



# *Custody*

Installation Six  
March 2024

Part 2

## Custody

### Installment Six — Part Two

#### MONDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 21

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Very early Monday morning, the asbestos contractor picked up his box truck. Once the doctor had told him before dinner on Sunday afternoon that the funds for the renovation were placed on hold and there would be a stoppage of at least two weeks, the contractor adjusted his morning schedule. The crew was diverted, and they came to get their truck and the supplies inside it to use at another site. All the equipment staged inside the building was left in place, to remain during the delay, at the previously contracted per diem rate to cover loss-of-use.

After the truck drove away, the doctor re-posted the outer door with the asbestos construction sign to forbid entry. Then he repositioned his van and smashed the back of it into the three yellow metal bollards protecting the exterior double doors to the boiler room. He left a phone message for his insurance company and reported the accident occurred during the prior evening's rainstorm. By noon, the van had been towed away for estimates and repairs, and the insurance company's interim loaner was on site.

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Eleanor Quatrane arrived a few minutes earlier than Soro and Costa. She had Monday morning coffees and donuts ready and a deck of cards, a single task or question printed on each.

She read the cards one by one as they drank and ate. The order in which she read the cards was an outline of the information she assembled over the weekend and still needed to discover. Her workmates agreed to cover a few of the tasks, expecting they would have a few hours before

Eleanor would be summoned by Thomas Bruce in advance of the next day's deadline and to hear the results of the weekend of work by the accountants.

Gabriella Costa agreed to search for a last name for Ned's daughter, Marie. She would also keep her ears pricked for a call from S.E.C. archivist DeWitt about the S.E.C.'s agent or the broker for the acquisition deal, in case Bruce had Eleanor somewhere else in the building. Lastly, she was still hell bent from Friday on finding a last name and current address for Valerie McKinley.

Quatrane asked Soro for help with the biggest legal issue she needed to track down. That was to see who controlled the trust fund that was still undeclared in the accountants' asset search and that had funded Marie's undergraduate and graduate school education at Columbia. Particularly, to see if perhaps Ned Hegerman's wife had been that Trustee. And if so, what became of the Trusteeship after her death.

For her own part, Quatrane reviewed her remaining cards and went over her sheets of notes from the weekend work. She went through the bound copy of the preliminary audit report, in case Thomas Bruce took it back from her after any sessions he may call her into that day.

Rosalyn Lowry started her office day off by drafting a request to go to Philadelphia the coming weekend, from Friday morning the twenty-fifth of the month through Sunday evening the twenty-seventh. When she got to the part about a live-in companion for Linda while she was away, she paused. She would come back to that later after she had a chance to interview a candidate she had in mind.

Her next task was to review each of the small study rooms. She wanted to find the one best suited for her gaming experiment. As she did, she saw Alexandria approaching her. "Mrs. Lowry, they said you were looking for me. Do you need a hand with something?"

"Yes, there are two things I wanted to ask you about. But could you step in here, please? They are rather confidential," the librarian replied, pointing into the study room.

When they were together in the room and Rosalyn has closed the door behind them, she asked, "How are you this morning, Alex? Do you have any students today, yet?"

"I'm fine, thank you. I have two students to tutor for math at nine-thirty. And then there is a full class project I'm helping with from ten-twenty until lunchtime. So far, my afternoon is still open." The young woman was curious, "Are you looking for something for the afternoon, today?"

"Alex, do you know I have some field trips I take to other libraries?" Rosalyn inquired.

"Yes. I heard you went to your alma mater last week," she replied.

"Well, I wouldn't usually go two weeks in a row. But last week it was really a day trip to New York City only. But I was hoping I could get an approval for a trip to Philadelphia this Friday through Sunday. Part of the arrangement though is that I find companionship for Linda . . . what some might call daycare or babysitting. But we try to avoid those terms in our family. Linda is too old to be considered a baby and daycare is too limited."

Rosalyn moved along, seeing that she had the young woman's attention, though she had no questions yet. "I was wondering if we could make some agreement about you staying at our house for those days—and nights—while I was away?" Rosalyn said nothing else than this introduction to the idea. She preferred to hear what Alex might have as questions, to get an idea of what she would imagine such an assignment would entail.

"I've never been asked to do that before, here at **HAPPYDALE**. Do you know if it is even allowed for me to do that, or for you to ask me to do that?" These were certainly good questions, but not exactly instructive of how Alex would envision spending the time.

"I'm too new here to know," admitted Linda's mother. "But I thought if we had an idea of how it might work, then I could include those details in my proposal to Administrator Grey."

“Should I make sure I don’t have any other commitments for those three days? Or do you think I could still work with others on Friday during school time?” These were the two things Alex thought to ask.

Rosalyn affirmed, “I will be here Friday morning to get Linda off to class. I’d say you would only have to be ready when the school day was completed to be around for her. And you two just don’t have to stay in our home only. You could go places or be around on the school grounds, too. Just like Linda does now if I’m in the library and she’s not, or if I’m home and she’s out and around. As long as you both know where the other one is going to be.”

“Could I bring her to town or the movies or something like that?” wondered Alex.

“It would be fine with me. You’re a responsible person. She knows you and is comfortable with you. And I trust you, or I wouldn’t be asking you.” assured Rosalyn. “But if you went somewhere, it would probably be best not to bring other kids along, unless other parents were also going.”

The young woman was thoughtfully respectful, as Rosalyn had always found her to be. “It sounds okay to me. I’d give it a try. I think you could ask her—Linda, I mean. It’s up to you to ask the Administrator to see if there are any policies about this. I’m not a full-time teacher, so I don’t know what rules the school might have. Like I say, I’ve never been asked to do this before.”

“Okay,” said Rosalyn. I’ll submit the proposal and let you know what she says.”

“And the other thing?” asked Alexandria.

“Excuse me?” said Rosalyn.

“You said there were two things you wanted to ask me,” said Alex.

“Oh, right. I did,” recalled Rosalyn, still absorbed in her thoughts of how to write her weekend proposal. “Have you done any more work reading with either Clementine or Deirdre, Linda’s classmates?”

"I've spent time with Dee and her friends. They like the *Choose Your Own Adventure* book series. I made a game out of it with them once. I gave them all the same book. We read the first few pages together until it came to the first choice they had to make. They picked different choices, and they had to read—out loud—their choice, and the path it took them down until the next choice."

Rosalyn was intrigued. "And how did that work out?" she asked.

"Pretty well, in fact. They read slowly at first, you know, because the others could hear them. They realized their friends knew when I had to help them with a word, or they had to struggle to sound out a word while their friends waited. But then they picked up speed when the story moved along because of their choice. And each had a separate adventure their choice led them to. After a few pages, it became more a game than a tutoring assignment. They seemed to have been having fun. And they did improve their reading skills." It was evident that Alex was pleased that her idea of how to have them read together worked out so well.

Rosalyn was indifferent to Alexandria's success. They had different agendas after all. She asked the young woman, "Do you know how to play the board game *Insecta*?"

"I don't think I've heard of that before," the tutor answered.

"Okay, I'll make sure Linda shows you," the librarian said.

"Why?" asked Alex.

"I may ask your help with it next week in the library after school," was what Rosalyn decided to tell her for the moment. "I may work it into reading programs. You seem to have done very well with making reading fun." She left it at that.

Shortly after Alex left to tutor her math students, Rosalyn got right down to drafting her proposal for the Philadelphia trip. She knew she should give Beatriz Grey a day or two before having to reply. So, getting it to her the first day of the week would be essential to her hoped-for success.

Danny Hart began his day over coffee and bagels from the bakery down the street, the latter a treat requested and paid for with Dominic's debit card. Danny couldn't figure why he insisted, but went along, in case it played into Dominic messaging his wife in two weeks when the debit card bill arrived.

Dominic had another request, as well. It was rooted in his days as a detective working out of a precinct, as he explained, "Danny, I need about two hours of your time this morning, perhaps a little less."

"What for? Where?" questioned Danny, his voice somewhat muffled because he was trying with his tongue to get the errant cream cheese off the corner of his mouth and cheek.

"Right here. In your place," Dominic replied in the inverse to the questions. "I'll try to explain. Working alone for four years required a change of work habits. It took me several weeks to acclimate. I'm trying to reverse that as quickly as I can for this new arrangement—of working with other people again."

He sipped from his coffee mug and then pushed it aside to give him room for a lined pad on the table. "I got the idea from those tremendous posters in the spare bedroom. They reminded me that it always paid big dividends when I was stuck on a case to go back to the beginning and rehash. My partner would say I 'pounded away at the problem by assailing it with facts.' He was always fancy with the words. He liked to call my rehash a 'recapitulation.' He said I didn't try to make the facts fit the theory of the case, or the crime, but instead I'd just go over the facts again slowly, in order or with logic, to see where the facts led. He used to say he was the logician, and I was the magician. Those caves worn away by the persistent waves against the waterlines of the ice and the cliffs made me think I should get back to that."

He started to jot notes onto the pad, as he continued talking to Hart. "Danny, I think if you are going hard to pursue this drug trade and abduction theory, you might miss something off that path. It's just like you said you broke off from, and ran parallel to, those Hegerman ladies; so they could

delve and you could keep looking elsewhere. Now I want to walk this along from the beginning, as I think I've heard it told to others in my presence, and for my benefit. But I'll need you to follow along to keep me honest. Can you do that?"

"Sure I can, and I'll—" Danny was interrupted.

Corredor put up his hand with the pointer finger upwards toward the ceiling and his thumb underneath and the other three fingers curled over like a trio of the lower-case letter 'c.' "But there's rules, Danny. You can only tell me if I have a fact wrong. You can not comment on my ordering arrangement or the logical connections I make between the facts, as I go along with my 'recapitulating.' When I'm all done with the rehash, and I get to the place where I tell you I'm at the end—well, that's another thing. We can discuss and agree or disagree or refine an insight then. But you must let me develop the whole stream uninterrupted, unless I have a fact incorrect. Do you think you can do that?"

"It'll take me a refill with hot coffee to still my tongue . . . but yes," said the investigator to the detective.

And so, Dominic Corredor began to re-enter the investigative world as part of a team . . . "What I state may be cryptic or developed, but only factual. And remember, factual doesn't mean truthful. It is a fact that a person can tell a lie. It doesn't matter if what a liar said was true; the fact is that's what the liar said." As he wrote down his facts and related hypotheses, in pencil, he said them aloud so Danny could correct any factual errors.

His written list looked something like his verbal roster:

"Roselyn said she had to leave immediately for a private school, where classes began the next day."

"Roslyn had help—from a driver—getting herself and Linda away from her apartment on Monday, August thirtieth."

"Roselyn had an accomplice in the hearing room on August thirtieth. It was a woman with heterochromia, two color eyes."



“Rosalyn had a helper—who parked a car next to the apartment—with her when she came at night to remove belongings from her apartment on Thursday, September third”

Corredor’s voice dropped an octave, when he looked at Danny and said what he wrote centered on the sheet.

*“Hypothesis to Test: Is there a private school within less than a day’s drive of the New Jersey apartment.”*

*“Further Hypothesis to Test: Is there a private school close enough to drive from the Jersey apartment, drop off the Lowrys, and then drive back to Manhattan for approximately a two o’clock hearing.”*

*“Related possible subsequent Task: Get a map and draw some concentric circles for travel times and distances in above hypotheses.”*

Dominic asked Danny, “See how this rehash thing works?” Hart nodded, showing he was following the rules of speaking only when a factual statement was not correct. He toasted with his coffee cup and enjoyed the caffeine hit. Corredor said, “Okay, back to a second group of facts.”

“A similar set of sneaker footprints were left in the accumulated floor dust of the basement on two occasions. One set prior to Friday, September fourth, from the interior staircase of the apartment house to Rosalyn Lowry’s side of the storage cages and back again. The second set on Friday afternoon the eleventh from the double bilco doors to the Lowry’s storage cages and back again.”

“Rosalyn may have entered the basement storage area on Friday afternoon the eleventh.”

“Rosalyn may have removed her collegiate 1972 Yearbook from a box in the storage area on Friday afternoon the eleventh.”

“Rosalyn may have been scented by Mike Riley’s dog on Friday afternoon the eleventh, in the basement storage cages, and she may have left a torn piece of her clothing behind snared on a sharp edge of cage mesh.”

“Rosalyn may have had assistance getting a ride away from the parking lot adjacent to the apartment on Friday afternoon the eleventh.”

“For all intents and purposes, from Danny Hart’s house visit, it would appear most likely that Paul Meadows and Annie Meadows did not see, or harbor in their home, Rosalyn on Friday afternoon the eleventh.”

*“Hypothesis to Test: Is there a private school within the distance to make a day trip back and forth to the Jersey apartment.”*

*“Further Hypothesis to Test: There is something about the 1972 graduating class’s senior Yearbook important for Rosalyn to hide.”*

*“Related possible subsequent Task: Find a copy of the 1972 Yearbook, preferably Rosalyn’s copy taken from a box in her storage cage in the basement of the Jersey apartment. Secure a pair of sneakers belonging to Rosalyn Lowry and check the treads against footprints in the basement dust at the Jersey apartment, if still possible.”*

*“Related possible subsequent Task: Consult the map referenced earlier to further encircle the distances and times in these new hypotheses.”*

*“Related possible subsequent Task: Make a possible match between the fabric snared on the storage cage mesh and a clothing item in Rosalyn’s possession.”*

*“Related possible subsequent Task: See how Riley’s dog and Roslyn react/respond to each other, if at all possible.”*

“Now detective, I would also do something else. It’s a type of give-and-take, question-and-answer review of facts. Evidence, or theories. I used this technique in my boxcar monologues over the years.” He laughed. “My fancy word partner called these my ‘dialectics.’”

“Give: Someone (Rosalyn and helper?) took wardrobe items typically worn by females, for an adult and a child, from the apartment on Thursday, September third in a nighttime incursion.”

“Take: Wherever the Lowrys fled to, four days earlier, was close enough to return from to acquire the means for a lengthier stay. Does this add credence to a boarding school destination?”

“Give: How did Linda get into a school on such short notice?”

“Take: A waiting list? A friend? Another parent of a student? A teacher recommendation?”

“Give: How does a parent get to live at a boarding school?”

“Take: It’s a specialized school. Or the answer is you don’t. If only the child is boarding, is the parent planning to move on to live elsewhere? Is that elsewhere nearby to the boarding school? Would she be back in the Jersey apartment, if this was a typical boarding school drop off and reside situation? She’s not back, it’s not typical.”

“Give: But what if the boarding school was for Rosalyn as a teacher?”

“Take: If Rosalyn were to teach, then her six-year-old child might live with her, perhaps in faculty housing of some sort, and be able to attend school. So lower grades would have classes at this boarding school.”

“Give: If so, how did Rosalyn find the job at such a late date for a new school year?”

“Take one: Specialized magazines or newspapers might have run August ads for last minute hires. What creates need for last minute hires? Maternity leaves extended. Spouse job transfers, military deployment.”

“Take two: Or maybe it was a personnel reference. If so, find out who she still knows who teaches. Would the last school where she taught provide a reference.”

