

High Heat

The man was over thirty, Reacher thought, and solid, and hot, obviously. He had sweated through his suit. The woman face to face with him could have been younger, but not by much. She was hot too, and scared. Or tense, at least. That was clear. The man was too close to her. She didn't like that. It was nearly half past eight in the evening, and going dark. But not cooling off. A hundred degrees, someone had said. A real heat wave. Wednesday, July 13th, 1977, New York City. Reacher would always remember the date. It was his second solo visit.

The man put the palm of his hand flat on the woman's chest, pressing damp cotton against her skin, the ball of his thumb down in her cleavage. Not a tender gesture. But not an aggressive gesture, either. Neutral, like a doctor. The woman didn't back off. She just froze in place and glanced around. Without seeing much. New York City, half past eight in the evening, but the street was deserted. It was too hot. Waverly Place, between Sixth Avenue and Washington Square. People would come out later, if at all.

Then the man took his hand off the woman's chest, and he flicked it downward like he wanted to knock a bee off her hip, and then he whipped it back up in a big roundhouse swing and slapped her full in the face, hard, with enough power for a real crack, but his hand and her face were too damp for pistol-shot [acoustics](#), so the sound came out exactly like the word: slap. The woman's head was knocked sideways. The sound echoed off the scalding brick.

Reacher said, "Hey."

The man turned around. He was dark haired, dark eyed, maybe five-ten, maybe two hundred pounds. His shirt was transparent with sweat.

He said, "Get lost, kid."

On that night Reacher was three months and sixteen days shy of his seventeenth birthday, but physically he was pretty much all grown up. He was as tall as he was ever going to get, and no sane person would have called him skinny. He was six-five, two-twenty, all [muscle](#). The finished article, more or less. But finished very recently. Brand new. His teeth were white and even, his eyes were a shade close to navy, his hair had wave and body, his skin was smooth and clear. The scars and the lines and the calluses were yet to come.

The man said, "Right now, kid."

Reacher said, "Ma'am, you should step away from this guy."

Which the woman did, backward, one step, two, out of range. The man said, "Do you know who I am?"

Reacher said, "What difference would it make?"

"You're pissing off the wrong people."

"People?" Reacher said. "That's a plural word. Are there more than one of you?"

"You'll find out."

Reacher looked around. The street was still deserted.

"When will I find out?" he said. "Not right away, apparently."

"What kind of smart guy [do you think](#) you are?"

Reacher said, "Ma'am, I'm [happy to be](#) here alone, if you want to take off running."

The woman didn't move. Reacher looked at her.

He said, "Am I misunderstanding something?"

The man said, "Get lost, kid."

The woman said, "You shouldn't get involved."

"I'm not getting involved," Reacher said. "I'm just standing here in the street."

The man said, "Go stand in some other street."

Reacher turned back and looked at him and said, "Who died and made you [mayor](#)?"

"That's some mouth, kid. You don't know who you're talking to. You're going to regret that."

"When the other people get here? Is that what you mean? Because right now it's just you and me. And I don't foresee a whole lot of regret in that, not for me, anyway, not unless you've got no money."

"Money?"

"For me to take."

"What, now you think you're going to mug me?"

"Not mug you," Reacher said. "More of a historical thing. An old principle. Like a tradition. You lose a war, you give up your treasure."

"Are we at war, you and me? Because if we are, you're going to lose, kid. I don't care [how big](#) of a corn-fed [country boy](#) you are. I'm going to kick your ass. I'm going to kick it bad."

The woman was still six feet away. Still not moving. Reacher looked at her again and said, "Ma'am, is this gentleman married to you, or related to you in some other way, or known to you either socially or professionally?"

She said, "I don't want you to get involved." She was younger than the guy, for sure. But not by much. Still way up there. Twenty-nine, maybe. A pale-colored blonde. [Apart](#) from the vivid red print from the slap she was plenty good looking, in an older-woman kind of a way. But she was thin and nervous. Maybe she had a lot of stress in her life. She was wearing a loose summer dress that ended above her knee. She had a purse hooked over her shoulder.

Reacher said, "At least tell me what it is you don't want me to get involved in. Is this some random guy hassling you on the street? Or not?"

"What else would it be?"

"Domestic quarrel, maybe. I heard of a guy who busted one up, and then the wife got real mad with him afterward, for hurting her husband."

"I'm not married to this man."

"Do you have any interest in him at all?"

"In his welfare?"

"I suppose that's what we're talking about."

"None at all. But you can't get involved. So walk away. I'll deal with it."

"Suppose we walk away together?"

"How old are you, anyway?"

"Old enough," Reacher said. "For walking, at least."

"I don't want the responsibility. You're just a kid. You're an innocent bystander."

"Is this guy dangerous?"

"Very."

"He doesn't look it."

"Looks can be deceptive."

"Is he armed?"

"Not in the city. He can't afford to be."

"So what's he going to do? Sweat on me?"

Which did the trick. The guy hit boiling point, aggrieved at being talked about like he wasn't there, aggrieved at being called sweaty, even though he manifestly was, and he came in at a charge, his jacket flapping, his tie flailing, his shirt sticking to his skin. Reacher feinted one way and moved another, and the guy stumbled past, and Reacher tapped his ankles, and the guy tripped and fell. He got up again fast enough, but by then Reacher had backed off and turned around and was ready for the second maneuver. Which looked like it was going to be an exact repeat of the first, except Reacher helped it along a little by replacing the ankle tap with an elbow to the side of the head. Which was very well delivered. At nearly seventeen Reacher was like a brand [new machine](#), still gleaming and dewy with oil, flexible, supple, perfectly coordinated, like something developed by NASA and [IBM](#) on behalf of the Pentagon.

The guy stayed down on his knees a little longer than the first time. The heat kept him there. Reacher figured the hundred degrees he had heard about must have been somewhere open. Central Park, maybe. Some little weather station. In the [narrow](#) brick canyons of the West Village, close to the huge stone sidewalk slabs, it must have been more like a hundred and twenty. And humid. Reacher was wearing old [khakis](#) and a blue T shirt, and both items looked like he had fallen in a river.

The guy stood up, panting and unsteady. He put his hands on his knees.

Reacher said, "Let it go, old man. Find someone else to hit."

No answer. The guy looked like he was conducting an internal debate. It was a long one. Clearly there were points to [consider](#) on both sides of the argument. Pros, and cons, and plusses, and minuses, and costs and benefits. Finally the guy said, "Can you count to three and a half?" Reacher said, "I suppose."

"That's how many hours you got to get out of town. After midnight you're a dead man. And before that too, if I see you again." And then the guy straightened up and walked away, back toward Sixth Avenue, fast, like his mind was made up, his heels ringing on the hot stone, like a [brisk](#), purposeful person on a just-remembered errand. Reacher watched until he was lost to sight, and then he turned back to the woman and said, "Which way are you headed?" She pointed in the opposite direction, toward Washington Square, and Reacher said, "Then you should be OK."

"You have three and a half hours to get out of town."

"I don't think he was serious. He was hauling ass, trying to save face."

"He was serious, believe me. You hit him in the head. I mean, Jesus."

"Who is he?"

"Who are you?"

"Just a guy passing through."

"From where?"

"Pohang, at the moment."

"Where the hell is that?"

"South [Korea](#). [Camp](#) Mujuk. The [Marine Corps](#)."

"You're a Marine?"

"Son of a Marine. We go where we're posted. But school's out, so I'm traveling."

"On your own? How old are you?"

"Seventeen in the fall. Don't worry about me. I'm not the one getting slapped in the street."

The woman said nothing.

Reacher said, "Who was that guy?"

"How did you get here?"

"Bus to Seoul, plane to Tokyo, plane to Hawaii, plane to LA, plane to JFK, bus to the Port Authority. Then I walked." The Yankees were out of town, in Boston, which had been a major disappointment. Reacher had a feeling it was going to be a special year. Reggie Jackson was [making a difference](#). The long drought might be nearly over. But no luck. The Stadium was dark. The alternative was Shea, the Cubs at the Mets. In principle Reacher had no objection to Mets baseball, such as it was, but in the end the pull of downtown music had proven stronger. He had figured he would swing through Washington Square and

check out the girls from NYU's summer school. One of them might be willing to go with him. Or not. It was worth the detour. He was an optimist, and his plans were flexible.

The woman said, "How long are you traveling?"

"In theory I'm free until September."

"Where are you staying?"

"I [just got](#) here. I haven't figured that out yet."

"Your parents are OK with this?"

"My mother is worried. She read about the Son of Sam in the newspaper."

"She should be worried. He's killing people."

"Couples sitting in cars, mostly. That's what the [papers](#) say. Statistically unlikely to be me. I don't have a car, and so far I'm on my own."

"This city has other problems too."

"I know. I'm supposed to visit with my brother."

"Here in the city?"

"Couple hours out."

"You should go there right now."

Reacher nodded. "I'm supposed to take the late bus."

"Before midnight?"

"Who was that guy?"

The woman didn't answer. The heat wasn't letting up. The air was thick and heavy. There was thunder coming. Reacher could feel it, in the north and the west. Maybe they were going to get a real [Hudson Valley](#) thunderstorm, rolling and clattering over the slow water, between the high cliffs, like he had read about in books. The light was fading all the way to purple, as if the weather was getting ready for something big.

The woman said, "Go see your brother. Thanks for helping out."

The red handprint on her face was fading.

Reacher said, "Are you going to be OK?"

"I'll be fine."

"What's your name?"

"Jill."

"Jill what?"

"Hemingway."

"Any relation?"

"To who?"

"Ernest Hemingway. The writer."

"I don't think so."

"You free tonight?"

"No."

"My name is Reacher. I'm pleased to meet you." He stuck out his hand, and they shook. Her hand felt hot and slick, like she had a fever. Not that his didn't. A hundred degrees, maybe more, no breeze, no [evaporation](#). Summer in the city. Faraway to the north the sky flickered. Heat lightning. No rain.

He said, "How long have you been with the FBI?"

"Who says I am?"

"That guy was a mobster, right? Organized crime? All that shit about his people, and getting out of town or else. All those threats. And you were meeting with him. He was checking for a wire, when he put his hand on you. And I guess he found one."

"You're a smart kid."

"Where's your backup? There should be a van, with people listening in."

"It's a budget thing."

"I don't believe you. The city, maybe, but the feds are never broke."

"Go see your brother. This isn't your business."

"Why wear a wire with no one listening?"

The woman put her hands behind her back, low down, and she fiddled and jiggled, as if she was working something loose from the waistband of her underwear. A black plastic box fell out below the hem of her dress. A small cassette recorder, swinging knee-high, suspended on a wire. She put one hand down the front of her dress, and she pulled on the wire behind her knees with her other hand, and she squirmed and she wriggled, and the recorder lowered itself to the sidewalk, [followed](#) by a thin black cable with a little bud microphone on the end.

She said, "The tape was listening."

The little black box was dewed with perspiration, from the small of her back.

Reacher said, "Did I screw it up?"

"I don't know how it would have gone."

"He assaulted a federal agent. That's a crime right there. I'm a witness."

The woman said nothing. She picked up the cassette recorder and wound the cord around it. She slid her purse off her shoulder and put the recorder in it. The temperature felt hotter than ever, and steamy, like a hot wet towel over Reacher's mouth and nose. There was more lightning in the north, winking slow, dulled by the thick air. No rain. No break.

Reacher said, "Are you going to let him get away with that?"

