

Hook, Line, Sinker

Strains of Gershwin and Copland flowed freely in the dimly lit room, and he wasn't as drunk as he appeared to be. Sobriety was uncommon in these parts in this day and age, and the last thing any mole would want was to stick out like a sore thumb. Not that he was a mole; at least, not yet. The regional FBI chief was tired of cooperation between the local police and the mafiosos, so he authorized a large scale operation. And he, Theodore Carlisle, was going to be an informant. *The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree.* His job designation came from J. Edgar Hoover himself, alongside the promise of international fame. He scanned the room while nursing his glass of strike-me-dead¹, hoping for the stars to align and a member of the infamous Moran family to fall on his lap.

His attention was quickly grabbed by a sudden ritardando² by the band and the introduction of the canary³. She was draped in knee-length black crepe and adorned with obsidian jewels that ran along her throat and dangled from her ears. Her shockingly bright, emerald eyes fixated on him as her scarlet-stained lips began to move:

*“Heaven, I'm in heaven,
And my heart beats so that I can hardly speak
And I seem to find the happiness I seek
When we're out together dancing, cheek to cheek...”*⁴

The woman swayed in time to the song, her gaze never leaving his. Upon a thunderous round of applause, she gracefully leapt off the stage and sauntered over to the tiny nook where he was sitting. She sat right down next to him in the booth

¹ Bootleg alcohol

² Slowing down of music

³ Female singer

⁴ “Cheek to cheek,” lyrics by Irving Berlin

“What’s a flyboy⁵ like you doing in a juice joint⁶ in our Saintly City⁷?” she inquired huskily, tilting her head to the side. Her eyes kept him frozen in place.

“Just enjoying the show,” he breathed, trying his hardest to stifle his immediate attraction.

“And a cake-eater to boot⁸,” she laughed, her eyes twinkling with mirth, “the name is Jacqueline,” she stretched out a perfectly manicured hand.

“Emil Johannsen,” Theodore supplied. He grasped the outstretched hand, brushing a kiss along her knuckles, “there’s been a shortage of planes flying, and I thought I’d come back home for a job. Is there any in this drum?”

“I’ll have to ask the big boss. Stay until after closing time?”

“Pos-i-lute-ly,” he promised with a grin, finally relaxing his grip.

“Nifty! I have to mooch⁹, abyssinia!” she gushed, ghosting a kiss over his cheek. She straightened herself up and strode out of his sight.

Over the next three hours, the door welcomed and bid farewell to a myriad of guests until he was the last one sitting. After some time, his eyelids felt like they weighed a thousand pounds before he gave into exhaustion and his head landed on the table with a loud thud. He was out for the count before midnight.

A rather intimidating, heavy set man finally marched up to Theodore’s booth at around 2 in the morning.

“You Emil?” the man shouted in to Theodore’s ear.

⁵ Fancy term for aviator

⁶ speakeasy

⁷ St Paul

⁸ Ladies’ man

⁹ leave

He woke up with a start.

“Who’s asking?” he inquired groggily

The man leaned over and whispered, “you a bull¹⁰?”

“Just a lowly flyboy looking for work, sir.” He couldn’t help but smile to himself.

“The name’s Linus Moran and I’m looking for a, whatcha-say, soldato. You know, a foot soldier? You seem like a torpedo¹¹ to me.”

“The jack¹²?”

“Heavy sugar¹³.” He curved himself even closer, “ever since they pinched old Scarface¹⁴, every gang has been scrambling for coverage and we’re the biggest in the market. So, flyboy, care to hang up your goggles?”

Theodore quickly agreed and Linus left him with a smile and a hefty pile of kale¹⁵. He called for a page-boy to delEmil the good news to the bull-in-chief. On his way out he found Jacqueline blocking the doorway.

“Keep running in to me like this and people might think you’re a vamp¹⁶,” he chuckled gently.

“That’s because I find you tight¹⁷. So, has my father saved you from being a dewdropper¹⁸?”

