



***SWING SET***

**A Novel in 12 Cocktails**

# Contents

5	<b>Introduction</b>
6	<b>GOLDEN KEYS</b> Spirit-forward, bright, floral, airy
9	<b>SPIN CYCLE</b> Fruity, citrus, slightly bitter
10	<b>THE CORK</b> Tropical, bright, creamy, slightly tart
13	<b>EMERALD FLAME</b> Spirit-forward, nutty, citrus, silky
14	<b>BEAUTIFUL BIRD</b> Floral, hints of heat, bright, citrus, herbal
17	<b>101st</b> Lush, tropical, creamy, aromatic
18	<b>BANANA SKIRT</b> Rich, nutty, citrus, dried fruits
21	<b>ANOTHER ROUND?</b> Spirit-forward, slightly sweet, herbal, aromatic
22	<b>BERN THE WOOD</b> Spirit-forward, smokey, earthy, herbal
25	<b>GOGO SWING</b> Refreshing, gently spiced, citrus, slightly sweet
26	<b>TAKE THE A (mocktail)</b> Bright, herbaceous, gently spiced
29	<b>SILENT SPRING (mocktail)</b> Refreshing, herbaceous, fruity, citrus, slightly bitter

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If you or any member of your party has a food allergy, please inform a member of our team and request a copy of our Allergen Menu. While we take great care to avoid cross-contamination, we cannot guarantee that any beverage is completely allergen-free.

Please note that an automatic service charge of 20% is applied to parties of six or more.

This menu is available for purchase, please ask one of our bar team.

# SWING SET

For over 80 years, Swing Set has served as a playground where ideas could swing freely before landing somewhere permanent. Tucked inside the Dupont Circle neighborhood, the bar became a refuge for thought-provokers and change-makers who understood that influence was sharpened not on stages, but in conversation. Politicians, artists, strategists, and social architects gathered here to challenge assumptions, trade perspectives, and quietly reshape the world over cocktails, all while hidden in plain sight.

I never announced them. I placed them. I knew who needed the corner table, who belonged at the bar, and who should arrive just late enough to be noticed. My work lived in the moments between arrivals: a new reservation created, a pause at the door, a table reassigned, and a delay disguised as a courtesy. These small adjustments shifted the gravity of the playground, placing rivals within listening distance and truth-tellers beside those who needed to hear them. They thought they came to disappear into the night, but nothing here is accidental.

At Swing Set, power relaxes at the bar, ideas swing back and forth, influence sharpens over another round, and history often begins with “stay for one more.”

Welcome to Swing Set. Your seat has been waiting.

*The Concierge*

On a humid Tuesday in '54, history didn't just begin; it bled all over the mahogany. The Swing Set sat in a basement off 14th Street, a subterranean sanctuary where the neon sign hummed a low B-flat. I was leaning against the bar, watching the ice melt in a glass of rye, when the door groaned open. In walked Jack Sterling. He looked like he'd been pulled through a knothole backwards. His fedora was wilted, and his trench coat carried the smell of rain and cheap cigarettes.

Sterling was a private eye with a reputation for finding things that wanted to stay lost. Usually, that meant runaway debutantes or missing ledger books. Tonight, judging by the way his eyes darted toward the corner booth, he was looking for something more dangerous; the truth.

"Arthur," he grunted, sliding onto the stool beside me. "The usual."

I nodded to Leo, the bartender. Leo didn't need to be told. He poured a double bourbon, neat.

"You look like you've seen a ghost, Jack," I said, keeping my voice below the trumpet solo.

"Worse," Sterling muttered. "I saw a Senator's daughter in a place she shouldn't have been. And then I saw the man she was with. He didn't have a face anymore."

I went still. In the market was about to crash. "Who?"

## GOLDEN KEYS \$22

"That's the t... But according to...  
Doyle Bar Single Barrel Filibuster Gin

Sterling took... He leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a gravelly rasp. "He was supposed to meet someone here tonight. Table seven. The one behind the velvet curtain."

I glanced at the reservation book. Table seven was booked under the name 'Smith.' In D.C., 'Smith' was...  
Cocchi Americano

"The guest...  
Orange Bitters

"He won't," Sterling replied. "He's currently being measured for a pine box. But the person he was meeting? They're coming. And they've got something he killed for."  
Golden Apple Foam

The air in the... The band transitioned into a slow, melancholy blues number. The shadows on the wall seemed to stretch, reaching for the patrons.

Just then, the door opened again. A woman stepped in. She was a vision in midnight blue silk, her hair a cascade of platinum waves that caught the light. She looked like she belonged on a movie screen, but her eyes held the hard, cold glint of a switchblade.

She didn't look at the bar. She walked straight toward table seven.

"That her?" I whispered.

"No," Sterling said, his hand sliding inside his coat toward his shoulder holster. "That's the distraction."

I looked toward the back entrance, the one that led to the alley. A shadow moved. A man in a grey suit, unremarkable in every way except for the way he carried himself—with the practiced stillness of a predator. He slipped into the booth across from the woman in blue.

