



Custody

Installation Four
January 2024

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We have made it together to the early hours of Friday morning, September 4, 1992. It's been a week since we first saw Rosalyn Lowry come, rain-soaked, to Myles' office to invite him to a birthday dinner with Linda. Labor Day weekend is about to bring in a new season.

All the characters in our tale are asleep for the moment. At one dream state or another. In one geographical state or another. Before the players begin to stir, it might serve us well to recall . . .

*Six-year-old second grader Linda Lowry is settling into **HAPPYDALE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL** with her mother, Rosalyn. **HAPPYDALE** is a new enclave for Rosalyn to hide them both from her divorced husband, Myles.*

Myles Lowry is an executive at an international medical supplies corporation. He has failed to win a family court reversal of his and Rosalyn's arrangement for custody of Linda and visitation rights. He enters the Labor Day weekend in search of his family, with the help of his lawyers.

Myles' friend and lawyer, Ned Hegerman, remains hooked up to machines that indicate he is still alive after suffering a heart attack the night after the failed custody hearing. His cardiac group's surgeon, Isidore Aronsen, is the sole source of information on Ned's health to his associates at the law firm, and to a blood relative keeping Ned's bedside vigil. At the law firm, Karidja Soro, a specialist in conflict resolution, has taken up the Lowry file. Her colleagues, stenographer Gabriella Costa and administrative assistant Eleanor Quatrane, and she have just hired a new investigator, Danny Hart.

We first met Mr. Hart when he did some work for Rosalyn's attorney, Godfrey Mellon, and his assistant, Miss Hayes. Miss Hayes is charged with the care of the New Jersey apartment that Rosalyn and Linda recently fled. Nearby the apartment live Linda's schoolmate Annie, and her father Paul Meadows. He helped with Linda's birthday party and later provided a key piece of evidence to Investigator Hart, a cassette player. It contained a recorded argument between Linda's parents on the eve of their disrupted custody hearing before Judge Eoin McCarver. Subsequently, Judge McCarver and Ramona, his clerk, have taken

questionable actions sympathetic to sustaining Linda's custody case, in hopes of keeping her from entering the state's child welfare system.

*Back at **HAPPYDALE** we saw that Rosalyn has leveraged a past friendship and continues to scheme future relationships to her advantage. She convinced Valerie, a former college friend from Barnard days, to help her secure sanctuary at the school, to flee from the New Jersey apartment, and to infiltrate the custody hearing. She presses Valerie to allow her daughter, Taylor, to watch over Linda, when she steps out and leaves her daughter in their new place. Rosalyn manipulates a budding relationship with an older legacy parent, Margie, and her daughter Katie, to replace Valerie and Taylor, knowing she will wear out her welcome with them before much longer. Nurturing Margie's comraderie with a trip to a singles bar provides a serendipitous opportunity for Rosalyn to exercise professional intimidation over her new boss, Beatriz Grey. Rosalyn will be the new librarian at the school, with a budget for numerous three-day weekend junkets to visit other libraries in the region.*

While her mother connives, we see Linda survives. Miss Alex monitors Linda successfully completing qualifying tests for acceptance into second grade. She wanders into Mrs. Steadman's second grade clique dynamics, ironically involving books. Four girls awed at the chance to read, befriend Linda, and her favorite story Black Beauty. But she runs afoul of the purported class bully, Dee, seemingly jealous of their classmates' redirected interest and attention. A confrontation over a pilfered copy of Black Beauty results in a school suspension, an uncertainty of allegiances, and Linda's discovery of a vintage railroad caboose in the woods.

Lastly, Valerie provides a nighttime ride back to the New Jersey apartment so Rosalyn can secure more personal belongings and clothing for living at the school—along with secret financial certificates of some kind that will provide funding for Rosalyn's life in self-imposed exile. The ride in the dark shines a light on the time Valerie and Rosalyn, then known as Roz Young, spent at Barnard—and how it shapes their rekindling acquaintance twenty years later. They also have room in Valerie's car to fit Linda's model train set, a birthday gift from Myles, whose evening vigil over the apartment from his rental compact ended an hour too soon to witness their arrival.

Friday early morning traffic was not as bad as Danny expected it to be going into the City, this first pre-rush-hour trip of the day. But he knew the considerable traffic already on the west bound side of I-80 escaping the holiday weekend, was a portend of the afternoon's expectation. It did not bode well for him, as he expected to make four crossings in all before his night was over and he was back home again.

That first trip but a memory, Danny sat quietly in the low light of his reading lamp and easy chair. He had followed all the law practice protocols: with permission to arrive early, to obtain working files that were secured overnight in special long flat file drawers, to bring them to the special study room by way of a dedicated hallway, and to continue studying the files from the Lowry family case.

He had been reading and making notes for an hour and a quarter before he heard a light knocking on his door, to which he answered 'hello.' The door opened and revealed two levitated cups of coffee and the smiling stenographer holding them, Gabriella Costa. "Good morning, Dan," was what to others might have sounded like an automatic start of a day at the office. But to Hart, he knew the greeting signaled an affirmation of the beginning of a workplace friendship. The afternoon before, he asked her if he could call her 'Gabs,' rather than the 'Gabby' she went by in the office. Her affirmative answer was tentative. She would sleep on it. And she would let him know if he could call her by that name—but only if he was as comfortable with her calling him, 'Dan.' She did not care for the juvenile sounding, 'Danny' on his business card and that others in the firm and courthouse called him. So, in oral shorthand appropriate for a stenographer, their agreement was struck. Henceforth to him she would be 'Gabs' and to her he would be 'Dan.' It mattered not how others referred to them, as far as they were concerned.

"What have you found so far? Any way I can help?" was her inquiry.

"There is one thing, for sure, Gabs. I've made a note here . . ." he paged through into his lapful of papers and drew out a four by six lined sheet from a

notepad he was using, "... in Monday's hearing transcript. There seems to be a break in the continuity of people talking to each other. It's subtle. But I can't figure out why. Maybe you could give the few pages I noted a look, if you would please."

She asked, "what am I looking for?" as she took the paper from him and the few typed transcript pages he handed her.

His answer was an intriguing invitation and a statement of trust. "I'd rather not say. I'm afraid I'll prejudice you. Just imagine yourself doing the recording and see if anything strikes you as ... well, unexplained."

"Okay. Anything else?"

"Maybe when Karidja gets here, and I'm finished this last file. You could sit in when we review. See if it seems I missed anything. Okay?" She nodded and left for her own desk in the adjacent workspace. On the way out she smiled as Dan thanked her for the coffee. She had added just the right amount of half and half she saw him use the day before.

Linda woke later in the morning, when Investigator Hart's coffee cup sat empty on the floor next to his reading chair. There was something lit by the morning sun that was not in her the room when she went to sleep. Against the wall and windowsill, was a large oblong box. The picture on its side declared its contents to be the model train set she dreamed about in the night. She had to touch the box to make sure she still was not dreaming.

She didn't even bother looking for her mother, whom she knew would still be asleep. She did not wonder if Taylor had slept over on the couch. Linda skipped the time it would take to use the bathroom. She went right at the box and began laying out the track on her floor. The room was not large enough for the oval to fit in the open floor space. So, Linda improvised as she had seen on TV that railroad pioneers did on the frontier. Where they had put down ties and rails over streams and valleys, above and through mountains, Linda raised the bed linens hanging from her bed, and folded them on top of the mattress. Fully a third of her oval track, put together section by section

like the number lines she counted on with Miss Alex in the library to qualify for second grade, extended into the imaginary tunnel and mountain under her bed. She gauged that enough of the track would reside there to hold the train cars under the bed. Hidden there within the mountain tunnel under her mattress, with her blanket and sheets draped down as a mountainside to the floor, the locomotive and following cars, all the way back to the caboose, could await the three green horizontal lights to signal it was safe to proceed. All the while in the non-pretend world of bedrooms, the train would be protected from being kicked over once she was finished railroading for the day.

The electric outlet for the transformer was easy to reach under the head of the bed, where no lights were plugged in. It too stayed unharmed, and easy to slide out onto the floor, when it was time to power up the locomotive for the next session of railroading at the newest rail line in **HAPPYDALE.**

Taylor knocked and entered through the open door with a 'good morning' and stared in amazement as the black 4-6-0 steam engine hauled a coal car, a box car, a flat car, a tank car, and a caboose around the loop, and disappeared for a while under Linda's bed, only to appear again to continue on its oval circuit.

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Across the river in New York, there was no railroad in Ned Hegerman's hospital room, whose floor space was large enough not to require a layout passage under the specialty bed that could raise itself high enough for even a Lionel double decker passenger train to navigate. The medical equipment to which the lawyer was still tethered, some similar to the kind that Myles Lowry's company sold overseas, gave no clear indication if he was dreaming as Linda did. Nor could they have shown clearly whether his unabated deep sleep over the past two days would have been disturbed by the Peace Train of Cat Stevens or Duke Ellington's A Train.

Only Ned was waiting in the dream station, with no nurses or bedside vigilant passenger holding a ticket to accompany him on his ride. The curves and peaks and valleys on the monitors that were still watching over him,

silently at his family-of-one's request, seemed to be leveling off to a distant horizon overnight. Were he on a platform somewhere, he might have looked in the windows of one local passing through and seen his wife sitting with young associates from the start of his law firm. On the opposite track, he would have perceived himself as the sole passenger in the front car of a two-car local slowly crawling through, while in the following car Karidja Soro was traveling uptown to her retirement dinner and speaking with Gabriella Costa and Danny Hart. Eleanor Quatrane was in neither coach.

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"So, you're the husband, right?" said the voice from next to the van. Myles had left the passenger side window open for air.

"What?" was all Myles allowed.

"Someone was here last night." Same man's voice.

"Where?" Myles remained guarded.

"In the apartment you keep watching." He bent to pick up after his dog, so Myles lost sight of him for a time.

"What if I said I didn't know what you were talking about," Myles decided to ask, still sitting behind the wheel, and wondering if he should drive off quickly.

"Well, then, if I were not a polite person, I'd probably say something about my dog not being the only one who needs picking up after." He just smiled.

Myles softened, "Last night, you say?"

"More technically I suppose it might have been already this morning, but by common parlance, yeah, during the night. I did not check my timepiece." His face and arm reacted mildly to his leashed dog pulling to continue their walk. "Dog let me know. He's good that way."

"A man or a woman? Anyone you recognized?" Myles said as he got out of the rental van and came around to let the dog sniff the back of his hand first and then extended it for a human handshake. "Myles. Myles Lowry. Linda's dad."

"Yes. Nice young girl." His practiced eyes kept focused close in on the interloper of this morning's dog walk. "Seems it's always easier to claim a kid than a former spouse, huh?" He didn't offer his name.

Myles felt uncomfortably stung. "Agreed. No sense ruining the curb a second time in one conversation."

Now smiling, "Mike Riley, retired military." He looked down and drew the dog back a step, or four, from Myles's pant leg. "Black Commandos. Advanced scout. No-name outpost southeast Asia. Two tours. Long time ago. But life-saving habits, contrary to common parlance, don't die hard. In fact, they don't die at all. Even after a 65th birthday." He paid attention to the dog, who was paying attention to a sapling. "So, what brings you here, Myles? Don't trust that detective woman to do her job?"

Myles was starkly amazed. He passed, for the time being, on asking about a detective. "I don't remember meeting before. What gave me away?"

"Staggering times of the day was a good plan, Myles. But the cars gave you away. Too many for personal ownership. Too different from each other—a big cruising sedan, a compact, and then a family van. I chuckled at this morning's pick and said to the dog, 'C'mon let's go see this guy.'" Riley danced a box step of sorts to avoid getting tripped up in the leash. "And too many out of state plates. 'Rentals for sure,' I told the dog." Riley allowed a few more sniffs at the green metal signpost on the grass between the curb and the sidewalk. "Myles, rentals are the most likely go-to for a Manhattan guy not willing to use his own identifiable vehicle, if he had one." Riley started following the dog and Myles fell in next to him on the sidewalk.

"Do you think the detective saw me here?" asked Myles.

"Nope. She's not been around for a few days. She asked all the tenants about seeing anybody strange. About knowing anything about the two of them going missing on Monday or Tuesday. Left her squad phone number and business cards if something got remembered or seen. You've only been

here since Wednesday afternoon.” The dog was too well trained to chase after the squirrel that barely escaped categorically being roadkill and then skittered right across their path. “Which begs the question, Myles. Are you supposed to be here?” He waited a little. “The Brits have an expression, ‘Don’t foul the footpath.’”

Myles had to decide. He did. “I have a restraining order. Can’t contact Linda and can’t come within ten feet of Rosalyn. So, I kind of figure parking on the side street or back more on the main road keeps me legal.” After a few steps of silence between them, Myles added, “I certainly wouldn’t park in the dead end.”

Riley waited an appropriate amount of time and spoke while he was still walking, so Myles wouldn’t have to look at him to answer. “They’re gone, you know. At least for now. Especially after whatever last night was about. It looked like a supply run. So, you may actually be at a dead end.”

“What, then? . . .” Myles probed, “. . . would a military man do?”

Turning the dog around and heading back up the sidewalk toward the apartment, Riley considered for a time and only after that, did he speak. “We don’t know one another, Myles. Never talked to you as a neighbor, though I saw you many a time coming and going. So, you can’t take what you asked me as advice. You asked what a military man would do—not what you should do.”

By the time he was ready to talk again, Riley and Myles had gained the curb of the dead end and were crossing to the other side. “I’d move on. Try to discover where they’ve gone, not wonder about them coming back or not. See if you can get into that apartment for a look around for any leads. Find a friendly or two, for verification and balance, good logistics, you know. Let some local keep an eye out for them here and report back. Don’t waste your time moping around this probable old port of no return.” The dog paced a tight circle on the grass in front of the apartment building, then settled on a spot, and plopped himself right down in a heap. His cheek and jowl on his right side came to rest on his foreleg. He closed his eyes and snuffled.

“And then, Myles, I’d reassess. What do I want—a family, a wife, or a kid? Or none of the above, as they say in the multiple-choice tests? Until I

knew that answer, I wouldn't know what help I'd need. Because, Myles, you will. This is not a one-man job."

Mike Riley was no stranger to staying still and silent in waiting. And that's what he did this Friday morning in September on the grass before his apartment. It wasn't a sniper's blind or a foliage-camouflaged lookout post. It was just an urban dwelling in New Jersey where several renters and their households did their best to get from one end of the day to the other. That was about to change for Riley and his dog.

Myles inquired, "As a hypothetical . . . how would you evaluate a retired commando as a local friendly in peace time?"

The dog walker replied, "They would probably be highly suitable. But you'd know if your choice was worth their salt only if they asked if you knew the difference between 'peace time' and you 'being at peace.'"

"I think I do," mused Myles. "But I may need some time to be sure. And then a little more time after that to be able to put it in words." He looked down at the dog and squatted to get a closer look at his resting face. He dared not reach out and to pet him. "For now, I suspect it has something to do with not becoming roadkill and being okay with not chasing every squirrel that runs in front of me." The dog opened his eyes and decided it was safe to let Myles be as close to him and Riley as he was. He exhaled, shifted his head to rest on his left cheek, looking away from Myles, and closed his eyes again.

Myles shifted as well. He stood up and looked at Mike Riley. "How did I do?"

"You'll do for now," his new acquaintance replied. "Look, here's that lady detective's card. I can get another. And I wrote my phone number and name and apartment number on the back for you before me and the dog came down to check you out. Call the number and leave a message and your number, if you want. And then we'll take it from here."

Myles hesitated to yield his phone number, even though he had taken out a pen and paper from his deep pants pocket. "First, though. Now I know what I should look for in a friendly. But I should also ask why this friendly is willing to be a friendly."

“Answer to that is—‘he already is.’” Riley had not been so cryptic on this topic. His reply left Myles confused and wondering if Rosalyn or her attorney were playing some kind of trick on him. A legal trap to overthrow his efforts to win custody of Linda.

“I don’t understand.” Myles took a few steps away and looked back and forth to the windows of the Lowry apartment and the one Riley occupied and then back at Riley and his dog.

“Most Sunday mornings your daughter comes down the fire escape and wanders along the embankment. She is enthralled by trains. She waves to the crews and sits for two hours. Sometimes she draws and sometimes she just watches. Me and the dog, we keep an eye on her from our window, without her knowing. No other apartment has such a view. I don’t think any of the neighbors know her routine. Every so often I let the dog out to nuzzle around in the barrier hedge on the fence line, just to make sure there’s a ‘presence’ in case anyone, who shouldn’t be, is looking on. I’m here to tell you, I’ve never seen her mother or any other adult out there with her. You can be sure, if your little girl shows up here, and I know about it, no harm will be coming her way—except at great expense to whomever has a mind to be thinking that way.”

Myles Lowry did not know what to say. He did not mention Linda’s gentleman caller, in fear of alienating his new watchdogs. Mike Riley nickered his dog awake and, without saying another thing or making another sound, they made their way home. Myles crossed the street and sat in the rental van, trying to collect and organize thoughts that were so far apart from each other that “scattered” just wasn’t sufficient to describe them. He was startled by a train whistle ascending from below the embankment.

Rosalyn came in on the two girls who were still fascinated with watching the train enter into the underbed world on its long side and re-appear out from under its foot. They had shaped two tunnel openings by folding and gathering and draping the bed linens around and over the tracks with enough clearance for the train to fit through.

Rather than contesting using the train so early in the morning, or so quickly upon its arrival from the apartment, Rosalyn fashioned a different derailment tact. "Do you ladies want some breakfast here or do you want to see if there's something special being served in the dining hall? We could invite Taylor's mother to join us there."

The four of them found there were omelets being made to order. There was toast and English muffins to go alongside, with butter and jellies and jams. On the way into the hall, they had already smelled the sizzling sausages and bacon, too. They enjoyed the food immensely and they liked talking about having a holiday weekend, after using Friday for non-fun tasks and activities.

The Lowry ladies said they would use most of the middle of the day for unpacking their clothes and home goods from the apartment trip the night before. Taylor said she was going to get most of her first big homework project of the quarter well underway, if not almost finished before dinner. Valerie had papers to grade, so they weren't ruining the weekend days of the holiday. She said that on those days, she wanted to take Taylor for special car rides in the countryside, where they could have a mother-daughter driving lesson to begin getting ready for her license test in the springtime. Rosalyn said after housekeeping that she wanted to investigate, with Linda, some books in the library that might be good for second graders learning to read. She told them she couldn't leave doing it until Tuesday, because it would get in the way of her first day on the new job and Linda would be back in class.

The refectory's big message blackboard had a colorfully chalked Special Friday Night supper menu that featured a 'bottomless' spaghetti and meatball feast, with a garden salad, and 'unlimited' Italian garlic bread. They agreed to meet back in the dining hall for dinner. That way neither of the moms would have to put time aside to prepare dinner or straighten out the kitchen afterwards on such a busy day. They'd have time to see a movie on television that night together at Valerie's and Taylor's.

Karidja Soro asked Danny Hart to convene a four-person gathering by nine forty-five Friday morning. They had become familiar with this conference room over the course of the Lowry case.

Nonetheless, it is Karidja who started off the session together. "Can you tell us what you have found so far in the files you've been studying, Danny, please? And give us an idea of how much more time you'll need to complete your review?" Her questions were more formal than she had been with the group before, even somewhat atypically hierarchical.

"I can. But I have a distinct feeling I am reporting to you rather than sharing information, as we have up to now this week. Before I get started, then, I wonder if you can tell me if there's a shift that's taken place while I've been tucked away in my study room these two days?" He was as formal as she was, but just more polite and friendly.

Eleanor and Gabby sat stunned, caught in the middle. Karidja stood up. "I must apologize. I'd like to try again." She looked at each of these people who had done so much for her in the last several days. "May I leave and come in, please?" She did not just ask Danny. She included the ladies, too. Body language gave her their permission. So, she left.

A very long eight minutes went by before the door opened again. Karidja held an armful of files and set them on the table. "Good morning, everyone. I am sorry to be late. Have you started already, Danny, I meant no disrespect."

Hart answered, "Nope, we were just shooting the breeze about the holiday weekend. I was saying how heavy the traffic was leaving town as I came in this morning. Nothing substantive or of lasting importance has transpired."

"Good." Karidja smiled and said, "Thank you."

"I was just about to say that I haven't heard from the hospital or Doctor Aronsen yet today." It was Eleanor breaking the ice without falling through. "Has anyone else had any word?"

