

Turning the Corner

Part Seven of a Nine Part Series

by **Eric Heise**

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For information on any document, idea or article, please contact the following:

Eric J. Heise
399 Normandy Drive
Norwood, Massachusetts 02062
ejh8@bellatlantic.net
<http://www.writersmarch.com>

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The Bossman sat in his study. He was eating a turkey on rye and glancing every few minutes at CNBC's ticker tape on the muted television. The stereo played Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 from a corner of the room.

He blended with the dimly lit room, wearing crimson clothing and his mahogany head matching the wood. He reached for the pickle on his plate when Gabriel came in with a cup of cappuccino on a tray. Bossman glanced at the television, watched the ticker tape but didn't react. "Thank you, Gabriel," he said.

"Tony Morasutto's brother has been arrested on a drug possession charge," Gabriel said.

The Bossman looked up and nodded. "When did it happen?"

"Sometime yesterday, along the river," Gabriel said. "Delmont has detailed information."

"Would you please send in Delmont, then," the Bossman said. "I would like to know more." Gabriel nodded and exited the room. Delmont entered a moment later, dressed in a gray suit. The Bossman looked up at him, noticed the crimson tie and smiled. "Mister Delmont, won't you please have a seat?" Bossman said. He gestured with his hand for Delmont to sit.

"Thank you for seeing me, sir," Delmont said. "I know that you are busy."

The Bossman set the plate aside. "Now," he said with his hands folded in his lap, "I understand the first part of our plan is in effect."

Delmont nodded. His legs were crossed and he found that acting civilized around the Bossman was not only easy on the nerves, but also warmed the Bossman up. Delmont wasn't a sophisticated man; he wasn't even a civilized man. He grew up in the slum of slums. His father beat his mother nightly until he killed her. He was raped in foster homes. He spent time in juvenile detentions, and he never graduated high school. Delmont had his vices, yet if the Bossman ever found out he was not clean (as clean as one could be in a big time drug and crime ring), he would be dead, and it probably would hurt first. He did his job and that's all the Bossman cared about. "He was arrested with another man late yesterday. He's still in lockup as of this morning. A special investigation unit has been brought in to handle the case and Detective Morasutto is being questioned as we speak." Delmont gave a small smile, showing his praise to the Bossman's plan.

The Bossman grinned. "Excellent. Who was the dealer, do we know?"

"It was the Chinese kid, the one they call Hu Jia."

"Ah yes, Mister Hu Jia."

“He wasn’t caught, though. And more importantly, he wasn’t ID’d.” The Bossman gave Delmont a crossed look. “There was an officer, a detective by the name of Martinelli who chased him, but the detective never caught him.”

“I’ve heard of the detective,” the Bossman said. “He has been one of the police department’s duller shields, but a constant pain to our operations and the operations of many of our customers. He was in on the Galli raid by the docks not too long ago.”

“The police are calling him, the *Phantom Dealer*. Martinelli claims he has chased Mister Jia on numerous occasions, three maybe four,” Delmont said.

“How did he escape?”

“A sewer pipe,” Delmont said. “Mister Jia is a small person, maybe five one. We ducked into one along the river and disappeared.”

“*The Phantom Dealer*,” Bossman said. He smiled. “That does something to this game, doesn’t it? That name.” Delmont sat still. The Bossman liked to ponder and when he had Jeremy Ahmet’s hand cut off for interrupting his thoughts, the staff learned to keep quiet. “That’s is a fine report. Mister Gabriel, would you please join us?” Gabriel appeared from the foyer. “Mister Gabriel, would you please have Joshua Kinkade join us? I believe the second phase of our plan is due to come in effect.”

“With pleasure,’ Gabriel replied and left.

“There is another thing I need to inform you on,” Delmont said. “While trying to escape in the sewer pipe, Mister Jia had to dump the remainder of his stash. There had been a buyer for it.”

The Bossman nodded his head. “How much did he lose?”

“All of his profit from this order,” Delmont replied.

The Bossman sat in silence and thought. Gabriel returned a few minutes later with another black man dressed a black suit.

