



**MR.**  
ENDICOTT

BY JIM FUSILLI

**N**o one during his lifetime thought Mr. Endicott depraved. Peculiar, yes. But in a city of seven million, there are more than a few peculiar men. I am considered one, though modestly so: Nearing my eighty-third birthday, a man short on time and living in a period not his own, I spend my remaining days knitting together the facts of the life of Reynolds Endicott, much as I have done since the early 1940s, in the fading hope that I finish my book before I depart. That I may not compels me to write this brief account so that some of what I have learned does not vanish undisclosed.

At the Public Library's midtown branch, the clerks, though granting me the level of respect age engenders, refer to me among themselves as "Endicott." Were that I were he, or that Mr. Endicott had been merely peculiar and not at all depraved, the city and the country would be decidedly different than they are now in the year 1985.

Young Mr. Endicott: tall, hair the color of shoreline sand, steel-blue eyes, prominent cheekbones, a long neck not quite swan-like as it had once been described, but there you have it. He walked with a confident gait, head held high, arms hardly swaying at his side. He was fastidious in his presentation: meticulously tailored suits, perfectly knotted necktie tight against his collar, cufflinks that invariably matched his tie pin, well-shined shoes despite the dust and muck that gathered in the streets of lower Manhattan. Yet, In the scrum at the axis of Wall Street, City Hall and Newspaper Row, he often passed unnoticed.

His most distinguishing characteristic was his voice. Mr. Endicott spoke plainly and patiently, but the sound he emitted when he did so had the tonal qualities of song. Resonant and rhythmic, his smooth, sturdy baritone seemed to communicate meaning beyond words as he would modulate it, however subtly, to convey more, or something other, than what he had said. Men and women alike pronounced it "seductive" and "enticing." I avoid use of the term "hypnotic" and have come to prefer "persuasive" for reasons you will soon see.

From his office on Park Row, Mr. Endicott would take his lunch at a nearby tavern, sitting in a corner accompanied only by newspapers from near and far delivered to him overnight and throughout the day. By his manner and penetrating glare, he made it clear that he had no interest in socialization. When he returned to his office, his secretary Jonathan Eccles would either have or have not a message for him. If the latter, Mr. Endicott would continue to scour his newspapers. If the former, Mr. Endicott would return the call and leave the office shortly thereafter. Whether under shining sun or an umbrella to ward off rain or downy snow, Mr. Endicott then waited in City Hall Park until his potential client or a representative arrived. Rarely did their conversation last more than mere minutes. Back in the office, Mr. Endicott would make his own travel arrangements without revealing to Mr. Eccles, a skittish man a decade his senior, his destination or how long he would be gone.

I will now tell you of one such assignment undertaken by Mr. Endicott in the summer of 1930.

Its initial details were delivered to him not by telephone, but in a sealed, nondescript envelope by a newsboy in the employ of the New York Herald-Tribune. After a brief return to his office, Mr. Endicott set out immediately for the western tip of Queens, commuting via the IRT Flushing line from Grand Central Terminal. There he met, somewhere in Hunters Point, John K. Kovar, the 58-year-old president of the John Kovar Bronze & Iron Works Company of Long Island City and a native of Plawno, Poland. Given Mr. Kovar's prominence – his company employed 72 men and was among the region's most important bronze fabricators – he chose a location that permitted a level of subterfuge.

Allow me to mention here that Mr. Kovar's long-time secretary had no knowledge of the meeting, which was not noted on Mr. Kovar's calendar. It did not appear in any of his personal papers left to the City University of New York. I have come to believe it was Mr. Kovar himself who passed on the invitation to the newsboy Roger Scott, who was killed on December 7, 1941, when a torpedo struck the USS Oklahoma on which he was stationed at Pearl Harbor. Mr. Kovar died in 1948, having declined several requests for an interview.

Whatever the content of the discussion between Mr. Kovar and Mr. Endicott – and I have come to learn that Mr. Endicott asked only for the bare bones of pertinent information in such meetings, preferring to draw conclusions based on his own research – they reached an agreement. Exceedingly well off, Mr. Kovar could easily afford to meet Mr. Endicott’s fees and expenses.

