

The background is a dark, grainy blue gradient. At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a building with several small, glowing yellow lights. The text is overlaid on this background.

**MOONLIGHT MILE**

**DENNIS**  
**LEHANE**

***NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
OF MYSTIC RIVER AND SHUTTER ISLAND***

## CHAPTER ONE

**O**N A BRIGHT, UNSEASONABLY WARM AFTERNOON in early December, Brandon Trescott walked out of the spa at the Chatham Bars Inn on Cape Cod and got into a taxi. A pesky series of DUIs had cost him the right to operate a motor vehicle in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the next thirty-three months, so Brandon always took cabs. The twenty-five-year-old trust-fund baby of a superior court judge mother and a local media mogul father, Brandon wasn't your run-of-the-mill rich kid asshole. He worked double shifts at it. By the time the state finally suspended his license, he was on his fourth DUI. The first two had been pled down to reckless driving, the third had brought him a stern warning, but the fourth had resulted in injury to someone besides Brandon, who escaped without a scratch.

This winter afternoon, with the temperature hanging just below forty degrees, Brandon wore a manufacturer-stained,

manufacturer-faded hoodie that retailed for around \$900 over a white silk T with a collar dragged down by a pair of \$600 shades. His baggy shorts also had little rips in them, compliments of whichever nine-year-old Indonesian had been poorly paid to put them there. He wore flip-flops in December, and he sported an insouciant mop of blond surfer's hair with an adorable habit of drooping helplessly over his eyes.

After drinking his weight in Crown Royal one night, he'd flipped his Dodge Viper coming back from Foxwoods with his girlfriend riding shotgun. She'd only been his girlfriend two weeks, but it was unlikely she'd be anyone's girlfriend ever again. Her name was Ashten Mayles and she'd been in a persistent vegetative state ever since the top of the car compacted against the top of her skull. One of the last acts she'd attempted to perform while she'd still had use of her arms and legs was to try and take Brandon's keys from him in the casino parking lot. According to witnesses, Brandon had rewarded her concern by flicking a lit cigarette at her.

In possibly the first brush with actual consequence that Brandon had ever known, Ashten's parents, not wealthy but politically connected, had decided to do everything in their power to ensure that Brandon paid for his mistakes. Hence the Suffolk County DA's prosecution on DUI and reckless endangerment. Brandon spent the entire trial looking shocked and morally outraged that anyone could get away with expecting personal responsibility of him. In the end, he was convicted and served four months' house arrest. In a really nice house.

During the subsequent civil trial, it was revealed that the trust-fund baby had no trust fund. He had no car, had no house. As far as anyone could tell, he didn't own so much as an iPod.

Nothing was in his name. Things had once *been* in his name, but he'd fortuitously signed them all over to his parents one day before the car accident. It was the *before* part that killed people, but no one could prove otherwise. When the jury in the civil trial awarded damages in the amount of \$7.5 million to the Mayles family, Brandon Trescott emptied his pockets of the nothing that was in them and shrugged.

I had a list of all the things Brandon had once owned and was legally prohibited from using. Use of said items, it was deemed by the court, would constitute not just the appearance of ownership but the fact of it. The Trescotts protested the court's definition of "ownership," but the press beat the shit out of them, the public outcry was loud enough to lead ships ashore through night fog, and they ultimately signed off on the deal.

The next day, in a wonderful "fuck you" to both the Mayles family and those loud voices of the great unwashed, Layton and Susan Trescott purchased their son a condominium in Harwich Port, since the Mayles' attorneys had not covered future earnings or future possessions in the agreement. And it was to Harwich Port that I followed Brandon early on a December afternoon.

The condo smelled of mold and rug beer and food left rotting in the sink on crusted plates. I knew this because I'd been in there twice to plant bugs and swipe all the passwords off his computer and generally do all the snoopy, sneaky shit clients pay top dollar to pretend they don't know guys like me get up to. I'd gone through what little paperwork I could find and hadn't found any bank accounts we didn't know about or any stock reports that hadn't been reported. I hacked his computer

and found pretty much the same—nothing but his self-serving rants to ex-frat buddies and some pathetic, never sent, letter-to-the-editor screeds rife with misspellings. He visited a lot of porn sites and a lot of gaming sites and he read every article ever written about himself.