“Joshua, please sit,” the Bossman said. “Thank you Gabriel.” Gabriel nodded and left. The new man sat next to Delmont. “Delmont has informed me that the first phase of our plan has been carried through successfully. It is time to execute the second phase. Now that we have Detective Morasutto busy aiding his junkie brother, I’d like to get Sergeant Bailey out of the way.”

“I have something ready right now,’ Joshua said. “Sergeant Bailey has been stressed lately. His job has become a hassle, his wife has left him. In his locker, Internal Affairs will find some pills. The inquiry should take sometime; Sergeant Bailey will be suspended pending the investigation. That should keep both of them out of our hair for quite sometime.”

“Excellent,” The Bossman said. “I would like to know when this goes down so that our Mister Enriquez may resume his business. We are expecting a large shipment in the next few days and I

would like to move it as soon as possible. Mister Enriquez has outlets for this merchandise. I want him open for business when it comes in.”

II

“I’m tellin’ ya, I had that little shit,” Detective John Martinelli said. He stormed through the police station offices, his partner Frank Marshall following. “I swear to Christ, Frankie, I’m gonna nail that little shit.”

“Come on, John, are you sure it’s a Chinese kid?”

“Sure as a spare ribs are greasy. That’s the motherfucker I have seen three fuckin’ times, now. *Three fuckin’ times!*” He held three fingers up to Marshall’s face. “And I’m going to get him.”

“John, now don’t take this the wrong way, but you’re the only one who seems to think there’s a Chinese guy out there dealing. There are lots of dealers out there, shit, he’s probably Hispanic,” Marshall said.

Martinelli turned around and faced Marshall, looking up at him. “Frank, I know a fried fortune cookie when I see one. You don’t think I can tell the difference between some fucking spic and some filthy chink? Huh?”

“Johnny, come on -.”

“Come on, shit, Frankie. That dealin’ bastard I chased was a gook, a chink, a filthy rice eating *moth-ah-fuck-ah* and I’ve seen him on two other fucking occasions. That’s the dealer we been looking for. Not some spic, not some b-l-ack, a Chinese kid.” Martinelli rambled on, getting louder. Marshall held his hands up to calm his partner down.

“All right, all right,” Marshall said. “The Phantom Dealer is a Chinese kid, I got you.”

“Not just any Chinese kid, a filthy gook dink chink *moth-ah-fuck-ah*,” Martinelli replied. The both looked to Martinelli’s right and through a window divide. Johnny Chan, a restaurant owner was filling out a robbery report with two other detectives. He had a goose egg bump on his forehead and thinning gray hair. He watched Martinelli and Marshall through the glass. The male detective was trying to get a description of the robbers. His partner, Brenda Causeway excused herself from the report and met Martinelli and Marshall on the other side.

“Would you two do me a favor and keep it down out here,” she said and looking at Johnny Chan, then back to Martinelli, who wasn’t much taller than she was. He curly light brown hair draped down her head. “I mean give me a break, fellas. He’s in there filling out a robbery report now, but I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if he left here and went straight to Minority Relations in City Hall. Just cool it.”

Martinelli sighed. “Sorry, we just missed a dealer again, third time -.”

“Third time, yeah I know. The whole station knows,” Brenda replied. “Just cool it, all right?”

Martinelli nodded and said, “Yeah.”

“All right then,” she said. “Hey, heard you guys got Morasutto’s younger brother today, though. That puts you one up on those guys.”

“Yeah, the famed CPA likes to party a little more than he’s let on,” Marshall said. “He’s screaming for his lawyer, but not even Johnny Cochrane’s going to get him out a possession of that magnitude. Too bad we weren’t any closer to a school. We could lock his ass up for centuries.”

“Yeah, too bad,” Martinelli replied. “Listen, Bren, what have guys found out about Roger Galli’s stolen goods warehouse? Anything good?”

“Just the normal, lots shit fell off a truck. Why?”

“Just wondering,” Martinelli said.

“John’s trying to ID a dealer,” Marshall said. “*The Phantom Dealer.*”

“I told you, the little shit’s real,” Martinelli said.

