

THE FRANCHISE

Book I

1952-1968

Birth Of A Dynasty

Edmund Benjamin

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Chapter 1

An Insurrection

It was the final week of August in 1952 when John Acropolis made what would be his last trip from Flushing, Queens, where he dropped off his girlfriend, a Broadway dancer, on his way home to his apartment in Yonkers. John could not remember the last time he was so happy. The drive to Yonkers, on the Bronx border, often took at least thirty minutes, and he usually spent the time focused on union business. Tonight's drive was different. As he sped along with no one else on the road, his head swam with thoughts of his future, a future with a wife and kids. John was so hyped up on adrenaline that if he were any higher, his nose might start to bleed.

At the time, Acropolis was the brash, young president of one of the fastest-growing Teamsters Locals in the country and rapidly becoming a major player in Westchester County's political scene. For the first time in its thirty-year history, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 654 was expanding its sphere of influence, getting involved with civic organizations, charities and local politics. As head of the Local, John made great strides in changing the 654's nefarious reputation. With John at the helm, the Yonkers-based Local now wanted nothing more than to come out of the shadows and be a part of the community.

That was his vision, a Local that did good for the community, not one that fed off it. He ran a Local that he hoped would eventually become as legitimate as his world would allow. That was who John was his entire life. He felt compelled to help those who couldn't help themselves. He couldn't stand to see someone bullied or taken advantage of, and not just those fortunate enough to be his friends, but complete strangers as well. Heading north on the Major Deegan Expressway, he drove past Yankee Stadium and an orphanage where he had spent what he chose to remember of his childhood. As he looked ahead, he felt invigorated, charged with enthusiasm. John was intoxicated with the anticipation of a new kind of life. Earlier that evening, after years of being a skirt-chasing playboy, John finally proposed marriage to his now fiancée, who had jumped into his arms and enthusiastically accepted his offer to share the rest of their lives.

Lantern-jawed and muscular, John was built like a fighter with movie star looks, much like Victor Mature, a matinee idol in the '30s and '40s. With his innate charm, physical appearance, and position in the community, John had always done very well with the ladies. But by the summer of '52, he was forty-four years old and had grown weary of waking up next to strangers with little or no connection other than the pleasure they had exchanged the night before. He had matured emotionally and, with a lot of introspection, had been able to process his past and finally put some of his childhood demons behind him, the same demons he had used so adroitly to keep others at bay. No longer fearful of an intimate relationship, he knew it was time to change. John entered Westchester County, passing Yonkers Raceway as the track's large digital clock read 1:48 AM. He thought, *a wife, kids, a real home, why not?*

After all, I've been through, I got it comin'. He promised himself he would never leave his children helpless the way he had been left, having to fend for himself.

Less than ten minutes later, John cautiously pulled to the curb in front of his apartment house, having turned the headlights off a few blocks before. He had been driving a borrowed Pontiac in his continuing effort to avoid being followed during the Garbage Wars. Parked outside his home, reviewing his day, John was reminded that his day was not over. One last piece of business lay ahead, and he needed to stay alert. At the time, the Garbage Wars were raging in Yonkers, a turf battle between John's Local 654 and Bronx racketeers pushing their way north with an eye on Westchester's refuse business. Streets were piled high with trash. Truck drivers were being beaten and their vehicles hijacked. But John and his men in Local 654 still had to conduct their business, even though they were going head to head with some very dangerous people--people who had snappy, descriptive nicknames, wore diamond pinky rings, and sharkskin suits. These individuals were unaccustomed to the word *no* and would do anything to accomplish their objectives.

The conflict was no secret; throughout the summer, front-page articles in the newspapers chronicled how John Acropolis, the well-respected, two-fisted unionist, would not allow Bronx gangsters to expand their trash-hauling concerns north into Westchester and 654 territory. Drivers on both sides were beaten, their trucks burned out, and businesses firebombed, making Yonkers a tough place to do business. This battle would determine who would control the then fifty-million-dollar-a-year garbage hauling industry in Yonkers and Westchester County.

Turning off the engine, John jumped out of the car and retrieved a freshly pressed suit from the rear seat. With the suit slung over his left arm, John paused for a moment and, for the first time in a long while, took in the breathtaking view of the Palisades. The night was clear, and the moon was shining so brightly that he could make out almost every detail of the cliffs across the glimmering Hudson River. The view put an appreciative smile on his face. He entered the lobby of his apartment building, feeling both invincible and proud of his accomplishments. Professionally, he was at the height of his power and popularity as a union leader. Personally, after a lifetime of struggle, he had managed to put his demons behind him with an eye toward the future, one he hoped would include marital bliss and a couple of kids.

As he entered the empty lobby, he stopped to check his mailbox. He retrieved several pieces of mail and headed toward the east side of the five-story building where his ground-floor apartment was located. He quickly went through the envelopes. *Nothing important*, he thought. It was mostly billed, with a reminder from his dentist that it was time for a checkup. When he got to the last piece of mail, he stopped abruptly. There was an unexpected letter from his alma mater, Colgate University. Just when he thought his day couldn't get any better, he was overwhelmed with pride when he read that he had been chosen to give a commencement speech at his old school. John had always credited his education with much of his success in business and life. He held every teacher he ever had in high regard, and now, for these respected academics to show their admiration for his achievements by asking him to speak to a graduating class was almost too much to take. But the broad smile on his face quickly vanished

when he heard the metal rear door open and a guarded voice saying, “Hey, John, it’s me.” Instantly, John put his index finger to his lips, shushing his late-night visitor and beckoning the one last piece of business of the day to follow him into his apartment.

Undistracted by what he believed was another money drop from one of the 654’s many illegal rackets, John walked through the small foyer to a tastefully furnished living room as he looked at the letter from Colgate. Without thinking to turn and face his visitor, he said, “So what’s what, kid, Whataya got for me?” The shadowy figure, who had been led into the apartment and allowed to walk straight up behind one of the most important men in Westchester County, reached into the brown paper bag he had at his side and took out a revolver with a makeshift silencer affixed to the barrel. He fired a shot at point-blank range right into the back of John’s head. The force of the projectile propelled John forward face-first onto the hardwood floor. The murderer cautiously took a step forward, leaned over the body, and fired another shot just behind John’s left ear. With the coup de grâce delivered and his mission achieved, the killer riffled through John’s pockets, looking for a bonus. John had been known to carry large sums of cash for “union business,” and since the assailant figured robbing the dead man wouldn’t get him any more time in prison than committing homicide, why not take the money? The killer hastily put the cash from John’s wallet into his pocket. After surveying the apartment to make sure he hadn’t made any mistakes, he walked toward the door. But he turned back to look at John, lying face down and lifeless in a pool of blood.

As the man turned around towards the corpse, the horrifying image of a faceless murderer with empty sockets where eyes belonged startled Edward “Senior” Boyle awake from a fitful sleep. Drenched in sweat, he realized it was the same recurring nightmare that had been plaguing him throughout his adult life. Senior quickly sat up on the edge of his bed. Using the undershirt he was wearing to wipe the perspiration from his face, he muttered to himself, “Fuck, not again.”

Groggy and tired from lack of sleep, Senior, a sixty-two-year-old Yonkers native, cleared his throat and took a moment to muster the will to get to his feet. A quick look around his bedroom reminded him what day it was as if he needed reminding. A charcoal gray Brioni suit, one of his favorites, hung on the hook on his bedroom door. It reminded him that today was the start of his labor racketeering trial. It had been fifty years since the Acropolis murder, a homicide that had become the most infamous in Westchester history. Coincidentally, it happened to be the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Centennial. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Senior couldn’t believe how fast the time had gone by. So much had happened in the months that had led up to his trial; he felt as if he were the undeserving recipient of wrath worse than that of the gods. Aches and pains, both physical and emotional, had nearly drained the life out of him. Staring into the mirror after splashing his face with cold water, he saw his ghastly appearance. Angry at the world as if cursed, he mumbled to himself, “Goddamn you all. Look at this. I look like an old fuckin’ man.” After shaving the gray scruff off his face and taking a long, hot shower, Senior got dressed and prepared for what he knew would be a difficult day. Looking dapper in his overpriced Italian suit, the once powerful ex-

Teamster boss primed and preened what was left of a full pompadour, topping it off with a few blasts of hairspray. It was 6:30 in the morning. Having nothing else to do for the next couple of hours but wait for his driver, who would arrive at 8:30 sharp, Senior sat in his favorite chair and tried to relax.

