



Custody

Installation Eight
June 2024

Part One

Custody: A Serialized Novel
June 5, 2024

Installment 8
Part One

Custody

A Serialized Novel
In Eight Installments

(October 2023 through June 2024)

Installment 8

June 5, 2024

We are approaching the climax of Linda Lowry's journey to family custody. She has contributed to her fate as much as any six-year-old might be expected to do. As controlled as it has been by others, it remains her journey.

*This final weekend of September that journey has become circumscribed by trains Linda has never taken, except to seek refuge in a caboose—itsself a relic of a philanthropist's dream, shrouded in the New Jersey woods of what has become **HAPPYDALE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL***

Saved from her current danger, by the man she redeemed as he rode freight trains to avenge others, Linda imagines playing with her father's gifted train set—once she is released by the doctors guiding her recovery from her caboose-induced heat stroke. But she knows nothing about her father's stroke, stoked by the heat of a different doctor's endless greed and anger—a doctor on the wrong track about which Lowry has taken yet other trains to Philadelphia this same end-of-September weekend to derail his quest for the rest of a stolen treasure in bearer bonds, and to cash them in for herself.

*But Rosalyn's hunt, to fund her future, troubles the cadre of advocates looking out for her daughter, Linda, in their own way. Detective Howe chases down any illegalities the collegiate friends have perpetrated that might convey Linda to state custody. Dominic Corredor stays by Linda's hospital bedside, until Miss Alex can return to bring her back to **HAPPYDALE**. While also, back at the school, Ned Hegerman's associates—Karidja Soro, Eleanor Quatrane, and Gabriella Costa—extract revelations from Valerie McKinley about the secret past entangling Rosalyn and the now-imprisoned Marie Aello. Secrets they will need to unravel to achieve a fair family custody arrangement for Linda Lowry, despite Godfrey Mellon's duplicity in front of Judge Eoin McCarver.*

Private investigators Angie Flynn and Danny Hart pursue Rosalyn along her escape route, tracking her history back to her childhood hometown. The same village where April Smith, Dr. Françoise Oulette, and Patrolwoman Maura Hammersmith, express their support for Myles and disdain for oncologist Denison LeClerc, aka Dennis Clark.

*And now . . . the final installment of **Custody: A Serialized Novel***

September 26, 1992
Saturday

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The six metal men stood in roughly an oval. They were taller than Rosalyn Lowry, who sat on a bench keeping her vigil. Her guidebook claimed this outdoor sculpted installation at Philadelphia's Rodin Museum was of *The Burghers of Calais*. The men did not look at each other. The renowned French sculptor had famously detailed each man's inner soul on his anguished face. They gazed outward toward the certain death they presumed awaited them. They had volunteered surrendering their lives in return for the foreign power across the water lifting a life-threatening siege their townspeople had endured for years.

"They don't die in the end, you know," said a voice standing behind her bench. "At least not at the end of this ordeal. Of course, we, all of us, die in the end. Or maybe not, if you believe it's not the end, but a beginning."

Rosalyn could not get over the quaint way this philosopher-stranger appeared. He wore a derby style topper, what some would call a bowler. But she knew that from another artist, who had an affinity for apples. The cape draped off his shoulders was distinct, not reminiscent of the opera-haunting Erik or the Baker Street Sherlock she knew from her incessant reading. She did not recognize his walking stick from the pages of Hugo or Dickens.

"Faced with a hard choice this morning, are you, Lowry?"

She did not ask how he knew her name. She had one concern, and she was not to be deterred. "The choice is made. It's only the details that remain," was her almost defiant reply.

He slowly strode around the installation and kept looking more at the faces of the burghers than at Roslyn, to whom he was clearly speaking. "I often wonder each time I look at their faces . . . would they have wanted to know what it was going to be like to return . . . to bring a siege-free village

back to some semblance of restored life?" He stopped and leaned on the walking stick, so he could reach inside his cape for a slip of paper. "And if they knew, would they have welcomed their death, or run away being free again, leaving the others behind?" He handed her the folded slip of paper. As he made his way toward the path out of the garden, he looked over his caped shoulder. "Lowry? Do you think they would have volunteered to stay, having once already made a resolution to leave it behind for others to resurrect?"

She said to him, "It's not what I came to discuss."

He eased a quarter turn, still looking in her direction. "Au contraire, ma chérie." When she did not reply, he said, "You can call that number and ask for Mr. Kelly Rocco. He will give you forty cents. His next expression of generosity will not be until the first of the month. As you say, only the details remain."

She watched him walk away, wondering how he could have known.

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The medics attending to Myles Lowry were kind to allow April to stay in the ICU. No one was harsh about the 'relatives only' policy posted on the unit entrance. And they even brought her a blanket for the overnight. She figured it was Dr. Oulette's doing. After all, it was Françoise's name inked in black marker on the whiteboard, adjacent to Lowry's bed, next to the slot pre-labeled ADMITTING PHYSICIAN.

A nurse came to care for Myles. She asked April to step out. Another nurse outside the ICU curtained space asked the young woman, "Miss, would you please come with me? We have a room for you to wait. And there is a policewoman there who has been wanting to see you."

"Miss Smith, your friends at the library and lunch counter are worried for you," was patrolwoman Maura Hammersmith's opening gambit, as soon as 'Ms. Smith' stepped in the room. She motioned April to a seat, which she took nervously. A knock came on the door and an orderly entered with a hospital breakfast tray. With eye contact only, the policewoman guided him

to the small table attached to the side of April's chair. "Eat first, please. It's been some time since you last had anything. They'll be awhile with Myles."

April wondered how much else this woman knew. She forked the food around on the tray and selectively ate minimal amounts. When she had some of the coffee and set the cup down, she wiped her mouth, folded the napkin on the tray and simply said, "Thanks."

The cop's reply was, "Yeah, well, hospital food, you know?" That got her a 'lips-only' smile. Maura added, "I hope you'll share a proper breakfast with me at your luncheonette sometime soon." That lit up her visitor's entire face. So, she knew they were ready to go. Now it was up to Smith to set the stage.

But first, to be sure, Maura put a small white paper bag on the table, with the local five-and-ten's logo on it. "That's a replacement," was all she said.

The young woman slipped a paperback book out of the bag. It was a dime store copy of *The Black Echo*. "Thank you," she said.

"So, it was you who left the other one I saw in the bedroom at the clinic?" asked Maura.

April asked Hammersmith, "Am I under arrest?"

Maura lightly replied without edge, "Should you be?"

It took a minute for April to say, "I don't really know. This has all been very confusing."

"Is there anything I can do about that?" asked the first on the scene at Myles's abandoned rental car almost a week ago.

"Yes. You can call me 'April' and not 'Miss Smith,' please," she stated simply and with purpose.

"And for now, I don't need to be 'Officer Hammersmith,' when it's just the two of us. 'Maura' is what friends call me. And until you make it clear that

can't be the case, you can do so, too." And that was the way they began what Maura hoped would be a relatively uncomplicated day, or more, together.

Maura took out her notepad, left it closed on her lap, and said, "I have convinced my captain to agree with my desire that you, April Smith, are to be treated as a material witness, and afforded all the protection and courtesy our department is in a position to offer you. That includes preemptive custody that state and federal law enforcement agents can not breach without my permission or assail without a warrant for your arrest."

April was composed on the outside but a wreck on the inside.

The policewoman took from her notepad a paper she unfolded to a regular size sheet. "This paper explains what I just told you. May I ask you, please," she said as she reached the paper across to April, "to read this over a few times and see if you understand it."

When she had done so 'Miss Smith' looked up from the paper, saying, "I think I understand this. But I'd like you to explain it more. The details, you know?" April was now a wreck on the outside, too.

"I can explain about being a material witness. But not in a way that you can pick and choose from among the details. It's an 'all or nothing at all' thing, April." She waited and then kept going. "The paper has two places to sign. One place says you concur that you are April Smith, and it gives the address where you rent an apartment as a modifier." She pointed with the end of a pen that appeared from her pocket. "The second signature says you understand what it says about being a material witness and that you agree to that designation in our investigation."

April took the offered pen, signed in two places, and handed the pen and paper back to the officer.

If anyone had told little Linda Lowry that hospital medicine for heat stroke included a small dish of partially melted vanilla ice cream twice a day, she would not have believed them. She would have gone for some of the

other flavors and a soda, but Dominic Corredor explained it had to be vanilla ice cream and plain water with some chemicals, electrolytes, her body needed.

“Why?” she asked him. She didn’t understand the nurse’s answer to the same question.

Dominic went around the bed and picked up a plastic bag with measuring lines on it, in those metric numbers Mrs. Steadman was telling them about in math class. He told her, “this bag collects your pee.”

“Ugh, gross,” she said.

“Until it gets to be a color that tells the doctor your kidneys are working okay again, you can only have certain foods and ones that won’t color your pee.”

“I’m tired again.” The child complained. She turned over and went back to sleep.

Corredor stepped out and looked at the pink square phone message that was left for him at the nurse’s station. It was from Detective Howe. She was coming by the hospital on the way back to her precinct. She had successfully finished her Saturday morning’s review at **HAPPYDALE**. From the time written on the message and the clockface behind the nurse standing nearest to him, Howe should probably be at the hospital within ten minutes.

“Excuse me,” Dominic said to her.

“Yes, Detective?” was her reply that he was still not accustomed to hearing.

“A woman, Detective Howe, is coming to see Linda. I am going to go to the cafeteria to get a coffee. Would you be kind enough to send her down there if Linda is asleep when she gets here?” She looked at the clock reflexively. “Linda just fell back to sleep again. I don’t know how long she’ll be out this time.”

He looked fretful, so she said, “Detective, these cases need a bunch of sleep. Especially a person as small as Linda. You should not worry that she

naps for an hour or so at a time.” He smiled and started to leave, except that she spoke, and he stopped to hear her. “You, sir, on the other hand are another matter.” He looked surprised. “I hope you are not driving when you leave with” . . . she looked at her papers . . . “Detective Howe. Because in cases like yours, Detective, I am sure the doctor would prescribe at least three hours of sleep before you did that.” Her smile was so winning, that Dominic could hardly object to her minding his business.

Over coffee and a breakfast sandwich, the detectives caught up with each other.

Howe reported, “I finished my interviews. I spoke to the headmistress, Beatriz Grey, and with the weekend caretaker, Miss Alex. There’s absolutely no negligence on either one’s part, or on the teacher’s. It all falls at the feet of the child who lied, Deirdre, and kept all their standard systems unalarmed. And there’s nothing criminal in that. It’s a home and school matter, as far as I am concerned—partially seen to already by our friend the red-head. And after talking to Clementine’s mother, who was deeply fearing retaliatory consequences, I made it clear to all parties that there are no charges to press against Red, or any disciplinary actions, including suspensions or expulsion.”

