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Young Belong to Me

Written by Colin Harrison

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YOU BELONG TO ME



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For Sarah, for Walker, for Julia

The city changes faster, alas, than the human heart.

—BAUDELAIRE

YOU BELONG TO ME



WEST FORTY-NINTH STREET BETWEEN FIFTH AND
SIXTH AVENUES, MANHATTAN

Her story, his trouble, begins in desire. He was walking with Jennifer Mehraz, in a rush. She'd been late to his office, and he'd waited in the lobby until the last minute, then three minutes more until she arrived, swishing in wearing a blue summer dress. "Oh, Paul, I couldn't get a cab—" And so on. We must hurry. Now they were cutting through Rockefeller Center, where the Friday lunchtime crowds were out, men in their shirtsleeves, women letting the September sun hit their legs, eating their expensive sandwiches, phoning, texting, watching and being watched. They didn't much see him, but they definitely noticed Jennifer.

"You can just go right in?" She took long steps in her heels, the wind pushing against her dress. "You don't need a ticket or something?"

"Only if you're bidding."

"Will you bid?"

Paul nodded. "Absolutely."

"Will you *win*?"

"I'd better."

She hurried to keep up. "Do you always win?"

"No. But I rarely lose."

They crossed Forty-ninth Street, passing the limo drivers parked at

the curb, smoking in the time-wasting, disconsolate way that they do, and entered the Christie's plaza.

"Just follow me," Paul told her as they pushed through the glass doors of the auction house. He collected his white bidding paddle at the desk and they proceeded to an elegant theater, where he found two seats for them a third of the way down and close to the aisle—he preferred not to be too far forward, so that his competitors wouldn't sit behind him.

Around them sat the crowd one sees at Christie's: rich people or their playacting representatives. He'd been going for more than twenty years now, ever since his days as an associate in an elephantine law firm seven blocks away, wondering how long it would be before he was fired for laziness or incompetence. The Christie's staff had seen him often enough through the years that they would quietly nod; he was, however, merely another pilgrim to the house of treasure, where the wonders of the world passed by every day, miracles owned by kings, emperors, presidents, moguls, thieves, fanatics, and visionaries, often never to be seen publicly again in the same century *or ever*. He wasn't so interested in Picassos or Elizabeth Taylor's jewels or the occasional Stradivarius. The latest Leonardo da Vinci manuscript or Qing dynasty porcelain bowl left him cold. There was one thing for Paul, and one thing only—old maps of New York City. He was a collector, had been since he was ten years old. How many maps did he own? Too many to count. Most worth not much and few worth quite a bit. And that day at Christie's some superb maps were going on the block, including one he'd tracked for years.

Jennifer watched as the tuxedoed auctioneer adjusted his microphone; meanwhile several wealthy older women inspected her from the row behind. Perhaps they were there to see their own heirlooms sell. A number of the old New York City fortunes had been wiped out in recent years, not that the world cared much or should. It seemed, however, that the women disapproved of Jennifer—Too blond? Too much leg? Too much shoulder? The diamond on her finger too glitteringly huge?—and scrutinized the both of them closely, wondering if she were Paul's young wife or a mistress. The city was full of mistresses, though

few people cared to note that fact. And perhaps Paul looked the type—a bit of the boulevardier, the charming lout lucky to still have his hair, they were probably thinking, a worldly squint in his eyes. But definitely not loaded. Has *some* money but not big money. Shoes not quite good enough, and that watch looks cheap. Rumpled and wrinkled, his best years already behind him, their appraisals made with practiced and devastating accuracy. Yet the women's scrutiny seemed more focused on Jennifer; they could sense that she was not born into the world of money but had pushed or pulled or moaned her way into it. Or maybe they studied her coldly just because she was young, as once they had been and were no longer.

Jennifer was checking her phone. "Ahmed says hello."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere on the Atlantic Ocean."

"When does he get home?"

"Sunday. Then we have the benefit the next night, remember?"

"I bought my tickets."

"But you'd rather not go?"

He hated everything about fancy dinners, including the beginnings, middles, and ends. But Jennifer and her husband were his neighbors across the hall, having become one of those wealthy young couples who kept up a busy schedule, with corporate socializing and charity events three nights a week when Ahmed wasn't zooming off to do yet another deal.

"Well?" she prodded.

"I used to go to these things, back in the day."

"And?"

"The shrimp is usually pretty good."