When the cab dropped him off, I pulled my digital recorder out of the glove compartment. The day I'd broken into his place and hacked his computer, I'd placed an audio transmitter the size of a grain of sea salt under his media console and another in his bedroom. I listened to him let out a bunch of small groans as he prepared for the shower, then the sound of him showering, drying off, changing into fresh clothes, pouring himself a drink, flicking on his flat screen, turning it to some soul-crushing reality show about stupid people, and settling onto the couch to scratch himself.

I slapped my own cheeks a couple times to stay awake and flipped through the newspaper on the car seat. Another spike in unemployment was predicted. A dog had rescued his owners from a fire in Randolph even though he'd just had hip surgery and his two hind legs were strapped to a doggie wheelchair. Our local Russian mob boss got charged with DUI after he stranded his Porsche on Tinean Beach at high tide. The Bruins won at a sport that made me sleepy when I watched it, and a Major League third baseman with a twenty-six-inch neck reacted with self-righteous fury when questioned about his alleged steroid use.

Brandon's cell rang. He talked to some guy he kept calling "bro," except it came out "bra." They talked about *World of Warcraft* and *Fallout 4* on PS2 and Lil Wayne and T.I. and some chick they knew from the gym whose Facebook

page mentioned how much extra working out she did on her Wii Fit even though she, like, lived across from a park, and I looked out the window and felt old. It was a feeling I had a lot lately, but not in a rueful way. If this was how twenty-somethings spent their twenties these days, they could have their twenties. Their thirties, too. I tilted my seat back and closed my eyes. After a while, Brandon and his bra signed off with:

“So, a’ight, bra, you keep it tight.”

“You keep it tight, too, bra, you keep it real tight.”

“Hey, bra.”

“What?”

“Nothing. I forgot. Shit’s fucked up.”

“What?”

“Forgetting.”

“Yeah.”

“A’ight.”

“A’ight.”

And they hung up.

I searched for reasons not to blow my brains out. I came up with two or three dozen real fast, but I still wasn’t certain I could listen to many more conversations between Brandon and one of his “bras.”

Dominique was another issue entirely. Dominique was a blue-chip working girl who’d entered Brandon’s life ten days earlier via Facebook. That first night, they’d IM’d back and forth for two hours. Since then, they’d Skyped three times. Dominique had remained fully clothed but wildly descriptive about what would happen should (a) she ever deign to sleep with him and (b) he came up with the sizable cash allotment

necessary to make that happen. Two days ago, they'd traded cell phone numbers. And, God bless her, she called about thirty seconds after he clicked off with bra. This, by the way, was how the asshole answered a phone:

**Brandon:** Talk to me.  
(Really. And people continued to contact him.)

**Dominique:** Hey.

**Brandon:** Oh, *hey*. Shit. Hey! You around?

**Dominique:** I will be.

**Brandon:** Well, come here.

**Dominique:** You forget we Skyped. I wouldn't sleep with you there wearing a hazmat suit.

**Brandon:** So you're thinking about sleeping with me finally. I never met a whore decided who she'd do it with.

**Dominique:** You ever meet one who looked like me?

**Brandon:** No. And you're, like, near my mom's age. And still. Shit. You're the hottest chick I ever—

**Dominique:** How sweet. And let's clarify something—I'm not a whore. I'm a carnal service provider.

**Brandon:** I don't even know what that means.

**Dominique:** I'm totally unsurprised. Now go cash a bond or a check or whatever you do and meet me.

**Brandon:** When?

**Dominique:** Now.

**Brandon:** Now now?

**Dominique:** Now now. I'm in town this afternoon and this afternoon only. I won't go to a hotel, so you better have another place, and I won't wait long.

