

A close-up photograph of a hammer with a wooden handle and a metal head, lying against a red brick wall. The hammer is heavily stained with bright red blood, particularly on the handle and the head. The background is a textured brick wall, and the overall lighting is dark and moody, emphasizing the crime scene nature of the image.

**A BENNETT & DEMARKO MYSTERY**

**THE ANGEL STREET  
ASSASSINATION**

**AARON S  
GALLAGHER**

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. -Aaron S Gallagher

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This book is dedicated to Jennie Rosenblum

Editor, mentor, fan, Jersey girl

# The Angel Street Assassination

A Bennett & DeMarko Mystery

Aaron S Gallagher



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# CHAPTER ONE

Friday 11:30 p.m.

A moonless night, dark and cold and silent. Outside the windows the wind tossed weightless flakes of new snow into the sky. A light flared in the darkness as the door of the refrigerator opened.

The light illuminated a tall man wrapped in a warm flannel robe as he reached into the inviting white interior and removed a glass bottle of milk. He closed the door as he twisted the cap from the bottle. He drank from the nearly full container. He emptied almost a third of it with a sigh. He glanced around the kitchen, still holding the milk. The clock over the stove told him it was almost midnight.

The milk soothed the heartburn that had awoken Sal D'Amico. He burped quietly, one cadaverous hand covering his mouth. He sipped again and turned to look out of the kitchen windows into the dark, cold night beyond. At first all he saw was his reflection: tall, thin to the point of gaunt, hair standing up in a crest on one side of his narrow skull. The hand went again to his mouth and he smoothed the thin mustache under the slightly hawkish nose. His stomach gurgled. He winced and swigged from the bottle again.

Sal went to the window, peering out into the night. He sipped the milk a third time, staring at the lazy, almost slow-motion spill of snow in the air. He leaned closer to see if the birdbath outside the window had frozen over.

Movement behind him in the reflection drew his eye. He turned. "It's all right, Bill. Just some indig-

The figure in the doorway wasn't his bodyguard, Bill Higgins. Too thin, too short. He couldn't see the face. Wary alertness gripped him.

"Who are you?"

No answer.

"Who sent you?" Sal's voice was firm, resigned.

Silence.

"You've got a lot of nerve, coming into my house like this. You know who I am?"

"Yes," the figure answered.

D'Amico glanced around the kitchen. Too far from the knives. He hadn't bothered to drop the little .32 into his robe pocket on his way out of the bedroom. The cooling allure of the milk had called too strongly.

A costly mistake.

The figure in the doorway of the kitchen took a hesitant step. Sal's eyes caught the hesitation and knew what it meant. He raised a hand. "Look, you don't want to do this."

The thumb pulled the hammer back. The mechanism of the gun was loud in

the semidarkness. “No.”

Sal’s mouth compressed into a thin line. Eyes on the gun he growled, “You’d better not miss. You don’t get a second chance.”

When the hand started to rise, Sal took his shot. He heaved the milk bottle in an overhand that Sal had practiced a thousand times- forty years ago in the streets and empty lots of Brooklyn. His aim had diminished, he saw, but the bottle tumbled end over end and shattered against the doorframe next to the gunman. The explosion sent shards of glass and sprays of milk in every direction. The gunman flinched away and Sal took his chance. He darted left around the kitchen table and through the narrow hall that led to the sitting room off to one side. He heard the gunman stumble after him.

Sal D’Amico had been many things in his life: Gambino underboss, gentleman, construction company owner, pimp. He was not a long-distance runner. More, he was never going to see the sunny side of fifty years old again. Heart thudding in his chest, Sal darted through the sitting room. He knew his rooms well, fortunately, because the scant light in the kitchen did not penetrate this deeply. He heard the gunman behind him. As he crossed the threshold of the sitting room into the foyer, he heard his pursuant stumble in the dark and a tight grin stretched his lips.

He hurried across the foyer, ignoring the front door. The cars were all in the garage, and anyhow the snow was two feet deep and he was in a robe and slippers. Besides, he had a better idea.

Through the second hall he went, until he came to the second door on the left. He put a shoulder to it and twisted the knob. It stuck. He reared back and hit it again. The door squealed and burst inward. Sal rushed into the room, feeling the hand of his assailant brush the back of his robe.

He stumbled through the room, slippers snagging on the bare plywood of the floor. The walls were skeletal and there was plastic draped on two of them. The plastic seemed to breathe as the wind billowed them, the outer shell of the walls of what would become a game room were not airtight. He jammed his left big toe against a stud nailed to the floor and fell headlong, arms flying out before him. He crashed to the floor where his wet bar would be when the room was complete. He scrambled to get to his feet, the wind knocked from his lungs. At the same moment he struggled upright, the gunman crashed into him, tackling him to the bare floor once more. They fell hard, Sal’s breath still gone, the gunman’s own breath exploding from his lungs as he landed hard on his ribs. Sal heard the gun skitter across the wood floor.

He rolled onto his hands and knees, climbed to his feet, and started to run. He crashed into a pair of sawhorses. A single sheet of plywood across them made a rough table, upon which a large toolbox lay. The whole structure collapsed as Sal bumped it, and the toolbox clattered to the floor, scattering piles of tools.

Sal hit the floor a final time, and this time he screamed with sudden agony as he fell onto a crowbar. The tines of the hooked end punctured his thigh. He recoiled and hit his head against an upright beam, hard enough to see stars.

His assailant, meanwhile, had clambered to his hands and knees, frantically searching for the gun. Unable to locate it, he turned to face Sal.

D'Amico writhed, rolled, and curled in a fetal ball, clutching his injured leg with both hands. Blood pulsed between his fingers. His eyes met his attacker's eyes, and for a second they just stared.

Sal moved first, groping for the crowbar, snarling a curse.

Fear widened his attacker's eyes, and he reached for the first thing he saw.

Before Sal could raise the heavy crowbar, a hammer came crashing down, shattering the delicate bones in Sal's right hand. He screamed again and jerked his hand away, cradling it to his chest. The air was loud with gasps and grunts of effort as both men struggled to catch their breath. The hammer came down again on Sal's knee and the brittle crack of metal on bone was almost louder than Sal's miserable, breathy screech. He collapsed sideways on the floor, trying unsuccessfully to drag himself away from his attacker.

The figure stood, the hammer dangling from one hand. He stared down at Sal D'Amico, who stopped his frantic scramble and turned. They regarded one another.

Sal cleared his throat and forced a laugh. "Y-you got me good with that thing. You got lucky, y'know?"

The heavy gasping for breath had subsided. The figure stared down at Sal. "No," he whispered. "I did not. That is why I am here."

"You don't h-have to," Sal stuttered, regretting the whine that crept into his voice. "I have money. I can get you anything you want. Name it."

The attacker advanced. "You cannot."

Sal raised his good hand. "I'm telling you I can do anything you want! Get you anything. Just don't! You got a choice here!"

The man raised the hammer over his head and whispered, "No, I do not."

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