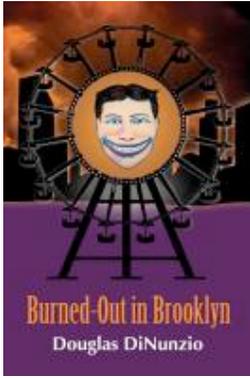




Burned-Out in Brooklyn

Douglas DiNunzio



*When Brooklyn private eye Eddie Lombardi offers to help the brother of a pretty young woman settle his astronomical gambling debts, he doesn't expect much trouble. And, when he offers to help a freak show troupe from Coney Island get free of a brutal manager, that's also expected to be business as usual. That the two cases might be related, with possibly fatal consequences, is not on his radar. Also see: *Jazzed-Up in Brooklyn: An Eddie Lombardi Mystery**

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6928.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your Free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

An Eddie Lombardi Mystery

Douglas DiNunzio

Copyright © 2013 Douglas DiNunzio

ISBN 978-1-62646-433-9

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2013

First Edition

1

Handsome Johnny Temafonte was playing eight ball and bumping back double shots of rye at Bernard's Billiards on New Utrecht Avenue. I drew a bead on the kid because I had a feeling something ugly was going to happen to him. I felt it the way animals feel a hurricane or an earthquake coming.

He was playing Joey Costa at fifty bucks a game and losing. Joey wasn't a hustler, but he had a smooth, sweet stroke, and he could run a whole rack before he missed. I didn't know how good Handsome Johnny was because he was new in the neighborhood and because, with all that rye in him, there was no telling how he played sober. He was down a couple of hundred, but he just kept boozing and losing. I pegged him as a kid without character, not a bad kid necessarily, but somebody I didn't want or need to know.

I was playing my own game of eight ball with my wavy-haired *goombah*, Frankie DeFilippo. We went to Bernard's whenever business was slow at his barbershop. I'm the local shamus, so my schedule's flexible.

I was losing, too, but only because my mind was on the Temafonte kid, wondering how and when the expected trouble would start. Joey Costa was winning big, so it wouldn't come from him. And

Douglas DiNunzio

the way the Temafonte kid was laughing and joking, you'd think he was up two hundred instead of down.

Still, I had this feeling.

Frankie rapped his cue against the rail. "*C'mon*, Eddie."

"Huh?"

"It's your shot. So *shoot*."

I was going for the eleven ball, but it was wedged between the six and the eight. I tapped the eleven into the rail just enough to move it free from the eight, and then I looked steely-eyed at Frankie. "Keep your eye on table #7," I said.

"Trouble?"

"Maybe."

"I'll go tell Victor." Victor Iademarco owned the place. 'Bernard' wasn't even his middle name.

"Hold up," I told Frankie, hooking him by the arm. The front door had just opened, letting in a gust of oppressive, mid-July heat and two men with their shirts stuck to them. The first was about my height and weight, the second big, burly, and rippling with anxious muscles.

"Mutt 'n' Jeff," said Frankie, grinning.

"Uh uh. Collection team. And trouble."

Handsome Johnny knew it, too. But he blanched only briefly when he saw them, his bright, drunken smile returning almost

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

immediately to its original glow. It was a reaction I wasn't used to seeing.

The two men took chairs by the front window and pretended not to notice the kid. It was a form of intimidation I'd used myself collecting bills with a big colored guy named Watusi. The idea was to make your deadbeat contemplate for a few moments what you might do to him if he didn't pay.

A sweating Joey Costa sank the fifteen ball and then the ever-dangerous eight. "That's game," he said meekly, his eyes shifting between Handsome Johnny and the men. Johnny nodded matter-of-factly, dropped a fifty on the table, and calmly returned his cue to the rack. Joey was clearing the table when the big, burly guy said, "Beat it, pal."

I tapped Frankie on the shoulder as Joey Costa slithered away, past the two men and out the door. "Okay," I said. "Go tell Victor to stay in back until this is over." The men were flanking the door now, wearing wide, intimidating grins.

"Hey, Johnny! *Come va?*" I said, favoring my left leg as I ambled over. I had a slight limp as the result of a bullet in my heel a couple of winters back, and I enjoyed exaggerating it before a fight. My cue rested carelessly in my left hand, not at all like the weapon it was.

