

david steece's

A QUESTION of HONOR

the paradox continues

the story of a real new orleans gangster

a mans life is a manuscript upon which he writes his legacy!

David (Blackie Giordano) Steece

book two of a trilogy

Chapter 1 de profundis

Where the hell am I....? Blackie could hear a buzzing, or humming, and then a ticking. Was it the click of a typewriter? What's that bright light?

As he came out of the stupor of being drugged from pain medication, he calmed down, his thoughts started to gather. He said to himself, *Oh yeah, the shooting on Airline Highway. There's that bright light!* He could see it through his eyelids as he tried to force himself to open them. When his eyes opened and were half-focused, he could see the clicking sound was some kind of monitor and the bright light was coming from overhead. He could feel there were wires and tubes attached to his body everywhere. He saw some movement to his left. *Oh! It's a person dressed in white! . . . A nurse . . .? Was he in a hospital . . .? He was! What happened, how did he get there?*



"Blackie at Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans"

He awoke to his first introduction to Cassandra “Cassie” Zanca, a cute little five-foot, four-inch, 120-pound copper-skinned Italian with beautiful eyes that looked like liquid caramel. She was a little off to his left and not looking in his direction when he finally got his body to react and said, “Who the hell are you?” She jumped about 10 feet and let out a little shriek. At the sound of her shriek, the door to her left burst open and “Big Mac,” “Ralph,” and “Wonder Animal” charged into the room shouting, “What’s wrong?” While looking at Blackie, she turned to them and said, “He woke up and scared the hell out of me!”

Blackie had been out for nearly a month after the shooting on Airline Highway. He had been given up for dead by several of the medical staff, most recently by Dr. Ferris, a neurologist who insisted Blackie was dead because his EEG (electroencephalogram) had flat lined. At that time, Cassandra Zanca was one of the few in the state of Louisiana who was a licensed, registered electroencephalogram technician. She had argued with Dr. Ferris that she had been trained if there was sweat on the brain, there was life, and the bottom of Blackie’s chart showed sweat. She had been right.

Cassie must have alerted other medical staff because, other than his men, the room was filling with doctors and medical personnel to witness the miracle who practically rose from the dead.

Born a Giordano, he had been sent south when his father had gone to prison. Blackie’s name had been changed to David Steece for his own protection. His new name was written into a Bible in some faraway place so he would have a birth certificate. After his father was released, he returned to Sicily just ahead of more indictments.

David Steece’s street name was Blackie. He was 38 years old, six foot two, two hundred thirty-five pounds. His copper-colored complexion and coal black hair accented by high cheekbones gave him chiseled good looks. His huge square shoulders made him appear much larger than he was. His muscular upper body and wiry legs required clothing to be custom fitted as well as to hide the .44 magnum, which was always on his right hip. His distinctive black eyes were as menacing as that of a primal predator surveying his prey. When angered, they could cut through a man with the fury of a rogue elephant or they could change to melt any woman with desire and passion. Blackie’s nose had been broken a couple of times but, hell, Sicilian noses were big and crooked anyway. He had a scar on the left front of his chin and another just over the left ear where a pistol sight had cut him in a fight. There was an indentation over the right eyebrow where a shotgun pellet had dented his forehead permanently. He had a three-and-a-half-inch scar on his throat. A knife fight had left a scar crossing the little, ring and middle fingers on his left hand and several more on the lower wrist.

He appeared to be of Italian ancestry, but nobody dared call him that.

He was *defacto* Sicilian and proud of it. He was the second son of a former big-time mafia boss in St. Louis, back home he had been called a “baby gangster.” Everyone said he was on the rise back then, if that Sicilian *indole* didn’t get him in trouble before he matured. They didn’t mean the law; they were talking about the way he would go over to Kansas City and ply his most notorious vice; partying with women.

His daddy had sent him to New Orleans when he was twelve or thirteen to be under Mr. Pete’s wing. This was kind of like boot camp, knowing Mr. Pete could jerk Blackie’s chain a lot quicker and he would listen to him better than anyone else who was not immediate family. This and the fact that Pop was getting ready to do a four-year bit for some cigarette and alcohol tax stamps that the Feebes (FBI) said were counterfeit. Assholes can’t take a joke.

Poppa had handed the St. Louis “Family business” off to his brother who would run it under his flag while Pop was away. But Uncle wasn’t Pop, and Blackie had a way of pushing the envelope with him. The two Families, St. Louis and KC (Kansas City), who had always gotten along could become acrimonious with their joint interest in other cities like Las Vegas and Denver.