Karidja held up a small square of pink paper from a phone message pad. "I have a message here to call Mellon. No indication of what it's about. But it says Godfrey is expected to return from the hospital by ten-fifteen and can take a call after that. It doesn't say it's about Ned, but I must tell you it has me worried." She paused and then went on. "I also have a note from one of the partners here that I am to see him at two this afternoon about some legal matters concerning the partnership. I hope the two things are just coincidental, but a nasty pain in the middle of my back suggests otherwise."

Gabriella realized she was biting the inside of her cheek when she tasted coppery blood on her tongue. "Please tell us as soon as you know. I can't stand this, Karidja." She turned to Quatrane. "Eleanor, I know you're not supposed to call the doctor, but could you try and see if we just missed a message. Or something." She looked down at her clasped hands in her lap when she saw Eleanor shake her head at the request.

Hart dared to speak up. "I know I'm the new kid on the block, working in the 'time out' room, alone. But I do have some things to ask about Ned and the Lowry files. I was hoping we could do that sooner than later."

The three women verbally stepped all over one another to tell him to go ahead.

"I've finished reading it all. From two years ago and through this past week. All I have to say is that something is not right. In fact, something might really be terribly wrong." They looked more stunned than when they got off to a bad start together a half hour ago. "I don't have all the pieces yet, so I'm going to beg your patience and ask you not to ask me for too many answers." He pumped the air in front of him with both hands extended.

"Since you haven't really worked with me before, I must make certain that you understand when I say don't ask me for too many answers, I definitely DO NOT, in capital letters, mean for you not to ask me questions. That's not a contradiction. You see, I need you to ask me questions as you listen to what I have found out—to help me clarify my thoughts and to open doors my mind hasn't yet pushed through. Each of us sees things differently and you have some of the color-by-number paint vials I don't. Together we can fill in the picture. Are you game to try?" This investigator, who was so used to working alone for so many years, searched the faces of the three women around the table. Each nodded her assurance.

“Okay. I’ll give you an example. I read through the transcript of Monday’s hearing three times. Remember I was not there for all of it. Just the middle part. I came late and was excused before it was over. A little while before I came in with the cassette recorder, there is a change in mood or tone of voice in the transcript. I can’t see any reason for that to be the case. It appears something happened that is not captured or reflected in the spoken record.” Danny inhaled and focused his memory of the written pages he had been imprinting on his mind in the low light of the reading room, as if he now had slices of microfiche somewhere between his eyes and that part of his brain where light and color and upside-down images are interpreted for their meaning. The images were there. But their meaning was still encoded.

“There’s a moment when Mellon is about to tell the judge that he does not think Mrs. Lowry is going to show up. Then there’s a pause. And he switches gears and asks if Ned can solicit Myles’s testimony first, to give her more time to arrive.” He held up one hand and pointed his longest finger toward Gaby. “This morning, I asked Gabs to read the transcript and put herself in the place of the court recorder. I was trying to get a sense if she could imagine what might be going on that didn’t get into the record.” He looked at her and cupped his right hand, motioned for her to pick up the discussion.

“I read the part Dan gave me. A few times. All I was able to come up with was that something did change the pace and direction of the hearing. But that it was not something anyone said—or it would be in the transcript.” Stenographer Costa flipped a page or two in front of her. “I told Dan there was an example of what I meant later in the transcript. When Ned wasn’t feeling well, and he needed a moment, all the transcript does is help you infer some physical action was taking place. In that case, the judge gave directions that fill in the blanks better than in—perhaps I might call it— ‘the event’ Dan asked me about.”

“Thanks, Gabs.” He turned to Eleanor and Karidja. They were both wearing huge smiles. Looking at them, all Hart could say was, “What?”

Eleanor raised her left eyebrow, just that one. She asked, “Gabs?”

And Karidja followed with, “Dan?”

“Let’s just say we reached an accommodation of ease,” the confident stenographer chimed in. “That and absolutely nothing else, ladies. No dinner out. No date night. So, let’s get on with it. Okay?” she said, pushing her glasses back up onto the bridge of her nose, and continuing, “In particular . . . Karidja . . . you are the only one of us that was there. Can you think of anything that validates Dan’s investigatory insight and curiosity?”

Hart was in awe of this woman once again. It was becoming a daily occurrence he thought he might get accustomed to anticipating with hope, each day he had a chance to be in her presence.

Attorney Soro closed her eyes, but spoke nevertheless. “Gaby, do you have that section of the transcript handy?”

“Right here. Dan gave me a copy so as not to ruin the permanent file.” Listening off to the other side of the table, Eleanor imagined a pair of name tags rising and falling on each side of a teeter-totter in a playground: Danny and Dan, Gaby and Gabs, Ned and . . . That brought her to a dead stop, sitting up in the air with no control of this fate, no matter what you called it.

Karidja turned to face Gaby, but did not open her eyes. “Would you please send me back to the hearing room by reading the transcript from a place before the interruption and then for a while afterwards, please?”

The reading of the transcript was the only thing to be heard in the conference room. It seemed no one breathed loudly enough to interrupt the clarity of Gabriella’s voice and the experienced pacing of her narration.

“Thank you. That’s enough, Gaby.” Karidya opened her eyes and looked at them all. “You three are the best team I have had the joy to work with in this building. This mound of files I’m inheriting from Ned and the staff and associates I deal with on these cases don’t even come close. But they are numerous, and they almost made me lose my balance. I thank you so much Danny Hart for saving me from myself an hour ago.”

She rubbed her hands over her beautiful face and then rubbed her hands together, palm to palm. “And so, you, Mr. Hart, are a splendid genius. Something did indeed happen that afternoon. And precisely when you sensed it did. There was an intrusion into the hearing room. A woman, I believe—I glimpsed around as ‘she’ was leaving—entered the room and brought the

hearing to a halt. Mellon looked around. I imagine he expected it was Rosalyn arriving late, to grandstand. But it wasn't Mrs. Lowry after all. And the intruder excused herself as being in the wrong room. Her apology is not part of the record, spoken or otherwise. Yet, her stepping in left a footprint in the progress of the afternoon, though those of us there did not perceive it to be so at the time, except for Mellon. And now that I think of it, perhaps, Judge McCarver also."

"And you think this is one of the things that might be terribly wrong, Dan?" asked Gabs.

"Exactly. Unexplained, yes. But not right, for sure," he affirmed.

Eleanor spoke up. "I'm missing something here, ladies and gent. Please bring me along so I can see and help."

"Two questions. Do you go to the courthouse, Eleanor, when cases are heard?" inquired Danny. "And do you drive a car in New York?"

"Infrequently. And not for some time, in fact," she replied. "And I use mass transit."

"Good God, the underwear," remembered Karidja.

"The what?" asked Quatrane.

"Remember when I came back from court on Tuesday? I told you about the guy in the security line who had to take off his belt and then his pants fell down and exposed his underwear?" Karidja gave her a moment. "And you asked me why he wasn't arrested for indecent exposure? Do you remember what I surmised?"

As they all knew, Quatrane recalled about ninety five percent of everything else the lawyers there ever said to her. "Yes, you said his papers to get him admitted to a court room were probably for something more urgent and important to the court."

Karidja echoed Danny's recent reply, "Exactly."

And Dan chimed in, “Bingo.” They looked at him. “See what I said about how important it was to ask questions, even if the answers aren’t immediately forthcoming.”

“Now I get it,” exclaimed Quatrane. “The lady intruder in the Lowry custody case could not have been there without papers. And she couldn’t have gotten to that specific hearing room by mistake. The papers don’t give people wandering rights. And the only person who didn’t have their papers curated to get into that hearing was Mrs. Lowry.” She was almost triumphant when she declared, “So, Danny, you’re telling us that Rosalyn gave her papers to a confederate so she could get a look inside the hearing.” Danny looked at her affirmatively. But he still prompted her for more, by opening up his eyes widely and urging her on by nodding his head . . . for her to take the next logical step, which she did. She asked the group, “But, why?”

Gabs raised her hand as if she was back in school, “And who is she?”

Danny Hart had just one thing to add. “Like you said, Karidya, what a team!”

There was a knock on the conference room door. Investigator Hart’s hackles went up. Knocks on this door did not bode well in the tales he’d been told. Godfrey Mellon’s turncoat—Charles or Charlie, depending on what end of the seesaw he rode—infiltrated their planning for Myles’s custody hearing, and who knew what else. And Charlie allowed a bogus water cooler deliveryman in to serve Myles a subpoena.

It was one of Gabriella’s work suite steno mates. “Sorry to intrude. But I’ve several messages here for you all. Attorney Soro, it’s getting near the time you wanted to be alerted to return Attorney Mellon’s phone call. And Mrs. Quatrane there’s a message to return a call to a Doctor Aronsen. For you, Mr. Hart, there’s a call on hold right now, which is why I came in, from Myles Lowry.” She turned and left. The three with calls to attend stood to leave. Gabriella Costa would have felt abandoned, except that Dan Hart asked her for help to find a phone he could use. She brought him to her desk and then left for the break room.

At HAPPYDALE, a girl with boy-length red hair and the improbable name of Clementine sat in the library across from Miss Alex. The teacher's aide was working this Friday morning before Labor Day to earn some extra money. But she was motivated even more by the urgency of Clementine's mother's plea to help her daughter keep up with schoolwork during her suspension, so she could fit right back in on Tuesday morning. Apparently, the school handbook published a list of phone numbers of teacher aides available for parents to hire directly as tutors or for extra help. Alexandria had never received such a call before and she was curious at the prospect.

"All's I told her was 'or else.' She's a big sissy who hides as a bully. Last year I hit one of her gang so hard I got in trouble. They took my lunch, and nothing happened to them. How is that 'fair?'" Clementine was not happy. She was not interested in word families. For sure.

Miss Alex had been going over those word families with Clementine and had asked her to use the word "fair" in a sentence. She was impressed with Clementine's dilemma and her sense of right and wrong. Alexandria had written a study paper on Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in college and was intrigued ever after by the tension between the two. "Do you like poetry, Clementine?" she asked.

"Only funny poems like in Dr. Seuss books." Was the redhead's answer.

Alexandria pursued it. "Who do you think is the fairest person in Dr. Seuss books you know?"

"I think that it is Sam, in *Green Eggs and Ham*," Clementine replied.

"Can you tell me why?" asked the tutor.

"Sure. He has something he likes so much he wants to share it. His green eggs and ham. But he doesn't force them on Guy-I-Am. He does keep asking, though. And he offers lots of ways to try the eggs and ham. He doesn't get into any fights over it. And in the end, he is happy that Guy-I-Am tries the food and likes it."

“How about if we try to make a rhyming poem like Eggs and Ham, using words that go with ‘fair?’”

“Okay. If you want,” said the second grader.

As an enticement, Alexandria suggested, “I think we could make it be fun.”

Clementine gave her a sideways look. “You’re like Sam-I-Am. You’re trying to make me try it in case I like it.” She sat up a little straighter and moved the three-lined paper on the table closer to where she could write on it, and picked up her pencil.

Alex had a personalized white board about the size of a theme book page. It had the three lines permanently scribed lengthwise on the board. A solid one on top and bottom. And a dotted one in the middle. They did not come off when the white board was wiped clean of whatever had been written with an erasable marker. When Miss Alex printed a word on her board, so the letters fit in the sizing lines, and held it up, the redhead copied it letter by letter onto her lined sheet.

They had quite the rhyming group of words, from more than one word family: air, bare, bear, care, dare, fair, hair, lair, mare, pair, rare, scare, square, stair, tear, wear. While they worked through the alphabet to make the list, the girl asked her tutor why she let kids call her Miss Alex. She said it was easier and shorter than her longer full name. After they had a few more words on their list, Alex asked Clementine if she had a shorter name her friends used.

Her answer was startling to Alexandria. “I don’t really have too many friends. We don’t live at the school. But you could call me ‘Red’—as long as you don’t tell anyone, and no one hears you say it to me.”

They started to make a poem. They said their ideas to one another. Alex helped out with some of the special words. Some ideas were very funny. Some had bad rhymes. Some rhymed but made no sense. And others came out in ways they liked. They kept having to whisper, even though they were in a far corner of the library, and it wasn’t crowded on a school day off.

Their final poem came out to be this:

A girl with red hair
was out in spring air
by a fence with a stair.

A pony and mare
Ran and jumped nearby there.

From his winter lair
Along came a bear
Not seen by the pair.

The girl dared to care,
waving arms at the bear
so it fled with a scare.

The fencepost was square,
the barb wire was bare
and made her shirt tear.

The secret stayed theirs,
The girl and the mare.
It only seemed fair.

Miss Alex asked her, "Why did you want what the girl did to be kept a secret?"

"Whenever I help someone, I get in trouble. So, if it stays a secret, I won't be in trouble. I can stay in school here. And my mom doesn't have to look for another job somewhere near a new school." It was straightforward and logical to Clementine, who after all, was her mother's darlin'. At least that's what her mom told her at the end of each day, when she was home to kiss her goodnight and tuck her in.

"To whom do you tell your secrets?" Alexandria expected to hear the name of a friend at the school.

But instead, Clementine surprised her again. "When I have a secret that I only want to tell a special someone, I tell it to my Secret Care Bear.

I know that name rhymes, but don't put it in the poem. I don't want kids to know."

After assuring Clementine that the poem was not going to be changed, Miss Alex said, "Wait here just a minute for me. I want to get a book from the library shelves for you." She returned in a few moments with a copy of *Green Eggs and Ham*. And then she shared some good news with her new pupil. "We have finished all your schoolwork for Tuesday. You have this book to bring to class. And we have done your word families and completed a writing project. That was everything on Mrs. Steadman's list of work to do together before Tuesday. You won't have to do any more over your long weekend holiday. Unless you and your mom want to read *Green Eggs and Ham* together. If you give me another few minutes, I am going to use the copy machine for your poem. I will put this original in your folder I have to give to Mrs. Steadman. And I'll give you the copy for you to bring home to keep and share with your mom." And looking around to make sure no one was in earshot, Miss Alex finished by asking, "How does that sound, Red?"

Clementine looked at this new person in her life and smiled. What she said came as no surprise to Alexandria. "That sounds fair to me." But what the freckled-face second grader did after that indeed did come as a surprise to Alex. She extended her fair-skinned hand to offer a handshake. Miss Alex took it gladly, feeling the warm and slightly nervously damp six-year-old palm against her own larger, grateful one.

95

Danny took Myles Lowry's phone call. He was shocked to hear that Myles was over in New Jersey. But seeing him would be on his way anyhow. The investigator had decided he was going to cross over the river and try to see the Meadows dad and daughter. Maybe they would know something about a woman friend of Rosalyn's. She seemed to be Danny's best lead in finding where the Lowry ladies had fled.

Perhaps the overexcited Mr. Lowry would even have some news on that score, too. He had only said he was in Jersey, and could they meet as soon as possible at a retro luncheon place, complete with an honest-to-

goodness, red-stooled soda fountain. It was evidently only a dozen or so streets away from the apartment.

As he left for Jersey, Eleanor asked him to call when he got there to see what she and Karidja found out about Ned and the hospital.

96

“Hello? This is Godfrey Mellon’s line, Miss Hayes speaking.” Miss Hayes was efficient and said nothing more than necessary when answering this particular line. Over the years it had saved her time and embarrassment, especially when callers were in a hurry, or wished as much anonymity as their calling a lawyer allowed.

“Good morning, Miss Hayes. This is Karidya Soro. I am a law associate of Ned Hegerman’s. I received a message to return a call to Attorney Mellon.”

“Oh, yes. He is back from his . . . visit. I’ll put you through.” Miss Hayes’ voice betrayed her hesitancy at describing Mellon’s trip to the hospital.

“Miss Soro. I have a matter of importance to you and the law firm. I’ve just come back from the hospital. Ned’s next of kin have asked me to begin putting his affairs in order—”

Soro cut in, “Wait, please. I’ve not heard anything this morning about Ned. He hasn’t—”

Mellon broke in, “No. He’s still there. They just have some medical decisions to make.” He gave her a moment to calm herself. “I have some of his papers here, but I do not have any advance directives. Do you know of any he has on file in your offices . . . or anything the firm itself has as policy or procedures in these matters?”

“No. I do not. But I’ll see immediately and get back to you. Will you be at this number?” Karidya had an uneasy feeling. Mellon had not been a warm person in her experience. But this call seemed to her to have an undertone that wasn’t about bad news from a hospital, or a person preparing for death.

This call was devoid of emotion, and not from shock. This call came from a man and a place that had no soul.

"I should be here for some time. But if I am out, Miss Hayes will know how to take any information you have, and she will know how to reach me. She will also be able to dispatch our office messenger to come over and pick up any documents you find." Mellon was about to end the call, but Karidya spoke up.

"Godfrey." That's all she said at first. She knew from her training that at certain crucial times, saying a person's name unexpectedly, and nothing else, was as abrupt a wake up as a handful of cold water splashed in the face. When she allowed the precise amount of time to elapse, she continued, "What are you not telling me?"

In his mind, Mellon was already on to the next thing he was going to do. Soro's expert interrogation wrenched him backwards and put him off balance. He was not prepared to go up against her just yet. In his finest out-of-the-courtroom version of 'nothing further, your honor' he told Soro, "I have to go now. Thank you."

Rosalyn Lowry never cared for packing and unpacking. She was fine with being on the move and not being confined by the will or acts of another person. But she found it bothersome to have possessions dictate how or where she went. By mid-morning the apartment trove was resituated in the **HAPPYDALE** residence, and the suitcases were stored under her bed. Only the unsorted bed linens were still in the pillowcases on the floor of a closet. And new bottom undersides of drawers hid papers with fancy borders and letters and numbers, not like those her daughter reviewed with Miss Alex.

It was the same Miss Alex who mother and daughter now saw heading out of the library they were just entering. Walking beside the tutor was a dazzlingly freckled child whose gender Rosalyn couldn't determine at a distance. When the redhead spoke to Linda, it was evident she was a girl. "Hi, Linda. Miss Alex helped me with my schoolwork. And we wrote a poem. I can come back to class Tuesday."

Linda was gleeful to see Clementine. "That's great." And turning to Rosalyn, Linda said, "Mom this is the friend I told you about. The one who helped get my book back." And with a slight pause, "And this is Miss Alex, our teacher."

"Well, teacher's aide, technically. I'm Alexandria. Hi." The young woman extended a hand in greeting. Left with no choice except being outrageously rude, Rosalyn shook hands and introduced herself. "Oh, you are the new librarian I've heard is coming. I do some tutoring here. This is my first go at it outside of the regular school day. I hope to see you around. I'll probably be needing your help. Please tell me if we are being too loud for the library. Sometimes the girls get excited, and I get swept up in their enthusiasm." Alex suddenly realized she was doing all the talking. "Like now. See, I just keep talking."

While the adults were engaged, so were the second graders. Linda said she was sorry about what happened with *Black Beauty*. She said she didn't think it was fair. She got no argument about that from Clementine, who held up her library book, *Green Eggs and Ham*. "I'm bringing this one on Tuesday. I hope my mom can help me to know some of the words before then. She reads this story to me all the time. But I want to be able to do it myself. Like you."

98

Eleanor Quatrane finally got through on the phone to Isidore Aronsen. "Yes, Ms. Quatrane, just give me a moment to get into a private space." She heard a distant door close, and a phone pick up, and another hang up. "There. That's better. I was out at the nurse's station. I prefer not having everyone in the hall hear our conversation."

"Thank you for calling me, doctor. As you can imagine we are all very anxious here for Ned." Eleanor chose not to ask why there wasn't an update at the usual time somewhat earlier in the morning.

The surgeon began. "Here's the situation, as it stands. I say it that way because things here are what we call . . . 'fluid' . . . in hospital-speak. You know that the family had requested we silence the audio alerts on some of

the monitors and disconnect those of less importance to life support.” He waited to make sure there was acknowledgment of those prior actions and communications.

He started again, “This morning, the pa . . . Ned . . . seems to be slipping into a more inactive condition. Without a more invasive review, which the family doesn’t want . . . and which, frankly, I don’t think Ned should be made to experience either . . . I can’t differentiate cause and effect. That’s why things are changeable without much notice—that’s the ‘fluid’ part.” A door opened and Eleanor heard hospital activity sounds in the background. She could not see the floor nurse, who did not realize the doctor was using the staff phone.

As she excused herself in pantomime, Aronsen went back to the phone call. “Sorry. The nurses didn’t know I was on the phone.” He cleared his throat. “So, as I was saying, I can’t tell you if Ned’s heart is affecting his brain or if his brain is affecting his heart. And between the two of them, they seem to be influencing his respiration.” He paused.

