

# WORLD GONE BY

A NOVEL

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LEHANE

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DENNIS LEHANE



WILLIAM MORROW

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# Dedication

*For Keeks*

*Of the blue eyes and the billion-dollar smile*

# Epigraph

*... I'm driving a stolen car  
On a pitch black night  
And I'm telling myself I'm gonna be alright.*

—BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, "STOLEN CAR"

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# Prologue

*December 1942*

BEFORE THE SMALL WAR BROKE THEM APART, they all gathered to support the big war. It had been a year since Pearl Harbor, and they came together in the Versailles Ballroom of the Palace Hotel on Bayshore Drive in Tampa, Florida, to raise money for troops stationed in the European Theater. It was a catered affair, black tie, and the evening was mild and dry.

Six months later, on a muggy evening in early May, one of the crime beat reporters for the *Tampa Tribune* would come across photographs from the event. He would be struck by how many of the people who'd been in the local news lately for either killing or being killed had attended the fund-raiser that night.

He thought there was a story in it; his editor disagreed. But look, the reporter said, *look*. That's Dion Bartolo standing at the bar with Rico DiGiacomo. And over here? I'm pretty sure that little guy in the hat is Meyer Lansky himself. Here—you see that guy talking to the pregnant woman? He ended up in the morgue back in March. And there—that's the mayor and his wife talking to Joe Coughlin. Joe Coughlin again, in this one, shaking hands with the Negro gangster Montooth Dix. Boston Joe, rarely photographed his entire life, but that night, he was photographed *twice*. This guy smoking a cigarette by the dame in white? He's dead. So's that guy. The guy out on the dance floor in the white dinner jacket? He's crippled.

Boss, the reporter said, they were all together that night.

The editor mentioned that Tampa was a small town disguised as a medium-size city. People crossed paths all the time. It was a fundraiser for the war effort; those were the *causes de rigueur* for the idle rich; they drew everyone who was anyone. He pointed out to his young, excitable reporter that plenty of other people who attended that night—two famous singers, one baseball player, three voice actors from the city's most popular radio soap operas, the president of First Florida Bank, the CEO of Gramercy Pewter, and P. Edson Haffe, the publisher of this very newspaper—were all quite unconnected to the bloodshed that had erupted back in March and stained the city's good name.

The reporter protested a bit longer but found the editor intractable on the subject and so went back to researching rumors of German spies infiltrating the Port Tampa waterfront. A month later he was drafted into the army. The pictures remained in the photo morgue of the *Tampa Tribune* long after anyone who was in them had passed from the earth.

The reporter, who would die two years later on the beach at Anzio, had no way of knowing that the editor, who would outlive him by thirty years before succumbing to heart disease, was under orders to end the paper's coverage of anything to do with the Bartolo Crime Family; Joseph Coughlin; or the mayor of Tampa, a fine young man from a fine Tampa family. The city, the editor was told, had already been tarnished aplenty.

The participants that night back in December had all been engaged, as far as they understood it, in a wholly innocent union of people who supported the soldiers overseas.

Joseph Coughlin, the businessman, had organized the event because so many of his former employees had enlisted or been drafted.

Vincent Imbruglia, who had two brothers in the fight—one in the Pacific and one somewhere in Europe, no one would confirm where—ran the raffle. The grand prize was two front-row tickets to a Sinatra concert at the Paramount in New York at the end of the month and first-class carriage on the Tamiami Champion. Everyone bought rafts

of tickets even though most assumed the wheel was rigged so the mayor's wife, a huge Sinatra fan, would win.

The boss of bosses, Dion Bartolo, showed off the kind of dance moves that had won him prizes in his adolescence. In the process, he gave the mothers and daughters of some of Tampa's most respectable families stories to tell their grandchildren. ("No man who dances with such grace can be as bad as some have claimed.")

Rico DiGiacomo, the brightest star in the Tampa underworld, showed up with his brother, Freddy, and their beloved mother, and his dangerous glamour was outdone only by the arrival of Montooth Dix, an exceptionally tall Negro made taller by the top hat that matched his tuxedo. Most members of the Tampa elite had never seen a Negro pass through a party without a serving tray on his palm, but Montooth Dix moved through the crowd of white people like he expected them to serve him.

The party was just respectable enough to be attended without regret and just dangerous enough to be worth remarking on for the rest of the season. Joe Coughlin had a gift for bringing the beacons of the city into contact with her demons and making it all seem like a lark. It helped that Coughlin himself, once rumored to have been a gangster and quite a powerful one, had clearly evolved past the street. He was one of the biggest charity supporters in all of West Central Florida, a friend to numerous hospitals, soup kitchens, libraries, and shelters. And if the other rumors were true—that he hadn't fully left his criminal past behind—well, one couldn't fault a man for a bit of loyalty to those he'd known on the way up. Certainly if some of the assembled tycoons, factory owners, and builders wished to settle any labor unrest or unclog their supply routes, they knew who to call. Joe Coughlin was the bridge in this town between what was proclaimed in public and how it was achieved in private. When he threw a party, you came just to see who'd show up.

Joe himself conferred upon the festivities no further significance than that. When a man threw a party where the upper crust mingled with street thugs and judges chatted with capos as if they'd never met before, either in court or in a back room, when the Sacred Heart

pastor showed up and blessed the room before imbibing with the same gusto as everyone else, when Vanessa Belgrave, the pretty but icy wife of the mayor raised a glass of thanks in Joe's direction, and a Negro as fearsome as Montooth Dix could regale a group of stuffy old white men with tales of his exploits in the Great War, and not a cross word or drunken faux pas was witnessed by anyone, well, that party was not only a success, it was quite possibly the success of the season.

The only sign of trouble occurred after Joe stepped out on the back lawn to get some air and saw the little boy. He moved in and out of the darkness at the far edge of the back lawn. He zigzagged back and forth, as if he were playing tag with other boys. But there were no other boys. Judging by his height and build, he was about six or seven years old. He spread his arms wide and made the sound of a propeller and then of a plane engine. He made wings of his arms and careened along the fringe of the tree line, shouting, "*Va-roooooom. Va-roooooom.*"

Joe couldn't put his finger on what else was odd about the kid, other than being a child alone at an adult party, until he realized his clothes were a good ten years out of date. More like twenty, actually, the kid was wearing knickerbockers, Joe was pretty sure, and one of those oversize golf caps boys wore way back when Joe himself had been a boy.

The kid was too far away for Joe to get a good look at his face, but he had the odd sensation that even if he were closer, it wouldn't have made a difference. Even from this far away he could tell the boy's face was irrevocably indistinct.

Joe walked off the flagstone patio and crossed the lawn. The boy kept making airplane sounds and ran into the darkness beyond the lawn, vanishing into the stand of trees. Joe heard him buzzing, somewhere back in all that darkness.

Joe was halfway across the lawn when someone off to his right whispered, "Psst. Mr. Coughlin, sir? Joe?"

Joe slipped a hand a few inches from the Derringer nestled at the small of his back, not his normal gun of choice but one he'd found suitable for black-tie events.