

UNAVOIDABLE

A crime scene on a dark wooden floor. In the center is a large, dark red blood splatter. A silver thermos lies on its side to the right, with red liquid spilling from its opening. A pearl necklace is draped across the blood. Several spent bullet casing shells are scattered around the blood. In the background, a dark wooden cabinet or dresser is visible. The title 'UNAVOIDABLE' is at the top, with red liquid dripping from the letters.

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By

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“I don’t need to tell you that, what determines a man’s legacy is often what isn’t seen.”

~ J. Edgar Hoover

Chapter 1

"I'm telling you, they got lucky."

"Lucky? No way!" Christian said, emphatically. "The A's dominated the Cubs in the World Series. Chicago didn't even show up."

I turned to look out of the car's window. Christian was right; the Cubs hadn't been able to handle the A's pitching. All of Chicago had cheered when we'd won the pennant, and then we'd all drowned our sorrows in illegal whiskey and beer when the A's nearly swept us in the World Series. I turned back to look at Christian. "If Hornsby—"

"Look, Saul," Christian said, interrupting me. "You're going to beat yourself up more and more if you keep playing 'what ifs' in your head. Get over it. The series ended five months ago. You're not going to do yourself any favors with the season starting in a couple of weeks. Besides," he gave me a quick glance, "I told you not to make such large bets with Stutzman and Friel."

"It's not about the money," I said, although losing a sawbuck to each of the two agents on Ness's team, both from Pennsylvania and both rabid fans of the Philadelphia Athletics, had stung. "It's the way that they rubbed it in, especially Friel."

Christian chuckled. "You know, for a vampire, you sure have a thin skin when it comes to baseball. Espe-

cially the Cubs.”

“I do not.”

“So, Game 3 wasn’t ‘the greatest debacle, the most terrific flop in the history of the World Series’ according to Mr. Ed Burns of the Tribune?”

“Hey, don’t you start. Everybody knows that Hack Wilson lost the ball in the sun. It wasn’t his fault.”

“Thin. Skin.” Christian taunted me again. “Well, you’d better get used to it. I think Philadelphia is going to make it to the series again this year.”

“We’ll beat them this time.”

Christian gave a noncommittal shrug. “Maybe. The Cards look pretty good.”

“No way will the Cardinals win the pennant.”

“Care to put some money on that?” Christian gave me a mischievous smile, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“I think I’ll pass. I’ve learned my lesson.” I went back to looking out of the car’s window at the bulk of the Eastern State Penitentiary. This is where Al Capone had been put away after his arrest for carrying a concealed weapon last year. It was a massive, imposing building, and it reminded me of castles that I’d seen in books. I checked my watch for the dozenth time since we’d arrived. “Come on. When’s this show going to get started?”

Christian glanced at his own watch. “There’s still time. The warden said that they weren’t going to release Capone until after ten. We’re lucky that we’re even here.”

I grunted an acknowledgement. “Whose ass did Ness have to kiss to get the news?”

“I think it was a professional courtesy. Since the warden is secretly releasing Capone a day before the ‘official’ date, I’m sure that he wanted us to know about it.”

“Maybe,” I offered. “Too bad we won’t be able to see the expressions on the faces of all of those people and reporters who are going to show up tomorrow for nothing.”

“Oh, I’m sure that somebody will snap a few photos of the event. That way they can howl about being duped by the warden in the papers.”

I smiled at the image, and then turned my thoughts back to Capone. “Still, it’s not like this has been a real hardship for Capone.”

“He’s spent nearly a year in prison,” Christian stated. “Capone’s always lived a lavish lifestyle, so prison life had to have been hard.”

“It’s been barely ten months,” I said. “And have you seen the photos of his cell? It had a nice rug and a bed with a warm, thick blanket. Plus, he had a desk, and an armchair, and *two* lamps.”

“Don’t forget the radio,” Christian added.