“My, my Detective Howe. Does your gym routine include arm curls with weights to improve wrist strength for bending of the law to your will?” Dominic kept a straight face.

Howe’s reply was, “No, sir. Just full body pull-ups on a chinning bar. They’re for long arm muscles to counterweigh the scales of justice when I reach those heights of the criminal justice system.” She too was without facial amplitude.

Dominic asked her, “I was curious if you even had time to look into any other aspects of the case while you were at **HAPPYDALE** today, Detective? You know, other than the chaos we stumbled into when we got there yesterday?”

“Today was mostly about the kid stuff of lying and running away and fighting . . . like I was saying.” She feigned a distraction when someone dropped a tray of silverware in the kitchen area.

"Mostly?" He allowed for the noise to dwindle. "Not that the NYPD has any business knowing the details of the New Jersey investigation, but nothing of substance to share?" he probed.

"I might have spoken to one or two other people," she owned up to.

"If Mrs. McKinley had tried any harder to get your attention yesterday afternoon, she would have tackled you into that pond and held you under until you paid her some mind, Detective," he admitted to having observed.

"Oh, yes. Valerie." Howe thought about it a bit. "She might have wanted a phone number or two. I don't know if the ones I provided were correct . . . or the ones she wanted."

"Might those numbers have been in your notepad?" he asked. When she nodded, he said, "Then they were the right numbers." And then he asked, "When will she be seeing the ladies from Hegerman's firm?"

"You know, I did see a car with New York plates out there this morning, now that you mention it."

There was a period of peaceful silence between them.

"So, what can I do for you after I look in on Linda?" asked Howe. "We're already halfway to the station now at this regional hospital, so I have some time."

"I'd jump a ride to Danny's place to get cleaned up and grab fresh clothes, if I thought I could get into his place. I know he'll bring me back here tonight to stay over again. He'd want to pay Linda a visit, too, I'm sure." Corredor was talking out loud the thoughts running through his head.

"I can get you in there," said Howe, as she dangled a set of keys for him to see. Danny had given them to her on her first visit to his building.

"Well, let's go up and let you see Linda. Who knows? Maybe she'll sense you're here and give you a few minutes before she goes back to dreamland." Corredor was always optimistic about the return-to-health-outlooks after missing persons were found . . . and after cops settled jurisdictional disputes.

"Wait," said Howe as they walked past the nurse's desk in ICU. She took off her armored vest and her police blouse. She folded them across the back of a chair in the hallway by the station. She had on a different color gym shirt than she did the day before. "Okay, that should be better," she told him.

Linda was groggy and barely saw them come in past the curtains. "Am I dreaming still, or is that you without your scary vest?" she said in a squeaky dry voice to Howe.

The detective picked up Linda's water cup and bent the flex straw to her lips. "Here little lady, you sound like some water is in order." She held the cup until Linda almost sucked it dry. "Better?" she asked when the drink was done.

"Yes. Thank you." Linda had nothing more to say. Her eyes drew shut. She didn't even turn her head to the side before sleep came over her again.

Howe suited up and they left for Danny's place after Dominic took some time to retrieve his things.

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Maura Hammersmith folded the signed document back into her notepad and replaced the notepad back in her jacket. She told April, "Material witnesses aren't taken to the police station or jail like people who get arrested, April. Where would you like me to take you so we could spend an hour going over everything?"

"Can we get back into Dr. LeClerc's clinic? Is the emergency over?" April couldn't quite read the patrolwoman's face after asking her about the clinic.

"Let's have you think of another place, please." Maura said without explanation.

"What about my apartment? I keep an extra key under the front mat," she said.

Maura answered in the only way she could. Truthfully. “Well, here’s the thing about your apartment. Was Myles Lowry ever in your apartment, April?”

“No. Why?” She was calculating how this material witness thing was going to work out.

“April. We thought that you and Myles had disappeared Sunday. We feared something bad might have happened. So, we posted a missing persons alert. After seventy-two hours we were allowed to use a search warrant to enter your apartment. We wanted to make sure you, or both of you, were not in there—hurt, alive, or maybe even dead. Remember all we knew about was that on my patrol on Monday night I found a crashed rental car that had been abandoned, in a way to hide it under the elevated railroad.” She gave Smith a chance to take this all in. Howe had learned that, to most people, it was disorienting to find someone else had been thinking something was happening in your life, that was completely the opposite of what you knew really was occurring.

The detective continued, “We still don’t have the results of fingerprinting we did in your apartment. I wanted to avoid going in there until we had those results. I was most concerned if Myles had been there. If you just told me, now, that he had been, then I would not be willing for us to go back inside at this time. I might inadvertently complicate collecting evidence in a criminal case.” She saw April moving her head in only partial understanding.

“But if you can tell me that no one has been in your apartment but yourself from Sunday morning—after the clerk says you left the motel—and our search team Thursday, then we can go back inside without any problem.” That was the timeline Howe wanted to establish for April.

“As far as I know, I am the only one.” April told her.

“Then let’s go there, April,” said Hammersmith. When they arrived in a police car and April stepped out, the neighbors who were out and around weren’t sure what to do or say. Maura hooked her arm around April’s in a friendly, supportive gesture, so neighbors wouldn’t crowd in to touch April or talk to her. She told them, “Miss Smith is fine. She is in good health and

happy to be home. There's been some misunderstandings and bad communications. That's all."

Maura was prepared to catch hell from her captain about exposing April to the public in this way. But she knew this was far more natural . . . a thought-to-be lost person privately coming home with the assistance of the police. She knew her captain would imagine the alternative she found to be undesirable—a press release on April Smith surfacing in a local hospital and a gaggle of cameras and film crews on her front stoop as she was brought home by law enforcement.

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As April was getting settled, and was straightening out some of the items the search team disturbed, Hammersmith got her permission to use her phone.

"Hello, Mr. Hart? Yes, good morning. I have some good news and some bad news for you. We have found Mr. Lowry. But he is not in good health. He has had a stroke and is now in the hospital under proper care."

She pressed on over his questions. "You asked me to tell you, so you could phone Ms. Cocom. I wouldn't wait if I were you. The story may be broadcast news within the hour, certainly by noontime. I'll call you later in the afternoon with more of an update, but I must go now, I am afraid."

They exchanged goodbyes and each ended the call on their phones.

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Eleanor felt much better on this drive across the George Washington Bridge and into New Jersey than her last one. Having Karidja and Gaby along and traveling in full daylight made all the difference in the world. Her only slight anxiety was not following Howe's directions properly enough to arrive on time to meet with Valerie McKinley at **HAPPYDALE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL**.

But she needn't have worried. They were driving up the same long driveway between the high white fences that amazed Linda Lowry the first day she saw them, after an exquisite diner breakfast with her mother and her friend, Valerie.

Valerie had sent her daughter, Taylor, packing a half-an-hour before the appointed time. She was loaded down with books for doing homework at the library. Her mother had given her money for lunch at the dining hall, so she didn't dip into her weekday budget card.

At eleven o'clock sharp, the three ladies alit from the car they parked in the lot adjacent to the residential building, where the McKinley home awaited, with Taylor's mother standing in the open doorway to welcome them.

After the introductions Karidja made on the group's behalf, Valerie McKinley had an idea of the complementary responsibilities these three ladies represented. As a teacher of literature, she was a practiced storyteller. Over the next two hours, they would appreciate how well Valerie narrated them a word picture of how they could continue to help Linda Lowry.

"I suppose I knew this day was a long time coming," Valerie confided. "I have no regrets, but trying to be a friend to Roz Young . . . Rosalyn . . . has been the work of a lifetime. And there is no life left in me for it. As soon as Taylor graduates early, in mid-December, we will be leaving HAPPYDALE behind, and hopefully, Rosalyn Lowry with it. As we tell each other, Taylor and I: New Year, New Life."

Karidja said, "We may need you to go back to some of the beginning times, your college days, before we are done today, if you are willing. You see, we only know the compressed result . . . and at that, there are still missing pieces we need help to fill."

"Compressed?" McKinley asked.

Then it was the taller women, Eleanor, who spoke. "As Attorney Soro said when we were introduced, I was Ned Hegerman's personal assistant for many years. Valerie, that included the time of Myles and Rosalyn Lowry's divorce and Linda's custody agreement. Only recently, have we learned about Marie Aello. At this time, we are trying to understand Marie and Rosalyn's

relationship over the years and up to the present. In particular, we are stymied to comprehend where a certain document called an Assignment Protection fits in that picture, then and now. We wonder if you can help us?"

Valerie had a wistful look on her face, that moved into a smile, and then a nod. "Have you read the AP, Attorney Soro?" That's what we called them.

"I have, yes. Many times, actually." Soro was factual and avoided being obstructive to McKinley's narrative rhythm.

"Long story . . . not short. Back in those days one powerful leverage that Columbia and Barnard had against protesting students was the implied threat of pulling their scholarships if they participated in shutting down the university or college. The idea was not legal, except in one instance. Most of the scholarships had clauses that revoked payments to recipients who committed felonies. Historically, that had nothing to do with protests. It was standard fare to release endowment funds back into the scholarship pool in the event a person went to jail, or was expelled for criminal behavior. Most dons of the university, investment bankers, fund managers, and large donors saw revocation of felons' scholarships as a necessary action to remove any scandalous bond between themselves and felonious activities. Ironically, in the two decades before our time at school, most of the subject offenses were white collar crimes of financial opportunism, fraudulent Ponzi schemes, or just plain speculative fun for spoiled rich kids with nothing to do with their spare time at school." Valerie checked her visitors' faces to make certain they were not getting bored and were closely following her tale.

"When the war protests just before our day sparked dissension and civil disobedience, most dramatically the seizure at Columbia by Mark Rudd and his cohort, the scholarship brigade rolled out a few high-profile revocations. It was pure intimidation. Most of the challengers never went to court. But then the schools began wielding leverage against blacks, browns and women who were at school on scholarships some thought were quota-satisfying and not otherwise deserved. They lost the anti-inclusion battle in the legislature or before the Board of Directors, so they went for the felonious behaviors that had kids locked up for demonstrating our era of the war and its aftermath. They were de facto, without due process, or even a trial. So, we English majors started polishing the style and grammar of equally untested documents that Columbia Law students crafted to look legal

enough—the Assigned Protections, APs.” She collected herself and kept going. She saw that the third woman, Costa, pushed her glasses up to the bridge of her nose as she was making notes on a steno pad. Valerie didn’t mind the notetaking.