The room continued to hum. A lobbyist laughed at a joke; a general lit a cigar. They didn't see

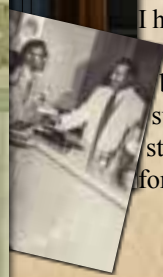


In John  
& Mary

## ERGE

For over fifty years, I have recommended and reserved tables for the most influential figures in Washington. Some lived here, others were only passing through for the night, but I pointed them all in the same direction: Swing Set. Over time, it became their favorite playground, a place where titles were checked at the door and intentions revealed slowly.

On any given night, live jazz filled the air, curling around the room like smoke. Cocktails were shaken or stirred by the most talented bartenders in the city, each one understanding that timing mattered as much technique. Laughter echoed softly, secrets were exchanged in low tones, and more than once I heard tomorrow's headlines whispered hours before they reached the daylight. I never asked questions, and I never repeated what I heard. My job was simply to keep the room in balance, and to make sure the right people stayed just long enough for history to begin.





The neon sign for “Joe’s Java” flickered with a rhythmic buzz that matched the throbbing in my temples. It was 2:00 AM in a city that didn’t sleep, it just passed out in its own filth. I’m Elias Thorne, and in this town, I’m the guy you call when the truth is a jagged pill that nobody wants to swallow. I don’t solve crimes; I solve perceptions. I’m a spin doctor, and business was booming.

The door to my office groaned open, admitting a gust of rain-slicked air and a dame who looked like she’d stepped right off a Technicolor billboard. She was draped in a trench coat that cost more than my car, and her eyes were two pools of midnight. “Mr. Thorne?” her voice was a velvet rasp. “They say you can make a landslide look like a light dusting of snow.” I leaned back, my chair screaming in protest. “Depends on who’s asking and how much they’re willing to pay for the shovel. Sit down, Miss...?” “Vane. Clarissa Vane.” She didn’t sit. She paced the small room like a caged panther. “It’s about Senator Sterling. The fundraiser tonight. There was an... incident.”

Sterling. The golden boy of the reform party. He was clean, or at least he had a very expensive laundry service. “A body,” she said, her voice dropping to a cheap gin. “In the library. A young woman. The Senator found her. He’s... distraught.”

## SPIN CYCLE \$21

I stood up, my chair creaking. “Distraught is for the papers. We need him ‘deeply saddened but resolute.’” “Vane, you have an hour before the press catches wind.” The Sterling estate was a fortress of marble and shadow. We entered through a side door, slipping past the remains of a fight that had turned sour. The library smelled of old paper and new death. There she was, sprawled on the rug—made her beautiful, and very much out of breath. Sterling was hunched over a leather armchair, his face the colour of wet ash. “Thorne, thank God. It was an accident. She tripped, she hit her head...”

I didn’t look at the girl. There was a bruise on her neck that didn’t come from a fall. “Sterling, shut up. From this moment on, you didn’t find her. You were in the conservatory, discussing a passing bill with three reliable donors. I’ll handle the rest.” I turned to Clarissa. “We need a narrative. She wasn’t a guest. She was an intruder. A disgruntled former staffer with a history of... let’s say, ‘emotional instability.’ She broke in, seeking a confrontation. In her agitated state, she suffered a tragic heart failure.” “But the bruise—” Clarissa started.



“What bruise?” I cut her off, my voice cold. “The coroner is a friend of the party. He’ll see what I tell him to see. By tomorrow morning, the headlines won’t mention a murder. They’ll talk about the ‘Tragedy at the Sterling Estate’ and the Senator’s ‘valiant but futile’ efforts to revive a troubled soul.”

I spent the next three hours weaving the web. A few phone calls to editors who owed me favors, a hushed conversation with a police captain who liked his pockets lined, and a carefully placed ‘witness’ who saw the girl climbing the garden wall.

As the sun began to bleed over the skyline, I stood on the balcony, watching the first news vans arrive. The story was already out there, spreading like a virus. The truth was buried under layers of carefully crafted lies, polished until they shone like the truth. Clarissa joined me, a cigarette dangling from her lips.

She arrived after the crisis had already begun and left before anyone realized it had been resolved. I watched her listen closely, ask very little, and move people just enough to change the story without ever stepping into it. By the time she finished her wine, reputations were intact, narratives were rewritten, and the room felt calmer than it had any right to be.

They called him The Cork, and he never arrived unnoticed, even when he tried, preferring the bar where conversations could be overheard and deals could float freely before settling. He introduced people who believed they'd met by chance, lingered just long enough to be remembered, and left before anyone could say who had invited him. By the time he tipped his glass and thanked me as if I'd done him a favor, dinners had turned into alliances, drinks into policy, and the room was already rearranged.

I watched him through the haze of Blue Note cigarettes and cheap bourbon at The Gilded Cage. My name is Elias Thorne, and in this city, I'm the guy you hire when the police are too honest or too bought to help. Usually, I'm chasing shadows, but tonight, I was chasing a ghost who wore a tailored sharkskin suit and a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

The Cork—real name unknown, though the FBI files on professional fixers would probably fill a basement—had just “accidentally” seated a disgraced city councilman next to a union boss. In ten minutes, a strike would be averted and a new highway contract would be signed. And I was there to find out how he did it.

# THE CORK \$22

I didn't turn around. I knew the scent. Chanel No. 5 and desperation. It was Clara Vane, the widow of the late District Attorney. Her husband had ended up at the bottom of the East River three weeks ago with a belly full of lead and a briefcase full of nothing.

