

## Good Whiskey (Prologue)

In 1917 I signed up to fight the Germans. This was a noble cause. Still, good men died all around me. It is human's nature to war. Need resources, land, oil, treasures, no matter, it was all the same through the millenniums. I left a soldier, but came back an outlaw. Who says crimes doesn't pay? It pays plenty. Sometimes in blood. But for those brave enough, it pays handsomely. I was battle hardened, violence was no stranger. I was tired of taking orders. It was time to make my own destiny.

Prohibition era 1920 to 1933.

The 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1919 and effective in 1920, prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of "intoxicating liquors". It launched the Prohibition era, aiming to reduce alcohol consumption, but it did not make the consumption or private possession of alcohol illegal.

Now let me get this straight. You were prohibited from making, selling, and transporting alcohol, but it was legal to drink it. Where did the government think people were going to get the alcohol to drink? They certainly did not expect people to conserve the alcohol they already had to last for 13 years of the prohibition era.

From the earliest of times, men made alcohol. Was the government so stupid to think Americans would go without?

The earliest known evidence of man-made alcohol dates to approximately 7,000 BCE in Jiahu, a Neolithic village in China's Yellow River Valley. Chemical analyses of pottery residue showed a fermented mixture of rice, honey, hawthorn fruit, and grapes. However, some studies indicate that beer brewing may have been attempted as early as 13,000 years ago.

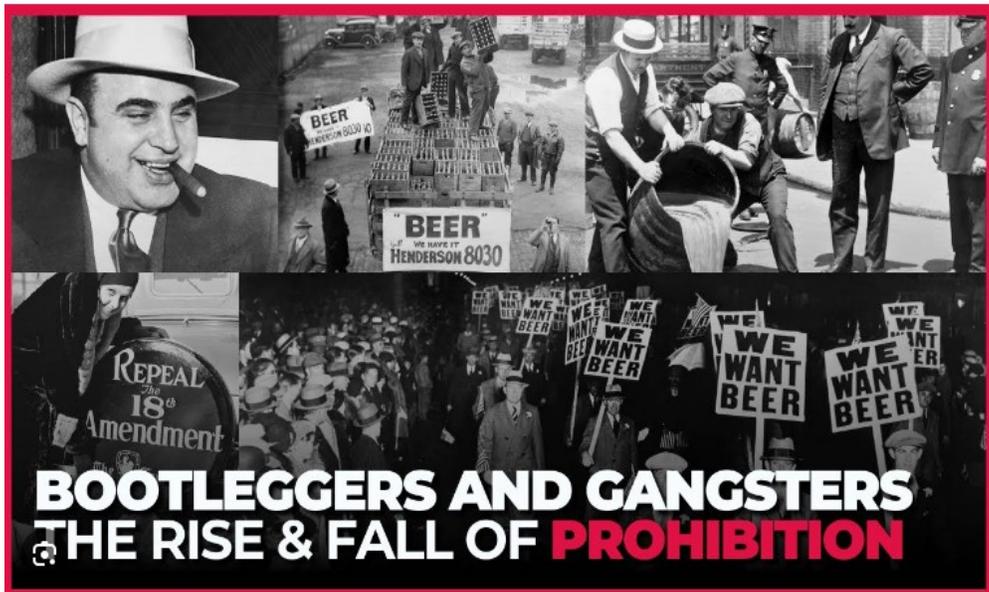
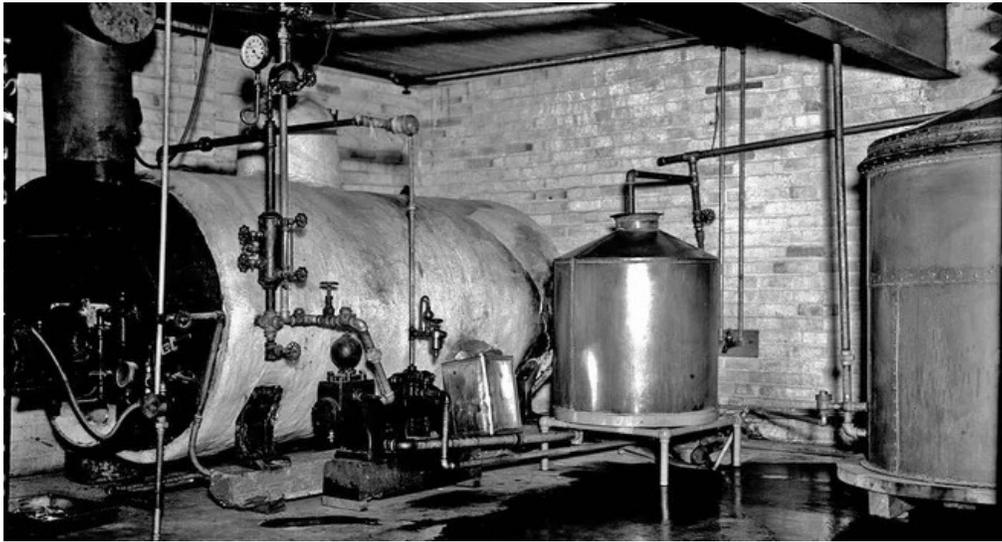
My guess is some wheat farmer left wheat out in the air in a bucket of water. It fermented and he drank some of the water and got drunk. He continued to repeat the process. After several jugs of the stuff, he noticed his wife looked

