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Lee Child is one of the world's leading thriller writers. He was born in Coventry, raised in Birmingham, and now lives in England's Lake District. It is said one of his novels featuring his hero Jack Reacher is sold somewhere in the world every nine seconds. His books consistently achieve the number one slot on bestseller lists around the world and have sold over one hundred million copies. Lee is the recipient of many awards, including Author of the Year at the 2019 British Book Awards. He was appointed CBE in the 2019 Queen's Birthday Honours.

Jack Reacher: CV

NAME:

Jack Reacher (no middle name)

BORN:

29 October

LAST KNOWN ADDRESS:

Unknown

EDUCATION:

US Army base schools
in Europe and the Far East;
West Point Military Academy

LANGUAGES:

Fluent English and French,
passable Spanish

HEIGHT:

6 feet 5 inches / 1.95 metres

SIZE:

50 inch / 127 cm chest,
3XLT coat, 37 inch / 95 cm
inside leg

EYES:

Blue

DISTINGUISHING MARKS:

Scar on corner of left eye,
scar on upper lip

SPECIAL SKILLS:

Small-arms expert, **outstanding**
on all man-portable weaponry
and **hand-to-hand combat**

SERVICE:

US Military Police, thirteen
years; first CO of the 110th
Division; demoted from Major
to Captain after six years; mustered
out with rank of Major after seven

SERVICE AWARDS:

Top row: **Silver Star, Defense**
Superior Service Medal
Legion of Merit
Middle row: Soldier's Medal,
Bronze Star, **Purple Heart**
Bottom row: 'Junk awards'

FAMILY:

Mother: Josephine Moutier
Reacher, French national
Father: Career US Marine,
served in Korea and Vietnam
Brother: Joe, five years in US
Military Intelligence, Treasury Dept

MOST TRUSTED CONTACT:

Frances Neagley: ex-colleague,
110th Division

WHAT HE DOESN'T HAVE:

Driver's licence; credit cards;
federal benefits; tax returns;
dependants

GONE TOMORROW

Lee Child



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For my sisters-in-law Leslie and Sally,
two women of rare charm and quality.

ONE

Suicide bombers are easy to spot. They give out all kinds of tell-tale signs. Mostly because they're nervous. By definition they're all first-timers.

Israeli counterintelligence wrote the defensive playbook. They told us what to look for. They used pragmatic observation and psychological insight and came up with a list of behavioural indicators. I learned the list from an Israeli army captain twenty years ago. He swore by it. Therefore I swore by it too, because at the time I was on three weeks' detached duty mostly about a yard from his shoulder, in Israel itself, in Jerusalem, on the West Bank, in the Lebanon, sometimes in Syria, sometimes in Jordan, on buses, in stores, on crowded sidewalks. I kept my eyes moving and my mind running free down the bullet points.

Twenty years later I still know the list. And my eyes still move. Pure habit. From another bunch of guys I learned another mantra: Look, don't see, listen, don't hear. The more you engage, the longer you survive.

The list is twelve points long if you're looking at a male suspect. Eleven, if you're looking at a woman.

The difference is a fresh shave. Male bombers take off their beards. It helps them blend in. Makes them less suspicious. The result is paler skin on the lower half of the face. No recent exposure to the sun.

But I wasn't interested in shaves.

I was working on the eleven-point list.

I was looking at a woman.

I was riding the subway, in New York City. The 6 train, the Lexington Avenue local, heading uptown, two o'clock in the morning. I had gotten on at Bleeker Street from the south end of the platform into a car that was empty except for five people. Subway cars feel small and intimate when they're full. When they're empty they feel vast and cavernous and lonely. At night their lights feel hotter and brighter, even though they're the same lights they use in the day. They're all the lights there are. I was sprawled on a two-person bench north of the end doors on the track side of the car. The other five passengers were all south of me on the long bench seats, in profile, side on, far from each other, staring blankly across the width of the car, three on the left and two on the right.

The car's number was 7622. I once rode eight stops on the 6 train next to a crazy person who talked about the car we were in with the same kind of enthusiasm that most men reserve for sports or women. Therefore I knew that car number 7622 was an R142A model, the newest on the New York system, built by Kawasaki in Kobe, Japan, shipped over, trucked to the 207th Street yards, craned on to the tracks, towed down to 180th Street and tested. I knew it could run two hundred thousand miles without major attention. I knew its

automated announcement system gave instructions in a man's voice and information in a woman's, which was claimed to be a coincidence but was really because the transportation chiefs believed such a division of labour was psychologically compelling. I knew the voices came from Bloomberg TV, but years before Mike became mayor. I knew there were six hundred R142As on the tracks and that each one was a fraction over fifty-one feet long and a little more than eight feet wide. I knew that the no-cab unit like we had been in then and I was in now had been designed to carry a maximum of forty people seated and up to 148 standing. The crazy person had been clear on all that data. I could see for myself that the car's seats were blue plastic, the same shade as a late summer sky or a British air force uniform. I could see that its wall panels were moulded from graffiti-resistant fibreglass. I could see its twin strips of advertisements running away from me where the wall panels met the roof. I could see small cheerful posters touting television shows and language instruction and easy college degrees and major earning opportunities.

I could see a police notice advising me: If you see something, say something.

The nearest passenger to me was a Hispanic woman. She was across the car from me, on my left, forward of the first set of doors, all alone on a bench built for eight, well off centre. She was small, somewhere between thirty and fifty, and she looked very hot and very tired. She had a well-worn supermarket bag looped over her wrist and she was staring across at the empty place opposite with eyes too weary to be seeing much.

Next up was a man on the other side, maybe four feet farther down the car. He was all alone on his own eight-person bench. He could have been from the Balkans, or the Black Sea. Dark hair, lined skin. He was sinewy, worn down by work and weather. He had his feet planted and he was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. Not asleep, but close to it. Suspended animation, marking time, rocking with the movements of the train. He was about fifty, dressed in clothes far too young for him. Baggy jeans that reached only his calves, and an oversized NBA shirt with a player's name on it that I didn't recognize.

Third up was a woman who might have been West African. She was on the left, south of the centre doors. Tired, inert, her black skin made dusty and grey by fatigue and the lights. She was wearing a colourful batik dress with a matching square of cloth tied over her hair. Her eyes were closed. I know New York reasonably well. I call myself a citizen of the world and New York the capital of the world, so I can make sense of the city the same way a Brit knows London or a Frenchman knows Paris. I'm familiar but not intimate with its habits. But it was an easy guess that any three people like these already seated on a late-night northbound 6 train south of Bleecker were office cleaners heading home from evening shifts around City Hall, or restaurant service workers from Chinatown or Little Italy. They were probably set for Hunts Point in the Bronx, or maybe all the way up to Pelham Bay, ready for short fitful sleeps before more long days.

