

Chapter 1

One minute Sonia “Sonny” Faber blamed herself—I’m totally undisciplined. The next she decided, no, my metabolism’s haywire. It’s my thyroid.

It was Monday morning. She and her taxi from the Near North Side of Chicago and her various body parts were approaching her office building on La Salle Street. All weekend long she’d been feasting on ice cream. Herds of rhinoceros-sized chocolate molecules—two-plus quarts of them—were now stampeding through her bloodstream. Her rear end was still OK—arguably. But without discipline you’d have to say it was endangered.

As she traversed the red marble lobby to the bank of tower elevators, she came upon something totally unexpected. LuAnne, her Executive Assistant, was there to ambush her. Ordinarily LuAnne waited upstairs on the 70th floor.

“Don’t enter,” LuAnne cried, extending both arms to block her path. “Osama bin Laden has struck again!” She opened her fist and displayed a metal disk about the size of a dime.

Always classy, today LuAnne was decked out in a simple ensemble, her straight blue skirt, her white blouse and her oversized red and blue bow tie with the white stars. By contrast, she herself had become a colorless “suit” and she was in fact wearing a suit. She and her new designer linen were 100% gray except only for her silver lapel ornament. Maybe she should dash home to change.

Leaning forward to inspect LuAnne’s offering, she detected the Opium perfume which she’d given LuAnne for Christmas. She peered at the object. “OK. So what makes you finger bin Laden?”

LuAnne ignored the question, simply tapped the disk with a painted nail. “I’ll bet you don’t realize what this is.”

“Actually I don’t.”

“Well, you can’t work upstairs. I rented some space on the 14th floor. I’ve rented furniture—a desk for you, a desk for me and so forth. They’re in place already. Sonny, your telephone was bugged! I would imagine your whole office.”

Although she always relied on LuAnne’s judgment, she was dubious about LuAnne’s imagination. “Can’t be,” she said. “We were routinely swept just last month.” As usual, LuAnne had an agenda. From her purse, she fished out the notebook in which she kept track of the daily and weekly deadlines. She flipped it open and said, “Things like this always happen at the worst time. I’m to call Litigation the instant you arrive. Their brief’s due this afternoon in the 7th Circuit and you criticized their earlier draft. The pharmaceutical companies need your comments ASAP on their possible merger, so I canceled your appointment with the Investment Analysts. That can wait until you’re less busy. You have to OK the Kalamazoo stock split. I told the Bar Association that you will not be at the committee meeting.”

LuAnne kept on droning through this week’s schedule, but she interrupted her. “Enough,” she said. “I’m going upstairs to the scene of the crime—pardon me, I mean the alleged crime. I’ve got to have a telephone. If it’s bugged, I’ll just be careful.”

LuAnne said, “I expected as much. By noon on the 14th floor you’ll have 6 new lines that are secure. They’ll be top secret. Nobody will have the slightest idea where we are. On the 70th floor, you can do routine work, like reviewing the brief, but on the 14th you can do all of the confidential stuff.”

She almost chuckled at LuAnne. LuAnne was in her glory, her face flushed with anticipation, her eyes wide and actually glowing.

She squeezed LuAnne's elbow and dragged her into an elevator. "Come on, Kid. Please answer my searching question. By what reasoning do you pin this on bin Laden?" "Who else?"

Arriving at the 70th floor, she waved to the receptionist and barreled down the corridor, forcing LuAnne to trot to keep up. As they passed the fax room, they encountered three suits—one male and two females who were earnestly conferring. Each paused and said, "Good morning, Sonny." Each ignored LuAnne. She shrugged and whispered to LuAnne over her shoulder, "Don't mind them, Kid. Young lawyers are natural born turkeys."

At the corner, by the door to her office, LuAnne overtook her and darted ahead, blocking her path again and holding her finger to her lips.

"Okay," she said to LuAnne, "I vow. Not one word." She sidestepped her and wriggled past.

Somebody had once labeled her office "La Salle Street's Gallery of Modern Art." Yes, it was huge and somewhat of a show place, but it was tasteful and not at all cluttered. She glanced around. Everything looked ordinary, and yet a tiny bug undoubtedly could be planted anywhere. In the wormwood frame of one of her original paintings or in the coils of some of her sculpture pieces a miniaturized video camera could be concealed. Naturally her desk itself had nothing on it, because LuAnne invariably cleared it at night and locked each and every paper in the secrecy vault.

The simplest possibility was that LuAnne had discovered a little gray disk, had decided it was a bug, and had escalated it into a new Osama bin Laden incident.

In case there were an actual bugging, she wanted to talk with John Palmer. Out of all of her partners in the firm, he was her buddy, her confidant. She wanted to say, why would anybody be doing this? I'm an open book; I have no secrets. Palmer would correct her. Palmer would remind her that she was the mastermind. Some of her decisions were worth fortunes in the stock market.

Suddenly, as if reading her thoughts, LuAnne said, "Heads up, Sonny. Here comes Mr. Palmer. Today is kickoff."

Indeed John Palmer was at the door, leaning into the office, his bald head gleaming, rather like a searchlight. Behind him there was a troop of young people. There were 25 new summer associates; tomorrow there would be the other 25. Every year her firm, Faber, Margolin, spent a million bucks recruiting top first-year and second-year students from the top law schools—Harvard, Yale, Chicago, Michigan, Stanford. Palmer was in charge of selecting the students and assigning them to partners for the summer.

As they entered, she shook hands with each one. "I'm Sonny Faber," she said, and she proceeded to greet each one by name. As she'd expected, they were astonished. She'd simply studied their applications and memorized their photographs. Occasionally she mentioned a school or a campus feature or a particular professor or a local newspaper.

The two outside walls of her corner office featured giant windows that rose from the floor to rounded arches near the ceiling. "Go on," she said, shooing them over, "you'd better take your very last look at the City of Chicago. At most law firms, summer associates are on vacation. At Faber, Margolin we overwork you. I trust you're all familiar the fundamental maxim our profession lives by."

"What's that?" somebody called.

“The law is a jealous mistress. You guys will be using not only LEXIS and WESTLAW but everything there is. Around here we’re very big——we’re huge——on research. What we are is a boot camp. That’s what you’ve got yourselves into. You’ll be drafting contracts, wills, trusts. You’ll be writing briefs. If you’re lucky, maybe on Sunday mornings you’ll have time to glance at a newspaper. Maybe you’ll have time for a cup of coffee before you come back to the office. Frankly, I doubt it.”

There was laughter, and she sidled to Palmer. Out of the corner of her mouth, mindful that she was disobeying LuAnne, she whispered, “LuAnne claims Ed Gallagher bugged my telephone.”

“We know your girl’s paranoid.”

“Was it bugged or wasn’t it? I won’t tell her you called her my ‘girl.’”

“Oh, it was bugged alright, but she’s nuts. What’s in it for Ed? What’s in it for anyone?”

He poked her and then, as LuAnne had done, held his finger to his lips.

She wanted to say, client secrets, that’s all. Instead she mumbled, “I don’t think Ed did it, but I’m going to tweak him anyway. I’ve been so busy that I keep forgetting to tweak him. Even if he’s innocent, he needs to be tweaked.”

Gesturing toward the students at the windows, Palmer said, “I beg you, Sonny, please do not do anything at this lunch today. Subtlety is not your thing. You use a meat ax.”

He turned away and called out, “OK, gang, we’ve marveled at Ms. Faber. Let’s go marvel at the library and the computers. We’ll allow Ms. Faber to do her work. She’ll do it at her usual astronomical hourly rates. We do not operate on Central Daylight Time. We operate on billable hours. Billable hours——that’s the concept by means of which our noble profession

manages to pay the rent. You'll see her again at lunch. Meanwhile, we've got seven more floors and 300 more partners to meet."

When they were gone, she half sat on the edge of her desk and contemplated LuAnne, who was in her line of sight, unlocking the secrecy vault in the adjacent office. LuAnne was wrong. Because Ed Gallagher was the head of the tax department, there was no reason whatever for him to bug her phone. He knew every client secret that she knew.

On the other hand, LuAnne was shrewd. If she said Gallagher, then probably it was Gallagher.

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It was almost noon. She stretched a giant rubber band around the pharmaceutical merger file she was working on and handed it to LuAnne to lock up. Not wanting to be caught waddling into the luncheon meeting when everyone was already there to observe her, she went to the corridor and practically sprinted to the elevator. She rode to the 68th floor and was able to breeze into Faber, Margolin's private dining room 5 minutes early.

She was hungry and began to salivate as soon as she detected the aroma of roasting chicken. The air conditioning made the room a trifle chilly, but it would warm up when all of the others arrived.

Theodore, one of the waiters, beckoned her to her table, where she spotted her place card. She seated herself. He pointed to a pitcher of ice water, and she nodded. There were occasions when she had him fill her glass with vodka.

Of the tables for 2, 4, 6, and 8, she was at one for 4. Reaching over, she checked the other place cards. Palmer was to be opposite her with Stefanski to her left and Berggren to her

right. Stefanski and Berggren were both first year Yale. Palmer had given her first choice, and she'd selected them.

Stefanski was 6 feet 6. You couldn't tell from his photograph, but he'd proved to be amazingly skinny. He was from Austin, Texas. He didn't weigh 10 pounds. It was interesting that he had a Master's in astronomy.

Berggren was a Phi Beta Kappa who had a BA in history. Therefore she had lots in common with her. She was a Phi Bete, too, and her father had been a professor of history. Berggren was tall for a woman, buxom, totally wholesome, terrifically good looking and blonde. As soon as she'd glimpsed her this morning, she realized that half the men in the firm would fall in love with her. She must have some defect. If she had a defect, it might be her hair. Her hair didn't seem to have a natural curl. She was number 2 in her class, with Stefanski right behind her as number 3.

Everything reminded her of Beth and Tom, her two children. Stefanski and Berggren way overshadowed them. Beth had been an adorable baby and pre-teen, but these days she never heard from Beth except indirectly through the bills from the therapeutic boarding high school in Rochester. As for Tom, who was older, he was born 6 months before she and Jerry were married. A year ago he'd disappeared from college. When he surfaced, he was backpacking somewhere in Europe. Nowadays she did more or less hear from him regularly. He didn't know how to write but was adept at his Blackberry, sending terse messages which LuAnne would receive, transcribe and forward to her. "Please send \$300 asap."

Sometimes she wept herself to sleep, and she had to remind herself of what she'd learned years ago in a Tough Love group. Tom and Beth were on their own in life; they had to do it all for themselves; no way she could do it for them.

At last the dining room's double doors opened, and in came Palmer with his brood. Also he was leading in a phalanx of other partners. These partners were the ones who had one or another of this first batch of summer associates assigned to them. She was the only partner who had two students.

Palmer was bringing in the Mysterious Geezer, too. He was Mr. Cartwright, the old man who was to be the luncheon speaker.

The first partner in line was Ed Gallagher. If he was guilty, he didn't look it. In fact, he was winking at her, which was consistent with both guilt and innocence. If she were the jury, she'd vote innocent, but at this lunch her intent was simply to have some fun. Ed Gallagher was the ideal easy mark. Oblivious to everything except whatever he himself was thinking, he was never aware when he was being kidded.

Palmer approached her table. In his charcoal gray suit and dapper as always, he looked rather like a midget, because he was shepherding Berggren and Stefanski. The top of his head, with his one thin swath of hair distributed over his entire pate, came only to the level of Berggren's chin. He was wearing the red and black geometric tie she'd given him for his last birthday.

He held Berggren's chair for her. Good old John Palmer was the man from a bygone era. He was courtly, with pre-feminist manners that he'd never relinquished or even adjusted.

She shook hands with Stefanski and then with Berggren. "So," she said, "we meet again."

Stefanski, the Texan, wore a string tie that wobbled on his Adam's apple as he grinned and replied, "Hi, Ma'am." There was something ingratiating about him. He was Lyndon Johnson reborn, another one of those persuasive, preacher-like southwestern politicians.

Berggren merely smiled, displaying lovely teeth, which reminded her to get LuAnne to schedule a routine dental appointment for her. Berggren's tan silk suit looked expensive. Her own suit felt tight, and in fact she couldn't quite button her jacket. Berggren's gold hair rested on her shoulders. Her own hair was ash blond and was two or three weeks overdue for a frosting. LuAnne, she said to herself, I need an appointment.

The waiters came immediately and served shrimp cocktails.

As they began to eat, she said, "OK, guys, this is not a leisurely lunch. We have 45 minutes, since you two have to get to work. What say we jump in and get acquainted. I'll tell you who we are. First off, Stefanski, I want you to know that you and I are the same. We're both scientists. I got a BS in physics and then went to law school, too. So that's who I am."

Stefanski hoisted his glass. "In that case, would a good-luck toast to me be in order? Sometimes I have career misgivings, but evidently I'm on the right track."

"Let's hope. Now let's consider John Palmer over there. He's too modest, so I volunteer to tell you about him. What can I say? The man's an encyclopedia. You will find that out."

Berggren turned to Palmer. "I'm intrigued. At this law firm, I'll bet you have a unique title, such as 'the Britannica Partner;' or would it be something more legal and prosaic?"

"Neither legal nor prosaic. I'm Sonny's Provost, whatever that may be. No doubt Sonny will be willing to define Provost."

"Hey, I'm no dictionary, but there is a history. At my university, the head guy, the Chancellor, appointed a man his Provost, and he explained the man's job. He said, 'I am the shepherd. The Provost is my crook.' That whole concept was so amazingly apt for John Palmer that I persuaded Faber, Margolin to adopt it. We're unique. Schools have Provosts. No other law firm has one."

Berggren said, "So Mr. Palmer is your crook. What exactly are the functions of the crook?" Her voice was deep, throaty and pleasant. This girl could be a smash TV anchorperson as well as a heartbreaker. She was certain that Gallagher, sitting at the table just behind her, was eyeing Berggren and drooling.

She said to Berggren, "OK. Since you're asking me, I may have to reveal something they don't teach in law school."

Berggren gasped. "I wonder if my ears deceive me. I'm from Yale. Could there possibly be any such thing?"

"You ask, what are the Provost's functions? It's really quite simple. John Palmer's function is to be my personal automated teller machine."

Stefanski said to Berggren, "I knew it! Isn't that exactly what I told you? Now perhaps Miss Faber will explain it to you more fully."

"Last month I won 1,000 bucks. I bet \$250 Palmer could name every U.S. vice president. Then I said, 'Quadruple or nothing. Going all the way back to John Jay, let's make him name every U.S. Supreme Court justice.' That's when somebody ran out to Barnes and Noble and came back with a World Almanac. Whenever I'm short of cash, I round up Palmer. He and I head for the nearest saloon. We hustle the people at the bar. He does baseball and boxing stats, British royalty from day one. You name it."

Berggren said, "Bonnie and Clyde! As a future lawyer, I believe it's my duty to turn you two in. I expect there's a substantial reward."

Palmer was blushing. "Sonny and I take turns being press agent. She has an exploit or two also."

As he began an anecdote, Berggren and Stefanski watched him, and she turned around to nod to Gallagher. Gallagher was supposed to be talking with Goldstein, the Harvard student assigned to him, but he was ignoring Goldstein. She'd caught him, instead, watching Berggren through his rimless eyeglasses and straining to overhear.

Although Gallagher was a slender, good-looking man, who could eat anything he wanted without getting fat, she characterized him as an iguana. Sometimes his eyes were half-closed, as they were here in his ogling Berggren, and sometimes his tongue darted out. Also he was what LuAnne called "handy," so Berggren had better watch out. Now he looked up and wigwagged his fingers. She wigwagged right back.

She decided to use Berggren as a decoy. She leaned toward Berggren, as if about to whisper something, and then gestured with her head toward Gallagher. Affecting a confidential tone of voice that was loud enough for him to hear, she said, "Don't look now, Berggren, but Gallagher in back of me is head of our tax department. I think he's the best in the city."

Berggren said, "I'm quite interested in federal tax."

"I know that. So you could be working with him if you want to." She paused to see Berggren's reaction. "Palmer gave you to me, because you're also interested in securities, which is a good bit of what I do. Are you OK on that?"

When Berggren nodded, she decided to fire her first shot. She said, "I want you to notice something, Berggren, something that's very, very interesting. Gallagher's got Goldstein. Do you see that? Goldstein's from Harvard. Do you notice that he seems to be ignoring Goldstein?"

Palmer immediately intervened. He said, "Ahem there, Sonny. I'm wearing my blinders, because I regard the four of us at this table as a world unto ourselves."

“John, please permit me to remind you that no man is an island, not even the four of us. Berggren, do you see the same thing I see? Do you see what Goldstein is wearing?”

Berggren said, “Oh, yes.”

Goldstein had a blue and white yarmulke pinned to his curly hair. She said to Berggren, “Do you think that could have anything to do with his being ignored?”

Palmer sighed and said, “Now perhaps you guys can understand what I was telling you a minute ago, that our Sonny Faber just loves to play games, but look here.” He pointed to his watch. “Our 45 minutes have dwindled to half. So what I want to know, Mr. Stefanski, is this. Why does an astronomer turn his back on the cosmos? Why does he betake himself into law school?”

Quickly she put her hand on Stefanski’s wrist and was almost able to close her fingers around it. “Please let me answer, Stefanski, and then you tell him whether I’m right. You see, John——golly, that’s a good question——there are two kinds of lawyer.” She rotated a little and tilted her head backwards toward Gallagher. “Tax lawyers are one kind. Stefanski and I are the other. We’re the good kind.”

Berggren was staring at her hand on Stefanski. She couldn’t tell whether Berggren was annoyed.

Since there was now a definite hush in the room, she knew that Gallagher and Goldstein and practically everybody else was listening in. She certainly didn’t want to embarrass Goldstein, but she’d gone too far to turn back. She said, “I’m glad we’re discussing this, Berggren, because there’s still time to save yourself from this fate.”

Stefanski said, “What fate is that, Ma’am? What’s our kind of lawyer?”

“Tax lawyers worship a golden calf. They do not care about Goldstein or anybody else for that matter, because all they care about is numbers, as in dollars or sections of the Internal Revenue Code. They’re always chanting ‘Section 302’ and ‘Section 401(a)’ and things like that.”

She’d been holding Stefanski’s wrist the whole time. Now she released him but leaned over and put one arm across his shoulders. My God, he was skinny! “John, I wonder if you remembered to bring a camera.”

Palmer didn’t reply. He was sipping coffee and glowering at her over his cup. “Meat ax,” he muttered.

“I was hoping you’d have a camera to record Stefanski and me. Forget your career misgivings, Stefanski. You and I chose law because we believe in people instead of numbers. We believe there is order in human nature just as there is in physical nature. No camera, huh? Sometimes I find myself so absolutely righteous that I feel like slaying the other guys, but I suppose nobody brought a sword of justice.”

Berggren said, “Could you use a fork?” She handed her Stefanski’s fork.

“Thanks. I guess I’ll have to use a fork.” She took the fork and pointed it back over her shoulder. “Turn your heads, everybody, and take a look at Gallagher. He and the Internal Revenue types are milking the golden calf—I’m pretty sure that’s what you do with a golden calf. While Stefanski and I are helping the downtrodden, Gallagher and his crew are chanting section numbers.”

She released Stefanski. She sat back and faced him. “Now let’s prove my point. You tell them, Stefanski. Speak right up. Would you or I ever ignore a fellow human being just because of what he’s wearing? Would you or I ever bug somebody’s telephone?”

Palmer groaned.

As Stefanski started to reply, this time it was Berggren who cut him off. She said, “Watch it, Ron. You’re being hustled.”

He answered, “Don’t worry. Nobody ever hustles a Texan. I work on a ranch every summer, and I know all about bugs. I use bugs all the time, Miss Faber—optical ones, telescopes. So I spy on things, too. Personally I despise eavesdropping. Even granting that there are ethical issues, however, the bugs themselves are merely observational devices. From a scientific point of view, bugs are nothing but hearing aids.”

Berggren slapped the table, rattling her silverware in her plate. “No!” she said. She shook her head so that her gold hair swept back and forth across her shoulders. “They’re most certainly not hearing aids. You’re trying to separate them from the ethics. You can’t do that. Bugs are inherently evil.”

“Good for you, Berggren. You’re my kind of lawyer.” She reached over and punched Berggren’s arm.

Stefanski said, “Hey! punch me, too. I hate eavesdropping.”

She punched him. “You’re a Texan. You know bugs. You despise them. You despise them with every fiber of your being. You’re my kind of lawyer, too.”

Then, rotating suddenly, she aimed the fork at Gallagher and said, “How about you, Ed? You’re a tax lawyer. We can see how you stand on yarmulkes. Tell us how you stand on eavesdropping.”

Palmer growled something unintelligible, jumped up and intervened again. Tapping his knife on his water glass, he said, “Ladies and gentlemen, pray continue with your cherries jubilee and your coffee, but I am in charge of tempus, and tempus fugits. So we now present a

minimal ceremony that won't prevent you from getting to work this afternoon. Mr. Bill Cartwright, please favor us with a greeting. Please limit yourself to no more than one or two words."

She wasn't finished with Gallagher and didn't welcome the interruption. However, from the table to her left, the Mysterious Geezer now rose.

His hair was white and crew cut, and there was one long vertical furrow on each cheek. His posture was strictly military, perfectly erect and seeming to confirm the speculation she'd heard that he'd been a high-ranking army or navy or espionage hero during World War II. Everything else about him also seemed to confirm such a theory. Although he had to be at least 80 or 85, he seemed robust and vigorous. Something in his aura commanded attention. Everyone became silent.

He said, "I'm obliged to use three or four words." His voice was surprisingly deep and forceful. "But, unlike Mr. Palmer, I am not going to call you 'ladies and gentlemen.' The reason is that the federal government wants to prohibit us from differentiating male from female. I do not want some FBI agent to swoop in here and haul me away for sex discrimination. Sometimes I fear things may be coming to that in our democracy."

He took a sip of water. "When I was a law student, would you believe that there was not even one pretty lawyer in my class? Now I am surveying the 25 of you, and I am going to be quite bold. I am going to defy the current rules of society, and I hereby declare that there is no federal or state statute that can prevent me from observing that 12 of you are very pretty.

"That's all I'm going to say on that subject, except I caution you——don't blame my silence on my age. Somebody might turn you in for age discrimination."

There was some laughter, and Palmer led some clapping. The Mysterious Geezer continued, "Here are my three or four words. A minute ago I noticed that we were all overhearing a conversation about lawyers." He turned to face Sonny. "I hasten to assure you, Ms. Faber, we were not using a bug."

Sonny called, "Hear, hear!" He nodded to her and then resumed. "Ms. Faber, you were decreeing that there are two kinds of lawyer. Maybe you're right, or maybe not. Nobody around here ever contradicts you, but I for one did not understand your point.

"Be that as it may, I'm here to say that you all have come to exactly the right place. Faber, Margolin is a great law firm. Whatever kind of lawyer there is, that kind is here. Some of you will be in tax. I'm a farm boy, so I happen to know you won't have to milk calves. Ms. Faber, you're definitely wrong about that.

"Nevertheless some of you young folks will be the ones milking the golden calf or whatever tax lawyers do. Some will be in litigation, some in appellate, securities, anti-trust, probate, banking, real estate, mergers and acquisitions. Keep your eyes and ears open. Ask questions. Study your mentors here, and you will draw unending dividends from what you learn at Faber, Margolin these three months.

"And one more thing. Congratulations to you, and best wishes for the summer and for your careers."

As the Mysterious Geezer sat down, first the students and then the partners stood to applaud him. Palmer gave her a thumbs up. The Mysterious Geezer was somewhat garrulous, and there'd been concern about how he would perform.

She wanted to resume with Gallagher, but Palmer called out, “OK, everybody, let’s go do what Mr. Cartwright said. As they say in Superman, we’ll do it for truth, justice and the American way.”

She stayed in her chair until the crowd left, and then she recognized that only she and the Mysterious Geezer and the waiters remained. “Nice work,” she said. “In fact, perfect.”

He said, “Do you have just a minute? I have something to discuss. It’s quite important to me but not earthshaking.”

Although the Mysterious Geezer was smart and actually rather witty, she never enjoyed conversations with him, because he grabbed hold of a subject and then rambled on and on with a lifetime of anecdotes and illustrations. She said, “I’ll get my assistant, LuAnne, to set up an appointment later in the week. Will that be time enough?”

As the Mysterious Geezer pondered, the doors opened, and Gallagher took one step into the room. He said, “Would you mind letting me talk privately with Sonny? That was a fine speech.”

The Mysterious Geezer rose and saluted. As she watched him depart, she asked Gallagher, “Who was that masked man?”

Gallagher sat in Berggren’s chair alongside her, and she was grateful he was using breath mints. “Sonny, I’ll come right to the point. You are an asshole.”

“That’s sweet, Ed. I assume you mean a Jewish asshole.” Gallagher labeled everyone either Jewish or Gentile. She’d heard him identify Palmer as “one of our Gentile partners.” Although fewer than 20% of the partners were Jewish, she once overheard him say, “I’m non-sectarian. I’m with a Jewish law firm.” Three years ago he’d fought to have the firm be named Gallagher, Faber & Margolin.

Now he brushed some bread crumbs from the table. “Come off this Jewish stuff, please. I’m fed up with you and your asshole secretary and that incredible Osama bin Laden shit. And then there’s your behavior just a moment ago, which was not only inexcusably rude but inappropriate in front of our students. However, I’m a very forgiving man. I’m here to make a deal.”

“If you stop bugging my telephone, what is it I have to do for you?”

He raised both arms in frustration. “I’m not going to respond to your charge. The fact is, Sonny, I don’t give a good flying fuck what you say on your telephone. I don’t give a fuck whether you’re calling from your own office or pissing away the firm’s money renting some little phone-booth office on the fucking goddamned 14th floor.”

“OK, Ed, I’ll suspend judgment. I’ll listen to your deal, but there’s one major condition.”

“You have but to name it.”

“You must please clean up your language. There are those who say you talk like that in front of clients. If so, it’s not right. You know I personally don’t give a shit, if I may put it that way, but there are certain people who do. They have squawked. I think they’re correct.”

“Point taken, Sonny, point taken. Right is right, and you may consider me a changed man already. Now here’s what, and let’s put everything else behind us. I dislike that Goldstein kid. I can’t relate to him, and it’s not because of that effing skull cap of his.”

“Of course it isn’t,” she said. “You like his skull cap.”

“And it’s not because of his fruit cocktail and kosher fish. Personally, I’m democratic. If I can eat shrimp, he can eat shrimp; if I can eat chicken, he can eat chicken. But look, he’s second year Harvard, top man in his class. He’s going to be as smart a Jewish lawyer as can be. I want to trade him to you for that good-looking broad you’ve got. I can relate to her.”

“I’ll think about that, Ed.” She got up and shook hands with him. “I’ll think about it overnight. What say we have breakfast tomorrow morning?”

He answered, “Same time. Same place.”

When they left the room together and walked down the long corridor toward the elevators, he said, “Don’t get me wrong. You’re a good-looking broad, too, but I’ve been studying you. I notice that lately you’re always the last person to leave every meeting.” He patted her on the behind. “Yes, you’ve become just the least little bit zaftig down there, but, hey, don’t you worry about it. On you it looks good.” He ducked into the library before she could answer.

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LuAnne handed her a stack of messages and flashed 14 fingers, reminding her they had to move.

“Not much point in that now,” she replied. “Gallagher knows you rented that space. He calls it our ‘phone booth.’”

“Aha! You see! He’s monitoring every word we say in here. Only Mr. Palmer and I knew about the 14th floor.”

“Whatever,” she said, riffling through the pile of messages. Half were from Jerry, but she tossed all of them aside. LuAnne had placed her blue and green folders, with current work, at the center of her desk. She pushed it all back to the corner. “Hell, LuAnne, I don’t feel like doing anything. Let’s have a half hour of fun. Please get me the summer associate files. I want Stefanski’s and Berggren’s and also I want that Harvard guy, Goldstein.”

As she watched LuAnne departing to the file cabinets in her adjoining office, she sat, kicked off her shoes and opened her bottom desk drawer. She rested her feet on it. It felt great.

If she lost some weight, there'd be less pressure, and her shoes would be more comfortable. On a yellow pad she scribbled a message for LuAnne. Then she leaned back and gazed over the city of Chicago. A light June haze blurred her view.

When LuAnne came to place the files on her desk, she tugged LuAnne's sleeve and pointed to the message. "1. Yes, Gallagher. He's definitely up to something. 2. Tonight I want to meet with Berggren and Stefanski—confidentially. 3. Don't use our phone here, but please arrange everything. Dinner at some medium-fancy place on Michigan Avenue or Near North."

The message was totally phony, because she didn't care one way or the other whether Gallagher knew she was meeting Berggren and Stefanski. Furthermore, still uncertain whether the room had actually been bugged, she knew Gallagher had no reason to bug it. That much was clear. Nevertheless she had to reward LuAnne. LuAnne was thriving on the intrigue. LuAnne was being very protective. Also, if LuAnne were encouraged to concoct a way of tweaking Gallagher further, that would be so much the better.

Now she herself was rewarded. With a grand flourish, LuAnne produced a cigarette lighter, wadded up the message and deposited it in an empty metal waste basket. She set fire to it. In no time there were little fingers of flame generating not just the smell of burnt paper but also a gray ribbon of smoke that rose and then dissipated in the breeze from the ventilating system. As soon as the flames went out, LuAnne scattered the black ashes with her ball point pen. Then LuAnne excused herself and dashed away, presumably to make her phone calls from the 14th floor.

With the Berggren, Stefanski, and Goldstein files on her lap, she settled back in her chair and deliberately summoned some advice Palmer had given her. If you value your life, he had said, do not ever underestimate Ed Gallagher.

I'm going to apply that advice, she thought. If Gallagher wants to swap students, there's got to be more to it than good-looking broads. There's got to be more to it than anti-Semitism. If this be paranoia, make the most of it.

She opened Berggren's file and began to read.

Chapter 2

At dinner with Berggren and Stefanski she was wondering, Who the hell am I? My student guidance record is Beth, the adolescent rebel, and Tom, the college dropout. Tom was backpacking somewhere in Europe. Berggren and Stefanski wanted career advice. Two bottles of red wine and then an after dinner cognac had loosened them all up.

“We’re also concerned,” Berggren said, “about Faber, Margolin. We like it here and are wondering whether this firm is under cyberattack. Did we come to the right place?”

Stefanski shook his head. “I’m not worried about that,” he said and then launched into what appeared to be his professorial stance. “Here’s how you find the culprit. What is a telephone bug? A telephone bug is merely a microphone to broadcast speech. You simply figure out who would expect to learn something from what is said aloud in your office. Does Mr. Gallagher fill that bill?”

Berggren said, “I felt sorry for Mr. Gallagher. Not to be out of line, but I thought you were unmerciful.”

“Oh dear. John Palmer blasted me, too. But believe me, all that was pure kidding around. I like Ed Gallagher and he likes me. I don’t think he had anything to do with the bugging.”

“That’s good,” Berggren said, “because, if you won’t be offended, yes, I would like to work with him on federal tax.”

Stefanski said, “So much for Mr. Gallagher. But then who bugged your office?”

“Well, Stefanski, whoever did it, I think it was an amateur job.”

“OK, but who was the amateur? Have you figured it out?”

She made a mental note. Wine and cognac. Evidently Stefanski was being fueled by the wine and cognac. Evidently they were capable of making him somewhat aggressive.

All the same he was right. Her task tonight was to pinpoint the culprit.

They finished their drinks and she dispatched Berggren and Stefanski into a cab to Hyde Park and flagged another for herself. This afternoon she'd ID'd the one person who definitely had a motive, and she needed to discuss it with Palmer. She was on her way to drop in on him at his John Hancock building apartment.

He opened the door and cried, “Sonny! Sonny!” His speech was slurred. Grabbing her arm to yank her in, he stumbled backward but was just able to avoid falling. He pulled her to the sofa and shoved her onto it. “I’m getting you a drink. Stay right there.”

According to her watch, it wasn't even 9:00 p.m. Just months ago his wife had died after lingering through pancreatic cancer. At the office it was no secret that Palmer would hit the bottle at night yet would miraculously show up totally sober the next morning. His drinking troubled her but she wasn't ready yet to intervene. He was her friend. He still needed to mourn.

Over at the portable bar cabinet, he sloshed a glassful for her. His hands and shirt cuffs got wet. Thrusting the drink to her, he managed to sprinkle a half dozen drops onto her skirt. She blotted them with a handkerchief from her purse and prayed they wouldn't stain. Her suit was practically brand new.

She rose and then took a small sip. “John, I just came to say hello. OK, now I've said it, so now I'll go home and talk with you tomorrow morning.”

He didn't respond.

“Will you be OK if I leave you alone?”

He subsided onto the sofa she'd just vacated. Although he seemed to pass out, a moment later he mumbled, "I'm OK. Thanks for coming." He managed a goodbye salute.

At her building she paid off the cab driver and checked her mailbox in the lobby. If it had ever happened before, she couldn't remember when. Zero mail. No letters, no advertising flyers, no credit card bills, nothing whatsoever. Zilch.

An amazing phenomenon, but an easy explanation because for two years she'd procrastinated. Jerry Faber had moved out, and she'd neglected to change her locks. So this bugging—why all of a sudden? She was visualizing him upstairs. He was actively bugging every room.

Sherlock Holmes had said, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

Why would Jerry Faber, who had been quiescent for two years now, suddenly start bugging her? She arrived at the obvious reason. Just last week he'd called her. "Hey, Sonny. How much is our art collection worth? Do you have some sort of inventory?"

Jerry Faber was preparing for a divorce action and, for one thing, he was relentless. You might say paranoid. As a negotiator, he had one style and one style only—hard ball. To get divorced, they had to have a property settlement, which meant they had to untangle 20 years. The art collection alone was at least a million and a half, three million if you included her office art. Gathering evidence, playing around with the latest electronic gimmicks, he'd be gunning, as usual, for more than his fair share.

So, she'd said to herself, the time has come.

Now, opening her front door, she had immediate confirmation. Today's mail for one thing. Exactly—there it was, inside the apartment, dumped haphazardly on the foyer table. Jerry was not noted for his neatness.

She checked the envelopes quickly. The one from Beth's school had been ripped open. It was a bill and, naturally, nothing from Beth herself. Nothing from Tom. No surprise there. Tom was strictly a telephone and email man. His handwriting was abominable. He never wrote letters or even postcards.

When she heard clanking and water running in the kitchen, she slipped off her shoes. Arming the pepper spray canister attached to her key chain and tiptoeing along the corridor, she encountered the unmistakable garlic of Jerry's special sauce.

He was there dumping spaghetti into a colander, live steam rising from the sink to swirl around his head and chest. His suit coat was draped on a chair, and he wore one of her aprons over his trousers. He had on her chef's hat from the Faber, Margolin office cookout summer before last. Because of those thick, dark curls, the hat was listing precariously. When he turned, she realized that he was in his undershirt but had a banner draped diagonally from his right shoulder. Bright red, blue, green and yellow letters proclaimed, "HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!"

She hugged him briefly, keeping her fists clenched and pressing her wrists against his hairy arms. Then she waved the pepper spray under his nose and said, "Consider yourself one lucky son of a bitch."

"Hey, you invited me."

