

Tracking Terror



A Novel by
Howard P. Giordano

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The hero is commonly the simplest and obscurest of men.

— Henry David Thoreau

Five Days Ago

Thursday, May 22

Roaches scrambled in every direction across the graffiti-covered walls on both sides of the tenement hallway. They looked as if they were trying to avoid a conflict that was none of their business. The squalid surroundings assaulted his senses: the urine smell overwhelmed him; the greasy film on everything he touched made him nauseous. The sooner this is over, the better, Pete Fanning thought.

“Police,” he shouted. “Open up!”

He tilted his head and listened. No response.

Fanning balled a fist and hammered the paint-flaked door. He nodded to his partner, Detective Walsh, who had gripped his weapon with both hands and squatted low to one side. Four more narcotics detectives hung back in the hallway, ready to provide backup. Behind them, coming from another doorway, the sound of a crying baby broke the silence.

Fanning stepped away from the door. He brought his right knee up to his chest, held it there for a beat, and with the full force of his 175 pounds, slammed his heel into the door, meeting it just to the left of the knob. The dried wood splintered easily around the cheap, worn out lock. The door banged open, bouncing off the wall and back into his waiting hand. He pushed it back and thrust his 9mm Glock into the lighted, open space. An uneasy silence met him.

Walsh entered first, darting to the right in a semi-crouched position. Fanning followed to the left. The sparsely furnished, dingy living room smelled of the hallway filth. He motioned toward the kitchen. Walsh moved in that direction. Fanning stepped to the closed bedroom door. His back flat against the wall on one side, he twisted the knob with his free hand. When the door swung open, he saw the drug dealer standing at the raised window, preparing to climb out onto the fire escape.

"Freeze, Ramirez!"

The dealer turned. He pointed his 25-caliber automatic at Fanning and squeezed off a shot. The gun misfired.

Fanning heard the weapon click. A rush of adrenalin pumped through him. Death had taken his measure, and he wasn't waiting around to give it a second opportunity. He returned fire. Two of his four shots hit their mark, one in the drug dealer's head and the second smashing into his neck. The dealer's body whirled from the impact before going down. Ramirez hit the floor, and Fanning watched, squeezing the air out of his lungs. The baby in the next apartment stopped crying.

Blood from the severed carotid artery saturated the floor of the bedroom. Pieces of skull dotted the wall next to the window. The paramedics arriving on the scene told him Ramirez died instantly.

That's what Pete Fanning was thinking of on Monday, five days later, when he rear-ended Teddy's SUV.

Chapter 1

Monday, May 27

“Jesus, Pete, where the hell was your head? Didn’t you see the damn car?” These were the questions he knew his wife, Anne, would fire at him. The only thing he’d be able to say would be, “Well, yeah, I guess I did, but what the hell, how often do you shoot and kill someone? I mean, as much as I was trying to put thoughts of that nightmare behind me, that’s where my mind was, not on my driving where it should have been.”

Fanning had been tailgating an SUV down the on-ramp to the Grand Central Parkway. He neared the end and tossed a quick look over his shoulder to check the oncoming traffic. The approaching right lane was clear. He hit the gas pedal hard, thinking the SUV had moved out. The impact seemed disconnected, like watching a movie. He heard the sounds of crunching metal and breaking glass, but off in the distance. Fanning sat dazed for several seconds before he realized his car had stopped. When he refocused, he saw a hulking figure coming toward him, bent over like an NFL running back breaking toward a hole opening in the line. Instead of a football, he held a two-foot long metal pipe.

For the second time within five days, Fanning went for his duty weapon. This time it was not in his shoulder holster strapped under his arm. It was beneath his tan windbreaker on the seat next to him. He

reached for it, stepped out and shoved the barrel of his 9mm Glock into the face of his road-rage attacker. "Police. Don't move!"

The man raised the pipe. Now he was the quarterback with a wide receiver in his sights. He saw the gun pointed at his head and froze. Wide-set eyes stared out over a flat nose, not in fear but in frustration. He was a boiling pot ready to explode. Fanning had locked a lid over him.

The man's dark complexion made Fanning think he might be a Latino, or maybe from the Middle East. Not certain he understood English, Fanning mouthed his words with a slow exaggeration. "Slowly lower your arm. Do it now!" The arm stayed suspended. "You understand what I'm saying?" No answer. Instead, the hulk rolled his eyes as Fanning's teenage son, Luke, did when his mother caught him sneaking out the back door after dinner without finishing the dishes. The big arm came down.

"Place the pipe on the ground. Do it now!"

He obeyed immediately, laying it on the pitched roadway. It tumbled to the curb.

"Now step back five feet." The man hesitated but when Fanning shouted, "Now!" he responded.

The man was big, easily two-thirty, maybe two-forty, with a broad neck, tree trunks for arms and a huge head of black curly hair that crept down over his wide brow like a sprig of ivy. He wore athletic sneakers, faded jeans and a clean, white tee shirt with Mickey Mouse painted across his expansive chest like a mural on a small wall. Weight lifter, Fanning guessed.

The parkway traffic motored noisily past, ignoring them. Fanning wondered if he could control the guy until he got a squad car there. At age forty and 175 pounds, he was still in fit condition, his five-foot, eleven-inch compact body kept in shape by regular workouts at the local YMCA. Yet he doubted he would have a shot against the moose in front of him, who was nearly half again his weight.

"Step over to the curb and sit down," Fanning commanded. The hulk inched backward toward the curb, sat down on the grass and folded his arms around his legs. Fanning punched in 9-1-1 on his cell phone and waited, his golf shirt sticky with perspiration. "Hey, yeah, this is Detective Sergeant Pete Fanning from Queens Narcotics . . ."

He completed his call and said to his attacker, "Unless you want me to cuff you, you'll sit there quietly." The man nodded and lowered his forehead to his knees.

Fanning strapped on his holster, keeping the flap unhooked. He picked up the pipe, surprised by its cool, smooth texture. The polished finish said it was new. He laid it on the back seat of his car and slipped into his windbreaker. Examining the two vehicles, he was amazed to see how little damage he had done to the man's mid-sized SUV. The left front headlight unit of his Ford Taurus was a jagged mass of chrome and glass. The fender, crushed against the tire, could be pulled free with a little well-placed leverage. He had drifted to the right just before he whacked the well-protected rear bumper of the SUV.

Fanning looked back at the hunched-over figure. "Hey, looks like I got the worst of it."

"Shoulda let you shoot me." The sound came from between the man's knees.

"How's that?" Fanning took several steps toward him and stopped when he looked up.

