

This year's *Supernatural Reality* story is released on the anniversary of Black Tuesday, the single worst day in the history of the U.S. stock market, and a day that caused too many deaths and ruined lives. This is the story of one of the souls lost that day...

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

by Susan and Dana

"How are we supposed to *find* a cold case that predates all modern technology, let alone *investigate* it?" Trixie Belden groaned to her friend Honey Wheeler as they exited a classroom at the local community college. Both girls had signed up for an extracurricular evening criminology course, and the assignments had been interesting and intriguing, captivating both of the would-be sleuths. Trixie had actually looked forward to attacking her homework for the first time in her life. At least, she had until they had received this latest assignment.

Usually, as soon as the instructor gave an assignment, Trixie's nimble brain was already finding ways to tackle, and ultimately solve, the problem. Right now, though, the curly-haired young woman had to admit that she was stumped. "At least we were allowed to choose a partner for the assignment," Trixie went on, looking at the bright side.

It was then that she turned to her honey-haired friend as they reached the front doors of the classroom building and exited into the crisp fall air. Instead of looking as perplexed as Trixie felt, Honey Wheeler looked absolutely smug.

Trixie's sandy eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Don't you look like the cat that ate the canary?" she exclaimed. "Spill it. What have you got up your sleeve?"

Honey smiled at her friend as she pulled her car keys out of her backpack. "We don't need to look for a case, because I already know of one."

Trixie's jaw dropped. "You do?" As soon as Honey unlocked the doors of the emerald green sedan that her parents had bought for "the household," Trixie slid into the passenger seat. "Tell me, tell me!" Her bright blue eyes sparkled with curiosity, and Honey had to laugh as she settled herself into the driver's seat and buckled her seatbelt.

"Not until you buckle your seatbelt, Miss Belden," Honey said primly, starting the engine. Trixie hurriedly clicked her seatbelt across her lap.

"Go on," she urged.

"Well, my great-grandmother—"

"This unsolved case is in your family?" Trixie screeched, interrupting her friend's narrative. "You have an unsolved crime in your family tree and you *never told me?*"

Honey laughed even as she repressed a small sigh. She loved her friend dearly, but Trixie's natural curiosity always seemed to blind her friend to more sensitive considerations.

"It happened to my mother's grandmother, the grandmother that she was especially close to, and my mother can be very sensitive about it." Honey chewed her lower lip as she turned out of the parking lot of the college. "As a matter of fact, maybe she won't be thrilled about me broadcasting our family history for an assignment. I mean, I never even told *you* out of respect for her."

Trixie said in a teasing tone, "Yeah, I can't believe you held out on me." Then she reached over and gave her friend's hand a squeeze and became serious. "Maybe she'll appreciate it if we can find some closure."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Honey brightened. “Maybe. At any rate, let’s go ask her. She and Daddy aren’t leaving for Montreal until the day after tomorrow, so maybe she has time to sit down with us. She can tell us the whole story—she knows it a lot better than I do—and give us permission at the same time.”

Trixie’s impatience surfaced again. “Can’t you give me a hint, Honey? I’ll just die if I have to wait until we get to the Manor House to hear the story!”

“Trixie,” Honey pretended to scold, “we’re only a few miles from Glen Road!”

Trixie shot her friend an impudent grin. “I know, but I still feel like I’ll—”

“Just die.” Honey grinned back at her passenger. “I know. And we can’t have that, can we?”

“I don’t think you want my death on your conscience,” Trixie said with a sniff.

“No, I certainly don’t,” Honey returned. “So, to spare us both from our fates, I’ll tell you a little bit.” Trixie smiled widely and settled back in her seat happily as her friend continued, “Like I said, it happened to my mom’s grandmother, back in the Twenties.”

Trixie’s blue eyes gleamed. “Oh, what a great time! Gangsters and flappers and prohibition and speakeasies and...”

“And the stock market crash of 1929,” Honey said. “You see, my mother’s grandfather killed himself on Black Tuesday, like so many other wealthy businessmen.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Honey,” Trixie said in a low voice.

Honey shrugged. “I didn’t know him personally, so it’s just a story to me. Anyway, his wife, my mother’s grandmother, swore up and down that he did not kill himself and had in fact been murdered.”

“That’s understandable,” Trixie said. “The suicide of a loved one can be hard to accept.”

“Well, that, and apparently he had been looking into some corruption, and my grandmother was convinced that he was murdered as a result.”

“Looking into corruption?” Trixie asked, wrinkling her nose. “I thought you said he was a businessman.”

“He was,” Honey confirmed, “but he was working with the feds on something.”

“Hmm, murder certainly does sound plausible.”

“Not only that, but he and my great-grandmother were newlyweds, blissfully happy and in love, and she had just told him the night before that she was pregnant with my grandmother. He was over the moon with happiness, and the last thing he would do would be to kill himself, according to my great-grandmother.”

“Well, I guess the stress of losing all of that money and not being able to provide for his wife and child might have been enough to push him over the edge,” Trixie mused.

“That’s the thing, Trixie,” Honey said as she turned the small sedan onto the long and winding Manor House driveway. “He didn’t lose all that much on Black Tuesday. He still had much of his fortune, and my great-great-grandfather didn’t trust the stock market at all and remained a very, very wealthy man while he watched his friends lose their fortunes. He would never have let his daughter and her family be destitute, which was a moot point anyway, given my great-grandfather didn’t lose that much.”

“How the heck did the police—or the feds, if he was working with them—ever accept the suicide theory then?” Trixie wondered.

Honey parked the car in the garage, and the two girls exited, grabbing their backpacks and heading toward the house. “Apparently, the federal agent who he was working with believed as my great-grandmother did, but no one could ever prove anything.”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Once again, Trixie felt that familiar excitement, the thrill of having a puzzle before her, just itching to be solved. As perplexed as she had been just a short time before, now she was exhilarated with the anticipation of being able to attempt to solve a case—no matter said case was decades old and she had no clue how she and Honey would manage to find clues. All she felt was that keen sense of curiosity burning within her.

“It would be *so cool* if we could manage to find a way to solve this!” she cried.

Honey put a warning finger to her lips as she pushed open the door and the two friends entered the grand entrance of the Manor House. “If my mom is okay with it. We still need to ask her.”

Trixie tried to tamp down her excitement. “There I go again, putting the cart before the horse!”

Honey smiled at her best friend in the world. “And we wouldn’t have you any other way.”

“What other way wouldn’t we have Trixie?” Madeleine Wheeler asked, joining her daughter and Trixie in the entrance as they set down their backpacks. She crossed the entranceway and gave Honey a hug while throwing a warm smile at Trixie. “I thought I heard you two come in from class, so I decided to do my best Trixie and investigate.”

Trixie laughed. “My reputation precedes me.”

“You’re just the person we wanted to see, Mother,” Honey said. “We were hoping you could help us with our latest assignment.”

Madeleine raised a graceful eyebrow. “Me? I’ll be glad to if I can. Why don’t we head into the library and talk about it.” This was more of a statement than a question, so Trixie didn’t even think and began to follow her. Suddenly, a sly look crossed Mrs. Wheeler’s face. “Actually, I think Miss Trask said that Cook was making a pumpkin pie. Let’s discuss this assignment in the kitchen while we enjoy some of that pie, shall we?”

The girls agreed and within a short time, the three women were settled at the kitchen table eating one of Cook’s heavenly pies.

“Mart will be sad he missed this!” Trixie exclaimed between delicious bites.

“You can take him home a piece, of course,” Honey’s mother offered. “Now, what is it you two think that I can help you with?”

Honey explained their assignment, but before she could even ask about her family history, Madeleine said, “And you thought of Great-Grandfather Clarke.”

Honey nodded. “Would it be too intrusive for us to use our family for an assignment?”

A faraway look came into Mrs. Wheeler’s large hazel eyes. The girls held their breath as they awaited her response. “I think it would be fine. I certainly don’t think it will hurt anything, and maybe you can even help.” She looked at Trixie. “You’ve certainly worked miracles for this family before.”

Trixie blushed, and Honey came to her rescue, taking the focus off of her friend. “Can you tell us the full story, Mother? I gave Trixie the basic story, but I didn’t give her any details. We’ll need to know as much as we can to start researching the case.”

Madeleine smiled. “Of course. Let’s finish our pie and then head into the library where we can be more comfortable. This might get long, if you want a lot of details.”

It wasn’t long before the three were ensconced in the library, the walls lined from floor to ceiling with richly bound books. Madeleine nestled herself on an armchair covered in rich velvet, and Trixie and Honey settled themselves on a luxuriously soft sofa to listen to the story.

When Honey’s mother began, her voice was soft, filled with an obvious reverence for the past. “This all begins in New York City, shortly before the Great Crash. My grandmother, Grace Morgan, was the light of

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

her father's life, and when she chose not to become engaged after her debut, he humored her. But she was starting to get to what was then considered an 'unmarriageable age,' although she was still young, so when the son of one of his best friends re-entered their lives, her father thought that it would be a perfect match.

"Charles Stillman, however, was nothing like his father, the deceased friend that Grace's father so admired. William Stillman was a wonderful, stand-up man, but the apple fell far from the tree, and Charles was a despicable man. Of course, neither my grandmother nor her father knew this at the time. Grace agreed to become betrothed to Charles because she knew that it would make her father happy, and she was beginning to fear that she would never meet the man of her dreams and so would end up a spinster.

"Shortly after the engagement was announced, Grace's father hired a new valet." She paused her narrative and smiled softly at the girls. "His name was Thomas Clarke."

"My great-grandfather," Honey breathed.

Madeleine nodded. "Your great-grandfather," she confirmed in a soft voice. "Finally, Grace had met the man whom she had been dreaming of, whom she had been holding out for, and she cursed her luck that she was now already betrothed. Not wanting to break her father's heart, she tried to ignore her growing feelings for Thomas and honor her engagement to her father's friend's son. Meanwhile, Thomas was falling more and more in love with Grace. He also tried to ignore his feelings, but as often is the case with true love, the feelings would not—could not—be ignored.

"When he confessed his love for your great-grandmother, he also confessed something else. He was working with a federal agent to convict Charles Stillman, her fiancé, on corruption charges. The fact that her father's valet position became available was no accident. He had been bribed to leave his post so that Thomas could get close to the family. After the engagement was announced, the feds wanted to determine if Grace's father was involved in Stillman's corruption."

She smiled at Honey's worried face. "He wasn't. But Grace reeled with the revelation that Charles had gambled away his vast inheritance in a shockingly short amount of time. In an attempt to maintain the standard of living to which he was accustomed, he had become involved with the Irish Mafia, and Grace began to suspect that he was only marrying her for her trust fund and future inheritance. Once she learned of his ongoing affair with a dancer at the speakeasy he frequented, one that had ties to the Irish Mafia, she became more convinced of that fact. She knew she was free. She knew she could call off the engagement with her father's blessing."

Both girls sat wide-eyed, leaning forward in their seats as Madeleine's soft voice continued the tragic tale. Later, Trixie would recall just how mesmerized she had felt during Mrs. Wheeler's narrative, like she was somehow *connected* to the story, being pulled in. She always wondered what part that played in sending them all off on the strange adventure that spanned across time.

"As you can imagine, Charles was furious when Grace broke the engagement, and he swore revenge. But for a time, life moved on blissfully and uneventfully for my grandparents. They were married in September 1929. Little did they know that they would only have about a month of wedded bliss before Thomas' life would be ended abruptly." Madeleine sighed, and Trixie and Honey found themselves sighing along with her.

"After he was gone, my grandmother tried to pursue justice. She contacted the FBI agent with whom Thomas had worked. He was convinced there was foul play as well, and that Charles Stillman was behind it, but he never was able to prove it."

"What about Great-Great-Grandfather Morgan?" Honey asked quietly into the silence that followed Madeleine's statement. "He was a smart man. He must have shared Grace's opinion."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Madeleine nodded. "He did. But he also was worried for her safety, and the safety of his unborn grandchild. He was terrified that Charles would hurt her—or worse. He sent her to live with an aunt in England until the baby was born. By the time she returned to New York with my mother, Charles had found another heiress, and he was married and spending *her* fortune. He seemed to have moved on, so my grandmother moved on with the business of her life—raising my mother."

The three sat in reverent silence for a few moments, and then Madeleine continued. "She never remarried. She continued to love Thomas and only Thomas until she died."

Trixie found herself blinking back tears, and she didn't dare look at Honey. Suddenly, she understood why Honey had never shared this story. It was so *personal*. Madeleine suddenly looked very tired.

"Thank you for telling us the story, Mrs. Wheeler," Trixie said quietly. The elegant, honey-haired woman smiled at her daughter's best friend.

"You're welcome, Trixie," she said. "If you girls are able, by some miracle, to solve this mystery, it would mean a lot to me."

"We'll do our best." Trixie made the promise, which Honey echoed.

* * *

"I promised your mother, and I don't want to fail," Trixie wailed to Honey three days later. Three days of fruitless Internet searches. Three days of spending a lot of time in the Sleepyside library hitting dead ends. Three days of stalking the library at the community college only to realize that their back issues of New York newspapers yielded no new facts. Three days of guiltily ignoring her other homework.

The librarian quickly shushed her, and Trixie flashed the woman a guilty look and mouthed the word, "Sorry."

"Trixie, you promised my mother that we'd do our best. And we'll keep that promise. She's not expecting miracles. She's not expecting us to solve this case," Honey admonished in a low voice, so as not to further raise the librarian's ire.

"But I want to so badly," Trixie whispered. "And because the anniversary of the death is actually in eight days, I really wanted to be able to present something to your mother. Maybe not proof, exactly, but something suggestive. Something to give your family closure."

"I have an idea," Honey said. "Tomorrow's Saturday. We'll head to the New York City Public Library. They have tons and tons of archives on that area. They're sure to have more resources than we have at these libraries."

Trixie brightened. "That's true!" At the stern look of the librarian, she lowered her voice again. "Gleeps, Honey. I'm going to keep getting us in trouble. We're not getting anywhere here, so let's head out so that we can discuss this."

After they had returned the reference materials to the reference desk, the two zipped up their jackets and headed into the brisk air. It was the end of October, and the reds and golds of fall were in full swing around them.

"So, we'll take the train into the city tomorrow morning," Trixie said as they crossed the parking lot. "Should we invite Miss Trask? Maybe she'd like to spend the day with her sister."

"Yes, let's! And the rest of the Bob-Whites were so fascinated by the story when we told it last night, maybe they'd like to come on our adventure, too."

"Perfectly perfect!" Trixie exclaimed. "I know that Brian and Mart promised to rake the leaves this weekend, but maybe if I promise to help, Dad will agree to let us hold off until Sunday."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“Di mentioned that she wanted to do ‘something exciting’ this weekend. I’m sure she’ll agree to a trip to New York,” Honey said as the two entered the car, which Honey navigated out of the parking lot.

“She can go shopping if she doesn’t want to spend the day in the library,” Trixie agreed. “What about Jim and Dan? Do you know their plans?”

“Jim was just going to try to get some homework done, which he could do at the library while we research, and I think Dan mentioned that he needed to do some work in the preserve.”

“Doesn’t he always?” Trixie said. “Maybe Mart, Brian, and I can finish the raking early and help him out on Sunday so he can take the day off tomorrow.”

“Jim and I can pitch in on both counts. With all of us working, we can finish both your yard and any preserve work in no time,” Honey offered.

And so that is how the seven Bob-Whites found themselves in New York City, Central Park to be exact, on the fateful afternoon of October 22.

* * *

The weather couldn’t have been more perfect. A gentle breeze ruffled the gold, red and purple leaves seemingly blooming on trees all around them. The sun shone down in merry streaks from the sky, peeking through the overlying trees as the seven Bob-Whites strolled through Central Park. Honey had taken off her jacket, tying it around her waist, and Di had pulled her dark hair up into a ponytail to get the long, thick locks off the back of her neck. Trixie skipped ahead of the others and turned around in a complete circle, spreading her arms out like a propeller. “I can’t believe it’s almost November! It feels almost like summer!” she cried.

Mart zipped up his jacket in a defiant gesture and gave his sister a sour look. “You’re just saying that because we’re finally outside after *hours* of fruitless searching in the library.”

Trixie wrinkled her nose at him. “No,” she replied with a sniff. “I’m saying that because it’s *true*.” She gestured in a large sweep toward the plethora of people out enjoying the summer-like day. “And I’m not the only one thinking so. *Everyone* is out and about today.”

“I will admit,” said Jim, as he shifted his backpack more firmly on his shoulders, “that it’s nice to be outside.” He grinned. “I’m seriously tired of reading my econ book.” He shook his head. “I do *not* like numbers.”

