

*Excerpt from*  
***SILENT PARTNERS***  
by  
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— **PROLOGUE** —

**NEW YORK CITY**  
**TUESDAY MORNING**  
**JUNE 23, 1998**

His internal alarm clock was as accurate as any fine electronic timepiece. At 6:30 a.m. he rose from bed taking care not to rouse his companion sleeping in the next room, and attended to his morning ablution. By 7:10 he was out of the front door of his recently renovated five-story townhouse on Tenth Street in Greenwich Village.

Before descending the steps, he momentarily stopped to absorb the sunlight bathing the tree-lined street and warming the early morning air, which was somewhat cooler than usual for this time of year. He took a deep breath and continued down the steps and through the gate, then headed west on Tenth Street towards Sixth Avenue. As usual, the street was virtually empty except for the occasional jogger, and it wasn't until he reached Sixth Avenue that the morning traffic of both pedestrians and cars began to pick up.

He turned left on Sixth Avenue and walked two blocks south to the newsstand on Eighth Street where he bought the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and *Daily News Record* as he did every weekday he was in New York. After skimming the headlines of the *New York Times* and *Women's Wear Daily*, he began retracing his steps up Sixth Avenue towards Tenth Street.

As he approached his townhouse, he noticed someone wearing a baseball cap, sunglasses, a sweatshirt, warm-up pants, and sneakers approaching from the opposite direction, smiling broadly as one good friend might greet another. Reflexively, he returned the smile, coming face to face with the stranger in front of the brownstone's wrought iron gate.

Out of the corner of his eye he observed the stranger's right hand moving swiftly upward, but before his smile could dissolve, blood spurted from two small holes in his temple. Just as

quickly, the stranger removed the attached AAC Evolution-9 suppressor from the Glock 19, 9-millimeter handgun, returned the silencer to its pocket abode and handgun to his waistband.

Almost without breaking stride, the stranger continued down Tenth Street in the manner of one out for a brisk morning walk, while the victim crumpled slowly to the pavement.

— PART ONE —

THE SUSPECTS

# 1

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“Why does it have to be so god-damned noisy this early in the morning?” Detective Frank Egan asked, sitting down at his desk in the squad room of the New York City Police Department’s Sixth Precinct. As he opened the container’s lid, he spilled steaming hot coffee over his fried egg sandwich, fortunately still wrapped in aluminum foil. “Shit!” he growled.

Frank was just under six feet tall, with a ruddy complexion, brown, penetrating eyes, graying hair just beginning to recede, and a waistline that suggested that diet was not an important element of his lifestyle. He looked older than his forty-two years, and his rumpled clothing didn’t help.

“It’s always like this,” said Barney Rubin, Frank’s junior partner for the last seventeen months. “You just tune out when you’re not hung over.”

Barney was five feet eight but the way his clothing hung on his stocky frame made him look shorter. He had green eyes and blond hair and a boyish and uncontrollable cowlick. He spoke in a rather gravelly voice that, along with his stubby appearance, brought Barney Rubble of *Flintstones* fame to mind.

He was seven years younger than Frank, but not in much better physical shape. Earlier in his career he thought he would enjoy being an undercover cop, but his uncanny resemblance to Barney Rubble diminished that avenue of career development. So he persevered on the route that led him to homicide detective and Frank’s partner.

Much to Frank’s annoyance, when the partners were together, the Flintstones comparison was irresistible to their fellow detectives. He was aware they periodically referred to him as Fred, though never directly in his presence.

Barney veiled his grin but just slightly. “Bad night again, huh Frank?”

“They’re all bad nights.”

“They don’t have to be, you know. Instead of boozing it up and unloading on some cheap whore whenever you get horny, you could have a nice lady with a hot body waiting for you every night.”

“I tried that once and it didn’t work. Now why don’t you button it and let me be

miserable in peace.”

While Barney resumed writing the report on the murder they—Frank, actually—had solved yesterday, Frank emptied spilled coffee from the aluminum foil into the wastebasket, opened the wrapper, and with a few bites, devoured the sandwich. It was the first solid food he’d had since the two slices of pizza he managed before confronting the girlfriend with evidence she’d killed her fiancée. After tying up all loose ends and saying goodnight to Barney, who went home to his wife, he decided to hit the bars—it was too early to return to the small one bedroom walk-up apartment on Second Avenue in the East Village he called home. Besides, he was still too wound up.

Now he sat hunched over his desk, slowly sipping his coffee, his broad shoulders draped in a dark gray suit that looked like it just came out of the same bed he did, which in fact it had.

*This is a fucking lousy job, he thought. Just because he was screwing some other broad. Is that a reason to kill the creep? And to think she’d never get caught. What the hell is wrong with these assholes? Maybe I’m getting too old for this shit?*

“Egan, Rubble, uh, Rubin,” a voice boomed from the captain’s office. “Get in here.”

Frank pulled himself up out of the chair, and still sipping his coffee, joined Barney entering the captain’s office. Tim Donovan sat on the edge of his desk. The prototypical New York Irish cop, Donovan looked like he could still go a few rounds as he had as an up and coming amateur boxer who couldn’t make it as a professional. So he joined the police force and worked his way up to his present position. He was holding a piece of paper in his hand.

“You look like shit, Egan,” he said, his neatly combed white hair a dramatic contrast to his red face. “Don’t you ever change your suit?”

“Once a month,” Egan retorted. “But only if it got stains on it.”

“You are one hell of a fashion plate. Did you ever think of getting it pressed once in a while? And don’t you know your clothes are supposed to match. Christ, your tie, socks, and suit look like they’re all going to different occasions.”

“Come on, Captain. Stop giving me this shit. You want a fashion plate, go hire Calvin Klein. You want a homicide cop, you got me.”

“Ah,” Tim said, waving his arm in disgust as he went behind the desk and sat down.

He and Frank had joined the force together and followed parallel paths in their careers until becoming homicide detectives. Then the bottom dropped out for Frank while Tim moved on. “You never should’ve divorced Bernice. It’s been all downhill ever since.”

“Wasn’t my choice,” Frank said, indifferently. “Now, you think you can put aside your role as marriage counselor and tell me why you called us in here and disturbed my few minutes of peace and quiet?”

“Excuse me, Frank. I thought you were supposed to be working today?”

“Alright, my wrist is slapped. So who’s been knocked off?”

“Even though you’re not one of New York’s leading fashion figures, I presume you’ve heard of the designer Giorgio Donati.”

“You think I’m some caveman or something? Of course I heard of him. He’s the Italian guy with the naked broads in his ads.”

“Why am I not surprised that it’s the only fucking thing you would know about him?”

“C’mon. Stop busting my balls. Just tell me what I need to know.”

“Somebody iced him this morning over on Tenth Street in the Village.”

“So why can’t the hotshots from Manhattan South handle it? If this Donati guy is so fucking important, why leave it to us poor slobs in the Sixth Precinct?”

“Because,” said Donovan, “we need someone with a great appreciation of fashion who can understand the nuances of the business to catch the killer. And who fills that bill better than you, this Precinct’s leading fashion plate. Besides, Manhattan South has their hands full right now with those two diplomatic assassinations. So quit bitching and do what I think you get paid for. Here’s the address. It’s your case now, and I don’t want it dragging on. We’re going to get a lot of heat on this one.”

“Yeah, and that’s why you want your best homicide detective on it,” Frank grunted as he turned and left the office with Barney trailing behind.