The woman said, "This really isn't your business."

"I'm happy to say what I saw."

"It wouldn't come to trial for a year. You'd have to come all the way back. You want to take four planes and two buses for a slap?"

"A year from now I'll be somewhere else. Maybe nearer."

"Or further away."

"The sound might be on the tape."

"I need more than a slap. Defense [lawyers](#) would laugh at me."

Reacher shrugged. Too hot to argue. He said, "OK, have a pleasant evening, ma'am."

She said, "Where are you going now?"

"Bleecker Street, I think."

"You can't. That's in his territory."

"Or nearby. Or the Bowery. There's music all over, right?"

"Same thing. All his territory."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Croselli. Everything north of Houston and south of 14th is his. And you hit him in the head."

"He's one guy. He won't find me."

"He's a made man. He has soldiers."

"How many?"

"A dozen, maybe."

"Not enough. Too big of an area."

"He'll put the word out. All the clubs and all the bars."

"Really? He'll tell people he's frightened of a sixteen-year-old? I don't think so."

"He doesn't need to give a reason. And people will bust a gut to help. They all want brownie points in the bank. You wouldn't last five minutes. Go see your brother. I'm serious."

“Free country,” Reacher said. “That’s what you’re working for, right? I’ll go where I want. I came a long way.”

The woman stayed quiet for a long moment.

“Well, I warned you,” she said. “I can’t do more than that.”

And she walked away, toward Washington Square. Reacher waited where he was, all alone on Waverly, head up, head down, searching for a breath of air, and then he [followed](#) after her, about two minutes behind, and he saw her drive away in a car that had been parked in a tow zone. A 1975 Ford Granada, he thought, mid-blue, vinyl roof, a big toothy [grille](#). It took a corner like a land yacht and drove out of sight. Washington Square was much emptier than Reacher had expected. Because of the heat. There were a couple of unexplained black guys hanging around, probably dealers, and not much else. No [chess players](#), no [dog](#) walkers. But way over on the eastern edge of the square he saw three girls go into a coffee shop. Coeds for sure, long hair, tan, lithe, maybe two or three years older than him. He headed in their direction, and looked for a pay phone on the way. He found a working instrument on his fourth try. He used a hot damp coin from his pocket and dialed the number he had memorized for West Point’s main switchboard.

A sing-song male voice said, “United States Military Academy, how may I direct your call?”

“Cadet Joe Reacher, please.”

“Hold the line,” the voice said, which Reacher thought was appropriate. West Point was in the business of holding the line, against all kinds of things, including enemies foreign and domestic, and progress, sometimes. West Point was Army, which was an unusual choice for the elder son of a Marine, but Joe’s heart had been set on it. And he claimed to be enjoying it so far. Reacher himself had no idea where he would go. NYU, possibly, with women. The three in the coffee shop had looked pretty good. But he didn’t make plans. Sixteen years in the Corps had cured him of that.

The phone clicked and buzzed as the call was transferred from station to station. Reacher took another hot wet coin from his pocket and held it ready. It was a quarter to nine, and dark, and getting hotter, if such a thing was possible. Fifth Avenue was a long narrow canyon running north ahead of him. There were flashes of light in the sky, low down on the horizon, way far in the distance.

A different voice said, “Cadet Reacher is currently unavailable. Do you have a message?”

Reacher said, “Please tell him his brother is delayed twenty-four hours. I’m spending the night in the city. I’ll see him tomorrow evening.”

“Roger that,” the new voice said, with no interest at all, and the line went dead. Reacher put the second coin back in his pocket, and he hung up the phone, and he headed for the coffee shop on the eastern edge of the square.

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An air conditioner over the coffee shop’s door was running so hard it was trembling and rattling, but it wasn’t making much difference to the temperature of the air. The girls were together in a [booth](#) for four, with tall soda [glasses](#) full of Coke and melting ice. Two of them were [blondes](#) and one was a brunette. All of them had long smooth [limbs](#) and perfect white teeth. The brunette was in short shorts and a sleeveless

button-front shirt, and the blondes were in short summer dresses. They all looked quick and intelligent and full of energy. Storybook Americans, literally. Reacher had seen girls just like them in greasy old out-of-date copies of Time and Life and Newsweek, at Mujuk and every other base he had lived on. They were the future, the stories had said. He had admired them from afar.

Now he stood at the door under the roaring air conditioner and admired them from a whole lot closer. But he had no idea what to do next. Life as a Corps kid taught a guy plenty, but absolutely nothing about bridging a fifteen-foot door-to-table distance in a New York City coffee shop. Up to that point his few conquests had not really been conquests at all, but mutual experiments with Corps girls just as [isolated](#) as himself, and just as willing and enthusiastic and desperate. Their only negatives had been their fathers, who were all trained killers with fairly traditional views. The three students in front of him were a whole different can of worms. Much easier from the parental point of view, presumably, but much harder in every other way.

He paused.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

He moved on, fifteen feet, and he approached their table, and he said, "Do you mind if I join you?"

They all looked up. They all looked surprised. They were all too polite to tell him to get lost. They were all too smart to tell him to sit down. New York City, in the summer of 1977. The Bronx, burning. Hundreds of [homicides](#). The Son of Sam. Irrational panic everywhere.

He said, "I'm new here. I was wondering if you could tell me where to go, to hear some good music."

No answer. Two pairs of blue eyes, one pair of brown, looking up at him.

He said, "Are you headed somewhere this evening?"

The brunette was the first to speak.

She said, "Maybe."

"Where to?"

"Don't know yet."

A waitress came by, barely older than the coeds themselves, and Reacher maneuvered himself into a spot where her approach gave him no choice but to sit down. As if he had been swept along. The brunette scooted over and left an inch between her thigh and his. The vinyl bench was sticky with heat. He ordered a Coke. It was way too hot for coffee.

There was an awkward silence. The waitress brought Reacher's Coke. He took a sip. The blonde directly opposite asked him, "Are you at NYU?"

"I'm still in high school," he said.

She softened a little, as if he was a rare curiosity.

"Where?" she asked.

"South [Korea](#)," he said. "Military family."

"Fascist," she said. "Get lost."

“What does your dad do for a living?”

“He’s a lawyer.”

“Get lost yourself.”

The brunette laughed. She was an inch shorter than the others, and her skin was a shade darker. She was slender. Elfin, almost. Reacher had heard the word. Not that it meant much to him. He had never seen an elf.

The brunette said, “The Ramones might be at [CBGB](#). Or Blondie.”

Reacher said, “I’ll go if you go.”

“It’s a rough area.”

“Compared to what? Iwo Jima?”

“Where’s that?”

“It’s an island in the Pacific.”

“Sounds nice. Does it have beaches?”

“Lots of them. What’s your name?”

“Chrissie.”

“Pleased to meet you, Chrissie. My name is Reacher.”

“First or last?”

“Only.”

“You have only one name?”

“That anyone uses.”

“So if I go to [CBGB](#) with you, do you promise to stick close by?”

Which was pretty much a do-bears-sleep-in-the-woods type of a question, in Reacher’s opinion. Is the Pope a Catholic? He said, “Sure, count on it.”

The [blondes](#) on the opposite side of the table started fidgeting with dubious body language, and immediately Reacher knew they wouldn’t come too. Which was dead-on A-OK with him. Like a big [green light](#). A one-on-one [excursion](#). Like a real date. Nine o’clock in the evening, Wednesday, July 13th, New York City, and his first civilian conquest was almost upon him, like a runaway train. He could feel it coming, like an earthquake. He wondered where Chrissie’s dorm was. Close by, he guessed. He sipped his Coke.

Chrissie said, “So let’s go, Reacher.”

* * *

Reacher left money on the table for four Cokes, which he guessed was the gentlemanly thing to do. He [followed](#) Chrissie out through the door, and the night heat hit him like a hammer. Chrissie, too. She held [her hair](#) away from her shoulders with the backs of her hands and he saw a damp sheen on her neck. She said, "How far is it?"

He said, "You've never been?"

"It's a bad area."

"I think we have to go east about five blocks. Past Broadway and Lafayette to the Bowery. Then about three blocks south to the corner with Bleecker."

"It's so hot."

"That's for sure."

"Maybe we should take my car. For the AC."

"You have a car?"

"Sure."

"Here in the city?"

"Right there." And she pointed, to a small [hatchback](#) car on the curb about fifty feet away. A Chevrolet Chevette, Reacher thought, maybe a year old, maybe baby blue, although it was hard to tell under the yellow street lights.

He said, "Doesn't it cost a lot to keep a car in the city?"

She said, "Parking is free after six o'clock."

"But what do you do with it in the daytime?"

She paused a beat, as if unraveling the layers of his question, and she said, "No, I don't live here."

"I thought you did. Sorry. My mistake. I figured you were at NYU."

She shook her head and said, "Sarah Lawrence."

"Who's she?"

"It's a college. Where we go. In Yonkers. North of here. Sometimes we drive down and see what's going on. Sometimes there are NYU boys in that coffee shop."

"So we're both out-of-towners."

"Not tonight," Chrissie said.

"What are your friends going to do?"

"About what?"

"About getting home tonight."

"I'm going to drive them," Chrissie said. "Like always."

Reacher said nothing.

"But they'll wait," Chrissie said. "That's part of the deal."

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The Chevette's air conditioner was about as lousy as the coffee shop's, but something was better than nothing. There were a few people on Broadway, like ghosts in a ghost town, moving slow, and a few on Lafayette, slower still, and [homeless](#) people on the Bowery, waiting for the shelters to open. Chrissie parked two blocks north of the venue, on Great Jones Street, between a car with its front window broken and a car with its [back window](#) broken. But it was under a working street light, which looked to be about as good as it got, short of employing a team of [armed guards](#), or a pack of vicious dogs, or both. And the car would have been no safer left on Washington Square, anyway. So they got out into the heat and walked to the corner through air thick enough to eat. The sky was as hot and hard as an iron roof at noontime, and it was still flickering in the north, with the kind of restless energy that promised plenty and delivered nothing.

There was no line at the door of the club, which Chrissie felt was a good thing, because it meant there would be spots to be had at the front near the stage, just in case it really was the Ramones or Blondie that night. A guy inside took their money, and they moved past him into the heat and the noise and the dark, toward the bar, which was a long low space with dim light and sweating walls and red diner stools. There were about thirty people in there, twenty-eight of them kids no older than Chrissie, plus one person Reacher already knew, and another person he was pretty sure he was going to get to know, pretty well and pretty soon. The one he knew was Jill Hemingway, still thin and blonde and nervous, still in her short summer dress. The one he felt he would get to know looked a lot like Croselli. A cousin, maybe. He was the same kind of size and shape and age, and he was wearing the same kind of clothes, which were a sweated-through suit and a shirt plastered tight against a wet and hairy belly.

Jill Hemingway saw Reacher first. But only by a second. She moved off her stool and took a step and immediately the guy in the suit started snapping his fingers and gesturing for the phone. The barkeep dumped the instrument in front of him and the guy started dialing. Hemingway pushed her way through the thin crowd and came up to Reacher face to face and said, "You idiot."

Reacher said, "Jill, this is my friend Chrissie. Chrissie, this is Jill, who I met earlier this evening. She's an FBI agent."

Beside him Chrissie said, "Hi, Jill."

Hemingway looked temporarily nonplussed and said, "Hi, Chrissie."

Reacher said, "Are you here for the music?"