There were a lot of young soldiers in KC who had no idea who Blackie was. They saw him as this arrogant young dude dressed in his black mohair suit, white-on-white shirt and tie, gold chains, diamond pinky ring and alligator shoes. They thought he was nothing more than a wanna-be gangster coming around and hitting on every broad in every joint in KC. Of course, the police lieutenants, captains, along with KC’s “Family” *capos* knew who he was, either through his father, the boss of St. Louis, or newspaper stories. However, he was usually mistaken for his older brother Georgie because they looked so much alike. The only problem with that was the police, capos and crew leaders didn’t hang out in the kind of joints where the KC *soldates* and Blackie spent their time. In addition, Blackie had spent his teen years in New Orleans. Both families and the cops “in the know” worried about him, because everyone who was anyone knew that Big Burt (Uncle Burt) would have reined his nephew in a long time ago if his Pop wasn’t out of the country and his brother Georgie hadn’t been killed in Korea while serving in the United States Marine Corps. Blackie remembered when he was about twelve or thirteen and Georgie was off fighting in Korea. A telegram came to the house about Georgie’s death. It was from some asshole in Washington, some secretary of something or other, not even from a U.S. Marine General. It read, “Missing in a Police Action for the United Nations.” Blackie said, “That’s bullshit! Georgie was a U. S. Marine fighting for the United States of America, not for some United Nations.” Blackie was so mad, he went and got one of his Pop’s shotguns, got the \$13.58 he had in his bedroom and grabbed a box of shells, which were probably bird shot. Blackie took the shotgun, shells and money got on his bike, and pedaled out to Lambert Field (St. Louis Airport). Walking up to the ticket counter with tears

streaming down his face, he laid the shotgun, shells, and money down on the counter while sobbing and said, "I want a ticket to Japan." It was the only place he could think of, he couldn't even remember the name "Korea," the country where the fighting was going on. He told them "I'm gonna go kill all those Japs that killed my brother." Today some trigger-happy security guard would have shot him before he got through the door at the airport. But back then, in 1950, the VIP guy came up and put his arm around Blackie and said, "Come with me while we get your ticket ready."

He walked him to a VIP waiting room, shotgun, shells and all. He got him a soft drink, told Blackie he had to wrap up the shotgun and shells and got his name and telephone number. In a few minutes, he came back and asked how Blackie had gotten there. Blackie said, "I came on my bike." The VIP guy said, "Your brother is very lucky to have a brother who loves him so much." The VIP guy then said, "I got to go park your bike. I'll be right back," and left again. When he came back this time he said, "It's gonna be a little wait. You want a hamburger and a Coke?" Blackie was always hungry. He answered, "Yeah, but can I have milk? I don't like soft drinks. My Momma says they rot your teeth and never lets us have them." VIP said, "You bet you can have milk. I see you didn't drink the Coke I brought you earlier. I wish my kids drank milk instead of soft drinks."

He left and came back shortly with a hamburger, French fries, and a big glass of milk. Well, by then, Blackie had calmed down quite a bit, and while he was eating, he asked the VIP guy, "Does it take long to get to Japan?" VIP said, "Yeah, it's a long way." Just then Momma and Pop came through the door; Blackie could tell Momma had been crying. Pop came over and hugged him and said, "You did good son, but we gotta handle this a different way." Pop handed the VIP guy some cash and said, "Thanks for takin' care of my son." Today this would have been handled totally different.

The original plan was for Georgie to take over for Pop, which would have made Blackie a college boy and great things someday. Now he was being touted for Georgie's spot and big things of a different kind. If something happened to Blackie now, the *modus vivendi* that existed between these two Families for so long would erupt into another *Castsellammare War*, not only affecting Missouri, but having fallout all over. Yeah, Blackie could easily become a *problema*. He needed to *diventar grande*, which was why he was back in New Orleans and had just recently gotten his own *Borgata*.