"I said . . . aah, the hell with it. Never mind." The big man lowered his head again.

Fanning waited while an American Airlines jet from nearby La Guardia Airport roared upward, climbing into a bank of low-hanging clouds. It passed over them, so close he could smell the jet fuel. When he could hear himself again, he said, "No, tell me. You say I should have shot you?"

"Yeah, that's what I said," the hulk mumbled from between his knees. "Thought you were somebody else. Just forget it." His voice was weak, but he had no language problem.

"Shoot you? Why, man? You that determined to die?" He moved closer and picked up a musky scent of aftershave. "Why would you want to die?" Fanning asked again.

The hulk raised his head, reached behind and started to push up. Fanning's hand went to his holstered weapon under his windbreaker. "Don't move! Stay right there."

Sliding back down, the man wrapped his arms around his knees and lowered his head. Fanning had moved to his weapon to show he was not playing games. He considered what might have happened if it hadn't worked. Any attempt to take that huge body down by physical force would be laughable.

When the man looked up, his eyes were watery. He tried speaking, but his heavy breathing choked back his words. He stopped, swallowed hard and started again.

"What do I have to live for? Since nine-eleven, my life has been a disaster. Lost my job, my two kids have been going through all sorts of hell at school, my wife's been called everything from a whore to God knows what, and by people we've known for years."

"Hey, you an Afghan?" It came out sounding as if he had asked him if he was a wizard.

"No way, man. I'm Indian. My family's from Delhi. Been here since '58. So's my wife's family. We both grew up in Brooklyn. Went to Brooklyn Tech."

Fanning remembered Tech was a high school well known for its powerhouse football program in the New York City area. He eyed his size again. "You play football there?" He noticed his breathing had slowed.

"Yeah. Made All-City, too, like anyone gives diddly-shit these days."

Fanning thought of his friend, Mike Allen, who, as an outstanding linebacker on their high school football team, had also made All-City. "What's your name?"

"Teddy. Teddy Vijay."

Fanning looked at him with a puzzled expression. "How'd you get that name? Teddy's not an Indian name, is it?"

"No. My given name is Teji Mahmud, after an Indian squash champion my folks liked. I changed it in high school to Teddy."

"Good move, man. Teji Mahmud doesn't sound like someone who could rip a person's head off on a football field." Fanning laughed then shot a look at Teddy. He was smiling. That's when he figured the potential for more trouble had eased. Still, he wished someone from the One-ten Precinct would show up soon.

"You a New Yorker?" Teddy asked.

The question surprised him. Once someone heard him speak, he could not imagine anyone taking him for anything but a New Yorker.

"Yeah, of course."

"Well, so am I. Born here," Teddy shot back. Then he asked, "How long you been a cop?"

It began to sound like an interview. Fanning had his fill of questions recently, from Internal Affairs after shooting the drug dealer, and now from Teddy. However, continuing a dialogue with the man just might keep things cool for a while.

Fanning ran his fingers through his prematurely iron-gray hair. "Fifteen years, Teddy, but if my life doesn't stop being threatened like it has been this past week, I might not get to retirement."

"Your life threatened? By who?"

"You mean, besides you? Some dirt-bag drug dealer up in the Bronx last week tried to take me out. First time in fifteen years on The Job, I had to shoot someone.

"The first time?"

"Yeah. Oh, I'd fired my weapon before, never at anyone. Gave me one hell of a scare . . . you know . . . seeing his gun pointing at me. I was lucky to get my shot off first."

"How'd you feel about taking someone's life?"

Fanning didn't have to think long. The image of bullets smashing into the drug dealer's head and neck, shattering his skull and severing the carotid artery, haunted him. The EMS technician told him Ramirez died instantly, but that provided little relief.

"Not too hot. I decided to take these next two weeks off to get through the trauma." He looked around at their two vehicles. "This is a hell of a way to start my vacation."

"Killing him was justified, wasn't it? It was you or him."

"The guy was garbage. Kind of what they got trashing the streets of Baghdad these days. No one's gonna miss him. Still, it's not easy taking someone's life."

"But that's part of being a cop, isn't it?"

"Right, but it's the one part I struggle with. I happen to believe life is precious, but if someone can't respect yours, he doesn't deserve to keep his."

He noticed Teddy winced. Was he going to say something? Maybe apologize for attacking him today. He just said, "I wasn't going to kill you."

"Yeah? Well, you could have fooled me."

"No, honestly, I just wanted to hurt you."

"So trying to do that, you were willing to be charged with assaulting a police officer with a deadly weapon?"

"I didn't know you were a cop."

Fanning grinned. "What's the difference? It's still assault with a deadly weapon."

"I lost it. You rammed me. All I could think was you did it intentionally . . . another guy using me as a scapegoat . . . again. I exploded. I decided no more crap from anyone."

"And that's why you came at me with the pipe? A little over the top, wasn't it?"

Teddy shrugged. His enormous shoulders touched the bottom of his earlobes. "Yeah, I know. The fall-out from nine-eleven . . . it's driven me nuts . . . destroying my life, my family. I can't handle it."

"How come you lost your job?"

"Same bullshit. Several big contracts cancelled because of the Iraq war. Said they couldn't afford to keep on two computer programmers. One troubleshooter had to go. I was it. I know it was more about me being a Muslim."

"That's rough," Fanning said. "You're not the only one hurting from the fall-out. There's the families of the three-thousand-plus who lost their lives. That includes my kid brother."

"He was in the World Trade Center?"

"A firefighter trying to save lives until the south tower folded on him."

"I'm sorry. How old was he?"

"Twenty-six. On The Job four years."

Damn! Fanning thought. This bozo just tried to take my head off. Now he has me talking about my brother. Gerry called that *taking the air out of the fire*. His life was all about firefighting. "Jeez, Pete, I'm sorry," Gerry had said after passing the NYFD test. "I feel guilty not following you but you know me and firefighting." Fanning was relieved. No need for both of them putting their asses on the line every day. One ass in the family was enough. Yeah, sure.

Teddy started to stand. "How about you? You blame everyone from that part of the world?"

Fanning's hand went back under his windbreaker. "Hold it there, Teddy. I told you to stay put. If you move again, I'm going to cuff you. Don't test me."

Teddy lowered his large frame. "Sorry, man. It's hard to sit still and talk about it."

Fanning understood. Thinking of his brother going down with the south tower drove him wild. When it happened, he wanted to nuke the whole Middle East. It was weeks before he could discuss it with his wife

without shouting. "It's the one time," he told Anne, "I can justify the idea of seeking revenge."