She leaned against him, and he smelled her perfume. "Paul, you might have actual *fun*, you know . . . Maybe you'll see an old flamer." She took the white numbered paddle from his hand and gave it an experimental wave, her gold bangle bracelets clanking softly. "Will Rachel be there?"

"She will, indeed."

"Right, she can't let you float around *unescorted*."

Jennifer flashed him a wicked little grin that pierced him completely. Then again, he had been pierced completely by women any number of times and yet had lived to tell the tale. After his second divorce, he'd bounced and bumped his way from one woman to another. He seemed to have lost the marriage knack; it hadn't been pretty.

"Wait, who are *they*?" Jennifer pointed at a trio of fussy-looking middle-aged men just arrived, whom Paul recognized as cold-blooded antiquities dealers from Paris, Shanghai, and Dubai. "They look sneaky," she said. "Pretending not to be."

She wasn't quite as wide-eyed as a year earlier, when she and Ahmed had moved in across from him. Learning fast, as you do on the way up. Ahmed was elevating toward the top, having graduated from Yale at age twenty and from Harvard's business *and* law schools at twenty-four, now a hybrid financier-lawyer. Serious high-powered intellect, no doubt about that. Full of himself, a world-beater in a city full of them. He had turned down *three* attempts by Goldman Sachs to hire him. Now thirty-two, Ahmed jetted around the globe doing deals, fronting the money for much older men who preferred to remain unseen. Paul had studied him, from an oblique angle. Maybe that was why he'd agreed to go to the wretched benefit, to watch the newest players in the theater of wealth and ambition, with Ahmed one of the fresh leading men. In effect, Ahmed was no longer working for one entity but several at a time, straddling the liquid intersection point of investment banks, energy companies, and sovereign governments. He was already making a boatload of money. He didn't like Paul much, and considered Paul's branch of law—employment and immigration—tedious small-ball, more or less akin to the manual labor done by the uniformed service workers who cleaned his office each evening. Was Ahmed wrong? No, not at all.

Oh, but the *real* reason he doesn't like me, thought Paul, is that I understand his wife better than he does. Paul knew where Jennifer came from, understood what her last few freckles and faintly nasal Pennsylvania accent *meant*. He doubted Ahmed had ever seen her hometown of Reading, having grown up in a rich immigrant Iranian family in Los Angeles, where the Mehrnaz family now owned a regional

bank and a great deal of commercial real estate. He seemed in a hurry to be the first Iranian-American senator or governor, for which an American-born wife was a prerequisite. But those positions would come years from now, long after his fortune had been banked, his reputation made. Tall and slender without being delicate, his black hair brushed straight back, Ahmed looked both elegant and powerful. And as he aged he would appear even more so. Older men had already started to fear him; Paul had seen as much at the parties, the men watching Ahmed's eyes for a sign of approval, the invisible wires of their anxieties yanking their weathered faces into a grin at his smallest conversational niceties, or nodding when there was no reason to nod. Yes, when the old men fear the young men, take notice, pal.

The auction was announced. He reminded Jennifer they were required to turn off their phones so as not to be able to communicate with confederates in shill bidding.

She handed him the paddle. "Better take this away from me before I do something outrageous," she said playfully. "Would you've left without me if I hadn't shown up at your office?"

"Yes."

"Really? But I'm your *date*." She gazed at him, and he saw in her bright eyes a swirl of sexual amusement and yet confusion about her place in the world. "Really?" she repeated.

But he was scanning the crowd for competitors, noting some fellow worshippers as well as a smattering of local investors who speculated in rare maps or bought them for their business clientele, rare maps now seen as a legitimate hedge against inflation in the same way that collectible coins or fine art were bought to diversify investment portfolios. They all knew one another in their fiendish little world, these greedily obsessive hoarders, these fetishizers of ancient ink and paper; they saw one another at the map collecting societies, they trailed through the overpriced Manhattan galleries, asking casually if the runners had found anything interesting in the estate auctions in New England, the South, the Midwest. Whether anything extraordinary had turned up. As it *always* did, sooner or later!