“On balance, Ned’s heart muscles are deteriorating. The cardiac arrest he suffered Monday night, or early Tuesday morning, injured him physically. And that injury seems to be more pronounced as the days go by. Whereas I had hoped time would heal the injury, Ned’s losing additional healthy tissue due to the reduced blood circulation to his heart.”

Aronsen looked at the clock on the wall. “I’ll know in about an hour, but I suspect that Ned’s not finding it easy to breathe. He’s been helped by the oxygen he’s been getting. But as his breathing has slowed, he’s been sending less of that oxygen to his brain. But that is about to change. We need to see his respiration rates and efficiencies when he starts breathing on his own. And then we’ll see how his brain responds.” He wanted to make sure this was going all together for her as it was for the medical professionals. “Does this make sense as I am explaining it?”

“Yes, doctor. We have clients we hear this about from their doctors. And our staff members have family experiences we share to support one another,” Quatrane was able to say, with difficulty. “But why did you say this was about to change, doctor”

“There was a meeting this morning here at the hospital of the family, its lawyer, and Ned’s medical team. After all considerations, the family has indicated that, except for intravenous hydration, they would like all other nutrition and artificial life support to be tapered down and discontinued as procedurally and medically appropriate. Within the hour, we are supposed to hear about any patient advance directives to the contrary. If there are none known or found, we will begin to follow the family’s wishes.”

Eleanor was extremely upset, but not enough to forget to dig further. “Doctor, may I ask who the family member is?”

“I’m afraid I’ve been told I can’t say,” he replied.

“Excuse me for asking, but as I work with a bunch of lawyers here, they are going to ask if Ned’s physicians are certain this person is a family member.” She asked politely, but firmly.

The doctor did not answer right away. But when he did, his answer was measured. “I personally verified this person is family. Beyond the medical requirements and hospital policy, I wanted to make sure because I was not pleased with my having to ask your associate, Ms. Soro, to step out of Ned’s room Tuesday morning when she was here.”

“Thank you, doctor. Is there anything we here can do? And what would you advise I put in this morning’s recorded message on Ned’s condition?” Eleanor inquired.

“First, I think you will be hearing from the family’s legal advisors, if you have not already.” As he paused, Quatrane thought of Karidja’s call from Mellon. She shook that thought off with disdain, thinking ‘couldn’t be.’

She heard Aronsen’s voice through the line. “After some hairsplitting consideration about for your message . . . I’d suggest you say something short and to the point, like: ‘Ned’s doctors say today his condition is guarded.’”

After a moment, he said, “Now, Ms. Quatrane, I know it’s hospital-speak again. But this way your law associates can’t blame you later on. And they may want to, at first. But as I figure it, they’ll come to realize they were thinking medically, not legally. And that would have been their mistake, if

you get my meaning.” He said nothing more on the topic. But he did say, “I appreciate all you’ve done for Ned and how you have treated me.”

The finality of his parting gesture was mind-numbing. But his logic and “do no harm” promise were anything but. Eleanor gently placed her phone receiver back in its cradle. It did not fall.

99

Linda was working her way through a few Dr. Seuss books her mother gave her from the library shelves. She knew them from listening to her father reading the rhyming and being silly with her. But her mother took a cue from Miss Alex and the redhead. She had picked out the simpler books to read for now at the library table. *The Cat in the Hat* and *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back* were better for getting to know words from their letters.

Another classmate from the reading clique was suddenly standing next to Linda at her table. It was Ashleigh, the tallest of the girls. She seemed to have quite a collection of Winnie-the-Pooh shirts. She was with her mom. “Mom, here is the girl who can read I told you about. Linda, this is my mom.” From the stacks, where she was looking for collections by two storytelling brothers much different from Seuss, Rosalyn saw the three of them and decided to join in. She thought the mom looked familiar. After introductions, she recalled the woman, Rachel, was one of the coffee drinkers at the “mother’s table” on Tuesday morning. Ashleigh said, “We are bringing back books for my older sister, Rebecca. She’s in fifth grade, but she went on a trip today with our dad, so she’s not here.”

“How’s things in the world of books and libraries?” asked Rachel.

“The larger library’s beacon of learning seems to be up on a higher shelf than the five-alarm fire about second graders reading and keeping track of what belongs to whom,” stated Rosalyn.

“Yeah. I heard from Ashleigh. She felt bad about turning down Linda’s offer to take *Black Beauty* home. The girls’ father was the one who read to them in our house. Back when we had a house. I must admit, I’m not much of a reader, myself.”

Rosalyn looked over at the girls. "Maybe I can find something Pooh-like that would be suitable to read in the second grade for Ashleigh and send it in to school with Linda Tuesday." She hesitated, "That is, if I'm not being nosy or pushy."

"No. That would be fine. They're supposed to be bringing a book in on Tuesday, you know. So, you'd be saving me, big time," she said. "I'm trying to keep her older sister on track with her grades. Today's little visit with the father will take her, and us, a day to get over. And then she'll be whining that 'it's a holiday, why do I have homework, it's not fair' . . . or some version of that." The woman stopped suddenly. She looked directly at Rosalyn and said, "God . . . excuse me, I shouldn't be going on like this . . . we don't even know each other. I'm so sorry. C'mon Ashleigh, we have to go." She handed Rosalyn the books she came in with. "Please put those back where they go. I'm so sorry."

Rosalyn went over to the table and sat next to Linda. "Well, that was quick. So that's Winnie-the-Pooh from your class, huh?" Linda nodded as she watched her classmate and her mother quickly leave through the double door of the library. Then Linda laughed. "What's funny," asked Rosalyn.

"They remind me of Kanga and Roo," she said through a giggle. "That's who Ashleigh said was her favorite storybook person—Roo—because of how he hopped through the forest."

A plan was forming in Rosalyn's calculations. "Let's go look for a book for her. Together. We can leave these other ones here for a while. No one will take them."

They settled on *Now We Are Six*. It had fewer words and there were lots of playful sketches. They brought it back to the table. Rosalyn opened to the last poem in the collection. It was titled, "The End." The whole thing was only twelve lines long, paired in six rhyming couplets. "Can you tell me any of the words you see in this poem, Linda?" she asked.

Her daughter looked at the words. Then she looked at the picture on the facing page. It showed Christopher Robin and Piglet and Pooh doing a dance in a patch of grass. Then she concentrated on the words again. All at once, she made a discovery. "Mom, these are our number words from school."

"Where?" the mother-librarian-schemer asked.

"At the end of each first line. Like on our math pages. See?" She pointed at the words and said them— "One." "Two." "Three" "Four" "Five" and "Six".

"What about the words on the line before those number words? Do you notice anything about them?" She gave Linda time to look them over. Rosalyn noticed that Linda's feet did not reach the floor when she sat up tall in the library table chair. And as she was looking at the page, she gradually began to swing her feet back and forth gently. If Rosalyn didn't have a deeper machination in the works, she might actually have enjoyed this as mother-daughter time with Linda, who just then startled her in a more-than-library-soft voice.

"Oh, I know now!" Linda was as excited as Newton with his alleged apple or Archimedes in his anecdotal bathtub, both tales of discovery high schoolers could find heralded upstairs in the science section of this very library. When her mother asked her what she found, Linda said, "The words are all the same except for the number word."

When her mother asked her if she knew what words the letters made, Linda could say all three of them: "When," she said. "I," she said. And "was" she said. The librarian trapped inside the burgeoning book plot asked her pupil what it would sound like if she said all the words in the line, in the order they were placed. She took her time.

And then, Linda Lowry read the first line in a book that she ever did by herself without hearing it read to her time after time after time by someone else. She read, "When I was One." She looked up expectantly to her mother. And then in sequence, she repeated the line five more times, adding one more year's age at the end of each line, until she read: "When I was Six." And, she realized, she was not pointing at each word with her finger. She saw them as a unit, as a whole thing, with a meaning that depended on them all.

"How does that feel?" asked Rosalyn.

Linda was quick to reply. "Like the first time I looked at the tracks in the box for a railroad train set and didn't know what to do. And then, I saw that one section of track fit into another. And if I did it right, over and over

again, I could put them together and they would make a loop. And then the train could go. That's what it felt like."

Rosalyn was devastated. She was on the cusp of creating a new place for herself. She was devising a scheme of her own for Linda. And right at that peak moment, the specter of Myles turned the whole thing into a train wreck.

100

Karidja Soro and Eleanor Quatrane met, in all places, in the ladies' room. They exchanged their urgent information as they cleansed their palms, careful not to seem to wash their hands of the mess that Ned Hegerman seemed to have found himself within. "Who do we talk to about this?" asked Karidja, since she had less experience than Eleanor in the corporate workings of the law firm.

"First we go and sit in that reading room with Gaby," replied Quatrane. "We need quiet and calm. There is so much to go over here first." And so, they did convene in an atmosphere of comfort and surroundings that offered the peace they did not feel inside themselves, and which the world outside had just wrenched from them in the last half hour. They got over their first emotions of the moment. Then they got down to work, for twenty minutes.

"Summing this up, then," said Gabriella, "you both have essentially been told that Ned is dying, sooner than later. Furthermore, a person we do not know of, whom Ned has never spoken of to me or either of you, and whom we do not think we have ever met properly, is recognized as the decision-making next of kin determining Ned's fate. And lastly, most despicably for now, it would seem that somehow Godfrey Mellon is handling all, or a portion of, Ned's legal affairs." She paused, "Is that it?"

They all concurred. Which left Gaby then to ask, "So what do we do next? What do we do about this?"

Quatrane took the lead. "Well, everyone knows Ned's health bulletin is way overdue. So, we either do not issue one and let uncertainty reign. Or we issue one and hope it keeps questions to a minimum. And in the meanwhile, we go about Ned's business and final affairs, to the extent we can." She

looked at her colleagues. She was thankful for the subtle lighting of the reading room. The glare of fluorescents would be too much for her to face just then. "Which means that I get that update on the message machine." They all nodded assent. "But what do I put on as the message?"

Stenographer Costa mused aloud. "Eleanor, you know this surgeon better than anyone. What was he trying to tell you? Should we take his advice? Use his message?"

Quatrane replied, "I've been going over this in my mind, on and off, since he hung up. He had thought it out, that's for sure. I keep thinking he was trying to message me on one level and suggest a message for everyone else. You know, like two messages in one."

Soro sifted what Eleanor had told them through her resolution filters. "He used a word that would mean one thing to doctors and another to lawyers. He said Ned's condition was 'guarded,' right?" Quatrane affirmed that. "To a doctor 'guarded' is being careful not to think he knows exactly what's happening to the patient, so he must rely on observation. But a lawyer who's 'guarding' knows precisely what her client is about, so she refuses to let on, or let anyone else exact any information, because it is not in the client's interest."

Again, it was Gaby who synthesized. "So, we use the doctor's suggestion verbatim. And you get that on the machine right away, Eleanor." But she had more. "We still have to figure out the next of kin and what Mellon's got to do with this. But that's not the most urgent—that's the given. The most urgent is that we must get a senior partner to tell us in the next ten minutes about any advance directives held on file for key personnel, especially Ned. That's you, Karidja. Because Mellon picked you. And because you're the associate attorney of our ad hoc flock."

Gaby exhaled. "And I'll go through his desk and file cabinets to see if there's anything there. Come and help me as soon as you can, Eleanor. And if you know he has a safe, and he's given you the combo, bring that too." She was finished. She stood. "Good luck, Let's go."

Gabs was only just starting to look at the top of Ned's desk when the intercom spooked her. She wondered if she was getting caught doing a task

she wasn't supposed to be performing. She touched the button on the phone base and spoke to the air in the room. "Yes?" she asked.

From the air came the voice of the same steno mate that interrupted the ad hoc group earlier. "Gabby, Danny is on the phone. He's asked for you after he couldn't get through to the others. And there's a message here for him from a lady in New Jersey."

"Would you be able please to bring me that message so I can give it to him after he talks to me? I'd really appreciate it." With that she pushed another button which was blinking. "Hello, Dan? It's Gabs."

"Hey. I couldn't get through to Eleanor or Karidja. It took forever to get through traffic. I'm calling in like Eleanor said to do before I meet Myles. What's happening there?"

"I've only time for the short version. Sorry. Ned's failing. Family's going to remove life support. For some reason Mellon's asking for advance directives Ned might have—that's why you couldn't get the others. We have less than ten minutes to find directives that would let Aronsen keep him on oxygen." She paused, "And a woman in New Jersey left a phone message for you here."

Dan was accustomed to fast, cryptic calls when he was on a case. This was the first time he took one from Gabs. And he was not surprised at all that the stenographer was good at it. "Okay, who's the lady? She leave a number?"

"Angie Flynn. Says to check your office machine. Has her number and what she wants to talk about. That's it. No way for us to follow up from here." She waited. And then she asked him, "Dan, must be something she doesn't want us to know. Seems to be a lot of that going around this morning. Do you know her?"

"We've crossed paths a few times. She's in the same line of work. Probably just a case she's working on. Coincidence she's calling this morning. I'll get back to her after I see Myles." He was about to hang up, but Gabs started talking again.

"Dan. My intuition is that there's no coincidences this morning. Take a minute and get to her before you see Myles." She listened to a wise crack he

made. "Fine with me. Bring me three pennies change and I'll give you a nickel. Bye."

Hart touched the bar atop the pay phone without hanging up the receiver. He fished out a quarter, rested his pen and notepad on the severely bent shelf under the coin box, dropped the coin in the slot and called his service. "Hart? It's Flynn. I need to ask you something. Quick, but ASAP. City guy, Mellon, had his girl Hayes call me. They want an apartment walked through weekly. Said it was for a case you were on. Wanted to know if I knew you or owed you anything, before they'd hire me. Four-month gig. I told her you owed me twenty bucks once, but you paid, with five bucks' interest. She took that as a 'no' and hired me. Call me soon. I got to be there at noon for a key." Hart wrote her number into his note pad, without her name. Next to the number he inked in "\$20 + \$5" so only he'd know whose number it was. He left the phone booth and headed down the street to meet Myles.

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Except when she was hired, Karidja Soro had not been in this partner's office suite. And she was too focused this morning to look around to see how it was furnished, though it was certainly plusher than the one Ned kept as "partner emeritus."

"No, Ms. Soro. The firm doesn't carry any standardized or mandated Advance Directives for partners, past or present, and senior executives. But let's make two calls right now."

He picked up his phone. "Gladys, please get HR on the phone for me. And at the same time, have the most senior member present in the group that crafts Advance Directives for clients on hold for me to talk to right after HR. Thank you." He looked at Karidja. "Anybody else you can think of in-house?"

She shook her head as he spoke, "Oh, yes. Thanks. I have an urgent need to know if you folks in HR have on file any Advance Directives for employees. I am specifically interested in Mr. Hegerman. And sorry, but I need to know this in the next three or four minutes." He listened. "Yes, please do."

He pushed in the blinking line on his desk set. "Yes. Thanks. I need to know quite quickly if your group has helped Ned Hegerman with a personal Advance Directive and if you have a copy of it on file." He listened. "Yes, by quickly I mean in three or four minutes. So please get on it right away."

Turning his attention back to Soro, he asked, "Do we know anything about who this relative . . . family member . . . happens to be? Can we get into a dialog to buy Ned some time?"

"Mellon's been very closed mouthed about that, I'm afraid. He rushed this at me on the phone just now." She thought a moment and then decided to go into territory not discussed with Eleanor and Gabby. "Sir, why do you think he called me? Don't you think he would have called you or another senior partner if he needed this so quickly?"

The partner looked up from his unlit intercom buttons for just a second to make sure she knew he was talking to her. Then he looked back down to scan for lights to pounce on. "His old man would have called me directly. And there was a time when I might have been able to pick up the phone to call him this morning. But we hear his son has his calls screened out nowadays. It's the younger Mellon you're dealing with, Ms. Soro. So, all I can say to your question is: 'asked and answered.'"

Soro was startled and spoke when she probably should not have, "You're saying, he really doesn't want an interfering Advance Directive?" All she got as an answer was a wry grimace and a tilt of the head.

A light lit. He pushed it in. "Yes? Okay, thank you then." He hung up and looked her way, "Nothing at HR, Ms. Soro." Another minute passed. A knock on the door was followed by Gladys with her hands on the shoulders of a young lady she was guiding into the office to stand where she could see both Karidja and the partner. She was out of breath. She held her hands in front of her like a chastity belt, clasping the fingers of one hand with the fingers and thumb of the other. "I was told to rush over here to tell you that Mr. Hegerman asked me six months ago about a Living Will. I first thought he was asking for a client. But apparently not. After he looked over the paper, he seemed disappointed that whomever he named as his Health Agent would have to know and sign a document. He thanked me and gave me back the folder I prepared for him."

The partner said, "Thank you. You can go back now. And you can walk."

She didn't move off the spot where Gladys placed her. She looked at Karidja. "I'm not in trouble, am I? Should I have told someone? Would he not be in the hospital if I had said something?"

Karidja rose and went over to her. She reached down and the girl capitulated, separated her grasp, and placed each hand in one of Karidja's, who spoke reassuredly. "No. No. Absolutely not." She looked to the partner for affirmation. He was non-committal. So, she turned back and asked the girl. "What's your name, dear?"

"Sally. Sally Norris. Ma'am." She replied.

Karidja realized the girl did not know who she was. "Sally, you did exactly what you are supposed to do. Client confidentiality is very important. You've been taught that in your legal training, right?" Norris nodded. It almost looked like she was fighting back tears, probably more of relief than grief. "And you know you have nothing to do with, and no responsibility for, Attorney Hegerman's hospitalization. Right?"

The girl shuddered and then stood, more relaxed. "Yes, Ma'am."

"Okay. Do you like coffee, Sally?" A nod in reply. "Good, then go down to the break room that Gladys can show you near here. Not your regular break room, understand?" At this, Soro looked over the girl's shoulder and made eye contact with Gladys, who had been standing in reserve during the few minutes the encounter took. Gladys smiled and gave Soro her own knowing nod, then mouthed: 'very nice.' Looking back at Sally, Soro finished her directions. "You sit there for six minutes. Have some coffee or water, whichever. And then walk back to work. Can you do that for me, please?" The girl said yes, turned and let Gladys lead her out as she had led her in. Except this time, Gladys simply draped one arm over Sally's shoulders as they left the office.

The partner waited until his door closed behind them. "So, Ms. Soro, you also arbitrate disputes individuals are having within themselves, huh?" She knew better than to answer. "I'll have to remember that." He picked up the phone receiver, thought the better of it, and placed it back on the base.

“Probably better not to tip the bastard off by calling his dad. An old lesson I learned the hard way when my kid faced down a playground bully.” He gave a shoulder shrug. “Well, we tried . . . You tried. I guess now it’s all up to Ned.” And then almost under his breath, he added, “God help him.”

Karidja Soro looked at the digital clocks on the wall, featuring the three national time zones. Aronsen’s hour to intervene had passed. Without any understanding of where her mind was going, it just echoed for her an internal sing song playground brag, “Look mom, no hands.”

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Danny hopped up onto the seat at the corner of the counter that Myles had saved for him, by placing his valise on the stool next to the one he was sitting upon. Myles had taken out some papers to work on so no one bothered him there. The place was not so crowded that the fountain manager or other patrons had objected. People usually avoided sitting there anyway. That end of the serving area was right near the entry door. It was an active space for transacting take-out orders on during the mid-morning coffee break rush, which on this Friday was just winding down.

“Thank you for seeing me,” was all Myles said to start, moving the papers out of the way. He put them in the valise and set it on the raised footrest against the counter under his stool. “I’m kind of worked up, so I didn’t want to get into it on the phone.”

Danny was still adjusting his focus on Myles as a client, first or second hand. “I was coming over the bridge anyway, so it worked out fine.” Previously Myles had been the agitating husband he was looking into for Mellon and, by inference, Rosalyn. Before he let Myles reply, he answered the counter man’s facial invitation to order. He asked for a hot coffee, some half and half, and a slice of apple pie, no ice cream.

Then he took a look around the place to make sure he didn’t know anyone at the fountain counter or the four tables that comprised the dining area. He didn’t, so he spoke. “What’s on your mind, Myles?”

“I’ve been watching her apartment,” he anguished out the confession.

"You've been what?" Danny put down his pen and open notepad next to his fork on its napkin. "Since when?"

