

PART I

———— TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY ————
DECEMBER 31, 1907, AND JANUARY 1, 1908
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Pulliam folded back the sheet and set his bare feet on the hardwood floor. Something thin and dry crunched under his left foot. He pulled his leg over his right knee and brushed the remains of a gray paint chip off his sole. He looked up and saw where small leaf-shaped flakes peeled away from the ceiling.

He sighed and glanced at his lover. “I’m sending you back to Louisville,” he said softly.

“Pardon?”

“You heard me.”

“Sending me? You talk to me as if I were your wife. Or your nigger.”

“It’s not safe.” He stood and crossed the room to the closet.

“You’re angry with me because the paint’s chipping, Harry? I watched your eyes.” Pulliam didn’t reply. “Do you have someone else?”

“Of course not.” He began to dress.

“Then why do you want me to leave?”

“I don’t want you to leave. Quite the contrary.” He reached for the hanger holding his suit. “It’s dangerous for us here.”

“How do you mean us? It’s not dangerous for me.”

“Yes, it is.” As he was about to put on his suit jacket, he looked for his gold silk handkerchief in the upper pocket, but it wasn’t there or in any pocket. He made a point of being very careful about every detail of his clothing. They had men watching him. If he left looking any different than when he arrived, they would nod and jot down in their notebooks that he had lost his handkerchief while visiting the flat on Bleecker Street.

He turned back to confront the beautiful face that questioned him

from the pillow. “Do you want your name to be associated with a love nest in Greenwich Village? Do you want your family to read about it? Or hear about it from friends? Or enemies? A Russell of Louisville caught in a love nest? A fairy love nest?”

“But this is New York. Nobody cares.”

“They will care in the National League, and so they will see to it that they know in Louisville.” He found the handkerchief on the closet floor.

“Is it a woman? There are always pretty women around base ball players and base ball men.”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Women like you. I see how they look at you.”

Pulliam shook his head. “I will not discuss this with you now.”

“At least you admit it’s a discussion.”

“That was a mistake.” Pulliam sat on the edge of the bed and leaned over to tie his shoes.

“I will not go back. I detest Louisville.”

“I mean to give up this flat.” Pulliam saw that his black shoes needed polish. “I plan to call the agent tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow is New Year’s Day.”

“The day after then.”

“Will you see me tomorrow? Since you are about to leave me? I don’t want to be alone on New Year’s Eve...”

“You won’t be alone.”

“...while you attend some perfectly horrible base ball banquet where I’m not welcome.”

“I won’t be entirely welcome, either.” He paused. “I told you. I am doing a favor for a friend, and I am already late.”

“Your friend is dead.”

“A favor for his family. I am obligated.”

“Aren’t you worried that I’ll misbehave?”

“No more than usual.” He returned to the closet for his coat and hat.

“Set me up in the club.”

Pulliam laughed. “That would be just perfect.”

“Why not? I’m a man. I’ll fit in.”

“You don’t fit in. It’s a different world.”

“Then you don’t want me.”

“Of course I want you, Ted. Didn’t I just show you that I want you?” He stood and went to the door. “But they are watching me, and they will crucify us both.”

“It’s a stupid game. A vile game. Why do you work for them?”

Pulliam lowered his voice to a whisper, pronouncing each word with a clipped firmness. “Never, ever speak of the game in those terms. It is not the game. It is the men who own the game that drag it down.”

“And you are on a noble mission to save the holy game. Jesus driving the money changers from the temple.”

He stared at his lover, now sitting up, his head against the wall, his torso exposed to the waist. *Why didn’t Ted appreciate the game? How could he not appreciate the game?*

Pulliam had once risked bringing Ted to Washington Park in Brooklyn to watch the Superbas play the Philadelphia team. He tried to teach him the basics of the game and show him how at its best it could be as uplifting as fine art or music. But it was hopeless and always would be.

“Be ready to leave here by the end of next week.”

“End of the week? I can’t and you know I can’t.” Ted slid back down onto the pillow. “The gallery needs me at least until the exhibit opens in February.”

“But you told me you hate the gallery.”

“I have obligations, just as you do.”

“Is it an exhibit of the painter I met at Mouquin’s?” He checked the inner left pocket of his suit jacket for the sheet of paper on which he had scribbled the toast he was scheduled to give at the banquet.

“Yes, and seven others. The exhibit opens February third. Macbeth will need me until then.”

“His name fits,” said Pulliam as he walked to the window and looked down onto a dark Bleecker Street, illuminated only by the light spilling out of several windows along the lane and a lone gas streetlamp three doors away. “A group show then? Do they all celebrate what is ugly in the world, like your friend?”

The black carriage remained parked directly across from the flat.