The fourth and the fifth passengers were different.

The fifth was a man. He was maybe my age, wedged at forty-five degrees on the two-person bench diagonally opposite me, all the way across and down the length of the car. He was dressed casually but not cheaply. Chinos, and a golf shirt. He was awake. His eyes were fixed somewhere in front of him. Their focus changed and narrowed constantly, like he was alert and speculating. They reminded me of a ballplayer's eyes. They had a certain canny, calculating shrewdness in them.

But it was passenger number four that I was looking at.

If you see something, say something.

She was seated on the right side of the car, all alone on the farther eight-person bench, across from and about halfway between the exhausted West African woman and the guy with the ballplayer's eyes. She was white and probably in her forties. She was plain. She had black hair, neatly but unstylishly cut and too uniformly dark to be natural. She was dressed all in black. I could see her fairly well. The guy nearest to me on the right was still sitting forward and the V-shaped void between his bent back and the wall of the car made my line of sight uninterrupted except for a forest of stainless steel grab bars.

Not a perfect view, but good enough to ring every bell on the eleven-point list. The bullet headings lit up like cherries on a Vegas machine.

According to Israeli counterintelligence I was looking at a suicide bomber.

TWO

I dismissed the thought immediately. Not because of racial profiling. White women are as capable of craziness as anyone else. I dismissed the thought because of tactical implausibility. The timing was wrong. The New York subway would make a fine target for a suicide bombing. The 6 train would be as good as any other and better than most. It stops under Grand Central Terminal. Eight in the morning, six at night, a crowded car, forty seated, 148 standing, wait until the doors open on packed platforms, push the button. A hundred dead, a couple of hundred grievously injured, panic, infrastructure damage, possibly fire, a major transportation hub shut down for days or weeks and maybe never really trusted again. A significant score, for people whose heads work in ways we can't quite understand.

But not at two o'clock in the morning.

Not in a car holding just six people. Not when Grand Central's subway platforms would hold only drifting trash and empty cups and a couple of old homeless guys on benches.

The train stopped at Astor Place. The doors

hissed open. No one got on. No one got off. The doors thumped shut again and the motors whined and the train moved on.

The bullet points stayed lit up.

The first was the obvious no-brainer: inappropriate clothing. By now explosive belts are as evolved as baseball gloves. Take a three-foot by two-foot sheet of heavy canvas, fold once longitudinally, and you have a continuous pocket a foot deep. Wrap the pocket around the bomber, and sew it together in back. Zippers or snaps can lead to second thoughts. Insert a stockade of dynamite sticks into the pocket all the way around, wire them up, pack nails or ball bearings into the voids, sew the top seam shut, add crude shoulder straps to take the weight. Altogether effective, but altogether bulky. The only practical concealment, an oversized garment like a padded winter parka. Never appropriate in the Middle East, and plausible in New York maybe three months in twelve.

But this was September, and it was as hot as summer, and ten degrees hotter underground. I was wearing a T-shirt. Passenger number four was wearing a North Face down jacket, black, puffy, shiny, a little too large and zipped to her chin.

If you see something, say something.

I took a pass on the second of the eleven points. Not immediately applicable. The second point is: a robotic walk. Significant at a checkpoint or in a crowded marketplace or outside a church or a mosque, but not relevant with a seated suspect on public transportation. Bombers walk robotically not because they're overcome with ecstasy at the thought of imminent martyrdom,

but because they're carrying forty extra pounds of unaccustomed weight, which is biting into their shoulders through crude suspender straps, and because they're drugged. Martyrdom's appeal goes only so far. Most bombers are browbeaten simpletons with a slug of raw opium paste held between gum and cheek. We know this because dynamite belts explode with a characteristic doughnut-shaped pressure wave that rolls up the torso in a fraction of a nanosecond and lifts the head clean off the shoulders. The human head isn't bolted on. It just rests there by gravity, somewhat tied down by skin and muscles and tendons and ligaments, but those insubstantial biological anchors don't do much against the force of a violent chemical explosion. My Israeli mentor told me the easiest way to determine that an open-air attack was caused by a suicide bomber rather than by a car bomb or a package bomb is to search on an eighty- or ninety-foot radius and look for a severed human head, which is likely to be strangely intact and undamaged, even down to the opium plug in the cheek.

The train stopped at Union Square. No one got on. No one got off. Hot air billowed in from the platform and fought the interior air conditioning. Then the doors closed again and the train moved on.

Points three through six are variations on a subjective theme: irritability, sweating, tics, and nervous behaviour. Although in my opinion sweating is as likely to be caused by physical overheating as by nerves. The inappropriate clothing, and the dynamite. Dynamite is wood

pulp soaked with nitroglycerine and moulded into baton-sized sticks. Wood pulp is a good thermal insulator. So sweating comes with the territory. But the irritability and the tics and the nervous behaviour are valuable indicators. These people are in the last weird moments of their lives, anxious, scared of pain, woozy with narcotics. They are irrational by definition. Believing or half believing or not really believing at all in paradise and rivers of milk and honey and lush pastures and virgins, driven by ideological pressures or by the expectations of their peers and their families, suddenly in too deep and unable to back out. Brave talk in clandestine meetings is one thing. Action is another. Hence suppressed panic, with all its visible signs.

Passenger number four was showing them all. She looked exactly like a woman heading for the end of her life, as surely and certainly as the train was heading for the end of the line.

Therefore point seven: breathing.

She was panting, low and controlled. In, out, in, out. Like a technique to conquer the pain of childbirth, or like the result of a ghastly shock, or like a last desperate barrier against screaming with dread and fear and terror.

In, out, in, out.

Point eight: suicide bombers about to go into action stare rigidly ahead. No one knows why, but video evidence and surviving eyewitnesses have been entirely consistent in their reports. Bombers stare straight ahead. Perhaps they have screwed their commitment up to the sticking point and fear intervention. Perhaps like dogs and children they

feel that if they're not seeing anyone, then no one is seeing them. Perhaps a last shred of conscience means they can't look at the people they're about to destroy. No one knows why, but they all do it.

Passenger number four was doing it. That was for sure. She was staring across at the blank window opposite so hard she was almost burning a hole in the glass.

