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JAMES COMEY

FDR DRIVE

A CRIME NOVEL

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

PROLOGUE

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

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

“It’s all about deterrence and perimeter,” his lieutenant had explained. The big event at the United Nations was generating lots of threatening chatter on social media and NYPD was going to lock it down in concentric circles, which was why they were pulling his squad in from Staten Island. “Park near the FDR so the world can see you,” he said. “Show the flag, and in the unlikely event the shit hits the fan, we got you in reserve. Easy time and a half for your guys.”

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

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



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

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

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

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

shouted to the squad's medic as the five operators came up behind him. "Officer down."

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

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

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

Burrell clicked his radio as he ran. "Dispatch, ESU Delta, ten-thirteen, ten-thirteen, Forty-One and FDR Drive. Officer down, officer down. Shots fired, explosion. In pursuit. Subject last seen headed to First Avenue."

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

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

CHAPTER ONE

One year earlier

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

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

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

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

"Could be some parents see only the darkness."

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

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

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

They stopped at the northwest corner of Eighty-Third Street and East End Avenue, a block before the Brearley School, a private, all-girls school that Sophie had attended since their move to Manhattan from Westport, Connecticut. The school was down a dead end where the Upper East Side met the East River, almost literally. The building itself was older than the FDR Drive, which deferred to its elder by dipping under Brearley and its neighbors so as not to block the view.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

On the subway, Nora put earphones in to keep people from talking to her, but never played sound through them; that would obscure any threats around her. She would read on her phone and take calls if any came (and if she had enough reception), but she wouldn't be distracted by music or a podcast in a crowded metal box with strangers deep underground. *Yeah,*

maybe a little dark, she thought, putting the devices in her ears. Still, her eyes swept the car at each stop and she wondered what voices some of those strangers were listening to.

Emerging from the Canal Street subway stop, Nora almost had to will her feet not to follow the familiar path to the United States Attorney's office. Her beloved and decrepit old building, which shared a brick plaza with NYPD headquarters, was getting its first overhaul since 1974, when the federal government originally built it next to the Church of St. Andrew. The structure had been emptied and would be stripped down to the beams before being rebuilt, although it would end up substantially the same size and still be too small for the full United States Attorney's office staff. *Only the government would replace an inadequate building with a slightly nicer inadequate building.*

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

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

“Mornin' boss,” he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Very leader-like," he replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What life?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Always the comedian," Benny mumbled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER TWO

"**T**his nation's soul is at risk, y'all," Samuel Buchanan shouted, his mouth almost touching the pop screen on the microphone. "And a country loses its soul the way a man does, one tiny"—which came out *tah-nee*—"bit at a time"—*tie-um*. He was smiling at his two producers as he launched into the familiar riff, gesticulating wildly as sweat gathered on his forehead, but always managing to avoid the mic boom arm. He'd learned the hard way that a whack on the boom not only startled his live listeners, but also meant he had to rerecord the whole thing before they could release the show as a podcast; there was no way the sound guy could fix that "in post," whatever the hell that meant. His gravelly voice was deep Georgia; listeners could feel the Spanish moss dripping from the trees as the dogs—*dawgs*—napped on the porch.

Of course, Sam Buchanan was a long way from the Florida-Georgia line and had been since he left for prep school in New Hampshire forty years before—except for occasional visits south to hunt from horseback at a private plantation. He was in the sunroom of his Gramercy Park apartment in Manhattan, sitting with his back to a fireplace the co-op board had ordered sealed up long before a limited liability company bought the place for six million. On the mantle behind him were arrayed the hats and helmets of working people—mementos of a life dedicated to people he saw as real Americans, whose plight he had first become aware of during his undergraduate and law school years at Harvard.

