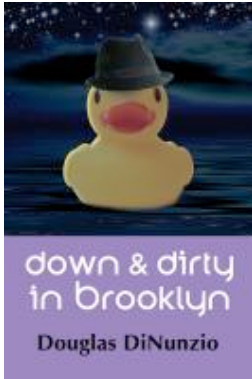




down & dirty  
in brooklyn

**Douglas DiNunzio**



*Before a Mafia hoodlum jumps off the roof at Bellevue Hospital, he asks private eye Eddie Lombardi to right an old wrong committed by his late brother. Eddie agrees. The task is to find and return a jewel-encrusted crown that came to a church in Brooklyn all the way from the Vatican. Unfortunately, that puts Eddie at odds with a dangerous Mafia underboss who has several incriminating secrets to hide.*

## **Down & Dirty in Brooklyn**

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**Down & Dirty  
in Brooklyn**

**An Eddie Lombardi Mystery**

**Douglas DiNunzio**

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First Edition

# 1

The guy on the roof of Bellevue Hospital had plenty of witnesses for his eight-story leap into the Great Beyond, but he wanted one more.

Me.

"Eddie Lombardi," I said as I showed my investigator's license to the cop at the police line. "Captain DeMassio called me from the Bath Avenue station, told me to come here."

"Just another loony takin' the plunge," said the cop.

"Maybe so."

"Helluva way to waste the morning."

"That it is."

I glanced at the large, eager crowd behind me, then craned my neck to look at the roof. A man stood at the edge, absolutely still, eight floors up. His back was to the crowd, his arms at his sides, like a diver waiting to perform a back somersault off the high board.

"Think he's gonna jump?" the cop asked. "I hate it when they make you wait."

"He's just taking the air," I said as I brushed past.

*Down & Dirty in Brooklyn*

The guy on the roof was Sammy Borzano, a feeder-level *Mafioso* semi-connected to a *capo* named Jimmy Santini. Sammy actually worked for John Bologna, a.k.a. Johnny Baloney, Santini's latest underboss. I hadn't seen Sammy for almost seven years, his latest stretch doing quality metal work for the State of New York. The last quality time I'd spent with him was on the playground at St. Margaret's School when we were in the third grade.

Why Sammy Borzano wanted to see me was the fifty-cent question. I didn't care all that much what happened to him, and besides, my mind was elsewhere. In about five hours, the Brooklyn Dodgers would meet the New York Yankees in Game 7 of the World Series. This year, 1955, the lowly Bums were finally going to show their elite cousins from the Bronx how the game was played. That's where *my* mind was. And my heart. So why should I care about Sammy Borzano? If *his* heart was set on taking the big leap just before the deciding game of the Series, let him leap.

A second cop met me at the elevator. Young. Crew cut. Mickey Mantle with a badge. "So, who you pickin'?" he asked as he pushed the button for the eighth floor.

I looked straight ahead and didn't answer. I'd watched the Flock drop the first two at Yankee Stadium, win the next three at Ebbets Field, then lose Game 6 back on the Bombers' turf. Their best pitcher, Whitey Ford, had been more than a match for our best, Don Newcombe, but the team had somehow held together, and now it was

up to Johnny Podres to get us that one win further than we'd ever been before.

We'd all be there to cheer the team on: Gino, Frankie, Tony, Angelo, and Sal from the neighborhood; Herm Kowalski, my one-eyed attorney from Coogan's Bluff; Liam O'Rourke, my wild Irish shamus from Flatlands; even my one-time nemesis and brand-new junior partner, Arnie Pulaski. The odd man out, as always, was Watusi, who was in Mississippi with my teen-aged godchild Desiree visiting her grandparents. He'd already missed the first six games of the Series during his brief trip, but he didn't care. Langston Hughes wasn't in either lineup.

"I *said*, who you *pickin'*?" growled the cop.

"I live in Bensonhurst, pal. Answer your question?"

"Loser," he said with a sneer of confidence.

"Wanna put some money where your big Bronx mouth is?"

"Can't. I'm on duty."

"Coward. And just for the record: Podres, complete game shutout."

"You got a crystal ball?"

"Lipton Tea leaves."

A stocky detective-lieutenant was waiting for me on the eighth floor. The hard look on his pale, stubbled face told me that baseball wasn't remotely on his mind. "Our jumper's a patient in the wacko wing," he said matter-of-factly. "Somehow, he ditched his hospital

gown, got his clothes back, and made it past two guards to the roof." I started to ask a question, but the cop had already turned and was marching up a dark, narrow stairway that led there. A young, curly-haired doctor met us just inside the door. He smelled of sweat and antiseptic, and because this was Bellevue, he smelled a little of madness.

"Mr. Lombardi?"

I nodded.