so much prettier. This was the first instance of a man having “beer goggles”. Same thing happens in honkytonks today.

Stills sprang up all over, moonshine was cooked, and the making and moving of illegal alcohol became a boom operation for those strong enough to endure. That was where I found myself in 1920.

During those 13 years, I made a ton of money, loved and lost, made some friends, and more enemies.

A still



***Good Whiskey***  
*(Chapter 1)*

The ingredients for good business are always about the same. Be pro-active, be smart, and get information. Also, it is always nice to have someone you can trust. I had the first two and the next two just happened by fate. I was walking down the street when I crossed by an alley. In there were two thugs beating up some poor sap. Maybe I still had some nobility left over from my war days. I didn't like what was going on. I engaged in the ruckus and the end result was two thugs knocked unconscious. My intervention got me a friend for life and someone who knew what was what. He had been on the wrong end of a debt collection. The two thugs worked for Johnny Calisco. A small time hood who worked for a big time hood.

Franky told me, when they wake up, they will not forget me or you. I was about to step over a line of no return. I knew violence and I knew about violent men. If I was going to go down this path, straight ahead was the only route. I'll take care of it. You watch the street. I pulled out my service revolver and two pops later the problem was solved.

I returned to the street and asked Franky, are we clear? Looks all clear from here. Franky did know what was what. Even though he had made bad choices, teaming up with me was not one of them. He said one way to make some dough was to hit some of the gambling games around town. There were at least a couple thousand bucks in play. It was easy. Push through a couple of lookouts mostly watching for cops and you were in. A mask over you face and a gun stuck out was enough to close out the game. On one such occasion I ran into a cheeky blond. Unafraid and sassy to the core, she dared me to stuff a cloth in her mouth. That was something I usually did to silence any screams from the onlookers. We made eye contact and there was that instant spark. Something that I would not forget. I never expected to see her again.

This routine worked for a while. I got a call from Johnny Calisco. Not on the phone. It was more of a personal request. Apparently, my hoists had brought the attention of Johnny's boss, Mr. Grant. Franky told me Grant

owned the west side. The spics and wops ran the other regions.

You've got a lot of moxie pulling these stunts on my guys. I could use a guy like you unless you don't want to be around anymore. There weren't many options offered. Go along or be gone.

This turned out to be a fortunate change for me and Franky. Prohibition had set in. The illegal booze racket was in full swing. The cops got paid off. The danger came from another source. Rival gangs. Guys being gunned down and vans loaded with expensive booze were being hijacked all around. Liquor became liquid gold. My learned sense of survival from the war aided me in these endeavors. It didn't take long for me to advance to be one of Grant's right hand men.

