

IN THE WIND

BARBARA FISTER

GAZORNUM / ST. PETER

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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For Tim

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one

It starts, as always, in the crowded cooler of the old Cook County Medical Examiner's office. A worker in coveralls and a mask loads the rough wooden boxes stacked against the wall onto a dolly and trundles them, three at a time, down the hallway to the loading dock where a truck is waiting. He hums to himself, steadying the topmost box with one hand, and doesn't notice the fluid that looks like antifreeze dripping from the corner of one of the boxes.

I follow the unmarked panel truck through South Side neighborhoods, into the suburbs, and to the cemetery, where a long trench is open near the back fence. The grass here is brown and sparse. Broken roots reach like bony fingers through the newly-dug earth and a cracked drain pipe drips rusty water. Two men unload the boxes and lower them in, nudging them close together to save space. Each box has a round brass tag nailed to one end—no names, just numbers.

When the last one is in place, lying unevenly because it barely fits, an old black man in a suit clasps his hands and mumbles a prayer before scattering a handful of dirt that patters down on the plywood with the sound of rain. There's a moment of quiet, just the rustle of the wind and the hum of traffic on a distant highway. Then he turns away and the backhoe starts up, making a shrill, insistent racket.

Only it wasn't a backhoe, it was the phone. I picked it up, feeling the familiar knot of sorrow in the center of my chest that always came with that dream. "Hello?"

"Anni? Is that you?"

"Yeah."

"You sound funny."

I recognized that low rumble: Father Sikora, the priest at St. Larry's, the Catholic church and community center four blocks from my house.

"I was asleep." I picked up my watch and squinted at it. Not quite 6:00 A.M. "What's wrong? Is Sophie—?"

"Not Sophie. It's someone else. She needs help. You got a car now, right?"

"In a manner of speaking."

"What does that mean?"

"It runs most of the time."

"Oh. Well, listen . . ." I heard him take a breath. "Take care of her, okay? I'm counting on you." *Click.*

I stared at the phone for a moment before I put it down. Father Sikora wasn't much for small talk, but this was cryptic even for him. I met him ten years ago, when I was a rookie police officer assigned to the Wood District, where his church was an anchor for the community. When I needed some insight into why there was a spike in vandalism or how residents would respond to a new policing initiative, he had the answers. He was in his late sixties, now, a barrel-chested Pole with a bald head, a boxer's mashed nose, a rolling gait from an arthritic hip, and gnarled hands that could wield a nail gun for hours of hard manual labor or cup the head of a newborn with immense gentleness. The sole priest in a busy parish, he offered three masses on the weekends, one each in English, Polish and Spanish. He'd never asked for my help before. Maybe another troubled teen had gotten lost in the big, bad city. That seemed to be my specialty these days.

Between that dream and the strange conversation, I felt disoriented and in sore need of coffee. I pulled on a pair of cutoffs and ran water into the old stovetop percolator, scooping in some of the Puerto Rican coffee that I buy at the local corner grocery. I filled a bowl with Little Friskies, went out on the porch, and left it at the bottom of the steps

for the three-legged stray cat who lived in the alley. He crouched by the trashcans, pretending indifference, but one ragged ear swiveled toward the sound. For reasons of feline pride, he preferred to think he stole the food when my back was turned. I knew he wouldn't make his move until I went back upstairs and shut the door behind me.

The early morning sun flooded the room with light from unexpected angles these days. I finally had time to work on the classic Chicago two-flat that I'd bought a year ago. I rented the downstairs flat to a young family and lived on the second floor in an apartment that had been a poky, dark warren of small rooms until I'd knocked out walls, opened the ceiling to expose the rafters, and ripped up carpet and layers of old linoleum to uncover the hardwood underneath. My brother Martin helped me install some old windows with rippled glass that I'd found at a junk shop, rigging them with old-fashioned sash weights hidden behind the casings so they opened and shut with buttery smoothness. They were thrown wide open now, the streets playing their morning music: cars, city buses wheezing away from their stops, neighbors calling out to each other as they headed to work—something I didn't do anymore, which meant I had plenty of time and more than enough energy to make some renovations.

From an early age I had known exactly what I wanted to do with my life. I would join the police and become a detective based at Area 4 Headquarters, finding the bad guys, helping their victims. No one who died on the streets would be buried without a name or a story, not if I was working the case. Things had gone according to plan—until I saw a cop named Hank Cravic lose his temper with a cocky teenager, leaving the kid with permanent brain damage. The boy's family filed a civil suit against the city and when it finally made its way through the courts, I was called as a witness. The city settled with the family for an undisclosed sum

without ever admitting responsibility, but after I testified against Cravic, everything changed.

It took a few months before I finally admitted to myself that I couldn't do the job anymore, not without the support of my fellow officers. I turned in my star, filled out the paperwork to get a PI's license, then borrowed a sledgehammer and went to work remodeling my apartment. I have a gift for anger management.

The percolator started to burble, and just as I turned the flame down, I heard tapping at the door. Since no one was visible through the peephole, I assumed it was one of the kids who lived downstairs. They were always up at the crack of dawn, and in mid-June dawn cracked early. But it wasn't a child, it was a short, fat woman in a blue jumper and orthopedic shoes, her face hidden under the bill of a baseball cap. When she took it off, I recognized her as one of the workers at St. Larry's.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm Rosa." She gave me an uncertain smile. "Father Sikora sent me?" As if she wasn't sure herself.

So it wasn't a runaway in trouble, it was a middle-aged woman who dressed like a nun—a nun who was a Cubs fan. "Oh, right. Come on in." I suddenly felt awkward about the skimpy tank top I'd worn to bed, the paint-spattered cutoffs, even conscious of the tattoo on my shoulder. It was a tasteful little diamond in a traditional Hmong design, but I doubted middle-aged church workers approved of women with tattoos.

"Sorry about the mess. Been doing some remodeling." I wiped dust from a kitchen chair with a dish towel, then wiped the table for good measure. "Have a seat." I ducked into the bathroom to brush my teeth, run a comb through my hair, and change into a T-shirt and a pair of jeans.

When I returned, Rosa was sitting at the kitchen table, dimpled and plump and so short her feet dangled above the

floor. Her hair, once dark but now threaded with silver, fell in a thick braid down her back, and her eyes were bright and curious as she tilted her head to read the address off a pile of mail in a basket on the table. “Koskinen,” she said thoughtfully. “Isn’t that a Finnish name?”

“Right,” I said, taking two mugs out of a cupboard. I braced myself for the usual reaction, a variation on “funny, you don’t look Jewish.” With my dark hair and brown skin, I wasn’t your typical Scandinavian. But she surprised me.

“You must have Saami ancestry.”

“Maybe. I don’t know anything about my ancestors, just that the name is common in Finland.” Not many people knew about the Saami, indigenous nomads who herd reindeer in northern Finland. She could be right. Or the genes that gave me my looks were Filipino, or Lebanese, or Puerto Rican, some multiethnic gumbo. It didn’t matter to me where they came from; I knew who I was.

But I didn’t know much about Rosa. I’d seen her working at the bustling community center next to the church. The old rectory housed a soup kitchen, a food shelf, and programs for families, teens, and the homeless, all of it run on ridiculous optimism and a loaves-and-fishes approach to budgeting. Rosa was usually somewhere in the background, holding a baby or talking softly in Spanish to a glowering teenager, upset by some slight or other.

“Is that your family?” she asked, nodding at a framed photo propped next to the basket of mail.

I brought over mugs of coffee and sat across from her, glancing at the photo taken the day I graduated from the Academy, me in a hat that looked too big, dwarfed by my brother and grandfather, who stood on either side. I realized I should have put it away somewhere until I’d finished taping and sanding the drywall; the glass was coated with fine white powder, like frost. “Yup. I’m the one in the uniform.”