**Brandon:** What if it's a real nice hotel?

**Dominique:** I'm hanging up now.

**Brandon:** You're not hang—

She hung up.

Brandon cursed. He threw his remote into a wall. He kicked something. He said, "Only overpriced whore you'll ever meet? You know what, bra? You can buy ten of her. And some blow. Go to Vegas."

Yes, he actually called himself "bra."

The phone rang. He must have tossed it along with the remote, because the ringtone was distant and I heard him scramble across the room to get to it. By the time he reached it, the ringtone had died.

"*Fuck!*" It was a loud scream. If I'd had my window rolled down, I could have heard it from the car.

It took him another thirty seconds before he prayed.

"Look, bra, I know I did some shit, but I promise, you get her to call back again? I'll go to church and I'll deposit a boatload of the green in one of those baskets. And I'll be better. Just have her call back, bra."

Yes, he actually called God "bra."

Twice.

His ringtone had barely burped before he flipped his phone open. "Yeah?"

"You get one shot here."

"I know it."



“Give me an address.”

“Shit. I—”

“Okay, I’m hanging—”

“Seven seventy-three Marlborough Street, between Dartmouth and Exeter.”

“Which unit?”

“No unit. I own the whole thing.”

“I’ll be there in ninety minutes.”

“I can’t get a cab that fast around here, and it’s rush hour soon.”

“Then get the power of flight. See you in ninety. Ninety-one? I’m gone.”

THE CAR WAS A 2009 ASTON Martin DB9. Retailed for two hundred thousand. Dollars. When Brandon pulled it out of the garage two town houses over, I checked it off the list on the seat beside me. I also snapped five photos of him in it while he waited for traffic to thin so he could enter it.

He hit the gas like he was launching an expedition to the Milky Way, and I didn’t even bother chasing him. The way he weaved in and out of traffic, even someone with the awareness of meat loaf, like Brandon, would see me riding his ass. I didn’t need to follow him anyway—I knew exactly where he was going and I knew a shortcut.

He arrived eighty-nine minutes after the phone call. He ran up the stairs and used a key on the door, and I caught it on film. He ran up the interior stairs, and I entered behind him. I followed him from fifteen feet away, and he was so wired that he didn’t even notice me for a good two minutes. In the kitchen on the second floor, as he opened the fridge, he turned when I

snapped off a few shots on the SLR and he fell back against the tall window behind him.

“Who the fuck’re you?”

“Doesn’t much matter,” I said.

“You paparazzi?”

“Why would paparazzi give a shit about you?” I snapped a few more shots.

He leaned back to get a good look at me. He grew past the fear of a stranger popping up in his kitchen and moved on to threat-assessment. “You’re not that big.” He cocked his surfer’s head. “I could kick your bitch ass out of here.”

“I’m not that big,” I agreed, “but you definitely couldn’t kick my bitch ass out of anywhere.” I lowered the camera. “Seriously. Just look in my eyes.”

He did.

“Know what I’m saying?”

He half-nodded.

I slung the camera onto my shoulder and gave him a wave. “I’m leaving anyway. So, hey, have a good one, and try not to brain-damage any more people.”

“What’re you going to do with the pictures?”

I said the words that broke my heart. “Pretty much nothing.”

He looked confused, which was hardly uncommon for him. “You work for the Mayles family. Right?”

My heart broke just a tiny bit more. “No. I do not.” I sighed. “I work for Duhamel-Standiford.”

“A law firm?”

I shook my head. “Security. Investigations.”

He stared back at me, mouth open, eyes narrowed.

“Your parents hired us, you dumb shit. They figured you’d

eventually do something moronic because, well, you're a moron, Brandon. This little incident today should confirm all their fears."

"I'm not a moron," he said. "I went to BC."

In place of a dozen comebacks, a shiver of exhaustion rippled through me.

This was my life these days. This.

