

## TWO HUNTERS IN MANHATTAN

by Mike Resnick

Things had not been going well for New York's Commissioner of Police. He'd started like a house afire, cleaning up most of the more obvious crime within a year—but then he came to a stone wall. He'd never before met a problem that he couldn't overcome by the sheer force of his will, but although he had conquered the political world, the literary world, and what was left of the Wild West, Theodore Roosevelt had to admit that after making a good start his efforts to conquer the criminal elements of his city had come to a dead halt.

He'd insisted that every policeman go armed. In their first three shoot-outs with wanted criminals, they'd killed two bystanders, wounded seven more, and totally missed their targets.

So he'd made target practice mandatory. When the city's budget couldn't accommodate the extra time required, almost a quarter of the force quit rather than practice for free.

He'd begun sleeping days and wandering the more dangerous areas by night—but everyone knew that Teddy Roosevelt wasn't a man to miss what he was aiming at, or to run away when confronted by superior numbers, so they just melted away when word went out (and it always went out) that he was on the prowl.

1896 drew to a close, and he realized he wasn't much closer to achieving his goal than he'd been at the end of 1895. He seriously considered resigning. After all, he and Edith had four children now, he had two books on the bestseller list, he'd been offered a post as Chief Naturalist at the American Museum of Natural History, and he'd hardly been able to spend any time at his beloved Sagamore Hill since accepting the post as commissioner. But every time he thought about it, his chin jutted forward, he inadvertently bared his teeth in a cross between a humorless smile and a snarl, and he knew that he wasn't going anywhere until the job was done. Americans didn't quit when things got rough; that was when they showed the courage and sense of purpose that differentiated them from Europeans.

But if he was to stay, he couldn't continue to depend on his police force to do the job. Men were quitting every day, and many of the ones who stayed did so only because they knew a corrupt cop could make more money than an honest businessman.

There had to be a way to tame the city—and then one day it came to him. Who knew the criminal element better than anyone else? The criminals themselves. Who knew their haunts and their habits, their leaders and their hideouts? Same answer.

Then, on a Tuesday evening in June, he had two members of the most notorious gang brought to his office. They glared at him with open hostility when they arrived.

"You got no right to pull us in here," said the taller of the two, a hard-looking man with a black eye patch. "We didn't do nothing."

"No one said you did," answered Roosevelt.

The shorter man, who had shaved his head bald—Roosevelt suspected it was to rid himself of lice or worse—looked around. "This ain't no jail. What are we doing here?"

"I thought we might get to know each other better," said Roosevelt.

"You gonna beat us and then put us in jail?" demanded Eye Patch.

“Why would I do something like that?” said Roosevelt. He turned to the officers who had brought them in. “You can leave us now.”

“Are you sure, sir?” said one of them.

“Quite sure. Thank you for your efforts.”

The officers looked at each other, shrugged, and walked out, closing the door behind them.

“You men look thirsty,” said Roosevelt, producing a bottle and a pair of glasses from his desk drawer. “Why don’t you help yourselves?”

“That’s damned Christian of you, Mr. Roosevelt, sir,” said Baldy. He poured himself a drink, lifted it to his lips, then froze.

“It’s not poisoned,” said Roosevelt.

“Then you drink it first,” said Baldy.

“I don’t like to imbibe,” said Roosevelt, lifting the bottle to his lips and taking a swallow. “But I’ll have enough to convince you that it’s perfectly safe.”

Baldy stood back, just in case Roosevelt was about to collapse, and when the commissioner remained standing and flashed him a toothy smile, he downed his drink, and Eye Patch followed suit a moment later.

“That’s mighty good stuff, sir,” said Baldy.

“I’m glad you like it,” said Roosevelt.

“Maybe we was wrong about you,” continued Baldy. “Maybe you ain’t such a bad guy after all.” He poured himself another drink.

“You still ain’t told us what we’re here for,” said Eye Patch. “You got to want something from us.”

“Just the pleasure of your company,” said Roosevelt. “I figure men who get to know each other are less likely to be enemies.”

“That suits me fine,” said Baldy. “You mind if I sit down?”

“That’s what chairs are for,” said Roosevelt. He picked up the bottle, walked over to each of them, and refilled their glasses.