What drove such fanaticism? The end of paper. People had long

collected maps, but now the world felt a great silent death transpiring. It was said that one of the oil-soaked Saudi princes had lost his head and was buying up any and all maps of the Middle East, any document showing land from the Suez Canal to the far shores of Oman. Price no object, of course. Millions upon millions. Had even quietly approached the British Museum for its priceless military maps of Arabia, and may not have been rebuffed. So, too, were the young Chinese moguls buying up maps of China, especially the eastern coast, where so much had changed over the last thirty years—rivers moved, shorelines filled in, mountains pulverized. American collectors from the West tended to like the huge multicolored maps of Texas, with its shifting borders, and interior regions marked as the territories of Apache or Comanche Indians, and most especially, the various maps prior to 1740 that showed California as an island. But across the world, the common element was the demise of paper. Now maps were pure digital information, pixelated sat-photo hybrids, ever more brilliantly interactive and throbbingly detailed. Zoom in, zoom out. But no matter how dense they were with glittering up-to-the-minute information, these maps were not tangible. No practiced hand had made them. No weak-eyed wretch had pressed an irregular sheet of rag paper upon an ink-rolled copper plate. Paul couldn't touch them or feel them; continuously updated, they preserved *nothing*.

Against this onslaught of time, he collected maps of New York City. Was it because he had spent his life there? Oh, Paul, he was just fifty now, old enough to be haunted by memory late at night, alone in bed and listening to the sirens rush away in the far streets, old enough that some of his maps, those few from the late twentieth century and beyond, represented landscapes where he himself had once stood. A boy attending public school in Brooklyn, riding the graffiti-slathered subways in the 1970s. A young college student at Columbia panting after the Barnard girls. A freshly minted lawyer, putting in the long hours, still interested in keeping his shoes shined. But for the most part, the New York City frozen in his maps had been long lost to time and to all living memory. He could only console himself by inspecting them closely with his magnifying eyeglasses, made for surgeons, 6X, ordered

from Germany. He would gaze at such maps, then lift his eyes to the window and see what had become of those same places, the glass city built atop the iron city built atop the brick city built over wooden structures held together with oak pegs and four-sided iron nails. For that is what New York is, a never completed masterwork, torn down even as it is resurrected, each minute populated by a different swarm of humanity streaming in and out through the bridges and tunnels—

—which was how Jennifer Mehrnaz had first appeared in New York City. Still Jenny Hayes then, she'd arrived from Pennsylvania on a Greyhound bus that passed through the Lincoln Tunnel, her luggage consisting of a battered duffel and a backpack. Reading was an unremarkable small city, but deeply American. He'd been there. Yes, sir. Poor and old, the factories empty or torn down. Surrounded by cornfields and new subdivisions. It had a minor league baseball team and men who fixed tractor-trailers and obese retired people eating breakfast at McDonald's. And yet from time to time a stunning and privately troubled girl grows up in a place like Reading, and only slightly less frequently does she leave to seek her future in Los Angeles, New York, Las Vegas . . . the big towns, where the light and noise, the distant mountains of money, are to be found. The more beautiful the girls, the more volatile their destinies. The world always has uses for them, especially ones who have no advantage other than their beauty, no education, no money, no family . . . who have already measured the distance between themselves and desperation. He'd met a number over the years, especially between marriages I and II, and had seen how tough and lonely they often were. Carrying around big holes inside, marked LOST FATHER, MOTHER BIPOLAR, BROTHER SELLS SYNTHETIC HEROIN, or some such. He and Jennifer had discussed how she'd grown up, and he'd wondered if her desire to talk to him was due to her awareness that the walls were quickly going up around her, that year by year she would be more completely defined by Ahmed's identity and wealth and position, carried ever that much farther away from where she'd come. Her mother had been a town beauty who'd married the wrong man a couple of different times. Jennifer never spoke to her now. And it was this past, she'd admitted, that she tended not to describe in detail for Ahmed, because

doing so made him look at her a certain way. She'd learned to tell people she'd "studied at Penn State" before coming to New York to look for work. Technically, this was true, but there was an unexplained gap of almost three years between the time she arrived in New York and the day she'd met Ahmed. Did Ahmed know much about those years? Paul's guess was no.

"You ready?" Jennifer asked him, watching the auctioneer confer with various aides and assistants.

"First the French and British maps."

