

Mark Hannon

1901

Patrolman Jerry Harrington stood at attention with the other men of the 5th Precinct's day platoon when Sergeant Rossa came in from his conference with the night watch sergeant. Stepping behind the desk, Rossa addressed the men in the indigo blue uniforms, his gray hair parted in the middle and plastered to his skull.

"Lads, as you know, there's big doins' at the park this week," he said in a thick Irish brogue. "The President himself will be coming to town, and he'll be bringing soldiers, Secret Servicemen and God knows who else with him. There's been maybe 100,000 people to visit the Exposition every day, and there'll be more to see the President. It's our job to make sure nothin' happens to him," he said, his walrus mustache shaking. "You'll have plenty of help – there's detectives from all over the country out there who'll be looking for pickpockets, bunko men, counterfeiters and especially, anarchists.

"Now," he said, his voice rising and his face reddening as it did when he was 'in an uproar' as Harrington's fellow Patrolmen called it, "We won't be havin' what happened to Garfield and Lincoln in Washington. This is Buffalo, men," he said, his index finger waving at them. "The most modern city in the nation! We've got more paved streets, electric lights and railroad tracks than any city in the world!" which most of his subordinates could believe, as many had never seen much outside of Buffalo. He paused for a second, then continued his lecture. "In addition to the wanted posters in the Reserve Room, there's a stack of flyers on this desk," he said, slamming his oversized palm on top of them, "which I want you to memorize. If you see any of these characters, run 'em in, and I don't mean maybe!"

“All right, now there’s a few more items for you men that will be working the Park Squad.” He turned to his right, and two men in gallusses and shirtsleeves came in from the Reserve Room carrying bundles of white clothes. “Special uniforms for the Exposition. These two men will fit you into them as best they can. Take care of them.” Again, the index finger waved. “Wash them every night when you get off. The Captain says if he hears of any slovenly men on this detail, he’ll have your balls for breakfast, and that’s after I get through with you!”

He took a breath, the redness in his face subsided, then he resumed. “Alright. You know what I expect of you, and I’m sure you’ll all do your duty. The nation’s eyes are upon us, so let’s look sharp. Now, come get your new togs,” and with that, he stepped around the desk to watch the tailors measure up the policemen for their new uniforms.

It took three different tries for the tailor to find a tunic that would fit Harrington. Just over average height, his years behind the plow and heaving bales of hay on the farm had given him extra wide shoulders. As he pulled on the larger jacket, Rossa came up close to him, hands clasped behind his back. Harrington knew this meant some whispered special instructions for his senior patrolman and, perchance, his successor. Rossa tilted slightly forward, and Harrington caught just the slightest whiff of whiskey on his breath.

“I have a particular task for you, Harrington,” he said, clearing his throat.

“Yes, Sergeant,” he answered, buttoning the golden brass buttons to the jacket.

“You’ll be driving the wagon. You’re my best man and I need a man with plenty of experience with horses to manage it, as there will be thousands, thousands of people around. You know the whistle signals. Now, let me see your pistol.”

Harrington buttoned the top button, the one that clasped the collar around his thick neck. He twisted his neck around, then nodded to the tailor, who went on to the next man. He handed his gun belt to the Sergeant, who looked over the highly polished black leather and withdrew the .32 revolver from the holster. He flipped open the cylinder and closed one eye to check the barrel for cleanliness. Satisfied, he slapped the .32 revolver’s cylinder closed and handed the weapon back to Harrington, butt end first. As Harrington snapped the holster’s flap closed, the Sergeant walked away to inspect the other men’s weapons and uniforms.

Harrington had used his pistol but once, in a gunfight outside the library downtown where a gunman had shot his wife's lover in the crowded reading room and fled out onto the street waving his gun while Harrington was walking his beat. Both he and the gunman had emptied their pistols at each other without result. People dove for cover, and thank God no one else was hurt before Harrington clubbed the madman down with the pistol. *Gunfire in crowded places*, Harrington thought, *is not safe for anyone*. He had practiced regularly since then, perfecting his aim out in the coal yard near his parents' house. *If there's an anarchist there*, he thought, *This time I'll nail him with the first shot*.

