

## Chapter Five — The War To Not Quite End All Wars

The stock market crash of Black Tuesday might have been ruinous for the national economy, but as the decade of the 1920's drew to its close, Joe the Boss had good reason to feel smug about his own big piece of the pie. Having started out fifteen years earlier as an ordinary soldier in the Morello Family, a short, fat thug with no grace or bearing, he had put his life on the line any number of times and walked away the winner, making himself undisputed Godfather of the largest, richest, most well connected criminal conspiracy in the world.

Of course, it's at just such a moment that hubris has a way of leading the powerful onto the path of their own destruction and, as Masseria surveyed the scene from his lofty peak, it fatefully occurred to him that there were several upstarts that could use a lesson in humility.

The extended Castellammarese Family particularly rankled. On top of the insults from Aiello, Milazzo and Maggadino in their outlying fiefdoms, the Castellammarese in New York were causing real problems in the lucrative garment district, slowing the takeover carefully planned by his trusted capo Charlie Luciano and the clever, ruthless Louis "Lepke" Buchalter. Luciano and Buchalter had set up a union headed by Philip Orlofsky to force Sydney Hillman, the head of the large Amalgamated union, to fall in line. The Castellammarese capo Salvatore Maranzano had taken a contract from Hillman to provide muscle in his fight against Orlofsky's union. Maranzano had assured Luciano that he was just taking Hillman's money and would cause no real problems, but it hadn't worked out that way, Maranzano's soldiers putting up real resistance in the many street battles being waged.

Both professionally and personally Maranzano was becoming an increasing annoyance to Masseria. A handsome, suave, cultured man, fluent in a number of languages and steeped in the

history of his beloved Roman emperors, he was about as different from Masseria as two mafiosi could be. In Sicily, Maranzano had been close to the most powerful Mafia Godfather, Don Vito Cascio Ferro, and his arrival in the United States in 1925, one step ahead of Mussolini's blackshirts, had been an occasion of celebration among the castellammarese. Young Joseph Bonanno, a recent arrival himself, had met and admired Maranzano in Sicily and was ecstatic to be invited to his welcoming dinner in New York. Bonanno wrote, "I felt honored and privileged just to be near him. I suppose it was like falling in love, only it was between men. When I was around Maranzano, I felt more alive, more alert, more called upon to fulfill my potential." The young and single Bonanno was only too happy to keep the distinguished don company as Maranzano waited for his wife and children to join him in the United States. Maranzano discreetly operated his many businesses, both legal and illegal, behind his front of the Eagle Building Company located downtown at Lafayette and Grand and it was no secret to Masseria or anyone else that he was clearly interested in moving up in the organization.

Just the same, Maranzano was not the Godfather of the Castellammarese in New York City. That position was held by Cola Schiro who operated out of Brooklyn, a hesitant, even weak mafioso despite, or as a result of, being one of the wealthiest individuals in the Family. In his autobiography, [A Man of Honor](#), Joe Bonanno relates that Schiro was, in fact, merely a puppet leader put in place and supported by Bonanno's cousin Magaddino. Joe the Boss was aware of Schiro's lack of power which is why he summoned Milazzo and Magaddino, not Schiro, when seeking concessions from the castellammarese.

With the coming of the new decade, the first distant rumble of the war that was to soon envelop the Mafia occurred in the Bronx at 1522 Sheridan Avenue on the evening of February 26, 1930, when Family Godfather Gaetano "Tom" Reina was shotgunned to death as he left the

apartment of his mistress. Author Peter Maas in his book The Valachi Papers ascribes Reina's murder to Masseria in an attempt to muscle in on the Family's lucrative racket of extorting tribute from the ice vendors in the city, Reina allegedly refusing to share with Masseria. (Joe Valachi likely would have had such inside information as he was married to Reina's daughter.) Additionally, Joe Bonanno in his memoirs mentions that Reina was indiscreet enough to express admiration for Maranzano in standing up to Masseria and that an informant in his Family passed on the information to Masseria's chief strategist and one-time Mafia Godfather Joe Morello, now going by the name Peter.

With Reina gone, Masseria sought to consolidate his power over the Family by imperiously installing as boss his own puppet, Joseph Pinzolo, by-passing Reina's three top capi: Tommy Lucchese, a partner of Luciano in the garment industry; Dominic "The Gap" Petrilli, another close ally of Luciano; and Gaetano "Tom" Gagliano, senior of the three. Believing that the Reina Family was firmly under his thumb, Joe the Boss felt free to confront the Castellammarese directly.

Much the way the assassination of the obscure Austrian Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo set off the cataclysmic First World War, the incident that ushered in the Castellammarese war was a murder on the periphery. Morello counseled teaching the Castellammarese a lesson by killing the Detroit Castellammarese boss Milazzo for his double insult of refusing to betray Aiello and then not coming in for the sitdown. Masseria assented and reached out to Detroit mafioso Cesare "Chester" LaMare, the man he was backing in Detroit to contend against the eastside Castellammarese Family. LaMare set up a meeting with Milazzo for May 31, 1930, at a Vernor Highway fish market, supposedly to iron out their differences but treacherously sending

three hitmen to execute his true intentions. Gaspar Milazzo and Rosario “Sassa” Parrinno were shot down moments after arriving for the meeting.

Joe Bonanno tells of the fear and confusion running through the Castellammarese as a result of the attack. “Masseria was a formidable enemy. In terms of resources, manpower and allies, Masseria had a huge advantage over the scattered Castellammarese clans.” The Castellammarese in Brooklyn hurriedly held a Family meeting presided over by the quaking Cola Schiro who predictably advised that the Family remain neutral and do nothing to avenge the deaths, expressing his belief that the fight was between Masseria and Aiello with Milazzo unwittingly involved through his failed mediation efforts. But Maranzano then took the floor and pointed out that not only had Milazzo been shot, but also Sassa Parrino of their New York Family. Joe Parrino, the murdered man’s brother, spoke up saying he believed it was just unlucky chance his brother had been there to be killed; but Maranzano pointed out that while Milazzo’s body had five bullets in it, Sassa had been shot six times which meant that his murder was intentional. It was a declaration of war against all the castellammarese, Maranzano said, not just Milazzo’s Detroit Family. When Schiro asked what they should do, Maranzano replied disingenuously, “Why ask me, I’m just a soldier?”

While Schiro dithered, Maranzano headed for Buffalo where the real power in the Castellammarese Family resided. For support, he brought along Magaddino’s young cousin, Bonanno, and another rising young capo, Gaspar DiGregorio. He informed the powerful Godfather of the Family that Masseria was saying he would condemn Magaddino if he didn’t answer his summons within a month, the news having its intended affect of galvanizing Magaddino. Maranzano then pointed out that nothing was being done, that Schiro was useless and a new leader was urgently needed. Magaddino knew what the ambitious Marazano was

getting at, but distrustful and jealous of him, Magaddino brought up the name of the richest of the Brooklyn castellammarese, Vito Bonventre, a capo in the Family and second cousin of Bonanno. It didn't take long to reject that notion, however, Bonventre elderly and semi-retired. And with Maranzano the only one preparing for the war, Magaddino was forced to accept the inevitable.

“Since the Castellammarese in New York would do most of the fighting, it was also agreed that Detroit and Buffalo would supply Maranzano with money, arms, ammunition and manpower,” Bonanno wrote. “Maranzano had gone from being ‘just a soldier’ to wartime commander-in-chief.”

Unaware of the preparations being made to openly challenge him and still trying to divide the castellammarese, Masseria invited Maranzano to meet with him and his consigliere, Morello. To allay suspicion, Maranzano accepted Masseria's invitation, bringing Joe Bonanno with him to the meeting in a private house in upper Manhattan, neither man certain it wasn't an ambush. Bonanno relates that Morello did most of the talking for Masseria, admitting they had killed Milazzo but only because he had been plotting with Aiello to kill “Mr. Joe” as he called his Godfather. As Magaddino had refused to meet with them as well, they wondered if he didn't like Mr. Joe either. Morello ventured that perhaps Maranzano could intercede and explain to Magaddino that Mr. Joe just wanted to meet with him to clarify events. When Maranzano said noncommittally that he would see what he could do, Morello's demeanor suddenly grew cold and he warned that if things weren't taken care of “there might be bloodshed.” Advising that the wisest course would be neutrality, he warned Maranzano against any treachery, saying he'd never fought a man like Petru Morello (Sicilian men most often had diminutive names—something like nicknames—based on saints). Maranzano replied in kind, “And you have never

fought against anyone like Turridru Maranzano,” the two men facing off for a moment before Masseria tried to smooth it over by blustering, “What a bunch of comedians, you two.” Diplomatically—and no doubt disingenuously—they drank to one another’s health and the meeting was ended.

The gauntlet was soon thrown down. When Magaddino failed to show up to answer Masseria’s summons and Maranzano made no further overtures, Masseria vowed to “eat those people like a sandwich,” the threat reaching Maranzano who used it to further rouse the castellammarese. Schiro quickly proved his uselessness when Masseria demanded from him a \$10,000 tribute and Schiro meekly paid up before scurrying into hiding. Maranzano was relieved to be rid of him but was concerned that Masseria’s next move might be against the rich and elderly Vito Bonventre, warning him to take precautions. Bonventre, however, discounted the threat, believing that he was too venerable for anyone to attack, a fatal illusion as he was haplessly shot down in the driveway of his home.

With the influential Bonventre dead and the mousy Schiro in the wind, Maranzano called a meeting of all the Family so they could formally elect someone to lead them. Masseria, trying to repeat what he’d accomplished in foisting Pinzolo on the Reina Family, had been advocating that Joe Parrino, the man who hadn’t much cared that his brother had been killed with Milazzo, be made head of the Family. Maranzano won in a landslide and immediately moved to organize a fighting machine, designating who would be the soldiers on the frontlines with many more in a support capacity supplying food, housing, guns and money.

Maranzano’s first strike was against one of his own, Joe Parrino paying for his chumminess with Masseria by being “shot to death in a restaurant,” as Bonanno blandly related (sounding very suspiciously as if he had something to do with the shooting). Maranzano also

moved quickly to eliminate the man he viewed as the brains behind Masseria, Morello answering a knock on the door of his second floor East Harlem office on August 15, 1930, to instantly take one shot in the forehead, four others in his body. One of the other men with him in the office was critically wounded by two shots but would survive while a third man managed to leap from the window though mortally wounded in the chest.