Fanning studied the large man. "Well, you better get past those feelings soon, Teddy, or you'll end up in worse trouble, like killing someone. That would fix it for your wife and kids."

Teddy sat still for several seconds. He sucked in a large supply of air, and the ears of Mickey Mouse inflated. When he exhaled, he started to shake. Fanning suspected his road rage behavior was not the norm for him. Coming eyeball-to-gun barrel with his service weapon certainly woke the guy up if it didn't scare the hell out of him.

Teddy asked again, "Are you holding me responsible, like everyone else, because I'm from that part of the world?"

"Hey, man, hard not to lump all you towel-heads together, don't you think?"

The towel-head crack slipped out before he could check himself. He was losing patience with Teddy's whining. Teddy showed no sign he had heard it so Fanning continued. "Those terrorists flying the planes . . . aren't they from a lot of different countries?"

"Yes . . . I mean, no . . . that is, they aren't sure where they came from." Teddy shook his head, beginning to become more animated. "Some had stolen Saudi ID's. You know that? Later the real Saudis, whose ID's they stole, turned up."

"Yeah, but don't forget, the al-Qaeda are Arabs, Pakistanis, Iraqis and Kuwaitis. They're from all of those countries, not just from Afghanistan. And some of those captured in Afghanistan turned out to be from Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and a few of those other stan-countries that seem to have an axe to grind with the US."

"Correct. However, no one from India. You get my point?"

He was right. Fanning remembered the NYPD profiling problems with African-Americans. "Well, apparently we have a tough time telling one Mid-East country from another."

"India is not a Mid-East country. It's in South Asia."

When Teddy said it, Fanning realized he had indeed been lumping together all the nations of that part of the world, holding them responsible for his brother's death—not just the Egyptian, Mohammed Atta, and his band of scumbags.

"So, Teddy, aren't India and Pakistan ready to nuke each other to hell and back with their own disputes? Maybe take the rest of South Asia and the Middle East with them?"

"That's not going to happen."

"You know what worries me? Maybe Nostradamus got it right. The end of the world is going to start with the crazies in the Middle East."

"Come on, man. Osama bin Laden isn't the only crazy one in that area. But remember, Islam's fanatical jihad has nothing to do with India."

"Well, you better hope their nuttiness isn't catching. Nothing justifies the use of nukes by India or Pakistan, or the use of pipes, for that matter. Now, you get my point?"

"No argument from me. I think you know how sorry I am."

His look said he meant it. Fanning could tell. Teddy wasn't some low-life dope dealer apologizing as he's being locked up for selling crack in the schoolyard. The nine-eleven fallout had pushed him to the end of his patience. Rear-ending him became the ultimate insult.

"Yeah, well, what the hell were you doing with that pipe in your car, anyway? Driving around with a two-foot metal pipe . . . hey, that can be considered carrying a concealed weapon, you know. The way you tried to use it today qualifies as a certain nuttiness, doesn't it?"

Once again, Teddy attempted to stand. "Did you look in the back of my SUV?"

"Stay sitting, Teddy," Fanning ordered.

Teddy settled back down. "I wanted to show you the box on the back seat, that's all."

"I noticed the box before, while looking over the damage. What's in it?"

"I was coming from Forest Hills Plumbing Supplies when all this happened," he said. He motioned to the damaged vehicles. "I'm converting a walk-in-closet into a second bathroom. The box is full of pipes and sink fixtures."

"Show me," Fanning said. He decided at this point that Teddy wasn't a flight risk.

Teddy rose up and Fanning trailed behind him to the SUV. A long line of vehicles had formed along the entrance ramp. One by one, they edged past the two vehicles parked to the side, each car patiently feeding out onto the parkway.

"Watch yourself," Fanning warned as they came up to the vehicle. "Stay on this side. And don't touch the door, Teddy. I can see okay through the window."

He could see the logo of Forest Hills Plumbing Supplies, visible on the side of the long packing box that rested on the rear seat. The top flaps were open, left that way after Teddy had reached in to grab the section of pipe he brandished when he came at Fanning.

"Still think I carried the pipe to use as a weapon?"

Before Fanning could reply, the flashing dome light of the squad car cut him off. It pulled out from behind the line of crawling cars and onto the grass. Two police officers jumped out holding their weapons.

"It's okay," Fanning called out, "put 'em away. Everything's under control."

The two police officers around the same age as his brother, Gerry, looked at Teddy, taking in his size and ethnicity. Fanning could see the questions coming. He remembered his towel-head remark and cringed.

"You okay, Detective? We were told you'd been attacked."

"I'm fine, boys. The 9-1-1 dispatcher must have misunderstood. Nothing more than a little old fender-bender. My fault. Too quick on the gas pedal."

"Nobody hurt?"

"Nobody. In fact, we've been here shootin' the breeze the whole while. We haven't exchanged driver and insurance info yet. Give us a few minutes. After, you can make your report. Then Teddy here can help me pull my fender off the wheel so I can drive it. Right, Teddy?"

Chapter 2

Seamus Slattery raised his eyes to watch. At the end of the long bar, the insistent ringing noise of the pay phone demanded the attention of an old man like an annoying mosquito. The phone hung on the wall outside the men's room door not three steps away. Slattery smiled, enjoying the way the man's head swiveled with indecision.

The telephone almost never rang, at least not while the old guy was there, which Slattery knew was practically every day. The Irish pub was a second home to many dockworkers who worked the Hudson piers in the Hell's Kitchen section of Manhattan. Everyone knew one another, bought each other beers and told endless stories about their grandkids. They returned daily to occupy the same bar stool as though their names were engraved on it.

The man continued listening to the pestering sound. He threw several looks down the length of the bar filled with other regulars. No one moved. With a slow resignation, he slid down from his stool, shuffled over to the black box and snatched up the receiver.

"Milligan's, wadda ya want?" He listened for a second and looked toward the far end of the bar. "Slattery . . . boyo . . . telephone's for ya," he yelled above the ambient elements of masculine voices and rising trails of cigarette smoke.

Colin Flynn turned toward his companion. "You expecting a call, Seamus?"

"Yeah, but I thought it was gonna be on my cell. Khalid misplaced my number again . . . the twat." Slattery looked at his watch and shrugged.

Slipping from his seat, he said, "Well, least he's callin' when he said he would." He turned and limped toward the rear of the pub and the waiting telephone.

He returned after several minutes. Climbing onto his stool, he lifted his Guinness and swallowed the remainder of the dark ruby liquid. Flynn had fixed his gaze on him as though he expected a report on the phone call. Slattery set his glass on the bar and looked at his watch again. "Gotta meet Masab in two hours. He's delivering the Arabs' contribution Khalid promised. I'll be dropping it off with Tommy on my way home."

