

The Phoenix Prescription

A novel

By

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Dedicated

To Gloria

Who has stood by me through endless years as I struggled to learn the craft of writing while practicing the art of surgery – you tolerated my absences, my frustrations, my moments of doubt; the challenges of either profession would have eroded the spirit of a lesser woman, but not you, my friend, my love.

This is our story

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PROLOGUE

July, 1977
Eastport Medical Center
Emergency Room

The surgical resident stormed into the trauma bay. He froze when he saw the battered body. Tractor tread marks tattooed the man's white chest skin. The blue eyes bulged, staring in disbelief from their sockets. One tanned forearm was mangled.

Bending to examine the chest wound, the young surgeon said, "Get me an endotracheal tube!"

She was an intensive care unit nurse on lend to the Emergency Room to cover the hospital's nursing shortage. He knew she'd seen this injury before, too. For her it had been in a distant country no one wanted to talk about. She'd seen the body insults and the body counts. He wished he had her war experience.

Still, one look and he knew the tractor rollover victim was in trouble. When, weeks later, he would be asked to recall the events of this night, he would have to admit the farmer wasn't dead when he arrived by ambulance in the ER.

Thrashing on a gurney, the farmer's neck veins bulged. His windpipe sounded crushed under neck bruises as he noisily sucked oxygen through a plastic mask. A gash across his right chest spewed blood with each shallow breath. Broken ribs framed a ragged hole below his right nipple through which the resident spied shuddering pink lung tissue.

"Should I call anesthesia?" the nurse asked.

"I'm all over this one." The surgical resident donned gloves and nodded in the direction of the wall suction. "Be cool, please."

"Blood pressure's eighty over zip," the nurse informed him.

"Open up both IVs." He lifted the man's chin.

"You want me to call blood bank?"

"Draw the usual trauma labs...cross and type him for six units."

Standing at the head of the stretcher the resident hunched behind the farmer's head. He slipped the metal blade of a laryngoscope past the bloated tongue, searching for the vocal cords, and the doorway to the farmer's windpipe.

A blob of mucous clung to the silver blade. He waved his hand without looking up. "Suction..."

The nurse removed a plastic suction tip from a cellophane sleeve. She turned on a machine and tested the tip against her gloved finger.

“Hand it to me!” He waved his gloved hand at her. “Come on!”

She pushed the suction catheter into his outstretched hand. Pieces of broccoli bubbled into the man’s mouth, spilling over his lower lip. The resident suctioned the debris obscuring his view. Noisy suction stopped. Plugged with flecks of vegetable matter.

“Shit!” The resident flicked an accusing look at the nurse.

At that moment the laryngoscope blade slipped off the farmer’s slimy tongue. He bucked like a mammoth striped bass slamming a fishing rod into a trembling curve.

“I’m calling anesthesia,” the nurse said.

It happened as she grabbed the wall phone. When he heard it, he dropped the laryngoscope. It sounded like someone breaking a handful of dry sticks. She spun toward him as the metal laryngoscope rattled to the floor. She crossed the trauma room to the stretcher, poking at the air as if searching for something. He stared at her, frozen in a bent stance like a broken statute, the suction catheter grasped in his hand.

He inhaled the stench of the farmer’s bowels. “It can’t...”

“Oh God!” she said, moving beside him.

The stench of loose bowels rose from the bed and filled the trauma room. The resident threw down the suction catheter. Vomit spewed from the man’s gaping mouth and down the sides of the swollen neck.

The resident stumbled back. Ripped off his gloves. Tore off his surgical cap and threw it toward a bucket, missing. Beyond a doubt, he knew what he had done. And he knew he couldn’t change it.

“I didn’t know...his neck,” he whispered. “I couldn’t wait for x-ray.”

The farmer’s body lay still. Fixed statue eyes stared at nothing. The mouth sagged open. Lips caked with mucous and broccoli. “His neck was already broken...an unstable fracture...” The resident peered down at the unshaven face. He inhaled hard, a sob.

The trauma bay air was foul. He stared at the dead face. Gaping black pupils seeing nothing. A hiss of air leaked from the chest wound.

She stood beside the gurney with him. He felt her hand slide up and squeeze his shoulder. He slipped his hands over the man’s ears. Massaged the bruised head, willing the farmer back to life.

After a moment, the resident released the head. He stared at the door, deciding something. The nurse released him and he sat in a chair before a small desk and placed his elbows on his knees. He bent forward with his head in his hands. When she came over and placed her hand on his neck, he felt it all break away.

He began to cry.

After several minutes, he wiped his eyes. He raised his head and glanced up at her. She eyed her watch and bit her lower lip. He knew what she was going to say.

She bent down and kissed his forehead. “Family’s in the waiting room.”

PART ONE

Saturday, February 4th, 1978. 11 PM.

Weather Service Forecast Office, Logan, Boston

“Marine warnings will likely be issued tomorrow. Snow may spread into the state as well and become heavy at times...a substantial snow may come of it.”

CHAPTER ONE

9:26 PM
Saturday, February 4, 1978
MA Route 95 North

The dashboard lights in Danny Ferrone's Porsche illuminated his fiancée's reclining form. Arms folded across her chest, she fiddled with the rock he'd given her last weekend while night skiing at Mount Snow. He'd stopped on a narrow trail and had

lighted a candle, mittens off. Her eyes had glistened at the sight of the diamond perched like an ice chunk in the box.

But, tonight they hadn't exchanged a word since leaving Boston tonight. Ashley's mood during dinner at *Grill 23* muted, not her chatty self. She'd refused all but a sip of Cabernet, ignoring his suggestion the weekend would go smoothly. His family would accept her pregnancy.

"Wish you could still drink." He reached across the console, squeezed her thigh. "Sorry you had to miss an outstanding '82 *Opus*."

"Your brother's crazy you know." She pushed his hand away. "That's why they make Thorazine."

Danny experienced a familiar annoyance. "This time it's different, Ash. I have to do this for Tony."

"There's always a state trooper around here."

"I want to beat this storm." He didn't want to become angry with her. "No telling if it's started in Eastport."

"They're expecting a big storm in Maryland later tonight, not New England. Boston's not getting snow until tomorrow...or Monday."

"They always get it backwards, one minute they say snow, next minute nothing. Killington's probably making snow anyway. Maybe we can ski next weekend?"

"Tony needs professional help. Is he going to disrupt our lives every time he flashes back?"