The monogrammed black leather chair was one of the must-have items he had taken with him when he was suspended from his post as president of the Teamsters Local 654 several years earlier. The charge was embezzlement, some nonsense about the Local paying top dollar to a local car dealership for new vehicles. Then, after the locals sold the cars back to the dealership for less than they were worth, benefiting the dealership, Senior and his inner circle would buy back the used cars for their family members at a conspicuously reduced price. In fact, it was downright insulting, not because Senior had been indicted or convicted of embezzlement and bribery, but because, in his own words, “After all the dirt and thieving we’ve done, to come after me for buyin’ and sellin’ cars is a slap in the face. I mean, fuck, what’s right is right.” The overstuffed, overpriced chair, a reminder of who and what he had been, was now the centerpiece of a makeshift office/war room he had set up in the basement of his modest Yonkers home. The setup was simple. Pressed up against an exposed brick wall was a medium-sized desk, a small computer monitor and keyboard, and, of course, the chair itself. From this inconspicuous spot, throughout his suspension, he had continued to control Westchester County and everything in it like a Roman emperor, almost as easily as running the 654 and the county when he was officially holding the reins of the most powerful Teamsters Local in the country.

Expecting several important calls before he had to appear in federal court in White Plains, Senior took a small bottle out of his pocket. *What the fuck? Maybe a couple of Valiums will help take the edge off.* In anticipation of the sedative's calming effect, Senior closed his eyes and tried to process all that had gone on. His labor racketeering trial and the prospect of being sent to prison were not his only troubles. He started to prioritize them, using his troubles as a measure. With his finances chief among his concerns, Senior was reviewing a mental spreadsheet when one of his cell phones rang. It was Senior's attorney, Ray Sisano.

A Yonkers native himself, Sisano was sharp, diligent, and well-connected. He was the kind of lawyer you wanted sitting next to you in court if you had the misfortune to find yourself facing a serious charge. He greeted Senior briefly, asking about his overall physical and mental state. "Are you shittin' me or what?" Senior responded. "What kind of question is that, Ray? How do you think I'm feelin'? I'm on top of the world. As a matter of fact, I was just sittin' around thinkin' about how life's been so kind and how I got it so good."

Sensing Senior's displeasure with the world and his situation, Sisano kept silent for a moment. Dropping the sarcasm, Senior asked, "So whataya think, Counselor, am I goin' away for life or what?" "No, of course not, Ed," Sisano assured him. "Look," he said, "today's just the start of a process. We're going to take it one step at a time. Please try not to worry. We've got a good, solid defense. All the government's got is some hearsay and secondhand information from disgruntled malcontents who used to belong to your Local. They can't link you to any specific crime. You were the head of an organization with more than

three thousand people in it. Your job was to delegate authority. How in the world are you supposed to know what every single one of your people is up to at any given time? So, some of them might have wandered off the reservation and been involved with things you weren't aware of that were illegal. So what? It has absolutely nothing to do with you and how you ran what is indisputably the most successful Teamsters Local in the country and the very reason they came after you with such zeal."

"English, Ray, English," demanded Senior. "What the fuck does 'zeal' have to do with me?" "I said 'zeal' because..." But quickly realizing Senior wasn't familiar with the word, Sisano changed the subject and asked rhetorically, "The 654's books are straight, aren't they?" Senior replied confidently, "Yeah, yeah, of course. The Feds've been through them more than my people." Sisano continued, "Most of the membership out there is working and earning a living, not to mention hundreds of men praising your leadership. Trust me, all this is a continuing vendetta by the International because, even after all the trouble they went through to bring you down, they still haven't been able to get their hands on your Local. The good folks on the jury will see that. That's my job, to make the jury see all this as a persecution rather than a prosecution. All you have to do is play the victim. 'Why me? What did I do?' That's how you've got to come across."

Listening to his savvy attorney gave Senior's confidence a boost. *Maybe I can get through this; what the hell, I've come this far*, he thought. Senior started to ask about the worst-case scenario, but the attorney cut his client off the moment he heard the word "appeal." "What did I say?" he reiterated. "One step at a time, Ed."

“What about my assets?” Senior persisted. “These humps are comin’ after me and everything I have with this goddamn RICO thing. Look, I get it. Okay? You get caught fuckin’ up, you go to jail. But what’s this Commie horse shit about goin’ after a person’s assets? They’re lookin’ to seize property, which, thank God, ain’t even in my own name. Then there’s the bank accounts they’re questioning and the safe deposit boxes they wanna inspect. What the fuck do I do? Is all this bullshit even legal? This ain’t Russia. I mean, for Christ’s sake, can’t we do anything?”

“Well,” Sisano said, “hopefully, things won’t go that far.” Trying to be encouraging, but in a subdued tone, he said, “That’s the way the RICO statutes are. They were set up so that if they can prove that you, Ed Boyle, as an individual, have been a part of an ongoing criminal enterprise, they can come in and, by law, take every asset or money they can link to the criminal activity they claim is a conspiracy. Look at what Giuliani did in the ’80s with all those mob guys down in the city. Besides puttin’ ‘em away for hundreds of years, they all had to give up millions in fines and forfeitures.” Taking Senior’s silence as concern for his finances and the welfare of his family, Sisano reverted to his mantra, saying, “Look, forget about all that. One step at a time, remember?” “Yeah, yeah, I know,” Senior said, “one step at a time.”

Thirty minutes into the conversation, Senior grew weary, especially after his learned counselor brought up a particularly embarrassing topic Senior had hoped to avoid. “So what’s with your kid brother? Is he okay? Has he tried to contact you or reach out in any way?” “Nah,” Senior answered, “not a word. But trust me, he will. As soon as that dumb fuck blows through whatever cash he’s got in his

pocket, he'll be callin'. You can bet your life on that." "Listen, Ed, you just tell him to get his ass back here from wherever he is. He can't hide forever, not from the government. Sooner or later, he's going to get picked up for some stupid mistake, which will make things ten times worse just because he ran. Explain to him that right now he's in more trouble for jumping bail than that nonsense that got him and that so-called friend of his locked up in the first place." When Sisano began outlining what laws applied to Lenny's situation, along with some general sentencing guidelines, it was more than Senior could take. Glancing up at an old photo of his father, he was so embarrassed for himself, his brother, and their family he cut Sisano off, saying that he had another important call coming in and that he'd see him in court.

After the talk with his attorney, Senior sank back into the puffy comfort of his favorite chair, doing his best to process everything bouncing around in his head: his trial, his brother's troubles, his ever-loosening grip on the Local, not to mention the recent tragic events surrounding his eldest son and namesake. It wasn't easy. With his eyes shut, he went back to sorting through the many current challenges that plagued his life, methodically filing away information and facts where they belonged. Compartmentalizing was one of Senior's strengths. After a lifetime of keeping secrets, conducting the kind of business for which recordkeeping was not recommended, he had honed the skill into a science.

Along with the Valium he had ingested earlier, the process calmed him. Thinking things out had always been like a security blanket or a warm bath. With his thoughts focused

on a task and aimed away from his own immediate troubles, he was finally able to relax.

