

## *Chapter 10*

**E**arl Clark stopped at the top of the driveway. Although no patrol car was in sight, he expected to see one shortly. It made little difference: he had taken into account that he would not get far before receiving some attention from Leila's surveillance team.

He got to Mountain Highway without picking up an escort. There he turned left, heading toward town using the route he always took when going directly to his office at the newspaper. He hoped to avoid arousing suspicions that he might be leaving the area, for leaving the area is what he had in mind—a trip to the city to be exact.

He had his phone with him, which would permit them to locate him easily. Before he reached the Creek-Street turnoff, he noticed an FSA patrol car in his rear-view mirror.

On Creek Street, Clark drove down the hill to Lake Way, turned right, right again on Howard, and pulled up to the espresso window. There he waited, pretending to be deciding what flavor to get, while checking his mirror in order to catch the surveillance car going by without appearing to be concerned about it. He waited a few seconds after it passed, handed a tip to the confused attendant, and pulled out to the street again, stuffing his phone into the specially shielded glove box, which would keep it from communicating with satellite and regional phone systems and thereby preventing his position from being tracked.

He had observed the patrol car turning left on First, no doubt to go around the block and come up behind him again while his espresso was being prepared. Therefore, he turned right on Second, went over to Creek Street, sped up the hill, and veered left onto Deer Drive. At the foot of Deer Drive he turned left onto Highway 321 and headed south without having attracted another escort.

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In less than an hour, Clark was into the outskirts of the city and still had not been trailed, thanks to his car not having any of the equipment that enabled the highway sensors to gather information from later-model cars. While his license plate might be detected, that was unlikely: it was mounted low on the car and had an anti-scanner coating applied to it.

He wound his way through the city, arriving by devious routing in a highrise business-and-residential area where he disappeared down a ramp to an underground parking garage. He punched in a code, and the door lifted to admit him into an unmanned facility where most of the parking spaces were assigned to tenants. He noticed that the spot where he usually parked was vacant, but he passed it up, circled back, and eased the T-bird into the remaining guest parking space.

Clark was bound for the residence of a friend whom he had not seen for several weeks. Prior to that he had visited her nearly every Saturday. Since she neither had nor needed a car (her place of business being within the same building), her parking spot was usually vacant.

His decision to come here was made on the spur of the moment while he sat in his shop after Evelyn had visited him. There was no opportunity to send a warning of his coming that would not have put too much information into the hands of the enemy. He had considered leaving a cryptic voice-mail message and had gone as far as composing it in his head:

*Dr. Hayrab, this is Earl Clark, one of your patients. Look, I have a terrific toothache, and I need your help. Is there any chance I can get an appointment? I need your help today, really, but I would need to make arrangements before I can leave here since I'm under constant surveillance. Please keep an opening for me.*

There was a chance that Carmen would receive and decipher the message. Although she was a dentist, she had never been *his* dentist; therefore, she would know that the toothache was a ruse. Since he was clearly stating that he needed her help *today*, he

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thought she would understand “Please keep an opening” to mean he was asking her to expect him at any time. Anyone else would think he was willing to endure the pain until next week.

After all that effort he had finally rejected the idea because it could lead to her being interrogated, and he did not consider it worth causing her that sort of trouble. The value of it was doubtful anyway since it would only slightly reduce the risk of her being away or being busy with something or someone else.

That risk was what he was contemplating as he rode the elevator up to the nineteenth floor of the Vineyard Building.

*For all I know she's out of town. Maybe she has a date tonight.*

When her officers failed to find Earl's car after it disappeared from the espresso drive-in, Leila decided to take an active role in directing a more thorough search.

She had been at her desk on the top floor of the Federal Building for nearly an hour when she finally conceded that he had eluded her watch, broken the bonds of her security net, and gotten away. Her team had scoured the town and its environs while she maintained a map marking where they had searched. Although they had checked the airport for his car, when she heard the sound of an airplane's engine and saw Harold's 172 going by over the lake, she nearly panicked. She called Harold and was relieved to learn that a former student of Earl's had taken the plane up.

Thus it became clear that Earl had left the area. If he were about some business, on some errand, or attending some meeting in town, they would have found his car. Mountain Highway, Crossroads, and First Avenue had been covered all the while, but there was a possibility that he had slipped out on 321 and gone south. Chances are he went to the city.

The fact that his phone seemed to have disappeared from the planet made it certain that he intended to be out of her reach; and if that were his intention, she had a feeling that was the way it would be. Nevertheless, she considered it her duty—even while admitting to herself that it signified a lack of trust in what God might be doing—to keep trying.

In a few minutes the two-hour grace period would expire, and she would have to file a report with the FBI. She had already prepared the message, and it was ready to go in an instant. She was of a divided mind with regard to that too. Why not forget the surveillance protocol? In fewer than fifteen hours she would no longer be here, and hopefully he would be leaving too. The answer, of course, was that she was in love with him and harbored a desperate desire to communicate with him somehow—even that she might have an opening to plead with him to yield and be

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saved for the Rapture and avoid any future complications. At the very least she must speak with him before going away, possibly leaving him forever.