I left the kitchen. "Best of luck, Brandon." Halfway down the stairs, I stopped. "By the way, Dominique's not coming." I turned back toward the top of the stairs and leaned my elbow on the railing. "And, oh yeah, her name's not Dominique."

His flip-flops made a sloppy-wet-kiss noise as he crossed the floorboards and appeared in the doorway above me. "How do you know?"

"Because she works for me, dumbass."

## CHAPTER TWO

**A**FTER I LEFT BRANDON, I MET Dominique at the Neptune Oyster in the North End.

When I sat down, she said, “That was fun,” her eyes a bit wider than usual. “Tell me everything that happened when you got to his house.”

“Can we order first?”

“Drinks are already on their way. Dish, dish.”

I told her. Our drinks came, and we found time to scan the menu and decide on lobster rolls. She drank a light beer. I drank sparkling water. I reminded myself it was better for me than beer, particularly in the afternoon. But part of me still felt like a sellout. What I was selling out was less clear to me, but I felt it all the same.

When I finished recounting the tale of my encounter with Brandon Flip-Flops, she clapped her hands and said, “Did you really call him a moron?”

“Called him a few other things, too. Most weren’t complimentary.”

As our lobster rolls arrived, I removed my suit jacket, folded it, and laid it over the arm of the chair to my left.

“I’ll never get used to it,” she said. “You, all dressed up.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not like the old days.” I bit into my lobster roll. Maybe the best lobster roll in Boston, which made it, arguably, the best lobster roll in the world. “It’s not the dressing-up I have a hard time with. It’s the hair care.”

“It’s a nice suit, though.” She touched the sleeve. “Very nice.” She bit into her roll and appraised the rest of me. “Nice tie, too. Your mom pick it out?”

“My wife, actually.”

“That’s *right*, you’re married,” she said. “Shame.”

“Why’s it a shame?”

“Well, maybe not for you.”

“Or my wife.”

“Or your wife,” she acknowledged. “But some of us remember when you were a lot more, um, playful, Patrick. ’Member those days?”

“I do.”

“And?”

“They seem a lot more fun to remember than they were to live.”

“I don’t know.” She raised one soft eyebrow and took a sip of beer. “I remember you living them pretty well.”

I drank some water. Drained the glass, actually. I refilled it from the overpriced blue bottle they’d left on the table. Not for the first time, I wondered why it was socially acceptable to leave a bottle of water or wine on the table but not a bottle of whiskey or gin.

She said, "You're not a very polished staller."

"I wasn't aware I was stalling."

"Trust me, you were."

It's odd how fast a beautiful woman can turn a guy's mind into lint storage. Just by being a beautiful woman.

I reached into the inside pocket of my suit jacket. I pulled out an envelope and handed it across the table. "Your payment. Duhamel-Standiford already took out taxes."

"Thoughtful of them." She placed it in her purse.

"I don't know if it's thoughtful. They're sticklers for the rules, though."

"You never were," she said.

"Things change."

She considered that and her dark eyes grew darker, sadder. Then her face lit up. She reached into her purse and pulled the check back out. She laid it on the table between us. "I have an idea."

"No, you don't."

"Sure I do. Let's flip a coin. Heads—you pay for lunch."

"I'm already paying for lunch."

"Tails . . ." She tapped a fingernail on the side of her pilsner glass. "Tails—I cash this check and we walk over to the Millennium, get a room, and blow the rest of the afternoon damaging the structural integrity of a box spring."

I took another drink of water. "I don't have any change."

She frowned. "Me, either."

"Oh, well."

"Excuse me," she said to our waiter. "Would you have a quarter we could borrow? Give it right back."

He handed it to her, a tiny tremor in his fingers for a woman almost twice his age. She could do that, though, unsettle a guy of most any age.

When he walked away, she said, "He was kinda cute."

"For a zygote."

"Now now." She perched the coin on her thumbnail and spring-loaded the thumb against the tip of her index finger. "Call it."

"I'm not playing," I said.

"Come on. Call it."

"I have to get back to work."

