MANY THANKS to my literary agent, Jay Garon, who discovered my first novel five years ago and peddled it aroundNew Yorkuntil someone said yes.

Many thanks to David Gernert, my editor, who's also a friend and a fellow baseball purist; and to Steve Rubin and Ellen Archer and the rest of the family at Doubleday; and to Jackie Cantor, my editor at Dell.

Many thanks to those of you who've written. I've tried to answer them all, but if I missed one or two, please forgive.

Special thanks to Raymond Brown, a gentleman and fine lawyer in Pascagoula, Mississippi, who came through in the clutch; and to Chris Charlton, a law school pal who knows the alleys of New Orleans; and to Murray Avent, a friend from Oxford and Ole Miss who now lives in D.C.; and to Greg Block at the Washington Post; and, of course, to Richard and the Gang at Square Books.

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HE SEEMED INCAPABLE of creating such chaos, but much of what he saw below could be blamed on him. And that was fine. He was ninety-one, paralyzed, strapped in a wheelchair and hooked to oxygen. His second stroke seven years ago had almost finished him off, but Abraham Rosenberg was still alive and even with tubes in his nose his legal stick was bigger than the other eight. He was the only legend remaining on the Court, and the fact that he was still breathing irritated most of the mob below.

He sat in a small wheelchair in an office on the main floor of the Supreme Court Building. His feet touched the edge of the window, and he strained forward as the noise increased. He hated cops, but the sight of them standing in thick, neat lines was somewhat comforting. They stood straight and held ground as the mob of at least fifty thousand screamed for blood.

"Biggest crowd ever!"Rosenbergyelled at the window. He was almost deaf. Jason Kline, his senior law clerk, stood behind him. It was the first Monday in October, the opening day of the new term, and this had become a traditional celebration of the First Amendment. A glorious celebration. Rosenberg was thrilled. To him, freedom of speech meant freedom to riot.

[&]quot;Are the Indians out there?" he asked loudly.



The heckling, praying, singing, chanting, and screaming grew louder, and the riot police inched closer together. The crowd was larger and rowdier than in recent years. Things were more tense. Violence had become common. Abortion clinics had been bombed. Doctors had been attacked and beaten. One was killed inPensacola, gagged and bound into the fetal position and burned with acid. Street fights were weekly events. Churches and priests had been abused by militant gays. White supremacists operated from a dozen known, shadowy, paramilitary organizations, and had become bolder in their attacks on blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Hatred was now America's favorite pastime.

And the Court, of course, was an easy target. Threats, serious ones, against the justices had increased tenfold since 1990. The Supreme Court police had tripled in size. At least two FBI agents were assigned to guard each justice, and another fifty were kept busy investigating threats.



for a Democrat in the White House. He wanted to quit, needed to quit, but he could not stomach the idea

of a right-wing Runyan type taking his beloved seat.

He could wait. He could sit here in his wheelchair and breathe oxygen and protect the Indians, the blacks, the women, the poor, the handicapped, and the environment until he was a hundred and five. And not a single person in the world could do a damned thing about it, unless they killed him. And that wouldn't be such a bad idea either.

The great man's head nodded, then wobbled and rested on his shoulder. He was asleep again. Kline quietly stepped away, and returned to his research in the library. He would return in half an hour to check the oxygen and give Abe his pills.

THE OFFICE of the Chief Justice is on the main floor, and is larger and more ornate than the other eight. The outer office is used for small receptions and formal gatherings, and the inner office is where the Chief works.

The door to the inner office was closed, and the room was filled with the Chief, his three law clerks, the captain of the Supreme Court police, three FBI agents, and K. O. Lewis, deputy director, FBI. The mood was serious, and a serious effort was under way to ignore the noise from the streets below. It was difficult. The Chief and Lewis discussed the latest series of death threats, and everyone else just listened. The clerks took notes.

In the past sixty days, the Bureau had logged over two hundred threats, a new record. There was the usual assortment of "Bomb the Court!" threats, but many came with specifics like names, cases, and issues.

Runyan made no effort to hide his anxiety. Working from a confidential FBI summary, he read the names of individuals and groups suspected of threats. The Klan, the Aryans, the Nazis, the Palestinians, the black separatists, the pro-lifers, the homophobics. Even the IRA. Everyone, it seemed, but the Rotarians and the Boy Scouts. AMiddle Eastgroup backed by the Iranians had threatened blood on American soil in retaliation for the deaths of two justice ministers in Tehran. There was absolutely no evidence the murders were linked to the U.S.A new domestic terrorist unit of recent fame known as the Underground Army had killed a federal trial judge in Texas with a car bomb. No arrests had been made, but the UA claimed responsibility. It was also the prime suspect in a dozen bombings of ACLU offices, but its work was very clean.

"What about these Puerto Rican terrorists?" Runyan asked without looking up.

"Lightweigh twenty years."	ts. We're not worried," K. O. Lewis answered casually. "They've been threatening for
"Well, mayb	e it's time they did something. The climate is right, don't you think?"
-	Puerto Ricans, Chief." Runyan liked to be called Chief. Not Chief Justice, nor Mr. Chief nief. "They're just threatening because everyone else is."
•	"the Chief said without smiling. "Very funny. I'd hate for some group to be left out." the summary on his desk and rubbed his temples. "Let's talk about security." He closed his
K. O. Lewis	laid his copy of the summary on the Chief's desk.
days. We'll use	irector thinks we should place four agents with each Justice, at least for the next ninety e limousines with escorts to and from work, and the Supreme Court police will provide cure this building."
"What about	travel?"
"It's not a go until the end of	od idea, at least for now. The Director thinks the justices should remain in the D.C. area the year."
tonight and tra	zy? Is he crazy? If I asked my brethren to follow that request they would all leave town vel for the next month. That's absurd." Runyan frowned at his law clerks, who shook their st. Truly absurd.
neudo in disgu	n IIII uoouu.



"Evidently. Listen, Chief, we're very concerned about Justice Rosenberg. He still refuses to allow our men inside his home; makes them sit in a car in the street all night. He will allow his favorite Supreme Court officer what's his name? Fergusonto sit by the back door, outside, but only from 10 P.M. to 6 A.M. No one gets in the house but Justice Rosenberg and his male nurse. The place is not secure."

Runyan picked his fingernails with the paper clip and smiled slightly to himself. Rosenberg's death, by any means or method, would be a relief. No, it would be a glorious occasion. The Chief would have to wear black and give a eulogy, but behind locked doors he would chuckle with his law clerks. Runyan liked this thought.

"What do you suggest?" he asked.

I've tried. I've explained to him that he is probably the most hated man in America, that millions of people curse him every day, that most folks would like to see him dead, that he receives four times the hate mail as the rest of us combined, and that he would be a perfect and easy target for assassination."

Lewis waited. "And?"

"Can you talk to him?"

"Told me to kiss his ass, then fell asleep."

The law clerks giggled properly, then the FBI agents realized humor was permitted and joined in for a quick laugh.

"So what do we do?" asked Lewis, unamused.

"You protect him as best you can, put it in writing, and don't worry about it. He fears nothing, including death, and if he's not sweating it, why should you?"

"The Director is sweating, so I'm sweating, Chief. It's very simple. If one of you guys gets hurt, the



"Of course not. In many ways he's worse than Rosenberg. He allows us to escort him to his apartment building, then makes us sit in the parking lot all night. He's seven floors up, remember. We can't even sit in the lobby. Might upset his neighbors, he says. So we sit in the car. There are ten ways in and out of the building, and it's impossible to protect him. He likes to play hide-and-seek with us. He sneaks around all



JUSTICE GLENN JENSEN'S OFFICE was on the second floor, away from the streets and the noise. It was a spacious room, yet the smallest of the nine. Jensen was the youngest of the nine, and he was lucky to have an office. When nominated six years earlier at the age of forty-two, he was thought to be a strict constructionist with deep conservative beliefs, much like the man who nominated him. His Senate confirmation had been a slugfest. Before the Judiciary Committee, Jensen performed poorly. On sensitive issues he straddled the fence, and got kicked from both sides. The Republicans were embarrassed. The Democrats smelled blood. The President twisted arms until they broke, and Jensen was confirmed by one very reluctant vote.

But he made it, for life. In his six years, he had pleased no one. Hurt deeply by his confirmation hearings, he vowed to find compassion and rule with it. This had angered Republicans. They felt betrayed, especially when he discovered a latent passion for the rights of criminals. With scarce ideological strain, he quickly left the right, moved to the center, then to the left. Then, with legal scholars scratching their little goatees, Jensen would bolt back to the right and join Justice Sloan in one of his obnoxious antiwomen dissents. Jensen was not fond of women. He was neutral on prayer, skeptical of free speech, sympathetic to tax protestors, indifferent to Indians, afraid of blacks, tough on pornographers, soft on criminals, and fairly consistent in his protection of the environment. And, to the further dismay of the Republicans who shed blood to get him confirmed, Jensen had shown a troubling sympathy for the rights of homosexuals.

At his request, a nasty case called Dumond had been assigned to him. Ronald Dumond had lived with his male lover for eight years. They were a happy couple, totally devoted to each other, and quite content to share life's experiences. They wanted to marry, but Ohiolaws prohibited such a union. Then the lover caught AIDS, and died a horrible death. Ronald knew exactly how to bury him, but then the lover's family intervened and excluded Ronald from the funeral and burial. Distraught, Ronald sued the family, claiming emotional and psychological damage. The case had bounced around the lower courts for six years, and now had suddenly found itself sitting on Jensen's desk.

At issue was the rights of spouses of gays. Dumond had become a battle cry for gay activists. The mere mention of Dumond had caused street fights.

And Jensen had the case. The door to his smaller office was closed. Jensen and his three clerks sat around the conference table. They had spent two hours on Dumond, and gone nowhere. They were tired of arguing. One clerk, a liberal from Cornell, wanted a broad pronouncement granting sweeping rights to gay partners. Jensen wanted this too, but was not ready to admit it. The other two clerks were skeptical. They knew, as did Jensen, that a majority of five would be impossible.

Talk turned to other matters.



"Not in the least."

HOMAS CALLAHAN was one of Tulane's more popular professors, primarily because he refused to schedule classes before 11 A.M. He drank a lot, as did most of his students, and for him the first few hours of each morning were needed for sleep, then resuscitation. Nine andten o'clockclasses were abominations. He was also popular because he was coolfaded jeans, tweed jackets with well-worn elbow patches, no socks, no ties. The liberal-chic-academic look. He was forty-five, but with dark hair and horn-rimmed glasses he could pass for thirty-five, not that he gave a damn how old he looked. He shaved once a week, when it started itching; and when the weather was cool, which was seldom inNew Orleans, he would grow a beard. He had a history of closeness with female students.

He was also popular because he taught constitutional law, a most unpopular course but a required one. Due to his sheer brilliance and coolness he actually made con law interesting. No one else at Tulane could do this. No one wanted to, really, so the students fought to sit in con law under Callahan at eleven, three mornings a week.

Eighty of them sat behind six elevated rows and whispered as Callahan stood in front of his desk and cleaned his glasses. It was exactly five after eleven, still too early, he thought.

"Who understands Rosenberg's dissent in Nash v. New Jersey?" All heads lowered and the room was silent. Must be a bad hangover. His eyes were red. When he started with Rosenbergit usually meant a rough lecture. No one volunteered. Nash? Callahan looked slowly, methodically around the room, and waited. Dead silence.

The doorknob clicked loudly and broke the tension. The door opened quickly and an attractive young female in tight washed jeans and a cotton sweater slid elegantly through it and sort of glided along the wall to the third row, where she deftly maneuvered between the crowded seats until she came to hers and sat down. The guys on the fourth row watched in admiration. The guys on the fifth row strained for a peek. For two brutal years now, one of the few pleasures of law school had been to watch as she graced the halls and rooms with her long legs and baggy sweaters. There was a fabulous body in there somewhere, they could tell. But she was not one to flaunt it. She was just one of the gang, and adhered to the law school dress code of jeans and flannel shirts and old sweaters and oversized khakis. What they wouldn't give for a black leather miniskirt.

She flashed a quick smile at the guy seated next to her, and for a second Callahan and his Nash question were forgotten. Her dark red hair fell just to the shoulders. She was that perfect little cheerleader with the perfect teeth and perfect hair that every boy fell in love with at least twice in high school. And maybe at least once in law school.

Callahan was ignoring this entry. Had she been a first-year student, and afraid of him, he might have ripped into her and screamed a few times. "You're never late for court!" was the old standby law professors had beaten to death.

But Callahan was not in a screaming mood, and Darby Shaw was not afraid of him, and for a split second he wondered if anyone knew he was sleeping with her. Probably not. She had insisted on absolute secrecy.

"Has anyone readRosenberg's dissent in Nash v.New Jersey?" Suddenly, he had the spotlight again, and there was dead silence. A raised hand could mean constant grilling for the next thirty minutes. No volunteers. The smokers on the back row fired up their cigarettes. Most of the eighty scribbled aimlessly on legal pads. All heads were bowed. It would be too obvious and risky to flip through the casebook and find Nash; too late for that. Any movement might attract attention. Someone was about to be nailed.

Nash was not in the casebook. It was one of a dozen minor cases Callahan had hurriedly mentioned a week ago, and now he was anxious to see if anyone had read it. He was famous for this. His final exam covered twelve hundred cases, a thousand of which were not in the casebook. The exam was a nightmare, but he was really a sweetheart, a soft grader, and it was a rare dumbass who flunked the course.

He did not appear to be a sweetheart at this moment. He looked around the room. Time for a victim. "How about it, Mr. Sallinger? Can you explainRosenberg's dissent?"

Instantly from the fourth row, Sallinger said: "No sir."

"I see. Might that be because you haven't readRosenberg's dissent?"

"It might. Yes sir."



So you don't read dissents, Mr. Sallinger, and now we learn that you also neglect majorities. What do you read, Mr. Sallinger, romance novels, tabloids?"

There was some extremely light laughter from behind the fourth row, and it came from students who felt obligated to laugh but at the same time did not wish to call attention to themselves.

Sallinger, red-faced, just stared at Callahan.

"Why haven't you read the case, Mr. Sallinger?" Callahan demanded.

"I don't know. I, uh, just missed it, I guess."

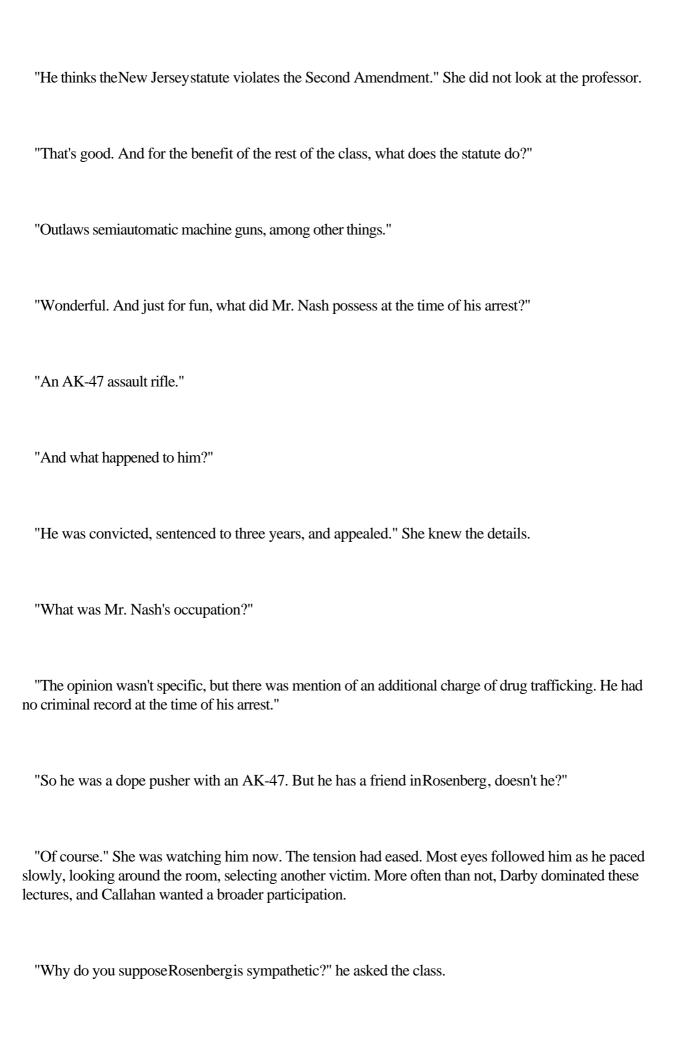
Callahan took it well. "I'm not surprised. I mentioned it last week. Last Wednesday, to be exact. It'll be on the final exam. I don't understand why you would ignore a case that you'll see on the final." Callahan was pacing now, slowly, in front of his desk, staring at the students. "Did anyone bother to read it?"

Silence. Callahan stared at the floor, and allowed the silence to sink in. All eyes were down, all pens and pencils frozen. Smoke billowed from the back row.

Finally, slowly, from the fourth seat on the third row, Darby Shaw lifted her hand slightly, and the class breathed a collective sigh of relief. She had saved them again. It was sort of expected of her. Number two in their class and within striking distance of number one, she could recite the facts and holdings and concurrences and dissents and majority opinions to virtually every case Callahan could spit at them. She missed nothing. The perfect little cheerleader had graduated magna cum laude with a degree in biology, and planned to graduate magna cum laude with a degree in law, and then make a nice living suing chemical companies for trashing the environment.

Callahan stared at her in mock frustration. She had left his apartment three hours earlier after a long night of wine and law. But he had not mentioned Nash to her.

"Well, well, Ms. Shaw. Why is Rosenbergupset?"





"Are you one of those normal, red-blooded, patriotic, middle-of-the-road Americans who wish the old bastard would die in his sleep?" There were a few chuckles around the room. It was safer to laugh now. Sallinger knew better than to answer truthfully. "I wouldn't wish that on anyone," he said, almost embarrassed. Callahan was pacing again. "Well, thank you, Mr. Sallinger. I always enjoy your comments. You have, as usual, provided us with the layman's view of the law." The laughter was much louder. Sallinger's cheeks flushed and he sank in his seat. Callahan did not smile. "I would like to raise the intellectual level of this discussion, okay. Now, Ms. Shaw, why is Rosenberg sympathetic to Nash?" "The Second Amendment grants the people the right to keep and bear arms. To Justice Rosenberg, it is literal and absolute. Nothing should be banned. If Nash wants to possess an AK-47, or a hand grenade, or a bazooka, the state of New Jersey cannot pass a law prohibiting it." "Do you agree with him?" "No, and I'm not alone. It's an eight-to-one decision. No one followed him." "What's the rationale of the other eight?" "It's obvious, really. The states have compelling reasons to prohibit the sale and possession of certain types of arms. The interests of the state of New Jersey outweigh the Second Amendment rights of Mr. Nash. Society cannot allow individuals to own sophisticated weaponry."

Callahan watched her carefully. Attractive female law students were rare at Tulane, but when he found

most part. The women arrived at law school liberated and loose. Darby had been different. He first spotted her in the library during the second semester of her first year, and it took a month to get her to dinner.
"Who wrote the majority opinion?" he asked her.
"Runyan."
"And you agree with him?"
"Yes. It's an easy case, really."
"Then what happened to Rosenberg?"
"I think he hates the rest of the Court."
"So he dissents just for the hell of it."
"Often, yes. His opinions are becoming more indefensible. Take Nash. For a liberal like Rosenberg, the issue of gun control is easy. He should have written the majority opinion, and ten years ago he would have. In Fordice v.Oregon, a 1977 case, he took a much narrower interpretation of the Second Amendment. His inconsistencies are almost embarrassing."
Callahan had forgotten Fordice. "Are you suggesting Justice Rosenberg is senile?"
Much like a punch-drunk fighter, Sallinger waded in for the final round. "He's crazy as hell, and you know it. You can't defend his opinions."

one he moved in quickly. Over the past eight years, he had been quite successful. Easy work, for the



He watched the red and blue channel lights far from shore. He checked his watch without moving his head. The clouds were low and thick, and it would be difficult to see it until it was almost to the pier. It

was planned this way.

The pickup was not from North Carolina, and neither was the farmer. The license plates had been stolen from a wrecked truck at a scrap yard near Durham. The pickup had been stolen in Baton Rouge. The farmer was not from anywhere, and per formed none of the thievery. He was a pro, and so someone else did the dirty little deeds.

Twenty minutes into the wait, a dark object floated in the direction of the pier. A quiet, muffled engine hummed and grew louder. The object became a small craft of some sort with a camouflaged silhouette crouching low and working the motor. The farmer moved not an inch in anticipation. The humming stopped and the black rubber raft stalled in the calm water thirty feet from the pier. There were no headlights coming or going along the shore.

The farmer carefully placed a cigarette between his lips, lit it, puffed twice, then thumped it down, halfway to the raft.

"What kind of cigarette?" the man on the water asked upward. He could see the outline of the farmer on the railing, but not the face.

"Lucky Strike," the farmer answered. These passwords made for such a silly game. How many other black rubber rafts could be expected to drift in from the Atlanticand pinpoint this ancient pier at this precise hour? Silly, but oh so important.

"Luke?" came the voice from the boat.

"Sam," replied the farmer. The name was Khamel, not Sam, but Sam would do for the next five minutes until Khamel parked his raft.

Khamel did not answer, was not required to, but quickly started the engine and guided the raft along the edge of the pier to the beach. Luke followed from above. They met at the pickup without a handshake. Khamel placed his black Adidas gym bag between them on the seat, and the truck started along the shoreline.

Luke drove and Khamel smoked, and both did a perfect job of ignoring each other. Their eyes did not dare meet. With Khamel's heavy beard, dark glasses, and black turtleneck, his face was ominous but impossible to identify. Luke did not want to see it. Part of his assignment, in addition to receiving this stranger from the sea, was to refrain from looking at him. It was easy, really. The face was wanted in nine countries.

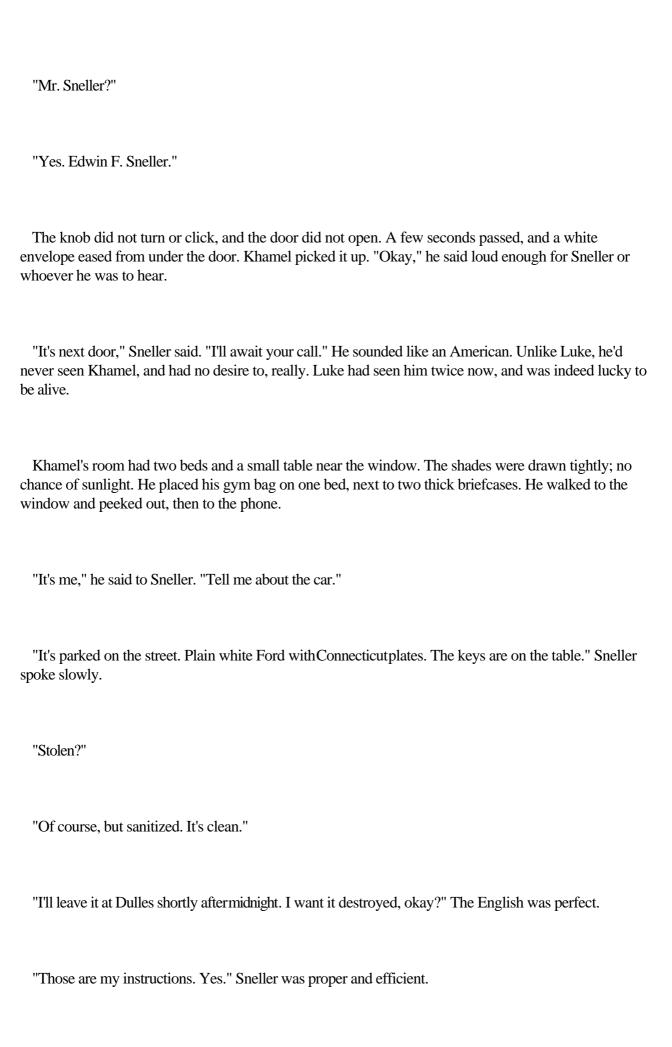
Across the bridge at Manteo, Luke lit another Lucky Strike and determined they had met before. It had been a brief but precisely timed meeting at the airport inRome, five or six years earlier, as best he could remember. There had been no introductions. It took place in a restroom. Luke, then an impeccably tailored American executive, had placed an eelskin attache case next to the wall next to the washbasin where he slowly rinsed his hands, and suddenly it was gone. He caught a glimpse of the manthis Khamel, he was now certainin the mirror. Thirty minutes later, the attache case exploded between the legs of the British ambassador to Nigeria.

In the guarded whispers of his invisible brotherhood, Luke had often heard of Khamel, a man of many names and faces and languages, an assassin who struck quickly and left no trail, a fastidious killer who roamed the world but could never be found. As they rode north in the darkness, Luke settled low in his seat, the brim of his hat almost on his nose, limp wrist across the wheel, trying to remember the stories he'd heard about his passenger. Amazing feats of terror. There was the British ambassador. The ambush of seventeen Israeli soldiers on the West Bankin 1990 had been credited to Khamel. He was the only suspect in the 1985 car-bomb murders of a wealthy German banker and his family. His fee for that one was rumored to have been three million, cash. Most intelligence experts believed he was the mastermind of the 1981 attempt to kill the Pope. But then, Khamel was blamed for almost every unsolved terrorist attack and assassination. He was easy to blame because no one was certain he existed.

This excited Luke. Khamel was about to perform on American soil. The targets were unknown to Luke, but important blood was about to be shed.

AT DAWN, the stolen farm truck stopped at the corner of Thirty-first and M streets in Georgetown. Khamel grabbed his gym bag, said nothing, and hit the sidewalk. He walked east a few blocks to the Four Seasons Hotel, bought a Post in the lobby, and casually rode the elevator to the seventh floor. At precisely seven-fifteen, he knocked on a door at the end of the hall. "Yes?" a nervous voice asked from inside.

"Looking for Mr. Sneller," Khamel said slowly in a perfect generic American tongue as he stuck his thumb over the peephole.



"It's very important, okay? I intend to leave the gun in the car. Guns leave bullets and people see cars, so it's important to completely destroy the car and everything in it. Understand?"
"Those are my instructions," Sneller repeated. He did not appreciate this lecture. He was no novice at the killing game.
Khamel sat on the edge of the bed. "The four million was received a week ago, a day late I should add. I'm now in D.C., so I want the next three."
"It will be wired before noon. That was the agreement."
"Yes, but I'm worried about the agreement. You were a day late, remember?"
This irritated Sneller, and since the killer was in the next room and not about to come out, he could sound a bit irritated. "The bank's fault, not ours."
This irritated Khamel. "Fine. I want you and your bank to wire the next three million to the account in Zurichas soon as New York opens. That will be about two hours from now. I'll be checking."
"Okay."
"Okay, and I want no problem when the job is finished. I'll be inParisin twenty-four hours, and from there I'll go straight toZurich. I want all the money waiting for me when I arrive."
"It will be there, if the job is finished."
Khamel smiled to himself. "The job will be finished, Mr. Sneller, by midnight. That is, if your information is correct."

"As of now it is correct. And no changes are expected today. Our people are in the streets. Everything is in the two briefcases; maps, diagrams, schedules, the tools and articles you requested."

Khamel glanced at the briefcases behind him. He rubbed his eyes with his right hand. "I need a nap," he mumbled into the phone.I haven't slept in twenty hours."

Sneller could think of no response. There was plenty of time, and if Khamel wanted a nap, then Khamel could have a nap. They were paying him ten million.

"Would you like something to eat?" Sneller asked awkwardly.

"No. Call me in three hours, at precisely ten-thirty." He placed the receiver on the phone, and stretched across the bed.

THE STREETS were clear and quiet for day two of the fall term. The justices spent their day on the bench listening to lawyer after lawyer argue complex and quite dull cases. Rosenberg slept through most of it. He came to life briefly when the attorney general from Texas argued that a certain death-row inmate should be given medication to make him lucid before being lethally injected. If he's mentally ill, how can he be executed? Rosenberg asked incredulously. Easy, said the AG from Texas, his illness can be controlled with medication. So just give him a little shot to make him sane, then give him another shot to kill him. It could all be very nice and constitutional. Rosenberg harangued and bitched for a brief spell, then lost steam. His little wheelchair sat much lower than the massive leather thrones of his brethren. He looked rather pitiful. In years past he was a tiger, a ruthless intimidator who tied even the slickest lawyers in knots. But no more. He began to mumble, and then faded away. The AG sneered at him, and continued.

During the last oral argument of the day, a lifeless desegregation case from Virginia, Rosenberg began snoring. Chief Runyan glared down the bench, and Jason Kline, Rosenberg's senior clerk, took the hint. He slowly pulled the wheelchair backward, away from the bench, and out of the courtroom. He pushed it quickly through the back hallway.

The Justice regained consciousness in his office, took his pills, and informed his clerks he wanted to go home. Kline notified the FBI, and moments laterRosenberg was wheeled into the rear of his van, parked in the basement. Two FBI agents watched. A male nurse, Frederic, strapped the wheelchair in place, and Sergeant Ferguson of the Supreme Court police slid behind the wheel of the van. The Justice allowed no FBI agents near him. They could follow in their car, and they could watch his townhouse from the street, and they were lucky to get that close. He didn't trust cops, and he damned sure didn't trust FBI agents. He didn't need protection.

On Volta Street in Georgetown, the van slowed and backed into a short driveway. Frederic the nurse and Ferguson the cop gently rolled him inside. The agents watched from the street in their black government-issue Dodge Aries. The lawn in front of the townhome was tiny and their car was a few feet from the front door. It was almost 4 P.M.

After a few minutes, Ferguson made his mandatory exit and spoke to the agents. After much debate, Rosenberghad acquiesced a week earlier and allowed Ferguson to quietly inspect each room upstairs and down upon his arrival in the afternoons. Then Ferguson had to leave, but could return at exactly 10 P.M. and sit outside the rear door until exactly 6 A.M. No one but Ferguson could do it, and he was tired of the overtime.

"Everything's fine," he said to the agents. "I guess I'll be back at ten."

"Is he still alive?" one of the agents asked. Standard question.

"Afraid so." Fergusonlooked tired as he walked to the van.

Frederic was chubby and weak, but strength was not needed to handle his patient. After arranging the pillows just so, he lifted him from the wheelchair and placed him carefully on the sofa, where he would remain motionless for the next two hours while dozing and watching CNN. Frederic fixed himself a ham sandwich and a plate of cookies, and scanned a National Enquirer at the kitchen table. Rosenberg mumbled something loudly and changed channels with the remote control.

At precisely seven, his dinner of chicken bouillon, boiled potatoes, and stewed onions stroke food was placed neatly on the table, and Frederic rolled him up to it. He insisted on feeding himself, and it was not pretty. Frederic watched television. He would clean up the mess later.

By nine, he was bathed, dressed in a gown, and tucked tightly under the covers. The bed was a narrow, reclining, pale green army-hospital job with a hard mattress, push-button controls, and collapsible rails thatRosenberginsisted remain down. It was in a room behind the kitchen that he had used as a small study for thirty years, before the first stroke. The room was now clinical, and smelled of antiseptic and looming death. Next to his bed was a large table with a hospital lamp and at least twenty bottles of pills. Thick, heavy law books were stacked in neat piles around the room. Next to the table, the nurse sat close by in a worn recliner, and began reading from a brief. He would read until he heard snoring-the nightly ritual. He read slowly, yelling the words at Rosenberg, who was stiff, motionless, but listening. The brief was from a case in which he would write the majority opinion. He absorbed every word, for a while.

After an hour of reading and yelling, Frederic was tired and the Justice was drifting away. He raised his hand slightly, then closed his eyes. With a button on the bed, he lowered the lights. The room was almost dark. Frederic jerked backward, and the recliner unfolded. He laid the brief on the floor, and closed his eyes. Rosenberg was snoring.

He would not snore for long.

SHORTLY AFTER TEN, with the house dark and quiet, the door to a bedroom closet upstairs opened slightly, and Khamel eased out. His wristbands, nylon cap, and running shorts were royal blue. His long-sleeved shirt, socks, and Reeboks were white with royal trim. Perfect color coordination. Khamel the jogger. He was clean shaven, and under the cap his very short hair was now blond, almost white.

The bedroom was dark, as was the hall. The stairs creaked slightly under the Reeboks. He was five-ten, and weighed less than a hundred and fifty pounds, with no fat. He kept himself taut and light so the movements would be quick and soundless. The stairs landed in a foyer not far from the front door. He knew there were two agents in a car by the curb, probably not watching the house. He knew Fergusonhad arrived seven minutes ago. He could hear the snoring from the back room. While waiting in the closet, he had thought of striking earlier, before Fergusonarrived so he wouldn't have to kill him. The killing was no problem, but it created another body to worry about. But he guessed, wrongly, that Ferguson probably checked in with the male nurse when he came on duty. If so, then Ferguson would find the carnage and Khamel would lose a few hours. So he waited until now.

He slid through the foyer without a sound. In the kitchen, a small light from the Ventahood illuminated the countertop and made things a bit more dangerous. Khamel cursed himself for not checking the bulb and unscrewing it. Those small mistakes were inexcusable. He dipped under a window looking into the backyard. He could not see Ferguson, although he knew he was seventy-four inches tall, sixty-one years old, had cataracts, and couldn't hit a barn with his .357 magnum.

Both of them were snoring. Khamel smiled to himself as he crouched in the doorway and quickly pulled the .22 automatic and silencer from the Ace bandage wrapped around his waist. He screwed the four-inch tube onto the barrel, and ducked into the room. The nurse was sprawled deep in the recliner, feet in the air, hands dangling, mouth open. Khamel placed the tip of the silencer an inch from his right temple and fired three times. The hands flinched and the feet jerked, but the eyes remained closed. Khamel quickly reached across to the wrinkled and pale head of Justice Abraham Rosenberg, and pumped three bullets into it.

The room had no windows. He watched the bodies and listened for a full minute. The nurse's heels twitched a few times, then stopped. The bodies were still.

He wanted to kill Fergusoninside. It was eleven minutes after ten, a good time for a neighbor to be out with the dog for one last time before bed. He crept through the darkness to the rear door and spotted the cop strolling benignly along the wooden fence twenty feet away. Instinctively, Khamel opened the back door, turned on the patio light, and said "Ferguson" loudly.

He left the door open and hid in a dark corner next to the refrigerator. Ferguson obediently lumbered across the small patio and into the kitchen. This was not unusual. Frederic often called him in after His Honor was asleep. They would drink instant coffee and play gin rummy.

There was no coffee, and Frederic was not waiting. Khamel fired three bullets into the back of his head, and he fell loudly on the kitchen table.

He turned out the patio light and unscrewed the silencer. He would not need it again. It and the pistol were stuffed into the Ace bandage. Khamel peeked out the front window. The dome light was on and the agents were reading. He stepped overFerguson, locked the back door, and disappeared into the darkness of the small rear lawn. He jumped two fences without a sound, and found the street. He began trotting. Khamel the jogger.

IN THE DARK BALCONY of the Montrose Theatre, Glenn Jensen sat by himself and watched the naked and quite active men on the screen below. He ate popcorn from a large box and noticed nothing but the bodies. He was dressed conservatively enough; navy cardigan, chinos, loafers. And wide sunglasses to hide his eyes and a suede fedora to cover his head. He was blessed with a face that was easily forgotten, and once camouflaged it could never be recognized. Especially in a deserted balcony of a near-empty gay porno house at midnight. No ear-rings, bandannas, gold chains, jewelry, nothing to indicate he was in the market for a companion. He wanted to be ignored.

It had become a challenge, really, this cat-and-mouse game with the FBI and the rest of the world. On this night, they had dutifully stationed themselves in the parking lot outside his building. Another pair parked by the exit near the veranda in the rear, and he allowed them all to sit for four and a half hours before he disguised himself and walked nonchalantly to the garage in the basement and drove away in a friend's car. The building had too many points of egress for the poor Fibbies to monitor him. He was sympathetic to a point, but he had his life to live. If the Fibbies couldn't find him, how could a killer?

The balcony was divided into three small sections with six rows each. It was very dark, the only light being the heavy blue stream from the projector behind. Broken seats and folded tables were piled along the outside aisles. The velvet drapes along the walls were shredded and falling. It was a marvelous place to hide.

He used to worry about getting caught. In the months after his confirmation, he was terrified. He couldn't eat his popcorn, and damned sure couldn't enjoy the movies. He told himself that if he was caught or recognized, or in some awful way exposed, he would simply claim he was doing research for an obscenity case pending. There was always one on the docket, and maybe somehow this might be believed. This excuse could work, he told himself repeatedly, and he grew bolder. But one night in 1990, a theater caught fire, and four people died. Their names were in the paper. Big story. Justice Glenn Jensen happened to be in the rest room when he heard the screams and smelled the smoke. He rushed into the street and disappeared. The dead were all found in the balcony. He knew one of them. He gave up movies for two months, but then started back. He needed more research, he told himself.

And what if he got caught? The appointment was for life. The voters couldn't call him home.

He liked the Montrose because on Tuesdays the movies ran all night, but there was never a crowd. He liked the popcorn, and draft beer cost fifty cents.

Two old men in the center section groped and fondled each other. Jensen glanced at them occasionally, but concentrated on the movie. Sad, he thought, to be seventy years old, staring at death and dodging AIDS, and banished to a dirty balcony to find happiness.

A fourth person soon joined them on the balcony. He glanced at Jensen and the two men locked together, and he walked quietly with his draft beer and popcorn to the top row of the center section. The projector room was directly behind him. To his right and down three rows sat the Justice. In front of him, the gray and mature lovers kissed and whispered and giggled, oblivious to the world.

He was dressed appropriately. Tight jeans, black silk shirt, earring, horn-rimmed shades, and the neatly trimmed hair and mustache of a regular gay. Khamel the homosexual.

He waited a few minutes, then eased to his right and sat by the aisle. No one noticed. Who would care where he sat?

At twelve-twenty, the old men lost steam. They stood, arm in arm, and tiptoed away, still whispering and snickering. Jensen did not look at them. He was engrossed in the movie, a massive orgy on a yacht in the middle of a hurricane. Khamel moved like a cat across the narrow aisle to a seat three rows behind the Justice. He sipped the beer. They were alone. He waited for one minute, and quickly moved down a row. Jensen was eight feet away.

As the hurricane intensified, so did the orgy. The roar of the wind and the screams of the partyers deafened the small theater. Khamel set the beer and popcorn on the floor, and pulled a three-foot strand of yellow nylon ski rope from his waist. He quickly wrapped the ends around both hands, and stepped over the row of chairs in front of him. His prey was breathing heavy. The popcorn box was shaking.

The attack was quick and brutal. Khamel looped the rope just under the larynx, and wrenched it violently. He yanked the rope downward, snapping the head over the back of the seat. The neck broke cleanly. He twisted the rope and tied it behind the neck. He slid a six-inch steel rod through a loop in the knot, and wound the tourniquet until the flesh tore and started to bleed. It was over in ten seconds.

Suddenly the hurricane was over and another orgy began in celebration. Jensen slumped in his seat. His popcorn was scattered around his shoes. Khamel was not one to admire his handiwork. He left the balcony, walked casually through the racks of magazines and devices in the lobby, then disappeared onto the sidewalk.

He drove the generic white Ford with Connecticut plates to Dulles, changed clothes in a rest room, and waited on his flight to Paris.

THE FIRST LADY was on the West Coast attending a series of five-thousand-dollars-a-plate breakfasts where the rich and pretentious gladly shucked out the money for cold eggs and cheap champagne, and the chance to be seen and maybe photographed with the Queen, as she was known. So the President was sleeping alone when the phone rang. In the great tradition of American Presidents, he had in years past thought of keeping a mistress. But now it seemed so non-Republican. Besides, he was old and tired. He often slept alone when the Queen was at the White House.

He was a heavy sleeper. It rang twelve times before he heard it. He grabbed it and stared at the clock. Four-thirty A.M. He listened to the voice, jumped to his feet, and eight minutes later was in the Oval Office. No shower, no tie. He stared at Fletcher Coal, his chief of staff, and sat properly behind his desk.

Coal was smiling. His perfect teeth and bald head were shining. Only thirty-seven, he was the boy wonder who four years earlier had rescued a failing campaign and placed his boss in the White House. He was a guileful manipulator and a nasty henchman who had cut and clawed his way through the inner circle until he was now second in command. Many viewed him as the real boss. The mere mention of his name terrified lowly staffers.

"What happened?" the President asked slowly.

Coal paced in front of the President's desk. "Don't know much. They're both dead. Two FBI agents foundRosenbergaround1 A.M. Dead in bed. His nurse and a Supreme Court policeman were also murdered. All three shot in the head. A very clean job. While the FBI and D.C. police were investigating, they got a call that Jensen had been found dead in some queer club. They found him a couple of hours ago. Voyles called me at four, and I called you. He and Gminski should be here in a minute."

"Gminski?"

"The CIA should be included, at least for now."

The President folded his hands behind his head and stretched. "Rosenbergis dead."



"Great. I want Voyles to get his share of the blame. Take care of the press. I want him humiliated. Then maybe we can run his ass off."

Coal loved this thought. He stopped pacing and scribbled a note on his legal pad. A security guard knocked on the door, then opened it. Directors Voyles and Gminski entered together. The mood was suddenly somber as all four shook hands. The two sat before the President's desk as Coal took his customary position standing near a window, to the side of the President. He hated Voyles and Gminski, and they hated him. Coal thrived on hatred. He had the President's ear, and that was all that mattered. He would become quiet for a few minutes. It was important to allow the President to take charge when others were present.

"I'm very sorry you're here, but thanks for coming," the President said. They nodded grimly and acknowledged this obvious lie. "What happened?"

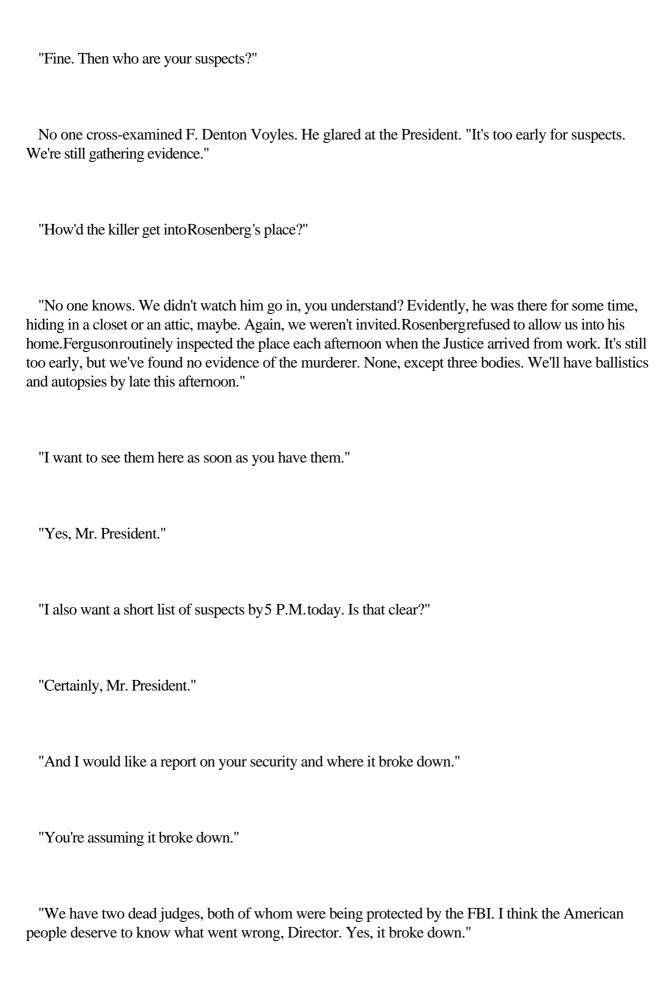
Voyles spoke quickly and to the point. He described the scene atRosenberg's home when the bodies were found. At 1 A.M. each night, Sergeant Ferguson routinely checked in with the agents sitting in the street. When he didn't show, they investigated. The killings were very clean and professional. He described what he knew about Jensen. Broken neck. Strangulation. Found by another character in the balcony. No one saw anything, evidently. Voyles was not as gruff and blunt as usual. It was a dark day for the Bureau, and he could feel the heat coming. But he'd survived five Presidents, and he could certainly outmaneuver this idiot.

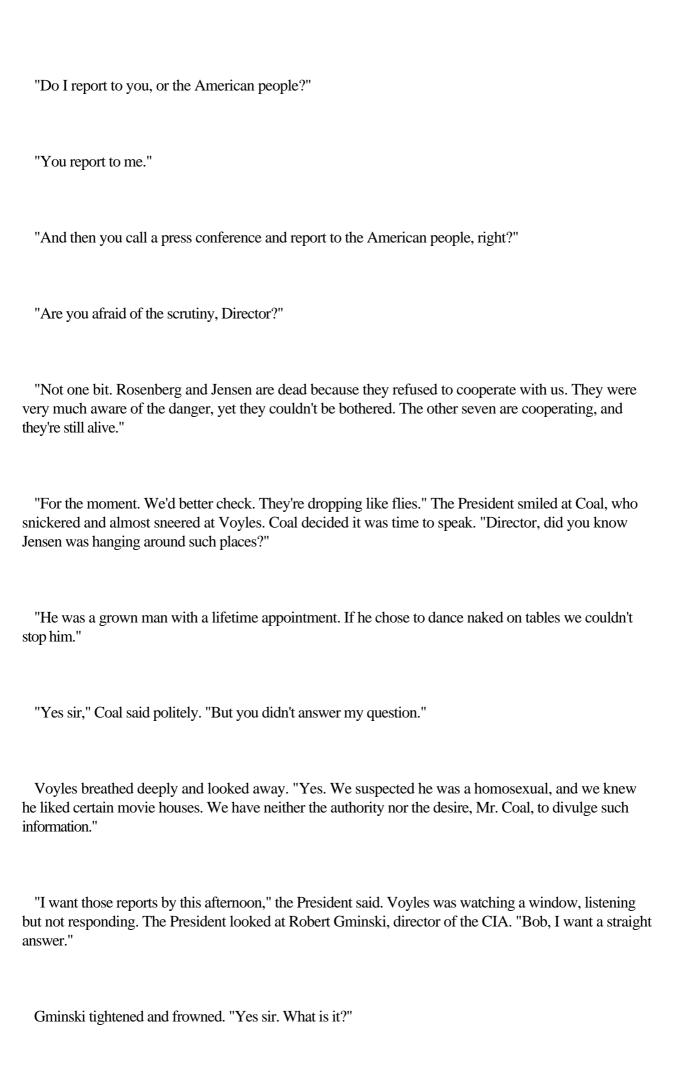
"The two are obviously related," the President said, staring at Voyles.

"Maybe. Certainly looks that way, but"

Come on, Director. In two hundred and twenty years, we've assassinated four Presidents, two or three candidates, a handful of civil rights leaders, couple of governors, but never a Supreme Court Justice. And now, in one night, within two hours, two are assassinated. And you're not convinced they're related?"

"I didn't say that. There must be a link somewhere. It's just that the methods were so different. And so professional. You must remember, we've had thousands of threats against the Court."





	o know if these killings are in any way linked to any agency, operation, group, whatever, of the ees Government."
	n! Are you serious, Mr. President! That's absurd." Gminski appeared to be shocked, but the Coal, even Voyles, knew anything was possible these days at the CIA.
"Dead se	rious, Bob."
"I'm serio Ridiculous!	ous too. And I assure you we had nothing to do with it. I'm shocked you would even think it.
	t out, Bob. I want to be damned certain. Rosenberg did not believe in national security. He sands of enemies in intelligence. Just check it out, okay."
"Okay, ol	kay."
"And I w	rant a report by five today."
"Sure. Ol	kay. But it's a waste of time."
	Coal moved to the desk next to the President.I suggest we meet here at five this afternoon, Is that agreeable?"
They bot	h nodded and stood. Coal escorted them to the door without a word. He closed it.
	ndled it real well," he said to the President. Voyles knows he's vulnerable. I smell blood. We'll on him with the press."

"I've got an idea for television." Coal was pacing again, very much in charge. We need to cash in on the shock of it all. You need to appear tired, as if you were up all night handling the crisis. Right? The entire nation will be watching, waiting for you to give details and to reassure. I think you should wear something warm and comforting. A coat and tie at 7 A.M. may seem a bit rehearsed. Let's relax a little."
The President was listening intently. "A bathrobe?"
"Not quite. But how about a cardigan and slacks? No tie. White button-down. Sort of the grandfather image."
"You want me to address the nation in this hour of crisis in a sweater?"
"Yes. I like it. A brown cardigan with a white shirt."
"I don't know."
"The image is good. Look, Chief, the election is a year from next month. This is our first crisis in ninety days, and what a wonderful crisis it is. The people need to see you in something different, especially at seven in the morning. You need to look casual, down-home, but in control. It'll be worth five, maybe ten points in the ratings. Trust me, Chief."
"I don't like sweaters."
"Just trust me."
"I don't know."

"Rosenbergis dead," the President repeated to himself. "I just can't believe it."

DARBY SHAW awoke in the early darkness with a touch of a hangover. After fifteen months of law school, her mind refused to rest for more than six hours. She was often up before daybreak, and for this reason she did not sleep well with Callahan. The sex was great, but sleep was often a tug-of-war with pillows and sheets pulled back and forth.

She watched the ceiling and listened to him snore occasionally in his Scotch-induced coma. The sheets were wrapped like ropes around his knees. She had no cover, but she was not cold. October in New Orleans is still muggy and warm. The heavy air rose from Dauphine Street below, across the small balcony outside the bedroom and through the open french doors. It brought with it the first stream of morning light. She stood in the doors and covered herself with his terry-cloth robe. The sun was rising, but Dauphinewas dark. Daybreaks went unnoticed in the French Quarter. Her mouth was dry.

Downstairs in the kitchen, Darby brewed a pot of thick French Market chicory. The blue numbers on the microwave said it was now ten minutes before six. For a light drinker, life with Callahan was a constant struggle. Her limit was three glasses of wine. She had neither a law license nor a job, and she could not afford to get drunk every night and sleep late. And she weighed a hundred and twelve pounds and was determined to keep it there. He had no limit.

She drank three glasses of ice water, then poured a tall mug full of chicory. She flipped on lights as she climbed the stairs, and eased back into the bed. She flicked the remote controls, and suddenly, there was the President sitting behind his desk looking somehow rather odd in a brown cardigan with no tie. It was an NBC News special report.

"Thomas!" She slapped him on his shoulder. No movement. "Thomas! Wake up!" She pressed a button and the volume roared. The President said good morning.

"Thomas!" She leaned toward the television. Callahan kicked at the sheets and sat up, rubbing his eyes and trying to focus. She handed him the coffee.

The President had tragic news. His eyes were tired and he looked sad, but the rich baritone exuded confidence. He had notes but didn't use them. He looked deep into the camera, and explained to the American people the shocking events of last night.

"What the hell," Callahan mumbled. After announcing the deaths, the President launched into a flowery obituary for Abraham Rosenberg. A towering legend, he called him. It was a strain, but the President kept a straight face while lauding the distinguished career of one of the most hated men in America.

Callahan gaped at the television. Darby stared at it. "That's very touching," she said. She was frozen on the end of the bed. He had been briefed by the FBI and CIA, he explained, and they were assuming the killings were related. He had ordered an immediate, thorough investigation, and those responsible would be brought to justice.

Callahan sat upright and covered himself with the sheets. He blinked his eyes and combed his wild hair with his fingers. "Rosenberg? Murdered?" he mumbled, glaring at the screen. His foggy head had cleared immediately, and the pain was there but he couldn't feel it.

"Check out the sweater," Darby said, sipping the coffee, staring at the orange face with heavy makeup and the brilliant silver hair plastered carefully in place. He was a wonderfully handsome man with a soothing voice; thus he had succeeded greatly in politics. The wrinkles in his forehead squeezed to gether, and he was even sadder now as he talked of his close friend Justice Glenn Jensen.

"The Montrose Theatre, atmidnight," Callahan repeated.

"Where is it?" she asked. Callahan had finished law school atGeorgetown.

"Not sure. But I think it's in the gay section."

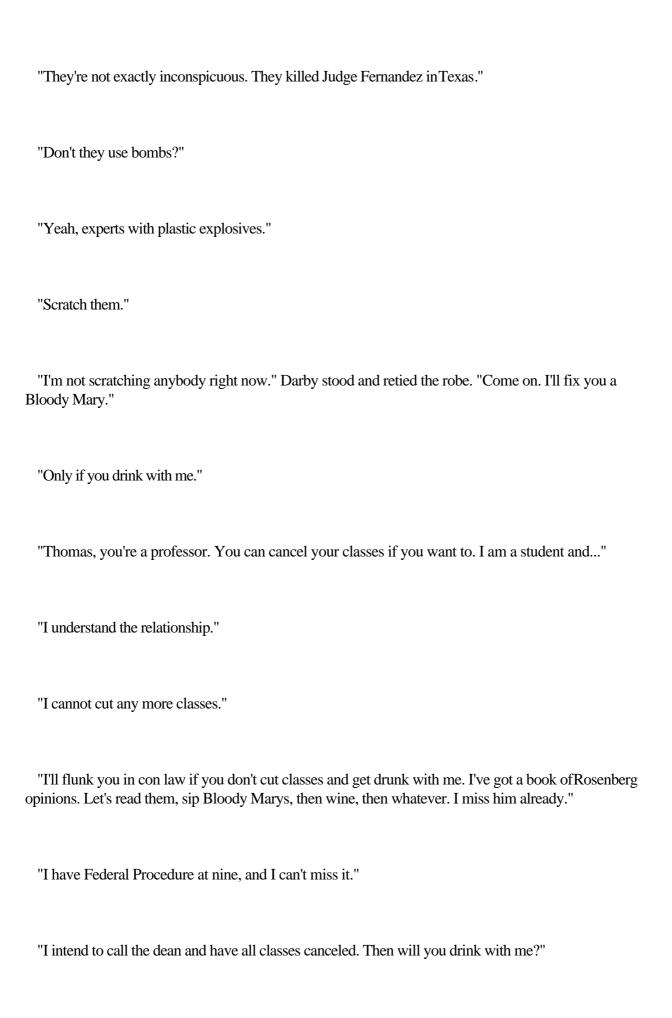
"Was he gay?"

"I've heard rumors. Evidently." They were both sitting on the end of the bed with the sheets over their legs. The President was ordering a week of national mourning. Flags at half-staff. Federal offices closed tomorrow. Funeral arrangements were incomplete. He rambled for a few more minutes, still deeply saddened, even shocked, very human, but nonetheless the President and clearly in charge. He signed off with his patented grandfather's smile of complete trust and wisdom and reassurance.

An NBC reporter on the White House lawn appeared and filled in the gaps. The police were mute, but there appeared to be no suspects at the moment, and no leads. Yes, both justices had been under the protection of the FBI, which had no comment. Yes, the Montrose was a place frequented by homosexuals. Yes, there had been many threats against both men, especially Rosenberg. And there could be many suspects before it was all over.

Callahan turned off the set and walked to the french doors, where the early air was growing thicker. 'No suspects," he mumbled.
"I can think of at least twenty," Darby said.
"Yeah, but why the combination? Rosenbergis easy, but why Jensen? Why not McDowell or Yount, both of whom are consistently more liberal than Jensen? It doesn't make sense." Callahan sat in a wicker chair by the doors and fluffed his hair.
"I'll get you some more coffee," Darby said.
"No, no. I'm awake."
"How's your head?"
"Fine, if I could've slept for three more hours. I think I'll cancel class. I'm not in the mood."
"Great."
"Damn, I can't believe this. That fool has two nominations. That means eight of the nine will be Republican choices."
"They have to be confirmed first."





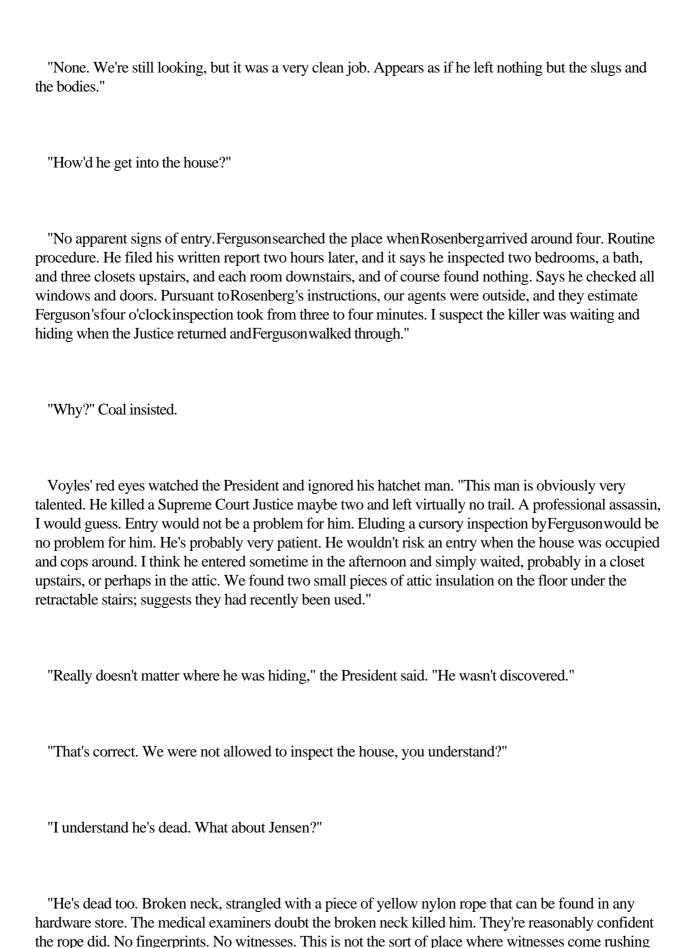
"No. Come on, Thomas." He followed her down the stairs to the kitchen and the coffee and the liquor.
WTHOUT REMOVING the receiver from his shoulder, Fletcher Coal punched another button on the phone on the desk in the Oval Office. Three lines were blinking, holding. He paced slowly in front of the desk and listened while scanning a two-page report from Horton at Justice. He ignored the President, who was crouched in front of the windows, gripping his putter with gloved hands, staring fiercely first at the yellow ball, then slowly across the blue carpet to the brass putting cup ten feet away. Coal growled something into the receiver. His words were unheard by the President, who lightly tapped the ball and watched it roll precisely into the cup. The cup clicked, cleared itself, and the ball rolled three feet to the side. The President inched forward in his socks to the next ball, and breathed downward at it. It was an orange one. He tapped it just so, and it rolled straight into the cup. Eight in a row. Twenty-seven out of thirty.
"That was Chief Runyan," Coal said, slamming the receiver down. "He's quite upset. He wanted to meet with you this afternoon."
"Tell him to take a number."
"I told him to be here at ten tomorrow morning. You have the Cabinet at ten-thirty, and National Security at eleven-thirty."
Without looking up, the President gripped the putter and studied the next ball. "I can't wait. What about the polls?" He swung carefully and followed the ball.
"I just talked to Nellson. He ran two, beginning at noon. The computer is digesting it now, but he thinks the approval rating will be somewhere around fifty-two or fifty-three."
"The golfer looked up briefly and smiled, then returned to his game. What was it last week?"



"It's been a long day, Mr. President," Bob Gminski said to break the ice. Voyles looked at the windows.



"Fingerprints?"

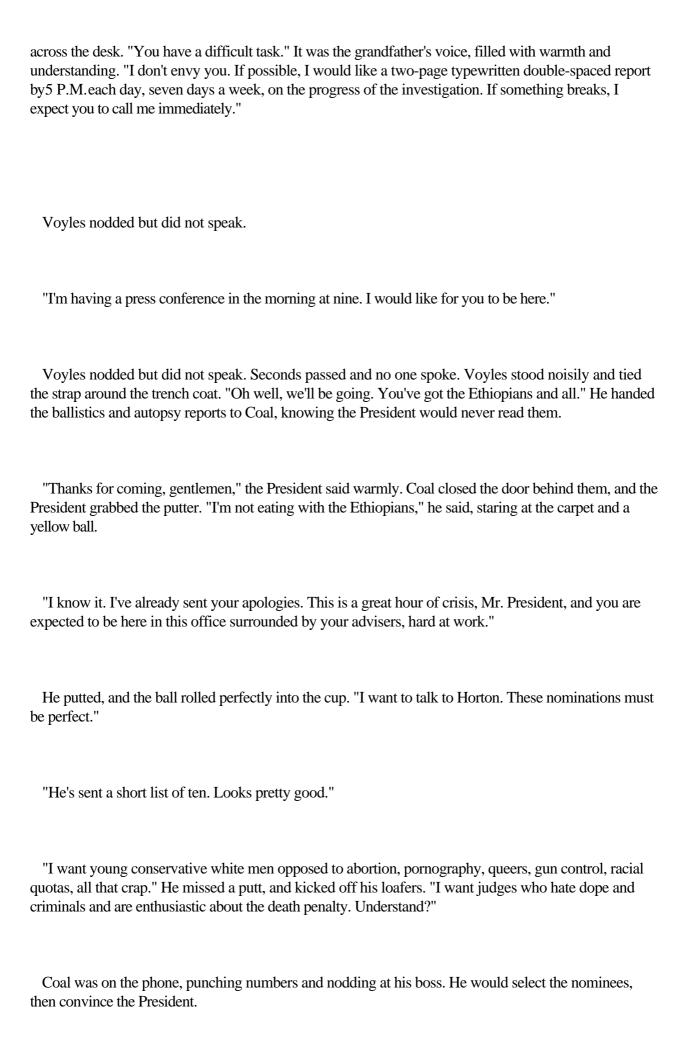


forward, so I don't expect to find any. Time of death was around twelve-thirty this morning. The killings

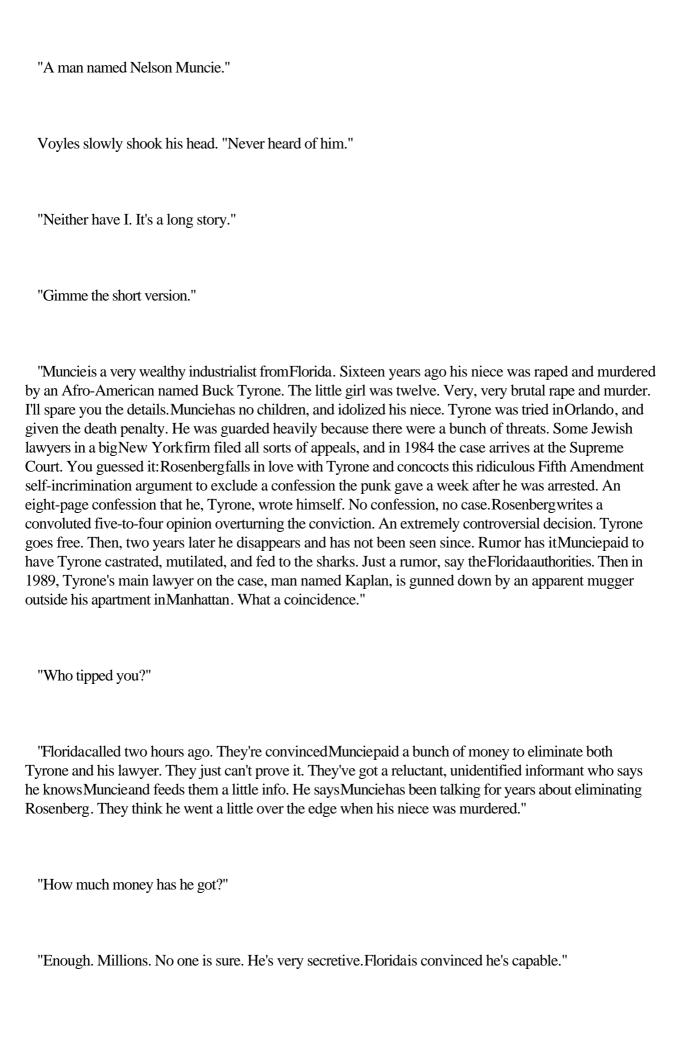


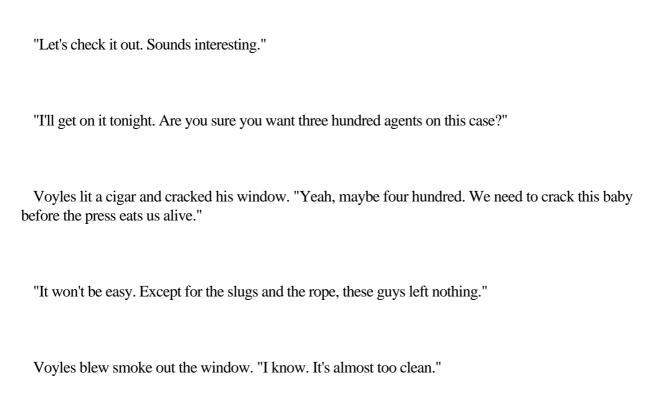
"Of course we did. But I assure you we didn't share it with anyone." The President shot a quick conspiratorial glance at Coal, who was scratching his chin, deep in thought.
Voyles shifted his rather wide rear and gave Gminski a smile, as if to say, "Let's play along with them."
"You're suggesting a conspiracy," Coal said intelligently with deep eyebrows.
"I'm not suggesting a damned thing. I am proclaiming to you, Mr. Coal, and to you, Mr. President, that yes, in fact, a large number of people conspired to kill them. There may be only one or two killers, but they had a lot of help. It was too quick and clean and well organized."
Coal seemed satisfied. He stood straight and again clasped his hands behind him.
"Then who are the conspirators?" the President asked. "Who are your suspects?"
Voyles breathed deeply and seemed to settle in his chair. He closed the briefcase and laid it at his fee "We don't have a prime suspect, at the moment, just a few good possibilities. And this must be kept ver quiet."
Coal sprang a step closer. "Of course it's confidential," he snapped. You're in the Oval Office."
"And I've been here many times before. In fact, I was here when you were running around in dirty diapers, Mr. Coal. Things have a way of leaking out."
"I think you've had leaks yourself," Coal said.
The President raised his hand. "It's confidential, Denton. You have my word." Coal retreated a step.
"Voyles watched the President.Court opened Monday, as you know, and the maniacs have been in





K. O. LEWIS sat with the Director in the back of the quiet limousine as it left the White House and crawled through rush-hour traffic. Voyles had nothing to say. So far, in the early hours of the tragedy, the press had been brutal. The buzzards were circling. No less than three congressional subcommittees had already announced hearings and investigations into the deaths. And the bodies were still warm. The politicians were giddy and wrestling for the spotlight. One outrageous statement fueled another. Senator Larkin fromOhiohated Voyles, and Voyles hated Senator Larkin fromOhio, and the senator had called a press conference three hours earlier and announced his subcommittee would immediately begin investigating the FBI's protection of the two dead justices. But Larkin had a girlfriend, a rather young one, and the FBI had some photographs, and Voyles was confident the investigation could be delayed.
"How's the President?" Lewis finally asked.
"Which one?"
"Not Coal. The other one."
"Swell. Just swell. He's awfully tore up aboutRosenberg, though."
"I bet."
They rode in silence in the direction of the Hoover Building. It would be a long night.
"We've got a new suspect," Lewis finally said.
"Do tell."