“Now, contrary to public perception, in our day there were really a minority of enrolled students who were protesting. Some were outside agitators. And many just went along, hoping to get an easy pass/fail defaulted set of grades for the semester. The hard drivers, Rosalyn and Marie among them, had no patience with those they saw, and treated as, less committed. If they had persisted in this caste system designation, the APs would have died on the vine for lack of wide support.” She adjusted in her chair.

“That’s kind of where I came in. I had been taking the harsh rhetoric of the protest leaders’ comments meant for the press and smoothing them to a more palatable message. Mine were as ferocious in their effect, just more sophisticated in their vocabulary and style. The hard drivers took notice only when they saw the newspapers were printing my releases verbatim, while theirs had been heavily censored. Theirs played in the tabloids better, headline fodder. But mine were debated in opinion columns. Based on my writings, legitimate journalists were posing questions to university spokespersons and the like. But I continued to be the butt of jokes and snide mocking—because I had two different color eyes. Only Roz Young took me seriously for a while. I was ecstatic. I had been validated.” Valerie McKinley looked at these three women in her home and saw they understood.

“Roz finally listened to me about a bigger base. I told her many of the scholarships—of non-protesting students who failed out or transferred—were not entirely used. And the universities and colleges were reaping back the money undeclared. It was a scandal none of them were level-headed enough to see would present the schools in a bad light, maybe even have the IRS investigate. But they were not interested in governmental intervention. The idea of anarchy was too appealing, regardless of its failure historically.” Valerie worked on her recall and then proceeded.

“I proved more recipients would join the protestors’ call to close down the university, if the APs assigned unused scholarship money to their kids and not have it left behind for the schools to glean. Suddenly the new form of AP with the inheritance provision caught on. Hundreds of working mothers who were matriculating on merit scholarships and financial need supplements were waving copies of APs around after the very first meeting

where they were introduced. They spread like napalm and a whole new segment of the student population supported the boycott of classes, even if they ignored the building takeovers and sit-ins.”

She looked at them with a wry smile. “You’d think that was pretty good for a heterochromatic co-ed, huh? Well, not so fast as they used to say in vaudeville. Guess who introduced the new AP? And guess who took all the credit for it gladly?” She gave them a minute they didn’t really need. “It was the first time of many that Roz Young used me and then betrayed me.”

She looked downtrodden as she admitted woefully, “It is true what they say about abused women. We seem to always come back to give it one more try, to prove we can make it better. And that’s how we got here now, with Linda hidden in the woods. When Rosalyn called that Monday begging to escape before she lost her daughter, I came back into her sphere of influence—what a poli-sci friend of mine used to call the ‘gravitational pull of the psychotic personality,’ even way back then when we studied autocrats.”

She told them, “I hesitated . . . too little, too late. I tried to call that guy down the road, Meadows, to say where he could find Rosalyn and Linda. But his kid answered, and I panicked. Hung up. And that was that.”

If they had been at a bar, instead of her home, this is when Valerie knew she’d drain whatever glass was in front of her and ask for a refill. But they had turned down her offer of coffee or water. So, she went on. “But it didn’t last long this time. Only long enough to drive in the middle of the night back to her apartment to help her again. But she was going to draw my kid, Taylor, in. She’s in high school here. I’m divorced and have custody, so I know the gig. Right now, I banished her to the library, no harm of Rosalyn finding her there today. She’s got major homework for Monday, and I didn’t want her here while you visited, and we talked. She doesn’t know most of this stuff.” She paused. “See even then as a college virgin, I knew you protect your kids. Even before they’re conceived. That’s what won over all those other young co-eds at Barnard. And what tore Roz Young and Marie Aello apart that first time.”

Gabriella couldn’t refrain herself. “What broke. And that was only the first time? Please, I need to know that.”

Valerie McKinley obliged, “Aello was older than we were by a few years. She was over at Columbia Law as a grad student. Only a very few of us knew part of her secret. We just didn’t know her father’s identity. She swore she would treat any daughter she had better than her father had treated her. She wanted to keep her funding for that kid-to-be. So, she signed over her education-related payments to Roz Young. Turns out Aello . . . hell, who picks a name like that out for herself . . . became for a while all talk and no walk . . . but that was to change. Anyway, she never came anywhere near felonious activity. And sadly for her, she also never came close to being a mom. I never knew why. By that time no one was talking to me anymore. So, I left them all behind at graduation and went to find another way to live.”

There was a moment when Karidja thought McKinley was done with her revelations. But then she started to recall a further episode.

“Some five years ago I was looking at Barnard for a teaching referral to hire on here at HAPPYDALE. I’d been divorced a few years and having trouble making ends meet. The gig here seemed pretty good. Not an outrageous salary, but room and board and free high school tuition for my daughter, and an inside track to an academic scholarship to a Barnard-reciprocal college for her after that. Couldn’t beat it.” She paused for a transition in the narrative.

“Anyway, someone who knew us back then saw me looking for a referral at Barnard and told me that Roz and Marie had a huge falling out. Seems to have happened when they each had had too much fun and drink at a party over at Columbia before they left the City after graduation. Story went that they were back to arguing who was the purer revolutionary of the two. Marie told Roz she wanted to be a teacher so she could indoctrinate little kids before they knew better and without their parents realizing it. Roz came back at Marie and accused her of wanting to be a lawyer so she could enact legislation to force change and then prosecute offenders. At one point, Marie called Roz a bitch. Roz’ retort was to call Marie a bastard. And that tore it.” Valerie ignored her telephone ringing and let it go unanswered.

“I didn’t know any of that at the time,” explained McKinley. “I knew Marie took a job in a law firm out near Pittsburgh and was not heard from for a long time. She seemed to have funds enough to make the move. She spent less than most of us did on schooling, what with her tuition, room and board, and books paid for, and all.” She shrugged.

“In all the fuss and bother, it appeared that Roz kept the original AP papers safely under lock and key when she moved on to another life as a teacher. She did pretty well from what I would hear before I dropped out of all contact with college people. She married a guy we three knew from Columbia. A straight arrow who hated the protestors and their politics. And now she’s kicked him to the curb, too. Maybe for cause, I don’t know.” The three ladies eyed one another at her depiction of Myles.

She brought the tale back to the near present. “But the AP reared its ugly head again when Rosalyn’s kid was not quite three years old. Marie Aello arrived back on the scene, uninvited. She wanted the document back so she could destroy it and lay clear claim to the unused portion of her college funding. I only found out about it because out-of-the-blue I got a call from Aello—how she got my number I never learned. She demanded that I tell her where the papers were. If I didn’t tell her she said she would sue me. She was shocked to find I wasn’t still friends with Roz, by then Rosalyn. I never heard from Aello again.” She exhaled.

“Now, this last part you can’t say I told you and I won’t say who told me. But I suspect it’s part of what you need to know.” She checked their faces and felt it was safe for her to go on. “Marie did hear from Rosalyn after I couldn’t tell her where the papers were. True to form, Rosalyn had a counter proposal. Roz always outmaneuvered the lawyers because she wouldn’t consent to being restricted by lawful requirements attorneys were sworn to uphold. She said that Marie had to help her get, and I’m quoting my source here, ‘a punishing divorce and a crippling custody arrangement’ from her husband’s lawyer. In return, he said Marie would get the AP document from Rosalyn ‘when it was over.’”

She saw the women in her living room were aghast with this new information. So, she went on, hoping the drama she was creating would serve her well in the end with them. “I never found out from my source—just a struggling kid trying so hard to get into law school that he worked at two different law firms to make ends meet—why Rosalyn thought Marie could influence the outcome of her legal manipulations against her husband.”

Gabriella Costa’s out-of-control hand wounded her steno pad with a dark line scrawled on it in reaction to the description of Valerie’s source. Gaby almost didn’t hear Valerie’s continuation of this tale of intrigue. “My

source was too young to have been at that party, but he knew of both women. He assured me that one day I'd learn what tied their fate to the divorce and custody hearings. When I pressed him to prove it to me, he just said, 'It's all about trust.' And that is all I know. For me it's just about trust."

She snickered out loud. "Imagine that—me trusting Rosalyn Lowry." She looked at her guests. "Ladies, that just isn't going to happen again in this lifetime."

298

The call was brief. "Itzel? Danny Hart here."

After a pause for her entreaty, he confirmed, "Yes, I have heard. But it's not all good news. Yet I promised to tell you, so here it is." She was silent on her end of the call.

"Myles has been found. He is alive, but he is hospitalized. I was told by the local police on Long Island that he is being treated for a stroke. I don't know how severe, but I know the officer who called me. By the sound of her voice, I am afraid to say it is probably very serious."

Itzel posed the string of questions that are always asked at times like these. Her mind was grasping for objective details to cover the panic of fear, to satisfy the anguish of the unknown. Danny let her ask, without trying to answer. When Itzel had exhausted the first conventional litany, and before she could start the second, he broke in.

"Ms. Cocom. Ms. Cocom. Itzel. Please, wait." When she did, he went on so she could hear, and possibly remember later to tell Bembe, when he would want to know. "It's very early and the only reason I got word was because I asked the patrolwoman to promise to call me right away. I said it was so I could tell you whatever news there was, no matter how incomplete at first." Itzel spoke a quick thanks. He answered, "Yes, you're welcome. You and I might hear something on the television or radio news this afternoon, so Officer Hammersmith wanted to make sure we heard from her first."

He gave her a minute. "Itzel, I know that your thoughts are now with Myles. But his thoughts would be with you, I'm sure, and all those children you both wanted to keep from getting sick. So, you are going to have to move ahead and not wait for him to be there to help you get your Board's approval of your plan for the syringes. Put your mind to that. Keep busy. It will be the best you can do for yourself and everyone else. When I have more word, I will get it to you." He told her she was welcome when she again thanked him and then he said goodbye.

299

In Camden, Rosalyn unfolded the piece of paper back at her hotel room. She dialed the number and waited for what seemed a long time. After five rings, a man's voice inquired, "Yes? Who is this? What may we do for you?"

"My name is Lowry. I was told to ask for Kelly Rocco." She spoke slowly and clearly to suppress her anxiety.

"How may I help you?" the voice asked.

"It's Rocco I need to speak to, please." She was insistent.

"There is a time limit. You should state your business," replied the voice.

Rosalyn blurted, "You don't seem to understand."

"Au contraire, ma chérie. Goodbye." It was not the voice from the Rodin, but how did he know to say that?

"Wait!" she screamed into the phone.

"What may we do for you?" She received a second chance.