Senior enjoyed this respite for all of ten minutes before another of his several cell phones came to life. Jarred back to the present, he answered the phone with his trademark greeting, a nasal “Yeah, who’s this?” Senior immediately had an uneasy feeling in his gut when he heard a brief silence followed by a familiar voice on the other end. In an apologetic tone, the voice said, “Ed, it’s me, Lenny. Please don’t hang up.” After a pause, Senior said, “I ain’t hangin’ up, Stupid, even though I goddamn well should. You know, Len, I don’t even know what to say to you. What the fuck is wrong with you? How could you do something like that? Ain’t you got no sense? I’m looking at Pop’s picture right now, and I swear to God, the old man must be rollin’ over in his grave with shame.” Begging for forgiveness and understanding, Lenny said, “I’m sorry, Ed. What the fuck can I say? I was drunk and hopped up on these goddamn pills Vinny gave me. I swear to God, I didn’t know what I was doin’. I think that fat rat bastard slipped me a mickey.”

Before Senior could say another word, Lenny changed the subject by turning to what he knew lay heavily on his brother’s mind. “Listen, Ed, I heard about what happened with the kid. I’m so fuckin’ sorry. Is he all right? Are they doin’ anything for him?” The concerned inquiry caught Senior by surprise, not because an uncle was asking about the welfare of his hospitalized nephew but because he didn’t know how Lenny could’ve possibly heard about the tragedy that befell his son. “What can you do? The doctors say all we can do is wait and hope for the best. You can’t get any two of them to agree on anything. I think Junior would be better off with a fuckin’ voodoo doctor. I swear to

God, these doctors and lawyers today are the real gangsters, lemme tell ya.”

While Lenny was trying to steer the conversation away from himself, Senior suddenly became aware of background noise over the phone consisting of giggling and spanking, prompting him to say, “Hey, Len, what the fuck? Are you losing your mind or what? It sounds like you’re having a goddamn bachelor party. I’m over here fightin’ for my fuckin’ life, my kid’s in Intensive Care, the Feds and their bean counters are lookin’ to crawl up my ass so they can take inventory, and you’re out wherever the fuck you are, doin’ God knows what, you selfish prick. You’re a shameless fuck, lemme tell ya, boy.” Lenny immediately quieted his company. Upon hearing his brother’s angry tone, he tried to offer what he thought was an explanation, but Senior was in no mood. He had to be in court in an hour, so in a curt tone, he said, “Listen, Dummy, you’re in more trouble for takin’ off than for what they say you and that other idiot did in the first place. You gotta get your ass back here and face the music. That’s the only way out. You come back on your own, and we might be able to work things out.” “No fuckin’ way, Ed, I ain’t goin’ to jail, not for that shit. You know what happens to guys who get sent to the can for that kind of thing? No goddamn way. I’m stayin’ put.” Exasperated, Senior yelled into the phone, “And do what, Len, hide under whatever rock you’ve been under the rest of your life? And then what? Ray is sayin’ you do the right thing here and come in on your own. There’s a good chance all you’ll get is a slap on the wrist and some counseling, which we both know you goddamn well need.”

Senior tried to break through Lenny's myopia. "They don't want you; this was all about me and the Local. You just got in the way of them tryin' to knock me outta the box and take over the Local. Look at the pressure they put on Bernie when he was the boss. They were on your brother's back so hard they drove him off the road. That accident wasn't Bernie's fault. It was them thievin' fucks at the International and their buddies in the FBI who caused that accident, not some defective tire. Believe me, they had no other way to go but to go after you. That's why I was always houndin' you about where you went and what the fuck you were up to. You understand now?"

A moment's silence gave Senior the impression that he had sold Lenny. There were no arguments, no objections, just a short, eerie quiet followed by Lenny saying sheepishly, "Lemme think about it, Ed. All right? Please, just gimme a little time to work it all out in my head. You're sure you can fix it so I ain't gotta go to prison?" Even though he wasn't at all sure he could deliver on his promise, Senior knew it was in his brother's best interest to give up, so he answered, "Len, what'd I tell ya? You come in and face what you did like a man, and I'm sure after all is said and done, the most you'll have to do is pay a fine and do some community service, maybe go around and pick up trash at a few parks." The two of them chuckled at the imagery. "Don't worry, just leave it to me," Senior said. "So when you comin' in so I can start workin' things out?" "I told you, Ed, please just gimme a little time to let things calm down, and I'll get back to you about turnin' myself in; you got my word."

The senior had done his best. As far as he was concerned, at least he got Lenny to think about it, which was a step in the

right direction. The way he saw it, maybe the government would be willing to cut him a little slack for helping to bring in a fugitive, even though it was his own brother. He said, "All right, look, I got The Girk comin' by in a little while to pick me up for court, so I gotta get ready to head up to White Plains. Lemme know if you need anything." No sooner had those words left his lips when Lenny responded, "I hate askin', especially with everything you got goin' on, but I'm a little low on cash. You think maybe you could . . ." Cutting Lenny off, Senior said, "Boy, you're some fuckin' piece of work, Len. I'm in trouble with the law, my kid's on his back with tubes doin' his breathin', my whole goddamn life's crumblin' down around me, and you want me to send you money so you can keep drinkin' and whorin'. I'm telling ya, Len, you might not have much sense, but you got balls like an elephant."

Glancing down at his Rolex, Senior noticed that he had less than an hour before he had to leave. Senior knew his brother Lenny was not one who easily took no for an answer. Weary of the dialogue between them, he directed Lenny to get back in touch with him later that evening. By then, he would have had enough time to come up with some kind of solution to Lenny's money problems. With that, Lenny once again reminded Senior how sorry he was for what had happened to his son and for all the trouble he had caused. Lenny told Senior in a reassuring tone that things would work out for him in the end. "You'll see, Ed, they always do, don't they?" Senior replied, "Yeah, we'll see."

The conversation was now over, and Senior tried to calm himself for the day ahead. He wanted to make sure he didn't compound his problems by being late to court, so he

reached for another one of his cell phones and called his driver and childhood friend, 654 shop steward Pete “The Girk” Deluca. When Deluca answered the phone, Senior instantly picked up on a strange vibe. It wasn’t so much the words Deluca chose as it was his tone. Though Senior couldn’t quite put his finger on it at the time, Deluca sounded nervous and edgy. “What the fuck is wrong with you,” Senior asked. “You all right? I’m the one goin’ to trial, remember?” “Yeah, no, I’m fine,” Deluca replied, “just sleepy, I guess.” “Well, splash your face with some cold water and get your shit together. I want you over here on time, 8:30 sharp. Understand?” “Yeah, yeah, I know, Ed. Don’t worry, I’ll be there on time,” Deluca promised. “Okay,” Senior said, “then I’ll see you when you get here.”

As Senior was about to end the conversation, Deluca interrupted by asking about Senior’s youngest brother. “You hear anything from Lenny? Did he reach out to you or anything?” Deluca’s inquiry about his brother Lenny struck Senior as odd, just as his tone had moments earlier, but with all he was dealing with, he wasn’t inclined to invest the energy to figure out why. Angry, disgusted, and embarrassed by his baby brother’s latest exploits, Senior replied, “Listen, you fuckin’ idiot, I got my own problems. The last thing I need today is to be thinkin’ about Lenny and his bullshit.” Before Deluca could apologize for bringing up the topic, Senior once again barked at him, “8:30, Dummy, don’t fuck up.” Wondering why he had spent a lifetime with someone who so easily agitated him, Senior tossed the cell phone onto his desk and asked himself, “What is it? Is everybody around me a fuckin’ idiot or what?” Exasperated and trying to settle back down, he thought, *I’m fuckin’ surrounded.*

Feeling like a Dodo bird, the last of a dying breed, Senior picked up a memento kept atop his otherwise bare desk. It was a toy truck with the words “Boyle and Sons” on the side. The letters were worn but still clearly legible. He clasped the metal keepsake tightly in his hand, sat back in his chair, and looked up at an equally old photograph of his father, Edward “Big Ed” Boyle, hanging on the wall just above his desk. It was the same black and white 8” x 11” found in all three hundred rooms in the 654’s hiring hall, located in nearby Tarrytown. There was an obvious family resemblance: the pudgy face, the crafty, duplicitous eyes, not to mention the most prominent feature, a large hooked nose that jutted out from the center of his face like a gnome on a sundial, a feature that had plagued the Boyle men for generations.