Harrington knew this detail well. He would get the wagon, pulled by two Percherons from the stable in Front Park and six men would ride in the back. They would be stationed behind the Hall of Music and simply wait there for any trouble to start. He had worked this type of assignment before, at a strike by a bunch of New York Central workers last year. When the picketers started to throw rocks at the trains in the big yard along Broadway, the Captain started the police line forward. When they continued throwing rocks at the trains and started throwing them at the advancing police as well, the Captain blew his whistle and Harrington drove the wagon into the crowd in a zigzag pattern, driving the strikers every which way. When they got through the crowd, he turned the wagon around and repeated the charge where they were still gathering. When the strikers were scattered, the men in back jumped out and pummeled any resistors with their billies and threw them in the back of the wagon.

Harrington didn't like the wagon job and he liked this even less. When he was up in the seat the troublemakers would throw everything from horse balls to paving stones at him and the horses. At least before he'd had the tall helmet on to protect his head. This special uniform looked grand, but it was topped off with a garrison cap that protected his head not even a little.

A pale young man in a brown suit sat at a corner table in the saloon, wiping up the last of the gravy with a piece of black bread. Carefully chewing this last morsel, he took a small sip from the beer stein before him.

"Would you like some more bread?" the proprietor's smiling wife said, coming around the bar wiping her hands on her apron. Leon Czolgosz shook his head.

“Are you sure? All my nice Polish boys love my homemade bread. I bake it myself, the same way I did in the old country.”

“No,” he said, holding back from adding, *you ignorant peasant*. She picked up his plate and returned to the bar where her moon-faced husband filled schooners of beer for the working men that were filling the place as they got off work. He sipped his beer, watching as the railroad workers, smelling of smoke, slapped their coins on the bar. As they slaked their thirst with gulps of the frothy beverage, their moods changed and soon songs were called for. A worker from a nearby packing plant in a blood-stained white coat sat at the piano and began tapping out Sousa’s “American Patrol.” Heavy work shoed feet and thick hands began keeping time with the butcher, and when he was finished, hands pounded on the bar in approval.

“Now,” one heavily accented voice said, “something we can sing to!”

Czolgosz got up, leaving the exact change for his meal on the table and tucking several newspapers under his arm. As he left the tavern, he thought, *These ignorant swine! The railroad workers! Don't they remember the railroad strike here just a year ago? Don't they know about the steel workers strike going on right now in Pittsburgh?* He returned to his hotel up the street, the clerk greeting him with a “Good evening, Mr. Nieman,” calling him by the name Czolgosz had used to sign the register.

“Any newspapers tonight?” Czolgosz asked.

“No, nothing until around ten tonight, unless something happens and they put out an extra,” he replied, noting Nieman’s watery blank stare. As he gave the unfriendly youth his key, the clerk thought, *He looks sickly, something wrong with that guy someway.*

Czolgosz carefully took off his brown suit, string tie and white shirt and hung them up. He opened the window and lay down on the bed on top of the covers in the stifling heat. He could hear accordions playing in the houses on Woltz Street behind the hotel and the ringing from the twin bell towers of St. Adalbert’s Basilica. *Are they all blind? Don't they see anything? They were like his own family, they cling to their beer, their music and their religion while we are all being crushed by the bosses and their government!* He remembered reading in the papers the words Emma Goldman had spoken about the killing of Italy’s King by Gaetano Bresci, who had traveled all the way from New Jersey to commit the deed. The King, she said, “had been put to death by a brave man who dared to act for the good of his fellow men, among whom he considered himself but a unit in the universe.”

That was when he'd left home and gone around the Midwest, traveling from job to job as a wire winder, glassworker and laborer, always reading and listening to speakers preaching about the plight of the workers and the need for men of action to light the flame of revolution.