“Yeah, we’ve all heard,” Brenda said. “Listen, we’ll try and get him to ID his dealer, but right now he’s mum. Not saying a word about *a thing* So if you got another lead, I suggest you chase it and not wait for us.”

“Yeah, Morasutto’s brother is the same way,” Marshall said. “Everyone is protecting their dealer.” He stroked his thick mustache.

“Well, you know what it’s like: Give up the dealer and you may as well move out of state,” Brenda said. “Cause you’re dead inside twenty-four and since your parole officer won’t even let you out city limits,” she shrugged, “that’s it, game’s over.”

“I’m gonna get him,” Martinelli said. “I am going to get that little fortune cookie and I’m going to crush him.”

“Martinelli! Marshall!” The three looked to the opposite end of the room. A middle-aged man stood in a doorway with “Captain Charles Murphy” stenciled on the window. “My office.”

“Time to go,” Marshall said. He and Martinelli headed towards the Captain’s office.

“Good luck,” Brenda said and went back to her partner and Johnny Chan.

Marshall and Martinelli filed into Murphy’s office. “Close the door,” he said, but he was calm. He sighed as they sat. “That’s a helluva catch you guys made.”

Martinelli shrugged. “Just doing our job, Captain. Would have liked to get more.”

“Yeah, like this *Phantom Dealer*,” the captain replied. “You’ve run into a couple of times, now, John, haven’t you?”

“Keeps slipping by, but I’ll nail him.”

“You have no ID, no evidence, just some Chinese dealer,” the captain said. “Any idea how many Chinese dealers there are out in this city?” Martinelli started to reply, but Murphy cut him off. “A lot. Now we have a more important problem on our hands. You guys have caught Morasutto’s brother with a heap load of dope. He’s in interrogation now waiting for his lawyer. I got Tony Morasutto coming down for questioning. And I’m waiting for the mayor to call and ask me why the brother of someone on my force was caught in a drug ring and we still can’t find the dealer. And once the papers get a hold of this *Phantom Dealer* shit, we’ll look like a fucking vaudeville act.”

“Cappy, I am telling you, I have run into this prick three times now,” Martinelli said holding up the three fingers again. “This guy’s no phantom. He’s real, as real as you and me. Now all I need to get in that interrogation room,” he pointed, “and get that bastard to talk -.”

“I don’t want you guys anywhere near him,” Murphy said. “I have people higher up handling this one and its not going to get to screwed it up. What I need is something more than this *phantom*. I need some real shit, John, and so far you’re the only one who’s seen him. And I have to go to the chief that shit? Are you nuts? You two jerks haven’t exactly been world-class in your busts. And City Hall is getting tired of it. Now I need you guys to find this *phantom* dealer. Get him and do it clean.”

“Yes sir,” Marshall said, sighing.

Murphy sat back in his chair. “All right. Any idea where to start?”

“We’ll check the usuals, go from there,” Martinelli said. “Hopefully they’ll get something from the questioning.”

Murphy nodded. “Listen, I told you City Hall is sick of you guys and bad busts. If this doesn’t pan out, I’m not sure if I can hold on to your badges for you, ok?” The two detectives nodded. “All right, get out here.” Murphy watched them leave with a somber look and then picked up the phone to resume his day.

III

The Bossman came around to the front of his desk. Ramon sat in the chair in front of it. “The shipment of heroin comes in next week. I want you, Mister Enriquez to be back in business for that sale,” the Bossman said.

“Is it safe?” Ramon asked. “The cops are going to be breathing on me anytime.”

“I have taken care of Detective Morasutto. He is preoccupied with his brother’s apparent drug use. And Sergeant Bailey, let’s just say he’ll probably be heading into early retirement very soon,” the Bossman said. “The police department will not be a problem to you.”

Ramon nodded. "How much is the shipment?"

"Enough to bring that early retirement dream of yours closer to your next birthday," the Bossman replied. "You should see Arizona sometime in the spring if all goes well with the sale of your store."

Ramon bit his lip and choked. He tried to draw in a breath but the air was stuffed between elation and excitement. The Bossman saw he didn't move and smiled. "I thought you would be pleased. You have been a quality distributor, which is why I have ignored your business with Quimby. Right now I am interested in moving this supply very quick. The police will be dormant for a while, but not forever. By the time the leaves change, police nuisance will be back to normal."

