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A Dark and Broken Heart

Written by R. J. Ellory

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A Dark and Broken Heart

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1

BAD AMERICA

The reason Vincent Madigan didn't kill the guy was because the guy looked like Tom Waits. Okay, he was Polish and his name was Bernie Tomczak, but he still looked like Tom Waits. Like Tom Waits did some Eastern European girl and this A-hole was the result. Not only that, but Bernie didn't squeal or cry or plead for his life. None of the regular drama. And Bernie didn't try to be a hero either. He just took the beating, and somewhere after the tenth or twentieth or fiftieth time that Madigan smacked him there was a grudging respect coming in out of left field. Madigan could go with that. He could run most of the way to anyplace with that. And amid all the blood and all the grunting and the sound of teeth breaking or whatever was going on, Madigan wondered if Bernie wasn't the toughest guy he'd ever . . . Ever what?

Madigan hit Bernie again, and whatever thought might have been there just disappeared. That always happened with bad coke and Jack Daniel's. And then Madigan stepped back and felt this rush of something in his chest, and his chest was thin glass like a lightbulb, and he figured if someone hit him back he would just shatter like . . . like . . . like something that shatters, and the feeling in his chest became nausea, and then he started retching and then Bernie fell down and there was a smile on his face, and that smile accompanied the realization that Madigan didn't have the will or the strength to hit him again.

"Jesus, Vincent," Bernie said through his broken and bloody teeth.

"You shut the hell up," Madigan replied. "Pay Sandià the money you owe him or I'm gonna come back and kill you."

Bernie Tomczak tried to smile. It didn't pan out and he just looked worse. "Vincent, seriously . . . I'm gonna pay the guy when I've got the money. But however long that takes, you ain't gonna kill me. If you kill me then no one gets nothing . . ."

"Screw you," Madigan replied.

A few minutes later Madigan got himself together, walked back down the alley, and got in his car. Then he drove away, and he figured if a motorcycle cop pulled him over for weaving back and forth all over the road, he would have to shoot the cop in the head and that would be another story.

Cars went by on all sides, and then he thought about his wife. The second one. Thought about the last time he'd seen her. Standing there in the doorway with that expression on her face. She had that look in her eyes, the look that told Madigan she wasn't alone. He wondered who was in the apartment, what was his name, and most of all he wondered what the guy looked like. And she said, *Hey, Madigan* . . . Her tone was all sassy and she was half-smiling like she knew she was being a bitch and she just loved it. *Hey, Madigan, how goes it?* And he remembered when he met her and how she was just working so hard to be someone, to be *anyone*, and how that naïveté and innocence had seemed so appealing. And now she had half his money and half his balls and half his everything. And then he remembered the other one, the wife before that. She had the other half of every-damned-thing, and that was a different story as well. And Madigan? He had nothing. Like he'd started with nothing and had most of it left. And it was all because of her. Because of both of them. All of them. All the same. And Jesus Christ, he felt like crap.

A block and a half into the Bowery and Madigan couldn't see the road anymore. He pulled over and got out and tried to stand upright, but it was no good. He got in the backseat and lay down, but the roof looked like it was coming down to crush him to death. So he sat up again, and that's when he knew he was maybe going to be sick some more.

He got out and leaned against a streetlight, and then he heaved dry noise into the gutter. Some woman looked at him like he was a piece of garbage, and he told her, "Go to hell, lady," and that shut her up. She hurried away and didn't turn back. He looked up and saw the facade of the Rodeo Bar, and he remembered that place. Inside they had a bar made out of a bus. He saw some girl singer there a while back. Sexy. Had a smoky voice like Billie Holiday. Ingrid something. Italian-sounding name. Ingrid Lucia. That was it. Where the hell was he now? Murray Hill?

After a little while he felt better and he reckoned he could drive a straight line to pretty much anyplace. He got in the car and pulled away from the curb, and he went a good way up the street. Then

he remembered where he was going and made the turn. Places to go. People to see. Things to do. Important things. Most things in life are bullshit. Everything good is hiding. You got to look for it a long time, and when you find it you're never certain it was exactly what you were looking for. You only know it's worth something when it's gone. Seems like life is there solely to teach you about all the ways you can hurt.