As a practical matter it would change nothing to notify the FBI. The only thing they would do would be to have the city police look out for him. She had already initiated that. Other than going out looking for him herself, she had run out of things to do.

It was tempting.

*Why not? Why not drive to the city?*

If love could lead her, she would find him.

“I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets, and will seek him whom my soul loves,” she quoted.

A message appeared on her screen. It was from Al Cypher down in Detention Suites.

I noticed when you came in to your office – also that Earl Clark eluded our surveillance team. It looks bad for Clark. Is there anything I can help you with? -AC

*I'll be glad to be rid of him. ... No, that's wrong. The poor man is in the detention of Satan.*

She dictated a response, which appeared on the screen:

Did you ignore my memo yesterday? Earl will soon be with me in heaven. Don't you miss out. -LL

*I wish someone could bring the good news to those men down there. Lord, have mercy on them.*

Ms. Labaki, chief executive officer, hit the key on her keyboard to send the report to the FBI. Lovesick Leila picked up her jacket and purse and turned her back to the panorama of lake and mountain that had been her delight during the few months that she had worked there.

*I'm out of here.*

At the foot of Hill Street, at the stop sign where it meets the highway, she hesitated with her left-turn signal blinking.

*What are my chances, really? The sun will go down about the time I get there. ... What if he comes looking for me? I think*

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*there's a slightly better chance of that.*

She switched the blinker to the right and headed toward home. As she passed the Garden restaurant, she recalled her thoughts of a day ago: Last night when making plans for today, she had every expectation of being with Earl tonight. They would be going to dinner together, probably to the Garden since it was the best restaurant in the area. So she had heard. She had never been there.

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*E*arl pushed the bell and waited. He knew that Carmen would have received an automatic notification of someone coming into the garage using her code—if she were there. And she would see him standing at the door in her hallway monitor. If his visit would be awkward for her, or if she simply did not want to see him, she would not answer the door.

There was a click. The door was being unlocked. It opened slightly, revealing a woman's face. It was Carmen.

"I need a place of refuge," he said as he stepped inside and closed the door. "The feds are after me; but as long as I get back by Monday, I think nothing will come of me being here."

"Are you under surveillance now?"

"Yes, supposedly, at home but not here—I hope. I had to get out of there: I couldn't stand it anymore. I slipped away in the T-Bird, which is hard to track. I don't have my phone on me; I left it in the shielded glove box in the car."

"What about the cameras? They record every vehicle going by."

"That's under city traffic control, and I think it will take some time for the cops to get the information. At least it's not instantaneous. And they probably were not able to pick up my license-plate codes. So I think I'm safe here for a while." (He was not aware of the extent to which information systems had lately been integrated.)

"If we're that safe, I'm sure you intend to take me to dinner for putting up with you."

"Any place you would like to go."

"Close is fine. Let's go to Peter's."

"Good. We always liked it there, and Peter is our friend. I'll have him alert us if anyone comes snooping around. It could be that the cops have already gotten an order to look for me, but I doubt that they'll hunt all over the city. I'm not that important. They'll wait until some information comes up, and hopefully it won't be tonight."

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"Give me a few minutes to get ready. There's coffee in the kitchen."

"Thanks. I need some."

"You can call and make a reservation for six o'clock."

Being familiar with the apartment, Earl went into the kitchen and poured himself a cup of coffee; then he picked up her residential phone, requested Peter's at the Vineyard, and made the reservation.

He was too wound up to sit down and relax. He paced from the kitchen to the living room where there was a view out onto the courtyard, and back to the kitchen where a sliding glass door opened onto a balcony patio. He was thinking of various scenarios of possible encounters with the police.

Finally, he turned his thoughts to Carmen in order to relieve his mind of worry. She would be his refuge tonight. Her company would be a comfort after all he had been through since he saw her last.

Carmen emerges from her bedroom dressed for dinner, rendering Earl, who wore the clothes he wore sailing, an unlikely escort.

"Do you have a hat I could wear?—in case they get access to the traffic photos and figure out where the T-bird went. A bit of disguise might be prudent. It's possible that they will be checking restaurants in this building."

Carmen opens a closet door. "Would you take down that box?" She searches through the box of hats. "How about this beret?"

"That will do fine. ... How do I look?"

"Goofy. It's a woman's hat and too small for you. You look like a kooky jazz musician."

"Good. I wouldn't want to deceive anyone."

"I know you always like to have a hat on, but you can't wear that inside the restaurant!"

"Don't worry, I'll take it off. But if we get word of the cops coming around I might have to put it on."

"All right. Have it your way. Let's go. It's almost six o'clock."