"Jesus, Seamus, I wished we didn't..."

"I know, I know, you've beaten that tune to death, Collie. We've no choice, as I see it."

"But..."

"Colin, damn it! Listen to me. When you and your brother, Tommy, were soliciting funds here to support our cause back in Belfast, before that feekin' treaty, we could count on a steady flow of cash from our good people in the States. Now we're on our own. Those sources, you know, all but dried up . . . skittish about contributing. We can't be choosers, can we, fella?"

"If the Westies were still around, wouldn't need the help of those damn Arabs, now would we? Be a walk in the park for the likes of Jimmy Coonan and Mickey Featherstone, them runnin' things around here."

"Well, they're not around anymore, so it's up to us." Slattery said, trying to restrain his anger with his friend's impatience and lack of understanding.

For the next few seconds, Flynn shuffled several Guinness bar coasters in front of him. He looked like a Three-Card Monte dealer. Slattery listened to the rumbling sounds from two heavy trucks making their way down Eleventh Avenue toward the Holland Tunnel. Their air brakes punctuated their noisy arrival at the red light on the corner.

Slattery blinked then shot an appraising look at Flynn. His friend's wrinkled brow gave the impression that he'd gotten a whiff of a bad smell. "What's the matter?" Slattery asked.

"I just don't trust those damned Bedouins. They'd murder their own mothers if push came to shove. Sorry, but I still see those flailing bodies on their way down from the top floors of the Trade Tower. I get the willies every time we have to meet with them in their damn mosque."

Slattery frowned. "Come on, Collie, this'll be over soon. Twelve more days. Besides, they need us as much as we need them." He gestured to the bartender and slid his glass forward. "Give 'em another too, Paddy. He could do with a bit of cooling down," he said. He let out a chortle.

"Shit!" was all Flynn could add.

Slattery continued speaking. "Understand this, Colin, you getting that maintenance job at the racetrack three months ago was like finding the key to the Arabs' vault. We'd not be able to pull this off without their financing, and it's a sure wager they couldn't get by the gate on their own. And then wouldn't bin Laden be disappointed?" Paddy returned and placed two brimming glasses of Guinness on fresh napkins in front of them. "Thanks, Paddy. Next jar's on him."

The bar man moved away, and Slattery turned toward Flynn, playfully punching him in the shoulder. "Let's not forget the hundred fifty-thousand donation they're makin' to our account. Let it be, lad."

They fell silent, taking time to sip their brews. Slattery took in the collegial surroundings of this pre-prohibition dated tavern, a landmark on Manhattan's west side. During the IRA's heyday in Northern Ireland, he remembered that many a fugitive looking for temporary sanctuary had found his way to this establishment. Hell's Kitchen, once a bastion of poor and working-class Irish-Americans, had undergone tremendous gentrification over the past three decades because of its proximity to midtown. The patrons of Milligan's, nevertheless, had a long history of support for the cause of the IRA, despite the waning fervor among others since the treaty of 1998.

"What time you meeting him?" Flynn asked, breaking into the Irishman's reverie.

"Between seven-fifteen and seven-thirty, at the Vernon-Jackson Station," Slattery checked his watch again. "Best be on my way no later than six. Don't know how quick I'll get a cross-town bus to Times Square. They don't appear to keep to a consistent schedule."

"Khalid gonna have the chemicals together and mixed in time for Pearse to build and wire it?"

"I hope so, though I don't think Pearse will need a whole lotta time. He's such a feekin' genius at bomb makin'."

* * *

Mike Allen entered the subway at Times Square on his way home from work. He swiped his transit card across the reader and pushed his

large frame through the subway turnstile. The man at the next turnstile spun through and made a sharp left, crossing into Allen's path, causing him to pull up. He scowled at the man and watched him limp toward the stairway down to the Queens-bound train platform. "Shithead," Allen grumbled. He followed him to the stairs.

Allen had gotten a good look at the man's face. He was certain he had seen this rude stranger before. But where? Nothing leaped out at him. He wondered if the queasiness in the pit of his stomach had something to do with it. Maybe he was just another commuter, someone he'd noticed in the subway during his nightly travels home. They were going in the same direction, weren't they . . . to Queens . . . taking the same train?

He watched the man hobble along the platform, darting looks back into the dark tunnel, in the direction from where the Number 7 train would be coming. He stopped mid-way, leaning out over the edge, shifting his weight from one foot to the other like an expectant father.

Allen walked to within a few yards and stopped. Well, shit, we're both waiting for the same Flushing Line train, he thought again. Yeah, that's why he looks familiar, expecting this reasoning to resolve the familiarity question and relieve his queasiness. Instead, he continued to struggle with the man's image. Suddenly, a vision came into focus. He stiffened. Good God, it couldn't be, he thought. Ten years later? Impossible! Yet . . .

Allen slipped out his wallet and removed the folded *New York Times* article, examining the photo of the terrorist. He turned his attention to the stranger standing a few yards away and without hesitation, tossed out any thoughts of it being the same person in the photo. The left hand of the man on the platform lacked two fingers at the knuckles.

He was guilty again of ghostly imaginings, a habit he had fallen into since the bombing ten years ago. He felt his heartbeat slowing. He pushed the stranger out of his mind while thoughts of his wife's tragic death flooded in.

Allen studied the ten-year-old, tattered *Times* article, bringing it up to his face in the dim light of the subway platform. The small photograph of the IRA terrorist buried amid the painful text caused him to wince as he absorbed the Irishman's impudent expression. The man in the photo wore his hair cropped short, military-style. A sharply carved jaw jutted forward like the prow of an old sailing ship, supporting an angry mouth that turned down at the ends. Pencil-thin eyebrows and pointy ears seemed at odds with the flat nose buttered across his face, giving the impression

of a pug with a losing record. Hatred burned unchecked in the charred cavities of his eyes while a soft wool peak cap dangled arrogantly on the end of the middle finger of his left hand, a *fuck you* expression for his English enemies. He looked to be in his late thirties. The caption identified him as Seamus Slattery, an IRA soldier, the leader of the Belfast group responsible for the bombings at the railway stations in London.

Again, Allen tried to glean some sense from the senseless act. How in God's name can someone intentionally kill innocent civilians and call himself a soldier? Some day he'd like to ask that of Seamus Slattery.

