

The
**BONE
COLLECTOR**

Jeffery
DEAVER

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First published in the United States in 1997 by Viking

A division of Penguin Books USA Inc.

First published in Great Britain in 1997 by Hodder & Stoughton

A division of Hodder Headline

This Hodder paperbacks edition 2006

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A Hodder paperback

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 340 68211 1

ISBN 0 340 68211 6

Typeset in Fairfield Light by
Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Grangemouth, Stirlingshire

Printed and bound by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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Hodder & Stoughton Ltd
A division of Hodder Headline
338 Euston Road
London NW1 3BH

For my family, Dee, Danny, Julie, Ethel
and Nelson . . . Apples don't fall far.

And for Diana too.

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I

KING FOR A DAY

'The present in New York is so powerful that
the past is lost.'

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

**Friday, 10:30 P.M.,
to Saturday, 3:30 P.M.**

Chapter **ONE**

She wanted only to sleep.

The plane had touched down two hours late and there'd been a marathon wait for the luggage. And *then* the car service had messed up; the limo'd left an hour ago. So now they were waiting for a cab.

She stood in the line of passengers, her lean body listing against the weight of her laptop computer. John rattled on about interest rates and new ways of restructuring the deal but all she could think was: Friday night, 10:30. I wanna pull on my sweats and hit the hay.

Gazing at the endless stream of Yellow Cabs. Something about the color and the similarity of the cars reminded her of insects. And she shivered with the creepy-crawly feeling she remembered from her childhood in the mountains when she and her brother'd find a gut-killed badger or kick over a red-ant nest and gaze at the wet mass of squirming bodies and legs.

T.J. Colfax shuffled forward as the cab pulled up and squealed to a stop.

The cabbie popped the trunk but stayed in the car. They had to load their own luggage, which ticked John off. He was

used to people doing things for him. Tammie Jean didn't care; she was still occasionally surprised to find that she had a secretary to type and file for her. She tossed her suitcase in, closed the trunk and climbed inside.

John got in after her, slammed the door and mopped his pudgy face and balding scalp as if the effort of pitching his suitbag in the trunk had exhausted him.

'First stop East Seventy-second,' John muttered through the divider.

'Then the Upper West Side,' T.J. added. The Plexiglas between the front and back seats was badly scuffed and she could hardly see the driver.

The cab shot away from the curb and was soon cruising down the expressway toward Manhattan.

'Look,' John said, 'that's why all the crowds.'

He was pointing at a billboard welcoming delegates to the UN peace conference, which was starting on Monday. There were going to be ten thousand visitors in town. T.J. gazed up at the billboard – blacks and whites and Asians, waving and smiling. There was something wrong about the artwork, though. The proportions and the colors were off. And the faces all seemed pasty.

T.J. muttered, 'Body snatchers.'

They sped along the broad expressway, which glared an uneasy yellow under the highway lights. Past the old Navy Yard, past the Brooklyn piers.

John finally stopped talking and pulled out his Texas Instruments, started crunching some numbers. T.J. sat back in the seat, looking at the steamy sidewalks and sullen faces of people sitting on the brownstone stoops overlooking the highway. They seemed half-comatose in the heat.

It was hot in the cab too and T.J. reached for the button to lower the window. She wasn't surprised to find that it didn't work. She reached across John. His was broken too. It was then that she noticed that the door locks were missing.

The door handles too.

Her hand slid over the door, feeling for the nub of the handle. Nothing – it was as if someone had cut it off with a hacksaw.

‘What?’ John asked.

‘Well, the doors . . . How do we open them?’

John was looking from one to the other when the sign for the Midtown Tunnel came and went.

‘Hey!’ John rapped on the divider. ‘You missed the turn. Where’re you going?’

‘Maybe he’s going to take the Queensboro,’ T.J. suggested. The bridge meant a longer route but avoided the tunnel’s toll. She sat forward and tapped on the Plexiglas, using her ring.

‘Are you taking the bridge?’

He ignored them.

‘Hey!’

And a moment later they sped past the Queensboro turnoff.

‘Shit,’ John cried. ‘Where’re you taking us? Harlem. I’ll bet he’s taking us to Harlem.’

T.J. looked out the window. A car was moving parallel to them, passing slowly. She banged on the window hard.

‘Help!’ she shouted. ‘Please . . .’

The car’s driver glanced at her once, then again, frowning. He slowed and pulled behind them but with a hard jolt the cab skidded down an exit ramp into Queens, turned into an alley and sped through a deserted warehouse district. They must’ve been going sixty miles an hour.

‘What’re you *doing*?’

T.J. banged on the divider. ‘Slow down. Where are?—’

‘Oh, God, no,’ John muttered. ‘Look.’

The driver had pulled on a ski mask.

‘What do you want?’ T.J. shouted.

‘Money? We’ll give you money.’

Still, silence from the front of the cab.

T.J. ripped open her Targus bag and pulled out her black laptop. She reared back and slammed the corner of the computer into the window. The glass held though the sound of the bang seemed to scare the hell out of the driver. The cab swerved and nearly hit the brick wall of the building they were speeding past.

‘Money! How much? I can give you a lot of money!’ John sputtered, tears dripping down his fat cheeks.

T.J. rammed the window again with the laptop. The screen flew off under the force of the blow but the window remained intact.

She tried once more and the body of the computer split open and fell from her hands.

‘Oh, shit . . .’

They both pitched forward violently as the cab skidded to a stop in a dingy, unlit cul-de-sac.

The driver climbed out of the cab, a small pistol in his hand.

‘Please, no,’ she pleaded.

He walked to the back of the cab and leaned down, peering into the greasy glass. He stood there for a long time, as she and John scooted backwards, against the opposite door, their sweating bodies pressed together.

The driver cupped his hands against the glare from the streetlights and looked at them closely.

A sudden crack resonated through the air, and T.J. flinched. John gave a short scream.

In the distance, behind the driver, the sky filled with red and blue fiery streaks. More pops and whistles. He turned and gazed up as a huge, orange spider spread over the city.

Fireworks, T.J. recalled reading in the *Times*. A present from the mayor and the UN secretary-general for the conference delegates, welcoming them to the greatest city on earth.