"Just since Wednesday. Today's the third day. I'm taking Fridays off to look for them. The other two days I came in the afternoon and evening. I've been renting a car. A different one each time. I thought I was being clever. But not so much, I guess. A guy who lives there, ex-commando with a dog, confronted me this morning. He's seen me each time." Myles looked embittered and embarrassed at the same time.

Danny's coffee and pie had come during the Myles recap. He added some half and half. Took a sip. He tested the firmness of one apple slice with his fork, urged it out from under the flaky crust, and started to chew on it, and on the idea of Myles-as-spy.

"You know they fought hard for you in court to win that settlement Monday." Danny was mindful of Ned's failing cardiac condition as they spoke. But he didn't want to lay a guilt trip on Myles right now. Hart needed to stay focused on the courtroom intruder he originally drove over to chase down. "If you violate that restraining order, all their effort goes right down the river and gets washed out to sea. And not even Lady Liberty will be able to free your daughter after that."

Myles responded firmly, but not argumentatively. "I won't get within ten feet of Rosalyn, and if she has Linda with her, I'm out of there before they can see me."

"And yet, a man and his dog . . ."

"A trained observer, ex-military, is all. No one else," his voice a tad bit raised. "Sorry. I'm on edge because of what the soldier told me." Now he had Hart's attention. The pie remained uneaten. The coffee only nursed and getting cold.

"He says that someone came to the apartment last night. Wasn't sure, but could have been Rosalyn, with an adult helper. They appeared to be two women. He said it looked like a supply run." He waited for Hart to say something.

Hart spoke only after another cold sip and a nod to the counterman's mimed offer for more coffee to warm up his cup. "I'd really like to get a look inside that apartment." He used the fork to get a nice mouthful of apple pie, in order to give Myles time to make an answer.

"That's what Riley—that's his name, the soldier, Mike Riley—what Riley said. A look inside might help figure out what the night stalkers were up to." That was all Myles had to offer at first.

"Soldier wouldn't call them night stalkers. I wonder if—"

Myles interrupted him. "He didn't. I just called them that." And then he remembered something else. "Oh, and one more thing." Reaching into his pocket, he said, "Riley gave me this police detective's card. He said she'd been around the apartment questioning neighbors Monday and Tuesday. Asking about strangers being around or seeing anything that Linda or Rosalyn might have done." He gave Danny the business card. "His number is on the back."

Danny was only vaguely familiar with the name, and less with the person herself. But the card reminded him he was going to meet Angie Flynn unannounced a few minutes before noon at the apartment. "Myles, let's finish up here. I want to be a half block from the apartment ten minutes before noon. And after that, I want us to go see the Meadows man and his daughter when she's out of school." He ate the last of his pie and drank almost all the coffee. "What did you have to eat?" he asked Myles. Myles told him. Danny took out two twenties and caught the counter man's eye. He held up the two bills so they could be seen distinctly. "Are we good?" he asked. A big smile and a nod were affirmation enough. "And we weren't here. Right?"

"What two guys?" was the reply.

Out on the sidewalk, Danny laid out a plan to Myles: they would take both cars from the soda fountain and park two blocks away from the apartment, near a big Victorian beside a pocket park, one housing lot in size. Myles knew the spot. Danny would leave his car and get into the van. Danny would drive one block closer and then wait there in the car while Hart walked over to the apartment street.

Rosalyn kept scanning shelves, reading books, and making lists. She checked in on Linda. She was getting restless with just the Dr. Seuss books. "I'm finished knowing words," she told her mother. "Now it's just the pictures I am looking at."

"I have a nice list of books for Mrs. Steadman to use on Tuesday with your class. But it's sort of messy in my handwriting. And, besides," and here she made sure Linda was seeing her whole face and head, which she was wiggling back and forth in jest, "shouldn't the school librarian," and here they both laughed as Rosalyn sat even more straight and tall in mock fun, "present the teacher with a typed list?" Linda didn't often see her mother so playful and looking happy. Rosalyn asked, "Do you want to wait here while I use the library computer and printer? Or should I come back later?"

"Could I just walk back h . . . to my room and play with my train while you make the list?" Her mother couldn't have hoped for a better solution. This way her daughter wouldn't wander over, while she was concentrating on the screen, and see that her mother was doing something with maps, not books.

"Can I trust you with the key? This would be a new thing here at our **HAPPYDALE** house." Linda seemed to accept the substitution. Rosalyn herself was more comfortable with "house" than "home" for their new dwelling.

"I'm older now, mom. I am six. Like in the poem." She held up the copy of A. A. Milne's *Now We Are Six* that Rosalyn was setting aside for Ashleigh, the tall girl with the Winnie-the-Pooh shirts. "I can keep a key and not lose it." Linda didn't dare reveal she had lost the fob on her discovery trip to the caboose.

"Okay. Let's try that, then," concurred her mother. "And maybe when I go to the store next time, I can get an extra key made that you could carry with you. That way you could get in the house if I am working at the library." Once again, serendipitous developments arose as evidence to Rosalyn that her planning of a pathway to a different future was looked on with pleasure

by the fates. At least this time, no one was going to be hurt by an errantly thrown barroom dart.

Linda picked up her things and kissed her mother. She left the library on her own and her mother set off to look for a reasonably isolated computer station. She laid out the hand-written list and opened a WORD file. She headed the list and entered the first bibliographic reference. She minimized the file so she could restore it to the screen quickly if she were interrupted. And she set about her intended task.

From the reference section she acquired three regional telephone books with Yellow Pages. Looking under the headings of BANKS and LIBRARIES she began to keyboard a list on a second WORD document. The first heading on the second file only referenced the libraries. She saved and minimized the that file also. Now she could toggle from one screen to another, depending on the privacy she required. As far as anyone who came along could tell, the new librarian was getting an early start on her job.

Linda was careful not to spill the orange juice she poured to drink. Her first train trip of the morning nudged its way slowly from under the bed-mountain and through the tunnel opening to greet the new day's sunlight.

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Karidja sought out Eleanor in the privacy offered by the ladies' room again. This time it was pre-arranged. It seemed they were learning from Hart. As they hoped, it was unoccupied at this time of the day. "Were you able to post the message?" she asked as they feigned a need to wash their hands.

Drying hers off on a paper towel, Eleanor answered, "Just barely. It took me two tries. But it's done." She tossed the crumpled towel in the trash bin and pushed open the door. In the hallway, after looking to make sure there was no one nearby, she asked the lawyer, "How did you do?"

Karidja shook her head. "Nothing on file in HR or in the Advance Directives group. Can you get the transcript from Monday's hearing, please? I have some notes I want to run past you both." Quatrane nodded. "Meet at Gaby's in five, then?" Eleanor acknowledged she'd be there.

Convened at Costa's desk, Soro gave them a more detailed idea of what transpired in the partner's office. She was barely finished when the intercom sounded. Gaby listened and then said, "All three of us are here, sir." She hung up the phone. "There's a messenger here with papers from Mellon. We've been summoned to the large conference room."

The same partner, plus two others, were there in the large conference room with Gladys, who had a notepad at the ready. The three women sat down and the partner with his name painted on the firm's glass entry door began speaking with no delay. "As they say on the Mickey Mouse Club, who is the leader of this gang, please?" No one spoke up soon enough for his liking.

So, he continued. "I understand you all feel an allegiance to Ned Hegerman. And that you've been working together on different aspect of his health reports and the case he was working when he had his heart attack."

After a moment, the partner Karidja visited with earlier spoke, saying, "So I've asked that you three be extended the courtesy of hearing this news first. A general announcement will be made in a half hour in the larger meeting room."

The senior partner resumed the helm. He picked up a courier's envelope, with its tell-tale, red triangular-shaped half diamonds scrolled around its edges, except where it had been torn open. "But now it's getting to be about more than Ned—perhaps much more. So, no more Mickey Mouse, Ms. Soro, got it?" And he slid the package down the table to end up right in front of her. Gaby would have preferred it was a shot glass and that she was somewhere else right about now.

"Mellon says he has Advanced Directives his—unnamed—client wants implemented, as long as we don't have anything to the contrary. Of course, these formal papers don't let on he already waved that semaphore in our faces about an hour ago."

Eleanor was infuriated and couldn't help herself. She dared not strike out against a partner, so Mellon was a suitable target for them both. "That bastard must have had the messenger sitting in the lobby downstairs."

"Very perceptive of you, Ms. Quatrane" The senior partner replied. "Their office courier was doing that exact thing for the prior twenty-five

minutes. Security was about to inquire about his business at the top of the hour. But he got up and went to an elevator three minutes before they were going to approach him."

Gaby saddened at her thought that Charlie had probably told Mellon some time in the past about that lobby security protocol.

He gave them a moment to take that in before he hit them with the second salvo from Mellon. "In addition, the papers in this delivery serve us notice that Ned Hegerman's Last Will and Testament, his Power of Attorney for financial matters, and a document titled Organ Donation Considerations, are entrusted to Mellon's firm for oversight, execution, and administration. As such, we have been served to produce within the week a formal, internal accounting of Ned's remaining interests in this firm, with an order to deliver an independent accounting firm's audit of all his ownership values, and shares in the firm's assets, within four weeks' time."

He went on, "The proceedings for the transfer of those documents is set for the Wednesday after Columbus Day weekend, October 14, at a place and time to be stipulated. At that time, our firm is to propose a timetable for the liquidation of Ned's share of the firm's assets and delivery of their cash value to Mellon's firm, so he can distribute them according to the terms of Ned's Last Will and Testament, before but no later than December 16, 1992."

Soro, Quatrane, and Costa were speechless. Two by sheer shock. The third by choice of discipline and demeanor. The latter asked, "May I open and see these documents, sir?" She did not think it advisable to do so without permission. Any impertinence perceived by a partner would not serve her, nor Ned, well at the moment.

"That is our intent, Ms. Soro. But by a specific procedure, please." He pointed to Gladys and waited until she completed her notetaking. Her practiced eye made Gaby certain Gladys was not creating a transcript of the proceedings. "Gladys here will go with you to Ms. Costa's office, where you will make a copy of the package contents. Then you are to give her the originals back. Everyone clear on this?" He scanned the group to make sure of unanimous consent.

Satisfied, he went on, "Next. The three of you are released . . ." they were horrified . . . "of any other obligations for the rest of the day . . ." they

were relieved . . . “By four o’clock you are to gather up anything you can find in Attorney Hegerman’s belongings and files that help us in this regard. You three are better suited than anyone else in the firm to recognize what is germane and what is not.” Quatrane had seen such a segregation once before. Years ago. Before the others were hired. When this trio of lawyers made partner. What appeared at first had been a strategy of efficiency, evolved into what it truly was meant to be from the start: a subterfuge of isolation, assignment of culpability, and dismissal of the parties involved. She would warn the others as soon as they were alone.

The partner continued, “The staff in the copy department will stay late to wait for you. They will make copies of anything you need for current cases—including the Lowry proceedings you have been carrying out in Ned’s absence. The originals of those materials should be replaced where they were in Ned’s office and files. Are we together, so far?” They nodded.

“After the end of business today, Ned’s office will be off limits to all but our security personnel and our auditors. So do not leave anything behind you will need to continue business as usual, please. Understood?” This time he waited for three verbal ‘yeses.’

“We will convert the pool area by Ms. Costa’s workstation into your space for the interim Ms. Soro, for efficiency. Mr. Hart may continue to use the reading room behind you. And Ms. Quatrane, I’ll leave it to you to decide how to delegate your front office duties in order to complete your working trio for the short term, at least until the October 14 proceeding.” This time he did not asked for affirmation.

“One of us will visit you early Tuesday and discover what you have found to assist you in Mr. Hegerman and Mr. Lowry’s affairs. Fortunately, Ms. Soro, you have not initiated any actions for Ned’s cases that were assigned to you earlier this week. We will reassign those to other colleagues without much delay, since we just reviewed them three days ago for the same purpose. Later Tuesday afternoon, you and I will go over your retained portfolios for resolution. We’ll see if any have urgency requiring delegation. For those that don’t, we’ll let them remain in your bailiwick for now.” He stood, and therefore so did the others.

“Since you have so much to do, only Ms. Quatrane needs to be with the company group in the auditorium when we convene shortly. She has been

the liaison for Ned's health bulletins. Please join us on the dais to give an update during this session, Ms. Quatrane. After that you can join the others." He seemed very satisfied with himself, an audience of one. The three executives left.

Gladys looked like she wished to be anywhere else on the earth than where she was. She silently looked down at the floor and waited until the others moved, so she could follow them and carry out her marching orders.

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Of course, Danny Hart and Myles knew none of this as Hart stepped out of the van and started down the sidewalk. He looked over his shoulder. "Remember, Myles. Keep an eye out for anyone who takes an interest in your being here. Anybody walking by or in the park. Or anyone driving by more than once. Write it down in your ledger so you can tell me later in detail. What they looked like. A license plate and type and color of vehicle. Trust me, it's not busy work, Myles; it will be good training for you. And, no matter what. Don't leave here. I am counting on you to stay and to be here when I come back. Please."

Danny walked down the sidewalk. The trees between him and the street had trunks of moderate circumference. A few had roots poked up through the grass, like a pool shark's hand bridging his cue over the felt tabletop in a neighborhood corner bar. Only one tree he passed, whose type he did not know, had caused the sidewalk to lift upwards. It was still early enough in the fall that most still had their leaves intact and green.

When he got to the main street that paralleled the sunken railroad tracks and whose name the apartment bore in its address, all he saw was a stocky fellow walking his dog. If he hadn't thrown a quick look over his shoulder as he guided the leash, Danny would not have suspected he was seeing Myles's new friend. And was being seen by him in return.

Danny knew better than to try to disguise his interest in the apartment building. That would only arouse this Mike Riley the wrong way. So, Danny crossed the street and walked directly at him. "Hello, Mr. Riley.

I figure from talking to Myles over a morning coffee and piece of pie down at the fountain shop that you might recognize me as the guy that was here Monday looking for Mrs. Lowry." Danny thanked him for the business card he gave Myles, as he held it out as proof-of-concept, as the investigator license training manuals called such a thing. "I've had limited dealings with the detective over the years. But she can at least tell you I'm legit, licensed and all."

Riley was non-plussed but impressed none the same. "Thought I'd seen you before. With the birthday party guy, but without his kid, right? Before the detective came around."

"Yeah. That was me in another lifetime. Back when I was working for Mrs. Lowry's lawyer per diem. But I quit his gig."

"And why was that, might a neighbor ask?" said Riley.

"Three things. She turned out to be a runner. Her lawyer is a bottom feeder. And neither of them seems to be as interested in Linda Lowry as her dad does."

"And you'd know that how?" the dog was losing interest in this conversation and was heading down the street for his noontime constitution. And that was real fine with Hart.

"Because I'm working for his lawyer now. Seems to be the side to be on. That is, Linda Lowry's side. Kind of like yourself, as I hear it from Myles." They eyed one another.

Riley turned to follow the dog. "That so?"

"Yes. It is so." Danny took a look at his watch. He had less than two minutes. "So, a favor, if I might. I have a chance to head off that lawyer's new eyes and ears. The one replacing me and I have some history. And she's to be here at noon. You can see her from a hundred yards down the sidewalk and she'll never know. For future reference, so to speak. But I need her now and it's best you're not in the picture—at least, not yet." He waited. "So, what do you say, Mike?"

"Leave me your particulars on the machine back of the card." He turned and made his way down the sidewalk, without a care in the world except for his dog. And for Linda Lowry.

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Eleanor Quatrane finally rejoined Gabriella Costa and Karidya Soro an hour later. None of them had eaten. None of them had an appetite for food. "How did the general assembly go?" asked Soro.

"I just listened and stood there. In the end, they didn't even have me address the group. At first, I was annoyed they didn't. But reflecting on it walking over here, I am very satisfied to have been window dressing. No one asked me any questions about Ned's condition, so in the workplace mind I am not a part of the partners' presentation or their plans." She was placid.

But Gaby knew still waters ran very deep in this woman. Especially when it came to Ned Hegerman. She had been at his side here every day for his most active years, and faithfully as he needed her in the recent twilight time. "Eleanor, I ordered us luncheon salads. I don't even feel like eating and expect you two don't either. But if we don't, come crunch time we're going to miss something and not be ready for four o'clock."

Karidja added, "And you can tell us what was said while we eat." As if on cue, the intercom announced to the air that their delivery was at the front desk. Karidja went to get it and to sign for it against Lowry's account. She wanted to leave a big enough footprint for the outside auditors to make it clear they were working on that case and not something nefarious for the partners, whom she sensed she was not going to trust too easily.

They opened the brown kraft delivery bag with its two ropey handles and found a stack of three light cardboard oblong boxes, whose tops folded as tabs into slotted flaps within the swirled radicchio logo. Each yielded a signature three-lettuce salad, with grilled chicken slices, sourdough croutons, crumbled bacon bits, tomato wedges, piñones, and bleu cheese dressing. As they ate the salads at desks in the steno pool adjacent to Gaby's workstation area, Quatrane held court.

“First, a little history for you ladies. History that I fear we may have to be vigilant about repeating itself. Before you were hired, the troika we faced today were made partner in something of a revenge coup. Some at the time saw it as being akin to FDR packing the Supreme Court. Two of the then five senior partners got involved in a strategy to fund an expansion of the firm. Ned was one of the other three, but he was considered by some a loner. Not so much as an odd man out, but as being independent of the other pairs.” She took a forkful that had a crouton and stopped talking in the midst of a crunch.

“Sorry. Anyway, these two fellows wanted to acquire a failing firm that practiced copyright law, which we did not do at the time. The money for the buyout was coming from a broker. Only afterwards did it get revealed that the broker had a conflict of interest. The brokerage house had clients with products that required copyrights and trademarks and patents to do their business. There was a backlash.” She took a long pull on the bottle of water that Karidja brought back from the conference room refrigerator when she fetched the salads.

“The other partners felt coerced into the buyout because Ned recused himself. A two-against-two vote was not enough to stop the deal. So, these two dissatisfied partners took a novel approach. They quietly rewrote the partnership agreement so that two more associates and one outsider were made partner. Each pair nominated an attorney from inside, but the third new partner, the outsider, was up to Ned to nominate. It was surreptitiously presented as a practice need, based on the increased business and new administration requirements of the acquisition. As it turned out the three new partners formed an alliance of independence of sorts over the years and forced the other partners out, or in Ned’s case, into a minority position.” She took another drink and some more salad. Soro and Costa were almost finished, being able to eat uninterrupted as they were mostly only listening. Karidya was doodling out a schematic of the power struggle.

“Finally, as the three added partners became the new face of the practice, they turned their attention back to the acquired business. None of them wanted to continue doing that kind of law. So, when a challenge arose from outside the company to that almost-forgotten conflict of interest, they circumscribed an exclusion of personnel. Four principal administrators of that division of the firm, who were not partners, were assigned a task to research deeply the history of the acquired company. They were said to have been—now get this— “released” from other duties to concentrate on the

task." She gave the idea time to sink in. And it did. Karidja and Gaby were on the edge of their seats, with no salad left to eat as a distraction.

"The long and the short of it was that they did discover discrepancies, occurring before the acquisition. But they had become so embedded in disguised, blind accounts that they continued on after the acquisition. That continuation made our firm responsible. Those four administrators were fired on the spot for cause, received no severance, and were not able to find jobs in the legal field in this part of the country afterwards. They had to relocate their families to the west coast and mid-west in order to find work." She ate some more salad and decided she wanted no more of it.

"Ned stayed on as partner, but was gradually eased out of major decision-making. All because, it seemed, he did not want to go along with the dismissals. But they never did anything but alienate him into this category of 'partner emeritus,' which is—"

"A bunch of nonsense and a big lie," broke in Gaby. "And everyone knows it. He was disgraced. But Ned never pursued it. Some people say it's because his wife had died. He had no kids. That he lost interest in lots of things right about then." She kept at it. "This is all true Karidja. I was here by then, right Eleanor?"

Karidja could not help but notice her hesitancy when Eleanor affirmed, "Yes, you were." She looked at them both. "But you were kind of new at the time. And devoted." She shook her head. "Yet, I used to think there was more to it. I worked with him. If he didn't care, he could have quit. He didn't seem to need the money." She drank some water. "But I'll tell you, when he got a case in those years, he cared, and deeply. But people just didn't see it. Some judges did. And some of the opposing lawyers. But few people here, because they had already written him off." She stopped and fought within herself about going on.

