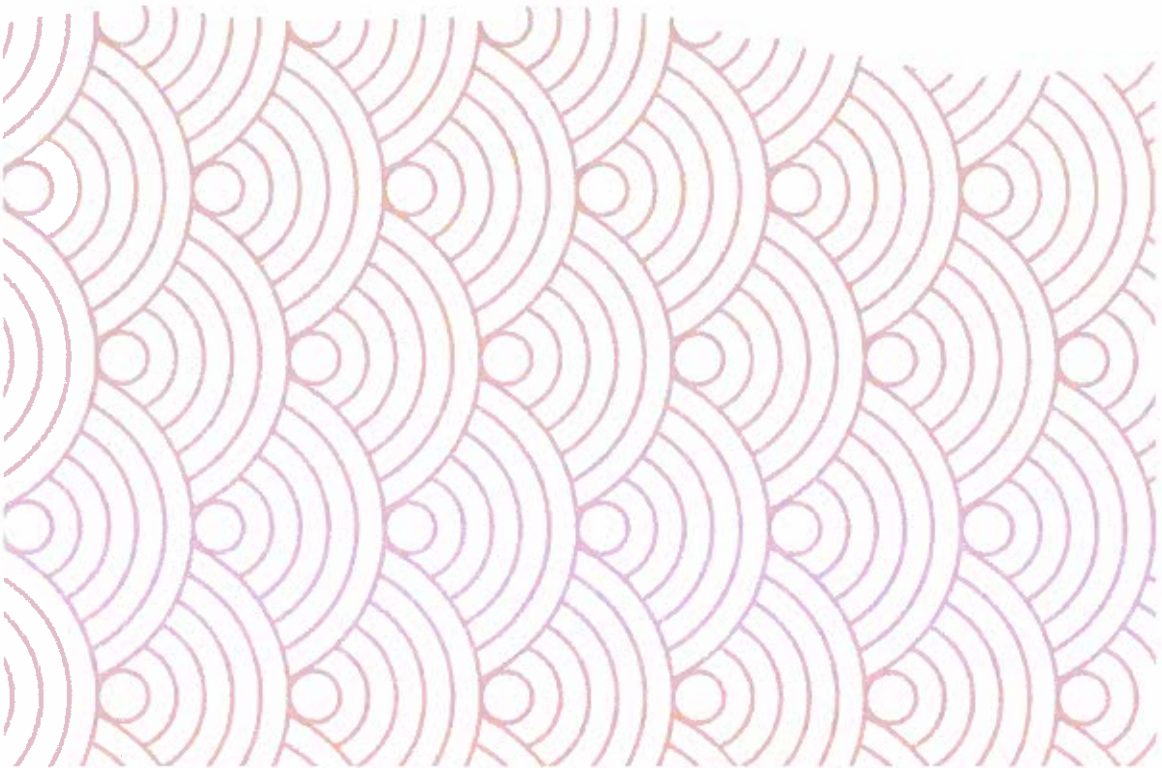




Lady Liberty



Lady Liberty

Summer's sun struck the aqua patina of the Lady of the Harbor. In the heat and the glare, she kept her arm up, her torch high, and her welcome warm. Undaunted still in 1996, despite a terrorist bombing just three years before in the basement garage of the World Trade Center across the harbor and the Black Tom munitions depot bombing eighty years earlier, this French gift to America endured the view of the ever-climbing Manhattan skyline. Over those one hundred and ten years, the buildings had become taller than she, and would continue to do so with every passing year. They were more noticeable than she. But she held her own and stayed aloof enough to avoid the grasp of their shadows.

i

Beverly Hand saw the Statue from the deck of the ferry bringing her from Manhattan to work in Jersey. More than usual, Bev took in the Lady today. She eyed her with strong intent. Bev's career would crash or soar today at her feet, draped by her green hem. Better the statue's feet than hers, since copper and alloyed steel were not susceptible as was human tissue to plantar fasciitis.

Over morning coffee when they first heard, the other therapists speculated about Hand, "What could she possibly have been thinking?" But for six months Beverly had persisted—in front of the medical review committee and then before the director's attorney after that. Both let her know they gave her proposal their permission only with reservations. Beverly Hand's retention on staff as a facility therapist would depend on the results of her escorted public outing with an autistic resident, planned for this very day. Her doctoral mentor at Columbia was hardly more supportive, "You can always document why the outing did not advance the patient's improvement and hope for the best from your defense before the committee."

But psychologist Hand wanted out of *The Terraces of Hoboken—A Health and Rehabilitation Center*. She wanted out of her tiny Ninth Avenue apartment. She wanted to live on Manhattan's East Side and work at Albert Einstein Hospital in the Bronx. She had promised her kid brother, just before he died, that she would accomplish the move and the job change.

As she stepped off the bus, her feet sore after sitting, Beverly reminded herself that the stakes today were higher than the 1986 restored golden tip of the torch's flame out on Liberty Island. The whole bus ride over from the ferry slip she mentally relived all the preparations she had made over the last half year. She was making certain that she could present a recap of them all, a half hour from now. By the time she was ready to get off the bus, she'd given herself a boost of confidence and an assurance that she could not have possibly done any more to get ready.

All that remained was the debriefing session awaiting her inside at *Hoboken Health*. This morning was her last hurdle. She wondered if the two men she was about to meet—an insurance underwriter and a psychologist affiliated with the new group that acquired *Hoboken Health* a mere ninety days ago—would be any harder to convince than the

formidable authorities who had scrutinized her plan already. Time would tell. For the moment, she had to go in and make sure her office and materials were in order—to receive them and host the session. She took a deep breath, climbed the brownstone stairs, and with throbbing heels, entered the facility on Hoboken’s gentrified Washington Street.

ii

“Good morning, Miss Hand. My name is Russell Grange. I am the Coordinating Psychologist for On-Site Staff Services. Mr. Taylor here is our insurance rep and liaison to the major carriers we retain for patient and resident liability issues.” The men assessed Hand as a mid-50-year-old, overweight and plainly dressed clinician. Unfair. But typical.

For his part, Grange was dressed impeccably. His Ozwald Boateng suit fit his athletic body perfectly. The overall palette was of a brown—somewhat darker than his skin—with a purple hinted undertone and a thin canary stripe effect, picked up by the butterscotch shirt and red tie just visible above the high-button, crest-labeled, square-shouldered jacket, itself lying flared to about mid-thigh. The slacks were creased, lightly cuffed, and set just at the instep of his russet tie-shoes. It was featured on the season’s runways, though Beverly Hand had no recognition or sense of fashion. All she knew was his six-and-a-half-foot frame looked very fine. He had not a tight salt-and-pepper hair out of place and his trimmed grey beard was the only hint of age in his executive appearance.

“Welcome. Nice to meet you. Please make yourselves comfortable.” Though Bev knew she was anything but comfortable with them here. She was furious with *Hoboken’s* director, Dr. Antonio DeLemars. He did not come along to make the introductions. All three of them could read that body language to mean Beverly Hand did not have his support. She angrily thought to herself, “*He met with these two guys and then just sent them downstairs to greet me alone.*” She added this insult to the list of reasons why she wanted out of this place. But first things first she convinced herself. Settle the problem at hand—the pun totally abused in her college days and later behavioral clinic internships.

Taylor was far less sartorial than Grange. His lightweight suit was far too big in the jacket and too tight at the waist, the fate of off-the-rack clothes for the unfit. His tie flopped around his belly and would not lay straight down the center of his wrinkled shirt, showcasing the strain on the fabric around the buttons. From somewhere within his hadn’t-missed-a-meal-lately gut his tinny voice almost whined, “Dr. DeLemars has briefed us on your, er, *project*, Miss Hand. Do you think the risks for the clinic, and for yourself as a practitioner, are merited?” Taylor had an annoying habit of getting right to the point and putting people on the defensive. He did it purposely. He had cultivated doing so. He touted it as a talent. He thought it the best way to make sure they lost their composure and showed they were unworthy of being underwritten by the group’s liability insurance.

“It’s not a *project* of mine, Mr. ... I’m sorry ... ?” He had flustered Bev some.

“Taylor.” Deferring in tone to show he won what he projected to be a contest.

“The outing is a crucial element of this resident’s therapeutic therapy. She ...”

“How so?” Grange’s voice was soft and inquisitive. But Bev didn’t trust his eyes.

“The pa ...” Bev reminded herself not to objectify her patient. “Fran Stico is a mature 32-year-old. She’s been alone since her father died six months ago. Fran is employed as a

computer data processor for a firm that fabricates very high-tech industrial machine parts. She reviews read-outs downloaded onto her home workstation by infra-red sensors on the production line. They use micro technologies to conduct quality control scans of the tooling of the final product. The read-outs are numerically digitalized. Reviewing them for quality control requires intense concentration and recognition of repetitive patterns."

"Is she high-functioning?" Grange seemed to know the right question to ask.

"I think she has Asperger's Syndrome."

"You *think*?" Taylor was as unlikable as he was unkempt. "Our insurers wouldn't be happy to hear that you didn't *know* what your patient suffers from."

"What Fran *suffers from* and what her condition *is* are two different things, sir." Bev let the ambiguity of her comment sit for a moment for its full impact. She stared at this number cruncher and let him feel he was one of the things autistic people suffered—fools like him. She went on, more diplomatically. "Fran suffers from the symptoms of whatever type of autism causes her problems. As clinicians and therapists, we specialize here at *The Terrace*—our part of *Hoboken Health*—in non-surgical therapeutic programs to help our patients recognize and cope with those symptoms, so they can get on in society."

