



Custody

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Part Two

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Sunday

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The Lord's Day rose on both sides of the Hudson. Some would sing his name in hymned refrains. Other would take the name in vain.

It had been many months since Marie Aello was up and around so early on a Sunday morning. She dispensed with her morning showering, naked mirror-mirror-on-the-wall, and dressing routine, in favor of driving across to New Jersey to arrive before most of Rosalyn Lowry's apartment dwelling neighbors stirred.

She strode from her car unmolested by any traffic or pedestrians across to the ground level door. If anyone looked out their window over their sabbath eggs and toast and coffee, they would wonder what lucky neighbor was starting their day off with a delivery of long-stemmed roses in the oblong white cardboard box with the gold cord ribbon and two oversized red bows. She entered without complication. It was never locked. The interior door was, however.

She set the box on the floor and undid the top end flap. She had chosen the contents carefully. The four foot long, green painted crowbar had a flat, beveled offset edge at one end. She slid it between the door jamb and the simple lock set by the doorknob. Forsaking her domineering heels for this errand, and wearing white canvas tennis shoes, she leveraged her full natural height and leaned her hip in against the metal bar. The wood frame spread enough to allow the latch to slip out of the strike plate. The door popped open without damage to the wood or any significant noise.

She proceeded down the same hall where she had recently followed Mike Riley. The door to the basement was more stubborn, its latch bolt longer. The nails screeched as the trim separated from the jamb when it cracked and splintered noisily.

Aello was fully committed and ignored the disturbance. She went about her business. The elderly neighbor who heard the ruckus did not. She saw that nice Mister Riley heading out to walk his dog when she looked out her side window. She slid the sash upwards and called out, "A burglar is breaking into the basement." He reversed direction and told her to call 911.

Hurried from her original plan, Marie was pleased to find that the third door in her path had no impediment to her entry other than a slide bolt on the staircase side facing her. She let the flower box fall at the base of the stairs when she entered the basement.

Inverting the breaker bar in her two-handed grip, she hooked the curved end around the top course of the metal mesh of the storage cage and yanked down with all her might. She had again misjudged the strength of the enclosure. She thought it would rip straight down, defaced, to expose the envelope she could see inside the top box. But all she managed to do was pry the mesh out of a few construction staples along the framed wooden rail. It made such a mangled mess that it was now going to be harder to penetrate.

A shaft of sunlight flooded the basement from the back door opening. She froze and was somewhat hidden by the cages. Riley came forward, seeing the discarded white box at the bottom of the interior stairs. His dog, off leash, traced his perimeter track, running as fast as he saw Mike was moving.

Riley bent to reach for the box and Aello brought the length of the bar down across his back and spine. He dropped to one knee. He heard a police siren from outside on the street as he pivoted and looked up at Aello. His reflexes did not fail him; he got his right arm raised defensively and saw her manic face. He did not see the upswinging long metal weapon come across from below his elbow and crash into his lower jaw.

The next blow would have been fatal, crushing the back of his skull. But Aello never dealt it. She dropped the bar, and it glanced off his lower leg as he sprawled.

It was the shock of a savage dog bite on her right buttock that loosened her grip. The dog's speed and Aello's forward lean to strike Riley the third time combined to propel the woman and the dog in a heap. The dog recovered faster than the woman. He clamped his jaws around her wrist and

wrangled her back and forth, dragging her away from his master. She heard her bones break. And the clang of metal when her leg hit the bar.

The dog was not to be deterred, but Marie Aello had not gotten to where she was in life by being a pushover. She felt for the bar with her free hand, slapping the concrete floor and coming up empty, all the while resisting her strongest urge to punch the dog in his head. And then her fingers touched the cold steel and twined around it. His cry was piteous when the flat end pierced his eye and his jaws let her go.

On her typical sunrise weekend shift, Detective Howe was driving the unmarked vehicle nearest to the apartment when the 911 emergency was broadcast. She was first to arrive. The hyper-excited first floor neighbor took three crucial minutes on the front lawn to direct her to the basement.

With enough free arm leverage to swing it now, Aello round-housed the metal shaft and collapsed the dog's lung as it compressed between the floor and the weapon. There was one yelp only. Howe heard it upstairs as she followed the trail of broken doors.

Aello gritted through her wounds and bar-crutched herself to a standing position, missing one shoe and awash in blood shed by the three of them. Hobbling to the cage, she pried it open at the padlock when the screws of the hasp tore loose as all her weight pressed against it. She turned triumphantly with the hard fought for envelope in her hand.

Detective Howe was not new to crime scenes. The amount of blood on the floor and bodies before her was startling. But more shocking was that the crime scene was still engaged.

She stared at Aello, standing battered and bloodied yet victorious for the moment. She held a brown envelope uplifted in one hand and dangled a monstrous crowbar in the other. Howe was stunned by the woman's sardonic grimace.

And then all hell broke loose, or at least the hound of hell did. Aello was gloating at the detective with so much satisfaction that she did not see Riley's dog lunging at her throat. She gagged and blood erupted from her mouth and nose. She could not scream her terror or plea for help. She

dropped the letter and with two hands lanced the dog's belly with the flat end of the bar. They both collapsed to the floor.

The metal bar fell useless, but the dying jaws would not release. Aello's bare heel pounded the floor as her leg spasmed up and down. The film over the dog's eyes told his story. But it was not over.

There was little that Howe could do for Riley until it was over. He still lay, face down on the floor. Now Aello's fists were banging the floor, too. The dog's eyes were rolling upwards, showing their whites; but still he clamped down, released, took a breath, and snapped shut again. In that brief respite, Aello gulped for air.

Howe had seldom discharged her firearm in what police jargon called 'anger.' She drew her sidearm and knelt next to the battle-locked bodies. She placed a gentle hand on the dog's neck. He did not react or respond. She extended her hand flat and covered his eyes. Placing the barrel so the trajectory of the projectile would pass through soft tissue and not toward Aello, the detective fired once. And even though the shot was fatal, it was not fired in anger.

Both bodies lapsed of their tension. Howe engaged the safety and holstered her service weapon and fastened the strap shut against any aggression by Aello.

She loosened the dog's jaws before rigor could begin and carefully rested his head on the floor. She examined Aello's neck. There was far less blood than she had imagined. The external skin was abraded and punctured lightly. But it seemed Mike Riley had not trained a killer. The dog had pressured her throat closed but not ripped nor torn out her jugular.

Through the backyard doors in front of her, the paramedics were advancing from the ambulances she had heard arriving. Her colleagues from the station house were approaching down the interior staircase behind her.

Howe took the blanket off one of the gurneys, unfolded it, and spread it gingerly over the dog's corpse. She heard the commotion as Riley snapped to from the smelling salts and the insertion of an IV in his arm.

His voice boomed at the detective, "Howe. What the fuck! Let me see my dog. Dammit."

She had never heard him speak in such a way. She deep-knee squatted next to the gurney. "I promise you, Mike. You don't want to see him . . . like this . . . not for the last time." She held his hand. "Mike, I'll take good care of him for you. Let's get you some medical attention. He didn't give his life protecting you so you could let it slip away. You need help right now, Mike. You're hurt."

He let himself fall back flat on the gurney. He was the first out the door and on the way to the emergency ward. As they rolled him out of the basement, Danny Hart side-stepped to get out of the way. He was rocked to see Riley being rushed away. His face and head looked a mess.

Hart saw Detective Howe and forced his way through the gathering crowd of cops and medics. The air in the basement smelled very unlike it did when he was here before. The slight damp odor of a closed space was gone. The unmistakable sting of gunfire tinged his nostrils and his tongue and back of his throat tasted the coppery tang of bloodshed. Layering it all was the combination of exertion and diversion, human scent of sweat and deodorant and perfume. The morning's coffee and fried eggs mixed with boot black from newly polished police shoes and recently applied antibiotics and torn bandage wrappings christened the scene as one of struggle and hoped for redemption. Hart's own voice broke the spell cast over his imagination by what he was immersed within. "Your desk sergeant called me like you ordered. I got here as fast as I could. What the hell happened?"

"Nothing good, Hart. Your agitator returned armed with a response and ill intent. She did a job on Riley and killed his dog. All over that envelope she was after," Howe exclaimed.

"Fuck you, you lying cop! You shot that dog. I didn't kill nothing or no one." Aello screamed at her after she overheard Howe. The EMTs cinched Aello down extra tight onto the stretcher and disoriented her by suddenly elevating her feet up only. It was a hard-learned, self-taught defensive tactic employed when transporting combative or uncooperative wounded gang members away from drive-by shootings.

"Get her out of here, now!" demanded the detective.

She commanded three of her forensic officers who had gathered around for her orders. "Get me an evidence bag . . . I want pictures of that envelope on the floor right where it is . . . same as that breaker bar . . . and I need snaps of that wrecked cage . . . and every break-and-enter door. Any place there's scrapes of green paint . . . pics and samples for lab matches. Full blood pools and splatters . . . Markers where the injured were on the floor. And the dog, covered for location . . . and then exposed for wounds . . . from the bar strikes, not only my gunshot. And then do your customary full scene investigation, please. Oh, and get techs down to the emergency rooms and get photos of their wounds before the docs re-bandage these field dressings up more."

Lastly, she summoned another officer over. He had been waiting instructions in the corner, out of the way. "You take that dog with kid gloves to our kennel center, you hear me? I want him treated like he was one of our K-9s. Full post-mortem . . . with pictures for heroism and for prosecution of his assailant. No excuses. Understand?" He assured her he did.

As he bent to attend to the dog, Hart saw the K-9 insignia on his uniform.

Detective Howe looked at Danny and then around the basement. "Where's your roomie? We could use his eyes."

"He's with the kid. She's getting out of the hospital this morning." Howe did not react. Then Hart said, "And sorry to say . . ." Howe reacted to that, looking at Hart sharply. ". . . after that, he's heading home. He's done."

"Yeah. I figured that after lunch yesterday." She shook her head side to side. "It looked like it, to me. Sounded like it, too." She looked around the basement. "I've seen it before. Just not on him."

Danny Hart had nothing to say in return. He hadn't seen it before. And this first time was crushing him.

Howe saw him wearing the sadness. She patted him on the shoulder, which she had to reach up to do. "Danny, don't worry for him. If he's going home that's the best." She straightened out her vest. "And his captain will be very happy to hear it."

Hart asked, "Why?"

"Because . . . even though I wasn't allowed to tell him . . . I can tell you now . . . but I'll deny I did . . . his captain is his old partner."

Hart was dumbstruck.

Howe closed off the conversation. "He's been watching over that family for years. That's what true partners do. I'm sure he'll be thrilled for those two young girls and their mother."

Hart exhaled. "Girls and mothers." He looked around the shambles of the storage area. All he could say to her was, "This case. This case."

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Hospital food always comes late on departure day, yet still seems to taste better than on any other morning. Linda Lowry was usually not a fan of oatmeal. But with cinnamon and raisins on top and with fruit salad piled high next to it in its own bowl, how could it miss? And the breakfast was the only thing that was not on time.

The floor nurse went over all Linda's charts. She checked her vitals. She marked everything off as still satisfactory with her young patient. She removed the IV and its port. All the papers from the clip board on the foot of the bed were reviewed, toggled to fit together neatly, and placed in her patient folder.

Alexandria was a half hour early and now had the nurse read to her all the directions on Linda's discharge papers. Dominic Corredor had gone through the closet, the bureau, and the bedside table drawers for the third time. Linda was dressed in her favorite pants and shirt she had described to Alex the night before. They had fit well into the little overnight satchel Alex carried in from **HAPPYDALE** that morning. The pink carry-all was also good to bring back to school the clothes Linda had worn on her caboose exploit.

Linda said and waved her 'goodbyes' to the staff as she was wheeled down to the exit doors and the discharge driveway arc. Alex and Dom placed her as directed in the rear right passenger seat and buckled her in. The detective sat shotgun and Alex drove them away and toward the train station, as requested the night before.

Alex got them to the station with eight minutes to spare for Dominic to catch his train into Manhattan, where he'd switch to the LIRR for his final train ride home of his epic fifty-month search-and-rescue saga.

Alex stayed back several steps from the rural platform. Dominic and Linda were engaged in a conversation that was not for her ears, as they all tacitly understood.

"I will always remember you. Every time I look on my bedroom shelf and see my daddy's lighter. Especially when I am sitting on the floor and watching my train go around the track." She thought she might cry. But she didn't, yet.

"You are a very special person, Miss Linda. I can't wait to tell my girls all about you." Dominic was not sure he could hold off his tears until watching her through the moving window he would sit next to when he boarded.

"Will I ever get to meet them? Your daughters?" she asked him. "I'd like to. But don't promise me, though."

"Why not?" he asked. "Promise, I mean?"

"It's hard enough to keep a promise when you're on your own. Like I can do with Clementine and some of the girls at my school," she told him. "But once you have a whole family to take care of too, it's hard to know what will happen. Like I found out with my dad." Her smile was forced, and her eyes were moist.

"Okay. No promises," he agreed. "But we can tell each other we hope to have you and my daughters meet someday, can't we, Linda?" And the train whistle sounded from nearby.

“Yes,” she said. And she hugged him, burying her head in the middle of his chest.

Inching to the platform, the train’s warning clang-clang-clang engulfed the air around the two of them. Alex stepped nearer to make sure Linda stayed on her side of the yellow warning line along the edge of the platform. Dominic reached with his right arm around Linda’s shoulders, still pressed to his midriff. He kept his left arm embrace around his tea party hostess’ upper back. He and Alex shook hands. She placed her hand on Linda’s outer biceps to signal it was time to finish saying goodbye. The girl let go of her friend so he could pick up his suitcase to board the train.

“Good-bye, little one,” he said, “It has been my indescribable pleasure to have made your acquaintance.” Dominic saw that she extended her hand, with the back of it face up. He took her hand in his and kissed the back of it.

He found a window very near where they stood on the platform. The carriage began to roll away very slowly. Linda did not run, but she took a few steps, with Alex in tow, to pace his leaving. The last of her that Dominic saw tearfully was Linda blowing him a kiss, as she stood next to Alex, whose arm draped over one of her little, trembling shoulders.

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Rosalyn inserted the copy of Tatar’s book into the depository box outside the library door, not ready to open for a couple of hours still on a Sunday morning. She reclaimed the rental car with her parking lot ticket stub and paid the attendant, who raised the security lift gate in return to permit her to exit onto the street.

She drove to the rental lot by the train station and turned the car back in. With so little travel, there were no extra charges or gas to top off. She sat in the station after checking no one was following her and that her train back to New Jersey was still on schedule.

She had used the phone in the hotel before checking out to call the security office at **HAPPYDALE** and arranged for a school van to pick her up at the railroad station. There was no conflict, so she was spared the need for

a taxi ride this trip. She then returned the call to Beatriz Grey, as requested. As Rosalyn had expected, and hoped, it was too early for the administrator to answer. So, she left a message and told Beatriz she had arranged for a school van and the estimated time she would be at the station.

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Danny stopped at his place for a few minutes before heading over to see Howe, as she had requested. He picked up the letter that Dom had left him. He knew he was not in a frame of mind to read it. He was too worried about Mike Riley and heartbroken about his dog. He folded the envelope and put it in his pocket to read it later in the day.

There was a separate item, he was happy to have seen at the moment. Dominic could never have known how timely the short note paperclipped to two photos would be. They were the pictures from Myles's office—the head shot of Myles and the one of the Cocoms in Mexico. His note said: "Take these with you when you go to see Rosalyn. They will establish credibility faster than anything else. And bring Itzel's phone number."

He sat for a few minutes with a cool glass of water to settle himself. Then he made a phone call.

"Karidja, it's Danny Hart," he said when she picked up the phone.

"Hello, Danny. And a good morning to you," she replied.

"I only wish it was, Karidja," he told her quietly.

"Danny? What's happened?" she asked in a measured tone. She said nothing about their noontime arrangements, but she could tell there was a chance they would not occur.

"Are you sitting down?" he inquired.

"I am now," she said after a moment's delay. She decided not to voice the question in the front of her mind, asking about Myles.

“Something horrendous has taken place this morning, just a while ago. Marie Aello broke into the apartment basement in Jersey to burgle the Lowry’s storage cage. She appears to have been after an envelope with Rosalyn’s name written on the outside. I suspect I know what it is, but Detective Howe has it right now as evidence,” he explained.

“Evidence of what, Danny?” she asked fearfully.

“A brutal attack. She assaulted Mike Riley with the oversized crowbar she used to break in. He was taken to the hospital. I don’t know his condition. But he did not look good, and he was not conscious when they wheeled him out. As soon as I have finished talking to you, I will be meeting Howe and going to the hospital.” He was about to continue, but she inadvertently interrupted him.

“Who’s watching his dog?” she asked somewhat reflexively.

“That’s more of the bad news, Karidja. The dog protected Riley by attacking Aello. She did lots of damage with the bar, but he fought back valiantly. She’s also in the hospital. But they were grappling in a death match and Howe had to put an end to it. The dog was almost dead and Aello looked like he was killing her. She euthanized the dog with her duty weapon. It’s real gruesome, a tragedy,” he told her.

“Are you and Dominic okay?” she asked. “Eleanor and Gaby are going to want to know.”

“Yes, I got there just as it was over. The Detective was out taking care of Linda, getting her back to **HAPPYDALE** before her mother gets back from Philadelphia,” he assured her. He felt badly about the half-truth, but he couldn’t bring himself to compound what he already had to report of the morning’s disastrous beginning.

“Karidja, I’m not going to get to your place by noon. But I really need to see you all today. May I impose upon you to call the others and tell them this news. And would you be willing to see if you all could gather at seven tonight? If so, please leave a message on my phone machine and I will call it to see if it will work for everyone. I hate asking you, but I need to get over to Howe and Riley quickly. I’ll give you updates as the day moves along.” He felt badly, but knew she would not require any apologies.

"You go, Danny. I'll do everything you said," she promised.

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Hammersmith's first stop on Sunday morning was at the safe house. She found April Smith up, dressed, and ready to do whatever was required. April told Maura she was happy she had gotten her the new copy of the Harry Bosch novel. It had proven to be a good distraction. Even if it did remind her about Myles's obsession with a bank robbery.

It was a good opening for Maura, which she appreciated because she was in a hurry to question Françoise Oulette, who Frances was serving papers to come to the station for questioning. "April, I have a question. It's an important question."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Do you have any feelings about . . . or do you have specific knowledge about . . . or has anything ever been said or hinted at to you . . . that might make you believe or suspect that . . . Denison LeClerc may have been involved in the bank robbery . . . or . . . without being involved . . . subsequently somehow came into possession of the bearer bonds from that heist that Myles was researching in the library?"

"What?" As her British librarian pen pal would say, April was gobsmacked.

"I need you to think some, April. Carefully. Did LeClerc ever talk to you about money or running the clinic at a financial loss?" Maura did not explain why she was asking.

There was a spark of recognition visible in the two times that April blinked her eyes. "Wait." She started pacing in the living room. She flipped the paperback onto the couch where she had been sitting, reading.

"What? April?" What are you recalling?" drilled Hammersmith.

“Remember I told you we had an argument about taking Myles to the clinic or to a hospital?” April asked. The county cop in the kitchen was quietly taking this all in.

“Yes, I do. How does this fit in?” pressed Maura.

“He said there were people who wanted to see his clinic fail. He called them greedy hospitals and insurance companies. He said once the new wing was finished, the clinic would finally be established in the region. He’d be able to continue helping people like my mother and me for years to come. But he stopped the renovation. He said that was so he could care for Myles where people wouldn’t take him away, and none of the other patients would be disturbed. But I felt there was more to it. I just didn’t know what,” she ran out of thoughts and words.

Maura said, “I called that asbestos company. They said LeClerc told them he did not have the money to pay them, but he would in a month.” Hammersmith thought for a bit and then assured April, “If you can think about this during the day, anything else that comes back to you, please write it down so we can go over it when I get back.”

“Where are you going?” April asked.

“I’m going back to the station. Frances and I are going to talk to Dr. Oulette about all of this. After we do, I am certain Frances will have some more questions for you. So please relax and take it easy for a few hours, April.” She turned her attention to the county officer.