HE CHIEF slouched behind his desk with a loosened tie and a haggard look. Around the room, three of his brethren and a half-dozen clerks sat and talked in subdued tones. The shock and fatigue were evident. Jason Kline, Rosenberg's senior clerk, looked especially hard-hit. He sat on a small sofa and stared blankly at the floor while Justice Archibald Manning, now the senior Justice, talked of protocol and funerals. Jensen's mother wanted a small, private Episcopal service Friday in Providence. Rosenberg's son, a lawyer, had delivered to Runyan a list of instructions the Justice had prepared after his second stroke in which he wanted to be cremated after a non-military ceremony and his ashes dropped over the Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Though Rosenberg was Jewish, he had abandoned the religion and claimed to be agnostic. He wanted to be buried with the Indians. Runyan thought that was appropriate, but did not say so. In the outer office, six FBI agents sipped coffee and whispered nervously. There had been more threats during the day, several coming within hours of the President's early morning address. It was dark now, almost time to escort the remaining justices home. Each had four agents as bodyguards.

Justice Andrew McDowell, at sixty-one now the youngest member of the Court, stood in the window, smoking his pipe and watching traffic. If Jensen had a friend on the Court, it was McDowell. Fletcher Coal had informed Runyan that the President would not only attend Jensen's service but wanted to deliver a eulogy. No one in the inner office wanted the President to say a word. The Chief had asked McDowell to prepare a few words. A shy man who avoided speeches, McDowell twirled his bow tie and tried to picture his friend in the balcony with a rope around his neck. It was too awful to think about. A Justice of the Supreme Court, one of his distinguished brethren, one of the nine, hiding in such a place watching those movies and being exposed in such a ghastly manner. What a tragic embarrassment. He thought of himself standing before the crowd in the church and looking at Jensen's mother and family, and knowing that every thought would be on the Montrose Theatre. They would ask each other in whispered

voices, "Did you know he was gay?" McDowell, for one, did not know, nor did he suspect. Nor did he want to say anything at the funeral.

Justice Ben Thurow, age sixty-eight, was not as concerned about burying the dead as he was about catching the killers. He had been a federal prosecutor in Minnesota, and his theory grouped the suspects into two classes: those acting out of hatred and revenge, and those seeking to affect future decisions. He had instructed his clerks to begin the research.

Thurow was pacing around the room. "We have twenty-seven clerks and seven justices," he said to the group but to no one in particular. "It's obvious we won't get much work done for the next couple of weeks, and all close decisions must wait until we have a full bench. That could take months. I suggest we put our clerks to work trying to solve the killings."

"We're not police," Manning said patiently.

"Can we at least wait until after the burials before we start playing Dick Tracy?" McDowell said without turning from the window.

Thurow ignored them, as usual. "I'll direct the research. Loan me your clerks for two weeks, and I think we can put together a short list of solid suspects."

"The FBI is very capable, Ben," the Chief said. "They haven't asked for our help."

"I'd rather not discuss the FBI," Thurow said. "We can mope around here in official mourning for two weeks, or we can go to work and find these bastards."

"What makes you so sure you can solve this?" Manning asked.

"I'm not sure I can, but I think it's worth a try. Our brethren were murdered for a reason, and that reason is directly related to a case or an issue already decided or now pending before this Court. If it's retribution, then our task is almost impossible. Hell, everybody hates us for one reason or another. But if

it's not revenge or hatred, then perhaps someone wanted a different Court for a future decision. That's what's intriguing. Who would kill Abe and Glenn because of how they might vote on a case this year, next year, or five years from now? I want the clerks to pull up every case now pending in the eleven circuits below."

Justice McDowell shook his head. "Come on, Ben. That's over five thousand cases, a small fraction of which will eventually end up here. It's a wild-goose chase."

Manning was equally unimpressed. "Listen, fellas. I served with Abe Rosenberg for thirty-one years, and I often thought of shooting him myself. But I loved him like a brother. His liberal ideas were accepted in the sixties and seventies, but grew old in the eighties, and are now resented in the nineties. He became a symbol for everything that's wrong in this country. He has been killed, I believe, by one of these radical right-wing hate groups, and we can research cases till hell freezes over and not find anything. It's retribution, Ben. Pure and simple."

"And Glenn?" Thurow asked.

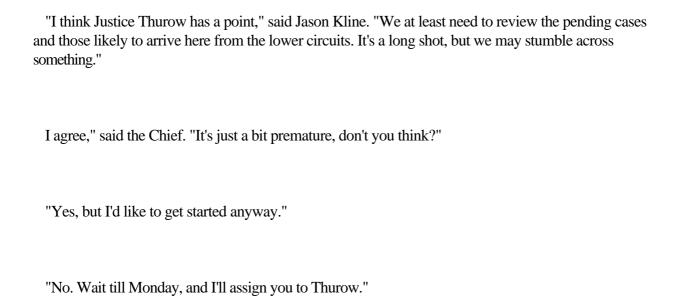
"Evidently our friend had some strange proclivities. Word must have spread, and he was an easy target for such groups. They hate homosexuals, Ben."

Ben was still pacing, still ignoring. "They hate all of us, and if they killed out of hatred the cops'll catch them. Maybe. But what if they killed to manipulate this Court? What if some group seized this moment of unrest and violence to eliminate two of us, and thus realign the Court? I think it's very possible."

The Chief cleared his throat. "And I think we'll do nothing until after they are buried, or scattered. I'm not saying no, Ben, just wait a few days. Let the dust settle. The rest of us are still in shock."

Thurow excused himself and left the room. His bodyguards followed him down the hall.

Justice Manning stood with his cane and addressed the Chief. "I will not make it to Providence. I hate flying, and I hate funerals. I'll be having one myself before long, and I do not enjoy the reminder. I'll send my sympathies to the family. When you see them, please apologize for me. I'm a very old man." He left with a clerk.



Kline shrugged and excused himself. Two clerks followed him to Rosenberg's office, where they sat in the darkness and sipped the last of Abe's brandy.

IN A CLUTTERED STUDY CARREL on the fifth level of the law library, between the racks of thick, seldom-used law books, Darby Shaw scanned a printout of the Supreme Court's docket. She had been through it twice, and though it was loaded with controversy, she found nothing that interested her. Dumond was causing riots. There was a child pornography case from New Jersey, a sodomy case from Kentucky, a dozen death penalty appeals, a dozen assorted civil rights cases, and the usual array of tax, zoning, Indian, and antitrust cases. From the computer she had pulled summaries of each, then reviewed them twice. She compiled a neat list of possible suspects, but they would be obvious to everyone. The list was now in the garbage.

Callahan was certain it was the Aryans or the Nazis or the Klan; some easily identifiable collection of domestic terrorists; some radical band of vigilantes. It had to be right-wingers; that much was obvious, he felt. Darby was not so sure. The hate groups were too obvious. They had made too many threats, thrown too many rocks, held too many parades, made too many speeches. They needed Rosenbergalive because he was such an irresistible target for their hatred. Rosenbergkept them in business. She thought it was somebody much more sinister.

He was sitting in a bar on Canal Street, drunk by now, waiting on her though she had not promised to join him. She had checked on him at lunch, and found him on the balcony upstairs, drunk and reading his book of Rosenbergopinions. He had decided to cancel con law for a week; said he might not be able to

teach it anymore now that his hero was dead. She told him to sober up, and she left.

A few minutes after ten, she walked to the computer room on the fourth level of the library and sat before a monitor. The room was empty. She pecked away at the keyboard, found what she wanted, and soon the printer was spewing forth page after page of appeals pending in the eleven federal appellate courts around the country. An hour later, the printer stopped, and she now possessed a six-inch-thick summary of the eleven dockets. She hauled it back to her study carrel and placed it in the center of the cluttered desk. It was after eleven, and the fifth level was deserted. A narrow window gave an uninspiring view of a parking lot and trees below.

She kicked off her shoes again and inspected the red paint on the toes. She sipped a warm Fresca and stared blankly at the parking lot. The first assumption was easy-the killings were done by the same group for the same reasons. If not, then the search was hopeless. The second assumption was difficult-the motive was not hatred or revenge, but rather manipulation. There was a case or an issue out there on its way to the Supreme Court, and someone wanted different justices. The third assumption was a bit easier-the case or issue involved a great deal of money.

The answer would not be found in the printout sitting before her. She flipped through it untilmidnight, and left when the library closed.

ATNOONTHURSDAY a secretary carried a large sack decorated with grease spots and filled with deli sandwiches and onion rings into a humid conference room on the fifth floor of the HooverBuilding. In the center of the square room, a mahogany table with twenty chairs along each side was surrounded with the top FBI people from across the country. All ties were loosened and sleeves rolled up. A thin cloud of blue smoke hung around the cheap government chandelier five feet above the table.

Director Voyles was talking. Tired and angry, he puffed on his fourth cigar of the morning and walked slowly in front of the screen at his end of the table. Half the men were listening. The other half had pulled reports from the pile in the center of the table and read about the autopsies, the lab report on the nylon rope, Nelson Muncie, and a few other quickly researched subjects. The reports were quite thin.

Listening carefully and reading intently was Special Agent Eric East, only a ten-year man but a brilliant investigator. Six hours earlier Voyles had picked him to lead the investigation. The rest of the team had been selected throughout the morning, and this was the organizational meeting.

East was listening and hearing what he already knew. The investigation could take weeks, probably months. Other than the slugs, nine of them, the rope, and the steel rod used in the tourniquet, there was no evidence. The neighbors in Georgetownhad seen nothing; no exceptionally suspicious characters at the Montrose. No prints. No fibers. Nothing. It takes remarkable talent to kill so cleanly, and it takes a lot of money to hire such talent. Voyles was pessimistic about finding the gunmen. They must concentrate on whoever hired them.

Voyles was talking and puffing. "There's a memo on the table regarding one Nelson Muncie, a millionaire from Jacksonville, Florida, who's allegedly made threats against Rosenberg. The Florida authorities are convinced Muncie paid a bunch of money to have the rapist and his lawyer killed. The memo covers it. Two of our men talked with Muncie's lawyer this morning, and were met with great hostility. Muncie is out of the country, according to his lawyer, and of course he has no idea when he will return. I've assigned twenty men to investigate him."

Voyles relit his cigar and looked at a sheet of paper on the table. "Number four is a group called White Resistance, a small group of middle-aged commandos we've been watching for about three years. You've got a memo. Pretty weak suspect, really. They'd rather throw firebombs and burn crosses. Not a lot of finesse. And, most importantly, not much money. I doubt seriously if they could hire guns as slick as these. But I've assigned twenty men anyway."

East unwrapped a heavy sandwich, sniffed it, but decided to leave it alone. The onion rings were cold. His appetite had vanished. He listened and made notes. Number six on the list was a bit unusual. A psycho named Clinton Lanehad declared war on homosexuals. His only son had moved from their family farm in Iowato San Franciscoto enjoy the gay life, but had quickly died of AIDS. Lane cracked up, and burned the Gay Coalition office in Des Moines. Caught and sentenced to four years, he escaped in 1989 and had not been found. According to the memo, he had set up an extensive coke-smuggling operation and made millions. And he used the money in his own little private war against gays and lesbians. The FBI had been trying to catch him for five years, but it was believed he operated out of Mexico. For years he had written hate mail to the Congress, the Supreme Court, the President. Voyles was not impressed with Lane as a suspect. He was a nut who was way out in left field, but no stone would go unturned. He assigned only six agents.

The list had ten names. Between six and twenty of the best special agents were assigned to each suspect. A leader was chosen for each unit. They were to report twice daily to East, who would meet each morning and each afternoon with the Director. A hundred or so more agents would scour the streets and countryside for clues.

Voyles talked of secrecy. The press would follow like bloodhounds, so the investigation must be extremely confidential. Only he, the Director, would speak to the press, and he would have precious little

He sat down, and K. O. Lewis delivered a rambling monologue about the funerals, and security, and a request from Chief Runyan to assist in the investigation.

Eric East sipped cold coffee, and stared at the list.

IN THIRTY-FOUR YEARS, Abraham Rosenberg wrote no fewer than twelve hundred opinions. His production was a constant source of amazement to constitutional scholars. He occasionally ignored the dull antitrust cases and tax appeals, but if the issue showed the barest hint of real controversy, he waded in with both fists. He wrote majority opinions, concurrences to majorities, concurrences to dissents, and many, many dissents. Often he dissented alone. Every hot issue in thirty-four years had received an opinion of some sort fromRosenberg. The scholars and critics loved him. They published books and essays and critiques about him and his work. Darby found five separate hardback compilations of his opinions, with editorial notes and annotations. One book contained nothing but his great dissents.

She skipped class Thursday and secluded herself in the study carrel on the fifth level of the library. The computer printouts were scattered neatly on the floor. The Rosenberg books were open and marked and stacked on top of each other.

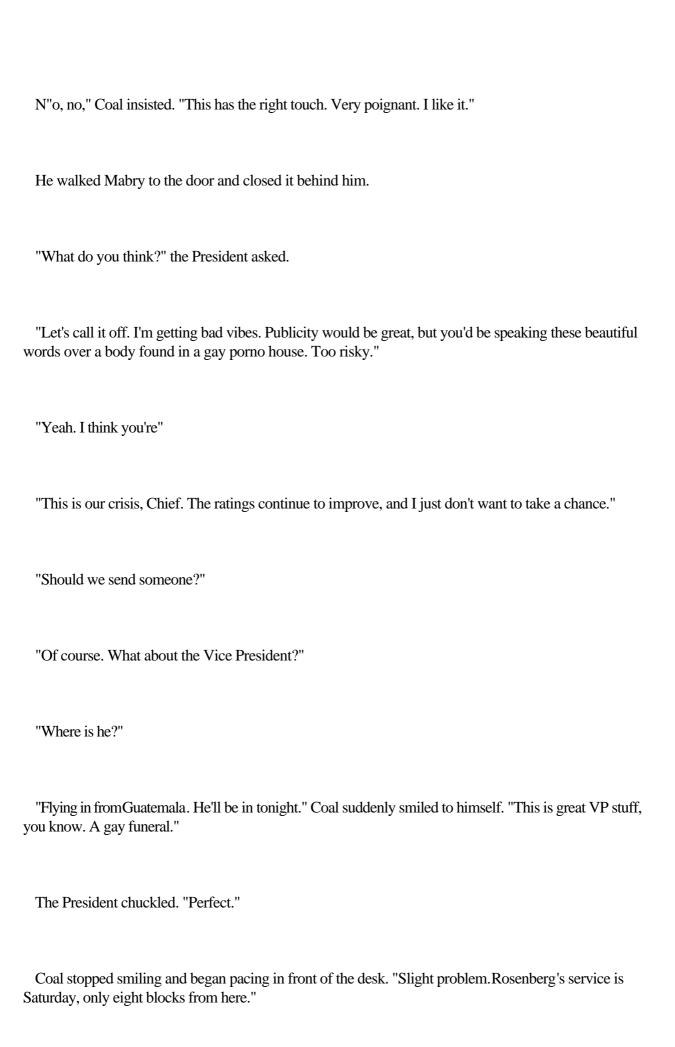
There was a reason for the killings. Revenge and hatred would be acceptable for Rosenbergalone. But add Jensen to the equation, and revenge and hatred made less sense. Sure he was hateable, but he had not aroused passions like Yount or even Manning.

She found no books of critical thought on the writings of Justice Glenn Jensen. In six years, he had authored only twenty-eight majority opinions, the lowest production on the Court. He had written a few dissents, and joined a few concurrences, but he was a painfully slow worker. At times his writing was clear and lucid, at times disjointed and pathetic.

She studied Jensen's opinions. His ideology swung radically from year to year. He was generally consistent in his protection of the rights of criminal defendants, but there were enough exceptions to astound any scholar. In seven attempts, he had voted with the Indians five times. He had written three majority opinions strongly protective of the environment. He was near perfect in support of tax

protestors.
But there were no clues. Jensen was too erratic to take seriously. Compared to the other eight, he was harmless.
She finished another warm Fresca, and put away for the moment her notes on Jensen. Her watch was hidden in a drawer. She had no idea what time it was. Callahan had sobered up and wanted a late dinner at Mr. B's in the Quarter. She needed to call him.
DICK MABRY, the current speechwriter and word wizard, sat in a chair beside the President's desk and watched as Fletcher Coal and the President read the third draft of a proposed eulogy for Justice Jensen. Coal had rejected the first two, and Mabry was still uncertain about what they wanted. Coal would suggest one thing. The President wanted something else. Earlier in the day, Coal had called and said to forget the eulogy because the President would not attend the funeral. Then the President had called, and asked him to prepare a few words because Jensen was a friend and even though he was a queer he was still a friend.
Mabry knew Jensen was not a friend, but he was a freshly assassinated justice who would enjoy a highly visible funeral.
Then Coal had called and said they weren't sure if the President was going but work up something just in case. Mabry's office was in theOldExecutiveOfficeBuildingnext door to the White House, and during the day small bets had been placed on whether the President would attend the funeral of a known homosexual. The office odds were three to one that he would not.
"Much better, Dick," Coal said, folding the paper.
"I like it too," the President said. Mabry had noticed that the President usually waited for Coal to express approval or displeasure over his words.

"I can try again," Mabry said, standing.





THOMAS CALLAHAN slept late and alone. He had gone to bed early, and sober, and alone. For the third day in a row he had canceled classes. It was Friday, andRosenberg's service was tomorrow, and out of respect for his idol, he would not teach con law until the man was properly put to rest.

He fixed coffee and sat on the balcony in his robe. The temperature was in the sixties, the first cold snap of the fall, and Dauphine Street below bustled with brisk energy. He nodded to the old woman without a name on the balcony across the street. Bourbon was a block away and the tourists were already out with their little maps and cameras. Dawn went unnoticed in the Quarter, but by ten the narrow streets were busy with delivery trucks and cabs.

On these late mornings, and they were many in number, Callahan cherished his freedom. He was twenty years out of law school, and most of his contemporaries were strapped into seventy-hour weeks in pressurized law factories. He had lasted two years in private practice. A behemoth in B.C. with two hundred lawyers hired him fresh out of Georgetown and stuck him in a cubbyhole office writing briefs for the first six months. Then he was placed on an assembly line answering interrogatories about IUDs twelve hours a day, and expected to bill sixteen. He was told that if he could cram the next twenty years into the next ten, he just might make partner at the weary age of thirty-five.

Callahan wanted to live past fifty, so he retired from the boredom of private law. He earned a master's in law, and became a professor. He slept late, worked five hours a day, wrote an occasional article, and for the most part enjoyed himself immensely. With no family to support, his salary of seventy thousand a year was more than sufficient to pay for his two-story bungalow, his Porsche, and his liquor. If death came early, it would be from whiskey and not work.

He had sacrificed. Many of his pals from law school were partners in the big firms with fancy letterheads and half-million-dollar earnings. They rubbed shoulders with CEOs from IBM and Texaco and State Farm. They power-schmoozed with senators. They had offices in Tokyo and London. But he did not envy them.

One of his best friends from law school was Gavin Verheek, another dropout from private practice who had gone to work for the government. He first worked in the civil rights division at Justice, then transferred to the FBI. He was now special counsel to the Director. Callahan was due in Washington Monday for a conference of con law professors. He and Verheek planned to eat and get drunk Monday night.









The clerk opened a drawer in the counter, and took out a key ring. She nodded, pointing with her forehead. "Follow me."
The sign on the door said JURY ROOM, but inside there were no tables or chairs, only file cabinets and boxes lining the walls. Darby looked around the room.
The clerk pointed to a wall. "That's it, on this wall. The rest of the room is other junk. This first file cabinet has all the pleadings and correspondence. The rest is discovery, exhibits, and the trial."
"When was the trial?"
"Last summer. It went on for two months."
"Where's the appeal?"
"Not perfected yet. I think the deadline is November 1. Are you a reporter or something?"
"No."
"Good. As you obviously know, these are indeed public records. But the trial judge has placed certain restrictions. First, I must have your name and the precise hours you visited this room. Second, nothing can be taken from this room. Third, nothing in this file can be copied until the appeal is perfected. Fourth anything you touch in here must be put back exactly where you found it. Judge's orders."
Darby stared at the wall of file cabinets. "Why can't I make copies?"
"Ask His Honor, okay? Now, what's your name?"



He looked just like a regular when he darted in and paid his money inside the door without looking at the cashier. Baseball cap, black sunglasses, jeans, neat hair, leather jacket. He was well disguised, but not because he was a homosexual and ashamed to be hanging around such places.

It was midnight. He climbed the stairs to the balcony, smiling at the thought of Jensen wearing the tourniquet. The door was locked. He took a seat in the center section on the floor, away from anyone else.

He had never watched queer movies before, and after this night he had no plans to watch another one. This was his third such smut house in the past ninety minutes. He kept the sunglasses on and tried to avoid the screen. But it was difficult, and this irritated him.

There were five other people in the theater. Four rows up and to his right were two lovebirds, kissing and playing. Oh, for a baseball bat and he could put them out of their misery. Or a nice little piece of yellow ski rope.

He suffered for twenty minutes, and was about to reach in his pocket when a hand touched his shoulder. A gentle hand. He played it cool.

"Could I sit by you?" came the rather deep and manly voice from just over his shoulder.

"No, and you can remove your hand."

The hand moved. Seconds passed, and it was obvious there would be no more requests. Then he was gone.

This was torture for a man violently opposed to pornography. He wanted to vomit. He glanced behind him, then reached carefully into the leather jacket and removed a black box, six inches by five and three inches thick. He laid it on the floor between his legs. With a scalpel, he made a careful incision in the cushion of the seat next to him, then, while glancing around, inserted the black box into the cushion. There were springs in this one, a real antique, and he delicately twisted the box from one side to the other until it was in place with the switch and the tube barely visible through the incision.

He took a deep breath. Although the device had been built by a true professional, a legendary genius at miniature explosives, it was not pleasant carrying the damned thing around in a coat pocket, just centimeters from his heart and most other vital organs. And he wasn't particularly comfortable sitting next to it now.

This was his third plant of the night, and he had one more, at another movie house where they showed old-fashioned heterosexual pornography. He was almost looking forward to it, and this irritated him.

He looked at the two lovers, who were oblivious to the movie and growing more excited by the minute, and wished they could be sitting right there when the little black box began silently spewing forth its gas, and then thirty seconds later when the fireball would flash-fry every object between the screen and the popcorn machine. He would like that.

But his was a nonviolent group, opposed to the indiscriminate killing of innocent and/or insignificant people. They had killed a few necessary victims. Their specialty, however, was the demolition of structures used by the enemy. They picked easy targets: unarmed abortion clinics, unprotected ACLU offices, unsuspecting smut houses. They were having a field day. Not one single arrest in eighteen months.

It was twelve-forty, time to leave and hurry four blocks to his car for another black box, then six blocks over to the Pussycat Cinema, which closed at one-thirty. The Pussycat was either eighteen or nineteen on the list, he couldn't remember which, but he was certain that in exactly three hours and twenty minutes the dirty movie business in D.C. would take a helluva blow. Twenty-two of these little joints were supposed to receive black boxes tonight, and at4 A.M.they were all supposed to be closed and deserted, and demolished. Three all-nighters were scratched from the list, because his was a nonviolent group.

He adjusted his sunglasses and took one last look at the cushion next to him. Judging from the cups and popcorn on the floor, the place got swept once a week. No one would notice the switch and tube barely visible between the ragged threads. He cautiously flipped the switch, and left the Montrose.

ERIC EAST had never met the President, nor been in the White House. And he'd never met Fletcher Coal, but he knew he wouldn't like him.

He followed Director Voyles and K. O. Lewis into the Oval Office at seven Saturday morning. There were no smiles or handshakes. East was introduced by Voyles. The President nodded from behind the desk but did not stand. Coal was reading something.

Twenty porno houses had been torched in the B.C. area, and many were still smoldering. They had seen the smoke above the city from the back of the limo. At a dump called Angels a janitor had been badly burned and was not expected to live.

An hour ago they had received word that an anonymous caller to a radio station had claimed responsibility for the Underground Army, and he promised more of the same in celebration of the death ofRosenberg.

The President spoke first. He looked tired, East thought. It was such an early hour for him. "How many places got bombed?"

"Twenty here," Voyles answered. "Seventeen in Baltimore and around fifteen in Atlanta. It appears as though the assault was carefully coordinated because all the explosions happened at precisely 4 A.M."

Coal looked up from his memo. "Director, do you believe it's the Underground Army?"

"As of now they're the only ones claiming responsibility. It looks like some of their work. Could be." Voyles did not look at Coal when he spoke to him.

"So when do you start making arrests?" the President asked.

"At the precise moment we obtain probable cause, Mr. President. That's the law, you understand."

"I understand this outfit is your top suspect in the killings of Rosenberg and Jensen, and that you're certain it killed a federal trial judge in Texas, and it most likely bombed at least fifty-two smut houses last night. I don't understand why they're bombing and killing with immunity. Hell, Director, we're under

S1	ege.	"

Voyles' neck turned red, but he said nothing. He just looked away while the President glared at him. K. O. Lewis cleared his throat. "Mr. President, if I may, we are not convinced the Underground Army was involved with the deaths of Rosenberg and Jensen. In fact, we have no evidence linking them. They are only one of a dozen suspects. As I've said before, the killings were remarkably clean, well organized, and very professional. Extremely professional."

Coal stepped forward. "What you're trying to say, Mr. Lewis, is that you have no idea who killed them, and you may never know."

"No, that's not what I'm saying. We'll find them, but it will take time."

"How much time?" asked the President. It was an obvious, sophomoric question with no good answer. East immediately disliked the President for asking it.

"Months," Lewis said.

"How many months?"

"Many months."

The President rolled his eyes and shook his head, then with great disgust stood and walked to the window. He spoke to the window. "I can't believe there's no relation between what happened last night and the dead judges. I don't know. Maybe I'm just paranoid."

Voyles shot a quick smirk at Lewis. Paranoid, insecure, clueless, dumb, out of touch. Voyles could think of many others.

The President continued, still pondering the window. "I just get nervous when assassins are loose around here and bombs are going off. Who can blame me? We haven't killed a President in over thirty

vears."	
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"Oh, I think you're safe, Mr. President," Voyles said with a trace of amusement. "The Secret Service has things under control."

"Great. Then why do I feel as though I'm in Beirut?" He was almost mumbling into the window.

Coal sensed the awkwardness and picked up a thick memo from the desk. He held it and spoke to Voyles, much like a professor lecturing to his class.

This is the short list of potential nominees to the Supreme Court. There are eight names, each with a biography. It was prepared by Justice. We started with twenty names, then the President, Attorney General Horton, and myself cut it to eight, none of whom have any idea they are being considered."

Voyles still looked away. The President slowly returned to his desk, and picked up his copy of the memo. Coal continued.

Some of these people are controversial, and if they are ultimately nominated we'll have a small war getting them approved by the Senate. We'd prefer not to start fighting now. This must be kept confidential."

Voyles suddenly turned and glared at Coal. You're an idiot, Coal! We've done this before, and I can assure you when we start checking on these people the cat's out of the bag. You want a thorough background investigation, and yet you expect everyone contacted to keep quiet. It doesn't work that way, son."

Coal stepped closer to Voyles. His eyes were glowing. "You bust your ass to make sure these names are kept out of the papers until they're nominated. You make it work, Director. You plug the leaks and keep it out of the papers, understand."

Voyles was on his feet, pointing at Coal. "Listen, asshole, you want them checked out, you do it yourself. Don't start giving me a bunch of boy scout orders."

Lewis stood between them, and the President stood behind his desk, and for a second or two nothing was said. Coal placed his memo on the desk and retreated a few steps, looking away. The President was now the peacemaker. "Sit down, Denton. Sit down."

Voyles returned to his seat while staring at Coal. The President smiled at Lewis and everyone took a seat. "We're all under a lot of pressure," the President said warmly.

Lewis spoke calmly. "We'll perform the routine investigations on your names, Mr. President, and it will be done in the strictest of confidence. You know, however, that we cannot control every person we talk to."

"Yes, Mr. Lewis, I know that. But I want extra caution. These men are young and will shape and reshape the Constitution long after I'm dead. They're staunchly conservative, and the press will eat them alive. They must be free from warts and skeletons in the closet. No dope smokers, or illegitimate children, or DUIs, or radical student activity, or divorces. Understand? No surprises."

"Yes, Mr. President. But we cannot guarantee total secrecy in our investigations."

"Just try, okay."

"Yes, sir." Lewis handed the memo to Eric East.

"Is that all?" Voyles asked.

The President glanced at Coal, who was ignoring them all and standing before the window. "Yes, Denton, that's all. I'd like to have these names checked out in ten days. I want to move fast on this."

Voyles was standing. "You'll have it in ten days."

CALLAHAN WAS IRRITATED when he knocked on the door to Darby's apartment. He was quite perturbed and had a lot on his mind, a lot that he wanted to say, but he knew better than to start a fight because there was something he wanted much worse than to blow off a little steam. She had avoided him for four days now while she played detective and barricaded herself in the law library. She had skipped classes and failed to return his calls, and in general neglected him during his hour of crisis. But he knew when she opened the door he would smile and forget about being neglected.

He held a liter of wine and a real pizza from Mama Rosa's. It was after ten, Saturday night. He knocked again, and looked up and down the street at the neat duplexes and bungalows. The chain rattled from inside, and he instantly smiled. The neglect vanished.

"Who is it?" she asked through the chain.

"Thomas Callahan, remember? I'm at your door begging you to let me in so we can play and be friends again."

The door opened and Callahan stepped in. She took the wine and pecked him on the cheek. "Are we still buddies?" he asked.

"Yes, Thomas. I've been busy." He followed her through the cluttered den to the kitchen. A computer and an assortment of thick books covered the table.

"I called. Why didn't you call me back?"

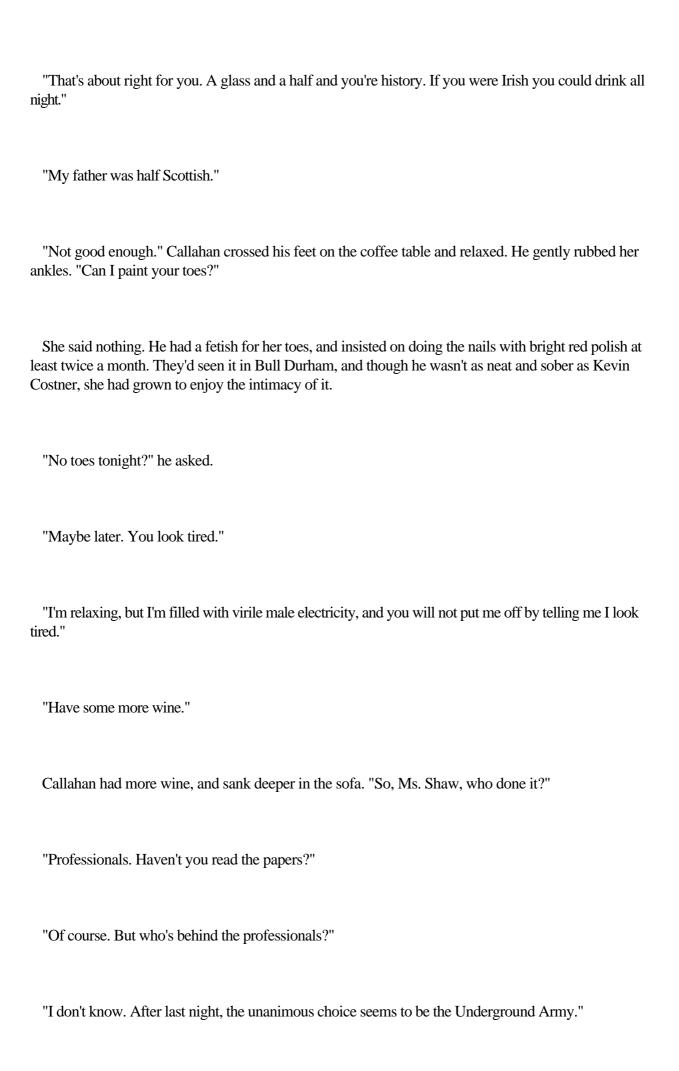
"I've been out," she said, opening a drawer and removing a corkscrew.

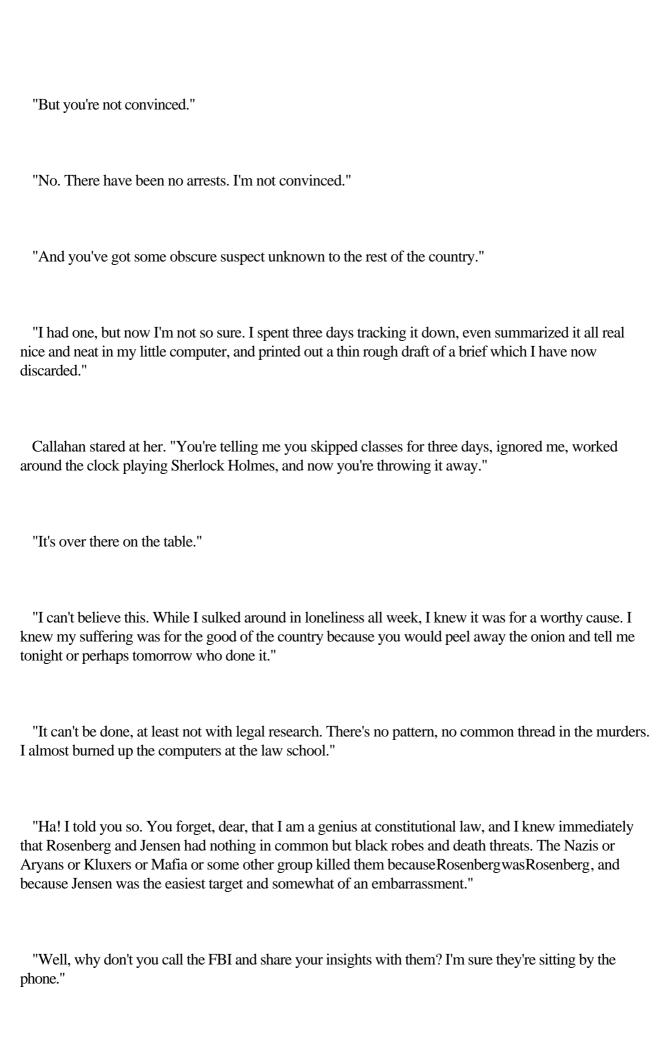
"You've got a machine. I've been talking to it."











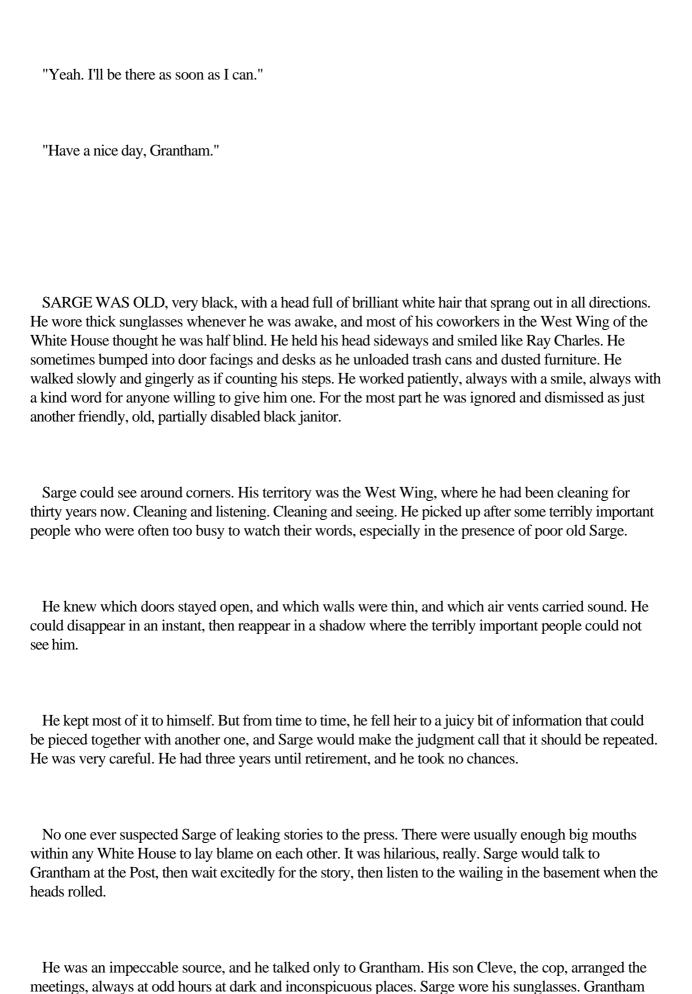
"Don't be angry. I'm sorry. Please forgive me."
"You're an ass, Thomas."
"Yes, but you love me, don't you?"
"I don't know."
"Can we still go to bed? You promised."
"We'll see."
Callahan placed his glass on the table, and attacked her. "Look, baby. I'll read your brief, okay. And then we'll talk about it, okay. But I'm not thinking clearly right now, and I won't be able to continue until you take my weak and trembling hand and lead me to your bed."
"Forget my little brief."
"Please, dammit, Darby, please."
She grabbed his neck and pulled him to her. They kissed long and hard, a wet, almost violent kiss.
THE COP stuck his thumb on the button next to the name of Gray Grantham, and held it down for

twenty seconds. Then a brief pause. Then another twenty seconds. Pause. Twenty seconds. Pause. Twenty seconds. He thought this was funny because Grantham was a night owl and had probably slept less than three or four hours, and now all this incessant buzzing echoing throughout his hallway. He pushed again and looked at his patrol car parked illegally on the curb under the streetlight. It was almost dawn, Sunday, and the street was empty. Twenty seconds. Pause. Twenty seconds.

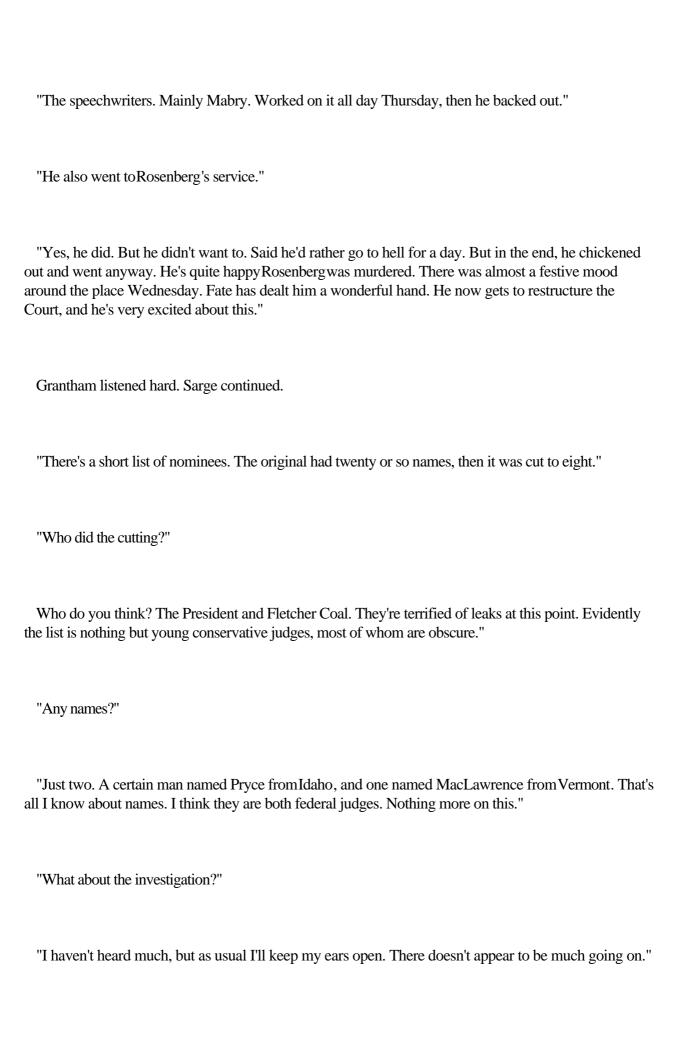
Maybe Grantham was dead. Or maybe he was comatose from booze and a late night on the town. Maybe he had someone's woman up there and had no plans to answer the door. Pause. Twenty seconds. The mike crackled. "Who is it!" "Police!" answered the cop, who was black and emphasized the po in police just for the fun of it. "What do you want?" Grantham demanded. "Maybe I gotta warrant." The cop was near laughter. Grantham's voice softened, and he sounded wounded. "Is this Cleve?" "It is." "What time is it, Cleve?" "Almost five-thirty." "It must be good."

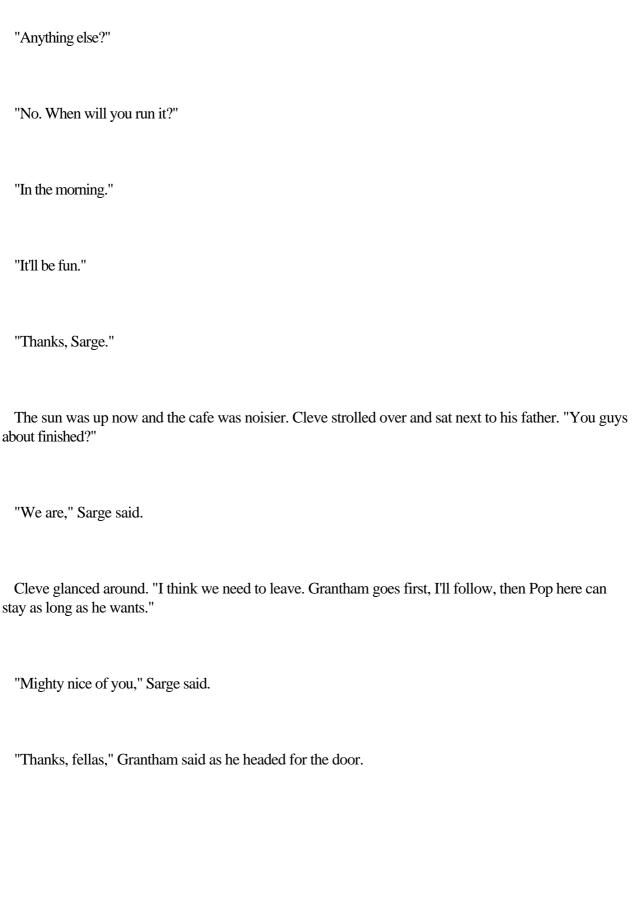
"Don't know. Sarge didn't say, you know. He just said to wake you up 'cause he wanted to talk."





wore the same with a hat or cap of some sort. Cleve usually sat with them and watched the crowd.
Grantham arrived at Glenda's a few minutes after six, and walked to a booth in the rear. There were three other customers. Glenda herself was frying eggs on a grill near the register. Cleve sat on a stool watching her.
They shook hands. A cup of coffee had been poured for Grantham.
"Sorry I'm late," he said.
"No problem, my friend. Good to see you." Sarge had a raspy voice that was difficult to suppress with a whisper. No one was listening.
Grantham gulped coffee. "Busy week at the White House."
"You could say that.Lotof excitement.Lotof happiness."
"You don't say." Grantham could not take notes at these meetings. It would be too obvious, Sarge said when he laid the ground rules.
"Yes. The President and his boys were elated with the news of Justice Rosenberg. This made them very happy."
"What about Justice Jensen?"
"Well, as you noticed, the President attended the memorial service, but did not speak. He had planned to give a eulogy, but backed out because he would have been saying nice things about a gay fella."
"Who wrote the eulogy?"





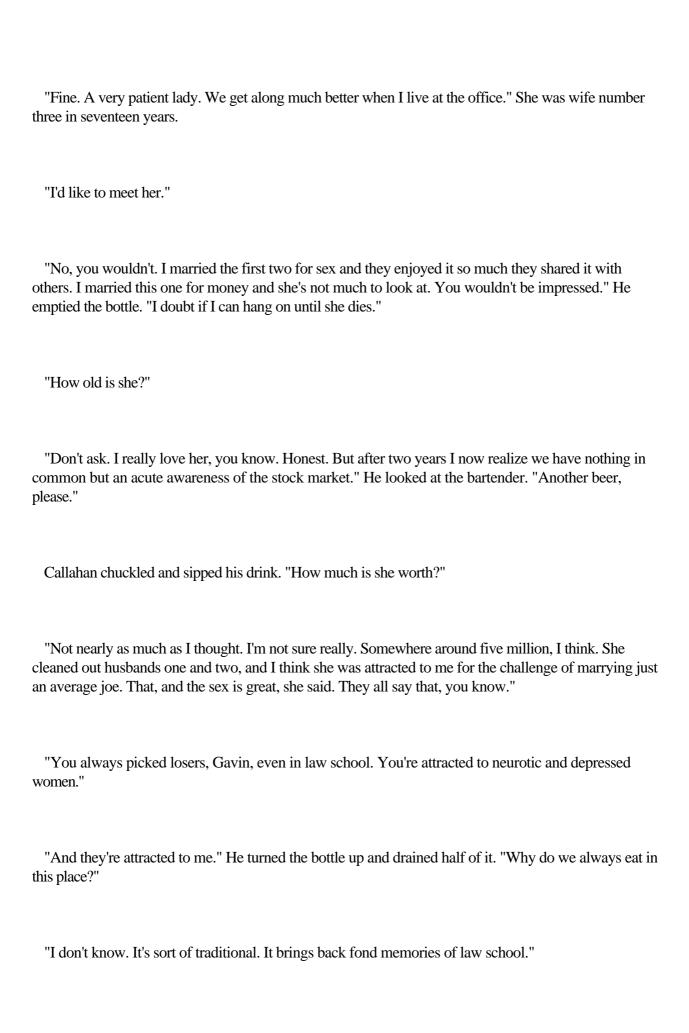
VERHEEK WAS LATE as usual. In the twenty-three-year history of their friendship, he had never been on time, and it was never a matter of being only a few minutes late. He had no concept of time and wasn't bothered with it. He wore a watch but never looked at it. Late for Verheek meant at least an hour, sometimes two, especially when the person kept waiting was a friend who expected him to be late and

would forgive him. So Callahan sat for an hour in the bar, which suited him just fine. After eight hours of scholarly debate, he despised the Constitution and those who taught it. He needed Chivas in his veins, and after two doubles on the rocks he was feeling better. He watched himself in the mirror behind the rows of liquor, and in the distance over his shoulder he watched and waited for Gavin Verheek. Small wonder his friend couldn't cut it in private practice, where life depended upon the clock. When the third double was served, an hour and eleven minutes after 7 P.M., Verheek strolled to the bar and ordered a Moosehead. "Sorry I'm late," he said as they shook hands. "I knew you'd appreciate the extra time alone with your Chivas." "You look tired," Callahan said as he inspected him. Old and tired. Verheek was aging badly and gaining weight. His forehead had grown an inch since their last visit, and his pale skin highlighted the heavy circles under his eyes. "How much do you weigh?" "None of your business," he said, gulping the beer. "Where's our table?" "It's reserved for eight-thirty. I figured you would be at least ninety minutes late." "Then I'm early."

"I live at work now. The Director wants no less than a hundred hours a week until something breaks. I told my wife I'd be home for Christmas."

"How is she?"

"You could say that. Did you come from work?"

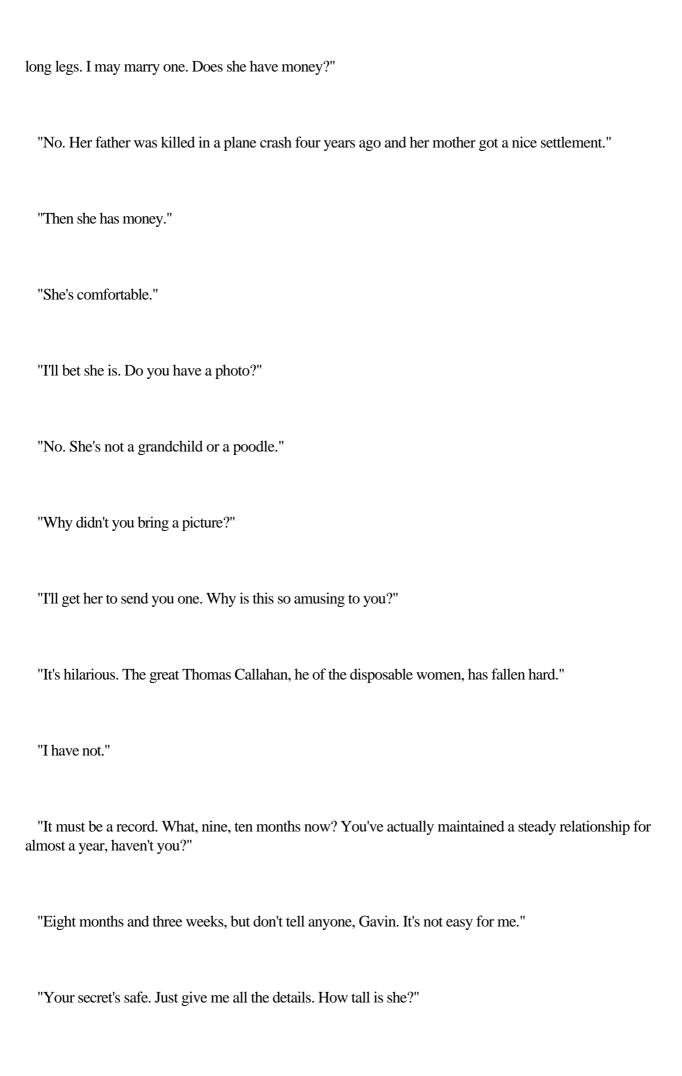




C	Callahan hung on every word. "This is pretty good."
	Yeah. I'm telling you this part because later, after a few more drinks, you'll expect me to tell you who e is on the list and I won't do it. I'm trying to be a friend, Thomas."
"]	Keep going."
	Anyway, there's no way the leak came from us. Impossible. It had to come from the White House. e place is full of people who hate Coal, and it's leaking like rusty pipes."
"(Coal probably leaked it."
eve	Maybe so. He's a sleazy bastard, and one theory has him leaking Pryce and MacLawrence to scare bryone, then later announcing two nominees who appear more moderate. It sounds like something he uld do."
"]	I've never heard of Pryce and MacLawrence."
	Join the club. They're both very young, early forties, with precious little experience on the bench. We ren't checked them out, but they appear to be radically conservative."
"2	And the rest of the list?"
117	That was quick. Two beers down, and you've already popped the question."
	The drinks arrived.I want some of those mushrooms stuffed with crabmeat," Verheek told the waiter. st to munch on. I'm starving."

"Don't ask again, Thomas. You may have to carry me out of here in three hours, but I'll never tell. You know that. Let's say that Pryce and MacLawrence seem to be reflective of the entire list."
"All unknowns?"
"Basically, yes."
Callahan sipped the Scotch slowly and shook his head. Verheek removed his jacket and loosened his tie. "Let's talk about women."
"No."
"How old is she?"
"Twenty-four, but very mature."
"You could be her father."
"I may be. Who knows."
"Where's she from?"
"Denver. I told you that."
"I love Western girls. They're so independent and unpretentious and they tend to wear Levis and have

Callahan handed over his empty glass. "Bring me an order too."



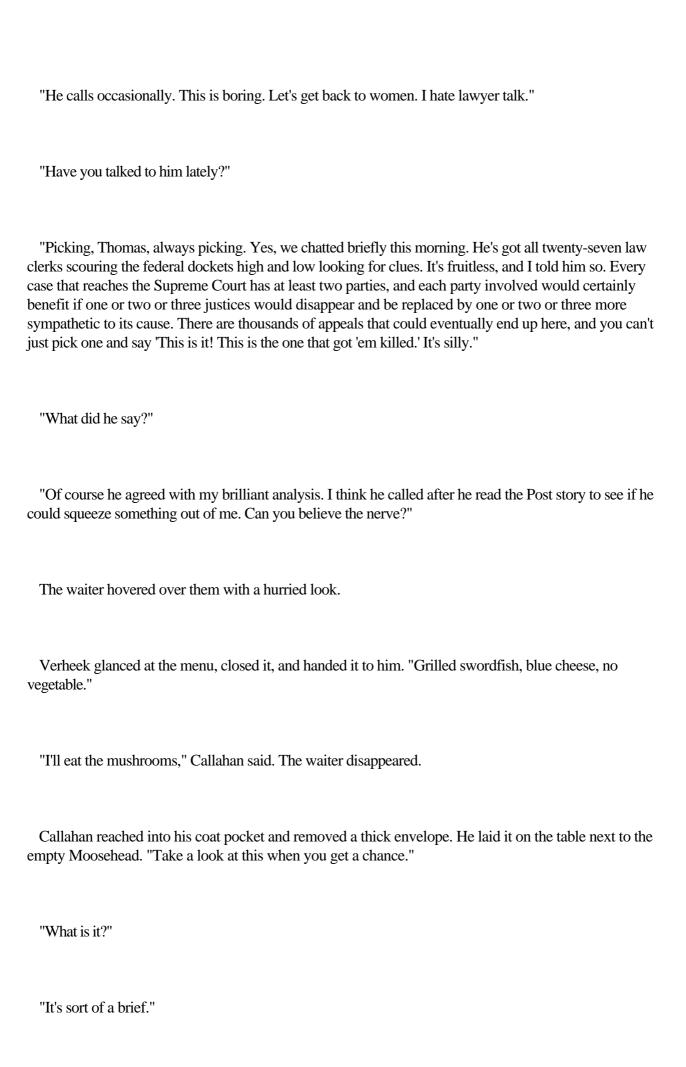




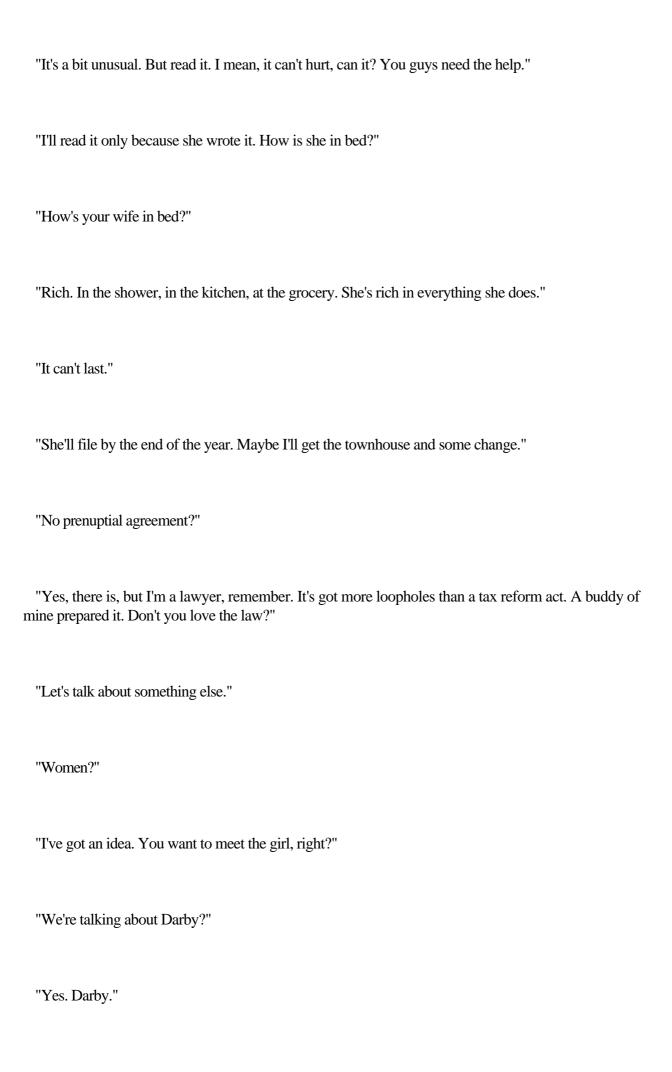
He stuffed another in his mouth. "Quite simple. It's so simple, it's easy to overlook. They were such natural targets. Rosenberg had no security system in his townhouse. Any decent cat burglar could come and go. And poor Jensen was hanging around those places at midnight. They were exposed. At the exact moment each died, the other seven Supremes had FBI agents in their homes. That's why they were selected. They were stupid."
"Then who selected them?"
"Someone with a lot of money. The killers were professionals, and they were probably out of the country within hours. We figure there were three, maybe more. The mess at Rosenberg's could have been done by just one. We figure there were at least two working on Jensen. One or more looking out while the guy with the rope did his thing. Even though it was a dirty little place, it was open to the public, and quite risky. But they were good, very good."
"I've read a lone assassin theory."
"Forget it. It's impossible for one man to kill both of them. Impossible."
"How much would these killers charge?"
"Millions. And it took a bunch of money to plan it all."
"And you have no idea?"
"Look, Thomas, I'm not involved in the investigation, so you'll have to ask those guys. I'm sure they know a helluva lot more than I do. I'm just a lowly government lawyer."

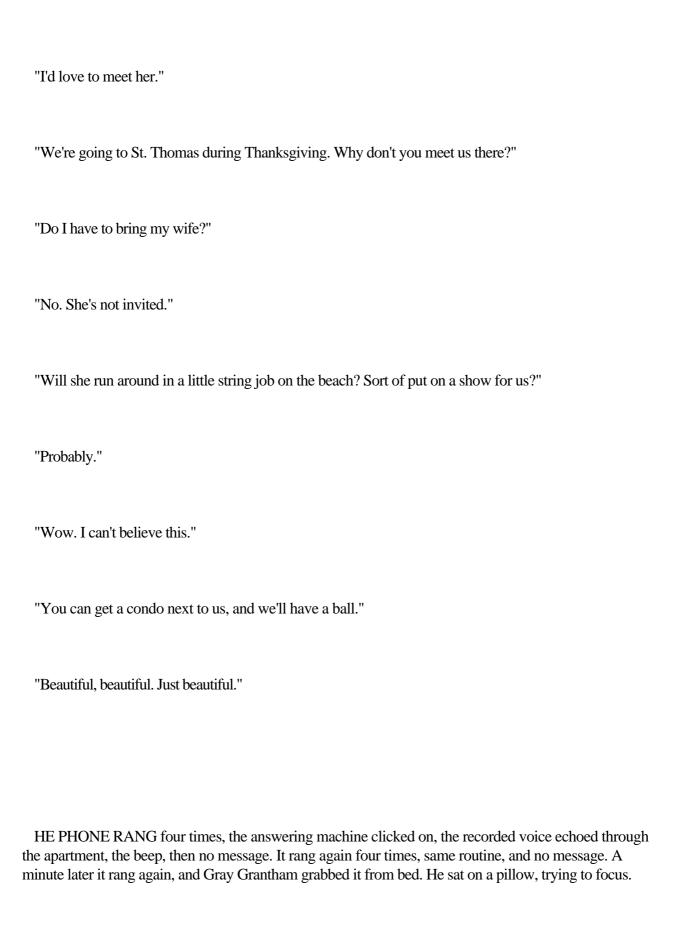
"Yeah, who just happens to be on a first-name basis with the Chief Justice."

"Why the combination?"





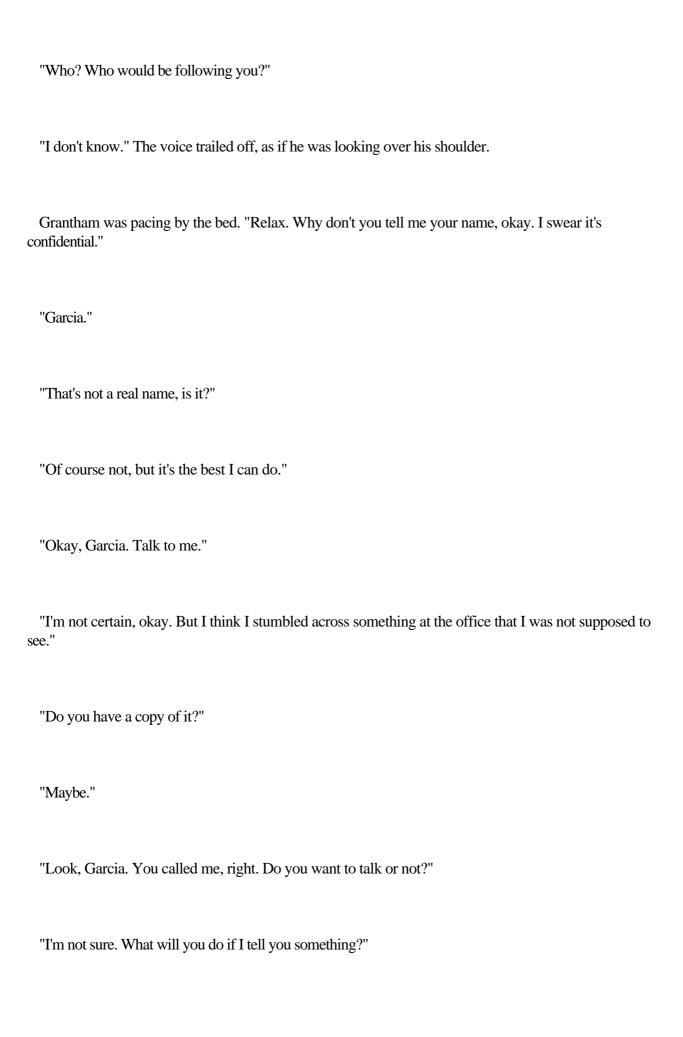


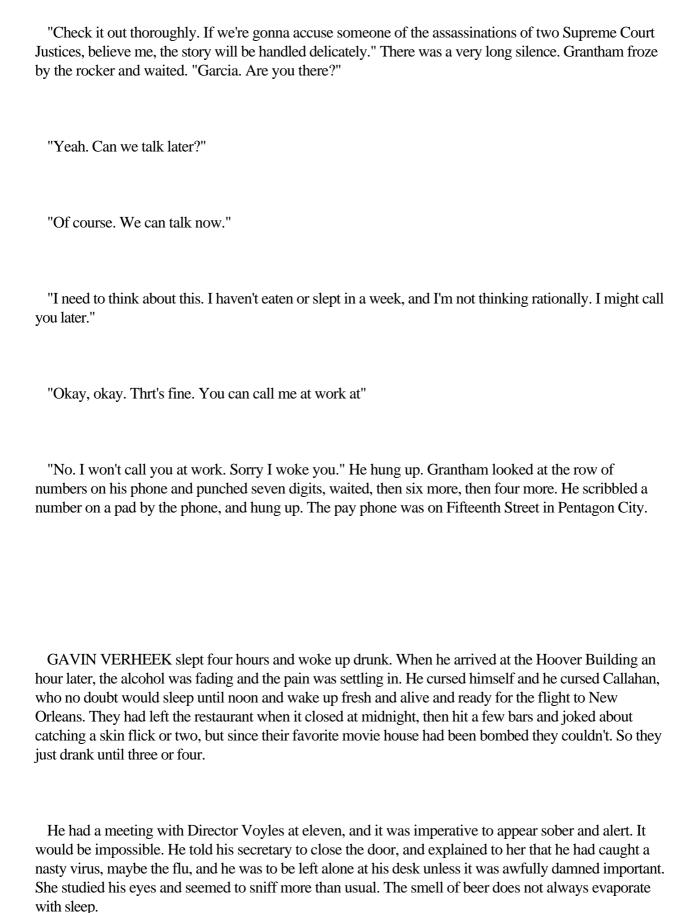


"Who is it?" he asked in pain. There was no light coming through the window.









