

## Whistle and I'll Wait For You

**South Halsted Street, Chicago, October 1876**

Behind the broad windows of the barbershop, men stretched out in reclining wooden chairs. Before high mirrors and ornate lamps, quick brilliantined barbers stepped around their customers, making conversation and tending to hair and whiskers. Francis rubbed the back of his neck, feeling the length of his hair. It would only take ten minutes. A shave too, perhaps. The high door opened with a jingle as he entered.

"Officer O'Neill," called a barber from behind a counter. "What can we do for you today?"

"A trim, I think," said Francis, taking a seat beside a couple of other men wearing dark suits. They studied their newspapers, pretending not to notice him.

"I can take you right away," replied the barber, turning a chair around towards him.

Francis looked at the men sitting nearby. Nobody returned his glance.

"Ah no. I'll read for a minute. Let these men go ahead."

The barber smiled and ushered the next man forward with a flourish of a towel.

Francis frowned at the cover of the misnamed *Police Gazette*, a burlesque dancer arching a leg ensconced in fishnet stockings. He selected the *Daily News*, a seemlier paper, and scanned the headlines. A handwritten sign to his right read "Challenge Laundry Service". An older boy came through the shop pushing a handcart piled with soiled linen for the laundry in the basement. He loaded tagged bags into a dumbwaiter and cranked the black iron wheel, slowly lowering the clothes. Sounds escaped from the women working below: shouts, laughter, snatches of song. Francis jumped up.

"Hold it there, son," he shouted.

The barbers froze, cutthroats and sharp scissors poised in mid-air. The laundry boy blanched. His eyes darted to the smutty paper on the low table.

"I didn't do nothing with it," protested the boy, acne-scarred face pale with fear.

Francis ignored him. He tiptoed over, ear bent to the dumbwaiter. He strained to catch a faint sound of song wafting up from below—muffled shouts and laughter when the distant singer

finished. After a minute of listening for more, he sat back down. From his pocket he retrieved a small Clarke tin whistle and repeated phrases from the melody, committing them to memory. The boy stared at him, mouth agape. The owner motioned for him to continue his job. He winked to the other barbers who smirked back as they returned to their clients. Business resumed as the policeman played quietly, smiling at the new tune.