"There's something you should know before you go out and talk to Sammy. He's entered the final, tertiary stage of neurosyphilis. There's already evidence of spirochetes, the organism that causes the disease, in his spinal fluid."

"Does he know?"

"Yes, and despite our best attempts to counsel him, he's decided not to see his illness through to the end. He *is* lucid, however, and whatever he tells you, I guarantee that it comes from a functional, if troubled, mind."

"You're sure I'm the one he wants to see?"

"No one else."

"I don't get it."

"Neither do we."

"So, whatta you think, doc?"

"What do I *think*?"

"Dodgers or Yanks?"



He answered with a glare, then stopped me as I tried to pass him. "I'm not sure you understand what's at stake here. Sammy's extremely excitable; he's not thinking straight."

"You just said he was."

"I'm talking about his emotions. He doesn't have to end his life this way. Try to give him reasons to live. We can help him. We can make what's left of his life bearable, productive, dignified."

"Just like Capone, right?"

Alphonse 'Scarface' Capone had spent his final days in Florida dying of syphilis, his once-fertile brain turned to Cream of Wheat. I didn't care much about Capone, either, but I wouldn't have wished syphilis on him. So, if Sammy Borzano wanted to leap before the doctors could play their little games, it was okay with me. If I were in his shoes, I'd be taking the leap myself.

"Well?" the doctor asked.

"Dodgers," I said, and I went out onto the roof.

Sammy met me with a schoolboy's smile. His chubby face had matured, hardened, but the smile was the same as when I'd first known him, the little mama's boy from 73rd Street with the ill-fitting, hand-me-down clothes and tousled hair, the kid that everybody liked. I didn't know how he'd found his way into the Mob; it didn't matter much now. I tried to convince myself that I still didn't care what happened to him. But when I gazed into his wasted eyes, I wished, just

short of praying, that I could restore him to what he once was. It was a foolish, forlorn wish, but I wished it anyway.

"Hey, Sammy," I said.

"Eddie. Eddie Lombardi."

"The same, Sammy. *Come va?*"

"Not so good, as you can see."

A cop on the periphery took a step forward, trying to use my entry as a diversion. Sammy stared him back, then fixed a pair of angry eyes on the curly-haired doctor. "Move these cops outa here. *Now*. And move yourself with 'em. I'm talking to Eddie alone."

The doctor hesitated, Sammy took a deliberate half-step back on the ledge, teetered for a moment, then steadied himself. He waited, stone-faced, until the last of the interlopers had left the roof. When someone in the crowd below shouted, "Jump!" Sammy looked down briefly, then offered a wry smile.

"Everybody's got plans for me, Eddie. The jerks down there, the docs and the cops up here. They all got plans."

"I know the score," I said. "The doc told me."

"You got plans for me, too, Eddie?"

"You know I don't, Sammy."

"Then I called the right guy."

"I guess so."

"I knew you were the right guy, the only guy."

"That's me, Sammy."

*Douglas DiNunzio*

"I knew I could trust you."

"That you can."

"Nobody but you, Eddie."

"Nobody but me."

"So, you want to hear a story?"

I was all ears.

## 7

Johnny Baloney was sitting behind my desk, flanked by a matched pair of Neanderthal hirelings. I looked around for Arnie, fearing the worst, but there was no sign of him. No sign of a bruised and beaten Ralphie Bologna, either. It was possible that Johnny hadn't yet heard about his brother's run-in with my hotheaded partner, but it wasn't likely. Ralphie was a notorious whiner, and Johnny Baloney made a point of knowing everything that went on within the Borough of Brooklyn, even if it only remotely involved him.

"Lombardi," he said. The tone was somewhere between a banker's foreclosure voice and a teacher calling roll. I admired him for a moment as he sat in my office chair. You couldn't help but admire the man, no matter how crudely he made his living. Movie star handsome, impeccably dressed, composed and competent. Guileful, too. He could be seconds from putting a bullet in your head, and you wouldn't even know he was sore at you.

"*Come va, Johnny?*" I said, taking a seat in the big stuffed chair where my clients sat. It was something you could say to Johnny Baloney that you wouldn't dare say to his boss. I liked that about

Johnny: blue collar to the core, but he had class. And brains. I wondered, with his cool intelligence, why he wasn't running a brokerage firm or a law office instead of doing Jimmy Santini's dirty work. Maybe, like Sammy Borzano, he'd never learned how to hit a Spaldeen, recite his times tables, or talk to a priest. But the potential was there, all right. It lit up the space around him like a fireworks display.

"Make any bets on the Series?" he asked, thumbing his black leather suspenders and smiling like a bookie when the fix is in.

I smiled back. "I root for the Dodgers, bet the same way."

"Bad tactics, worse odds."

"Maybe so."

"Course, now you've got probability on your side."

"Probability?"

"How many other times the Bums go up against the Yanks?"