The driver turned back to the cab. With a loud snap he pulled up on the latch and slowly opened the door.

The call was anonymous. As usual.

So there was no way of checking back to see *which* vacant lot the RP meant. Central had radioed, *'He said Thirty-seven near Eleven. That's all.'*

Reporting parties weren't known for Triple A directions to crime scenes.

Already sweating though it was just nine in the morning, Amelia Sachs pushed through a stand of tall grass. She was walking the strip search – what the Crime Scene people called it – an S-shaped pattern. Nothing. She bent her head to the speaker/mike pinned to her navy-blue uniform blouse.

'Portable 5885. Can't find anything, Central. You have a further-to?'

Through crisp static the dispatcher replied, 'Nothing more on location, 5885. But one thing . . . the RP said he hoped the vic was dead. K.'

'Say again, Central.'

'The RP said he hoped the victim was dead. For his sake. K.'

'K.'

Hoped the vic was dead?

Sachs struggled over a wilted chain-link and searched another empty lot. Nothing.

She wanted to quit. Call in a 10–90, unfounded report, and go back to the Deuce, which was her regular beat. Her knees hurt and she was hot as stew in this lousy August weather. She wanted to slip into the Port Authority, hang with the kids and have a tall can of Arizona iced tea. Then, at 11:30 – just a couple of hours away – she'd clean out her locker at Midtown South and head downtown for the training session.

But she didn't – couldn't – blow off the call. She kept

going: along the hot sidewalk, through the gap between two abandoned tenements, through another vegetation-filled field.

Her long index finger pushed into her flattop uniform cap, through the layers of long red hair piled high on her head. She scratched compulsively then reached up underneath the cap and scratched some more. Sweat ran down her forehead and tickled and she dug into her eyebrow too.

Thinking: My last two hours on the street. I can live with it.

As Sachs stepped farther into the brush she felt the first uneasiness of the morning.

Somebody's watching me.

The hot wind rustled the dry brush and cars and trucks sped noisily to and from the Lincoln Tunnel. She thought what Patrol officers often did: This city is so damn loud somebody could come up right behind me, knife-range away, and I'd never know it.

Or line up iron sights on my back . . .

She spun around quickly.

Nothing but leaves and rusting machinery and trash.

Climbing a pile of stones, wincing. Amelia Sachs, thirty-one – a *mere* thirty-one, her mother would say – was plagued by arthritis. Inherited from her grandfather as clearly as she'd received her mother's willowy build and her father's good looks and career (the red hair was anybody's guess). Another jolt of pain as she eased through a tall curtain of dying bushes. She was fortunate to stop herself one pace from a sheer thirty-foot drop.

Below her was a gloomy canyon – cut deep into the bedrock of the West Side. Through it ran the Amtrak roadbed for trains bound north.

She squinted, looking at the floor of the canyon, not far from the railroad bed.

What is that?

A circle of overturned earth, a small tree branch sticking out of the top? It looked like—

Oh, my good Lord . . .

She shivered at the sight. Felt the nausea rise, prickling her skin like a wave of flame. She managed to step on that tiny part inside her that wanted to turn away and pretend she hadn't seen this.

He hoped the victim was dead. For his sake.

She ran toward an iron ladder that led down from the sidewalk to the roadbed. She reached for the railing but stopped just in time. Shit. The perp might've escaped, this way. If she touched it she might screw up any prints he'd left. Okay, we do it the hard way. Breathing deeply to dull the pain in her joints, she began climbing down the rock face itself, slipping her issue shoes – polished like silver for the first day of her new assignment – into crevices cut in the stone. She jumped the last four feet to the roadbed and ran to the grave.

'Oh, man . . .'

It wasn't a branch sticking out of the ground; it was a hand. The body'd been buried vertical and the dirt piled on until just the forearm, wrist and hand protruded. She stared at the ring finger; all the flesh had been whittled away and a woman's diamond cocktail ring had been replaced on the bloody, stripped bone.

Sachs dropped to her knees and began to dig.

Dirt flying under her dog-paddling hands, she noticed that the uncut fingers were splayed, stretched beyond where they could normally bend. Which told her that the vic had been alive when the last shovelful of dirt was spooned onto the face.

And maybe still was.

Sachs dug furiously into the loosely packed earth, cutting her hand on a bottle shard, her dark blood mixing into the darker earth. And then she came to the hair and a forehead below it, a cyanotic bluish-gray from the lack of oxygen. Digging

further until she could see the dull eyes and the mouth, which had twisted into a horrible grin as the vic had tried in the last few seconds to stay above the rising tide of black earth.

It wasn't a woman. Despite the ring. He was a heavysset man in his fifties. As dead as the soil he floated in.

Backing away, she couldn't take her eyes off his and nearly stumbled over a railroad track. She could think of absolutely nothing for a full minute. Except what it must've been like to die that way.

Then: Come *on*, honey. You got yourself a homicide crime scene and you're first officer.

You know what to do.

ADAPT

A is for Arrest a known perp.

D is for Detain material witnesses and suspects.

A is for Assess the crime scene.

P is for . . .

What was *P* again?

She lowered her head to the mike. 'Portable 5885 to Central. Further-to. I've got a 10-29 by the train tracks at Three-eight and Eleven. Homicide, K. Need detectives, CS, bus and tour doctor. K.'

'Roger, 5885. Perp in custody, K?'

'No perp.'

'Five-eight-eight-five, K.'

Sachs stared at the finger, the one whittled down to the bone. The incongruous ring. The eyes. And the grin . . . oh, that fucking grin. A shudder ripped through her body. Amelia Sachs had swum among snakes in summer-camp rivers and had boasted truthfully she'd have no problem bungee-jumping from a hundred-foot bridge. But let her think of confinement . . . think of being trapped, immobile, and the panic attack'd grab her like an electric shock. Which was why Sachs walked fast when she walked and why she drove cars like light itself.

When you move they can't getcha . . .

She heard a sound and cocked her head.

A rumble, deep, getting louder.

Scraps of paper blowing along the roadbed of the tracks.
Dust dervishes swirling about her like angry ghosts.