“Father Sikora told me you’re a private investigator now, that you work for Sophie Tilquist’s parents.”

“They asked me to help find her when she ran away. I would have done it anyway, I’ve known the family for years.” Jim and Nancy Tilquist were my oldest and best friends. Their lives had been thrown into disarray when their daughter Sophie was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age fourteen. In the three years since, during manic episodes, she would disappear from home, looking for excitement in the city. Most recently I’d found her at St. Larry’s, communing with archangels among the flickering votive candles in the sanctuary.

With the first sip of coffee, my hand automatically started looking for a cigarette and I gave it a mental smack. I’d quit that, too, but the urge was still there. It was time to get down to business. “So, I understand you need help.”

She nodded at me over her mug, her dark eyes solemn. “I have to go somewhere and I don’t have a car.”

I had to struggle to keep a straight face. The old priest knew I’d just gotten my PI’s license, but apparently that hadn’t impressed him as much as the news I’d finally bought a battered car from one of his parishioners. He’d been ragging me about using my bike to get around town since the Cougar I’d driven for years died of old age. He thought it was dangerous, that the city was no place for bikes. I didn’t pay any attention to him, enjoying a brief holiday from the daily hunt for street parking. But I finally realized I could get a phone call in the middle of the night and have to prowl the city in search of Sophie, and that meant I had to have a car.

“Sure, I can give you a lift. Where do you need to go?”

“Bemidji.”

I wondered if I heard her right. “You mean, Bemidji, Minnesota?”

“Actually, it’s a little north of there. You’ve never heard of it.”

I drank some coffee. That would take, what, ten hours? Fifteen? A couple of days shot, going there and back again. I thought about offering her a ride to the bus station and the bus fare if necessary, but Father Sikora would have done that, if that's all it took. Something was going on, something neither one of them wanted to explain.

I liked the old priest. When I used to stop by St. Larry's with questions and a badge, he would look me in the eye and answer without messing around. True, there were times I could tell he was holding something back, but I'd learned through experience he always had good reason. And he'd been kind to Sophie, who had mistaken the bright, clamoring excitement that filled her mind for a divinely-inspired mystical experience. She'd been stable since the last episode, though. I could afford to be out of town for a few days.

Besides, for reasons I couldn't guess, Father Sikora was counting on me.

I looked over at the woman, her eyes on me as she sipped from her mug. "So," I said to her, "what's the best way to get to Bemidji?"



I threw a change of clothes, my cell phone, and a couple of paperbacks into a knapsack, and checked my wallet—better hit up an ATM before we left town. At only 6:30, it was too early to call my brother, Martin. He was planning come over after work the next day to help me replace the bathroom sink. I'd give him a ring after we got on the road, explain the change of plans.

The feral tomcat, who was pretending someone else had cleaned out the bowl of Friskies, watched us come down the back stairs suspiciously, darting off in his lopsided way when we got too close. Though it was early, the sky was already hazy and bright, the stagnant air already as hot as if it came from an open oven. For the second week in a row, temperatures were predicted to reach the upper nineties by

afternoon. As we came through the narrow gangway between my house and the next, I caught the pungent scent of stale tobacco and sweat, and stopped short, causing Rosa to step on my heels.

“Morning, ladies.” He was leaning back on his elbows, surveying the street as if he owned it. He took a slow toke on his cigarette to show how comfortable he was. “Gonna be another hot one.”

“Get off my porch, Tyler.”

“Just resting my feet.”

“Rest them somewhere else.”

He shrugged and gave Rosa a roguish wink as he stood. I was afraid he’d ask if she could spare a few bucks, so I gave him a “get-lost” glare and pointed her toward my car. As I circled around to the driver’s side, I looked back. Tyler was ambling away down the sidewalk, flicking ash off his cigarette, a cell phone pressed to his ear, probably setting up his next score.

“Who was that?” Rosa asked.

“Just a guy I arrested a couple times. For some reason, that makes him think we’re buddies.” Tyler was a country boy from the southernmost end of the state. He had a drug habit, a soft accent, cornflower-blue eyes, and shoulder-length wavy locks and a wispy beard that made him look like a picture of Jesus, except Jesus never had so many tattoos on his arms. He made a specialty of charming his way into old ladies’ homes and pocketing anything he thought he could sell. He was a master at talking his way out of trouble, becoming a confidential informant for more than one cop, as adept at playing them as his old ladies.

“He sometimes comes by for supper at St. Larry’s.” Her eyes were fixed on the rear view mirror. “Always complains about the food.”

“How long have you worked there?” I asked as I coaxed the Corolla’s engine to a rough start.

“A little over a year. So, you’re the one who bought Laronda’s car. I thought she’d never find a buyer.”

The Corolla chugged loudly as I pulled out into the street. It needed a new muffler, among other things. “Yeah, I was in the market and . . . I don’t know, I felt sorry for her.” Laronda, the previous owner, had launched a campaign of stopping me on the sidewalk or in the market, patting my arm, telling me what a good little car she had—a little dented up was all—how she needed the money so she could pay off some hospital bills, buy the medicine the doctors told her to take. She almost looked disappointed when I finally said yes, okay, I’d buy the car. Like it had been too easy. Rosa didn’t say anything, but I got the feeling she felt sorry for *me*, suckered into buying such a piece of junk.

“Father Sikora’s a good guy to have on your side.” I said.

“Yes, he is.” She looked placidly out the window, not taking the invitation to explain why she had to leave town suddenly.

“Don’t you think you should tell me what this is about?”

“It’s better if I don’t. You were at the Temple last month, weren’t you?” If she was trying to change the subject, it worked. I looked at her, surprised. “One of our regulars was on the list this year. I wanted to be there for him. What brought you to the service? Someone you knew?”

“I go every year,” I said, not really answering her question. It was an annual memorial service, held at the Chicago Temple, that strange neo-Gothic skyscraper in the Loop that combines Methodist ministry and fifteen floors of office space. A few dozen people would gather there at the end of May to remember those buried by the county at public expense. Not that much was expended—embalming performed by students of mortuary science who needed the practice, a forty-dollar pine box, and a few square feet of a

trench in the Homewood cemetery, where they were interred, a dozen at a time, as soon as investigators in the morgue detail were certain no one else would foot the bill. Fifteen or twenty of the three hundred or so buried by the county each year didn't even have a name. My mother was buried there, identified only by a number until Jim Tilquist helped me track her down. I had only the vaguest memories of her, and never found out how she died, but I went to the service every spring, and sometimes took the trip with her to Homewood in my dreams.

I waited for traffic to clear and pulled onto Western, swerving around an old woman pushing a grocery cart filled with her belongings. She traveled up and down the street every day, always pushing the same load, always with that look of fierce purpose, never seeming to get to wherever the destination was.

There was an ATM in the front entrance of a pharmacy just up the block. I pulled into an open spot in front of an unmarked car where a plainclothes cop was drinking coffee in a go-cup, the *Sun-Times* spread out across his steering wheel. It wasn't just the shoulder rig bulging under his jacket that told me he was a cop, but the look on his face, a tense kind of patience earned from hours of surveillance. If some lowlifes were giving Rosa trouble, finding a parking spot right in front of an armed police officer seemed a piece of luck. I put it in neutral and pulled the hand brake, leaving the engine running, thinking the fewer times I had to deal with that balky ignition, the better. "I need to get some cash. Why don't you figure out our route."

I reached across, opened up the glove compartment to pull out the pocket road atlas, and saw an ugly snub-nosed .38 with a taped grip that I had forgotten was in there. I glanced at Rosa, pulling the map book out from under it, but she didn't seem to notice the gun, or politely ignored it at least.