She left and closed the door behind her. He locked it. To make things equal, he called Callahan's

room, but no one answered.

What a life. His best friend earned almost as much as he did, but worked thirty hours in a busy week, and had his pick of pliant young things twenty years his junior. Then he remembered their grand plans for the week in St. Thomas, and the thought of Darby strolling along the beach. He would go, even if it caused a divorce.

A wave of nausea rippled through his chest and up his esophagus, and he quickly lay still on the floor. Cheap government carpet. He breathed deeply, and the pounding started at the top of his head. The plaster ceiling was not spinning, and this was encouraging. After three minutes, it was evident he would not vomit, at least not now.

His briefcase was within reach, and he carefully slid it next to him. He found the envelope inside with the morning paper. He opened it, unfolded the brief, and held it with both hands six inches above his face.

It was thirteen letter-sized pages of computer paper, all double-spaced with wide margins. He could handle it. Notes were scribbled in the margins by hand and whole sections were marked through. The words FIRST DRAFT were handwritten with a felt pen across the top. Her name, address, and phone number were typed on the cover sheet.

He would skim it for a few minutes while he was on the floor, then hopefully he would feel like sitting at the desk and going through the motions of being an important government lawyer. He thought of Voyles, and the pounding intensified.

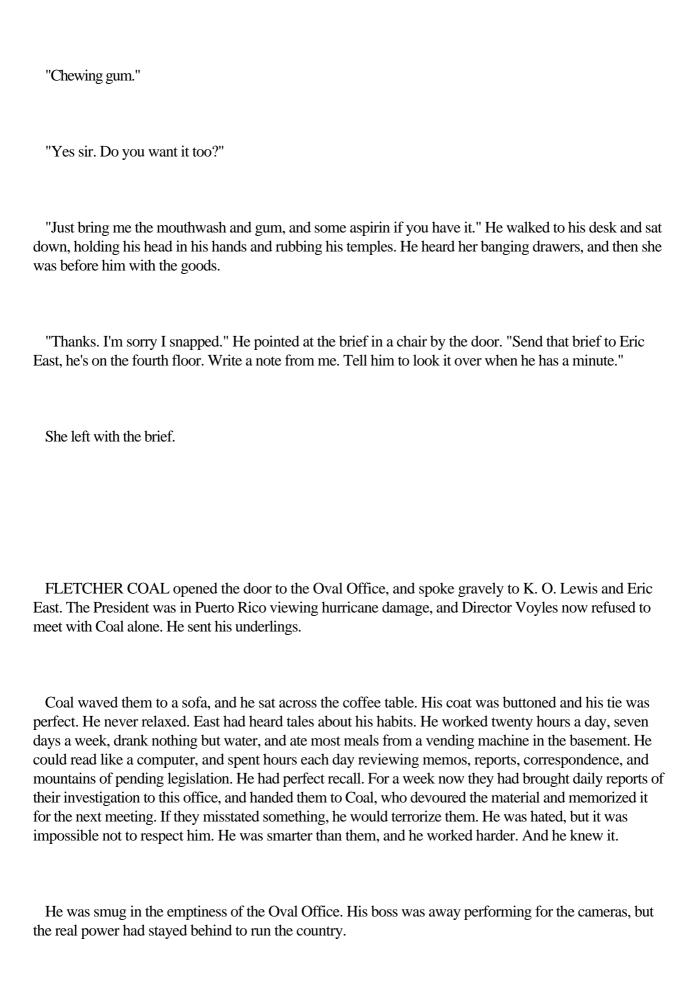
She wrote well, in the standard, scholarly legal fashion of long sentences filled with large words. But she was clear. She avoided the double-talk and legal lingo most students strive so desperately for. She would never make it as an attorney employed by the United States Government.

Gavin had never heard of her suspect, and was certain it was not on anyone's list. Technically, it was not a brief, but more of a story about a lawsuit in Louisiana. She told the facts succinctly, and made them interesting. Fascinating, really. He was not skimming.

The facts took four pages, then she filled the next three with brief histories of the parties. It dragged a bit here, but he kept reading. He was hooked. On page eight, the briefer whatever it was summarized the

Rosenberg and Jensen from the Court. Callahan said she had already discarded this theory, and she appeared to lose steam at the end. But it was highly readable. For a moment he had forgotten his current state of pain, and read thirteen pages of a law student's brief while lying on the floor on dirty carpet with a million things to do. There was a soft knock at the door. He slowly sat up, gingerly stood, and walked to the door. "Yes." It was the secretary. "I hate to bother. But the Director wants you in his office in ten minutes." Verheek opened the door. "What?" "Yes sir. Ten minutes." He rubbed his eyes and breathed rapidly. "What for?" "I get demoted for asking those questions, sir." "Do you have any mouthwash?" "Well, yes, I believe so. Do you want it?" "I wouldn't have asked if I didn't want it. Bring it to me. Do you have any gum?" "Gum?"

trial. On nine, it mentioned the appeal, and the final three pages laid an implausible trail to the removal of



K. O. Lewis placed a four-inch stack of the latest on the table.

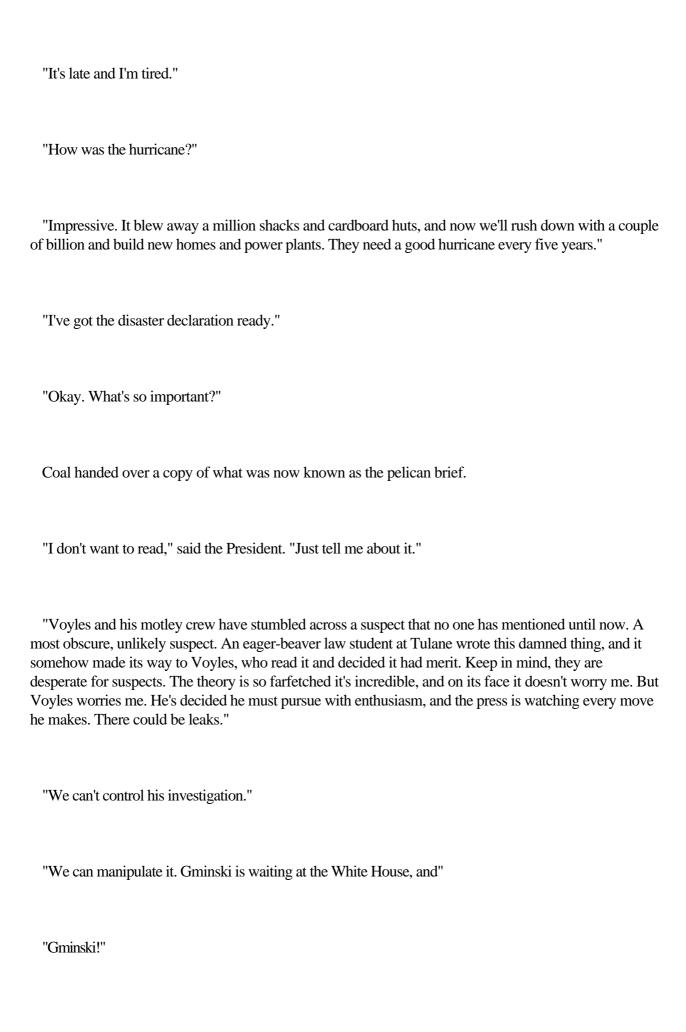


"Not that we know of. And rumor has it he goes under the knife and gets a new face every two or three years."
Coal pondered this for a second. "Okay. What if it's Khamel, and what if he was involved in the killings? What does it mean?"
"It means we'll never find him. There are at least nine countries, including Israel, actively stalking him right now. It means he was paid a bunch of money by someone to use his talents here. We've said all along the killer or killers were professionals who were gone before the bodies were cold."
"So it means little."
"You could say that."
"Fine. What else do you have?"
Lewis glanced at Eric East. "Well, we have the usual daily summary."
"They've been rather dry as of late."
"Yes, they have. We have three hundred and eighty agents working twelve hours a day. Yesterday they interviewed one hundred and sixty people in thirty states. We have"
"Coal held up his hand. Save it. I'll read the summary. It seems safe to say there is nothing new."
"Maybe a small new wrinkle." Lewis looked at Eric East, who was holding a copy of the brief.

"What is it?" Coal asked. East shifted uncomfortably. The brief had been passed upward all day until Voyles read it and liked it. He viewed it as a long shot, unworthy of serious attention, but the brief mentioned the President, and he loved the idea of making Coal and his boss sweat. He instructed Lewis and East to deliver the brief to Coal, and to treat it as an important theory the Bureau was taking seriously. For the first time in a week, Voyles had smiled when he talked of the idiots in the Oval Office reading this little brief and running for cover. Play it up, Voyles said. Tell them we intend to pursue with twenty agents. "It's a theory that has surfaced in the last twenty-four hours, and Director Voyles is quite intrigued by it. He's afraid it could be damaging to the President." Coal was stone-faced, never flinching. "How's that?" East placed the brief on the table. It's all here in this report. Coal glanced at it, then studied East. "Fine. I'll read it later. Is that all?" Lewis stood and buttoned his jacket. "Yes, we'll be going." Coal followed them to the door.

THERE WAS NO FANFARE when Air Force One landed at Andrews a few minutes after ten. The Queen was off raising money, and no friends or family greeted the President as he bounced off the plane and darted into his limousine. Coal was waiting. The President sunk low in the seat. "I didn't expect you," he said.

"I'm sorry. We need to talk." The limo sped away toward the White House.



"Relax, Chief. I personally handed him a copy of this three hours ago, and swore him to secrecy. He may be incompetent, but he can keep a secret. I trust him much more than Voyles."
"I don't trust either one of them."
Coal liked to hear this. He wanted the President to trust no one but him. "I think you should ask the CIA to immediately investigate this. I would like to know everything before Voyles starts digging. Neither will find anything, but if we know more than Voyles, you can convince him to back off. It makes sense, Chief."
The President was frustrated. "It's domestic. CIA has no business snooping around. It's probably illegal."
"It is illegal, technically. But Gminski will do it for you, and he can do it quickly, secretly, and more thoroughly than the FBI."
"It's illegal."
"It's been done before, Chief, many times."
The President watched the traffic. His eyes were puffy and red, but not from fatigue. He had slept three hours on the plane. But he'd spent the day looking sad and concerned for the cameras, and it was hard to snap out of it.
He took the brief and tossed it on the empty seat next to him. "Is it someone we know?"
"Yes."

BECAUSE IT IS A CITY of the night, New Orleans wakes slowly. It's quiet until well after dawn, then shakes the cobwebs and eases into the morning. There's no early rush except on the corridors to and from the suburbs, and the busy streets downtown. This is the same for all cities. But in the French Quarter, the soul of New Orleans, the smell of last night's whiskey and jambalaya and blackened redfish lingers not far above the empty streets until the sun can be seen. An hour or two later, it is replaced with the aroma of French Market coffee and beignets, and around this time the sidewalks reluctantly show signs of life.

Darby curled herself in a chair on the small balcony, sipping coffee and waiting on the sun. Callahan was a few feet away, through the open french doors, still wrapped in sheets and dead to the world. There was a trace of a breeze, but the humidity would return by noon. She pulled his robe closer around her neck, and inhaled the richness of his cologne. She thought of her father, and his baggy cotton button-downs he allowed her to wear when she was a teenager. She would roll the sleeves tightly to her elbows and let the tails hang to her knees, then walk the malls with her friends, secure in her belief that no one was cooler. Her father was her friend. By the time she finished high school, she had the run of his closet, as long as things were washed and neatly pressed and put back on the hangers. She could still smell the Grey Flannel he splashed on his face every day.

If he was living, he would be four years older than Thomas Callahan. Her mother had remarried and moved to Boise. Darby had a brother in Germany. The three seldom talked. Her father had been the glue in a fractious family, and his death had scattered them.

Twenty other people died in the plane crash, and before the funeral arrangements were complete the lawyers were calling. It was her first real exposure to the legal world, and it was not pleasant. The family attorney was a real estate type who knew nothing about litigation. A slick ambulance chaser got next to her brother, and he persuaded the family to sue quickly. His name was Herschel, and for two years the family suffered as Herschel stalled and lied and bungled the case. They settled a week before trial for half a million, after Herschel's cut, and Darby got a hundred thousand.

She decided to be a lawyer. If a clown like Herschel could do it and make big bucks while wreaking havoc on society, then she certainly could do it for a nobler purpose. She thought of Herschel often. When she passed the bar exam, her first lawsuit would be filed against him for malpractice. She wanted to work for an environmental firm. Finding a job, she knew, would not be a problem.

The hundred thousand was intact. Her mother's new husband was a paper company executive who was a little older and a lot wealthier, and shortly after their marriage she divided her portion of the settlement between Darby and her brother. She said the money reminded her of her deceased husband, and the gesture was symbolic. Though she still loved their father, she had a new life in a new city with a new husband who would retire in five years with money to burn. Darby had been confused by the

symbolic gesture, but appreciated it and took the money.

The hundred thousand had doubled. She placed most of it in mutual funds, but only in those without holdings in chemical and petroleum companies. She drove an Accord and lived modestly. Her wardrobe was basic law school, purchased from factory outlet stores. She and Callahan enjoyed the better restaurants in town, and never ate at the same place twice. It was always Dutch treat.

He cared little for money, and never pressed her for information. She had more than the typical law student, but Tulane had its share of rich kids.

They dated for a month before they went to bed. She laid the ground rules, and he anxiously agreed to them. There would be no other women. They would be very discreet. And he had to stop drinking so much.

He stuck to the first two, but the drinking continued. His father, grandfather, and brothers were heavy drinkers, and it was sort of expected of him. But for the first time in his life, Thomas Callahan was in love, madly in love, and he knew the point at which the Scotch was interfering with his woman. He was careful. With the exception of last week and the personal trauma of losing Rosenberg, he never drank before 5 P.M. When they were together, he abandoned the Chivas when he'd had enough and thought it might affect his performance.

It was amusing to watch a forty-five-year-old man fall for the first time. He struggled to maintain a level of coolness, but in their private little moments he was as silly as a sophomore.

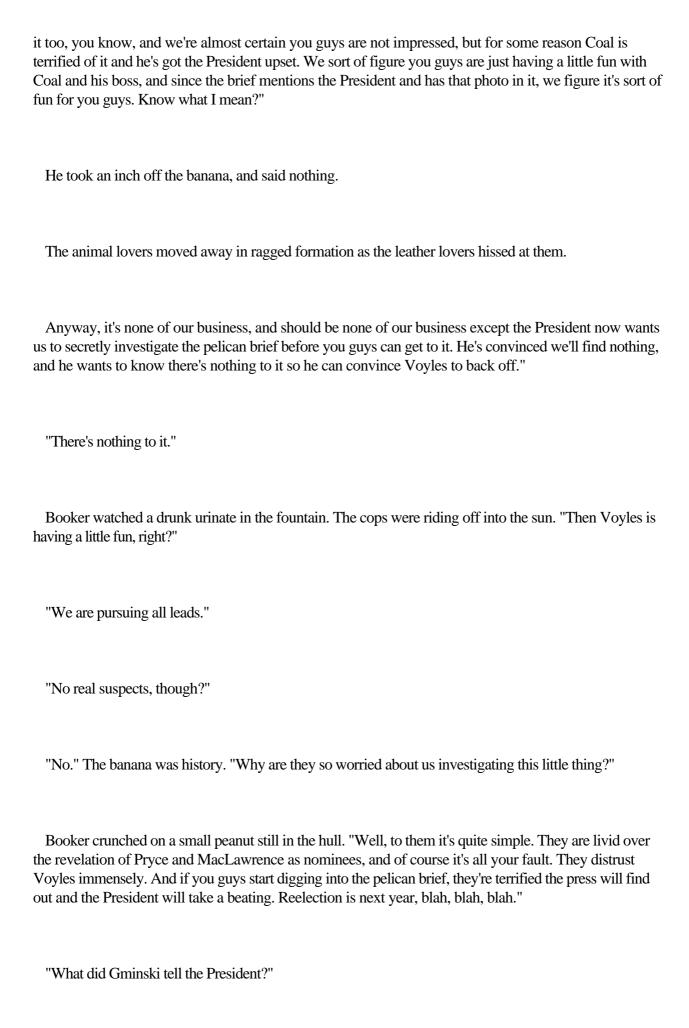
She kissed him on the cheek, and covered him with a quilt. Her clothes were placed neatly on a chair. She locked the front door quietly behind her. The sun was up now, peeking through the buildings across Dauphine. The sidewalk was empty.

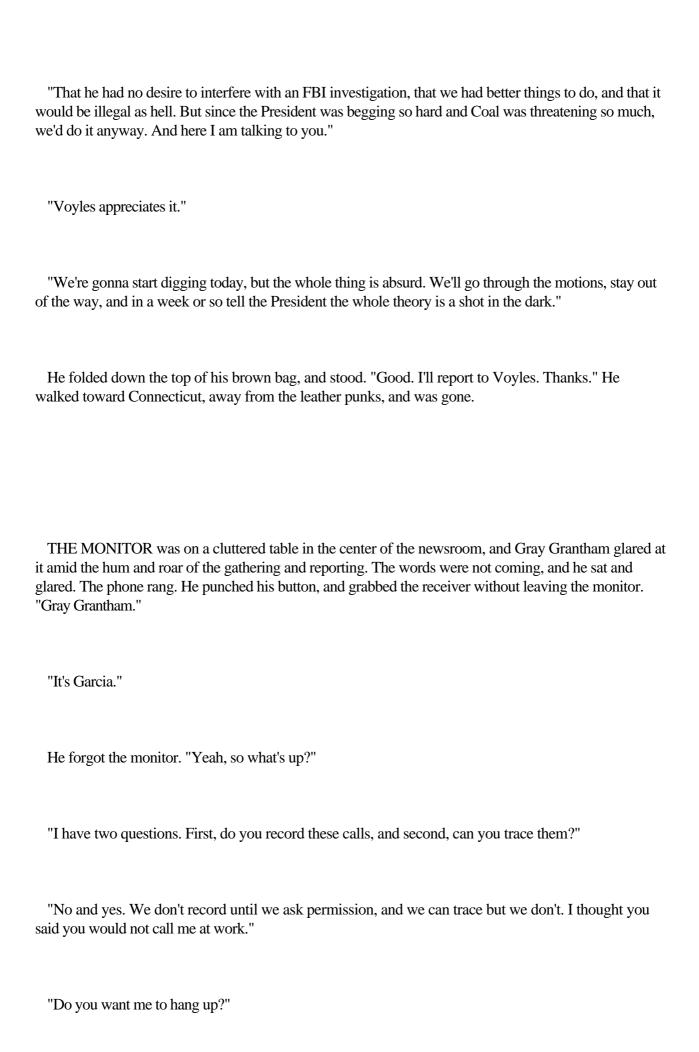
She had a class in three hours, then Callahan and con law at eleven. There was a mock court appellate brief due in a week. Her casenote for law review was gathering dust. She was behind in classwork for two courses. It was time to be a student again. She had wasted four days playing detective, and she cursed herself for it.

The Accord was around the corner and down a half a block.

THEY WATCHED HER, and it was enjoyable. Tight jeans, baggy sweater, long legs, sunglasses to hide the eyes with no makeup. They watched her close the door and walk quickly along Royale, then disappear around the corner. The hair was shoulder-length and appeared to be dark red. It was her.
HE CARRIED HIS LUNCH in a little brown paper bag, and found an empty park bench with his back to New Hampshire. He hated Dupont Circle, with its bums, druggies, perverts, aging hippies, and black-leather punks with red spiked hair and vicious tongues. Across the fountain, a well-dressed man with a loudspeaker was assembling his group of animal rights activists for a march to the White House. The leather people jeered and cursed them, but four mounted policemen were close enough to prevent trouble.
He looked at his watch and peeled a banana. Noon, and he preferred to eat elsewhere. The meeting would be brief. He watched the cursing and jeering, and saw his contact emerge through the crowd. Their eyes met, a nod, and he was sitting on the bench next to him. His name was Booker, from Langley They met here occasionally, when the lines of communication became tangled or blurred and their bosses needed to hear real words that no one else would hear.
Booker had no lunch. He began shelling roasted peanuts and throwing the hulls under the circular bench. "How's Mr. Voyles?"
"Mean as hell. The usual."
He threw peanuts in his mouth. "Gminski was in the White House until midnight last night," Booker said
There was no response to this. Voyles knew it.

Booker continued. "They've panicked over there. This little pelican thing has scared them. We've read







Garcia was gone. Grantham punched seven digits, then six, then four. He wrote the number, then flipped through the yellow pages until he found Pay Phones Inc. The Vendor Location listed the number on Pennsylvania Avenue near the Justice Department.

THE ARGUMENT started with dessert, a portion of the meal Callahan preferred to drink. She was nice enough when she clicked off the drinks he'd already consumed with dinner: two double Scotches while they waited on a table, one more before they ordered, and with the fish two bottles of wine, of which she'd had two glasses. He was drinking too fast and getting sloppy, and by the time she finished rattling off this accounting he was angry. He ordered Drambuie for dessert, because it was his favorite, and because it was suddenly a matter of principle. He gulped it and ordered another, and she was furious.

Darby spooned her coffee and ignored him. Mouton's was packed, and she just wanted to leave without a scene and get to her apartment alone.

The argument turned nasty on the sidewalk as they walked away from the restaurant. He pulled the keys to the Porsche from his pocket, and she said he was too drunk to drive. Give her the keys. He gripped them and staggered on in the direction of the parking lot, three blocks away. She said she would walk. Have a nice one, he said. She followed a few steps behind, embarrassed at the stumbling figure in front of her. She pleaded with him. His blood level was at least point-two-zero. He was a law professor, dammit. He would kill someone. He staggered faster, coming perilously close to the curb, then weaving away. He yelled over his shoulder, something about driving better drunk than she could sober. She fell behind. She'd taken a ride before when he was like this, and she knew what a drunk could do in a Porsche.

He crossed the street blindly, hands stuck deep in his pockets as if out for a casual stroll in the late night. He misjudged the curb, hit it with the toes instead of the sole, and went sprawling and bouncing and cursing along the sidewalk. He scrambled up quickly before she could reach him. Leave me alone, dammit, he told her. Just give me the keys, she begged, or I'm walking. He shoved her away. Have a nice one, he said with a laugh. She'd never seen him this drunk. He'd never touched her in anger, drunk or not.

Next to the parking lot was a greasy little dive with neon beer signs covering the windows. She looked inside the open door for help, but thought, how stupid. It was filled with drunks.

She yelled at him as he approached the Porsche. "Thomas! Please! Let me drive!" She was on the sidewalk and would go no farther.

He stumbled on, waving her off, mumbling to himself. He unlocked the door, squeezed downward, and disappeared between the other cars. The engine started and roared as he gunned it.

Darby leaned on the side of the building a few feet from the parking lot's exit. She looked at the street, and almost hoped for a cop. She would rather have him arrested than dead.

It was too far to walk. She would watch him drive away, then call a cab, then ignore him for a week. At least a week. Have a nice one, she repeated to herself. He gunned it again and squealed tires.

The explosion knocked her to the sidewalk. She landed on all fours, face down, stunned for a second, then immediately aware of the heat and the tiny pieces of fiery debris falling in the street. She gaped in horror at the parking lot. The Porsche flipped in a perfect violent somersault and landed upside down. The tires and wheels and doors and fenders slung free. The car was a brilliant fireball, roaring away with flames instantly devouring it.

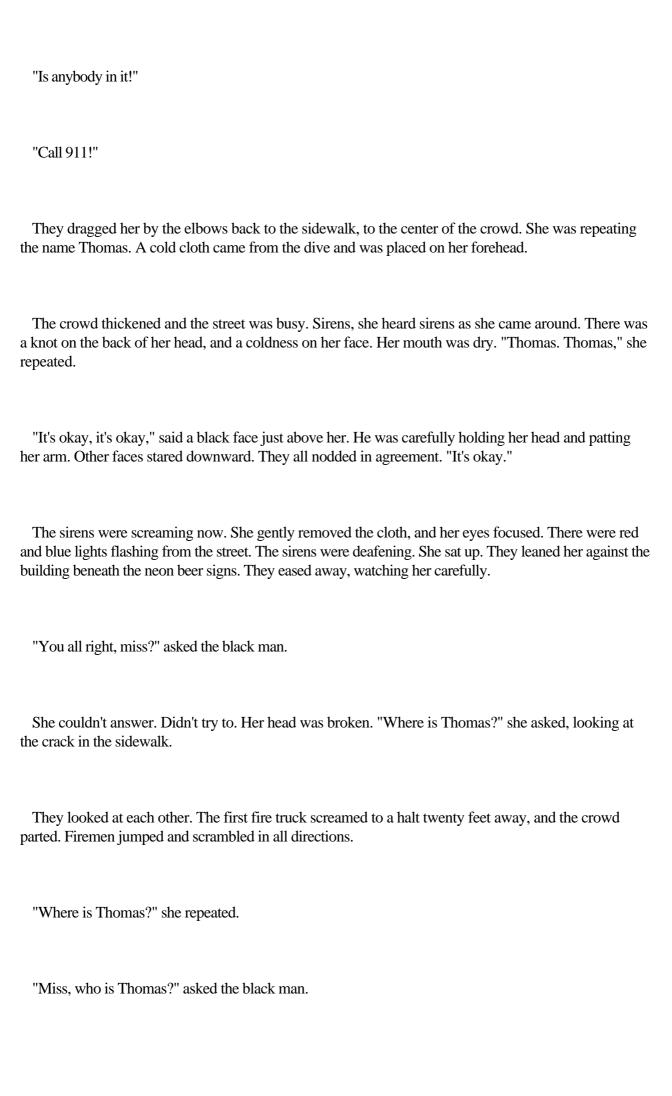
Darby started toward it, screaming for him. Debris fell around her and the heat slowed her. She stopped thirty feet away, screaming with hands over her mouth.

Then a second explosion flipped it again and drove her away. She tripped, and her head fell hard on the bumper of another car. The pavement was hot to her face, and that was the last she remembered for a moment.

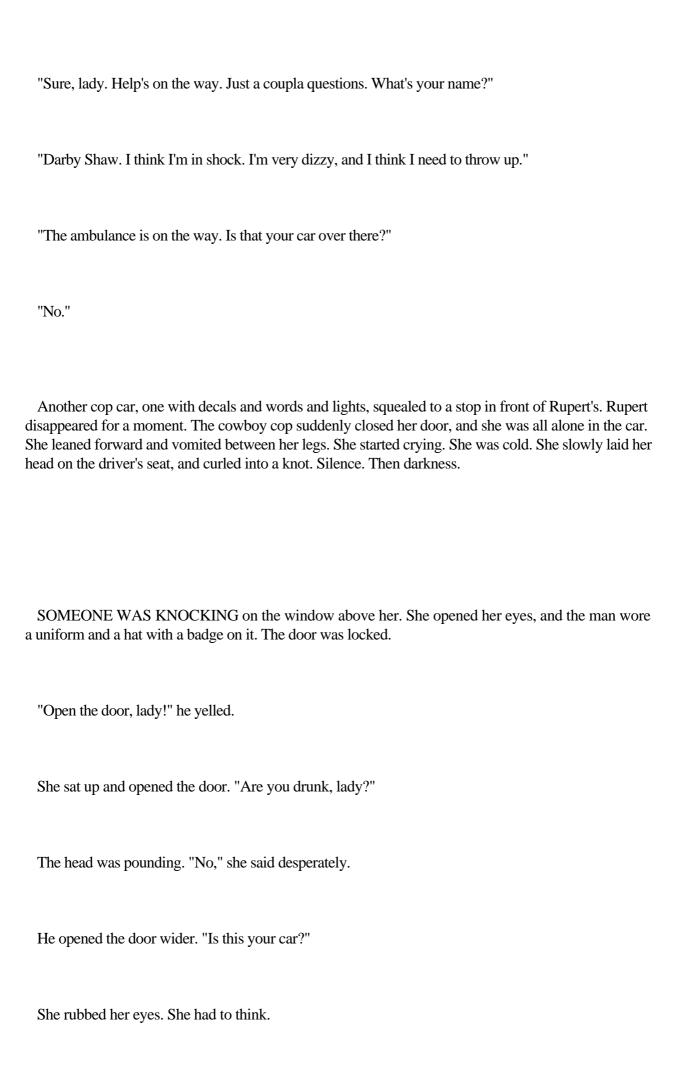
The dive emptied and the drunks were everywhere. They stood along the sidewalk and stared. A couple tried to advance, but the heat reddened their faces and kept them away. Thick, heavy smoke billowed from the fireball, and within seconds two other cars were on fire. There were shouts and voices in panic.

"Whose car is it!"

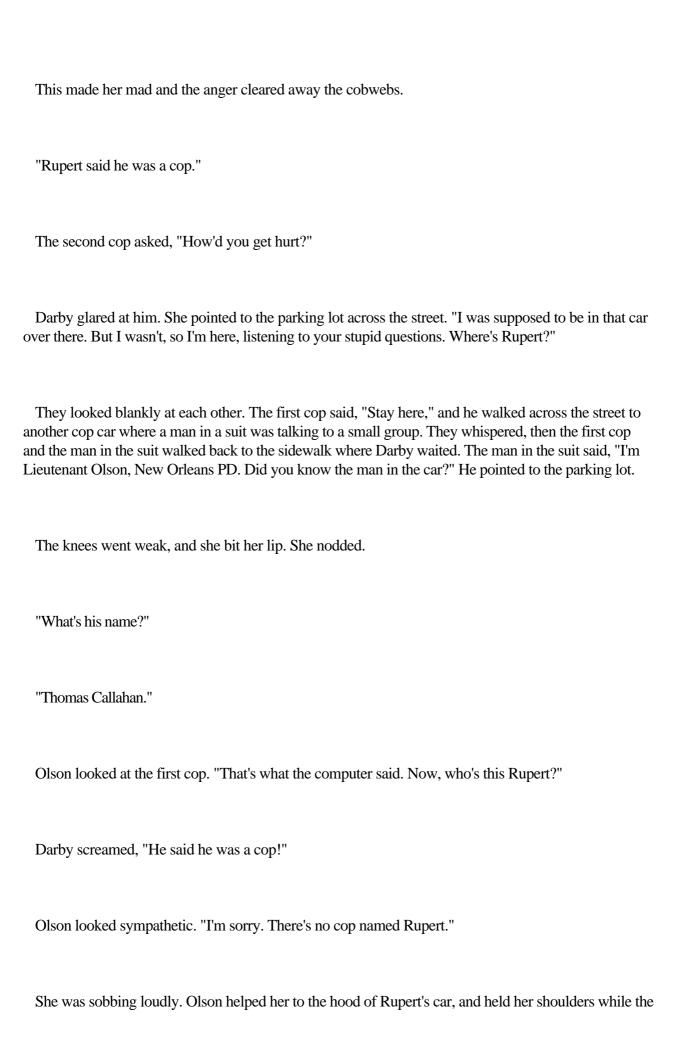
"Call 911!"











crying subsided and she fought to regain control. "Check the plates," Olson told the second cop, who quickly scribbled down the tag number from Rupert's car and called it in. Olson gently held both her shoulders with his hands and looked at her eyes. "Were you with Callahan?" She nodded, still crying but much quieter. Olson glanced at the first cop. "How did you get in this car?" Olson asked slowly and softly. She wiped her eyes with her finger and stared at Olson. "This guy Rupert, who said he was a cop, came and got me from over there, and brought me over here. He put me in the car, and this other cop with cowboy boots starting asking questions. Another cop car pulled up, and they left. Then I guess I passed out. I don't know. I would like to see a doctor." "Get my car," Olson said to the first cop. "The second cop was back with a puzzled look. The computer has no record of this tag number. Must be fake tags." Olson took her arm and led her to his car. He spoke quickly to the two cops. "I'm taking her to Charity. Wrap this up and meet me there. Impound the car. We'll check it later." She sat in Olson's car listening to the radio squawk and staring at the parking lot. Four cars had burned. The Porsche was upside down in the center, nothing but a crumpled frame. A handful of firemen

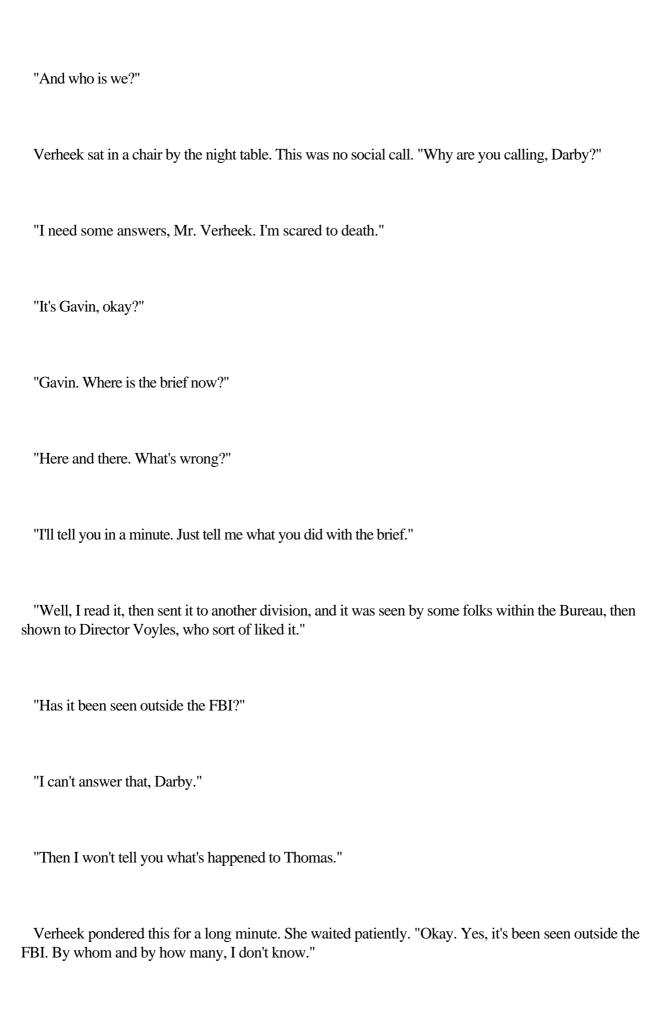
and other emergency types milled about. A cop was stringing yellow crime-scene tape around the lot.

She touched the knot on the back of her head. No blood. Tears dripped off her chin.



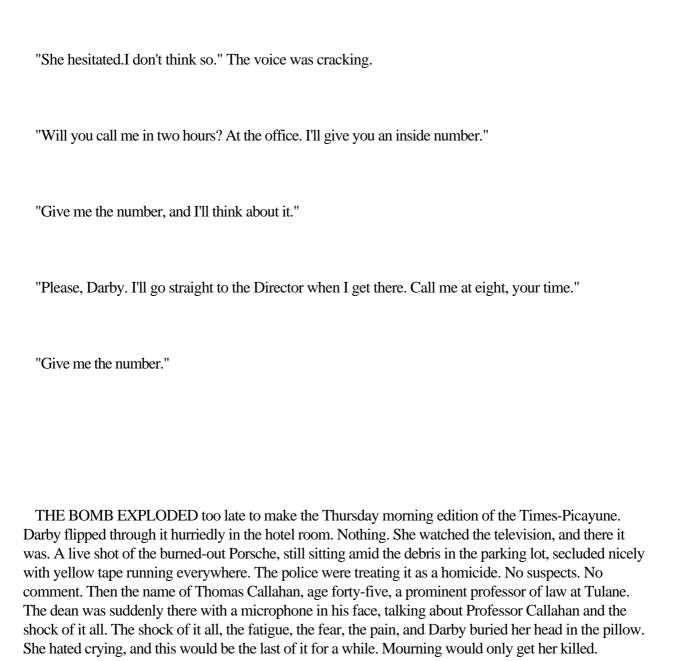
She stared at the traffic lights and shook her head. "You're certain it was intentional?" "No doubt about it. It was a very powerful explosive. We found a piece of a foot stuck in a chain-link fence eighty feet away. I'm sorry, okay. He was murdered." "Maybe someone got the wrong car." "That's always possible. We'll check out everything. I take it you were supposed to be in the car with him." She tried to speak, but could not hold the tears. She buried her face in the handkerchief. He parked between two ambulances near the emergency entrance at Charity, and left the blue lights on. He helped her quickly inside to a dirty room where fifty people sat in various degrees of pain and discomfort. She found a seat by the water fountain. Olson talked to the lady behind the window, and he raised his voice but Darby couldn't understand him. A small boy with a bloody towel around his foot cried in his mother's lap. A young black girl was about to give birth. There was not a doctor or nurse in sight. No one was in a hurry. Olson crouched in front of her. "It'll be a few minutes. Sit tight. I'm gonna move the car, and I'll be back in a minute. Do you feel like talking?" "Yeah, sure." He was gone. She checked again for blood, and found none. The double doors opened wide, and two angry nurses came after the girl in labor. They sort of dragged her away, back through the doors and down the hall.

Darby waited, then followed. With the red eyes and handkerchief, she looked like some child's mother. The hall was a zoo with nurses and orderlies and the wounded yelling and moving about. She turned a corner and saw an EXIT sign. Through the door, into another hall, much quieter, another door, and she



"He's dead, Gavin. He was murdered around ten last night. Someone planted a car bomb for both of us. I got lucky, but now they're after me."
Verheek was hovering over the phone, scribbling notes. "Are you hurt?"
"Physically, I'm okay."
"Where are you?"
"New Orleans."
"Are you certain, Darby? I mean, I know you're certain, but, dammit, who would want to kill him?"
"I met a couple of them."
"How'd you"
"It's a long story. Who saw the brief, Gavin? Thomas gave it to you Monday night. It's been passed around, and forty-eight hours later he's dead. And I'm supposed to be dead with him. It fell into the wrong hands, wouldn't you say?"
"Are you safe?"
"Who the hell knows?"
"Where are you staying? What's your phone number?"





EVEN THOUGH it was a wonderful crisis, with the ratings up and Rosenberg dead, with his image clean and polished and America feeling good about itself because he was in command, with the Democrats running for cover and reelection next year in the bag, he was sick of this crisis and its relentless predawn meetings. He was sick of F. Denton Voyles and his smugness and arrogance, and his squatty little figure sitting on the other side of his desk in a wrinkled trench coat looking out a window while he addressed the President of the United States. He would be here in a minute for another meeting before breakfast, another tense encounter in which Voyles would tell only a portion of what he knew.

He was sick of being in the dark, and fed only what bits and crumbs Voyles chose to throw his way. Gminski would throw him a few, and somehow in the midst of all this crumb scattering and gathering he was supposed to get enough and be satisfied. He knew nothing compared to them. At least he had Coal to plow through their paper and memorize it all, and keep them honest.

He was sick of Coal, too. Sick of his perfectness and sleeplessness. Sick of his brilliance. Sick of his penchant for beginning each day when the sun was somewhere over the Atlantic, and planning every damned minute of every damned hour until it was over the Pacific. Then he, Coal, would load up a box of the day's junk, take it home, read it, decipher it, store it, then come in a few hours later blazing away with all the painfully boring mishmash he had just devoured. When Coal was tired, he slept five hours a night, but normal was three or four. He left his office in the West Wing at eleven each night, read all the way home in the back of his limo, then about the time the limo cooled off Coal was waiting on it for the return ride to the White House. He considered it a sin to arrive at his desk after 5 A.M. And if he could work a hundred and twenty hours a week, then everyone else should be able to do at least eighty. He demanded eighty. After three years, no one in this Administration could remember all the people fired by Fletcher Coal for not working eighty hours a week. Happened at least three times a month.

Coal was happiest on mornings when the tension was thick and a nasty meeting was planned. In the past week this thing with Voyles had kept him smiling. He was standing beside the desk, going through the mail while the President scanned the Post and two secretaries scurried about.

The President glanced at him. Perfect black suit, white shirt, red silk tie, a bit too much grease on the hair above the ears. He was sick of him, but he'd get over it when the crisis passed and he could get back to golf and Coal could sweat the details. He told himself he had that kind of energy and stamina when he was only thirty-seven, but he knew better.

Coal snapped his fingers, glared at the secretaries, and they happily ran from the Oval Office.

"And he said he wouldn't come if I was here. That's hilarious." Coal was clearly amused.

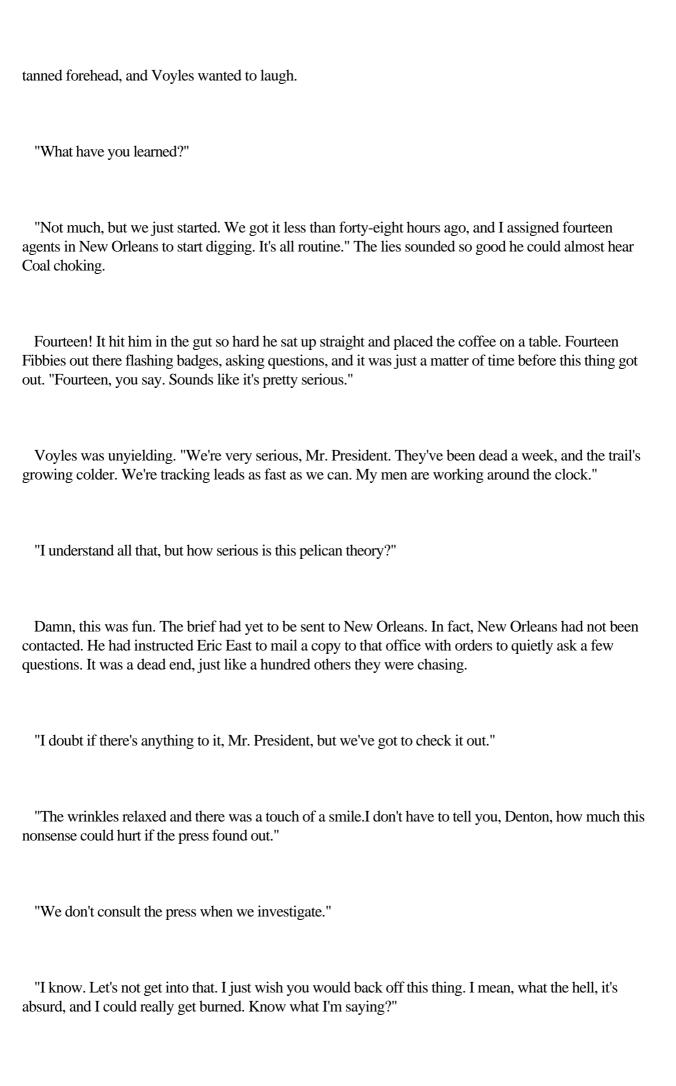
"I don't think he likes you," the President said.

"He loves people he can run over."

"I guess I need to be sweet to him."



"Yes, he can. I have to really watch him. He's very bright and drives hard, but he tends to overdo it at times."
"He's a son of a bitch, and I'll say it to his face." Voyles glanced at an air vent above the portrait of Thomas Jefferson where a camera watched it all below.
"Yes, well, I'll keep him out of your way until this thing is over."
"You do that."
The President slowly sipped from his coffee and pondered what to say next. Voyles was not known for his conversation.
"I need a favor."
Voyles stared with rigid and unblinking eyes. "Yes, sir."
"I need the scoop on this pelican thing. It's a wild idea, but, hell, it mentions me, sort of. How serious are you taking it?"
Oh, this was funny. Voyles fought off a smile. It was working. Mr. President and Mr. Coal were sweating the pelican brief. They had received it late Tuesday, worried with it all day
Wednesday, and now in the waking hours of Thursday were on their knees begging about something one notch above a practical joke.
"We're investigating, Mr. President." It was a lie, but how could he know? "We are pursuing all leads,



"Voyles was brutal. Are you asking me to ignore a suspect, Mr. President?"

Coal leaned toward the screen. No, I'm telling you to forget this pelican brief! He almost said it out loud. He could make it real plain for Voyles. He could spell it out, then slap the dumpy little wretch if he got smart. But he was hiding in a locked room, away from the action. And, for the moment, he knew he was where he belonged.

The President shifted and recrossed his legs at the knees. Come on, Denton, you know what I'm saying. There are bigger fish in the pond. The press is watching this investigation, just dying to find out who's a suspect. You know how they are. I don't have to tell you that I have no friends with the press. Even my own press secretary dislikes me. Ha, ha, ha. Forget about it for a while. Back off and chase the real suspects. This thing is a joke, but it could embarrass the hell out of me."

Denton looked hard at him. Relentless.	
The President shifted again. "What about this Khamel thing? Sounds pretty good, huh?"	
"Could be."	

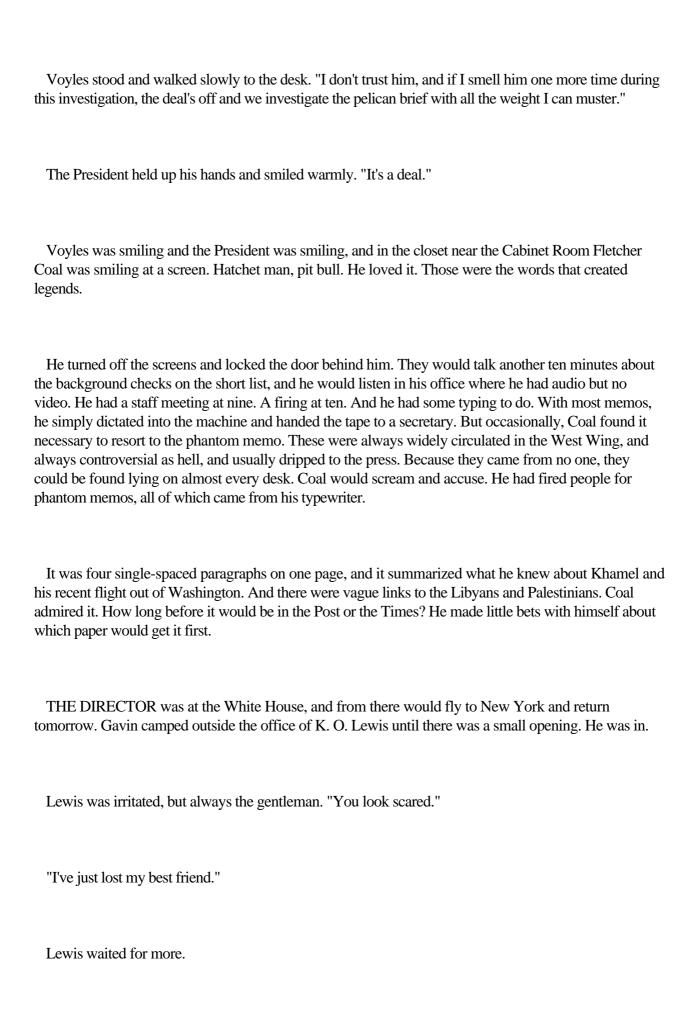
"Yeah. Since we're talking numbers, how many men have you assigned to Khamel?"

Voyles said, "Fifteen," and almost laughed. The President's mouth fell open. The hottest suspect in the game gets fifteen, and this damned pelican thing gets fourteen.

Coal smiled and shook his head. Voyles had been caught in his own lies. On the bottom of page four of the Wednesday report, Eric East and K. O. Lewis gave the number at thirty, not fifteen. Relax, Chief, Coal whispered to the screen. He's playing with you.

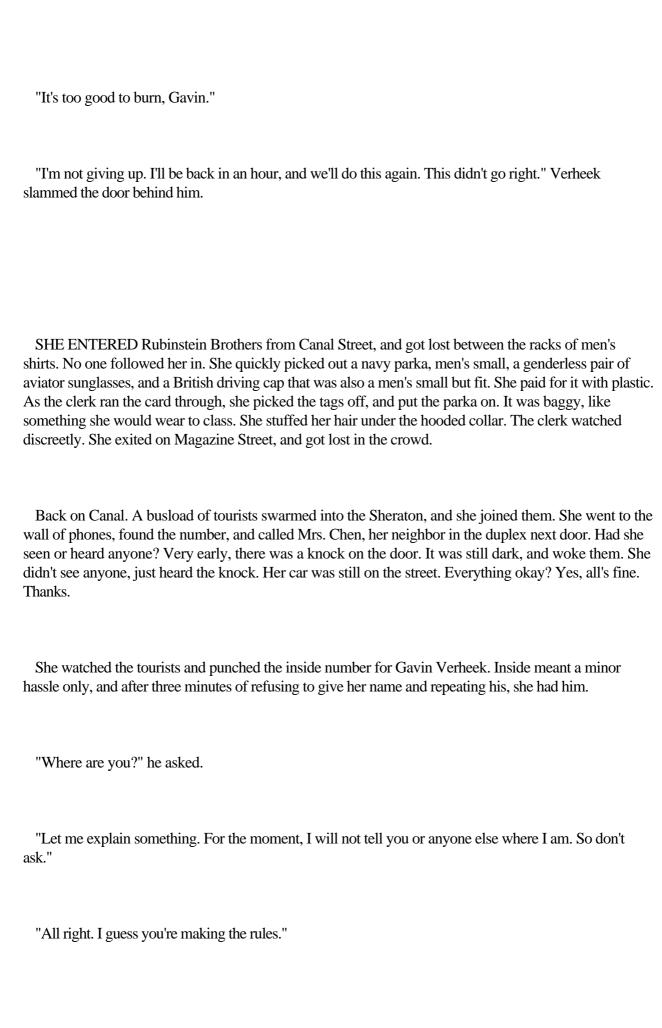
The President was anything but relaxed. "Good god, Denton. Why only fifteen? I thought this was a significant break."

"Maybe a few more than that. I'm running this investigation, Mr. President."
"I know. And you're doing a fine job. I'm not meddling. I just wish you'd consider spending your time elsewhere. That's all. When I read the pelican brief I almost vomited. If the press saw it and started digging, I'd be crucified."
"So you're asking me to back off?"
The President leaned forward and stared fiercely at Voyles. "I'm not asking, Denton. I'm telling you to leave it alone. Ignore it for a couple of weeks. Spend your time elsewhere. If it flares up again, take another look. I'm still the boss around here, remember?"
Voyles relented and managed a tiny smile. "I'll make you a deal. Your hatchet man Coal has done a number on me with the press. They've eaten my lunch over the security we provided to Rosenberg and Jensen."
The President nodded solemnly.
"You get that pit bull off my ass, keep him away from me, and I'll forget the pelican theory."
"I don't make deals."
Voyles sneered but kept his cool. "Good. I'll send fifty agents to New Orleans tomorrow. And fifty the next day. We'll be flashing badges all over town and doing our damnedest to attract attention."
The President jumped to his feet and walked to the windows overlooking the Rose Garden. Voyles sat motionless and waited.
"All right, all right. It's a deal. I can control Fletcher Coal."









"Thank you. What did Mr. Voyles say?"
"Mr. Voyles was at the White House and unavailable. I'll try to talk to him later today."
"That's pretty weak, Gavin. You've been at the office for almost four hours, and you have nothing. I expected more."
"Be patient, Darby."
"Patience will get me killed. They're after me, aren't they, Gavin?"
"I don't know."
"What would you do if you knew you were supposed to be dead, and the people trying to kill you have had assassinated two Supreme Court Justices, and knocked off a simple law pro fessor, and they have billions of dollars which they obviously don't mind using to kill with? What would you do, Gavin?"
"Go to the FBI."
"Thomas went to the FBI, and he's dead."
"Thanks, Darby. That's not fair."
"I'm not worried about fairness or feelings. I'm more concerned with staying alive until noon."
"Don't go to your apartment."



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S NAME was Croft, and he'd worked for the Post for seven years until his third drug conviction sent him away for nine months. Upon parole, he declared himself to be a free-lance artist, and advertised as such in the yellow pages. The phone seldom rang. He did a little of this work; this slithering around shooting people who did not know they were targets. Many of his clients were divorce lawyers who needed dirt for trial. After two years of free-lancing, he had picked up a few tricks and now considered himself a halfass private investigator. He charged forty bucks an hour when he could get it.

Another client was Gray Grantham, an old friend from his newspaper days who called when he needed dirt. Grantham was a serious, ethical reporter with just a touch of sleaze, and when he needed a dirty trick, he called. He liked Grantham because he was honest about his sleaziness. The rest were so pious.

He was in Grantham's Volvo because it had a phone. It was noon, and he was smoking his lunch, wondering if the smell would linger with all the windows down. He did his best work half-stoned. When you stare at motels for a living, you need to be stoned.

There was a nice breeze coming in from the passenger's side, blowing the smell onto Pennsylvania. He was parked illegally, smoking dope, and not really concerned. He had less than an ounce on him, and his probation officer smoked it too, so what the hell.

The phone booth was a block and a half ahead, on the sidewalk but away from the street. With his telephoto lens, he could almost read the phone book hanging from the rack. Piece of cake. A large woman was inside, filling the booth and talking with her hands. Croft took a drag and watched the mirror for cops. This was a tow-away zone. Traffic was heavy on Pennsylvania.

At twenty after twelve, the woman fought her way out of the booth, and from nowhere a young man with a nice suit appeared and closed the door. Croft got his Nikon and rested the lens on the steering wheel. It was cool and sunny, and the sidewalk bustled with lunch traffic. The shoulders and heads moved quickly by. A gap. Click. A gap. Click. The subject was punching numbers and glancing around. This was their man.

He talked for thirty seconds, and the car phone rang three times and stopped. It was the signal from Grantham at the Post. This was their man, and he was talking. Croft fired away. Get all you can get,

Grantham had said. A gap. Click. Click. Heads and shoulders. A gap. Click. Click. His eyes darted around as he talked, but he kept his back to the street. Full face. Click. Croft burned a roll of thirty-six in two minutes, then grabbed another Nikon. He screwed on the lens, and waited for a mob to pass.

He took the last drag and thumped it into the street. This was so easy. Oh sure, it took talent to capture the image in a studio, but this street work was much more fun. There was something felonious about stealing a face with a hidden camera.

The subject was a man of few words. He hung up, looked around, opened the door, looked around, and started toward Croft. Click, click, click. Full face, full figure, walking faster, getting closer, beautiful, beautiful. Croft worked feverishly, then at the last moment laid the Nikon in the seat and looked at Pennsylvania as their man walked by and disappeared in a group of secretaries.

What a fool. When you're on the run, never use the same pay phone twice.

GARCIA WAS SHADOW BOXING. He had a wife and child, he said, and he was scared. There was a career ahead with plenty of money, and if he paid his dues and kept his mouth shut he would be a wealthy man. But he wanted to talk. He rambled on about how he wanted to talk, had something to say and all, but just couldn't make the decision. He didn't trust anyone.

Grantham didn't push. He let him ramble long enough for Croft to do his number. Garcia would eventually spill his guts. He wanted to so badly. He had called three times now, and was growing comfortable with his new friend Grantham, who'd played this game many times and knew how it worked. The first step was to relax and build trust, to treat them with warmth and respect, to talk about right and wrong and moralities. Then they would talk.

The pictures were beautiful. Croft was not his first choice. He was usually so bombed you could tell it in the photography. But Croft was sleazy and discreet, with a working knowledge of journalism, and he happened to be available on short notice. He had picked twelve and blown them to five by seven, and they were outstanding. Right profile. Left profile. Full face into the phone. Full face looking at the camera. Full figure less than twenty feet away. Piece of cake, Croft said.

Garcia was under thirty, a very nice-looking, clean-cut lawyer. Dark, short hair. Dark eyes. Maybe Hispanic, but the skin was not dark. The clothes were expensive. Navy suit, probably wool. No stripes or patterns. Basic white spread collar with a silk tie. Basic black or burgundy wing tips with a sparkling shine. The absence of a briefcase was puzzling. But then, it was lunch, and he probably ran from the office to make the call, then back to the office. The Justice Department was a block away.

Grantham studied the pictures and kept an eye on the door. Sarge was never late. It was dark and the club was filling up. Grantham's was the only white face within three blocks.

Of the tens of thousands of government lawyers in D.C., he had seen a few who knew how to dress, but not many. Especially the younger ones. They started at forty a year and clothes were not important. Clothes were important to Garcia, and he was too young and well dressed to be a government lawyer.

So he was a private one, in a firm for about three or four years now and hitting somewhere around eighty grand. Great. That narrowed it down to fifty thousand lawyers and no doubt expanding by the moment.

The door opened and a cop walked in. Through the smoke and haze, he could tell it was Cleve. This was a respectable joint with no dice or whores, so the presence of a cop was not alarming. He sat in the booth across from Grantham.

"Did you pick this place?" Grantham asked.

"Yeah. You like it?"

"Let's put it like this. We're trying to be inconspicuous, right? I'm here picking up secrets from a White House employee. Pretty heavy stuff. Now tell me, Cleve, do I look inconspicuous sitting here in all my whiteness?"

"I hate to tell you this, Grantham, but you're not nearly as famous as you think. You see those dudes at the bar." They looked at the bar lined with construction workers. "I'd give you my paycheck if any dude there has ever read the Washington Post, heard of Gray Grantham, or gives a damn what happens at the White House."



"I'm sure that'll give him a thrill."

The patrol car drove away, and Grantham hurried to his Volvo, now filled with the stench of burnt grass. He locked the door, turned on the dome light, and ripped open the envelope. It was clearly an internal White House memo, and it was about an assassin named Khamel.

HE WAS FLYING across town. Out of Brightwood, onto Sixteenth and south toward central Washington. It was almost seven-thirty, and if he could put it together in an hour, it would make the Late City edition, the largest of half a dozen editions that began rolling off the presses at ten-thirty. Thank god for the little yuppie car phone he had been embarrassed to buy. He called Smith Keen, the assistant managing editor/investigations, who was still in the newsroom on the fifth floor. He called a friend at the foreign desk, and asked him to pull everything on Khamel.

He was suspicious of the memo. The words were too sensitive to put on paper, then sling around the office like the latest policy on coffee or bottled water or vacations. Someone, probably Fletcher Coal, wanted the world to know that Khamel had emerged as a suspect, and that he was an Arab of all things, and had close ties to Libya and Iran and Iraq, countries led by fiery idiots who hated America. Someone in the White House of Fools wanted the story on the front page.

But it was a helluva story and it was front-page news. He and Smith Keen had it finished by nine. They found two old pictures of a man widely believed to be Khamel, but so dissimilar they appeared to be of different people. Keen said run both of them. The file on Khamel was thin. Much rumor and legend, but little meat. Grantham mentioned the Pope, the British diplomat, the German banker, and the ambush of the Israeli soldiers. And now, according to a confidential source at the White House, a most reliable and trusted source, Khamel was a suspect in the killings of Justices Rosenberg and Jensen.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS after hitting the street, she was still alive. If she could make it to morning, she could start another day with new ideas about what to do and where to go. For now, she was tired. She was in a room on the fifteenth floor of the Marriott, with the door bolted, lights on, and the mighty can of Mace lying on the bedspread. Her thick, dark red hair was now in a paper sack in the closet. The

last time she cut her hair she was three years old, and her mother whipped her tail.

It took two painful hours with dull scissors to cut it off yet leave some semblance of style. She would keep it under a cap or hat until who knows when. It took another two hours to color it black. She could've bleached it and gone blonde, but that would be obvious. She assumed she was dealing with professionals, and for some unfathomable reason she determined at the drugstore that they might expect her to do this and become a blonde. And what the hell. The stuff came in a bottle, and if she woke up tomorrow with a wild hair she could go blonde. The chameleon strategy. Change colors every day and drive 'em crazy. Clairol had at least eighty-five shades.

She was dead tired but afraid of sleep. She had not seen her friend from the Sheraton during the day, but the more she moved around the more the faces looked the same. He was out there, she knew. And he had friends. If they could assassinate Rosenberg and Jensen, and knock off Thomas Callahan, she would be easy.

She couldn't go near her car, and she didn't want to rent one. Rentals leave records. And they were probably watching. She could fly, but they were stalking the airports. Take a bus, but she'd never bought a ticket or seen the inside of a Greyhound.

And after they realized she had disappeared, they would expect her to run. She was just an amateur, a little college girl brokenhearted after watching her man blown to bits and fried. She would make a mad dash somewhere, get out of the city, and they would pick her off.

She rather liked the city at this moment. It had a million hotel rooms, almost as many alleys and dives and bars, and it always had crowds of people strolling along Bourbon, Chartres, Dauphine, and Royal. She knew it well, especially the Quarter, where life was within walking distance. She would move from hotel to hotel for a few days, until when? She didn't know when. She didn't know why. Moving just seemed intelligent under the circumstances. She would stay off the streets in the mornings, and try to sleep then. She would change clothes and hats and sunglasses. She would start smoking, and keep one in her face. She would move until she got tired of moving, then she might leave. It was okay to be scared. She had to keep thinking. She would survive.

She thought of calling the cops, but not now. They took names and kept records, and they could be dangerous. She thought of calling Thomas' brother in Mobile, but there wasn't a single thing the poor man could do to help her at this moment. She thought of calling the dean, but how could she explain the brief, Gavin Verheek, the FBI, the car bomb, Rosenberg and Jensen, and her on the run and make it sound believable. Forget the dean. She didn't like him anyway. She thought of calling a couple of friends from law school, but people talk, and people listen, and they could be out there listening to the people talking about poor Callahan. She wanted to talk to Alice Stark, her best friend. Alice was worried, and Alice

would go to the cops and tell them her friend Darby Shaw was missing. She would call Alice tomorrow.

She dialed room service, and ordered a Mexican salad and a bottle of red wine. She would drink all of it, then sit in a chair with the Mace and watch the door until she fell asleep.

GMINSKI'S LIMO made a wild U-turn on Canal as if it owned the street, and came to a sudden stop in front of the Sheraton. Both rear doors flew open. Gminski was out first, followed quickly by three aides who scurried after him with bags and briefcases.

It was almost 2 A.M., and the Director was obviously in a hurry. He did not stop at the front desk, but went straight for the elevators. The aides ran behind him and held the elevator door for him, and no one spoke as they rode up six floors.

Three of his agents were waiting in a corner room. One of them opened the door, and Gminski barged through it without any sort of greeting. The aides threw the bags on one bed. The Director yanked off his jacket and threw it in a chair.

