



Part One

THE VICTIM

“NEVER GIVE A SUCKER AN EVEN BREAK.”

—*Edward Francis Albee*

D N E

Girlfriends,
a Dumbwaiter,
and a Dixie Cup

Some people simply amazed Victoria Hart. Take Carol Sesnick . . . she worked as a pediatric nurse at a local children's hospital and had been taking night school courses for a year to become certified, hoping to join the profession as a C.N.P., or Certified Nurse Practitioner. What on earth would possess her to risk her life, to put herself in mortal danger, because the People of the great Garden State of New Jersey wanted to put a piece of pond scum like Joe "Dancer" Rina in the yellow brick prison at Rahway? After Carol testified, she would have to be put in the Witness Protection Program. She'd have to live in some icebox state like Minnesota. Her life would be completely changed and arguably ruined. And yet, here she was, risking it all so Victoria Hart, a New Jersey State Prosecutor, could kick some mob ass in court and convict a short, incredibly handsome little creep who walked on his toes. *The case is going to be close, Victoria thought, but winnable.*

The indictment charged that the thirty-eight-year-old alleged Mafia Don had lost money in a card game in the back room of the Greenborough Country Club. The big winner, a man named Frank Lemay, had been beaten almost to death with a nine-iron in the parking lot as he was getting into his car. Seventy-eight thousand dollars in winnings was stolen from him. And then, before Victoria was assigned to the case, the victim had unhooked himself from his I.V. bottles and had walked out of the hospital, never to be seen again. The wallet and credit card he had left in the hospital administrator's office turned out to belong to a man who had been dead for two years, so the name was an alias. Frank Lemay didn't exist. The case against Joe Rina was on the verge of being dropped when Carol Sesnick stepped forward and said she had been waiting for a friend in the country club parking lot and had seen the whole thing. She had become the State's whole case now that the victim had disappeared.

Victoria Hart had on occasion been called "Tricky Vicky" in the Trenton press because she often employed unorthodox legal strategy to achieve courtroom success. Prosecuting Joe Rina, a frequent star of *Hard Copy*, without a complainant got her a lot of ink that she would have rather done without.

Victoria anxiously looked out the car's rear window. "Are we clear?" she said to her State Police driver, who had a weightlifter's neck that widened like a cobra's hood at the trapezius muscle.

"I'm gonna take one more precaution, but I don't see anyone back there," he said, then slammed down the accelerator and made an abrupt turn through a darkened gas station . . . shot down an unlit narrow alley, turned left onto a residential street, swung a quick U, then parked and switched off his headlights. Nobody followed. Victoria knew the precautions were necessary, but after two weeks, they were getting damned tiresome.

The car they were in had been selected moments before from a line of fifty plain-blue police sedans in the State Police

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Motor Pool. This was in an effort to defeat any tracking devices that might get placed if Victoria used the same vehicle more than once. She suspected Joseph Rina would go to any lengths, including murder, to shut down the case against him. The trial was scheduled to start in two days and Victoria had been making nightly visits to her hidden witness to prepare her for testimony.

Victoria's notes for the first day in court were scribbled in her obsessively neat handwriting on a yellow legal pad in her briefcase. She had her opening argument down pat. She was going to give the jury a tour through the graveyard of Rina Mafia tyranny. It would be a morbid history lesson, and she hoped it would redefine that handsome little shit with the perfect white teeth and wavy black hair.

Victoria had been assigned this prosecution by the District Attorney, Gil Green, because Tricky Vicky was popular with the media and had a near-perfect conviction rate, but the voir dire process had been brutal. New Jersey used the "Donahue Method" to pick jurors, which meant that the jury box was filled with candidates and the Prosecution and Defense had to question each one in front of the others. It was hazardous because you ran the risk of offending a juror you would later be forced to accept. Voir dire had already taken a week and they had gone through two complete panels. Victoria thought the composition of potential jurors was extremely unfortunate and had favored the Defense. The panels were loaded with undereducated ethnic males who, she thought, would be her least sympathetic jurors. They were already disenfranchised by the system and would see Joe Rina as a role model who disrespected City Hall and won. In the end, she had broken the cardinal rule of jury selection and used her last peremptory challenge to eliminate a twenty-five-year-old Sicilian street character who, she was almost certain, would vote for acquittal.