Danny glanced at her and let up on the pedal, the Porsche reluctantly whining down. The top button of her blouse was undone, her long brunette hair over her shoulders, free of the barrette she usually wore. “My brother must’ve been admitted for a reason. Didn’t sound like just a bad dream. All he said was he wanted to tell me something.”

“We're not talking diabetes here, are we?” She stared at the speedometer until he turned to her.

“You never minded my driving before? Is this some motherly instinct?”

Ashley buttoned her blouse and faced the side window. She rubbed something on the glass, weeping softly. He’d never seen her react like this before. He had not meant to hurt her.

“Look, it was a stupid thing to say.” Danny slowed the Porsche. “I’m sorry.”

They passed the *Peabody* exit without another car in sight. He groped for her hand. He knew so little about her feelings this early, spooked by it, really.

“You agreed it was my decision.” Ashley dabbed her eyes with a tissue. “I want to get married, Danny. Maybe it’s time to give up our insane work schedules. You’re at the office night and day...and your crazy competitive ski-racing schedule? Maybe it’s time to give that up, too. I’ll tell you, I don’t miss the skating tour.”

“Are we going to tell my parents?”

“You've already spoken to your father, haven't you?”

The Porsche accelerated before he realized he had mashed the pedal. Immediately, he backed it down. “I mentioned it, I think.”

“Not that I want one, but Big Anthony won't hear of an abortion.” She taunted him and he deserved it. “Can't rely on Tony for grandchildren. Too much Agent Orange. And now the Ferrone legacy is threatened by a mere Protestant.”

It came out flat. The accusation hung inside the Porsche like bad breath. Big Anthony. Damn her.

“You call my father that when you're angry.”

“Count on me being fairly pissed right about now.” Ashley hugged her arms. “Your mother, on the other hand, is more enlightened than you think.”

“When she's sober.”

Danny pressed the pedal and the Porsche lunged through the night, its turbo-charged engine a subdued whine muted by Paul McCartney and Wings drifting from the radio. He had given little thought to Ashley's interaction with his family, previous visits cursory affairs, polite conversation with his father as the tacit purveyor of Ferrone truth. As they reflected in silence, Danny wondered if he might lose this remarkable woman seated beside him. Maybe she would reject him if he didn't pay attention. There was probably a Ferrone gene for paternalism, maybe even stupidity.

“Was Tony physically abusive before his divorce?”

“At times.”

“Your father protected him, of course. Carroll was a battered wife.”

“You could say so.”

“Being a Vietnam Vet doesn't give your brother special rights. He actually *was* in Vietnam, not some pretender?”

“A Medal of Honor’s hard to fake.”

The *Beverly* exit shot off into the night, traffic thinning out on 95 North, Ashley flipping to a weather station. “At dinner you said Tony got infected?”

“Where he injects his insulin. He’s also back on tranquilizers. He’s afraid something’s going to happen if he doesn’t talk to me.”

“Tony needs a real shrink, not a little brother confidant. Bet the infection’s just an excuse to get him hospitalized on your dad’s friend’s service again. Big Anthony won’t hear of his hero son getting psychiatric help. A sign of weakness? Big Anthony’s sons never—”

“—OK, OK, I hear you.” Danny scowled at her, his trigger fuse smoldering. “Give it a rest.”

She didn’t. “Tony’s behavior’s the problem. Not his diabetes.”

Ashley was right, of course. It had always been about Tony’s erratic behavior, even before the Marines got hold of him, the high school football team a trifling dumping ground for his brother’s aggressiveness. His father had relented in ’66 after arranging for his brother’s release from jail after a bar brawl; if Tony wanted to fight so damn much, sign up for Vietnam.

“Ash, remember that little barber shop across from Dad’s office on Liberty Street?”

“Where you got your curls cut as a child?”

“Guido still cuts Tony’s hair.”

“Guido,” she chuckled. “Of course, Guido.”

“You want to hear this or what?”

“Wouldn't miss a Guido story for all of the pasta in Eastport.”

Danny gripped the steering wheel. “Anyway, a month after coming back stateside after his third tour, Tony gets his hair cut. Gets up from the chair, looks in the mirror, says to little Guido, 'Hey man, you made me look like a fucking Marine again'. Picks up a chair, throws it through Guido's front window.”

“Daddy paid for it.”

Danny grinned, holding the steering wheel with one hand. “Dad paid for the window and a very expensive haircut.”

“It's a blessing they never had children,” Ashley said. “Does he drink?”

“Mom does the drinking for the whole family.”

“Daddy never got her help, either?” It sounded more like a statement rather than a question.

“She wouldn't accept help, I guess.”

The night split open as the Porsche's high beams swept the curved guardrails ahead. Danny turned off the radio, his mind teasing the pieces of the weekend ahead. How his family would accept the news of Ashley's pregnancy remained the issue. Unless, of course, Tony trumped them.

“Funny, I've not given a thought to maternity clothes.”

“Should we pick a date to get married this spring, you know, considering?”

“Considering this summer I'll look like Miss Piggy?”

He rubbed her thigh. She slid her hand onto his. “I see no reason to delay our lives together, Ash. We would’ve done it within the year either way.”

Ashley leaned over and scratched his cheek. “Will your mother let us sleep together?”

“She’ll be excited we’re getting married.” He felt for her hand on his cheek and moved it to his waist. “With our genes the kids’ll skate and ski like bandits.”

They sat holding each other’s hands in the dimly lighted Porsche. Danny drove with one hand, bolting through the February night, a cluster of red beads ahead signaling rear lights. He smiled and gunned the Porsche past a string of cars, throwing up a vortex of dust. They were close to the Eastport exit.

She insinuated her hand beneath his sweater and scratched his belly skin. “You never said if you wanted a boy or a girl.” Her fingernails crept over his chest, tickling him. She brushed the hair on his abdomen.

His skin came alive. “Doesn’t matter,” he said. “As long as the baby’s healthy.”

“This baby’s going to change you life, Danny.” She kissed his cheek, unbuckled her seat belt and reached beneath his shorts. “Of course, some things won’t change.”

The New England night disappeared behind them as the Porsche’s lights swept the road, the guardrail lighting up like platinum. “It must have been New Year’s Eve,” she said.

“That’d be about right.”

His hips rose from the seat. She leaned over the console, her hair falling onto his chest, her lips warm on him.