"Fine. So, this Asp ..."

"Asperger's Syndrome." Beverly Hand felt she was finally achieving an equal voice in the discussion. "Our current understanding is that Asperger's is a type of high-functioning autism. As of the current moment, our observations bear out that people with Asperger's tend to have a better ability to understand speech than lower-functioning autistics. Fran's working at home is suitable because she typically has a problem with making rapid responses to unexpected social situations. She can deal over the phone, protected by the distance and the anonymity that gives her. That's why we are meeting this morning in my office rather than the conference room. Fran is used to this room and not to the conference room. The incandescent lighting in here is better for her because the fluorescent lighting in the conference room bothers her, as it does many autistic people. She can actually see the sixty-cycle fluctuation emitted from those lights. For her the conference room is as distracting as you experience a dark bar lit by a strobe light. And because it's continuous and unavoidable, it causes pain and confuses the senses over enough time.

"Why has she come to *The Terraces*, Miss Hand?" Grange countered this insurance guy fairly well. They reminded her of a good cop-bad cop interrogation routine on a TV police drama.

"Until half a year ago, Fran's dad took care of the family household. Fran has no siblings. She and her father have lived together all her adult life. We don't have definite information on his wife. Fran says her mother went away. Other times she says her mother died. We've found no other relatives and Fran doesn't recall living anywhere else. There are pictures of her father in the Second World War with a woman on the Champs Élysées. But Fran doesn't know if she is her mother. It could be the woman passed away or that Fran's autism chased her away. We don't know. We put it off as a key issue for now. When Fran's back in her own place we think counseling may address that issue, if it appears necessary." Bev noticed that Grange just listened, holding his long and manicured fingers under his chin, touching them tip- to-tip prayer-style. They were café colored, noir on the back and au lait on the palm side. Taylor was making notes, especially about Fran's mother with a bulky pen he smothered with his short, thick fingers.

Beverly continued, "Any way. Our goal is to respond to Fran's greatest self-identified motivation. She wants to be back home in her own familiar place. She wants to get back to work. This trip is the major step in her doing that. When she's back home Fran will need to take care of things her father used to do, or at least be in a position where she can have others provide those things for her." Beverly Hand was correct in not generalizing to these men. They both seemed somewhat more interested than they were at first. At least they had stopped interrupting her. That helped Bev feel less defensive.

"What types of things?" Just to get an idea." Taylor appeared to be genuinely interested, asking in a more conciliatory manner. Bev had passed his litmus test of sincerity and he was now getting to work on the case, not the therapist.

"Groceries and housekeeping, mostly. Fran's a terrific cook. Her dad spent years with her in the kitchen. But he did all the meal planning and the shopping. She will need help getting groceries to her at home. None of the stores near her right now take orders by computer, but some do take fax orders and they also make deliveries. So, she has worked to know how to plan menus and budget her money. Her ideas about nutrition were not developed enough to be certain she would have a balanced diet and food bills she could afford. We have been working on those things in her occupational therapy sessions here at *The Terraces*. Fran's choice has been to take the information about food groups and balanced nutrition using Dr. Barry Sear's program, The Zone, and the computer support for meal planning from MetaMedic—to work out a grocery shopping list for herself. She has been very successful at doing it comfortably." Beverly paused. There were no questions. So, she went on to the next topic.

"Fran will also need assistance with housekeeping, because doing it is too disorienting for her and creates paralyzing anxiety attacks. She knows this from when her dad tried to teach her to clean house. There's a little lawn, so she will need to learn how to deal with a kid from the neighborhood or a gardener who's willing to do something so small. She appears to be getting interested in gardening. She may even decide to tear out the lawn and plant a flower garden she can tend herself. That would be great progress, because she hardly went outdoors alone while her dad was alive.

"So, where does the excursion to the Statue of Liberty fit in? The insurance companies will want to know why there and not something simpler." Beverly was surprised that the insurance liaison, and not the clinician, was taking the lead in the questions. She took encouragement from it by letting herself believe that Grange was satisfied with what he had heard her say already.

"The idea came from something Miss Stico said herself. One day in early springtime when we were working together, she looked out a window upstairs. When there are fewer leaves on the trees you can just make out the Statue if you look down toward the harbor. After staring out the window for some time, Fran said if she were free, she would go to the Statue of Liberty. I asked her how she knew about the Statue, and she said her father gave her lots of picture books and they looked at sightseeing videos once a week at night. About two weeks after that she was late for a session together and I went looking for her. She was upstairs looking out that same window again. I asked her if she wanted to go to the Statue of Liberty. She said if she was free she would go, but that she wasn't free. I asked if I took her to the Statue, would that make her free. I was still learning about Fran. I wondered if her associative thinking would not demand the sequence of the events to be crucial."

"That's very intuitive. Nice work." Grange had been quiet for so long and Bev had focused so much on Taylor, that hearing the psychologist's voice surprised her. It was energizing to be congratulated by one of whom she had come to think of as a long line of Grand Inquisitors. But then he looked right at her with those eyes she did not trust. Grange put a question to her more akin to the type she anticipated from him. "What precautions have you taken for the sensory overload such a trip might occasion for your patient, Miss Hand?"

But Hand was ready. "Fran has been practicing with Irlen tinted glasses we got from Long Beach to calm some of the visual disturbances she will encounter out there. Yesterday we finished her second round of Berard Auditory Training, which we started a week and a half ago. Last month when Fran did Berard it was quite evident it was effective in keeping her calm. After the training we had two planned interruptions of her session with me, and we purposefully had two people talking to her at once. Yesterday she was even better at picking out words she had missed last month on the tests."

"What about meds?" Grange was smooth, but insistent and intense.

"We continued Fran's Tofranil for adaptation to stress. We moderated the dosage carefully with assistance from her referring physician, based on his records and Fran's own knowledge of her estrogen levels during menstruation. After her father's funeral she was experiencing higher degrees of stress than is usual for her."

The insurance rep spoke up as he checked items on his paperwork. "I've gotten all the paperwork for the prescriptions. And the hearing tests. Are these eyeglasses on this California bill what you were talking about for those lenses?" Taylor was businesslike enough, yet it seemed he was trying to break the tension, his eyes going back and forth between Grange and Hand.

"Correct," Bev answered.

"That just leaves this videographer's bill. What is that about, please? For my records."

This was Beverly Hand's unique contribution to the therapy. It was the subject of her research at Columbia, and it was what she hoped would carry her into Einstein. She went onto autopilot when talking about it. "Well, Mr. Taylor, for a person with Miss Stico's type of autism, it is very unsettling to go out in public. It is also quite unnerving to do new things, to go to new places, to break the daily routine. In talking to Fran in her early weeks at *The Terraces*, I learned her dad showed her those tourism videos repeatedly. And without the audio playing. Her father had really done his homework. God bless him. He took care of this woman. He understood what was hard for her and how far she could be brought along. So, I plotted out this trip to the Statue of Liberty and had a videographer come along with me once. Fran has looked at copies of that video to familiarize herself with our planned trip."

"Excuse me, Miss Hand. These bills look atrociously high for one videotaping session and a copy of the tape. Why all this studio time if it was an unedited record of the trip?" At the beginning of the interview, Bev thought Taylor would conduct this type of questioning as a cross-examining lawyer would be accustomed to doing. But he had changed his tone along the way for some reason. He asked hard questions, but without being harsh. She couldn't help but think he was coming over to her side, while Grange was swinging strongly against the program and the field trip.

"You're right, Mr. Taylor. I am so excited about going today, that I forgot to explain. We recorded several different copies of that tape that were essentially the same visual image. We started with Fran with tapes that had no audio track on them. Gradually we introduced Miss Stico to additional soundtrack components on other copies of the tape. At first, we filtered out all voices and just went with middle frequency background noise. Then we used a tape with only low frequency background sound. Then we went to one with only higher frequency noises. After those, we had other versions that mixed the frequencies, until we progressed to a copy with full audio, all frequencies and speech. Fran needed to assimilate these things slowly because she hears frequencies you and I don't. She also must work very hard to distinguish these sounds from one another and be able to cope with them. Autistic persons often receive conflicting messages from their sensory centers. Some audio impulses come through as colors and feelings, rather than as sounds. These can be troubling. We wanted to watch the impact of each group of sounds separately, and then being added together one-at-a-time, to make sure we could identify what might be too overwhelming for Fran, individually or cumulatively. Had we found any, today's planned trip would have been either postponed or cancelled altogether.

"But she's done well with all the stimuli separately and most of them in combinations. We have tried to get her as ready as possible for this excursion. We've combined bus and subway travel, as well as the ferries we need to get to and back from the Statue. If this regimen works for Fran, we can get her home and living her life again as she needs, and wants, to do. And we hopefully would have developed a prototype that other therapists and clinicians can try to use as a regimen for autistic adults facing the same or similar life changes that leave them alone and threatened. "

"Who has been your guiding force behind these steps, this therapeutic model, if you will? I'm not sure I recognize it from my work across the country." There was a mixed tone in Grange's question. Beverly couldn't put her finger on it, but she was increasingly wary of this man and his questions. She did not know precisely why. But her instinct was that this was an extremely critical question to the psychologist. Or rather, that her answer was going to be especially important to Dr. Russell Grange.

"I have to take responsibility for the regimen. But the credit for the insights I used as a basis go to a woman whose books I've read and whom I went to hear speak last year out at Colorado State university. Her name is Temple Grandin."

Grange simply nodded. He spoke not a word. Not even when Taylor looked right at him expecting he would be the next to say something.

Bev couldn't stand the silence and tried to move things along by asking him, "Dr. Grange, would you like to meet Miss Stico now?"

