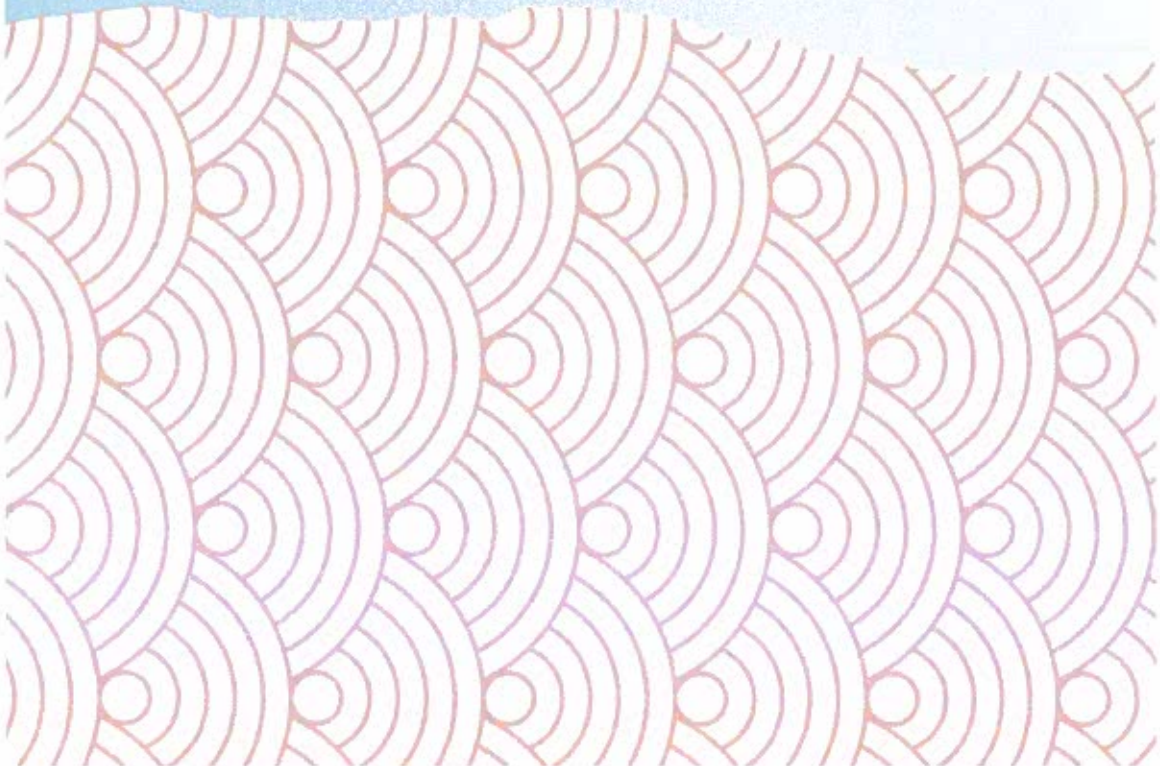




The Letters



The Letters

—1—

Her fourth morning tied to the same uncomfortable wooden chair started as the other three had. It would probably continue in the same pattern . . . fear in the early hours, sheer terror by midafternoon, with tears toward nightfall. It was not how Carol expected to be spending this second Tuesday and the warmest day so far in December of 1979.

She had no idea whether she'd live to see Christmas. Yesterday's letter, the second one to be delivered in as many days, had carried the promise that she wouldn't be killed before her husband had adequate time to secure her two-million-dollar ransom. But instinctively, she doubted that promise would be honored.

*"Honor." That reminded her of her son, Joey.
She had been so proud of him earlier last
year when the phone call came:
'Mrs. Dwight? This is Mr. Lascano,
the high school principal.'
A tight feeling seized her throat. She imagined
everything that could be wrong.
'Each Spring, the junior class receives
National Honor Society Awards.
A combined consideration of grades,
personality, and character assessment . . .'*

His voice drifted away in her tear-blurred memory. Carol squeezed her eyes shut tightly, trying to make the present horror go away.

The door slammed so hard her eyelids snapped open. So did one of the room's spinning-and-tearing window shades. It spun around and smacked the top of the window frame five times, sharply. Each time it did, Carol flinched as if her own face were being slapped. The terrorist called "Henry" focused his temper at the window, now that he had taken it out on the door and still had more anger to shed. That same sick smirk Carol had come to despise accentuated his threatening voice, as he harshly drew the torn shade. "Your ole man and the kid aren't answering the mail. That's not good. I'm gonna hafta send them a reminda that'll shake things up a bit."

The slamming door brought Roberto from the other end of the railroad flat, where Henry thought he had been at prayer. It was the first month of the Muslim year, Muharram. Henry was too excited about his selection for involvement to acknowledge that this abduction was contrary to the Shia New Year practices of peacefulness and abstinence from belligerence. Carol Dwight was equally unaware of any of this. She and her family did not

know that her ordeal began after that month's three white days of fasting, which Roberto had observed.

What Carol Dwight did know was that since these people took her from a neighborhood parking lot, she was able to relax only when Roberto, this taller, more thoughtful one, was around. Carol knew he was a terrorist as were the others, but his Iberian manner was more assured, less edgy somehow. He did not make her nervous the way Henry did. And that angered Henry because he noticed it.

The first time Henry had seen it was when Carol was trying to flirt with Roberto in the hopes he'd undo, or at least loosen, the ropes abrading her wrists. She had nearly convinced herself that it might be worth allowing him to undo other things as well, if trading those favors could win her freedom. She had been overly obvious though, not being at all practiced in the art. Even as obtuse as Henry was, he had seen and understood her aims. And he grew very angry. His fury was all the more threatening because it grew from a jealousy of Roberto and not an anger at Carol for wanting to escape. And now, Roberto worked him up even more by briefly leaving and then returning to the room, tossing him a roll of tape wordlessly, and demeaning Henry in front of Carol, by leaving him, again, to fix the shade by himself.

Instinctively, though, Carol feared something worse about Roberto. She feared that when he finally did lash out, whatever he chose to do would be so unexpected that the power of it would seem worse than imaginable, disproportionately so. And her husband, Stephen, always said her instincts were good.

* * * * *

"Mr. Dwight, I know all about your instincts, sir. You've told me about them each day for the last week. Don't get me wrong—we appreciate your letting us set up here with you at home. But really, there's little you and your son can do but wait here, for another letter. Yesterday's said they would not harm your wife until you had adequate time. And . . ."

"All due respects, Agent Morris. You've been through all this before. I haven't. So, all I have right now are my instincts. And right now, they're telling me that these . . . these fanatics . . . think I've had enough time. They don't care how hard two million dollars are to arrange. All they know is that they want it now." Dwight paced, thinking without speaking. And then "Let me ask you about instincts, agent. Didn't you ever follow an instinct on a case? I mean a pure honest-to-God instinct, when there were no facts to help you out?"

"Yes. Once I did. And it cost me my job. In the end I had to relocate. Start up another whole career . . ."

But Stephen Dwight didn't hear the closing lines of Morris' answer. He had had enough that morning and thrust his hands in his pockets in disgust. He left the room and went to the kitchen for water. He left Morris alone with his distant, painful memories:

'But we wouldn't have to go through all the red tape, and all the security risks that cripple interagency task forces, if we just started up a new branch of the Agency.'

He heard his own voice hauntingly from the past. The Director's reply had been sharp. 'And what facts, remember Frank, I said FACTS just then; what facts are you saying support the need for this task force?'

'A dead partner and a friend's widow are all the facts I need, Director! Call it an instinct if you would. I just know that putting deeply covered agents from an unknown branch of the Agency into the ranks of...'

The years may have dulled Morris's anger, but certainly not his memory.

The telephone shattered his recollection.

Stephen had the phone in hand and was listening attentively as Morris entered the kitchen. The electronics were all working and the engineer in the corner of the breakfast nook was feeding data into a keyboard and scanning a computer terminal map of the city's phone system when Dwight spoke. "Thanks for letting me know, Jack. There's been no decision here yet. Thank the Board members for their support for me would you, please. I'll be back in touch as soon as I know what we decide."

Dwight hung the receiver back up in front of the rotary dial on the black wall phone. Next to the phone, thumb-tacked to the striped kitchen wallpaper, was their family Advent calendar with just the first five doors open. Joey had decided he would open no more of the daily doors to holiday discoveries until Carol was home safely.

Morris looked straight at his surveillance engineer. "Well?"

"The call came from the corporate offices of Hanson, Dwight, and Clarendon: a division of FGQ Enterprises, Manhattan relay, midtown, from a 17th floor extension."

"Sound right, Stephen?" asked Morris in a pleasant enough voice, whose goal was to give Dwight some reassurance more than it was actually to check the surveillance equipment.