“Hear, hear on that,” Brian agreed. “Calculus was doing me in on my end.” A smile lightened his handsome face. “It’s too beautiful of a day to spend it inside.”

“Sitting in the library wasn’t doing us any good anyway,” Honey said with a little pout. “I so thought that the city library would be more helpful than the one at home, but we didn’t find *anything*.”

“Well, that’s not exactly true,” Dan pointed out. “We did find a nice obituary about your great-grandfather that told a little about him and your family—and the story had a nice studio photograph of him, so we know what he looked like.”

“Fat lot of good that does us,” Trixie said with a groan.

“I wish we’d found more out about your great-grandfather, Honey,” Di said with a little sigh. “If I were a conspiracy theory freak, I’d think that there’d been a hush-up about it. You’d think that someone that wealthy dying in such a spectacular way would have more press.”

“Well, a lot of people just thought he was another suicidal person,” Brian pointed out, “and the stock market crash itself was the big news of the time. People were more focused on that than on one individual’s death—no matter how wealthy he might have been.”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“And if what you read about in history is true,” Mart added, “Thomas Clarke was only one of many suicides during that time period. Everyone was going crazy.”

“That’s true,” Dan inserted, “and then you had the whole issue of gangsters being pretty prominent at that time. They had that big war going on within the Italian mafia families—the Castellammarese War, and you can bet the Irish Mob was taking advantage of their distraction by taking over their business.” At the others’ surprised looks, he gave them a sheepish smile. “I got caught up in reading about Legs Diamond and Owney Madden. We heard a lot about some of the guys from way-back-when, when I was in the gang. They’re legends.”

“Two of the Irish Mob’s more notorious prohibition-era gangsters,” Mart added, by way of explanation.

“I know who they are,” said Honey as she tossed her hair. “Trixie and I went to a lecture on organized crime in New York for our class.”

“Charles Stillman was connected with the Irish Mob,” Trixie mused, “but he hid his tracks pretty well. I didn’t see any reference to his activities with them.”

“He got enough money from his wife to cover his tracks.” Honey sniffed disdainfully.

“I feel sorry for his wife,” Jim said with a frown. “What a life she must have led!”

“At least your great-grandmother was smart enough to escape,” Brian said, giving Honey a softened look.

“She was,” Honey said, her eyes growing wistful, “but she had to raise my grandmother alone—and *be* alone for the rest of her life.”

“But she was really, really happy for a little while,” Dan said quietly. “I’ll bet she never was sorry for that little bit of true happiness that she had.”

“No,” Honey agreed, her hazel eyes misty, “she never was.”

The group made their way down the grand staircases in Bethesda Terrace, crossing over to the large fountain at the end of the terrace. Di sat down on the edge of the large circular pool surrounding the fountain and let one slim hand skim through the water. “I know we were supposed to be researching the case—and I *did* look, but I kept getting distracted.” Di flashed the others a dazzling smile. “I was more interested in the clothes,” she admitted. “Those gorgeous beaded gowns, the flapper dresses with the fringe...” She sighed. “I’d feel so beautiful in one of those.”

“You *are* beautiful, doll face.” The words were murmured in a low, strange voice that Diana didn’t immediately recognize. “Don’t you worry about a thing. When the money comes in, Charlie’ll get you whatever kind of dress that you want.”

Di turned from the fountain, startled, and found a strange man leaning down over her. His hand slid up her leg, running over the silk stockings she wore. She had no time to exclaim or protest, however, because the man’s face swam suddenly into view for a brief moment before his lips claimed hers in a rough, possessive kiss.

Meanwhile...

Mart’s face turned a rather unbecoming shade of purple as he witnessed Diana being mauled by the unknown man. “Hey!” he shouted. He grabbed the railing of the old staircase, intent on heading down it toward Diana when he found himself suddenly, violently stopped. With an angry glare, he whirled around to face his sister. “Trixie! What the hell...?”

“Mart, stop. *Stop.*”

“That guy has his hands all over Diana. I’m going to tear his heart out,” Mart said, his voice furious.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“Mart!” Trixie’s voice rose in exasperation. “Will you calm down a minute? Look around you. *Look.*”

Mart shook Trixie’s hand off, still intent on running down the stairs to his girlfriend, when his sister’s words finally sank in. How did he get to the top of the stairs? They’d been down by the fountain a moment ago.

His body stilled. The sun was no longer low in the sky as it had been. Instead, it shone brightly above them. Other than Diana, none of the other Bob-Whites could be seen. They’d vanished.

Unwillingly, he took his eyes away from the spot where Diana was. The park was surprisingly empty for that time of day. In fact, other than the two of them, Diana and her unfamiliar man, there was only a lone individual, standing watching from a more hidden corner of the balustrade, his fedora low on his face.

Trixie clutched Mart’s arm in excitement. “Mart,” she hissed. “I think that’s Thomas Clarke!”

“What?” Mart looked at her in incredulity. “Thomas Clarke? Honey’s great-grandfather? With his...” His voice trailed off and the furious anger was back in full, breathtaking force. “His hand is halfway up her dress!”

“No, no. Not him.” Trixie shook his arm again and tilted her head toward the corner of the upper balcony. “*Him.*”

Mart followed Trixie’s gaze to the man half-hidden in the shadows. The man looked in their direction and held a finger to his lips briefly before he slipped away, tilting his hat down more firmly over his face.

Meanwhile...

“...and I don’t care what the lousy bum says.” The voice was low, guttural and, from what Dan could tell, immensely irritated. “If he doesn’t take that swell for a ride and bump him off, *he’ll* be the one swimmin’ at the bottom of the Hudson.”

The words sounded as if they’d been pulled right out of a gangster movie. Dan almost laughed, expecting to see Mart doing a poor imitation of one of the New York gangsters they’d been discussing.

But then he saw the face in front of him.

A firm, stubborn jaw, which looked as if it had been in far too many prize fights. Smaller scars lined the rims of his cheeks, which Dan recognized as having been made with knife blades. He had small, dark, angry eyes and a large nose that had been broken at least once. The man had an old-style fedora hat pulled down on his head.

Dan took a quick glance downward, noting how the seams of the suit coat the man wore didn’t fit quite right—as if there was too much muscle underneath to be contained in such a garment. He also noticed the telltale bulge of a gun.

He no longer felt like laughing.

Dan swallowed and tried to think what to say. “He’s a few bricks short of a load,” Dan ventured, “to be messin’ with you.”

The other man stared at him for a moment and then let out a sharp bark of laughter. “Yeah, yeah. Sure is.” Then, he poked a pudgy finger against Dan’s suit coat. “What he’ll be wearin’ is cement overshoes if he don’t take care of that meddlin’ fed, got me?”

“Yeah, I got you,” Dan replied. He was very thankful for the old gang face at that moment, which gave him a nice blank slate to hide his emotions—emotions that were anything but calm.

It was one thing to read voraciously about gangsters—their old-world charm and movie-star-esque quality seemed so glamorous in books and websites, but face-to-face with who he immediately knew to be a full-

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

blooded, very much *alive* Prohibition-era gangster was not an experience Dan was looking to repeat again soon.

“And make sure Daisy doesn’t distract him from doin’ what he should be doin’.” At that, a rather lascivious leer crossed the other man’s face. “Not that he don’t have good *reason* to be distracted. The gams on that broad...” With a low wolf whistle, the man winked at Dan before his face sobered, and he leaned forward, his face dark and his eyes hard. “Just make sure he takes care of it.”

With that, the man abruptly turned and headed away from Dan, who waited until the man had completely disappeared from view—and even a few moments afterward—before he let out a sigh of relief.

“What the hell is going on?” he muttered to himself as he looked around him. Dan took a couple of deep breaths to steady himself before he glanced down and really *looked* at what he was wearing. Dark shoes, *spats*, of all things, and what looked to be a pin-stripe suit.

He gingerly felt his head and pulled off a very nattily styled fedora. “I don’t believe this,” he murmured.

But the biggest shock of all was when he turned to look around him. It wasn’t the walking couples, who were all decked out in clothes reminiscent of the 1920s, or the cop patrolling in an old-fashioned double-breasted police coat and decked out with an old-style hexagonal hat giving him a suspicious look. No. It was the press of the small handgun in the holster strapped around his shoulder. He pulled out the gun in a furtive manner and looked at it. A Colt. Likely a 1903, if he remembered his guns. An old favorite of the Mob.

“Damn,” he whispered. “I’m a gangster!”

Meanwhile...

Honey blinked her eyes at the sudden loss of light around her. She frowned a little, wondering how they’d lost the sun so quickly, when she looked around her and realized she wasn’t near the fountain any longer. Instead, she appeared to be in an extremely luxurious car.

The door of the car opened and a handsome, very familiar dark head peered in. “Honey?” he asked.

The black uniform suited Brian well. His dark hair and tanned skin against the crisp uniform made for a very attractive sight. Honey sighed a little as she looked at him. “You look beautiful,” she said as she stretched out her hand toward him.

Brian’s cheeks pinked a bit, but he didn’t grab her hand. “Honey, stop.” His voice was a low hiss.

“What? Why?” she demanded. Then, Honey came to reality with a huge thud. Her eyes widened. “You look like Tom when he’s on duty. Why are you dressed in a chauffeur’s uniform?”

“You’ve got me,” he replied in a low voice. He raised an eyebrow at her. “Why are *you* wearing that rock?”

“Rock?” Honey crinkled up her nose at him, her eyes puzzled before she followed his gaze to her hand. A huge diamond ring twinkled on her left hand. A ring she’d seen many times before. She gasped. “Brian!”

“You know what?” he interjected, a scowl crossing his face. “I’m coming to the realization that I really, really don’t like seeing another man’s ring on your hand.”

“Brian!” Honey’s cheeks flushed—partly because of the glance she’d seen from a woman peering curiously at them as she walked past, and partly because of Brian’s words. They were far too young to get married, but...

With concerted effort, Honey turned her focus to the present. “It’s not *my* ring,” she said in a low, agitated voice. “It’s my great-grandmother’s. My mother takes it out and wears it for special occasions.”

“Why are you wearing it, then?” He frowned. “That’s far too valuable of a ring...” His voice trailed off and a look of panic began to creep through his eyes. “Oh, no. No, no, *no!*”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"It's October," she whispered, "and we were investigating a mystery..."

"Do *not* tell me we're traveling through *time* now," he snapped.

"Do you have any other explanation?" she retorted. "Why are we suddenly gone from where we were with the others? Why am I wearing a cloche hat?" Honey fingered her hair, the normal long length of which had vanished into a short bob. "Where's my hair?" Her voice sounded pitiful even to her own ears.

Brian's gaze immediately flicked to the short, straight hairstyle that framed Honey's face. Then, he finally reached out to her, running his thumb along the shorn hair's edge. "It's not so bad," he said softly. "You actually look kind of cute—in that 1920s sort of way."

They stared into each other's eyes for a few moments before Brian recollected where he was and coughed a little. He pulled back and said in a louder voice, "There it is, Mrs. Clarke. No worries."

Honey gave him a blank look until Brian gave a meaningful glance toward an older couple, who'd stopped ostensibly to look over the view of Central Park behind them, but were, in fact, trying to see into the car to see whom Brian was being so familiar with.

She gave him a brief smile and said, "Oh, yes. Thank you. I was...it was silly of me to carry on so." Honey surreptitiously grabbed the small beaded purse that lay on the seat next to her and waved it. "Sometimes it just blends in with the seat and I can't see it."

Brian rolled his eyes, but he merely politely and correctly closed the door and then opened the front door and slid into the driver's seat. "I think Old Nosey Parker and her husband are going on their way," he muttered, "but I think we ought to get out of here before they recognize you or the car." He shook his head as he started the engine. "You'd think for *once* that we'd get some sort of warning. Time travel. God."

"You traveled back in time before," Honey protested. "Back to the time of Jack the Ripper?"

Brian whipped his head around and gave her a dark look. "Those were visions—not time travel. I wasn't me trapped in someone else's body."

"It can't be that bad," Honey ventured, a little plea in her voice.

"It can't?" Brian demanded as he pulled out onto a connecting road. "We don't know where the others are—or if they even traveled back in time with us. We're supposed to do...what? Stop a murder? With gangsters involved? We could be killed." And then his face darkened further. "And to top it all off, you've leaped into your great-grandmother. Your very *married* great-grandmother."

"Brian!" Honey's cheeks were flaming.

"I'm not an actor," he muttered, his voice low, angry and dark. "Exactly how I am supposed to pretend to be some sort of indifferent, friendly servant while my girlfriend has to do God knows what with her husband?"

"He's not my husband," she shot back at him. "He's my great-grandfather." Her face blanched at the thought, and then she moaned and put her head in her hands. "You are *not* helping."

"I don't know what kind of alternate universe we're in," Brian said, "but I'll tell you this. I am *not* excited about getting yanked around for a paranormal joy ride every year." He hit the steering wheel with a gloved fist. "I used to love Halloween. Now, I hate it."

"Brian!" Honey repeated, her voice full of exasperation. "Not. Helping."

"Have you thought about what happens if you get involved with what happened to your great-grandfather back here?" he demanded, pressing forward as if he hadn't even heard her objections. "If your great-grandmother gets killed back here, *you* don't exist in the future."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"If my great-grandmother gets killed while I'm in her body, we probably both end up dead anyway!" Honey snapped.

Brian pulled up in front of a rich, stately looking brownstone and turned off the engine. He twisted around so that he faced her, and then, upon seeing the look on her face, repressed whatever it was he was going to say. He blew out a long breath and tugged on the brim of his cap. "I'm sorry, Honey. I just...I don't do well in these situations where you're just thrown in there with nothing to tell you what to do or where to go, and I feel..." He broke off and shook his head. "You're *my* girl. I don't like even *pretending* that you're not—even if it is for a good cause."

"I still *am* your girl, Brian," she said, reaching out and squeezing his shoulder with her hand. "We'll find a way to make this work without...well, without any problems of that kind. Okay?"

"I hope so," he muttered, even as he took the keys, opened the door and got out. A moment later, he was holding the door open for Honey, who exited out of the car as if she'd done it a million times before.

As Honey got to her feet, she suddenly realized that the old home she stood in front of was one she'd seen many, many times. Her grandmother, in fact, still lived in the old brownstone, ruling the roost. Memories flooded through her brain of her parents taking her there for Christmas, of Jim's first reaction to the huge formal dining room and of being little and she and Ben playing on the large stone steps that led up to the front door while her parents and his drank lemonade on hot summer days.

It was the same place, all right, and yet, it was different. The house looked newer—cleaner—the window edges were painted a different color, and Grandmother's stone pots that normally adorned the bottom of the steps were gone.

How in the world did they end up *here*? Honey glanced over at Brian, who was standing, arms crossed, with a scowl of Bobby-esque proportions on his face. It was rather amazing. Brian had found his way here without any help from her—not even a smidgen of conversation about where they'd be headed at that time of day. He'd taken her home—her great-grandmother's home...

...when he'd never been to the house before.

Honey pondered this for a moment, staring blindly at the house in front of her. Perhaps it meant that some of the familiar routines of the chauffeur's life—ones he normally wouldn't even think about—were available to Brian. Maybe even a little of Grace's chauffeur stayed behind.

Honey frowned. *But where did these people all go? Was it like that TV show, Quantum Leap? And those people from the past—her great-grandmother, her chauffeur, and God knows who else—were even now in the park in the current time in their bodies?* Honey shivered. "Let's not even go there," she muttered to herself.

She finally stepped forward, shaking herself from her reverie, and moved away from the open car door.

"What?" Brian asked as he closed the car door behind her. "Did you say something?"

Honey squared her shoulders and gestured with a slim hand toward the brownstone's large ornate Tiffany glass door. "You said you're not so good in these situations, and yet, you got me home without any effort at all."

Brian stared at her for a moment before looking, really looking, at her old family home with surprise. "I...I don't know how that happened. I didn't even think about it. I just drove and ended up here."

"Grace's chauffeur knows where she lives," Honey said in a low voice. "I expect that his body just did what it always does. It didn't need thought to get you here. Pre-programmed passages in the brain." A small smile curved her lips. "You and your personality just came along for the ride."

"I just wish me and my personality was back in the present with my own body." Brian's mutterings were cut off as he got back into the car, likely, Honey thought, to store it in the garage. Apparently, another normal thing for the chauffeur to do.

Honey smiled to herself and then headed up the stone steps to her great-grandmother's house, knowing instinctively that the old-fashioned key that jingled around the bottom of her beaded purse would be a perfect fit for the brass door lock on the beautiful Tiffany door.

Back in Central Park...

Jim swore later that he'd felt a jolt when he'd arrived—again—in Central Park. He could still see the fountain from where he was—sort of—but he remained hidden from view in one of the clumps of trees that outlined the terrace around the fountain.