Three weeks later, Pinzolo's puppet reign of the Reina Family came to an end. On September 9, 1930, a cleaning woman came in at ten P.M., to do the midtown offices of California Dry Fruit Importers, a company owned by one Tommy Luckese. She found a fat man lying dead on the floor with five bullet wounds: two in the back, one in the side, and two more in the chest. The chief medical examiner determined that he'd been shot some six hours earlier and an undertaker later reported that someone had called him just before the cleaning woman found the body directing him to pick up a body in those offices. As luck would have it, Lucchese just happened to have left that very morning on an out-of-town business trip, a story the police evidently found less than compelling. He eventually was indicted for complicity in the murder, but the case, not surprisingly, failed for lack of evidence.

If Joe the Boss hadn't gotten the message before, he now realized that the Castellammarese were not about to roll over, and he went into hiding, elevating capo Alfredo "Al Mineo" Manfredi to replace Morello as his consigliere and Minister of War. Putting their two heads together, they came up with the brilliant supposition that Maranzano was responsible for the hit on Morello and, as there wasn't a hint of any local Castellammarese soldier being involved (the victim who'd survived didn't recognize the gunmen), it was easy to believe the rumor that at least one killer had been imported from Chicago. As Aiello was the enemy in

Chicago and thus would have been the one to send the killer, Masseria dispatched Mineo to coordinate with Big Al to take care of the troublesome Aiello once-and-for-all.

On the evening of October 23, 1930, Aiello walked out of the apartment house of his friend Pasquale “Presto” Prestigiocomo and found himself under gunfire from across the street. He ran for cover towards the back of the building only to be cut to pieces by machine gun fire from another apartment overlooking his escape route, the two places rented ten days earlier by men who were never identified. The coroner removed fifty-nine bullets from his body. Capone paid his respects by sending a wreath of roses arranged as a clock with the hands pointing to the time Aiello died, 8:30.

Aiello’s death was a heavy blow to the Castellammarese as he’d been a major source of funding for the war; but Maranzano had a potentially devastating response lined up. Headquartered in an out-of-the-way apartment in Yonkers, Maranzano had established a complex intelligence network to track and intercept Masseria forces. As described years later by mob informant Joe Valachi, the soldiers were secreted at various hideouts covering a wide area. When a Maranzano loyalist on the street—Joe Bonanno said they used a lot of cab drivers for their anonymous mobility—spotted any of Masseria’s men, they called a central number to report the information. The central number then called the nearest hideout that scrambled a hit-team to attack whoever had been fingered.

This spy network had discovered that Steve Ferrigno, a top member of the Mineo crew, kept an apartment in a large complex at 760 Pelham Parkway in the Bronx, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Maranzano ordered that it be kept under surveillance and a search was started to find a man unknown to any of Masseria’s forces to front the renting of an apartment in the complex. With the outbreak of the war, both sides had started furiously recruiting soldiers—



a glut that would keep the Mafia from inducting new members (called “opening the books”) until the 1950’s—and one of the proposed new members of the Castellammarese forces was a small-time hood, primarily a burglar, named Joseph “Joe Cago” Valachi. He was recommended for the front man in the rental by an old friend of his, Reina Family member Dominick “The Gap” Petrilli.

Though accounts differ somewhat, the basic outline of the event goes that for over a month no Masseria forces appeared, Valachi and a number of other Maranzano loyalists trying to stay awake as they kept watch. Valachi says that Joe Profaci stayed in the apartment from time-to-time and told him at one point that Maranzano and Gagliano had put up \$150,000 each for the war with Magaddino and Aiello sending \$5,000 a week, lamenting the fallen Aiello’s lost contribution. While these sums are corroborated from other sources, it should be noted that Joe Bonanno convincingly disparages the idea that the head of a Family—as Profaci was—would ever act as a mere soldier in the war, saying that Profaci denied ever meeting Valachi (though by the time Valachi related the story, no mafioso would ever admit he’d met the infamous rat).

Ferrigno finally was spotted outside the complex but a planned shooting was called off when the friendly doorman waved at Valachi who would have been fingered in the murder, having rented the apartment in his own name. Not long after, however, as Valachi was coming into the complex from the street, he was amazed to find himself walking in front of Ferrigno and none other than Masseria himself who he recognized from the pictures he’d been shown. Suspicious of the rough looking Valachi, the two men followed him into his building and rode with him in the elevator, Valachi going to the sixth floor to throw them off before rushing down the stairs to his second floor apartment to sound the alarm. The shooters in the apartment were Nick Capuzzi, Girolamo Santucci who was called “Bobby Doyle” from his moniker as a boxer,

and someone Valachi knew as Buster from Chicago who Joe Bonanno later surmised was a friend of his named Bastiano Domingo, though he wasn't from Chicago. Masseria was spotted going into Ferrigno's building and they planned to shoot him the moment he came out, even if it implicated Valachi. To Valachi's relief, the men didn't reappear though others kept arriving, including underboss and Minister of War Al Mineo. None of the targets emerged that night and the next morning Valachi was taken off the hook as a ground floor apartment that looked out on the courtyard was rented by another soldier using an alias, the hit team setting up inside. Valachi related that the meeting broke up the next day, November 5, 1930, with the men exiting in pairs. Finally, when Ferrigno and Mineo came strolling out together, the gunmen felt they couldn't let such an opportunity pass and three double-barreled shotguns let loose through the windows of the ambush apartment into the courtyard, cutting down the men.

During the police investigation, a black maid in Ferrigno's apartment related that six men had been there earlier that day having a meeting that lasted several hours. Though she had no idea who they were, an overcoat left in the apartment was identified as belonging to Masseria and he was brought in for questioning. The oath of omertà kept his mouth shut and he was released on \$35,000 bond as a material witness in the case.

Valachi told the doorman several days later that the killings had scared him and he was moving out, never suspected of being an accomplice except by Masseria's men who quickly fingered him as the lookout. Soon after, having proved his mettle, he was driven to a country house outside New York and was formally initiated into Cosa Nostra by the man he ever after respectfully referred to as Mr. Maranzano with Joe Bonanno designated as his sponsor in the Mafia.

Given the strategy of going after the important bosses in the Masseria Family, Valachi tells a story of being confounded to find himself chastised for shooting at Paul Gambino, a Masseria soldier who escaped with only a bullet clipping his ear. Driving in East Harlem while Steve Rannelli shot at Gambino who was in another car, in trying to get away his rear bumper hooked on the front of Gambino's car and the two cars careened wildly together for several blocks before Valachi could break free. Told that Paul Gambino was small-fry not worth the bother, the shooting had the serendipitous result of convincing the soldier's more influential brother, Carlo Gambino, of bringing his forces over to Maranzano's side. On another occasion, Valachi and Salvatore "Sally Shields" Shillitani tried to shoot two Masseria men, Joseph Rao and Big Dick Amato, as they exited an East Harlem restaurant, but the two targets strolled away oblivious of their luck as the excited Shillitani had forgotten to take the shotgun off safety.

Bonanno relates that to celebrate the murders of Mineo and Ferrigno, Maranzano and his top soldiers took time out over the Christmas/New Years holiday to have a week-long party at a remote farm near Hyde Park, New York. Maranzano, Bonanno and others from the New York Family hosted the event with Gagliano, Lucchese, and Scalise in attendance, Joseph Zerilli coming in from Detroit.

A different Christmas story was told, however, in the memoirs of Nicola Gentile, a mafioso who would flee to Italy in the 1930's to avoid prosecution and, decades later, finding himself in straightened circumstances, attempt to make money by publishing an account of the Honored Society more revealing than any mafioso previously dared. (His habit of placing himself at the center of events and his pathetic personal circumstances evidently caused the Mafia to give him a pass on his indiscretions). According to Gentile, just after Christmas in 1930 a national meeting of bosses was convened in Boston with a commission—Gentile's own

term—traveling to New York where they put up in ten rooms in the Hotel Pennsylvania and summoned Maranzano who put off meeting with them. Luciano, told of Maranzano's stonewalling, contacted Capone and the next day Francesco "Frank the Enforcer" Nitti arrived in New York with the message to Maranzano that if it didn't meet with the commission immediately he'd find himself at war with Chicago, Gentile claiming that Nitti threatened to use airplanes in the war. Maranzano came in and was forced to accept a two-month truce, Masseria also agreeing to the ceasefire.

Though Joe Bonanno related that a Family boss in Boston often was used as a mediator of disputes, a serious problem with Gentile's account is that the war did not cease in the early months of 1931. An important Masseria capo murdered during this period was Giuseppe "Joe Baker" Catania, a blood-member of the old Morello Family as a nephew of Ciro Terranova, his father a member of the early Morello Family which murdered him when his drinking threatened to reveal secrets to the authorities investigating them. Maranzano learned that Catania used the office of a Bronx bail bondsman as a collection point for his loansharking activities and Valachi, along with the gunmen Sally Shillitani, Nick Capuzzi and Buster from Chicago, rented a fifth floor apartment across the street from where they planned to shoot Catania with a rifle. When it was decided that the angle and distance made the shot less than ideal, Valachi noted there was an empty ground floor apartment that would give a clear shot. On the morning of February 3, 1931, Valachi and the gunmen broke into it and were surprised to find three painters at work. The men were taken captive and, in Valachi's self-serving account, he left to prepare the getaway car. Catania, after kissing his wife good-bye and heading for his car around the corner, was hit by six rifle shots, dying that afternoon in a Bronx hospital without saying anything to the authorities about his shooting. According to Valachi, one of the shooters later told him, "You could see the

dust coming off his coat when the bullets hit.” Catania’s funeral was gangland lavish with a \$15,000 coffin and some ten thousand spectators watching the cortege that included forty flower cars. Terranova, laying his hand on his nephew’s coffin, vowed revenge, never knowing that Maranzano already had set up a hit on him at the funeral with only the crowd keeping it from being attempted.

It was during this period that Luciano decided, all things considered, that it would be best if Masseria exited the scene. Maranzano and Masseria were two scorpions in a bottle so the war would go on until one or the other was defeated. While Joe the Boss had started out with superior forces, the Castellammarese were fighting more intelligently and their diffusion was proving an asset. Maranzano was the commanding general, but if he fell one of the other castellammarese, such as Magaddino, easily could pick up the standard and continue on while Joe the Boss had no such backup. The Luciano crew, far and away the strongest in the Masseria Family, had no enthusiasm for the war and would have preferred it never began. Now Luciano and his confidants—Vito Genovese, Frank Costello, Joe Adonis, Meyer Lansky and Bugsy Siegel—agreed that the best course would be for it to end as quickly as possible. Of course there was also the fact that with Masseria out of the way his rackets would be ripe for the taking. On top of those considerations, Luciano had opportunity to bring down Masseria, something that he couldn’t do to Maranzano—at least while the war went on. All things considered, Masseria must have been something of a trusting sort to have not foreseen what was coming.