“I’m sorry, I forgot to ask . . . are you the day watch or have you been here all night?” Maura said.

“I’m fresh meat. I just came on at eight. I’ll be here until four,” the policewoman replied. “Is there anything I should be especially aware to watch for, or do, ma’am?”

The first thing Maura did was come up close and ask to see her badge and photo identification. Satisfied and making a note of both in her notepad, Hammersmith told her. “Mostly, keep anyone who is not from our station, and who has not called to be identified beforehand, out of this house.

No matter how nice it is outside, you both need to stay inside. Your department will call to arrange food deliveries. Don't take any food that was not what you ordered, or is not brought by law enforcement that lets itself in through the garage. No doorbells or door knocks are to be answered."

One last thing came to mind as she made for the door to the garage. "And when you answer the house phone, do not identify yourself. You only say 'yes,' and let the callers bear the burden of proving who they are." And with that she left.

First thing in her car when she was in the garage, Maura radioed in and verified with county that the house escort was legit. After an unexplained delay, the county policewoman and April heard the garage door open, and the car roll out, and then the garage door go down again. Then the car left, only after the garage door was shut. That was the protocol to make sure the driver always had eyes on the door to make certain no one on foot snuck into the garage during the car's exit and departure.

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Danny greeted Howe's desk sergeant, who had seen him coming on his street surveillance screen. "Mr. Hart? Detective Howe would like you to go up those stairs, rather than wait for her in the examination room. It is being used currently. Howe was standing on the top step as he approached.

"Please come over this way, Danny," she asked. Howe led him into an examination room that was a mirror image of the one downstairs. It was near the front of the floor and did not require them to walk in and among the desks that others in the precinct occupied, or would if they were not on duty outside the station, or off duty.

"Boss, this is Danny Hart," introduced Detective Howe. "Danny, my boss wants to ask you some questions about this morning. Would that be okay with you?"

"Should it be okay with me?" asked Hart.

"It would help us all, if you'd be willing to do so." Howe explained.

Danny nodded. "Then please sit and I'll be back when you both are done," Howe told them.

It took Detective Howe's superior forty-five minutes to interrogate Hart. The police might have considered this a discussion or conversation, but to Hart it was very close to a 'do you want a lawyer present' situation. Not because he needed one, but for Howe's protection. Clearly, he was being grilled to verify what the detective claimed had taken place—even if his report was all after the fact observation—and to validate that her verbal reconstruction to her superior was consistent with what Hart, as a trained investigator, reported for his own part.

When they were all done, and the captain had left, Hart and Howe joined one another again on their own, in the same room. Danny asked if he could use the phone. He called his number to listen for messages.

Karidja confirmed that the three women from Hegerman's practice were good for a seven o'clock evening gathering at Karidja's.

Alexandria had left a pair of messages. The first was their agreed upon affirmation that she and Linda had safely arrived at HAPPYDALE. A while later she called again and passed on the information that she had received from Beatriz Grey—that Rosalyn was on the expected train and had asked for a van pick-up at the train station.

Lastly, Angie Flynn had called as she had said she would. She was ready to go with Danny to HAPPYDALE to see what they could find out by talking to Rosalyn, if that was still in play.

Danny filled in the gaps for the parts of the messages Howe might not have intuited after hearing the messages through the speaker device on the examination room table.

For her part, Detective Howe then gave Danny Hart medical updates on Mike Riley and Marie Aello. She had taken care of those phone calls—to hospitals and doctors and surgeons—during Danny's forty-five-minute interrogation.

Riley was still in surgery. And he probably would be for hours. He had a broken shoulder. Three ribs were fractured on the dorsal side. His jaw

would need wiring and several teeth would require an oral surgeon's assessment, once his more serious head wounds were evaluated and treated. He may have had suffered a skull fracture, but that was not certain yet. More imaging was needed.

Marie Aello was far better off. The bite and punctures on her buttocks and upper leg were disinfected and were getting attention from a cosmetic plastic surgeon, whose services she demanded very loudly. The cracking she heard in her arm were indeed bones that were x-rayed and set, then placed in a cast she would wear for several weeks. To the naked eye, her neck was somewhat miraculously only superficially traumatized. There was deep tissue damage from compression and her trachea was severely contused internally and externally. It would be quite some time before she was pleased to adore her nakedness in her morning mirror. But had Mike Riley been a different type of dog owner, she would be on a slab with a toe tag in that hospital rather than in the surgical theater with indelible black ink lines tracing where skin was to be sculpted and tucked.

Of course, Aello had a female corrections officer posted outside the surgical suite and a state trooper assigned to the recovery suite and her designated private room. Howe's captain was awaiting word from criminal court to come and pick up her arrest warrant and her subpoena to appear that evening in her room for arraignment on multiple felony charges.

Detective Howe was assigned to desk duty pending a review of her firing her weapon at the scene of an ongoing felony.

Danny Hart could do nothing for Riley for the time being. Howe said she would look in on Riley when he was out of surgery. She'd be off duty by then and she felt she owed it to him, on account of his dog. He was in a different hospital than Aello, so she would not be in conflict of her status, awaiting determination of the shooting.

So, Hart excused himself to find a phone that did not belong to the police department to call Angie Flynn. The desk sergeant directed him to a nearby tavern that opened at eleven on Sunday mornings. It was within walking distance. The diners were too far away and required driving, which Hart did not want to do, as that would take him further away from where he expected to meet Flynn.

Dr. Françoise Oulette and Officer Frances arrived at the police station about ten minutes after Maura Hammersmith did. Only partially following their captain's directions, the policewomen had decided that Frances would take the lead, but that both women would participate in the interview. One of the first decisions they made was the setting. They made sure the space they utilized did not resemble an interrogation room. They chose a spacious second floor conference room, and eschewed the oversized table and chairs in favor of a more relaxed seating ensemble of an armchair and two settees around a lower coffee table. Maura took up her seat in the armchair while the others were still downstairs. The chair was set in the corner of the arranged suite. That left Frances and the doctor a roomier settee apiece, both of which were well within reach of the table and with space to set jackets or pocketbooks comfortably off to the side, not in their laps or on the floor. Lighting was sufficient from some recessed ceiling incandescent floods and the bay window overlooking and framing the space at the end of the room. They were somewhat removed from the traffic pattern from the door to the coffee bar and its under-the-counter fridge. Additionally, their captain had made certain no one was to interrupt by entering the room during the interview.

Frances began, "Doctor, this is my colleague, Maura Hammersmith. She was the officer who initially found Mr. Lowry's abandoned car and she has been working the case, largely undertaken at her behest and persistence. Maura, may I introduce Doctor Françoise Oulette, whom you have heard about from April Smith."

Each of the policewomen watched for signs of recognition or alarm at the mention of April's name. There were none visibly apparent. Frances went on. "Maura has spent considerable time with Miss Smith and has persuaded our captain to extend to her the status of 'material witness.' This is for two reasons. We are uncertain if the relationship she has had with Dr. LeClerc over the years makes her vulnerable to coercion as this case goes forward. As a material witness, we can provide her with safe refuge at an undisclosed location, for her protection and well-being. Secondly, she has been present at almost every critical event in Dr. LeClerc's interest and interaction with Myles Lowry. As a material witness, she is shielded in some regards from the news organizations taking an interest in the case and more importantly, from

any of LeClerc's legal representatives, before or during any potential litigation. As well, there is some degree of immunity that comes along with being material witness, which can be jeopardized if it becomes evident that Miss Smith willfully participated in or committed any felonious acts."

Realizing this was a considerable amount of information to take in, by prior agreement, they switched over to Maura speaking next. "What we are hoping you can help us with, if you so wish, Doctor Oulette, is to corroborate some of the information April has provided. This is particularly true in the case of medical technicalities that April may not fully understand herself, but that she saw or assisted with."

Maura changed her tone of voice to be more assuring, and shifted her body language to face Françoise more directly. "Unlike with April, we are not questioning you nor addressing you as a material witness or as a person of interest involved in Mr. Lowry's being surreptitiously surveilled second-hand by Dr. LeClerc, being injured in a car crash with Dr. LeClerc, being cared for at the oncology clinic rather than a hospital after an unreported motor vehicle accident, and the eventual stroke we expect will be shown to have been caused by that crash."

And then to be more clear, Hammersmith began to finish up. "All of the District Attorney's attention and our department's activities are focused on Denison LeClerc, by that name or any other real or assumed name he may have used over his lifetime. No other person, at this time, is under scrutiny. If any others are to be added, we have been advised it would only be persons who motivated the doctor's choices or activities, or who abetted him in their being carried out for their own illegal personal gain, financial or otherwise. Lastly, there are absolutely no professional medical practice considerations in our case. Dr. LeClerc will have other authorities and certification boards in the state to address in those regards."

After a pause, she offered, "We are not considering you fitting into any of those categories of interest I just mentioned, Doctor Oulette. If you feel you do, and without specifying which that or those might be, we do not want to have you stay with us for a conversation. You can choose to excuse yourself with no explanation, without prejudice or consequence. And that includes if this process simply makes you uncomfortable and one in which you do not wish to participate, even if you do not consider yourself referred to in those profiles I just outlined."

“Okay, Officer Hammersmith,” said Frances, “I know our captain said you had to say all those things before we started to interview Dr. Françoise, but that was a lot more formal than I thought it was going to be.” She turned to the doctor. “At the risk of seeming to be the stereotypical ‘bad cop’ ‘good cop’ routine, may I apologize, if need be, for all that necessary information.”

Sensing it was expected of her to speak or get up and leave, Françoise Oulette chose the former. “Your code of forthrightness comes very close to the written and oral disclaimers and conditions I often must present to a person coming for psychiatric services. Quite the burden we must fulfill for the sake of such considerations and the law, wouldn’t you say?”

Frances was up to the challenge, however politely stated. “I find our position often to be adversarial and therefore highly suspect. Is it the same for your profession, doctor?”

“I have a grandfather back in Ault, France. My mother’s father. We were quite close when I lived and went to university on the Continent. When I was a little girl, he treated me in a peculiar way. He spoke to me as an equal, never as an inferior; not as an adult actually, but as a child who deserved respect. When my mother would scold him for doing so, and my father would ask him why he spoke to me as if he were a child, he would just smile and shake his head. Once, when angry, my parents made him explain, right in front of me. I was only ten years old.”

She thought back a moment before she recounted her grandfather’s words. “He told them anyone who had seen the gestapo ask children innocent questions to trick them into betraying their parent-sympathizers and their semite neighbors, could never be anything less than honest with a child again in their life, without being overwhelmed by a deep pain and heartache.”

She looked at them both. “Perhaps many of the persons who feel put upon by you police respond with anger and outrage, even if they are too oppressed to express it publicly. But probably many of those who feel put upon by we psychiatrists are too ashamed to have sought our help in the first place, and so they turn that hate inward to fester into even deeper disorders. Either way it’s not good for anyone involved.”

Oulette adjusted her mid-calf skirt and crossed her high boots at the ankles, “I think my grandfather had it right.” She stretched her long legs out

straighter in front of her, next to the coffee table which had no refreshments upon it. "So, what would you ladies like to talk about?"

319

The phone rang through three times before Angie picked it up. "Flynn," was all she said.

"Danny here," doubling her word count.

"You don't sound so good. What's up?" she quizzed him. She did not bother him about how long it took him to return her message on his machine.

"Bad time in Dodge, Angie. Aello turned Riley's basement into the OK Corral. He's in surgery big time, long time. And his dog's dead. Howe had to shoot him. Aello beat him near to death and he had her by the throat. The place is a bloody mess." He was amazed at how he didn't even have to hear her speak to begin talking like she did. She found it gratifying and endearing.

"Should I go over there? Can I do anything?" she volunteered.

"No, it's all yellow taped and still being processed probably," he said. "Better for us to stay away."

"What about our wandering mama? She still humming Philadelphia Freedom aboard Amtrak?" Flynn wanted to know as she checked the time on her kitchen clock.

"I heard from Linda's Miss Alex. Mrs. Lowry's on time and has arranged for a station pick up on the commuter line by the school's van," he reported.

Flynn said, "Now there's an idea. Lots can take place on a twenty-minute, or so, van ride, Danny. What logistics do you make out?"

"We could make the station from here in one car. But that's it. We'd have to go back to get it after we were done with her. Not enough time left to

triangulate, with two vehicles to the school and one back over to the train.” Hart sketched it out.

“Devil’s in the details. We can always figure that out later,” Angie affirmed. “Question is, do we still want to do this? Do we have enough to confront her, yet? ‘Cause if we don’t, she’s going to do a runner again,” was Flynn’s best assessment.

“I can put it in front of you while I drive. We can decide if we ride the van or let it go without us to **HAPPYDALE**, with Rosalyn being none the wiser. And we’ll wait to go another day. But I’d like to hear you out on it for today,” he affirmed.

Angie was on board. “You know that park-and-ride we scoped out last time? It’s on the way. How about if we meet there? Ten minutes?” she proposed.

“I’ll be there in eight,” was Danny’s reply.

320

A phone rang. A voice picked up, “Yes?”

“This is LeClerc.”

“He’s not taking your calls, doc.”

“What do you mean? You said I still had time.”

“That was before your place made the news, doc.” And then the phone went dead.

321

The first question that Officer Frances posed to Dr. Oulette was this: “Do you think that we can trust April Smith and what she tells us?”

Françoise thought a moment and wanted to make sure the policewomen did not think she was being cute or evasive. “That may turn out to be two questions, but here’s what I think . . . I had a very short period of time to decide if I thought April was reliable to look after Myles Lowry, at least to the extent of following simple directions about his care. You see, she was with him longer and more than any medical professional. I decided she was. At first, I wasn’t truly sure if that was because I needed her to be, or because in fact she was reliable. But she proved to be remarkably able and intuitively keen to provide Myles with what he needed, even in some very difficult and extreme situations. Patient confidentiality between Myles and myself prevents me from giving you explicit examples, but she certainly proved herself trustworthy to me.”

She switched her tone and went on, “However, you also asked me about trusting what she tells you. That I am not completely sure about.” She noticed Hammersmith’s skeptical look. But not so for Frances. “I am categorically telling you I do not think she is a liar, nor that she is delusional or anything like that.” She paused for that to sink in.

“But depending on what you ask her and how you ask her, you may have to parse the truth out of her answer. For example, I once told her that patients with brain injuries like Mr. Lowry’s may be prone to hallucinations. I foolishly thought that was all I had to say. But as she witnessed me caring for Myles, she asked me to clarify if something he had just done and said was a hallucination or not.” The doctor felt she wasn’t getting through to the policewomen.

“What I am trying to describe is this . . . if I had not clarified what a hallucinating patient looked or acted like, and came back the next morning and asked if Myles had hallucinated during the night, she might have said yes or no, doing her best to imagine what he would look like or say in that condition. So if she, let’s say ‘misdiagnosed’ something that occurred, she may have told me ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and been telling the truth as much as she knew it to be. But medically or physiologically that might not have been correct. I would therefore advise that if you have some similar situations or it involves technicalities or specialized knowledge you are asking her about, you would do well to not repeat my learning curve—and make sure she is able to answer the questions you are asking, in the way that you are asking them.” She counted off four seconds in her head, her typical practice when giving a patient time to consider what she had said before going on to the

next thing. “Do you see what I am trying to tell you with my answer about trusting her and trusting what she says might be two different experiences, or answers.”

It was Hammersmith who said, “I hope we can ask better questions with you now, or we may be here long enough to have to order in some dinner.”

As she glanced over at the coffee bar, Françoise said, “A coffee would do quite nicely now that you mention it. And a glass of water, please.”

Maura stood up, embarrassed that their interrogation tactic didn’t translate over to this conversational style as well as they had thought it might. She saw to the drinks while Frances continued with the questions. The doctor confirmed she preferred her coffee black when asked.

“From your experience, how would you say that April performs under pressure? Do you think she is easily intimidated?”

“I witnessed a remarkable amount of creative problem-solving under very trying conditions. On one occasion she put herself at a very personal and intimate risk in my presence, for the sake of making certain that Myles received the correct care he needed. If it had not been for her doing what she did, taking the chance that she risked, he may not be alive today.” Oulette smiled as she remembered how beautiful April was, as she stood to expose herself to prove Myles was not hallucinating at a crucial point in the doctor’s assessment of his condition. “I do not recall seeing any attempts at intimidation, so I can’t answer that part of your question.”

Frances moved off Myles and went over to LeClerc. “Do you think April would favor Myles or LeClerc if she had to choose loyalty to one over the other?”

“I’m speculating somewhat because I only met her this past month, and she has a longer and more complex relationship with Denison than with Myles. But I’d say when I first came on to this case, she was acting on behalf of Denison’s interests, if even under some duress and confusion. But as it became clear to April, and to me for that matter, that Denison had given up and abandoned Myles and relinquished his care without regret, April grew more protective, responsive, and, to use your word, ‘loyal,’ to Myles.”

Placing the coffee and water on the table in front of the physician, Maura inserted herself into the flow of the conversation. “Why do you think LeClerc did that to Myles?” She stayed with it, “I don’t mean to ask you for an idle speculation. I’d hope you could elaborate if possible. It’s a pretty big deal to us, even though we are not reviewing medical practice liability or malpractice” . . . and she added as far more than an afterthought . . . “for him or anyone else. Our interests lie elsewhere around the same question.”

Françoise decided on taking the water first, in case the coffee was hotter than she dared right away. She noticed neither of the women took a drink for themselves. She recognized the technique from psychological studies, cutely referred to as ‘parch and flood,’ that is, to make subjects uncomfortable first from thirst and then from the need to void. “I did not speak to April about this directly, though we had some tacit ‘givens’ you might call them, regarding what was being left for us to figure out on our own, without Denison’s help or intervention. He neither facilitated nor obstructed what we chose to do for Myles, other than the one major consideration in his control only, which was why he wasn’t bringing Mr. Lowry to a hospital, right away, out of hand.” She paused, “And certainly, when it came to Myles going out into the community with April, he did have to give his approval to our recommendations.”

Maura was jumping out of her skin about these excursions. Frances was very happy she held herself in. This was not the time to break Oulette’s narrative. It would have been a moment to make an audio recording, but that would be highly illegal and not admissible in court anyway. So old fashioned police work was in order—listen and make notes and be careful to remember with precision, and then debrief one another afterwards, as their captain had said. That’s why they chose to have two of them with Oulette in response to the captain’s telling them to pick which one was going to interview her.

The physician continued, speaking now in equal parts as a psychiatrist and a psychologist to answer this question. “I think April saw a nice man being mistreated and wanted to do what she could to help. She mentioned once to me that he could have taken advantage of her in more than one way, more than one time, and didn’t. He was always polite to her in the library. He never took advantage of her generosity. She came in on a day off to help him. Who does that? Was she helping the doctor then? Probably, yes. And remember, that was before the crash.” She paused to switch images, real and psychological. “And the day prior she wound up spending the night in his

hotel room. That had nothing to do with the doctor, even if it might have started out that way at the beginning of the evening. Yet by the next morning she came away unscathed—morally, physically, and spiritually. Ladies, we know not to underestimate such a thing. And the more that Denison LeClerc withdrew, the more she stepped in. And since you've asked, I think he saw that and let it happen. It seemed to be working into some larger plan he seemed to be shaping, without disclosing to us."

Then a harder edge of Françoise Oulette began to emerge. "But here's a point of fact. He knew he was doing something wrong." She shifted on the settee and sipped the coffee. The temperature was suitably hot. "April told me he was paying her more than she was scraping by with at her two jobs. And he had her fabricate a story about being out of town. He paid for new clothes for her to keep her from going back home and being seen by her neighbors. He said it was because he needed someone he could trust to stay on hand with Myles in case he needed something. He made up an excuse that the cancer treatment professionals in his clinic were too essential to put into Myles's room. He never hinted at hiring shift nurses as temps. And he vetted his most loyal employees only to enter that solarium he physically assembled almost single handedly with April's help."

She exhaled. "And worst of all. He was sending her away into exile after that month of working with Myles, with two years' worth of hush money, paid monthly to string her out. True, she negotiated that in the face of a veiled threat that something bad was going to happen to her if she didn't comply. But good for her—like you asked me before, performance under extreme pressure. And now that I think of it, not a bad job of bargaining her way out of intimidation. I didn't think of that before when you asked."