Nevertheless, the photo exuded a sense of strength and confidence, exactly what Senior knew he needed if he was to get through his racketeering trial. But all Senior received from his father’s likeness today was a warm, comforting feeling accompanied by a torrent of memories. The flood of reminiscences of his childhood and the 1950s centered on what was known in Yonkers and Westchester County at the time as the Garbage Wars.

Chapter 2

The old adage, “One man’s garbage is another man’s gold,” was never more true than in the spring of 1952. Dubbed the Garbage Wars by the newspapers, the dispute had turned into a two-sided campaign of violence and vandalism. The battle was not for the actual refuse but rather for the right to control or “represent” the truck drivers in that industry. In Westchester alone, the industry was worth fifty million a year. It was a two-sided campaign with drivers on both sides being hospitalized, trucks being firebombed, and businesses that got caught in the middle being harassed. Yonkers had turned into a war zone.

On the one side was the Yonkers-based Teamsters Local 654, whose bosses were organizing the drivers in the refuse hauling industry and getting them to sign up with the union. The tough-talking, fiery John Acropolis led the Local. The 654’s domain was as clear in 1952 as it was in 2003, north of the Bronx border to Putnam County, and east from the banks of the Hudson River to the shores of the Long Island Sound and Fairfield, Connecticut, 456 square miles of lush rolling hills that were carved into three valleys by the last Ice Age and intersected by the Croton, Bronx and Saw Mill Rivers. Acropolis and his twenty-six-hundred-man Teamsters Local claimed that since the drivers in the garbage industry drove in Westchester and were employed by a Yonkers-based outfit, Westchester Haulage Company (WHC), they had the legal right to represent those drivers and have them sign up with the Local.

On the other side, Anthony “Nino” Mistretta, the malevolent head of the newly formed Trash Carting Association of Westchester (TCAW) and, not coincidentally, president of WHC, the largest trash carting firm in the county, thought otherwise. Mistretta was not only the owner and operator of WHC and head of the TCAW but was also reputed to be one of the biggest Mafia figures in the New York area. A well-respected senior captain in the Genovese crime family, he was already doing business with Local 27, a Bronx-based garbage hauling union that his brethren in the Mafia controlled. Local 27’s jurisdiction ended at the Bronx border, so when the mob-controlled union tried to push its way north and expand, a small war broke out. At the time, there were fewer than a hundred men in the refuse collection and carting industry. But in the years to come, that number would grow, as would the garbage business.

Short-tempered and incapable of suffering fools, Mistretta was foul-mouthed and profane to a fault. The man had only a fifth-grade education; this was reflected in his limited vocabulary of coarse words and street slang. But despite his own harsh upbringing, Mistretta had managed to rise from abject poverty, traversing the minefield of a career in organized crime to become not only one of the wealthiest, most influential men in Westchester County but one of the most revered and powerful Mafia bosses in the country. He was also one of the most feared.

It all started in 1949, three years after Mistretta had moved to Westchester and formed WHC. Like any good businessman, he was looking to grow his business, so he contacted a mayoral aide, Blake Remineski, who was the point man for the Yonkers Common Council and the

number three man to the Yonkers Mayor, Richard “Tricky Dicky” Greeley. An accountant by trade, Remineski was the individual who made all the backroom deals and under-the-table transactions for the group of people who ran City Hall in the late ’40s.

In a small, poorly lit room, the two met, and Mistretta explained in his no-nonsense manner how it would behoove all concerned if the city were to vote to turn the trash-hauling business over to the private sector. “You guys are gonna make out like bandits,” Mistretta said. And so, with a firm handshake, the multimillion-dollar trash hauling concession was practically given to Mistretta for the measly sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, with a monthly payoff of a thousand dollars a month for as long as there was garbage to pick up. The way Mistretta saw it the garbage business in Westchester was his, bought and paid for.

Mistretta and his “friends” in New York City and the Tri-state area had done business with mob-controlled Teamsters labor unions for decades. It was the way business was done. The wholesale chicken industry, the garment district, and the trash hauling industries, to name a few, were all controlled by organized crime, and their stranglehold and influence over those industries were through the unions themselves. “Control the union, and you run the industry.” That’s what Depression-era gangster and original union infiltrator Louis “Lepke” Buchalter, said of taking control of whole industries. “Control the weak link, and you can take whatever you want.”

The dispute between the two entities escalated dramatically when, early in 1952, Acropolis went to the Yonkers Chamber of Commerce and got them to back and support a competing firm in the trash hauling business. John formed

“Rex Carting,” a small trash hauling firm whose chief purpose was to challenge Mistretta’s authority and rule. John wanted to show customers they were being taken advantage of with the exorbitant carting fees they were being charged. Rex Carting would be manned exclusively with men from Local 654. And so began the Garbage Wars. The streets of Yonkers had turned into a battlefield, with Mistretta and his goons seizing every opportunity to beat up and hijack Rex drivers and their trucks. In retaliation, Rex drivers, backed by teams of union men in cars following their union brothers, would beat up Mistretta’s drivers, disabling their trucks and, on occasion, firebombing truck yards and businesses connected to Mistretta.

At first, it seemed like a stalemate. Young and idealistic, John defied Mistretta at every turn for almost a year. With no intention of backing down, he was prepared to see the fight through to the end. Throughout his life, John would often say, “I never had anything handed to me. If I wanted something, I had to go out and get it, and I had to fight for everything.” John Acropolis was no altar boy. He had, on a couple of occasions, beaten several men nearly to death and was not above taking cash from a willing and eager businessman looking to make life a little easier for himself. But “Johnny Boy,” as he was called by the men he led, would never sell out his own men. A deal would never be made where his union brothers did not benefit in some way.

For John, the line he would not cross was the one that led into his men’s pockets. That was why the rank-and-file members loved him; they never had to worry about “coming across” or paying for their jobs. Greed and selfishness just weren’t in John’s DNA. He’d sooner cut off

a limb than squeeze a nickel out of the men he considered family. John's take on the topic of payoffs and kickbacks was simple. "Yeah, sure," he'd say, "I'll take money to grease the wheels and to keep things running smooth, but you'll never catch me takin' one red cent from my guys. And I promise you that if I'm walking away with something, then so will my union brothers." That set John apart from other labor leaders. He wouldn't cross that line, and he wouldn't let anybody else cross it, either.

When John returned to Yonkers after the war, he was already the President of Local 654, having been elected in absentia in '44. Up until his return in the fall of 1945, Big Ed was the acting boss and was running the Local without interference. Big Ed's close circle of friends and supporters, including his old friend and bootlegging partner, Tommy Armento, and Tommy's son, Bobby, were running nearly a dozen money-making, under-the-table rackets. The group of bosses that made up the Local administration would split the proceeds among themselves. Rackets such as selling merchandise that "fell off of trucks" to friends and associates, leasing "union peace in the workplace" to employees, and selling jobs to family and close friends brought in tens of thousands of dollars in cash annually. But it was the "jobs-for-sale" racket in particular that John had a problem with, forbidding its continuation shortly after he returned from the service.

When John found out it was still going on behind his back, his first instinct was to lash out at the men responsible and break heads. The very day he learned the racket was still being run after he had made it clear he wanted it stopped, John stormed into the office, shoving around and threatening several in the Local's leadership, including Big

Ed Boyle, who had been the Local's number one man in John's absence. The next day, John assembled the bosses in a room at the Local's headquarters in downtown Yonkers. All of the Local's executive officers and business agents were staunch Boyle supporters. John wanted it to be understood once and for all, there would be no more dipping into the members' pockets, not on his watch, anyway.

