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The Ex

Written by Alafair Burke

Published by Faber & Faber

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the ex

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FABER & FABER

First published in 2016
by Faber & Faber Ltd
Bloomsbury House
74–77 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DA

First published in the United States in 2016
by HarperCollins Publishers
195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY
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A CIP record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571–32815–4



2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

June 17, 2015

TRANSCRIPT OF RECORDED
INTERVIEW WITH JACKSON HARRIS

10:27 AM—recording starts
NYPD DET. JIMMY BOYLE

Boyle: Okay, I've turned on the machine, Mr. Harris. Just to make clear, are you here at the First Precinct voluntarily?

Harris: Yes.

Boyle: And you're willing to speak to me of your own accord?

Harris: Sure.

Boyle: Terrific. As you know, we're tracking down folks who were at the waterfront this morning. We've spoken already, but if we could just get it down on tape real quick since we're talking to so many people. Can you tell me in your own words when and why you were there?

Harris: Sure. About seven AM. I was meeting a woman named Madeline.

Boyle: And you don't know Madeline's last name or phone number.

Harris: No, just her e-mail address.

Boyle: You said you'd only seen her in person once, at the Christopher Street Pier two Saturdays ago. Pretty girl, huh?

Harris: Sure.

Boyle: But you said it was more than that. You said it was "surreal"—I think that was your word?

Harris: You need this part?

Boyle: The more detail, the better chance we have at identifying her. Since she was meeting you, she may have been in the area, too.

Harris: Okay, yeah. I was on my morning run, and I see this woman in a party dress, sort of a pale pink color, strapless. But she's sitting right on the damp grass. The sun was just beginning to rise. And she's barefoot, drinking champagne straight out of the bottle. Yes, the whole thing was sort of surreal.

Boyle: And you mentioned a basket?

Harris: She had some kind of package on the ground next to her. When I got closer, I could see it was a picnic basket. I think she noticed me looking at her, because she held up her bottle like a toast when I ran by. Oh, and she was reading.

Boyle: And you said it was the book that really intrigued you.

Harris: Well, I'm a writer. So a beautiful woman in last night's dress, drinking champagne, with a book. What's not to like?

Boyle: But you didn't actually talk to her?

Harris: Oh, God, no. But then I mentioned this woman to a friend.

Boyle: Charlotte Caperton?

Harris: Yeah. I should've known she wouldn't let it drop. Charlotte's kind of a busybody when it comes to running my life. Anyway, she's the publisher of this website, like an online magazine all about the city. It's called the Room.

Boyle: Oh sure. Can't call yourself a New Yorker and not know about the Room.

Harris: So the next thing I know, Charlotte's posting a missed-moment article online.

Boyle: And that's one of those "I saw you on the 6 train" kind of things, right?

Harris: Or in my case, "I was the out-of-breath middle-aged jogger who saw you on the pier." But Charlotte made it sound less pathetic.

Boyle: And is that normal? Does your friend write personal ads every time you see a pretty woman?

Harris: There's no *every time* in my case. My wife—well, she's gone, and there hasn't been anyone else. I've got a teenage daughter. I'm not exactly a player. So, yeah, Charlotte figured it was a big deal that I even mentioned this woman. That maybe I was finally ready, whatever that means. Anyway, I guess a lot of people read the Room, because a few days later, this woman Madeline responded to the post. Turns out the book she was reading was one of my favorite novels. We started e-mailing back and forth, and last

night, she proposed that we meet in person. I feel bad taking your time with this corny story given what's at stake.

Boyle: I guess I'm curious. I'm single myself. The whole match-dot-com game. And you've got to admit, this is pretty—

Harris: Incredible, I know.

Boyle: And you mentioned you also had a basket with you this morning at the waterfront?

Harris: Really, I'm not sure why we need to get into this. It's a little embarrassing.

Boyle: Look, our conversation here is just one tiny part of figuring out who was where and when. So, you know, if another witness mentions seeing a man with a basket, we'll know—yeah, that was Jack Harris. Onward.