"Is forty cents the best I can do?" she queried.

“That seems a fair price for a cup of coffee. How many cartons of coffee beans would you like to sell in the first year?” he spoke in measured tones of nonsense syllables she somehow understood.

“I would think about fifty to begin, sir.” She guessed a reasonable number to suggest.

He seemed pleased. “Okay, I’ll meet you on the first of the month.” And then he hung up the phone.

Rosalyn thought it was a long way to come for a cup of coffee. She had an afternoon and evening to kill before her morning train on Sunday. Perhaps the library had a different type of fairy tale she could immerse herself within after training over Mr. Franklin’s Bridge again—without spinning her rental car’s wheels or flax into gold. And then oddly, she wondered if Kelly Rocco was any more unlikely a name to guess than Rumpelstiltskin.

300

Back in her uniform blouse and protective vest, but before meeting up with Corredor again and leaving the hospital, Detective Howe had made a phone call. She was now discussing that call with Dominic, as she drove her NYPD counterpart home to Danny Hart’s place. She told him, “I called Administrator Grey. She told me she had again checked the Philadelphia hotel where Mrs. Lowry said she was going to stay. She was registered but she never checked in. However, the librarians told Grey that Mrs. Lowry had been in and out of the library during the day. And she was researching the Brothers Grimm as advertised. Grey left a request at the library desk for Rosalyn to call her. But there’s been no word.”

Dominic asked her, “Do you think she’s left for good, without her daughter?”

Howe said, “I’m sixty-fourty she’s coming back. Elsewise I don’t think she would have spent time at the library. But I can’t figure out why else she would go there . . . to Philadelphia, I mean”

Danny Hart didn't answer Howe's phone call because he was out and around with Angie Flynn, at her request. They were sitting in the vest pocket park two blocks up from the Lowry's Jersey apartment, after she had completed her weekly status check on the premises. It was Hart's turn to bring the coffees.

They discussed the business of private investigating. They talked about their worst case and their best case, to get acquainted better. And then, Flynn took a flyer. "Danny, I got something I need to ask you."

Hart was apprehensive because her tone of voice changed. "What's that, Angie?"

"You ever work a case when you thought nobody—even your client—was telling you the whole truth?" She watched a squirrel hop along with a nut in its mouth.

"Yes. Several times, actually." He gave it a second thought. "But I'm not sure it was always on purpose. Sometimes they were scared. Sometimes they didn't know if they could trust me." And then he gave it a third thought. "Angie? You don't think I'm lying to you, do you?"

She didn't answer his question, which caused him some concern. "What I mean to ask Danny is something . . . different. Let me try again." She watched the squirrel leap onto the trunk of the tree and scurry upwards. "I guess what I mean is . . . did you have a case with a bunch of people who were on one side and another bunch on the other side . . . but that they are not being truthful with the people on their own side, not really with me?"

"What's chewing at you, Angie? Is it these Lowrys?" asked Danny. It was the closest he was going to get to exonerating himself from the liar's bunch.

"I'm vulnerable here, Danny. You could say I'm dropping my drawers, after a fashion." She couldn't look him in the eye. And that was making him nervous. "Dresser drawers, is what I'm talking about, Danny." She brushed lint off her pants leg even though none was there.

“The tall one, Aello, went through the Jersey apartment when I was yanked out of bed on a weekend morning to open it up for her. I was told by Mellon’s girl, Hayes, to get my ass over there pronto. I know you know all this. But here’s what I’m telling you for the first time—and that I’m telling no one else, Danny. This high heeled prima donna got down on her knees when she thought nobody was looking and she reached into Lowry’s dresser drawers. Not kinky like for underwear or something. She got her hands up on the underside of the drawer, looking for something stuck to the bottom, hidden like.”

Flynn was doing her best to see Aello’s face in her memory. “Danny, she was ripping mad when we left there. She didn’t find what she wanted and stuttered, for the only time, about wanting to help her friend Rosalyn. But she was out for herself in those drawers, not her friend.” She paused, “And then when she flew off the handle entirely downstairs in the basement it was over not being able to search through Rosalyn’s things in the cage.”

She stood up and put her foot on the bench to re-tie her shoe that didn’t need any attention. Her balance was perfect from her physical training. And her mind was on an even keel from those same disciplines. “Danny, I’m batting my head on the wall asking myself what she was looking for. And I know that it was for herself, not her friends. Rosalyn and Mellon would never have heard about it if she found what she was hunting down.”

She stomped her foot on the ground, with all the force she could put into it. She got his attention. “So why, Danny, are they not on the same page, if they’re on the same team?” Then she squatted down and fixed him right in the eyes. “Danny? Are we on the same page? Are we on the same team? Or are you still them-against-us-ing me?”

She was formidable. And he was caving. “Angie. I do not know what she was hunting in those drawers. I swear.” She looked so disappointed as she stood up. “But I can tell you what she would have found if they had still been there.”

She sat back down and simply said, “That’s more like it, Danny. So, let’s go back to that first day, should we?” And she said no more. It was his turn.

“That first day, yes. When you gave me ten minutes inside the apartment. I did not find anything that day. But on the Friday that I searched the apartment after the Thursday night incursion, I found something strange. It seemed some things had been taped to the underside of several dressers drawers, but were no longer there. He stopped there for a moment.

“But you looked for them again in Lowry’s place at the school, didn’t you? How did you do that without Dominic knowing, Danny?”

He wasn’t surprised she could figure it out once they started talking about it. That is why he didn’t risk it with Dominic. “There was just a small amount of time when Corredor was looking for footprints in the mud outside the bedroom window.”

“What did you find, Danny?” she wanted to know.

“You following what Myles had been researching out on Long Island when he disappeared?” Danny asked her in an apparent change of subject.

But both investigators knew the difference between a subject being changed and two subjects being linked. “Danny, I just tied my shoe; don’t go making it loose again by pulling my leg.”

Danny told her, “That shoe was tighter before you tied it than after. So, stop trying to sneak up on me and just ask me straight out from now on, Angie. Like you said, no lying or deceit between teammates.”

“Are you telling me that Rosalyn Lowry has those bearer bonds, Danny?” she would have fallen over if she hadn’t just sat down on the bench.

“She has some bonds. Are they from the heist? I don’t know.” Danny was firm on that point.

“You’ve got to tell Howe and Corredor, Danny,” she urged.

“Angie Flynn, don’t you dare tell me what I do, or do not, have to do.” He had never looked like he did just at that moment, ever before in Flynn’s brief time with him. This was the purported hardness of Danny Hart. She did not care for it one bit.

Hart kept drilling it home, hard, to make sure there wasn't any misunderstanding. "That is exactly what we must not do, Angie. They are cops. We are not. To us those bonds are clues to finding a little girl first, and then her peripatetic mother. Clues lead us to solutions we can prove and what we then, and only then, can report to the authorities. But to cops, these bonds are evidence of a potential crime that they must act on immediately, with property seizure and personal detentions or arrests. One of the things that Dominic has taught me is that detentions and arrests lead to flight and permanent disappearance of little children who can not protect themselves. That's the team you're on if you leave Mellon's and Aello's and Rosalyn's dark side and advocate for Linda Lowry and, I hope to God, her father. Are you in?"

"Danny, why is she reading *Rebecca*?" asked Flynn in what really seemed to be a change of subjects.

"What?" he screamed loud enough to make a half a dozen birds, three squirrels, and two older people, twenty feet away on a bench of their own, all turn and leave in a hurry. "Haven't you heard a thing I've been saying?"

"Every word, Mr. Hart." She replied evenly. "And, again, I ask you, if you really want to find the wandering Mrs. Lowry, 'Why is she reading *Rebecca*?' It's a novel with women who are so mentally ill that if Rosalyn Lowry assimilates their multiple personalities, Linda's mother will threaten peoples' lives in the bargain—maybe even her daughter's!"

Angie Flynn was on a roll and wouldn't stop. "You told me she becomes who she reads about. So, when I was in Rosalyn's apartment waiting for Aello to finish her search, I wrote down the titles of the novels she had been reading featuring women that she imagined she had become. First a devil-inseminated Manhattanite. Followed by a transplanted misandrist southerner in St. Louis, with a daughter she traps in infirmity and a son she constantly emasculates. Then a Manhattan divorcée who abandons her kid to find herself, only to come back and sue her husband in court to restore her primary custody. Next, she's a socially disgruntled teacher of pre-pubescent English girls, whose minds and souls she poisons. And now she might be a widower's new bride or a housekeeper or a deceased first wife, each cast afloat in an intrigue of infidelity, murder, and arson. Which of those is she liable to be or to do, Danny, if we don't find her?"

Myles Lowry, who had been found and now lay in a Long Island hospital ICU, appeared inert to the medical professionals who checked on him periodically and who watched and listened to the various monitors that were trying to interpret what was going on inside his head.

But to Myles there is a flurry of activity. Mostly there are images and questions, with a background of sounds he can not clearly discern at first. He hears a constant movement of fluid, which he does not know is the blood flowing through his veins, but which is having trouble coursing to all parts of his brain.

He's seeing Petey. And he hears the taunts. He can't be sure if he is a taunter, or on the periphery only, as he saw before. He has a hard time coping with the idea that perhaps he had been unkind and cruel to Petey. The memories are all scrambled, corrupted, leaving a disfigured picture of the past. But it plays over and over again, without changing. He is tormented because he tries to change what he sees from reoccurring. He hears the same dialogue, the same chants. The same piteous cries for help and escape. Myles calls out to them and begs them to stop. But it does no good. The loop replays with exact repetition. No one hears his pleas.

Myles realizes his scrambled memory has disfigured the past. That word rasps on the bone of his skull. What a strange use of 'disfigure.' He sees a teacher of literature writing it with nail-scratching sounds of chalk on a chalkboard.

Then he sees a young woman. An angel. She is beautiful but is she also disfigured? Does disfigurement reside in the breast cancer that hides and kills as it duplicates itself, feeding on live tissue? Does disfigurement define the mastectomy that rids her of that cancer. Hopefully completely. Or is the tattooing that reimagines and pictures her anew also a disfigurement, or a transfiguration?

His wounded mind half thinks and half feels. He is mixing the women, blending their deeds and fates. But he can't recall their names. Does pumping ink into the body cause a change that is akin to injecting words off a page into the soul? How many needle pricks a minute deliver the tattooist's mark

beneath the skin? How many words in ink on a page incite the mind and impress the soul between each blink of an eye?

It is too much. With a blip on a white line on one screen and a beep in the vibration of one speaker, the turmoil subsides, it goes dark inside, and the blessed peace of sleep descends. Myles rests.