John made it a point to look around the room and make eye contact with everyone sitting at the table, men he knew to be Boyle allies whom he hadn't had a chance to get rid of before going off to war. Glancing around with a menacing scowl, John got right to the point, saying, "Lemme catch one of you motherfuckers goin' behind my back again doin' something I told you I wanted to be stopped! Most of you guys look like you haven't missed a meal in a long while; you got lazy and fat while I was gone. Instead of lookin' out for our people, you greedy pricks are out there shakin' down guys that are supposed to be your 'brothers'." Before one man was able to utter a syllable, John snapped, "No more! There's plenty of money to be made in the county without havin' to put your hands in your brothers' pockets." Now, looking directly at Big Ed, John said, "There's gonna be a lot of changes around here, and you boys are either gonna do it my way, or you're gonna take it on the chin and find another line of work." Turning in his chair with his back to the men, he said, "I'm tryin' to be reasonable and civil. Don't make me have to cave in one of your fuckin' heads over this thing. I hear one mumblin' word from any one of our guys about havin' to pay to get work, and the next time we talk, I'm gonna be swingin' a billy club. So be careful. Be very goddamn careful." Without another word, the men began rising out of their chairs, backing out of the

room, and returning to what they had been doing before John angrily beckoned them to the impromptu meeting.

The following week, after tensions had calmed a bit and a few half-hearted apologies had been made, Big Ed was going to try to reason with John at their end-of-the-week meeting. He was going to try to persuade him that income already generated and flowing into the Local's pyramid of power, like the "jobs-for-sale racket," would be better used than turned away. Big Ed was in a tight spot. Not only were he and his friends, and John, too, going to lose a substantial amount of money every year, but he had also lost face. Big Ed hoped by confronting John out in the open and in front of his peers, he could regain some of the respect he felt he had lost during their last encounter. It was important to Big Ed that he was the one to get John to compromise and capitulate to the needs of the Local leadership who sat at his table. He figured if he approached John diplomatically and rationally, he might be able to sell the idea that maybe they could stop selling any more jobs as a more realistic option. Big Ed had no idea how wrong he was when it came to John Acropolis.

That Friday afternoon, as per schedule, the Local's executive officers, along with several of the 654's business agents, gathered in a small conference room at their third-floor headquarters in the RKO building. The meeting was set for 2:00 P.M. but it was a quarter after when Big Ed rushed into the cramped space and quietly took his place facing John at the opposite end of a large, rectangular oak table. He respectfully apologized to John and the others for his tardiness, and the meeting resumed. John Acropolis sat and stared at Big Eddie Boyle, the 654's number two man and representative for the Local's other bosses, their family

and friends, many of whom had at one time or another been bullied or insulted by a truculent Acropolis.

With a lot on his mind, John sat silent for a moment. As he watched Big Ed take notes and catch up with the meeting, he was put in mind of how hard Big Ed had pushed to settle with Mistretta. John realized just how out of hand the whole Garbage Wars had gotten. In a daze, he thought of how much the negative attention and publicity went against all he believed the 654 could be: the violence, the expense and, most important, the lost peace of mind for him, the Local, and the City of Yonkers. John wanted to focus all his attention on the business of tending to the union's growth and prosperity.

John had been a fighter for as long as he could remember, geared for combat, first for his own safety as an orphaned child and later for the safety of friends and strangers alike. Eventually, it became a way of life. He saw it as a calling to help those who were weaker and to stand up for those who couldn't help themselves. To John, it was all about doing what he felt was right, no matter what the consequences, personal or otherwise. Lately, though, he had been re-examining his thoughts on the all-out war with Mistretta.

It was at this moment that Big Ed's voice caught John's full attention, returning him to the meeting in a millisecond. John looked across the oak table at Big Ed, hiding his disdain and distrust with a world-class poker face. Most in their inner circle considered Big Ed an imposing figure. Over six feet tall and carrying more than 240 pounds, Big Ed had the silhouette of a refrigerator. Big Ed's clothes were straight off the track, and he was always clean-shaven with an overall neat appearance, but compared to the rakishly cool Johnny Boy Acropolis, Big Ed seemed

slovenly and unstylish. But the most prominent chink in Big Ed's armor was his large hooknose. John had picked up on Big Ed's lack of self-confidence years earlier. Today, he intended to use those insecurities to embarrass him and put him in his place.

Among those attending the meeting were Chuckie Ratic, the Local's secretary-treasurer, Sebastian "Sibi" Aldo, recording secretary, and Larry Diets, the sergeant at arms. Also joining the meeting was newly made Business Agent Albert "Bird" Racine, a long-time Boyle stalwart and family friend.

It was no secret that John and Big Ed had been at odds over how the Local should be run. Big Ed was spoiled, having gotten used to running things the way he wanted while John was away. While John was abroad fighting in the war, Big Ed and his entourage acted as if the Local belonged to them and not the membership; in the process, they helped themselves to everything they could get their hands on.

Big Ed began speaking briefly when John interrupted, saying there was something he needed to discuss. He said, "Look, this mess we're in with the garbage people has gone too far. This war's gotta come to an end. It's no good for us, no good for Yonkers. And on top of that, we look as bad as the humps we're goin' against. Just look at the papers. We've been goin' at it all wrong. Every day, our guys are gettin' beat up, our trucks are winding up in the river, not to mention all the negative bullshit in the papers about us; it's gotta stop."

John tried to explain why he thought the war should end. He had been offered a deal to settle the dispute with Mistretta and his associates that would have put five cents

per ton of all the garbage hauled in Westchester County in the Local's pocket, a deal John, months earlier, had said no to on principle. In his heart, Big Ed had always hoped that John's arrogance would someday trip him up and take him out of the lineup. *Let him cut his own throat*, he thought, but now here he was, saying everyone would be better off if they did go ahead and work something out with Mistretta. Now, Big Ed feared he might never be rid of John and his idealistic views unless he took action.

Once he was done addressing his concerns about the conflict with Mistretta and explaining how the resolution should be handled, John turned his attention to another subject that he had raised earlier in his tenure. A while back, he had put forward a vision of the Local building its hiring hall, but it met with a lukewarm response, especially from Big Ed. But if he showed the others that he himself was capable of compromise and accommodation, regardless of personal feelings or self-interest, John now thought the others might follow suit. So he again spoke enthusiastically about building a new hiring hall for the 654. The Yonkers-based Teamsters Local had been located at their present location in the RKO building across from City Hall for more than a decade. The 654 had outgrown their third-floor offices in downtown Yonkers. The rank and file were holding their general membership union meetings in the cafeteria of St. Mary's School, in a building a block away from the church and school itself. John would say, "It's the smart move. Instead of throwing good money away on cramped rental space, we could carry a mortgage, build equity and get some relief on the Local's taxes." But that's not how Big Ed and his cohorts saw it.

Most of the men in the room were street-level guys with little or no understanding of the complexity involved in running a successful business such as a Teamsters Local. For guys like the ones who supported Big Ed, the primary concern was how many of their relatives and friends were working steadily and how much cash the pyramid of power brought in at the end of the month.

In the middle of John's explanation of the Local's long-term needs, Big Ed politely interrupted, asking, "John, with all due respect, why should we go through the trouble and expense of building a union hall? It's crazy. We got plenty of money comin' in, which is more than covering our monthly nut. The guys are happy and payin' their dues on time. Why rock the boat? I don't see it. It just doesn't make sense."

This was what John was waiting for. He paused for a moment. He knew what he was going to say was harsh and would probably sting, but he needed to make a point. John wanted everybody in that cramped conference room to understand, as far as he was concerned, that the business they were in was the management of a legitimate union Local whose primary function was to benefit the entire rank-and-file membership, not to line the pockets of the greedy few who happened to be running the Local. Without expression, John said, "I'm rocking the fuckin' boat 'cause it's off course and headin' in the wrong direction."