Hemingway said, "I'm here because this is one of the few places Croselli doesn't get total [cooperation](#). Therefore this is one of the few places I knew he would have to put a guy. So I'm here to make sure nothing happens to you."

"How did you know I would come here?"

"You live in South Korea. What else have you heard of?"

Chrissie said, "What exactly are we talking about?"

Croselli's guy was still on the phone.

Reacher said, "Let's sit down."

Hemingway said, "Let's not. Let's get you the hell out of here."

Chrissie said, "What the hell is going on?"

There were tiny cafe tables near the deserted stage. Reacher pushed through the crowd, left shoulder, right shoulder, and sat down, his back to a corner, most of the room in front of him. Chrissie sat down next to him, hesitant, and Hemingway paced for a second, and then she gave it up and joined them. Chrissie said, "This is really freaking me out, guys. Will someone please tell me what's going on?"

Reacher said, "I was walking down the street and I saw a guy slap Agent Hemingway in the face."

"And?"

"I hoped my presence would discourage him from doing it again. He took offense. Turns out he's a mobster. Jill thinks they're measuring me for [concrete](#) shoes."

"And you don't?"

"Seems oversensitive to me."

Chrissie said, "Reacher, there are whole movies about this stuff."

Hemingway said, "She's right. You should listen to her. You don't know these people. You don't understand their culture. They won't let an outsider disrespect them. It's a matter of pride. It's how they do business. They won't rest until they fix it."

Reacher said, "In other words they're exactly the same as the Marine Corps. I know [how to deal](#) with people like that. I've been doing it all my life."

"How do you plan to deal with them?"

"By making the likely cost too high. Which it already is, frankly. They can't do anything in here, because they'd be arrested, either by you or the NYPD. Which is too high of a cost. It would mean lawyers and bribes and favors, which they won't spend on me. I'm not worth it. I'm nobody. Croselli will get over it."

"You can't stay in here all night."

"He already tried it on the street, and he didn't get very far."

"Ten minutes from now he'll have six guys out front."

"Then I'll go out the back."

"He'll have six guys there too."

Chrissie said, "You know when I asked you to stick close by me?"

Reacher said, "Sure."

"You can forget that part now, OK?"

Reacher said, "This is nuts."

Hemingway said, "You hit a made man in the head. What part of that don't you understand? That just doesn't happen. Get used to it, kid. And right now you're in the same room as one of his goons. Who just got off the phone."

"I'm sitting next to an FBI agent."

Hemingway said nothing in reply to that. Reacher thought: NYU. Sarah Lawrence. Hemingway had never confirmed it either way. He had asked her: How long have you been with the FBI? She had answered: Who says I am?

He said, "Are you or are you not?"

She said nothing.

"It's not real hard. It's a yes or no answer."

"No," she said. "It really isn't."

"What does that mean?"

"It's yes and no. Not yes or no."

Reacher paused a beat.

"What, you're freelancing here?" he said. "Is that it? This isn't really your case? Which is why there was no back-up van? Which is why you were using your little sister's tape player?"

"It was my tape player. I'm suspended."

"You're what?"

"Medical grounds. But that's what they always say. What it means is they took my badge, pending review."

"Of what?"

"Like you said. The lawyers and the bribes and the favors. They're weighing me in the balance. Me against all the good stuff."

"This was Croselli?"

Hemingway nodded. "Right now he's [fireproof](#). He had the investigation shut down. I figured I might get him to boast about it, on the tape. I might have gotten something I could use. To make them take me back."

"Why wasn't Croselli armed in the city?"

"Part of the deal. They all can do what they want in every other way, but the homicide figure has to come down. Give and take. Everyone's a winner."

“Does Croselli know you’re suspended?”

“Of course he does. He made them do it.”

“So in fact the goon in the same room as me knows it too, right? Is that what we’re saying here? He knows you’re not about to pull a badge. Or a gun. He knows you’re just a member of the public. Legally, I mean. In terms of your powers of arrest, and so on. And less than that, in terms of your credibility. As a witness against Croselli’s people, I mean.”

“I told you to go see your brother.”

“Don’t get all defensive. I’m not blaming you. I need to make a new plan, that’s all. I need to understand the parameters.”

Chrissie said, “You shouldn’t have gotten involved in the first place.”

“Why not?”

“At Sarah Lawrence we would say it was uncomfortably gender normative behavior. It was patriarchal. It spoke to the paternalistic shape of our society.”

“You know what they would say in the Marine Corps?”

“What?”

“They would point out you asked me to stick close by, because you think the Bowery is dangerous.”

“It is dangerous. Twelve guys are about to show up and kick your butt.”

Reacher nodded. “We should go, probably.”

“You can’t,” Hemingway said. “The goon won’t let you. Not until the others get here.”

“Is he armed?”

“No. Like I said.”

“You sure?”

“Hundred percent.”

“Do we agree one opponent is better than twelve?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Wait here,” Reacher said.

Reacher walked across the dim room, as graceful as a bulked-up [greyhound](#), with all the dumb confidence a guy gets from being six-five and two-twenty and sixteen years old. He moved on through the bar, toward the restroom corridor. He had been in relatively few bars in his life, but enough to know they were superbly weapons-rich environments. Some had pool cues, all neatly lined up in racks, and some had martini [glasses](#), all delicate and breakable, with stems like stilettos, and some had [champagne](#) bottles, as heavy as clubs. But the [CBGB](#) bar had no pool table, and its customers were apparently indifferent to

martinis and champagne. The most numerous local resource was long-neck beer bottles, of which there were plenty. Reacher collected one as he walked, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Croselli's guy get up and follow him, no doubt worried about rear exits or [bathroom windows](#). There was in fact a rear exit, at the end of the restroom corridor, but Reacher ignored it. Instead he stepped into the men's room. Which was perhaps the single most bizarre place he had ever seen, outside of a military [installation](#). The walls were bare brick [covered](#) in dense graffiti, and there were three wall-hung urinals and a lone sit-down toilet all exposed up on a step like a throne. There was a two-hole metal sink, and unspooled toilet rolls everywhere. No windows.

Reacher filled his empty beer bottle with water from the faucet, for extra weight, and he wiped his palm on his T shirt, which neither dried his hand nor made his shirt appreciably wetter. But he got a decent grip on the long glass neck, and he held the bottle low down by his leg and he waited. Croselli's guy came in seconds later. He glanced around, first amazed by the decor, then reassured by the lack of windows, which told Reacher all he really needed to know, but at sixteen he still played it by the book, so he asked anyway. He said, "Do we have a problem, you and me?"

The guy said, "We're waiting for Mr. Croselli. He'll be here in a minute. Which won't be a problem for me. But it will be for you."

So Reacher swung the bottle, the water kept in by [centrifugal](#) force, and it caught the guy high on the cheekbone and rocked him back, whereupon Reacher whipped the bottle down again and smashed it on the lip of a urinal, glass and water flying everywhere, and he jabbed the jagged broken circle into the guy's thigh, to bring his hands down, and then again into his face, with a twist, flesh tearing and blood flowing, and then he dropped the bottle and shoved the guy in the chest, to bounce him off the wall, and as he came back toward him he dropped a solid head butt straight to the guy's nose. Which was game over, right there, helped a little by the way the guy's head bounced off the urinal on his way to the floor, which all made a conclusive little head-injury trifecta, bone, porcelain, tile, good night and good luck.

Reacher breathed in, and breathed out, and then he checked the view in the busted mirror above the sink. He had diluted smears of the guy's blood on his forehead. He rinsed them off with lukewarm water and shook like a [dog](#) and headed back through the bar into the main room. Jill Hemingway and Chrissie were on their feet in the middle of the dance floor. He nodded them toward the exit. They set off toward him and he waited to fall into step. Hemingway said, "Where's the goon?"

Reacher said, "He had an accident."

"Jesus."

They hustled on, through the bar one [more time](#), into the lobby corridor, fast and hot. Too late.

They got within ten feet of the street door, and then it opened wide and four big guys in sweated-through suits stepped in, [followed](#) by Croselli himself. All five of them stopped, and Reacher stopped, and behind him Chrissie and Jill Hemingway stopped, eight people all in a strung-out, single-file standoff, in a hot [narrow](#) corridor with perspiration running down the bare brick walls.

From the far end of the line Croselli said, "We meet again, kid."

Then the lights went out.

* * *

Reacher couldn't tell if his eyes were open or closed. The darkness was total and profound, like the next stop after nothing. And the darkness was completely silent, way down at some deep primeval level, all the low subliminal hum of modern life suddenly gone, leaving nothing in its place except blind human shufflings and a kind of whispered eerie keening that seemed to come up from ageless rocks below. From the twentieth century to the Stone Age, at the flick of a switch.

From behind him Reacher heard Chrissie's voice say, "Reacher?"

"Stand still," he said.

"OK."

"Now turn around."

"OK."

He heard her feet on the floor, shuffling. He searched his last retained visual memory for where the first of Croselli's guys had stopped. The middle of the corridor, facing dead ahead, maybe five feet away. He planted his [left foot](#) and kicked out with his right, hard, blindly, aiming groin-high into the pitch-black emptiness ahead. But he hit something lower, making contact a jarring split second before he expected. A kneecap, maybe. Which was fine. Either way the first of Croselli's guys was about to fall down, and the other three were about to trip over him.

Reacher spun around and felt for Chrissie's back, and he put his right arm around her shoulders, and with his [left hand](#) he found Hemingway, and he half pulled and half pushed them back the way they had come, to the bar, where a feeble battery-powered safety light had clicked on. Which meant it hadn't been the flick of a switch. The whole building had lost power.

He found the restroom corridor and pushed Chrissie ahead of him and pulled Hemingway behind him, to the rear door, and they barged through it, out to the street.

Which was way too dark.

They hustled onward anyway, fast, out in the heat again, [muscle](#) memory and instinct compelling them to put some distance between the door and themselves, compelling them to seek the shadows, but it was all shadows. The Bowery was a pitch-dark and sullen ditch, long and straight both ways, bordered by pitch-dark and sullen buildings, uniformly massive and gloomy, their unlit bulk for once darker than the [night sky](#). The skyline sentinels forty blocks north and south weren't there at all, except in a negative sense, because at the bottom of the sky there were dead fingers where inert buildings were blocking the glow of starlight behind thin cloud.

"The whole city is out," Hemingway said.

"Listen," Reacher said.

"To what?"

"Exactly. The sound of a billion electric motors not running. And a billion electric circuits switched off."

Chrissie said, "This is unbelievable."

Hemingway said, "There's going to be trouble. Give it an hour or so, and there's going to be rioting, and arson, and a whole lot of looting. So you two, right now, head north as far and as fast as you can. Do not go east or west. Do not use the tunnels. Do not stop until you're north of 14th Street."

Reacher said, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to work."

"You're suspended."

"I can't stand by and do nothing. And you have to get your friend back where you found her. I think those are our basic obligations." And then she ran, south toward Houston Street, and was lost in the dark within seconds.

* * *

The street light on Great Jones was no longer working, but the blue Chevette was still under it, gray and formless in the dark, as yet unmolested. Chrissie opened it up, and they got in, and she started the motor and put it in gear. She didn't turn on the lights, which Reacher understood. Disturbing the massive darkness didn't seem right. Or possible, even. The great city felt stunned and passive, an [immense](#) organism laid low, implacable and indifferent to tiny scurrying humans. Of which there was a growing number within view. Windows were opening, and folks on lower floors were walking downstairs and coming out, standing near their [doors](#) and peering about, full of wonder and apprehension. The heat was still way up there. It wasn't cooling down at all. A hundred degrees, maybe more, clamping down and now smug and settled and supreme, unchallenged by fans or air conditioning or any other kind of manmade mediation.