303

Maura Hammersmith knew from the search warrant results that there was almost no food in April Smith's kitchen appliances or closets. The drive-in offerings at the fast food were nowhere near as nutritious as she would have liked. But in a pinch, it would have to do. So would the microwave, to warm them by the time they were ready to be eaten.

Before Maura could begin their first interview, her shoulder mount sounded. She picked up and heard her captain. "Officer, are you at that apartment?" She affirmed that she was.

Her boss asserted. "Turns out not to be a good choice. Get some things and move out. Press is on the way. I'll give you a location on your car radio." He was off before she could reply.

"You heard him, April. Three minutes. Grab some clothes. I'll clean these up. We'll get something else soon." She put the food back in the bags. Poured the drinks in the sink. Rinsed it clean. Used a bigger recyclable brown sack from the local supermarket she found folded for reuse in the closet to stuff it all into.

April was not fussy and was quick. She did not argue. She took what she needed in a soft-sided gym bag and met the policewoman at the door, almost as soon as the kitchen was cleaned up. They were out the door and driving down the road before the reporters arrived.

The neighbors were surprisingly unhelpful about having seen anything worth telling the newspaper people about. Who read the papers anyway anymore? It might have been very different if there were cameras videotaping. To see themselves on television that night, they would have

thought of something to say. That's why the young girl next door phoned the TV channel with the tip in the first place.

304

Karidja was uncommonly quiet in the back seat of Eleanor's car as they headed past the tall white fences snaking over the countryside hills by the horse meadows. They certainly were beautiful creatures, as Linda had seen, being reminded of her Black Beauty.

"Do you think Valerie did anything criminal helping Rosalyn this month, Karidja?" Gaby was free to talk. She wasn't driving. Stands of trees and open fields had replaced the horse meadows.

The lawyer answered thoughtfully. "Maybe not. But that doesn't spare her from perhaps having to prove that in a court of law. She might not have even done anything morally wrong. Actually, quite to the contrary. But it haunts me to hear her worry about trusting Mrs. Lowry. Valerie told us she yearns for Taylor's early graduation, so they can be long gone before Myles and Rosalyn are back in front of a custody judge by the end of the year. But she is wary, I think, of a different trial having to do with other matters she purposely did not divulge to us."

Eleanor chimed in her thoughts, careful not to distract herself from watching the road, with its twists and turns and ups and downs. "Rosalyn must think it isn't 'over,'—her words to Aello. She still refuses to rescind that AP and give the document back to Marie. We can now profess an awareness of the AP, since Valerie told us about it, even if we can't say we have read it from the copy I got . . ." Quatrane almost forget and spilled the beans about from whom she got the copy of the document. "That's why Aello and Mellon are going to show up, guns blazing, Monday. They will reject that audit, because it doesn't include the Trust. But the AP must be part of the rejection too, at least for Marie."

She stopped her talking, and the car, at a four-way stop intersection. But she did not drive forward. She looked in the rear view. The road was still as empty behind them as it had been for many minutes. She put the car in PARK and set the emergency flashers to ON.

Over the warning lights' constant clicking sounds ticking off the seconds, she told her friends. "Here's what I don't get . . . it isn't the AP that was left out of the audit. It was the Trust." She checked the mirror for the road behind and to see whether she had Karidja's attention from the back seat. "I knew that somehow that AP was crucial to Marie. Now we know from Valerie just how personal it is as well. But now I must admit I am not sure that Mellon even knows about the AP. I think he's only been working to prove Ned, and not his wife, controlled the Trust."

She turned off the alerting lights, levered the gear shift to DRIVE and they moved on.

After a mile or so, it was Costa who startled them with a yelp. "Hey, you know what, Eleanor? Even at this late date, Aello could get another degree from Columbia paid by scholarship, if she wanted to go for a specialty. But only if she could obtain and destroy that AP agreement, which she doesn't know we know about. I know it seems to be unlikely she'd want more schooling if she has an established legal career in Pittsburgh. We should check that out. Why did she come back here? She was here before Ned's heart attack. Did something happen out by the Three Rivers?"

She took out her steno pad and began to make a note about calling around Pittsburgh on Monday. That is when she saw the long black line on her pad. The one her angry number two pencil made, whose truth she would not ever erase. She wanted to be reminded that she could feel love and hate for the same person.

But then she noticed one more thing in her notes of what McKinley had said at the end. "Holy . . ." she swore. "Ladies, you do know who Valerie's secret source was, don't you?" They were quiet, not wanting to say his name aloud and upset her. "So, what I want to know is, how the hell did our beloved spy, Charlie Spada, know about McKinley? And how did he know how to find her before he left for Mellon's banishment in California?" She answered her own question, as rhetorical as it was meant to be. "He must have done some of his own poking around, either in Myles's information at our offices or in Rosalyn's over at Mellon's place. One way or the other, he knew about all four of these players back in their college days, long before we did. And he knew about the Trust." She flipped a page in the notepad. "Valerie told us her source said it was all about trust. But what if she misheard him? What if Charlie actually told her, it was all about 'A Trust' or 'The Trust?'"

Eleanor asked Gaby, "So you're saying you think McKinley still does not know about Hegerman's paternity, or about Marie's scholarship money source?"

"Exactly," said Gaby, still smarting about Charlie's betrayal. "Her motives seem still to be what she said they were. But it also means that Mellon might not have been the only one who knew what Charlie Spada was up to. Or the only one who put him up to it." She closed her notepad and said, "Valerie was right about not trusting Rosalyn again in this lifetime."

When they were through, it was a voice from the back seat that said. "But I think there's even more. That AP taunts a childless Aello. She knows it leaves Roz Young somewhere around a hundred thousand dollars to pay for her kid's education." She left her next fear unspoken, for the time being.

305

The police budget buried a non-marketed sale of a foreclosed house a few years before. With its two-car attached garage, it was easy to pull in and bring the door down, and then enter the house without being eyeballed any more completely from the street or nearby front windows. The neighbors were under the impression the new couple were both in the military and deployed. So, to have the local police patrol pass by every once in a while, to check out the house, seemed a welcomed courtesy. Occasional overnight guests were assumed to be relatives from out of town.

Each of the women carried a brown sack of groceries and fixings from the light-bulb lit garage into the house. These would provide April something to eat and drink over a couple of days. After getting those all organized in the kitchen and pantry, they verified the launderers on call had straightened the place up after its last use, a two-day seclusion for a battered spouse. The time before that was a grand jury witness for an out-of-town case, who needed anonymity and an escorted drive to the district court a half hour away. The purchase was purposefully a three-bed room to accommodate stay-in, round-the-clock security.

The Salvation Army furnishings were suitable and serviceable. The matching blinds and curtains were typical window treatments for the neighborhood and provided the privacy most neighbors desired for themselves as well. There was a little laundry nook, with washer and dryer, off the bedroom hall that took care of clothing and bedding, as needed.

"We don't know one another, April," began Maura. "So, tell me what is more comfortable for you—giving me a high-points narration of what happened to Myles's car and the aftermath? . . . or me asking you questions for you to answer?" Maura assured her, "I'm good either way." She opened her notepad, "And I can stop a narrative with questions for clarification along the way."

"Let's do the last one. I'll tell you the story and you jump in where you need to do that." April was not intimidated as she thought she might be.

"Whenever you're ready," said the police officer.

"Doctor LeClerc wanted me to have Mr. Lowry take me to dinner at a secluded spot. He described it to me and said I should get out of the car when we got to the front door in the rain. The place was empty, he said because it was rented out for a special event. So, I did what he asked—"

Maura asked, "Where was the restaurant?"

"Down by the fish places along the river in the business park," she said, and told Maura the name of the eatery.

Maura finished her notes and then said, "Okay. Go ahead."

"Well, I got out and stood on the porch, under the overhang, out of the rain. Before Mr. Lowry could move the car to a parking spot, the clinic van backed up very fast. It crashed into the side of the car, sort of pinning it against the wall. It seemed to me that both motors were racing, but neither car was moving. Suddenly, the van yanked away from the car. Almost as soon as it did the car sped off. But it kept going straight. It didn't turn. Then with a big noise of metal and glass, the car smashed head-on into the adjacent brick wall."

“Did anyone come to help?” asked Maura. “Anyone who might have seen what took place, near you or from a different angle?”

“I don’t think so. I didn’t see anyone. And I didn’t hear anyone.” She thought a minute. Then she said, “It was spooky quiet. Nothing moved at first. And then the doctor sort of dropped out of the van when the driver’s door popped open. He might have pushed it with his shoulder and just kept falling. I really don’t know for sure. I think I looked at the car and didn’t see Mr. Lowry getting out of his car, so I ran over to help the doctor.”

“What took place then, please, as you recall it now looking back?” Hammersmith was trying to put Smith back on scene and not having her rationalize it as an afterthought.

“I forget his exact words, but the doctor told me he needed help getting Mr. Lowry out of his car—”

“Did he call for help?” the officer asked.

“No. He just started us helping ourselves,” April said.

“Was there a radio in the van to connect to the clinic or to a hospital?” Hammersmith was now taking the material witness through the beginning of her investigation. Time would tell Maura if she was looking into an accident or an intentional crime.

“I don’t know. I’d never been in that van, or any of the clinic vans, before.” April was trying to remember but to no avail.

“Okay. Leave that for now, please. Think back to the parking lot and the crash again with me,” she cajoled. “How did you help the doctor?”

“He forced the van doors open. They were pretty bent. He showed me how to get the gurney out and we rushed it over to the car. The door window was smashed, and the driver’s door was broken, somehow, that he forced it open. He told me what to do and we got Mr. Lowry onto the gurney and into the van,” she recalled, skipping the details she sensed the policewoman was not asking her to tell about, just now.

“Did he say anything about the crash during that hectic time?” It was part of her training to recognize that in the confusion right after an event like this that people utter things that can be very revealing.

“He said once that it was an accident. He said he hardly ever drove standard transmission. He asked if I could drive the van.” She reconstructed the sounds in her mind to tell the story.

“Was he asking you if you were hurt, do you think, or too upset to drive?” Maura was trying to assess the man she would soon be interrogating with her captain, and not as a material witness.

“No. No. I took it he meant could I drive standard transmission,” said April. She was getting frustrated by so many interruptions, so she spoke faster to keep the policewoman from asking so many questions.

“I told him I could . . . he ordered me to get in and be ready to drive . . . he went back to the car and started it up . . . there were white billows coming from the engine of the car . . . steam not smoke from a fire . . . he ran back and said to follow him . . . so I did.” She caught her breath and saw that Maura was not going to interfere with her remembering and recalling out loud what came next.