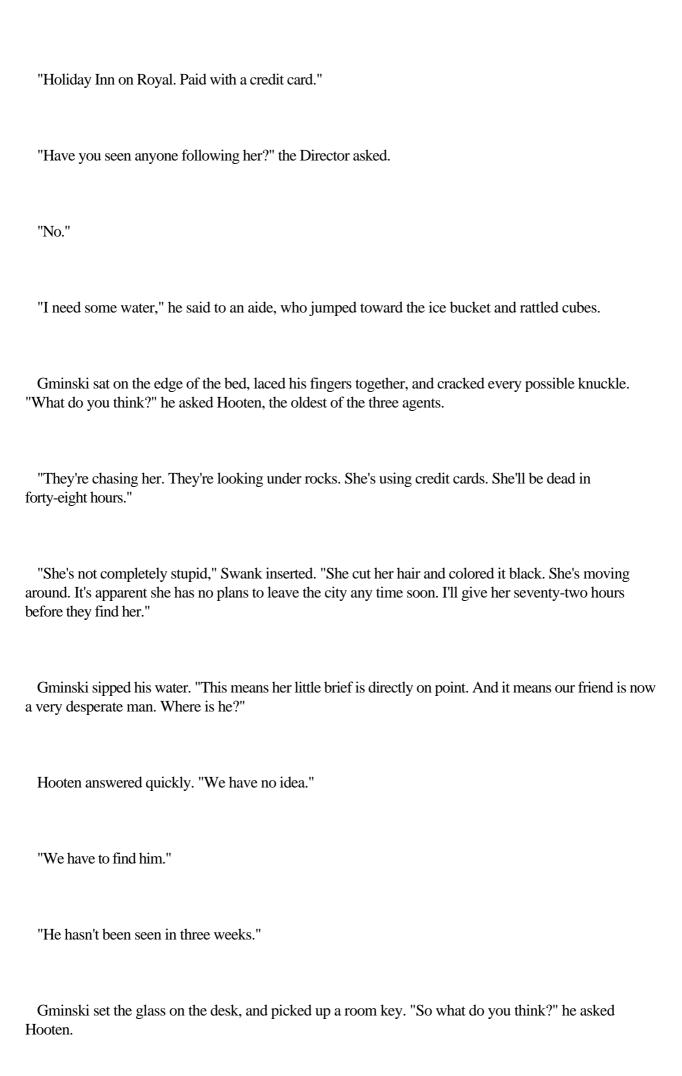
"Where is she?" he snapped at an agent by the name of Hooten. The one named Swank opened the curtains, and Gminski walked to the window.

Swank was pointing to the Marriott, across the street and down a block. "She's on the fifteenth floor, third room from the street, lights are still on."

Gminski stared at the Marriott. "You're certain?"

"Yes. We saw her go in, and she paid with a credit card."

"Poor kid," Gminski said as he walked away from the window. "Where was she last night?"





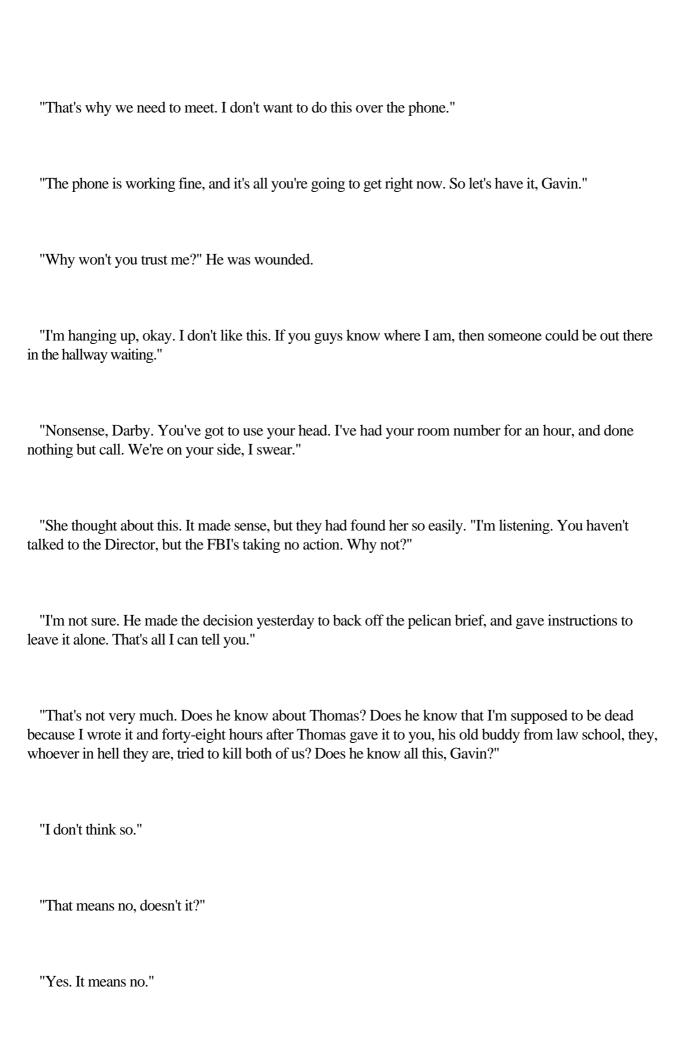
would not stop. Could be a wrong number, but they would stop after twenty rings.

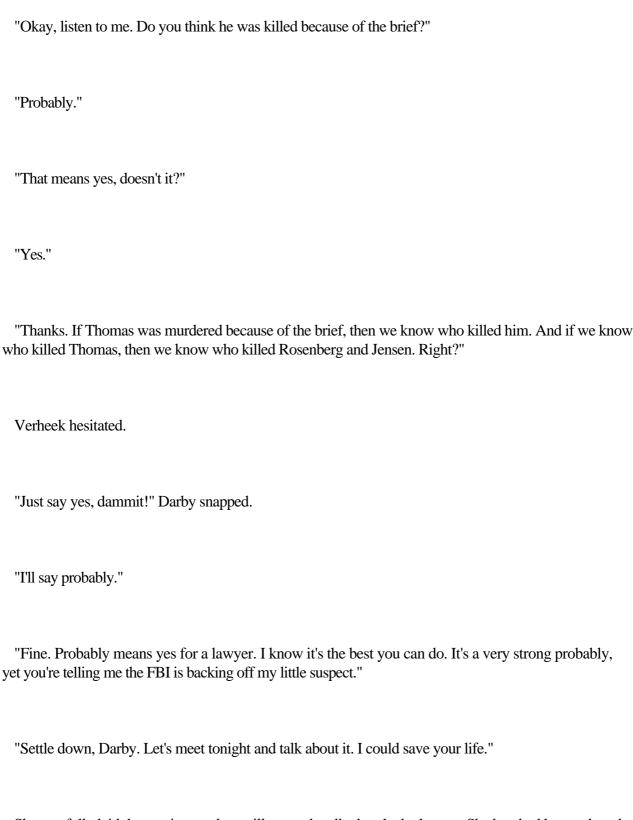
It was not a wrong number. The cobwebs began to clear, and she moved closer to the phone. With the exception of the registration clerk and maybe his boss, and perhaps room service, not a single living soul
knew she was in this room. She had ordered food, but made no other calls.
It stopped ringing. Good, wrong number. She walked to the bathroom, and it was ringing again. She counted. After the fourteenth ring, she lifted the receiver." Hello."



"Darby, are you there?"







She carefully laid the receiver under a pillow, and walked to the bathroom. She brushed her teeth and what was left of her hair, then threw the toiletries and change of clothes into a new canvas bag. She put on the parka, cap, and sunglasses, and quietly closed the door behind her. The hall was empty. She walked up two flights to the seventeenth, then took the elevator to the tenth, then casually walked down ten flights to the lobby. The door from the stairway opened near the rest rooms, and she was quickly inside the women's. The lobby appeared to be deserted. She went to a stall, locked the door, and waited for a while.



"I can't wait. I'll call later."

The first newsstand did not have the Post. She zigzagged toward Canal, covering her tracks, watching her rear, down St. Ann, along the antique shops on Royal, through the seedy bars on both sides of Bienville, and finally to the French Market along Decatur and North Peters. She was quick but nonchalant. She walked with an air of business, her eyes darting in all directions behind the shades. If they were back there somewhere in the shadows watching and keeping up, they were good.

She bought a Post and a Times-Picayune from a sidewalk vendor, and found a table in a deserted corner of Cafe du Monde.

Front page. Citing a confidential source, the story dwelt on the legend of Khamel and his sudden involvement in the killings. In his younger days, it said, he had killed for his beliefs, but now he just did it for money. Lots of money, speculated a retired intelligence expert who allowed himself to be quoted but certainly not identified. The photos were blurred and indistinct, but ominous beside each other. They could not be of the same person. But then, said the expert, he was unidentifiable and had not been photographed in over a decade.

A waiter finally made it by, and she ordered coffee and a plain bagel. The expert said many thought he was dead. Interpol believed he had killed as recently as six months ago. The expert doubted he would travel by commercial air. The FBI had him at the top of their list.

She opened the New Orleans paper slowly. Thomas did not make page one, but his picture was on page two with a long story. The cops were treating it as a homicide, but there wasn't much to go on. A white female had been seen in the area shortly before the explosion. The law school was in shock, according to the dean. The cops said little. Services were tomorrow on campus. A horrible mistake had been made, the dean said. If it was murder, then someone had obviously killed the wrong person.

Her eyes were wet, and suddenly she was afraid again. Maybe it was simply a mistake. It was a violent city with crazy people, and maybe someone got their wires crossed and the wrong car was chosen. Maybe there was no one out there stalking her.

She put the sunglasses on and looked at his photo. They had pulled it from the law school annual, and there was that smirk he habitually wore when he was the professor. He was clean shaven, and so handsome.

GRANTHAM'S KHAMEL STORY electrified Washington Friday morning. It mentioned neither the memo nor the White House, so the hottest game in town was speculating about the source.

The game was especially hot in the Hoover Building. In the office of the Director, Eric East and K. O. Lewis paced nervously about while Voyles talked to the President for the third time in two hours. Voyles was cussing, not directly at the President, but all around him. He cussed Coal, and when the President cussed back, Voyles suggested they set up the polygraph, strap in everyone on his staff, beginning with Coal, and just see where the damned leaks were coming from. Yes, hell yes, he, Voyles, would take the test, and so would everyone who worked in the Hoover Building. And they cussed back and forth. Voyles was red and sweating, and the fact that he was yelling into the telephone and the President was on the other end receiving all this mattered not a bit. He knew Coal was listening somewhere.

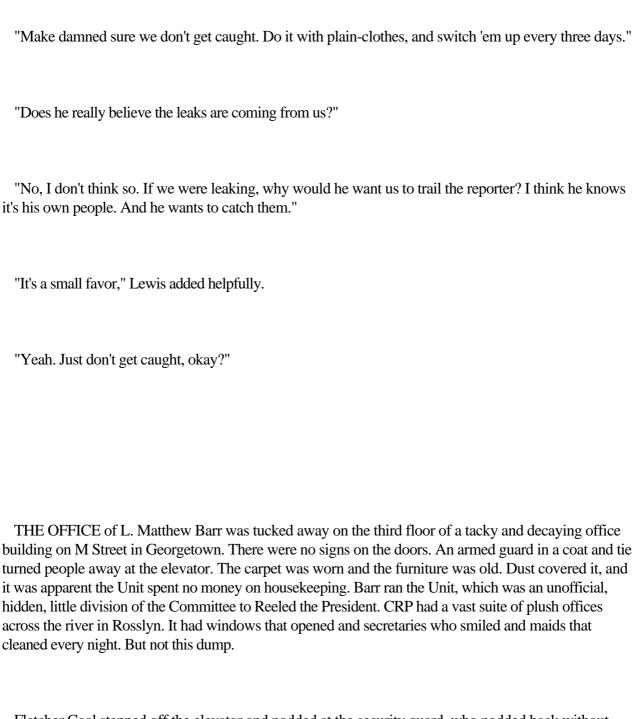
Evidently, the President gained control of the conversation and launched into a long-winded sermon of some sort. Voyles wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, sat in his ancient leather swivel, and began controlled breathing to lower the pressure and pulse. He had survived one heart attack and was due for another, and had told K. O. Lewis many times that Fletcher Coal and his idiot boss would eventually kill him. But he'd said that about the last three Presidents. He pinched the fat wrinkles on his forehead and sunk lower into the chair. "We can do that, Mr. President." He was almost pleasant now. He was a man of swift and radical mood swings, and suddenly before their eyes he was courteous. A real charmer. Thank you, Mr. President. I'll be there tomorrow."

He hung up gently, and spoke with his eyes closed. "He wants us to place that Post reporter under surveillance. Says we've done it before, so will we do it again? I told him we would."

"What type of surveillance?" asked K.O.

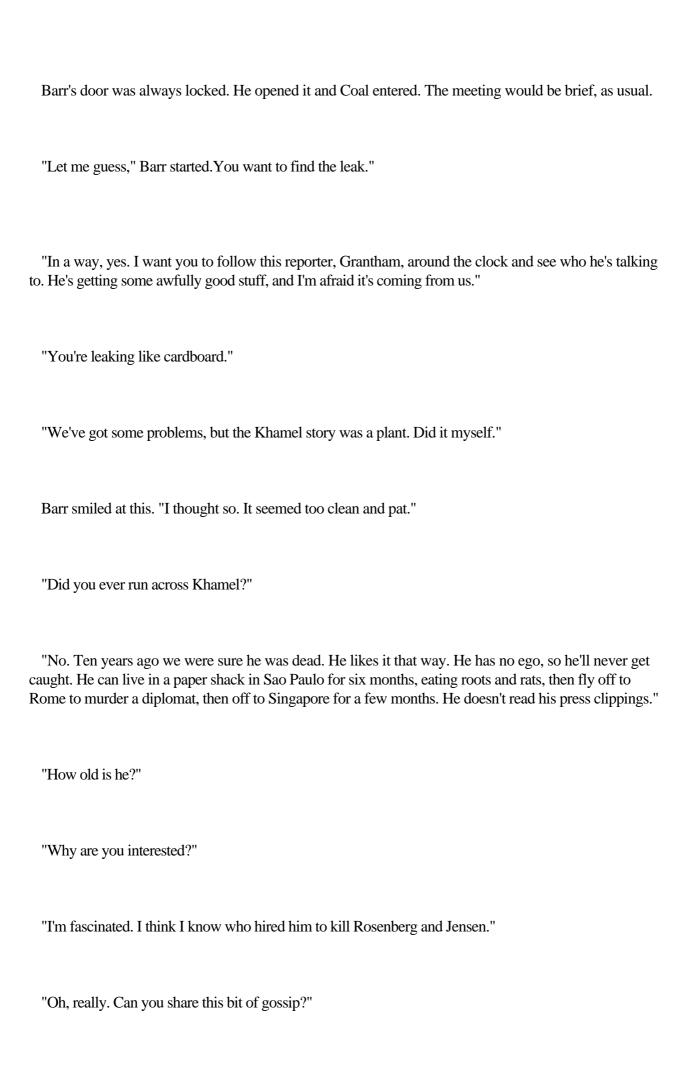
"Let's just follow him in the city. Around the clock with two men. See where he goes at night, who he sleeps with. He's single, isn't he?"

"Divorced seven years ago," Lewis answered.



Fletcher Coal stepped off the elevator and nodded at the security guard, who nodded back without making another move. They were old acquaintances. He made his way through the small maze of dingy offices in the direction of Barr's. Coal took pride in being honest with himself, and he honestly did not fear any man in Washington, maybe with the possible exception of Matthew Barr. Sometimes he feared him, sometimes not, but he always admired him.

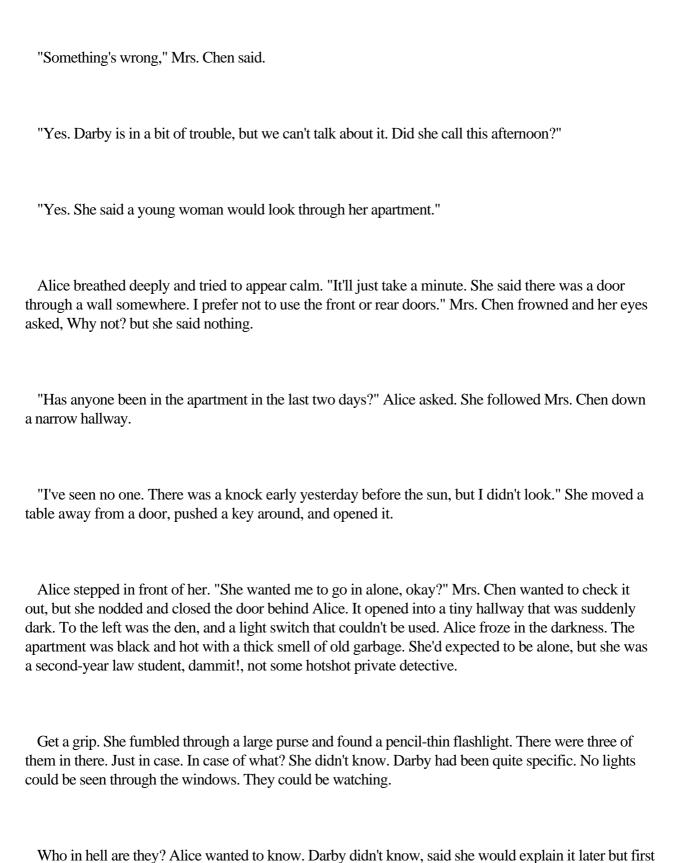
Barr was an ex-Marine, ex-CIA, ex-spy with two felony convictions for security scams from which he earned millions and buried the money. He had served a few months in one of the country clubs, but no real time. Coal had personally recruited Barr to head the Unit, which officially did not exist. It had an annual budget of four million, all cash from various slush funds, and Barr supervised a small band of highly trained thugs who quietly did the work of the Unit.



"No. Not yet."
"He's between forty and forty-five, which is not that old, but he killed a Lebanese general when he was fifteen. So he's had a long career. This is all legend, you understand. He can kill with either hand, either foot, a car key, a pencil, whatever. He's an expert marksman with all weapons. Speaks twelve languages. You've heard all this, haven't you?"
"Yeah, but it's fun."
"Okay. He's believed to be the most proficient and expensive assassin in the world. In his early years he was just another terrorist, but he was much too talented for simple bomb throwing. So he became an assassin for hire. He's a bit older now, and kills just for money."
"How much money?"
"Good question. He's probably in the ten-to-twenty-million-a-job range, and there's not but one other guy I know of in that league. One theory believes he shares it with other terrorist groups. No one knows, really. Let me guess, you want me to find Khamel and bring him back alive."
"You leave Khamel alone. I sort of like the work he did here."
"He's very talented."
"I want you to follow Gray Grantham and find out who he's talking to."
"Any ideas?"

"A couple. There's a man by the name of Milton Hardy who works as a janitor in the West Wing."





Alice had been in the apartment a dozen times in the past year, but she'd been allowed to enter through the front door with a full array of lights and other conveniences. She had been in all the rooms, and felt confident she could feel around in the darkness. The confidence was gone. Vanished. Replaced with

the apartment had to be examined.

trembling fear.

Get a grip. You're all alone. They wouldn't camp out here with a nosy woman next door. If they had indeed been here, it was only for a brief visit.

After staring at the end of it, she determined that the flashlight worked. It glowed with all the energy of a fading match. She pointed it at the floor, and saw a faint round circle the size of a small orange. The circle was shaking.

She tiptoed around a corner in the direction of the den. Darby said there was a small lamp on the bookshelves next to the television, and that the light was always on. She used it as a nightlight, and it was supposed to cast a faint glow across the den to the kitchen. Either Darby lied, or the bulb was gone, or someone had unscrewed it. It didn't matter, really, at this point, because the den and kitchen were pitch-black.

She was on the rug in the center of the den, inching toward the kitchen table where there was supposed to be a computer. She kicked the edge of the coffee table, and the flashlight quit. She shook it. Nothing. She found number two in the purse.

The odor was heavier in the kitchen. The computer was on the table along with an assortment of empty files and casebooks. She examined the mainframe with her dinky little light. The power switch was on the front. She pushed it, and the monochrome screen slowly warmed up. It emitted a greenish light that covered the table but did not escape the kitchen.

Alice sat down in front of the keyboard and began pecking. She found Menu, then List, then Files. The Directory covered the screen. She studied it closely. There were supposed to be somewhere around forty entries, but she saw no more than ten. Most of the hard-drive memory was gone. She turned on the laser printer, and within seconds the Directory was on paper. She tore it off and stuffed it in the purse.

She stood with her flashlight and inspected the clutter around the computer. Darby estimated the number of floppy disks at twenty, but they were all gone. Not a single floppy. The casebooks were for con law and civil procedure, and so dull and generic no one would want them. The red expandable files were stacked neatly together, but empty.

It was a clean, patient job. He or they had spent a couple of hours erasing and gathering, then left with

no more than one briefcase or bag of goods. In the den by the television, Alice peeked out the side window. The red Accord was still there, not four feet from the window. It looked fine. She twisted the bulb in the nightlight, and quickly flicked the switch on, then off. Worked perfectly. She unscrewed it just as he or they had left it. Her eyes had focused; she could see the outlines of doors and furniture. She turned the computer off, and eased through the den to the hall. Mrs. Chen was waiting exactly where she'd left her. "Okay?" she asked. "Everything's fine," Alice said. "Just watch it real close. I'll call you in a day or two to see if anyone has been by. And please, don't tell anyone I was here." Mrs. Chen listened intently as she moved the table in front of the door. "What about her car?" "It'll be fine. Just watch it." "Is she all right?" They were in the den, almost to the front door. "She's gonna be fine. I think she'll be back in a few days. Thank you, Mrs. Chen." Mrs. Chen closed the door, bolted it, and watched from the small window. The lady was on the sidewalk, then gone in the darkness.

Alice walked three blocks to her car.

FRIDAY NIGHT in the Quarter! Tulane played in the Dome tomorrow, then the Saints on Sunday, and the rowdies were out by the thousands, parking everywhere, blocking streets, roaming in noisy mobs, drinking from go cups, crowding bars, just having a delightful time raising hell and enjoying themselves. The Inner Quarter was gridlocked by nine.

Alice parked on Poydras, far away from where she wanted to park, and was an hour late when she arrived at the crowded oyster bar on St. Peter, deep in the Quarter. There were no tables. They were packed three deep at the bar. She retreated to a corner with a cigarette machine, and surveyed the people. Most were students in town for the game.

A waiter walked directly to her. "Are you looking for another female?" he asked.

She hesitated. "Well, yes."

He pointed beyond the bar. Around the corner, first room on the right, there's some small tables. I think your friend is there."

Darby was in a tiny booth, crouched over a beer bottle, with sunglasses and a hat. Alice squeezed her hand. "It's good to see you." She studied the hairdo, and was amused by it. Darby removed the sunglasses. The eyes were red and tired.

"I didn't know who else to call."

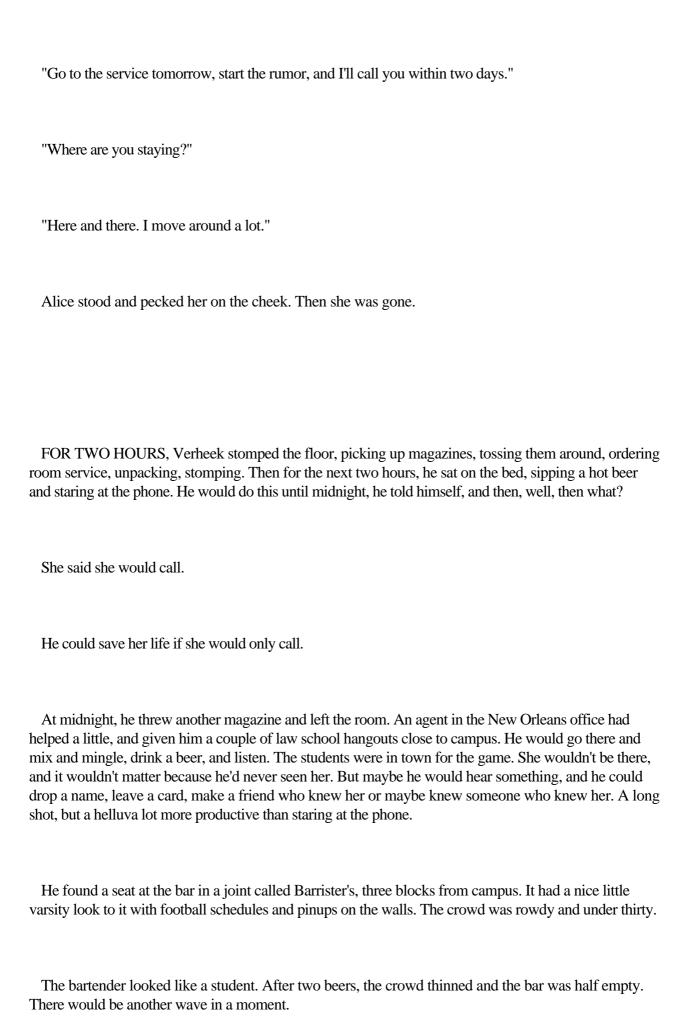
Alice listened with a blank face, unable to think of something appropriate and unable to take her eyes off the hair. "Who did the hair?" she asked.

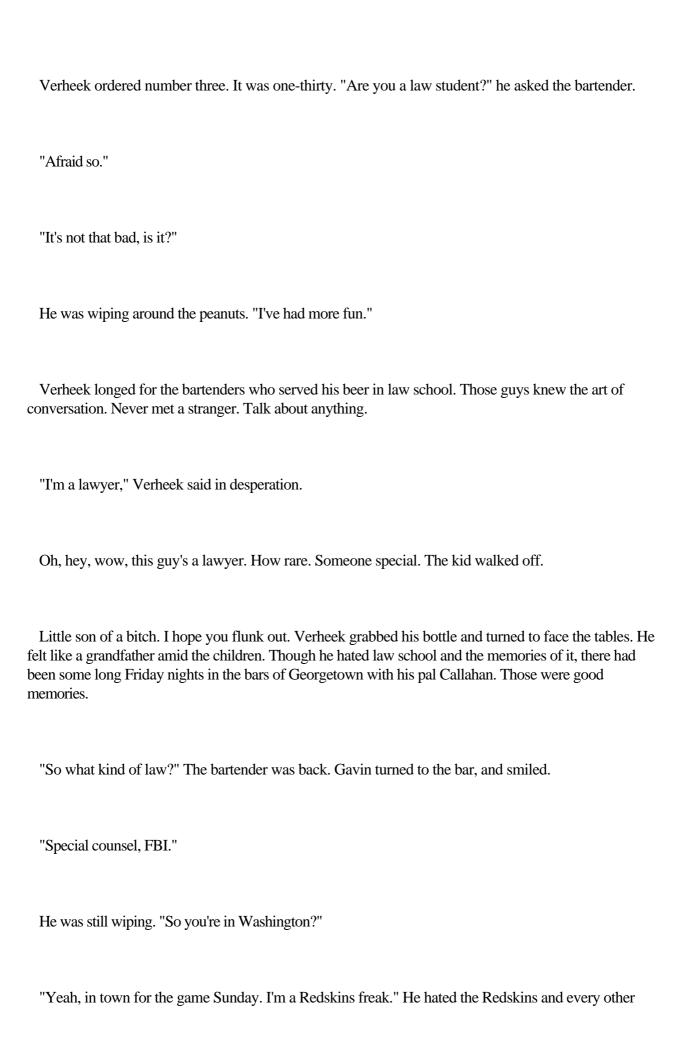
"Nice, huh. It's sort of the punk look, which I think is making a comeback and will certainly impress folks when I start interviewing for a job."

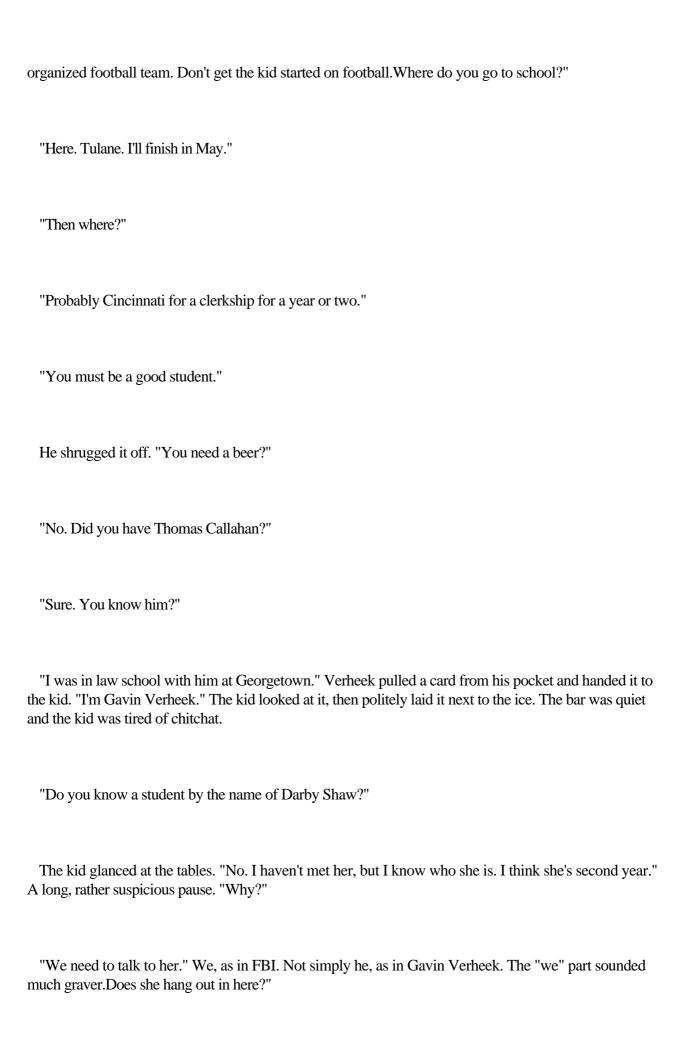
"Why?"
"Someone tried to kill me, Alice. My name's on a list that some very nasty people are holding. I think they're following me."
"Kill? Did you say 'kill'? Who would want to kill you, Darby?"
"I'm not sure. What about my apartment?"
Alice stopped looking at the hair, and handed her the printout of the Directory. Darby studied it. It was real. This was not a dream or a mistake. The bomb had found the right car. Rupert and the cowboy had had their hands on her. The face she had seen was looking for her. They had gone to her apartment and erased what they wanted to erase. They were out there.
"What about floppies?"
"None. Not a single one. The expandable files on the kitchen table were placed together real neat and are real empty. Everything else appears to be in order. They unscrewed the bulb in the nightlight, so there's total darkness. I checked it. Works fine. These are very patient people."
"What about Mrs. Chen?"
"She's seen nothing."
Darby stuffed the printout into a pocket. "Look, Alice, suddenly I'm very scared. You don't need to be seen with me. Maybe this was not a good idea."
"Who are these people?"

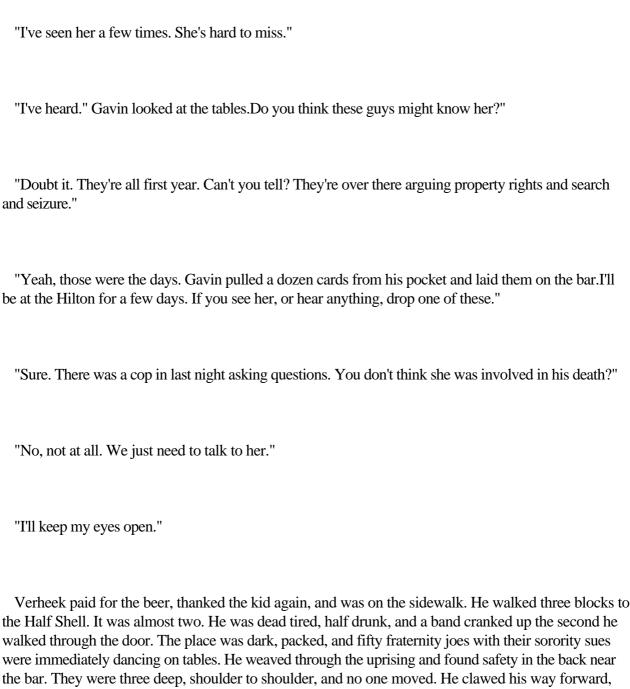


"I don't think so. They started talking, and someone was listening very closely, and it found the wrong ears."
"Talked about what! Come on, Darby. It's me. Your best friend. Stop playing games."
Darby took the first tiny swallow from the bottle. Eye contact was avoided. She stared at the table. "Please, Alice. Allow me to wait. There's no sense telling you something that could get you killed." A long pause. "If you want to help, go to the memorial service tomorrow. Watch everything. Spread the word that I called you from Denver where I'm staying with an aunt with a name you don't know, and that I've dropped out this semester but I'll be back in the spring. Make sure that rumor gets started. I think some people will be listening carefully."
"Okay. The paper mentioned a white female near the scene when he was killed, as if she might be a suspect or something."
"Or something. I was there and I was supposed to be a victim. I'm reading the papers with a magnifying glass. The cops are clueless."
"Okay, Darby. You're smarter than I am. You're smarter than every person I've ever met. So what now?"
"First, go out the back door. There's a white door at the end of the hall where the rest rooms are. It goes into a storage room, then to the kitchen, then out the back door. Don't stop. The alley leads to Royal. Catch a cab and ride back to your car. Watch your rear."
"Are you serious?"
"Look at this hair, Alice. Would I mutilate myself like this if I was playing games?"
"Okay, okay. Then what?"









the Half Shell. It was almost two. He was dead tired, half drunk, and a band cranked up the second he walked through the door. The place was dark, packed, and fifty fraternity joes with their sorority sues were immediately dancing on tables. He weaved through the uprising and found safety in the back near the bar. They were three deep, shoulder to shoulder, and no one moved. He clawed his way forward, got a beer to be cool, and realized again he was by far the oldest one there. He retreated to a dark but crowded corner. It was hopeless. He couldn't hear himself think, let alone carry on a conversation.

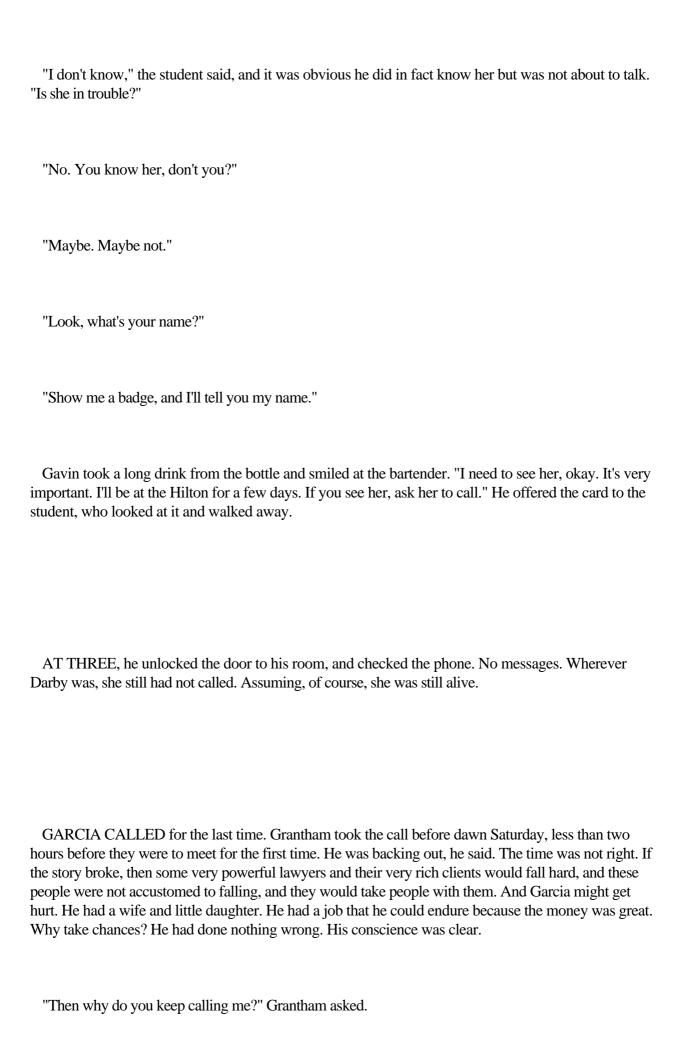
He watched the bartenders: all young, all students. The oldest looked late twenties, and he rang up check after check as if he was closing out. His moves were hurried, as if it was time to go. Gavin studied every move.

He quickly untied his apron, flung it in a corner, ducked under the bar, and was gone. Gavin elbowed through the mob, and caught him as he stepped through the kitchen door. He had an FBI business card ready. "I'm sorry. I'm with the FBI." He stuck the card in his face. Your name is?"

The kid froze, and looked wildly at Verheek. "Uh, Fountain. Jeff Fountain."
"Fine, Jeff. Look, nothing's wrong, okay? Just a couple of questions." The kitchen had shut down hours ago, and they were alone. Just take a second."
"Well, okay. What's up?"
"You're a law student, right?" Please say yes. His friend said most of the bartenders here were law students.
"Yes. At Loyola."
"Loyola! Where the hell! Yeah, well, that's what I thought. You've heard about Professor Callahan at Tulane. Funeral's tomorrow."
"Sure. It's all over the papers. Most of my friends go to Tulane."
"Do you know a second-year student there by the name of Darby Shaw? Very attractive female."
"Fountain smiled. Yeah, she dated a friend of mine last year. She's in here occasionally."
"How long ago?"
"It's been a month or two. What's wrong?"
"We need to talk to her." He handed Fountain a stack of cards. Hang on to these. I'll be at the Hilton for a few days. If you see her around, or if you hear anything, drop one of these."







"I think I know why they were killed. I'm not certain, but I've got a good idea. I saw something, okay."
"We've had this conversation for a week now, Garcia. You saw something, or you have something. And it's all useless unless you show it to me." Grantham opened a file and took out the five by sevens of the man on the phone. You're driven by a sense of morality, Garcia. That's why you want to talk."
"Yeah, but there's a chance they know that I know. They've been treating me funny, as if they want to ask if I saw it. But they can't ask because they're not sure."
"These are the guys in your firm?"
"Yeah. No. Wait. How'd you know I was in a firm? I haven't told you that."
"It's easy. You go to work too early to be a government lawyer. You're in one of those two-hundred-lawyer firms where they expect the associates and junior partners to work a hundred hours a week. The first time you called me you said you were on the way to the office, and it was something like 5 A.M."
"Well, well, what else do you know?"
"Not much. We're playing games, Garcia. If you're not willing to talk, then hang up and leave me alone. I'm losing sleep."
"Sweet dreams." Garcia hung up. Grantham stared at the receiver.
THREE TIMES in the past eight years he had unlisted his phone number. He lived by the phone, and

his biggest stories came out of nowhere over the phone. But after or during each big one, there had been

a thousand insignificant ones from sources who felt compelled to call at all hours of the night with their hot little morsels. He was known as a reporter who would face a firing squad before revealing a source, so they called and called and called. He'd get sick of it, and get a new, unlisted number. Then hit a dry spell. Then rush to get back in the B.C. directory.

He was there now. Gray S. Grantham. The only one in the book. They could get him at work twelve hours a day, but it was so much more secretive and private to call him at home, especially at odd hours when he was trying to sleep.

He fumed over Garcia for thirty minutes, then fell asleep. He was in a rhythm and dead to the world when it rang again. He found it in the darkness. "Hello."

It was not Garcia. It was a female. "Is this Gray Grantham with the Washington Post?"

"It is. And who are you?"

"Are you still on the story about Rosenberg and Jensen?"

He sat in the darkness and stared at the clock. Five-thirty. "It's a big story. We've got a lot of people on it, but, yes, I'm investigating."

"Have you heard of the pelican brief?"

He breathed deeply and tried to think. "The pelican brief. No. What is it?"

"It's a harmless little theory about who killed them. It was taken to Washington last Sunday by a man named Thomas Callahan, a professor of law at Tulane. He gave it to a friend with the FBI, and it was passed around. Things snowballed, and Callahan was killed in a car bombing Wednesday night in New Orleans."

The lamp was on and he was scribbling. "Where are you calling from?"



	call Monday morning. If we're gonna do business, Mr. Grantham, you must show me The next time I call, tell me something I don't know."
She was	at a pay phone in the dark. "Are you in danger?" he asked.
"I think s	so. But I'm okay for now."
She soun lawyer?"	nded young, mid-twenties, maybe. She wrote a brief. She knew the law professor. "Are you
"No, and elsewhere.'	don't spend your time digging after me. You've got work to do, Mr. Grantham, or I'll go
"Fine. Yo	ou need a name."
"I've got	one."
"I mean a	a code name."
"You me	ean like spies and all. Gee, this could be fun."
"Either th	nat or give me your real name."
"Nice try	. Just call me Pelican."

HIS PARENTS were good Irish Catholics, but he had sort of quit many years ago. They were a handsome couple, dignified in mourning, well tanned and dressed. He had seldom mentioned them. They walked hand-in-hand with the rest of the family into Rogers Chapel. His brother from Mobile was shorter and looked much older. Thomas said he had a drinking problem.

For half an hour, students and faculty had streamed into the small chapel. The game was tonight and there was a nice crowd on campus. A television van was parked in the street. A cameraman kept a respectable distance and shot the front of the chapel. A campus policeman watched him carefully and kept him in place.

It was odd seeing these law students with dresses and heels and coats and ties. In a dark room on the third floor of Newcomb Hall, the Pelican sat with her face to the window and watched the students mill about and speak softly and finish their cigarettes. Under her chair were four newspapers, already read and discarded. She'd been there for two hours, reading by sunlight and waiting on the service. There was no other place to be. She was certain the bad guys were lurking in the bushes around the chapel, but she was learning patience. She had come early, would stay late, and move in the shadows. If they found her, maybe they would do it quick and it would be over.

She gripped a wadded paper towel and dried her eyes. It was okay to cry now, but this was the last one. The people were all inside, and the television van left. The paper said it was a memorial service with private burial later. There was no casket inside.

She had selected this moment to run, to rent a car and drive to Baton Rouge, then jump on the first plane headed to any place except New Orleans. She would get out of the country, perhaps Montreal or Calgary. She would hide there for a year and hope the crime would be solved and the bad guys put away.

But it was a dream. The quickest route to justice ran smack through her. She knew more than anyone. The Fibbies had circled close, then backed off, and were now chasing who knows who. Verheek had gotten nowhere, and he was close to the Director. She would have to piece it together. Her little brief had killed Thomas, and now they were after her. She knew the identity of the man behind the murders of Rosenberg and Jensen and Callahan, and this knowledge made her rather unique.

Suddenly, she leaned forward. The tears dried on her cheeks. There he was! The thin man with the narrow face! He was wearing a coat and tie and looked properly mournful as he walked quickly to the chapel. It was him! The man she'd last seen in the lobby of the Sheraton on, when was it, Thursday morning. She'd been talking to Verheek when he strolled suspiciously through.

He stopped at the door, jerked his head nervously around he was a klutz, really, a giveaway. He stared for a second at three cars parked innocently on the street, less than fifty yards away. He opened the door, and was in the chapel. Beautiful. The bastards killed him, and now they joined his family and friends for last respects.

Her nose touched the window. The cars were too far away, but she was certain there was a man in one watching for her. Surely they knew she was not so dumb and so heartbroken as to show up and mourn her lover. They knew that. She had eluded them for two and a half days. The tears were gone.

Ten minutes later, the thin man came out by himself, lit a cigarette, and strolled with hands stuck deep in his pockets toward the three cars. He was sad. What a guy.

He walked in front of the cars but did not stop. When he was out of sight, a door opened and a man in a green Tulane sweatshirt emerged from the middle car. He walked down the street after the thin one. He was not thin. He was short, thick, and powerful. A regular stump.

He disappeared down the sidewalk behind the thin man, be hind the chapel. Darby poised on the edge of the folding chair. Within a minute, they emerged on the sidewalk from behind the building. They were together now, whispering, but for only a moment because the thin man peeled off and disappeared down the street. Stump walked quickly to his car and got in. He just sat there, waiting for the service to break up and get one last look at the crowd on the off chance that she was in fact stupid enough to show up.

It had taken less than ten minutes for the thin man to sneak inside, scan the crowd of, say, two hundred people, and determine she was not there. Perhaps he was looking for the red hair. Or bleached blond. No, it made more sense for them to have people already in there, sitting around prayerfully and looking sad, looking for her or anyone who might resemble her. They could nod or shake or wink at the thin man.

This place was crawling with them.

HAVANA was a perfect sanctuary. It mattered not if ten or a hundred countries had bounties on his throat. Fidel was an admirer and occasional client. They drank together, shared women, and smoked cigars. He had the run of the place: a nice little apartment on Calle de Torre in the old section, a car with

a driver, a banker who was a wizard at blitzing money around the world, any size boat he wanted, a military plane if needed, and plenty of young women. He spoke the language and his skin was not pale. He loved the place.

He had once agreed to kill Fidel, but couldn't do it. He was in place and two hours away from the murder, but just wouldn't pull it off. There was too much admiration. It was back in the days when he did not always kill for money. He pulled a double cross, and confessed to Fidel. They faked an ambush, and word spread that the great Khamel had been gunned down in the streets of Havana.

Never again would he travel by commercial air. The photographs in Paris were embarrassing for such a professional. He was losing his touch; getting careless in the twilight of his career. Got his picture on the front pages in America. How shameful. His client was not pleased.

The boat was a forty-foot schooner with two crew members and a young woman, all Cubans. She was below in the cabin. He had finished with her a few minutes before they saw the lights of Biloxi. He was all business now, inspecting his raft, packing his bag, saying nothing. The crew members crouched on the deck and stayed away from him.

At exactly nine, they lowered the raft onto the water. He dropped his bag into it, and was gone. They heard the trolling motor as he disappeared into the blackness of the Sound. They were to remain anchored until dawn, then haul it back to Havana. They held perfect papers declaring them to be Americans, in the event they were discovered and someone began asking questions.

He eased patiently through the still water, dodging buoy lights and the sight of an occasional small craft. He held perfect papers too, and three weapons in the bag.

It had been years since he struck twice in one month. After he was allegedly gunned down in Cuba, there had been a five-year drought. Patience was his forte. He averaged one a year.

And this little victim would go unnoticed. No one would suspect him. It was such a small job, but his client was adamant and he happened to be in the neighborhood, and the money was right, so here he was in another six-foot rubber raft cruising toward a beach, hoping like hell his pal Luke would be there dressed not as a farmer, but a fisherman this time.

This would be the last for a long time, maybe forever. He had more money than he could ever spend or

give away. And he had started making small mistakes.

He saw the pier in the distance, and moved away from it. He had thirty minutes to waste. He followed the shoreline for a quarter of a mile, then headed for it. Two hundred yards out, he turned off the trolling motor, unhitched it, and dropped it into the water. He lay low in the raft, worked a plastic oar when necessary, and gently guided himself to a dark spot behind a row of cheap brick buildings thirty feet ashore. He stood in two feet of water and ripped holes in the raft with a small pock-etknife. It sank and disappeared. The beach was deserted.

Luke was alone at the end of the pier. It was exactly eleven, and he was in place with a rod and reel. He wore a white cap, and the bill moved slowly back and forth as he scanned the water in search of the raft. He checked his watch.

Suddenly a man was beside him, appearing from nowhere like an angel. "Luke?" the man said.

This was not the code. Luke was startled. He had a gun in the tackle box at his feet, but there was no way. "Sam?" he asked. Maybe he had missed something. Maybe Khamel couldn't find the pier from the raft.

"Yes, Luke, it's me. Sorry about the deviation. Trouble with the raft."

Luke's heart settled and he breathed relief.

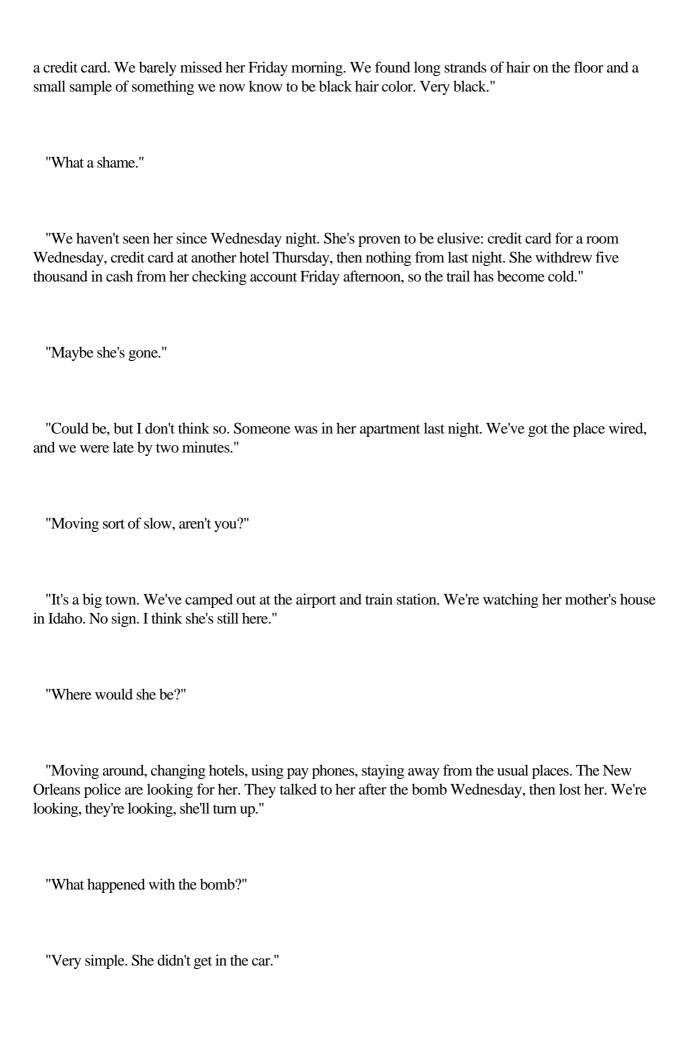
"Where's the vehicle?" Khamel asked.

Luke glanced at him ever so quickly. Yes, it was Khamel, and he was staring at the ocean behind dark glasses.

Luke nodded at a building. "Red Pontiac next to the liquor store."

"How far to New Orleans?"





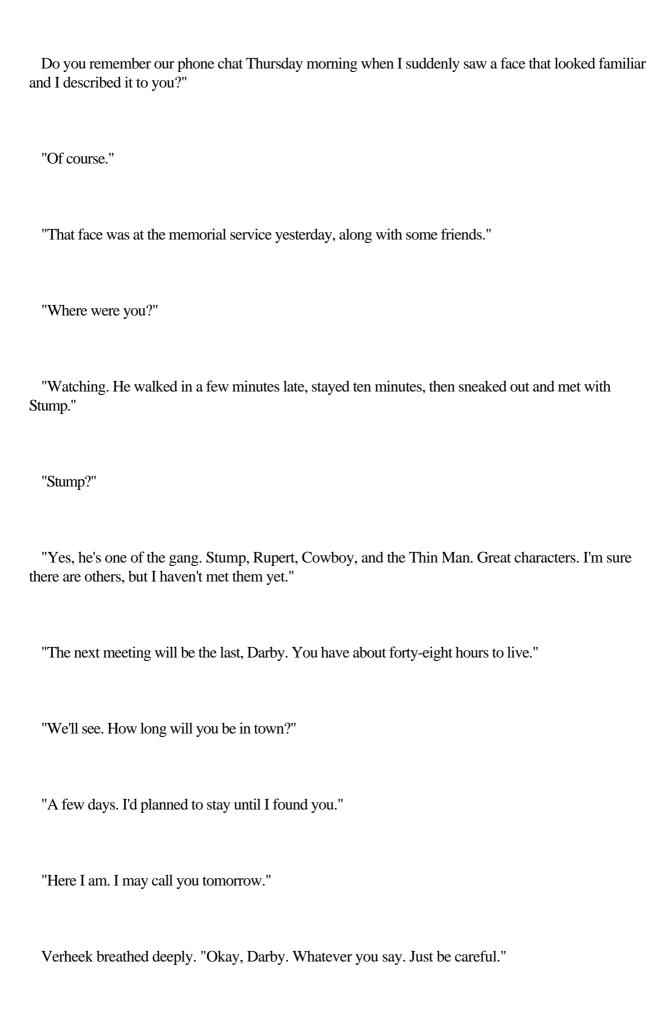


He prowled five or six bars Saturday night. Tulane lost again, and after the game the bars filled with









She hung up. He threw the phone across the room, and cursed it.
TWO BLOCKS AWAY and fifteen floors up, Khamel stared at the television and mumbled rapidly to himself. It was a movie about people in a big city. They spoke English, his third language, and he repeated every word in his best generic American tongue. He did this for hours. He had absorbed the language while hiding in Belfast, and in the past twenty years had watched thousands of American movies. His favorite was Three Days of the Condor. He watched it four times before he figured out who was killing whom and why. He could have killed Redford.
He repeated every word out loud. He had been told his English could pass for that of an American, but one slip, one tiny mistake, and she would be gone.
THE VOLVO was parked in a lot a block and a half from its owner, who paid one hundred dollars a month for the space and for what he thought was security. They eased through the gate that was supposed to be locked.
It was a 1986 GL without a security system, and within seconds the driver's door was open. One sat on the trunk and lit a cigarette. It was almost 4 A.M. Sunday.
The other one opened a small tool case he kept in his pocket, and went to work on the yuppie car phone .that Grantham had been embarrassed to buy. The dome light was enough, and he worked quickly. Easy work. With the receiver open, he installed a tiny transmitter and glued it in place. A minute later, he eased out of the car and squatted at the rear bumper. The one with the cigarette handed him a small black cube, which he stuck under the car to a grille and behind the gas tank. It was a magnetized transmitter, and it would send signals for six days before it died and needed replacing.
They were gone in less than seven minutes. Monday, as soon as he was spotted entering the Post
building on Fifteenth, they would enter his apartment and fix his phones.

HER SECOND NIGHT in the bed and breakfast was better than the first. She slept until mid-morning. Maybe she was used to it now. She stared at the curtains over the tiny window and determined that there had been no nightmares, no movements in the dark with guns and knives emerging and attacking. It was a thick, heavy sleep, and she studied the curtains for a long time while the brain woke up.

She tried to be disciplined about her thinking. This was her fourth day as the Pelican, and to see number five she would have to think like a fastidious killer. It was day number four of the rest of her life. She was supposed to be dead.

But after the eyes opened, and she realized she was indeed alive and safe, and the door wasn't squeaking and the floor wasn't cracking, and there was no gunman lurking in the closet, her first thought was always of Thomas. The shock of his death was fading, and she found it easier to put aside the sound of the explosion and the roar of the fire. She knew he had been blown to pieces and killed instantly. She knew he did not suffer.

So she thought of other things, like the feel of him next to her, and his whispering and snickering when they were in bed and the sex was over and he wanted to cuddle. He was a cuddler, and he wanted to play and kiss and caress after the love-making. And giggle. He loved her madly, had fallen hard, and for the first time in his life could be silly with a woman. Many times in the middle of his lectures, she had thought of his cooing and snickering, and bit her lip to keep from smiling.

She loved him too. And it hurt so badly. She wanted to stay in bed and cry for a week. The day after her father's funeral, a psychiatrist had explained that the soul needs a brief, very intense period of grieving, then it moves to the next phase. But it must have the pain; it must suffer without restraint before

it can properly move on. She took his advice, and grieved without courage for two weeks, then got tired of it and moved to the next stage. It worked.

But it wasn't working with Thomas. She couldn't scream and throw things the way she wanted. Rupert and Thin Man and the rest of the boys were denying her a healthy mourning.

After a few minutes of Thomas, she thought of them next. Where would they be today? Where could she go without being seen? After two nights in this place, should she find another room? Yes, she would do that. After dark. She would call and reserve a room at another tiny guest house. Where were they staying? Were they patrolling the streets hoping to simply bump into her? Did they know where she was at this moment? No. She would be dead. Did they know she was now a blonde?

The hair got her out of bed. She walked to the mirror over the desk, and looked at herself. It was even shorter now, and very white. Not a bad job. She had worked on it for three hours last night. If she lived another two days, she would cut some more and go back to black. If she lived another week, she might be bald.

A hunger pain hit, and for a second she thought about food. She was not eating, and this would have to change. It was almost ten. Oddly, this bed and breakfast didn't cook on Sunday mornings. She would venture out to find food and a Sunday Post, and to see if they could catch her now that she was a butch blonde.

She showered quickly, and the hair took less than a minute. No makeup. She put on a new pair of Army fatigues and a new flight jacket, and she was ready for battle. The eyes were covered with aviator shades.

Although she had made a few entrances, she had not exited a building through the front door in four days. She crept through the dark kitchen, unlocked the rear door, and stepped into the alley behind the little inn. It was cool enough to wear the flight jacket without being suspicious. Silly, she thought. In the French Quarter, she could wear the hide and head of a polar bear and not appear suspicious. She walked briskly through the alley with her hands deep in the fatigues and her eyes darting behind the shades.

He saw her when she stepped onto the sidewalk next to Burgundy Street. The hair under the cap was different, but she was still five-eight and she couldn't change that. The legs were still long and she walked a certain way, and after four days he could pick her out of a crowd regardless of the face and hair. The cowboy boots snakeskin with pointed toes hit the sidewalk and started following.

She was a smart girl, turning every corner, changing streets every block, walking quickly but not too fast. He figured she was headed for Jackson Square, where there was a crowd on Sundays and she thought she could disappear. She could stroll about with the tourists and the locals, maybe eat a bite, enjoy the sun, pick up a paper.

Darby casually lit a cigarette and puffed as she walked. She could not inhale. She tried three days ago, and got dizzy. Such a nasty habit. How ironic it would be if she lived through all this only to die from lung cancer. Please, let her die of cancer.

He was sitting at a table in a crowded sidewalk cafe at the corner of St. Peter and Chartres, and he was less than ten feet away when she saw him. A split second later, he saw her, and she probably would have made it if she hadn't hesitated for a step and swallowed hard when she saw him. He saw her, and probably would have been only suspicious, but the slight hesitation and the curious look gave her away. She kept walking, but faster now.

It was Stump. He was on his feet and weaving through the tables when she lost sight of him. At ground level, he was anything but chubby. He seemed quick and muscular. She lost him for a second on Chartres as she ducked between the arches of St. Louis Cathedral. The church was open, and she thought maybe she should get inside, as if it would be a sanctuary and he would not kill her there. Yes, he would kill her there, or on the street, or in a crowd. Anywhere he caught her. He was back there, and Darby wanted to know how fast he was coming. Was he just walking real fast and trying to play it cool? Was he sort of jogging? Or was he barreling down the sidewalk preparing to make a flying tackle as soon as he caught sight of her? She kept moving.

She hung a left on St. Ann, crossed the street, and was almost to Royal when she took a quick glance behind her. He was coming. He was on the other side of the street, but very much in pursuit.

The nervous look over the shoulder nailed her. It was a dead giveaway, and he was into a jog now.

Get to Bourbon Street, she decided. Kickoff was four hours away, and the Saints fans were out in force celebrating before the game because there would be little to celebrate afterward. She turned on Royal and ran hard for a few steps, then slowed to a fast walk. He turned on Royal and was trotting. He was poised to break and run hard at any second. Darby moved to the center of the street where a group of football rowdies were moving around, killing time. She turned left on Dumaine, and started running. Bourbon was ahead and there were people everywhere.

She could hear him now. No sense looking anymore. He was back there, running and gaining. When she turned onto Bourbon, Mr. Stump was fifty feet behind her, and the race was over. She saw her angels as they made a noisy exit from a bar. Three large, overweight young men dressed in a wild assortment of black and gold Saints garb stepped into the middle of the street just as Darby ran to them.

"Help!" she screamed wildly and pointed at Stump. "Help me! That man is after me! He's trying to rape me!"

Well, hell, now, sex in the streets of New Orleans is not at all uncommon, but they'd be damned if this girl was going to be abused.

"Please help me!" she screamed pitifully. Suddenly, the street was silent. Everyone froze, including Stump, who stopped for a step or two, then rushed forward. The three Saints stepped in front of him with folded arms and glowing eyes. It was over in seconds. Stump used both hands at once: a right to the throat of the first one, and a vicious blow to the mouth of the second. They squealed and fell hard. Number three was not about to run. His two buddies were hurt and this upset him. He would have been a piece of cake for Stump, but number one fell on Stump's right foot and this threw him off. As he yanked his foot away, Mr. Benjamin Chop of Thibodaux, Louisiana, number three, kicked him squarely in the crotch, and Stump was history. As Darby eased back into the crowd, she heard him cry in pain.

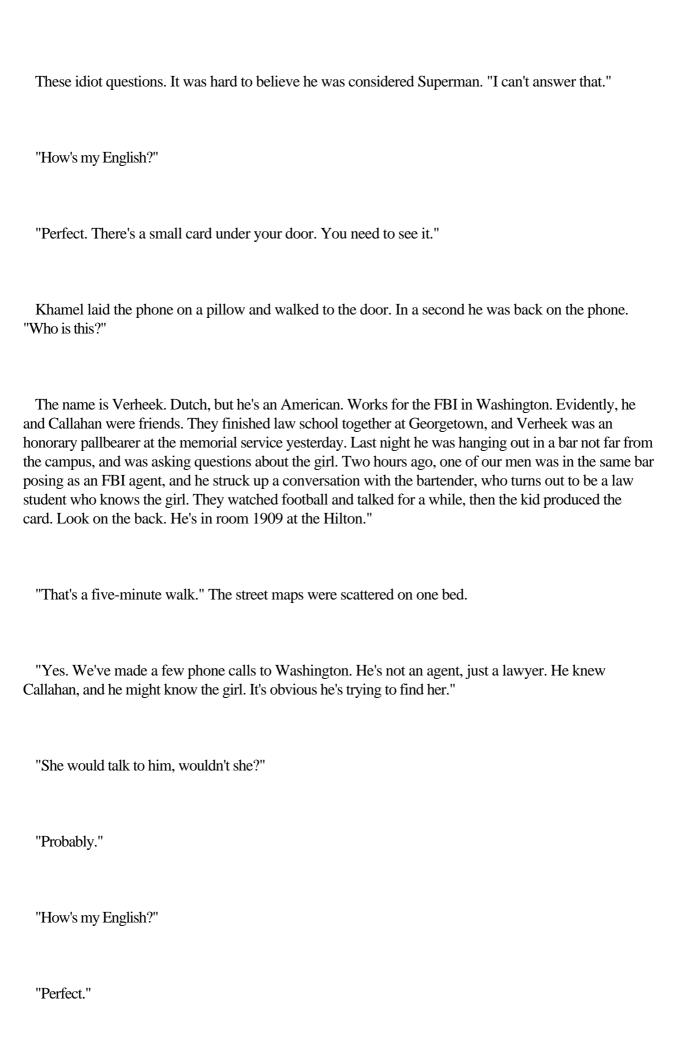
While he was falling, Mr. Chop kicked him in the ribs. Number two, with blood all over his face, charged wild-eyed into Stump, and the massacre was on. He curled around his hands, which were curled around his severely damaged testicles, and they kicked him and cursed him without mercy until someone yelled, "Cops," and this saved his life. Mr. Chop and number two helped number one to his feet, and the Saints were last seen darting into a bar. Stump made it to his feet, and crawled away like a dog hit by a Mack truck but still alive and determined to die at home.

She hid in a dark corner of a pub on Decatur, drinking coffee then a beer, coffee then a beer. Her hands shook and her stomach flipped. The po'boys smelled delicious, but she could not eat. After three beers in three hours, she ordered a plate of boiled shrimp and switched to spring water.

The alcohol had calmed her, and the shrimp settled her. She was safe in here, she thought, so why not watch the game and just sit here, maybe, until it closed.

The pub was packed at kickoff. They watched the wide screen above the bar, and got drunk. She was





KHAMEL WAITED AN HOUR and left the hotel. With the coat and tie, he was just an average joe strolling along Canal at dusk headed for the river. He carried a large gym bag and smoked a cigarette, and five minutes later entered the lobby of the Hilton. He worked his way through the crowd of fans returning from the Dome. The elevator stopped on the twentieth floor, and he walked one flight down to the nineteenth.

There was no answer at 1909. If the door had opened with the chain locked, he would have apologized and explained he had the wrong room. If the door had opened without the chain and with a fate in the crack, he would have kicked it sharply and been inside. But it did not open.

His new pal Verheek was probably hanging around a bar, passing out cards, begging kids to talk to him about Darby Shaw. What a nut.

He knocked again, and while he waited he slid a six-inch plastic ruler between the door and the facing, and worked it gently until the bolt clicked. Locks were minor nuisances for Khamel. Without a key, he could open a locked car and start the engine in less than thirty seconds.