As the medical staff checked Blackie's vitals, one of the doctors was looking in his eyes with a little flashlight thing. Blackie was hollering at his men, "How are my girls?! Where are my girls?!" The hospital had been inundated with Blackie's family, his children and his men the entire time he had been out, keeping the waiting room full. Ralph answered calmly, "Em's got the girls today, Boss, and they're fine. Your sister Patsy, or Elaine, have

been coordinating everybody. Everyone's been here every day with ya, Teri and Beth came home from school." Teri, his oldest daughter and his princess, was currently at the university in his home state of Missouri. Beth, his angel was a senior honor student at St. James Major High School in New Orleans. Though she was adopted, her jet black hair, complexion, and almond eyes made her look like he spit her out. Luann Gail (she preferred her middle name which had been given to her as respect for Blackie's sister Patsy Gail), was his heart. The "Dennis the Menace" of the bunch, she was still a little gangly as she started to mature into a young lady. Alley, his eyes, had just left Ursuline Academy in New Orleans where she had been under the competent guidance of Sister Terasacus and was moving into her desire to play sports, namely soccer. Rae-Rae, the baby of the bunch, was attending Shores Academy, also planning her future by not spending much time on her homework and much more time telling Blackie, "Daddy, I don't need to go to school, I'm going to marry a doctor." The girls' mother, Liz, Elizabeth Valletta from Rapides Parish, and Blackie, had gone through a bitter custody battle a few years before. Blackie had won and had been playing "mommy and daddy" ever since.

After a couple of hours of tests, the doctors ordered Blackie moved to a private room on the Two East wing of Southern Baptist Hospital on Napoleon Avenue in New Orleans, where his head nurse would be Rita Porter, who Blackie knew was astute politically, a big fan of "Honey Fitz" (Lt. Governor James E. Fitzmorris, Jr.) and an ally of Blackie's. She also had the street knowledge to know Blackie was a man of respect and thereby had her staff acquiesce to his every whim. By the time they got Blackie in the room, not only had Em gotten there with the girls, but word had spread all over town. In no time at all, the hospital was filling with friends and 'Family'.

Meanwhile, as Elaine gave Blackie a manicure, Rita Porter told Blackie of Cassie's efforts to keep him on life support when Dr. Ferris had given up. Blackie had Rita tell Cassie he wanted to see her that night before she left the hospital. When Cassie stopped by his room on her way home, Blackie invited her to have dinner with him the following night. She responded, "I'm not real big on hospital food, but thanks anyhow." Blackie said, "Darlin', we aren't eating hospital food. Masson's will cater our dinner. What's your pleasure?" Masson's, a world renowned five-star New Orleans restaurant was owned by Ernie and Albert Masson. Ernie was one of Blackie's closest lifelong friends, and Albert, his brother, a veteran ace fighter pilot from the Korean War, was a friend of Blackie's in his own right. Cassie thought, *sure, what a bullshit artist. They're gonna cater his dinner. Right.* But to her surprise, when she came by the next evening, just to see, there was a table set up with a linen tablecloth, napkins, china, crystal dinnerware and silver, with Ernie Masson himself doing the honors. Only the *vino* was missing, alcohol was not allowed in the hospital. Shocked, was not the word for how embarrassed she felt. Blackie, in an effort to

sweep Cassie off her feet, made this a ritual every evening until he was released.

From early the second day, when Blackie's mind starting working again, other than some brief updates on business, his entire thought process was dedicated to "who pulled the trigger" and "who set him up for the hit." Money and favors at every level and magnitude were offered on the street. It was just a matter of time until someone who had heard something would snitch for the money.

Larry Heaslip, Jr. called a few days later and told Blackie that while having lunch at the NOAC (New Orleans Athletic Club), during the talk about Blackie coming out of a coma he had overheard that Jamie Kuotroy, a few months ago, had been making inquiries about Blackie. Larry was a Jefferson Parish councilman-at-large for the East Bank and a political ally. He was six feet tall, two hundred twenty pounds, and was big and ugly enough to be one of Blackie's soldiers. Larry wasn't sure why, but he thought Jamie's beef had been over some broad. Blackie sent the Hulk and Wonder Animal to find out what they could at the NOAC. Blackie, wishing that Mickey was home, wondered how many more months it would be. Mickey, Mickael Acosta, was a six-foot, one hundred ninety pound, cold, steel hard Sicilian. He was one of Blackie's toughest, if not the toughest, *soldate*. He had used bad judgment a few years ago and had been up north of St. Francisville at a place known as Angola State Penitentiary.