But she found that pace was good to keep track. “. . . he drove out of the business park . . . I did not know the way . . . I’d only rode my bike there by the ball fields and the riverwalk and the wetlands once or twice before . . . it’s almost in the next town . . . so I had to watch the car more than the road. We crossed the Sunrise and were near the tracks . . . the overhead ones . . . before I realized just where we were.” Again she exhaled, almost in exact synchronization with recalling with relief the familiar location she saw on the day she was narrating about.

“LeClerc pulled the car into the last parking space . . . away from almost everything else—

Here, Hammersmith did interrupt, because for her this was crucial. “Were there many cars in the parking lot at that end?”

Impatiently, April told her, “. . . God, no . . . it was practically empty . . . it was getting dark . . . it might have been raining again, I can’t remember . . . but there were no other cars back there. I had plenty of room just to stop the

van near the spot . . . so he could get in without getting wet . . . yea, so it must have been raining again.”

“And then?” asked her questioner.

“We might have argued . . . I’m getting it mixed up . . . because we talked about it again . . . maybe . . . I just forget . . . it was too upsetting.” Now the stress was coming through. Hammersmith had seen this before. Witnesses were calm through an event and its aftermath. But when they had to give testimony a day or more later, the adrenaline that insulated them at the time had worn away and was replaced by a sense of terror about what they had experienced.

April’s potential courtroom testimony was going to have to be clearer, more certain. So, the officer pursued it, “Don’t worry yet about when, Miss Smith . . . just tell me what you two argued about, please April? . . . and which side did each of you take?”

“It was about taking Myles to his clinic or to a hospital . . .” And here was the insight into criminality that the experienced professional, alive and well in Maura Hammersmith, was principally going to find what her captain was going to want to know about.

She couldn’t afford to lose this edge. Maura stopped writing and gave her intense scrutiny to April Smith’s every word, every facial expression, every body language movement, and the junction of what parts of the story evoked tears, rekindled anger, and softened her emotions. It was in this phase of her witness statement that April began to refer to ‘Myles’ and not ‘Mr. Lowry,’ to abandon the respectful title of ‘Doctor’ when referencing LeClerc.

It was when she was telling Maura about the days after the crash that April introduced the policewoman to Dr. Oulette. It was this stretch of their time together that April spoke so quietly about Myles, and painfully about his unforgiving night terrors. And finally, his distorted morning face on that last day at the clinic.

As often may happen with a material witness, the object of this crash story transmuted. April herself became the subject of the narrative.

Hammersmith now became acutely vigilant for her interviewee. For here is where prosecutors and defense attorneys perch like ravens, ready to squawk shrilly to deafen juries to the witness's words. Here is where with talons and beaks, the not-so-solicitous barristers pierce and peck at the eyes of the beholder, to leave reddened, runny sockets that the twelve arbiters, ceasing to be peers, judge—and then ascend to belief, or descend to incredulity.

306

Hart drove his car into the alley and then turned into his driveway to find the security fence rolled back and the garage door up. Flynn pulled hers in and angled half in the alley and half in the drive when Danny stopped by the gate. Off to the side beyond the gate was a local police vehicle. His chest thumped once and then quieted when Detective Howe stepped out from in front of her squad and waved a welcome hello that conveyed no threat or alarm.

Danny moved his vehicle straight into the garage and Flynn eased hers into the drive apron outside the open fence. The three of them stood and exchanged greetings. Obviously, Howe owed Danny an explanation. "It seems you knew what you were talking about when you gave me the keys to get in here. I am so glad it did not involve an emergency. Dominic came to collect some clean clothes and to freshen up. He wants you to bring him back to be with Linda overnight, Danny, since her mother is still away."

"Let's close this gate over and go upstairs, then. What do you say? Have you time?" Both ladies said they did. They secured the area and headed up the elevator.

They entered the living space on the top floor just as Dominic was getting his things together. He spoke to them, one and all. "Hello, Danny. I hope it's okay I asked Detective Howe for a ride back from the hospital. I was going to hang out at her station, but then she surprised me with the keys to the kingdom. Are you still of the mind to see Miss Linda together tonight?"

Danny replied, "That still sounds good to me. Did you have enough clothes to run a washing machine load, Dominick? That's what I hear, right?"

"We can talk about that later, Danny. But your ears do not deceive you." Dominic was not forthcoming about that in front of the ladies. But he was about something else. "Would you three like to join me for lunch down the block at the bar and grill? I was thinking of a perfect Reuben and a beer, before getting a ride back west to the hospital from Danny. I was not going to rely on hospital food for supper."

Detective Howe told them, "I'll need to call in and see if I'm okay to be away from the station, but reachable. I'm still due lunch after my school investigation this morning." Hart pointed her to the phone. They had moved it since her last visit.

He and Flynn were good for taking Dominic up on his invite, as long as they could make a pit stop here in the apartment, they said. Hart told Flynn, "You're first, Angie. Down the hall and in the master bath." While the ladies had their attention elsewhere, Danny turned to Corredor. "Detective? Anything you need to tell me?" he said.

Checking that the other two were not in earshot, Dominic told him, "Lunch is on me, Danny. I need to use my debit card. So don't let them quibble, okay?"

"Dom?" persisted Hart.

"It's a long enough car ride to the hospital for the rest of it, Danny," was all Corredor said.

They had a friendly, really-hit-the-spot lunch in an alcove that spared them the sport's television array and the local news bulletins. Afterwards they walked back to Danny's. Just before the ladies were going over to the elevator to go down to their cars, Detective Corredor wished them a good Saturday evening, a little more warmly than was his custom. Hart went to see them out the driveway so he could secure the fence and the garage door for the night.

By the time Danny was stepping off the elevator and back into his top floor dwelling, Dominic was finishing up with folding the laundered sheets, having made the bed with the linen closet set from the guest room. It didn't

take much of an investigator to understand, but Hart respected that Corredor indicated he would use the car ride back to the hospital to see Linda Lowry to have 'the conversation.'

They were about ready to leave, and Dominic excused himself to go use his bathroom. When Danny heard the bathroom door close, he realized Dominic had left the bedroom door wide open. Hart walked over and looked in. The room looked very similar to the way it did when Danny first brought Dominic home from Mike Riley's Jersey apartment. Both beds were made up, military neat. The Cliffs of Moher and the gigantic ice floe in the Drake Passage were still proclaiming the endurance of the land and the persistence of the sea.

The only different look was that a modest suitcase, packed and ready to go, had replaced a bedraggled and wearily-stained travel bag. Danny stepped back into the kitchen out of immense respect for the NYPD's most celebrated rescuer of missing children.

Dominic came out carrying the suitcase, saying, "I'm going to need this overnight at the hospital, Danny."

Hart's only reply was, "I can't wait to see that little girl wonder. If she's sleeping, I don't care, I'm going to make enough noise to wake her up." The investigator never inquired about what time the next morning Dominic wanted to be picked up.

Halfway into the thirty-minute ride to the hospital, Danny spoke up. "I forgot to tell you that, when I went downstairs with Flynn and Howe, they asked me to thank you for picking up the lunch tab."

"Least I could do was include them. I needed the tab to be large enough to require a second card holder's authorization, Danny." Dominic was looking north and west out the windshield, where the horizon was still upholding a final rimshot of daylight over the hills. He lowered the passenger's side window about a third of the way down.

"Yes. I thought you were going to be very close to the limit you told me was set for a purchase. Especially with a tip for the server and bartender." Hart was already feeling his loft was going to be a lonely place to come back to each night again for a while.

“By agreement, that second authorization expires in thirty-six hours, Danny.”

Corredor heard a distant train expressing a low moan in the gloaming.

Hart marveled that, at his advanced age, within less than a month’s time he had befriended this man who was so different from himself in many ways, yet like him at core. Corredor had said the car ride would give them enough time to talk about it. But as it turned out, they hardly needed any words to spoil the quiet time together.

307

Many material witnesses panic when they find themselves left alone with strangers. A fear of retribution sometimes arises when their inaugural minders go off duty, or go to pursue other parts of the investigation. But this policewoman named Frances was fascinated by the details of the archivist’s job at the library. It gave her and April a neutral ground of interest to talk about and use to pass the time when Maura and Frances changed shifts at the safe house.

And the assortment of multiple flavored pints of Ben and Jerry ice cream she brought with her didn’t hurt the evening’s passing either. As April contrasted the Chubby Hubby and Chocolate Therapy and Cherry Garcia with her last week of clinic food, Frances manipulated the discussion and the witness, to reveal more about the time of Myles’s custody in LeClerc’s clinic. How he seemed to have been losing weight every day, that he seldom talked about his wife, or that he was not given the walking exercise she had been told he would receive, and that the sound piped in from the active areas of the clinic was deadly, worse than even elevator music, and how it dampened any noise created in the solarium from reaching back into the clinic hallways.

After April retired for the evening, with a county policewoman on loan, sleeping overnight in the adjacent room of the safe house, Frances drove to the station house to meet Officer Hammersmith and their captain. They were astounded at the ‘ice cream ingenuity’ Frances used to learn as much as she could about Myles’s in-clinic care between his crash and hospitalization. It seemed that only those things Dr. Oulette asked April to

provide would be considered medical treatment, as defined by insurance companies, Medicare, or the state board of medicine. As he listened to Frances recount April's impressions, which were purposefully not recorded as witness testimony, the local police captain began to worry about their basis for arresting and trying LeClerc criminally.

He outlined it to his two officers. "We are going to have to be careful to decide what charges we ask the district attorney to file. It does not appear that LeClerc supervised Myles's medical care. He claimed to April that he provided an impromptu site, to protect Lowry, and contracted with Oulette for critical care. He might claim that the only services his people provided the guest patient were comfort care. The quality of the medical decisions is not our venue, for criminality at least. That's going to be decided by some medical board or certification agency."

Maura said, "That's half the reason I feel so strongly about this, sir." He looked at her in a way that allowed her to continue. "I found myself being selective about what I noted in writing, and what I allowed for a wider sensory input—how she looked and what it seemed she was feeling." She shifted in the chair at the table they sat around. "I had to get a handle on whether I thought she was telling me the truth. And whether she was in this for her own reasons or for LeClerc's."

Frances spoke up. "My read on this from the library people, and from my visit there tonight at the safe house, was that she likes the guy—I mean, Lowry. But I also got to think she started this for the doctor—like she owed him, for her mother, and for her cancer care. The library people know she thought highly of LeClerc and the work he did at that clinic. She brought books for his patients from the library and changed them out every two weeks."