Luciano arranged a meeting with Maranzano that was held, according to Joe Bonanno, at a private house in Brooklyn, Genovese accompanying Luciano. Their discussion was, Bonanno wrote, “...one of those classic Sicilian dialogues in which every word carried manifold

implications but nothing is stated directly.” Everyone understood, however, what the agreement was.

A few weeks later, on April 15, 1931, Masseria and Luciano went for lunch at the Nuova Villa Tammaro, a small family restaurant at Coney Island favored by the mob, driving in Masseria’s armor-plated car with windows an inch thick. Joe had a reputation for enjoying his food—Maranzano derisively referred to him as ‘the Chinese’ because his fat cheeks gave his beady eyes a squinting quality—and the meal lasted a couple of hours. When they were finished, the owner of the restaurant, Gerardo Scarpato, cleared the dishes before going out for a walk and missing all that occurred. Luciano suggested to his boss they play a few hands of Kleb, a Russian card game Masseria enjoyed. After the second hand, Luciano excused himself to use the toilet, leaving Joe the Boss alone in the restaurant, swollen and satiated. Behind him, the door burst open and in rushed Albert Anastasia, Genovese, Adonis and Siegel. Mob hits are usually portrayed as brutal, efficient killings, but the four men in this hit fired some twenty shots at their stationary target with only five hitting him, more than enough to prove fatal, however, for ‘the man who could dodge bullets.’ The gunmen ran out, dropping two of their guns in the alley next to the restaurant where they jumped in the waiting stolen car driven by the aging Terranova who evidently had come over to Maranzano’s side despite—or perhaps because of—the hit on his nephew. He promptly twice stalled their getaway vehicle and Siegel pushed him aside, started it and squealed away.

Luciano came out of the restroom and, with Scarpato’s shaken mother-in-law, calmly waited for the police. When questioned, he said, “I was in the can takin’ a leak. I always take a long leak.” The newspapers quoted police officials who predicted an outbreak of mob warfare, not realizing that the death of Joe the Boss was not the beginning but the end.

The Castellammarese war was over—the overt war at least.

As is true with most events, recollections vary with the observer and accounts differ as to the subsequent rounds of meetings to formalize the peace. Joe Bonanno cites three separate gatherings called by Maranzano following the conclusion of the war. The first, according to him, was held in early May of 1931 at a resort in Wappinger Falls, an upstate New York village near which a number of Castellammarese had settled to work in the local shoe manufacturing trade. It was attended, Bonanno said, by some three hundred mobsters, presumably all Men of Respect, with the dramatic touch of an airplane circling overhead equipped with a bomb and machine gun to watch for police or other threats.

Bonanno relates that this meeting was followed by an even larger gathering in late May in Chicago under the auspices of Capone who was formally recognized by Maranzano as the head of the Family in the city. Luciano, he says, asked for and received permission to bring Meyer Lansky though he was to be excluded from the formal meeting. This national meeting was a sort of formal cease-fire, Maranzano going over the history of the war that was now behind them, introducing the new bosses of the New York Families and making his peace with Capone. None of the other participants mention these meetings, but all agree that in June there was a meeting at a hall in the Bronx attended by some five hundred mafiosi, bosses from all over the country showing up in person or sending representatives, much of the New York mob in attendance with a mix of bosses, captains and even soldiers, the new and lowly Valachi, for example, standing at the back. The room was festooned with religious artifacts, crosses and statues of saints (Maranzano, who once studied for the priesthood, somehow considered himself a piously religious man, a trait he shared with Joe Profaci who kept a shrine in his house) with

the victor of the war sitting above his vassals in a rented throne-like chair at the center of a dais. Next to him were the Godfathers of the Families he was going to ordain.

Maranzano, who fancied himself an accomplished orator, spoke in Italian, often lapsing into a Sicilian dialect, lording it over his audience by throwing in Latin quotations that few of the assembled mobsters possibly could have understood. In his inimitable way, he again went over the war, stressing the transgressions of Joe the Boss against all of them, how he'd unjustly sentenced the Castellammarese to extinction, his tyranny causing so many to die and not just castellammarese, recalling the Godfather Reina who'd fallen. Then Maranzano grandly told them it would be different from that time forward. Roughly based on the structure of the Roman military, first, he was to be *Càpo di tutti i Càpi*—Boss of all the Bosses. The Honored Society in New York was to be formally divided into five Families, each to have a Godfather, the formal Mafia term being *rappresentante*, and his second-in-command, a *sottocapo* or underboss. Beneath them would be a number of *caporegima* or *capodecina*, *capi*, who would head ten-man *regimi* or crews of soldiers. Each man in the chain would answer to the man above him with rigid discipline enforced. Every soldier would be assigned into a Family and a *caporegima* and, if he wished to change, he would have to formally petition the head of the Family and receive the permission of all those involved. Under penalty of death, no member could raise his hand to another, and no murders could be carried out without the permission of the soldier's *capo* who, in turn, would have to have the approval of the *rappresentante*. If the proposed murder was between differing Families, the approval would have to come from himself as *Càpo di tutti i Càpi*. It was also forbidden for any member to become involved with another member's wife or even an unattached female relative unless he received the man's permission. The Families would respect one another's territory and rackets, and any disputes between Families would be



arbitrated by Maranzano himself. And he would share in all the rackets of all the Families, the specific shares to be arrived at later.

The five Families were not new, but most of them had changed leadership. Luciano would head what had been the Masseria Family, and his underboss would be Vito Genovese; Gaetano Gagliano would take over the Reina Family with Tommy Lucchese as underboss; Francesco Scalise would be the new boss of the Mineo Family with Vincenzo Mangano the underboss; Joe Profaci would remain head of his Family with Giuseppe “Joe The Fat Man” Magliocco under him; and he himself, Maranzano, would take over the Schiro Family, naming Angelo Caruso as underboss. Caruso had been a leader of the non-Castellammarese in the Family and the appointment was made to be politic, showing that the Castellammarese would share power with all the Family’s factions.

At the banquet that followed, the members approached Maranzano and demonstrated their fealty by offering him cash-filled envelopes. Reports of the amount he received vary widely, but Luciano says he alone tendered \$50,000 which seems a reasonable sum considering what he was taking in. He claims Maranzano was given nearly one million dollars that night. Regardless of what Maranzano actually realized, he proved remarkably cheap in sharing the wealth. Both Valachi and Joe Bonanno, two men who idolized him, commented on how little they received as a reward for having fought and won the war. Valachi, who had elected to become part of Maranzano’s personnel retinue, a sort of Praetorian Guard, had to go back to common burglary as a part-time sideline to make ends meet.

Luciano had more serious reservations about Maranzano than mere cheapness. Topping his grievance list was the situation in the garment industry where Maranzano continued to battle his and Lepke’s front union headed by Orlofsky, allowing Hillman a relatively free hand in the

Amalgamated. This was serious money and Maranzano refused to back off. On top of that, of course, was Luciano's distaste to kowtow to any Boss of all Bosses. He had knocked off Joe the Boss and felt that it made little sense to replace one old-world mafioso dinosaur with another. Among his wide contacts, Luciano found a satisfying support for killing Maranzano though getting to him obviously was not going to be the cakewalk it had been with Masseria.

Maranzano, for his own part, was already plotting to solidify his control by means of a wholesale slaughter of pretenders to the throne. Perhaps even before he'd taken power, he'd marked Luciano, Genovese, Adonis and Costello for elimination in the New York mob, Moretti over in New Jersey, Magaddino in Buffalo and Capone in Chicago, throwing in the annoying Dutch Schultz for good measure. The Castellammarese would reign and he alone would be at the summit. Joe Valachi tells of Maranzano calling him in to explain why he was holding on to all the money instead of sharing it, telling Valachi "We have to go to the mattresses again" and revealing the impressive line-up that he was planning to kill. He had contracted with a non-Italian hitman named Vincent "Mad Dog" Coll, a toothy-grinned one-man crime wave, giving him a \$25,000 down payment to kill Luciano and Genovese. Maranzano apparently figured that using this outsider would divert suspicion from him and provide more time to set up the other hits.

Luciano had a similar idea of using outside hitmen to penetrate the security that constantly surrounded Maranzano who had relocated his headquarters from unfashionable digs downtown to a ninth-floor suite of offices at 230 Park Avenue above Grand Central station in the establishment heart of Manhattan. While Maranzano was protected everywhere he went by his usual phalanx of bodyguards and riding in bulletproofed cars, he faced a host of legal problems. Under investigation for tax evasion, alien smuggling and bootlegging, it wouldn't be any great

surprise for him to find another bunch of legal authorities dropping in to his office to chat. In fact, he had ordered his bodyguards not to bring weapons to the offices anticipating the arrival of lawmen of one sort or another. Accordingly, Lansky gathered four Jewish gunmen and secreted them in a house in the Bronx where they underwent elaborate training to impersonate federal agents and memorize the layout of Maranzano's offices.

As the summer of 1931 waned with the two plotting forces moving their pieces around the board, Luciano's wide-ranging contacts once again proved invaluable. Frank Costello's attorney, George Wolf, later wrote that the Jewish gangs had somehow learned of Maranzano's plan to call Luciano and Genovese to his offices for a business meeting with Mad Dog Coll waiting to ambush them. Bugsy Siegel was informed and he passed on the intelligence to Costello.

It was no shock to Luciano and Lansky to hear what Maranzano intended and, while they were ready with their own men, they decided to wait for his call before setting in motion their counterstrike. The time came just a few weeks later, Maranzano phoning to set up the meeting in his offices for the next afternoon, September 10, 1931. That night, Luciano and Lansky met with the killers at the safehouse in the Bronx, going over the plans, Luciano introducing them to Tommy Lucchese who would be in Maranzano's offices the next day to surreptitiously point out Maranzano so there would be no mistakes. They were going to get only one shot at him so they couldn't afford to botch the job.

The next afternoon, Lucchese arrived at Maranzano's offices just before two o'clock, explaining that his boss, Tom Gagliano, had sent him over on a business matter. Before they could go into Maranzano's private office, four men entered and identified themselves as federal agents, asking which one was Salvatore Maranzano. Maranzano fell for the ruse and readily

identified himself, Lucchese catching the eye of the lead gunman, Red Levine, who, with another of the gunmen, escorted Maranzano into his private office while the other two drew their guns and ordered Lucchese, the secretary and the five bodyguards to line up against the wall. In the office, Levine and the other man drew knives and attacked Maranzano, slashing his throat and stabbing him in an attempt to kill him quietly; but he began to fight back furiously and the two killers were forced to draw their guns and shoot him four times in the head and body. Satisfied that he was dead, they ran out of the office, and fled down the stairs joined by the other two gunmen. Lucchese glanced in at Maranzano's body then hurried out to the elevator, Maranzano's bodyguards fleeing down the stairs to escape the scene before the police arrived. Running into the commotion as he headed up to Maranzano's office was none other than Mad Dog Coll who promptly turned around and disappeared, pocketing the \$25,000 down payment he'd received for a job he'd now never have to perform. The only slip-up was when one of Maranzano's bodyguards, Bobby Doyle, who may have been a Luciano plant on Maranzano's staff, hung around a bit too long and was picked up by the police arriving on the scene.

