

Mob Justice - Paul Blake

The Assassin cursed the cold, November weather as he jimmied the lock to the John Marshall Law School building with a short iron bar. He had removed his gloves to maintain sufficient grip and could feel the cold of the metal freezing his hands. The brittle padlock snapped with more noise than the Assassin wanted. He picked up the lock pieces and stuffed them in the left front pocket of his woollen overcoat. The bar he put in one of the two bags he had with him. He rubbed his hands together briskly and took his gloves out of the other pocket and put them on. He heard a noise behind him and turned to see. He saw the faded and brittle front page of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune* rustling in the breeze. It looked like it was from a few weeks ago, the headline exclaiming, "U.S. JURY CONVICTS CAPONE". *Is that an omen?* The Assassin asked himself. He pushed open the door and crept inside. He pulled the heavy door closed behind him, then stopped and listened for a minute. He had already scouted out the building over the past few nights and knew there were no watchmen on guard. He decided to not switch on his Rayovac flashlight, *don't want anyone passing to see the glow of the torch*, and headed to the stairs in the murky gloom. His way was faintly illuminated by the glow from the streetlights outside coming through the leaded windows. He reached the staircase, stole a look at his Elgin-brand wristwatch and saw that it was coming up to midnight, *plenty of time, no need to rush and make noise*. He headed up to the fourth floor, his dark leather Converse All-Stars basketball shoes made the occasional squeak on the marble steps as he turned each corner. Each squeal made him wince. *I should have worn the oxfords, blisters be damned*.

The Assassin reached the top floor and headed for the door that would take him to the flat roof above. He turned the brass doorknob, but the door wouldn't open. He put down the bags he was carrying and took out the lockpicking kit from the inside pocket of his overcoat,

knelt and went to work. The lock was quite simple and with his tension wrench and a couple of picks the Assassin picked it within a minute. He put his hand on the doorknob and pulled the door towards him. The door was stuck in the frame, so he pulled with more force and the door opened outwards with a loud creak. Beyond the door was a set of steps leading upwards. The Assassin walked up them, closing, but not locking the door behind him. At the top of the stairs another door blocked his way onto the roof. This one was not locked. The Assassin turned the doorknob and pushed the door open. He was struck by how cold the night was and pulled his coat lapels closer together to block some of the chill. The roof was flat with a two-foot-high parapet wall surrounding the edge. The roofing material was asphalt covered with a thin layer of gravel. *That's not going to be good to lay on all night.* He walked across the roof, the gravel crunching under his feet, to the parapet. He crouched down and looked over the edge at the Chicago Federal Building to the northwest, he had an unobstructed view along West Jackson Boulevard, the road bisecting the two. It was as he had expected perfect for tracking the target to the courthouse inside the Fed Building. The Assassin took out two rough blankets from one of the bags and placed one of them on the roof floor close to the parapet in order to block out some of the icy breeze. He then laid on top and covered himself with the remaining woollen blanket.

A half an hour's drive away to the south in the Woodlawn district, Judge James Herbert Wilkerson was sat at his desk in his wooden panelled study. The desktop with its green leather top was lit by a brass bankers lamp, the majority of its light aimed downwards allowing Wilkerson a clear view of the court papers and law books piled beside his yellow legal pad. He had spent most of the evening making notes in his elegant Spencerian penmanship. His younger colleagues had moved over to the simpler Palmer method, but

Wilkerson preferred the elegance of the older way. *I'm too old to change now.* Wilkerson was sixty-one years old and could feel each one of those years in his bones on this chilly October night.

A knock on his study door made him lift his head for the first time in an hour, the neck joints made an audible crack at the movement. He grunted and rubbed his neck, trying to massage out the stiffness.

'Are you coming to bed James?' His wife Mary asked, 'it's almost midnight, and you have an early start in the morning.'

She walked across the study floor; her white, silk, ankle-length nightgown clung to her body as she moved. They had celebrated their fortieth wedding anniversary in August, and Wilkerson was still surprised by how much the sight of his wife's curves affected him. Mary stood behind him, moved his hand and started kneading his neck in firm and deep circles. He groaned in relief as the tension evaporated at her touch.

'I shouldn't be too long now. I have the main arguments down which should refute any objections from the defense,' he said.

'Have you decided how long he's going to get?'

'Since when have you been interested my cases?'

'It's all anyone at the club talks about. If I had a nickel for every person that came up to me to ask about the case, we could both retire down to the warmth of the Florida sun, away from Chicago in the winter.' She shivered at the thought. Wilkerson could feel the tremors in her hands. 'It is the most famous trial in Chicago since Leopold and Loeb.'

'Oh, if it's for the old gossips at your club, of course, I'll tell you.' Wilkerson said with a smile in his voice.

'What's he like?'