Six blocks and Madigan was there. There was a taste of coke in a twist of paper in the dash, and he hunted around and found it. Then he dabbed his finger moist, picked up most of it, and rubbed it in his gums. He waited a moment, and then he felt better—like he was coming alive again—and he opened the car door, got out, went up to the warehouse door and knocked, and they opened up and let him in.

"Hey, Groucho," Chico said.

Madigan nodded. "Everyone here?"

"Harpo is; Zeppo ain't. He called. Be here in five."

"Good 'nough," Madigan replied, and he took off his jacket and walked across to where Harpo was waiting to go over everything again in the most detailed detail imaginable. That was the way it had to be. Details were everything. The devil was in the detail.

"Groucho," he said.

"Harpo," Madigan replied.

Madigan knew their names. All three of them. They didn't know his. He knew everything about them. They knew nothing in return. This was the upper hand, the royal flush against a pair of jacks, a three of aces against a something of whatever else. They looked the way such people always looked. They spent their time in the joint just working out, putting on muscle, and once they were out they let it go. They smoked too much, drank too much, maintained a minimal level of personal hygiene. They would all go unnoticed in a crowd—regular height, dark-haired, clean-shaven, but who they really were was in their eyes.

Madigan sat in the chair, lit a cigarette, and closed his eyes for a moment. Harpo said, "You okay, man?" Madigan looked up and smiled. "I wanna do this thing," he said.

"Tomorrow is the day," Harpo said.

"I know tomorrow is the day," Madigan replied. "But I wanna do the thing now. This waiting bullshit is . . . is—"

"Bullshit?" Harpo ventured.

Madigan smiled. "Bullshit is what it is," he said. He smoked his

cigarette and waited for Zeppo—aka Laurence Fulton, an ugly son of a bitch who did three-to-five upstate for a GTA beef, another term sometime before that, now had another thing pending with the DA for accomplice to armed robbery; a man with more balls than sense, a raw red fist of a temper. Most important of all was the rape charge. The rape charge that never stuck. His word against that of a thirteen-year-old Hispanic girl out of East Harlem. Fulton was always late. Always apologetic. *My old lady* this, *My old lady* that. More crap from people who'd had a lifetime's experience of talking crap. Hell, what did they think? That other folks had a never-ending appetite for it?

Madigan dropped his cigarette on the floor. He put it out with his heel and then put the butt in his jacket pocket. Leave nothing behind. No prints, no beer cans, no food wrappers, nothing. We were here, and then we were gone. Gone like ghosts. And this place was so damned far from his own haunts that they could look for months and find nothing. Like looking for a handful of air in a paper bag; you knew it was in there, but you just couldn't see it.

Fulton arrived. He started up about something-or-other, everything tagged with a sad apology, but Madigan didn't listen. The four of them sat around the plain deal table in the middle of the empty warehouse, and they got out the plan of the house, the plan of the street, the plan of the park and the surrounding block. Then they went through it one more time, and then another time for good luck, and Madigan believed they'd got it enough for him to call it a day.

He looked at the three of them—Laurence Fulton, Chuck Williams, Bobby Landry. Print their sheets in one go and you could wallpaper a duplex. Fulton and Landry were two strikes down, Williams was a one-time deal. All three of them—among so many other things—were sex offenders, the kind that slid like oil off glass. Nothing ever stuck. Those cases were the hardest to prosecute, the easiest to defend. These three were somewhere out beyond the lower levels, the bottom-feeders. That's why he used them. If they wound up dead then it was no one's loss, everyone's gain. And Madigan himself? He had never been inside, intended to keep it that way. If he went inside, knowing what he knew, he was dead, no question. Fulton and Landry were both lifers if they were pinched, though Fulton was in the end zone compared to Landry. Landry was dangerous, unpredictable, even psychotic, but Fulton? Fulton was an out-and-out sociopath. Hell, they were all lifers if