The Porsche veered to the left, spun into a hard right. Danny arched his back, boot jammed the brake. Ashley's head snapped up. Porsche slammed the guardrail, metal shrieking on metal backwards.

He jerked the wheel in a wild attempt to control the car. Back window exploded. Engine burst into flames. Porsche's interior filled with smoke.

Danny lost sight of the road. Explosion of glass in his face.

Ashley screamed his name.

CHAPTER TWO

9:22 PM
Saturday, February 4th 1978
Eastport Medical Center

Saturday Night Live was about to come on. Tim Voight's little portable with bunny ears was snowy, but he'd be able to hear the jokes. All you needed on-call for the trauma service. A little diversion. Besides, they'd predicted a snow storm. So there'd be few folks arriving in the ER with broken bodies – *if* it snowed hard enough to keep them off the road.

He tugged off his bell bottom jeans. He donned a scrub top and tie pants. Just like pajamas. The weekend would be a cake walk.

He turned down his radio in the middle of the Bee Gees, *Stayin' Alive*.

Voight's beeper went off. The ward secretary on West Two informed him he had a new admission for Doctor Scott.

* * *

9:40 PM
West Two

Room 203's door was closed.

Voight stopped to swallow a last gulp of bitter coffee, tossed the container into a bucket on top of a pair of bloody gloves. He checked the name on the Admission sheet again. Was there a possibility this might be a bogus admission?

There was something screwy about this guy's admission diagnosis. A diabetic who had not spiked a fever while in the ER? No fever or elevated white blood count with a major soft tissue infection? *Why admit him to surgery?*

A fourth year surgical resident, Tim Voight carried a ton of foreboding down the dimly lighted corridor of Eastport Medical Center's premier surgical floor to the new admission's room. Voight's usual loose athletic gait was stiff. As if his annoyance caused him joint pain. The trauma beeper hung from his scrub pants.

He pulled a stethoscope from his lab coat pocket and knocked on the door.

The Chairman of the Department of Surgery wasn't known for bullshit admissions. Down the hall someone moaned from a half-open door. In another room two patients argued over a TV station.

Voight pushed open the door to Room 203 without waiting for an answer. What he saw sent his annoyance into orbit.

The new admission didn't look sick. A middle-aged man sitting on the hospital bed dressed in street cloths, a huge hand on his knee, fingers twitching.

"Sir, I'm Doctor Voight." He extended his hand. "I've got to examine your leg."

"Where's my doctor?" The man's voice came from his tonsils. He ignored Voight's handshake offer. "My brother here yet?"

“I have no information about your brother.” Voight stuffed his stethoscope into his lab coat pocket and eased back from the hospital bed. The new admission wore a heavy pullover sweater, jeans and low-cut boots. A hospital Johnny remained folded on the nightstand beside the bed. The man, heavysset with thick graying hair and bushy eyebrows, began to massage his wrists with slow deliberate motions.

Scanning the admission sheet again, Voight shifted his weight, eyed the man’s composed expression, the twitching thumb. His name was Anthony Ferrone, Jr. “How bad does it hurt?”

“Don’t mean nothin’. You gonna get me a sedative, Doc?”

“We’ll need a blood sugar first, some other labs. You know, to determine your insulin requirements. How did this start?”

Tony Ferrone provided Voight with a disjointed history of throbbing thigh pain. “Probably the insulin injections,” said Ferrone.

The man's temperature was normal. Why had the Chairman of the Department of Surgery admitted this guy? It seemed a waste of time. But then nothing was a waste of Voight’s time. Not since summer. Not since the dead farmer. Not while he was being scrutinized.

They eyed each other across the room.

The man clenched, released his fists. “You ever examine me before?”

Voight glanced down at his OR shoe covers. “You've had other EMC admissions?”

“Seen my old charts, Doc?”

Charts? As if on cue a nurse appeared at the door. Voight turned to her and frowned at two thick volumes she held in her arms. "Mr. Ferrone's old medical records." She hoisted one of the frayed charts and looked Voight with a look. "You'll want to review them, closely."

The nurse deposited the two charts on the nightstand. She turned and closed the door behind her.

They were alone again. "Thick charts," Voight said.

"So there it is," said the new admission.

Withdrawing his stethoscope again, Voight eyed the man sitting on the bed. "If you'll undress, I'll examine you."

Ferrone picked at his fingers, for the first time Voight noticed plastic under the broken nails. The man's hands were huge, callused. Voight motioned to the charts. "Something in your records I need to know about?"

Ferrone rocked back on the bed holding one knee with his huge fingers laced. Hands clasped each other, banana fingers.

He made no attempt to undress. "Just my whole fucking life." Voight grabbed the two volumes. He excused himself and stepped out into the hall. He read several typed discharge summaries of previous hospital care. His temper unraveled like a cuff snag.

Tony Ferrone had never undergone surgery.

Ever.

* * *

10:15 PM

West Two

“Am I missing something, Mr. Ferrone?” Voight had re-entered Room 203. He stood beside the bed.

Why *wouldn't* a diabetic have thick hospital records? Insulin-dependent diabetics get every complication in the book -- blindness, kidney failure, severe skin infections -- any system in the body can become involved because of the narrowing of tiny blood vessels. Was he overlooking something subtle? Was this another of Scott's tests to see if Voight could prove himself worthy of progressing in the surgical training program? Maybe this nut case did have something wrong.

Was Scott testing him?

“Impressive,” Voight said, tapping the old charts.

Ferrone didn't have the typical sallow complexion of an addict, no sunken cheeks of malnutrition, or skinny arms and legs of a smoker who also drank, no tremors, no hollow eyes. Not like Voight's sister, not the way Dawn had appeared last weekend when he visited the chronic care facility, three months into a coma at Champlain Regional Rehabilitation Center near their home south of Burlington, Vermont. Instead, this guy appeared to be in good physical condition, bare forearms free of needle tracks, no dialysis shunt scars, no rashes.

“Drop your drawers,” Voight said.

An irregular splotch of redness covered the skin above Ferrone's right kneecap. When Voight pressed it with his index finger. There was no pain reaction from Tony Ferrone, the erythema blanched, leaving an oval image of Voight's fingertip. Minor inflammation.

"That's it?"

"You gonna check the rest of me?"