Then a low wail . . .

Five-foot-nine Patrol Officer Amelia Sachs found herself facing down a thirty-ton Amtrak locomotive, the red, white and blue slab of steel approaching at a determined ten miles an hour.

'Hold up, there!' she shouted.

The engineer ignored her.

Sachs jogged onto the roadbed and planted herself right in the middle of the track, spread her stance and waved her arms, signaling him to stop. The locomotive squealed to a halt. The engineer stuck his head out the window.

'You can't go through here,' she told him.

He asked her what she meant. She thought he looked woefully young to be driving such a big train.

'It's a crime scene. Please shut off the engine.'

'Lady, I don't see any crimes.'

But Sachs wasn't listening. She was looking up at a gap in the chain-link on the west side of the train viaduct, at the top, near Eleventh Avenue.

That would have been one way to get the body here without being seen – parking on Eleventh and dragging the body through the narrow alley to the cliff. On Thirty-seventh, the cross street, he could be spotted from two dozen apartment windows.

'That train, sir. Just leave it right there.'

'I can't leave it here.'

'Please shut off the engine.'

'We don't shut off the engines of trains like this. They run all the time.'

‘And call the dispatcher. Or somebody. Have them stop the southbound trains too.’

‘We can’t do that.’

‘Now, sir. I’ve got the number of that vehicle of yours.’

‘Vehicle?’

‘I’d suggest you do it immediately,’ Sachs barked.

‘What’re you going to do, lady? Gimme a ticket?’

But Amelia Sachs was once again climbing back up the stone walls, her poor joints creaking, her lips tasting limestone dust, clay and her own sweat. She jogged to the alley she’d noticed from the roadbed and then turned around, studying Eleventh Avenue and the Javits Center across it. The hall was bustling with crowds – spectators and press. A huge banner proclaimed, *Welcome UN Delegates!* But earlier this morning, when the street was deserted, the perp could easily have found a parking space along here and carried the body to the tracks undetected. Sachs strode to Eleventh, surveyed the six-lane avenue, which was jammed with traffic.

Let’s do it.

She waded into the sea of cars and trucks and stopped the north-bound lanes cold. Several drivers tried end runs and she had to issue two citations and finally drag trash cans out into the middle of the street as a barricade to make sure the good residents did their civic duty.

Sachs had finally remembered the next of the first officer’s ADAPT rules.

P is for Protect the crime scene.

The sound of angry horns began to fill the hazy morning sky, soon supplemented by the drivers’ angrier shouts. A short time later she heard the sirens join the cacophony as the first of the emergency vehicles arrived.

Forty minutes later, the scene was swarming with uniforms and investigators, dozens of them – a lot more than a hit in Hell’s Kitchen, however gruesome the cause of death, seemed

to warrant. But, Sachs learned from another cop, this was a hot case, a media proper – the vic was one of two passengers who'd arrived at JFK last night, gotten into a cab and headed for the city. They'd never arrived at their homes.

'CNN's watching,' the uniform whispered.

So Amelia Sachs wasn't surprised to see blond Vince Peretti, chief of the Central Investigation and Resource Division, which oversaw the crime scene unit, climb over the top of the embankment and pause as he brushed dust from his thousand-dollar suit.

She was, however, surprised to see him notice her and gesture her over, a faint smile on his clean-cut face. It occurred to her she was about to receive a nod of gratitude for her *Cliffhanger* routine. Saved the fingerprints on *that* ladder, boys. Maybe even a commendation. In the last hour of the last day of Patrol. Going out in a blaze of glory.

He looked her up and down. 'Patrolwoman, you're no rookie, are you? I'm safe in making that assumption.'

'I'm sorry, sir?'

'You're not a rookie, I assume.'

She wasn't, not technically, though she had only three years' service under her belt, unlike most of the other Patrol officers her age; they had nine or ten years in. Sachs had foundered for a few years before attending the academy. 'I'm not sure what you're asking.'

He looked exasperated and the smile vanished. 'You were first officer?'

'Yessir.'

'Why'd you close down Eleventh Avenue? What were you *thinking* of?'

She looked along the broad street, which was still blocked by her trash-can barricade. She'd gotten used to the honking but realized now it was really quite loud; the line of cars extended for miles.

'Sir, the first officer's job is to arrest a perp, detain any witnesses, protect—'

'I know the ADAPT rule, officer. You closed the street to protect the crime scene?'

'Yessir. I didn't think the perp would park on the cross street. He could be seen too easily from those apartments. See, there? Eleventh seemed like a better choice.'

'Well, it was a wrong choice. There were no footprints on *that* side of the tracks, and two sets going to the ladder that leads up to Thirty-seven.'

'I closed Thirty-seven too.'

'That's my point. That's all that needed to be closed. And the train?' he asked. 'Why'd you stop that?'

'Well, sir. I thought that a train going through the scene might disturb evidence. Or something.'

'Or *something*, officer?'

'I didn't express myself very well, sir. I meant—'

'What about Newark Airport?'

'Yessir.' She looked around for help. There were officers nearby but they were busily ignoring the dressing-down. 'What exactly about Newark?'

'Why didn't you shut that down too?'

Oh, wonderful. A schoolmarm. Her Julia Roberts lips grew taut but she said reasonably, 'Sir, in my judgment, it seemed likely that—'

'The New York Thruway would've been a good choice too. And the Jersey Pike and Long Island Expressway. I-70, all the way to St Louis. Those are likely means of escape.'

She lowered her head slightly and stared back at Peretti. The two of them were exactly the same height, though his heels were higher.

'I've gotten calls from the commissioner,' he continued, 'the head of the Port Authority, the UN secretary-general's office,

the head of that expo—’ He nodded toward the Javits Center. ‘We’ve fucked up the conference schedule, a U.S. senator’s speech and traffic on the entire West Side. The train tracks were fifty feet from the vic and the street you closed was a good two-hundred feet away and thirty above. I mean, even Hurricane Eva didn’t fuck up Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor like this.’

‘I just thought—’

Peretti smiled. Because Sachs was a beautiful woman – her ‘foundering’ before attending the academy had involved steady assignments for the Chantelle Modeling Agency on Madison Avenue – the cop chose to forgive her.