The driver sat atop his perch, bundled in a long brown coat, a dark scarf wrapped around his head under his top hat.

"It's not the art that's ugly," said Ted. "It's the men that own the art who bring it down."

Pulliam spun around. "I mean to give up this flat as soon as possible," he said. "I will continue to subsidize your rooms at the Prince George until the end of January. You will need to find other lodgings through February third." He went to the door.

"Will you visit me in my rooms?" asked Ted.

"You know I cannot be seen with you at your hotel. Why do you insist on...insist on..." He opened the door and walked out of the flat without looking back.

Thomas stood with his cab at the corner of Bleecker and MacDougal. Pulliam climbed into the hansom saying, "Delmonico's, Thomas." He rubbed his eyes and his temples. He felt the beginnings of what he knew would be an intense headache. Fighting with Ted inevitably made him angry with himself, and the strain could make him physically ill.

He would call Ted in the morning and invite him to dinner at Mouquin's where they would chat about his artists and the upcoming show at the Macbeth Galleries. They would have fun together. It would ease the tension between them, and perhaps he would convince Ted that some time away from New York would be best for them both.

He would then phone his sister Grace and wish her and her family a happy 1908. Her son, his namesake, would be two years old in ten days and talking more clearly than ever. The thought of speaking with him eased the pressure behind his eyes.

A dram of whiskey might kill the pain in his temples, and he knew John Brush would have a selection of the best bourbons at the National League banquet. Perhaps he would have two drams.

The hansom turned up MacDougal Street and approached Washington Square. Pulliam tapped on the rear wall behind him and shouted, "Thomas, is a carriage following us?"

A few moments passed. Pulliam imagined Thomas turning in his seat to check the street behind them.

"There is a carriage behind us, Mr. Pulliam."

"Does the driver wear a brown coat and a scarf?"

"It's difficult to see, sir. He wears a dark coat and scarf, much like my own. Shall I pull over and let them pass?"

"No. That won't be necessary. Just try to keep your eye on them."

They turned at Waverly Place and drove along the park.

"Sir?" shouted Thomas.

"Yes, Thomas?"

"The carriage continued toward Eighth Street."

"Thank you, Thomas."

Of course it did, Pulliam thought. They know I'm going to Delmonico's. Brush would have given them instructions to take a different route to Forty-Fourth Street and wait for me there.

He put his head in his hands. The pain behind his eyes began to throb.

Squeezing herself into the corner of the last seat of the car, Lenore tried to ignore her fellow subway passengers, most of whom were quite drunk. At each stop more stumbled on board, bottles in hand, hugging and laughing and swaying freely with the movement of the train. The passenger next to her, a girl who could not yet be twenty, had turned away from her, legs in the aisle, in order to respond to the open leering of a young man standing above her. When the train turned in the tunnel, the force pushed the girl into Lenore's side, but the couple continued flirting as if Lenore existed only to stabilize the girl's balance.

When the train stopped at Seventh Avenue she waited until the revelers had left the car before she followed them onto the station platform. The joyful din of the New Year's Eve crowd in Times Square floated down the exit and echoed in the hollow of the subway tunnel. Passengers from the cars behind her rushed past to join the party on the street. The volume of the noise grew as she climbed the stairs.

On the sidewalk, the crowd was so thick that she could barely move.

She worried that she would be late, and she did not want to be late or it would be her last performance.

She could do nothing to avoid the pressing throng of young men in their bowlers and women in their huge, flopping Merry Widow hats. They were bundled up against the cold, but most had long since loosened coat buttons and untied scarves. Some blew horns, some waved rattlers, and others rang bells. Many just hooted and hollered for the sheer drunken joy of it all. Couples embraced openly.

She had difficulty distinguishing the prostitutes from the casual merrymakers, and she knew a working girl when she saw one. So many of her theater friends had in desperation turned to brothels, or walked the streets, to make ends meet. The banquet at Delmonico's would be a temptation for others to slip into their ranks. They would be encouraged to do so. When her friend May recruited her to join the small chorus line that would perform for a private New Year's banquet, she knew she could be among them.

If it were a dinner for Morgan or Hearst or Standard Oil, she would have been flattered as only the best dancers in the line were invited to perform for the most important businessmen and politicians. But May told her the banquet was for base ball men. She liked base ball and had met many base ball players and several team magnates when her father was alive. But she had also heard too many stories about John McGraw's pool halls in Herald Square and the parties in the uptown hotels near the ball parks. Her performance, she assumed, was expected to include a one-on-one after their dance, especially since they were to present a version of "Take Me 'Round in a Taxicab" being developed for Grace Leigh, one of the stars of Mr. Ziegfeld's new review. Her costume was little more than an "On Duty" sandwich sign over a tight, strapless bodice that covered less than a bathing suit. They would flail around the banquet room and wait to be hailed by one of the guests.

