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THE **PRINCES** OF
PROHIBITION



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THE PROHIBITION YEARS p. 81

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Une collection imaginée avec humour,
enthousiasme et provocation par Rupert Morgan

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CHAPTER I

THE *TOMOKA* WAITED on a calm, cold ocean. It sat immobile in the water, the entire ship trembling with the diesel respiration of its engine – a slow, rolling rumble that sounded to the 19 year-old Patrick Bailey like a dragon sleeping in its cavern.

In the early morning fog the continent of America, just over three miles away, was perfectly invisible, but somewhere far in the distance Pat could hear the long, sad call of a train sounding its horn as it travelled along the New Jersey coast.

“Give the signal again, son,” Bill McCoy softly instructed him.

Pat flashed the ship's searchlight three times toward

the coast. He liked McCoy. There was no darkness about him. The proprietor and captain of the *Tomoka* was exactly like the American men Pat had seen in films back in Ireland: tall and strong with the easy optimism of a people who knew their country represented the future.

There was an answering flash of light in the fog. And twice. And again.

“Wilson – ready the gun,” McCoy ordered.

Pat glanced nervously at the captain as one of the mariners went to occupy the machine gun post at the front of the ship.

“Don't worry, son – it's just a precaution,” McCoy smiled at him. “Not everybody in the bootlegger¹ business is an honest law-breaker like myself. Point the searchlight toward that ship now.”

Pat turned the light to the place where they had seen the three flashes. Soon, a milky light answered through the mist. They heard the sound of the other boat's engine as it began to move closer.

“Keep the light on them,” McCoy said. “Let them know where we are.”

1. See page 97

“How do you know it's the right ship, Captain?” Pat asked.

“I don't. That's why we have the gun.”

“Have you ever had to use it?”

“No, but only because everyone knows I *could* use it!” McCoy laughed, “See, Pat, I'm a believer in what old President Roosevelt said a few years back about the art of diplomacy: '*Speak softly and carry a big stick*'. This way nobody makes trouble.”

“What if it's a navy ship?”

“We're over three miles from the US coast. These are international waters and there isn't a goddamn law in the world that says I can't sit here with a cargo full of Canadian whisky if I want to. That's the beauty of my system – out here I'm a free man and Prohibition be damned.”

Slowly, the other boat moved closer, the sound of its motor growing louder. Soon, the fog was white with the illumination of their two searchlights, the milky air dancing with currents like cigarette smoke in a bar. When the other boat was close enough that they could see the dark silhouette of its prow, McCoy picked up a

loudhailer and called out across the water.

“Approaching vessel – this is the *Tomoka*. Identify yourself!”

There was a brief pause before a man with a strong New Jersey accent answered:

“This is the... er... fishin' boat *Albatros*. Mister Madden sends Captain McCoy his regards an' says he's hopin' for a big catch of fish today.”

“Mr Madden will be pleased to hear that we have a large cargo of Canadian... salmon on board,” McCoy joked. “Permission to come alongside, *Albatros*.”

Putting down the loudhailer, McCoy said: “I want all hands on deck and ready to transfer the cargo! Except you Wilson. Stay on that gun.”

“Is something wrong?” Pat asked.

“Not particularly. But these men work for Owney Madden², the biggest gang boss in New York. I figure there's probably a reason why they call him The Killer.”

The other boat's engine growled as it began to move toward the *Tomoka*.