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The Force

Written by Don Winslow

Published by Harpercollins

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**DON
WINSLOW**

**THE
FORCE**



HarperCollins *Publishers*



HarperCollinsPublishers
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

First published in Great Britain by HarperCollinsPublishers 2017

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First published in the United States by William Morrow,
an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers 2017

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A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN: 9780008227487 (HB)

ISBN: 9780008227494 (TPB)

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Designed by William Ruoto

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
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During the time that I was writing this novel, the following law enforcement personnel were murdered in the line of duty. This book is dedicated to them:

Sergeant Cory Blake Wride, Deputy Sheriff Percy Lee House III, Deputy Sheriff Jonathan Scott Pine, Correctional Officer Amanda Beth Baker, Detective John Thomas Hobbs, Agent Joaquin Correa-Ortega, Officer Jason Marc Crisp, Chief Deputy Sheriff Allen Ray "Pete" Richardson, Officer Robert Gordon German, Master-at-Arms Mark Aaron Mayo, Officer Mark Hayden Larson, Officer Alexander Edward Thalmann, Officer David Wayne Smith Jr., Officer Christopher Alan Cortijo, Deputy Sheriff Michael J. Seversen, Trooper Gabriel Lenox Rich, Sergeant Patrick "Scott" Johnson, Officer Roberto Carlos Sanchez, Trooper Chelsea Renee Richard, Master Sergeant John Thomas Collum, Officer Michael Alexander Petrina, Detective Charles David Dinwiddie, Officer Stephen J. Arkell, Officer Jair Abelardo Cabrera, Trooper Christopher G. Skinner, Special Deputy Marshal Frank Edward McKnight, Officer Brian Wayne Jones, Officer Kevin Dorian Jordan, Officer Igor Soldo, Officer Alyn Ronnie Beck, Chief of Police Lee Dixon, Deputy Sheriff Allen Morris Bares Jr., Officer Perry Wayne Renn, Patrolman Jeffrey Brady Westerfield, Detective Melvin Vincent Santiago, Officer Scott Thomas Patrick, Chief of Police Michael Anthony Pimentel, Agent Geniel Amaro-Fantauzzi, Officer Daryl Pierson, Patrolman Nickolaus Edward Schultz, Corporal Jason Eugene Harwood, Deputy Sheriff Joseph John Matuskovic, Corporal Bryon Keith Dickson II, Deputy Sheriff Michael Andrew Norris, Sergeant Michael Joe Naylor, Deputy Sheriff Danny Paul Oliver, Detective Michael David Davis Jr., Deputy Sheriff Yevhen "Eugene" Kostiuhenko, Deputy Sheriff Jesse Valdez III, Officer Shaun Richard Diamond, Officer David Smith Payne, Constable Robert Parker White, Deputy Sheriff Matthew Scott Chism, Officer Justin Robert Winebrenner, Deputy Sheriff Christopher Lynd Smith, Agent Edwin O. Roman-Acevedo, Officer Wenjian Liu, Officer Rafael Ramos, Officer Charles Kondek, Officer Tyler Jacob Stewart, Detective Terence Avery Green, Officer Robert Wilson III, Deputy U.S. Marshal Josie