Big Ed glanced over at the others for their reaction before turning back to face John, who said, "You know what your goddamn problem is, Ed?" To which Big Ed replied, "No, John, I don't," sarcastically adding, "Why don't you tell me what my problem is." John smiled. Big Ed's sarcasm made it that much easier for him to go on the offensive. Relaxed

and sitting back in his chair, John said, “You don’t get what I’m sayin’ about building ourselves a hiring hall and about why we shouldn’t dip into our men’s pockets or why we’d all be better off if we acted like smart businessmen and not like some hoods running a crap game-because you can’t see the future. You can’t see that far down the road because that big, fat banana blocks your view,” an obvious reference to Big Ed’s nose, “stuck dead in the middle of your fat face. That’s why you can’t see the big picture.”

Big Ed was in shock from the personal attack. He couldn’t believe John had insulted him in front of his peers. His fury seethed like boiling water, and in an instant, his face was as red as a plum tomato. Big Ed knew John was physically brutal and mortally dangerous, but he couldn’t let such an obvious insult go without a proper response. Suspecting John was trying to goad him into a fight, Big Ed also knew those in the room would stop any altercation before it got out of hand, so his only option was to lunge over the table at John in a mock attack, yelling, “What the fuck did you say? Say what you just said to me again. Go ahead. I wanna hear it!” As expected, the Local’s officers quickly grabbed a piece of their hulking, irate friend, hoping to prevent what they believed would be a serious fistfight. All the while, John hadn’t flinched or moved a muscle. Smirking, he sat back in his chair as placid as a lily pond, yawning for effect.

John thoroughly enjoyed the rise he got out of Big Ed. As the group was trying to restrain Big Ed, he added, “Look at this. First, he can’t see, and now I think he’s losin’ his hearing too.” John punctuated his comment with a hearty chuckle while others desperately wrapped themselves around their agitated friend, pleading with him to calm

down. They whispered in his ear, "Don't do this, Ed. That's what he wants. The guy's a fuckin' animal. Just let it go." As the men struggled to drag Big Ed out of the room, John casually stood up and noticed that everyone in the room had left with Big Ed. Not one of the Local's officers had stayed back with the president of their Local. They were all gathered in the next room, tending to Big Ed's hurt feelings and consoling him for the insult he had sustained. The men standing around him echoed the words, "Not here, not like this, Ed; don't give the fuck the satisfaction."

Realizing he had somewhere to be, John casually walked out of the conference room. He grabbed his jacket and left the 654's offices, pausing for only a moment to tell Chuckie Ratic he was late for an appointment with a contractor in New Rochelle and that he would check back in for his messages. Standing beside Big Ed's desk with the others close by, Ratic replied, "You got it, John. No problem. We'll see you later."

John felt everyone's stare as he walked out of the office, everyone's except Big Ed's. Still mortified, Big Ed couldn't look anyone in the face. Fumbling with papers on his desk, he claimed he was fine, but he was still so angry and agitated that he could feel his hands trembling. One of the men walked off and began to make coffee while the others slowly dispersed.

Moments after John had left, Bobby Armento entered the Local's offices with a sorrowful look in his eyes. Bobby's father, Tommy Armento, was a well-liked, well-respected man in the community, a real "knock-around guy," as they used to say. Many a night in the early days of organized labor, Tommy returned home with bruised cheeks or a

blackened eye he had gotten while marching on picket lines.

In the fall of 1951, after years of picket lines and fights on behalf of the 654, the elder Armento was diagnosed with throat cancer and was battling the disease with every fiber of his being. By the spring of '52, he had to be hospitalized and was quickly deteriorating. Bobby had gone to visit his father in the hospital and brought him some chicken broth his mother had made. Unable to hold down solid food, Tommy had lost so much weight he looked like a skeleton. The poor guy was so ill and close to death that he even had difficulty sipping the broth. Whenever Bobby visited his father and saw how frail the man had gotten, in pain and waiting to die, his spirit would be crushed.

When Bobby approached Big Ed's desk, he saw that the man who had always treated him like a second father seemed rattled. Bobby asked, "What's up? Everything all right, Ed?" "Nah, it ain't all right," said Big Ed, "but it will be." Changing the subject, Big Ed said, "How's your dad feelin'? Is he any better?" Big Ed knew what the answer was going to be, but he had to ask. He made a point of going to the hospital every day to visit his dear, old friend, but in the last few weeks of Tommy's illness, Big Ed's trips had become more infrequent. It had gotten tougher and tougher to see someone he cared for deteriorate in front of him. Originally, doctors had given Tommy six months to live, yet the once rough-and-tumble Teamster had just passed the one-year mark. Sad and anticipating the inevitable, Bobby said, "The same. He couldn't say much; the poor guy just lay there." Bobby's voice cracked when he added, "He couldn't even get down any of the soup my mother made for him." Bobby took in a deep breath, about

to continue, but he had to pause for a moment as tears welled up inside. When Big Ed saw the emotion and pain in Bobby's face, he changed the subject.

Hoping to get Bobby's attention focused on something other than his father's illness, Big Ed asked him if he had seen Acropolis on his way in. Shaking off his emotions, Bobby said, "Yeah, sure, he just walked out of the building and got in his car." Big Ed motioned to Bobby to get closer so that he could speak to him in a muted tone. "We gotta take a ride. I gotta run around and make some stops, so get the car and I'll meet you in the lot." Without hesitation, Bobby nodded, turned around and left the office, doing exactly what he was told.

Ever since John had returned from the war and started talking about his vision for the Local and its future, Big Ed, along with others in the administration, readily dismissed his ideas. The men who helped run the 654 would jeer and criticize John's all-knowing attitude and demeanor, calling him a "Philadelphia lawyer" behind his back, a reference to a man with an answer for everything.

Deep in his gut, in a place he'd never admit to, Big Ed knew much of what John was preaching to get the Local leadership to come together and achieve was the smart thing to do. For his part, Big Ed felt ashamed and angry that all he could do was recognize the smart thing, knowing he was not insightful or creative enough to come up with these ideas himself. Big Ed decided something drastic had to be done if he and his inner circle wanted to hold onto the Local.

Chapter 3

The following week, after tensions at the office had cooled and hands had been shaken, it seemed all was back to normal between John and Big Ed. When Big Ed missed the leadership's end-of-the-week meeting at the Local's headquarters that Friday, not much mind was paid to his absence. The fact was that Big Ed and Bobby were on their way to a secret meeting with Mistretta. Dreading face-to-face with the notorious Yonkers gangster, Big Ed felt light-headed and queasy. The ride from the Local's offices to Mistretta's trailer and base of operations took only five minutes. Within sight of WHC, which sat on a four-acre parcel of land next to the old city dump, Bobby asked, "Ed, you feelin' all right? Maybe you should put this meetin' off until . . ." Big Ed cut Bobby off, saying, "Don't worry, I'll be fine when it's over. That's what got my stomach in a knot; it happens every time I gotta talk to this guy. He makes me sick."

Minutes later, from inside a small, dank trailer, Philip "Philly Eyes" Burparelli, one of Mistretta's top enforcers and a stone-cold killer, said, "I think I hear 'em pullin' in, Boss." "Good," Mistretta said, "Right on time, the way I like." Mistretta was forty-nine years old in 1952 and built like a bulldog, with a leonine head and a harsh, gravelly voice. Unlike Ed, Mistretta was not concerned about the meeting. He unwrapped an overstuffed egg sandwich and bit into it as if it were his last meal. With a mouth full of food, Mistretta asked, "He with anybody?" Still peering out of a small slit in the blinds, Burpparelli replied, "Yeah, Boss, it looks like he's got that Armento kid with him."