Points one through eight, check. I shifted my weight forward in my seat.

Then I stopped. The idea was tactically absurd. The time was wrong.

Then I looked again. And moved again. Because points nine, ten, and eleven were all present and correct too, and they were the most important points of all.

THREE

Point nine: mumbled prayers. To date all known attacks have been inspired, or motivated, or validated, or invigilated by religion, almost exclusively the Islamic religion, and Islamic people are accustomed to praying in public. Surviving eyewitnesses report long formulaic incantations run through and repeated endlessly and more or less inaudibly, but with visibly moving lips. Passenger number four was really going at it. Her lips were moving below her fixed stare, in a long, panting, ritualistic recitation that seemed to repeat itself every twenty seconds or so. Maybe she was already introducing herself to whatever deity she expected to meet on the other side of the line. Maybe she was trying to convince herself that there really was a deity, and a line.

The train stopped at 23rd Street. The doors opened. No one got off. No one got on. I saw the red exit signs above the platform: 22nd and Park, northeast corner, or 23rd and Park, southeast corner. Unremarkable lengths of Manhattan sidewalk, but suddenly attractive.

I stayed in my seat. The doors closed. The train moved on.

Point ten: a large bag.

Dynamite is a stable explosive, as long as it's fresh. It doesn't go off by accident. It needs to be triggered by blasting caps. Blasting caps are wired with detonator cord to an electricity supply and a switch. The big plungers in old western movies were both things together. The first part of the handle's travel spun up a dynamo, like a field telephone, and then a switch was tripped. Not practical for portable use. For portable use you need a battery, and for a linear yard of explosive you need some volts and amps. Tiny AA cells put out a weak volt and a half. Not enough, according to prevailing rules of thumb. A nine-volt battery is better, and for a decent kick you want one of the big square soup-can size cells sold for serious flashlights. Too big and too heavy for a pocket, hence the bag. The battery nestles in the bottom of the bag, wires come off it to the switch, then they head on out through an unobtrusive slit in the back of the bag, and then they loop up under the hem of the inappropriate garment.

Passenger number four was wearing a black canvas messenger bag, urban style, looped in front of one shoulder and behind the other, and hauled around into her lap. The way the stiff fabric bulged and sagged made it look empty apart from a single heavy item.

The train stopped at 28th Street. The doors opened. No one got on. No one got off. The doors closed and the train moved on.

Point eleven: hands in the bag.

Twenty years ago point eleven was a recent addition. Previously the list had ended at point ten. But things evolve. Action, and then reaction. Israeli security forces and some brave members of the public had adopted a new tactic. If your suspicions were aroused, you didn't run. No point, really. You can't run faster than shrapnel. What you did instead was grab the suspect in a desperate bear hug. You pinned their arms to their sides. You stopped them reaching the button. Several attacks were prevented that way. Many lives were saved. But the bombers learned. Now they are taught to keep their thumbs on the button at all times, to make the bear hug irrelevant. The button is in the bag, next to the battery. Hence, hands in the bag.

Passenger number four had her hands in her bag. The flap was bunched and creased between her wrists.

The train stopped at 33rd Street. The doors opened. No one got off. A lone passenger on the platform hesitated and then stepped to her right and entered the next car. I turned and looked through the little window behind my head and saw her take a seat close to me. Two stainless bulkheads, and the coupler space. I wanted to wave her away. She might survive at the other end of her car. But I didn't wave. We had no eye contact and she would have ignored me anyway. I know New York. Crazy gestures on late night trains carry no credibility.

The doors stayed open a beat longer than normal. For a mad second I thought of trying to shepherd everyone out. But I didn't. It would have been a comedy. Surprise, incomprehension, maybe language barriers. I wasn't sure that I knew the

Spanish word for bomb. *Bomba*, maybe. Or was that light bulb? A crazy guy ranting about light bulbs wasn't going to help anyone.

No, light bulb was *bombilla*, I thought.

Maybe.

Possibly.

But certainly I didn't know any Balkan languages. And I didn't know any West African dialects. Although maybe the woman in the dress spoke French. Some of West Africa is francophone. And I speak French. *Une bombe. La femme là-bas a une bombe sous son manteau. The woman over there has a bomb under her coat.* The woman in the dress might understand. Or she might get the message some other way and simply follow us out.

If she woke up in time. If she opened her eyes.

In the end I just stayed in my seat.

The doors closed.

The train moved on.

I stared at passenger number four. Pictured her slim pale thumb on the hidden button. The button probably came from Radio Shack. An innocent component, for a hobby. Probably cost a buck and a half. I pictured a tangle of wires, red and black, taped and crimped and clamped. A thick detonator cord, exiting the bag, tucked under her coat, connecting twelve or twenty blasting caps in a long lethal parallel ladder. Electricity moves close to the speed of light. Dynamite is unbelievably powerful. In a closed environment like a subway car the pressure wave alone would crush us all to paste. The nails and the ball bearings would be entirely gratuitous. Like bullets against ice cream.

Very little of us would survive. Bone fragments, maybe, the size of grape pits. Possibly the stirrup and the anvil from the inner ear might survive intact. They are the smallest bones in the human body and therefore statistically the most likely to be missed by the shrapnel cloud.

I stared at the woman. No way of approaching her. I was thirty feet away. Her thumb was already on the button. Cheap brass contacts were maybe an eighth of an inch apart, that tiny gap perhaps narrowing and widening fractionally and rhythmically as her heart beat and her arm trembled.

She was good to go, and I wasn't.

The train rocked onward, with its characteristic symphony of sounds. The howl of rushing air in the tunnel, the thump and clatter of the expansion joints under the iron rims, the scrape of the current collector against the live rail, the whine of the motors, the sequential squeals as the cars lurched one after the other through curves and the wheel flanges bit down.

Where was she going? What did the 6 train pass under? Could a building be brought down by a human bomb? I thought not. So what big crowds were still assembled after two o'clock in the morning? Not many. Nightclubs, maybe, but we had already left most of them behind, and she wouldn't get past a velvet rope anyway.

I stared on at her.

Too hard.

She felt it.

She turned her head, slowly, smoothly, like a preprogrammed movement.

She stared right back at me.
Our eyes met.
Her face changed.
She knew I knew.

