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BEAN FATE

BASED ON A TRUE CRIME

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Author's Note

This is a work of fiction. However, it is based on real historical events and people.

It was almost one hundred years ago; a very different time. The ethnic slurs, and many of the attitudes and values found in this story, while common at the time, are considered totally unacceptable today.

Except as otherwise identified, all of the characters are white to the best of my knowledge.

The following characters in this story are real historical people:

Harry Bronfman, 37; Samuel 'Sam' Bronfman, 31; Allan Bronfman, 26; Paul Matoff, 35; Jean Matoff. Johnny Torrio, 40; Al Capone, 23; Dutch Schultz, 21. James A. Cross, 46; R.E.A. Leech, 63; Charles Augustus Mahoney, 52. Lee Dillege, 36; Jimmy Lacoste, 25. William Hale 'Big Bill' Thompson, 53; Amos Alonzo Stagg, 60; Charles Fitzmorris, 38. Meyer Chechik, Zasu Natanson, and Harry Rabinovitch. Gordon White; Colin Rawcliffe, 26; Dr. John Nicol, Colonel Johnson, A. J. Andrews, 57.

Among other real people referred to are the following:

Cyril and Vernon Knowles, Jacques Bureau, Frank Hamer, Dr. T. Albert Moore, Violet McNaughton, Nellie McClung, Avery Erickson, Fred Fahler, and Swede Risberg.

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Chapter 1

Big Bill Thompson just loved a parade. Just loved it, especially one featuring himself. And the completion of the Michigan Avenue Bridge over the Chicago River in May 1922 seemed like a good excuse for another one featuring himself. After all, it was a major milestone in the development of the bustling raw city of three million people on the shores of Lake Michigan, a city of many large such projects. Home of the world's first skyscraper!

And so it was that on a steamy day a parade approached the bridge, the city flag of only two stars and stripes flying from flagpoles atop the tender houses at the four corners of the bridge. It was an engineering marvel that Big Bill had built. Well, he hadn't built it but he had the good fortune to be the Mayor of Chicago when it was completed. It was a bascule bridge or drawbridge with leaves that met in the middle and could be raised to allow tall ships to pass under it to travel up the river. It was also double-leaf, which meant its leaves were divided in two along the axis so that it could be operated as two parallel bridges independently. And finally, it was a double-decker with a roadway on both levels, the upper intended for faster traffic and the lower for slower.

It was across the upper level with leaves down flat that Big Bill, sweating in a three-piece suit complete with gold watch chain and leather chaps, rode his horse at the head of the parade waving his trademark Stetson to the crowds. The city police marching band with various drums and brass instruments, and various floats, cars, and trucks, followed for two hours. The thousands of spectators, many the worse for wear from occasional guzzles of bootleg whiskey, known as booze, cheered and waved stars and stripes flags as the parade passed along Michigan Avenue and over the marvel of a bridge while they were showered with booster pamphlets from biplanes flying low overhead.

Goddammit! This is my town, thought Big Bill. Wouldn't trade it for New York and all its fancy people. Look at all those people out there, WASPs, bohunks, darkies and they all voted for me. Well, not all but enough. The WASPS still do, most of them, because I'm one of them. Although not those arrogant anglophile McCormicks and their fucking newspaper. But enough, along with the bohunks and darkies. It was tricky to be sure he ruminated while waving from high above the crowd on his horse. While a majority of the WASPS want prohibition, the others don't. But so far, I've walked the line, kept a majority. And the truth is the WASPs are no longer a majority and there's no way we can really enforce it. Too many people want to drink when they want to drink. And I'm okay with that. Don't mind it myself.

After the parade ended, he went back to his hotel suite and received a variety of good-humored citizens to celebrate the great civic event. While booze was served along with other drinks, it was done discreetly out of a pantry by a black waiter in a crisp white chef jacket with the hotel logo.