Part of the legend surrounding Maranzano's murder was a supposed slaughter of old-time mafiosi carried out that evening, a purge some imaginative writer deemed the 'Night of the Sicilian Vespers.' While it is mostly pure imagination, none of the bosses being killed, a number of small-fry did meet untimely and brutal ends. Oddly, Gerardo Scarpato, the owner of the Nuova Villa Tammaro where Masseria had been gunned down, was murdered, presumably either by Masseria loyalists exacting revenge or by Luciano forces to cover their tracks. Joe Valachi felt himself in danger with good reason. Three of his friends on Maranzano's crew had been shot at on Lexington avenue the day of Maranzano's death, and three other associates soon were murdered, one shot in a barbershop doorway in the Bronx, two others washing up in Newark Bay

a few days later with their heads crushed and throats slashed. Valachi believed he was saved by his friendship with Dom Petrilli who kept him out of harm's way by taking him out to a nightclub the night of Maranzano's murder. Nonetheless, he had to go into hiding, saved because he was married to the daughter of Tom Reina and appealed to his brother-in-law, Reina's son, to hide him, which he did until Valachi was able to call on his friendship with both Lucchese and Petrilli who interceded for him with Luciano.

Though it was hardly a widespread slaughter, the Castellammarese naturally were thrown into fear and confusion worse than when Milazzo had been shot. Who had killed Maranzano and why? Was war being renewed against them, Masseria's hand rising from the grave? No one seemed to know and prudence dictated they return to their safe hideouts and keep off the streets as much as possible, cautiously surfacing only for Maranzano's typically grandiose gangland funeral. It was there that Joe Bonanno learned from Magaddino that Luciano was behind Maranzano's murder. Magaddino was among the first to hear the truth as he had never been close to Maranzano, envious of his rise to power during the Castellammarese war. Bonanno, in fact, had suspected at first that Magaddino himself had murdered Maranzano. But now he learned from his cousin that Luciano was claiming he had had to do it as Maranzano was plotting to kill him and his colleagues, having hired Mad Dog Coll for the hit. Maranzano hadn't confided these plans to Bonanno and Bonanno was unsure what exactly was taking place, wondering if Luciano was making a grab for supreme power by renewing the war against the Castellammarese. In any case, the Maranzano Family required new leadership and in an open vote elected the twenty-six year-old Bonanno to be their new Godfather, the more intimate "Father" the term he preferred.

Luciano, securely atop the throne and sincere in his desire for a peace that would leave him there, reached out to the Castellammarese to explain his actions. That was how Magaddino had learned the truth of the incident. As Bonanno was now officially the Family's Father, Luciano set up a meeting with him to clarify intentions and mend fences. Bonanno was wary of the meeting, not entirely sure he could trust his cousin and having seen firsthand the ease with which Luciano betrayed associates when it suited him. In deference to Bonanno who preferred conversing in Sicilian, his English retaining a thick accent to the end of his life, Luciano spoke at the meeting in a polyglot mixture of Sicilian and English. After the customary polite greetings, Luciano launched into an explanation of the circumstances of his actions, reiterating that Maranzano had hired Coll to kill him, an action that in Mafia tradition justified his response against Maranzano. And now it was time for peace he told Bonanno, explaining his vision for a new set-up for the Mafia. He didn't seek absolute power as Maranzano had. He only wanted each Family to be its own power and respect the territory and rights of all others. As Father of his Family, Bonanno would have absolute authority to conduct matters as he wished. And he would have a strong voice on the new board Luciano envisioned, a group of the Godfathers of the Mafia who would meet to coordinate their interests and work out inter-family disputes equitably without unnecessary bloodshed.

Bonanno, born and bred in the traditional Sicilian Mafia with its constant internecine warfare, had his doubts about this vision of Charley Lucky's. But new and inexperienced, he knew he was in no position to challenge the powerful Luciano even if he'd had a mind to. He accepted Luciano's offer of peace and eventually the two men reached a measure of ease if not intimacy with one another.

Out with the old and in with the new. The path was at last clear for Luciano to create the vision he'd long had of what organized crime should be. A few weeks after Maranzano was laid to rest, the national meeting Luciano called for convened in Chicago where Capone played host, his power and political graft so widespread that he was able to take over the downtown Congress and Blackstone hotels (holding secret ownerships in both it was rumored) and ring them with his men to keep out the riffraff. The meeting wasn't restricted to the Italian mob but included all the racketeers Luciano was associated with—Jews, Irish and WASP. As he had done with Bonanno, Luciano first talked with the various bosses in private meetings to explain his new concept of crime as big business. Each mob would be like an independent company free to run its own affairs, operating rationally to maintain stability in a quest for increasing profit, eschewing the irrational and emotional vendetta over inane issues of honor or revenge that simply upset the smooth flow of crime and corruption that kept the profits flowing to all of them. Furthermore, there would be no *Càpo di tutti i Càpi*, no one above everyone else. The bosses would be equals, like captains of industry, negotiating, forming friendships, even competing, but always as equals who respect one another.

To maintain the order, he proposed the creation of a new ruling body, the Commission. To begin, the heads of the strongest Families would sit on it: the five Families of New York, plus Magaddino of Buffalo and Capone of Chicago. Any disputes between Families would be brought before the Commission that would discuss the matter and make a ruling to which all would have to bow. The Commission's rulings would be law aimed at dispensing justice and keeping the peace that benefited them all. Dissenters would not be going against one boss or Family, but all of them in concert. No one would be strong enough to defy the Commission. Additionally, every five years a national meeting, such as this one in Chicago, would be held at

which all the Families would have a voice, with the membership of the Commission ratified for another five-year term. Democracy and peace would prevail to the benefit of all.

In this modern spirit, another tradition Luciano altered was that of the capo consigliere, the head counselor to the boss. Previously, there had been two types of consigliere. One was created by any boss who had a particularly close and respected associate, using him as a second opinion the way Masseria had done with Morello. Additionally, the Mafia as a whole had had some particularly respected men who might be consulted by any boss who felt he needed outside advice or perhaps a mediator. Joe Bonanno wrote that prior to Luciano's new setup, such Men of Respect had been Tata Aquilla of New York and later Gaspare Massina of Boston, mobsters perhaps of no great renown for their criminal deeds but held in high regard by virtually everyone. Now, this role of inter-Family consigliere would be more or less taken over by the Commission that would be the final arbiter of disputes between Families, and it was the Family consigliere that Luciano made a formal position. The Family consigliere would be able to hear complaints from ordinary soldiers and advise the capo, none of the parties having any fear of retribution regardless of what was said. At the same time, the capo was under no obligation to act on the consigliere's advice. This was the Mafia, after all, and democracy could only be carried so far.

To Luciano, it all sounded so perfect he couldn't comprehend how any of the others could not immediately accept it. To the even more pragmatic Lansky, however, it became clear that some of the traditional mafiosi were uncomfortable with this new set-up so different from their old world traditions. He counseled Luciano to throw them a bone by putting a name to the organization he was creating, something that would tie it firmly to memories that made them feel comfortable. He suggested Luciano name it the Unione Siciliana, a slight variation from the old Unione Siciliane, the organization that had initiated the war over who would lead it.



Luciano was scornful of the old traditions, but Lansky pointed out that it was just a sop for the Men of Respect who needed it, that it meant nothing to the progressives like Luciano and himself. But if it would keep the old men happy, why not use it? Luciano accepted the reasoning and began to spread the name around to placate those not quite ready for the revolution. Luciano himself never took it seriously, calling their conspiracy “the Outfit” when he needed to refer to it.

At the evening banquet, tradition reared its head once again as the bosses began approaching Luciano with the customary cash-filled envelopes, Luciano stunning the bosses by refusing to accept the money. As they were all equals now, why should they be paying him anything? It just perpetuated the wrong idea that someone was at the top, he told them. Capone, for one, was aghast that anyone would turn down such an offering. Luciano allegedly later recalled with some amusement, “I think I really made Capone sick. His face turned green, and I’m sure it wasn’t from too much vino.”

The King was dead and the modern body of organized crime had been born. Its creation had been an organic response to the existing situation, Luciano’s vision an outgrowth of his own experience. For the most part, the men leading the change were young, few of them over forty, and many would retain their power for decades. They were Americans, either born or having grown up in the United States, with only tenuous ties to the Old World and its more rigid caste systems. Their world of organized crime had been decisively altered by the dynamic nature of America, their power hugely inflated by the wealth handed to them through the misguided social experiment of Prohibition. The torrent of cash it had provided had allowed their limited organizations to move out from their isolated traditional criminal milieu in the urban immigrant centers to infiltrate a wide variety of legitimate businesses in the larger economic sphere, at the

same time widely corrupting the authorities charged with holding in check their criminal endeavors. The younger and less hidebound criminals who had seized these opportunities had gained the power and incentive to defy and ultimately overthrow their elders who for too long had myopically ignored the new realities. The old distinctions between Mafia, Camorra, Stoppaglieri and the like had disappeared, even the name Mafia something of a misnomer as each group used its own appellation.

But at the center of this supposed new order lay a fatal flaw: the seemingly eternal greedy quest for absolute dominance. Luciano could talk all he wanted about a Commission of equals, but in a world of naked power where men were expected to take by force what they desired, equality would prove an elusive concept. Even as Luciano created this supposedly supreme judicial body, it was more illusion than reality for he was, by far, the first among them and everyone knew it. The wealth and political graft he controlled had won him the position and, in many ways, it allowed all of them to operate. The connections and influence that centered on him were so widespread that no single mob, or even minor alliance, could challenge him. He was a superpower and by his mere presence he kept the others in line. In little more than half a decade, however, his power would be waning under the onslaught of legal troubles, and there would prove to be no shortage of men harboring ruthless ambition that made them eager to vie for the right to fill the vacuum his absence created. The Commission would endure, but it would be severely challenged as, one after another, men killed and were killed attempting to reach the top.

Ultimately, peace would not prevail. It was not in the nature of the beast.

## Chapter Sixteen — Dapper and Drooler

For two days following Castellano's death, no one outside the circle of plotters had an inkling of what was going on. Then word went out to the Gambino capi that the consigliere Joe N. Gallo was holding a meeting for them at a Manhattan restaurant appropriately named Caesar's, owned in part by Sammy Gravano and not far from where Castellano and Bilotti were shot down. Gotti had already met with Gallo to arrange the transition of power, Gallo warning him unnecessarily that they must never admit to killing the Godfather as the Commission's rules bound it to exact retribution. Tony Caponigro's torture death for whacking Bruno was proof enough they could expect fearsome retribution.