**T**hree days later, Mr. Endicott ferried across the Hudson to Jersey City, New Jersey, where he boarded the southbound B&O Railroad’s Capitol Limited. In Washington, he checked into the Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue NW, a short walk from the White House.

The following afternoon, he reported to the Library of Congress where he examined blueprints submitted by the office of Cass Gilbert, the notable architect who designed and had built in New York the U.S. Custom House, the New York Life Insurance Company Building and the Woolworth Building which sat diagonally across from Mr. Endicott’s Park Row office. Mr. Gilbert had been selected by the late William Howard Taft, his friend, fellow Republican, former U.S. President and former Chief Justice, to design and build the new Supreme Court Building on First Street NE behind the U.S. Capitol and a short walk from where Mr. Endicott now sat. (At this point in 1930, there was but the makings of a construction site at the former location of the National Women’s Party headquarters. The building would not be completed until 1935.)

Mr. Endicott received additional documentation from a library clerk that confirmed information he had uncovered before he left New York. Designed by Mr. Gilbert and John Donnelly Sr. and to be sculpted by John Donnelly Jr., the bronze doors to the new building were to be 17 feet high, 9 ½ feet wide and weighing 13 tons. The General Bronze Corporation of Long Island City was contracted to provide the bronze for the project.

There was no evidence to suggest that the Kovar Bronze & Iron Works Company had ever been under consideration as a supplier for the project. The General Bronze Corporation was the preeminent provider of architectural bronze in the United States. It had a long-standing relationship with Mr. Gilbert. John K. Kovar had made clear to Mr. Endicott that he viewed General Bronze with admiration, but had grown tired of his company’s subordinate status. Thus, when he was approached by a Henry Gladstone of Washington D.C., he listened with grave interest as Mr. Gladstone proposed to Mr. Kovar a means by which to undercut General Bronze and to secure the assignment to provide the bronze for the Supreme Court Building.

According to the files of Washington’s Metropolitan Police Department I obtained, Mr. Gladstone had a criminal record that included fraud and misrepresentation. Of this, I concluded, Mr. Kovar was unaware.

Thirty-six years after the fact, I brought information I had discovered about Henry Gladstone to Carter Collins Jr., who had served as a clerk to Chief Justice Edward Douglass White. By then, I had ascertained that Chief Justice White objected more strenuously to the creation of a Supreme Court Building than previously known, stating a preference to work at his office in the Old Senate Chamber of the Capitol Building. As president, Mr. Taft promoted the Court’s need to assert its independence and stature with a monumental headquarters of its own. Succeeding Mr. White as Chief Justice after his death, Mr. Taft won out.

By 1967, former clerk Mr. Collins had long been in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was a professor at Harvard Law School. An avuncular man of Taft-like girth, Professor Collins, over soup and sandwiches in the faculty cafeteria, remembered Mr. Gladstone.

“After the spectacle of his death, how could I not?” he said plainly.

“Did the Metropolitan Police question you?” I asked.

“No. Why would they?”

I read his expression. He did not know any of what I was about to tell him.

“Mr. Gladstone told an associate that a former clerk to Mr. White had informed him the justices would support President Taft’s proposal if he made certain alterations to the plan proposed by Cass Gilbert.”

Professor Collins raised an eyebrow in a near-comic manner.

“Mr. Gladstone accepted ten-thousand dollars from a supplier who would stand to profit were the altered proposal accepted.”

With a chuckle, Professor Collins shook his sizable head.

I waited.

“Where to begin,” he said. “Chief Justice White had no ‘former clerk.’ I was it for his entire term.”

I continued to make my notes.

“By the time Congress released the funding – in 1929, I believe – Chief Justice White had been dead for eight years. From the grave, he had no influence. From my law office on Boylston Street, I had none either.”

“Thus, the supplier was deceived,” I said.

Professor Collins took up his soup spoon. “I assume this supplier yet he feels threatened, exploited and perhaps humiliated, contacted the Metropolitan Police.”

Continuing to write, I did not answer.

**H**ere I divert from my narrative. It will come as no surprise to you, a knowledgeable reader of historical non-fiction, that I greatly admire the work of Robert Caro, biographer to Robert Moses. The thoroughness with which Mr. Caro unpeels Moses’ life in “The Power Broker” is commendable to an extreme, applying his judgments by example rather than explication. His prose carries the color and pacing of a novel of mid-century New York. I have tried to attain a similar level of excellence in my biography of Reynolds Endicott, though he was a private figure who left behind very little in the way of documenting his own life.