“They say you spent some time out West as a cowboy, sir,” said Baldy. “Maybe you’d like to tell us about it. I ain’t never been west of the Hudson River.”

“I’d be happy to,” said Roosevelt. “But I wasn’t a cowboy. I was a rancher, and I hunted bear and elk and buffalo, and I spent some time as a lawman.”

“You ever run into Doc Holliday or Billy the Kid?” asked Eye Patch.

Roosevelt shook his head. “No, I was in the Dakota Bad lands and they were down in New Mexico and Arizona. But I did bring in three killers during the Winter of the Blue Snow.”

He spent the next half hour telling them the story and making sure that their glasses stayed full. When he

was done he walked to the door and opened it.

“This was most enjoyable, gentlemen,” he said. “We must do it again very soon.”

“Suits me fine,” slurred Baldy. “You’re an okay guy, Mr. Roosevelt, sir.”

“That goes for me, too,” said Eye Patch.

Roosevelt put an arm around each of them. “Anyone care for one last drink?”

Both men smiled happily at the mention of more liquor, and just then a man stepped into the doorway. There was a loud pop! and a blinding flash of light.

“What the hell was that?” asked Eye Patch, blinking his one functioning eye furiously.

“Oh, just a friend. Pay him no attention.”

They had their final drink and staggered to the door.

“Boys,” said Roosevelt, “you’re in no condition to walk home, and I don’t have a horse and buggy at my disposal. I suggest you spend the night right here. You won’t be under arrest, your cell doors won’t be locked or even closed, and you can leave first thing in the morning, or sooner if you feel up to it.”

“And you won’t lock us in or keep us if we want to leave?” said Eye Patch.

“You have my word on it.”

“Well, they say you word is your bond . . .”

“I say we do it,” said Baldy. “If we don’t, I’m going to lay down and take a little nap right here.”

“I’ll summon a couple of men to take you to your quarters,” said Roosevelt. He stepped into the corridor outside his office, waved his hand, and a moment later the two men were led to a pair of cells. True to his word, Roosevelt insisted that the doors be kept open.

When they woke up, Roosevelt was standing just outside the cells, staring at them.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” he said. “I trust you slept well?”

“God, my head feels like there’s an army trying to get out,” moaned Baldy.

“We’re free to go, right?” said Eye Patch.

“Right,” said Roosevelt. “But I thought we might have a little chat first.”

“More stories about cowboy outlaws?”

“No, I thought we’d talk about New York City outlaws.”

“Oh?” said Baldy, suddenly alert.

“The criminal element thinks it controls this city,” answered Roosevelt. “And to be truthful, they are very close to being right. This is unacceptable. I will bring law and order to New York no matter what it takes.” He paused, staring at each in turn through his spectacles. “I thought you two might like to help.”

“I knew it!” said Baldy. He looked around. “Where’s the rubber hoses?”

“Nobody’s going to hurt you,” said Roosevelt. “We’re all friends, remember?”

“Sure we are.”

“We are,” insisted Roosevelt. “In fact, I have proof of it.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” demanded Eye Patch.

“This,” said Roosevelt. He handed each of them a photograph, taken the night before. There was Roosevelt, throwing his massive arms around the two happy criminals.

“I don’t understand,” said Baldy.

“You’re going to become my spies,” said Roosevelt. “I’ve rented a room under a false name in the worst section of the Bowery. I’ll be there every Monday and Thursday night, and twice a week you’re going to report to me and tell me everything that’s being planned, who’s behind it, who is responsible for crimes that have already been committed, and where I can find the perpetrators.”

“You must be crazy!” said Baldy.

“Oh, I don’t think so. There are more copies of that photo. If you don’t agree to help me, the next time we capture a member from either of your gangs, that photo will be in every newspaper in the city, and the caption will say that it’s a picture of me thanking you for informing on your friends.”

“Oh, shit!” muttered Eye Patch. “You’d do it, too, wouldn’t you?”

“Absolutely. One way or another, I’m going to bring law and order to New York. Do we have an agreement?”

“We ain’t got no choice,” said Baldy.

“No, you don’t,” agreed Roosevelt.