"That'd be a phone in or near the conference room most likely. It's on the 17th floor." Stephen was used to industrial high tech. He was glad the people helping him get Carol back were as well versed as they appeared to be in using state-of-the-art electronics.

“That was one of my partners, Jack Hanson. The Board of Directors has finished its pre-lunch meeting and voted to make the two million dollars available. Apparently, they’ve done something with the ransom to make the money most likely unusable later. Under the guise of portability, they’ve ordered the payment to be comprised only of \$ 1000 bills.

“They have made it clear to me that it isn’t Carol they are interested in. They just don’t want to be targeted for another hit by terrorists. They also want to get out in front of any negative public opinion portraying the company as being too bloodthirsty to help, in light of FGQ’s ‘war record’ in Vietnam.

“In short, we are their rock against a hard place.”

Morris said, “Okay, Mr. Dwight. Okay. I don’t like it. But it’s your call. Let the bankers be a little careless so the reporters get the story of a movement of a lot of money. Tie it into the current bank failures, corporate bankruptcies, and merger mania. No mention of ransom. But absolutely no details of the transfer.”

Frank Morris was regional FBI now. He had been higher up in the CIA, until he suggested the infamous *Operation Hedgehog* that lost him his job there. Before that he was a Green Beret. He knew terrorists. He thought Carol Dwight was never going to be home again with her husband Stephen and their teenaged son, Joey. But he also wanted some dead terrorists in exchange. And anything, or anybody, getting in the way of that—including Stephen Dwight himself—would pay the price.

“So, you see, little lady, your ole man’s gonna ‘pay the price’ as they say around the ole Board Room.” He pointed at her with the tube of paper he had rolled his letter into. He wore that same sick smirk. God, how she’d love to knock it off his face. With a shovel. That smirk and the earphones he wore to listen to his cassette tapes. This early afternoon they sat in a three-quarter-complete ring around his neck and rested on his shoulders. Two small, blue circle sponges fit the ends to cushion his ears when he wore them for listening.

This was how Henry and thousands of middle-easterners and Iranians around the globe had been radicalized. By way of audio cassette tapes. But they had been played for groups on larger machines, in coffee houses and apartments or at prayer. Places and times where communal listening had been safe and secretive. Henry’s early listening had been lyrical—vocal and instrumental music—Palestinian in origin, recorded earlier in the 70’s. Lately, his listening had become more up to date with the political progression of Ruhollah Khomeini in exile.

Henry now stood before Carol and started sadistically to read his newest letter out loud. The same inane demands. The same linking of her husband’s corporation to its parent company, ‘... for FGQ’s manufacture and war-time sale of materials more flammable than napalm, more toxic than Agent Orange...’

“But Stephen’s got nothing to do with FGQ, god damn it. Just because they were too small to keep from being acquired is no reason to hurt him and his partners. Hanson, Dwight, and Clarendon put together chemical compounds that have saved and helped severe burn patients all around the . . .” The slap to her face was the first time he’d hit her. She was jolted almost back onto the floor. The chair tottered.

Henry’s hand was cocked and ready to hit her once more if she did it again. He was on a roll, and he’d brook no interference. He said nothing. Just glared. When she put her head down in defeat, his smirk returned. He walked across to his table and set about finishing his work quietly. This morning’s letter was the first he wrote in her presence. And today was the first time Henry had worn his earphones in front of her.

Henry had two cassettes in his jacket pocket, plus the one he’d snapped into his Walkman. Amazing device, he thought! Small enough to hook to his belt. The tape didn’t skip when he walked. Lightweight. After a slow introduction that summer, the stores now had them stocked for their first Christmas season’s sales. At \$200 they cost a little more than his month’s rent, but he thought their blue-and-silver metal promise was limitless.

Since he had bought one of the first available in July, he had been able to listen to music from modern Palestine’s founding days, making a comeback now in these tempestuous times of occupation. Henry had found it inspirational and deeply emotional. He had welcomed it, as he thought the top 40 radio of the day was frivolous.

By October he had become obsessed by the cadence of the Ayatollah’s voice, as the magnetic tape spooled from the left side of the cassette to the right. And he could pop it out, flip it over, reinsert it, and play the second side for just as much instruction from the Supreme Leader. Any time he wanted, or needed, to hear it.

This past autumn, as he had walked along on streets or sat in parks, the cassettes sang and spoke from his hip. He reveled in hearing languages he had been immersed in while growing up in Great Neck and Bay Ridge.

Today, only Henry could hear those nationalistic songs of resistance playing in his ears as he sat and wrote carefully so his hyper-excitement did not lead to illegibility.

Carol looked up slowly, so as not to incur his wrath again. She was realizing just how sick this man was and didn’t want to do anything to push him over the edge. He was already so close to it that she felt that it would not take much. He was like a madman from a bad movie. Closing her eyes and exhausted, she nodded off. Her mind connected obscenely and went to her husband and son, and their last movie night out. Joey had convinced them to see *The Amityville Horror*. When he dug his heels in Joey could be very convincing. How could she have ever imagined, sitting in that movie theater, that just months later she’d be confronted with her family being murdered by a different scary man. Even daydreaming, she rejected that thought and fought it off by recalling how, on the way home after the movie, Joey had blasted the car radio playing that summer’s Gloria Gaynor anthem, *I Will*

Survive! The melody in her head roused her. But it was still Henry in front of her, not her family car's windshield.

It was just about mid-afternoon and the daylight that came in through the haphazardly taped rip in the shade was dim. The illumination from the one small overhead bulb hanging from the ceiling was very diffuse. Still, Carol noticed that this letter was different from the two he read to her before packaging them. And her instincts told her the difference was a dangerous one. Carol could see the paper was heavier. And he folded it first, then unfolded it, before he put pen to paper to write the next page of this letter. The envelope was of thick manila, not the untraceable plain white common stock that carried the earlier threats and demands.

Roberto came back into the room. He gave his eyes a chance to adjust to the lower lighting, and then looked around for the source of the noise he heard before from down the hall. The red welt on Carol's cheek, the water in her eye, and the twisted rug under her chair answered the question. As he turned and looked at Henry, his practiced eye saw and understood what Carol had only sensed.

The tall European was visibly angry. "Where are your writing gloves, you crazy fool? That's all the FBI needs is your fingerprints. Where the hell're your brains? You're so intent on taunting this bitch that you're going to mess up." Roberto's voice went from anger to a threatening scream. Suddenly, he snatched up two handfuls of Henry's shirt. He was clearly four inches taller than the man he'd just wrenched out of a sitting position before shoving him fiercely backwards. Henry bounced down onto his chair and sat rigidly, held in place by Roberto's gripping stare. "You screw up and lay down a trail that leads to me and you're dead, right next to your lady friend. Got it? Mark my words. You'll burn before you let on that I'm on this continent."

"So, *there it is*," she thought to herself. Carol's instincts were right on the money. When it came time for Roberto to blow up, he was much stronger, more focused, and far more deadly than Henry could ever dream of being. At first, she thought he was angry at her being taunted so cruelly for the hour and a half she had sat through this letter's writing and reading. The terrorist who'd looked at her with a kind eye up to now, the one she thought she could seduce to gain her freedom, was, in the end, looking out for his own ass, and clearly was not interested in hers—one way or the other. For the very first time in a week, she lost all hope. The shudder that ran through her from crown to ankle was so violent it shook the wooden chair enough to make the arguing terrorists stop dead and look in her direction.

There was a new fire in Roberto's eyes. It frightened Carol even more. And now that he was out of the line of that fire, Henry's confidence returned. And so did that goddamn smirk. In that second, held in their cutting glares, Carol Dwight came to know for real, just why these men were called *terrorists*. She felt the sweat fall in huge drops out of her armpits and down her sides. Her back ached worse than when she had delivered her only child. She shuddered again under the weight of it all.

Henry rallied. "No need for gloves, my friend. This is a special letter. A manifesto. Everything I've ever felt against the American system is in this letter. And no one's gonna read it. Just this bitch here will ever know what's in it." He pointed his naked, nail-bitten finger towards Carol.

She closed her eyes and wished his finger were a gun. Instinctively, Carol realized why she was to be alive until Stephen Dwight had enough time to raise the two million ransom dollars to free her. Henry's manifesto wasn't as inane as it had sounded word-for-word. Henry's manifesto wasn't to be discovered in the rhetoric of the letter. Rather, it would be the statement made by the bomb fashioned to explode when Stephen or Joey or whomever ripped the manilla envelope open in desperation. The sheer terror of it drove home right through Carol's temples. She wished her hands were free to press against her head to ease the pain. Instead, she could only close her eyes. But the images inside her head were relentless and offered no comfort. At the very instant of highest anticipation about Carol's safety, her husband or son would see the last light of day in his life in some brilliant flash that would precede a long eternity of darkness.