Wells, Patrolman George S. Nissen, Officer Alex K. Yazzie, Officer Michael Johnson, Trooper Trevor Casper, Officer Brian Raymond Moore, Sergeant Greg Moore, Officer Liquori Tate, Officer Benjamin Deen, Deputy Sonny Smith, Detective Kerrie Orozco, Trooper Taylor Thyfault, Patrolman James Arthur Bennett Jr., Officer Gregg "Nigel" Benner, Officer Rick Silva, Officer Sonny Kim, Officer Daryle Holloway, Sergeant Christopher Kelley, Corrections Officer Timothy Davison, Sergeant Scott Lunger, Officer Sean Michael Bolton, Officer Thomas Joseph LaValley, Deputy Sheriff Carl G. Howell, Trooper Steven Vincent, Officer Henry Nelson, Deputy Sheriff Darren Goforth, Sergeant Miguel Perez-Rios, Trooper Joseph Cameron Ponder, Deputy Sheriff Dwight Darwin Maness, Deputy Sheriff Bill Myers, Officer Gregory Thomas Alia, Detective Randolph A. Holder, Officer Daniel Scott Webster, Officer Bryce Edward Hanes, Officer Daniel Neil Ellis, Chief of Police Darrell Lemond Allen, Trooper Jaimie Lynn Jursevics, Officer Ricardo Galvez, Corporal William Matthew Solomon, Officer Garrett Preston Russell Swasey, Officer Lloyd E. Reed Jr., Officer Noah Leotta, Commander Frank Roman Rodriguez, Lieutenant Luz M. Soto Segarra, Agent Rosario Hernandez de Hoyos, Officer Thomas W. Cottrell Jr., Special Agent Scott McGuire, Officer Douglas Scott Barney II, Sergeant Jason Goodding, Deputy Derek Geer, Deputy Mark F. Logsdon, Deputy Patrick B. Dailey, Major Gregory E. "Lem" Barney, Officer Jason Moszer, Special Agent Lee Tartt, Corporal Nate Carrigan, Officer Ashley Marie Guindon, Officer David Stefan Hofer, Deputy Sheriff John Robert Kotfila Jr., Officer Allen Lee Jacobs, Deputy Carl A. Koontz, Officer Carlos Puente-Morales, Officer Susan Louise Farrell, Trooper Chad Phillip Dermeyer, Officer Steven M. Smith, Detective Brad D. Lancaster, Officer David Glasser, Officer Ronald Tarentino Jr., Officer Verdell Smith Sr., Officer Natasha Maria Hunter, Officer Endy Nddiobong Ekpanya, Deputy Sheriff David Francis Michel Jr., Officer Brent Alan Thompson, Sergeant Michael Joseph Smith, Officer Patrick E. Zamarripa, Officer Lorne Bradley Ahrens, Officer Michael Leslie Krol, Security Supervisor Joseph Zangaro, Court Officer Ronald Eugene Kienzle, Deputy Sher-

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“Cops are just people,” she said irrelevantly.

“They start out that way, I’ve heard.”

—RAYMOND CHANDLER, *FAREWELL, MY LOVELY*

THE FORCE

THE LAST GUY

The last guy on earth anyone ever expected to end up in the Metropolitan Correctional Center on Park Row was Denny Malone.

You said the mayor, the president of the United States, the pope—people in New York would have laid odds they'd see them behind bars before they saw Detective First Grade Dennis John Malone.

A hero cop.

The son of a hero cop.

A veteran sergeant in the NYPD's most elite unit.

The Manhattan North Special Task Force.

And, most of all, a guy who knows where all the skeletons are hidden, because he put half of them there himself.

Malone and Russo and Billy O and Big Monty and the rest made these streets their own, and they ruled them like kings. They made them safe and kept them safe for the decent people trying to make lives there, and that was their job and their passion and their love, and if that meant they worked the corners of the plate and put a little something extra on the ball now and then, that's what they did.

The people, they don't know what it takes sometimes to keep them safe and it's better that they don't.

They may think they want to know, they may say they want to know, but they don't.

Malone and the Task Force, they weren't just any cops on the Job. You got thirty-eight thousand wearing blue, Denny Malone and his guys were the 1 percent of the 1 percent of the 1 percent—

the smartest, the toughest, the quickest, the bravest, the best, the baddest.

The Manhattan North Special Task Force.

“Da Force” blew through the city like a cold, harsh, fast and violent wind, scouring the streets and alleys, the playgrounds, parks and projects, scraping away the trash and the filth, a predatory storm blowing away the predators.

A strong wind finds its way through every crack, into the project stairwells, the tenement heroin mills, the social club back rooms, the new-money condos, the old-money penthouses. From Columbus Circle to the Henry Hudson Bridge, Riverside Park to the Harlem River, up Broadway and Amsterdam, down Lenox and St. Nicholas, on the numbered streets that spanned the Upper West Side, Harlem, Washington Heights and Inwood, if there was a secret Da Force didn’t know about, it was because it hadn’t been whispered about or even thought of yet.