As a writer, though, I have had to come to terms with the reality that New Journalism has altered the course of fact-based reporting. The most egregious example is Truman Capote’s “In Cold Blood” in which the author clearly and indisputably fabricated parts of the story including dialogue. Doing so may have made for a brilliant work, but to call it “non-fiction” leeches all meaning from the term.

And yet.

Here is my dilemma.

There are no living witnesses to the conversation between Mr. Endicott and Henry Gladstone. There are no notes or transcriptions of what was said. What I discovered is that they met on a steamy evening near the Tidal Basin just off the National Mall.

Mr. Gladstone took this meeting on the basis of a telephone call. He was invigorated by what he claimed he was told. There was a suggestion that he might receive additional payment were he to expedite his mission to persuade the justices to balk at the Gilbert plan to hire the General Bronze Corporation and favor of Kovar Bronze & Iron works. I use the word “suggestion” because this information came to me via “the associate” I had mentioned to Mr. Collins at Harvard. Her name was Mildred Boxbauer and she was a prostitute who had lodged with Mr. Gladstone and become somewhat of a confidant. By the time we spoke, she was riddled with cancer. The Roman Catholicism of her childhood, abandoned to the point of complete dismissal, had returned to importance in her life. A Sister Alberta at Georgetown University Hospital supported my thesis that Miss Boxbauer would not sin so close to death. And indeed, she died two days after our final conversation.

Also, regarding the use of the word “suggestion”: When Mr. Endicott spoke to persuade he did not need to make offers or promises to do so. He simply spoke, calmly as sunset. This I have confirmed

from six different sources, each of whom said some variation of “All he had to do was ask and from that moment forward nothing was as important to me than to fulfill his request.” What Mr. Gladstone intimated to his associate about how he might profit additionally from his meeting with his anonymous caller was at best speculation and more likely old-fashioned crowing to impress a woman.

So now we have Mr. Endicott on a bench on the National Mall. Straight ahead, about a mile away, is the White House. To the far left is the Lincoln Memorial. Nearer on the right is the Washington Monument. The mall is populated with summer tourists as well as locals on their way to wherever after work. The persistent July sun hangs above trees stalwart in the honey-thick humidity. The cherry blossoms are long gone.

His legs crossed, Mr. Endicott has his fedora perched on a knee. He appears to examine it for lint or an errant strand of hair. This is his customary signal to identify himself to those he would meet.

Mr. Gladstone approaches. Before he sits, he offers Mr. Endicott his hand.

Mr. Endicott is well-mannered. He accepts it and, returning his hat to his head, gestures for Mr. Gladstone to speak.

Mr. Gladstone: “How do you want to do this?”

Mr. Endicott does not react.

“Mr. Kovar. How impatient is he?”

“Moderately so.”

“We’re going to have to take care of the clerk,” Mr. Gladstone says.

“Carter Collins Jr.”

Mr. Gladstone frowns. He hadn’t mentioned the clerk’s name to Mr. Kovar.

“When you say ‘take care,’” Mr. Endicott continues, “precisely what do you mean?”

“Information costs, don’t it?” Mr. Gladstone says, somewhat defensively.

“Ah. The initial ten-thousand dollars failed to suffice?”

“Collins had a taste. Sure he did.”

“Was that here in Washington or up in Cambridge?”

Mr. Gladstone bristles. He never told Mr. Kovar that Collins was no longer in the nation’s capital. He snaps at Mr. Endicott. “Say, what is this? Are you—”

“Easy,” says Mr. Endicott. “Easy..”

Mr. Gladstone examines Mr. Endicott. He decides the man doesn’t present a physical threat. Yet he feels threatened.

“Kovar wants his money back? You can tell him to go stuff it.”

Mr. Endicott is staring across the mall at the White House beyond the Ellipse.

Having reasoned that Mr. Endicott is not with the Metropolitan Police or any law-enforcement body, Mr. Gladstone presses on. “Kovar came to me. He was looking to bribe a Supreme Court judge. Why are you after me? Why not him?”