So I became a bootlegger. Why did they call it bootlegging?

During the Progressive Era and the subsequent Prohibition (1920–1933), **bootleg** referred to the illegal manufacture, transport, sale, or distribution of alcoholic beverages. Originating in the 1880s as the practice of hiding flasks in boots, it came to describe smuggling alcohol, running speakeasies, and illicitly trafficking in banned spirits.

Author's note: I was surprised to learn that some of my own favorite bourbons were around during and before prohibition. Whether they had been illegally transported or not I do not know. Even though production had ceased, warehouses full of stored bottles became targets for raids and fighting among the gangs. Here are some of my favorite bourbons that were around.



These were all made before prohibition. All except the Knob Creek. It is a spin off of Jim Beam and was first produced in 1990.

So this was the life I had dreamed of. Money, power, booze, and women. Of course there were women. None that had really caught my eye until I ran into that blond hussy again. She was a constant presence in Grant's entourage.



The spark was still there, but a small problem existed. It appeared that she was Grant's girlfriend. My first thought was that she was too classy to take up with an old codger like Grant. It was not the first time I saw a beauty hook up with money and power. I had money and power of my own and in addition, I was handsome. A fact that did not go unnoticed by Roxie. It was inevitable that we would hook up. Each time Grant was out of town on business, we found ourselves together.

I was head over heels for her and I thought she felt the same. We continued that way for several months until one of Grant's goons saw us together. It was just a casual embrace, but enough to rouse Grant's suspicions. Franky gave me a heads up. I asked Roxie to run away with me. We could start up in another city. Miami was ripe for my kind of action. We had agreed to meet later that night. I was in for an unpleasant surprise.

*Good Whiskey*  
*(Chapter 2)*

Roxie agreed to meet me at one of our rendezvous spots. When I arrived, she was there along with Grant and several of his goons. This did not look good. Roxie opened up with “I am sorry Jack! I guess we weren't meant to be.” Not only were you not meant to be, you will no longer be. This was from Grant. Nobody steals my property. Take him out. You know what to do. You promised me that you would not kill him. Why should I honor a promise to someone who betrayed me? Take her out too. No need to kill her I said. What I need is loyal people around me. Those who are not are disposed of pronto.

We were herded out and into waiting cars. I didn't see where they took her. I had been searched when I entered the motel room. They took my service revolver. They failed to find the derringer I always carried in my boot.



Boots were not only used to hide whiskey bottles. We were headed out of town to some remote spot no doubt. I was in the back seat next to one of the goons who was holding a gun on me. As I reached in my boot, I pushed the gun aside. The bullet fired and went through the car roof. One of my bullets went into the guys forehead, the other hit the driver. Unfortunately, at that time, we were over a bridge. The car hit the bridge supports and I heard a crash. Next thing I knew, the car had crashed through the side and was careening down and into the river below.

I was able to breathe with the trapped air in the car until I felt it was safe to swim out. I imagined others might have been following me and I didn't want to risk being shot as I surfaced. The river carried me down to a shallow bank

and I was able to crawl up and into the forest.

I was heartbroken. Did Roxie betray me or was she just caught? Something I might never know. I guess she had been killed. For months I looked for some sign that she was still alive. No trace of her surfaced. I figured Grant must have thought I had died too. I had no way of knowing and it was better for me to disappear for a while. Miami was just the place. My original plan to restart there was still viable. I had been trying to get the lay of the land and it was slow going. I had no contacts there and I was leery of exposing myself. It was pure luck that who should I run across? Franky. What are you doing down here? Don't you remember, you told me about your plan to start up here? I wasn't sure if you were dead or alive, but this is the place to find out. I don't think Grant would have keep me on his payroll.

