the two counterfeiters were thrown into separate cells. Inspector McClusky then issued orders for all the other members of the gang to be rounded up, and the results were gratifyingly swift. Special Operative Burns and his police escort cornered the Sicilian they had been watching in a basement room in Elizabeth Street and managed to get him out of the building without attracting a crowd. Pietro Inzerillo was arrested without incident in his store, and Joseph Fanaro was seized outside Morello’s restaurant on Prince Street. None were given time to draw the weapons they were carrying. The closest McClusky’s detectives came to trouble was on the Bowery, where two other members of the gang glanced up in time to see a quartet of policemen bearing down on them. The Sicilians half-drew their revolvers, but the policemen disarmed both with their nightsticks, relieving their prisoners of two more guns and a set of lethal stilettos.

Eight members of Morello’s gang were arrested that evening, and a ninth at midnight. Almost all proved to be as well-armed as their boss – next day newspapermen were invited to photograph a table-top laden with all the daggers and revolvers found on them – and most, to Flynn’s considerable annoyance, had permits that entitled them to go about the city armed.

McClusky was jubilant at his success — “radiant,” one newspaperman described him, and “all smiles.” His men, relieved to have made so many arrests without serious incident, celebrated too. But, the man from the *New York Sun* observed, “Flynn and his Secret Service agents didn’t smile or express any particular joy. The agents who did all the clever work in this case looked bored.” The reporter was right to note the difference in the response of the detectives and Flynn’s operatives, but he was quite wrong in guessing the reason. The Chief was not bored; he was worried. He felt sure that McClusky had just made a serious mistake.

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It was obvious, as early as next morning, that Flynn’s concerns were justified. Searches of all the prisoners’ apartments turned up large quantities of correspondence, written in impenetrable Sicilian, but no sign of any contraband — no forged notes, no bad coins and no printing plates — nor anything to link the barrel victim directly to Morello’s men. Nor were the “strenuous efforts” that the police made to squeeze statements from the suspects any more fruitful, despite application of the brutal methods of the third degree. Not one of the arrested men would talk, and when Flynn took the suspects, one by one, down to the morgue to ask them if they recognised the body, none said a word to indicate they did. Morello, whom the Chief’s men had seen talking at length to the barrel victim two days earlier, “showed not the slightest sign of recognition or agitation,” a disappointed Flynn confessed. “He shrugged his shoulders and volunteered the statement: ‘Don’t know.’”

In the absence of a confession, McClusky's case remained slender indeed. Several cigars found in Petto's pocket were of a variety identical to the ones Petrosino had discovered on East 11<sup>th</sup> Street. A sample of the sawdust from Morello's restaurant, which Carey took after the arrest, looked much the same as the bloodstained shavings in the barrel. And a search of the Clutch Hand's dingy attic room on Chrystie Street turned up a collar of the same size and make as the one worn sported by the dead man. It was enough to impress the newspapermen covering the story, who reported that charges were expected any day, but scarcely sufficient to convince either the District Attorney's office or the Secret Service. "The police redoubled their efforts," Flynn recalled, "but to no avail. Every clew, and there were few enough of them, led to nothing. Each new line, which was run down to no purpose, left the case more baffling."

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The breakthrough that McClusky had been praying for came three days later, unexpectedly, when a clerk opening the mail at police headquarters discovered an anonymous letter addressed to the inspector.

'I know the man who was found in the barrel,' the note began.

He comes from Buffalo for the purpose of getting money... he was condemned for false papers. The police have made the proper arrests, bring the condemned Giuseppe Di Priemo from Sing Sing, promise him his liberty and he will tell you

many and many things, do as I write and you will discover all. We salute. Yours  
friends S.T.

McClusky read the letter through more than once without feeling much the wiser for it. It had evidently been composed by an Italian with a limited command of English but a rather better knowledge of Morello's gang. The reference to "false papers" suggested that the dead man in the barrel had been a forger, too, and the suggestion that he came from Buffalo made sense — it certainly explained why no one in Little Italy had recognised the corpse. But the name 'Giuseppe Di Priemo' meant nothing to the men of the Detective Bureau; nor did McClusky have any idea why such a person should be locked up in Sing Sing, an infamous prison 30 miles north of New York where a large proportion of Manhattan's criminals spent at least a part of their careers.

