



Custody

Installation Six
March 2024

Part 1

Custody

Installment Six — Part One

*We have yet to see and hear the last of Sunday, September 20, 1992. We saw this day begin and we can now continue to witness it becoming consequential in so many lives—of those who are with Linda Lowry at **HAPPYDALE**, of those who are scheming for and against her family in metro New York, of those who are searching for her in New Jersey, and of those on Long Island who do not even know Linda Lowry will have a place in their lives.*

*As a reminder, already before noon on this Sunday morning the following things have happened. Rosalyn Lowry has slept in late, after watching TV the night before and reading some pages of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, her current source of inspiration, imitation, and assimilation. Her daughter, Linda, has made an early morning foray to visit her caboose in the woods on the **HAPPYDALE** school property. Danny Hart was roused by a call from Mike Riley alerting him that Linda's "gentleman caller" train-riding drifter is in the backyard of the apartment in New Jersey. Mike has sent his dog into the darkness of the storage room basement to chase the drifter down, finally catching him outside in the yard as he tried to make good his escape. Afterwards, back in Riley's apartment, under the watchful eye of the dog, the drifter revealed to Hart and Riley and Detective Howe that he is NYPD Detective Dominick Corredor, on a disability leave. His specialty had been finding lost or missing or abducted children, but his grief at finding four children dead before he could rescue them has resulted in his self-imposed exile to hunt down those responsible. Lastly, Myles Lowry had rented a car on Friday and driven back to his boyhood hometown to search for clues into his wife and child's disappearance. He has continued his weekend of research by examining past issues of the village newspaper on microfilm, with the help of the public library's part-time archivist, April Smith, whom Myles discovered sleeping in his motel bed after their chaste, drunken Saturday night of waiting out a sudden, unpredicted rainstorm.*

Let's return to that still young day and see what else our 'familiar' are up to and how our 'newly-founds and about-to-be-founds' will cast their shadows before midnight, or at least nightfall, on the fate of Linda Lowry.

162

Dominic Corredor looked at a twin bed he hoped he would sleep in that evening. It would be his first night of bed sleep in several months.

He also was awed by the photo poster beside the bed portraying the towering heights of the Cliffs of Moher and a geo-partnered image hovering above them displaying a huge ice floe in the uncommonly calm Drake Passage. His eyes went to the caves etched out of each by powerful, insistent ocean tides.

His size doppelgänger, Danny Hart, had provided him with fresh clothing to complete his first private shower and shave opportunity in a long time. He went slowly to luxuriate and to keep his newly bandaged, dog-bitten forearm dry. His nasty looking forehead gouge he got from running into the Lowry's cage mesh was medically insignificant and did not require any bandaging. The clothes he arrived in and his stain-worn go-bag were on the floor in a transparent, zippered laundry bag Danny had provided. He bent over and retrieved only two tokens from those belongings and slipped them into his borrowed pants pocket. He zippered the bag again and stood up.

The smell of fresh-brewed coffee lured the man across to the door. With his left hand on the doorknob and an unarmed right hand, Corredor wondered what world lay before him as he stepped across this threshold. He counted the twelve reports of nearby Sunday church bells signaling noon and summoning a congregation to worship and prayer. Those sounds and thoughts urged him to hope that, on the other side of this door, he might find a place of sanctuary.

163

About an hour before that same noon many miles away, soon after the library opened for Sunday patrons, Myles Lowry sat alone with a small cardboard box of yellow plastic microfilm reels, scanning through archived issues of the village newspaper dating to his early teen years.

A grainy black-and-white photo of a man who was once taunted by town kids had sparked his interest the day before. Since then, he could not tear himself away from tracing the story of an infamous bank-related heist from back then. Soon Myles' tracing became an obsession, which must have been similar to the one that had seized the local newshound who kept at it, reporting from time to time in the small circulation weekly. On Saturday, before their night together, April Smith had become his research aide and film reel retriever.

April knew the library's archives backwards and forwards. She even wore one of those special rubber bands on each wrist, in case one broke and she needed to replace it to keep the film from loosening on its reel. Each band was a moderately wide distinctive loop, with a 't' tab sticking up even more erect than a rose thorn or a unicorn horn might. The tab was purposefully designed so the oils from the reader's fingers did not contact the band or the microfilm surface, when opening the roll and fitting its square-holed edge onto the sprockets to feed it into the reader. She had become quite adept at politely showing patrons and researchers how to use their thumb and forefinger along the outer edge of the roll, to handle the film.

Myles had been at it about an hour when he saw one of those brown rubber bracelets beside him, contrasted by April's indoor white skin and her blue and red rose-tattooed forearm that she now rested on the library table before him. Her sleeveless, cropped-to-the-shoulders, loose fitting tee shirt revealed the suggestion of other tattoos he had not seen the night before.

"So, what are you up to, Myles? Do you need the next editions, yet." She spoke as she gently turned his lined yellow pad to peek at his notes. To her surprise he let her continue looking at his handwritten summaries, as he spun the reel forward past pages of ads, town committee meeting calendars, and high school sports reporting.

He looked up and smiled. "Good morning, again, April." Seeing the clock on the wall had advanced since his entry, he corrected himself. "Good noontime, Ms. Smith." She carefully rotated the writing tablet back as it had been. She leaned forward and gave a little shrug, hoping he would excuse her curiosity.

"It has been weeks of issues since his last article. I keep feeling something must be coming soon," replied Lowry.

“What have his reports taught you so far?” she asked, seemingly innocently enough.

“What’s it like out? I’d rather sit on one of those outdoor benches, if it’s nice enough to do so. Will you need a jacket? I feel awkward talking out loud in a library.”

“I’ve got a sweater I can grab. I keep it in the office here in case the air conditioning is set too low. I go to the archives downstairs where it’s always controlled for humidity as well, but it’s usually colder up here, at least in the summertime.” When she came back with her shoulders and tattoos covered, they went out to the shrub and flower garden by the library entrance.

“The long and the short of it, so far, is this.” He started to say as they sat down on the park-style bench, plaqued to commemorate a departed benefactor. “Two backpacks containing bearer bonds went missing. A troubled man, who went by the name of “Petey,” was familiar to railroad commuters and kids in town. He was reportedly seen making off with the bags, instead of the daily newspaper and monthly magazine bundles it was his job to deliver to newsstands and candy stores in the business district. He made his deliveries early each day and in the later afternoon. Back then there were morning papers and papers with early afternoon editions. There were the papers from New York and Boston that were trucked in or carried by train and then the two locals, *Newsday* and *The Long Island Press*.” April interrupted him to say hello to some library patrons who greeted her as they entered.

“The stories on the microfilm fill in the blanks I could not remember from when I was growing up,” he started again.

Almost too eagerly, April asked, “Like what blanks?”

“It seems there was to be a delivery of bearer bonds from the bank, in the railroad station plaza, by way of the train to New York City. Since it was after winter banking hours, there were only officers of the bank and the security company involved. In the late afternoon’s gathering darkness, the bond carriers were redirected outside the station and told a more traditionally expected armored car was going to be used instead. They were shown into the truck, waylaid and overpowered, and when they were finally released hours later from the locked and abandoned vehicle, the backpacks

and bonds were gone." Myles took a look at his notepad he had brought outside of the library with him.

"In the days that followed, no way could find Petey. Witnesses began imagining that maybe Petey had picked up the bags by mistake—"

April cut in sharply. "That's preposterous!" She covered her mouth with her hand and apologetically told Myles, "I'm sorry. That all sounds so highly unlikely."

"That's the same conclusion the authorities came to," according to the news reporter. "But nevertheless, neither Petey nor the bonds showed up in the weeks that followed."

"There were investigations. The bank people were censured, fired, and heavily fined for the odd procedure for releasing the bonds." Myles told her.

"What did they have to say for themselves?" April inquired.

"They told the same thing to the police, the District Attorney, the courts, the media—apparently anyone who would listen—the way the reporter tells it. They say the bonds were private property and insured. The owner of the bonds stipulated the means of transfer and delivery."

Again, April demonstrated almost a need to know that seemed strange to Myles, but he mistook her interest in the story for a possible interest in himself. After all, how else would he allow himself to understand the 'highly unlikely,' as she had just used the term to describe something else, events of the night before? Why else could he imagine, he thought to himself, would April Smith ever end up in his motel room overnight? The same young, tattooed library part-timer who now asked him, "Why would the bond owner do that?"

Lowry put those troubling thoughts of April aside and answered her question. "After what must have been some significant digging, the reporter wrote about that in an article I just read this morning. It was later in that same year, deep into the summer, that his article about it appeared." Myles adjusted himself on the bench. The seat wasn't as comfortable as it looked. Except that there was this young woman willing to keep sitting there with

him, he probably would have gotten up and returned inside. The day was changing and becoming overcast.

“Apparently, the bonds belonged to a rather eccentric older gentleman. He had lived in this town for most of his life and kept an apartment in Manhattan. After his children left home and the village, and his wife passed away, he sold the house here and made the apartment his full-time northern residence. He still went to Florida for the winter months.” Myles stood up and stretched his legs walking back and forth in a tight oval in front of the bench. Had he lifted his arms and put them out straight from his sides he would have looked like a tightrope walker. “The reporter wrote that after his wife died, he became something of a recluse who stopped trusting people and institutions. He chose to live in anonymity and opted inexplicably for a ‘hide in plain sight’ method to transport his funds.”

Myles sat back down and said, “And that’s as far as I’ve gotten. I may read a little more and then decide to check out of the motel, to get something to eat, and to head back to New Jersey before it gets too late.”

April Smith made her way back inside the library behind him. She rehung her sweater in the office and came over to Lowry’s table with her shoulders and arms, but not her soul, bared again. Standing before Myles, she asked, “Are there any other issues you want me to retrieve from the archives? I’m not working today, but I’ll put the ones you’re done with away and get you any others you want before I head back home.”

Myles surveyed the table. There were just two more reels in the last box in front of him. He was finished with the two others that were there. “No, thanks. I’m done with these,” sliding the two closed boxes with the flat palm of one hand over her way, “and will just go through these other last two reels.”

“Okay. Well, it was nice meeting you. Let me know if you come back again next weekend. I’m working Friday and Saturday again next week.” April started to walk away but stopped when Myles spoke her name.

“April. If you’d like, I’ll come back after the motel and pick you up to get something to eat. My way of saying ‘thank you.’”

In order not to appear too desirous of him doing that, she said, "Hey, call me when you're ready and I'll let you know if I can. You have my number."

164

Breakfast at the HAPPYDALE dining hall that Sunday morning had been a lingering treat. Linda had been happy to have a chance to sit with some friends instead of her mother. She had been hungry after her secret trip to the caboose earlier that morning. She had been able to have much more to eat here, without her mother noticing, than she could have had at home.

For her part, Rosalyn had been pleased to sit with some adults for a change of pace. Especially since they were not talking about school or library business. The talk of the morning had been about a group outing for parents and kids. The site for the event was to be a movie theater with multiple auditoriums. That afternoon the featured movies included family shows and more mature films.

The Sunday morning newspaper movie review and timetable pages had been spread out and shared, occupying space on the tables between coffee cups, plates of eggs and ham or bacon, some stacks of pancakes with melted butter and syrup, and individual bowls of fruit salad and cottage cheese from the buffet serving line. Based on the times for movie starts and the running times of the films, the group had settled on three to choose from that had just recently opened: *The Legend of Wolf Mountain*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *Unforgiven*. They all were first showings of the day and had been slated to start within five minutes of each other, around one o'clock. But because the first two were about the same length and the Clint Eastwood film would run for an extra half hour or so, the women set up carpools according to which film individuals wanted to see.

Since Rosalyn had spent the night before with Mr. Eastwood, she opted for Tarantino's directorial debut and, as a result, she would be riding with Linda. Thus, she would see a contemporary failed jewelry heist gone bad and leave the Old West revenge-murder-justice and family reunion for others to watch.

Rosalyn's fixation on her viewing choice and the carpooling possibilities had made her, uncharacteristically, less vigilant. She had not realized, in time to turn down the invitation to go to the movies, that Linda would be taking in a film about kidnapped kids needing to use their wits and valor to survive in an unimaginable world, until they could be saved by agents of adult justice and law enforcement.