What have you been doing? I got in with a good bootlegger. I think if I introduce you to him, he will ask you to join his gang. Franky was right. Alphonso was of Cuban descent. In addition to that, he was a rival of Grant. That was an added bonus. I felt I had a score to settle with Grant.

Franky told me about your rift with Grant. If you are only joining us for your personal vengeance, things will not go well for you. I need men who are loyal to my business first. I understand. I will work to make money for your business, if something comes up to cause grief for Grant, it will be a secondary action. Good enough.

About that time, Alphonso's sister entered the room. Roxie was an all out floozy whereas Carmen's beauty carried a subtle elegance.



Let me introduce you to my sister. She is not part of my organization. Her passion lies with freeing Cuba from its current harsh dictator. Our father was killed leading the revolution that was put down by Castro.

The look in her eyes was not one of distaste, but one of learned caution. She was not about to take up with anyone in her brother's business. So I would run in to her off and on during the course of my contact with Alphonso. Each time the barrier she had first put up slipped down little by little.

Franky found out that Grant was trying to muscle in to our Miami business. I discussed it with Alphonso. We should hit his warehouse and give him the message to stay out of Miami. Alphonso agreed. Not only did we eliminate Grant's workers, we stole his hooch and set fire to his warehouse. I let one of the workers go. I pined a message to him for Grant. Jack says hi from Miami. I just couldn't let it go. For what he had done to me and probably Roxie, he deserved the rub. Not the smartest thing for me to do. I should have stayed dead.

I was guilty of one of the seven deadly sins. Actually I think more than one. *“pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth”* and pride is the worse.

My *pride* forced me to acknowledge my presence.

I had a *lust* for power. My *greed* for money fueled my ambition. **Wrath** is just another name for vengeance. So no **gluttony** or **sloth**. Eating too much and laziness were not in my vocabulary.

Grant received my message with a fury I wish I had witnessed. Not only had I evaded his death sentence, but now I was working against his best interests.

Alphonso told me to meet him at a club. He wanted an update on the Grant operation. I was prepared to give him the good news. When I arrived at the club, a waiter escorted me to a table and instead of Alphonso, his sister Carmen was there. I thought you weren't part of Alphonso's business? I am not. He had a sudden meeting and had to leave. He just asked me to meet you and tell you why he couldn't be here. He did this out of courtesy. He

didn't want to stand you up. I appreciate that. Have you eaten? I have not. Well then, just let this be a pleasant meal between us. Don't get the wrong idea. I still steer away from any of Alfonso's business partners. I just happen to be hungry at the moment. Good enough. Lets start off with a fine Bordeaux. I thought prohibition was in effect? It is except the places that Alphonso owns. We talked pleasantly about mundane things. The war, Cuba, how I happened to get into the business. When we left, she was sufficiently inebriated. As I walked half holding her to a waiting taxi, she said, don't think you can take advantage of me just because I am a little tipsy. I wouldn't think of it. I asked her for her home address. She didn't answer. She had fallen asleep against my shoulder. I told the taxi guy to take me home. I carried her up the steps and laid her in my bed fully clothed. Then I fell asleep myself on the couch in the living room. Sometime in the night, she woke me and pulled me into my bedroom. We woke up the next morning next to each other. I expected her to feel regret for failing to follow her own reasons for not getting involved with her brother's business partners. I saw no sign of that and from then on we were a couple. The only indication I got from her former position was once she just said she wished I was in another line of work. I never regretted connecting up with her although there were some negative aspects to our relationship. This was early 19<sup>th</sup> century and a white man taking up with a colored woman was not looked upon with favor.

Author's note: In those times referring to an African American woman as colored was as respectful as it could be. Of course others used a highly derogatory term I will not mention here.