‘Patrolwoman Sachs’ – he glanced at the name tag on her chest, flattened chastely by the American Body Armor vest – ‘an object lesson. Crime scene work is a balance. It’d be nice if we could cordon off the whole city after every homicide and detain about three million people. But we can’t do that. I say this constructively. For your edification.’

‘Actually, sir,’ she said brusquely, ‘I’m transferring out of Patrol. Effective as of noon today.’

He nodded, smiled cheerfully. ‘Then, enough said. But for the record, it *was* your decision to stop the train and close the street.’

‘Yessir, it was,’ she said smartly. ‘No mistake about that.’

He jotted this into a black watch book with slashing strokes of his sweaty pen.

Oh, please . . .

‘Now, remove those garbage cans. You direct traffic until the street’s clear again. You hear me?’

Without a yessir or nosir or any other acknowledgment she wandered to Eleventh Avenue and slowly began removing the garbage cans. Every single driver who passed her scowled or muttered something. Sachs glanced at her watch.

An hour to go.

I can live with it.

Chapter TWO

With a terse flutter of wings the peregrine dropped onto the window ledge. The light outside, midmorning, was brilliant and the air looked fiercely hot.

‘There you are,’ the man whispered. Then cocked his head at the sound of the buzzer of the door downstairs.

‘Is that him?’ he shouted toward the stairs. ‘Is it?’

Lincoln Rhyme heard nothing in response and turned back to the window. The bird’s head swiveled, a fast, jerky movement that the falcon nevertheless made elegant. Rhyme observed that its talons were bloody. A piece of yellow flesh dangled from the black nutshell beak. It extended a short neck and eased to the nest in movements reminiscent not of a bird’s but a snake’s. The falcon dropped the meat into the upturned mouth of the fuzzy blue hatchling. I’m looking, Rhyme thought, at the only living creature in New York City with no predator. Except maybe God Himself.

He heard the footsteps come up the stairs slowly.

‘Was that him?’ he asked Thom.

The young man answered, ‘No.’

‘Who was it? The doorbell rang, didn’t it?’

Thom's eyes went to the window. 'The bird's back. Look, bloodstains on your windowsill. Can you see them?'

The female falcon inched into view. Blue-gray like a fish, iridescent. Her head scanned the sky.

'They're always together. Do they mate for life?' Thom wondered aloud. 'Like geese?'

Rhyme's eyes returned to Thom, who was bent forward at his trim, youthful waist, gazing at the nest through the spattered window.

'Who was it?' Rhyme repeated. The young man was stalling now and it irritated Rhyme.

'A visitor.'

'A visitor? Ha.' Rhyme snorted. He tried to recall when his last *visitor* had been here. It must have been three months ago. Who'd it been? That reporter maybe or some distant cousin. Well, Peter Taylor, one of Rhyme's spinal cord specialists. And Blaine had been here several times. But she of course was not a *vis-i-tor*.

'It's freezing,' Thom complained. His reaction was to open the window. Immediate gratification. Youth.

'Don't open the window,' Rhyme ordered. 'And tell me who the hell's here.'

'It's freezing.'

'You'll disturb the bird. You can turn the air conditioner down. *I'll* turn it down.'

'We were here first,' Thom said, further lifting the huge pane of window. 'The birds moved in with full knowledge of you.' The falcons glanced toward the noise, glaring. But then they always glared. They remained on the ledge, lording over their domain of anemic ginkgo trees and alternate-side-of-the-street parkers.

Rhyme repeated. 'Who *is* it?'

'Lon Sellitto.'

'Lon?'

What was he doing here?

Thom examined the room. 'The place is a mess.'

Rhyme didn't like the fuss of cleaning. He didn't like the bustle, the noise of the vacuum – which he found particularly irritating. He was content here, as it was. This room, which he called his office, was on the second floor of his Gothic townhouse on the Upper West Side of the city, overlooking Central Park. The room was large, twenty-by-twenty, and virtually every one of those feet was occupied. Sometimes he closed his eyes, playing a game, and tried to detect the smell of the different objects in the room here. The thousands of books and magazines, the Tower of Pisa stacks of photocopies, the hot transistors of the TV, the dust-frosted lightbulbs, the cork bulletin boards. Vinyl, peroxide, latex, upholstery.

Three different kinds of single-malt Scotch.

Falcon shit.

'I don't want to see him. Tell him I'm busy.'

'And a young cop. Ernie Banks. No, he was a baseball player, right? You really should let me clean. You never notice how filthy someplace is till people come to call.'

'Come to call? My, that sounds quaint. Victorian. How does *this* sound? Tell 'em to get the hell out. How's that for fin-de-siècle etiquette?'

A mess . . .

Thom was speaking of the room but Rhyme supposed he meant his boss too.

Rhyme's hair was black and thick as a twenty-year-old's – though he was twice that age – but the strands were wild and bushy, desperately in need of a wash and cut. His face sprouted a dirty-looking three days' growth of black beard and he'd wakened with an incessant tickle in his ear, which meant that those hairs needed trimming as well. Rhyme's nails were long, finger and toe, and he'd been wearing the same clothes

for a week – polka-dotted pajamas, god-awful ugly. His eyes were narrow, deep brown, and set in a face that Blaine had told him on a number of occasions, passionate and otherwise, was handsome.

‘They want to talk to you,’ Thom continued. ‘They say it’s very important.’

‘Well, bully for them.’

‘You haven’t seen Lon for nearly a year.’

‘Why does that mean I want to see him now? Have you scared off the bird? I’ll be pissed if you have.’

‘It’s important, Lincoln.’

‘Very important, I recall you saying. Where’s that doctor? He might’ve called. I was dozing earlier. And you were out.’

‘You’ve been awake since six A.M.’

‘No.’ He paused. ‘I woke up, yes. But then I dozed off. I was sound asleep. Did you check messages?’

Thom said, ‘Yes. Nothing from him.’

‘He said he’d be here midmorning.’

‘And it’s just past eleven. Maybe we’ll hold off notifying air-sea rescue. What do you say?’