“How long are you going to hold that photo like a rope over our heads?” asked Eye Patch.

“As long as it takes to get some results.”

“Are you open to a deal?”

“We just made one,” said Roosevelt.

“A different one.”

“Go ahead.”

“We’ll do what you want,” said Eye Patch. “We ain’t got any choice. But there’s a guy who can get everything you need a lot quicker than we can, and maybe put a few of the biggest crooks out of action for you. You don’t know him—nobody on your side of the fence does—but if I can put you together with him and he’s what I say he is, will you burn the pictures?”

“He’ll never go for it,” said Baldy.

“I might,” said Roosevelt.

“I don’t mean you, sir,” said Baldy. “I’m talking about Big D. There’s no place he can’t go, and he ain’t scared of nothing.”

“Big D,” Roosevelt frowned. “I’ve never heard of him.”

“That’s not surprising,” said Eye Patch. “He only comes around once a week or so, usually just before the bars close. But I’ve seen him talking and drinking with just about every man you want to nail. Yes, sir, if you’ll go for my deal, we’ll pass the word to Big D that you’d like to have a powwow with him.”

Roosevelt pulled out a piece of paper and scribbled an address on it. “This is my room in the Bowery,” he said, handing it to Eye Patch. “Beneath it is the name I will be using while there. Tell him there’s money involved if he accepts my offer.”

“Then we have a deal?”

“Not until I meet him and decide if he’s the man I need.”

“And if he’s not?” persisted Eye Patch.

“Then you’ll be no worse off than you are now,” said Roosevelt.

“What happens to the photos if he kills you?” asked Baldy.

“You think he might?” asked Roosevelt.

“Anything’s possible,” said Baldy. “He’s a strange one, that Big D.” He paused uncomfortably. “So if he decides to kill you . . .” He let the sentence hang in the air.

“He’ll find out what it’s like to be up against a Harvard boxing champion,” answered Roosevelt. “It’s Wednesday morning. Can you get in touch with him in time for him to come to the room tomorrow night?”

“This town’s got a pretty good grapevine,” said Eye Patch.

“Bully! The sooner we get the crusade underway, the better. Gentlemen, you’re free to go.”

Eye Patch began walking toward the end of the cell block, but Baldy hung back for a moment.

“I don’t figure I owe you nothing, the way you tricked us,” he said to Roosevelt. He lowered his voice. “But watch yourself around him, sir.” He made no attempt to hide the little shudder that ran through him. “I’m not kidding, sir. I ain’t never been scared of nobody or nothing, but I’m scared of him.”

Roosevelt went to his squalid Bowery room on Thursday night, laid his hand and a walking stick on a chair, and waited. He’d brought a book with him, in case this Big D character hadn’t gotten the word or chose not to show up, and by midnight he was pretty sure he’d be reading straight through until dawn.

And then, at 2:30 A.M., there was a knock at the door.

“Come,” said Roosevelt, who was sitting on an oft-repaired wooden chair. He closed the book and put it on the ugly table that held the room’s only lamp.

The door opened and a tall, skeletally-thin man entered. He had wild black hair that seemed to have resisted all efforts to brush or comb it, piercing blue eyes, and very pale skin. He wore an expensively-tailored black suit that had seen better days.

“I understand you wish to speak to me,” he said, articulating each word precisely.

“If you’re Big D, I do,” said Roosevelt.

A smile that Roosevelt thought seemed almost indistinguishable from a sneer briefly crossed the man's face. "I am the man you seek. But my name is not Big D."

"Oh?"

"They call me that because they are too uneducated to pronounce my real name. But you, Mr. Roosevelt, will have no difficulty with it."

"I didn't give my . . . ah . . . representatives permission to reveal my identity."

"They didn't," was the reply. "But you are a famous and easily-recognized man, sir. I have read many of your books, and seen your photograph in the newspapers."

"You still have the advantage of me," said Roosevelt. "If you are not to be called Big D . . ."

"You may call me Demosthenes."

"Like the ancient Greek?"

"Precisely," said Demosthenes.

"The Greeks are a swarthy race," said Roosevelt. "You don't look Mediterranean."

"I have been told that before."

"The hair seems right, though."