He pressed his bulky frame against the graffiti-covered steel post at the edge of the platform. His forty-year-old blue eyes strained under the low-level glow of the neon fixtures above him, lights that lined the full length of the steamy subway platform. In what must have been his two hundredth reading, he had all but memorized each tormenting word.

"For the first time in more than seven years, the group has inflicted casualties among ordinary civilians in England . . ."

The vein in his left temple pulsed. Those God-damn sons-a-bitches! Forty wounded, six dead. For what? What the hell did it accomplish? He'd asked himself that question over and over.

"Mikey, why keep tormenting yourself?" Pete Fanning asked the last time they shared a pitcher of beer. "Throw the clipping away. All you're doing is keeping the anger alive. What for? It's not going to bring back Kathy."

Allen didn't want to hear his best friend's well-meant advice. Strangling the life out of Seamus Slattery would satisfy his need for revenge. Only then would the Atlas-like burden he carried for allowing his wife to travel to England without him, be eased—but never relieved. He continued reading.

"The bombs that rocked two central London railroad stations on Monday appear to signal a change of tactics by the Irish Republican Army . . ."

Allen had spent the last ten years trying to put the shattered pieces of his life back together. He struggled with it every waking hour, trying to understand why it happened.

The Number 7 train rumbled into the Times Square station, the final stop in Manhattan. He refolded the page along its well-defined creases and slipped the clipping back into his sweaty leather billfold before shoving it into the hip pocket of his black gabardine trousers. He watched the stranger sideslipping back and forth, anticipating where the doors would

open. Allen had no such problem. He knew from years of commuting where to stand.

The car's double doors opened in front of him. Allen moved his six-two, linebacker frame to one side, making room for the exiting passengers. A wave of coolness washed over him as he strode inside the empty air-conditioned car. He slid across a seat to the window end, curled his back into the molded form, and propped his elbow on the dusty window ledge.

The limping stranger entered the same car through the next set of doors. He stood, gripping the pole in the foyer area. Soon the train would reverse direction for the fifty-five minute trip across Manhattan, under the East River, then through the populated neighborhoods of Queens, past Shea Stadium and into the Flushing Main Street station, the end of the line. Within minutes, it would reverse its monotonous circuit back to Manhattan.

The collected perspiration beading on Allen's wide forehead evaporated fast. He removed the black clip-on bow tie he wore at his bartending job and put it in his pocket. The damp underarms of his white dress shirt, unbuttoned at the collar, made him shiver in the cooler air. During the trip across Manhattan, the empty car would take on passengers until it filled. It would remain crowded until it reached the Jackson Heights station, where he would get off, descend to the street below and walk the six blocks to his house—a routine he followed every evening.

The train pulled from the station. Allen slumped to one side, peering out the dirty window into the tunnel's murkiness. Lighted arched stanchions rhythmically whipped past, each glowing torch reflecting on the cold glass that supported his head. Why did I give in to Kathy's Celtic stubbornness, he thought, agreeing to let her go on ahead? "Can't you wait?" he had argued. "I mean, my vacation begins next week. We can fly over together then."

"But I'll miss the christening if I wait," she insisted. "Mike, it's my sister's first child. It's important that I'm there."

He thought again of Kathy's train trip from Maidenhead into London's shopping district to shop for a christening present. A birth and a death—the connection always drew pain. She had no doubt taken a moment to freshen up after the long ride. The two bombs exploded in sequence, two minutes apart. The first went off in the lost package area at Victoria Station and the other at the Paddington Station in the ladies room

where they found Kathy's body. Scotland Yard assured him that her death had been instantaneous, as if he might find solace in that fact.

Allen ignored the rush for the remaining seats by those boarding at Grand Central, the last station in Manhattan. The doors closed, and the train lurched into motion, embarking on the six-minute crossing under the East River to Queens. The stranger remained standing, his head swiveling side to side.

Vernon/Jackson, the first station on the Queens side of the river, was located in a desolate industrial area. The figure waiting on the platform surprised Allen. He tried to remember the last time he saw anyone get on or off at this station.

The limping stranger let loose of the pole when the train stopped, and he plunged toward the opening doors. With his torso halfway out, he beckoned to the man on the platform who had been scanning the cars. The man spotted the waving friend and boarded the car before the doors snapped closed behind him. With little formality, he nodded and handed the stranger a brown envelope.

Both men moved toward seats across the aisle from Allen. The limping one stumbled when the train lurched into motion. His foot came down on the instep of a man in an adjacent seat. The rider jerked back his leg, his face registering anger when the offending stranger offered no apology. Turning away in disgusted resignation, the rider went back to his newspaper. The incident went unnoticed by most of the passengers.

Allen, unaware he had been staring, was surprised when a challenging voice confronted him. "And what would ya be lookin' at? Do ya think you might have a problem or somethin'?"

It was the unmistakable Irish lilt, not the words, that caught Allen's attention. "Excuse me. Are you talking to me?" His voice was calm.

"I was asking why ya staring? Ya haven't stopped since I came aboard. You know me?" The scowl and tone were hard to miss. "Do I look familiar?" The voice had grown louder and angrier. When he spoke, he flashed his yellowed, cigarette-stained teeth and fleshy gums.

The surrounding passengers sneaked looks, newspaper pages flipped noisily, and feet shuffled on the car's surface.

The Irishman waited for a reply.

Allen, alerted by the challenge, scrutinized the two men as though he was seeing them for the first time. The Irishman's disheveled appearance—his baggy, European-style slacks, Nike running shoes, dark,

short-sleeve shirt unbuttoned at the neck, his narrow, soiled red tie with the knot pulled down for relief from the heat—made him ordinary and unimposing. He held the delivered brown folder on his lap, secured by a left hand with two missing fingers.

The new arrival with a swarthy complexion and dark hair wore a buttoned and pressed business suit over a white dress shirt and dark tie. The contrast of attire was glaring. Except for the antagonistic demeanor of his questioner, Allen would have paid them little attention.

He ignored the man's question, turning toward the window and closing his eyes. When he opened them, he looked out into the tunnel's darkness. The Irishman's reflection filled his window from across the aisle. He watched him bending in toward his companion, talking in a low voice, resigned to having cowered Allen into silence.

Mike Allen never backed off from a fight, but a dumb confrontation like this, he decided, was not going to provoke him into doing something foolish. The Irishman was an asshole.

The train left the Hunters Point Station. Allen continued to study the Irishman through the window's reflection until the train emerged into daylight and washed out his image. Once in the open, the train began its gradual ascent to travel elevated over the crowded neighborhoods of Queens. The queasiness he had felt earlier returned.

