

CHAPTER ONE

Max Lovely stopped his old Chrysler at the end of his driveway. His neighbor was on her front porch, struggling with a plastic trash can in the fading light. He turned off the engine.

"I'll get that for you, Mrs. Grybowski."

She sighed. "This garbage can keeps getting bigger."

"They have a way of doing that." He carried it down to the sidewalk and left it beneath the old maple tree in front of her house.

"You're a very kind young man," she said.

"Well, you're half right." He hadn't even been young a decade ago when she started calling him that.

She laughed. "How about some coffee?"

"Thanks, but I'm on my way to a client."

"A client?! In that shirt?"

Lovely glanced down. "There's a problem? Someone my age would notice?"

"Come on," she said, shaking her head. "A minute with my iron."

Lovely waited shirtless on her couch, chastened, slightly embarrassed, grateful as always for her concern.

"There. Now you'll make a good impression on him," she declared.

"Her."

She raised her eyebrows. "Single?"

"Probably deranged like most of my clients. Thank you, Mrs. Grybowski. Any trash cans give you trouble, call me. You're under my protection."

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It was past ten p.m. when Lovely turned back onto his street. He lived in Watertown, on the outskirts of Boston, in a

neighborhood of boxy two-family houses dating from the early twentieth century. The street was deserted at that hour. As far as he could tell, he was the only person on the block who stayed up past eleven and slept past six.

Lovely's new client, Jaimee Kantor, hadn't seemed unstable. He wasn't so sure about her ex-husband, though. He had vanished three weeks earlier only to reappear, wraith-like, at the window of her fifth-floor apartment the previous evening. The unsettling image still preoccupied Lovely, and he was pulling into his driveway before he noticed the alien object on his front porch. He stopped short and squinted at it. A man was crouched beneath his living room windows. The man sprang to his feet, cleared the porch steps in a stride, and took off down the street.

Lovely spun his car around and stomped on the gas. Out in the open, he could see the man was tall and thin, with broad, angular shoulders. He was wearing coveralls and black leather gloves. He darted onto a side street. Lovely skidded around the corner in time to see him cut in between two houses. Lovely screeched to a stop, jumped out. No one in sight. He raced to the back of the houses, glanced left and right. The maze of connected back yards was in deep shadow.

Lovely ran back to his car for a flashlight and tried again. The light swept over a familiar landscape of detached garages shaded by oaks and maples, a few listing storage sheds, smaller ornamental trees and shrubs, vine-covered trellises. Too much cover. He searched the area for fifteen minutes but turned up nothing. The man could be half a mile away by now.

Lovely went back to his car and drove home. As he passed Mrs. Grybowski's house, he noticed her front door was open. He pulled over. She wasn't on the porch. He climbed the steps and rang the bell. "Mrs. Grybowski?" He rang again. Had she gone out and left the door open by accident? It was possible, given her short-term memory. He gently closed the door.

Lovely parked in the stand-alone garage at the rear of his house, a frame two-family with faded blue paint. He lived

on the first floor beneath his landlord. Lovely checked the lock on his front door, then took a quick look inside. Nothing appeared out of order. He brought his flashlight out to the porch where he had spotted the prowler.

A screen on one of the living room windows was pushed up. There were tool marks, perhaps made by a screwdriver, on the aluminum base of the screen, and hand marks on the dusty sash where the prowler had tried to push open the window. Fortunately, it had been locked. Lovely took a closer look at the sash. There were no fingerprints, just the blank smudges left by the prowler's gloves. The signature of a professional.

Lovely left the porch and started along the base of the house. The east side, adjacent to the driveway, had no cover, and the windows were in plain view of the house next door. None of the screens had been forced. Lovely reached the rear of the building and turned the corner. The back yard was dark, shaded by two large maples, their boughs swaying restlessly in the breeze. The house behind was two hundred feet away. Its rear porch light was barely visible, twinkling through the shifting leaves. Lovely shined his flashlight on the first of the windows on the back of his house. It bore tool marks like those on the front.

Something brushed against his leg. He froze. The creature meowed and Lovely let out his breath. It was Cyrus, the giant Persian that lived down the street. Lovely ran his hand over the cat's back and tail. Its fur was as soft as a kitten's, but its jaws were as big as a leopard's. Certain death to any unwary smaller creature. Lovely moved on to the next window. Every screen on the back of the house had been pried open, then closed.

The prowler had been very thorough. It would have been easy for him to break a pane of glass and reach through to unlock a window, but he hadn't. Obviously, he put a high premium on his entry going undetected. There was nothing of monetary value in the apartment, and a quick look through the windows would have made that apparent, so the attempted break-in was probably related to a case. Was the burglar

someone Lovely knew, then? His shape--tall and thin, with broad, angular shoulders--did not seem familiar.