Maura and Frances sensed she was not done, so they waited. "I can only overlay my sentiments atop hers. I came in the dark of the night as a favor to an associate and colleague. We might have even been friends—but that's worn out now thinner than a twice-used gauze pad. As a doctor, I helped a patient and agreed to come and see him later in the daylight for a follow-up and consultation with LeClerc. We argued about getting him right to a hospital. I made him promise me he would do that at the drop of a hat, as soon as the signs of no progress toward recovery were evident. I gave him three days with the patient only, with hospitalization if he was not recovered. I feared brain injury the most. Yet, he was recovering, remarkably well, in fact. Almost by the hour.

She thought a bit more. “You asked me why? What was his motive? I have to say it sounded to me by the end of the week LeClerc had money problems. One place I’d look if I were you is the financial health of the clinic, and maybe his too. But ladies, this is in retrospect. In the moment, I was as taken with Myles Lowry’s spirit and fight to recover from a car crash as April was, if certainly not as enamored of the man romantically. He did not appear to be anything more than severely concussed, and coming out of it. And as he did, he spoke about his past in the town. It seemed he was back on the trail of the bank robbery April said he had been researching in the library before the crash.”

A sip of water gave her recollecting time. “You know, now that there’s some distance from the events and you’re asking me these questions . . . I’d have to say, Denison got almost ‘squirrelly’ about that robbery and the missing bonds and money one time. It might not have been clinical, but he was obsessed with that topic . . . enough to take April’s passing mention of the Lowry name and enlist her to shadow him . . . to telling April later he needed to ask Lowry about that robbery because bad men were possibly coming after Myles . . . and they needed to shelter him clandestinely in the clinic until he got better from the accident. And all the while, those financial worries took his energy and attention away from Lowry, subjugating Myles to our care.”

Maura asked, “Was he transparent about that robbery and did he ever mention the bearer bonds that were stolen?”

“Not to me. And they didn’t have a part in my staying on. I extended my commitment to Myles—not to LeClerc—just until the weekend. That was going to be it for me, regardless, because LeClerc promised a hospitalization by then if Myles wasn’t up and walking out of the clinic under his own steam,” Oulette answered. “I couldn’t abandon the patient, though. I had fashioned a regimen to measure recovery—the excursions to jog his memory. I trusted April to accompany him, and to observe his reactions, which she did faithfully and objectively.”

“Were they working?” asked Frances.

“Yes. And no,” was her conflicting answer. “Myles was clearly aware of his surroundings, mostly up at the railroad station, the train platform, the plaza, and the cathedral. He had cited them in our conversations, which April

was permitted to listen in on, concerning what he remembered about his boyhood hometown. But what April was telling me afterwards was that she was unsure if Myles thought he was cognizant he was in 1992 or whether he thought he was revisiting his childhood years when they went on those excursions. We were trying to work those things out before another, and last, excursion was planned to test the idea. But that night Myles stroked out.”

The policewomen exchanged glances to determine if they thought the interview was at an end. A further issue arose in Hammersmith’s mind. So she asked Oulette, “What was so important to you about ending that weekend, if I may ask?”

Françoise had to decide just how much of her life she wanted to reveal to these strangers and representatives of the law. “Beyond sound medical practice, there is something personal. I told you of my grandfather in France. He is convinced he is dying. He wants me to come back, to what he insists is my home. He wants me to continue his mission of remembrance. And he needs to know before the first of October if I will commit to him.”

Frances asked gently, “What is that mission. I don’t recall hearing the expression before.”

“Our town sits atop wonderful white cliffs facing the Channel. Some think in earlier geological ages we were attached to Dover and its cliffs. The advancing columns and retreating shambles of the Reich’s army made an example of our townspeople—what resistance would cost. Our mission of remembrance is never to forget the townspeople to whom all that happened. Two years from now there will be an observance and a celebration, fifty years since D-Day and the beginning of France’s liberation.”

She saw the date did not hold much meaning for these policewomen of another country, another time, another sense of women’s place in history. “My grandfather’s dream of a sanitorium for aging veterans and traumatized civilians and widows from those years of war, and after that for their children and grandchildren, will reach fruition then. It will be called Remembrance Hall. Ironic with dementia and other mind-robbing diseases prevalent today, now that we are living much longer lives. He wants me to come home now to guide its design and to be its first director. He knows I am immensely qualified to do so. But he needs to have my answer by this coming Wednesday. I wanted the weekend time to pray and reflect on it before

making my final decision. I suppose seeing Myles every day this past week made me acutely aware. It was hard not to stay and care for him.”

Françoise’s revelation was the endnote and they all recognized that. The policewomen stood and thanked her. They shook her hand, happy the outcome was not placing an arrest warrant in that hand, or cuffing it to her other hand and walking her downstairs to booking. Their captain’s focus solely on LeClerc of these three of Lowry’s caregivers was affirmed as correct.

As they crossed the large room, the doctor suddenly stopped walking. “Officer Hammersmith, why did you ask me about my weekend deadline?”

“I’m not at liberty to say, I’m afraid. Why do you ask?” replied Maura, with a glimmer of hope in her heart.

Françoise Oulette mused, “Because you have reminded me with your last few questions, that Denison may have intimated, when we agreed to my care of Myles ending over the weekend, that he too had a deadline of October first and a decision he needed to make before tomorrow. He never said about what, but it was at a time he was very, like I said, practically obsessed, about those stolen bearer bonds.”

Hammersmith’s heart burst on fire with the desire to ask her captain if she could be the law enforcement agent to bend back his arms forcefully and place non-surgical metal rings around Denison LeClerc’s wrists. But being honest with herself, she sensed she would face stiff competition.

Not wanting competition where she needed cooperation reminded Maura she had a pair of phone calls she should make.

322

Rosalyn reassessed as Jersey passed by the Amtrak window.

There were times the train rocked a lullaby and moved along at what she guessed was under ten miles an hour. Once in a train yard, strewn with old broken pallets that had fallen off the top of two or three stacks of ten to

twenty apiece, they were going slow enough for her to count them. Until an Acela sped past on the adjacent track and made her feel she was sitting still while the whole world passed her by. She could hardly see the faces, blurred and seemingly suspended as projections in the air between the windows of the two trains. Rosalyn could not tell who was coming and who was going. Then, as suddenly as it began, it was over; and her train picked up speed and was moving through towns with steeples she could see and bells she could not hear summoning the faithful as she headed elsewhere.

The station platform was uncluttered, designed for commuter connections on busy workdays. She made her way out of the Amtrak and into the open doors awaiting westbound travelers. The car was sparsely populated. She felt a chill, realizing that open doors and available seats did not a welcome make.

She wondered what welcome to anticipate at **HAPPYDALE**.

She knew Beatriz Grey would be satisfied she returned, but may have hoped she had gone on further south at 30th Street Station rather than riding north.

She was certain there was nothing left between her and Valerie and Taylor McKinley. She suspected a remnant remained with Margie and Katie, but anything of meaningful reliability in a pinch was out of the question.

She could count on Alexandria, but only so far as Linda needed her. Miss Alex would have nothing to do with the girl's mother's scheming and dreaming of escape, if it should be necessary. Though, she did have a car Rosalyn reminded herself.

Her diversion lay in libraried kids with red hair and mean spirits sitting before an unsuspecting Mrs. Steadman, who had no afterschool insecticides in her teaching aids and lesson plans.

She told herself to work on being Rumpelstiltskin for the time being and see what she could weave magically among the rest of the book club women. Perhaps there was a needle in that haystack she could magnetize into a compass with wheels that could spin on down some tomorrow road.

And maybe she could say the name of Kelly Rocco, instead of Rumpelstiltskin, and win the prize of keeping her child away from people of power and entitlement, while they all tore themselves apart stomping their feet in protest and anger.

Perhaps that child could find a jinn in her night-after-night pages of Scheherazade to grant them their fondest wishes—six in all, if they both counted.

And then the train began to slow with purpose, and rattle and shake to bring the passengers out of their reveries and make them look around for belongings not to leave behind, and other sorts of baggage.

The local platform was modest in comparison, as if the further west and more rural the rails, the simpler and less demanding the ridership became. A hand lettered sign posted the next time a station master would be present in person. Until then, a number to call was useless because the phone on the pole with the corrugated umbrella hat had been vandalized for its dimes and nickels and quarters, probably right after the light bulb overhead was smashed to conceal the theft.

At least the **HAPPYDALE** van was waiting in the middle of the parking lot, as requested. There was no sign of the driver, so she re-gripped her suitcase handle and began across the blacktop, ignoring the crosswalk and any other painted lines to influence human behavior. The door to the bus was half open. As she reached for it, she heard the unmistakable repeating sound of the plastic door of a portable toilet door banging shut, then open, then shut again, finally. She looked and saw the driver raise his waving hand to her in greeting from the edge of the lot. He had something in his hand she could not discern.

So, she pushed in on the door's v-hinge and started to step up without waiting for him. She left her suitcase on the ground for him to lift up the stairs.

Rosalyn turned at the top of the stairs and saw a man and a woman she did not know sitting in the back of the van. She stood, trying to decide. She looked out the windshield and saw the driver was standing sideways and looking at the railroad tracks. He was lighting up a cigarette. He put the

lighter back in his pants pocket next to the new crisp twenty-dollar bill that would buy him his next carton.

The two other train departees had already gotten into their cars and left the lot. Only one car remained, off aways against the edge of the lot, away from the portable toilet. Nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

323

After a drink of water Linda made a failed attempt to take a ten-minute nap, on her bed freed from the train set box that now was on the floor. Linda was now wide awake in her room and opening the train set box. She and Alex were constructing an oval track on the floor almost the same way that Taylor and Linda had done before. They watched the locomotive go in and out of the bed tunnel they formed with bed sheets and spreads. They spread out, bellies down on the floor, to work the trains and peek under the bed.

After a few minutes, Miss Alex looked over towards Linda. Ironically, the train had relaxed her so much, hypnotizing her with its circular progress, that the six-year-old was fast asleep. Her dreams in drifting off were of the freight train behind their apartment, with the Cheshire cat and moon logos. The person she saw coming up the embankment toward her was her gentleman caller, but he was dressed as that nice police detective, who let her call him Dominic.

Alex carefully lifted her and tucked her in without awakening her. She left the night light on and closed the door. She checked she had left nothing in Rosalyn's bedroom, except the business card Danny Hart gave her to leave behind.

324

Mellon was not a sports participant by any means. Watching a Sunday one o'clock football game on television at home was as macho as he was going to get at his age. He missed having his dad in the same room, rooting

for made field goals and screaming at costly fumbles. But right now, the senior and junior Mellons were not seeing eye to eye.

When the phone rang, Mellon thought at first it was a penalty being whistled on the field. But it would turn out he was the one who was going to lose miles, not yards, when he picked up the phone to talk to a police captain over in New Jersey.

“Attorney Mellon? Good afternoon. I am the precinct captain over in New Jersey by your client’s apartment—Roselyn Lowry.” He kept talking because Mellon said nothing in return. “This morning a felonious assault occurred at the apartment. The attacker was another client of yours, a lawyer by the name of Marie Aello.”

This time, Mellon did reply. “You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“Oh, sir. I wish to God I was. But sir, your client, that is, Ms. Aello is hospitalized and recovering from dog bites and contusions from a struggle with another resident at the apartment.”

“Are you saying that Ms. Aello attacked a dog? And the dog’s owner wants to bring charges?” Mellon was getting more upset as he used the remote to mute the game broadcast. He didn’t mind, it was just a beer commercial anyway.

“No, sir, Attorney Mellon,” the captain corrected. Your client viciously attacked the dog’s owner.

Mellon asked in a dismissive voice, only reserved in the human gene pool for lawyers, particularly defense attorneys, “Well, just how injured is he?”

The captain had dealt with this type of attorney all his life in Jersey family courts, juvenile courts, and criminal proceedings. He was having none of it. Besides, if Howe ever found out he soft-pedaled this, he’d never hear the end of it. “The aggression was premeditated and occurred during the commission of a felony, a burglary. Your client used an elongated crowbar as a weapon. Right now, the gentleman is recovering from two surgeries already performed today and the doctors are hoping he can rest for a few hours to be strong enough for at least one more major procedure.”

“That certainly sounds bad, captain. But you have it all wrong. I do not practice criminal law.” With that, Mellon changed the channel, leaving it muted, to see how the other one o’clock contest was going.

“Well sir, you know what they say about practice. Regardless, Ms. Aello is demanding your presence as her representative. And to consult with her on what she says to tell you is a ‘timely and pressing matter.’ I assure you Attorney, this is simply a formality that requires legal representation. It is an arraignment to allow for your client to remain in the hospital overnight for her well-being and to advance her recovery. You can have plenty of time with her to arrange other counsel, if you feel it appropriate, for a bail-or-remand hearing that will be scheduled at this evening’s arraignment and take place later tomorrow.”

Godfrey Mellon could not believe that Ned’s bastard daughter was wrecking yet again another weekend. “All right, then, may I trouble you please, captain, for the arraignment’s time and place.”

The last part of what he thought of as ‘this nasty business’ was to disturb Miss Hayes at home. He told her he needed a ticket—which she could have faxed to him at home— on the PATH across to Jersey and to have ‘that woman Flynn’ pick him up. She was to get him to the hospital fifteen minutes early—he gave Hayes the address and time of the arraignment—attend the proceedings as a witness, and then drive him back to the PATH station so he could cross again over to Manhattan. All he wanted back from Hayes on her return call was the train information for going across to Jersey—time, train number, and platform assignment.

325

Rosalyn took a few steps into the van. Near enough to the still-open door to get back outside if need be; far enough in to start a conversation with the woman and man, whose arm dangled out the window so she could not see what he might be holding.

“So, is this the Wild, Wild West?” she asked. “Are we to play cowboys and Indians?”

The man replied, leaving his hand outside the van, "I don't think that would be considered politically correct."

Rosalyn came back quickly, "That has never bothered me."

Again, the man spoke. "That's what we hear from your college friends."

It was as if he had slapped her flat on the face with an open hand. But she recoiled nicely, "Okay, so are you cops or robbers?"

The woman sat forward and put her hand on the man's knee to stop him from answering. He drew his empty hand in from the outside and placed it, with his other, in his lap. "We are neither." She was glad to see Rosalyn's shoulders relax just slightly. "We are private investigators, Mrs. Lowry."

"And just who are you then?" asked Lowry. She placed a hand on the back of one of the van seats. If they were underway, it would have been seen as a gesture to steady her stance against road movement. The woman in the back of the bus knew that was exactly what she saw, only Rosalyn's movement was from nerves within.

"I am Angie Flynn. I am employed by your lawyer, Godfrey Mellon. And this is Danny Hart. He was my immediate predecessor in Mr. Mellon's employ. We are both licensed, independent private investigators based right here in New Jersey, just closer to the Hudson than we now find ourselves with you."

"What does Mellon want you to do? What do you want with me?" Lowry asked pointedly. She threw a glance through the windshield and saw the driver stubbing out his cigarette butt with his shoe on the parking lot pavement, but not yet heading toward the bus.

"Attorney Mellon simply wanted us to find you. He hired me when you had left your apartment and then returned for more possessions in the middle of the night." She did not wait for a reply. "But we want you today to tell you about your family's hospitalizations."

"My what?" she sat at that news.

Flynn continued. "Your ex-husband was in a car accident and subsequently suffered a stroke. He is hospitalized on Long Island. Your daughter needed some attention after suffering from heat stroke. But she is waiting back home for you with Miss Alex and is doing just fine."

Rosalyn got antsy and reconsidered her position. "So how do you two know all this?"

Now Hart spoke up. "It's what we do. We investigate. All so we can help people. And the person we would like a chance to help today is you, Mrs. Lowry."

"And how do you propose doing that?" she fired back at him. She turned around because she heard footsteps behind her. It was the driver.

"It will take about as long as the ride back to HAPPYDALE to explain, if you're open to that," said Angie.

She bit. "Amuse yourselves, if you must, or if Mellon requires. But you two are history when we get to the school."

Hearing this, the driver said, "So you two coming as well, then, mister?"

"Yes, please," was all he needed to hear from Mr. Twenty-Dollar Hart. He went up front and started the van.

On the way there in the car, she and Hart decided she would talk about Myles and he would talk about Linda. They were hoping Rosalyn would be more patient with a woman speaking about her ex-husband. They had also agreed not to identify Hart's employer unless it became necessary to say any more than they already had.

The three of them maintained their distance, shortened only when they got on the open road and the noise made Rosalyn come closer. She moved and sat on the bench seat that ran along the side of the bus and faced its center. She could slide either way, toward the back or the front, as suited her liking. Danny and Angie remained in the last row of the bus, with the back of the seat in front of them as a half barrier Rosalyn could feel comfortable about.

Flynn began. "As we were saying, Mr. Lowry is hospitalized out on Long Island—"

"Where on the Island and what was he doing out there?" she wanted to know.

"He was back in the town where you each spent your childhood years. He was trying to locate any insight he could into where he might find you." She purposefully did not include Linda in Myles's search objective.

"Why was he looking for me? Doesn't he think he's done enough?" Her tone was sharp and nasty.

Flynn had no way of understanding or narrowing down the universe of things to which Rosalyn might be referring, so she did not try to answer. She continued with her own line of conversation. "Your lawyer hired me to make sure you were not harmed by anyone or abducted when you were no longer in your apartment on the morning of the custody hearing." She had chosen not to tell Rosalyn outright that she had not attended the hearing. "He told me to find Paul and Annie Meadows and ask them if they had heard from you." It was her method of comfort when interviewing a person to give them a way to know she had been thorough and knew certain things or people. Often, it made people mention things she did not know, all because they figured she already did.

Investigator Flynn continued, "Then the lines began to blur. The judge put off the custody decision. He said to make a decision, that you could not speak your mind about, was unfair to you. He used a legality, called 'without prejudice,' to let the current situation as of that Monday stand until he said, 'both living parents' were back before him in his courtroom. Most of the energy from the lawyers then changed over to trying to find you safe and sound and to fulfill the judge's requirements for a new custody hearing. Mr. Lowry began taking Friday's off to spend long weekends to try to find you—"

Rosalyn cut her off, "Which is why I suppose I saw him at the information office of the library up at Barnard." She saw their surprise. "Oh, your investigation didn't turn that up, huh? Well, go on with your story, Ms. Flynn."

Angie projected feeling non-plussed, if even a little too late to be convincing. "It was also at a library that he spent significant time in your hometown, searching for traces of your past that might lead to your present—"

Again, Rosalyn interrupted, "My Yearbook wasn't enough for him?" She saw no change to their faces. "Oh, so that part you did know about. Well, good for you."

Flynn kept an even keel, "His main effort at the Long Island library was researching local news from the weekly newspaper from when you were both growing up. You know . . . school notes, sports stories, social pages . . . that sort of thing." She did not perceive a strong reaction from Rosalyn and decided to leave the big loose end unattended at that moment.

"Then there was the car crash, which may or may not have been an accident. We don't know for sure." And that's when Rosalyn winced. Both investigators saw it. They were sure it wasn't because of a crash. It was the part of maybe not being an accident that grabbed her. But they had to move along. They were probably almost halfway to **HAPPYDALE**.

"For some reason, the oncologist who crashed into him . . ." and now a tic flickered Rosalyn's left eye . . . "kept him for three days in his clinic. He only went to a hospital when he had an overnight stroke."

Rosalyn had no questions about Myles. She did ask, "You said my daughter was also in a hospital?"

That was Danny's cue. "On Friday there was a dispute. One of Linda's classmates was angry at her because she lost some kind of card game late Thursday afternoon, and she held Linda responsible. She had a bookmark she had stolen from Linda earlier in the term. It was a gift from Myles, with a train locomotive picture Linda and her father found meaningful. The loser tore up the bookmark and left the scraps on Linda's desk. This happened right after you took the taxi Friday morning and Linda went to class early. Linda was distraught and she ran away into the woods to a refuge she had discovered weeks before and kept secret from everyone. Deirdre, her classmate, lied during roll call and told Mrs. Steadman that you had decided to let Linda come to Philadelphia with you. No one looked for her almost all class day, except for her friend Red, I mean Clementine. That was because

Linda left her one or two torn pieces of the bookmark, she knew Red would recognize. Near the end of the school day, Clementine took out her suspicions on Deirdre and leveled the bully with an amazing set of punches, I am told. The devastated and defeated bully confessed to her lie and a massive search began. Messages were left for you at your hotel, but Administrator Grey later found you had not checked in there, even though the librarians said you were safe and sound and using the library. That's why Grey left a message she hoped the library would pass on to you."