Thompson wasn't called Big Bill for nothing. He was a big man of an athletic, if now portly, build who dominated a room with his booming voice and outgoing personality. Some would say an outrageous personality, a dangerous personality with a strange populist showmanship for a Methodist and Republican of respectable upbringing. He stood shaking hands at the head of a small receiving line of well-wishers.

One of the first was the Baptist pastor with the big following.

"So glad to see you, reverend," said Big Bill with his signature handshake, pumping the preacher's hand with his right hand, small for a big man, and clapping him on the shoulder with his left hand.

"Glad to be here," said the pastor in a voice with still a hint of a lower-class English accent. "And I just want to thank you for all you're doing in supporting our crusade against crime."

"Nothing could be more important for this city. Glad to help. Anytime you need anything, just get in touch."

The pastor moved on.

Among those waiting in the line was a smallish foxy-looking man in a dapper three-piece suit. Finally, he reached Big Bill.

“Why, hello Johnny,” said Big Bill heartily, looking around slightly nervously as he pumped Johnny’s hand with his right hand and clapped him on the shoulder with his left hand.

“Hello, mister mayor,” said Johnny in a quiet raspy voice with a thick southern Italian accent. “Thanks for all your help.”

“Glad to help. Any time you need anything, just get in touch.”

After another vigorous handshake, Big Bill hadn’t let go, Johnny turned and left the room. He’d only been there for a few minutes, just long enough to remind Big Bill.

Johnny left the room, took the elevator down, and walked through the lobby. There were a couple of Chicago policemen at the door. After all, the Mayor deserved security. As he walked past them, Johnny made eye contact with one and nodded in acknowledgment. The policeman nodded back.

A lot of people were drinking a lot of booze in Chicago that night. Among them was a flashy-looking guy and a flashy-looking blonde woman in a downtown Italian restaurant.

At about ten PM, a big Packard car drove under the Loop, the elevated urban railway, along a side street and up beside that restaurant and stopped. Two men got out, one from each of the backdoors. They both wore homburgs and raincoats. One was beefy with conspicuous facial scars and the other was slim with cold dark eyes. The doorman noted their raincoats because it wasn’t raining and nervously opened the door. He’d seen this picture before.

They walked in and saw at a table across the room the flashy-looking guy with the flashy-looking blonde. As he looked up, the guy’s face registered instant dismay. He’d recognized the duo for what they were but it was already too late. Even as he pulled out the .35 caliber pistol, the beefy guy opened his coat and fired across with a sawed-off shotgun. The targeted guy crashed back off his chair in a spray of blood dead as a doornail. The blonde was hit too but was still alive. The slim guy with the dark eyes walked up and put her out of her misery with a shot from a big Colt 45 revolver. Then the two assassins turned and walked out and climbed into the waiting car.

As it took off, the beefy guy said to the other, “That’s the way we do it.”

Half an hour later, they walked into a red brick row building on South Wabash Street, not the saloon on the left but the staircase on the right. They ascended the stairs and, as they turned on the second floor landing to enter a

suite of offices, they passed a cop descending from the whorehouse on the third floor who nodded at them. The ugly-looking thug who stood on guard at the entrance to the suite of offices ushered them over to an office, opened the door, and stepped aside to let them in, closing the door behind them. Foxy-looking Johnny sat behind a desk. They walked up to the desk and stood, almost at attention it seemed.

“You got the job done?” asked Johnny.

“Yes, we did, Mister Torrio,” said the beefy guy with the scar.

“Should remind the street that we don’t accept bad booze.”

“Uh huh,” nodded the beefy guy. The guy with the dark eyes was expressionless.

“Good job, boys,” said Torrio. “Now, I have another one for you.”

They looked interested, wondering if another hit was about to be ordered.

“Up in Canada. I hear it’s wide open out west. There’s a guy named Harry Bronfman in Saskatchewan just across the border from North Dakota. I hear he has booze for sale. Big quantities. I want you to go up there and make arrangements.”