Lovely moved into the other side yard, dimly illuminated by the lights from Mrs. Grybowski's house. He glanced toward the street. It was silent and still. The only sound was the hum of the air conditioner in the upstairs apartment. A row of yew trees grew close to this side of the building, providing cover for the prowler to work on the windows. Lovely squeezed between a pair of yews, feeling the dew soak through his shirt. He shined his light on the first window. The screen had been forced. He backed out and moved on to the next window. As he pushed through the yews, his foot came down on something soft. He jerked back his leg and pointed the flashlight at the ground. An ice-cold feeling gripped his insides. It was a body. He moved the flashlight to the face. It was Mrs. Grybowski. He dropped to his knees and grabbed her wrist, searching for a pulse. She was dead.

CHAPTER TWO

The cause of death was strangulation. The crime scene team was still at work in the yard, and it might be days before the medical examiner released his report, but Lovely wasn't in doubt: bruising and contusions on the throat, pinpoint hemorrhages on the lips and eyelids, and a shred of black leather snagged on the crucifix Mrs. Grybowski wore around her neck. The prowler had been wearing black gloves.

The two homicide detectives had grilled Lovely for an hour, making him repeat his story again and again, watching for inconsistencies, waiting to pounce like a couple of weasels outside a rat hole. But that was just routine. It soon became obvious that Lovely was as much in the dark as they were--and genuinely stunned and saddened by the death of his neighbor.

"What do you suppose she was doing out in the yard in a bathrobe and slippers?" one of the detectives had asked him.

"I have no idea. She was feisty, but not crazy. She wouldn't confront a prowler at ten o'clock at night."

"Unless she knew the guy."

That was a possibility Lovely had not considered.

The detectives had Lovely walk through Mrs. Grybowski's apartment, checking for anything out of the ordinary. The living room looked as it had earlier that evening. He had spent a minute staring at the sound system in her bedroom--a tuner and cassette player stacked in the wall unit opposite her bed. Something about it bothered him, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

Lovely let his head fall back against the chair. He knew Mrs. Grybowski's children, and even a few of her grandchildren. He could only imagine the suffering this

would bring. As he stared at the ceiling, his thoughts turned back to the prowler. Could the man have known Lovely would be out, meeting with Jaimee Kantor? Lovely hadn't mentioned the appointment to anyone. It was conceivable that Jaimee had sent the man, but he considered it unlikely. He let his thoughts drift back over the events of the evening.

Jaimee lived in a brownstone in Boston's South End. The apartment had been renovated recently, as was evident from the crisp paint and modern baseboard heating units. But the building was nearly a century and a half old, and traces of its Victorian origins remained: a marble mantelpiece, an ornate plaster medallion above the ceiling light fixture, a three-sided bay window overlooking Tremont Street. The weather was warm for early May, and the windows were open, letting in a night breeze. Lovely could hear the occasional swoosh of a passing car.

"My husband, David, showed up at his office two hours late," Jaimee said, "and told his secretary he was going on vacation. He put a few files in his briefcase and left. He didn't say where he was going or when he was coming back. That was three weeks ago, and no one's heard from him since."

She was sitting on the couch dressed in blue jeans with frayed knees and a white cotton tank top. Her eyes were a startling green, framed by long pale lashes. She wore no jewelry or make-up, and her light brown hair was in a ponytail. She seemed faintly sad--something at the corners of her eyes.

He said, "Your husband left town without telling you where he was going?"

"We've been separated for a year and we're getting a divorce. We're still on good terms, but he wouldn't necessarily tell me about his vacation plans."

"And no one has seen him in three weeks?"

"Not exactly. Last night at about this time, I went to the doorway of our daughter's room to check on her. She was sleeping--she's two. I saw David standing on the balcony, looking in at her through the sliding glass door."

Lovely raised his eyebrows. "Spooky."

"And a shock, too. Living on the top floor, you don't expect to see someone looking in your window. I backed out of the room when I saw him, and when I looked again a few minutes later, he was gone."

"How'd he get up there?"

"There's a stair from the balcony up to a roof deck. He must have climbed down from the roof."

"Any idea how he got on the roof?"

She shook her head.

The image in Lovely's mind was of a frightened man, running or hiding from something. An external threat? Some internal anguish?

"So what does it mean?" he asked.

"I have no idea. That's why I called you. Irene Freeman at the Women's Crisis Center recommended you."

"Did you tell her about David?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Jaimee considered the question. "I'm not sure."

"Irene knows several women investigators. She usually recommends them first."

Jaimee smiled. It lit up her face but didn't chase the sadness from her eyes. "Irene said, 'If your problem's a stalker, Max Lovely has the qualities that make an impression on a man: he's six foot two, weighs two-thirty, and carries a gun.'"