Not so. On her way to dinner with Stefanski and Berggren, she'd stopped at LuAnne's desk and picked up a batch of pink message slips. She flipped through them, maybe 25 or 30, all

from Jerry. "LuAnne, do me a favor, please. Please call him and tell him he can reach me after 10, but only by phone. Please be specific about that. I don't want to see him."

LuAnne started lecturing her and wouldn't let her go. "I'm recommending you not be cruel to him. You know what today is. The man's in love. He's going to come over."

Opening her credenza door, LuAnne thereupon selected a small box from her collection of gift-wrapped packages. She rattled it. "These are cuff links, acquired for your special occasion. In the modern system, you know, it's platinum for the 20th."

Many's the time LuAnne had come to the rescue. Her exhaustless gift supply included expensive aftershave and perfume, best-selling new books, Swiss army knives, the finest Belgian chocolates, expensive French and California wines.

She'd made a face at LuAnne and squeezed her shoulder. "Thanks, Kid. Take it from me, don't ever get married. Right this minute I'm in no mood for presents." Nevertheless, just to please LuAnne she plunked the box into her purse, waved goodbye and blasted out the door.

Now Jerry drew up a kitchen stool, seated himself at the breakfast counter and said, "Let's be friends. I didn't barge in. Knowing you're fooling around and hence quite probably otherwise engaged, I rang maybe five times. Remember how I've always hated those chimes? Well, I figured, hey, I don't have to tolerate them. I own half this place. I'll just have a look around for the necessary changes, I'll take some notes, make an anniversary dinner for you and then be gone, if necessary."

She said, "Ha! I've been carrying this pepper spray for years now, and nobody's ever tried to mug me. Better not attempt any changes. This is my home. I'm hunting for the slightest excuse."

He said, "Oh, by the way, as long as I was here, I took the liberty of checking your mail. Nothing from the kids."

"Fuck you, Jerry. Please keep your hands off my mail."

"The kids," he answered.

"You won't be pulling this again. Tomorrow I change all the locks."

Tonight she was resolved not to say one word to him about the kids. If we get into that labyrinth, I'll be having a couple of beers. Next thing you know, 2 hours of pointless recriminations.

In her mind the responsibility was clear. Tom was a dropout simply because he'd never had a father who sat down and guided his school work. Tom went to him once with a trigonometry problem, and Jerry, the great math whiz, couldn't interrupt his two-and-a-half hour conference call. Beth had a busy lawyer for a mother. Although she'd been a good role model for Beth, Beth needed a father, too. Jerry never took Beth for walks. She was sure he never went shopping with her. Beth had puppy love crises, and he never knew it.

She removed her contacts and stowed them in her purse. Rubbing her eyes, she said, "So no kidding, I assume you're here on some secret mission. You've come crawling out of the woodwork. What's inducing you to do that? I'm asking point-blank, What is it? Why are you here?"

He fingered the banner.

She sat alongside him and leaned forward to inspect it. "What does that thing say? Do you realize it makes you look like a Miss America contestant?" She put on her rimless glasses. In order to impugn his masculinity, she added, "By God, I was right. You're Miss Illinois."

"If you say so, but at least I don't drink." He sniffed the air. "Obviously that's why you're late. You stopped and refreshed yourself, didn't you, at your friendly neighborhood tavern. You've become somewhat of a regular, haven't you?"

Although she wanted to explain that she'd had only a little wine and one cognac at dinner, she didn't want to be on the defensive. Also she didn't want to mention the tiny mouthfuls of vodka at John Palmer's. She said, "You're always demanding to know what I want. Here's what I want. I want you to level with me—for just this once. How about it? What's tonight's secret mission?"

He said, "I'll level with you if you level with me. Who's your boyfriend these days?"

She said, "OK, that's fair, but you go first."

"Very well. I've brought you a rather novel anniversary present."

She said, "Let me see if I can guess. You're paying off the balance of your bill. Bookkeeping keeps sending me copies of your monthly statements. You're still into us for 40 grand."

"Please remind your bookkeeping people how much I've already paid. Please advise them that I'm not in a position to cough up the wee balance today or tomorrow. You might also inform them that the amount is closer to 30."

"This present you speak of—is it tangible or intangible?"

"I want to move back in."

"That's interesting," she said.

OK, this was way beyond interesting. Jerry had his office and also lived in a ten-room apartment, somewhere on Lake Shore Drive. So she'd heard. She'd never troubled to check. What she did know for sure was that a young blonde woman—another lawyer, an

acquaintance in fact——lived with him. It had been some two years now. A month ago, she'd spotted them at the opera. She went up and said, "Hi there." Then they'd all hugged and air kissed and chatted as if nothing were going on.

Now she said, "So who's your divorce lawyer these days?" Jerry changed lawyers every month or so. "I'm trying to figure out what he or she's up to. What's he or she up to?"

Jerry said, "I fired him. I don't want a divorce."

"Come on," she answered. "You can tell me. I'm your lawyer, too."

"Honest to God, Sonny. Now it's your turn. How's your sex life?"

"You did something obscene to my office. You violated my privacy. You broke in here to do it to every room in my apartment."

He got up, shaking his head no and waving his arms. He held his finger to his lips. Everybody was always cautioning her to be quiet.

At the sink he dumped the spaghetti from the colander into a plastic container and put it into the refrigerator. Still shaking his head no, no, no, he emptied the pot of his special sauce into another container, waved the ladle at her and again touched his mouth.

"Your mission," she said. "Please enlighten me."

Again he touched his mouth. "Read my lips, Sonny. I'm not violating this, and I'm not violating that. Didn't you hear me? Didn't I tell you I don't want a divorce?"

She began to get his point. Teetering on her stool, she grabbed the magnetic refrigerator memo pad. She wrote, "We bugged in here?"

He wrote, "Probably. But VERY IMPORTANT was your office bugged? Nod yes or no."

She nodded yes.

Aloud he said, "Since it's too late for dinner let's get out of here and go for a walk or get a drink. I'll come back and stay here tonight. Tomorrow I'm traveling. I'll move my stuff later."

"Wow!" she said as she started putting on her walking shoes from her little tote bag. "I can't get over how you sweep a girl off her feet. A very short walk. I'm dead tired."

"Poor, poor Sonny. We'll get you back early. I'll just put on my shirt and I'll leave my jacket here."

"Better take it."

He said, "I'll leave this notebook."

"Take that, too."

She double locked her front door. They didn't speak in the corridor, in the elevator or in the lobby. Outside, on Astor Street, it was cool but pleasant, a slight, fishy-smelling breeze blowing in from Lake Michigan. She said, "So that's what it's like to be bugged. Your privacy, your free speech, your First Amendment rights, they don't mean a thing."

He grabbed her arm. "What's this about your office?"

"Jerry, Jerry, Jerry. I thought we were leveling with each other. You don't have to bug my office. I'll tell you whatever you want. And what's this ridiculous business about moving back? Obviously you're having your mid-life crisis. Is all this really necessary?"

"Sonny, you may not want it, but I'll give you some advice."

"Which is?"

"I didn't do anything in your office. I'm not doing anything in your apartment. There really are bad guys out there. I advise you to look for other suspects."

“Benefit of the doubt, Jerry, but I’ll have to try other suspects on for size. Here goes. LuAnne suspects Gallagher, but that makes no sense.”

“Maybe it does, maybe it doesn’t. What’s her theory? Is there something going on with Ed?”

"Oh, just the usual. He's fucking around with one of my summer associates."

"Literally fucking?"

"No doubt he'd like to."

"Tell me more about this summer associate. I'd like to know where she's from."

"Tonight I took her and her summer associate boyfriend to dinner. At some point she remarked that I'd manhandled him. It was just something I did for fun at the summer kickoff lunch. I was staging an act for Gallagher."

Jerry said, "You're robbing the cradle. My spies already told me about that. Where's this girl from?"

“Why don’t you ask your Mata Hari informants?”

Except for this spying on her, she was witnessing the Jerry Faber she admired the most. Perhaps he'd spotted something. He'd light upon angles and doggedly pursue the tiniest possibilities that everyone else dismissed. He ignored nothing.

“Here’s all I know,” she said. “She’s movie star gorgeous. Wears expensive clothes. Says her old man owns a big river-front property outside St. Paul. Name’s Berggren.”

“St. Paul, huh? I don’t know that Berggren name, but I’ll check it out.”

Even though she was wearing her walking shoes, her feet still hurt. “Hey, Jerry, look. Let’s sit on that bus stop bench.”

He sat next to her and deposited his notebook onto her lap. It was three-inches thick, heavy and bulging. “My so-called secret mission is to get you and your law firm to sign onto a stupendous new deal. Guess what. Two days ago I picked up 51% of certain Class A stock and an option on the rest. So of course I now have only 8 more days to file the SEC’s Schedule 13D. That’s going to be real tricky. I need you, Sonny.”

“I’m afraid it’s not the 13D you have to worry about. I won’t mention any names, but certain people in the firm are squawking about the \$40,000 you owe us. It’s been 2 years, hasn’t it? Can’t this wait until you liquidated that? If you can buy stock, why can’t you pay us? That’s what they’ll say.”

“Let’s look at the big picture. Am I nuts, or isn’t it you guys who owe me? How much business do I channel to you per year? Forget that. I don’t even owe you \$40,000. I owe \$32,000, which is pure chicken feed. Whereas my new deal is no kidding stupendous. Your firm will make a fortune. It’s the biggest thing of my life, and it’s now or never. If I don’t do it, somebody else will. Frankly, Sonny, you personally can’t afford to turn me down.”

She knew exactly what he meant. Jerry Faber was her best client, and just about Faber, Margolin’s best client, producing fees way beyond 30 million a year, some from his own operations and lots and lots more from the new clients and deals he was always bringing in. A couple of months ago Fortune Magazine had written him up, calling him "the new breed of corporate raider." A maestro of the internet, he’d invented a practically unlimited data base, and his genius was being the first guy to spot the spectacular opportunities. Two or three times a year he’d strike oil, and there was a waiting line for his next big one.

He extended his arm for a handshake and said, “So how’s about it, Sonny? Deal?”

“I’m sorry. It’s not me, Jerry, but OK, I’ll name a name. Every time anybody mentions Jerry Faber, Gallagher goes berserk. He says he won’t ever do any more work for you until you pay up.”

“You amaze me, Sonny. Since when do you take no for an answer? You can do this one.”

“No. First figure out how to pay up, and I’ll take a shot.”

“Look here.” Suddenly his voice had become strident, and he was squeezing her arm. “I need to make this work, and you need to make it work. You must. Go on ahead, call it a mid-life crisis, but the fact is my mind’s made up, and I will not turn back. I’m no longer just the glorified employee.”

“If a ‘glorified employee’ is what you’ve been, you’ve certainly been paid handsomely. We bought the condo for all cash, didn’t we? We set up the trust funds for Tom and Beth, didn’t we? Our art collection. I’m told you have a great big Lake Shore Drive apartment. If I’m not mistaken, it’s bigger than my apartment.”

“You’re missing the fucking point. The money guys grab the gravy. I get crumbs. I’m not doing that anymore.”

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning this deal is gigantic. Meaning I control it. Meaning I’ll be the guy throwing crumbs to the money guys.”

“No can do, Jerry.

“Fuck it, Sonny. Fuck Ed Gallagher. Fuck it. Fuck it.”

“Calm down. It’s scaring me that you’re so emotionally involved. What’s this deal all about?”

“Read the goddamned notebook.”

“Make it easy. Just give me one clue.”

“OK. Clue Number One. Your buddy Gallagher. Why’s he hitting on what’s-her-name, this summer girl? All I know is she’s from St. Paul, and that’s why Gallagher is hitting on her.”

“Please explain that to me. I need just a couple of baby steps.”

“World Agriculture’s headquarters are in Minneapolis. St. Paul is right next door. I’m taking over World Agriculture.”

“So what’s Gallagher’s role?”

“The instant I file the 13D, I’m disclosing the whole deal publicly. If it gets known before then, probably it’s a disaster. I’m working around the clock. I’m this close. Literally. I’m flying out from O’Hare at 4:00 a.m. tomorrow. I’m locking up deals. I have 8 days till the 13D, and I will be done. I must be done. Meantime total secrecy, no leaks.”

“Where to at 4:00 a.m.? How does Gallagher fit in?”

“How the hell does he know to hit on that girl?”

“Straight from the shoulder, Jerry. You can’t possibly take over World Agriculture. You’re talking a 30, 40 billion dollar acquisition. That’s enormous. I’ll bet they’ve got 100 or 200 subsidiaries and affiliates throughout the world. Face it, you’re out of your league.”

“Sonny, do me a favor, please. Read the goddamned book.”

“Does your book tell you how you’re going to pay the up-front legal fees? Before we’re finished, you’ll be into us for three, three point five million. Can you put up a big chunk of that as a retainer for us to start? And probably it’ll be lots more. If we have to go into court, make that a big chunk of four, five, six.”

“Please, Sonny. Don’t make me beg. If you’re scared of the whole thing, how about start by doing the 13D? Come on. You’ll be learning the deal backwards and forwards. I’ve got 8 days.”

“I’m really sorry. The firm simply won’t touch this without the great big retainer. It’s not just Gallagher. Nobody will believe you can come up with it. And that includes me. If you can’t pay the \$40,000, or whatever it is, how can you handle the retainer? I recommend that you try some other law firm. What about your lady friend?”

He jumped up. “Gimme that book.” He grabbed the notebook and stood facing her, brandishing his finger at her. “That’s exactly what I’ll do. You’re blowing it, Sonny. I’m taking this deal to somebody else.”

"OK," she said.

He ran onto the street and found a taxicab. As soon as he entered, the cab pulled away. She waved goodbye.

Before the cab reached the corner, it stopped and then backed up to where she was standing. First the window opened, next the door. He put one foot onto the pavement. "What the hell," he said, and he tossed her the notebook. “I’ve got an 8-day deadline. Read the goddamned book. And do something about it.”

The book was heavy and awkward to hold onto, but she managed to clutch it. Juggling it as he and the cab disappeared, she’d lost her chance to yell, Good night, you devious son of a bitch. Give my regards to Susie Floosie.

Heading home, she flipped through the pages, looking for his money calculations and reading as well as she could under the street lights. Two things jumped out at her.

First thing, somehow he had \$1,500,000 in a bank account titled “TBJ.” And there was a check to Faber, Margolin, signed by two persons, Jerry and somebody illegible. It was stapled to the front page. Since the dollar amount was blank, he was telling her to fill it in.

The notebook was an awkward carry and her feet hurt but she began to trot home. She regretted she never carried a mobile phone. She wanted to talk with him right now. Can you use that \$1.5 million to pay Faber, Margolin the \$40,000? And more important, does TBJ stand for Tom, Beth and Jerry?

Since it couldn't be his own money, no way could he use it to pay off the \$40,000. Certainly the account was restricted, certainly it was limited to this crazy World Agriculture deal. The title TBJ, however, was intriguing. She took it to mean Tom-Beth-Jerry. If that was correct, it meant he definitely intended to pull off the achievement of his lifetime. Moreover, she could see why he was so emotional. He was intending a major hit for the kids as well as for himself.

Second thing, Not a chance. I won't touch it. I won't let him blow somebody else's money on a guaranteed loser. This World Agriculture thing is too grandiose even for an operator like Jerry.

What it was was an opium pipe dream. She hoped that million five wasn't from Colombia or maybe those Afghanistan guys.

The more she thought, the scarier the million five. If this deal was dishonest, Beth and Tom would be implicated. Obviously he'd found a sucker to bankroll him, the illegible guy. For Jerry, that was never a problem. There were millions of rich suckers out there, and he had unlimited guts. If it were necessary, or if it amused him, he'd have the guts and the balls to

approach the Queen of England. He claimed to live by General Patton's motto from World War II—"toujours l'audace." To make it worse, he was charming and incredibly persuasive.

On charming and persuasive, she herself happened to be Exhibit A.

Fortunately, he was not just convincing but meticulous, too. Everything he did, he recorded. Holding the book in both hands, she began trotting home again. Well, she'd soon find out what he'd done, and she'd have had this aerobic exercise.

Upstairs she wiped away her perspiration and plunked herself onto her ergonomic desk chair in her den, her legs tucked under her. She had a yellow pad on her lap for notes and questions, and she turned on her computer. For the sake of secrecy, she did not go onto the network but used only her personal hard drive.

The first part of the book was a detailed valuation of World Agriculture. Jerry's technique was to determine real asset value, which he called "honest-to-goodness value." World Agriculture did a million things and owned all kinds of companies and property. Book values and stock market prices were artificial numbers cooked up by accountants and brokers. Although he wasn't the only real value analyst, he'd invented his own data base computer programs. Being paranoid, when he ran a search, he had uncanny skill and knew exactly what to hunt for. Which is why he was "the new breed of corporate raider."

His notebook arrived at World Agriculture's honest-to-goodness value. In his shorthand it was "Three Dozen," meaning 36 billion. No way he could handle that.

Later, on page 38, he identified the bankroll sucker, Mr. Kim, of KHE, Kim Household Electronics, a South Korean company. She could picture Jerry pocketing a check for a million five and winking at Mr. Kim, nonchalantly neglecting to mention the big things and the little things that might go wrong when you try to take over a Three Dozen company.

With that scary image, she needed the gory details. On page 42 Jerry valued Mr. Kim's KHE at 6 billion, making it a "Half Dozen" company. This got weirder and weirder. Jerry and KHE were David. They were going to take on Goliath.

There was a long contract between Jerry and KHE. For secrecy purposes, it was standard for Jerry to hire small, unknown local law firms to write up the contracts for his deals. Since each minor deal was part of a larger plan, he always provided that no local contract would take effect until she, as his principal lawyer, gave her personal approval to all of the terms and provisions.

She skimmed the document. Nothing there she wouldn't approve. Nothing at all unusual, except that it didn't mention the million five. It did specify, however, that KHE would put at Jerry's disposal Mr. Kim's huge Boeing private jet. Why did he need a jet? According to his notebook, in the last month he'd been not only in South Korea but in Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, mainland China, Japan, the Philippines and India. In each place, he had a tentative contract with a local company. Evidently these were the deals he was locking up in his final 8 days, and on each one he needed her approval to finalize it.

Jerry was right to be worried about the 13D. If she agreed to handle the takeover, 8 days might not be nearly enough. They'd have to research all of the securities, anti-trust and foreign investment laws and, to boot, all applicable local laws of all of those individual countries. It'd be great for Faber, Margolin, an enormous business opportunity for the firm, but the work was overwhelming. It was borderline impossible.

She went back to the beginning of the book and began reading every page with the greatest care. An astonishing picture began to emerge. I don't believe this, she said to herself. Jerry's a genius. I say again, the man's a genius. This damn thing is typical Jerry Faber. It's

dead eye, slambang Jerry Faber. It's giant, off-the-charts Jerry Faber. If there's a hole in it, I don't see it. If only I could run this by John Palmer.

Spontaneously now, with absolutely zero premeditation, she reached over and took hold of the telephone cord, tugged it toward her and speed dialed Jerry. After 10 or 11 rings she left him a voice mail message. "You win. I'll ram this through at the firm. Count on it. We're taking the deal. But listen, Jerry. That doesn't mean you're not a slime ball."

No longer exhausted, no longer yes or no about the whole thing, no longer debating whether she should cross the Rubicon or else not cross the Rubicon, she went into the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face. Then she returned to the den and called LuAnne.

LuAnne sounded sleepy. "Please forgive me," she said to LuAnne. "It's way after midnight, isn't it? Hang onto your hat. Great big new one. Gigantic. May I proceed?"

LuAnne brightened. "You may fire when ready. I'm just studying." She was a night student at Chicago Kent Law School, and she reveled in being a key part of these exciting deals.

"Please notify the usual for the War Room at 8:00 tomorrow morning, sharp. When I say "the usual," I mean the whole takeover team. Don't let anybody say no. They'll be mad at you when you wake them, but they'll understand. Somebody gives you a hard time, tell them I said this deal is not merely great big. Don't bother calling Palmer. Would you please get today's kids—Berggren, Stefanski and that Harvard guy Goldstein. They'll need one-day access cards to the War Room."

LuAnne said, "No problem. Sure you don't want Mr. Palmer? What shall I do about your breakfast with Mr. Gallagher?"

"Right you are. Please cancel but please tell him the following, quote, Sonny says to tell you the trade is on, close quote. Are you OK on all that?"

LuAnne said, "Check. No breakfast, no Mr. Palmer." She now seemed totally alert. "Do you want the Mysterious Geezer there?"

It was LuAnne who'd code named Mr. Cartwright the Mysterious Geezer. She was very good at code names, and indeed nobody knew who he was or where he'd come from. He'd just showed up one day. Now he had a title, Faber, Margolin's Consulting Documents Editor. To keep him busy, they'd given him little jobs and discovered his tremendous skill at proofreading for both form and content. The World Agriculture deal would eventuate in 200,000 to 500,000 pages of reports, memorandums, contracts, press releases, and perhaps pleadings in court. He'd need a staff of 3 or 4.

She said, "Hell yes, I want the Mysterious Geezer."

"Good," LuAnne said, "because he called and rather urgently wants an appointment to see you. He said to tell you you'll find it's just this side of earthshaking. You could fit him in around lunch tomorrow, after the meeting, of course."

"Okay, tomorrow. Please go make your calls, and good night."

Her mind was racing and not merely a mile a minute. Boy! This thing was too incredible. Two hours ago she was convicting Jerry Faber. Now she was rooting for Jerry Faber and working for him. She thought, I'm nuts. I've cast the die. If Jerry goes down in flames, I go down in flames. She wished she knew how to pray.

Indeed there was something to pray for. Tomorrow would be Jerry's most dangerous day. When she jumpstarted Faber, Margolin, she'd bring some 30 or 40 people on board. The upside was that in the next 8 days, they'd log 4,000 or 5,000 billable hours, everybody putting in 17, 18 hours a day—U.S. research, international research, drafting, conferences, negotiations, whatever.

But then there was the downside——too many people would know too much and then, above and beyond all that, there was the internet. World Agriculture's name or one key detail hits the internet, Jerry would be dead——it would take only 15 minutes tops.

Dangerous day indeed. One loose mouth, it would all be over.

It was an awesome responsibility. She loved it.

After undressing, she was standing naked and barefoot in the kitchen. The kitchen was clean. Jerry'd rinsed out all of his cooking utensils and had set them upside down to drain on the rubber mat. She heated a glass of skim milk that might make her sleepy. When she shut off the overhead fluorescent, there was only the little night light by the door. As she drank, she scratched her sides and her waist. It felt delicious and made her shiver.

Exhausted but still all keyed up, she lay in bed. She didn't want to read or watch TV. She wanted to start incubating, and she had to get to sleep.

She had zero interest in Jerry himself. She definitely did not want him to move back.

There was a man named Adam, who lived in Washington. She'd met him just once, and he'd accused her of leading a monastic life. She didn't want to start in thinking about him.

She didn't want to think about Tom. She didn't want to think about Beth.

She pictured Berggren and Stefanski. What an attractive couple! A few hours ago, she'd put them into a cab and discovered they were sharing a vacationing friend's one-bedroom apartment in Hyde Park. They were so young, and she was in her 40's——albeit her early 40's. They were together, and she was here by herself.

She tossed for 5 or 10 minutes and then sat up and said out loud, "What the hell. I'm not monastic." She reached into her night table and took out the vibrator.

Chapter 3

She awakened, refreshed, all charged up, and, believe it or not, ready to take on World Agriculture. She had no specific plan. She was at her best when she improvised.

At exactly 7:55 a.m., she inserted her magnetic card to admit herself to the 69th floor. For the last three years, during her term as chairperson of the Securities Department, there'd never been one information leak from the "War Room." She credited both the hard security and the soft security she'd introduced. The War Room comprised the entire floor and was used exclusively for all of Faber, Margolin's top secret transactions, the takeovers, mergers, acquisitions, tender offers and the gamut of big deal corporate and private negotiations.

Whereas personal offices, including her own, were swept only monthly, the War Room had hard security that consisted of random electronic sweeping of the whole floor at least every 10 days. Access cards were coded, changed weekly. You entered the War Room, and you and the duration of your visit were logged.

For the most sensitive transactions, "soft" security was such things as no recording or other electronic devices. A burly guard—she'd nicknamed him the "Gatekeeper"—checked briefcases when you entered. At his request and just for an amusing show, she authorized him to wear a uniform and a sidearm. She liked to say, "That's semi-hard security."

Today Jerry Faber's secret plan required the maximum hard and soft protection. In addition to everything else, she'd be using Faber, Margolin's need-to-know Blue Sheet procedure.

She neared the kitchen and saw that already most of the takeover team was congregating there. She joined LuAnne in the conference room and said, “Good morning. No coffee for me, please. I’m on adrenaline.”

LuAnne was not serving coffee. Rather she was all by herself arranging placements at the elliptical conference table, distributing Blue Sheets, pens, and yellow note pads. As always, she was fetching. She had on her khaki suit with one of her paisley scarves at the neck. On her lapel there was some sort of military medal.

With the Blue Sheets in her hand and without stopping, LuAnne looked up and smiled. “Sonny,” she said. “Good morning. Please do nothing else. Please immediately go check your chair.”

The conference table was polished hardwood, and it was huge. Once, when necessary, it had comfortably accommodated 40 or 50. Her chair was dead center on the window side. She pulled it back and discovered a Gideon Bible lying on the seat.

LuAnne said, “Compliments of the Mysterious Geezer. He says to tell you it’s of ‘paramount importance.’ He said to use that phrase. He said you will understand. I did not check it out.”

Since the others seemed now to be pouring in all at once, she sat and placed the Bible on her lap and called to each person by name. She felt righteous. These newcomers were carrying in not just coffee and fresh-squeezed orange juice. They were toting trillions of fat calories—bagels, lox, sweet rolls, muffins, cream cheese, butter.

As of this morning, she was making herself immune to certain calories. She’d started her strict, no-fat diet.

Gallagher walked around, paused behind her and kissed her cheek. As he did, he whispered into her ear, “You’re a decisive broad. You made a smart trade. I’ll take real good care of her. You’ll like that Goldstein. He’s your kind of guy.”

Berggren entered, peered this way and that and then seated herself between Stefanski and Goldstein at one end of the table and looked tres beautiful.

Gallagher had taken his seat and seemed to be eyeing Berggren. Whatever else he might be up to, he was smitten.

When the Mysterious Geezer stepped in and paused near her, she winked and said “Gotcha, Mr. Cartwright. What a thoughtful gift.”

“My pleasure. You’ve read it then, have you?”

“Not yet, but you can be sure I’ll be studying it.”

He looked dismayed. “If I were you, I’d definitely do it right off. I’d do it very first thing. I’d do it before anything else.”

Centering Jerry’s black notebook on the table in front of her, she gave the partners and others time to wind up their conversations. John Palmer, touring upstairs with the second batch of summer associates was missing. The earliest she could see him would be after lunch. She had a million things to discuss.

LuAnne came and seated herself alongside. That military medal, she was glad LuAnne was wearing it. It was an omen, a good-luck token. These people were Faber, Margolin’s troops. She was the field commander. She was now about to deploy them.

She began to speak in her loudest voice. “You know, just last week I heard one of my colleagues say that the old-fashioned hot, lazy summer is best. I felt in agreement right then and there, but, truthfully, I hate lazy summers.” As she spoke, everyone grew silent. “Be that as it

may, we're gathered here today at this ungodly hour to commence work on a new takeover. We will not be having a lazy summer. I have to tell you that what we're about to do is nothing short of colossal."

After pausing for effect, she continued. "There will be two phases to what we do. First phase, in exactly 8 days, we have to file an SEC Schedule 13D. It will be tremendously difficult, so please prepare yourselves for around-the-clock. If you already have other work to do, you'll have to farm it out."

She checked the entire room, and no one was reacting. "Phase 2," she said. "Undoubtedly we will be in the courts. The target is dug in. For one thing they've got a poison pill. However, ladies and gentlemen, we, too, have a plan."

Gallagher was waving for attention. "Who we talking about? Who's the target?"

Frank Morrissey, the chief litigation partner, spoke up. The building was non-smoking, but he had his unlit pipe clamped in his teeth. There was the slightest scent of his sweet tobacco. "Re our contest of the poison pill, Sonny. Do we have grounds? Or is this going to be seat-of-the-pants creative?"

"Tsk, tsk, Ed and Frank. Come on now, you two are takeover veterans. Must I remind you we've got newcomers in the room? For the benefit of our summer associates, and, yes, as a reminder to everybody else, let's go directly to the Blue Sheets you see in front of you. I won't say one word. In particular, I won't say the target's name, until we do our housekeeping."

Holding aloft one of the Blue Sheets, she said, "I'm calling this project 'Special Sauce.' In this blank space, the one right here at the top, please insert that name, Special Sauce. Everything has to be in your own handwriting. The printed terms acknowledge that you will be privy to secret information. As you know, there are SEC and other rules concerning insider

information, but our Blue Sheets go beyond all that. They are not merely an NDA, and they are not merely an NCA.”

She looked at the summer associates and saw that she’d got their attention. They were now conferring with each other. Finally Goldstein said, “What’s an NDA and what’s an NCA?”

“Jargon,” she said. She was trying to evaluate Goldstein and was happy he’d spoken up. If this kid really wanted to learn something, evidently he’d ask. “Nice question, Goldstein. NDA stands for non-disclosure agreement. NCA is a non-circumvention agreement. I’m telling you that the Blue Sheets are NDA and NCA contracts but that they’ve got unbelievably powerful teeth. You sign a Blue Sheet, that’s your solemn word you’ll use today’s information solely for your job. If for any reason you violate your solemn word, we’ll get an injunction against you, we’ll sue you for damages, no matter how enormous, and we’ll do et cetera to you.”

Although ostensibly addressing her remarks to Gallagher and Morrissey, she continued to look directly at the summer associates. She said, “Here’s an announcement I always make. For good and sufficient reasons, maybe somebody here can’t conscientiously give his or her solemn word. If so, no problem. Any such person please just get up now and walk out——partner, summer associate, paralegal, whoever. You needn’t explain. I won’t embarrass you. There’ll be no reprimand, no prejudice against you. That goes for everybody.”

She waited a full two minutes and no one got up to leave. “I have to make double sure,” she said, “so let’s put all this yet another way. Berggren, do you understand that, even if you are physically tortured, you will not disclose today’s information?”

Berggren put her hand to her throat, chuckled and nodded.

“Hey,” she said to Berggren, “don’t laugh. This is serious stuff. How about you, Stefanski? And you, Goldstein? Do you guys likewise understand and agree without reservation? If so, please say yes.” Each of them, all three of them, including Berggren, said, “Yes.”

She looked over to Frank Morrisey. “I’m now going to check this out with the partners. Frank, do you agree with everything I just said?”

“Hell, yes, Sonny. Trust me. As most of you know, I was a Viet Nam POW. I saw physical torture. I don’t want to be physically tortured.”

“OK, Frank, I’m assuming that goes for Ed Gallagher, too, and everyone else. Is that right, Ed?”

“Let’s get going,” he muttered.

“I’ll take that as a definite yes. LuAnne will now go around to pick up the signed forms. When she does so, please give her your laptop, cell phone, blackberry, iPod, any recording or electronic device whatsoever you might have. Maybe our Gatekeeper missed them when you entered. They’re all contraband in here. We’ll return it when we adjourn.”

LuAnne tugged her sleeve and whispered, “Discussions.”

“And, oh yes, thank you, LuAnne,” she said. “Our 13D is due in 8 days. We dare not miss a single moment. Therefore, until the 13D is filed, this particular case is not to be discussed for any reason outside of this War Room. If you need to talk it over, the way to do it is to ask LuAnne for an appointment to come in here. Outside the War Room you never know who’s listening. Perhaps you’ve noticed the World War II poster near the Gatekeeper’s security desk. There were all those Nazi wolf pack torpedo U-boats out there in the Atlantic Ocean. Our secrecy policy coincides with that poster: ‘Loose lips sink ships’.”

She'd finished and was looking around for questions. From far to her left the Mysterious Geezer was leaning forward. "Ms. Faber," he said. His voice came booming out. "May I be so bold as to insert a suggestion at this juncture?"

"Good morning, Mr. Cartwright. Of course you may."

He stood and said, "I'm wondering. Quite obviously, you are about to announce a major new undertaking. I'm impressed that you deem it colossal and that you're so fiercely requiring secrecy. It's not every day that something colossal takes place. Such a thing is of biblical proportions. I'm therefore wondering if it would be out of place to invoke divine guidance. That's something I would consider of paramount importance."

"Divine guidance! What a unique idea," she said. "I like it."

Gallagher was right across from her. He shouted, "What the fuck is this? Are we having a fucking prayer meeting, or are we here to do some work?"

"Ed," she said, "listen to the way you talk. Just yesterday, didn't you tell me you'd changed? Didn't you say, 'I'm a changed man?' Weren't those your exact words? Mr. Cartwright, you go right on ahead and procure us some divine guidance. However, please make it some very brief divine guidance, so as not to delay our secular duties. And please be sure to request particular attention to Mr. Ed Gallagher's vocabulary."

There was laughter. Eventually even Gallagher was grinning.

As the Mysterious Geezer cleared his throat, bowed his head and began speaking, she opened the Bible on her lap and felt an envelope taped inside the front cover. Removing it and concealing it under the table edge, she saw it was addressed to her in the Mysterious Geezer's handwriting. She extracted a note. It said, "A word to the wise. This room is a broadcasting booth. You can trust me on this one."

Instantly she decided to trust him. She put the note and the envelope in her purse.

The Mysterious Geezer concluded, “And in all this we ask Your holiest wise counsel and help.”

Gallagher said, “Amen, amen, amen. Jesus Christ, let’s get this show on the road.”

She said, “Fine work, Mr. Cartwright. Did you hear Ed Gallagher just now? I think it’s already taking effect.”

LuAnne returned and set the stack of Blue Sheets in front of her. “Everybody’s signed. No contraband items.”

Gallagher said, “Let’s go, damn it. Let’s go. You’ve got your Blue Sheets. Who the hell is the target? What’s our plan? Let’s get cutting.”

She stood and rifled through the Blue Sheets, pretending to be studying them. “One second please, Ed. I’m thinking about this.” She placed Jerry’s notebook on the table. She whispered to LuAnne, “Watch what I’m about to do. I can’t help it.”

After a moment, she stooped to retrieve her purse from the floor and managed to slip the bible into it. She straightened, clutched everything against her chest and, seeing that everyone was glowering at her, took a deep, deep breath and headed around the table.

As she passed the Mysterious Geezer, she brushed his head with her sleeve. He turned and she mouthed, “Good save,” but really she was thinking, boy, oh boy, you’d better be right. Either this is a good save or else it’s a catastrophe. Any case, I’ve just made it my problem. I’ve just blown away 24 hours. We can’t afford to lose 24 hours.

At the door, she took another deep breath and turned. “I know it seems mysterious. Thank you all for coming this morning. Sorry I troubled you. Today was just introductory. Please get

your work schedules cleared. We'll meet again. Tomorrow at 8:00. No, let's make that 7:30. Time's of the essence."

She sailed out, just catching Gallagher standing at his seat, facing the hallway and yelling after her, "I don't fucking believe this. Would you mind telling us what's going on?"

She got in an elevator and went from floor to floor. Finally she found Palmer, smack in the middle of the new summer associates. From down the hall she caught his attention and gestured him into an unoccupied supply room, probably not bugged. In five minutes flat, not naming the target, she outlined Jerry's plan and explained what she'd just done in the War Room. "Give it to me straight, John. Did I do right?"

