



A VIGNETTE OF THE MAFIA


**THE KING
CHRONICLES**

EPISODE #1

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THE KING CHRONICLES – Episode One

Zoron took a swig of his cheap whiskey and slammed his glass on the table. “Tony, I don’t like those fucking punk ass kids over there...” he growled. “Fuckers remind me of the little punks we had to deal with in the joint.”

Tony chuckled and took a pull of his cigar. “Relax, old friend,” he said, watching the group of teenagers shoot a game of 9-ball. “They’re just kids. We were all kids once.” He turned and gave him a grin. “Or at least I was. You were probably born a Serbian bull. Popped out your momma’s womb ready to kill someone.”

Tony “The Limp” Conforti was a short, balding old Mafioso who had a cranky disposition and walked with severe limp, the origins of his moniker. Most of his waking hours were spent at the seedy pool hall he owned, “EAST SIDE BILLIARDS,” and he was what some people referred to as a “people watcher.” But he generally disliked people. And they generally disliked him. Even most of the guys who worked for him disliked him. But he was a decent boss, and more often than not he treated them with respect.

Tonight he was doing what he did almost every night—hanging out in his dingy pool hall, drinking brandy, and smoking “lilos,” the short pungent cigars he chain smoked. He knew the cigars were killing him, but he figured what the hell, at least he would go out on his own terms. He was old now, almost seventy, and had lived life by his rules. Or rather, the rules he had sworn his life to over thirty years ago. The rules of *La Cosa Nostra*. And even though nearly twenty of those years had been spent in prison, he had never wavered in his commitment to the oath he’d taken so long ago. It was what defined him. It was what made him who he was. A Mafioso. And like any true Mafioso, he took great pride in this. Being a member of Detroit’s secretive Mafia sect, known simply as the “Partnership,” had been his life’s greatest achievement, his greatest honor. And would be until his final breath, whether it came from lung cancer or an assassin’s bullet.

Tony was a thoroughbred Mafioso but by no means was he a don. His rank within the *La Borgata*, “The Community,” was *capodecine*, a lowest ranking captain in the Falcone Family, which was in fact made up of several families. From his pool hall, he ran a relatively small crew of about twenty soldiers, most of whom worked petty street rackets—card games, dice, drugs, loan sharking, extortion, larceny and several other vice crimes. And he was fine with this. He’d never harbored dreams of being the boss or being elevated to one of the Family’s higher-ranking *capiregimes*. He was a simple man with simple tastes. A fancy vacation home in Italy or Aspen had no appeal to him. He didn’t need a hunting lodge up north and an offshore bank account filled with millions he couldn’t spend. To be happy, all he needed was his pool hall and a few bucks in his pocket. Well, a stash of good Cubans, some strong brandy, and an occasional hooker helped.

Tony's immediate superior was a 50-year-old Sicilian named Salvatore Toccio, a powerfully built Mafiosi and one of the Syndicate's five ruling *capiregime*. Ironically, before prison, Tony had actually been Sal's mentor and eventually sponsor. Now the roles had been reversed and Tony worked for Sal, who had grown to be very powerful over the years. Tony had no idea how many crews Sal ran, but there were whispers that his guys were pulling tens of millions off the street. That's the way it was there in Detroit. Nobody knew who was doing what, which was exactly the way the Boss wanted it. Tony remembered the current Boss's predecessor, Don Zirello, once pontificate, "Some say it's best for the right hand to never know what the left is doing, so no one man can take down the whole Partnership if he flips. But I say the middle finger should never know what the ring finger is doing. That way everyone's safe." And Don Falcone had kept it that way. Every *capiregime* had ten or twelve made *capi* working under him. Every one of those *capi* had a crew of ten, twenty, even thirty guys. And some of those guys had crews of their own. Only the *capiregime* knew who was doing what. But only the *Capi di tutti Capi*, Boss of Bosses knew everything. This protected the Family from FBI penetration and government cooperators. It was how the Boss had maintained his position at the top of the Family for nearly thirty years. He was an extremely secretive man. In fact, Tony had only met him a couple of times, once a funeral and once at the only occasion when all the Syndicate's top brass gathered under one roof—the annual Celebration of the Italian American Delegates.