He had tried to talk to Goldman in Cleveland, get close to her, but her followers had kept him off, pushed him away after her speech there. He had even heard one of them mutter something about his probably being a police spy. *Me! After all my troubles in Pittsburgh during the wireworks strike! After all I have read and done and learned! All I wanted to talk to her about was what books she had read, where could I gain her wisdom, knowledge of the cause and the world. Her man Berkman had shot Frick, then Bresci had killed the King of Italy, and now I know what I must do. I will show them all.*

It was hot in the room and Czolgosz felt like he was on fire. The rashes on his hands and feet came and went, the sores on his genitals hurt almost all the time. On the train here, his headaches had nearly paralyzed him. His vision got blurry and when the conductor announced the next stop was Buffalo, for a few moments he forgot where he was, what he was doing. The doctor in Cleveland had warned him of this and gave him a sassafras purgative and an ointment with mercury. It had made him sicker than a dog, and he had thrown it all away when he had decided on his mission. The symptoms had faded for a while then returned. *I will die anyway, he thought, and I must not let that whore's curse stop history.*

William McKinley, President of the United States, pushed the order to relieve the last Volunteer Regiments in the Philippines across the table to the Secretary of War and carefully put the cap back on the pen. *There, that's done,* he thought, looking across the paneled railway car at Elihu Root, who had spent the last several days telling him that the insurrection in the Philippines was almost over, and the Army regulars and the Marines were about to embark on a campaign on the island of Samar to crush the last organized resistance. While Root spoke to him of Civil Governor Taft's establishing his administration throughout the islands, McKinley winced as he reread General Chaffee's latest dispatch about the casualties. McKinley made sure Secretary of War Root saw it, and observed the shocked look on Root's face at the numbers, his amazement that over half the dead were from fever – malaria, yellow fever, typhus. Root was a lawyer and a marvelous administrator, *but he's never seen a battlefield,* he thought. McKinley had, and closed his eyes at the memory of

all the mangled, fly covered corpses on that hot day at Antietam, at the tents filled with the groaning and screaming wounded, most of whom everyone knew would soon die in agony. *How did it come to this*, he thought. *We came to liberate the Philippines and now were fighting the people we freed. Please God, end this terrible war.*

McKinley opened his eyes and smiled at his wife Ida seated beside him. “Now,” he said, a room warming smile appearing on his face, “let’s see what this modern city of Buffalo looks like, shall we?” Everyone smiled and nodded as Root’s assistant closed up the portfolio and disappeared to another car. The train was slowing down, pulling into one of Buffalo’s six passenger stations, and Ida and his staff could see people waving and holding flags as the brakes on the President’s train started screaming as they were applied.

McKinley was just rising from his chair when suddenly there was an explosion, then another and another. The windows on one side of the car shattered, their sharp edges flying inward and shredding the curtains, sending the car’s occupants diving for the floor and screams of terror erupting from the people on the platform. McKinley put his arms around Ida and held her tight to his chest. The explosions stopped, and the President looked around the car, then began laughing and said, “Is everybody all right? Be careful of the broken glass!”

The President’s Secretary, George Cortelyou shouted. “What is it!? We must get the Secret Servicemen in here!”

Root was frozen in his chair, his eyes wide. “Why...why...it sounded like cannons!” he said finally.

Walking across the car, McKinley put his hand on the white jacketed Black porter who was prostrate on the carpeted floor. “William, you and the other boys just go get some brooms to clean up this glass, it’s going to be all right now.”

Slowly, the people in the car rose, brushing shards of glass off their clothes. “It’s all right, everyone,” the President said. “It would seem the local artillerymen sent to greet us put a bit too much charge in their guns!”

As the President’s cortege prepared to exit the car, the Secret Servicemen who had leapt out of the second car at the explosions lined the platform as the band struck up “Hail to the Chief.” McKinley went about the car, his magnetic black eyes and firm grip on a shoulder here, a bicep there reassuring all was well as they filed out into the summer day onto the platform.