Great Jones Street was one-way west, and they crossed Lafayette and Broadway, and continued on West Third, Chrissie driving slow and tentative, not much faster than walking pace, a dark car in the dark, one of very few about. Maybe drivers had felt compelled to pull over, as part of the general paralysis. The traffic lights were all out. Each new block was newly weird, still and silent, blank and gray, absolutely unlit. They turned north on [LaGuardia](#) Place, and went counterclockwise around the bottom right-hand corner of Washington Square, back to the coffee shop. Chrissie parked where she had before, and they got out into the soupy air and the silence.

The coffee shop was dark, obviously, with nothing to see behind its dusty glass window. The air conditioner above the door was silent. And the door was [locked](#). Reacher and Chrissie cupped their hands and pressed them to the glass and peered through, and saw nothing except vague black shapes in the dark. No staff. No customers. Maybe a health board thing. If the refrigerators went out, maybe they had to abandon ship.

Reacher said, "Where will your friends have gone?"

Chrissie said, "No idea."

"You said there was a plan."

"If one of us gets lucky, we meet back here at midnight."

"I'm sorry you didn't get luckier."

"I feel OK now."

"We're still south of 14th Street."

"They won't find you in the dark, surely."

"Will we find your friends in the dark?"

"Why would we want to? They'll get back by midnight. Until then we should hang out and experience this. Don't you think? This is pretty amazing."

And it was. There was a hugeness to it. Not just a room or a building or a block, but the entire city, slumped inert and defeated all around them, as if it was ruined, as if it was dead, like a relic from the past. And maybe it was more than just the city. There was no glow on any horizon. Nothing from across either river, nothing from the south, nothing from the north. Maybe the whole Northeast was out. Maybe all of America. Or the whole world. People were always talking about secret weapons. Maybe someone had pulled a trigger.

Chrissie said, "Let's go look at the Empire State Building. We may never see it like this again."

Reacher said, "OK."

"In the car."

"OK."

They went up University, and used Ninth Street across to Sixth Avenue, where they turned north. Sixth Avenue was nothing at all. Just a [long black](#) hole, and then a small rectangle of night sky where it ended at Central Park. There were a few cars on it. All were moving slow. Most had their lights off. Like the Chevette. Instinctive, somehow. A shared assumption. Crowd behavior. Reacher caught a sudden whiff of fear. Hide in the dark. Don't stand out. Don't be seen.

Herald Square had people in it. Where Broadway cut across, at 34th Street. Most of them were out in the middle of the triangle, away from the buildings, trying to see the sky. Some of them were formed up in moving bunches, like sports fans leaving the stadium after a win, with the same kind of boisterous energy. But Macy's windows were all [intact](#). So far.

They kept going all the way to West 38th, crawling past the dead traffic lights and the cross streets, unsure every time whether they should yield or keep on going, but it turned out there was no real [danger](#) of either fender benders or confrontation, because everyone was moving slow and acting deferential, all after you, no, after you. Clearly the spirit so far was [cooperation](#). On the roads, at least. Reacher wondered how long it would last.

They went east on 38th and turned on Fifth four blocks north of the Empire State. Nothing to see. Just a broad dark base, like both sides of every other block, and then nothing above. Just spectral darkness. They parked on the Fifth Avenue curb, on the block north of 34th Street, and got out for a closer look. Thirty-fourth was a double-wide street, with a clear view east and west, dark all the way, except for an orange glow in the far distance above what must have been Brooklyn. Fires were burning there.

"It's starting," Reacher said.

They heard a cop car coming north on Madison, and they saw it cross the six-lane width of 34th Street one block over. Its lights looked amazingly bright. It drove on out of sight, and the night went quiet again. Chrissie said, "Why did the power go out?"

"Don't know," Reacher said. "Overload from all the AC, or a [lightning strike](#) somewhere. Or the electromagnetic pulse from a nuclear explosion. Or maybe someone didn't pay the bill."

"Nuclear explosion?"

"It's a known side effect. But I don't think it happened. We'd have seen the flash. And depending where it was, we'd have been burned to a crisp."

"What kind of military are you?"

"No kind at all. My dad's a Marine, and my brother is going to be an army officer, but that's them, not me."

"What are you going to be?"

"I have no idea. Probably not a lawyer."

"Do you think your FBI friend was right about riots and looting?"

"Maybe not so much in Manhattan."

"Are we going to be OK?"

Reacher said, "We're going to be fine. If all else fails, we'll do what they did in the olden days. We'll wait for morning."

They turned onto 34th Street and drove over as close as they could get to the East River. They stopped on a trash-strewn triangle half under the FDR Drive, and they stared through the windshield over the water to the dark [lands](#) beyond. Queens dead ahead, Brooklyn to the right, the Bronx way far to the left. The fires in Brooklyn looked pretty big already. There were fires in Queens, too. And the Bronx, but Reacher had been told there were always fires in the Bronx. Nothing behind them, in Manhattan. Not yet. But there were plenty of sirens. The darkness was getting angry. Maybe because of the heat. Reacher wondered how Macy's windows were doing.

Chrissie kept the [engine running](#), for the AC. The gas was about half full. The tails of her shirt hid her shorts completely. She looked like she was wearing nothing else. Just the shirt. Which looked great. She was very pretty. He asked, "How old are you?"

She said, "Nineteen."

"Where are you from?"

"California."

"You like it here?"

"So far. We get seasons. Heat and cold."

"Especially heat."

She asked, "How old are you?"

"I'm legal," he said. "That's really all you need to know."

"Is it?"

"I hope so."

She smiled, and turned off the engine. She [locked](#) her door, and leaned over to lock his. She smelled of hot clean girl. She said, "It's going to get warm in here."

"I hope so," he said again. He put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her close and kissed her. He knew how to do it. He had more than three years of practice. He put his free hand on the curve of her hip. She was a great kisser. Warm, wet, plenty of tongue. Closed eyes. He pushed her shirt up a little and ducked his hand under it. She was lean and firm. Hot, and a little damp. She brought her spare hand over and put it under his shirt. She smoothed it up over his side, over his chest, and down to his waist. She put the tips of her fingers under his waistband, which he took to be an encouraging sign.

They came up for air, and then they started again. He moved his free hand to her knee, and slid it up the wondrous smooth skin of her thigh, on the outside, with his thumb on the inside, to the hem of her shorts, and back again, to the other knee, and up her other leg, just as smooth and luscious, his fingers on the inside this time, his thumb on the outside, [all the time](#) trying to imagine anything more splendid than the feel of a warm girl's skin, and failing. And this time he went a little further, until his leading finger was jammed against the hard seam between her legs, at the bottom of her zip. She clamped hard on his hand, which at first he took as an admonition, but then he realized she had another purpose in mind, so he kept his hand there, pushing hard as she ground away, almost lifting her off the seat. Then she sighed and gasped and went all rubbery, and they came up for air again, and he moved his crushed hand to the buttons on her shirt, and he tried to make his fingers work. Which they did, reasonably well, one button, two, three, all the way down until her shirt fell open.

They kissed again, the third marathon, and his free hand went to work in a different area, first outside a silky bra, and then inside, from below, until it was all pushed up and her small damp breasts were his. He moved his mouth to her neck, and then to her nipples, and he put his hand back where it had been before, and she started grinding again, long and slow, long and slow, breathing hard, until for a second time she sighed and gasped and fell against him, as if she had no bones in her body.

Then she put a hand on his chest and pushed him away, back toward his window, which again he took as a reproach, until she smiled like she knew something he didn't, and unbuttoned his pants. Slim brown fingers took care of his zip, at which exact point for the first time in his life he truly understood the phrase died and gone to heaven. Her head went down into his lap, and he felt cool lips and a tongue, and he closed his eyes, and then he opened them again and stared about, determined to remember every last detail of his situation, the where and the when, and the how, and the who and the why, especially the why, because his conscious mind could find no logical path between the Port Authority bus terminal and what had to be some kind of enchanted kingdom. New York, New York. It's a wonderful town. That was for damn sure. So he stared around, [locking](#) it all in, the river, the formless boroughs beyond, the distant fires, the wire fences, the bleak [concrete](#) pillars holding up the road above.

He saw a man standing thirty yards away in the dark, silhouetted against the glow coming off the water. Mid-twenties, maybe, judging by his posture, medium height, thick in the upper body, a geeky shape to his head, because of uncooperative hair. He had the kind of hair that should have been cut much shorter, but it was 1977. He was holding something in his right hand.

Chrissie was still busy. She was unquestionably the best ever. No [comparison](#). None at all. He wondered if Sarah Lawrence was coed. He could go there. Just as good as NYU. Not that they were likely to get married or anything. But maybe she had friends. Or a sister. In fact he knew she had friends. The two [blondes](#). They'll wait. That's part of the deal. They had two hours until midnight, which suddenly seemed like nothing at all.

The guy moved in the dark. He rolled around a pillar, light on his feet, staying [covered](#), checking the blind spot at ninety degrees, checking the other direction, and then moving forward, fast and straight to the next pillar.

Toward the Chevette.

The guy eased around the new pillar, just to check his new blind spot, and then he pulled back and merged with the [concrete](#), barely visible again, [all the time](#) being very careful with the thing in his hand, as if it was valuable or especially fragile.

Chrissie was still busy. And she was doing a fine, fine [job](#). Died and gone to heaven wasn't even close. It was an underestimate of the most serious kind. Egregious, even. It was the kind of faint praise that could cause a diplomatic incident.

The guy moved again. He went through the same routine, reflexively, glance, glance, move, to the next pillar, closer still to the Chevette, and he blended in, bringing his right arm to rest last, solicitous of the thing he was holding, taking care not to bring it into contact with the concrete.

Thereby bringing it separately through the river's glow, all by itself.

Reacher knew what it was.

It was an upside down revolver, swinging by the trigger guard on the guy's right-hand index finger. A squat shape, thick in the upper body like the guy himself, rounded in the grips, a two-and-a-half-inch barrel, smooth, with few projections. Could have been a Charter [Arms Bulldog](#), a five-shooter, sturdy, most often chambered for the .44 Special. Double action. Easy to service. Not a target shooter's gun. But good close up.

Chrissie was still busy. The guy moved again. Closer still to the Chevette. He stared right at it. Before he had gotten on the bus in Pohang Reacher's mother had made him read her newspapers. New York City. A killing spree. The Son of Sam. Named from his crazy letters. But before the letters came he had been called something else. He had been called the .44 Caliber Killer. Because he used .44 caliber bullets. From a revolver.

Specifically, the NYPD said, from a Charter Arms Bulldog.

Chrissie was still busy. And this was no kind of a time to stop. No kind of a time at all. In fact stopping was not a possibility. Physically, mentally, every other way. It was absolutely not on the agenda. It was in a whole different hemisphere than the agenda. Maybe a whole different universe. It was a biological fact. It was not going to happen. The guy stared. Reacher stared back. He's killing people. [Couples](#) sitting in cars. Way to go, Reacher thought. Do it now. I'll go out on a high note. The highest possible note in the whole history of high notes. Jack Reacher, RIP. He died young, but he had a smile on his face.

The guy made no move. He just stared.

Reacher stared back.

The guy made no move.

Couples sitting in cars.

