

Chapter 1

Four Days Ago

The FBI agent sat in a stolen car watching prostitutes work the street corner. He had been waiting patiently for a certain call girl to show up. Her name used to be Tiffany. He had no idea what her name was now, and he really didn't care. As the agent sat on stakeout, he ran through his plan for the fifth time that night. He had been trained by his father to always plan when you could, and he wanted his dad's approval more than anything in the world. He saw Tiffany walk up to the corner. The agent smiled, started the car, and pulled up to the curb. He pointed toward Tiffany, and she walked up to the car. The agent pulled out a roll of ten \$20 bills. Tiffany smiled, opened the door, and got in the car. The agent pulled away from the curb with a destination in mind.

"You gotta name, Sugar?" Tiffany asked.

"You don't remember me?" the agent asked. "It's John, John Fowler. I used to see you all the time when you worked at that strip club, The Daily Grind Gentleman's Club."

Tiffany looked the agent up and down and shook her head.

"Sorry, Sugar, I don't remember you. I remember the name, but you don't look like I thought you should. Sorry," she said regretfully.

"That's ok," the agent said, his bright blue eyes sparkling. "I hope this isn't weird. I always thought you were hot back when we worked at the club, but I never mixed business with pleasure."

Tiffany smiled. "Not a problem, Sugar. Where are we going?"

The agent smiled. "How about the old club? I can get us in."

"Ooh, kinky! I like it!" Tiffany giggled and sat back in the seat of the car. After a few minutes, they arrived at the abandoned strip club. The agent helped her through an opening in the back, and they made their way through the old club. It was still in good shape. The pole was the focal point of the room with all of the tables turned to face it. Most of the tables had seats on them. A layer of dust covered almost everything. There hadn't been any signs of vandalism, which didn't surprise the agent. You'd have to be pretty stupid to vandalize an old Mafia hangout. It had been abandoned for several reasons. The main one being that John Fowler helped put its former owner in jail over three years ago. Tiffany took the agent's hand and giggled.

"The Champagne Room?" she asked. The agent smiled wickedly.

They headed into the room. It was pitch black. The agent reached into his coat and pulled out a flashlight. He turned it on, and the room lit up. Cheap vinyl chairs and couches that could easily be cleaned off littered the room. He sat the flashlight on the couch. He looked at the surface, wondering how many germs

were on the couch, but he knew what he had to do. The agent sat down, and Tiffany crawled onto his lap. The agent smiled and made a turnaround sign with his index finger. Tiffany winked at him and playfully slapped his leg. Tiffany turned around and started to straddle him. The agent popped up off the couch in an instant, grabbed her head, and twisted it quickly. The agent smiled at the cracking sound her neck made. Her body dropped to the floor, dead. The agent looked down at the lifeless prostitute on the floor.

“John,” Bruce said to her dead body. “You better figure this thing out quick, or there are going to be a whole lot of dead people, and it’s all going to be your fault.” Bruce began to ready the abandoned building to be burnt down, whistling tunelessly as he did.

4 Years Ago

Chet's Apartment, New York City

Chapter 2

Chet looked at his poker account for the third time in the past two minutes. \$0.00 was showing in the balance. Just three minutes ago, it read \$500,000.00. Chet had just moved all in on another player. He had trip aces, and his opponent had been semi-bluffing with a flush and straight draw. Chet had a 70% chance to win the hand going into the river. Chet knew the other player was bluffing. The guy he had been playing with believed in using his big stack to push other players around.

Chet couldn't believe his good luck. He was going to withdraw over \$100,000.00 out of his poker account that night before he started checking the games that were going on. Chet knew he could beat his opposing player. All of that changed when his opponent's flush card came on the river, and Chet was left penniless.

Chet hadn't played the percentages, cards, or even the player wrong. He had just misplayed his bankroll. It was just too good of an opportunity, in his mind, for him to make a whole lot of money. Chet was crestfallen. Not only had he blown his entire bankroll, but he was going to use some of that money to cover rent that month. He had taken a bad beat at a local game earlier that week that had wiped out all of his cash. Chet was literally broke.

Chet walked around his apartment for a minute and thought about his options. He could call John and get a loan. John would help him and wouldn't say anything. The problem was all Chet could ask from John was enough to pay his bills. The best Chet could hope for online was to rebuild his bankroll from the one cent/two cent games. That would take forever. The other option was to call a loan shark he knew. Chet knew, since he was an FBI agent, he really shouldn't have contact with The Duck, but he could borrow enough to both get in on a decent game and pay rent.