Harris: Sure, okay. Yes, Madeline's e-mail said, you bring the picnic basket, I'll bring the champagne. So that's why.

Boyle: And explain to me again why you were supposed to meet at the football field. Seems like the meet-up spot would be Christopher Street Pier where you first saw her in the grass. It's only a couple of blocks away.

Harris: She suggested the sports field. There's a scene in the book I mentioned that's set there. Meet at chapter twelve—sort of a puzzle.

Boyle: Sounds complicated. And then after all that, she didn't show up?

Harris: Not that I saw. When I got there, a few people were milling around, but no one who seemed to be looking for me. I left when it started to pour.

Boyle: Did you e-mail her asking where she was?

Harris: No.

Boyle: If it were me, I'd want an explanation after such a dramatic lead-in.

Harris: It's like reality set in with the rain. The whole thing seemed silly.

Boyle: What happened to the basket?

Harris: I left it outside the field with a note.

Boyle: I see. Where outside the field?

Harris: On a bench on the path leading to the street. I figured she'd see it if she showed up later.

Boyle: What exactly was in the basket?

Harris: Wow, you really want the details. Um, some croissants and some grapes. And the note.

Boyle: Where'd you get the paper for the note?

Harris: I always have a reporter's pad in my pocket. Tools of the trade, I guess.

Boyle: When did you hear the shots?

Harris: I didn't know they were shots until later, when I got home and heard the news. Other people around me—we were all wondering what the sounds were. Like firecrackers. They seemed distant, so it was hard to tell.

Boyle: Okay, but where were you when you heard them?

Harris: Charles Street. On the opposite side of the West Side Highway. I'm surprised the sound carried so far.

Boyle: Believe it or not, they've got acoustic sensors that can pick up gunfire two miles away. So, just to sum up, there's no reason you went to the football field other than to meet this Madeline woman?

Harris: No.

Boyle: You don't know anyone else who would've been at the field this morning?

Harris: No. Other than Madeline, of course. I can give you her e-mail address.

Boyle: Okay, so it's just a coincidence that Malcolm Neeley was one of the shooting victims?

Harris: I'm sorry. What—

Boyle: You know the name, right? Of course you do. Malcolm Neeley was one of three people shot this morning at the football field, just

yards from you and your little picnic basket. Care to explain that, Mr. Harris?

Harris: Wait, that doesn't make sense.

Boyle: You said yourself: The story sounded a little surreal. You even said "incredible" at one point.

Harris: You don't . . . you can't possibly think I did this.
[No response]

Harris: I need a minute to think.

Chapter 1

WHITE NOISE IS magic, right up there with tinfoil and Bluetooth and Nespresso pods. White noise makes the sounds of the city disappear. The horns, garbage trucks, and sirens all vanish with the touch of an app on my iPhone. When white noise fills my room, I can be anywhere, which means I'm nowhere, which is the only way I can sleep.

And then the phone rings.

RELYING ON MUSCLE MEMORY, I managed to answer without opening my eyes because I knew the room would be filled with light I was not ready to face. "Olivia Randall."

"Hey."

I knew from the voice that it was Einer, our assistant-slash-investigator. A deeper voice behind me murmured something about what time it was, and I felt a heavy forearm drape across my hip. I rolled forward to face my nightstand, away from the voice in my bed. "Hey," I said in response.

"Don thinks you're taking the morning off because of Mindy," Einer

said. "He says you're resting on your laurels, but I think he's jealous of all the attention."

I forced myself to open my eyes. The clock in front of me told me that it was 11:17 AM, nearly halfway through a normal person's workday.

Next to the clock was a half-empty bottle of grappa. Grappa? The odd shape of the bottle triggered a memory: a client—referred by a law school friend who, unlike me, made partner at Preston & Cartwright—handing me a bottle, inexplicably shaped like the Eiffel Tower, to thank me for getting a glove compartment full of parking tickets dismissed in one fell swoop. I told him that a tip wasn't necessary, but he missed the hint that it was insulting. Into the kitchen cabinet went the bottle. And then another memory: the forearm across my hip reaching into the cabinet last night: "Grappa! I love grappa."