But they weren't. Not from an exterior perspective. Chrissie's head was in his lap. Reacher was alone in the car. Just a driver, off the road in the emergency, waiting in the passenger seat, for the extra legroom. The guy stared. Reacher stared back. Chrissie was still busy. The guy moved on. To the next pillar, and the next, and then he was lost to sight.

And then Chrissie's work was done.

* * *

Afterward they repaired the damage as well as they could, straightening and zipping and buttoning and combing. Chrissie said, "Better than Blondie?"

Reacher said, "How could I tell?"

"Better than Blondie live on stage at [CBGB](#), I mean."

"A lot better. No real [comparison](#)."

"You like Blondie, right?"

"Best ever. Well, top five. Or ten."

"Shut up." She started the engine again and put the air on max. She slid down in her seat and lifted her shirt tails so the vents blew straight up against her skin.

Reacher said, "I saw someone."

"When?"

"Just now."

"Doing what?"

"Peering into this car."

"Who?"

"Some guy."

"For real? That's kind of creepy."

Reacher said, "I know. And I'm real sorry, but I have to go find Jill Hemingway. I should tell her first. She needs some favors."

"Tell her what?"

"What I saw."

"What did you see?"

"Something she should know about."

“Was it one of Croselli’s guys?”

“No.”

“So how is it important?”

“She might be able to use it.”

“Where is she?”

“I have no idea. Let me out in Washington Square and I’ll walk. I bet she’s north of Houston.”

“You would be going right back in there, where we got chased out before.”

“Let’s call that phase our reconnaissance.”

“What would you do this time?”

“Fastest way to find Hemingway is to look for Croselli.”

“I’m not going to let you.”

“How could you stop me?”

“I would tell you not to. I’m your girlfriend. At least until midnight.”

“Is this what they teach you at Sarah Lawrence?”

“Pretty much.”

“Works for me,” Reacher said. “We’ll just hang out, see if she comes by.”

“Really?”

“I mean it.”

“Why?”

“Laws of physics. A random [encounter](#) doesn’t get more likely just because both parties are moving.”

“OK, where?”

“Let’s say the corner of Bleecker and Broadway. That might make the encounter less random.”

“That’s way down there.”

“It’s a block from Houston. We can break out south if we need to.”

“We?”

“Was it you who wanted me to stick close by?”

“This is a whole different type of crazy.”

Reacher nodded.

"I understand," he said. "I really do. It's your choice. You can let me out in Washington Square. That would be fine. Don't think I'll ever forget you."

"Really?"

"If I'm done before midnight, I'll come say goodbye."

"I mean, really, you won't forget me? That's very sweet."

"Also very true. As long as I live."

Chrissie said, "Tell me more about the guy you saw."

Reacher said, "I think it was the Son of Sam."

"You are crazy."

"I'm serious."

"And you just sat there?"

"Seemed like the best thing to do."

"How close did he get?"

"About twenty feet. He had a good look, and he walked away."

"The Son of Sam was twenty feet from me?"

"He didn't see you. I think that's why he walked away."

She glanced all around in the dark and put the car in gear. She said, "The Son of Sam is an NYPD case, not the FBI."

Reacher said, "Whoever passes on a tip gets a brownie point. I imagine that's how it works."

"What's the tip?"

"The way he moved."

There were more sirens behind them. First Avenue, Second Avenue, uptown, downtown, crosstown, there were plenty of cops on the streets. The mood was changing. Reacher could taste it on the air.

"I'll come with you," Chrissie said. "For the experience. These are the big things we'll always remember."

* * *

They used 34th Street again, back toward the center of the island, back toward the heart of darkness. The city was still pitch black, still dead, like a giant creature fallen on its back. There were [broken windows](#). There were people roaming in groups, carrying stuff. There were police cars and [fire](#) trucks speeding through the streets, all lit up and whooping and barking, but their lights didn't make much impression on the blackness, and their sirens didn't seem to worry the roaming people. They merely scuttled into doorways as the cars and trucks passed. The people reminded Reacher of tiny nighttime

organisms working on a corpse, penetrating its skin, exploring it, disassembling it, feeding off it, recovering its nutrients, recycling its components, like a dead whale feeds a million sea creatures on the ocean bed.

They turned south on Fifth Avenue at the Empire State Building and drove slowly in the middle lane, passing knots of people in the roadway, two of whom were carrying a rolled-up carpet, three of whom were loading the trunk of a big battered car with something in boxes. They veered left onto Broadway at 23rd Street, past the ghostly [Flatiron](#) Building, and they continued south, around Union Square, across 14th Street, into enemy territory, and onward. The mayhem got a little worse the further south they went. Broadway looked narrow, like a dark trench through a dark landscape, and there were busted windows, and people everywhere, moving in groups, fast and furtive and silent, barely visible at all, except for the glow of cigarettes. They passed 4th Street, and 3rd, where they had been before, and Chrissie started to slow the car, and Reacher said, "Change of plan. I think Sixth Avenue and Bleecker might be better."

Chrissie said, "Why?"

"What is Croselli worried about right now?"

"Getting his stuff ripped off. Like anyone. If he has stuff."

"I think he does. I mean, how does he earn money between Houston and 14th? Maybe protection rackets and hookers and so on, but dope for sure. He must have a stash somewhere. But where? Not in an [ancestral](#) home in Little Italy, because that's way south of Houston."

"You know the geography pretty well."

"I've studied it from afar. And he walked west from Waverly. After the slapping incident. Toward Sixth Avenue. Obviously he was heading back to make his phone calls. About me. So his HQ must be west of Waverly."

"You think Hemingway knows where it is?"

"I'm sure she does. And I'm sure she's watching it, right now. I'm assuming no one gave her an actual role tonight, because she's suspended. So she's still freelancing. I bet she's hoping some bunch of guys busts down Croselli's door, so she can get a record of what's inside. Maybe she'll even get Croselli defending it, which would be pretty much a slam dunk, wouldn't it? Doesn't matter what kind of deal he made. Some things can't be ignored."

"It will be more than just Croselli defending it. He's got twelve guys."

"Ten now," Reacher said. "Two of them are in the hospital. Or trying to get there. But we'll keep out of their way. It's Hemingway we want."

"Hard to find one woman in the dark."

"All we can do is try."

So they rolled onward, toward Houston Street, past a big stereo store with two busted windows and not much left inside, and they made the right and crept west, past the dark wasteland streets of Soho coming in from the left, Mercer, and Greene, and Wooster, and West Broadway, and Thompson, and

Sullivan, and MacDougal. Then they turned right on Sixth, and headed north a block to where Bleecker and Downing and Minetta all met in an untidy little six-way split. Retail was down-market and scruffy in that location, some of it too scruffy even for looters, some of it already busted wide open and stripped. Looking north, Sixth was the same long black hole it had been before, with the same slim upright rectangle of night sky at the end of it.

Chrissie said, "Should I park here?"

Reacher said, "Let's cruise a few blocks."

"You said we would hang out and let her come to us."

"Mission creep. Occupational [hazard](#). Like the Navy transporting the Marines."

"I'm an [English major](#)."

"Just five minutes, OK?"

"OK," she said.

But they didn't need five minutes. They were done in barely sixty seconds. They made the tight left onto Downing, and a right on [Bedford](#), and a right on Carmine, back toward Bleecker again, and in a doorway on the right side of the street Reacher caught a flash of pale skin and blonde hair, and he pointed, and Chrissie jammed to a stop, and Jill Hemingway stepped out of the dark and bent down to Reacher's window, like a Seoul streetwalker talking to an enlisted man.

* * *

Reacher expected Hemingway to be mad at his reappearance, but she wasn't. He figured she felt exposed. Or caught out in her own obsession. Which she was, basically. And she looked a little sheepish about it.

He asked, "Is his place near here?"

She pointed through the car at a pair of large blank [doors](#) across the street. They were tall and wide. Like a wagon entrance, from long ago, big enough for a cart and a team of horses. In the daylight the paint might have looked dark green. Set into the right-hand door was a judas gate, big enough for a person. Presumably the doors would lead to an interior [ground floor](#) yard. It was a two-story building. Offices above, possibly. Or storerooms. Behind the building was a bigger building, blank and dark and massive. A brick church of some kind, maybe.

Reacher asked, "Is he in there?"

Hemingway nodded.

Reacher asked, "With how many others?"

"He's alone."

"Really?"

"He runs protection rackets. Among other things. So now he has to deliver. His guys are all out, watching over his clients."

"I didn't know protection rackets worked that way. I thought they were just extortion, plain and simple."

"They are, basically. But he needs to maintain some kind of credibility. And he needs to keep his best cash [cows](#) in business. There's a lot of damage being done tonight. Plenty of places are going to go under. No more payoffs from them. And a wise man keeps an eye on his cash flow."

Reacher turned and looked at the doors. "You hoping someone will break in?"

"I don't know what's taking them so long. That's the problem with junkies. No get-up-and-go."

"What has he got in there?"

"A little of everything. He keeps his inventory low because he's got the New Jersey Turnpike and the Holland Tunnel for rapid resupply, which is apparently what they teach you in business school now, but still, I bet there's a week's worth in there."

"Are we in the way? Should we go park somewhere else?"

"You should go home. This isn't your business."

"I need to talk to you."

"About what?"

"The Son of Sam."

"Croselli isn't enough for you?"

"I saw him."

"Who?"

"I saw a man carrying a Charter [Arms Bulldog](#) and peering into cars."

"Are you serious?"

"It was our car he peered into."

"Where?"

"The East River, at 34th Street."

Hemingway said, "You know guns, right? Being a Marine and all?"

"Son of a Marine," Reacher said. "It was the right gun."

"It's pitch dark."

"The moon and the stars and the water."

Hemingway ducked down another inch and looked across Reacher at Chrissie. "Did you see it too?"

Chrissie said, "No."

"How come?"

"I wasn't looking."

Hemingway said, "I don't know what to do. OK, let's say we have a confirmed sighting, but so what? We already know the Son of Sam is in New York. That's the point of the guy. It adds no new information. You'd need something more. You'd need to know who he is. Do you?"

"No," Reacher said. "But I know what he used to be."

* * *

They parked on Bleecker, intending to walk back and join Hemingway in her doorway hideout, but suddenly Bleecker had people on it, some of them in groups, some of them in pairs, some of those groups and pairs carrying stuff too heavy for comfort, and therefore consequently looking for alternative modes of transportation, such as small [hatchback](#) cars, each one apparently ideal for hauling a large television. Reacher and Chrissie were a yard out of the Chevette, with the doors closed but not locked, when the staring match started. Two guys, staggering under an enormous box, with Sony [written](#) on it upside down. They came in a straight line, eyeballing the Chevette all the way, and Reacher said, "Keep walking, guys."

The guy on the left was a shadowy grunting figure, and he said, "Suppose we don't?"

"Then I'll kick your butt and steal your television."

"Suppose you drive us?"

"Just keep walking," Reacher said.

They didn't. They eased the box carefully to the ground and stood up again, breathing deep, two dark figures in the dark. Even from six feet away it was hard to make out detail, but their hands hadn't gone to their pockets yet, which was a good sign. It meant any upcoming combat was likely to be unarmed, which was reassuring. Reacher had grown up in a culture of extreme violence, it being hard to describe the U.S. [Marine Corps](#) any other way, and he had taken its lessons on board, with the result that he hadn't lost a fight in more than ten years, against Corps kids from the same culture, and against rivalrous local youth all around the world, who [liked](#) to think the U.S. military was nothing special, and who liked to try to prove it by proxy, usually unsuccessfully. Two punks on a blacked-out New York City street were unlikely to prove an unprecedented problem, unless they had knives or guns, which was unknowable at that point.