165

Eleanor Quatrane hardly slept for more than a half hour at a time Saturday night into Sunday. The thing that kept coming back to her as she tossed and turned and walked back and forth around her home was the nagging knowledge that she still had not found in all the historical documents a reason that Ned Hegerman would have capitulated and allowed Myles Lowry to accept such a horrible visitation arrangement two years earlier.

She knew there could be three players in the mix.

Rosalyn Lowry would not want Myles to have any visitation rights, but would have had to accept some minimums.

Godfrey Mellon had to have had something of his own motivation, but it may have been between him and Hegerman, with the Lowrys as collateral damage of his opportunism. Quatrane knew Ned and Myles had a long relationship, so Myles choosing him as his lawyer was understandable. But she could not fill in the piece of why Rosalyn chose Mellon.

The newly discovered daughter/heir was a curiosity. Eleanor was searching for the reason she had asked Mellon to adjudicate and settle her father's last affairs. She found no mention of a person named Marie in the Lowry divorce proceedings documents, currently or two years earlier.

But Eleanor had a loose end she started tugging at during the night. Barnard and Columbia were linked in an affiliation carefully described as 'not an assimilation' of the all-women's school into the coed megaplex of Columbia. That was affirmed in captions under the Political Club picture on the Yearbook's photocopied pages Myles brought them. It was Gabriella Costa who discovered that. And she also called the registrar's office at

Columbia, to avoid talking to Barnard, and learned that the first three-year trial of that arrangement coincided with the years Myles was at Columbia and Rosalyn was at Barnard.

Walking in room-to-room circles on her carpets in the early hours of Sunday, some things other than just the sun dawned on Quatrane. The elusive Valerie McKinley was a collegiate contemporary of them both, as well.

But the pieces of the puzzle frame that had escaped detection before, came into view for Eleanor as she smelled the first pot of coffee she put on to brew. The just-revealed audit documents of Ned Hegerman's assets showed dates for his contributions to Columbia undergraduate and to Columbia law. Those semester dates started earlier than, but overlapped in their later years with, the early collegiate careers of Myles and Rosalyn and Valerie. Eleanor was too excited not to call somebody about this.

Of course, it had to be Danny, given his rules about not involving either Gaby or Karidja.

Hoping against hope that he'd be home on a Sunday morning and that he would pick up his phone rather than let it go to record mode, Eleanor hurriedly got dressed, grabbed a coat and her change purse of quarters, and went looking for a pay phone. She had to walk a block more past the tavern whose neon branding lights in the windows were sleeping. On that next street, she came to her branch of Citibank with an ATM located in a card-entry exterior foyer. She was hoping she remembered correctly that it also had an out-of-the-weather pay phone.

There was no answer on Danny's phone. She left him a message that she would try back again, in the time it would take her to walk once around the block, from the bank to the bar and back again.

She had no luck on the second try either. She spoke into the message machine once more. "Danny, it's Sunday morning. Use my home number to leave me a signal to let me know I can come back to this pay phone and call you. When you call my number, let it ring twice. Then hang up. Then immediately call me back again and let it ring just once. Then hang up." She explained, "Some of my lady friends up in Westchester and I use this as a way to avoid toll call charges. The signal tells our friends that we arrived safely,

after the drive home alone from being out together.” She didn’t know what else to do, but hang up, walk home, and hope for the best.

166

The accountants were facing Thomas Bruce for the second Sunday morning in a row. They were quite unhappy about being there, especially the two who had—now perhaps to go unused—tickets for the Jets game against the 49ers at one o’clock over in the Meadowlands. The green and white fans were getting ribbed by the Giants followers, because they had the televised Monday Night Football game the next day against the Bears out in Chicago.

“Are you absolutely sure?” Bruce demanded.

The senior accountant spoke for the group to provide anonymity for any one person, as a blank cartridge is given to an unspecified member of a firing squad. “We followed your instructions to find a pre-existing, forgotten tranche in Attorney Hegerman’s past. One such possibility arose, not in his assets, but in his wife’s. An amount of a third of a million dollars. Some years before she passed away, dating back around the Kennedy inauguration. Hegerman did not incorporate that fund into his assets upon her death. It continued as a trust that did not bear his name.”

“Is the trust still in place today? Who controls it upon his death?” asked Bruce.

“We are still looking for that,” the accountant indicated.

“Is there anything out of the ordinary about this?” Bruce inquired. “Will this trust be considered an asset of Ned’s by the principles of a forensic audit?” He was pacing and thinking out loud, so the accounts considered his musings as a rhetorical question.

“Does it matter to whom any distributions of the fund were made?” Bruce brought himself up short and turned to look at them. “If Ned did not receive any of the money from the trust, and if it were managed by someone else—if it was kept at arm’s length from Ned—would it be appropriate for

the audit to exclude it from among his assets, and by extension, the assets of this law firm?"

"We would have to examine the guidance documents for the industry to get that answer precisely. We may have to consult with the legal department tomorrow when the staff returns to work, sir."

Bruce looked around the room. It was obvious from the shifting of accountants in their seats at the table, these men wanted to go home to their families, or wherever they had in mind, and at least salvage half their Sunday. He decided not to stand in the way. He could not afford a full-scale revolt from these men. He was going to need them on his side until the end of the year. Their work was what very well might save the firm's assets from usurpation by Godfrey Mellon—and him from his partners.

"Before we break it off for today, I just have one more question." He inhaled. "Is there anything odd or out-the-ordinary, or unexpected, in this trust or the inaugural tranche?" Anything that Mellon's money people will treat as a rock to kick aside and look under?"

There was some throat clearing. Their spokesperson was silent. But Bruce knew something was . . . what his partners would call, 'off.' He was getting more uncomfortable by the moment, until one of the young guns at the far end of the table spoke up.

"It may be nothing, sir, but . . . and I think I'm the only one who's bothered by it . . . but . . .—"

Bruce had no patience left. He almost screamed out loud, "What!"

"Well, sir, I would not be concerned if the tranche was for \$300,000 or \$335,000." He shifted some papers in front of him and picked up a small slip of paper. "But, sir, it was for the amount of \$333,333.34 precisely."

The managing partner looked hard at the young man. He scanned the rest of the bent heads and downcast eyes around the table "You mean, young man, like one of a three-way-split of a million dollars?" Bruce accused.

"Exactly." The young man almost forgot his manners, "Sir."

Bruce was too dumbfounded to pursue this new information publicly. He wanted no witnesses to, or record of, his thoughts. He dismissed them all to go home and enjoy whatever the rest of the day held in store for them. He did ask the spokesperson to send a request to legal to meet the next morning at 9:30 in the large conference room. The same room that Ned Hegerman used to construct his staff to revisit the custody of Linda Lowry.

Most of the accountants were not looking forward to having their Monday asses in chairs at that meeting with legal and Bruce. But there were two accountants checking their watches. Their timepieces suggested they could have their Sunday asses in their seats on the twenty yard line, watching the pigskin fly, before the beginning of the second quarter. They did not care at the moment about Monday morning quarterbacks with attorney's sheepskins.

167

About fifteen minutes before noon, the twice-rung phone signal sounded in her apartment. Eleanor put on her coat and made her way back to the pay phone. The tavern was open this time, but she forsook its potential for phone booth interruption, and because the patrons cheering their Premier Soccer League teams was so loud. In the first month of this new League, SKY's telecast matches were already filling city barstools late on Sunday mornings.

Fortunately, no one was looking to get cash from the ATM at the Citibank while Eleanor used the phone to call Danny.

As she had hope, Danny picked up. She never imagined it would be after only one ring.

"Go ahead." Danny's voice was excited and sounded as if he was expecting a call from someone other than herself.

Caught off guard, she replied, "Danny, it's Eleanor."

He thought she sounded somewhat breathless. "Is everything okay? Are you safe?"

“Yes. But Danny, I have big news.” She waited. He said nothing. She thought she heard another man’s voice in the background. She tried to envision where he might be in Danny’s place. “And I had to tell you. I’m sorry if it was too early in the day to leave my message before. But I hardly slept last night.”

“It’s okay. Really, Eleanor. What’s the news?” he asked in his more usual calm voice.

“Pieces of the puzzle are coming together from the Yearbook pages, the documents from the reading room floor, and the audit book of Ned’s assets. Not all of them. But enough to get you thinking of what’s to be done next.” She inhaled.

She continued carefully. “Myles, Rosalyn, and Valerie McKinley all were in college at the same time. He at Columbia. The ladies in Barnard. The schools had what they called a “non-assimilation agreement” for three of the years they were there. A few years before and then during those same years, a trust somehow associated with Ned, or him with it, made payments for tuition and board at Columbia and Columbia Law. It only makes sense to me that the money was for his daughter, Marie. And it makes further sense that he didn’t want anyone to know he was doing that. Tomorrow I will look to see if the charitable foundation he began was the source of those funds.”

Danny interrupted. “You can’t get caught . . .”

But before he could go on, she jumped in. “I can do that because Thomas Bruce wants me to come back to him again with further thoughts about why Ned’s assets don’t balance with his expenditures. I’ll have to explain that another time. Just trust me on this. I’m not getting caught, at all.”

She went back to her Sunday morning brainchild. “Let me go back now for you. If that’s whose education Ned was paying for, then there is a chance that all four of them were there together, and perhaps some or all of them knew one another in some capacity or another—Myles, Rosalyn, Valerie, and Marie.” She exhaled and then it occurred to her. She had not checked back over her shoulder since she left home. She did not know if she had been followed. She relaxed when she realized that she did have her ATM card she needed to get in the Citibank foyer and to take money out of the

cash machine, in case she needed to make it appear that was the point of her trip.

Her thinking gave Danny a chance to reply. But as he started, she stopped him. "Wait Danny, I forgot to check if anyone followed me. Wait."

Hart was at first glad she was checking. But he became uncomfortable when it took her three minutes to get back to the phone. The first thing he heard was not her voice, but a coin drop. And then he heard her say, "It's okay. Just a guy walking his dog. He went right back into his building after picking up . . . well, let's call it the hair of the dog that didn't bite him."

Finally able to talk to her, Danny said, "You did a massive thing here, Ms. Quatrane. And for your next trick . . .?"

"I was hoping you would tell me that, Danny. You're the investigator." She reminded him of their earlier tit-for-tat about who was better suited to find out certain things, and who was not.

"Well?" was all he said.

"Well, I'll track that money down tomorrow first thing. At the same time, I've got to find his daughter's last name, then and now. I will get after current law firm associates and bar exam results from back in the after-graduation time period. I'll look for Marie as a first name. Too bad it's so common, but you told me this wasn't always easy. Having Columbia Law as a degree source might help some. And . . . Danny. Who knows, as I go through the motions with Bruce tomorrow, maybe her last name will appear on some of the papers he hasn't shown me yet. One way, or the other, I'll find her."

"And what if you do, Eleanor. What then?" asked Hart.

"I'm not sure. But I still think Mellon's got something to do with this." She paused. "And maybe Mrs. DeWitt at SEC will pull a rabbit out of her hat as she doffs it to Ned . . . whom she remembered and spoke well of, by the way. Who knows what we might find about that other puzzle—the acquisition and collapse of the previous partnership."

“Hope so. Be careful. And take a rest this afternoon, to make up for last night and to counteract this excitement. You’ll want to be at your best and on your toes tomorrow with Bruce,” Danny told her.

After she hung up, Danny turned to Dominic Corredor. “One of the ladies from the law firm representing Linda’s father, Myles Lowry.”

The railroad rider-née-NYPD detective nodded and just mumbled, “Huh.”

“I’ll tell them about you later on, maybe. For now, let’s just see how things turn out between you and Howe. Okay?” Danny asked.

Corredor just nodded and paced some more.

168

April Smith sat with Doctor Denison LeClerc in the same office she had been to once a week in the last six months of her mother’s life. His oncological treatments were respectful, and the environment of his burgeoning clinic was serene. That was four years ago when she first met him. Since then, the clinic had expanded and acquired more space in the medical building. When the current remodeling of the last portion he had recently acquired was completed, his clinic would be the structure’s sole occupant. It sat on a corner lot on the other side of dead man’s curve from the public library.