"No, thank you. I'm quite satisfied with what you've done. You have the approval of On-Site Staff Services to take your trip today. With one rider."

"What condition would that be, sir?" Bev was getting very edgy. She felt the whole thing had suddenly come apart at the seams, yet he was giving his approval."

"No condition. Just another rider. On your excursion, that is. Dr. DeLemars says you have an adult male amnesia victim. I would like him to accompany you and Miss Stico on your trip to Liberty Island today."

"I don't understand, Doctor. We are ready to leave in less than two hours. This has been all planned. I don't have time to train another assistant to help the amnesia patient."

"No problem, Miss Hand. You don't get an assistant."

“But ... I”

“Take it or leave it, Miss Hand. You bring the John Doe along, or you don’t go. Simply put, On-Site can’t afford to fund this therapeutic model for another patient. We have more head injury and amnesia type patients than we have adult autistics. If this scheme of yours will work for one patient, it could work for others as well. Plus, there’s no expense for upfront work on the amnesia population. Besides, this way if you aren’t successful with Miss Stico, maybe you’ll get lucky with your John Doe. And the model should be able to be replicated at our other facilities and centers. We’ll leave you now so you can get on with your work. We will see ourselves out.” And with that, the two men were up and gone, without so much as a bow or a handshake.

iii

“All I’m saying, Dr. DeLemars, is that if you had been there, I think we could have kept today’s trip as planned, without having to bring along the second resident.”

“And what I’m telling you, Miss Hand, is that the brownstone next door is for sale. Dr. Grange was quite quick to point that out to me. He also pointed out that it should not be very hard to break through—on two upper floors to add another five residential spaces and to create an outpatient center on the bottom two floors. That was before he told me that he and Mr. Taylor could show themselves to your office. Is there a picture forming here for you? That Grange was sent by On-Site about more than *medical* breakthroughs today. I hope so. Now, unless you are volunteering to call off your field trip, I’d suggest you get our John Doe ready for the outing without any further delay.”

So, she’d been wrong about DeLemars abandoning her for the interview. Regardless, she didn’t apologize to him for something he didn’t even know she was angry about earlier.

iv

“Fran, this is another resident here at *The Terraces*. We call him John.”

“Hello, John. Are you autistic, too?”

“No. I don’t think so. They tell me I have amnesia from some kind of accident.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. What happened?”

“I’m afraid I don’t even know that. In fact, I don’t even remember my name. They call me John here. Lucky nobody has to be formal. I don’t think I’d want to be called, ‘Mr. Doe.’”

“Well. I’ll just call you, John, then. Why are you wearing that tape player and the headset?”

“I found it in the library upstairs the other day. The music is kind of soothing. They say maybe it will help me remember something. I guess it’s supposed to be portable because they called it a Walkman.”

*What clear and piercing eyes
you have. I don’t think I’ve ever
seen a blue as light before.*

Bev let them handle the introductions to see how they might get along with each other. She was happy to see they were at least willing to do that. Fran was generally still and awkward when meeting new people. John had not really interacted with too many residents in his two weeks at *The Terraces*. He did not seem put off by her direct questions. He adjusted the headset into a necklace-like position and let the foam-cushioned earpieces rest atop his shoulders. "Fran, I have asked John to come here this morning because something has come up about our trip today."

"We're still going, aren't we, Bev. I mean, I have worked really hard to go. I've done everything you wanted. Even the hard things." Fran scratched her forearm, the way Bev noticed she did when she was getting agitated.

*Don't look away now. Where
are you going with that look?
Do you know I'm here?*

"Yes. Yes. We're still going. Don't get worried now, Fran." Bev Hand was fast to give assurances. She did not want Fran Stico on edge to start the trip. "But there has been a change in the plan. The people who had to approve the trip asked me to have John come along with us."

"Why? He said he's not autistic. This trip is for ... is for ... my ..." the frustration of this last-minute surprise started to grip Fran with a dread fear. Changes meant something could go wrong. Just like changes in the computer printouts she wanted to go home and work on again meant trouble with the machines at the factory. "It's unfair. There are quality assurances for machines. Why can't there be for people?"

Bev missed the logic in Fran's reply. But she didn't miss the panic in her voice.

Neither did John. He reached out to touch Fran's hand to assure her. "I don't want to ruin your day, Miss Stico. I'm very sorry to have ..."

Fran jerked her hand away when she felt the touch of John's fingers and let out a cry of fright. John jumped out of his chair and was trying to get closer to her to apologize, but it only made things worse. Before he knew what had happened, he was looking Beverly Hand directly in her face. She had gotten out from behind her desk and inserted herself between the two of them so John would not seem so frightening to Fran.

*Your eyes are cold, Miss Hand.
What's going on in your head?*

*Daddy, Daddy.
Where are you?*

Bev looked at them each, back and forth. Tried to settle Fran down and make sure she didn't lose John for the trip. If he said he didn't want to go, then the whole thing would be off, and Bev didn't want that to happen. "Please, sit. Both of you. Let me try to explain. Please. That's it, Fran. Please, John. Yes. Thank you."

The therapist collected herself and eased back to lean against the front of her desk. She was now on the same side as they were. She sat up on the corner of the desk, edgewise, facing them but sitting a little higher than they were in the chairs. She wanted them to be able to see each other and be ready to get between them again if need be.

"Let me explain, John. I have been working with Fran for almost six months now. Ever since she was a young girl, Fran has had a ... let's say, a *condition*. There are some things she is unable to do without causing great harm to herself. Some things she must protect herself from—things that other people do that cause her pain. Even when they don't mean to do so, or even things they have no idea can harm her."

*Lady, you're lying. You
don't care about her or me.
Don't put this on me.*

He rejoined aloud, "All I did was try to show some friendship and concern. I didn't mean anything bad by it. I assure you. I mean, have I even forgotten how to do *that*?" John was upset as well.

"No. No, John. You haven't forgotten. It's quite regular to put your hand on someone else's to give them assurance. But for Fran, someone else's touch is upsetting, especially if she doesn't see the person reaching out and the touch is unexpected."

Fran sat still and quiet while listening to them talk about her as if she were not there. But she had no desire to explain these things for herself, so she sat and showed no emotion. But within herself there was a tirade brewing. She fought down the urge to rebel. She thought of her dad.

*You kept me from tearing
at my clothes and throwing
things when I was so upset.
But now you're not here, Daddy,
to help me. I will do it for you,
like you asked before you died.
But only if it works, Daddy.
Why can't people just leave
me alone. I don't want to
bother anyone else and all
I expect in return is to be
left alone and not be bothered
by them. I want to go back
home. For some reason this
trip to the Statue of Liberty
is something I have to do
before they will let me go home.
So why does this man have to
be a part of this anyway? It makes
no sense. It is totally illogical.*

"Well, should I apologize, or what?" John was sincere, without knowing what to do.

"You could try." It was an awkward answer for her; not often apologizing herself.

It took John's saying her name three times before Fran would acknowledge that he was addressing her. That about got him ready to quit trying. It was only as he put his headphones back in place and was getting out of his chair to leave that his movement—in

her peripheral vision—brought Fran back from imagining being home with her father. She finally realized John was looking at her. “What did you say? Were you talking to me?”

Thank God. There are those nice eyes again.

It's not his fault. He's not the one making me do this, Daddy.

“Yes. I said I was sorry to scare you and to hurt your feelings. I didn't know any better. I seem to have forgotten some very basic things about getting along with people. That's what my amnesia has done. If you can help me understand what I should, and should not do, I will try to make sure I don't upset you again.”

“It's not your fault. People just don't know what it's like to be me. So, they do things that are hurtful most of the time.”

The therapist saw they were both trying, so she still held out some hope for the day. “Maybe we can start over and figure out how the three of us can take this trip. I have an idea. But let me ask you first what thoughts you have.”

Fran looked at John. “I have practiced and worked for this day a long time. I know what I am supposed to do.”

John felt the burden was on him. “So, I'm just along for the ride. Is that it?” He looked to Beverly Hand for the answer, arms outstretched and palms up as she had seen him do before with his principal therapists—when he was at a loss to know what was happening to him. Fran saw he made a little shrug of his shoulders as he spoke.

Bev spoke to him quietly and directly. “Another doctor, who is sort of my boss, thinks you might see things that will spark your memory if you take a trip like this. Since there's no one else going on this kind of trip from here for a long time, he told me to take you along. He works with amnesia patients and wants to see if a trip like this might help you, and even them, in the future.”

“Sort of two for the price of one, huh?” John was a little curt, realizing he was being treated as an accommodation.

“Something like that, I'm afraid, John. Yes.” Bev felt conflicted. She wondered how much progress would be made with him next week when he was perceiving himself as a second-class citizen. But there was no avoiding it. And time was slipping away. She had less than an hour to have the three of them on the bus. After all, John was not her priority.

v

Beverly Hand almost couldn't believe the three of them were on the bus and heading down Washington Street to the PATH station. Fran with her clean but well-worn favorite light sweatshirt, sneakers, and slacks. John with his Walkman headset wire running down inside the zipper into his yellow windbreaker. The therapist stared out at the people walking along the sidewalks. The cars double and triple parked. The guy in the red sweatshirt arguing with the brown uniformed meter maid. The McDonalds tucked into the

storefront. And the homeless guy, fetching today's lunch money—bottle-by-bottle and can-by-can—from the metal litter baskets. Nothing but the contents, and how crumpled his oversized black plastic was, distinguished his cart from the one the old woman behind him used to roll her two bags of groceries out of ...