Lovely smiled. "But your problem's not a stalker."

"No..."

There was silence. A group of people with laughing voices passed by down on Tremont Street. Lovely caught the faint scent of cigarette smoke drifting in through the open windows.

He said, "So you think your husband's in trouble, that it might be something illegal, and possibly dangerous."

Jaimee looked startled. Then her eyes drifted up to the ceiling. After a moment, she nodded slowly. "I hadn't really thought it through, but I suppose you're right--that's what's been turning around in the back of my mind."

"Does David have a history of breaking the law?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then why do you think he's up to something illegal?"

She paused. "I guess I always had the feeling there were things he wasn't telling me."

"What's he do for a living?"

"He's a real estate lawyer. He develops real estate on his own, too, with an architect partner."

"Does he have any mob clients, or is he involved with any loan sharks?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then why do you believe he's into something dangerous?"

A few strands of Jaimee's hair had come loose from her ponytail. She fiddled with them for a minute, then pushed them over her shoulder. "I think I've always had the nagging fear he was headed for destruction--like someone who drives too fast and doesn't keep his eyes on the road." She was silent for a minute, then shook her head. "You're probably wondering why I would have married a man like that."

"Why did you?"

"I don't know, I guess I was in love with him and didn't stop to think. Maybe that's why it only lasted two years."

She slipped out of her clogs and rubbed a bare foot slowly across the carpet. One toenail was painted pink.

"David's not stupid," she said. "I mean, he's a talented lawyer and a good businessman. He made *Law Review* at Harvard, as he's fond of telling everyone. But he's so intent on becoming a mogul, he doesn't always watch where he's stepping. And the people he surrounds himself with..." She rolled her eyes.

"Like who?"

"His law partner, Allen Pierce, for instance. Allen has good connections, but he's mean-spirited and grim as the reaper. And David's real estate partner, Roland Moore..." She sighed. "Roland, God." She glanced at Lovely, then away.

"Something I should know about you and Roland Moore?"

"No, it doesn't matter. Another mistake." She poked at

her clogs with her toe.

Lovely wasn't convinced it didn't matter, but he decided not to press the question yet.

"What is it you want me to do, exactly?" he asked.

"Find out what's going on. I'm worried about David. He might need help, and I don't know if he'd have the sense to ask for it. He thinks all he has to do is turn on his charm and everything will be ok."

"Maybe you should let him go. He's not your responsibility anymore."

"Our daughter wouldn't think so."

"All right. Where would he go if he was in trouble? Could he be with his family?"

Jaimee shook her head. "I've spoken to them, and to his friends. Nobody has a clue."

"Does he have a girlfriend?"

"Probably--he wouldn't go long without one. But I don't know who."

"Where does he live?"

"Around the corner on West Canton Street. I went by the apartment the other day--it's where we lived together and I still have keys. The air smelled musty. I'll give you the keys if you want to look around."

"Please. I'll need a photograph of him, too. And I'd like to check out your roof."

While Jaimee went in search of a picture, Lovely wandered over to a collection of framed snapshots on the mantel: A baby, presumably her daughter, sitting in a highchair with a bowl of blueberries and a very stained face. The same girl, a bit older, holding a stuffed frog almost as big as herself. There were half a dozen pictures of her and she was only two. By the time she graduated from high school, the mantel would be sagging under the load. Lovely turned to a collection of eight-by-tens on the wall. They were of dark-skinned men and women in a jungle setting, naked except for body paint. They might have been Polynesians or South American Indians.

Jaimee returned. "This is the only one I could find," she

said, slightly embarrassed.

It was a picture of Jaimee and David, side by side, arms around each other. David had a handsome, friendly face and an athletic physique. There was something restive in his posture, as if he were finished posing for the photograph and ready to move on to the next activity. Jaimee was wearing a white sun dress and white earrings. Her hair was down and shining in the bright sunlight.

"It was a party," she said, glancing down at her tank top and frayed jeans and suddenly sounding a bit apologetic. "I don't usually dress up."

"I'm not offended. You kept your shoes on for the first half hour I was here."

Jaimee laughed. "Come on, I'll show you the deck." She led him through her bedroom to the balcony. "There's a spiral stair to the roof. I'll wait for you inside."

CHAPTER THREE

Lovely climbed up to Jaimee's roof and stood on her deck, looking out over the South End. Tremont Street was a broad, busy boulevard that ran through the heart of the neighborhood. Rows of attached Victorian townhouses, some brownstone, some brick, lined the street on both sides. It was past nine and traffic was sparse. Overhead, stars were barely visible through the humid haze. Jaimee's apartment was in a block of identical bow-front buildings. The roofs were flat, with two-foot-high brick parapet walls marking the boundary of each townhouse. Lovely could see a pair of skylights on each roof, a large one at the front and a smaller one at the rear. The only other vertical outlines were chimneys, rising waist-high above the level of the roofs.