"Nice going," he said, clapping her on the shoulder. "What you did is perpetrate an expensive 8:00 a.m. prayer meeting and on top of that a gigantic anticlimax. Never mind that you had to do it, you'll be paying a heavy price. From now on, watch your back, Sonny. You're in for it. Gallagher won't let you get away with this. But you were decisive. Nothing else matters. You had sufficient reason. So yes, you did right."

Now it was just before noon, and, so far, the world had not come to an end. Though peacefully reviewing some annual reports and proxy statements, she'd kept listening for Gallagher and making a mental list of the probable obscenities he'd be uttering when he burst into her office. He never showed, and it was an eerie silence.

About a quarter after twelve, the silence ended. LuAnne knocked and then ushered in Gallagher's secretary, Edna. Edna proffered an envelope. There were nicotine stains on her fingers. Edna said, "He instructed me to put this in your hands personally."

The envelope had one typewritten sheet. "You are hereby notified that there will be an emergency meeting of the Executive Committee at 5:30 p.m." The only item on the agenda was

the unacceptable behavior of the C.O.P., the Chief Operating Partner. Gallagher signed it as chairman and added a postscript in his own handwriting. “Be advised. This will be a sanity hearing.”

Evidently John Palmer’s dire expectations were starting to kick in. While she was taking over World Agriculture, Gallagher would be taking over Faber, Margolin. If the Executive Committee voted to recommend her removal as C.O.P., the next step was a two-thirds vote of all partners. She didn’t think they had the votes, but, as Palmer would say, you never know.

She said, “Thanks, Edna. I’ll be there. Please tell him I wouldn’t miss it.” She checked her watch. From her desk drawer she got her purse. Then she bowed to LuAnne and Edna, and she left.

She was on her way to the Art Institute’s garden restaurant, which LuAnne had selected as the place for a secret conference.

Chapter 4

She was at her Art Institute garden table. It was a fine June day, just a trifle muggy. She'd ordered a carafe of red wine and was taking a sip when the Mysterious Geezer appeared at the entrance. While he was not quite so tall as Stefanski, she couldn't miss his erect figure. He spotted her. As he strode over, she pictured him on the bridge of a battleship or in the corridors of the Pentagon.

Partially rising, she shook hands. "Thanks for coming. Above all, thanks for the warning."

She prayed he wouldn't be garrulous. Right this minute her surveillance consultants were in the War Room. Just as soon as she got back to the office, she'd have their report. Was there a bug or was there not? They'd been all through the office last night. This morning they were sweeping her condo.

Meanwhile what she wanted at this lunch was very simple. First, what did the Mysterious Geezer know? Second, how did he find out? Or there was a third possibility, was he just plain wrong?

Extending his glass as she poured him some wine, he said, "Permit me to observe that you look elegant, Ms. Faber. I'm convinced red is the most becoming to you."

She was pleased he was approving her new jacket. Recently she'd gone shopping and was making a conscious effort to look more like LuAnne. She liked the jacket and color, too, and, despite the mugginess, hadn't removed it. She said, "If you're right about the War Room, Mr.

Cartwright, we're forever in your debt."

He said, "Why not call me 'Geezer?' Everyone else does."

She raised her glass. "A toast. On the specific assumption that the War Room has in fact been bugged, here's to you, Mr. Cartwright."

Clinking his glass with hers, he took a tiny sip. "I've never heard such a thing before. That was not a toast. That was a conditional toast. As they say, you are really something else, and it persuades me I'm right that you're the one person who can help me."

"You're helping us. We'll help you."

He said, "Notice that you're making it plural whereas I'm speaking in the singular."

She said, "I'm not sure how this relates to our War Room problem."

The waitress came to take their orders. He thanked her and handed over his menu. He said, "You'll forgive me, won't you, if I make a crude and sexist comment about you personally. It's impressive the way you handle your 300 bozos up there in your fancy tower offices. I agree with what they say about you. Do you know what they say?"

"No."

"They say that, when God created Faber, Margolin, She gave you the firm's testicles."

She said, "Yes, I have heard that."

He said, "That's why I decided you could help me. I want you to be my lawyer. You see, my name is not Cartwright."

"I know that. John Palmer and I tried to find you in the Martindale-Hubbell directory, and we checked with your supposed law school. In fact there was considerable controversy over what to call you. LuAnne came up with 'the Mysterious Geezer.' John Palmer had reservations, not

about you but about the name, and he advanced one or two interesting theories, claiming you're not all that mysterious. In the end, however, it was Mysterious Geezer that won out."

He said, "So despite everything you keep me on. I'm touched."

"As I say, Mr. Cartwright, you help us, we help you."

"Do you also know that I'm a fugitive?"

"No. I'm fascinated, but, frankly, that's secondary right now unless it has to do with our War Room."

The waitress arrived with their food. Without speaking, they ate. She had a salad, olive oil dressing on the side. He had a roasted vegetable plate. When she took up her wine, he quickly clinked her glass again and said, "There's a man named Felix Sandor. Yesterday I panicked, because I was astonished to see him in the office. He's an IRS electronics specialist. Black bag stuff. I've encountered him before in other cities. I hate this guy. He scares me. When I saw him, I was reminded of my own situation. I'd been living in paradise here, and now, all of a sudden, I was going to be driven out all over again. As I say, I panicked. All I could think of was to throw myself on your mercy. I wanted you to talk me out of running away."

She said, "Why are you running from this man?"

He said, "Do you know how old I am?"

"No, but there's an office pool. I drew some number or other. It was high. I forget what it is."

"I was always a maverick, a sole practitioner. When I got to be 65—that's 22 years ago—I couldn't find my records. You see, I didn't even have a secretary, used public stenos as needed. As a result, I didn't file my income tax return. The next year I still couldn't find anything. I'm very sloppy—I concede that. So I didn't file again. And then the next year again

and then again and again. In effect, I dropped out of the tax system. My head's in the noose."

She said, "My hat's off to John Palmer. You're confirming his favorite theory. No wonder we couldn't trace your social security number. Mr. Cartwright, you're a bona fide tax fugitive."

"I suppose that's an accurate term, but for me it's been the curse of my old age. Why aren't I living in Palm Springs, playing golf with the movie stars? How come everybody else gets social security? As for me, every day I wake up scared silly that they're coming after me to take me away. Do you have any idea what it's like to live in a world where someone is always tracking you down?"

He paused, and he was peering at her. She had a million questions but didn't want to distract him. He cleared his throat. "I had to eat," he said. "When my savings ran out, I took to the road. I invented identities. I always managed to find the odd job—just enough to survive. They would take out the withholding, but eventually the IRS computers would raise questions I couldn't answer. So I simply fled to another city—another identity, another employer, another phony social security number. You guys are my very first stop in Chicago. You'll be amused that I'm beginning to regard myself as the Mysterious Geezer. Sometimes I don't remember who I actually am. Early-stage Alzheimer's, I suppose. Or more likely, in my case, late stage."

"Tell me about this man Felix Sandor."

He said, "This Felix Sandor is extremely bad medicine. He's like the Russian KGB or the KBG—I can never remember which it is. Let's say he's like the Gestapo. Every year there are lawyers who are nailed for tax crimes. Suddenly clients are indicted. When he's around, things happen. So yesterday, when I saw him whispering with Mr. Gallagher near the library, I panicked."

She said, “My God! Now you’re blowing my mind, but I have to tell you you’re absolutely wrong. There’s no way they would send this guy Sandor to hunt you down. They don’t even know you exist. What interests me is Gallagher. How does Gallagher connect?”

He said, “I’m calm now. I know you’re right. I know they’re not after me——as yet.”

She took a sip of water and picked up the check which the waitress had left. “So tell me about Gallagher.”

“Gallagher noticed me coming around a corner, and he tried to duck out of sight. I think you can bank on it that the two of them are up to something electronic.”

“Do you have any theory why Gallagher is doing this?”

He inclined his head, pointing with his chin to a teenage girl who was just arriving at a table with some boys. On first glance the girl resembled her daughter Beth. She was about the same height and build and had approximately the same brunette hair color. “OK, I see her, but you’ll have to explain the relevance.”

“She’s a tease.” The girl was wearing cutoff denim shorts that rode way up and displayed her protruding buttocks. The Mysterious Geezer shrugged and said, “That’s it. I happen to agree with Sigmund Freud. Sex is at the bottom of everything. When I was a youngster, I did my best to bring about the liberal morality which we have actually achieved today. Regrettably, I was way ahead of my times. Now, although I’m an atheist, I thank God every night that I’m what is called ‘well on in years.’ I mention this to explain Mr. Gallagher, who, of course, is much younger.”

“I think I get you, but it’s very tenuous. I think you’re suggesting that Gallagher is bugging us in some sort of sexual pursuit of my summer associate Berggren.”

He said, “A handsome woman to be sure, but, no, Ms. Berggren is not the one who’s

involved.”

She said, “Then I’m lost. Would you mind if we just concentrate on Gallagher and the electronics?”

“I thought I’m doing just that. That’s what I’m getting at, but I see it’s not obvious to you the way it is to me.”

She said, “That’s for sure.”

“To put it bluntly,” he said, “according to my observations, your Mr. Gallagher is in love with you.”

Let’s get out of here, Mr. Cartwright. I don’t see how ducking around corners implicates Ed Gallagher. I certainly don’t buy this love stuff, and I even doubt that it was this so-called Felix Sandor you saw. In short, I wonder whether your situation is playing tricks on your mind.”

He said, “We’ll soon find out, won’t we? We’ll soon have the definitive answer. You’ll be receiving your surveillance report on the War Room. We’ll see if I’m talking through my hat.”

They walked through the Art Institute and down the steps to Michigan Avenue. They found a taxicab. It had air conditioning. It felt good. As they drove off, he said, “Permit an old man to caution you that love can be perverse as well as normal. Your Mr. Gallagher’s afraid of you. He won’t believe he’s a man until he’s gotten you into bed or, failing that, until he outfoxes you in business.”

She said, “This is beyond me. I’m going to discuss it with John Palmer.”

“Right,” he answered. “Your Mr. Palmer’s another case in point.”

Where on Earth does he get that? she was wondering. For his part, the Mysterious Geezer simply rose and muttered “So long”. He threw her a goodbye kiss, and he disappeared at the exit.

Chapter 5

She was deliberately arriving a few minutes late for Gallagher's emergency meeting. If they had to wonder where she was, it would heighten their tension before she presented her defense.

The Executive Committee always convened in one of the conference rooms on the 65th floor, and tonight she knew that all thirteen Committee partners would be present. Although Faber, Margolin had an adequate number of female partners, this year it happened that she was the only woman on the Committee.

Before opening the door, she checked her purse. She had the surveillance report. It completely vindicated the Mysterious Geezer. Not just her office was bugged. Not just the War Room was bugged. Her apartment was bugged, someone having distributed ten sophisticated audio-video devices throughout.

Two particularly obnoxious devices were in her bathroom. Obviously that someone had gone to enormous expense, and he or she was not merely a spy but a voyeur to boot. She shuddered. I'll probably be finding myself on the internet. At least I'm losing weight. So far only she and LuAnne knew the results. She'd asked LuAnne to find John Palmer, but he was gone for the day. The Mysterious Geezer was gone, too. Since she hadn't had time to digest the report, she didn't intend to disclose it this evening unless somehow she discovered herself backed into a corner.

She knocked once, entered and immediately confronted Gallagher who was standing just inside and near the blackboard. He was alongside his secretary, Edna. Her hands were on her stenotype machine, and, of course, a cigarette was drooping from her lips. Poor Edna. She lived

alone, was in her late 60's, and no one had ever seen her without a cigarette. Even though the building was strictly non-smoking, at an after-hours meeting like this one, they ignored the rule solely for Edna.

Edna had court reporter skills and was transcribing every word, meaning that Gallagher was very serious indeed. Ordinarily no stenographer was present. The Committee rarely bothered with anything except summary minutes.

Already Gallagher was in full voice. He was denouncing her in such a way that she had to laugh. He was saying, "I am fucking tired of the way our C.O.P. bitch—hello, Sonny, no offense—runs this firm." She wished the Mysterious Geezer were here to listen to this performance by her 'lover.' "You're not a dictator, Sonny, and it's not your kingdom. For your information I'm asking for your removal as C.O.P. Half of you were there this morning," he said, gesturing about the room. "She calls an 8:00 a.m. meeting and then walks out."

She took her seat next to Frank Morrisey, who, as always, exuded his tobacco smell and had his unlit pipe in hand. He faced her and said, "You'll admit, Sonny, it was a trifle highhanded. Not to mention unexplained."

She nodded. "Right you are, Frank. Highhanded and unexplained. That's what it was."

Gallagher had not sat down. He was pacing back and forth at one end of the table. "She's not a sole practitioner. She's a partner. By what authority does she commit us to a piece of business without telling her partners what it's about? Suppose there's a conflict?"

Morrisey said, "There you are, Sonny. Since Ed's got a point, can we assume you've checked out your deal for conflict?"

Before she could reply, Gallagher said, “Fuck the conflict. There’s a far more serious problem. We all know the client has to be Jerry Faber. Now I find that very interesting, because I personally don’t think Jerry Faber has a pot to piss in. This morning she gathers half the goddamned legal talent in the world to attend some fucking prayer meeting. I don’t care if this new thing’s colossal or not colossal. I demand to know who’s going to pay for that little fiasco. Do you realize he still owes us from last year? I demand to know when we’re going to get paid.”

He stopped now and glared at her. “That’s a direct question, Sonny. Who’s going to pay and when?”

Joe Margolin had his jacket off and his sleeves rolled up. “Go ahead, answer the direct question, Sonny. Jerry’s going to run up a big tab on this one. How much are we talking about?” “Three point five million, plus or minus.”

Joe said, “That would certainly pay one or two of our bills, but we have to look at it the other way, too. I assume he’s taking somebody over. If he fails, how do we get paid? Have you gone into that?”

“Joe,” she said, “what are you asking? Do you think you’re playing with kids?”

Opening her purse, she fished out Jerry’s check and waved it around, twice flashing it right past Gallagher’s face. She reached over and handed it to Joe. “Please pass that around.”

Margolin inspected it and gave out a long whistle. “Well, he said, handing it on, “I’d have to call that an adequate retainer. That’s assuming it doesn’t bounce.”

“No problem,” she said. “The bank’s our client. I spoke with the president this morning. We’ve got the funds.”

Quickly Sam Sugarman put on his eyeglasses and took the check. After just one glance he attempted to whistle. He failed. “Edna,” he said, “please put in the minutes that Joe Margolin’s whistle goes for me, too. Also write down that a million bucks is what I would call adequate. Joe, we’re definitely not playing with kids.” He passed the check along.

Earlier this morning, Jerry’d been impressed, too, but he’d been enraged. She’d reached him at the airport specifically to warn him. “I’m filling in the check for \$1,000,000. I’m depositing it today.”

His scream still echoed in her ears. “You and your money-grubbing law firm are deliberately murdering this deal.”

“Not so, Jerry. Just tell me no, and I won’t do it.” For a long time he’d continued to whine and grumble. She’d listened carefully, but he’d never said no.

Now Gallagher, still on his feet, grabbed the check from Sanford and took his turn at scrutinizing it. She got up. She went and planted herself right alongside him and stood so that the two of them were together, touching at hip and shoulder, facing the group. She waited just a few seconds. Without looking at him, she made a fast move. She plucked the check from his hand. She twirled it overhead. Then she made a deep bow and reached over and swept the check back to Joe Margolin.

She said “OK, Mr. Gallagher, may we please have your next direct question?”

Bill Morse laughed. “She’s too much.”

Evidently flustered at the proximity, Gallagher moved away and said, “Who’s he taking over?”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” she said, “we’re using Blue Sheet procedure. Some of you do not have need-to-know. Until the operation hits the streets, which will be in about a week, we’re not going to take the rap for leakage. I’ve checked for conflict. There’s no conflict. So I’m standing fast on Blue Sheet. But I have one little direct question for Ed Gallagher. You want me to divulge the target, right, Ed?”

He didn’t respond, so she tapped her watch and continued, “It’s now about 6:00 p.m., Tuesday evening. I want you please to explain how come you can’t wait a measly couple of hours until tomorrow morning at 8:00. Direct question, Ed.”

Morse said, “I’ll answer for him. Everybody tries to make a buck. Ed wants to make a killing. I hear he’s got a stockbroker in Tokyo.”

Gallagher growled something and started toward Morse. When Morse said, “Just kidding, Ed,” Gallagher halted. He sat down.

Sugarman said, “Rats. I was hoping for a championship fight this evening, but I’m out of here now. My kid’s pitching Little League. Do we have anything to vote on? Ed, is there a motion to remove her as C.O.P.?” He adjusted his necktie and got up to leave. “I’m ready to vote.”

Gallagher said, “There’s no motion. If there is, I withdraw it. Meeting’s adjourned.”

Edna promptly folded and put away her stenotype equipment. She snuffed out another one of her cigarettes, said goodnight and departed.

In about five minutes everybody else was gone except for her and Gallagher. She sat down, put her feet on a chair, and said, “If I weren’t bone weary, I’d buy you a drink. In fact, I’m tempted.”

“Sonny, you’re an asshole, but you’re a funny asshole, and I love you. So I’m going to do you a great big favor, which I suggest you take as a prediction. Don’t move. Wait right here.”

He went to his suit jacket, which was draped over a chair. From an inside pocket he pulled out a shiny packet. “In case you’re not a woman of the world,” he said, returning to her, “I want you to know that this is a condom. I was saving it for somebody else.” He tore open the foil container. Removing the flat disk, he blew it up to a short, slim balloon, tied the end, and laid it on the table directly in front of her. He poked it once or twice with his finger. He said, “This is Jerry Faber.”

“Strange,” she said, watching it bounce. “It doesn’t resemble him at all. It looks more like what you would call a small prick.”

He said, “Observe this.” From his shirt pocket he took a ballpoint pen. With one fast overhand motion he punctured the condom. It popped and instantly became a tiny, jagged piece of latex.

She said, “How superbly graphic, Ed. But now I’m out of here, too. Come on. Let’s go have that drink.”

“Not tonight.”

She left. She didn’t look back, but she could tell he followed her a few steps. From behind her he called, “Don’t kid yourself that you won any victory.”

She entered the elevator and then leaned back out to throw him a kiss. As the door closed, she heard him say, rather softly, “That was a prediction, Sonny. Don’t ever claim I didn’t warn you.”

Chapter 6

When she went to sleep, Gallagher's prediction about Jerry was raising a great big question. When she awakened at 5:30, she knew the answer. It's an IRS problem. It's a big IRS problem, and the two of them have been concealing it from me.

According to Jerry's schedule in his notebook, he was now in Thailand, 5:30 p.m., exactly 12 hours later than Chicago time. She called his Bangkok hotel. "Hi," he said. "You just caught me. We inked the contract. It's the big one, the cornerstone. I've e-mailed it to you. I now have the takeover locked up. I'm on the way out to a dinner celebration."

"That's nice. Congratulations, but you need to explain what's going on between you and Gallagher."

"Hey, go on back to sleep," he answered. "You're dreaming."

"Why were you so determined to steer me away from Gallagher?"

"Good night, Sonny. I've got to go. Pleasant dreams." He hung up.

She called Palmer, woke him up and arranged to call for him in a cab at the John Hancock building. They'd have just enough time to arrive in the War Room at exactly 8:00. Fortunately, Palmer was a fast study and they knew each other perfectly. Somebody at the office had dubbed them "the mind reading twins."

As soon as Palmer entered the cab, she said, "Jerry's got a major tax problem that he's concealing from me. That guy is so devious, John. He's been painting Gallagher as a security leak in order to steer me away from talking with him."

"Hold on," Palmer said. "How do you know he's got a tax problem?"

"Last night Ed secretly warned me that Jerry's in deep, deep trouble. I'd call it a courtesy

warning of sorts. Ed's been meeting in our offices with an IRS gorilla named Felix Sandor."

"I'm dubious," Palmer said, "but let's assume it's true. May I be indiscreet?"

"I wish you would be. I've never seen you indiscreet."

"If we assume this tax thing is true, aren't we at the point where you should be talking with your friend in Treasury? Shouldn't we be finding out what they're doing?"

She was flabbergasted. Palmer was speaking about Adam, her acquaintance in Washington. She said, "No, there's no need for what's-his-name. I'm going to get young Goldstein working on this."

"If there is a genuine and dire tax problem, Sonny, I disagree. Goldstein's your new summer associate, isn't he? Is he up to a heavy job like this?"

She wanted to find out how Palmer knew about Adam, but she also had to brief him on the Executive Committee meeting. When they arrived at the office building, Palmer helped her from the cab and said, "Obviously neither one of us knows all the details, but I think you should play this safe. Don't gamble, Sonny. You're committing the firm to a huge project. If Jerry goes bust, we're in trouble."

"There's another thing I haven't mentioned," she said, "I don't know where Jerry got that million five. Could it be mafia, some kind of money laundering?"

At the War Room floor, she stepped out of the elevator. He followed and said, "Under the circumstances, you can't afford not to change your mind. Go see your friend in high places."

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On the street, near the Sears Tower, she found herself debating with young Goldstein from

Harvard. He fancied himself an expert on poison pills. He'd just taken a course on corporate law. He was planning to write a law review article.

Immediately after finally briefing the Faber, Margolin takeover team in the debugged War Room, she'd dumped her high heels in her office and slipped into her Nikes. As she was waiting for the elevator, she'd caught sight of Goldstein. He was just about to enter the 70th Floor library.

"Hey," she'd called. "I'm going out for one half hour——super brisk power walking. How about coming with?"

She'd already told LuAnne this morning, "Shake hands with Jane Fonda. Last night I found an old tape, plugged it in and started stair-stepping. By July 31 I'll be down 12 pounds. Guess what. By July 31 you'll be seeing ye olde college beauty, if you can imagine such a thing."

Now practically racing across Wacker Drive, she was compelling Goldstein to run, and she was always one big stride ahead of him.

Poor Goldstein was attempting to maintain conversation. He said, "Could we come back to the poison pill in just a minute? What I want to know is, Was that only talk at the luncheon, or do you really hate tax lawyers?"

Over her shoulder she said, "I hate all lawyers. I'm an anarchist."

Despite his resemblance to Jerry——hair that was dark and curly plus his swarthy Semitic features——Goldstein was pudgy and needed this exercise even more than she did. Puffing and grunting, he said, "How old is Mr. Cartwright?"

She mumbled something unresponsive. She'd come to respect the Mysterious Geezer, because it was he who'd tipped her off that the War Room was bugged and that Gallagher and Sandor were connected. In her book he was the ageless oracle at Delphi.

From behind her Goldstein said, “This drag racing is discriminatory. You’re ashamed to be seen with me. You’re embarrassed I’m wearing a yarmulke. I think I should report you to somebody.”

“Hey, don’t you yeshiva graduates ever read the U.S. Constitution? In America we have freedom of religion, you know. Whoever wants to wear a yarmulke, the Founding Fathers say, Sure, go on ahead and do it.”

Approaching the bridge over the Chicago River, she stepped up the pace but now spotted a sidewalk café near Riverside Plaza. She halted and leaned on a rail above the river. With a facial tissue from her purse, she blotted under her eyes. “I should have brought a change of clothes. Let’s go get ourselves an ice cold diet drink.”

He ordered fresh orange juice. Squinting, he shielded himself from the sun and said, “Good thing I’m learned in Talmud, because that gives me the power to reconcile anything. I don’t find it at all untenable that a lawyer is an anarchist.”

She said, “Personally, I don’t spend 30 seconds on that theoretical stuff. Let’s talk about something real.”

“The poison pill,” he said.

“No, not the poison pill. What does \$100,000 mean to you?”

“Could that be a job offer for next year? I hope that’s how much you’re paying your new associates.”

“A hundred thousand is what is called ‘chump change.’ We didn’t quantify this at the takeover meeting this morning, but have you figured out how much cash is required to take over a company that size?”

He wiped his forehead with a paper napkin. “I get you. A hundred thousand would be chump change by comparison. The problem is I don’t know where you derive that particular number.”

“Somebody spent 100 grand bugging my home, my office, the War Room. Somebody bought and installed top-of-the-line electronics. Who is it who can throw around that kind of money?”

From his shirt pocket, on his PDA, his personal digital assistant, he plugged in some numbers, studied the result for a minute and then looked up at her. “Speculators,” he said, “definitely speculators. Right after our meeting I went and checked The Wall Street Journal. The stock’s selling around 90. I’d guess there’s \$9,000,000 traded every single day—U.S., London, Tokyo and elsewhere. So a one-time hundred grand is chump change. That’s just a ball park guess, of course.”

Gulping her diet cola, she threw some dollar bills on the table, got up and poked his shoulder. “You’re way off, Goldstein, way, way off. Any idea how far off you are?”

He shook his head.

She said, “It’s hot and sticky. Let’s stroll back slowly, or else let’s get a cab. Multiply your numbers by 10. The target—we’re in public, so no names please—is monstrously big. Every day it’s not \$9,000,000 that’s traded—it’s \$90,000,000. More than \$100,000,000 isn’t unusual.”

“So why isn’t it speculators?”

“Good question. The situation is much more sinister than speculators.”

“Sinister or not,” he said, “as I’ve been explaining to you, it’s my opinion that your

takeover's dead. There's something you don't seem to realize. Here's what your client's already done, and now there's no turning back. He's acquired all of the target's Class A stock common stock. Right? As you know, under the company's poison pill plan, that automatically triggers the poison pill."

She said, "OK. So what's your point?"

"So your takeover's totally sunk. Every Class B share and every C share automatically becomes 100 shares, so your client's Class A shares are swamped and out voted."

"I see that you've read the poison pill plan. Have you also read the Articles of Incorporation?"

"No, but I've done the numbers backwards and forwards."

She said, "Hmm. Let me see now. How long have you been practicing law? Oh, gee, I'm suddenly reminding myself that you're still in school. Yesterday I spent 2 hours in a conference call with high-powered corporate lawyers. You see, Goldstein, there are certain financial institutions that we're going to use. Take the tender offers, for example. We'll deposit incredible amounts of cash. It's why the banks love us and what we do."

He waved at a cab, but it didn't stop. "Boy," he said, "this is exciting stuff. It's better than law school."

"In any case," she said, "I gave all of those high powered financial lawyers my plan, and naturally, we discussed the poison pill, and thereupon we practicing lawyers—we specialists, every one of us—we all advised our clients that the poison pill will be no problem. Now, just this minute, however, I'm horrified to discover from you that we were all totally wrong."

She poked his shoulder again, this time rather hard.

He shrugged and made a point of rubbing his arm. “Is it absolutely necessary to cripple your summer associates? I might put in for Workers’ Comp.”

“You do that,” she said. “Maybe you’ll hit a jackpot.”

He said, “Present company excepted, Ms. Faber, and with all due respect, practicing lawyers think they have all the answers. You don’t seem to realize that I’ve just aced my final exam in corporations and that every single question involved poison pills. So, let’s face it, as the responsible practicing lawyer that you are, you’re simply going to have to arrange another conference call with your financial people. You don’t even have to confess you’re wrong. I suggest you explain to them that Harvard Law School is at the cutting edge of everything and that you just got an authoritative update.”

“Listen, Kid, I’ve got three assignments for you. First, read the Articles of Incorporation and then write me a memo.”

“OK, I can do that.”

“Second, I said sinister, and I mean sinister. How’d you like to tackle an organization that’s become a bit too muscular for its own good?”

Up now on Jackson Boulevard, Goldstein darted into the street to hail a cab. “I’m still boiling hot. I’ll treat.”

When they were seated, she said, “There’s a man named Felix Sandor, but I doubt that’s his real name. Supposedly he works for the IRS, but I’m not sure of that either. Your assignment is to find him. You are to figure out what he and the IRS are doing to us. You are to determine by what authority they’re doing whatever they’re doing. Sandor is not to have any inkling whatsoever. Furthermore, my partner Ed Gallagher is not to have any inkling.”

“I’ve seen this before,” he said. “My parents used to watch Mission Impossible on TV, and I’ve seen all the movies. I’m pretty sure this is a rerun.”

“Here’s assignment number 3. You are to interview our Mr. Cartwright. Although he works for us, he’s recently become a client as well. For a good number of years now he hasn’t filed any income tax returns. I want you to develop and implement a complete plan to rescue him. This, too, is top secret. On the plus side, you’ll find he can help you with the Sandor problem.”

Goldstein had been taking notes on his PDA. She said, “Also, inasmuch as Faber, Margolin is now knowingly harboring a tax fugitive, you’ll have to figure out how to protect our law firm.”

“Can do.”

“Don’t dilly dally, Goldstein. Time is of the essence in all this. Are these tasks over your head?”

“No way. They’re wonderful assignments, and I’ve already got Mr. Cartwright half solved.”

“How so?”

“I don’t think anybody will want to put an 80-year old in jail. Also I think maybe there’s an amnesty program.”

“Eighty-seven,” she said.

As their cab pulled over and stopped at the office building, he took out his wallet, but she said, “No way. It’s my treat. You’re a working man, so you go upstairs. I’m sweaty. I’m going home to change.”

Since she never carried a cell phone, didn't want to be bothered, on the way home she had the driver pause at a drug store. She called Palmer. "I had the surveillance people check your office. They say it's not bugged. Have you any idea whatsoever what I'm about to do?"

He laughed. "I never do."

She said, "I've decided it's the IRS. Those bastards are targeting Jerry. I've got a plan."

"You always do."

"It's showdown time with Jerry and Gallagher." Although of course Jerry was her own personal client, Faber, Margolin's tax department handled all of his tax work. Therefore Ed Gallagher knew everything that was going on between Jerry and the IRS. She said, "He's got some kind of tax problem, and neither one of them has bothered to tell me about it."

Palmer said, "Either that, or they're both deliberately concealing it."

"Right you are, John. They're both concealing it. I'm not going to let them get away with it. I just called to keep you abreast. Wish me luck. Today is truth or consequences."

When she got home, she took her shower and opened her closet to decide between her red silk and the purple and white pleated. It was marvelous that her garments already felt loose after only 24 hours of dieting.

She decided to reward herself even further. She got into her jeans and then her Chicago Board of Trade T shirt. Hey, I'm the boss, she thought. I can take the rest of the day off. I'm granting myself a 24-hour leave of absence.

She called LuAnne and barked out instructions concerning the pharmaceutical merger, the electronics proxy statement, and two thousand other pending matters. "Cover for me, please."

To her surprise LuAnne didn't protest. "Right," LuAnne said. "On the big one, I assume

Mr. Palmer will be handling the takeover preparation.”

“As usual.”

Now, although everything superficially seemed under control, she was still discomfited by the bugging. She’d taken Goldstein on the walk for a definite reason——she was not yet ready to conduct business in any of her regular places.

She was especially discomfited at home. She went to the living room and commenced touring the apartment, stopping to scrutinize each one of the ten locations on her walls where electronic devices had been discovered. They’d been drilled through from the vacant condo to the south, and there were telltale, white-chalk flecks of plaster dust on the carpet. As she entered her bathroom, she shuddered. Two audio/video devices had been intruded here, one opposite the bathtub, one opposite the toilet and the sink. These two were the particularly obnoxious ones. What momentous secrets are there when I’m sitting on my toilet or when I’m stepping out of my shower?

Plunking herself onto the edge of her bed, she dialed Jerry. When he answered, she said, “I don’t think they’ve had time to rebug me, but let’s talk elliptically. Do you remember your law school days?”

“I remember everything.”

She was recalling him as the olive-skinned, baby-faced kid from South Shore. He was the kid who’d talked her into quitting the physics department. He was the kid who’d gotten her pregnant with Tom. He was the kid who promised, “If you go to law school, we’ll practice together.” Whereas she’d graduated and landed a big job, he’d never practiced even one day. He stayed in school to get an MBA on top of his law degree, and then he went to work for Merrill

Lynch. He was on commission, not even a draw. Tom at 6 months of age was the guest of honor at their wedding. All during the pregnancy and right after, too, she was producing every penny of their income.

She said, "Do you recall a bar where we used to hang out after movies downtown?"

"Of course, but now it's a coffee shop."

"So nowadays you and your young girlfriend hang out there. Isn't it amazing? Some things just never change, do they? Listen. I'm going to be there in exactly one half hour. Would you please meet me?" Knowing he couldn't tolerate the spontaneity, she hung up before he could weasel out. Soon her telephone started ringing. She smiled but otherwise ignored it.

On the street it was no trick to commandeer a taxi. Near North it was never a problem except when it rained. She didn't even own a car, just rented one whenever she needed it. If I owned one, she thought, they'd bug that, too.

She was nursing an unsweetened iced tea in the coffee shop when Jerry appeared at the door. He was in his gray plaid suit. Since it was still pre-lunch, she had the place practically to herself. He located her immediately, removed his sunglasses and headed over. Besides his youthful figure, he had a vigorous stride that she knew he achieved by means of his tennis and his treadmill. From credit card receipts going back as much as two years ago she knew something else, too. He'd begun buying drug store products that would conceal white streaks in his hair.

As he stooped to kiss her, he exhaled, enveloping her in a cloud of cigar breath. She was tempted to say, That's why you can't move back in.

He said, "I truly hate you. You've got an offensive hit-and-run style. When you called, did it ever occur to you that you made me walk out of a crucial meeting? I only came here

because I assume we're going to make arrangements. If we strike while the iron's hot, it won't be painful. I'll move back tonight. Is there any of my spaghetti sauce left?"

"Jerry," she said, "you're a goddamned liar."

He raised his right hand as though taking an oath. "I couldn't be any more honest. I admit she still lives in the apartment, but we're totally split. OK, if you must know, she has a separate bedroom, and half the time she sleeps there with her new boyfriend. She thinks she's fooling me. Anyway, screwing around is in my distant past. I'm a homebody."

She said, "I repeat. You're such a liar that you don't even know when you're telling the truth. Will you give me the straight answer to one question?"

"Every answer I give is straight."

"We'll see. Who the hell is Felix Sandor?"

She was checking out one theory, namely that Jerry himself had hired Sandor. Although she was inspecting him closely, she saw no sign of recognition. He merely shrugged. What he might have to gain by hiring Sandor she didn't know, but then Jerry was capable of anything. Conceivably he was trying to pick up the secrets of her other clients. He wasn't above such a thing. Everything in the world was part of his data base.

"OK, give me the straight answer to another question."

"That will be two straight answers to two consecutive questions. Do I get to move back in?"

"When was the last time you had a meeting with Ed Gallagher?" This time she was going for the pay dirt. If Jerry Faber had a tax problem, he'd discussed it with Gallagher.

Jerry said, "These are weird questions. I haven't seen Ed in maybe 6 months."

“I think you’re lying.”

“Ask Ed. Now how about one straight answer for me. Who’s your boyfriend these days? My spies tell me you’re robbing the cradle with a kid from Texas. What will Tom and Beth say?”

Although of course Jerry was just needling her in order to retaliate, it was obvious she’d blundered in getting so physical with Stefanski at the kickoff luncheon. The other evening Berggren had accused her of manhandling, and now Jerry was showing up with “spies,” whoever they might be. Faber, Margolin’s famous grapevine was working overtime.

Jerry said, “And what about what’s-his-name in Washington?”