There's Cheap Maggie's. It's about the only good thing that they have here. At least the clothes I buy there are soft. I couldn't stand the scratchy things they gave me at first. I just want to go home.

Have I ever been on this street before? How should I know? Look for something familiar on the trip, she says. I've seen these yellow parabolas before, but not on that store.

Beverly Hand wondered whether all these people on the bus knew how much better off they were than her two charges. How could they? They had their own problems. Bills to pay. Families to raise. Jobs to hold down.

Even with these special glasses on, the colors are frightening me, Daddy. I know I want to close my eyes. But you said just to pick one and look at it. The black jacket is what I picked. Like you said, he's not facing this way. So, he won't think I'm staring. Where are you, Daddy?

I'm a grown adult and I can't read. I knew how to before. What the hell's the matter with me. All these signs up where the wall curves into the ceiling with messages I can't understand. So, they re-teach me the alphabet. But these signs aren't in the right order all the time. At least that one in the circle says A-B-C. But that one next to the eye is wrong, C-B-S. And the one under the fanned colors, N-B-C, is out of order, too.

Bev Hand hoped her luck with a half-empty bus in late morning would be matched with a not-too-busy commuter station and railway car for a trip through the tubes over to Manhattan. They should just beat the lunch rush.

*The baseball guy. Why
does the sign say M-E-T-S?
I know something like that.
Not quite, but close.
And how come I know it's a
baseball guy but can't figure
out the letters? Damn.*

*See over there, Daddy It's the
skyline. The Trades below, the
Empire above, like you taught
me. And this bus. Miss Hand
had videos of this, too. I love you,
Daddy. Miss Hand says you must
have loved me too. I don't know
how she knows. But I know how
I know. I love you, Daddy.*

The commuter platform was full, but not overly crowded. Bev Hand was now over the shock of having to bring John along. For the first time that day she was grateful he was there. She would work it to her advantage as much as she could. She got his attention by waving her hand. He lowered the headset from the portable tape player and listened to her. The classical music was a whisper by his chin, though she could still hear it. "John, if you could stand on the other side of Fran from me, we could keep people from bumping into her."

John smiled at Fran, wishing he could see her eyes, hidden now behind the Irlen lenses. "Would that be okay with you, Fran?"

She nodded.

Hand was ecstatic. Was this going to work, or what? You bet it would. She told herself she was good enough to make it work. By God, let them all—Grange, Taylor, DeLemars—stuff their crow in, handfuls at a time, and eat it cold. Feathers and all.

*It's like you said, Daddy.
There would be people I would
have to learn to trust. Are you
with me, Daddy?*

*What a group. A bodyguard
with no memory. An autistic
trying to get along in one of the
busiest cities in North America and
a self-centered thera ... Wait.
How did I know that about New York?*

The train was still too far away to see, but Beverly Hand heard it and felt it under her feet. The sensation had always been a warning for her. An attention-getter. Especially now that it pained her fasciitis from heel-to-toe. It hurt less with the orthotics in her dress shoes, but she dressed down for today and was without their cushion.

She could see other people back up a half step from the yellow line by the edge of the platform. And the usual sound of feet rushing down from the upper levels and ticket booths came at her over her shoulder.

Something's not right about this. Why am I underground? This should be up above the cars and the street. I know that without knowing why. And the letters are wrong. Jeez, what's with the letters again? PATH on the cars and METRO on the ads. For some reason I think it should be MERTA.

Oh, Daddy. What a terrible thing. My feet are pounding. Not nice like when you taught me to dance to the music I couldn't bear to hear. And the wind—my hair's going everywhere. I can't stand it whipping my face. The noise—I'm not sure where it's coming from. First it was off to the side, then up behind me. I'm seeing the colors again, it's so loud. I'm inside the colors and now it's quiet and still. There's no one here but us again now. Like it used to be.

As hard as she tried, Bev Hand just couldn't break through. All the preparation and planning. All the testing. All the videos and soundtracks. When it came to the crescendo of sound, she lost Fran Stico into the unquenchable autistic cocoon. The three of them stood virtually alone on the platform. The train was gone. It grew more quiet. Before she could do anything, she saw John Doe moving in front of Fran Stico.

She's solid. She's gone. I can't believe it. I've never seen anything like it before. Seen. That's it. I don't want her screaming like she did before, when she couldn't see me.

"What's the matter with her, Miss Hand? What can I do to help her?"

"It's the noise. She's shut down emotionally to protect herself from the noise. It's so much louder to her than to us. And it confuses her. She not only hears it, but it makes her other senses work overtime. She can actually see the noise. It registers as colors. I don't know what to do for her yet. We might just have to wait it out."

*Got to do something.
If I stand in front of her,
maybe she'll see me better. And
I can make the noise go away."*

The therapist stood, rigid and watching. Her feet throbbed from standing on the hard platform for so long. The man who knew nothing about himself was trying to know about someone else. He was standing in front of the woman now. He lifted off his headset from the Walkman and set them on Fran Stico's head. She began to sway a bit but said nothing. She didn't pull away.

*It's like a dream, Daddy. The man,
the one they call John. I see him.
But I don't know where he is. Or
how he got here with me and you.
And there's music. Soft music,
like we used to listen to
together on the back porch in
the summertime.*

*Come on, girl. Look at me.
Damn, I can't see her eyes through
those tinted lenses, but I swear
she's looking right through me.*

"John." It was the therapist's voice. He fought not to look away from Fran's face. "Her peripheral vision is better when she's disoriented. Stand off to one side so she can see you more clearly. I'm going to do the same on the other side."

Fran turned her head ever so slightly. "That is beautiful music. How did you make it be here, John?"

And with that, the episode was over. Like a swimmer underwater in a summer storm, Fran's musical surroundings were unperturbed by the thunderous noise of the next train coming into the station. The three boarded together and tumble-rumbled their way through the Hudson's riverbed. Beverly Hand thought she never better appreciated the expression about still waters running deep. It was an absurd thought. But it was all that would come to her troubled mind as she sat across from her traveling companions, each wrapped in a personal mystery inaccessible to the therapist.

vi

In Battery Park, the Ranger leading the tour was the same young man who gave the tour that Beverly Hand videotaped months before in preparation for Fran Stico's big outing. Bev felt it a good omen. There would be more familiarity for Fran. She would remember the

videos and her hard work getting ready for today. It would soothe her and calm her down from the unsettling incident on the PATH platform.

"Fran, do you recognize the guide? He's our friend from the tapes." Fran looked again. She smiled. She withdrew the headset tentatively. She smiled again and nodded. Bev looked around her at the park, the fort, the grass, the sheltering trees. And at John Doe, standing, looking out past the park at the traffic surging under the newly green traffic signal. She had almost forgotten him, absorbed with Fran, and distracted by her hips that hurt her now, as the foot pain changed her gait and balance. She'd definitely chosen the wrong shoes for this outing.

"Do you like history, John?" He turned to meet her gaze but was distracted by the ad for the METS baseball team spread along the side of a bus traveling the perimeter of the park. He looked her way, while really looking beyond where she stood. He simply shrugged his shoulders.

*What kind of idiot question is that,
anyway? I don't know my own past.
How should I know what I feel about
history?*

They moved over to hear the Ranger's presentation. "This location has had many names and uses over its long history. It was built to be a fort, but never fired a shot in anger and never had to defend the city from an attack from the sea. The structure has needed patrons to defend it against plans to demolish it, by none other than Robert Moses. It's been used for the performing arts, including by none other than P T Barnum. It's been the site of an aquarium. It was an immigration center before Ellis Island."

*So, if there's ivy on this wall, why
do I expect the wall to be red
brick instead of this cut stone.*

*A round fort. Daddy, the story books
we read from had square forts with
towers at the corners. I like this better.
It's like an embrace from my squeeze
machine, strong and firm and calming.*

The Park Ranger added some current local color, "Not too many years ago a big storm blew down one of the oldest trees in the park. When it was being cut apart for removal, several scores of musket balls were found in the wood, deep beneath the bark."

*Nobody can see the hurt inside if
they look only for wounds outside.*

"We should really be moving on now, Fran, John. We need to get over to the ferry for Liberty Island." Fran moved the headset back up into place as they walked. She looked over at John, and he at her. Bev missed the exchange. They spoke no words but had, with four

facial expressions asked to keep the music, affirmed it was okay, indicated thanks, and closed with *you're welcome*.

"This ferry ride is shorter than the one we'll make later to go back to Jersey." Bev Hand's voice was louder than usual, so they could hear her over the sound of the wind blowing as they stood on the open deck. "How does it feel to be traveling along the water, Fran? Do you see why they call her Lady Liberty? Imagine after sailing across the whole Atlantic Ocean what she must have looked like to all the people who traveled here for a new life of freedom." Beverly Hand turned away from Fran Stico for a moment to see how much longer the trip to the island would take. Almost unaware of John Doe as she fussed over Fran, Bev now saw he was looking back toward Manhattan and up the East River and not out to the Statue. "John, I have to use the rest room. And I want to see if it's less crowded than those will be on the Island, in case it's better for Fran use it now, and avoid the crowds out there. Can you watch her for a moment, please?" He nodded without really taking his eyes off the skyline. "Fran, I'm going to the women's room. Will you wait here with John?" She decided to leave out the part about Fran's using the bathroom. Fran looked at John and then back to Bev. She hesitated, but then nodded. Bev was off at the mere movement of her head, leaving them together on the deck, but alone in their thoughts.