For sale was the entire Hingham Collection, accrued over more than one hundred years, initially by a British sea captain and then by the captain's son and grandson. The American heirs, it was said, had squandered their considerable inheritance in all the usual ways (stock market myopia; pharmaceutical existentialism; penile dementia; the wretched euphoria of alcoholism) and a few less usual ones (the self-important funding of incomprehensible art films; the donation of weighty sums to religious charismatics), and had been forced to sell off the many hundreds of maps in the collection, the total value of which exceeded \$60 million, according to the pre-auction estimates. Old Captain Hingham, long of beard when alive and utterly dead since 1904, had purchased maps in all of his ports of call, said the Christie's program, around Europe, of course, Africa, India, the Asian coastal cities, Australia. He'd rolled them up in clean sheets of Japanese rice paper and slipped them into surplus brass artillery shells he bought from the British navy and expertly sealed them with muslin and wax against the invasion of moisture, light, insects, or curious human fingers. Each long brass shell was labeled with the particulars of the map's age, dimensions, provenance, and purchase price. When he returned twice a year to his seaside cottage on the North Yorkshire coast, he placed the maps and his captain's logs (also sealed with wax) into a recessed space in the bone-dry stone cellar. And that is where they stayed, unopened and stacked like wine bottles in an angled mahogany lattice, as his son and grandson, both in the British merchant marine, kept adding to them without ever looking at what was already there. It wasn't until the late 1960s that the great-great-granddaughter retrieved

the hundreds of maps stored beneath the house, revealing a spectacular collection. Old Captain Hingham had amassed something for just about everyone, including half a dozen maps of old New York.

But Paul was only interested in one. It was about a hundred and fifty years old and had long fascinated him: the private, oversized map of Manhattan printed by D. T. Valentine. From the period of 1841 to the early 1870s, Valentine, a fastidious, portly man who parted his hair down the middle, assembled a spectacular annual volume called the *Manual of the Common Council of New York*. These were small, thick books compiling the statistics of the burgeoning city, with reports on the progress of its construction, and were distributed to wealthy businessmen, politicians, and other notables, who often had their names stamped in gold on the spine. The yearly volumes were lavishly illustrated with hand-colored engravings depicting scenes from the city as well as folded maps representing New York of both the present day and the past. Paul had dutifully acquired a copy of every one.

But D. T. Valentine had commissioned a private, oversized version of his vertical representation of the island of Manhattan, one on which he noted and hand-colored the exact locations and names of saloons, brothels of fine reputation, churches, schools, firehouses, insane asylums, and cemeteries (including those reserved for Negroes, Quakers, and Jews). Most maps of the period were no larger than two feet by three feet, but this beauty stretched forty-one inches wide by sixty-four inches high. Two examples were known to be in existence: a less ornate version held in the New York Public Library and the second in the Hingham Collection, bought for three dollars in gold in 1887, when the contents of Valentine's personal effects were liquidated. The map's cartouche featured an Indian and a worldly New Yorker in a top hat sitting on either side of a globe, upon which a golden eagle and a beaver perched. The waters of the Hudson and East Rivers were replete with representations of the major wooden sailing vessels of the day, and the docks of the East Side were each labeled by the shipping lines they serviced. Where the burgeoning metropolis reached the bucolic edge of the countryside—somewhere around present-day Ninetieth Street—Valentine could not resist inscribing what remaining farms existed on the isle of Manhattan

as well as representing where their orchards stood, rendering tiny apple trees in rows. Paul even knew how many, having counted them while poring over the high-resolution scan of the map that the auction house provided; its clarity and detail were virtually pornographic.

There were specific reasons why he craved this map, each more mentally toothsome than the next. First, the map was rare, complete, beautiful, magnificent, and was desired by every major New York City map collector. Yet the same could be said of perhaps a dozen maps appearing on the market each year. Second—and of signal interest to those same collectors—the map was so large that Valentine had ample space to annotate the map as he saw fit. This meant that he recorded, in his quill pen (the blue ink of his minute letterings tinged with violet), on certain streets the comings and goings of personages whose travels he deemed worthy of documentation. Such as a line of faint dashes through the Bowery thus inscribed: *This route walked by M^r. Charles Dickens of England on 1st visit to U. States, 1842*. Ten blocks north, along the edge of Cooper Union's Great Hall, read the notation *A. Lincoln speech given here Febry, 1860*. Last, Valentine's hand identification of the names of various saloons, bars, inns, and houses of ill repute included, at the corner of Bleecker and "Broad-Way," a saloon owned by a W. E. Reeves, Paul's great-great-grandfather, whose own records had amounted to no more than a worthless, mouse-nibbled sheaf of papers. Fantastic. *Irresistible*. Oh, did he want—

—such a pedestrian word, *want*. Useless in these circumstances. He desired and needed and required the oversized map, he *craved* it; he fevered for it, he felt that it was already rightfully his; he wanted to touch it and smell it and possess it, to run his finger along its stiff edges. He had felt such possessiveness before—with women, and during legal battles. He was not, at heart, decorous and civilized, no matter how he appeared. His ostensible refinement went only so deep, and beneath that there was something else, harder, meaner, a man governed by impulse and need rather than prudence. His second wife, who was in no way shy about her opinions, said to him, "Paul, you *look* nice, but you are actually a fucking bastard." There'd been no point in disagreeing.