Drug deals and gun deals, traffic in people and property, rapes, robberies and assaults, crimes hatched in English, Spanish, French, Russian over collard greens and smothered chicken or jerk pork or pasta marinara or gourmet meals at five-star restaurants in a city made from sin and for profit.

Da Force hit them all, but especially guns and drugs, because guns kill and drugs incite the killings.

Now Malone’s in lockup, the wind has stopped blowing, but everyone knows it’s the eye of the storm, the dead quiet lull that comes before the worst of it. Denny Malone in the hands of the feds? Not IAB, not the state’s attorneys, but the feds, where no one in the city can touch him?

Everyone’s hunkered down, shitting bricks and waiting for that blow, that tsunami, because with what Malone knows, he could take out commanders, chiefs, even the commissioner. He could roll on prosecutors, judges—shit, he could serve the feds the mayor on the proverbial silver platter with at least one congressman and a couple of real estate billionaires as appetizers.

So as the word went out that Malone was sitting in the MCC, people in the eye of the hurricane got scared, real scared, started to seek shelter even in the calm, even knowing that there are no walls high enough, no cellars deep enough—not at One Police, not at the Criminal Courts Building, not even at Gracie Mansion or in the penthouse palaces lining Fifth Avenue and Central Park South—to keep them safe from what’s in Denny Malone’s head.

If Malone wants to pull the whole city down around him, he can.

Then again, no one’s ever really been safe from Malone and his crew.

Malone’s guys made headlines—the *Daily News*, the *Post*, Channels 7, 4 and 2; “film at eleven” cops. Recognized-on-the-street cops, the-mayor-knows-your-name cops, comped seats at the Garden, the Meadowlands, Yankee Stadium and Shea, walk-into-any-restaurant-bar-or-club-in-the-city-and-get-treated-like-royalty cops.

And of this pack of alphas, Denny Malone is the undisputed leader.

Walks into any house in the city, the uniforms and the rookies stop and stare, the lieutenants give him a nod, even the captains know not to step on his shoes.

He’s earned their respect.

Among other things (Shit, you want to talk about the robberies he stopped, the bullet he took, the kid in that hostage situation he saved? The busts, the takedowns, the convictions?), Malone and his team, they made the biggest drug bust in the history of New York.

Fifty kilos of heroin.

And the Dominican who was trafficking it gone.

Along with a hero cop.

Malone’s crew laid their partner in the ground—bagpipes, folded flag, black ribbons over shields—and went right back to work because the slingers and the gangs and the robbers and the rapists and the wiseguys, they don’t take time off to grieve. You wanna keep your streets safe, you gotta be on those streets—days, nights, weekends, holidays, whatever it takes, and your wives, they knew what

they signed up for, and your kids, they learn to understand that's what Daddy does, he puts the bad guys behind bars.

Except now it's him in the cage, Malone sitting on a steel bench in a holding cell like the dirtbags he usually puts there, bent over, his head in his hands, worrying about his partners—his brothers on Da Force—and what's going to happen to them now that he's put them neck deep in shit.

Worrying about his family—his wife, who didn't sign up for this, his two kids, a son and a daughter who are too young to understand now, but when they're old enough are never going to forgive why they had to grow up without a father.

Then there's Claudette.

Fucked up in her own way.

Needy, needing him, and he's not going to be there.

For her or for anybody, so he doesn't know now what's going to happen to the people he loves.

The wall he's staring at doesn't have any answers, either, as to how he got here.

No, fuck that, Malone thinks. At least be honest with yourself, he thinks as he sits there with nothing in front of him but time.

At least, at last, tell yourself the truth.

You know exactly how you got here.

Step by motherfucking step.

Our ends know our beginnings but the reverse isn't true.