"What in the world...?" he asked himself. Jim stepped forward, intent on returning to the fountain, but was surprised at the different feel of the clothes he was wearing. He looked down at the foot he'd stepped forward with. Gone were the sneakers, and instead, he saw a pair of black brogues on his feet. He held his hands out in front of him and saw the cuffs and arms of what appeared to be a dark suit coat.

Stifling a gasp, Jim pulled his foot back and leaned against the nearest tree trunk. "What in the hell is going on?"

"That's what I'd like to know."

Jim turned his head sharply toward the voice, which was low, somewhat amused, and right near him.

The man who'd spoken was of medium build and height, athletic looking, with honey-colored hair the exact shade of his sister's peeking out from under what appeared to be a very expensive fedora hat. Jim had seen the photograph in the paper, but it didn't do justice to the living, breathing man. Apparently, Maddie and Honey Wheeler's striking good looks had come from Thomas Clarke. Even the hazel eyes were similar.

"You startled me," Jim said, straightening away from the rough bark of the tree he'd been leaning against. *That* was an understatement.

"Sorry," Thomas said with an upward quirk of the lips. "I thought FBI agents weren't startled by anything."

FBI agent? Jim suddenly became aware of the feel of a strapped holster over his shoulder and the press of its accompanying gun. *God. I'm his contact. His FBI...what do they call it again? Handler?—or whatever it was they called them back then.*

"I'm just a little jumpy today," he said, choosing his words carefully as he glanced up and down the path that led out of the area of trees in which they were standing. No one coming. "And what's all this about the FBI?"

Thomas gave him a long look that reminded him so much of his mother that he began to be seriously freaked out. *Snap out of it, Frayne.* "I'm here to report new information, not to talk to you about things you already know." The searching look finally disappeared, and the amused one returned. "If I wanted to shoot the bull, I'd just stop next door."

"Next door. Right." Jim ran a hand down his face, trying to get his bearings.

"Are you all right?" Thomas asked, concern suddenly etching his features. "You look as if you've seen a ghost."

I'm looking at one right now! "I, uh, it's been a long day. I'm tired." Jim attempted a smile. "Nothing wrong." He gestured at Thomas. "You mentioned your report?"

"Yes," Thomas began before looking around surreptitiously. "I think we're finally getting somewhere. Cultivating that clerk in Stillman's office is really starting to pay off."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“Oh?”

“He mentioned that Stillman regularly visits some speakeasies down in Hell’s Kitchen. I waited by a nearby newsstand until he left his home to go out last night. I followed him to Donovan Mangan’s place down on Eighth Avenue—a good place to find Irish whiskey, I understand.” He gave Jim a sardonic look before he continued, “Stillman got stopped by someone before he went in. Big, nasty-looking fella. Stillman looked terrified.” Thomas gave a short bark of a laugh. “I’m not surprised. I would have been a bit scared myself if I’d been in his shoes. I think he’s one of those torpedoes who introduce men to the bottom of the Hudson.”

Torpedoes? “What did the guy want?” Jim asked.

“Mentioned something about a shipment that never arrived. Alcohol, I suspect.” Thomas’ mouth curved up into a grin. “He has a week to get it delivered...or else.” He ran a finger across his throat in a slitting motion. “What I figure is that we can set up some sort of trap. He’ll bring that shipment, and we’ll catch him—redhanded—with the alcohol. We might even get a few extra gangsters arrested as part of the bargain.” The young man clapped his hands together, rubbing them in delight, and gave him a grin. “I’ve got a way to get inside. An old friend of mine still enjoys a glass of wine now and again and drops by Mangan’s place once in a while. He promised he’d give me the password for the 29th as soon as he got it.” He raised his eyebrows. “Catching him with a shipment of alcohol ought to be enough to put him away for a good while, won’t it?”

Jim’s mind was racing. How on earth was he going to set up an FBI sting on Charles Stillman? In a week? When he didn’t even have the foggiest idea who in the world he was, let alone how to get a hold of anyone at the FBI? “Remind me,” he said in a low voice, “what today is?”

Thomas gave him a queer look but immediately replied, “The 22nd of October.”

“The 22nd,” he repeated, feeling a growing sense of dread stealing over him. Jim stared at the handsome young man, as full of eager adventure as he’d ever seen Trixie be, and realized that the shipment promised by Stillman to arrive on the twenty-ninth wasn’t likely to be alcohol.

No. That shipment was much more likely to be Thomas Clarke’s dead body.

And Back to Diana...

Di instinctively pulled back from the man, breaking the rough kiss. She stared at the man, noting that his gray eyes darkened with displeasure at her action. His blond hair was wavy but slicked back, and although his face was relatively attractive, there was something about it that made Di uneasy.

“What gives, Daisy?” the stranger spoke.

“Daisy?” Di echoed. “I think you must have me confused with someone else.”

The man stared at her, a mixture of disbelief and irritation on his face. Suddenly, his face relaxed and he burst into laughter. “You slay me, doll. Pretending to be someone else. Okay, doll face, if you’re not Daisy Lynch, who are you?”

Lynch? The word ricocheted around Di’s brain. *Could I have a relative who looks like me? And why does he keep calling me doll face? It’s like something out of an old movie...*

Suddenly, something clicked, and Di looked down. Gone were her stylish, modern clothes. In their place was a satiny violet dress that could have come straight from the pages of the books on 1920s fashion that she had just been perusing. Without thinking, she brought her hand to her hair and realized that it was in a short bob. Her mind reeled as she tried to process what was happening.

One minute she had been wishing she could wear the beautiful 1920s gowns, and the next minute she was. And, apparently, her name was Daisy.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“Cat got your tongue?” the stranger said, staring at her. The mirth of a few moments before was gone, and the irritation had returned.

Di shook her head. “No,” she replied. “I just thought of something and zoned out for a moment.”

Confusion settled on the man’s features. “You what?”

Oh no! Di thought. *If I am somehow stuck in the Twenties, they probably haven’t invented that phrase yet!* She searched her brain for a phrase she thought would be appropriate, if those gangster movies that Dan was forever watching were at all accurate. “You never heard that phrase before?” she asked. “It’s the cat’s meow!”

Once again, the strange man threw back his head and laughed! “Well, I’ll be... You always amaze me, doll face. You say the funniest things.”

Di smiled nervously at him. “I’m so glad you’re amused.” Di wasn’t sure why, but she somehow knew that she did not want to get on this man’s bad side. There was something about him that made Di think that underneath the polished exterior was a bad temper—a dangerous one, even.

“You never answered. If you’re not Daisy, who are you?”

“I was just pulling your leg,” Di said, hoping that sounded vaguely Twenties-ish. “Of course, I’m Daisy.”

“That’s too bad. I thought it might be fun to pretend that we were people other than Daisy Lynch and Charles Stillman.”

Charles Stillman! That was the man that Honey’s great-grandmother had suspected had killed her great-grandfather. Di desperately tried to hide the horror and revulsion that she felt as she realized that she had just been kissed by a probable murderer.

Back to Trixie and Mart...

Now that the strange man who was pawing at Di was no longer being so intimate with her, Mart had calmed down. Trixie was trying to drag him toward the man she was convinced was Thomas Clarke, but he held back, not wanting to take his eyes off of Diana.

“Quick!” Trixie exclaimed. “He’s getting away.”

“I am *not* letting Di out of my sight,” Mart returned, looking back toward the black-haired beauty. Di turned her head, and Mart suddenly realized that her hair was much shorter than it had been just a few moments before. He also was calm enough to process that her purple blouse and black pants had been replaced by a violet dress in a style similar to those he’d seen flappers in old pictures. Instead of the modern windbreaker she had been wearing, a long wool coat with a fur lapel gaped open over the dress.

What the...?

A squeal brought Mart out of his reverie, and he turned. Trixie released her grip on Mart’s arm and was running in the opposite direction. Mart’s blue eyes followed the direction in which his sister was running, and he realized that she was running toward none other than Jim Frayne. But it was not the Jim Frayne who Mart knew so well. The dark blue denim jeans and navy blue sweatshirt that he wore so casually were replaced by a natty-looking suits, and the sneakers that the outdoorsman preferred had been replaced by black brogues. Mart turned his gaze back toward Diana and saw that she was now alone on the bench. The blond stranger was walking away, and Di sat looking visibly shaken.

Mart took the steps two a time and sprinted over to where Di sat. When he was a few feet from her, Diana looked up and recognition sparked in her violet eyes. She fairly flew off the bench and into Mart’s arms.

“Mart!” Di exclaimed. “What the heck is going on here?”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Mart held his girlfriend tight and said, "I don't know. One minute, we were all together in the park, and the next minute, all hell breaks loose."

Diana pulled back from Mart and looked at him with troubled eyes. "I've got more news for you," she said. "That man I was with? He's Charles Stillman."

Mart's blue eyes widened. "*What?* The man Mrs. Wheeler wanted Trixie and Honey to prove killed her grandfather?" At Di's nod, he let out a low whistle and ran a distracted hand through his blond hair.

At that moment, Trixie marched up to the couple, Jim in tow. "Guess what?" she asked without preamble. "That *was* Thomas Clarke that I saw, Mart. Jim just met with him. Apparently, he's Thomas Clarke's FBI handler." Her blue eyes sparkled with excitement, and it was clear that all she could think about was the mystery at hand and not about how they had landed in a decade far different than their own...and from which they might not be able to return.

Di spoke up. "That man I was with his Charles Stillman, Trixie."

Trixie's face lit up. "Wow! This mystery might be easier to solve than I thought back when we were in our time," she said.

The others looked at Trixie in exasperation, and Mart admonished his almost-twin, "Trixie, I hardly think the difficulty of solving the mystery is our biggest problem at this point. Have you not noticed that we're not in Kansas anymore?"

"Yes," she said indignantly, "but we've experienced strange stuff before and survived. Remember when Brian was traveling back in time? Everything turned out all right then," she pointed out.

A sigh escaped Mart's lips. "He wasn't *actually* time traveling, Trixie. He was having visions of the past. That's a little bit different than being stuck in a different time."

Trixie waved her hand airily, still unconcerned. "So we solve the mystery, save the day, and then return to our own time."

Green, blue, and violet eyes stared at her in disbelief. Jim was the first one to break the silence that followed her words. "Uh, Trixie? How do you know that's how it works? What if we're stuck here forever?"

For the first time, the import of their situation seem to register with Trixie. The sparkle in her blue eyes diminished, and her confident, excited look was replaced with a troubled expression. No one spoke as they all considered being stuck in the past forever. Before anyone could speak, they heard a familiar voice behind them.

"Man, am I glad to see you guys!" Dan said as he strode up to them, looking every inch like the lead gangster in one of those movies he was always watching.

"Dan?" Jim asked. "Do I even need ask what you do for a living?" Despite the gravity of the situation, Jim's lips quirked in a half-smile as he took in Dan's getup.

Dan smirked. "I'm pretty sure I'm in style for the times," he said. He looked at Trixie and Mart. "And I'm pretty sure it beats being a maid and cook."

"A maid?" Trixie asked. "Who are you calling a maid?" Everybody's eyes traveled to Trixie's clothes, and as Trixie looked down, to her horror, she realized that Dan was right. She was wearing a uniform that could not be mistaken for anything but a maid's.

Mart couldn't help himself and burst out laughing. "Who says there isn't cosmic irony?"

But Trixie's brain was clicking, and instead of taking the bait, she asked, "All I know is I'm a maid. But it doesn't tell me who I am or where I belong." She started exploring the pockets in her maid uniform as she asked, "Did people carry driver's licenses back in the Twenties?"

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"I don't know," Di said as she opened the beaded purse that hung on her arm, "But maybe there's something that will tell us where we live. Apparently, my name is Daisy Lynch, so at least I know that much."

"What I want to know," Mart said, "is how everyone else apparently sees us as the people from this time period, but we can recognize each other as ourselves."

Dan looked at him sardonically. "Have we *ever* been able to explain the things that happen to us when we're thrown into one of these paranormal mysteries?"

Mart gave him a look that clearly said, "Good point."

Meanwhile, Jim had pulled his FBI identification out of one of the pockets in his suit. He looked at it and said in a surprised voice, "Frayne? According to this, I am William Winthrop Frayne." He looked up at his friends. "The Winthrop can't be a coincidence. I must be related to this man, but I never knew we had an FBI agent in the family."

"That is *so cool!*" Trixie fairly squealed, their precarious situation forgotten at the excitement of discovering that Jim had an FBI relative.

"Apparently, mobsters don't carry ID," Dan reported. "So I'm not quite sure who I am."

Something flickered in Jim's emerald eyes. "Donovan Mangan. On Eighth Avenue."

Four pairs of confused eyes stared at the red-head. He hastened to explain, "Thomas Clarke mentioned that Stillman hung out at a speakeasy run by someone named Donovan Mangan that was located on Eighth Avenue in Hell's Kitchen. I was so discombobulated at the time that the name didn't even register. I bet you're that speakeasy owner, Dan."

"So, it looks like I had a mobster in the family. I'm not quite sure how I feel about that."

"Better than being a maid," Trixie muttered with a disdainful glance at her outfit. She wisely decided to ignore Mart's snicker as he searched his own pockets for some form of identification.

Dan continued, "The character I just met with mentioned Daisy." He looked at Di. "We know from Mrs. Wheeler that Stillman was involved with a dancer at the speakeasy, so that makes sense." Then, his eyes widened.

"What?" Trixie immediately asked, her eagerness apparent. "What is it?"

"The man I just met with said that someone needed to make sure he got rid of the fed—and that someone had better not be distracted by Daisy..." he said slowly, processing the information.

Trixie again clutched at Jim's arm. "That's our proof! That guy was clearly talking about Stillman and Clarke!"

"But he called him a fed, and Thomas Clarke wasn't technically a fed," Dan reasoned.

Trixie shook her head. "I don't think that matters. They may have thought he was a fed and not just an informant. Or maybe they didn't distinguish. We *must* be on the right trail." She waved a hand at their surroundings. "I don't think that the universe would have put us here if we weren't supposed to solve this case." Her eyes lit. "And now maybe we can also prevent the murder and give Honey's family a happier ending."

Jim shook his head. "I don't know if we want to change history *too* much, Trix. I mean, what if that changes things so drastically that Honey's mom and Honey aren't born?"

Trixie's eyes clouded at that thought. "I'd just die if Honey didn't exist."

"Right. So, maybe we should just concentrate on solving this murder and not on trying to change history by preventing it," Mart said.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Trixie agreed but said, "I still find it hard to believe that the universe put us here to allow Honey and me to get an A on this assignment."

Di said, "Maybe it was more about giving Mrs. Wheeler closure than about your grade, Trix."

Trixie blushed. "That's right, Di. I'm being thoughtless again."

As much as Mart liked seeing Trixie's discomfiture at times, other times he didn't, and this was one of those times. He spoke up, changing the subject. "I don't have any ID, but at least the five of us have found each other, even if some of us aren't sure who we are. But we need to find Honey and Brian."

Jim thought a moment and then said, "We all stayed in the park, even if it was different parts of the park, so it stands to reason that Honey and Brian are still around here somewhere."

"Should we stay here and hope that they find us, or should we walk around looking for them?" Mart asked.

"This is where we were when it happened, so maybe they'll find us here," Trixie offered. But although the five waited for their two friends for more than an hour, there was no sign of them. Everyone was starting to get more than a little worried when Jim remembered something.

"It would appear that at least three of us jumped into the bodies of relatives, so it stands to reason that Honey jumped into the body of her great-grandmother."

Trixie brightened. "Then we just need to find a phone book and look up Honey's great-grandmother, and we can find her." In the next moment, however, her smile disappeared from her face. "Unless they don't have phone books in the Twenties?"

Jim smiled. "It doesn't matter if they do, because Honey's grandmother still lives in the same brownstone that's been in her family for generations. I've visited her there, and I can take us right to it."

"Let's go!" Trixie said, brightening again.

"Hang on a second," Dan said. "I don't think it'd be too smart for a mobster to show up on Honey's great grandmother's doorstep. Not to mention the fact that it may not be too healthy for *me* to be seen with *you*."

"I hadn't thought of that," Trixie said, her face falling.

"We know the approximate location of the speakeasy that Charles Stillman was said to frequent. Since I'm apparently the owner, I can head back there." He nodded toward Diana. "And Di can come with me, since that's where she dances."

At Dan's statement, Mart put his arm around Di and pulled her close to him. "No way am I letting Diana go to some mobster's speakeasy," he declared. Di herself didn't look too pleased at the prospect, either.