Inside, he locked the door behind him, and placed his bag on the bed. Like a surgeon, he picked the gloves from a pocket and pulled them tightly over his fingers. He laid a .22 and silencer on the table.

The phone was quick work. He plugged the recorder into the jack under the bed, where it could sit for weeks before it was noticed. He called the weather station twice to test the recorder. Perfect.

His new pal Verheek was a slob. Most of the clothes in the room were dirty and simply thrown in the direction of the suit case sitting on a table. He had not unpacked. A cheap garment bag hung in the closet with one solitary shirt.

Khamel covered his tracks and settled low in the closet. He was a patient man, and he could wait for hours. He held the .22 just in case this clown happened to barge into the closet and he had to kill him with bullets. If not, he would just listen.

GAVIN QUIT THE BARS SUNDAY. He was getting nowhere. She had called him, and she was not hanging around those places, so what the hell. He was drinking too much and eating too much, and he was tired of New Orleans. He already had a flight booked for late Monday afternoon, and if she didn't call again he was finished playing detective.
He couldn't find her, and it wasn't his fault. Cabdrivers got lost in this city. Voyles would be screaming by noon. He had done his best.
He was stretched on the bed in nothing but boxer shorts, flipping through a magazine and ignoring the television. It was almost eleven. He would wait on her until twelve, then try to sleep.
It rang at exactly eleven. He pushed a button and remotely killed the television. "Hello."
"It was her.It's me, Gavin."
"So you're alive."
"Barely."
He sat on the edge of the bed. "What's happened?"
"They saw me today, and one of their goons, my friend Stump, chased me through the Quarter. You haven't met Stump, but he's the one who watched you and everyone else walk into the chapel."
"But you got away."



Darby, tell me where you want to meet right now, and within fifteen minutes I'll come get you with three agents. These guys have guns, and they're not afraid of your little Stump and his pals. We'll get you out of the city tonight, and take you to Washington tomorrow. I promise you'll personally meet my boss, the Honorable F. Denton Voyles, tomorrow, and we'll go from there."
"I thought the FBI was not involved."
"It's not involved, but it may be."
"Then where do the three agents come from?"
"I've got friends."
She thought for a moment, and her voice was suddenly stronger. "Behind your hotel is a place called Riverwalk. It's a shopping area with restaurants and"
"I spent two hours there this afternoon."
"Good. On the second level is a clothing store called Frenchmen's Bend."
"I saw it."
"At precisely noon tomorrow, I want you to stand by the entrance, and wait for five minutes."
"Come on, Darby. You won't be alive at noon tomorrow. Enough of this cat and mouse."

"Just do as I say, Gavin. We've never met, so I have no idea what you look like. Wear a black shirt of





"I'll see you tomorrow, Gavin."

"I hope I see you, dear."

She was gone. He hung up. "Son of a bitch!" he yelled to the walls. "Son of a bitch!" He walked along the end of the bed a few times, then to the bathroom, where he closed the door and turned on the shower.

He cussed her in the shower for ten minutes, then stepped out, and dried himself. It was more like two hundred and fifteen pounds, and all of it was situated badly on the five-nine frame. It was painful to look at. Here he was, about to meet this gorgeous woman who suddenly trusted him with her life, and what a slob he was.

He opened the door. The room was dark. Dark? He had left on the lights. What the hell? He headed for the switch next to the dresser.

The first blow crushed his larynx. It was a perfect blow that came from the side, somewhere near the wall. He grunted painfully and fell to one knee, which made the second blow so easy, like an ax on a fat log. It hit like a rock at the base of the skull, and Gavin was dead.

Khamel flipped on a light, and looked at the pitiful nude figure frozen on the floor. He was not one to admire his work. He didn't want carpet burns, so he lifted the pudgy corpse onto his shoulders and laid it across the bed. Working quickly without any wasted motion, Khamel turned on the television and raised it to full volume, unzipped his bag, removed a cheap.25 caliber automatic, and placed it precisely on the right temple of the late Gavin Verheek. He covered the gun and the head with two pillows, and pulled the trigger. Now the critical part: he took one pillow and placed it under the head, threw the other one on the floor, and carefully curled the fingers of the right hand around the pistol, leaving it twelve inches from the head.

He took the recorder from under the bed, and ran the telephone wire directly into the wall. He punched a button, listened, and there she was. He turned off the television.

Every job was different. He had once stalked his prey for three weeks in Mexico City, then caught him in bed with two prostitutes. It was a dumb mistake, and during his career he had been assisted by numerous dumb mistakes by the opposition. This guy was a dumb mistake, a stupid lawyer pilfering

around running his mouth, passing out cards with his room number on the back. He had stuck his nose into the world of big-league killing, and look at him now.

With a little luck, the cops would look around the room for a few minutes and declare it to be another suicide. They would go through the motions and ask themselves a couple of questions they could not answer, but there were always some of those. Because he was an important FBI lawyer, an autopsy would be done in a day or so, and probably by Tuesday an examiner would suddenly discover it was not a suicide.

By Tuesday, the girl would be dead and he would be in Managua.

HIS USUAL, official sources at the White House denied any knowledge of the pelican brief. Sarge had never heard of it. Long-shot phone calls to the FBI produced nothing. A friend at Justice denied ever hearing about it. He dug all weekend, and had nothing to show for it. The story about Cal-lahan was verified when he found a copy of the New Orleans paper. When her call came in at the newsroom Monday, he had nothing fresh to tell her. But at least she called.

The Pelican said she was at a pay phone, so don't bother.

"I'm still digging," he said. "If there's such a brief in town, it's being closely protected."

"I assure you it's there, and I understand why it's being protected."

"I'm sure you can tell me more."

"Lots more. The brief almost got me killed yesterday, so I may be ready to talk sooner than I thought. I need to spill my guts while I'm still alive."

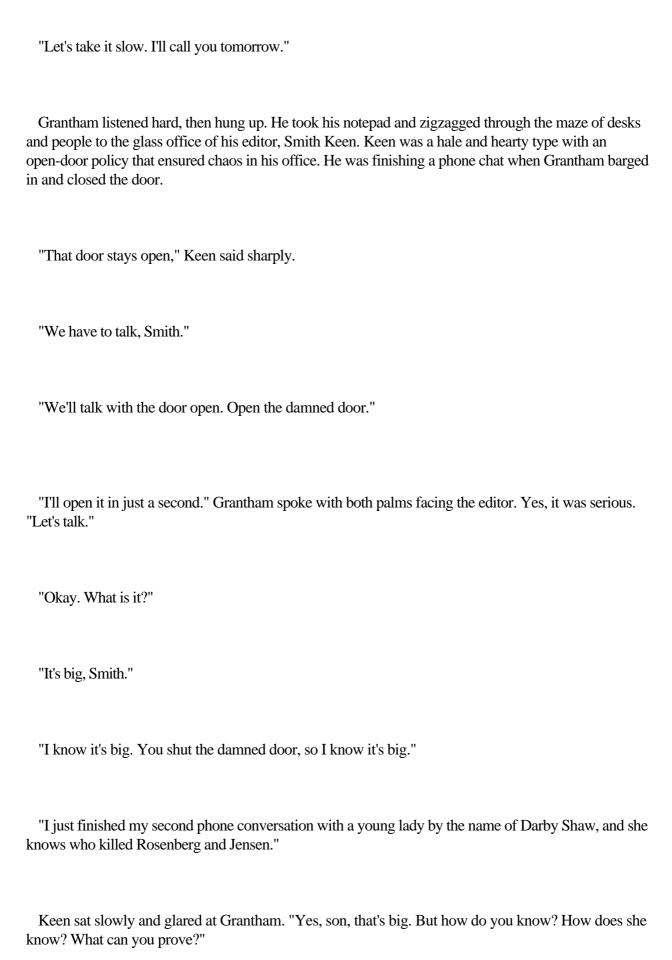
"Who's trying to kill you?"

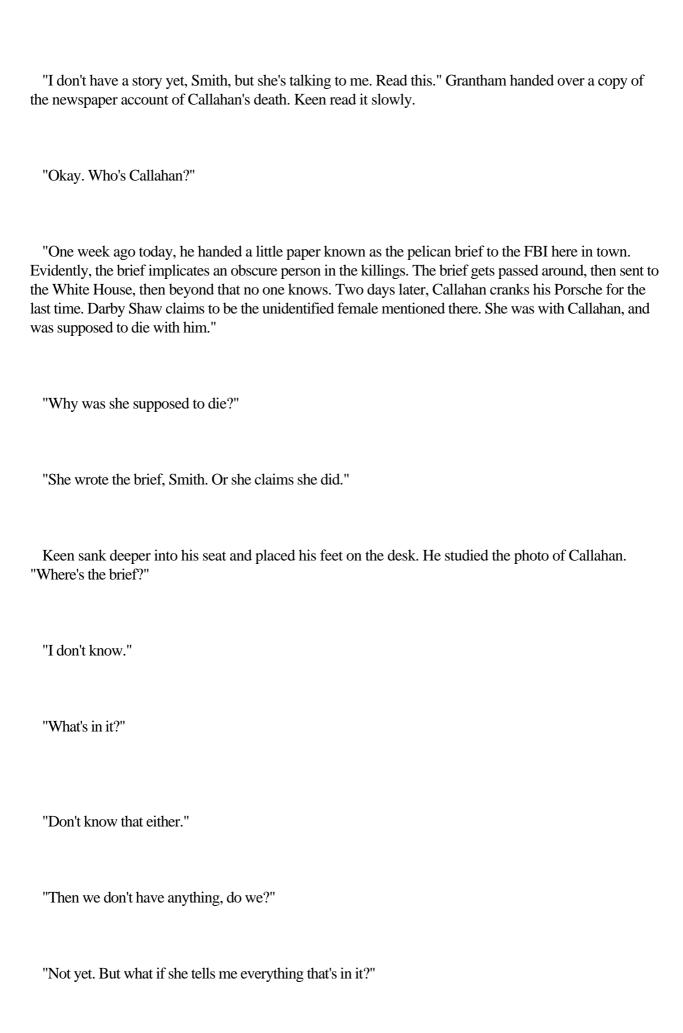


"I'm rather tired of the French Quarter, and I plan to leave today. I'll call you from somewhere tomorrow. Do you have access to presidential campaign disclosure forms?" "It's public record." "I know that. But how quickly can you get the information?" "What information?" "A list of all major contributors to the President's last election." "That's not difficult. I can have it by this afternoon." "Do that, and I'll call you in the morning." "Okay. Do you have a copy of the brief?" She hesitated. "No, but it's memorized." "And you know who's doing the killing?" "Yes, and as soon as I tell you, they'll put your name on the hit list."

Grantham scribbled furiously. "Yes. I'm listening."

"Tell me now."







cases. Man, how he hated lawyers. Why did they all dress alike? Dark suits. Dark shoes. Dark faces. An occasional nonconformist with a daring little bow tie. Where did they all come from? Shortly after his

arrest with the drugs, the first lawyers had been a group of angry mouthpieces hired by the Post. Then he hired his own, an overpriced moron who couldn't find the courtroom. Then, the prosecutor was of course a lawyer. Lawyers, lawyers.

Two hours in the morning, two hours at lunch, two hours during the evening, and then Grantham would have another building for him to patrol. Ninety bucks a day was cheap, and he would give this up as soon as he got a better deal. He told Grantham this was hopeless, just shooting in the dark. Grantham agreed, but said to keep shooting. It's all they could do. He said Garcia was scared and wouldn't call anymore. They had to find him.

In his pocket he had two photos just in case, and from the directory he had made a list of the firms in the building. It was a long list. The building had twelve floors filled mainly with firms filled with nothing but these fancy little esquires. He was in a den of snakes.

By nine-thirty the rush was over, and some of the faces looked familiar coming back down the escalators, headed no doubt for the courtrooms and agencies and commissions. Croft eased through the revolving doors, and wiped his feet on the sidewalk.

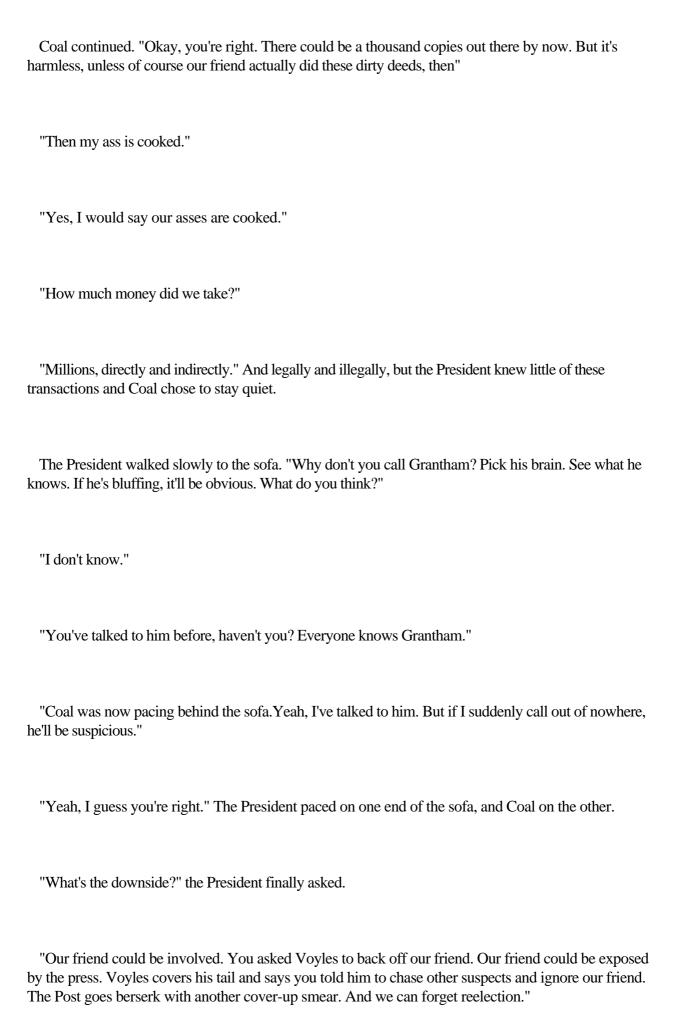
FOUR BLOCKS AWAY, Fletcher Coal paced in front of the President's desk and listened intently to the phone in his ear. He frowned, then closed his eyes, then glared at the President as if to say, "Bad news, Chief. Really bad news." The President held a letter and peered at Coal over his reading glasses. Coal's pacing back and forth like Der F\'fchrer really irritated him, and he made a mental note to say something about it.

Coal slammed the phone down.

"Don't slam the damned phones!" the President said.

Coal was unfazed. "Sorry. That was Zikman. Gray Grantham called thirty minutes ago, and asked if he had any knowledge of the pelican brief."

"Wonderful. Fabulous. How'd he get a copy of it?"
Coal was still pacing. "Zikman knows nothing about it, so his ignorance was genuine."
"His ignorance is always genuine. He's the dumbest ass on my staff, Fletcher, and I want him gone."
"Whatever." Coal sat in a chair across the desk and folded his hands in a little steeple in front of his chin. He was very deep in thought, and the President tried to ignore him. They thought for a moment.
"Voyles leaked it?" the President finally said.
"Maybe, if it was leaked. Grantham is known for bluffing. We can't be certain he's seen the brief. Maybe he heard about it, and he's fishing."
"Maybe, my ass. What if they run some crazy story about that damned thing? What then?" The President slapped his desk and bolted to his feet. What then, Fletcher? That paper hates me!" He moped to the windows.
"They can't run it without another source, and there can't be another source because there's no truth to it. It's a wild idea that's gone much further than it deserves."
"The President sulked for a while and stared through the glass. How did Grantham find out about it?"
Coal stood and began pacing, but much slower now. He was still painfully in thought. "Who knows. No one here knows about it but you and I. They brought one copy, and it's locked away in my office. I personally Xeroxed it once, and gave it to Gminski. I swore him to secrecy."
The President sneered at the windows.



"Anything else?"
Coal thought for a second. "Yeah, this is all completely off the wall. The brief is fantasy. Grantham will find nothing, and I'm late for a staff meeting." He walked to the door. I've got a squash game for lunch. Be back at one."
The President watched the door close, and breathed easier. He had eighteen holes planned for the afternoon, so forget the pelican thing. If Coal wasn't worried, neither was he.
He punched numbers on his phone, waited patiently, and finally had Bob Gminski on the line. The director of the CIA was a terrible golfer, one of the few the President could humiliate, and he invited him to play this afternoon. Certainly, said Gminski, a man with a thousand things to do but, well, it was the President so he would be delighted to join him.
"By the way, Bob, what about this pelican thing in New Orleans?"
Gminski cleared his throat and tried to sound relaxed. "Well, Chief, I told Fletcher Coal Friday that it was very imaginative and a fine work of fiction. I think its author should forget about law school and pursue a career as a novelist. Ha, ha, ha."
"Great, Bob. Nothing to it then."
"We're digging."
"See you at three." The President hung up, and went straight for his putter.

RIVERWALK RUNS for a quarter of a mile along the water, and is always crowded. It is packed with two hundred shops and cafes and restaurants on several levels, most under the same roof, and several with doors leading onto a boardwalk next to the river. It's at the foot of Poydras Street, a stone's throw from the Quarter.

She arrived at eleven, and sipped espresso in the rear of a tiny bistro while trying to read the paper and appear calm. Frenchmen's Bend was one level down and around a corner. She was nervous, and the espresso didn't help.

She had a list in her pocket of things to do, specific steps at specific moments, even words and sentences she had memorized in the event things went terribly wrong and Verheek got out of control. She had slept two hours, and spent the rest of the time with a legal pad diagraming and charting. If she died, it would not be from a lack of preparation.

She could not trust Gavin Verheek. He was employed by a law enforcement agency that at times operated by its own rules. He took orders from a man with a history of paranoia and dirty tricks. His boss reported to a President in charge of an Administration run by fools. The President had rich, sleazy friends who gave him lots of money.

But at this moment, dear, there was no one else to trust. After five days and two near misses, she was throwing in the towel.

New Orleans had lost its allure. She needed help, and if she had to trust cops, the Fibbies were as clean as any.

Eleven forty-five. She paid for the espresso, waited for a crowd of shoppers, and fell in behind them. There were a dozen people browsing in Frenchmen's Bend as she walked past the entrance where her friend should be in about ten minutes. She eased into a bookstore two doors down. There were at least three stores in the vicinity from which she could shop and hide and watch the front door of Frenchmen's Bend. She chose the bookstore because the clerks weren't pushy and killing time was expected of the customers. She looked at the magazines first, then with three minutes to go she stepped between two rows of cookbooks and watched for Gavin.

Thomas said he was never on time. An hour late was early for him, but she would give him fifteen minutes and she'd be gone.

She expected him at precisely noon, and there he was. Black sweatshirt, red baseball cap, folded newspaper. He was a bit thinner than she expected, but he could lose a few pounds. Her heart pounded away. Be cool, she said. Just be cool, dammit.

She held a cookbook to her eyes and peered over it. He had gray hair and dark skin. The eyes were hidden behind sunglasses. He fidgeted and looked irritated, the way he sounded on the phone. He passed the newspaper from hand to hand, shifted his weight from foot to foot, and glanced around nervously.

He was okay. She liked the way he looked. He had a vulnerable, nonprofessional manner about him that said he was scared too.

After five minutes, he walked through the door as he was told, and went to the right rear of the store.

KHAMEL HAD BEEN TRAINED to welcome death. He had been close to it many times, but never afraid of it. And after thirty years of expecting it, nothing, absolutely nothing, made him tense. He got somewhat excited about sex, but that was it. The fidgeting was an act. The jittery little movements were contrived. He'd survived face-offs with men almost as talented as he, and he could certainly handle this little rendezvous with a desperate child. He picked through the safari jackets and tried to appear nervous.

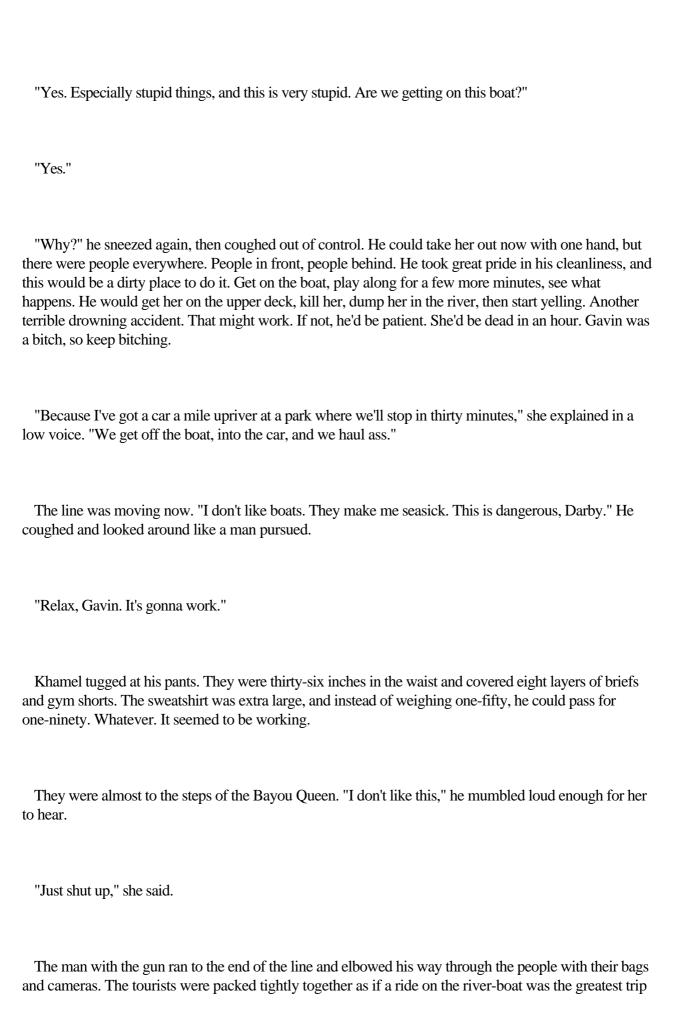
He had a handkerchief in his pocket, because he suddenly had caught a cold so his voice was a bit thick and scratchy. He had listened to the recording a hundred times, and he was confident he had the inflection and rhythm and slight upper Midwest accent. But Verheek was a bit more nasal; thus, the handkerchief for the cold.

It was difficult to allow anyone to approach from the rear, but he knew he must. He did not see her. She was behind him but very close when she said, "Gavin."

He jerked quickly around. She was holding a white Panama hat and speaking to it. "Darby," he said, pulling the handkerchief out for a fake sneeze. Her hair was a gold color and shorter than his. He sneezed and coughed. "Let's get out of here," he said. "I don't like this idea."

Darby didn't like it either. It was Monday and her classmates were going about their business of clawing through law school, and here she was camouflaged to the max and playing cloak and dagger with this man who could get her killed. "Just do as I say, okay. Where'd you get the cold?" He sneezed into the handkerchief and talked as low as possible. It sounded painful. "Last night. I left the air on too low. Let's get out of here." "Follow me." They left the store. Darby took his hand, and they walked quickly down a flight of stairs leading to the boardwalk. "Have you seen them?" he asked. "No. Not yet. But I'm sure they're around." "Where the hell are we going?" The voice was scratchy. They were on the boardwalk, almost jogging, talking without looking at each other. "Just come with me." "You're going too fast, Darby. We look suspicious. Slow down. Look, this is crazy. Let me make a phone call, and we'll be safe and secure. I can have three agents here in ten minutes." He was sounding good. This was working. They were holding hands, running for their lives. "Nope." She slowed. The boardwalk was crowded, and a line had formed beside the Bayou Queen, a paddle wheeler. They stopped at the end of the line. "What the hell is this?" he asked.

"Do you bitch about everything?" she almost whispered.



in the world. He had killed before, but never in such a public place as this. The back of her head was visible through the crowd. He shoved his way desperately through the line. A few cursed him, but he couldn't care less. The gun was in a pocket, but as he neared the girl he yanked it out and kept it by his right leg. She was almost to the steps, almost on the boat. He shoved harder and knocked people out of the way. They protested angrily until they saw the gun, then they began yelling. She was holding hands with the man, who was talking nonstop. She was about to step up onto the boat when he knocked the last person out of the way and quickly stuck the gun into the base of the skull just below the red baseball cap. He fired once, and people screamed and fell to the ground.

Gavin fell hard into the steps. Darby screamed and backed away in horror. Her ears were ringing from the shot, and voices were yelling and people were pointing. The man with the gun was running hard toward a row of shops and a crowd of people. A heavy man with a camera was yelling at him, and Darby watched for a second as he disappeared. Maybe she'd seen him before, but she couldn't think now. She was yelling and couldn't stop.

"He's got a gun!" a woman near the boat yelled, and the crowd backed away from Gavin, who was on all fours with a small pistol in his right hand. He rocked pitifully back and forth like an infant trying to crawl. Blood streamed from his chin and puddled under his face. His head hung almost to the boards. His eyes were closed. He moved forward just a few inches, his knees now in the dark red puddle.

The crowd backed farther away, horrified at the sight of this wounded man fighting death. He teetered and wobbled forward again, headed nowhere but wanting to move, to live. He started yelling; loud painful moans in a language Darby did not recognize.

The blood was pouring, gushing from the nose and chin. He was wailing in that unknown tongue. Two crew members from the boat hovered on the steps, watching but afraid to move. The pistol concerned them.

A woman was crying, then another. Darby inched farther back. "He's Egyptian," a small, dark woman said. That news meant nothing to the crowd, now mesmerized.

He rocked forward and lunged to the edge of the boardwalk. The gun dropped into the water. He collapsed on his stomach with his head hanging over and dripping into the river. Shouts came from the rear, and two policemen rushed to him.

A hundred people now inched forward to see the dead man. Darby shuffled backward, then left the scene. The cops would have questions, and since she had no answers, she preferred not to talk. She was

weak and needed to sit for a while, and think. There was an oyster bar inside Riverwalk. It was crowded for lunch, and she found the rest rooms in the back. She locked the door and sat on a toilet.
SHORTLY AFTER DARK, she left Riverwalk. The Westin Hotel is two blocks away, and she hoped maybe she could make it there without being gunned down on the sidewalk. Her clothes were different and hidden under a new black trench coat. The sunglasses and hat were also new. She was tired of spending good money on disposable clothes. She was tired of a lot of things.
She made it to the Westin in one piece. There were no rooms, and she sat in the well-lit lounge for an hour drinking coffee. It was time to run, but she couldn't get careless. She had to think.
Maybe she was thinking too damned much. Maybe they now thought of her as a thinker, and planned accordingly.
She left the Westin, and walked to Poydras, where she flagged a cab. An elderly black man sat low behind the wheel.
"I need to go to Baton Rouge," she said.
"Lord, honey, that's a heckuva ride."
"How much?" she asked quickly.
He thought a second. "A hundred and fifty."
She crawled in the backseat and threw two bills over the seat. There's two hundred. Get there as fast as you can, and watch your rear. We may be followed."

He turned off the meter and stuffed the money in his shirt pocket. Darby lay down in the backseat and closed her eyes. This was not an intelligent move, but playing the percentages was getting nowhere. The old man was a fast driver, and within minutes they were on the expressway.

The ringing in her ears had stopped, but she still heard the gunshot and saw him on all fours, rocking back and forth, try ing to live just a moment longer. Thomas had once referred to him as Dutch Verheek, but said the nickname was dropped after law school when they became serious about their careers. Dutch Verheek was not an Egyptian.

She had caught just a glimpse of his killer as he was running away. There was something familiar about him. He had glanced to his right just once as he was running, and something clicked. But she was screaming and hysterical, and it was a blur.

Everything blurred. Halfway to Baton Rouge, she fell into a deep sleep.

DIRECTOR VOYLES stood behind his executive swivel chair. His jacket was off, and most of the buttons on his tired and wrinkled shirt were unfastened. It was 9 P.M., and judging from the shirt he had been at the office at least fifteen hours. And he hadn't thought of leaving.

He listened to the receiver, mumbled a few instructions, and hung it up. K. O. Lewis sat across the desk. The door was open; the lights were on; no one had left. The mood was somber with small huddles of soft whispers.

"That was Eric East," Voyles said, sitting gently into the chair. He's been there about two hours, and they just finished the autopsy. He watched it, his first. Single bullet to the right temple, but death came sooner from a single blow at C-2 and -3. The vertebrae were shattered into tiny chips and pieces. No powder burns on his hand. Another blow severely bruised his larynx, but did not cause death. He was nude. Estimate of between ten and eleven last night."

"Who found him?" Lewis asked.



Voyles nodded at the door, and Lewis got up and closed it. The Director was standing again, cracking his knuckles and thinking aloud. "We have to cover our asses. I think we should assign at least two hundred agents to pelican, but try like hell to keep it quiet. There's something there, K.O., something really nasty. But at the same time, I promised the President we would back off. He personally asked me to back off the pelican brief, remember, and I said we would, in part because we thought it was a joke." Voyles managed a tight smile. "Well, I taped our little conversation when he asked me to back off. I figure he and Coal tape everything within a half mile of the White House, so why can't I? I had my best body mike, and I've listened to the tape. Clear as a bell."

"I'm not following."

"Simple. We go in and investigate like mad. If this is it, we crack the case, get the indictments, and everyone's happy. But it'll be a bitch to do in a hurry. Meanwhile, idiot and Coal over there know nothing about the investigation. If the press gets wind of it, and if the pelican brief is on target, then I'll make damned sure the country knows the President asked us to back off because it's one of his pals."

Lewis was smiling. "It'll kill him."

"Yes! Coal will hemorrhage, and the President will never recover. The election is next year, K.O."

"I like it, Denton, but we have to solve this thing."

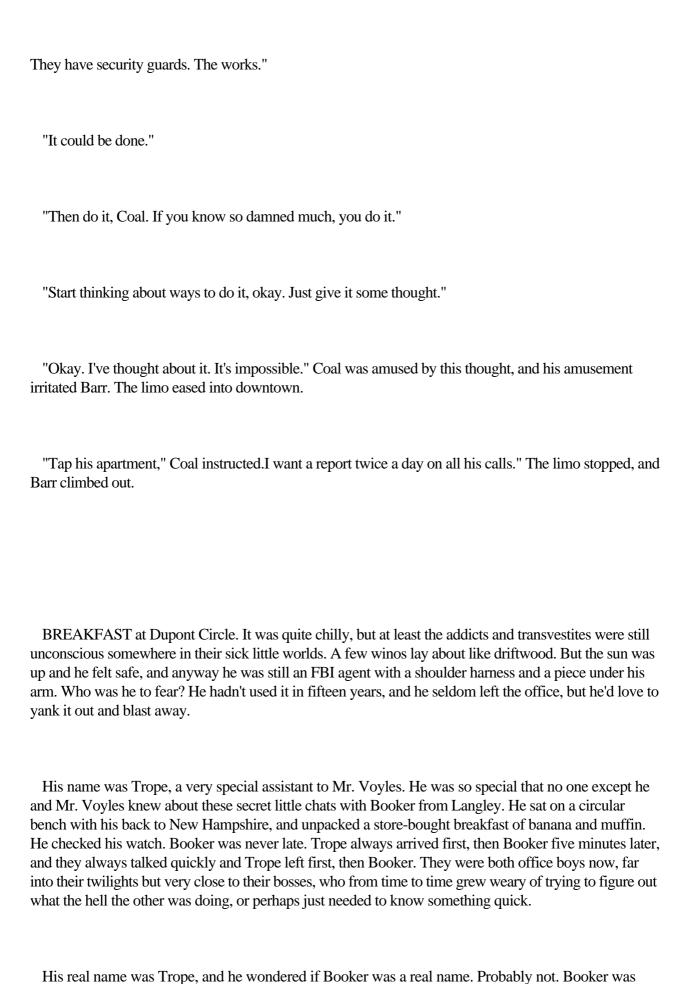
Denton walked slowly behind his chair, and slid out of his shoes. He was even shorter now. "We'll look under every stone, K.O., but it won't be easy. If it's Mattiece, then we've got a very wealthy man in a very elaborate plot to use very talented killers to take out two justices. These people don't talk, and they don't leave trails. Look at our friend Gavin. We'll spend two thousand hours digging around that hotel, and I'll bet you there won't be a shred of useful evidence. Just like Rosenberg and Jensen."

"And Callahan."

"And Callahan. And probably the girl, if we ever find her body."

"I'm somewhat responsible, Denton. Gavin came to me Thursday morning after he learned of Callahan, and I didn't listen. I knew he was going down there, but I just didn't listen."
"Look, I'm sorry he's dead. He was a fine lawyer and he was loyal to me. I value that. I trusted Gavin. But he got himself killed because he stepped out of bounds. He had no business playing cop and trying to find the girl."
"Lewis stood and stretched.I'd better go see Mrs. Verheek. How much do I tell her?"
"Let's say it looks like a burglary, cops ain't sure down there, still investigating, we'll know more tomorrow, etc. Tell her I'm devastated, and we'll do whatever she wants."
COAL'S HMO stopped abruptly at the curb so an ambulance could scream by. The limo was wandering aimlessly through the city, a ritual not unusual when Coal and Matthew Barr met to talk about really dirty business. They sat deep in the back of it, sipping drinks. Coal was indulging in a spring water. Barr had a sixteen-ounce Bud purchased from a convenience store.
They ignored the ambulance.
"I must know what Grantham knows," Coal was saying. "Today he called Zikman, Zikman's aide Trandell, Nelson DeVan, one of my many former assistants who's now with the Committee to Reelect. And these are just the ones I know of. All in one day. He's hot on this pelican brief."
"You think he's seen it?" The limo was moving again.
"No. Not at all. If he knew what was in it, he wouldn't be fishing for it. But dammit, he knows about it."
"He's good. I've watched him for years. He seems to move in the shadows and keeps in touch with an





from Langley, and they were so paranoid even the pencil pushers probably had fakes.

He took an inch off the banana. Hell, the secretaries over there probably had three or four names.
Booker strolled near the fountain with a tall white cup of coffee. He glanced around, then sat down next to his friend. Voyles wanted this meeting, so Trope would speak first.
"We lost a man in New Orleans," he said.
Booker cuddled the hot cup and sipped. "He got himself killed."
"Yeah, but he's still dead. Were you there?"
"Yes, but we didn't know he was there. We were close, but watching others. What was he doing?"
Trope unwrapped the cold muffin. "We don't know. Went down for the funeral, tried to find the girl found someone else, and here we are." He took a long bite and the banana was finished. Now to the muffin. It was a clean job, wasn't it?"
Booker shrugged. What did the FBI know about killing people? "It was okay. Pretty weak effort at suicide, from what we hear." He sipped the hot coffee.
"Where's the girl?" Trope asked.
"We lost her at O'Hare. Maybe she's in Manhattan, but we're not certain. We're looking."
"And they're looking." Trope sipped cold coffee.
"I'm sure they are."





the yearbook by a great admirer of Darby's. It looked like something out of Vogue. She was laughing at something or someone at the picnic. The teeth were perfect and the face was warm. He had tacked this

one onto the small corkboard beside his news desk.

There was a fourth fax, a photo of Thomas Callahan, just for the record.

He placed his feet on the desk. It was almost nine-thirty, Tuesday. The newsroom hummed and rocked like a well-organized riot. He'd made eighty phone calls in the last twenty-four hours, and had nothing to show but the four photos and a stack of campaign finance forms. He was getting nowhere, and, really, why bother? She was about to tell all.

He skimmed the Post, and saw the strange story about one Gavin Verheek and his demise. The phone rang. It was Darby.

"Seen the Post?" she asked.

"I write the Post, remember."

She was not in the mood for small talk. "The story about the FBI lawyer murdered in New Orleans, have you seen it?"

I'm just reading it. Does it mean something to you?"

You could say that. Listen carefully, Grantham. Callahan gave the brief to Verheek, who was his best friend. Friday, Verheek came to New Orleans for the funeral. I talked to him by phone over the weekend. He wanted to help me, but I was scared. We agreed to meet yesterday at noon. Verheek was murdered in his room around eleven Sunday night. Got all that?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"Verheek didn't show for our meeting. He was, of course, dead by then. I got scared, and left the city. I'm in New York."

"Okay." Grantham wrote furiously. "Who killed Verheek?"





"Perhaps. But I'll call you in the morning."
Grantham hung up, and for a moment admired the slightly blurred photo of this very beautiful law student who was convinced she was about to die. For a second he succumbed to thoughts of chivalry and gallantry and rescue. She was in her early twenties, liked older men, according to the photo of Callahan, and suddenly she trusted him to the exclusion of all others. He would make it work. And he would protect her.
THE MOTORCADE moved quietly out of downtown. He was due for a speech at College Park in an hour, and he relaxed in his limo with his jacket off, reading the words Mabry had put together. He shook his head and wrote in the margins. On a normal day, this would be a pleasant drive out of the city to a beautiful campus for a light little speech, but it wasn't working out. Coal was seated next to him in the limo.
The Chief of Staff routinely avoided these trips. He treasured the moments the President was out of the White House and he had the run of the place. But they needed to talk.
"I'm tired of Mabry's speeches," the President said in frustration. They're all sounding the same. I swear I gave this one last week at the Rotary convention."
"He's the best we've got, but I'm exploring," Coal said without looking up from his memo. He'd read the speech, and it wasn't that bad. But Mabry had been writing for six months, and the ideas were stale and Coal wanted to fire him anyway.
The President glanced at Coal's memo. "What's that?"
"The short list."
"Who's left?"

"Siler-Spence, Watson, and Calderon." Coal flipped a page. "That's just great, Fletcher. A woman, a black, and a Cuban. Whatever happened to white men? I thought I said I wanted young white men. Young, tough, conservative judges with impeccable credentials and years to live. Didn't I say that?" Coal kept reading. "They have to be confirmed, Chief." "We'll get 'em confirmed. I'll twist arms until they break, but they'll be confirmed. Do you realize that nine of every ten white men in this country voted for me?" "Eighty-four percent." "Right. So what's wrong with white men?" "This is not exactly patronage." "The hell it's not. It's patronage pure and simple. I reward my friends, and I punish my enemies. That's how you survive in politics. You dance with the ones that brought you. I can't believe you want a female and a black. You're getting soft, Fletcher." Coal flipped another page. He'd heard this before. "I'm more concerned with reelection," he said quietly. "And I'm not? I've appointed so many Asians and Hispanics and women and blacks you'd think I was a Democrat. Hell, Fletcher, what's wrong with white people? Look, there must be a hundred good, qualified, conservative judges out there, right? Why can't you find just two, only two, who look and think like I do?"

"You got ninety percent of the Cuban vote."

The President tossed the speech in a seat and picked up the morning's Post. "Okay, let's go with Calderon. How old is he?"
"Fifty-one. Married, eight kids, Catholic, poor background, worked his way through Yale, very solid. Very conservative. No warts or skeletons, except he was treated for alcoholism twenty years ago. He's been sober since. A teetotaler."
"Has he ever smoked dope?"
"He denies it."
"I like him." The President was reading the front page.
"So do I. Justice and FBI have checked his underwear, and he's very clean. Now, do you want Siler-Spence or Watson?"
"What kind of name is Siler-Spence? I mean, what's wrong with these women who use hyphens? What if her name was Skowinski, and she married a guy named Levondowski? Would her little liberated soul insist she go through life as F. Gwendolyn Skowinski-Levondowski? Give me a break. I'll never appoint a woman with a hyphen."
"You already have."
"Who?"
"Kay Jones-Roddy, ambassador to Brazil."

"Then call her home and fire her." Coal managed a slight grin and placed the memo on the seat. He watched the traffic through his window. They would decide on number two later. Calderon was in the bag, and he wanted Linda Siler-Spence, so he would keep pushing the black and force the President to the woman. Basic manipulation. "I think we should wait another two weeks before announcing them," he said. "Whatever," the President mumbled as he read a story on page one. He would announce them when he got ready, regardless of Coal's timetable. He was not yet convinced they should be announced together. "Judge Watson is a very conservative black judge with a reputation for toughness. He would be ideal." "I don't know," the President mumbled as he read about Gavin Verheek. Coal had seen the story on page two. Verheek was found dead in a room at the Hilton in New Orleans under strange circumstances. According to the story, official FBI was in the dark and had nothing to say about why Verheek was in New Orleans. Voyles was deeply saddened. Fine, loyal employee, etc. The President flipped through the paper. "Our friend Grantham has been quiet." "He's digging. I think he's heard of the brief, but just can't get a handle on it. He's called everyone in town, but doesn't know what to ask. He's chasing rabbits."

Coal had never touched a golf club, and hated the idle chatter about handicaps and such. "Do you think Voyles is investigating down there?"

"Well, I played golf with Gminski yesterday," the President said smugly. "And he assures me

couldn't stay out of the sand and water. It was funny, really."

everything's under control. We had a real heart-to-heart talk over eighteen holes. He's a horrible golfer,

"No. He gave me his word he would not. Not that I trust him, but Gminski didn't mention Voyles." "How much do you trust Gminski?" Coal asked with a quick glance and frown at the President. "None. But if he knew something about the pelican brief, I think he would tell me" The President's words trailed off, and he knew he sounded naive. Coal grunted his disbelief. They crossed the Anacostia River and were in Prince Georges County. The President picked up the speech and looked out his window. Two weeks after the killings, and the ratings were still above fifty percent. The Democrats had no visible candidate out there making noise. He was strong and getting stronger. Americans were tired of dope and crime, and noisy minorities getting all the attention, and liberal idiots interpreting the Constitution in favor of criminals and radicals. This was his moment. Two nominations to the Supreme Court at the same time. It would be his legacy. He smiled to himself. What a wonderful tragedy. THE TAXI stopped abruptly at the corner of Fifth and Fifty-second, and Gray, doing exactly what he was told, paid quickly and jumped out with his bag. The car behind was honking and flipping birds, and he thought how nice it was to be back in New York City. It was almost 5 P.M., and the pedestrians were thick on Fifth, and he figured that was precisely what she wanted. She had been specific. Take this flight from National to La Guardia. Take a cab to the Vista Hotel in the World Trade Center. Go to the bar, have a drink, maybe two, watch your rear, then after an

hour catch a cab to the corner of Fifth and Fifty-second. Move quickly, wear sunglasses, and watch for

everything because if he was being followed he could get them killed.

She made him write it all down. It was a bit silly, a bit of overkill, but she had a voice he couldn't argue with. Didn't want to, really. She was lucky to be alive, she said, and she would take no more chances. And if he wanted to talk to her, then he would do exactly as he was told.

He wrote it down. He fought the crowd and walked as fast as possible up Fifth to Fifty-ninth to the Plaza, up the steps and through its lobby, then out onto Central Park South. No one could follow him. And if she was this cautious, no one could follow her.

The sidewalk was packed along Central Park South, and as he neared Sixth Avenue he walked even faster. He was keyed up, and regardless of how restrained he tried to be, he was terribly excited about meeting her. On the phone she had been cool and methodical, but with a trace of fear and uncertainty. She was just a law student, she said, and she didn't know what she was doing, and she would probably be dead in a week if not sooner, but anyway this was the way the game would be played. Always assume you're being followed, she said. She had survived seven days of being chased by bloodhounds, so please do as she said.

She said to duck into the St. Moritz at the corner of Sixth, and he did. She had reserved a room for him under the name of Warren Clark. He paid cash for the room, and rode the elevator to the ninth floor. He was to wait. Just sit and wait, she'd said.

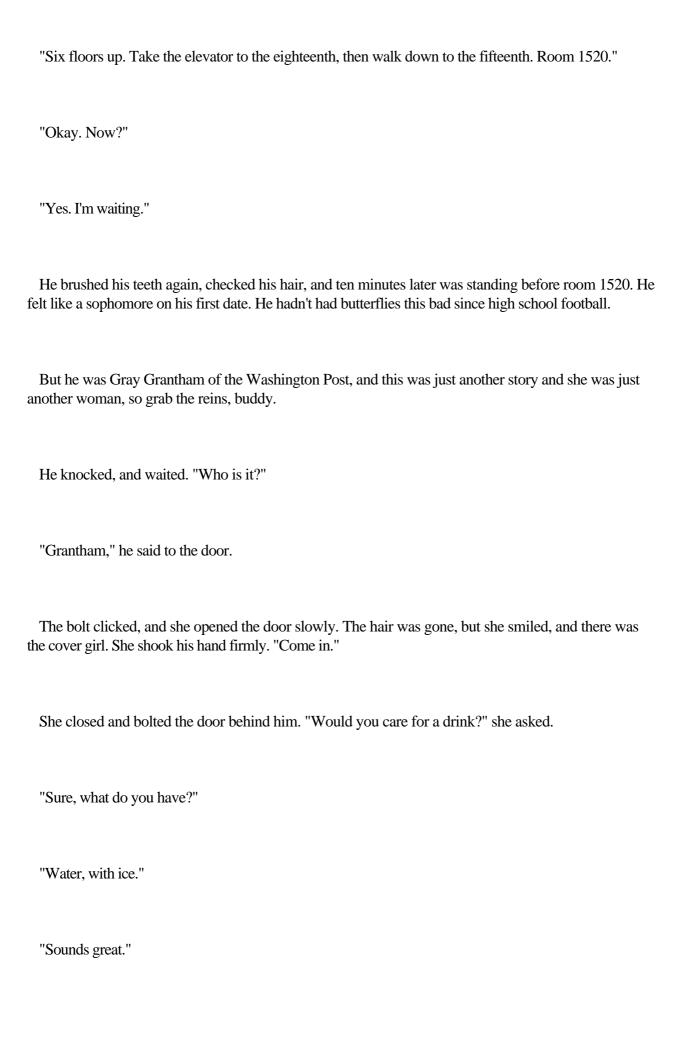
He stood in the window for an hour and watched Central Park grow dark. The phone rang.

"Mr. Clark?" a female asked.

"Uh, yes."

"It's me. Did you arrive alone?"

"Yes. Where are you?"



set his bag on the table, and took a seat on the sofa. She was standing at the bar, and for a quick second he admired the jeans. No shoes. Extra-large sweatshirt with the collar to one side where a bra strap peeked through. She handed him the water, and sat in a chair by the door. "Thanks," he said. "Have you eaten?" she asked. "You didn't tell me to." She chuckled at this. "Forgive me. I've been through a lot. Let's order room service." He nodded and smiled at her. "Sure. Anything you want is fine with me." "I'd love a greasy cheeseburger with fries and a cold beer." "Perfect." She picked up the phone and ordered the food. Grantham walked to the window and watched the lights crawling along Fifth Avenue. "I'm twenty-four. How old are you?" She was on the sofa now, sipping ice water.

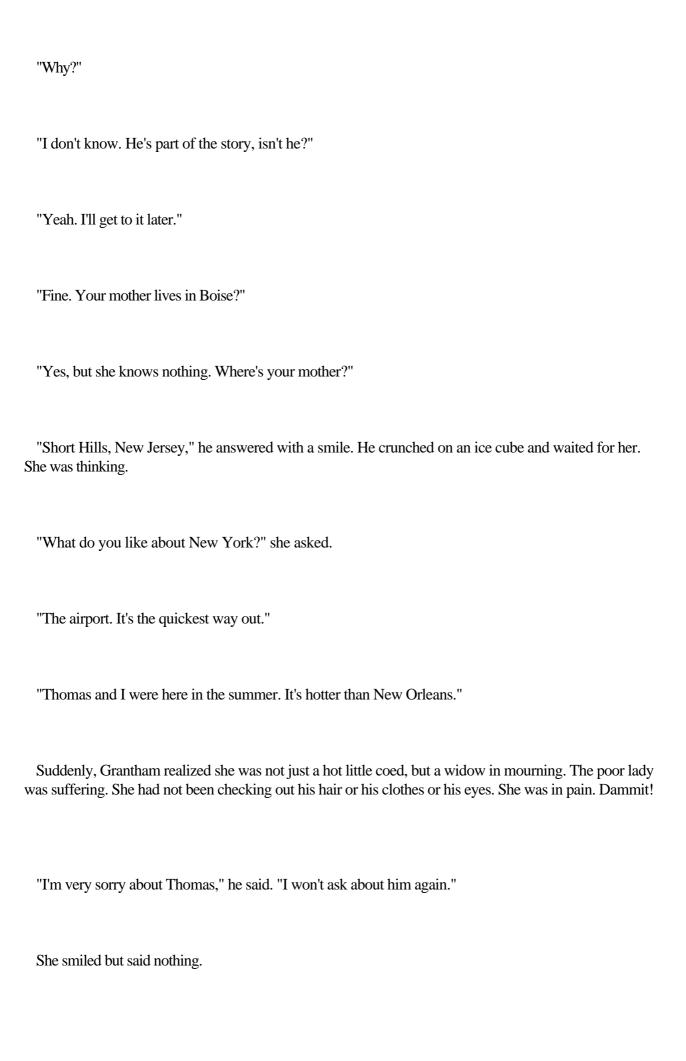
He took the chair nearest to her. "Thirty-eight. Married once. Divorced seven years and three months

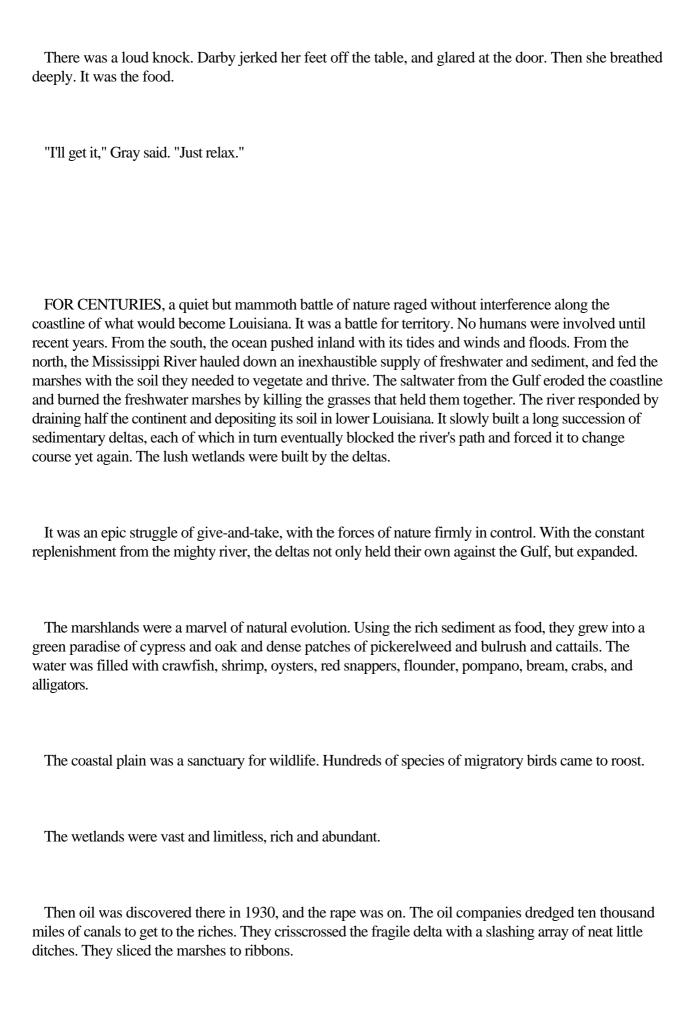
ago. No children. Live alone with a cat. Why'd you pick the St. Moritz?"

She walked into a small sitting room where the television was on with no sound. "In here," she said. He









They drilled, found oil, then dredged like maniacs to get to it. Their canals were perfect conduits for the Gulf and its saltwater, which are away at the marshes.

Since oil was found, tens of thousands of acres of wetlands have been devoured by the ocean. Sixty square miles of Louisiana vanishes every year. Every fourteen minutes, another acre disappears under water.

IN 1979, AN OIL COMPANY punched a hole deep in Terrebonne Parish and hit oil. It was a routine day on just another rig, but it was not a routine hit. There was a lot of oil. They drilled again an eighth of a mile away, and hit another big one. They backed off a mile, drilled, and hit an even bigger one. Three miles away, they struck gold again.

The oil company capped the wells and pondered the situation, which had all the markings of a major new field.

The oil company was owned by Victor Mattiece, a Cajun from Lafayette who'd made and lost several fortunes drilling for oil in south Louisiana. In 1979, he happened to be wealthy, and more importantly, he had access to other people's money. He was quickly convinced he had just tapped a major reserve. He began buying land around the capped wells.

Secrets are crucial but hard to keep in the oilfields. And Mattiece knew if he threw around too much money, there would soon be a mad rush of drilling around his new gold mine. A man of infinite patience and planning, he looked at the big picture and said no to the quick buck. He decided he would have it all. He huddled with his lawyers and other advisers, and devised a plan to methodically buy the surrounding land under a myriad of corporate names. They formed new companies, used some of his old ones, purchased all or portions of struggling firms, and went about the business of acquiring acreage.

Those in the business knew Mattiece, and knew he had money and could get more. Mattiece knew they knew, so he quietly unleashed two dozen faceless entities upon the landowners of Terrebonne Parish. It worked without a major hitch.

The plan was to consolidate territory, then dredge yet another channel through the hapless and

beleaguered marshlands so that the men and their equipment could get to the rigs and the oil could be brought out with haste. The canal would be thirty-five miles long and twice as wide as the others. There would be a lot of traffic.

Because Mattiece had money, he was a popular man with the politicians and bureaucrats. He played their game skillfully. He sprinkled money around where needed. He loved politics, but hated publicity. He was paranoid and reclusive.

As the land acquisition sailed smoothly along, Mattiece suddenly found himself short of cash. The industry turned downward in the early eighties, and his other rigs stopped pumping. He needed big money, and he wanted partners adept at putting it up and remaining silent about it. So he stayed away from Texas. He went overseas and found some Arabs who studied his maps and believed his estimate of a mammoth reserve of crude and natural gas. They bought a piece of the action, and Mattiece had plenty of cash again.

He did the sprinkling act, and obtained official permission to gouge his way through the delicate marshes and cypress swamps. The pieces were falling majestically into place, and Victor Mattiece could smell a billion dollars. Maybe two or three.

Then an odd thing happened. A lawsuit was filed to stop the dredging and drilling. The plaintiff was an obscure environmental outfit known simply as Green Fund.

The lawsuit was unexpected because for fifty years Louisiana had allowed itself to be devoured and polluted by oil companies and people like Victor Mattiece. It had been a trade-off. The oil business employed many and paid well. The oil and gas taxes collected in Baton Rouge paid the salaries of state employees.

The small bayou villages had been turned into boomtowns. The politicians from the governors down took the oil money and played along. All was well, and so what if some of the marshlands suffered.

Green Fund filed the lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in Lafayette. A federal judge halted the project pending a trial on all issues.

Mattiece went over the edge. He spent weeks with his lawyers plotting and scheming. He would spare no expense to win. Do whatever it took, he instructed them. Break any rule, violate any ethic, hire any

expert, commission any study, cut any throat, spend any amount of money. Just win the damned lawsuit.

Never one to be seen, he assumed an even lower profile. He moved to the Bahamas and operated from an armed fortress at Lyford Cay. He flew to New Orleans once a week to meet with the lawyers, then returned to the island.

Though invisible now, he made certain his political contributions increased. His jackpot was still safe beneath Terrebonne Parish, and he would one day extract it, but one never knows when one will be forced to call in favors.

BY THE TIME the Green Fund lawyers, both of them, had waded in ankle deep, they had identified over thirty separate defendants. Some owned land. Some did exploring. Others laid pipe. Others drilled. The joint ventures and limited partnerships and corporate associations were an impenetrable maze.

The defendants and their legions of high-priced lawyers answered with a vengeance. They filed a thick motion asking the judge to dismiss the lawsuit as frivolous. Denied. They asked him to allow the drilling to continue while they waited on a trial. Denied. They squealed with pain and explained in another heavy motion how much money was already tied up in exploration, drilling, etc. Denied again. They filed motions by the truckload, and when they were all denied and it was evident there would one day be a trial by jury, the oil lawyers dug in and played dirty.

Luckily for Green Fund's lawsuit, the heart of the new oil reserve was near a ring of marshes that had been for years a natural refuge for waterfowl. Ospreys, egrets, pelicans, ducks, cranes, geese, and many others migrated to it. Though Louisiana has not always been kind to its land, it has shown a bit more sympathy for its animals. Since the verdict would one day be rendered by a jury of average and hopefully ordinary people, the Green Fund lawyers played heavy on the birds.

The pelican became the hero. After thirty years of insidious contamination by DDT and other pesticides, the Louisiana brown pelican perched on the brink of extinction. Almost too late, it was classified as an endangered species, and afforded a higher class of protection. Green Fund seized the majestic bird, and enlisted a half-dozen experts from around the country to testify on its behalf.

With a hundred lawyers involved, the lawsuit moved slowly. At times it went nowhere, which suited Green Fund just fine. The rigs were idle.

Seven years after Mattiece first buzzed over Terrebonne Bay in his jet helicopter and followed the swamplands along the route his precious canal would take, the pelican suit went to trial in Lake Charles. It was a bitter trial that lasted ten weeks. Green Fund sought money damages for the havoc already inflicted, and it wanted a permanent injunction against further drilling.

The oil companies brought in a fancy litigator from Houston to talk to the jury. He wore elephant-skin boots and a Stetson, and could talk like a Cajun when necessary. He was stout medicine, especially when compared to the Green Fund lawyers, both of whom had beards and very intense faces.

Green Fund lost the trial, and it was not altogether unexpected. The oil companies spent millions, and it's difficult to whip a bear with a switch. David pulled it off, but the best bet is always on Goliath. The jurors were not impressed with the dire warnings about pollution and the frailness of wetland ecology. Oil meant money, and folks needed jobs.

The judge kept the injunction in place for two reasons. First, he thought Green Fund had proven its point about the pelican, a federally protected species. And it was apparent to all that Green Fund would appeal, so the matter was far from over.

The dust settled for a while, and Mattiece had a small victory. But he knew there would be other days in other courtrooms. He was a man of infinite patience and planning.

THE TAPE RECORDER was in the center of the small table with four empty beer bottles around.

He made notes as he talked. "Who told you about the lawsuit?"

A guy named John Del Greco. He's a law student at Tulane, a year ahead of me. He clerked last summer for a big firm in Houston, and the firm was on the periphery of the hostilities. He was not close to the trial, but the rumors and gossip were heavy."







"I'll read it later. Tell me about the photograph."

Mattiece is from a small town near Lafayette, and in his younger years was a big money man for politicians in south Louisiana. He was a shadowy type back then, always in the background giving money. He spent big bucks on Democrats locally and Republicans nationally, and over the years he was wined and dined by big shots from Washington. He has never sought publicity, but his kind of money is hard to hide, especially when it's being handed out to politicians. Seven years ago, when the President was the Vice President, he was in New Orleans for a Republican fundraiser. All the heavy hitters were there, including Mattiece. It was ten thousand dollars a plate, so the press tried to get in. Somehow a photographer snapped a picture of Mattiece shaking hands with the VP. The New Orleans paper ran it the next day. It's a wonderful picture. They're grinning at each other like best friends."



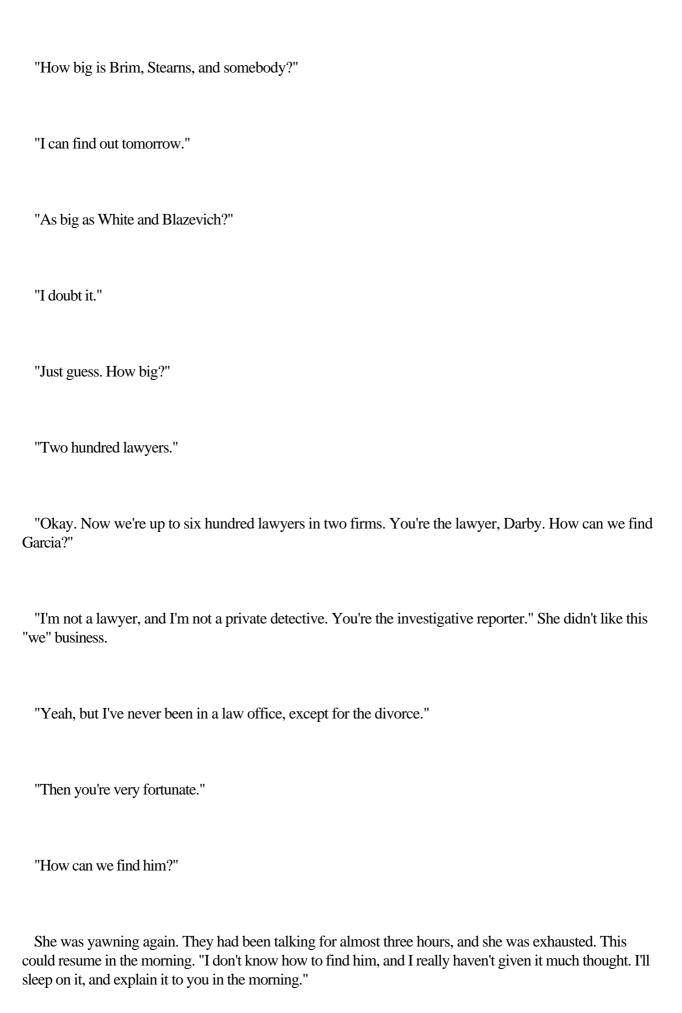




"I thought you said the law firms were primarily from New Orleans and Houston and other codidn't mention D.C."	ities. You
Darby shook her head. "You're assuming too much. I can think of at least two D.C. firms the across. One is White and Blazevich, a very old, powerful, rich Republican firm with four hundr lawyers."	
Gray moved to the edge of the sofa.	
"What's the matter?" she asked. He was suddenly wired. He was on his feet walking to the dback to the sofa.	loor, then
"This may fit. This may be it, Darby."	
"I'm listening."	
"Are you listening?"	
"I swear I'm listening."	
He was at the window. "Okay, last week I got three phone calls from a lawyer in D.C. name but that's not his name. He said he knew something and saw something about Rosenberg and I he wanted so badly to tell me what he knew. But he got scared and disappeared."	
"There are a million lawyers in B.C."	
"Two million. But I know he works in a private firm. He sort of admitted it. He was sincere a frightened, thought they were following. I asked who they were, and he of course wouldn't say	•









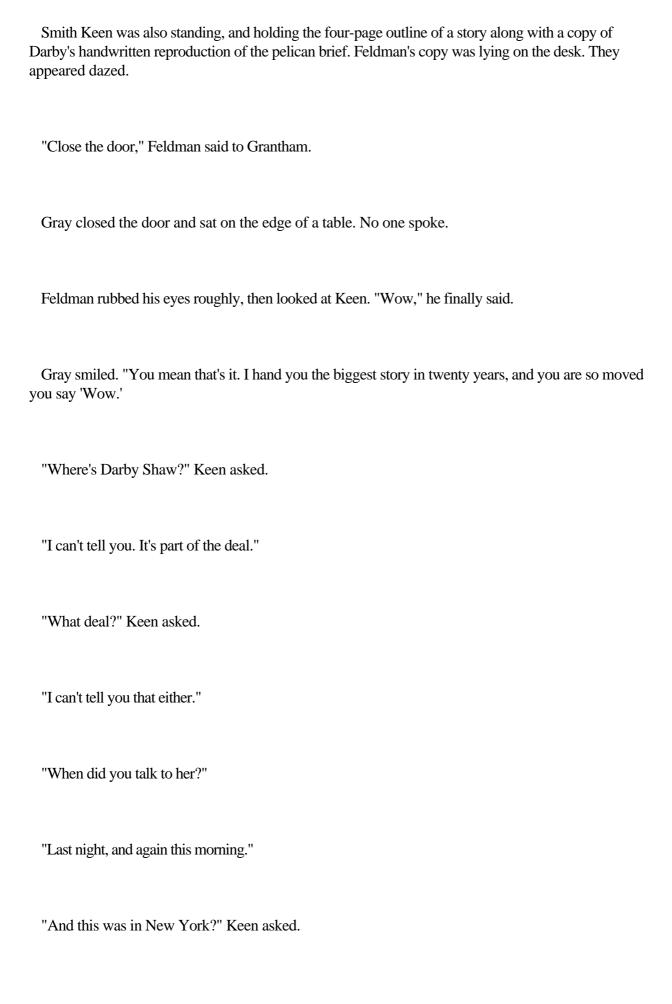
"Lock the door, get in the bed, and sleep well. I'll be right here, and everything's all right."
"Thanks." She nodded and smiled again, then closed the door to her bedroom. He listened, and she did not lock it.
He sat on the sofa in the darkness, watching her door. Some time after midnight, he dozed and slept with his knees not far from his chin.
HER BOSS was Jackson Feldman, and he was the executive editor, and this was her turf, and she didn't take any crap off anyone but Mr. Feldman. Especially an insolent brat like Gray Grantham, who was standing in front of Mr. Feldman's door, guarding it like a Doberman. She glared at him, and he sneered at her, and this had been going on for ten minutes, ever since they huddled in there and closed the door. Why Grantham was waiting outside, she did not know. But this was her turf.
Her phone rang, and Grantham yelled at her. "No calls!"
Her face was instantly red, and her mouth flew open. She picked up the receiver, listened for a second then said, "I'm sorry, but Mr. Feldman is in a meeting." She glared at Grantham, who was shaking his head as if to dare her. Yes, I'll have him call you back as soon as possible." She hung up.
"Thanks!" Grantham said, and this threw her off guard. She was about to say something nasty, but with the "Thanks" her mind went blank. He smiled at her. And it made her even madder.
It was five-thirty, time for her to leave, but Mr. Feldman asked her to stay. He was still smirking at her over there by the door, not ten feet away. She had never liked Gray Grantham. But then, there weren't too many people at the Post she did like. A news aide approached and appeared headed for the door when the Doberman stepped in front of him. "Sorry, you can't go in right now," Grantham said.