It was a warm, late May summer evening with the sky losing light rapidly. Visibility waned and dark shadows would accompany his walk home under the arcing glow of the overhead white street lamps.

The Irishman still bothered him. Allen turned his attention to the series of large outdoor advertising billboards cruising past his window, some rising from the street below, others plastered to the sides of multi-storied commercial buildings or mounted on their rooftops.

FLY AMERICAN—SCHICK BLADES SHAVE CLOSER THAN EVER—DKNY IS NEW YORK— FUN-FILLED JAMAICAN HOLIDAYS.

He read each word, eyeing their accompanying visuals with mild interest.

CATS, THE MUSICAL TO SEE—AVIS TRIES HARDER—THE NEW YORK TIMES COVERS IT ALL.

As *The New York Times* billboard zipped past, Allen jerked his head rearward, his eyes locked onto the poster until it was out of sight. For a second time, his jogged memory exploded, except this time it had him sucking breath like a child trying to avoid discovery in a game of hide-and-

seek. His hand went again to his billfold, stopping when he realized the Irishman had paused in his conversation and looked in Allen's direction.

Two passengers standing in the aisle edged sideways between the Irishman and Allen in preparation for detraining at the Queensboro Plaza Station. When they cleared out, he saw the darker man stand up and make his way toward the middle doors. The train slowed, and Allen's pulse quickened. He watched to see if the Irishman would also get up. Instead, he remained seated and head-bobbed a farewell to his departing companion.

Commuters transferring to the Flushing Line crowded the express platform. The train stopped, and the doors opened. Those exiting riders switching to the Astoria Line muscled their way out of the car through the maze of impatient passengers boarding. Moments later, newcomers filled every vacated seat. Those too slow in boarding jammed the aisles, left standing to read the car-card ads above their heads. Allen could see the Irishman's legs and feet through the forest of standing riders. His face was no longer visible as the train left the station.

Allen reached for his billfold, removed the *Times* clipping, unfolding it to re-examine the picture of Seamus Slattery. He scrutinized the ten-year-old photo, trying to imagine how the years might have transformed the terrorist. His military haircut, now gone and replaced by a full head of tangled graying hair, was the most apparent difference. The jutting jaw and pointy ears were still in evidence. Allen pictured the man's earlier angry look when he had accused him of staring. He projected it alongside of the arrogant expression in the photo where the terrorist dangled his wool cap on the now missing tip of the middle finger of the left hand.

He was convinced of the strong resemblance, despite the absent digits. The reality of this chance encounter astonished him. How could an IRA terrorist be riding a New York City subway unchallenged? He came off as any working stiff on his way home. Allen fought back denial, wanting to believe it was Seamus Slattery. He refolded the article. What should I do? If it's him and he gets away, I'll be sorry for the rest of my life.

At the Bliss Street Station, Allen watched the half-dozen young recruits from the area's Police Academy, dressed in gray and blue student uniforms, board the car and cluster at one end. He often ran into these rookies, always picturing himself among them, imagining what his life would be like if he had been accepted fifteen years ago. He scored well, above the norm on the written exam in fact, and made a joke of the

physical agility test. The slight heart murmur detected during his medical exam, however, had prevented him from joining that rookie class with his friend, Pete.

Over the next several station stops, passengers exited the car with practiced speed until Allen could again see the Irishman's face through the thinning crowd. Familiar landmarks passed his window. He could see street lamps coming alive, the setting sun disappearing behind the mountain range of apartment buildings in the distance, and in the western sky, a jet airliner winking its lights turned into its final flight path toward nearby La Guardia Airport.

His chest felt heavy. He began to sweat again. Was he being rational? Was he trying to wish this bizarre chance encounter true?

The train slid into the Woodside Station, and the Irishman stood. Without looking in Allen's direction, he limped to the door in front of several other departing riders. In an instant, Allen decided. He jumped to his feet before the closing doors could shut him off from the terrorist forever, and darted out onto the platform. A small wall of slow shuffling people formed in front of him. He hung back as they headed for the down staircase and followed at a safe distance.

At the change-booth level, the Irishman turned left and went down the next flight of stairs to the street. Allen raced to the open stairs on the opposite side, careful not to lose sight of the man. At the base of the steps, he peered across the wide span of Roosevelt Avenue and watched the man stop at a newspaper stand nestled under the staircase. When the Irishman stepped away, Allen noticed the brown folder tucked under his arm was gone. A newspaper had replaced it.

The man hurried along Roosevelt Avenue and disappeared around the corner. Allen crossed the avenue, melting into the shadows on the opposite side. He followed down the tree-lined residential street, careful to use the large, full-leafed oak trees and bumper-to-bumper parked automobiles as a cover. It was not difficult keeping the Irishman in view as that hour produced little foot traffic. Most residents had already arrived home.

The quiet Woodside residential neighborhood developed into a mixture of six-story, pre-war apartment buildings and rows of red brick, two-family homes, not unlike the one he owned in Jackson Heights. A narrow driveway to a rear garage separated each home. Like sentries for

the two-family homes, the tall apartment buildings framed the ends of each street.

Irish residents had populated Woodside in droves over the last twenty years, many of them recent immigrants settling with or near relatives already established in the area. Heavily Irish and heavily Catholic, he thought. A logical safe haven for a Seamus Slattery.

The headlights of an oncoming car created a flood of broken shadows among the trees, causing a brief whiteout. The car passed. He picked out the form of the man as he turned to go up the two steps to the doorway of a house. Allen stopped behind a wide oak, trying to shrink his large body. He watched as the Irishman fumbled with his door key. Lights glowed through the downstairs windows. The second floor was dark. The man went in, closed the door. Moments later, Allen saw the upstairs lights go on.

* * *

It was nearing midnight when Pete Fanning joined his wife, Anne, in bed. Ten minutes later the ringing phone broke through the sound of the TV, muffling the punch line of a joke Jay Leno was telling about Teddy Kennedy. He looked toward Anne, who had already curled up on her side, and then at the lighted digital clock on the nightstand, before hitting the remote's mute button.

Picking up the phone, he said in a low voice, "Hello."

"Pete, Mike. Sorry to bother you guys this late, but I need to talk to you about something."

"Sure, Mike. Anything wrong?"

"Huh, uh . . . no. Nothing's wrong. Just need to ask you something."

"Hold on," Fanning said, switching the phone to his other hand in order to turn away from Anne. She had pushed herself upright, plumping the pillow behind her. "Mikey, what's up?"

"I need to talk to you. Can you come by the restaurant tomorrow night after my shift?"