"Mart, I don't see what other choice that we have," Dan said. "The girl that Honey's great-grandmother's first fiancé was cheating on her with can't exactly come marching up to the front door of her house. I promise I'll take care of Di, and I *won't* let anything happen to her."

Mart turned his blue eyes and stared searchingly into Diana's violet ones. After a moment's hesitation, she nodded. "Dan's right, Mart. We need to play the roles that we've fallen into."

Mart looked his best friend, and he knew that he could trust Dan. That wasn't the problem. It was that didn't trust the kind of life that Dan suddenly found himself in. It was clear the Dan's alter ego ran with a rough crowd. What if he or Di said the wrong thing, unknowingly, because they didn't have the full history of their alter egos? Mart hated to think what would happen.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

He voiced his concerns out loud, and Dan responded, "I'll keep Di away from everyone else. Then, I'll lock myself in my office and say that I've got a lot of business to do and not to disturb me. That'll cut down on a lot of interactions."

Jim spoke up. "It's probably the best we can do, Mart. I'm not happy about this either, but what other choice do we have?"

Reluctantly, the group said their goodbyes, making plans to meet up again in the park the following day at noon. Dan and Di headed off in the direction of the speakeasy, while Jim led Trixie and Mart in the direction of Honey's great-grandmother's brownstone. On the way, Trixie commented, "Mart and I still have no idea who we are, though. Even if we find Honey and she is in her great-grandmother's body, she still can't exactly invite two people who are clearly beneath her station to stay on as houseguests. Where will we stay?"

Mart said, "I found some cash in the pockets of my pants. Maybe we can find a hotel."

The matter was left unresolved because just then Jim pointed down the street and announced, "There it is." The three approached the building and were trying to decide whether they should knock on the front door when Trixie looked toward the back of the property and saw Brian drying a freshly washed, elegant old car. She tapped Jim's shoulder excitedly and pointed to Brian. "Look! There's Brian!"

The trio hurried over to him, and when he looked up and saw them coming, a wide grin split his face.

"Man, am I glad to see you guys! We had no idea where you guys were."

"We? So Honey *is* with you?" Jim asked

Brian nodded. "Yes" he confirmed. "She somehow became her great-grandmother, and I'm apparently her chauffeur, Henry Belden. The older woman who serves as head housekeeper—"

He was interrupted as a woman with curly gray hair and bright blue eyes exited the house from the servants' entrance. "Lillian and Clarence Belden! Where have you been?" The woman scolded as she approached them. Trixie and Mart looked at each other. *Was she talking to them?* The woman marched up to the group standing by the Packard and put her hands on her hips.

"Clarence!" she said, addressing Mart. "*Where* are the groceries that you and Lillian went to purchase?"

"I... I..." It was such fun to see Mart at a complete loss for words that Trixie had to smother a grin. The woman turned to face the young girl. "And I don't know what you're smiling about, young lady. I let you out of your dusting duties because you promised to help Clarence carry the groceries back so that Brian could pick up Mrs. Clarke and not have to worry about driving you two to the grocer's."

Mart murmured, "You even get out of dusting in the past." Trixie wanted to shoot him a dirty look, but she was so intimidated by this dynamo in front of her that she didn't dare.

The woman looked at the two in exasperation. "Please don't tell me that there's nothing to serve for dinner?"

"No, ma'am," Mart said.

"There *is* something for dinner?" the woman asked, peering around for the possible presence of groceries.

"There was some excitement in the park..." Mart began.

At that point, Jim interjected. "I'm sorry, ma'am. It's my fault. You see, I was..."

The woman seemed to notice the man for the first time, and Jim's voice trailed off as she turned her eyes on him. "I'm so sorry, sir. Allow me to introduce myself since my children seem to have forgotten the manners I taught them." She frowned in their direction and then continued with a hand extended. "I'm Elizabeth

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Belden, Lillian and Clarence's mother." She released his hand and waved it at Brian. "And this is my other son, Henry."

Jim smiled. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Belden. I see the whole family serves the Clarkes?" he asked, discreetly searching for information.

"We serve the Morgans, but Mr. Morgan's daughter, Grace, recently wed Thomas Clarke, and they are staying here temporarily until they can find a suitable home. My oldest, Henry, serves as chauffeur, but I suppose that's pretty obvious. My second son, Clarence, has had a love of food since he was a child. He grew up to be the head cook," she explained with no small amount of pride in her voice. "My only daughter, Lillian, will someday be head housekeeper. Or, she will be if she puts her mind to it. My husband, Harold, is the head butler."

"It's refreshing to see such loyalty," Jim commented, floundering for something appropriate to say. He realized by the curious look that she gave him that it might not have been as appropriate as he thought.

"All good families have loyal generations of servants," she said.

"Ah, yes, I suppose that's true," Jim said, hoping to redeem himself. "Again, I apologize for the mishap in the park that caused Tr—Lillian and, er, Clarence to return without the groceries." He hoped that Mrs. Belden wouldn't ask for details of said mishap, because his mind was drawing a total blank about what excuse that he could give her.

Fortunately, she was more concerned about the missing food. "Henry, can you please drive Clarence to the grocer's?" At Brian's nod, Mart moved toward the car. Trixie started to follow, but her "mother's" hand reached out and stopped her. "Not so fast, young lady. I did your dusting, but that meant I didn't have a chance to finish the laundry. I need your help, so you'll not go gallivanting off again."

"No gallivanting off for you again today, Lillian," Mart said with a grin as he opened the car door.

"Whatever, *Clarence*." The emphasis on his name brought the reaction for which Trixie had hoped. She might be a maid, but at least she had a pretty name. If they ever got back to their time, she'd be calling Mart Clarence, for sure.

Trixie turned to the older woman. "Ma'am," she said, unable to bring herself to call her mother. "Mr. Frayne was hoping to speak to Mrs. Clarke." Trixie congratulated herself for remembering to call them by the unfamiliar, formal names instead of Jim and Honey.

"Of course, Mr. Frayne. My daughter will let her know you've come calling." She turned her eyes back to Trixie. "And then you'll immediately come to the laundry room to help me."

"Yes, ma'am," Trixie said meekly.

The three of them headed into the house, and once they crossed through the thick wooden door Trixie marveled at the luxuriousness of the art deco surroundings that managed to blend beautifully with older pieces from the Victorian era. *Too bad Di can't come see this*, she thought. *She'd be in heaven*.

The head housekeeper led Jim to an elegantly appointed sitting room and turned to Trixie. "Mrs. Clarke is in her room. Remember not to dawdle once you've let her know about her guest."

"Yes, ma'am." Trixie threw a panicked look at Jim, wondering just where Honey's...*Grace's* room might be. She headed toward the stairs, and when she was sure that Elizabeth had disappeared into the servants' quarters, she hurriedly returned to the sitting room.

"Where do you think Grace's room might be?" she asked. "I don't want to run into anyone while I'm wandering around lost and create suspicion!"

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Jim closed his eyes. "I believe that most of the rooms for the family are at the left at the top of the stairs. Guest rooms are to the right."

"Thank you!" Trixie said and was gone. She hurried up the stairs and turned left. She was relieved to find the second floor vacant.

"Honey!" she said in a fierce whisper, hoping her voice would carry through the right door, and Honey would hear her. And then, realizing that Grace's father or husband or another servant might be behind one of the doors, she switched. "Grace? Mrs. Clarke?"

One of the doors swung open, and Trixie said a brief prayer that it was her friend who would appear in the hallway. Her prayers were answered, and she was so relieved that she rushed up to Honey and hugged her.

"Trixie!" Honey exclaimed. "Can you *believe* this?"

Trixie shook her head. "I've got to hurry, because the head housekeeper, who is apparently my mother, needs me to help her with the laundry."

Honey looked down at Trixie's uniform. "You're my *maid*?" she asked in horror. Then, realizing the humor of the situation, she couldn't help but laugh. Trixie looked indignant at first, but then she chuckled too.

"I know, right?" Then, she sobered. "Jim is waiting for you down in the sitting room. He's Thomas Clarke's FBI contact."

Honey smiled. "Jim's an FBI agent, and you're a maid. What will the universe think of next?"

Trixie grinned. "I have to go, but Jim will get you up to speed. Mart's off shopping with Brian, so I assume he's filling him in." She gave her friend one last hug and then hurried away. Suddenly, she stopped and turned back. "Oh yeah, you wouldn't happen to know where the laundry area is, do you?"

Honey gave her directions to where the laundry room was in her grandmother's house, hoping it hadn't moved around in the decades since Grace's time, and Trixie sprinted off. Honey headed to the sitting room to find out just what Jim knew.

* * *

Meanwhile, "Donovan" and "Daisy" were navigating their way through Hell's Kitchen. Di gripped Dan's arm, and Dan hoped that no one recognized that Stillman's mistress was seemingly being intimate with him. Then he reasoned that *he* was the mobster, and Stillman probably was afraid of *him*.

Dan noticed that although the crowd was a little more rough looking and more uninhibited in their clothing choices than most of the gentry occupying Central Park, most of them gave him wide berth when they saw him and recognized his ilk. He noticed some people crossed the street to avoid him as well, and for some reason, that amused and depressed him at the same time. It was depressing, because Dan had clawed his way out of that life in this very neighborhood, and now he had been thrown back into it. He tried not to think that way, because *he* wasn't the one who chose this life. Donovan had. And maybe his knowledge of this area and of gang mentality could help him while he was trapped in this body.

Di had obviously noticed other people's reactions, too, because she murmured, "I'm not sure if it's helping or hurting my reputation to be seen with you."

Dan smiled down at her. "Don't worry, doll face. You're still a classy dame in my eyes."

Di smiled and relaxed ever so slightly, but she didn't loosen her grip on Dan's arm. They walked another block or two down Eighth Avenue, and Dan wondered, "It's not like Donovan can advertise his speakeasy. I wonder how we'll recognize it."

Di smiled suddenly. "I think there'll be a sign."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"From the universe?" Dan asked.

"Something much more simple," Di said, pointed to a large sign proclaiming, "Mangan's Hotel." The two smiled at each other and approached the building. The fifteen-story building was impressive but did not look out of place in the neighborhood. The first four stories were travertine-clad, the cream color of these floors contrasting nicely with the dark brown brick of the remaining stories. The mansard roof gave the hotel an elegant appeal.

The pair entered the lobby, and the staff immediately became reverent. The doorman tipped his hat extra low. "Mr. Mangan," he murmured. "Miss Lynch."

Dan nodded toward the man, figuring that the mobster wouldn't smile nor greet his legitimate employees by name. Di, however, smiled widely at the man, acting the part of a woman being treated well above the station to which she had been born and enjoying the attention.

As he crossed the lobby, Dan's eyes sought out someone who looked as they would be a speakeasy employee rather than a legit hotel employee. His eyes lit on a rough-looking man with the tell-tale bulge beneath his suit. He steered Di in the man's direction and suddenly had a thought. He fervently hoped that his hunch was right.

"Mr. Mangan," the man said as Dan and Di approached him.

"I need you to escort Miss Lynch up to her room," he said, banking on the fact that Daisy might have a room in the hotel and assuming this man could lead her to it. "We had an incident in the park, and she's a bit shaken. She's not to be disturbed by anyone once she's there, even Stillman. *Particularly* Stillman."

The man nodded and stepped forward to escort Daisy. Dan looked around, as though someone might be following him. "I'm going to wait here to make sure that we weren't followed, and when you return, I'll need you to come to my office with me."

Again, the man nodded and this time said, "Yes, Mr. Mangan." Di shot Dan a grateful glance as she allowed herself to be escorted away by the man. Although he was rough-looking and she'd hate following him under normal circumstances, she knew he could get her to his room, and he would not disobey his boss' orders.

As Dan waited for the man to return, his eyes scanned the lobby area, taking in his surroundings. Suddenly, he was glad that he had often helped Di study for her art history classes. He recognized the interior as having a decidedly art deco influence, and Dan even realized that it must have been recently redone given when art deco began to rise in popularity. His distant relative had had ten years to profit off of prohibition, and he clearly had invested some of his ill-gotten gains into establishing a classy hotel for his patrons. Dan wondered how many of these patrons were invited to the speakeasy in the basement.

Richly colored Oriental rugs in hues of burgundy and deep red adorned the floor, and luxuriously upholstered chairs and settees in the same color scheme sat atop the rugs, inviting guests to relax in their opulent softness. Three art deco-inspired chandeliers made of French glass hung overhead, twinkling brilliantly. The paneled ceiling was ornate in its detail.

Finally, the man who had escorted Di returned, and Dan allowed himself to be led to the back of the hotel, through a nondescript door labeled "Keep Out," and down a dingy set of stairs. The lower level was fairly labyrinthine, but eventually, Dan was led to a carved oak door. The man stepped aside and waited for Dan to unlock the office. Dan reached into his pocket for the keys that he had found earlier and hoped that he chose correctly among the four that were there. He managed to find it on the second try, muttering something about all keys looking alike.

Dan stepped through the doors and immediately saw the masculine influence. The furniture was very dark, and the paper that adorned the walls was a deep red color. A humidor of cigars sat on the large walnut desk

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

next to an ornate black marble ashtray. Dan crossed the room and sat down in the dark brown leather chair, facing his subordinate.

"I need you to tail Stillman. I've been getting some heat about him and his sloppy ways. That swell needs to make the fed stoolie disappear for good. You let me know what that does and where he goes. I want to know *everything*."

Again, the man nodded. "Yes, boss. Anything else?"

"No. Please make sure I'm not disturbed for the next several hours." Dan suddenly had a thought. "And make sure you post a guard at Daisy's door. Let her know that if she needs me, I'm available. Got it?"

The man nodded and took his leave, shutting the door behind him. Dan leaned back in his chair in satisfaction. He had gotten this far. He opened a drawer in his desk. Now it was time to find some clues that would link the murder of Thomas Clarke to Stillman and the Mob.

Back at the Brownstone...

Honey entered the sitting room to find Jim precariously perched on a mohair swivel chair near one of the windows that faced the garden outside. Even though the body he was traveling in was likely shorter than Jim's over-six-foot frame, he still looked ridiculous in the small chair.

Honey grinned at him as she walked over to where he was sitting. "What on earth are you doing sitting in that chair?"

"That's where she put me!" Jim said with a scowl. "Mrs. Belden, I mean. Where else was I gonna sit?"

"How about on the much bigger couch over here?" Honey gestured with a slender hand toward the much wider sofa on the opposite side of the room.

Jim gave her a sour look but readily got to his feet and settled more comfortably on the larger piece of furniture.

Honey joined him there, running her hand over the rosewood end table that was attached to the sofa. "You know," she mused, "I think this is what they called a 'cosy corner'." She leaned over, inspecting the furniture with a practiced eye. "They used to store things in here like glasses, books and such."

"Maybe you could do a grand tour of all the hiding places later?" Jim said, his voice irritated and impatient.

Honey straightened at his words and closed the small door in the cabinet, which did indeed store a very nice collection of period barware. "Sorry. I got distracted. I wonder what Great-Grandmother did with all of this furniture? It's really nice."

"What anyone else does with furniture? Buys new stuff when the old stuff wears out or goes out of fashion?" Jim rolled his eyes. Then, upon seeing the look on Honey's face, he sighed. "I'm sorry. I just..." Jim fidgeted with his fedora hat, turning it around in his hands. "I'm grouchy. I don't like feeling manipulated—and that's what I feel like this time travel is. Manipulation."

Honey reached over and squeezed his hand. "I know exactly how you feel." She gave him a rueful smile. "Great-Grandmother didn't probably keep any of this furniture anyway when she got her own place."

"If she was anything like our mother, the furniture probably is due to be pulled out and gotten rid of next week to make way for whatever the most up-to-date current fashion is for 1929." The smile on Jim's face showed he was teasing.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Honey giggled at that. "You're right. Mother would give you grief for saying it, were she here, but you're right." She placed her hands in her lap and looked with earnest interest at her brother. "I'm sorry for being distracted. So...talk to me."

Jim glanced toward the door, but Honey shook her head. "We're close enough to the Victorian age—especially that housekeeper," she said in a low voice, "that I'd be best not to be closeted with you behind a closed door. The last thing I need is for my great-grandfather to get the idea that I'm carrying on a sordid affair with you."

Jim sighed. "God. Would that we for *once* have something clear-cut and easy to deal with?" He shook his head. "All right, fine. But don't blame me if someone carts you off to the loony bin after hearing you talk about time travel."

"You'll be there with me, so I'm not worried," Honey said with a wink.

Her brother didn't bother to reply to that. He instead spoke in low tones, telling Honey of his meeting with Thomas Clarke, the little he'd heard of Dan's meeting with the gangster, and who he, Dan and Di were supposed to be. "From what he tells me, he wants to set things up for a sting to catch Charles red-handed with an alcohol shipment for next Tuesday, the 29th." Jim looked at Honey despairingly. "I don't have any idea how to hook up with anyone at the FBI. How am I supposed to set up a sting?"

