

DEEP COVER

By George J. Condon

Detective Ray Burke's shoe heels clicked on the black terrazzo floor of the station house as he walked the green corridor to the interrogation room. Despite the discomfort of his chronic heartburn, Ray was in a good mood. He had the Bonini Family's district *capo* Frank Sorvino in custody. This time, it looked as though he could really nail the creep.

When Ray walked into the interrogation room, his partner Joe Conroy was there already, along with Sorvino and a ferret faced character named Parker who was Sorvino's lawyer. All three men looked up as Ray closed the door behind him. As usual, the place smelled of sweat and stale coffee. Ray pulled out a chair and sat down at the table, facing his prisoner.

Sorvino had silver hair and was always a dapper dresser. The only thing preventing him from being handsome was the reptilian coldness of his eyes. When he saw Ray, Sorvino leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers together behind his head as he grinned.

"Well, well, Detective Burke," he said. "I should've known that you were behind this."

"Why is my client even here?" Parker asked. "This is just more police harassment."

"Save your indignation for the trial, Counselor" Joe said. "We've got your boy Sorvino cold for two murders."

"Ridiculous," Parker said.

"Be quiet, Parker," Sorvino said.

He sat up straight and put his hands on the table, palms down.

"Who am I supposed to have murdered?"

"Fats D'Angelo and Lewis Greenberg," Ray said.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Burke. I've no idea what you're talking about."

"Usually, a man of your rank in the organization just orders a hit," Ray said. "For some reason, you decided to do these two guys personally. We can prove it."

"Really?" Sorvino asked with a yawn. "How?"

"You smoked a cigarette while you waited for Fats D'Angelo in that underground parking garage," Joe said. "After you shot him, you left the cigarette butt on the garage floor. That was sloppy of you, Sorvino. We checked saliva from that butt against a sample of your DNA. Perfect match."

"Mr. Sorvino visited D'Angelo regularly," Parker said. "That cigarette butt could have been left there at any time."

Sorvino scratched his nose.

"What about Greenberg?" he asked in a bored tone.

"He was your accountant," Joe said. "Maybe you caught him skimming off some cream for himself, so you killed him."

"You have a vivid imagination, Conroy."

"We found the gun where you tossed it into a dumpster near where Greenberg was killed," Ray said. "You were smart enough to use a stolen piece as a throw away, but you got careless when you wiped it clean. We lifted a partial print that's a good match to prints of yours we have on file."

"Only a partial print?," Parker asked. "I can produce a dozen expert witnesses who will say it isn't a conclusive match."

"There's more," Ray said. "I neglected to mention we have testimony from Sammy Falcone that links Sorvino to both killings."

Sorvino smiled.

"You must mean Sammy 'The Finger' Falcone," he said. "You're going to have a tough time putting poor old Sammy on the stand, unless you know a good medium. He had a terrible accident, last month."

"Yeah, we know," Joe said. "He just happened to fall out of a tenth floor window, two days after he agreed to testify against you. It's a good thing we have his testimony on tape."

"A recording doesn't make a credible witness," Parker said. "It can't be cross-examined. I'll move to have the tape disallowed."

"We can verify its authenticity," Ray said. "When we add all the pieces of evidence together, a jury will convict. Sorvino will spend the rest of his life rotting in a prison cell."

Ray paused and took a deep breath. This was the part he hated.

"It doesn't have to be that way, Sorvino" Ray said. "Tell what you know about the Bonini Family

and we'll give you immunity on the murders."

Sorvino looked at Ray for a moment, then he laughed.

"I'm going to tell you squat Burke. I'm no rat."

"Your loyalty is touching," Joe said. "Better think it over. Helps us nail the Boninis to the wall and you walk. Don't help us and you spend the next thirty years behind bars. Your choice."

"Don't count on too much support from your button men either," Ray said. "Most of them want to move up in the organization. They won't like taking orders from a boss who is in jail. If you were to get shanked to death in the prison exercise yard, it'd create a convenient opening for some young turk to get himself promoted."

"You don't scare me," Sorvino said. "Anything else?"

"Not a thing," Joe said. "We're sending you to a holding cell until your arraignment tomorrow. Our immunity offer is good for just forty-eight hours. If you're smart, you'll take it."

#

The next morning, Parker phoned Ray to say that Sorvino wanted to discuss the immunity deal again. Ray and Joe drove over to the Scarborough Detention Center where the *Mafioso* was being held. They waited in the visiting room while the guards brought Sorvino in. The mobster looked much less dapper wearing prison coveralls and leg chains. Sorvino sat down in a chair and faced the two detectives through a heavy gage wire screen.

"Parker told us you wanted to see us," Ray said.

"That's right. I've been thinking about your offer. I'm willing to deal, but you've gotta protect me. If I snitch on the Boninis, my life won't be worth a used condom."

"We can put you into a witness protection program," Ray said.

"Forget it. I know about those. You give me a phony name and I live on chump change in some hick town, peeing myself every time the doorbell rings."