this thing went the wrong way. This was the kind of deal where a good number of people were going to die on the scene. They had a matter of minutes for the in and out. Soon as there was gunplay there could be soldiers running from all quarters. Silencers were out of the question, even homemade ones. Hit like this it was best to go in noisy. The shock factor played in your favor. At least there would be no police, not for this gig. Not until later. But hell, anyone who figured *any* plan was a cert was dumber than a box of sand. That was the trick: Anticipate every which it could go wrong, and you upped the odds on it going right. And if the thing didn't go down, then Madigan knew his whole sorry life would be history anyway. The heist was a straight fifty grand apiece, maybe seventy-five. The moment they got inside they had to be all over that money like stink on shit. If the money made it out the back door, they were screwed. That's why timing was of the essence. This was the deal. Mess this up and it got deeper than a hole through the bottom of hell. The better part of a quarter mill was going into a house up near First and Paladino at ten in the a.m., Tuesday the twelfth, and Vincent Madigan, Laurence Fulton, Chuck Williams, and Bobby Landry would be in for that money at 10:05. At 10:10 they had to be out of there and running. Madigan needed the money for the lawyers. He owed more than twenty in alimony alone. And then there was Sandià himself. That was the bitterest irony of all. He could give the lawyers ten and keep them in the woods for a few more weeks, but Sandià needed everything else. That was where his cut needed to go. Forty grand toward a seventy-five-grand debt. Mr. Sandià—loan shark, bookie, dealer, pimp, King of East Harlem, and all-round Man of the Year. Like the Bernie Tomczak gig that morning—chasing up Mr. Sandià's other debtors bought Madigan time, but never a discount. And if the house job came back to him, then Madigan was in deeper than he could ever comprehend. He could imagine the meeting that would take place between him and Sandià. *Vincent . . . I know it was you. I have the evidence here. You killed my people and you stole my money to pay your debt to me. You paid me back with my own money. And don't insult me by telling me you didn't. Tell me the truth and I'll kill you quickly. Lie to me and I will have someone torture you for a month.*

Madigan looked at the men around him. Three pedo grunts out of Leavenworth on a day pass for cheap whiskey and cheaper whores. That was what he had. It didn't get much worse than this.

"So we're good," Fulton said. "We're here at eight thirty

precisely, out of here at eight forty. No later than nine thirty we're on the corner of First and 124th, and then we're on hold until we see that money go in the house." He smiled. "And then, my friends, we are up."

Williams reached into his bag, brought out a fifth of rye and four plastic cups. He shared the bottle between the cups, passed them around.

"To Joe DiMaggio," Madigan said.

"Joe DiMaggio?" Landry asked.

Madigan smiled. "Anyone who can hit that many home runs and bag a babe like Marilyn Monroe deserves a toast every time I take a drink."

Landry smiled. "To Joe DiMaggio."

They drank. The cups and the bottle went back in Williams's bag. Madigan was the only one to ensure he wiped his cup before he returned it to Williams.

"We're done," Madigan said, and he got up. He wiped down the seat, the edge of the table, everything he'd touched. He made his farewells and went out to the car. He looked for any more drugs in the dash; there was nothing but half of some white pill that could have been anything from aspirin to Benzedrine. Madigan licked it. More than likely a bennie, so he dropped it dry. He would either get a buzz or lose a headache, either which way was fine.

He drove a while. He parked ahead of some $9.99 All-U-Can-Eat chop suey joint and looked in the rearview. From how many mirrors in how many restrooms in how many bars had that worn-out face looked back at him? Too many? Or too few? Once, maybe a long time back, he'd been a handsome man, a man with a crooked smile and some kind of charm in his eyes. But now all he saw was the other side of himself, the darker side, the side that he hid from the world. Maybe he'd just lock himself in a motel room and drink himself to death. Maybe that would be simpler.

Madigan smiled at himself. "A-hole," he said to the reflection, and then he started the car and pulled away from the curb.

He was hungry all of a sudden—cheap burgers and greasy fries kind of hungry.

2

WALKIN' WITH THE BEAST

Things happen. Most of them bad. Too many things to remember. You forget the details, of course. Details are unimportant until they're important, and when they're important they're vital. Life and death kind of vital. How you came to be where you are can never be attributed to one thing only. Like the destination never comes down to one facet of the journey, and if we're talking about life then the destination you planned for and the destination you get are never the same damned thing anyway. And there is never one thing that causes you to lose control, to have your life become something other than your own. If there was one reason, then maybe you could go back and fix it. That's what you keep thinking. You keep turning it over, like a video loop or something. But it's not that simple. Nothing's that simple. When you take a good look, even the simplest things are a great deal more complicated than they at first appear.

