

Excerpt from

THE GRANDFATHER CLAUSE

A Novel by Philip A. Genovese, Jr.

All the while, Vinny watched from across the room. Sweating, eyes bulging, breathing quickly and noisily through his nose, he tried not to look at Joey Freeze and his brains oozing onto the floor. But his chair had been dragged to within three feet of the big dead man. It was as if Lincoln had known they had grown up together. Vinny closed his eyes and shook his head. He would have to find a good mortician. He could never let Joey's mother see him like this. No, old Mrs. Malacci wouldn't hold up seeing her little Joey with two big holes in his head. Poor Joey Malacci. Big and tough, but he wouldn't hurt a flea, unless Vinny told him to. Joey Freeze they called him. He always liked it freezing fuckin' cold. He'd drive around with the air on all winter. Hell, one time Vinny had seen him sweating sitting in the stands at a Giants game in December. Well, he wouldn't sweat no more. Then he looked over at Lincoln and Henderson. *These motherfuckers will die for this*, he promised himself.

Lincoln sat at the table with the wallets and spread them out in the order of their owners lined up at the bar. "Let's see who are new friends are," he said.

Lincoln removed a driver's license or credit card from each wallet and began to read. "We have, Mr. Gerald Ferrini, Mr. Anthony Musto, Mr. Francis Migliaccio, Mr. Anthony Virelli, Mr. Anthony Canella, *and* Mr. Salvatore *Venezio*. Hmm, whadaya know, six guys and three of 'em named *Anthony*?"

Lincoln looked over his shoulder at Vinny and, raising his eyebrows, said. "Vinny, this is a very *toni* place you have here."

Lincoln belly laughed again, slapping the table causing the wallets and ID's to jump. Then he abruptly stopped, glanced up at Henderson and shrugged. "I thought that was goddam funny. I guess wise guys don't have much of a sense of humor." Then to Vinny again. "You goombahs outta lighten up. There's more to life than spaghetti and meatballs, ya know."

Vinny grunted from behind the duct tape. It was muffled, but Lincoln understood the two words: *Fuck you!*

"Vinny. Vinny." Rising to his feet. "With language like that you can see why we had to tape your mouth shut. But don't worry, your time to talk to me is almost

here. In fact, we're gonna play a little game." Pacing between Vinny and the table. "I think you'll like it. It's called Ding Dong Dago. Ever hear of it?" Turning to the men at the bar. "You guys? No? That's okay, I'll teach you. It's easy and loads of fun." Pausing to glance thoughtfully up at the ceiling, he concluded, "Well, fun for me, anyway."

Lincoln walked back to the table of wallets. "First, we mix up the ID's like this. Then, I cover my eyes and . . . pick one at random." Holding up a driver's license. "And the first lucky player is . . . Mr. Anthony Virelli! Tony, come on down!" Nodding to Henderson.

Henderson was able to select Virelli by reading the body language and side glances of the men at the bar. He followed Lincoln's gesturing and moved Virelli so he was standing in front of Vinny, with Joey Freeze on the floor between them.

"Okay, Vinny," Lincoln began. "This is a game of knowledge. That's right, I'm going to ask you questions that will test your knowledge of certain events. It's an easy game because these events have not only occurred in the very recent past but they are also events that I know you have direct knowledge of. Any questions so far?"

Vinny didn't have a clue where this was going, but when he saw the fear in Virelli's eyes he thought that it was probably justified. He stared back at Lincoln with all the defiance he could muster.

Lincoln smiled. "No questions? No, of course not. You have duct tape on your mouth. So let's begin.

"Here's how this game works." Lincoln pointed to the wall clock over the front door. "That will be our game clock – our shot clock, if you will. I'm gonna ask you a question and you'll have thirty seconds to answer it correctly. Of course, your answers must be one hundred percent true and honest. If you fail to answer correctly within thirty seconds, then it's Ding Dong Dago. Simple, right?"

"Okay Vinny, here's your first question. What arrangements have you made with Joseph Napolo, Michael Cogan, and John Anelli? And where is the item that you hijacked two days ago? Oh, I'm sorry that was two questions." Ripping the tape off of Vinny's mouth and leaning close to affect a stage whisper. "I'll be fair; just answer the first question." Looking up at the clock. "You have thirty seconds."

Vinny stretched his fleshy cheeks against the sting of the tape and looked up at the clock. He had twenty-five seconds left. Vinny thought, *What the fuck is Danny Gallagher doing?* Was he still in the kitchen?

Danny was a neighborhood kid, in his early twenties. He'd been hanging around for years and they had been paying him to clean up, take out the trash, and such. He knew the streets, the wiseguys and the cops, and played both ends well. Did he know that there was a sawed-off 12-gauge hidden in the steam table or did he just run out the back door when he heard the shooting? Who would blame him? Maybe he was getting help. Vinny realized he would be real happy to see a handful of New York's Finest come busting threw the door right about now.

"Ten seconds left on the shot clock, Vinny," Lincoln taunted.

"Why don't you go fuck yourself?" Vinny retorted.

Lincoln shook his head dramatically. "Oh no, I'm sorry, Vinny. You can't answer a question with a question in this game. Perhaps I should have explained the rules more carefully. Let's see what the judges say." Lincoln turned away and pretended to be listening intently to the imaginary judges. When he turned back to Vinny, shaking his head again in mock sympathy, he had the silenced .22 revolver in his right hand. "Just as I thought, Vinny. The judges have ruled against you. And, the shot clock says it's Ding Dong Dago time."