The only capi not present at the meeting at Caesar's were Tommy Gambino in mourning over the shooting of his uncle, and elderly Joe Acuri who had checked himself into the hospital and had his place taken by his nephew, Salvatore Franco. The entire meeting was a charade organized by Gotti. Gallo was placed at the head of the table in the downstairs room, Gotti on one side of him, Frank DeCicco on the other. Gotti loyalists Gravano and Angelo Ruggiero sat away from the table against the wall, the only ones in the room carrying guns. Gallo told the assembled capi that no one knew what had happened, who had shot Castellano and Bilotti, but that an investigation was being made. Any information that turned up was to be passed to him through Gotti or DeCicco who were running the Family with him. He told them to stay calm, keep a low profile, not to overreact. The Family was intact and would continue to prosper.

Gotti knew the capi were guessing that he'd been behind Castellano's assassination and he used the meeting, chaired by the venerable Gallo, to demonstrate that he was, in fact, firmly in charge and the Family was going to continue to function smoothly under his leadership. Though

some thought Gotti too crude and doubted his ability to lead the Family, many others had disliked Castellano and were content to have as their new boss a tough street hood like Gotti. As for Gotti, he didn't think any of them had the cojones to challenge him.

The next day at a closed coffee shop in a mid-town hotel, Gotti held a more intimate meeting with Gallo, Ruggiero, DeCicco and Gravano to set up the details for his election as boss, directing them to contact every capo to make certain they'd attend. He also issued the cover story to be spread to the other Families that they didn't know who had shot Castellano but were investigating. When Gallo voiced the opinion that they wouldn't be able to stall forever with such a story, Gotti remonstrated, "After I'm boss, we won't have to say anything."

The election meeting was held near the end of December 1985 in a new high-rise apartment building on the fringe of where the Wall Street encountered the latest grunge-chic neighborhood of Tribeca, situated just downtown from the more established Soho, a geographic relation which gave rise to Tribeca's street-joke name of Below-ho. Gambino capo Jackie "Nose" D'Amico, a Gotti loyalist, maintained an apartment in the building and arranged to use the basement recreation room for the induction, Gallo again presiding as puppet-master of ceremonies.

After telling the assembled capi that no one knew yet who had whacked Castellano but they were looking into it, Gallo moved to the main business of the election of a new Godfather, calling for nominations. As Gravano later related, even the most obtuse capi had realized by that point what was happening from reports in the newspapers that Gotti was behind the murders and would be the new boss. When DeCicco nominated Gotti there were no objections or other nominations and the vote was unanimous. Gotti then rose and told them that DeCicco would be his underboss with Gallo continuing as consigliere. To replace himself as capo of his crew, he

elevated Ruggiero while DeCicco's uncle George "Butterass Georgie" DeCicco took over his nephew's crew.

Gravano, of course, was also to be rewarded by being made a capo, but he wanted to observe proper respect for his elderly boss Salvatore "Toddo" Aurello by first offering to create a new crew. Aurello, however, decided to step down and let Gravano assume leadership of the existing crew, the switch being formally made at a meeting with Gotti and DeCicco, Aurello having formally requested that Gravano succeed him.

Throughout the Family, Gotti consolidated his hold on power. Ruggiero, Gotti's friend from childhood and newly elevated capo, had the most trouble adapting to the new status of his old friend. In addition to the major assignments he was carrying out for Gotti, he brought to Gotti a minor problem he was having about a loanshark customer, used to having his old buddy as a sounding board. This time, however, Gotti sharply rebuked him, saying, "I don't deal with this anymore." He further explained to Ruggiero how all the soldiers now would have to go through channels: "I'll tell them, 'listen, your skipper will keep me up to date, you keep your skipper up to date.' I can't socialize with these guys. I can't bring myself down. I'm a boss, you know what I mean? I gotta isolate myself a little bit."

In a later meeting, on a bug placed by the New York State Organized Crime Task Force Gotti was taped musing on his dreams for his regime. "The law's going to be tough with us, okay? If they don't put us away, for one year or two, that's all we need. But if I can get a year run without being interrupted, get a year, I'm gonna put this thing together where they could never break it, never destroy it, even if we die, be a good thing."

Though he didn't explain how this was to be accomplished, one of his acolytes responded, "It's a helluva legacy to leave."

“Well, you know why it would be, ah, because it would be right. Maybe after thirty years, it would deteriorate. But it would take that long to fucking succumb.” He added, “We got some fucking nice thing if we just be careful.”

Part of being careful was establishing working relations with the other Families and Gotti sent out formal word to them of his election as Godfather and his appointments, informing them that the Gambino Family was intact and running smoothly and that they were still investigating the hit on Castellano. They wanted no sanctions against them and he wanted to assume his seat on the Commission.

The response was generally positive, the only negative coming from Gigante’s Genovese Family who reminded that a Commission rule had been broken in the killing of a Godfather without permission and that someday someone would have to answer for that. Gotti responded that as soon as the culprit was uncovered, revenge would be taken.

Gigante, of course, read the same newspapers as everyone else as they named Gotti as the new Godfather of the Gambino Crime Family and likely killer of Castellano. Believing the stories to be true, he was already making plans to exact payment for breaking the rules. The laws of the land might be a joke, but not those of the Mafia.

The newspaper stories of the Castellano murder primed the public for a glimpse of the ruthless criminal who had carried out the bold coup and on January 13, 1986, it got its first look when Gotti appeared in court on pre-trial motions on his upcoming federal racketeering trial. Many were captivated by Gotti’s carefully crafted image and natural ebullience at finding himself, an uneducated street hood who had grown up in dire poverty, on the top rungs of the Mafia ladder. Everything about him denied his background.

Impeccably dressed in a \$2,000 dollar custom made suit with a tailored overcoat, a \$200 tie of hand-painted silk, his silvered blown-dried hair carefully coifed and his tanned full face accented by a tight, coy smile, he obviously enjoyed the media attention as he headed into the court, quipping to one reporter who asked about being boss of the Gambino Family, "I'm the boss of my family—my wife and kids." As he exited the courthouse, he played the gentleman by holding the door for a female reporter then gave away his roots by crassly pointing out his own good manners before strutting to a waiting black Cadillac, the rear door attended by a burly bodyguard, giving a friendly wave and being whisked away.

The whole performance was featured on the evening news, the credulous public captivated by this Godfather come to life. Here was a gangster ruthless enough to have seized power by gunning down his boss in the street in front of hundreds of witnesses, yet in public he was charming and polite and handsome and powerful. One newsman, impressed by the slick image Gotti presented, tagged him "The Dapper Don." With a fervor not seen since the heyday of Al Capone, Gotti was seized upon as the archetypal Mafia Godfather and rarely would he be long out of the headlines ever after. And just like Al Capone, the publicity would prove to be a critical element in his downfall.

Gotti was prominently back in the news in March of 1986 as he came up for trial for felony assault and theft against a refrigerator repairman named Romual Piecyk who had had the temerity to blow his truck's horn when blocked by cars double-parked. When Piecyk learned who the cops had arrested for his assault, he was rightfully mortified. When dragged into the witness stand and asked by the prosecutor if the men who had "punched and smacked" him were in the courtroom, he said, "I don't see them now," obstinately refusing to identify Gotti and his accomplice. Piecyk testified, "To be perfectly honest, it was so long ago, I don't remember. I

don't remember who slapped me. I have no recollection of what the two men looked like or how they were dressed.”

The case was dismissed with the New York Post getting in the final word with its headline, “I FORGOTTI!”

One person who hadn't forgotti, however, was Chin Gigante. In stark contrast to ‘The Dapper Don’, he continued to play the demented slob, shuffling around in public in his old bathrobe and bedroom slippers, staring vacant-eyed, drool sometimes dribbling from his mouth. It was an act calculated to disarm, and it worked. Each time a court sought to bring him to justice, his lawyers pointed out his bizarre behavior backed by three decades of intermittent psychiatric hospitalization, arguing that it made him legally unable to participate in his own defense, a legal shield against prosecution.

Amazingly enough, even though Gotti knew perfectly well there was nothing wrong with Gigante who maintained an impeccable Upper East Side brownstone where he donned stylish slacks and blazers as he lounged with his mistress, in his arrogance he discounted the Chin's will to challenge him, believing him to be weak. Gravano and DeCicco weren't so sure, continuing to hide out in the basement of Joe Watt's house. But as winter gave way to spring with no moves made against them, they began to think their boss was right and resumed their usual routines, the safeguards abandoned. It would prove a fatal mistake.

On Sunday, April 13, 1986, Gotti and DeCicco along with Gravano had plans to meet at the Veterans and Friends Social Club in Bensonhurst, the main meeting place for the Gambino Family. DeCicco and Gravano showed up in the early afternoon, but Gotti called and said he was tied up and would meet them later in the city. Gravano and DeCicco stayed to talk with the assembled mobsters, keen not to make the same mistake as Castellano by removing themselves



from day-to-day contact with the capi and soldiers. Among those at the club that day were Jimmy Failla and Danny Marino, two of the people who had been waiting inside Spark's Steak House for Castellano the evening he was murdered.

At one point, a Lucchese soldier name Frank "Frankie Hearts" Bellino who resembled Gotti asked DeCicco if he had a business card for a lawyer DeCicco had used that Bellino wanted to retain. DeCicco searched his wallet without finding it and decided it might be in the glove compartment of his Buick parked across the street, he and Bellino going out to get it. Bellino later said DeCicco joked about a bag under his car being a bomb, but paid it no real attention. DeCicco slid into the passenger seat and began going through the glove box, Bellino standing on the sidewalk next to him, when the innocuous bag beneath the car blew up, sending DeCicco flying out through the windshield to land on the sidewalk, Bellino blown backwards out of his shoes, his toes sheared off by some piece of flying debris.

Gravano and others ran out and saw the burning car, Bellino lying on the sidewalk with blood gushing from his feet, DeCicco lying nearby. Gravano tried to get his friend DeCicco away from the burning hulk, telling author Peter Maas, "I grabbed a leg, but he ain't coming with it. The leg is off. One of his arms is off... I got my hand under him and my hand went right through his body to his stomach. There's no ass. His ass, his balls, everything, is completely blown off." The missing arm was found later on the awning of a bakery shop, a detached foot dozens of yards away against a parking meter.