Things color you bad. Takes more than a prayer and a promise to uncolor you. This stuff stains your soul. Deeper than that even. And for a while your mind can get all twisted around in figuring out how to go backward and fix things up. The drugs, the booze, the wives and the kids you messed up. And then—almost imperceptibly—you start to wonder if you can go forward and out the other side. It starts to make sense. You can't get off the rollercoaster midflight. You ain't never gonna jump clear of this thing. But maybe it stops somewhere. Or maybe you can do something to make it stop. And then you can get off.

Comes down to it, profiling is a lie. It is bullshit. I am neither a loser nor a loner. I do not live with my mother. I have been married twice. I have four children from three different women. I am fertile, focused, and right now—right at this very moment—I am screwed. I am surprised every morning I wake up and find out someone hasn't killed me. I can sell two different lies out of separate corners of my mouth at the same damned time. I saw a girl die three weeks ago. I knew she was ODing, and there was nothing I could do. I knew she wouldn't make it to the hospital, and I knew I could never save her, and it's things like that that

make me wonder what the hell is going on in this world. No one gave a damn about her. Not her dealer, not her pimp, not her mom or dad or brothers or sisters, and sometimes I wonder if I am going to die that way—forgotten, unknown, irrelevant. It's that kind of thing that gives me nightmares, and, like Tom Waits says, it takes a whole lot of whiskey to make the nightmares go away. And I have nightmares. A lot of nightmares. And they're getting worse. I gotta do this thing with these three whackos tomorrow. I gotta get this money and get Sandià off my back. I gotta get the lawyers sorted with the alimony, and then we're good to go. I'll get cleaned up. I'll get straight. I'll drink carrot juice and take vitamins and slow down on the booze, and I'll stop chugging bennies like they're PEZ. I'll get a girl, a nice girl, and things'll be good. I'll have some money in my pocket, and we're all gonna be fine an' dandy. That's what we'll be.

I think all these things, and then I think: Who the hell are you kidding? You think you're gonna fool anyone with this, most of all yourself? You're a dumb son of a bitch. Hell, you couldn't pour piss out of a shoe if the instructions were written on the heel. Five minutes in your company is the best argument anyone could ever get for compulsory sterilization.

And then I take a couple of bennies, maybe a Adderall or Desoxyn—whatever I can get—and it all kicks into life. I see things in a different light, and I think: To hell with it; it's all gonna be fine. Balance it all out with some Klonopin or a Xanax or two, and I start to make sense of things. Things start to look less fractured, more straightforward. Get some drinks. Maybe the Cedar Tavern where they have that old bar that was saved from the Susquehanna Hotel. Go down there and hang out with the ghosts of Ginsberg and Kerouac and Vincent O'Hara, and then drive down to the Bridge Café for soft-shelled crabs and a hanger steak . . . World sure looks seven shades of different after that.

I'll do that tonight, but I'll keep Jack Daniel's—great friend that he is—at arm's length. For tomorrow I need my wits and my wisdom. Tomorrow is the day when it starts to turn around one eighty and go in the right damned direction.

It has to.

Just for once, it has to.

3

LIKE CALLING UP THUNDER

The inside of the Ford Econoline E-250 cargo van smells like a post-game locker room on a hot Sunday afternoon. Four men have sweated inside it for the better part of an hour, back and to the left across the junction, out of line of sight of the building. Vincent Madigan is up front, passenger side; Bobby Landry is behind the wheel; Laurence Fulton and Chuck Williams in back. Landry will stay in the vehicle, keep the motor running. Vincent Madigan will lead the assault, in through the back second-floor windows, coming at them like a tidal wave of shock and awe. That's the ticket here. This is the free pass for the job. They'll never expect it, and that element of surprise is the only damned thing they have. Madigan has a sawn-off three-inch Mossberg on a loop from his shoulder and under his overcoat. He has a .44 in back of his waistband. Williams has an M-16 in a canvas duffel. Fulton doesn't like long-shooters, and has gone for a .45 and a .38. It's going to be very noisy. And they plan to leave no witnesses.

By reckoning, by past experience, trusting everything that has happened before, Madigan expects four men in the house. The rear of the house is not where they keep their eyes. Eyes are always out front. Eyes look for the money, and when the money comes up, well, then—and only then—are they all eagle-eyed out back. These guys may be tough, but they're not the brightest lights in the harbor. That, and the simple fact that Sandià owns the whole neighborhood and no one in their right mind would even consider robbing him . . .