"Play hooky. They won't know the difference."

"I'll know the difference."

"Integrity," she said. "How overrated."

She flicked her thumb and the quarter tumbled toward the ceiling, then tumbled back to the table. It landed on the pay-check, equidistant between my water and her beer.

Heads.

"Shit," she said.

When the waiter passed, I gave him his quarter back and asked for the check. While he rang up the bill, we didn't say a word. She finished her light beer. I finished my water. The waiter ran my credit card and I did the math for a good tip. The next time he passed, I handed him the bill.

I looked across the table into her large, almond eyes. Her lips were parted; if you knew where to look you would see a small chip at the bottom of her upper left incisor.

"Let's do it anyway," I said.

"The room."

"Yes."

"The box spring."

"*Si.*"

"Sheets so wrinkled they'll never be ironed out."

"Let's not set the bar too high."

She flipped open her cell and called the hotel. After a few moments, she said to me, “They have a room.”

“Book it.”

“This is so decadent.”

“It was your idea.”

My wife spoke into the phone. “We’ll take that one if it’s available now.” She gave me another giddy look, as if we were sixteen and borrowing her father’s car without his knowledge. She tilted her jaw back toward the phone. “Last name is Kenzie.” She spelled it out. “Yes. K as in ‘kangaroo.’ First name is Angie.”

IN THE ROOM, I SAID, “WOULD you prefer I call you Angie? Or Dominique?”

“The question is which one do *you* prefer?”

“I like ’em both.”

“Both it is.”

“Hey.”

“Yeah?”

“How can we wreck the sheets from over here on the dresser?”

“Good point. You got me?”

“I got you.”

AFTER WE’D DOZED TO THE DISTANT honks and beeps of rush-hour traffic ten stories below, Angie propped herself up on her elbow and said, “This was crazy.”

“It was.”

“Can we afford it?”



She knew the answer, but I said it anyway. “Probably not.”

“Shit.” She looked down at the white sheets with their high thread count.

I touched her shoulder. “Every now and then, we should get to live a little. D-S pretty much assured me they’d hire me on permanent after this job.”

She looked up at me, then back at the sheets. “‘Pretty much’ isn’t ironclad.”

“I know that.”

“They’ve been dangling this fucking *permanence* in front of you for—”

“I know.”

“—too long. It’s not right.”

“I know it’s not. But what am I going to do?”

She scowled. “What if they don’t make a real offer?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“We’re almost out of money.”

“I know.”

“And we have an insurance bill coming up.”

“I know.”

“Is that all you can say? ‘I know?’”

I realized my teeth were gritted hard enough to snap. “I’m sucking it up, Ange, and doing jobs I don’t like for a company I’m not terribly in love with so that eventually I can get hired permanent and we can get insurance and benefits and a paid vacation. I don’t *like it* any more than you do but until you finish school and get a job again, I don’t know what else I can do or fucking say that will change things.”

We each took a breath, our faces a little too red, the walls a little too close.

“I’m just talking about it,” she said softly.

I looked out the window for a minute, felt all the black fear and stress of the last couple of years crowding my skull and revving my heart.

Eventually, I said, “This is the best option I see on the table right now. If Duhamel-Standiford keeps playing carrot-on-a-stick, *then*, yeah, we’ll have to reconsider what I’m doing. Let’s hope they don’t.”

“Okay,” she said and it came out riding a long, slow exhalation.

“Look at it this way,” I said, “the debt’s so big and we’re so financially fucked that the bonus money we just blew on the hotel room wouldn’t have made a dent.”

She tapped her fingers lightly on my chest. “Ain’t you sweet to say?”

“Oh, I’m a helluva guy. You didn’t know?”

“I knew.” She hooked a leg over mine.

“Pshaw,” I said.

Outside, the horns grew more insistent. I pictured the strangled traffic. Nothing moving, nothing even appearing to.

I said, “We leave now or we leave an hour from now, we’ll get home the same time.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Shameful, shameful things.”