He climbed over the deck railing and headed out across the block of buildings. The air was warm and still, scented by ailanthus and roof tar. He stepped over a parapet wall.

"Good evening, Mister Lovely."

Lovely jumped. A man was sitting on the front edge of the roof, legs dangling in space. He was looking over his shoulder at Lovely. A chimney had blocked Lovely's view of him from the deck.

"Oz?"

"Who else would be greeting your alabaster behind on a rooftop in the South End?" As usual, he spoke in an ironic imitation of a southern accent.

"What are you doing up here?"

"I'm on top of the world, looking down on gentrification."

Lovely grinned. He had met Oz while working on a case a few years back, and had been running into him in odd

places ever since. He didn't mind.

"Have a seat," Oz said, waving him over.

"No thanks. You may be a cat, but I'm a buffalo--and not fond of heights." Lovely sat on the parapet wall, well away from the edge of the roof.

Oz was half a foot shorter than Lovely, with a slender, muscular build. He had a wry smile that matched his tone of voice.

"What brings you to Tremont Street?" Lovely asked.

"I rebuilt that chimney a few weeks back and took a liking to this spot."

Oz was a mason. His talent for knowing everyone and everything, however, surpassed even his great skill with bricks and mortar.

"Well, maybe you can answer a question for me." Lovely gestured over his shoulder. "That's the only unit with a roof deck. Is there another way up here without a fifty-foot ladder?"

"Sure, there's a head house on the end building of each block."

Lovely squinted into the darkness. Fifty yards away, he could make out the silhouette of what looked like a small shed. The end building across the street had a similar structure.

"If you can get through the front door," Oz said, "you can take the stairs right up to the roof. That's what I do."

"You have a key?"

"Nah, I spring the lock with a pocket knife."

Lovely chuckled. "You have *chutzpah* Oz, I'll say that for you."

"That's Jewish for balls, right?"

"More or less."

"Then yeah, I got it."

"Just be careful. It's been a while since I left the police force, so I may be out of touch, but we used to call that breaking and entering. We used to arrest people for it."

"I'm sure you did, Officer Lovely, but don't get tense: I know the man who owns the building. I do work for him all the time. He owns this one, too."

"Ahh. Wouldn't happen to be a guy named David Kantor, would it?"

"Yeah, it would."

Lovely nodded thoughtfully. Sharing his clients' secrets was not something he did without good cause. But Oz he could trust, and depend upon to be well informed.

"I need your help, Oz. David Kantor's missing. His wife just hired me to track him down."

One corner of Oz's mouth turned up. "Beautiful woman hires you to find her husband--sounds like a conflict of interest, Mister Lovely."

"They split up."

Oz winked. "I know. Tell me what's happening."

Oz listened in silence, staring down at the empty street five stories beneath his swinging feet. When Lovely finished, Oz said, "Huh," and kept staring. The traffic light at the intersection was in its nighttime setting, one side flashing yellow, the other red. A taxi cab, rattling like it was about to fall apart, hurtled through the red light without slowing down.

"I saw David on the roof that night," Oz said.

"Did he see you?"

"No, I was leaning back against the chimney. I wondered what he was doing, but I figured, what the hell, it's his roof."

"Where did he go when he left?"

"Drove off down Tremont Street in his white BMW."

Oz nodded toward the west.

"If you see him again, will you call me?"

"Of course."

"And will you ask around for me—see if he might have been up to anything shady?"

Oz smiled. It was always a menacing sight, like a barracuda showing its teeth. "The lovely Miss Jaimee couldn't answer that for you?"

"She had only the vaguest of suspicions."

"Those are the most interesting kind. I'll see what I can do."

Now, two hours later, Lovely sat slumped in his swivel chair, listening to the crackle of the police radios outside and wondering if the prowler had known he would be out. If so, he didn't believe Jaimee had given the man the information--at least not intentionally. He hadn't sensed any deceptiveness, and his instincts were rarely in error. Even an expert liar couldn't fool him for long.

Doors slammed out on the street. An engine revved. Lovely went to the living room windows. Cars were pulling away. The lonely anti-climax to every crime-scene investigation, abandoning the spot to its grisly memories. This time, though, the body on the way to the morgue was not a nameless victim, it was Mrs. Grybowski. Lovely couldn't quite believe she was dead--that she would never again bring him leftovers, or scrutinize his female visitors from her front porch.