But Madigan hasn't got any room to maneuver; desperate situations call for desperate measures.

Madigan, Fulton, and Williams will be up on the roof of the outbuilding before the delivery's even made. The outbuilding adjoins the property, its roof sitting beneath the window by three feet, no more. The way it goes is this: Landry's out in the street. He sees the money going in the front. He radios Madigan, and

Madigan, Fulton, and Williams are coming through the upper floor as the money reaches the top of the stairwell. The four goons are dead in a hail of gunfire, and then the money goes out the back, along the alleyway beside the house, into the van, and away. Five minutes, tops.

Madigan closes his eyes. He feels the rush. He feels the punch of the thing in his lower gut. If this goes, then maybe there's an out for him. If this dies a death, then regardless of whether he makes it out of the house there's no chance. If he doesn't get caught by the cops, Sandià will find him. And then there will be the inevitable conversation, and Sandià will torture Madigan for a month and leave his heart in a box on the sidewalk in front of the apartment where his kids live. This is what Sandià will do. This is the kind of man that he is.

Landry grips the wheel. His knuckles are white. Madigan watches him for a moment, and then he glances over his shoulder at Fulton and Williams. Any other day and he would be kicking the crap out of people like this for the money they owed Sandià. But today? No, not today. Today is different.

"We're out of here," Madigan says quietly, and such is the tension and anticipation in the van that they would have gotten that message had he only thought it.

Fulton opens up the back door.

Williams goes first. Blue jeans, tan work boots, a black jacket with the collar up against the cold. Over his shoulder is the duffel. It's all in his eyes, his body language, his gait—the fear, but also the *need* to feel that fear.

Madigan nods at Fulton. Fulton does the two-fists-clenched, *I'm ready for this* gesture, and then he's out the door as well. He follows Williams, is no more than ten feet behind him, and Madigan waits for a good five minutes. He allows ample time for them to walk back around the block and come up to the alleyway beside the house from the far side.

"Whatever happens," Madigan tells Landry, "whatever you hear, whatever the hell you think might be going on in there, you don't take off until I'm back. I don't care if Zeppo comes back here with half his head blown off. I don't care if half of Costa-fuckin'-Rica comes out of that house with Harpo's head on a stick and his balls in a paper bag. You don't go anywhere until I'm in here with you. You get me?"

"Hey—" Landry starts, and he smiles. He's done this kind of

thing before. He knows the score. He knows what's *meant* to happen and what *really* happens are sometimes as far from each other as north and south.

"Hey nothing," Madigan says. "You just say, 'Yes, sir, Mr. Groucho.' That's all I wanna hear right now."

Landry nods. "I got it, man. I know the deal here." He bangs the steering wheel with his palms a couple of times for emphasis, and then he grips it again like a lifeline.

"So we're good?"

"We're good, man. We're good."

Madigan tucks the leather loop of the Mossberg over his shoulder and buttons his overcoat. He jerks back the lever and the door opens. He steps down into the street and looks back one more time at Bobby Landry. He's a young guy, only twenty-five. He has a thin film of sweat varnishing his forehead.

Madigan closes the van door and starts walking. At the corner, he glances back. The only giveaway is the thin cloud of fumes issuing from the van's exhaust. In this neighborhood? Someone parked up in a vehicle with the engine running? Well, that person has something going on that someone else is going to disagree with, for sure.

Madigan nods one more time at Landry, and then turns the corner.

At the rear of the house, Fulton and Williams are already down on their haunches side by side, backs against the wall of the outbuilding. The roof of the building is no more than ten feet from the ground. A simple boost, and they're up there. They sit quiet—all three of them—and Madigan can see the light in their eyes. He knows he has it too. It's a light like nothing else. It isn't fear, not exactly. Maybe it's fear and excitement and anticipation all bound up together in that moment when you know you might die. Madigan has experienced it so many times it's like one of the family. It's something that regular folk will never understand. You could give it a name—could be the best damned name in the world—and people still wouldn't understand it. Not even soldiers, because they're not fighting two enemies. Here he has Sandià's people, and he has the police. The *po-lice*. Screwed either way.