"Are we to discuss my looks or your proposition?" said Demosthenes.

"My proposition, by all means," said Roosevelt. He gestured toward a chair. "Have a seat."

"I prefer to stand."

"As you wish. But I must tell you that I am not intimidated by size."

Demosthenes smiled and sat down. "I like you already, Mr. Roosevelt. But from your books I knew I would. You take such pleasure in the slaughter of animals who want only to escape."

"I am a hunter and a sportsman, not a slaughterer," answered Roosevelt severely. "I shoot no animal that does not have a chance to escape."

"How inefficient," said Demosthenes. He cocked his head and read the spine of Roosevelt's book. "Jane Austen? I should have thought you were beyond a comedy of manners, Mr. Roosevelt."

"She has an exquisite felicity of expression which seems to have eluded you," said Roosevelt.

"Her felicity of expression is duly noted." Another cold smile. "It is manners that elude me."

"So I've noticed. Shall we get down to business?"

"Certainly," said Demosthenes. "Which particular criminal are you after?"

"What makes you think I'm after a criminal?" asked Roosevelt.

"Do not be obtuse, Mr. Roosevelt," said Demosthenes. "I move freely among the criminal element. Two lawbreakers have passed the word that you wished to meet with me. What other reason could you

possibly have for this extravagant charade?"

"All right," said Roosevelt. "At present three men control seventy percent of the crime in Manhattan: William O'Brien, Antonio Pascale, and Israel Zuckerman. Thus far my men have been unable to ferret them out. I have been told that you have access to them, and the ability to adapt to dangerous situations. The City of New York will pay you a one-thousand-dollar bounty for each one you deliver to my office."

"And you think this will end crime in Manhattan?" asked Demosthenes, amused.

"No, but we have to start somewhere, and I prefer starting at the top. Each of them will implicate dozens of others if it will get them lighter sentences." Roosevelt paused and stared at the tall man. "Can you do it?"

"Of course."

"Will you do it?"

"Yes."

"I'll expect you to keep this agreement confidential," said Roosevelt. "Say one word of it to anyone else and I will feel no obligation to fulfill my end of it."

"I will say nothing of it," answered Demosthenes. "It is comforting to note that even the remarkable Theodore Roosevelt breaks the law when it suits his purposes."

"Only to apprehend greater lawbreakers. I don't question your morality or methodology; I'll thank you not to question mine."

"O'Brien, Pascale, Zuckerman," said Demosthenes. "Have the money ready, Mr. Roosevelt."

"I'll be in my office every afternoon."

"I won't." Before Roosevelt could object, he held up a hand. "These men hide by day and come out at night. It is at night that I shall apprehend them."

He turned and walked out of the room without another word.

Roosevelt went back to his Manhattan apartment and slept most of the day on Friday. He arose in late afternoon, had a hearty meal, and walked to his office just after sunset—

—and found the body of Antonio Pascale on the floor.

Damn! thought Roosevelt. I told him I wanted this man alive for questioning!

He inspected the body more closely. It seemed even more pale than Demosthenes. Pascale had a blue silk scarf wrapped around his neck. Roosevelt moved it, and found that his throat had been ripped out.

Roosevelt wasn't sickened by the sight. He'd done too much taxidermy, spent too much time in the wilderness, to turn away in horror or disgust, but he was puzzled. Did Demosthenes keep a killer dog he hadn't mentioned? Roosevelt tried to reconstruct their meeting in his mind. Could Demosthenes possibly have misunderstood that Roosevelt wanted to get information from the gang leader?

Roosevelt summoned a team of policemen and had them take the body down to the morgue, then sat down heavily on his office chair. How could he get hold of Demosthenes before he killed another man with information Roosevelt needed?

He was still pondering the problem a few hours later when Demosthenes, his color a bit darker and richer than the previous evening, stepped through the doorway, lowering his head to avoid bumping it against the lintel. "You owe me a thousand dollars, Mr. Roosevelt."

"You owe me an explanation!" snapped Roosevelt. "You knew I wanted this man alive, that he had vital information!"

"He put up a fight," said Demosthenes calmly. "I killed him in self-defense."

"Did you tear out his throat in self-defense too?" demanded Roosevelt.