I forced myself to focus on Einer's words. Morning off because of Mindy. Right: Mindy, the twenty-four-year-old former child starlet I saved from prison yesterday by suppressing the cocaine that had been found in her impounded Porsche while she was collecting a ten-thousand-dollar club-promotion fee in the Meatpacking District.

My fee was more.

"Tell Don I have no laurels to rest on," I said, leaning back against the padded headboard of my bed. Don's my law partner. He's also my mentor, plus an honorary dad or an uncle or something. Most important, right now he was probably wondering where I was. I could still hear the white noise, even though the app was closed now, as I wracked my brain for a credible story I hadn't used recently. "A client from a couple of years ago called early this morning. His son got picked up on a DUI coming home from a house party in Brooklyn. He thought he had slept it off but was still drunk from the night before." The voice next to me muttered, "He's not the only one."

"It took a little longer than I thought to keep him from getting booked."

"Good, I think Don will be happy to know you're not in the neighborhood. He won't admit it, but that old softie worries about you like crazy."

I didn't get the connection between the two sentences, but here's the thing about being a liar: you develop an instinct for when you've missed a

step and need to fake it. "No cause for worry," I said. "You weren't calling to check on me, were you?"

"No, there's some kid who keeps calling. Won't leave a name. He or she or whatever is threatening to come to the office if you don't call back. And when it comes to kids, that's a serious threat by my standards."

"Nice to know we've got an iron spine at the front desk, Einer. Just give me the number. And tell Don not to worry. Just a stupid DUI."

I opened my nightstand and pulled out a pen and one of the many notebooks I always keep nearby.

I had half the number entered in my phone when I felt the hand at the end of the forearm across my hip beginning to explore. Really?

I threw back the blankets, rolled out of bed, and started gathering items of clothing from the floor. "It's late. Your wife's flight lands in an hour."

THE PHONE RANG ONLY ONCE.

"Hello?" The voice was eager. Clear, but low. I could tell why Einer had been uncertain about gender. Probably female. Not a little kid, not a woman.

"This is Olivia Randall. You called my office?"

"Yeah. I'm worried about my dad. He's not answering his phone or his texts."

Great. Had we reached the point where kids call lawyers the second their helicopter parents go incommunicado? I was tempted to hang up, but if I did, with my luck, her father would turn out to be someone important.

"I'm sure your father probably just stepped out for a little while, okay?"

"No, you don't understand. The police were here. He left with them. He said everything was fine, but then the police returned, like, immediately." My mind wandered back to Einer's comment about Don being relieved to hear I wasn't near the office. "They had the super with them, and they knocked on the door and told me I needed to leave the apartment."

"Did they say why?" I asked, beginning to strip the sheets with my free hand.

"No, but I asked them if I was under arrest. They said no, and then they started being nice to me, calling me *sweetie* and stuff—asking if they could contact a family member for me to stay with or something. So at that point, I stopped asking questions and told them I had debate team practice and was supposed to spend the night with my aunt."

"So you're calling from your aunt's house?" This conversation was starting to make my head hurt. Everything was making my head hurt.

"No, I don't even have an aunt. But I figured I could do more on my own than if they put me in a foster home or something."

"So you're in foster care?" I tossed the top sheet onto the floor of my closet.

The girl on the other end of the line made a growling sound. "Oh my God. The police were here talking to my father. Now he's gone. And there are cops at our apartment who basically kicked me out. I'm pretty sure they have my dad for some reason. In which case, I don't have anywhere to go, in which case they might throw my ass in foster care. So I made up an aunt and called you instead."

If I had to guess, the girl's father had probably been arrested, and she spotted my name in the euphoric tweets from my latest celebrity client, Mindy Monaghan. I started into my usual blow-off speech, about how I wasn't taking new clients, etcetera. She responded by demanding that I get down to the First Precinct to help her father.

"How do you know he's at the First Precinct?"

"I don't, not for sure. But the police cars parked outside our building have a one painted on the side of them."

"I can e-mail you a list of referrals—"

"No, you *have* to help him. It's the least you can do after the way you treated him."

