

## CHAPTER 1

Friday, September 21, 1984

Money is the lifeblood of Las Vegas and Tommy Sullivan was bleeding out.

He threw his losing cards onto the felt and pushed away from the poker table. "Fuck this!" he muttered. Leaving his few remaining red chips to hold his spot, he staggered out of the Silver Comet poker room and into the main casino.

Tommy wasn't good at much, but he believed he was good at poker. At a card table, he was somebody. But today poker let him down. He shoved his way through the noise and the crowd and escaped to a quiet bathroom stall. He didn't need the bathroom, only the silent isolation it afforded. He sat down on the seat, fully clothed, and closed his eyes.

Not long after settling there, he heard someone else come into the stall next to his. The man locked the door and uttered several sharp grunts. Tommy grimaced at a damp cigar smell and looked over at the man's black wingtip shoes. They poked out from under a pair of deep blue dress pants.

The grunting stopped, replaced by heavy labored breathing. Then the pants fell to the floor and bunched around the man's shoes. At the same time, Tommy heard a soft whoosh and saw a fat black wallet drop to the tile.

Tommy stared at the wallet and his breath quickened. Nothing happened for a moment. The man did not seem to notice it lying there. Then, like a snake seizing its prey, Tommy's left hand shot out and snatched it up, pulling it into his lap. There was no reaction from the owner. Cradling it in both hands, he squeezed the soft leather, testing its heft. His eyes wide, he opened it to reveal a thick sheaf of hundred dollar bills.

*You can't keep this money. Any second this guy will notice. Put it back,* he thought, but he could not let go of it. Hurrying, Tommy closed the wallet, stood up, shoved it into his back pocket, and bolted from the stall.

In the bright bathroom glare, he glanced once at his flushed face in the mirror and ran out into the lively casino. There he stopped and looked around. Gamblers and waitresses scurried past him. Excited tourists rushed by. The place was abuzz with people talking loudly and having fun. No one paid any attention to him.

The wallet felt like a heavy stone in his pocket, pressing against him. *Could I still give it back? No, I already took it,* he rationalized. He had a powerful urge to take it out and look again. *Not here. They have cameras. Plus the guy could come out any minute. Gotta get outta here.*

He fled the casino, nearly running, down a long carpeted hallway. The abstract red, yellow, and orange rug screamed at him. *Hurry!* At the end of the hall, he came to the elevator for the parking garage.

Breathing hard, he waited there alone, tapping his hip until the elevator door opened and he entered. The cab surrounded him with mirrors. Everywhere he turned he saw his long thin body pacing, his arms twitching. The shock of red hair on his head looked like fire. He clenched his fists ready to battle anyone who might confront him.

Fighting came naturally to Tommy. Throughout his childhood, he fought with his father. And in school, he fought with his teachers. Then, in his teens, he fought with his girlfriend and later, he fought with his boss. For Tommy, life was a battlefield.

At the third floor, he stepped out into the concrete stillness of the parking garage. It was cool and dark. He jumped when a distant car started up on another floor. His eyes darted everywhere, scanning the wide space. With no one in sight, he walked quickly to his rented Ford Fiesta and unlocked the door. Sitting down in the driver's seat, he exhaled a big breath.

A tremor ran through his arms and he put both hands on the steering wheel to steady himself. He could smell the sweat under his clothes. In the tight confines of the small car, he twisted around and pulled the wallet out of his back pocket. Opening it again, he felt a tightening in his chest and took a deep breath. *This is wrong*, he thought, but shoved the thought aside.

He removed the wad of hundred dollar bills and counted them. Three thousand, three hundred dollars. Staring at the money, he said aloud, "These are the spoils of war." He separated a thousand dollars and put that in his own wallet. The rest went back into the man's wallet. He started to lock the stolen wallet in the glove compartment when he stopped, curious to know more.

He riffled through cards and photos and extracted the owner's license. It showed a dark haired man named Fausto D'Angelo, a Nevada resident, date of birth June 6, 1938. Brown eyes, it read, and five feet eight inches tall.

Tommy studied the photo for a moment. *All right, this is the man whose money I stole. Fuck. It's done now.*

He put the license back, closed the wallet, and this time, locked it in the glove compartment. He swallowed hard and told himself he was a gladiator, winning, defeating a powerful enemy.