"No," answered Demosthenes. "I tore out his throat because I wanted to."

"Was there any doubt in your mind that I wanted him alive, that I was not paying you to kill him?"

"None whatsoever."

Roosevelt pulled a small pistol out of his pocket. "Then I am arresting you for murder."

"Put that toy away before I become annoyed with you, Mr. Roosevelt," said Demosthenes, unperturbed. "I will withdraw my request for the thousand dollars, and we'll call it even."

"You don't seem to understand," said Roosevelt. "You killed a man, and now you're going to stand trial for it."

"If you persist in threatening me, I may have to take that gun from you and destroy it."

"I wouldn't advise it."

"When I want your advice, Mr. Roosevelt," said Demosthenes, taking a step toward him, "you may rest assured I shall ask for it."

"That's close enough," said Roosevelt ominously.

"I'll be the judge of that," said Demosthenes.

Roosevelt fired his pistol point-blank at the tall man's chest. He could hear the thunk! of the bullet as it struck its target, but Demosthenes paid it no attention. He advanced another step and Roosevelt shot him right between the eyes, again to no effect. Finally the tall man reached out, grabbed the pistol, and bent the barrel in half.

"Who the hell are you?" demanded Roosevelt, as he tried to comprehend what had happened.

"I am the man who is going to clean up your city for you," answered Demosthenes calmly. "I have been doing so privately since I arrived here last year. Now I shall do so at the instigation of the Commissioner of Police. Keep your money. I will extract my own form of payment from those criminals whose presence we will no longer tolerate."

"Don't use the word 'we' as if we were partners," said Roosevelt. "You killed a man, and you're going to stand trial for it."

"I think not, Mr. Roosevelt," said Demosthenes. "I sincerely think not."

He turned and walked out of the office. Roosevelt raced to the doorway, spotted a trio of cops at the far end of the corridor, and yelled to them, "Stop that man! Use any force necessary!"



The three men charged Demosthenes, who knocked them flying like tenpins. Before they could gather themselves to resume the attack, he was gone.

“Who the hell was he, sir?” asked one of the cops, spitting out a bloody tooth.

“I wish I knew,” answered Roosevelt, a troubled expression on his face.

All right, thought Roosevelt, sitting at his desk, where he had been for the two hours since Demosthenes had left. He never saw my gun in the Bowery. Edith would have told me if we’d had a visitor at the apartment. The next time I saw him was right here, so he couldn’t have disabled my weapon. He knew it worked, and he knew it wouldn’t harm him.

And what about the three officers who tried to stop him? He brushed them aside like they were insects buzzing around his face. Just what kind of a man am I dealing with here?

There’s no precedent for this, and if any member of the force had seen him perform similar acts word would certainly have reached me. Yet he implied that he’s been killing people for a year now. Probably the criminal element; those are the murders that no one bothers to report.

But what’s going on here? It’s easy to label him a mad-man, but he doesn’t strike me as deranged.

Roosevelt stood up and began pacing his office. Suddenly he felt almost claustrophobic. It was time to breathe some fresh air, to walk off some of his nervous energy. Maybe just getting out and exercising, taking his mind off Demosthenes for a few minutes, might let him come back to the problem with fresh insights.

Suddenly he heard half a dozen gunshots and an agonized scream. He rushed down the stairs to the main entrance in time to see four of his policemen clustered together around a fifth, who lay motionless on the pavement. A few feet away was another body, as pale as Pascale had been.

“What’s going on here?” he demanded, striding out into the open.

“I’ll be damned if I know, Mr. Roosevelt, sir,” said an officer. “Some tall guy, I mean real tall and skinny as a rail came out of nowhere and dumped that body in front of the building. We confronted him and demanded that he come inside to be interrogated, and he refused. Jacobs walked up and grabbed him by the arm, and the guy threw him against that lamppost. Jacobs weighed about two hundred pounds, and the lamppost was twenty feet away.” The officer paused. “I think he’s dead, sir.”

“The tall man?”

“Jacobs, sir. We drew our guns and demanded that the tall man surrender to us, and he just laughed and began walking away, so we opened fire. So help me, sir, we must have hit him four or five times, and he didn’t even flinch.”