Voight withdrew his penlight, flipped it on. When he peeled open Ferrone's right eyelid, Voight almost dropped the light, as hostile black globes fixed on him. As expected, no pinpoint pupils suggesting narcotic use. Eyes tracked properly with a good reaction to light. He probed the muscular triangles below Ferrone's chin. No neck masses.

"Take off your shirt." Voight stuffed the pen light into his pocket. He pulled out his stethoscope. "Lungs're next."

Ferrone had a green Marine Corps tattoo on his right shoulder and under it in black, *semper fi*. Voight listened, the metal disc sliding over ribs. Lungs clear, not a wheeze, nothing.

What the hell's going on?

Next, Voight listened to Ferrone's heart sounds, the room quiet.

"Lie down, please. I'm going to check your abdomen."

"You an intern?"

Voight swallowed. His sister's tragedy, as always, slept a millimeter below his scalp. And, he, fighting to endure in the surgery program, was two years away from

becoming a surgeon. *No, he wasn't a fucking intern.* “Fourth year resident, actually.”

“When're visiting hours?” Ferrone lay back on the bed, arms over his head. “My brother's driving up from Boston.”

“Had a rectal exam recently?” *Say yes.*

“Get me a shot, Doc?”

“Not until I've gone over you completely.”

Ferrone sat up, extended his arms and spread his fingers even though Voight had said nothing. “I don't drink no more. See? No tremors. And no fucking rectal probe.”

“You've done this drill before?”

“It's in those records.” Ferrone motioned to the thick volumes on the bedside stand. “Read them some more.”

“What's that stuff under your nails?”

“Resin. Crowley's Boatyard.”

Voight examined the man's fingernails. The tip of the man's left pinky finger was missing.

“How did you lose your finger?”

“AK 47 round.”

Voight, a scratching feeling in his neck. “A what?”

Tony Ferrone held up his left hand and bent the finger with the end missing.

“NVA in '68. Shit luck.”

Voight remembered cafeteria conversations with his chief resident Art Cunningham who'd been in Vietnam and who told stories about guys who prayed for a

minor wound that would return them stateside, to what Cunningham had called ‘the world.’

“Near miss,” Ferrone said. “Just a few millimeters from deep six one way, a lifetime of hell the other.”

Voight noticed sweat beads form on the man's forehead. “I'll get you something when I'm done.” *What had he missed in the old records?* Voight prayed he wouldn't be stuck with this agitated Vet for hours, listening to war stories.

Tony Ferrone's eyes became fixed on something, perhaps a haunting image, staring across the room, tinkering with vacancy. Voight had touched something. What happened to this guy in Vietnam? *Why is he here at EMC?*

““Why's did Doctor Scott admit you to surgery?”

“That's how we do it.”

That's how we do it? Voight's neck tingled. He picked at the collar of his scrub top. We? Scott and this loosely wrapped Vet? Or was it this guy and his brother? Or was this a family affair with Scott as the director of admissions?

“Anthony, drop your jeans again. I want to check out that leg one more time.”

The trauma beeper slung on his scrub pants went off. He pressed the button wondering if it was a multiple car accident or some asshole bleeding from self-circumcision by candlelight. Probably not. That took a full moon. His beeper read, *ER STAT. Stab wound.*

Ferrone stood. He released a round buckle made of epoxy embedded with M16 shell casings and lowered his pants. He stared hard at Voight.

“For the record, Doc,” he said. “*Never* call me Anthony. It’s Tony. Just Tony.”

CHAPTER THREE

6:10 PM
Saturday, February 4th
Weather Forecasting Station Boston

“Turn it off, son.”

Homer Struthers didn’t like the kid. Not necessarily because he was Puerto Rican, but because the little bastard was always challenging him. Struthers didn’t mind answering questions. After all, as the Meteorologist-in-Charge at Logan, he was expected to teach the new forecaster’s aide the ropes. But, the kid always wore a smart ass grin. And the accent was phony, for sure.

Alexander Ortiz was sitting before the office’s dedicated weather teletypewriter listening to some god awful song. Ortiz said it was by a group called the Boomtown Rats. Struthers leaned back at his desk and studied a GOES satellite photograph.

He glanced over at the bobbing head and said quietly, “Alex, turn that shit off.”

Ortiz groaned. He slouched over to the radio and flipped it off. “Want me to find a public radio station?” he said, smiling. “Maybe a little Glen Miller...or Beethoven?”

Struthers didn’t answer him. He frowned at the GOES satellite product. Then, he compared the photo to the most recent LFM-2 data, the twelve hour forecast. The valid time for the computer generated Limited-Area Fine Mesh Model was until seven PM tonight. It was new technology, unproven so far.

Still, there it is.

The five hundred millibar product was showing the beginning of it. A hint of cyclogenesis. The beginning of a comma-shape in the cirrus shield cover. Maybe it would evolve into an extra-tropical cyclone right there – Struthers ran his finger over the LFM-2 product. There, off the South Carolina coast.

But, would it travel north?

“Hey Doc?” Ortiz said, interrupting his thoughts. “Think Harper was right at yesterday’s afternoon briefing? He said he thought we’d get something outta this one? You agree?”

The new observer had heard members of the team – the operations man, the communicator, the marine focal point, and the old man, Harper – refer to Struthers as ‘Doc’, a term of endearment from the guys he’d worked with for years. Now, this little bastard Ortiz had jumped in and started using Struthers’s nickname after only two weeks on the job. It irritated Struthers to no end.

He studied the satellite photo for a moment before answering Ortiz. “Looks like it’s going to do something.”

“Or it could it be nothing, Doc?”

Homer Struthers was called ‘Doc’ because he had predicted just about every weather event on the money for the last twenty odd years. During his twelve years in Texas earlier in his career in 1961, he’d perfectly predicted the devastation that Hurricane Carla had subsequently inflicted along the coastal areas of Texas and Louisiana. And, although half a million people had left their homes when warned, over half of the population in the hurricane’s predicted path had stayed at home or in the homes of friends and relatives. Struthers had been incensed. He worked for years to improve reporting of big bad storms and eventually became the national guru for an organization called, *From Warning to Action*, a movement focused on teaching folks to heed extreme weather warnings.

Perhaps it was unique to Americans, we lovers of freedom and the right to self-determination, but it seemed to Struthers that lots of people were making the wrong decisions about evacuating disaster areas these days when forewarned. Struthers continued to dedicate his life to changing how folks reacted to severe weather warnings, despite the public’s reluctance to cooperate. For too long, a belief of now of mythic proportions held that people would panic in the face of danger. Mass panic would produce massive numbers of deaths.