The guy on the right said, "Maybe we'll take the girl with us. Maybe we'll have ourselves some fun."

The guy on the left said, "Just give us the keys and no one gets hurt."

Which was the moment of [decision](#). Surprise was always good. Delay was always fatal. Guys who let a situation unfold in its own good time were just stockpiling problems for themselves. Reacher ran at the left-hand guy, two choppy steps, like an infielder charging a grounder, and he didn't slow down. He ran right through the guy, leading with his forearm held horizontal, jerking his elbow into the guy's face, and as soon as he felt the guy's nose burst open he stamped down and reversed direction around the box and went after the second guy, who flinched away and took Reacher's charging weight flat in the back. The guy pitched forward like he had been hit by a truck, and Reacher kicked him in the head, and the guy lay still.

Reacher checked their pockets. No knives, no guns, which was usually the case. But it had been their choice. They could have kept on walking. He hauled the right-hand guy next to the left-hand guy, close together, shoulder to shoulder, and he picked up the heavy box like a strongman in the circus, struggling and tottering, and he took two short steps and dropped it on their heads from waist height.

Chrissie said, "Why did you do that?"

"Rules," Reacher said. "Winning ain't enough. The other guy has to know he lost."

"Is that what they teach you in the Marine Corps?"

"More or less."

"They'll wreck the car when they wake up."

"They won't. They'll throw up and crawl home. By which time you'll be long gone anyway."

So Chrissie [locked](#) up, and they walked back through the heat to where Hemingway was waiting on Carmine. Reacher said, "No progress?"

Hemingway said, "Not yet."

"Maybe we should go recruit someone. There are plenty of people on Bleecker."

"That would be suborning a felony."

"Means to an end."

"Tell me what you meant about the guy with the [Bulldog](#)."

"Can you use it?"

"Depends what it is."

"It was dark," Reacher said. "Obviously."

"But?"

"He was in his mid-twenties, I would say, medium height, heavy in the chest and shoulders, quite pale, with wavy hair that wouldn't lie down."

"Carrying a .44 Bulldog?"

"Most Bulldogs are .44s. But I don't have X-ray vision."

"How far away was he?"

"Twenty feet, at one point."

"How long were you eyeballing him?"

"Twenty seconds, maybe."

"Twenty seconds at twenty feet," Hemingway said. "In a blackout? That's a tough sell. I bet there have been a thousand reports tonight. People freak out in the dark."

"He was a trained man," Reacher said.

"Trained how?"

"The way he moved through the available cover. He's ex-military. He's had [infantry](#) training."

"So have lots of guys. You ever heard of Vietnam?"

"He's too young. This guy was of age six or seven years ago. The draft was winding down. You had to be pretty unlucky. And I don't think he was ever in combat. I've seen lots of people back from Vietnam. They're different. This guy was all theory and training. Second nature, for sure, pretty slick, but he had never lived or died by it. I can guarantee that. And I don't think he was a Marine. They're different too. I think he was army. And I think he's been in [Korea](#). It was like a fingerprint. I think he did basic, and infantry, with the urban specialization, and I think he served in Seoul. Like a particular combination. That's how he looked. I see it [all the time](#). You ever been there? Seoul teaches you to move a certain way. But he's been out at least two years, because of the hair, and he's had time to get a bit heavy. I think he volunteered at eighteen or nineteen, and I think he served a three-year hitch. That was my impression, anyway."

"That's one hell of a detailed impression."

"You could offer it as a filter. They could see if any persons of interest match up."

"It was twenty seconds in the pitch dark."

"What else have they got?"

"Maybe I could."

"Suppose it worked? Suppose they get the guy? Would that be good for you?"

"Of course it would."

"So what's the downside?"

"Sounding desperate and pathetic."

"Your call."

"You should try it," Chrissie said. "Someone needs to catch the guy."

Hemingway said nothing.

* * *

They waited, all crammed together in the doorway opposite Croselli's place, with absolutely nothing happening. They heard sirens, and snatches of conversation from people passing by on Bleecker. Like headline news. It was now only ninety degrees. The lights had gone out at Shea in the bottom of the sixth, with the Mets trailing the Cubs by two to one. Subway riders had spent scary hours trapped underground, but were slowly making their way back to the surface. Cars were using [chains](#) and ropes to tear the shutters off stores. Even [Brooks](#) Brothers on [Madison](#) had been looted. Crown Heights and Bushwick were on [fire](#). Cops had been hurt and arrests had been made.

Then the last of the passersby moved on and Carmine went quiet again and the clock in Reacher's head ticked around toward midnight. He said to Chrissie, "I'll walk you back to your car. Your friends will be waiting."

She said, "Are you staying here?"

"Might as well. I already missed my bus."

"Do you think the roads are open?"

"Wide open. They want people to leave."

"Why?"

"Fewer mouths to feed here."

"Makes sense," Chrissie said. They walked together to the corner, and around it, where the Chevette waited undisturbed. The two guys were still laid out in the roadway, under the box. Like a cartoon accident. They were still breathing.

Reacher said, "Want me to ride with you?"

"No," Chrissie said. "We go back alone. That's part of the deal."

"You know how to go?"

"Up on Sixth and across on 4th. And then it's right there."

"Roger that."

"Take care, OK?"

"I will," Reacher said. "You too. I'll never forget you."

"You will."

"Check back next year, see if I have."

"OK. Let's see who remembers. Same night, same place. Deal?"

"I'll be there," Reacher said.

She got into the car, and she eased away from the tangle of [limbs](#) behind her, and she made the left on Sixth, and she waved through her open window. And then she was gone.

* * *

Hemingway said, "I'm going to put it in the system. Your impression, I mean. That's the smart play here. They'll ignore it of course, but it will be in the record. I can say told you so, afterward. If you're right. That's always worth a point or two. Sometimes more. Being right afterward can be a wonderful thing."

"It's a filter," Reacher said. "That's all. It's about efficiency."

"But I still need Croselli."

"The Son of Sam wouldn't get you out of jail?"

"I need Croselli."

"Why?"

"Because he burns me up."

"You ever read a book called Moby-Dick?"

"OK, I get it. And I admit it. Croselli is my great white whale. I'm obsessed. But what can I do about it? What could anyone, with a whale pressing on her head?"

"Is that how you feel? Like you have a whale pressing on your head?"

"That's exactly how I feel."

"Then let's trade," Reacher said.

"What for what?"

"I need a ride out of town."

"When?"

"As soon as possible. I'm sure my brother is worrying about me. Which I'm sure is hard on the old guy. I need to put him out of his misery."

"I'm not a taxi dispatcher."

"You have a car."

"I'm not a chauffeur, either."

"You could lend it to me."

"How would I get it back?"

"I don't know."

"Do you even have a license?"

"Not exactly."

"No deal," she said.

"OK," Reacher said.

"What were you going to do for me?"

"Suppose an unknown suspect broke into Croselli's place, and you got a look inside. Then the unknown suspect fled, but you were too busy securing [the scene](#) to chase him."

"I've been waiting two hours for that to happen. But it hasn't."

"I could do it."

"You're sixteen years old."

"How is that relevant?"

"Entrapment is bad enough. Entrapment with minors is probably worse."

"Who would ever know, [apart](#) from you and me?"

"I have no way of getting you a ride out of town."

Reacher paused a beat, and said, "Maybe we should refine the plan."

"What plan?" Hemingway said. "We don't have a plan."

"Probably better if it's not you who makes the discovery. It could look like a personal vendetta. It could give Croselli's [lawyers](#) something to work with. Probably better if it's not even the FBI at all. Better if it's the NYPD. Don't you think? An independent agency, with no ax to grind. If they discover a dope dealer and his stash in their city, then it's out there. It can't be denied. It is what it is. Your people will have to [hush](#) up their deal, and they'll have to admit you were right all along, and you can turn your review procedure into a medal ceremony."

"The NYPD is busy tonight."

"They have a narcotics division, surely. Make the call ahead of time. Get a sense of how long they're going to be, and we'll try to time it exactly right. I'll bust in, you hang back and keep an eye on things for a minute until the cops show up, and then we'll both slip away, and you can drive me north. Meanwhile the NYPD will be building your case for you, and by the time you're back in town your bosses will be rolling out the red carpet."

"How [far north](#) do you want to go?"

"West Point. It's up the river a ways."

"I know where it is."

"So do we have a deal?"

Hemingway didn't answer.

* * *

Hemingway finally [agreed](#) about thirty minutes later, close to one o'clock in the morning. But the plan went wrong immediately. First they couldn't find a working phone. They searched up and down Carmine, and they tried the corner of Seventh Avenue, and the corner of Bleecker, and Sixth Avenue, and every pay phone they found was silent. They didn't know if it was the result of the blackout, or just the general [abject](#) state of the city. Reacher figured the phone company had its own electricity, in its own wires, so he was all in favor of carrying on the [search](#), but Hemingway was reluctant to foray further, in case she missed something over at Croselli's place. So she walked back to the doorway on Carmine and Reacher went on alone, across Sixth, and on the corner between Minetta Street and Minetta Lane he found a phone with a [dial tone](#).

It was too dark to see the numbers, so he dialed by feel, zero for the operator, and he waited a long time before she answered. He asked for the NYPD's Sixth Precinct, and waited again, even longer, before the call was picked up and a voice barked, "Yes?"

Reacher said, "I want to report illegal narcotics in the West Village."

The voice said, "What?"

"There's a storeroom full of drugs on Carmine just been bust open."

"Any dead bodies?"

"No."

"Anyone currently in the act of getting killed?"

"No."

"Fire?"

"No."

The voice said, "Then stop wasting my time," and the phone went dead. Reacher hung up and hustled back, sweating, ninety degrees at one in the morning, and he relayed the news to Hemingway, who nodded in the dark and said, "We should have seen that coming. I guess they're all hands on deck right now."

"We might have to use your own people."

"Forget it. They wouldn't take my call."

Reacher said, "Still got your little sister's cassette recorder?"

"It's my cassette recorder."

"Still got it?"

"Why?"

"Maybe I can get him to boast on the tape."

"You?"

"Same principle. You can't let this look like a vendetta."

"I can't let you. You and him, face to face? I have a conscience."

"What's he going to do to me?"

"Beat you to death."

"He's a [made man](#)," Reacher said. "He has soldiers. Which means he tells other people to do the heavy lifting. Which means he's out of practice. He's all hat and no cattle. He's got nothing. We already saw that on Waverly. Any twelve-year-old in the Philippines could eat his lunch."

"Is this a Marine Corps thing?"

"I'm not a Marine."

"How would you get in?"

"I assume the church behind him is [locked](#)."

"Tonight for sure. If not every night."

"I'll figure something out."

"How would the military do it?"

"Marines or army?"

"Army."

"They'd call in artillery support. Or air-to-ground."

"Marines?"

"They'd start a [fire](#), probably. That usually brings them out real fast."

"You can't do that."

"I'm not a Marine," Reacher said again. He looked across the street. The second-story windows were dark, obviously. Which meant Croselli could be right there, watching. But without seeing much. A man in a dark room watching a lit street had an advantage. A man in a dark room watching a dark street might as well have saved himself the eyestrain.