“Let’s take a look at the body he brought to us,” said Roosevelt. He walked over to the corpse. “Do you recognize him?”

“It’s Israel Zuckerman, the guy who runs the Jewish gang.” The officer frowned. “At least I think it is.”

“You’re not sure?”

“I remember Zuckerman being darker, like he’d spent most of his life in the sun. Mediterranean, I think they call the type. This guy’s so pale he looks like he’s spent the last twenty years in jail.”

“It’s Zuckerman,” said Roosevelt. “Leave that scarf around his neck until you move him inside.”

“Whatever you say, sir.”

Another officer approached them. “Jacobs is dead, sir.”

“Do you have any explanation for what happened?” asked Roosevelt.

The officer shook his head. “It almost like something out of that crazy book everyone’s reading.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Roosevelt.

“It’s some kind of thriller about, I don’t know, this creature that kills people and drinks their blood.”

“I don’t read popular literature,” said Roosevelt with an expression of distaste.

“Well, if you change your mind, sir,” said the other officer, “it’s called Dracula.”

“I think I heard someone mention it once or twice,” said Roosevelt with no show of interest.

“It’s about this guy who can’t be hurt, at least at night. He drinks people’s blood . . .”

“Enough!” said a third officer, who was examining Zuckerman’s corpse. “I’d like to eat dinner again sometime before I die.”

“Sorry,” said the officer.

“All right,” said Roosevelt. “Let’s get these men inside before the sun comes up and we attract a crowd. Take them both down to the morgue, find out what killed Zuckerman—though I can hazard a pretty good guess right now—and have someone contact Officer Jacobs’ widow.”

“Shouldn’t that be your job, sir?”

“It should be, but we’ve got a killer on the loose, a killer that bullets don’t stop. I’ve got to find out what will stop him.” He paused. “I suppose we should put a guard around O’Brien, but it wouldn’t stop this man, and I’m not going to lose any more officers before I find out how to defeat him.”

He went back into the building, climbed the stairs, and retrieved his hat and his walking stick from the corner of his office. Then he went back outside. A few minutes later he was walking up Park Avenue. After a mile he turned onto 34th Street, then turned left on Lexington. He wandered the city, considering the problem, discarding one approach after another, and suddenly realized that it was daylight.

He stopped by a newsstand to pick up a paper, was pleased to see that neither murder had been reported yet, and saw a full-page ad for the hot new bestseller Dracula—the same book his officers had been talking about. He waited until a bookseller’s shop opened, walked inside, picked up a copy, and skimmed the first sixty or seventy pages.

It was a flight of fancy. Well-written, though the man couldn’t hold a candle to Austen or the Brontes, or Americans such as Mark Twain or Walt Whitman. But the similarities between the fictional Dracula and the very real Demosthenes were striking, and finally he put the book back where he’d found it. He decided to head to the Astor Library to do some research. There were references to a Nosferatu, and to Wampyres, and to other creatures, but they were so far-fetched that he couldn’t see them being of any use. Still, they were something, and that was more than he could find anywhere else.

He carried a dozen books to a table and began taking notes, researching the legend as meticulously as he

researched ornithology or naval strategy. He created two columns. The first contained suppositions that three or more sources held in common. When he couldn't find at least three, or when they were contradicted by another source, they were moved to the second column.

By late afternoon he had only two items remaining in the first column. Sooner or later every other "fact," every supposition, had come into conflict with some other legend or the purported facts and suppositions.

It wasn't much to go on, but he decided he couldn't wait. Demosthenes wasn't going to stop killing, but once he delivered O'Brien—there was every chance that Roosevelt would never see him again.

It would take perhaps half an hour to prepare, but although the sun was low in the sky, he didn't really expect to see Demosthenes before midnight. His three previous appearances had been between midnight and dawn.

Roosevelt stopped by the apartment to have dinner with Edith. Then he finished his preparations, told Edith that he would probably be spending the night at the office, promised to find a cot and not sleep in his chair, and finally took his leave of her, after selecting a book to read, and stuffing a pile of personal correspondence that required responses into a leather case.