## Tito's Vodka

“He's a catalyst,” she said, following my eyes on The Cork as he adjusted his cufflinks. “He doesn't commit the crime. He just puts the gun in the right hand at the right time.” “He put the gun in my hand and that killed Arthur,” she whispered.

## Suze

## Passionfruit Liqueur

The Cork moved toward the exit, his walk a tiny, controlled swagger that commanded the air around him. I didn't turn around. I knew the scent. Chanel No. 5 and desperation. It was Clara Vane, the widow of the late District Attorney. Her husband had ended up at the bottom of the East River three weeks ago with a belly full of lead and a briefcase full of nothing.

## Passionfruit

The city outside was bleeding neon and rain. The 1952 Studebaker Starlight idling at the curb was too flashy for the rain. The 1952 Studebaker Starlight idling at the curb was too flashy for the rain. The 1952 Studebaker Starlight idling at the curb was too flashy for the rain.

## Mango

who wanted to be invisible, but that was his game—hiding in plain sight. I climbed into his beat-up Ford and kept two blocks of distance, the wipers humming a frantic rhythm against the rain. He led me to the docks—the kind of place where the fog is thick enough to hide a heel and the only laws the weight of a blackjack. The Cork stepped out of his car, his sharp against the yellow glow of a warehouse lamp. He wasn't alone. A man stepped out of the shadows: Big Sal, the muscle for the Moretti syndicate.

## Vanilla

## Lime

## Egg White

I crept closer, sticking to the damp brick walls. The air smelled of salt and rot. “The meeting is coming to the table. He's smarter than Vane. He knows the price of silence.” “And the widow?” Sal growled.

## Prosecco

“She's a loose cannon,” The Cork replied, checking a gold pocket watch. “I've spent tonight making sure she's not unstable. A tragic breakdown after the loss of her husband. No one will believe her when she starts pointing fingers.” My blood turned to ice. He hadn't just been “fixing” deals; he was gaslighting a grieving woman to cover a murder. I reached for my Smith & Wesson .38, but a floorboard groaned under my feet. In the world of pulp, that groan is a death sentence. Sal spun around, a snub-nose appearing in his hand like magic.



“Thorne,” The Cork sighed, not even looking back. “I knew you were at the bar. I even made sure your drink was on the house. You really should learn to accept a favor.”

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They knew her the moment she stepped inside, that unmistakable crown of red hair catching the light like a scene straight from the silver screen. I made sure she had a seat where the room could admire her without staring too long, the kind of place where cinema legends could trade glamour for a quiet drink. She spoke warmly of Ireland and the old studio days, and for a moment the bar felt less like Washington and more like a theater between scenes, where even the brightest stars were content to sit, sip, and let the night roll on.



The collage features a script page on the left with dialogue such as "Well if you want a thing for me to do..." and "You're a bold one, leave to be kissing...". In the center is a yellow movie poster for "The Quiet Man" starring Maureen O'Hara and John Wayne. At the bottom is a handwritten note on lined paper that reads: "I would like to see you in your physical shape... I would like to see you just to know you thought...".

He carried patience the way others carried authority, and I always seated him where conversations could unfold without urgency. Night after night, I watched him listen, return, and listen again, understanding that peace is built slowly and never in a single sitting. When Good Friday finally arrived, it felt less like a breakthrough and more like the natural end of a long series of quiet, deliberate nights.

But in my line of work, "quiet" is just another word for the heartbeat of a ticking bomb. The name on the door said Larkin Investigations, but the office mostly smelled of stale tobacco and the kind of rain that only falls in Belfast—the kind that feels like it's trying to wash away sins that are baked into the brick. It was April 1998. The city was holding its breath, waiting for the men in suits at Castle Buildings to sign a piece of paper that promised to stop the bleeding. I was leaning back in my swivel chair, watching the neon sign of the pub across the street flicker like a dying pulse, when the door opened. She didn't knock. Women like her don't need to; they just inhabit whatever space they decide to occupy. She was draped in a trench coat the colour of a bruise, and her eyes held enough secrets to fill a confession box. "They say you're the man who finds..."

# EMERALD FLAME \$21

"I find things that are lost," I corrected, stubbing out a Lucky Strike. "There's a difference." "A ledger book, one containing the names of every photograph across my desk. It showed a man I recognized from the red deals between the shadows and the spotlight. 'Shipments of things that don't go 'pop' in the night, but 'boom.' If that book hits the street before the ink is dry on the Agreement, the whole peace process does..."

## Clarified Wilde Gin Dolin Dry Vermouth Barry's Tea

I took the job because I believed in the politics—I'd seen too many 'historic' nights end in sirens—but because I knew the man who had the book. He was a bottom-feeder named Miller who ran a betting shop near the shipyards. He dealt in information, the only currency that never devalues in our zone.

The rain was coming down in sheets when I reached the docks. The gantries of Harland & Wolff loomed over the city like yellow gallows. I found Miller in the back of a gin joint where the air was thick enough to chew. He wasn't alone. Two gorillas with knuckles the size of walnuts stood guard. "Larkin," Miller sneered, his teeth yellowed by cheap tea and spite. "You're late for the party. The Big Men are making peace. What's a private eye got to do in a world without crime?"