Again, it was the snap of the window shade that brought Carol out of her distraction. She felt sick and was blinded, by the still bright afternoon light slanting into the room without warning. Henry was the one screaming now. "What the hell are you doing? Pull that shade down. You want us caught or something?"

Roberto was unmoved, unflinching. "Look, you stupid child, I still don't know where they recruited you, or how long you've been around. But I'll tell you this. It'll be a cold day in that hell you're swearing on before you'll learn anything else from me. I'm walking out of here right now. The others may bring you back to Jersey tomorrow. I've got bigger fish to fry, for what's coming next." Carol was at first surprised he was so careless to mention Jersey; and then was terrorized what his doing so augured for her future. She heard him speaking again to Henry, who was still smarting from his insult. "But as a parting gesture, I'll give you one last piece of on-the-job training. Once you've snuffed her old man and her kid, the heat's going to be on full blast. If you want the little lady here to behave herself while you hold her to ensure safe transit, you still have a long way to go to break her spirit." Roberto bent over and stuck a piece of duct tape to the floor, pressing down on it with his shoe. "Start by putting her chair here, where she can see you mailing that last little missive, which I presume is set to go off when opened or torn." These last words were three-quarters statement and one-quarter question. When Henry answered with his smirk, Roberto acknowledged with a smiling nod of his own. "And don't let anyone else be close enough to notice when you mail that letter, either. Understand. No witnesses to your placing it in the corner mailbox."

Then Roberto turned to Carol, whom he knew was listening to his every word. Just as he knew she heard every word so far in Henry's rambling letter. "Don't be so disappointed. You'll welcome the end when it comes. Henry's last three victims did. Why, it'll be over so fast it'll make heads spin. You may even need a little time to realize the end has come and gone." She was befuddled. He really was twisting her mind with his off-handed manner and calm voice. She could hardly believe she'd ever felt he would be her

way out of this ungodly mess. How could she have been so wrong? she wondered. Her ears almost didn't hear what her brain was now comprehending as his last words echoed somewhere in the back of her head. "It's been nice making your acquaintance. Assuredly we will never meet again." Her eyes missed his slight, formal bow, but that, too, left an indelible slap of insult on her already injured, throbbing brain.

Henry had no problem seeing Roberto departing and hearing his, "I'm out of here." But Henry's brain never made the connection.

* * * * *

"I'm glad we could make all the connections you needed, Mr. Dwight. In all my years of running the bank, I've never seen anything like it. All the money is here as requested. All to fit into that one valise on the desk." The branch manager was caught between the nervousness of the moment and the pride of having one whopper of a story to tell his grandchildren over their coming holiday visit. "Thousand-dollar bills . . . two thousand of them . . . wow!" Washington was sure surprised at your Board's request. You know Treasury started destroying these things a decade ago. Good thing your company had a few days to give them to get these ready, just in case."

Stephen tried to get the manager to shut up. "Mr. Klein, my family and I thank you, very much . . ."

And he wasn't the only one. Before Stephen could even finish, he was interrupted. ". . . that's fine. Now, Mr. Dwight, let's get this all organized and let's get out of here before we run out of time. It's still a long ride up to the Bronx from here, with afternoon traffic." The voice that was even more nervous than the banker's belonged to one of Morris's people named 'Anderson.' Apparently, he had no first name.

The banker broke in. "There's a call for you, Mr. Dwight. You can take it over on the far desk." He pointed to a corner desk in plain sight, but far enough away to be out of earshot.

Anderson turned, surprised, to Klein. "Who was that calling? No one was supposed to know we're here. That's why we came after hours."

"It was a member of the Board of Directors of Mr. Dwight's company," was all the banker got out before another nameless agent cut in. "For an operation no one was supposed to know about, it's awfully crowded out front on the sidewalk."

Anderson moved the agent aside slightly and looked past his shoulder to see out the front window. "Who the hell are all those people?"

“They’re newspaper and television reporters. Craziest thing. Some of them say there were rumors flying around about an international corporate merger being sealed up after the Market closed . . .”

But Anderson didn’t let the agent finish. “Of course, there were rumors. Morris had them started to keep the money flow from being traced to the ransom story. I told you that. Don’t you remember I told you that, Jeff?”

“Yes, sir. I do. But two camera guys out front said that they got calls from a European banker saying this was the spot where the transaction was taking place and that the principals would be here, lawyers and all, at 4:30 this afternoon. And that,” he said flatly, “wasn’t part of what you told me, or you would have assigned more guys to this detail . . .”

As Jeff spoke, Stephen Dwight returned from his call to hear the end of their conversation, “...because we’re not going to get past those reporters without losing valuable time. And somebody’s got to deal with them as decoys or we’ll be followed. And if we’re followed, there’s no chance of getting to the Bronx Zoo alone with this money by six o’clock.”

Amid all the confusion it was Stephen Dwight who spoke in the same confident tones his business associates were accustomed to deferring to without question. “Look. Joey and I can go out the back. We’ll meet Mr. Anderson after he gets his car and comes around to pick us up.” He paused, but only slightly. “Jeff and Mr. Klein can go out front with Mr. Anderson and stall for the few minutes we’ll need. What do you say? I’m sure it’ll work.” No one else was as prepared to offer anything better, so they reluctantly agreed, and all went their separate ways. “We’ll connect out back, then?” asked Joey, hesitating. His father was pulling him away and toward the back door before anyone could answer. “Just move, Joey. Now!” he ordered. And then at the rear door, in whispered urgency, “To your mother’s car, son.”

* * * * *

Henry finished the last taped connection between the cushioning pages of his death note and the paper-thin explosives. He twisted it as firmly as the others—experts armed with audio cassettes—had twisted his mind. Carol simply watched in horror. She was absolutely helpless, and she knew it. Her husband or son, or both, would die and she could do nothing about it. Her tears were completely exhausted in the hour it took Henry to finish his handiwork, after Roberto had left. He listened to his Walkman as he wrote—just six feet from where she sat. Six feet—burying depth—she worried, hauntingly. For his part, Henry had enjoyed flaunting every minute of his work.

The smirk had snuck back over his face as he sat in his chair and swayed to the music. Carol knew the time was at hand. She also realized that a new terror welled up within her. Henry was getting a great charge out of his work, as he was reading the last

parts of it to her. His emotions were shifting from the political, completely vented by his letter-writing, to the sexual. In the last fifteen minutes it seemed he could hardly leave himself alone.

When he stood up to look at the finished letter bomb, he was more aroused than Carol thought possible from building a bomb. He looked down at himself and then, for a moment embarrassedly, at Carol. The smirk had become a leer. He methodically and ceremoniously held the envelope in front of his face, stared at her, and then licked the flap with his glistening tongue very slowly. As he looked down at his pants, his words struck Carol like a brick, "I'll be back to take care of this in a few minutes." He rubbed himself against her side deliberately as he moved Carol's chair over to the tape on the floor, so her line of sight directly faced the mailbox by the deserted corner lot. He saw the sill blocked the view looking up from the street below. He begrudgingly recalled that Roberto had picked this spot well. It was the tallest building on the corner, and no one could see in the windows from any other nearby building.

He leaned very close to Carol. She thought with disgust that he was going to kiss her. Instead, he abruptly shouted right into her ear, "Now make sure you watch the street like Roberto said, bitch." His scream was intensely terrifying. She wasn't anticipating it, and the unexpected twists and turns, ups and downs of her emotions were wearing her out. This was the work of terror, plied by terrorists. His rough yelling was shocking in contrast to the silence of the outside world that could neither see nor help her. That was the outside world she hadn't seen for almost a week. A world to which her eyes were still having trouble adjusting. She couldn't believe she was still near home—at least still in 1979 New York. She couldn't believe he was speaking again from across the room.

"I was going to mail this at the Post Office, but Roberto's idea is . . . *far superior*, as he would say. Just know how many fingers I hold up as I mail it. Because that's how many times I'm gonna hurt you if you don't, should we say . . . *cooperate*, when I get back. If you know how many fingers I hold up, maybe I'll leave you alone for the same number of hours. Who knows?"

Again, the leer. Again, as he went out the door, she felt deep within her soul how these terrorists used uncertainty as a weapon. "At least if I knew I was going to die, I could get ready for it," she said out loud to the empty room. Her emotions had been pent up for too many days not to use this solitude to strike back in some way. So, she shouted out loud again to the mute walls, "At least if I knew, then I wouldn't keep hoping. Oh, dear God. My boy! My husband!"

"The boy? The husband? And the money? How the hell could you let all that slip through your hands, Anderson?"

Morris almost crushed the phone receiver in the Dwight's kitchen as he listened. "What kind of European accent? And how did you let an unauthorized call distract you that way?" Again, he stopped to listen. "But you knew no one on the Board of Directors was told when he was going to the bank. How could you think it would be one of them trying to talk to Dwight? And why then? Jesus Almighty on the cross, Anderson, I thought you'd been trained for this. Good Christ, man, get back to central and don't move. If this thing blows up, I'll have you ass and your ID." Morris was beside himself.