“Take three: Or maybe it was a personal reference. If so, is there a faculty member at the boarding school who passed on word of the vacancy in the eleventh hour, as a word-of-mouth inquiry.”

“Take four: Have NJ police or NY police been able to reconstruct phone calls in and out of the apartment, or records of calls in case any came in from the schools.”

“Take five: Is it possible that Valerie née McKinley is a teacher? If so, where? If at the boarding school, how could that be discovered without knowing the school? Does she also have a child who might be a student? What age? That would also give grade levels at Boarding School, if they are

together. Would the Yearbook indicate McKinley's major, which was not law, and provide an insight into what subject she might teach?"

"And Danny, I have another set of questions for you about the Jersey apartment," said Corredor:

"What seemed to be missing from the apartment after that first morning they left, when you looked around with Paul Meadows?"

"What additionally seemed to be taken from the apartment during the Thursday night incursion, when you were examining it Friday morning and afternoon?"

"What else might have been taken from the basement storage cages the day the Yearbook was removed?"

"Are there any factually incorrect questions in these groups, Danny."

Danny did not offer any.

"Well, then, these are the questions I'd delineate back in my old squad. Can you help me with any of them today?"

"I need a break. You've put a lot in front of me." Danny looked at the floor and his clasped hands set in the air between his knees. "I might like to take a walk. But I don't think you should be seen in the neighborhood quite yet. Until we hear again from Howe and whatever restrictions her boss puts on the arrangement."

"Okay. Fine with me. But in return I have a hard proposal for you" He paused a moment and then spoke up. "I'd like to meet your three lady friends from the law office. I have questions for them as well. Can we arrange that? Do you think the investigations can cross paths, even if they don't merge?"

Danny winced at the suggestion. "I'll think about that while I walk. Write down an outline of what you want to ask them, like you just did for me. It will help me decide." Corredor held up his pencil in one hand and a piece of

paper in the other, to signal his assent. "One more thing, Dom." Corredor said nothing except with his eyes. "What kind of sandwich am I bringing back for you?" The detective snickered and placed his order. Then Danny stepped into the elevator and left the detective to his work.

Dominic began another track of facts, observations, and questions about the personalities in the case. These were the questions he wanted to run by the ladies who had been working on the legalities of the custody battle, the hearing room arguments, the disappearance of Linda and her mother, and these other two women who kept muddying the waters.

In the past, he explained this kind of thinking to his squad mates by way of an image. He asked them to think about their squad cars. Each wheel had an assembly comprised of a shock absorber and a spring. They worked together to carry the weight of the vehicle and to smooth out the bumps along the way. Either one alone wasn't enough to keep the car on the road, but together they could. The questions he asked Danny were the straight, air compressed shock absorbers. The ladies could help him consider the personalities surrounding those events.

He hoped these methods of finding missing persons would work again for him for Linda and Rosalyn, as they had for so many other kids and adults he had helped who were apparently lost and undiscoverable.

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Back at **HAPPYDALE** Rosalyn had enough time to finish her proposal and a list of the next round of books she would recommend for Mrs. Steadman's class. She wanted to make sure she was advancing both parts of her target project, even though the per-grade listing was not yet approved. She did not intend to ask again about the book club at this appointment, lest there be too many items to ask Beatriz Grey to bless and allow to move forward. The off-site research and the graded reading lists were enough for today. And of them, the trip to Philadelphia was the most urgent, for its secondary financial fact-finding venture.

Beatriz Grey was not exactly friendly this Monday afternoon, but she was not as curt either as she had been the last time they sat together in this

office. She did not offer refreshments, but she did deign to sit in the suite of armchairs and settee rather than aloof, off behind her desk. Rosalyn felt she should take what she could get.

“What have you today, Rosalyn?” was Grey’s icebreaker.

“I wanted to demonstrate a next round of reading for Mrs. Steadman’s class, because many of the students, and their moms, have really taken to the project Mrs. Steadman had instituted and I don’t want to short circuit it by lacking books she might need.” Lowry thought it best to give credit to the teacher and not herself. Doing so also added on-going veracity to her claim during her hiring interview, that she wanted to be a librarian who backed up teachers in their curriculum and class assignments. She gave Beatriz the list of new books, without telling her she had already ordered them with the library’s acquisition fund. They were due to arrive from the supplier in time to give to Mrs. Steadman before she left for Philadelphia, should both her requests succeed.

Rosalyn walked across the quad a half hour later. She felt convinced that Beatriz Grey’s speedy approval of her reading list concept for multiple grades and the coming weekend’s trip to Philadelphia were due to her efforts. She had worked hard in her weeks at **HAPPYDALE** to re-form herself in the mold of Miss Jean Brodie. Reading from the novel became a daily exercise for Rosalyn, akin to using it as a handbook for self-improvement. It did not matter to her that she was a librarian and not a teacher. It did not matter to her that she did not have a classroom coterie trailing after her. It did not matter that the girls Miss Brodie influenced into the world of pubescence, were twice as old as Rosalyn’s subjects she was awakening to navigating the universe of the printed word. What mattered was that she was trusting the new persona she was creating, successfully blending in, undetected and undiscoverable. Myles and Hegerman would not locate her and Linda here. Rosalyn was further amazed that Grey gave her permission to ask Miss Alex to serve as adult custodian for Linda from Friday afternoon until Sunday night.

Beatriz Grey watched Rosalyn make her way across the quad to the library. The woman almost looked as if she was sashaying back to the stacks. The **HAPPYDALE** administrator seemed to miss picking up on her librarian’s disguised disdain for her and her authority. Rosalyn had fully assimilated the attitude directly from Jean Brodie’s disrespect and dismissive attitude

toward her own headmistress, Miss Mackay, at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls. It was so clearly depicted on every page. Rosalyn had dosed herself with it every evening in her bedtime reading of Muriel Spark's novel.

Time would tell which globetrotter's influence would win out, the black type on pulp page fictional Miss Brodie or the lusty flesh and blood Yvonne, whose prompting Beatriz was following in her acquiescence to Rosalyn's requests. As many a guerilla and tyrant had discovered throughout history, proxy battles were always so uncertain.

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The phone operator on the main lines, buzzed Gaby's desk phone. To her saying hello, the operator said, "Hey, Gaby. Quatrane's still 'bruced-up' as the expression goes these days. So, I'm handing off this call, as requested. Woman name of DeWitt from SEC says she has some info for Eleanor. Can you take it?"

Eagerly, Costa told her, "Yes." In a moment she heard the click and she continued, "Hello, Mrs. DeWitt? I'm Gabriella Costa and I work with Eleanor Quatrane. She asked me to take your call so you wouldn't have to call back."

"Okay. If that's how things work there. Just tell me, are you sure?" said the older woman.

"Why, yes, I assure you it's fine to tell me what you were going to say to Eleanor." Gaby was getting nervous.

"Well, I'm an archivist. Maybe you could tell me what I was looking into for Mrs. Quatrane." DeWitt was friendly, but unflappable.

"Fair enough. I am glad you are being careful." Gaby did not want to offend this woman. She was their one thin tread to the past. "We are looking for a person who had firsthand knowledge of a certain transaction around 1960, give or take a year either side. That person could be the broker who signed an acquisition sheet for SEC compliance, or the oversight expert at SEC who verified the authenticity of the transaction."

“That’s fine, Miss Costa.” DeWitt seemed satisfied. But she was not completely done. “May I ask the reason for your interest?” And then there was a silence, awaiting an answer. In that silence, Gabriella hand-signaled to Karidja, who had become aware of the call going on across the room from her worktable.”

Costa was hesitant. “I hope I am not misrepresenting anything that Eleanor asked you, or told you, Ms. DeWitt . . . and I may have to get some help from one of the lawyers helping Eleanor, whom I have asked to pick up an extension on this call . . . but as I understand it, the transaction was an acquisition of a copyright law practice. The transaction was between at least two law firms, and it was financed by a third-party broker.”

DeWitt replied, “That may be the facts of a transaction, or of an acquisition. But what I asked you, Miss Costa, was why you and your firm are interested in it, some three plus decades later.”

Karidja spoke up, “Hello. Mrs. DeWitt. I am Karidja Soro, an attorney. I understand from Eleanor that you know Ned Hegerman. I worked with Ned Hegerman for four years, two and a half of them on a custody case involving a six-year-old girl. It’s the case Ned was working on when he died earlier this month.”

She slowed down, once she realized DeWitt had not hung up the phone on her end.

“My condolences. Ned was a fine man.” DeWitt’s voice was genuine.

“Yes, I always thought so, too. But there are some who are now casting doubt on that. This transaction is being cited as a means to discredit Attorney Hegerman and suggest some financial wrongdoing on his part in the approval of the acquisition and its aftermath.” Karidja sighed, audibly, because this whole discussion saddened her, and she wanted DeWitt to know that.

“That’s good enough. You needn’t say anymore, Attorney Soro. I can send out this information in the afternoon’s mail drop.” She was about to hang up, but Soro stopped her.

“Mrs. DeWitt. I’d like to meet you if I could. My way of saying thank you for helping us, for helping Ned. May I come right down and see you and



get the information firsthand. In a way, time is of the essence. There is a deadline tomorrow at noon for this information. And I'd like to try to find either of these two persons before then."

DeWitt countered. "I haven't gone out for lunch. You know the deli by the SEC. The one with the four small tables in the back beyond the counter?"

"I can find it. What time?" asked Karidja.

"Half past noon. And that will give me some time to find out one more thing," said DeWitt.

"What's that, Mrs. DeWitt?" asked Gaby, just so DeWitt knew she had stayed on the line.

"Well, dearie, one of these two men is dead. It was thirty some years ago you know, as you said," she snickered. "But I'm going to see if this other fellow is still with us."

Karidja responded, "We would be very appreciative of that."

"Well, if Ned needs it by tomorrow, there's no wasting time for you to get acquainted. See you in the deli. I'll be having the hot tea and half a pastrami. I eat my dinner in the middle of the day. Can't eat late at night anymore." It was her only overt reference to her age.

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Danny had unwrapped their sandwiches on the kitchen table while Dominic was peeling the paper off the straws and piercing the plastic cup lids dead center at the crosshairs. Before they sat, the phone rang.

Danny answered with his non-committal, "Hello?"

"Hart? It's Detective Howe," she said.

"Hello, Detective Howe," he answered for Dominic's benefit as well as to acknowledge his caller. He put the phone on speaker mode so they both could hear what Howe was going to say.

"I heard more this morning about Bembe Cocom. Nobody I spoke to in law enforcement or immigration makes him out for the drug connection. And as a sideline, I found he's something of a recluse. He's very committed to the art and jewelry. He sends money back to Mexico to family he has there. That's according to the financial records he filed with IRS for the last few years."

She stopped abruptly, said to someone else, "I'm on this call for a few more minutes. Then I'll be there."

Danny told her, "I thank you for that. But now I must ask you something else. It will just take a minute."

She laughed. "As you heard, that's all I have. Go. Fast, please. I've got to use the ladies' before the next confab I just got tapped for."

"Corredor's needing to talk to the ladies at the law firm. But it can't be there. And they can't know in advance. Can we work something up like that you want to see them for some more questions and background about Linda? You know, something they'd be hard pressed to turn you down about?" He looked at Dom as he spoke and shrugged his shoulders.

"Where and when? And I got to tell you I don't know what I'm being asked to sit in on right now, she replied.

"Soon. Better tonight if we can, after you're all finished with work." Danny was aware of the accountants' deadline the next day, but said nothing about it to complicate a request he wanted to keep simple.

"I'll call you when this thing is over, and we can see. No promises. But I'll try." And she hung up.

Over on Long Island, Myles was sleeping still and medicated lightly. There was a delicate balance. Denison LeClerc wanted to keep him from being too restless or in pain. But he did not want to overmedicate him in case he had a concussion or damage to his brain. He had struck the side window of his car very hard, and he sustained a whiplashing from the explosive force of the airbag. His neck had bruising from snapping forward into the car door and then rotating to be struck again, his head wrapped from ear to ear in nylon.

After convincing April Smith to look after Myles for non-acute medical needs, he made an urgent phone call to a colleague who had helped him before. She had also been one of his patients some years back, which served as the origin of their occasional, professional collaboration.

“Hello, may I speak to Dr. Oulette. Françoise Oulette?” he was polite and tried not to let the panic gripping his throat render his voice unrecognizable.

“Yes. This is Doctor Oulette.” Her voice was pleasant and unrushed, as he had experienced almost always when they talked on the phone, before the emergent nature of a patient’s need crept to the forefront.

“Françoise. Good day. I am in need of your assistance. Today if possible. Can you make some time to look in on a new patient? I would be in your considerable debt if you are able.” There was more personal timbre to his voice than their customary professional exchanges.

Hearing an edge in his request and the tone in his voice—almost a desperation—she told him she would be there at five-fifteen, after her last office appointment.

He thanked her profusely and after hanging up the phone and straightening his jacket and tie, Denison LeClerc put on his lab coat. He checked his pockets for his stethoscope and script pad, and then went out to see his next three appointments. After that he would step back and go see to Myles. By then he should just about be coming out of his sedation and be ready for an assessment, by way of a physical evaluation.

It was half past noon when Karidja Soro and Mrs. DeWitt made their inaugural face-to-face acquaintance around a small table in the nook of a Manhattan deli. And good to her word, Mrs. DeWitt was sitting up to a steaming cup draped by a tea bag and half a sandwich, poking its crust and a pickle spear out of folded white deli paper. After all, it was New York.

The aging face from the archivist depths of the SEC wore a smirk as she pointed to the empty chair for the lawyer to use at her table.

Karidja couldn't read the look. She simply said, "Mrs. DeWitt?" But her round face, smiling eyes, and gleaming teeth asked her question about the smirk.

"Well, sweetie, it amuses me that even in his sunseting years, it seems that Ned Hegerman remembered those his profession had long marginalized. His Jewish parents would be astounded that he invited a person of color to stand by his side, even if it took him until near his end. But that's not the half of it. A woman as well. God bless you, Ned Hegerman." She bit into her rye bread and pastrami. "And where might your people be from, Miss Soro?"

"What Ned would always call 'The Ivory Coast,' ma'am," she replied.

"Word has it that Ned had you ride 'first chair' when it came to his last side deal. That right?" Her tea was still too hot to do anything more than give it lip service. Most likely, the only thing she ever did that for.

"Yes, ma'am. He did. He wasn't feeling particularly well that day." She recalled it was Ned's last day to be on earth, but kept that to herself.

"So, before we run out of time . . . here you go," DeWitt said as she handed a flat piece of paper across the table. She had withdrawn it from a kraft envelope, and it now lay face up with its top tucked under the flap. "There are two names. A broker who put up someone else's million dollars for the rights to the acquisition. But he's dead several years now. So, unless he left something to read, he's got nothing for you to help Ned." Now the tea seemed just the right temperature to sip.

“The other name belongs to an SEC employee. Back then, there was always one assigned to walk a project through . . .”

Karidja thought the pause was purposeful, so she filled the gap. “Why was that, Mrs. DeWitt?”