*Ricky, my choir boy brother, would never have the balls to do this.*

## CHAPTER 2

Friday, September 7, 1984

Two weeks earlier, in the small living room of his South Boston childhood home, Tommy watched his mother prepare for a party. It was a big day for his younger brother, Ricky, who graduated that

afternoon from the Boston Police Academy.

Erin Sullivan knew it was long past time for Ricky to get on with his life and move out of the house they shared. The party was her idea. It was her way of sending him off with love. At twenty-six, he agreed it was time to go. Once he started working on the force, he would get his own place.

With suggestions from Tommy, Erin invited Ricky's neighborhood friends and his poker buddies. The crowd would arrive soon.

On a sideboard in the living room, Erin placed a big punchbowl filled with various fruit juices and a liberal dose of rum. She set out a tall pile of red plastic drink cups alongside it. Standing back, she considered pouring herself a drink, but instead, she turned and headed into the kitchen.

At the center of the kitchen table, she placed a sheet cake decorated with sugary depictions of a police badge and a jail. Above those images, she wrote in green frosting, "Congratulations Officer Ricky Sullivan."

Tommy wandered into the kitchen. He hadn't seen the cake before and he suppressed the intrusive thought that his mother never made him a special cake. *Fuck. Maybe I didn't do anything worth celebrating.* He shook his head. *Forget it.* This was Ricky's day. He wished his brother well, even if the little twerp was going to be a cop, of all things. With a twisted smile, Tommy nodded his approval of the cake. His mother returned the smile. She wouldn't let anything ruin this day.

Ricky came downstairs dressed head-to-toe in his new uniform. Looking at his mother and brother, he could not hold back a silly grin. Tommy rolled his eyes while his mother placed both hands on Ricky's shoulders, beaming at him.

Twenty minutes later, his friends began to show up. Young men and women gathered around the new policeman, toasting him with large glasses of punch and raucous laughs. Tommy grabbed the cap from Ricky's head, waved it to the room, and placed it cockeyed back on his brother's head. Everyone applauded.

Tommy stood back, tilted his head to one side and studied his little brother. "Congratulations," he said. "You'll be the only virgin on the force."

Ricky's already reddish cheeks grew a shade brighter. He straightened the cap and gave his brother a little shove. "Don't make me arrest you," he said.

Billy Kowalski, the only other virgin in the room, placed a big hand on Ricky's shoulder. A large, kind man, Billy said earnestly, "You're just waitin' for the right girl."

Ricky studied Billy for a moment and nodded. Then he looked at the women through the doorway, in the kitchen. He had known all of them since grade school. They were friends, nothing more.

"Wait'll he busts a hooker and she offers him trade," said Eric Zinkawich.

Ricky looked down at his wiry little poker buddy and gave him a friendly shove. "Not gonna happen," he said, still blushing and hiding his face behind a big cup of punch.

"Cops get a lotta perks," observed Todd Baron, another member of their poker crowd.

"To the new Ricky," Tommy chuckled, holding up his cup. "Virgin turned sex fiend."

Ricky shook his head. The gentle joshing from his big brother was vastly better than Tommy's usual barbs.

Eric's long blond hair flew from side to side following his animated hands. "Well, I think we should do something about that," he said.

"Oh yeah, like what?" laughed Ricky. He never took Eric very seriously. And he had no interest in a hooker, if that's what Eric had in mind. He would wait until marriage, he thought.

"We should go to Vegas. Get you laid out there," Eric urged, "before you're a real cop."

"Yeah, right." Ricky glanced at his fellow poker players. They were all around him, holding their drinks and watching him.

Tommy chimed in. "Good idea. Keep the party going."

Jared Appleton thought about it. Las Vegas was tempting. He jumped at any excuse to gamble. "Why not?" he said. "Give Ricky a Vegas send-off. I'd go, play some craps, poker." He noticed Ricky's anxious eyes. "It's okay," Jared assured him. "You don't have to get laid if you don't want to, but you could check out the Palace Club with us. You might like that."

The Palace Club was a strip joint the others had visited on previous trips. Ricky had never been to Las Vegas, let alone a strip club. He shook his head. Gambling was bad enough, but a strip club, never. Lust was a sin. He shook his head. He would not go to the Palace Club.