He quickly called Dwight's partner at the Manhattan office. "Is there a Board member in town who speaks with a European Latin or Spanish accent?" he asked without even identifying himself. Jack Hanson recognized the gruff voice and sensed something was very wrong. "Not only no one in town; but no Board member with such an accent, at all." The only answer Hanson heard was the line going dead.

Morris had nothing left to go on to get the terrorists. No ransom he controlled for bait. No angry husband whose wrath he could manipulate. No confused kid he could use as an unknowing decoy. And those had been his true and unstated intentions. What a waste. She'd die. The professionals would move on to another place and do it again. He felt like ringing Stephen Dwight's neck for dealing on his own. Frustrated, he found himself muttering to no one in particular, "Dwight and his goddamn instincts. How dare the bastard. How dare he . . ."

His voice trailed off, but his mind raced. "Maybe. Just freaking maybe," he told himself. He called over to the engineer sitting by his electronic gear and nursing a cold cup of coffee. He hadn't dared leave his post to get a refill at the kitchen counter. "Clark. Get CIA on the phone. Director's office. I'll take it over here," as Morris spoke, he picked up an auxiliary eavesdropping line on the counter.

"But the Director isn't available right now sir," her unfamiliar voice was almost snide.

"Listen, sweetheart." He could almost hear her sitting up straighter at the sound of his voice. "You tell him. And tell him now. Tell him who's calling. First name and last. I'll wait." It was 4:45 in the waning afternoon.

The male voice came on in two minutes. There were no introductions. No formalities. Just a dead cold tone. "What? It better be good, Morris."

"Nice talking to you, too," Morris paused. He always went by the rule in these situations that *he who talks first loses*.

The Director knew him too well to play. They had spent too many years together as allies, even if they had sparred on occasion. That had made it interesting. That had made them an effective team as Director and Section Operations Coordinator. But the last bout over Morris's pushing for *Operation Hedgehog* caused the unmendable rift. Morris tried an

end run by going to the Senate Intelligence Committee rather than accepting the Director's rejection of the plan. Two days later Morris was out.

Now the Director was talking to his old nemesis, reduced to a regional operative for the FBI. But they both knew better than the title indicated. And Morris's silence was going to win the day. Under the guise of being busy, the Director gave in.

"Okay, Frank. I'll give. What do you want?"

"Information. Straight. No questions asked. And it dies with me." Morris always had known how to pique his former boss's interest.

"Why should I?" The Director still couldn't resist.

"Because it might save a hostage situation and bag some of the bad guys."

"The New York thing I saw on the Telex this morning?"

"Probably."

"What do you want to know, Frank. I'm busy."

"Three things. Did you ever mobilize *Hedgehog*? If so, are there any Europeans assigned to infiltrate domestic terror groups? Are any now still in the field under assignment or running loose?"

"That's a lot to ask."

"In more ways than one, pal. Remember, we both know why I'm in Brooklyn and you're still in God's country. But I'm not calling for that. That would's too deep. I'm calling *from* the field, *for* the field. And then it's over and done with. We never spoke." All Morris's cards were on the table, including the jokers.

"Now, Frank, you know . . ."

"Three simple yes or no answers will do. Then I'm gone."

"You don't expect . . ."

"Gone. I mean it. Forever."

"Alright, then. Yes. *Hedgehog* is in. There are some Europeans here in the States, and . . . well never mind. But the style is free. Just as you designed it. So, I don't know the answer to your third question. We usually hear after the fact. Quickly. Quietly. *From a friend*. And it's over until the next time. . ."

"Thanks. 'Bye."

"Frank? Frank?"

"Yeah?"

"About *Hedgehog*."

"Yeah?"

"It works, Frank. Damn well."

Morris hung up without saying a word.

"Listen, Joey. I'll call you as soon as I know," Stephen put up his hand up to head off further conversation. "We've been through it, son. I'm not saying anything more. And neither are you. Got it?" Stephen waited for Joey's non-verbal reply.

Then he continued, "You drive that way, watch the one-way streets: up two blocks, over two, down two, back two, and keep making that circuit, as a box. I go on foot the other way. The guy said no one else is to come. Remember they managed to get everyone else sidetracked to the Bronx. They're smart, Joey. Let's not confuse things. Just be near this pay phone at five o'clock. We'll have your mother back soon. Go on, now."

With that, Stephen Dwight tucked the valise up under his right arm and started along the sidewalk. It was relatively mild for December in Brooklyn, with only a slight breeze. It hadn't rained since right after Thanksgiving and it hadn't yet snowed that season. The storekeepers had swept the sidewalks. The sanitation department must be coming a different day, Stephen thought. There were no garbage bags piled up or trash cans lining the sidewalk for collection. Dwight had known this type of neighborhood shopping street for most of his adult life, but today everything was different. And not just because the holiday lights were strung across the street from the facades of the stores and apartments on the upper floors.

He watched everything as if he were using a microscope. He didn't want to become inattentive due to his familiarity with these avenues. The terrorists were smart. Dwight would blend in here, not stick out as a stranger. Two blocks away he saw the sign he was told to look for, perpendicularly set above the entrance to a corner drug store. The blue Bell System logo on the metal plaque stood out in the westering afternoon sun. Across the street he was to look for an empty apartment on the top floor, no decorations on the windows. He pressed his pants leg pocket to make sure the key was still there. He found it, as he was told he would, duct-taped to the pay phone where Joey was to be at five o'clock. It would open

the door to the apartment where he was to leave the money. Then he was to cross the street to the pharmacy and wait near the pay phone for the call telling him where to find his wife. He looked at his watch, afraid to be even a second too late. It was 4:53.

The winter afternoon was moving on. The sun would be at the horizon in about an hour. The windows of the taller buildings across Brooklyn were golden, and this sheltered, commercialized avenue was already settling into twilight. A wash of brightness cast by the headlights of a mail truck from the Post Office parking lot crossed his path. The carrier was on her way to make the last two five o'clock pick-ups down the street—most likely many Hannukah greetings peaking for Friday and Christmas cards just beginning to stuff the sidewalk boxes. He stepped off the curb and headed up the street briskly, remembering the warning not to run, not to attract any undue attention. No snow or leftover sand or salt was underfoot. Several storefront windows had Glass Wax faux-frosted corners. Their interior displays were theme-colored in an array of reds and greens and purples and blues, with model trains and baskets of picturesque dreidels for sale.

One or two stock boys were cranking the awnings back up into the storefronts for the night. They listened to the squeaking rollers but paid more attention to the young women walking along the sidewalks and window shopping.

* * * * *

Henry didn't dare attract attention to himself by looking up at the woman in the third-floor window. Not with a blue and white police cruiser sitting on the corner. Little did he know when it moved away, after what seemed to be an eternity, that the cops were answering an APB for the woman's own car, spotted by a taxi driver just moments before only three blocks away.

Free of the cops, Henry went into full gear. Now he looked toward the window and knew Carol could see him, even though the sill kept him from seeing her. He put up his hand. In it was the manilla envelope. He raised his other hand and put up two fingers. If she didn't know he'd put up two fingers, he'd really give it to her. Not that he wasn't going to anyway. "She'd better be watching," he spoke out menacingly in a nearly audible gruff undertone.

Yes, Carol was watching. Looking out on a silent world. Looking in some strange way at the beginning of the murder of her family. The thought that she would never see her husband's face again devastated her. Instead, she saw that goddamned smirk and two fingers in the air. She also knew that two other things were in the air. Rape and torture. Hers.

With horror slowly wrenching away at her stomach, Carol watched as Henry stepped off the corner sidewalk and started toward the mailbox. It was maddening. He wasn't the least bit rushed. He knew he'd make the five o'clock pick-up with a minute or

two to spare. *How could he be so cool about murder? So detached! So seemingly unaffected? So unflinchingly barbaric?* Then it struck her consciousness even more deeply. *How would he be as he punished her, raped her, and tortured her; as he most surely figured to do? If she couldn't solicit any sympathy at the worst moments, what was there left for her to do?*

"Short of the bastard being hit by a car, I'm lost," she sobbed out loud. Once again, she startled herself in the otherwise silent world of terror that she sat within. Uncertain. Alone.

But he wasn't hit by a car, or anything else, while crossing the street. Henry had made it to the mailbox without incident.

As he opened the wide hinged door and placed the letter bomb on the inside of the lid, something distracted him. A low and familiar whistle sounded from the deserted lot on the opposite corner. He looked up and half-saw, half-sensed a familiar figure, but it was now ominous and threatening. Instinctively, Henry looked back into the letterbox. There, in an instant, he saw his letter flat on the open lid and a small object stuck beside it to the inner wall of the blue mailbox.

Carol never heard his scream through her window.

She couldn't quite believe her eyes, though hers did not see what Henry's did.