***Good Whiskey***  
*(Chapter 3)*

As I said before, we had paid off the cops. There was one cop that did not take bribes. He really wasn't a problem though. He looked the other way as far as bootlegging goes. If you were caught for robbery or murder, that was another story. So I made sure we didn't get caught. He was not the problem. He had a brother-in-law named Jasper that was bat-shit crazy. Besides being a certified loony, he was also a big time bigot. He hated the idea that I had taken up with Carmen. In spite of his brother-in-law being a cop, he was a

bootlegger too. Alphonso asked me to collaborate with him and negotiate a cut of our regional business. When I met him, he didn't hold back his vile attack on my choice of lovers. I took offense at his comments, but kept it to myself. Wild emotions can really screw up a business deal. At our first meeting he made an absurd request. He wanted 70% cut of the region. I offered 15%. His father-in-law interjected and he finally backed down and we agreed on 20%. I thought that would be the end of it. Instead, he started raiding my speakeasies and shooting up the places. Each time he would leave a vile note in reference to Carmen with the caption 70%. It was time for me to have a talk with Sam, his brother-in-law cop. I told him you know what I have to do. Absolutely not. He is my brother-in-law. I can't condone killing anyone. I didn't want to have to do this, but you leave me no choice.

Sam's only daughter Luann had left home six months before for fame and fortune in Los Angeles. Like many before her, she envisioned being discovered by Hollywood. Instead, she gets swindled by some unscrupulous leach. Trying to pay off a loan to help get her an audition, she ends up a drug addict and a hooker. Jack takes out some photos and shows them to Sam. His face turns powder white. Where is she now? She is safe and off of drugs. I will give you her address after I take care of your brother-in-law. My only request is that you do the deed yourself.

I told Jasper that I had a deal for him. He probably thought I was giving in to his crazy requests. I met him at his own bar. Well, well, if it isn't the nigger lover finally coming to his senses. I guess you could say that, as I pulled out my gun and shot him right between the eyes.

Sam honored his part to not arrest me. I honored my part to let him know where to find his daughter. Next thing I knew, she was back home. She had joined a church group and was now a bonafide temperance advocate. That didn't bother me. When I met her, she thanked me for saving her. It was her later activities that cause me problems.

Alphonso was my boss, but he had a bigger boss, Giuseppe Luciano. He saw the profitability of casinos and wanted to build one in Miami. I thought this was a good idea. The only problem was getting the business men of

Miami to vote it in. Luann started preaching each week at her church against gambling. Another vice like drinking to prey on innocent victims. She was most effective. The local business men were afraid to cross her and they voted to ban casinos. This was a big loss for Giuseppe and me personally because he had tasked me with taking care of Luann. I told Franky that she was not to be touched. His only comment was that is going to be a problem. I knew it was, but that was a line I refused to cross.

Meanwhile, I asked Carmen to marry me. She said yes. We set up house on a small beachfront house. It was idyllic. The next couple of years were the best of my life.

I always worry when things feel too good. Just my paranoid nature I guess. Thinking disaster was just around the corner. It was a good thing I was still pro-active and smart to a degree. I knew danger was on its way. I had been summoned to meet with Giuseppe.

Franky accompanied me. I was led through the corridor and into a room with an elevator. I was thoroughly searched and my weapons were removed. The two guards who escorted me told Franky only I was allowed to go further. This was expected. I was brought before an ornate double door. As the door swung open, there was Giuseppe sitting at an enormous mahogany desk like a king. He didn't waste time. You have cost me a lot of money not taking care of that casino business. I also made you lots of money with the bars and booze. I need someone who follows orders, not one who picks and chooses. You can either do it my way or not at all. Deja Vu. This is the same offer I got from Grant. This time I was prepared. One of the guards hit me in the stomach with the butt of his rifle. As I doubled over I heard bombs and gun fire going off below and outside. When I rose up I grabbed the gun I had been hit with and blew a hole through the guy's neck. I shot the second guard as Giuseppe was pulled through some alternate doorway and out of my view. I had anticipated that Giuseppe would not welcome my visit. Franky and I had talked to Alphonso before my trip. I asked Alphonso if he was ready to move up the ladder. We had our own army of followers. They were currently eliminating Giuseppe's own crew. Giuseppe still lived, but his reign was over. When you get knocked down like this, no one would follow you

again.