"What refuge are you talking about? What secret?" was the total response Rosalyn allowed, remarkably enough.

"Up in the woods behind your apartment block, almost a mile in, is a pond and beyond that is an old relic of a railroad caboose. It's left over from the founder of the school and his original plan to have a little train going around the property, according to Mrs. Reading at the town library near the school. By mistake, Linda got herself trapped in the upper compartment of the caboose for almost seven hours. It was brutally hot and almost airtight. Her heatstroke was considerable, and she needed a hospital stay until this morning to recover." Just as Angie had done, the story Danny told was filled with points of fact that showed how well they did their jobs, but stopped short of alienating Rosalyn by blaming her for anything that occurred.

Rosalyn said nothing to them. She stood up from the bench seat and walked to two rows behind and across from the driver. She sat in the front-facing seat. "How much longer until we are at the school?" she asked him in a voice loud enough for the investigators to hear, as she intended.

"About six minutes, Mrs. Lowry," was his answer. "Should I bring you to the library or home?" he inquired. He also spoke loudly enough for the passengers in the back to hear. He was grateful for their cigarette money, but seeing they had disturbed the librarian, he wondered if he was going to get reprimanded for letting them on the van.

"Home."

The van driver did not think things were looking so good for him. Rosalyn was not gracious by nature. He knew that from his own experience around the school and by word of mouth from his work friends who sat each

morning at the dining hall coffee table. But she was almost rude getting off the van and expecting him to carry her suitcase to her door.

She unlocked the door and was quiet enough about it that she did not wake her daughter. She opened the door and saw that Alex was right in front of her, getting ready to open the door from the inside. Rosalyn walked directly to her bedroom and left it up to the van driver to hand her suitcase in to Alex. Danny and Angie stood on the front walk, not willing to enter without an invitation.

Alex knocked gently on Rosalyn's bedroom door. She did not wait for an answer. She just spoke quietly enough to be heard without waking Linda in the room down the hall, whose door was still closed. "May I do anything for you, Mrs. Lowry?"

The only words she heard spoken from behind the door were, "I'll see you tomorrow, Alexandria."

With that Alex placed the suitcase off to the side of the bedroom door against the hall wall, so no one would trip over it. She took her jacket from the back of the couch and let herself out.

On the front walk, she realized the investigators had seen and heard most of everything through the open front door.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what to say," was as polite a formulation of words that Alex could think to say to Flynn and Hart. After all she knew they had done for Linda, it seemed . . . well . . . unforgivable.

Angie said, "It's on her, not you, Alex. Could you show us to a pay phone here on campus. We are going to call a cab to go back to the train station to get our car and then head back home. From the look of things, I would not want to ask the van driver to make the trip."

"Would you accept a ride from me, please?" She had such a winning smile, though Rosalyn certainly did her best to chase it away. "Our friend Linda would be very disappointed if she heard I made you use a taxi. And there is a coffee stand along the way, with fresh picked fruit from the apple orchards if you'd like to buy a bag."

“Do you like apples, Alex?” asked Flynn.

“Sure do. I like to make apple pies this time of year, too,” she proclaimed, raising all their spirits.

“Okay. You’re on. We’ll trade you two bags of the best pie-making apples for a tank of your gas.” And with that Angie Flynn and Alex saved the day. Or at least this small part of it, all things considering.

It was left to Danny to say, “I may swap out that hot coffee for a cold quart of apple cider and drink it straight from the container.” And another thought came to him. “Alex, if there is a pay phone you pass, perhaps we could make a brief stop of five or six minutes, please.”

“Happily, Mr. Hart, you can sip on your cold cider while you call from the coffee and fruit stand.” Miss Alex knew how to perk up a crowd, even a crowd of one or two.

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Godfrey Mellon was not the only person whose weekend was interrupted by Marie Aello’s pending arrest on assault charges. And Danny Hart was not the only person with a way to get messages from home. Coincidentally, the same person was also checking messages from a coffee and fruit stand in rural New Jersey.

As Hart and Flynn got in her car at the commuter railroad station, having said goodbye to Miss Alex and thanking her for the ride from **HAPPYDALE**, they almost simultaneously said out loud what they could not while riding in Alex’s car. “I’ve got to tell you something!”

Flynn said, “Let me go first, I’m kind of on the clock.”

Hart asked her, “Right now, or soon?”

“By late afternoon. It’s about Aello. She’s being arraigned for assault. Judge will be bedside in the hospital. Hayes called from Mellon’s office. He says he wants me present as a witness to the arraignment. But I know that all

he really wants is a convenience chauffeur he won't have to pay for, since he'll charge it off to his client. I'm to pick him up at the Jersey PATH station, bring him to the hospital, witness the arraignment, and get him back to PATH."

Danny mused, "That's interesting."

"Yeah, that's what I'm thinking, too. How can we turn this small inconvenience to me into a huge inconvenience for Mellon and company? She speculated. "He's probably going to want me to do the same thing some time tomorrow when Aello is out of the hospital and goes to court for a bail hearing or remand."

"What are you thinking, Angie?" asked Danny.

"Let's strategize this like blackjack. Now you hit me with one of what you've got. We should do this full table, not just what's in our hand. Especially if you're still seeing your queens at seven o'clock, when I'm shielding my hole card from Mellon," she said this in a way that Danny was amazed he was finding easy to follow. He appreciated her approaching the evening as something that would unfold dynamically.

He inhaled and started to tell her about his first phone call. "There was a message from Detective Howe. Riley made it through his first two surgeries and is resting up, sedated heavily, for another trip into the operating theater for what was said to be a major procedure. She thinks this means his ribs and shoulder are set as much as they can be, and immobilized. And that his dental work and jaw have had their first attention. Next comes what is going on inside his head. There is some swelling the docs don't like, so before they did the other work, they relieved some of that pressure somehow—maybe a drilling or patch removal of skull at the fracture site. She's off desk assignment for the shift, so she's staying on hand at the hospital. So, for now, Mike's covered. And the K-9 kennel pathologist has examined his dog and respectfully prepared his remains for whatever Mike decides to do."

Angie hit back, "Okay. Then except for relieving Howe and checking in on Mike's progress, there's nothing from that front for tonight. I don't know if her captain will be at the arraignment later, but you can be sure there will be representation at the bail hearing tomorrow. Your turn."

But they weren't turning at all. They were on the four-lane now heading back and would pass by the hospital exit they started out at, with Linda Lowry and Alex some hours before. "My second message was also partially a hospital update. From Hammersmith. Myles appears to be resting comfortably. His head presents different challenges than Mike's apparently, because he is not heavily sedated at all. Doc Oulette is trying to get him to be awake so she can do some observations and diagnostics on brain activity. His vitals suggest his circulation and heart and lungs are working acceptably, with no further tremors or clots or respiratory distress."

"Thank God for that," interjected Flynn. "But you said 'partially' Danny."

"Yeah, they have been extremely busy out there. Their captain let Frances and Maura loose on the other two—Oulette and Smith. He wants to make sure LeClerc's a stand-alone and to determine if the women might be collateral, but not abettors. They are now pretty convinced about that. April Smith is sequestered as a material witness. And after what Hammersmith characterized as a 'deep-run interview and threat assessment,' Oulette is no longer under suspicion. She has been cleared to tend to Lowry. Maura also says there's an interesting side story to Oulette that we might want to know about next time we talk." Danny stretched out his arms over the dashboard, almost out to the windshield.

"And there's more." He flexed all his fingers in a hand exercise that looked like they were duck beaks facing off, honking and quacking at each other. Flynn had never seen him do that before. "Hammersmith's captain says something is about to happen, possibly involving the Federal Treasury Department. She doesn't know what it is, but thinks it's about LeClerc and the robbery that Myles was researching. And that it is imminent."

"Not good." She was back to her 'when-I'm-tense' monosyllables.

He matched her. "For sure."

Neither one spoke for about two miles. And it wasn't because the small-town Jersey strip-malls backing up to the highway were all that breathtaking.

She gave in first. "I haven't told anyone about Rosalyn's drawers."

"It's just the two of us, so far," he said. "I need to see her. Talk to her. With one of them incapacitated and the other incarcerated, their kid's heading for ward-of-the-state status. Angie, that's not what I signed on for."

"After it all, I'm going to find that harder to swallow than Aello could with Riley's dog on her throat," she said in her inevitably unique way.

Another mile and a half went by. It was Flynn who spoke first again. "Danny, what are you and the queens going over tonight? Hit me."

"A few things me to them. A Riley update. A Linda update. And I have not told them about Dominic leaving yet. I have to do that face-to-face, Angie." He looked at the passing housing cluster and a sign for a rest stop. Hey, pull in up here, would you please? I need some air and to walk around the parking lot some. And I'll hit the head, too, while we're here. Then maybe we could sit at one of their picnic tables and figure out what's next. You have time before Mellon, right?"

After checking the clock on the dash, she said, "Twenty minutes, tops."

"That's five more than I'll need." He returned to looking out the side window.

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Though some pieces were still missing in her design, Karidja Soro was crafting a strategy for resolution. It was the way she thought. It was the way she averted problems before positions became intractable. She had set her Côte d'Ivoire Elephants mascot at her home office desk lamp, to stay mindful of Myles, and to cheer on her efforts not to let Linda Lowry's fate rely on penalty shots.

It was now an appropriate afternoon hour to phone the Jersey police precinct. By now they should have progressed far enough on the assault case against Marie Aello. When Detective Howe was not available, she asked to speak to her supervisor, who turned out to be the precinct captain, who also happened to be available since he was in his office working on a case. He identified himself and greeted her when the phone connection was made.

“Hello Captain. I am Attorney Karidja Soro. I had some dealings with Detective Howe on the Lowry missing persons case.” Before she could continue, he replied.

“Yes. I recognize your name. Detective Howe speaks very highly of you. I might say that is quite a compliment to you. You see, she is not particularly fond of lawyers. What may I do for you in her absence?” He kept on going without waiting for an answer. “As you probably know, she discharged her weapon this morning over at the Lowry’s apartment. As a result, Detective Howe is on desk duty until the shooting is internally reviewed. She also is not here right now. I believe she has gone to the hospital to look in on the assault victim.”

Karidja let her voice convey a smile. “I wonder, Captain, how many news outlets have you told that now-memorized message to so far this fine day?”

“Yes, I am now certain you are who you say you are. The detective suggested to me that you might call, and that I would find you so disarming—a word she chose to poke me in the side today, no doubt—because things you say would be offensive uttered by others, but are somehow quite charming as you voice them. All part of your ‘mystique’ I believe was the word she chose.”

“I will have to thank her for that kindness when I next see her.” She paused. “And when might you think that could be, captain?” It was a typical Soro flanking comment.

“Not for Aello’s arraignment in the hospital this evening for sure. But I am hopeful she will be in court at the bail hearing sometime tomorrow.” The captain was back to his straightforwardness.

“Is that an invitation, captain? As a Lowry attorney, of course, since it was their property that was damaged in the thwarted burglary.” Soro at her smoothest.

“Please call the desk sergeant at eight-fifteen in the morning, Ms. Soro. She or he should be able to provide you with the court and time for those proceedings.”

There was a momentary silence while each of them waited to see if the other had something to say. Almost out of habit, he said, "Is there anything else, Attorney Soro?"

Ironically it was left to the end of the call, but Soro finally got to the topic she originally called to discover. "We have address and phone information for Aello in Brooklyn, which we got from Columbia University's alumni office. I was wondering if Detective Howe heard back from the DMV on the plates she ran from the car Aello had at that apartment earlier?"

"Why?"

"We want to keep an eye on the place from the street, to make sure no evidence is removed. But first, we'd like to confirm we have the right place."

He asked her to hold. He came back on the line and spoke the address Howe's files indicated she got from DMV. He was overly formal in order to belie any charges of undue favoritism, should the recording of the call ever be requested as trial evidence. It was a match, which she told him, to validate he had not initiated a conveyance of information inappropriately. She too had a potential subpoenaed recording in mind as she spoke.

She thanked him politely. They exchanged parting sentiments and hung up their phones almost simultaneously.

Karidja arose and took a walk around her living room and dining room, checking for the third time that everything seemed in order for the evening. In the kitchen she opened the tap and ran the cold water to half-fill a juice glass. She stood by the sink to drink it in three unhurried swallows. She placed the glass upside down on the cloth covered drainboard and returned to her desk and phone.

Her next call was to Dominic Corredor's captain. He was also in his office, surprisingly enough. She thought for sure she was going to be asked to leave a message—which was against her principles. Only in emergencies did Karidja leave messages for law enforcement command personnel she had yet to meet in person or to whom she had been introduced by a third party in that person's command.

She was more stylized and formal on this call than the last. "Good afternoon, captain. My name is Karidja Soro. Thank you for your time on a Sunday afternoon. I represent a client in a missing persons case that has had some notoriety of late, the Lowry family in New Jersey." He interrupted and told her he was somewhat familiar with the affair. She understood he was setting the tone early to keep Dominic Corredor explicitly out of the conversation. "At one of the Lowry sites there was a brutal assault this morning. The alleged perpetrator is in a hospital at this time and there will be a bedside arraignment this evening. A bail-or-remand courtroom hearing will occur tomorrow."

"And what may I do for you in this regard, Attorney Soro?" he asked.

She replied, "I have a home address for the alleged attacker in your borough. I was wondering if there was any way to make certain any evidence at that address is secure from removal and destruction between now and tomorrow's hearing?"

"Have you a warrant for an interior search, attorney?" he inquired.

"No, Captain, I do not. And I do not wish to prejudice the case by asking for one," she admitted.

"Then what are you suggesting or asking, Ms. Soro?"

She was keen on realizing he was not getting impatient or annoyed. His courtesy was an invitation. She decided to accept it. "I was thinking more along the lines of a simple posting on the front door to advise against potential evidence tampering in the event the dwelling were to become designated as a crime scene. Behind some yellow tape on the door jamb perhaps."

"I wonder if you know . . . are there any . . . hallways . . . in the structure at this address, Attorney Soro?" he inquired carefully.

Karidja was very pleased with how this call was going. "As far as I am advised, Captain, there are no available corridors in this domicile."

"I believe our inventory of that particular posting sign is depleted at this time, though we do have police line tape we use at parades and such.

If you could fax me a copy of that communication, we could print it out here on some yellow paper stock and place it on the door, if that would be of assistance. Only until tomorrow when you call to tell me how the hearing went, of course." He told her the fax number and wished her a good day.

She ended the call and said a quiet prayer of thanks to God for backyard tea parties, welcoming little girls, and friendly wandering strangers.

Her last call of this cycle went to, of all people, Thomas Bruce. He was taken up short to hear from her. "Why are you calling me, Ms. Soro? And on a weekend afternoon? Could this have not waited until morning?"

She looked at her mascot elephant and could have sworn he would have taken a long drink to cool off, and then spouted the whole draught of water out his arched trunk to saturate Bruce where he stood. Cooled down by the image, she said pleasantly, "It is a timely security issue, sir." That got his attention.

"What? Where?" he demanded.

"Your meeting tomorrow with Mellon and Aello is threatened." She had learned he was best addressed in bullet points. She had slowly grown accustomed to speaking to him 'in PowerPoint.'

"How? By whom?" again stated without collegiality.

"Aello launched an assault on Mrs. Lowry's neighbor this morning, during the commission of a burglary. She was attempting to steal documents to influence you tomorrow afternoon." She had also learned lengthy statements were effective as long as he was their subject.

True to form, he had no interest in victims, unless he was being victimized. And so, he asked, "What documents?"

Then she upended his day. "That's not what's important, sir, if you'll excuse me. Time is of the essence. What you need to do is to assign a surveillance car in front of her home address in Brooklyn I am going to give you. The police will be posting the address shortly against trespass to protect

potential evidence she has in her home that she can use with Mellon against you and your audit's veracity and their acceptance of it."

"What documents?" he insisted.

"Sir, you must focus, or you may risk everything you have worked for. A car outside. Twenty-four seven until after Aello's bail hearing tomorrow and your meeting with Mellon, if he gets there after her bail hearing in New Jersey. No one goes into the dwelling. And I must emphasize, this includes your security personnel. They will be prosecuted for breaking and entering and criminal trespass. And you will be served an arrest warrant personally, for conspiracy to defraud Mellon and Aello and tampering with evidence. She will be exonerated of her trespass and criminal assault this morning. You and the firm will lose everything."

"What documents?"

"I must go now, sir. You are empowered to choose your own fate." She hung up the phone, having raised the stakes to an incredibly high level. From that precipice she could maneuver some safety for Rosalyn and Linda, should Aello somehow be freed, or if she were to flee the hospital grounds, because she would need to go home first.

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It took less than ten minutes for Frances and Hammersmith to convince their captain that Denison LeClerc acted alone. They were done before Doctor Oulette was back from her interview and checking in on Myles at the hospital. She was surprised how much she missed April's assistance and companionship.

For her part over in the safe house, April was almost finished reading the exploits of Harry Bosch and was already wondering whether Maura could get her another Bosch book, so she could see what Michael Connelly had happening next to the LAPD detective. She stopped reading and went to find the county policewoman, half asleep at the kitchen table, to see if she could ask about getting another book. She said she'd try to see if her relief could get

one. She would be disappointed later when Maura told her that a second Harry Bosch book had not yet been published.

Part of the reason Maura's captain only needed ten minutes to hear them out was because the clock was moving even faster on the other part of the case.

"The feds are coming for LeClerc in the morning. As a courtesy, I was shown the paperwork very quickly and was not allowed to retain a copy. He's not immediately being arrested on federal charges. And he's not being booked for the bank heist. It's about defrauding the government out of hundreds of thousands of dollars in reimbursement claims through federal health programs, mostly Medicare. But apparently, it's all a ruse, which is why I wasn't given the documents." He looked at them both.

Frances said, "It all makes sense."

The other two turned to her. Maura simply said 'what?' and the captain dared her to explain herself. She laughed at herself and apologized. "Sorry, sometimes I talk out loud when I am convinced I'm just thinking in my head to myself," she almost proclaimed. And then she started her 'thinking tic.' But the captain let her go with it. He wanted to hear what she was thinking.

"Here's what I think I got from the local newspapers on the microfilm. And a little from my law classes at the academy. And some from looking up things on the internet at the library. They have it there on a computer you can access with your library card to use for an hour at a time." She stopped her fingers for the time being, but left her hand on the table edge, thumb beneath, inch worm digits up top.

"The robbery took place so many years ago that the crime is past the statute of limitations in many states, including New York. Depending on how the Treasury Department interprets the legal applicability of the dollar amount stolen and whether the bonds physically crossed state lines, they may still be able to try to prosecute for theft, but it's shaky."

She switched venues, "The same thing goes for the insurance claim, based on the specific policy of the bond owner, who probably thought he'd either spend the money by now, or simply re-insure them when the old

policy was finishing up. The insurance company cannot recover their payout to the bank and the bond owner, because the policy no longer applies. But the insurance company may confiscate the bonds, since they, in effect, paid for them. The insurance company would do that to put them back into circulation at face value, and hope the value would be recognized. There is a good chance they would hold their face value in legitimate markets. Black markets would reduce the value, perhaps by up to half; but we're not interested in them. For the legal insurance company, it may even offer a reward for the recovery of the bonds, at a commission type percentage of face value, say 15% to 20%, usually only paid to an entity that never cashed in any of the bonds illegally on the black market.