FOUR

We looked straight at each other for the best part of ten seconds. Then I got to my feet. Braced against the motion and took a step. I would be killed thirty feet away, no question. I couldn't get any deader by being any closer. I passed the Hispanic woman on my left. Passed the guy in the NBA shirt on my right. Passed the West African woman on my left. Her eyes were still closed. I handed myself from one grab bar to the next, left and right, swaying. Passenger number four stared at me all the way, frightened, panting, muttering. Her hands stayed in her bag.

I stopped six feet from her.

I said, 'I really want to be wrong about this.'

She didn't reply. Her lips moved. Her hands moved under the thick black canvas. The large object in her bag shifted slightly.

I said, 'I need to see your hands.'

She didn't reply.

'I'm a cop,' I lied. 'I can help you.'

She didn't reply.

I said, 'We can talk.'

She didn't reply.

I let go of the grab bars and dropped my hands to my sides. It made me smaller. Less threatening. Just a guy. I stood as still as the moving train would let me. I did nothing. I had no option. She would need a split second. I would need more than that. Except that there was absolutely nothing I could do. I could have grabbed her bag and tried to tear it away from her. But it was looped around her body and its strap was a wide band of tightly woven cotton. The same knit as a fire hose. It was pre-washed and pre-aged and pre-distressed like new stuff is now but it would still be very strong. I would have ended up jerking her up off her seat and dumping her down on the floor.

Except that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere near her. She would have hit the button before my hand was halfway there.

I could have tried to jerk the bag upward and swipe behind it with my other hand to rip the detonator cord out of its terminals. Except that for the sake of her easy movement there would be enough spare length in the cord that I would have needed to haul it through a giant two-foot arc before I met any resistance. By which time she would have hit the button, if only in involuntary shock.

I could have grabbed at her jacket and tried to tear some other wires loose. But there were fat pockets of goose feathers between me and the wires. A slippery nylon shell. No touch, no feel.

No hope.

I could have tried to incapacitate her. Hit her hard in the head, knock her out, one punch, instantaneous. But as fast as I still am, a decent swing

from six feet away would have taken most of half a second. She had to move the ball of her thumb an eighth of an inch.

She would have gotten there first.

I asked, 'Can I sit down? Next to you?'

She said, 'No, stay away from me.'

A neutral, toneless voice. No obvious accent. American, but she could have been from anywhere. Up close she didn't look really wild or deranged. Just resigned, and grave, and scared, and tired. She was staring up at me with the same intensity she had been using on the opposite window. She looked completely alert and aware. I felt completely scrutinized. I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything.

'It's late,' I said. 'You should wait for rush hour.'

She didn't reply.

'Six more hours,' I said. 'It will work much better then.'

Her hands moved, inside her bag.

I said, 'Not now.'

She said nothing.

'Just one,' I said. 'Show me one hand. You don't need both of them in there.'

The train slowed hard. I staggered backward and stepped forward again and reached up to the grab bar close to the roof. My hands were damp. The steel felt hot. Grand Central, I thought. But it wasn't. I glanced out the window expecting lights and white tiles and saw the glow of a dim blue lamp instead. We were stopping in the tunnel. Maintenance, or signalling.

I turned back.

'Show me one hand,' I said again.

The woman didn't answer. She was staring at my waist. With my hands high my T-shirt had ridden up and the scar low on my stomach was visible above the waistband of my pants. Raised white skin, hard and lumpy. Big crude stitches, like a cartoon. Shrapnel, from a truck bomb in Beirut, a long time ago. I had been a hundred yards from the explosion.

I was ninety-eight yards closer to the woman on the bench.

She stared on. Most people ask how I had gotten the scar. I didn't want her to. I didn't want to talk about bombs. Not with her.

I said, 'Show me one hand.'

She asked, 'Why?'

'You don't need two in there.'

'Then what good can it do you?'

'I don't know,' I said. I had no real idea what I was doing. I'm not a hostage negotiator. I was just talking for the sake of it. Which is uncharacteristic. Mostly I'm a very silent person. It would be statistically very unlikely for me to die halfway through a sentence.

Maybe that's why I was talking.

The woman moved her hands. I saw her take a solo grip inside her bag with her right and she brought her left out slowly. Small, pale, faintly ridged with veins and tendons. Middle-aged skin. Plain nails, trimmed short. No rings. Not married, not engaged to be. She turned her hand over, to show me the other side. Empty palm, red because she was hot.

'Thank you,' I said.

She laid her hand palm-down on the seat

next to her and left it there, like it was nothing to do with the rest of her. Which it wasn't, at that point. The train stopped in the darkness. I lowered my hands. The hem of my shirt fell back into place.

I said, 'Now show me what's in the bag.'

'Why?'

'I just want to see it. Whatever it is.'

She didn't reply.

She didn't move.

I said, 'I won't try to take it away from you. I promise. I just want to see it. I'm sure you can understand that.'

The train moved on again. Slow acceleration, no jerk, low speed. A gentle cruise into the station. A slow roll. Maybe two hundred yards, I thought.

I said, 'I think I'm entitled to at least see it. Wouldn't you agree?'

She made a face, like she didn't understand.

She said, 'I don't see why you're entitled to see it.'

'You don't?'

'No.'

'Because I'm involved here. And maybe I can check it's fixed right. For later. Because you need to do this later. Not now.'

'You said you were a cop.'

'We can work this out,' I said. 'I can help you.' I glanced over my shoulder. The train was creeping along. White light up ahead. I turned back. The woman's right hand was moving. She was juggling it into a firmer grip and slowly shaking it free of the bag, all at once.

I watched. The bag snagged on her wrist and

she used her left hand to free it up. Her right hand came out.

Not a battery. No wires. No switch, no button, no plunger.

Something else entirely.

FIVE

The woman had a gun in her hand. She was pointing it straight at me. Low down, dead centre, on a line between my groin and my navel. All kinds of necessary stuff in that region. Organs, spine, intestines, various arteries and veins. The gun was a Ruger Speed-Six. A big old .357 Magnum revolver with a short four-inch barrel, capable of blowing a hole in me big enough to see daylight through.

But overall I was a lot more cheerful than I had been a second before. Many reasons. Bombs kill people all at once, guns kill one at a time. Bombs don't need aiming, and guns do. The Speed-Six weighs north of two pounds fully loaded. A lot of mass for a slender wrist to control. And Magnum rounds produce searing muzzle flash and punishing recoil. If she had used the gun before, she would know that. She would have what shooters call Magnum flinch. A split second before pulling the trigger her arm would clench and her eyes would close and her head would turn away. She had a decent chance of missing, even from six feet. Most handguns miss. Maybe not on the range, with ear

defenders and eye protection and time and calm and nothing at stake. But in the real world, with panic and stress and the shakes and a thumping heart, handguns are all about luck, good or bad. Mine and hers.