"We have a special program for important guys like you," Joe said. "We call it 'Deep Cover' It's way better than the regular witness protection that the Feds offer."

"Better? How?" Sorvino asked.

"More money," Joe said. "Tighter protection. Nicer relocation spots. Nobody we've put into the program has ever been found. Remember Terry Caputo?"

"Sure. That rat fingered three of Gio Paglia's best men."

"Yeah, and I know Paglia has been looking hard for Caputo for two years now. He hasn't found the

guy, has he?"

"All right," Sorvino said. "Put me into this 'Deep Cover' thing and I'll tell you what I know about the Boninis."

"Smart move," Joe said. "We'll be in touch."

As the two detectives left the building, Joe grinned at Ray.

"That made my day," Joe said. "Sorvino knows enough to help us really take the Bonini family apart. We'll bring him back downtown tomorrow and pick his brain."

"Did you have to tell him about Deep Cover?" Ray asked.

"Why not? Can you think of a better candidate?"

"What if we need to bring him back to testify?"

"We don't put him into the program until we're sure we don't need him any more. We've never had a problem before. Relax, Ray."

"I guess you're right," Ray said, but his heartburn was flaring up again.

#

During the next year, Ray and Joe had a dozen meetings with Frank Sorvino. At first, the mobster's years in a culture of *omerta* made him feel awkward about talking to the police, then he seemed to become proud of what he was telling them. Ray and Joe learned some crucial facts about who wielded the real power within the Bonini Family and about the group's activities, such as drug dealing and loan sharking. Sorvino told them literally where the bodies were buried. He had a memory for detail that Ray was forced to admire. Ray and Joe recorded all of their conversations with Sorvino for later use as evidence.

Sorvino's information was so good that the Crown was able to build several solid cases against the Boninis without his direct testimony at the trials. The mobster had to make only three court appearances during the entire period. Ray and Joe didn't take Sorvino out of his cell unless he was really needed. Keeping him alive and talking was too important. At one of the trials, a thin bearded man set off a metal detector when he tried to smuggle a handgun into the courthouse. He turned out to be mentally ill and with no connection to the Boninis.

#

One warm May afternoon, Ray and Joe sat in their car while they watched a suspected crack house. They were working a stakeout that was unrelated to the Bonini trials.

"Honest to God, that's what happened." Ray was saying. "Helen bugs me for months to take her to the ballet, then she falls asleep in the middle of the second act. I'll never understand women."

"Don't even try," Joe said as he sipped coffee from a paper cup. A moment later, he crumpled the empty cup and tossed it out through the car's open window. He looked over at Ray and grinned.

"This Bonini thing has been sweet," Joe said. "A few members of the Family may still wriggle off the hook, but most of them are going to jail for a long time. I think we've squeezed as much juice out of Frank Sorvino as we can. It's time to put him into Deep Cover."

"Are you sure?" Ray asked.

"Yeah. This morning, I talked it over with Chief Brennan."

Ray felt his heartburn surge like an ocean wave.

"You mean Brennan knows about Deep Cover?" he asked.

"He's seen paper work on the other thugs we've processed through the program," Joe said. "Brennan thinks we're cooperating with the Feds on a special program of theirs. You and I are the only ones who know how the thing really works. So long as we don't ask for anything from Brennan's budget, he doesn't want to dirty his hands with the details."

"What did you tell him about Sorvino?" Ray asked.

"Just that I thought we had enough on the Boninis now to put Sorvino into witness protection. He agreed."

"I won't be sorry to see the last of that creep Sorvino," Ray said. "Some of the things he told us he'd done for the Boninis shocked even me. It's a crying shame that animals like Sorvino can get out from under what they've done by ratting out their fellow scum."

Joe shrugged.

"We do the best we can, Ray. Will you make the arrangements?"

"Sure."

#

"All right, Sorvino," Ray said. "Your future depends on what I'm gonna tell you, so pay attention."

Ray and Sorvino were in the interrogation room at the station house. Sorvino looked different now. His silver hair had been dyed dark brown and he wore a fake brown mustache. Ray took a fat Manila envelope from his jacket and spilled its contents onto the table in front of the mobster.

"From now on, your name is Greg Morris," Ray said. "Here's a new passport and driver's license. There's a phony biography written on these typed pages. Better read it and memorize it."

"What about my money?" Sorvino asked.

Ray slid a bank book across the table.

"We set up an account for you in The Cayman Islands. The bank has a reputation for not giving

out any information about customers."

Sorvino opened the bank book and scanned the contents. His eyebrows went up slightly in surprise and he grinned.

"Not bad," Sorvino said. "I thought you guys were going to nickel and dime me."

"I told you that you'd like Deep Cover," Ray said. "Be patient. Setting up one of these witness protection programs is way more complicated than scratching your butt. You're not going to have any worries about money. By the way, I've packed a suitcase for you. You'll be leaving for The Caymans tonight."

"The Caymans? Tonight? What gives?"