Frances laid her right hand on the table, thumb underneath and four fingers on top. Then she thrummed her hand as if her pinkie to her pointer were sections of an inchworm. Her captain was accustomed to this as what he called her 'thinking tic'—which he had told her numerous times drove him crazy. "At best, captain, this woman is conflicted—or at least she was. I think he alienated her over this crash and, I don't know—would you call it an abduction?" She looked at him and then at Maura. "I'd go after that, I don't know—would you call it a disaffection?"

The captain made his decision unilaterally after they gave their input. That was his leadership style. Wait, listen, then direct. No one mistook it for a democracy. He typified it on his annual self-evaluation as being halfway between a faulted democracy and an enlightened despotism. "Maura and Frances, you decide between you, from a personality standpoint, which one of you inherits this Dr. Oulette, without offering her material witness status, to interview about these goings-on. Once you've made an assessment about her and where we should go with whatever you find, let's get together again. But quickly, please. The clock's ticking, and not just in this time zone."

Maura asked him, "How long can your friend in the county give us safe house presence and overnights?"

"We left it open-ended for up to four days. That's the first of the month and their next tour-of-duty calendar turn." And that required him to tell them something else about this case.

"I have another facet of this case to tell you about. And I must do it now." He was quite serious and both women were alert to hear what he had to say. "Frances, Maura asked me earlier to see if I could track down a retired state or county cop who was on this bank heist case you traced off the library microfilm."

He deliberated before going on. "I'm not going to identify this person, a retired law enforcement agent, not even by gender, or duty station. Based on my inquiry, I received a phone call from this source. I was told that the man known as 'Petey' is living out his days in a sheltered environment, within an appropriate community, supportive of his . . . the word used was 'needs.' I was told that with respect for his dignity and peace of spirit, the source has talked to 'Petey' many times over the years. They have become close acquaintances, in fact. The retiree swears to us, and also to state and county officials several times in the past and again quite recently, that Petey had no part in the planning or execution of that robbery of bearer bonds and cash. He affirms that any involvement Petey may have had that evening was not within his capability to understand and was sadistically opportunistic on the part of the true thieves, who remain to this day, at large. Furthermore, as of this date there has been no recovery of the bonds nor of the remnants of the cash, some of which has re-entered circulation, but not in a manner that has helped to solve the crime or apprehend those responsible."

Frances asked her captain, "Sir, why is this even of interest to us? I am not sure I understand."

"It's a loose end. One we are told some eagle scouts in Treasury hope to fashion into a snare this weekend and then into slip-knotting handcuffs by the first of the month." It was all he was going to say.

308

Dominic had only seen Miss Alex once before, but she was the kind of person who carried herself so distinctly that she was not easily forgotten. He had met many women of whom she reminded him, as he hunted for missing children. A gentleness emitted about her that a terrified child would find certainty in running to for help. At ninety degrees of shimmer, however, her aura would darken, so that the most hardened child abuser would run away from her ferocity, terrified for his life.

Danny followed Corredor into the hospital room and saw the weekend companion caregiver at the foot of Linda's bed. She was so emboldened by her charge that she defiantly continued to open the flip board and proceeded to read over Linda's medical chart. "It looks pretty good to me," she said simply. "Wouldn't you be encouraged by a column full of check marks under the heading 'within normal parameters' next to all these tests they do?"

She handed the chart to Dominic and went over to Linda, who was awakened by Alex talking to the two men. "How about some water, there, little lady?" she asked as she extended the bent straw toward Linda's yawning lips. Over her shoulder she asked Danny, who was just accepting the clipboard from Dominic, "You gents been here, or just arriving for evening visiting hours like me?"

Dominic went around to the far side of Linda's bed and squeeze-walked along with his back against the wall. He left Danny and Alexandria to converse in the more open portion of the room, where they would also intercept any doctors on Saturday night rounds.

Linda reached her hand up to his. "They still have the water stuff in my arm. But," and here she giggled quietly to him, "they took the pee bag away and I can walk to the bathroom."

"What have they done for you while I was away today?" Corredor asked her in a private whisper.

"I got two rides. One in a chair and one on a bed-thingy. I went for pictures. One was of my tummy and kidneys. Like you said when my pee got to the right color. The other one was a sled that went into a tube like a playscape or a gerbil tunnel. I had to lie real still for that one. It was very noisy." I didn't have to dress up, though, because the pictures were of inside. They saw my head and my chest." She was content, holding his hand now and resting quietly.

After a few minutes, Dominic asked Linda, "Would it be okay if I went and found the doctor and asked about what the pictures showed? And how they think you are doing?"

She began to release his hand, but then tugged it a little when he was letting go. When he looked down at her, she said. "Ask them if I can go back to school with Miss Alex . . . Please? I want to be there when my mom gets home. I don't want her to worry. Or she'll never let me out of the house again for a long time."

"Sure will," he said. "It shouldn't take too long. We'll be back soon."

The three adults left the room and headed for the nurse's station, looking to find out about rounds and a quiet place to talk to the doctor on duty, but not in front of Linda. The head floor nurse said, "I suppose it wouldn't matter if I asked who was next of kin?" Not one of them said a word or made a move to explain. "Yeah. I didn't think so. She's quite aware for a six-year-old—at least for what we usually see up on this floor." After a moment more, she asked, "So, how is this going to go, do you think?"

In a wondrous stroke of woman's intuition, Alex knew enough to be their spokesperson. "I'm the school representative and the out-of-town parental designee for care this weekend. These gentlemen are assisting the young lady and her parents on a matter of pressing family importance. This is

a New Jersey private investigator, and this NYPD detective specializes in protecting children in difficult situations.”

She shifted weight from one foot to the other and slightly shrugged. “I suppose you could say we are next-to-kin, rather than next-of-kin.”

After a pause during which no objection was registered, Alex continued, “Since we are each helping the family in three different ways, perhaps you and the attending physician, if that’s the term—TV medical shows, you know—could speak to all of us. We’d be most obliged.”

The nurse shook her head and did all she could in the circumstance. She pointed with an extended arm, “Please make yourselves comfortable in that consult room. The doctor will be along shortly. If she has medical students in tow, she’ll dismiss them after rounds and then come and see you.”

As they sat, Hart said, “Miss Alex, you were absolutely wonderful.”

“Well, I was completely terrified. I was sure I was going to have to excuse myself or say my water broke and I didn’t even know I was pregnant—which I know I can’t be—or something else in fancy medical terms for wetting my pants.” She was shaking a tiny bit as she sat down.

Dominic Corredor told her, “Mrs. Lowry chose very well. Her little girl is in good hands.”

It was fewer than ten minutes later that rounds were apparently over, since the doctor came into the room. She sat with them to put them at ease and to rest her feet from ninety minutes of walking and standing. “Good evening. I’m glad to see that our young guest has so much support on her last evening here with us.” She searched their faces to make sure they realized what she was saying. They did.

“Now, as far as the next few days go, which of you will be caring for Miss Lowry, please?”

Alexandria spoke up. “I will be coming back in the morning and bringing her to her home at our boarding school. It’s about a forty-minute drive. I have a regular car. Will she be able to make that drive with me?”

“Those are good questions . . . Miss . . .” she was stymied. There was too much paperwork about Linda, and she could not readily find their information.

“Alex is fine,” she told the physician.

“Thank you . . . Alex . . . I think Linda can do that. I’d say an hour would be tops for her first time sitting and taking in all the sensory stimulation—movement, sight, sound. If she has sunglasses at her home, you could bring them with you for her to wear. No headsets or earphones, full audio without compression or distortion will be essential for physical balance and to avoid auditory headaches. And, and no loud radio or tape deck music in the car, please. And I’d recommend she sit in the back seat, passenger side. She will have you to see in the foreground of things out the windshield, and the interior of the car for context and a frame of reference for things going by as you move down the road. Take it slow, especially up and over hills and around curves please on secondary roads. Stay in the right lane and don’t exceed the speed limit on the highways also.”

“If we tell her, she will remind me as we go along. I’m sure of that,” laughed Alex.

The doctor continued. “Linda should not be left alone. She should stay inside tomorrow, but not in bed. She should keep hydrated. At least four nice big glasses of water through the day. She should sip and nurse them, not just chug them down. She should walk around indoors a few times in the morning and again in the afternoon. Go easy on full flights of stairs for tomorrow, too. She should probably stay out of classroom work for two days. Otherwise, tomorrow through Tuesday, she should limit TV watching to three hours, with no more than one hour at a time. Also limit reading. No more than a half hour at a time. No more than two hours a day. If she wears glasses to do any of those things, make sure she uses them. If the weather allows, on Monday and Tuesday she should take an hour-long walk each half day, but no playground or physical play with others—especially no up and down teeter-totters.”

The doctor scanned her papers, made a note on the second page, and then asked the three of them. “Can one of you bring Linda back here Tuesday afternoon around four-thirty for an appointment? I’d like to see her and do

an evaluation before Linda can go back to the classroom and resume regular activities starting again on Wednesday.”

“I will tell her mother all this and help her as she needs. I can give them a ride here on Tuesday. Her mother does not have a car,” explained Alex.

The doctor’s shoulders lowered perceptibly. She addressed all of them. “That’s good news. I was hoping I would get to meet Mrs. Lowry. I’d feel better going over all the medical information with her, rather than with Linda’s ‘next-to-kin,’” she smiled at them. “Hospital policy . . . you know.”

Danny appreciated her sense of humor and her way of letting them know she had talked to the head floor nurse before seeing them now. She went back to talking directly to Alexandria. “Alex, all these directions will be written out on Linda’s discharge papers you will receive tomorrow. Make sure her mother reads them, please. There are no medications being prescribed. I like to ask care givers to read the discharge papers each night and each morning for these first few days home, just to make certain nothing is overlooked, forgotten, or left undone.”

The doctor turned her attention slightly away from Alex, to favor Corredor. “Will you be spending the night here again this evening, Detective?”

“Yes, I would like to do that, please,” was Dominic’s reply.

“Would you like me to have anything else brought in for you?” she asked. “Will you be able to follow the same routine with the night staff as you were doing?”

“No, thank you. Everything was just fine. I’ll certainly be able to do again what we did last night. I’ll be on hand until Miss Alex comes tomorrow,” he assured the physician, who was familiar with their arrangements since Linda’s admission.

“Well, that’s all I have. Unless there are questions?” The doctor scanned their faces and folded her papers and placed them into Linda’s folder for rounds.

No one had any questions for her. She stood and wished them a good night and left.