OK, she thought, he means Adam. Adam doesn’t come from the grapevine, because I met him only that one time, and it was not in Chicago but in Washington, D.C. So, if he means Adam, Adam has to come from Jerry’s crew of adolescent computer hackers and from my office telephone bills and credit card records.

She said, “I think you mean Philadelphia. I haven’t seen or talked with what’s-his-name in months.”

Jerry extended his hand. “That’s right—Philadelphia. Let’s shake. Shall we cut this shit and be friends? Tonight I move back in. OK? If there’s no spaghetti, we’ll make it a gala occasion. I’ll cook us something gourmet.”

She shook hands but said, “No, you can’t. I’ve made my peace, and I won’t get sucked in again.”

“Oh, I think you might. I haven’t played my trump card yet.”

“Play it.”

“I have to move back, Sonny. I’m flat broke. I can’t pay my rent, so I’m being evicted. Literally

evicted. I have no place to go. There, you see I'm begging you. You've never been able to resist that."

He was a man of enormous pride. Although he was speaking lightly, she knew he had to be deeply wounded, because, yes, he was begging, Jerry Faber style.

She patted his arm and said, "I wouldn't worry about it. It's summer time, so I'm sure you'll find that the park bench will be very comfortable. They say that sleeping in the fresh air is remarkably beneficial. Meanwhile you have World Agriculture. You'll pull that one off in, say, 5, 6 months, so by late fall or winter you'll be on your feet. You'll be back indoors. You'll live happily ever after."

He took out a cigar. When a waitress came by and pointed to the no smoking sign, he put it away. He said, "World Agriculture is a scam. World Agriculture never had a chance. That is to say, it had a prayer, but then you and your law firm killed it when you grabbed that 1 million. At one stroke you people glommed onto nearly every penny we had in our kitty."

His approach always had been to blame either her or someone else. She said, "I wish you'd rise above yourself, Jerry. All we need is 5 minutes of concentrated honesty. I don't see where it's a scam. I've read your plan. I know everything there is to know about your plan. I believe in you. I believe in your plan."

He said, "Did your reading tell you where the 1.5 million came from?"

"I assumed your regular backers."

"Guess again."

"This is no time to be cryptic," she said, but he stayed silent.

She was watching his face for clues. He was tightening and loosening his jaw muscle. He was not

looking at her but staring at his coffee. She laid her hand on his. “OK, Jerry. What are the facts? Is this anything we can’t handle? Is this Mafia? Is this drug laundering?”

He got up. “I’m not ready for this. I’ll phone you tonight.” He wheeled and dashed out the front door, turning at the last moment and calling back, “I’m serious about moving in.”

As quickly as she could, she went to the coffee shop’s street window. With her forehead against the pane she searched for him in the swarm of noon hour passersby. Jerry, she said to herself, be real careful. Those bad guys are scary.

A moment later she calmed herself. Jerry had no need for the dirty money——no need, because he was playing in the major leagues, and everybody perceived him as a winner. Since the legitimate corporate sources were always pushing and shoving to get in on the ground floor of his next deal, he could actually take his choice.

OK, she said to herself, I cross off the Colombians——at least for the time being. Also I cross off Al Capone.

Nevertheless Jerry was dead, she thought, returning to her table to retrieve her purse. She studied the check and left a tip. The IRS made it a point to leak high-profile investigations to The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times or The Washington Post. No more than 60 seconds after they did that to Jerry, investors in every country in the world would know that the IRS was questioning his integrity.

It would be great PR for the IRS. It would make Jerry Faber an instant leper. It would destroy the World Agriculture takeover.

She presented her money to the cashier. “May I please use your telephone?” The time had come to do some heavy brainstorming with her master strategist.

When Palmer answered, she said, “John, this is Mrs. Leper calling once again. I have to talk with you. Your office is not safe enough.”

“What’s up? When and where?”

“Right away. Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park. I don’t think that’s been bugged yet. Think about this, will you, John. I believe Ed Gallagher sandbagged me last night. He had Edna transcribing the meeting. He tricked me into handing over the retainer. I don’t know where Jerry got that money. If he’s involved in anything, Ed’s going to claim I’m in complicity.”

Palmer said, “I’m on my way.”

She hung up, thanked the cashier and went onto the street. She was remembering Gallagher’s last remark last night, “Don’t ever claim I didn’t warn you.”

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She found and established herself on a bench more or less near Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park.

Aside from her own problem with Gallagher and Jerry’s problems with Felix Sandor, it was a delightful day. Her newspaper was on the seat next to her, and she planted one foot on it, leaning back against the arm rest in order to face the sun.

Now she squinted and was able to make out Palmer in his pale blue summer suit, about a block away, lurching toward her. She raised her arm to signal him. It was on account of a Korean

War injury that he had an awkward gait. When he arrived, he seemed cool and crisp. He always seemed cool and crisp. He sat on the far end of her bench.

She said, "Tell me the truth. I'm a heartless bitch, aren't I?"

"I've always regarded you as a very caring person."

"Jerry's being evicted. I told him he could sleep in the park. I'm sitting here trying to empathize and trying to see how it would feel to be homeless."

"Good luck. I'm not quite sure I could ever visualize Jerry Faber homeless and sleeping in the park."

"I ought to be worrying about him. Instead I'm lounging here. I'm developing facial wrinkles and skin cancer and calmly figuring out legal strategies. He's my husband. Shouldn't I be in a dither? Do you think half an hour will hurt me?"

"First of all, you're a lawyer. You're doing precisely what lawyers do. Clients dither. Lawyers solve problems. Second, he's not your husband. He's your estranged husband. So, no, I don't think dithering is required."

"Bless you, John. Since you're always so completely supportive, please convince me I don't have to worry. I think Jerry's done something funny to get the \$1,500,000."

Unperturbed as ever, Palmer didn't blink even once. "I don't picture him holding up a bank."

"I'm operating strictly on hunch, mind you, because he didn't say. Maybe he did something funny, and maybe he didn't."

"You're renowned for your hunches, and this particular 'funny' hunch could explain Mr. Sandor, if this supposed Mr. Sandor actually exists. I can see a scenario. Jerry uses takeover

funds for personal purposes and doesn't declare them as income. So the IRS sends Mr. Sandor to get the goods on him. I can see that scenario, but it means there's nothing to worry about."

"John, here's what's wrong with that. As you know, Jerry's not above pulling such a stunt, but I doubt he did. It's too penny ante. If he did something funny, you can bet he did it on a colossal scale. Colossal is Jerry Faber's registered trademark."

Palmer said, "True. My point was simply that you can relax for the time being, because it doesn't matter which particular scenario it is. They don't have a case as yet. They're finding it necessary to send this Mr. Sandor to gather evidence by electronic bugging. That means that today, therefore, you don't have to be in a dither—but very, very soon, I'm afraid."

She heard herself sigh. She'd already reached Palmer's conclusion.

"I repeat my earlier suggestion. Aren't we at the point where you should be talking with your Washington friend in Treasury?"

She said, "Still no need for what's-his-name. I've got young Goldstein working some angles. I'll just twiddle until there's another development. Right now I'm going home."

Palmer got up. "You're a lucky dog. I can't go home."

"You can do what I did—give yourself permission."

"I can't. Whenever you get into something that fascinates you, Sonny, you have this tendency to preempt me. You ignore that I'm Provost. And you might recall that you've got me overseeing World Agriculture. That's 24 hours per day, minimum, right there. Notice I'm not even mentioning worrying. I sit back there in our electronic command center. I contemplate two guys—you personally, Sonny, and Jerry. You two are about to be tarred with the same brush.

So go on home. You can leave it to me to do the worrying.”

As he turned and headed toward Michigan Avenue, she fell into step alongside him. Suddenly he halted, blocking her with his arm. He said, “Wait a minute. Stupid me.” He slapped his forehead. “I’m just beginning to realize something. I should have seen it all along. Are you up for a small wager?”

“Always.”

“Well, I just realized your basic premise is 100% incorrect. Ed Gallagher is not working with Jerry on any problem whatsoever.”

He was dead right. Yes, that had been her basic premise, and, yes, she’d already figured out that she’d been wrong.

He tapped his trouser pocket. “One hundred bucks. I happen to have here \$100 that says Jerry’s retained his cousin Billy.”

They resumed walking. She didn’t say anything, but for hours now she, too, had been zeroing in on Cousin Billy. When they reached the street, she signaled for a cab.

He held the door for her as she entered, closed it and then leaned forward to talk with her through the open window. He said, “I definitely recommend you change your mind about consulting your friend in high places. It’s a tax problem alright, but it’s a Cousin Billy tax problem. We just don’t do that stuff. If we don’t abort this thing immediately, it’ll go thermonuclear. Which means that our young Mr. Goldstein is not equal to this particular challenge. If Jerry goes down, you go down. If you lose Jerry, you lose \$15,000,000 per year of fees—that’s \$15,000,000 at the absolute minimum. I hate to say it, but Gallagher will unseat you.”

His fingers remained at the bottom of the open window. Unsnapping her purse, she pawed around and retrieved her wallet. She ranked Cousin Billy as Chicago's top criminal lawyer. She selected four 20's and two 10's. Cousin Billy was a sole practitioner. These days he specialized in big-time, front-page white-collar crimes.

"You win," she said.

He laughed his villain's laugh as he took the money from her, and he made a great show of counting it and stuffing it into his trouser pocket.

She said, "Well, I guess we've got a brand new competition here, but my bet stays on Goldstein."

"I disagree. I strongly disagree. I say let's find out what's going on. I say let's head it off. If you go the Goldstein route, you're just dithering."

"John, I'm entitled to dither. Estranged or not, I am his wife, so I'm going to go home and suffer. I'll lie down and pull my blanket over me for 15 minutes. That's a reasonable amount of time, wouldn't you say?"

He stepped back. "We don't have 15 minutes."

As the cab jerked forward, she yelled to him, "Hey, don't fret. As soon as I get tired of suffering, I'll get up and decide what I'm going to do next. I'll let you know."

She turned to look back through the rear window. He was waving goodbye.

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She showered and changed into her jeans and now her Chicago Art Institute T-shirt.

She called LuAnne and confirmed that coverage of her pending matters was continuing smoothly.

“Keep covering for me, please. I’m going to disappear for a day or two.”

LuAnne didn’t protest. “Have a good time,” she said.

After checking herself in the mirror, she took \$3,000 in cash from beneath her underwear in her dresser drawer. She double locked her front door, went onto Astor Street and got in a cab.

“O’Hare airport,” she told the driver.

Chapter 7

She was in Rosslyn, a suburb outside Washington, D.C., waiting for Adam FitzGibbons to return from the men's room. Sitting at a window table at the Tivoli restaurant, she was studying the Potomac, which lay before her in a panoramic vista.

Adam was the Cabinet undersecretary who had ultimate authority over the IRS. When Palmer spoke of her "friend in high places," he was referring to the Treasury Department and to Adam in particular. How Palmer had managed to learn of her acquaintance with Adam was a mystery she hadn't yet solved. Jerry knew of him, too, and that was another mystery.

She counted on trips away from home and the office to broaden her frame of reference. Here Adam had quickly become the focus. Here she allowed seemingly irrelevant thoughts to come to her. She wanted to ask him if he was a sailor, because she was visualizing him at the helm on the Potomac or on Chesapeake Bay. Perhaps it was his ruddy summer complexion. In April, when she'd met him, he must have been comparatively pale. Perhaps tonight his double-breasted blue blazer and white trousers were connoting "commodore" to her. He was a tall man, muscular in his upper torso. Perhaps it was her sense that he exuded command.

Almost a thousand miles away everything else seemed on hold—Ed Gallagher and his machinations at Faber, Margolin, Tom and Beth, World Agriculture, the Mysterious Geezer, the summer associates, the mergers, the stock splits, the bugs. However, Jerry Faber's legal problems were not on hold. They were explosive. They'd brought her here, and John Palmer was exactly correct. If she was going to do anything, she had to do it instantly. She had to do it right at the top.

Now she felt Adam's hands on her. He'd come up in back of her and was massaging her neck and shoulders. She wasn't surprised. Although she hadn't heard him approach, she knew he was fond of this particular intimacy. Back in April, as he was accompanying her in a cab to National Airport, her muscles were sore from tension. She'd been testifying all morning at an SEC hearing on proposed new regulations. He was there representing the Treasury on income tax aspects. In the cab, as she was rotating her head clockwise and counterclockwise, stretching it as far as she could in every direction, he reached behind her and applied a gentle, relieving pressure. All she did then was purr.

Tonight she inclined her head to rest her cheek on his hand, and he whispered in her ear, "I'm glad you recognize that we're a full-service Treasury Department." He had a nice aftershave scent.

She said, "Holy smokes, Adam, is there any way you could have your IRS provide this particular service whenever they audit returns? Taxpayers would become very compliant. In fact, please write me down. I volunteer to field test your program."

"You know what?" he said, releasing her. "You're giving me an absolutely crackerjack idea."

She'd forgotten that his voice did not issue from his larynx but resonated from deep in his chest. "You're giving me crackerjack ideas, too."

Now he patted her and moved from behind her, and she had the impression that he flowed into his seat and ended up sitting erect and strong. Almost as tall as Stefanski, he was graceful as well as muscular, whereas Stefanski was skinny and seemed articulated and mechanical.

He grinned at her, just slightly revealing two rows of nice, even teeth. She liked it that he

always looked directly at her when she spoke. She liked everything about him except possibly his hand-painted orange and red necktie, but actually the necktie, too, seemed part of his fluid aura. In effect it was his declaration that he could wear anything, go anywhere, do anything he wanted.

She asked, "By any chance are you a sailor?"

"And do you by any chance have a network of spies?"

Although he was giving her the perfect opening to talk about Felix Sandor and the IRS's electronic intrusions, she deemed it premature.

She raised her glass in toast. "Here's to flowers."

"To flowers," he said.

An indeterminate amount older than she, he was almost like a kid in his spontaneity. During her testimony he was the one who'd fired the incisive questions at her. Then she'd introduced herself to him as soon as there was a break, and he said, "While you were speaking, I took the liberty of deciding that you and I can settle all these technical matters between ourselves. Let's get the hell out of here."

Without hesitating an instant, she'd hooked her arm in his, and it was an elegant moment. She was sensing that the two of them were fluid and spontaneous to exactly the same degree. They set off in the light spring drizzle and never made it back to the hearing. They had lunch. They spent an hour in I. M. Pei's East Wing, occasionally holding hands and once almost kissing. When it became 3:00 o'clock, he rode with her to the airport.

Since April she'd spoken with him six or seven times. The first Saturday after the meeting he'd called her at her apartment. "No particular reason," he'd said, "except I'm working alone at the office, and I'm feeling sorry for myself."

She wired him flowers, anonymously. Within two hours she received back a huge bouquet, also anonymously. Neither of them had ever acknowledged the exchange.

He took a small sip and said, “I agree with something you said here in Washington—we’re kindred, Sonny. So I’m thinking of my crackerjack idea. I wonder if we’ve both got the same crackerjack idea. What do you think?”

“My theory is that these things are always like the magnetic poles—north and south, equal and opposite. So I’ve got ten bucks that says yes we do.”

He laid down his menu and put a \$10 bill on the table. “I believe I’ll take that bet. I’ll tell you my idea. I say let’s finish our drink and not have dinner here.” He reached toward her and let his fingertips make contact with her hand. “There’s probably a great McDonald’s nearby. I say let’s carry out some burgers and fries, and then let’s go to a certain motel I know. I’m no masseur, but I can tell you’re under great tension. So I’m suggesting a revolutionary new procedure—personal acupuncture. It’s available only to selected taxpayers, and I’ll administer it myself. If it works for you, I’m going to recommend we try it for everybody.”

She entwined her fingers with his. “By golly, that’s a humanitarian idea. My idea is quite similar but much more self-centered.”

“Let’s hear your idea. I’m very open to self-centered.”

“I say let’s finish dinner here, so that I can watch the sunset on the Potomac. I’ve never seen it before. Then let’s go to my hotel.”

“That makes sense, a lot of sense, but am I correct that you’re staying at what used to be the DuPont Plaza? Didn’t you mention that you’re at the old DuPont Plaza?”

She nodded.

“From my point of view,” he said, “the so-called DuPont Plaza is very centrally located. Everybody in the world knows me. The Washington Post knows me. The television networks know me. These are just examples. More to the point, my own home is only a few blocks away. Since my acupuncture procedure is still experimental, I don’t want too many prying eyes. Frankly, I’m speaking of my wife for one. Isn’t there some way that we can avoid the so-called DuPont Plaza?”

“It has one big advantage——crucial toilet articles are there. Also it has a sentimental advantage, because one of my heroes, the scientist Leo Szilard, used to stay there. I always try to get his room. They’ve got a nice little bar, and my idea is to sedate ourselves with a bottle of wine. In this day and age we probably ought to discuss whether there are any of those vile and loathsome diseases to worry about.”

He was nodding in agreement. He said, “I’m sure I’m alright so far as that goes. How about you?”

“No problem there. For all practical purposes, I’m driven snow. Would it compromise you to be seen in the bar? Will your wife be peering in the window or swooping in to check out the place?” She reached across and lifted his necktie. “If you were to remove this particular garment, would The Washington Post notice you? I’m not saying it’s not beautiful.”

“I have a sentimental attachment. Somebody gave it to me for Father’s Day.” He squeezed her hand. “I suppose I could get away with the bar, but how can we handle the acupuncture?”

“You’re a lucky man.” She was having a momentary pang of self-pity. “This last Mother’s Day I heard from nobody. Nobody sent me a card, nobody gave me a necktie. But you

know, I think my hero Szilard pioneered verbal acupuncture. I wonder if there's any point in our considering verbal acupuncture."

He took back the \$10. "I'm going to hold on to this until I'm certain we have the identical idea."

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She went to her room after pointing Adam into the bar to wait for her. Ostensibly she was going to freshen up, but really she intended to call LuAnne to find out what had been going on back home. She sat on the bed and then decided not to take the risk. Nobody at all knew where she was. If Adam would help her protect Jerry, it would be imprudent to provide even the tiniest trail for Mr. Felix Sandor. Already too many people knew about Adam.

She took the phone and called the bar downstairs. "A guy just came in with a noticeable necktie," she said. "Could I please speak with him?" In a few moments he came on the line. "Adam," she said, "you sound spooked. Did somebody spot you?"

"No, but I confess I feel very visible here. I was all shook when they said there was a phone call."

"I decided I'm known in this town, too, so why don't you come up, and I'll make you a drink."

When he entered, he was still holding the \$10 bill, and in fact he'd been clutching it in his fist during the cab ride from the restaurant. He said, "Although I've been admiring your dress all evening long, just now I was speculating that I'd come up and find you in something more comfortable."

She was near the clothes closet, and she beckoned him to it. "*Voila*, my entire wardrobe."

Her jeans, T shirt, bra and underpants were folded on one hanger. Her walking shoes and socks were on the floor alongside two empty shopping bags.

He leaned into the closet to peer around. “What about luggage? Usually visitors to our nation’s capital come more fully provisioned.”

“Only a few hours ago I was in these jeans. I was meeting at Buckingham Fountain in Chicago with my partner John Palmer. I got in a cab to go home. Then I changed my mind. I decided to see you. I raided my cash supply for \$3000, went straight to O’Hare and called you. This cocktail dress comes from a shop down the street on Connecticut Avenue.” She lifted her skirt 5 or 6 inches above her knees. “So do these pantyhose and various other undergarments. I want you to know I selected sexy undergarments. So do my cosmetics, my bathroom stuff and my shoes. Hence I don’t have anything more comfortable.”

He said, “You certainly chose a lovely dress. I think it’s what they call ‘Connecticut Avenue Blue.’ How about twirling for me. Maybe I’ll get a glimpse of your undergarments.”

She took his hand and twirled four times, and it felt good. Her legs were OK, and the full skirt concealed her thighs and her bottom. In fact, her bottom felt as if it had shrunk after just two days of dieting and after just two days of Jane Fonda.

“OK,” she said, subsiding into a chair, “In order to feel more comfortable, I’ve got to get one preliminary out of the way. When I decided to come here, I figured there was a good shot at personal acupuncture, and I still do, but that wasn’t my reason for coming. Being here, my values seem to have changed. You might say acupuncture has become my real objective, with everything else secondary. Would you be willing to take all that as a given?”

“Magnetic, equal and opposite.”

“So then, at the risk of teasing you, I can tell you that I’ve had mental acupuncture with you a fair number of times since April. I also have to alert you that there are certain problems that might stand in the way.”

“Why did you pick \$3,000 in cash? At my Cabinet level, nobody tries to influence anybody with \$3,000.”

“I think my partners review my credit card charges in detail. I’m sure my husband—my estranged husband—has computer geeks who do the same to my card accounts and to my bank statements and telephone bills and probably even to my library card. These guys are not my problem.”

He did not respond. She unlocked the minibar by the window and poured a glass of vodka for herself and one for him. At the Tivoli they’d both been drinking vodka. She added ice and handed him a glass.

“No,” she said, “the problem is your man Felix Sandor.”

“I can’t confirm or deny that I know Felix Sandor, but I can tell you, friend to friend, that there is a man by that name and that he’s a thug, an electronic thug. I can also tell you that you’re wise to use cash rather than credit cards. If he’s taken an interest in you, you have precious few secrets. But, of course, I never heard of him.”

“At the risk of teasing you, would you like to know some of the various things that take place during my mental acupuncture?”

“If the IRS is after you, I don’t think I should know. It would be different if I were in, say, Agriculture or Labor. I think you’re 100% right that there are problems that stand in the way.”

“If they’re not after me but after my estranged husband, would it be OK to tell you? I’d

enjoy telling you.”

“I don’t think so.” He looked at his wristwatch. “Jesus, look how late it is. I live only a few blocks away. I ought to be moseying on home.”

She said, “All of a sudden I think there’s something going on here. Why am I feeling that I have to high pressure you? It might help me if you’d please put that money away, because I’m getting the impression that you think I’m trying to sell you something. I must say I hate that impression.”

Without saying anything, he cleared his throat and slumped more deeply into his chair.

“OK, Adam, I’ll tell you exactly what I want out of you. Yes, I had an original business objective, but, yes, it’s been aced out by acupuncture because of our fun and games tonight.” She paused. “However, I won’t go any further now unless you reassure me. If you have qualms, this is the time to let me know. Otherwise I won’t say any more.”

Again he remained silent.

“OK. Your man Felix Sandor bugged my office, bugged our ultra-secret securities rooms, bugged my apartment, put not just one but two audio/video bugs in my bathroom. Adam, I mean video in the bathroom! Now that’s sick.”

“Please don’t hang that on me. Felix Sandor is not my man. In any case, I don’t know what I can possibly do for you.”

“For starters, I want that illegal shit cut out instantly. I want every transcript of every monitored conversation. I want the original tapes. I want the original and all copies of the bathroom videos.”

She was amazed at what she was saying. She did not mean to come out fighting. “I’m

sorry, Adam. Those bathroom tapes bother me. I've been racking my brains. I'm wondering what I did in there—e.g., what kind of noises did I make? I get so mad. Is there any way that Sandor could be strung up by his testicles and dangled from your Treasury building?"

"Listen," he said, "I don't know anything about this, because I don't ever involve myself on this level. Analytically, there are at least three possibilities. If there is an investigation—and I stress that I don't have any idea whether there is one—and if you are the subject of the investigation, there might be a court order authorizing surveillance."

She nodded and held up one finger.

"Moving right along," he said, "if it's not you, if it's your husband, that's the second possibility, and in that case I'm not sure what the legal situation is. I presume you file joint returns, so there could be some sort of basis for going after you personally."

She held up two fingers.

"OK, Sonny, we come to the third possibility, but I must say I'm very uncomfortable running through these things. Can't you just accept it that I don't actually know anything, that I'm just being abstractly analytical? You're a very smart lawyer. Why don't you tell me what a third possibility is."

"Oh, Adam, my eyes are closed. I'm feeling stupid because I was so strident a minute ago. I will say that, if your IRS is out to get someone, they will drum up a third possibility and a fourth and a fifth. As I see it in real life, it has to be Jerry. There's not even an outside chance it's me. We file separate returns. Sorry about strident."

He stood up and began edging toward the door. "Strident? Yes, you were, but I understand why—your house is your castle, let alone your private rooms therein. But look here,

Sonny, it's been real great to see you. Let's do this again sometime. Next time you're going to be in town, let me know, so that my wife can join us."

He opened the door, faced her full on and shrugged. A minute later he was gone. The last she saw was the door swinging closed behind him.

"Wow!" she said out loud. Plumping up her pillow, she sat on the bed, leaned back and kicked off her shoes, which had been hurting her all evening. She reached over to the night table to retrieve her vodka, and she discovered that he'd left his \$10 behind. She seized it, tore it up and went and flushed the pieces down the toilet.

This is just too much, she thought. I feel like a fucking asshole. Wait a minute. I didn't do anything wrong. I put my cards on the table, and he rejected me. I don't have to suffer on account of that. She slipped her shoes back on and headed downstairs for a nightcap.

Chicago was an hour earlier, and she was still on Chicago time.

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As soon as her early morning flight arrived at O'Hare, she called John Palmer. She woke him up. The only third possibility she had been able to think of was that the whole law firm, Faber, Margolin itself, might be under investigation. She said, "John, there's something new to ponder. Please meet me the same place as yesterday. Since it's rush hour, better give me a good hour or 45 minutes."

He was waiting in Grant Park near the fountain when she got there, again in a summer-weight suit although the day was still cool. As usual he had the morning pallor that meant he'd

drunk himself to sleep. Since she was anxious to see him, she hadn't even stopped at home. As a result, she was still toting her Connecticut Avenue shopping bags.

She said, "You were right, and you were wrong. I met with Adam FitzGibbons in Washington yesterday. As you know, he's Treasury undersecretary." She brandished the parcels as if for proof. "You were absolutely right that the situation is urgent and that we have to go to the top. You were wrong that friendship would get this guy to help me. He didn't know anything about it, and he won't touch it. So much for friendship. On the other hand, he did confirm that the IRS uses Sandor." She hoisted a shopping bag and drew one finger across her throat. "He warned me to be careful."

The two of them simply remained standing there, facing each other. At last he shrugged. "My hunch is he'll be back to you. You experienced only his immediate reaction. If I were you, I'd let it rest there a day or two—two days max—and see what happens."

"His immediate reaction was to assume I'm a whore wanting to trade sex for official favors."

"I don't think so."

"I was there."

Although she often disagreed with Palmer, they'd always found the middle ground for their differences, and she'd never known him to be entirely wrong. Therefore she took heart that he was in effect defending Adam against the whore charge which she was leveling.

Adam was an asshole. She positively liked him. She wanted to be with him again. Whore or not, asshole or not, if he were to call tonight, she'd fly to him tonight. Unfortunately, he'd

never call until Jerry's case was finished—if it was Jerry's case—or he'd never call until her case was finished if it was hers. If Faber, Margolin was the third possibility, he wouldn't call at all until that investigation had exhausted itself.

So farewell, Adam FitzGibbons.

She said, "John, how the hell did you know that I know Adam FitzGibbons?"

"I had to do some research."

"Oh, God, now John Palmer has me under surveillance, too."

He laughed and touched his chest. "Me? John Palmer? John Palmer is not one of the bad guys. You'll recall that John Palmer is the Provost. John Palmer is the partner who oversees the employee sympathy fund. In April, when you sent flowers to your Mr. FitzGibbons, you used your office credit card, and I instructed my secretary to find out whether he was bereaved or had a hospitalized family member or whether he was something else."

"I can definitely tell you he's something else. If anybody feels bereaved, I feel bereaved. I wish I hadn't gone."

"I disagree. He'll be back. You started the ball rolling."

"He kicked me in the teeth."

Palmer stepped back and rotated, so that now he was facing away from her. "Although this is none of my business, I'll ask it anyway. Did you in fact say something or maybe do something that sounded like an offer to trade him?"

She released her shopping bags, which she was still holding, and she circled in front of him. "Can I believe this, John? Are you finally asking me a question about my personal life? How long have we known each other? Of course I didn't, but he made me feel as if I did. It is

your business, John. You're the one person in the world I have no secrets from."

She stepped forward and hugged him, pressing her face against his chest and pushing herself as close to him as she could. Except for the time at the cemetery when his wife died, she'd never embraced him like this. She waited for him to return the pressure of the hug, but he remained rigid and resistive and didn't even put his arms around her.

When she loosened the embrace and leaned away, she saw that his face was flushed. It was contorted, too, and she suspected he was crying. "I wish you'd hug me," she said. "I need it this morning." He didn't move. "Come on, John, please break down and hug me. You can use it, too."

Now his arms went up, and he grasped her shoulders. Into her ear he whispered, "I can't believe I'm saying this. I just want you very much to know that I would never ever kick you in the teeth."

Chapter 8

Jerry Faber had wrapped up his work overseas and flown home. He had called his children home and the family assembled at his apartment and he briefed them on everything he had achieved.

The entire Jerry and Sonny Faber family took Jerry's secret escape route. They rode the freight elevator from his penthouse to the basement, and it was downright unpleasant. A completely dysfunctional bunch, she was thinking, we're no family. So she stood behind them all in the elevator car, watching Beth hold Jerry's hand and Tom rest his arm across Jerry's shoulder.

Downstairs they trooped through some corridors into the building's garage and then piled into the U-Haul van that Jerry had rented. They drove to a Wendy's for lunch.

She felt a tremendous sense of anticlimax, because the immediate heat was off. There was no IRS investigation. There was no Mafia money. There was no drug money. The moment Jerry produced Beth and Tom, she knew that he'd borrowed \$750,000 from Beth's trust fund and another \$750,000 from Tom's.

Unfortunately, "borrowed" wasn't the right word. "Embezzled" would be a great big stretch but would be a lot closer to it. While she was hugging and kissing Beth, she was simultaneously boiling over at Jerry.

At the restaurant, everyone else went to the serving counter to order, but she excused herself and phoned John Palmer to alert him.

He said, "Our saga's latest twist and turn. Do you know this about Jerry for a fact or are

you surmising it?"

"I'm totally certain."

"OK. Even if it's not Mafia, it's not really much better. But at least it's finally something definite, and we'd better disclose it to New York right away." He was referring to Jerry's investment bankers, who were arranging the billions that would be needed.

"Listen," she said, "I'll come to the War Room tonight. I have to—I must—spend the afternoon with the kids. Can I get away with that? But please, you've got to intercede for me with LuAnne. She's got a pile of stuff for me and doesn't give me a minute's peace. As for New York, they'll be working all night long just like we are."

"If you must," he said, "but we have to telephone them about this, so the sooner the better. They have the final say. If they want to shut down the deal, it's down. Tomorrow we also have to disclose it to our Executive Committee."

"Ugh," she answered. "That means Ed Gallagher. I certainly don't relish it."

She hung up, went to the counter to purchase her salad and diet cola, and then joined the others at the table.

Sliding into the booth, she was thinking, How mature Beth looks. Beth's face was young but intelligent. Beth's hair was neatly combed for the first time since she was a toddler or maybe a pre-teen. And she'd dressed for lunch, even for lunch at Wendy's, changing from her jeans into a nice blue and yellow floral print. Also she was wearing her expensive gold necklace with the oblong amber stones, her Bat Mitzvah gift from two of her grandparents, Jerry's mother and dad. So Beth had come a long way. Before she'd entered the Rochester boarding high school, she'd always ditched her decent clothes and conventional jewelry, such as the necklace. She was 100%

dedicated to grunge.

Now Beth chewed a bite of chicken and swallowed it, leaned over to her and said in a confidential voice, “So what’s up with you two? Are my beloved mother and father split forever? Or will they grow up and get back together and live happily ever after? What’s the next installment?”

“Probably your beloved mother and father will never grow up.” She squeezed Beth’s hand. “I’m willing to talk about it, but let’s do it later on, when we can be private, girl to girl.”

Beth’s question certainly had an adult flavor. It was the kind of question that two years ago she wouldn’t have been able to ask.

She glanced at Tom. He’d matured, too. He was sitting with his fork poised, too engrossed in what he was saying to pause to eat. He’d always been a wonderful raconteur and now was regaling Jerry with his adventures in Europe as a roustabout with a Russian circus. While he used to resemble Jerry quite closely, the Russians must have fed him well, because his face had filled out. Jerry’s face remained skinny by comparison. Like Jerry, Tom had an olive complexion and dark curly hair. Today he had an alert, bright-eyed appearance that was his rather than Jerry’s. He’s finally taking on some of my features, she thought. And my fingers are crossed. I expect he’ll be going back to college.

For the first time in years she was actually proud of her children, and she was glad they were home.

She finished her salad and went for a refill of her diet cola.

She was still enraged over the trust funds. Years ago, when Jerry’d pulled off his first big acquisition, she and Jerry set up the funds, one for Tom, an equal one for Beth. They’d decided to spend half of his fee for themselves—they bought the huge condominium for cash. They salted

away the other half for the kids and made Jerry the trustee of the trusts. After all, he was the hotshot MBA from the University of Chicago.

So the trusts gave him investment discretion, but he didn't have any authority to invest the money in his own high-risk deals. What he'd done was undoubtedly a breach of trust, gross self-dealing even if not technically embezzlement.

Back at the table, she sat and watched him in action. You had to know Jerry Faber to remind yourself that this guy was an accomplished con man, and you almost had to admire his skill. Outwardly fascinated by every word Tom or Beth said, outwardly the loving, concerned father, he was manipulating them. His angle—— line up their legal approval for his borrowing.

Probably both of them had already approved. Even if so, however, Mr. Snake Oil was in trouble, and no amount of manipulation would rescue him. Tom's OK would be good, but Beth was only 17. Therefore Beth didn't have legal capacity. Beth could approve all day long, but her vote was meaningless. So, yes, as a practical matter, he'd "embezzled" her funds.

As soon as they finished lunch, Jerry said, "I've got stuff to do. Let's get going." He drove them to her apartment, where Beth and Tom would be staying in their old bedrooms. The two of them disembarked and dashed in.

He remained in the van, preparing to pull away, but she stood alongside his open window and glowered at him. After a few seconds, he chickened out and looked away, began studying his key in the ignition, simply did not have the balls to face her. He definitely reeked of his cigars and of the onion and ketchup from his hamburger as well. She leaned forward and spoke into his ear. "You're unprincipled. You're an asshole."

"Who, me?"

“An asshole. You’re a totally unprincipled asshole. She’s not 18. Your fucking deal’s dead.” She wanted to spit at him or slap his head, but she simply turned and walked away.

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Upstairs in her apartment she compartmentalized herself. She decided to be a mother and nothing else during the long afternoon. Whenever she thought of a household chore, she interrupted Beth or Tom no matter what they were saying or doing. Rummaging around in the linen closet, she pulled out towels, washcloths and clean sheets. She distributed them in their bedrooms and actually made up their beds herself, but first she had to locate the blankets in plastic bags in one of the hall storage closets, where the cleaning woman had stashed them. She returned to the living room. “Now what were you saying?” she said. Suddenly she remembered dinner. She took the cordless telephone while Tom was reminiscing about an adventure in Germany, and, maintaining eye contact with him and nodding at him the whole time, she placed a huge order for groceries. She asked Beth a question but jumped up before she answered. She went to vacuum and dust their bedrooms. “Sorry,” she said when she came back. When the groceries arrived, she personally stocked the refrigerator and pantry. At 6:00 o’clock she microwaved the dinner, producing three delicious prepackaged Chinese meals.