Then she woke them up, "But here's where the Treasury Department could arrest and prosecute, even at this late date. If someone has been selling the bonds off at 'pennies on the dollar' as the term goes, that's a felony, because it's akin to money-laundering. And depending on the type of bond and the original issuer, it could be a federal felony. And that is the situation in this case. Selling off these bonds, or taking any part in the transaction to do so, is a federal felony. Minimum twelve to fifteen years. Maximum for a syndicated operation, for example, 25 to 40 years depending on the total value of the bonds transacted, especially if they were rolled out and sold more than once, say at 70 cents on the dollar the first time, and then that buyer becomes a seller at 50 cents on the dollar for a twenty-cent margin. That's fraudulent and carries big time—particularly if it's compounded by using counterfeit money to buy the bonds. And that happens. You know what's said—no honor amongst thieves."

"This is pretty impressive, Frances," said her captain.

"I'll say," said Maura.

"Oh, wait," there's more. "But I've got to pee first. I'll be right back."

Maura told her captain as Frances almost ran from the room, "I left a phone message for Danny Hart that the Feds might be coming about the bonds. I should give him an update after Frances is finished, what do you think?"

Her captain did not hesitate, which to Maura meant he had already finished thinking this same thing through on his own. "We should keep all the

avenues open. These cases looked separate before, but they look to be on a collision course. So, I want everything they can tell us about our friendlies and bogies here, even if that requires us to reciprocate. Permission granted! And check on Myles before you call and include that too. He might have something for us about the wife. She should be back from her Philadelphia outing.”

When Frances came back, she told them the last thing she was thinking about. “If the Feds who are coming are also interested in LeClerc not paying his proper share into Medicare, it reminded me that if they investigate his finances and see that he is using money cashed out of those bearer bonds to pay them, rather than insurance payments or patient co-pays, they could possibly prosecute him for money-laundering.”

329

Danny Hart took too much time on the longer-than-expected line for the men’s room and then walking around outdoors at the rest stop, so they skipped the picnic table chat and talked in the moving car instead as Flynn drove.

She told him, “You’re going to have to check on Riley without me, now that Mellon’s expecting me to pick him up from the Tubes. You’ll want your car anyway to go over to Karidja’s. Which brings me back to my question—what else are you four going over?”

Hart went down the list. “From what I have heard them talking about, they were still on three things. The Hegerman audit Mellon has until end of business tomorrow to challenge, the Trust set aside after the Mellon’s dad’s fraudulent law practice acquisition, and that AP document Aello was after this morning. They are hell bent to connect all of them, and keep the last two out of the settlement audit.”

He added, “I also get the sense they are looking at their own futures because they think Thomas Bruce is going to throw them to the wolves when they’re all done with Mellon and Aello and Rosalyn Lowry.”

Angie asked him, “And where do you stand on all that?”

Danny saw the exit signs going by closer to each other as they approached the more populated section of Jersey the interstate was now traversing. "I am as aloof to those things as I was when I broke off my search for Linda from their financial investigation. But those items are not as separate as I once thought." He sneezed twice and had to recover before going on.

"God bless you," said Flynn.

"Thanks." He went back to her question, or at least his answer to it. "I want to make sure that little girl doesn't get lost in the shuffle. I told them even if I got fired, I was on this case until she was found and back with her family. And now that she's found, these three ladies are going to have to make sure she stays found and this judge gets them in his courtroom again, where I first met them all." He sneezed again.

"But what about you, Angie Flynn? I kind of got you into a pinch here and I'm really sorry for that," he told her.

"I'm a big girl, Danny." She let it go at that for a lane change and a reading of an electronic traffic sign about road conditions ahead. "What's your thoughts on my time with Mellon today?"

"Tell me yours first so I don't clutter you up," he said.

She started slowly and gained speed, "I want to crawl in one ear and stomp around on his brain worse than Aello mashed Mike's, before he shakes me out the other ear when he gets out of the car back at the PATH station."

She saw the ramp for the park and ride, where they left Danny's car, coming up and she moved over.

Once on course, she started in again. "I'm going to tell him I insisted on being with you and Howe as long as possible, so I could report back to him firsthand—and so you guys didn't find his client without me being in the thick of it."

She signaled and turned into the lot. "Listen, Danny, I'm no saint, but I'd pose as the virgin crushing the head of the snake as far as he's concerned, if I have to. They're not good people, Danny. And I'm damned, serving as their

minion. I need a good, long, hot shower after being near them. But Linda Lowry's not swirling down the drain with my soapy water."

She pulled in by his car and saw she had five minutes to spare before she had to leave. She didn't waste them. "I think I should tell him I think I know what Aello was after. But I won't tell him correctly. I need him twisting in the dark of night that he thinks is the light of day. That way he'll find himself not being able to trust whatever Aello or Lowry tell him—which will probably be lies, anyway." She killed the engine; cranked the window for air.

"Tomorrow in front of Bruce and Quatrane and Costa and Soro, he'll already be in the wind, because Rosalyn Lowry will never let Mellon into her drawers. But I want that wind to have his swinging, because his pants will be bunched at his shins when I get through with him. And Aello will just enjoy the show, thinking she can take what she can get, none the wiser that she's on the way to three squares and an hour's walk a day, and nowhere near heading back out to Pittsburgh."

She turned to him and gave him no time to share advice. "You tell that lady lawyer tonight that Mellon will show up with his brain tenderized and marinated, so she can cook him slow and long, and then send him home empty-handed and scramble-headed, more than he got Myles and Mike messed up—happy he won't be visiting his daddy as well, when he goes to see Aello each month."

Danny had no better advice to give her than she had already provided for herself. He extended a hand to shake, which she did, and he said "See you around, Angie. You've been swell."

She drove off as Hart walked across the Sunday-empty lot to get his car.

Over on Long Island, Maura Hammersmith was participating in her captain's pre-despot democracy. He had asked her and Frances to come into his office to discuss what they thought should be done about LeClerc.

Maura said, "I wonder if we arrest LeClerc in the next hour and keep him overnight, within the allotted time frame, and then process him tomorrow at the county courthouse, will that prevent the Feds from starting in on him until Tuesday?"

"What would the charges be?" the captain inquired.

"Does it matter? Wouldn't the time frame be the same?" she asked.

Frances checked in, "Only if our charges were local and state, and were not federal for them to take over. And it would most likely be good for us to stay completely away from the money. That's what I'd think. Captain?"

"There's some merit in those thoughts," he answered. "What do you make of it?" he looked at Maura. "And I think your timeline is the start of a good idea, too."

Maura replied, "Could we just file preliminary charges, saying our investigation was on-going and more charges might follow?"

All the captain said was, "Why?"

"If we just stayed with leaving the scene, we wouldn't yet have to be claiming an intent that we may have to prove before we were ready to do so. And that keeps April out of it in the library and hotel room events that occurred before the crash."

Maura moved along an imaginary time chart she envisioned of that evening. "We could stay with abandoning the rental car as obstruction after the fact and not have to prove he was the operator of the van." She had a thought. "We need to find out where he had that van towed for repairs, Captain."

He nodded, but did not stop her progression, along which she said, "For Myles we could keep the charge at reckless endangerment and illegal detainment."

"What would that get you?" reflected Frances out loud.

"I don't know for sure. You tell me. You're better at this than I am."

I'm trying to do two things, or maybe three. First, I don't want to have a charge his attorney, even a public defender if that's all he gets, will be able to say should have April Smith standing next to him equally charged, and challenging her material witness status. Second, I don't want to expand jurisdiction by getting into the car being rented in NYPD territory, or opening the door to charge April with abetting the relocation and detainment. And lastly, I don't want today's charges to implicate Françoise Oulette in Myles's aftermath care."

The captain was ready to move on. They could tell from his sitting up straighter in his chair and looking at the top of his desk more than at them. And his ascension to formality. "Officer Frances, do you have anything else?"

As always, Frances gave him an answer it was easy to segue into his decision and orders for their subsequent action. "Only the desire to arrest Denison LeClerc, while we still know he is here in town, and before the Feds take him away and cut him a money deal that ignores everything he has done to Myles Lowry and those two nice ladies he involved."

Neither officer was surprised by the speedy and terse order. "Go, then."

331

Detective Dominic Corredor discovered in his flesh and bones that riding a train to a specific destination with finality was different from riding the rails as a hunter; and that having a seat next to a window in the daylight was far superior to a crate or two stacked next to each other in a closed boxcar whistling at countryside grade crossings in the night.

He marshaled his cash carefully, including the few bills that Danny Hart apparently hastily slipped into his jacket during their hospital hallway farewell. He used the debit card for the train tickets and a drink in each of the two stations. He wasn't confident about on-board conductors accepting a debit card. He wanted to have enough cash for the last leg of his journey, a cab ride home from where he detrained from the LIRR.

The cab moved along at residential neighborhood speed. It gave him a chance to see things had changed in his village center. In the commercial district there were both familiar and new shops. He wondered about the merchants who were not in business any longer. Was it the economy or did they have family adjustments: sad illnesses or deaths; or happy newlyweds or matriculating collegians whom they followed elsewhere?

He thought of nice, hard-working family people he had known. He hoped they had gone from being great parents to being grandparents and not on to widowhood.

The schoolyard and parking lot was weekend empty. The huge spreading elm that was a fixture forever on the front lawn was now an eight foot tall, chain-saw-sculpted Pilgrim, the school mascot. He was unsuccessful in recalling a hurricane or nor'easter he had missed during his years away.

Turning the corner onto the long street to his house, he saw that two long-empty lots, that he and his neighbors gathered to clean up on several Earth Days, now presented new homes. The one that caught his eye had a portable basketball pole and hoop in the driveway and three bicycles resting on their sides nearby on the lawn.

The driver was slowing, reading house numbers from mailboxes and front doors. "A little further up on the right," Corredor offered. When the cab stopped, he saw it was good he hadn't said, "the red house with the white fence." What had been his house was now more brown than red. A low hedge of boxwoods thrived along the previous fence line. He grew nervous as he passed the two twenties over the seat to the driver for the twenty-seven-dollar fare. "The rest is yours," he said, suddenly realizing that he had hardly spoken to the driver the whole ride. "Would you mind waiting a moment in case this is the wrong place?" he asked.

Dominic looked for familiar items in front of the house to allay the slowly rising fear in his chest. He saw none. Everything appeared pristine and in order, almost not 'lived-in,' as the expression went. He looked over his shoulder to make certain the taxi was waiting. It was.

He turned to face the front door, just three steps from where he stood. As he took that first step, the sound of the door latch came to his ear. And then the door, whose color was not what he remembered, opened slowly. He could not see clearly. There was water in his vision. He blinked it away, afraid to raise his hand.

Two young ladies he had last known as little girls stood before him in their Sunday finest. Dresses of the brightest yellow and green it seemed he had ever seen. Behind and between them, with a hand on each of their shoulders, was the love of his life. Still.

He heard their voices and the sound of a car driving away.

332

Rosalyn was careful not to wake her daughter from her late afternoon nap, even though it was hardly dinner time for everyone else. If Linda was still as tired as they said, she might sleep through the night. She held a glass of wine in the kitchen while she re-read Linda's discharge papers. There was nothing in the medical directions that would prevent her from letting her daughter sleep through the night. Linda's medical charts and nurse's records suggested she still was sleeping for long periods in the hospital, regardless of the time of day.

Rosalyn quietly cracked the door and looked into the softly lit bedroom twice over the first two hours. Linda appeared to be resting without distress. The librarian-mother couldn't help but notice the model train track was back, lain out on the floor again.

After the second time, Rosalyn thought it safe to unpack as noiselessly as she could. She dropped some of her clothes from the trip into the laundry and put the rest on hangers in the closet or in her dresser drawer. Out of habit, she reached under the drawer to verify that an envelope was still securely taped in place. She saw a business card on her dresser and left it there for later, thinking it was the librarian's and had fallen from one of the notebooks she had written her Grimm's Brothers' research within.

333

When Godfrey Mellon sat into Angie Flynn's car, he let his briefcase rest on his lap. She started to tell him right away, feigning some excitement. "Mr. Mellon, lots has happened since Miss Hayes called me about picking you up. I think you'll want to hear some of it before the arraignment."

"Not now, Flynn. I'm giving some thought to the arraignment." He brushed her off.

"I really want to at least tell you—" she tried again.

He raised his voice to say, "Miss Flynn, please stop!"

She considered stopping the car if this third appeal was denied. But she went for subtle over dramatic. Angie vocalized in the inverse, quietly muttering almost to herself, but just sulking loud enough for him to hear, "I thought for sure you'd want to know I found Mrs. Lowry and the child."

"Can't you understand, I'm . . ." and then it hit him. "You what?!"

"Mrs. Lowry and the child are at a private boarding school in the countryside," she flatly intoned, projecting hurt feelings to sell what would be coming next. She off-handedly passed him half an index card, with MRS. LOWRY and Rosalyn's kitchen phone number printed out neatly. Turning into a parking space at the hospital, she turned off the car and got out without saying another word. She started walking toward the MAIN ENTRANCE sign. When she heard his door slam, she shouted back over her shoulder, "Lock that door, please, so it's here when we get back. Or you'll miss your train." He could not see her face and its pleased-with-myself smirk as he leaned down to push the button in and hold the knob to close the door. He checked to ensure he had done it correctly and that the door was locked. She was almost to the front door of the hospital by the time he was walking as fast as he could without running after her.

In the hospital she walked up to the security guard posted in the center of the lobby. She inquired about the arraignment. She was told the way to Aello's room. Mellon came up, slightly winded, just as the guard was

saying, "Better hurry, that judge just went up a few moments ago. Can't miss him, squat roly-poly guy—with a very tall bailiff in uniform. Woman."

Flynn stepped off smartly toward the stairs, which she knew would keep Mellon more occupied and less talkative than the elevator for the one floor climb. He paused and glanced at the elevator bank and saw both carriages were above the seventh floor, so he followed her into the stairwell. He was annoyed she hadn't held the door for him and was already three steps up by the time he was lifting his foot and reaching for the banister.

Atop the landing, Flynn opened the door and looked down the three hallways that were visible. At the end of one, she saw a tall woman in uniform and a much shorter, squat man walking away from her. She started off in their direction, lingering just enough for Mellon to see where to go, but not enough to catch up to her for conversation.

334

In a different hospital several miles away, Danny Hart was also looking down a hallway and saw a uniformed man sitting on a folding chair against the wall. He stood as Danny approached, showing he was a local police officer and not a hospital security guard.

"Hart. Private investigator. Looking for Detective Howe, sir. She with Riley?" Polite enough, respecting the duty posting, but brooking no interference. It did not work.

"Are you armed, sir?" When Danny said he wasn't, the officer explained, "With apologies, sir. Detective Howe requires me to ask for photo ID for anyone wishing to enter the room."

"As well she should. Mike Riley should not be here." Danny handed the man the leather fold-over holding his investigator's license. The cop thanked him, handed it back, and pointed to a room two doors down and across the hall— "418," he said. Howe had installed the guard in front of a decoy room. What Hart was not seeing was the armed watch inside the room, just in case.

The room Danny entered was meant to be a double, but one bed had been removed to allow more bedside monitoring equipment and a couple of extra chairs and a table. Detective Howe was dozing in a hospital recliner, with her feet slightly raised. She raised her eyelids at the noise of the door opening and the increase in sound coming from the hallway. She still wore her protective vest, but her sidearm was glaringly absent. She would not receive that back again until the investigation into the discharge of the firearm was completed. Howe knew Danny came to see Mike, so she respectfully kept her distance, and her seat.

Riley's hair was usually close cropped, but Danny saw now that more than half his head had been shaved. Some of the red disinfectant stained his skin beyond the edges of the wrappings bandaging where they had worked on his skull. Most of the wounds everywhere else the doctors had attended to were underneath the special hospital warming blanket that compensated for his erratic up and down core temperature. His face was puffy from all the trauma and stress of surgery, and probably medications and antibiotics. The coffee and the apple, which Alex gave Hart, from the bags she was going to bake pies with, churned in his stomach.

Danny patted the blankets in a spot he hoped Mike would feel without pain. He took a seat next to Howe. "This isn't on you, Detective," he tried to assure her. "I understand you know that, and that it doesn't make it any easier. But please keep that in mind."

"He'll be lonely . . . when he goes home. Especially when his rehab requires walking a few times a day." Hart could see that Howe was flat out exhausted. Yet she was already looking ahead. And not thinking of herself.

"Detective, you need some decent sleep. That recliner's not going to cut it. And neither is a reduced calorie hospital breakfast. Today was horrible, but Mike's going to need you fighting for him tomorrow. You've got to be fresh at Aello's bail hearing. They take witness and victim statements into account. You know that. Riley won't be there to demand that judge throws away the key for the seven months it's going to take to bring Aello to trial. Linda won't be there to beg this woman can't be free on bail to go after her and her mother."

Hart wasn't about to let her off easy. "And you better be real clear with your own review board. That shooting was justified. Don't let them get away

with any crap that it put Aello at danger. That weapon discharge just as much saved her miserable life as it did mercifully attend to the dog's misery. You must be ready and able to be forceful about that. No sorrow about the dog can look like, or be manipulated to appear as, regret or guilt about that shooting. If you're tired, they'll run you to the ground over it. Riley will be furious if that happens. Mike will see that as a win for Aello and a big loss for you."

"Okay, Danny. Okay. I get it. I'll go in an hour or so," she promised.

"That guard's going to chase you out of here. I'll see to that," he said. "And, by the way, nice decoy room. I'll have to add that to my repertoire."

She smiled an acknowledgment. "Thanks."

"I'd insist on taking you to get you something for dinner, but I'm due across the river to meet at Attorney Soro's. She and her two colleagues and I are comparing notes in advance of Mellon's deadline tomorrow on some legal issues that involved him and Aello and the Lowrys," he told her.

"I sure hope Aello's in lockup and will miss that session," Howe noted, coming back to form. "Will having found the wife and kid change anything?" she asked.

"If the husband was up and around it would. But it seems they've just changed places. One will still be unable to appear before the judge," he opined.

"Well, at least you still have the possibility of 'both living parents.' No small feat, in this case, it's beginning to appear," she said, hoping not to bring a hex upon the house of Lowry.

Marie Aello was getting bored out of her skull. In a manner beyond acceptability, especially for a lawyer, she told the nurse who inquired how she was feeling . . . "my ass is sore as hell, my throat is parched, and my arm is too heavy with this cast."

The Filipino nurse had given up saying “I’m sorry” to Aello about an hour before, which was very early in her Sunday afternoon-to-evening mercy shift. Her friend, who had concert tickets, was really going to owe her big time for taking this coverage. Word began to spread, particularly among the non-whites working the floor, to avoid engaging with this patient as much as possible.

Aello couldn’t figure out why three extra chairs, a raised stool, and a hi-top table were being delivered on a rolling dolly by a maintenance staffer to her room. When she brutishly demanded to know what he was doing and verbally abused the older Black man who had just finished arranging the furnishings in her room, he started to answer in a subservient and gentlemanly manner, “Well, missus . . . and then he broke into a mock imitation of Sammy Davis Junior’s skit from Rowan and Martin’s *Laugh-in* show . . . he danced his way toward the door and rapped, “if your lawyer’s sleeping, better give him a nudge, order in the courtroom, here comes the judge. . .”

No one answered her call bell for the next ninety minutes.

She dozed off for a while, figuring no one was going to answer her demands anyway. When she woke, Aello slammed her room door when she managed with difficulty to squirm out of her bed to use the corner bathroom toilet by herself. And that seemed to suit everyone just fine.

Aello had hardly gotten back into the bed, half-hiking over the side rail she was unable to drop from atop the mattress, when the room door opened. A uniformed woman, tall and well-sculpted, entered the room, without a word of greeting. A slim, black metal, collapsible baton that was fully opened, extended from her right hand toward the floor. She proceeded across the room, opened the bathroom door to make certain the space was empty, and then moved across to do the same thing with the floor-standing wardrobe in the room. At both doors, she first angled the baton away from her body at about forty-five degrees in a ‘ready-to-sweep’ position. She looked behind the floor-length drapes, gathered at each side of the room’s window, but only after she initially parted them with the baton. The glazing looked out at the parking lot of the hospital and the U-shaped entry pavilion and courtyard. She slid the vertical glass panel all the way open, leaned out to make sure there was no balcony, or at least that no one was standing on one if there was. She took out a very small pair of optics, not much larger than opera

glasses, and scanned the roof across the way and all the windows of the wall facing Aello's room. Then she slid the glass closed and drew the drapes all the way closed.

