

Chapter 1

2015

Thirty years ago a kid named Matty Dunmore disappeared. There were no “missing” fliers posted or alerts on milk cartons. The disappearance didn’t make the local paper or the five o’clock news. But no one who knew anything about the situation expected it to. The Mob had a way of keeping things quiet in Nowhere, NJ. If someone couldn’t be found that was because there was nothing to find. As they say, there are only two ways out of the family—prison or the morgue—even when you’re only fourteen-years-old.

~#~

Matt stared out the window of the taxi as it left New York’s JFK airport. He shouldn’t be here and he knew it. “Why New York? Why now?”

“Hey buddy,” the cabby called in his thick New York accent, “did you say something?”

Matt was pulled back to the present. Glancing at the driver, he said, “No, sorry. Just thinking out loud.”

The cabby chuckled. “This your first trip to the city?”

Shaking his head, Matt turned back toward the window. “No, but it’s...been a while.”

“Sounds like a story worth tellin’.”

Matt made a nervous sounding laugh, but there was nothing funny about his past. Deep down he knew coming here was a mistake. He should have found a way to support his client from home in Florida. He should have pushed back when his business partner, Jay Baxter, insisted he make this trip. But Baxter would have demanded to know why Matt couldn’t make time for their most important new client. It wasn’t like he could tell Baxter the truth. No one—not even his wife and son—knew the truth.

The Matt Larson they knew was a successful businessman, not a ghost named Matty Dunmore with a secret so big it could get Matt and everyone he loved killed. Matty needed to stay buried in the past, and now Matt was risking everything by coming back.

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HD Smith 2015-3-9 12:22 PM

Comment [1]: Should this be here as an introduction ... I think I removed the one from KP ... here it kind of helps the reader get into the story, especially since the first chapter is so short ... thoughts?

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Comment [2]: I like this here as a short prologue and think it is fine to keep it. It really does set the tone

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Comment [3]: I considered putting the family here first ... if you like that better, then maybe it should be “the family”

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Comment [4]: I like family because Nowhere is also a town, so this statement as “out of Nowhere” applies to anyone leaving in general. “the family” implies those in Nowhere who got involved

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Comment [5]: This revised introduction is very strong and clear and establishes for us the present Matt and his relationship to the boy of your past Matty scenes

Chapter 2

1985

It was Fourth of July and the gang would be meeting later at Demarko's Pizza, but first Matty had a job to finish. He delivered packages for Mr. Hill, the mob's top man in Nowhere. It wasn't a hard job and it usually paid well—twenty to twenty-five dollars a pop, but his mother didn't like it much. He knew she didn't want him working for the mob, but it wasn't like he had a choice—no one said no to Mr. Hill.

The hot summer sun beat down on his shoulders as he walked back from the delivery. He hadn't seen a cloud all summer, and today was no exception. The temperature was already a sweltering ninety-eight degrees. He was thinking about the large cold soda he was going to order at Demarko's when out of nowhere the Foster brothers jumped him.

Lester and Marvin Foster were in the same grade as Matty, but they both had about twenty pounds on him and looked more like oversized fat kids than eighth graders. They slammed into Matty so hard that he tripped and fell flat on his face, smacking his nose hard enough to bring tears to his eyes. Wiping his nose, he left a trail of blood on his arm.

Pushing up from the dusty floor of the abandoned building, Matty was slammed from behind again, sending him sprawling. Angry, he jerked up, forcing his legs under him, this time making it to his feet. Spinning around he saw Lester coming for him. Swinging wildly, Matty caught air with the first punch. He quickly corrected and swung again, making contact with Lester's nose. A satisfying squeal escaped Lester's mouth.

Matty pulled back for another strike. Marvin grabbed his arm and wrenched it back. Matty lost his balance, crashing back to the filthy floor. Lester was back on him in a heartbeat, kicking him in the side hard enough to bruise his ribs.

Marvin dug into Matty's pocket, pulling out the two tens—all of his tip money. "Let's go, Les."

Marvin headed for the door, just as Lester kicked Matty one more time.

"See you around Dumbmore." Laughing, he bolted after his brother.

Matty felt nauseous as he got to his feet. Wincing, he gingerly pulled up his shirt on the left side, touching the spot where Lester had kicked his ribs the hardest. It was sore, but nothing felt broken. He'd have to be careful not to go shirtless around the house until the bruises healed, or he'd have to explain the fight to his mother, and she'd just get all weird again about his job.

"There will be payback," Matty grumbled, as he left the old building to find his friends.

