FDR DRIVE

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To the people of SDNY, past and present,
who are an enduring force for good

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FDR DRIVE



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PROLOGUE

New Wave Pier baked in the early September sun. The occasional tongues of artificial turf that the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation had bolted down to create a "park" out of a long strip of concrete on the East River's edge were hot enough to burn exposed skin. Not that the joggers and stroller-pushing parents were tempted to linger. Here at Forty-First Street, the pier ended without warning and the choices were a U-turn or a dip in the treacherous river, chaotically reversing direction with the tide.

Today, the pedestrians made their turns long before the end, rather than approach the big black NYPD Emergency Service Unit vehicle idling loudly in the sunshine. The sanitation department had moved two barricades to open a gap in the fence so the BearCat could back onto the pier from the FDR Drive. The truck's air conditioning was working hard, which was a blessing to the seven ESU officers inside in full tactical gear. In the front passenger seat, Sergeant George Burrell stared out at the northbound traffic on the Drive and fantasized about not being a supervisor so he could be hunched in the back with the team, who were scrolling on their phones. *But I'm a boss now,* he thought, shaking his head. *Boss of this hot-as-hell little piece of concrete.*

"It's all about deterrence and perimeter," his lieutenant had explained. The big event at the United Nations was generating lots of threatening

chatter on social media and NYPD was going to lock it down in concentric circles, which was why they were pulling his squad in from Staten Island. "Park near the FDR so the world can see you," he said. "Show the flag, and in the unlikely event the shit hits the fan, we got you in reserve. Easy time and a half for your guys."

Burrell couldn't say *I would trade the overtime for some action, sir. Great to be in Manhattan, but we don't wanna just sit here; we wanna do shit.*

But any shit to be done was over there, in one of the circles closer to the tall rectangle of the UN headquarters he could see through his door window. There were a bunch of ESU teams between here and there. Even FBI SWAT was positioned closer to the big rally. *I show the flag. They're in the fight.* He shook his head and looked down, glancing at his phone.

◆

He thought he might have imagined the faint *pop, pop* sound but he looked up just as an explosive shockwave rocked the BearCat, almost lifting the front wheels off the ground before dropping it down to bounce on the powerful suspension. Even inside the armored vehicle, the blast was loud, followed immediately by the sickening crunching of metal as cars were thrown against the FDR's barriers. Burrell shouted, "Go! Go!" as he jumped from the truck and began running toward a cloud of smoke on the far side of the FDR, right where Forty-First Street ended at the Drive. Holding his M4 rifle with two hands, he squeezed past a car with a crushed driver's side and weaved across the cluttered and suddenly still roadway.

At the corner of Forty-First, he saw something on the ground, mostly obscured by the gray smoke. Three steps more and there it was:

the lower half of a man's body—jeans and white sneakers with legs and feet still in them—lying next to a hole gouged in the sidewalk. He turned to see his squad behind him, charging across the FDR, then looked back toward a sound coming from the direction of First Avenue, in front of the Midtown Tunnel ventilation building. A woman was crouched beside a motionless figure in the middle of the street, shouting and holding something up in her hand. George sprinted through the dust cloud and leveled his weapon at her.

"FBI! Jessica Watson, FBI!" she shouted. He could see now that she was holding her leather credential case in the air. "Agent down! Agent down!"

Burrell was next to her now. He glanced at a very large man lying on his back, eyes closed. She was holding her hand against what looked to be a wound in his right chest under his arm, dark blood surging around her fingers with each beat of his heart as she begged with the wounded man. "Please, Benny, please, hold on. Stay with me." George had seen plenty of sucking chest wounds during his two tours in Afghanistan. "Doc!" he shouted to the squad's medic as the five operators came up behind him. "Officer down."

The medic knelt and tore open her kit. "Shrapnel?"

"Gunshot," Jessica answered as she moved out of the way so the medic could do her job.

Jessica turned to Burrell, speaking rapidly but calmly. "There were two. My partner was shot just before the first bomber blew up. Second is White male, thirties, six feet, black cap, green backpack." She looked up at him, then turned to point toward First Avenue. "It's gotta be another bomb. He's heading for the rally."

Burrell clicked his radio as he ran. "Dispatch, ESU Delta, ten-thirteen, ten-thirteen, Forty-One and FDR Drive. Officer down,

officer down. Shots fired, explosion. In pursuit. Subject last seen headed to First Avenue."