Reacher crossed the dark street, to the double [doors](#). He put his fingertips on them. They felt like sandpaper. Fifty-year-old paint, plus [fifty years](#) of smoke and grime and dust. He tapped, first with his fingernails, then gently with his knuckles. The wood felt old and thick and solid, like it had been shipped a [hundred years](#) before, from some ancient forest out west. He slid his palms across the surface, until he found the judas gate. Same paint, same grime, same wood. He felt for the hinges, and didn't find any. He felt for the lock, and rubbed it with his thumb. It seemed to be a small round Yale, worn [brass](#), probably as old as the paint.

He headed back to Hemingway. He said, "The doors are probably two or three inches thick, and the judas gate is all of a piece. All quality lumber, probably hard as a rock by now."

"Then maybe the army way is the only way."

"Maybe not. The judas gate opens inward. The lock is an old Yale, put in maybe fifty years ago. I'm guessing they didn't chase out a void in the door. Not in wood that hard. Not back then. People weren't so uptight about security. I bet the lock is surface-mounted on the back. Like an old house. The tongue is in a little surface-mounted box. Two screws, is all."

"There will be another door. Out of the yard, into the building. Might have a newer lock."

"Then I'll knock and rely on charm."

"I can't let you do this."

"It's the least I can do. I screwed you up before. You might have gotten something. You were going to take that slap and keep him talking."

"He had already found the wire."

"But he's arrogant. He's got an ego. He might have carried on regardless, just to taunt you."

"That's what I was hoping."

"Then let me put it right."

* * *

Reacher turned around and lifted his shirt and bared his back to Hemingway. He felt hot fingers scrabbling at his waistband, gapping it out, fitting the plastic box behind the elastic on his shorts. Then he felt the scrape of a wire, and her hand burrowed up his back, under his shirt, to his shoulder [blade](#), and then on over the top, a curious vertical embrace, her breath on his neck, and then she turned him around again to face her, and her other hand went up the front of his shirt, to find the microphone, to pass it from [hand to hand](#), and to pull it down into place. She stopped with it trapped against his chest, and she kept her hand there, flat, nothing between her palm and his skin except the small pebble of technology.

She said, "I put it in my bra. But you don't have one."

"Imagine that," Reacher said.

"There's nothing to keep it in place."

Reacher felt an immediate film of sweat between his chest and her hand. He said, "Got a Band-Aid in your purse?"

"You're a smart kid," she said, and she went into a one-hand-two-elbows contortion to root through her bag, and as she craned her neck to look downward into it her forehead touched his lips, just briefly, like a kiss. [Her hair](#) was limp, but it smelled like strawberries.

She jerked her bag back up on her shoulder and held up something that crackled slightly. A Band-Aid, he assumed, still in its hygienic wrapper. He took it from her and peeled it open in the space between their faces. Then in turn she took it back from him one-handed and used it to tape the microphone in the trench between his chest muscles. She smoothed the [adhesive](#), once, twice, and then she took her hands out from under his shirt and pulled it down into place.

She put her palm on his chest, like Croselli had put his on hers, pressing hard on the damp cotton, and she said, "He'll find it."

"Don't worry," Reacher said. "If he puts his hands on me, I'll beat him to death."

Hemingway said nothing.

Reacher said, "That's a Marine Corps thing."

* * *

The darkness didn't help. It didn't help at all. Reacher lined up on the opposite curb, like a sprinter at the start of a race, but he couldn't exactly see where he was heading. Adjustments were going to be necessary as he ran. He took off, slow and clumsy, partly because of the dark, partly because he was a terrible runner, with long lumbering strides, and three paces out he saw the doors, and two paces out he saw the judas gate, and with one pace to go he saw its lock, and he launched his leading foot in a scything kick, slightly across his body, and he smashed his heel as close to the small Yale circle as he could get, with all his two hundred and twenty pounds behind it, multiplied significantly by the final acceleration of his foot, and by the fact that his whole bulk was moving briskly, if not exactly fast.

But it was enough. The judas gate exploded inward, with what felt like no resistance at all, and Reacher hurtled through the resulting blank rectangle into a space so dark he could make out nothing at all. There was the feel of cobblestones under his feet, and the sour smell of garbage, and sheer dark walls rising on his left and his right and ahead.

He felt his way along the right-hand wall to the back corner of the yard, where he found a door. Ridged glass above, a panel below, a smooth steel handle, and a lock that felt newer. The glass was probably tempered and reinforced with wire. The lock was probably chased into the door and the jamb. A whole different proposition.

He waited, to see if Croselli would come down and open it himself. Which he might. He must have heard the crash of the judas gate. But he didn't come down. Reacher waited three minutes, breathing hard, stretching his eyes wide open, willing them to see something. But they didn't. He stepped up to the door again and traced its shape with his hands. The panel below the glass would be the weak spot. Plywood, probably, maybe three-eighths thick, painted, retained in the frame by quarter-round moldings. Reacher was wearing shoes he had bought in the London airport two deployments ago, stout British things with welts and toecaps as hard as steel. They had busted heads and kneecaps already that night. Plywood wasn't going to be a major problem.

He stepped back and poked forward with his toe to fix his target in his mind. Then he kicked out, bang, bang, concentrating on the corners of the panel, viciously and noisily, until the wood splintered and the moldings came loose.

Then he stopped and listened.

No sound from inside the building.

Which was a bitch. Reacher would have preferred to meet Croselli face to face on the [ground floor](#). He didn't relish heading up a flight of stairs toward an alert opponent at the top.

He waited some more.

No sound.

He squatted down with his back against the doorframe and punched out the panel with his elbow, until it folded inward, like a miniature door itself, [hinged](#) on a few surviving nails. Then he twisted around and put his arm and his shoulder through the hole and reached up and scrabbled for the knob. Which he found easily enough. He had [arms](#) like a gorilla. Every childhood photograph of him featured six inches of bare wrist, at the end of every sleeve.

The door opened and he struggled upright and backed off a yard, just in case. But there was no sound inside. Croselli didn't come out. There was nothing to see. Just darkness. The inside air smelled hot and stale.

Reacher stepped in, to what felt like a narrow lobby with a tiled floor. He slid his feet ahead, one after the other, and he felt a bottom stair. There was a [handrail](#) on the left. The opposite wall was less than three feet away. It was painted, and it was damp with condensation.

Reacher went up the stairs, his right hand out in front of him, his left holding the handrail. There was a yard-wide half landing, and then the stairs doglegged and continued upward. At the top was dusty superheated air and a six-by-three upstairs lobby with a sticky carpet and a door at each end. A front room, and a back room.

Under the back room door was a bar of faint warm light.

Reacher stared at it, like a thirsty man in the desert might stare at a cold drink. It was a candle, probably. It was the first manmade light he had seen in more than three hours.

He put his hand under his shirt at the back and pushed the button Hemingway had showed him. It's red, she had said, which hadn't helped, because he didn't have eyes in the back of his head, and it was pitch dark anyway. So he had learned it by feel. He tapped his chest, so that a thump could mark the start of the recording. Then he put his hand on the doorknob.

* * *

Reacher twisted the knob and pushed the door, one, two, fast and hard, and he stepped into a room lit by a guttering candle. The flame danced in the rush of air. The room was a twenty-by-twenty space with a dark window in the back wall, and a row of old-fashioned safes on the left, like something out of a black-and-white Western movie about [bank robbers](#), and on the right there was a row of [file cabinets](#) and a desk, and sitting at the desk in a leather reclining chair was Croselli. The chair was pushed out and turned sideways, so that he was sitting face-on to the door.

He had a gun in his hand.

It was a Colt M1911, a .45 automatic, standard military issue for sixty-six years, hence the [model number](#). It looked a little scratched and battered. It was all lit up by the candle, which was on the desk, welded to a [china plate](#) by a pool of its own wax. A standard [household item](#), a few cents at the hardware store, but it felt as bright as the sun.

Croselli said, "You."

Reacher said nothing.

Croselli had shed his jacket and pulled down his tie, but his shirt was still wet. He said, "I was expecting Hemingway. What are you tonight, her knight in shining armor? Is she sending a boy to do a man's [job](#)?" Is he armed? Reacher had asked. Not in the city, Hemingway had said. He can't afford to be. Not applicable inside his own premises, apparently. Which was a bitch. Reacher looked at the row of safes. There were six of them, shoulder to shoulder, each one about a yard wide and six feet tall. They had keyholes, not [combination locks](#). The door on the far end was wide open, and the void behind it was empty. Their [armory](#), Reacher guessed. For dire emergencies. Like that very night. Clearly Croselli's soldiers were all armed, all out on the street, all insuring protection.

"You have a gun," Reacher said, for the tape.

"I'm defending my property," Croselli said.

"This is your place?"

"I'm not a common burglar."

Reacher took a step. The Colt's muzzle rose a degree, to track him. Reacher asked, "Is your name on the title?"

"I'm not that stupid."

"Then this isn't your place."

"Only technically. Believe me, kid, everything you see here is mine."

"What's in the safes?"

"Inventory."

"Yours?"

"I already told you."

"I need to hear it in short simple words."

"Why?"

"We could do business."

"Business?"

"That's what I said."

"You and me?"

"If you're smart," Reacher said.

"You broke down my door."

"Would you have let me in, if I had knocked?"

"What kind of business could we do, you and I?"

"You're using the New Jersey Turnpike and the Holland Tunnel. Which means you're getting supplied out of Miami, all the way up I-95. Which means you're paying over the odds, and you're losing some to unreliable mules, and you're losing some to routine New Jersey State Police patrols. I could help you with all of that."

"How?"

"I bring stuff in direct from the Far East. On military planes. No scrutiny. My dad's a Marine officer."

"What kind of stuff?"

“Anything you want.”

“What kind of price, kid?”

“Show me what you’ve got and tell me what you paid. Then I’ll break your heart.”

“You hurt two of my men.”

Reacher said, “I hope so. I need you to understand. You do not mess with me.” He took another step. The Colt’s muzzle rose another degree. Reacher said, “Are you buying from Martinez?”

“I never heard of Martinez.”

“Then you’re way over the odds already. Who are you buying from?”

“The Medellin boys.”

“I could save you forty percent.”

Croselli said, “I think you’re full of shit. I think this is a Hemingway stunt.”

“You shut her down.”

“For which I paid good money. For which I expected a durable result. Anything else is liable to make me angry.”

“This has nothing to do with Hemingway.”

“Pull up your shirt.”

“Why?”

“I want to see the wire. Before I shoot you.”

Reacher thought: unregistered guns, a deceptive real estate title, a straight-up reference to the Medellin cartel out of Colombia, and a straight-up reference to bribery. The tape had enough. He took a deep, deep breath and put his hands on the hem of his T shirt. Then he jerked forward from the waist and blew out the candle.