“Good for you, dearie. I like a lady that knows when to listen and when to speak up.” She smiled as she set the cup down. “There were two reasons, mostly. One was for SEC to make sure there were no shenanigans going on. And the second was to alert the conferees that their submittal was going to be rejected due to procedural reasons, missing documents, unsigned copies—you know the drill—stuff of no substance to the true content, but that still can sidetrack a deal.”

Soro spoke up, on cue, she did not doubt. “So, one would presume that everything was” . . . she looked around at the deli environment and could not resist . . . “kosher about the deal.”

“One might,” echoed DeWitt, with a little lilt on her last syllable to draw it out.

The lawyer couldn’t miss the chance. “Or one would have to presume nothing, and ask the SEC man some questions to see if there were some things around the edges of the acquisition that were questionable, though perhaps not criminal enough to send up a red flag to a fast-moving administrative judge anxious to go to lunch or to get home for dinner.”

Mrs. DeWitt might have been on in years, but not much else had passed her by. “That is, if one were predisposed to do so.”

“And where might such a predisposed person look for such a retired SEC personality?” Karidja inquired.

“Attorney? Have you any relatives that work also in the legal sector?” Dewitt asked as she was finishing her sandwich.

No. It’s just me,” answered Karidja. “In fact, most of my family is still in Côte d’Ivoire. What people here in the States call immediate and extended family, both.”

“Over the years, I have found that relatives—immediate and extended—often populate the employment rolls in similar, or related, sectors of work in New York City.” She looked around to see that no one was waiting to sit at their table.

“In fact, did you know that the senior Mellon has a maternally linked cousin who worked for SEC some years ago?” DeWitt asked.

“No. I did not.” Karidja did not realize the lunch menu would be so filling.

Her table mate spoke assured her, “Oh, yes. He goes by the name of Joshua Winston.” She folded the deli paper to include all her lunch refuse. There was one separate square of paper she did not include. That piece she slid across the table with her two forefingers. You can put this in your envelope, too. It’s the residence he calls home these days. It’s up in Riverdale.” She stood, put her refuse in the corner waste bin and then set her used cup on the collection shelf next to the bin. “Please extend my regards to all of Ned’s friends. I hear there aren’t many left in that firm. He certainly chose well in your case.”

“Well, thank you, Mrs. DeWitt. If there is anything we can ever do for you, please—

Before Soro could finish, the archivist from the basement of the SEC said to her, in a friendly, but firm voice, “The best thing you could do for me, I sincerely believe, is for you and your friends to forget about me so completely . . . that it would be that we never met today . . . that you all never heard about me . . . and that I never even existed. Goodbye now, dearie.”

Karidja stood and watched Mrs. DeWitt walk the length of the deli, past the counter case of salads and meats to slice, and then disappear through the front door to meld into the lunchtime throng on the sidewalks of New York. The last thing Soro was aware she heard was a voice behind the counter, calling out the quintessential New York question. “Next?”

200

New Jersey Detective Howe was through with her session much quicker than expected. And the matter at hand was informational on another case, with no need to take any more of her time that afternoon.

She called Danny and agreed to what he requested. He admitted he was reluctant to ask her. And he was uncertain of the wisdom of introducing NYPD Detective Dominic Corredor to the Ned's friends. Howe's only condition before agreeing was to have Corredor explain to her why he wanted to see Soro and Costa and Quatrane that night.

The two detectives talked for ten minutes on the phone. Hart listened to his end of the discussion and did not hear her side. What he heard were the same types of questions Dominic wanted to put to the ladies. The questions were about the people in the case and not the actions that he had grilled Danny on earlier. When Danny heard the questions, he understood the logic Dominic employed in his casework. The method seemed appropriate to Howe. She agreed to make the call. She promised to get back to them as soon as she had something to tell them.

201

LeClerc came into the suite set up for Myles Lowry. He was sleeping lightly and not in any apparent stress. All his vital signs on the monitor were strong and within expected ranges. Only the separate specialized bedside monitor displayed some wavering in his EEG line. He would review that with Doctor Oulette when she arrived in ten minutes or so.

He walked over to the settee where April Smith, now wearing facility scrubs as outerwear, was sitting in the sunlight. It was allowed in by the one window shade they had open. The rest were drawn to keep the room as sedate as the patient and to prevent outside viewers from seeing in. "April, I'd like to tell you about the doctor who I've asked in to consult on Myles. Her name is çç Oulette. She is originally from a small town in Normandy, France, named Ault. It is perched on the English Channel and shares a distinct geological feature made more famous by its English sister formation at

Dover. Each city has a tall, steep cliff face of gleaming white chalk stone facing the connecting arm between the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea.” He let that information set in and then pursued what he considered was more important for him to convey.

“Her medical specialty combines psychology and psychiatry to address multi-faceted recovery for persons suffering physical traumas to the brain and nervous system. She has schooled, trained, and practiced there in France and here in the States. She has helped me with cancer patients, but not your mother or family members. I have helped her with accident victims, whose recovery is complicated by cancer and its associated pain. We have developed a mutual respect and we maintain a strict doctor-to-doctor-through to-patient confidentiality. You needn’t worry about talking to her about Myles and answering any of her questions about his condition you observe.” He finished by patting her on the top of her leg, just slightly above the knee, and then he stood up, saying, “I’ll go to greet her now and we will return very soon.”

April did not flinch or withdraw her leg to indicate she thought his patronizing was immodest or improperly sexual. But what she did after LeClerc left was to get up and go down the hall from the suite to her own room, to use her bathroom before the new physician arrived.

202

Soro and Costa had some news for Quatrane. For the last ninety minutes, through lunch, Quatrane herself had been listening to accountants and Thomas Bruce.

Karidja told her compatriots about her lunchtime with Mrs. DeWitt. Now they had a name and an address of what might be the only living person aware of the details of the original acquisition of the copyright practice by their law firm. What they lacked at the moment was a plan to use this new information to get to the heart of the acquisition matter. Two weeks before, they would have counted on Danny Hart to have a plan and pursue it. That was not the situation at hand. Nevertheless, they were happy that they had their first movement in weeks on this item. But what shocked them was finding out that Godfrey Mellon’s cousin-once-removed may have had a hand



in approving an acquisition that otherwise might not have been judged acceptable at SEC. They could only hope he hadn't been removed again before they could get to talk to him.

Costa told them she had some leads on a last name for Valerie McKinley, but nothing proven. Information was being protected for privacy reasons. She had not discovered yet a public means to acquire the information. But she wasn't giving up, though, she assured them.

While they were assembled and talking, the intercom wanted their attention. In her accustomed role, Gaby picked up the handset. "Yes?"

"You three have a call from law enforcement," the operator told her.

"What? What law enforcement? Who?" Gaby tried to inform her work sisters at the same time as she was trying to answer the phone. She tapped the speaker button.

"The caller identified herself as Detective Howe from the police station serving that apartment in New Jersey where Mrs. Lowry and her daughter disappeared," said the operator.

"I'll take it," said Karidja. She answered when the connection clicked in. "Hello. This is Attorney Karidja Soro. I am an associate of Ned Hegerman's, Myles Lowry's friend and attorney."

The connection was crackly. "Yes, hello. I am familiar with your name. First, please accept my condolences on your friend and colleague's passing."

"May I ask how you are familiar with my name?" replied Soro.

"Yes, you may. But first, may I ask if this call is being recorded, please? I have disconnected the recording device here by patching in through my vehicle's radio."

"I can stop recording, if that is necessary, or advisable," said Soro.

"I assure you that it is," she said.

“Please hold,” asked Karidja. She tapped the hold button and then the intercom for the switchboard. When the operator picked up, she said. “Hi. I have that law enforcement call you put through. The Detective has requested that we not record this call. Please disable the recording for now,” she asked.

“Please hold.” The three ladies looked at each other. That was a strange and unprecedented request from the receptionist.

The door to the room was opened slowly and quietly. Before they could say anything, the receptionist appeared before them with her pointer finger raised and tapping repeatedly over her closed and silent lips. She wrote them a note quietly. “We have been told by security that all your calls have to be logged, monitored, and recorded. Please don’t say I told you.” With that she left quickly. And then her voice came back over the intercom, “I’m sorry ma’am. I can’t get that to stop working somehow. What would you like me to do?”

“Please get a phone number for me to call the detective back within a few minutes. Please tell her we are technologically unable to fulfill her request currently.” Karidja was livid. But her voice gave nothing away. “Please write down the number and bring it back here. Thank you.”

“Okay, ladies. Coats on. We will make three copies of the number. We all will leave at the same time, on the same elevator. And we will split up as soon as we hit the street. We go in three directions. Eleanor, go to the stationers you called from the last time. Gaby, jaywalk directly across the street right in front of the building, go the other way and enter the first luncheon counter that’s open that has a pay phone advertised outside. Sit at the counter, order a coffee and Danish, and start talking to the staff about whatever comes to mind about New York sports. I will not tell you where I am going, so you will not know, and you will not have to lie if we get asked. I will call Howe back. Ready?”

They all were, and they did what she said. Security was overwhelmed and could not cover three departures simultaneously. The one suit who was in the lobby chased Gabriella and almost got hit by a car. He radioed his supervisor to send someone to the stationer’s Eleanor went to when she had given him the slip the last time. By the time a third plain clothes guard could be scrambled, Karidja was long gone and nowhere to be seen.

Soro had been a weekly evening regular in the back room of the tavern a half-block from the firm. The televisions mounted on the wall were currently playing real time and recorded games of football from Spain, Mexico, and Egypt. Côte d'Ivoire was not among the teams on the pitches being broadcast. Drink service had slowed after lunch and the bartender was okay with giving her the bar phone to plug into the jack in the back room.

"Hello. Detective Howe? This is Karidja Soro again. I am sorry for the delay. Your call was the occasion of our confirming what we had somewhat expected and nervously feared. Our movements and communications are being monitored by our own firm's security and perhaps some outside services as well." She smiled at the bartender who offered her a drink. When she shook her head, he placed it down anyway and mouthed, "club soda only." He turned and walked away unobtrusively.

"But that's our problem to solve. Sorry. What can I do for you?" said the lawyer.

"I have come upon some valuable information regarding my case, the disappearance of Linda and Rosalyn Lowry. I would like a detective to share it with you and to be able to run some things past you and Mrs. Quatrane and Miss Costa. Since time is of the essence in a case like this, I would like to meet this evening. Would that be possible to arrange, do you think?" Howe was very careful, in talking to a lawyer, not to be too precise, and not to fall into any half-truths or untruths. After all, they were both officers of the court.

Karidja replied, trying not to be distracted by a headed-in goal that amped up the crowd overseas and the television volume in New York. "We might have a time factor of interest as well. Mrs. Quatrane has been working with something of a deadline by the end of business tomorrow. So, tonight will be of interest to her, I would imagine. Miss Costa's schedule is unknown to me. But she has often expressed how much she wants this to be settled, for the Lowrys and for Mr. Hegerman's reputation. So, I think she would be available." She paused, but not long enough for Howe to feel she had a space to fill. "I say it that way, because we have had to be somewhat inventive in being able to elude this corporate shadow to allow me to get back on the phone with you. I think it best to make arrangements for tonight now, while I can. So, I'll speak for the others and move forward." She ceded the discussion over to Howe and gladly took a healthy mouthful of the cold and sparkling water.

“Will you all be back at work at quitting time? And what time is that, exactly?” asked Howe.

“We expect to go back until our usual four-thirty exit. You see, we all exited *en masse*, in three different directions, in a rush to confuse the trackers.” Karidja said. “I learned that from my African cousins.”

“Well done, madam attorney. Quite legal and ethical. But probably not repeatable as a strategy. Do you have anything else in mind?” asked the detective.

“I am afraid that was my one phone conversation derived lesson—from discussing the current politics in my home country—that I could fall back upon.” A thought and a risk occurred to the lawyer. “As a mutual friend of ours, I hope, said to me once, ‘I’m all out.’”

“I may have an idea. Miss Soro.” Howe checked her watch first, and then spoke. “Can you arrange for the three of you to be together, in the building, at four-twenty? With your outer clothing close at hand?”

“Unless security does something in retaliation for our recent stunt, I think we can. May I ask why?” Soro said back to her.

“Well, let’s say my New Jersey office may have intercepted a credible threat against the health and welfare of persons associated with the unexplained disappearance, or possible forced abduction of, Linda and Rosalyn Lowry. We may issue a temporary protective order for material witnesses here in Jersey, and legal advocates for the pair, late this afternoon.” Howe said no more.

From assisting their families, Karidja Soro was very familiar with many instances of “the disappeared” in unresolved conflicts in several countries around the world. “I will prepare my colleagues to cooperate, with no resistance, Detective Howe.”

Karidja finished her club soda, unplugged the phone, and went out to thank the bartender, return the empty glass, and his telephone. All he said was, “Nice goal there, eh ma’am?” She nodded tacit approval and thanks. She placed a twenty-dollar bill on the bar and set the phone down on top of it.

For her part, Detective Howe phoned Dominic Corredor's captain. "Sir, this is Detective Howe over in Jersey. I believe we have a mutual friend. I am in need on short notice of a safe space, a hotel room or house doesn't matter, for several hours later today. My two unmarked vehicles will be picking up the protected parties at four-fifteen in downtown Manhattan. A third non-descript vehicle may arrive shortly after we do at the location. We are avoiding the possible threat to these persons from a Mexican drug cartel. But we do not want that known, nor do we want extra protection. Both would call too much attention to what will appear to be a family birthday party." She stopped, having gotten it all out before she thought twice.

The captain said in return, "Our mutual friend is getting inside your head, Detective. I should hope your association is a short one for your sake. Here is the address and room number you can use. I will make sure you have sanctioned food delivered at the dinner hour. What flavor cake, Detective, chocolate or vanilla?"

"It took Howe a moment to register he was not being sarcastic, but trustingly helpful on account of Dominic Corredor. All she said was, "Thank you sir, chocolate would do very nicely."

Her next call was to Hart. "Danny? We're good. You get yourself and Corredor and Mike Riley, if he'll come, to the address I'm going to give you no later than four-fifteen and no earlier than ten minutes before that. There will be a key at the desk. Bring no food or weapons or Riley's dog. I'll have a date for each of you. Tell Dom his captain was a big help on this one."

April Smith enjoyed listening to Françoise Oulette's accent. The doctors did not make her leave the suite as they discussed Myles. One of the nurses had earlier told April not to be afraid to talk to Myles. In fact, she encouraged it. She was told not to wait for a response, but to watch in case one was perceptible. Now she wondered if Myles could hear these doctors in some way.

"He's been in a car accident, Françoise. And I was the driver who struck his vehicle. I brought him right here because I was afraid that more

than his injuries were life threatening. And I had confidence that, with your help, we could see in two to three days if we could provide adequate and appropriate medical care for him here." The oncologist did not want to reveal too much until he knew of her cooperation, or not.

"Denison. You seem to know more about this man than just that you hit him with your car. So, what are you not telling me, please?" Oulette asked.