As soon as they ate their fortune cookies, she rinsed the plastic trays, took a quick, hot shower and then put on office clothes, her silk dress that looked like Beth’s floral print.

She hugged Beth first, then Tom. “Very big deal at work,” she said. “It was on my mind all afternoon. Wait till this deal’s done, and then I won’t be distracted.” She blew them each a kiss, and she sailed out. Watching the door close behind her, she said to herself, I’m quite the role model—combination mother, cleaning woman, cook, and now the dedicated professional

person.

The city traffic was light as her taxi headed toward the Loop. She didn't have to go there to do work, because Palmer was running the whole show. When he headed up these round-the-clock sessions, his drinking was controlled. So, no, she had no qualms about the work. Moreover, with all of her Faber, Margolin takeover team lawyers actively on the job, there wasn't anything she herself could add.

Nevertheless she had two specific missions that required her presence.

One mission was to call New York to disclose what Jerry had done. No doubt John Palmer had already drafted a disclosure statement. She'd go over it with him and then fax it off. Since the investment bankers controlled the funds, they always had the final say-so. Undoubtedly New York would want the takeover to continue, but first they'd exact some exorbitant financial concessions from the final cut. So a basis point or two, that's what Jerry's trust fund adventure would probably end up costing him and his backers—in this case as much as \$1,500,000. When you made a mistake, you paid for it, which is why New York loved sudden problems. New York always compensated itself.

Her second mission was to buck up the troops. Monday was D-Day for the invasion against Germany, and 9:00 a.m. Eastern time was H-Hour. Therefore it was vital for morale that the boss show up to manifest her concern and support. There were vital tasks to be accomplished tonight and tomorrow and all weekend long. Dwight Eisenhower was another of her heroes. In various TV specials on World War II, she'd seen him visit the airborne and infantry battalions on the eve of his D-Day. Also she was recalling, however, that bad weather had forced the postponement of what was his original D-Day.

Arriving at the office, she went directly to the War Room. “You holding up in here?” she asked LuAnne. LuAnne was standing at her War Room desk, a sandwich in one hand and a can of soft drink in the other. She was wearing not jeans but tapered brown cotton pants. She had on a tan work shirt with a big sunflower embroidered on the left front. Her sleeves were turned up above the elbow, and a large brown tortoise shell comb gathered her gorgeous red hair into a ponytail.

“Mr. Palmer and I are eagerly awaiting you,” LuAnne said.

“I know. My kids came back.”

“I know that. I’m very happy for you, but you’ve got a lot of catching up. So far everything’s under control, and everybody’s placated. I beg you, though, don’t go home without seeing me. And, oh, yes, a new development. Upstairs you’ve got a suspicious looking package that arrived this afternoon by special courier, whom I didn’t recognize. It’s marked ‘Addressee Only.’ Naturally I wondered if it’s a mail bomb, and I didn’t open it. If you want, I’ll get it for you while you’re seeing Mr. Palmer.”

“What’s the return address on this mail bomb?”

“It’s from a Mr. Adam FitzGibbons.”

“It’s a mail bomb alright, but I’ll take a look.”

She was torn. She wanted to dash upstairs to get her package right now, this very minute, but World Agriculture was teetering in the balance. Today’s first priority was World Agriculture. Adam FitzGibbons was second in line.

Sliding her fingers along the textured corridor wall, she went to Palmer’s office and plopped herself into a chair. As she expected, he was fully dressed with necktie and suit jacket.

“My rotten husband,” she said.

“A totally unprincipled man,” Palmer replied.

“Unprincipled——exactly what I called him at lunch today, word for word. Only I pinpointed it on him precisely. I identified a specific feature of his personal anatomy.”

Palmer said, “I’ve taken the liberty of giving young Stefanski a copy of Beth’s trust agreement, because I’ve invented what I believe might be a procedure to satisfy New York. If you’re willing to go on the hook personally, maybe we can still rescue this deal.”

She said, “I’ll listen.”

“Tom’s trust is OK, because he’s of age. For Beth, we go into court tomorrow on an emergency petition for the appointment of a guardian ad litem for her. Now, you may be nuts to do so, but you personally indemnify her trust against any loss. If the deal blows up——in other words, if the absolute worst happens——the whole thing could cost you, let’s say, \$1,000,000, including outrageous attorneys fees and guardian fees. The trust itself, however, will not lose one penny. Since you’re good for the million, I think the guardian and the judge will approve on behalf of Beth. If so, we clean this up in just one day.”

“Jesus,” she said, “\$1,000,000. But I agree with that number. That’s my outside exposure, and it’s too much exposure. So, no, I don’t think so. The only thing that tempts me to do it is that I believe in the deal.”

“It’s your call, Sonny. I have Stefanski mapping out the court procedure. He’s to research the issues under Illinois law and then to draft up all of the necessary papers. Right now he’s in here somewhere, sitting at a computer terminal. I myself drafted the indemnification undertaking. We’ll need to attach your current financial statement. Stefanski’s deadline is 6:00 o’clock

tomorrow morning. I think he can do it.”

“I’m sure you instructed him to keep this under his hat. Tomorrow’s Friday. Until we announce on Monday, we don’t dare identify World Agriculture.”

“Under penalty of death, he’s sworn to secrecy, but you’re giving me a good idea. If we do it, I’ll file as Beth’s next friend, and I’ll use assumed names——Jane Doe and Richard Roe. I’ll ask the court to seal the petition until at least Monday.”

Now LuAnne knocked on Palmer’s open door and stuck her head into his office. “Sonny,” she said, “here’s your bomb. I’ve got to rush back to work.” Handing her a package that resembled a large shoe box, LuAnne promptly scooted out the door.

She hefted the package for a moment and then extended it toward Palmer. “I do believe LuAnne’s scared of this. Do you think it’s a bomb?”

He scrutinized the address label. “Seeing who sent it, I guess it is.” She ripped off the paper wrapper. Inside there was in fact a shoe box, and inside that, swaddled in newspapers, there were two videotapes and about a dozen audio cassettes. One videotape, the one with a hand-drawn skull and crossbones pasted on it, was labeled “S. Faber Bathroom.” She handed all of them to Palmer.

There was also a small jewelry gift box, which rattled when she shook it. Tearing off the navy blue bow and the gold foil paper, she removed the top. The box contained an electronic key, the key to the room she’d been occupying at the old DuPont Plaza just last night. She stuffed the box and key in her purse and didn’t show them to Palmer.

Palmer handed back the tapes. “Now for a decision. Please take a look at this indemnification undertaking. What’s your pleasure?”

It was a four-page document, a typical John Palmer product, precisely written and covering every possibility. “What the hell,” she said. She signed it.

He said, “OK, if you’re doing that, here’s the disclosure letter I wrote for your signature. We put it in writing, we fax it to New York, and then we call them.”

She read the letter and signed it.

She handed him the document and his pen. She had only one thought—I’m going to Washington. “You call New York,” she said, “and speak for me. Whatever you say is OK.”

She waved goodbye and snuck out without seeing LuAnne.

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Arriving at National Airport after midnight on the last flight from Chicago, she double-timed to the cab stand. She’d called Adam from O’Hare, and he’d be waiting for her at the hotel. She’d called Beth and Tom, too. “I have to go out of town tonight. It’s this big deal. Why don’t you see if you can get together with your father? You’ll find some money in an envelope in the buffet. I might be gone until as long as Sunday. You guys can’t reach me, but I’ll call in often.” Some beloved mother I am, she thought.

She’d also called LuAnne. “Please continue to placate,” she said. “Another day won’t hurt anyone.” This time, since now LuAnne knew the name Adam FitzGibbons, she told LuAnne where she’d be. “The room might be in my name, or it might be in his. Palmer doesn’t know where I’m going. I told him he can reach me through you.”

Approaching the old DuPont Plaza, she was terrified she’d forgotten what Adam looked like. Now she arrived, and she took the elevator right up. Although she had the room key in her hand, she knocked on the door. He opened it, but she didn’t dare look at his face. His necktie, at

her eye level, was pulled down. His two top shirt buttons were open, so that a few black and gray chest hairs were peeping out. His sleeves were rolled above his wrists.

At last she compelled herself to look up at him and was relieved that his smile was immediately familiar. It was his little boy smile. He looked sun tanned and utterly healthy.

Without a word, she stepped into his arms and pressed her face and body against his. She lifted her head to touch his mouth with hers. His lips were incredibly soft. The kiss lasted and lasted and made her tremble, sending some kind of triggering signal from her lips and tongue to her brain and to her nipples. Down below she was oozing her sex fluids, which had been dammed up from last night. Her whole skin became supersensitive.

She refused to break the embrace until she had to breathe. Taking his hand, she led him inside and kicked the door closed. She said, "That was the sweetest kiss I ever had."

He murmured something and drew her to the bed. When he sat on the side of it, she knelt on the floor between his legs, resting her hands on his knees. He began stroking her face and mouth.

He said, "I'm in trouble, very serious trouble."

"Me, too," she answered, kissing his fingers.

"If you and I go to bed," he said, "I'm a goner."

"Me, too. Mind you, I want to be a goner. Let's be goners as soon as possible, but I'm scared. I'm 42, going on 43, and I never felt like this before."

"I'm exactly 50. I should've learned something in a half century. We have to stop right now. We'd better get prudent."

"I know what's going on. It's companionship deprivation. I married Jerry when I was a

kid. I never had an across-the-board companion——sexual, intellectual, domestic, professional. If we go to bed, I think you'll become my first and only companion. That's what I want from you."

He kissed her and said, "For starters, would you be willing to press your hand against my male member?"

"I'd love to. I've done it many, many times——all alone, of course, in my own boudoir. I've even got a hunch what it looks like." She bent forward and kissed the fly of his trousers, pressing hard against his erection.

"Wait!" he cried. "You've got to quit doing that. Do you realize it was just last night you were here? Do you realize I haven't been able to think of anything but you?"

"Funny," she answered. "Last night all I wanted was to get you into this very bed. Tonight I don't think I want to. I'm involved in a gigantic deal at work. I love it. If I get into bed with you, I won't ever want to get up. I'll retire from the law practice. I'll lie here all day, eating chocolates while waiting for you to come home from the Treasury Department. I won't ever see my children again. I'll gain 50 pounds."

He said, "If we go to bed, I'll be the one waiting for you and eating the chocolates. Please do me a favor. Please go sit in that chair over there. We've got to let this male member subside."

She rose and paced the room for a moment. Then she sat in the chair. "Let's take a walk outside. I recall there's an all-night drugstore. I hopped on a plane as soon as I got your package, and I don't have so much as a toothbrush."

Bending forward to peer at his crotch, he said, "Well, there's a CVS nearby, but looks like I'll need just another minute or two to become presentable. Then we'll go. Please tell me about

your big deal at work.”

“Hot damn!” she said, “This is the companionship I’m talking about. In fact I’m desperate to tell you. On the plane coming here I rehearsed it over and over. You listened with great interest and admiration.”

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They did her shopping and now were in a virtually deserted cafe in Georgetown. “Only a big pot of coffee for me,” she said. “If I have one drink, I’ll lose all my restraints and all my inhibitions. I just want to stay awake. Wednesday I saw the sunset with you.” She looked at her digital watch. “Now it’s Friday already. Today I want us to see the sunrise.”

Alongside her in the booth, he was fondling her hand and arm, sending every hormone she had roaming throughout her body and keeping her skin impossibly supersensitive.

Mentally, however, it was altogether different. She was kicking herself, because she’d blabbed and blabbed and totally compromised the takeover secrecy. She’d revealed to Adam that World Agriculture was the takeover target. “Aha,” he’d said. “That’s what I call Page 1 Wall Street Journal news.” Worse than that, she’d divulged the plan of attack, detail by detail.

So now Adam FitzGibbons knew absolutely everything that he had no business knowing. Adam knew they were offering World Agriculture shareholders 175% of market price. That was prong one. Adam knew prong two—they were fighting the poison pill and filing a lawsuit in Delaware on Monday morning. And, third, Adam knew they were mailing out proxy solicitations for World Agriculture’s annual meeting.

She said to herself, Animal lust is one thing. I can cope with animal lust, but it’s the companionship that seduced me. Now I’m comprehending how spies do what they do. I feel as if

I've sold out my country.

She squeezed his thigh and said, "Can I level with you? I'm scared to death——dripping with remorse, in fact. I'm afraid you might be a spy for World Agriculture." Her voice was quavering, and she didn't know whether she could continue.

She took a giant breath. "Adam, if you're a spy, I've blown everything, ruined a multi-billion dollar deal. So, if you're a spy, will you please put me out of my misery immediately."

"Of course I'm a spy."

Her whole body stiffened. She couldn't stifle a gasp.

He said, "But I'm your spy. Overnight I became the master criminal. You made me your high-level IRS mole." Earlier he'd told her, "I stole the tapes. I walked into Felix Sandor's cubbyhole when he wasn't there and just helped myself. Nobody logged me in, and nobody even saw me in his building. It was my most daring achievement ever."

"Yes," she said, "but you never explained why you did it."

He answered, "I did explain. I said I didn't know why I did it."

Was he a spy or wasn't he? He certainly wasn't giving her the straightforward denial she was craving. Perhaps evasions like this were a masculine trait, because he was definitely reminding her of Jerry Faber, who never, ever, gave a straight answer to any direct question.

If Adam were Jerry Faber, she'd never let him get away with any such thing, but now she had a flash of discomfort. She was not with Jerry. She was with Adam. Get Jerry out of your mind, she said to herself. Do not compare the two of them.

She took a deep breath and decided, I'm going to trust Adam.

Hugging his arm and pressing against him, she kissed his cheek, rubbing her lips up, down

and across against the bristles of his beard. "I'm glad we bought you a razor."

He said, "You astound me. You've got to be running on empty. You get the deal Monday night. A few days later—only a few hours actually—you've mounted your three-pronged attack. Somehow, in between, you mobilized your law firm. You mobilized the investment bankers, and you mobilized three or four New York law firms. When did you sleep? How the hell did you pull it off?"

She said, "Oh, no, you don't. Look here, Adam—I'm sealing my lips. First I have to decide whether you're an enemy spy. I'll have to sleep on it."

Reaching across her, brushing his hand against her mouth and neck, he inched his fingers onto her breast inside her bra. No one was watching. He squeezed her very, very softly, then rubbed his palm back and forth. He said, "Would a spy do this?"

"Most definitely."

"Would a spy do this?" he said, taking away his hand.

"Probably."

"In that case I guess you're right. So OK, I'm a spy. My assignment is to learn everything there is about you." He was nuzzling her cheek. "That's terrible, isn't it? Come on, please tell me again, tell me every single thing you did from Monday night on."

"Boy," she said, "what an interrogation technique. Let's go back to the hotel. I'll find out what time sunrise is, and I'll set the alarm. Till then I want us to take a vow of celibacy. I need to do some actual sleeping."

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It was 10:00 o'clock, she was in her slip and she got up to look out her DuPont Plaza

window. Adam was still in bed but already awake. She said, “I was right not to set the alarm. I was exhausted. We wouldn’t have been able to see the sunrise from here anyway. I’m going to take a shower.”

“Could I come in there with you? Could I watch?”

“Alright! I’ll do a striptease! But suppose I want to watch you. Suppose I pull you into the shower with me. What happens to our firm resolve, our sacred vows?”

“I’m afraid I’d better stay out here. I’m notoriously weak on firm resolve.”

She kissed him and stepped into the bathroom. Soon her mouth tasted minty and fresh again. The hot shower was wonderful. Her hair became clean once more. She combed it and brushed it and used the hotel’s blow drier. She’d carefully hung her dress on the padded hanger she’d bought, and now she inspected it. Most of the wrinkles had steamed out. I’ll be able to appear in public again, she thought. As she reentered the bedroom, she said, “Your turn.”

Fluffing up the pillows, she sat back against them on the bed and called room service to order breakfast. When Adam emerged from the bathroom, he stooped to kiss her. She said, “You sure smell elegant. In fact, we both smell soapy clean. Listen, I’m having toast and coffee. I selected orange juice, scrambled eggs and English muffins for you. I won’t let you have bacon because of the cholesterol. When we finish, I think I’ll drop into our Washington office for just a minute. Or at least call them and then call Chicago.”

“Right,” he said, “today’s Friday. You have your last minute details.”

“Also I’ve got to call my kids.”

The telephone startled them while they were eating. Adam said, “We’re still registered in your name. Nobody knows I’m here.”

John Palmer was on the line. “Hold onto your hat,” he said. “Disaster has struck. There’s been a leak.”

She put her hand to her throat and couldn’t face Adam. “Who leaked what?”

Palmer said, “So far I’m not sure who, but take a look at the financial section of the Washington Post. There’s a big story, with pretty much your entire plan accurately outlined—the 175% price, the Delaware lawsuit, the proxy fight, every single thing. At opening this morning the stock price went through the roof, and the Exchange suspended trading.”

She said, “Shit.”

“Wait a minute,” he said. “I’m not through. Half an hour ago World Agriculture filed suit against Jerry. I’m just scanning the pleadings as we talk. For some reason they didn’t go into the Federal court. They’re in Cook County Circuit Court. They want a permanent injunction and a TRO, a Temporary Restraining Order. They allege he’s misusing Beth’s trust funds in a takeover attempt.”

She’d told Adam about Jerry and the trusts. She said, “How the hell did they get hold of that?”

Palmer said, “There’s a hearing on the TRO at 3:00 o’clock this afternoon. Judge Kinnaird. Morrissey says she’s OK, she’s fair. I tried to find a flight for you, but they’re all booked, so LuAnne’s chartering you a plane. She’ll call you back with the details. You’ve got to be here.”

She said, “I’ll be there.”

She hung up and turned to Adam and said, “Shit.”

Adam FitzGibbons was sipping coffee. He was peering at her over the rim of his cup.

He did not look like a spy. Or maybe he did.

Chapter 9

Somewhere in the gloom under the clouds was John Palmer, her best friend, the man from whom she never kept any secrets. Until today he'd respected her and in fact admired her. Today would be the start of John Palmer Era Two, because she had to own up to the most juvenile of blunders. A love sick goddamned puppy, she'd violated every single one of Faber, Margolin's rules for secrecy, including the very rules that she herself had written. When others did what she'd done, she'd booted them out and never once blinked.

She was in the co-pilot's seat of the chartered Lear jet, almost mesmerized by the cloud cover that seemed to stretch across the entire country. From Dulles airport in Virginia to O'Hare in Chicago, she never once saw the ground, but above the clouds there was sunshine.

The pilot, a bearded old timer, had handed her a pair of sunglasses, but she just held them and wouldn't use them. What a metaphor for love, she was thinking—gloom and clouds when you restrict your vision; magnificent white light when you see, hear, taste, smell and feel everything in the universe.

What she dreaded the most was Palmer's style—John Palmer, the black belt of the silent rebuke. He's never directly criticized me, she said to herself. He dissects everything and just pinpoints what's good and also what's bad. This one's all bad.

In the sunlight above the clouds she was physically aroused by the luscious curves and fluffy patterns below. Everything brought back physical sensations of Adam—his smooth lips, his scratchy beard, the erection he seemed to have the whole time.

She wanted to exonerate Adam, but Palmer kept intruding. She could hear herself saying, He's not a spy, John. Then, after an excruciating 60-second pause, she could hear Palmer replying, Yes, but he's a candidate spy.

She trusted Adam for the simple reason that her nipples were tingling. OK, so that isn't exactly scientific method, she thought, but there's no way I could ever react like this to a dishonest guy. On the other hand, looking at it objectively, there's no way I could ever explain this to Palmer.

She began practicing her speech to Palmer. John, she was going to say, on a statistical basis, the leak most probably comes from New York. Four huge law firms and some of the investment bankers are in New York. Or maybe somebody from our own law office in Washington is dirty or maybe someone from our satellite office in Delaware. Maybe somebody from the West Coast Consortium. They're notoriously loose-mouthed.

John would shrug. Finally he'd say, Everybody will know it came from Chicago. There was a calculated, systematic intrusion. Somebody brought Felix Sandor to Chicago. That means that we've got a traitor in Chicago. That traitor has made the enemy privy to our deepest secrets.

Now she landed in Chicago and located the white stretch limousine that LuAnne had arranged for her. After a few minutes of light traffic she arrived downtown at Faber, Margolin. Calculating the correct time—she'd left her wristwatch on D.C. time, not wanting anything at all to separate her from Adam—she saw there was only a half hour before she was due in court. She rode the elevator to the 69th Floor, the War Room, and marched straight into Palmer's office. He was reclining way back in his chair with his legs and feet across his desk, the one personal informality he ever allowed himself. He murmured a greeting and then said, "Just catching forty

winks. Actually I thought you'd be going directly to court."

She closed his door behind her. Without any preliminaries she said, "I believe you're searching for The Washington Post culprit. I'm turning myself in. I think it might be me."

Palmer didn't answer, didn't blink, didn't move, so she continued, "When I get back from court, I'm going to call New York. I'll own up to what I did. Then I'm calling a meeting of our Executive Committee for tonight. I'll get down on my knees, and I'll grovel before Gallagher."

Palmer still didn't react.

"I'll grovel just like Galileo did when he confessed at his trial. John, I know I'm innocent. I know it wasn't my friend Adam FitzGibbons who tipped off The Washington Post. I trust the man completely."

Now Palmer sat up straight. He leaned forward, planted his elbows on his desk and peered at her.

She rested her elbows on the desk, too, cupping her chin in her hands, and they faced each other for at least a full minute. The silence became not just awkward but threatening. Maybe I'm wrong, she was thinking. Maybe Adam did it.

Now the door opened behind her, and Frank Morrissey came in. Even though she didn't turn to look at him, she knew it was Morrissey, because she'd caught a whiff of pipe tobacco. Morrissey said, "Ah, there you are, Ms. Faber. We'd better hasten on over. They said you were back." If Morrissey was going to court, evidently exerting his prerogatives as Faber, Margolin's chief litigation partner, it meant that he'd decided to take personal charge of the TRO hearing.

"Let's go," she said aloud. Then, just to herself, she said, I'm saved by the bell. One more silent second in here with John Palmer, and I'm condemned forever. "Hey, where's Jerry?" she

asked Morrisey, turning around to face him squarely.

“I don’t want him here. This is not an evidentiary hearing. I’ve written a rather good brief. The TRO is 100% based on briefs and affidavits.”

“OK, fine,” she said. “Let’s get going.” She rose and went to the door to make her escape.

After her confession, neither she nor Palmer had said a word, and now they didn’t even wave to each other. So, she thought, the shootout at high noon is yet to come.

On the street, as she and Morrisey strode toward the courtroom in the Daley Center, she zipped along in high gear, always a step or a half step ahead of him.

Without stopping, he reached into his briefcase and plucked out some documents. “Hey, Speed Demon,” he said, “feast your eyes.”

The documents were Faber, Margolin’s written response to World Agriculture’s TRO motion. They included Jerry’s affidavit and Morrisey’s 15-page brief, which she scanned as she walked. She looked up only to dodge pedestrians and to avoid the cars and the Chicago Transit Authority buses at the intersections.

“Great!” she said. “That’s what I call a brief, right to the point and completely persuasive. At least I believe every word of it. You’re arguing that World Agriculture’s got no interest or standing to complain about Beth’s trust fund. Kinnaird’ll buy that. She’ll boot them out of court.”

He said, “Obviously I agree with you. I just wish you were Judge Kinnaird.”

She said, “Trust me. They don’t have a chance, but they must know that, too. So now I’m wondering, What’re they up to? Take it from me, Frank. They’ve got something up their sleeve.”

Although he commenced speculating, he was not an imaginative man outside the working

details of actual litigation. For that reason she tuned him out and found herself listening only to every other word.

She was trying to revert in her head to the forthcoming confrontation with Palmer, but she had absolutely nothing new to consider. The plain and simple fact was that she'd messed up with her big mouth. You can love Adam all you want, you can trust Adam with your life; but you don't ever break discipline, you don't ever spill your guts about World Agriculture.

So she resigned herself. She had no defense. She'd earned the rebuke she was about to get. She'd destroyed her friendship with Palmer. All she could do was psych herself up for the confrontation.

In about five more minutes she and Morrisey reached the Daley Center. On the 22nd floor, tugging open one of the smoked glass doors into Judge Kinnaird's courtroom, she discovered an absolute zoo of lawyers, two-thirds of them men, one-third women, every single one of them a suit. She stepped back to look at Morrisey. He was a suit, too, in fact a three-piece, summer-weight suit. Look at me, she thought. What kind of lawyer am I? I've been wearing this gaudy print for two whole days.

She pulled on Morrisey's arm. "Jesus," she said, "what a target for a terrorist. If a guy wanted to wipe out the legal profession coast to coast, he accomplishes it with one bomb right here."

He whispered, "Hey, Sonny!" and elbowed her in the ribs. "In airports and courthouses we don't ever joke about bombs."

She was glad that she and Morrisey were the only persons from Faber, Margolin, because everybody else seemed present in at least triplicate. She said, "You're right, it's no joke. It's sad,

real sad. My rotten husband'll find out he's the last of the big-time spenders. He'll be getting a bill from every one of these birds——\$500 an hour, including travel time from New York and back. Plus they'll all stay over for a meeting here tomorrow and spend the weekend in Chicago. So, no, Frank, it's no joke, not to me it isn't."

Just inside the door, she saw the enemy. They were four or five acquaintances who were lawyers from the Chicago firm representing World Agriculture. She nodded to them. Standing near the jury box, they were conferring there with a half dozen lawyers she didn't know at all. Probably these other guys were from Minneapolis, which was World Agriculture's headquarters.

Across the room she spotted the lawyers on her side of the case, gathered in droves as if for an American Bar Association convention. They were senior partners from the four New York law firms that represented the investment bankers who were backing Jerry, perhaps 12 or 13 of them altogether, not even counting their local Chicago counsel. Each one had his briefcase either in his hand or on the floor between his feet or else resting on the lawyers' table. Some were sitting at the table, some just clustering around. She knew all of the New Yorkers from Jerry's previous deals, and of course she knew the Chicago counsel from Bar Association activities or from other business or social dealings.

Catching the attention of Shorty Mason, the woman who was the smallest and peppiest of the New Yorkers, she grinned at her and mouthed the words, "Hello there." She waved and started over to shake hands, but Judge Kinnaird's bailiff intervened.

He entered the courtroom from a door to the rear of the bench and shouted, "All rise." Judge Kinnaird followed him in. She was a trim, nice-looking blonde woman, dressed in her black robe. From Bar Association meetings, she knew Judge Kinnaird slightly and liked her.

Hesitating for just a second upon encountering the throng of lawyers, smiling and nodding to her left and to her right, Kinnaird mounted the bench and commenced arranging the papers that she was carrying. After a minute she signaled to her clerk, and the clerk called the case, “World Agriculture International, Incorporated, Plaintiff, versus Jerome X. Faber, Defendant.”

Instantly the horde of attorneys surged toward the bench, sweeping Morrisey and her along but jostling them and fighting past them and shoving them back farther and farther to the outer fringes.

Judge Kinnaird said, “Goodness, a stampede. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I’m certainly impressed to see such a distinguished gathering of legal talent, but, on the other hand, it makes me sad. This is a simple case. I think you’ll find we’re not going to be here very long, not at all, so we’re all going to have a distinct sense of anticlimax. Nevertheless, for the record and since you’re all here in fact, please tell the court reporter who you are and whom you represent. For the benefit of the reporter, please spell your own names and your firms’ names, too.”

It took a good ten minutes for all of the lawyers to identify themselves and their firms. Out of the side of his mouth, as they were waiting their turn to speak, Morrisey whispered to her, “What’s your prediction?”

She said, “Smashing victory.”

“Mine, too. She’s read my brief. She’s already made up her mind. That’s why we won’t be here very long.”

She said, “That’s why I wonder what they’re up to. I don’t think they ever expected to win. I’ve got a theory.”

Downstairs she confirmed the theory.

As she and Morrisey emerged from the elevator, reporters and cameramen swarmed all around them. Somebody had made darn sure the media would be present. There were the people from each one of the Chicago TV channels and also from the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Sun-Times and Crain's Chicago Business. In addition, popping up on one side of her was the woman from The New York Times, and on her other side was the man from The Wall Street Journal. All of these reporters had interviewed her before. There were others she'd never met.

Yes, indeed, she was thinking. We have here an 8 billion dollar hostile takeover, front page and prime time all over the world.

Someone from CNN thrust a microphone at her. "Will this case affect your takeover attempt? You're Mr. Faber's wife and his lawyer, too, so obviously you must be gratified with the result. And that's your daughter's trust fund, isn't it?"

She forced herself to smile. She didn't comment.

A sandy haired man, another person she didn't know, leaned toward her and identified himself. "I'm Goodman from The Washington Post."

She shook hands with him and said, "Glad to meet you, Mr. Goodman. I bet you're the guy who started this. I'd love to know your source."

He grinned. "Not a chance."

When she and Morrisey finally disengaged themselves and headed back to the office, she said, "I learned something crucial today. World Agriculture is clever, diabolically clever."

Morrisey shrugged. "Not so. We beat the shit out of them."

"Look at it this way, Frank. This was out and out PR. We were going to file suit against

them in Delaware, and they beat us to the punch here in Chicago. We were going to announce the takeover Monday. They found out about it and announced it today. What they did is, they gave it their own spin.”

“Nevertheless we kicked their ass. I wrote that brief myself.”

“Very good brief, Frank, but no. The TRO was just the backdrop for their PR. They didn’t care one whit about the TRO. They accomplished exactly what they wanted—they trashed Jerry publicly, and they trashed me and they trashed you.”

Morrisey stopped walking, gaped at her but didn’t speak.

She said, “Did you notice that skinny old man? He’s Hastings. He’s from the Financial Times of London. When you get home tonight, you’ll see yourself on the tube. In fact you and I are probably on British television right now. Every investor on the planet will see us. They’ll have the impression that you, Franklin J. Morrisey, Jr., are defending an archfiend. You’re a shyster sleaze bag, Frank. You’re aiding and abetting the man who steals pennies from his own underage daughter.”

Morrisey put his briefcase on the pavement and stepped back against the building.

She tapped her chest and said, “Yours truly—Mrs. Jerry Faber, the archfiend’s estranged wife—she’s another one of his lawyers. She’s no better. She’s got her fingers in the very same cookie jar. So what this episode means is, Hey, Everybody! Watch your wallets. Don’t trust these Faber people. Don’t trust their shyster lawyers. For God’s sake, don’t ever let them get their hands on World Agriculture.”

“In other words,” he said, “PR to fight off the takeover.”

When she entered the War Room back at Faber, Margolin, LuAnne presented her with a bouquet of yellow roses. “Congratulations,” LuAnne said. “Good news travels fast. Mr. Faber called. He was thrilled and asked me to buy you these. He requests that you phone him immediately. I think he wants a blow-by-blow.”

She didn’t care about Jerry. She wanted to find John Palmer to get it over. However, she now had cold feet and so decided to delay the inevitable. She said to LuAnne, “He wants a blow-by-blow, does he? Let’s go down to the 14th floor. I’ll give him a memorable blow-by-blow. I don’t want to do it up here. I need the privacy on 14.”

LuAnne sighed. She said, “Well, I certainly don’t envy poor Mr. Faber. Everybody’s mad at everybody. It’s been real tough on all of us. Mr. Palmer went totally paranoid ever since the leak.”

They took the elevator and got off on 14. As they headed down the long corridor, LuAnne said, “Be prepared. Mr. Palmer insists 14 be locked up tight with a 24-hour security guard. He used it when he called you this morning. He doesn’t trust any place else.”

At the office door LuAnne took her keys from her jacket pocket but didn’t use them, clinking them instead on the translucent glass pane. There was a moving shadow inside, and then the door swung out about three inches, stretching a security chain across the opening.

LuAnne said, “If you can see in there, that’s Michael. And, Michael, you can see Ms. Faber out here. Michael’s got the first day shift.”

When Michael admitted them, she maneuvered past LuAnne to shake hands with him. “Good to meet you, Michael. Thanks for helping us.” He was husky. He looked about 18 years old. He had a gun and handcuffs on his uniform belt. He was as tall as Stefanski but had

incredibly broad shoulders.

She said, “This is my first visit here.” She went through the reception area, which LuAnne had furnished with floor and table lamps, a couch and several nice looking chairs. There was good-quality tan and brown carpeting. Also LuAnne had put up some Chagall reproductions on the walls. A coffee table held two large art books and a big glass bowl with Hershey’s Kisses. In the back there were two private offices, a large one for her and a smaller one for LuAnne. She caught a glimpse of the computers and printers and fax machines in LuAnne’s room. Also she spotted the security safe for sensitive documents. In her room she called out, “You’re a genius, LuAnne. Everything’s perfect. You’ve even hung some of my art work, and look! you’ve brought my little Henry Moore.”

She glanced around further, feeling altogether at home, and then sat at the desk and called Jerry.

He said, “You didn’t need to call. I’ve been watching CNN, so I know all about it. Will you be offended if I offer you some good advice? You missed the perfect opportunity to explain our case. You were on camera for about 30 seconds, and I’ve got to tell you that you urgently need graciousness lessons. You were a totally silent sound bite. In fact, you were characteristically rude. What exactly did you gain by ignoring the CNN reporter?”

“Did CNN advise you that today’s little outing will cost you at least \$200,000?”

“As per usual,” he said, “you’re going to yell at me. You’re never wrong. Somehow everything’s always my fault. I’ll hang up and talk to you some other time.”

“I apologize, Jerry, it’s not your fault at all. I forgot that you’ve got to be mentally incompetent to embezzle \$750,000 from your own daughter. Are you listening?”

He didn't answer. The asshole had hung up on her, and now a recording was advising her to hang up, too.

LuAnne was standing in the doorway, watching her. She said to LuAnne, "Please see if you can get that young Goldstein guy. I need to talk with him."

In less than 10 minutes LuAnne ushered in Goldstein. He looked nice. He was wearing a blue pin stripe, and today both his necktie and his yarmulke were maroon. "Hey, have you lost weight?" she asked. She pointed to one of the client chairs.

He sat down and crossed his legs. "I'm ingratiating myself with Faber, Margolin. If the boss diets, I diet."

She said, "I see you're sneaking a look at your watch. I assume you're Orthodox. You won't work after sundown tonight, and you won't work tomorrow. Is that correct? What's the status of your reports? You owe me the one on Cartwright, the Mysterious Geezer, and the other one on Felix Sandor. The Mysterious Geezer can wait. This afternoon I'm urgently interested in Felix Sandor. Can you give me a quick thumbnail on Sandor?"

Goldstein nodded and opened his briefcase. He handed her three thick memorandums. He said, "The top one's the poison pill."

"Wow!" she said. "You're a fast worker. I'll read them in detail tonight."

He said, "You'll also see I've got a foolproof plan to rescue Mr. Cartwright."

"Great," she said. "What about Sandor?"

"You don't want me to boast about Mr. Cartwright?"

"Felix Sandor, please. We'll do boasting some other time."

"He's not just a surveillance man. He can hack into any computer system. He's a

consultant to government agencies, like the FBI and the IRS. I've laid out the statutes and analyzed the authorities. I found a Court of Appeals case that lambasts him and that blasts the IRS for using him and ignoring the statutory prerequisites. He's been convicted twice for electronic felonies, but he's had a presidential pardon from Richard Nixon."