"Sounds good," said Tommy. "Let's do it." He looked across the room at his longtime girlfriend, "Cat" Whelan. The dark haired woman stood by herself, leaning against a bookcase. She wouldn't stop him, he knew. In fact, she would probably encourage him to go. She believed in him, in his ability to win at poker, and her faith in his skill bolstered his belief in himself, "Nothin' keepin' me here," he stated.

Todd Baron spoke up. "Not me. I have to work."

"Same here," said Billy.

Dick Morgan, another of the poker players and a junior high school science teacher, said "Nah, I can't go."

"Well, the four of us then. Ricky, you wanna?" asked Jared.

Ricky looked fondly at the group before him, his poker buddies. He loved these guys, even Tommy.

*Especially Tommy.*

There was some sort of turmoil in the Boston Police Department, problems with bussing black students from Roxbury to white communities and cries of police brutality, so his start date had been postponed. He wasn't due to begin work for another three weeks.

He had gambled before, played slot machines in Atlantic City. He enjoyed it. Moderate gambling wasn't a sin. His friends had all been to Las Vegas more than once. He was curious. *Why not keep the party going? I don't have to sleep with a hooker or anything.* "Why not?" he said, "but no hookers."

"Yeah, okay," Tommy laughed. "I'll set it up. We'll go in two weeks and we'll stay a week."

*Vegas, here I come,* thought Ricky.

### CHAPTER 3

Friday, September 21, 1984

Two weeks later, at one in the afternoon, TWA flight 1611 from Boston landed at McCarran Airport in Las Vegas. Tommy, Ricky, Eric, and Jared picked up their bags, found their rental car, and sped toward the Roundup Hotel and Casino.

One of the older hotels on Las Vegas Boulevard, the Roundup was shabbier than the gleaming buildings that towered nearby. But it was a bargain. The foursome felt lucky to get a large suite right on the Strip. From there, they could walk to nearby casinos or easily drive to any of the others.

The Roundup had its own small casino located at the front of the complex, but none of them wanted to gamble there. They preferred to go where the action was, the hot new spots. The Roundup was a place to sleep, nothing more. Behind its sad little casino stretched the hotel. The two story building extended a hundred yards to the rear. They drove toward the back and parked in the lot that paralleled the building.

After dropping their luggage in their rooms, they piled back into the car and Tommy drove them down the Strip. He headed for the Desert Inn, but then changed his mind and drove back toward their hotel. He pulled into the garage of the Silver Comet, the big casino next door to the Roundup. Jared wondered why Tommy chose the Comet. They could have walked there from the Roundup, but he gave it no further thought

Every game in the casino had its devotees and each of the four men had his own preference. Ricky never learned the table games and played nothing but slot machines. He enjoyed the repetitive routine, the simplicity, win or lose with every spin.

His older brother Tommy played poker exclusively, claiming it was "the only game where the odds aren't against you." Eric usually played blackjack. He could take or leave gambling, but when he played,

he found he most enjoyed the rhythm of blackjack. The game calmed him.

For Jared, all gambling was alluring. Since getting sober a year ago, his interest in gambling had grown. He liked all the games in the casino, but craps was his favorite. And now he was on the hunt for a lively craps table.

In the Silver Comet, they entered the giant casino space. They were immediately surrounded by slot machines and Ricky planted himself before one. The group left him there and walked on.

Eric grinned at every cocktail waitress they passed while Tommy scanned the distant walls for the poker room. He finally spotted the word "Poker" in block letters in a far corner and he trotted toward the sign, leaving his friends behind.

Eric and Jared followed him, but they stopped at the entrance to the room. They peered in and saw Tommy wending his way to the sign-in desk. Poker had its own separate space filled with dozens of low tables and quiet serious card players. Eric shook his head. There was better fun to be had elsewhere in the casino.

Moving on, they arrived at a row of half a dozen blackjack tables. The first one called for a minimum bet of one hundred dollars. Aside from the dealer, the table was deserted. Next were two twenty-five dollar tables. They each had two players and five empty chairs. Eric and Jared walked on and arrived at the busiest tables, those with a five dollar minimum. Eric found an empty seat at one and squeezed into it. Jared noticed the other six players grudgingly moved to make room.

As he settled in, Eric asked a swarthy young man to his right, "How's it going?"