"I'm looking for a book, Miller. The kind with names. Give it to me, and maybe you live to see Saturday." Miller laughed, but it was a thin, nervous sound. "That book is my retirement plan. There are people on both sides of the peace table who'd pay a king's ransom to keep their names out of it. Gun-runners, bagmen, the lot." "The ransom isn't in sterling tonight," I said, stepping closer. I could feel the heat of the radiator and the cold iron of the .38 in my shoulder holster. "It's in blood. If you leak those names, the radicals on the fringe will have all the fuel they need to torch the Agreement before it's even signed."

The office smelled of stale Luckies and the kind of cheap gin that burns on the way down and scars on the way out. I was staring at a grease stain on my desk that looked vaguely like New Jersey when the door opened. She didn't kick it down, and she didn't sashay in like a femme fatale with a grudge. She just stepped into the room, and suddenly, the grit felt like it didn't belong.

Lady Bird Johnson. The First Lady. She sat in the guest chair—the one with the spring that stabs you in the thigh—and somehow, the chair looked like it had been upgraded to velvet. “Mr. Marlowe,” she said, her voice a soft, Texas-honeyed drawl that could smooth over a gravel pit. “I believe someone is trying to pull the petals off my plans.” I leaned back, my chair groaning in protest. “I’m a private dick, Mrs. Johnson. I find missing husbands and straying bank accounts. I don’t usually do gardening.”

“This isn’t about gardening,” she said, her dark eyes steady. “It’s about the Highway Beautification Act. Someone’s trying to pull the petals off my plans, and I’m the only one who can stop them. The wildflowers in the field are beautiful, but they’re not what we need. We need flowers that can survive the highway. We need flowers that can survive the highway.”

She didn’t need to raise her voice. She had that quiet power, the kind that moves mountains by eroding them. She understood that if you change the scene, you change the soul of the place.

I took the job for the money, though the Treasury notes she left on the desk were crisp enough to cut your hand because she was brave enough to pick a fight with a woman who had a reputation for being a hard

The trail led to a warehouse down by the Anacostia. It was a cavernous hole that smelled of diesel and damp earth. Inside, I found crates—hundreds of them—marked with the National Park Service logo. They were filled with bluebonnet seeds and cherry saplings, hijacked before they could hit the store. Shadows shifted in the loading dock. I palmed my Smith & Wesson, the cold steel a comfort against the humid D.C. night.

“Step out,” I said. “Unless you want a lead salad.” A man stepped into the light. He was wearing a suit that cost more than my car, but his face was pure gutter. “Relax, Marlowe. It’s just weeds. We’re doing the broad a favour. Billboards make money. Flowers just take up space.”

It was ‘Gravel’ Gus Vancamp, a lobbyist for the outdoor advertising syndicate. He had a cigar clamped in his teeth and enough arrogance to fill the National Mall. “The First Lady doesn’t see it that way, Gus,” I said. “She thinks a highway ought to be more than a concrete vein for commerce. She thinks people deserve a view.” Gus laughed, a sound like dry leaves in a gutter. “She’s a dreamer. This is a city of concrete and kickbacks. You can’t eat beauty.”

“Maybe not,” a voice said from the shadows behind me. I spun around. Lady Bird was standing there. No Secret Service, no fanfare. Just a woman in a tailored suit and a look of immense, patient disappointment. She’d followed me.

## BEAUTIFUL BIRD \$22

Hibiscus Laevis Infused-Casa Dragones

Blanco Tequila

Del Santo Herbal Liqueur

Yuzu

Jalapeno

Lime



She arrived without spectacle, but the room always felt calmer once she was seated. I learned quickly that her influence moved through beauty and patience, shaping behavior the way gardens do quietly, over time. When she spoke of highways lined with flowers and cities softened by green space, it was clear she understood that lasting change didn't need applause, only care and vision.



They called him the 101st, and I always made sure he had a seat where persistence could do its work. Night after night, he returned with the same quiet resolve, pressing for justice one conversation, one vote, one person at a time. I watched him turn patience into progress, proving that influence doesn't always shout, it shows up again tomorrow.



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The neon sign of the "North Star Lounge" flickered like a dying heartbeat, casting jagged red shadows over my desk. In the 1950s, Montgomery was a pressure cooker with the lid screwed tight, and I was just the man who kept the steam from scalding the wrong people. My name is Elias Thorne. I'm a private investigator, which is a polite way of saying I'm the guy you hire when the police are the ones committing the crime.

The man they called the 101st—real name, Julian Vane—sat in the corner booth. He didn't look like a revolutionary. He wore a crisp white shirt, a thin black tie, and a hat that sat level on his head. He didn't carry a gun, but he carried a leather-bound ledger that scared the local precinct more than any man ever could. In it were names. Names of people who were tired of the back of the bus, who were ready to sign their lives away for a ballot.

# 101st \$21

"Thorne," Vane said as I slid into the booth across from him. His voice was like low-octave cello music. "The day is getting heavy. You feel it?" "I feel it," I replied. "They aren't looking for a broken taillight, Julian. They're looking for that book."

- Planteray Cut & Dry Rum**
- Kota Pandan Liqueur**
- Piña Lemon Balm**
- Saline**
- Egg White**

Vane tapped his fingers on the table. "This isn't just about the architecture of a new world. They can kill the architect, but the blueprint is already in the hands of the workers."