“Just take the Kennedy outbound,” she said, settling the atlas in her lap. “I’ll get some change together for the tolls.” She started to burrow in her purse.

As I headed toward the pharmacy, I glanced back. The cop was focused on his newspaper, not interested in me or the illegal handgun in my glove compartment. There were a couple of newspaper boxes on the sidewalk. I put in two quarters and pulled out the morning *Trib*. The usual: a headline about the latest crisis in Iraq, concern that the power grid might fail again as temperatures rose. Protests held at police headquarters over the second shooting of an unarmed black youth by police in a matter of weeks. I wondered, not for the first time, why they bothered to call it news.

It was too early for the pharmacy to be open, but the door to the lobby with the ATM was unlocked, monitored by a pair of security cameras. I slipped in my card, punched in the numbers, and tucked the bills into my wallet. That gun was bothering me. Chicago has some of the strictest handgun laws in the country. It’s not a good place to be caught with an unregistered weapon. I’d found it during Sophie’s most recent manic escapade, in a squat where she had been staying. It hadn’t been fired recently, but just in case, I had wiped it down thoroughly and stuck it in my glove compartment, not mentioning it to her parents, who were already frantic enough. When I finally found Sophie, she was in no state to explain where it had come from, and in the turmoil of getting her hospitalized I forgot all about it. I knew I should turn it in at one of the districts, but it would lead to hours of paperwork and questions. It would have to wait until I returned from Minnesota.

As I pushed out to the sidewalk, two men approached. My first thought was that they had been watching the ATM and picked an easy target—a woman, yet, all of five foot three, slight of build. The sensible thing would be to play it

safe and hand over my wallet. But they weren't muggers; they were wearing suits and ties. And when I glanced over at Rosa, I saw her face was stiff with dread.

Operating on pure instinct, I tossed my newspaper at the bigger of the two men to distract him and then turned to the one approaching close behind me and kned him hard in the groin, causing enough of a jolt he dropped the SIG Sauer he was holding out of sight behind his right leg. It clattered to the sidewalk and we both dived for it. The big man, batting at the paper that fanned around him, tripped over our legs and crashed down hard. I head-butted the other one and got my palm on the grip of his pistol. By this time, the assault on his *cojones* had got the better of him; he was hunched over, gasping, face screwed up in pain.

The plainclothes cop was out of his car, now, identifying himself in a bellow loud enough he heard three blocks away, his service weapon extended. I rose to my knees and sent the SIG spinning toward him across the sidewalk, showing him my palms. He stopped it with his foot and pointed his gun at its owner, whose hand was moving into his jacket.

"Fiske, FBI." The man took out a badge case and let it fall open. He dabbed his split lip with the back of his other hand and frowned at the stain. The bigger man lumbered to his feet, breathing hard. He held his right arm tenderly to his chest, wincing as he scanned the street. "Goddamn it!"

Fiske got up to retrieve his weapon, then ordered me to lie face-down on the sidewalk. He cuffed my wrists behind me and gave them an extra tug to show who was boss. The early rush hour traffic had slowed to a crawl as people gawked. The homeless woman pushing the grocery cart had made it this far in her daily trek and was doggedly trying to steer through it all, her eyes wide with panic, a driver hanging out his window, yelling angrily after she clipped his car with her cart.

Fiske patted me down thoroughly, then bent close enough I could feel the heat of his breath, smell the coppery tang of the blood that stained his teeth. “Verna Basswood,” he said intimately, his voice vibrating with tension. “Where’d she go?”

“Who?”

He spat, a red glob landing on the sidewalk near my face. “You’re going to regret wasting my time.”

Cruisers were drawing up, sirens whooping as he grabbed my arms and hauled me to my feet. I couldn’t make out the questions people were asking me over all the racket, but I could guess what they were about. The spot where I’d left my Corolla idling was now vacant.

Two

I spent the next eight hours in a small windowless room in the Dirksen Federal Building, with Fiske and a parade of other agents asking me questions about how I knew Rosa Saenz, about my political leanings, and how much involvement I had with leftist organizations. I thought the answer to that one was easy—none—but Fiske pounced as if he'd caught me in a major omission. Apparently, the community center at St. Larry's qualified in his book, and witnesses had seen me there on more than one occasion. I wasn't going to let them know about Father Sikora's phone call, not until I had a chance to talk to him, so I stuck to the bare truth: I only went there to canvass during investigations—oh, and once when they had a bake sale. I'd bought a dozen oatmeal cookies, if I remembered correctly. Fiske exhaled wearily and massaged the skin between his eyes, body language for "You're lying," but I stuck with my impression of an honest citizen doing her duty.

Two hours into it, I asked if I could make a call—not to a lawyer, just to check in with my brother. I wasn't sure what I had gotten myself into, but if there was any chance my name was going to end up in the news, I didn't want him to hear about it secondhand. Fiske took me to another room, pointed to the phone on the desk, and pretended to read some notices pinned to the wall as I dialed the number of the cell phone Martin always carried in a holder clipped to

his belt. I told him I was at the Federal Building, answering some questions, but that it was nothing to be concerned about. I reminded him about our plans for the next day—that after work he was going to take the train into town and help me replace the bathroom sink. Maybe we could order out a pizza for dinner. It was a short conversation, but at least I had made sure he wouldn't worry if he heard I'd been taken off the street in handcuffs.

Fiske escorted me back to the small room and he and his colleagues dragged me over the same territory several more times, digging for details. It was getting tiresome, so I mentioned casually that one of the times I stopped by St. Larry's, I was looking for Jim Tilquist's daughter. I left out the fact that Sophie was in a psychotic state at the time and her parents were my clients, the first and only clients since getting my PI's license. I simply explained that I had known Sophie's stepfather since I was a child. When I went on the job he'd been my mentor and friend, and I'd even introduced him to the woman he married. It wasn't surprising that when his oldest daughter ran off to spend some time in the city, as teenagers will from time to time, the family asked me personally to find her and bring her home. She wasn't gone long enough to make it official police business, and Jim liked to keep his personal life private, given he was the FBI's senior agent on the Chicago Terrorist Task Force.

Introducing Special Agent Tilquist's name into the conversation had an interesting effect. There were three suits in the room at that point. They all used different techniques to avoid looking at each other: scratching an ear, examining a loose thread on a sleeve. Fiske fingered his swollen lip and asked if I wanted some more coffee. Even though I said I didn't, he rose, the others following him out. I sat by myself for nearly two hours. I'd wanted them to know I had friends here in the Dirksen Building, but I didn't expect so strong a reaction.

With all that time to think it over, I retraced everything they'd asked me, trying to figure out what was going on. When Fiske had cuffed me he'd asked about . . . Vera? Verna? It had sounded strangely familiar, but I couldn't think why. The authorities seemed to think Rosa was mixed up in something political; that much was clear. Though nobody had used the phrase "national security," their questions pointed in the direction of a terrorist investigation. But they had declined to explain, and I couldn't imagine any connection Rosa might have to their usual suspects—fundamentalist Islamic organizations or eco-activists who spiked trees and burned SUVs.

When Fiske came back, he was alone. He went over his original questions again, adding a few more for good measure, but his tone had changed from hostile to strictly professional. When he asked what connections I had with the Native American community, I was puzzled, but dredged up every name I could think of, from a community-relations officer who claimed to be part Cherokee to a homeless Menominee who panhandled in Grant Park.