"It's going to take some time to move that much stuff," Ramon said. "Even if it is heroin. It has a street price higher than coke, it'll take some time."

"Notify your best dealers and clients. Let them know this is a one-time only shot to get rich," the Bossman said and walked back to the rear of his desk. "That should motivate them."

"Heroin's a big deal," Ramon said. "Most of my people don't touch it."

"They will when they hear the profits sing to them," the Bossman said. "And start with that Chinese dealer."

"*Hugal!*" Ramon asked. "He won't touch it. He is very specific on his dealings, very specific."

The Bossman smiled and held up a finger. "Mister Jia has had some bad luck lately and I think he needs to make up the loss. Entice him and he'll go for it."

"Wasn't he involved in some busts lately?"

"Just happened to be there, but the police have nothing on anyone they don't already have in custody," the Bossman said. "Don't worry, we are all going to profit from this in a very big way." The Bossman laughed, but Ramon just sat in the seat, thinking about Arizona and prison bars.

IV

The lieutenant wore a better grade suit than most cops. And when he had the maintenance man open Bailey's locker, he could smell Armani as his next purchase. "Well, well, well," Nile Rogers said to his partner. "What do we have here?" Rogers held up a baggy of colorful pills. His partner took it from him.

"Looks like a few uppers, a few downers, a this, a that," Steve Walker said. His suit wasn't as nice as Rogers, but he was only a young sergeant. "Think he got this shit at one of those GNC places up the mall?"

Rogers shook his head and frowned, pulling the corner of his mouth open and gritting his teeth. "I don't know, Stevie," he said. "It looks like Sergeant Bailey has got some serious explaining to do."

A loud voice came from outside the locker room and the door opened with a thud. "What the fuck do you mean internal affairs wants to search my -." Bailey stopped and saw Rogers and Walker standing by his locker with the maintenance man and his bolt cutters. "What the fuck do you two want?"

The Maintenance man suddenly remembered a leaky faucet and excused himself. Bailey was with Captain Murphy. Rogers took the baggy back.

"So, Jack, if we test this, Stevie and I think it might diet supplement pills or something," Rogers said. "How close would we be? You're kinda thin, so these can't be those enzyme, get ripped like a fuckin' madman pills, now could they? What are they Steve?"

"Nutritional herbal supplements," Walker replied.

Rogers grinned out of the corner of his mouth. "Yeah, that's them. You taking you vitamins, Jack?"

"I've never seen that shit before in my life," Bailey snapped.

"I know, everyone says that."

Walker sifted through the top shelf and pulled something out. "Well, look at this," he said. Rogers turned and saw Walker with a leather zip up wallet wide open. Inside was a flame burnt spoon with a syringe kit. He had another baggy with it containing gray powder. "This must be that milk shake shit you drink to get really pumped." Rogers gave a sharp whistle.

"Aw, fuck you guys, that shit was fucking planted!" Bailey was yelling. "You two fucking assholes have no right -."

"You have the right, though. To remain silent. Anything you say -."

"Fuck off!"

"- can and will be used -."

"Blow it out you ass, ouch! Fucking cuffs are too tight!"

"- against you in a court of law."

"Ah! Let me go! Let me out of this shit!"

The two Internal Affairs officers led Bailey through the station as their peers watched.

V

The commuter cafeteria was half full and noisy, even for the late afternoon. Hu Jia sat by the window, the side of his head on his hand. He had an iced tea in front of him, but barely touched it. He sighed, thought of what he was going to do. The cash was running out quickly. He was able to pay the rent, get the tuition out of the way, but was left with a small lump of cash and two bills: rent or Spring tuition. He desperately needed to go to class, but that last deal was too close. He didn't want to have to do any more deals, not one.

Chucky Adidas came and saw him three days before. Chucky only wore Adidas clothing, most of them sweat suits and gym clothes. Hu didn't understand the appeal. Hu was sitting on the front step of his building flipping through his new textbooks. Normally he'd be thrilled, elated to be starting the school year, but it came bitterly. The deal. The deal had gone bad and he'd lost his payday stash.