After six days of selection, Victoria was nervous about her jury. Defense attorney Gerry Cohen, on the other hand, seemed pleased. All through voir dire, he had his jury selection experts spread around him like card kibitzers, whispering, pointing, and pushing pieces of paper in front of him. As each juror was questioned, Gerry would nod sagely and then decide whether to use a peremptory challenge, dismiss a juror for cause, or accept. Victoria had to rely on gut instinct. She didn't have any background checkers with psychology degrees. She had only David Frankfurter to help her.

David was former Supreme Court Justice Frankfurter's great-grandson. He was a tall, skinny, twenty-seven-year-old Assistant State Prosecutor known around the office as "Dodger Dog" because of his last name and because he had been raised in Los Angeles and loved the Dodgers.

Victoria and David would study the jurors in the panel, trying to pick them by type. She wanted women more than men. She preferred married, white-collar, educated people with children, people who would see Joe Dancer for what he was, instead of some charming refugee from *Hard Copy* who had looks and romance draping him like Armani clothing. She was very worried about jurors ten and twelve, both young unemployed males who didn't fit her acceptable profile. With one alternate left to pick, and all of her peremptory challenges gone, she could be forced to accept the next candidate, whoever or whatever it was. The last alternate juror would be interviewed tomorrow, and the trial would start the following morning.

Her police driver, who she thought was named Alan, finally nodded in satisfaction, turned his headlights back on, and drove out the way he had come. A surprise thunderstorm had dropped a half-inch of rain late that afternoon, and now sheet lightning lit the horizon like flashes of distant artillery.

Ten minutes later, they arrived at the underground parking garage of Trenton Towers. They whisked by what looked like

an empty gray Econoline van without paying much attention to it. They didn't notice that the windows were fogged.

Victoria took the old Otis eight-man elevator up to the fourteenth floor. The building was mid-fifties, but she had picked it because it had several advantages from a security standpoint: The floors were small and could be easily protected; there was only one elevator bank, limiting access; and the building had low occupancy and a completely vacant fourteenth floor, which gave them much needed separation from the other tenants. The old fifteen-story residential building was adjacent to a business district so it had little night traffic, making secure meetings between herself and Carol Sesnick easier to arrange.

The elevator opened on fourteen and Victoria walked out into the "safe house," carrying her briefcase, purse, and a garment bag. She was greeted by two plainclothes deputies whom, over the last two weeks, she had grown very fond of. Tony Corollo was the tall, silent Italian who seldom smiled but projected an easy warmth. The other was Bobby Manning. He'd been a Trenton High School football star. He had a ruddy complexion and a lock of auburn hair that hung in planned disarray on his forehead.

"Evening, Ms. Hart," they both chirped. "Bring us anything?"

She had been religiously stopping at the mini-mart near her apartment, picking up candy and reading material for them. She dug in her purse for some tabloid magazines.

"No Nestlé's Crunch?" Bobby Manning said, grinning his question at her.

She found a package of Butterfingers she'd missed in the side pocket of her purse and handed it to him. "Best I could do, Bobby," she said, and they moved off their folding chairs in the hall toward the locked door that led to Carol's suite.

Victoria found Carol in the white tile bathroom trying a new hairstyle. She had curled it and her soft brown hair was now

piled up on her head, giving her a French poodle pouf. She was in her slip, holding a hand mirror, with a disgusted frown on her ordinary but pleasant face.

“I fucked it up, V,” Carol said, still looking in the mirror, wrinkling her freckled nose. “It wasn’t exactly supposed to come out like this.” She held up a picture in *Glamour* magazine that showed a thin-faced model with the same do, only it was subtly different. On the model the piled-up curls seemed to look fresh and perky. The narrow-faced blonde in the picture had her hair pulled back on the sides, tight curls cascading down her back. On Carol Sesnick the look was less effective. “What I got goin’ here is pure Brillo pad, ain’t it?” Carol said, pouting.

Victoria grabbed a hairbrush and started to rearrange the back of the hairstyle. “Turn around a little more,” she instructed as she worked, pulling the sides back and clipping them up higher to better resemble the model in the picture.