*Daddy, when I see her and go inside
her to know her secrets then I will be
free. They said so. I can come back home.*

*I know something about this place is
wrong. The shapes are just not
exactly right. I see it as it is,
but expect it should be different
somehow.
The tallest building. I'd
expect one. But there are two.
The river should have bridges
but they don't seem the right
shape or size. They are too
big and have too much structure
above their roadways. And there should
be taller buildings on both sides.
And the lake I want to see. Where is that?
I don't remember the ocean or this statue.
But how do I know something
like that and not know why I know it?
What's this about? And how do I know
the power plant on this ferry is running
rough? How can my feet tell me from the
deck vibrating that something's loose
or broken in the rhythm of the power?*

*Daddy, did you ever ride this ferry?
I can feel the way the floor pulses at my feet*

*and how the bench moves. Bev's been away
and I can't remember for how long. John's
here but he looks locked away in a daydream,
like the way you showed me on video how
I looked like when I 'went inside,' as you called
it. I'm a little afraid but John's music is nice.*

Bev came back. She was relieved to see them where she had left them. But she knew something had changed. John was still absorbed looking back over Lower Manhattan. He didn't even turn when she called his name. Fran was sitting on the polished wooden bench across from him. She sat, cross-legged at the ankles, with the heel of her left leg pushing off the deck so she was rocking back and forth on the bench, keeping time to the music in her head and the movement of the boat at her feet. The wind rippled the worn sweatshirt. The soft cloth of her slacks fluttered underneath her thighs. Beverly wondered where between that heel and that head the true Fran Stico was to be found. Having convinced them both that the rest rooms here were less busy than those on the island would be, Bev led the way to the bathrooms, showing John that his was across the deck from the women's. They agreed to meet "topside," as John told them it was called.

John passed right by the bathroom, shooting a glance over his shoulder to make sure the therapist didn't notice. He stood at the open elliptical door and stared over the yellow chain blocking the way to the steps beyond. Letters stenciled in dark black against the grey bulkhead were EMPLOYEES ONLY. John felt he had probably walked past many such signs in his life, though he still couldn't interpret this one. But drawn by the smell of oil and grease that somehow were familiar, he unhooked the chain, stepped over the portal onto the metal rungs, re-hooked the chain behind him, and descended the six narrow, grated treads to the metal catwalk below.

He strode to the rail of the walkway and looked down into the engine room. Two men in greasy overalls had an array of tools laid out on the deck below and were shouting at one another over the sounds of the engine. Smiling to himself, John Doe turned from the rail, crossed back over, and ascended the short metal ladder, stepped through to the gangway by the men's room, and refastened the chain behind him. After using the men's room, he rejoined his companions and found people getting ready to disembark.

"Just look at her, John. Isn't she majestic?" Beverly Hand tried engaging him in an effort to make sure he would help her protect Fran Stico from any crowd buffeting as they visited the Island. When he didn't make any answer other than a protracted gaze from the granite pedestal to the golden torch, she asked him outright. "Will you help me again with Fran? Please, John." He nodded and looked at Fran. She was also studying the Statue. From the side he could see beneath the tinted lenses and saw her eyes. They looked like they hid a hundred secrets at once.

*What goes on inside your head, Fran Stico?
Do you feel out of place like I do? I didn't
notice before how attractive you are.
I couldn't get past your worn clothes
and my anger at being a tag-a-long today.
You have a nice face. Maybe I can tell*

*you that later. Or would that make
you scream and cringe again? Why are
you really here today, anyway? Do you
know who you are any better than
I know who I am?*

*She's beautiful, Daddy. Look at her face.
It beams when the sunlight falls on her.
Like you used to call me your sunshine.
I will get to the crown. I know I will.
I want so badly to be back in our home,
Daddy. Be with me so I can make it to
the top today.*

vii

The guided tour of the museums and the base of the Statue were uneventful for Beverly Hand and, as much as she could tell, for her party. But that was because she continued to favor Fran Stico with her attention. Fran seemed relaxed enough, protected on each side by Bev and John.

*The air in here is amazingly well
balanced. Constantly cool, even on this
summer day, with crowd movement and
doors opening. Must use over twenty
percent make-up air, because I can smell
the sea air, even in here. And well
engineered, because it's not too humid.
But how do I know these things? I can't even
read and I know these technical things. It just
doesn't make sense. Unless I've been here
before or have something to do with this place.*

The tour group headed for the upper reaches of the Statue. Without Beverly Hand seeing it, the guides split the group in two, separating Fran and John. When a guide's hand shot out, John found himself moving forward so it would land on his arm and not Fran's. He didn't want her embarrassed and he wanted to avoid a scene. As Beverly looked back and saw what happened, she heard John Doe say he would wait in the lobby by the exhibits until they came back down.

Fran was unaware John had left, because she had replaced the headset after the guides had explained they were heading upstairs. She knew John's music was better for her than the sound of hundreds of feet shuffling across the floor. That sound grated on her nerves as they walked in the rotunda, and she needed to avoid it as they went up into the tighter spaces to ascend the Statue.

John watched them go up and then headed back through the crowd to the displays to pass the time. He listened as the next group heard their guide. "For the country's Bicentennial observance, people from all over the country sent in photographs and information about themselves. The idea was to create a database of information where people could come and find out about their family members and relatives from whom they had become separated or to discover distant relatives they never knew. Now, since the Statue's and Ellis Island's Centennial a decade ago, we have a treasury of accessible information and pictures of hundreds of thousands of families from all across the country. Hardly a day goes by without a person finding out about someone they lost contact with long ago, copying down their last recorded whereabouts, and promising themselves to get in touch when they arrive back home. Now over here ..." John let the tour group move away with its guide before he crossed the floor and walked up the three short steps to the arcade of video displays. He was unsteady on his feet and reached out to hold onto the thick, tubular, brass railing.

He stood and confronted the signs he could not read. Next to him was a school kid away from his tour. The kid wore untied sneakers, and his hair was shaven on one side of his head. The long black hair on the uncut side was swept over the top of his head and fell like a curtain over the bare stage of his scalp. John guessed he was in his mid-teen years. All six pimples stood out along his cheek and forehead when he turned to look at John. "Pretty cool, huh? Found my friend's cousins on this thing."

"Can't seem to understand how this works," was all John said. He stared blankly at the monitor with its electronic American flag rippling across the screen. He didn't notice the kid had moved closer to him. John almost jumped away like Fran Stico had from him that morning.

"Here. See, the name I want is Waters. So, I key in the first three letters." The kid's fingers had almost no nails, bitten away to the stubs. He struck the three letters on the keypad, W-A-T, and another key after those. The screen blinked a moment and then a list of names scrolled onto the monitor. The first name was backlit with a green horizontal bar highlight. "Get the name you want by pushing this arrow key that points up or that one that points down" ... he demonstrated ... "and then hit the enter icon ... rrrightttt ... here!" The screen winked again, and the list of names was replaced by a picture of a man and a woman and two children. In a panel space on the right of the screen near the photo were the letters WATERS, THOMAS T. PA. The kid pointed his almost nail-less finger at the screen. "See, that's my friend's cousin I was searching for. The shorter boy in the blue shirt." All John Doe could do was smile.

"You try," the kid said. John Doe shook his head. "Go on. I'll help you if you get stuck. My class went up to the top. I can't stand heights. I told the teacher I'd be here so they wouldn't freak out." His smile was so disarming. John Doe fell into the charm. The kid's appearance made him look unapproachable, but he really wasn't. From somewhere deep in his memory, John Doe associated the term "hard case" with the way the kid looked. He didn't recognize what the word meant, but he was surprised he knew a word that fit a kid he never met before. Or at least couldn't remember knowing before.

John depressed the keys he recognized; in the correct order he had memorized them at *The Terraces*: D-E-F. Then he couldn't remember what came next. So, he looked to the "hard case" and just smiled and shrugged. The kid reached across and pressed the key that had ENTER embossed into it. The screen blinked and a roster of names appeared, with the

top name highlighted under a band of Statue of Liberty green. The letters were DE FABAR, ADAM, AZ. John Doe was embarrassed to ask for help again, so he touched the icon that the boy had previously. The screen winked and a picture appeared. The kid looked at the picture, and then at John. "See," he declared triumphantly, "There you go."

A man and a little girl stood in the photo, before a distinctively shaped and very tall saguaro cactus plant. "Anyone you know?" the kid asked.

John looked at him and said, "I don't know anybody." The answer unnerved "hard case" a little. He tried to make up for taking a step back by saying, "It's a real long shot to find someone you know on this thing, anyway. Well, there's my class. Got to go. 'Bye.'" But John saw no group coming back from the upper levels of the Statue just then.

*Wonder if this thing can know who you
are when you don't know yourself?
I'm a grown adult. Things here look
familiar, yet somehow wrong. And kids know
how to make things work that puzzle me.
What a sorry situation.*

Almost as an afterthought he keyed the letters A-B-C. He struck the enter key and another list of names came up on the screen. He saw the green patinaed band of light behind the first name.

*Always was good with machines.
But how do I know that?
And how do I know that the "long shot"
the kid said has to do with gambling?*

Just to see if he recalled how to make the machine work, he struck the icon. The machine winked and the picture formed on the screen—a man and a woman and three kids in front of a two-storey house. Which story was his, though?

*Jeez. She looks familiar, too.
All except that she's smiling.
I almost don't recognize her
without her screaming at me.*

It all happened in as short a time as the screen took to blink on the picture. John Doe reeled back and almost tumbled over the brass rail. He collected himself and moved back again, closer to the screen. How he could know something about this woman became clear when his eyes focused on the screen again. For standing there next to her, in front of the two-storey house, was a man who looked exactly like the one John Doe saw standing in front of him each morning at *The Terraces* as he shaved. It was himself. Which story was his, though?