He found out soon after on the street that the cops were looking for a Chinese dealer they called *The Phantom*. Hu found it nerve racking, but Jamal at the courts said there was only one cop who said the guy was Chinese, the one who got away, and even he couldn't be sure. Hu was relieved no one knew who the dealer was, but he knew it couldn't last. And even so, he was still out five figures.

Chucky usually made liaison contacts for Ramon and various other suppliers with small timers in the area. Hu could trust him with business, and that was only because Chucky reported to Bossman Fernandez. Hu was going through an Emily Dickinson poem in an anthology when Chucky approached him.

"Yo, Mighty *Whojah*," Chucky said swaying. "What's it is, ma'man."

Hu looked up and saw Chucky's hand out. He gave him a *homes* slap. "Hallo, Chucky."

"Yo, whachu reading there rice cake?" Chucky asked. "Mang, that shit look all garbage and shit, mang." He pointed to the text. Hu ignored him and closed the book. "Damn, mang, that shit is just shit, you know what I mean? Damn!"

Hu looked down the street. Three girls were playing hopscotch on the sidewalk.

"So, you wanna go fo' walk?" Chucky asked. Hu still looked down the street, squinting. He looked at Chucky.

"Wha', fowa?" Hu asked, thick with the Chinese accent he could never hide.

"Got a deal you might be interested in," Chucky said. "This one's a big score. Heard you might need the money."

Hu stopped breathing, but didn't flinch. That shockwave, the excited and scared nerve that pulsates ripped through him. He sat still for a moment. Chucky gestured with his hands, twirling them up in front of him. "Come on, mang, let's go chat."

Hu nodded, packed his books into his bag and slung it over his shoulder. Chucky knew enough when and where to talk. They got three blocks down the street before he said, "Listen, mang. Major shipment. As much shit as you want. And this is high-end smack, none of that blow shit. This is high-grade heroin. Major shit."

"I don't deal with heroin," Hu said. "Tell Ramon I'll pass."

"Whojah, mang, don't get all fucking stubborn on this shit," Chucky said. "This is a one in a million chance, major shit. Top grade, high priced, the works."

"No."

"I'm telling ya, this is not one to be missed."

"No. Too dangerous. Coke one thing. Smack totally different. Street poison."

"What the fuck, mang, you think blow is any different? Fuck, mag, you're being stupid. Shit is shit and this is shit that'll bring in the dough. That's the only difference that should matter. Listen, I got others to communicate with, but you beep me if you change your mind. Remember, as much shit as you want and even a credit since *youse* a preferred customer and all."

Hu stopped. He looked at Chucky and then up the street. An old lady was walking her dog.

"You just think it over, let me know, but don't wait too long. This shit is bound to go fast. Once in a lifetime."

Once in a lifetime, Hu thought. He sighed again, not noticing all the students in the cafeteria, not even Melanie from the Accounting office, the pretty blonde girl who was so nice to him a few weeks ago. She walked through the room with friends when she saw Hu by the window alone. "I'll catch up with you guys later," she said and walked over to Hu, still slumped over his arm.

She smiled and knocked lightly on the table. Hu turned his head and forgot his dilemma. "Hi," she said. "Hu, do you remember me, Melanie from the -."

"Accounting office. Yes, of course. Hallo."

"Hello," she said. "How have you been? Like your classes?"

Hu looked and nodded, wide eyed.

"Do you mind if I -."

Hu snapped out of his trance. "Oh, no," he said cleaning the table of his books. "Please, sit." She tossed her bag in first and sat down.

She smiled. "I just saw you sitting over here and thought I'd stop by and say hello." Hu gave a small smile and nodded. "I wasn't interrupting anything was I?"

Hu shook his head. "Oh, no, not at all. I was just – just thinking. Have dilemma."

"Got a tough class?" She grimaced.

"Oh no, classes are fine. I like them all. I just am in a rock and hard place." He sighed. "Ever have to do something you don't want to do, but you have to do it?"

"Like a bad term paper?"

Hu shook his head. "Something harder, terrible."

"I think so, why?"