If she missed, she wouldn't get a second shot.

I said, 'Take it easy.' Just to be making sounds. Her finger was bone-white on the trigger, but she hadn't moved it yet. The Speed-Six is a double-action revolver, which means that the first half of the trigger's pull moves the hammer back and rotates the cylinder. The second half drops the hammer and fires the gun. Complex mechanics, which take time. Not much, but some. I stared at her finger. Sensed the guy with the ballplayer's eyes, watching. I guessed my back was blocking the view from farther up the car.

I said, 'You've got no beef with me, lady. You don't even know me. Put the gun down and talk.'

She didn't reply. Maybe something passed across her face, but I wasn't watching her face. I was watching her finger. It was the only part of her that interested me. And I was concentrating on the vibrations coming up through the floor. Waiting for the car to stop. My crazy fellow passenger had told me that the R142As weigh thirty-five tons each. They can do sixty-two miles an hour. Therefore their brakes are very powerful. Too powerful for finesse at low speeds. No feathering is possible. They clamp and jerk and grind. Trains often skid the last yard on locked wheels. Hence the characteristic yelp as they stop.

I figured the same would apply even after our slow crawl. Maybe more so, relatively speaking.

The gun was essentially a weight on the end of a pendulum. A long thin arm, two pounds of steel. When the brakes bit down, momentum would carry the gun onward. Uptown. Newton's Law of Motion. I was ready to fight my own momentum and push off the bars the other way and jump downtown. If the gun jerked just five inches north and I jerked just five inches south I would be in the clear.

Maybe four inches would do it.

Or four and a half, for safety's sake.

The woman asked, 'Where did you get your scar?'

I didn't answer.

'Were you gut shot?'

'Bomb,' I said.

She moved the muzzle, to her left and my right. She aimed at where the scar was hidden by the hem of my shirt.

The train rolled on. Into the station. Infinitely slow. Barely walking pace. Grand Central's platforms are long. The lead car was heading all the way to the end. I waited for the brakes to bite. I figured there would be a nice little lurch.

We never got there.

The gun barrel moved back to my centre mass. Then it moved vertical. For a split second I thought the woman was surrendering. But the barrel kept on moving. The woman raised her chin high, like a proud, obstinate gesture. She tucked the muzzle into the soft flesh beneath it. Squeezed the trigger halfway. The cylinder turned and the hammer scraped back across the nylon of her coat.

Then she pulled the trigger the rest of the way and blew her own head off.

SIX

The doors didn't open for a long time. Maybe someone had used the emergency intercom or maybe the conductor had heard the shot. But whatever, the system went into full-on lockdown mode. It was undoubtedly something they rehearsed. And the procedure made a lot of sense. Better that a crazed gunman was contained in a single car, rather than being allowed to run around all over town.

But the waiting wasn't pleasant. The .357 Magnum round was invented in 1935. Magnum is Latin for big. Heavier bullet, and a lot more propellant charge. Technically the propellant charge does not explode. It deflagrates, which is a chemical process halfway between burning and exploding. The idea is to create a huge bubble of hot gas that accelerates the bullet down the barrel, like a pent-up spring. Normally the gas follows the bullet out of the muzzle and sets fire to the oxygen in the air close by. Hence muzzle flash. But with a hard contact shot to the head like passenger number four had chosen, the bullet makes a hole in the skin and the gas pumps itself straight in after it. It expands violently under the skin and either rips

itself a huge star-shaped exit wound, or it blows all the flesh and skin right off the bone and unwraps the skull completely, like peeling a banana upside down.

That was what had happened in this case. The woman's face was reduced to rags and tatters of bloody flesh hanging off shattered bone. The bullet had travelled vertically through her mouth and had dumped its massive kinetic energy in her brain pan, and the sudden huge pressure had sought relief and found it where the plates of her skull had sealed themselves way back in childhood. They had burst open again and the pressure had pasted three or four large fragments of bone all over the wall above and behind her. One way or the other her head was basically gone. But the graffiti-resistant fibreglass was doing its job. White bone and dark blood and grey tissue were running down the slick surface, not sticking, leaving thin snail trails behind. The woman's body had collapsed into a slumped position on the bench. Her right index finger was still hooked through the trigger guard. The gun had bounced off her thigh and was resting on the seat next to her.

The sound of the shot was still ringing in my ears. Behind me I could hear muted sounds. I could smell the woman's blood. I ducked forward and checked her bag. Empty. I unzipped her jacket and opened it up. Nothing there. Just a white cotton blouse and the stink of voided bowel and bladder.

I found the emergency panel and called through to the conductor myself. I said, 'Suicide by gunshot. Last but one car. It's all over now. We're secure. No further threat.' I didn't want to wait until the

NYPD assembled SWAT teams and body armour and rifles and came in all stealthy. That could take a long time.

I didn't get a reply from the conductor. But a minute later his voice came through the train PA. He said, 'Passengers are advised that the doors will remain closed for a few minutes due to an evolving incident.' He spoke slowly. He was probably reading from a card. His voice was shaky. Not at all like the smooth tones of the Bloomberg anchors.

I took a last look around the car and sat down three feet from the headless corpse and waited.

Whole episodes of TV cop shows could have run before the real-life cops even arrived. DNA could have been extracted and analysed, matches could have been made, perpetrators could have been hunted and caught and tried and sentenced. But eventually six officers came down the stairs. They were in caps and vests and they had drawn their weapons. NYPD patrolmen on the night shift, probably out of the 14th Precinct on West 35th Street, the famous Midtown South. They ran along the platform and started checking the train from the front. I got up again and watched through the windows above the couplers, down the whole length of the train, like peering into a long lit-up stainless steel tunnel. The view got murky farther down, due to dirt and green impurities in the layers of glass. But I could see the cops opening doors car by car, checking, clearing, turning the passengers out and hustling them upstairs to the street. It was a lightly loaded night train and it didn't take long for them to reach us. They checked through the

windows and saw the body and the gun and tensed up. The doors hissed open and they swarmed on board, two through each set of doors. We all raised our hands, like a reflex.

One cop blocked each of the doorways and the other three moved straight towards the dead woman. They stopped and stood off about six feet. Didn't check for a pulse or any other sign of life. Didn't hold a mirror under her nose, to check for breathing. Partly because it was obvious she wasn't breathing, and partly because she didn't have a nose. The cartilage had torn away, leaving jagged splinters of bone between where the internal pressure had popped her eyeballs out.