And his eyes never saw what Carol's did.

Henry had just put his murderous letter into the mailbox when, to Carol, it seemed he hesitated. Then there was a blinding flash and a pair of staggering explosions. Carol's window shook and almost broke. All the force and power of the two blasts funneled right out the gaping mouth of the letterbox. The destruction plowed right through Henry's torso. It tore loose from his legs and his head. Most of what had been Henry's midsection was in the middle of the intersection, near a mail truck, even before his head dropped straight to the ground, bounced off the bottom of his left leg and stopped, after one full roll, at the base of what remained of the demolished letterbox.

Assorted charred and curled remnants of never-to-be-delivered holiday greetings, end-of-the-year bill payments, and shreds of crispy envelopes drifted down onto an open-air dead letter office. Through the mail truck driver's fractured windshield, it looked like a letter carrier's fantasy snow-globe.

Carol was in shock. She was stunned beyond belief. She was swept into hysteria by a flood of multiple and conflicting emotions: Bewilderment. Relief. Amazement. Fear. Hate. Sorrow. And then, absolute confusion.

Through a deserted lot on the opposite corner, a tall imposing figure walked with purpose, but without running. It was Roberto. He wore a pair of surgical gloves almost completely transparent from street level. In his hand was a device that resembled a remote control for a garage door. He let it drop, unnoticed, amid the carnage of Henry's feet and head.

Then. Incredibly. Roberto looked up at the window. He nodded politely to the woman he could only imagine was now able to see him. Then he pointed down the street. Carol looked away in that direction and almost fainted. Only the ropes and the painful wooden chair kept her from collapsing to the floor. There, across the street, and running with a valise banging against his leg, was her beloved Stephen. She looked back quickly, but Roberto was nowhere to be seen.

Carol saw Stephen disappear under her line of vision, beneath the window sill, as he rushed with abandon across the street. She could hardly believe it as she heard his familiar footsteps, taking the stairs two at a time, and crossing the hallway. A key was scratching its way into a lock. In a moment it would be over.

Morris picked up the phone before the first ring was complete. An accented voice simply stated a street address in Brooklyn, and the words, "All clear."

Morris knew, instinctively, but asked anyway. "Who is this?"

Above the sound of a dime cascading inside a drug store pay phone, Morris heard: "A friend. The Director said to call."

—2—

Carol Dwight lay propped on pillows in an FBI safe house on Staten Island. She'd been examined and discharged from a private clinic without any public records or health care claim forms traceable by Henry's New Jersey associates. She had taken a long, hot shower for the first time in six days. She wore comfortable pajamas Stephen had brought from home. The sleeve was cuff-folded up to her left elbow to make room for the saline IV taped to the back of her hand. Both wrists were salved and lightly wrapped to ease the chaffed skin and rope burns. It had been a busy four hours.

She was looking forward to a good night's sleep in a bed, as soon as she was done with Agents Morris and Anderson and their note-taking tech with his computer and keyboard.

Anderson's turn was first. He wanted to know about Henry's cassettes and Walkman. There was a shoebox of tapes in a back room. Carol told him Henry had gone there to work on his first two letters.

"We'll need to translate them. But there's reasons to believe you might know something about them." He just let his statement hang there in the room.

"How's that?" Stephen demanded, in a tone that was also asking "*What did you just say?*"

Anderson became defensive. Morris again doubted his competency, as he heard the agent try to recover, "I mean he might have said something, that Ms. Dwight heard, to give us an insight about the tapes."

Carol spoke quietly. She had mastered this voice over the years in her classrooms. They all stopped to listen. She did so on purpose to stop an argument she instinctively knew Stephen would start—to protect her from what he thought was an accusation.

"The only time I saw him with the cassettes was today. He was writing what he told me and Roberto was very important—he called it his *manifesto*. She turned directly to Morris specifically speaking to him. "Did you find Roberto?"

"He's not whom we're interested in right now. Right now, Henry is the key." Morris cut her no slack. They both knew his answer was dangerously disingenuous.

"Okay. If that's how it is, then," was Carol's dissatisfied reply.

"It is." Anderson spoke up to get Carol back to talking about Henry and his cassettes.

And so, she did. "I saw him singing quietly and his body moved as if he was listening to music. But not pop music on the radio. Not music to dance to. More like music before a ball game—to get the fans excited, the team psyched up to play their best. To destroy their rivals."

Her son scoffed at his mother's description. He broke Anderson's train of thought.

"Did he mention the music in the manifesto?" Morris wanted to know. Anderson didn't care for these interruptions. This was his debriefing, not Morris' interrogation.

Carol spoke to the room, to no one in particular. "No. He was talking about people and places and events."

"Can you recall any of them?" asked Anderson.

Now she did speak to Anderson particularly, but loud enough for all to hear. "Well, he did say that Thanksgiving was a celebration of oppression. He thought it was opportune this year that the holiday coincided with the anniversary of JFK's assassination, because Henry said he was an oppressor, too—of Cubans and the Vietnamese."

“Ouch.” That was Stephen’s voice she heard. While Anderson asked, “What else, please?” But Morris maintained his silence.

Carol answered him. “He mumbled about airline hijackings and then cried out, very clearly: *‘and don’t forget Munich and the Olympics.’* He was singing quietly to himself then.” She paused a bit and then continued, haltingly, “After he hit me for arguing with him about Stephen’s company—”

“What. He hit you? He’s lucky his own guy killed him.”

“Maybe . . .” said Morris. He didn’t mean it to be spoken aloud.

“What did you say?” It was Stephen. He was angry and confused.

But Carol commanded the room again. “Forget it, Stephen. Please. I want to get this over with. Okay?” Carol looked at him the way she knew he would not refuse her request.

Then she continued, again in that quiet voice they all had to concentrate to hear. “Like I was saying. After I argued about Vietnam and napalm, he went off on a tear. He said we got what we deserved when Three Mile Island blew up. Now we could pay even more for oil. And he was happy that Skylab fell from space to show Allah punished our pride.

“He was angry that Bhutto was executed in Pakistan. He blamed America. He rejoiced the Sandinistas overthrew the US-backed Somoza regime. He applauded their kidnappings and ransom demands as a tactic for change in Nicaragua. It connected for him to other events and movements—many I didn’t know about, but I did recognize the IRA killing Mountbatten a few months ago.

“But then Henry was interrupted by Roberto. He rested awhile and caught his breath after Roberto left. When he went back to his letter, he had even more intensity.

“And he switched to seething about Iran. I was more familiar about that because of all the TV coverage I remember, especially Ted Koppel every night counting the embassy days. Henry was thrilled that Khomeini returned this year. He said he wanted to go see him—that he knew the sound of his voice and the soul of his faith, from what he called the exile cassettes.”

Carol took a moment, and a sip of water. Then she went on. “He denounced Saddam Hussein and was emboldened by the student take-over of our Tehran embassy. He was furious about a mosque in Mecca that was seized, and where hostages were taken. I did not know about that. But he was excited that in retaliation the next day the American embassy in Pakistan was attacked. That was last month. I remembered that, but not the Mosque thing.

“That brought him right up to my kidnapping. He wrote about that and then finally stopped. He said it was time to go the mailbox.”

“He never took a break?” asked Anderson.

Carol took a minute to think, and then spoke up. "I never saw the Walkman before today. So, I don't know what he did when he wasn't guarding me. But each night after he ate dinner he went inside where they had a small TV. They watched the TV news and then that new channel from Connecticut, ESPN, that had on that Sports Center show in the evening. He watched that."

Agent Morris broke in. "That should be enough for now for you to work with, Anderson. Go see what you and Clark can make out of this—to see what their next move is . . ."

"Carol asked, "You mean tomorrow, in Jersey?"

Stephen got up. "That's enough now. You need some rest, Carol. It's 9:45. This can all wait—"

"No, Stephen, it can't. They know about tomorrow, right?"

A knock on the door stopped her. Carol wasn't used to more than two other people in her bedroom at a time—and that was only Stephen and Joey when he was much younger.

Now there were four grown men, strangers, huddling around her bed. She found it quite daunting. But she knew she had more to say. So, she put those uncomfortable thoughts and feelings aside.

"Agent Morris. A word, sir."

"And who are you?"

"McClarren. Jersey State police. Newark."

"Yes, finally. New Jersey." Carol stunned them all. "Did you find the address? Where the bomb makers are? Where they were going to take me to tomorrow with the money?"

Anderson looked at her. Looked at his note pad. Shot a glance at Clark. And then stepped over in front of Morris. He got in his face real good. "Looks like we lost a bunch of time here. Hope it wasn't a waste. We'll get on these cassettes right away. I'm saying nothing about this guy or Jersey. That's yours. Good freaking luck with it." He eyed Clark and they left.

Morris looked at McClarren as officiously as he could muster. "What have you got for us?"