"And why not?"

"They're in a meeting. Leave it with her." He pointed at the secretary, who despised being pointed at and despised being referred to simply as "her." She had been here for twenty-one years. The news aide was not easily intimidated. "That's fine. But Mr. Feldman instructed me to have these papers here at precisely five-thirty. It's precisely five-thirty, here I am, and here are the papers." "Look, we're real proud of you. But you can't go in, understand? Now just leave the papers with that nice lady over there, and the sun will come up tomorrow." Grantham moved squarely in front of the door, and appeared ready for combat if the kid insisted. "I'll take those," the secretary said. She took them, and the news aide left. "Thanks!" Grantham said loudly again. "I find you to be very rude," she snapped. "I said 'Thanks.' He tried to look hurt. "You're a real smartass." "Thanks!" The door suddenly opened, and a voice called out, "Grantham." He smiled at her, and stepped inside. Jackson Feldman was standing behind his desk. The tie was

down to the second button and the sleeves were rolled to the elbows. He was six-six, with no fat. At

fifty-eight, he ran two marathons a year and worked fifteen hours a day.



"What difference does it make where we talked? We talked, okay. She talked. I listened. I flew home. I wrote the outline. So what do you think?"
Feldman slowly folded his thin frame and sat deep in his chair. "How much does the White House know?"
"Not sure. Verheek told Darby that it was delivered to the White House one day last week, and at the time the FBI thought it should be pursued. Then for some reason, after the White House had it, the FBI backed off. That's all I know."
"How much did Mattiece give the President three years ago?"
"Millions. Virtually all of it through a myriad of PACs that he controls. This guy is very smart. He's got all kinds of lawyers, and they figure out ways to funnel money here and there. It's probably legal."
The editors were thinking slowly. They were stunned, as if they'd just survived a bomb blast. Grantham was quite proud, and swung his feet under the table like a kid on a pier.
Feldman slowly picked up the papers clipped together and flipped through until he found the photograph of Mattiece and the President. He shook his head.
"It's dynamite, Gray," Keen said. We just can't run without a bunch of corroboration. Hell, you're talking about the world's greatest job of verifying. This is powerful stuff, son."
"How can you do it?" Feldman asked.
"I've got some ideas."
"I'd like to hear them. You could get yourself killed with this."

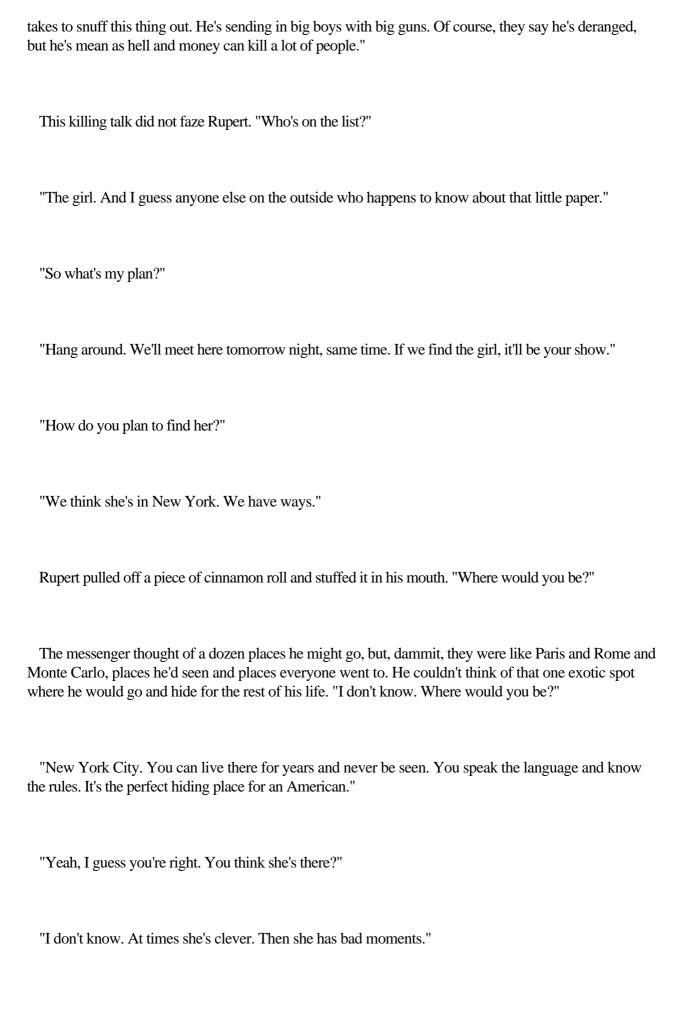




Gray smiled and left the office.
HE WAS ALMOST to Thomas Circle when he saw the blue lights behind him. The cop did not pass, but stayed on his bumper. He was oblivious to both the speed limit and his speedometer. It would be his third ticket in sixteen months.
He parked in a small lot next to an apartment house. It was dark, and the blue lights flashed in his mirrors. He rubbed his temples.
"Step out," the cop demanded from the bumper.
Gray opened the door and did what he was told. The cop was black, and was suddenly smiling. It was Cleve. He pointed to the patrol car. "Get in."
They sat in the car under the blue lights and stared at the Volvo. "Why do you do this to me?" Gray asked.
"We have quotas, Grantham. We have to stop so many white people and harass them. Chief wants to even things out. The white cops pick on innocent poor black folks, so us black cops have to pick on innocent rich white folks."
"I suppose you're gonna handcuff me and beat the hell out of me."
"Only if you ask me to. Sarge can't talk anymore."
"I'm listening."







"The messenger was on his feet. Tomorrow night," he said.

Rupert waved him off. What a goofy little twerp, he thought. Running around whispering important messages in coffee shops and beer joints. Then running back to his boss and reliving it all in vivid detail.

He threw the coffee cup in the trash and was on the sidewalk.

BRIM, STEARNS, AND KIDLOW had a hundred and ninety lawyers, according to the latest edition of the Martindale-Hubbell Legal Directory. And White and Blazevich had four hundred and twelve, so hopefully Garcia was only one of a possible six hundred and two. But if Mattiece used other D.C. firms, the number would be higher and they didn't have a chance.

As expected, White and Blazevich had no one named Garcia. Darby searched for another Hispanic name, but found none. It was one of those lily-white silk-stocking outfits filled with Ivy Leaguers with long names that ended in numerals. There were a few female names sprinkled about, but only two were partners. Most of the women had joined after 1980. If she lived long enough to finish law school, she would not consider working for a factory like White and Blazevich.

Grantham had suggested she check for Hispanics because Garcia was a bit unusual for an alias. Maybe the guy was Hispanic, and since Garcia is common for them, then maybe he just said it real quick. It didn't work. There were no Hispanics in this firm.

According to the directory, their clients were big and rich. Banks, Fortune 5005, and lots of oil companies. They listed four of the defendants in the lawsuit as clients, but not Mr. Mattiece. There were chemical companies and shipping lines, and White and Blazevich also represented the governments of South Korea, Libya, and Syria. Silly, she thought. Some of our enemies hire our lawyers to lobby our government. But then, you can hire lawyers to do anything.

Brim, Stearns, and Kidlow was a smaller version of White and Blazevich, but, gosh, there were four Hispanic names listed. She wrote them down. Two men and two women. She figured this firm must have been sued for race and sex discrimination. In the past ten years they had hired all kinds of people. The client list was predictable: oil and gas, insurance, banks, government relations. Pretty dull stuff.

She sat in a corner of the Fordham law library for an hour. It was Friday morning, ten in New York and nine in New Orleans, and instead of hiding in a library she'd never seen before, she was supposed to be sitting in Federal Procedure under Alleck, a professor she never liked but now missed sorely. Alice Stark would be sitting next to her. One of her favorite law nerds, D. Ronald Petrie, would be sitting behind her asking for a date and making lewd comments. She missed him too. She missed the quiet mornings on Thomas' balcony, sipping coffee and waiting for the French Quarter to shake its cobwebs and come to life. She missed the smell of cologne on his bathrobe.

She thanked the librarian, and left the building. On Sixty-second, she headed east toward the park. It was a brilliant October morning with a perfect sky and cool wind. A pleasant change from New Orleans, but difficult to appreciate under the circumstances. She wore new Ray-Bans and a muffler up to her chin. The hair was still dark, but she would cut no more. She was determined to walk without looking over her shoulder. They probably weren't back there, but she knew it would be years before she could stroll along a street without a doubt.

The trees in the park were a magnificent display of yellow and orange and red. The leaves fell gently in the breeze. She turned south on Central Park West. She would leave tomorrow, and spend a few days in Washington. If she survived, she would then leave the country, go maybe to the Caribbean. She'd been there twice, and there were a thousand little islands where most people spoke some form of English.

Now was the time to leave the country. They'd lost her trail, and she'd already checked on flights to Nassau and Jamaica. She could be there by dark.

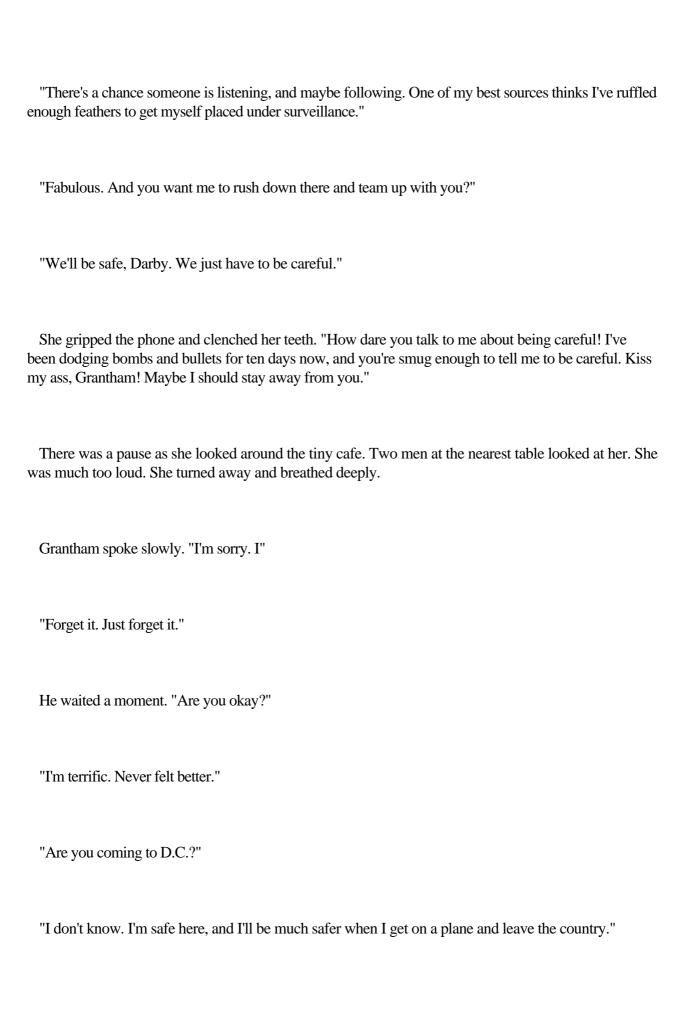
She found a pay phone in the rear of a bagel shop on Sixth, and punched Gray's number at the Post. "It's me," she said.

"Well, well. I was afraid you had skipped the country."

"Thinking about it."

"Can you wait a week?"

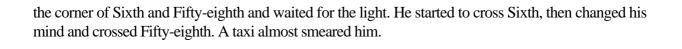
"Probably. I'll be there tomorrow. What do you know?"
"I'm just gathering junk. I've got copies of the annual statements for the seven public corporations involved in the suit."
"It's lawsuit, not suit. A suit is something you wear."
"How can you ever forgive me? Mattiece is neither an officer nor director of any."
"What else?"
"Just the thousand phone calls routine. I spent three hours yesterday hanging around courthouses looking for Garcia."
"You won't find him at a courthouse, Gray. He's not that kind of lawyer. He's in a corporate firm."
"I take it you have a better idea."
"I've got several ideas."
"Well, then, I'm just sitting here waiting on you."
"I'll call you when I get there."
"Don't call me at home."
She paused for a second. "May I ask why not?"



"Sure, but I thought you had this wonderful idea about finding Garcia, then hopefully nailing Mattiece. I thought you were outraged and morally indignant and motivated by revenge. What's happened to you?"
"Well, for one, I have this burning desire to see my twenty-fifth birthday. I'm not selfish, but perhaps I'd like to see my thirtieth too. That would be nice."
"I understand."
"I'm not sure you understand. I think you're more concerned with Pulitzers and glory than my pretty little neck."
"I assure you that's not true. Trust me, Darby. You'll be safe. You've told me the story of your life. You must trust me."
"I'll think about it."
"That's not definite."
"No, it's not. Give me some time."
"Okay."
She hung up, and ordered a bagel. A dozen languages rattled around her as the cafe was suddenly packed. Run, baby, run, her good sense told her. Take a cab to the airport. Pay cash for a ticket to Miami. Find the pagest flight south, and get on the plane. Let Grantham dig and wish him the best. He

She hung up, and ordered a bagel. A dozen languages rattled around her as the cafe was suddenly packed. Run, baby, run, her good sense told her. Take a cab to the airport. Pay cash for a ticket to Miami. Find the nearest flight south, and get on the plane. Let Grantham dig and wish him the best. He was very good, and he'd find a way to break the story. And she would read about it one day while lying on a sun-drenched beach sipping a pina colada and watching the windsurfers.

Stump limped by on the sidewalk. She caught a glimpse of him through the crowd and through the window. Her mouth was suddenly dry and she was dizzy. He didn't look inside. He just ambled by, looking rather lost. She ran through the tables and watched him through the door. He limped slightly to



He was going nowhere, just strolling along with a slight limp.

CROFT SAW THE KID as he stepped from an elevator into the atrium. He was with another young lawyer, and they didn't have their briefcases so it was obvious they were headed for a late lunch. After five days of watching lawyers, Croft had learned their habits.

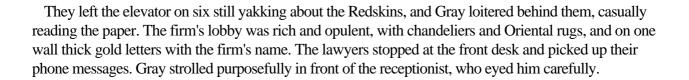
The building was on Pennsylvania, and Brim, Stearns, and Kidlow covered floors three through eleven. Garcia left the building with his buddy, and they laughed their way down the sidewalk. Something was very funny. Croft followed as closely as possible. They walked and laughed for five blocks, then, just as he figured, they ducked into a yuppie corporate fern bar for a quick bite.

Croft called Grantham three times before he got him. It was almost two, and the lunch was winding down by now, and if Grantham wanted to catch the guy, then stay close to the damned phone. Gray slammed it down. They would meet back at the building.

Garcia and his friend walked a bit slower on the return. It was a beautiful day, and it was Friday, and they enjoyed this brief respite from the grind of suing people or whatever they did for two hundred bucks an hour. Croft hid behind his sunshades and kept his distance.

Gray was waiting in the lobby near the elevators. Croft was close behind them as they spun through the revolving door. He pointed quickly to their man. Gray caught the signal and punched the elevator button. It opened and he stepped in just before Garcia and his friend. Croft stayed behind.

Garcia punched number six a split second before Gray punched it too. Gray read the paper and listened as the two lawyers talked football. The kid was no more than twenty-seven or twenty-eight. The voice maybe had a vague familiarity to it, but it had been on the phone and there was nothing distinctive about it. The face was close, but he couldn't study it. The odds said go for it. He looked very similar to the man in the photograph, and he worked for Brim, Stearns, and Kidlow, and one of its countless clients was Mr. Mattiece. He would give it a shot, but be cautious. He was a reporter. It was his job to go barging in with questions.



"May I help you, sir?" she asked in the tone that meant, "What the hell do you want?"

Gray did not miss a step. "I'm in a meeting with Roger Martin." He'd found the name in the phone book, and he'd called from the lobby a minute earlier to make sure lawyer Martin was in today. The building directory listed the firm on floors three through eleven, but did not list all one hundred and ninety lawyers. Using the yellow pages listing, he made a dozen quick calls to find a lawyer on each floor. Roger Martin was the man on the sixth floor.

He frowned at the receptionist. "I've been meeting with him for two hours."

This puzzled her, and she could think of nothing to say. Gray was around the corner and into a hallway. He caught a glimpse of Garcia entering his office four doors down.

The name beside the door was David M. Underwood. Gray did not knock on it. He wanted to strike quickly, and perhaps exit quickly. Mr. Underwood was hanging his jacket on a rack.

"Hi. I'm Gray Grantham with the Washington Post. I'm looking for a man named Garcia."

Underwood froze and looked puzzled. "How'd you get in here?" he asked.

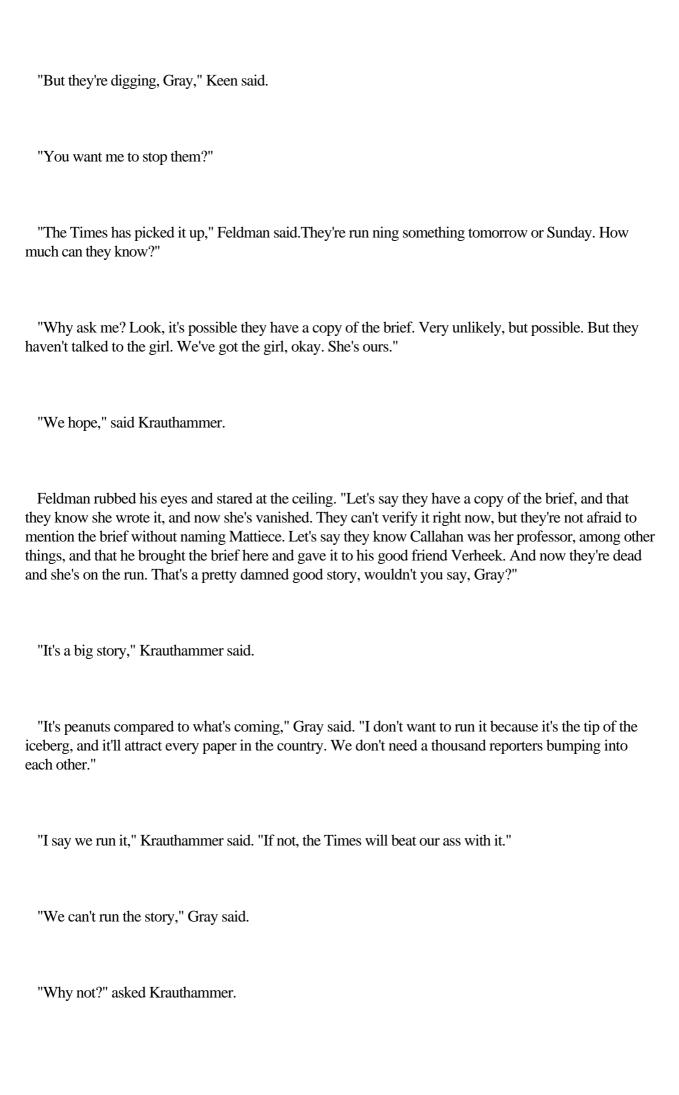
The voice was suddenly familiar. "I walked. You are Garcia, aren't you?"

He pointed to a desk plate with his name in gold letters.



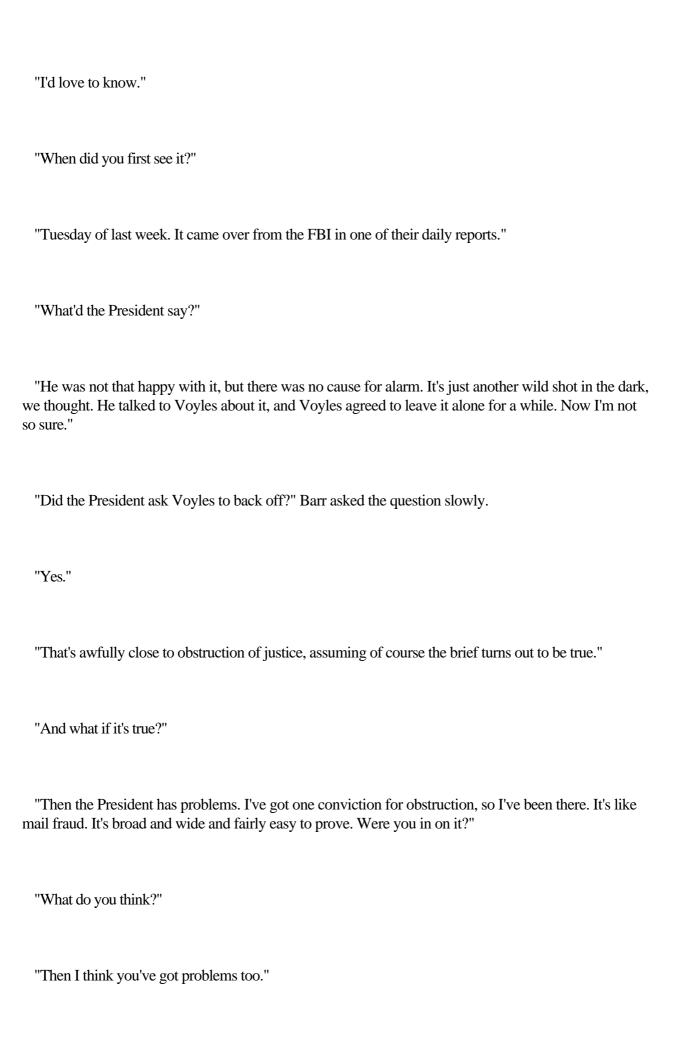


"You're getting paid, aren't you? Do it for one more week, okay? I can think of harder work."
"Croft stopped on the sidewalk, and Gray kept walking. One more week, and I'm through," Croft yelled to him. Grantham waved him off.
He unlocked the illegally parked Volvo and sped back to the Post. It was not a smart move. It was quite stupid, and he was much too experienced for such a mistake. He would omit it from his daily chat with Jackson Feldman and Smith Keen.
FELDMAN WAS LOOKING for him, another reporter said, and he walked quickly to his office. He smiled sweetly to the secretary, who was poised to attack. Keen and Howard Krauthammer, the managing editor, were waiting with Feldman. Keen closed the door and handed Gray a newspaper. Have you seen this?"
It was the New Orleans paper, the Times-Picayune, and the front-page story was about the deaths of Verheek and Callahan, along with big photos. He read it quickly while they watched him. It talked about their friendship, and their strange deaths just six days apart. And it mentioned Darby Shaw, who had disappeared. But no link to the brief.
"I guess the cat's out of the bag," Feldman said.
"It's nothing but the basics," Gray said. "We could've run this three days ago."
"Why didn't we?" asked Krauthammer.
"There's nothing here. It's two dead bodies, the name of the girl, and a thousand questions, none of which they answered. They've found a cop who'll talk, but he knows nothing beyond the blood and gore."

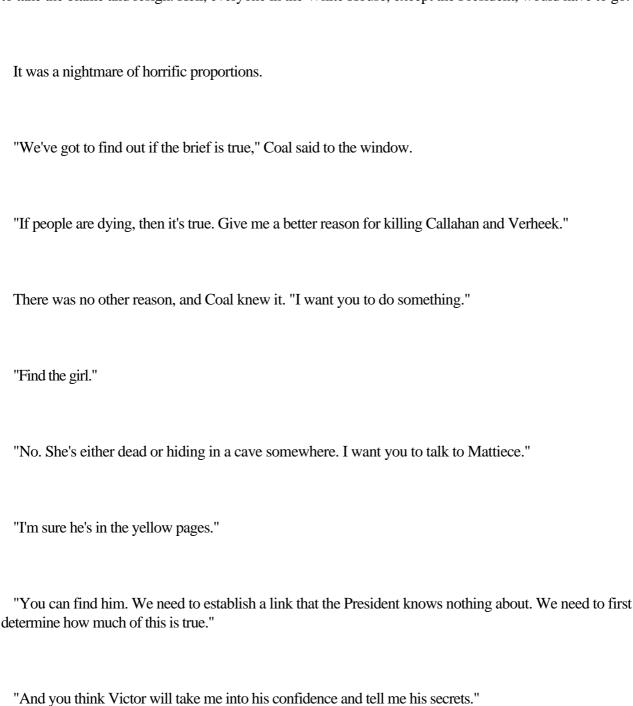


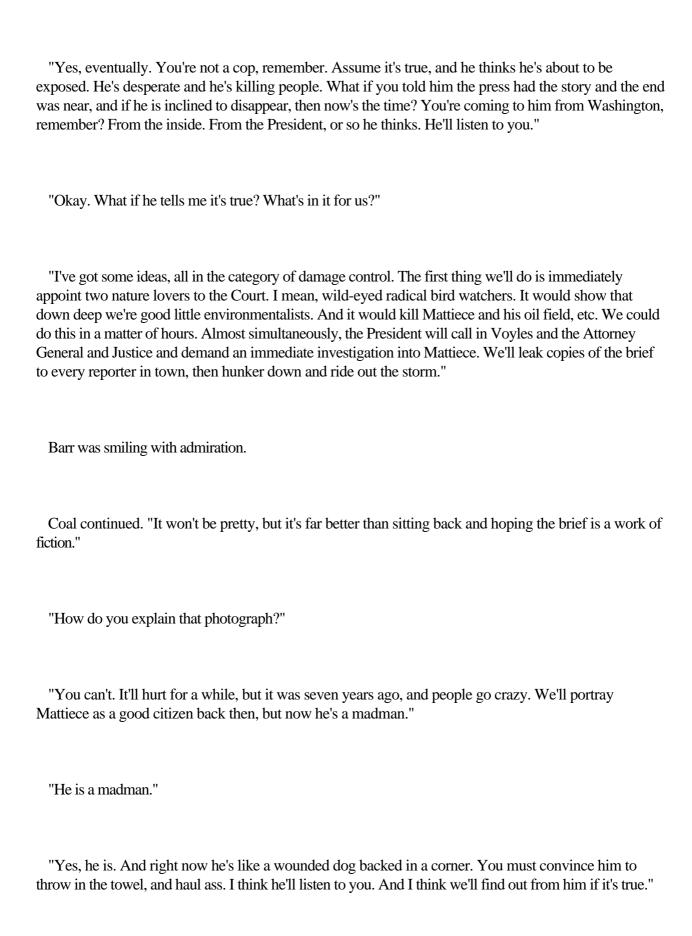


"Tł	ney're running something tomorrow or Sunday," Feldman said again.
assun	et 'em run it. I'll bet money it'll be the same story with probably the same mug shots. You guys are ning a hell of a lot. You're assuming they've got a copy of the brief, but its author doesn't have a of it. We don't have a copy of it. Let's wait, and read their little story, then go from there."
	e editors studied each other. Krauthammer was frustrated. Keen was anxious. But the boss was man, and he said, "Okay. If they run something in the morning, we'll meet here at noon and look at
"Fi	ne," Gray said quickly and reached for the door.
"Yo	ou'd better move fast, Grantham," Feldman said. "We can't sit on this much longer."
Gra	antham was gone.
with	E LIMOUSINE moved patiently in the Beltway rush hour. It was dark, and Matthew Barr read the aid of a reading light in the ceiling. Coal sipped Perrier and watched the traffic. He had the brief orized, and could have simply explained it to Barr, but he wanted to watch his reaction.
	rr had no reaction until he got to the photograph, then slowly shook his head. He laid it on the seat, hought about it for a moment. "Very nasty," he said.
Coa	al grunted.
	ow true is it?" Barr asked.

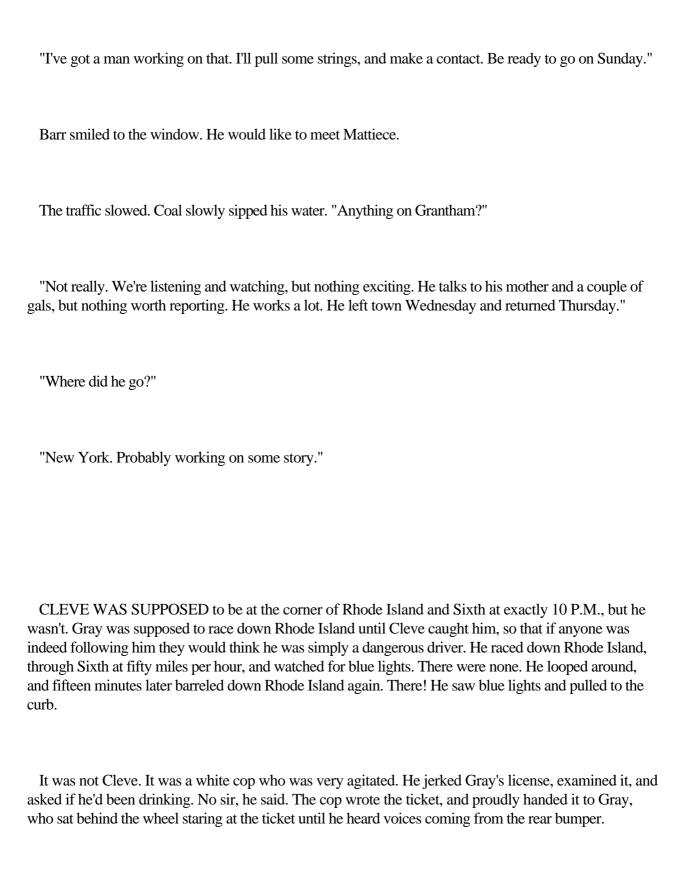


They rode in silence and watched the traffic. Coal had thought through the obstruction angle, but he wanted Barr's opinion. He wasn't worried about criminal charges. The President had one brief little chat with Voyles, asked him to look elsewhere for the time being, and that was it. Hardly the work of felons. But Coal was terribly concerned with reelection, and a scandal involving a major contributor like Mattiece would be devastating. The thought was sickening-a man the President knew and took millions from paid money to have two Supreme Court Justices knocked off so his pal the President could appoint more reasonable men to the bench so that the oil could be harvested. The Democrats would fall in the streets howling with glee. Every subcommittee in Congress would hold hearings. Every newspaper would run it every day for a year. The Justice Department would be forced to investigate. Coal would be forced to take the blame and resign. Hell, everyone in the White House, except the President, would have to go.





"So how do I find him?"



Another cop was on the scene, and they were arguing. It was Cleve, and he wanted the white cop to forget the ticket, but the white cop explained it had already been written and besides the idiot was doing fifty-six miles an hour through the intersection. He's a friend, Cleve said. Then teach him how to drive before he kills somebody, the white cop said as he got in his patrol car and drove away.

Cleve was snickering as he looked in Gray's window. "Sorry about that," he said with a smile.
"It's all your fault."
"Slow it down next time."
Gray threw the ticket on the floorboard. "Let's talk quick. You said Sarge said the boys in the West Wing are talking about me. Right?"
"Right."
"Okay, I need to know from Sarge if they're talking about any other reporters, especially from the New York Times. I need to know if they think anybody else is hot on the story."
"Is that all?"
"Yes. I need it quick."
"Slow it down," Cleve said loudly and walked to his car.

DARBY PAID for the room for the next seven days, in part because she wanted a familiar place to return to if necessary, and in part because she wanted to leave some new clothes she had purchased. It was sinful, this running and leaving everything behind. The clothes were nothing fancy, sort of upscale safari law school, but they cost even more in New York, and it would be nice to keep them. She would not take risks over clothes, but she liked the room and she liked the city and she wanted the clothes.

It was time to run again, and she would travel light. She carried a small canvas bag when she darted from the St. Moritz into a waiting cab. It was almost 11 P.M., Friday, and Central Park South was busy. Across the street, a line of horses and carriages waited for customers and brief excursions through the park.

The cab took ten minutes to get to Seventy-second and Broadway, which was the wrong direction, but this entire journey should be hard to follow. She walked thirty feet, and disappeared into the subway. She had studied a map and a book of the system, and she hoped it would be easy. The subway was not appealing because she'd never used it and she'd heard the stories. But this was the Broadway line, the most commonly used train in Manhattan, and it was rumored to be safe, at times. And things weren't so swell above the ground. The subway could hardly be worse.

She waited in the correct spot with a group of drunk but well-dressed teenagers, and the train arrived in a couple of minutes. It wasn't crowded, and she took a seat near the center doors. Stare at the floor and hold the bag, she kept telling herself. She looked at the floor, but from behind the dark shades, she studied the people. It was her lucky night. No street punks with knives. No beggars. No perverts, at least none she could spot. But for a novice, it was nerve-racking anyway.

The drunk kids exited at Times Square, and she got off quickly at the next stop. She had never seen Penn Station, but this was not the time to sightsee. Maybe one day she could return and spend a month and admire the city without watching for Stump and Thin Man and who knows who else who was out there. But not now.

She had five minutes, and found her train as it was boarding. Again, she sat in the rear and watched every passenger. There were no familiar faces. Surely, please, surely, they had not stuck to her on this jagged escape. Once again, her mistake had been credit cards. She had bought four tickets at O'Hare with American Express, and somehow they knew she was in New York. She was certain Stump had not seen her, but he was in the city, and of course he had friends. There could be twenty of them. But then, she was not certain of anything.

The train left six minutes late. It was half empty. She pulled a paperback from the bag and pretended to read it.

Fifteen minutes later, they stopped in Newark, and she got off. She was a lucky girl. There were cabs lined up outside the station, and ten minutes later she was at the airport.

IT WAS SATURDAY MORNING, and the Queen was in Florida taking money from the rich, and it was clear and cool outside. He wanted to sleep late, then play golf whenever he woke up. But it was seven, and he was sitting at his desk wearing a tie, listening to Fletcher Coal suggest what they ought to do about this and about that. Richard Horton, the Attorney General, had talked to Coal, and now Coal was alarmed.

Someone opened the door and Horton entered alone. They shook hands and Horton sat across the desk. Coal stood nearby, and this really irritated the President.

Horton was dull but sincere. He was not dumb or slow, he just thought carefully about everything before he acted. He thought about each word before he said it. He was loyal to the President, and could be trusted for sound judgment.

"We are seriously considering a formal grand jury investigation into the deaths of Rosenberg and Jensen," he announced gravely. In light of what's happened in New Orleans, we think this should be pursued immediately."

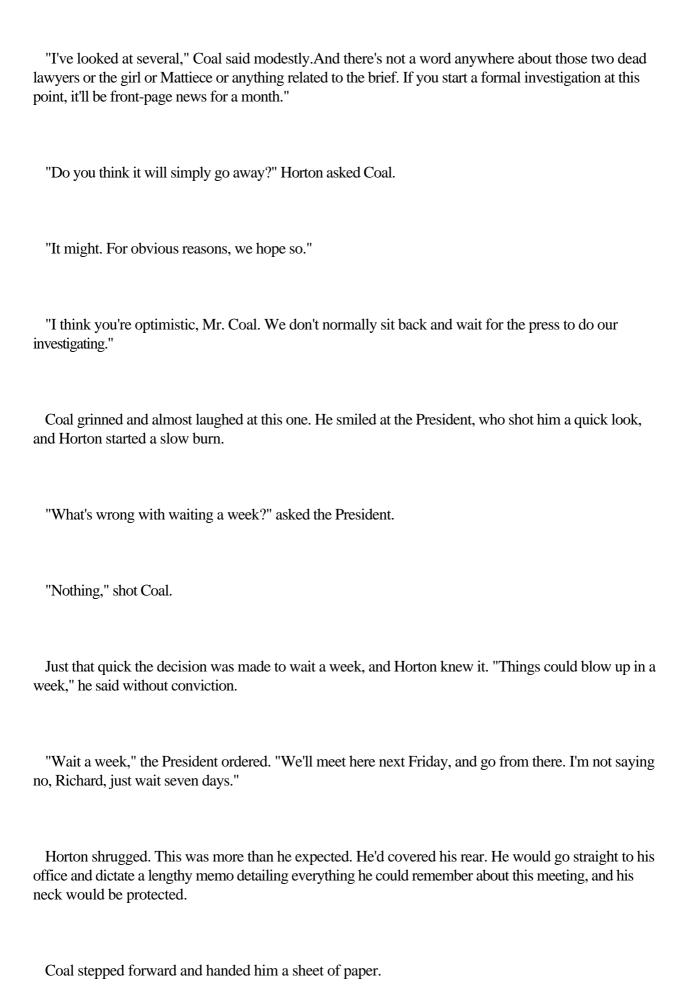
"The FBI is investigating," the President said. "They've got three hundred agents on the case. Why should we get involved?"

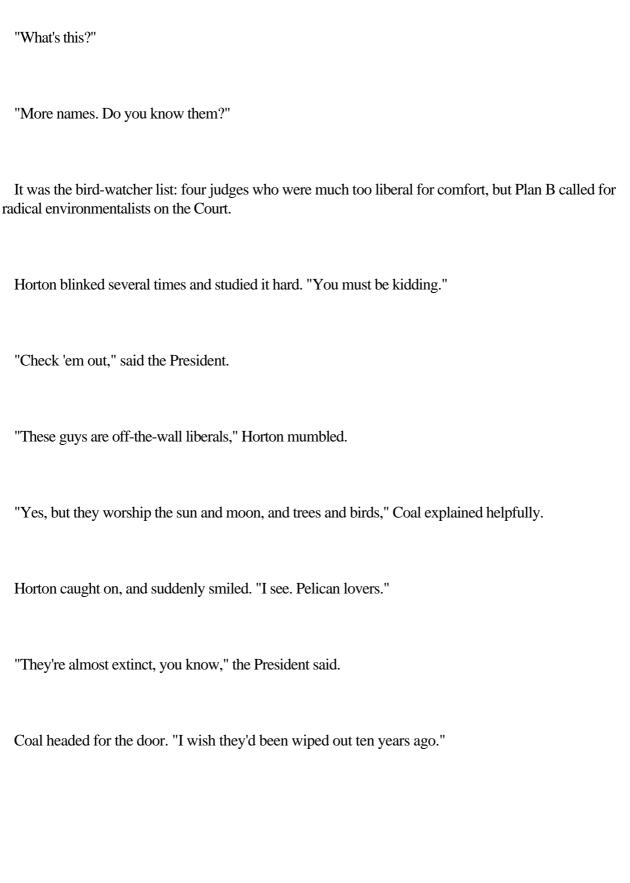
"Are they investigating the pelican brief?" Horton asked. He knew the answer. He knew Voyles was in New Orleans at this moment with hundreds of agents. He knew they had talked to hundreds of people, collected a pile of useless evidence. He knew the President had asked Voyles to back off, and he knew Voyles was not telling the President everything.

Horton had never mentioned the pelican brief to the President, and the fact that he even knew about the damned thing was exasperating. How many more knew about it? Probably thousands.

"They are pursuing all leads," Coal said. "They gave us a copy of it almost two weeks ago, so we assume they're pursuing it."







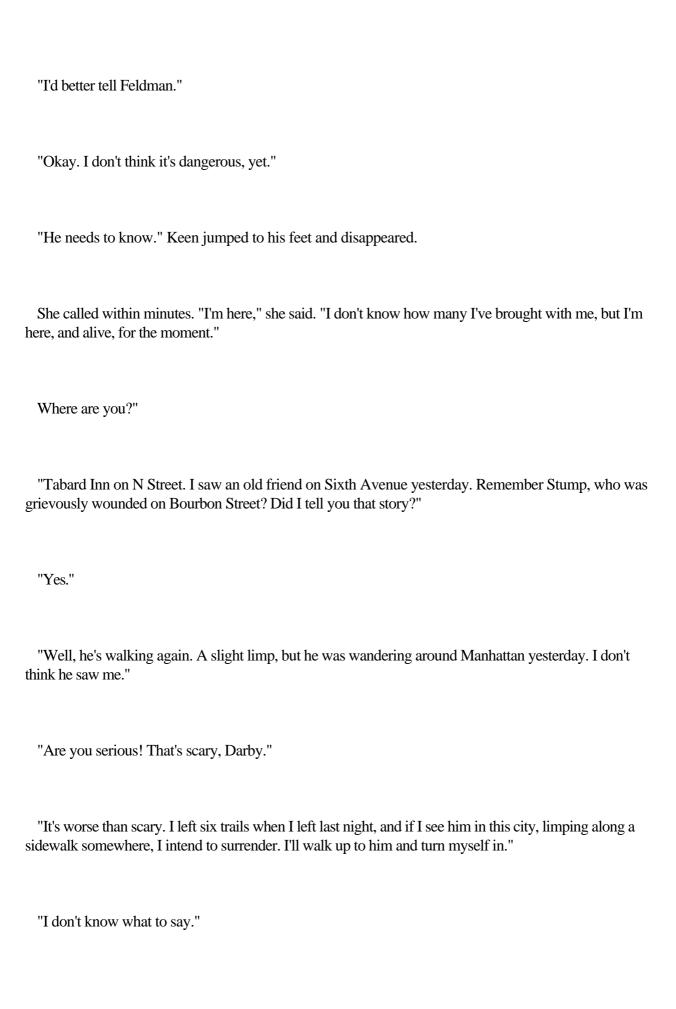
SHE HADN'T CALLED by nine when Gray arrived at his desk in the newsroom. He'd read the Times and there was nothing in it. He spread the New Orleans paper over the clutter and skimmed it. Nothing. They had reported all they knew. Calla-han, Verheek, Darby, and a thousand unanswered questions. He had to assume the Times and maybe the Times-Picayune in New Orleans had seen the brief or heard about it, and thus knew of Mattiece. And he had to assume they were clawing like cats to verify it. But he

nad Darby, and they would find Garcia, and if Mattiece could be verified, they would do it.
At the moment, there was no alternative plan. If Garcia was gone or refused to help, they would be forced to explore the dark and murky world of Victor Mattiece. Darby would not last long at that, and he didn't blame her. He was uncertain how long he would last.
Smith Keen appeared with a cup of coffee and sat on the desk. "If the Times had it, would they hold off until tomorrow?"
Gray shook his head. "No. If they had more than the Times-Picayune, it would've run today."
"Krauthammer wants to run what we've got. He thinks we can name Mattiece."
"I don't follow."
"He's leaning on Feldman. His angle is that we can run the whole story about Callahan and Verheek getting killed over this brief, which happens to name Mattiece who happens to be a friend of the President's, without directly accusing Mattiece. He says we can be extremely cautious and make sure the story says Mattiece is named in the brief, but not named by us. And since the brief is causing all this death, then it has been verified to some extent."
"He wants to hide behind the brief."
"Exactly."
"But it's all speculation until it's confirmed. Krauthammer's losing it. Assume for a second that Mr. Mattiece is in no way involved with this. Completely innocent. We run the story with his name in it, and

then what? We look like fools, and we get sued for the next ten years. I'm not writing the story."

"He wants someone else to write it."

"If this p yesterday.	paper runs a pelican story not written by me, the girl is gone, okay. I thought I explained that
blow up in	d. And Feldman heard you. He's on your side, Gray, and I am too. But if this thing's true, it'll a matter of days. We all believe that. You know how Krauthammer hates the Times, and he'se bastards'll run it."
name Mat	an't run it, Smith. They may have a few more facts than the Times-Picayune, but they can't tiece. Look, we'll verify before anyone. And when it's nailed down, I'll write the story with a name along with that cute little picture of Mattiece and his friend in the White House, and the Il sing."
"We? Y	ou said it again. You said, 'We'll verify it.'
•	arce and I, okay." Gray opened a drawer and found the photo of Darby and the Diet Coke. He to Keen, who admired it.
"Where	is she?" he asked.
"I'm not	sure. I think she's on her way here from New York."
"Don't g	et her killed."
	being very cautious." Gray looked over both shoulders and leaned closer. "In fact, Smith, I being followed. I just wanted you to know."
"Who m	night they be?"







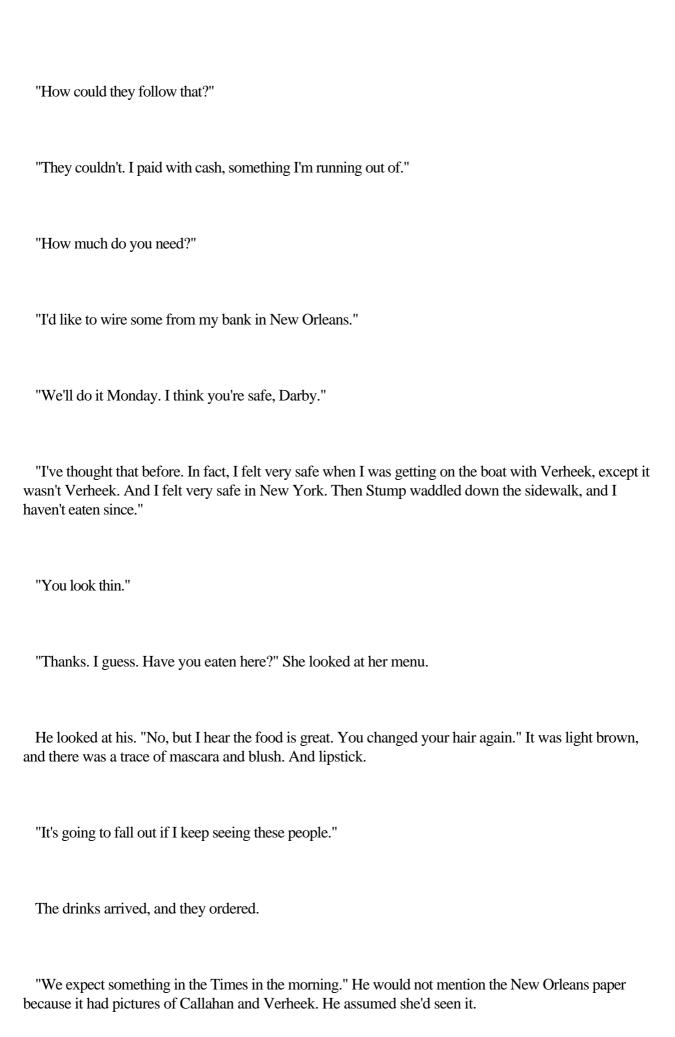
SHE WAS SITTING at table thirty-seven, in a dark corner of the tiny restaurant when he found her at exactly nine. The first thing he noticed was the dress, and as he walked to the table he knew the legs were under it but he couldn't see them. Maybe later when she stood. He wore a coat and tie, and they were an attractive couple.

He sat close to her in the darkness so they could both watch the small crowd. The Tabard Inn appeared old enough to have served food to Thomas Jefferson. A rowdy crowd of Germans laughed and talked on the patio outside the restaurant. The windows were open and the air was cool, and for one brief moment it was easy to forget why they were hiding.

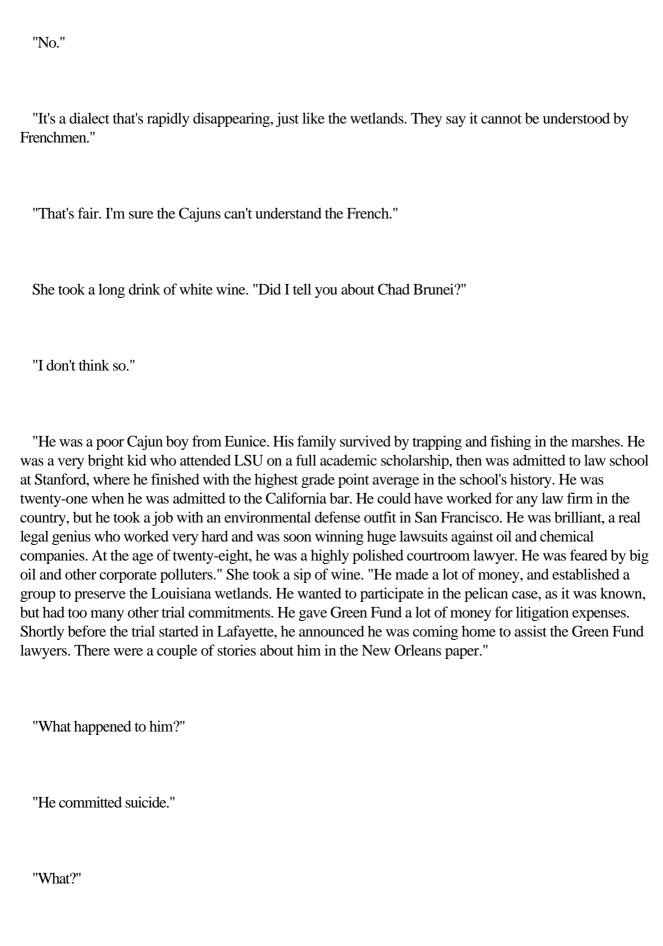
"Where'd you get the dress?"
"You like it?"
"It's very nice."
"I shopped a little this afternoon. Like most of my recent wardrobe, it's disposable. I'll probably leave it in the room the next time I flee for my life."
The waiter was before them with menus. They ordered drinks. The restaurant was quiet and harmless.
"How'd you get here?" he asked.
"Around the world."
"I'd like to know."

"I took a train to Newark, a plane to Boston, a plane to Detroit, and a plane to Dulles. I was up all

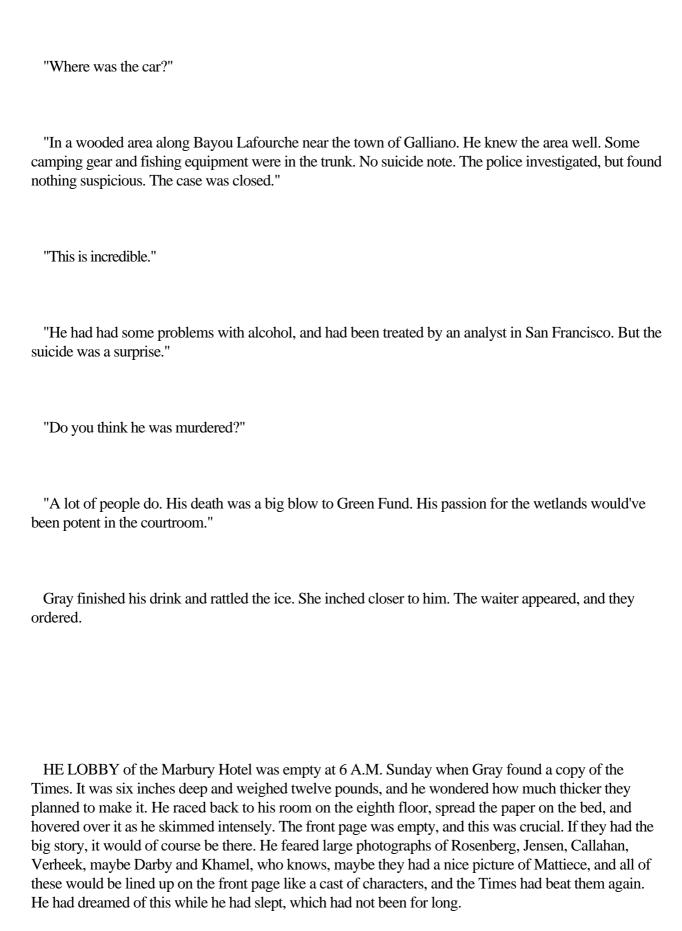
night, and twice I forgot where I was."



This didn't seem to interest her. "Such as?" she asked, looking around.
"We're not sure. We hate to get beat by the Times. It's an old rivalry."
"I'm not interested in that. I know nothing about journalism, and don't care to learn. I'm here because I have one, and only one, idea about finding Garcia. And if it doesn't work, and quickly, I'm out of here."
"Forgive me. What would you like to talk about?"
"Europe. What's your favorite place in Europe?"
"I hate Europe, and I hate Europeans. I go to Canada and Australia, and New Zealand occasionally. Why do you like Europe?"
"My grandfather was a Scottish immigrant, and I've got a bunch of cousins over there. I've visited twice."
Gray squeezed the lime in his gin and tonic. A party of six entered from the bar and she watched them carefully. When she talked her eyes darted quickly around the room.
"I think you need a couple of drinks to relax," Gray said.
She nodded but said nothing. The six were seated at a nearby table and began speaking in French. It was pleasant to hear.
"Have you ever heard Cajun French?" she asked.



"A week before the trial, they found him in a car with the engine running. A garden hose ran from the exhaust pipe into the front seat. Just another simple suicide from carbon monoxide poisoning."







"What if Garcia's overrated? What if you find him and he won't talk, or what if he knows nothing? Have you thought about that?"
"I've had nightmares about that. I think he knows something big. There's a document or a piece of paper, something tangible, and he's got it. He referred to it a time or two, and when I pressed him he wouldn't admit it. But the day we were supposed to meet, he planned to show it to me. I'm convinced of that. He's got something, Smith."
"And if he won't show it to you?"
"I'll break his neck."
They crossed the Potomac and cruised by Arlington Cemetery. Keen lit his pipe and cracked a window. "What if you can't find Garcia?"
"Plan B. She's gone and the deal's off. Once she leaves the country, I have permission to do anything with the brief except use her name as a source. The poor girl is convinced she's dead regardless of whether we get the story, but she wants as much protection as possible. I can never use her name, not even as the author of the brief."
"Does she talk much about the brief?"
"Not the actual writing of it. It was a wild idea, she pursued it, and had almost dismissed it when bomb started going off. She's sorry she wrote the damned thing. She and Callahan were really in love, and she's loaded down with a lot of pain and guilt."
"So what's Plan B?"
"We attack the lawyers. Mattiece is too devious and slippery to penetrate without subpoenas and warrants and things we can't dispense, but we know his lawyers. He's represented by two big firms here

in town, and we go after them. A lawyer or a group of them carefully analyzed the Supreme Court, and



"I don't know yet. She hasn't gotten that far."
SHE HAD INSTRUCTED HIM to stay off the streets and to eat in his room. He had a sandwich and fries in a bag, and was obediently walking to his room on the eighth floor of the Marbury. An Asian maid was pushing her cart near his room. He stopped at his door and pulled the key from his pocket.
"You forget something, sir?" the maid asked.
Gray looked at her. "I beg your pardon."
"You forget something?"
"Well, no. Why?"
The maid took a step closer to him. "You just left, sir, and now you are back."
"I left four hours ago."
She shook her head and took another step for a closer look. "No sir. A man left your room ten minutes ago." She hesitated and studied his face intently.But, sir, now I think it was another man."
Gray glanced at the room number on the door. 833. He stared at the woman. "Are you certain another man was in this room?"

"Yes, sir. Just minutes ago."

He panicked. He walked quickly to the stairs, and ran down eight flights. What was in the room? Nothing but clothes. Nothing about Darby. He stopped and reached into a pocket. The note with the Tabard Inn address and her phone number was in the pocket. He caught his breath, and eased into the lobby.

He had to find her, and quick.

DARBY FOUND an empty table in the reading room on the second floor of the Edward Bennett Williams Law Library at Georgetown. In her new hobby as a traveling critic of law school libraries, she found Georgetown's to be the nicest so far. It was a separate five-story building across a small courtyard from Mc-Donough Hall, the law school. The library was new, sleek, and modern, but still a law library and quickly filling with Sunday students now thinking of final exams.

She opened volume five of Martindale-Hubbell, and found the section for D.C. firms. White and Blazevich ran for twenty-eight pages. Names, birth dates, birthplaces, schools, professional organizations, distinctions, awards, committees, and publications of four hundred and twelve lawyers, the partners first, then the associates. She took notes on a legal pad.

The firm had eighty-one partners, and the rest were associates. She grouped them by alphabet, and wrote every name on the legal pad. She was just another law student checking out law firms in the relentless chase of employment.

The work was boring and her mind wandered. Thomas had studied here twenty years ago. He'd been a top student and claimed to have spent many hours in the library. He'd written for the law journal, a chore she would be enduring under normal circumstances.

Death was a subject she'd analyzed from different angles in the past ten days. Except for going quietly in one's sleep, she was undecided as to the best approach. A slow, agonizing demise from a disease was a nightmare for the victim and the loved ones, but at least there was time for preparation and farewells. A violent, unexpected death was over in a second and probably best for the deceased. But the shock was numbing for those left behind. There were so many painful questions. Did he suffer? What was his last

thought? Why did it happen? And watching the quick death of a loved one was beyond description.

She loved him more because she watched him die, and she told herself to stop hearing the explosion, and stop smelling the smoke, and stop watching him die. If she survived three more days, she would be in a place where she could lock the door and cry and throw things until the grieving was over. She was determined to make it to that place. She was determined to grieve, and to heal. It was the least she deserved.

She memorized names until she knew more about White and Blazevich than anyone outside the firm. She eased into the darkness and caught a cab to the hotel.

MATTHEW BARR went to New Orleans, where he met with a lawyer who instructed him to fly to a certain hotel in Fort Lauderdale. The lawyer was vague about what would happen at the hotel, but Barr checked in Sunday night and found a room waiting for him. A note at the desk said he would receive a call in the early a.m.

He called Fletcher Coal at home at ten, and briefed him on the journey so far.

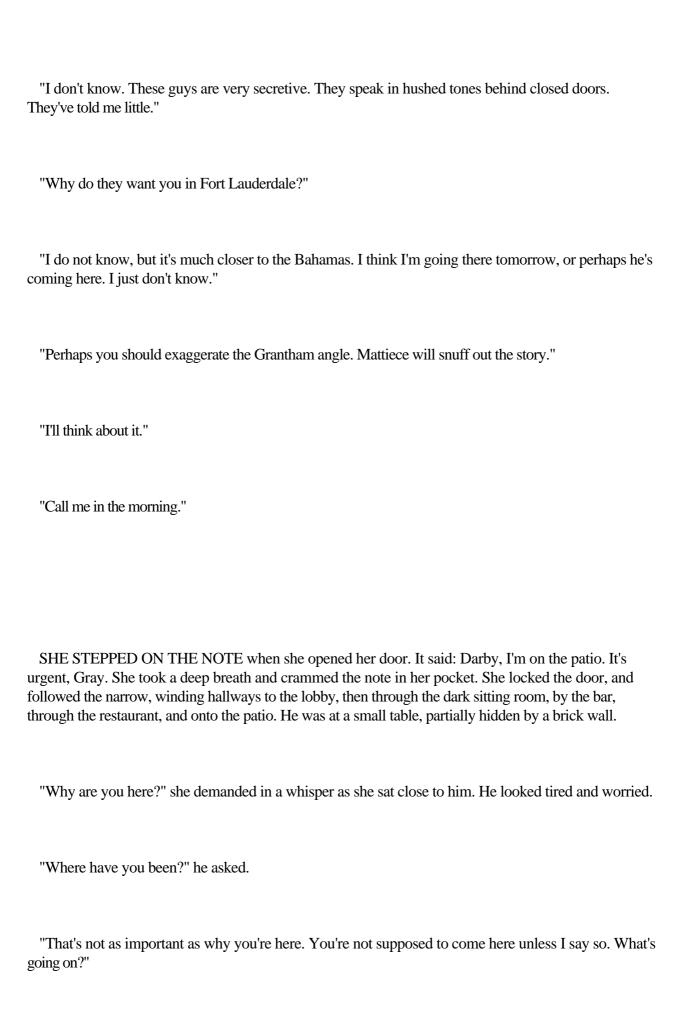
"Coal had other things on his mind.Grantham's gone crazy. He and a guy named Rifkin with the Times are making calls everywhere. They could be deadly."

"Have they seen the brief?"

"I don't know if they've seen it, but they've heard of it. Rifkin called one of my aides at home yesterday and asked what he knew about the pelican brief. The aide knew nothing, and got the impression Rifkin knew even less. I don't think he's seen it, but we can't be certain."

"Damn, Fletcher. We can't keep up with a bunch of reporters. Those guys make a hundred phone calls a minute."









sneaked down for coffee, then sneaked back to his room. The inn was quaint and ancient, and had somehow been formed when three old townhouses were connected. Small doors and narrow hallways ran in all directions. The atmosphere was timeless.

It would be a long, tiresome day, but it would all be spent with her, and he looked forward to it. He'd made a mistake, a bad one, but she'd forgiven him. At precisely eight-thirty, he knocked on the door to room 1. She quickly opened it, then closed it behind him.

She was a law student again, with jeans and a flannel shirt. She poured him coffee, and sat at the small table where the phone was surrounded by notes from a legal pad.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked, but only out of courtesy.

"No." He threw a copy of the Times on the bed. He'd already scanned it, and it was empty again.

Darby took the phone and punched the number of the Georgetown law school. She looked at him, and listened, then said, "Placement office, please." There was a long pause. Yes, this is Sandra Jernigan. I'm a partner with White and Blazevich here in town, and we're having a problem with our computers. We're trying to reconstruct some payroll records, and the accountants have asked me to ask you for the names of your students who clerked here last summer. I think there were four of them." She listened for a second. "Jernigan. Sandra Jernigan," she repeated. I see. How long will it take?" A pause. "And your name is, Joan. Thank you, Joan." Darby covered the receiver and breathed deeply. Gray watched intently, but with an admiring grin.

"Yes, Joan. Seven of them. Our records are a mess. Do you have their addresses and social security numbers? We need it for tax purposes. Sure. How long will it take? Fine. We have an office boy in the area. His name is Snowden, and he'll be there in thirty minutes. Thank you, Joan." Darby hung up and closed her eyes.

"Sandra Jernigan?" he said.

"I'm not good at lying," she said.

You're wonderful. I guess I'm the office boy.
"You could pass for an office boy. You have an aging law school dropout look about you." And you're sort of cute, she thought to herself.
"I like the flannel shirt."
She took a long drink of cold coffee. "This could be a long day."
"So far, so good. I get the list, and meet you in the library. Right?"
"Yes. The placement office is on the fifth floor of the law school. I'll be in room 336. It's a small conference room on the third floor. You take a cab first. I'll meet you there in fifteen minutes."
"Yes, ma'am." Grantham was out the door. Darby waited five minutes, then left with her canvas bag.
The cab ride was short but slow in the morning traffic. Life on the lam was bad enough, but running and playing detective at the same time was too much. She'd been in the cab five minutes before she thought about being followed. And maybe that was good. Maybe a hard day as an investigative reporter would take her mind off Stump and the other tormentors. She would work today, and tomorrow, and by late Wednesday she would be on a beach.
They would start with the law school at Georgetown. If it was a dead end, they would try the one at George Washington. If there was time, they would try American University. Three strikes, and she was gone.
The cab stopped at McDonough Hall, at the grungy base of Capitol Hill. With her bag and flannel shirt,

she was just one of many law students milling about before class. She took the stairs to the third level, and closed the door to the conference room behind her. The room was used for an occasional class and on campus job interviews. She spread her notes on the table, and was just another law student preparing

for class.

Within minutes, Gray eased through the door. "Joan's a sweet lady," he said as he placed the list on the table. "Names, addresses, and social security numbers. Ain't that nice."

Darby looked at the list and pulled a phone book from her bag. They found five of the names in the book. She looked at her watch. "It's five minutes after nine. I'll bet no more than half of these are in class at this moment. Some will have later classes. I'll call these five, and see who's at home. You take the two with no phone number, and get their class schedules from the registrar."

Gray looked at his watch. "Let's meet back here in fifteen minutes." He left first, then Darby. She went to the pay phones on the first level outside the classrooms, and dialed the number of James Maylor.

A male voice answered, "Hello."

"Is this Dennis Maylor?" she asked.

"No. I'm James Maylor."