A police van just happened to come by and the men flagged it down to rush the two men to a hospital. Gravano was amazed to find that despite his exertions there wasn't a drop of blood on his white shirt, the explosion having blown out virtually every fluid in DeCicco's body. It

was later reported he died on the way to the hospital, but Gravano was convinced he was as dead as could be while lying on the sidewalk.

Gravano dispatched one of his crew to find Gotti and tell him what had happened. Gotti, a notorious late riser, was still at home and he rushed over to the scene, shaken by Gravano's account of what had happened to DeCicco and the extensive damage to the car. At his own club, he couldn't keep still, telling everyone who drifted in, "You got to see the fuckin' car, you wouldn't believe the car."

A bit late, the Gambinos went on full alert with Gotti and the others afraid raging warfare was about to break out. Suspicion as to whom was behind the murder immediately centered on Gigante of the Genovese Family seeking punishment of Gotti for the murder of Castellano without the permission of the full Commission, Bellino's resemblance to Gotti adding to the speculation. The use of a bomb, however, confused the issue. The rule in the American Mafia against using bombs went back to Luciano's era, and Gigante especially was a stickler for following the rules, precisely the reason he'd been after Gotti in the first place. Bombs were common in the Sicilian Mafia, however, and some wondered if one of Castellano's many contacts among the Zips had been behind it. Some also suggested the murder might be a private vendetta, Bilotti's relatives getting back at DeCicco for his intimate betrayal as he had been a confidant of Castellano and Bilotti.

It wasn't until 1994 when one-time Lucchese underboss Anthony Casso turned informer that the story came out. According to Casso, Gigante was in fact behind the murder, using a bomb to divert suspicion from himself. He ordered the murders of Gotti and DeCicco to avenge the unauthorized deaths of the former Godfather and underboss, Castellano and Bilotti. Enlisted in the plot was the man who became the acting boss of the Luccheses after Corallo was sent to

prison, Vittorio “Vic” Amuso, along with his brother Robert, and Casso who was underboss of the Lucchese. In the Gambino Family, the capi Failla and Marino, both Castellano loyalists, were enticed to join the conspirators with a promise that the Commission would push through Failla as boss with Marino as underboss after the murders.

When it was decided to use a bomb to throw off suspicion, Casso recruited an ex-U.S. Army munitions expert who had become a drug dealer associated with the Genoveses, Herbert “Blue Eyes” Pate. Through a Casso contact in Florida, Pate obtained a quantity of C-4 plastic explosive and ran a demonstration test at a remote upstate New York location for Amuso, his brother Robert, and Casso. Impressed with Pate’s skill, they gave him the go ahead and he fashioned a second bomb from the C-4, using the remote device of a toy car to trigger the detonation.

The conspirators alerted Gigante when it was learned from Marino and Failla that Gotti and DeCicco were going to stop at the social club. Pate, his face unknown to most mafiosi, walked past DeCicco’s car carrying a bag of groceries, dropping a package on the passenger side. As he bent to pick it up, he slid the paper bag containing the bomb under the car.

Casso and the Amuso brothers waited in a car up the street listening to police broadcasts on a scanner while Pate kept watch from a car across the street and slightly up from DeCicco’s, having to wait about an hour before DeCicco came out accompanied by Bellino. When DeCicco slid into the passenger seat, Bellino next to the car, Pate pulled out with his driver’s side window rolled down and pressed the remote toy car transmitter to detonate the bomb. It appears he wasn’t quite the expert with explosives Casso believed as shrapnel from the explosion showered his car, cutting his ear and damaging the exterior so badly it had to be repainted.

Despite Casso's confession of how the murder was committed, Pate never has been charged as there is no corroborating testimony or other evidence to prove that Casso's account is truthful. The case is still listed as open.

Gotti impressed everyone in the Family with his fearless demeanor following DeCicco's murder, convincing himself it was some private matter as Gigante, the only likely perpetrator, couldn't possibly be bold enough to challenge him. In this, of course, he was very mistaken.

The day after the explosion, Gotti's hard-charging bullet-headed attorney, Bruce Cutler, asked the court that Gotti's federal racketeering trial be postponed due to the rampant publicity, much of it centering on Gotti, that prejudiced his client's right to a fair trial; but the judge denied the motion and continued with jury selection which went slowly, many clearly reluctant to sit in judgment on such dangerous defendants. Then, after nine jurors laboriously had been chosen, the judge learned that they had violated his orders not to discuss the case and he was forced to dismiss them. With that setback, he caved in and reversed his earlier decision, postponing the trial until August, four months away.

The prosecutor, Diane Giacalone, immediately filed a motion asking that Gotti be kept in custody rather than go free on bail, claiming the likelihood of his intimidating witnesses. As proof, she cited the case of the terrified refrigerator repairman Romual Piecyk. Gotti's lawyer, Bruce Cutler, immediately got Piecyk to sign an affidavit that he'd never been threatened, Piecyk telling reporters the government was unfairly persecuting the fine and upright Gotti, none of which impressed the judge who granted Giacalone's motion and ordered that Gotti be remanded to the Metropolitan Correction Center (MCC) for the remainder of the trial.

Just before giving himself up to the authorities, Gotti visited Joe Butch Corrao at his social club in Little Italy. Showing a sense of humor, Corrao had named it the Andrea Doria, presumably after the Italian cruise liner which had sunk in 1956 off Nantucket after a collision with the Swedish liner the Stockholm, the club listed in the phone book as the Hawaiian Moonlighters Association with a plaque on the door that said: "On this site in 1897 absolutely nothing happened." Corrao also owned the Cafe Biondo across the street from his social club, opened years earlier by his mobster father James "The Blond" Corrao, biondo meaning blond in Italian.

Gotti's brother Gene had been pushing Corrao as the replacement for DeCicco as underboss; but Gotti had someone else in mind and presumably wanted to break the bad news personally to the influential Corrao. A last minute appeal by Cutler kept Gotti free for an additional three hours, spent in Corrao's Cafe Biondo, before the appeal was denied and Gotti returned to Brooklyn to surrender, telling reporters he was "ready for Freddy," the phrase a Brooklyn euphemism for manly stoicism in the face of cruel fate.

To run things day-to-day while he was behind bars, Gotti appointed a troika consisting of the venerable Joe "Piney" Armone, his new best pal Sammy Gravano, and his old buddy Angelo "Quack-Quack" Ruggiero who was pressing to be named the new underboss. Ruggiero was in an advantageous position as he was the only one other than family members and lawyers with access to Gotti at the MCC, acting as his personal messenger to the Family.

One of Gotti's first demands startled and dismayed Gravano, Ruggiero bringing word that Gotti wanted DiBernardo killed, allegedly for loose talk about whom he thought should be boss, apparently not Gotti. There was also the possibility of baser motives as DiBernardo had told Gravano that he had loaned considerable sums to both Gotti and Ruggiero to pay for their

lawyers. And, of course, with DiBernardo out of the way his lucrative businesses, including pornography, clubs and union kickbacks, would be up for grabs.

DiBernardo was also facing a five-year prison sentence on a federal conviction in an F.B.I. sting operation of the pornography industry and was under further investigation for pornography involving children which would likely be dealt with even more harshly. Judged to be at heart a racketeer like Castellano instead of a gangster like Gotti, there was a suspicion he was susceptible to cutting a deal with the authorities to save himself while frying everyone else.

Just the same, Gravano argued that DiBernardo had been a key part of the Castellano hit and was owed simply for that, as well as the fact that without a crew of his own he presented no threat. But his protestations were in vain and when Ruggiero's plan to kill him fell through, Gravano himself was called upon to get the job done. Gravano set up an evening meeting in the basement office of his construction business and as DiBernardo sat talking with him, Gravano's trusted gun "Old Man" Paruta shot him twice in the back of the head with a silenced .38. The second shot splattered bone and brains all over the place, making Gravano remark distastefully, "Jesus, that was messy."

The body was placed in a body bag obtained from the mob's favorite funeral home, Scarpaci's, and later that night put in the car trunk of a key Gotti loyalist who eventually would serve as acting underboss and then consigliere, Frank "Frankie Loc" Locascio. Gotti later intimated to Gravano that Locascio was used to get rid of a number of bodies, Gravano assuming they were buried near Locascio's upstate farm where he kept a variety of heavy digging equipment. DiBernardo's Mercedes was driven off by John Carneglia—the shooter in the Castellano murder who had the sang froid to walk around the car to help kill Bilotti after shooting Castellano—to be destroyed in a car salvage yard he owned.

DiBernardo's businesses that were even vaguely related to the Family were taken over and parceled out by Gotti who designated Gravano as the Gambino contact to the Teamsters Local 282. Gravano told the Local's president, Bobby Sasso, that they'd meet only in the middle of the night at out-of-the-way motels and that he wasn't to show his face at any Family gathering, funerals and such, to avoid stimulating the interest of the authorities. Both Gotti and Gravano benefited from DiBernardo being removed from the kickbacks extorted through the union, Gotti redividing the spoils to give himself eighty percent, five percent more than Castellano had taken, Gravano awarded the remaining twenty percent.

Gravano believes that Gotti kept every penny of his eighty percent, sharing it with no one. Gotti was addicted to gambling and suffered regular huge losses, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars in a week. Musing on Gotti's addiction, Gravano astutely pointed out that he never once heard Gotti talk of a bet he'd won while regularly complaining of the close bets he'd lost, causing Gravano to speculate that Gotti had the psychology of being driven to lose. Judging by Gotti's reckless high-profile persona as a Mafia Godfather in the face of the authority's most relentless and effective drive to indict and prosecute organized crime, such a psychological tic might be suspected to have underlain Gotti's entire career.

Gravano's faith in Gotti's judgment was restored in some measure when Gotti passed over his voluble sidekick Ruggiero and named Piney Armone as new underboss. Like Gotti, Gravano felt Armone was a better choice to appease the older mafiosi, the Don Cheeches as they were pejoratively known. Though both Ruggiero and Armone were tainted with involvement in narcotics—Armone had been one of the defendants in the famous French Connection trial of the 1960's, before the edict of no drug dealing—his long service to the Mafia would put the oldtimer's minds at rest in a way Ruggiero never could have done.

Gotti's brother Gene, brought word that Gotti wanted Gravano and Locascio to go to every crew to hold what the Mafia calls a "tie-in." This is a ritualistic ceremony in which all the members of a crew sit down together in a circle holding hands, symbolizing that for the moment they are all equal and of one Family. Gravano or Locascio would then talk of the Family's strength and unity, going over the Mafia covenants, reaffirming their blood relationship in the Honored Society. No doubt some thought it bullshit, but for many it proved moving, including Gravano and Locascio. Gravano commented to Locascio, "This was a good idea John had." Locascio replied, "John's an old-timer at heart—like me."

