

New York Times BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DENNIS
LEHANE



LIVE BY NIGHT

A Novel

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Dennis Lehane



WILLIAM MORROW

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

Dedication

*For Angie
I'd drive all night. . . .*

Epigraphs

Men of God and men of war have strange affinities.

—CORMAC MCCARTHY, *BLOOD MERIDIAN*

It's too late to be good.

—LUCKY LUCIANO

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PART I

Boston
1926–1929

Chapter One

A Twelve O’Clock Fella in a Nine O’Clock Town

Some years later, on a tugboat in the Gulf of Mexico, Joe Coughlin’s feet were placed in a tub of cement. Twelve gunmen stood waiting until they got far enough out to sea to throw him overboard, while Joe listened to the engine chug and watched the water churn white at the stern. And it occurred to him that almost everything of note that had ever happened in his life—good or bad—had been set in motion the morning he first crossed paths with Emma Gould.

They met shortly after dawn in 1926, when Joe and the Bartolo brothers robbed the gaming room at the back of an Albert White speakeasy in South Boston. Before they entered it, Joe and the Bartolos had no idea the speakeasy belonged to Albert White. If they had, they would have beat a retreat in three separate directions to make the trail all the harder to follow.

They came down the back stairs smoothly enough. They passed through the empty bar area without incident. The bar and casino took up the rear of a furniture warehouse along the waterfront that Joe’s boss, Tim Hickey, had assured him was owned by some harmless Greeks recently arrived from Maryland. But when they walked into the back room, they found a poker game in full swing, the five players drinking amber Canadian from heavy crystal glasses, a gray carpet of cigarette smoke hanging overhead. A pile of money rose from the center of the table.

Not one of the men looked Greek. Or harmless. They had hung their suit jackets over the backs of their chairs, which left the guns on their hips exposed. When Joe, Dion, and Paolo walked in with pistols extended, none of the men went for the guns, but Joe could tell a couple were thinking about it.

A woman had been serving drinks to the table. She put the tray aside, lifted her cigarette out of an ashtray and took a drag, looked about to yawn with three guns pointed at her. Like she might ask to see something more impressive for an encore.

Joe and the Bartolos wore hats pulled down over their eyes, and black handkerchiefs covered the lower halves of their faces. Which was a good thing because if anyone in this crowd recognized them, they'd have about half a day left to live.

A walk in the park, Tim Hickey had said. Hit them at dawn when the only people left in the place would be a couple of mokes in the counting room.

As opposed to five gun thugs playing poker.

One of the players said, "You know whose place this is?"

Joe didn't recognize the guy, but he knew the guy next to him—Brenny Loomis, ex-boxer and a member of the Albert White Mob, Tim Hickey's biggest rival in the bootlegging business. Lately, Albert was rumored to be stockpiling Thompson machine guns for an impending war. The word was out—choose a side or choose a headstone.

Joe said, "Everyone does as they're told, no one gets so much as a scratch."

The guy beside Loomis ran his mouth again. "I asked you know whose game this was, you fucking dunce."

Dion Bartolo hit him in the mouth with his pistol. Hit him hard enough to knock him out of his chair and draw some blood. Got everyone else thinking how much better it was to be the one who wasn't getting pistol-whipped than the one who was.

Joe said, "Everyone but the girl, get on your knees. Put your hands behind your head and lace the fingers."

Brenny Loomis locked eyes with Joe. "I'll call your mother when this is over, boy. Suggest a nice dark suit for your coffin."

Loomis, a former club boxer at Mechanics Hall and sparring partner for Mean Mo Mullins, was said to have a punch like a bag of cue balls. He killed people for Albert White. Not for a living, exclusively, but rumor was he