She rolled on top of me. “We have the sitter till seven-thirty.”

“Ample time.”

She lowered her head until our foreheads touched. I kissed her. It was the kind of kiss we’d taken for granted a few years ago—deep and unhurried. When we broke it, she took a slow breath and then leaned back in and we tried another one.

Angie said, "Let's have a few dozen more of those . . ."

"Okay."

"And then a bit more of that thing we tried an hour ago . . ."

"That was interesting, wasn't it?"

"And then a long hot shower . . ."

"I'm sold."

"And then go home and see our daughter."

"Deal."

## CHAPTER THREE

**T**HE PHONE CALL CAME AT THREE the next morning.

“You remember me?” A woman’s voice.

“What?” I was still half-asleep. I checked the caller ID:  
PRIVATE NUMBER.

“You found her once. Find her again.”

“Who is this?”

Her words slushed through the phone line. “You owe me.”

“Sleep it off,” I said. “I’m hanging up.”

“You owe me.” She hung up.

THE NEXT MORNING, I WONDERED if I’d dreamed the call. If I hadn’t, I already had trouble remembering if it was last night or the night before. By tomorrow, I assumed, I’d forget the whole thing. On the walk to the subway, I drank my cup of Dunkin’s under a low, clay sky and ragged clouds. Brittle

gray leaves stirred in the gutter, waiting to fossilize in the first snow. The trees were bare along Crescent Avenue, and cold air off the ocean hunted the gaps in my clothes. Between the end of Crescent Avenue and the harbor itself was JFK/UMass Station and the parking lot beyond. The stairs leading up to the subway station were already thick with commuters.

Even so, a face appeared at the top of the stairs that I couldn't help but be drawn to. A face I'd hoped never to see again. The weary, embattled face of a woman who'd been passed by when life was handing out luck. As I drew close to her, she tried a hesitant smile and raised a hand.

Beatrice McCready.

"Hey, Patrick." The breeze was sharper up top and she dealt with it by burrowing into a flimsy jean jacket, the collar pulled up to her earlobes.

"Hi, Beatrice."

"I'm sorry about the call last night. I . . ." She gave a helpless shrug and looked at the commuters for a moment.

"Don't mention it."

People jostled us as they headed for the turnstiles. Beatrice and I stepped off to the side, close to a white metal wall with a six-by-six subway map painted on it.

"You look good," she said.

"You, too."

"It's nice of you to lie," she said.

"I wasn't," I lied.

I did some quick math and guessed she was about fifty. These days, fifty might be the new forty, but in her case it was the new sixty. Her once-strawberry hair was white. The lines in her face were deep enough to hide gravel in. She had the air of someone clinging to a wall of soap.

A long time ago—a lifetime ago—her niece had been kidnapped. I'd found her and returned her to the home she shared with her mother, Bea's sister-in-law, Helene, even though Helene was not what you'd call a natural-born mother.

"How're the kids?"

"Kids?" she said. "I only have one."

Jesus.

I searched my memory. A boy. I remembered that. He'd been five or six, shit, maybe seven, at the time. Mark. No. Matt. No. Martin. Definitely Martin.

I considered rolling the dice again, saying his name, but I'd already let the silence drag on too long.

"Matt," she said, careful eyes on me, "is eighteen now. He's a senior up the Monument."

Monument High was the kind of school where kids studied math by counting their shell casings.

"Oh," I said. "He like it?"

"He's . . . under the circumstances, he's a, ya know, he needs direction sometimes, but he turned out better than a lot of kids would."

"That's great." I regretted the word as soon as it left my mouth. It was such a bullshit, knee-jerk modifier to use.

Her green eyes flashed for just a second, like she wanted to explain in precise detail just how fucking *great* her life had been since I'd had a hand in sending her husband to prison. His name was Lionel and he was a decent man who'd done a bad thing for good reasons and flailed helplessly while it all transformed into carnage around him. I'd liked him a lot. It was one of the more cutting ironies of the Amanda McCready case that I'd liked the bad guys a hell of a lot more than the good ones. One exception had been Beatrice. She

and Amanda had been the only blameless players in the entire clusterfuck.