"You're saying I know your father?" Too many clients think that just because you represent them for one thing, you're their lawyer for life.

"My name is Buckley Harris. My father's Jack Harris."

JACK HARRIS. THE NAME HIT me in the gut so hard that I tasted last night's grappa at the back of my throat.

Her voice pushed away the competing thoughts—images from the past—working their way into my consciousness. "I heard them talking about gunshots or something. So I assumed it was about my mom. And then I saw the news online, so now I'm totally paranoid, thinking it has something to do with that."

After what had happened to her mother, I wouldn't blame the girl for being paranoid. But, once again, I wasn't getting the connection between one sentence and the next. What news?

"The numbers on the patrol cars are what you figured; I'll go to the First Precinct and find out what's going on. Do you have somewhere to go in the meantime?" It was June. Were kids still in school? I had no idea.

"I'm headed to Charlotte's now."

Now there was a name I hadn't heard in a very long time.

The second I hung up, I made my way to the living room. My briefcase was on the sofa, exactly where I had let it drop while Ryan was pulling off my suit jacket last night.

I slid out my laptop, opened it, and Googled "New York City gunshots."

Someone had opened fire this morning on the Hudson Parkway. The number of injuries and fatalities was unclear. And my ex-fiancé, Jack Harris, might or might not be at the First Precinct for reasons that might or might not have something to do with it.

AS I APPROACHED THE FRONT desk at the First Precinct, a uniform nudged his buddy, followed by a quick whisper. Maybe they recognized me, either as a relatively successful defense attorney or perhaps from precinct gossip. (Though I was by no means what the cops would call a "Badge Bunny," you can't spend ten years on the criminal court scene as a single woman without a thing or two happening.)

Or, more likely, I had the look of someone who didn't belong in a police

station. To any half-decent police officer, it would be apparent from my tailored suit and expensive shoes that I was either a prosecutor or a defense lawyer or a reporter or a high-maintenance victim: trouble whatever the story.

At forty-three, I knew by now that my natural expression when I was thinking—intense, brow furrowed, lips pursed—could be intimidating to most people. The Internet called it RBT: Resting Bitch Face. And, no question, I had it. But lucky for me, I also know how to turn that frown upside down. *First impressions,* as my mother always warned me.

"Hi." As I gave the huddle of officers my best smile, I felt my hungover skin yearning for hydration. I told them I was looking for a Jack Harris.

I hoped for blank stares. Instead, the desk sergeant asked if I was Harris's lawyer. I held the smile.

"I am," I said coolly. "I also know Mr. Harris well personally. He's a man of some significance in New York City. If he's here, I assume you have an explanation."

Police like to say that they're straight shooters, all about the justice, color blind, fair and balanced, yada yada. But the truth is that they're used to both victims and perpetrators who are poor and powerless. When someone rich and powerful collides with the criminal justice system, it's a big fucking deal. No harm in flashing your feathers early and often.

But the desk sergeant who spoke up was unfazed. "You say you know Jack Harris? Well, I'll be honest, I might've thought I did, too. It's a damn shame what he's gone through. Yesterday, I would have rolled out the red carpet if he walked in here. But now?" He made a *pssshht* sound.

Once again, I was a step behind, but I knew I wasn't going to get information out of a glorified receptionist.

He picked up the handset of the nearby phone.

"I'm sure you know, Sergeant, that under New York's right to counsel laws, you *must* immediately inform Jack Harris that a lawyer is here for him."

He jiggled the phone in his hand. "Who d'ya think I'm calling? Ghostbusters?"

THE MAN WHO EMERGED MINUTES later from the stairwell was immediately identifiable as a multigeneration cop. Young but confident. The pale skin, red hair, and freckles of an Irish kid from the city. The introduction he offered sealed the first impression. His name was Jimmy Boyle.

"Wow, that's a real name, or did the NYPD give it to you as a promotion?"

"One hundred percent authentic. Not James. Not Jim. Jimmy Boyle on the birth certificate."

I told him I needed to see my client, and he told me that's what he'd heard. I followed my gut and asked if Jack was here because of the Hudson River shooting.