"Five."

"And never beat 'em once, right? That's what I mean about havin' probability on your side. Law of averages." Casually, he propped his feet on the desk. "Nice," he said, meaning the desk.

"It belonged to my father."

"Heard Sammy Borzano passed on," he continued in the same voice. "Heard he jumped off the roof at Bellevue. Heard you were there." His eyes half-closed when I didn't respond, and he studied me

*Down & Dirty in Brooklyn*

for a moment. "Saw a guy jump once. Ten story building. Saw him go splat on the sidewalk. To this day, I can't eat watermelon."

"I didn't stop to look," I said.

"What'd Sammy have, TB?"

"Neurosyphilis."

"He called for you?"

"Yes."

"Called for you before he jumped."

"Yes."

"How come?"

"He wanted to talk."

"About what?"

"Lots of things."

That brought a scowl that compromised Johnny Baloney's gangster good looks. "Don't figure me for simple, Lombardi. We're havin' a nice little chat here. No reason it should get ugly."

"His brother Tommy..."

"Ah! The one who stole from the Church. *Merda* on two legs!"

"Sammy wanted to talk about him."

"To you."

"Yes."

"You and nobody else."

"I guess he trusted me."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"What'd he want?"

"He wanted me to apologize to a priest for him."

"That why you were over in Bay Ridge?"

"That's where the priest was, yes."

"And the rest of it?"

"I was curious about why Tommy got whacked."

"He got *whacked* because he did the big no-no. That's why he got *whacked*! I'd-a whacked him myself, the little shit. May his black fuckin' heart roast in Hell."

"I was curious, that's all."

"Curious enough to call in the cops?"

"Lieutenant Dobler knew the case. It made sense to talk to him about it."

"And the money?"

"Money?"

He frowned, snapped his fingers, and one of the hoods patted me down. The envelope was still in my jacket pocket. "The money, Lombardi. And before you start figurin' me for simple again, I'll tell you there's a thousand bucks in there. What's Sammy's money doin' in your pocket if you're just curious?"

"He wanted me to give it to somebody," I said, still straight-faced. Lying to Johnny Baloney gave me an electric thrill that almost

compensated for the piss-in-my-pants fear that accompanied it. "Her name is Martha."

"Martha who?"

"He didn't say. She was nice to him when he was a kid. A neighbor lady, I'm guessing. Sammy wanted me to find her and give her the money."

"All of it?"

"Ten per cent commission for me."

"And if you don't find her?"

"It goes to the church in Bay Ridge. The one that lost the crowns. Part of the apology."

Johnny Baloney slowly took his feet off the desk, straightened himself, and stood up. "Martha, huh?"

"That's her name." He wasn't believing a word of it, but he wasn't reaching for his silver-plated .45, either. I breathed a little easier.

"You go look for this Martha, Lombardi. Look for her all you want. But don't get curious about Tommy Borzano. Tommy Borzano is none of your business."

"Okay."

"Anybody who bets on the Dodgers against the Yanks, he's already behind the eight ball. Don't get behind *my* eight ball. *Capisce?*"

"I understand."

"I believe you do."



He was adjusting his fedora against the late morning light from my office window when the sounds of a scuffle outside disturbed his preening and put his goons on alert. The street level door suddenly slammed open, and Arnie Pulaski raced up the stairs, gun at the ready. "What the hell..." he said, as he saw the pair of .45's that were aimed at him. "What's goin' on, Eddie? Who the hell are these guys?"

"Put away the piece, Arnie," I said.

Arnie was staring at Johnny Baloney, who was grinning ear-to-ear and still adjusting his hat.

"And who the fuck is *this*?"

I glared, Arnie stood open-mouthed for a moment, then slid his .38 into the shoulder holster under his left arm. Johnny Baloney's smile kept growing.

"Your partner?"

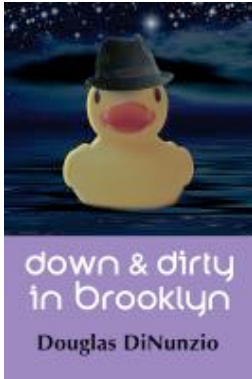
"Until he gets himself killed," I said, turning a fierce eye to Arnie.

The hood who'd been watching the black Lincoln appeared at the top of the stairs. He had a .45 in his hand, and a good-sized welt was rising under his left eye. Johnny Baloney waved him off and took a long, predatory look at Arnie.

"Very colorful," said Johnny Baloney as he swept past. He stopped at the door, paused a moment for emphasis, then turned and gave me a similar look. "My brother Ralphie could use some boxing lessons. Maybe your hot-headed partner here could give him some."

*Down & Dirty in Brooklyn*

He offered a parting smile as his bodyguards, guns still drawn, led the way down the steps and out the door.



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