"His name is Myles Lowry. I believe that people are looking for him and that he is looking for them. They have a mutual interest in one another's knowledge of an alleged bank theft many years ago. If Lowry has the spoils of that robbery, in the form of over a million dollars in bearer bonds, his life may be in danger. It is unknown what each party might do to acquire the others portion of the stolen bonds."

They both reacted to the audible gasp emitted by the young woman sitting in the suite's settee.

"Françoise, this is April Smith. She is from the area and befriended Myles, at my request, over the last several days. She has agreed to look after his non-acute needs while we use this space as his impromptu recovery suite. It did not seem prudent to me to incorporate his care into the clinic's general population, or to have his presence here too widely known and discussed. In much the same way I did not want to leave him unprotected in a hospital.

I can vouch for April. I have known her for some years. Her mother was a terminal cancer patient of mine some time ago. I have explained our collaborations to April, so she understands how each of us will be attending to Mr. Lowry. The charge nurses and other medical personnel seeing to Mr. Lowry are some of my most trusted employees. They have promised me their utmost discretion and confidentiality.

"And what would you have me do for this patient, doctor?" the woman inquired.

Denison stated his case and his desire. "I do not see any formidable physical injuries in my thorough exam and imaging of his bones, and tissues, and interior organs. They all seem to be functioning as well as would be expected for a motor vehicle accident victim. All, that is, except his consciousness and his brain." The oncologist spoke with deference. "I was

hoping you could do an evaluation and ease him off the medication that is keeping him comfortable and then see if he needs any physical treatment or therapies. I expect from what you have shown me over the years, that Mr. Lowry may have some memory problems. If so, I hoped you might be able to discern that and help him make his way through to recovery.”

“I will give you three days, visiting in the morning and afternoon. If there is no measurable improvement, Mr. Lowery will be beyond my services. I would at that time recommend you transfer him to a facility where he can receive the care and assistance he will require going forward, which may not fall into the category of recovery.” Only her accent made her words pleasant for April to hear. The content of her words sent a chill up and down the library archivist’s spine and made her begin thinking to where she should urge LeClerc to arrange her own relocation.

204

Just a half hour before the HAPPYDALE library was about to close for the school day, Rosalyn was glad to see Alexandria walking over to her at the circulation desk. She spoke to the young woman before Alex could ask any questions.

“Administrator Grey approved my trip to Philadelphia when I met with her today. And she said it was entirely up to you and me to decide and make arrangements for you to be Linda’s companion from Friday to Sunday, as we discussed. That is, if you are still interested.” Rosalyn was hoping there would be no hesitancy.

“I am looking forward to it, actually, Mrs. Lowery,” was her reply. And I’d be interested in hearing about that game and reading with Linda’s classmates.”

So as not to lose any momentum, Rosalyn invited Alex over for dinner that night. She could see how to play *Insecta* with Linda. And they could make plans for the weekend. They agreed on six o’clock and went their separate ways.

Back in Manhattan, the outside security man who was still smarting from having to admit he'd 'lost' Eleanor Quatrane twice already, was shocked by the arrival of the two sedans. They nestled up to the yellow painted curb of the loading zone. Two people got out of the first car and three from the second. The drivers stayed behind the wheels, cars idling. Four tall, well-sculpted men wore sunglasses, ties and jackets, barely disguising their shoulder holsters, with badges in flip packets over their belts. The one woman was thin, dressed in a business suit and wearing a protective vest, badge and breast name plate, sidearm holstered at her hip. Her eyes penetrated the space before her.

The insecure security guy was about to demand they move and not remain in the pick-up lane, when one of the men from each vehicle adopted a standing position that amounted to a perimeter. The other three arrivals walked right past him, paying him no mind.

In the law firm's elevator lobby and reception area, the three presented a commanding presence. The men stood to prevent access in or out of the glass office doors. They again ignored the security staffer, who turned upon seeing them and headed for the Managing Partner's office. Upstairs and down, the police escort gladly noted that the building security personnel were not apparently armed.

Only the woman spoke as she approached the receptionist. "I am New Jersey Detective Howe." Handing her a folded paper, she continued, "This is a warrant for your supervisor. We are here to execute this warrant by taking three of your employees into protective custody." Howe ignored the man coming across the open office floor space with the security staffer who fled moments before. "Please escort me immediately to the work area of Karidja Soro, Eleanor Quatrane, and Gabriella Costa. Their safety—and perhaps their lives—depend on your speedy cooperation."

The flustered receptionist forgot she was tethered to the desk switch board unit. She rose too fast for its limited elasticity and almost wound up falling to the floor. She quickly took off the headset, mussing the hair she always fussed with before expected company was arriving on the elevators. She told Howe to follow her and went straight back to the steno pool that had



housed the Lowry case operatives for the better part of two weeks. One of the police escorts stepped in to block the way they went.

Soro, Quatrane, Costa, and Howe made their way out of the office and toward the open elevator door that Howe had mechanically 'isolated-in-waiting' upon their arrival. The Managing Partner, who was clutching the warrant instead of reading it to find something to protest, was shouting at Howe's two unresponsive associates. As the women passed by and stepped into the elevator, the plain clothesmen turned and walked away, without paying any mind to the insults and threats, now muffled by the closing glass doors. They followed into the elevator, whereupon the door slid closed, and the carriage began its descent.

"Thank you, ladies," was all Howe said until the carriage approached the main lobby floor. Then she told them, just the once. "Our vehicles are directly outside. Soro you're in the back seat of the second car with me. Quatrane and Costa please go with your escort into the back seat of the lead car. Our drivers have remained in the cars. Our sidewalk posted officers will ride shotgun. Each of these two gentlemen will sit behind the driver. That gives us armed cover on both sides, if need be." The elevator door whisked open and the six of them made their way with purpose and without incident into the cars, that then drove up to the corner. One turned left and the other right, to thwart any pursuers and to confound street cameras.

206

Rosalyn served them an early and simple dinner, defrosting a pair of frozen pizzas and tossing a salad. The three of them sat around the table afterwards. Rosalyn observed Linda teach Miss Alex how to play *Insecta*.

While they played, Rosalyn made mental notes of how to distribute the roles between the foes of Mrs. Steadman's second grade class. She would encourage the two of them to allow the *Choose Your Own Adventure*-reading Deirdre take the lead at helping red-headed Clementine select the body parts from which to fashion each player's insect creature. In return, Clementine would leave Seussian happenstance behind and foster Dee's capability to plan ahead, and not just react by proxy, when opting for specific flexibilities and powers with which to invest their insect characters.

The struggle to gain freedom from the Hive would be the platform where Rosalyn would have Alexandria foster each young lady's fierceness and decisiveness of when to battle alone and when to forge alliances, however transitory, based on self-interest and ultimate survival.

To get the exact edge she wanted to inculcate, Rosalyn had ordered two copies of the book she was giving each girl to read later in the week. Barbara Park's brand-new title introduced an almost six-year-old named Junie B. Jones, in *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus*. The book and character were just the modeling of spine and verve and wit Rosalyn desired for these two girls. She would help them internalize their rolling pin and gut-punching aggressiveness, respectively, into something more subtle and calculatingly more useful as they grew into puberty. Later on, they could find their own Jean Brodie to take care of that life phase.

207

Godfrey Mellon decided not to try his luck at a Monday dinner out, after his two disasters around mealtime the day before. Most of his favorite spots were shut on Monday night anyway. So, here he was in his kitchen, separating the aluminum handles and opening the white square box that held his pork fried rice. He set it on the plate next to his chicken and broccoli and liberally shook the overturned bottle of soy sauce onto the whole thing. He was happier with a cold California white from his upright wine cooler than the warm sake they tried to sell him at the take-out.

He looked down at his customary blue-lined, yellow legal pad. He was making a new list of items to have on hand the next day at the law offices he would visit to acquire the files for Ned Hegerman's estate dissolution. He could hardly wait to monetize the holdings that would be forfeit before the end of the year. Amassing more wealth was its own reward. But seeing a rival toppled at the same time made it even more delicious than his Chinese dinner. He imagined that the ancestral chefs of those that made tonight's meal probably had an ages-old saying about such a fortunate fortune. And it was most likely too long to fit on the paper of his fortune cookie dessert.

He did have to admit that his father's revelations the evening before were quite shocking. He had never realized the full extent to which his dad had manipulated Ned Hegerman, and then blackmailed him for decades.

Remembering the other horrid event of the previous afternoon, Mellon couldn't get the bitched-up face of Ned's bastard daughter out of his mind.

How she ever became a sister-in-crime with Roz Young back in law school, and then returned from her life in Pennsylvania to take up again with the newly minted Rosalyn Lowry, was all too much for Mellon to accept as fair. Like the story his father told him yesterday, he was sure there were parts of this tale of vile sisterhood that he had never heard. He wondered if he ever would. But not enough to wish for what was to come in fairly short order, without his desire or expectation.

208

Across town something more than soy sauce was shaking at about the same time. Three spicy ladies in a different sisterhood and five salty cops from New Jersey were stepping out of a pair of sedans before a three star, not too heavily sought-after, hotel and long-term residence. Everyone living there, or transitioning overnight there, was so involved with his own life, or anxious to have her life's pain hidden from others who would only want to increase it, that it had made this building a perfect place for NYPD to use as a functioning safe space.

Soro, Quatrane, and Costa followed Howe inside and directly down a pair of intersecting hallways leading to several apartment doors, each with a brass number nailed top and bottom to the metal fire door jamb. When they arrived at number 7, Howe knocked twice. The door was opened from the inside. The only things that opened wider than the door, were the three women's eyes as they found themselves face-to-face with Danny Hart.

"Welcome ladies. Long time, no see." He did not allude at all to his exclusive commerce with Quatrane. "Please come in and make yourselves comfortable. There's only one bathroom, so you can figure amongst you the

order you need to use it, if at all. It's right down that hallway, the door on the left, which we left ajar."

Danny stood by the kitchen counter, which had a coffeemaker and a tray of cups, and sugar bowl and creamer on the counter. A tea kettle was steaming, without screaming, on the stove. Hart exchanged extended greetings with each pair of women, as the third was in the ladies' room. A large component of their conversations required of Danny some explanation to smooth out their ruffled feelings about his two-week absence.

There were two other men on the couch in the large sitting room. The only law enforcement person who stayed was Detective Howe. As was her custom, she kept her vest on and her sidearm in position. The others were dispersed somewhere, at her direction, to take care of the vehicles, and to establish an outside perimeter in the hallway and on the surrounding sidewalk. Their presence was neither welcomed, nor did it provide any measure of comfort for the other residents and guests. The fact that the room was at the end of the hallway and slightly around a corner turn of the hallway, and adjacent to an emergency exit, was most likely a factor in the NYPD selecting the room in the first place. One of the sedans was at-the-ready by that exit door. The display was overt on purpose. Howe may have to apologize to Corredor's captain for betraying the secrecy of the place.

When everyone was settled and had found a place to sit, Detective Howe took the lead. "I want to thank you all for being here. Since you all don't know one another, and are probably guessing who might be who, I'll provide the introductions. After I give your full name for identification, I will default to using first names only. I hope that will create an environment for some camaraderie. Because such a relationship will make it easier for everyone to know the goal of this evening, and activity growing from it, is to benefit the Lowry women, especially Linda. Not to denigrate her mother, but because she is a child. And children deserve everyone's effort to provide safety, comfort, and justice."

She stood centrally and continued, "I am Detective Howe, from the police command covering the geography of the Lowry apartment and its surroundings. My supervising captain assigned me to what our precinct is still considering a missing persons case. The missing persons are Rosalyn and Linda Lowry. You should know that the latitude of a missing persons case is that it is not charged with determining . . . whether the persons have

removed themselves from their accustomed place and routine . . . whether someone else has caused that to occur, with their consent or without out . . . whether they have come to some harm . . . whether they have suffered some fatal demise." She paused and looked around the room to see how people were responding to this explanation. "It is charged with one goal . . . to find them and return them to safety, wherever that may be, with their consent and willingness."

"Now, I realize that it may seem to be a very uncertain situation to find oneself in as the lead detective on a case. But I want you to be confident that I welcome the status of a missing persons case being assigned to Linda and Rosalyn. I welcome it because it offers me the widest range of strategies and options for activity to find them. And that is why you have all been asked here, or been brought here."

The gentleman across the way from me is a neighbor of the Lowry women. His name is Mike Riley. Mike and his dog have been instrumental in providing us with information very helpful to this investigation. He is familiar with Linda and her routines. She considers him and his dog friendly and reliable, should she need help. Mike has created a culture of concern among all the apartment neighbors. They trust him to pass on information and to be vigilant for them and for the Lowrys. Mike is a retired military veteran. I did ask Mike not to bring his dog tonight, but you may have occasion to meet him as time goes by."

With hardly a pause, Howe kept on. "Sitting next to Mike, is Dominic Corredor. He is a NYPD detective currently on leave from the department and working as an independent contractor for my captain, as an employee of Mr. Hart's agency. For the time being he is residing at, and working out of, Mr. Hart's home and place of business over in New Jersey. Dominic, or Dom, is a confidante of Linda Lowry's. You may wonder how such a thing could be so. Dom and Linda met on a Sunday morning in her backyard. And they had a birthday tea party together. Dominic left on the local freight train after that party, but has returned to assist in our search. He is well equipped to do so. He is one of the NYPD's premier finders of missing persons, with a specialty in cases involving unaccounted for disappearances of children." She took a few steps to clear a better line of sight for those gathered.

"Sitting in the armchair next to them is Danny Hart. His private investigation firm was first hired on an impromptu basis by Godfrey Mellon

to discover where the Lowry women were on the day of an important Lowry family child custody hearing. That Monday has come to be generally accepted and established as the day of their disappearance. Shortly thereafter, Danny was fired by Attorney Mellon and hired by Attorney Soro to assist in the search." Howe then pivoted and directed everyone's attention to the large couch on the other side of the room.

"The three women brought here this afternoon, not necessarily against their will, but certainly not the way they expected their day of work to conclude, all are employed by the law firm representing Myles Lowry. From left to right on the couch we have Gabriella Costa, Karidja Soro, and Eleanor Quatrane." She paused and realized each of the women raised her hand when introduced. This was something the men did not do.

"Gabriella, or Gaby, is Attorney Ned Hegerman's most trusted stenographer, archivist, and document preparation specialist. Her activities for Ned are primarily conducted in their law offices, not in the courtroom. Ned relies on Gaby on many occasions to be a notetaker at meetings and a transcriber of witness preparations and expert witness depositions." Since it was evident someone other than herself had provided the information, Howe motioned to Gaby with her hands and gestured with her face to inquire if she had gotten the facts in the introduction correct. Gaby nodded that she had. She was also not the only one in the room who realized, and appreciated, that Howe did not refer to Ned in the past tense.