The room went almost all the way dark, except for the soft illumination from the nightlight fluorescent bar above the head of Aello's bed—until the woman was back at the door and able to switch on all the overhead lights in the room. Without a word to Aello, she opened the door and three people entered. The first was a robed judge, the second was Godfrey Mellon, and the third was the private investigator, Flynn, from that hellhole of an apartment basement.

"Godfrey!" Aello almost screamed, but her voice cracked hoarse from dehydration.

The tall woman got up in Aello's face, so the patient didn't see the bracelets come out and attach her to the bed. When she felt the tug, Marie looked up in surprise and saw a fourth person enter the room. He was a stenographer with a rolling computer stand for his transcription device.

For the first time, the statuesque uniform spoke. She did not need to wear heels to look down upon the soon-to-be-prisoner. "Kindly be quiet, Attorney Aello. Adopt your courtroom decorum. Please be advised that this is a formal arraignment proceeding, the Honorable Judge Benjamin Venticelli, New Jersey Vicinage 2, presiding."

Judge Venticelli addressed Godfrey. "Attorney Mellon. Are you representing Attorney Aello in this proceeding?"

"I am, Your Honor."

The judge nodded to the uniform, serving as bailiff. As bailiff she intoned in a practiced voice, "This proceeding is hereby convened in the matter of Riley and the State of New Jersey v Aello. Marie Aello, you are charged with illegal entry, breaking and entering, vandalism of property, theft of personal property, assault with attempt to harm and maim, assault with a lethal weapon, and three counts of animal cruelty."

The judge again addressed Mellon directly. "Does your client waive the reading of her rights?"

"She does, Your Honor."

The judge asked Mellon, "Does your client understand the charges against her, as read by the plaintiff, Attorney Mellon?"

Godfrey looked at Marie and she disdainfully made a rude gesture meant for everyone in the room, which took effort to raise her arm with the cast, since her other was bound to the bedrail. "She does Your Honor," replied Mellon. "However, for the record, my clients stipulates that the charges against her are inappropriate and unfounded."

"Be that as it may, counsel," said the judge, "how does your client plead?"

"My client forcefully pleads 'Not Guilty,' Your Honor, under no uncertain terms." Aello glared at the judge and sneered at Flynn.

"Thank you, counsel," replied the judge. And then he continued, "In the interest of fairness and sensitivity to your client's on-going recuperation, this court is adjourned until ten a.m. tomorrow morning in Superior Criminal Court, Newark. See the bailiff for directions. At that time, it will be decided if your client is to be bound over or if bail will be entertained. A court date for a hearing on the charges will also be assigned on the Superior Court calendar. The prisoner will remain in this hospital facility and this room, under guard, until transported by the marshals to court tomorrow. "

"Your Honor, if it please the court, may we provide private security for the overnight?" was Mellon's request.

"Are you out of your mind?" It was Aello's screech. Pointing at Flynn with her unshackled, but cast-incumbered hand, she called out, "I'm not staying here with her, Your Honor. Absolutely not! She's not guarding me! This is all her fault. And yours, Mellon. If she hadn't kept me out of that cage in the first place, none of this would have happened!"

The uniform placed herself between Aello and the judge. "You're about to be charged with threatening, ma'am." She snapped her baton to its full length. "I warn you to desist while the judge is here, or your butt will be ripping on that other leg as well, and you'll be too embarrassed to show where you've been hit."

“Do you know how inappropriate that sounds?” yelled Aello. “You’re a fucking bailiff and I’m a lawyer for God’s sake.”

“Three things,” she said as the tip of her baton found itself between, but not touching, Aello’s breasts, which were obvious and loose under the hospital johnnie. “My sex life is none of your business.” The baton moved the johnnie to one side, “I don’t think the Almighty is answerable in a court of law.” Now she moved the johnnie to the other side. “And if you don’t behave yourself, you just may wind up in a cage.” The bailiff stepped away. Aello saw the woman’s reflection in the mirror on the back of the hospital room door. Her imagination raced. “Are you ready, Your Honor?” the bailiff-now-escort asked the judge. He answered by informing all present that court was indeed adjourned.

Three of her visitors left Aello almost alone in her room. None had removed the handcuff from her uninjured wrist or the siderail. Now she would have to wait for a bedpan through the night. Mellon passed her a note quietly and then he left last, after the others. She almost threw the note onto the floor, but she looked at it first. On it he had quickly scribbled Roz Young’s name and a phone number.

336

Arresting Denison LeClerc had to be done decisively and legally. Maura and Frances were made well aware by their captain that no part of their procedure could be faulted by the doctor’s lawyers later at the station house interview room or holding cell, nor at his arraignment or trial without detriment to their ability to keep him in their jurisdiction as long as they needed him to be there.

After debating the pros and the cons, mostly centered around their desire to withstand an entrapment defense, the captain decided they should go to the clinic in a clearly marked police car and that each woman should be unmistakably recognizable as a uniformed officer of the town police department.

Frances was driving and Maura was, however inappropriately termed, riding shotgun. They entered the main parking lot of the clinic. The car

registered to LeClerc was one of the few cars parked near the clinic's front entrance. By design, Frances stopped and let Maura out of the patrol car by the street entry to the lot. She adopted a visible presence in that position. From there, Frances slowly rolled through every parking area, driveway, building approach, service and delivery entries and exits, and loading docks accessible to her vehicle. Despite a utility trench that was left open and blocking the usual conveyance, she was still able to circumnavigate the entire facility because she was willing to jump a curb, ride on a sidewalk, and transit a dirt and gravel fire lane that bordered the property line behind the building. She included a review of the double door emergency entrance through which she knew, from April Smith and Maura Hammersmith, that Myles Lowry made his inaugural gurney incursion into the clinic the fateful night of the crash.

There was only one vehicle stationary in a location other than the front lot Maura was watching over, where LeClerc's registered vehicle was left waiting his return. That one vehicle was the known-to-be-rented ambulette van. It was parked by the double doors in the rear of the building. Before heading back to rejoin Maura out front, Frances eased the cruiser back up and onto the dirt and gravel fire road leading away from the clinic. A little way down the road, Frances stopped the car, so she could check out one just one more thing. She got out of her car, leaving it idling in case she had to move fast, and in a matter of a few minutes determined that it was possible to leave the back of the property using that fire lane. It would be a rocky ride, and at one point a tight squeeze between two substantially trunked trees. But it was possible to use it to trespass through the adjacent wooded lot and come out on the main street across from the library parking lot, on the arc of dead man's curve. At that point the road was divided by an easily mounted curbed-and-cemented flat median.

Frances looked around and found some deadfall in the woods. She dragged two long sections, one with a crown of tangled branches, and jammed them across the space between the two trees. They could be moved, as she had done, but it would delay, and hopefully thwart, an escape, except on foot from there. She used the dashboard two-way and radioed into the station and requested that a second police cruiser be in the library parking lot, off the clinic property, keeping watch on the fire road curb cut.

She doubled back off the fire road and drove up to the ambulette. Getting out of her idling vehicle again, she took two metal trash containers

that flanked the double door entry and placed each on its side, and foot jammed them to chock the back tires. They were visible enough to alert a legitimate medical emergency departure that they needed extraction. Again, it would not stop a rear flank get-away attempt, but it would slow one down, by what might prove to be a few critical minutes.

Hammersmith was caught off guard when the patrol car came back from the way it left, wondering if a circumnavigation was not possible and they might be “blind” about part of the building exterior. Frances debriefed her on the complete perimeter surveillance and makeshift security. Maura had a hard time envisioning their captain’s face when she imagined their post-arrest debriefing.

Frances continued to keep the lights dark and siren silent. She drew the cruiser up perpendicular across the rear of what they hoped was the car LeClerc was using, without obstructing their ability to open their doors. They sat like that for the required ten or so minutes until a woman came out of the building and approached the passenger side of the police vehicle.

“Dr. LeClerc wants me to find out why you are blocking his car,” she said.

Maura replied, “Is the doctor inside or did he become aware of our vehicle with an off-site monitor from an outdoor security camera for the parking lot?”

“A what?” she asked.

Not bothering to elaborate, she repeated just the first part of her inquiry. “Is the doctor inside?”

“Yes. He is in his office,” she said.

“Are you working with the doctor this Sunday evening?” Maura inquired.

“Yes. In fact, I am,” she said.

“Are there other personnel in the building at this time?” Maura asked.

“Only the two people from the cleaning company, getting the place ready for Monday morning,” was her reply.

“May I ask what you and the doctor are working on tonight? Are there any patients in the clinic at this time?” Maura continued, maintaining the pressure gently, keeping the woman on the defensive. She was becoming visibly nervous, wringing her hands at the end of her fully extended arms down in front of her. It made Frances happy to be able to see her hands, empty and out in the open like that.

“Month end charts for patients we sent to other facilities after the emergency. And their Medicare reports,” she said.

Frances spoke next so Maura didn't. “Miss? For patient privacy we can not enter the building while Medicare records are out and being worked on. I wonder if you could ask the doctor to step out here a moment to speak to us, please. We got a call that there's been a break-in and the clinic's van has been vandalized. We'd like to verify the location of the van, find out if the report is accurate, and get Dr. LeClerc's authorization to enter the van to make a visual examination for a report of the crime. Of course, his insurance company will do the claims work. But we are just interested in the criminal activity.”

“Well, I don't know,” she said. “He's pretty busy.”

Then Hammersmith went back at her, “Excuse me, are you saying you won't tell the doctor his quarter-of-a-million-dollar ambulance van has been looted? Maybe of narcotics?” That shook her up enough to go get the doctor.

It took about eight minutes, but an angry looking oncologist came out of the clinic rapidly and made his way directly for the police car. Like the woman before him, he went for the passenger door. Unlike for their previous visitor, this time Frances slowly stepped out of her side of the cruiser and appeared to come around to be part of the conversation about to take place.

“This is highly irregular, Officer . . . he looked at her name on her lapel strip . . . Hammersmith.” He jumped back a step. “Hey, you're the one who was here . . .”

Before LeClerc could accuse Maura of harassing him again about the arrangement of his clinic . . . and reminding her that she and her captain were made to leave the clinic a few days before, he heard a voice behind him.

“Denison LeClerc, you are under arrest for leaving the scene of a motor vehicle accident, obstruction of a police investigation, and reckless endangerment.”

“What are you talking about?” he demanded.

“Please put your hands behind your back,” she said, as she attached one cuff to the wrist at his side in front of her. Frances simply said, “Maura.”

At that point, Hammersmith addressed him by name again, “Denison LeClerc . . .” and then she read from a small, laminated card she took from her pocket the words the oncologist was familiar with from so many procedural shows on television . . . his Miranda rights.

They left him with a bottle of spring water, one wrist cuffed to a table ring in an interview room, while he waited for his attorney. In the meanwhile, they worked on their written after-action report. Frances had radioed the patrolman sitting in the library parking lot and explained to him how to unbarricade the fire lane and to remove and replace the garbage cans from behind the ambulette.

As LeClerc’s frustrated lawyer discovered, much to his chagrin, the officers had made a clean arrest. They had not entered the building without a warrant. They were forthright in identifying themselves as police officers. Their inquiry was about a clinic-owned van involved in an unsolved and unreported motor vehicle accident, in which a person was seriously injured. He promised to see his client at the arraignment the next day and left.

Mellon was more interested now in hearing from Flynn than he was about getting the next departing PATH train. There would be more. “Is there a coffee shop nearby, do you think, Miss Flynn? I’d like to hear what else you could tell me.”

"It's Jersey, sir. I know a diner," was her reply.

She'd been in so many diners before. They were like dogs. So many breeds and nationalities. Yet they all had four legs and a tail, except those born without or who would never answer to the name of LUCKY. At diners there were always baked goods and cookies to greet you and say goodbye. Mirrors all over the place. Oversized menus and endless urns of coffee.

They took an end booth in a corner by the long hall to the bathrooms. These were the ones other patrons avoided, she explained. It would give them a moat of unoccupied booths. And the place was clean so there were no offensive odors coming from the hall.

"So please tell me," the lawyer requested.

Flynn could see that right beneath the listing for apple, blueberry and Boston cream, there was also apparently humble pie on the menu. Hart had told her once she thought like she talked.

"When Miss Hayes called me to see about hiring me to check on Mrs. Lowry's apartment, she asked me if I knew Danny Hart. I told her I did know of him, and our paths had crossed from time to time, but that we were not friends, and hardly even acquaintances. Well, that has changed in the last few weeks. I discovered that he was hired to work for Ned Hegerman's associates, after you sacked him."

"Why?" asked Mellon, in an even tone, without apparent anger.

"Why, him? and Why, me?" she said. "Him, first. He still feels responsible to find Linda Lowry. He even was willing to get fired by Hegerman's co-Attorney and still look for her on his own dime."

"Soro?" asked Godfrey.

"Yes, she's the one. Black lady from Africa, I'm told." She left it like that to see if he would give anything away.

"Pain in my ass. Incredibly loyal to Ned. Even with him dead." He waited as the waitress put some waters on the table with their coffees. "Are you ready to order, or would you like some time?" she asked.

"We'll wait a little. Thank you," said Angie.

"But you need to watch out for her," warned Mellon. "She is a damn good lawyer." He put some cream into his coffee. "Her downfall, what they call in the arts, 'her tragic flaw,' is that she's too nice and always wants to be fair. She blesses it with the title 'conflict resolution.' Bunch of horse manure. She's right that it helps things grow. But she doesn't seem to realize the stink it makes."

Angie was careful not to call attention where she did not want him looking. "Anyway, back to Hart, okay?"

"Certainly," he said.

"I've started tracking Mrs. Lowry and her daughter with him, since we all know where Mr. Lowry is. I'm able to cover more ground and get more information for you than if I was still working just on my own. I don't find it unethical. I've been very forthright with him, He knows I am working for you." She led him on, hopefully.

"That's very creative of you, Ms. Flynn. I've seen such arrangements work quite well in the past on this very case," he said, amused.

"With Hart?" she acted startled.

"No. No. No. Some other young man. But set that aside, and get back to Hart, please."

"Well, I was only telling you about Hart, so you'd understand how I could tell you about Mrs. Lowry being found," she explained. "Since I've learned from Hart that you need both parents to get back to custody court."

"Yes, but you see, Ms. Aello has put the screws to that for the moment," he said.

She was stepping very carefully now, telling herself not to make an omelet. "You mean tomorrow's hearing?" She ventured. And then she went for it, "Can I pick you up and bring you tomorrow for that, as well, sir?"

"Since you've offered, I'd find that extremely helpful, if you would please," he said, accepting her parry.

"Too bad the evidence from the attack won't be available for the arraignment." She felt a kinship to the armorers who loaded Enola Gay.

Mellon almost choked on his coffee. He needed a sip of water. "What did you say?" he asked as he recovered.

The waitress came over. "Are you alright, sir?" And when he nodded wordlessly, she inquired, "Will you be ordering now?"

Flynn wanted more time, so she said, "I would like a nice diner-style Reuben and a cold cola please."

"Have you a bar?" he asked. The waitress said they did. "Then I'll have a scotch on the rocks and a bagel and lox, if you would please, with a schmear."

He looked at Flynn. "Please tell me about this evidence. It may help me tomorrow to know in advance," he almost was pleading.

Angie asked her grandmother in heaven to forgive the lie she was about to tell, and to keep an eye on a little girl named Linda, who needed all the help she could get, because her mother was not a nice person. "Mrs. Lowry gave a personal letter to Ms. Aello some years ago. It had to do with something that Attorney Hegerman told her at the time she was married, before her daughter was born, of course. Apparently, Ms. Aello wanted that letter back." Angie waited for some facial recognition or verbal admission from the lawyer. There was no admission, and his face was almost contorted in confusion.

Flynn tried to twist him up even more. "When Ms. Aello first met me and Mr. Riley and his dog, she was insistent and very rude. I let her look in Mrs. Lowry's apartment as Miss Hayes said you ordered. But I had never heard of that basement before from Miss Hayes or you. And Miss Hayes was so specific about letting Aello go into the apartment, that I kept her from unlocking Mrs. Lowry's storage unit. That's why she was cursing at me and blaming me at the arraignment." She caught her breath, as if she was upset.

“But what she did not tell you was that she just didn’t look at the apartment. The only word to use was, she ‘searched’ the place. You ask her. She doesn’t know it, but I saw her opening drawers and cabinets. She was looking for something. And when she didn’t find it, that’s when she asked Mr. Riley about extra storage.”

Their food came out, fast and hearty diner fare. Their discussion cooled down. Angie was waiting to see what he volunteered.

As it turned out, all Mellon volunteered to do was pay the check and accept a ride to the PATH station. But Flynn knew two things. He had more to tell, and she would have to find a way to have him do that in the morning rides to and from the bail-or-remand hearing. And she should let Hart know she lied to him to cause conflict with both his clients, Lowry and Aello. To be timely, she was hoping that Detective Howe had a phone number for Attorney Soro’s home, where Danny would be with the three women from Hegerman’s firm.

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After Danny and Eleanor and Gabriella and Karidja exchanged greetings, he asked to excuse himself to check his phone for messages in case there was information helpful to their evening discussion. He joined them with two pieces of news. “I had two calls that I should let you know about. First, Officer Hammersmith from Long Island called to say they had arrested the oncologist who hurt Myles, Denison LeClerc, and he will be arraigned tomorrow. And Angie Flynn called to say Detective Howe was going to get in touch with you, Karidja, about Mellon and Aello. Did she?” he asked Soro.

“Yes. Not too long ago, in fact. Detective Howe was approached by Ms. Flynn to pass on a message to me, thinking Howe had my phone number, which she does.” Explaining it to all assembled, Karidja reported: “The gist of it is that, after she and Danny went their separate ways this afternoon, Investigator Flynn was with Mellon and Aello, at Mellon’s behest, and will be again tomorrow—getting him to Aello’s arraignment and bail hearing. She’s used that time to reveal to Mellon that she’s been working with Danny to find Rosalyn, and has been successful. She gave him Mrs. Lowry’s phone number, signaling that Mellon is still her client, not Danny. Then she lied to him about

what Aello was after. She told him it was a letter that Rosalyn sent Marie revealing something Ned told her, back when she and Myles were getting married. Flynn's plan was to sow discord and make Mellon think the two ladies were working together, against him, behind his back; and to hide the AP's existence from Mellon, if he did not already know about it."

Eleanor Quatrane asked, "In all of this, has anyone gotten updates about how Myles and Mike Riley are doing?" No one had anything later than noon that day. She said, "At least we know that Linda Lowry is out of the hospital and back with her mother."

Quatrane then said she thought they should get on with their main objective for getting together, unless anyone had anything else to update. "I'm afraid I do," said Danny Hart. The ladies were caught off guard because they did not expect anything else. "And it does relate to Linda getting back home to Rosalyn, and the two of them not being 'missing' anymore, since we know they are at HAPPYDALE."

Gabriella could tell from Hart's tone of voice. She had a premonition and let out a small, audible gasp; and then she whispered Dominic's name.

Hart nodded her way and then told them, "Dom packed his things at my place last night and had Miss Alex and Linda drop him at the train station on their way back to the school." He saw all three were saddened by the news.

But Quatrane was apprehensive. "He's going after the last of those kidnapers, isn't he? I'm so fearful he's going to be hurt in the end."

"Kidnappers will bring him no harm, Eleanor. Of that I am almost certain," said Danny.

Gaby jumped in. "Because he's not heading west, is he, Danny?" Hart affirmed he was not. "Thank God. Do you think they will take him back?"

Eleanor was suddenly elated. "Danny, is he going home to his family? Really? Is he?" She was so excited.

"If they will have him. Early signs are that they are willing. He used his debit card yesterday for a big lunch check. It required authorization by his

wife as second card holder. And she gave it." Danny explained, "That was their agreed message code that he was ready to come home and was asking if he could; and hers to say she and their daughters would be there waiting for him."

Karidja told them what they each felt to some degree or another. "It is bittersweet, for sure. Resolutions seldom evoke only one emotion. I will miss him very much, but am so happy for him and his family." After a moment, she said to them, "And now he has left the rest of the task to us, so let's get on to it. Eleanor?"