Next to the picture were the letters ABCOCK, AARON IL. Two displays to his right, an elderly woman was lettering a piece of paper with a stub of a pencil, one like he'd used to record a golf score, he thought. But then he didn't know how he knew about golf. John Doe

walked over to her in his still-dazed state. "May I borrow your pencil when you're finished, please? I'll only take a minute."

She looked at him and instinctively clutched the lapels of her lightweight jacket closed. Her modesty compelled her to do it. After all, this was New York. And being so much taller than she was, this stranger could look down the neck of her summer dress. She gave him the pencil wordlessly. Seeing he had no paper, and seeing now he was harmless and in some sort of a daze, she released her jacket and used both hands to tear her paper in half and handed him the blank part. "Are you okay, sir? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"It appears as if there is someone here I never thought I would meet again." He spoke so slowly she thought he'd never complete the thought. "I'm not sure what to do about it yet. The guide said people write the names and try to get in touch. Maybe it will work for me." John Doe could think of nothing else to say. And it was the truth of the matter.

Returning the pencil, and holding out the paper, he asked, "If I might—what do the letters after the name mean?" She told him the two letters stood for the state the person lived in. "And what would this 'IL' represent?" he managed to say with a crack in his voice. She told him it meant Illinois and slowly walked away because the intensity in his eyes made her nervous. After all, this was New York.

He went back to look at the display. Under his name there was a space labeled OCC. Next to it on the screen, in different letters against a blanker background, were the letters HVAC engineer. He backed away and went down the three steps, this time really clinging to the brass rail. He sought out a bench and sat down to wait for Beverly and Fran to return from their ascent to the observation deck in the crown.

*It's starting to come back now. I
recognized those HVAC letters.
They aren't in an alphabet row
because they mean something else
than the alphabet. I used to work with
fans and heaters and air conditioners.*

He looked at the overhead ductwork. It came back to him. HVAC stood for Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning. And the letters ABC were the letters in the one name he wrote on the paper, not just an alphabet row. Just like the other name had the letter A twice at the beginning, so the name was at the beginning of an alphabetical listing. He hung his head and stared at his feet.

From within this trance on the bench, an image appeared. He imagined he saw the untied sneaker laces of the "hard case." But it was not his imagination, the kid was talking to him, "Hey man, are you going to be okay? Should I get a guide, or something. My class is lining up in a few minutes to go to the ferry, but I can call one over quick."

John managed to look up and stammer, "What's this say?" as he handed him the paper.

"So, you really can't read, huh? That's terrible. Let me see."

*Will he give it back? Or will
he "freak out" as he called it and*

*start jumping around and
showing off to his school buddies
that I can't read? Hell, what choice
do I have? I'm not showing Miss Hand.
I want to know more about myself before I do that.*

The “hard case” read the penciled letters. “Where did you get this?” John Doe pointed to the displays. “Show me which one. Come on, before my teachers call us to go.”

The two of them stood before the printed screen that the kid cued up again from the information on the paper. “So, look here,” he pointed to each field on the display as he spoke. “This puts the last name first and the first name after that. So, you reverse them to say the name. This person is Aaron Abcock. And he’s from Illinois. He is an HVAC engineer, whatever that is.” He handed the paper back. “And then you key this GO button to see if there’s a picture.” Which he did. And then he gawked. From screen to John and back to each again. “Hey, isn’t that you? You knew all the time and you were trying to trick me or something?” John keyed the OFF button and slowly shook his head. All the kid saw was a face blanker than the display screen.

The boy handed John the paper back and walked away to rejoin his schoolmates. When he was far enough away to feel safe, he turned and looked at John Doe, still standing with one hand on the round brass rail and holding the half sheet of paper in the other. The space between them began to fill up with the flow of visitors: some lately arriving off the ferry, others descending from the upper staircase of the Statue, and those—like himself—forming up in line to catch the next ferry off the island. They would most likely never see each other again, this random boy and this lost man. After all, this was New York.

viii

Beverly Hand was radiant in the afternoon sunlight, despite standing somewhat off-center to ease the pain in the hips her fasciitis caused after a long day on her feet. Safely aboard the Liberty Island to Liberty Park Ferry, she could hardly wait to step onto New Jersey soil, take the bus up to Hoboken, and walk triumphantly into the front door of *The Terraces of Hoboken—A Health and Rehabilitation Center*. She had only one matter to handle before that, and she would watch for her opening very carefully.

If Beverly could take care of John first and fast, she’d have more time to see to Fran. And she certainly needed to have them separated to accomplish the deed. “Did you see anything you liked, John? I mean, while Fran and I were up in the Statue.”

*I went up in the Statue, Dad.
I mean all the way up. As far as they'd
let us go. The stairs were narrow sometimes,
but I took my time like you used to say. And
I was careful when people were going
to bump me. I just thought of my squeeze
machine and kept calm.*

While the wind played a bit with his hair, John spoke to Beverly, turning his back to the wind and Fran to do so. He had to turn that way because Beverly purposefully stood downwind from him when she asked the question. "Not really. A group of school kids on tour. An old woman. People playing with machines with words and pictures. Not much else. The lines to the bathroom were long there. You were right."

"John, may I ask you a favor?" she tried to use her sweetest feminine guile in place of a therapist's professional manner.

Taken aback by the familiarity of her tone, John answered, "Depends, I guess."

"Well, it's not for me. It's for Fran, really. So, you mustn't tell her."

"I don't know. I like her some, yeah. But what's the favor?"

"Some people at *The Terraces* might ask you about today's trip. And what I ..."

"You mean the guys who made you take me along? What would they want to know, anyway?"

It was Bev Hand's turn to be taken a little aback. John almost seemed defensive. "Did something happen out there, John? Did you learn something about yourself you don't want them to know?" She could get to this in his debrief session, later. For now, the clock was ticking on her own agenda, and she didn't want to get sidetracked. "Because if it did, we could talk about it first when we're alone. You don't have to say anything to them about yourself. I wanted to talk to you now about what they may ask you about Fran."

"Yeah?"

She assured him with a nod. She reached out to take his hand in hers, but he sensed it and turned away. He only made a quarter turn, so as not to be facing Fran. He now looked out over the deck rail. Beverly dropped her hand.

"John?"

He turned back to her. "Okay. But only *about* Fran. And only *for* Fran." He didn't say he wouldn't do it for her, but Beverly Hand understood that's what his eyes meant. And now those eyes bore down on her hard. "What's the favor?"

Hand swallowed hard. She was not used to having patients work her over more than she did them. "You know that if they think Fran did well today, they will let her go home. And you know how much she wants to go home. Don't you, John?"

"What's that got to do with me?" He wouldn't release her from his stare, but Beverly broke the contact and looked over the water they still had to cross to be at the pier. She almost panicked to see the distance getting shorter and shorter. Turning back to him and checking to make certain that Fran could not hear her, she said, "They might think that Fran cheated by wearing your headset and listening to the music. But it's unfair of them to think that way. She did well, John. She really did."

*I don't know what I did or who I was
as Aaron Abcock. But I know this look.
And I know this voice. I've seen it and
heard it before. I don't remember
the names. I can't recall their faces.
But I'm no stranger to this.
I wonder if I liked it any less then.*

"What's in this for you, Miss Hand?"

As soon as the Aaron-in-John saw the look of discovery on Beverly Hand's face—a combination of fear and shock—he began to remember.

*I could be a real bastard sometimes.
At least that's what the woman in
the picture back on Liberty Island
told me. And not just a "hard case"
like that kid. It seems she called
me a "bastard" lots of times.*

"That's unimportant, John. Fran is what's important, now."

"Who," was all he said, and it was not a question.

"What do you mean, 'who'?" Beverly didn't know what to make of this. Or him. Had he already forgotten Fran? Was his short-term memory starting to fail?

It hadn't. "You should have said, 'Fran is *who* is important now.' In fact, you should have said, 'I am not important, John. Fran is *who* is important now.' But, you see, Miss Hand, you didn't. You didn't because to you, Fran Stico is a 'what' a 'thing.'"

"How dare you speak to me this way. I have worked long and hard with Fran. I want to see her back home where she belongs. I want her out of *The Terraces*."

*Maybe as John Doe I don't have
to be a complete bastard.
At least not yet, anyway.*

"No doubt. I just told you that you want that for you and not for Fran. And I will say nothing about the Walkman. But you need to know—whatever I do— I do for her and not for you. That's all. It's quite simple. Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to take a walk around and go inside, because it's a little chilly out here all of a sudden."

The shoreline was growing closer, and Beverly Hand was running out of time. The ferry wheelhouse was blocking the view of the Statue of Liberty as she turned to Fran. She moved her hand slowly in Fran's peripheral vision. It was their sign. Fran took off the headset, letting it dangle around her neck. The player itself was clipped to the waistband of her slacks. She turned to look at Beverly.

"Fran, did you have a good time today?"

"Yes. And now I'm ready to go back home, right?"

"Just about, Fran. There are a few things to ..."

"What things? Who says there are more things? I thought once I made this trip, I could go home again."

"I know. I know. And I think you are ready. And I'm going to tell them that. But ..."

"Tell who? Who else has to know?"

"The people that had to approve the trip will want me to make a report, Fran. And they'll want to talk to you to see for themselves. If they like what I tell them ..."

"Why wouldn't they believe you when you say I can go home?"

"They'll want to hear and see it for themselves, too. They'll want to speak to you directly, Fran."