"Attorney Karidja Soro is Ned Hegerman's protégé in their practice. Her specialty is conflict resolution, especially in matters involving international disputes. Ned brought her in on the Lowry case two years ago when the couple's divorce was being finalized, and Linda's first custody agreement was being fashioned. She has managed all parts of the Lowry legal actions since then. This includes assisting with, and then directing, their client's defense and claims for crafting a new custody arrangement. Since Ned's untimely death in the days after Rosalyn and Linda disappeared, Karidja has been her firm's lead attorney on this case, and related matters concerning Attorney Hegerman's legacy." Soro also had the opportunity to affirm the accuracy of Howe's introduction, though she was hesitant to do so, if only because she was trying to discern the source of the latter information attributed to her.

But agree she did, and Detective Howe moved along.

“Eleanor Quatrane is the senior member of the trio, by virtue of her longevity at the firm and her longstanding friendship and service to Ned Hegerman. As is the case in many organizations, the responsibilities of the senior members are often the most difficult to delineate. It would appear to be most prudent for me to say that in this instance, Eleanor takes on whatever Ned needs her to do, and her colleagues respect and follow her lead in many regards, more often than not. Currently, she is engaged in defending Ned’s legacy by working with the managing partner on a response to a legal challenge by Godfrey Mellon to divest and acquire Hegerman’s monetized value from the firm before year’s end.” Karidja and Gaby each separately noticed that Howe did not wait for an affirmation of her words about Eleanor.

“So, now that we are all aware of each other, we need to begin. Time is certainly of the essence. This is always true in missing persons cases. It is also true because of the deadline tomorrow afternoon for conveyance of financial information by Ned’s firm to Godfrey Mellon.” She walked over to the table that appeared to serve for dining, withdrew the straight back wooden chair from one its places, and sat down. “Dominic, you have the floor.”

The three women all adjusted themselves physically to face Corredor, who was over by a window ledge table. They were a little surprised that the person they knew the least, and about whom they wondered how he graduated from train tramp to top cop, was going to begin this session.

209

Yvonne dialed up Beatriz after school was out. “Did that bitch of a library lady show her face today?” she asked.

Beatriz answered, “Her face and her hand. She wanted to go to Philadelphia. And she still wanted book lists approved for all grades.”

“What did you say?” the former chef and current instigator inquired.

"I did what you said to do. I gave her some nylon. Not for dressing up when she goes library-hopping. I gave her just enough to weave that rope you want me to give her as a necklace."

210

Corredor started out without any foreplay.

"I'd like to believe there are two principal theories of this disappearance. I use the singular because it seems those to whom I've listened think that Rosalyn and Linda are still with each other." He cleared his throat.

Karidja was impressed that he did not say 'to whom I've talked' but rather 'to whom I've listened.'

"So, before I go further, I would like to ask if anyone thinks the two of them are not together as we gather here tonight?" To some of those gathered, the question had not even occurred to them to ask themselves, or anyone else for that matter. Regardless, after a short pause, but enough to give someone a chance to speak up, which no one did, Corredor continued.

"Okay. Fine. Two theories . . . First, the disappearance is related to the custody battle between the parents. Second, one or more bad actors have abducted the mother and daughter for reasons soon to be presented by Mr. Hart." There was a general shifting of body weight in chairs and couches and one audible gasp at upon the proclamation of the idea of an abduction.

Corredor kept going. "I'm going to quickly pursue an outline of the first theory and pose questions it raises. And then I am going to need help from you ladies," he looked over at the couch, "to learn more about the Lowrys."

"I went over this with Danny, twice, after I studied all he had, everything Mike could tell us, and everything you told Danny, and that I read in his notes. Please forgive me but I'll give you the same 'rules'—for lack of a better word—I gave Danny. This is how I worked as a cop. After more than four years of working alone, I'm still reacclimating. Only interrupt me if I



have a fact wrong. Please let me develop the whole theory for your consideration, because there are moving parts and connections it takes a while to put together. When it's all done, that's when any and all questions and discussions are most informed and productive."

He went through the entire theory of the case as he had in Danny's apartment. Nobody challenged the basic core of his understanding of what went on in and around the apartment and hearing room from the day of Linda's birthday to the last incursion into the basement storage area. A few times, Dominic noticed that Howe was jotting some notes in her case pad. He saw that Mike was caught off guard about a thing or two that went on in the backyard of his place. But on the whole, there was acceptance of his presentation—which he knew was very different from agreement.

It was the ladies who were hearing some of these things for the first time. Especially things that took place after Danny broke off his investigation from theirs the night they met at Costa's home in Brooklyn.

Dominic asked if anyone needed a break, the bathroom, refreshments. They were all so mesmerized they just wanted him to keep going. So, he did. "Before I go to the next area of concentration, the Lowrys themselves, I had some open-ended questions just now. I'd like to see if you can give me any factual answers you have that I can plug into this theory of the case. Where you can't I'll know that's what I have to work on next, or ask for help on those facts."

He started.

"Has anyone found a private school they may be at?" No one did or had even looked yet.

"Where are the Yearbook pages that Myles copied? Can I get them to see them, please?" Gaby said she'd get them to him.

"Does anyone have a friend or relative who has a primary grader who attends a private boarding school? or who teaches at one? No one did.

Does anyone have the ability to research want ads from eight weeks or so ago, say mid-July through Labor Day, for teachers at private schools located in a ninety-mile radius of the Lowry's Jersey apartment.

Eleanor said, "That was something I used to be able to get a clerical pool working on, but I do not know if our trio is still going to be isolated after the Mellon meeting tomorrow."

Gaby chimed in, "And I expect repercussions for our stunt of running out of the building together to make their phone call back to Detective Howe."

Not to be outdone, Karidja added, "I've been wondering what the reaction will be to our being placed in protective custody." She looked at Howe. "After Detective Corredor is done, I'd like to have a look together at how long you can you keep us without causing a stir in the NYPD or your department?"

"Noted," said Howe. "Continue please, Dominic."

211

The oncologist had left the psychiatrist alone in the recovery suite with the former librarian/counter server. They sat quietly and watched Myles breathe steadily and the covers on his hospital bed rise and fall, counterpointing the red, green, and blue lines on the monitors and the white and yellow numbers next to them.

"How do you know Doctor LeClerc?" asked Oulette.

"Four years ago, he treated my mother for cancer. He performed some surgery and after that some radiation and chemo. I moved here to be close by. I came in every day for a while, an hour or two at most, before or after work, as my schedule allowed. He never enforced visitor's hours on me. I got to watch his patient care and felt he was a good doctor. My mother slipped away, but he kept most of her pain manageable." April had told the story many times before. But Oulette listened better than most. So, April was more mindful of her mother in this telling of the tale, than of either herself or the doctor.

"And you still are here?" Oulette inquired.

“Well, not really here, in the clinic. I stayed because I had no job prospects elsewhere. I had no real money to fall back on. My mother’s money all went to her treatments. I had a job at a luncheonette and a part time job across the street at the library. Between the two of them, there was enough for rent and food, my apartment’s a few streets away. And I had health insurance from the union of restaurant workers the luncheonette workers joined years ago.”

“Is it a nice place to live for you? For young people?” Smith felt the question was more about herself than about the town. She was beginning to feel comfortable around this woman. And in such a short time. She was surprised.

“It’s okay, I guess,” she said. “I don’t really have a big group of friends. But that’s just me. I’d probably have just as many friends if I lived in a bigger city. There’s a movie house and a bookstore. And I can take the train to the city. The station is just another three blocks more to walk than I walk to the luncheonette to work. Once or twice a year, I take the train out to the east end and spend a week with a group of guys and girls that chip in and rent a beach house together. That’s fun.”

“And you came by this arrangement with this patient, how?” Oulette wondered aloud.

April figured that Françoise was letting her guard down as well, and slipping into a vernacular pacing of English she might have spoken in her French hometown.

“Well, I bring books over from the library for patients once a week. And I collect past issue magazines from the stationery store by the luncheonette for placement in the waiting rooms. The store owner donates them instead of giving them back for exchange. So, I see staff and Doctor LeClerc a few times a month. And I come for quarterly check-ups. I check on myself since my mom had breast cancer pretty bad.” Smith did not usually get into such personal matters in a first conversation with someone. But this had a different feeling to it. Even though she still held back some information.

And then the reason for Doctor Oulette’s interest became more apparent. “Well, April, usually a person without medical training and licensing doesn’t look over patients at a clinic. So, I am trying to decide

if there is something here I should reconsider before agreeing to care for Mr. Lowry." She hesitated, but decided to finish what she had started with the young woman.

"You see, April, Denison said he asked you to take an interest in Mr. Lowry. But I can not make a connection to satisfy myself that this isn't more complicated than he makes out. In my practice as a psychiatrist and psychologist, I often deal with the beginnings of things, of people's reasons for thinking the way they do, or acting the way they choose to act. My friend the doctor has not told me how it is that he knew Mr. Lowry was here in town for him to ask you to take that interest. It is a small thing, perhaps. But it is also a very big thing. Can you help me with this?"

"I'll try. I missed coming over with books for patients because I got involved helping Mr. Lowry acquire things from the microfilm archives in the library basement. That's my job when I'm there as a part-timer on the two days the full-time archivist does not work." She stopped to remember the order of events. "When I came over here to the clinic to apologize to the doctor, I mentioned Mr. Lowry by name, saying how nice he seemed and that I was enjoying helping someone with such a project."

"And?" was all Françoise intoned, to draw more out from the young woman.

"Oh, yeah. When I mentioned his name, the doctor became very interested. He asked me to keep helping him and to let me know what his research was about and how it was going." The librarian thought that was enough.

But the experienced psychiatrist was not yet satisfied. Once more she said, "And?"

"When I told the doctor that Myles was really getting intrigued by the story of the bank robbery, he got very animated. He told me he would pay me a few hundred dollars to stay helping Myles, even though my hours at the library didn't require me to keep at it that long, or on Sunday. One thing led to another, and we spent the night together, first at the bar where he was staying, and then waiting out a rainstorm overnight in Lowry's motel room."

Oulette was horrified by the look on her face and her movement to stand up and leave the recovery suite. "Oh, but nothing wrong happened. We just fell asleep. We drank too much. We didn't . . . you know."

Françoise could only see a conflict and a dilemma. "This is more than I am interested in getting mixed up in. A million dollars is not a good omen. More than a rainstorm is going to fall, I fear." She was deep in thought. "I will go find my friend the doctor and tell him I will keep my word, but nothing more. Two or three days, and that will be it for me. It has been nice meeting you, April. Please be careful. I will see you tomorrow, unless something occurs tonight with the patient and I am called back."

"What could happen?" asked April.

"If Mr. Lowry awakens or if the monitors begin to sound alarms, please make sure you ring for the nurses immediately. And tell them I said they should have me summoned to return as soon as possible. You can use the word 'STAT' with them. They will understand the urgency." And with that, Françoise Oulette left the recovery suite. Only Myles Lowry and April Smith remained.

Some time later, April met the second shift call nurse. She wore a white uniform and white shoes with rubber soles that made no noise when she walked on the tile floor. The tiles would be there longer than anticipated, now that the construction was paused, and this entire area was converted for patient recovery.

The nurse read the chart in the metal folder at the foot of Lowry's bed. She recorded all the information off the monitors onto a graph and sheet affixed to a clipboard. She checked the plastic bag and recorded how much fluid had gone down the clear tube and into Myles's arm. She unhooked the plastic bag from the rail on the hospital bed. It was calibrated with black lines and numbers indicating (cc) volumes of his dark yellow urine. She recorded that number as well on the chart and rehung the bag. She put all the paperwork down to free both hands. She straightened his sheets, adjusted his pillows, and turned out the headboard reading lamp.

"He's all set for the night, Miss Smith. Please call me if you need anything or if the patient indicates he is feeling distress." She had said

nothing at all to Myles. And if her name plate hadn't had her name printed on it NANCY, April wouldn't have known her name.

April had gone to the clinic lending library and picked a book she had placed there on her last visit. It was a debut crime novel by an author named Michael Connelly. The title was *Black Echo*. It was about a Los Angeles Police Detective named Hieronymus Bosch. His friends and family called him Harry, for short. The driving plot in the story was a bank robbery, but there were many subplots to make the story exciting and worthwhile, according to the reviews. After about six or seven pages of reading aloud to Myles from the bedside chair, she arose and went to get herself ready for the night. Even though it was early, the day's drama had exhausted her.

The nightwear she had been provided was a set of hospital issue woman's underwear for use under operating room scrubs. The bottoms were snug, a size smaller than she might have chosen. And the top was a very loose and thin, white t-strap undershirt. She put on a white terrycloth hospital shower robe over them for warmth and modesty. She decided not to make a fuss and just to make better arrangements for subsequent nights.

For another ten minutes she read some more to Myles and then went across to the couch rather than to her room, from which she had brought back a sheet and blanket after she had changed for the night. She turned off the table lamp, pulled up the covers to her chin and began to dream of where she would like to relocate when this was over and Myles was released from the clinic, no later than the end of a month. Los Angeles came to mind, probably because of Harry Bosch.

But as sleep invaded her consciousness, April began to dream of the naked men and women frolicking and fleeing and the exotic beasts from the painting she had seen in a coffee table art book in the library. She became deeply haunted by the events of these two days and understood that even though she wasn't physically injured, her mind was playing tricks on her nevertheless. She was somehow experiencing Netherlands painter Hieronymus Bosch's famous *Garden of Earthly Delights* triptych and its renowned portrayal of sin and evil.

Dominic Corredor accepted Detective Howe's invitation to continue. "When I was authorized as an NYPD detective to search for a missing person, I tried to learn as much about that person as possible. Sometimes that turned out to be immensely helpful, especially when their habits and routines came through in discussions about them. I was hoping I could ask you ladies some questions about Rosalyn. Many times, women notice things men do not; and understand better than men what they are seeing in another woman. So far, I've only heard from guys—Mike and Myles and Danny, and a little from what Paul Meadows told Danny."

"I'll give you the whole landscape, and then just stop talking and let you fill me in, okay?" he asked. It seemed all agreed.

"Can you give me an idea if you think Rosalyn was recently, or even ever, in love with Myles?"

"Whose safety and welfare do you think is more important to Rosalyn, hers or her daughter's?"

"If they left the Jersey apartment on their own accord, or at least on Rosalyn's, do you think Rosalyn would leave again? And do you think there's a chance she would leave Linda behind?"

"If she left Linda behind, would it be with someone she trusted, or somewhere she knew Linda would be safe?"

"Do you have experience of Rosalyn acting out in a way that emulates a character in a book she was reading? For example, Linda called me her 'gentleman caller' when we had a tea party together. I later came to learn her mother was being influenced by reading 'The Glass Menagerie.'"

"If you do make that connection, do you know what books or stories, or materials were on a 'next to read' list for Rosalyn?"

"Do you know whether Linda was able to read herself, or was being taught to read, by her mother?"

“And if yes, what was she reading?”

“Do you think Rosalyn was having an affair with Paul Meadows?  
Or, at least, wanted to have that happen?”

“Do you have any insight or documentation about how Rosalyn supports the two of them? A bank or source we could trace, and use to track them, if she’s still funding themselves that way?”

“Do you think Rosalyn has settled the two of them somewhere—like the boarding school scenario—or do you imagine they are still on the run?”

