

MOST WANTED

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A TOUCHSTONE BOOK

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PART ONE

Where I'm Coming From

— CHAPTER 1 —

I was dead asleep when the call came in that June night in 2011, and I had to grope for the phone by the bed. It was Colonel Marian McGovern, the superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, my old job. She was telling me something about Whitey Bulger, but I couldn't quite follow it.

“Sorry. Can you say that again?” I asked. “What was that?” I was sure I was dreaming.

“Whitey Bulger, Tommy,” she repeated. “He was captured in California.”

“Wait. What?” I was fully awake now. My wife pulled herself up in bed beside me.

The colonel still had to say it all one more time before it could sink in.

“When did this happen?”

“About an hour ago. The FBI captured him in Santa Monica. I got a call from Special Agent DesLauriers.” He was in charge of the FBI's Boston office. “I thought you'd want a heads-up.”

“Santa Monica,” I repeated. “Jesus.”

“A few blocks from the beach. He'd been renting an apartment there with his girlfriend.” Catherine Greig, the woman he'd fled Boston with, back in 1995. I remembered her well. A real ballbuster, over twenty years younger than Whitey. We'd wanted to search her town house for Whitey the night he fled, but we'd been running all over the place trying to find him. When we showed up at her door, she refused to let us in. “No warrant?” she sneered. “Then go fuck yourselves.” Then she slammed the door in our faces.

That was our last chance of catching Whitey that night. Or for the next

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sixteen years. Over time, he got up to second—just behind Osama Bin Laden—on the FBI’s most wanted fugitive list, with a \$2 million reward on his head. And then he was number one.

“Where’s Whitey?”—that game was always fun to play. I had him in Cuba. I figured his money would hold up, it had great beaches, and there was no extradition treaty with the United States.

I had the beach part right, but I certainly didn’t pick him for Santa Monica. And not in the same third-floor apartment, steps from the piers, for the last fourteen years. Nobody guessed that.

When I finished the call, I filled in my wife, Marguerite, who’d suffered through the Whitey investigation even more than I did. “They got him,” I told her. “In Santa Monica.” I didn’t have to say who.

You might think I’d feel frustrated not to have bagged the guy myself, but I was just glad that somebody got him. It didn’t matter to me who it was, and it still doesn’t. Just so long as Whitey rots in prison now.

I called up Danny Doherty and Stevie Johnson, two members of the Whitey team I put together, and told them the news. They wouldn’t mind being woken up for this.

“Well, it’s about time,” Stevie said.

All three of us—Danny, Stevie, and me—had been afraid we’d never get him. Either he’d slip away forever, or he’d turn up dead. He’d just stay out there somehow, permanently out of reach.

“They better hang on to him,” Danny said. “That’s all I can say.”

It wasn’t for another day or so that we got pictures. Bulger bald, with a monkish white beard and a loopy grin on his face, Greig looking gray and defeated. Both of them stooped with age. Some people thought Whitey might be seriously ill. I don’t know about that, but he did look weak. He’d always been about power—having it, projecting it. He was not a big man, but his arms and shoulders had always been heavily muscled. Now that strength was all gone, and he looked like just another tired old man, maybe a few years away from using a cane or a walker.

For a guy who was one of the most sought-after fugitives in the en-

tire world, he'd proved surprisingly easy to apprehend. The FBI had been tipped off about his name and address, lured him into the garage, clapped the handcuffs on him, and that was it. You had to wonder how hard the FBI had been trying for the past sixteen years. That whole time, Whitey had been hiding in plain sight, lying out on the beach, maybe a little quiet with the neighbors, his bedroom window blacked out. It took sixteen years for someone at the Bureau to figure out—how about we try looking for her? She's probably not as careful as a mobster about hiding her tracks. It seemed pretty basic to me, but apparently not to the FBI.