Fiske kept coming back to Thea Adelman, a lawyer who showed up on television whenever Native American issues were in the news. I'd been up against her in court and knew she was a talented defense lawyer and an effective muckraker—and no friend of the police. She had been profiled in the *Trib* earlier in the week, complaining about how ineffectual the Office of Professional Standards was in dealing with the systemic racism in the department. The photographer had posed her in front of police headquarters, using as a backdrop the sidelong, resentful glares of the uniforms going in and out.

When that line of inquiry was exhausted, Fiske went back to basics. "Where is Rosa Saenz? Why did she come to you? When are you going to stop stonewalling?" He began to salt his questions with bits of personal information about

cases I'd worked, friends and enemies I'd made along the way, why I'd resigned so abruptly and whether it was connected to that lawsuit against the city. His tone was sympathetic, but he was letting me know he knew enough about me that he could tighten the screws whenever he wanted. "That brother of yours," he said casually. "I hear he's . . . what's the phrase they use these days, 'special needs'? Wouldn't be good for him if you got in trouble for withholding information, would it?"

I seethed inside, but kept my answers simple: I didn't know why she came to me; I didn't know where she was.

It was 3:00 P.M. when they finally cut me loose. I stepped outside and took a deep breath. Even though there was a full day's worth of scorching heat trapped in the concrete box of Federal Plaza, I felt myself start to shake. It was partly exhaustion from all those hours of weighing each word, monitoring my facial expressions, avoiding the small traps that Fiske and his colleagues kept setting for me. But it was also the residual emotion from an experience I hadn't totally understood before. Though I'd conducted my share of hardball interrogations, I never really knew what it was like to be on the other side. I felt used and dirty, as if I'd been stripped and prodded in front of an audience. All I wanted was to go home and take a shower.

But as I started across the plaza, headed for the nearest El station, I found myself flanked by a couple of friendly CPD detectives, who offered to take me to Area 4 headquarters to file a report on my stolen car. Having had enough of small, windowless rooms for one day I declined, but they wouldn't take no for an answer. It turned out they had a few questions, too.



"You want to run that by me again?"

"Not really." I glanced at my watch—5:30 already. I figured the simplest way to get through this was to act

cooperative and wait them out, but my patience was growing frayed. Across the table from me, a beefy middle-aged detective named Alvin Prochaska massaged the side of his face as if it ached. I knew him from working at Area 4. He was one of those overweight guys with bad feet who worked the phones and typed reports with two fingers, collected his paycheck, and counted the days to retirement, which would be spent in a rustic cabin in Wisconsin, where shellacked fish decorated the knotty-pine walls.

“Let’s start with the woman showing up at your door this morning. It’s not like I got anything else to do.” One watery blue eye regarded me; the other one was hidden behind the hand that was propping his head up.

“This is stupid.”

“That’s the only part of your statement I’m willing to believe.” I slumped back in my chair and closed my eyes. “So this woman shows up at your door this morning,” Prochaska prompted me in a bored voice, going through the motions one more time. “How’d you know her, exactly?”

“I’d seen her a few times over at St. Larry’s, that’s all. I have no idea why she took off in my car.”

“If you didn’t know this woman that well, why were you going to drive her all the way to Duluth?”

“Bemidji.”

“Whatever.”

“Like I said, she seemed like . . . a good person. Like a nun or something.”

The watery blue eye blinked slowly, a reptilelike look of skepticism. “You’d drive a nun you hardly know to Brainerd at the drop of a hat?”

“Bemidji. Listen, it’s hard to explain, but . . . did you go to a Catholic school, by chance?”

“St. Mary of the Angels.” He pointed over his shoulder with his thumb, knowing exactly where it was, one of his cardinal points.

“Then you know what I’m talking about. A nun asks you to do something, you don’t mess around. You do it.”

He tipped his head in grudging agreement. “Fine, but you didn’t ask what it’s about? Do you know how far away Bemidji is?”

I noticed this time he knew the destination. “Not exactly. It’s, like, north of Minneapolis, right?”

“It’s, like, north of everything.” He gave me a sleepy one-eyed glare and then with a thick forefinger flipped through a little notebook lying on the table in front of him. “No luggage?” he asked, knowing the answer.

“Just a little handbag.”

“So, what you’re telling me, you barely knew this Rosa Saenz.” He peered at me, as if I were wearing a sign he was trying to read in a language that he didn’t know. “And out of the blue, she shows up at your door. And you were going to drive her hundreds of miles . . .” His translation skills failed him. “You want another cup of coffee?”

“No thanks. What’s this is all about, anyway?”

He didn’t answer, just let his face slide back into his palm and propped it there. We looked at each other for a while. Then he sighed heavily and we sat there some more.

“Am I going to be charged with something?”

“Well, you did assault two federal officers.”

“I didn’t know those guys were Feebs. They didn’t announce. Looked like a robbery, okay? It’s not the safest neighborhood.”

“I realize that. I work here, remember? Which—listen, just out of curiosity . . .” he leaned across the table. “When you figure you’re being mugged by two guys who weigh two, three times as much as you, and they’re armed and you’re not . . . you think it’s wise to take ’em on?”

“They pissed me off.” He rolled his eyes. “All right, maybe it wasn’t too smart, but—”

“You got that right.” Having dispensed his personal-safety tip of the day, he went back to paging listlessly through his notebook, blinking so slowly I thought he was falling asleep. The door opened and his partner, Dugan, came in. He was a rangy, restless six-footer with a crooked tie, a crooked nose, and an air of private amusement, as if there was some cosmic joke out there that nobody else appreciated. “We found your car, Ms. Koskinen,” he said. “Abandoned up by Humboldt Park.”

Prochaska hauled himself to his feet, turned his back to me so he could mutter privately to Dugan. “So, what’s the deal?”

I could barely make out the answer. “Boss just held a press conference. Unis are on double shifts until the fugitive’s apprehended.”

It seemed unreal, suddenly, the word *fugitive* colliding with the image of the woman sitting peacefully in my kitchen. Whatever Rosa was accused of, whoever she really was, it was big enough to make the evening news. What had Father Sikora gotten me into?

Prochaska sighed. “Aw, shit. Like we need this now. Look I gotta . . .” He glanced over at me, then down at his watch. “There’s this thing my wife’s got on tonight. I’m already late. She’s gonna chew my ass.”

“Go on home, Al. I’ll wrap this up.” After he left, Dugan turned back to me. “You’re not planning to leave town, Ms. Koskinen?” he said, enjoying the cliché.

“Well, I was really looking forward to seeing that famous Paul Bunyan statue, but . . . no, I’m not going anywhere. We’re through?”

He looked around the dingy room. “Hey, if you want to stick around, fine, but I’m outta here. Give me a minute, and I’ll run you up to your car.”

He ushered me out into the squad room. It was all eerily familiar: phones trilling, rough laughter, an irate

mother looking for news of a child who had been picked up for questioning. The handful of detectives working late fell silent and glanced at me with the same hostile indifference they reserved for cons and defense lawyers, then turned back to their work. That attitude had grown pretty familiar, too, in my last months on the job.

Dugan flipped through a pile of “while you were out” slips at his messy desk; then we headed down the stairs and through the lobby of the uniform division downstairs. A crumpled sheet of paper scuttled across the tile as Dugan pulled the door open for me. Rosa’s round, smiling face was on it. Apparently, it was a flyer distributed to the patrol officers sent out to find her.

When we stepped through the glass doors, the air wrapped around us like a muggy, warm blanket. Clouds lowered over the city, ripe with rain, but there was no hint of a cooling breeze. “Why don’t I just catch a bus?” I nodded toward the stop on the corner. “The fifty-two goes right by the park.”

“Nah, it’s on my way. Let’s go.” Dugan gave me a smile, but there was something in his tone that told me it wasn’t optional. We crossed the street to the parking lot, where employees’ personal cars were parked inside a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, got into his Jeep, and headed out into the clogged arteries of the rush hour.