“Do you know any distant friends or family—by miles and or relationships—who would provide them safe asylum?”

“If they left their apartment willingly, what are your instincts about whether Rosalyn is running from Myles or from something, or someone, else?”

“What do you make of the timing of their disappearance from the apartment in relationship with the custody hearing that Monday afternoon?”

“Do you think Mellon knew they were going to flee?”

“Do you think Mellon has anything to do with their leaving?”

“Do you think Mellon knows where they are now?”

“Do you think anyone does?”

“What do you think it would take for Rosalyn to decide to return to the area, whether it was to the Jersey apartment or not?”

“Do you have any ideas about who might want to harm the Lowry ladies enough to make Rosalyn take up and run?”

“Do you know of anyone who might have abducted Rosalyn and Linda, and why?”



Corredor stopped pacing in the loop he had been making inside the seating ellipse of the men and women in the safe room at the hotel. He addressed them all. "I know that's a lot to take in, but you can see how it's all of one piece. One question leads to the other. And a particular answer may lead in an entirely different direction." He looked at Hart and then decided to say something else.

"I just want to say that detectives and investigators sometimes get tunnel vision. They see one possible way to chase down a suspect, or to interpret the clues in a case, or to develop only one theory of a crime. And some of us doing this add to the picture by having personalities that are, well, single-minded. That's why I'm asking you these questions that I am. I want to stay as open as I can. I want to avoid duplicating the exact same searching you are doing. For two reasons. First, you are better suited to do it than I am, because you know the history and you know these people. Second, because I owe it to you to think of things you are not thinking of, however seemingly outrageous, either because I have facts you don't have or because if I don't perhaps no one will. And either way, we might miss the one thing we need to find these ladies. So, I appreciate your patience and understanding." Only then did he reapproach his chair. But before he sat down, he issued an invitation and a caution. "Floor's open, don't fall through."

213

Godfrey Mellon absolutely refused to pick up his home phone. Whomever wanted to leave a message this late on Monday could do so. If they had an issue for tomorrow, they'd leave a message. He could ignore it or answer it, as he saw fit. But it would be his choice. He had another hour of reading to do in preparation for the big day.

The voice was shrill, "Mellon. It's Marie Aello. Look, about tomorrow afternoon. I want to look through that Jersey apartment in the morning. I might see or find something there that helps me figure out what I haven't so far—where the bitch and her kid are hiding. So have that Angie Flynn person call me in the morning and meet me there by nine-thirty. I'll drive over the bridge earlier and wait nearby. There must be a breakfast counter or a diner nearby I can find."

She hung up.

Mellon wanted no part of her. He'd have Miss Hayes call Flynn tomorrow and leave it up to them. Those ladies didn't need a guy getting in the middle to muck it up.

214

Despite that the trend of the invitation had been extended by Detective Corredor toward the women who worked with Ned Hegerman, the first person to speak up was Mike Riley. "Look, I'll make this quick and get out of the way. Would that be okay, ladies?"

The trio, and Howe, didn't know whether to take exception or to be flattered. They did not really know this man. However, he seemed to win their tacit agreement.

"Thank you. Since I left the service ages ago, I'm not used to talking in front of groups. Mostly, it's me and my dog." He couldn't decide whether to stand up or to keep sitting. There was some rocking back and forth, but in the end, he stayed seated as he was.

"I can tell you a few things that are facts. And I can tell you some things that are feelings." He gave Corredor a glance, knowing the fellow had asked just to be stopped for facts. "Linda is a great kid. She gets along and plays nice by herself in the backyard. She stays out of trouble. She is polite to adults. She never bothers my dog. You can ask the detective here how good she is as a hostess." He laughed to relieve his nerves. "She obeys her mother. She respects her father. As lonely as she might be, I've never seen her act out or try to run away."

"I feel her mother told her they were leaving the apartment, and she went, as she was told. Even if I missed something, my dog wouldn't have. He never raised a ruckus the morning they disappeared. I can assure you that if Linda Lowry had let out a whimper or yelled at the top of her lungs because she was being kidnapped, that dog would have been all over me to get out of my place. He would have gone after anyone he sensed was hurting her." He thought of something else.

“Let me explain it this way.” He sat forward on his seat. “In the Army, I was a scout. I was trained to look around, to watch, to get an idea of things. Were they okay or were they not going right? I was good at it. I’ve medals to show for it. But more than that, I got more men and women in uniform home to their families when their tours were over than most other guys.” He cleared his throat. “And that’s how I trained my dog.” He nodded his own approval. He was a proud man. He took pride in his dog and his work with his dog.

“Now, take Dominic here.” He pointed to the Detective. “He comes into the yard from the train track ravine, right? He’s looking kind of rough . . . sorry, sir. But Linda’s with him. They are being friendly. They go out of sight into the bushes. She comes out. He’s there alone. She goes to get him food. What does my dog do? Nothing.” Riley looked around to see if they were following his sense of things. They seemed to be, as far as he could tell.

“So, next time this same man, this train rider, comes back on another Sunday morning and climbs up the incline and into the yard, checks out the bushes, and doesn’t find Linda . . . what does he do? He does something the dog doesn’t like. He pries his way into the basement storage room. The dog? He goes nuts. He takes the new training I gave him after . . . we think Rosalyn . . . snuck into her apartment. And he goes after the guy. Why? Because of what he’s doing and where he’s going. And Linda’s not there to make it okay.” He cleared his throat again, and this time he did stand up. “So, what’s the point? It’s not just the guy . . . it’s what he’s doing . . . that the dog knows is not right. And he goes at it to set things straight.”

He continued. “So, I feel that if this was an abduction—even if it was her dad—or somebody working for that lawyer of hers—my dog would know if it wasn’t on the up and up. Like I said, he’d be crashing my apartment door, even if it was before dawn. And that Monday morning? Nothing.”

He looked around. He was satisfied with his message. He was glad to have had his say. He sat back down. Of everyone in the room, Danny Hart was most familiar with Mike Riley. He had spent more time, and in more situations, with Riley than anyone else in this assembly. As Mike sat back down, Danny realized he had never heard Mike speak as much at one time, as passionately, or as persuasively.”

Howe coughed and got up to get herself a bottle of water that Dominic's captain had thoughtfully provided with the safe rooms. She brought one over to Riley and handed it to him without asking. He smiled gratefully, twisted off the cap, and drank about a third of it in one go.

Gaby stood up and said, "Ladies, anyone else? I'll make the water run." A few hands went up and Gaby acquired the necessary bottles and made the distribution. Since she was still standing, she turned and spoke. "I don't know what you've been up to Danny since you left my house some weeks ago. But it looks like you've made some nice, and thoughtful, new friends. Cheers to that." She raised her bottle of water and took a ladylike sip.

"Detective Corredor, I have never met Mrs. Lowry personally, but I've read Ned's papers and heard quite a bit about her. Frankly, I find her to be a person I think I would not like. Of course, that falls into the category of feelings, not facts, I know. But that's how this lady approaches people. What I feel is first. What I learn as facts comes next. I'll leave you to sort it out . . . may I call you Dom? I don't care for titles or names with too many syllables. Right, Dan?"

The room was closing on Hart. He wasn't aware of just how fierce Gabs felt her anger about his departure. Dominic tried to move things back to center. "You certainly may call me Dom. What would you prefer I call you?"

She liked that he asked. And she thought one more dart at Hart would take care of things well enough. "You can call me Gabs, Dom." But she was looking at Danny as she said it.

"Back to Mrs. Lowry. I don't have any information yet, in everything I have been working on or have been shown, that moves my imagination to abduction. On the other hand, almost all that I have seen and heard makes me think that Rosalyn Lowry is a selfish person, who puts herself first, above all else. I have no trouble imagining that if she had a reason to avoid the custody hearing that it wouldn't bother her at all to hit the road and take Linda with her." She took another sip.

"But here's the thing . . . I don't think she took Linda with her because she wanted to have her daughter along. I think she took her because she did not want her husband to have her. Here's a fact for you Dom, because it happened before you stepped off your train and met Linda. In the week

before the hearing for custody, when Rosalyn was orchestrating the birthday dinner, to put her husband over his custody limits, she was transitioning from reading *The Glass Menagerie* over to reading *Kramer vs Kramer*. She still wanted control over her children's lives, by becoming Amanda Wingfield. But she learned from trying to become Joanna Kramer that it was a fatal mistake to flee and leave your child behind for your ex-husband to care for.

"There's probably more I could dig up, but that's what comes at the moment. I'll let my work mates fill in some more." She sat, sipped her water, and gave Dan Hart a look of severe disappointment.

Eleanor deferred to Karidja. Not for any reason other than she wanted to have the last word.

Attorney Soro felt more comfortable standing and walking around the room. It allowed her to think better and to make adjusting eye contact as she required. She also did not want to be sitting near Gaby. There was too much of a distraction competing with the Gabs and Dan show for her liking. She'd be the one to diffuse it, if possible. So that was her starting point in answering Corredor's dialectic.

"When we three ladies were working with Danny and Myles, we kept one another moving forward, but not on the straight and narrow. We were able to see things broadly because we split up the tasks, and we reviewed our findings regularly. We ladies have been able to do that since our night at Gabriella's in Brooklyn. Not necessarily because we wanted to, but because we have been alienated from the rest of the firm since the custody hearing at first, and definitively after Ned's death." She looked at her coworkers and saw they were satisfied with her introduction.

"We know some things now that you might not. There are other things we suspect but have not yet been able to prove factually. And some feed into the questions Dominick has posed. Here they are:"

"We know that Godfrey Mellon is in some way involved with the disappearance of the Lowry ladies. We just don't know if he orchestrated and blessed their flight or that fleeing the apartment was Rosalyn's choice not to deal with Mellon for the custody struggle. Relative to the detective's questions, we have not entertained the idea among ourselves of bad actors and an abduction. I don't know if Eleanor or Gaby have thought of it

separately. But I'd suggest it best for us to reserve our consideration of that question with whatever Dominic alluded to when he said Danny would talk about that soon."

"Our focus has been on people, some of whom you have asked about Dominic, and others you have not. We have four people of around the same age whom we think knew one another in their college years. We know they attended Columbia and Barnard in overlapping years, and there are yearbook clues to suggest they probably knew each other. They are Myles Lowry and Roz Young, who would eventually marry, and she would become known as Rosalyn Lowry. There is a woman whose first name is Valerie and whose maiden name most likely is McKinley. She had a friendship with Roz Young in Barnard and has heterochromia. We think she is the woman with two different color eyes who intruded upon the custody hearing. Lastly, there is the woman who was by Ned's bedside and who kept me away from him in the hospital. We are almost certain she is Ned's daughter, born out of wedlock. Her first name is Marie. She is a Columbia grad and attended Columbia law after that. There's more about her that Eleanor will talk about." She looked at Quatrane, who nodded in agreement.

"I don't mind the interjection of facts here, gentlemen and Detective Howe. Can you add anything about either Valerie or Marie?" Soro inquired.

Dominic looked over to Danny and said, "Yours or mine to answer?" Danny pointed at Corredor. Hart figured two things. He should stay with the drug story for this session. And he should avoid commenting on the three ladies' work, especially Gabriella Costa's.

So Corredor spoke to answer Soro's question. "Okay. Here's a hypothesis, not a fact. And it looks like you and your work may be able to fill some of its holes. But one way or another, it shows we haven't been working exactly parallel, and our paths may definitely cross and enrich each other."

Before he went any further, he did ask Howe, "Is there anything you have for this topic. And are there any things we have told you that I should not be talking about?" After she gave it a thought, Howe told Dom to go ahead with whatever he would like.

Soro was increasingly impressed with the inclusiveness and complexity of this man's mind and manner. Costa saw a more-rough-around-

the-edges, actionable person than she had seen in Hart. She saw how they played off one another well and that they complemented one another in a way that could very definitely benefit Linda Lowry. For her part, Quatrane said a quiet thank you prayer to Ned Hegerman—for whatever grace he could bless upon this expanding group of truth seekers and, hopefully, child rescuers.

“I think it is highly likely that Rosalyn has exerted some influence on the woman you have now provided us with a name to identify, Valerie née McKinley. We can proceed with the portrait of a college associate, an informer at the custody hearing, and an enabler in fleeing the apartment and returning for additional belongings some days later. A missing piece would be discovering if she has teaching credentials. And if she does, she may teach at the same private boarding school to which Rosalyn fled and at which she is now hiding. And it might be that the entrée to being there is Rosalyn joining the staff or faculty with housing included, rather than student acceptance of Linda, as Rosalyn suggested to Paul Meadows.

Soro replied, “It is very gratifying to see some of this coming together from different angles. Perhaps Mike can help us learn to train this dogged truth running in circles up until now, so we can grab it by the tail.” Riley raised his water bottle in a salute to the resolutionist.

“Now a second adjunct of this collegiate quartet—the person of Marie, last name unknown. We are fairly certain, with the assistance of Ned’s cardiology team leader Isidore Aronsen, that she is Ned Hegerman’s daughter. We make her out to be four to six years older than the Lowrys. But she has some connection with, of all people, Godfrey Mellon, to whom she has given the charge to settle her father’s earthly affairs. Eleanor will go over that with you.” Again, they exchanged looks and nods. “Suffice it to say for starters that Mellon is out with a vengeance to rectify some perceived or real wrong that Hegerman inflicted upon him, or Mellon Sr., or their law firm. And crucial to that playing out—in a way I have not yet solved on a legal basis—is the relationship between Marie and Rosalyn and, ultimately, the demeanor and result of Linda Lowry’s custody hearing.” She inhaled and exhaled for her finale.

“And that gives us a weighty advantage. It is likely the settlement of Ned’s estate involves some intrigue between Marie and Rosalyn. And there’s something else. The extension of their custody battle is not endless. It runs

out on New Year's Eve. Godfrey Mellon agreed to that, and Judge McCarver approved. But a key element is that both of Linda's living parents must be in the court room to settle that custody status. I made sure of that in the language and conditions our negotiated resolution." Karidja turned as if she was in a court room facing a jury.

"So, Dominic, I am one hundred percent certain, that unless she is dead, Rosalyn Lowry will be returning to court before New Year's Eve. And to win her battle against her ex-husband she will do everything in her power to keep her daughter alive as well. And, as much as I do not want to wait until the end of the year to see Linda returned, I hold onto the knowledge that stifling Godfrey Mellon legally now will be the best use of my time and energy. I will leave finding Linda up to those of you more suited to do so, with Gaby and Eleanor's helping you with all the facts they can find and feelings they can exude."

Karidja had put the conflict between Gaby and Danny to rest. The proper context for this group was the future and not the past. The singular focus of this group should be Linda Lowry and not themselves. The air in the room was clear, without any windows having to be opened.

Soro patted Costa's knee as she passed her and then sat down on the couch again. She turned to Quatrane and told her, "Your turn. Ned is with you, ma'am."

Quatrane did not wait for anyone to ask a question or suggest she needed an introduction. She started right in, after glancing at Danny Hart. This man had gone further than anyone in her life, other than Ned, to make her feel empowered and justified in the self-confidence he encouraged.