When Malone was a kid, the nuns taught him that even before we're born, God—and only God—knows the days of our lives and the day of our death and who and what we'll become.

Well, I wish he'd fucking shared it with me, Malone thinks. Given me a word, a tip, dimed me out, ratted on me to myself, told me something, anything. Said, Hey, jerkoff, you took a left, you should have gone right.

But no, nothing.

All he's seen, Malone isn't a big fan of God and figures the feeling is mutual. He has a lot of questions he'd like to ask him, but if he

ever got him in the room, God'd probably shut his mouth, lawyer up, let his own kid take the jolt.

All this time on the Job, Malone lost his faith, so when the moment came when he was looking the devil in the eye, there was nothing between Malone and murder except ten pounds of trigger pull.

Ten pounds of gravity.

It was Malone's finger pulled the trigger, but maybe it was gravity that pulled him down—the relentless, unforgiving gravity of eighteen years on the Job.

Pulling him down to where he is now.

Malone didn't start out to end up here. Didn't throw his hat in the air the day he graduated the Academy and took the oath, the happiest day of his life—the brightest, bluest, best day—thinking that he'd end up here.

No, he started with his eyes firmly on the guiding star, his feet planted on the path, but that's the thing about the life you walk—you start out pointed true north, but you vary one degree off, it doesn't matter for maybe one year, five years, but as the years stack up you're just walking farther and farther away from where you started out to go, you don't even know you're lost until you're so far from your original destination you can't even see it anymore.

You can't even get back on the path to start over.

Time and gravity won't allow it.

And Denny Malone would give a lot to start over.

Hell, he'd give everything.

Because he never thought he'd end up in the federal lockup on Park Row. No one did, except maybe God, and he wasn't talking.

But here Malone is.

Without his gun or his shield or anything else that says what and who he is, what and who he was.

A dirty cop.

PROLOGUE

THE RIP

Lenox Avenue,
Honey.
Midnight.
And the gods are laughing at us.

—LANGSTON HUGHES, “LENOX AVENUE: MIDNIGHT”

Harlem, New York City

July 2016

Four A.M.

When the city that never sleeps at least lies down and closes its eyes.

This is what Denny Malone thinks as his Crown Vic slides up the spine of Harlem.

Behind the walls and windows, in apartments and hotels, tenements and project towers, people are sleeping or can't, are dreaming or are beyond dreams. People are fighting or fucking or both, making love and making babies, screaming curses or speaking soft,

intimate words meant for each other and not the street. Some try to rock infants back to sleep, or are just getting up for another day of work, while others cut kilos of heroin into glassine bags to sell to the addicts for their wake-up shots.

After the hookers and before the street cleaners, that's the window of time you have to make a rip, Malone knows. Nothing good ever happens after midnight, is what his old man used to say, and he knew. He was a cop on these streets, coming home in the morning after a graveyard shift with murder in his eyes, death in his nose and an icicle in his heart that never melted and eventually killed him. Got out of the car in the driveway one morning and his heart cracked. The doctors said he was dead before he hit the ground.

Malone found him there.

Eight years old, leaving the house to walk to school, he saw the blue overcoat in the pile of dirty snow he'd helped his dad shovel off the driveway.

Now it's before dawn and already hot. One of those summers when God the landlord refuses to turn the heat down or the air-conditioning on—the city edgy and irritable, on the brink of a flameout, a fight or a riot, the smell of old garbage and stale urine, sweet, sour, sickly and corrupt as an old whore's perfume.

Denny Malone loves it.

Even in the daytime when it's baking hot and noisy, when the gangbangers are on the corners and the hip-hop bass beats hurt your ears, and bottles, cans, dirty diapers and plastic bags of piss come flying out of project windows, and the dog shit stinks in the fetid heat, he wouldn't be anywhere else in the world.

It's his city, his turf, his heart.

Rolling up Lenox now, past the old Mount Morris Park neighborhood and its graceful brownstones, Malone worships the small gods of place—the twin towers of Ebenezer Gospel Tabernacle, where the hymns float out on Sundays with the voices of angels, then the distinctive spire of Ephesus Seventh-Day Adventist and, farther up

the block, Harlem Shake—not the dance but some of the best damn burgers in the city.