In August, Gotti's federal racketeering trial resumed with a new jury being chosen. One of the chosen jurors, however, was eager to be reached by Gotti, seeing his participation in the case as a chance to make easy money.

His name was George Pape, a forty-eight year old suburbanite husband and father of two whose drinking problem made for constant financial pressures. A go-between went to Gravano and told him Pape wanted \$120,000 to assure his vote for acquittal. Gravano had Gene Gotti carry the news to his brother who instantly approved payment for Pape. But even if Pape had not existed, the trial would not have been a sure win for the prosecution. The F.B.I. had withdrawn assistance in part because the prosecutor, Diane Giacalone, had insisted on revealing the role as an informant of a Mafia associate on trial with Gotti, Willie Boy Johnson, putting his life in something more than danger in order to pressure him to testify. Still, Johnson adamantly refused, sitting at the defense table next to Gotti throughout the trial, traveling with him in the police van back and forth from their cells in the MCC, believing Gotti's words of forgiveness. It was foolish of him, but he was able to convince himself that he had been given a reprieve on the strength of the fact that had he testified, he could have implicated Gotti in multiple murders.



Among other crimes he committed for the Gambino Family, it was rumored that he was instrumental in the death in 1980 of John Favara, Gotti's neighbor who accidentally killed Gotti's twelve year-old son Frank in an auto accident. Favara was threatened then kidnapped before he could move from Gotti's neighborhood, and was never seen again. One anonymous informant told the F.B.I. that he'd been kept alive for a week until Gotti returned from a Florida vacation—the trip taken as an alibi—and cut up Favara personally with a chain saw.

When Gotti and the others were acquitted, his supporters were ecstatic over his latest victory, the press coming up with the new catchy moniker of “the Teflon Don,” the Godfather so slick that legal charges slid off him. Gotti himself seemed to embrace this concept, telling people who advised him to adopt a lower profile that he was inventing the new face of the Mafia, that he would lead the way in confronting and defeating the government with their own weapon: the criminal justice system. More than ever, he became a celebrity, seen at the trendiest Manhattan nightspots, such as Regine's, hobnobbing with the glimmeratti. Gravano relates how one night when he and Gotti were having dinner at a chic uptown restaurant, Gotti pointed out a couple staring at him. Two of their bodyguards were at the bar and Gravano asked him, “You want me to have them go and see what they want, these people?”

“No, no!” he said to Gravano. “This is my public, Sammy. They love me.”

Gravano and other prudent mafiosi were appalled at Gotti being seduced by his own image. As Gravano said of his kind, “We're not actors, we're not actresses. We're gangsters and racketeers. We're not supposed to be known to the public. What happened to that prick in the finger, when Paul said, ‘We're a secret society’? What kind of secret is this?”

Out of jail for the first time in a year and with no legal proceedings to impede him, Gotti moved to demonstrate that he was firmly in charge. One of his first moves was to tell the

venerable Joe N. Gallo “You’re not helping the Family. You can stay as consigliere in name, but as of now you’re inactive.” Gallo acquiesced, in no position to challenge Gotti, as Gravano became the acting consigliere.

While Gotti maneuvered within his Family, Chin Gigante found more reasons to be annoyed with him than simply for the hit on Castellano. John Riggi, the boss of the New Jersey Decavalcante Family—a subset of the Genovese Family and the model for the Sopranos—complained to Gigante that Gotti had his brother Gene wandering around New Jersey making contacts among the unions in the construction trade, their exclusive territory as far as Gigante was concerned.

In August of 1987, Genovese consigliere Louis “Bobby” Manna, Martin “Motts” Cassella, Frank Daniello and Richard “Bocci” DeSciscio met to go over options for a hit on Gotti. Paranoid about police surveillance, the meeting was held in the lady’s room of a restaurant owned by Cassella in Hoboken, New Jersey, just across the river from Manhattan. DeSciscio was an experienced hitman and the plan worked out was a simple one using his talents. As the Gotti brothers came out of the Bergin social club, DeSciscio in disguise would jump from a parked car and shoot them.

Unfortunately for them, the lady’s room had been bugged by the Feds.

While the F.B.I. enjoyed taping mobsters intimate conversations, overhearing the plot meant they were bound by law to inform the intended victim of the threat against his life. Once Gotti heard the news and responded, the Genoveses were certain to realize they had a serious leak and look to plug it, threatening all sorts of information sources. But the law was the law and early the next afternoon, Gotti’s wife Victoria answered a knock at the front door of their modest brick home in Howard Beach to find two F.B.I. agents asking for her husband. Gotti, a late riser,

came to the door in a robe and listened quietly as he was told there was a plot to murder him and his brother Gene. “No big deal,” he responded. Told that the threat came from the Genovese Family in New Jersey, he said that Gigante was his friend and he wasn’t worried about it.

Among his men at the Bergin there was no need for a pose and he vented a volcanic rage against Gigante, yelling that he wanted him killed, unaware that the Ravenite had been bugged since February of 1988, one of the early tapes catching him saying, “You get that sort of respect with murder.” He and his new consigliere Gravano agreed that the threat was genuine or the F.B.I. wouldn’t have contacted him, guessing that it must have been something more than an informant, that it came directly from the source through a wiretap somewhere. Gravano mused on DeCicco’s death, wondering if Gigante had been behind it, but Gotti still refused to believe the Genoveses would use a bomb. Just the same, it seems apparent that Gotti did strike back, hitting a Genovese capo named James “Jimmy” Rotondo who was found shot dead in his car, spoiled fish wrapped in the New York Times in his lap.

With the warning plainly made, the strategy was for Gravano to contact Manna and let him know what the F.B.I. had reported while claiming that Gotti didn’t believe it for a minute. Coupled with Rotondo’s murder, this would let Gigante know they were on to him and weren’t about to let him run over them, but wouldn’t directly threaten him too much. Unless Gigante had the will to instigate open warfare, which Gotti doubted, he would be checked. Gravano made the contact, the Geneoveses claimed that if it wasn’t just a trick by the F.B.I. then whoever had talked about such a plot must have been kidding. Gotti pretended to believe their response. Stalemate. Gravano found himself impressed again with Gotti’s deft maneuvering, the velvet glove covering an iron fist.

Gotti's old buddy Ruggiero, however, threatened to bring the whole shaky edifice crashing down. Locked away in the MCC instead of being out on bail due to his own foolish behavior, he could do nothing but stew on the sidelines as one of his oldest friends ascended to the head of the Family. But instead of sharing in the spoils, he found himself excluded and ostracized, in large part because of his incessant chatter. The tapes the government had made of his conversations had done huge damage, everything from contributing to Castellano's murder to the indictment of New York politicians Mario Biaggi and Meade Esposito. Now he had to watch the aged Armone grab the spot he coveted as underboss while his rival Gravano became consigliere.

Feeling it all fade away, Ruggiero chose a fateful move to assert his power. When he'd been arrested on his narcotics charge, comments by Gaspipe Casso had circulated in the mob disparaging Ruggiero and questioning whether or not he would turn informant to get himself a lighter sentence. Seemingly from sheer pique at the insult, Ruggiero decided to kill Casso on his own without seeking Gotti's permission which was a bit insane considering that Casso was the underboss of the Lucchese Family. Killing him could start a war between the Families.

Knowing his motivation wasn't sufficient for anyone other than himself, Ruggiero made up a reason that by weird coincidence mirrored the truth: Gotti wanted Casso killed because he had been the one behind the murder of Frank DeCicco. One person who bought into the story was a veteran Bergin soldier under Ruggiero who was locked up in the MCC on a hijacking charge, Michael "Mickey Boy" Paradiso. Looking to ingratiate himself with his capo and the Godfather, Paradiso volunteered to line up outside hitmen to whack Casso, hiring three mob associates he knew: Robert Bering, Nicholas Guido, and a Staten Island hood named James Hydell who was a nephew of Gambino capo Danny Marino.

Their ambush of Casso, caught sitting in his car on the street in front of a Chinese restaurant in Brooklyn in September of 1986, was a disaster. They hit him with five shots but only wounded him.

Hydell was tracked down and arrested by the two corrupt New York police officers Lou Eppolito and Steven Caracappa who delivered him to Casso. Gravano later told the F.B.I. that Failla and Corrao of the Gambinos were brought in by the Luccheses to question Hydell themselves. As Hydell only knew that Paradiso had hired them to kill Casso because he had killed DeCicco, he couldn't tell them anything more. There must have been some concern as Hydell was related to Marino; but business was business and, inevitably, he was killed. The coroner recorded sixteen bullet wounds—in the knees, the groin, the abdomen and the head, most likely in that order for maximum effect.

Casso also put out a contract on Nick Guido and an inept gunman tracked down Guido and killed him, only to find it was the wrong Nick Guido, a perfectly innocent young man who just happened to live in the same neighborhood and have the same name. For Casso, well, accidents will happen, no big deal. Robert Bering reportedly turned himself into the police, but died of a heart attack before being brought to trial.

Hydell's confession under torture had to make Casso paranoid since, in fact, he had killed DeDicco. But at the same time he wondered how much the Gambinos really knew since the consigliere of the Family, Sammy Gravano, had come to visit him in the hospital right after the shooting. Unless Gravano was a great actor, he had been sincere in his condolences. Hydell had given up Paradiso as the man who hired him, but as Paradiso was in the MCC along with Ruggiero, his capo, suspicion immediately fell on Ruggiero and thus on the Gambinos in general.

Casso contacted Gravano who again professed the innocence of Gotti in the shooting, Casso asking for a sit-down to determine what was going on. "This has got to be about something else," he told Gravano. "I never had no beef with Frankie DeCicco."

Ruggiero denied to Gotti any knowledge of the attempted hit, not that Gotti believed him. Mickey Paradiso trying to kill Gasso on his own was highly unlikely. But in what would amount to Gotti's last act of friendship with Ruggiero, he decided to spare his life, merely busting him back to soldier.

As Casso had already requested a sit-down that by necessity would be attended by his boss, Vittorio "Vic" Amuso, Gotti decided to approach Gigante about joining in, making it a full Commission meeting. Attenuated as the Commission would be with only three members present, they would constitute a quorum, the days long past when Chicago, Detroit, or Philadelphia would attend a Commission meeting unless their interests were directly involved.

Gotti directed Gravano to get with Casso and Venero "Benny Eggs" Mangano, the Genovese underboss, to begin the process of setting up the meeting. As usual when heads of state meet, it took a good while to arrange, the sit-down not taking place until early in 1988. A Gambino capo had a brother living in an apartment building in lower Manhattan that could be used for the morning meeting. Gravano relates that they were surprised that Gigante agreed to any location they controlled, but it was later learned that he had a relative living in the building so he was able to spend the night there ahead of time, lessening the chance of a successful ambush by the Gambinos, treachery always a possibility.