Struthers knew differently.

He'd researched the big disasters of the twentieth century. For example, after the famous radio broadcast on October 30, 1938, when a Martian invasion was announced on Halloween eve, over eighty per cent of the listening audience hadn't reacted to the warning at all. Struthers had also discovered in his research that a majority of patrons at the Coconut Grove fire in 1942 had not panicked; they had either been asphyxiated or had left the nightclub calmly.

Holding the satellite photo by its edge, Struthers lofted it in Ortiz's direction. It flew a few feet and slip-streamed to the floor. "Study it and tell me what you think," Struthers's said.

Ortiz got up and retrieved the photo. He examined it for less than ten seconds. "Don't look so bad."

"Sit down and *study* the goddamn thing." Struthers said.

Ortiz turned the radio on as he wove his way past the computer on his way to his small corner desk. The room filled with the hammering harmonics of the Rolling Stones.

Struthers rose and crossed to the door leading to the roof. He went outside and lit a cigarette. He had to quit, inhaling, feeling the rush settle him. "Prognosis," his lung specialist at the Massachusetts General Hospital had said to him recently. "It's all about prognosis. You, the weather. Me, when you're going to die of lung cancer. We both send out warnings. And no one listens."

Struthers ground out the cigarette half-smoked in a canister near a frozen potted plant. He turned and looked back through the glass door. He smiled to himself.

The little bastard.

Alexander Ortiz was making a paper airplane out of the satellite photo.

* * *

9:59 PM
Saturday, February 4th
Eastport Medical Center

Sitting at the nurse's station, Voight reached for Volume II of the Vietnam Vet's dog-eared medical record. As his beeper went off again, he resisted an urge to throw both volumes of Tony, not Anthony, Ferrone's records and the trauma beeper at the wall. Art Cunningham, his chief resident, was paging him to the ER.

“What's the difference between a surgical resident and a pile of dog shit?”

“Speaking of getting into dog do do,” said the ward secretary. “This guy's father's a big shot in town.”

“No one goes out of their way to step on a pile of shit. Ergo, I've got a political admission.”

Voight flipped through Volume Two, thinking how much both volumes resembled Boston telephone books. He'd call the ER as soon as he had Ferrone's orders done.

So, who's Anthony Ferrone?

The floor radio hummed a weather update. It described a low-pressure center developing over the Great Lakes with snow expected on the southern shores. Moments

later, as Voight entered orders into the computer, the ward secretary interrupted him.

“Hey pretty boy, Doctor Scott's on 2220.”

“I hope this is more important than the Bruins walloping the Montreal Canadians,” grunted his Chairman.

Voight described Ferrone's minimal physical findings, as interesting as the Boston Bruins playing the Eastport girl scouts. “Even with diabetes, he's got good distal pulses. Mild redness in his thigh.”

“Apparently he's been limping.”

Voight heard crowd noise swell to a crescendo in the background and he prayed the Bruins wouldn't score while Scott was on the phone. “It's not an abscess, sir.”

“Nothing to drain?” Scott asked. “Nothing deep?”

“His past history's psych stuff from Vietnam.”

“I'm aware of Tony's history.” Thickness coagulated Scott's voice, some indistinct warning, reminding Voight of his status. “I've been involved with Tony a long time,” Scott said. “He's got numerous problems. Give him a choice of sedative.”

“He knows what he wants?”

“Seymor Strong's his internist. Been regulating his insulin since Best and Banting discovered the stuff.”

“Is he an addict?”

“Flashbacks. Used to drink some.”

“He's pretty shaky.” Voight threw out bait to get Ferrone off Scott's service.

“Maybe even suicidal.”

A long moment accumulated. Scott's silence reached into the nurse's station, dampening the clatter of charts and computers keys. The sounds of the hockey game were gone. "Tony's been in the Vietnam Vet Study Group for years. He's seen more than a little combat. You're sure it's not an abscess?"

Voight felt a squeeze in his gut. Could he have missed a deep-seated pus pocket? "Pretty sure it's superficial, sir. He's on eighty units of insulin...a real brittle diabetic."

"I want Tony on my service." Scott's voice cut Voight like a razor. "Do you understand? Now, about your failure to answer the trauma beeper..."

"Doctor Scott, I was working up *this* guy."

"Tim, hold it! We've got a full weekend on-call together. Art's leaving tomorrow. You've got to help me. Bruce Chalmers and our CEO, Harrington, want to crucify you. Doctor Chalmers is old school and mean. And the CEO? Hell, all Harrington sees is a chance to downsize, go from three to two chief residents. He'd save forty grand just in salary. Don't give them a damn opening."

"This Ferrone guy isn't much for us."

"Jesus Christ, Tim. Did you hear me?"

Before Voight could answer, Scott hung up. Voight's beeper screamed again. *Call ER stat.*

To the dead telephone in his hand, Voight said, "If you want me to improve my clinical performance, Doctor Scott...why aren't you here supervising me?"

* * *

He'd never forget that particular Mortality and Morbidity Conference. They'd crucified him. Even his fellow residents had indicted him with their even silence. It had changed his life.

Standing at a podium before a mumbling audience of Attending surgeons and residents, he had started his presentation at the weekly mortality and morbidity conference by presenting the facts of the case in a halting voices. He had been interrupted several times for clarification. A young radiologist wearing an earring had showed x-rays of a shattered neck. Then, an elderly pathologist had projected slides of the torn lungs and the disrupted cervical spinal cord. Cervical spine fractures, unstable on admission to the ER.

The room had erupted at this point.

A neurosurgeon had jumped up. "Why the bloody hell didn't you insist on standard in-line traction by an assistant to stabilize the neck while attempting to intubate him?"

"Why not call for help?" another surgeon had demanded.

Within the hour, he'd been summoned to the office of the Chairman of the Department of Surgery. The neurosurgeon of record had sat nearby, listening to the Chairman's verdict. Unhappy, the neurosurgeon had demanded an end to Voight's career.

"This sort of incompetence cannot be tolerated," he had said.

"No," said the Chairman. "Probation."