For April Smith, it was a short walk from her apartment to the library and the clinic. She rented the apartment so she would be near her mother’s last residence. She found the library work to be near her apartment after her mom passed away in comfort and peace. Her four-day-a-week, full-time job of ten-hour days at the luncheonette in town was a longer walk, or a bike ride away.

LeClerc asked her, “So you’re sure this man’s name is Lowry?”

“Yes, doc. I saw it on his out-of-state library card yesterday and again on the motel register last night,” she assured him.

LeClerc said emphatically, “April, I never meant to put you in harm’s way. I must tell you this motel thing really has me upset. As a doctor, it would be unconscionable to ask a woman to use a night in a motel to find out about a stranger. But as a friend, I’d be appalled to do that.”

“Doc, don’t worry. It wasn’t like that at all. We just drank too much and flat out fell asleep watching television. You can relax about this, please.” Her innocence seemed almost quaint to the relieved oncologist.

“So, tell me April, why is he researching the robbery?” he asked.

“I don’t get the feeling he started off doing that. He just asked for a few reels from the time he was growing up here. It seemed he was looking at nostalgia, like high school sports and kid activities like scouting and church outings—you know, the hash-and-home fries of a local weekly. It was only when he came across the first reports of the theft that he started pursuing it.”

“Does Lowry say why he’s interested?” continued Doctor LeClerc

“No. That’s the thing. He had stopped talking to me about his reasons. He hadn’t said much until this morning. We were out on a bench near the entry, and I poked around like you asked me to do. He talked more about it then—more than last night or in the library,” she reported.

“I wonder what he’s up to?” mused the physician.

“He’s up to the old man’s eccentricity. You know, the guy who the bonds belonged to back in the City.” Her answer was literal; LeClerc’s question had not been. He continued to be amazed at her inability to figure out what he was after about this Lowery guy.

“What do you want me to do, doc? It looks like he’s leaving like he said he was going to,” Smith asked.

“Please take him up on the invite to eat together. I’m certain about that. But we’ve got to have him take you somewhere I can check him out personally. Listen, when he comes to pick you up at your place, can you get him to come inside? Tell him you have to make a phone call first before you leave. Say a friend has an eatery place to tell you about. When you call me, I can tell you where to ask him to go to eat. Can you do that for me, please,

April?" Denison LeClerc still didn't have all his details straight, but he knew the general idea.

LeClerc had to make two phone calls himself first, after she left.

169

Dominic Corredor knew Hart and Howe had said he was to stay with Danny for his own comfort and protection. But as pleasant as being here in Danny's place seemed, the cop in him really felt like he was under some sort of preliminary house arrest.

Truth be told, Dom wasn't the only one who felt he was in a tight spot. Danny had absolutely no desire for Howe to know where he lived. But they had agreed they could not bring Corredor into a police station, nor chance being seen with him in public if this whole thing went sideways. And that is how it would go if it turned out this rail rider was a pathological liar who had done something terrible to Linda Lowry. It had been risky enough bringing him to Urgent Care.

When Howe rang the front doorbell four floors down on the sidewalk, Danny started to the elevator. He took the risk. "We'll be right back up, Dom. Please give it a chance and hear her out?" he asked.

"You know what she's going to say already?" Corredor asked from his seat on the couch. "She's only had two or three hours to figure it out."

His host, or jailer, answered. "No, I have no idea. I've only known this woman for less than a month. So I can't even guess." Hart shrugged as the elevator door opened and he stepped in. On the ride down he could only hope what Corredor had asked them to consider, about bringing him into the search for Linda as some type of consultant or independent contractor, had resonated with Howe, and whomever she had to talk to and report.

Howe was not in uniform. She looked like she was dressed to go out for an exercise run of a few miles. Her appearance was less bulky without her protective vest. She seemed less threatening without a badge displayed on her belt or chest. The one car in front of his place that Danny did not

recognize as a regular on the street was not police issue, marked or unmarked. Strangely, he felt some kind of optimism rise within him. But he didn't really know for what he might have been hoping.

He closed the door and said, "This is workspace." Howe scanned the open floor. She carefully pointed forward, with her forehead and shoulders leaning in, as if she were entering to search for a fleeing suspect. With her eyes, she asked Hart if she could look around. He said, "Please do," and made a sweeping motion with his hand.

Howe paced the floor, every once and a while throwing a glance out the front windows and onto the street and sidewalk. She tried the rest room doorknob. When it wasn't locked, she opened it and checked if the space was indeed what the icon on the door said it was. Danny couldn't help but notice that she also craned around to make sure there was nothing she needed to see behind the open door, least of which might be someone standing there. Even without a vest or a drawn sidearm, it seemed her ingrained habits died hard. Hart figured that was much preferable to a careless detective doing so.

Howe took her time and peeked in the two rear office spaces, the little meeting room, and the file cabinet room off the hallway behind the cityscape mural that split the floor, front and back. She made her way over to where Danny stood at the open elevator door. "Where to now?" she asked.

"Home is up top. Corridor's up there." Danny kept it factual as long as Howe was still in a stalking mode.

She asked, "And in between, on two and three?"

"Three apartments each. Rented out. Families. Some kids in most." Danny's staccato reply matched the pace of Howe's inquiry.

She nodded and stepped in the carriage. On the way up, she kept at it. "Stairs, Danny?"

So did he. "One flight each, front and back. Open out into the street out front and a driveway out back. Fire escapes on each side down to ground level passages, narrower than an alley for vehicles other than bicycles or motor scooters."

“Two and three flight walk-ups?” was Howe’s last quiz.

“If the office is open, they’re welcome to use the elevator. If I’m home and they call me, I open up if they’re coming back with groceries.” He thought to add. “And if their kids are home alone and need something, they know they can use the elevator to get help if I’m home or down in the office.”

It was only that final additional piece of information that broke Howe’s cop face into a smile. In the rising car, she noticed the requisite up-to-date inspection label, a red emergency phone behind the ‘break glass’ door, and its accompanying small hammer on a chain. But uncommonly it had a companion. There was a black handset, readily accessible at child-height, that had DANNY printed on a dymo-type label affixed, facing front. It did not require any dial or button to reach him.

Dominick Corredor was still patiently sitting on the sofa. He stood only after they entered into the room from the elevator and could see him. His arms were at his sides and his hands were clasped in front of his waist.

Howe spoke first. “Good afternoon, Detective.” He visibly relaxed at her greeting and returned it saying the identical words. Danny felt affirmed in his assessment that Howe was a woman of few words because she knew how to make each one of them count.

As host, Danny asked, “Should we sit at the table or in the comfortable chairs?” Howe did not need to speak to answer. She just sat in a separate armchair. Clearly, she did not want to sit beside one of the men on a couch and have to look sideways to see and talk directly. It was easy for Corredor to sit back down. Danny made his way to another chair so they would face each other in a triangle of sorts. But before he sat, he asked, “Water, coffee, soft drink?” Two head shakes signaled they would start off dry. Danny sat and extended both hands forward toward Howe to give her the floor.

Her voice was fuller than her frame suggested might be expected. Once they knew her, people came to realize there was not one thing ‘slight’ about Detective Howe. “I regret it took so long to get back to you. But there were some boxes to check that required input above my rank and budgetary discretion. Some were here in my precinct. And, as you would expect, some were further east, across the river.” She paused. “You know, Danny, that

drink idea was a good one. But your choices were too limited. Can you do any better?"

Hart stood and went to the kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and closed it. He opened a cabinet too low for them to see inside. He closed that one. He took a few steps into the sitting area. "I have a few beers, a white wine, a whiskey, a tequila, and orange juice."

"I'm off duty until Tuesday now. So a white wine seems suitable for a late Sunday brunch," was Howe's reply.

Corredor said, "I'll take an orange juice, please. I'm not used to drinking anymore, contrary to the prevailing opinion about non-commuting rail riders." He was not yet comfortable enough to smile in Howe's company. And he wanted first to hear what she needed a drink to tell them, or that she thought they needed one to hear. Danny came back with a short tumbler of whiskey, neat.

All seated and sipped, Howe restarted. She asked Corredor directly, "Dominick. Bad news or good news first?"

Corredor was not quick to answer. He thoughtfully asked, "You have both?"

Danny stayed out of it.

"Yes, I do." She asked, "Which first, Detective. Your choice."

"Let's do the bad first and then we can move ahead, I hope, with the good." Dominick Corredor was never happy about duty assignments of notification—having to give bad news to surviving family members after a tragedy.

Howe sat forward. "Suits me." She sipped the wine and set the glass down on the hardwood floor next to her chair. "The bad news is that neither captain on either side of the river is anxious to change your status right about now. Mine wants nothing to do with you, or my proposal, which we will return to shortly." She waited to see what either man had to say. Mindful of their silence, she continued.

“Your immediate command and much of the squad personnel have changed in the last year or two. Only your former partner remains. The new captain is the one my boss talked to. As I hear it, he wants any requests for a change in your status made formally in writing through an attorney, and perhaps in conjunction with the union. His official position is that he doubts your identity and thinks you might be an imposter.” She reached down and had another sip of wine.

Again, neither Dom nor Danny spoke.

“Now the good news. Your side of the river first?” She looked at Dom and took his nod to be assent.

“None of your other colleagues have been notified. No one has, nor will, speak to your wife or children, or any other immediate family.” She waited for a new nod to allow her to continue.

“My boss says your captain is not being a pr. . ., uh, ‘harsh.’ He claims his official position is purposeful. It gives him and the NYPD some deniability about whether he has credible evidence that you are alive and here in the metro area. He means to protect any records of your activities —arrests, confidential informants, investigations, undercover assignments—that bad actors may be attempting to wrest out of department hands by posing to be you.”

She took another sip, but this time held on to the glass. “He, your guy, emphasized that he has not spoken of my boss’s phone call to his superiors or to the union or to IAB. The only person he spoke to, privately in person, is a trusted judge assigned to the Grand Jury, for your safety and his protection. He underscored that no media contacts have been made, nor are contemplated. He left it up to my guy completely for the time being.”

She held her glass up for Danny to see. “You have a ladies’ room here, Danny?” He took her glass to refill and started to point her toward the corner room, but stopped. He turned to Dominick and saw his apprehension.

He curved and extended the reach of his outstretched hand. “If you go back down that long hallway, Detective, you’ll see my bedroom. Please feel free to use the master bath.” Walking to the refrigerator, Danny noticed

Corredor's puffed-cheek exhale. "May I give you more of my juice, Dom?" he asked.

"No, thanks. You may need it again, Danny." This time he allowed a smile.

"Are you good with the New York response so far?" Hart asked Corredor.

"Better than I was expecting. I'd be curious who the new captain is. But I'm not asking any questions right now," was his reply.

Figuring she had given them enough time to talk without her being in the way, Howe flushed the unused toilet, which they heard through the kitchen wall, and walked back toward the sitting area. She couldn't help but notice the low ambient lighting in the bathroom and bedroom to compensate for the interior coverings permanently affixed over the windows. She thought their matching panels in the outer rooms and kitchen were décor options, but apparently that was not the case, she decided. She told herself, *'And here I thought there was just one mysterious guy I've been talking to out there.'*

Howe picked up where she left off. "As I was saying, for now it's up to my captain. He also is keeping a tight lid on the news. How tight, he hasn't really said. And, of course, I can't ask." She took her glass back from Danny.

"And now, because this is the good news portion of the program . . . she sipped some wine . . . I can say that my boss was forthcoming about one thing, Detective. Whomever this new captain is over there in the City, he certainly knows a considerable amount about you. And he is bag fan," she took a minute. "Sorry, I wasn't given the NYPD captain's name."

Howe took another moment to re-pace her presentation. "My guy said that your guy sounded like my guy called your guy for a recommendation as part of a job interview. Your guy all but told my guy he shouldn't let you get away." Dom's facial expression suddenly cracked. He looked conflicted. "No, not that. He meant keep you off whatever train was leaving for parts unknown and get you on this case if we were serious about finding Linda Lowry."

"What did he say to that?" asked Danny, no longer able to sit on the sidelines.

"My guy said he has no patience with Lone Rangers," she replied to Danny. "I happen to know that for a fact. I've learned the hard way . . . seen it in action." She said turning to Dom, "So don't take that personally, Detective."