He paused when he realized he didn't know the radio code for a bombing. "Possible bomb attack, UN. FBI says the guy has a bomb."

He was sprinting toward the corner as the dispatcher responded in the usual fashion, a flat voice requesting a description. He gulped for air and kept running, gasping out what Jessica had said. The emergency tones for all units sounded on his radio as he turned onto First Avenue. All he could see ahead were thousands of people walking north to celebrate global unity at the United Nations.

CHAPTER ONE

One year earlier

"So in college are you going to take me to class every day too?" Sophie asked as they walked along Eighty-Third Street not holding hands.

"This is different," Nora Carleton answered with a smile. "Sure, if that's what you want, but only if you promise to go someplace nearby."

"Hilarious. Look, Mom, I love you, but I'm in seventh grade now and I'm almost thirteen. Nobody my age gets walked to school anymore."

"Could be the other parents don't see the darkness in the world, Bug."

"Could be some parents see only the darkness."

Nora exhaled audibly. "Please give me a slight break since it's just the first week of school and change can be hard for parents, you know."

They walked several steps in silence before Nora spoke again. "Okay, I'll stop at East End. But then your friends won't get to see you model a deeply affectionate relationship with your mother, which is kinda sad."

"They'll survive," Sophie said, grinning. "Besides, they're raised by their nannies anyway."

They stopped at the northwest corner of Eighty-Third Street and East End Avenue, a block before the Brearley School, a private, all-girls

school that Sophie had attended since their move to Manhattan from Westport, Connecticut. The school was down a dead end where the Upper East Side met the East River, almost literally. The building itself was older than the FDR Drive, which deferred to its elder by dipping under Brearley and its neighbors so as not to block the view.

Nora opened her arms. "Nana will meet you after school. Gimme a squeeze."

Sophie leaned toward her mother, but paused. "Can you ask her to meet me here?"

"Of course," Nora answered. "And I will leave it to you to explain that you are ashamed of her."

"Mom—" Sophie began, but Nora pulled her in close.

"Kidding, kidding. Can't believe how tall you're getting." Nora's chin rested on top of her daughter's hair, which was straight, middle parted, and auburn, just like her mother's.

"Should stop soon," Sophie replied. "I think I'm going to be average height, thank God."

Nora pushed her back, her hands holding Sophie's shoulders, an exaggerated serious expression on her face. "What, you don't want to be five twelve like your mom? You've seen a lot of short WNBA stars? And don't forget Taylor Swift is five eleven!"

Sophie smiled at their familiar banter and gave her mother a final hug. "Nothing personal. Fine being you; I just want to be a *mini*-you, and I prefer soccer to basketball. Also, I love you."

"Love you too, Bug." Nora released her and watched her walk away, before calling out, "You know you can't choose height. It's in the DNA."

Sophie spun in a circle with her arms out wide and smiled before continuing the walk to school.

I am my mother, Nora thought, watching her. *How the hell did that happen so fast?*

It was a short walk from Sophie's school to the subway. Nora could take the newer Second Avenue line downtown or walk two blocks farther to the ancient Lexington Avenue line. Because the Second Avenue Q train wandered in strange ways, both routes got her to the federal building in lower Manhattan in about the same time, so she alternated and tried to be random about it. Sophie was correct: Nora's work and life experience—especially now that she was the Deputy United States Attorney, the number two in the Southern District of New York—had indeed given her a dark view of humans. But she also knew another truth: patterns were a gift to bad people who might want to hurt you, so there was no harm in changing routes.

On the subway, Nora put earphones in to keep people from talking to her, but never played sound through them; that would obscure any threats around her. She would read on her phone and take calls if any came (and if she had enough reception), but she wouldn't be distracted by music or a podcast in a crowded metal box with strangers deep underground. *Yeah, maybe a little dark,* she thought, putting the devices in her ears. Still, her eyes swept the car at each stop and she wondered what voices some of those strangers were listening to.