“Tell me again how Capone was being punished? His cell was almost as nice as his place at the Lexington.”

“It was still a cell.”

My only response to that was another grunt. “He was on vacation,” I said. I turned to look at Christian. “And I think he’s been involved with those recent attacks in Chicago.”

“You mean the diner?”

I nodded. “That, and the gunfight at that speakeasy a month back.”

Christian shook his head. “As far as we know, those attacks weren’t related to anybody that Capone has a grudge against, and they didn’t seem to be a grab for power or territory by his organization. Besides, how’d he order a hit from inside the pen?”

I turned in my seat and stared, open-mouthed, at Christian. After a moment, he acknowledged the obvious. “Okay, okay. Capone the gangster and Capone the vampire could have easily done it. But I still don’t think that he had anything to do with those attacks.”

“You don’t think that Capone would stoop to killing innocent children?” I asked, anger and sadness fighting each other as to which of my emotions would be the one to bubble to the surface first. “A little girl was killed at the diner. A survivor said that she was holding the case that had the bomb in it when it went off.”

“Capone is a monster—in both the figurative and the literal sense.” I ignored the veiled barb in that comment. “But the diner was up on the North Side, in a part of the city that normally isn’t under Capone’s influence. If anybody was making a play, it was Bugs Moran.”

I shrugged to acknowledge his point. “But Moran has been pretty quiet lately. I don’t think it was him. Plus, a bombing isn’t his style.”

“Gangsters have styles?”

“You know what I mean,” I said. “But it is strange that there haven’t been any direct attacks on Capone’s organization. I mean, while he’s been ‘on hiatus’ here.” I gestured to the massive structure outside. “We haven’t heard a peep from Mr. Brown or his master since Capone was arrested. Why didn’t they make a move to try to take over Capone’s territory? Last May, it felt like we were on the verge of a full-scale vampire gang war, but then as soon as Capone gets pinched, nothing happens.”

“Maybe Mr. Brown’s master got what she wanted?”

“I don’t think so. Something else had to have happened.”

“What, though? We’ve not seen Mr. Brown since he

fled the pier in Atlantic City,” Christian said.

I gave yet another shrug. Christian and I had beaten this topic to death since our return from New Jersey. We were no closer to figuring out what was going on now than we were a year ago. Mr. Brown had apparently disappeared from the face of the Earth.

“When we get back to Chicago, we should practice your ‘Renfield’ routine,” I said, changing the topic. “With Capone back in town, it may come in handy.”

“Don’t call it that,” Christian growled while he unconsciously fingered the silver cross that he wore around his neck. “You know that I hate being referred to by that name.”

“No, you hate that I have any power over you because of our connection.”

“That, too.”

“Capone used the word procurator. I could call you that instead of Renfield.”

Christian turned to me in a huff. “Just call me your partner. That’s what I am, despite this abominable curse you’ve afflicted me with.”

Still winning friends, Sarah’s voice taunted me. You know he’s going to sit and fume for the rest of the day now.

Oh, shut up, I told her.

Fine, be a putz and don’t apologize. I was getting tired of all of your yammering anyway.

You should listen to your sister, my mother felt compelled to add. You know your partner doesn’t like it when you call him that name.

And what should I call him, then?

Are you meshuga? My father suddenly asked. You call him your partner, because that’s what he is. I didn’t

get to be supervisor at the plant—

“I’m sorry,” I said quickly, cutting off my father’s voice. I’d heard enough about his job to last me a lifetime—which might be forever now. “I know that you don’t like me to use that name.”

I waited, but Christian continued sulking. I bit back my frustration. “I won’t use it again... partner.” I raised my eyes to see that Christian had relaxed, somewhat.

“You’re more than that, too,” I said. “You’re a really good friend.”

Christian angrily held up his index finger. “I’m your partner, you unholy abomination, but I am *not* your friend.”