Then she decided if she couldn't tell this group, she would never be able to tell anyone. "And then it happened. Everyone could see it two and a half years ago. He did care. He was still a very good lawyer. It became monumentally true for some reason when the Lowry divorce reared its ugly head. No one else wanted to touch it. And Ned would not have let another person near it."

“Karidja, you saw how much he wanted to work on that ever since, these last two years, right?” demanded Gaby. “I can tell you it’s all in the notes, in the court transcripts. I still don’t know how that case came out the way it did two years ago. It made him a laughingstock in the hallways here. Myles never knew he should have seen his girl more often. He was too distraught. Too angry. But always with Rosalyn or Mellon or the court system. Never at Ned. They had been friends before the trial. It was a terrible conclusion—not even deserving the name of a ‘settlement.’”

Karidja said resignedly, “Maybe he worked hard enough to put him in his grave.”

Quatrane fought back. “He hasn’t yet. And that doesn’t mean we died. Or will sit around and let history repeat itself. I was here. I always felt something was wrong.”

She stood up and forcefully stuffed the remains of her lunch in the bag, held it open for them to do the same with theirs, and then jammed it into a waste basket designed to take far less trash. “And now that you’ve made me think about it again, we have lots to do in a very few hours. So. Let’s go.”

“Where are we going?” asked Karidja.

“You two are going to be right here and in Ned’s office. You will do what the partners said. Get everything we need for active cases out and ready for copying. Pull anything out that is about Ned’s shares and values. Mark the file locations for their proper return.”

Then she almost resembled Danny Hart, looking around him for eavesdroppers before saying, “But also do what they did not ask. Keep an eye out for anything of Ned’s Will or Organ Donation. Look in every file marked with those topics. If he was meaning to have it not found, he could have assigned it to a name appearing to be a client, while actually being his.” She waited a moment to see if they had questions.

Since they did not, she asked one more thing. “Gaby. When you made your spread sheet for overlapping cases for your Dan, how far back did you go?”

"We said two years. But I went back about three years, in case there were delays and postponements that resurfaced." She waited for a follow-up question that did not come from Eleanor.

But Karidya asked her, "Where are you going Eleanor? Don't you think we need you here?"

"Yes. We need me. But not in these remaining files after the 'emeritus' reshuffle. We need me back further than Gaby's two years for overlap."

"Then where? And when?" inquired Gaby, pushing her glasses up on her nose.

Quatrane looked angry, but not at Costa. "To the archives downstairs. To look through files and notes about that acquisition and the subsequent bloodbath. None of that is indexed on the computers. We'll show these bastards—screw them and their 'released.' I'll explain later. See you in an hour or two back here."

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HAPPYDALE'S library was not very active on the Friday off. And Rosalyn's list-building was going along without much interruption. She had local libraries identified in her first round of experimental locations that corresponded with appropriately small-volume banking institutions. Each list was arranged and could be printed separately, for her to use with Beatriz Grey on the one hand and for her to make travel plans on the other. The lists would be matched for overlapping purposes only back in her house when Rosalyn worked without the prospect of discovery.

Her reading list for second graders was also sufficient enough to print out to show Tuesday, first to Administrator Grey and then to Mrs. Steadman.

It was time to go and find Linda and make a small lunch together. She had stayed too long to make the serving hours for lunch at the dining hall. Besides, she reminded herself, they were meeting Valerie and Taylor for the Friday Special Spaghetti and Meatball dinner at the dining hall. And then a TV movie night over at their house afterwards.

Not two minutes after Mike Riley and his dog walked away, Danny Hart watched from across the street as a three-year-old Nissan Sentra, black two-door sedan rolled into the dead end and nudged in against the curb. Parking was easy to find at noon on a weekday, even if it was the beginning of the Labor Day weekend. People were still working and there was at least a half day, if not a full day, of school locally.

He saw no other car coming with the Sentra. And there was only one female occupant, the driver. And while that driver was looking down at the passenger seat beside her and gathering up her things, Danny tapped on the window, opened the door, and said hello.

"I wondered if you would just show up. Get in here before anyone sees you, please." It wasn't much of a personalized greeting after not seeing one another for over a year. Angie Flynn finished clearing off the seat and was flinging things she didn't need into the back seat as he climbed in.

There was no cheek pecking or hand shaking. They accepted the logic of their professional relationship. At first it had been based on reciprocal need, occasioned by their mismatched clientele. They seldom were in competition with each other, and only infrequently at odds with each other. Over three years they developed a tolerable, mutual respect.

Danny handed her a five-dollar bill. "Just to be sure I'm not making a liar out of you," referring to his alleged interest payment. She scoffed. But she did tuck the Lincoln above the sun visor just the same.

"So, what gives here, Danny?" she wanted to know. "Should I be taking this on?"

"It's a divorce-custody-visitation rights dispute, with some wonky things going on around the edges. I got pulled in by the younger Mellon on Monday because I was in Jersey on a different case for their firm. He had no one else nearby. She didn't show in court for a custody hearing. He sent me over to see if she and her daughter were okay. He styled it a 'welfare check.' Turns out she had taken off with the child that morning and now no one

knows where she is." He stopped talking to take a look around outside the car to make sure no one was approaching.

Flynn said, "No need to be jumpy, Danny. Nobody followed me."

"Yeah. Anyway, while I was here a friend of hers showed up. Long and short of it he had a cassette player with evidence on it. I took the evidence to the court for Mellon. He tried to suppress it. He didn't succeed and he fired me." That was all Danny was willing to tell Flynn.

"I kind of heard he didn't succeed because you played the hero for some little girl. And that piqued my interest enough to be here. But not without hearing from you first. What else is there to this I should know?" Flynn asked.

"I'd be able to answer that better if I could ask a huge favor," said Danny.

"Yikes. I'm not even on the case and you're working me. Before you ask me anything, I'll tell you what I know," she told him. "Right now, there is purportedly an envelope on the kitchen table up there. It was left by a law associate before dawn on his way into work early to beat the holiday traffic. It has two weeks' pay and an apartment key, and a mailbox key in it. The door is currently unlocked." She looked him in the eye. "Now if you tell me I should forget this case, I won't even go up there. But once I do, I'm in for a penny and in for a pound. I don't know Mellon or this Hayes woman. I can't afford to find I'm exchanging a pennyweight of feathers for a pound of lead, Danny. So, what's your advice? And what do you want to know?"

Danny gave it a long thought. He counted the teeth along the upper jaw of the horse whose lip Angie Flynn just turned up and inside out. He looked down the dead end toward the railroad embankment. He thought of Linda Lowry in her overgrown hideout with a railroad-riding 'gentleman caller' and decided.

"What I'd really like to know Angie is how much gas do you have in this non-descript vehicle?"

"Enough to get home. But not enough to run from Mellon," she said.

“Well, if you could take about fifteen minutes to go and get it filled up, I could give you a more informed answer when you get back.” He looked at her.

“I don’t suppose you’re going to wait around on the corner for me, are you Danny?”

“Probably not,” he said.

She mused. “Let me see now. Let’s say this was Angie Flynn and Danny Hart doing a hypothetical at a bar, while we were discussing an upcoming ethics review for our license renewals.” She saw that his face urged her to continue. So, she did. “Angie says to Danny that Mellon’s not yet her client because she hasn’t signed anything or accepted his retainer. Sound about right so far?” He nods.

“And then Danny says it isn’t technically breaking and entering if the door isn’t locked. He just came back to check that he secured the door properly when he left in such a rush Monday. And while he was checking, he thought he heard something upstairs that might have been a kid crying. Now sure, it could be a neighbor’s infant. But what if it was Linda Lowry, scared and alone up there—after having somehow returning by herself, or worse yet having been abandoned. He’d be obliged to check, right?”

“I think we’d both pass that ethics screening with flying colors,” Hart opined. “So, there’s only one question, Ms. Flynn,” he summarized.

“And what is that, Mr. Hart?” she quizzed.

All Danny said as he was opening the door was, “Regular or high test? Remember it’s Jersey, they pump the gas.”

She drove away as he walked toward the apartment. When he looked over his shoulder, Mike Riley and his dog were returning from their noontime excursion. They turned down the dead end to go in their back door, which Riley probably locked when they began their trek.

Myles Lowry made his first entry in his notes. For the second time in less than ten minutes, a black Nissan went by. This time it was going in the opposite direction as its first pass. He noticed it was a woman driving.

If she went by again, he promised himself he'd pay better attention to the license plate.

On his first scan through the apartment, Danny was able to concur that Riley had been right about the Thursday night incursion being a supply run. Many fewer wardrobe items remained hanging in the closets than were there Monday. And there were no clothes left now in the bureau drawers. As he searched, one bureau drawer gave him trouble. It was stuck. He couldn't get it to close. So, he left it as it was.

On his second pass, he looked for the mailbox key in the kitchen that Paul Meadows showed him Monday afternoon. It was nowhere to be found. Perhaps it was in Angie's envelope. But he wasn't touching that.

There was no mail on the floor by the front door. He picked up the phone. It had been disconnected.

He slid open the single middle drawer in the writing desk in the living room. There were some flat, oversized ten-by-thirteen manilla envelopes in there that he did not recall seeing on Monday. They had marks left by scotch tape on several spots along the edges. One had a glossy sliver that had split off at an angle, from what must have been a larger rectangular tab of tape, and it remained adhered.

Instinctively he knew he only had about five minutes left. He looked around for where the envelopes might have been before. Nowhere looked apparent in the normal commerce of coming and going in an apartment. He stood still, centered himself, and surveyed the apartment again. The dresser drawer that was stuck open caught his eye.

He found there was no problem in pulling the drawer out of the furniture completely. He turned the drawer over so he could see its bottom. And that's when he saw it. There was a space that suggested an object had been taped there for some time. The area was slightly discolored and less dusty. Starting free from, the drawer slid back in place as it was supposed to, without sticking. But there was no tape left on that drawer bottom. So he looked some more.

It only took Hart two more minutes to check the rest of the drawers of that size. Under the third he tried, he found a complementary-angled

remnant of cellophane tape from the envelope in the desk drawer. It was still affixed to this bureau drawer bottom. In all there were three drawers with similar shading. And there were three manilla envelopes inside the writing desk drawer. Danny carefully extracted the envelopes, untucked his shirt, placed the large envelopes flat against his belly, and lowered his shirt, leaving it untucked.

He took one more look around and left. He was gone and walking up the sidewalk toward Myles's rental van as Flynn drove past, at the residential speed limit, without any acknowledgment. He didn't tell Flynn about Riley, nor vice versa. He figured they were both adults. They'd figure it out. Just like Riley, patiently watching from his own apartment window, figured out Danny had made a slight wardrobe adjustment during his recon of the Lowry unit.

And when Danny finally got around to talking to her, he wasn't going to indicate to the local police detective that he knew anything about Flynn or Riley either. He frankly didn't care if she figured anything out right now. If he needed her later, he'd address that at the right time, in a way beneficial to him and Linda Lowry. Before he talked to the Jersey detective though, he wanted to discover if she had any contacts in Manhattan.

Before Danny could tell Myles they still needed to go see the Meadows dad and daughter, and almost before he had buckled his lap belt, Myles proudly announced that he had a license plate of a car, a black Nissan, that a woman had driven past three times during his time waiting at the pocket park curb.

In the middle of sandwiches—peanut butter and jelly for Linda and tuna fish for her mother—the kitchen counter phone rang. It was going to be their first phone call. Linda was excited. Her mother was petrified. Next to the phone was a device about the size of a large index card, but as thick as a pack of one hundred cards. It had a small screen with a three-line message. The date and the time were on the first line. A phone number was in the middle. Below that was Valerie's name. Seeing that relaxed Rosalyn and she picked up the receiver on the adjacent phone.

Before she could say anything, Taylor's voice came through the line. "Mrs. Lowry? My mother wants to know if you want to take a run to any shopping in town. I'll stay there with Linda, if you want."

Rosalyn quickly asked Linda while Taylor waited on the other end. Linda was excited to hear Taylor was coming over. "Sounds good to us. When should I come over to your place?" asked her mother. "Okay. I'll see you in ten minutes. Sure, we'll pass one another on our ways."

Linda was excited to show Taylor *Now We are Six*. And even more excited to read to her the last poem, "The End." She was so proud of how she did, with some help from Taylor with the words "nearly," and "hardly," and "clever." While Linda went to use the bathroom, Taylor spent some time with the book. She found in its pages a set of notes in handwriting that she thought must have been Mrs. Lowry's.

At first it seemed nice of her to make a list of poems for Ashleigh to learn to read. But she noticed the list was not in the order of the pages of the book. And as she read the poems, the list was not in an order from easiest to hardest to read. She paid more attention to the words and ideas next.

The first on the list was "Us Two." It was about Christopher Robin and Pooh. The poem was about having an imaginary friend. They solved math problems together. They went for a walk across the river to hunt for dragons. They scared the dragons away, even though the pictures showed the young boy and his bear chasing birds. And as they went upstairs to bed for the night, with no adult to tuck them in. Pooh asserts that "It isn't much fun for One, but Two can stick together." Taylor thought it was more sad at the end than it should be. Like Christopher Robin was lonely and not sure of himself, so he made up a friend instead of finding a real life one.

The second poem was "The Friend." The setting suggested Christopher Robin getting asked math and history questions at school. He's very afraid of social harping if he gets the answer wrong. He withdraws and resolves that he'll let Pooh do the answering. That way, the young boy asserts "it doesn't matter what the answer ought to be, 'cos if he's right, I'm Right, and if he's wrong, it isn't Me." Taylor was especially struck by the capitalizations used in the poem.

And last on the list for Ashleigh was “Solitude,” which was the opening piece in the collection. Taylor was reading fast because she heard the toilet flush and knew Linda would be back as soon as she washed and dried her hands. It was only the title and eight short lines. So, she could read it three times. It was about pretending to have a place to go to be alone, “where nobody ever says, ‘No.’”

Taylor decided she was going to talk to Valerie about these. She just had a feeling she shouldn’t keep this to herself.

It was a nice change of pace when Linda asked Taylor to pick some poems to read to her. They looked together. Taylor looked for positive themes, to make sure there were some. Linda looked at the sketches. She became quite excited to see a poem about a toy train. All of Pooh’s friends were drawn waiting at the station for the train to come. “The Engineer” was fun. It was about experimenting with the train set on a rainy day. Mostly, Taylor was glad to see that even though the experiment—to make a brake for the train—did not work, there was no blame or hiding the fact. Taylor was also sure that with repeated readings and work together, Linda would come to know all the words of the poem and be happy to try to read it herself.

When they were just about done with the book and had agreed to look for just one more poem, Taylor began regarding the drawings. She wanted to find two kids pictured together, without the imaginary bear. She finally spotted one, late in the pages of the book, called “The Morning Walk.”

The first of the two four-line stanzas told of two young girls who held hands as they walked and talked together about being friends even when they were older, “forty-two” to be exact. The second showed them playing later in the afternoon, at the thing they discussed in the morning about doing together.

Taylor had her own experiences of trying to make friends, moving around, avoiding the sometimes-nasty things that confronted children of single parents. For her part, she thought “The Morning Walk” was a healthier story to imagine with a poem a second grader could read, than escaping with an imaginary friend. The words in this poem were harder. Linda and her classmates would probably have to memorize “The Morning Walk” first, and then come to recognize what the words they already knew looked like when letters spelled them out. Taylor felt it was certainly worth that effort.

Gaby answered the phone at her desk as she stuck post notes, with messages they wrote, onto the folders she and Karidja had selected from Ned's file cabinets. With Quatrane in the basement, Gabs was designated to work the phones to keep Dan current on important information. She had it on speaker, so Soro could listen in as she worked across the way. She was digging into her notes from Monday and the hearing transcript Eleanor had acquired for her from the files.

They could both hear Danny, as he stood in the phone booth near the soda fountain shop for the second time that day. "Myles and I met up. He was staking out the apartment on his own. I gave him hell for doing that. But he uncovered some good information. He secured some future help we are going to need here." He covered his free ear with his hand so he could hear better.

"We're grabbing a coffee near this phone booth and then we will be on our way to catch up with Paul Meadows and his daughter, Linda's friend, Annie. With any luck she'll have half a day of school and we won't have to wait until after three o'clock to see them. Traffic is going to be horrendous. I don't know where she goes to school so I can't check ahead." He saw Myles coming out of the fountain shop with their coffees. "I looked up his address from the copies I made of my Monday notes that I turned in to Mellon. I wrote down directions from your street atlas there in the reading room" The phone required another quarter, so he had to wait a moment to tell them more.

"I'll tell you ladies later just how, but I learned a little more about Rosalyn. And one of her former neighbors informed Myles that the apartment was entered last night by two women. Neighbor says things were taken out in suitcases and pillowcases, then they drove away. Looks more purposeful than a robbery. I'm hoping it means Linda and Rosalyn are not too far away." Hart didn't say just how much he wanted that to be the case.

"How are you three making out?" he asked while he sipped from the take-out container.

"Well, I feel worse than a hooker, because at least she gets paid after someone has had their way with her—if you get my drift, Dan," said Gabs.

"I get the picture," he replied. "Mellon?"

"Mellon somehow is pulling a lot of strings. He's acting on behalf of Ned's family and is also representing Ned at the same time," she told him.

"What's he want?" inquired Dan.

"For starters, he wants any and all documents concerning Ned. That includes Last Will and Testament, Living Will, Power of Attorney, Organ Donor Permissions." She recounted in her head. "And as of a while ago, he saw to it that except for hydration, Ned is unhooked from all care and life support."

Hart indicated to Myles he should go back to the van, so it wasn't unattended. "That's not so good. Not good at all. Sorry."

"And Dan?" she said softly.

"Yes." He replied.

"Quatrane thinks the three of us ladies are going to get shitcanned. And soon. She said these three partners have done this once before. Back when Ned was put out to pasture." She took a moment. "So, we better find something before the end of the day, Dan, or we're probably done. Certainly at least by Tuesday before the end of business."

Karidja could hear Gaby's side of their phone conversation. She looked up and then she spoke, somewhat excitedly. "Danny, can you hear me?"

After he acknowledged he could, she told him and Gaby the same thing. "I've matched my notes up to the hearing transcript. The way Gaby taught us to do." She smiled in Gabriella's direction. "I am absolutely positive that Mellon knew in advance Rosalyn was inviting Myles to the apartment—days in advance. I think there's a chance they conspired to trap Myles, as a strategy to end his visitation rights. I'm less certain that he now knows where she is, though..."

Danny interrupted and struggled against the background street noise. "Karidja? Listen, if I can't get through traffic to make it to court to see that bailiff, is there anyone there you trust enough to do it, if you can't?"

"I do, but I'm not sure he'll talk to someone he doesn't know. Why?" she wanted to know.

"I still think the intruder is a key to our finding Linda—and Rosalyn. If Meadows can't help me, then it might only be the bailiff who can. May I ask you to call over to the clerk—her name was Ramona—and see if that bailiff is even working today and until what time? Then see if it's possible for me to get with the bailiff by phone?" He signaled to Myles to start the engine. "If you only have until tonight, I can't afford to wait until Tuesday to speak to him. I'll call you when we are done with Meadows." He signed off.

Together they went back to Hart's car and from there they drove in tandem toward the Meadows' home. It was too far away to have to double back. And Meadows lived nearby an entrance to the parkway back to the bridge.

They parked by the Meadows' house after getting to the end of Hart's directions. They found out it was too late for him to go to school to pick up his daughter. They would have to wait for her to arrive by bus. "You'll see it coming down the street. It's God-awful. The district is experimenting with the same yellow-green color they have on the town's fire engines. It's ridiculous, but you can't miss it. That's supposed to be the point."

Finally, the yellow-green inchworm turned the corner three blocks down. It worked its way up the street. After each lurching advance, it stopped and glowed off and on. The energy from that display seemed to paralyze the movement around it, as if it emitted a neurological agent seizing all other locomotion. Out onto that static landscape, the worm disgorged small life forms that scattered to and fro. They attached in a symbiotic manner to larger forms, with whom in a more orderly fashion they made their way away from the road. When a safe distance was achieved the worm ceased glowing and all movement resumed.

Danny was crawling out of his skin and kept looking down at his watch. It was the same one that Ned Hegerman used so expertly in the custody hearing when he was questioning Hart. Now, it seemed to be working against the lawyer. Finally, Annie Meadows got off the bus, looked both ways, and crossed the street to where her father stood waiting in front of their home.

As the three men had agreed, Myles and Hart would wait by their vehicles until Meadows raised his hand to signal he had told his daughter the men were there and wanted to talk to them both. The dad and daughter turned to walk very slowly to the house. Paul raised his hand and the four of them arrived at the front door together.