"Eh, up and down," the man shrugged. "This is a pretty cold shoe."

Eric grinned. "Time for a change then." He took out two twenty dollar bills and slid them over to the dealer. A crisply efficient Asian woman, she immediately spread the bills apart, counted out eight red five dollar chips in two neat piles and placed them in front of Eric.

"Good luck," she said as she dropped the twenties into a slot next to her.

Eric placed ten dollars in the betting circle and received a four and a ten. Jared saw him lose the hand and promptly bet another ten dollars. Eric watched the cards intently, his hands lifting and dropping his chips. Jared shrugged. He was already bored. Blackjack lacked the energy and camaraderie of craps. He tapped his friend on the shoulder. "I'm going to play some craps. See you later."

Eric responded with a brief nod. Concentrating on blackjack was one of the few activities that could keep Eric's normally agitated body relatively still, except for his hands. They never stopped moving.

For some reason, the craps tables were hard to locate in the big casino. Jared didn't mind. He strolled past roulette and baccarat tables, the wheel of fortune, three-card poker and other table games he didn't recognize. People sat before all of them, watching talking, or cheering.

Jared enjoyed walking around the casino, soaking in the lively atmosphere. Like an alcoholic in a bar, he simply enjoyed being there. He lit a Marlboro and continued his unhurried tour.

At last he spotted the craps tables. There were four of them, each a long oblong well, rimmed with a thick rail where players kept their chips. Jared decided to watch for a while, get a sense of the action, and savor his anticipation.

The tables, known as pits, sat at the ends of two adjacent rows of other games. The area between the rows was off limits to the players. The pit bosses worked there, watching the action and stepping forward to render a decision when a problem or question arose.

Jared felt his heart beat a little faster. Like Eric, he was interested in playing at a table with the lowest minimum bet, a five dollar table. There were two. Standing near one, he peered through the crowd. Everyone was leaning forward, focused on the far end of where a smiling young woman held the dice up in the air.

Her boyfriend kissed her cheek. "Make this six," he said. "You can do it. I know you can."

Others joined in, shouting, "Six, six. How 'bout a hard six?" they laughed.

She threw the dice.

"Eight. Came easy," said the stickman.

"All right! We'll take that while we're waiting," said a man in front of Jared, as he was paid forty dollars.

The stickman collected the dice with a thin wooden crook and slid them back to the woman.

"C'mon six," her boyfriend urged again.

The dice flew down the table coming to a stop with a two and a four showing. "Winner. Six. Came easy," said the stickman.

The players around the table shouted "All right!" as their winnings were doled out. They picked up their chips and arranged them in the slots in front of them on the rail. "Keep it up," someone shouted. "Same good shooter."

It seemed like a hot roll and Jared wanted to join in. He squeezed into a spot at a corner of the pit, putting his cigarette out in an ashtray on a shelf below the rail. He had three hundred dollars with him and he dropped five twenties on the green felt.

"Change a hundred," said the seated croupier as he took the money and counted out a stack of twenty red chips. Jared picked them up, leaving one on the pass line for the next roll.

A moment later, the young woman threw a seven. "Front line winner," said the stickman. "Take the don'ts. Pay the line." A second five dollar chip landed next to Jared's bet. He picked it up and left his

original bet in place.

The next roll was a four, a difficult number to make, Jared knew, but he placed ten dollars behind his bet anyway. *What the hell*, he thought, *I came to gamble*.

“How long has she been holding the dice?” he asked the player to his left, a balding middle-aged man, whose pot belly kept him a bit further from the table than Jared. The man was busy organizing his chips by color.

He did not look up. “She rolls a lot of numbers,” he said, selecting a group of chips and dropping them on the table. Gesturing to the loose pile, he told the dealer, “Gimme sixty-four across.” His chips were distributed on the boxes marked 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10, the “numbers.”

Sure enough, she did roll numbers, fives, sixes, eights, and then remarkably, a four. Jared was paid \$25. He grew more excited. Sometimes a woman shooter was lucky. Craps is the most superstitious game in the casino. He believed in her, in her magic, and he would ride this shooter as far as she would take him.

After stealing Fausto D’Angelo’s money, Tommy skittered back to the casino, heading toward the poker room. *Okay, act like nothing happened. Go back to the game*.