Hu shook his head. "Just got a lot of on my mind, that is all." He sighed and she looked at him, hoping he would say more.

"Sometimes life doesn't give us the best options, huh?" She frowned and wrinkled her nose.

He shook his head. "I figure out what to do."

She smiled. "Come on, cheer up, we got fourteen weeks of this madness." She giggled and got Hu to smile.

"No matter. How are your classes?"

"Good," she said. "My Ancient History class is going to be a bit tough. I'm not great at remembering facts and how they're supposed to go. But we have a research paper to write before the end of the semester, so that should help. It's just the tests that will be hard."

"You do ok," Hu said. "Just study. History good. My problem is English. Not very good with English."

Melanie smiled. "How long have you been in this country? I mean, you weren't – I just assumed -."

Hu held up his hand. "I been here ten year. It still hard. I was born in village in China, vedy communist. Then family come here, but father not around. It just me and my mudder and little sister. It hard for her cause she is too young to remember. She has become vedy Americanized."

"What happened to your dad?"

"He leave. We not see him in many year."

Melanie frowned "I'm sorry."

"It long time ago," Hu said. "But mudder sick all the time and medicine expensive."

"She must have medical benefits where she works," Melanie said.

Hu shook his head. “No work.” Melanie frowned, feeling selfish for complaining about class work. “So I have to provide. Mudder can’t work, sister too young.” He sighed. “Sorry, should not vent.”

Melanie reached over and held his hand. “No, it’s ok, really. I don’t mind.” He looked up and saw her smiling. “My friends say I’m a good listener. And I’m pretty good at English if you ever want any help.”

Hu smiled and nodded. “Ok, but you call me if you need help with History. I good at dat. I help dere.”

Melanie laughed and nodded. “Deal.”

It was a chore for Hu to leave the house. He knew that as soon as he did he’d be drawn to Ramon like a magnet. He left with his bag slung over his shoulder, the same one he’d traveled with in the sewer pipe. This time it was empty and dry. He’d gotten rid of the damaged stash immediately after the pipe escape and still ached over the loss. Last time, he thought as he walked out the front door. Last time I sell.

Ramon no sooner looked at his watch when he noticed Hu coming towards his store. Hu walked past and disappeared around a corner. The narrow alley was barely wide enough even for Hu, but he made it through with his bag in his hand. The back door to Ramon’s store was cracked open and Hu slipped in. Ramon was waiting for him. They both nodded and Ramon waved for Hu to come through.

“Always on time, you are,” Ramon said, but Hu did not reply. Ramon spoke easy and quiet. “This is premium high grade source. There is very little better on the earth. This is a one-time shot with this stuff; so don’t be shy in your pricing. How much do you want?” Hu held up three fingers. “After this is gone, I can not guarantee there will be any left if you need more.”

Hu shook his head. “Will not want refill,” he said. “This last for a while.”

Ramon fiddled with the scale. “I heard about your loss, and I am very sorry. Even sorrier to hear you are getting out, but just as well. You and I don’t have the blood for this business. I, too, may be getting out after this. Just be careful.” Ramon looked at Hu. “It’s still a little hot out there.” Hu nodded and watched him weigh the three packs. “Have you got buyers lined up already?”

“A few,” Hu replied. “I want to sell this quick.”

“Well, don’t take short money for this stuff,” Ramon said. He finished with the scale and slid the three packs to Hu. Hu pulled a wad of money out of his pocket and handed to Ramon. Hu nodded for him to count, but Ramon shook his head. “I know it is all there.” Hu loaded his bag and zipped it closed. Ramon extended his hand to Hu, which he had never done before. Hu shook it. “I

wish you the best," Ramon said. Hu nodded one last time and left. Ramon watched him go and felt sorry it would be the last time.

"Oh, that's more than last time," Martin said. "And not as much."

"Premium grade," Hu replied.

Martin paused for a moment and then bobbed his head. "Ok, I'll just take a little more than that, though."

Like before, Martin walked away and Hu vanished. He thought the stuff was a grayer than normal, but like the dink said, it was premium. Martin strolled home through the neighborhood unknowing that he was about to die.

- end -