‘Have you been on the phone?’ Rhyme asked abruptly. ‘Maybe he tried to call while you were on.’

‘I was talking to—’

‘Did I say anything?’ Rhyme asked. ‘Now you’re angry. I didn’t say you shouldn’t be making phone calls. You can do that. You’ve always been able to do that. My point is just that he might’ve called while you were on the line.’

‘No, your point this morning is to be a shit.’

‘There you go. You know, they have this thing – call waiting. You can get two calls at once. I wish we had that. What does my old friend Lon want? And *his* friend the baseball player?’

‘Ask them.’

‘I’m asking *you*.’

‘They want to see you. That’s all I know.’

‘About something vay-ree im-por-tant.’

‘Lincoln.’ Thom sighed. The good-looking young man ran his hand through his blond hair. He wore tan slacks and a white shirt, with a blue floral tie, immaculately knotted. When he’d hired Thom a year ago Rhyme had said he could wear jeans and T-shirts if he wanted. But he’d been dressed impeccably every day since. Rhyme didn’t know why it contributed to the decision to keep the young man on, but it had. None of Thom’s predecessors had lasted more than six weeks. The number of those who quit was exactly equal to the fires.

‘All right, what did you tell them?’

‘I told them to give me a few minutes to make sure you were decent then they could come up. Briefly.’

‘You did that. Without asking me. Thank you very much.’

Thom retreated a few steps and called down the narrow stairway to the first floor, ‘Come on, gentlemen.’

‘They told you something, didn’t they?’ Rhyme said. ‘You’re holding out on me.’

Thom didn’t answer and Rhyme watched the two men approach. As they entered the room Rhyme spoke first. He said to Thom, ‘Close the curtain. You’ve already upset the birds way too much.’

Which really meant only that he’d had enough of the sputtering sunlight.

Mute.

With the foul, sticky tape on her mouth she couldn’t speak a word and that made her feel more helpless than the metal handcuffs tight on her wrists. Than the grip of his short, strong fingers on her biceps.

The taxi driver, still in his ski mask, led her down the grimy, wet corridor, past rows of ducts and piping. They were in the basement of an office building. She had no idea where.

If I could talk to him . . .

T.J. Colfax was a player, the bitch of Morgan Stanley's third floor. A negotiator.

Money? You want money? I'll get you money, lots of it, boy. Bushels. She thought this a dozen times, trying to catch his eye, as if she could actually force the words into his thoughts.

Pleeeeeeeeeease, she begged silently, and began thinking about the mechanics of cashing in her 401(k) and giving him her retirement fund. *Oh, please . . .*

She remembered last night: The man turning back from the fireworks, dragging them from the cab, handcuffing them. He'd thrown them into the trunk and they'd begun driving again. First over rough cobblestones and broken asphalt then smooth roads then rough again. She heard the whir of wheels on a bridge. More turns, more rough roads. Finally, the cab stopped and the driver got out and seemed to open a gate or some doors. He drove into a garage, she thought. All the sounds of the city were cut off and the car's bubbling exhaust rose in volume, reverberating off close walls.

Then the cab trunk opened and the man pulled her out. He yanked the diamond ring off her finger and pocketed it. Then he led her past walls of spooky faces, faded paintings of blank eyes staring at her, a butcher, a devil, three sorrowful children – painted on the crumbling plaster. Dragged her down into a moldy basement and dumped her on the floor. He clopped upstairs, leaving her in the dark, surrounded by a sickening smell – rotting flesh, garbage. There she'd lain for hours, sleeping a little, crying a lot. She'd wakened abruptly at a loud sound. A sharp explosion. Nearby. Then more troubled sleep.

A half hour ago he'd come for her again. Led her to the trunk and they'd driven for another twenty minutes. Here. Wherever *here* was.

They now walked into a dim basement room. In the center

was a thick black pipe; he handcuffed her to it then gripped her feet and pulled them out straight in front of her, propping her in a sitting position. He crouched and tied her legs together with thin rope – it took several minutes; he was wearing leather gloves. Then he rose and gazed at her for a long moment, bent down and tore her blouse open. He walked around behind her and she gasped, feeling his hands on her shoulder, probing, squeezing her shoulder blades.

Crying, pleading through the tape.

Knowing what was coming.

The hands moved down, along her arms, and then under them and around the front of her body. But he didn't touch her breasts. No, as the hands spidered across her skin they seemed to be searching for her ribs. He prodded them and stroked. T.J. shivered and tried to pull away. He gripped her tight and caressed some more, pressing hard, feeling the give of the bone.

He stood. She heard receding footsteps. For a long moment there was silence except for the groans of air conditioners and elevators. Then she barked a frightened grunt at a sound right behind her. A repetitive noise. *Wsssh. Wsssh.* Very familiar but something she couldn't place. She tried to turn to see what he was doing but couldn't. What was it? Listening to the rhythmic sound, over and over and over. It took her right back to her mother's house.

Wsssh. Wsssh.

Saturday morning in the small bungalow in Bedford, Tennessee. It was the only day her mother didn't work and she devoted most of it to housecleaning. T.J. would wake up to a hot sun and stumble downstairs to help her. *Wsssh.* As she cried at this memory she listened to the sound and wondered why on earth he was sweeping the floor and with such careful, precise strokes of the broom.

* * *

He saw surprise and discomfort on their faces.

Something you don't find very often with New York City homicide cops.

Lon Sellitto and young Banks (Jerry, not Ernie) sat where Rhyme gestured with his bush-crowned head: twin dusty, uncomfortable rattan chairs.

Rhyme had changed considerably since Sellitto had last been here and the detective didn't hide his shock very well. Banks had no benchmark against which to judge what he was seeing but he was shocked nonetheless. The sloppy room, the vagrant gazing at them suspiciously. The smell too certainly – the visceral aroma surrounding the creature Lincoln Rhyme now was.

He immensely regretted letting them up.

'Why didn't you call first, Lon?'

'You would've told us not to come.'

True.

Thom crested the stairs and Rhyme preempted him. 'No, Thom, we won't be needing you.' He'd remembered that the young man always asked guests if they wanted something to drink or eat.