When Whitey was captured and flown back to Boston, he was the talk of the city, and much of the country, too. I knew him as a fiendish killer, but to lots of people in Boston he was just a character. That's how he was seen in the tony parts of town like Cambridge, The Back Bay, and Beacon Hill. In tougher neighborhoods like Charlestown, the North End, and Southie, Whitey was almost the unofficial mayor, as plenty of people there thought of him as a Robin Hood who always had a few bucks for some turkeys to give to the poor at Thanksgiving. That drove me nuts. Whitey Bulger sure as hell didn't give anything away. He was a murderer, a drug dealer, an extortionist, a thug. He was like the Boston Strangler or Joe "The Animal" Barboza or Johnny Martorano, only worse because he did more damage over a much longer time. These were not gentle guys, and Whitey wasn't gentle either.

Lots of people lined the streets to watch Whitey be taken by police SUV and, escorted by state troopers, from Logan Airport to the new Joseph A. Moakley federal courthouse on the South Boston waterfront. On TV, I watched Whitey emerge from the SUV, and he walked, in handcuffs and leg irons, to the courthouse, a federal Marshal on each arm. I saw the halting gait, the hunched shoulders. Waiting for him inside was his brother, the former state senate president, Billy Bulger, who'd lost his job as president of the University of Massachusetts for refusing to tell a congressional committee what he knew about his brother's whereabouts during Whitey's flight. This first court appearance of Whitey's was brief,

since it was to see if he qualified for bail. Since he had been the most wanted fugitive in America, the answer would be no.

It wasn't for another month that I laid eyes on him myself. I'd been waiting for that moment ever since we first started up the investigative unit to get him in 1990. That was over two decades, a good chunk of my life spent on Whitey Bulger, but I'd never once seen him, at least not definitively. In late July after his capture, though, he was to be formally arraigned, and I drove in from my home in Worcester to see him in the federal courthouse. I sat with the victims' families in the small spectators' gallery. I'd done what I could to find out what had happened to their loved ones; before our investigation, many of them had never known for sure. The news wasn't happy. In every case, a member of their family had been murdered by Whitey, often in a hideous fashion. But, painful as that was, they were grateful to know. Now they came up to shake my hand, with some warm words. Some of them were tearful. I sat next to Steve Davis, the burly brother of Debbie Davis. Starting in her late teens, she'd been the girlfriend of Stevie Flemmi, Whitey's close associate. When Flemmi tired of her, Whitey strangled her for him. We'd found the corpse, buried on a beach not far from where Whitey lived with Catherine Greig. Now Steve Davis greeted me with a clap on the back like a family member.

Finally, a door opened, and there was Whitey. Clad in an orange prison jumpsuit, his legs clapped in irons, he shuffled into the court, a U.S. Marshal holding tight to each arm. His brothers Jack and Billy Bulger were there in front-row seats, and he shot them a look of hello, with a little wave. The brothers nodded back with half smiles. Beside me, I could tell Steve Davis was tensing up, his breath coming heavy, obviously infuriated to see his sister's killer a few feet from him. I was afraid he might leap from his seat and charge at Bulger. Instead, he blew out several long breaths and dried his hands on his pants. Whitey took a seat in a chair at the defendant's table, facing the judge, his back to us. All around me, the victims' families stared hard at Whitey's back, their gaze like bullets.

Whitey was detestable, yes. But mostly what he seemed to me right then was small. And old. Beaten looking. All the life had drained out of

him. He was just a wisp of a guy shuffling around, his rough voice all that was left of the vitality that had once terrified an entire city.

But that thought didn't bring me peace. I was pleased to see him captured, no question. But what kept coming back as I looked at this old man was the cold fury that had so often surged through me on this case. I'm not the type to yell and scream. People say I show my anger in my eyes. Just seeing how old Whitey was as he sat, his shoulders curved, on that chair—it reminded me of how long he'd been gone, and that made me think of *why* he'd been gone so long. And why he hadn't been rotting in prison as he deserved. And that went back to why we hadn't been able to arrest him that day that Catherine Greig tossed us off her front steps, or any day since. And that only raised other questions, the same old questions, as to why someone like Whitey Bulger had been able to stay in business for so long, killing, extorting, dealing drugs, terrorizing. And, finally, why had this outrage *still* not been addressed? How could it *still* fester, wrecking more lives, like those of the families of the victims sitting around me?