I put my hand to my heart. “You always say the nicest things.” I gave a little laugh to let him know that his bluster didn’t bother me. At least, I assumed it was bluster. He called me an abomination against God so frequently that it felt like how my mom always referred to Dad as a lazy schmuck when he did something that she didn’t like.

“Whatever you want to call it, we have a... bond now. We need to practice using it so that we can deal with Capone when he gets back to Chicago.”

Christian pointed to the rear gate of the penitentiary, which was swinging open. “Speak of the devil.”

“I’m sitting right here,” I deadpanned. Christian sighed, rolled his eyes, and shook his head as he started the car. A single Dodge sedan pulled out of the gate and passed us. I could make out Al Capone sitting in the back seat. Christian put our beat-up Buick Standard Six into gear, and we followed Capone’s car.

Chapter 2

“Don’t lose him,” I said, as Capone’s car turned west to head out of Philadelphia.

“His is the only other car on the road,” Christian said, gesturing to the empty road with one hand. “Besides, we know where he’s going.”

“If the warden’s information was right.”

“It was. Why would he lie to Ness?”

“And if Capone sticks to the plan,” I added. Christian didn’t have a reply for that, and I felt a small tingle of victory.

We were approaching an intersection. Capone’s car slowed, and then went on straight up the road. I said, “Uh. Weren’t they supposed to turn if they were going to the train station? Like they were supposed to?”

Christian’s reply was to gun the engine. We sped through the intersection. He pointed to a sign that read “Airport 5 miles”.

“That’s where they’re going. He’s going to fly home,” Christian said, sounding smug.

“Great,” I said. “I’ve never been on a plane before.” Christian started to say something, but I laughed to let him know that I was joking.

The road curved to the left, and Capone’s sedan disappeared around the bend, briefly hidden by a cluster of trees and shrubs. As we made the turn, a Model A

Ford raced up along a side road, the car spraying dirt and gravel over us as it skidded onto the highway.

“Mother of God!” Christian swore, and jerked the wheel. We avoided colliding with their bumper by mere inches, and my dead heart raced as I had a vision of being decapitated in a horrible car crash on a Pennsylvanian county road.

That would be a great headline, quipped Sarah. *“Mighty Vampire Slain in Car Crash.”*

I ignored my sister’s sarcasm as Christian kept us on the road. “Crazy country drivers,” he complained.

Something wasn’t right about this, and my arm hairs stood up. I looked over at the Ford and then I spotted it. “The plates,” I said, pointing. “They’re from Illinois.”

Just then, the Ford accelerated. A window on the passenger side rolled down, and I saw the distinctive shape of a Tommy Gun poke out of the car.

“Gun!” I yelled, just as the staccato of bullets ripped through the air. Christian jerked the wheel, but it was suddenly clear that they were shooting at Capone. Bullets impacted with a loud THWANG, THWANG, THWANG on the rear of the Dodge. The big car struggled to accelerate and started to swerve, the driver trying to break the gunner’s aim.

I felt our car slow a bit, and I turned to Christian. “What are you doing?”

“Staying alive.”

“And what happens if Al Capone is gunned down outside of jail a day *before* he’s supposed to be released? I’m not thrilled about saving Capone’s life, but we can’t let him be killed like this. The press will have a field day, and Ness will never let us hear the end of it.”

Christian hesitated, and I could hear him grinding

his teeth. Then he said, “Blessed Jesus, please protect us.” Our car accelerated, and I pulled out my gun and rolled down my window.

Ooh... think you can actually hit something this time?
Sarah taunted me.

Shut up! I know what I’m doing.

Sure, nudnick. I’m still surprised that Ness even lets you have a gun.

Well, I can’t go all fangy when we’re dealing with regular goons.

Fangy?

It’s a word, I told her, as I pointed the gun at the Ford.

“Your safety is still on!” Christian yelled.

I felt the heat rising on my face as I thumbed the safety off and tried to ignore the peals of laughter coming from Sarah.