‘Capone? Well, he’s very well dressed. Wears expensive clothes and jewellery and has a lot of charisma. The reporters and people outside the court love him. But looking into his eyes, it’s a different story. He has the dead eyes of a shark. He is quite ruthless, almost intimidating.’

‘What even for you?’ She laughed at the idea.

‘No, of course not.’ He said, laughing with her. His laugh died out as he looked down at his pad. At the note, he had left himself. Circled to ensure he paid attention. “Watch your back.”

Loud backfire woke the Assassin from his sleep. His eyes snapped open immediately. He got to his knees and looked over the parapet. He saw the sleek lines of the black Dodge Brothers automobile highlighted by the streetlights lining the route below, a puff of black-blue smoke came out from the back of the car and he tracked the jerky motion of the vehicle until it passed out of view. The Assassin looked at his watch, the luminous hands showing it was almost three-thirty. *Far too early to be awake.* He backed away from the edge and stood up. He crunched across to the roof door. The door was set into a box structure sticking up above the flat surface. He opened the door and listened for a minute. Satisfied he wasn’t going to be disturbed he returned to his makeshift bed. He stretched his back, relieving the muscles from the various aches that had built up while laying on the gravelly mattress. He closed his eyes still hearing the bang of the exhaust in his mind. As per most nights, his brain took him back twelve years, to his time as part of the American Expedition Force in France. The Battle of Cantigny. May 1918. Soissons in July, St. Mihiel in September, and the Meuse-Argonne Forest until Armistice in November of that same year.

Faces appeared and disappeared. Squadmates, men he killed. Friends, and enemies. He could smell the blood and piss of the trenches on the Somme, could hear the screams as his bullets hit their mark, hear his friends as they received theirs. Too many faces. Tears forced their way through his closed eyelids, trickled down the sides of his face into the nape of his neck, salty rivulets of anguish. He saw the mud and the bodies. He heard the whine of the bullets picking off anyone foolish enough to raise their head to look across no man's land. He was celebrated by his comrades, the generals, and the Government. He appeared on posters to sell war bonds. His face and his kill count, side by side. The tally ever increasing. The competition with Herbert W. McBride. Ol' Herbie won with over one hundred confirmed kills. The Assassin not too far behind. Until he stopped. Aimed to wound rather than kill. The faces too much for him to bear.

Returning to America after the war was tough on the Assassin. In bars and on the streets he kept seeing the faces of his kills staring at him. He was admitted to the Kankakee State Hospital, Illinois, around fifty miles south of Chicago, and diagnosed with shell shock. He stayed there for two years, treated with, at first, deep sleep therapy, where he was given barbiturates to induce a coma-like sleep for periods up to a month. The treatment failed to correct his moods and his hallucinations. In 1920 he was offered the choice to undergo lobotomy treatment, where connections in areas of the brain were scraped away, or electric shock therapy, where electric current would be sent through parts of the body. Both methods had had their successes and some very public failures. The Assassin decided to forego either and hid the symptoms, declaring himself cured. He checked himself out of the hospital a new man. He self-treated his condition with cocaine, marijuana cigarettes, and alcohol. To fund his developing habits, he turned to the one skill that saw him through the war. He became a gun for hire.

Judge Wilkerson opened his eyes. Mary was gently snoring beside him. Rhythmic and reassuring. He looked over at his nightstand. The lightly glowing hands on the oval alarm clock sitting on the cotton doily were showing it was four o'clock. *Too early*. He closed his eyes and searched for the return to the unconscious. Capone's emotionless eyes appeared in front of his eyelids. He felt the goosebumps rise up on his arms. *Enough of that*. He chided himself. He sat up, careful not to disturb his wife. Swung his legs out of bed and his feet sought the slippers on the floor. Once they were clad, he stood up and walked to the bedroom door. He unhooked his robe, put it on and turned the door handle.

The Judge went into his study; he turned on his desk lamp to illuminate the room. The spines of a hundred leather legal tomes on the bookshelves shone in the glow. He walked over to the mahogany bureau, to the crystal decanter sitting on its silver tray. He upturned one of the cut-glass brandy snifters resting on the lace doily beside the decanter. *Mary sure loves her doilies*. He took the heavy stopper from the decanter and poured a generous amount of the Napoléon brandy it contained into the glass. He replaced the decanter on the tray and the stopper. He lifted the glass to his nose, swirled the glass, and enjoyed the cinnamon and vanilla notes emanating from the aroma. He moved the glass to his mouth and took a sip to wet the lips and take away what he knew would be an overpowering alcohol blast that would make him cough. Waking Mary. When he was confident his mouth had become acclimatised to the taste he took a large mouthful, letting it sit in his mouth for a moment before swallowing. The liquid burned his throat and created a warmth in his chest. The flavours of the brandy woke various tastebuds in his mouth and he quickly finished off the rest of the glass. *That's why Prohibition will never work*. Prohibition was a ban on the production,

manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. It had been introduced in 1920 by the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, after a movement by the “dry crusaders”, pious protestants and social progressives. Consumption was not outlawed though. Judge Wilkerson never asked Mary how or where she obtained his liquor, he just wished Prohibition was over. He poured himself another glass and sat in the easy chair beside his desk.