The last cruiser switched off its flashing lights and headed off down the road. Lovely watched it pass out of sight. A nagging thought had been turning around at the back of his mind. He hadn't seen the prowler's face, but the prowler wouldn't know that. He might assume Lovely could identify him. Lovely wondered if he'd be coming back.

CHAPTER FOUR

David Kantor's office was located downtown in Center Plaza, a long brick-and-concrete building which curved to follow a bend in Cambridge Street. There were several entrances spread out along the block. Lovely found the address he was looking for and rode the elevator to the fourth floor.

He had spent the morning making routine phone calls. Kantor had not applied for electrical, gas, or telephone service recently. His mail was being forwarded to his office. His name was not on the National Crime Information Center computer, nor was he known to the Boston police. Lovely's last call had been to his own assistant, Eliot Tufton, whom he had dispatched to the registry of deeds to research the properties David owned. Lovely wanted to know who held David's mortgages, and whether there were any attachments--mechanics' liens, tax liens, lis pendens--anything that might shed light on what was happening to David financially. He had also walked through David's condominium and stopped by Jaimee's office--she was a software engineer--to return her keys.

Lovely opened a heavy oak door and stepped into the offices of Pierce and Kantor, Attorneys at Law. The reception room had three large windows facing Government Center. With a telescope, one could have peered into the office of Mayor Keith Riordan, to watch him bask in his power, popularity, and boyish good looks. Lovely was greeted by a petite, red-haired woman seated behind an L-shaped desk.

"May I help you?" She had a small voice and seemed timid.

Lovely summoned up his friendliest tone. He had been

accused, more than once, of coming across as grouchy.

"My name's Max Lovely. I'd like to speak to Mr. Pierce, please."

"Will he know what this is regarding?"

"No."

The woman's expression grew uncomfortable. "Mr. Pierce is very busy. He may not see you if he doesn't know what this is regarding."

"All right. I'm a private investigator working for David Kantor's wife. She's concerned about his absence."

The discomfort vanished from the woman's face, replaced by something harder to read--confusion, perhaps, or fear.

"One moment," she said, and picked up the phone.

Lovely watched her as she relayed the information, trying to divine the meaning of her reaction. He was pretty sure it wasn't the result of grouchiness this time.

"Mr. Pierce will see you now. Through that door."

Pierce rose to his feet and reached across his desk to shake Lovely's hand. He was a few inches shorter than Lovely, with white-blond hair and pale skin. His face, handsome but marred by acne, was impassive.

"Pleased to meet you," he said in a toneless voice. He motioned Lovely into a leather chair. Lovely wondered if people accused Pierce of being grouchy. Maybe they could share about the experience.

Lovely repeated what he had told the secretary. "It's been three weeks and Ms. Kantor is growing concerned. Do you have any idea where David might be?"

"No."

Lovely waited for Pierce to say more. He didn't. You could learn a lot by the way a man answered his first question.

"Did David mention anything in the days before he left that might explain why he went away so suddenly?"

"No."

"Was he working on any particular case that might account for his departure?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Can you think of anyone David might be running from? A potentially dangerous client, for example."

"No."

Was Pierce being uncooperative, Lovely wondered, or was he just taciturn by nature? Maybe a different approach would draw him out.

"I've never met David. What can you tell me about him?"

"The question is too broad."

Lovely sighed. Pierce didn't need the framed diploma on the wall to prove he was a lawyer.

"A tall, thin man was prowling around my house last night," Lovely said. "Does David know anyone who fits that description and might do something like that?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Was he litigating against anyone who might have threatened him?"

"Not that I know of."

Lovely paused, his annoyance rising. Pierce was obviously not taxing his mind in search of answers.

"Are you concerned about him, Mr. Pierce?"

"Is there any reason to think some harm has befallen him?"

Lovely tapped his pencil on his pad. "How do you and David get along?"

"Fine."

"And if he never comes back?"

"He said he was going on vacation. Is there any reason to think he won't come back?"

Lovely leaned back in his chair. "Do you get pissed off when people answer your questions with questions?"

Pierce's impassive face twitched. "I have work to do and I've told you all I know. Good luck with your search."

Lovely gave a mental shrug. He wasn't learning anything, or even having fun.

"Thanks. Let's do this again sometime." He stuffed his still-blank note pad in his pocket and left.

As Lovely passed through the reception area, the

secretary caught his eye. She gave him an intent, almost pleading look. He took a business card from his pocket and dropped it on her desk as he walked out.

CHAPTER FIVE

Roland Moore's architectural firm was located on Newbury Street, in a neighborhood known as the Back Bay. The area had actually been a bay at one time, a tidal flat at the Charles River estuary. By the mid-nineteenth century, with Boston's population growing rapidly, the bay reeked of sewage at low tide, and the city fathers resolved to fill it in. Broad, French-inspired boulevards were laid out on the filled land, and house lots sold. The new homes were larger and more architecturally distinct than those of the South End, where Jaimee Kantor lived. The South End, with its narrow streets and small English squares, began to seem old-fashioned. Upper-class Bostonians soon abandoned it in favor of the Back Bay, and the South End entered a period of decline that would last a hundred years.