Quatrane took the lead as they sat around in Soro's formal parlor room. "What we know is that Thomas Bruce for our firm and Godfrey Mellon for the others, perhaps acting together and perhaps not, may meet tomorrow at four o'clock—if the Hegerman audit is going to be challenged. I still expect it will be. And I think Bruce is going to ask me and Karidja to attend."

Gabriella replied, "I'm not so sure about that anymore."

"About which part of it, Gabs?" asked Hart.

His voice, and calling her that name, sent a charge through the room. It made the three ladies confident that Hart was again fully invested with their efforts. Linda had been found. They knew where Rosalyn was. Myles was sort of abducted, but not as part of an on-going threat. And though debilitated, his current whereabouts were known. Danny Hart's energy seemed ready for them to focus on getting the Lowrys back in front of Judge Eoin McCarver for a settlement.

Gabs answered, "The part about the audit." She gave him a minute to shift gears. "Marie Aello has gone from being the mystery child to becoming a wild card. She's crazed by that document turning her money over to Rosalyn. She nearly killed Mike Riley over it. And just because she needs Mellon to keep her out of jail today and tomorrow, she seems spitefully alienated from him, and she hates the Lowrys. I don't see her helping Mellon tomorrow in rejecting that audit, because now she can't destroy the AP in advance. If she keeps the Trust balance out of the audit, as it is now, the settlement between the law firms won't touch the Trust, and she won't lose it in the AP. She'll live to fight that another day."

Quatrane asked her, "So, what are you saying? About tomorrow, I mean."

"I'm motivated by Angie Flynn. I'm thinking among all the papers and calls and contacts and people I've gone through over the past few weeks, where is there something I can throw in front of Mellon—not like you and Karidja who must stay on the legalities with Thomas Bruce—but subterfuges to undermine cooperation among a friendly Rosalyn-Marie-Godfrey partnership. But mine won't be lies like Flynn's, don't worry Karidja. Mine will just be misdirection, sowing uncertainty."

"You've been awfully quiet over there, Attorney Soro," said Danny. "My experience, before my temporary absence from this war council, would lead me to believe that you are envisioning a path through all this. Would that be correct, or have I been gone too long?" he asked.

"I find myself still wondering if tomorrow can serve to leverage a better outcome for our friend Linda from Judge McCarver," she told them.

"What will that depend upon?" he asked.

"Strangely enough, quite a considerable amount may rely upon Linda herself. As it did once before, actually. But this time she is older and more mature. And we must level the playing field for her better this time around."

Eleanor recalled aloud, "Well, now we know that the last time, Mellon and Rosalyn had something on Ned. Effectively, they were blackmailing him. And Marie could have bailed him out, but wouldn't, she hated him so much. If Ned's not representing Myles, shouldn't that be enough this time around?"

"Be a shame if it was," ruminating Gaby loudly enough for the others to hear.

Eleanor brought her up short, almost scolding saying, "Gabiella?"

Her reply was, "They should be made to pay. The whole lot of them. Even Mellon's old man. His greed's what started this, after all." And that gave her two great ideas she decided to keep to herself, in light of Quatrane's tone.

Karidja told Gabriella, and told them all, “Be very careful, please. In the resolution of an international conflict, it is essential not to plant the seeds of later discord. That always seem to yield a far greater disturbance a generation removed or more. So, too, with personal disputes. Solutions that inflict revenge satisfy only the conditions to spawn cyclic feuds.”

“I can’t stand the idea of rolling over and playing dead to these people.” Again, it was Gabriella who spoke her mind. “There must be something better.”

“Your knowledge and temperament are unique, Gaby. Will you empower me with them, so I can fashion a resolution that paralyzes the Rosalyn-Marie-Godfrey troika, as you style them, leaving them unable to strike back ever again?” A chided Gabriella Costa said she would. She abandoned her two vengeful ideas and decided to trust Soro, instead.

Danny Hart asked, “Karidja, what are we looking at here as a process in front of the Judge when you get to a custody hearing?” He elaborated, “Who comes? Can we? Are there witnesses? Does he hear from anyone other than the lawyers? Do the spouses address the judge? What about Linda—you made some reference to that.”

Eleanor wanted to know from him, “Why are you asking about that now, Danny. We must get through tomorrow first, you know.”

Hart replied, “Seems to me that our stenographer wants to lay some landmines, but the resolutionist says no one can be maimed, use fencing instead. And the attorney says not to spread recurring weeds. In my mind that means we think bamboo.”

Almost simultaneously Quatrane squinted out . . . “What?” and Soro exclaimed . . . “Brilliant. It could work.” Then they started talking at cross purposes, not waiting for each other to finish, and no one could clearly understand. It was atypical for the group. They were out of practice.

Finally, Costa called out . . . “enough with bamboo . . . what is this—pandemonium?!” They all exploded in laughter.

“You’re very devilish, Gabs,” observed the investigator.

"Thanks, Dan," she replied.

When they all had settled down and gotten back into proper form, Danny still had the floor. "So, you get the idea, right?" asked Hart. "We sow fast-growing obstacles tomorrow at the courthouse and the meeting room. They look innocuous so are left standing. They multiply and cover acres and acres because they spread on unseen roots. Each one stands alone, like Gabs wants to drop in on Mellon and Aello and Lowry to distract them. But then by the time Myles is well enough to be wheeled into McCarver's space and you subpoena Roslyn from school, they won't know the forest for the trees. You blindside them with a resolution while they're looking the other way to protect themselves and Karidja gets the best deal possible for Linda."

Quatrane told him, "Danny, you have been spending entirely too much time with that young lady, Angie Flynn. Maybe the young ladies here know what you just said, but I'm lost. Say it to me slowly, no imagery or slang. And tell me specifically what I do to play my part."

Karidja said, "No, Danny. Don't repeat yourself. Let's see if we understand and can apply it when you're not standing right next to us. Gaby, what would you do to follow Danny's idea?"

"I'd make Mellon walk a mile in our shoes. It took us two weeks to learn the people involved in this intrigue from the beginning, and another several days to know where they fit. Mellon knows the people probably, but he doesn't know that we know. And he can't be sure without talking to them whether they have talked to us. If I could think of a way . . . wait!"

She was very excited. She energized the rest of them. She walked past the table with after-dinner desserts and drinks Karidja put out and they hadn't touched. She picked up an Ivorian sweet beignet, called *boflotos*, took a bite, and was on her way. "Karidja, let me go back to what Danny asked you before he suggested bamboo." She checked out Danny's pleased expression and went on. "Will you call witnesses during the custody hearing?"

"I am allowed to ask for character references in writing to be submitted to the Judge beforehand. I can request in-person testimony, but that gets a little tricky if it weighs on the judge's patience, so not too many. Why?"

“I’m thinking of making a list of potential persons you might solicit for references, either in writing or in-person. This would be legitimate, it’s only in-house preparation. The list would have a heading like: Contact for Custody Hearing. No claims would be made that these people were approached for this purpose, though we have approached them for other parts of our Lowry investigation and search for Linda. I would fax this list to Angie Flynn this evening, so she has it tomorrow when she picks Mellon up at the PATH station.” She let the idea sink in.

Then she went for the jugular, like Riley’s dog, clamped on so Mellon suffocated, but had no broken skin to bleed to tip him off. “Angie can tell him it became available, from an anonymous informant in your office, while she was helping look for the Lowrys. She can ask him innocently, as part of her services for him, if it is something he would find helpful. That is, make him ask for it, don’t represent it as something formal, like an investigation report—have him assert it has a value. Flynn does not assign it any value or objective importance she is vetting.”

They were dazed she had this level of energized calculus ready to unleash on the man she had been assembling information about for four weeks, while all that time a young girl she had never met was hidden away from sight by his client. “Now get this. He must figure out how we even know about these people. And I’ll include some he might not even know, or remember by name. Then suddenly, he will see his whole house of cards crumbling in front of a judge in family court, who has the power to adjudicate for Linda—and then, Karidja, you refer him and his father to the SEC.”

“I thought you said this would not be vindictive, Gabs,” said Hart.

“It won’t be. Karidja will never have to use the list, or even admit she put it together for the court’s consideration. All the list is going to do to Mellon, and maybe even Aello and Rosalyn, is less than the blackmail they perpetrated against Ned some years ago. This will simply apply psychological pressure—which Attorney Soro can truthfully deny was ever a part of her arbitration—to have Rosalyn and Godfrey, gracefully, or begrudgingly, eventually accept the divorce settlement and custody arrangement that Karidja decides is a fair resolution.”

Sensing they needed a release valve to decompress, Karidja, as a good host, offered a break with refreshments—featuring homemade and specialty

Ivorian desserts and coffee or tea or cold non-alcoholic drinks. Gabs sat in the corner for fifteen minutes and jotted down a prospective lists of names they could review and amend, by addition or subtraction, as they saw fit.

After forty-five minutes for socializing and regrouping, their consensus was to take the copies Karidja made of Gabriella's list and run down the names one at a time for a 'yea' or 'nay' vote, including which names were to be flagged for in-person testimony. All the others were to go under the heading on the final fax list as WRITTEN REFERENCE.

In the end, the persons shown as individuals to testify as in-person witnesses were: Dr. Françoise Oulette, April Smith, Valerie McKinley, Beatriz Grey, Charles Spada, Joshua Winston, Marie Aello, and Danny Hart. The list from whom to request written references consisted of: Detective Howe, Detective Corredor, Itzel Cocom, Doctor Isidore Aronsen, Officer Maura Hammersmith, Mike Riley, and Paul Meadows.

They agreed that they should respect the wishes of Mrs. DeWitt from the Manhattan SEC office and make no reference to her on either list. They felt it was crucial to have the Mellon cousin, Joshua Winston, shown as a person Mellon would think was a source of information, even though Mr. Winston might not even be alive later in the year, at the time of the hearing.

And most certainly, they left Angie Flynn off the list for 'obvious reasons' proclaimed Costa.

When they were done, they made a nicely keyboarded, undated, copy, which for effect had a hand cross out and correct spelling for Charles, rather than Charlie, Spada—which would make his name really jump off the page when Mellon saw it.

Danny phoned over to Angie Flynn, as she had asked him to for any updates she might give him of the arraignment, after their session at Karidja's was over. Little did she suspect he would have a major update and invitation for her. She accepted and walked over to turn on her fax machine as they continued their conversation. She was convinced that their fax list would significantly out-perform anything she was trying to create to disgruntle Mellon more the next day. She told Danny she would cut off the transmission line showing the date and time, and then make a full page size photocopy to give to Mellon in the morning. She wished them a good night.

The last phone calls while they were still assembled that Sunday night were made by Karidja, in her function as attorney for Myles and Mike. As had happened to her a few times before in her years of practice, the understaffed night nurse desks this Sunday evening mistook her identification statement to mean she was exercising her 'durable power-of-attorney' for the incapacitated men.

Myles was resting, but not as comfortably as he had been during the day. Karidja was told this might be a good sign. It might mean he was coming around, and on the way to regaining consciousness. They would monitor his medications carefully to make certain he received only the appropriate dosages, given his stroke diagnosis and subsequent prognosis. They verified Karidja's home phone number and office phone number to keep in touch with her, as the hour of the day dictated.

Mike Riley was finally out of his third procedure of the day. He was very weak, and his vital signs were fluctuating. But the surgeons were very pleased that he had been resourceful and fit enough to withstand his injuries and tolerate the invasive care he required. He was in the ICU and would be watched constantly through the night.

She thanked each nurse when the first, a man, and the second, a woman, were done with their reports. She told them she or her office would call back in the morning for an update. Without being asked, Eleanor had already set her plan in motion to make those calls and use the same recording-and-reporting method for the friends as she had done for Ned during his final hospitalization. The only difference was that she would use her home phone number and recording device, and not the one at the office.

Being that Marie Aello was in a holding cell and not fully incarcerated, it was easier for her to feign a migraine and be brought to the stationhouse nurse's room, from where she could phone in a request for an emergency prescription from the all-night pharmacy that would deliver.

She was afforded privacy for the call, especially since no one wanted to spend any more time than necessary with the ill-mannered attorney-prisoner.

When the phone was finally answered after six rings by a sleepy, female voice, she started right in with a string of female body part curses that shocked Rosalyn Lowry awake. "When I get out of here on bail tomorrow, I am coming for you and for your daughter." Aello never identified herself or spoke Rosalyn's name. Her time on the phone was considerably less than needed for a tracing recording, she thought.

She covered her 'wrong number' dial with a call to the pharmacy and requested the medicine as stipulated. It's delivery an hour later seemed to validate her proper use of the phone.

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Danny Hart's top floor was lonely, as he told Dominic Corredor he suspected it would be. Hart thought he'd need to reassess his situation, now that his house guest and new friend had turned many of his assumptions topsy-turvy. His two mainstays of working alone and avoiding New York City seemed in jeopardy. Only time would tell.

As he was falling off to sleep, later than he would have preferred, his phone rang. Before this case, he would have left it until morning as a message to return. But with two friends in the hospital in grave conditions, he had relocated the phone to his bedside and was on it in an instant.

The voice belonged to a woman he did not recognize, though he thought he might have heard it before. "Is this Mr. Hart?"

"Yes," he wanted to hear more.

"I would like to reconsider," she said.

"Reconsider what . . . please?" he answered.

“Reconsider asking you into my home. Tonight. As soon as you can come.” Abrupt and to the point, but not offensively so.

“Well, I’m not so sure—”

“Danny. This is not a ‘booty call,’ as they say these days. I think me and my daughter—who happens to be a great fan of you and your friend Dominic—need your advice, and maybe also your help.” She still did not say her name. She was cautious, not knowing if his phone was surveilled, and by whom.

Her caution was not lost on Hart. “I would think an hour.”

She thanked him, checked on Linda’s bedroom, and poured another glass of wine.

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Between afternoon and evening ‘time-outs’ in Yvonne’s adjacent bedroom, Beatriz and her favorite caterer had put the final touches on the plan for Monday afternoon’s Free Ultimate Surprise Barbecue Dinner. Yvonne’s drivers would arrive in corporate vans and take over the quad as soon as classes began. They would spend the morning assembling the table-and-chair and canopy arrangements.

After the school’s lunch break, the dining hall would close, and Yvonne’s food preparation staff would assume that kitchen and finish the cooking and salad mixing. They would then arrange all the food in their aluminum chaffing trays and plastic serving bowls. Buns and rolls would be pyramided artistically on circular corrugated cardboards, condiments would be designated for individual stations that would be set on strategically opened folding tables in the quad. Individual plastic cutlery settings, already nestled in dinner-sized napkins, were aligned in cartons for distribution at the serving tables.

The sub-contractor for the lawn games, balloons, and face-painting would arrive in time to start the entertainment in the half hour that the food was being staged on the quad, and then remain for the rest of the program.

Administrator Grey had not intended on falling asleep on Yvonne's couch. But the day had been too relaxing, exciting, and wine-laced to have any other conclusion to the night. She awoke about four in the morning and drove back to **HAPPYDALE**, leaving Yvonne in her bed alone, as she had spent the overnight hours.

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"Who is it?" Rosalyn asked, through the closed door on which Hart had knocked quietly.

"You called me," Danny said.

Cracking the door open slightly, she said, "Do you have identification? I don't have any way of knowing you are you, even if you were on that van today." She insisted, with the chain still securing the door.

He passed through three things. A business card identical to the one that Alex had left in her bedroom. A photo of her former husband. And a picture of Itzel and Bembe Cocom from Myles's office. Danny said a quiet prayer, "Thank you God for Dominic Corredor."

"Please come in, Mr. Hart," Rosalyn said, greeting him as he entered. "I can't be too careful right about now. There's too much going on."

He was relieved to see she was appropriately dressed in a bulky Eagles football sweatshirt from her recent excursion, loose jeans, socks, and sneakers. He had promised himself that if the overnight summons was designed as a seduction, he was turning right around and going back to his place.

He passed on coffee and accepted a cold soda, still in the can. "So, what is happening, Mrs. Lowry"

"You may call me Rosalyn, or Roz, if you'd like," she said.

"We'll see as we go along," he replied. He had also decided on the drive to the school that he'd stay with the pronoun 'you' and only refer to Linda by a given name.

"My caregiver, Alex, left your business card. I suppose you asked her to do that?" she stated and asked simultaneously.

He nodded, without further elaboration, verbally or by facial expression. Hart was following Flynn's earlier advice not to let the ladies, Aello or Lowry, have occasion to slot him into a hated stereotype by the way he talked to them or treated them in person. Angie's exact words were, "Treat these ladies like they were in your mother's front parlor, coming to invite her to join the local garden club."

"I phoned because she called and threatened us. Just minutes before I called you. She said something about getting out on bail . . ." She inhaled. "Is she in jail or something?" asked Rosalyn.

Danny was aware that she was frightened. But more because she said she was. Her demeanor was not reflecting that.

"Mrs. Lowry." He waited to make sure she was paying attention as an adult equal and not as a feminist, or whatever she was, and unable to have such a conversation. When he felt she was at least willing . . . the able was still to be proven . . . he began. "I don't want to be harsh or disrespectful. But I do mean to be firm. Before I answer any of your questions, I would like you to tell me as frankly as you wish to, why you called me here tonight and what it is you want to tell me and what it is you might want me to do." She did not answer right away, so he added, "I say this because I do not want to lead you on. Nor do I want to betray any confidences."

She thought about it some and told him, "I don't particularly like dealing with men, Mr. Hart. Doing so hasn't worked out for me very well."

Danny offered, "May I ask you this, then, please? Have you ever trusted a man—let's leave Myles out of this—to help you with your daughter? Say Mr. Mellon or Mr. Meadows?"

Lowry replied, "Mellon has been useful. But I do not particularly trust him. Mr. Meadows had his own reasons to have his daughter befriend Linda. But I'll at least give him the benefit of the doubt. He was always a gentleman. And he was often very helpful with Linda."

Hart realized she was saying words that were sharp, but he also recognized her tone was not brash. He hoped it was because she was beginning to feel she could, like him, say hard things politely. "Would it help us get along better if you knew that I considered my being here is because of Linda and not because of you?"

She began, "That is pretty—"

He spoke quickly and didn't let her characterize his position with a word that might come between them. "Let's just say I have found it helpful always to be as honest as possible, particularly in difficult interactions."

"I see," she said. She wanted to go on the attack, but restrained herself. Rosalyn settled on this: "May I ask if you have been completely honest with me so far?"

Danny said without delay, "I have not told you any lies, neither has Ms. Flynn. But we have not told you everything. And if omission is not truthful, we're probably on the fence with a few things," he admitted.

"Tell me those things. Then I'll decide what comes next. As can you." she bargained with him.

"We told you I worked for Mellon before Flynn did. That's the truth. What we didn't say was that she got hired because Mellon fired me." He waited.

"Would you be willing to tell me why he fired you?" she said.

"Yes, if you want to know." She said she did, so he went ahead and did. "Paul Meadows loaned you a tape player for Linda's party game. You used that player to tape your argument with Myles. Meadows heard it and brought it to me. He brought it to me because I was still at your apartment, looking into your disappearance for Mellon. Mellon wanted to use the transcript against Myles at the custody hearing that Monday afternoon. I thought that

was unfair to Myles, and to Linda. I did not have fairness to you in my mind at that time.”

He paused and when she did not react poorly, he moved the story along. “Because I had followed Mellon’s instructions and rushed it across the river to the hearing, despite Mellon’s strenuous objections, Judge McCarver played the tape. Since the judge wanted to be fair to both parents, he suspended the hearing until both could be present—making no decision that day. Mellon was so annoyed, he fired me.”

“So, if you were fired, why are you still here?” She guessed, “Wait, do you now work for Hegerman?”

“Hegerman’s dead, Mrs. Lowry. He had a stress-related heart attack the night of the hearing and died a few days later,” he told her.

“That doesn’t answer my question, though, does it, Mr. Honest Hart?” she accused.

“No, it doesn’t, but it is the beginning of the answer. A woman who worked with Ned took over the case. She approached me after Mellon fired me and recruited me to assist with Myles’s custody challenge. I sort of refused—”

“Sort of?” she came back.