Tony was considered to be a "solid earner," a guy who consistently made money. He always kept Sal in the loop of his rackets. When Sal called him in, he came in. When Sal ordered him to do something, he did it without question. And because of this, he was allowed to operate with certain level of autonomy. Sal, who Tony considered a friend, dropped by about once a week to pick up an envelope of cash, but other than that he rarely interacted with other elements of the Partnership. Occasionally, a "friend of ours" would drop by to say hello or shoot a game of pool, but months would often go between these visits. And he liked it this way. Not only did it give him a sense of anonymity, but it allowed him to play the role of bigshot Mafioso, for all his regular patrons knew he was in the mob. He made sure of it.

Tony loved it when local tough guys came in and treated him like he was a boss, jokingly calling him "Don Conforti," always showing him the utmost respect, as if he himself was Boss of Bosses. He especially liked sitting around his table with the young guys, telling war stories about the "good ol' days," or about his many years in prison. He would sit at his private table in the back of the pool hall, sipping brandy, smoking cigars, acting like he was a don. Neighborhood ruffians would come in and hang on his every word as he embellished tales of yore, of the many scores he and his crew had done before he was sent to prison. He may not have been a real boss, but at least he was the boss of his own domain.

Three months ago, one of Tony's old prison buddies had come walking through his door. The guy's name was Zoron Rakanovich, an intimidating 50-year-old Serbian who was built like a bull. A big one. Well over six foot and 300 lbs, Zoron had a barrel chest, no neck, and shoulders to match. One of the things that made him so intimidating was his dead eye, dead from years of untreated cataracts. He looked as mean as he was. And his years in prison had only made him meaner. He had served 25 years for murdering his wife's lover when he caught them in bed

together. Him and Tony had spent several years at the same prison, and during that time they became very close, spending thousands of hours walking the yard together, side by side, exchanging war stories from their past. Zoron had been a career criminal himself, who fled Serbia after killing a man during a botched drug deal. When he got to Detroit, where he had family, he had continued his life of crime by selling drugs and extorting other drug dealers in his east side neighborhood. He was an intrinsic tough guy with a propensity for violence. Which was why Tony liked him and had been so happy to see him walk through his doors three months previous.

Zoron now worked for Tony as a contract enforcer, collecting back debts and juice for his bookies. He also ran a small crew of Serbians who sold coke and pot in the suburb of Sterling Heights, several miles north of Detroit proper. Most of his days were spent at the pool hall, sitting around the table with Tony, drinking and smoking cigars, talking about their years together in prison, how they “ran that place.” But because he wasn’t Italian, he would never be anything more than a minor associate in Tony’s crew. Nevertheless, because he was tight with Tony, he liked to throw his weight around and act like was a big shot Mafioso. Which Tony actually thought was amusing.

“*Grazi, bella,*” Tony said to his only waitress, taking another puff of his stogy, staring at her behind as she walked away. “Shake that *culoo* for me, sugar...”

He then slowly took a sip of his brandy and surveyed the room. It was busy for a Tuesday night. Most of his regulars were there. A few bikers and pool sharks. A couple of hookers looking for a john. The teenage boys and their girlfriends were being obnoxiously loud as they drank sodas and played pool. Normally he would have gone over to tell them to cool it, to settle down, but for some reason they made him feel nostalgic tonight. They made his mind drift back to his own youth as he discreetly watched them, sipping his drink, puffing on his cigar.

“To be young again...” he mused.

“What’s that, Boss?” Zoron asked from across the table, an annoyed look on his face as he stared at the group of boisterous teenagers.

Tony turned and looked at him. “I said it sure would be nice to be young again. Look at them. Not a care in the world. When they leave here, those boys will take their young peaches someplace to fuck them like rabbits...”

Zoron narrowed his eyes on the group of teenagers. “Those little punks don’t even know what the hell they are doing with a pussy. Give me one of those ripe young lambs for an hour. They’ll forget their boyfriend’s name!”