She sipped and talked almost without swallowing. "And that's when I hit him up with my proposal. I told him I wanted to engage Danny here as a private consultant on the case. And if we did, I had it on good authority that Danny would bring Dom along as an independent contractor for the duration." She held up a hand to make sure they let her finish.

"He liked the idea that he could think he had some control over the activity since the precinct budget was being used to hire Danny's firm, especially since that meant he got the services of this highly recommended NYPD detective without having his name appear on the payroll. The precise way he put it was this: *'Put in the request under your name, Howe. You've a thinner neck than me. Who knows? Maybe they'll miss or not want to hit a lady as hard. And let Hart bill you enough to pay himself and the other guy.'*"

"Did he have any other sage advice?" mocked Danny.

"He certainly did, gents." She looked at them both. "He said, 'Go find that girl.'"

With that, Howe began to stand, and then stopped. She realized she may have left them without a chance to ask her questions, as she had when she first met Danny and posed the inside-out question: *what can you do for me?* So, Howe hoped that now she didn't sound like the lady at the deli counter when she asked, "Anything else?"

"Yes," Danny said too eagerly. Corredor and Howe looked at him with surprise. They each thought she was talking to Dom.

"Do either of you know people in narcotics? People you can trust?" He waited and didn't say why he wanted to know, or what they were to be trusted about.

Howe took the lead, "In New Jersey or New York?"

Dom said, "It's been a while between busts."

He answered both at once. "Either place. Doesn't trust last?"

Dom said, "Not with narcs."

Howe agreed. And then asked why he wanted to know. And what that had to do with Linda Lowry?"

"This might take a minute," he told them. He walked over to the fridge and this time he took out a beer for himself. He cracked the can above the sink in case it was going to spill over. It foamed some, which he caught with a quick clamp of his mouth over the tab slot.

"I've stepped out on the ladies in Ned's firm, at least two of them," he started.

"Wait," said Howe. "Danny, you're dating these women?"

Corredor burst out laughing. Howe looked at him sternly. "Detective," Dom managed, "he said *on* not *with*."

Howe said, "Oh. Sorry. I usually don't miss things like that."

"I know you don't," said Danny, recalling her sore spot that almost put an end to their first interview, and who knew what else. "Should I re-start?"

"Please do," she said. "It's Sunday. I'm off duty. I wined."

Hart nodded. "I've separated my investigation from the one Ned's supporters are working on. And I'm also pursuing a parallel track now." He told them.

"Why?" asked Corredor, which surprised Danny.

"They are too focused. I was afraid I'd miss something. Make too many assumptions about where I should be looking for Linda." Danny confessed.

Again, Corredor came at him. "Which is why you aren't complaining about Howe asking you to take in another set of eyes living in your place for now?"

Danny admitted, "Something like that, I guess." Hart hadn't really thought about it. His respect for Corredor's policecraft increased. Eyeing Howe, he saw the same thing had just happened for her.

"Anyway. I came to a point where I couldn't look at Myles Lowry without hearing the old pulp fiction standard assertion that 'it's always the husband'—when there's no butler in the piece. Besides, I did start working this case for Rosalyn's lawyer and got an earful about Ned and Myles from her side of the witness table." He took a draw from the can.

"Where'd the drugs come in?" Corredor quizzed his host, no longer thinking of him as a jailer.

"Maybe Mexico" Hart replied.

"Hold up, Danny." Howe inquired. "You jumped ahead too far for me. And I think Dom meant to be asking you where's the connection with Myles?"

Corredor nodded his agreement about his question's intent.

"Oh, my bad." That soccer expression reminded him of Karidja's elephant mascot. He put her out of his mind, though it wasn't easy to do. In fact, it hadn't been easy to do all week, but she needed to be above reproach for what might come of Danny's search for Linda.

"Myles has a business associate where he works. Her name is Itzel Cocom. He met her in Mexico City. She's a business whiz with the import and export of the medical supplies their company manufactures and sells. Seems Myles is very partial to her, professionally and personally, but not intimately as far as I can discover. He's arranged legal immigration for her three kids, husband, and mother in order to get her high placed in the business." He looked to make sure they were following what he knew was a tricky path to go down.

“The husband’s name is Bembe Cocom. The word is he is a highly skilled and sought-after artisan. He specializes in jewelry reflecting Mayan themes. I forgot to say that Mayan is their family heritage, on both sides. He fashions and crafts high-end pieces of jade and basalt and silver mostly. Its imaginative and suggestive. The serpents and jaguars appear to writhe and lurk in his larger brooches and medallions. I’ve seen them in catalogs and in two stores in Manhattan that carry his work. It’s pricey but looks like it should be. He authenticates the pieces with a small letter ‘b’ somewhere in the engraving or seams of the silver.”

Danny kept going so he didn’t lose them. “In his immigration application there is a mention that is not present in his wife’s or his mother-in-law’s. It says he is seeking asylum from drug cartel interests.”

Before he could go any deeper, Howe spoke up, “You’ve been a very busy boy, Danny. But I’m losing you with regards to Linda’s disappearance.”

“That’s because there’s one more piece to tell you about. Myles Lowry is not a millionaire. But he isn’t poor by any stretch either. But I can’t figure out where he made his money. It’s true that ever since he brought Itzel into that company, its international market share and profits have soared. And profit-sharing has been lucrative for the Lowrys and the Cocom. But he had money to start a small independent, making one device, before the company he’s with now bought him out to avoid competition.”

“But still, Danny, where’s Linda in all this. Are you making it too complicated?” repeated Howe.

Dom cleared his throat, as if he had to remind them that he was in the room, and perhaps, in the discussion as well. They glanced over his way, and he leaned into the room from his place on the couch. “Danny, you think that Myles Lowry’s company, before or after the buyout, was compromised and needed capital. To get the capital he goes to Mexico and starts up a dual import/export channel, medical supplies, and high-end art. He does what’s necessary to secure the Cocom family’s freedom, and—in exchange—the cartel creates, or expands, a drug trade route across the southern border. But Lowry’s divorce somehow endangers that, and he wants out. So, the cartel snatches up his daughter to get him back in the fold?”

Taking Danny's tacit nod and smile at face value, Howe pushed back directly, "Don't you think that is frankly just the other side of outrageous, Danny?"

Hart fired back. "Which? It's outrageous for the cartel to do? Or it's outrageous for me to be thinking that way?"

"Hey, I know I'm the new kid from the other side of the tracks, and I've been talking to the inside walls of boxcars for way too long . . . but you both have got to slow down. We're supposed to be on the same team here. Right? Looking for a missing kid?" Dominick Corredor was quickly easing back into the mode he had been away from for quite some time. And his recently introduced teammates could see he was as good as the NYPD captain suggested.

He didn't yield the floor once they caught themselves and apologized to each other. "Look," he said, "I don't have fresh ties, but there is an Interpol lady who might recall that I found her runaway niece once." He wrote her name on one of the index cards that Danny had put out on the coffee table with pens, although none of them had been used so far. "You have someone call her, Danny, or you do it. Reference me from years ago, not now. Ask her if she has any way of knowing what you are asking about in Mexico." He then said to Howe, "And maybe you could see if there's a friendly narc in the metro area who could do the same for you." The room went quiet.

He kept going because it seemed that's what their silence was inviting him to do. "I'd like to know if we could put this drug thing to bed and get on trucking down other avenues. Or I'd like confirmation that this is a boulevard we better drive down at breakneck speed." He gave them a minute, then said, "Look, I don't know the current drug scene that well. But what I do know is missing kids. And every day that goes by in the first week becomes shrunk into every hour in the subsequent weeks" . . . he hitched a breath and looked down at the floor and then at each one of them . . . "when you draw a timeline of how long there is left to find her before we simply won't be able to do so."

He sensed he needed to give the two of them another few moments, so he stood up and said, "I'm going to say goodbye for now, Detective. Nature's calling. And Mr. Hart here promised me a ride in his car to show me some places of local interest. Didn't you, Danny? And I sure don't want to miss that."

He went to the spare bedroom and closed the door.

170

Rosalyn and Margie sat in the front seat of her car, with Linda and Katie in the back. The girls were talking about playing *Insecta* when they got back from the movies, if their parents let them and there was time to do so before each family had dinner.

The low simmering heat between Rosalyn and Linda cooled over when they entered the multiplex, with its sprawling refreshment counter. Her mother offered her a choice of candy or popcorn and a small drink to bring into the theater. Linda asked for a small bag of buttered popcorn and a root beer.

Linda followed Katie toward the numbered doors, careful not to spill her treats on the theater's hallway carpet, with its embroidered faces of stars and starlets, animated heroes and villains. Each time an auditorium door was opened by other moviegoers in front of them, the sounds of loud voices and booming music from trailers excited them and quickened their steps.

171

As NYPD Detective Corredor closed the bedroom door, Howe wanted to disarm anything that was left in their chambers. She changed the subject and told Hart, "This is some place you have here, Danny. I appreciate that you let me come here. I can only imagine it was not easy for you to do that."

He replied, "No, it wasn't. But now that I have, you need to see the rest."

"The rest?" she wondered what he could be talking about.

"Yes, on the way out. Would you like the bathroom before you go?" She said she did, having only faked using it earlier. "You know the way. I'll get us ready."

As they were descending on the elevator, Hart told her. “One floor lower than the street level office area you saw coming in, there is a garage and utility space you’ll see on your way out. It opens onto an alley behind the building. I want to show it to you in case you need it someday.”

She did not respond because she could not fathom a ‘someday’ she would need to come here without Hart being with her. But she kept her powder dry, because she was not sure what side of Danny Hart she was going to see next this Sunday. For Howe the complexity of this investigator—imagining drug involvement in Linda Lowry’s disappearance—was either pure genius or sheer lunacy, or somewhere on the slippery slope of the scale in between.

The basement area reminded her of many underground police station garages she had been in, just on a smaller scale. There was room for two cars in line. There were electrical and HVAC service components lining a wall. And the elevator in the corner. An overhead door gave way to an excavated driveway, partitioned from an alley by a swinging cyclone fence with razor wire topping.

Although that it seemed a little over-engineered for a small mixed-use residential and commercial building, there was nothing that appeared exceptional, until Danny brought her to a rectangular panel. When he opened the front of the grey metal panel, it looked like her desk sergeant’s video display. There was a screen displaying the front of the building. She could see her parked car where she left it. There was another projection of the garage driveway and alley out back. What were probably additional roof-mounted units portrayed the length of the street in front of the building and a downhill road from the intersection to the alleyway heading to the excavated driveway. Two interior displays cycled alternating views of hallways and stairwells, and what appeared to be a laundry room, but not the inside of tenant apartments. The last screen alternated views of the first-floor office space, except for the two bathrooms she had seen. A bank of six surveillance reviews was certainly not standard operating procedure for a New Jersey urban edifice.

Danny reached up atop a shelf in the cabinet. He took down a remote door opener and handed it to Howe. From inside the cabinet, he took a small key ring with two keys and gave that to her as well. “Big key is for the fence if it’s padlocked. Small key is for this cabinet. Remote is for the overhead door,”

he instructed, as he pointed to each. "Detective, I own this place and this space. You have my permission to enter in case of an emergency or the need to act in any law enforcement capacity. You require no warrant. You can treat this as a safe house—for yourself or for any member of the Lowry family. If you want that in writing, I'll have it to your desk sergeant tomorrow—notarized and witnessed."

She just looked at him. "Is that all?"

He replied, "It's certainly somewhat over the top. I know. But I'm happy to be a fool who is alive and whose friends and dependents are as well. I just couldn't bear to be a fool whose friends or dependents were harmed or dead because of me." He thought and gave in. "Those families upstairs are included in that company. And, as of today Detective Howe, so are you."

She didn't know what to say. So, she said nothing.

"And now, I'll ask you to walk out to the alley and finish your afternoon exercise run around the block to go to your car. It's late enough in the day now that people who were still asleep when you arrived are up and on the prowl. I choose not to have them see you leaving the building or knowing that you were here." He extended his hand and when she did, he shook it.

As Howe jogged out of the alley and onto the hilly street, she heard the overhead door descending. She had the discipline not to give in to the reflex of turning around to see from where the sound was coming.