Carol and Victoria were both in their early thirties, trim and fit, but the comparison ended there. Their reflections both glittered in the large mirror of the too-bright bathroom. They were a study in contrasts. Victoria was by far the prettier. She had classic bone structure, high cheekbones, and a sculpted face. But she was not a fashion adventurer. . . . She wore her hair cut very short to save time. She would roll out of bed in the morning, jump in the shower, towel her hair dry, and hit it with a dryer while she went over her legal notes propped on the sink before her. She could be out the door in fifteen minutes. Her makeup was minimal, sometimes nonexistent. Despite this lack of primping, she had a radiant natural beauty that had earned her half-a-dozen offers to model by New York agents . . . sleek, well-dressed men who smelled of aftershave and slipped agency cards in her hand, suggesting she call. She dismissed these entreaties as sleazeball pickup routines, despite the fact that the cards they gave her were sometimes embossed in gold with the names of prominent agencies.

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“There,” Victoria said, clipping the other side of Carol’s hair back with a barrette.

“I don’t know,” Carol said, studying her reflection dubiously. “I think I look stupid. Makes my face seem round.”

“Maybe if you don’t pile it up so high . . . let some of this, up here, straggle on the sides,” Victoria said, pulling a few strands down. Since she took so little interest in her own hair-style, she felt ill equipped to give beauty tips to others. She was much better at conducting a withering cross-examination.

“You got the dress!” Carol exclaimed, finally spotting the garment bag Victoria had draped over the commode.

“Yep. Gil Green shit a brick when he saw the bill. But, if O.J. can get Rosa Lopez that ugly blue outfit, you oughta get this pretty tan one.” She pulled it out of the bag and held it up.

“Love it, love it, love it,” Carol said, as she unzipped it and stepped in, then turned to the mirror. “Whatta you think?”

“You’re gonna knock ’em dead, girlfriend.” Victoria grinned. Under all the easy chatter she continued to marvel: Why would somebody risk everything just because it was the right thing to do? When she evaluated the tremendous sacrifices Carol Sesnick was making, it took Victoria Hart’s breath away.



In the back of the gray Econoline van, Tommy “Two Times” Rina and Texaco Phillips were hunched over a Building Department schematic of Trenton Towers. They had computer-accessed the plans from the City Building Inspector’s office by using a Rina Family computer technician. He’d downloaded everything.

“Fucking heating ducts are tiny. . . . We’ll never get inside them, they’re forty fucking years old,” Tommy said angrily, looking at the plans and smelling Texaco’s horrible odor, which he knew was caused by anabolic steroids. In the front seat, be-

hind the wheel, chewing on a toothpick, was a skinny Jamaican Rastafarian. His dreadlocks were greased and beaded; his dusky skin lacked luster.

Texaco Phillips kept flicking his gaze in the direction of the Rasta. He didn't, for the life of him, understand why Tommy would want a wheel man who looked like a fucking jigaboo street character. Texaco had asked Tommy that question twenty minutes ago when the Rasta had gone to take a leak in the gas station can.

“ 'Cause he's a Dixie cup.” Tommy grinned and refused further comment.

Texaco didn't know what the hell that meant, but the grin had spooked him, so he shut up. Texaco couldn't get away from Tommy Rina fast enough. Tommy was Joe Rina's older brother and Joe had put them together for this piece of work, so Texaco had no choice. Tommy, like his brother, Joe, was short, only five-seven, but that was all they had in common. At thirty-eight, Joe Dancer was much more handsome, and walked on the balls of his feet to gain a little height. He'd been doing it since junior high and the habit had earned him his nickname. Joe had beautiful wavy hair and perfect teeth that glittered like a box of Chiclets.

Tommy had the same wavy hair, but it seemed to grow too far down on his forehead, giving him a simian appearance. He had the same white teeth as his brother, but they protruded, giving him a leering overbite. His eyes were blue like Joe's, but instead of reflecting intelligence, they were pig-mean. The family resemblance was definitely there, but the recipe was off, the results skewed.

“Take us around the block. I wanna see this here fire exit,” Tommy said to the Jamaican, pointing to a door indicated on the plans.

“Ya, we be rollin', mon,” the Jake mumbled unintelligibly, as he put the van in gear and pulled out.