He reached the office at about 8:00 P.M., told the policemen on duty to pass the word that if Demosthenes showed up, even if he was carrying a corpse, not to try to stop him. They looked at him as if he'd been drinking, but he was the Commissioner of Police and finally they all agreed.

Roosevelt entered his office, sat down at his desk, immediately pulled out all existing copies of the photo of himself with Baldy and Eye Patch. After all, he reasoned, they'd done their duty, even if no one had foreseen the consequences. An avid letter writer, he spent the next three hours catching up on his correspondence. Then he picked up a copy of F. C. Selous' latest African memoir and began reading it. He was soon so caught up in it that he didn't realize he was no longer alone until he heard the thud of a body being dropped to the floor.

"O'Brien," announced Demosthenes, gesturing toward the pale corpse.

"Why do you keep bringing them to me?" asked Roosevelt. "Our agreement has been abrogated."

"I am bound by a different moral code than you."

"Clearly," said Roosevelt, barely glancing at the body. "I'd like you to tell me something."

"If I can."

"Did you kill Pericles and Sophocles too, or is this a recent aberration?"

A cold smile crossed the tall man's face. "Ah! You know. But of course you would. You are not like the others, Mr. Roosevelt."

"I most certainly am," said Roosevelt. "I am a man. It is you who are not like the others, Demosthenes."

"They are sheep."

"Or cattle?" suggested Roosevelt. "You have relatives that live on cattle, do you not?"

Another smile. "You have done your homework, Mr. Roosevelt."

"Yes, I have. Enough that I find it difficult to believe you ever suggested that the warrior who runs away will live to fight another day."

“A misattribution,” said Demosthenes with a shrug. “I do not retreat—ever.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

“It nevertheless would have been good advice for you,” said Demosthenes. “I intuit that you think you know enough to harm me. Do not believe everything you believe you have learned. For example, it is said that a vampire may not cross over water, and yet I crossed the Atlantic Ocean to find fresh feeding grounds. They say the sunlight will kill me, yet I have walked down Fifth Avenue at high noon. They say I cannot enter a building without being invited, but you know that no one has invited me here.”

“All that is true,” agreed Roosevelt. “And it is all irrelevant.”

“I admire you, Mr. Roosevelt. Do not do anything foolish that will force me to harm you.”

“You are not going to harm me,” said Roosevelt, getting to his feet.

“I warn you . . .” said Demosthenes.

“Save your warnings for those who are afraid of animals,” said Roosevelt. “I told you before: I am a hunter.”

“We are both hunters, each in our own way,” said Demosthenes. “Do you think to slay me with your fabled Winchester rifle?” he added with a contemptuous smirk.

“No,” answered Roosevelt, picking up his weapon and positioning himself between Demosthenes and the door. “We both know that bullets have no effect on you.”

“Ah!” said Demosthenes with a smile. “You expect to beat me to death with your walking stick?”

“I have a motto,” said Roosevelt. “Thus far I’ve shared it with very few people, but someday I think I shall make it public, for it has served me well in the past and will serve me even better tonight.” He paused. “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” He removed the metal tip from his wooden walking stick, revealing the sharp point that he had whittled earlier in the evening. “This is my big stick.”

“So you’ve learned that much,” said Demosthenes, unperturbed. “Has any of your research told you how to drive a wooden stake into the heart of a being with fifty times your strength?”

“Let’s find out,” said Roosevelt, advancing toward him.

Demosthenes reached out confidently and grabbed the walking stick with his right hand. An instant later he shrieked in agony and pulled his hand back as the flesh on it turned black and began bubbling.

“The wooden stake was not the only thing I learned this afternoon,” said Roosevelt. “I took the liberty of rinsing my walking stick with holy water on the way here.”

Demosthenes uttered a scream of rage and leaped forward. “If I die I will not die alone!” he snarled as the point of the stick plunged deep into his chest and his hands reached out for Roosevelt’s throat.

“Alone and unmourned,” promised Roosevelt, standing his ground.

A minute later the creature named Demosthenes was no more.

It didn’t take long for new kingpins to move into the positions vacated by Pascale, Zuckerman, and O’Brien. Somehow, after Demosthenes, they didn’t seem like the insurmountable problems they might have been a month earlier.

The Commissioner of Police looked forward to the challenge.