Tony burst into laughter. “Those girls are young enough to be your daughter.”

The bellicose Serbian gave him an almost evil grin. “That’s why she’ll be calling me *tata* when I’m finished,” he said, using the Serbian word for father.

Again Tony laughed. "You're a damn pervert, *paisan*."

Zoron gave him a wink. "No, I'm just a man. And over there are a bunch of boys."

For several more minutes, the two old friends continued bantering back and forth as they drank and smoked their cigars, but Zoron found himself scowling at the group of teenagers. He'd never liked kids. Especially loud and obnoxious ones like these. They reminded him of the young punks who played cards and bogarted the dayrooms on prison. So many times he had wanted to walk over and crack a pool stick over their heads to shut them up, to show them who really was tough, but he had to always bite back his anger and refrain. It just wasn't worth 30 days in the hole and dealing with their gang brothers. But these teenage punks, they didn't have a gang. And he wouldn't get 30 days in the hole for putting them in their place. So, before he knew it, he slammed his drink down on the table and found himself making his way towards them. With his stooped shoulders, large head and barrel chest, he looked like an angry bull.

"Hey there, doll," he said to one of the young girls, a particularly buxom brunette wearing a low-cut shirt that displayed ample cleavage. When she looked at him like he was some kind of weirdo, he added, "What's wrong, sugar tits, don't you know a *real* man when you see one?"

One of the teenagers, a good-looking kid with dark hair and a stocky build, chuckled and said, "Easy now, old school."

Zoron glared at him. "Old School?" he growled menacingly. "That's what they called old men in the joint. But I ain't no old man. I can fuck you and your crew of faggot pussies up right now without even breaking a sweat." He turned and grinned salaciously at the girl. "Then I'll take sugar tits in the back and show her how a real man fucks."

The handsome young teenager was one Giovanni "Vonni" Battaglia, a Brooklyn-born Italian tough guy who was not used to being talked to like this. In fact, he had never let anyone talk to him like this. Never in his life. And he wasn't going to start with this drunken old fool.

"Listen, you drunk old Russian—"

"I am Serbian!" Zoron boomed, taking a step closer to him.

"Yeah, whatever," Vonni said, unimpressed. "I don't know what your problem is but do me a favor and take your drunk ass back over there before you get fucked up."

Zoron stood to his full height, his stopped back straightening out to give him a few more inches of height. "You are going to fuck me up, little boy?" he said, bursting into laughter. "Please, show me how. I would love to see this."

Tony suddenly appeared behind Zoron. "Hey!" he yelled. "What the hell is going on? Nobody is fuckin' anyone up in my place unless I say so."

Vonni was glad to see Tony had come over to intervene. He didn't know him personally but he knew from King that he was a ranked member of the Syndicate. And he hoped that the old Mafioso knew he was one of King's closest friends. His closet friend.

"Listen, Tony, I don't know if this guy is a friend of yours, but he just comes over here and starts disrespecting Tommy's girl and wanting to fight with me. Do me a favor and get this fucker away from me before he makes me fuck his ass up."

Tony narrowed his eyes on him. "So, kid, you think you can come into my place and disrespect me by threatening my good friend, while I'm standing right here? Who the fuck you think you are?"

Suddenly, in a flash, Zoron had Vonni by the shirt, a stiletto switchblade pressed against his neck. "Yeah, punk, you think you can just come in here and disrespect the fuckin' boss to his face. In the joint, we'd cut you from ear to ear for that!"

Vonni didn't flinch. He simply looked him in the eye. "Listen, friend, you are about to make a big mistake. Do you know who I am?"

Zoron pressed the blade into Vonni's cheek, drawing a small trickle of blood. "You're a punk ass kid who thinks his dick is bigger than it is. I should—"

CRACK! Vonni punched him square in the jaw, dropping him to a knee. But the old Serbian was as tough as he looked. After only a brief moment of shock, he jumped back to his feet, this time brandishing the .38 special he'd had tucked in an ankle holster.