“Why the fuck don’t you put on some cologne?” Tommy Two Times said to Texaco, who couldn’t smell himself and didn’t know what Tommy was talking about.

They sat in silence as the van rounded the block. The tires hissed on the rain-wet pavement. With the windows up, it was close and stuffy in the van. Texaco was the kind of odd creature who took up more space than his body was allotted. He carried a lot of baggage that took getting used to. Aside from his pro-linebacker size, he also had a unique personality which included a sense of humor that had never progressed since the eighth grade. He had a huge collection of fart jokes, and a sexual appetite that was criminally short on foreplay. He was in the jump-on, hold-on category and joked that during sex he used the “Honor Method,” which instructed: Once you get on her, stay on her. It was a concept that twice got him arrested on date-rape charges while he was still playing middle linebacker for the New England Patriots. After a few midnight phone chats, both victims had a last-minute change of heart. Texaco’s body odor and personality could cool a room like awkward laughter.

“Put the fucking window down, Demo. It stinks in here,” Tommy said. The Jamaican didn’t respond; his hands were busy driving. “Hey, you listenin’ up there? I’m talking to you.”

“Mickey Mouse is in de house but Donald Duck don’t give a fuck,” Demo mumbled but finally rolled down the window anyway. Texaco, hearing this, shook his head in disgust. What a moron. The Rasta’s name was Demo Williams. What a fucking breed of people. *Who would name their kid Demo?* he thought, forgetting that his parents had named him Texaco. The van circled the block with the window mercifully slipstreaming cold, fresh air.

“Pull up there,” Tommy said.

The Jamaican pulled the van to the curb while Tommy studied the fire door; then he started paging through a set of photocopied building plans.

“Gotta old dumbwaiter, goes all the way up. Gotta gas engine. It’ll be too loud to run the damn thing. If I can fit in the fucking box, you think you could pull it up fourteen floors?” Tommy said, looking up at Texaco, who nodded . . . glad he wasn’t being asked to get in the dumbwaiter with Tommy.

“Okay then, that’s the plan. Demo, you stay right here, keep the motor running. And Texaco, once I clear out them brown hats, I want you up there to help sanitize the place. Okay? You’ll hear ’em hit when they come down.”

“Okay,” Texaco said, looking at the cleaning kit in a Gucci leather suitcase beside him.

“I don’t know about the garage. Far as I can see, they got nobody in there, but you gotta hold my back,” Tommy added. “I don’t wanna be up there hosing off these assholes and have the elevator deliver me up a new squad of uniforms.”

“Nobody will be coming up the elevator,” Texaco assured him, and Tommy looked hard at his huge accomplice, pinning him with blue pig eyes that suggested Texaco was the worst fuck-up on earth. There was electricity in his look but also dead malice and timeless evil. They were the eyes of a prehistoric lizard.

The whole operation had to be fast and clean. Tommy had decided not to use a contracted cleaning crew. On some hits a crew of “sanitation specialists” would follow in right behind to wash the crime scene down with detergents and vacuum the carpets, eliminating trace evidence. The crime scene would be purged . . . no prints, no blood spatter, no hair or fiber. Problem was, you had to know the cleanup team was solid. It was a new specialty and Tommy had never used one; he would rather not have anybody left behind who could rat him out. Texaco was risk enough. He knew the big, ugly steroid jockey was just smart enough to figure that Tommy would kill him inch by fucking inch if he ever rolled.

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Tommy picked the lock on the fire door; then he and Texaco went into the darkened building. The dumbwaiter was still located in its shaft, and once they pried the small door open they could see that the old rope was frayed and dusty with spider webs. Tommy easily fit in the little box. He sat on the metal tray with his knees up under his chin and looked out like a psychopathic child. Texaco pulled the rope, lifting the dumbwaiter fifteen feet, testing the strength of the line. It held. Then he continued to lift the dumbwaiter. Texaco had to grip the rope and ease it up hand-over-hand. By the time the huge ex-linebacker had the box seven stories high, his forehead and massive arms were dripping with sweat. Friction blisters were beginning to form on his palms. It occurred to him that he could make a giant contribution to mankind by simply letting go of the box, sending the little Sicilian maniac on a seven-story asspucker ride in the free-falling dumbwaiter. But Texaco didn't have the guts to do it. He knew Tommy would survive the fall, like Wile E. Coyote. Somehow he'd come back and kill Texaco, "inch by fucking inch," just like he'd always promised.