Matty belonged to a gang consisting of him and his gang of friends, which included Mr. Hill's son Lenny, and the Townsend brothers, Ronny and Juli. Mr. Townsend, Ronny and Juli's dad, worked for Mr. Hill. He was known as "The Butcher", a nickname that Juli and Ronny had never fully explained to Matty, but he had a few guesses—they either didn't know for sure or he wasn't willing to tell. Lenny was Mr. Hill's son from his first marriage. Not that it was obvious when meeting them together. Most days Matty thought Mr. Hill treated him better than he treated Lenny, and Lenny looked nothing like his dad. Ronny was a year older than Matty, Lenny, and Juli. He'd been held back a year, repeating the first grade—something he insisted was caused by a typo. He'd recently had a growth spurt and was now a full head taller than Matty. He was definitely the guy you wanted backing you up in a fight.

Matty and his friends all lived just over the bridge from New York City, in Nowhere, NJ. At least that's what they called it. They had all been close since the first grade, when they first formed their gang. That was when they decided all mobsters had what they called an "E

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Comment [6]: In changing this around I think you've lost the mention of the abandoned building. We suddenly have Matty pushing himself up from the dusty floor (2 para down). You might want to add a sentence in the next paragraph where you describe them attacking him where you mention that they scooped him up and shoved him into an adjacent abandoned building.

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Comment [7]: You will see that in the next three paragraphs I have rearranged your introduction so that it follows a more logical structure. As it read it laid out several disconnected pieces about Lenny, Ronnie, and Juli, as well as the gang. Since this is a dip into backstory, while Matty walks to Demarko's stewing on revenge, it's important for this to feel like an organized explanation. What I have suggested with this is in one paragraph you introduce the gang, so I've moved this material you wrote together, creating transitions where necessary. In the second paragraph, I've focused on your further development on the gang—now that the reader will know who they are—regarding their closeness and nicknames. Then, in a third paragraph, we have Matty's thoughts, which percolate out of all this.

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Comment [8]: This specification is necessary since otherwise it's hard to see the link to Juli at the end of this sentence.

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name”—a name that usually ended in y. It worked out okay for most of the guys, but Juli, whose real name was Julian, had gotten the short end of the E name stick. Of course, only the gang could call him that. If anyone else tried, they’d be in for a world of hurt. Juli wasn’t the biggest guy in the gang, but he was the toughest.

The Foster brothers are going to be sorry.

Matty’s side was hurting from the pounding Lester had dished out. He was glad to see that his friends were at Demarko’s Pizza, their unofficial home base for the summer. The building the pizza place occupied had once been a gas station, and on really hot days the outside seating area smelled like motor oil and burnt rubber, but the pizza was always good.

The guys were sitting outside at one of the old picnic tables. Lenny, a lanky kid with black hair so straight it seemed to always be covering at least one eye, nodded and elbowed Ronny when he saw Matty crossing the street. Juli noticed the action and looked up, wincing when he caught sight of Matty. It was obvious Juli and Ronny were related. Ronny was like a mini Mr. Townsend, stocky with wavy dark brown hair that he wore a little long. Juli had the same hair and facial features, only his hair color was a golden sun-streaked blond like their mother’s and his body was lean like a runner.

Looking Matty up and down, then touching his nose, Juli said, “What happened to you?”

Swiping a napkin from the table, Matty wiped his nose—removing what blood remained. “I was across town dropping off a package for Mr. Hill. On the way back the Fosters jumped me and stole my tip money.”

Juli jumped to his feet, always ready for a fight. “Where are they now?”

Matty shrugged. “I don’t know. Lincoln Square?”

Ronny stood, chucking his trash in the nearby can. “Then what are we waiting for?”

“Hell, yeah,” Lenny chimed in, getting to his feet. “They can’t get away with that shit.”

Lincoln Square was what Matty called the four blocks at the corner of Lincoln and Madison. The Foster brothers treated it like their own private kingdom, but today they were going to find out why you didn’t steal from the mob. Matty’s friends weren’t bullies, but they couldn’t let the Fosters get away with taking the money. If they did, everyone might take a shot at them.

Matty’s nose stung and the pain was creeping toward his right eye. He’d have no way to hide a black eye from his mother, and she’d be doubly pissed if she found out what he was about to do, but the Fosters had it coming.

Ronny stretched his shoulders as they turned onto Lincoln.

“I hope you softened them up for us Matty,” Lenny crowed.

Matty nodded, his teeth clenched as he psyched himself up for the fight.