"I see," she said. "That jibes with what I know. A friend calls him an electronic thug. So, Goldstein, I guess you're ready for a new assignment. I'll read this tonight. I'll give you something new on Monday."

"What's wrong with now? I'll incubate it. I'll be back on Sunday."

"Goldstein, Harvard Law School's own ball of fire," she said. "OK, I'm 90% certain that The Washington Post leak comes from right here in our Chicago office. Somebody here's in cahoots with Felix Sandor. Your job is to find out who it is. I hope and pray it's not my partner Gallagher. Now go on home, Kid, and incubate, and Good Shabbat to you."

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She must have dozed off for a moment. Coming awake, she realized that her shoes were off and that her feet were propped on an open desk drawer. LuAnne was alongside her, rousing her by shaking her shoulder. She'd been dreaming about Adam, but she couldn't remember the content.

LuAnne said, "Mr. Palmer's on his way down here to 14. It'll take him all of 30 seconds. He absolutely insists on seeing you."

This is it, she thought. He'll analyze the consequences or maybe just glare at me some more, but then, thank God, it'll be all over. She put on her shoes, stood up to smooth out her dress and from her purse got a mirror and a brush to fix her hair. When Palmer arrived, she was

thinking, I believe I look OK.

“Hey there, John,” she said. “We beat them to a bloody pulp in court, but they won the fight. They didn’t even work up a sweat.”

He sat in the chair which Goldstein had vacated. “Morrisey told me your theory, and I told him I agree with you. We’ll soon be soliciting shareholder proxies for the World Agriculture annual meeting, and Jerry’ll wish he’d never heard of Beth’s trust fund. He won’t get a single one, so we’ll have to take him off the proxy list. We’d better take Mrs. Jerry Faber off, too.”

She said, “The big guns from New York and San Francisco came to town for the hearing. I expect they’ll be staying the weekend. I’ll look them up tomorrow and tell them in person about Adam FitzGibbons. I don’t think Adam did it, but I have to tell them what I did. Tonight I’ll confess to Gallagher and our Executive Committee. Jesus. I want to bite that bullet fast and get it over with.”

She felt wonderfully relieved at even this anticipation of her forthcoming catharsis. Palmer, however, was shaking his head. “I wouldn’t do any of that.”

“I blabbed, John. I can’t hide from it.”

He said, “May I speak with utmost candor?”

“Let me have it, John, right between the eyes.”

“I’m older than you.”

“And wiser.”

“Not wiser but more experienced. Right now, Sonny, you’re infatuated—I know that—with this FitzGibbons person.”

She didn’t respond.

“It’s leading you down the wrong path. Witness your indiscretion regarding World Agriculture. I said I was going to be candid. It’s not uncommon to be blinded by emotion.”

She wanted to jump up and start pacing the room. OK, it’s coming, she was thinking, but, goddamn it, the man’s embarrassed and is taking forever to spit it out. The result is the old Chinese water torture. If only the phone would ring, or if only LuAnne would interrupt with some urgent business.

Palmer’s face was flushed, and he wasn’t looking at her. He was studying instead a pile of paper clips on her desk, poking them with his finger. “Sonny,” he said, “you and I have been in harness together for some 15 years now.”

“That’s true.”

“When Gladys died, I was relieved.”

“You two were heroic.”

“Yes. However, with all respect to Gladys, I had a purely selfish reason. At last I could be with you without guilt.”

He held up his hand to stop her from speaking. Then he continued, “You are the most exciting person I have ever known.”

“We’re a team, John. We’ve had some moments.”

“Quite simply, Sonny, I am proposing that you and I commence seeing each other socially with a view to ultimate marriage.”

She didn’t know how to respond. “Infatuation,” she said. The word just squirted out.

“I’m prepared to deal with that,” he said. “I believe, as we get acquainted on a personal level, as we exchange personal confidences, in fact as we embrace from time to time as we did the

other morning, we will be nurturing the primary bond that already exists between us.”

She used to smoke cigarettes, and she wished she had one right now, because she needed time to prepare an answer. She’d tear open the silver foil and deliberately extract one cigarette. She’d tap it on the desk and then hunt around in her purse for matches. She’d light up, take a long, deep drag and then blow out the smoke. By the time she waved her hand to clear the air, she’d be ready to speak.

Palmer didn’t wait. He said, “Therefore I will now explain why you are not responsible for the takeover leak. Do you know who’s responsible?” He paused for about 10 seconds and seemed to be cringing into himself.

She understood immediately and shook her head. “There’s no way, John. When you get drunk, you pass out before you can possibly reveal any secrets. I’ve timed you.”

He took a business card from his shirt pocket. “OK, how do you explain this?”

She took the card. It bore the name Mike Goodman, Business Correspondent for The Washington Post. On the back there was a handwritten message. “John, thanx a lot.” It was signed “Mike.”

He said, “I don’t remember this at all. I found that just before you got back from Washington. I ought to be shot.”

As she continued studying the card, he took his breast pocket handkerchief and wiped his eyes. “I must have been in a jealous rage. You went to Washington to be with Mr. FitzGibbons. I went to a bar. If you will entertain my idea, Sonny, I can guarantee you this will never happen again.”

She was about to reassure him, but LuAnne appeared at the door. “Sorry to interrupt you,”

she said. “Mr. FitzGibbons is calling.”

“Please see if I can get back to him in an hour.”

“He says he absolutely must talk with you. He’s at a pay phone. He promises it won’t take three seconds.”

Lifting the phone, she punched a button and said, “Adam, I’ve got to call you back.”

“Sonny,” he said, “I’m calling from the grocery. At the checkout counter, you and Jerry are in separate pictures on the cover of one of the tabloids, The Global Herald. Want to know the headline? “How To Get Rich Quick——Dip Into Your Baby’s Piggy Bank.” Jerry’s sitting in what looks like a safe deposit vault. He seems to be counting piles of money. There’s a child on his lap. You’re naked. You’re in your bathroom. You’re stepping out of your shower. You’ve got two black rectangles concealing your key parts. I’m buying all their copies.”

“Thanks for the tip, Adam. Please call me at home in about an hour.”

Palmer was still dabbing at his eyes. LuAnne was still at the door. She motioned to her, beckoning her to the chair alongside Palmer. “Guys,” she said, “we’ve got planning to do. This fight is getting real dirty.”

LuAnne said, “Osama bin Laden.”

Chapter 10

She was in the elevator on her way to her apartment. The Global Herald had made her not paranoid but super alert, not defensive but on the counterattack.

LuAnne and Palmer hadn't been of help. Obviously Palmer had found the situation excruciatingly personal. He could only cluck sympathetically, and his face, including his bald head, lit up like a red lamp when he'd patted her hand.

"You guys are commiserating," she'd said. "Let's get strategic. The other side is showing its weakness. If they were confident, wouldn't they have us in Federal court?"

She'd started pacing the office, making complete circuits behind LuAnne and Palmer and behind her desk. "I'm talking serious action. Would they be fooling around with the tabloids? Would they bother with phony state court TROs? They'd be zapping us"—— she'd slapped the back of LuAnne's chair——"they'd be zapping us with full-page ads in the Journal and the Times——New York Times, L.A. Times, London Times. Come on, you guys, let's think."

LuAnne was savvy but never ever strategic. "As a woman," she'd said, "I know exactly what you're feeling. To be exposed like that!"

"Hell, LuAnne," she'd answered. "Where's my briefcase? I'm going home. I don't give a shit about the pictures. Whatever I weighed then, that's what I weighed. I'm already down 10 pounds, so who cares? But don't get me wrong. Your idea's damn good——show Beth and Tom the pictures before they see them from one of their friends."

Now, in fact, she was carrying a shopping bag with half a dozen copies of The Global Herald. On the way home, she'd stopped off at the supermarket at Clark and Division and had stocked up for home consumption and for her office files as well. The photos weren't too bad.

Yes, her face was recognizable. The camera angles, however, were distorted, so that her body—praise the Lord—wasn't gross. Most important, as Adam had said, the key areas were rectangled out. No big deal, she thought. It's as if I'm wearing my bikini.

As soon as she opened her front door, she heard voices in the kitchen. One of the voices was Stefanski's—the Texas drawl was unmistakable. What's he doing here? OK, that's definitely out of the ordinary. In her new super-alert counterattack mode, she was searching for clues. Everything the least unusual was a clue.

Arriving in the kitchen, she plunked her shopping bag and briefcase onto the floor alongside the refrigerator. Tom wasn't there. Beth was, and Stefanski was on a stool, leaning onto the breakfast bar directly across from Beth, gesturing at her with his giant Jamaican souvenir coffee cup. He was wearing faded jeans and a Chicago Cubs T-shirt. He'd had a short haircut that made him look like a lanky cigarette-commercial cowboy. All he needed was the horse, a cigarette dangling from his lips, a trusty six shooter and a ten-gallon hat.

Beth appeared both young and mature and, in her opinion, adorable and sexy, too. Well, she was 17 going on 18. The blouse she had on seemed rather familiar. No doubt about it. Except for the fact that it had cost \$300, it looked perfect on Beth, but it was her own harlequin blouse, one of her favorites, the one with the diamond pattern and the elongated collar points.

Stefanski set his coffee cup on the counter. Brushing cookie crumbs from his fingers, he stood to greet her. "Hi there, Ma'am. Sorry about the intrusion. I called. Beth said it would be OK to come over."

"Nice to see you. An unexpected pleasure, unexpected to say the least." She shook his hand and thought, Boy, what a grip. This kid's en route to the U.S. Senate. Spontaneously she reached way

up and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Where's Tom?" she asked Beth, hugging her and catching a whiff of her own Ysatis perfume that Beth was using. "Sorry, Sweetheart, sorry I had to leave you last night to fly off to Washington, but it's good to be home. You look very nice. And I've got to talk with you and him both. Is he in his room?"

"Champaign. He's taken the train to Champaign. He thinks he can persuade them to let him register for the fall semester."

"Bully for Tom! I'll chat with him when he gets back. Tonight you and I can have our girl-to-girl."

Beth pointed to the Global Heralds peeping out of the shopping bag. "Dad predicted you'd buy up every copy in the entire United States. He's already showed us the pictures and explained about the bugging. At your office, too! How disgraceful! Believe me, I'll feel a lot safer next week when Tom's back. I'm literally scared to death to take a shower or to use the bathroom."

Stefanski grimaced. "Another thing to worry about, Ms. Faber, is the office. You were immediately pinned up in the kitchen in the War Room. I took you down and threw you away. Five minutes later I had to take you down again. Let's face it. You're the big news of the day. You're even bigger than our victory in court this afternoon. Incidentally, I warned Beth she's not immune either. Soon we'll probably be seeing her baby photograph, naked on a bear skin rug. These tabloid guys never quit."

Beth said, "That'll certainly be no problem. I've never posed in the altogether—not yet anyway. Maybe, however, maybe when Playboy or Penthouse discovers me——"

She took a stool alongside Beth and looked across to Stefanski. Her daughter was a first class flirt,

and Stefanski, her target, was grinning at her. Whatever urgency had brought him here, he was giving no sign of it. She said, "Please pour me a cup. I assume you're bringing tidings from downtown."

He shrugged. "Is it OK to talk in Beth's presence? I've already told her basically what it's about. It's quite personal."

"Then you and I must have different definitions of personal. I suppose you might as well fire away, but, Beth, you understand we're swearing you to secrecy."

"Come on, Mother, you're a lawyer. Dad graduated law school. Secrecy's in the DNA. I was looking at his bathrobe. I finally figured out that those are scales of justice embroidered on our family crest."

Stefanski said, "I'm resigning from Faber, Margolin."

Beth said, "I told him he's silly. He's blaming himself."

"Blaming yourself for The Global Herald?"

"That was just the last straw. The real reason is that Claudia Berggren and I both lied to you."

Beth sputtered drops of her coffee. "You didn't mention any Claudia Berggren to me. Who's Claudia Berggren?"

From his jeans pocket he took out and unfolded one of Faber, Margolin's Blue Sheets. He read, "If at any time you become aware of any reason whatsoever why you or anyone else might have a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict, you must immediately, without any delay whatsoever, give full details to your superior or to the Chief Operating Partner."

She said, "You certainly read beautifully, Stefanski. What are the gory details?"

"Claudia has a definite conflict of interest, and I knew about it as soon as you announced the takeover. I said nothing. That violates the Blue Sheet. Claudia and I discussed it of course, and we decided we could handle it. We agreed we were professional and would never under any circumstances misuse our information about the takeover."

Even though he hadn't identified the specific conflict, she was developing a strong hunch. "We could have handled the problem," she said, "had you but told us. We're a big law firm. We'd give you something else to do."

He winced. "We knew that. Certainly we knew that, but the takeover of a giant company—that was fabulously exciting."

"So what?" she said.

"So we just kept quiet, and then today! Talk about being in over our heads! Today is Black Friday, the day that will live in infamy. The Washington Post story breaks, the TRO lawsuit is filed and then this Global Herald thing. All these in just 24 hours. Hence I'm resigning. I'm reluctantly resigning. Ditto for her. She's telling Mr. Gallagher right now."

Gallagher! At her conference with LuAnne and Palmer, LuAnne had said it right off—"Osama bin Laden," and the three of them had concurred, because The Global Herald was triggering the identical memory in each of them.

Two years ago, supposedly, Gallagher had paid off a temporary secretary. Supposedly he owned a collection of pornographic pictures. Supposedly he'd attempted to show them to her. Supposedly he'd paid her \$50,000. There was never any charge, never any investigation, never any confrontation with Gallagher, just the raw rumor whispered among a few of the partners. Taking a quick swig of her coffee, she said, "That's real abstract, Stefanski. May I please have the

nitty gritty specifics? First, however, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to freshen up. See this dress? I feel as if I've been wearing it for weeks now."

She went to the bedroom, and it felt wonderful to kick off the high heels. Although she began changing, her actual purpose was to call LuAnne to check out her hunch. Instead of dialing her, however, she dialed Adam's office number but hung up halfway through. D.C. was an hour ahead. It was too late. No doubt he'd be gone. Even if she knew his home number, she'd never call him there.

Adam's wife—that was the problem that she hadn't looked at yet.

She simply wanted to cradle herself in his voice. No, not so. She wanted to make love. She'd fondled him, but only through his trousers. She'd stroked his nipples, but only through his shirt. If I were with him now, she thought, I'd unbutton him. I'd ditch World Agriculture. I'd ditch Faber, Margolin and be rid of Gallagher forever. But I can't do it by calling him at his office.

She dialed LuAnne's number at the War Room. Great! LuAnne was still there. "Hey, Kid," she said. "Please get out the World Agriculture Facts File, the executive personnel volumes."

The Mysterious Geezer had created the World Agriculture Facts File. The man was a maestro with corporate and financial libraries and with business and biographical publications, such as Who's Who in Corporate America. Roaming everywhere on the Internet and digging into SEC reports and dozens of data bases, he'd compiled four 3-inch thick loose-leaf notebooks. He'd presented himself at her office and deposited them on her desk. "Not bad," he chuckled. "Not at all bad for a mysterious old geezer using Pentium technology."

She'd glanced through all four volumes immediately and later on studied them in detail. The personnel sections were an astonishingly complete dossier that gave dates of birth, marital status, children's names, residential, educational and employment histories and detailed current job descriptions. He'd even gotten photographs and credit reports on most of the top 50 World Agriculture executives. "I'll update this weekly," he said.

LuAnne returned to the phone and said, "OK, Sonny, I've got two volumes here—the executives."

"Good. My hunch tells me there's somebody who might be a close relative or family friend of our summer associate Berggren. Please scan just the 20 to 30 big wheels. If memory serves, there's a certain female in her 40s, way high up. I think she's maybe in mergers and acquisitions. I'm pretty sure she's a blonde."

In just 60 seconds, as soon as LuAnne suggested three names, she was able to recall in detail the extended biographies that the Mysterious Geezer had written about each of them. Also, from Berggren's application to be a summer associate, she remembered the little Minnesota town where Berggren was born. "You're wonderful," she told LuAnne. "Good picks. I've got her. Yes, I've definitely got her."

Returning to the breakfast bar in the kitchen, she found Beth reaching across to feed a cookie to Stefanski. As though caught in the act, they both drew back quickly. Beth's face was flushed. Before Beth went off to the boarding school in Rochester, she'd known that Beth was sexually active. One reason for sending her away was to separate her from the grungy crowd she was traveling with. Now, today, although Beth appeared mature enough to handle herself, she was heading for trouble because Stefanski was committed to Berggren.

She said to Beth, "Why is it you think it's silly for him to resign?"

"The DNA, Mom. Lawyers keep secrets, even from their families. If Ron knows something professionally, he'll never reveal it."

"So you're saying that Stefanski never revealed anything to anyone."

"That's correct."

"How about his girlfriend, his very close girlfriend Berggren. Did she reveal anything to anybody?"

"You'll have to ask him. I never met her. Two seconds ago I didn't even know he had a girlfriend."

"Well, I do think he does, and therein lies a problem."

Stefanski said, "Just a minute please, ladies, do I get in on this conversation? Is anybody here interested in what I have to say? Is anybody here curious about the actual facts?"

Beth said, "No. My mother's a very smart woman. She and I don't require any outside help."

"Beth's quite right. Our real specialty—hers and mine—is feminine intuition. Listen, Stefanski, what say we make a small wager. We'll use our intuition, and then I'll tell you what the actual facts are, and then you judge whether I'm right."

"I'd be willing to put up 50 cents for something like that."

"Come on, Stefanski. You're a potential lawyer. No self-respecting lawyer would consider 50 cents interesting. Make it \$2.00. I'll give you 5-to-1 odds. If I lose, you get 10 bucks. Think about that—10 enormous bucks!"

Stefanski put two one-dollar bills on the counter. When she covered them with a ten, he

groaned, "Help! I'm believe I'm being hustled, but what the heck——nothing ventured, nothing gained."

He half closed his eyes and waved his hands in front of his face. "Oh, great and mysterious swami," he said, adopting somewhat of a sing-song voice. "You have just lost your ten enormous bucks. There's no way you can win my two hard-earned dollars."

"Cocky, cocky," she said. Rummaging through her purse, she took out and waved another ten-dollar bill back and forth. "Shall we double the stakes?"

Stefanski shook his head.

"Too bad. I could use the money. There's one key fact, Stefanski, one fact that explains everything. Are you ready for me to name it?"

"Shoot."

She said, "Berggren's got a relative in a high-level position at World Agriculture. That's it. That's her conflict. I don't think I need say anything further. And don't you bother to answer. You know exactly whom and what I'm referring to."

When Stefanski shoved the money to her, she picked it up and waved it at Beth and said, "You see, they lied to us, Beth. I can't have that. I have to trust my people. Then there's the practical level. Our investment bankers will be convinced the opposition has a direct pipeline into us. We can't have that either."

Beth said, "They didn't mean anything at all. They're sorry. They're very sorry."

She shook her head at Beth. "No, if they have any excuse, it's youth and enthusiasm for the job. Too bad, however. In our business sorry gets you nowhere. Youth and enthusiasm get you nowhere. A lawyer's a lawyer."

She smoothed the money and slipped the bills into the wallet in her purse. "Well, there you are, Stefanski. I hope you've learned your lesson. Next time don't be so free with your \$2.00."

"Hey," Beth said, "wait a minute. Where's my half?"

She fished back into the wallet and handed Beth one dollar.

Stefanski shook his head. "An entire family of con artists! Look here, Ms. Faber. I was youthful and enthusiastic, and I apologize. I definitely want to keep on working here. Is there any hope you'll accept my apology?"

"Go call Berggren," she said. "Please tell her to get in a cab and come over here immediately, but do not tell Gallagher she's coming. That's crucial. Understand? I have to find out certain things. Beth and I are going to cook you one of our famous Chinese dinners. Listen again, please. If she hasn't talked with Gallagher yet, don't invite her."

Beth was looking into the freezer. She said, "Come on, Mom, let her come anyway. I want to meet her. Good, we've got those yummy complete meals with the sexy fortune cookies."

Stefanski got up and peered around for the telephone. She pointed down the hall. "The study's down there. You can have some privacy, but remember——please don't say anything until you find out whether she's already talked with Gallagher."

When Stefanski was gone, Beth said, "I adore Texans."

"Yes, but this one's too thin for my money. Besides he's already spoken for. I hope you don't get too excited. An older woman's got her hooks into him."

Beth said, "I can handle that."

"I'm not putting you down, but I wonder. So shall we incorporate this into our girl-to-girl agenda? We'll be up all night. We've got an ever-growing agenda."

Stefanski returned. He sat down, poured himself some hot coffee and said, "Claudia's on her way."

- 0 -

Berggren entered and was both gorgeous and cutting edge chic. When she removed her tinted outdoor glasses, however, her eyes seemed red. She might have been crying.

As Berggren embraced Stefanski, she watched Beth measuring Berggren as a rival. She saw Beth starting at ground level, taking in the sandals and slate-blue painted toenails, slowly moving up the long, long legs in the straight white jeans, the round but petite rear end, the rope belt with a gold lock-and-key buckle off center over the right hip, the silk slate-blue sleeveless blouse, the thin rope band with tiny gold lock and key on the left arm, the high, ample breasts under the silk, finally the golden aura of hair crowning the face.

Beth went to her and extended her hand. The two of them made a striking pair. She was happy that Beth looked equally lovely and that she seemed a lot more natural, a lot less made up, a lot less deliberately chic. "I'm the daughter," Beth said.

"I'm the summer associate," Berggren answered.

Stefanski said, "Summer associate? Didn't you resign?"

"What about you? Didn't you resign? Did you tell Ms. Faber?"

When Stefanski nodded, Berggren continued, "We were afraid you'd literally kill Ron. So what did she tell you? Here's what Mr. Gallagher told me. He said, Don't resign, don't say anything to anybody and definitely don't worry. Since I didn't actually do anything, I committed no crime. Naturally I don't agree with that. I'm just telling you what he said."

Stefanski said, "I don't get it. We're guilty as hell."

“I’m simply repeating what the man said. Then I lied to him about something. He asked whether you knew anything, Ron, and I said no, of course not. He said, ‘Good, do not say anything.’ I was protecting you in case you wanted to change your mind. You didn’t actually do anything either. It was my conflict, not yours.”

Beth said, “Let’s eat. All this business talk is making me hungry. Let’s eat right now.”

“Yes,” Berggren said. Stefanski nodded, began pointing to his mouth with one hand and rubbing his stomach with the other.

She put her arm across Beth’s shoulder. “Listen, People, tonight Beth and I are cooking. We’re using our ancient family recipe. Hence nobody is to nose around swiping our secrets. Beth, please escort our guests into the dining room and keep them there. I’ll conjure the meal all by myself. Please pour them and me some red wine and of course a glass for yourself. Use the good Italian stuff from the rack in the hall closet.”

Beth wasn’t too young for dinner wine. Beth was holding her own with Berggren and Stefanski. She didn’t want to be treating her as a child.

When they were gone, she read the instructions and popped the frozen containers into the microwave. It would require six beeps and about 10 minutes.

She wanted to give Stefanski plenty of time to tip off Berggren that her secret was known. If she could believe Berggren about Gallagher, Gallagher was up to something. Berggren had fucked up, and he knew she’d fucked up. So he had no right to give her a pass. Tomorrow she and Palmer would turn that one against him.

She seated herself at the breakfast bar and decided to spend the 10 minutes marveling at Beth’s transformation from teenage rebel to fresh, smart, attractive, rather aggressive young

woman. She'd had her own crushes at Beth's age, and she'd safely recovered from numerous broken hearts. Probably there wasn't anything at all she could tell Beth about sex. In fact her own sex life was a shambles and wouldn't make a useful model for anyone. If Beth was making a play for a man already spoken for, what about herself? What about Adam? What about Mrs. Adam?

Eventually the last microwave beep sounded, and she transferred the food onto paper plates, which she carried two at a time into the dining room. She stood by the table and drained her wine glass. "Please fill 'em up again, Beth," she said and then went back to the kitchen for the chopsticks, the soy sauce and the fortune cookies.

At last she sat down. "Stefanski," she said, raising her glass to him, "I'm going to give you a chance to earn your money back. Berggren, your colleague Stefanski and I have been wagering, and I'm hereby giving you a chance to get in on it, too."

Since Berggren didn't reply to her, didn't even nod or shake her head, she continued, "I'll give you good odds, Berggren. I'm thinking 10 to 1. I'll tell you detailed, amazing secrets about yourself. I'll name names. For example, I'll name a woman named L.B. Carver. I think you know her. If I'm wrong, you're rich. But shall we eat first? Beth's famished. You two are famished. I'm famished."

As she lowered her glass and took up her chopsticks, she watched Berggren carefully. Berggren was sitting with her hands flat on the table. Then, abruptly pushing back her chair, Berggren got to her feet. "No!" she said. "God damn it, no!" Her voice was loud but quavering. "Everything's a goddamned game to you. This is my life. This is my career. I'm still in law school, and already I've fucked up my career. Well, I'm not playing any of your games. I just want to get out of Chicago and start all over. I hope I never see Chicago again."

Half of her believed that Berggren was playacting, covering her ass. Half of her thought she was genuinely upset.

From the chair next to Berggren, Stefanski lunged toward her and tried to embrace her at the hips. She twisted free and pushed him away with both hands. “You’re fucked, too. Everything I ever touch turns to shit.”

Beth cried out, “Holy Christ! The story of my life!”

Now Berggren definitely was crying, her shoulders trembling and little noises escaping her. Yes, indeed, if it was an act, she was a born actress. Berggren wiped her eyes with a napkin and then fled from the dining room back into the kitchen.

Stefanski started after her, but Beth blocked him with her arm. “Stay where you are. I’m going to handle this. I know this stuff.” She got up. She followed Berggren into the kitchen. She paused to look back and to wave to Stefanski and to her, and then she closed the swinging door behind her.

If anybody knew this stuff, it was Beth. She’d had years and years of therapy and years and years of individual and group counseling. So probably it wasn’t a bad idea to let her handle Berggren. If Berggren was phony, Beth would spot it, just like that.

Meantime Stefanski was on his feet, clenching and unclenching his fists. He was looming over her, his bean pole body erect, his face seemingly way up near the ceiling.

“OK, Stefanski,” she said, “We need some structure here. I don’t mean to be rude, but I think you should please go home. I want Beth and me to handle this. I promise I’ll call you when we’re done.”

“No,” he said, “I prefer to stay here in case she needs me. What exactly are you going to

do to her?”

“Please go home. We’re going to torture her. When we’re through, we’ll stuff the body in a taxicab and send it back to you.”

He hesitated for a full minute but then shrugged and came and shook hands with her. “Alright, I’m leaving.” He turned and went to the door to the hallway. “I guess you’re right. Are you sure she’ll be OK?”

“She’ll be OK.”

He took a few steps down the hall but spun around and returned. “What about me? Will I be OK?”

“You’ll be OK.”

He took a half step toward her. “Are you sure I’ll be OK?”

“I’m sure.”

“I mean, I’m way up in the stratosphere. Have I resigned or haven’t I? Do you want me to be packing my bags? I don’t know whether I’m still on the team.”

“Good question, Stefanski. Good question. I’ll be talking with Berggren. I’ll tell you tomorrow.”

Chapter 11

At 1:30 in the morning she went downstairs with Berggren. In the elevator and in the lobby of her building, neither of them spoke. It had been a long, long evening, and they were all talked out. Since she liked Berggren but trusted her just 50%, it remained only to decide whether to ship her home. More likely than not, she'd have to go.

Outside it was muggy, typical Chicago in June. Even though it was late, it was Friday night, the beginning of the weekend, so that the automobiles and occasional throngs of young pedestrians generated a steady background of the usual city street noises. Because she and Berggren were walking briskly, she right away sensed the buds of moisture that were forming on her brow and chest and under her arms. Thank God for air conditioning. At State Street, spotting an available cab, she hailed it by jumping off the curb and gesturing vigorously. "This is for you," she said to Berggren. "I'm beat. I'm turning around and going back."

Berggren, as she opened the taxi door and started to step in, suddenly whirled to face her, grasped her forearm and said, "Which way are you tending about me? Please tell me, please."

"I'm going to incubate you. Sleep tight. Good night."

She shoed Berggren inside and closed the door behind her. The instant the cab pulled away, she went home.

She found Beth with her shoes off, curled up on the couch, hugging one of the beige bolsters and watching a movie on TV. Beth raised up on one elbow, turned down the sound and said, "Let's talk. I've got her sized up perfectly. May I explain?"

She shook her head. Bending over to embrace Beth as tightly as she could, she muttered, “I’m totally exhausted.” Then she went directly into her room. As soon as she closed the door, she began to reconsider. I ought to be acknowledging her. She’d been the actual sparkplug. She was great. Opening the door now, she took two steps into the hall. “Hey, Beth,” she yelled. “Tomorrow. Let’s talk tomorrow. I want you to know you were wonderful. I’m just bushed.”

Partly the confrontation with Berggren had drained all of her energy. Also, only about 24 hours ago, she’d flown to Adam in Washington. At the old Dupont Plaza she’d spent the night with him, more or less chastely, and then had to turn right around to fly back for the TRO hearing in court. As a result she was still sexually aroused and was aching to be with him. There seemed to be a kind of electric potential, a true voltage, at the bottom of her groin. There seemed to be goose bumps wherever her garments rustled against her skin.

If I manage to fall asleep, she said to herself, I’ll be thinking about him, but this is going to be tough. I can’t call him whenever I want. Why didn’t I realize that before?

She undressed. Sometimes she slept in the nude, but tonight, just because Beth was staying here, she pulled on her pajama bottom and buttoned it. As she did so, she debated calling John Palmer. She had two methods of incubating her hard decisions. One was to talk them over with him, but of course at this hour he might be passed-out drunk. The other took longer but was equally effective. It was simply to let the problems percolate around in her head as she slept. She’d wake up knowing what to do.

Lying in bed now, not conscious of being awake or asleep, she heard the telephone, picked it up and simultaneously checked the digital alarm clock on the night table. It was 2:15. The numbers were glowing red. She expected the caller was Adam—he was supposed to have

called earlier—but, no, it was Berggren. Berggren was saying, “I’m calling to report that I’m safely home. Also I’m calling to alert you.”

Berggren’s voice was as throaty and forceful as usual. Once or twice, during the long evening, she’d become shrill. “I just talked to my aunt,” she continued, “and she plans to see you tomorrow. There’s one thing you definitely should keep in mind. You’ll discover you like her. You’ll like her a lot. Yes indeed, my aunt’s quite the goodly apple.” She went silent for a half minute. “I wonder if you follow what I mean. I don’t want to say anything other than that in a telephone call.”

“I think so, Berggren. Thanks.”

She fell back asleep right away, and then at 5:10, according to the big red digits, the phone rang again. This time there was a voice that sounded like Berggren but was not quite Berggren. “This is L.B. Carver,” the voice said. “I’m in our company plane out of Minneapolis. A hell of a time to wake you up, but my niece is having a panic attack. It seems her whole career and the rest of her life are in ruins. I assume you know the Oak Terrace Room at the Drake Hotel. Can you meet me for breakfast at 7:30?”

Since there was no possibility of going back to sleep again, she took a steaming hot shower, blow dried and curled her hair, dabbed on some perfume and then sat naked on the edge of the bed. Her mind was totally active. Her body was still fatigued, so that she was tempted to lie down for just another 5 minutes. She managed to resist.

As soon as it was 6:00 she called Palmer. To her surprise, he answered promptly, sounding both alert and sober. She said, “Guess what. A major new development.”

“Really? What’s our latest catastrophe?”

“Excuse me. I must have reached the wrong John Palmer. I was calling John Palmer the optimist.”

“Touché.”

“An hour or so from now, John, I’m going to have breakfast with L.B. Carver.”

“L.B. Carver? I think she’s some kind of big shot. Is she the one who’s running the show for them? How the hell?”

“Last night I didn’t have a chance to call you. Something huge went on, to wit a spontaneous showdown with Berggren and Stefanski. Believe it or not, L.B. Carver is Berggren’s aunt. I ferreted that one out, but I can’t brief you now because I have to get dressed and then scoot over to the Drake Hotel. Berggren and Carver appear to be scared to death we’re going to can her. Here’s what I need from you. What do you make of the phrase ‘goodly apple?’ I make it that it’s from somewhere in THE MERCHANT OF VENICE. When that SOB Jerry moved out, he took my Complete Works.”

“Act I, Scene 3. That’s what I make of it.”

“OK, so what’s the whole quote? Since Berggren deliberately brought it up, I have to take it seriously. I’d say she’s warning me about something.”

“Yes, from the context in Shakespeare, I’d say she probably is. So, pray tell, what’s going on?”

“What’s the quote, John?”

“Oh, I get it,” he said. “I thought we were doing 6:00 a.m. Trivial Pursuit. Very well. Somewhere in Scene 3 Antonio speaks of the devil. ‘The devil can cite scripture,’ he says. ‘An evil soul producing holy witness.’ Does that remind you sufficiently, or should I go on?”

“Please.”

“Then Antonio uses your specific goodly apple phrase. He says that such an evil soul ‘Is like a villain with a smiling cheek / A goodly apple rotten at the heart.’ I daresay that does it for you. Shall I go on however?”

“I know the next line. ‘Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!’ I knew it was something like that but couldn’t remember the whole thing. Obviously I’m right to take this seriously. But why did Berggren call me with it? What do you think? Is she shooting straight? Is she just trying to score points in order to hang onto her summer job? One theory I have is that she and Carver are in cahoots, the two of them setting me up for something.”

Palmer went silent, but she could picture him entering and computing all this new data, his eyes squinting, his high forehead furrowing. At last he said, “I’m happy to be talking with you, but I’m not accustomed to doing so at this unholy hour. I suppose you want my considered 60-second opinion on your major new development.”

“Yes, but wait a second or two,” she said. She was shivering, because the air conditioner had just this minute kicked in. Fetching her lightweight plaid bathrobe from the foot of the bed, she shrugged into it. “Probably you’re thinking what I’m thinking, John. There’s no way Carver’s flying here simply to talk about Berggren.”

“Correct,” he answered. “I can’t read Berggren, but my hunch is that World Agriculture’s running scared. The phony TRO, The Global Herald—those could be desperation measures. If so, it means they regard you as the main brain and need to find out how much they can push you around. Carver will be measuring you personally. Berggren, of course, provides the convenient excuse, a godsend opportunity, if you will.”

“OK, how should I handle it?”

“Carver will ask you questions, most of them diversions, but some of them will reveal what she’s thinking.”

“That’s precisely what I figure, too.”

“Therefore encourage her to talk. Don’t you say even one word. If you don’t talk, she has to talk. The more she says, the more you learn. But remember, you yourself are 100% silent. Regard her as super cagey. Read her like a book, Sonny! When you’re done, you’ll come over here, right? I’ll be waiting.”

- 0 -

As the Oak Terrace Room’s first customer, she waved aside the maitre d’ and strode into the restaurant almost as far as she could get. Selecting a small window table, she sat with her back to the entrance and assumed a position of repose. By looking out onto the street, one story below, she could observe the Michigan Avenue traffic and thus entertain herself. It was 7:05, still a half hour, plus or minus, that she’d have to wait.