Jimmy Boyle nodded. All business. "Likely to be three counts."

That would be of murder, I surmised. Three counts of murder against a guy I could only imagine being arrested if he accidentally walked out of a Whole Foods with a raisin granola bar. Buckley Harris's worst fears about her father's situation were quickly becoming a reality.

I asked Jimmy Boyle if were talking about the same Jack Harris. "The one I know couldn't possibly—"

"Nice try, Counselor. You'll hear the details eventually. But Harris? From hometown hero to bad guy zero, just like that."

Chapter 2

As I followed Detective Boyle up two flights of stairs, through a squad room, and down a narrow hallway lined with interrogation rooms and holding cells, I tried to prepare myself mentally.

I hadn't seen Jack in person for nearly twenty years, only pictures. The Sunday Styles announcement when he and Molly née Buckley got married ("Mrs. Harris, 25, is a substitute high school teacher. She graduated from Boston College. She is the daughter of Pamela and Daniel Buckley of Buffalo, New York.") The author photos on three different novels, all typical fare for male literary writers—no smile, intense stare: the opposite of Jack. The annual Christmas card pictures on our friend Melissa's refrigerator—pictures that would eventually turn up in all those "remembering the victims" retrospectives after Molly died.

I knew from all those photographs that Jack, like the rest of us, had aged. A little extra weight softened the angles of his thin face, and a few lines added character to his green eyes. Some flecks of gray lightened what was still a full head of messy brown waves. But despite the subtle changes, he looked in pictures like the boy I'd first met when we were eighteen. If any-

thing, he was one of those people who'd grown more attractive with time.

The man I glimpsed through the one-way glass when Boyle paused outside an interrogation room was not what I had expected from all those photographs. Think of every beauty tip for looking one's best: good sleep, plenty of water, no stress. Getting arrested means the opposite of all that. Jack looked tired and disheveled. Sweat marks pitted his plain white undershirt. Don called it getting hit by "custody's ugly stick"—fear, exhaustion, bad fluorescent lighting: it wasn't pretty.

Jack flinched at the sound of the interrogation room's door opening. His eyes brightened as he recognized me.

I tried to reassure him with a quick smile, then turned to Boyle. "We'll need a private room, please."

"It's private once I shut the door, Counselor. The recording equipment's off."

"Look at it this way, Detective. When your hard work and savvy investigative skills lead you to some nugget that could have been gleaned from the conversation I'm about to have with my client, do you really want me claiming that you got it through a Sixth Amendment violation? Judges know how easy it is to monitor these rooms with the touch of a button. And let's face it, these days a lot of them aren't big fans of the NYPD."

I could see Boyle picturing a courtroom scene in the distant future. "No skin off my ass. Give me a second."

Jack started to speak once Boyle was out of view, but I raised an index finger to my lips. He was staring at me like I might not be real, his eyes searching mine for something—comfort, an explanation, an apology, what? The room, already small, seemed to shrink with every second that passed in silence, and I finally had to look away. Two minutes later, Boyle reappeared, instructed Jack to stand, and handcuffed his wrists behind him.

"Really, Detective?"

"You're the one who wants him moved from this comfy room with a big sturdy lock. Can't have it both ways, Ms. Randall. Or did you forget that your boy's the suspect in a triple homicide?"

THERE WERE NO ONE-WAY WINDOWS or recording instruments in sight in the conference room Boyle ushered us into. I thanked him as he closed the door. He rolled his eyes.

Jack was still looking at me in disbelief. "How did you know—"

"Your daughter called me."

"But how did she—"

"She pieced it together and got worried. From what I can tell, you raised a clever girl."

There was an awkward pause, and he looked at the door that Detective Boyle had just shut. "They really eavesdrop?"

"He needs to know you've got a lawyer who's not going to make his job any easier." Boyle would be back here any minute to say the clock was ticking on the next transport to MDC. After the standard spiel about attorney-client privilege, I got straight to the point. "They seem to think they have something on you. What is it?"

He muttered something so low that I could barely make out the words. *Howard Johnson*.