Then there are the dead gods—the old Lenox Lounge, with its iconic neon sign, red front and all that history. Billie Holiday used to sing there, Miles Davis and John Coltrane played their horns, and it was a hang for James Baldwin, Langston Hughes and Malcolm X. It's closed now—the window covered with brown paper, the sign dark—but there's talk about opening it again.

Malone doubts it.

Dead gods don't rise again except in fairy tales.

He crosses 125th, a.k.a. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

Urban pioneers and the black middle class have gentrified the area, which the Realtors have now christened "SoHa," a blended acronym always being the death knell of any old neighborhood, Malone thinks. He's convinced that if real estate developers could buy properties in the bottom levels of Dante's *Inferno* they'd rename it "LoHel" and start throwing up boutiques and condos.

Fifteen years ago, this stretch of Lenox was empty storefronts; now it's trendy again with new restaurants, bars and sidewalk cafés where the better-off locals come to eat, the white people come to feel hip and some of those condos in the new high-rise buildings go for two and a half mil.

All you need to know about this part of Harlem now, Malone thinks, is that there's a Banana Republic next to the Apollo Theater. There are the gods of place and the gods of commerce, and if you have to bet who's going to win out, put your money on money every time.

Farther uptown and in the projects it's still the ghetto.

Malone crosses 125th and passes the Red Rooster, where Ginny's Supper Club resides in the basement.

There are less famous shrines, nonetheless sacred to Malone.

He's attended funerals at Bailey's, bought pint bottles at Lenox Liquors, been stitched up in the E-room at Harlem Hospital, played hoops by the Big L mural in Fred Samuel Playground, ordered food

through the bulletproof glass at Kennedy Fried Chicken. Parked along the street and watched the kids dance, smoked weed on a rooftop, watched the sun come up from Fort Tryon Park.

Now more dead gods, ancient gods—the old Savoy Ballroom, the site of the Cotton Club, both gone long before Malone's time, ghosts from the last Harlem Renaissance haunting this neighborhood with the image of what it once was and can never be again.

But Lenox is alive.

It actually throbs from the IRT subway line that runs directly underneath its entire length. Malone used to ride the #2 train, the one they called "The Beast" back then.

Now it's Black Star Music, the Mormon Church, African American Best Food. When they get to the end of Lenox, Malone says, "Go around the block."

Phil Russo, behind the wheel, turns left onto 147th and drives around the block, down Seventh Avenue and then another left onto 146th, and cruises past an abandoned tenement the owner gave back to the rats and the roaches, chasing the people out in the hope that some junkie cooking up will burn it down and he can collect the insurance and then sell the lot.

Win-win.

Malone scans for sentries or some cops cooping in a radio car, bagging a little sleep on the graveyard shift. A sole lookout stands outside the door. Green bandanna, green Nikes with green shoelaces make him a Trinitario.

Malone's crew has been watching the heroin mill on the second floor all summer. The Mexicans truck the smack up and deliver it to Diego Pena, the Dominican in charge of NYC. Pena breaks it down from kilos into dime bags and distributes it to the Domo gangs, the Trinitarios and DDP (Dominicans Don't Play), and then to the black and PR gangs in the projects.

The mill is fat tonight.

Fat with money.

Fat with dope.

“Gear up,” Malone says, checking the Sig Sauer P226 in the holster on his hip. A Beretta 8000D Mini-Cougar rests in a second holster in the small of his back just below the new ceramic-plate vest.

He makes the whole crew wear vests on a job. Big Monty complains his is too tight, but Malone tells him it’s a looser fit than a coffin. Bill Montague, a.k.a. Big Monty, is old school. On his head, even in summer, is his trademark trilby, with its stingy brim and a red feather on the left side. His concession to the heat is an XXXL guayabera shirt over khaki slacks. An unlit Montecristo cigar perches in the corner of his mouth.