He thought back to his final meeting with Treasury Agent Frank Wilson, where they were discussing the sentence. They were in the Judge’s Chambers in the courthouse. Wilson was in charge of the Al Capone investigation.

‘Well done, Mr Wilson,’ The Judge said when Wilson entered the chambers. ‘Your hard work secured that conviction.’ The Judge guided him to the long oval table that dominated the centre of the room.

‘Thank you, Judge.’ Wilson was a quiet man, very succinct with his words. A far cry from Elliot Ness and his ‘Untouchables’. The Judge wasn’t enamoured with Mr Ness. *Believes too much of his own press. However, it was a shame that their part of the investigation, the Volstead Act violations, was dropped. It would have made sentencing a lot easier.* The Volstead Act was the informal name for the Prohibition Act; it was named after Andrew Volstead, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, who managed the legislation.

‘Can I get you a drink to celebrate?’

‘A small one would be good. Thank you, Your Honour’.

The Judge walked over to the walnut veneered cocktail cabinet, alongside a long bookcase, filled with thick case law books. He opened the door and took out two glasses. He placed them on top and took out a whiskey decanter. He poured a single measure into one of

the glasses and a double into the other. He topped the single glass up with a splash of water from a jug next to the decanter.

‘My secretary makes sure this is kept full. I’ve needed it during this trial.’ He brought the glasses over to the table and gave the single measure to Wilson.

‘It’s ok. Mr Ness is not here now, Your Honour.’ Wilson permitted a smile to show on his face.

‘So, how can I help you today Mr Wilson?’

‘I was wondering how you were getting on deciding about Capone’s sentencing and thought that rather than worry about it I’d come here and ask you directly.’ Wilson took a sip of the whiskey. He showed his appreciation of the taste by slightly lifting the glass up and nodding.

‘I have not made my mind up yet. I am looking into precedent cases that I can use to support whatever decision I make. I will assure you I will not be going light on him. That is for sure.’

‘I’m glad to hear that, Your Honour. That is a relief. The team will be very pleased as well.’

‘Is there anything else?’

‘There is one other matter, Your Honour. You may be aware that while I was investigating Capone undercover, he organised a hit on my wife and I.’ The Judge nodded. ‘I thought that he could do the same to you.’

‘Why would he do that? He has already been convicted.’

‘Well, I was looking into it and if anything happened to you before sentencing the case would be given to another judge. One that Capone could put pressure on or pay off for a

lighter sentence. I could see from his face in court that he was thinking about it. He had that look in his eyes.’

The Judge thought for a moment. ‘The case could even be declared a mistrial, and you would have to go through all that again. Risking evidence being “lost” or witnesses coerced. Thank you, Mr Wilson, for bringing this to my attention. I will think further on this.’ The Judge held his hand out, and Wilson shook it and then left.

Back in his study the Judge shifted in his chair. An uncomfortable itch started dancing in the middle of his back. He downed his drink and placed the glass on the small side table next to the chair. He took a deep breath, stood up and switched off his desk lamp. *Better get some more sleep. I’ll need it today.*

The Assassin checked his watch, *its five after seven. If he sticks to his standard pattern, he should be here soon.* The waiting was the hardest for the Assassin. He’d weaned himself from his addictions and had been clean for three years ago. Now, he didn’t even smoke. *Cigarettes always made the waiting easier though.* His mind was calm. At Peace. Four years ago, by chance, he met an Indian man in the hotel bar in Boston he was staying at. The Assassin was there for a job. The Indian man, Swami Vivekananda, was in America to spread the word about yoga. He must have seen something inside the Assassin pleading for help as he approached and befriended the Assassin. Over the next few months they met regularly and he taught the Assassin about meditation and yoga exercises for relaxation and calmness. The Assassin found his demons easier to deal with. He still had to pay his bills though.