A big cop with sergeant's stripes turned around. He had gone a little pale but was otherwise well into a pretty good impersonation of just another night's work. He asked, 'Who saw what happened here?'

There was silence at the front of the car. The Hispanic woman, the man in the NBA shirt, and the African lady. They were all sitting tight and saying nothing. Point eight: a rigid stare ahead. They were all doing it. *If I can't see you, you can't see me.* The guy in the golf shirt said nothing. So I said, 'She took the gun out of her bag and shot herself.'

'Just like that?'

'More or less.'

'Why?'

'How would I know?'

'Where and when?'

'On the run-in to the station. Whenever that was.'

The guy processed the information. Suicide by gunshot. The subway was the NYPD's responsibility. The deceleration zone between 41st and 42nd was the 14th Precinct's turf. His case. No question. He nodded. Said, 'OK, please all of you exit the car and wait on the platform. We'll need names and addresses and statements from you.'

Then he keyed his collar microphone and was answered by a loud blast of static. He answered that in turn with a long stream of codes and numbers. I guessed he was calling for paramedics and an ambulance. After that it would be up to the transportation people to get the car unhooked and cleaned and the schedule back on track. Not difficult, I thought. There was plenty of time before the morning rush hour.

We got out into a gathering crowd on the platform. Transport cops, more regular cops arriving, subway workers clustering all around, Grand Central personnel showing up. Five minutes later an FDNY paramedic crew clattered down the stairs with a gurney. They came through the barrier and stepped on the train and the first-response cops stepped off. I didn't see what happened after that because the cops started moving through the crowd, looking around, making ready to find a passenger each and walk them away for further inquiries. The big sergeant came for me. I had answered his questions on the train. Therefore he made me first in line. He led me deep into the station and put me in a hot stale white-tiled room that could have been part of the transport police facility. He sat me down alone in a wooden chair and asked me for my name.

‘Jack Reacher,’ I said.

He wrote it down and didn’t speak again. Just hung around in the doorway and watched me. And waited. For a detective to show up, I guessed.

SEVEN

The detective who showed up was a woman and she came alone. She was wearing pants and a grey short-sleeved shirt. Maybe silk, maybe man-made. Shiny, anyway. It was untucked and I guessed the tails were hiding her gun and her cuffs and whatever else she was carrying. Inside the shirt she was small and slim. Above the shirt she had dark hair tied back and a small oval face. No jewellery. Not even a wedding band. She was somewhere in her late thirties. Maybe forty. An attractive woman. I liked her immediately. She looked relaxed and friendly. She showed me her gold shield and handed me her business card. It had numbers on it for her office and her cell. It had an NYPD e-mail address. She said the name on it out loud for me. The name was Theresa Lee, with the T and the h pronounced together, like *theme* or *therapy*. *Theresa*. She wasn't Asian. Maybe the Lee came from an old marriage or was an Ellis Island version of Leigh, or some other longer and more complicated name. Or maybe she was descended from Robert E.

She said, 'Can you tell me exactly what happened?'

She spoke softly, with raised eyebrows and in a breathy voice brimming with care and consideration, like her primary concern was my own post-traumatic stress. *Can you tell me? Can you? Like, can you bear to relive it?* I smiled, briefly. Midtown South was down to low single-digit homicides per year, and even if she had dealt with all of them by herself since the first day she came on the job, I had still seen more corpses than she had. By a big multiple. The woman on the train hadn't been the most pleasant of them, but she had been a very long way from the worst.

So I told her exactly what had happened, all the way up from Bleecker Street, all the way through the eleven-point list, my tentative approach, the fractured conversation, the gun, the suicide.

Theresa Lee wanted to talk about the list.

'We have a copy,' she said. 'It's supposed to be confidential.'

'It's been out in the world for twenty years,' I said. 'Everyone has a copy. It's hardly confidential.'

'Where did you see it?'

'In Israel,' I said. 'Just after it was written.'

'How?'

So I ran through my résumé for her. The abridged version. The U.S. Army, thirteen years a military policeman, the elite 110th investigative unit, service all over the world, plus detached duty here and there, as and when ordered. Then the Soviet collapse, the peace dividend, the smaller defence budget, suddenly getting cut loose.

'Officer or enlisted man?' she asked.

'Final rank of major,' I said.

‘And now?’
‘I’m retired.’
‘You’re young to be retired.’
‘I figured I should enjoy it while I can.’
‘And are you?’
‘Never better.’
‘What were you doing tonight? Down there in the Village?’
‘Music,’ I said. ‘Those blues clubs on Bleecker.’
‘And where were you headed on the 6 train?’
‘I was going to get a room somewhere or head over to the Port Authority to get a bus.’
‘To where?’
‘Wherever.’
‘Short visit?’
‘The best kind.’
‘Where do you live?’
‘Nowhere. My year is one short visit after another.’
‘Where’s your luggage?’
‘I don’t have any.’
Most people ask follow-up questions after that, but Theresa Lee didn’t. Instead her eyes changed focus again and she said, ‘I’m not happy that the list was wrong. I thought it was supposed to be definitive.’ She spoke inclusively, cop to cop, as if my old job made a difference to her.
‘It was only half wrong,’ I said. ‘The suicide part was right.’
‘I suppose so,’ she said. ‘The signs would be the same, I guess. But it was still a false positive.’
‘Better than a false negative.’
‘I suppose so,’ she said again.
I asked, ‘Do we know who she was?’

‘Not yet. But we’ll find out. They tell me they found keys and a wallet at the scene. They’ll probably be definitive. But what was up with the winter jacket?’

I said, ‘I have no idea.’

She went quiet, like she was profoundly disappointed. I said, ‘These things are always works in progress. Personally I think we should add a twelfth point to the women’s list, too. If a woman bomber takes off her headscarf, there’s going to be a suntan clue, the same as the men.’

‘Good point,’ she said.

‘And I read a book that figured the part about the virgins is a mistranslation. The word is ambiguous. It comes in a passage full of food imagery. Milk and honey. It probably means raisins. Plump, and possibly candied or sugared.’

‘They kill themselves for raisins?’

‘I’d love to see their faces.’

‘Are you a linguist?’

‘I speak English,’ I said. ‘And French. And why would a woman bomber want virgins anyway? A lot of sacred texts are mistranslated. Especially where virgins are concerned. Even the New Testament, probably. Some people say Mary was a first-time mother, that’s all. From the Hebrew word. Not a virgin. The original writers would laugh, seeing what we made of it all.’