He was a casually aggressive driver; either that or something was wrong with his depth perception, given the way he wove in and out of traffic, always a hair’s breadth from disaster. “Must have been a little weird, being in the box, huh?” he said, cutting in front of a van with only a few inches to spare. “Given you used to interview suspects there not so long ago.”

“How long you been at Harrison?” I asked, attempting to change the subject.

“Six weeks. Not that I’m new at this. Sixteen years in. Patrol in Shakespeare, then narcotics, five years in Belmont Violent Crimes. Don’t laugh, we actually had some, though I have to admit there were times we were tempted to go out commit a few, just to stay awake. A stint at headquarters before a transfer to Harrison.”

“Who’d you piss off?”

“Whaddya talking about? It was at my request. And hey, they had a sudden resignation. Guess I owe you one.”

I wasn’t sure about that. Belmont, covering the city’s wealthy North Side, had the lowest crime rate of Chicago’s five areas. Area 4, often called Harrison, after the street its headquarters was on, had hot spots seething with gang violence, racial friction, and all the usual outcomes of joblessness, drugs, and poverty. “You’re doing this all backward. Most people use seniority to move to a quieter gig.”

“One thing I’ve noticed over the years: Most people are idiots.”

I held my breath as he took advantage of a slowly accelerating truck to switch lanes and gain several inches.

“You know what I dealt with the last couple of years?” he went on. “Not criminals, not victims. Data. Mountains of data. We got everything so automated, so tied together with mapping systems and court records and rap sheets. Seven million offender records, nine million incidents, all the numbers you need to run the PD with maximum efficiency. Like, ‘How many arrests did this officer make last month. Is he earning his salary?’ It was bullshit. I wanted to do something real for a change.”

“Harrison’s real, all right.”

“That’s for sure. My mom’s still mad at me for transferring. She calls me regularly to give me a lecture about why she isn’t talking to me anymore.”

“She worries.”

“We got a lot of cops in the family. You think she’d be used to it.”

“I don’t think it works that way. How’d you get Prochaska for a partner?”

“Hey, he’s all right,” he said defensively, sensing criticism. “Little slow on his feet, maybe, but he’s been around forever, knows a lot.”

“Could be. I never worked that closely with him. Our investigative styles weren’t real compatible.”

“Somehow that doesn’t surprise me.” We inched forward. Dugan tapped his fingers restlessly against the steering wheel, nervous energy radiating from him like the heat rising in waves from a sidewalk. “How big of a hurry are you in?”

“No hurry at all,” I said quickly, thinking he was about to throw a bubble light on the roof and show me more of his exceptional driving skills.

“Great. Let’s get something to eat.” He was already turning down a side street. “There’s a barbeque joint a few blocks from here. They have this amazing habanero sauce, guaranteed to clear your sinuses.” He glanced at me. “No?”

“My stomach’s kind of touchy tonight. Drank too much bad coffee at the Federal Building. Out of that pot labeled ‘for suspects only.’”

He nodded sympathetically. “The one they spike with lye. Hey, I know just what you need.” Inspired, he turned abruptly into an alley, barely missing a fencepost, and parked behind a row of storefronts that held a Laundromat, a corner grocery, and a store with no name other than Ropas Usadas.

He led me through a back door, past a kitchen, and into a tiny dining room, five of the six tables occupied by Asians sitting over steaming bowls of noodle soup, the only item on the menu. A hand-lettered sign on the wall gave our options in Vietnamese and English: beef, shrimp, or chicken *pho*, with a choice of two sizes, huge and enormous. A small

television on the counter was tuned to a soccer game. I studied the banner scrolling at the bottom of the screen, hoping to catch news about Rosa, but it was only giving scores. Dugan pulled out a chair for me at the one open table, saw the seat was mended with tape, and suddenly looked unsure of himself. "Should have warned you. It's kind of . . . We can go somewhere else."

"This is fine. The food smells great."

An old man who looked like a stump of weathered wood with a towel tied around it took our orders, which Dugan gave, once again in take-charge mode. Before waddling away, the old man gave me a smile that showed three of four pegs of yellow teeth. "They know me here," Dugan said. "I like to grab a bite in the neighborhood before I head home. I rent a garden apartment from one of my aunts in Hyde Park. The restaurants there are trendy, full of ferns and shit, catering to the university crowd."

"So it's not on your way after all."

He winced, caught out. "Humboldt Park's not that far."

"It's miles in the wrong direction. What's this really about?"

"I just want to talk, but not in an interrogation room. Got a call couple of months ago, when I was still at headquarters. From Jim Tilquist."

Tilquist again. I searched my memory. Had he ever mentioned Rosa Saenz? Not that I could remember.

"We worked together on a few things in the past. He wasn't too happy about your resignation. Wanted to be sure that you weren't being pressured or anything."

"Christ." I hadn't talked to him before handing in my star, hadn't realized how disappointed he must have felt when he heard about it. "It was my decision. Hope he didn't give you a hard time."

"He was just watching your back. You know him pretty well, huh?"

“Since I was a kid. He worked at Harrison then. Got me interested in police work.” He’d been my mentor, coaching me patiently through the cultural politics of the district where I’d first been assigned, putting a good word in all the right places so I’d make detective in record time. After he married my friend Nancy and became a father, he left behind the gang shootings and raw violence of the West Side to earn a law degree. He worked for a couple of years in the Northern District on federal prosecutions before he joined the FBI. He handled public corruption investigations for the local field office until he was appointed to lead the Terrorist Task Force, where his connections with the CPD were especially valuable. I tried to remember when I’d last spoken to him. It had been a short conversation in their kitchen one evening. He’d come in late, looking tired and drawn, and poured himself a stiff drink before even saying hello. His daughter was the only subject of conversation that night.

“He said you were trying to solve his cases when you were ten years old. What was that about?”

“I was eleven. And it was a case that was never solved. Well, unless you count it as a missing persons.”

“Who was missing?”

Raindrops chased down the window, turning the neon signs of a bar across the street into a canvas of runny paint. “My mother. She couldn’t take care of my brother and me, so when I was two years old we went into foster care. It wasn’t working out, especially for my brother Martin, who ... well, it was only going to get worse. So I figured, hey, I knew a few things about our mother, and I had a photograph of her. I thought there might be some relatives we could move in with, so I went to Area Four and asked to talk to a detective. People there were being kind and stuff, but Jim Tilquist was the only one there who actually listened to me.”

He had seemed so old, though he was only thirty-five at the time. I remembered him offering me a cup of coffee as if

I were a grownup, making it half milk and sweetening it with three packets of sugar, knowing somehow I was too proud to say I wasn't used to the bitter taste. He paid attention as I talked, and his fingers were gentle as he took the photograph from me and studied it, holding it carefully by the edges, like evidence. He seemed to understand without being told that it was the only thing I had to go on.

The old man brought two big bowls of soup and set them in front of us, then returned with a heaping platter of fresh basil and bean sprouts and sliced peppers. I picked up a plastic spoon decorated with blue dragons and tried the broth. "This is excellent."

"Better skip the peppers; these suckers are hot," Dugan said, scooping most of them into his bowl. "So, Tilquist helped you find your mom?"

I nodded. "Took a while. Turned out she had died four years earlier. Undetermined causes, decomp pretty advanced. No ID on her, nothing."

He winced. "That must have been tough."

"I barely remember her, tell you the truth. We did find a relative, though, my grandfather. He adopted us, gave us a good home, which was the main thing."

Dugan watched me eat for a minute, then took up his chopsticks and went to work, slurping noodles. "You're a PI now, huh?" he asked, dabbing splashes of broth off his shirtfront with a napkin.

