

CHAPTER FIVE

JUNE 23, 1936

ALCATRAZ PENITENTIARY

9:45 A.M.

Al Capone lets down his guard. It is shortly after breakfast as the man nicknamed Scarface works his shift, mopping the prison shower room. He once wore expensive suits and diamonds but now displays the standard Alcatraz uniform of blue chambray shirt, trousers, belt, and shoes. Capone is thirty-seven, the former head of a notorious Chicago crime syndicate that earned profits of more than \$100 million annually.* He lived without fear of arrest—paying off judges, police, and politicians to ensure his freedom. But the mental acuity necessary to oversee a criminal enterprise is now beyond Capone because of a chronic syphilitic infection that is eroding his mind. And while Alphonse Gabriel Capone was once the most feared Mob boss in America, reputed to have killed more than thirty human beings, he is now just another inmate at this escape-proof prison on a windy island in the middle of San Francisco Bay.

Capone knows he has enemies here at Alcatraz. He has a reputation among the inmates for seeking special treatment from Warden James A. Johnston, who has famously declared that his prisoners are

* Worth more than \$18 billion in modern currency.



*A candid photo of Al Capone; his wife, Mae;
his son, Albert Francis “Sonny” Capone; and Sonny’s wife, Ruth,
outside his Florida home.*

“entitled to food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. Anything else you get is a privilege.” This dictum, also known as Rule Number Five in the inmate regulation handbook, is the reason Warden Johnston constantly denies Capone favors.

But that doesn’t stop the Mob boss from trying. In one instance, he attempts to avoid the wait at the prison barbershop. “Get to the back of the line, you bum,” says fellow inmate James Lucas, a twenty-two-year-old Texan known as a chronic hothead.

“Do you know who I am, punk?” snarls the thickset Capone.

Lucas grabs a pair of barber shears and presses a blade into Capone’s jugular vein. “Yeah, I know who you are, grease ball. And if you don’t get back to the end of the line, I’m going to know who you *were*.”

The two men—one, a bank robber and car thief; the other, America’s most famous mobster—become mortal enemies after the incident. Capone puts out the word that anyone who kills Lucas will be handsomely rewarded.

But it is Lucas who takes action. As Al Capone mops the shower room, the young Texan attacks from behind, slashing at the gangster

with scissors. Capone wheels and throws up his hands to defend himself, but blood flows onto the floor as Lucas plunges the scissors into his fellow inmate's back, chest, and palms.

Sounds of the fight bring guard Thomas J. Sanders on the run. Beating Lucas severely with his billy club, Sanders puts an end to the murder attempt. James Lucas is quickly sent to D-Block and placed in solitary confinement. Al Capone is hustled off to the prison infirmary for treatment of his wounds. He survives, though with a new set of scars to go with the three others cascading so dramatically down his left cheek. Four years into an eleven-year sentence for tax evasion, Capone quickly returns to life as an Alcatraz inmate. At night, like the other prisoners, he is tormented by laughter and partying in the city of San Francisco—the sounds carried across the cold waters of the bay, as if the nightlife was right next door.

But it is not. San Francisco is over one mile away from this island the inmates call “The Rock.”



For Al Capone, it has always been about not keeping his mouth shut.

He is eighteen and working as a bartender and bouncer at a cabaret in Brooklyn's Coney Island called the Harvard Inn. The young man can be charming, but one evening as he takes a shine to a beautiful patron, he prefers to be crass. “Honey,” Capone whispers to a dark-haired woman sitting at a table with another man, “you have a nice ass and I mean that as a compliment. Believe me.”

The beauty's name is Lena Galluccio. The other man is her brother. A drunken Frank Galluccio lunges at Capone after hearing the lewd comments. Capone fights back. Galluccio draws a pocket knife and slashes at the young bartender, slicing open the left side of his face. As Frank and Lena hustle from the dance hall to escape further conflict, a dazed and bleeding Capone is rushed to the hospital. Soon after his release, face still covered in stitches, the future mobster goes looking for Galluccio, seeking revenge.

As it turns out, both men work for crime families. A meeting is arranged to broker a truce. It is a hoodlum named Charles “Lucky” Luciano who arranges the sit down at the Harvard Inn with both men.

Al Capone is ordered to apologize for insulting Lena. He is also told not to seek revenge. Capone does not argue the ruling, understanding that he must obey or die.

Capone also understands his new nickname: Scarface.

This is the way of life within the world of organized crime. The syndicates consider themselves family units, and leaders are sought out for their wisdom in times of conflict. Capone enters this world after dropping out of school at the age of fourteen. He first belongs to a Brooklyn street gang named the Rippers, who mainly steal cigarettes. But soon a twenty-five-year-old mobster named Francesco Ioele—a.k.a. Frankie Yale—takes young Capone under his wing.