In recent decades, Newbury Street had become the Back Bay's boutique district. Its converted brownstones now housed art galleries, antique shops, and trendy clothing stores. Clusters of white-clothed cafe tables dotted the sidewalk. On the way from Center Plaza, Lovely had changed his assessment of the Pierce interview. He had learned something after all: Allen Pierce was in no hurry for his partner to return. And his secretary was as scared as a rabbit.

Roland Moore's office was situated between a shoe store with an Italian name and a French hairdresser. The reception room had glass walls and a blue glass ceiling that arched upward like a cathedral. Above it, nothing was visible but diffused light, creating the illusion of sky. The walls were decorated with framed photographs of houses--designed by Moore, Lovely presumed--which resembled fishtanks stuck together at odd angles. The centerpiece of the room was the

receptionist, a long-limbed blonde in a white dress. She looked as if Moore had taken her out of a Fifth Avenue window display and brought her to life. Or almost to life: her smile was as inert as a mannequin's.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"I'm here to see Roland Moore. My name's Max Lovely. He won't know me, but you can tell him I was sent by Jaimee Kantor. I just need to ask him a few questions."

The receptionist continued to smile at Lovely while he spoke, until the corners of her mouth began to quiver from the strain. It was fatiguing to watch. Whatever Moore was paying her, it wasn't enough.

"One moment," she said. She picked up the phone and spoke to Moore. "He'll see you now," she said to Lovely. "His office is at the end of the hall, last door on the right." She was still smiling.

"You don't have to feel obliged to smile at me," Lovely said gently. "I can see you're helpful and polite."

She looked startled, then indignant. An instant later, she realized he wasn't mocking her. The tension drained from her body and her eyes took on a glimmer of life. She didn't say anything, but Lovely thought he felt a silent "thank you" as he went past her desk.

Roland Moore was lounging on a sofa when Lovely walked in. He was over six feet tall, broad-shouldered, with lots of dark hair and very photogenic cheek bones. He was wearing a charcoal-gray sport jacket made of fine Italian wool and a crisp, perfectly tailored white cotton shirt. Lovely wondered if he should apologize for not having brought his camera.

Moore rose to his feet and shook Lovely's hand. "Please, have a seat." He gestured to an armchair adjacent to the sofa. There was a desk and a computer in the office, too, but they appeared to be afterthoughts.

"I spoke to Jaimee this morning on another matter," Moore said, his tone friendly. "She told me what you said about her keeping her shoes on for the first half hour." He leaned back on the couch, an amused smile on his face.

Lovely eyed him, trying to determine what was out of place. Beneath the smile, Moore seemed ill at ease.

"When you spoke to her on the `other matter,' did she mention she's very worried about David?"

Moore adjusted his expression, belatedly, to reflect concern. "Yes, of course. We're all a little uneasy about his absence."

"Any idea where he might have gone?"

"None."

"Why do you suppose he left on such short notice?"

Moore shook his head. "I really don't know. It's not like him to do this kind of thing."

"Was he having financial problems?"

"Not that I know of. Our projects are doing fine."

"Any problems with the union?"

"Never."

Lovely didn't have the impression Moore was lying, but he seemed overeager to profess his ignorance.

"How come you're nervous, Mr. Moore?"

Moore cocked his head. "Nervous? I'm not nervous."

Now Lovely had the impression he was lying. "Can you think of anyone who might have a grudge against David?"

"No, he's not the type to make enemies."

"How do you get along with him?"

"Very well."

"How's he feel about you sleeping with his wife?"

Moore's smile crumpled like a paper flower under a boot. "They split up a year ago, and he doesn't know about it--not that it's any of your business."

"So why is this interview making you tense?"

Moore's face tightened. Lovely gave another mental shrug. Some days, he pissed off everyone.

"I told you," Moore said, "it's not."

He was still lying.

"Was David doing business with anyone dangerous?" Lovely asked. "A loan shark, for example."

"Not that I know of."

"A tall, thin guy, probably a killer, was prowling

around my house last night. Know anything about that?"

Moore's eyes widened. "No!"

That, at least, seemed like an honest response.

"If David was running from someone," Lovely said, "they'd be looking for him. Has anyone else asked about him?"

Something flickered across Moore's face. A direct hit.

"Who?" Lovely asked.

"No one in particular," Moore said quickly. "Naturally, a number of our business associates have wondered about David's surprise vacation. But no strangers have come looking for him."