Such a goddamn Martha Stewart.

Silence for a moment. Large, rumped Sellitto – a twenty-year vet – glanced down into a box beside the bed and started to speak. Whatever he'd been about to say was cut off by the sight of disposable adult diapers.

Jerry Banks said, 'I read your book, sir.' The young cop had a bad hand when it came to shaving, lots of nicks. And what a charming cowlick in his hair! My good Lord, he can't be more than twelve. The more worn the world gets, Rhyme reflected, the younger its inhabitants seem to be.

'Which one?'

'Well, your crime scene manual, of course. But I meant the picture book. The one a couple years ago.'

‘There were words too. It was *mostly* words, in fact. Did you read them?’

‘Oh, well, sure,’ Banks said quickly.

A huge stack of remaindered volumes of *The Scenes of the Crime* sat against one wall of his room.

‘I didn’t know you and Lon were friends,’ Banks added.

‘Ah, Lon didn’t trot out the yearbook? Show you the pictures? Strip his sleeve and show his scars and say these wounds I had with Lincoln Rhyme?’

Sellitto wasn’t smiling. Well, I can give him even less to smile about if he likes. The senior detective was digging through his attaché case. And what does he have in *there*?

‘How long were you partnered?’ Banks asked, making conversation.

‘There’s a verb for you,’ Rhyme said. And looked at the clock.

‘We weren’t partners,’ Sellitto said. ‘I was Homicide, he was head of IRD.’

‘Oh,’ Banks said, even more impressed. Running the Central Investigation and Resource Division was one of the most prestigious jobs in the department.

‘Yeah,’ Rhyme said, looking out the window, as if his doctor might be arriving via falcon. ‘The two musketeers.’

In a patient voice, which infuriated Rhyme, Sellitto said, ‘Seven years, off and on, we worked together.’

‘And good years they were,’ Rhyme intoned.

Thom scowled but Sellitto missed the irony. Or more likely ignored it. He said, ‘We have a problem, Lincoln. We need some help.’

Snap. The stack of papers landed on the bedside table.

‘Some help?’ The laugh exploded from the narrow nose Blaine had always suspected was the product of a surgeon’s vision though it was not. She also thought his lips were too perfect (Add a scar, she’d once joked and during one of their

fights she nearly had). And why, he wondered, does her voluptuous apparition keep rising today? He'd wakened thinking about his ex and had felt compelled to write her a letter, which was on the computer screen at that moment. He now saved the document on the disk. Silence filled the room as he entered the commands with a single finger.

'Lincoln?' Sellitto asked.

'Yessir. Some help. From me. I heard.'

Banks kept an inappropriate smile on his face while he shuffled his butt uneasily in the chair.

'I've got an appointment in, well, any minute now,' Rhyme said.

'An appointment.'

'A doctor.'

'Really?' Banks asked, probably to murder the silence that loomed again.

Sellitto, not sure where the conversation was going, asked, 'And how've you been?'

Banks and Sellitto hadn't asked about his health when they'd arrived. It was a question people tended to avoid when they saw Lincoln Rhyme. The answer risked being a very complicated, and almost certainly an unpleasant, one.

He said simply, 'I've been fine, thanks. And you? Betty?'

'We're divorced,' Sellitto said quickly.

'Really?'

'She got the house and I got half a kid.' The chunky cop said this with forced cheer, as if he'd used the line before, and Rhyme supposed there was a painful story behind the breakup. One he had no desire to hear. Still, he wasn't surprised that the marriage had tanked. Sellitto was a workhorse. He was one of the hundred or so first-grade detectives on the force and had been for years – he got the grade when they were handed out for merit not just time served. He'd worked close to eighty hours a week. Rhyme hadn't even

known he was married for the first few months they'd worked together.

'Where you living now?' Rhyme asked, hoping a nice social conversation would tucker them out and send them on their way.

'Brooklyn. The Heights. I walk to work sometimes. You know those diets I was always on? The trick's not dieting. It's exercise.'

He didn't look any fatter or thinner than the Lon Sellitto of three and a half years ago. Or the Sellitto of fifteen years ago for that matter.

'So,' collegiate Banks said, 'a doctor, you were saying. For a . . .'

'A new form of treatment?' Rhyme finished the dwindling question. 'Exactly.'

'Good luck.'

'Thank you *so* much.'

It was 11:36 A.M. Well past midmorning. Tardiness is inexcusable in a man of medicine.

He watched Banks' eyes twice scan his legs. He caught the pimply boy a second time and wasn't surprised to see the detective blush.

'So,' Rhyme said. 'I'm afraid I don't really have time to help you.'

'But he's not here yet, right, the doctor?' asked Lon Sellitto in the same bulletproof tone he'd used to puncture homicide suspects' cover stories.

Thom appeared at the doorway with a coffeepot.

Prick, Rhyme mouthed.

'Lincoln forgot to offer you gentlemen something.'

'Thom treats me like a child.'

'If the bootie fits,' the aide retorted.

'All right,' Rhyme snapped. 'Have some coffee. I'll have some mother's milk.'

'Too early,' Thom said. 'The bar isn't open.' And weathered Rhyme's glowering face quite well.

Again Banks' eyes browsed Rhyme's body. Maybe he'd been expecting just skin and bones. But the atrophy had stopped not long after the accident and his first physical therapists had exhausted him with exercise. Thom too, who may have been a prick at times and an old mother hen at others, was a damn good PT. He put Rhyme through passive ROM exercises every day. Taking meticulous notes on the goniometry – measurements of the range of motion that he applied to each joint in Rhyme's body. Carefully checking the spasticity as he kept the arms and legs in a constant cycle of abduction and adduction. ROM work wasn't a miracle but it built up some tone, cut down on debilitating contractures and kept the blood flowing. For someone whose muscular activities had been limited to his shoulders, head and left ring finger for three and a half years, Lincoln Rhyme wasn't in such bad shape.

The young detective looked away from the complicated black ECU control sitting by Rhyme's finger, hardwired to another controller, sprouting conduit and cables, which ran to the computer and a wall panel.