"The hotel?" I asked.

"No. Your first mock client interview in law school. The professor gave you a fake case file, a robbery. The client's name was Howard Johnson, and you were practicing on me. We were on that lumpy futon in the living room, don't you remember? And you got so mad at me for laughing every time I said my name was Howard Johnson. We kept starting over and over again until you told me to change my name to something else so you could get through the questions, exactly how you wrote them." Jack was staring into the table, seeing a scene that had played out twenty years earlier. "So I started throwing out alternatives: Mel Content, Jerry Atric, Drew Blood. You didn't see the humor until Seymour Butts. You don't sound like a stressed-out first-year law student anymore."

Jack was suffering not only the physical, but also the cognitive tolls of custody. For some people, this part was almost like going into shock. There was no time to reminisce. I had to shake him out of it.

"Jack, you're under arrest, apparently for murder. There were shots fired at the football field at the Hudson piers today. People died. Did they explain any of that to you?" From the quick news searches I'd done on my phone during the cab ride to the precinct, I had yet to see any identification of the victims, or any mention that a suspect had been arrested. "Listen to this question carefully: what would make the police think you did this?"

I had learned the careful phrasing from Don. As worded, the question allowed for distance. It gave the client a chance to tell me what evidence the police might have, but still allowed me ethically to let the client take the stand and offer an entirely divergent story.

"I—I heard the shots by the West Side Highway. I didn't even know they were shots. Then I got home and heard the news. Obviously, I was rattled. I mean, after Molly. That I had been so close to another shooting—"

Back when Molly was killed, I had thought about reaching out. But how? A phone call? A sympathy card? Does Hallmark have a special section for, "Sorry I haven't talked to you since I shattered your life, and now I'm sorry you lost the woman who pieced it back together?" Probably not.

As Jack described how he ended up in an interrogation room wearing a sweaty undershirt, I could picture every step, starting with Jimmy Boyle's knock on Jack's apartment door. Boyle told him they were canvassing for witnesses, like it was standard door-to-door protocol. The police were looking for "folks" who might have seen something. If he could come down to the station, that would be helpful. And Jack was Jack. He was as helpful as they came.

I interrupted to double-check whether the police gave him the option of "helping" from the comfort of his own apartment.

"Um, yeah, I guess so. But Buckley was home, and I could tell she was listening. You know how kids are." Actually, I didn't. "And, well, things with Buckley—she's a tough, brave girl in a lot of ways, but she's sensitive about certain things. The way she lost her mother—it damaged her. So the thought of police coming to her home and asking about anything gun related—you

can imagine that it's upsetting. So when the detective said maybe we could talk at the station instead, I figured it was because he saw me distracted by Buckley."

"So you agreed to come in?"

"Basically. But I said at least half an hour ago that I needed to get home, and he just keeps saying they need a little more time."

I pressed my eyes closed. Jack really was still the same: kind but gullible. The police had played him. "Your daughter was worried for a reason, Jack. You're not a witness. You're a suspect. And that detective seems pretty confident that they have a case against you. What have you told them?"

"This morning— Oh God, Olivia, talking to you, of all people, about this. It's embarrassing."

"Well, right now, I'm all you've got, and Boyle will be back here to process you soon." Booking. Transport. A holding cell. This was no time for him to be shy. "I can't help you if you don't start talking. So let me ask the question again: *what would make the police think you did this?*"

When he was finally done answering my carefully phrased question, he slumped back in his chair and looked up at the acoustic-tiled ceiling. "Jesus, they're never going to believe me."

I managed to keep my response to myself. *Damn straight they won't.*

I PRESSED JACK TO TELL me exactly how much of this information he had given to the police.

"All of it," he said.

"Seriously? The party dress and the basket and the book?"

"The detective said he was curious. He said he was single, too. Every time I asked him why he needed all these details, he seemed to have an explanation."

Boyle had pressed for details because they now knew Jack was locked in—on tape—to a complex explanation for being near the site of the shooting. And complicated stories don't sound as true as simple ones.