Yale is a criminal visionary, the first gangster to use the term *family* to describe Italian immigrants who perform acts of racketeering, extortion, and murder. He is not averse to working with local Irish gangs, knowing both will profit despite their ethnic differences. Frankie Yale, who adopted the last name to coincide with the collegiate theme of the Harvard Inn, becomes the main influence in Al Capone's life.

In 1920, knowing that he must leave Brooklyn if he is to prosper on his own, a newly married Capone moves to Chicago with Frankie Yale's blessing.* There he joins the Colosimo family, along with fellow New York transplant Johnny "the Fox" Torrio. The Fox is the nephew of "Big Jim" Colosimo, who controls more than one hundred brothels staffed by sex slaves. But Big Jim has a problem.

A gang known as the Black Hand, imported from Italy, is making extravagant extortion demands against Colosimo. Big Jim assigns the Fox, known as a brutal enforcer, to put that to an end.

At thirty-eight, Giovanni Torrio is older than Al Capone by seventeen years. Born in Southern Italy, he changed his name as a young man to sound more American. Torrio is a natural leader, known for being strategic and cunning. However, within weeks of moving to Chicago,

* Al Capone married Mae Coughlin, an Irish girl from a middle-class family, in 1918. Although he frequently consorted with mistresses and prostitutes, the couple remained married the remainder of Capone's life. They had one child, Albert Francis Capone, who went by the nickname Sonny.

the Fox is clashing with his uncle, Big Jim. Torrio believes that Colosimo's focus on prostitution is limiting.

On January 17, 1920, a new law known as the Volstead Act goes into effect. This prohibits the sale or possession of alcohol. Prohibition, as it becomes known, does not at first seem like a new revenue stream for the criminal families—or at least not to Big Jim Colosimo. But the Fox sees it differently. Secretly providing a thirsty American public with alcohol has the potential to reap an enormous amount of wealth. Torrio believes that the crime syndicates are making a grave mistake if they do not participate in the new pastime of “bootlegging,” in which alcohol is smuggled into the country and made available for sale at highly inflated prices.*

So it is that Johnny “the Fox” Torrio resorts to extreme measures. He arranges a business meeting with the Genna crime family, on the surface an ally of Big Jim. Torrio boldly informs the Gennas of his plans to expand into bootlegging and seeks their permission to murder his uncle. The gangsters, led by six brothers known as the Terrible Gennas, control the Little Italy section of Chicago. Sicilian by birth, they own a federal license to manufacture industrial alcohol. Along with communion wine, this is one of the few types of spirits allowed to be sold legally in the United States. Torrio's plan will expand those legal sales into the bootlegging market, and the Genna brothers quickly agree to placing a hit on Big Jim.

This is not a decision made lightly. Colosimo is one of the most famous men in Chicago, well connected with politicians and celebrities. Colosimo's, his South Side restaurant, is routinely packed with the city's wealthiest and most famous denizens.

On May 11, 1920, Big Jim Colosimo enters his restaurant and is shot dead by an assailant hiding in the cloakroom. There is evidence that the gunman might have been Al Capone. But to this day, no one knows his identity.

What is known is that Johnny Torrio then becomes leader of Colosimo's crime syndicate. Al Capone becomes his number two. Acting

* *Bootlegging* is a nineteenth-century term based upon the smugglers' trick of concealing bottles in their boots.

as an understudy to the Fox, he is given free rein to open brothels, gambling dens, and speakeasies—the secret establishments where Americans now go to drink.*

In a strange turn of events, Johnny Torrio is shot four times on January 12, 1925. Torrio is sitting in his car as the murder is carried out by members of a rival Irish gang. The Fox is shot in the chest, neck, right arm, and groin, but when the shooter approaches the car and places a pistol to Torrio's temple to finish the job, there is no bullet in the chamber. The gunman flees, sure that he has completed the hit, but the Fox lives up to his reputation and survives the assassination attempt. However, Johnny Torrio knows his death is near. So, a few weeks later he chooses to retire from organized crime and moves back to New York City.

Before Torrio leaves, he anoints Al Capone as his successor.



It's good to be Scarface. Now twenty-six years old, the new head of what is known as the Chicago Outfit controls an empire that consists of prostitution, speakeasies, illegal breweries, and racetracks, bringing in hundreds of thousands of dollars a week.

The new boss quickly gains weight, beefing up to 250 pounds on his five-foot, ten-inch frame. He becomes a Chicago celebrity, dominating the city's criminal subculture. Capone also attracts the media by issuing provocative quotes like "You can get much farther with a kind word and a gun than you can with a kind word alone." Despite the violent imagery, many Chicagoans laugh.