As the band played and the onlookers cheered, Cortelyou leaned in to get to the President's ear. "Mr. President, I've canceled the reception at the Hall of Music. There are just too many people for it to be safe."

McKinley held Cortelyou's hand firmly with his right and patted it with his left. "Nonsense, George, you're just frightened by the cannon, that's all. Look around us, George," he said, turning to all sides with his arm outstretched. Cortelyou took in the harbor and canal, crammed with steamships, the world famous Dart, Watson, and all the other grain elevators rising above the gray warehouses beside them and the growing steel and cement high rises downtown, all lit in the shimmering Lake Erie sunshine.

"Prosperity, George, spreading in every direction. It's like I said during the election. Now that the depression of the last century is over, everyone will have a full lunch pail. The people who will come to shake my hand leave their problems behind. They bring only good will, and I most certainly feel better for the contact with the great American public. Now you go and get in touch with the people at the Exposition and make sure that reception is on the schedule!"

Cortelyou brushed a few slivers of glass off the President's frock coat as McKinley nodded and beamed to the people doffing their hats to the man from Canton. "Yes," McKinley chuckled, "we should get to Mr. Milburn's house and refresh our clothes. The morning's excitement and the day's heat has made us a bit agitated, and we'll want to look our best at the Exposition this afternoon."

It was hot that day, and Harrington relieved the six men of the wagon crew for an hour, two at a time. He knew they would take their break somewhere where they could get beer, but drew the line when they tried to stash some bottles in the wagon. He couldn't believe the people there. The papers said that over 100,000 people were visiting the Exposition every day, looking at all the marvelous pavilions. There was everything from cycloramas of the Johnstown Flood, to live exhibits of American Indian life and a Japanese Village, to Frank Bostock's animal show, featuring elephants and lions "that cowered before him." The crowds loved the brightly colored classical buildings and oohed and ahed when hundreds of thousands of light bulbs were turned on to light up the Electric Tower and all the other buildings at night, the electricity traveling all the way from Niagara Falls, "Nature's Greatest Generator" as they called it.

Conscious of the responsibility Sergeant Rossa had given him, Harrington stayed by the wagon almost the whole shift, worrying all hell would break loose when he was away from his post. He kept the horses in the shade as much as possible and got them plenty of water. Even with all the exposition's marvels, children still loved the gentle giants. He was about to give Antonius, the offside horse, an apple when a little boy in a sailor suit came up to him.

"Do you want to give Antonius the apple?" Harrington asked. The boy's face lit up and his mother nodded in approval. As he gave the boy the apple and held him up to the big gray head, Harrington noticed a glassy eyed man in a brown suit stumble by. *That's the second time he's gone around the Hall*, he thought. *Something shady about him.* He continued to hold the boy while Antonius munched and even held him so the child could stroke the horse's mane. Putting him down, he tousled the boy's hair then watched him charge happily back to his mother. He surveyed the area, but the strange man in the brown suit was gone.

Sergeant Rossa came by every hour or so, approaching unannounced from different angles and checking they were on post. On a recent visit, he gathered the detail around the wagon.

"Two detectives just ran down four pickpockets from Albany," Rossa said quietly. "Followed them around the grounds all day and snatched them up in their rooms over on Elk Street. They found hundreds. Maybe thousands of dollars' worth of watches, cash and jewelry!"

"Now, the President is going to be here anytime now, and I want all you lads to look sharp and keep a weather eye peeled for troublemakers. I'll be over in front of the Hall, so keep alert for my whistle if I need yas."

Harrington tugged at his immaculate white tunic and smiled. Last night when he came home from work, his mother and his fiancé Marceline met him at the door. He had brought the white uniform home to be washed and they both set to it while he ate his supper. He got himself some coffee afterwards and spoke to Marci as she heated up the iron on the stove to press the special uniform.