"And from what we know about his death, whatever happened didn't work right the first time, because Clarke's death was attributed to suicide." Honey tapped a finger against her mouth as she thought. She stilled suddenly and then reached out to grab Jim's hand. "Oh! Jim!"

"What?" he demanded.

"Thomas Clarke supposedly committed suicide at his office—after finding out about the stock market crash." She continued in an eager, low voice, "Maybe that's the problem! Clarke never got to that sting—the one that the FBI set up. Stillman was at Clarke's office and killed him there. So they didn't get him for the murder, and they didn't get him for the corruption."

"But we need to get him on both," Jim said with a frown. "Even if we could prevent the murder at his office, all that's going to do is switch the time and place of the murder. We need to get Stillman on the corruption charges and get him in jail so he can't commit the murder."

Honey gave a little groan. "He didn't show up the first time," she hissed. "How are we supposed to get him to show up *this* time?"

The two siblings sat in silence for a long moment, each scrambling to come up with an idea. Then, suddenly, Jim's face cleared and his lips began to turn up in a smile.

"What?" Honey demanded, her hazel eyes searching her brother's face. "You've thought of something. What is it?"

"Well, we need Stillman to come to the club, right?"

"Yes...?"

"And he's more concerned with finding Clarke than worrying about his shipment."

"Okay..."

"Well, what if we kill two birds with one stone, so to speak?" Jim grinned at her. "We plan a raid on Donovan Mangan's speakeasy. Dan puts pressure on Charles Stillman that he'd better be there with a shipment next Tuesday—*or else*. We catch Stillman with the alcohol and he goes to prison!"

"That's all well and good," Honey said, "but what about Clarke?" She hit the top of the sofa with her fist as she spoke. "We're here to try to help *him*, not worry about the alcohol shipment."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“Stillman’s going to try again and again until he gets Clarke unless we eliminate Stillman from the equation. And the best way to do that is by getting him put in prison,” Jim insisted.

“Yes, I understand that. But what’s to prevent Stillman from going to kill Clarke *first* before he goes to deliver his shipment?” Honey demanded.

“That, my dear, is where you come in.” Jim’s face took on a self-satisfied look that Honey rarely saw on anyone else’s face but Trixie’s.

“Me?”

“Yes, you.” Jim leaned forward and spoke in a hushed, hurried tone. “You need to be a burr to Thomas Clarke’s side on Tuesday. You cannot leave him for even a moment. There is no way that Stillman can make it look as if Clarke killed himself if you are with him all the time.”

Honey gave him an aghast look. “But he could make it look like we both killed ourselves! Or that my great-grandfather murdered my great-grandmother before he killed himself. And then where would we be?” She narrowed her eyes. “Do you have some sort of plan as to how exactly I’m supposed to keep him away from Stillman?”

Jim began to look distinctly uncomfortable.

“Jim?”

“You aren’t going to like it,” he said finally.

“I already know that,” she said with an impatient gesture of her hand.

“I’m going to suggest to him that he make himself scarce on the 29th. He’ll need to distance himself so that there isn’t any suspicion that he was involved in the whole mess. He can’t go to work. He can’t go anywhere where someone could easily find him until the whole raid is over.” He gave Honey a steady look. “And I’m going to suggest that he take his wife with him.”

Honey stared at him blankly for a moment before realization set in and her cheeks went completely pink.

“What? No. Oh, my god. Jim. No.”

“Just keep him occupied. That’s all.”

“Occupied? Jim!” Her voice dropped down to a low, harsh whisper. “There is no way--*no* way—I am having sex with my great-grandfather.”

Jim recoiled. “What? No! I wasn’t suggesting *that*.”

“Then what *were* you suggesting?”

“Just...figure out something to keep him occupied.” Jim’s face had gone as fiery red as his sister’s. “I thought maybe a romantic dinner at a secluded hotel or something. Maybe you could tell him about the baby.”

Honey ran her hands over her face. “I don’t even know if *she* knows that yet.” She gave him an accusing stare. “I don’t even know if she *is* yet.”

Jim’s eyes widened at that. “What? She has to be. Honey!”

“Why? What do you...” Honey’s voice trailed off as realization set in. “Oh, God. Oh, God. She has to be. Because otherwise, I...” Honey took a deep breath before she shook her head. “No, wait. I remember. Mother said that she told him. She told him the night before he died that she was pregnant.”

Jim sagged back against the couch with exaggerated relief and gave her a relieved smile. “Well? See? You *have* to tell him now. Your great-grandmother hasn’t yet. That’ll be the perfect thing to draw his attention away from the raid.”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Footsteps in the hallway had Honey springing to her feet. She turned and tried to hide her initial gasp of surprise when Thomas Clarke walked into the room.

A male version of herself. Or her mother. *Wow.*

Ben was the only natural male from the Hart line, and he looked a great deal more like his father, rather than his mother. Her aunt, her mother and she all looked rather similar, but she'd always assumed their traits were feminine ones. She hadn't realized how devastating those looks could be in a man.

Thomas's hazel eyes had narrowed, focusing on Jim rather than on his wife. "Frayne," he greeted Jim in a cursory fashion. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

Honey glanced between Thomas and Jim and held out her hand toward her great-grandfather with a little hesitant smile. "I was just keeping Mr. Frayne entertained while he waited for you, darling."

Thomas didn't say anything for a moment, his gaze hard as he stared at Jim, but then his entire demeanor softened as he looked at Honey. There was so much love in the hazel eyes that looked at her that Honey felt a sudden stab of wistfulness. It was obvious that Thomas Clarke adored his wife.

And that, more than anything else, firmed her determination that she would prevent this noble, brave man from succumbing to his fate.

Honey walked over to him and it seemed almost as natural as breathing to give him a soft kiss on the cheek. He smelled of rich cigars and a more subtle scent of something sweet—vanilla? She murmured, "Have you been into the cookies again?"

Her reward for the sally—which she had no idea where it came from—was a deep chuckle. "I can't put anything past you, can I?"

"Better not to even try," she said. Honey smiled at him, getting lost in the warm gaze he bestowed on her for a moment before Jim cleared his voice and brought Honey back firmly to the present. Her cheeks went pink and she quickly excused herself from the room. *What in the world am I doing?*

"Grace just must not be entirely gone," Honey reassured herself. "That's all."

Just then, Trixie came down the hallway, her face wild. Honey was startled enough by her friend's appearance to be pulled out of her reverie. "Trixie?"

"Lillian," Trixie reminded her curtly. She tilted her head toward a closed door nearby, and the two young women slipped inside the library.

Fortunately, Grace's father did not appear to be within, so Honey closed the door behind them and turned to look at Trixie in inquiry. "What's going on?"

"Laundry." The word was spat out with so much venom that Honey nearly took a step back away from Trixie. "Did you know that they still do laundry with *washboards* in this house?"

Honey tried, but failed, to hide a smile. "Washboards?"

"I should have stayed around for the dusting," Trixie said with a groan. "The washing is going to take *eons*. I'm never going to get away to do any investigating whatsoever." She shook her finger at her friend.

"Generations of loyal servants? I'm glad my ancestor—whoever he was—got out to the farm in Sleepyside. I don't even like doing laundry with a regular washer and dryer. Scrubbing on a washboard?!"

"Not everything was good in the good old days, I guess," Honey said, her hazel eyes twinkling.

"That's for sure," Trixie grumbled.

"Well, I'll just tell the housekeeper that I need you...for...oh, I don't know. Something or other."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

The door to the library opened and Mrs. Belden came in, glancing suspiciously at her “daughter” before turning to Honey. “Mrs. Clarke. I...I was just looking for Lillian.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Mrs. Belden,” Honey said with a brilliant smile. “I was just coming to look for *you*. I have need of Lillian’s help today.” She lowered her voice to a conspiratorial tone. “I’m planning a surprise for Thomas.”

Mrs. Belden’s face lightened, and she returned Honey’s smile with one of her own. “A surprise? Well, how nice. I’m sure he’d love a special surprise when he returns from his trip.”

“His trip?” Honey stared at her blankly.

“You know...his trip to Washington?” Mrs. Belden gave her a curious look, but continued, “He has to travel for business tonight. He told me he expects to return on the 28th. Has there been a change in his plans?”

“Oh, no. Not that I know of.” Honey waved a hand in a dismissive gesture. “I was just thinking his trip was next week, not this week. Terribly scatterbrained of me.”

Mrs. Belden didn’t reply other than with a nod and then a sharp glance at her “daughter”. She left the two girls in the library to themselves.

“Your great-grandfather is going to Washington?” Trixie demanded. “That’s good, isn’t it? He’ll be away—out of town—while we get everything set up.”

Honey expelled a breath and nodded. “That’ll help a lot.” The thought of how natural that intimate exchange had felt between the two of them a few moments before made Honey very glad that her great-grandfather had plans outside of the city. She was frankly very worried about how much of her great-grandmother’s personality and feelings had been left behind in her body.

She didn’t express this, however, to her best friend, but simply nodded at her. “So...we’ve got to get a surprise planned for Thomas,” she mused.

“We do?” Trixie gave her a surprised look. “I thought that was just a ruse to get us some time to get out of here.”

“Jim thinks I need to find a way to keep Thomas occupied on the 29th. So he doesn’t go near the place where he was murdered.”

“Oh! Well, hmmm...that makes a lot of sense.” Trixie’s blue eyes lit with amusement. “I’m sure you’re the only one who could talk him into staying away from a really cool FBI raid.”

Honey gave her a dark look. “Let’s just go and find your brothers and see what we can do to set up this ‘surprise’, shall we?”

“Whatever you say, boss,” Trixie said with a fully correct curtsy.

“Oh, Trixie.” Honey’s voice was slightly exasperated, but still full of the age-old affection she felt for her friend. Quickly, she ushered Trixie out into the hallway, and the two young women headed for the kitchen to see if they could find the boys.

Meanwhile...

Thomas Clarke’s face changed rapidly once his wife had left the room. He walked over to the door and closed it, turning the key in the old-fashioned lock. “What the *hell* are you doing here?” he demanded.

Jim was so taken aback by the fierce anger on the other man’s face that he wasn’t sure *how* to reply to him.

“I don’t want my wife involved in this mess. She knows too much already. You being here...” He shook his head.

“*She* is the reason I’m here,” Jim spoke in a low voice.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Thomas' head jerked back and he stared at Jim. "What? Why?"

"I've spoken with my..." Jim scrambled for the right words to express himself. "...associates. There's been some concern that Stillman may try to use your wife as leverage with you." He gave the other man a level look. "I've information from a reputable source that Stillman's under a great deal of pressure to kill you."

To Clarke's credit, he didn't immediately laugh off Jim's words. His expression grew troubled. "I knew that was a risk going into this," he said slowly, "but it was a risk I was willing to take."

"A risk you're *still* willing to take?" Jim demanded. "Are you willing to risk your wife's safety as well as your own?"

"Grace isn't in any danger," Thomas said, his voice hard and stubborn. "Good God. Stillman was going to marry her. He wouldn't hurt her."

"Stillman is desperate and unpredictable. Those sorts of men can do anything." Jim pressed the point. "All I need from you is the password for entrance into that speakeasy. My men and I will do the rest." He pointed toward the closed door. "Your primary concern should be that wife of yours. I want the two of you in a safe place when the raid happens. Nothing should connect you to the raid. You need to be somewhere protected. You both do."

Thomas hesitated a long time, running his hand up and down the back of his neck. Finally, he gave Jim a short nod. "All right. For Grace, I'll do it."

Jim repressed a huge sigh of relief and merely acknowledged Thomas' words with a simple, "Good."

"I have business that will take me to Washington until the 28th." Thomas raised an eyebrow at Jim. "Should I send Grace off somewhere? Her father has a home in Maine. I could..."

Jim shook his head. "We don't want her somewhere isolated—far from help." He thought for a moment and said, "Let me find a good place. I'll get her safely there and then I'll come for you before we raid the place next Tuesday."

Thomas held out his hand to Jim, who shook it, and then he unlocked the door to let Jim leave. Jim was about to cross the threshold into the hallway when Thomas' voice stopped him.

"I'd do anything for her," he said quietly. "Anything."

Jim turned to look at Thomas and saw the quiet determination he'd seen so often on his sister's face—the one that spoke of how passionate she was about the people who were important to her—and his own face softened. "Keeping her safe—keeping you *both* safe—is why I'm here."

Thomas looked at him for a moment and then nodded. He stepped out into the hallway and led Jim through to the back of the house, and Jim pulled his hat firmly down on his head and slipped out the door, using his old skills of blending in and not being seen, to disappear from sight.

* * *

The seven Bob-Whites were able to keep their appointment to meet at noon at Bethesda Terrace. Dan had sent room service up to Diana in her room, and she had been able to remain there uninterrupted until Dan had appeared to escort her back to Central Park to meet the rest of their club. Dan had spent the night going through every paper and document in Donovan Mangan's office, trying to get as much evidence as possible together to give to Jim. He had found a secret panel in the office, and it was in the papers he had found behind the panel that he had discovered a proverbial gold mine. Behind the secret panel had lain the real books behind Mangan's business, not the doctored ones that sat in his legitimate office upstairs off of the lobby of the hotel. There were names, dates, locations, income, expenses...everything that Jim's ancestor would need to build a solid case against Mangan and Stillman.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Dan didn't like turning in a member of his own family, but he didn't see what other choice he had. He reasoned that not only had he never met this man, or even heard about him in the family lore, Donovan Mangan had been involved in murder. Family or not, there was a line that had to be drawn. So, underneath his suit jacket all of the evidence was hidden.

Jim looked rather tired as he joined the others on the steps. When Honey commented on it, he explained that he was unsure where he lived, so he had located his office and slept in it. Fortunately, William Frayne kept a spare suit in his office, so at least Jim had been able to change his clothes. It had not made for a comfortable night, but he was able to read through all of the files pertaining to the case. He waved a stack of papers that were relevant to Charles Stillman and Donovan Mangan.

Honey explained that she had been able to request that Brian drive her for a day of shopping, and she had made sure that Lillian's mother allowed "her daughter" to accompany her to help carry her packages. That morning, Honey, as Grace, had also requested an elaborate evening meal that would require Mart to visit the grocer's again to purchase several items. She had offered to give him a ride, and so the four were able to leave the house together. If Elizabeth Belden found her employer's sudden urge to travel with her servants odd, she did not let on.

"We've got to be quick," Trixie said, looking around for anyone who might have been watching the group. "Dan can't be seen with Jim—or really with any of us except Di, for that matter. What do we know so far?"

Dan spoke up as he slid a sheaf of papers from underneath his suit jacket. "Here's proof that Stillman is connected to Mangan. It appears that Stillman inherited two warehouses in Hell's Kitchen from his father. He had been trying to sell them to pay off his debts, but Donovan co-opted them to use for his bootleg operations. There's documentation in here that shows that Stillman knew full well that his warehouses were being used for illegal activities."

"That's good. Now we have the proof that Jim's relative couldn't get!" Trixie said. "That way he won't keep coming after Grace and Thomas. Let's arrest him now!"

Jim shook his head. "It's not that easy, Trixie. Arresting him with Dan's documentation would mean implicating Donovan, which would mean that Dan would go to jail along with Donovan—or be killed in retaliation for providing the feds with proof."

"Well, then what do we *do*?" Trixie asked in frustration.

"I think it all comes down to that raid on the 29th. We get Stillman then, save Thomas Clarke's life, and hopefully get returned to our own time," Jim said. "With Dan on the inside, we can make sure that the raid goes down like we want it to."

"Did you meet any of your FBI colleagues?" Dan asked. "Do you know how to set up a sting?"

Jim moved his head around in a manner that neither indicated "yes" nor "no." He rustled through some of the papers that he had found in William's office until he found the one he was apparently looking for. "According to this, another agent named Schneider is helping me. I figure I'll just give him instructions to set up the raid, and he can handle all of the FBI details that I'm clueless about."

Dan nodded. "Not a bad plan. I've been having Donovan's underlings do as much stuff as I can, too." He slapped Mart on the back. "It got Di here to her room with an armed guard who made sure that Stillman didn't bother her."

Mart's blue eyes were grateful as they eyed his best friend. "Thanks, man. I should have known I could trust you to take care of her."

Di's violet eyes sparkled. "I even got room service and breakfast in bed out of the deal."

Trixie groaned. "Breakfast in bed sounds fantastic. I have more chores here than at Crabapple Farm!"