Handsome Johnny watched my approach with an odd detachment, like I was a character in a foreign movie. He looked like

Douglas DiNunzio

he might laugh. Either the rye had numbed his fear, or he didn't have any.

The big guy just scowled and said, "Mind your own business, pal," as I showed him both rows of fine, straight, Italian teeth.

He cracked his knuckles. "You hear what I said?"

"Sure, sure," I answered. "What's the problem?"

"The pretty boy owes money. He's gonna pay it here and now."

"Sorry. Not here and not now."

"How's that?"

"Only debts get paid at Bernard's involve shootin' pool. He owe you money for shootin' pool?"

"He owes Jackie Dean five c's for poker. You know who Jackie Dean is, don't you, pal?"

"Sure," I answered. Dean was a high roller who operated in the ritzier sections of Queens. He owned a restaurant and a nightclub.

"We come to collect for Mr. Dean," said the shorter man, but I kept looking at the big guy.

"Not here, not now."

"Who says?"

"Shucks, I guess I do."

Even before his body moved, his eyes gave him away, a predatory gleam that's the hallmark of tough guys with double-digit I.Q.'s. As his overhand right began its long, ponderous arc, I caught him hard in his unprotected ribcage with my stick. While he was

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

doubled up, I connected on his chin with my free right hand, knocking him flat on his back and turning the gleam into twilight. The smaller man turned and ran, but right into the approaching Frankie, who dropped him with a sudden left.

That should've ended it, but the big guy's gleam returned as he pulled out a blade the size of a Bowie knife from his boot. Frankie moved up, but I waved him off and shifted to a double-handed grip on the cue, like Robin Hood wielding his staff. I parried the first thrust easily, a sliver of cue stick flying off behind me like whittled wood. When he shifted, I tried whacking him in the head with the tip end, but I was off-balance and missed. As I pulled the cue back, he slashed a second time and caught the thick end about an inch from my hand. Too close for comfort, so I jabbed him hard under the ribs with the butt. When the knife dropped, Frankie stepped in and kicked it away.

The big guy was still face-up on the floor and groaning softly when I pushed the tip end of the cue into his open mouth. "Listen up, pal," I said when his eyes re-focused on me. "You move an inch before I tell you and I'm gonna ram this the rest of the way. Know what happens when I do that?"

"Uhh," he said.

"It's not that I'm worried about *you*," I needled, "but this is a good stick, and I don't wanna slime it up with your brains."

"Uuh," he repeated.

"Now, you're gonna get up from this floor, take your sleepin' pal here, and crawl back to wherever you came from without any more fuss. Understand?"

As I pulled back the cue, he nodded and started to rise. Frankie, standing just behind him with his own stick at the ready, was counting down on his fingers, meaning it'd take the big guy all of five seconds to renege. Frankie got as far as two, the guy lunged, and Frankie broke the thick end of the cue over his head.

There was enough cash in the big guy's wallet to send him all the way to Albany, but the White Rabbit Lounge in Kew Gardens, Queens, which belonged to Jackie Dean, was far enough. I took out ten bucks more to pay for the cues, Frankie and I lifted the two men into the first cab that came along, and then we went back into Bernard's.

Handsome Johnny Temafonte was waiting for us. He had a double rye in one hand and a cue stick in the other.

"Thanks, fellas," he said, shit-faced. "Wanna shoot some pool?"

I studied him for a moment. True to his nickname, he was a good-looking kid, early twenties, azure-eyed, sandy-haired. He was blessed with broad, square shoulders, a solid midsection, and long, powerful legs. Great paratrooper material, at least physically, so I wondered why he was still here in Bensonhurst and not over in Korea fighting the gooks like this other kid I knew, Arnie Pulaski.

"You're all played out for today," I said. "The next cab's for you."

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

He smiled through his disappointment as Frankie went out to hail it.

"That was a close one, kid," I continued a moment later.

"Sure was," he said, grinning. He started to thank me again, but stopped when he followed my eyes to the big front window. Dark, hostile clouds were rolling in from the great nowhere west of Brooklyn to push away the Dodger-blue sky. The wind had picked up and was blowing urban sagebrush, mostly newsprint, down New Utrecht Avenue. I looked out at the ugly, building storm, then at the kid, and it took only the smallest fraction of a second to put them, and me, together.