¹⁰ cop

¹¹ hitman

¹² money

¹³ A lot of money

¹⁴ Al Capone, not to be confused with Tony Montana

¹⁵ See 13

¹⁶ Seducer of men

¹⁷ attractive

¹⁸ Unemployed male

He coughed in surprise, “Your father? Linus Moran, the notorious mobster, is your father? Is that why you didn’t give me your last name?”

“Need to-know basis, flyboy. I didn’t know if you were on the level¹⁹. Now I do.” She stepped into his personal space, face inches from his. She whispered in his ear.

“Welcome to the family.”

Then she opened the door and disappeared into the arctic night. Later that day he found a note with her telephone number in his breast pocket.

Over the weeks that followed, he became fully ingrained with the Moran clan. His first posting was at the Wabasha Caves, guarding the vats from competitors. He made “friends” among the fellow soldatos and was a confidante to many. But his overseers were suspicious from the get go, so he was continuously looking for over his back. Regardless, he quickly carried out missions quickly and efficiently. He eventually earned the rank of capo²⁰ after a sudden vacancy. The previous one was whacked²¹ for suspicion of being a rat. Theodore felt no regret for his hand in that, as Bower was expendable to the FBI anyway.

That night, after speaking with Linus Moran, he met Jacqueline at Neumann’s Bar. He saw her at a table in the middle of the drum²², wearing a floor length, ruby gown with her eyes rimmed with kohl²³. She extended a glass of champagne as he sat down.

¹⁹ trustworthy

²⁰ Captain, *mafia term*

²¹ killed

²² speakeasy

²³ Heavy eyeliner

“Capodecina²⁴, in so little time? I’m impressed.”

He blushed and replied, “I couldn’t have done it if weren’t for you.”

“I know. Come, I have something to show you.”

She rose and led him out of the basement and into the street. They went around one street corner, up Margaret Street, and continued on until she stopped in front of a small house.

“After you,” she purred, holding out a key.

He unlocked the door and found himself in a living room filled head-to-toe with dainty files pertaining to the organization.

“Am I supposed to be in here?” he queried.

“You’re a capo now. This is your information. Use it wisely.” He swore he could see her wink in the dark. The final piece of the puzzle fell in to piece when she added, “Make sure the right eyes see it, gift from God.”

He was about demand an explanation as she walked out the door. She left him alone with a sinking feeling in his stomach and reams of sensitive information.

He spent the next day locked in the house, taking notes on the files. His surprise mounted with each name that came across. There were associates, soldiers, capos, underbosses and bosses of all the major gangs in the Twin Cities. What made his heart skid to a halt were the top two names on the victim list: Spencer and Edna Carlisle, his

²⁴ Long form of capo

parents. Listed right next to their names was their killer: Linus Moran. The pain that had remained dormant for the past 20 years came back with a vengeance. He attacked the rest of the dossier with a blind fury, documenting every slightly incriminating incident.

After the span of several hours, he heard a key slowly turning in the lock. Panicking, he stuffed his notes into the nearest manila envelope. He straightened up just as the door opened.

“Emil! Just the man I wanted to see,” Moran exclaimed, bending over the threshold.

Theodore felt stirrings of hatred boiling in his veins. However, the best course of action at this point was to remain silent.

“Cat got your tongue? Anyways, I’ve got a job for you. John Dillinger and Babyface Nelson and a handful of their allies are coming to town and are in dire need of protection. Can you handle it?” Moran demanded.

“Of course, sir,” he answered with thinly veiled contempt.

“Perfect, I’ll meet you at Neumann’s Bar at say, noon tomorrow?” Moran smiled and walked out, leaving just as quickly as he came.

As soon as the door clicked shut, he ran for the telephone. “Boss, I got news for you. John Dillinger and Babyface Nelson are coming to St. Paul, tomorrow. Am I clear for a sting?” he spoke hurriedly.

“I’ll send backup immediately. Nice work, Carlisle.”

“Yeah, boss,” he said weakly, his grief starting to overwhelm him.