"Has your grandfather accepted the fact you're marrying a policeman yet?" he asked as she sprinkled water on the trousers. Papa Daugherty was a retired railroad man who had been in the great strike of 1877. The white-haired old man lived with Marci's family now and still grumbled when Jerry came around. It had been worse when Jerry had joined the army in '98. "Jingoist!" the old man had called him. Jerry had marched off with

the 65th, but only got as far as the drill fields in Virginia. Cuba secured, the regiment was mustered out, and Jerry came home with dysentery and no medals. *If only we'd gotten to Cuba*, he thought, reading about the Rough Riders' heroics in the papers. Now that he and Marceline were engaged and Jerry was at her house almost nightly, he told her of his adventures at work and his hopes of making Sergeant. On nice nights he enjoyed sitting on the glider on the porch with Marci. The old man would say hello then take his newspapers inside and begin cursing the Republicans ("Nothing but thieves in high hats!"), the war in the Philippines ("Imperialists!"), loud enough for everyone to hear.

Marci's eyes lit up as she stroked the iron across one of the pant legs and he stepped close to smell her Gibson girl hair.

"Lilac, mmm," he said. She smiled and elbowed him away. He couldn't wait until she was finished ironing and he could walk her home. He shivered at the thought of stopping in the shadows of the elm tree just before they got to her house and kissing her, her body up against his for a moment and her intoxicating perfume in his nose.

Czolgosz waited in line in the stifling heat, his hand in his pocket. His head buzzed and his vision grew fuzzy. His knees felt like they would give out, but he kept a grip on the pistol. The Black man behind him nudged him as he tried to keep his balance.

"C'mon, man, the line's moving," the Black man said.

Czolgosz elbowed him and moved forward with a growl. When he got to the President, he saw a perfectly tailored man with beaming dark eyes reach out to him and say, "Good afternoon, young man!"

The President's eyes went wide with surprise when Czolgosz pulled out the revolver and fired twice before the Black man grabbed his arm and threw him to the ground. Somebody twisted the revolver out of his hand and punches rained on him from all directions. Amid the shouting he heard the President say, "Don't...don't let them hurt him."

Harrington was thinking of Marci's lilac scent when suddenly there was shouting everywhere and people swarming towards the front of the building. Police whistles were going off in every direction, and then Sergeant

Rossa burst out of the back door of the Hall, knocking people left and right out of his way. Behind him were soldiers and Secret Servicemen dragging a battered young man, one eye swollen and closed, his hair hanging in his face and blood streaming from his mouth and forehead.

“Get him in the wagon men!” Rossa shouted. Harrington and the other policemen pushed people out of the way to get the wagon door open, and when a soldier was shoved and lost his grip on the man, Harrington picked the bleeding man up and threw him into the enclosed wagon. *It’s that glassy eyed fellow!* he thought. *What has he done?* Two men with badges on their coats jumped in the wagon with him and Rossa slammed the door shut.

“What’s happening, Sergeant?” was all Harrington got out, a thousand thoughts rushing through his brain. The red-faced Rossa shouted, “Get up in the seat, man, and drive this assassin to the jail! Use the whip if you have to! Go! Go!”

Assassin? Harrington thought, as he jumped up and grabbed the buggy whip. A crowd was swarming around them, and policemen were using their clubs to force a path for the horses.

“Kill him!”

“Anarchist!”

“Hang him!” men shouted while women screamed and children cried in fear of the mob moving like a wave around the wagon. By the time they got to Delaware Avenue, they had outdistanced most of the angry throng. Harrington shook the reins to speed the horses clattering over the cobblestones then banged on the small barred front hatch of the wagon’s enclosure.

“What the hell happened?” Harrington shouted. The hatch opened and a mustachioed Secret Service man’s face appeared.

“He shot the President! Get us to the jail!” the Secret Serviceman yelled and slammed the hatch shut.

When they got to the jail, the Secret Servicemen hustled the assassin into the building and a crowd began to gather. An hour later, Harrington and a score of policemen were in front of the jail, their white uniforms soiled and bloodied, fighting off the howling mob trying to lynch the gunman. Sergeant Rossa came outside, grabbed Harrington by the shoulder and led him inside the jail.