A Mossberg 590 pump-action 12-gauge shotgun with a twenty-inch barrel loaded with powdered ceramic rounds sits at Phil Russo’s feet by his high-polished red leather shoes with the skinny guinea toes. The shoes match his hair—Russo is that rare redheaded Italian and Malone jokes that there must have been a bogtrotter in the woodpile. Russo answers that’s impossible because he isn’t an alcoholic and he don’t need a magnifying glass to find his own dick.

Billy O’Neill carries an HK MP5 submachine gun, two flash-bang grenades and a roll of duct tape. Billy O’s the youngest of the crew, but he has talent, street smarts and moves.

Guts, too.

Malone knows Billy ain’t gonna cut and run, ain’t gonna freeze or hesitate to pull the trigger, if he needs to. If anything, it’s the opposite—Billy might be a little too quick to go. Got that Irish temper along with the Kennedy good looks. Got some other Kennedy-esque attributes, too. The kid likes women and women like him back.

Tonight, the crew is going in heavy.

And high.

You go up against narcos who are jacked on coke or speed, it helps to be pharmacologically even with them, so Malone pops two “go-pills”—Dexedrine. Then he slips on a blue windbreaker with NYPD stenciled in white and flips the lanyard with his shield over his chest.

Russo orbits the block again. Coming back around on 146th, he hits the gas, races up to the mill and slams the brakes. The lookout hears the tires squeal but turns around too late—Malone's out the door before the car stops. He shoves the lookout face-first into the wall and sticks the barrel of the Sig against his head.

"*Cállate, pendejo*," Malone says. "One sound, I'll splatter you."

He kicks the lookout's feet out from under him and puts him on the ground. Billy is already there—he duct-tapes the lookout's hands behind him and then slaps a strip over his mouth.

Malone's crew press themselves against the wall of the building. "We all stay sharp," Malone says, "we all go home tonight."

The Dex starts to kick in—Malone feels his heart race and his blood get hot.

It feels good.

He sends Billy O up to the roof to come down the fire escape and cover the window. The rest go in and head up the stairs. Malone first, the Sig in front of him, ready. Russo behind him with the shotgun, then Monty.

Malone don't worry about his back.

A wooden door blocks the top of the stairs.

Malone nods at Monty.

The big man steps up, jams the Rabbit between the door and the sill. Sweat pops on his forehead and runs down his dark skin as he presses the handles of the tool together and cracks the door open.

Malone steps through, swings his pistol in an arc, but no one's in the hallway. Looking to the right, he sees the new steel door at the end of the hall. *Machata* music plays from a radio inside, voices in Spanish, the whir of coffee grinders, the clack of a money counter.

And a dog barking.

Fuck, Malone thinks, all the narcos got 'em now. Just like every chick on the East Side has a yapping little Yorkie in her handbag these days, the slingers got pit bulls. It's a good idea—the spooks are scared shitless of dogs and the *chicas* working in the mills won't risk getting their faces chewed off for stealing.

Malone worries about Billy O because the kid loves dogs, even pit bulls. Malone learned this back in April when they hit a warehouse over by the river and three pit bulls were trying to jump through the chain-link fence to rip their throats out but Billy O, he just couldn't bring himself to pop them or let anyone else do it, so they had to go all the way around the back of the building, up the fire escape to the roof and then down the stairs.

It was a pain in the ass.

Anyway, the pit bull has made them but the Domos haven't. Malone hears one of them yell, "*Cállate!*" and then a sharp whack and the dog shuts up.

But the Hi-Guard steel security door is a problem.

The Rabbit ain't gonna crack it.

Malone gets on the radio. "Billy, you in place?"

"Born in place, bro."

"We're gonna blow the door," Malone says. "When it goes, you toss in a flashbang."

"You got it, D."

Malone nods to Russo, who aims at the door's hinges and fires two blasts. The ceramic powder explodes faster than the speed of sound and the door comes down.