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Brian looked around. "Let's rein it in, Trix. We need to hurry, remember." He recapped, "So, Jim will get his fellow agent to plan the raid for the 29th. Dan will ensure that Stillman gets to the right place. How are we keeping Thomas Clarke safe?"

"Honey and I are handling that. Right now he's in Washington, DC until the 28th. I already told him that there's a plot against him, and he needs to remain safe—and keep Grace safe as well. He's expecting that I'll take him to a safe house on the 29th." Jim looked at Dan. "Can you protect him there? You're the only one besides me with a weapon, and I should be in on the raid. If anyone from the Mob makes it to the safe house, you can pretend you got there first or something."

Dan considered that and finally said, "That could work. But how are we going to lure Stillman to the raid? He's supposed to be off killing Clarke, so he's not supposed to be there."

"I'll do it," six pairs of surprised eyes turned toward Diana.

"Absolutely not," Mart said when he recovered. "There is no way that a girlfriend of mine is going to act as bait for some psychopath who's involved with the Mob. No. No way."

Diana remained calm as she looked at the blond. "So what do you suggest, Mart? Who *is* going to lure him?"

Mart looked around at his fellow Bob-Whites. "Dan," he said stubbornly.

"We just determined that Dan is going to keep Thomas Clarke and Honey safe," Di pointed out.

Brian spoke up then. "Only because Dan was the only one with a weapon." He turned to Dan. "Can you get me a weapon before the 29th?"

"Of course," Dan said. "Donovan has several pistols behind his secret panels. I can get you one."

At that, Honey's hazel eyes filled with concern. "Brian..." she began.

"It's fine, Honey," Brian reassured her. He reached for her hand, realized she was above his and then settled for an awkward pat. "You know that Tom Delanoy taught me how to use a gun properly, so I can handle it. Chances are, if no one gets wind of the safe house, then I won't need to use it anyway."

"Actually, it's a really good idea for Brian to act as protector," Jim said. "I told Thomas I'd get him to safety on the 29th. Who better to take him to safety than his chauffeur?"

Brian nodded. "That'll work."

"So, Jim's leading the raid, Dan's getting Stillman to it, Honey is keeping Thomas Clarke occupied, and Brian is protecting the two of them," Mart said, not noticing that Honey blanched at his turn of phrase about Clarke. "What are Di, Trixie, and I going to do?"

Jim looked at Trixie, noting the eagerness in those bright blue eyes of hers. There was no way he could let her get involved with the raid, but he knew it would be a daunting task to keep her away. He knew she would not like what he had to say, but he cleared his throat and threw caution to the wind.

"I'm sure Mrs. Belden will be expecting you and Trixie to be at home helping out, Mart."

Trixie stared at him in disbelief for about two seconds before her temper kicked in. "If you think that I am dusting or washing dishes or scrubbing laundry with a *washboard* while the rest of you are out catching a murderer, you don't know me very well at all, Jim Frayne!"

"I do know you, Trixie, but what excuse are you going to give Mrs. Belden for leaving the brownstone?" Jim asked.

Trixie pointed a finger at Honey. "Honey will tell her that she needs me to be with her for the surprise for Thomas. Honey already told her that she needed my help planning the surprise. It wouldn't be all that unusual for me to accompany her to make sure it goes off, right?"

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Everyone looked at Honey, as she had been the only one of them born with servants. "That could work. That means that Trixie, Brian, and I will be with Thomas."

Trixie shook her head. "No, that's just what we'll tell Elizabeth. I'll be involved in the raid!"

"How?" Mart demanded. "The 1920s weren't exactly known for feminism. What kind of a raid would involve a woman?"

"I don't know," Trixie said stubbornly. "But this one's gonna."

"Trixie, please," Honey tried to reason with her friend. "It's true. Having a woman involved would not only be downright unheard of, but it also might spook the men. You don't want the raid to fail, do you?"

Trixie shook her head and sighed. "No," she said emphatically but with clear disappointment. "I guess not. But it's going to *kill* me to be on the sidelines."

"I know," Jim said, giving her hand a gentle squeeze, "but we've got to work with what we've been given. And a broad being in on gangster business would be unlikely back in the day."

"Who are you calling a broad, Frayne?" Trixie asked, but her eyes twinkled, indicating that her good humor had been restored.

"I want Di at the safe house, too," Mart said. He held his hand up to forestall any protests or questions. "All we have to tell Clarke is that Di is Stillman's mistress, she helped set him up, and now she's in danger and needs protection. Clarke, of all people, will understand that."

"Okay, and what about you, Mart?" Dan asked. "Where will you be in all of this?"

Mart bowed deeply. "Honey, of course, will need her cook to create the perfect meal as part of her surprise for Thomas." He looked at Dan. "Tom Delaney taught me a lot about guns, too. If you can get both Brian and me guns, it'll double the protection."

Dan nodded. "I can do that."

"Where will we find a safe house?" Di wanted to know.

Jim said, "That's one thing I'll assign to Schneider. He should know how to secure one." He looked around. "We've been here long enough, I think," he observed. "We've got the basics of a plan. Let's set as much of it in motion in place as we can and meet here again on the 28th at three o'clock to hammer out the final details and bring each other up to date. That's when Dan will bring Mart and Brian the two extra pistols. Everybody stay safe in the meantime, you hear?"

Everyone nodded their heads solemnly and promised to be careful. Once again, they headed their separate ways to play their roles and do the best that they could to keep up appearances before they were able to put their plan into action on the 29th.

During the next several days, Jim immersed himself in FBI procedure and tried to keep up with his caseload, visiting Trixie and Honey secretly at night for advice on crime-solving. Dan did his best to keep up appearances as a mobster, running the speakeasy with an innate instinct that he did not know he had. He did his best to keep Stillman away from Di, but it was difficult on the nights that "Daisy" performed at the speakeasy. Stillman was always in attendance on those nights, and he always expected to be able to follow Daisy to her room. Dan kept him in check by reminding Stillman that he had a job to do, and it wouldn't do for him to be distracted by some dame...no matter what her gams looked like.

Finally, Di had said something to Charles that so obviously put him off that Dan had to know what she had said. Di had leaned in conspiratorially and informed Dan that she had told Charles that she was having female troubles, and that had sent him scurrying away...fast. Dan had thrown back his head and laughed, wondering why everyone felt the need to protect Di when she was clearly capable of protecting herself.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Brian took pride in the upkeep of the Packard and the maroon Ford Model A Town Car with the black accents that was Grace's father's choice of automobiles. Trixie, as she grudgingly performed the various household chores expected of her, would often look out the window to see Brian painstakingly wiping the car dry after a wash. She remembered what she had gone through to get him his jalopy, and she felt renewed pleasure at giving him something that obviously gave him so much joy.

Mart was having a ball in the kitchen, whipping up meals for his employers as well as his own family. His love of food served him well, as had learning tidbits from Moms in her kitchen at Crabapple Farm. As a matter of fact, when Elizabeth Belden declared that she was going to keep track of some of his recipes to pass down to future Belden generations, Mart began to wonder about the circularity of time. Had Moms' recipes traveled back in time to become the very recipes that her mother-in-law would teach her in the future? His head had begun to ache with the pondering, so he soon gave up that line of thought and concentrated on cooking.

Honey ran the brownstone, drawing on her experience as her mother's secretary and using techniques that she had watched Miss Trask use when running the Manor House. It was fun to get to know her great-great-grandfather, too. He was a kind man, but very driven and often distracted taking care of his business.

All of the Bob-Whites were fascinated listening to the news of the day. Bank runs, something that they had only read about, began to become more commonplace, and it was obvious that a financial crisis was looming. The mood was tense, and Grace's father began staying even later at work, ensuring that his family's finances would not be ruined when the crisis finally hit. He was very careful to keep his worries from his daughter, but because Honey knew what was imminent, she was able to recognize the depth of the worry behind the constantly furrowed brow and the distracted tone of his conversations with her.

All seven of them knew that they would be a witness to history, seeing the events of one of the most defining days of the twentieth century unfolding before them. After meeting one last time on October 28, 1929, to firm up their plans, they also hoped that they would be changing one bit of history for the better.

* * *

The morning of October 29th dawned overcast and chilly. The gray sky only added to Jim's gray mood as he rolled to sit up from the lumpy couch on which he'd been sleeping for the past week. He rubbed his eyes wearily and looked around at the untidy little office.

In some ways, it reminded him of his great-uncle's rambling old house when he'd first entered it. Piles of paper were stacked on the desk along with newspapers, heavy library books and case files through which he'd been looking.

He wasn't any more ready to lead a Prohibition-era FBI raid than he had been a week ago. Jim yawned and stretched, trying to iron out the kinks in his back, when there was a brisk knock and the door opened to let in the short, sturdy-looking man who he'd been spending a great deal of time with over the past week. "Mornin', Schneider," he said with a half-hearted smile.

Theodore Schneider looked crisp, cool and collected in his freshly pressed suit, dark blue tie and gleaming white shirt. He lifted his hat enough to just clear his head before settling it back down there again. "Have you been sleeping here again, Frayne?" He shook his head. "You'd better be careful. Virginia'll think you're sleeping with some other dame."

The mythical Virginia had become rather epic in his mind. He had gathered, from Schneider's teasing, that Virginia Lee was William Frayne's faithful, long-suffering girlfriend. If Jim's own experience of working for the FBI during 1929 in New York City was anything to go by, Virginia did not likely see much of William Frayne.

"Her thinking that would be a lot more interesting than what I've actually been doing." Jim groaned as he got to his feet. "That couch is made of rocks. It has to be."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Schneider laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "You ought to go home. Have a shower and get changed into some fresh clothes. You'll feel like a new man."

Jim would have loved to have followed the other man's advice, but even after searching through his entire office, he still hadn't found anything that listed his home address. William Frayne was too cagey for his own good. "I've got a home somewhere? I seem to have forgotten it. I'm lucky I remember my own name, let alone my address."

"I'll get us a cab and we'll go there." Schneider's demeanor continued to be cheerful. Apparently, raids were things FBI agents normally looked forward to. He couldn't figure out why else the other man was so damned happy.

Stop complaining, he warned himself. *You've got work to do.*

"All right," he said out loud. Jim shrugged on his discarded suit coat, tied his brogues on his feet and then grabbed his long wool overcoat and hat. He gestured toward the door. "After you."

Jim hesitated and let Theodore precede him into the street, once they'd reached the ground floor of the field office's building, hoping that Theodore would know his home address and be able to give it to the cab driver.

Luck was with him, and the other man did exactly as he'd hoped. Within a short period of time, the cab pulled up in front of a non-descript seven-story building. "Go on in and get ready. I'll be back to get you in an hour," Schneider said.

Jim nodded and extricated himself from the cab. He passed the doorman, who seemed to recognize him, with a smile and a tip of his hat before greeting the elevator boy, who apparently also knew him by sight. A few moments later, the elevator doors opened onto a floor with only a few doors as possibilities as entrances for his residence.

He waited until the elevator doors had closed, pulling out a set of keys from his pocket, and then traveled down the hallway, trying the doors furthest from the elevator first.

The second door he tried opened easily with the fourth key he'd tried on his ring. With a sigh of relief, Jim entered the apartment, locking the door behind him.

The place was small and sparse, with a couple of older pieces of Victorian-era furniture in the living room, and a double bed with an armoire in a bedroom off the living room. The kitchen and bath made up the back of the small apartment, the bathroom off of the bedroom, and the kitchen off of the living room.

Jim went into the bedroom, shedding his wrinkled suit as he went. He was pleased to see at least two other suits hanging in the armoire and crisp folded shirts and collars in the drawers underneath the hanging clothes.

He stopped by one of the nightstands that flanked the bed, drawn by the photo frame there. It was one of the only decorative pieces in the place, so it immediately drew his attention. A very pretty blonde with crimped hair in a beaded flapper-style dress beamed at him from the picture frame. "The famous Virginia," he murmured to himself. "Old Will's got good taste." He replaced the picture on the small table. "Wonder if he ends up marrying her?"

With a little cheery whistle, Jim headed to the bathroom and thanked the gods above for hot water, soap and a fresh set of clothes.

Meanwhile...

"Father?" Honey poked her head into the study, where her great-great-grandfather sat behind his desk, reading one of the long paper trails from the ticker tape machine near him.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

He looked up at her, and Honey was saddened to see how deeply the lines of worry had been etched into his face. “They’re selling like mad men.” The words were almost to himself, as if he didn’t even notice her standing there.

Soft-hearted Honey hurried into the room and threw her arms around the older man. “It’ll be all right, Papa. No matter what happens.”

His face lightened for a moment and he patted her awkwardly on one of the arms that wrapped around him. “I’ve done my best—for you and Thomas.” He blew out a breath. “I think we’ll weather this storm.”

“I have faith in you,” she whispered before kissing him on the cheek. She straightened then and looked down at him in concern. “Will you be all right? Thomas and I will be gone until at least tomorrow—maybe past Halloween.”

“Go, my dear,” he said with a half-hearted smile. “I’ll be fine.”

Casting him another worried look, Honey impulsively hugged the older man before she hurried out of the room again and nearly ran smack-dab into Trixie. “Oh, Tr...I mean, Lillian!”

Trixie shook her head. “Honey,” she hissed. “You’ve got to be more careful!”

“I can’t get used to calling any of you by the names you have here,” Honey admitted as she looked at her friend with a rueful smile. “They just don’t fit.”

“Well, I’m still trying to wrap my mind around Jim being an FBI agent, so I guess we’re in the same boat,” Trixie said with a little laugh. She grabbed her friend’s arm and gave her a tug. “Mart and Brian have everything in the car, and it’s packed up. We need to get going.”

“Oh. Oh! Okay. Right.” Honey followed her friend down the hallway. She placed a bright red cloche hat over her hair, tucking the strands carefully underneath. She then pulled her coat off of the coat rack near the door and grabbed the small suitcase she had placed near the rack. Trixie opened the door and Honey followed her out onto the porch and then down the stairs toward the street where Brian waited near the Packard.

Trixie got into the front seat to sandwich between her brothers, and Brian then held the door open for Honey, trying to keep his face stoic.

Honey, however, could see the dark look in his brown eyes. He’d been holding up admirably during the week, driving her where she needed to go, being careful not to be seen as stepping across that distinct servant line, but it had been hard on him. She also didn’t like the constant reminder of her family’s wealth being shoved into his face.

There was no time or privacy to reassure him, however, as Grace’s husband was waiting in the car, just beyond the open door. Honey gave Brian a small smile, which he noticed but did not respond to, and then slid onto the seat next to Thomas.

“What’s going on?” she asked in a soft voice as Brian closed the door behind her.

“I spoke to Mr. Frayne this morning.” Thomas squeezed her hand with his. “It’s all been arranged.”

“Good,” Honey said simply. She let her hand rest in Thomas’, but her mind was already elsewhere. She hoped—*fervently* hoped—that Jim, Dan and Di were able to set the wheels in motion. She looked across at Thomas’ face, the one that continually showed so much love for his Grace, and knew, at that moment, why her great-grandmother had never married anyone else. She tightened her hand briefly around his. *He’s alive. We’ve got to keep him that way. For Grace, for Grandmother, for Mother.*

For me.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

The shades had been pulled over all the windows other than the front and back one. She settled back against the seat, praying and hoping all the while that they'd get through it all in one piece.

Brian started up the car and pulled out onto the street. None of them saw the Studebaker Big Six sedan slip out of its parking space nearby to follow them down the busy Manhattan street.

Across Town...

Dan thought to himself that if he survived the evening's festivities, he'd sleep for a week. Donovan Mangan apparently had quite an arsenal of men at his disposal, but even they were not enough to warrant him absenting himself on the night of a major alcohol delivery to the speakeasy. Mangan was, he had found, known for his paranoia and his great, obsessive attention to detail.

In retrospect, Dan thought his relative would have made an excellent legitimate owner of a restaurant or hotel. Service in his place was second to none. The bar gleamed, the tables were romantic and beautifully set, and the dancers were professionals, accompanied by old-school jazz musicians. Dan looked around the fastidious, superb-looking speakeasy and wished his father could have seen it.

But, again, his father had been an altar boy, a patriot and a soldier. Gangsters and speakeasies, no matter how decked out they were, would not have been something of which his father would have approved.

Uneasily, Dan ran a hand down the back of his neck. "Not me, Pa. Him. Not me." His low, muttered words had one of the waitresses glancing his direction, but upon seeing he hadn't addressed her, her blue eyes immediately darted away, turning to focus on the table she was setting.

With a grunt of approval, Dan turned on his heel and walked out of the room, climbing up one of the secret back staircases to the floor where most of the staff stayed. He nodded curtly to the bodyguard outside Di's room, unlocked the door and entered, locking the door behind him.