As he walked through the busy casino, he expected someone to confront him, but nobody did. In the poker room, he took his seat again at the table. He looked down at the meager pile of chips he had left there, shaking his head.

Twenty dollars was all that remained of the six hundred he had brought with him this evening. His bluffs hadn’t worked. Each time he tried, someone saw through him and took his money.

He looked at the other players. It was the same set of faces he had left. None looked back at him. *This time it will be different*. He removed two hundred dollars from his wallet and dropped the money on the green felt.

“Change two hundred,” the dealer announced. She picked up the bills and counted out two groups of red five dollar chips which she slid across to Tommy.

With two modest stacks in front of him, Tommy studied the tall towers of chips arrayed before the other players. They looked like well defended castles. He glanced at his cards, a four and a seven, nothing with which to storm the barricades. He dropped them as if they had burned his hands.

He replayed over and over picking up the brown wallet from the cold bathroom floor. *Why did I do that?* He looked back at his new chips. *That’s why*. He looked up momentarily at the ceiling above him. *Someone was watching*, he thought. He considered leaving, but stayed where he was.

For half an hour, he played no hands, losing only the antes. Finally he straightened up and tried to



focus. *Get the fuck on track*, he told himself. *You're better than this! Don't make stupid bets. Pay attention! Win back that six hundred and more. Just play fucking smart. Three thousand bucks isn't life-changing. It's not a hundred thousand. Think! Get back in the game. Win back your money!*

Making money was never easy for Tommy. Back home in South Boston, he worked part-time at Mulvaney Motors, a used car lot. He began the job at seventeen after leaving home and school in his junior year. Twelve years later, he was still working there, still earning minimum wage. No longer a used car lot, Mulvaney's had degenerated into a junk yard. Tommy hated it.

Once in a while, he would make a few extra dollars when someone brought in a hot car and paid him to cut it up for parts. He could have made more money if he stole the cars himself, but he was not confident enough to try that. So he chopped up cars for others. His best chance, he thought, was playing poker, especially if he could play for big stakes. But he needed money he didn't have to play that.

Tommy decided not to tell his girlfriend about his newfound windfall. He pictured Cat, dark hair and dark eyes flashing worry and anger. She might tell him to turn in the wallet. He stiffened. *Fuck her. I found it. It's mine. It's my stake. I need it.* He shook his head, annoyed with himself for letting Cat creep into his thoughts. He didn't like her affecting his feelings, let alone influencing his actions. Somewhere in his soul, he was ashamed of himself for stealing the money. Maybe that's why he didn't want her to know. He did not want to be diminished in her eyes.

Tonight's poker continued to go badly and he was now down another hundred and twenty dollars. That made seven hundred he had lost. He pushed away from the edge of the table and muttered, "This sucks. That's it for me." None of the indifferent group of players around him said a word. He was glad he hadn't decided to play for higher stakes. Maybe tomorrow. He gathered his remaining chips and left to cash them out.

Walking to the cashier's cage, he brightened, thinking about the thirty-three hundred he had found. *Okay, I lost seven hundred, but I've still got thirty-two hundred dollars. I came with six, so I'm twenty-six hundred ahead.* At that moment, he almost believed he had won that money playing poker.

He cashed out his chips and decided it was time to gather the rest of his group and get back to their hotel. He found sinewy little Eric at a five dollar blackjack table. "How's it going?" he asked. "I'm callin' it a night."

Eric flipped his stringy blond hair to one side and looked up at his tall friend. He thought they would have to drag Tommy away from the poker room. "You're done?" he asked.

"Yeah, I was really hot. A good score for today. I figured it was time to stop. How you doin' anyway?"

"I had a good run too, but I'm starting to lose some back now, so yeah, I can stop, while I'm still up." Eric waved the dealer off. "I'm done," he told her, gathering up his chips. "Let me cash these."

"I'll get Jared," said Tommy. "We'll meet you at the cage and then we'll pick up Ricky. Guaranteed he's still sitting in front of that stupid slot machine, the fool."

Eric headed off to the cashier's cage and Tommy looked around the room, glancing once again up to the ceiling. He spotted Jared Appleton's head above a crowd at a craps table. Walking up to it, he peered past a row of onlookers. He could see his friend had an ample supply of red and green chips in front of him. He reached in and tapped Jared on the shoulder. "Hey man," he said, "looks like you're doin' okay. We're gonna head out. How 'bout it? You don't wanna lose that back. How much you up?"