The Assassin picked up the M1903 Springfield rifle that was laying on the roof next to him, his gloved hands not feeling the cold, hard wood. He reached inside his jacket and removed a five-round .03-06 cartridge magazine clip. He flicked the switch on the bolt action up to the “on” position and pulled back the bolt. He then inserted the clip and pushed the bullets into the rifle. He took the empty clip and put it back into his pocket. Then he racked the bolt forwards which loaded a bullet into the chamber. He left the switch in the “on” position, which would give him the use of all five rounds. If he had put it in the “off” position, the rifle would operate as a single shot rifle, and he’d have to load a new bullet each time. *I should only need the one bullet, but you never know.* He considered attaching a scope to the rifle which would increase his viewing magnification, making it easier to recognise his target, however, due to the close range from the rooftop to the courthouse, he decided against it as the increased magnification would make it harder to track the target. *At this range, I’d be able to look into his ear with the scope.*

The Assassin, satisfied that the rifle was ready, rested the barrel on the parapet ledge. For the shot, he’d be crouched, and the ledge would make good support for his forearm and elbow to steady the shot. He looked over the parapet and watched the people walking around below. Everyone was hurrying around the large square in front of the federal building. The cold making them hustle. Mainly construction workers in their denim overalls and newsboy style caps, and businessmen in their suits, long coats, and a varied selection of fedora, trilby, and bowler hats. Near the courthouse, the Assassin could see reporters gathered by the entrance, their appearance distinguishable by scruffy looking suits, pork pie and trilby hats. Interspersed among them were smarter dressed men, wearing sleek looking suits and wearing homburg hats, the Assassin smiled at their preening. *Obviously, gangsters waiting for Capone.* Three police wagons stopped on the road that ran parallel to the federal building.

The Assassin saw the herd of reporters make a beeline for them as four cops exited from each of the first and last vehicles, Winchester M1897 shotguns in hand and at the ready. They walked to the middle wagon and spread out, facing outwards in a defensive position. The man closest to the wagon banged a fist on the side panel, two, three times. Two officers got out of the vehicle and walked around the back of the wagon. One drew his sidearm and aimed it at the wagon as the other unlocked the doors. The Assassin watched on as Capone shuffled out of the back of the wagon, his hands bound by cuffs. He was wearing a black suit, waistcoat, and a brilliant white ascot hat. The courthouse gangsters wished they looked as sharp as he did. The officer helped Capone down from the wagon. The protective cops formed a moving corridor either side of Capone and the two escorting officers. Shotguns aimed outwards. The reporters shouted questions, flashbulbs popped from their cameras. The Assassin forced his gaze away from the spectacle and scanned the area for the Judge. He knew the Judge parked his vehicle a block away and walked to the courthouse, picking up a paper from the newsstand on the corner. The Assassin watched the newsstand, while keeping the Capone sideshow in his peripheral vision. Capone and his uniformed entourage entered the federal building, and the hubbub died down. The Assassin picked up the rifle, ensured his grip was secure, and waited.

Judge Wilkerson hurried along the pavement. He pushed past throngs of commuters from all walks of life. *That damn truck.* He had hoped to be in the courthouse before now. A truck had broken down crossing an intersection and had blocked traffic until some good Samaritans helped push it out of the way. He stopped at his usual newsstand and bought today's issue of the *Chicago Tribune*. Capone's expressionless face stared at him from the front page. He

folded it in half and tucked it under his arm which was carrying his beat-up red leather briefcase. He crossed the square, noting the built-up crowd by the entrance.

There! The Assassin saw the Judge cross the road and walked on to the square. The red briefcase shone like a beacon. The Judge's pace slowed as he looked at the federal building entrance. The Assassin tracked his journey, biding his time. *Now.* He pulled the trigger. The rifle shuddered as the gunpowder in the casing exploded, and the bullet left the barrel. The Assassin automatically pulled back on the bolt to expel the expended casing and readied a new bullet.

The Judge felt the passage of the bullet as it jostled the air behind his head. He then heard the crack of a weapon. He instinctively ducked at the sound. He then heard a metallic clatter behind him and then the sound of something heavy hitting the ground moments later. He spun around, and his eyes widened at the sight of the wicked looking Bowie knife gently spinning on the floor, with its dulled steel blade and wooden handle. He then saw the large man in the double-breasted suit with a bullet hole in his forehead, his eyes glazed and unfocused, slumped on the ground.

The Judge looked across to the John Marshall Law School and up to the parapet. He nodded to the Assassin, and then hurried to the federal building entrance against the tide of people coming the other way.

The Assassin tipped the brim of his fedora hat and waited until the Judge was safely inside the building. He ejected the four remaining bullets from the rifle and put the rifle down on the roof. He picked up the bullets and the empty casing and dropped them into a pocket. He then picked up his bags and walked towards the roof door, leaving the rifle in position. *It would be too conspicuous walking out of here with that. The Judge has paid me enough I can get a new one.* He started thinking of his next mission in Honolulu, Hawaii, protecting the defendants in a rape case from the local white population so they could face a fair trial.

THE END

I hope you enjoyed this. My novel A Young Man's Game is out soon so keep an eye out for news on my site paulblakeauthor.com or my Twitter [@paulblakeauthor](https://twitter.com/paulblakeauthor)

