

# The River

Why do some people rush so quickly to their doom? It seems that as soon as they can think for themselves, they scheme and plot nefarious exploits that they believe will make them rich and famous, yet they never take the time to read our history!

They hang their hats on the dubious exploits of legends like Billy the Kid, Jesse James, Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone and so many other notorious, bigger-than life criminals, that they do not take the time to remember their failures, unhappiness, and eventual demise. Each outlaw is guilty of tempting fate, yet they each believe that they are the exception. Such a man was Jimmy the Greek, who lived his life as though he would live forever yet feared death with every breath.

There is still enough cruelty, violence, greed, and lust to haunt a man into dreams of easy money, soft beds, fine food and the best of everything that the world has to offer. However, little thought is spent on just how quickly they hurry to their horrible deaths. Like the old saying goes, “history repeats itself,” Jimmy was yet another fool too preoccupied with filling his pockets with easy blood money to ever take note of such historical facts of those losers he idolized.

Jimmy was born into a poor Greek family on the south side of Boston. His father worked two jobs just to put enough food on the table to keep his family from starving during the great depression of the 1930’s, and Jimmy’s father was one of the lucky ones. After all, he had two jobs, one busing tables in a greasy diner during the day and another job loading delivery trucks with coal in the evenings. Jimmy remembered his old man coming home night after night covered in soot. Then the arguments started...

“You aren’t making enough money!” his mother shouted. “I’m sick and tired of living in filth!”

One time, as Jimmy slept in his bed, along with four younger brothers and a baby sister, he heard a loud slapping noise from the kitchen downstairs, followed by his mother’s crying.

“This is never going to happen to me,” Jimmy swore, with tears streaming down his cheeks.

Years later, Jimmy made good on that promise to himself. He had become a soldier for one of the ‘Southie’ gangs of Boston. Over the years, he climbed the ladder of success in the underworld and became one of the most dependable smugglers in the city. Jimmy knew that they killed a lot of people to get their hands

on this particular shipment of gold. He also knew they did other terrible things that he did not like to think about. Yet, they always took good care of him, and he was able to provide a nice home for his mother after his father passed away. His brothers and sister wanted nothing to do with him, but he did not care. He was living the good life, and he accomplished it all on his own with no help from them.

“Jimmy,” one of his gang associates whispered. “This is crazy! We are never going to make it in time. The gold – it’s too much – it’s too heavy! It’s slowing us down, we’re gonna get caught!”

“Shut your mouth,” Jimmy sneered, “and get this gold to the boat.”

“But we’re exhausted, Jimmy,” grunted another of his crew. “We already have millions in the cargo hold. Let’s just drop what we have and get going before it’s too late.”

“Never!” Jimmy said, running out of patience. “I’ve worked too hard to lose the largest heist of my career on a bunch of cry-babies. Suck it in and do your job. We’ve killed too many to get to where we are. There’s no going back! Just a few more pallets and then we’re out of here!”

“Yeah, but the boat is already too heavy,” warned another, “I don’t think it can take on any more without sinking, especially if we need to make a run for it. The boat won’t hold all of us along with the cargo.”

“I don’t want to hear any more from you guys. I should have guessed none of you would have the guts to handle a job like this. Any more nagging from you girls and I’ll kill you right here and now and keep this fortune all for myself.”

One of Jimmy’s closest friends came close to him and said, “Jimmy, with all respect, you promised us that this would be an easy job. You said there would be no killing. I will not go to the chair for you, Jimmy. This heist ain’t worth it.”

“But we’re almost finished!” Jimmy argued. “Let’s just get this over with. All this worrying and complaining is what’s slowing us down!”

Suddenly, a beam of light splintered the dark night from above the hill. It was the police.

“Stop right there!” shouted one of them over a bull horn. “Freeze, or we’ll open fire!”

Jimmy laughed to himself. “Go ahead and shoot you idiots. You’re too far away to hit me. In another moment I’ll have the rest of my gold safely inside my boat. I’ve waited all my life for a score as big as this one... go ahead and shoot,” he mocked. “No one is gonna take this from me now!”

“Fire!” came the command from the hilltop, and suddenly there were a dozen machine guns emptying their loaded magazines onto the dock and into the boat in the river below.

Jimmy underestimated the police. He dropped a box of gold on the dock and then dove into the black, cold water beneath the boat, hoping to elude the splaying

bullets. He wasn't hit, but he had to hold his breath before he could safely surface on the other side of the boat for cover.

"All I need is just one more minute!" he thought, as he held his breath, swimming in long strokes beneath the surface. "If I raise my head for air, they'll certainly shoot me," he thought, just as he was beginning to pass out.

Eventually, he had to break the surface of the icy river to fill his aching lungs with air again. When he did, he saw from a safe distance that the police had taken his boat along with the millions of dollars' worth of his stolen gold.

"They probably think they killed me," he said to himself. "Ha! Someone should tell them what bad shots they are!" He treaded water until he watched the police finally leave. As he continued to tread water, he began to feel very tired, and was not sure how much longer he could do so, so he untied his boots and let them sink to the depths below. "That's better," he thought, but he still wasn't certain that he had the strength to swim all the way back to the dock. It seemed like a mile away. "They may have gotten my gold, but at least they didn't get me," he reasoned.

Suddenly, a small rowboat emerged from the mist, with a man standing in it, holding a long pole.

"Hey mister!" Jimmy cried, "pick me up and let me ride in your boat!"

The old man slowly steered his boat alongside Jimmy and helped him in.

"That's great old timer, now just get me to the other side as quickly as you can."

"The river is too wide and too deep to cross swiftly, and my evening on the river has tired my arms."

"Never mind that!" Jimmy replied angrily. "Just go as fast as you can. If I were not so exhausted, I'd row this boat myself!"

"As you wish," the old man sighed, "but why do you hurry so, and why are you out in the water so far from the shore?"

"Look, old man, if you only knew what I've been through tonight... Just get us out of here and to the other side of the river. I'll take good care of you."

Jimmy was getting his breath back, and though he was beginning to feel more relaxed, he noticed that the mist had become a thick, dense fog. "How quiet the river has become," he said, looking over the port side of the boat to look for his reflection in the black water. "Hey! I think I see the shore, but it doesn't seem familiar." Jimmy thought that perhaps, the boat had drifted further down the river.

"We are not drifting, young man," the old man said. "There is no current in this river to take us anywhere other than to our destination."

Suddenly, the boat jerked as it hit the soft, muddy bank below it. Jimmy jumped out of the boat and climbing out of the water over the bar of sand, he said, "I have known this river all my life – ever since I was a kid – yet I don't recognize this beach."

Jimmy waited for an answer for a moment, and after not getting one, he turned around to the weary, old man, now seated in his boat with the long pole out of the water and resting across his lap.

“Don’t you know who I am?” the old man asked. “I am Charon, the Ferryman of the underworld who transports the dead over the River Styx to the shores of Hell.”