Right there in Voight's presence, the neurosurgeon had defied the Chairman. Bruce Chalmers had gone on record, growling that he would fight Wendell Scott until the

incompetent resident was dismissed. Further, Chalmers had insisted he would inform the Board of Trustees and hospital's CEO of the dreadful details of the case. Never again would the public be subjected to such unskillful and imbecilic care by an unsupervised trainee.

CHAPTER FOUR

10:10 PM
Saturday, February 4th
Eastport Medical Center

He received the stat page from Ginger St. Onge, an ICU nurse who often covered the Emergency Room. She seemed annoyed when she realized he was covering trauma tonight. Ginger had dated Voight's chief resident, Art Cunningham since Voight had

started his residency at Eastport Medical Center. She'd made it clear to Voight she didn't appreciate his casual attitude.

"We've got two bad crunches down here, Doctor," Ginger fumed. "One's hypothermic with a bad head injury. The other's a stab in shock. Why didn't you answer your page?"

"Can't Art take care of them?"

"Voight!" Ginger snapped. "You've got the trauma beeper. You should be *here* resuscitating these players."

"I'm working up a new admission of Scott's."

"You want Artie to handle the burn, too?"

A burn. "How big?"

Voight eyed his watch. An involuntary wave of dread struck him. It would take hours to get a major body burn victim cleaned, bandaged and loaded with IV fluid and antibiotics. It would take days to completely cover him with shaved pieces of his own skin, rehabilitated enough to get back home. It would take months of revision surgery to reduce the scarring, and, in the end, the residual ugly scars would define their minimal success.

"The burn hasn't arrived yet," said Ginger. "Artie's with the head injured woman. She's cold as ice."

"Tell the big guy help's on the way."

"The big guy's thirty-six hours away from the College of Surgeons meeting in San Francisco, Voight. Get *your* ass down here, now!"

* * *

10:20 PM
ER

Art Cunningham left Ginger with the stab wound. A short blond nurse wheeled the hypothermic woman to x-ray for a head CT scan. He slipped out into the ER corridor and mounted an empty stretcher outside of the trauma room. He lay back against the wall thirty feet from the main ambulance platform. Had things under control.

Wiping his receding hairline with the sleeve of his lab coat, Cunningham experienced a familiar dull ache crawling into his back. He checked his watch. *Goddamn Voight*. Cunningham fished into the breast pocket of his lab coat for the cigarettes he no longer carried. Quitting butts at the age of forty-nine wasn't going to be easy. Not that there's ever a good time to quit. Another lousy habit he'd picked up in Nam.

"Where are you, Tim?" he said to the far wall. "You're gonna get your ass fired."

Cunningham picked at spattered blood on his lab coat, knowing he was staring into the teeth of another night in the operating room. But, above all his agitation sprung from an abiding annoyance mixed with no small measure of empathy for Tim Voight. The kid had so much talent. Yet he wandered Eastport Medical Center as if the world ran at constant speed, Voight's speed. Since Voight's probation had started, the kid's usual kinetic momentum had slowed, as if he had stepped into some sticky residue of fear. All

because of the unfortunate mishandling of a cervical spine fracture as a junior resident. And now that fuck up was compounded by his sister's tragic accident.

Cunningham reached overhead and lifted a wall phone from its cradle. His cheek stung where his fingers grazed his face, cold from the woman found in the median of I-95 North. "Did Voight answer?"

"A moment ago," said the operator.

"Thanks."

Forty-nine years old and I'm still a fucking resident. My choice. Still, it didn't make things any easier.

"Come on, Tim. Get the hell down here."

* * *

10:37 PM
ER

Inside the trauma room, Cunningham eyed Victor Ramos in hemorrhagic shock from a gang fight in a coastal bar. The strip of land called The Flats was wedged between Eastport and Eastport Harbor. Cunningham had IV fluids running full blast in the victim. He'd crossed and typed the guy for anticipated blood transfusions. And as soon as the operating room broke from a fractured hip, he'd explore Ramos's belly.

Chalmers would consult on the hypothermic woman after a head CT scan had been performed. Typical fucking Chalmers. Get the scan, and then he'll come in.

Anyway, she was in a coma. Voight would have to handle her until Chalmers arrived.

The paramedics told Cunningham the driver of the Porsche was severely burned. He knew damn well St. Mary's down the street would never accept a big body burn.

Scott's service at EMC would get the burn, too. Cunningham didn't know when.

Something had happened while the ambulance was in-bound, something with the guy's airway.

Ginger stuck her head out of the Trauma Room. "Bed One's pressure's just dropped to eighty!"

He jumped off the stretcher and ducked into the trauma room. Ginger had already ripped open a bag of intravenous fluid. Cunningham poked Victor Ramos's belly. "Keep a couple of bags of Lactated Ringers ahead until the blood Bank delivers."

"Tim should be doing this," Ginger complained. "What'll his excuse be this time?"

"Let it go, OK?"

"Yeah yeah, let it go my ass."

Ginger taped a second IV in place in Ramos's wrist. She leaned out of the trauma room and yelled down the corridor for respiratory therapy. Cunningham administered two more liters of IV fluid to Ramos. The guy's blood pressure nudged up. Five minutes later, it slid back into his boots once more.

Ramos had serious on-going internal hemorrhaging.

The blond nurse returned from x-ray with an orderly squeezing a bag attached to the hypothermic woman's endotracheal tube. Ginger grabbed the stretcher. "Artie, as long as you're playing intern, let's get these frozen clothes off this poor soul."

They attached her to a ventilator.

Outer layer of ice on the woman's blouse and slacks had begun to melt, leaving a watery sheen on the fabric, as if she'd emerged fully dressed from a shower. Ginger's scissors crunched as she sliced away rigid silk cloth, revealing cold red skin beneath. Cunningham noticed the brilliant glow of her skin, searching for areas of white frostbite.

"God, she's cold!" the blond nurse said, touching the woman's foot.

Ginger rubbed her fingers on her scrub dress to warm them before she divided the woman's bra and peeled each cup away from her breasts.

Cunningham stared at the woman's erect nipples. "Do we have more blankets?"

Ginger nodded toward the corner. "That's it."

The blond nurse took the scissors from Ginger, cut through the woman's belt. Then she slid the scissors down the front of each pant leg, slitting them open and peeling them back. As the fabric fell away Art Cunningham grunted his relief. Both of the woman's legs were intact.

Ginger removed the woman's frozen slacks. Chunks of ice clinging to the cloth thudded loudly when she discarded them in a barrel. They pulled on a johnny and tucked the woman's arms under two blankets.