Christian pulled along the driver’s side of the Model A. The RAT-A-TAT-TAT explosion of bullets continued from the other side of the car as a tongue of flame licked out of the Tommy Gun’s barrel with each bullet. The bullets continued to strike the rear of Capone’s car, sparks flying with each impact.

The driver of the Model A finally noticed us. I could see his eyes go wide. I don’t know if he thought that we were the cops or if he thought that we were some of Capone’s men, but I saw him take one hand off the wheel and reach into his coat.

“Not today, buddy.” I aimed at the car’s front wheel, like Barney Cloonan had said to do if you wanted to disable a vehicle. We needed these guys alive in order to see who had sent them after Capone. Was this just a normal gang thing—some of Moran’s men, or another gang—looking to make a statement? Or was this the

first shots in a large-scale vampire gang war? Either way, taking out the head of your rivals was a tried and true method that Capone himself had used more than a few times. But how did they know that Capone would be let out a day early?

I shook the thoughts away and concentrated on my aim. Our car and the Ford were both weaving all over the road, nearly colliding with each other a few times. I pulled the trigger.

The gun bucked in my hand, and I continued to pull the trigger. In a short time, the last casing was ejected, and the slide locked back. There were four neat holes in the Ford's fender, but the tire was still in one piece.

Nice shooting there, Wild Bill, Sarah taunted. It's truly amazing that you even hit the car. Maybe if it was the size of a barn you might have better luck.

I didn't have time to argue with her. The driver of the Ford raised his weapon, a small revolver. He didn't bother to roll down his window, and just fired. Glass exploded, and Christian swerved. Two bullets struck my door, two hit the hood, and one hit the windscreen, which erupted in a spider web of cracks, but didn't shatter.

"Don't worry," said Christian. "It's bulletproof."

Just then, the final bullet from the other driver struck the windscreen. More cracks appeared, followed by a small hole.

"Well, it's *supposed* to be bulletproof."

"Damn it, I'm going to do this the easy way." I felt my fangs extend inside my mouth.

So, now it's okay to get all 'fangy'? Sarah asked, her tone mocking. *What are you going to do, bite their car?*

"Get me alongside them!" I yelled to Christian.

Christian applied more throttle, and we pulled alongside the Ford. I opened my door and stepped onto the running board, the grey pavement racing by inches under my feet. I didn't think. I didn't pause. I just acted.

I jumped off of the running board and landed on the rear of the Ford, my fingers digging into the metal frame like it was soft dough. Through the rear window, I could see the gunner pulling in his weapon and turning to face me. I leaped forward just as he pulled the trigger. Several bullets exploded out of the car where I had just been. He stared at me, his mouth wide in shock, while the driver was trying to keep the car on the road.

I reached through the shattered window and grabbed the steering wheel. We needed to get off the road, to keep them from killing Capone. Or me. With a quick jerk, I ripped the steering wheel from the driver's hands and turned it, hard. The car turned sharply and then shuddered, the rear wheels skipping once before we were suddenly airborne.

Oh shit! What the hell did I do?

I jumped clear as the Ford tumbled, rolling along the highway, glass shattering and covering the road in a sparkling carpet. The car finally came to rest on its wheels, but it wouldn't be able to drive any further.

I landed hard, hitting my knee, and rolled as well, but I fared better than the Ford. As I stood up, my knee almost gave out, but I was already starting to heal. Past the ruined Ford, I could see Capone's Dodge continue to scream down the road.

"Figures."

Behind me, Christian slowed to a stop. He opened the door and stood on the running board. "Are they all right?"

A year ago, I would have thrown him an angry reply at a comment like that; it seemed that he cared more about the goons than me. But we'd been working together long enough now that I knew that he knew that I healed easily from these kinds of scrapes. Besides, we needed these two *schmos* alive if we wanted to learn why they'd attacked Capone.