Now the auctioneer announced himself, and the first of the Hing-

ham maps, an enormous 1753 *Plan de la Rivière Seine à Paris*, was immediately displayed, to general applause. A spectacular map with the Jardin des Tuileries drawn in detail as well as the twelve bridges across the Seine listed in a numbered key. If you were a Parisian, how could you possibly resist? The bidding began slowly, then accelerated in ten-thousand-dollar increments until the pretenders were winnowed out.

"Wow," said Jennifer. "The French were—"

"The best mapmakers of their era," he said.

"So beautiful," Jennifer whispered, glossy lips an inch from his ear.

"But not for me."

Two numbered paddles were being waved from either side of the room, and the auctioneer consulted with the staff on the phone with the call-in bidders. It was then that Paul noticed a stir, a disturbance, in the gallery of expensive hair and clever eyeglasses behind them. Eager to see if any of the Manhattan dealers in front might make a play for the Paris map, he paid no attention. Until he heard Jennifer make a noise—a little strangled cry.

She had turned to look down their row of seats. Standing in the aisle four patrons away was a large young man in desert-colored soldier's fatigues. He was tall and hawkishly handsome in a blond, sun-beaten way, and he stared down at her expectantly. Aggressively. As if he knew her well. His large hands looked calloused. He didn't react to the curious stares from the auction patrons who'd noticed him, including the gaggle of disapproving women behind them.

"How did—?" Jennifer whispered fiercely, seemingly aware of the exact distance the man had traveled to this place, or even what he had overcome to be standing before her. She stood, weakly, it seemed, and glanced at Paul, her eyes clouded by both an unnamed grief and an inability to resist an even stronger feeling. Paul waited for her to offer a word of explanation.

But Jennifer said nothing and squeezed awkwardly past the four seat-holders to the aisle, not bothering to apologize, and collapsed against the man. His arms enveloped her, his chin atop her head, but he did not close his eyes during their embrace and instead swept his gaze aggressively across all those who witnessed them, particularly Paul, daring

anyone to intervene. Paul waited for Jennifer to look back at him, but she did not. They left together then, Jennifer fetching in her blue summer dress as she leaned against the man, needing or wanting his support like one who is intoxicated and does not expect to recover anytime soon.

He sat mystified, the minutes flicking by, no longer thinking about where he was or what he was doing, searching his conversations with Jennifer for any reference to this unnamed man. He was not a brother or a cousin, Paul was sure, despite the similar coloring, for she had folded herself into the man's arms in a much different way, with intimate familiarity. And how did he know she was here? Jennifer had walked straight from her apartment to Paul's office. She had not expected him, for her reaction showed her surprise. One doesn't just happen upon former lovers—if that was what they were—in a place like New York. The city is too big, the chances for coincidental contact too small . . .

It was then that Paul heard the auctioneer announce the next item, and he instinctively consulted his catalog. Had he really not been paying attention? Had the Chinese already battled for Captain Hingham's Shanghai maps? The D. T. Valentine map had just gone up—*My god, I have to be more alert!*—and for the next few minutes he waved his paddle with reckless insistence, eager to just buy the damn thing, overpaying if necessary, and not interested in the thrill of competition. He had been looking forward to having Jennifer next to him as he won this fabulous map, and now she was gone, leaving him irritated and perplexed by her disappearance. He kept his paddle aloft. The other serious bidders—three collectors and a dealer—saw his fanatical determination and gave up. Going once, twice . . . *Bang*. Sold to the tall man with the scowl on his face.

Later, after Paul had signed the papers that specified the buyer's premium atop the "hammer price," and stood to go, a corpulent young man stepped forward.

"Mr. Paul Reeves?"

“Yes?”

“I work for Robert Gibbs.” A prominent estate attorney who tidied the piles of money left behind by wealthy people. “We had reason to think that you might be at the auction today.”

“Well, here I apparently am.”

