

Prologue

Eddie Coyle had parked on the right shoulder of I-94 and left the engine running and the heater on low. It was below freezing in the Motor City. My seat warmer was on low, but the heat became too much and I turned it off.

Eddie Coyle said, “Back in ’97 there was the Loomis Fargo Bank robbery.”

His words pulled me out of my trance. His voice was powerful.

I asked, “Where was that?”

“Charlotte, North Carolina. They withdrew over seventeen million dollars.”

“That’s a lot of money.”

“Seventeen million.”

“Where are they now?”

“Jail.”

I removed my black fedora, then reached inside my suit coat and pulled out my pocket watch, checked my time against the time on the dash.

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He said, "Two minutes. That's how long it took Dillinger to rob a bank. When you're on the job, keep that number in mind. Two minutes. I'll cover the rest with you next week."

"Violence and injury occur in less than three percent of bank robberies."

"You did some research."

"Less than one percent involve murder, kidnapping, or hostages."

"I never did the research. The only numbers that matter to me are on the front of money."

"Well, I like to know my odds. They don't look good, but they're better than the odds in the unemployment line. I'm starting to feel I have a better chance of winning the lottery than getting a job."

Sheltered from the inclement weather, I was sitting at the cross-roads with the devil.

Sometimes the only choices a man has left are bad ones.

Eddie Coyle asked, "How long have you been out of work?"

"Over two years."

"You speak a handful of languages."

"I do."

"Your wife said that you used to be an executive."

"I was. For a while, I was."

"And can't find a decent job."

"Welcome to America. The long line on the left is the line for the disenfranchised."

"A chicken in every pot and a car in every garage."

"Add that to the long list of lies."

"That's not the way it's supposed to be."

"I know."

Tempted by Trouble

“It goes against the grain of the American dream. Doesn’t make sense to me.”

“I worked on the line too. I was blue-collar too. Yep, I was laid off, lost my white-collar job, took a drastic pay cut, and ended up on the line for nine years. Seven years white-collar, seven blue-collar. I was willing to work wherever I could work, despite my education.”

“Not many executives are willing to take a blue-collar job when things get rough.”

“Not many.”

He looked at his watch and I thought about my own future, a future as dark as the night.

I pulled down the visor, flipped open the vanity mirror, and when it illuminated I stared at my image. My father’s image. My face was Henrick’s face. The face of a real man, a face not made for billboards and magazines. I used his pocket watch, a timepiece that had been his father’s timepiece, a pocket watch that had kept time for decades.

But the world had changed since Henrick walked on top of this littered soil, and not for the better. No one would say it was the best of times. It was bad for Wall Street, the housing industry, and law enforcement, and a travesty for the car industry. I didn’t see another way out.

As the SUV hummed, I asked Eddie Coyle, “What’s the cargo you have in the back?”

“I told you already.”

“What are we waiting on?”

“Godot.”

The man who had appropriated the name Eddie Coyle was in the driver’s seat, both literally and metaphorically. Ice spotted the sides

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of the roads and icicles hung from barren trees for as far as the headlights from passing cars would allow me to see; the same symbols of a harsh winter hung from interstate signs. Detroit was in a deep freeze. The chill that had crippled the Midwest and parts of the North sat on us as we waited on the right shoulder of I-94, the engine running and the lights off. It was twelve thirty in the morning. Five minutes later another Cadillac Escalade pulled up behind us.

I kept my voice smooth, masked my nervousness, and asked, “Are you expecting company?”

“My brother.”

“So you didn’t come from Rome by yourself.”

“I haven’t been alone all evening.”

“You said you worked with two other guys, Rick and Sammy.”

“From time to time.”

“Which one is your brother?”

“Neither. My brother is Bishop. We call him Bishop.”

“What’s he doing back there?”

“He’s going to be our lookout.”

“You and your brother could’ve done this alone.”

“If you want to make it to the next level, you’ll do this, not him. He’s already in.”