4

I didn't have a problem being quits with Johnny Temafonte, but his sister was not somebody to walk away from. *Bellissima*.

So, the next morning, I decided to keep my part of the bargain and see who I could settle with on the kid's behalf.

The nearest creditor was Pinky Pearlman, who owned the Pom Pom Club, a strip joint in Borough Park. He also had a restaurant in Flatbush, where he spent most of his time. I didn't know much else about him, not even why people called him Pinky. I figured he had one on each hand, like everybody else.

Diamond Jim's was the restaurant, a steak house and cocktail lounge off Linden Boulevard. It had a respectable facade, with a big plate glass window and the name etched in gold rotogravure-style lettering. The menu was high-priced, the silverware was sterling, but that was all show. There was always more action in the back room behind the kitchen than out in the dining area. Out-of-towners occasionally wandered in and sawed their way through Pinky's rawhide filets, but mostly the guys from the back room ate there on breaks from twelve-hour marathons of seven-card stud, and mostly it was take-out from the Chinese place down the street.

Douglas DiNunzio

A flabby, bald-headed man in a rumpled, light blue suit was sitting alone at the bar when I walked in. Two lanky waiters in white were laying out silverware on maroon-colored tablecloths for a lunch-hour crowd that would never arrive, and a couple of hoods were drinking beers at a shadowy back table.

"Mr. Pearlman?" I asked as I approached the bar.

"Jesus Christ, not *again!*" he shouted, turning on his stool.

I offered a "Who, me?" look and just stood there.

"You from Mr. G?"

"Name's Lombardi. Don't know any Mr. G."

His round, florid face trembled and turned deeper red. Then I saw his eyes, the whites so uniformly bloodshot that they looked pink. Pinky.

"Well, if you *are* from Mr. G, you tell him the answer's still a big fuckin' 'no.' That's N-O. Get it?"

I started to approach again, but he put his hand up stiffly, palm out, then extended the gesture into a straight-arm. "I'm doin' my books," he said, spit flying. "I don't let nobody see my books."

"I don't care about your books, Mr. Pearlman, and I don't care about Mr. G. I'm here about Johnny Temafonte."

"Who the hell's *he?*"

"Dago who owes you money," shouted one of the men from the back table. He was looking at me and grinning. Sleek, tall, muscular,

early thirties. My hard eyes met his briefly, and then I continued with Pinky. "I'm here to see if we can't work out some arrangement..."

"Oh, yeah, *him*." Pinky turned to the man. "How much does he owe me, Burt?"

"Eight hundred," I offered.

"I heard fifteen," Burt said, upping the ante on his grin.

I turned and met his eyes again, harder. "You heard wrong, mister."

His chair scraped on the floor as he rose. "Never once met a fuckin' Eye-tal who could count past the hairs in his nose," he said as he approached. Another chair scraped as the second man, shorter, same build, stood up and followed.

I offered Pinky a serious but still respectful look. "I didn't come here for trouble, Mr. Pearlman, but if your little echo wants some..."

Pinky glanced to see how far Burt and the other man had come forward, then waved them off.

"Send Short Charlie out here," he said. "You two stay in back."

"Wop-wop, dago, wop-wop," Burt chanted with a parting smirk as he and the other man disappeared into the kitchen.

Pinky ignored me and worked on his books until a slight, beady-eyed man wearing a green visor and thick glasses emerged. The man waited patiently until Pinky grunted, "Temafonte."

"Seven hundred eighty-five bucks, plus two days' interest at twenty percent, comes to one thousand ninety four bucks."

I glared at Pinky. "Not fifteen hundred."

"Tell me about the kid," Pinky asked. I thought he was talking to me, but the beady-eyed guy answered.

"Luckiest sonofabitch I ever seen at the table. Smart, too, and bluffs good, but he plays reckless, like he don't even care if he wins or loses. Ain't a counter, handles his cards clean, far as I can see. He just don't know when to quit, that's all. And he don't give a damn."

Pinky nodded and said, "Tell Burt and the Turk to come back." He closed his ledger as the beady-eyed guy disappeared.