"Maybe. I mean, I got the license, but I'm not planning to join a firm or anything. I'm thinking about law school, actually."

"You want to be a lawyer?"

No, I wanted to be a cop, but that was no longer an option. I felt a spurt of irritation. "You ever going to tell me what all that was about today?"

"All what?"

“Getting jumped by the FBI, cuffed, questioned for hours. Why are they after Rosa Saenz? What the hell’s going on?”

He poked around in his bowl for a moment before looking up at me. “All right, even trade. You tell me what happened—no bullshit this time—and I’ll give you what I got.”

“What bullshit?”

“You were lying to us.”

“I wasn’t . . . okay, maybe I left out a detail or two.”

“So let’s fill in the blanks. Why did Saenz go to you?”

“Look, off the record?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“How criminal off the record turns out to be.”

“Nothing criminal. Somebody sent her to me.”

“Who?”

“A friend I don’t want jammed up. I’ll find out what the story is, let you know what I can. Hey, it’s more than I gave the Feebs.”

“You’ll get back to me, though, right? And soon. The feds are being strong, silent types, as usual. If we’re supposed to tear the city apart to find this woman, I want to have a better idea what I’m dealing with.”

“I understand. And I really don’t know why Rosa wanted to go to Bemidji. She didn’t say. Actually, now that I think of it, she said it was north of Bemidji, a place I wouldn’t have heard of. I figured she was running from someone, maybe witnessed something that puts her in danger. I can’t see her doing anything criminal, though.”

“Lot of people seem to feel that way. Fiske, the one in charge—you have some history with him?”

“First time I ever laid eyes on him was this morning.”

“When you thought he was trying to rob you. Most muggers don’t wear suits like that.”

“Neither do most cops,” I shot back.

Dugan snorted. “That’s what our guy said. Got to be in the Outfit to afford an outfit like that. Or just be willing to pay top dollar to look good. Fiske is ambitious and takes himself mighty seriously. You made him look stupid, disarming him in front of an audience.”

“I didn’t exactly go looking for this.”

“I know, but trust me, he’s not the kind of guy you want as an enemy. How’d he know Rosa went to you for help?”

Good question. I was pretty sure, given the line of questioning, that Fiske didn’t know about Father Sikora’s call. But somewhere along the line . . . “Tyler,” I said, realizing suddenly he must have been the one. “He’s a hype, feeds his habit with petty crime and selling intel to the cops. He saw us together this morning. Must have known the feds were looking for her, phoned in the tip.”

“A one-man neighborhood watch, huh?”

“A neighborhood pest.”

“That community center where she worked—it’s near where you live, right? What’s it like?”

“It’s a busy place. They have a soup kitchen, English lessons for immigrants, youth programs—” I cut myself off, picturing my last visit to the teen center, but he was watching me closely, sensing more. “Jim Tilquist has a seventeen-year-old daughter who’s attracted to the streets, doesn’t realize what kind of trouble she could get into. I’ve tracked her down a few times for the family. Last month, I found her at St. Larry’s. A lot of kids her age hang out there.” Though on that particular night, she was the only one having religious visions.

“She knows Saenz, then?”

“I don’t know. She never mentioned her. Look, what does Tilquist have to do with this? And why do they want Saenz anyway?”

“You really don’t know?”

“I told you that already. Come on, it’s your turn.”

He delayed by slurping up some more noodles, then hunted around for his napkin, wiped his fingers. “Fiske believes she’s a fugitive they’ve been after for over thirty years,” he finally said.

“Vera something, or Verna?” Dugan looked up sharply. “He asked me where she was. They think Saenz is this person?”

“Apparently.”

“What’s the charge?”

“Homicide.” He produced the word after a slight pause, and then he seemed to come to some decision. “Someone shot and killed a federal agent here in Chicago back in the seventies. It was a big deal.” He spoke softly, fixing his eyes on mine with a look that said, Put it together.

“You’re talking about . . .”

“Special Agent Arne Tilquist. Your friend’s father, killed in the line of duty.”

“But that means . . .” My head was swimming. I helped the woman accused of shooting Jim’s father escape capture. What had Father Sikora been thinking, sending her to me? He knew I was a friend of the Tilquists.

“Verna Basswood was a person of interest, but she was never apprehended,” Dugan said. “The feds believe Rosa Saenz is Basswood.”

I stared out the window, going back over Fiske’s interrogation. No wonder they took notice when Jim Tilquist’s name came up. I knew that his father had preceded him at the FBI, that he was killed on the job when Jim was young, presumably assassinated by members of a radical group he had pursued in the early seventies. I’d read up on the case years ago, but Jim never talked about it. Thirty-five years was a long time to evade capture. And I couldn’t wrap

my head around the notion that the woman who asked me for a ride was a desperate fugitive. A violent radical. A killer.

Dugan was studying me. “You must be feeling lousy about this.”

“I just don’t understand. She seemed so . . .”

“Like a nun? Or so you said. For what it’s worth, the community reaction is on her side, one hundred percent. You weren’t the only taken in.”

“The person who sent her to me—you better believe I’m going to talk to him.”

“You seem distraught. Am I going to have to put you on homicide watch?” He made a face so goofy I couldn’t help laughing. But if he was trying to make me feel better, it didn’t work for long.

“What am I going to tell him?”

“Jim Tilquist? The truth. Sounds like he’s been a good friend for a long time. He’ll understand.”

“I wish I did. This woman—she’s a church worker, a grandmother to the neighborhood kids, their *abuelita*. Maybe the feds are acting on a bad tip.” But I flashed on her expression as she spotted the two agents. She knew who they were, and what they were after. And, with a sinking feeling, I remembered there was a loaded firearm in my car when she took off in it.

“I don’t know. There’s stuff going on with this case I don’t understand at all. One thing I *do* know—” Dugan was suddenly leaning forward, giving me a hard look, the kind you use on suspects.

“What?”

“You’ve barely touched your food. That’s considered a sign of disrespect. This culturally insensitive behavior could upset my friends.” He wagged a chopstick at me. “So if you don’t finish that soup, Koskinen, I may just have to do it for you.”

THREE

It was nearly eight P.M. before I got back to my apartment. I had finished the soup, to Dugan's mock disappointment. Then we drove to Humboldt Park and circled it until I spotted my Corolla parked beside a fire hydrant. He pulled up beside it. "Shit. She totaled it."

"Actually, the previous owner did that." I plucked a parking ticket from under the window wiper. "You have friends at headquarters. Want to fix this for me?"

"No. Does this thing actually run?"

"Sure. Most of the time."

He prowled around it, frowning. "Doesn't look very safe."

"Dugan, jeez. It's fine. Needs some body work and a tune up, is all."

I was anxious to check out the contents of the glove compartment, but he hovered, waiting to see if it would start, hoping to prove me wrong. I tried the ignition and got a hiccup and a cough. I pumped the gas pedal, turned the key again and, after some judicious nudging on the accelerator, the engine caught and idled roughly.

"Call me," he said, scrabbling out his wallet at the last minute and handing me a card after jotting on it. "Anytime. Cell's on the back."

"Okay." I tucked it into my pocket, wondering why he was so interested in a case that wasn't even his.

“The city’s a tinderbox,” he said, sensing my unspoken question. He rested an arm on the roof the car, leaned down to be at eye level with me. “Two black kids have been shot by cops in the past month. There’s a lot of anger out there. And it’s hot, way too hot for June. Given the crime she’s charged with, we have to proceed as if Saenz is armed and dangerous. There’s going to be a massive law enforcement presence on the streets, and it’ll set people off. The sooner she’s in custody, the better. For everyone.”

“I’m with you on that. Thanks for dinner.”