172

The doctor was impatient with the busy signals he was getting. Finally, his call was ringing through. "Kelly? Kelly Rocco? This is Doctor Denison LeClerc. I want to hear from you again why you think this name Lowry is important and unmistakably so."

Rocco told him, "A banker from somewhere in New Jersey was approached for a person named Lowry, asking about bearer bonds and how to redeem them anonymously. He told this person he did not deal in such

transactions. Several days later a guy in a pawn shop in upper Manhattan was asked about knowing anybody who would take them, for fifty cents on the dollar. Same name came up. Lowry. That's all I know, Doctor LeClerc."

The doctor demanded, "What did this guy look like? Did they say?"

"No. They never saw the person. Two different intermediaries apparently. Making the inquiry on behalf of the Lowry person," Rocco told him.

LeClerc pressed Rocco. "Look, I'm getting stretched out by this last renovation. How is my reserve holding out?"

"All your bonds are still here. You've leveraged about sixty percent of them. But the banker must feel the squeeze is on. I was told you'd have to cut the exchange from sixty to fifty-seven cents on the dollar, beginning on the first of the month when the fourth quarter starts reporting. So, if you need something, you might want to calculate that now while you can still keep the full sixty, doc." Rocco was firm in his stance, since he was only the messenger and not the banker making the decision.

"But, why the change, Rocco?" persisted the doctor

"Maybe it's supply and demand. They say you emptied a large tranche with your first disbursal after graduation to start the practice. Then you went years before coming back for smaller amounts. That's true, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes. So, what's that got to do with anything? Especially now?" Doctor Leclerc wanted to know.

"Doc. Don't shoot the messenger, huh?" Rocco complained.

"But it just makes no sense. I can't see—"

"It may not make sense to you, but it's a very reasonable position for them to take, —"

The interruptions were making the phone call break down from being a discussion. "And how's that Mr. Rocco? Answer me that," the oncologist dug in.

“Wait, doc. If you want me to explain, then stop interrupting me for God’s sake. All right?” The middleman was squirming in his chair but refused to be intimidated.

“Okay. Sorry. Go ahead.”

“You think of the bonds as fluid because they have a value. But they aren’t. They can’t be. Any other type of currency would be gaining interest while it sits. Any other currency could be transferred to short term investments for gain. Your money earning them money. That’s what banks and credit companies do. You know that.” He was happy the physician was finally listening with his ears instead of his mouth.

“These bonds are wild-catted because the bearer can be anyone. That’s how they can hold them for clients. But, remember Doc, they have a face value. They are, in fact, static. They’re beauties because they can not lose value. But they’re beasts because that value can not increase, either. The only way they can gain value for these guys, who fancy themselves financiers instead of the fucking crooks they are, . . . excuse my French please, I guess when I said financiers I switched to French.”

He started again after the doctor guffawed on his end of the line. “Anyway, these financiers gain money when you buy back the bonds at a reduced value. They sent you seventy cents; you gave them a dollar with your first buy back. That was a thirty percent interest profit for them. Much higher than banks, but lower than they could get arrested as loan-sharks. Then for years the bonds sat there earning them nothing and just waiting for the future. They’re not wine, doc. They don’t get better. They stay the same. Meanwhile, other people want to launder more than a dollar in exchange for them. But the agreement is they can’t use your bonds for that. Your bonds are spoken for. Especially yours because of the manner in which you obtained them.” He expected pushback for his impertinence. But none was forthcoming from the defeated doctor.

“So now when you seem desperate and want to do a deal, market values and supply and demand lessens the exchange rate you are going to get. I hope I’m not speaking out of turn, doc. But they don’t give advance warning to most people. Most just take their lumps and have to shut up about it. After all, what are their clients going to do, go to the police and say they’ve

been robbed. We both know that's not happening." And that was all Rocco had to say.

The oncologist snapped back sharply, "So they are satisfied with thirty percent years ago and nothing but another three percent now years later? Where's their big payoff for all their trouble?"

"If you really need to know, doc, I'll tell you." Rocco hoped he'd stop.

But the oncologist didn't, "Yeah. I really need to know."

He paused and thought hard about revealing what he now had to say to shut the physician up. "The statistic I did not tell you was that the ill-gotten gains these bankers' clients turn over to them for safekeeping often are connected to their clients disappearing without a trace. In that event, the written agreement stipulates the bonds default to the bankers, no questions asked."

"That's severely harsh of you to say that way, sir." The man of medicine refused the courtesy of addressing the man of finance by his name.

Kelly Rocco's reply was stunning. "As an oncologist, you tell your clients they have a thirty percent chance of surviving your surgical intervention into their problem. They cling to those odds and protect their psyche from considering the other seventy percent."

The doctor thanked him curtly and told him he would be in touch before October.

173

A few miles down the road from **HAPPYDALE**, in the opposite direction from the movie theater, Beatriz Grey and her 'preferred paramour,' which was their mutually teasing sobriquet, were enjoying the solitude and passion of a Sunday afternoon.

Grey's lover, Yvonne, was a successful former restaurateur and a marvelous chef. She would make certain they would eat well that night.

HAPPYDALE'S administrator was counting on it for their second feast of the day.

But the service industry was a hard business. Yvonne had made her money and decided it was time to cash in while she was on top . . . of the restaurant business, not Beatriz. She had sold her authentic French recipes, her kitchen help, her building, and the name of the restaurant, Yvonne's, for a very tidy sum to retire upon. The most work she did these days for nighttime fun was occasionally tending bar, to meet people, to feel the electricity of mingling, and to keep her hand, and whatever else, in the scene. Beatriz met her that way. But running a prestigious private school kept Grey from being able to have this relationship in a way she could require exclusivity. The open arrangement seemed to be working for both of them, at least for the moment.

Over dinner, Yvonne asked Beatriz about the troublesome librarian. Bringing up Rosalyn Lowry almost spoiled the whole evening for Beatriz. But Yvonne was nothing, if not calculating. She had run lots of competition out of the restaurant district in several cities in her time.

"I feel badly that this woman is bending you over a library carrel and a bar stool," she told Beatriz. "We should put our heads together and figure a way to blunt her edge, you know."

Grey wrapped her fingers around the hem of her slip. "What have you in mind?" she asked.

"Well, if she thinks she's blackmailing you for power, we could strip her of that currency in public without a complete disclosure." Yvonne was scheming and Beatriz was intrigued.

"Go on," the administrator said.

"At your next big public gathering at **HAPPYDALE** I could accompany you as your invited guest." She told Grey.

"Under what pretense?" Beatriz asked. "Having you on the stage next to me would require explanations I'd rather not give." She drank some of the water in her dinner glass. "I can't conduct some behavior that I may find myself defending before the Board of Directors, my sweet. Lowry would win hands down, then."

Yvonne abandoned that idea. But another came rushing right in behind it, as she looked at her place setting. "When you have your next outdoor festival and feast, why don't I cater it? I can promise you a great student and adult response to wonderful food. At the end, you could call on the crowd to thank the chef and servers with a great big round of applause." Yvonne had been feted this way so many times in her career that she could envision it taking place against the backdrop of linen covered serving tables and desserts on trays, right within the larger quad at **HAPPYDALE**.

"I can see it now, Beatriz. I come out with my crew. I prearrange for one of my staff to give me a big hug as I'm standing there with them. I turn to you and do the same, and plant a big old kiss right on your lips." She was smiling broadly and encouraging Beatriz to like the idea by coming to her side of the table and giving her such a kiss right there and then in her dining room. Of course, she would not sit on Grey's lap in the quad as she was doing now, nor dwell on the kiss for so long. But she was doing her best to sell the idea, after all. She moved her face away just a short distance. She let her hand rest on Grey's shoulder the way Beatriz always seemed to like. And then she offered the *pièce de résistance*. "And then you find that woman in the crowd and stare her down, daring her to make something of it."

Beatriz Grey found herself out of breath.

"I promise you that will level the old playing field behind the school once again," was all Yvonne said as she rose from Grey's lap, left the dinner dishes right where they were, and headed toward her bedroom.

174

Once Detective Howe had left, Danny Hart kept his promise to show Dominic Corredor the larger picture of the landscape of key places around the apartment where he first met Linda Lowry. Hart found it intriguing to see Corredor getting reacclimated to riding in a car. Apparently, the motion of a driven vehicle on a state highway or a municipal surface road differed from the cadence of a freight train. Dom looked at Danny after he slid over in his seat toward the driver's side of the car. Dan had made a left turn that his passenger didn't expect. He had been too occupied with looking out the side window to read store signs.

"I didn't see that coming. Sorry for bumping into your shoulder, explained Corredor. "I'll have to look forward more than sideways for a couple of more rides."

"What caught your eye, Dom?" Danny asked. He was more interested in what Corredor was looking for, or at, than any apologies for disorientation.

"I was trying to get an idea of what the neighborhood around the Lowry's was like. What kind of traffic—foot, vehicular, and illegal substance merchandising—was prevalent." He turned and watched the sidewalk for another block. When they stopped at a red light, he added, "And I was looking for a cut rate clothing store to get some appropriate things to wear. Not that I'm ungrateful, but . . ." he ran his hand over the thigh of the pants Danny had loaned him.

"Explain something to me, please . . . but only if you want to. I don't mean to pry." Danny saw Dom nod permission to ask. "In your four years of . . . investigative drifting . . . how did you find resources to live on?"

"My legit resources were an agreement between my wife and I." He looked straight ahead out the windshield, concentrating on a timeless spot on the out-of-focus urban horizon. "She opened a debit account in her maiden name. After a bump to start, she deposited a quarter of my monthly disability into it. The monthly statements she gets in the mail were her way of knowing I was still alive and, generally speaking, where I had been traveling. All I had to do was avoid using the card in any of those ATM machines that had security cameras. You can use a debit card in most green grocers and dry goods stores, as we used to call them, without worrying about matching the name on the card and the user, and without having your face recorded. Especially when you keep the sale below \$47. And you can get cash back, again, as long as it's for less than \$94. I don't know how the card companies got those numbers, but it seems pretty universal, in this part of the country, anyway."

"And she never tried to track you down?" asked Danny.

"That was the deal. We both kept our ends of the bargain," Dom replied, still staring straight ahead. "And we still are."

"Any boundaries?" Danny pushed, but gently, he thought.

“Boundaries?” there was a slight uptick in Corredor’s voice. Danny wasn’t familiar enough yet with the man to know if that was his inflection with a one-word question, or if he was getting testy at Danny’s questions.

“Yeah, geographic. Places I should be careful not to bring you, or ask you to go alone,” explained the investigator.

The NYPD in Corredor made him hesitant to answer too quickly. He was evaluating whether that was really what Hart was asking about, or if Danny sensed it was time to change the direction of his questions until some later time. Then Hart could start in again where he left off wherever he was intending to go. “Originally, it was a 20-mile radius from home. But to be safe, as the children get older and my wife takes them places for commerce and social reasons and other ‘kid things,’ I avoid Long Island—most particularly Suffolk County. That’s where the house is.” Dominic could almost see that house in his mind’s eye, even though his face’s eyes were tracing the mortar line on a brick wall a quarter of a block away ahead of them.

175

Myles looked around the motel room. Everything seemed in order. His bag was packed and on the still unmade bed. He left a ten-dollar bill on the desk for the room cleaners. He picked up the phone and called the phone number on the small, library index card he took out of his pocket.

“Hello, April?” he waited for affirmation. “I’m leaving the motel now and will have something to eat before heading back to Jersey. Would you want me to pick you up?” To her positive answer, he said, “See you in ten minutes. You pick a place to go.”

Doctor Denison LeClerc answered on the second ring. “Yes, Doctor LeClerc here.” As he expected and hoped, it was April Smith. Lowry was coming to bring her to dinner. But Myles called earlier than they expected when they planned earlier. Now the oncologist would have to flex his timetable and her instructions somewhat. “You know that new seafood place near the fisheries?” He listened. “Yes, that’s the one. You know how to tell him to get there?” Again, he listened as Smith told him how she thought they could go to get there. “Yes, have him drop you off at the door. There’s a

covered porch with a little ramp for patrons' wheelchairs and for delivery carts and hand trucks from the river docks. It's raining lightly so he shouldn't mind you asking him to do that." He listened to her a moment. "No, don't stand right by the car. Go up the ramp and wait under the porch overhang near the entry door."