“Get out of that uniform,” Rossa commanded, and another patrolman handed Harrington a suit of black clothes. “You’ve got another job to do, Harrington,” Rossa told him, and led his patrolman through the building as he shed his tunic and jumped out of the trousers. At the back door there were six other men out of uniform. He saw the gunman in the middle of them, one eye closed and jaw askew, holding a bloody towel to his forehead.

“They’ll get him in the hearse, you’ll drive. Head out Broadway, you’re taking him to the jail out in Batavia. We might not be able to hold the mob back much longer,” the Sergeant said. The six men dragged the assassin quickly outside and Harrington followed. He looked up and saw a cloaked hearse parked at the curb, with two horses neighing and striking the pavement with their hooves.

“Go!” Rossa said, as the men clambered into the hearse behind Harrington. There were people milling about and coming closer. One man, bottle in hand said, “Hey, did they kill him? Is that him in there?” and a crowd started to gather. Harrington leaped up in the driver’s seat and snapped the reins. He headed out Broadway towards the county jail in Batavia, as newsboys shouted, “Extra! Extra! Anarchist shoots President McKinley!” and Harrington thought, *I knew there was something wrong about him. If I’d only stopped him. This never would’ve happened and now I’m saving the son of a bitch’s life!*

Six days later, Harrington and the rest of the squad were just getting off when the Captain came in and announced the President had died. The squad repaired to Myer’s Tavern to discuss the news.

One of the policemen said, touching a bruise on his head, “And we saved the killer’s life from a lynch mob.”

Harrington stayed silent and ordered another beer. *You don’t know the half of it*, he thought.

“The damned Secret Service should’ve stopped him!” another policeman said.

If only I’d grabbed him when I had the chance! Harrington thought.

“We should’ve just let the mob get him,” the first policeman said, rubbing his head again. “Now everyone will blame us for the President getting killed.”

Sergeant Rossa came into the bar and the policemen grew silent. The Irishman pointed down the bar at them and said, “Whiskey for my men.” When the bartender had poured them all a drink, Rossa raised his glass.

“To President William McKinley, may he rest in peace.” They all raised their glasses and toasted in silence. Rossa ordered himself another whiskey, and Jerry heard him say to the bartender, “Buffalo will never be the same.” Rossa threw down the second whiskey and left.

Jerry and the others stayed and continued drinking beer until the events of the last week were forgotten. Jerry left as the sun went down and headed over to Marci’s house, humming the tune “Tell me Pretty Maiden.”

Papa Daugherty sat on the porch next to Marci’s parents and slapped the newspaper with the back of his hand.

“For the life of me,” the old railroad man said, “I don’t understand it. Secret Service men. Detectives everywhere. Police! Lines of soldiers, for Jesus sake, and not one of them stops this loony anarchist from killing the President of the United States!”

“Papa, watch your language,” Mrs. Daugherty said from her wicker chair.

“And then, the first man to wrestle him down is a nigger waiter, God bless him!” he said, throwing the paper onto the porch’s wooden deck.

“Papa! That’s awful! Stop talking like that!”

Jerry was just coming up the Daugherty’s front steps when he heard that. “Huh,” Jerry said. “He used to be a thief in a top hat, now he’s a martyr and we’re a bunch of fools, eh pop?”

Marci stood up from the glider, giving Jerry a concerned look. He wanted to grab her and kiss her, right now, right here. He saw her hands tightly grasped together in front of her.

“Jerry, you must be tired. Why don’t you go home and get some sleep,” Marci said, caution in her voice. Her parents and grandfather stared at Jerry in silence.

Jerry stopped, halfway up the steps. “You’re right, you’re right,” he said. “It’s been a trying day, I’ll just go home now...” *Oh hell, don’t let me wreck this, too,* he thought.

As he walked away swaying slightly under the streetlights, he could hear the old man say, “Hmmp. I’m telling you Marceline, he’s a bad one. All them coppers think they can do whatever they want. Look at him, walking home on both sides of the street.”

END

