

# Night of the Devil

## The Untold Story of Thomas Trantino and the Angel Lounge, Updated and Expanded

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### CHAPTER 1

#### An Old Cop with a Mission

A late-winter rain is lashing the house as the old cop sits in an easy chair. He wears a flannel shirt, heavy slacks, and thick white socks to guard against a chill. A pillow is plumped under his left arm. It takes him a while to get comfortable; even the little things are a chore since the stroke.

The cop, whose name is Andrew Voto, can use a little help whenever he rises from the chair, and he leans on a cane. Though he goes out regularly for lunch with friends, he is most comfortable in this house at 56 Christopher Street in the Borough of Lodi, New Jersey. Lodi is a very Italian, very close-knit community just across the Hudson River from New York City.

This Saturday in March 1999 is a perfect day for staying home, talking on the phone with friends, reminiscing. Not so long ago, Andy Voto was the police chief of Lodi, so he knows a lot of people.

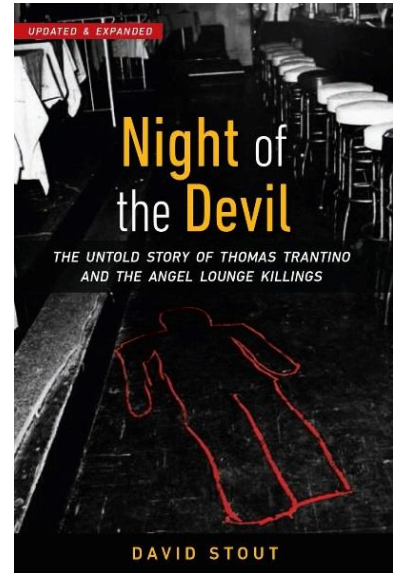
He has a lot of memories, too. Sometimes he has trouble making his words keep up with what he's trying to say. He blames the stroke for that and isn't a bit defensive. The memories are there, all right, and clear, each one of them. It's just that they run together or bounce off each other in odd ways. He has so many memories, now that he's closing in on seventy-three.

A couple of his mother's relatives were professional boxers a long time ago. Andy Voto knew Rocky Graziano, knew him well enough that the fighter came to see him in the hospital after the stroke, gave him a dollar bill for good luck. He knew the other Rocky too, the great heavyweight Marciano.

"He came to my mom's house for pasta," Andy Voto says. "I used to pick him up at Idlewild Airport. It was called Idlewild back then."

Andy Voto is at the place in life where a little thing can jog his memory and the years will just fall away, taking him back to a time where he wants both to laugh and to cry. It doesn't take much at all: a visitor asks about the photographs of two dogs, schnauzers of show quality, lovingly coiffed and primped. With no little pride and nostalgia, Andy says the dogs were his.

And then his mind brakes and does a hard right. Andy starts talking about his brother, and his brother's dog. "Pete had this Chihuahua that used to sleep on his shoulder when



Pete was on the sofa,” Andy recalls. He laughs at the image: Pete Voto, his older brother, also a cop, built like a bull (though with an oddly cherubic face), and just as strong. He’d been a wrestler in high school.

And what kind of dog did he have? A Chihuahua, for God’s sake!

The really funny thing is that Pete, for all his good qualities, wasn’t much of a dog lover. But he sure cared about that Chihuahua. Chico! That was his name.

“The dog died a few weeks after Pete did,” Andy says. He doesn’t say the dog died of a broken heart; he doesn’t have to.

Andy has a hard time imagining his brother as anything but a big, intimidating man. He wasn’t that tall, only about five ten, but he weighed close to 240 pounds. He had a neck like a fire hydrant and thick, beefy muscles. What would he be like if he had lived? Well, he’d be going on seventy-six. He’d probably be a little stooped over with age, and not as strong. Maybe he’d have arthritis. He’d be complaining about that when he wasn’t bragging about his children and grandchildren.

Pete served on the battleship *Alabama* in the Pacific in World War II. He got his nickname, “The Bull,” in the navy.

Andy remembers the time Rocky Marciano and his manager were having dinner with the Voto family. The manager said, “Rocky, I’d never bet against you in a fight, but if you went up against The Bull here ...”

Pete was just about the best big brother any kid could have, always walking Andy home from school and making sure he had his rubbers on in the wintertime.

“My brother Pete, he always worried that *I’d* get hurt on the job,” Andy says.

On this rainy afternoon, Andy talks just a little about what might have been. He doesn’t dwell on the paradox that Pete, his older brother, is forever young in memory. Hell, forty isn’t old at all. That’s how old Pete was when he died.

Andy Voto stands up and looks out at the rain. The window faces onto a cross street. Out there, he says, *right out there* less than a block away, that’s where Pete’s killer was that summer morning a long time ago. Trying to get away by hitching a ride with a milkman. Hell, there aren’t any milkmen anymore.

It’s fitting, somehow, that Pete’s killer was practically outside the window just after Andy got the phone call telling him his brother was dead. The killing took place not more than a half-mile away, after all. Lodi is such a small place, in every way.

Just for a minute, Andy Voto wonders out loud whether everything would have been better if the timing had been different that August morning—a minute one way or the other, say.

His eyes get a faraway look as he remembers. “Get my fucking gun!” he was shouting to his wife, Matty, just after the phone call. “Get my fucking gun! Someone killed my brother.”

What if he had dashed from the house in rage and grief while the killer was still outside? If they had shot it out, a lot of people would have been spared everything that followed. Maybe things would have been better no matter which bullets had found their mark ...

But Andy Voto doesn't let himself think that way for long. What's the point? There are things he loves about his life, especially his family. He has a mission, too. The mission is all about one man.

When he's in the mood, Andy maneuvers a big cardboard box into the center of the room. It's full of letters, old newspaper clippings, old detective magazines. The magazines are more than thirty-five years old, and they have big write-ups about the awful thing that happened on August 26, 1963.

That date is the dividing line in Andy Voto's life, and in a lot of other lives. From that day on, everything would be different for Andy Voto, for as long as he's on this earth.

Help yourself, he says. Look through the stuff all you want.

There's a picture of Pete Voto in his Lodi cop's uniform, big face, babylike, lit up with a smile. And there's a picture of young Gary Tedesco, wearing a serious face and the short-cropped hair and thin tie that were in style way back then. It's hard to believe that Gary would be in his late fifties now; that's how much time has gone by.

And there's a picture of Andy Voto, so much younger, so much bigger. Andy was no pushover physically; anyone can tell that from the old picture. It shows his face all torn up with grief and rage on the day of his brother's funeral.

The magazines are not wrinkled. The pages are not torn, and there is very little yellowing, considering how old all the stuff is. That's because Andy doesn't look at it very often.

So why does he keep the old magazines in the house at all? Doesn't it hurt to have them around?

No, he says. It doesn't. He's been hurt as much as he can be hurt. "Why do I save them? My brother's a part of history." The rain lashes the house some more, and for a moment his shoulders sag under the weight of years. "And maybe I'm not so far from being a part of history."