Driving through an opening in a chain-link fence onto a graveled section where Mistretta's trailer was located, Big Ed and Bobby were acutely aware that they were being watched. Bobby parked a borrowed Oldsmobile near the trailer. When he turned off the engine, Big Ed said, "This shouldn't take long. Just keep your eyes open and lay into the horn if you see something that ain't right." "You got it, Ed," Bobby said. As Big Ed made his way from the car to the trailer door, Burparelli said, "He's on his way in, Nino. You want I should take a walk?" Because Burparelli had no direct tie to Mistretta's garbage business or other legitimate concerns, he thought he would excuse himself out of respect. At his desk, digging into his food, Mistretta said, "Nah, sit down and relax. I want this cocksucker on edge."

Mistretta's yard was a busy, dusty place with dump trucks and heavy machinery rushing by each other. Coughing and waving off the dust, Big Ed was almost glad to be entering the trailer. Almost. Just as he reached for the doorknob, it swung open. Standing in the doorway with a menacing scowl, Burparelli said, "You comin' in or what?" Big Ed answered with a brief "How you doin'?" and with an even briefer handshake, he cautiously entered the trailer.

As soon as he was inside, he noticed another man reclined on the couch. Recognizing the man to be Donato "Danny Boy" Portanova, Big Ed said, "Hey, Danny, how are you?" Portanova was also a remorseless killer. But he was much smarter than Burparelli. He was one of Mistretta's go-to guys, in charge of many of Mistretta's legitimate businesses. Portanova sat up slightly but did not rise to greet Big Ed, opting rather to extend his hand from his supine position, "Hey, how you doin', Ed? Come on in and make yourself at home."

Having greeted Mistretta's men, Big Ed turned toward the opposite end of the trailer, where Mistretta was sitting at his desk, still eating. Already on the edge of nausea, Big Ed thought he was going to vomit when he had to march through the cluttered, filthy space. The trailer was strewn with empty coffee cups, crumpled sheets of newspaper and trash. Because of the overwhelming stench of stale coffee and cigar smoke, Big Ed made his way through the mess, trying to hold his breath. When he reached Mistretta's desk, Big Ed extended his hand over the desk to shake Mistretta's hand. He watched Mistretta wipe his mouth with his bare hand just before offering it to Big Ed. They both knew that under no circumstances was Big Ed going to refuse to shake the hand that was now covered with the man's lunch. Big Ed did his best to hide his disgust as Mistretta invited him to sit, glibly inquiring whether Big Ed was interested in part of his nearly devoured sandwich. Hurriedly, Big Ed put his hands up, saying, "No, no, no, Nino. Please, you go ahead. I just finished a big lunch, and I couldn't eat another bite, really. Thanks anyway."

After belching, with a bit of egg clinging to his chin, Mistretta began to speak. A coarse, blunt man, he wasted no time getting to the point with absolutely no subtlety. "Look, you and me, we always worked things out nice between us in the past, right? For Christ's sake, we started out in the same business back in the old days," a reference to Big Ed's time as a driver for organized crime during Prohibition. "This thing between us is way outta hand. You and me gotta work this garbage thing out here and now, or things are gonna get a whole lot worse; this fuckin' cocksucker Acropolis is no good. He's makin' me look bad to my friends and business associates, not to mention all the money I'm losin' every day." Pushing what was left of his

lunch aside and looking at Big Ed directly in the eyes, Mistretta pounded on the desk with his fist, barking, "My goddamn trucks are gettin' dumped in the river. My people are gettin' sent to the hospital. I'm tellin' ya, boy, this low-down motherless dog missed his callin'. He's been workin' for the wrong side. He should be workin' with us." Mistretta glanced over Big Ed's shoulder and saw that his men were grinning sardonically at his comment about John and his choice of careers.

When he saw concern in Big Ed's eyes, Mistretta continued in a slightly more muted tone. He said, "You and I both know this whole garbage thing has gotta be taken care of. Right now, it's way too hot for me to do anything. If something happened to your boss over there at the Local, the cops, the Feds and the newspapers would all try and crawl up my ass lookin' for answers. But I think I got a way outta this mess for the both of us." With his stomach churning, Big Ed braced himself as if he were about to get kicked in the gonads. Reluctantly, he asked Mistretta, "What's that, Nino?" Mistretta said, "You gotta handle it yourself. You ever hear the expression, 'Takin' care of your own and keepin' it in the family?'" Big Ed played dumb. Wishing it had only been a swift kick in the nuts, he said, "I'm not sure what you mean." Frustrated at what he thought was Big Ed's stupidity, Mistretta growled, "You gotta take this fuck out yourself. He's your problem, so fix it, and I don't give a good goddamn how it's done, you understand?"

Big Ed was paralyzed with fear. He thought, *is he asking me to do what I think he is?* The thought had crossed Big Ed's mind dozens of times in the past, the kind of fantasy induced by momentary rage. But to kill a man intentionally,

even someone he loathed like John Acropolis, was not something Big Ed imagined himself capable of doing. That's why he was there meeting with Mistretta. Big Ed had always hoped that, sooner or later, Mistretta would tire of John, handle the "problem" himself and leave him, Big Ed, to run the Local with an understanding and a deal between them. Looking at Big Ed's face, Mistretta saw reluctance and fear. But he knew he could be persuaded. Wanting to reassure Big Ed and sell his idea, Mistretta said, "It's no big deal. If you ain't got the stomach to do what's needed, you find somebody who does. That's all. I can see it in your eyes. You hate this prick as much as I do. You're gonna do this here because it's in your best interest, and I'll tell ya why. It ain't no secret that 'Johnny Boy' don't know how to treat his friends and the people he works with, beatin' this one up in a bar, pushing and shovin' that business agent over wanting to look at the Local's books, threatening and bullyin' good people. This fuck doesn't respect nobody. You don't lay hands on the people you work with, not even in 'our thing.'" Wagging a sausage-thick index finger at Big Ed, Mistretta said, "Besides, you got a lot more to gain than I do. You do this thing right, you, me, and your friends over there at the Local can go back to doin' business like normal people and enjoyin' our fuckin' lives like when this fuck was off fightin' in the war."

While Big Ed remained silent and listened attentively, he was trying to figure out what Mistretta meant. That's when Mistretta said, "First off, ain't you guys lookin' to build a union hall or some shit?" Cautiously, Big Ed answered, "Well, we're looking into it. As a matter of fact, it was John who came up with the idea; he thinks we'd be better off

owning a place instead of just renting space from someone else.”

Mistretta asked, “How much do you think a job like that’s gonna cost you?” After a slight pause and a bit of quick calculation, Big Ed said, “Off the top of my head, I don’t know, around about \$200,000 for the property and construction of the building, give or take.”

Mistretta said, “Good, so this is what you’re gonna do. You know my cousin Earl Natrillo, don’t ya?” “Yeah, sure,” Big Ed said, adding, “He owns Natrillo Construction, right?” Nodding his large head, Mistretta said, “Well, he’s gonna come in and build that new union hall for the 654. The state’s building some new bridge over there in Tarrytown, and since his construction company’s doin’ a lot of the work, Earl’s got access to a lot of hard-to-get materials, shit like concrete, steel, lumber, any goddamn thing you might need, all tough to get because of the war and all. You said the new place is gonna cost your Local two hundred grand, right?” When Big Ed nodded yes, Mistretta said, “Okay, great, so this is what’s gonna happen. My cousin, Earl, is gonna come in and do the job for, say, \$400,000, double the cost. When the work is done, Natrillo Construction is gonna bill your Local, and after he’s paid, I make sure you get back the \$200,000 extra the Local paid in cash and with no one knowin’ a goddamn thing about it.”

Looking past Big Ed’s fearful brown eyes and peering deeply into his soul, Mistretta saw what he knew to be curiosity. After all, building a union hall for the membership while pocketing \$200,000 in cash was one hell of an incentive for murder, but Big Ed still wasn’t sold. There was something about Mistretta’s pirate smile that made Big Ed feel as if, whatever he decided, Mistretta was

going to come out ahead. The fact was, before the Garbage Wars broke out, Mistretta had tried to barter with Acropolis, but John wouldn't budge.