Ronny pointed. “There they are!”

“Let’s get em’,” Juli said, taking off in a flash.

Matty, Ronny, and Lenny took off after Juli.

“Lesley,” Matty yelled, “you fatso, remember me?”

Lester and Marvin’s eyes widened as they spotted the gang racing toward them. They bolted in the opposite direction as fast as their lumbering legs could carry them.

Lester screamed like a girl as Juli tackled him from behind.

Lenny and Ronny jumped Marvin, twisting him around and taking turns sucker punching him.

Matty joined Juli, shoving Lester into the nearest brick wall.

“How does it feel to get jumped?” Matty taunted, hitting Lester in the gut. “You gonna cry for mama, you big baby?”

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Comment [9]: This specification is necessary since otherwise it’s hard to see the link to Juli at the end of this sentence.

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Ronny was a year older than Matty, Lenny, than Matty, Lenny, and Juli. He’d been held back a year, repeating the first grade—something he insisted was caused by a typo. He’d recently had a growth spurt and was now a full head taller than Matty. He was definitely the guy you wanted backing you up in a fight.

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Moved up [2]: Ronny was a year older than Matty, Lenny, and Juli. He’d been held back a year, repeating the first grade—something he insisted was caused by a typo. He’d recently had a growth spurt and was now a full head taller than Matty. He was definitely the guy you wanted backing you up in a fight.

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Moved up [1]: Lenny was Mr. Hill’s son from his first marriage. Not that it was obvious when meeting them together. Most days Matty thought Mr. Hill treated him better than he treated Lenny, and Lenny looked nothing like his dad.

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Comment [10]: This sounds repetitive since you’ve already mentioned that they were clearly related.

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Juli landed a right hook into Lester's jaw. "Two against one isn't fun, is it?"
 "Cops!" Lenny yelled.
 Matty glanced over his shoulder. A police cruiser was rounding the corner. "Shit. Juli, we gotta go."
 Lenny and Ronny darted down an alley, but Juli wasn't backing down. He took another swing at Lester.
 Grabbing Juli's arm, Matty tried pulling his friend away. "Come on, man."
 Tires screeched to a stop behind him. An officer grabbed Matty, slamming him down hard against the squad car.
 The second officer pulled Juli off Lester, nearly getting hit in the process. "You looking for a trip to juvi, kid?" he blustered, spinning Juli roughly to face him. His threat died on his lips as he cursed and muttered something that sounded like, "Townsend."
 Juli held up his chin as if daring the officer to hit him.
 The officer's eyes darted around as if checking who might be watching. He adjusted his grip, holding Juli by the arm, but just enough to keep him away from Lester.
 The officer holding Matty down pushed at his back. "Where are the other two?"
 Matty remained quiet.
 In a calm quiet voice, the officer holding Juli said, "I only saw these two. Let's wrap this up."
 "Monroe," the first officer squawked, "are you blind?"
 Matty glanced up to see the second officer—Monroe—go from looking cautious to pissed. The officer holding Matty, shoved him again. "The other two that were beating up that kid."
 Matty almost chuckled when he saw that Marvin was curled in a ball crying, his shaggy red hair sticking to his face. *What a baby.*
 "Look, Grayson," Monroe stressed the other officer's name, "I only saw two kids. Let's write them a ticket and go."
 "A ticket!" Grayson barked. "We're taking them in."
 Monroe moved closer to the car with Juli in tow. Whispering, he said, "Look, man, you've only been here a few weeks. I'm telling you, we should just write them a ticket."
 "No," Grayson said, pushing at Matty's back again. "They weren't jay walking. This was assault. The book says—"
 "Fine," Monroe interrupted him, holding his free hand up in the "I'm not fighting you" gesture, "but for the record"—he looked at Juli as if speaking to him directly—"I have nothing to do with this." Turning back to Grayson, he added, "it's your collar. My name isn't going on the arrest record." He handcuffed Juli and led him around to the passenger's side of the car. Shaking his head, he muttered, "Death wish."
 Officer Grayson handcuffed Matty and led him to the driver's side of the car, shoving him in beside Juli and slamming the door.
 "Sorry, man, you shoulda run," Juli said.
 Matty chuckled. "No way, can't leave a man behind."
 "Your mom's gonna be pissed."
 Matty shrugged. "She was going to see the black eye anyway. Look"—Matty nodded toward the front of the car—"Lester's crying. You think he's playing it up for the cops?"
 Juli snorted. "Maybe, but it's the last time they'll jump you."
 "Yeah," Matty sighed, dropping his head back against the seat, "but we didn't get the money."