On the morning of the meeting, Gotti and Gravano rendezvoused with Amuso and Casso on the street where the Gambino capo whose brother owned the apartment met them to lead the way in through an underground garage. Casso, the recent survivor of five bullet wounds,

remarked, “What a great place for a hit.” Gigante, accompanied by Mangano, was the last to show up, unshaven and dressed in his trademark pajamas and bathrobe.

The meeting began with the most serious business between them, the attempted hit on Casso. Gravano related what the Gambinos had been able to learn—or at least all they would admit to. Recognizing how inadequate their explanation was, Gotti added that they were busting Ruggiero from capo back to ordinary soldier under Gotti’s own brother, Gene. Casso replied that he should be killed, looking to his boss, Amuso, for support. Amuso, however, understood that there were bigger issues on the table and merely asked to hear what Gotti had to say.

“I just can’t do it,” Gotti told them, pleading that he didn’t have enough evidence of Ruggiero’s involvement. “It’s hard to kill Ange on suspicion after all these years,” he said. Paradiso could draw on no such sympathy, however, Gotti promising he’d be killed as soon as he got out of prison. Amuso was satisfied and Gigante couldn’t have cared less. The matter was closed.

Gotti and Gigante had more important concerns, their war moving from a covert shooting phase into diplomatic maneuvering. Gigante told Gotti that whatever his men had said to prompt the F.B.I.’s visit was not authorized by him, the Genoveses and Gambinos always having good relations. When Gotti agreed, saying “We can’t fight among ourselves. We fight the government,” Gigante backslid a moment, commenting that Castellano had been fighting the government when he was killed. “He was standing up to two RICO’s, like a man,” he said.

Gotti again pleaded ignorance of who had killed his former Godfather, remarking, “The fucking cops might have killed Paul.”

That absurdity ended the fatuous discussion about murder, real and contemplated, the conversation shifting to Commission issues. Gotti revealed that he had communicated with

Junior Persico in prison, pressing him to resolve the matter of acting boss of the Colombo Family. While Persico had been jailed for much of his administration, it had been a piecemeal incarceration, the possibility always existing of his returning in person to run the Family. Now, however, he was locked up for the foreseeable future but still clung to power. Vicorio “Vic” Orena had been carrying out the duties of acting boss without Persico settling on him alone. Persico’s son Little Allie Boy also threw his weight around and nepotism might have elevated him to boss despite his youth and inexperience. Persico’s brother and consigliere, Alphonse “Allie Boy,” would have been the natural choice, but he had gotten into the wind after a 1980 conviction on loansharking and though reported to be sighted any number of times around the globe—the head of the Eastern District organized crime Strike Force told the Marshals one time that he thought Allie Boy was a member of a federal jury pool in Brooklyn—he had yet to surface.

Gotti, taking the initiative to organize the business of the Mafia as a whole, had pressed Persico to settle the issue and Persico had decided on Orena, Gotti concurring. Between themselves, they agreed that Orena would take the Colombo Commission seat and only the Commission would have the right to depose him.

Gigante didn’t like the way the deal had been struck, knowing full well that Gotti’s intervention put Orena in his debt. But with his own isolation and Persico backing the transition, it was a done deal and he would not object. It was agreed that Orena would take his seat at the next Commission meeting. Ultimately, and for disputed reasons, the Colombo succession would descend into open warfare.

With the Colombo transition settled for the moment, Gotti pressed to have the Bonanno Family once again seated on the Commission after their long hiatus. Joey Massino was running



the Family competently and quietly, keeping them under rein and out of the limelight after the fiasco of Joe Pistone and the later Pizza Connection trial.

This was a power play that Gigante could derail, however, not wanting Gotti to have two new Commission members in his pocket. He countered that the matter of the Bonannos should be taken up at the next Commission meeting and Amuso went along with him, Gotti outvoted. It was useful to Gotti just the same as word would inevitably get back to Massino, further cementing the alliance between the Gambinos and Bonannos.

Gotti then made one more move to play kingmaker. He said that the books had been closed a long time and to keep Cosa Nostra vital they should make some new members, pointing out that the Genoveses had room for some forty new soldiers. Gigante told him, "When the time comes, I'll make those moves inside my family. I appreciate your concern, but I'll do it when I'm ready." But once again, Gotti knew that he was going to get the appreciation of the men who would have been inducted if his advice had been followed. Gigante would be the ogre who made them wait.

Such instincts were what made Gravano admire Gotti. Gravano's account of the events at this Commission meeting, however, conclude with a wry observation on the relative merits of Gigante and Gotti. Gotti remarked proudly at one point that his son, John Jr., had just been made into the Family. Gigante's response was, "Jeez, I'm sorry to hear that." His sorrow at the news took the others back at the time, but on reflection, after Gravano had broken with Gotti, he realized Gigante's response had been the normal one. Neither he, Gigante, Castellano, or many other mafiosi wanted their sons to follow in their criminal footsteps. They knew what a precarious life it was and wanted better for their progeny. Gotti, on the other hand, could think of no brighter future for his son. As Gravano mused, contrasting the relative sanity between

Gigante hiding behind his pajamas and bathrobe and the flamboyant man-about-town Gotti, “Who was really crazy?”

Feeling more firmly entrenched in his position as the Godfather of the Family, Gotti decided towards the end of 1987 to add to his base of operations the bright lights big city of the Ravenite social club in Manhattan’s Little Italy. Most recently used by Gotti’s revered boss, Neil Dellacroce, the club had once been the base for Lucky Luciano and later for Carlo Gambino who had given it its literary moniker. And he repeated Castellano’s mistake when Big Paul took over from Gambino of requiring the capi to show up regularly at his social club to pay homage.

For the F.B.I., that was a lucky break. Even more fortunate, they discovered that Gotti used an upstairs apartment for discussions and they managed to place a bug in it, recording his words that would return to sink him. The first recorded conversation from the apartment was recorded up on the evening of November 30, 1989. Listening to the tapes, the F.B.I. knew that at last they had discovered the place where Gotti felt secure enough to talk about the innermost machinations of the Mafia.

Gotti, Gravano, Locascio and one of Gotti’s attorneys, Michael Coiro, were recorded. Gotti first commiserated with Coiro who’d been convicted earlier that day on a RICO charge brought by the Justice Department for his involvement in the Gambino narcotics trafficking case, more of Ruggiero’s monumental screw-up. Gotti then apologized for having to press Coiro for help at such a time, but he wanted Coiro to reach out to his contact and get inside information on the upcoming murder indictment in the Castellano case. “But what you gotta do, is you gotta grab this guy, Mike. We’ve been good to him in the past, we’ll be good to him in the future. I never once asked you who he is. Did I ever ask you?” Coiro agreed he’d never asked. “Can you see this guy pronto?” Gotti pressed, Coiro replying that he’d do it the next day.

After Coiro left, Gotti, Gravano and Locascio talked about all manner of things, Gotti launching into a tirade about the dead Castellano, a “rat motherfucker” better off dead. At one point, he shifted his fury onto Ruggiero, saying “He deserved to have his tongue cut out—if nothing else, his fucking tongue cut out.” Gravano missed the shift, however, thinking he was still ranting about Castellano, Locascio having to straighten out the subject matter. This evidently reminded Gotti that Locascio was not privy to the inside information on the Castellano hit, the cover-up still rigidly in place, and Gotti tried to cover his tracks. “Whoever killed this cocksucker, probably the cops killed this Paul,” he said. “But whoever killed him, the cocks—he deserved it.”

Gotti then preened by relating how a Gambino soldier, Jo Jo Corozzo, had happily told him earlier that day that he’d been talking with a few “skippers” from another Family and they all agreed that “‘Since youse are here, this is the first time that they could remember, in years, that the Families ain’t arguing’. Nobody’s arguing.” Gravano seconded the observation, Gotti so impressed with himself that he repeated, “None of the Families are arguing with nobody.”

Gravano, ever the realist, however, noted, “And if it wasn’t for this guy, if it wasn’t for him, I think this really would be so fucking united.”

“This guy,” evidently was Gigante who had schooled everyone in the Mafia to never use his name, pointing to their chin to express who they meant.

Gotti was still in his dreamland though. “Not only that,” he went on, “if there’s a bad situation, hey, rules need a little changing or something...send, send, send the five underbosses or the consiglieres—together, boom. This is my way, my thinking, because this thing, in other words, the five Families, put together—badda bing!” Gotti clapped his hands. “That’s the law.”

One obscure comment Gotti made caught the attention of the authorities. “We’ll break their ass, Sam,” he said while they were talking about their legal troubles. “We got this little bit of an edge, you know. Fuck them. Listen, we know everything.”

How they knew everything was what the F.B.I. wanted to know.

The next conversation the F.B.I. would tape in the apartment made the authorities believe that at long last Gotti would soon receive from the courts the harsh fate he so well deserved.

At 7:30 on the evening of December 12, Gotti and Locascio sat down to go over some peeves that had been building up in Gotti, and the F.B.I. was electrified to hear Gotti’s admissions of complicity to murder, taping as he said, “When DeeBee [Robert DiBernardo] got whacked, they told me a story. I was in jail when I whacked him. I knew why it was being done. I done it anyway. I allowed it to be done, anyway.”

After complaining about all the new businesses that were being created, Gotti said darkly, “And every time we got a partner that don’t agree with us, we kill him. You go to the boss and your boss kills him. He kills ‘em. He okays it. Say it’s all right, good.”

The transcript of the evening’s conversation quickly made its way to the Justice Department in Washington where it was reviewed with a sense of amazement. Considering the content of the tape, the admissions of murder and intimate discussion of the workings of the Mafia as a criminal conspiracy, there seemed little possibility that Gotti again would evade justice when they brought their case against him.

Gotti knew that the threat from the Genoveses under Gigante hadn’t gone away. Casso in fact, had gone ahead with plans to use a car bomb to kill Gotti but was finding it difficult to find the right time and place. Gotti’s Brooklyn home was considered, but there was too much random traffic to risk it. Blowing up some innocent child along with Gotti would cause too much heat.

They would never need to come up with a better plan.

On December 11, 1990, Gotti, Gravano and Locasio were arrested by federal authorities at the Ravenite. At their bail hearing, Gravano was stunned to hear on the F.B.I. tapes what Gotti really thought of him, words that ultimately led him, along with his own self-interest in avoiding the prison sentence he richly deserved, to become a cooperating witness for the government.

At his trial two years later, Gotti was found guilty of all charges, fined \$250,000 and given multiple life sentences without the possibility of parole. He would never taste freedom again, dying of throat cancer in prison in 2002.

Sometimes, crime doesn't pay worth a damn.