I dusted broken glass and road grit off my coat. The Ford was a crumpled mass, looking like a tin can that had been used too long in a game of kick the can. "I hope so," I said, as I walked over to the wreck.

I could smell the gasoline leaking from the ruptured tank. Mixed with it was the sweet scent of blood. I heard Christian close his door, followed by the crunch of his shoes on the broken glass.

The driver's side was smashed so badly that I had to lean down in order to see into the car. The inside was a mess, as were the two men. Amazingly, the passenger was still clutching the Tommy Gun, but he also had part of the door frame sticking through his neck.

Ooh... look at the carnage, Saul, cooed Moira's voice in my head. I could picture her licking her lips in a seductive gesture. *I didn't know you had it in you.*

I shook the thought of her away and turned my attention to the driver. I could hear the faint beating of his heart. "This one is still alive," I said, as Christian circled the wreck. "But his partner won't be walking out of here."

Christian leaned down, and I saw him go pale as he looked into the car. "You okay?" I asked. Christian swallowed, closed his eyes for a moment, crossed himself, and then nodded.

A soft groan came from the driver, and I pulled hard

on the door. The metal creaked and popped at first, and then, with a loud squeal, the door ripped open. I knelt down and gently smacked the man's cheeks.

"Wake up, buddy. You alright?" His eyelids fluttered and slowly opened.

"Wha..."

"You were in a car wreck. Help's on the way," I lied. I could tell that his injuries were too severe. Any help that might be coming would arrive too late. I needed to act fast to find out what we needed to know.

"Just relax," I commanded. "Tell me why you were shooting at Al Capone."

The combination of the trauma of the accident and my gift of persuasion seemed to have the desired effect.

"Want... wanted to s... send a mess—age to Capone." He licked his lips, and I was suddenly reminded of a February night a year ago when I was lying in a hospital bed after having been shot by Capone.

"What message?" I asked.

"That he... he's not un... untouchable. We weren't to k—kill him... just show him he could be re... reached." The man's head rolled to look at me. "That we know his... secrets." He gave a small smile at the remark.

"Who wanted to send the message?" I asked.

"M... man in..." he coughed, blood spurting from his lips and hitting me in the face. I had to force myself to keep from licking it up.

"What man? Who told you to scare Capone?"

"Never g—gave his name," the driver looked up into my face. "Pale... man, dressed in... b—brown." He lifted his left hand and poked it at me. "Are you... a Fed?"

I was surprised by the question, but I nodded. The man gave another smile, or maybe it was supposed to

be a smirk. “The man... he said that if... if we ran into t—two Feds... to tell them that he ha-hasn’t for... gotten w—what they did in—” he coughed out more blood, “in Atlantic City.”

I looked up to Christian, who was leaning in the passenger side window. I wasn’t sure if his eyes were wider than mine.

More coughs came from the driver. “Where did you meet this man in brown? Where is he?”

“He... h—” his voice fell silent and his head dropped to his chest. I heard the final beat of his heart.

“Damn it!” I struck the side of the car hard enough that it rocked. “We were *this* close to learning where Mr. Brown is.”

Christian was ignoring me. He was pulling open the gunner’s coat, rifling through his pockets.

“We haven’t heard a peep from Brown or his master since Atlantic City, and then this comes out of nowhere.” I gestured to the ruined car. “And now our one lead to find Brown has died.”

Yeah, great job nudnik, Sarah taunted in my head. Maybe next time, don’t be too ‘fangy’.

I don’t need you telling me I screwed up.

Sure you do. How else are you going to learn? That’s what sisters are for.

“Finally,” Christian muttered. I looked over and saw him examining something in his hands. He glanced at me, with a slight smile on his face. He tossed something to me, and I caught it. A black matchbook. I flipped it over, and printed in bright, blood-red ink was the name “Pandora’s Legacy – Pool Hall” and a Chicago address.

“Kind of a strange name for a pool hall,” Christian said.