A lot of work had been put into him coming home and it was just around the corner. Blackie's trust in Mickey, who was more like a son than a soldier, ran as deep as "*sangue di mio sangue*". In a few days it was determined that Blackie could leave the hospital with the care of a nurse and a therapist at his home. In the days that followed, Uncle Paul was getting Blackie out of the house for drives. Nowhere special, just out to Denny's where the crew hung out, which put Blackie back in touch with his men. Finally the medical people allowed him to drive and he started driving with Uncle Paul as a co-pilot and Wonder close behind. Blackie's progress improved daily until he was comfortable driving alone

Chapter 2 the irish wanna be

Blackie home, where his life *toenore ala normalita*, but after dinner he decided to go to the club. There Mr. Pete was surprised to see him, but had a job he could do. Mr. Pete briefed Blackie on an upcoming potential deal and told him to go get this Irish wanna-be Eddie Kelly and listen to the deal he and his connection offered. Blackie went out into the rain from the side door and ran down the narrow passageway between the two night clubs, The Sho Bar and Poppa Joe's. He jumped in the Caddie muttering, "God damned Louisiana rain!" Blackie cranked the Caddie and pulled out on Bienville, down to Chartres to Esplanade then East on I-10.

Blackie wondered, *Why was he the lucky one the Boss picked to meet this wanna-be Irish hood, Eddie Kelly, and who the fuck were they going to meet?* Blackie thought, *nobody seems to know anything about this hair-brained scheme. The way his luck had been running, he could end up either busted or shot dealing with some white asshole outside of his Borgata.* Blackie roared out on I-10 East as the rain turned to mist. You could hear the Goodyear Eagles sucking up the rain like possums sucking water after they filled their bellies on some unlucky prey in the swamp.

Exiting at Downman Road, he scanned the parking lot in the rear of the Martin Brother's Restaurant. Blackie could see Wonder's car under the down ramp of I-10. Martin Brothers was on the corner of Chef Menteur Highway and Downman Road and had been a standard meeting place on Monday nights because it was closed. What would have happened if Blackie hadn't wondered into the Sho Bar? This couldn't have been thought out ahead of time, no one knew he was coming.

The parking lot was blocked on three sides, on the east side by the I-10 exit ramp, the south by Interstate 10 and the west by the Intracoastal Waterway. Blackie saw Eddie's red and white Buick and slowed down, checking the area well before pulling in.

Eddie, seeing the Caddie, jumped out of his car and ran through the light rain. He flopped back in the big red leather seat and said, "Shit, this weather is too shitty for ducks. Damn we're gonna be late."

"Who we gonna meet?" Blackie asked.

Eddie responded, "Jim Mac-something and some dude from out of town. This is a good deal, man, and the money is good and we can trust 'em.

"How the hell can the money be good when ya don't know who or what the deal is? Plus the only way I know three people can be trusted is if two of 'em are dead," snorted Blackie, getting only a shrug from Eddie for an answer.

Blackie wheeled the Caddie out on the Chef Menteur Highway and headed east again. He never liked Eddie. He was a small-time hood from Birmingham, Alabama. Typical Irish; five foot, nine inches, one hundred sixty pounds, medium build with blond hair, blue eyes, and that milky-white skin that Blackie hated, except on redheaded women. Eddie always had some bullshit hustle that never made two nickels. Blackie had met Eddie about five years ago when they had dated sisters. He hadn't been able to keep Eddie out of his life since then and had no idea what happened to the broads. The sister Blackie had, no way could have been good enough to put up with all this Eddie bullshit. Eddie had conned Mr. Pete this time into some goofy fucking meeting.

As they headed east on the Chef Menteur Highway, Eddie started to rattle on about how cool the guys were they were going to meet and how much bread they were going to make. Blackie ignored his talk and wished he was in some hotel suite bedded down with some gorgeous redhead, like *hmmmm, Susan Hayward*.

When they approached the Highway 90 Truck Stop at Chef Menteur and Highway 11, you could see carnival rides and tents in the distance as they loomed out of the darkness like a bunch of exotic wild beasts. Blackie thought, *not many things in life had such a tremendous contrast between the open and closed carnival midway. Open, it was a un belo mixture of brightly colored lights, loud music, and happy vivace people everywhere, especially i giovai having a great time.* Blackie figured if those same *i giovai* came up on this place closed with its eerie shadows and weird shapes they would probably *spaventare qn a morte*.