The two visitors carried in their coffees. Annie sat at the kitchen table having a glass of milk and two store bought Keebler cookies from a package that she shared with the two men while she listened to the adults talk. They each helped themselves to one apiece to be polite. The sandwich cookie was a tan elf, with a chocolate filling. Her dad and Linda's dad also sat at the table. But the man who only her dad had met before, Mr. Hart, used the side chair and sat a little way away from the table. He had a notepad on his lap and a pen. He was the one asking the questions.

"It seems, Mr. Meadows, that—"

"Paul.' Please call me 'Paul.' Otherwise, it sounds like an interrogation and not a discussion. That is, unless this is an inter—"

"No, it's not . . . Paul," said Investigator Hart. "Again, I want to be very clear, especially in light of your relationship with Mrs. Lowry. I—"

"Excuse me, sir. Mr. Hart, our friendship with the Lowrys is based on Linda being a classmate of Annie's. I want to assure you as you continue your investigation, and it is I who wants to be very clear with you, Myles, that I am not in a relationship with Mrs. Lowry." Paul Meadows was not happy he had let these men into his house. Or that they were speaking about adult things such as this in front of his daughter.

"I'm sorry. Please let me start again," requested Danny.

Meadows looked at his daughter. He gave her another cookie out of the package. And then he extended the package as a peace offering to Myles and Danny. Once again, Myles took one to be polite. But not Danny. He took two. And spoke directly to Annie, bending over in his chair to make sure she knew he was addressing her. "You know, I like E.L. Fudges even better than Oreos."

He bit the head off the elf and smiled. "Paul. Because you and Annie know the Lowry family, I want to make sure you know that my services have been . . . adjusted. When we met at the apartment you were kind enough to help me with the cassette player from Linda's birthday party. But I have been fired by Attorney Mellon. I am now working for Myles's lawyers." He took a second bite and there was very little left of the first elf.

"Now, you might ask why I did that. Well, the reason is this. I have to work for an attorney. That's the way things are set up. But in my mind, I am really working for Linda Lowry. I am personally convinced she is still safe and with her mother and not very far away from here." He paused because Annie made a bubbly sound with her mouthful of milk. She almost dropped the glass in her excitement about her friend, when she heard Danny say he thought Linda was nearby. He looked right at her. He popped the rest of the first elf in his mouth and then took a sip of his coffee.

"We were told that two women came to the apartment last night and removed personal items, clothing and the like. It seemed more like something Mrs. Lowry and a friend may have done because they left in such a rush Monday and couldn't take everything they would need. It does not at all appear that someone robbed the apartment of its contents. I'm sorry I can not tell you who provided this information, but it is reliable." Danny stopped and let what he had to say settle in.

"What I am trying to piece together. . ." He halted and turned to Annie, again leaning over just enough to be eye to eye without being threatening. "That's what an 'investigator' does, Annie. That big word means I try to put pieces of a problem together. Do you like to do jigsaw puzzles?" he asked her outright.

When she told him she did, he kept laying the foundation to acquire information he hoped she possessed. "I was doing a jigsaw puzzle once. It was two rows of mailboxes with eight cats climbing on them and resting in the sun." He looked up and over at Paul Meadows and saw in his face that it was okay with her father for Danny to keep talking to his daughter. "I just couldn't get the border, the frame, finished. I had it on my dining room table to make enough space for it. I was just about to give up. I pushed my chair out from the table and, all of a sudden, I saw five pieces of the puzzle had fallen onto the carpet. The color of the rug and the pieces was so close that I did not see them when I was looking before that."

This time he used his hands to break the second elf cookie in half. He reached half out to her to share. She looked at her dad for permission and he nodded his head. They shared the cookie. "Well, now my puzzle is how to find your friend Linda. And I can't seem to put the picture frame together until I find a few more pieces. That's what I hope talking to your dad and you will do for me—and for Linda." He straightened up in his side chair and turned back to Paul Meadows.

"Do you know if Rosalyn had any woman friends here in the neighborhood to whom she would turn for such help, Paul?"

"She seemed to keep to herself. Even for the party with all those kids there. There wasn't another mom giving her a hand. I thought maybe she just wanted to be sure it went exactly like she wanted. I'm not much help about this, I'm afraid." And then he felt the need to add, again. "Myles, the help she asked me to give was about the party, as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what goes on between you and her, but there's nothing between her and me."

Danny thought some more and then asked, "Do you have any idea about where Rosalyn might have taken Linda, or gone with her? You know, from any offhanded things she might have said from time to time. A place she liked. A favorite place of Linda's?"

He turned his attention back to Annie. "How about you, Annie? Can you think of any favorite places Linda talked about? When you were playing together? Or at school?" He was keeping it very casual, sounding like a conversation between friends trying to solve a riddle. He noticed that Myles was saying nothing. But he did seem also to be thinking about such places.

Danny asked Paul, "Sometimes in these types of cases, that is, when someone seems to have taken it upon themselves to go away a while, people start asking questions. I wonder if any of the other parents have asked if you know anything about the disappearance? Has anyone in the school community contacted you—either personally because the girls were associated in their minds as friends, or as a general all-points-inquiry of every one of Linda's classmates' parents?"

Again, there was nothing. He looked at Linda. She shook her head.

"What about phone calls? Prank calls? Reporters calling?" he was really reaching. Still nothing from the Meadows, dad or daughter.

Hart closed his notebook. "I wonder if I could ask a favor, Paul?" Meadows asked what it was. "So, I don't have to use a pay phone, may I make a collect call back to the law office to check in? They were chasing something down for me."

Just as Paul was giving Danny the okay, Annie asked the investigator, "What's a pay phone?"

"Has she ever seen one, do you think, Paul? One you could remind her about?" asked Danny.

The dad said no, he could not recall any. "How about on television. Maybe on *Sesame Street* or somewhere? A favorite cartoon show?"

"None that come to mind," was all the dad said.

Myles Lowry tried his hand at it before Danny could come up with an explanation. "Annie, when you were younger, did you ever have a toy that was a cash register?"

"Yes. And there was one at kindergarten, too," she told him.

It was such a ubiquitous toy; Myles figured the odds were pretty high. "Can you tell me how I worked. How you used it to play 'store' or shopping games?"

Annie was more than excited to be part of the conversation. All three adults were paying attention to her. "There were yellow, blue, and red plastic coins. They fit into the top part. But you had to put the right coin in each place, or it wouldn't fit. When the coin was there you turned the crank and the coin fell into the machine. That's how you paid for the things you wanted to buy. You could hear the coin land in the drawer." She was very proud of herself.

Myles was pretty proud of himself, too, truth be known. "Well, pretend you have a phone and not a cash register. It has three circle places at the top. One for a quarter. One for a dime. One for a nickel. Like these coins." He took

one of each out of his pocket from the change he just was given for the coffees at the soda fountain. When you put them in you get to make a phone call. If you need help the operator comes on the line to talk to you. When you put them in you hear a dial tone, like on your home phone.” He picked up the receiver and held it out over the table so everyone could hear it. “And when the call is over or your time is up, the coins fall into a metal box at the bottom, just like your plastic coins do in the cash register. Because you use money coins to make the call it is called a ‘pay phone.’ They are not in a person’s house. They are on the street corners, or in stores or buildings. That way you can make a call when you are not at home. That’s how we asked your dad if it was okay for us to visit with you today. We were at a store, and we called him using a pay phone to call your house phone.”

She surprised them all when she asked, “When you called this phone from the pay phone, could my dad hear busses and street noises?” When Myles said you could, then she shocked them all by saying, “Do the coins make a little bell sound when they fall into the metal box, and you hear this noise?” She picked up the quarter and dime and nickel Myles had set down and she dropped them into the small metal waste basket in the corner. They rattled metallically. Myles and Danny and Paul were stunned.

It was her dad who asked her, “Why did you want to know that, Annie?”

She told him, “I think that when you were in the shower one day, somebody called us from a pay phone, because those were the noises I heard. A person was breathing on the phone but would not talk to me. I heard the bus sneeze and city noises. Then the metal coins and a little bell. Then came the dial tone.”

No adult spoke. She became worried at their quiet. “Am I in trouble, Daddy?”

“Why would you think that, honey?” he said.

“Because I didn’t remember to tell you when you were dressed and came out of your bedroom.”

Very peacefully, Danny Hart asked Annie, “Can you remember what day that was, Annie? Was it a long time ago. Or just a few days ago?”

"I remember it was the day Linda left. I remember because when the phone rang, I was hoping she was calling me to tell me where she was."

Myles looked at Paul. "Out of the mouths of babes." He could think of nothing else to say.

Paul's answer to his daughter was that she was not in trouble. And that, in fact, they were very happy she could remember about the call and tell them about it as well as she did. He explained to Hart that the "sneezing" his daughter was referencing were the pneumatic brakes on city busses.

"All this is extremely helpful. But I would ask you to make sure neither you nor Annie tell anyone about this phone call. I wouldn't want word to get out and have Rosalyn spooked by it so much that she thought she had to go on the run again. Because this time she might flee even further away." He waited for an answer from Meadows. It came as a tacit nod. And then he asked, "Would I be able to make that phone call to the law office now, please?"

Meadows took his daughter to her room to get changed out of her good school clothes so they could go to the nearby playground together after the two men were done on the phone.

It was Karidja who was talking on the phone to Danny. He told her about the phone call. She dissuaded him from rushing into trying to trace the call box until the afternoon's mess with Ned's papers was settled. She intimated that if they were indeed released from employment, she wanted to chase down that phone call without the law firm having a part in the search. He reluctantly agreed. He deferred to her judgment about the state of affairs in the law offices and what the partners were perhaps orchestrating.

"Now let me tell you what I found out from the courthouse," she offered to Danny. "Can Myles hear, or will you be telling him after we get off the phone?" she wanted to know.

"What's preferable, based on what you are going to say?" said Hart.

"What's his frame of mind? Is he focused on what we need him to be?" she wondered.

“He was terrific with his daughter’s friend, Annie. Without him we’d never have learned from her about the phone call,” he asserted.

“Okay, then. Let’s make sure he can hear this,” she agreed.

“Go ahead. This instrument has a speaker in the handset,” Said Hart, after he made sure the bedroom door was closed on the Meadows pair and Myles realized he was to listen.

“The bailiff is on duty today. But it’s a short court calendar because of the holiday. He will not be around late enough for you to make it there to see him. So, I went ahead, as you told me to do, Danny, and talked to him about the ‘uninvited visitor,’ as he called her. He did not particularly care for the implications of admitting to use the term ‘intruder’ in the courthouse or the hearing room.” As she was finishing that part about how to refer to the mystery woman, Eleanor came back in. Now all three of the women would be right up to date on the topic.

“The bailiff and I had a little go around on Monday concerning your showing up at the hearing, if you recall, Danny.” He said he did. “Well, I think he wanted to make certain he was talking to me. So, when I asked him about the woman, he replied with a testing question of his own. He wanted me to tell him what the woman was wearing. I told him I did not get a look at her except as she was leaving. He was ready to end the talk right there, however politely. When I realized the thing could be over before it got started, I tried harder. I told him all I could recall from the back view was brown pants and a blue shirt. And that I thought the visitor had a female voice, so I thought she was a woman.” She let all that sink in.

Myles spoke up, quite unexpectedly. “You’ll need to go more quickly, please, Ms. Soro. We’re all on the clock here—and there—and on the highways and bridges.”

“I apologize, sir. I was hoping my speed was conducive to thinking and remembering.” She waited.

Then Myles spoke, “Well, I didn’t even look at ‘her’ because I was afraid it was going to be Rosalyn. I was fed up with the mind games. And I still am, actually.” He caught himself. “Wait, that came out wrong. Rosalyn’s

and Mellon's mind games. I wasn't suggesting anything about you. Sorry if it came off that way."

Myles still sounded like a mess to Karidya. She wondered at Danny's assessment. "Okay. Let's get back to it," she almost demanded. "Once I said I had a recollection of blue and brown clothing, the bailiff told me, 'Ms. Soro, clothes were not all that was blue and brown. That visitor lady had one blue eye and one brown eye.'"

Karidja paused and then continued. "He also told me that the papers the woman gave him to permit entry into the hearing room had no picture ID, but were made out in Rosalyn's name. When I told him about the underwear guy—which by the way he and everyone else who works there in security had heard about it too—he agreed with Eleanor. That visitor needed papers to get as far as she did . . ."

Still frustrated, Myles said, "We knew that, though, didn't we?"

Gaby had had enough of Myles Lowry just about then. They were killing themselves for this guy and his kid. And he seemed to have no gratitude, or even a clue. "That's right, sir. But now we have a bailiff who liked your daughter so much that he is willing to get us the security pictures, and maybe even the film, for that day. We may have a chance to find this visitor on screen and to get a picture of her to show around."

All five of them could hear the rage in her voice. Enough so that Myles apologized. Again. But in the middle of it, he swore. Loudly. And then he raised his voice and to sound like he was giving an order, "What did you say about her eyes, Ms. Soro? Tell me again, quickly, please. Don't even think about it."

She said quicky, "One blue. One brown."

He swore again, Twice. Loudly. With words Danny hoped did not make their way through Annie Meadows's bedroom door. They would have precluded Annie hearing "The Talk" from her father when she reached puberty.

"We've got to go back to the apartment. I might know this woman. And there may be a picture of her in Rosalyn's Yearbook." He was agitated.

"I don't recall seeing a Yearbook, Myles," Danny cautioned.

"You wouldn't. Her school stuff's in the basement personal storage area. Each tenant has a space. Chicken wire enclosure stretch across two by threes and stapled in place." Another swear, but then a reprieve.

A voice broke in from the other end of the phone line. "What are you guys talking about over there? We can't make any sense out of it." The voice belonged to Eleanor. "And we're running out of time. We must bring these files to the copy room in twenty minutes. If you want anything from us, you better tell us right now."

"Dan? It's Gabs." She was so good at breaking through confusion, except perhaps her own. "Is this what we've got on the mystery lady? We might get film and still pictures from the courthouse security entry line that's a week old, but with no identity. You might get a picture from a Yearbook for identification, but it will be from twenty years ago. But age and identification could be secondary to heterochromia—that's the condition's name when a person has two different color eyes?"

"Exactly, Gabs." He said, keeping the inappropriate personal admiration out of his voice.

"Then we'll each do that, and do it now. In case we get booted out of here—for the weekend, or for good—we five must have a get-together later today, say 8:30? Everyone knows my address. I'll host. Let's get going."

And so, they did.

Once they were alone in their own place in **HAPPYDALE** after the shopping and 'companioning,' Taylor sat in an armchair in their living room. She told her mom, "I need to talk to you about something."

It was quite uncommon to have a prelude. Taylor usually just started talking when she wanted to say something. And as with any teen, it wasn't quite that often, except when she wanted something from her mother.

Valeria made sure Taylor knew she had her mother's full attention and then said, "Go ahead. I'm listening."

"Tell me what Mrs. Lowry's job is going to be, please." She didn't explain why she wanted to know.

Her mother thought a moment or two and said, "As far as I can gather, she will be the new librarian, because the former one retired. I don't know that her job will be any different. She may do it differently. That happens when a new person takes over a job. But the job should still be the same. Why do you ask?"

"Well, I have a bad feeling about it." She spoke with the certainty of a teen, who was not sure why she was certain.

Valerie's maternal antennae went up. Human moms don't extend these physically, as an appendage, like a queen bee does. But they each use theirs to know what's going on with colony members in and outside the hive. Valerie's were working overtime right then; sensing smells, tastes, sounds, sights—perceiving the dance of imminent danger her offspring was box-stepping and head-butting in this conversation.

Valerie felt she had given her enough time to collect her thoughts, and asked, "Taylor. What has you feeling this way? Can you tell me, please?"

Her daughter pulled her legs up onto the chair she was using, tucking her heels close to her haunches and her knees up near her chin. She wrapped her arms in front of her, clasping them near the top of her shins, and set her chin on her peaked knees. This is what her mother called Taylor's 'fetal sitting' position. "Mrs. Lowry is getting books from the library to give to Mrs. Steadman. But she's picking them for specific kids, not just to make a class shelf for them to choose from themselves."

It was evident to Valerie her daughter was having a hard time telling her ideas, as she continued talking. "Ashleigh is the girl who wears the Winnie-the-Pooh shirts to remember her dad used to read Pooh books with her. Now her mom does not read with her at all, not just Pooh books, but any books."

Valerie responded in a good and quiet rhythm, without interrupting or challenging. "How do you know this, honey?"

"First, I overheard it all in the library today while I was studying at one of those quiet carrells. Nobody saw me. Mrs. Lowery was there with Linda and different people were coming in and out and talking with her." She took a moment. "And then, I saw a list Mrs. Lowry had written, that was at their house just now during my companion time with Linda."

Mother queen bee Valerie knew an alarm dance of a worker bee when she heard its buzzing. After all, this was Rosalyn Lowry—perhaps wearing the long shadow of Roz Young—that Taylor was talking about. "Go on, please," she said.

"There's this book of poems and drawings, written by the Pooh guy Milne, called *Now We Are Six*. It was at their house. Linda asked me to help her read a poem about being six years old. She knew almost all the words and wanted to show me she could read it. She did a good job at it. And the poem is fine, no problem with that." She took in a deep breath and undid her arms, but kept her feet in the chair. She let her legs down sideways and adjusted herself in the chair.

"But the paper had a list. It had Ashleigh's name and the title of three poems, selected to teach her to read them eventually. Since Linda went in the bathroom I had time to read them, the poems I mean." She shook her head. "Mom. The poems were about keeping to yourself and not trusting other people. My literature teacher would say . . . 'the narrator was internalizing' . . . what was going on around her to protect herself and to become isolated. The poems made me feel sad for someone who did that to themselves."

And then she kept going so she didn't lose the point. "I looked through the book with Linda after she came back. I found three poems that were happier. And just as easy to teach a second grader to read. They were about making friends and being happy." She looked at her mother. "Why would Mrs. Lowry want to use a book or a story or a poem for a girl to make herself be sad and alone? It just doesn't seem what a teacher, or even a librarian, should do. Am I wrong?"

They spoke about it some more. Valerie promised she would look into it with the teacher and with her friend. And with Ms. Grey even, if it became

necessary. She could do that, she assured her daughter, as a teacher. She wouldn't have to say she found any of this out from Taylor.

Taylor was happy about all that. She said she would make sure she only read happy and good things with Linda when they had companion time.

And that was how they left it.

For the time being, anyway.

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After leaving the Meadows family home, Myles and Danny got in their respective cars. Danny said he had seen a blue metal telephone placard on a storefront they passed along the way from Rosalyn's place. He made sure he still had, in his pocket, the police detective's business card with Riley's phone number hand-written on the back. Myles drove the van and followed Danny as they looked for the store with the pay phone again. It did not take too long for Danny to find the store. Or for Mike Riley to pick up his ringing phone.

They drove back over to the neighborhood of the apartment. Hart parked his car a block and a half away, got into the rental van, and Myles drove them to the dead end. He pulled in against the curb, near to where Mike Riley and his faithful dog were taking in the Friday afternoon air.

This time Riley shook hands. Hart realized he did that to assure his dog, who fell in line with the friendly trekkers. They walked down the slightly inclined side yard and turned to pass along the back of the building. Riley used his tenant key to open the walk-in basement door. "There's a stairway from the hall upstairs inside, and a double bilco around the other side," Riley said. "But this door's the best to reach the light switch. Its nearer to Myles's storage cage." Lowry got the message that for Riley this was considered a friendly accommodation, and not a break-in. Hart looked up the side of the building above them and understood Riley had directed them to the entrance that no other tenants, from their apartment windows, could see them using.

The dust and age of things down here was considerable. The electrical service down in this basement storage area would not pass code for a new

construction, or even a remodel. It was old knob and tube wiring, with a substandard fuse box. Atop the box were half-filled and empty little cardboard trays. They were once sealed in cellophane when they were on sale in a hardware store. But now they were unwrapped or only partially covered. The trays held threaded, ceramic circular fuses with glass ports on the top to look into and see if the fuse was still intact. They were color-coded and numbered to indicate how many amps the fuse could handle. Mostly ungrounded wires, with exterior woven asbestos insulation, stiff and frayed in many places, were strung from one ceramic cylindrical support to another. Each knob was nailed through its center and affixed to a beam or joist of the basement ceiling. Wire ran from toggle switches on the wooden frames of the cages up to the naked single low watt light bulbs dangling from overhead. There were about three cages lit by each 40 or 60 watt bulb. Some had blown out and not been replaced, adding to the overall dinginess of the space.