"Three, maybe four hundred," Jared said, never turning his eyes from the table. He had been lucky and was reluctant to leave.

"We're going back to the room. C'mon. Cash out."

Jared said nothing as the shooter threw the dice. They settled on a two and a five. "Seven out," the stickman shouted. *Damn*. Jared watched the dealers gather in all the chips on the table. He frowned as a chunk of his gains disappeared.

*Tommy's probably right. I could just as easily lose all this back. You get a hot run, you walk away when it ends. I'm not gonna see another run like that tonight.* "Okay. Okay, I'm going," he said, collecting two fistfuls of chips from the rack.

As they walked to the cashier, Tommy announced, "I'm gonna clean this place out tomorrow."

Jared laughed. "You wish."

But the determined set of Tommy's jaw was deadly serious. "I'm here to make money, a lot of it," he said. "Or somewhere else," he added, looking up once again.

"You always want the big score, don't you?" Jared shook his head. "That's all you think about man, money." As soon as these words came out, Jared thought he should have kept quiet. Who was he, after all, to criticize his friend? When it came to gambling, he was no better.

Tommy turned and glared at him. "So?"

"Well, there's more to life than money." Jared continued, committed to this line of thought.

"Yeah? Like what?" Tommy stared at him, defying him to answer.

Jared shook his head. "Like caring about other people," he said, more quietly.

"Yeah, and you do? Like you have someone in your life! You think you're better than me? Bullshit!" snarled Tommy. He strode on ahead, ending the conversation.

Jared stopped and exhaled heavily. *Tommy has a point. Who do I care about? And who cares about me?* He hurried to catch up.

At the cashier, they saw Eric talking to a tall blonde waitress. Her hair was the same shade as his, only shorter. In one hand, she held a drink tray. The other rested on her hip as she gazed impassively down at him. His long hair swung wildly from side to side with his energetic gestures.

Jared smiled at the height difference. *Nothing deters Eric*, he thought as he watched the waitress retreat. He turned and walked up to the cashier's cage where he redeemed his chips, receiving \$425. He felt a brief floating sensation as he looked at the bills. He had started with one hundred dollars. Joining his two friends, they headed to the slot machines to get Tommy's younger brother.

They found Ricky pumping quarters into the same slot machine they had left him at almost three hours earlier. He had a large plastic cup filled with coins. "Man, this is my lucky day," he said proudly. "Up like forty, fifty dollars here."

"Let's go," Tommy said. "C'mon, you can buy us breakfast tomorrow," he added with a laugh.

Ricky's forehead creased, his smooth innocent face reflecting a moment of anxiety, but then he laughed. "Not me."

"C'mon. Cash that in," Tommy laughed.

"Yeah, all right." Ricky stood up and admired his cup of quarters. "Be right back," He headed off to the cashier's cage.

Tommy placed a hand on the slot machine his brother had been playing and shook his head. *Typical*, he thought, *I play a game of skill and lose, while he has good luck for no reason and makes fifty bucks*. His annoyance did not last long. Tommy smiled once more, remembering he had over three thousand dollars in his wallet.

Ricky returned with his winnings. All four headed to their little Ford in the garage and left the casino.

About the same time Tommy and the others pulled out of the Silver Comet parking garage, Fausto D'Angelo barged through the outer door of the casino manager's office. He stormed into the empty reception room and pounded on the locked door of the inner office. "Hey Jimmy, lemme in," he shouted.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm coming."

Jimmy McGuire opened the door. A tall, bony man, he shifted from side to side on stockinged feet as he tucked in his shirt. Crouching slightly behind him, his secretary Judy buttoned her blouse.

"You're lockin' the door now, huh," Fausto stated. A damp, unlit cigar protruded from the left corner of his lips. He wore a tailored, black three piece suit that probably fit him a year ago. Now the buttons of his vest strained against his ample belly.

"Hey Fausto!" Jimmy said, with a stiff grin.

Fausto looked past Jimmy's flushed face at the woman. "Get outta here," he told her.

Jimmy looked over at Judy and motioned with his hand for her to hurry up. He turned back to Fausto. "C'mon Fausto, you don't gotta be like that. Whaddaya need?"