On the fourteenth floor, Tommy slowly and quietly opened the door of the dumbwaiter and, when he didn't see anyone, slipped out into the hall. The building was musty. Ornate ceilings and faded green-and-red-patterned carpets framed the columned hallway. He could hear the two deputies talking in low tones around the corner from where he was standing. He moved silently to a maintenance closet and slipped inside. He needed to listen to the sounds on this floor to determine how many people were up here. Standing with hanging mops and Lysol bottles, he waited patiently, taking his time, enjoying the intrusion. Killing for Tommy was a luxuriant, tactile experience that rivaled sex.

He was in no hurry to end it. He heard a phone ring, and a little later, a toilet flushed. After listening carefully to the sounds and muffled voices, he thought there were at least two women in the corner suite and two men in front of the elevator. The rest of fourteen seemed quiet. The empty rooms talked to him. . . . He could hear no TVs or radios coming from the other section of the floor. He thought the Prosecution had probably chosen the fourteenth floor because nobody else was up here. He was looking out of the maintenance closet through a slit in the slightly opened door.

A beautiful woman he recognized as Victoria Hart left at ten P.M. He could hear her laughing with the cops before she got in the elevator and the doors closed. It was going to be much easier than he had originally thought.

After she left, Tommy "Two Times" Rina slipped out of the closet and moved up the corridor to where the two deputies were looking at something in the *Star* tabloid. Tommy pulled out his silenced 9mm SIG-Sauer P-226 and held it in his right hand. In his left, he had his 9mm silver and black Israeli Desert War Eagle. They were his two favorite handguns. The Germans and the Jews made the best guns. It was an irony that completely escaped him.

"Evening, gents. Is Liz Taylor getting a new husband?" he said flatly.

Both cops spun, going for their weapons, but they froze when they saw Tommy holding the two silenced 9mm cannons. If they moved, they were a micro-second from death.

"The fuck . . . ?" Tony Corollo said, astounded that Tommy had somehow gotten up there, behind them.

"The fuck?" Tommy mimicked. "Was that the fucking question, you worthless fuckface?" he said deadpan.

The deputies looked at him and knew they had no chance to get to their shoulder holsters.

"I want you two cheeseburgers to get up and move over to

the elevator and stand there with your hands on the door. You, with the brown hair, push the button. Get the box up here.”

“What’re you gonna do?” Deputy Corollo asked hesitantly.

“Gonna throw you two shitheads a party. Gonna be fun. . . .”

When the elevator arrived, Tommy told Deputy Manning to reach in and push fifteen, which was the floor directly above, then told him to let the elevator go on up. Bobby Manning did as he was told, and once it was gone, Tommy waved his guns at them. “Okay. Now pry them doors open again; let’s get us a look in there.” They hesitated, so he re-cocked the SIG-Sauer for emphasis, and the two frightened officers pushed their fingers in and pried the elevator doors open. They both looked down the yawning dark throat of the elevator shaft.

“Officer Krupke, whatta ya see down there?” Tommy grinned.

“Nothing,” Tony Corollo said, wondering if he could dive out and catch the cable, slide down it, and get out of the way before Tommy pulled the trigger.

“Nothing? Look again, get way out there. . . .” Tony and Bobby craned their necks but didn’t lean out. “What you’re looking at down there is the landing zone, fellas. That there’s ground zero. Now I want you two bricks to hit right smack in the middle of the shaft. We got cash prizes for that lucky winner.” Tommy was really beginning to enjoy himself. “This is ‘The Jersey Solution,’ ” he said. “I get the lady, and you two hemorrhoids get the shaft.”