At the time, he had offered the Local nearly twice the amount he was now offering Big Ed in exchange for murder. Mistretta's personal interests were much more than settling the Garbage Wars. "With Johnny Boy out of the way and all this bullshit behind us, we can all go back to makin' money. My associates in the garbage business and I'll stay with Local 27 in the Bronx, and everything can go back to normal, except you and your people be gettin' a piece of the pie every month steady." Mistretta could see he had Big Ed on the hook and seriously thinking about what he proposed as a solution to everyone's problems. All he had to do was pull him in nice and easy.

More than intrigued, Big Ed asked Mistretta exactly how big a piece he and his friends at the Local would receive. Mistretta said, "We, meanin' me and all my friends in the garbage business here in Westchester, would give you and your people over at the Local three cents a ton on all the garbage we pick up off the streets. At the end of the year, you're lookin' at maybe another couple hundred thousand, give or take. And that's every year." The wheels were turning in Big Ed's head. Two hundred thousand cash for himself from the union hall deal, with another couple of hundred thousand a year coming into the Local from the deal with the garbage haulers-Big Ed was beginning to grasp what Mistretta had meant when he said it would be in his best interest.

Still hot about what had happened at the Local's office a week earlier, Big Ed felt that going ahead and actually killing Acropolis sounded better by the minute. Playing

another card, Mistretta added, "Oh yeah, and let's not forget you're the new boss over there if anything was to happen to Johnny Boy, ain't ya?" Big Ed said, "I guess so, yeah, sure." Big Ed was seriously contemplating life without John Acropolis. Past the obvious financial benefits, the idea of finally being his own man and the boss appealed to him no end. In a haze from trying to process everything he and Mistretta had talked about, Big Ed seemed almost semiconscious. Mistretta beckoned Big Ed's attention by snapping his thick fingers and said, "Hey, what's wrong with you? I'm talkin' here. You look like you were dreamin' about your next piece of ass." Out of his momentary stupor and back in the present, Big Ed said, "No, no, of course not, Nino, I'm fine. It's been a long day; I'm just a little tired, is all. I apologize." Capitalizing on the moment, Mistretta said, "The days are all long when you're number two." For the first time in days, Big Ed cracked a faint smile.

Mistretta pressed his index finger on top of his desk as he reiterated how much Big Ed had to gain. "Look, sooner or later, this fuck is gonna wind up in a shallow grave, so why not make a move and get your ticket punched? Jesus fuckin' Christ, for a little bit of risk, you and your friends stand to gain a lot. You do the right thing here, and it all falls into your lap. You're gonna take over the Local, get a new building to operate out of, a big bag of money, besides gettin' a nice piece of change comin' in every month." Grimacing, Mistretta cracked his knuckles and said, "Now, you tell me, who's got it better than you?"

Mistretta was an expert at reading people. He was like an animal. His feral cunning had brought him this far, and his instincts never failed him. Looking into Big Ed's eyes, he

could practically read his thoughts. What he saw was concern about being sent to prison for murder and about what would become of his family if anything were to happen to him. In his youth, Big Ed was on his own with little to lose, but things were different now. He was married with two small children at home and one on the way. Saving his ace in the hole for last, Mistretta said, "Look, I can see in your face you're concerned about going to jail. Don't be. Don't forget me and your boss been goin' round and round for more than a year. Plus, he's got big people all over the county hot enough to wanna put him where he belongs. If somethin' were to happen to Johnny Boy, the first person the cops are gonna wanna talk to is me, not his own people, capisce? No one's gonna give you a goddamn second look. You're his number two. You're the one that's gonna come in and save the day, take over the Local, carry on his good works, keep his memory alive for his family and friends. And when the dust does settle, maybe you and your guys put up a plaque or some shit with his name on it. Trust me; you'll wind up a hero." Mistretta leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands behind his sun-scorched head. "Besides, I got the feelin' the cops ain't gonna be breakin' their balls lookin' for whoever whacks this fuck, you follow?" Mistretta's cryptic comment that the police in Yonkers were with him and that they would lack interest in solving the murder of John Acropolis clinched it for Big Ed.

Mistretta had settled the garbage dispute between him and the 654 and would soon be vindicated among his peers. But most important to Mistretta was the fact that he had played Big Ed so well that, if everything went according to plan, John would be successfully eliminated by his own man in the Local, and Mistretta would finally have something he

had pursued since moving to Yonkers in the mid-'40s. He would control Local 654, which would soon become the wealthiest and most powerful Teamsters Local in the country.

When their eyes agreed that the meeting was over, the two men stood face to face, and Mistretta walked out from behind his desk. The gangster and the labor leader-to-be reached out to shake hands. Mistretta said, "You're all right. I've always liked you, a real stand-up guy." After Big Ed thanked Mistretta for his time and his offer, Mistretta said, "Good, then I guess that's it. We have an understanding, and I'll be waitin' to hear from you." Big Ed nodded, saying that he'd be in touch.

As Big Ed walked to the end of the trailer, Portanova rose up off the couch and was standing next to Burparelli, who had been on his feet at the door for the entire meeting. After a brief but cordial handshake with both men, Big Ed turned toward the door. Just as he was turning the knob to exit, Mistretta's coarse voice stopped him in his tracks. "Oh yeah, one more thing," Mistretta said. "From time to time, some of my 'friends' are gonna be comin' to you for help, a union book, a job, a strike, whatever. Like I say, they're gonna be 'friends of mine,' so do the right thing." Glad the meeting was over so he could leave the trailer, without thinking, Big Ed replied, "Yeah, sure, no problem."

Big Ed had been in Mistretta's trailer for almost an hour. As soon as he got back into the car, Bobby asked, "Ed, everything all right? What took you so long?" "Later," Big Ed curtly replied. "Now, come on, let's get the hell outta here." While Bobby slowly backed out of the busy yard, Mistretta and Burparelli were both peering through the blinds. As their car pulled away from WHC, Burparelli

asked, “Whataya think, Boss, he goin’ for it?” Confidently, Mistretta replied, “Yeah, you bet your fuckin’ ass he’s goin’ for it, and when he does, he’s mine, him and that whole goddamn Local.” Portanova chuckled and commented, “Nino, you got that dopey bastard hook, line and sinker. You should have been a fisherman.” The three men enjoyed a hearty laugh.

A short while later, after they had swapped cars, Bobby dropped Big Ed back off at the 654’s office. In the time it took the two to go back and exchange the Oldsmobile they had been driving for Bobby’s own car, Big Ed mentioned that they needed to talk privately and asked Bobby to come by his house later. As Big Ed climbed out of the car, Bobby told him that he had to run an errand for his mother. Bobby had promised his worried mother he would check in on her younger sister, his Aunt Maria, and make sure everything at their house was all right. Knowing Bobby’s uncle, Jake, was an abusive drunk prone to violent outbursts and fits of rage, Big Ed told him, “Go and do whatever you need to do, and when you’re done, you can come by.”

When Big Ed finally got upstairs to the Local’s third-floor office, he saw most everyone had left for the weekend. It was well after four, and only the 654’s head secretary was at her desk. After checking for messages, Big Ed took his place at his desk. From his chair, Big Ed gazed past the partitioned offices to John’s private office. Mulling over the meeting with Mistretta, Big Ed found himself seriously thinking about their discussion. While he was trying to sort all these things out in his head, Big Ed’s eyes found their way to a small toy truck he kept on his desk. The truck, with the words “Boyle and Sons” painted on the sides, had been a gift from his close friend, Tommy, Bobby’s father,

the man who lay dying in a hospital bed less than a mile away from where he sat. Tommy had given this small show of affection to Big Ed the day his first child was born in 1940. A gesture of hope and good wishes, it was his way of saying he hoped his friend would be blessed with more children and hopefully sons. The thoughtful gift reminded Big Ed of just how much he had to lose.