"The only thing I can thank Thomas Bruce for in the last fortnight has been to get me ready to talk to you this evening. Otherwise, I can assure you that he and his partners are beneath contempt. And in rank order to them is the depravity named Godfrey Mellon." She turned and faced Danny Hart but spoke to the whole group.

"I have worked for lawyers all my adult life. Ned Hegerman is the finest of them all. Mr. Hart told me when we first met that he did not mistake the law for justice. He told Ms. Soro that if he was fired or if our firm gave up on Linda Lowry, he would not. And, you, Gabriella told me once after you



walked out of the quiet reading room behind your steno pool, that if I had to trust a man, I should not choose Myles Lowery. I should choose Mr. Hart. Well, thank you all for the advice. Here is the fruit of my listening to you.” Mike Riley felt chills in his military spine that he had not weathered since his days in uniform.

“Back in 1960, Godfrey Mellon’s father set a scheme in motion that would defraud many people for three decades. Whether that was his intent out the outset or not is meaningless. He never put an end to it when he could have, and it destroyed lives and families. Tomorrow afternoon at the end of business, figuratively and literally, his son will inflict another wound in that legacy. And for the second time in a month, Ned Hegerman and those who loved him will be broken-hearted.” She caught her breath and convinced herself to stay controlled and dry-eyed.

“The devil is in the details, too compounded to go into right now. But the gist of it is this. A failing copyright law practice in which Mellon senior had a controlling interest was sold off by a third-party broker to Ned Hegerman’s law firm. Hegerman knew of the fraudulent prospectus of that firm’s value. But Mellon knew of Marie, the bastard daughter, and blackmailed Ned to recuse himself in a partnership vote. That cleared the way for the sale. A million-dollar bribe and kickback scheme accompanied the transaction, with the promise of earnings many times that much in the first four years of the acquired practice. A third of the bribe went to Marie’s mother, a third was retained by Mellon Sr to perpetuate the scheme as needed, and a third was to go to Ned, but it was diverted to Ned’s wife, who wielded it over the years before her death in retaliation for Ned’s infidelity. She put it in a trust that was designated for Marie’s education through law school and passing the bar. Whatever was left was to go to her issue, legalese for her kids.” Eleanor stood still and then quaked, from head to toe, as some of her colleagues had seen happen before. But she recovered quickly and continued.

“We have just found the SEC witness to the transaction of the acquisition. Karidja is very close to having him agree to testify to the fraudulent scheme. But time is of the essence. She has a motion tomorrow morning for a stay to a compliance matter. Our firm is required by that time to present to Mellon a timetable for liquidation and monetization of all of Ned’s interests in the law firm, which must be itemized and assigned a real

value. An independent audit will be charged to verify those assets. They will comprise the portion of Ned's estate his daughter Marie will inherit." Eleanor cleared her throat and got ready to say the hardest part.

"While all these activities will look on the surface to be normal and unexpected, there are not. Mellon's strategy is to sap enough resources and value from Ned's partners that the firm will cease to have the funds to continue operating in its current iteration. Attorney Hegerman's reputation will be forever sullied. Mellon will gain a windfall from his legal fees for settling Marie's inheritance. And the Lowry's case will be dropped for lack of continued representation and irrevocable differences between the parents, with neither of them willing to allow the other custody of their daughter. Linda will likely be turned over to the New York Department of Child Welfare and become a ward of the State." She trembled again, but stayed on course.

"I have been able to convince the managing partner, Thomas Bruce, that there is a discrepancy between the value of Ned's stated assets. The crux of the matter is that over the years he has donated more money to charities, which includes the money for Marie's education, than he has assets from his income from the company. I have not identified for Bruce the source of the differences in value. He has been hammering away at the accountants the company hired to find it before the end of the day tomorrow when he meets with Mellon to turn over the books. But as far as I know, they do not have knowledge of the million-dollar bribe and kickback scheme. And they do not know anything about the trust. My hope is that they will not be successful, they will give a defective audit to Mellon, his independent auditors will find there is a problem, and there will be a delay in the settlement of Ned's will." She looked at them all with a pregnant pause and asked them the question she hoped they were now asking themselves. "Why?"

"There are a few reasons. First and foremost, and on the surface, Marie will be too greedy to accept less than she suspects she should inherit. But underlying that, there is still something I have not discovered that gives Rosalyn Lowry, or perhaps Roz Young legally, some leverage on Marie. It may turn out to be related to Ned's estate. If that is true, Marie will be hesitant to close out the estate—especially if Rosalyn's leverage is financial." She looked to Karidja, to make sure she could say the next part. The lawyer nodded.

"I think the weakness in Marie's financial future somehow resides in the trust. The trust had more value at inception than was spent on Marie's

education. An increase in its value over time would only exacerbate the difference. That seems borne out by looking at the start off bribe of a third of a million dollars, and the amount in the trust when Ned's wife died, even factoring in the tuitions paid for law school. If Bruce makes it tomorrow and doesn't know to include the trust from the auditor's attention, we stand to delay probate of the will. I have verbalized and written to Bruce about the discrepancy and pointed out the sector of charitable giving. So, I think I have insulated myself from any wrongdoing. At least, as Danny would say, as far as the law would perceive or prosecute. A delay would give me more time to find that leverage. And now that we have more people working on this in a coordinated way, maybe that leverage will surface."

Then Quatrane added, "And if they do find the trust before tomorrow, I will argue with Bruce that he can keep it out of the house audit because it was Mrs. Hegerman's, not Ned's. And Ned did not inherit the Trust. The language of the Trust holds it separate and unattached, available only for Marie and her future children. And unless she adopts, I don't think she'll have a child before New Year's."

Gaby called out to Eleanor. "And don't forget to tell them about Mellon and the delay."

"You do it Gaby, please. You have that part down pat."

"Okay. So, Costa took the floor back again. "For his part, Mellon won't want the will reading and probating delayed, because that will provide more time for scrutiny. His claim on Ned's assets won't have any merit, if it is shown that the originating acquisition of Mellon's wealth derived from a fraudulent transaction. His father would be implicated, too. So, Godfrey's a struck pig, with no hind teat. He will never be willing to discuss anything of value remaining in that Trust as an asset of Ned's, without putting his father into jail. And besides, Marie already controls the Trust, except for Rosalyn's hand in it. So why would she allow Mellon to claim it as Ned's."

She thought she was done and was going back to sit down. But she remembered. "Oh, in case you want to know why I mentioned New Year's." Again, she looked to both Soro and Costa for affirmation. "The Lowry's custody battle is only open until midnight on New Year's Eve. So, both those living parents will have to be back by then, and before Judge McCarver, or whatever designs Mellon and Marie have on the Lowry's settlement will be

moot. And the payment deadline on Mellon's acquisition of Ned's assets is also set for that day, December 31, 1992."

The ladies sat on the couch, mentally exhausted and physically strained, since their being taken into protective custody. They were tired and hungry. And they still had to get answers to Karidja's question of how long they would be in custody. Lastly, they still had to hear from Danny about his abduction theory. Gaby had settled down and was almost looking forward to hearing Danny's quieting voice. It would remind her of better times in the reading room. She laughed to herself when a mental image of a flying saucer over the Jersey apartment popped into her brain.

A knock came on the door and Howe looked at her watch. She stepped forward and told those around the part of the room in line with door to, "Step back, please." When they did, they were surprised to see her draw her service firearm and approach the hinge side of the door. She spoke through the wall, "Who is there?"

"It's us, Detective." The two men outside had been the drivers of the unmarked cars from the custody detail. "Food delivery just came in an NYPD vehicle that parked a block and a half away. We had to walk over, sign for it, and carry it back here, so the car wasn't associated with the safe house. Open up, while the food's hot and before we get our fingerprints burnt off." Those in custody were very grateful for the food and the caution used to bring it to them.

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Kelly Rocco made an uncharacteristic phone call to Denison LeClerc. He usually only replied to calls from the oncologist. He had initiated calls infrequently, and seldomly after the dinner hour.

"Hey, doc. Rocco here. Hate to bother you this late in the day. But I got something you asked me to tell you as soon as I knew."

"What is it, Mr. Kelly?"

“It’s going to be all the way down to fifty-five cents starting on October first.

So don’t wait too long, doc. Remember it might take a day or so to clear the transaction, and it’s upon completion, not the start-up that the rate gets fixed. So you might want to think of a week from today, Monday the twenty-eighth, to put in your request. That additional five percent is going to attract a lot of other orders that will have to be handled.”

“That’s really aggravating, Rocco. But I know you explained that it’s out of your control. I appreciate you took the time to call me.” LeClerc signed off from the call without waiting for a response. He knew Kelly was not talkative on the phone. All Rocco’s calls lasted less than the time it would take to trace them, based on the clientele on his phone. And the messages were never explicit enough, just in case, to avoid legal ramifications.

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Supper was welcomed at the safe house, but it was over fast. There was very little socialization and no substantive discussions. An unspoken unanimity wanted to hear Danny Hart on the topic of abduction.

He started in with no delay once they took the same seats they had previously occupied. “I became very wary of Myles Lowry on Friday, the day after someone re-entered and removed belongings from the Jersey apartment—the same day we met in the evening in Brooklyn. He got jumpy when I started asking certain questions during the day when we were together. And that night, I noticed two things especially. He was shocked when I said I found evidence of contraband in the Jersey apartment. And he was abnormally concerned about my bringing information to Detective Howe. But even more than that, he seemed angry that I did not tell him that afternoon about the contraband and that I went to the police without telling him I was going to do that. And that I did not take him along when I went.” Hart moved about the room to signal a change in topics as he began to talk again.

“Just as you ladies are doing, I’m heeding Hal Holbrook’s movie adage. I’m ‘following the money.’ You are looking into the Mellon legal empire. And I am looking into Myles and his medical device company.”

“Myles was a whiz kid in school. Along the way he invented and patented some kind of medical device. But he discovered with his small company he did not have the necessary resources to manufacture or distribute it. He and his device were viewed as potential competition by a larger conglomerate, so they bought him out, patent and all. They insulated themselves against his resurgence by using a non-compete clause in his hiring contract and by keeping his work focus offshore. They had him join their division at what has now become Easton International Medical Supplies, based here in New York.” Hart looked at his watch. It was getting close to seven thirty.

“Several years ago, in Mexico City, Myles hired Itzel Cocom away from her employer. They met at a sales convention. He sweetened the pot by arranging immigration for her family, including asylum from drug cartel influence for her husband Bembe. He’s a high-end jewelry designer and artist. From here in New York, he deals his art across the southern border and to the islands. I think he is threatened still by narcotics traffickers, who use their leverage to piggyback their product on his shipments. I think Myles gets a cut of the profits, because the Lowrys live higher on the hog than his salary and benefits suggest possible, especially after Rosalyn retired from teaching when Linda came along.” He looked to Dominic to make sure he wasn’t making this too complicated or longwinded. Corredor bent his left hand at the wrist and twirled it in a circle, telling Hart to speed it up. Most of the others couldn’t see his hand because of the way he was sitting.

Hart quickened his pace. “The Lowry divorce brought too much attention onto Myles and his work responsibilities, which were left for Itzel to keep running. I think the cartel abducted the Lowry women to force the couple to settle their custody dispute quickly and quietly, so a full review of family finances did not occur. Detectives Howe and Corredor think I have strayed wildly from the path of truth and light here—but they were kind enough in the last few days to make inquiries with their contacts in law enforcement and immigration, to see if the Cocoms pop up on anyone’s radar. It’s too soon for any a definitive answer in that regard.”

“A postscript to my following the money is even more inconclusive, but nonetheless worth further investigation. And I am doing that. But I have not asked the Detectives for help in that regard. You see, there is a delicate balance concerning what you ladies have told us you have done so far and my suspicions about abduction and drug trafficking. It’s all supposition and fact-finding. We have not established that any laws have been unmistakably broken or any crimes committed. So, we can talk to the Detectives without compromising them or placing them in a position where they are obligated to report criminal activity or behavior, including our own potentially. You should know I must thank Karidja for this caution and concern. It was she after all that drew me into Linda Lowry’s camp by reminding me of my duties as ‘an officer of the court’ as she put it.” He exchanged glances with the attorney. She lowered her head to hide her smile.

“So, I will only say that following the money has raised questions for me about how Rosalyn has supported herself and Linda. Just as you saw an imbalance in Ned’s income and donations, Eleanor; to me it appears the alimony and child support Myles was ordered to pay are not outstanding amounts of money. Clearly that Jersey apartment isn’t the Ritz, apologies Mike. But Myles is living in much better digs in a Manhattan high rise after the divorce. I get the impression that it was the one favor for Myles that Ned eked out of that lopsided divorce and custody agreement two years ago.”

“In this scenario, are you afraid for their lives?” asked Soro.

“I am not certain. The detectives tell me that intimidation and the threat of violence are hallmarks of the cartel when protecting such a lucrative source, if that’s what it is. Killing the Lowrys won’t improve the situation, as there do not appear to be any players waiting in the wings to substitute what Easton International offers. It’s doubtful they would count on Itzel and Bembe to hold their positions without Myles’ patronage and protection.” It was all Hart had to offer.

Gaby spoke up. She felt she owed it to Hart, if nothing else as an olive branch, perhaps. “Dan, you paint a very troubling picture. It’s too terrible to think about. But it’s also too horrendous to ignore.” She paused. “Is there anything in Ned’s documents we are constantly examining that could help you?” Hart thanked her and said he did not think so.

“Okay, then,” announced Detective Howe. “It’s gotten late. I still must answer Attorney Soro’s question about how long this protective custody is to last and how it is to be rescinded and your lives restored to normal patterns and routines. I propose a ten-minute break. Refreshments from the NYPD are on the counter. You know where the rest room is.”

The mingling began almost right away. Gabs approached Dan and extended both her hands, palms up. “I was very disappointed and angry with you, Mr. Hart. But you did nothing more than keep your word about Linda. So, friends again?” she asked.

She was taken aback when Dan said, “No, Gabs.”

She was relieved when he said, “Friends, still.”

So, Gabriella Costa now knew two things. Danny had never stopped considering her a friend. And he considered her to be that and only that, a friend.

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Both the Lowry ladies were preparing for a good night sleep at **HAPPYDALE** by spending some time with a book on their own. Rosalyn decided to inculcate herself into the demise of Rumpelstiltskin and her daughter was starting to look at all the illustrations in the next book her mother had given her to read. It was a children’s version of *One Thousand and One Nights*. She was most attracted to the drawings of the mysterious Jinns, arising from a variety of containers: vases, lamps, boxes, and the like. The idea of having three wishes was very appealing to the young girl. She had no idea her mother was beginning her tutorage in becoming her own version of Scheherazade. Neither mother nor daughter had an inkling of the danger that laid ahead in those pages.



Detective Howe presented a few variations on the theme of protective custody. "Big picture, you could all stay here, in expanded accommodations. You could be brought back to your homes to spend the night and a gender appropriate escort will be posted with you." She gave them a minute and then elaborated on the variations.