Emerging from the Canal Street subway stop, Nora almost had to will her feet not to follow the familiar path to the United States Attorney's office. Her beloved and decrepit old building, which shared a brick plaza with NYPD headquarters, was getting its first overhaul since 1974, when the federal government originally built it next to the

Church of St. Andrew. The structure had been emptied and would be stripped down to the beams before being rebuilt, although it would end up substantially the same size and still be too small for the full United States Attorney's office staff. *Only the government would replace an inadequate building with a slightly nicer inadequate building.*

Instead, as she entered Foley Square, Nora turned toward the massive office tower directly across from the Thurgood Marshall courthouse—the Jacob K. Javits federal office building. But nobody called it that. To the FBI, which filled many of its forty-one floors, it was "26 Fed," short for 26 Federal Plaza, another made-up US government address in lower Manhattan. The tall windows of 26 Fed offered sweeping views in all directions. Now the Criminal Division of the US Attorney's office had those views—as a temporary tenant on two floors, just above the FBI. The space was fine—although the walk across Foley Square to court felt unnecessarily exposed—but Nora couldn't shake the feeling that they were unwelcome guests temporarily invading the FBI's turf.

The building's many federal tenants, including the perpetually busy immigration and social security offices, made it a crowded place during business hours, so Nora had to squeeze into an elevator for the ride to 38. There, the security guard greeted her with a broad smile and waved her around the X-ray machines.

"Mornin' boss," he said.

"You know you've got to stop with the 'boss' stuff, Artie," Nora replied, shaking her head. "You've known me for ten years."

"Only the day after you leave, which I hope is never," he answered.

Nora laughed and turned left down the long, narrow hallway. Prosecutors on the outside, with windows; support staff on the inside, no windows—sunlight reaching them only through the frosted glass walls

of the lawyers' offices. She greeted everyone she saw, stopping to chat every few doors, trying to remember whom she had visited most recently.

Far down the hall, she could see the enormous figure of Benny Dugan blocking the sunlight coming out of her office. But she didn't hurry, hopscotching among office doors until she finally reached him and heard the Brooklyn baritone.

"Ms. Smooth," he said, using his longtime nickname for her, "you running for office or somethin'? Lotta baby kissing goin' on."

Nora smiled and looked up at the six-foot-five Benny, noticing for the first time, with the sun behind him, that his blond crew cut was turning gray. "I'm a *leader* now, Mr. Rough, as you too often forget. I'm the DUSA"—she pronounced it *doo-sah*—"and a leader needs to check in with the troops as often as possible. And I read somewhere that the CEO of a restaurant chain has to constantly taste the soup to know what's going on."

"Very leader-like," he replied.

"And unlike the crappy old building, where the DUSA only passed three offices on the way to her door, this monstrosity offers the DUSA a chance to taste a lot of soup along a single hallway."

Benny smiled. "And will the DUSA be referring to herself in the third person at all times now?"

"She is giving it serious thought," Nora said with a grin, pushing past him into her office. "And how may the DUSA serve you this fine morning?"

Benny followed her across the big office and dropped his two hundred and fifty pounds onto the blue faux-leather couch. "Your mom wanted me to remind you that she'll be home tonight—after she picks up Soph at school—and she's gonna make her ziti casserole. Asked if you could grab some bread and a bottle of Chianti on your way home."

Nora pulled her mouth into a tight line and stared at Benny without speaking.

"What, what?" he protested. "Just delivering messages."

Nora chuckled and shook her head. "I just can't get used to this life."

"What life?"

"You, Mom, an item. She didn't come home last night. I was worried sick."

Benny blew air out of his nose. "No, you weren't. You knew she was safe and sound in the arms—"

"Nope," Nora interrupted, "stop right there. Don't need any R-rated images of you and my mother in my head. No, thank you."

"Your mind," Benny said, shaking his head. "I was going to be entirely appropriate."

Nora laughed. "If my mom is making you *appropriate,* we may have a chance on global warming."

"Always the comedian," Benny mumbled.

"Will you be joining us to eat your girlfriend's famous ziti dish?"

"I wish," Benny said, "but I got a surveillance on the Buchanan case, which we're gonna brief Carmen on this morning."

"Oh right, what time are you meeting with Carmen and the DUSA?"

Benny paused and shook his head. "It's not working."

Nora laughed. "No, it's not. Was worth a shot. What time should I be there?"

Benny pushed himself to his feet. "Ten. Carmen's office."

As he walked to the door, Nora called after him. "Hey, just so you know, I actually like this new life. You're good for her."

Benny turned. "I'm not as good a person as you think I am."

"Did the DUSA say you were a good person?"

"The DUSA did not," he replied with a broad smile. "See you in a few."