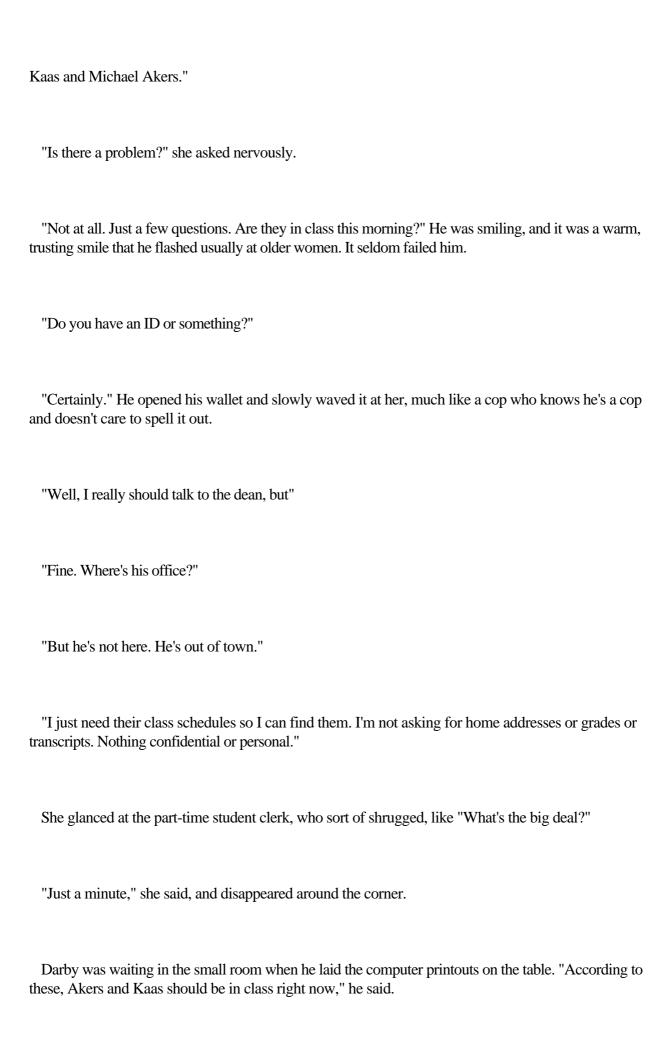
"Sorry." She hung up. His address was ten minutes away. He didn't have a nine o'clock class, and if he had one at ten he would be home for another forty minutes. Maybe.

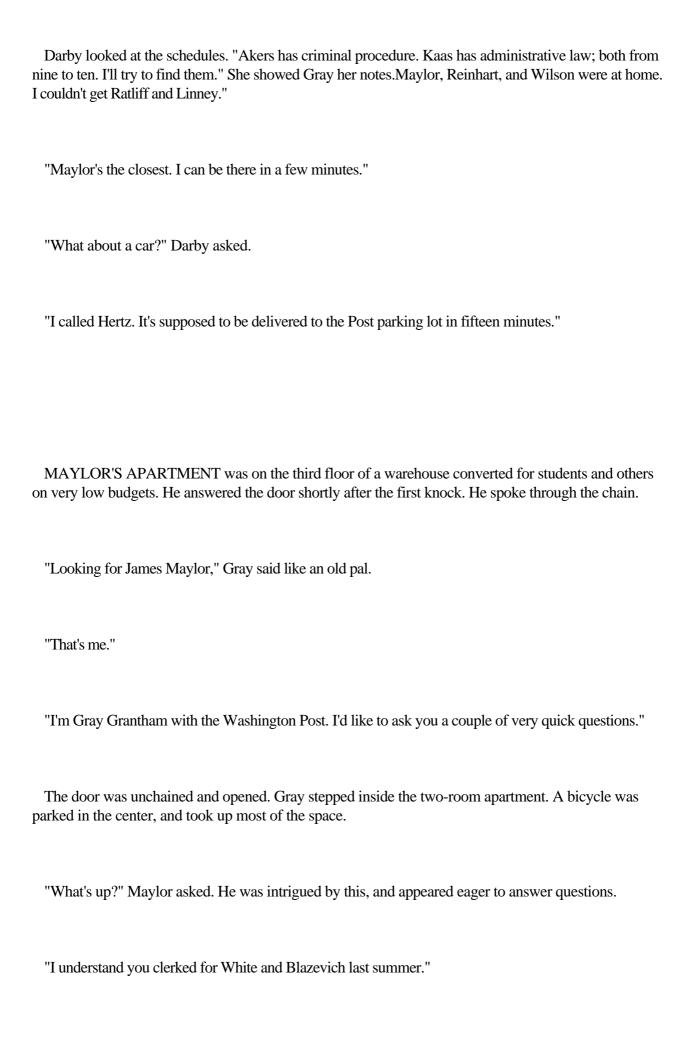
She called the other four. Two answered and she confirmed, and there was no answer at the other two.

Gray waited impatiently in the registrar's office on the third floor. A part-time student clerk was trying to find the registrar, who was somewhere in the back. The student informed him that she wasn't sure if they could give out class schedules. Gray said he was certain they could if they wanted to.

The registrar walked suspiciously around a corner. "May I help you?"

"Yes, I'm Gray Grantham with the Washington Post, and I'm trying to find two of your students, Laura







from George Washington, Patrick Franks and a guy named Vanlandingham; a girl from Harvard named Elizabeth Larson; a girl from Michigan named Amy MacGregor; and a guy from Emory named Moke, but I think they fired him. There are always a lot of clerks in the summer."
"You plan to work there when you finish?"
"I don't know. I'm not sure I'm cut out for the big firms."
Gray smiled and stuck the notepad in his rear pocket. "Look, you've been in the firm. How would I find this guy?"
Maylor pondered this for a second. "I assume you can't go there and start asking around."
"Good assumption."
"And all you've got is the picture?"
"Yep."
"Then I guess you're doing the right thing. One of the clerks will recognize him."
"Thanks."
"Is the guy in trouble?"
"Oh no. He may have witnessed something. It's probably a long shot." Gray opened the door. "Thanks

"Oh. Sure. A couple from Georgetown that I already knew, Laura Kaas and JoAnne Ratliff. Two guys

again."
DARBY STUDIED the fall listing of classes on the bulletin board across the lobby from the phones. She wasn't exactly sure what she'd do when the nine o'clock classes were over, but she was trying like hell to think of something. The bulletin board was exactly like the one at Tulane: class listings tacked neatly in a row; notices for assignments; ads for books, bikes, rooms, roommates, and a hundred other necessities stuck haphazardly about; announcements of parties, intramural games, and club meetings. A young woman with a backpack and hiking books stopped nearby and looked at the board. She was undoubtedly a student.
Darby smiled at her. "Excuse me. Would you happen to know Laura Kaas?"
"Sure."
"I need to give her a message. Could you point her out?"
"Is she in class?"
"Yeah, she's in administrative law under Ship, room 207."
They walked and chatted in the direction of Ship's admin law. The lobby was suddenly busy as four classrooms emptied. The hiker pointed to a tall, heavyset girl walking toward them. Darby thanked her, and followed Laura Kaas until the crowd thinned and scattered.
"Excuse me, Laura. Are you Laura Kaas?" The big girl stopped and stared. "Yes."
This was the part she didn't like; the lying. "I'm Sara Jacobs, and I'm working on a story for the Washington Post. Can I ask you a few questions?" She selected Laura Kaas first because she did not have a class at ten. Michael Akers did. She would try him at eleven.

"What about?"	
"It'll just take a minute. Could we step in here?" Darby was nodding and walking to an empty classroom. Laura followed slowly.	
"You clerked for White and Blazevich last summer."	
"I did." She spoke slowly, suspiciously.	
Sara Jacobs fought to control her nerves. This was awful. "What section?"	
"Tax."	
"You like tax, huh?" It was a weak effort at small talk.	
"I did. Now I hate it."	
Darby smiled like this was the funniest thing she'd heard in years. She pulled a photo from her pocket, and handed it to Laura Kaas.	
"Do you recognize this man?"	
"No."	
"I think he's a lawyer with White and Blazevich."	



At ten forty-five, Darby found herself loitering again in front of the bulletin board, hoping for another miracle. Akers was a male, and there were different ways to approach him. She hoped he was where he was supposed to bein room 201 studying criminal procedure. She eased that way and waited a moment or two until the door opened and fifty law students emptied into the hall. She could never be a reporter. She could never walk up to strangers and start asking a bunch of questions. It was awkward and

uncomfortable. But she walked up to a shy-looking young man with sad eyes and thick glasses, and said, "Excuse me. Do you happen to know Michael Akers? I think he's in this class."
The guy smiled. It was nice to be noticed. He pointed at a group of men walking toward the front entrance. "That's him, in the gray sweater."
"Thanks." She left him standing there. The group disassembled as it left the building, and Akers and a friend were on the sidewalk.
"Mr. Akers," she called after him.
They both stopped and turned around, then smiled as she nervously approached them. "Are you Michael Akers?" she asked.
"That's me. Who are you?"
"My name is Sara Jacobs, and I'm working on a story for the Washington Post. Can I speak to you alone?"
"Sure." The friend took the hint and left.
"What about?" Akers asked.
"Did you clerk for White and Blazevich last summer?"
"Yes." Akers was friendly and enjoying this.
"What section?"



"I don't think so. He may know something." "I hope they all get disbarred. A bunch of thugs, really. It's a rotten place to work. Everything's political." "Thanks." She smiled, and turned away. He admired the rear view, and said, "Call me anytime." "Thanks." Darby, the investigative reporter, walked next door to the library building, and climbed the stairs to the fifth floor where the Georgetown Law Journal had a suite of crowded offices. She'd found the most recent edition of 'thejournal in the library, and noticed that JoAnne Ratliff was an assistant editor. She suspected most law reviews and law journals were much the same. The top students hung out there and prepared their scholarly articles and comments. They were superior to the rest of the students, and were a clannish bunch who appreciated their bril liant minds. They hung out in the law journal suite. It was their second home. She stepped inside and asked the first person where she might find JoAnne Ratliff. He pointed around a corner. Second door on the right. The second door opened into a cluttered workroom lined with rows of books. Two females were hard at work.

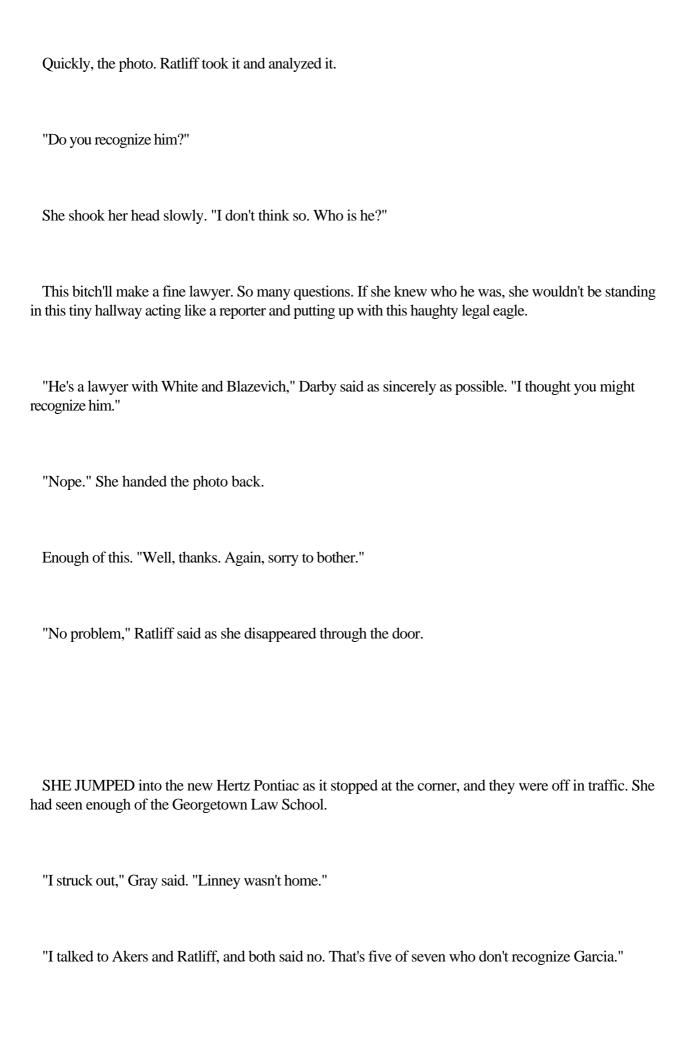
"JoAnne Ratliff," Darby said.

"That's me," an older woman of maybe forty responded.

"Hi. My name is Sara Jacobs, and I'm working on a story for the Washington Post. Can I ask you a few quick questions?"

She slowly laid her pen on the table, and frowned at the other woman. Whatever they were doing was terribly important, and this interruption was a real pain in the ass. They were significant law students.







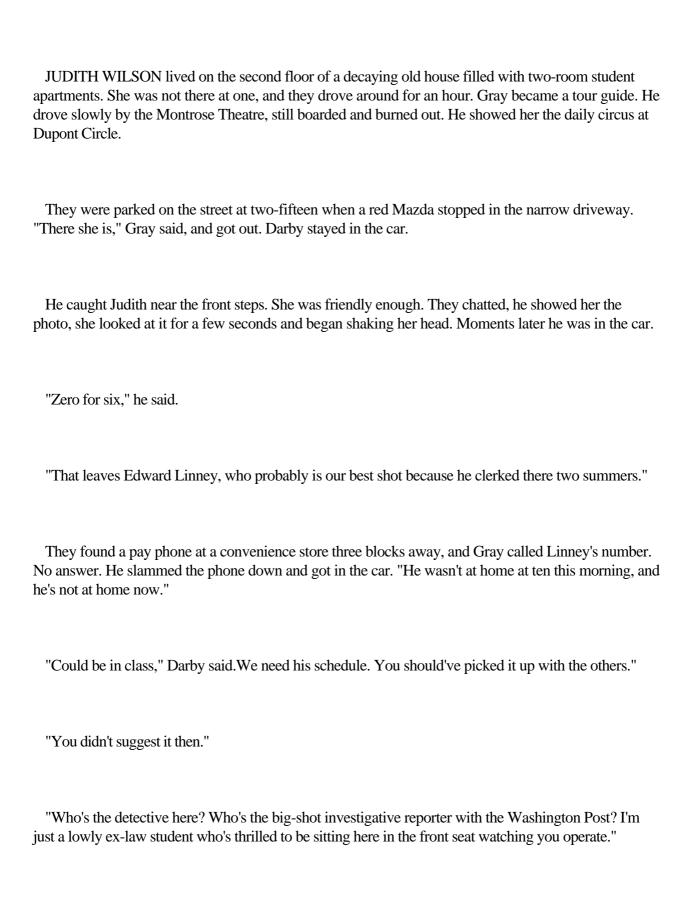


"Hopefully. If we can verify your little brief, then we'll run one helluva story."

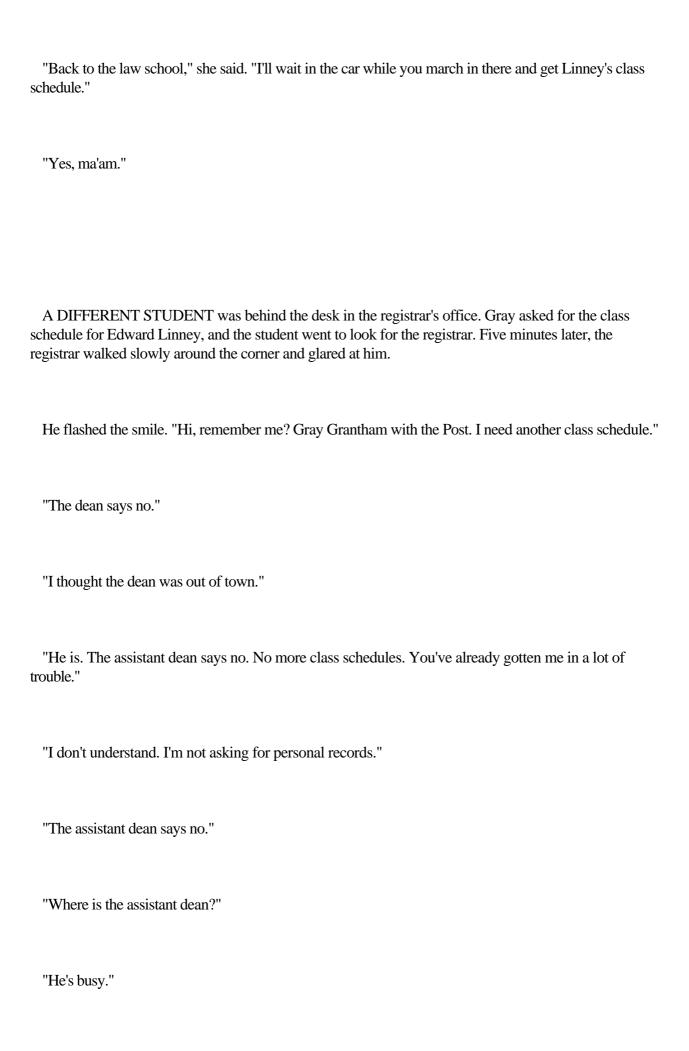
"You can see the headlines, can't you?"

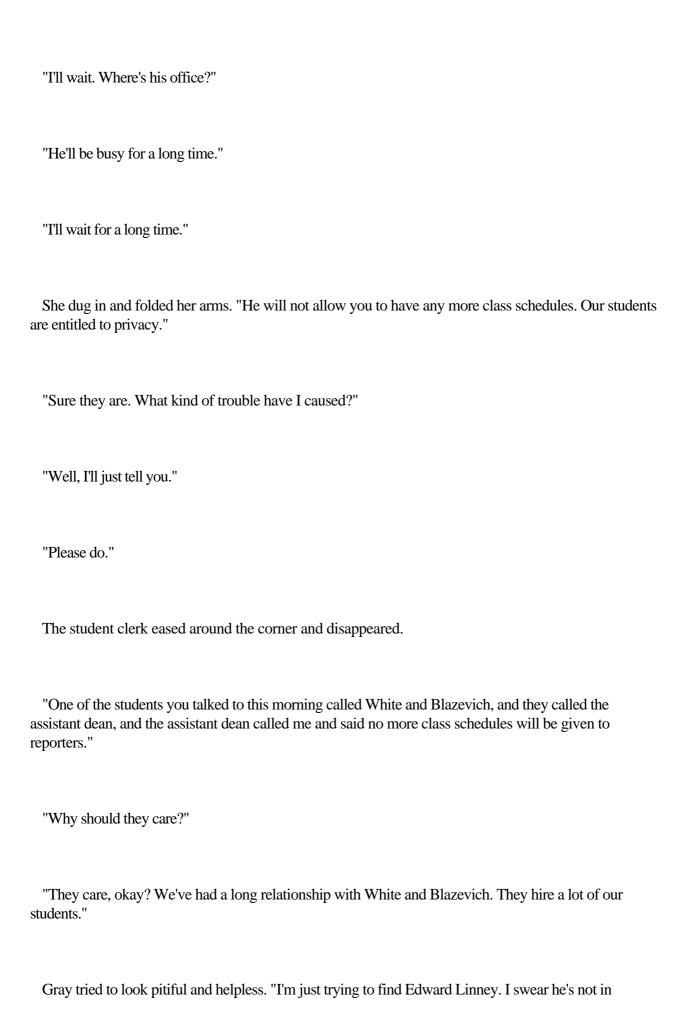


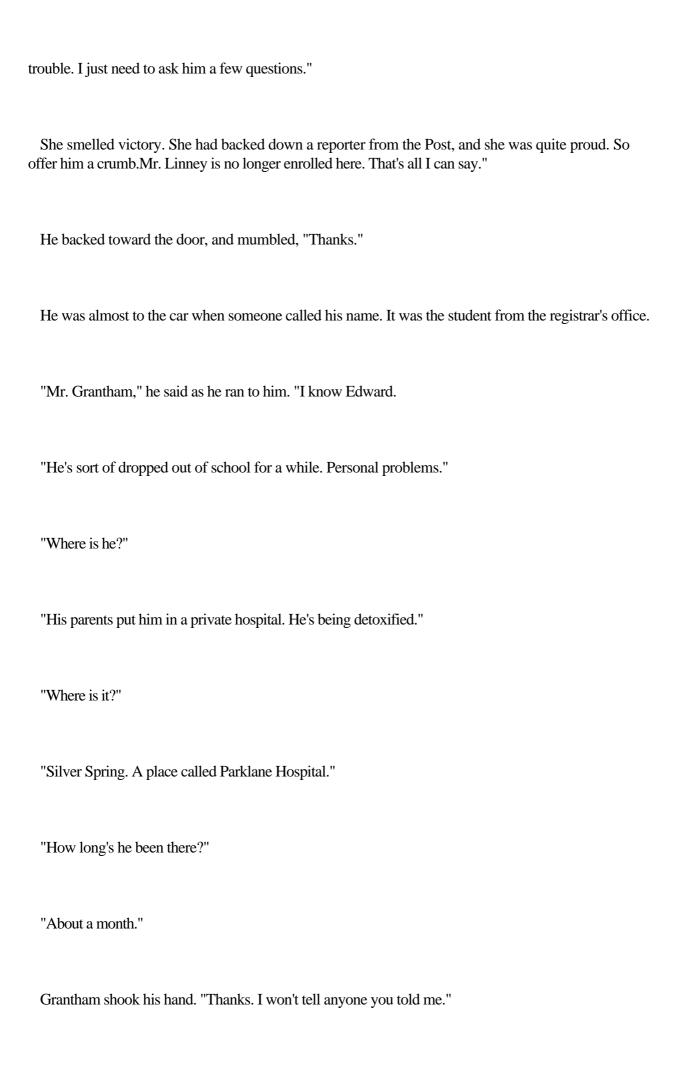
A burly man with a contorted face was suddenly beside the table. "Hurry up!" he yelled. You're talkin too much!"
"Thanks, Pete," Gray said without looking up. Pete was lost in the crowd, but could be heard yelling another table. Darby dropped her sandwich.
"He owns the place," Gray explained. "It's part of the ambience."
"How charming. Does it cost extra?"
"Oh no. The food's cheap, so he depends on volume. He refuses to serve coffee because he doesn't want socializing. He expects us to eat like refugees and get out."
"I'm finished."
"Gray looked at his watch.It's twelve-fifteen. We need to be at Judith Wilson's apartment at one. Do you want to wire the money now?"
"How long will it take?"
"We can start the wire now, and pick the money up later."
"Let's go."
"How much do you want to wire?"
"Fifteen thousand."



What about the backseat? he almost said. "Whatever. Where to?"











there would stand and watch helplessly as they led her away in shackles. Her name would be in the

paper, the Post, and Stump, if he was literate, would see it, and they'd get her. As she crept along by these closed doors, the beaches and pina coladas seemed unreachable. The door to number 22 was closed and had the names Edward L. Linney and Dr. Wayne McLatchee tacked on it. She knocked. THE ADMINISTRATOR was more of an ass than the receptionist. But then, he was paid well for it. He explained they had strict policies about visitation. These were very sick and delicate people, his patients, and they had to protect them. And their doctors, who were the finest in their field, were very strict about who could see the patients. Visitation was allowed only on Saturdays and Sundays, and even then only a carefully selected group of people, usually just family and friends, could sit with the patients, and then only for thirty minutes. They had to be very strict. These were fragile people, and they certainly could not withstand interrogation by a reporter, regardless of how grave the circumstances. Mr. Grantham asked when Mr. Linney might be discharged. Absolutely confidential, the administrator exclaimed. Probably when the insurance expired, suggested Mr. Grantham, who was talking and stalling and halfway expecting to hear loud and angry voices coming from behind the double doors. This mention of insurance really agitated the administrator. Mr. Grantham asked if he, the administrator, would ask Mr. Linney if he would answer two questions from Mr. Grantham, and the whole thing would take less than thirty seconds. Out of the question, snapped the administrator. They had strict policies.

A VOICE answered softly, and she stepped into the room. The carpet was thicker and the furniture was made from wood. He sat on the bed in a pair of jeans, no shirt, reading a thick novel. She was

struck by his good looks.

"Excuse me," she said warmly as she closed the door behind her.
"Come in," he said with a soft smile. It was the first nonmedical face he'd seen in two days. What a beautiful face. He closed the book.
She walked to the end of the bed. "I'm Sara Jacobs, and I'm working on a story for the Washington Post."
"How'd you get in?" he asked, obviously glad she was in.
"Just walked. Did you clerk last summer for White and Blazevich?"
"Yes, and the summer before. They offered me a job when I graduate. If I graduate."
She handed him the photo. "Do you recognize this man?"
"He took it and smiled. Yeah. His name is, uh, wait a minute. He works in the oil and gas section on the ninth floor. What's his name?"
Darby held her breath.
Linney closed his eyes hard and tried to think. He looked at the photo, and said, "Morgan. I think his name is Morgan. Yep."
"His last name is Morgan?"

"That's him with a C."	a. I can't remember his first name. It's something like Charles, but that's not it. I think it starts
	e certain he's in oil and gas?" Though she couldn't remember the exact number, she was was more than one Morgan at White and Blazevich.
"Yeah."	
"On the ning	th floor?"
"Yeah. I wo all of nine."	orked in the bankruptcy section on the eighth floor, and oil and gas covers half of eight and
He handed	the photo back.
"When are	you getting out?" she asked. It would be rude to run from the room.
"Next week	x, I hope. What's this guy done?"
"Nothing. V And good luc	We just need to talk to him." She was backing away from the bed.I have to run. "Thanks. k."
"Yeah. No	problem."
She quietly her.	closed the door behind her, and scooted toward the lobby. The voice came from behind
"Hey! You!	! What're you doing?"





MATTHEW BARR had never experienced a speedboat before, and after five hours of a bone-jarring voyage through the ocean he was soaked and in pain. His body was numb, and when he saw land he said a prayer, the first in decades. Then he resumed his nonstop cursing of Fletcher Coal.

They docked at a small marina near a city that he believed to be Freeport. The captain had said something about Freeport to the man known as Larry when they left Florida. No other word was spoken during the ordeal. Larry's role in the journey was uncertain. He was at least six-six, with a neck as thick as a utility pole, and he did nothing but watch Barr, which was okay at first but after five hours became quite a nuisance.

They stood awkwardly when the boat stopped. Larry was the first one out, and he motioned for Barr to join him. Another large man was approaching on the pier, and together they escorted Barr to a waiting van. The van was suspiciously short of windows.

At this point, Barr preferred to say good-bye to his new pals, and simply disappear in the direction of Freeport. He'd catch a plane to D.C., and slap Coal the moment he saw his shining forehead. But he had to be cool. They wouldn't dare hurt him.

The van stopped moments later at a small airstrip, and Barr was escorted to a black Lear. He admired it briefly before following Larry up the steps. He was cool and relaxed; just another job. After all, he was at one time one of the best CIA agents in Europe. He was an ex-Marine. He could take care of himself.

He sat by himself in the cabin. The windows were covered, and this annoyed him. But he understood. Mr. Mattiece treasured his privacy, and Barr could certainly respect that. Larry and the other heavyweight were at the front of the cabin, flipping through magazines and completely ignoring him.

Thirty minutes after takeoff, the Lear began its descent, and Larry lumbered toward him.

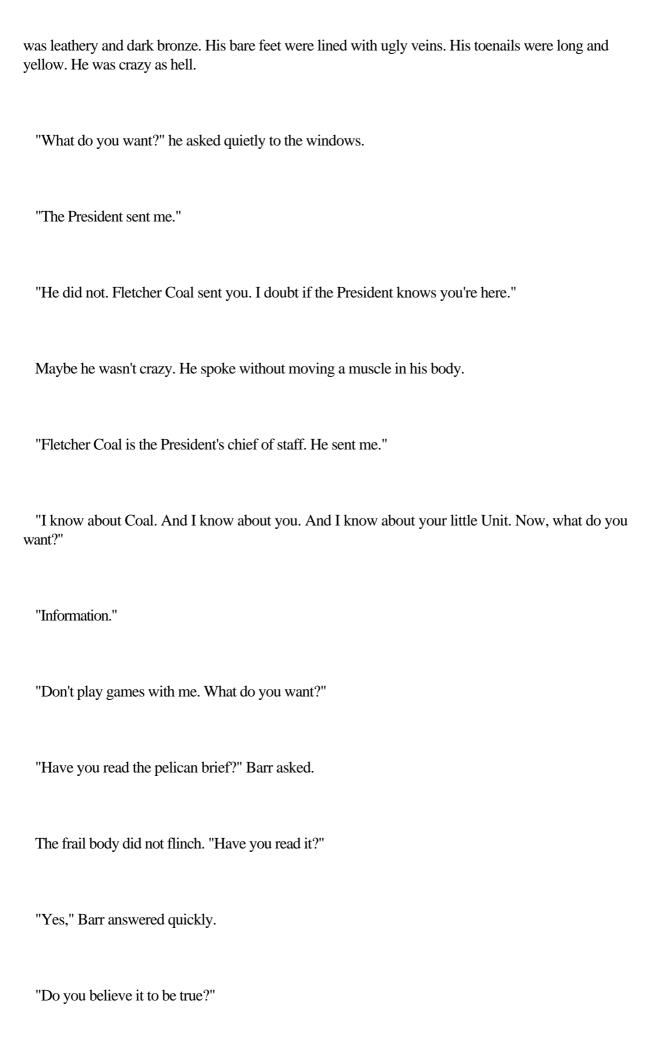
"Put this on," he demanded as he handed over a thick, cloth blindfold. At this point, a rookie would panic. An amateur would start asking questions. But Barr had been blindfolded before, and while he was having serious doubts about this mission, he calmly took the blindfold and covered his eyes.

THE MAN who removed the blindfold introduced himself as Emil, an assistant to Mr. Mattiece. He was a small, wiry type with dark hair and a thin mustache winding around the lip. He sat in a chair four feet away and lit a cigarette.
"Our people tell us you are legitimate, sort of," he said with a friendly smile. Barr looked around the room. There were no walls, only windows in small panes. The sun was bright and pierced his eyes. A plush garden surrounded a series of fountains and pools outside the room. They were in the rear of a very large house.
"I'm here on behalf of the President," Barr said.
"We believe you." Emil nodded. He was undoubtedly a Cajun.
"May I ask who you are?" Barr said.
"I'm Emil, and that's enough. Mr. Mattiece is not feeling well. Perhaps you should leave your message with me."
"I have orders to speak directly to him."
"Orders from Mr. Coal, I believe." Emil never stopped smiling.
"That's correct."
"I see. Mr. Mattiece prefers not to meet you. He wants you to talk to me."

Barr shook his head. Now, if push came to shove, if things got out of hand, then he would gladly talk to Emil if it was necessary. But for now, he would hold firm. "I am not authorized to talk to anyone but Mr. Mattiece," Barr said properly. "The smile almost disappeared. Emil pointed beyond the pools and fountains to a large gazebo-shaped building with tall windows from floor to ceiling. Rows of perfectly manicured shrubs and flowers surrounded it.Mr. Mattiece is in his gazebo. Follow me." They left the sun room and walked slowly around a wading pool. Barr had a thick knot in his stomach, but he followed his little friend as if this was simply another day at the office. The sound of falling water echoed through the garden. A narrow boardwalk led to the gazebo. They stopped at the door. "I'm afraid you must remove your shoes," Emil said with a smile. Emil was barefoot. Barr untied his shoes and placed them next to the door. "Do not step on the towels," Emil said gravely. "The towels? Emil opened the door for Barr, who stepped in alone. The room was perfectly round, about fifty feet in diameter. There were three chairs and a sofa, all covered with white sheets. Thick cotton towels were on the floor in perfect little trails around the room. The sun shone brightly through skylights. A door opened, and Victor Mattiece emerged from a small room. Barr froze and gawked at the man. He was thin and gaunt, with long gray hair and a dirty beard. He wore only a pair of white gym shorts, and walked carefully on the towels without looking at Barr.

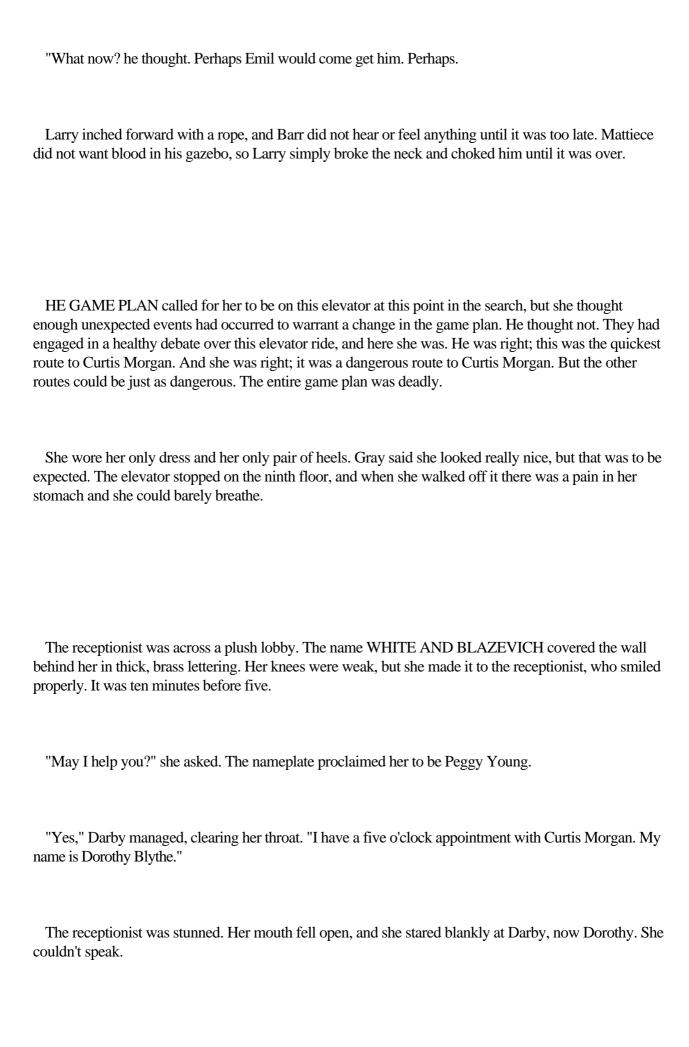
Barr avoided the towels and took his seat. Mattiece turned his back and faced the windows. His skin

"Sit over there," he said, pointing at a chair. "Don't step on the towels."









Darby's heart stopped.Is something the matter?"
"Well, no. I'm sorry. Just a moment." Peggy Young stood quickly, and disappeared in a rush.
Run! Her heart pounded like a drum. Run! She tried to control her breathing, but she was battling hyperventilation. Her legs were rubbery. Run!
She looked around, trying to be nonchalant as if she was just another client waiting on her lawyer. Surely they wouldn't gun her down here in the lobby of a law office.
He came first, followed by the receptionist. He was about fifty with bushy gray hair and a terrible scowl. "Hi," he said, but only because he had to. "I'm Jarreld Schwabe, a partner here. You say you have an appointment with Curtis Morgan."
Keep it up. "Yes. At five. Is there a problem?"
"And your name is Dorothy Blythe?"
Yeah, but you can call me Dot. "That's what I said. Yes. What's the matter?" She sounded genuinely irritated.
He was inching closer. "When did you make the appointment?"
"I don't know. About two weeks ago. I met Curtis at a party in Georgetown. He told me he was an oil and gas lawyer, and I happen to need one. I called the office here, and made an appointment. Now, will you please tell me what's going on?" She was amazed at how well these words were coming from her dry mouth.

"Why do you need an oil and gas lawyer?"

"I don't think I have to explain myself to you," she said, real bitchy-like.
The elevator opened, and a man in a cheap suit approached quickly to join the conversation. Darby scowled at him. Her legs would give way just any second.
Schwabe was really bearing down. "We don't have any record of such an appointment."
"Then fire the appointment secretary. Do you welcome all new clients this way?" Oh, she was indignant, but Schwabe did not let up.
"You can't see Curtis Morgan," he said.
"And why not?" she demanded.
"He's dead."
The knees were jelly and about to go. A sharp pain rippled through the stomach. But, she thought quickly, it was okay to looked shocked. He was, after all, supposed to be her new lawyer.
"I'm sorry. Why didn't anyone call me?"
Schwabe was still suspicious. "As I said, we have no record of a Dorothy Blythe."
"What happened to him?" she asked, stunned.
"He was mugged a week ago. Shot by street punks, we believe."







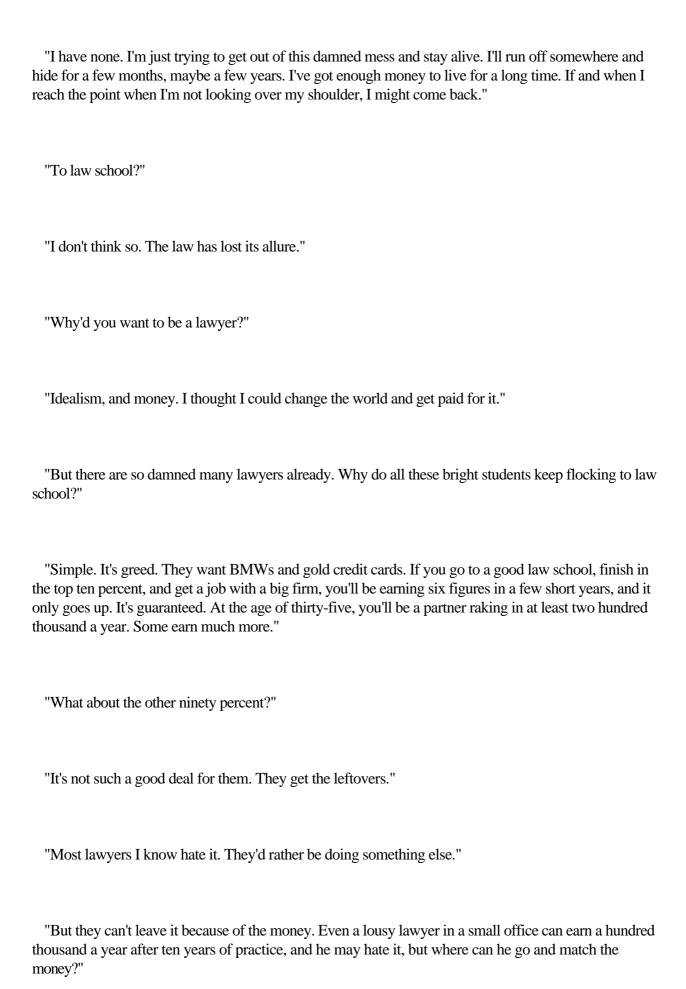


She removed the forearm from her eyes and gently massaged both temples. "I'm sorry I cried."
He finished the beer with a long drink. "You earned the right." She was in tears when she stepped off the elevator. He was waiting like an expectant father, except he had a .38 in his coat pocket-a .38 she knew nothing about.
"So what do you think of investigative reporting?" he asked.
"I'd rather butcher hogs."
"Well, in all honesty, not every day is this eventful. Some days I simply sit at my desk and make hundreds of phone calls to bureaucrats who have no comment."
"Sounds great. Let's do that tomorrow."
He kicked his shoes off and placed his feet on the bed. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Minutes passed without a word.
"Do you know that Louisiana is known as the Pelican State?" she asked with her eyes closed.
"No. I didn't know that."
"It's a shame really, because the brown pelicans were virtually wiped out the the early 1960's."
"What happened to them?"

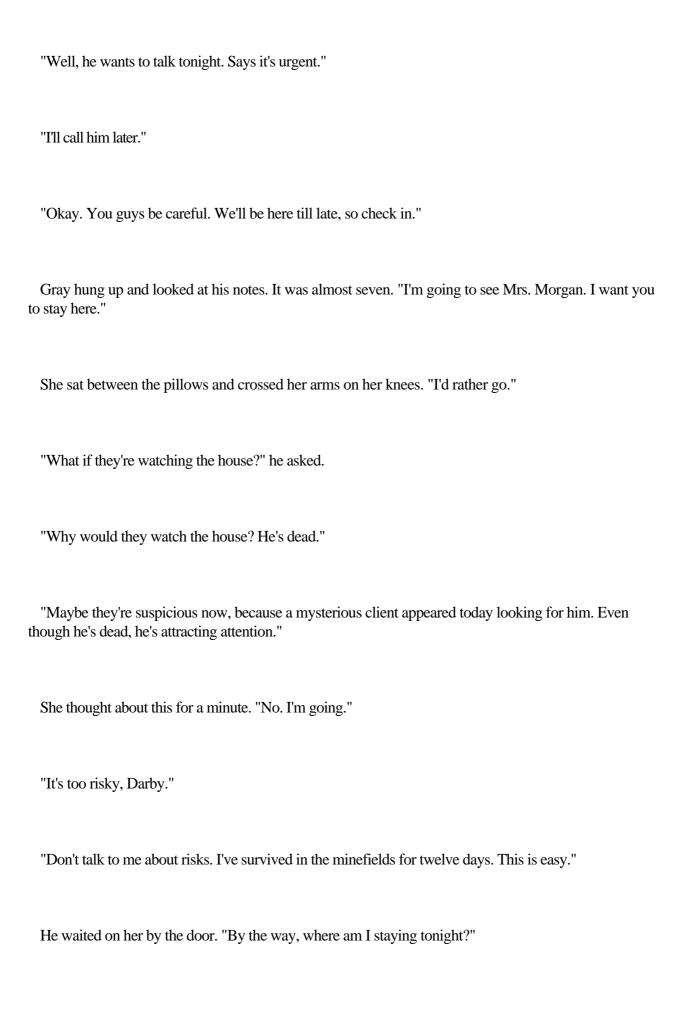
Pesticides. They eat nothing but fish, and the fish live in river water filled with chlorinated hydrocarbons from pesticides. The rains wash the pesticides from the soil into small streams which eventually empty into rivers which eventually empty into the Mississippi. By the time the pelicans in Louisiana eat the fish, they are loaded with DDT and other chemicals which accumulate in the fatty tissues of the birds. Death is seldom immediate, but in times of stress such as hunger or bad weather, the pelicans and eagles and cormorants are forced to draw upon their reserves, and can literally be poisoned by their own fat. If they don't die, they are usually unable to reproduce. Their eggs are so thin and fragile they crack during incubation. Did you know that?"

"Why would I know that?"
"In the late sixties, Louisiana began transplanting brown pelicans from southern Florida, and over the years the population has slowly increased. But the birds are still very much in danger. Forty years ago there were thousands of them. The cypress swamp that Mattiece wants to destroy is home to only a few dozen pelicans."
Gray pondered these things. She was silent for a long time.
"What day is it?" she asked without opening her eyes.
"Monday."
"I left New Orleans a week ago today. Thomas and Verheek had dinner two weeks ago today. That, of course, was the fateful moment when the pelican brief changed hands."
"Three weeks ago tomorrow, Rosenberg and Jensen were murdered."
"I was an innocent little law student minding my own business and having a wonderful love affair with my professor. I guess those days are gone."

Law school and the professor might be gone, he thought. "What're your plans?"







"Jefferson Hotel."
"Do you have the phone number?"
"What do you think?"
"Dumb question."

THE PRIVATE JET with Edwin Sneller aboard landed at National in Washington a few minutes after seven. He was delighted to leave New York. He'd spent six days there bouncing off the walls in his suite at the Plaza. For almost a week, his men had checked hotels and watched airports and walked streets, and they knew damned well they were wasting their time, but orders were orders. They were told to stay there until something broke and they could move on. It was silly trying to find the girl in Manhattan, but they had to stay close in case she made a mistake like a phone call or a plastic transaction that could be traced, and suddenly they were needed.

She made no mistakes until two-thirty this afternoon when she needed money and went to the account. They knew this would happen, especially if she planned to leave the country and was afraid to use plastic. At some point, she would need cash, and she'd have to wire it since the bank was in New Orleans and she wasn't. Sneller's client owned eight percent of the bank; not a lot, but a nice little twelve-million-dollar holding that could make things happen. A few minutes after three, he'd received a call from Freeport.

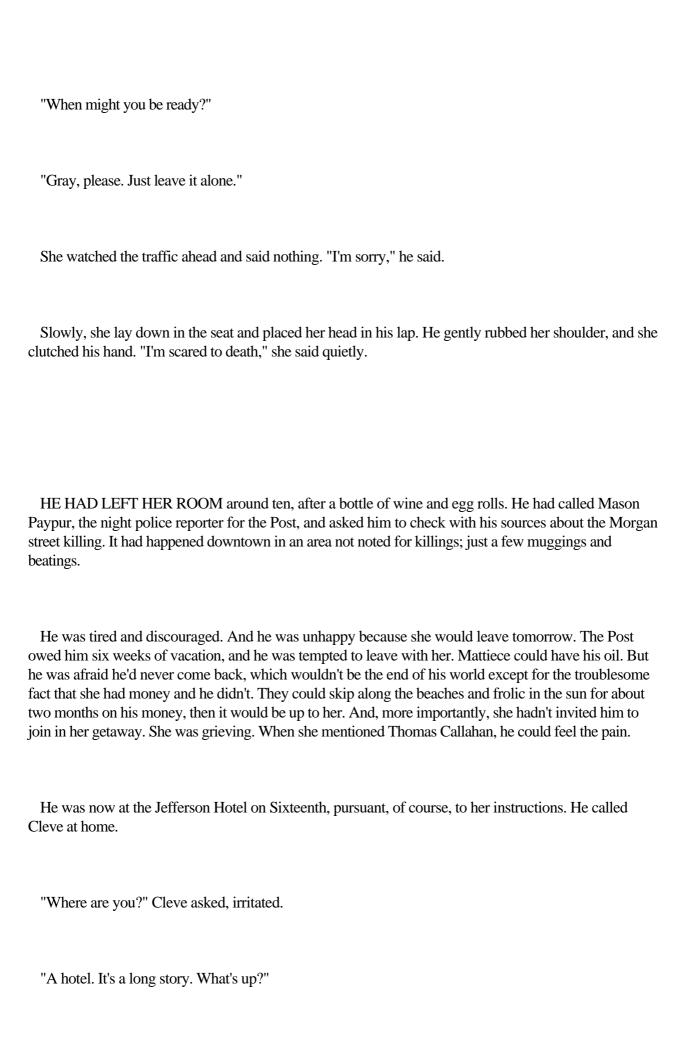
They did not suspect her to be in Washington. She was a smart girl who was running away from trouble, not to it. And they certainly didn't expect her to link up with the reporter. They had no idea, but now it seemed so logical. And it was worse than critical.

Fifteen thousand went from her account to his, and suddenly Sneller was back in business. He had two men with him. Another private jet was en route from Miami. He had asked for a dozen men immediately. It would be a quick job, or no job at all. There was not a second to spare.

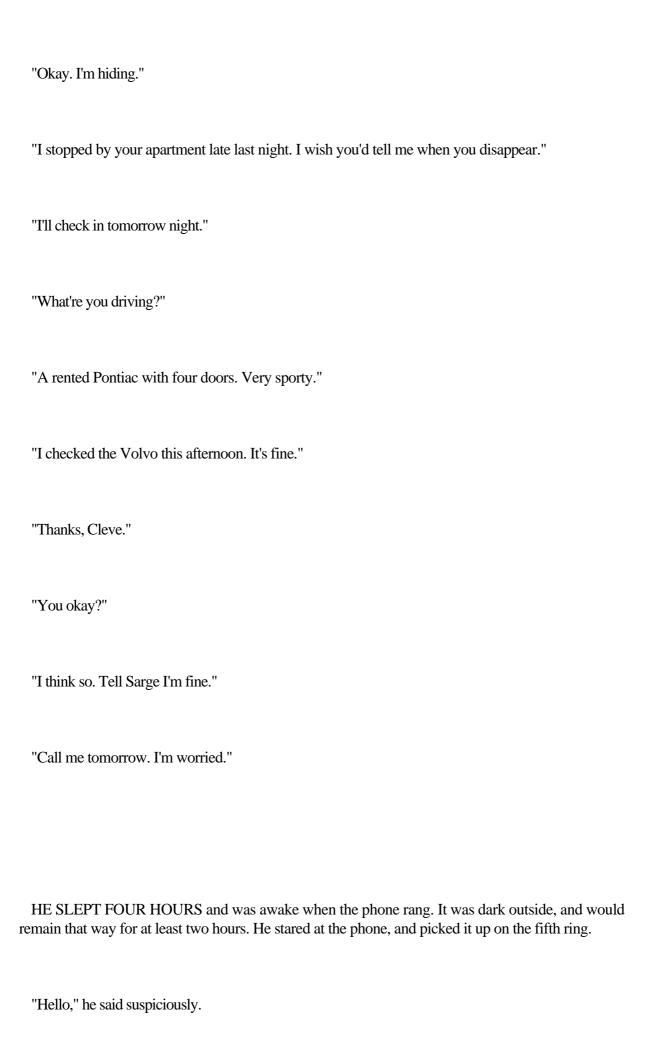
Gray nodded as if this was understandable. "We won't be five minutes. I promise."
He walked onto the porch and closed the door behind him. "I guess you're hard of hearing. I said she doesn't want to talk."
"I heard you, Mr. Kupcheck. And I respect her privacy, and I know what she's been through."
"Since when do you guys respect anyone's privacy?"
Evidently, Mr. Kupcheck had a short fuse. It was about to blow.
Gray kept calm. Darby backed away. She'd been involved in enough altercations for one day.
"Her husband called me three times before he died. I talked to him on the phone, and I don't believe his death was a random killing by street punks."
"He's dead. My daughter is upset. She doesn't want to talk. Now get the hell out of here."
"Mr. Kupcheck," Darby said warmly. "We have reason to believe your son-in-law was a witness to some highly organized criminal activity."
This calmed him a bit, and he glared at Darby. "Is that so? Well, you can't ask him about it, can you? My daughter knows nothing. She's had a bad day and she's on medication. Now leave."
"Can we see her tomorrow?" Darby asked.
"I doubt it. Call first."

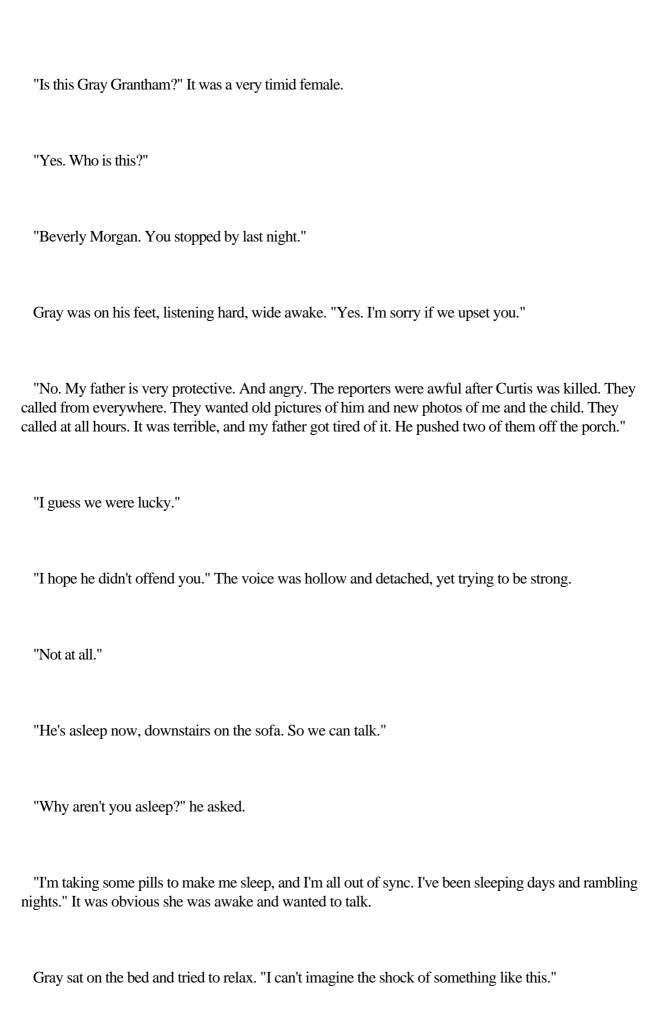


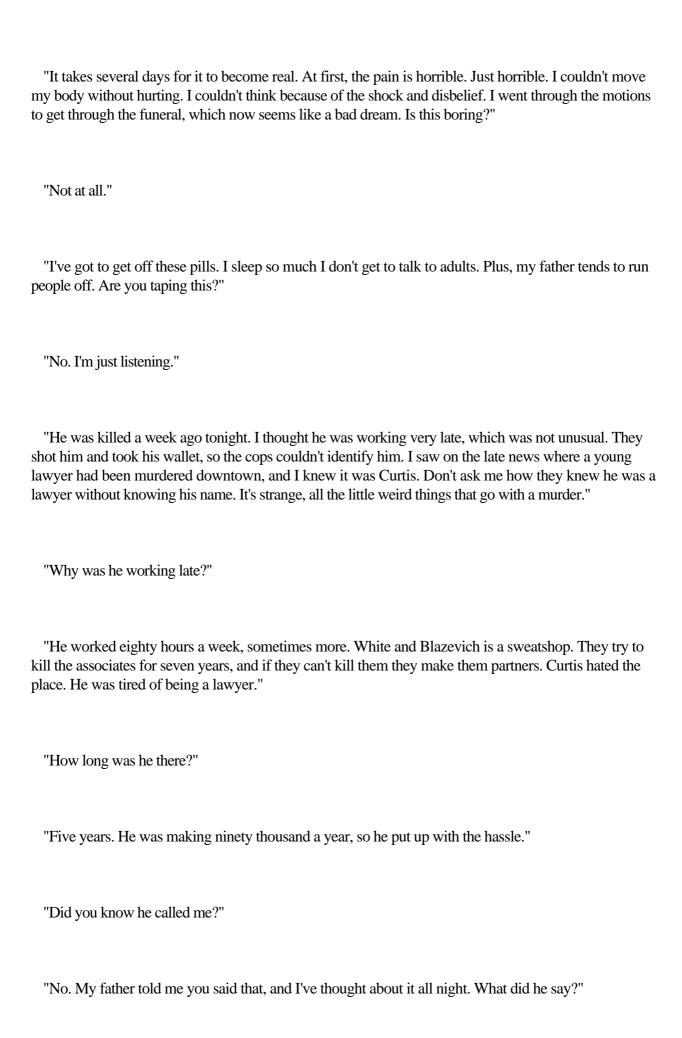








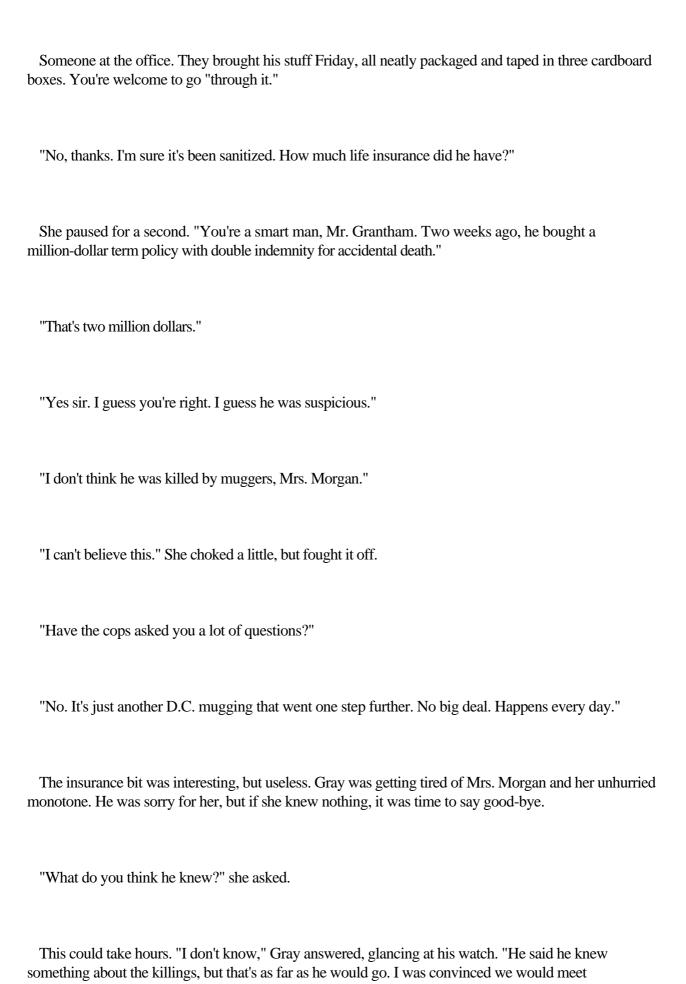






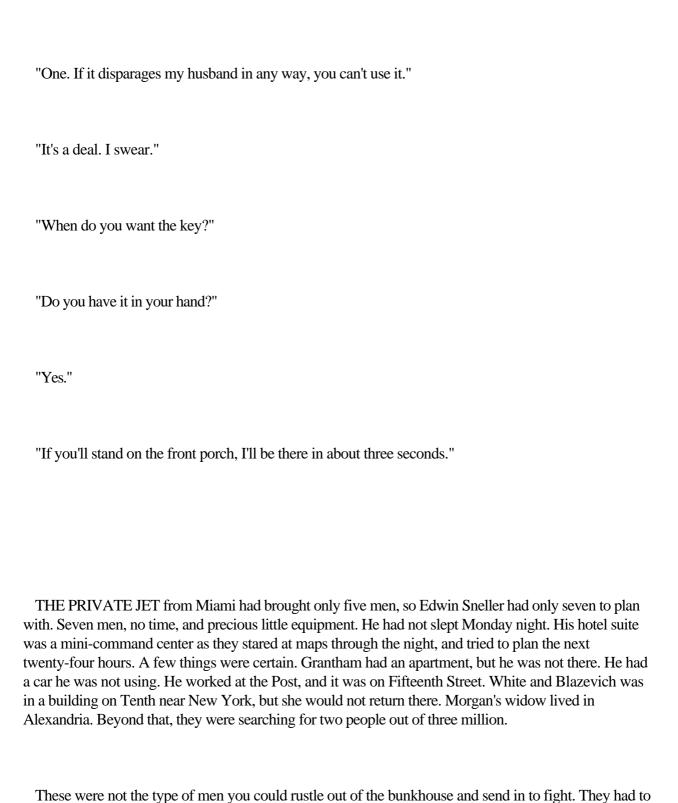
"The money kept getting better. He almost left a year ago, but the job offer fell through. He was very unhappy, but he tried to keep it to himself. I think he felt guilty for making such a big mistake. We had a little routine around here. When he came home, I would ask him how his day went. Sometimes this was at ten at night, so I knew it was a bad day. But he always said the day had been profitable; that was the word, profitable. And then we talked about our baby. He didn't want to talk about the office, and I didn't want to hear it."

"Well, so much for Garcia. He's dead, and he told his wife nothing. Who cleaned out his desk?"









be found and hired, and he'd been promised as many as possible by the end of the day.

Sneller was no novice at the killing game, and this was hopeless. This was desperation. The sky was falling. He would do his best under the circumstances, but Edwin Sneller had one foot out the back door.

She was on his mind. She had met Khamel on his terms, and walked away from it. She had dodged bullets and bombs, and evaded the best in the business. He would love to see her, not to kill her, but to congratulate her. A rookie running loose and living to tell about it.

They would concentrate on the Post building. It was the one spot he had to come back to.

THE DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC was bumper to bumper, and that suited Darby just fine. She was in no hurry. The bank lobby opened at nine-thirty, and some time around seven, over coffee and untouched bagels in her room, he had convinced her that she should be the one to visit the vault. She was not really convinced, but a woman should do it, and there weren't many available. Beverly Morgan told Gray that her bank, First Hamilton, froze their box as soon as they learned of Curtis's death, and that she was allowed only to view the contents and make an inventory. She was also allowed to copy the will, but the original was placed back in the box and secured in the vault. The box would be released only after the tax auditors finished their work.

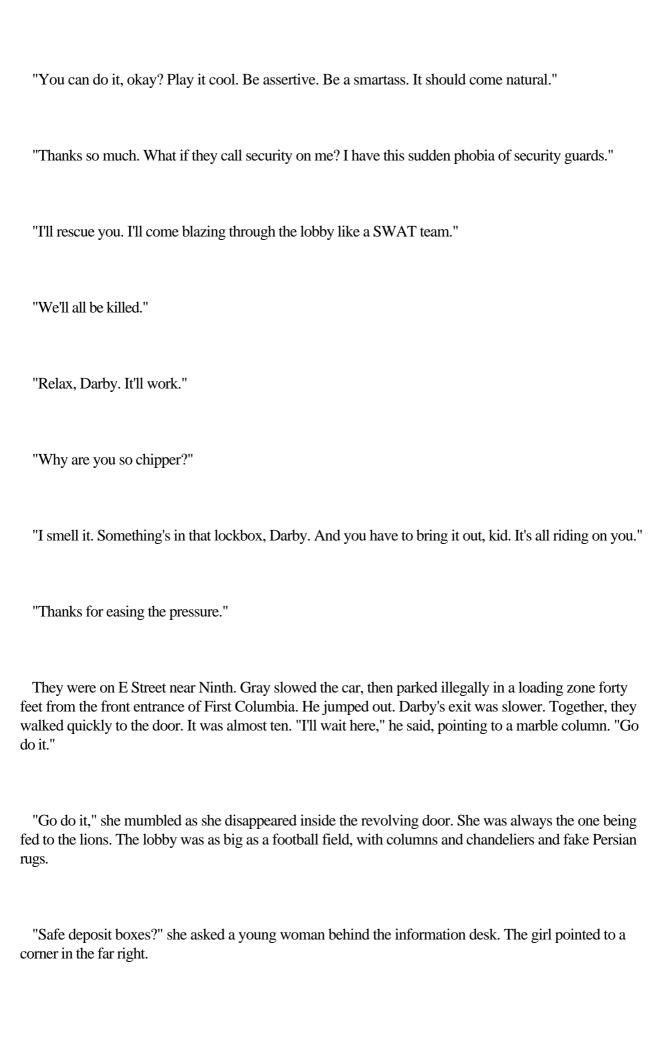
So the immediate question was whether or not First Columbia knew he was dead. The Morgans had never banked there. Beverly had no idea why he chose it. It was a huge bank with a million customers, and they decided that the odds were against it.

Darby was tired of playing the odds. She'd blown a wonderful opportunity last night to get on a plane, and now here she was about to be Beverly Morgan matching wits with First Columbia so she could steal from a dead man. And what was her sidekick going to do? He was going to protect her. He had this gun, which scared her to death and had the same effect on him though he wouldn't admit it, and he planned to play bodyguard by the front door while she pilfered the lockbox.

"What if they know he's dead," she asked, "and I tell them he isn't?"

"Then slap the bitch in the face and run like hell. I'll catch you at the front door. I've got a gun, and we'll blast our way down the sidewalk."

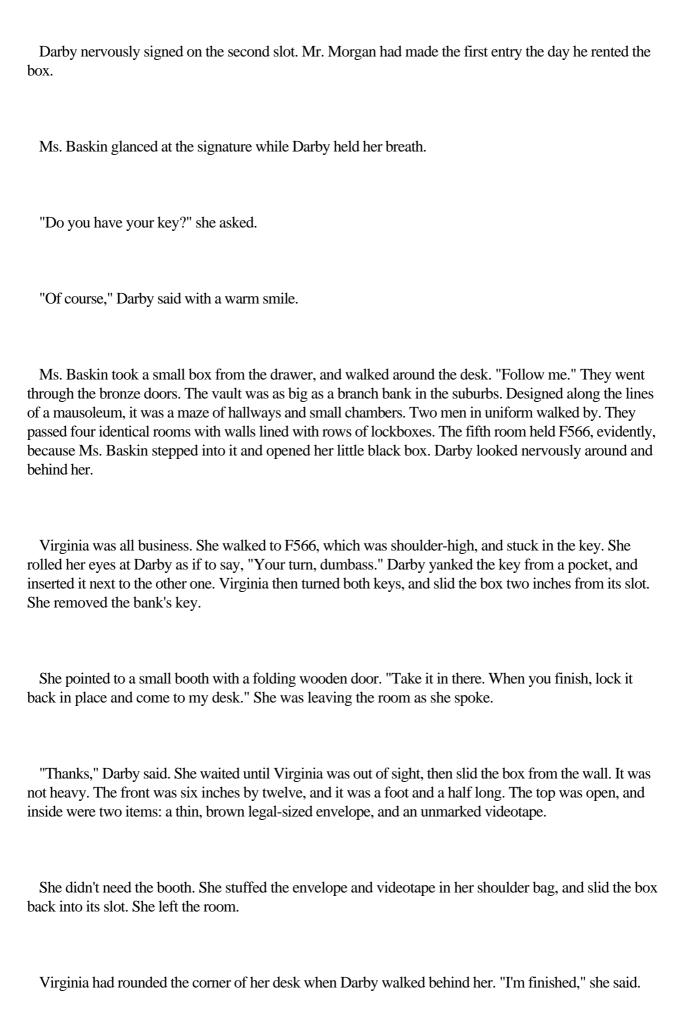
"Come on, Gray. I don't know if I can do this."