- Admin 2015-3-9 12:22 PM
Comment [11]: What about "aint"? I think that sounds more natural. See what you think.
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Comment [12]: This here is telling – just their action to Matty's response tells us that they are running away.
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Lenny and Ronny ran straight to Miller's Pub. It was where Lenny's father, Mr. Hill, ran his business, and where he hoped to find Ronny's dad. Lenny had to tell Mr. Townsend the cops grabbed Juli and Matty.

The pub, which was the first in a row of attached buildings, was crowded as usual and smelled like beer and cigars. Wooden booths ran along one wall, with a smattering of tables throughout—this was no dance club. Lenny spotted a few regulars, and one or two faces he didn't recognize. Although it might have seemed odd to an outsider, no one looked twice as the boys entered the pub and headed for the bar.

Freddy, the bartender on duty, was drying a beer mug. He nodded when the boys entered.

Lenny nodded back. "Is Mr. Townsend here?"

"Yeah, he's in the back with Hill."

"Thanks, man," Lenny said, but before he could walk away, an old guy at the bar grabbed his arm.

"You look familiar," the old drunk slurred in a raspy whisper. His eyes were bloodshot and his breath reeked of alcohol. He wasn't one of the regulars. "Are you Manny's—"

"Hey buddy," Freddy interrupted, pulling the old man's hand away from Lenny's shoulder. "You've had enough to drink. It's time to go." Freddy nodded to Mario, one of the tough guys guarding the door to the back room. "Get this guy out of here."

Lenny watched as Mario pulled the old man off the bar stool and firmly ushered him outside. Absently Lenny pushed the hair out of his eyes, wondering who Manny was. Nobody ever said he looked like anyone, not even his dad—who was as different from him in appearance as two strangers. His mother once said he looked like his dead uncle Bill, but Lenny never saw a resemblance in old pictures.

"Ignore that drunk, kid, he don't know nothin'," Freddy said as if he knew what Lenny was thinking.

"Yeah, man, sure." Lenny nodded and headed for the backroom.

Unlike the pub, the back room was never very crowded. Most days it resembled a small warehouse with high ceilings and painted over windows, and aside from the occasional dark reddish-brown stain, the floors were plain gray concrete. Although not common knowledge, the back room was actually the building next door to the pub. The left half, toward what would have been the front of the original structure, held the office. The right half, which had a door leading to the back alley, was stacked with boxes of counterfeit merchandise.

Lenny's father, Mr. Hill, was the man that ran Nowhere for the mob. His light brown hair was cut short to keep it from curling. He was sitting on the office side at an old school metal desk, which probably had come with the building. Behind him were a matching standalone safe and two filing cabinets. Mr. Hill's driver, Reno, and another goon were playing cards at a small table across from the pub entrance. A couple of wooden straight back chairs, which had handcuffs dangling from the rungs, lined the wall near the table.

Mr. Townsend, who was standing near Lenny's dad, looked up as Lenny and Ronny walked in.

At six-foot-nine Mr. Townsend was the tallest man Lenny had ever met, and Ronny was a shorter, longer-haired, version of him. Lenny wished he looked more like his dad, then maybe drunk guys in the bar wouldn't think he was someone else.

Admin 2015-3-9 12:22 PM

Comment [14]: Backroom = adjective, i.e. "backroom deals" back room=noun.

Search "backroom" and make sure wherever it is a noun, as here, there is a space, back room

Admin 2015-3-9 12:22 PM

Comment [15]: You might want to cut this statement. It might come across as too much broadcasting. You've already mentioned above that they don't look the same. If you cut this it has the interesting effect of showing that Lenny is possibly avoiding paying overt attention to the fact that he doesn't look like his dad, since the reader will know he doesn't look the same from Matty's POV. It can add a very interesting layer of questions that will compel your reader therefore to cut this. See what you think.

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Comment [16]: I just gave an example above – I hope this clarifies. It comes down to simple that backroom is an adjective, back room is a noun. Backroom deals vs. the back room.

Admin 2015-3-9 12:22 PM

Comment [17]: Is it possible Lenny might know his father's name and might refer to him by it here?

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Comment [18]: If you use Mr. Hill's first name in Lenny's POV, consider here might be a place you could use his name here, si... [4]

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Comment [19]: Re: cutting the statement on previous page. If you do that, then t... [5]

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Comment [20]: This here can go, since it is double-statement. It's already implie... [6]

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