"Johnny Temafonte's a war vet," I volunteered. "He's havin' some problems re-adjusting to civilian life. If you don't let him back in your game, I'll make sure he pays what he owes."

"Wop-wop, dago, wop-wop," came Burt's taunt again.

"Shut up, Burt," Pinky said casually, then offered me a caustic look, pink eyes flashing like cheap stones. "You takin' on the kid's debt?"

"No. I'm just offering you a sensible way to get what he owes you without taking on trouble."

"And what trouble is that?"

"Me."

He stepped off the stool. "Well, now, that just scares me half to death," he said, trading grins with Burt and the Turk.

I continued. "Just give me your word you won't let the kid in your game anymore, and I'll see he pays you off."

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

"You got a jumbo pair o' balls comin' in here tellin' me what I gotta do," said Pinky, eyes flashing almost red, voice husky with bravado.

"I'm just trying to help the kid."

"Wop-wop, dago, wop-wop," chanted Burt.

"You better start helpin' yourself, pal," said Pinky, stepping back as Burt took the final step forward.

Burt was still trying to intimidate me with his grin when I brought my heel down hard on the toe of his shoe, pivoted, and drove my elbow into his ribs, then finished him with a lightning chin shot. He groaned, almost musically, and tipped forward like a felled tree. The Turk was already moving at me when I pushed the slumping Burt into him, and they both toppled to the floor. The Turk started to draw his gun, but Pinky said, "That's enough."

I stepped back, pulled one of my business cards from my shirt pocket, and placed it on the bar in front of Pinky. "The offer's still open," I said.

And I walked out.

The Pepsi-Cola thermometer in the drug store window across the street said it was eighty-five degrees. The way the sweat was rolling off and soaking into my white dress shirt, the humidity level had to be higher. I'd need a quick shower and a change of clothes before making my second call, Tommy Durning's place at Coney Island.

Douglas DiNunzio

On the way home, I stopped at Gino's grocery store, parked, and let myself in. I checked the store twice a day while Gino and his family were gone. The canned goods were all stacked in place, the vegetable bins noticeably empty during his week-long absence. Carmello's Market at 66th Street and 15th Avenue was getting most of Gino's business now, just as Gino got most of Mr. Carmello's every year at the end of August. Theirs was a friendly competition. They had price wars once in a while, but they never ceased being civil, even friendly, to each other. My business was different.

Frankie's barbershop was my next stop. He had a customer, Old Mr. Caravaggio, so I took the waiting chair by the window. The radio was on, and Johnnie Ray was singing "*Cry*" like he just might.

"You hear the news, Eddie?" asked Frankie.

"What news?"

"Big fire in Flatbush. Look, you can still see the smoke." He pointed out the window in that direction, and I turned around. The ugly, billowing cloud over Flatbush was the color of pitch.

"What the hell's burning?"

"Pinky Pearlman's place, Diamond Jim's. Right to the ground. It's all over the radio."

"Jesus H. Christ! When'd it happen?"

"Half hour ago."

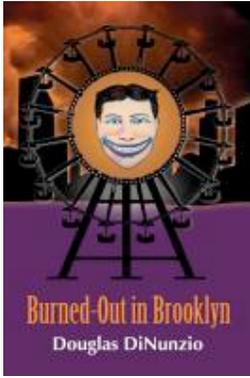
"Jesus H. Christ!"

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

Old Mr. Caravaggio leaned forward in the chair, his silver hair slicked back with Wildroot Cream Oil. A hint of garlic wafted from his nearly toothless mouth. "It's probably for the best," he said with a sour face. "I ate there once, and the food was terrible."

"Never been, myself," said Frankie. "How 'bout you, Eddie? You ever been there?"

"Half hour ago."



*When Brooklyn private eye Eddie Lombardi offers to help the brother of a pretty young woman settle his astronomical gambling debts, he doesn't expect much trouble. And, when he offers to help a freak show troupe from Coney Island get free of a brutal manager, that's also expected to be business as usual. That the two cases might be related, with possibly fatal consequences, is not on his radar. Also see: *Jazzed-Up in Brooklyn: An Eddie Lombardi Mystery**

Burned-Out in Brooklyn

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/6928.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**