Fran started scratching her arm through her sweatshirt. "And who are these people? What will they want to know about me? I don't like new people. You know that. Why are they trying to keep me from going home? Why won't you all just leave me alone?" She was shaking and her voice was trembling.

Hand was glad John was walking around and not hearing what she was telling Fran now. "Who they are doesn't matter, Fran. The only thing that matters is what they can do. They can let you go home. And they will. They will as long as they hear what they want to hear. From me. And from you. They'll hear it from me. Will they hear it from you?"

"I'll tell them exactly what we did. How we got to the top of the Statue of Liberty. How I looked out over New York Harbor from the Observation Deck in her crown." Fran looked around but the ferry blocked her view of the Statue. "How I looked out and saw the tall buildings in Manhattan and wasn't scared. How I looked out and saw New Jersey. And wasn't scared. How the helicopters going by and the ships passing and blowing their horns didn't bother me. How I looked right up the Hudson River and didn't care who knew I was there. How we rode the train and the bus and the ferry and that I talked to my Dad in my heart and listened to John's music and that I let no one bother me. Just like it will be at home. Nobody bothering me. And me not being afraid. And talking to my Dad in my heart when I need to. That's what I'll tell them. So how can they keep me from going home?"

"Fran. Fran. That's what you should tell them. Except for one thing." And here she paused and looked away—pretending as if she was making sure no one else could hear their secret—but really so Fran could not see her scheming face. "You can't tell them about John's music."

"Why? If I tell the truth, they should let me be free. Everyone knows that. My Father even taught me that was in the Bible."

"John was not supposed to have the music, Fran. If they know he had the music, they may make him stay at *The Terraces*. And he wants to leave just like you do. You wouldn't want to make John stay when you can go free, would you, Fran?"

"No. John was nice. He scared me at first. But then he was nice. I wouldn't do anything to hurt him or to make him stay. Fran, I heard him say they thought the music might help him remember things. They can't say that and then say he can't have the music. You must be wrong, Fran."

"Did I say 'music?' I meant to say he didn't have permission to take 'the Walkman' on the trip. In case it got lost or broken, or something." The eyes behind the Irlen lenses were looking right through the therapist, making her very nervous. Now that old pun was the only thing ringing true—this was getting out of hand. "You just can't tell them about the music. That's what's so important, Fran."

"But you know I can't lie. I'm no good at it. I can't make things up. Now you've scared me. I'm going to ruin it for myself and for John. If you knew he shouldn't have the music, or the Walkman, why did you let him take it? This was supposed to be our trip. Not John's. Why did he have to come anyway? I told you it was supposed to be my day!"

"I know, Fran. And I'm sorry. But that's what they will look at. To see if you could handle changes. They'll say if you couldn't today, you won't be able to at home alone. That you need more time at *The Terraces* until you are better at handling change. You don't want that, do you, Fran? Fran? You don't want to stay. You don't want to make John stay any longer than he wants to. Do you, Fran?"

"Now you're making me cry. Why are you doing this to me? I thought you were supposed to help me. You promised you would. That's what you promised. My father said a promise is a promise. Even I know that. My father warned me about you all. You're just like the others. Just leave me alone."

She broke and ran. Back toward the stern, over the engine room—she felt the warm air from the funnel and stood in its wash. It bothered her and soothed her at the same time. It confused her. She could see the Statue again, from within the warmth. Fran rocked with her arms folded across her chest and looked at the Lady of the Harbor through her tears in the westering summer sun.

ix

Beverly Hand called Fran by her name over and over again, but she couldn't get through. It was no use. Though Beverly stood not five feet from her, Fran Stico was gone; she was with her father at home. To her all the rest was lost. None of it was there, including Beverly Hand, who called and pleaded. Her voice traveled on the wind. No one heard it on Liberty Island. No one heard it in Manhattan. No one heard it on the streets of New Jersey.

But Aaron Abcock did. He heard it through the funnel overhead as he stood below deck, where he was learning more about himself. Where minute-by-minute he was becoming less John Doe and more Aaron Abcock. Hoping to become something in between. He rushed to get topside to find Fran.

"What's going on, Bev? What's the matter with Fran?"

"She's upset about going back. That's all."

*I've seen people look at me and lie,
and this lady is lying. What could
she have possibly done to poor Fran?*

"I don't believe you, Miss Hand. Not for a moment."

"Well, then. See if you can get through to her!"

"Go take a walk so she doesn't see you. Go on. Get out of here for a while." And to his great surprise, that's what she did. Infuriated, Beverly Hand did walk away, from him and from her. And God knows what else. Limping along on her sore feet, aggravated by quickly pivoting in her anger.

*I don't know where I found it
in myself to talk to her that way.
I must be getting over that knock
on the head those guys gave me...
Geez, there it goes again. What guys?*

John-Aaron gently walked around in front of Fran. He placed both hands up in front of her, about two feet from her face. She did not flinch. He remembered her first outburst that morning. He slowly moved his hands into the fields of her peripheral vision. She

blinked. He was finally used to the Irlen lenses enough to see through them when she stood in the shade. She looked straight ahead into his eyes, but her stare was still somewhat blank. It reminded him of the computer screen. It blinked and the list of names appeared. Now, how to find the right name? He slowly moved his hands closer to her chest and carefully picked up each earpiece of the headset, without touching her neck or sweatshirt. Moving easily, without any suddenness, he placed the padded earpieces onto her ears. He reached down to her waistband and held the Walkman with one hand and pressed the play button with the other. Her eyes came to. She looked at him as clearly as the photographs winked onto the video screens back at the Statue.

Her voice was soft and unafraid. "John, is that you?"

He reached and necklaced the headset on her shoulders and clavicles again. She did not flinch. "Something like that. Are you all right, Fran?"

"Don't leave me, please."

Aaron-John assured her. "I'm not going anywhere without you, Fran. We have a little more of this ferry ride. Then a bus ride and we will be back."

"I know it's not your fault, John. But why did you give me the music if you weren't supposed to have it?"

"Did Beverly tell you that?"

"Yes."

That lying bitch of a coward.

"What else did she tell you?"

"She said you weren't supposed to have the Walkman with us in the first place—that you shouldn't have given it to me. And that if I told about the music you would have to stay longer at *The Terraces*. But, John, I'm autistic. I can't think ahead to cover up a lie. They will catch me at it. I know they will. I'm sorry. I don't want to make trouble for you. Now we'll both be stuck there for God knows how long." Fran met and held his eyes, right through the glasses. He was not turning away.

*How could so much goodness in one person
be so mistreated by these others?
I've got to do something—
as John or Aaron I don't know.
Teach me well, Miss Stico. Here we go.*

"Why is lying hard for you? Explain that to me so I can help."

She took a breath like her father taught her. She went slowly and without emotion getting in the way. "To be a good liar you have to remember what you said before and keep building on the lie. I don't think emotionally. I can't read other people's emotions well enough to know whether they've believed the lie or not. I think logically and factually. For me to tell a fib, it can only work if I can figure out beforehand what I am going to be asked. Only then can I figure out what to say to keep the lie going. But today I don't know what to think ahead about. I don't know these people. It won't work."

"Fran, how will they know about the music?"

"They'll see the Walkman and the headset."

"What if they couldn't see them? How would they know about the music then?"

"Only if you or I or Bev tell them about it."

"Okay. Now from what she told you, do you think Beverly is going to tell them about the music?"

"No. She's afraid to let them know."

"Do you think I'm going to tell them about the music?"

"I don't know. Are you?"

*How could she twist this
poor girl around this way for her own
ends. She's supposed to put her patient's
interest before her own. This can't stand.*

"No. I'm not. Fran, watch my hands, please." He slowly unplugged the headset from the Walkman and then gently lifted it off and eased it over her head. He placed his hand out to indicate he wanted the player. She unclipped it and gave it to him. "Where can I put this, so it never troubles you again, Fran?" He made sure she was still watching his hands as he spoke and was wrapping the headset wires around the Walkman.

She looked back to the Statue, almost out of sight around the curve of the shoreline. She cast her eyes toward the water, telling him wordlessly—Down There! He turned to make sure everyone he could see was looking at the Jersey pier the pilot was lining the ferry up to enter. With no more than the word, "Done," Aaron-John cast the Walkman and headset overboard and they watched them sink in the ferry's churning wake.

"It's our secret, Fran." She smiled at him and nodded, somewhat unconvincingly. But he knew she'd have the time she said she'd need. "Just tell them the noises didn't bother you, Fran. You don't have to tell them why. And they'll never think to ask." Now, let's go and find that Miss Hand.

*Strange configuration on this ferry.
The stern and the bow are identical.
They fit right in shore to shore, without
having to turn around. That's what I feel
like right now. John Doe at the bow
where everyone here sees. Aaron Abcock
in the stern of the past. Always there,
just not what they see at first.
And I get to pick which way to go.*

x

On the ride back, the three of them sat on the wall-mounted molded plastic benches facing into the bus, each lost in private thoughts. The ladies sat on the right side of the bus. The gentleman on the left side across the way. He leaned forward once to ask them what the letters L-O-T-T-O meant. These alphabet groups still intrigued him. He saw this set on

the discarded newspapers on the empty seat next to him and on the ads that lined the curved lower ceiling and upper walls of the bus, above the windows.