When there was a break in traffic, we stepped out into the cold and moved to the back. Eddie Coyle popped open the rear of the luxury SUV. The interior light revealed a man stuffed inside industrial carpet. He had been rolled up like a cigarette. He wore wingtip shoes that were similar to mine. The man had been a professional. As we grabbed the dead body and unloaded it from the back of the SUV, one of Detroit’s landmarks, the giant Uniroyal tire, towered on the

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opposite side of I-94. A freezing drizzle tapped against my fedora like an erratic heartbeat, that same freezing water adding weight to my long wool overcoat. The ground crunched underneath my Johnston & Murphy shoes as I held on to the feet of the dead man. My breath fogged in front of my face and my lungs contracted with each frigid breath. We were about forty yards into the brush and debris when we heard a boom, then in the distance the sky lit up. It was a new year and fireworks brightened the suburbs. For three seconds, if anyone on I-94 had looked into the wooded area that served as a barrier between the interstate and a strip mall, they would have seen two men wearing suits carrying six feet of carpet off into the nether regions. The carpet moved like a giant caterpillar battling to become a monstrous butterfly. The man in the carpet kicked, his right shoe slipping off his foot. Startled, I jumped and caught my breath. I didn't yell, but inside my head my voice screamed, and I abandoned my end of the rug.

The dead man wasn't dead.

Eddie Coyle dragged his end of the carpet another ten yards before he let it fall hard. While the man kicked and fought until the carpet unrolled, Eddie Coyle reached underneath his suit coat and pulled out a handgun. The man wore black socks and wingtips. Nothing else. He was naked, pale, tall, and no more than thirty years old. His wrists and mouth were wrapped in duct tape. He struggled to get free. Traffic passed by on I-94, everyone intoxicated and unaware. As another late round of fireworks put beautiful colors in the dark skies, Eddie Coyle fired three shots, each shot lighting up his face. He was a CEO who was executing his business with a calmness that was terrifying. The man collapsed, fell back onto the carpet.

Eddie Coyle regarded me, his breath fogging from his face.

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He said, “No witnesses.”

I nodded.

He nodded in return.

I stood tall and firm, despite feeling that this frozen ground was about to become my grave as well.

He asked, “You ever heard of Yoido Full Gospel Church?”

“Can’t say that I have. That’s not in Detroit or Dearborn, is it?”

“It sits on Yeouido Island in Seoul, South Korea.”

“Okay.”

“It has over eight hundred thousand members.”

“You thinking about going there?”

“I can only imagine how much money they bring in every Sunday. I can’t imagine how much we could pull if we organized and hit a church that size.”

“Are we robbing a bank or are you talking about robbing a church?”

“Banks. I’m a bank man. Banks are federally insured, so no one loses in the end.”

Eddie Coyle’s attention went back to the work at hand.

Eddie Coyle said, “The body won’t smell for a while. It’s below freezing and will stay that way for at least a week. It’s cold enough to throw off the time of death by a few days. It might be weeks, maybe a couple of months before anybody finds what’s left of him.”

Another chill ran up my spine, a combination of coldness, fear, and hate.

Eddie Coyle said, “You’re almost officially one of us now.”

“Almost.”

“You just knowingly and willingly participated in a crime.”

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“I guess this makes me a partner in your business.”

“You don’t get your name on the door, not just yet.”

“I stand corrected.”

“It gives me a bargaining chip in case you have other ideas. Mister Executive, so far so good. You didn’t fall apart. You didn’t freak out and run. You passed the test. You’ll need nerves of steel.”

I shivered from the cold. I knew it would have been futile to run. His brother was probably standing in the cold, waiting for me to panic and run out of the woods, his gun ready to fire.

Eddie Coyle took out a package of Marlboro Blacks, then tossed me his smoking gun.

He said, “It’s your turn to put a few bullets in one of my problems.”

“The man’s dead.”

“But he’s not dead enough, Dmytryk.”