The pelting rain, which was now starting to come down harder, had Blackie thinking to himself that the rain was probably *un cattivo presagio* adding to his belief that the whole deal sucked and had him wondering again what the hell was he doing here. Blackie's mind drifted to the time someone had told him about what they called a "razzle," one of the gambling concessions which the carnival operators called flat stores. Blackie figured they probably got the name because when you finished playing them you would *essere al verde*. Even though it was still early in the evening, it was very dark and dreary. The rain and heavy clouds cast an eerie air over the whole area. Blackie knew they were infringing on the Conforto's *territorio* as he pulled through the parking lot looking for anything suspicious besides all the 18-wheelers which were always *sospetto* and wound back around to the front. When Blackie heard Eddie's voice telling him to park, he snapped back to reality. The voice sounded like it was off in the distance, almost like a dream, as Blackie pulled the Caddie up beside a big blue Mercedes with a Texas license plate. He thought, *flat stores must make good money*. He decided this place would provide as quick an access as any if he had to leave in a hurry.

As they walked toward the building, Blackie could see the outline of

Wonder's Lincoln and felt better knowing how close his backup was. Inside Eddie spotted the two guys at a table and motioned for Blackie to follow him over. Jim Mac (McCain it turned out was his last name) was introduced by Eddie to Blackie and Robert Metzger. Bob was a six-foot, eight-inch, two hundred eighty-pound former U.S. Marine who Blackie thought was big enough to go bear hunting with a stick and have you feeling sorry for the bear. Blackie tried to size the place up as well as he could. It was so damn small and crowded he wondered if he could even get his .44 magnum out if he needed it without getting his arm stuck in the little chair. As they sat down around the small table in the rear, Eddie made small talk while Blackie and the other two men played "doggie smelling," sizing each other up.

Jim tells them he and Bob are in the market for "lockup" girls and the pay rate is \$100 to \$150 each in the fifteen-year-old bracket. Lockups are young, but fully developed girls. They're usually *fuggitivo* that are picked up or even kidnapped off the streets, then literally locked up as prisoners in warehouses throughout the nation and even overseas until they were so *esausto* that they could no longer earn money. Their need, Jim and Bob's, was for blondes and redheads to be sent to Japan, the Middle East, Mexico or even parts of South America where the demand for light-haired chicks is higher than others. When the girls are worn out, they are dropped in big city slum areas and left to take care of themselves, most are already or soon become druggies. Not long after that, they usually end up dead from some sick John, an overdose on drugs, or some outlaw pimp beats them to death. Jim and Bob were implying that they have the contract with several locations outside the U.S., primarily Japan. They needed a few hundred girls right away.

Blackie thinks to himself, *to make money this way is infra dignitatem*. Still, he made sure his facial expression didn't give away how he really felt and his thoughts remained segreto.

As Blackie drifted off with thoughts about his daughters, he suddenly realized everyone was standing to leave so he got up and followed them out. The rain had let up some, but it was still dark and gloomy, the kind of night when the only thing you needed was a good book or better yet a good woman to cuddle up with, preferably a redhead.

As Blackie and Eddie headed downtown, Eddie was talking a mile a minute, most of which Blackie didn't even hear. Blackie liked what his crews were doing at the time; they were making good bread so he could think of no reason to change his operation. Sharking, booking, or even running broads who were old enough really didn't seem like breaking the law to Blackie. Highjackings really didn't hurt the working man, some insurance company ate that. The business protection, hell they were better than the cops. Some asshole robs you, you don't go to court twenty times, if the cops even catch the robber. They track the asshole down, beat the shit outta him, get what ever of your stuff

he's still got, and take all his shit and his money and give it to you. If you're still short, they go back to the dude and he gets the bread you're short or gets his ass beat every day till he does. This is very effective because word spreads you fuck around in that neighborhood and you gonna have a problem. Blackie lived in one section of Metairie for years and after the first year, no robberies, no speeders. Kids could play in the street, in fact Blackie used to hold bicycle races right in front of his house with all the neighborhood kids. Many parents, if their kid was acting up, would bring them over for Blackie to have a talk with them. This ain't bullshit! If you want, check. Many still live there, doctors, Judges, politicians and business leaders. They may not have known it was Maf, although many may have suspected it. They just liked leaving their homes and cars unlocked and knowing they were safe. Muscle - well maybe - but if you beat your wife or kids, were a drunk, didn't pay your bills you needed your ass kicked. If you didn't keep your word - same scenario. That's what the public by and large wanted; women, gambling and loans for emergencies when they were turned down by the white man's banks. There had been a cliché for years saying, "You could borrow \$100 from Whitney Bank if you put up \$1,000 collateral, not to mention the interest rate." This girl gig business was a different story. Blackie'd just have to wait and see what the Boss said, the final decision wasn't his so why worry about it. Anyhow, it was all just business, *ainsi soitil*.