He gave her a second and then added, importantly, "And Ms. Smith, don't worry about the empty parking lot. The restaurant is reserved for a private party starting later this evening. It's for a hastily arranged gathering after an unexpected pre-sundown funeral."

176

The shorter movies were enjoyed by most of the adults and by all the kids. The second adult car-pooling groups still had a half hour more to see of the Clint Eastwood western, and then they could weigh in with their reviews.

Margie drove Rosalyn, Linda, and Katie back to **HAPPYDALE**. The girls went to the living room to set up the *Insecta* board game, with a bowl of pretzels and second sodas of the day. The ladies had a stronger drink with their chips and salsa.

177

As they proceeded to drive down the street, Hart pulled into a curbside spot that didn't require backing up to parallel park. Then he said, "We can walk around and look for a store, if you want." But the detective could see that Danny wasn't making a move to get out of the car just yet.

Instead, he asked Dominick, "But before we go out in a public place, I need to ask you to finish telling me about your resources while you were . . . wandering and searching. Other than what you arranged with your wife, what were the not-so-legit sources you had for funds? Anything I need to worry about? Say, someone looking to collect?"

Corredor replied, "I told you that some of the justice for those four children's murders was delivered by rivals or displeased former associates. Ironically, some were apparently more than happy to spend a little of their hard-earned resources as cash advances . . . against what they might have found a way afterwards—perhaps through a cooperative third party—to claim from law enforcement . . . shall we say . . . in conjunction with what the police bulletins called 'rewards for information leading to the apprehension or arrests in the case.'" Dominic looked Hart in the eye as he explained, as he had been unable to do when he spoke of his wife. Then he just said outright, and not as a question, "I hope that doesn't present a problem. I doubt anyone is looking to collect any of that money back."

Danny gave no answer. He also did not continue his earlier offer to go shopping. He just pulled out and drove two more blocks, which brought them to a curbside parking space on a commercial street. "Over there is the coffee shop I told you about. I met Myles there near the start of this thing. As we pull out of here in a few car lengths across the street, you can see a sidewalk pay phone. That's been our go-to communication center. Two reasons . . . one is it's convenient and accessible without going indoors . . . two is that calls from it are harder to trace."

Corredor raised an eyebrow. "Danny?"

"Again, two things. First, relative to Lowry's family. Not so much at the beginning, but as things have heated up after the lawyer, Hegerman, died . . . it seems our little group has attracted some inordinate attention. Though we don't know why for sure . . . yet. That's part of what I hope you can help us with." Danny paused, to look into the rearview mirrors.

Dominic knew the look and cut in, "But your over-the-shoulder deal isn't new to this case, Danny. You're too practiced and smooth at it, except to another traveler's eye. What else have you got to tell me?"

"That's the second thing . . ." Danny squared up in the car seat, turned to him and said . . . "Detective."

"I'm all ears, sir." A smile and an arms-spread gesture accompanied Corredor's growing comfort with this man. "But we've been parked here too long. Go a few blocks away. And then we can continue."

They advanced out of the business block and into a residential area. Hart pulled the car up to a curb alongside a small pocket park. "I find this is a safe spot, either out in the park or in the car. There's no need to explain being here and it has good lines of sight for two square blocks. He pointed down the road. "And it's not a long walk straight ahead to Lowry's apartment house. I park here often and hoof it, so my car isn't seen, and become familiar, by the apartment. And leaving a car by a park and taking a walk isn't so remarkably out of place, either."

"Okay. Got it." Said the man used to tracking people once he left his freight train accommodations. "But you still have the second half of an explanation you were telling me."

"Yes. Well, it seems I have caused many people discomfort over the years. Some of them are less rich than they were, some are living on probation. And still others are still guests of the state, in one place or another." They nodded a mutual understanding.

"The place I own and live in are spoils of the job. And the people who live there don't deserve to be collateral damage of their landlord's escapades. So, I'm very careful not to be followed home. I also avoid working on the eastern banks of the Hudson if I can avoid it."

"And the pay phone thing, goes along with that? No tracing calls to your digs? Makes sense." Corredor summed it up, so Danny didn't have to. "One more question . . . a request really." He paused to make sure Danny was paying attention. "I can't usually get quarters back with a debit card. So, you'll have to get me some, okay?" He already knew about the message machine from hearing Danny talking to Eleanor on the phone.

Danny laughed and started up the car again, so they could drive down the street and past the apartment. They didn't stop and they did not see Mike Riley out walking his dog. Danny turned left, without spilling Dom out of his seat this time, and headed up the road. "This is the way to the friend's house, Rosalyn's and Linda's; Paul for the mom, Annie for the girl. Last name of Meadows. He knows my car and I spooked him when I came here last looking for Rosalyn, right after her second incursion this past Friday. Of course, I couldn't tell him I was looking to see if he was abetting her activities, so I made up a story. I think he knew my excuse was bogus. So, this will be more of a drive-by, if you don't mind. Another visit will simply not be credible,

even if I said it was to introduce you—which I do not want to do, as you know. I just want you to know where their house is and what it, and the neighborhood, look like in the daylight.” Danny was happy that Meadows was not outside to see him drive by. Paul Meadows’s car was in the driveway, though, so Danny couldn’t be sure if they’d been seen from inside the house.

As Danny headed them back to his place, his new shotgun companion asked to find him a clothing store open on Sundays for casual jeans, shirts, and underwear. Hart told him, “Okay. But only if I use my credit card, so your debit’s not showing you to be around these parts, and so you won’t have to worry about spending limits. Just get everything you need, please, outerwear too if you want a jacket. It’s on the firm’s credit card, which in turn, is on the lawyer’s. As the garage door rumbled down behind them in Danny’s basement, it was getting near dark. Each of the men took some of the bags holding Dominick’s new wardrobe into the elevator for the ride up to the top floor.

178

After relaxing like Danny told her to do for an hour, Eleanor Quatrane was again so anxious, she went out for a walk and a coffee just to get some air and a change of scenery. She read the entertainment section of the Sunday paper at her table. She thought about taking in a matinee movie but couldn’t find anything that suited her mood or taste. She did, however, accomplish one feat. She verified that no one seemed to be following her this Sunday afternoon. And that made her recall she had a pulp paperback at home she bought the last time she was followed. She was a fast reader, so she walked back home to see if the book would fill the afternoon and evening for her.

Back in her home, halfway through the book she found it too formulaic and unimaginative. The guy who was going to take the fall for the murder had been set up by his wife, disgruntled by his infidelity. She put the book down on the chairside table and went to use the bathroom.

About to sit back down in her chair, she picked up the book. Then it hit her. What if it wasn’t Ned’s money to declare? Where did it come from? Where did it go? Was there any of it left?

What if Ned had been teaching her two things during that divorce case she taunted Thomas Bruce about, with the couple whose lawyers forgot about an old family inheritance?

Quatrane cleared a space on her kitchen table. She had a scratch pad from her desk to work with. But she also took an idea from Karidja. She did not have index cards, but she did have some old note cards with pictures too saccharin to send to her friends. She used a scissor to cut the cards apart and used the inside blank surfaces as if they were unlined index cards. As she had seen Soro do, she limited each card to one idea.

Pretty soon she had a deck of cards with things to do, or find out, or chase down the next day at work. Since they were on cards individually, she could give one or two to Karidja or Gaby if they wanted to help. And she could have a handful to carry into Thomas Bruce's office if he planned to grill her again before the Tuesday audit deadline, depending how he made out with the numbers people over the weekend.

179

Doctor Denison LeClerc had prepared his vehicle earlier in the afternoon, so even though Lowry called April early, he was still ready to leave immediately after April Smith's phone call. He would need the extra time it would take for Lowry to get from the motel to Smith's home, which was just a few blocks from his office, if he was to be waiting for them at the restaurant parking lot. He had covered the modestly sized, painted logo on the top rear side of the clinic's van with the oversized magnetic sign from the contractor's box truck parked in his lot.

The oncologist so seldomly drove the van that he took more time getting to the commercial and industrial park than he had hoped it would. Once he got to the immediate area, he carefully drove past a few businesses with their green oblong trash dumpsters lined up by their walls. Supply houses here were favored by electrical, plumbing, and lighting contractors. Merchants selling marine parts, and those purveying tackle for day charters moored along the quay, had anchors and rods and reels as hand-painted identifiers right onto their store's cement block walls.

He turned a corner and saw the more gaily painted buildings along the riverfront and the moorings. These were certainly more welcoming, including the restaurant featuring fresh shellfish, brought right up to the docks from the two nearby bays, and fresh catch-of-the-day fish from not far off the Long Island and Jersey shorelines.

Ten minutes later, Lowry arrived in the drizzling rain of an afternoon growing ever drearier, as he listened to April's droned directions. He did not see a clinic van in the restaurant parking lot, but one marked as belonging to Asbestos Fiber Control Company. Myles ignored the sign saying MORE RESTAURANT PARKING IN REAR. He pulled up to the front door by the blue-and-white handicapped parking spaces, so April could hop inside without getting too wet in the sprinkling rainfall pattering on the windshield. As LeClerc had instructed, April had asked for the special drop off and Myles obliged.

As she reached the top of the inclined entry ramp to the porch, she turned at the sound of a vehicle's grinding gearbox. She saw through the car's back window that Myles had also heard the racket. It caused him pause and he stared at the back of the van a few rows of empty spaces away from him in the lot. Suddenly, the van lurched backwards. It appeared as if an inexperienced driver, or at least one accustomed to driving with automatic transmission, had missed shifting into second gear to go forward, and forced the van into reverse. The speed associated with second gear was much too fast for reverse and the van sped backwards over the painted lines of unoccupied spaces.

No one saw how contorted Myles Lowry's face became when he realized his rental was going to be rammed—T-boned right on the driver's door exactly in line with his shoulder. The force of the crash drove his forehead and nose forward, so they smashed flat into the door window, which was closed because of the rain. An impression came over Myles that he forgot what he was doing there. At this restaurant, in this car, which wasn't his.

The vehicle was momentarily pinned on the passenger side into the restaurant wall. Fortunately for Smith, up on the porch, she was further back behind the car's right taillights. They only stayed red briefly, because Lowry's right foot was jarred off the brake pedal and it became lodged, in a way that depressed the gas pedal. Myles had never taken the car out of DRIVE

according to the dashboard display. The spinning tires struggled forward as the car tried to break free, scratching the right side fenders against the restaurant wall. When LeClerc realized his error and shifted properly into first gear, the larger vehicle's hold on Myles's rental let go. The freed car started forward, with nothing in the parking lot to stop it or slow it down.

Lowry instinctively pivoted to try looking out the sidestruck, starburst windshield. It was a fractal array spreading from each side toward the middle. It made Lowry sporadically remember that he had been imagining on the drive over here—from some woman's house, he thought vaguely—that he would use a nutcracker to squeeze and split the lobster claw he had been expecting to order.

He had just portions of seconds to see the grey-and-white pebbly details of mortar in an orderly perpendicular grid, setting off the red bricks that formed the wall his sedan was about to try driving through.

The back fender and truck lid kept traveling at twenty miles an hour when the front bumper and grill abruptly stopped. Myles wondered if the back seat felt pressured by that crush of metal and glass—because the back of his brain surely felt smushed by his skull, still moving when his halted chin and forehead were engulfed by the exploding air bag.

The car interior was coming apart at the seams, as it had once before in a collision that totaled it. The Manhattan rental firm kept its costs down, and profits up, by obtaining wrecked vehicles and then treating them only to cosmetic body work repair. They only retrofitted them with the minimum of a steering post airbag and the front bench seat belts required by law.

Lowry felt places and memories slipping away, disappearing like his face would seem to do a few rows back into the parallel mirrors in the barber shop he frequented. He saw faces—Roselyn, Linda, Itzel, Karidja, and finally Mellon and Hegerman—the same way he'd once seen koi deep in a winter-iced-over pond. They faded away when clouds swept in to fill the sky above the oriental garden behind a sushi restaurant.