Ventilator fired. Chest heaved against the blankets. For a fleeting moment Cunningham saw not a hypothermic patient in a coma, but a stunning woman.

“What's his pressure now?” Cunningham pointed to Ramos across the trauma room. The man's face was pale, sweaty.

“Still eighty over zip.”

“Hell, I've got to get him to the OR.” Cunningham watched Ginger's familiar form disappear from the room as he palpated the man's belly, feeling the same muscular resistance. Ramos winced. “How long was the knife?” Cunningham asked.

“How the fuck I know, man. You gonna cut me?”

Cunningham felt his patience shrink. “Oh, Yeah. I'm going to make that wound look like a scratch.”

“What the fuck's that suppose to mean?”

Cunningham ignored him. He flipped through the hypothermic woman's chart. They'd labeled her, Jane Doe.

The blond nurse bent between Bed Two's flexed legs, checking the woman's Foley catheter. “Not much urine.”

“Give her a bolus of LR, too,” Cunningham said.

Ginger returned and hung a second IV bag marked with a piece of tape and let it run full blast. “She needs a neurosurgeon”.

“Make damn sure Tim calls Chalmers after he's checked her out.”

Ginger shook her stethoscope at him. “I'm giving Voight two more minutes before I call Doctor Scott myself.”

“Don't.”

“Why not?”

“You know why not. I’ll deal with Voight.”

“Pussy.”

Cunningham turned back to the stretcher behind him and examined the woman on Bed Two again. He focused a penlight into her eyes. Her pupils gaped. When he lifted her knee and struck the tendon with his reflex hammer there was no response.

Shock -- a pause in the act of dying. A window of opportunity. A narrow chiasm of time during which to reverse life-threatening damage. After that golden period, Cunningham understood, the opportunity to save the patient evaporated and dissolved into chaos and recrimination.

“We’re still waiting for special thermometers from the ICU.” Ginger straightened from a low cabinet, cradling bags of IV fluid in her arms like firewood “This lady’s as cold as spring water, Artie.”

He glanced from Bed One to Bed Two, Pancho Villa lying next to Sleeping Beauty, the ice Princess.

Both were sick enough to die.

* * *

10:43 PM
ER

The paramedics described the nature of the burn victim's airway problem to Cunningham. It had developed while in-bound from Route 95 North. The victim, thirty-two year old driver of the Porsche, a lawyer from Boston, had sustained extensive burns to his face, chest, abdomen, and extremities. He also had a fractured left thigh bone and a mangled right leg.

The lawyer's passenger was Cunningham's hypothermic woman.

Must've been one spectacular fucking accident.

* * *

10:42 PM
ER

Without checking in with his chief resident, Tim Voight walked into the ER bay, a huge general purpose Emergency Room area cordoned off with hanging curtains. A nurse waved to him from the farthest bed next to the wall. An old man lay moaning on a stretcher.

"Over here, handsome."

"What've you got?"

"Eighty-two year old white male found on the floor of his apartment," the nurse read from the clipboard. "Volunteer from Meals on Wheels called the police when he didn't answer his doorbell."

"How long's he been without food or water?"

“Not as long as I’ve been without a good man.” She looked at Voight with a mischievous expression. “Anyway, the ER docs think he's got something wrong in his belly.”

Bending over the stretcher, Voight peeled back the man's johnny and examined the wrinkled belly skin covered with ugly moles. Voight pressed with his hand near the belly button.

The man winced. “Don't, please.”

“Sorry, but I need to know where it hurts, sir.” Voight spoke softly, plunging his fingers deeper into the man's abdomen. “Here?”

Voight wasn't certain of the diagnosis. But as sure as it was Saturday night, the old bugger had a case of peritonitis. You don't need a clear-cut diagnosis before cracking a belly. Perforated ulcer? Appendicitis? Voight knew something had punched the old goat's ticket.

“Tim, damn it!” His chief resident stood at the door to the big room.

“What’s up, Art?”

“We’ve got bigger problems in the trauma room.”

CHAPTER FIVE

10:54 PM, February 4th
Eastport Medical Center
ER

Two paramedics shared a joke as they eased a stretcher out of an idling ambulance backed up to Eastport Medical Center's Emergency Department Entrance. They snapped down support legs like the landing gear of a miniature jet and rolled a body wrapped in blankets toward the double doors. The face, recessed in the folds of a red blanket, didn't permit Voight more than a glimpse.

He inhaled the sick sweet smell of cooked flesh and gasoline.

It was the burn. But, there was something else going on.

During their radio transmission, the paramedics had made it clear they expected a doctor to greet the ambulance. What bothered Voight at the moment he surveyed the victim was not the burn – the guy had an adequate airway for the moment with oxygen flowing by mask – but rather the lack of an explanation for why *he* was needed in the ER right now. Why a standby doctor? It stank of more political bullshit.

What was so special about this patient? What a night. First, a screwball Vietnam vet. *Now this?*

A black Bentley roared up to the ambulance unloading area. It slid to a stop on asphalt caked with broken ice. From the driver's door a heavysset man charged out of the car wearing a dark suit and an open black overcoat. He left the car parked at an angle claiming two handicapped slots.

By the time the man had stormed up to Voight at the ER door, his wife had managed to open the passenger door. The burly man passed Voight without speaking. The woman slammed her door and stared at the Emergency entrance.

Her stance was lopsided. With effort she shuffled to the entrance. She wore an expensive looking fur coat and appeared to be in her late sixties. She stopped in front of Voight. Angry voices rose behind them above the background emergency room chatter.

Voight heard his boss's name bellowed by the Bentley owner.

"Better get him out of there," the woman said stepping closer to Voight. "My husband's a bully. Doctor, I'm Mrs. Ferrone."

Voight made the connection. "Tony's mother?"

Pieces of some as yet undeclared puzzle locked into place as Voight remembered his conversation with Tony Ferrone. Something about a younger brother visiting from Boston. Could the burn be Tony's brother?

"The ambulance?" Voight inhaled scotch. "Your other son?"

“Danny, yes.” She dabbed her eyes with a tissue. She turned and surveyed the corridor leading away from the entrance. “Is Ashley here, too?”

“Unfortunately,” Voight said. “She’s comatose.”

“Wendell?”

“You know Doctor Scott, ma’am?”