Madigan breathes deeply. It is cold. He exhales and watches his breath dissipate. His pulse is regular, his heartbeat too, and he feels the blood in his veins, thin like water. He did a couple of

Dexedrine earlier. Kicked things up a notch. He's okay. He feels a balance. He did just enough, and it's all good.

He checks the handheld. Can't miss word from Landry in the van. That delivery arrives at the front door, and in that moment they're up on the roof and over to the window. In that moment. No sooner, no later. The money coming in through the front door puts all eyes on the street. No one will be looking their way. These guys ain't that good. And if they're seen from a property that faces the rear of the building . . . well, this is the neighborhood. No one says a thing. Not a word. And sure as shit no one calls the *po-lice*. Down here it doesn't work that way. This isn't Gramercy Heights or Chelsea. This is East Harlem. Suck it up, motherfuckers; only way out of here is in a squad car or the coroner's wagon.

Fulton goes to speak, but Madigan silences him with a shake of his head. Williams has got the bag laid out flat at his feet. It's unzipped, and Madigan can see the dull sheen of the M16's barrel. Fulton is a gangbanger, and Williams isn't that far off. They want blood and mayhem. No class. No subtlety. They want to see people exploding. Fireworks in a butcher's store. And when they're done, they're gonna want to go and screw teenagers. These are the kind of folks he's now socializing with.

The handheld crackles once, but it's just a burst of static. He checks the volume, the small red light on top. Williams instinctively reaches for the M16. There is electricity everywhere. He can feel the raw copper taste in the back of his throat.

Madigan stays his hand. Williams closes his eyes and holds his breath for just a second.

A bead of sweat breaks free from Madigan's hairline and starts down his forehead. He wipes it away.

"To hell with this," Williams hisses, and it's little more than an exhalation of pent-up nerves.

"Chill, chill," Fulton says, and Madigan looks sideways at the man, and behind the light in his eyes he sees the thing that makes them do this. The *hunger*. That's the only word to use. It's a hunger, a need, a reason to live. More often than not it's a reason to die, but until then it's just who and what they are. They kowtow to no one. They grant respect to no one but their own kind, and even then it is granted begrudgingly. These are precisely the kind of people who would do something as foolish as robbing one of Sandià's drug houses. That's the second reason Madigan chose them.

*

When Bobby Landry saw the beat-to-shit Chevy Caprice pull up in front of the house, he slowed down inside. Everything went quiet. He held the radio in his hand for a moment, and then raised it to his mouth. His finger hesitated over the TALK button. He watched carefully. He had expected an inconspicuous car, something that no one would give a second thought to, but this was taking it to the extreme. This could be nothing more than a crowd of Costa Rican junkies after a score.

He breathed slowly. Timing was everything. If the crew went in the back before the money arrived, they'd be dead. If they went in too late they be dead all over again.

If they'd known faces it would have helped. Any of Sandià's people could be on the delivery run. And Sandià had no shortage of mules and carriers and grunts.

Three men came out of the Caprice. Two crossed the sidewalk and stood at the gate. The third hung back with the car. They were scanning the street, no question. If a fourth man got out, and if that fourth man was carrying a duffel, a suitcase, a backpack—anything that was big enough to contain a quarter mill in used bundles—then Landry would be on the radio to the crew at the back of the property.

Landry held his breath. It was good. This was it. This was the deal. Right here, right now.

The man at the side of the Caprice leaned down to speak to someone in the car. That someone then came out slowly, glancing back over the way, all eyes and ears, and once he was out of the vehicle and upright Landry saw the bag.

This was it.

The gig was on.

He pressed TALK.

Madigan was on his feet, his back to the wall, the side of his face against the left edge of the window frame. Williams stood to his right, Fulton over on the other side, and through the glass Madigan watched for the first sign of the door opening at the base of the internal stairwell. He'd been inside once before. He knew the layout well enough. The front door opened into the lower hallway. The stairwell started not six feet away and ran a straight line up to the second floor. The window was ahead of a turn in the stairs. From his vantage point he could see the light from the street as the

front door opened, see the light disappear as the front door was closed behind the delivery crew, and then they would start up the stairs. One man ahead, the carrier behind him, the other two behind him. Madigan's Mossberg through the window would take out the lead man, maybe the carrier. In that moment of stunned confusion generated by the attack, all three of them—Madigan himself, Fulton, and Williams—had to be through the aperture and firing before these assholes even had a chance to tell the time. The narrow stairwell, the fact that the two front men would fall backward into the latter two—these things Madigan counted on. Surprise and gravity. Shock and awe. Bodies in motion and then at rest.