Godfrey Mellon was outraged by Marie Aello's demand to see him in the middle of a Sunday afternoon. It didn't matter that they were in a classy city restaurant with a trendsetting, pre-evening weekend seating. The place had become preferred by patrons not liking to meld with the Sunday brunch bunch, with dyspeptic children of divorce torn not only by selecting from the bipolar buffet and menu, but tortured by choosing between parents. An invitation for the afternoon would not have been that great a problem. That she felt in a position to be making demands on his time. however, did.

Her voice was as irritating as her presence. "What's this I'm hearing in bar chatter that you and Judge McCarver are being swayed by Karidja Soro in handling the Lowry custody?"

Godfrey had his own not insignificant backroom capabilities to display. "You should stay away from bars where peoples' lips flap faster than their fingers page through the latest law journal for a case to read on the toilet."

His implication of her type of lawyer friends stung. She flinched. Mellon did not. "There were three people in that room, Marie. And since one of them is dead . . . my condolences . . . your hearsay is unacceptable and inadmissible."

"Regardless," she tried to recover, "why are you letting a lawyer specializing in conflict resolution delve into my business, Mr. Mellon." She eyed him disdainfully, and then added with her renowned sarcastic tongue, "What on God's green earth is a 'resolutionist' anyway. It isn't even a word for Lord's sake."

"For something that doesn't exist, your speech seems quite roused with sabbath rattling, Attorney Aello." Mellon started to rise out of his chair. "And now, you must excuse me, if there is no substance to your summoning me here."

"You haven't answered my question, sir." She fidgeted with the fork of her place setting. "All this dickering between you and their firm for this

simple custody case is calling too much attention to my inheritance and settling Ned's estate."

Mellon remained standing. "When you see him in hell, you can ask your father. He chose her. He fashioned Linda Lowry's whole advocacy team." It was all he had to say. "And now, I will have my Sunday supper elsewhere, if you don't mind."

Before he turned, she said quietly enough so only he could hear. "I do mind. But fuck me. Go have your well-named sabbath, attorney . . . god-free."

"Not on your life," was his reply. But she did not know which part of her seething statement of dismissal he intended to answer.

181

April Smith had never been in a car accident. She had not even seen one occur, only come upon them afterwards. This collision of the clinic's van charging backwards into Lowry's rented car, and then his crashing head-on into a brick wall were phantasmagoric. It all happened with such brutal force and unflinching speed. Yet April saw it unfold almost in slow motion, every gruesome detail and horrific sound prolonged infinitesimally, as to become relentlessly predictable and unavoidable, blossoming from intent, not an accident, at all.

The rain was not cold. But she was shivering anyway. Somehow, she already knew her sweater hanging at the library was not miles, but now worlds away and as pale and lifeless as a shed snakeskin, too small to be associated with, or used in, this new life Denison had lured her into.

April resolved she would no longer allow the doctor to be the apple of her eye. But, it turned out, not just yet. Her resolve melted in the rain as she was drawn across the parking lot to his side when the driver's door of the van swung open and he stumbled out onto the pavement, bent down on one knee, and held his head in both hands. All she could see were the hands that eased her mother's dying pain.

There in the rain, he raised his face and told her, "We've got to get him out." He stood and reached to April to steady her. "Lowry, we've got to get him out." The oncologist went to the back of the van and began tugging on the bent doors. They were buckled inwards, but not fully stove shut. They made a protesting screech but yielded. The doors sprung more than swung apart. The rainwater on them sprayed into April's face. "Here, grab this side of the gurney when I unlatch it," the doctor ordered.

As his voice had done to many scrubbed-in nurses, it re-energized April's camp counselor first aid and CPR training. She picked the gurney off its rails on her side and together they were rolling the folded-out legs and wheels toward Lowry's stalled car.

Myles was out cold. His forehead was gashed, and his nose was bleeding. But his groaning declared he was still alive. His head appeared to be erect on his neck as it should be, not snapped off to one side as it might have been. The door opened easily. They saw that was because the hinge assembly was snapped and extended into the cabin. Fortunately, it had not lanced Lowry's legs. The surgeon opened the transport's med kit he'd set on the gurney. He used the scalpel to slice the shoulder harness and lap belt that probably saved Myles's life. With his expert fingers he felt every side of Lowry's neck and discovered some tissue swelling from trauma, but no breaks or discolored, engorged skin.

"April, put your hands behind his neck. Keep supporting his head straight up. I'm going to lower the seat back, but we must keep him sitting up." He moved toward the middle of the car, so she could fit in on his left, and next to him up by the dashboard. He felt the lever beside the chair, placed his foot on it, slid both his arms in against Lowry's back, and then told April, "Here we go." He pressed his foot down and the seat back loosened, he leaned his shoulder against its edge next to Myles, and it collapsed backwards as he had hoped. Between his arms supporting his newest patient's back and April's assisting hands cradling his head, Lowry's neck was unstrained.

"April, you can let his head go gently. Let it rest back onto my right arm. Then get the gurney lined up perpendicular to the car, with the foot end lowered as far down as it will go. You'll see the mechanical lever on either side."

April was comfortable around mechanical things and engines. With more males than females in her neighborhood, she survived by being a tomboy. She could fix a bicycle better than any girl, and most of the boys. She found what LeClerc told her and had the gurney positioned perfectly. It reminded her of a playground teeter-totter.

The oncologist's familiar voice brought her back from her childhood, as LeClerc told her, "Keep that gurney steady. I'm going to adjust his body, and simply slide him out of the car and up the slanted bed. It doesn't look like there's anything blocking the way. I'm going to do it with a steady, smooth motion so as not to twist his spine. When I say so, keep the gurney from tipping over with your hips, and slip your arm under his knees to lift them just enough to clear the space between the car and the gurney, so his heels don't catch his feet and jerk him backwards. Have you got that?" She nodded and he said, "Okay, on my count of three I will start."

It sure wasn't pretty, but it worked. And Myles groaned just enough that the physician was assured he was still with them, but hopefully not additionally injured by the transfer. They rolled Myles across the lot, getting wetter all the while. April was grateful the lot was still empty, and no one had come along. She had no way of knowing it had cost the doctor a pretty penny to buy the restaurant for the night and have them cancel all their prior reservations. There were things he hadn't told her . . . and never would.

With the patient strapped in and on an IV drip, the gurney locked in its travel rack and tracks, and the back doors forced shut against their protest, Denison turned to April. "If I need you to . . . can you drive this van? Damn thing is a standard transmission." She assured him she could. She kept her opinion of his driving to herself. "Okay, get in and get ready. I'm going to see if his still works."

The rental still had a little more life in it. If it didn't start dropping body parts off along the way, and if it didn't run out of fluids, he just might be able to get it out of this incriminating location. Jogging across the lot, he came up to the van. April powered down the driver's window to hear him better. "Follow me."

182

Back in **HAPPYDALE** after games and snacks with Margie and Katie, the Lowry ladies had an hour or so to kill before their Sunday dinnertime. They had agreed on grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup when they were walking from the theater back to Margie's car.

"Linda, what do you feel like before dinner? Quiet reading, television, or board games?" asked Rosalyn.

Her daughter was surprised that Rosalyn wanted to stay engaged together. "I still have a few pages of homework for tomorrow. I should do it now before dinner. But I can do it at the kitchen table if you are doing some library work." Her voice assured her mother that their recent disagreement was over, and they were on better terms again.

"Okay. You do that and I will review some books for suggestions to your classmates, their moms, and to Mrs. Steadman. I'll just sit over here and spread out on the couch." She opened the refrigerator and took out a split of white wine that was still half filled. There was just enough for a glass. "Do you want some juice or milk? I don't think any more soda is a good idea today."

Linda asked her for a glass of water, while she was already looking at her workbook, open on the table.

183

It wasn't raining any harder on the van's windshield, but the mood of the late overcast afternoon was set. April drove behind the sedan as instructed. It was wobbling. She wondered if that was the car's condition or the driver's. The doctor was firm and in control, but he looked shaken just the same. In all the years she knew him, as a patient's daughter, as a patient herself, as a neighbor, and just recently as a helper in some matter of importance to him, she had not seen him like that.

They turned into the commuter parking lot alongside the elevated railroad tracks, on the side that serviced the back of the businesses adjacent to the lot. Most shops were closed for Sunday. The occupied spaces in the lot were sparse and at a distance from each other. The sedan coursed to the furthest end of the lot, all the way down to about two streets away from the station. It turned left and front-ended into a space underneath the tracks, somewhat hidden from view by the cement pillars of the elevated railbed.

Denison LeClerc emerged and walked in front of the van, got in, and sat facing frontwards. "Please drive us to the clinic, April." That was all he said. He tilted back against the head rest and closed his eyes.

184

Godfrey Mellon and his father so infrequently had dinner together, that when his son called at the last minute and invited him out for a Sunday meal, he was reluctant to refuse more than he was eager to accept.

Their dinner discussion was memorable, neither could recall what they had eaten. For the first time ever, the son insisted that his father tell him some missing pieces he wanted to know about his father's relationship with his recently deceased acquaintance, Ned Hegerman. The son argued that with Hegerman dead, no one could possibly bring any harm to his father, or their law firm. So he insisted they should have no secrets from each other.

Mellon senior had grown tired over the years. His son's isolation of him from the everyday workings of the firm he had built had lately taken a toll on his health. He saw no reason to hide what he had never told his son of the genesis of the bad blood Godfrey was now trying to shed in revenge and greed.

The senior Mellon set his utensils down and drank what little water there was left in his glass before starting in. "Nowadays, your generation would call this an origin story. But there are probably few heroes in this one. Many years ago, during Ike's presidency, I bought a major interest in a small independent practice that specialized in copyright law. It was the post war years. GIs were graduating from college. New subjects were creating and filling textbooks. People were reading and listening to music. Bands were

popping up with new types of music. Popular magazines were printing original fiction. Scripts were being written for radio dramas and the film industry." He waited discretely as some diners passed their table.

"But it did not work out as I had hoped. By the time JFK was in the White House, to keep the enterprise from going under, we needed to find a law firm to acquire it wholesale and incorporate into its practice. I hired a brokerage house to handle the deal. It appeared to be on the up and up, on the surface of it. The asking price was a fixed million dollars. No strings attached." He cleared his throat and held up his water glass to signal the wait staff to refill it.

"But the broker turned sour. Unknown to me and undisclosed to the buyer, there was a conflict of interest, namely, the brokerage house had clients with products that were trademarked, copyrighted, and otherwise legally protected. The sale went through, but the scandal hit the news worse than LBJ's gall bladder scar, and kept profitability down and the million-dollar expense was never recouped."

"But where does Hegerman come into this, dad?" Mellon was getting impatient with his father.

"Hegerman could have stopped the deal. But he recused himself and that firm's by-laws favored the deadlocked partners who wanted to make the purchase. Most of that is documented, though it would require dogged research to discover. All but one of the principals has moved on or passed on, equally unreachable."

"And you know why Hegerman recused himself?" he asked. "You've never told me that."

"Oh yes, I know," the patriarch affirmed.

"And how did you come by that knowledge, if I may ask?" the son challenged, suggesting he did not believe his father's claim.

"I know because I caused it to occur. I took the million dollars Hegerman's partners paid for the copyright practice. I gave a third of it to his wife. And I gave a third of it to the mother of his illegitimate daughter, which

only a few of us in the legal trade knew about. And I kept a third of it for future use." He gave his son a moment to take this all in.

"As it turned out, Hegerman's wife put the money into a trust fund, beyond anyone's reach than hers while she was alive. The daughter's mother took the money, in exchange for her silence. She used it to take care of her needs and to raise her daughter, whom she named Marie."

He continued, "And I used my share anonymously to leverage and manipulate the carousel of partners over time, to keep Ned Hegerman on at his firm, in an essentially powerless position as far as they were concerned. Simultaneously, I blackmailed Hegerman to stay on and to inform me of cases that were going to pit our firms against each other in court. In return, after his wife passed away, all he was required to do was not interfere with the use of the trust to continue Marie's education through to her passing of the bar."

"And he agreed to that? I find it hard to believe," protested Mellon.

"That is because, my son, your moral compass is so offset by your egomagnetism that you are incapable of seeing such a core direction of self when others center their lives on one. You didn't see it in Hegerman. And you don't see it in the people he assembled to assist his friend, Myles Lowry, in his time of need."