Theresa Lee didn’t comment on that. Instead she asked, ‘Are you OK?’

I took it to be an inquiry as to whether I was shaken up. As to whether I should be offered counselling. Maybe because she took me for a taciturn man who was talking too much. But

I was wrong. I said, 'I'm fine,' and she looked a little surprised and said, 'I would be regretting the approach, myself. On the train. I think you tipped her over the edge. Another couple of stops and she might have gotten over whatever was upsetting her.'

We sat in silence for a minute after that and then the big sergeant stuck his head in and nodded Lee out to the corridor. I heard a short whispered conversation and then Lee came back in and asked me to head over to West 35th Street with her. To the precinct house.

I asked, 'Why?'

She hesitated.

'Formality,' she said. 'To get your statement typed up, to close the file.'

'Do I get a choice in the matter?'

'Don't go there,' she said. 'The Israeli list is involved. We could call this whole thing a matter of national security. You're a material witness, we could keep you until you grew old and died. Better just to play ball like a good citizen.'

So I shrugged and followed her out of the Grand Central labyrinth to Vanderbilt Avenue, where her car was parked. It was an unmarked Ford Crown Victoria, battered and grimy, but it worked OK. It got us over to West 35th just fine. We went in through the grand old portal and she led me upstairs to an interview room. She stepped back and waited in the corridor and let me go in ahead of her. Then she stayed in the corridor and closed the door behind me and locked it from the outside.

EIGHT

Theresa Lee came back twenty minutes later with the beginnings of an official file and another guy. She put the file on the table and introduced the other guy as her partner. She said his name was Docherty. She said he had come up with a bunch of questions that maybe should have been asked and answered at the outset.

‘What questions?’ I asked.

First she offered me coffee and the bathroom. I said yes to both. Docherty escorted me down the corridor and when we got back there were three foam cups on the table, next to the file. Two coffees, one tea. I took a coffee and tried it. It was OK. Lee took the tea. Docherty took the second coffee and said, ‘Run through it all again.’

So I did, concisely, bare bones, and Docherty fussed a bit about how the Israeli list had produced a false positive, the same way that Lee had. I answered him the same way I had answered her, that a false positive was better than a false negative, and that looking at it from the dead woman’s point of view, whether she was heading for a solo exit or planning to take a crowd with her might not alter

the personal symptoms she would be displaying. For five minutes we had a collegiate atmosphere going, three reasonable people discussing an interesting phenomenon.

Then the tone changed.

Docherty asked, 'How did you feel?'

I asked, 'About what?'

'While she was killing herself.'

'Glad that she wasn't killing me.'

Docherty said, 'We're homicide detectives. We have to look at all violent deaths. You understand that, right? Just in case.'

I said, 'Just in case of what?'

'Just in case there's more than meets the eye.'

'There isn't. She shot herself.'

'Says you.'

'No one can say different. Because that's what happened.'

Docherty said, 'There are always alternative scenarios.'

'You think?'

'Maybe *you* shot her.'

Theresa Lee gave me a sympathetic look.

I said, 'I didn't.'

Docherty said, 'Maybe it was your gun.'

I said, 'It wasn't. It was a two-pound piece. I don't have a bag.'

'You're a big guy. Big pants. Big pockets.'

Theresa Lee gave me another sympathetic look. Like she was saying, *I'm sorry*.

I said, 'What is this? Good cop, dumb cop?'

Docherty said, 'You think I'm dumb?'

'You just proved it. If I shot her with a .357 Magnum, I'd have residue on me up to my elbow.'

But you just stood outside the men's room while I washed my hands. You're full of shit. You haven't fingerprinted me and you haven't Mirandized me. You're blowing smoke.'

'We're obliged to make certain.'

'What does the medical examiner say?'

'We don't know yet.'

'There were witnesses.'

Lee shook her head. 'No use. They didn't see anything.'

'They must have.'

'Their view was blocked by your back. Plus they weren't looking, plus they were half asleep, and plus they don't speak much English. They had nothing to offer. Basically I think they wanted to get going before we started checking green cards.'

'What about the other guy? He was in front of me. He was wide awake. And he looked like a citizen and an English speaker.'

'What other guy?'

'The fifth passenger. Chinos and a golf shirt.'

Lee opened the file. Shook her head. 'There were only four passengers, plus the woman.'

NINE

Lee took a sheet of paper out of the file and reversed it and slid it halfway across the table. It was a handwritten list of witnesses. Four names. Mine, plus a Rodriguez, a Frlujlov, and an Mbele.

‘Four passengers,’ she said again.

I said, ‘I was on the train. I can count. I know how many passengers there were.’ Then I reran the scene in my head. Stepping off the train, waiting among the small milling crowd. The arrival of the paramedic crew. The cops, stepping off the train in turn, moving through the throng, taking an elbow each, leading the witnesses away to separate rooms. I had gotten grabbed first, by the big sergeant. Impossible to say whether four cops had followed behind us, or only three.

I said, ‘He must have slipped away.’

Docherty asked, ‘Who was he?’

‘Just a guy. Alert, but nothing special about him. My age, not poor.’

‘Did he interact in any way with the woman?’

‘Not that I saw.’

‘Did he shoot her?’

‘She shot herself.’

Docherty shrugged. 'So he's just a reluctant witness. Doesn't want paperwork showing he was out and about at two in the morning. Probably cheating on his wife. Happens all the time.'

'He ran. But you're giving him a free pass and looking at me instead?'

'You just testified that he wasn't involved.'

'I wasn't involved either.'

'Says you.'

'You believe me about the other guy but not about myself?'

'Why would you lie about the other guy?'

I said, 'This is a waste of time.' And it was. It was such an extreme, clumsy waste of time that I suddenly realized it wasn't for real. It was stage managed. I realized that in fact, in their own peculiar way, Lee and Docherty were doing me a small favour.

There's more than meets the eye.

I said, 'Who was she?'

Docherty said, 'Why should she be someone?'

'Because you made the ID and the computers lit up like Christmas trees. Someone called you and told you to hold on to me until they get here. You didn't want to put an arrest on my record so you're stalling me with all this bullshit.'

'We didn't particularly care about your record. We just didn't want to do the paperwork.'

'So who was she?'

'Apparently she worked for the government. A federal agency is on its way to question you. We're not allowed to say which one.'