“Heh, heh,” she laughed aloud. Carver’s very first impression of her would be determinative. Repose was part of what her partner Joe Margolin called “Sonny Faber’s patented negotiation technique.” By appearing to be in repose, she’d be presenting herself as an immovable object. Carver would have to approach her through the whole length of the restaurant, registering that she was immovable, that she was totally without concern about the forthcoming meeting. To carry this repose message a step further, she rested her left hand on the table so that she could see her wristwatch without even moving her head. The trick was to be immobile and to remain immobile for whatever time it took until Carver showed up.

I look OK, she thought. She was wearing her black slacks and her ruby red long-sleeved blouse and her necklace made up of two dozen separate intertwined silver and gold strands, her last birthday present from Jerry. She'd forgotten to put on her more-or-less matching earrings, which she'd found in a shop on Oak Street and bought for herself. Even though her eyes were tired and irritated, she was using her contacts. Her hair needed a frosting and a trim, but there wasn't anything she could do about that now.

The first challenge to repose occurred when the waiter approached, brandishing a carafe of juice in one hand and a silver pot of coffee in the other. After only about three hours' sleep and being very, very thirsty this morning, she desperately needed a large orange juice and a great big jolt of heavy-duty caffeine. She declined everything, however, barely moving her lips to speak. She wouldn't even be taking a sip of water.

Years ago, when she and Joe Margolin had merged their firms to form Faber, Margolin, Joe had stood alongside her at the giant celebration dinner party. It was in the Grand Ballroom of the Palmer House. Joe signaled to the orchestra to stop playing. He tapped the public address microphone and announced to the assembled partners, "Feast your eyes on this kid next to me here, Ladies and Gentlemen. Let this kid—hell, I'm 63; I can call her a kid—let this kid into a room with any other lawyer on the planet, and she'll bamboozle him. That's what she did to me. That's why we're Faber, Margolin and not Margolin and Faber. She's totally extemporaneous, just makes it up as she goes along. I've seen everything, but in all my years, I've never seen anything like it. Ladies and gentlemen, I present my new partner and my very good friend, Sonny Faber."

Joe was wrong about that. Her technique wasn't at all extemporaneous. Repose was an

idea she'd gotten way back in high school when she'd read an F. Scott Fitzgerald novel for sophomore English Lit. At a restaurant in France, Dick Diver and another character were watching a man who sat alone, also absolutely motionless, also presumably waiting for someone. They were thinking he had "repose," but at some point he reached up and smoothed his hair. Therefore he did not have "repose." Something on his mind was compelling him to move. Now she herself was becoming somewhat agitated and in fact was tempted to change to a different table. For the last 15 minutes, at street level below, a Fairmont Laundry & Dry Cleaning van was illegally parked on the west side of Michigan Avenue. The driver was just sitting there. She'd been watching him the whole time. She said to herself, Woman's intuition. I've got a hundred bucks that says that's Felix Sandor.

It was Adam's warning that brought Sandor to mind: "This guy has no moral scruples whatsoever. He's got more electronic gadgets than the Defense Department, and anything technology can do, he can do." If it really was Sandor in the van, and if she continued to sit at the table by the window, he'd read every word that would be said today. He'd simply pick up the window glass vibrations and then would run them through his electronic gizmos.

Despite her concern, she managed to remain immobile and then, at 7:30 precisely, a hand squeezed her shoulder, squeezed it forcefully. Concurrently there was the lightest scent of Jean Patou's Joy, \$365 an ounce. Looking up, she was startled to see her summer associate, Claudia Berggren—that is, a somewhat plumper version of Claudia Berggren, a woman just about as tall as Berggren.

Like Berggren, L.B. Carver was a genuine beauty. Her own age, 43, she was using blush and eye liner and eye shadow as well as mascara, but not lipstick. Her eyebrows were neatly

sculpted. Twenty years ago she must have broken every heart in Minnesota and probably even today.

Carver said, “Ms. Faber, I presume.”

She rose, stood erect and gestured toward the chair opposite her. “Let’s use first names,” she said. “I’m not Ms. Faber. I’m Sonny.”

Carver set her giant purse on the floor next to the window and pulled out her chair. “OK, Sonny,” she said, “first names it is. We’ve got a good number of very high class Jewish people at World Agriculture, so I realize you can’t technically have what we call a Christian name. Would you believe it that some people care about such things? I don’t. I have two Christian names, and I can’t even remember what they are, it’s been so long. So call me L.B. I think you’ll agree that’s non-sectarian.”

Carver was wearing slacks, too. As she sat, she spread her napkin onto her lap and then leaned forward and clasped her hands on the table. She sported three large rings, two of them with oversized stones. On one wrist she had several thin gold bracelets. Her lightweight navy sweater had a freeform design, metallic gold threads woven into the wool. Her face and neck had just a few lines, but they were definitely there. Her hair, the color identical with Berggren’s, was not as attractive as Berggren’s. Piled a little high and heavily sprayed in place, it simply wasn’t fashionable. On the other hand, if a tornado were suddenly to blow through the Oak Terrace, her coiffure would remain totally intact.

Carver glanced around. “Dear me, no ash trays here. So we’re in non-smoking, are we? I guess I can survive though I’m a little nervous at meeting you, Sonny. There’s your tough-guy reputation, of course, and Claudia tells me you’re the most competitive person she’s ever met. She

wants me to reassure you or to give you some kind of affidavit.”

“OK, you’re talking about my summer associate Berggren. I don’t call her Claudia. I generally use last names only.”

“To be honest, Sonny, my advisers made me promise to needle you with that Christian name business. You should feel free to ignore it. Anyway I’m not here to talk about Claudia. I don’t give a shit what happens to her. I wish her all the best, but she’s a big girl. She’s made her own bed. She’s just the excuse for me to meet you.”

Wow! she was thinking. Bold face candor is this gal’s style. Let’s get her talking. Immediately, however, she found herself being forced into a weird contest of wills. For maybe 7 or 8 minutes neither of them spoke. They just sat there. Even when the waiter came to take their orders, they remained mute. He said, “Orange juice, ladies? Coffee?” After a long moment, and strictly to avoid being rude, she said, “We’ll need a little more time. We’ll signal you.”

This is really comical, she was thinking. She’s doing to me the same thing I’m doing to her. I’ll bet she’s bugged Palmer’s phone. I’ll bet she’s overheard my whole game plan with Palmer.

As she continued to stare straight into Carver’s eyes, Carver simply stared right back. It was hard not to blink. Finally she made a decision. Taking off her wrist watch, she laid it on the table. She said, “I’m leaving in 5 minutes.”

Carver said, “Good move there, Sonny. Let’s call it a draw. This is too comical.”

“The very word I was thinking of.”

Carver said, “I instinctually like you. Yes, I do. So I’ll give you some unsolicited advice. Why don’t you call off your takeover?”

She shrugged at Carver but, of course, didn't answer.

"I never lose, Sonny. I never lose, because I fight dirty. You use Marquis of Queensberry. I don't. I'll be fighting real dirty—real, real dirty."

Perhaps the silent face-to-face had made Carver a trifle uncomfortable, for now she began tapping her fingers on the table and then rotating one of her big rings. "You'll find that I always say exactly what I mean," she said. "I do not ever bullshit. You guys are buying up my shareholders' shares at 175% of all-time high market price. I can't beat that. Hell, I looked. I can't find a single white knight to bail us out. So let's see now, let's just reason. Since I'm not going to cave in, what are my alternatives?"

Partly at least, Berggren had been right on target about Carver. Yes, she definitely liked Carver's candor. She herself was right, too, that the 175% buy-up price was going to prove to be the unbeatable killer in the takeover. Carver wasn't saying one word about the poison pill. And she definitely liked Carver personally, liked her friendly voice and her breezy no-bullshit style. So, OK, she's got a smiling cheek—that's for sure, but I can more or less trust her. As she says, she doesn't bullshit.

Now she almost laughed because Carver took a mirror from her purse and checked her hair. She's an actress, too. She's pausing for dramatic effect. There's nothing to check. Every single wisp is permanently located just where she put it.

Carver said, "Here's what I'm going to do. First, I'm going to dismantle your law firm. You won't know what hit you. I advise you to reflect on that. That won't be enough, so I'm going to have to dismantle your husband, too. I admire him. That guy's almost as dirty as I am. I've got book on every business transaction he's ever done. I've got chapter and verse on his sex life."

Carver now leaned toward her and gestured with her hand to beckon her closer. She had to respond by leaning forward, because Carver had commenced speaking in a subdued voice that wasn't merely intimate but person-to-person confidential. Carver said, "I'm going to do something for you that'll be worth millions. When the time comes that you and what's-his-name will be getting divorced, I'll be letting you use our whole sex dossier. That includes every bit of evidence you'll ever need, every picture, all the affidavits, the video recordings, to say nothing of the hotel and motel records and the credit card charges. That's a little favor from one woman to another. Your husband's got the morals of an alley cat."

She considered saying to Carver, If you also need a list of his magazine subscriptions or anything else whatsoever, I'll be glad to get it for you. Carver, however, didn't pause, didn't give her the opportunity. She asked, "Is divorce no-fault in Illinois? Not that it makes any difference. You'll take him to the cleaners, Sonny. He'll cave in fast when he sees what you've got."

Now Carver sat back. "Oops," she said and chuckled, uttering a pleasant throaty sound that reminded her of Berggren. "I'm already having second thoughts. I'd better not be giving away his money. As we're sitting here, I'm getting some pretty serious libido twinges. They're about 10 on the Richter scale. Truth be known, Sonny, I'm helpless. I like men, and my libido always gets me into trouble. I especially like Jewish men. Once you figure out how to handle them, Jewish men tend to be very obedient lovers. Maybe you can use this information. Anyway, your Mr. Jerry Faber and I would make one hell of a team. I'm going to look into that."

Seeing that Carver was studying her closely for reactions, she relaxed her facial muscles, so that her expression would remain totally blank. "Don't you start worrying," Carver said. "This is just my fantasy life that's talking. You two are still married, and I don't play around with

married men. Not any more I don't. But I kid you not. Somebody could make a gigantic fortune by putting out a sex education book that's based entirely on my own true life story."

Warning sirens were going off everywhere in her head, but—— with one exception——they were just big talk. If she wants Jerry, be my guest. I can live with that. If she wants to blast him, yes, she can humiliate him with the sex life stuff, but that wouldn't be fatal. As for his business transactions, I know them all. She's bluffing. She hasn't got anything. There isn't anything to get. However, I'll check on it today. I'll check out every detail, and then I'll double check.

Nearby the waiter caught her eye and elevated the coffee pot. She shook her head. She was going to tough it out all the way.

The one exception, the one thing she had to take seriously, was this dismantling threat. Carver was saying something specific, telling her she'd cut a deal with Ed Gallagher. She'd be throwing him some business——a whole lot of business——and he'd be taking Faber, Margolin's tax department and God knows who else, and he'll be starting his own firm. This woman was a world-class devil. In less than 5 seconds flat she'd sweet-talked me and simultaneously slipped a stiletto into her, inserts it just like that between her ribs.

She says reflect on it. Very well, L.B., Sonny though, I've reflected. Every single thing you said pointed to Gallagher——your Jewish dig at Jerry, the Christian name business, we won't know what hit us. Therefore, if Palmer and I don't act fast——I mean if Palmer and I don't act today——we're looking at the end of Faber, Margolin.

She retrieved her watch from the table and buckled it onto her wrist. "Time's up," she

said.

Carver shoved aside the silverware and water glasses and reached across the table to grab both her hands, pinning her in place. Now she began whispering, her face only inches away. Her breath had a nice toothpaste fragrance. “Just one more very important thing before you go, Sonny,” she said. “I hate those fucking bathroom pictures every bit as much as you do. You’re a big girl. You can live with them, but my heart goes out to your kids. If I know kids, they must be devastated. Beth’s at a delicate age. She’s in a boarding school in Rochester, right? She used to be wild, right? A kid like that always leaves a trail.”

She didn’t respond, and Carver continued, still holding her hands in place. “Do you see why I absolutely hate that son of a bitch Felix Sandor? He’s got more pictures. And not just of you. You won’t believe some of the stuff. Fact is I love children. He sickens me. In fact I fear him. I’m sorry I ever met him.”

Carver grimaced and inclined her head toward the window. “He’s out there right now, taping this whole thing. In case he needs it, he even put a microphone in my purse. It’s on the floor right there. For Christ’s sake, Sonny, I wouldn’t be using an asshole like that——Sandor, you’re a fucking asshole——except that you guys are trying to take over my \$38 billion company. I won’t let you do that. All’s fair, Sonny. All’s fair.”

She had to marvel at Carver for sticking her with one stiletto after another, for making her threats but never once altering the amicable tone of her voice. She managed to tug her hands free, and she stood alongside her chair. “I’m going to run.”

Carver reached for the menu. “Very well, you do that, but I’m not. I’m famished. I always start off with a big breakfast. I don’t know why I don’t gain weight.” She pointed to a

table where a man and woman were eating. “Do you see those cute little bottles of jelly? Our Mexican subsidiary makes them. I’m a scavenger. When I leave here, I go from one table to another and always spirit away at least a half dozen, which is another reason I need this great big purse.”

Carver winked. “Let’s keep that one just between you and me. The Drake’s not aware. But listen here. Do you know what your problem is?”

Of course I know what my problem is, she was thinking. I’m dying of thirst.

Carver said, “Speaking as one old friend to another, you’re in hot water two feet over your head, Sonny. You have to make up your mind that you don’t have any secrets any more. Not one. It makes my blood boil, but my man Sandor claims he owns you. He tells me he doesn’t care whether you go to the bathroom in your own home in Chicago or in a hotel like what you call the old Dupont Plaza in Washington, D.C. Your mistake is that you always stay at that particular place. You should make it a practice to vary your behavior.”

Yet another stiletto! Carver was watching her, and she watched Carver. After an interminable half minute, Carver saluted her. “That’s free advice. Have a nice day.”

She felt that Carver was dismissing her, and now she was admiring herself, because she’d stayed outwardly cool throughout, had maintained repose, had remained the immovable object. A tribute to my yoga lessons, she was thinking. She grinned and returned the salute and gathered up her purse.

Carver said, “As I say, Sonny, I enjoy a good wholesome fuck even more than the next guy, but you and I are quite different—— when I fuck, I don’t fuck a married man. Hell, I’m his wife’s best friend.”

She wondered whether Carver could hear her heart. A few minutes ago, when Carver mentioned Beth, it had started thumping in her chest, and she'd begun yoga breathing, beginning deep in her abdomen and drawing air all the way to the tops of her lungs. Now that Carver was pinpointing Adam FitzGibbons—and Mrs. Adam Fitzgibbons—her heart began hammering away even faster. I've got to warn Adam. I've got to talk with Beth—she's got pictures of Beth!

Since every one of Carver's threats stemmed from Felix Sandor, she wanted to see what the man looked like. She laid her purse on the table, turned and steadied her forehead against the window pane. Down below the driver stuck out his hand and waved to her. He was wearing earphones, but she couldn't see his face.

She turned to go. Nodding to Carver, she said, "Nice to meet you." Carver was engrossed in the menu and didn't answer. As she retrieved her purse and headed to the door, she was careful not to let her steps falter.

Carver called after her, "Remember now, don't trust anybody. Nobody at all, Sonny. My own niece, Claudia, is an example. I'm not the only goodly apple."

As she kept on walking, she heard Carver say, "I'd look into your son, Tom, too. He's a great big one."

Jesus H. Christ! Downstairs and outside the hotel the sun was shining. It was a gorgeous day with a light, fresh-smelling breeze coming off the lake. That woman was an expert, Sonny thought. She worked me over from top to bottom. She must have learned her stuff from the Gestapo. If I'm still alive, I'm lucky to be alive.

She headed to Michigan Avenue so that she could march right up to confront Felix Sandor and the

Fairmont Laundry & Dry Cleaning van. When she got to the corner, the van was gone.

She turned south toward Palmer and his apartment in the John Hancock Building. I compelled her to talk, she thought. Palmer'll be proud of me.

As she proceeded, however, she made a decision. It has to be Plan B for meeting Palmer—I'm not setting foot in his apartment. She'll overhear everything we say. She knew my strategy backwards and forwards, which is why we both clammed up. Comical is right, but also pretty goddamned scary.

She was bloody and bruised, but at least she'd accomplished one thing this morning. She was now the new, the improved, the totally paranoid Sonny Faber. Everything was bugged everywhere. Carver might be smart, real smart. She might have a million or two million dollar budget for Sandor—two million's chump change in this deal. But she had John Palmer. She and John Palmer will concoct a foolproof scheme—she hoped. Or else.

Flagging down a cab, she said to the driver, "Please take me around the block four or five times. I want to find out if I'm being followed. Then drive up to Evanston for an hour. I'll get out and I want you to drive all over the North Western Campus then drive back when I call you. Until then don't talk to anyone in person or by phone. If you do everything right, I'll pay you \$600 in cash."

Chapter 12

Since no one was following her, she did her deep breathing exercises and relaxed in the cab and figured out her priorities.

First, Beth and Tom——Sandor had targeted them. At the thought every one of her muscles automatically tightened, but she made them ease, one at a time. Also first, Adam——I've got to warn Adam. If his wife is really Carver's best friend, he never said one word. Again she tensed and eased up.

But Faber, Margolin is the real number one. I think Palmer and I have less than 24 hours to head off disaster, to head off Gallagher.

James Bond movies kept coming to her mind. "I'll bet!" she said, half aloud, and on an impulse she dumped the contents of her purse onto the seat alongside her. Replacing the items one by one, she found one foreign object——a Drake Hotel ballpoint pen she'd never seen before. OK, she thought, my hat's off——that L.B. Carver's tricky. I didn't see her do it, but she slipped this to me.

She unscrewed the top, and a tiny battery popped out. What we have here, she said to herself, is a James Bond radio beacon. Felix Sandor is following me on a side street. Therefore we will now see just how smart he is. She reassembled the beacon, tucked it under the back seat and rapped with her apartment keys on the driver's thick plastic window. She handed him 50 bucks. "Please drive on up to Northwestern University in Evanston. Drive around there for 15 minutes and then go wherever you want. I'm getting out here."

She was at the intersection of Diversey and Halsted. LuAnne was just two blocks west.

Savoring the image of Sandor gloating and supposing he was tracking her to Evanston, she dashed into the drugstore on the corner. From inside she surveyed the streets for about five minutes and then literally slunk out and headed west, clinging to the buildings and trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, just in case.

She'd been to LuAnne's once before, for the housewarming when LuAnne and her brother had bought the place. They'd converted it into two apartments with LuAnne occupying the one upstairs.

It wasn't 8:30 yet when she spotted the painted red porch and the red brick building. She hesitated a moment but then punched the bell.

Three or four minutes later LuAnne asked over the intercom, "Who is it?"

She identified herself and, as she waited for LuAnne to come down, she looked east and west along Diversey. There was nothing unusual in sight, in fact nothing at all moving.

Reassured, she continued to look but began reliving and embroidering her stay with Adam at the old DuPont Plaza on Thursday night.

She saw herself in her bikini panties and bra and Adam in his plaid boxer shorts. That was memory. Until they fell asleep they'd rubbed against each other, but that was just about all, a triumph of mutual superhuman will power. That was memory, too. So, whereas in Washington she'd held herself back—she'd managed to restrain herself from reaching inside his shorts—here, in Chicago, standing on LuAnne's front stoop, she went ahead and did it.

Mental sex is shit, she said to herself. I physically ache, and that's lousy. The truth is I'm a total hedonist. I want to call Adam this instant. I can't. I want to put both arms around him. I

want to whisper to him. I can't. I want him to whisper to me—his breath tickles my ear. The situation's crazy—I'm stymied by a woman I never met. I don't even know her name. I hate wives. And clever me—I go on and pick L.B. Carver's best friend.

At last LuAnne arrived to open the door, and it was startling to see her. Ordinarily a fashion plate, she was barefoot this morning and was wearing a plain lilac terry cloth robe. Her fiery red hair, instead of being gathered as usual, looked radiant as always but was uncombed and bushy. Her face was scrubbed and there were pillow marks on her cheek.

“Do you need to come in?” LuAnne asked. “It happens I've got some company.”

“If I could.”

“Wait,” LuAnne answered, holding up one finger and closing the door.

Five minutes later she was back and now admitted her. This time she was spiffy in her black loafers and trousers and a crimson Harvard sweat shirt, and she'd pulled her hair into a pony tail. She said, “I've started the coffee. You and I can sit in the kitchen.” Her breath was spearmint.

“Do you have any orange juice?”

“I've got orange juice. Of course I've got orange juice. You're at Chez LuAnne, Sonny. If you want toast, I can even make you toast. Rye? Whole wheat?”

Upstairs they passed through the living room and dining room and also passed a door which was closed. As a favor to LuAnne and her brother, she'd reviewed the rehab plans, so she knew it was a bedroom door. Undoubtedly someone was inside, because there were floorboard creaks and muffled movements.

LuAnne led her into the kitchen. With fancy lace curtains and four or five wall samplers, it had a

charming 19th Century aura. “Take a look at that,” LuAnne said, pointing to a bulky antique gas stove that was in shiny, spotless condition and that was at least 100 years old. It was the crowning decorating touch. In style—in clothes and in home furnishings and in whatever—LuAnne’s taste was impeccable.

LuAnne indicated a chair by the round breakfast table. “What’s up?” she said. “First of all, let’s be wary. I didn’t even phone you, because your phone—this entire place—is bugged. No two ways about it.” As she spoke, she heard footsteps—no doubt LuAnne’s company—tromping away from the bedroom and down the front stairs.

LuAnne handed her a 10-ounce glass of juice. “I’ve always fretted about that myself. You and I talk so much.”

“LuAnne, it’s a truly terrible thing to do to you. I believe today’s your first day off in what? Two weeks? But I’m wondering. Would you please be able to help me? I need a face-to-face meeting with the big guys—the investment bankers and their lawyers. Whoever’s still in town, including the wives.”

Producing one of her notepads, LuAnne said, “I’ve got a list of their hotels. If you’re talking lunch, it’s not too early to be calling them. Will you meet in the War Room? Do you want me there? What about Mr. Palmer?”

“I do not want Palmer.”

LuAnne seemed surprised. “He appears to have the takeover under control. Don’t you think he can spare the time?”

“I woke him up early this morning, so why not give him a break and let him sleep. As for you, I definitely want you to take the day off, but I need your help just to set up the arrangements,

and then you're finished. So let's see, please get the Mysterious Geezer. If I need backup, he'll be impressive. Also I wonder if you could possibly get young Goldstein. I think several of the bankers and lawyers and wives are Jewish, and I like the way Goldstein handles himself."

She didn't actually want Goldstein. Since L.B. Carver and Sandor were surely listening in, she was raising the Jewish issue solely to twit Carver. She did it to me with that Christian name stuff, so why not some tit for tat——might as well have some fun.

LuAnne shrugged. "No way to get Mr. Goldstein. Remember, it's Saturday. If I'm not mistaken, he won't even answer the phone. What about Mr. Stefanski? He's congenial."

"Well, I'd want him, yes, but my daughter, Beth, thinks she's got an afternoon movie date with him. Apparently John Palmer's given him a 4-hour pass from the War Room."

To her knowledge, Beth didn't have a date with Stefanski, but again she wanted to throw a curve ball at Sandor and Carver.

LuAnne went to the stove and poured coffee into an oversized but shallow cobalt blue cup. "Hmm," she said, "Stefanski and Beth. That's rather interesting." She came back and sat down. "So lunch in the War Room. Right?" She looked over her shoulder to check the wall clock. "No time to arrange a gourmet meal, but I'll manage to corral one of our more imaginative caterers."

"Good," she answered, "we'll have lunch in the War Room, whatever we can feed them." Reaching across, however, she laid her hand on LuAnne's notepad. "May I?" she said.

She took LuAnne's pen and printed in great big letters, "NO!!! NOT THE WAR ROOM. MCDONALD'S AT NAVY PIER." Navy Pier was Chicago's recreational facility extending into Lake Michigan. During the summer it was a Mecca for families and teenagers.

LuAnne wrote, "R U kidding? You won't hear a word. It's a zoo——10,000,000

children.”

“Exactly,” she said aloud. Then she wrote, “That’s the genius. I defy them to eavesdrop.”

LuAnne wrote, “Clever! What else?”

She took back the pen and printed, “PALMER——HE IS ABSOLUTE NO. 1 PRIORITY. HE’S BUGGED. DO NOT CALL. DO NOT SPEAK. GET HIM TO NAVY PIER FIRST THING.”

“Got that, Sonny. Anything else?”

“Yes,” she answered, and she heard herself letting out an unintentional, deep, deep sigh. She wanted to talk about Gallagher, about Tom and Beth, but what came out was pure Adam. “What do you think I ought to do about that other guy?”

The question was totally unrehearsed. Why am I consulting LuAnne? I’ve known her for three years, and she and I have never once had any intimate conversation. Shit, I never even realized that she’s got a personal life. So I must be oblivious. Company? Of course she’s got “company.” But who ever thought of her on that level?

LuAnne raised her eyebrows and mouthed the question “Mr. FitzGibbons?” Then she spoke, “Is that what you mean? Is there some kind of problem?”

She nodded yes and pointed to the ring finger on her left hand. Adam wore his wedding ring, but she’d stopped wearing both her engagement ring and her wedding band the instant Jerry moved out two years ago.

LuAnne wrote, “Holy cow!” She drew a triangle and labeled the top vertex “YOU.” She labeled the other two vertices “F” and “Mrs. F.” Handing the notebook back to her, she said, “You know, Sonny, I don’t think I’m the person to comment on this.”

“Of course you’re not. Forgive me. I came barging in on you this morning.” She gestured with

her head toward the bedroom and the front stairs where LuAnne's company had tromped. "I never even asked you whether you have other plans for today. Do you have other plans?"

"Yes, but if we're bugged in here, I certainly don't want to be disclosing what they are. In fact, the two of us walked and walked hours and hours last night and searched our souls and decided to come clean with you. So let's go outside. I have to place my calls, but I'll place them from the pay telephone at the bagel store. I'm sure that one can't be bugged. We're hungry. We'll eat there and talk with you."

She took LuAnne's pen again and wrote, "After that, please cab to the War Room and drag Berggren to Navy Pier. Don't take no. Don't speak and reveal where. BUT PALMER FIRST."

With the pen she pointed to FIRST, made sure LuAnne understood and then gulped a last swig of coffee. "Let's go," she said.

Downstairs she led the way onto the porch while LuAnne turned around to double lock the door. With his back toward her, a man was sitting on the steps. He rose and faced her. It was Tom. "Tom!" she cried. Tom looked great, ruddy and muscular in his light tan T shirt. "You're in Champaign. Beth said you're in Champaign."

"No, I'm right here."

LuAnne came and snuggled her arms around Tom's waist and then raised onto her tiptoes and kissed him on the mouth.

As they walked to the bagel store, she found herself thinking, I'm fucking oblivious. I assume they'll be giving me the facts, but isn't there anybody I can trust? I thought I could trust LuAnne, and obviously L.B. Carver knows Tom better than I do. Well, live and learn.

They arrived at the store. She'd kept watching for Felix Sandor, but——so far as she

could tell——she didn't see him.

You know, she said to herself, everything's always got a funny side. I can actually picture it——the Fairmont Laundry & Dry Cleaning van that's wandering around the Northwestern campus and up and down the streets of Evanston. I adore paranoia!

She thought, I adore paranoia except for that one little fact, the fact that Faber, Margolin's in mortal danger.

Chapter 13

McDonalds at Navy Pier was in the huge food court. LuAnne and Tom were just arriving, delivering Berggren and the Mysterious Geezer.

She took LuAnne and Tom aside. “Where the hell’s John Palmer? He’s supposed to be first.” She’d been waiting for him since leaving the bagel store shortly after 10:00.

It was almost 11:30, and the out-of-towners would be arriving any minute. Earlier, with a \$20 bill, she’d bribed a busboy, a polite, freckle-faced college kid who evidently was earning his summer money. She needed him to cordon off 5 big round tables for the 30 persons she was expecting, “Please hang around and protect the tables,” she’d said. “When they get here, we’ll also need some food.”

LuAnne muttered into her ear, “I’m rather worried.” Always ready to suspect a conspiracy, she was looking about to see that no one could overhear. “We went to his apartment at the Hancock Building. We got the concierge to take us upstairs, and we hammered on his door for maybe 5 minutes——no answer. OK, we concluded he’s at the War Room, but, no, he wasn’t there either.”

“Please just go ahead and locate him,” she said. “I expect he’s en route, and I expect you crossed paths.”

Tom said, “There are drinking rumors about Mr. Palmer. What we can do is pick him up, one place or the other, drunk or sober.”

“OK, Tom, that’ll work. But I’m certain he’s dead sober. I spoke with him early this

morning. He just got tired of waiting for me. You'll find him in the War Room."

The Mysterious Geezer and Berggren were standing off to one side, waiting for instructions.

The Mysterious Geezer looked snazzy in his gray pinstripe and deep blue shirt. Like Palmer, he always dressed with suit and tie, even during the takeover frenzy in the War Room. His white French cuffs were peeping out from his coat sleeves.

Talk about snazzy! Berggren was wearing an almost sheer pale green belted summer frock that ended a good six inches above her knees. With her long, lovely legs, she could do that. She looked bare. She broadcast sex, legs and up. Her neckline was a deep, wide vee, and you could easily see the swelling of her breasts.

She looked to check whether Tom was ogling Berggren. He wasn't. As a matter of fact, he was gazing at LuAnne and softly brushing her cheek with the back of his hand. He was quite the devoted swain. As she watched, they turned, waved goodbye and headed for the exit.

So, she said to herself, true love comes to Tom Faber—he's got eyes for LuAnne only. At the bagel store the two of them had revealed their history, and revealing was the right word, or maybe astonishing. For a year they'd been carrying on secretly but felt guilty about fooling her and therefore broke up many times. Tom would say, Don't worry. I'm sure it's OK. LuAnne would say, No, no, I'm betraying Sonny. Eventually Tom dropped out of school. He'd decided to go to Europe to backpack until he could get LuAnne out of his system. At the bagel store, however, it was obvious that the true love had ultimately prevailed. Or maybe it was the absence that had made his heart grow fonder. In any case they were together again and were apparently love starved—all the while, as they'd filled her in, they were holding hands and hugging and kissing.

Since they'd both kept glancing at her apprehensively, she'd wanted to reassure them.

“Your story’s quite romantic and touching. I’m not mad today, and I wouldn’t have been mad then.” The fact is, however, she wasn’t at all sure how she felt, whether she was delighted for Tom or furious at LuAnne. I’m Scarlett O’Hara, she said to herself. I’ll think about that tomorrow.

Now Berggren approached her. She was emitting a light, sporty talcum scent. “Sonny, I’m wondering why I’m here. Can you please tell me? Am I fired?”

“You’re here for the charade. You’re not fired. I’m happy, indeed Faber, Margolin’s happy, to keep you on.”

“Charade? And you’re not kidding—I’m staying?”

“You’re staying.”

“Definitely staying?”

“Definitely—provided I can get the bankers and lawyers to approve.”

“Wow, Sonny, a load off me! You’ll never be sorry. At 6:00 this morning I was packing my bags. I didn’t want to face them at home, so I was going to tuck my tail between my legs and hide out the rest of the summer at Yale. I’ve got my airplane reservation for tonight.”

“Better not cancel it. Better wait to see what happens.”

“I’m not worried, Sonny. They can’t help but approve—I boasted to my aunt that Sonny Faber can do anything.”

Since Berggren had noticed “charade” and was asking about it, she was sorry she’d used the word. This morning charade had a private meaning for her, in fact a vital secret meaning. The luncheon with the out-of-towners had a specific purpose—deal with the Washington Post leak, get approval of keeping Berggren. While those things could have been accomplished in the War

Room, the situation had evolved, and she no longer considered the War Room secure. Total, absolute, foolproof secrecy had become imperative. Hence McDonalds at Navy Pier. And hence Berggren and the Washington Post had downgraded and were now only the ostensible purpose of the luncheon. They'd become the cover, the charade, for the get together with Palmer.

“Excuse me a second,” she said to Berggren and then began turning this way and that to scan the entire food court for Palmer. Although the odds were he wouldn't pop up at this precise moment, she was taking an instant to rehearse her conversation with him. Also, she was admonishing herself for the 16th time. Get a grip on yourself—stop thinking about Adam. There's no time for Adam.

John, she'd say when he showed up, Carver is unbelievably cunning. She and Gallagher are going to hit us on Monday morning. They'll be making a combined preemptive strike, just as Al Pacino did against the rival mob. You remember. It was in one of those Godfather movies—I forget which one.

What's your reasoning?

You can trust me on this one, John.

In other words, just your famous Sonny Faber intuition.

Whatever, John. Take it from me—Gallagher'll be holding a press conference in less than 48 hours. Carver's choreographed all of his moves. So Monday morning, while our publicists will be hand carrying and e-mailing our takeover press release, Carver'll have Gallagher presiding over a goddamned breakfast press conference with omelettes and lox and bagel for everybody. Every newspaper chain and TV network will be there. She'll have him renting the fucking grand ballroom at the Regency Hyatt, and why not? She's paying for it. He'll be announcing that he and

the former Faber, Margolin tax department are opening a new firm—the Law Offices of Edward J. Gallagher. World Agriculture’s got three dozen subsidiaries and affiliates. Carver can feed him—can secretly guarantee him—four, five million in business.

John would absorb that for a minute, and then he’d answer, That’s just the PR picture, Sonny. You’re overlooking the bigger problem—it won’t be only our tax department. Gallagher will be raiding our litigation department, too, and God knows what else.

She’d say, Jesus! You’re right! Frank Morrissey’s our litigation man. We’re starting our law suit. If Frank jumps ship, we’ll really be crippled. We’ll be sunk. We’ll be dismantled.

OK, she said to herself now, so that’s exactly what we’re up against. I wish to hell he’d get here already. Again she looked all around. Again she checked her watch. Again she calculated the dwindling hours—just 45 of them—till Monday morning.

She turned back to Berggren. During the 20 or 30 seconds she’d been “conversing” with Palmer, Berggren in front of her remained persistent. In fact Berggren had grabbed her arm. She said, “Could you tell me what factors decided you? Could you tell me what charade?”

She said, “Sure, first there was your goodly apple phone call. That was a smart heads up to alert me. A responsible lawyer does precisely that sort of thing. You are, or rather you will ultimately be, a responsible lawyer.”

“And then second?”

“And, second, Beth left me a note which I found taped to my front door when I was leaving to meet your aunt. Here you are. You can read it.”

She handed Berggren the note from the pocket of her slacks. Berggren opened it and promptly read it aloud. It said, “You can trust Berggren. I like her.”

Berggren seemed delighted. “That’s very nice. I like her, too. So what’s the charade?”

“The charade’s not important. You can assume it’s a performance to get you approved. Look, here comes the team now.”

She was just spotting some of the out-of-towners, standing at the entrance, peering around, hunting for her. She climbed onto a chair and began circling her arms overhead.

Within a few minutes almost everyone was there, mingling and chatting at the tables she’d commandeered.

The sole absentees were the Spratt twins and their wives. The Spratt wives, Eleanor and Dorothy, were very savvy, gorgeous former Las Vegas showgirls, and she knew that they took their time about getting dressed and applying their makeup. Therefore the California contingent—the Spratts—was invariably the last to appear.

She introduced all the others to Berggren and the Mysterious Geezer, simultaneously directing everyone to a seat at one or another of four of the tables.