Jack was saying he never should have mentioned the woman to Charlotte. "She runs that website, the Room. And she loves romance posts. Jesus, I even said the woman reminded me of Molly—that, for the first time, I was open to the idea of another shot at happiness."

Not a second shot at happiness, but *another* one. Molly was already the second, because I was the first. Twenty years later, and still so much guilt.

"I should have realized," Jack was saying, "that Charlotte would take me literally and try to find the woman. And when Charlotte sets her mind to something . . . the next thing I knew, she's got this post on the Room's home page. I was mortified. She didn't use my name, but she may as well have with all the biographical details. I actually forgot about it, but then Charlotte got a response a few days later. We started e-mailing, and I was supposed to meet her today. I swear, that's all I know."

And he had fed every detail to the police, who would twist and turn the information to suit their needs.

"This woman Madeline's the one who picked the football field as the meeting spot? The e-mails will back that up?"

"Absolutely. Well, with a few connections of dots. Once she responded to the post, I asked her what book had her so engrossed. It was *Eight Days to Die*. It's one of my favorites." I had never heard of it, but, then again, I wasn't a big reader these days. "So last night, when she suggested that we meet in person, she said meet at chapter twelve. Flip to that chapter of *Eight Days to Die*, and there's a scene at the football field."

His bizarre, complicated story about Missed-Moment Madeline had taken on one more absurd layer, but as long as the woman backed him up, we could show that it had not been Jack's idea to place himself at the sports field that morning.

I asked him exactly what happened when he got there.

"Nothing. No big dramatic moment. I saw a few people on the far end of the field, but no woman who seemed to be waiting for me. I wondered for a second if I was on some kind of *Candid Camera* show. I mean, was the entire setup someone's idea of a cruel joke? I felt pretty stupid. Then when

it started pouring rain out of the blue, I took it as a sign. Enough of this, back to real life."

I pointed out that he hadn't completely given up. He had left the basket and the note.

"I guess part of me wanted to believe she'd come through. But I don't know what any of that has to do with the shooting. Or why Malcolm Neeley was there. I swear, when the detective said his name, it was like, *thwack*. An anvil descending from the sky in a cartoon, right onto my head. It still doesn't feel real."

Yet he didn't ask for a lawyer.

Everyone thinks he's somehow going to convince the police he's innocent as long as he doesn't lawyer up. Dumb, dumb, dumb. I asked Jack where his shirt was, even though I suspected I knew the answer.

"When we first got to the station, he said they were running tests on everyone who'd been near the waterfront. He said it would be quick. They swabbed my hands."

"You didn't think it was weird when they asked for your *clothing*?"

"You don't have to talk to me like I'm an idiot, Olivia."

One of our first fights had begun with the identical sentiment: I didn't have to treat him like an idiot. "I'm not treating you like an idiot," I had said. "You're actually *being* an idiot." And then instead of defending himself, he told me I was *emasculating* him. I said something even meaner.

Now, I simply said, "Jack: your shirt."

"The shirt came later. After I told him that I needed to get home, he said we could clear some things up if he could run another test on my shirt. Whatever I need to do to prove I'm innocent, I will do. How long do those tests take?"

I held my tongue.

Gunshot residue. GSR tests were a one-way street for law enforcement. A positive test made the suspect look guilty. A negative test could be explained away by some soap and water.

"I wish you'd tell me this isn't that bad," he said. "I assume the missed-

moment post is still floating around online. The police can read my e-mails, whatever they need. I know it's kind of nutty, but that doesn't mean I shot anyone. How could they even think that?"

"Jack, it's Malcolm Neeley. How could they *not* think it?"

He looked like he was about to cry, but then regained his composure. "You know the irony? When I first saw Madeline on the pier with some kind of package next to her, I thought, maybe she's a runaway bride who has fled her hotel room with a frantically packed go bag, ready to catch an early train out of Penn Station. And then there it was. *Penn Station*—a reminder of the reason I don't look at and wonder about and conjure up entire imagined backstories for women I don't know. Something always sneaks up and reminds me that I don't have *normal* anymore. The minute I thought about Penn Station, I should have run away and never looked back."