McClarren handed him a piece of folded note paper. "For *us*? Nothing. For *you*? *This*. It's from a friend." He tipped the brim of an imaginary trooper's hat that he would no longer wear as a plain clothes detective. "Good evening, Ma'am. Sorry to disturb." And as

unassumingly as he had come, *McClarren, Newark*, left for the evening—never to be seen again.

“Well, Mrs. Dwight. Perhaps you have more to tell me about—I was unaware, it appears.”

“Why don’t you want to know about Roberto?” Carol wanted to sound insistent, without starting a pointless confrontation.

“He’s not part of my investigation.” It was all he could think to say, as weak an answer as it was.

Carol had all she could take of adjusting pillows and sitting up and straightening her pajamas in front of strangers. “Stephen, help me up, please. Take out this IV, too. It’s almost empty.” With his help Carol got up out of the bed. She took a few unsteady steps. “Mr. Morris. I could use a fresh glass of water from the kitchen, please.” She handed him the glass she was using.

Morris went to get the water. He knew on his return he was about to find out first-hand just why trained terrorists hadn’t broken Carol Dwight completely.

While the water ran in the faucet to get cold. Morris used the kitchen phone to call the Jersey State Police in Newark. It somehow did not surprise him that no one by the name of *McClarren* was assigned to that barrack. All Morris could imagine was that his old friend and nemesis in Washington was apparently not through with this case yet.

The unfolded paper bore a single street address in the metropolitan Newark area. He phoned it in to his superiors for them to begin surveillance. With a cold glass of water in hand, he headed back to do his own intel recon.

“How did you keep all this in your head, Mrs. Dwight?” Morris started right in. But Carol couldn’t answer with a mouthful of water.

Her husband answered for her. “It’s an old history teacher’s trick of hers. Serves her well on shopping day at the supermarket, too. Besides, it’s more than just a good memory, or even a photographic memory. The scientists call it, what is it, oh yeah—eidetic. She’s never monetized it though. So not many people know.”

Carol picked up the loose end. "I suspect if it were known, I might not have been kidnapped. These men were prepared, but they mostly were also culturally conditioned chauvinists. They probably spent more time finding Stephen and his money as vulnerable and just picked his lesser next of kin, his wife, to snatch up." She swallowed another bit of the water. "They would have done better staying in New Jersey."

"Who knows?" deflected Morris. He did not want to have this conversation. He had now satisfied himself that the Dwights were not involved as insiders. So, he could move on. Preferably without them. But he knew he might not be able to have his 'druthers.

But Carol was not so easy to shake off. "That's why I want to hear what you know about Roberto. I think he's more than meets the eye. I think he's the brains of that outfit. Henry certainty isn't—wasn't."

Morris resisted. Hesitantly. Instead, he opened the piece of paper. "Look. There's no record of McClarren with the Newark State Police. This paper he gave me is a Jersey address. I have to wonder if it came from the same person that contacted Stephen about you and Brooklyn—and diverted us to the Bronx." He stopped there.

Instinctively, Carol said, "And you think that's Roberto, right?"

Morris looked at each of the three of them, father, mother, and son. "Let's just say—it occurred." Morris was cautious. "It also occurs to me that the others may not know that you're not in Roberto's custody and that he doesn't have the money. They may just think that Henry was careless and blew himself up."

Stephen Dwight could not simply stand by and listen any longer. "What are you saying—without saying it—Agent Morris?"

Carol set down her glass and moved over and stood between the two men. She answered her husband, "What he's saying, Stephen . . . is that we have to give Roberto the money if Mr. Morris is to catch the others. The ones who made the bombs." She said this while facing Stephen and placing her right hand flat on his chest. And after a pause, she said, "And, one more thing." She turned her head and looked back over her shoulder at Morris.

Morris remained silent. He just smiled tightly and nodded slightly.

"What?" demanded Stephen impatiently.

Carol turned her head again to look directly in her husband's eyes. "Me."

* * * * *

Stephen Dwight exploded. "Never. Not in a million years."

"There is one other way." The new voice shocked them all. It was Joey's. The three adults had just about forgotten he was with them in the room and witnessing the entire evening's proceedings very attentively. Now they turned their attention toward him.

The young man held them spellbound. "The only way for that plan to work is without mom or Roberto. If the Jersey guys don't know where those two are, then they would be happy to find out that we don't either.

"I've been thinking a lot about this tonight; ever since I was pacing around in that clinic." He waited a moment and looked at each one of the adults in the room. He saw it was okay to go on.

"The only way you get the Jersey guys to know that we don't know about mom, Roberto, and the money either—is that they find me looking for my mom at the bomb site. A distraught teenager searching for his mom. Right there in Brooklyn. Right where they'll be looking. Carefully, of course, with all the police that are still investigating. But there's tons of gawkers to give them cover. I saw them all on the TV news before in the clinic waiting room. They're filling the sidewalks, pressing against those police barriers."

Stephen was on the brink of losing his renowned cool. He was finding being a parent of a feisty, determined teenager a lot harder than being a business executive of complaining employees. He was about to speak, but his son stopped him by putting up a hand and continuing.

"Dad, hear me out. Please. I haven't missed learning from you during those summer internships at the company." Joey nodded with raised eyebrows. His dad relented. "So, I go there. If the Jersey guys aren't there, then nothing happens. But if they are, then I'm their way back to the ransom."

Stephen again was the only one who spoke up. He was so intent on Joey that he did not see that Carol and Morris were following closely without objection. "I can't lose you, too, son. I just . . ."

"Dad. You haven't lost anyone or anything—yet. But with those guys on the loose, you sure could. A month from now. A year from now." He went on, "I don't want to start college glancing over my shoulder around every corner on campus, wondering who's looking at me in poli-sci classes. Do you want to live that way? Do you want mom to?" Stephen turned for help to his wife and Morris. He was stunned to find Carol staring proudly at her son and Morris smiling.

For a few moments, no one spoke. Then Carol said, "Okay, Mr. Morris. How can you make this work?"

The next day turned out to be the warmest that December until Christmas. Of course, on this Wednesday before Hannukah no one would have known that yet. When Morris would eventually look back in hindsight, he would see that the weather was only one of the many things about that day to shock him.

The plain-clothed men and women in the unmarked police cars and the spotters across the street from the Jersey address were keeping their precinct up to date. Periodically Morris heard from them and a few FBI personnel in a separate van. It was slow going, with all the relays they had started during the night—after getting the address from McClarren. But Morris wanted to stay with the Dwights.

For Morris, they were his new Hedgehogs, though he let on to no one about that. He hadn't been trusted years before, why would he expect to be now? But Operation Hedgehog worked already on this case, why shouldn't it still? Even with these latest twists.

Clark was back in their new safe house kitchen with his electronics. This second anonymous location was in the Bronx, not far from the George Washington Bridge. Access to Jersey would be quicker than from other boroughs. Anderson was assigned to watch Joey. Locally, only the Dwight family knew or had seen Anderson. So, Morris was betting that he was a safe choice to shadow the boy. For his own part, Anderson was highly motivated to make this work, so Morris knew the plan had that going for it, too.

But Morris's ace-in-the-hole came from Stephen Dwight himself. It was pretty easy with his connections to have a police camera placed right at the explosion site, marked as belonging to a minor local non-network news outlet from Long Island. The living room TV in the new safe house received a secondary UHF signal from that on-site camera. So, Morris and the Dwights had a way to see Morris's plan unfold.

Just as Joey had guessed, even on this day after all the excitement, the police barriers still contained a significant group of gawkers. They stood only three deep now, though. There were only half as many curiosity seekers as there were the evening before. Agent Morris and Joey's parents could see Joey on the TV, fidgeting back and forth, careful not to stay in one place for too long. Morris knew he'd be easier to be spotted by the Jersey crew and harder for them to abduct if he kept moving around, as the agent had instructed him to do. Carol and Stephen were watching the crowd for anyone they might recognize as a new face from the last few weeks. They had some black and white grainy photos from Jersey cameras outside the address for comparison. And they had Carol's memory of who she saw before she was hooded at her abduction.

Agent Clark called in to Morris and asked him to come to the kitchen. "You have a call you'll want to take." He pointed to a secure phone instrument in and among the surveillance equipment. All he said into the receiver was his name. That voice from his past-now-become-present skipped pleasantries. "What are you doing in Jersey?"

"I figured you'd want me there. Or at least expect I would be." There was a silence.

"You can't have your Hedgehog send me an address and not have me do something." Morris waited. The Director hung up, finding out what he really wanted to know—without having to ask, or worse yet, beg for it. Morris didn't have long to think about it. He heard some excitement from the room with the TV.

"There." It was Stephen. "They're keeping about three people between them, not standing right next to each other. They are to Joey's right. About five people over. Those look like the clothes in the Jersey picture, but I can't see their faces that well."