“Mr. Gibbs instructed me to find you and let you know, in a highly confidential manner”—the young man leaned forward—“that the health of Mr. James Stassen is not good, that he is, ah, *failing*.”

“James McKinley Stassen?”

The young man quietly nodded.

Paul felt suddenly alert, electric with alarm. The owner of the Stassen-Ratzer map of New York? Was it possible? Unseen in thirty years? Hand-colored copperplate engraving, 47¾ by 35 inches? Commissioned by the British Admiralty in 1766, the Ratzer was the finest map of an American city made in the eighteenth century and was extremely rare. Created by Lieutenant Bernard Ratzer, military engineer in the Royal American Regiment. Stassen’s copy had a singular history, and had accidentally appeared in the blurry background of a black-and-white photograph in a *Life* magazine article from the early 1940s about Manhattan society women. Paul had a copy of the article in his files. The Stassen-Ratzer map. Worth a *thousand* rare Valentines!

“I didn’t realize he was still alive.”

“It’s expected that Mr. Stassen will last—well, not too much longer.” The young man handed Paul a business card. “Mr. Gibbs would take it as a great favor if you would contact him at your convenience . . . But sooner rather than later.”

Now it was Paul who kept his voice low. “The potential sale is to occur before Stassen dies?”

“Mr. Gibbs will explain the particularities.”

He took that as a yes. “Tell your boss I’m impressed he found me. I’d like to meet him Monday or Tuesday?”

“Mr. Stassen is having a medical procedure in his apartment early next week. The soonest would be Wednesday morning at nine.”

“Fine, fine,” said Paul. “I’ll be there.”

“We propose you meet at Mr. Stassen’s residence.”

Because that's where the map is, thought Paul. "Okay."

The man produced a piece of paper. "The address, on Park Avenue. Mr. Gibbs will meet you in the lobby at nine."

Paul folded the paper into his pocket. "Assuming, of course, Mr. Stassen doesn't leave us before then."

He walked home to Sixty-sixth Street, trying to enjoy his capture of the Valentine, but distracted by the fact that the Stassen-Ratzer was in play. What was wrong with him? He had followed the Valentine map for eight years. Now he had it! And so what! Could he feel no satisfaction? Was he such a materialistic idiot that he already needed the next acquisition, the next *confiscation*? This is truly an illness, he thought, I'm a goddamned, pathetic map *junkie*, a middle-aged man who hoards old pieces of paper. But . . . but no!—*no*, the Stassen-Ratzer map *merited* such psychic distress! . . . If the rumors, the rare glimpses, reported over the years were true—and maybe they weren't!—but if they were, then it was not just *any* map of New York City, it was Halley's Comet and Michael Jordan and Sophia Loren and John Lennon and Angkor Wat. There was one, *only one*. Could he afford the Stassen map? No. Not possible. Well, yes, but it would hurt mightily. He'd have to mortgage his apartment. Or sell off holdings. But that took time. This was a different situation; the seller would demand payment quickly. As the sole owner of his law firm, Paul could draw on the firm's credit line. Certainly irregular, yet not quite illegal. But doable. A little paperwork to adjust and sign. Maybe he would will the map to the Smithsonian, the only proper thing to do. BEQUEST OF PAUL REEVES. Had a nice egomaniacal ring to it. Why hadn't Stassen done that? Impossible to know. He found himself sweating through his suit, striding faster than necessary, pressing forward as if genuinely rushing to get somewhere. Then, there he was, turning the corner to his apartment building, a fifty-eight-story stack in which each floor was shaped like the letter U laid flat and contained two mirror-image apartments, the elevator arriving at their intersection.

"Afternoon, sir," muttered Parker, the doorman. Paul thought his

navy-blue uniform was ridiculous and suspected Parker did, too, the effect being to compress his personality within his starched jacket and striped pants. But now Paul wondered if he caught a glint in Parker's eye—a shard of savage amusement that he knew he'd better keep to himself. Which, a second or two later, he did, his expression melting into the disinterested formality he usually displayed.

The elevator stopped on the forty-seventh floor. Jennifer and Ahmed's apartment, 47-E, stood to the right, and Paul's, 47-W, to the left. They would stay in their three-bedroom only a little while longer, he surmised. It wasn't grand enough for their rising station, and within a year or two, perhaps after a first child, they would inevitably move to a much larger place, Central Park West perhaps, or the new building on Fifty-seventh Street, where the penthouse had just sold for no less than \$120 million to the daughter of a Russian oligarch. He noticed that their front door was open, about an inch, as if someone had intended to shut it but had been distracted. This happened from time to time and usually meant Jennifer had dashed down to the lobby to greet a friend or retrieve a delivery. He took a step toward the door, noticed no lights on in the apartment, and listened a moment. Nothing. He turned toward his own door a few paces away.