“My pleasure. Let’s do it again sometime.”

“Ah, no. I don’t think so.” His face went blank, and I realized he thought I was giving him the brush-off. “Look, I enjoyed it, but you’re new at Harrison. You don’t want to get off on the wrong foot.”

“Hell are you talking about?”

He wasn’t making this easy. “*You’re* the detective; figure it out.”

“What, that brutality lawsuit? You did the right thing.”

“That’s what I thought at the time, but you testify against a fellow cop, you may as well turn in your tin right away, get it over with. I could handle the crap they gave me, the pranks and the ugly phone calls, but sometimes you need backup and I wasn’t getting it. You saw how everybody was looking at me at the shop. Most people—”

“Are idiots, like I said.” He planted his hands on my window frame, as if holding the car in place by force until he had his say. “I come from a cop family, I know how cops think, but I’m not going to stand up for assholes just because they wear a uniform.”

“I’m just saying—”

“Thanks for the warning, but I can handle myself. Besides, you’re supposed to get back to me soon as you talk to Rosa’s friend, remember? And don’t kill him; I’ll want a chance to interrogate him first.” He straightened up and gave

my Corolla two thumps on the roof, like a cowboy patting a horse.

I was impatient to check the glove compartment, but he kept watching me chug down the street, hands in his pockets, shaking his head, amused by the spectacle. As soon as I was safely out of his sight, I reached over and opened the glove compartment. The road atlas was still there. The .38 snub-nosed revolver wasn't.



I found a parking place two blocks from my house. There was a rustling in the weeds by the trash cans as the cat disappeared into the undergrowth. Pilar, my downstairs tenant, came out onto her back porch, her baby riding on her hip. "Hey, I heard you got arrested."

Someone must have seen me cuffed on the sidewalk this morning and had spread the word. "The authorities just wanted to ask me some questions."

"You were gone the whole day."

"They had a lot of questions."

"Was it about Rosa Saenz? They hassling people about her, knocking on everybody's door. It's all over TV that she killed a FBI agent a long time ago. Only that don't make sense. Everyone says she's a nice old lady, wouldn't shoot nobody." I hoped Pilar was right about that, I thought as I climbed the steps to my flat. Given I'd inadvertently supplied that nice old lady with a weapon.

What the hell was I going to say to Jim?

Inside, I switched on a lamp, then took out my cell phone and dialed Jim's office number. His voice told me he was on another line and invited me to leave a message. I couldn't come up with one.

There were several messages waiting on my voice mail. A reporter on the cops and courts beat of the *Chicago Tribune* who knew me from the old days wanted a comment. There were three hang-up calls, one after a barely audible sigh that

somehow sounded like Father Sikora. Another message from the reporter, wheedling, reminding me he had a deadline, and then Nancy Tilquist, asking me to give her a ring. I deleted them all and called her.

“Oh, good. I was wondering when we’d hear from you.”

“Have you talked to Jim?”

“Briefly. He’s still at work; I don’t know when he’ll get away.”

“How’s he doing? Did he tell you—”

“He didn’t say much. Just that they’d spotted the woman who was wanted for his father’s murder, but she’d escaped. Listen, there’s something I need to talk to you about, but it’s . . . complicated, too hard to explain over the phone.”

“Is it—?”

“Not Sophie. She’s doing fine. In fact, she’s spending the evening in the city with friends. I’m in town too, not that far from you. I know you’ve had a long day, but could you come over? It’s important.”

“Where are you?” She gave me an address in Bucktown. I put the phone down, wondering what she wanted to talk about. I’d known her for years, almost as long as I’d known Jim, and I usually could guess her state of mind from the tone of her voice. But tonight there was something tense and complicated going on behind her cryptic words that I couldn’t tease out.

She and Jim made an odd pair. Nancy was a British-born anthropologist who taught at Stony Cliff, the college where my grandfather had been chair of her department. He’d always had a habit of taking people under his wing, and Nancy, a young, single mother with a rambunctious toddler, had become practically a member of our household. She had the left-leaning skepticism of law enforcement typical of academics. Jim came from a long line of career cops and was

ten years older than Nancy, and a hundred years more jaded about the human condition. But I didn't care about their differences. Apart from my brother and grandfather, they were the most important people in my life. My adolescent scheming to bring them together was so transparent they began their courtship as a kind of joke, as if I'd written an amateurish sitcom script and they humored me by acting their parts, playing it with broad comedy. But little Sophie quickly grew attached to Jim and it wasn't long before something genuine sparked between the two of them.

They'd been married fifteen years now, adding two more daughters to the family, a surrogate family for Martin and me since our grandfather's death. But in the last year or two, the strain of Sophie's illness was beginning to wear on their relationship, and the long hours Jim was putting in at work didn't help.

The last remnant of twilight was fading from the sky as I got in my car. I passed roving packs of kids having noisy, aimless fun, hookers gearing up for a long night's work, a group of old people sitting in lawn chairs in a driveway drinking beer and laughing, a radio playing *rancheras* while one of them tended brats on a grill. Not far behind me, a silver Cavalier followed at a discreet distance, making the same turns I did. Apparently all those hours spent answering questions at the Federal Building hadn't satisfied the authorities. I had a tail.

After crossing an invisible border, I drove along streets that could have been in another city altogether. Gentrified, artsy, hip and a little rough around the edges, although too well-off and settled to be as cutting edge as it wanted to be, Bucktown was less than two miles from my neighborhood but in an alternate universe, one where most of the residents were white and college-educated, the children went to private schools, and a cup of coffee cost over three dollars.

I found the address and parked as close as I could, my battered Corolla looking ashamed of itself among the luxury cars on the street. Behind me, the Cavalier disappeared discreetly down a side street. The house was a well-preserved two-story brownstone with arched windows glowing in the night. I let myself through the wrought iron gate and followed the flagstone path to the porch.

“Ms. Koskinen? Come in.” The woman who opened the door was tall and slim, her face framed by hair that fell to her waist and looked like black silk. I recognized her—Thea Adelman, the Native American lawyer whose name had piqued Fiske’s interest. I hesitated before climbing the front steps, trying to fit this new information into the picture, but she didn’t appear to remember me.

She pointed me toward the living room. Nancy rose from the couch and gave me a quick hug. Her shoulder-length, wiry hair was thickly threaded with gray, and she seemed even thinner than when I last saw her, her skin drawn taut across her cheekbones. In the three years since Sophie was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder, Nancy always seemed poised for bad news, bracing herself. “Thanks for coming, Anni.”

“What’s going on?”

“We’ll explain. This is Thea.” The woman put out a narrow hand, which felt cold in mine.

“We’ve met, actually,” I said. “The Yellow Medicine case, six years ago.”

Her welcoming smile faltered. “Of course. I thought your name sounded familiar.”

“I’m Harvey,” the man said, stretching out a hand. Harvey Adelman, her husband and partner at law. He had nice crinkly eyes and a warm smile. Apparently he hadn’t picked up on his wife’s reservations about me. “Would you like something to drink? Coffee, or—?”

“No thanks.”

“What case was this?” Nancy asked.

“Ray Yellow Medicine,” Thea said before I could answer. “He was a homeless man who was picked up on an assault charge. The police coerced a confession out of him while he was under the influence of alcohol. Once he had a chance to sober up he recanted, but the State’s Attorney pursued it, unfortunately.”

“Ray got mad at the owner of a corner store who wouldn’t let him use the facilities,” I explained. “So he tried to drown him in the toilet.”

“My client had an alibi.”

“His girlfriend? She couldn’t even keep her story straight.”

“That confession was coerced.” Thea smiled tightly.