Over the years, he had gained and lost any number of political consulting jobs, sales positions, and radio gigs—even marriages—but Buchanan had never forgotten the voiceless Americans of European ancestry, and now the combination of digital media and podcasting had given his own voice a power and range he had never imagined. The harder the titans of the corporatized tech world worked to silence him, the stronger he got. The fools didn't realize that their "content moderation" bullshit just made his followers hungrier for his words. Maybe his followers

couldn't hear them in the usual channels now that Silicon Valley had worked so hard to throttle him. And maybe the advertisers had been scared away—except the commemorative coin and orthopedic shoe people, who understood what loyalty was. But the words still got out, streamed on messaging apps, watched on computer monitors, shared in clips by users on the very same platforms that had banned him. And now his new email subscription service was gaining momentum; it seemed there were a lot of Americans who understood that freedom was worth \$29.99 per year. Of course, being banned from payment platforms made things harder, but he wasn't trying to reach people addicted to the opioid of Apple Pay or PayPal; *his* people were the Americans who realized what was at stake and wrote checks or mailed cash.

Buchanan was seated behind his desk, swiveling his Herman Miller Aeron chair side to side, which met his need to move, while keeping his mouth near the microphone. The headphones served as a sort of headband, holding back his unruly long brown hair. Senior producer Herbert Cusak sat on one side of a long table that was pushed against the desk to form a T. His job was to send Buchanan talking points and questions for politicians or commentators joining by Zoom, which was the usual way Buchanan hosted guests. Cusak's thoughts would appear on the laptop in front of the host. "Herb knows my mind," Buchanan liked to say; they had been together through various ventures since Cusak had graduated from Hampden-Sydney College and volunteered for a conservative Congressional campaign in southwest Virginia on which a young Buchanan was speechwriter. Now fifty-three, the never-married Cusak wore basically the same outfit as he had the day they met: white button-down dress shirt, hand-tied bow tie, and khaki pants with a nautical-theme belt. The only thing different about him was that his belly now obscured some of the nautical theme and his light brown hair was thin and combed over from a part, which sat just above his left ear. Cusak hated New York but saw little of it; he rarely left Buchanan's enormous apartment, splitting his time between the sunroom studio and the au pair suite on the far side of the floor, overlooking the back alley.

Across from Cusak, pushed back from the table with her laptop on her legs, sat the junior producer, Rebecca Hubbard, a recent journalism and mass communication graduate of the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Becky's job was to do instant research in response to electronic questions

from Cusak or prompted by whatever Buchanan or a guest were talking about. She would feed her work product to Herb, who would decide what to put in front of the host. Becky loved New York and took the job after her college roommate's mother told her she knew of someone "in the media" who was looking to make an entry-level hire. She wore baggy clothes and oversized glasses, with her dirty-blond hair pulled back in a ponytail, despite Buchanan's repeated suggestions that she "dress to impress," let her hair down, and get contacts so "the world can see your pretty self." She ignored him—he really didn't understand the younger generation, she told herself—and it didn't seem to affect her job, which paid very well.

At the far end of the table, a digital camera sat on a small tripod framed so only Buchanan was visible in the shot. Buchanan swiveled less when he knew they were filming. He was perfectly still now, glancing at the laptop and then up at the camera, his face glistening with sweat, which had run down his neck, darkening the front of his open-collar blue dress shirt.

"In my"—*mah*—"experience, the only thing necessary for evil to triumph in the world is that good men do nothing."

Becky quickly typed a message to Cusak: *Isn't he supposed to say that's from Edmund Burke?*

Ideally, but past it now, Herb typed.

Buchanan was indeed far beyond the supposed Burke quotation: "... and there is no doubt that what we face today in America is evil, plain and simple. There's no other word for the intentional, willful, *knowing* destruction of a culture established on this continent by the blood and sweat of our brave ancestors, a culture with roots much older than that, roots that stretch back to the words and work of our Lord and Savior two thousand years ago. And they want you to think it's not about you, that voices like my own are exaggerating the threat. They want you to stand there like sheep, silent bystanders to one of the great genocides of human history. In the words of a great poem:

"First they came for the children, and I did not speak out—because I was not a parent.

"Then they came for our privacy and I did not speak out—because I had nothing to hide.

"Then they came for gun owners, and I did not speak out—because I was not a gun owner.

"Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me."
Wait, Becky typed, that's not the poem and it's from the Holocaust.
Whatever, came Herb's reply. Good stuff tho.