Di looked up, startled, and then calmed down upon seeing him enter the room. "I am so jumpy," she said in a low voice. "Every time I hear someone in the hallway, I think it's all over." She shook her head. "I don't know how anyone goes through with this kind of life. Always looking over your shoulder for a cop to haul you off to jail or some bad guy who's going to slit your throat?"

Dan swallowed hard, a rush of unwanted memories flooding his brain. "Yeah, not fun."

Di clasped his arm with her hand, her violet eyes warm with sympathy. "I can't imagine, sometimes, Danny, how you ever survived it."

"You do what you have to," he said, shrugging as if he didn't care, even though every cell of his highly active conscience was firing the full realization of what he was doing at that moment in time at him and not liking it a bit.

"Any luck getting a hold of Stilman?" Di asked as she grabbed one of the silk stockings to pull over one long, shapely leg.

Dan stared for a moment before his remembrance of his best friend kicked in and he averted his eyes to stare in fascination out the window that overlooked the city outside. "No. I've tried calling his home and his office a couple of times. Old-fashioned phones suck. I don't know how to reach him short of sending some of my guys out to look for him."

"I'll go," Diana said as she slipped her foot into one of the black patent-leather Mary Janes which finished her outfit.

"What? No. I thought we decided all of that. You're going to the safe house with the others. Jim has it all arranged," Dan said in a firm voice.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"I can't. Not yet, anyway." Di adjusted her dress, jostling her chest into place under the form-fitting black-fringed dress.

Dan closed his eyes. "Seriously, Di, must you? I'm only human."

Di looked up, a question on her face, and upon seeing the expression on his, giggled. "Sorry. It's just that this dress is so tight. I don't think Daisy was quite as well endowed as I am."

"Well, you-as-Daisy are endowed plenty," he retorted, "and my best friend is your boyfriend. So cut it out."

Di adjusted her long strands of pearls and gazed at herself in the mirror a moment before nodding decisively. "Good. All ready."

Dan opened his eyes again. The restlessness was back in full force with an edginess he couldn't begin to explain. "Di...I told you..."

"It's Daisy," she said and patted him on the cheek, "and I've got to go get Stillman." She put a finger to his protesting lips. "Don't argue with me. You can't leave here before the shipment arrives, and none of the others have the influence on Stillman to get him here."

He was quiet for a long time, struggling with what the right thing was to do. Finally, he acquiesced. "Take Randolph with you," he urged.

Di wrinkled her nose as she thought of the silent, muscled man who'd stood outside her door for most of the week she'd been in the hotel. "Dan..."

"If you want to get Stillman," he said in a low, rough voice, "you'll have Randolph with you. Otherwise, you're not going."

Di scowled at him, but finally, the scowl disappeared. "Hmm...he might prove influential to getting Stillman here."

"Exactly." Dan had been speaking in quiet tones the entire time he'd been in the room, but now he raised his voice to a pitch he was certain Randolph could hear. "C'mon, you lousy dame. I don't have all night."

"Hold your horses," Di immediately replied, her voice one long Brooklyn whine. "I gotta get my coat." With a practiced flounce, she grabbed the long overcoat and threw it on over her shoulders. Then, she headed toward the door, which Dan unlocked, and the two of them exited out into the corridor.

"Randolph," Dan said as he re-locked the door.

"Yes, boss?" Randolph gazed at Dan with the same, eerie, unblinking stare he'd given Dan every other time he'd talked to him.

"I want Charles Stillman back here tonight. He's the one who's set up this shipment, and I want him here to help me unload it." Dan puffed out his chest and swaggered a little. "It's about time that high-hat rich boy understood who was in charge of this operation."

Randolph nodded. "So I should go grab him for you?"

"Take Daisy here with you. She can help you *persuade* him." Dan gave Di what he thought was a pretty spectacular leer, lingering on first her "gams" and then her chest before returning to meet her violet eyes. Randolph let out a rusty chuckle—as if it had been some time since he'd last laughed.

Di, on the other hand, merely looked bored.

Dan could barely keep his lips from twitching.

"All right, boss. I'll take care of it." Randolph then looked at Daisy. "C'mon, missy. Let's go."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Dan fought to conceal the reluctance he felt upon letting Di out of his sight, but Randolph had been, he thought, a loyal minion to him, and he had no reason to hurt “Daisy”—either for the bad guys or for the feds.

He let out a long breath as Di and Randolph disappeared from view and then turned on his heel to go back downstairs to the speakeasy to ready the storeroom for its impending delivery.

On the Way to the Safe House...

Brian had glanced at least a half dozen times in the mirror before Trixie, who was sitting next to him, keyed up with excitement, said, “What are you looking at?”

Brian didn’t speak for a few moments, but Mart, instead, said in a low voice, “We’re being followed.”

“What?” Trixie scooped closer to Brian to try to peer into the rearview mirror, but Brian elbowed her away.

“Stop that,” he said in an irritated voice. “I’m trying to drive.”

“Who’s following us?” Trixie demanded.

“Three guesses, and the first two don’t count,” Mart said, his voice as testy as his brother’s.

“Is this what happened the first time?” Trixie asked. She spoke barely above a whisper, glancing over her shoulder at the couple in the back. Honey was keeping Thomas occupied with a string of seemingly random conversation.

“All we know was what Honey’s mother said, and you know how time can make stories change.” Brian glanced again in the rearview mirror. “I don’t know if any of the servants was with him, but he was killed in his office.”

“But we’re not going to his office,” Trixie said.

“That may just change the location of his murder,” Brian said grimly, “not the fact of it.”

Mart pulled out his Colt pistol from his holster. “I really hope I don’t have to use this,” he muttered.

“Have it out and ready,” Brian said as he neared the large hotel in which Jim’s FBI friend, Schneider, had sectioned off a couple of rooms for a safe house. “If there’s any trouble, it’s going to be between the car and the inside of the hotel. I can’t see him following us inside and being marked that way. He isn’t going to leave the car.”

“Trouble?” The word came from the back seat. Thomas’ voice was severe and all-too-knowing.

“We’ve been followed, sir,” Brian said. He turned around in his seat to look at Thomas. “Both Clarence and I are armed. Mr. Frayne saw to that, and we’re good shots, both of us.”

“Hopefully, that won’t be necessary,” Honey said suddenly. She leaned forward and grabbed her small suitcase, handing Thomas a buttoned jacket and a cap. “Quick. Put these on.”

As Thomas stared at her, Honey pulled out a dark fedora hat and a suit coat that was a close enough match to the dark pants Mart was wearing. “You put the coat on, M...Clarence, and pull the hat down on your head to shield your face.”

The real Clarence, Honey had learned, after seeing a photograph the proud Elizabeth had shown her, actually did not have the dark good looks that had obviously been passed down through generations from the Harold who worked for her great-great-grandfather to Brian in the present. She was so used to the sandy blond curls of Mart, Trixie and Bobby, that she’d almost forgotten that those were a Johnson trait, not a Belden one.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Clarence and his sister, Lillian, had the same sort of friendly, open faces that she associated with the younger Beldens, but they had a rather stubbornly straight light brown hair. Hair that she hoped was a close enough color to Thomas' to be mistaken for it.

Thomas was busy switching into the coat and cap she'd provided him. "How do we get into the hotel?" he murmured.

"We won't be entering here," she said. Honey pulled off her red hat and handed it to Trixie, who took her own more shabby, dark one off and handed it to Honey. Then, the two young women exchanged coats as well—Honey's woolen coat with its fur stole for Trixie's dark plain one.

With a careful tucking of her hair around the brim of the hat, Honey nodded in satisfaction. "You two...back here. Quickly."

It took a bit of calisthenics on both Mart and Trixie's parts, but they soon had joined Thomas and Honey in a crumpled heap in the back seat.

Thomas looked at Honey in dismay. "They'll be sitting ducks. We can't...Grace!"

Brian had already gotten out of the car and walked around the side and, with a flourish, opened the door for Mart and Trixie to exit. Mart had already pulled out his gun as he waited for Trixie to exit.

"You'll see about the suitcases, Henry?" Trixie said as she exited, waving her hand airily.

Brian gave her a pointed look but nodded. "Yes, ma'am." On the pretense of straightening his jacket, he grabbed his pistol in anticipation. Once Trixie had vanished into the hotel, he exchanged a grim look with his brother.

"Be careful," Honey whispered.

Mart took a deep breath, pulled his hat more firmly down over his head and exited the car.

Brian was not watching his brother, however, but staring at the Big Six sedan, which had sped up upon seeing Mart extricate himself from the car. Time seemed to screech to a halt for him at that moment. He reached forward with one hand to slam the car door. The other hand reached out for his brother, yanking him full-body toward the ground.

The rapid rat-a-tat-tat of gunfire exploded all around them. Screams echoed throughout the street and people began to run toward the hotel, knocking over the doorman in their efforts to get into the hotel. Brian fired a few shots toward the car, but the car was already racing away, making his shots futile.

The car's tires squealed as they sped off down the street. Once the car had disappeared from view, Brian's frantic gaze turned to his brother. "Are you all right? Mart?"

Mart got to his knees and let out a long breath, rubbing his face in disbelief. "Yeah, yeah. I'm okay."

Then, Brian opened the car door. "Mr. Clarke? Mrs. Clarke? Are you all right?!"

Thomas was helping Honey back to the seat. They'd both hit the floor of the car after Brian had closed the door. "I can't believe it," Thomas said, shaking his head. "Shooting at us! In front of a hotel! In front of all these people!"

"Let's not stay out here any longer," Brian urged. "Quick. Inside. Before they come back."

Several FBI agents, upon hearing the gunfire, had rushed out of the hotel. With a brisk efficiency that took Honey's breath away, they whisked Thomas and Honey into the hotel, leaving Brian, Mart and Trixie to garage the car and bring the luggage inside.

Meanwhile...

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Randolph drove up to the front of a very opulent-looking building. The doorman waiting in front of the building eyed them with a measure of distaste, but, seeing as how the two of them remained in the car, he didn't bother with them.

"Aren't we going inside?" Di ventured, glancing over at Randolph.

"Wait."

It was the first word Randolph had spoken since they'd left Mangan's Hotel a half-hour earlier. Di was ready to climb the walls, ready to take some sort of action—to be *done* with the whole thing. For once, she understood Trixie's need to "do".

She fidgeted during the long wait, playing with the fringe on her dress and continually looking out the window to see if Stillman would appear.

Finally, after about a half hour more, a Big Six sedan pulled up behind them, and Charles Stillman got out of the back seat of the car, looking more than a little shaken. The car immediately peeled out, leaving Stillman staring after them from his place on the sidewalk.

Di glanced again at Randolph, who gave her one short nod. Then, she opened the door to the car and got out. "Honey!" she squealed.

Stillman turned at the sound of her voice, and she was surprised to see how haggard and...well, *frightened*, he looked.

"Oh, baby, what's wrong?" she crooned, hurrying up to him, hoping that she looked the part of a solicitous floozy. *A solicitous floozy?* "I missed you at the club. Mr. Mangan's all over me 'cause you're not there. He says tonight's the night and you need to be there *or else*." She shivered in a dramatic fashion. "What's he talkin' about?"

"Nothing," Stillman said, his voice distracted and his gestures impatient. "I'm not going anywhere near that club."

"What?" Di stared at him in dismay. "Charlie." She used her best wheedling voice, the one that had never failed to get any of the Bob-White men to do what she'd wanted them to. "You can't let me go back and face him without you. He *told* me..."

"If you were smart, you'd be nowhere near that club, too," he said in a low harsh whisper. "The FBI's gonna raid it tonight."

Di didn't have to pretend to give him a dumbfounded stare. The expression on her face was real. "What?"

"It's gonna be raided. They know we have a shipment tonight. Best thing to do is to leave and not come back."

How does he know? Di was beginning to panic. If they couldn't get Stillman there, everything would fall apart. Would they be stuck in the 1920s forever? Di looked nervously over at the car where Randolph sat, his quiet, imposing presence making her even more nervous. "Charlie, there's always a rumor about raids. What's so special about tonight?"

"I know. Trust me. I know." He gave her a hard look. "If you're smart, you'll vamoose. I know that's what I'm gonna do."

But before Stillman could leave her and dart back into the hotel, Randolph had gotten out of the car and made his way over to the younger man. He said in a low, gravelly voice, "Join the lady in the car."

Di could see that the business end of a pistol was poking through Randolph's coat. She paled as she looked at Stillman, who looked wild and desperate. "Charlie," she begged, "just do it."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Charlie looked around him for help, but the doorman, sensing trouble, had stepped just inside the door and was staring pointedly in the opposite direction, determined not to see anything. Guests inside the hotel were too far away for assistance, and the sidewalk was empty of people other than the three of them.

With his shoulders sagging in defeat, Charles accompanied Di and Randolph to the car.

Di's mind raced with possibilities as the car made its way back to Mangan's Hotel. *Someone tipped Stillman off. Who? Why? Could this be why Stillman never got caught?*

He's not the only one who's corrupt.

Near Mangan's Hotel...

Jim lingered over a piece of pie as he waited for Schneider to return. He'd seen the various federal agents arrive, getting into position at various points in the hotel lobby, waiting for the signal to head downstairs to the speakeasy.

He'd been surprised at the continuous, steady stream of people entering the hotel, clearly dressed for a night out on the town. Everyone had been brimming with the horrible news about the stock market's crash. The folks here, however, were determined to lose their worries in the bottle, he thought. To dance one more night gaily and freely before reality truly set in.

He couldn't imagine having everything you'd worked and hoped for gone in one fell swoop. It just boggled the mind.

The few agents he'd spoken to had been fervently glad they'd had little funds to put into the stock market.

"Terrible business," one of them had said to him while shaking his head. "All those millionaires losing their shirts."

"What's so terrible about that?" Another one barked out a laugh. "Now they know what the rest of the world feels like."

Jim was more and more anxious to return to his own time. The little he'd read about the Great Depression had convinced him he'd want no part of it. Jim glanced down at his watch. *Damn it, Schneider. Where the hell are you?*

A few moments later, he was surprised to see a white-faced Di entering the hotel on Charles Stillman's arm, a broad-shouldered thug propelling Stillman along with what looked to be a pistol. Di didn't see him, and he didn't want to break his cover to hail her, in the event that Charles Stillman knew William Frayne by sight.

Something was wrong—terribly wrong.

Jim finished the pie, not tasting a whit of it. Finally, he saw Schneider enter the hotel and signal surreptitiously to the others. Jim tossed a few coins on the table and exited the dining room to follow the others to the speakeasy below.

"What took you so long?" Jim asked under his breath as he caught up with Schneider. Schneider's face was set and almost angry. "What happened?" he demanded.

"An attack on Thomas Clarke and his wife is what happened," Schneider shot back.

"What?" Jim had to lengthen his stride to keep up with Theodore's furious pace toward the back of the hotel where the stairs were which led to the speakeasy underneath the hotel. "Are they all right?"

"Yes. The chauffeur was pretty quick thinking. Got Clarke down on the ground before the shooting started. Almost like he knew it was coming."

Schneider's voice was speculative and Jim glanced at him, not understanding the tone in the other man's voice.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

“So they’re safe. Right? No injuries.”

“No injuries.”

The two men followed the other agents down the stairs of the speakeasy, being as stealthily quiet as possible.

“Did they catch the shooter?” Jim persisted in a low whisper.

Theodore Schneider gave Jim a peculiar look before he shook his head. Then, all conversation ceased as the men pulled out their weapons and one of them knocked on the door and stood in front of it, blocking the others from view.

A small sliding door at eye level slid open. “Password?” The voice of the individual who spoke was low, guttural and distinctively gangster sounding.

“Bob-White,” the agent replied.

There was a slide—that was the small door closing—and then the sound of key turning in the lock, and then the door opened wide.

“Federal agents! This is a raid!” the first agent shouted.

And with that, all the agents poured into the room.

Meanwhile, in the Storeroom...

Dan oversaw the last of the crates of bottles being loaded into neat stacks in the storeroom through the normally hidden door that led to the loading dock.

Stillman sat in sullen silence on top of one of the crates, watching the burly men finish unloading the last of his trucks into the storeroom.

“That’s all of it,” one of the men called out.

“Good.” He gestured imperiously toward the hotel. “Go check the lobby and outside the hotel for feds.” Dan smirked at the small group of thugs standing near the trucks. “Stillman says a raid’s gonna happen tonight.”

The general laughter in response to this comment made Stillman flush angrily, but he didn’t leave his perch on top of the crate on which he was sitting.

“You, too, Randolph,” Dan said, eyeing the big gangster carefully.

Randolph’s gaze went from his “boss” to Diana, who had said nothing since she’d joined the group in the storeroom, to Stillman.