That was the problem. I wasn't an architect; I was a shield. And someone was trying to crack it. The job started two days ago when a woman named Clara came to my office. She was a seamstress with hands that had fought a war against denim and won. She told me her brother had vanished at a meeting at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. The police told her he'd probably just "wandered off." But Clara knew better. Her brother had been seen talking to Julian Vane.

I spent the afternoon pounding the pavement, dodging the glares of patrolmen who didn't like the way I looked at their city. I followed a trail of whispers that led me to a warehouse on the edge of the Alabama River. It smelled of stagnant water and old secrets.

Inside, I found more than I bargained for. It wasn't just a kidnapping; it was a conspiracy. Stacks of flyers, smeared with fresh ink, called for a city-wide boycott. But next to them were crates of dynamite and a list of addresses—Julian's office, the church, the homes of the organizers. Someone was planning to turn the movement into a funeral pyre.

I didn't have time for a warrant. In this town, a warrant was just a piece of paper that told the villains you were coming. I kicked in the door of a back office and found a man named 'Gator' Reed, a low-rent enforcer for the Citizens' Council. He was holding a heavy brass key and a smug expression.

"You're out of your depth, Thorne," Gator sneered, reaching for a snub-nosed .38 on the desk. My forearm pressed against his throat. "Where's the boy, Gator?" I growled.

"He's at the old mill," he wheezed. "But you're too late. The fuse is already lit. Not just for

The banana skirt was the legend, the shimmering myth that packed the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées until the walls sweated, but I knew the woman who lived behind the feathers and the fame. I always made sure she had the seat she wanted—the velvet booth in the far corner of Le Sphinx, where the shadows were long enough to hide a face but the view of the door was unobstructed.

She arrived laughing, radiant, already halfway into a story, and I'd watch the room soften the moment she crossed the threshold. It wasn't just the perfume—something expensive and floral that cut through the haze of cheap tobacco—it was the electricity she carried. I never asked where she'd been or where she was going next; some guests carried too much history for questions. During the war, she listened as carefully as she performed, and I learned to recognize the pause in her smile when something worth remembering passed the bar. Tonight, that pause lasted a heartbeat too long.

"The usual, Jacques," Josephine said, sliding into the booth. Her eyes, usually bright enough to light a black cat, were dim. "I poured the coffee for the veterans and the dreamers. As the bubbles rose, she leaned in. The jazz band was kicking into a frantic rendition of Bye Bye Blackbird, providing the perfect acoustic curtain.

## BANANA SKIRT \$22

"There's a man in a grey suit tracking a slick character in a grey herringbone suit who had just stepped in from the film. He looked like he'd been pressed in a book and forgotten about. "Grey suit?"

## Martell VS Martell Blue Swift

## Frangelico

## Banana Liqueur

## Banana Brûlée

## Lemon

## Chocolate Bitters

Josephine did not blink. She had the instincts of a hunted cat. "That's the errand boy, Varga is the one behind him. The one who looks like he owns the bank and the vault inside." Varga entered a moment later. He was a mountain of a man with a jaw like a cobblestone and eyes that had seen too much. He didn't look at the stage. He didn't look at the girls. He looked straight at Josephine.

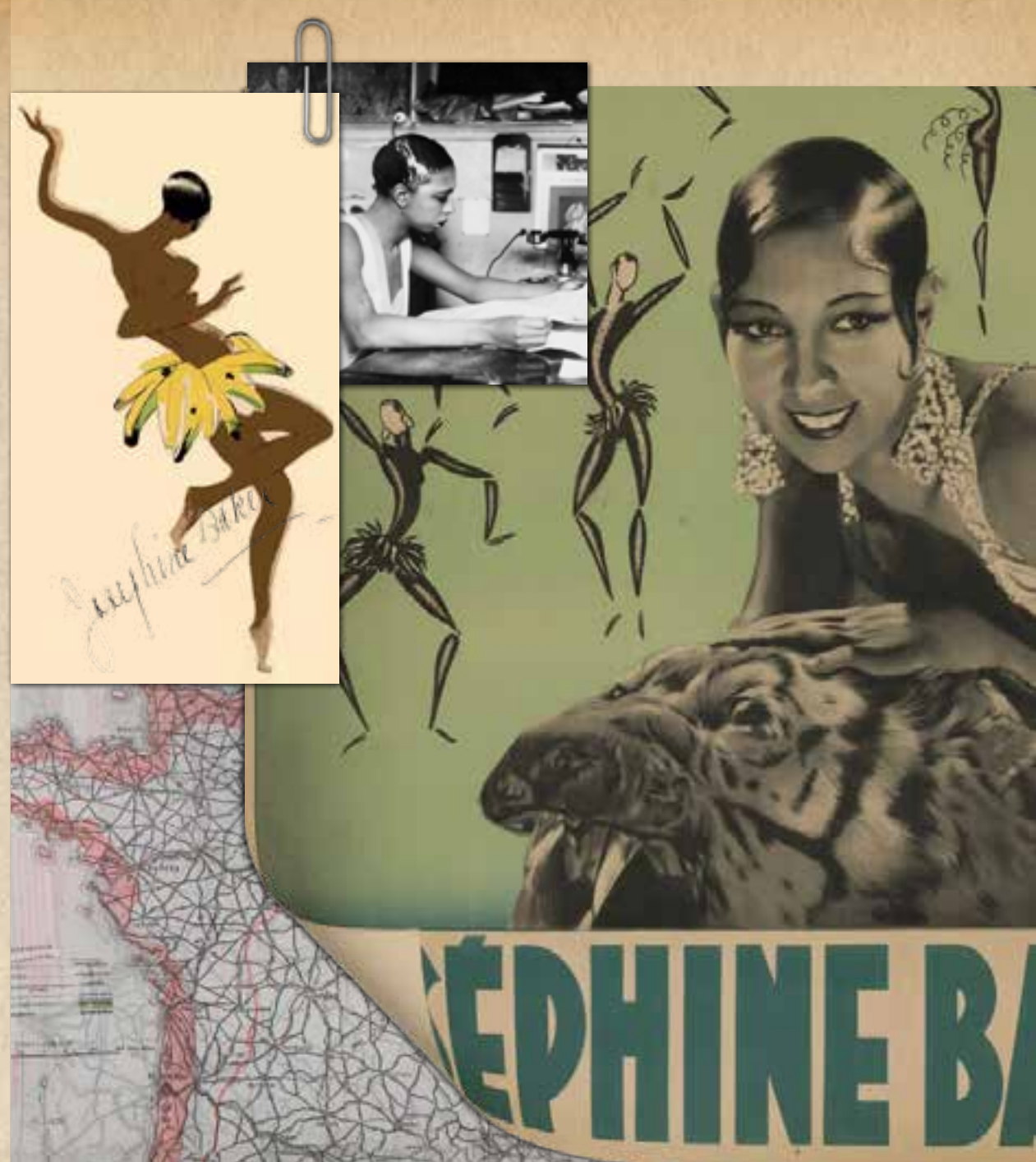
"He thinks I'm the key," she murmured, taking a slow sip of her drink. "And he's right. But the key isn't a piece of metal, Jacques. It's a song."