“I accepted being hired, but specifically in the effort to find Linda. I said I had to remain neutral on the custody question between you and Myles, partly because I told them I would not reveal any information for their use that I acquired while working for Godfrey Mellon.”

He went back to the story before she gave up on him. But she did seem either intrigued or interested. He could not tell. He decided not to try to discern her motives, at least for the moment. “At that time, a day after the hearing, there were several theories. One was that you took Linda and fled. Another was that someone abducted both of you. A third was that Myles had something to do with your disappearance. There also was a concern that the so-called ‘gentleman caller’ from the freight train in your backyard had kidnapped Linda and harmed you in the process. Even Paul Meadows was suspect. There was an unrelated idea I’ll come back to that arose later. It was

like you said on the van at the railroad station—it looked like the Wild, Wild West. In fact, the only reliable person in the whole New Jersey entourage was your next-door neighbor, Mike Riley.”

“Riley? Riley?” she was trying to remember him. It was interesting to Danny that she was focused on that, of all things.

“A guy with a dog. Lives on the upper floor of the connecting building,” he told her.

“The guy who kind of kept an eye on everything going on?” she asked.

“Yeah. That’s him,” admitted Hart.

“He the guy that told you I went back to the apartment that night?” she wondered.

“He was, after a fashion. He didn’t know it was you, for sure,” said Danny.

“Okay. So go back to your work for Hegerman’s protégé,” she said. “She the Black lawyer from Africa that gets bad-mouthed by Mellon’s people?” Danny nodded because he was too angry to speak and hoped his face didn’t show it. “What’s her name?” asked Rosalyn.

“Karidja Soro,” was all he volunteered.

“I suspect she was one of the three who came to talk to Valerie here at the school? I heard about that when I got back this evening.” She did not say from whom she heard it. He didn’t ask, and Katie’s name wouldn’t mean anything to him anyway. She came by, angling for the next weekend gig, since she claimed Alex messed up this one, and saw the car over at the McKinley’s.

Danny did not reply. And Rosalyn saw he wasn’t going to.

“So, anyway—you and the Black lady?”

Danny spoke in measured terms. “There are three reasons why I wish you would not say that again in my presence, Mrs. Lowry. First, because it’s disrespectful and I like her, professionally. Second, because if you stereotype

her, especially negatively, you will underestimate what she can do for you or to you, as the case might be. I feel it's only fair to warn you, since we are being honest."

Reprimanded but not repentant, Rosalyn said, "And the third?"

"Because if you do, I am leaving. And I'd find it harder to make sure Linda is safe without your help than with it." He met her eyes and did not shrink.

"What else have you not told me yet?"

"I've told you enough for starters, Mrs. Lowry. That's all that was left out in what I told you on the van. Now it's your turn to tell me what you want me to do and why."

"I want to know why you think it's your mission in life to protect my daughter. Do you think I can not do that myself?" she raised her voice somewhat, but was mindful not to wake her daughter.

"I think you can very adequately protect your daughter from dangers that your husband may or does present. You have proven that so far." He set that record straight and then played side B.

"However, I think there are dangers that do not involve your husband, at least directly, and that you either do not know enough about them to be protective, or you do not know about them at all, in which case you will be totally unprepared to keep your daughter safe in their wake." He said no more and simply waited for Rosalyn to have time to think about what he said.

"I called you because Marie Aello has become mentally unstable. I don't know how I can prove that to you, but she is in jail and I don't know why," she repeated. "And she called to threaten my daughter tonight. I have taken care of her nonsense for a long time, but tonight she sounded different—unhinged. And I'm worried she's not acting alone because someone gave her my phone number."

"Marie Aello is under arrest because she savagely assaulted your Good Samaritan neighbor, Mike Riley, who I consider a friend. He is in a hospital following three surgeries, including one on his brain; he may be near death as

we speak. She beat him with a metal crowbar she used to break into your apartment basement to steal back a document you have kept from her for years. As a result, his dog is dead, too." He did not stop. "So, you are right to trust your instincts that she is unhinged, and her threats are worth considering seriously—and you're right to trust the instinct to call me for help."

"And why is that, the part about trusting you?" she said, masking how shaken she was at the news of Aello's brutality.

"First, because I have sworn no harm will come to your daughter while I am still breathing on God's green earth. And secondly, because I am not the police and am not bound to be law-abiding in the pursuit of justice." He did not flinch from her stare.

"I don't like trusting men. I told you that," restating her position.

"Look, Mrs. Lowry, I am old. I'm near retirement. In fact, this case might just be my swan song, if it keeps going the way it is. So why don't I suggest a charade between you and me? Let's act as if you have already emasculated me as you usually try to accomplish with other younger and less experienced men in your life. And having done that, let's take it a step further and figure that you have castrated my resistance as well."

He thought some more; she stayed silent, and was perhaps shocked. "Look, you like literature and assimilating characters into your personality, right? Hegerman and Mellon are convinced of that, by the way, while we are being honest. Let's have our charade say I am a eunuch—from the days of sultans and jinns you are having your Scheherazade, Linda, read from every night—perfectly suited and entrusted with the care and safety of a young girl while she makes her way in life toward womanhood."

Again, she would not engage, but forged ahead. It seemed an acceptance of the charade, but it wasn't affirmed. "What is this that is so dangerous and doesn't involve . . . Linda's father?" she posed.

As much now as Hart still refused to use her given name, he rejected any reciprocal stance concerning her ex-husband. "Myles was engrossed in researching a bank heist back after you both graduated high school. A large amount of what was stolen were what are called bearer bonds. They are

pieces of specialized paper assigned a value but not identified as belonging to a specific person. So whomever has them, called the bearer, can cash them in for currency or precious metals.”

“So?” she asked.

He was losing patience, but wanted to give her some more time. This revelation was going to make or break being able to work with her, and keep him close to Linda. “It’s possible that the oncologist thought Myles had almost half of the bonds from the robbery, and maybe some of the cash. He wanted it back.”

“Why? Was it his?” she persisted as if she was just curious, but her guard was slipping.

“The thieves were never arrested. It would seem that they might inflict harm to find them, and then worse once they acquired them.” Hart was out of avenues of conversation.

“Why would this doctor think Myles had these bonds, anyway?” she entreated.

Her urgency gave him hope she would cave. “Because thieves are always suspicious and nervous of being found out. If the doctor thought Myles was after him, why wouldn’t the guy think Myles was doing the same. The local police think the doctor just about exhausted his take, and is greedy enough to risk going after Myles proactively, before Myles could make a move.”

She finally asked the question crucial to her, which she hoped to sneak in casually. “But why Myles? How did he find out about the library?”

“By pure chance, too complicated for tonight, as it is getting very late. But not accidental. You see, what we learned from a material witness, but who did not connect the bonds to the doctor at the time, was that your name—Lowry—was the trigger. This guy came after Myles because someone knowledgeable about the bonds said a person named Lowry had them.” Whether she went along with the Eunuch charade or not, Danny had just shown Rosalyn Lowry that he had the genital fortitude to challenge her honesty.

He waited to see what she would do.

“My name? What do you mean?” she protested.

“May I ask why you chose Philadelphia for this past weekend?” said Hart.

“Why not? It has a big library?” she replied.

“And with Newark and Camden, it’s one of three biggest east coast hell holes for counterfeiting and money laundering, Rosalyn.” It was not lost on either of them that he used her given name for the first time in their long night together.

“How do you know?” she asked, meaning to ask him about the crime statistics.

“You can tell me in the next thing you say, or I will show you how I know.” He said calmly.

“What are you talking about?” she held out.

“Let’s say that even a eunuch can know what’s in a lady’s drawers, Rosalyn. Whether she lives in an apartment or a boarding school.” He got up. She took a step toward her bedroom.

But he surprised her by walking toward the front door. He said good night, and opened the door, and went to his car.

As he was backing up, he had to wait for another car driving in with only its dim fog lights illuminated. In that delay, she gained the side door and knocked on the window. “Please come back,” she pleaded.

He did not want to do it, but he could not abandon Linda to some horrendous fate, if she was next on the hit-and-run victim list. He turned off the car, saw a woman get out of the car that had come in and parked on the other side of the lot, and was relieved it wasn’t someone after the Lowry ladies in the dark of the early morning hours.

He found she had left the door ajar. She was not in her bedroom, but in Linda's. He heard them talking in low tones. They came out, with Linda almost sleep walking to the bathroom. The door was left unclosed. She used the toilet, and they flushed it. Danny opened the coat closet door and stood behind it so Linda would not see him if she looked into the front room. When she was tucked back in, her mother returned and stood before Hart.

"For a eunuch, you have some balls," she observed. "So, what now?"

"You come into the kitchen, and we talk and figure this thing out. Because, Rosalyn, there is very little time left before you could be put in jail for over 20 years. With Myles laid up, you give Judge McCarver no choice but to make Linda a ward of the state."

She began to protest, but he put up his hand, with the pointer finger aimed at the ceiling. "I know. Because I already looked into me being granted custody, if either of you showed up dead. I was told I was too old and did not have a feminine presence in my home. I didn't win any points with the Child and Family hearing officer on that count, when I asked him why he, a widower, was able to have his grandson living in his home, under his care."

Rosalyn had been at the mercy of men before and made a life of getting rid of them and their influence. But she knew this to be different. She had no storybook solution to assimilate. Which reminded her to ask. "How did you know about my books?"

"You keep them in your bedroom nightstand in your chronological reading order; left to right; milestones, so to speak, of your battles over the years. But like I told you earlier tonight, that's of no interest to me, except as it influences Linda." He dragged his chair in closer to the kitchen table.

"We need to move on, honestly. As soon as tomorrow night, depending on how long my friends in your hometown police can conceal Doctor Denison LeClerc in the court and prison system in Nassau County, the United States Treasury Department is going to take him into custody, impound all his personal property and belongings, bank accounts, and business files, minus patient confidential medical records. And they will squeeze him until those bearer bonds they think he has access to come fluttering out into the daylight again, like grouse from the tall weeds, after

all these years. And, Rosalyn, once they count them and he starts saying the name Lowry, your goose is cooked.”

“So what do you recommend?” she asked with an edge in her voice he did not particularly care to hear.

“Well, I’m no financial wizard, Rosalyn, but I can’t imagine you have all the bonds in your possession hidden in furniture in this condo, or that you did in the apartment before now. Is that right?” he asked.

She said that was correct.

“And I imagine you would not have left them unprotected in the storage cages in that apartment, because you have not lived there long enough,” he surmised.

She said that was correct.

“Am I well-founded to hope that you have not cashed any of those bonds over the years since the night of the robbery?” He was timid in asking this question.

She said that was correct.

He asked, “Would it be relatively easy to get our hands on all those bonds tomorrow; before the Treasury detained LeClerc?”

She said that was correct, but complicated.

A second thought occurred to him to ask. “Did you get any of the cash from the heist?”

She said that was correct.

He ruminated, “I suppose some of that was spent and some is still available?”

She said that was correct.

“Could that be acquired tomorrow?” he wondered.

“She said that was correct, since it was all here in the condo. That, she said had been in the storage cages.

“Was retrieval of the cash part of what he told her he called ‘the second incursion,’ with the Yearbook and the dog chase?”

She said that was correct.

“Are the bonds all in one place or do we have to make separate stops?” he asked.

“We?” she inquired.

“We,” he affirmed.

“What about Linda?” she demanded.

“Covered. Miss Alex already volunteered in the hospital today before you got off the train. The discharge nurse told her all the instructions and gave her the paperwork she passed on to you. Can you call in sick or something, medical reasons for things Linda needs you to do, or some such?”

She said that was correct. And then she wanted to know what he thought was going to happen with the bonds.

“I’m still working on that in my head. Tell me. What state are the bonds located in?” he asked.

At that she balked. “Why do you need to know that now? I’ll show you when we are leaving here tomorrow, and Linda is set with Alex.”

“It may make a difference to what we do if the bonds have not left New York State,” he explained. “Interstate movement complicates things. What percent of the bonds, by volume, not value, are her in the condo?”

“Probably less than 5%, I’d guess,” she claimed.

Danny replied, “All right, we’ll have to keep that quiet when we combine them with the rest that are in New York. They are in New York State, aren’t they, I hope.”

She said that was correct.

“And in the same place? One stop?” he asked the unanswered question from earlier.

She said that was correct. Was there anything else he wanted to know. She was getting tired.

“Were you involved in the planning or the execution of the robbery or did you abet the thieves after the fact?” he asked. “Because those are felonies and I am afraid I will not be able to help you with those as easily,” he explained.

She said, “No to all those questions. And what do you mean ‘easily,’ Mr. Eunuch wannabe?”

“Okay, then. Will you be here in the morning, Mrs. Lowry?”

She said she would be.

“And will you still be willing to let me help you with this tomorrow—if not for yourself, at least for Linda, to keep her mother out of jail?”

She said she would be.

He said he was leaving and told her to get as much sleep as she could, so she was rested when he returned at eight-thirty.

She said she would be.

And last, he asked her if she could acquire some non-descript packaging or a work briefcase that would hold the envelopes with the bonds in them that she had in her possession.

She said she could.

“Rosalyn, do you understand that I do not want to know anything about the cash? That I do not want to have it with us tomorrow? And that I am not going to get involved in that part of the heist until you have explained everything that happened that night?” he almost chanted it as a prayed litany.

She said she did.

Was there anything else she wanted to ask or have him do as he left and before he came back.

She said she did.

He asked her what it was.

“See what you can find out about a person known in the year of the robbery as Dennis Clark. He’d be a few years older than I am—which you can figure out, because it is unbecoming of a fellow like you to ask a woman like me her age.”

As Danny Hart started his car and left in the wee hours, he did not notice the curtains in the window across the way were parted to see what time he left.

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Beatriz Grey wanted to go to sleep, but she forced herself to sit in the dark and watch across the expansive quad to Rosalyn’s place. As long as Mrs. Lowry had her lights on, Grey would watch. She wanted to be aware if the librarian left her home, fleeing troublesome surroundings for the second time in less than two months. She made certain the new speed dialing function on her phone was set to the security department, in case she needed it.

If the administrator had stealthed across the dewy grass and snuck a look in Rosalyn’s bedroom, she would think all she was peeping was a mother amidst a bout of insomnia, putting her clothing away from a weekend trip and reorganizing her boudoir bureau, while she kept an anxious ear and eye open for her recuperating daughter in the next room. It could never have occurred to Grey that Rosalyn’s anxiety arose from harvesting what was under those dresser drawers, or that the manilla envelopes spread on her bed next to her librarian’s zippered briefcase, marked with **HAPPYDALE’S** logo, were not work papers for her grade level and book club projects from her Philadelphia excursion.

Beatriz so wanted to catch Lowry up in activity that was grounds for dismissal. Doing so would be more satisfying, and less personally risky, than the anticipated high visibility public kiss on the lips from Yvonne the Caterer later that evening on the quad she now overlooked.

Grey had gotten wind that Lowry's selection of Miss Alex for her weekend minder had ruffled feathers with Margie's, and perhaps Valerie's, daughters. It was irrelevant that the choice had proved providential, in light of Linda's medical emergency, which none of the three candidates could have prevented. Grey decided as she gazed into the night, from the darkness of her soul, that she would summon Katie and Taylor to her office separately, to determine if either had seen anything, while 'babysitting' Linda previously, that she could use against Rosalyn.

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No matter how many times he almost dozed and drove off the road, now that he was home Danny Hart needed to make at least one phone call, and perhaps two more if he could last that long. He was going to need at least two hours of sleep before driving back to get Rosalyn to carry out what he still needed to verify was a credible, however unreasonable, plan for the bearer bonds.

The night desk officer answered the phone at the Long Island police station. Danny asked, "May I please leave a message for Officer Frances?"

"Sir? She is here. Would you like to talk to her instead?" said the watch officer. When he excitedly said yes, she told him to hold, and she would put the call through.

She came on with little delay. "Mr. Hart? It's pretty early, sir. Is this an emergency? Bad news about Mr. Lowry?" she inquired sequentially.

"I didn't expect to find you there. It's only four-thirty in the morning," he said conversationally.

“Well, sir, we’ve gone over to twelve-hour shifts until the end of the month. We only have county back-up at the safehouse with Miss Smith until midnight shift Wednesday night. I’m on the four-to-four shift, so I just started. What can I do for you, sir?”

“For starters, you can remember I’ve never worn a uniform you need to address as ‘sir’ or salute, so ‘Danny’ or ‘Mr. Hart’ would be fine, though I’d prefer the former, unless your upbringing would incline you otherwise,” he allowed.

Frances told him, “My upbringing would go with the ‘Mister’ part, but Maura and the captain are weaning me off that, it would seem.” She gave a little laugh.

“Speaking of which, that’s why I asked for you. Hammersmith and your captain tell me you’re the brainiac around the archive research and understanding all about the bearer bonds. That right, in your estimation? Honesty is what I am in real need of right now, Frances, not false humility,” he said firmly.

She was as street smart as she was book brilliant. “Wait a moment, please.” And then, “Go on.”

“As I was saying about honesty and humility—”

“That being the case, Danny, it’s affirmative.” He’d taken the stiffness out of the naming thing, but apparently the starch would remain otherwise.

“I need crash course 101 on bearer bonds, Frances, let’s say hypothetically, if I might?” he hinted.

For twenty minutes, Danny asked his imaginary scenarios and Frances directed and redirected his view of the things he sketched out for her. His plan was graduating from just credible to perhaps reasonable. A lot would depend on Rosalyn Lowry, luck, timing, and on any guardian angels assigned to Linda Lowry, not excluding the one who woke her father up and brought him back to reality.

“Now that school is out, Frances, can you update me on Myles?” he asked.

"Wait, please," she asked.

A moment later she came back on the line, "Well, Mr. Hart, it was actually a combined effort, but yes, I have some working knowledge of the topic. So, if you ever have any questions about them, I will try to answer them."

He was in awe of her. She had edited out their hypotheticals by taking the call off the recorded line and now stitched his previous question in with a new, appropriate answer. "Thank you very much, in the extreme," he said back, in an acknowledgment he knew she would understand. "I was wondering if you had any news on Mr. Lowry?"

"When I came on at four that was my first call. He spent a restless night and is showing signs of waking. Dr. Oulette is very hopeful he will respond to stimuli this morning and rejoin us in the conscious world. Of course, that's only lacing up his sneakers for a trek, but it's something, wouldn't you say?" she asked genuinely.

"Yes, it is. I know a little girl who would love to read and play trains with her father again before very long," he replied wistfully.

"Anything else, Mr. Hart?" stated formally.

"There might be. I have a question or two for Miss Smith. How can I ask her things without the material witness thing getting into play?" he wondered.

"Officer Hammersmith checks on the county shift change each morning. She's at the safe house from seven-fifteen to eight-forty-five, also spending some time with Miss Smith. I'd suggest you call there in her last half hour on site. She might be willing to accept or reject your questions and then facilitate your discussion with the witness." She gave him the number.

"Thank you, Frances. For everything you have done for the Lowrys," he told her.

His last call before falling into bed was to the hospital in New Jersey. The night desk found his name, asterisked as a priority caller, on the cleared list, which they had recently compiled based on documents found in Riley's

clothing. The nurse began helpfully reciting the information from the ICU report, mumbling through the medical jargon, and calling out the information in layman's terms. She told Hart that Mike's vital signs had stabilized during the overnight . . . he was breathing on his own . . . intubation was removed . . . to avoid potential internal infection sites . . . patient's inter-cranial swelling had begun to go down . . . no clear determination if as a result of fluid draining or reduced tissue inflammation . . . his most recent EEG . . . at three o'clock . . . was showing improvement toward normal . . . no fever . . ." She stopped reading and parsing what was there. "It looks to be a good report, Mr. Hart. Is he your friend, are you family?"

"Friend," he said, not willing to elaborate and be stricken from the list.

"Anything else, I can do for you, Mr. Hart?" she asked.

"Has Detective Howe returned? I made her go home for some sleep before," he inquired.

"She is not here, sir. But the police cordon is still in place," she told him.

He thanked her, set his alarm for six-thirty, and went to bed. Not the two hours of sleep he wanted. But it would have to do.

To be continued at Part Three