"A combination of those two things could be done. You could be taken to your homes, realizing you are not in possession of any provisions for an overnight stay at the moment. Your escort could return you to this location in the morning, and we could proceed accordingly." Again, she gave them time to consider, without asking for an answer.

"Most importantly, I would like to know if any of you feel threatened about returning to your normal routine tomorrow. Anyone that does will be accommodated with an extension of the protective custody." She looked up when a dish in the kitchen rattled, settling in the sink. It unnerved the three ladies to see that as she looked to the kitchen, her right hand slid down to her sidearm. The men did not seem too bothered by her reaction.

As he did earlier, Mike Riley spoke up without being asked about any further considerations. "I'd like to get back to my dog, ma'am. I appreciate being included in this review and discussion. But if you don't see any additional contributions I can make, I'd opt to go home tonight and not return tomorrow. I have your phone number, Detective Howe, if anything occurs. Especially if anyone shows up who should not be there and me and my dog take notice." Howe cast him a look of evaluation and then of approval. Until she heard from Hart, she did not feel it necessary to talk about Riley's transportation back to New Jersey.

Corredor was next to interject. "Detective, if you need my assistance to staff the protective custody, I would be happy to do so. But I don't know enough about the jurisdictional or authorization issues involved."

Howe knew that answer right away, and provided it. "Thanks for the willingness, Dominic. But you are here as part of the investigative team, not the law enforcement one. So, I won't be able to ask you for assistance." She paused a moment and then precluded any inquiry from Hart. "And that goes

for you, too, Danny. I can't ask you for help. And you can't give me any. So, you and Dom are only here tonight or tomorrow because you want protection." She thought a moment. "And if we are short-handed, or have an NYPD hesitancy, you can probably protect yourself better than I can." And then she realized her oversight. "But if your tenants are a concern, we can post people from the precinct, especially when you and Dominic are not home."

That left it up to the ladies to express their wishes. The three of the couch mates looked at each other, silently inquiring what each wanted to do. It turned out none of them wanted to spend the night without a chance to change clothing and freshen up. But they also wanted a chance to review and discuss all that they heard that afternoon and early evening. So, they were torn, until Gaby asked the full group.

"I liked that your protective custody, Detective Howe, swooped in and got us out of work before we could get in trouble for what we did—by all three of us exiting the building together before that and tipping our hand that we knew we were being surveilled and followed. But going forward, I don't want to get fired and lose my job, just yet. So, I'm trying to figure this out." She looked to Dan as she talked to the room.

"If Dan's right, I can understand a danger exists. I'm just not sure how that includes us. If Eleanor's on the right track about Mellon, I can see where he's a threat for reputation and our jobs. But I can't see where he would send people, or have the means to send people, to hurt us. If Myles is involved, though, I am concerned he knows quite a lot about us and he knows where I live, and so too where my mother and her caretaker are right now. So, I'd like to be at home overnight." She shrugged her shoulders and looked at the others.

Soro spoke next, as she had done before. "I don't feel threatened by Danny. He's the only one who knows where I live, as far as I know. Of course, if someone wanted to do me harm, it would be an easy thing to discover. I find myself somewhat neutral in this regard." She thought for a moment. "But I really want to be in the office tomorrow, or as soon after that as I can. In place of that, I wouldn't turn down a ride to Riverdale tomorrow while in protective custody. I have a retired S.E.C. agent to visit in his nursing home. No lights and sirens, you understand, just an NYPD escort into unfamiliar territory, in case I'm really being followed."

Quatrane laughed at her friend's persistence and opportunism. "I think that if I'm absent from our workplace tomorrow and not available for that meeting with Mellon, and any prior preparation Bruce wants from me, I'll surely be made to pay for that sooner than later. In fact, I'd even have the chutzpah to show up early, of course, delivered by an escort and under protective custody until I was safely in the building. That would disarm Bruce magnificently and provide his security force with a colonoscopy courtesy of the long arm of the law." She scanned the smiles around the room. It was the first time she saw how nice Howe's teeth could look when they were not set to attack mode.

"However." And at that Eleanor raised her hand. "I agree with Gaby that I need their input and insights on all this new information we have just received. We work well together, and I want, no, I need, that to be ready for facing Bruce, and heaven forbid, Mellon, tomorrow." She shook her head, to get rid of that man's face in her imagination and indecision about what to do about this approaching night.

It was Danny who broke the dilemma. "Gabs, is your mother up on the third floor yet?" Only half of the people in the room understood his question, and none perceived his reason for asking it.

"Yes. She and the caretaker," was Costa's reply, half lit with a dawning renewed appreciation for what Hart contributed to this group.

"What if NYPD brought Karidja and Eleanor home to collect their things and then brought them to your place for the night. If their places are indeed being watched by Bruce's people, they would acknowledge and report back to him that you are still legitimately being protected. You wouldn't have to worry about your mother's safety. You ladies could consult with each other. Howe would only have one place to protect, allowing her to concentrate her personnel. You could use the two bedrooms on the middle floor for your house guests, Gabs. And in the morning, you'd all have escorts to wherever you want to go." He hesitated before saying the last thing on his mind. "And if anybody is really out to do you harm, within an hour or so, this safe place will be empty again, before any blabbermouth inside NYPD could do any damage, except reveal the location."

Corredor took exception to the dig about a snitch in the NYPD. But he kept it to himself. He found he liked this version of Danny Hart more than the one who'd been looking for drug runners under every rock and rill.

Howe also was impressed and would be pleased to tell her desk sergeant they were right to feel the way they did about Investigator Hart. "Well, I'm technically out of my jurisdiction and it's only Detective Corredor's reputation that's gotten us this far. I wouldn't mind covering one location overnight and giving the NYPD back it's safe house. I can do that with my people, as I explained to you about how missing persons cases are handled. If that's the sense of the group, we can do what Danny suggested. And, of course, if Miss Costa doesn't mind making her house available. And as you ladies said, that will give you time to decide how you want to proceed with our protection detail in the morning."

And that is what they did. Danny drove Riley home to his dog. He and Dom returned to Danny's place for the night. Howe went back to Jersey after the ladies were all settled in Costa's place, with four of the afternoon squad remaining on detail and four fresh officers scheduled to return for a midnight to eight shift.

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As the midnight shift arrived in Brooklyn, a local patrolwoman in a Nassau County town bisected by the LIRR elevated railway line rolled slowly through the municipal parking lot. This was her routine every weekday night when she was on duty. Since there was no overnight parking permitted except on weekends or in the designated spots closer to the railroad station, her attention caught on a car parked at the farthest end of the lot, underneath the elevated line.

In the past, she had interrupted some couples mistaking the lot for a lovers' lane. But that did not seem to be the case this particular Monday night. Her headlights reflected strangely off the driver's side door as she drove up. The window had several fracture lines in it. When she got out of her patrol car and approached the vehicle, she had her mag flashlight held in ready position in her left hand over her shoulder and her right hand on the

grip of her service pistol. She had unsnapped the leather restraint above the hammer and thumbed the safety off on the weapon.

She resecured her sidearm when she saw the car was not occupied. She called in to her desk dispatcher on her epaulet mounted radio. He took down the VIN number as she read it off the metal plate on the dashboard she illuminated with her flashlight. She went around the front of the car, saw the damage to the grill, and read off the license plate number to the same dispatcher. "Run those, please, Tom, if you would. I'm going to take a look around and then sit in my car and start my report. Let me know what you get back on those numbers, please. Thanks."

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April Smith was a very light sleeper. She was awakened by someone moaning in pain. There was a considerable rustling of bed linens. When the low beeping of his monitors became more insistent, April realized it was Myles she heard.

She rushed out from under her covers on the rest area couch, and over to his bedside.

Lowry was tangled in two plastic tubes. One was from the IV bag above and the other was from his urine collection below. She leaned over to reach his covers and move them out of the twisted tubes. The straps of the undershirt slipped off her shoulders and she was exposed. But she ignored her situation in favor of improving his.

It was hard to tell at night, in the dim lighting of the recovery room, whether Myles had awakened or was thrashing around in his sleep. But her doubt about that was put to rest when Myles sat up and turned. His legs dangled off the side of the bed, where she had lowered the rail to reach him.

Lowry looked around the large room. He stared at his lap and his legs. He turned his attention to April's face and bared front. All he said was. "Where am I?"

April got Lowry settled back onto the bed, his head on the pillow and then covered herself. She pressed the call button for the night nurse. She was glad she had retrieved the shower robe and tied the sash, because the third shift nurse was a man. He looked to be in his thirties and his cadenced accent suggested he was from somewhere in the Caribbean. It took the two of them to get Myles properly situated.

Following LeClerc's earlier instructions, the night staff administered a mild sedative. It was a dosage to calm him, but not put him to sleep right away. He would remain awake for an hour or so, enough time for an assessment to be made. Gradually the narcotic would take effect and he would sleep for four or five hours. Given the time of night, that would carry him through to Tuesday morning.

As she requested, Doctor Oulette had been summoned. She came within fifteen minutes. She spoke to Myles privately, setting a chair at his now-neatened bedside.

Even though he was sedated, he was able to speak with Françoise. Regardless of what she asked him, however, Myles kept telling her, repeatedly and consistently, "An angel with a glorious set of wings came to me in my sleep and carried me back to this land of the awakened."

The doctor was kind to Lowry. She did not protest or challenge his recollection. She did not want him to return to an agitated state, so she decided to wait until Tuesday morning to see him again. The night nurse left and went to do his rounds for other patients elsewhere in the clinic. Oulette stayed by Lowry's bedside until he drifted off to sleep, without incident.

Out of earshot, across the quiet and otherwise unoccupied recovery suite, April Smith sat in a pool of lamplight on the couch she had chosen to sleep on in the corner of the space. She let her paperback book rest on her lap, unable to concentrate on the story. She waited to see if there was anything the doctor or the patient needed from her. She felt it was not right for her to go to her room down the hall now, any more than she felt comfortable going there earlier in the night and leaving Myles alone. She adjusted the white shower robe and smoothed it out as the psychiatrist approached and sat in a facing armchair.

"He's resting now. The shot they gave him should keep him until morning," she said. "You should get some rest as well, Miss Smith." She smiled and turned halfway in the chair to look at Myles. "I'll come back in the morning to see if he will be more coherent then."

"What did he say? Is he going to be okay, do you think?" asked April.

"You have feelings for him?" inquired the doctor.

"Not intimate or romantic," she said, without protest or forceful defensiveness. She mused, "It's just that he was so nice to me in the library. And such a gentleman in his motel room when I suppose I was very vulnerable."

April was worried about details of the car crash being disclosed. She and LeClerc were not Oulette's patients, so there was no confidentiality the psychiatrist was required, and expected, to protect. She dared to ask anyway, "What did Mr. Lowry have to say?"

"Well, I am concerned he may have some injuries from the crash," she said guardedly.

April winced, hearing the doctor say 'crash' and not 'accident.'

Oulette mistook the young woman's expression for compassion. "I'll know better when I see him tomorrow."

"What types of things will tell you about injuries? What kind of injuries would you discover just by talking to him? Is there anything I can do? Anything I should not do? I mean, if he wakes up and talks to me?" April's questions were not intrusive of the doctor's relationship with her patient, so Oulette let the discussion continue, for her own purposes.

"Tonight, Mr. Lowry seems to be hallucinating. If that is the level of his communication tomorrow, it may provide insight into his various mental capacities and how well they are functioning, if they are intact and normal." She tried to keep it impersonal and not overly clinical.

"What will you ask him about and why?" Both women recognized the nervousness in April's voice.

Oulette treaded lightly. “April, I will ask him questions to see if he knows who he is, where he is, what year it is . . . things like that.” She considered and continued. “I’ll ask him questions to test his memory—long term and short term. I’ll ask if he can tell me where he grew up, what things he liked to do as a child, as a teen, and what work he does as an adult.” She peered more directly at April and said, “I may have you help me by his bedside at some point and ask him if he knows who you are.”

April was glad the doctor did not mention the crash again as something she would ask Myles about. “What did he hallucinate? How will I know to recognize he is doing that, you know, if he talks to me tomorrow before you come back?”

Françoise decided to trust her instincts and answered more woman to woman than doctor to caregiver. “I am trained to remember details, April. As I recall, and will put in my notes, his words were: “An angel with a glorious set of wings came to me in my sleep and carried me back to this land of the awakened.”

“Is that important?” asked April. She was shifting nervously again on the couch. She fidgeted with the shower robe, drawing it more tightly to take in the slack she caused by moving.

Françoise noted again that observing April may be a gateway into her reaching Myles, in a way or ways she could not yet identify. “April, if Myles says things that don’t seem to make sense, that are not grounded in reality as you usually recognize it in your everyday life—then he’s probably clinically hallucinating.” She saw April understood. “And if all, or mostly all, he can do is communicate hallucinations, that will tell me he is living more inside his head than he is outside here with the rest of us. That may be a sign he was concussed only. Or that he may have some severe brain bruising or injury.”

April spoke up. “What will that mean?”

The physician concluded, “If that is the case, then I will be done with helping him here. He will have to be transported to a different care facility. Imaging on his brain would commence. Tests and more tests. And based on those findings, a plan for care, and hopefully if it’s not too late, for recovery, will be developed and initiated. Speed and time are of the essence, though. That’s why I agreed to two or three days with LeClerc. Myles can not be



allowed to languish here. He must be steadily improving, almost by the hour, or he needs to leave.”

“So that’s why it’s very important for you to know if he’s hallucinating, then?” asked April.

“Absolutely,” Françoise responded.

“Then . . .” was the single word April allowed.

Before Oulette realized what was happening, April Smith stood up in the wash of the lamplight next to the couch. She undid the sash on the shower robe and let it drop to the floor. The young woman wore only hospital issued undergarments, typically for use beneath operating room scrubs. Her arms were tattooed with vines and roses. She explained, “After my mother died, I had Denison perform a double mastectomy for me to avoid her fate. I refused reconstructive surgery and opted instead for body art. As Myles struggled in his sheets before, I rushed over from sleeping on the couch, without bothering with the robe. Myles saw me when I reached across to help him get free from his hospital bedding.”

April let the straps slip on the tee. It slid down to come to rest on the robe at her feet. She raised her arms high to form a classical overhead pose of victory, exposing to Françoise what Myles had seen. “He was not hallucinating, Doctor.”

There before her eyes, the psychiatrist saw a splendid rendition of the female archangel, Dina. Her feet were enswirled by a cloud below April’s navel. The angel’s body was glorious and partially draped in a white robe. Cradled in her left hand was a Torah that incorporated April’s mastectomy scar into the scroll’s lettering. She raised a flaming sword in her right hand, uncovering her naked shoulder, and striking out to the side, so the artwork followed around the curve of April’s right side, ending before and under her scapula. Dina’s upstretched wings began at the bottom of each side of April’s rib cage and unfurled, curving to her armpits. There, the tips of Dina’s wings met April’s scars, left where Denison had vanquished, by extraction, any future suspect nodes. The angel Dina’s face was tilted downwards to look at the Torah, the source of truth and salvation.

To be continued next month.