In the pulp world of 1950s Paris, secrets were the only currency that didn't devalue. Josephine Baker wasn't just a star; she was the most glamorous courier in the history of espionage. During the Occupation, she'd carried intelligence written in invisible ink on her sheet music. Now, years after the liberation, the ghosts were still restless.

Varga approached the booth. He didn't wait for an invitation. He sat down, his bulk making the leather groan. "Madame Baker," he said, his voice a low rumble. "You have a habit of keeping things that are out of fashion. Memories. Loyalties. Lists."

Josephine flashed that million-franc smile—the one that had charmed kings and generals. "I'm an artist, Monsieur. I keep what is beautiful. Treason is never beautiful."

"The names on that list are men of influence," Varga countered, his hand disappearing into his



They knew her by the banana skirt, and I always made sure she had the seat she wanted. She arrived laughing, radiant, already halfway into a story, and I'd watch the room soften the moment she crossed the threshold. I never asked where she'd been or where she was going next; some guests carried too much history for questions. During the war, she listened as carefully as she performed, and I learned to recognize the pause in her smile when something worth remembering passed the bar.



They worked the bar like architects, and I always trusted them to set the tone before the room ever filled. What looked like service was really craft. Each drink placed with intention. Each conversation given just enough time to breathe. I watched them turn the bar into a gathering place where labor became trade, trade became art, and influence moved as smoothly as another round.

Kofi didn't just pour gin; he engineered the atmosphere of The Gilded Cage. He'd come from Accra ten years ago with a law degree that the New York Bar Association didn't recognise and a way of reading people that no university could teach. He stood six-foot-four with skin the colour of espresso and a smile that could either welcome you home or warn you off, depending on how you held your shoulders.

I was sitting in my usual booth, the one where the shadows hugged the cracked leather, nursing a lukewarm coffee. My name's Miller. I'm a private investigator, which is just a fancy way of saying I get paid to look at things people want to keep hidden.

"You're brooding, Miller," Kofi said, his voice a deep, melodic rumble that cut through the hiss of the soda siphon. He was polishing a highball glass with rhythmic precision. "The rhythm of your breathing is off. Someone died, or someone is about to."

"Always the same," I said, my eyes fixed on the bartender's hands. The club in Harlem thrummed with the low, steady pulse of a saxophone. Kofi paused, his dark eyes reflecting the amber glow of the back-bar lights. Harlem is a long way from the West Side. Why come to me? "Because the last person seen with her was a regular of yours. A regular of yours named 'Velvet'." Word is, he treats this bar like his personal boardroom.

## ANOTHER ROUND? \$22

**Nikka Days Whisky**

**Amaro Nonino**

**Averna**

**Sweet Vermouth**

**Guinness Lavender Reduction**

**Cherry Saffron Bitters**

Kofi's expression didn't change, but the speed of his polishing slowed. He set the glass down. "Victor is a man who trades in promises he doesn't own. He was here an hour ago. He left a matchbook on the bar—not his usual brand." He slid a small, silver-foiled matchbook across the mahogany. "That's a long way from the jazz scene," I noted.

"Victor isn't interested in music, Miller. He's interested in weight. Specifically, the weight of things that can't be seen." Kofi's voice dropped an octave. "There is a rumour circulating among the Ghanaian crews. A shipment of 'merchandise' that talks back. Elena might not be missing. She might be inventory."