The light was there.

Madigan even heard voices.

He reached out his right hand and stayed Williams once again. He nodded to Fulton. Fulton looked like a man with a fire in his gut. He had the .45 in one hand, the .38 in the other. Doc-fucking-Holliday.

The delivery crew started up the stairs. The lead man was eight or ten steps up before the front door closed below him. One more step, one more second, and then Madigan was turning, the Mossberg ahead of him like an extension of his own body, his finger jerking, the slide coming back a second time, a third, the window exploding inward.

The first barrage took the guy's face away. Madigan hit him just beneath the chin, but the trajectory was angled upward by just a few degrees. The instinctive response of the lead man to pull his head back away from the source of the blast meant that his face was parallel to the angle of the shot. Most of his features were on the ceiling before he knew what the hell had happened.

The weight of the front man, the fact that he fell backward into the carrier, the narrow stairwell—all these things worked in Madigan's favor. He was through the devastated window and firing more shots down into the melee of arms and legs before any one of them had a chance to pull a gun, let alone fire it.

Fulton and Williams came in behind Madigan, and the three of them let fly with a barrage of gunfire sufficient to decimate not only the four men now heaped at the bottom of the stairway, but the risers themselves, the banister, and much of the lower hallway. Plaster and wood fragments, chunks of masonry, carpeting, blood, bone, flesh, teeth, and the smoke and noise and screaming of the

men beneath them. Another day in hell. It was a turkey shoot. It was a massacre.

Madigan stopped firing only when there were no shells left.

Fulton and Williams followed suit.

The silence was eerie, far more unsettling than the war that had just taken place. The smoke hung in a thick pall above them. The smell of sweat and cordite and blood was thick enough to taste.

Madigan took the stairs at their edges for greatest support, descending tentatively, hoping that the risers didn't collapse beneath him. The idea of landing feet-first in the disaster zone that lay there not ten feet below him was . . . well, picking Costa Ricans out of the treads and welts of his boots was not something he'd scheduled for this Tuesday afternoon.

Williams, using his common sense, lay down on the landing and leaned over toward Madigan. He held out his hand, and Madigan gripped it. From halfway down the stairs he could reach the bag, but it was beneath bodies, and it took Madigan some time to work it free. One of the handles was snapped, the bag punctured in numerous places, spattered with blood, but the bodies had acted as a shield against it and it was remarkably intact considering all that had taken place.

Madigan pulled it up by the good handle, and Williams assisted him in his return to the upper landing.

At the top Madigan took a second to check the contents of the bag. Thick wads of hundreds and fifties. Looked like a great deal more than he'd anticipated. He smiled to himself, but gave no outward acknowledgment to Fulton and Williams.

"Go," he mouthed, and followed them to the window. He indicated with his hand, knowing full well that they would be hearing nothing clearly for a while. In his own ears the ringing was intense, deafening almost.

They were out, across the roof of the outbuilding, down into the alleyway and into the street within thirty seconds.

The van was already on the go as they reached it, Madigan up front with the bag, Fulton and Williams in back with the weaponry.

Landry took the first three hundred yards at speed, and then he hit First Avenue and slowed right down. He headed southwest, followed a road parallel to the FDR Drive, kept within the limit, took it easy, and when he crossed East 117th, he started to relax. No sirens. Not a sound. No one following them.

"Okay, where to now?" he asked Madigan.

"Change of vehicle near the Metropolitan Hospital. There's an alleyway off of East 109th. Get to the junction with Second and I'll direct you."

Madigan glanced over his shoulder. Fulton and Williams were grinning like crazies queuing for meds.

Went like clockwork. Went like a dream.

Half an hour's work for way more than a quarter mill.

Madigan clutched the bag on his lap. He could feel the bundles inside. This was the way out. Lawyers, Sandià, whoever the hell else wanted a piece of him, they were all history. Rock *and* roll, motherfuckers . . . Rock and fucking roll.