"Now you fucked up, kid..." he growled menacingly, pointing the stub-nosed pistol at Vonni's face. "Now I show you who *YOU* are fucking with."

But when he cocked the hammer back, Tony grabbed his wrist. "Not in my place!" he yelled, pushing him back. "What's wrong with you? He's just some punk kid! You gonna pop him in my place? In front of all these people because he got tough with you? Put that goddamn gun away." He gave him a look. "And since when did you need a gun to handle a couple of teenage punks?"

Zoron, looking both angry and ashamed, drooped his shoulders and stared at Vonni as he slipped the gun back into its ankle holster. "You're lucky, punk, I have a lot of respect for Tony. He just saved your life."

Vonni just stared back at him, knowing he didn't want to push his luck. Not when he himself was unarmed, a rarity these days.

Eventually, Tony was able to push Zoron back to their table, where he continued to reprimand him for being such a hot head and nearly killing a kid in his place business, in front of over a dozen witnesses.

“But did you hear how the kid talked to me?” Zoron pleaded his case. “Back in the joint, we put up with punks like that because we had no choice. But we ain’t inside no more. We shouldn’t have to put up with those little *kurci* out here.”

“So...” Tony said, puffing on his cigar. “You were just going to shoot the fuckin’ kid right here in my place? What are you, a fuckin’ idiot? You’d end up back in the can for another twenty-five years. That what you want?”

Zoron just turned and stared at the group of teenagers as they quickly made their exit from the pool hall. He would have loved to shoot that punk ass kid right in his face. He hated punks like that. He had dreamed of killing them for twenty-five years while in prison. And now, he was just waiting for a chance, the right opportunity to show one of them who was the real tough guy, the real gangster.

King was sipping hot espresso with his grandfather on the terrace of grandparents’ Grosse Pointe mansion, when he heard his grandmother yell from inside the house:

“Giovanni is here!”

King was surprised by this because he had given Vonni instructions to not pick him up for three more hours. He reveled in spending time with his grandfather. They had dinner together almost every night, oftentimes just the two of them alone so they could discuss business. He adored his grandfather, who he considered more of a father than grandfather, since his actual father had been murdered by an assassin the year he was born, over 19 years ago. Since then, his grandfather had taken to raising him like he was his very own son. And for good reason. King was the last Falcone, the last male of their bloodline. But it was more than that. His grandfather wanted to see him someday lead their family into the future. As far back as King could remember, his grandfather had been instilling in him how to carry himself, how to conduct himself with honor, loyalty, and integrity, how to be “a man of honor.” He cherished their private evening dinners together, which was why he was now mildly annoyed that Vonni had returned early to pick him up.

“Send him back!” he yelled to his grandmother, who was in the kitchen cleaning up dinner.

But after several minutes, when Vonni didn’t appear, King stood and headed into the house, figuring he knew where his *protettore* was. He became even more annoyed when he found him

sitting in the living room, flirting with his younger cousin, Pamela, who he knew had a crush on Vonni.

“What the hell, bro, I told you nine o’clock,” King said, scowling at him, making his annoyance obvious.

“I had a situation,” Vonni replied, jumping to his feet, snapping to attention, as a soldier would in the presence of a superior officer.

“What kind of situation?” King prompted, suddenly looking more concerned than annoyed.

Vonni glanced at Pamela, signaling that it was something they could not discuss in front of her.

King nodded towards the basement. “Come on, downstairs. Tell me about this situation.”

Three days later, on a busy Friday night, King and Vonni casually walked into EAST SIDE BILLIARDS and slowly took in their surroundings. The place was busy, dark and smoky like almost all pool halls. A few teenagers were shooting pool, but mostly there were older men. In the back were a group of rough-looking bikers and their even rougher-looking girlfriends. Outdated rock was playing from the outdated jukebox. The place had no liquor license but of course it served beer and even liquor to its regular patrons, so almost everyone was drinking.

“You see the guy?” King asked.

Vonni’s eyes scanned the room until they stopped on a table set in the far back corner of the room. “Over there.”