“You found out?”

“Is that why you sent me? For revenge? To put the man who murdered my parents behind bars?”

“It’s an effective motivator, isn’t it?”

“Bye, boss.”

He sat at attention at promptly twelve the next day, scanning the patrons in the upstairs lounge. Moran had debriefed him and the rest of the capos the evening before. Later, he spent the remainder the night on the phone with the local headquarters, finalizing the strategy for the next day. The backup agents were mingled within the crowd downstairs, waiting for his cue. His pulse thundered through his veins, almost coming to a halt when Moran walked in to the room, followed by notable gangsters Henry Dillinger and Babyface Nelson. They immediately went over to bar where Theodore waited.

He stood up and shook their hands. “The rest of the boys are downstairs,” he muttered.

“Excellent. This way.” Moran led the men down to the underground speakeasy and Theodore took up the rear.

He started hyperventilating as he descended the stairs, gripping his cream soda bottle. Once he reached the basement floor, he thrust the bottle in the air.

And with that, all hell broke loose. Plainclothes surged in to the crowd, their handcuffs glistening in the air. Within minutes, the majority of the Moran gang were escorted out onto the street by FBI agents.

Standing at the bottom of the steps, Theodore Carlisle watched as the mafia scene in St. Paul burned. And Jacqueline Moran was nowhere to be seen.

He sat in public for the first time in six weeks on the witness stand. After the big sting, he was sequestered away in a safe house in Minneapolis with round the clock guards. His boss expressed concern for his safety but J Edgar Hoover himself demanded that he testify for the prosecution. No less than 12 notorious gangsters currently stood trial, and he was responsible for the arrest of every single one of them. That thought made him sweat through his Norfolk jacket and he desperately wanted to run his hands through his immaculately coiffed hair.

Blood rushed through his ears as the prosecutor approached.

“You are Theodore George Carlisle?” the lawyer asked.

“Yes, that is correct,” he firmly stated, relishing the look of recognition and fear that had appeared on the elder Moran’s face.

“Mr. Carlisle, what was the extent of job.”

“To infiltrate the Moran gang, gain their trust, and report back.”

“And you completed this task?”

“Perhaps I took it too far. But then again, the FBI wanted intel, and I gave it to them.”

Hayden Deinard looked pleased and announced, “Your honor, I have no further questions.” The defense declined and he was dismissed. He briskly walked out of the courtroom, out of the main doors, and in to broad daylight.

“Hey there, flyboy,” a familiar feminine voice cooed behind him. He whirled around.

“Jacqueline, what are you doing here?” he asked, completely shocked at the reappearance of his lover.

She stalked towards him inserting her . “I wanted to see you on your big day in court, Theodore.”

“How do you know? How did you find out who I am?” he pressed.

“How could I not know? You look just like them,” she mused, her gloved left hand dragging along his suit collar. “Same nose, same eyes, same jawline. Don’t be surprised,” she added, glancing at the expression on his face, “I’ve seen the files.” She reached into a secret pocket in her dress and pulled out a ornate silver dagger. Pressing the tip into his chest, she continued speaking: “Do you want to know why they died, Theodore? Why your parents died? Your father was a member of the Moran gang, and he turned on them. He broke the holy oath of Omertà. Oh, and your mother wasn’t innocent either,” she included. “She set up the meeting with the FBI. They deserved their murder. And so do you.” She punctuated that sentence with a sudden thrust to the heart. She leaned in, her lips brushing his ears like they had countless times before. “I have to thank you, my love,” she intimated, “I couldn’t have done this without you. You may have cut the head off my father’s organization, but I’m afraid that the limbs are still intact. They need a leader, and as you have said time and time again, I would be a perfect one.

“I’m sorry you won’t be around to see my reign. But you broke Omertà, my heart, and a rat that is caught never survives,” she sighed. She kissed him gently on the mouth, laid him on the ground, and took off into the street.

The last thing he saw was a flowing swath of her signature black crepe before the world went black.

Word Count: 2191