The air in the bar suddenly felt heavy, thick with the smell of stale tobacco and cold secrets. I picked up the matchbook, the foil cool against my calloused palm. "Inventory? You mean human trafficking?"

Kofi nodded once, a sharp, grim movement. "The Star of Africa is a front for more than just cocoa beans and textiles. They deal in shadows. And Victor? He's the one who scouts the talent. He looks for girls with no one to miss them—or so he thinks."

"He miscalculated with Elena," I said, my voice grating like gravel. "Her father might be broke, but he's got friends on the docks. That's how I got the lead."

"Then you must move quickly," Kofi warned, his eyes darting to the door as the bell chimed, signalling a new arrival. "Victor is scheduled to meet a 'supplier' at Pier 42 at midnight. If Elena is there, she won't be for long. The freighter sails at dawn."

I stood up, the leather of the booth creaking in protest. My coffee was cold, forgotten. "Pier 42. Thanks, Kofi. I owe you one."





WASHINGTON, DC  
 END TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION  
 8234



They called him the godfather of go-go, and the room always felt more like itself when his rhythm as nearby. I watched his sound pull the city's heartbeat into the bar, uniting politicians, locals, and night-owls under the same groove. When the beat settled in, Washington stopped performing and started moving, and I knew the night would belong to him.

**SOUL SEARCHERS**  
 "I NEED SOME MONEY"  
 New Release.. "HERE WE GO AGAIN"

For over fifty years, I recommended and reserved tables for the most influential figures in Washington. Some lived here, others were only passing through for the night, but I pointed them all in the same direction: Swing Set. Over time, it became their favorite playground, a place where titles were checked at the door and intentions revealed slowly.

On any given night, live jazz filled the air, curling around the room like smoke. Cocktails were shaken or stirred by the most talented bartenders in the city, each one understanding that timing mattered as much as technique. Laughter echoed softly, secrets were exchanged in low tones, and more than once I heard tomorrow's headlines whispered hours before they reached the daylight. I never asked questions, and I never repeated what I heard. My job was simply to keep the room in balance, and to make sure the right people stayed just long enough for history to begin.

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**GOGO SWING** \$21

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- Maker's Mark Bourbon**
- Prosecco**
- Crème de Cacao**
- Cayenne Spiced-Lillet Rouge Reduction**
- Lemon**

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**MOCKTAIL** fall in Harlem; it beat a rhythm against the pavement like a drummer who'd lost his tempo and his mind. I sat in my office above 125th Street, the neon sign of a nearby jazz club flickering a tired Morse code against my frosted glass door: D-U-K-E.

My name is Sterling. I'm a private investigator, which is just a fancy way of saying I get paid to look at things people want to keep hidden. I was nursing a lukewarm coffee when the door opened, and a cloud of expensive perfume drifted in, followed by a woman who looked like she'd been poured into a midnight-blue silk dress.

"Mr. Sterling?" her voice was a cello suite—deep, rich, and full of secrets.  
 "That's what it says on the door," I said, leaning back. "What can I do for you, Miss...?"  
 "Lola. Just Lola. I'm looking for something that was lost on the A Train. Something more valuable than gold."

I lit a cigarette. "What were you wearing when you lost those wallets and umbrellas on the A Train, Lola?" she asked, her eyes fixed on me. "A red dress and a black hat?"

# TAKE THE A \$15

"This wasn't a wallet," she whispered, leaning over my desk. "It was a manuscript. The original score for a new arrangement. If it falls into the wrong hands, the music of this city will never be the same."  
**Pathfinder Non-Alcoholic Herbal Spirit**  
**All Spice Sumac Cola**

I started when I saw the manuscript on the A Train platform at 59th Street. The station smelled of ozone, damp wool, and the lingering echoes of a thousand hurried footsteps. According to Lola, the Duke's lead was hidden in a trench coat just as the doors were closing.

I caught the next uptown express. The A Train is a beast of steel and thunder, a mechanical heartbeat that connects the glitz of Midtown to the soul of Harlem. As the car lurched forward, I watched the faces of the passengers—tired workers, wide-eyed dreamers, and the occasional predator.

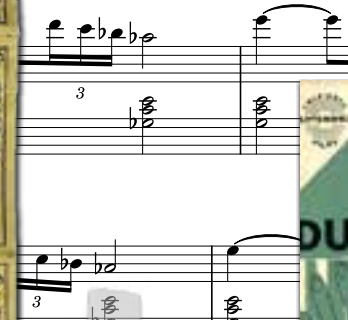
I found my first lead near the conductor's booth. A crumpled piece of sheet music, tucked under a seat. It wasn't the manuscript, but it was a clue: a fragment of a bass line, written in a hand that looked like it was dancing.

At 145th Street, I hopped off. The air up here was different—sharper, filled with the smell of soul food and the distant honk of a saxophone. I headed for the Cotton Club, the unofficial headquarters of the man they called the Duke.

The club was a fever dream of brass and velvet. On stage, the band was warming up, the brass section gleaming under the spotlights. And there he was, sitting at the piano like a king on a velvet throne, Duke Ellington. He didn't play the piano so much as he conversed with it, his fingers moving with a grace that made the ivory keys seem like they were singing.