The frames for the rows of cages were rough-hewn two by threes. The overhead laterals ran perpendicular to the ceiling joists and were nailed in where they crossed. The floor lateral fasteners had been shot through the wood and directly into the cement floor, each driven by a .22 Remington power load in the handle, struck with the deafening blow of a hand sledge. The collars of the orange plastic blossoms were still visible along the top of the two by threes, where the masonry nail penetrated the board. Vertical two by threes were set sixteen inches on center and had first been jammed then hammered tightly between the laterals, then toe-nailed in place. The whole frame then had chicken wire staple gunned right into the wood. The goods inside the cages were more secure from theft than it might have appeared. Nevertheless, between the wires and wood and the cage contents, Hart couldn't help thinking the place could instantly become fire trap.

Each tenant had a set of two adjacent cages included in the monthly rent. Extra cages were available at a monthly rate for additional storage, on an annual basis. Most of the paired sets held pieces of household furniture, cardboard cartons still bearing the black heavy print written by movers to categorize what was inside, and an occasional bicycle or sled, and lastly garden tools, once determined to be irreplaceable, and now forgotten for the ages. Indiscriminately, most everything wore a coat of dust endemic to the situation of abandonment of the material, or more likely, of the hope that consigned the material to the cage initially. Prolonged presence here by asthmatics or those with mesothelioma was certainly not recommended, nor within current guidelines of the American Lung Association.

The area was dimly lit. The three of them could barely see from just inside this back door. Only an item's vague outline or distinctive bulk made its identification possible from a distance of more than two or three feet. "I brought you a flashlight," said Riley as he handed it to Danny. "I'm taking the dog for a walk now. Just pull the door closed behind you when you leave. I'll lock it later when I see your van is gone. Have a good weekend."

When they saw and heard the door close, Myles said, "Danny, shine the light over here. It's this way."

Danny put his hand on Myles's shoulder and said, "No. Wait. Just stand still. We need to let our eyes adjust to the light in here or we might miss something important."

"Like what? I thought we were in a hurry," was the eager ex-husband's retort.

"It doesn't pay to be in such a hurry that we make a mistake," Hart explained from experience. "This is the last week of summer before Labor Day. But it's not a seasonal change, like from fall to winter or spring to summer. There should have been very little need for people to go into their long-term storage down here since your daughter's birthday party. Any disturbance of material property or of people walking down here is going to be easy to see from changes in layers of dust, or footprints. But we have to be ready to look for them. Our eyes have to be attuned to the lighting down here. And we can't let this flashlight shine in our eyes. Just let the beam light the way ahead of us, so we can look for changes in the dust, or broken spider webs that are still dangling across a doorway or opening from room to room. Do you understand?" He was an investigator accustomed to working alone. Having to explain these things or having someone barge into a space he wanted to study was not making him happy. "If you don't want to do it this way, then go wait in the van. Please."

"I'm sorry," replied Myles. "This is new to me. Just tell me what to do as we go along. I'll be careful."

"Okay, stand still but point to me where your storage cage is." When he did, Myles pointed the flashlight beam at the floor in front of them. Except for their footprints and those of the dog, it did not appear anyone had come

in through this door recently. "Fine. Now, point the way to that double bilco door Riley said was down here." directed the investigator.

"It's around the corner on our left. We can't see it from here," Myles told him.

"We'll come back to that, then," said Danny. "Can you point the way to the stairway to the first-floor hall from here, though?" Myles was able to do that. Where he pointed was in front of them, but about seventy feet away. Without the light bulb above the door in the wall, Danny wouldn't have seen it was a door. Hart told Lowry, "Here's what I want you to do. Come and stand a little in front of me and to my left. But look at the floor as you go and do not step where another footprint—man's or dog's—is already in the dust." When Myles had done that, Danny gave him his next instruction, "I am going to turn off the flashlight. I will put my hand on your shoulder. I want you to reach that arm down straight. I am going to put the flashlight into that hand. But I would have turned the beam back on, first. I want you to just aim the light at that stairway door. Don't worry if the beam doesn't carry all the way. And do not, under any circumstances, shine that light back around at either of us. Got it, Myles?"

Myles did what he heard Danny tell him to do. And now he stood in front of Danny and aimed the flashlight beam at the cellar stairway door. It lost its effectiveness about ten feet before the door. He said, "It doesn't reach."

Danny told him that was alright. He asked, "From where you are standing, can you shine the beam to your storage cage? It's okay if it's the back of the cage. Just no light shining back at us."

The beam cut through the lowly lit room and came to rest on the back of a stack of three boxes that were in their cage. "These are in the cage, Danny. The door is around the other side of them." It was only about fifty feet into the room from their position.

"That's great. Now turn off the flashlight please, but don't shine it up or back at you while you do. Use two hands if you need to do so to feel the slide and move it to the off position." Myles did it perfectly.

Standing now in just the basement haze cast by the naked lightbulbs, Danny Hart spoke up again after their eyes adjusted. "I'm going to come and stand next to you. When I am there, please hand me the flashlight." They both did those tasks. Danny continued to speak. "Myles, I am going to turn on the flashlight while it's pointed forward. I am going to sweep the floor between us and your storage cage with the light's beam. I am going to do it slowly, starting nearest to us, going left to right, and the beam will also be gradually moving away from us toward your cage. Okay?" Myles affirmed he was on board.

"Now we are both going to look as carefully as we can at the floor. And the floor only. We'll look at other surfaces and things next. But for now, just the floor. We are looking to see if we can detect disturbances in the dust. We're looking for footprints, swaths of dust moved by a box being dragged across the floor, tire tracks from a dolly or a shopping cart or the like; and places where someone dripped a leaky soda can or glass of water or cup of coffee, or anything else. Can you do that, please? We need to be patient and we need not to move forward. We have to hold our ground and talk to one another if we see something." He explained further when he sensed Myles was getting the picture of what the task was that was before them. "When it gets to be that we can't see well enough down the way, and there's no disturbance in front of us, we'll walk into the room some more and begin again from a closer spot, until we make it all the way to your cage or that cellar door."

It did go slowly, but it was certainly worthwhile. Two other cages closer to their starting point had traces of footsteps, but they went nowhere near the stairs or the Lowry cage. They advanced to that spot and started looking again. One set of prints went away down the side aisle on their left and it looked as if the floor had been mopped or swept, to clean a spill. But the new settled dust over that space suggested it wasn't a fresh disturbance. "What's down that way?" Danny asked, pointing beyond the spill cleanup.

Myles tried to recall and then he did. "The far wall there is where the bilco doors are, but there is another row of cages to the right after you get to the wall. Like you'd be heading again toward the stairs and the main street front wall.

They kept going up the main walkway between the cages, because there was nothing on the floor. There was now only about fifteen feet to the

cross aisle of their cage. Danny froze and stopped Myles by gripping his upper arm. All he said was, "There!"

The beam of the flashlight showed sneaker footprints. They began with one track whose toes were pointing toward them. The other had the heels closer to them. They both looked like they were made by the same shoes. They went right up to the closed door. "Myles, where is your cage?" Lowry pointed and Hart lighted them with the beam of Riley's flashlight. The tracks went from the stairway door to the cage and back again. They did not look like the boot prints the astronauts left on the moon because the dust was not as deep. But they did look fresh and well-preserved.

"Okay, Myles. Here's what we are going to do," explained Hart. "We're going back the way we came, one cross aisle. As long as we don't arrive at other tracks on the floor than our own, we're going to walk down that aisle so we are one row shy of your cage. When we get to the end, we will go around the side of the cage row. We will then walk back in the correct aisle and walk to your cage. We won't mess up any prints from the stairs to the cage, in case they are your ex-wife's. And our tracks will just be from the back door to the cage from the other side, so we can verify our presence and our actions."

They were now off to the side, but basically in front of the Lowry cages. The prints from the stairs only went to the cage closer to the stair. Facing the two cages, that was the one on the right. Myles and Danny stood before the one on the left, with only their tracks in the dust. The lock on the hinged door was not hasped shut on the right side, where someone had entered recently. But the one on the left was padlocked.

Danny looked into the looked cage and asked, "Myles, what's in this side?"

Hart still couldn't interpret Lowry's wistful voice from his simmering one. "Mostly my stuff. I wasn't going to be living here, but she just told the movers to take everything anyway. I had no say in the matter. Once here, she made me segregate our belongings left and right. Communal stuff not divided in the settlement went where it fit best after that. You can see that's why my side is more jammed with that communal stuff. It made sense to her. She wanted to make it easier to get at things belonging to her and Linda, as they needed them."

"I don't suppose you carry the key for this lock?" asked Hart.

"No. But I have this." He held up a small pair of wire cutters. "Riley put these in my back pocket when he gave you the flashlight. He whispered 'Shh!' in my ear as he did it."

Danny said. "Well, it's your stuff. Have at it."

Myles made short work of the chicken wire along the front of his side of the cage, immediately adjacent to Rosalyn's side. He squeezed himself into the slit he cut through. He turned and told Danny, "You stay out there. Just in case we're in court over this." He paused. "I think I learned that from you, by the way," and let a smirk wash over his face.

Myles voice and spine firmed up. He started clipping the wire divider between their two cages. "You light up the floor, Danny, and I'll see where she went in here. Then I'll ask you to light up the boxes and things, to see what she might have opened." Myles was learning fast. Danny did as he asked.

It didn't take long before Myles had the box his ex-wife had opened, based on Danny's dust tutorial and flashlight assistance. "Well, I'll be damned!" He held something up for Danny to light. "It's her Yearbook. She might as well have put a bow and ribbon on it for us." He sounded almost gleeful.

But the teacher knew more than the student. "Not so fast, Myles," said Danny. "She's no idiot. This might not be as good as you're thinking it is." Danny's dry throat was a familiar symptom of investigatory disappointment he had not shared with Myles. He hoped it was from the dust Myles was kicking up in the cage. But he really knew better. "Bring that over here so we can see it together in this light, please, Myles." He was pointing to a waist high end table stacked on Myles's side of the cage.

He directed Myles to set the book carefully onto the top of the table, so he didn't knock over the table or ruin the Yearbook. "Myles, turn a page at a time, slowly. I have a bad feeling some pages are going to be loose, based on how crooked they're all sitting in the cover's binding."

Myles did as Danny told him. After several pages, a handful slid to the side and he had to catch a bundle of them in his free hand, so the batch didn't fall to the floor.

At the worst moment, the batteries started to fail in the flashlight. The bulb flickered and dimmed, unreliably. Danny struck the light against the side of his palm, to no avail. Riley would be furious with himself. But to be fair, they hadn't given him much notice. Now they had just the single naked Damocles bulb from the next cage over to read the Yearbook.

When Myles got to the section of Senior Grad pictures, at least four sheets of head shots had been roughly torn out from the sewn spine. The alphabetical order of the Class of '72 was fractured. Myles also discovered several sheets from the candid student shots and group club photos had been torn away.

"What do we do now?" Myles just about pleaded of the investigator.

"Put the book back in the box and set it as it was. Only she will know we did it. But she will not want to prove it to anyone else." He was thinking fast now. "And then tear open the tape on some of your boxes. Make it appear your side of the cage was the target, but don't ransack it. Knock that table over too as you leave the cage." Myles was doing what he said when Danny asked him, "Pass me that push broom in the back, please."

As they left the way they came. Danny dragged the broom behind them, side to side. No one would be able to trace their shoes as those that made the footprints. He cast the broom aside behind some boxes near the exit door like a burglar would have done.

"Danny, follow me to the rental place so I can turn this van in. Then you can bring me to Gabriella's for 8:30 or drop me off and meet me there. Your call."

"Myles, you go along without me. I'll meet you tonight after you've returned the van and eaten something."

"What are you going to do?" Lowry inquired.

"I'm going to take some thinking time on this side of the river before I meet with everyone tonight. I'm still trying to adjust to not working on my own, Myles. I might see if that detective wants anything from me, before she comes around looking when I don't want her to be in the way. Especially now that we've been down in the basement." Hart held up the police department business card so Myles could see the shiny side. Of course, that reminded Danny he should probably dial up the handwritten number staring him in the face, so he could tell Riley they made a mess in the storage area cages.

What Hart would tell neither Lowry nor Riley was that before he went to see the detective, he would make a few calls to confidants on both sides of the Hudson to make sure she was not connected. He knew he could use help in addition to Riley's, and another ally to go along with Meadows. But he'd have to make certain she was an honest broker. And Danny Hart was still wary about that pay phone caller. What he particularly did not like was that he still did not know if the call was placed by a man or a woman.

113

Linda Lowry was liking her new room. She had her train set and her soon-to-be second favorite book to look at, *Now We Are Six*. The black steam engine was slowly moving through the elongated oval. Every once or twice when she looked up from the pages of the book, she had to wait to see the train because it was hidden in the tunnel under her bed. The Ernest Shepherd decorations and drawings in the book helped Linda imagine that Milne's menagerie of Kanga and Roo, Pooh reading his paper, Piglet holding his satchel, and Eeyore, well, being Eeyore, were on their station platform waiting for their train as well.

As fun as these new adventures were, Linda knew they were temporary. The library book was on loan. Tuesday it would be given to Ashleigh by her librarian and teacher. And so, Linda's loyalties were not shaken. *Black Beauty* was still her favorite story. She was determined to keep trying to learn to read it all by the end of second grade. Thinking of these things led Linda to hope that Clementine would be back in class when school resumed on Tuesday.

She turned her attention back to trains and “The Engineer” poem when thoughts of Tuesday made her remember that bully, Deirdre.

Outside in the kitchen, Rosalyn had her papers arranged on the table. She had already picked two locations to go on her first three-day jaunt. Each place featured a library she would tell Beatriz Grey she was visiting and a bank she would tell no one about. She acquired very helpful paper fold-out regional maps, while the filling station attendant gassed up Valerie’s car during their afternoon outing. Next on that set of tasks was devising suitable transportation and lodging. But she would do that over the weekend because it could be done by phone right there from her house. What she had done so far was satisfactory to her, and it was still only Friday.

She folded those papers in half and slipped them into a six by nine white envelope she took from her writing desk the night before. If she had more room, she would have taken the oversize ones, too. But she had to leave them behind. She’d get them another time, if she ever went back to the apartment by the dead end. Rosalyn walked into her bedroom and stood the envelope up sideways behind her hardbound copies of *Rosemary’s Baby*, *The Annotated Glass Menagerie*, *Kramer vs Kramer*, and two other books whose pages faced out because their spines were pressed against the now-hidden envelope. The envelope fit well in height and length and was not visible if someone quickly looked at the book collection aligned neatly on the bottom shelf of Rosalyn’s nightstand.

She walked over and opened Linda’s door without knocking. “Everything okay in here?” she asked.

“Yes. But would you just read me “The Engineer” one time, please.

“How could a librarian turn down such a request?” her mother said laughing.

Rosalyn squatted on the floor cross-legged as her daughter handed her the book. Before she began, she asked Linda, “Any words you need help with?” She held the book out flat between them to reveal the two-page spread, with seven drawings and three stanzas. Linda pointed at three, and one at a time Rosalyn said the word, had Linda spell out the letters, for ‘upstairs,’ ‘which,’ and ‘worked.’ This is how her mother taught Linda the words in *Black Beauty*. Now she read from a new book, and it still seemed

to work. For both of them. The mother and the librarian.

Leaving Linda to her own devices, Rosalyn poured herself a second cup of coffee, happy that her electric percolator had survived its captivity in a pillowcase during the prior night's raid. She picked up the library reference book she borrowed, *El-Hi Novels for Grade Level Readers*. She began her weekend search for a book apiece—for a feisty redhead and a, possibly misunderstood, bully. Rosalyn was still mulling over all that Valerie had told her the night before about Dee's family history, and savagely heroic saving of her mother.

114

Back at the law office, the ad hocs had a few moments left. Eleanor was organizing the materials on a cart for them to bring to the copyists.

Karidja wanted help with reviewing Monday's hearings, while they still had access to records. She had Gaby read aloud the transcript section the stenographer had sussed out. It was during the discussion about Mrs. Lowry not showing up for the hearing Monday. Mellon was telling the judge about his occasional contact with Rosalyn, and that he expected a phone call from her that never came:

MELLON: "With today's hearing coming up, she was nervous about seeing Mr. Lowry. And about Linda being in his company. So, I asked her to call my service last night to indicate the evening went off without incident. That she and her daughter were safely home together, and alone, after the festivities."

Karidja asked the two ladies to consider the notes she made herself in the courtroom. She read them verbatim: "Why invite him if it was going to make her nervous? Something doesn't add up. And Mellon's right in the middle of it."

Gabriella answered the brainstorming inquiry. "Maybe she was coerced into it."

Eleanor chimed in with a triple tone. "Or she and Mellon planned it for some reason, almost a week before. Make a copy of that page of the transcript and tuck it into your notes, Karidja. And let's get going. Now!" It was five minutes to four. Her sense of urgency was well placed.

115

Danny was typically not comfortable walking into a police station. That afternoon he forced himself to put that aside. But he still surveilled the spaces he walked through to make sure he knew who was, or wasn't, there. He approached the desk sergeant, sitting at an elevated and somewhat protected platform. "I am a private investigator looking to speak to Detective Howe, please." He handed his photo identification card up for the sergeant to read.

"She expecting you?" Danny always knew these men and women handling the watchtower to be persons of few words.

"Personally, no. But she requested anyone with information on a missing person's case to come forward." He received his ID back from above, but kept it out in hopes of having to show it again to the detective.

Another staccato, "Wait, there." The uniformed three-striper pointed to a pair of wooden chairs against the wall. Hart was happy to have his back protected, but not as much to be on display to any and all who entered the lobby area.

He was looking out the double doors to the street he had used himself not five minutes earlier. The voice behind him caught him by surprise. "I'm Howe."

He stood and extended his hand. She did not take it. She used hers to motion toward a nearby open door. The plaque on the wall beside the door jamb read CONFERENCE ROOM 2. It had a small table in the center of the room, six chairs, and a CCTV security monitor suspended from the ceiling in the far corner. The back of the desk sergeant's head was the silent subject in the foreground of the monitor's view. The front doors were the principal field of vision. Howe closed the door behind them. Danny handed her his ID.

She looked at it and gave it back. "What can you do for me, Mr. Hart?"

He chuckled. She asked him what was funny. He replied, "That usually gets asked in the inverse, Detective Howe."

Without inviting a first name basis, she said, "Sarge said you came forward. So, I'm not here for you; you're here for me, far as I can tell."

With a nod, Danny started right in. "I've been working the Lowry missing persons' case. First for the wife's lawyer and now for the husband's."

"How's that work?" she sat.

So now Danny knew she was interested enough to give him some time. He walked around to the facing side of the table to sit. He saw the view on the CCTV monitor changed to the street and sidewalk out front.

As he sat, Howe spoke. "It rotates. Gives us a little more of a heads up than just that someone's already inside. Especially if we don't look forward to having that someone inside."

Danny was impressed. Not with the technology. With Howe and her awareness and willingness to share. Unless it was meant as a warning. He figured time would tell. He came back to her question about his clients. "I had a falling out with her attorneys. But his liked my work and asked for help. They imagined I had information they could use. When I told them that anything I knew from Rosalyn would not be shared with them or Myles, they still asked me for help going forward."

"What's the motive?" Howe inquired.

"I am not sure yet, but she—"

"No, Hart. Not the motive for the case. The motive for buying your services on the rebound. It's weirdly like a girl dating the guy who jilted her best friend. If you get the drift." Howe's face did not give her away. Close set eyes. Narrow nose. Neutral lipstick, or maybe sun balm. He couldn't tell. Set chin and straw for hair, straight. Caucasian with only a summer street tan.

"Don't know about the dating part. You?" he asked.

"Hart, I'm busy." She went to push away from the table.

"Linda Lowry. The girl. Seems she's captured some hearts of her own," Danny said quickly. It was apparently enough so that Detective Howe got over being offended enough to end the interview. She stayed in her chair.

"Never met her." She relapsed into speaking as the desk sergeant she was, before making her gold shield.

"Ever work across the river, Detective?" injected Danny into the conversation.

"No. I—." Her answer was automatic and not carefully thought out.

"Just wondering. Knew a guy over there named Howe once. Years—and tears—ago. Wondered if he was a relative. He's not with us anymore." Danny felt if that range of possibilities didn't strike a chord, he could take the gamble on her.