A quad's life is wires, a therapist had told Rhyme a long time ago. The rich ones, at least. The lucky ones.

Sellitto said, 'There was a murder early this morning on the West Side.'

'We've had reports of some homeless men and women disappearing over the past month,' Banks said. 'At first we thought it might be one of them. But it wasn't,' he added dramatically. 'The vic was one of those people last night.'

Rhyme trained a blank expression on the young man with the dotted face. 'Those *people*?'

'He doesn't watch the news,' Thom said. 'If you're talking about the kidnapping he hasn't heard.'

'You don't watch the news?' Sellitto laughed. 'You're the SOB read four papers a day and recorded the local news to watch when he got home. Blaine told me you called her Katie Couric one night when you were making love.'

'I only read literature now,' Rhyme said pompously, and falsely.

Thom added, "'Literature is news that stays news.'"

Rhyme ignored him.

Sellitto said, 'Man and woman coming back from business on the Coast. Got into a Yellow Cab at JFK. Never made it home.'

'There was a report about eleven-thirty. This cab was driving down the BQE in Queens. White male and female passenger in the back seat. Looked like they were trying to break a window out. Pounding on the glass. Nobody got tags or medallion.'

'This witness – who saw the cab. Any look at the driver?'

'No.'

'The woman passenger?'

'No sign of her.'

Eleven forty-one. Rhyme was furious with Dr William Berger. 'Nasty business,' he muttered absently.

Sellitto exhaled long and loud.

'Go on, go on,' Rhyme said.

'He was wearing her ring,' Banks said.

'Who was wearing *what*?'

'The vic. They found this morning. He was wearing the woman's ring. The other passenger's.'

'You're sure it was hers?'

'Had her initials inside.'

'So you've got an unsub,' Rhyme continued, 'who wants you to know he's got the woman and she's still alive.'

'What's an unsub?' Thom asked.

When Rhyme ignored him Sellitto said, 'Unknown subject.'

'But you know how he got it to fit?' Banks asked, a little wide-eyed for Rhyme's taste. 'Her ring?'

'I give up.'

'Cut the skin off the guy's finger. All of it. Down to the bone.'

Rhyme gave a faint smile. 'Ah, he's a smart one, isn't he?'

'Why's that smart?'

'To make sure nobody came by and took the ring. It was bloody, right?'

'A mess.'

'Hard to see the ring in the first place. Then AIDS, hepatitis. Even if somebody noticed, a lot of folks'd take a pass on that trophy. What's her name, Lon?'

The older detective nodded to his partner, who flipped open his watchbook.

'Tammie Jean Colfax. She goes by T.J. Twenty-eight. Works for Morgan Stanley.'

Rhyme observed that Banks too wore a ring. A school ring of some sort. The boy was too polished to be just a high-school and academy grad. No whiff of army about him. Wouldn't be surprised if the jewelry bore the name Yale. A homicide detective? What was the world coming to?

The young cop cupped his coffee in hands that shook sporadically. With a minuscule gesture of his own ring finger on the Everest & Jennings ECU panel, to which his left hand was strapped, Rhyme clicked through several settings, turning the AC down. He tended not to waste controls on things like heating and air conditioning; he reserved it for necessities like lights, the computer and his page-turning frame. But when the room got too cold his nose ran. And *that's* fucking torture for a quad.

'No ransom note?' Rhyme asked.

'Nothing.'

'You're the case officer?' Rhyme asked Sellitto.

‘Under Jim Polling. Yeah. And we want you to review the CS report.’

Another laugh. ‘Me? I haven’t looked at a crime scene report in three years. What could I possibly tell you?’

‘You could tell us tons, Linc.’

‘Who’s head of IRD now?’

‘Vince Peretti.’

‘The congressman’s boy,’ Rhyme recalled. ‘Have him review it.’

A moment’s hesitation. ‘We’d rather have you.’

‘Who’s we?’

‘The chief. Yours truly.’

‘And how,’ Rhyme asked, smiling like a schoolgirl, ‘does Captain Peretti feel about this vote of no confidence?’

Sellitto stood and paced through the room, glancing down at the stacks of magazines. *Forensic Science Review*. Harding & Boyle Scientific Equipment Company catalog. *The New Scotland Yard Forensic Investigation Annual*. *American College of Forensic Examiners Journal*. *Report of the American Society of Crime Lab Directors*. *CRC Press Forensics*. *Journal of the International Institute of Forensic Science*.

‘Look at them,’ Rhyme said. ‘The subscriptions lapsed ages ago. And they’re all dusty.’

‘*Everything* in here’s fucking dusty, Linc. Why don’t you get off your lazy ass and clean this pigsty up?’

Banks looked horrified. Rhyme squelched the burst of laughter that felt alien inside him. His guard had slipped and irritation had dissolved into amusement. He momentarily regretted that he and Sellitto had drifted apart. Then he shot the feeling dead. He grumbled, ‘I can’t help you. Sorry.’

‘We’ve got the peace conference starting on Monday. We—’

‘What conference?’

‘At the UN. Ambassadors, heads of state. There’ll be ten

thousand dignitaries in town. You heard about that thing in London two days ago?’

‘*Thing?*’ Rhyme repeated caustically.

‘Somebody tried to bomb the hotel where UNESCO was meeting. The mayor’s scared shitless somebody’s going to move on the conference here. He doesn’t want ugly *Post* headlines.’

‘There’s also the little problem,’ Rhyme said astringently, ‘that Miss Tammie Jean might not be enjoying her trip home either.’

‘Jerry, tell him some details. Whet his appetite.’

Banks turned his attention from Rhyme’s legs to his bed, which was – Rhyme readily admitted – by far the more interesting of the two. Especially the control panel. It looked like something off the space shuttle and cost just about as much. ‘Ten hours after they’re snatched we find the male passenger – John Ullbrecht – shot and buried alive in the Amtrak roadbed near Thirty-seventh and Eleventh. Well, we find him dead. He’d *been* buried alive. Bullet was a .32.’ Banks looked up and added, ‘The Honda Accord of slugs.’

Meaning there’d be no wily deductions about the unsub from exotic weaponry. This Banks seems smart, Rhyme thought, and all he suffers from is youth, which he might or might not outgrow. Lincoln Rhyme believed he himself had never been young.