Take the A train



ANOTHER BIG WEEK  
 Beg. FRI., FEB. 13th

THE  
**ORIOLES**

WEEK Beg. FRI., FEB. 20th

**DUKE  
 ELLINGTON**

His Band and Revue

He never rushed the room; the room followed his tempo. I could tell the night would linger longer once the music began, notes folding into conversation until no one remembered why they'd planned to leave early. His melodies did more than entertain, they arranged the evening, giving everyone permission to stay just a little while longer.



## Silent Spring' Is Now Noisy Summer

Industry  
Up in Arms Over  
a New Book

JOHN M. LEE  
200,000,000 pesticides in-  
has been highly irritated  
quiet woman author whose  
ous works on science have  
ained for the beauty and  
of the writing.  
Rachel Carson,  
"Sea Around Us"  
Age of the Sea"  
ers in 1951 and  
Carson, trained as  
biologist, wrote grace-  
and sheer life.  
Her latest work, however,  
Carson is not so gentle.



Rachel Carson Stirs  
Conflict—Producers  
Are Crying 'Foul'

feeding the use of their prod-  
ucts. Meetings have been held  
in Washington and New York;  
Statements are being drafted  
and counter-attacks plotted.  
A drowsy midsummer has  
suddenly been enlivened by the  
greatest uproar in the pesticides  
industry since the berry  
scare of 1959.  
Miss Carson's book is  
entitled "Silent Spring."  
The author derived the title  
from a poem which she used  
in an imaginary town  
in which chemical pollution has  
silenced the birds.

To keep  
her co  
Silent  
in a  
microscope.

She never raised her voice,  
but the room grew quieter  
when she spoke. I watched  
her trade small talk for facts,  
letting science settle into  
conversation until it became  
impossible to ignore.  
Long before Silent Spring  
changed the world, I knew  
she was someone whose  
words would linger well  
after the season ended.

The rain didn't wash the city clean; it just turned the grime into a slick, iridescent **MOCKTAIL** mirrored the neon signs of the dive bars. I sat in the corner booth of "The Rusty Anchor," nursing a lukewarm coffee and watching the woman who was about to kick a hornet's nest.

She was Rachel, a biologist with eyes that saw through the PR smoke screens of the chemical giants. She never raised her voice, but the room grew quieter when she spoke. I watched her trade small talk for facts, letting science settle into conversation until it became impossible to ignore. Long before Silent Spring changed the world, I knew she was someone whose words would linger well after the season ended.

"The songbirds are disappearing, Jack," she said, her voice a low vibration against the din of the bar. "First the robins, then the bluebirds. It's not just a bad season. It's a massacre." I lit a Lucky Strike, the smoke curling toward the yellowed ceiling. "People want green lawns and big harvests, Rachel. They don't care about a few dead birds."

"They will when they realise they're next," she replied, sliding a folder across the scarred wooden table. "It's not just a bad season with rashes that won't heal, it's a slow-acting poison. I call it a slow-acting poison."

# SILENT SPRING \$15

I opened the folder. It was filled with grainy photos of scorched earth and chemical manifests from Green Valley. The air smelled like a mountain of red tape.

## Seedlip Garden Non-Alcoholic Spirit

## Lyre's Rosso Non-Alcoholic Aperitif

## Strawberry Basil Oleo Saccharum

## Citrus

## Fever-Tree Elderflower Tonic

My job was simple: find the rot. But in this town, the rot was the foundation.

The Green Valley distillery sat on the edge of the marshes like a concrete fortress. I spent three nights watching the perimeter. The trucks rolled out at midnight, marked tankers leaking a sickly sweet vapor that clung to the walls like mold. I slipped through the chain-link fence on the fourth night. The air inside the complex was heavy, tasting of copper. I found the executive wing—mahogany doors and thick carpets that muffled the sound of heavy soles. I wasn't looking for a safe; I was looking for the filing cabinets of the Chief Operating Officer. A man named Dr. Aris Thorne.



Thorne's office was a shrine to "Progress." Charts on the wall showed yield increases that looked like mountain ranges. But in the bottom drawer of a locked cabinet, I found the "Red File."

It was a series of internal memos. "Field Test 4: Total ecosystem collapse within 48 hours. Residual toxicity in soil expected for 50+ years. Recommendation: Suppress." A floorboard creaked behind me.

"A bit late for a lab tour, Mr. Marlowe?"

I turned to see Thorne. He was a thin man with spectacles that caught the moonlight, looking more like a schoolteacher than a merchant of death. He wasn't alone. Two bruisers in cheap suits stood behind him, their hands hovering near their waistbands.

"The birds stopped singing in the valley, Doc," I said, tucking the Red File into my coat. "I figured I'd come find out why."

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"They will when they realise they're next," she replied, sliding a folder across the scarred wooden table. "Look at the data from the valley. Livestock dying, children with rashes that won't heal. It's the 'Apex-9' formula. The Department of Agriculture is calling it a miracle. I call it a slow-acting poison."

I opened the folder. It was filled with grainy photos of scorched earth and chemical manifests from Greenglow Chemicals, a titan with enough lobbyists in D.C. to bury the truth under a mountain of red tape.

"What do you want from me?" I asked.

Suntory Toki Whiskytoxic before they hit the market."

**THE END**

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Unearthly plans to destroy her homeland propels an unknown marine biologist into uncharted waters.

## **COME SPY WITH ME**

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# THE DOYLE COLLECTION

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