Still, if the murder was product of some counterfeiters' feud, the Secret Service would most likely know more, and brief a phone call to William Flynn was all it took to enlighten the inspector. Flynn was perfectly familiar with the name: Di Priemo, he informed McClusky, was a middle-ranking member of Morello's gang, one of four Sicilians who had been arrested on New Year's Eve for passing forged \$5 bills in Yonkers. He was a native of Lercara Friddi, in the Sicilian interior, had lived in New York for three years, and — thanks to his recent conviction in a federal court — had just begun a four-year sentence for counterfeiting. The Chief recalled Di Priemo as uncommunicative to a fault, but, with several years to serve, the desire to cut something from that sentence might just make him willing to talk.

It would take a man a day to travel from New York to Sing Sing and back, but the barrel investigation was going nowhere. McClusky decided to send Petrosino to see prisoner Di Priemo. An Italian speaker would have a much better chance of getting information from the Sicilian than an ordinary detective.

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The great grim bulk of Sing Sing correctional facility had been carved out of a hillside on the steep banks of the Hudson at a point where the river swept off in a wide bend to the west, away from New York. The whole prison had been hewn from the grey marble that abounded in the district: the huge claustrophobia-inducing walls that enclosed the entire complex, the main block with its minute cells — each eight feet long and three feet wide — the death house, and the multitude of workshops in which the jail's thousands of prisoners were set to work each day. It was a terrible place in which to be incarcerated, cramped, rigidly disciplined, and so close to the fast-running river that chill damp permeated everywhere. Each cell held nothing but a cot, a lamp, a Bible and a slop bucket; the bathing facilities were non-existent; and the whole prison, in the words of one Sing Sing warden, lay in the grip of “a coldness that hovers like a pall, and a heaviness that presses down upon the spirit like a huge millstone.”

For a newly-arrived prisoner such as Giuseppe Di Priemo, Sing Sing was very close to hell. The penitentiary squatted on a low bluff half a mile above the village of Ossining, and had been carefully positioned so that the men imprisoned there could be made to break rocks in quarries within its perimeter; its very name, a corruption of the Indian

phrase *sint sincks*, meant “stone upon stone.” The prison, indeed, had been constructed by its own first inmates, and a large proportion of the convicts still worked the local marble, enduring brutal conditions as they cut and shaped each stone. Over the years, though, as the prison grew, it had diversified into several other industries. By 1903, Sing Sing was one of the largest industrial complexes in the United States, and the factories inside its walls made iron stoves, forged chains, and manufactured shoes. The latest drafts of prisoners, though, were set to work in the jail’s steam laundry, where they laboured in what were reputedly the worst conditions in the entire US prison system, washing, drying, starching and ironing thousands of shirts a day in temperatures that sometimes reached 150 degrees.

It may thus have been sheer desperation that drove Di Priemo to see Petrosino when the detective reached Ossining on the afternoon of 19 April. Certainly the prisoner possessed, in full measure, the Sicilian’s ingrained antipathy to the police. Di Priemo began the interview cool and uncommunicative, and despite Petrosino’s ingratiating Italian, seemed uninterested in answering anything but the most basic questions.

The two men made for an interesting study. They were similar in age — Petrosino was 36 years old, Di Priemo 28 — and looked not unlike each other. Both men were short and stocky; both were physically strong. But the detective had one great advantage over the monosyllabic prisoner: a surprise to shock him into talking.

“Do you recognise this man?”

Petrosino slid a photograph of the barrel victim across the table. It had been taken in the New York morgue after the undertaker had done his best to patch up the dead man's wounds. The eyes were glassy and the rip in the throat had been concealed by dressing the corpse in a high collar, but the face was recognisable.

Di Priemo glanced down and stiffened. "Yes," he agreed, taken aback despite himself. "I know that man, of course I do. He's my brother-in-law. What's the matter with him? Sick?"

"He's dead," said Petrosino.

Even the detective, with his years of experience, was surprised by what happened next. There was a moment's shocked silence. Then Di Priemo, the tough Sicilian counterfeiter, swayed and collapsed – some sort of faint, Petrosino thought. It took a minute or two to revive him, and longer before he could continue. When he did, his demeanour had changed from suspicious to downright uncommunicative. "My brother-in-law lived in Buffalo," was all he would say. "He had a wife and family there. His name is Benedetto Madonia. His wife is my sister."

Di Priemo gave the Italian detective an address in Buffalo, but he refused absolutely to say any more. Petrosino could get not a syllable out of him concerning Madonia's murder or the dead man's relationship with Giuseppe Morello.