‘Rifling on the slug?’ Rhyme asked.

‘Six lands and grooves, left twist.’

‘So he’s got himself a Colt,’ Rhyme said and glanced over the crime scene diagram again.

‘You said “he,”’ the young detective continued. ‘Actually it’s “they.”’

‘What?’

‘Unsubs. There’re two of them. There were two sets of footprints between the grave and the base of an iron ladder

leading up to the street,' Banks said, pointing to the CS diagram.

'Any prints on the ladder?'

'None. It was wiped. Did a good job of it. The footprints go to the grave and back to the ladder. Anyway, there *had* to be two of 'em to schlepp the vic. He weighed over two hundred pounds. One man couldn't've done it.'

'Keep going.'

'They got him to the grave, dropped him in, shot him and buried him, went back to the ladder, climbed it and vanished.'

'Shot him in the grave?' Rhyme inquired.

'Yep. There was no blood trail anywhere around the ladder or the path to the grave.'

Rhyme found himself mildly interested. But he said, 'What do you need me for?'

Sellitto grinned ragged yellow teeth. 'We got ourselves a mystery, Linc. A buncha PE that doesn't make any fucking sense at all.'

'So?' It was a rare crime scene when every bit of physical evidence made sense.

'Naw, this is real weird. Read the report. Please. I'll put it here. How's this thing work?' Sellitto looked at Thom, who fitted the report in the page-turning frame.

'I don't have time, Lon,' Rhyme protested.

'That's quite a contraption,' Banks offered, looking at the frame. Rhyme didn't respond. He glanced at the first page then read it carefully. Moved his ring finger a precise millimeter to the left. A rubber wand turned the page.

Reading. Thinking: Well, this *is* odd.

'Who was in charge of the scene?'

'Peretti himself. When he heard the vic was one of the taxi people he came down and took over.'

Rhyme continued to read. For a minute the unimaginative words of cop writing held his interest. Then the doorbell

rang and his heart galloped with a great shudder. His eyes slipped to Thom. They were cold and made clear that the time for banter was over. Thom nodded and went downstairs immediately.

All thoughts of cabdrivers and PE and kidnapped bankers vanished from the sweeping mind of Lincoln Rhyme.

'It's Dr Berger,' Thom announced over the intercom.

At last. At long last.

'Well, I'm sorry, Lon. I'll have to ask you to leave. It was good seeing you again.' A smile. 'Interesting case, this one is.'

Sellitto hesitated then rose. 'But will you read through the report, Lincoln? Tell us what you think?'

Rhyme said, 'You bet,' then leaned his head back against the pillow. Quads like Rhyme, who had full head-and-neck movement, could activate a dozen controls just by three-dimensional movements of the head. But Rhyme shunned headrests. There were so few sensuous pleasures left to him that he was unwilling to abdicate the comfort of nestling his head against his two-hundred-dollar down pillow. The visitors had tired him out. Not even noon, and all he wanted to do was sleep. His neck muscles throbbed in agony.

When Sellitto and Banks were at the door Rhyme said, 'Lon, wait.'

The detective turned.

'One thing you should know. You've only found half the crime scene. The important one is the other one – the primary scene. His house. That's where he'll be. And it'll be hard as hell to find.'

'Why do you think there's another scene?'

'Because he didn't shoot the vic at the grave. He shot him there – at the primary scene. And that's probably where he's got the woman. It'll be underground or in a very deserted part of city. Or both . . . Because, Banks' – Rhyme preempted the young detective's question – 'he wouldn't risk shooting

someone and holding a captive there unless it was quiet and private.'

'Maybe he used a silencer.'

'No traces of rubber or cotton baffling on the slug,' Rhyme snapped.

'But how could the man've been shot there?' Banks countered. 'I mean, there wasn't any blood spatter at the scene.'

'I assume the victim was shot in the face,' Rhyme announced.

'Well, yes,' Banks answered, putting a stupid smile on his own. 'How'd you know?'

'Very painful, very incapacitating, very little blood with a .32. Rarely lethal if you miss the brain. With the vic in that shape the unsub could lead him around wherever he wanted. I say unsub singular because there's only one of them.'

A pause. 'But . . . there were two sets of prints,' Banks nearly whispered, as if he were defusing a land mine.

Rhyme sighed. 'The soles're identical. They were left by the same man making the trip twice. To fool us. And the prints going north are the same depth as the prints going south. So he wasn't carrying a two-hundred-pound load one way and not the other. Was the vic barefoot?'

Banks flipped through his notes. 'Socks.'

'Okay, then the perp was wearing the vic's shoes for his clever little stroll to the ladder and back.'

'If he didn't come down the ladder how *did* he get to the grave?'

'He led the man along the train tracks themselves. Probably from the north.'

'There're no other ladders to the roadbed for blocks in either direction.'

'But there *are* tunnels running parallel to the tracks,' Rhyme continued. 'They hook up with the basements of some of the old warehouses along Eleventh Avenue. A gangster during

Prohibition – Owney Madden – had them dug so he could slip shipments of bootleg whisky onto New York Central trains going up to Albany and Bridgeport.’

‘But why not just bury the vic near the tunnel? Why risk being seen schlepping the guy all the way to the overpass?’

Impatient now. ‘You *do* get what he’s telling us, don’t you?’ Banks started to speak then shook his head.

‘He *had* to put the body where it’d be seen,’ Rhyme said. ‘He needed someone to find it. That’s why he left the hand in the air. He’s *waving* at us. To get our attention. Sorry, you may have only one unsub but he’s plenty smart enough for two. There’s an access door to a tunnel somewhere nearby. Get down there and dust it for prints. There won’t be any. But you’ll have to do it just the same. The press, you know. When the story starts coming out . . . Well, good luck, gentlemen. Now, you’ll have to excuse me. Lon?’

‘Yes?’

‘Don’t forget about the primary crime scene. Whatever happens, you’ll have to find it. And fast.’

‘Thanks, Linc. Just read the report.’

Rhyme said of course he would and observed that they believed the lie. Completely.