"None," is all she allowed.

"You didn't meet Linda. But how about her little friend, Annie Meadows?" He got to the point.

"Once. Dad is Paul. They were at the party." Howe told him from memory as she sat further back in her chair. "Let me ask you, Mr. Hart. You think the dad's involved?"

"He denied to Lowry's face an hour ago that he had anything going on with the wife. About the disappearance, I don't know for sure. I haven't gone there yet. You?" They were getting on fine together for a first date, Danny thought.

Side-stepping, she asked, "An hour ago, you say?" Howe looked at him quizzically.

"Yeah, thereabouts. We—Myles Lowry and I—went to his place to fill in some gaps in the trial log, not the disappearance necessarily." Hart seemed to find that a half-truth was better than a lie, when you're just getting to know someone.

"And you talked to the Meadows daughter, I take it?" she posited, as she took out a small notepad from her Kevlar vest pocket and a pen. When Danny eyed the vest, she said. "Quirky enough. I just wear it in the station. Feel safer, or at least prepared, that way. That and the CCTV. In the car I only carry it in the trunk for calls. It's off-putting to the general public. Doesn't add to the community policing image."

She was taking a few notes now that Danny started to give her new information she did not have. "When we thought we were finishing up there, I asked Meadows if I could use his phone, so I didn't have to find a pay phone to call in to the lawyer's office. I knew traffic was going to make me late getting back across the Bridge."

All Howe had written were two words: pay phone. He could see them when she set the notepad down on the table and spoke to him. "They say soon you could carry a phone with you in your pocket. Wild, huh?" She reflected, "Just like Dick Tracy's watch in the funnies."

Danny ignored the interruption but wondered why she did that. "Anyways, before I made the call, Annie asked what a pay phone was. It took a little back and forth, but it turned out she said they got a pay phone call to their house the day Linda disappeared."

Now Howe was writing, and thinking, and speaking. And that was the trifecta Danny was hoping she'd bring to the table. His for the case and the one in front of her. "You can give me the Meadows phone number, I take it?" Which he did. She wrote it down. "I have it elsewhere, but I want to have it all here together and I want to make sure I got it right before."

Danny liked her organization and her modesty and honesty. There were cops who would never admit such things. And the mistakes they made because of it were irreversible. Next, she asked him what he hoped she would. "You know what time they got this call?"

"He doesn't have one of those phones that keeps a history. Talking to them today, the best we could estimate was . . . late in the afternoon, between Annie getting home from school and them having dinner. He didn't hear the phone because he was taking a shower."

"Anything else?" asked the detective.

"Yes. Square One from before." Danny waited to see how good a cop she was.

It didn't take her very long. Hart wondered if the time it took was all memory, or part memory and part decision-making to answer as she did. "So that's how you could help me." She paused. "And now I'm supposed to ask how I can help you. Is that right, Danny." Two points Danny noted. She asked the right question. And she dropped the 'Mr. Hart.'

"I imagine you would really be helping both of us, if we're each still trying to find the Lowry ladies," he said, as a prelude and an invitation. He was judging this Detective Howe and hoped she would know the right answer.

"You want me to use resources I have that you don't. Otherwise, we wouldn't be having this visit. You'd like to know where that pay phone is located." She sat a little forward in her chair, pursed her already thin enough lips, raised her eyebrows, and asked, "So, Danny, did I pass the test?"

He decided there was no point in protestation or denial about there being any test. Hart simply answered, "Yes, you did. And very nicely, I might add."

As she stood, Detective Howe extended the hand she withheld upon their meeting. "Thank you. Have you a calling card so I can reach you? Being, that is, as we don't have those fancy pocket phones yet." Danny passed her his card with his left hand as he completed the handshake with his right. He finished the exchange by telling her, "The answering service is confidential and unidentifiable. Only I can get a message off it. Not as fancy as a pocket phone for sure. But it gets the job done . . . reliably."

Detective Howe stood behind the desk sergeant for a few moments. When she looked at his monitor, she saw Danny Hart walking away, down the street. Then he stopped, turned, and waved to the camera. The sergeant asked, "Guess we're putting his calls through when they come in, Detective?" She told him yes.

The Friday evening spaghetti and meatball dinner at the **HAPPYDALE** dining hall was a big hit. Adults and kids were very pleased with the taste and the amount served. Those who wished a second helping were permitted to go back to the serving line for more.

When their girls went up for desserts, Valarie asked Rosalyn how her first long day went in the library. Her friend was not very forthcoming. She simply said she was happy to get a jump on things for Tuesday.

"Taylor said Linda was excited by a poem about trains. They read it together when we were out in the car this afternoon." Valerie's observation primed Rosalyn's conversational pump, without pushback it seemed.

Thinking about what to reveal, Rosalyn adjusted her chair and used her napkin to brush some crusty bread crumbs off her lap and into her hand. In her pants pocket, she felt the key she had cut while she was with Valerie in the dry goods store.

"Well, I did make some progress. I didn't want to commit; in case I was not as successful as I want to be this weekend. But I did start looking for books for Mrs. Steadman's second grade class. It's sort of a 'demonstration project,' if I could call it that." She speared a piece of meatball on her fork, but did not take it from the plate to eat.

"In my hiring interview with Beatriz Grey, I told her when I was teaching, I was bothered by school librarians who would not become familiar with the curriculum teachers were to follow. As a librarian I promised I would get to know what the classroom teachers wanted." She paused and asked, "Did you ever have that problem?" And with that she put the piece of meatball in her mouth.

"I don't think I depended on them much, except for summer reading lists and special projects," answered her friend.

"I talked to Linda about her classmates. You and I talked in your car last night about that trouble with her *Black Beauty* book being taken. You encouraged me to think differently about whether Deirdre was just a bully.

So, I am looking for books that might be very suitable for some of the specific kids that were involved. They need a book by Tuesday, so I have a few days to work on it. I got a jump on it today with a Winnie-the-Pooh book of poems.”

Valerie listened carefully. She had experience in the past with Rosalyn telling half-truths, so she was being cautious. She kept Taylor’s information in mind. Her response was tepid, “Good luck with that. Let me know how it goes.”

The girls arrived back with a slice of pound cake, topped with a scoop of ice cream for dessert. Chocolate for Linda, Vanilla for Taylor. That changed the mood and the conversation. Their mothers settled for a cup of hot coffee only. Without admitting it, each was looking forward to a glass of red wine. That was not on the dinner menu, but once their girls were in bed, it was on their dessert list at home.

117

The Brooklyn brownstone was in Gabriella’s family since soon after her grandparents moved to the city from Italy after the First World War. It was where she grew up, in a three story, three generation home. She knew no other home. Her two brothers had moved away. Her father had passed on to join all the older generation family members, on both sides. Of the family, that is, not the Atlantic. A live-in companion, who hailed from the same Italian hillside as the brownstone’s ancestors, cared for Gabriella’s mother on the third floor, for most of the year. Up there, they felt safe from any disturbance and away from the noise and bother of the street. Her mother did miss same floor access to the back yard garden, but it was an acceptable trade-off in her later years.

The middle floor featured a big family kitchen and an oversized dining room. It had less use in 1992 than in the decades before when the house was full of excitement and family. There was a reasonably-sized bedroom on the street-facing front of the house on that floor. The European-sized pantry and larder off the back of the kitchen had been converted to a screened-in sitting porch that looked out over the back yard. For the last two spring-to-summer seasons, Gabriella’s mother came down a floor and enjoyed the view of the

yard. For those twelve weeks, the three of them shared cooking and eating together on that middle floor.

Gabriella had the first floor to herself. It had a master bedroom and full bath suite, a modest kitchen, a study, a formal dining room on a less grand scale than upstairs, and a front parlor harkening to the days of greeting guests, socializing with neighbors, and entertaining the occasional suitor.

That parlor was where Gaby was preparing to greet the others coming for eight-thirty. She had alerted her mother and her companion, so they were not alarmed by visitors coming to the front door and company down below, where the older women were finishing up their 'summer residence' as they all jokingly called their time on the second floor.

Gaby had help from her mother's companion to carry in the long sideboard with her from the dining room. On it, Gabriella had arranged a variety of foods, since the invitation was not explicitly for a sit-down dinner, and it was only extended, in crisis, fewer than five hours earlier.

There was a plain homemade platter of chesses and sliced meats, neither formal nor exotic enough to be called a charcuterie. Beside it were various cocktail crackers and sliced bread, with condiments. A few bottles of wine flanked the crackers, accompanied by an adjacent bottle each of vodka, scotch, and bourbon. An ice bucket and some mixers were standing by.

From the office earlier, Gaby had phoned an order in to the local bakery around the corner. The baker delivered to her house an array of dessert cookies and a wheeled cheesecake, comprised of eight slices, two each, of four different varieties. An electric coffee urn was set up with cups and saucers. She would plug that in later.

They came by car and cab. As they mingled, Dan and Gabs found themselves off to the side while the others chatted. Gabs gave Dan a nickel. "Got my change?" she asked.

Dan reached into his pocket and produced just three pennies. "This is all I've got."

She said, "Exact change!"

He said, "Keep it up."

After some refreshments they decided to get to work. By consensus, and because she was host, and would take the most accurate notes, Gaby chaired.

She deferred to seniority graciously asking, "Eleanor, what do you think is happening? And what do you think we should do?"

"So far, we haven't been fired. I take that to be a good sign. Of course, that could happen over the weekend, but I think it is unlikely. For three reasons." She sipped some white wine and replaced the glass on the end table she had used for her sandwich plate, beside her section of the couch.

"First, if they intended to get rid of us, it would have been after we gave them the documents at four o'clock. That would have been the end of our usefulness and the beginning of our possibly becoming a liability. Second, if we are going to be made an example of, it will be with full dress parade when the office is full again on Tuesday after the holiday and before people start back in to work. And third, and I hate to make this seem equal to the other two reasons . . . but as far as we know, Ned was still alive at five o'clock." She said that she wanted to listen first before suggesting what they should do next, other than going to work on Tuesday, well rested.

Gabriella thanked her and said, "I think it's best if we each have a chance to answer the same question, without stopping to discuss any one person's viewpoint. That will avoid duplication and make the conversation as informed as it can be. What do you all think of doing it that way?"

Since all agreed, Gaby asked Karidja to go next.

"I think it is good that Eleanor is focused on our relationship with the partners and the law firm. I've been less attentive to that. I am really dug in to where Godfrey Mellon is in all this. I no longer think of him just as Rosalyn's lawyer, no disrespect or omission meant by that, Mr. Lowry." She looked at

Myles and was still uneasy with his being in on these conversations. But the others certainly seemed to think he should be, so she acquiesced without even letting them know of her feelings to the contrary. She knew as a resolutionist that discipline was essential and that this was no time for collateral argumentation.

"I'll explain. First, I think he has an active part to play in Rosalyn and Linda leaving New Jersey and skipping out on Monday's hearing. I'm just not sure yet whether he's complicit or just had advance awareness of her intent. There is also a marginal chance in my mind that he orchestrated the abandonment and coerced Mrs. Lowry to flee." She put up her hand to indicate she wasn't finished. She put down the paper in her hand and picked up a set of index cards.

"Second, I am convinced—without evidence or hard facts—that he has something to do with the restriction on our hospital visitation to Ned . . . and . . . what amounts to be a 'gag order' on Dr. Aronsen about the identity of Ned's next of kin, whom I am also convinced without substantive proof is the woman who was keeping Ned's bedside vigil." She took a mouthful of water.

"And . . . please bear with me . . ." She had a short coughing fit and took more water. "My throat is dry, sorry." She looked around the room at them all. She let her gaze fall on Myles the longest. "The third mystery in this piece with Mellon is the intruder in the hearing room. I know she is not the hospital vigilante. They are of different physical characteristics, especially weight and size of frame. Even though I saw one just from behind and the other just in a seated position, I am certain of this. And these matters can not be disguised so easily. But it is too much of a coincidence to me that these women have entered our adventure without having some connection to Mellon, by his direction or not. It may prove extraordinarily complex, indeed, if they are in our Lowry case at their own, or someone else's behest, and not Mellon's." Another sip of water and then she concluded.

"So, for me one half of the 'what do we do next' is to find out who these two women are and where they fit." Again, she raised her hand and they waited.

"Lastly, I am intrigued to discover that it seems Ned Hegerman has turned to Godfrey Mellon to administer his end-of-life affairs. From what I know of these two men, my inclination is to suspect deeply that this legal

stewardship is a matter of coercion by Mellon and some desperation Ned finds himself immersed within. But I am far from understanding either, or even, from moment to moment, why I am so inclined to think this way. So, I need to say this and then have you good friends help me see my way to it, or through it, as the case may be.”

At that she rose from the straight back chair she had chosen to use. She crossed over to the sideboard. She took a short glass and placed three ice cubes into it. Then she poured a half glass of bourbon over the ice and sat back down. Seeing her drink anything other than dinner wine was a first for almost everyone in the room. They were glad she was going home by cab.

That Gabs had a great sense of pace and people was a fact of life that Dan Hart was beginning to be in awe of and to appreciate. She affirmed this by saying, “That’s a lot to take in. Thank you, Karidja.”

She put on her hosting and moderating hat. “I think we could all use a break. Please help yourself to some of the desserts. I’ll start the coffee; it only takes eight minutes. The guest bathroom is right down the hall, on the right for you gents. I left the door ajar and a night light on, so you’ll have no trouble finding it. Ladies, keep going down the hall and along through the bedroom and use the master bath, if you wish. The coffee pot will be our hourglass. Let’s start back in ten minutes. Don’t be surprised if you hear any noises from upstairs. My mother lives up there with her live-in, health care companion. It’s probably time to get ready for bed up there, so you’ll hear water and walking. No worries.”

When they reconvened after pleasantries were exchanged about her home, and the arrangement of her kitchen particularly, they began again.

“I don’t want to repeat what Eleanor and Karidja have said. I thought of some of those things, but certainly not all, nor as well as they did. So, all I want to do is remind us of a few things.” She looked at the key words she wrote on an index card she borrowed from Karidja during the break.

“If we still have access after Tuesday, because we did not get fired—and I apologize for my unprofessional language earlier today about getting fired—here’s what we can still use.” She looked at the card.

"We have the prep files and lawyers' notes for the entire Lowry proceedings. These should still be in the long files by Eleanor's desk, because Danny used them last in the reading room and wasn't finished with them when he said he had to go to Jersey this morning."

"We have Eleanor's index list of files she pulled from downstairs and that the clerks copied for us and then returned to the basement. This is, of course, if they were able to do what they said they would attempt to do. Remember, these were not included in the partners' instructions, but I hope the copyists did Ned the favor of making these for us and then secreting them back downstairs. I know these ladies. Unless security caught them at it, I sure hope they came through." She looked at her card.

"We should have a clean copy of the court transcripts from two years ago and from Monday's hearing." One more read through of her card.

"Lastly, we should have the roster of the file names we pulled today for the copyists, in case the files themselves are not readily accessible without being retrieved again."

She turned to Myles. "Now if we do get released from the company on Tuesday, it will be important for you to determine whether you want continued representation there or whether you bring your case elsewhere to continue trying to gain custody of Linda. That would require following up on the postponement without prejudice you received from Judge McCarver Tuesday. It would be best for you to know these files exist. You should ask your new attorney to seek copies of them for your use. But act fast if you do. You see, in all likelihood, after tonight, or at least Tuesday, if we are released, we three ladies may not even be able to talk to you about these matters, let alone help you."

She scanned the room and saw that Eleanor and Karidja turned to Myles and nodded agreement with what she said. He saw them do it, because then he took both his hands and laid them against his face and rubbed them up and down while he shook his face side-to-side, to clear his head.

"It's your turn, Dan," Gabs said to him, leaving no room at this moment for Myles to respond.

"It's getting late. I'll be quick. I agree with everything you ladies have said . . . whether I've heard it before, thought it myself, or heard it for the first time in this room. So, I'm just going to tell you where we've been today and where I'm heading next." He looked at Myles to make sure Lowry heard the pronouns he used—plural for today, singular for the future.

"You may know parts of this, but like Karidja did, I'm making sure you know that pieces of this fit together—even if I don't know exactly how, as of yet. I would advise and appreciate you not asking the 'how' I know all of this. Just knowing the 'what' should help you move forward with your tasks. Not knowing my 'how' should avoid you being implicated in any potential future problems." He saw they were skeptical but ready to listen.

"A pair of women entered the Jersey apartment last night. It was not a burglary. It was an entry to acquire household items, clothing, and personal goods. We should suspect it was Rosalyn Lowry and a confederate who did this. There is a good chance, but not a definite fact, that the accomplice may be the same woman who made the hearing room incursion Monday. Some of the items taken may have been contraband, or at least items that an occupant of the apartment had hidden previously and retrieved last night." He looked at Myles who appeared shocked.

"As a group, with Myles, we have our own confidant now who will alert us to any goings on at the apartment. He is a resident tenant and has military training at observation. His name is Mike Riley, and you should take his calls if he tries to reach you. His motivation is concern for Linda and nothing else I can ascertain. He also has a dog that will probably protect Linda if he thinks she's in harm's way, with or without directions from Riley." To this Myles nodded.

"You have heard about a man and his daughter who were at Linda's birthday party. I can tell you nothing I know about this man or girl that I learned while employed by Mellon's firm. This is Karidja's and my agreement and terms of hire." He paused. All looked at Karidja; she nodded affirmation. "We have otherwise learned that Meadows disavows any romantic interest in Rosalyn. We do not know if he has any involvement in the disappearance or last night's entry. He learned just this afternoon that their house phone received a call from a pay phone late Monday afternoon. Annie did not recognize what it was until today, nor did the caller engage her in a conversation on Monday. It was not a diversion call made by her father. He

was in the shower at the time. I bartered this information with the local investigating police department, in exchange for their trying to trace the location of the pay phone from which the call originated. The contact there is a woman, a Detective Howe." Again, Myles appeared stunned.

"What I make from all of this is that I disagree with Karidja when she said before that Rosalyn has left New Jersey. I think she is still in that state. But I can not divulge why I think this to be true. However, you ladies and Myles are smart enough to figure out why I feel that way. But you can't do that in my presence." He left it at that.

"I will remind Ms. Soro, and inform the rest of this merry band of Linda lovers, of a key component of my standard employment arrangement. Except that I have grown to care about you all personally, it does not matter to me what happens on Tuesday, with regard to your employment. Once I start a case, I stay with it until the end." He made eye contact with each of them.

"So, I will be searching for Linda Lowry, and her mother, if need be, until the girl is found. It matters not if the firm terminates our agreement. All I can say is that I pray to a god you may or not be beholden to, that she is found safe and sound and returned to her father. What happens after that is not a matter of concern to me at this time, if it ever is." He put his plate on the sideboard.

"I am going to go now. I can not hear anything else for professional reasons I do not expect you to understand, nor that I will explain. Depending on your status Tuesday, I will be in touch and keep you updated. You each know how to reach me confidentially and untraceably. Good night and have a safe holiday. When I get home eventually, I will call to learn the latest on Ned Hegerman's condition. I do not want to know about that while I'm trying to concentrate on Labor Day Weekend traffic. You may wish to do the same."

And with that he left.

When Danny Hart was home and dressed more comfortably for the remainder of the night, he poured the drink he wanted in Brooklyn, but dared not take before having his say and then driving home.

He called the hospital to see if the same reply was being given out there. It was. He was told only family members were to receive reports on Ned Hegerman's condition. That gave him a glimmer of the idea that Ned was hanging on.

So, he took a sip of his drink and called the dedicated message line that Eleanor had set up at the law firm. It took somewhat longer to begin playing the recording. When it began, it was a male voice, not Eleanor's. Hart was not surprised because he knew she had not been at the office to receive the doctor's report after late rounds. So, he allowed himself to hope for the best, whatever Ned would prefer that to be.

The message played. It was the same one that had already been heard by Myles, Eleanor, Karidja, and Gabriella. Their trips home took less time than Danny Hart's.

Thank you for calling to inquire about Attorney Ned Hegerman. The principal partners of the firm regret to inform friends and employees that late this afternoon, our dear friend, Ned Hegerman, passed away peacefully. Speaking for the family, his daughter, Marie, expresses her gratitude for your prayers and thoughts for her father. When she finalizes plans for a memorial service, the firm will make the announcement on her behalf, at her request. Our offices will be closed for the Labor Day weekend to all but senior partners and security personnel, until Tuesday morning at eight o'clock.