“We could hardly shut him up long enough to Mirandize him, much less coerce anything out of him. Lucky for him he had a good lawyer,” I added generously, though it didn’t seem to help. “Look, if you got me here to ask me what I know about Rosa Saenz or Verna Basswood, or whatever her name is, it won’t take long. I don’t know anything.”

The Adelmans exchanged startled glances, then looked at Nancy, who shook her head. “I didn’t mention any names on the phone.”

“What makes you think this is about Rosa Saenz?” Thea asked me.

I looked at Nancy, but she was studying her hands, avoiding my eyes. “When the feds were grilling me, they wanted to know about any connections I had with the Native American community. I mentioned we’d been up against each other in court. They got real interested.”

“Did you tell them where to find Rosa?” Thea asked, a subzero chill in her voice.

“I couldn’t even if I wanted to. I don’t know where she is. Do you?”

“No, we don’t either,” Harvey said mildly. “So what exactly did you tell them?”

My first impulse was to say it was none of their damned business, but I swallowed my anger and kept it simple. “Saenz came by early this morning and asked me to give her a ride out of town. I said okay. When I stopped at an ATM, two guys moved in on me. Looked like I was being robbed. I resisted. In the confusion, she took off in my car. That’s it. The feds wouldn’t even tell me why they’re after her, so I was the last to learn that I’d helped a fugitive escape. A fugitive wanted for killing my best friend’s father.”

“That’s what they’re saying, but it’s bollocks.” Nancy said firmly. “I’ve met her. She talked to us the night you found Sophie at the church. I don’t believe for an instant she could have killed anyone.”

“Let me give you the details as we know them,” Thea spoke formally, as if she were making an opening statement in court. “The FBI believes Rosa Saenz is Verna Basswood, an activist who was indicted in 1973 for the murder of Special Agent Arne Tilquist. He was trying to eliminate a small radical splinter group of the American Indian Movement operating in Chicago under the leadership of Logan Hall. Tilquist led a team of FBI agents in a raid against the group. It was a fiasco. An agent was seriously injured—hit in the spine, ended up paraplegic.” She looked at me challengingly, expecting a response, but I didn’t say anything.

“Days later, members of the group were spotted at a farmhouse in southwestern Wisconsin,” she went on. “Agents stormed the place. It was a bloodbath. Everyone there was killed, including Logan Hall. A week after that, Arne Tilquist was found dead in a basement in North Lawndale, shot in the head. The investigation focused on Verna Basswood, the only member of the group who wasn’t present in the farmhouse. They concocted enough

circumstantial evidence for an arrest warrant, but Basswood disappeared into the underground.”

“And now they think they found her,” I said.

“They haven’t found her.”

“Okay, counselor, I’ll rephrase. Are Rosa Saenz and Verna Basswood one and the same?”

“Whether or not that’s the case, Rosa Saenz is innocent until proven guilty. You need to understand that during the seventies, the FBI went after anyone they felt was a threat using any means necessary. If violent confrontations weren’t an option, they would coax informants to lie and then manufacture enough corroborating evidence to put their enemies away. It wasn’t legal, but it was an essential tactic in a wider program to intimidate the public and discourage dissent. If that sounds familiar, that’s because it’s exactly what they’re doing today.”

“You’ve heard Jim complain about it,” Nancy said, appealing to me. “Nobody’s more devoted to the job than he is, but this isn’t the organization he joined. The fact Rosa Saenz is accused of murdering a federal agent in an FBI family—you can imagine what they’ll make of that. She doesn’t have a hope of a fair trial, not the way things are now.”

“We want to take on Rosa’s defense,” Harvey said, leaning forward earnestly. “Her case can expose how badly our civil liberties have been eroded since nine/eleven, but we’ll need an experienced investigator. Nancy has been working with us on another matter. She thinks you could help us.”

“You know as well as anyone how the system can get things wrong,” Nancy said to me. “And Jim has always said you’re the best he ever worked with.”

I turned to her, kept my voice low, keeping the conversation between the two of us. “Yeah? What would he

say about me working for the woman accused of murdering his father?”

“I told you: She couldn’t have murdered anyone. It’s impossible.”

“But what would he say?”

“It’s the right thing to do.” Her eyes were fixed on mine, daring me. And while I sensed she was speaking for herself, it sounded like the kind of thing Jim would say. The right thing. Simple as that. But it never was that simple.

“We’re getting ahead of ourselves,” Thea interjected, cool and firm, all business. “Before we go any further, I need to ask a few questions. Just so we’re all on the same page. Ms. Koskinen, how long were you employed by the Chicago Police Department?” She drew a yellow legal pad over and picked up a pen.

“Ten years. Two in uniform, eight at detective rank.”

“That was a quick promotion.”

“I’m good. I’m also a woman.”

“Is that relevant?”

“It’s accurate. I was fast-tracked because it helped the numbers at headquarters. Lots of qualified men wait longer for promotion.”

That wasn’t the answer she wanted. “During those ten years, were there any civilian complaints filed against you?”

“Three.” I had a feeling I knew where this was going.

“Substantiated?”

“One was.”

“Any penalty?”

“Couple of weeks without pay.”

“That sounds serious. Who filed the complaint?”

“It was the Rebecca Garza case,” I said, anger flickering like heat lightning inside my head.

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“Jonathan Garza filed the complaint. Her husband, the guy who beat her to death and tried to palm it off as a home

invasion. He cracked a joke at the wrong time. I hit him; I was taken off the case. He was convicted anyway.”

“I see. What about the other complaints?” she added.

“Thea, you’ve got the wrong end of the stick,” Nancy said. “She was cleared on those, and besides—”

“Nancy, come on. You know how it works. The Office of Professional Standards only finds fault when the offense is so egregious and so public that they have no choice.”

“One was a guy I had some history with,” I said before Nancy could intervene again. “Things got rough during an arrest. He used it to jam me up.”

“The other complainant?” she asked, our eyes locked.

“Similar situation. Except she was a woman.”

“Do you lose your temper often?”

“Only when I want to.”

Thea studied me with that hint of uncertainty I’m used to seeing when people are trying to figure out if I’m a light-skinned black, Latina or maybe just Italian. “Ms. Koskinen, please don’t take this the wrong way, but Rosa’s case is one that will involve racial sensitivities, an area in which the CPD has a particularly poor record. These two complainants—”

“Amazing coincidence. Both of them were black.”

She set her pen down, aligned it neatly with the notepad. “Surely you can understand why I have some concerns. We’ll be defending a Native American accused of a capital offense in a racially charged case. This assignment will require speaking with witnesses who have no reason to trust an ex-cop. And now we find out you’ve had a number of civilian complaints on your record, all filed by people of color.”

“No. Garza was white.”

“Latino. It’s a pattern. Every one of your complainants was a minority.”

“He was a chiropractor. He lived in Lincoln Park, drove a Jaguar. I don’t believe this.”

“I’m sure you have had a lot of experience investigating homicides, and I appreciate that being a woman in that profession must have been challenging—”

“Not to me.”

“—but given the political nature of this case and the current climate in this city, I don’t feel it would be in my client’s best interests to involve you in this investigation.”

“Then we’re both happy, since I wasn’t planning to take the job.” I rose. “See you later, Nancy.”

“Wait.” She followed me to the door and blocked my way. “Anni, this is my fault. I didn’t explain things to Thea. She just—”

“I tried to help a woman this morning, right? Only she didn’t let me know I was betraying a friend in the process. She took off in my car and I was the one who got handcuffed, stuck in an interrogation room, told I’m a lying piece of shit for hours on end by an arrogant smart-ass in a suit. Then you bring me out here to help this woman *again*, and I get the same damned treatment. I don’t need this.”

“Anni, listen—” she began, but I’d had enough. I pushed past her and left.