Fanning had become accustomed to Allen's growing seriousness over the last few years. He tended to make large the most insignificant matters. Fanning had learned not to play into it.

"Sure, pal."

"I'm off at seven, so come by a few minutes before. You're not working, are you? Didn't you tell me you were taking the next two weeks off from work?"

"Vacation . . . starting yesterday. But it didn't begin quite the way I expected." He started to go into the story of his fender-bender, but he saw the irritated expression on Anne's face when he turned toward her, a clear signal to cut the conversation short. He winked. "I'll tell you when I see you," he said to Allen. "Should we plan on having dinner there?"

"Yeah, if it's okay with Anne. I'd say bring her along, but I need to talk to you alone."

"Okay, Mikey, see you around seven."

Chapter 3

Tuesday, May 28

Pete Fanning pulled on his Yankees cap and stood watching the starting nine of Forest Hills Junior High School shagging flies and fielding grounders. He remained standing until he caught his son's eye and waved. Luke raised his glove to ear level and wiggled it, trying to be cool with his greeting, as though it was an ordinary event to have his father sitting in the stands.

Yesterday, Luke had announced at dinner the coach had decided to let him start at first base the next day, the last game of the season. As the youngest eighth grader to make the squad and used sparingly as a pinch hitter or pinch runner all season, Luke exploded with excitement.

"What do you think, Dad, can you come? It starts at three. Can you . . . can you?"

His son's Opie-like innocence was pure joy to him. "Buddy boy, I'll be there. I promise."

Sitting down, he pulled up the sleeves of his sweatshirt, propped his elbows against the worn, wooden step of the tier behind, tilted his face skyward toward the warm rays of the late afternoon sun and smiled. Finally, he would enjoy seeing his son play ball.

Fanning thought of the many times he'd wished his own father had felt that way. If he had, he might have witnessed his own teenage son gracefully pulling down long fly balls hit to center field, where the high

school senior covered the acreage better than any center fielder in the recent history of Bryant High School. At least that's what the coach told him when he announced that a major league scout was going to be in the stands the day of the final city championship game. The scout saw him but his father never did.

Forest Hills won. The final score was twelve to seven. Luke made one throwing error. Nerves, Fanning thought, but he was near perfect fielding his position. He batted at the bottom of the order, had a single, walked once and struck out once. One for three—not a bad day for a seven-inning game. He knew Luke would get better, his arm stronger.

They hugged after the final out and walked together to the parking lot with Luke waving to his teammates. "Good game, Frankie. Way to go, Terry. See you tomorrow."

Fanning moved the Taurus into traffic and looked over at his son's face. It radiated with pride.

"I'm glad you came today, Dad."

"I am too. I wish I could do it more often. It's difficult right now with the assignment I got."

Fanning's thoughts drifted back to the shooting. He pictured the grizzly scene in the drug dealer's apartment. The fallout of the incident had led to this rare opportunity to see his son play ball. At least something good came of it. Thinking aloud, he said, "Tough way to earn time off."

Luke turned toward him with a quizzical look. "You mean shooting that guy?"

The question took Fanning by surprise. He forgot Anne had told Luke the story. He'd become angry with her. It was nothing he felt comfortable sharing with his thirteen-year-old son.

"That's what I mean," Fanning said. "It wasn't something I liked doing."

"But you had to do it, didn't you?"

"Sure. I might not be here if I hadn't."

They rode in silence until they reached their street. Luke spoke up. "Dad, I'm glad you did."

Turning off the engine in the driveway, Fanning reached over, and, wrapping one arm around Luke's shoulder pulling him toward him, he kissed the top of his son's tousled head.

Anne stood at the counter chopping onions into tiny pieces as Fanning and Luke came through the kitchen door. A bowl of diced tomatoes sat

next to another small bowl full of shredded cheese. "So how'd it go?" she asked without turning around.

"We won!" Luke shouted.

Anne wiped her hands across her apron and held out both arms to Luke. The boy rushed into his mother's embrace. When he pulled away, he asked, "What's for dinner?"

"Tacos, your father's favorite, but he's not staying for dinner."

Luke looked back at his father. "You have to go out?"

"Yeah, afraid I do. Mike asked me to meet him after work. It's something important. I couldn't say no. Your mom's punishing me by making tacos."

Luke snickered. He stepped toward the refrigerator. "Mom, okay if I have a Coke?"

"Just one," she said, turning back to her chopping. "You're going to be eating soon."

"While you're at it, bring me one too," Fanning said, taking a seat at the kitchen table. Luke sat down opposite his father, sliding one of the cans across the table.

Anne walked to the table and put her hands on Luke's shoulders. "Why don't you go upstairs, get out of your uniform and wash up. We'll be eating in fifteen minutes." She looked across at Fanning. "You better get ready too or you'll be late."

He remained seated until Luke disappeared up the stairs. "You're not pissed, are you?"

"Pete, you go. Take care of what you have to. You always do that anyway."

"Come on, Anne, what was I supposed to do? Mikey's got something bothering him. He wouldn't have called if it wasn't important."

"You know, Pete, everything seems important to you but your own family."

"That's bullshit! How the hell can you say that?" He got to his feet.

Anne spun around to face him. "How?" she asked. "When was the last time you spent an entire day with Luke and me?"

His arms flew toward the ceiling. "It's my job. I can't help it if it's not a nine to fiver."

"Never mind," she said and turned away.

He knew if he continued the argument, it would end the same way as it always did, a day of painful silence between them. He left the kitchen and took the stairs two at a time.

* * *

Dressed in a casual open-neck shirt and khakis, Fanning arrived at the theater-district restaurant five minutes early. He found Mike Allen braced against the service end of the long oak bar of Frank and Pat's Steak House, waiting for him. His large body blocked the busy wait staff, forcing them to reach around his bulk when picking up drink orders. Fanning slipped onto a vacant stool adjacent to the service bar end. The late shift bartender poured him a Dewar's without asking.

"What's up, Mikey?" Fanning stirred the ice around in the glass.

Allen's unclipped bow tie hung from his shirt collar. His face expressed real concern, not just his everyday heavy look. Fanning had not seen it for a while.

Allen nodded his head. "Let's move to the table back there."

Early diners trying to make their eight o'clock curtains filled the dining room. Pat Ryan, the efficient steak house owner, orchestrated the service from the kitchen. Fanning turned on his stool and looked to the corner where Allen had pointed, to a small, empty table, a two-seater, one of six lining the antiqued brick wall that partitioned the bar section from the dining area. Small Tiffany-style lamps suspended from the ceiling splashed each tabletop with just enough light to create an air of intimacy one would expect of a cozy two-seater.