Dominic was glad that Danny excused himself to use the rest room prior to driving home and before they headed back to see Linda to say their 'good nights.' The detective took the opportunity to ask Alex, "I wonder if I could impose on you for a favor tomorrow?" She said she would be more than happy to provide what he requested. They went back to see Linda.

All three were standing to say their 'good nights.' Alex went first, as she wanted to get on the road before it was too late.

Danny wished Linda a 'good night' and Dominic told her he was going to walk Danny to his car and be back in a few minutes. She waved to Hart and thanked him for bringing Corredor back to the hospital.

"How about a cold soda for the ride, or a water, Danny? asked the detective. There's a machine right down the hall by the room we were just in.

"Guess you got to know the lay of the land around here, Detective," said Hart. "A cold soda would spark the ride back home quite nicely."

The two RNs in the nurses' station saw them in profile at the end of the hall. Two men standing, facing each other, one with a can of soda in his left hand and the other with his left hand in his pocket.

"I hope you left me a forwarding address, Detective," said Hart. He wasn't expecting Dominic to say the words 'I'm leaving.' Using his debit card was all the indication the detective was going to give. That was his way and Hart accepted it, and him.

"On the guest bathroom sink," answered Corredor.

"Place is going to be lonely, again, Dominic. Are you sure about this?" We still could use some help, you know." Danny was fighting to control his voice.

NYPD's star of the lost-and-found told him, "You guys are wrapping this thing up nicely. From here on out it's going to have to be by the book. Howe and Hammersmith will hold you and Flynn to that. Having me

underfoot is just going to cause undue attention and give some hotshot lawyer countermeasures to sully the waters . . . whether it's putting LeClerc in jail or having Mellon disbarred, which your other three lady friends will no doubt attend to."

Danny again pled his case, but to no avail.

Dominic told his newfound friend, "One thing I learned riding the rails on that last case, Danny, was that it was different from working my old desk. Back in the precinct days, there was always another jacket on my desk to look into as soon as someone came home to their family. But for four years now I've come to understand that when the lost are found, it's time for me to get lost."

He cleared his throat. "And one more thing—in that rail time I was one of those who became lost. Now it's time to go home and, I hope to God, be found again."

One RN had left the station and gone to answer a room call. But the other saw the silhouette of two men down the hall in the now-dimmed nighttime lights of the muted hospital corridor. They moved nearer to each other. Their right hands moved slowly toward each other, almost as if a marionette puppeteer's hand eased them closer. And in their clasping hands their silhouettes solidified—and became one body and soul.

Linda had forced herself to stay awake until Dominic returned. He pulled the visitor's chair over to her bedside and sat down. Linda struggled to keep her eyes open. She was under her covers and her head was on her pillow. She really wanted to read him a few pages of a bedtime story from the *Arabian Nights* that Miss Alex brought her. But the doctor said she had to wait until she got home to read.

She asked Dominic a question, "Did they both leave?" He told her they had.

She dozed some and woke and spoke again. "You and Mr. Hart became friends, didn't you?" He told her they had.

Then she slept for almost five minutes. He moved in the chair, and it dragged on the tile floor enough to make her stir, and half-asleep she asked him, "You found both of us in time, when we each needed a friend, didn't you?" He told her they had.

She turned on her side and saw a new suitcase against the wall. She had not seen it before when they came in. She sat up. Her feet dangled out from under the sheets and were in front of his knees, where he remained sitting in the chair.

"Is that yours?" He told her it was.

"Are you who the doctor said was staying here tonight?" He told her it was.

"Tomorrow when I leave with Miss Alex, will it be time for you to go home to your daughters?" He told her it was.

Linda looked him in the eye, the one with the tear drop running onto his clean-shaven cheek. "I'm glad you are going to see them. And I am happy you were wrong."

The gentleman caller returned her gaze and asked about what he had been wrong.

She replied, "You told me that first day at the train that what you most wanted to have were the very things you couldn't hold." She reached and held his hand. "But tomorrow when you go home, you can."

She released his hand, and got under her covers again, put her head on her pillow, and wished him, "Good night."

Itzel Cocom heard again from Danny Hart, after he left Dominic at the soda machine and was in the lobby phone booth. He told her he was phoning from a hospital in New Jersey, without explaining precisely why. He just said he was there for a client. He said he had no further news about Myles and

asked if she did. Itzel told him, "There was a short news item on the evening broadcast about a Long Island cancer clinic shutting down suddenly and transferring patients to areas hospitals. It made me think of Myles, but no information about patients was given. It was about cancer though, not strokes, so I figured it was not about him."

Danny said, as empathetically as he could, "I'm afraid that Myles may become part of that story. So, watch for developments. Due to a set of strange events, he was receiving temporary care at that oncologist's facility." All he heard was a gasp and a soft, mumbled prayer on the other end of the line. "I expect I will hear much more by tomorrow morning from the local authorities there. I am going to listen to the news accounts tonight when I get home, but only with a grain of salt. I'd invite you to do the same. I will give you an update as soon as I can tomorrow."

It wasn't extraordinarily late for a Saturday evening, so she decided to make one more call after filling Bembe in on what Hart had to say.

She was not surprised to hear Lowry's boss was not at home. But she did not expect to hear he was at work and would take her call.

"Good evening, sir. I have some news for you that may be disturbing. I know we are planning for this week's quarter-ending report, so I thought you should know what I have just learned." She waited, to accept his polite evening greeting, and then he asked her to go ahead.

"I am afraid that I have an update on Mr. Lowry. He has not been in touch with us because he has suffered a stroke. I do not know how serious it is. But he is in a hospital out on Long Island. He was under the care of an oncologist, for reasons I do not fully understand. But that cancer clinic was featured on the news this evening. It suddenly had to close and transfer patients to other facilities. Apparently, Myles was one of them. I expect a full report in the morning. I will call you back if I may, even though it is Sunday."

Myles's boss replied. "You must certainly call me tomorrow when you know. But in light of the circumstances, may I ask you to hold the line a moment, please? And is your husband with you?" When she said he was, he invited her to have him pick up on the phone extension to join the call.

The Cocombs were extremely nervous at the possible implications of this request. In a few moments, Myles's boss came back on the line.

He greeted Bembe and then spoke somewhat formally. "When I approved Mr. Lowry's taking Fridays off, he left me an unopened letter. He asked me to leave the message undisturbed, unless it came to be that he was not going to return for a longer-than-expected period of time."

The Cocombs' heard the envelope being opened. "Let me scan this first, in case . . ." There was a silent space of time. And then he spoke, "I will read to you Myles's note:

To Whom it May Concern:

Dear Friends and colleagues,
In case I find my daughter has been abducted
and is out of this region, I will immediately pursue
whoever has taken her.
Itzel Bembe is more than capable to do my job.
Give it to her and to no one else!

Myles Lowry

P.S. And do not go cheap. Pay her what you are
paying me. It's only fair, first of all. And if that's
not a good enough reason for you~do it anyway~
because someone else will if you don't!

With a small pause, and a change from his 'reading' voice to his 'normal' phone conversation voice, he said, "I will see this is enacted by noon tomorrow, Ms. Cocom. Will you be prepared to give that presentation you have been working on . . . let's say . . . at two in the afternoon on Monday, please?"

With mixed feelings, and heeding Danny Hart's encouragement, Itzel assured her new boss that she certainly would be.

Something would happen the next day when she arrived at work, though she did not know it now, as she got ready to retire for the night.

At seven minutes to eight Sunday morning, she would walk over to the grandfather clock in the corner of what now would be her daily workspace. She would open the cabinet glass door and remove the post note that had been there for some days. She would read Myles's message.

With a gentle nudge, she would set the pendulum into motion. Moving the hands of the clock through its cycle, waiting each fifteen-minute sweep for it to chime, she would eventually move the hands to read the current time, three minutes to eight. She would be organizing a few papers three minutes later when Myles Lowry's clock would again signal the beginning of a new workday at Easton International Medical Supplies.

310

Rosalyn sat cross-legged on her Camden hotel bed after having a modest Saturday dinner promoted on the menu as homecooked meat loaf with mashed potatoes, green beans, and a garden salad. She chose a non-descript eatery that she hoped not to be discovered frequenting by anyone following her on the train back from the library. She was spending the evening with a bottle of red wine, reading, and taking notes on her lined pad.

The Philadelphia library had both a reference section and a circulation collection that Rosalyn found helpful and stimulating for the adult book club discussion and understanding of "Rumpelstiltskin." In particular, she cared very much for the insights and interpretations of Maria Tatar. After passing on to Rosalyn the phone message to get in touch with Administrator Beatriz Grey back at her school, the librarian had also been kind enough in the late afternoon Saturday to allow Rosalyn to borrow overnight Tatar's five-year-old book, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Rosalyn made herself a list of some highlighted facts to use with the book club. Specifically, she listed four talking points from the chapter about spinning tales in folklore and fairy tales:

- Each crisis for the heroine has a 'helper who transforms' into a villain.
- A new helper is a 'countervailing force' against the turncoat.
- The liberator eventually puts the heroine into a new risk.
- In almost every instance, either deceit gets the heroine in trouble, or deceit saves her.

Her plan was to use these to relate to things that happened to the women in the discussion group, so they could talk about their experiences together. But

the most devastating directly quoted sentence she copied out to be the center of her man-hating vision, to have the women at **HAPPYDALE** talk about and herald the most, was the one she found on the bottom of page 127:

“The entire cast of male protagonists in ‘Rumpelstiltskin’ can be seen as a set of mixed characters: guardians, protectors, and benefactors become each in turn the heroine’s adversaries.”

311

As much as Danny Hart did not want to alarm his lady friends from the late Ned Hegerman’s law firm on a Saturday night, he felt the news about Myles was too timely to hold back. He phoned each of them and was relieved to find Eleanor in her kitchen doing food preps for the coming week ahead, Karidja doing weekend laundry and changing her bed linens, and Gaby having an evening upstairs at home with her mother and her caretaker.

They each were receptive to his phone call news that Linda Lowry was going to leave the hospital in the morning. He briefed them about Myles, so they were not caught off guard by a more detailed televised nightly news at eleven o’clock, when he hoped to be asleep. He was grateful they all accepted his invitation to spend some time together around noon Sunday afternoon before the new week began. That would be a more suitable time to have more news from Hammersmith about Myles—and April Smith, Françoise Oulette, and Denison LeClerc. And it would be better to tell them about Dominic Corredor’s departure face-to-face.

Though it was the smallest, Karidja volunteered her place to meet. She said it was central for everyone’s travel. And she pointed out that she hadn’t hosted the group yet in her place. A second round of quick calls settled the venue and time.

To be continued at Part Two