He took out a plastic lighter and lit his cigarette, its tip glowing in the night.

Eddie Coyle smiled. “Any man who crosses me will never be dead enough.”

Again in the distance, there was an explosion and beautiful colors that lit up the skies.

I handed the gun back to Eddie Coyle. “He was your problem, not mine.”

“Be a man.”

“I am a man. And putting a bullet in a dead man won’t elevate that status.”

Moments later the sound of feet crunching the ground came toward us.

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It was Eddie Coyle's brother. He was a large man dressed in a fur coat that made him look like a bear stalking through the darkness. When he came closer I saw that he carried another rug over his shoulders. He dropped the rug and allowed it to unroll. The body of a woman rolled free and came to a stop next to the man who had been hidden inside the first rug. She was still alive.

Bishop regarded me. "You're the new guy that my little brother is vouching for."

His voice was thick, not as refined as Eddie Coyle's. Bishop sounded like years in prison, drug smuggling, and everything immoral. He sounded like crime personified. He was the type of man I loathed, the type of man I'd never wanted to associate with.

I said, "I'm the new hire."

"You look like a jerk who would do my taxes, if I ever paid taxes."

"You look like a man I'd hit in the mouth for insulting me, if he ever insulted me intentionally."

"Your wife said you had a chip on your shoulder."

"My wife isn't part of this, so I'd like to keep this between the parties involved."

"That's what the old wheelman said. And you see where that got him."

Eddie Coyle said, "Dmytryk is motivated and will fit in with Rick and Sammy."

Bishop asked, "You ever been employed in this line of work?"

"That's none of your concern. Eddie Coyle is the one I report to."

Eddie Coyle hunched his shoulders and turned to walk away. I followed Eddie Coyle, my wingtips crunching over ice and frozen grass as we headed back toward the interstate.

Tempted by Trouble

We left Bishop behind. Halfway to the interstate, behind us, a gun fired three rapid shots.

Those celebratory explosions sent a chill up my spine.

When we climbed back inside the SUV, Eddie Coyle turned his lights on and put the Cadillac in drive, pulled away, and said, “No witnesses left behind. That’s my number-one rule. No witnesses.”

“Even the woman.”

“Breasts or balls, penis or poontang, spook, Jew, or wetback, a witness is a witness.”

The message was clear.

Eddie Coyle said, “Megachurches are nothing more than tax-free symbols of greed and power.”

“Back to talking about robbing God.”

“Megachurches are the Walmarts of the religious world, one-stop shopping, pulling members away from all of the local mom-and-pop box churches.”

“What’s the issue?”

“Capitalism and how it has infected everything that was once good.”

“Capitalism was all about big fish devouring little fish and never stopping to masticate their prey. It’s a good thing when you’re winning. When you’re losing, you see its faults.”

He nodded. “The country is devolving. The Tea Party is out there expressing their outrage over health care. If this is the outrage that comes from health care, it’s going to be crazy when immigration is brought to the table. Bad economy and racism, the fear of a new labor pool coming from beyond these shores to do jobs in an already jobless country—it will be a Molotov cocktail. It will be the Detroit race

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riot in '43 and the Detroit race riot in '67 and the Watts riot and the '67 Newark riots and the Oklahoma race riots in every state, city, and town in America.”

I didn't say anything else. He'd just murdered two people and was engaging in a casual conversation about churches and politics.

Eddie Coyle said, “I hope your wife feels better. When you get home, tell her I said that.”

“You don't have to worry about my wife.”

“Understood.”

“Worrying about my wife is my responsibility.”

“Again, I apologize for crossing that unseen line.”

I tightened my jaw and held on to my fedora, a classic hat I had inherited from my father.

In my mind I was grabbing Eddie Coyle's gun and shooting him over and over as the SUV lost control and flipped over a half dozen times. As he sped down I-94, I should have killed Eddie Coyle right then. But I had known the man for only two hours.

DESPERATION

The state of being desperate or of having the recklessness of despair.