"Too many people are hunting for you in this town, Sorvino. You need to get out of the country. The airports may be watched, so we'll use a chartered plane that'll take off from a private airstrip. The plane leaves in two hours. Once you're in The Caymans, you can pick up some cash from your bank accounts and go anywhere you like."

"What if I need something?" Sorvino asked.

"Your support contact's name and phone number are on your biography sheets. She'll be the only one to have any clue where you are. Even I won't know. It'll be safer that way."

"How do I know you won't double cross me?" Sorvino asked.

"If we do, then you'll turn up dead someplace. Word would get around and nobody else would be willing to tell us the time of day. It's in our interest to keep you alive."

"Yeah," Sorvino said, seeming to relax a little.

"All right, let's go," Ray said. "We have to meet that plane."

#

When Ray took Sorvino out to the station house parking lot, it was eight o'clock in the evening and just turning dark. A full moon gave some pale light. Ray wanted to get this whole thing over with as soon as possible. Just being with Sorvino made him feel like he needed a shower.

"Why do I have to wear these handcuffs?" Sorvino asked.

"Procedure," Ray said. "Until I put you onto that plane, you're still my prisoner. That dark blue Chevrolet over there is our car."

"You've gotta be kidding, Burke. That hunk of scrap metal must be at least ten years old."

"I know you'd prefer a brand new Mercedes, Sorvino, but fancy cars attract attention. We want to be inconspicuous."

"It's still a piece of crap," Sorvino grumbled as he opened the Chevrolet's front passenger's door and climbed in. Fifteen minutes later, he and Ray were riding west on Highway 401.

"We're being followed," Sorvino said as he looked into the Chevrolet's right hand mirror.

"Is it a black Toyota?" Ray asked.

"I don't know. It's dark out there. I can't see much more than the car's headlights."

"It's my partner Joe," Ray said. "I wanted some backup, just in case we ran into a welcoming committee from the Boninis."

A few minutes later, Ray turned off the highway. He followed a two lane rural road for a few kilometers to a small place named Clarksville. Just outside of town, Ray slowed the Chevrolet and drove it through the open gates of a huge compound that was bordered by a high chain link fence. Joe parked his black Toyota just outside of the fence.

"What's this place?" Sorvino asked as Ray switched off the Chevrolet's lights and engine.

"An auto wrecking yard."

"What? Is this some kind of double cross, Burke?"

"Relax. We're going to change cars here, in case anyone saw us leave the station."

"Yeah? So, where's the other car?" Sorvino asked.

"Good question. It was supposed to meet us here. I'll have to call in to find out what happened."

Ray pulled a cellphone from his jacket and switched it on.

"Damn!" he said.

"What's wrong?" Sorvino asked.

"My cellphone has a dead battery. Great timing. I saw a light burning inside that shed over there. Somebody must be still working the yard. I'll use his phone to call about the car. Hold out your wrists, Sorvino."

"Why?"

"Just hold them out."

Ray unlocked the handcuff from Sorvino's left wrist, then snapped the cuff shut around the car's steering wheel.

"Hey! What are you doing that for?" Sorvino asked.

"I don't want you taking off while I'm gone."

"Why would I want to go anywhere?"

"I don't know and I don't want to find out. Sit tight. I'll be back in less than ten minutes."

Ray stepped out of the Chevrolet and closed the driver's door. He walked about ten meters away from the car, then he looked up. High above, he could see that there was a light on in the control cab of a huge overhead crane. He knew that meant the crane operator was at the controls. Ray pulled a black plastic flashlight from one pocket of his jacket. He aimed the flashlight up at the crane cab and flicked the light on and off three times.

Ray watched while the crane's long boom swung around until it was directly above the blue Chevrolet. A thick steel cable attached to enormous metal jaws snaked downward until the jaws clamped onto two sides of the car. As the crane hoisted the Chevrolet off the ground like a toy, Ray thought he saw Sorvino's frightened face pressed against the car's window. In the dark, he couldn't be sure.

The crane swung the dark blue sedan to the left until the car was directly above a rubber and steel conveyor belt that fed a huge hydraulic compressor. It lowered the vehicle a little, then dropped it onto the conveyor belt. A diesel engine growled to life and the belt began to move forward, feeding the Chevrolet into the black maw of the compressor. Ray heard the shriek and crunch of tortured metal as huge hydraulic pistons pushed the compressor's walls inward on all sides, under tons of force.

A few seconds later, the remains of the car emerged from the compressor's exit ramp as a one meter cube of compacted metal, glass and plastic. This cube also contained what had once been human flesh, blood and bone. The crane picked up the processed cube and added it to a pile that was waiting for transport to recycling smelters.

Ray shivered and turned up the collar of his jacket.

"I promised that nobody would ever find you, Sorvino," he said. "I kept my promise. Nobody ever will. God have mercy on us all."

Ray walked toward the wrecking yard's gate where Joe was waiting in the Toyota. He hoped that Joe had some antacid mints with him. Ray's heartburn was killing him.

The End