"What's Lowry got to do with this. You're the second person today to throw this in my face," he pursued angrily.

His father let out what might have been a snicker. "Yes, let me guess, who." He paused and then restarted the origin story, as he had called it. "In their college years, Marie knew Lowry and the woman he was later to marry. Something occurred among them that made the women more loyal to each other than to Myles. Sexual politics of the time? Student activism? Who knows?" He mused. "Anyway, years passed, and when the marriage went sour, the women aligned their interests in some way to avenge the separate hurts they perceived they suffered at the hands of Ned and Myles. Together they coerced Ned with their silence about his paternity of Marie, in exchange for the most punitive custody arrangement conceivable and achievable. And, my dear son, they deceived you to imagine you were its architect."

“Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?” Godfrey had fury in his restaurant-smothered voice.

“Why, Godfrey, do you forget that for ten years you have been telling all the lawyers and secretaries and interns, and even the lowly boys and girls on their messenger bicycles, that I was to be told nothing about the daily goings on at the firm?” He raised his water glass as a toast. “They were extraordinarily loyal to you, Godfrey, to the last.” He laughed at his son’s shocked face.

“So loyal, in fact, that when you resurrected that whole conflict of interest thing back then—which you are only now seeing you did not truly understand—none of them advised you, nor tried to stop you, from toppling Hegerman and that firm. All you managed to do then was ruin four good lawyers and their families. But you showed your true colors. And repainting them will be impossible for you to ever accomplish. Especially since you’ve gone after Hegerman again, first in the Lowry case for almost three years, and now, even though he’s dead, you’re trying to attach what might be left of his value and assets.”

Godfrey stuttered in his own defense. But he had nothing coherent to say as his father stood up, not waiting for coffee and dessert. “Good luck with that, son,” were his father’s parting, and as it turned out, his departing words. After that night they would never speak again. And the senior Mellon was never to enter the offices of his now accursed law firm again, except perhaps to haunt the place after his more classical version of crossing the bar.

185

The library was closed as April Smith drove past it to turn at the light and swing into the back entrance to LeClerc’s clinic, as he directed from the passenger seat. She backed the van snugly next to the asbestos removal box truck, making it impossible to see from most vantage points.

“Wait here a moment, please,” the oncologist told her. He stepped down from the van onto the asphalt. He walked along the paved path to the back door, which bore a warning sign not to enter. He took out his keys and unlocked the doors, pushing them back into a locked open position.

He came around to the driver's side of the van. When April lowered the window, she got less wet than she expected. The box truck was higher and longer and blocked the wind and the rain. "April, no work has started on the asbestos flooring. We can go through here safely and get Lowry set up in a private room of his own. Don't worry. It's totally safe for us to go in here."

They forced open the van's rear doors, unfastened the gurney from its travel restraints, and unloaded Myles from the van onto the pavement in front of the clinic's open doors. It was a fairly smooth ride into the building. Once the gurney was steady inside, LeClerc went out in the rain and peeled the magnetic signs off the van. He replaced them onto the sides of the big construction truck where they belonged.

It took them ninety minutes to retrofit the oversized corner solarium space in the part of the building scheduled for construction work. Their work was made somewhat easier because all the furnishings had been previously removed for the renovation. They essentially started with an empty room. As LeClerc had asked, April closed all the floor-to-ceiling vertical blinds, which fortunately had not yet been taken down by the contractor. She then stayed with Myles for most of that time, except for stepping into the sunroom's washroom to relieve herself and wash her hands and face, so she could handle Lowry and the equipment the doctor kept rolling down the hall and into the large room.

By the time they were finished, the former conservatory had been transformed into a huge private suite. Most of the work was grunt work and mechanical hookups. LeClerc did the grunt work so he could place everything as he wanted it to be. Smith did the mechanical and electrical work as he directed, so he could watch the control panels and readout displays when she plugged them in or ran them in sequence electronically. They completed the task, with her making the corrections he required and implementing the facets he kept changing his mind about.

Lowry's ex-wife and daughter could not have possibly imagined what had happened to Myles in the last two days. After their soup and sandwich

Sunday evening supper they were sitting at the cleared kitchen table together. Linda was teaching her mother how to play *Insecta*.

Within a half hour, the basic rules were mutually understood. Now Linda was teaching her mother how the strategy of the game was played. Two things were amazing to Rosalyn. The first was that her six-year-old could learn how to play a game made for kids twice her age, according to the box labeling. The second was that her daughter picked up on the strategy of the game after playing for less than eight hours with a few different people older than she was.

The game was a contest and a competition. Players had the game to contest with, and other players to compete with. The paradigm was primal and unmistakable. They played together over the course of an hour and a half, until it was getting to be Linda's bedtime on a school night.

After tucking Linda in, which had not happened all that many times in these new surroundings, Rosalyn began to ponder possible cross pollinations of *Insecta* and library book reading selections for Mrs. Steadman's two most challenging, and volatile, young girls. Rosalyn had already been working on books that would sublimate the red-haired Clementine's aggression, but keep the force of it pent up for the right moment to explode. And she had also been calculating how to orchestrate the *Choose Your Own Adventure* process to push Deirdre to be a more subtle manipulator, so she looked less like a bully.

Rosalyn had learned from the books in her nightstand, which she absorbed and internalized in the last three years, and had lined up to read here at **HAPPYDALE**, how to mold her personality after these models to fit the occasions challenging her. These women had helped her form herself to confront her unexpected pregnancy and the threat of losing her daughter to her possessed spouse. They showed her how to make herself a mother who could raise a self-sufficient girl, destined to be subjected to marginalization by a class-conscious society. They gave her the strength and vision to take her life and her child's in hand, to fight for and win a divorce. And now, a rebel teacher was shaping her to influence schoolgirls to take the first steps of independence to eventually reach their prime of life, emotionally, physically, and sexually—while doing the same for their injured and downtrodden mothers with subversive fairy tales for them to idealize.

In all of this, she could envision re-setting one of the quiet reading rooms in the library. With its shades drawn over for privacy, it could serve as the tabletop battleground for Clementine and Deirdre to battle for *Insecta* supremacy—Roselyn’s librarian-provided proxy for playground violence, free from the threat of expulsion and Beatriz Grey’s interference.

187

April Smith walked out of the new patient suite. She stood in the hallway and awaited Denison LeClerc to emerge. “I don’t know about all of this, doctor. What is going on? What did you do?”

“It was an accident. I swear. I just messed up that standard transmission under stress. I only wanted to talk to him. And if I didn’t like what I heard, I wanted to scare him about coming back to our town and the library.” Half-truths at best.

“Why? What was so bad about what Myles was doing?” she felt uneasy confronting him, but this was too unexpected from the man she knew as a caring doctor.

“There are people jealous of the success of the clinic. People who want it to fail. Especially now when this last expansion will solidify its place in the community and the medical landscape of this part of Long Island,” he replied. “Offering all this help to the people and families . . . it will be lost . . . to the greedy hospitals and practices that want these patients for their own.”

“And how does Lowry fit in? You’ll have to do better than that, doctor. And quickly. Because I think I should be going to the police about this.” April was not fond of most authority figures, with LeClerc a notable exception because of his care for her mother. But this was not theoretical. She had seen things happen that she deeply felt should not be allowed to go unpunished.

“The police! Are you delusional, girl?” LeClerc was shaking her, a hand on each shoulder. “Do you know what the police will say? And their lawyers?” His mind raced as fast as her heart did. “They’ll say you spent a night with him in the motel. They’ll say you spent time with him at the library on your day off. That you were a part of this, right from the start. They’ll take your

story and turn it against you, I can assure you of that.” He dropped his hands and paced a circle in front of her right there in the empty hallway.

“They will twist your report of a crime into the confession of an accomplice. You will be accused of bringing . . . of luring him . . . to that restaurant.” LeClerc saw her first tears and knew he was close to winning her over. “Some well-dressed lady lawyer from the district attorney’s office will stand up and say . . . with disdain the jury won’t be able to resist agreeing with . . . that you got out of the car so you wouldn’t get hurt. She’ll claim that proves you knew what was going to happen. They will emphasize that after the crash you drove the van with him inside, strapped helplessly to a gurney, for God’s sake. You assisted . . . they’ll say it legally, that you abetted . . . in the disposal and abandonment of his crashed car, where you hoped it wouldn’t be found for days. And they’ll demean this clinic and its medical expertise—which you witnessed first-hand in your mother’s last weeks on earth—by emphasizing you did not drive him to an emergency ward at a local hospital.”

188

There was one more chore Rosalyn had left herself to do before a new week began. She had to plan out her next excursion. This time she would go to the public library in Philadelphia. She had used the **HAPPYDALE** library resources to discover that the Free Library had a strong children’s literature collection. Financially, Philadelphia also had been suggested as beneficial to visit for a certain type of alternate banking sector she might find there.

Rosalyn needed to plot out a public transit plan to get to the Amtrak station nearest to **HAPPYDALE**, to then take the northeast corridor service down to Philadelphia. She had some brochures from the library that she hoped would help, even if the schedules would need updating. The last thing she did about the Philadelphia planning was to look at the underside of her dresser drawers and make certain the envelopes taped there were secure and would not fall off anytime soon.

189

Detective Howe phoned Danny Hart's machine in the early evening Sunday. Her message was quick and to the point. "Danny, I heard back from two of my sources. Neither has any file on, nor experience of, either Itzel or Bembe Cocom or on Myles Lowry. I'll ask around more tomorrow, but that's what I have tonight."

190

The oncologist had settled April down in the hallway. They were now sitting in his office, from where he could monitor Myles Lowry's medical equipment and vital signs. All seemed within acceptable levels for a person suffering from a concussion and under sedation with an IV drip. He would have to attend to him soon, but he still had to triage April Smith. She had drained the glass of whiskey he gave her neat. Now she was sipping some more of it, also neat.

"Here is what I'd like you to consider, April. If you would be kind enough to hear me out." They made eye contact, and he was encouraged that at least she was listening. "I need help with Myles. It's that simple. If you can help me, I will put you on retainer here at the clinic. You can stay here in a room we can prepare down near Myles's suite. You will not be disturbed by anyone. That entire wing has been vacant since the renter left at the end of his lease in July. I already called the contractor and postponed his asbestos work for a month. Very few people will know you are here. I'll provide food, TV, microwave, a dorm refrigerator, books, magazines, and whatever else you need. I will get you clothes to wear when you are not watching Myles and provide you scrubs to wear when you are."

He kept going since she had not yet rejected his offer. "I think it best not to go back to your place, so your neighbors can't tell any investigators they saw you this evening and then you left. We can leave phone messages for the library and the luncheonette that you've been called out of town suddenly on family business and someone came to pick you up on short notice. I'll pay you more than you are currently earning. I expect it will be for about a month."

And then he told her, “Or there’s Plan B. I’ll give you ten thousand dollars, cash. Today. I’ll get you to an airport hotel for overnight. I’ll book a flight, but not in your name, for first thing in the morning to anywhere in the country or Caribbean you want—as long as it is a place no one knows you or will look for you.” He continued, “I’ll deposit one thousand dollars a month into a bank account you can access, but that will not be traceable to you, for two years. It will be my short-term version of what you see on TV as ‘witness protection.’ Only this will be more like ‘accomplice protection.’ I know this would be drastic, but I am willing to do whichever of these you would like, to protect the clinic.”

April swallowed the last of her whiskey. She did not ask for more. But what she did ask was, “And those are my only two choices?”

“I’m afraid they are the only two that I can let you make,” he said flatly.

Her retort came from her tomboy past. “But you have others you can make, I suppose?”

All he did was shrug. “April, Myles is like your mother and all my other patients. Their survival hangs in the balance of care. It sometimes is life or death.”

The former lunch counter, library archivist looked up and stared him square in the face, with teeter-totter playground vision. “I used to think that was true. But I also always thought the doctor was on the life side of that imbalanced non-equation.” She sat heavy in the chair to keep him up in the air. She placed the empty glass back on the corner of his desk next to the bottle he had been pouring from. “So how about this as a Plan C? I stay for the month, under your terms. And after four weeks, we switch over to Plan B.” Then she nudged the glass so he could pour three fingers of agreement.

Continued at March 2024 — Part Two