Mr. Endicott is well aware that Mr. Gladstone initiated the contact with Mr. Kovar, who had been told bidding was about to reopen on the bronze contract. Not entirely familiar with U.S. law, Mr. Kovar assumed if an attorney associated with a Supreme Court justice was involved, a \$10,000 payment was above board. Akin to a consultant’s fee.

Mr. Endicott makes no mention of these details. His end game has begun.

“The money’s gone,” Mr. Gladstone confesses. He is sweating now under his suit.

“Breath deep,” says Mr. Endicott.

Mr. Gladstone does so.

“My dear man, you are in an inexorable bind,” says Mr. Endicott, his voice both soothing and unsettling. “The issue, once again, is fraud. Exoneration is not possible. You have put into question the integrity of the Supreme Court.”

Mr. Gladstone heard the words as they were spoken. They rode into the fog of his mind on a melody both weightless and leaden with deadly meaning. Mr. Gladstone knows not what he has just been told other than it is a truth more profound than any he has ever heard.

“There is a solution.” Mr. Endicott turns. “I would like you to now look at me.”

Mr. Gladstone does as he is told. He cannot resist the man’s song.

Fading sunlight settles on Mr. Endicott’s ruby cufflink.

“The knot tightens,” Mr. Endicott says. “Four walls draw near.”

He takes Mr. Gladstone’s hand.

“In a moment,” he says, “I will release you.” His steel-blue eyes glisten. “When I do so, you will turn a half-circle until you are looking to your right.”

Mr. Endicott lifts his long, thin, perfectly manicured fingers.

“Slowly now...”

Mr. Gladstone turns.

“What do you see?”

“The Washington Monument,” Mr. Gladstone says.

“The Washington Monument,” Mr. Endicott repeats.

Mr. Endicott knows it is 555 feet, 5 1/8 inches high. There are 897 steps to the top. Eight windows dot the pyramid atop the sculpture. These windows cannot be opened by means other than removal. Mr. Endicott knows the screws can be loosened with the edge of a Mercury dime.

“You will enter with the last tour group,” says Mr. Endicott as he stands. “You will feel no pain.”

**O**f course I have no idea what Mr. Endicott said to Mr. Gladstone. Neither did Mr. Kovar. Nor did Jonathan Eccles, Mr. Endicott’s secretary back at the Park Row Building. I have rewritten that scene, and several others, many times. Many, many times. To this day, I find it awkward and artless. Mr. Endicott, the man who killed with his voice, no doubt was never as stilted and coy as I have portrayed him. I have it in my mind that he spoke very briefly with some combination of words and sounds I can’t quite imagine. One late afternoon in the New York Public Library, I shivered with the thought that, had I finally formulated exactly what Mr. Endicott said in such moments and could recreate his voice in the hollow of my mind, his song would drift into my very core and I would do myself a great harm. By my calculations, Mr. Endicott was involved in 17 such events as the one with Mr. Gladstone before his own tragic and unexplained death. Would I compel myself to be number 18?

As for the matter of Kovar Bronze & Iron Works Company: Until the day he died, Mr. Kovar did not attribute Henry Gladstone’s death to Mr. Endicott, who had been hired only to retrieve what remained of his \$10,000. Perhaps to better live with himself, he ascribed Mr. Gladstone’s suicide to the fact that his scheme had been exposed. This I learned from his granddaughter Rebecca who was startling by his confession while visiting him at a nursing home in Cold Spring, New York, near her parents’ home.

Cass Gilbert died before the Supreme Court Building was completed. His son Cass Jr. assumed control of the project, which was completed in 1934. The General Bronze Corporation provided the bronze for the massive doors, which are magnificent to this day.

Henry Gladstone became the third person to die by suicide in a fall from high on the Washington Monument, following Mae Varney Cockrell of Covington, Kentucky, in 1915 and Albert Birney Selp of Washington D.C., in 1923. Mrs. Cockrell, who suffered from what would now be diagnosed as

depression, left a note in which she wrote: "Forgive me, sweetheart, but this is my only way out. Always remember I love you and you are the dearest husband in the world. Please burn my body."

Mr. Selp, a 30-year-old veteran of World War II, left no note.

Neither did Henry Gladstone.