Without hesitation he fired twice, once from each gun. Both silenced automatics made faint hissing sounds like a man spitting out a fruit seed. The first bullet blew Bobby Manning out into the darkness. He hit the opposite wall, slamming against the structure, throwing a spray of arterial blood into the air and all over the brick-walled shaft. Then he fell silently down, palms and shoe soles trailing like streamers as he plunged into the dark

abyss. Tony Corollo was simultaneously hit in the mid-back. He flew out into the dark shaft but managed to grab and catch the metal cable. Blood gushed from a huge exit wound in his stomach. He weakly pulled his service revolver and, hanging on by one hand, dripping blood like icehouse beef, he tried to aim at Tommy, but his grip slipped and he had to drop the gun to grab the cable with his other hand. As he hung there, they locked gazes. At the bottom of the shaft, Bobby Manning hit. The sound was faint, like a snowball hitting a brick wall. "Nice try," Tommy finally said to the Deputy, whose intestines were now snaking out of him, blood and stomach acid raining down on his dead partner. Then Tommy fired his silenced Desert War Eagle again, this time hitting the Deputy in the mouth. Tony Corollo's head snapped back and he was blown back off the cable. Little pieces of his teeth recoiled forward and rained ivory chips on the purple and red hallway carpet. Then he too was gone, cart-wheeling freely down the shaft.

On the ground floor, Texaco Phillips heard both of them splat in the oil and shale goop that was in the bottom of the shaft. He gathered up his suitcase of brushes, sponges, bleaches, and hand vacuums, then pushed the elevator button. In seconds he was riding up to join Tommy.



She was in the bathroom, sitting on the toilet, pinning the hem on her new tan dress, when Tommy walked in on her. "Who are you?" Carol said, looking up in alarm. "What're you doing here?"

"Taking care of my brother and having a pretty damn good time to boot," Tommy said. And then he finished the job, right there in the overlit tile bathroom, exploding little pieces of her into the bathtub, covering the tub wall with a fine spray of brain tissue and cerebrospinal fluid.

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Demo pulled the van away from the building, screeching the tires.

“Don’t burn rubber. Just go slow,” Tommy said from the back seat. Demo slowed down. “Go to this address.” Tommy handed a slip of paper to the Rastafarian.

“We still be chillin’, right, mon?”

“You ask a lot of questions. You’re gonna be one dead fucking rent-a-nigger, you keep it up,” Tommy growled.

Texaco saw Demo’s shoulders tighten. But the Rasta didn’t do anything; he just drove slowly, heading across town toward the address Tommy had given him.

They arrived at a locked junkyard in Hoboken. Once they parked, Tommy took out a key. Texaco opened the gate and they pulled in. Tommy looked at Demo and smiled. “That pissed you off when I called you a rent-a-nigger, didn’t it?”

The Rasta turned in his seat and looked into Tommy’s eyes. He saw craziness and changed his response. “We be hat up, brotha. De work be done. Ain’t no need ta be disrespectin’,” he finally said.

“Fuck there ain’t. You come here, you sit in my van, you drip fuckin’ chicken grease all over the seats, you make a fuckin’ mess. You’re nothin’ but a ganja-smokin’, voodoo-dancing, low-bone motherfucker who oughta be buried up to his scrawny neck in pig shit and hosed down with donkey piss.”

The Rastafarian looked at Tommy like he couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“Now you’re probably so pissed I can’t fuckin’ turn my back on you, right?” Demo said nothing. “So now you gone and give me a big fuckin’ problem. Y’see what I’m saying? Now I gotta either watch my back constantly or buy you a fuckin’ suit right now.”

And with that criminal logic he fired the SIG-Sauer right through the back of the seat. The Jamaican was thrown into the dash. Blood shot up onto the windshield and stained the headliner over his head. Tommy looked at Demo with interest. "Maybe you can help me with something," he said to the dying Jamaican. "That was the Kraut cannon . . . okay, now here's the Jew gun." He fired two more rounds through the upholstery from the Desert War Eagle. The body danced on the seat as the bullets slammed into Demo Williams, killing him. "You tell me, Demo, 'cause I'll be damned if I can tell. Which one you think got more stopping power?"

Tommy picked up his brass and got out. He looked at Texaco, who was standing, shivering in the cold night. "Fuckin' guy was a Dixie cup, just like I told ya."

Texaco still didn't get it.

"Disposable," Tommy added.

Texaco Phillips nodded; his nerves were badly jangled. There was no doubt in his mind that Tommy Rina was insane.