"Someone stole my money," Fausto growled. "Took my wallet. I wanna see the cameras, the tapes."

"Yeah, okay. Just a minute, huh?"

As Judy hustled out past them, Fausto turned and watched her exit, shutting the door behind her. "You gotta concentrate on your work more, Jimmy."

"Hey, I am. It's like, uh, she helps me."

"Yeah, she helps you."

Jimmy looked around and found his shoes on the floor behind him. "You got robbed? Where'd it happen?"

"I dunno. That's what I need to find out."

"But in the casino, you figure?" He looked up at Fausto as he bent over and tied the laces on his black leather shoes.

"Yeah, in the casino. Had to be."

"So all right, let's go to the big room. See what we can see."

Together they walked passed Judy without a word and out into a broad hallway. They walked quickly down the hall and turned into a large room. Television screens lined the walls. Men and women sat at individual work stations. Banks of monitors flickered before them and the room hummed with beeps and clicks. Nobody looked at them as the two men entered.

"We need to pin down where you were and when," Jimmy said.

"Yeah. I know I had it at the blackjack table, this afternoon. Maybe some asshole picked my pocket there. No wait. I had it after that when I went to the cashier. Cashed out a few thousand. So I had it then, like three, maybe four o'clock...That's the last I saw it."

"All right. Let's check." Jimmy turned to one of the seated women. "Beverly, let's see the cage near the blackjack tables today at three."

"That's camera 27," she said. "Three o'clock?"

"Yeah. He just told you," Fausto said irritably.

"Okay, of course. What are you looking for?"

“We wanna see when I get there. After that. See if someone takes my wallet.”

She walked to the VCR for camera 27 and rewound the tape. It took her some time to find the footage where the time stamp read 3:00pm.

The men stood behind her and stared at the screen. The picture was a bit blurry. When they installed the video surveillance system, Jimmy had opted for color video over the sharper black and white cameras. He thought knowing the color of someone’s clothing would make identification easier.

When the tape reached the 3:21pm mark, they saw Fausto approach. “There you are,” shouted Jimmy. “Slow it down.”

Beverly obliged and they all watched Fausto hand the cashier two stacks of black one hundred dollar chips. The cashier counted out three thousand dollars and Fausto placed it in his wallet. The wallet went back into his rear pants pocket.

“Okay, follow him,” said Jimmy.

It was a cumbersome process. Beverly located the next camera and they watched Fausto stride through the casino. He didn’t encounter anyone nor did he stop for any reason. He walked to the sports book, a big darkened room set up like an amphitheater with wall mounted screens displaying sports events of all kinds.

She switched to a new camera that showed him in that room. He met another man there. They watched as the two talked and gestured at the horseracing screens. As far as they could tell, Fausto’s wallet stayed in his pocket. Finally the portly man turned and waved his arm to the exit. The two men left the room together.

A camera trained on the casino floor picked them up again as they walked into a nearby rest room. There were no cameras inside the bathrooms. The observers could only watch the rest room entrance.

After several minutes, the other man came out and re-entered the sports book.

“That’s Joey Barone,” Fausto said. “He didn’t do nothin’.”

Another two minutes went by and a red-headed man went into the bathroom. Four minutes later, he came back out. He stood still, outside the rest room entrance, looking around. And then, after a moment, he hurried off.

“Who the fuck was that?” asked Fausto.

“I don’t know, but we’ll find out.” Jimmy tapped Beverly’s shoulder. “Get the time and we’ll come back to him.”

They continued watching the rest room door and five minutes later, Fausto emerged. He unbuttoned the lowest button on his vest and went back into the sports book. They watched him talk with his friend Joey for twenty minutes before he approached the betting windows. It was there he

discovered his wallet was gone. It was obvious. He raised his arms, gesturing angrily. Others nearby shrank back.

Somewhere between his two trips to the sports book, Fausto lost his wallet.

Growing more agitated, he said to Jimmy, "Yeah, I wanna know anybody I passed by, anybody who walked behind me, anybody who picked something up off the floor. And yeah, who was that skinny kid who came out of the bathroom? Wait, let's see what he does."