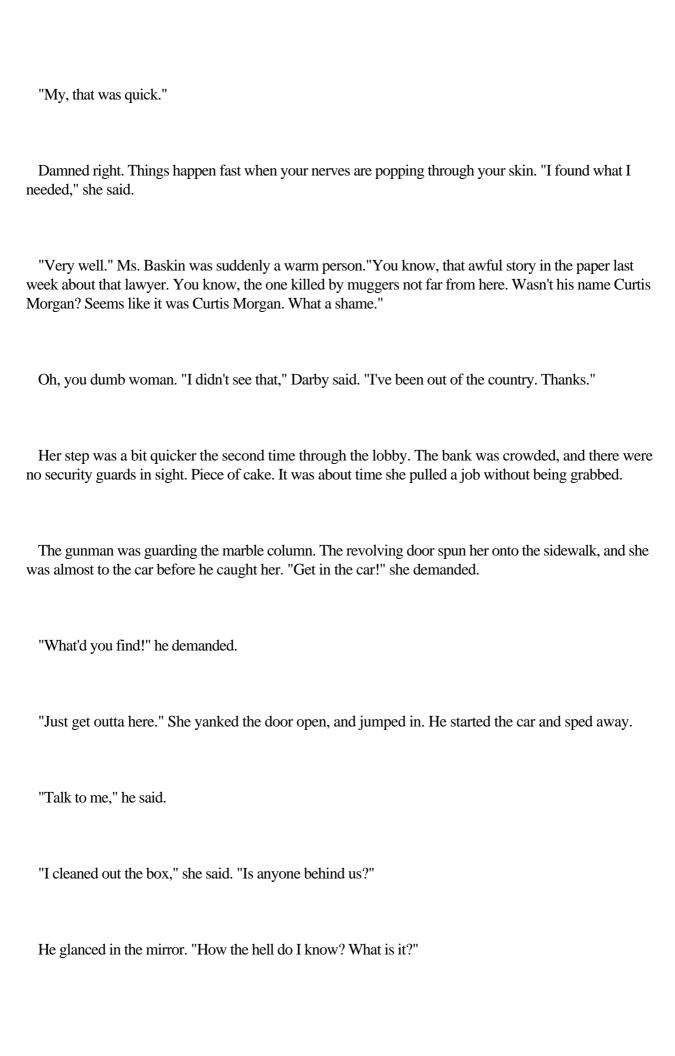


"Thanks," she said, and strolled toward it. The lines in front of the tellers were four deep to her left, and to her right a hundred busy vice presidents talked on their phones. It was the largest bank in the city, and no one noticed her. The vault was behind a set of massive bronze doors that were polished enough to appear almost golden, no doubt to give the appearance of infinite safety and invulnerability. The doors were opened slightly to allow a select few in and out. To the left, an important-looking lady of sixty sat behind a desk with the words SAFE DEPOST BOXES across its front. Her name was Virginia Baskin. Virginia Baskin stared at Darby as she approached the desk. There was no smile. "I need access to a box," Darby said without breathing. She hadn't breathed in the last two and a half minutes. "The number, please," Ms. Baskin said as she hit the keyboard and turned to the monitor. "F566." She punched the number and waited for the words to flash on the screen. She frowned, and moved her face to within inches of it. Run! Darby thought. She frowned harder and scratched her chin. Run, before she picks up the phone and calls the guards. Run, before the alarms go off and my idiot cohort comes blazing through the lobby. Ms. Baskin withdrew her head from the monitor. "That was rented just two weeks ago," she said almost to herself. "Yes," Darby said as if she had rented it. "I assume you're Mrs. Morgan," she said, pecking on the keyboard.

Keep assuming, baby. "Yes, Beverly Anne Morgan."









"You're yelling again."

He yanked the wheel to the right and pulled into another tow-away zone on E Street. Horns honked as he slammed his brakes. He glared at her.

"Thanks," she said, and started reading it aloud.

It was a four-page affidavit, typed real neat and sworn to under oath before a notary public. It was dated Friday, the day before the last phone call to Grantham. Under oath, Curtis Morgan said he worked in the oil and gas section of White and Blazevich, and had since he joined the firm five years earlier. His clients were privately owned oil exploration firms from many countries, but primarily Americans. Since he joined the firm, he had worked for a client who was engaged in a huge lawsuit in south Louisiana. The client was a man named Victor Mattiece, and Mr. Mattiece, whom he'd never met but was well known to the senior partners of White and Blazevich, wanted desperately to win the lawsuit and eventually harvest millions of barrels of oil from the swamplands of Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana. There were also hundreds of millions of cubic yards of natural gas. The partner supervising the case for White and Blazevich was F. Sims Wakefield, who was very close to Victor Mattiece and often visited him in the Bahamas.

They sat in the tow-away zone with the bumper of the Pontiac protruding perilously into the right lane, and were oblivious to the cars swerving around it. She read slowly, and he sat with his eyes closed.

Continuing, the lawsuit was very important to White and Blazevich. The firm was not directly involved in the trial and appeal, but everything crossed Wakefield's desk. He worked on nothing but the pelican case, as it was known. He spent most of his time on the phone with either Mattiece or one of a hundred lawyers working on the case. Morgan averaged ten hours a week on the case, but always on the periphery. His billings were handed directly to Wakefield, and this was unusual because all other billings went to the oil and gas billing clerk, who turned them in to accounting. He'd heard rumors over the years, and firmly believed Mattiece was not paying White and Blazevich its standard hourly rate. He believed the firm had taken the case for a percentage of the harvest. He'd heard the figure of ten percent of the net profits from the wells. This was unheard of in the industry.

Brakes squealed loudly, and they braced for the impact. It barely missed. "We're about to be killed," Darby snapped.

Gray yanked the gearshift into Drive, and pulled the right front wheel over the curb and onto the sidewalk. Now they were out of traffic. The car was angled across a forbidden space with its front bumper on the sidewalk and its rear bumper barely out of traffic. "Keep reading," he snapped back.

Continuing, on or about September 28, Morgan was in Wakefield's office. He walked in with two files and a stack of documents unrelated to the pelican case. Wakefield was on the phone. As usual, secretaries were in and out. The office was always in a state of disruption. He stood around for a few minutes waiting for Wakefield to get off the phone, but the conversation dragged on. Finally, after waiting fifteen minutes, Morgan picked up his files and documents from Wakefield's cluttered desk, and left. He went to his office at the other end of the building, and started working at his desk. It was about two in the afternoon. As he reached for a file, he found a handwritten memo on the bottom of the stack of documents he had just brought to his office. He had inadvertently taken it from Wakefield's desk. He immediately stood, with the intention of returning to Wakefield. Then he read it. And he read it again. He glanced at the telephone. Wakefield's line was still busy. A copy of the memo was attached to the affidavit.

"Read the memo," Gray snapped.

"I'm not through with the affidavit," she snapped back. It would do no good to argue with her. She was the legal mind, and this was a legal document, and she would read it exactly as she pleased.

Continuing, he was stunned by the memo. And he was immediately terrified of it. He walked out of his office and down the hall to the nearest Xerox, and copied it. He returned to his office, and placed the original memo in the same position under the files on his desk. He would swear he'd never seen it.

The memo was two paragraphs handwritten on White and Blazevich internal stationery. It was from M. Velmano, who is Marty Velmano, a senior partner. It was dated September 28, directed to Wakefield, and read:

Sims:

Advise client, research is completeand the bench will sit much softer if Rosenberg is retired. The second retirement is a bit unusual. Einstein found a link to Jensen, of all people. The boy, of course, has those other problems.

There was no signature.
Gray was chuckling and frowning at the same time. His mouth was open. She was reading faster.
Continuing, Marty Velmano was a ruthless shark who worked eighteen hours a day, and felt useless unless someone near him was bleeding. He was the heart and soul of White and Blazevich. To the power people of Washington, he was a tough operator with plenty of money. He lunched with congressmen, and played golf with cabinet members. He did his throat cutting behind his office door.
Einstein was the nickname for Nathaniel Jones, a demented legal genius the firm kept locked away in his own little library on the sixth floor. He read every case decided by the Supreme Court, the eleven federal appellate courts, and the supreme courts of the fifty states. Morgan had never met Einstein. Sightings were rare around the firm.
After he copied it, he folded his copy of the memo and placed it in a desk drawer. Ten minutes later, Wakefield stormed into his office, very disturbed and pale. They scratched around Morgan's desk, and found the memo. Wakefield was angry as hell, which was not unusual. He asked if Morgan had read this. No, he insisted. Evidently he mistakenly picked it up when he left his office, he explained. What's the big deal? Wakefield was furious. He lectured Morgan about the sanctity of one's desk. He was a blithering idiot, rebuking and expounding around Morgan's office. He finally realized he was overreacting. He tried to settle down, but the impression had been made. He left with the memo.
Morgan hid the copy in a law book in the library on the ninth floor. He was shocked at Wakefield's paranoia and hysterics. Before he left that afternoon, he precisely arranged the articles and papers in his desk and on his shelves. The next morning, he checked them. Someone had gone through his desk during

Morgan became very careful. Two days later, he found a tiny screwdriver behind a book on his credenza. Then he found a small piece of black tape wadded up and dropped in his trash can. He

He saw Velmano in Wakefield's office more than usual.

assumed his office was wired and his phones were bugged. He caught suspicious looks from Wakefield.

the night.

Advise further that the pelican should arrive here in four years, assuming other factors.

Then Justices Rosenberg and Jensen were killed. There was no doubt in his mind it was the work of Mattiece and his associates. The memo did not mention Mattiece, but it referred to a "client." Wakefield had no other clients. And no one client had as much to gain from a new Court as Mattiece.

The last paragraph of the affidavit was frightening. On two occasions after the assassinations, Morgan knew he was being followed. He was taken off the pelican case. He was given more work, more hours, more demands. He was afraid of being killed. If they would kill two justices, they would kill a lowly associate.

He signed it under oath before Emily Stanford, a notary public. Her address was typed under her name.

"Sit tight. I'll be right back," Gray said as he opened his door and jumped out. He dodged cars and dashed across E Street. There was a pay phone outside a bakery. He punched Smith Keen's number and looked at his rented car parked haphazardly across the street.

"Smith, it's Gray. Listen carefully and do as I say. I've got another source on the pelican brief. It's big, Smith, and I need you and Krauthammer in Feldman's office in fifteen minutes."

"What is it?"

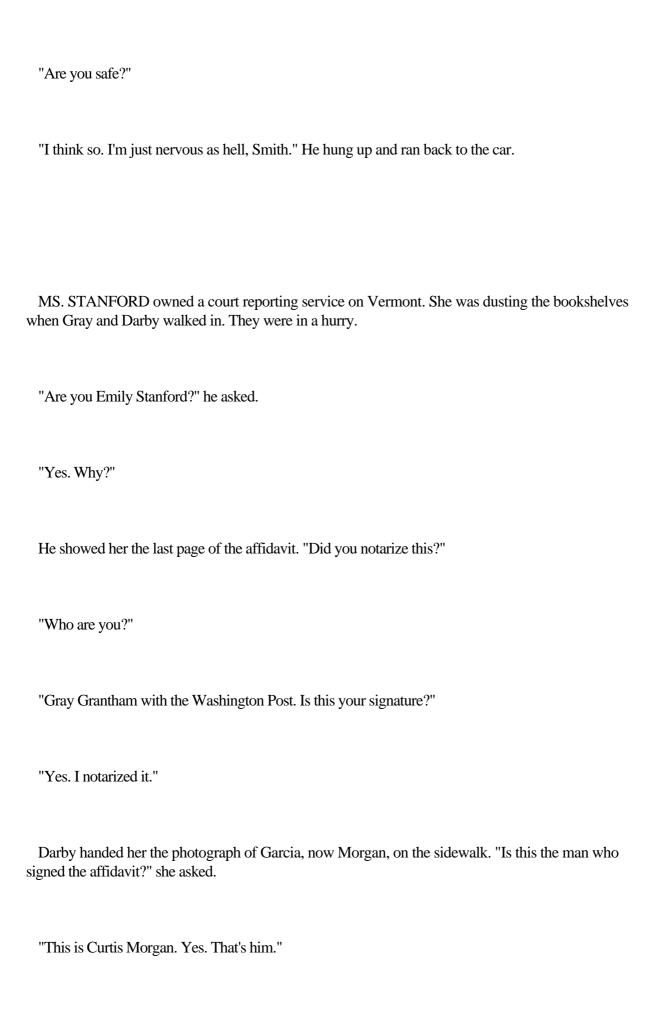
"Garcia left a farewell message. We have one more stop, and we're coming in."

"We? The girl's coming in?"

"Yes. Get a TV with a VCR in the conference room. I think Garcia wants to talk to us."

"He left a tape?"

"Yes. Fifteen minutes."







She nodded politely and forgot each name as she heard it. They were all at least fifty, all in shirtsleeves,

all deeply concerned. She could feel the tension.

"Give me the tape," Gray said.

She took it from her bag and handed it to him. The television and VCR were at the end of the room on a portable stand. He pushed the tape into the VCR. "We got this twenty minutes ago, so we haven't seen it."

Darby sat in a chair against the wall. The men inched toward the screen and waited for an image.

On a black screen was the date-October 12. Then Curtis Morgan was sitting at a table in a kitchen. He held a switch that evidently worked the camera.

"My name is Curtis Morgan, and since you're watching this, I'm probably dead." It was a helluva first sentence. The men grimaced and inched closer.

"Today is October 12, and I'm doing this at my house. I'm alone. My wife is at the doctor. I should be at work, but I called in sick. My wife knows nothing about any of this. I've told no one. Since you're watching this, you've also seen this. [He holds up the affidavit.] This is an affidavit I've signed, and I plan to leave it with this video, probably in a safe deposit box in a bank downtown. I'll read the affidavit, and discuss other things."

"We've got the affidavit," Gray said quickly. He was standing against the wall next to Darby. No one looked at him. They were glued to the screen. Morgan slowly read the affidavit. His eyes darted from the pages to the camera, back and forth, back and forth.

It took him ten minutes. Each time Darby heard the word pelican, she closed her eyes and slowly shook her head. It had all come down to this. It was a bad dream. She tried to listen.

When Morgan finished the affidavit, he laid it on the table, and looked at some notes on a legal pad. He was comfortable and relaxed. He was a handsome kid who looked younger than twenty-nine. He was at home, so there was no tie. Just a starched white button-down. White and Blazevich was not an ideal place to work, he said, but most of the four hundred lawyers were honest and probably knew nothing about Mattiece. In fact, he doubted if many besides Wakefield, Velmano, and Einstein were involved in the conspiracy. There was a partner named Jarreld Schwabe who was sinister enough to be involved, but Morgan had no proof. (Darby remembered him well.) There was an ex-secretary who'd quit abruptly a few days after the assassinations. Her name was Miriam LaRue, and she'd worked in the oil and gas section for eighteen years. She might know something. She lives in Falls Church. Another secretary whom he would not name had told him she overheard a conversation between Wakefield and Velmano, and the topic was whether he, Morgan, could be trusted. But she just heard bits and pieces. They treated

him differently after the memo was found on his desk. Especially Schwabe and Wakefield. It was as if they wanted to throw him up against the wall and threaten his life if he told of the memo, but they couldn't do it because they weren't sure he'd seen it. And they were afraid to make a big deal out of it. But he'd seen it, and they were almost certain he'd seen it. And if they conspired to kill Rosenberg and Jensen, well, hell, he was just an associate. He could be replaced in seconds.

Litsky the lawyer shook his head in disbelief. The numbness was wearing off, and they moved a bit in their seats.

Morgan commuted by car, and twice he was trailed. Once during lunch, he saw a man watching him. He talked about his family for a while, and started to ramble. It was apparent he'd run out of hard news. Gray handed the affidavit and the memo to Feldman, who read it and passed it to Krauthammer, who passed it on.

Morgan finished with a chilling farewell: "I don't know who will see this tape. I'll be dead, so it won't really matter, I guess. I hope you use this to nail Mattiece and his sleazy lawyers. But if the sleazy lawyers are watching this tape, then you can all go straight to hell."

Gray ejected the tape. He rubbed his hands together and smiled at the group. "Well, gentlemen, did we bring you enough verification, or do you want more?"

"I know those guys," Litsky said, dazed. "Wakefield and I played tennis a year ago."

Feldman was up and walking. "How'd you find Morgan?"

"It's a long story," Gray said.

"Give me a real short version."

"We found a law student at Georgetown who clerked for White and Blazevich last summer. He identified a photograph of Morgan."



"The brief portion is already outlined. I can finish it up in an hour or so. Give me two hours on Morgan. Three at the most."

Feldman hadn't smiled since he shook hands with Darby. He paced to the other side of the room, and stood in Gray's face. "What if this tape's a hoax?"

"Hoax? We're talking dead bodies, Jackson. I've seen the widow. She's a real, live widow. This paper ran the story of his murder. He's dead. Even his law firm says he's dead. And that's him on the tape, talking about dying. I know that's him. And we talked to the notary public who witnessed his signature on the affidavit. She identified him." Gray was getting louder and looking around the room. "Everything he said verifies the pelican brief. Everything. Mattiece, the lawsuit, the assassinations. Then we've got Darby, the author of the brief. And more dead bodies, and they've chased her all over the country. There are no holes, Jackson. It's a story."

He finally smiled. "It's more than a story. Have it written by two. It's eleven now. Use this conference room and close the door." Feldman was pacing again. We'll meet here at exactly two and read the draft. Not a word."

The men stood and filed from the room, but not before each shook hands with Darby Shaw. They were uncertain whether to say congratulations or thanks or whatever, so they just smiled and shook her hand. She kept her seat.

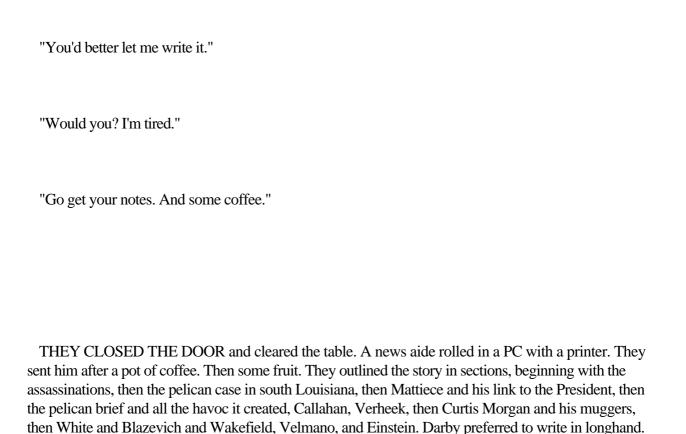
When they were alone, Gray sat beside her and they held hands. The clean conference table was before them. The chairs were placed perfectly around it. The walls were white, and the room was lit by fluorescent lights and two narrow windows.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I don't know. This is the end of the road, I guess. We made it."

"You don't sound too happy."





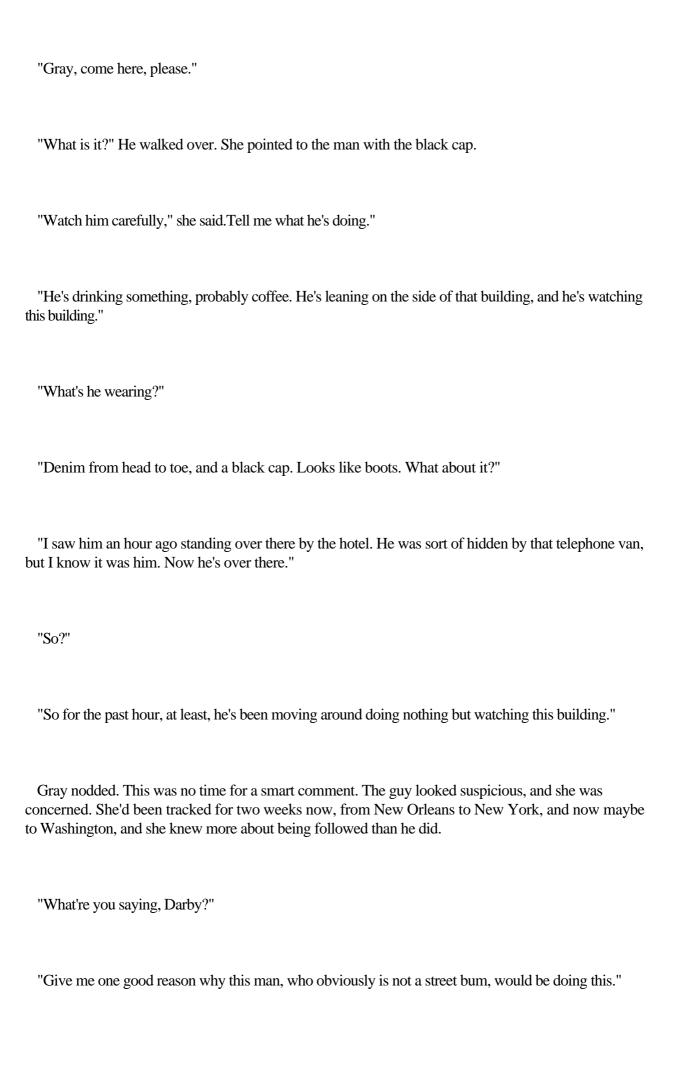
Darby was a model of organization, with notes neatly arranged on the table, and words carefully written on paper. He was a whirlwind of chaospapers on the floor, talking to the computer, printing random paragraphs that were discarded by the time they were on paper. She kept telling him to be quiet. This is not a law school library, he explained. This is a newspaper. You work with a phone in each ear and someone yelling at you.

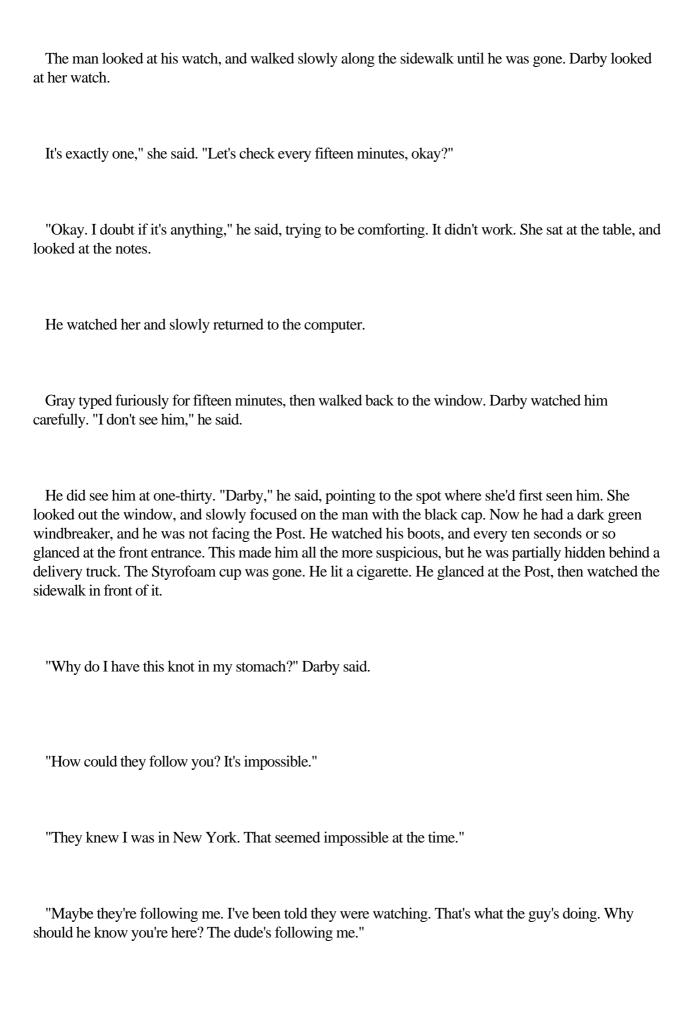
She scaled down the litigation and the brief, and what was known of Mattiece. Gray took the rest, and

typed out rough notes on the machine.

At twelve-thirty, Smith Keen sent in food. Darby ate a cold sandwich and watched the traffic below. Gray was digging through campaign reports.

She saw him. He was leaning on the side of a building across Fifteenth Street, and he would not have been suspicious except he had been leaning on the side of the Madison Hotel an hour earlier. He was sipping something from a tall Styrofoam cup, and watching the front entrance to the Post. He wore a black cap, denim jacket, and jeans. He was under thirty. And he just stood there staring across the street. She nibbled on her sand wich, and watched him for ten minutes. He sipped from his cup and never moved.







She glanced around the room. They were immersed in the story. Stump was out of sight, so she couldn't show him to Gray, who was reading and smiling. No, they were not watching the reporter. They were waiting on the girl.

And they had to be desperate. They were standing on the street hoping somehow a miracle would happen and the girl would emerge from the building, and they could take her out. They were scared. She was inside spilling her guts and waving copies of that damned brief. Tomorrow morning the game would be over. Somehow they had to stop her. They had their orders.

She was in a room full of men, and suddenly she was not safe.

Feldman finished last. He slid his copy to Gray. "Minor stuff. Should take about an hour. Let's talk phone calls."

Just three, I think," Gray said. "The White House, FBI, and White and Blazevich."

"You only named Sims Wakefield at the firm. Why?" asked Krauthammer.

"Morgan fingered him the most."

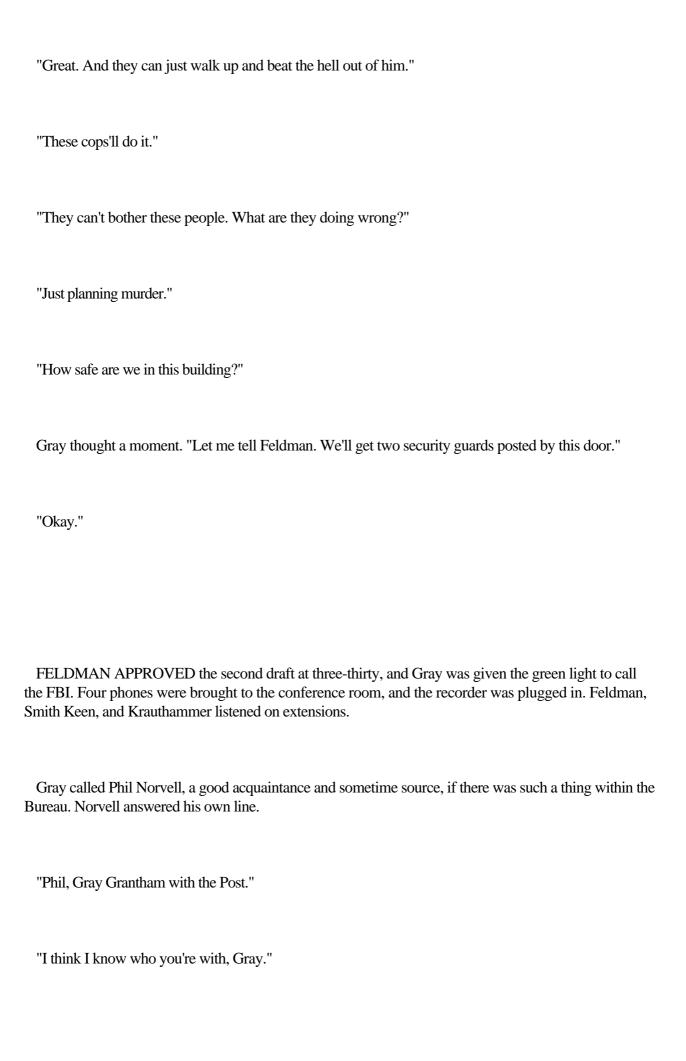
"But the memo is from Velmano. I think he should be named."

"I agree," said Smith Keen.

"Me too," said DeBasio.

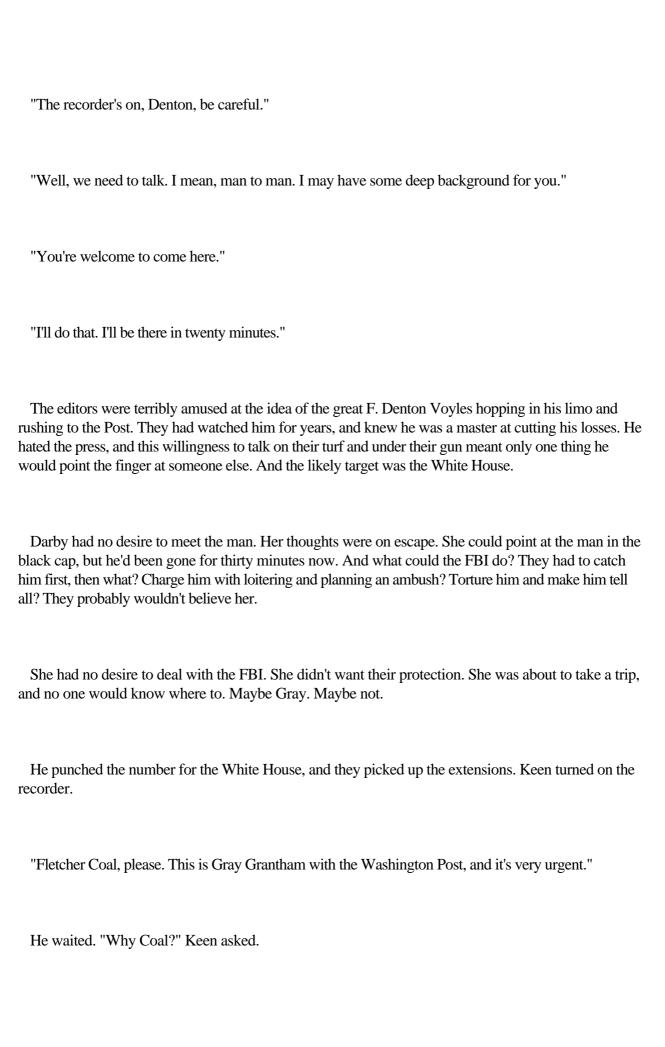
"I wrote his name in," Feldman said. "We'll get Einstein later. Wait until four-thirty or five before you call the White House and White and Blazevich. If you do it sooner, they may go nuts and run to court."

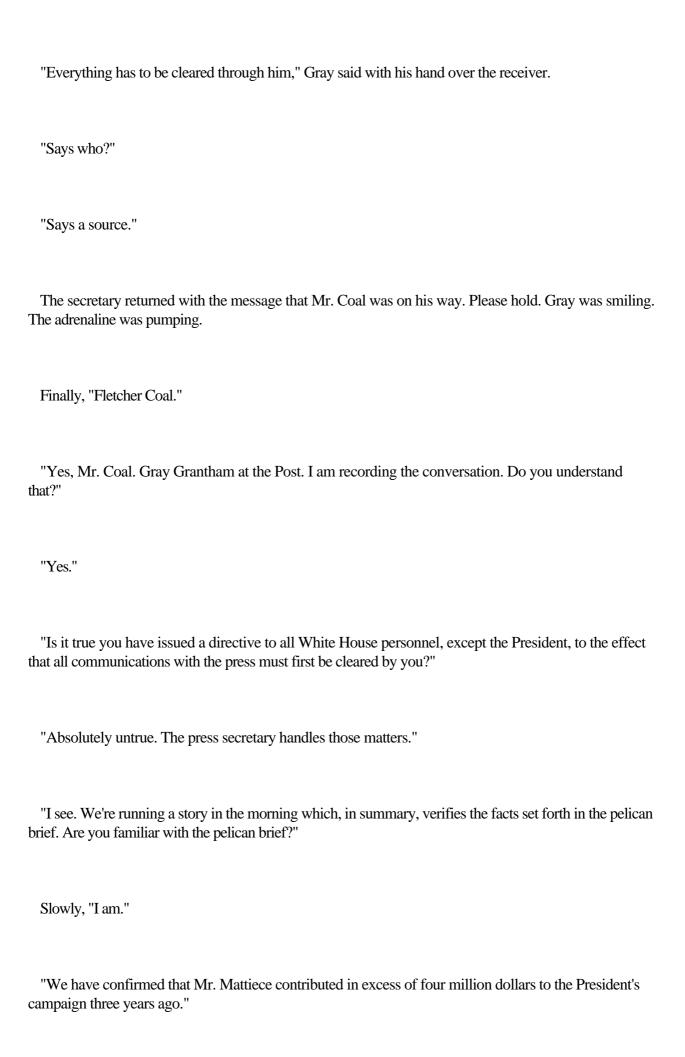
"I agree," said Litsky the lawyer. "They can't stop it, but they can try. I'd wait until five before I called them."
"Okay," Gray said. "I'll have it reworked by three-thirty. Then I'll call the FBI for their comment. The the White House, then White and Blazevich."
"Feldman was almost out the door.We'll meet again here at three-thirty. Stay close to your phones."
When the room was empty again, Darby locked the door and pointed to the window. "You've heard me mention Stump?"
"Don't tell me."
They scanned the street below.
"Afraid so. He met with our little friend, then disappeared. I know it was him."
"I guess I'm off the hook."
"I guess you are. I really want to get out of here."
"We'll think of something. I'll alert our security. You want me to tell Feldman?"
"No. Not yet."
"I know some cops."

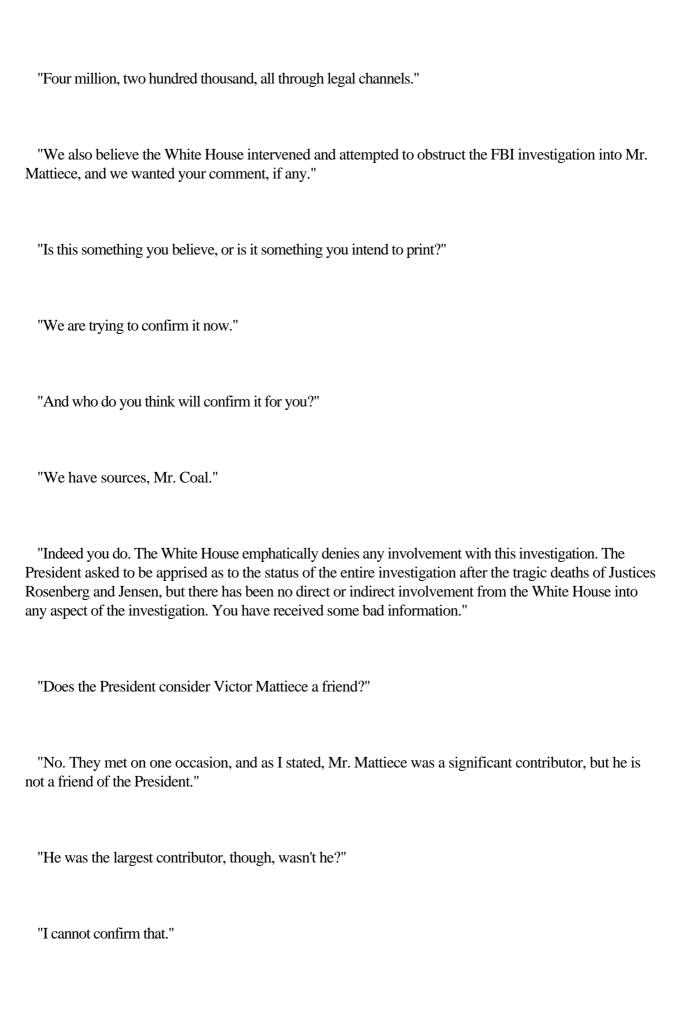


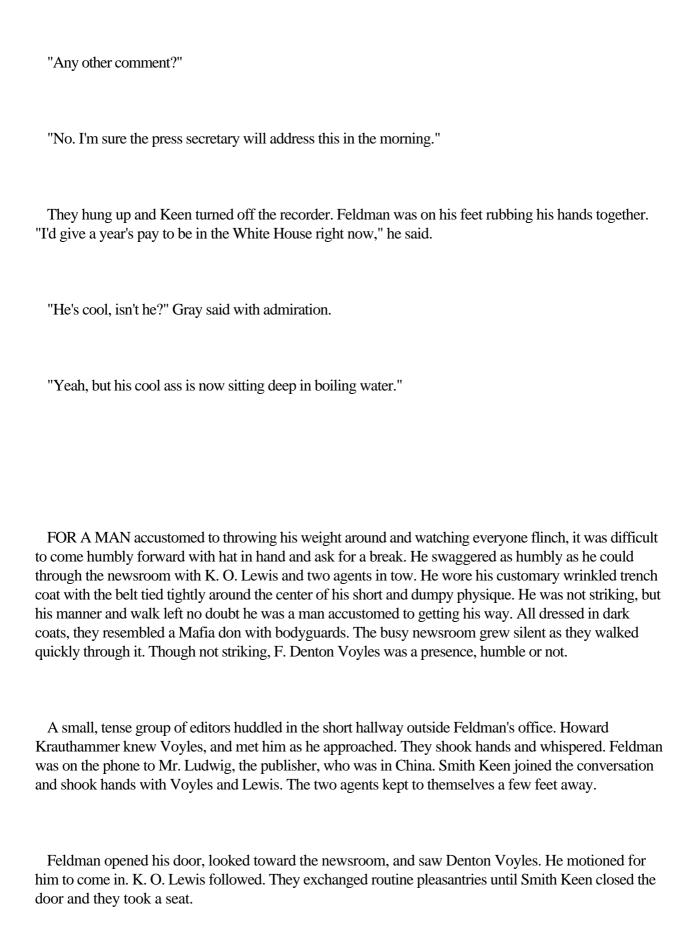




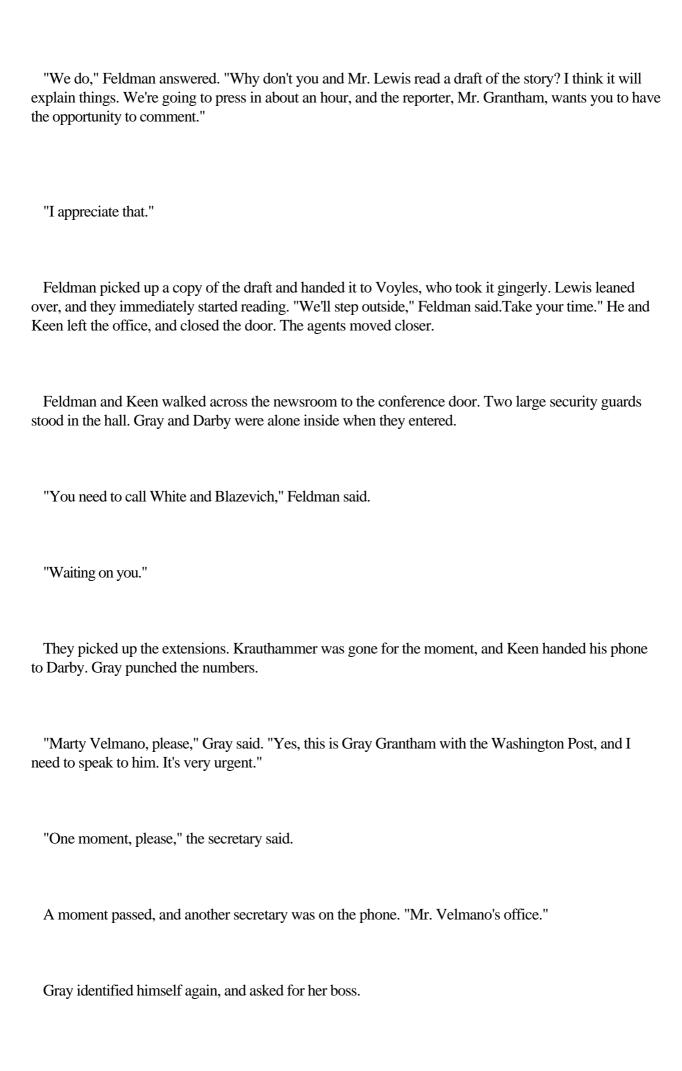




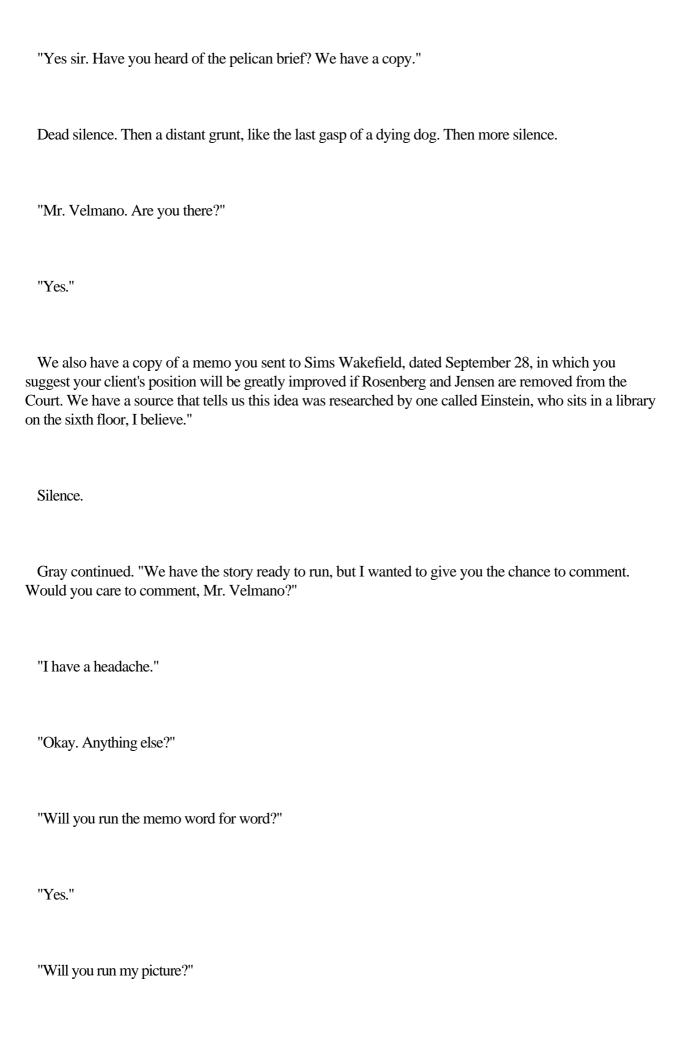




"I take it you have solid confirmation of the pelican brief," Voyles said.











falling. Traffic inched along the street. There was no sign of Stump and his band of confederates, but they were there, no doubt waiting on darkness, no doubt plotting one last effort to kill her, either for prevention or revenge. Gray said he had a plan to exit the building without gunfire after the deadline. He wasn't specific.

Voyles entered with K. O. Lewis. Feldman introduced them to Gray Grantham, and to Darby Shaw. Voyles walked to her, smiling and looking up. "So you're the one who started all this," he said in an attempt at admiration. It didn't work.

"She instantly despised him.I think it was Mattiece," she said coolly. He turned away and took off the trench coat.

"Can we sit?" he asked in general.

They sat around the table-Voyles, Lewis, Feldman, Keen, Grantham, and Krauthammer. Darby stood by the window.

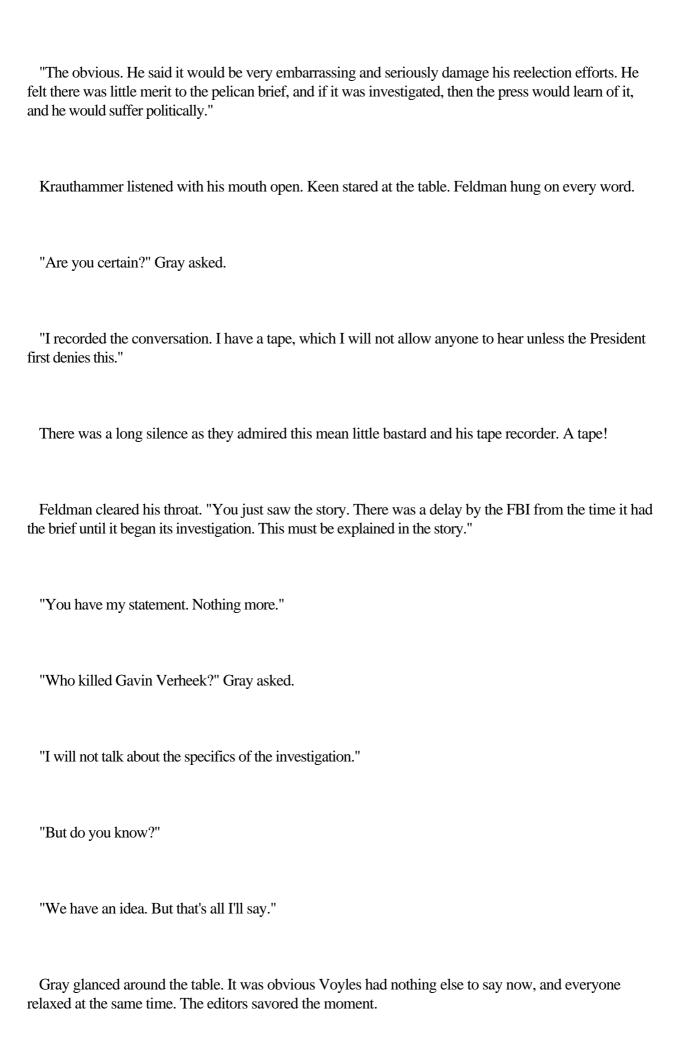
"I have some comments for the record," Voyles announced, taking a sheet of paper from Lewis. Gray began taking notes.

First, we received a copy of the pelican brief two weeks ago today, and submitted it to the White House on the same day. It was personally delivered by the deputy director, K. O. Lewis, to Mr. Fletcher Coal, who received it with our daily summary to the White House. Special agent Eric East was present during the meeting. We thought it raised enough questions to be pursued, but it was not pursued for six days, until Mr. Gavin Verheek, special counsel to the director, was found murdered in New Orleans. At that time, the FBI immediately began a full-scale investigation of Victor Mattiece. Over four hundred agents from twenty-seven offices have taken part in the investigation, logging over eleven thousand hours, interviewing over six hundred people, and going to five foreign countries. The investigation is continuing in full force at this time. We believe Victor Mattiece to be the prime suspect in the assassinations of Justices Rosenberg and Jensen, and at this time we are attempting to locate him."

Voyles folded the paper and handed it back to Lewis.

"What will you do if you find Mattiece?" Grantham asked.





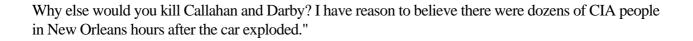












"But why?" Gray asked.

2The brief had been legitimized, and Mattiece was killing people. Most of his business is in New Orleans. And I think the CIA was very concerned about Darby. Lucky for her. They came through when it counted."

"If the CIA moved so fast, why didn't you?" she asked.

"Fair question. We didn't think that much of the brief, and we didn't know half as much as the CIA. I swear, it seemed like such a long shot, and we had a dozen other suspects. We underestimated it. Plain and simple. Plus, the President asked us to back off, and it was easy to do because I'd never heard of Mattiece. Had no reason to. Then my friend Gavin got himself killed, and I sent in the troops."

"Why would Coal give the brief to Gminski?" Gray asked.

"It scared him. And, truthfully, that's one reason we sent it over. Gminski is, well, he's Gminski, and he sometimes does things his way without regard for little obstacles like laws and such. Coal wanted the brief checked out, and he figured Gminski would do it quickly and quietly."

"So Gminski didn't level with Coal."

"He hates Coal, which is perfectly understandable. Gminski dealt with the President, and, no, he didn't level with him. It all happened so fast. Remember, Gminski, Coal, the President, and I first saw the brief just two weeks ago today. Gminski was probably waiting to tell the President some of the story, but just hadn't got the chance."

Darby pushed her chair away, and walked back to the window. It was dark now, and the traffic was still slow and heavy. It was nice to have these mysteries revealed to her, but they created more mysteries. She just wanted to leave. She was tired of running and being chased; tired of playing reporter with Gray; tired of wondering who did what and why; tired of the guilt for writing the damned thing; tired of buying a

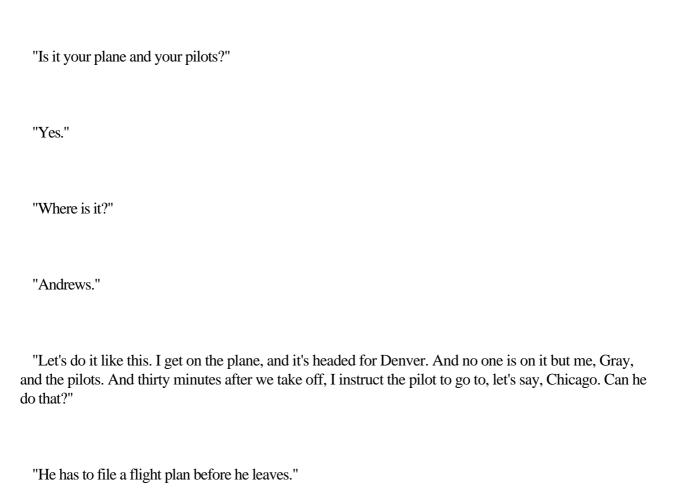




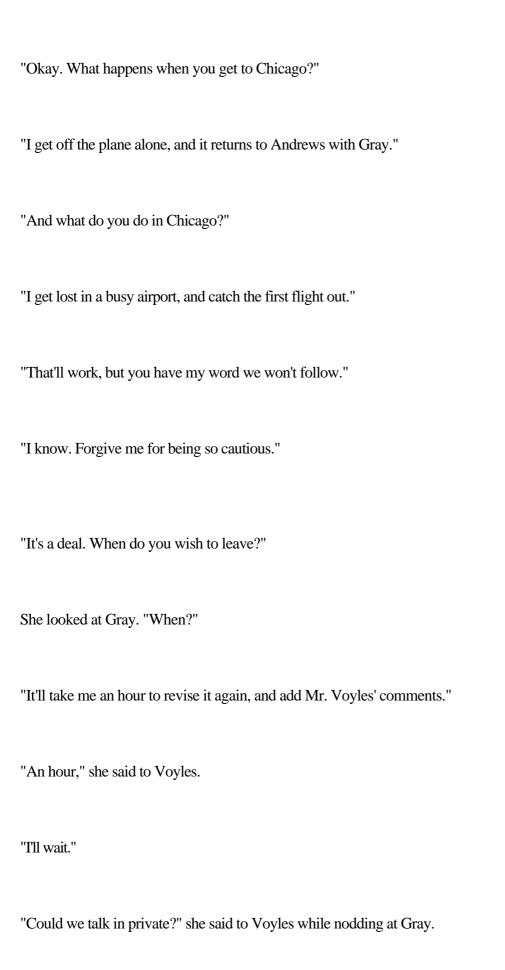
It's a good one. I've got planes and helicopters and plenty of men who carry guns and are not the least bit afraid of those boys out there playing hide-and-seek. First, we'll get you out of the building, and no one will know it. Second, we'll put you on my plane and fly you anywhere you want. Third, you can disappear from there. You have my word we will not follow. But, and fourth, you allow me to contact you through Mr. Grantham here if, and only if, it becomes urgently necessary."

She was looking at Gray as the offer was made, and it was obvious he liked the deal. She kept a poker face, but, damn, it sounded good. If she had trusted Gavin after the first phone call, he would be alive and she would never have held hands with Khamel. If she'd simply left New Orleans with him when he suggested, he would not have been murdered. She'd thought about this every five minutes for the past seven days.

This thing was bigger than she was. There comes a time when you give up and start trusting people. She didn't like this man, but for the past ten minutes he had been remarkably honest with her.



"I know. But you're the director of the FBI, and you can pull some strings."





THE TAKEOFF was smooth and the jet was headed due west, supposedly for Denver. It was adequate but not luxurious, but then it was owned by the taxpayers and held by a man who cared nothing for the finer things. No good whiskey, Gray determined as he opened the cabinets. Voyles was an abstainer, and at the moment this really irritated Gray since he was a guest and dying of thirst. He found two semichilled Sprites in the refrigerator, and handed one to Darby. She popped the top of the can.

The jet appeared to be level. The copilot appeared in the door of their cabin. He was polite and introduced himself.	
"We were told that we would have a new destination shortly after takeoff."	
"That's correct," Darby said.	
"Fine. Uh, we'll need to know something in about ten minutes."	
"Okay."	
"Is there any liquor on this thing?" Gray asked.	
"Sorry " The copilot smiled, and returned to the cockpit	

Darby and her long legs consumed most of the small sofa, but he was determined to join her. He lifted her feet and sat at the end of it. They were in his lap. Red toenails. He rubbed her ankles and thought only of this first major eventthe holding of the feet. It was terribly intimate for him, but didn't seem to faze her. She was smiling a little now, unwinding. It was over.

[&]quot;Were you scared?" he asked.



The foot play reminded her of Thomas. He'd get half drunk and smear polish around the nails. With the jet humming and shaking softly, he was suddenly many miles removed from her. He'd been dead for two weeks, but it seemed much longer. There'd been so many changes. It was better this way. If she was at Tulane, walking by his office, seeing his classroom, talking to the other professors, staring at his

invited to visit later, and this was disturbing. He had no idea where she was going, and this was

intentional. He was not certain she knew her destination.



"And after that?"



unnecessary, but I'll feel safer. I'll eventually land somewhere in the Caribbean."
Somewhere in the Caribbean. That narrowed it to a thousand islands. Why was she so vague? Did she not trust him? He was sitting here playing with her feet and she wouldn't tell him where she was going.
"What do I tell Voyles?" he asked.
"I'll call you when I get there. Or I might drop you a line."
Great! They could be pen pals. He could send her his stories and she could send postcards from the beach.
"Will you hide from me?" he asked, looking at her.
"I don't know where I'm going, Gray. I won't know until I get there."
"But you'll call?"
"Eventually, yes. I promise."

"I'll catch a quick flight somewhere. I'll do my four-airports-in-one-night routine. It's probably

BY 11 P.M., only five lawyers remained in the offices of White and Blazevich, and they were in Marty Velmano's on the tenth floor. Velmano, Sims Wakefield, Jarreld Schwabe, Nathaniel (Einstein) Jones, and a retired partner named Frank Cortz. Two bottles of Scotch sat on the edge of Velmano's desk. One was empty, the other almost there. Einstein sat alone in one corner, mumbling to himself. He had wild, curly gray hair and a pointed nose, and indeed looked crazy. Especially now. Sims Wakefield and Jarreld Schwabe sat in front of the desk with ties off and sleeves rolled up.

Cortz finished a phone chat with an aide to Victor Mattiece. He handed the phone to Velmano, who placed it on the desk.

"That was Strider," Cortz reported. "They're in Cairo in the penthouse suite of some hotel. Mattiece will not talk to us. Strider says he's over the edge, acting very bizarre. He's locked himself in a room, and, needless to say, he ain't coming to this side of the ocean. Strider says they've told the boys with the guns to get out of town immediately. The chase is off. The fat lady is singing."

"So what're we supposed to do?" asked Wakefield.

"We're on our own," said Cortz. "Mattiece has washed his hands of us."

They spoke quietly and deliberately. The screaming ended hours ago. Wakefield blamed Velmano for the memo. Velmano blamed Cortz for bringing in a sleazy client like Mattiece in the first place. That was twelve years ago, Cortz screamed back, and we've enjoyed his fees ever since. Schwabe blamed Velmano and Wakefield for being so careless with the memo. They dragged Morgan through the mud again and again. It had to be him. Einstein sat in the corner and watched them. But that was all behind them now.

"Grantham mentioned only me and Sims," Velmano said. The rest of you guys may be safe."

"Why don't you and Sims skip the country?" Schwabe said.

"I'll be in New York at 6 A.M." Velmano said. "Then to Europe for a month on the trains."

"I can't run," Wakefield said. "I've got a wife and six kids."

They'd heard him whine about his six kids for five hours now. As if they didn't have families. Velmano was divorced, and his two children were grown. They could handle it. And he could handle it. It was time to retire anyway. He had plenty of money stashed away, and he loved Europe, especially Spain, and so it was adios for him. He sort of pitied Wakefield, who was only forty-two and didn't have a lot of money.





THE LIMO stopped abruptly in front of the two-story home in Dumbarton Oaks, in upper Georgetown. It blocked the street and that was fine because it was twenty minutes after midnight, and there was no traffic. Voyles and two agents jumped from the rear of the car, and walked quickly to the front door. Voyles held a newspaper. He banged the door with his fist.

Coal was not asleep. He was sitting in the dark in the den in his pajamas and bathrobe, so Voyles was quite pleased when he opened his door.

"Nice pajamas," Voyles said, admiring his pants.

Coal stepped onto the tiny concrete porch. The two agents were watching from the narrow sidewalk. "What the hell do you want?" he asked slowly.

"Just brought you this," Voyles said, sticking the paper in his face. "Gotta a nice picture of you right next to the President hugging Mattiece. I know how much you like newspapers, so I thought I'd bring you one."

"Your face'll be in it tomorrow," Coal said as if he'd already written the story.

Voyles threw the paper at his feet, and started walking off. "I got some tapes, Coal. You start lying, and I'll jerk your pants off in public."

Coal stared at him, but said nothing.

Voyles was near the street. "I'll be back in two days with a grand jury subpoena," he yelled. "I'll come about two in the morning and serve it myself." He was at the car. "Next I'll bring an indictment. Of course, by then your ass'll be history and the President'll have a new bunch of idiots telling him what to do." He disappeared into the limo, and it sped away.

Coal picked up the paper, and went inside.

GRAY AND SMITH KEEN sat alone in the conference room, reading the words in print. He was many years beyond the excitement of seeing his stories on the front page, but this one brought a rush with it. There had been none bigger. The faces were lined neatly across the top: Mattiece hugging the President, Coal talking importantly on the phone in an official White House photo, Velmano sitting before a Senate subcommittee, Wakefield cropped from a bar convention picture, Verheek smiling at the camera in an FBI release, Callahan from the yearbook, and Morgan in a photo taken from the video. Mrs. Morgan had consented. Paypur, the night police reporter, had told them about Wakefield an hour earlier. Gray was depressed about it. But he wouldn't blame himself.

They began drifting in around 3 A.M. Krauthammer brought a dozen doughnuts, and promptly ate four of them while he admired the front page. Ernie DeBasio was next. Said he hadn't slept any. Feldman arrived fresh and hyper. By four-thirty, the room was full and four televisions were going. CNN got it first, and within minutes the networks were live from the White House, which had no comment at the moment but Zikman would say something at seven.

With the exception of Wakefield's death, there was nothing new initially. The networks bounced back and forth between the White House, the Supreme Court, and the news desks.

They waited at the Hoover Building, which was very quiet at the moment. They flashed the photos from the papers. They couldn't find Velmano. They speculated about Mattiece. CNN showed live footage of the Morgan house in Alexandria, but Morgan's father-in-law kept the cameras off the property. NBC had a reporter standing in front of the building where White and Blazevich had offices, but he had nothing new. And though she wasn't quoted in the story, there was no secret about the identity of the author of the brief. There was much speculation about Darby Shaw.

At seven, the room was packed and silent. The four screens were identical as Zikman walked nervously to the podium in the White House press room. He was tired and haggard. He read a short statement in which the White House admitted receiving the campaign money from a number of channels controlled by Victor Mattiece, but he emphatically denied any of the money was dirty. The President had met Mr. Mattiece only once, and that was when he was the Vice President. He had not spoken to the man since being elected President, and certainly did not consider him a friend, in spite of the money. The campaign had received over fifty million, and the President handled none of it. He had a committee for that. No one in the White House had attempted to interfere with the investigation of Victor Mattiece as a suspect, and any allegations to the contrary were flat wrong. Based on their limited knowledge, Mr. Mattiece no longer lived in this country. The President welcomes a full investigation into the allegations contained in the Post story, and if Mr. Mattiece was the perpetrator of these heinous crimes, then he must be brought to justice. This was simply a statement for the time being. A full press conference would





She could grow accustomed to this. Her room was small but clean. There was no air conditioner, but the fan worked fine and it was not unpleasant. The water ran most of the time. She decided to stay here a couple of days, maybe a week. The building was one of dozens packed tightly together along streets that ran down to the harbor. For the moment, she liked the safety of crowds and streets. She could walk and find whatever she needed. St. Thomas was known for its shopping, and she cherished the idea of buying clothes she could keep.

There were fancier rooms, but this would do for now. When she left San Juan, she vowed to stop looking over her shoulder. She'd seen the paper in Miami, and she'd watched the frenzy on a television in the airport, and she knew Mattiece had disappeared. If they were stalking now, it was simply revenge. And if they found her after the crisscrossing journey she had taken, then they were not human, and she would never lose them.

They weren't back there, and she believed this. She stayed close to the small room for two days, never venturing far. The shopping district was a short walk away. Only four blocks long and two blocks deep, it was a maze of hundreds of small and unique stores selling everything. The sidewalks and alleys were crammed with Americans from the big ships. She was just another tourist with a wide straw hat and colorful shorts.

She bought her first novel in a year and a half, and read it in two days while lying on the small bed under the gentle rush from the ceiling fan. She vowed to read nothing about the law until she was fifty. At least once an hour, she walked to the open window and studied the harbor. Once she counted twenty cruise ships waiting to dock.

The room served its purpose. She spent time with Thomas, and cried, and was determined to do it for the last time. She wanted to leave the guilt and pain in this tiny corner of Charlotte Amalie, and exit with the good memories and a clean conscience. It was not as difficult as she tried to make it, and by the third day there were no more tears. She'd thrown the paperback only once.

On the fourth morning, she packed her new bags and took a ferry to Cruz Bay, twenty minutes away on the island of St. John. She took a taxi along the North Shore Road. The windows were down and the wind blew across the backseat. The music was a rhythmic mixture of blues and reggae. The cab-driver tapped the wheel and sang along. She tapped her foot and closed her eyes to the breeze. It was intoxicating.

He left the road at Maho Bay, and drove slowly toward the water. She'd picked this spot from a hundred islands because it was undeveloped. Only a handful of beach houses and cottages were

permitted in this bay. The driver stopped on a narrow, tree-lined road, and she paid him.

The house was almost at the point where the mountain met the sea. The architecture was pure Caribbeanwhite wood frame under a red tile roofand built barely on the incline to provide for the view. She walked down a short trail from the road, and up the steps to the house. It was a single story with two bedrooms and a porch facing the water. It cost two thousand a week, and she had it for a month.

She placed her bags on the floor of the den, and walked to her porch. The beach started thirty feet below her. The waves rolled silently to the shore. Two sailboats sat motionless in the bay, which was secluded by mountains on three sides. A rubber raft full of kids splashing moved aimlessly between the boats.

The nearest dwelling was down the beach. She could barely see its roof above the trees. A few bodies relaxed in the sand. She quickly changed into a tiny bikini, and walked to the water.

IT WAS ALMOST DARK when the taxi finally stopped at the trail. He got out, paid the driver, and looked at the lights as the cab drove in front of him and disappeared. He had one bag, and he eased along the trail to the house, which was unlocked. The lights were on. He found her on the porch, sipping a frozen drink and looking like a native with bronze skin.

She was waiting on him, and this was so damned important. He didn't want to be treated like a houseguest. Her face smiled instantly, and she set her drink on the table.

They kissed on the porch for a long minute. "You re late," she said as they held each other.

"This was not the easiest place to find," Gray said. He was rubbing her back, which was bare down to the waist where a long skirt began and covered most of the legs. He would see them later.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said, looking at the bay.



course, has been indicted, along with four of his people. There'll be more indictments later. It dawned on me a few days ago that there was no big cover-up at the White House, so I lost steam. I think it killed his reelection, but he's not a felon. The city's a circus."

They walked in silence as it grew darker. She'd heard enough of this, and he was sick of it too. There was half a moon, and it reflected on the still water. She put her arm around his waist, and he pulled her closer. They were in the sand, away from the water. The house was a half a mile behind them.