* * *

They left me locked in the room. It was an OK space. Grimy, hot, battered, no windows, out-of-date crime prevention posters on the walls and the smell of sweat and anxiety and burnt coffee in the air. The table, and three chairs. Two for the detectives, one for the suspect. Back in the day maybe the suspect got smacked around and tumbled out of the chair. Maybe he still did. It's hard to say exactly what happens, in a room with no windows.

I timed the delay in my head. The clock had already been running about an hour, since Theresa Lee's whispered talk in the Grand Central corridor. So I knew it wasn't the FBI coming for me. Their New York field office is the largest in the nation, based down in Federal Plaza, near City Hall. Ten minutes to react, ten minutes to assemble a team, ten minutes to drive uptown with lights and sirens. The FBI would have arrived long ago. But that left a whole bunch of other three-letter agencies. I made a bet with myself that whoever was heading my way would have IA as the last two letters on their badges. CIA, DIA. Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency. Maybe others recently invented and hitherto unpublicized. Middle-of-the-night panics were very much their style.

After a second hour tacked on to the first I figured they must be coming all the way from D.C., which implied a small specialist outfit. Anyone else would have a field office closer to hand. I gave up speculating and tipped my chair back and put my feet on the table and went to sleep.

* * *

I didn't find out exactly who they were. Not then. They wouldn't tell me. At five in the morning three men in suits came in and woke me up. They were polite and businesslike. Their suits were mid-priced and clean and pressed. Their shoes were polished. Their eyes were bright. Their haircuts were fresh and short. Their faces were pink and ruddy. Their bodies were stocky but toned. They looked like they could run half-marathons without much trouble, but without much enjoyment, either. My first impression was recent ex-military. Gung-ho staff officers, head-hunted into some limestone building inside the Beltway. True believers, doing important work. I asked to see ID and badges and credentials, but they quoted the Patriot Act at me and said they weren't obliged to identify themselves. Probably true, and they certainly enjoyed saying so. I considered clamming up in retaliation, but they saw me considering, and quoted some more of the Act at me, which left me in no doubt at all that a world of trouble lay at the end of that particular road. I am afraid of very little, but hassle with today's security apparatus is always best avoided. Franz Kafka and George Orwell would have given me the same advice. So I shrugged and told them to go ahead and ask their questions.

They started out by saying that they were aware of my military service and very respectful of it, which was either a bullshit boilerplate platitude, or meant that they had been recruited out of the MPs themselves. Nobody respects an MP except another MP. Then they said that they would be observing me very closely and would know whether I was telling the truth or lying. Which was total

bullshit, because only the best of us can do that, and these guys weren't the best of us, otherwise they would have been in very senior positions, meaning that right then they would have been home and asleep in a Virginia suburb, rather than running up and down I-95 in the middle of the night.

But I didn't have anything to hide, so I told them again to go ahead.

They had three areas of concern. The first: Did I know the woman who had killed herself on the train? Had I ever seen her before?

I said, 'No.' Short and sweet, quiet but firm.

They didn't follow up with supplementaries. Which told me roughly who they were and exactly what they were doing. They were somebody's B team, sent north to dead-end an open investigation. They were walling it off, burying it, drawing a line under something somebody had been only half suspicious about to begin with. They wanted a negative answer to every question, so that the file could be closed and the matter put to bed. They wanted a positive absence of loose ends, and they didn't want to draw attention to the issue by making it a big drama. They wanted to get back on the road with the whole thing forgotten.

The second question was: Did I know a woman called Lila Hoth?

I said, 'No,' because I didn't. Not then.

The third question was more of a sustained dialogue. The lead agent opened it. The main man. He was a little older and a little smaller than the other two. Maybe a little smarter, too. He said, 'You approached the woman on the train.'

I didn't reply. I was there to answer questions, not to comment on statements.

The guy asked, 'How close did you get?'

'Six feet,' I said. 'Give or take.'

'Close enough to touch her?'

'No.'

'If you had extended your arm, and she had extended hers, could you have touched hands?'

'Maybe,' I said.

'Is that a yes or a no?'

'It's a maybe. I know how long my arms are. I don't know how long hers were.'

'Did she pass anything to you?'

'No.'

'Did you accept anything from her?'

'No.'

'Did you take anything from her after she was dead?'

'No.'

'Did anyone else?'

'Not that I saw.'

'Did you see anything fall from her hand, or her bag, or her clothing?'

'No.'

'Did she tell you anything?'

'Nothing of substance.'

'Did she speak to anyone else?'

'No.'

The guy asked, 'Would you mind turning out your pockets?'

I shrugged. I had nothing to hide. I went through each pocket in turn and dumped the contents on the battered table. A folded wad of cash money, and a few coins. My old passport. My ATM card.

My clip-together toothbrush. The Metrocard that had gotten me into the subway in the first place. And Theresa Lee's business card.

The guy stirred through my stuff with a single extended finger and nodded to one of his underlings, who stepped up close to pat me down. He did a semi-expert job and found nothing more and shook his head.

The main guy said, 'Thank you, Mr Reacher.'

And then they left, all three of them, as quickly as they had come in. I was a little surprised, but happy enough. I put my stuff back in my pockets and waited for them to clear the corridor and then I wandered out. The place was quiet. I saw Theresa Lee doing nothing at a desk and her partner Docherty walking a guy across the squad room to a cubicle at the back. The guy was a worn-out mid-sized forty-something. He had on a creased grey T-shirt and a pair of red sweat pants. He had left home without combing his hair. That was clear. It was grey and sticking up all over the place. Theresa Lee saw me looking and said, 'Family member.'

'The woman's?'

Lee nodded. 'She had contact details in her wallet. That's her brother. He's a cop himself. Small town in New Jersey. He drove straight over.'

'Poor guy.'

'I know. We didn't ask him to make the formal ID. She's too messed up. We told him that a closed casket is the way to go. He got the message.'

'So are you sure it's her?'

Lee nodded again. 'Fingerprints.'

'Who was she?'

'I'm not allowed to say.'

‘Am I done here?’

‘The feds finished with you?’

‘Apparently.’

‘Then beat it. You’re done.’

I made it to the top of the stairs and she called after me. She said, ‘I didn’t mean it about tipping her over the edge.’

‘Yes, you did,’ I said. ‘And you might have been right.’

I stepped out to the dawn cool and turned left on 35th Street and headed east. *You’re done.* But I wasn’t. Right there on the corner were four more guys waiting to talk to me. Similar types as before, but not federal agents. Their suits were too expensive.