She wondered for a moment if any of the base ball magnates would recognize her, but quickly dismissed the thought. She had been very young, barely in her teens, when she had last met base ball men at her father's memorial service.

She fought the crowd up Seventh Avenue to Forty-Fourth. She had

never seen Times Square so bright. The Hotel Astor stood ablaze with brilliant electric illumination, every one of its dozen floors projecting a steady flow of warm Edison light out from the elegant, red-brick facade. The last of the brownstone row houses stood as narrow shadows overwhelmed by the mass of the new hotels and theaters. Times Square, or Longacre Square as she still thought of it, was no longer a residential neighborhood.

She paused and looked up at the Jardin de Paris, atop the New York Theatre, where Ziegfeld's first review had made its unexpected success the previous summer. May told her that if she did as she was told tonight she would get a second audition, this time in front of Mr. Ziegfeld himself.

"I put in a good word for you with Abby," May had said. "Don't let me down." Lenore didn't believe her, but she didn't know what else to do.

A blizzard of confetti and ticker tape swirled through the air. The noise grew to an earsplitting pitch. Lenore turned and looked back toward the tall new Times Building at the bottom of the square. It reminded her of the Flatiron Building in Madison Square, but with a wedge cut out of the top ten floors. A huge illuminated globe sat at the top of the building's flagpole. She had read that they would experiment with dropping it at midnight instead of setting off the traditional fireworks.

Perfect, she thought. A huge electric base ball signaling that 1907 was now 1908.

Henry T. "Monkey" McBride sat at Forty-Seventh and Broadway on the smaller of the Engine Fifty-four fire wagons, looking down into the flowing crowd. This New Year's Eve would be easy duty because it was just an electric ball instead of fireworks. Nonetheless, someone had to keep watch, and so there he sat reining in the damn horses that would never get used to the whistles, horns, and rattles. But he was content to watch the party. It could have been worse. Normally he would have been on call, ready to climb into some fourth- or fifth-story tenement inferno.

To his left, at the end of the square in the middle of Broadway, he noticed a wide circle of women tormenting a stumbling, obviously drunk young man in their center. He wore a black bowler, slightly crushed and tilted on the side of his head. He wobbled and made a run at their locked arms, attempting to break through. They held firm and flung him back to the middle of their circle, howling with laughter as he fell to his hands and knees. His hat stayed on his head.

Whores, thought McBride. *Having a laugh at the expense of a drunk, one of my own neighbors from the Tenderloin, no doubt. Good for them. Let him have it, the silly bastard.*

The young man struggled to his feet and tried again, with the same result. Again the women laughed, slapping their thighs and clapping their hands. This continued for ten minutes until several police arrived. They playfully swatted the girls' linked arms with billy clubs, hauled a couple away, and freed the young man to make his way into the crowd below Forty-Seventh.

I was right, thought McBride. *Whores. The police wouldn't treat a decent lady like that.*

He watched the drunk for several minutes, following his bobbing derby hat as it weaved down Broadway into the square. The shouting and noise grew louder. He looked up and saw the glowing white ball begin its descent.

Looks like a big electric base ball, he thought.

One of the women who had tormented the drunk followed him into the crowd, but he didn't notice her. He looked up to see the big bright ball slide down the flagpole. The crowd cheered. Arms waved high. Whistles and horns blew in a piercing cacophony. Hats flew through the air. The whore reached up, swiped his bowler, and flung it over the crowd. The man was too drunk to notice who stole his hat, but knew immediately that he would never find it among the hundreds being crushed on the street.

A damn pity, he thought, *that such a good hat should be gone, just like that, trampled and smashed and made useless on a cold night like New Year's Eve.* He decided right then and there that as soon as he had the money he would buy a new bowler, better than the one he had just lost. And the

new one would be brown so next year he could easily find it among all the black hats on the street. He almost picked up one of those black bowlers to replace the one he lost, but decided against it. *Who knows what kind of vermin lives in the hair and hats of the type of blokes who would be in Longacre Square on New Year's Eve?* He shrugged and turned west toward the Ninth Avenue El.

Certain she would be late, Lenore pushed her way onto Forty-Fourth and proceeded east. Amazed at how dark and empty the crosstown street became as soon as she left the square, she gathered up her heavy, full-length, black wool skirt and ran as best she could. It took several minutes to cover the long block to Sixth Avenue, cross under the El tracks, pass the huge red Hippodrome Theater, and then arrive at Fifth Avenue, across the street from Delmonico's.