Lovely eyed him. The response was almost believable, but it didn't explain the flicker. "Any other private investigators?"

"No."

"Police?"

"No, I told you, no one but our regular business associates."

Lovely nodded slowly. "I hate listening to BS, don't you?"

Moore's mouth opened, then closed. He took a calming breath. "Look, I'm trying to be helpful and I don't appreciate the implication."

"Ok. Let's make a list of everyone who asked about David. That would be really helpful. Names and occupations."

Moore reeled off a dozen names--contractors, real estate brokers, insurance agents. Lovely was pretty sure the name he was looking for wasn't on the list, but at least his note pad had something on it.

Lovely thanked Moore for his time and departed. On the way out, he waved to the receptionist. She smiled at him, then caught herself and stopped, then smiled again, then burst out laughing.

CHAPTER SIX

Lovely was leaning back in his swivel chair, eyes closed, feet on his desk. His mind worked best when his body was in repose. He let his thoughts drift. They floated in circles for a minute, then bumped into a fact: Roland Moore was a liar. Someone else was looking for David. But why would Moore want to hide that? Lovely's mind floated for another minute, then bumped. Moore had something to hide, too. Certainly, having his partner out of the way would make it easier for him to pursue his "other matters" with Jaimee.

Then there was Allen Pierce. The man had a personality that could freeze Prestone II and a poker face even Lovely couldn't read. Maybe David was running from Pierce.

Then there was the prowler--too thin to be Moore and too tall to be Pierce. Three bad guys and no good guys. Lovely shook his head. The odds were turning against him already.

The phone rang. With a grunt, he sat up and yanked it off the hook.

"Lovely, here," he growled.

"What's the matter with your cranky ass, Mister Lovely?"

Lovely snorted. "Sorry, Oz. Did I hurt your feelings?"

"That's better. I asked around about David Kantor. He's no Mother Theresa, Mister Lovely."

Lovely sighed and leaned back in his chair. Four bad guys and no good guys. "Go on."

"The building inspectors love to shake his hand, because his hand is never empty. The board of appeals gives him everything he asks for, and he gives the board members everything they ask for. The city councilmen open their doors for him, because they know his wallet will open for them.

That's your boy, Mister Lovely."

"What about Roland Moore?"

"There are no secrets between the two."

"That's what you think."

"Huh?"

"Does David burn buildings," Lovely asked, "or steal money, or run around with loan sharks?"

"No."

"Then why the hell did he drop out of sight?"

"No one seems to know."

Lovely sighed. "Got any good news for me, Oz?"

"The stock market closed down."

"Glad to hear it."

Lovely put down the phone and closed his eyes. Maybe tomorrow he'd meet some good guys.

The doorbell rang.

"Go away," Lovely growled.

It rang again.

"This better be good."

It was his assistant, Eliot Tufton. Lovely let him in.

"Boy, do I have a story for you!" Eliot shouted, waving a sheaf of papers over his head. "Kantor doesn't borrow from a bank, he borrows from a private lender--and the guy's a Winthrop! But a fake Winthrop, according to my dad. And that's not all: the clerk at the registry of deeds..." Eliot's voice trailed off. He glanced around the room. "Cripes, Max, this place is starting to look bad. It's even worse than mine."

"Yeah, but I've spent years getting it this way. You have your apartment cleaned every week, and two days later, it looks like the L.L. Bean store after a tidal wave."

"That's true." Eliot pushed aside a pile of newspapers and sat down on the couch. He was wearing a light blue Oxford shirt, khakis, and Topsiders. He was twenty-eight years old, six feet tall, and still couldn't buy liquor without two forms of ID. They had met a few years back when Eliot hired Lovely to recover some stolen artwork. When the case was over, Lovely offered him a job. Thanks to his trust fund, Eliot didn't need the work, and in truth, Lovely didn't need an

assistant. They had worked together on every case since.

Lovely sat down across from him. He wasn't feeling cranky anymore. "So, what were you yelling about?"

"Oh, the clerk. I asked him a question about one of David's properties, and he said, 'David Kantor... Were you the guy I spoke to yesterday?' I said, 'No, was someone else looking up Kantor's property?' He said, 'Yes.'"

"Well, I tried to get a name or a description, but the clerk had no memory of the guy at all--he talks to hundreds of people every day. All he remembered was the name, David Kantor, because his uncle's name is David and he's a cantor. By the way, Max, when he said, 'cantor', he made it sound like a job or something?"

"A cantor is the person who leads the singing in a synagogue."

"Oh." Eliot paused. "I don't think I'd like that job."

"No, you're not cut out for it. Now what's this about a private lender?"

"Right. Most of Kantor's loans are from a guy named J. Andrew Winthrop."