Chet sat for a minute. He picked up the phone and dialed John's number but never hit the send button. Chet closed his eyes, hit erase, and punched in The Duck's number. Chet was only going to ask for \$25,000.00. That would be plenty to get him started. The phone rang. When it was picked up, the only thing Chet heard on the other end was, "Quack." That was it, just one simple word to let people know who they reached.

“Duck,” Chet began. “It’s Chet Morris. How much am I good for?”

There was silence on the phone for a minute. Chet waited patiently. He heard some keystrokes.

“One cent,” the voice on the other end finally said to Chet. Chet knew that meant one hundred thousand dollars. Cent stood for centomila, which in Italian meant one hundred thousand. Chet knew he shouldn’t take more than twenty-five thousand, and even that was risky. He was somewhat surprised to hear his own voice.

“Can you transfer the whole amount into my account?” Chet asked.

“Quack,” was the response, and the line went dead. Chet was positive that in three months, he would have the loan paid off. If not, he would tell John and they would straighten everything out. Chet checked his online bank account and saw the funds were already there. He loaded fifty thousand into his poker account and went back to playing. It would be no time before he paid off the Duck and took down his poker nemesis. No time at all.

Today

The Moores

Chapter 3

John stood at the top of the stairs at the Moore home. He looked into the family room where everyone he considered family, except for his parents, sat talking. He looked at Arthur and Madeline Moore, Sam's mom and dad. The Moores earned their initial money the old fashioned way; Arthur inherited it. John smiled and took a drink of tea. If you ever mentioned to Arthur how he came into his money, he would remind you how he had doubled the money ten times over. Arthur had taken his parents' money and managed to make them rich beyond John's dreams. John should know. Once Sam, his wife who died four years ago, passed away, John came into the entire inheritance of Arthur's parents. John thought he should really one day look into how much money was left to him.

Sitting close to the Moores was Rosa Martinez. She had been the former housekeeper of Archibald Staples. Archibald was the closest thing to a nemesis that John had, except for the person who killed Sam. Archibald was suspected of everything under the sun, but nothing had ever been, or could be, proven when it came to illegal activities concerning him. Until now. Archibald thought Rosa couldn't speak English when he hired her and spoke in front of her about everything. Rosa was hiding out at the Moores's until the FBI could finish interviewing her and build a case against Archibald. In the meantime, Rosa and Madeline were becoming joined at the hip.

John next looked at the soon to be former Senator, Jeremiah Cosby. John wondered if the country was ready for Jeremiah to become the Vice President of the United States. Jeremiah stood for truth and wanted to stamp out those who committed heinous acts. Most politicians thought Jeremiah was too strict, especially since Jeremiah was looking at cleaning up the way Washington worked. John remembered when he first met Jeremiah. John had thought Jeremiah to be out of touch with people. John had been at an event he was throwing when there was a commotion outside. The kitchen staff had caught what they called "a bum" going through the trash, looking for food.

Jeremiah had talked to the man, and to John's surprise, sent the man home with food for his family. The next week, Jeremiah had gotten the man a job. When John asked Jeremiah about it later, Jeremiah responded, "That man didn't fail society, my boy. We failed him. Well tarnation, young feller, why should I have all of this food and money I'll never use? It wasn't like the man was looking

for a handout. He had offered to work for someone in the kitchen staff earlier this week, but they flat out refused to even let him clean up!” John had never told anyone that story; he wanted no part of politics. Jeremiah was a good man that wanted to serve the people, not a chosen few. John thought of Jeremiah as a second father. So did his late wife, Sam.

Sam. She was the reason they were all gathered here. It was getting close to four years now since her death, and her case still hadn't been solved. John still remembered walking home the night he had closed the big Mafia case and being so close to their apartment when it exploded, with Sam inside. John sucked on an ice cube and looked down at Chet, Trip, and Jessica. Somehow, it had gone from just him to him, Chet and Jessica. Well, somehow wasn't true. The creation of the team had been all Sam and Jeremiah's doing, but that was a story for another day. After Sam's death, John left the FBI. Recently, he came back, and now, instead of a team of three, it seems they had added in the New York Office Director, Trip. John shook his head and chuckled to himself.