It resembled an Italian villa rather than a restaurant. Ornate, terracotta-trimmed windows glowed golden yellow, an occasional shadow passing through the soft light. There was no flickering from candles, gaslight, or the simple lamps fueled by Rockefeller's Standard Illuminating Oil or kerosene, as in the windows of the city's tenements. Delmonico's was as fully wired for electric lights as the Hotel Astor in Times Square. The brightness of the third floor's tall double windows, each with a round porthole window above it, spilled onto Fifth Avenue and the three canopies that sheltered the busy Forty-Fourth Street entrance.

Lenore crossed the avenue and found the side door that led into the basement kitchen. The sudden change from the chill of January in New York to the tropical heat of the kitchen all but knocked her over. A large man in a long-sleeve, institutional white shirt; filthy apron; and squat toq held out an arm and stopped her.

"Which party?" He sized her up as if she were a hog belly ready for his butcher's knife.

"The base ball dinner," she answered.

"Ah. Okay. You are a taxicab, no?"

She nodded.

“Okay. You late.” He gestured toward the far side of the kitchen.

She hurried past a long row of polished copper prep counters where a gauntlet of cooks worked under hanging racks of huge metal pots with lids the size of hand cymbals. They looked her over and leered as they sliced meats and prepared sauces, insulting her in a rich mix of languages. She silently wished each of them fewer digits in the New Year.

As she turned the corner at the last counter she heard a man call, “Hey, taxi!” She glanced at him. An overweight, middle-aged cook with a thick drooping mustache grinned at her. Sweat beaded on his forehead and ran down his nose. He pulled the bottom of his apron away to reveal his open pants and a huge, gray-red salami hanging out of his unbuttoned fly. “You want some of my meat?”

“Lenore,” called May. “Come on already. You’ve got one minute to change. Here,” she said as she tossed a cardboard placard and bundled fabric at her. “A good thing there ain’t much to change into.”

“Where do I dress?” Lenore started to ask.

“Undress is more like it. Right here,” answered May. “You got no time to find the ladies’.”

Lenore glanced at the other eleven dancers in their “costumes,” sandwich signs that covered bodices cut low in harlequin colors of black and ruby red. She looked at the cooks who were now clapping and cheering, and then she stepped behind the line of girls, hiding herself as she stripped. The entire kitchen booed loudly. She balled up her clothes and held them under her arm as they made their way up the service stairs to the third floor.

The idea of the New Year’s Eve banquet distressed Pulliam. He had to cancel plans and hurt Ted in order to attend. But Brush had invited him and made it known that George Dovey was coming down from Boston, Gary Herrmann from Cincinnati, and Charlie Murphy of the Cubs all the way from Chicago. His old friend and former employer Barney Dreyfuss would be in from Pittsburgh. The locals, Charlie Ebets from the Brooklyn Superbas and Frank Farrell of the American

League Highlanders, would be there as well. And he would have to deal with John McGraw. The Giants’ beady-eyed, squat little manager made Pulliam sick. He represented everything that was wrong with base ball. His foul mouth and childish, mean-spirited histrionics on the field dragged the game back into the nineteenth century.

Christy Matthewson would attend with McGraw. The wide-eyed and naïve lad from Pennsylvania was the Giants’, and perhaps the game’s, best pitcher. Why he socialized with McGraw away from the ball park Pulliam could never understand.

But O. P. Caylor’s daughter Lenore would be there, and so perhaps Jane Matthewson, Elsie Brush, and other wives. Their presence would temper the behavior of the men.

Pulliam jumped out as the hansom pulled up to Delmonico’s Forty-Fourth Street entrance, busy with revelers either just arriving to celebrate the beginning of 1908 or leaving for parties elsewhere in the city.

“Thank you, Thomas,” he said. “I will find a cab after the banquet.”

“I don’t mind waiting, sir. There might be too few cabs this night.”

“But I will be taking a young lady home. She lives all the way uptown near 110th Street. And then it will be back to the club. You should go home.”

“I will be perfectly fine right here, sir. Enjoy yourself.”

Pulliam hesitated. “Very well, Thomas. Thank you. I am very late for the banquet so I anticipate it will end soon. It’s already,” he took his watch out of his vest pocket and flipped it open, “it’s already ten after twelve. Hmm. I guess I missed celebrating the stroke of midnight.”

“Happy New Year, sir.”

“Happy New Year, Thomas.”

He turned and walked up the steps under the middle of three canopies that extended to the curb. A uniformed doorman held the entrance open. Pulliam paused and handed him a coin.

“Do you see the hansom just now turning to wait across the street?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Please see that he gets a pot of fresh coffee and a flask of Courvoisier. I’ll settle the bill on my way out.”

He rode the elevator to the third floor with a young lady in a mink