Alphonso took over Giuseppe's territory. He left me to manage his Miami section. I was all done with this line of work. I figured I had already use up all my luck. I appointed Franky to take over. He was happy to do it. I had stashed enough money away to not need to work this line of work anymore. Franky lasted 7 years before fate caught up with him.

Prohibition ended in 1933. I was reading the story in the local paper when a ghost from my past emerged from the back of the photo. Apparently Roxie didn't die as I had thought. I knew this was not a photo from the past. One of the patrons, sitting at a table of the restaurant she was a waitress at, was reading a newspaper and yesterday's date was clearly visible on the front page.

I couldn't help myself. I needed to find out what had happened. I told Carmen about what I had seen. She trusted me enough to know I was loyal to her. I need to go an talk to her.

It wasn't hard to find her. When I arrived she didn't look surprised or particularly happy to see me. She told me about the events that took place at the bridge I had taken a dive off of. She was in the car following me. Just like me, she was guarded by a guy sitting next to her and one driver. When we crashed into the side of the bridge, her car didn't stop and rammed into the back of mine. That was the noise I had heard before going off of the bridge. Her driver was killed and the gunman dropped his gun in the crash. She retrieved it before he could and shot him dead. She then left the scene and disappeared just like me.

I searched for you for months. Why didn't you try to find me? Our little tryst was entertaining, but I wasn't as enamored by our relationship as you were. That would have stung if I didn't already have someone truly loyal to me. Does Grant know you are alive? Probably not and I am I would like to keep it that way. It was just by chance that I happened to see your photo or I would never have known you survived. I think you are still safe as I made my exit from the bar and her life.

I had one more task to do before returning to Miami.

***Good Whiskey***  
*(Chapter 4)*

Romans: 12:19 “Vengeance is mine sayeth the lord.”  
That is all good and fine, but I like this one better.

“Vengeance is a dish best served cold.” I had had plenty of time to plan my vengeance against Grant. He was about to get a taste of the cold hard steel from the knife I carried in my boot. It was especially made for me by one of Alphonso's artisans. It was thin, light weight, and razor sharp. It fit nicely in my hidden boot sheath.

I could have just shot Grant from a distance, but that would not appease me. I needed to look him in the eye.

I knew where he hung out. No need to be subtle about it. I walked up to the door and demanded to see Grant in person. I told him I had a message that he would not want to miss. I carried the photo of Roxie I had cut out of the newspaper. I was searched, but my hidden stiletto was not found.

Grant was indeed surprised to see me and more surprised that I had walked into his lair. So what is so urgent that you have come to me. I hope you are not looking for a job. I don't think your future is too secure.

I just thought you might be interested in a former friend. I handed him the photo with Roxie in it. His eyes lit up, then dimmed. This is probably a fake. I thought so too, but look at the date on the newspaper the guy is reading at the table. Grant's eyes lit up again, but with unbridled fire and fury. Where is she? She asked me to keep it a secret, but for you I will whisper it in you ear. Grant, feeling unafraid with two of his goons guns aimed at me and in his own realm, leaned toward me. I pulled the knife from its sheath and rammed it into his throat. It went in like a knife through butter. I pulled it out and side armed it into one of the guards. I turned Grant's body

around in front of me as bullets flew in my direction. I grabbed Grant's gun from the table and shot the other guard. I left by a side door and made my escape unscathed.

### *Epilogue*

Yes, I had asked Carmen to marry me and she had said yes. We bought a small beachfront house in Miami.



I was content to spend my remaining days with Carmen. She could finally relax no longer wondering if and when I got blown away. I bought a boat and started up a charter tourist business. I didn't need the money, but Carmen told me to get out of the house to many times. I looked lost without something to do. When I didn't have a charter lined up, she would join me cruising up and down the coast. Eating fresh fish just caught and sipping wine on the stern as the sun set over the Miami River.





**Sunset over Miami River 1900's**



**The End**