King followed Vonni’s gaze to a table where four men were seated, drinking and playing cards. He vaguely recognized two of them. Old men. Members of the Family for sure. The other two, he had never seen before in his life.

“Come on, let’s say hi,” he said, nodding for Vonni to follow.

Vonni grinned, but said nothing as he followed his boss right up to the table.

“Which one is he?” King said, pointing at the table of men.

“Him,” Vonni answered tersely, piercing Zoron with a glare.

Zoron looked up, his eyes red and watery from alcohol. "You again? Do I have to put a bullet in you just to make you go away? What the fuck do you want, punk?"

King took a step closer to him. "What is your name?"

Zoron took a moment to focus his drunken eyes on him. "My name? Who the fuck are *you*, kid? Another pussy ass punk who wants his ass kicked?"

King slowly looked around the table and then stopped on Zoron. "My name... is Omnio Falcone," he said slowly, intentionally, and then gestured to Vonni. "And I'm here because you owe my friend an apology."

Zoron burst into a drunken fit of laughter, and then slowly pushed himself to his feet, his immense bulk causing the old wood chair to creak. "You fuckin' kids these days have balls. I'll give you that..." Casually he reached in his pocket and came out with a switchblade. "How about I butcher you two pretty boys? Huh? Maybe give you what we called in the joint a 'buck-fifty.' Take a hundred-fifty stitches to sew you back up."

Tony, with what seemed like lightning speed, was on his feet, standing between them. At first, when the two kids walked in, the one seemed mildly familiar to him. But when the kid said his name, Omnio Falcone, it suddenly hit him. This kid was no punk. He was the one they called "King," grandson of none other than Don "The Butcher" Falcone, Boss of Bosses. The kid was well-known in The Community. He was supposed to be the real deal. Ran a crew down in the ghetto. A lot of the other *capi* didn't like him. Called him a lone wolf and maverick. Said he was always scabbing people's rackets and stepping on toes. But he was the Boss's favorite grandson so nobody dared say shit about it.

"Zoron!" Tony exclaimed. "Sit your fuckin' ass down. Put that damn knife away. Have some respect for me and my place. You were out of line the other day, and you're out of line now. Apologize to the kid."

Zoron looked at him like he had gone crazy. "What? Do you remember how this punk talked to me? He fuckin' sucker punched me!"

Tony, who now looked sweaty and nervous, waved his hand. "Ah, you had it coming after how you talked to him and that girl. Now apologize to the kid and get it over with. This is my place. You work for me. Now apologize to the kid."

Zoron was confused but he was too belligerent, too stupid, and too stubborn to figure it out. Instead he turned back to King and Vonni. "Fuck that! And fuck these two punks. I ain't apologizing to no one. Especially no fuckin' punk ass kids. In prison, they would—"

"So, you refuse to apologize to my friend?" King asked calmly.

Zoron spit on the floor. "Fuck you both. Now go home and cry to your momma, little boys. How 'bout dat?"

King nodded, looked at Vonni, and motioned for the door. With that, the two of them turned and slowly walked out of the pool hall.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Tony spat vehemently, looking at his drunken friend. "Do you realize who that kid was?"

"Who, the punk who sucker punched me?"

"No, the other one. The one with the dark eyes. That's the goddamn Boss's grandson. The big Boss. The BOSS! Now I'm gonna get called in for this shit. You better start saving up, because you're gonna have to buy your way out of this. I guarantee when they..." He froze mid-sentence when he saw King running up behind Zoron with an aluminum baseball bat.

CRACK!

King's first swing likely killed Zoron. But he didn't stop. Everyone in the place froze, paralyzed as he continued to pummel Zoron's lifeless body with the bat, each blow making a sickening clank on impact, spraying blood and gore all over the floor.

After what seemed like minutes but was in reality only seconds, King stopped and pointed the bloody bat at Tony, who was frozen with shock and consternation. "My grandfather is blaming you for this, so now you have to pay. Me. Every fucking week from now on. One rack. *Capisce?*"

Tony stared at the twitching body of his once good friend. "Ye... yeah, kid. Whatever the Boss wants."