Women, naked save for plastic gloves and hairnets, bolt for the window. Others crouch under tables as money-counting machines spit cash onto the floor like slot machines paying off with paper.

Malone yells, "NYPD!"

He sees Billy through the window to his left.

Doing exactly shit, just staring through the window. Jesus Christ, throw the grenade.

But Billy doesn't.

The fuck's he waiting for?

Then Malone sees it.

The pit bull's got puppies, four of them, curled up in a ball behind her as she runs to the end of her metal chain, snapping and growling to protect them.

Billy doesn't want to hurt the puppies.

Malone yells through the radio. "Goddamn it, do it!"

Billy looks through the window at him, then he kicks in the glass and lobs the grenade in.

But he throws it short, to avoid the goddamn dogs.

The concussion shatters the rest of the glass, spraying shards into Billy's face and neck.

Bright, blinding white light—screams, yells.

Malone counts to three and goes in.

Chaos.

A Trini staggers, one hand to his blinded eyes, the other shooting a Glock as he moves toward the window and the fire escape. Malone hits him with two rounds in the chest and he topples into the window. A second gunman aims at Malone from beneath a counting table but Monty hits him with a blast from his .38 and then a second one to make sure he's DOA.

They let the women get out the window.

"Billy, you okay?" Malone asks.

Billy O's face looks like a Halloween mask.

Gashes on his arms and legs.

"I been cut worse in hockey games," he says, laughing. "I'll get stitched up when we're done here."

Money's everywhere, in stacks, in the machines, spilled on the floor. Heroin is still in coffee grinders where it was being cut.

But that's the small shit.

La caja—the trap—a large hole carved into the wall, is open.

Stacked, floor to ceiling, with bricks of heroin.

Diego Pena sits calmly at a table. If the deaths of two of his guys bother him, it doesn't show on his face. "Do you have a warrant, Malone?"

"I heard a woman scream for help," Malone says.

Pena smirks.

Well-dressed motherfucker. Gray Armani suit worth two large, the gold Piguet watch on his wrist five times that.

Pena notices. "It's yours. I have three more."

The pit bull barks wildly, straining against her chain.

Malone is looking at the heroin.

Stacks of it, vacuum wrapped in black plastic.

Enough H to keep the city high for weeks.

"I'll save you the trouble of counting," Pena says. "One hundred kilos even. Mexican cinnamon heroin—'Dark Horse'—sixty percent pure. You can sell it for a hundred thousand dollars a kilo. The cash you're seeing should amount to another five million. You take the drugs and the money. I get on a plane to the Dominican, you never see me again. Think about it—when's the next time you can make fifteen million dollars for turning your back?"

And we all go home tonight, Malone thinks.

He says, "Take your gun out. Slow."

Pena slowly reaches into his jacket for his pistol.

Malone shoots him twice in the heart.

Billy O squats and picks up a kilo. Slicing it open with his K-bar, he dips a small vial into the heroin, gets a pinch and dumps it into a plastic pouch he takes from his pocket. He crushes the vial inside the test bag and waits for the color to change.

It turns purple.

Billy grins. "We're rich!"

Malone says, "Hurry the fuck up."

There's the sound of a pop as the pit bull breaks the chain and lunges toward him. Billy falls back, throwing the kilo into the air. It mushroom-clouds and then falls like a snow shower into his open wounds.

Another blast as Monty kills the dog.

But Billy's flat on the floor. Malone sees him go rigid, then his legs start to spasm, jerking uncontrollably as the heroin speeds through his bloodstream.

His feet pound on the floor.

Malone kneels beside him, holds him in his arms.

"Billy, no," Malone says. "Hold on."

Billy looks up at him with empty eyes.

His face is white.

His spine jerks like an uncoiling spring.

Then he's gone.

Freakin' Billy, beautiful young Billy O, as old now as he's ever gonna get.

Malone hears his own heart crack, and then dull explosions and at first he thinks he's been shot, but he doesn't see any wounds so then he thinks it's his head blowing up.

Then he remembers.

It's the Fourth of July.