She was reserving the fifth table for herself and Berggren and the Spratts. When she got Berggren to sit down, she leaned over her and again caught the slightest whiff of her talcum. She said, “One Jack Spratt will sit on your left and the other on your right. I’ll go sit across from you, between the wives. You’ll want to chat it up with the Jack Spratts. You’ll find they’ll be powerfully influential in getting you approved.”

Berggren said, “Two Jack Spratts?”

“Right. I can’t tell them apart.”

Now it was time to get everybody eating. On her way to Navy Pier after the bagel store, she’d stopped off at the automatic teller machines and got \$500 in cash. She took the money from her

purse, signaled for the busboy, peeled off \$300 and said, “Please find out what everybody wants or else just bring enough food for 30 people, and you can keep the change. Plain hamburgers, cheeseburgers, drinks——diet and regular——salads, fries and desserts. Whatever. Above all, please don’t forget the sugar free.”

The Spratts were imaginative and aggressive investors. Some ranked them with legendary figures like Warren Buffet and his Berkshire Hathaway corporation. The Spratts, however, were more intuitive and considerably less scholarly and systematic than Buffet. And they were lucky in addition to being shrewd. Since everybody wanted to ride their coattails, they’d put together the huge West Coast Consortium, which The Wall Street Journal had dubbed “W2C.”

With W2C putting up more than 6 billion of the 8 billion Jerry needed to carry off the takeover, W2C’s New York lawyers pretty much called the shots, but in turn the Spratts called the shots for the lawyers.

Nobody ever defied the Spratts. If an investor campaigned hard enough, they might let him in on a W2C deal. They had a long surefire waiting list, and raising 6 billion was no problem. If they let somebody in and if he then dared to disagree with them, they simply booted him out and replaced him with someone else.

The Spratts had backed Jerry’s very first venture——almost ten years ago——and they promptly fell in love with him. He could do no wrong.

They love me, too, she was thinking. Every month or so they called her up. They’d say such things as, We’re doing this IPO, this Initial Public Offering. It’s for a software company in Bangor, Maine. Would you represent the issuer? Or they’d say, We’re backing a startup internet company. They need heavy duty legal representation. Would you be interested?

Simply put, the Spratts were feeding her the new legal business that year after year brought in millions in fees. Those fees cemented her power at Faber, Margolin, but all of a sudden—cement or no cement, fees or no fees—L.B. Carver and Gallagher were pulling Faber, Margolin right out from under her.

Carver had certainly used the right word—she was dismantling Faber, Margolin.

Now, at last, the Spratts arrived, and it seemed that everyone in the food court looked up to watch them parade over to her table. There was indeed a distinct California aura about them. In their 60s, the men were suntanned and slender, masculine and distinguished, casual but utterly sharp in their expensive sports jackets, razor-crease trousers and \$600 Italian shoes. Both the wives were blonde today and were even more striking. They were in their 40s, but from a little distance you could think they weren't even 30.

Eleanor and Dorothy were each just about 6 feet tall, not quite a head taller than their husbands. In addition, they were wearing their high heels, of course, and tight knee-length skirts, long-sleeved blouses and diamonds galore, nothing the least bit casual. What really attracted the eye, however, was not their makeup or dress but their showgirl carriage and their graceful movement—they were models on the runway. LuAnne, she was thinking—LuAnne's shorter but otherwise exactly like that. I wish I were, too.

One of the twins was Jimmy and the other Joey, but she'd once giggled and told them, "I give up. I'm going to call you both Jack."

Besides their fabled financial success, the Jacks were renowned as connoisseurs of women. She wanted to laugh now but managed to keep it to a smile, because, exactly as she'd known they would, they commenced examining Berggren the very moment they spotted her at the table. When

Berggren tried to rise to greet them, each kept a hand on her shoulder, gently forcing her to remain seated. They were taking good, leisurely looks right down her neckline. When they pulled back their chairs, they both leaned over for a minute to study her legs.

Dorothy came, sat next to her, laid a hand on her wrist and nodded back toward Berggren. She whispered, “Ah, youth. Do you see why I need my face lifts and my tucks and my et cetera?”

Eleanor hitched up her skirt, sat alongside her and said, “Me, too. I’m telling you, ever since Viagra, we’re keeping those two off college campuses, and Dorothy and I are both thinking of hiring a private eye.”

The busboy arrived, wheeling a cart piled with food.

She waited perhaps 10 minutes to give everybody a chance to do some eating. Still no John Palmer, she said to herself, so I might as well crank up the charade. She stood, strode to about the center of their staked-out area and spoke as loudly as she could, “Can everybody hear me?”

At college she’d done theater in the round and therefore was accustomed to speaking in the middle of crowds. She knew how to rotate and gesture and how to project her voice to everyone. “At 5:00 this morning I had a phone call from World Agriculture, from a woman named L.B. Carver. Who is L.B. Carver? She’s one scary person. She’s their chief assassin. She fights takeovers. I met with her. I listened to her for a half hour. She claims she never loses. She says it’s because she fights dirty. She knows everything about us. I mean she knows absolutely everything. She knows things about me that I don’t know.”

From one of the tables crewcut George Mickelson shouted, “Hey, there, Sonny, you say she knows everything. In that regard I’m really worried about this Washington Post leak. I’m

convinced it came from your firm.” His voice was irritatingly squeaky.

She’d anticipated that Mickelson would be attacking, and she was already prepared. He was a young lawyer for the New York bank that was engaged to act as the Takeover Manager for stock escrow and other technical matters. Behind his back he was known as “Pompous George” or “Squeaky Wheel.”

Even though she was reminding herself about her own indiscretion with Adam FitzGibbons and about Mike Goodman——Goodman was Palmer’s reporter and drinking acquaintance from the Washington Post——she said, “I wonder why you’re blaming us. Sure I’ve talked to people. Maybe I said too much. Sure John Palmer’s talked to people. Maybe he did, too. No doubt you yourself have talked to people. Haven’t you, George? Tell us honestly. Are you the guy who can cast the first stone?”

He began blushing. “I’m not blaming you. I’m not blaming any particular person. Since I know that none of us would ever leak anything deliberately, I was simply assuming that somebody’s hacked into your computer network. Doesn’t your law firm have firewalls? Nobody ever breaks into our computers.”

She removed a large manila envelope from her purse and began flapping it above her head. It contained a full copy of The Global Herald. She’d already addressed the envelope to him. “On my way here, George, I stopped off and bought you a souvenir. I’ll hand it over in just a minute. I think you’ll be keenly interested. I think you’ll see what we’re up against with L.B. Carver. I think you’ll conclude that the Washington Post leak——or for that matter anything that was leaked from our office or from you personally or from your office——is a mere trickle compared to what’s actually going on.”

“I’m not following you, Sonny.”

“You will, George, you will. Meanwhile, with specific regard to firewalls, I don’t want you to leave town without taking a tour through our War Room. If your firm’s thought of some security measure that we’ve overlooked, maybe you can give us some ideas.”

Now she said to the Spratts, “Jimmy and Joey, will you gentlemen please help that young lady stand up.” They scrambled to their feet and pulled back Berggren’s chair. They assisted her and stood alongside her, one steadying her with an arm across her shoulder and one with his palm against her lower back.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I present Claudia Berggren. She’s a top Yale law student, and she’s working with our firm this summer. She’s been doing a bang up job on the federal tax aspects of our takeover. I remind you that there’s a poison pill with some tricky provisions. We want her to stay with us, but I can’t make that decision by myself. That’s something that’s going to be entirely up to you. In other words, I won’t do it unless you give me the green light.”

She could see Berggren’s hands behind her back. The fingers on both hands were crossed. She said to her, “Berggren, I’ve got you on display. Are you OK with that?”

Berggren nodded yes.

“I want everybody to know,” she continued, “that just last night I accused this lovely young lady of being a spy for World Agriculture. I discovered that she’s the niece of L.B. Carver. I’ve already told you that L.B. Carver’s their takeover assassin.”

Mickelson cried, “Aha! I see it all now. It’s not a computer leak at all. Our client hereby demands that you get rid of her, summarily. Our law firm would never permit such a thing.”

One of the Jack Spratts said, “Just a minute now, young fellow, let’s hear what Miss Faber

has to say. If I know Miss Faber, she's got something up her sleeve."

"The Internet," she said. "We've designed a web site, and I want to put on it every single thing we know about the takeover, every single thing we plan to do. I'm talking about the lawsuits we're filing, the spinoffs and the splitups, complete details of each and every deal we've made for the World Agriculture divisions we're selling off. Ditto——yes, we'll also do full-page magazine and newspaper ads. I'm talking the Journal, New York Times, etc., Forbes, Fortune, Business Week, in fact everybody and every place we can think of."

Since no one said anything, she went on, "If we do that, I don't care whether Claudia Berggren's a spy. I don't think she is, but spies will do World Agriculture no good at all. There'll be nothing for them to learn. There'll be no secrets for them to discover."

Finally Mickelson said, "No way."

"George," she said, "are you a litigator?"

"You know I'm not."

"Did you check with your litigation people?"

He shrugged but didn't speak.

"I'm not a litigator, but I've checked with our litigation people. They tell me that in our lawsuit, which we're filing Monday morning——not even 48 hours from now——all of this information will come out anyway. It'll come out in depositions, in interrogatories and in other discovery. In litigation there are no secrets nowadays, George. Do you disagree?"

Mickelson took off his eyeglasses but didn't respond, so she continued, "You're a bank lawyer, George. Is that correct?"

"You know I am."

“Precisely. And I’m a securities lawyer. I’d trust your opinion on any bank problem whatsoever. Our problem, however, is not just things like SEC Rule 10b-5 but all the disclosure and anti-fraud provisions. In my opinion—in my experience—the more we disclose, the safer we are. Don’t you agree, George, that we can’t keep anything secret, that we’re better off if we conceal nothing, if we openly publish everything that an investor would ever want to know. Please think that over, and tell me if there’s any reason not to publish all of that information.”

Again Mickelson didn’t respond. This time she made it a point to wait for two full minutes, during which he fidgeted but remained totally mute.

“So, George, the thing I’m wondering about is how we can get hurt. Let’s even assume, just for the sake of argument, that Ms. Berggren is in fact a spy. What’s she’s going to steal? More likely she’ll feed us information about them. The United States and Russia have a red telephone hotline to prevent miscalculations. Ms. Berggren will be our red telephone hotline to her aunt, L.B. Carver. I think we’ll have an advantage, not a danger.”

The Jack Spratts started to applaud, and soon everyone except Mickelson did, too. “Don’t you just love it,” one of the Jacks asked, “when this gal gets strategic?”

Now she walked over to Mickelson and handed him the envelope with The Global Herald. She stood behind him and put her hand on his shoulder. He was wearing a tailored tan short-sleeved shirt, and he felt burning hot. In fact she could see moisture beads on his forehead and could scent his perspiration. She patted him. “Go on ahead—rip ‘er open.”

He placed the envelope on his lap and didn’t open it.

She continued, “What’s actually going on is not a leak or a trickle, George. It’s a flood. It’s a full scale, all-out assault on our privacy—on my privacy. Forget the Washington Post,

George. Forget the leaks. World Agriculture's attacking me personally and my children personally and my husband personally. No doubt, even as I speak, they're hacking into my personal bank records and into my credit card accounts and in fact into every source of personal information you can imagine, including, I regret to tell you, my own bathroom. I'm living in an electronic fish bowl. I'll hire you, George. If you know how to firewall against that stuff, I'll hire you to do it. You name your price."

She went back to her purse and took out two more Global Herald envelopes that she'd prepared, one addressed to Dorothy Spratt and the other to Eleanor. "These are for your husbands," she said, winking at them, "but you might want to censor them first. Otherwise I'm afraid your guys'll be enjoying them."

She looked from one table to another, trying to make eye contact with practically everybody. "I didn't have enough for all the rest of you, so, George Mickelson, will you please be kind enough to pass your copy around. You'll all learn exactly what L.B. Carver means when she says she fights real dirty."

She sat down. One of the Jacks held up Berggren's right arm. "The winner," he announced, "and still champion. Mickelson, you go on back to New York and tell your law firm and your bank that W2C heartily approves of having this delightful young lady continue to work on our project. Tell them we also approve Sonny Faber's Internet plan and her newspaper plan. And I'm hereby issuing an invitation to World Agriculture—please, World Agriculture, please send us more spies, exactly like this one."

The other Jack nodded his head vigorously. "Anybody who disagrees, let them speak now or forever hold their peace."

Nobody spoke, not even Mickelson.

Clinging to their hands for just a moment, Berggren allowed the Jack Spratts to return her to her seat. She smiled at them. Then she looked over to her and smiled at her and mouthed, “Thank you, Sonny. Thank you.”

She nodded to Berggren and grinned back at her. In a low voice but out loud she said to her, “Piece of cake. Foregone conclusion.” To herself she said, So much for the Washington Post, so much for the whole charade.

She resumed eating, but her hamburger had become ice cold. As she laid it aside and took a swallow of her diet drink, she felt someone tapping on her shoulder. She turned around. It was Tom, but he was all by himself, LuAnne nowhere in sight. “Hey there,” she said. “Where’s Palmer?”

“Mom.” He was leaning forward and speaking directly into her ear. She could feel his warm breath. His voice was quavering. “Mom,” he said, “John Palmer is dead.”

Chapter 14

It was Monday, shortly after 7:15 a.m., and she was in the United terminal at O'Hare. Unable to sleep, she'd been there since 6:00.

While she was OD'ing on Starbucks coffee and waiting for Adam's flight, she was trying to fathom the mystery that had been bugging her for two whole days. She'd talked with Adam twice since Palmer's death but hadn't had the guts to ask him. If what L.B. Carver told me is true, that she's your wife's best friend, how come you concealed that from me? Why'd you do that?

Very disturbing. Adam was L.B. Carver's Trojan Horse! Where's John Palmer when she needed him? He'd demand she track down this possibility.

Just as she was taking a final swig of coffee, there was an announcement. She could see for herself—Adam's plane was taxiing to the gate. He was the first out. Solid and lean, he was gorgeous in a pale blue suit she'd never seen before, and she'd forgotten how tall and bronzed he was.

She made a snap decision. I'm going to trust this guy.

She dashed to him, yanked him out of the stream of disembarking passengers and wrapped her arms around him, nestling her cheek against his shirt. All of her concerns vanished. Weren't hormones wonderful?

He said, "I've got just this one bag. Are you OK?"

"Right now I'm glad. But really, Adam, I'm sad, oh so sad."

Even though she felt conspicuous, she held his hand at first and then walked through the terminal

with her arm around his waist and his around hers. They didn't speak.

They got a cab right away. Inside she said to the driver, "The Hilton Hotel and Towers, please."

Adam chuckled his deep rumbling laugh. "Is this really a smart thing to do? I admit it's funny as hell. There's nobody——nobody but Sonny Faber——who could pull this one off."

"Yeah, it's going to be a riot, but I'm still in shock——too devastated to enjoy the humor."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know the man, but I know what he meant to you. So I'm sad, too. If empathy helps, this is heartfelt empathy."

"Just what I've been needing." She squeezed his hand and released it and then reached up to stroke his cheek. Later on he'd be needing a shave. "Here's my plan for this morning's laugh riot. I'll step up and make a huge fuss over the court order. Then I'll introduce you, and you say whatever you want. If you do two minutes, that's plenty. Then we'll leave and go to the office."

"I can do two minutes."

"That's good. You've got to meet the partners. Then I need to talk with you, so we absolutely, positively must have some private time. The funeral's at 2:00. You might want to go. I'm going but truth is I'd rather do my mourning privately."

"If you go, I go." He kissed her forehead. "In the big picture, Sonny, we're proceeding too fast. We're allowing your Mr. Ed Gallagher to force our hands. We're plunging in over our heads. It feels ridiculous."

"I had no choice," she answered. "The old domino effect——he forced me, I forced you. From the standpoint of the law firm, it was a stroke of genius for me to call you. For you and me

personally—God, are we plunging in! You can still back out, you know.”

“Damn the consequences, Sonny—on Saturday night, when I said to you, ‘Yes, count on me,’ with that one statement I crossed the Rubicon. You don’t know me very well. I don’t ever turn back.”

“I realize that now, and I love you for it, but I admit I’m still scared you’ll go away.”

“My wife,” he said. “You do remember that I’m married, don’t you? You’re still married, too. Am I not correct? So don’t think I’m not afraid you’ll go away. Everything’s equal and opposite—remember? As soon as I meet the partners, you and I absolutely, positively have to do intensive leveling with each other.”

“Right you are,” she said. “Equal and opposite.”

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On the Hilton Towers’ daily event directory they found the Edward Gallagher press conference listed for breakfast at 8:00 in the Lake Michigan Room. To herself she said, Right on the nose! He’s doing exactly the big announcement bash I predicted except it’s here at the Hilton instead of at the Regency Hyatt. To Adam she said, “We’re OK on time. They’ve just started feeding, so I’ll go in and start the program. Yes, it’s hilarious—it’s Ed Gallagher’s show, and he can’t begin without me.”

Entering the Lake Michigan Room, she spotted Gallagher standing all by himself across from the entrance. She nodded toward him and out the corner of her mouth said to Adam, “That’s Ed Gallagher. Have you ever met a human iguana? I’ll introduce you. My executive assistant

calls him Osama bin Laden. Take a look and tell me—is he, or is he not, an iguana?”

“I don’t see iguana. I’d say more the typical tight-ass lawyer. I see nervously thin—look at him fidget. I see rimless glasses, mustache, navy blue suit, probably lots of dandruff, nice conservative lawyer necktie.”

“Yes, fidgeting, and for darn good reason.” She towed Adam along by the elbow and went directly to Gallagher. “Good morning and congratulations, Ed. You’ve got a full house. Proves, doesn’t it, that the fourth estate never passes up the chance for a free meal.” She took a quick count all around the room. At the very least there were 50 or 60 persons at the buffet or lined up to have omelettes prepared, and a couple dozen were already eating at the tables. “Boy!” she said, “What’s this costing you?”

“Good morning, Asshole,” he answered. “You’ve really got balls.”

“Ed, I want you to meet Adam FitzGibbons. Adam, this is Ed Gallagher. He’s one of my most ardent admirers.”

“I can see that.”

Adam held out his hand, but Gallagher ignored it. Adam said, “Sooner or later we’ll have to talk, Ed. If today’s not good, what say we get together when things quiet down. OK?”

Gallagher didn’t respond.

She checked her watch. “Starting time, Gentlemen. So, Ed, I’ll just go on ahead and do what I have to do. Adam, you’ll be up next, and we’ll leave as soon as you’re finished.”

When she turned and headed to the speaker’s rostrum at one end of the room, Adam followed her and said, “Iguana alright—not in appearance but certainly reptilian. Iguanas are reptiles, aren’t they?”

“That’s actually what I meant, but I do have to defend him—I honestly never noticed any dandruff. Meanwhile take a gander at that gloomy bunch over there. They’re my former partners, too, and you’ll note there’s not more than 10 of them. It’s no accident they’re gloomy. They’re wondering what hit them and what they’re doing here. Their caper’s costing them unbelievable cash. I’ll supply the gory details later.”

Adam took a seat at an empty table. She left her purse there and stepped up and tapped on the microphone. “Ladies and gentlemen, I begin by acknowledging numerous friends and acquaintances. Hello there, everybody. Nice to see you. And then, for those of you who don’t know me, I’ll simply say that I’m Sonny Faber of Faber, Margolin.”

She peered around the room as though searching for Gallagher and then, discovering him, pointed and said, “Look, everyone. He’s here, too—our gracious host this morning, my former partner, Ed Gallagher. Thanks, Ed, thanks for giving me this opportunity to launch you and my other former partners in your brave new venture. Ed, did you order a ship-launching champagne bottle? Too bad. If you had, I’d do the ceremonial smash for you. In any case, let’s all give Ed Gallagher a great big round of applause.”

She waited a bit, but, of course, except for her and Adam, there was no applause. He and she kept on clapping for 15 seconds and then Harper, from Crain’s Chicago Business, called out, “Question, Sonny. What are you doing here? Are you saying this is a friendly split-up? What are the facts?”

“Fair question, Jim. But first I personally am going to do 30 seconds of silence for my friend and partner, John Palmer. As you know, he died unexpectedly on Saturday morning. He wasn’t just my friend and partner. He was a prince of a man.”

“And what are the facts on what happened there, Sonny?”

She stayed mute for a full minute and then said, “There’s an autopsy, Jim. Until that comes in I’m not saying anything. But I’m here to talk about the living. I’ll be glad to take any questions about what’s going on.”

She felt exhilarated and in complete command of the proceedings. Although she wasn’t the least thirsty, she elaborately poured herself a glass of water from a pitcher at the rostrum and took a long slow sip. Pace is everything, she was reminding herself. Out loud she said, “Certainly it’s a friendly split-up. Ed’s a long-time friend of mine. I’m going to miss him. We did have one issue—the method of splitting.” She took another sip, pausing to allow any questions. Since there weren’t any, she continued, “Yes, there was just a difference of what I would call methodology.”

Again there were no questions. “We found out about it late Saturday afternoon. At that time one of our young summer associates—she’s a Yale law student—alerted us to Ed’s methodology. Naturally, by then all the courts in the city are closed except the Criminal Court out at 26th and California. We phoned around, however, and located a chancery emergency judge and went to him for a temporary restraining order, a TRO.”

Now Jim Harper spoke up again. “What do you mean when you say ‘methodology?’”

“Quite simple, Jim. My friend Ed had decided to spirit——‘spirit’s’ an accurate word, and it’s the judge’s word, not mine——Ed had decided to spirit all of our tax clients’ files out of the building and to do so very late Saturday night. To be precise, he was going to do it in the wee, wee hours of Sunday morning. He’d hired a crack team of professional movers who guaranteed to pack him up and move him out in less than 4 hours beginning at midnight. In one way I wish we’d

let him do it—it would have been a new world’s record. He and his colleagues would have disappeared with some 3200 cartons. But, alas for the Guinness record books, the judge granted us the TRO.”

Somebody called out, “In plain English, a hostile split-up. So why are you here?”

“Hold on a minute. I’m saying the split-up is as friendly as such things can be. I’d call it an amicable divorce. I personally got on the telephone and reached Ed at home and invited him to come talk with the judge. He was surprised that I knew what he was up to, or maybe he was dumbfounded, but he came right over for the hearing. He was most cordial throughout.” She didn’t clarify it that he was cordial only in the judge’s presence.

She continued, “With the Civic Center courts closed, the judge invited us to his lovely Lake Shore Drive apartment, and he held the hearing as we sat around his dining room table sipping wine. He was a most gracious host. He said, ‘I don’t think a drop or two will interfere with the administration of justice.’ He’s got a magnificent view of the Outer Drive and Lake Michigan. Very, very civilized, wouldn’t you say? Now that I’m thinking about it, however, I’m remembering that it wasn’t 100% friendly. The judge’s wife was sore as hell. They were late for a dinner engagement.”

Mike Goodman from the Washington Post yelled out, “Details, please. What are the facts on the split-up?”

“OK, Mr. Goodman, the bottom line is that Ed conceded he hadn’t gotten the clients’ permissions to remove their files.”

She went and retrieved her purse, made a show of rummaging around in it and finally extracted a copy of the TRO and came back and laid it on the rostrum. “Under the circumstances,

the judge in effect said, You'll have to wait until you get the permissions. Therefore I'm ordering you not to physically remove any files whatsoever. I'm also ordering you to deliver within 24 hours a comprehensive list of each and every computer or electronic file in your possession or control—you and your cohorts. If you have cartons, do not open them except in the presence of Ms. Faber or her authorized deputy."

Now she flashed the order above her head, exhibiting it to the left and to the right. "Then the judge signed this order that I have here and personally handed it to Ed. He said, 'You're restrained, Mr. Gallagher.' And that was that."

Goodman said, "Can we get a copy of that order?"

"You know you can. It's public record, but I've arranged to make it easy for you. I'll give you this copy, Mr. Goodman, with the understanding that you'll promptly duplicate it and give one to everybody here who wants one. The hotel concierge is aware and is expecting you. It's just two pages. Is that OK?"

She extended the order to him. He got up from his table and came and took it. "Thanks," he said and returned to his seat.

"There's another question still pending," she said. "Why am I here? During the hearing, Ed said to the judge, 'What should I do? I've got this press conference Monday morning, and it's too late to cancel it.' The judge said, 'That's up to you, Mr. Gallagher. But if there is a press conference, I want Ms. Faber to run that meeting. Let me have that order. I'm writing that into it.' You guys will see it in the order. The order's typewritten, but he added that last sentence in his own handwriting."

She refilled her glass from the pitcher and took another sip. "So there you have the

complete details.”

One of the TV network financial commentators, Julia from the local ABC outlet, said, “Not quite, Sonny. The press release we got from Mr. Gallagher says 25 guys are pulling out, most from the tax department. If all these guys are gone, doesn’t that blow a gigantic hole in your law firm?”

“Boy, Julia, am I glad you asked that,” she answered, and she went and tugged Adam from his chair. “Many of you national correspondents no doubt recognize Adam FitzGibbons. Adam’s going to head up our tax department. He’s a world class tax lawyer, which means we’ll be stronger than we ever were. We’re so thrilled to have him that in fact we’re in the process of changing the name of the firm to Faber, Margolin, FitzGibbons, etc.”

She paused to stare directly at Gallagher and to wink at him. The man’s dying, she was thinking. He’d always agitated and practically begged to become a name partner.

“Over the years,” she continued, “some of you have written about Adam’s achievements. He’s been top undersecretary in the Treasury Department for——how long is it now, Adam? three years? Please come on over here, Adam, and say a word or two.”

He took her place at the rostrum. Although with his booming voice the last thing he needed was a microphone, he adjusted it, raising it a good nine or ten inches.

“I’m a practicing lawyer,” he said, “and I’ve been doing a long sabbatical with the government. Six months ago I decided to get back into private practice. That’s my real love. We’d just finished the job of writing the new Treasury regulations on off-shore transactions. I think some of you know that off-shore was one of my specialties. Consequently that particular project became my baby. When the regs became final, I felt I’d completed my civic duty. So a

half year ago I handed in my resignation to the Secretary of the Treasury, and he was kind enough to request that I stay on until I landed somewhere definite.”

She grinned and nodded to Adam. She liked the way he sounded and liked the smooth way he was handling himself in public. Up to now she'd had the usual reservations about an unknown—the new kid coming suddenly into the firm—but every single one of those fears was evaporating as he spoke.

Her big remaining fear—the Trojan Horse—was underneath the surface and didn't evaporate. He'd concealed L.B. Carver. I trust him, but why the fuck didn't he level with me? Whose side is he on?

He turned and moved from the rostrum and came to her and stood alongside her, just about a foot away. “Well, as you all know, Faber, Margolin's a top tier law firm, highly regarded by every professional in the country. It therefore took me precisely two seconds when Sonny Faber here”——he rotated to face her——“called me after midnight Saturday night.”

He didn't mention the awkward moment that was still jarring her. When she called him at 1:00 a.m., Washington time, none other than Mrs. Adam FitzGibbons answered the phone and said, “May I tell him who's calling?”

Now, with a strong, vigorous grip he shook Sonny's hand very briefly, and the unexpected contact made her fingers tingle.

He said, “She didn't say anything about any hole in the firm. She's very persuasive, you know. Here's the way she put it. ‘Adam,’ she said, ‘I'm calling you because our firm's got an opportunity opening.’ I said, ‘Say no more. I'll be there, I'll grab it, I want to get into your firm, this is the spot I've been hoping for.’ I prudently waited until 10:00 o'clock Sunday morning

before I called the Secretary—even so I woke him up—to activate my resignation, and here I am.”

Now she returned to the rostrum and lowered the microphone. “Thanks, Adam,” she said. “At this juncture, Adam and I will clear out. This is Ed Gallagher’s show. Don’t be fooled, you guys, by that TRO order against him. OK, it just means that Ed stumbled slightly coming out of the starting gate. He’ll land on his feet. He’s a great lawyer, and you can say that I said so. Do you know what I hope and pray? I hope and pray that he manages to develop a whole new clientele of his own without spiriting away any of ours.”

There was a good bit of laughter, and she waved goodbye, waved to everyone and deliberately counted off her 6 or 7 strides toward the door. Then she halted. “Oh, my gosh,” she cried and raised her hands overhead. She raced back to the microphone. “I almost forgot. I never finished answering Julia’s question about the hole in our firm. Sorry, Julia. I completely forgot to tell you that 15 out of Ed’s 25 intended colleagues changed their minds and decided to stay. So there’s really no hole.”

Julia said, “That’s a much smaller hole for sure. Electric cattle prods, I suppose. How’d you do it, Sonny?”

“Come on, Julia. Cattle prods are third-degree. Faber, Margolin hasn’t used that stuff in years. We simply held an impromptu meeting and reasoned with them. It was yesterday about 5:00 o’clock in morning.”

Somebody laughed. “Impromptu? Five a.m. Sunday?”

She tried to appear astonished. “This is really strange. I regard all you media guys as exceptionally intelligent and well-informed, and yet you appear to be under the common

misconception that lawyers aren't accustomed to working on weekends, let alone at 5:00 a.m. May I remind you that Faber, Margolin's the champion of the underdog? You show us an underdog and we're there, day or night."

Mike Goodman spoke, "Would you just give us the facts, please. What are the facts?"

Obviously—from Goodman's impatient tone—it was time to call it quits. "OK, Mike, it quickly became apparent to us that Ed Gallagher and all 25 of his people had blundered into a trap of sorts. They'd forgotten, you see, that our partnership agreement requires a withdrawing partner to put up a cash deposit to cover his obligation under our office lease, which runs another 10 point 5 years. If you've ever seen our offices, you'll be able to surmise what that comes to in dollars. I'm signed on that lease, too, and I shudder to think about it. Hell, I'm never going to withdraw. When you get the chance, why don't you ask Ed how much he has to put up. Fifteen of his guys simply got cold feet."

Goodman said, "Can I get a copy of that partnership agreement? Can I get the lease?"

"Sorry, no, you can't."

Now, as she and Adam finally left the rostrum for good, he whispered, "Jesus, am I glad I'm on your side. You're the greatest showman of all time. You pulverized that poor SOB. On top of that, you're making him pay for it. How much cash does he have to put up?"

"Oh, under the formula, merely 750 thou."

"Wow! Why's that?"

"When I drafted the partnership agreement, I was concerned about just this eventuality of people pulling out en masse. I inserted a clause. Everybody signed it. Nobody else remembered it, but I did. We're seizing the money from their current partnership draws and from their capital

accounts. They have no choice. It's a no-interest deposit. They'll get it back—in 10 point 5 years. That's only a decade away.”

Adam smiled at her. He had a beautiful smile. The meeting had gone so well that she wanted to hug him and kiss him. He said, “You're utterly wicked.”

Now she began moving to the door, waving goodbye to the news people and pausing here and there to introduce Adam or to shake hands or to clap someone on the shoulder. When eventually they reached the door, Gallagher was there waiting for her, scowling.

She thrust out her hand. “Great turnout, Ed, great breakfast meeting. Good luck. No hard feelings. Let's you and me shake on that.”

“Go fuck yourself,” he answered. “I don't forgive, and I don't forget. You, too, Asshole,” he said to Adam.

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Adam wowed the partners. There was a noon reception for him, standing room only, in the 68th floor dining room. Joe Margolin introduced him. “This guy is presidential timber,” he said, “judging by the way everybody is shaking his hand. Adam, are you running for office?”

Adam stood alongside Joe and towered over him even though Joe, at 5'10", was standing on a step at the podium. “The only office I'm running for is one where I can sit down and get to work for this law firm. We're going to have the greatest tax department in the country. That's my pledge.”

Until it was time to eat lunch and then go to Palmer's funeral, Adam regaled them with inside stories of the Treasury, including an actual fistfight that the Secretary had to personally

intervene in.

Joe Margolin whispered to her. “Your man is terrific.”

Though she wanted to say, He’s not my man, she just nodded.

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She, Jerry, Tom and Beth were at the funeral. Along with LuAnne, they’d all ridden out to the church in Evanston. Palmer had no family. He was a Unitarian and the minister asked her if she wanted to say anything. “Absolutely not. I couldn’t handle it.”

All during the ceremony, she controlled her grief, tried not to be thinking of Palmer, didn’t want to be thinking of Adam. She couldn’t miss seeing him, however, sitting about four rows ahead of her, taller than everyone else except the Mysterious Geezer, who was at the end of the same row.

Outside she spotted him sliding into a limousine, and she said to Jerry, “You travel with the kids. I’m taking a cab home. I need some intensive solitude.”

At home, she slept until 7:00 in the evening and then went to her answering machine to see if Adam had called. He had not. There was only one message, and it was disquieting. Even though the caller didn’t identify herself, she immediately recognized L.B. Carver. “Your friend’s gone. I know what you’re going through. Regardless of what you might be thinking, we had nothing to do with it. I investigated.”

Carver’s voice was slurred. She wondered whether L.B. was drunk.

Adam was staying at the Palmer House, where LuAnne had reserved a room for him. Why hadn’t he called?

Around 10 o’clock she broke down and telephoned him. “Something very strange has

happened,” she said. “I need to discuss it. Do you want me to come over?”

“No.” He seemed awake and alert.

“I could use a hug.”

“Not tonight. I’m exhausted.”

“Oh, you are?” She hung up. Into the dead phone she said, “Go to sleep.”

After her long nap, she herself was intensely alert but still physically exhausted. Having had the nap, the last thing she wanted was to go to sleep. Too much, much too much, to figure out. She got dressed and walked past the study, where Beth was watching TV with Stefanski. She peeked in and smiled to them and then went out and took a two-hour walk.

Back home, she peeked into the study again and found that Stefanski was gone. Beth looked up from book said, “Need to talk?”

“Thanks, but I’m all talked out. Believe it or not, I just had a long therapeutic session—a virtual conversation. That John Palmer’s amazing. He advised me to go home and drift off.”

Beth said, “Some woman called twice, wouldn’t identify herself, wouldn’t leave a message. It’s a Chicago number. I looked it up for you on caller ID. It’s on a pad in the kitchen.”

She kissed Beth goodnight and went to bed. This is most interesting, she was thinking—L.B. Carver and Adam, both in Chicago at the same time.

Definitely unable to sleep, she got up and checked the number on the pad in the kitchen. At least L.B. wasn’t at the Palmer House.

Chapter 15

No sleep for me tonight, she thought. I just want to be with him, but the partners are still reveling, celebrating with Adam. Joe Margolin had definitely warned her. “Please don’t crash this party. This is huge. We’re entitled.” So, sure, OK, let the boys be boys. She’d simply show up for breakfast.

She got dressed, walked to the Palmer House and sat in the lobby. She’d let them sleep it off until nine.

Later, when she went upstairs, the concierge greeted her at the elevator and said, “We’ve just had a whirlwind. Our hotel furniture is here, but our guest shipped everything else out in just minutes. Everything’s gone. Every single thing. Every person’s gone. I’ve got all the doors and windows wide open to clear the air.”

“Adam Fitzgibbons. Isn’t Mr. Fitzgibbons here? I’m sure he left a message.”

“No, no message, except maybe that piece of paper somebody pasted on a bathroom mirror.”

She turned and went around into the suite. Sure enough there was a piece of paper on the mirror. In a woman’s handwriting – in L.B. Carver’s handwriting – it said, “I never lose.”