She stared at me now, as if searching for a me behind the me I projected. A more worthy, more authentic me.

A group of teenage boys came through the turnstiles wearing letter jackets—varsity athletes heading to BC High a ten-minute walk down Morrissey Boulevard.

“Amanda was, what, four when you found her?” Bea said.

“Yeah.”

“She’s sixteen now. Almost seventeen.” Her chin tipped at the athletes as they descended the stairs toward Morrissey Boulevard. “Their age.”

That stung. Somehow I’d lived in denial that Amanda McCready had aged. That she was anything but the same four-year-old I’d last seen in her mother’s apartment, staring at a TV as a dog-food commercial played in the cathode rays bathing her face.

“Sixteen,” I said.

“You believe it?” Beatrice smiled. “Where’s it go, the time?”

“Into somebody else’s gas tank.”

“Ain’t that the truth.”

Another group of athletes and a few studious-looking kids came toward us.

“You said on the phone she was gone again.”

“Yeah.”

“Runaway?”

“With Helene for a mother, you can’t rule it out.”

“Any reason to think it’s more, I dunno, dire than that?”

“Well, for one, Helene won’t admit she’s gone.”

“You call the cops?”

She nodded. "Of course. They asked Helene about her. Helene said Amanda was fine. The cops left it at that."

"Why would they leave it at that?"

"*Why?* It was city employees who took Amanda in '98. Helene's lawyer sued the cops, sued their union, sued the city. He got three million. He pocketed a million, and two million went into a trust for Amanda. The cops are terrified of Helene, Amanda, the whole thing. If Helene looks them in the eye and says, 'My kid's fine, now go away,' guess what they do?"

"You talk to anybody in the media?"

"Sure," she said. "They didn't want to touch it either."

"Why not?"

She shrugged. "Bigger fish, I guess."

That didn't make sense. I couldn't imagine what it was but she wasn't telling me something.

"What do you think I can do here, Beatrice?"

"I don't know," she said. "What can you do?"

The softening breeze moved her white hair around. There was zero doubt that she blamed me for her husband getting shot and being charged with a grocery list of crimes while he lay in his hospital bed. He'd left his house to meet me at a bar in South Boston. From there, the hospital. From the hospital, jail. From jail, prison. He'd walked out of his house one Thursday afternoon and never walked back in.

Beatrice kept looking at me the way nuns used to look at me in grammar school. I hadn't liked it then, I didn't like it now.

"Beatrice?" I said. "I'm real sorry your husband kidnapped his niece because he thought his sister was a shitty parent."

"*Thought?*"

"But he did, in fact, kidnap her."



“For her own good.”

“Okay. So we should just let anybody decide what’s good for a kid who doesn’t belong to them. I mean, why not? Every kid with an asshole parent, line up at the nearest subway station. We’ll ship you all to Wonkaville where you’ll live happily ever after.”

“You through?”

“No, I’m not.” I could feel a rage building in me that got closer to the surface of my skin every year. “I’ve eaten a lot of shit over the years for doing my job with Amanda. That’s what I did, Bea, what I was hired to do.”

“Poor guy,” she said. “All misunderstood.”

“What *you* hired me to do. You said, ‘Find my niece.’ And I found her. So you want to give me the arched eyebrow of guilt for the next ten years, knock yourself out. I did my job.”

“And a lot of people got hurt.”

“I didn’t hurt ‘em, though. I just found her and brought her back.”

“That’s how you live with it?”

I leaned back against the wall and exhaled a long burst of air and frustration. I reached into my coat and pulled out my Charlie Card to slide through the turnstile. “I gotta go to work, Bea. A pleasure seeing you. Sorry I can’t help.”

She said, “Is it about money?”

“What?”

“I know we never paid your bill from the first time you found her, but—”

“What? No,” I said. “It has nothing to do with money.”