Morris picked up the phone, patched through to the FBI van. A moment passed. "Anderson. We see some possibles. Clothing for ID, not faces. About a half dozen bodies to the kid's right. And spaced."

As they watched the TV screen, a woman with a microphone pushed her way from the back of the bystanders to stand between the Jersey guys. "Hello. I'm Meghan from Channel 68. Have you been able to see anything here about the explosion?" A camera man moved up from the street side of the barriers. Meghan pushed the microphone into one guy's face, and he backed away. He just shook his head, put his head down and moved away. His associate was several steps ahead of him, heading down the street. They walked off in different directions. Just like they were taught. How they practiced. It was all Morris could do to let them walk away. He had to. There might be more of them.

Roberto also watched them from his parked vehicle. As they dispersed, he drove off. He wondered if it was his Director or if it was Morris who was closing in. He hoped he hadn't wasted his time on Morris.

Joey walked the two blocks to the bus stop. He waited for three busses to come and go. All not traveling the route he feigned wanting. Anderson watched the shorter Jersey fellow approach the bus stop. "Do you have extra change?" he asked Joey. He put his hand out with a twenty-dollar bill. Joey looked down at the money and saw the short stubby knife in his other hand, held right up against Joey's belly. Joey said nothing. "Here's my friend. Let us give you a ride." Joey did not resist. From across the street, Anderson made no move to stop them. But he and Joey each had a little prayer going full speed in their heads.

"Agent Morris." It was Clark. "Another call, sir."

"Nice trap. What's the play with the kid?" asked the accented voice in Morris's ear. The agent didn't care how Roberto had known to call there. He wasted no time on that. Morris knew he knew anyway. They spoke very briefly, in staccato. In the background, Morris heard a car idling, the engine hum echoing in a sidewalk phone booth. The last thing Morris said was, "Carol's counting on you."

* * * * *

The Jersey flat was better decorated than the Brooklyn rooms where his mother described living out her captivity. Joey was oddly confident of a similar outcome. But this group wanted him to write the letter. "Not until you tell me what you did with my mother. And the money my dad had." Joey did not let on that he was very happy to see he had surprised them.

* * * * *

The agent assigned to be at the Dwights house to catch the phone and the door had some company. He opened the door to a kid, on a bike, who had brought an envelope to the door. The boy wore a sweatshirt with a NY Knicks logo on front. It was still mild enough that he didn't need a knit hat or gloves while out riding after dinnertime. The agent gave him a \$20 bill. He asked the boy for more information about the man who stood under a streetlamp on a corner three blocks away and asked him about the Dwight's address. That was twice more than the kid got from the first guy to deliver the letter. But that \$ 10 bill in his pocket propelled the boy more than his curiosity about which way the lost guy walked away. So, the agent found out nothing about the suspects' whereabouts.

They drove the envelope, still unopened, to a secure facility in Manhattan, where an agent specializing in detonation safety open it very carefully. The letter inside was examined and then reinserted for delivery to the Bronx safe house, as quickly as possible. No sirens. No lights. The envelope was addressed in Joey's familiar printing. Carol and Stephen read the letter and then handed it to Morris and Clark.

Dear Dad,

I am so sorry I disobeyed you. But the TV news said mom's driver's license was in the pants pocket of the guy who died in the mailbox explosion. I just had to come and see what I could find out. And now I'm in a load of trouble.

Two guys pulled knives on me, threw me in a car, and drove me to this place they have. I don't know where I am. But we had to cross a bridge to get here.

Dad, these are the guys that stole mom. And they're mad. Their other friend is missing. They say they don't know where mom is, either. They swear they did not get the money. And they still want it.

I told them you gave it to their friend already. But they don't believe me. They want to know who you gave it to and where. They said they were going to call you and say nothing. You should just tell them when and where.

That's it. They won't say when they're going to call.

Please help. I'm scared for mom. And for me, a little.

Joseph

Morris spoke first. "Since he signed it the way he did, it's on the level. and it seems he's not very worried yet that they will hurt him."

Joey's parents agreed. Then Carol asked, "How do we get the call? What do we say when they call?"

Agent Clark spoke first, quite uncharacteristically. "When your phone rings at your home, the call is patched through over to our equipment here. Stephen will answer it just as if he were at home."

Morris spoke up, "Worst case is that they know the FBI and NYPD were up in the Bronx when the bomb went off. But they may know that Roberto wasn't. That leaves Joey driving around in your car and you, Stephen, on the street. I'd guess they didn't hear about you, Stephen. I'd go with the car."

Stephen couldn't resist. "Instinctively, Agent Morris?"

Morris was glad they were relaxed enough to think they could tease him. He could swallow a little pride. It went down better than eating crow. Especially off the Director's menu. But Morris knew he may still come to regret the risk of keeping his Washington superiors somewhat in the dark about the current status of the case.

Morris quickly got back in stride. "Listen, Stephen. As few words as possible. Write these down. Memorize them: *A tall guy in black. His gun rapped on my rear window when I was at the red light by the deli and the shoemaker. All he said was, 'the money.' I said, 'back seat.' He opened the door, took the valise, closed the door. The light changed. I heard him say 'drive' and a car horn blared. I couldn't see him clearly in the rearview mirror and drive at the same time.*"

That's all, Stephen. Even if they ask for more. Deny you know anything else. And then make as much noise as you can about where Carol and your son are. And be very careful, Stephen. Do not call him "Joey" or we'll lose our letter signature signal.

After spending most of the day and an overnight with them, Joey couldn't get used to seeing how young his two kidnapers were. Probably fewer than four or five years older

than he was. They didn't have much to say to him at first. But after a while they taunted him about how easy he had it in America. He didn't have the poverty they knew. Nor the fear. Not knowing when American soldiers or their friends would drive into their village when they were young. Or the refugee camp when they grew older. Not knowing if a plane they could not see or hear would be dropping leaflets with messages or maybe even bombs from the sky. They assured him it was no way to live, without it causing hate and a desire for revenge. The reasons for these things they could not tell him with certainty when he asked. But their mentor could. And he would come soon. For his part, Joey wondered if he would finally meet the missing Roberto.

Late in the morning on the second day Joey was in captivity, the Newark Police and the FBI van surveillances independently confirmed a third person had entered the apartment through the front street door. He let himself in, not needing the two young men to open the door for him. They each had decent pictures to send along shortly to Morris and the Dwights. But the black and white glossies and even the color shots were not of a person familiar to Carol Dwight. Now Morris had a fourth man to consider. And identify.

The identification came from Washington some ninety minutes after Carol Dwight said he was not Roberto. Morris's FBI superiors were not happy to learn about him placing the Dwights in harm's way with their captors. His next up in command let him know. "On no uncertain terms, you are going to be recalled and reprimanded. Except that they've got the kid, they'd have me pull you right now. My boss heard from the CIA Director that they've identified the operative in your teletype photo. He's a top recruiter from the Middle East, with time in Palestine and Iran. Your dead guy in Brooklyn was one of his prize students. It's very rare for him to let himself be exposed on the streets of America. So, you just put a civilian in the middle of a hornet's nest. And you better get him out, Morris. God knows what you were thinking. But apparently, your old boss across the river in Virginia seems to imagine he does. Why do you figure that could be, Agent Morris?"

And that was only the second worst phone call Morris would get that half hour. The worst followed almost immediately. It came in on an untraceable line Clark gave him, not the kitchen wall phone he had just hung up. The caller had an accented voice, "Bad play. You waited too long."

Morris retaliated, "What if you showed up with two packages? And I closed in as soon as you left?"

A pause. "I'll check if it's possible. No promises. You'll hear from me only if it can be made to work." And just before the phone clicked off, "You pressed your luck, Morris. You should have altered your strategy. Two of the same creatures can't be in the same cage. Side by side, their disguises evaporate into transparency."

As night fell that second day, the Newark surveillance reported there were no lights on in the watched apartment. A nervous site commander sent an undercover detective dressed as a US mail carrier to the outside door with an alleged holiday package for delivery. An overhead light in the shared vestibule came on. A woman answered the door. A woman no one had seen in the entire time they were watching. "Why do you have a package so late? Why do I have to sign for it?" she wanted to know. She would not accept it. It was not addressed to her. It must be some mistake. Her apartment number was different. Her neighbors had not been here since mid-morning as far as she knew.

Morris had no way to contact Roberto—if indeed it was he who had phoned. The Newark police had gone through the adjacent buildings earlier, in their surveillance on the first evening. There were no connections between the buildings. No alleyways out back big enough for vehicles. No direct passages to the roof. And no outside watchers had seen the suspects on the street, the sidewalk, the roof or anywhere else. Where they went and how they went there was something no one could tell Anderson, nor he Morris. Three men and a boy. Seemingly vanished.