They returned to the view of Tommy outside the bathroom. They watched him exit the casino. Beverly found the hallway camera and they followed him to the garage. There were several more cameras located in the parking building. They saw Tommy walk to a small car and sit in it for a while before returning to the casino and entering the poker room. It wasn't possible to see what, if anything, he did in the car.

Fausto bent over, close to the screen. His unlit cigar brushed Beverly's cheek. She stiffened at his hot breath on her neck and his voice exploded in her ear. "I wanna keep watchin' him," he huffed.

Beverly backed away, grimacing. "Okay," she said.

"He's gotta be the guy. Nobody else came close to me. He grabbed my wallet in the bathroom somehow. When my pants was on the floor, he stuck his hand in my pocket is how he did it, that piece a shit."

"Right," said Beverly.

"Wait, let's look at a live shot, see if he's still there." Beverly stood and led them to a screen showing the current action in the poker room. Tommy's seat was empty and his chips were gone.

"Fuck. He's gone. Alright, back to the tape. See where he goes, if he leaves the Comet." They returned to the recording. "Stay on him. Don't lose him," Fausto ordered.

They watched Tommy go into the poker room where he played cards for an hour. Then he rose from the table and cashed his chips. He collected three other young men and left with them in the same small car they had seen him in earlier. The grainy image in the dark garage made it impossible to read the license plate. Even the car's color and make were difficult to determine in the poorly lit garage.

Fausto smacked the side of the monitor with his hand. "Fuck him! Yeah, get that poker dealer to describe him exactly. I want you to find that piece a garbage and get his buddies too."

"You got it," said Jimmy, even though he knew how hard it could be to track down someone seen once in the casino. The camera only showed Tommy from above. His face and the faces of his friends were not clear, nor their height or any distinguishing marks. Two of them had red hair. They knew that much. It wouldn't be easy but there was a much better chance of finding them if they returned to the Silver Comet.

Beverly and the rest of the staff would continue to watch for the group.

Jimmy asked for the best still shots they could get of the four men and their car. His security team would spread the fuzzy images around to the other casinos.

"We'll get him," Jimmy nodded vigorously, facing the monitor, not quite able to look his boss in the eye.

"Yeah," Fausto grunted.

Tommy and company returned to their hotel. It would be well after one in the morning in Boston and they were tired.

Jared shared a room with Tommy. He sat down on the end of his twin bed and lit a cigarette, his favorite brand, Marlboro.

Tommy glanced at him smoking and then rose and walked toward the door. "I gotta get some cigarettes," he announced.

"You want one?" Jared offered.

"Nah. I want my own."

Eric watched from the doorway to his section of the suite. He pulled a joint out of his shirt pocket and lit it.

Despite smoking a cigarette himself, Jared had an immediate reaction to the marijuana. "Jesus, do you have to do that in here?"

"Oh yeah. Sorry. I forgot. I'll go outside." Eric walked out into the night and saw Tommy heading across the parking lot. "Hey! Wait up," he shouted.

Tommy stopped and turned. "You're not coming with me," he snarled.

"Okay. Christ!" Eric shook his head and stayed where he was, smoking on the sidewalk.

Tommy had only wanted to walk as far as the trash can in the parking lot, but because Eric was outside, he had to go further. He drove out of the lot and headed down the Strip, looking for a quiet place to stop. There weren't many. Any time, night or day, Las Vegas Boulevard was busy.

He drove until he came to a Denny's restaurant which he thought would be relatively quiet in the rear parking lot. He turned in to the driveway alongside the building and drove around to the back. At this late hour, there were few other cars there and he parked away from the brightest lights.

He unlocked the glove compartment and removed the wallet. He stared at it for a moment. *Maybe I should return it anonymously, Keep the money; return the rest.* He thought about it. *No. someone might*

*see, figure it out. My fingerprints are all over the license and everything.* He shook his head.

Then, he hurried to remove the money, the license, credit cards, photos, everything. The money went into his own wallet and he tore the license in half.

*Extra money.* He loved having a thick wad of cash.

He threw the empty wallet into a dumpster at the far edge of the lot. A trashcan sat alongside the back wall of the restaurant and he rushed up to it. With a gulp, he dropped in the torn halves of the license and the rest of the items. He made sure it was all covered with garbage.

Looking around quickly, he returned to his car and drove back to the hotel. He had forgotten to buy cigarettes.