His apartment had once been a similar three-bedroom but he had converted it into a one-bedroom with a large display gallery. The building was designed so that all of its apartments would catch the morning light through their eastern windows. The two legs of the U were a mere forty-five feet away from each other, and when the light was just so, one could gaze directly through that space into the large plate-glass windows of the mirror-image apartment across the way. In the morning the eastern apartments could look into the sun-washed western apartments and in the afternoon the western could look into the eastern. But not in Paul's case, for these windows were located along one wall of his map gallery and he'd installed slatted louver blinds on all of them, virtually eliminating the penetration of sunlight into the room.

The reason was simple. Sunlight damaged maps, especially those that were brightly colored. Although all of his maps were framed with ultraviolet glass, he was distrustful that this offered full protection. So

his private museum remained hidden from the world. He had installed floor-to-ceiling display walls and his maps hung there undisturbed. They were laid out according to strict chronology, and one stepped into the room at the middle of the seventeenth century—the period when maps of New York City were first made, often drawn by hand with pen and ink—and reached the present era at the end. There were a few blank gaps in this progression, places he expected someday to fill. Oh, he *was* happy now to have the Valentine map! It was quite an experience to walk past these maps one after the other. He saw time. He saw *what had happened*. Would that he owned every map ever drawn of New York! Merely to posit that idea made him a little crazy; to have every map would be to have *all of it*, every block and street and lane and alley and crooked road—and such possession would only be godlike, for no such collection did exist, or could. The closest would be the complete holdings of the New York Public Library, and although the curators there had access to this near-infinity, they did not *possess* it. The maps did not *belong* to them. They did not have the legitimate power of destruction. They could not burn the whole lot, as Paul could with his collection, were he ever mad enough to do that. For the collector collects to *have*. To own, to worship, to possess—to say this is mine and no one else's.

Because the windows of his map room were always shuttered, the occupants of the other apartment across the way had long ago lost their inhibitions in front of their own windows. He rarely took advantage of this vulnerability. However, guided by instinct or curiosity, now he proceeded to the farthest window—the one directly opposite Jennifer and Ahmed's bedroom—and, perfectly hidden in shadow, gently pulled down the slat at eye level.

He saw them.

The tall blond soldier was atop Jennifer, her long legs lifted high around his waist, her arms clasped around his shoulders. The late light was sufficient to see the undulating ridge of tanned muscle that ran along either side of his spine, the lifting buttocks that sank and rose and sank again, driving himself into her. A movement neither too hurried nor too slow. Paul watched them with affection for their youth and

urgency; he had been that young, that vital, once. We all were, no? Or will have been? But if he gazed upon their copulation with a kind of sentimental reverie, he also could not forget certain lessons learned and unlearned and learned again at great cost in his own life, as one who had batted around in the city for decades now, seen men and women regularly wreck their lives while guided by the astonishing conviction that they were doing just the opposite. That they had it all figured out, that they knew what was up, that the reward was worth the risk, that the secret wouldn't be broken, that one's own heart was knowable. Yet there Jennifer and her soldier were, in the grip of great glory and hidden happiness, and although he was glad for them (how can we condemn lovers, really?—is it possible?) he wondered if the moment was yet an ominous beginning, certainly for Jennifer Mehraz and her husband, but perhaps even for himself as well.

He dropped the slat . . . but lifted it again. He had to see, of course, see all. Now Jennifer's arms rose in the air above the soldier, splayed wide, open to him, receiving whatever might come next. As he loomed above her, she reverently licked the thick curve of his neck. That she was beneath a man not her husband in the expensive vault that her husband had bought—the front door still open, no less—was apparently far from her consciousness. The seconds passed; the big soldier thrust again and again until a last convulsion ran through Jennifer, and then through him. Jennifer lifted her forehead against the man's chest—Paul imagined he could hear her cry out—and then they were done.

He gently let the slat fall, and stepped back into the darkness of his maps, which seemed gathered about him in silent witness, each a different, frozen face of the city that had held innumerable lives.

Decades tumbling on decades.

Wish and dream, trouble and desire.