Surrendering the element of surprise and knowledge, Morris had the Newark police and the FBI detachment enter and scour the building. They had search warrants in hand—acquired from Newark courts that afternoon—just in case they had to go in to save Joey. In the back wall of a closet of the apartment where Joey was held, they discovered a passageway to an adjoining apartment. That connecting apartment was unoccupied.

In that unit's bathroom, a collection of delivery company jackets, shirts, slacks, and caps in various sizes was still hanging on the shower curtain rod, as were empty hangers. Neatly arranged shoes lined the floor next to the tub. A call to the delivery company gleaned a report of an overdue van and driver, but not something unheard of at the beginning of the Christmas delivery season.

The sink and bathtub had a few hairs from shorn beards and heads. They were missed being wiped up with the paper towels found in a plastic garbage bag—several hours later—in an alleyway trash can a few streets away.

There was, however, a flat, unfolded sheet of note paper thumb-tacked to the back room wall of that escape apartment. It was lettered in Joey's printed hand.

Dear Dad

I don't know where I am being taken. I still know nothing about mom.
Or the money you gave their friend.

They are afraid if they call, you will know where they are.

All they want now is the money they were supposed to get for taking mom.
They need it to leave the country and go home. It is \$ 125,000.

They will contact you soon.

Joseph

—3—

Two days went by. Agent Clark was severely disappointed that he was not able to take family time for the first two days of Hannukah. Carol Dwight prayed that her son's captivity, at the hands of the two who took him, was not as hard as hers had been. There were no traces of materials for making bombs at the Newark apartments. So, she hoped maybe Joey's captors were not the ones who built them after all. Just others in the group.

But she did worry about how large the group was. What their ultimate goals were. Why they needed two million dollars. And if there were more bombs.

She was frantic about what would become of her son.

Whenever she dozed off or tried to sleep at night, it was the voice and face of Henry she kept hearing and seeing. And that horrible moment at the mailbox.

Frank Morris had been to Washington and back, Friday and Saturday. His career was all but done. His one sit down was with a Deputy Director within the FBI and the Director of the CIA. It did not last long. Morris mostly listened. He affirmed he tried to use the members of the Dwight family to reconnect and apprehend the kidnappers. They sent him back to New York to close out the case to preserve the continuity with the kidnappers, and to keep them from suspecting there was a clandestine agent among their associates.

Anderson held down the fort in Morris's absence. He took the call from, he assumed, Roberto with a third address that first day, but it was not one in which Roberto placed high confidence. He suspected it might even have been a bogus address. Perhaps a trap. If the authorities showed up there, it would likely be the end of Roberto's operational usefulness, if not indeed his life. Anderson refused to pass the address along or take any action on it himself. On the second day, a few hours before Morris was back in the metropolitan area, Anderson heard again, briefly, "It's vacant. Thank you for staying away. Goodbye."

There was little left for Morris and the Dwights to do, but to follow instructions to have the \$ 125,000 delivered by an independent courier firm arranged for by the kidnappers. Even with its considerable influence, it still took Hanson, Dwight, and Clarendon's attorneys most of the day that Sunday to switch out to \$ 100 bills, so as not to jeopardize Joey's life. The Board of Directors felt the inconvenience was well worth holding onto the balance of its two million dollars from earlier in the week.

The weather had turned more seasonably cold, but it still had not snowed, and it had only rained a few times, since after Thanksgiving. The service picked up the parcel late Sunday at the Dwight's home, still staffed by FBI agents posing as residents. Stephen, and Carol secretly, were still sequestered in the Bronx safe house.

Per the client's instructions, the delivery service left the parcel on the kitchen table of an unlocked, unoccupied two-story, single-family home. It was completely furnished, in a middle-class neighborhood in Queens. It had a full attic with dressers and footlockers with drawers filled with family heirlooms, tablecloths, and fabric for making quilts. There was a mostly unfinished basement, with a laundry area, washer and dryer, and the home heating furnace and water heater. The money stayed right where it was delivered, unclaimed into the next day.

That next day was Joey's sixth in custody. Religious calendars for the month showed it was almost half-way through Hannukah and two-thirds of the way through Advent. It was the twenty-seventh day of Muharram. For the NYPD and the FBI and most of the rest of New York going about its daily business, it was Monday, December 17, 1979.

But life was about to become far from orderly at the house with the money on its kitchen table. Chaos was to be the order of the day.

Just before eleven o'clock on that Monday morning, three trucks arrived within fifteen minutes. They parked illegally, ignoring the waning alternate side of the street parking rules. They were neither ticketed, nor molested. The parking ban was set to expire in ten minutes. The trucks bore signs and letterings for an estate sale auctioneer. They were a white panel truck, an unpainted silver metal box truck, and a black open bed pick-up.

Scores of people arrived—responding to neighborhood fliers and a classified ad in the morning's newspaper. Some drove up in trucks and cars and many walkers from the neighborhood appeared, a half hour before the noon start schedule. This was certainly typical of seasoned estate sale shoppers, who never waited for the posted time of the sale to show up and start hunting. The day's first shift surveillance teams, plain clothes detectives and undercover police posing as neighbors, were soon swamped by prospective buyers parking at the curbside and double parking parallel to them. Shoppers, and those otherwise interested, traipsed around the house picking at or fondling items for sale. Many carried out tables, and chairs, and lamps with their hand-lettered price tags dangling from a string and flapping in the chilly December air. Framed pictures and mirrors, tarnished wall sconces, with and without light bulbs, were hugged as new décor or exotic holiday gifts still requiring careful wrapping. Somehow within the melee an unmarked parcel in the kitchen went missing.

Morris had erred again. He was off his game. He kept the potential money pick-up quiet for too long, fearing an NYPD leak, like the one at the two-million-dollar hand-off at the bank. By freezing out the NYPD until ten o'clock that morning, he missed the chance

that New York's Finest might discover the advertising for the auction Morris knew nothing about. NYPD insisted they would have noticed it and alerted him—but he'd never know for sure. The auctioneer was vetted during the mass movement of people and auctioned belongings. He was absolved of any complicity by virtue of his legitimate contract, with the same firm that hired the delivery company that dropped off the money the day before. Weeks later, NYPD and the FBI would still not be able to locate that firm.

At four in the afternoon, when all was said and done, the police and FBI meticulously went through the property. Dusting for fingerprints seemed pointless, but the exercise was conducted, nonetheless. The Dwights stayed away, still sequestered in the Bronx to keep Carol's whereabouts a mystery.

By six o'clock, up and down the Queens street the setting sun laid out long shadows, cast by trees, front stoops, fences, second story dormers, and street signs designating parking hours. The day was growing as cold as the trail left behind by the absconding culprits.

In the basement furnace room, as the Con Ed tech was verifying the gas was shut off in the now-empty house, a New York City detective scanning the whitewashed stone walls with his flashlight, created a rectangular shadow. He discovered an oversized brown manila kraft envelope, clipped with two wire-spring clothespins to a clothesline strung to utilize the ambient heat from the furnace. Joey had hand-printed his father's name and address with a wide black felt tip marker on both sides of the package.

* * * * *

Once it had been deemed safe to do so, Carol had to read her son's letter twice to try to understand. She cried and cried. And then she shook from sobbing. She threw the letter on the floor after crumpling the paper so severely the others had to spread it out on a table in the safe house to uncrease it before they could see the printed message. Stephen did not know with whom he was most angry. Morris and Anderson were shell-shocked. For some reason Clark was less so; maybe because he had two teenagers himself, one a girl, the other a boy.

Dear Dad:

I simply could not believe the two fellows who took me are only three years older than I am. They have seen and experienced so much more than I have. And most of it is horrible. Life has been very cruel to them. Well, maybe not life, just other people.

Sadly, the bad things that have hurt them and their families include some things we Americans, our businesses, and our government have perpetrated.

I met a man here. He is their mentor. I can not write out his name. But he spent many hours with me over these several days. He has asked me to think about life and what I value. He has assured me he does not know what has become of mom or the ransom money or their friend you gave it to.

So, I can only hope that she is still safe somewhere and that you will find her some day soon and that you can return together to our home.

I made an agreement with my mentor. I think it is best for everyone. He and his people will leave our country. They will not look for mom, their friend, or the ransom money. No one will.

All they want in return is for me to go with them. Of course, part of the reason is to provide them with some guarantee of what they call safe passage. They are being honest about saying they will come to less harm, or no harm, if I am with them.

But what this is also about is for me to be able to spend time with them in many places in the world where their people live in fear and hardship.

For two years.

After that time, I will be free to leave and return home, or to stay for however long I wish and for whatever reason I wish.

I have decided to treat this like an extended semester abroad. I was going to do one of those in my sophomore year, anyway. I hope you can see your way to thinking of this the same way.

It is agreed that in some way, from time to time, I will be able to send you word that I am okay, without of course, disclosing where I am.

Please know that I love you. I am grateful and blessed for all you and mom have done for me all these years.

All my love,
Yusuf