To the public, Capone is the mobster who travels around town in a bulletproof car, wears outlandish suits, and sports a broad fedora hat. The Mob boss is also generous when it suits his purpose, giving outlandish tips to waiters and providing clothing to the city's poor on cold winter nights.

Of course, Capone's power is not built on charity. It is stark brutal-

* The term refers to the practice of not speaking at all about the establishment, for fear of alerting the police.

ity that really defines him. Soon, he clashes with Chicago's North Side Gang and shoots their leader, Earl "Hymie" Weiss, dead.

As a result of his aggression, Al Capone lives in constant fear of his own assassination, so anyone suspected of treachery is harshly punished. At one dinner in 1929, Capone invites three men he believes are planning an act of betrayal. It is only after the unsuspecting trio eat and drink their fill that they are set upon. Their hands and legs are tied to their chairs, and they quickly realize their lives are in danger.

Al Capone approaches John Scalise, Albert Anselmi, and Joseph "Hop Toad" Giunta clutching a baseball bat. Then he starts swinging.

The mobster brutally slams the bat into the heads of each man. Then he works on the fingers and forearms. The bat is brought down hard on the groins of the alleged Judases. The air is rent with screams and the sound of breaking bones. But Al Capone refuses to let the men die. The violence only stops when he becomes too tired to swing the bat anymore.

The bodies of the three gangsters are found outside Hammond, Indiana, shortly thereafter.* The local coroner will state for the record that he has never seen human beings so utterly destroyed.

But that is only the beginning.



In February 1929, Al Capone sits agitated in his Florida compound. He has just been told that a gang under the leadership of Capone's greatest rival, George "Bugs" Moran, has been plotting to kill him.

So under a bright Florida sun, Capone decides to strike first. Hiring four assassins from outside Chicago, so their identities will be unknown, Capone hatches a plan to lure the Moran gang to a local garage under the ruse of selling them top-grade Old Log Cabin whiskey for a low price. Bugs Moran himself is also supposed to arrive at the SMC Cartage Company at 10:30 a.m. to assist the seven other gang members

* John Scalise, Albert Anselmi, and Joseph Giunta did indeed plan to betray Al Capone. Because of Capone's paranoia, he was able to pick up on the plot against him.

in collecting the liquor. But Moran is running late, perhaps because it is Valentine's Day.

His tardiness will save his life.

The assassins drive up to the garage in a stolen police car. Two wear law enforcement uniforms. At first, the Moran gangsters believe this to be a normal police raid.

But it is not.

The men are herded inside the garage and lined up against a wall. They cannot fight back as their weapons have been confiscated. Then, using tommy guns and a sawed-off shotgun, the assassins shoot each man at least fifteen times.

Knowing neighbors may have heard the loud thunder of machine-gun fire, the two killers dressed in police uniforms escort the other two assassins out of the garage, as if arresting them. All four step inside the stolen police car and drive away.

No one will call the police.

The brutal killings become legend in Chicago and will go down in history as the St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

Al Capone is thousands of miles away as the murders take place, but no one doubts that he is responsible. Because of massive press coverage, the massacre makes Capone more famous than ever.

It also marks the beginning of his downfall.



It is August 22, 1934, when Inmate #85 arrives at Alcatraz. Unable to convict Al Capone of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre or other crimes, federal officials seek any means possible of putting him behind bars. In 1931, the Treasury Department under Agent Eliot Ness finally gets a Capone conviction for tax evasion. The mobster is sentenced to eleven years in prison. The first portion of his sentence is spent in the Atlanta federal penitentiary, where his opulent wealth makes it possible for him to bribe prison authorities and receive any pleasure he wants. But things are different at Alcatraz.

In addition to being assaulted by James Lucas, Al Capone is subject to an extremely hard daily regimen. His mind soon begins to rapidly deteriorate. Finally, five years after his arrival at Alcatraz, Capone is

released with time off for good behavior on November 16, 1939. He has the mental capacity of a twelve-year-old.*



With the gangsters of the 1930s almost completely wiped out, J. Edgar Hoover is convinced that his new FBI has crime under control in America. Hoover now turns to a completely different set of law enforcement problems.

As the Second World War breaks out in Europe, the FBI is mandated to keep track of possible spies from America's enemies abroad. The director takes to his new task with relish.

What he doesn't know is that the war mandate will soon actually help a new breed of criminal organization that will spread terror and corruption throughout America.

The Mafia is on its way.

* An interesting sidebar to Capone's Alcatraz incarceration is that he shared space with Alvin Karpis, the public enemy arrested by J. Edgar Hoover. Karpis is Inmate #325 and will go on to serve the longest term of any convict in the prison's history—twenty-seven years. Alcatraz will close for good on March 21, 1963, and Karpis will be relocated to another penitentiary. He will be released on parole in 1969 and die from an accidental overdose of pills and alcohol in 1979.