Fanning laughed. "You know, if I didn't know any better, I'd say you were coming on to me."

Allen made off without replying. Fanning pushed a five-dollar tip across the bar and picked up his scotch. He followed his friend to the table. As soon as they sat down, Allen dropped his bomb. When he completed his narration, he looked up at Fanning for his reaction.

"Are you out of your mind? Millions of Irishmen in New York City, and you think you ran into Seamus Slattery on the goddamned Flushing Line? Jesus, Mikey, you gotta let it go."

He studied Allen's angry face. He'd seen him lose it many times in high school when a classmate pushed too far. Without warning, Allen's pent up anger could explode. He had to be careful. After ten years, Seamus Slattery was still Allen's hot button.

Their friendship went back a long way, over thirty years. They'd become tight as brothers from grade school and throughout high school, graduating and enlisting together in the Army. Both went to Fort Benning, Georgia, for Military Police training. Fanning remained for a year as an MP instructor; Allen shipped out to England, but their closeness resumed after they returned.

The big man continued to simmer, not moving. He looked like an enormous statue of a Buddha Fanning once saw during his tour in the Far East. Seconds passed before he decided it was safe to probe Allen further.

"Okay, tell me again what you did when you left the train."

Allen took a deep breath. "I went down the steps on the other side. I'm certain he never saw me. When I got to the street, I watched him stop off at the newsstand to pick up a paper."

"Probably, *the Irish Echo*." Fanning smiled at his own humor, but Allen's grim face remained.

"I don't know what it was but when he left, he didn't have that damn brown envelope he'd been carrying. At first I thought he'd set it down when he paid for the paper and forgot to pick it up. I waited because I thought he'd come back to get it."

"And he didn't?"

"No, the bastard kept walking down Roosevelt Avenue. When he turned left at the corner of Sixty-first Street, I crossed Roosevelt to the opposite side. I waited until he got fifty yards ahead. I didn't want to get too close."

"How the hell could you see him? It was dark, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, but by then the street lights were on. There was enough light. With his limp, he couldn't walk that fast. There was nobody else around . . ." Allen's voice trailed off when he spotted one of the Cuban busboys coming toward their table.

"*Perdóneme*, Mike, but you guys gonna eat here or you wan me set you up inside?" the young Cuban asked. The kid stood before their table like a rigid soldier awaiting his orders.

"No, *chico*, inside. But not right away, okay? I'll tell you when. And Willie, ask Terry to bring Pete another Dewar's, will you? And me a Bud Light.

"*Si*, Mike, *pronto*."

"*Gracias, amigo*," he said and left.

Listening to Allen addressing the young bus boy, Fanning flashed back to their high school years, remembering that Allen had an easier time in Spanish class than he did. Allen was smart, a good student who scored in the low fifteen hundreds on his SATs. Nevertheless, Fanning knew enough Spanish words now to get his meaning across to those Hispanic drug dealers he encountered.

"Hey, and you never thought Spanish would come in handy after high school," Fanning said.

"Good thing we're not in Cuba. Castro might run me out for murdering the language."

Allen seemed to be loosening up. "So, go on," Fanning urged. "What happened when you followed him? How the hell did you keep your big body from being spotted?"

Allen pushed his chair away from the table. He stretched his long legs, careful not to get them in the way of customers heading toward the restrooms in the back. "That neighborhood's not like Jackson Heights. It has these big, old oak trees. Between them and the parked cars and vans, I had plenty of cover."

"And you watched him go into one of the houses on Sixty-first Street?"

"Yeah. He crossed over the next avenue. The house was midway down that block."

"Well, it's easy enough to find out who lives..."

"I know that," Allen shot back. "But you don't think some shit-for-brains terrorist is going to list his name in the phone book, do you?"

Terry arrived with their drinks, dampening Allen's rising anger. He pulled his long legs in and sat up straight to make room. Terry set the tray down, lifted the Bud Light and Fanning's scotch and placed them on the small table.

"Thanks, Terry," Allen said when the waiter turned to leave. "By the way, how's your audition for that new show going?"

The young man faced them holding the empty tray at his side. One sneaker-foot rested on top of the other, showing off his perfect balance. His broad grin could not hide his appreciation that Allen had asked. "Third call-back tomorrow," he said full of pride. "If I get it, I'll be able to pay my roommate for the back rent."

"You'll get it," Allen said, "and if you don't, there'll always be another show."

"Chorus line dancer?" Fanning asked when Terry left.

"Yeah. Chasing the spotlight. Those kids have it rough." He picked up his Bud and poured half into his Pilsner glass. A foamy head bubbled to the top.

Fanning watched Allen take a large swallow. He hoped to convince his friend before the night was over to come to terms with his Seamus Slattery fixation, get him to admit that the appearance of this terrorist ghost of ten years ago was an unlikely, one-in-a-million shot.

"Look, I know it's Slattery. I mean, there must be a way to check the guy out, isn't there?"

Short of taking the ghost of Seamus into custody and running a background search on him, there was little Fanning could do to satisfy Mike. "You know, I hate to break this to you," he said, "but somewhere along the line I think I heard those bastards from the IRA were given immunity when the shooting over there stopped."

Allen's normal fair complexion turned whiter. His eyes narrowed. "That's bullshit! How could they let those bastards go after killing so many innocent people? There's gotta be something wrong with that."

"Well, I'll check it out with our rep on the JTTF."

Allen looked back at him.

"Joint Terrorism Task Force. It's part of the FBI. It's a team made up of representatives from every level of law enforcement, from local to federal. Our rep ought to know. Meanwhile, just keep cool. You know where the guy lives. If you want, I'll run a check, see who owns the house. Okay?"

Allen's wide brow looked like a football field of yard lines. "Yeah, okay."

"Good, now let's get some supper. I hope they're not out of filets."

* * *

Fanning arrived home in time to catch the eleven o'clock news with Anne, a habit she followed every night. Those nights he worked, she stayed up after the news, watching either Letterman or Leno, depending on which guest line-up appealed to her. During the early years when both were working, she fell asleep by eleven-thirty. Their schedule left no time for passion, Fanning complained. He liked to joke they had conceived their only child, Luke, in one giant gymnastic move, on the fly while moving in opposite directions. He could pinpoint that weekend morning they did it.

Since he began working in Narcotics five years ago, things got worse. His schedule, his hours, plus the risk-tightrope he walked, had not been kind to his marriage. He loved working in Narcotics, loved the excitement, but most of all he loved the idea he accomplished something good. These

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