“I can take care of Stillman,” Dan said, letting his voice display the icy rage that had been churning inside him since he’d heard Diana’s out-of-breath comments about Stillman finding out about an FBI raid.

Stillman’s flush vanished, leaving the man a rather sickly pale.

Randolph nodded and exited out the door to the loading dock.

“Well, well, well, Stillman. Turn informant for the feds, have you?” His upper lip curled as he made the final notations in Donovan Mangan’s ledger.

“What? No!” Stillman looked horrified.

“You haven’t managed to kill Thomas Clarke yet, have you?” Dan pulled out his pistol and pointed it at Stillman.

Stillman swallowed. “Mangan, look...”

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"Have you?"

The other man was too frightened to answer. He stared unblinkingly at Dan's gun.

Suddenly, the door behind them burst open, and the cacophony of shouts and gunfire echoed then through the soundproofed room.

"What the...?" Dan's voice trailed off as he saw Jim come through the door, his pistol drawn.

"FBI. Put your hands up." Jim's voice dripped with ice as he eyed Stillman.

Stillman's hands immediately rose. "Oh, thank God!" he said fervently. "This...this...*gangster* kidnapped me and..."

"Button it," Jim said in a low growl. "We know all about your connection with this...*gangster*."

Diana moved suddenly, widening her violet eyes. "Oh, officer! It's so awful. I didn't know what to do!" She nodded toward Stillman. "He said there was going to be a raid here tonight. He warned me, and..."

Jim's eyes narrowed. "He warned you?" Then, his gaze swiveled back to Stillman. "Who warned *you*?"

The click of a gun being cocked near Jim's head made all four of them freeze. "That would be me."

Theodore Schneider's voice was still as cheerful as ever. He shook his head as he looked at Charles Stillman. "I told you to stay away from here." His dark gaze shifted from Stillman to Dan. "Well, we'll just have to make this work." He gestured toward Stillman. "The raid happened, thanks to your help. This *gangster* killed a federal officer in the line of duty." His smile was cold. "And we even have a pretty little witness who'll tell the story just as she's told.

"It'll all work well, really." He pulled back the trigger of his revolver. "A happy ending for the FBI, with a minor sad note, of course, and a nice little shipment to start up a new *speakeasy* with no one any the wiser."

Theodore leaned forward and said in a low voice to Jim, "Don't worry. I'll make sure Virginia is well comforted."

Dan and Di stared at Jim in horror. Dan's gun was pointed straight at Theodore, but the FBI agent was so close to Jim, he was afraid of hitting his friend instead of Schneider.

"Say goodbye, Agent Frayne."

A single gunshot echoed through the room. Di screamed and Charles Stillman scrambled to his feet.

Jim fell forward, but, as the others quickly saw, it was only because he was propelled by the dead weight of Theodore Schneider's lifeless body.

Dan whirled to look and saw Randolph entering the room, a smoking gun in his hand. "Randolph," he said, his voice hoarse.

"Randolph Walters," the man said with a quiet smile. "FBI." He gestured at the three of them with his gun. "And you are all under arrest."

Much Later...

Jim leaned against the prison cell's door, a weary smile on his freckled face. Dan and Di gave him anxious looks from inside the cell. Di was sitting on Dan's lap. Jim's eyebrows rose when he saw them and Di said in firm voice, "A rat, Jim. I saw a *rat*. I am not sitting anywhere that a rat has been crawling. Do you get me?"

Dan shrugged his shoulders a bit helplessly at his friend. Jim coughed, hiding his laugh. "Yes, ma'am," he said in a polite voice.

"Got our bail yet, G-Man?" Dan drawled.

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

"Your bail has been quickly and promptly paid," Jim admitted. "By a good-looking broad named Sue." He winked at him. "Are you sure you don't want to stay around 1929 to check her out?"

"As tempting as that sounds," Dan said as he rose, forcing Di to settle her feet on the cell's floor, "I think I'd rather blow this joint."

Jim unlocked the cell and held open the door. A few moments later, Dan and Di were greeting the morning sun of October 30th. Jim followed them a few minutes later. "I'm supposed to tell you to not leave town."

Dan rolled his eyes. "If I were Donovan Mangan, and thank God I'm not, I'd be getting out of Dodge as fast as I could go."

"Me, too," Di said firmly.

"I don't think Mangan's ledgers being used as evidence against Charles Stillman will be looked on too fondly by his fellow gangsters," Jim mused.

"No, I don't think so," Dan said, looking around him a bit nervously. "Shouldn't we be returning to our own time? I mean...as fun as this all has been..."

"I think we need to return to the park," Diana said. "After all...that's where we were when we left, right?"

"Good thinking, Lynch," said Jim in his best gangster-era voice.

She batted her eyelashes at him. "Then, what are we waiting for?"

"Meet you there," Jim said after he helped Di into an awaiting cab. "Appearances and all that."

His two friends nodded and Jim closed the door of the cab, letting out a long exhale as he watched the cab pull into traffic. He waited a moment or two and then hailed one for himself. "Central Park, please."

Meanwhile...

Honey had fallen asleep late into the night after they'd finally heard that Charles Stillman had been placed under arrest. Last thing she'd remembered was resting her head against Thomas' chest, just enjoying hearing the steady thud of his heartbeat.

Morning now streamed in the windows of the hotel and she found herself in bed, a silk nightgown covering her body. In consternation, she sat up, shocked.

Thomas rested peacefully nearby, sound asleep. Her face softened as she looked at him. "October 30th," she whispered, "and you're still alive. Thank God. Thank God."

A quiet knock on the door had Honey scrambling out of bed and reaching for the matching robe that was draped over a nearby chair. She slid it over her shoulders and walked over to the adjoining room's door to answer it.

Trixie stood on the other side of the door and her eyes widened as she looked at her friend.

"We didn't...I didn't..." Honey's face flushed with embarrassment. "He just put me to bed last night after I fell asleep. That's all."

Trixie held up her hands in surrender. "I didn't say a word."

Honey pulled the pieces of her robe more tightly together. "So, what do you want?"

"Jim just called from a phone booth in Central Park. Di and Dan are out on bail, and they're all at the park. We're to meet them there as soon as we can." She gestured back toward the room in which Honey was standing. "Hurry up! Get dressed!"

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

Trixie then disappeared back into the other room, closing the door behind her. Honey turned, uncertain, looking at the sleeping man in the bed.

A few minutes later had her dressed and ready to leave. Honey bit her lip, wondering whether she should awaken Thomas or not. Finally, she made a decision.

She sat down for a moment, scribbled a quick note on the hotel's stationary and placed it on the nightstand next to where Thomas was sleeping. Then, she smoothed back the honey-colored hair from his head and gave him a light kiss on the cheek. He smiled in his sleep and snuggled more firmly into the pillow.

"Goodbye, Great-Grandfather," she whispered. "Have a happy, happy life."

With that, she strode with quick but quiet steps across the room and let herself out.

The click of the door registered with the man on the bed, whose eyes blinked open. He yawned and then looked around him, "Gracie?"

Then, Thomas spotted the note on the nightstand, picked it up and read it.

Come meet me at the Bethesda Fountain.

I've something to tell you. A surprise.

Your Grace

He smiled and traced the fine handwriting on the note before he put it on the table. Then, he swung his feet off the bed and rose to head toward the shower—a whistle on his lips and the tension gone from his shoulders.

A Little Bit Later...

Honey was the last of the seven to reach the fountain. She attributed her slow walk to a certain reluctance to leave the incredible people in her family she'd gotten to know and would never see again. Her eyes were red-rimmed when she finally joined the others in front of the fountain.

Brian reached over and wrapped his hand around hers, and the feeling was so blessedly good and normal, that Honey felt her equilibrium return. She gave him a grateful smile, which he returned.

"So, what do we do now?" Trixie demanded.

"I'd say click our heels and say, 'there's no place like home'," quipped Mart, "but considering none of us are wearing silver shoes, that might not help us."

"Especially if we end up in Kansas," Dan said dryly.

Di looked around the terrace speculatively and said, "Well, maybe we need to do what we were doing when we left." Putting actions to words, she sat down gingerly on the fountain's edge. "I was talking about how beautiful the 1920s dresses were—and they *are*..." Di opened her coat, intent on showing them her black fringed dress, when she suddenly looked down and all she saw were the jeans she'd been wearing when they'd entered the park what seemed ages and ages ago. She looked up, her violet eyes jubilant. "Look!"

The others began to exclaim in excitement, noticing that they, too, were back in their present-day clothes.

Honey, however, was looking past them—watching a scene that seemed almost as into a mist. She saw a woman with a short, blond page-boy haircut greeting the man she knew as Thomas Clarke.

"You said you had a surprise for me, darling. What is it?"

"A baby, Thomas," the woman said with a brilliant smile. "We're going to have a baby."

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

The look on Thomas' face was one Honey would never forget. His face softened, his hazel eyes filled with tears and he cupped Grace's face with his hands. "Oh, Gracie, love," he murmured, just before he kissed her.

A tug on Honey's hand pulled her firmly and completely into the present. The mist vanished as if it had never been. Brian looked down at her, a worried look on his handsome face. "Honey?"

"I'm fine. Truly. I'm...fine." She looked at the others, summoning a smile. "We're back!"

"But was it a dream? Did it really, truly happen?" Jim wondered. "It seems almost unreal."

"One easy way to find out," Honey said. "Anyone have some coins?"

A quick survey of pockets pulled out and purses opened gave Honey a handful of coins. She climbed up the stairs of the grand staircase, the other Bob-Whites on her heels. She soon found a payphone near one of the eating areas in the park, put in a number of coins, and dialed a very familiar number.

"Hello?"

"Mother?"

"Hello, Honey! Have you girls finished researching for your class?"

"We didn't find a whole lot," Honey said cautiously. "There were so many articles about the stock market crash for that day."

"Well, if I remember Grandmother telling me correctly, it was still pretty big news. Do you still have that article I gave you? Maybe you can have them look it up that way."

"Article?"

"The one from the *Times*, dear. Remember?"

Honey looked at the others, puzzled, for a moment before she slipped her backpack off her shoulder and unzipped it, looking through the notebook inside. It was then that she found it. A laminated article from a late press run of the October 30, 1929 *New York Times* with a headline that read: "Corrupt Federal Agent Shot Dead During Raid on Speakeasy". Her eyes widened. She held up the article to show the others, who stared at her in disbelief.

The voice on the other end of the phone brought her out of her reverie. "Honey? Are you still there?"

She swallowed. "Yes, yes, Mother. I'm still here."

"I think if you'll look, you'll find it. One of Grandfather's favorite stories. A very exciting time. I'm just thankful no one was hurt during all that shooting going on." Her mother's voice warmed in remembrance. "I wish you'd been able to meet him, sweetheart. He was a wonderful, wonderful man."

Honey looked over her shoulder back toward the fountain where she'd last seen Thomas Clarke, and all she could picture was the deep love and devotion in those warm hazel eyes. Her eyes, so like his, welled up with tears as she turned her gaze back to her friends. "I'm sure he was," she whispered. "I'm sure he was."

The End

Dana's notes: OMG. I don't even have words. Truly. The fact that this collaboration began nearly a decade ago (and the friendship even longer!) still astounds me every year. Each year it remains fresh for us no matter how many we've done. We brainstorm, we concentrate on different characters, Leigh (Mountainhawk) never fails to provide us with a spark of inspiration, we conspire, we go back and forth with simpatico comments, we...well, I could go on. Suffice to say, October is the best month *ever*. *g*

This year, we even managed to start early. We came up with an initial plan for this year's story last year. I downloaded images for the graphics last spring before my iStock credits expired. And then we both forgot! We

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

began discussing what became this story in July and developed an initial outline in early August, the whole idea inspired by one of Mal's questions to authors for the *Gatehouse Flyer*. I answered that I could see Trixie as a flapper, and Susan answered that she could see Dan as a Mob type. And an idea was born! Then I remembered our plan from last year, but we were so excited about this that we shelved it. We had a full-on story outline in place before mid-September. And yet, we were *still* scrambling to finish the story on time, as always! (And I take full responsibility for that. I dragged my feet on each section, but Susan never did!)

It's our curse every year, but we're always so invigorated by it and laugh about it that maybe it's our blessing? No matter what, I *know* it's a blessing to work with Susan. She's so funny and witty and such an amazing writer. We may disagree on comma placement (although, we actually didn't during this story, lol!), but we always agree on the important things, and these characters mean the world to both of us. The fact that we both love and are fascinated by the Twenties helped us a lot, but Susan channels it in a way that I never could, and I am so grateful for the depth that she brought to this story. And the fact that she writes the best endings *ever*. WJB, baby, WJB.

Susan and I both struggle at titles, so I began to look at famous titles from the 1920s to try to do a riff on one of those. At the Eleventh Hour we decided on *The Murder of Thomas Clarke*, inspired by Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Akroyd*. I'm slightly obsessed with the Grand Dame of Mystery so it was natural for me to want to pay homage to her.

Susan started a list of research links, and every time I went to add a link I had found in my research, it was already covered on hers. So, her list below covers the both of us. We're both research fanatics, but not every detail we placed in the story could be corroborated. Any errors we made are not for lack of trying!

Thank you so much for your support of our paranormal universe over the years. It means a great deal to the both of us. Hoppy Hallow-Weenie!

Dana word count: 11,257

~****

Susan's notes: I can't believe we made it another year! Dana and I have a whole year to plan things, and yet, it seems like every year, we're racing to meet a deadline near the end of October. Maybe we just like it that way. ;)

It's a great, great pleasure to work with Dana on these stories. We just have so much FUN. Again, she goes above and beyond the call of duty, working with her voice recognition software while traveling and scribbling out last minute dialogue using airport WiFi. She. Is. Awesome. :)

This is obviously a topic near and dear to my heart. I adore Prohibition Era stuff—flappers, speakeasies, gangsters and the like. I mean, I am from Chicago. ;) I was greatly excited to remember that Black Tuesday happened near Halloween in October. It made a super setting for our story.

Speaking of which, Black Tuesday, of course, is the day that the stock market bottomed out in the United States after a series of falls over the course of about a week. People went from being millionaires to in debt overnight. It's estimated that more than \$25 billion dollars worth of personal wealth was lost over that week. That would be around \$315 billion in today's dollars. It's no wonder a depression followed that time.

I did a bunch of research on a bunch of Internet pages. I don't know if I have them all, but I tried to collect them as I went. I also, thanks to my mom, had a couple of books checked out from the library on gangsters and the stock market crash of 1929, which I was perusing for information.

<http://www.patrickdowney.com/gangster.html> (no longer available)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Mob

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owney_Madden

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_Club

<http://www.centralpark.com/guide/attractions/bethesda-terrace.html>

<http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm> (no longer available)

<http://www.biking-in-manhattan.com/cp07-fountain.htm> (no longer available)

http://mafia.wikia.com/wiki/Castellammarese_War

<http://thefiringline.com/forums/showthread.php?t=245137>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colt_Model_1903_Pocket_Hammerless

<http://www.vincelewis.net/38super.html> (no longer available)

<http://thefiringline.com/forums/showthread.php?p=1371599>

The Murder of Thomas Clarke

<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/28/hells-kitchen-not-clinton-still-simmers/> (no longer available)

<http://www.centerforhistory.org/pdfdoc/The%20Victorian%20Home%207.pdf> (no longer available)

<http://www.artdecocollection.com/seatingitems.htm> (no longer available)

<http://www.sheilaomalley.com/?p=3793>

<http://packardinfo.com/xoops/html/modules/modelinfo/viewmodel.php?model=1319>

<http://packardinfo.com/xoops/html/modules/myalbum/photo.php?lid=7935>

And the books...

Six Days in October by Karen Blumenthal

The Crash of 1929 by Nathan Aaseng

American Gangsters, Then and Now: An Encyclopedia by Nate Hendley

Black Tuesday by Robin S. Doak

Obviously, we throw in our normal disclaimers—the characters belonging to Random House, etc. as well as the fact that we created the other cool characters, including the eponymous Thomas Clarke, who is my new favorite. :) And we have no idea how things truly work at the FBI, and definitely not how they would have done things in the 1920s. Any deviations from what is true and accurate is entirely our fault. *G* Any use of any real places, publications, products, etc. is all made with no profit to the writers. :)

The book quote reference near the end is, obviously, a tribute to the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. And yes, in the movie, Dorothy's slippers are ruby red, not silver, but Dorothy in the book's slippers are silver, and I figured Mart, of all people, would know that.

Thanks for always being so supportive of this universe Dana and I write together. We have a great, great time doing it, and October has become one of the most fun times of year for us. :) Have a wonderful Halloween, and we'll see you again next year! :)

Susan word count: 15,396