"Winthrop's your middle name, right?"

"Right. My great-great-grandfather married a Winthrop. His son was Eliot Winthrop Tufton the First."

"And you're the Fourth."

"Right. So I called my dad to ask if this guy J. Andrew was related to us. He got all irate and said those Winthrops didn't even come to this country until the end of the seventeenth century; they're not even related to John Winthrop, never mind being descended from him, but they go around naming their kids John because they think they can fool people that way, and they're all a pack of social climbers and liars, and besides, they made their money in the triangular trade."

"How the hell does your father know all that?"

"Are you kidding? He knows every Winthrop in the country. He has our family tree memorized back to the Stone Age."

Lovely shook his head. "John Winthrop was a Pilgrim,

wasn't he?"

"A Pilgrim?! Come on, Max. John Winthrop was the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He founded Boston. The Pilgrims were down in Plymouth. Didn't they teach you American History at Dorchester High?"

"I was looking out the window that semester. So these fake Winthrops--they're in the mortgage business?"

"That's just it: they're not. My dad says they own a lot of commercial real estate, but they don't lend money. And as a banker, he'd know."

One of Eliot's ancestors had founded Boston Bank and Trust two centuries earlier, and the family still owned it.

"So there's something special going on between J. Andrew Winthrop and David Kantor," Lovely said.

"Looks that way."

Lovely nodded. He checked the list of names Moore had recited. Winthrop was not on it.

"Refresh my memory," Lovely said. "What's the triangular trade?"

"Max! I can't believe..."

Lovely raised his hand. "Just answer the question. You didn't know what a cantor was."

"All right. New England traders would bring molasses up from the West Indies and make it into rum. Then they'd take the rum to Africa and trade it for slaves. Then they'd carry the slaves to the West Indies and trade them for molasses."

"Right. Now I remember why I forgot." Lovely shook his head. "The Puritans were involved in that?"

"Absolutely."

"Makes you wonder what god they were worshipping."

"What god?"

"Money," Lovely said.

"Oh. They worshipped money all right; and not just money, but success. They saw it as a mark of divine favor."

"Chosen by God to get rich in immoral ways."

"Yeah, it is kind of twisted."

"Do you have an address for this fake Winthrop?"

"Sure, it's on every mortgage." Eliot handed him the sheaf of documents. Winthrop lived at Louisburg Square, on Beacon Hill.

"Did you find any evidence that Kantor's having financial problems?" Lovely asked.

"No, but that doesn't prove anything. These loans could be in default and I wouldn't know unless notices of foreclosure had been filed."

Lovely nodded. "There's a file cabinet in Kantor's condo packed with business files. I'd like you to go through it. You know more about this stuff than I do, with your MBA and your years at the bank."

"Ok."

"I'll call Jaimee and tell her you'll stop by in the morning to pick up keys. She doesn't leave her apartment until ten."

When Eliot was gone, Lovely returned to his room and took up the position he had relinquished to answer the door. A pair of thirty-gallon fish tanks were ranged along the wall adjacent to his desk. The one on the right--the new one--housed a freshwater gar, six inches long. It was hovering motionless on the far end of the tank, staring at the fish in the other aquarium. Lovely grimaced. Time to feed the creature.

Lovely scooped a net-full of guppies from a goldfish bowl and dropped them into the gar's tank. The gar drifted toward them. It was brown in color and as thin as Lovely's little finger. It looked like a floating stick--which was the objective. The gar brought its snout up next to a large female, then snapped its head sideways and caught the little fish in its beak. The guppy wriggled frantically. The gar moved its jaws a few times, adjusting its grip, then swallowed the guppy whole.

Lovely turned away. He had tried feeding the gar flake food, pellet food, frozen food. But if a creature wasn't alive, the gar didn't recognize it as edible. So Lovely fed it guppies and watched it grow--two inches in the month he'd had it.

Lovely turned to look at his other aquarium. These fish didn't eat each other. He adjusted his feet on the desk to give them a more comfortable lie. He listened to the bubbling of

the undergravel filter and felt the rise and fall of his chest. "Noticing," he called it. He spent hours at it, whenever he could. That mind worked best, which worked least.

An hour later, the phone rang. Lovely leaned forward and picked it up.

"My name is Marcia Paige," the caller said in a low, urgent voice. "I'm the secretary at Pierce and Kantor. I need to speak to you as soon as possible."

Lovely could hear traffic sounds in the background. "Where are you?"

"At a pay phone on Cambridge Street. I just got off work."

"You have a car?"

"Yes."

"Come over now." Lovely gave her directions to his house and hung up. He stared at the phone for a minute, wondering what she was so anxious to tell him. Then he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and picked up his "noticing" where he had left off.

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