“Then what?”

“Look,” I said as softly as I could, “I’m hurting just as bad

as anyone in this economy. It's not *about* the money, no, but I can't afford to take on any job that doesn't pay, either. And I'm about to go in for an interview with someone who *might* give me a permanent job, so I couldn't take side cases anyway. Do you understand?"

"Helene's got this boyfriend," she said. "Her latest? Been in prison, of course. Guess what for."

I shook my head in frustration and tried to wave her off.

"Sex crimes."

Twelve years ago, Amanda McCready had been kidnapped by her uncle Lionel and some rogue cops who'd had no interest in ransoming or hurting her. What they'd wanted was to put that child in a home with a mother who didn't drink like she owned stock in London gin or pick her boy toys from the Sex Freaks Shopping Network. When I found Amanda, she was living with a couple who loved her. They'd been determined to give her health, stability, and happiness. Instead, they'd gone to prison, and Amanda had been returned to Helene's home. By me.

"You owe, Patrick."

"What?"

"I said you owe."

I could feel the rage again, a *tick-tick* turning into a tom-tom beat. I had done the right thing. I knew it. I had no doubt. What I had in place of doubt, though, was this rage—murky and illogical and growing deeper every day of the last twelve years. I put my hands in my pockets so I wouldn't punch the wall with the white subway map on it. "I don't owe anyone anything. I don't owe you, I don't owe Helene, I don't owe Lionel."

“What about Amanda? You don’t think you owe her?” She held her thumb and index finger a whisker from touching. “Just a little bit?”

“No,” I said. “Take care, Bea.” I walked toward the turnstiles.

“You never asked about him.”

I stopped. I dug my hands deeper into my pockets. I sighed. I turned back to her.

She shifted her weight from her left foot to her right. “Lionel. He should have been out by now, you know, a normal guy like him. The lawyer told us when we pled guilty that he’d be sentenced to twelve years but only do six. Well, that was the sentence. They told the truth about that.” She took a step toward me. She stopped. She took two steps back. The crowd streamed between us, a few people giving us looks. “He gets beat up a lot in there. Worse things, too, but he won’t talk about that. He isn’t meant for a place like that. He’s just a sweetie, you know?” She took another step back. “He got in a fight, some guy trying to take whatever my husband didn’t want to give? And Lionel, he’s a big guy, and he hurt this guy. So now he has to do the full twelve and he’s almost done. But they’re talking about new charges maybe unless he turns rat. Helps the feds with some gang that’s running drugs and things in and out of there? They say if Lionel doesn’t help them, they’ll mess with his sentence. We thought he’d get out in *six years*.” Her lips got caught between a broken smile and a hopeless frown. “I don’t know sometimes anymore, you know? I don’t.”

There was no place for me to hide. I held her eyes as best I could but I eventually dropped my gaze to the black rubber flooring.

Another group of students walked behind her. They were

laughing about something, oblivious. Beatrice watched them go and their happiness shrank her. She looked light enough for the breeze to toss her down the stairs.

I held out my hands. “I don’t do independent work anymore.”

She nodded at my left hand. “You’re married, uh?”

“Yeah.” I took a step back in her direction. “Bea, look—”

She held up a hand. “Kids?”

I stopped. I didn’t say anything. I couldn’t find the words suddenly.

“You don’t have to answer. I’m sorry. I am. I was stupid to come. I just thought, I dunno, I just . . .” She glanced off to her right for a moment. “You’re good at it I bet.”

“Huh?”

“I bet you’re a real good father.” She gave me a wadded-up smile. “I always thought you would be.”

She turned into the crowd exiting the station and vanished from my view. I went through the turnstile and down the stairs to the subway platform. From there I could see the parking lot that led out to Morrissey Boulevard. The crowd streamed from the stairwell onto the asphalt, and for a moment, I saw Bea again, but just for a moment. Then I lost sight of her. The crowd was thick with high school kids, and most were taller than her.