*Remember how you let me
buy a ticket once, Dad?
With Mom's birthday for
the numbers? 'Cause I
thought if the numbers
were lucky enough to win,
she might come back to
live with us?*

"LOTTO is one of several lottery games the state conducts, John," Beverly Hand explained, with something of a chill in her voice. These were the first words the two had exchanged since he stunned her on the ferry. She had to make certain that Fran was not aware that a rift had torn apart their traveling trio. "You buy tickets at candy stores, or liquor stores, or newspaper stands. The numbers you've picked get printed on your ticket. You try to pick numbers that might match those to be drawn from the state-run Lottery machine later in the night or week. If you're lucky enough to have picked the numbers that come out of the machine, you win a monetary prize. Twice a week the prize is worth millions of dollars. It's legalized gambling for people who can't, or won't, go down to Atlantic City."

"What is Atlantic City?" Aaron-John's voice was distant, but Bev heard it enough to answer anyway.

"That's a place in south Jersey that has legalized casinos where people can gamble around the clock. There's poker and blackjack and roulette and baccarat, almost anything you can imagine to bet on. You can do it in the casinos there. Sports, horse races, jai alai." She reached over and picked up a crumpled copy of the *New York Daily News*. She opened to the handicapping list for the races. "See John, the papers print out the names of the horses racing at different tracks in the area. The numbers after the horse's and jockey's names are the odds on the horse winning. You can bet on these at Atlantic City and in storefronts with signs that have the green letters OTB on them."

She was paying attention to John more than she had all day. She found it had served as a good way to pass the time on the first part bus ride, with less tension and worry about the day's trip for her and Fran, who was quietly attentive to their gambling discussion.

*Good God, more initials. Wait,
What's that?*

"And what do those letters mean, OTB?"

"It stands for Off-Track Betting." It means you don't have to go to the racetrack to place a bet on a horse race." Then suddenly realizing where they were, with only two bus stops to go, the therapist became impatient. She had let John become too much of a distraction. Fortunately, he seemed placated and became quiet. So, there was no argument for Fran to witness.

*This is all falling into place now.
I don't know if I can take any more in
one day. I know I am Aaron Abcock.
I know I engineered HVAC systems.
And when, from below decks, I heard Bev
calling Fran, I recalled hearing something
I wasn't supposed to—when I was looking
at a building's system design.
There were voices traveling through a duct
from upstairs, above where I was working.
That was in this Atlantic City—that Bev
just said was a haven for gamblers.
The two guys I was hazy about before
must have followed me from there
up to the airport at Newark.
That's where they beat me and left me
for dead. That hard case kid said
that finding a person you're looking for
at the Statue of Liberty was a long shot.
That's what reminded me about gambling
in the first place. Then these signs here.
Wonder what the odds are on finding yourself?
They're not listed in the sports pages.*

Aaron-John folded the newspaper back in half and placed it on his lap. The full-page photo on the back of the *News* caught his eye. He opened it up and held it out in front of himself.

"Hey, Beverly. What's this a picture of on the back page?"

She was too busy for him. Only one more stop to go. She was collecting up their things and getting Fran ready to leave the bus. She snapped, almost nastily, "That's some player on the Mets catching a fly ball in a baseball game."

*Daddy, I bet I know the
player if I see the picture.
When I get back home, I'm
still going to watch the games
on TV. I might have to put the
sound on though, since you won't
be there to explain it to me.*

*Got to be careful here. Can't let
her begin to suspect.*

"But what's all that stuff behind him?"

"I don't know." Fran was looking out the window at the double-parked cars that were blocking the bus stop and slowing the driver down.

Little did the two of them know that Fran was closely listening to them. “Let me see, John. I used to watch baseball with my Dad.” She reached across so he could give her the newspaper. “That’s ivy. Out in Chicago there’s a baseball park where ivy covers the outfield wall. See. Look here—closely,” she said, handing him back the paper and pointing. “You can see the brick wall behind the ivy. According to that caption, the Mets play there tonight. You might be able to watch the game on TV back at *The Terraces*, John. Sometimes it’s on channel 9, WOR-TV. See, up there on the wall by the door, John. It’s an ad for the Mets with the 9 in the bottom corner.” Fran sat back again, leaving him with his thoughts, and going back to her own. Beverly Hand stopped her fussing. She was taken aback by this exchange and was left wondering what was going on with this newfound ease of conversation between her two travelers.

*The noise on this bus isn't getting to me,
Daddy. And I was really listening to two
voices at once just then, and following along.
I can't wait to get home. I know I'll do fine.
I miss the work on my computer. And everybody
at the market will help me with my food orders.
I just know they will. And I'll have the flowers
in the yard that mom used to say she wished
we'd have growing each season.*

xi

Beverly Hand continued keyboarding her report while all the residents of *The Terraces of Hoboken—A Health and Rehabilitation Center* were at dinner. She did not take the time to stop in on them, as she might have done on most other days. She wanted to get this report into the hands of the people she had to please to win her case. She put it all down about Fran Stico. How well Fran did. There was no mention of the Walkman and headset, and she played down the incident on the PATH platform. She attributed the rocking of the train car as the aid in soothing Fran’s anxiety attack. That, and Fran’s progress in therapy.

She finished late. Fran Stico had already turned in for the night, apparently exhausted by her adventure. A light in the TV lounge drew her in. Alone in the dimly lit room, watching the Cubs play the Mets at Wrigley Field, was John Doe. She observed him from afar to see if it looked like he made any progress. Now that her report was done about Fran, she allowed herself to wonder about this strange man.

He appeared to be deciphering a commercial break between innings. For her own part, therapist Hand was fascinated by the breathtaking view from the Goodyear blimp. It provided a video panorama of the city in the early color-splash of a summer sunset: the graceful spans across the Illinois River, an urban necklace that began the water bridge from the Great Lakes and eventually on to the Gulf of Mexico; the sleek Sears Tower, now no longer the world’s tallest building, standing out against the finger-painted clouds of the evening sky; the cars gliding along Lake Shore Drive, with only half of them using dusk-

defying headlights; and lastly the serpentine El, making its half-empty, window-winking way through the Loop in the financial district. This was the type of city she could imagine working and living within. Either here in New York, or there in Chicago, or even way out in San Diego. She wondered to which of these parts of the country she was heading.

*So, Aaron Abcock, here is your city.
That's why John Doe thought it was strange
the trains ran underground, the bridges were so tall,
and the river too wide. And why what they
call the World Trade Center seemed
to have one tower too many.
Why the ivy on brick walls at Wrigley Field
made Battery Park's brown stones so out of place.*

Miss Hand's voice interrupted his musings as a car commercial appeared on the screen. "Anything come back to you yet, John?" Bev pulled up a chair and sat so she could see him without blocking his view of the game. He seemed very interested in the car, a new Dodge Intrepid.

"Nothing substantial. But I must tell you that I won't be seeking your help to make any further discoveries."

"You mean you are going to ask to stay with your other therapists?"

"Something like that. I don't know what yet."

"You should be careful, John. You wouldn't want ..." She stopped talking because he was obviously too interested in the car to hear her threat. "John?"

"Wasn't the guy who headed the Bicentennial involved with Dodge cars somehow?"

*Why does that car look so familiar?
Did I leave one at the airport?*

"What?" Bev was accustomed to what seemed like incongruous comments from Fran Stico, but this was a new pattern for John Doe.

"On the trip today, some guide said a place was fixed for the Bicentennial. Here's an ad on the TV for a Dodge. So, I asked you, didn't some big shot at Dodge have something to do with those celebrations?"

"Oh, yeah. Not for the American Bicentennial—but for the Centennial observance of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. Lee Iacocca." She looked at him. "Do you recall where you were for the Bicentennial in 1976, John? That might help us," she paused a bit, "or you," a shorter pause, "discover more about your past."

*This woman is getting on my nerves
worse than Anna ever did.
Why can't these women just
leave me alone to my work and ...*

He turned from the TV and bore down a harsh stare at Beverly, as she stood to leave the room, with what Aaron-John thought was a wince of discomfort. "Frankly, Miss Hand, I

am more interested in my future than in my past. And I'm not so sure one is going to depend on the other."

She huffed and let him take in the dismissive look she sent his way.

As she pivoted to walk out on him for what she hoped was the last time, all she could think of was getting her shoes off and icing her feet as soon as she got back to her Ninth Avenue apartment. But his parting statement stopped those feet cold—in their tracks.

In his newly developing Aaron-John voice he subtly told her, "And by the way, you don't know what became of that Walkman when they find it missing and start asking about it later this week."

xii

Three evenings later, Fran Stico took a look around her kitchen. Everything seemed in place and the groceries were in the refrigerator and pantry. She switched off the overhead light—a set of six low-watt incandescent bulbs suspended over the round wooden table. She turned to make her way to her own bed.

Across the Hudson, Beverly Hand was sipping white wine and re-editing her letter of resignation on the computer screen. She set the wine glass down and moved Russell Grange's congratulatory evaluation letter aside. Then she picked up her preferred letter from the day's mail—the letter of invitation to join the staff at Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein College of Medicine. It was the fifth time she was reading that one. It went better with white wine than the cheese and crackers she polished off somewhere between the second and third reading, and whose crumbs had fallen off the desk and into her ample lap when she set it back down next to the screen with the blinking cursor.

In the recreation room back at *The Terraces*, Aaron Abcock was watching a late-night showing of the afternoon game from Wrigley Field. After the Mets left town, the Atlanta Braves came to the windy city for a two-game series. Today's was the "get-away" game, played in the afternoon. Aaron was catching the contest courtesy of Ted Turner's TBS national rebroadcast, after the other residents were in bed for the night. With every inning he was taking in, more and more of the puzzle pieces of his earlier life were coming back. Baseball in Chicago seemed to have a way of doing that. Not enough yet to figure out what he wanted to do. Not sufficiently to decide who he was free to become. But the game still had a few more innings to play out.