* * *

The room went from softly glowing to blacker than the Earl of Hell’s winter coat all in a split second, and Reacher blundered straight ahead, forcing passage between Croselli’s chair and the desk, and Croselli whipped the Colt around in the same general direction and fired. But he missed by a mile, and the muzzle flash backlit him perfectly, like a photographer’s strobe, so Reacher picked his spot and slammed a straight right into the back of his neck, right where soft turns to hard, and Croselli pitched head first out of the chair and landed on his knees. Reacher groped for the chair and lifted it high by the [armrests](#) and slammed it down on Croselli’s back. He heard the sound of steel on linoleum as the Colt skittered away, and he brushed the chair aside and groped and patted blindly until he found the collar of Croselli’s shirt, which he bunched in his left hand while he pounded away with his right, short roundhouse punches to the side of Croselli’s head, his ear, his jaw, one, two, three, four, vicious clubbing blows, until he felt the steam go out of the guy, whereupon he reached forward and grabbed the guy’s wrists and yanked them

up behind his back, high and painful, and he clamped them together in his left hand, human [handcuffs](#), a party trick perfected years before, enabled by the freakish strength in his fingers, from which no one had ever escaped, not even his brother, who was of equal size, or his father, who was smaller but stronger. He hauled Croselli to his feet and slapped at his pants pockets until he heard the [jingle](#) of keys. Croselli got his second wind and started struggling hard, so Reacher turned him a little sideways and quieted him down again with a pile-driver jab to the kidney.

Then he fished out the keys and held them in his right hand, and he asked, "Where's your book of matches?"

Croselli said, "You're going to die, kid."

"Obviously," Reacher said. "No one lives forever."

"I mean tonight, kid."

Reacher separated a key by feel and pressed the point high on Croselli's cheek. He said, "If so, you won't see it happen. I'll take your eyes out first."

"Matches in the desk drawer," Croselli said.

Reacher turned him again and slammed a short right to his stomach, to fold him over and keep him preoccupied, and he walked him bent over and puking to the desk, and he used his free hand to rattle open the drawers, and to root around, all by feel. There was all kinds of stuff in the drawers. Staplers, pens, rolls of Scotch tape, some in [dispensers](#), pencils, paper clips. And a book of matches, a little limp and damp.

Using a matchbook one-handed was practically impossible, so Reacher turned Croselli toward the window wall, let go of his wrists, and shoved him hard, and used the resulting few undisturbed seconds to detach a match and strike it, all fizzing and flaring in the dark, and to light the candle with it once again, by which time Croselli was shaping up for a charge, so Reacher stepped toward him and dropped him with a right to the solar plexus, just as the room bloomed back to its former cozy glow.

A solar plexus was worth at least a minute, Reacher thought, and he used that minute to cross the room and pick up the Colt, and to dump its magazine, and to eject the shell from its chamber, and to pick up the chair, and to set it back on its casters, and to turn it just so, and to find the Scotch tape, and to pick the guy up, and to dump him in the chair, and to start taping his wrists to the frame.

Scotch tape was weaker than [duct tape](#), but Reacher made up for it with length, around and around, right hand, [left hand](#), until the guy looked like he had two broken wrists, in casts made of some kind of new see-through yellowish plaster. Then came his ankles. In all Reacher used six whole rolls of tape, and after that there was no way the guy was moving.

Then Hemingway came in the door.

She looked at the candle first, and then at Croselli.

Reacher said, "He admits on tape everything here is his."

She said, "I heard a gunshot."

“He missed. It was about twenty degrees off on the port side.”

“I was worried.”

“It’s the godfather who should worry. This is a made man.”

“What did he say on the tape?”

“Take it out of my pants and listen for yourself.”

Which she did. Reacher felt the hot quick fingers again, and the weird embrace, under his shirt, as the microphone was passed from [hand to hand](#). Then she clicked and waited and clicked again, and a thin tinny version of Croselli’s voice filled the room, taking responsibility for everything in it, admitting to the Medellin connection, admitting to the [bribe](#), and hinting at the size of it.

She said, “You have his keys?”

Reacher said, “Right here in my hand.”

“Open the safe [doors](#).”

Which he did, starting next to the empty [armory](#), working away from the window, until all of the safes stood open. All of them were full of smooth-packed plastic-wrapped [bricks](#), some brown or green in color, most white or yellow.

She said, “Can you get his keys back in his pocket?”

He did, and said, “What next?”

“Does his phone work?”

He tried it, and said, “Yes.”

She gave him a number and said, “It’s our internal credible threat hotline.”

He called it in, the exact address, without giving his name, and then the call ended, and she said, “Their response time will be more than five minutes but less than ten.”

She put her plastic cassette recorder on the floor near Croselli’s feet. She said, “We should go. My car is not close.”

Reacher said, “Is this enough?”

She said, “More than enough. Medellin is toxic. And the evidence is right here. It’s a photograph, Reacher. This is a [photogenic](#) prosecution. It doesn’t matter who he bribed. No one is ever going to say a word against this one. It’s a tidal wave.”

“One last thing,” Reacher said, and he turned back to Croselli, and he said, “Slapping women is not permitted. You’re supposed to [be a man](#), not a pussy.”

Croselli said nothing.

Reacher raised his hand. “How would you like it?”

Croselli said, “You wouldn’t hit a guy tied to a chair.”

Reacher said, "Watch me," and slapped the guy in the face, hard, a real crack, wet or not, and the chair went up on its side legs, and balanced, and balanced, and tottered, and then thumped down on its side, with its casters spinning and Croselli's head bouncing around like a pinball.

Then they hit the bricks, and Hemingway's [prediction](#) of five-to-ten came true, in that they saw hurrying cars about six minutes out, and then a pair of heavy trucks. A lot of firepower. And why not, for a credible threat?

* * *

Hemingway's car was four blocks away, on Sullivan. It was the mid-blue Granada Reacher had seen before, with the vinyl roof and the toothy [grille](#). He said, "You sure this gets you off the hook?"

She said, "Count on it, kid. Being right afterward is a wonderful thing."

"Then give me a ride out of town."

"I should stay."

"Give them time to grieve. Give them time to figure out how it's really their own idea. I've seen this shit before. All organizations are the same. You need to lay low for a day. You need to be out of the spotlight."

"West Point?"

"Take the Thruway and the Tappan Zee."

"How long will I be gone?"

"They're going to roll out the red carpet, Jill. Just give them time to find it first."

* * *

They drove a long, long time in the dark, and then they hit neighborhoods with power, with traffic lights and street lights and the occasional lit room. Billboards were bright, and the familiar nighttime background of orange diamonds on black velvet lay all around.

Hemingway said, "I have to stop and call."

Reacher said, "Call who?"

"The office."

"Why?"

"I have to know whether it worked."

"I'm sure it did."

"I have to know."

"So stop. We could get a cup of coffee."

"It's a hundred degrees."

"Got to be less than ninety now."

"Still too hot for coffee." She pulled over to the right-hand lane, and then she took an exit road to what Reacher imagined was a superpower version of the standard type of highway facility, with multiple restrooms, and gas big enough for trucks, and motel rooms for weary drivers, and not just something to eat, but a restaurant big enough to feed Syracuse. And payphones. There was a long line, right outside the restaurant's extensive and brightly-lit windows. Hemingway used one, and hung up smiling, and said, "It's working. Croselli has been arrested."

He asked, "How's the whale?"

She said, "The whale is gone."

She looked dazed for a second, and then she got a big smile on her face, and they hugged, with some kind of relief and ecstasy in her tight embrace. Reacher felt bony ribs, and the flutter of her heart. It was beating fast.

Then she moved to another phone and dialed another number, and she gave her name, and she dictated a long report about a confirmed sighting of the Son of Sam, made by what she called a confidential informant, who had what she called extensive military experience.

Then she hung up again and said, "This will sound crazy, but I really want to rent a room just to take a shower."

Reacher said, "Doesn't sound crazy to me."

"Does it matter what time you get there?"

"Not within a shower or two."

"So let's do it."

"Both of us?"

"It's a mutual benefit."

"Who goes first?"

"I go first."

"OK," Reacher said.

She paid at the motel office, a visible wad of bills, what Reacher figured must be the whole-night rate, and she came back with a key, to room 15, which was located way in back, the last cabin before the woods. Reacher said, "Do you want me to wait in the car?"

Hemingway said, "You can wait in the room."

So they went in together, and found a hot stale space, with the usual features. Hemingway checked the bathroom, and came out with a bunch of towels, and said, "These are yours," and then she went back in and closed the door.

Reacher waited on the bed until she came out again much later, all hot and pink and wrapped in towels. She said, "Your turn," and she crossed the room, a little unsteady on her feet, as if overcome by steam, or exhaustion.

He said, "You OK?"

She said, "I'm fine."

He paused a beat, and then he went in the bathroom, which was as steamy as a sauna, with the mirror all fogged up, showing the swipes and [arcs](#) where the maid had [cleaned](#) it. He stripped and hung his [limp](#) clothes on a hook, and he started the shower and set it warm, and he stepped into the tub and pulled the curtain. He soaped up and used the shampoo, and he scrubbed and rinsed, and he stood under the warm stream for an extra minute, and then he got out.

Getting dry was not really an option, given the temperature and the humidity. He moved the moisture around his skin with a towel, and he put his old clothes back on, damp and snagging, and he combed his hair with his fingers. Then he stepped out in a billow of moisture.

Jill Hemingway was flat on her back on the bed. At first he thought she was sleeping. Then he saw her eyes were open. He took her wrist and felt her pulse.

Nothing there.

He tried her neck.

Nothing there.

Her eyes stared up at him, blank and sightless.

Medical reasons. Her heart, he thought. No doubt a cause of concern. He had felt it racing and fluttering. He had seen her stagger. He crossed the room and stared out the window. Still the dead of night. Through the trees he could see lights from cars on the highway. He could hear their sound, faint and [constant](#). He crossed back to the bed and checked again, wrist, neck, nothing.

He stepped out to the lot and closed the door behind him, and hiked over to the line of payphones outside the restaurant. He chose one at random and dialed the number she had given him, for the internal hotline. He reported her death, said it looked natural, and gave the location.

He didn't give his name.

Jill Hemingway, RIP. She died young, but she had a smile on her face.

He walked on, to the gas plaza, past the car pumps, past the truck pumps, to the exit road. He kept one foot in the traffic lane, and rested the other on the curb, and he stuck out his thumb. The second car to pass by picked him up. It was a Chevrolet Chevette, baby blue, but it wasn't Chrissie's. It was a whole different car altogether, driven by a guy in his twenties who was heading for Albany. He let Reacher out at an early exit, and a dairyman in a pick-up truck took him onward, and then he walked a mile to the turn that led up to the Academy. He ate in a roadhouse, and he walked another mile, and he saw West Point's lights up ahead, far in the distance. He figured no one would reveille before 0600, which was still two hours away, so he found a bus bench and lay down to sleep.

* * *

The day after the blackout power was restored in part of Queens at seven in the morning, [followed](#) by part of Manhattan shortly afterward. By lunchtime half the city was back. By eleven in the evening the whole city was back. The outage had been caused by a maintenance error. A [lightning strike](#) in Buchanan, New York—part of the long summer storm Reacher had seen in the distance—had tripped a [circuit breaker](#), but a loose [locking](#) nut had prevented the breaker from closing again immediately, as it was designed to do. As a consequence, a cascade of trips and overloads had rolled south over the next hour, until the whole city was out. By morning, more than sixteen hundred stores had been looted, more than a thousand fires had been set, more than five hundred cops had been injured, and more than four thousand people had been arrested. All because of a loose nut.

* * *

Twenty-eight days after the blackout the Son of Sam was captured outside his home on Pine Street, Yonkers, New York, less than [four miles](#) from Sarah Lawrence College. His year-long killing spree was over. His name was David Berkowitz, and he was twenty-four years old. He was carrying his Charter [Arms Bulldog](#) in a paper sack. He confessed to his crimes immediately. And he confirmed he had volunteered for the U.S. Army at age eighteen, and had served three years, partly inside the continental U.S., but mostly in South [Korea](#).