He telephoned the news back to New York in any case, and McClusky called it through to Flynn. The Chief was sitting in his office with a Sicilian translator when the phone rang, working his way slowly through the piles of letter books and correspondence seized from Morello's room. He felt sure that he had seen Madonia's name somewhere earlier that day, and — leafing back through the Clutch Hand's untidy ledgers — he eventually found it. Scrawled along the edge of an interior page were the words 'Madonia Benedetto, 47 Trenton Avenue, Buffalo, New York.' The note, Flynn observed with interest, was in Morello's handwriting. Unlike the other entries on the page, it had been scribbled in red ink.

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By the time Petrosino got to Buffalo, Madonia's wife had heard what happened to her husband.

The salacious *New York Journal*, which had better contacts and deeper pockets than any other paper in New York, got word of Petrosino's trip to Sing Sing from an informant at police headquarters as soon as the Italian detective phoned in his report. A hurried telegram to the paper's stringer in Buffalo brought the reporter and a local beat policeman to Madonia's apartment in a two-storey frame house that evening. The two men found the oldest of the barrel victim's children, 21-year-old Salvatore, sitting outside enjoying the spring air.

Harry Evans, the Buffalo policeman, was a man of limited tact. Introducing himself, he bluntly explained: “The New York police believe that the Italian who was found with his throat cut is your father.”

“I don’t know about that,” answered Madonia warily.

“Is your father home?”

“My father is in New York, but we expect him home in a few days.”

Evans pressed his point: “Do you know whether or not your father is alive?”

“I guess he is.”

It was only when the reporter handed Madonia the *Journal*’s photo of his body lying in the New York morgue that the news sank in. Badly shaken, the dead man’s son burst into tears, then ran blindly back into the house in search of a family portrait. He held the snapshot and the folded copy of the *Journal* side by side. There was no room for doubt; the two photographs depicted the same man.

“You had better come in,” the young man told his visitors.

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Petrosino arrived at the Madonia house next morning to find the whole family in mourning and the dead man's wife in bed. Lucy Madonia had been unwell even before word of her husband's brutal murder reached her. Now she looked drawn and ill, older by far than her 42 years.

It took Lucy a long time to admit that she knew anything of her husband's activities. He was just a mason, she insisted in response to Petrosino's questioning, and had never been in trouble in his life. Yes, Benedetto had done what he could to help her brother when they heard of his imprisonment; he had hurried down to New York to see a lawyer, then journeyed on to Sing Sing to visit Di Priemo. But his purpose was simply to request that his brother-in-law be moved to the penitentiary at Erie, Pennsylvania, where it would be much easier for his family to visit him.

Petrosino persisted. He had experience of interrogation, and knew when to hold back information and just when to reveal it. By the time that he had laid out all the police and the Secret Service knew about her husband, Lucy Madonia had been compelled to agree that her husband was indeed acquainted with a group of Sicilians in New York. He had "gone out on the road" for them, she admitted, shuttling by rail from Pittsburgh to Chicago and Buffalo. What exactly Madonia had done on his visits to those cities Lucy did not know, she said, but the Secret Service men that Petrosino showed her statement to on his return to Manhattan recognised the route as one often employed by counterfeiters. This tied in well with the anonymous letter writer's claim that Madonia had a conviction, at home in Sicily, for passing forged bills.

Mrs Madonia had one more thing to tell Petrosino. Her brother, Di Priemo, she confided, had written to her more than a month ago to say he was in trouble. Soon after that, he had cabled urgently for funds. From somewhere, her husband had raised a thousand dollars – a large sum, and one he dared not send directly. With Di Priemo in custody pending his trial, Benedetto had instead addressed his envelope to an acquaintance in New York. Enclosed with the money was a note instructing the man to take the cash and hand it to a man in a Prince Street saloon.

It was what happened next, Lucy thought, that sent her husband to his death. Her husband's friends had received the money safely, but they had done precisely nothing to help Di Priemo, neither hiring him a lawyer nor using the cash to bring influence to bear to save him. Nor would they return the unspent dollars to Madonia. Enquiries, and, eventually, letters of entreaty, had no effect on them. In the end the Buffalo stonemason decided that his only chance of recovering the cash was to visit New York himself.

Then Mrs Madonia added something else, something that made Petrosino start. There was one man, the widow said, who might know why Benedetto had been killed. Her husband had mentioned his name to her, just once, when they were debating how to help Di Priemo. A man called Giuseppe Morello, Madonia had whispered, was the head of a “great society, a secret society, of which he himself was a member, but Morello was against him and would do nothing to aid her brother.”

Petrosino knew what that meant. It meant the maimed, implacable Morello was no mere counterfeiter with a ruthless streak.

He was something much more frightening. He was boss of the New York Mafia.