The paramedics had pushed Danny Ferrone’s stretcher into the big room they called the bay. Patients on stretchers and in wheelchairs looked on. Their families sat nearby on benches. Mrs. Ferrone walked past Voight and triggered the sliding doors. Without answering she started down the corridor toward her injured son. After several paces she stumbled, turning back to face Voight.

“My husband won’t allow Danny to be treated here.”

Voight rubbed his mustache. *Then why was I requested to wait for the damn ambulance?* “If we transfer your son before he’s fully resuscitated,” Voight said. “He could die en route.”

She swept her arm down the corridor to where her husband stood, overcoat open, hands on his hips, rocking on his heels. Voight studied the man’s powerful shoulders and contorted expression. The cashmere coat and three-piece suit cost more than Voight’s monthly salary.

“Convince *him*,” she challenged.

* * *

10:59 PM
ER

The Ferrones stood together in the bay tearfully begging their son to open his eyes. After several minutes, they fell quiet. A desperate stillness overcame them.

Danny's father leaned on the stretcher railing. He wiped his eyes. His wife held his arm and surveyed the damp sheets soiled with charcoal and road dirt.

Voight waited patiently until their silence was filled with the sounds of sick and frustrated victims in the other curtained cubicles. Only then did he approach the Ferrones. Voight coerced his way through Anthony Ferrone's belligerence. After awhile the father agreed to let Voight begin Danny's resuscitation in Wendell Scott's absence.

"Temporary measures only," the father dictated. "Transfer to Boston. That's the next step."

With Danny's parents looking on, Voight bent over the stretcher and selected patches of unburned skin on Danny's wrists and started two large bore IVs. When Voight removed the sterile cover from a Foley catheter kit and explained he needed to insert the tube into Danny's bladder, Mrs. Ferrone peeled her husband from the stretcher and walked him to the waiting room.

"My son's not staying in this rat hole," Danny's father bellowed in retreat.

Uncovering Danny Ferrone's burned chest, then his arms and legs, Voight discovered olive and black leather in place of soft pink skin. Danny's back was no better. Patches of unburned skin were tiny islands in a sea of charcoal. Voight swallowed a spasm of nausea. He slid his stethoscope over Danny's chest wall.

Voight stood back.

Cleaning the disc with an alcohol swab, he concluded Danny had suffered an inhalation injury as well – seared nasal hairs, facial burn with watery blebs, sooty sputum dripping from swollen lips, hoarse breaths. The mechanism was simple. While Danny was trapped inside the Porsche, he'd inhaled smoke.

No signs of neck trauma. *Thank God.*

Still, Voight ordered cervical spine x-rays. Maybe Scott would intubate Danny if his blood gases came back as bad as Voight expected. He darted out into the cooler corridor and yelled for a portable chest x-ray. Less than a minute passed before Danny's father returned.

“When will you transfer Danny to Mass General?”

Voight lied, “I'll start making arrangements.”

It was a major league burn. Danny was in shock, leaking body fluids through his burned skin like water poured through a cloth. His father was crazy. A transfer before Danny was resuscitated would mean certain death.

Anyway, it wasn't Voight's problem. He'd let his Chairman make that decision. His job was to resuscitate Danny, not make judgments about his disposition.

“Call Bartholomew Fitz,” fumed Anthony Ferrone, inches from Voight. “He's head of the burn unit at MGH.”

“Your son's too unstable for an immediate transfer.”

Danny's father wore a malicious smile. “Really?”

“It's a matter of safety.”

“Danny will be quite safe in Boston, sonny.”

* * *

11:20 PM

ER

Fifteen minutes later, Wendell Scott arrived. Voight observed the affection his boss had for Danny, distress overwhelming Scott as he surveyed the burns and smashed bones of his neighbor's son. Voight had never witnessed Scott come unglued, his boss and Danny Ferrone's father were disconsolate, hugging, in tears beside Danny's stretcher. The senior Ferrone bent over and spoke to his son. There was no response.

"We've got him drugged up," Wendell Scott explained, turning and leveling a hard look at Voight.

Surely Scott knew from the chart Danny had received no medications, no sedation. Surely he knew Danny's coma was a result of head trauma, like the frozen woman. Grabbing Anthony's arm, Scott led him to the waiting room where his wife sat alone. Voight drifted over to the door and watched Scott's animated conversation through a glass partition.

Scott was back in the ER bay within minutes. Voight stripped back Danny's sheet and blanket and detailed the extent of his burn wounds, front and back. He uncovered the fractured femur. Then he exposed Danny's crushed right lower leg.

Scott looked on in silence.

“Start dressings with Silvadene,” Scott said. “Keep his fluids running while you calculate his requirements, cross and type Danny for six units of blood, give antibiotics, get basic labs. Oh, and call ortho.”

“Of course, sir.”

He grimaced at Voight. “See what happens when a friend treats a friend? Go on, Tim. You know what to do.”

“Are you recommending transfer?”

“Christ no! The trip would kill him.”

Voight pulled the sheet and blanket over Danny’s body. To preserve body heat. It would be one of many issues Mr. Ferrone knew nothing about. “Can you convince Danny’s dad?”

Scott shrugged. “Go back to the trauma room and make sure Ashley is stable.”

“Ashley, sir?”

“Head injury? Hypothermic?”

“Who’s she?”

“Anthony Ferrone’s daughter-in-law.”

* * *

11:56 PM
ER

Leaving Danny with a nurse, Voight returned to the trauma room. Ashley Laughton had not moved since arriving in the Emergency Room. Limp and unresponsive

to Voight's merciless hypodermic needle jabbing, Ashley Laughton did not react with a muscle contraction from neck to toes. A spinal cord injury could block sensations from the upper body. But, her neck x-rays were normal. He'd made certain of that. And, of course, a massive head crunch could have caused all of the neurological findings he'd documented.

Voight delicately touched her frigid forehead below the stained bandage. What horrible injury was concealed by the gauze? An open skull fracture? Major underlying brain injury? You never know what parts of the interior an auto accident victim hits at the moment of impact.

Voight eyed the clock.

He painted antiseptic solution over the woman's belly skin and prepped her for a peritoneal lavage, a bedside test to determine if she had blood in her abdominal cavity. If so, it would be an absolute indication for exploratory abdominal surgery.

Ginger entered the trauma room. "Do you need a DPL kit?"

"Got one." Diagnostic peritoneal lavage. The test would give him an answer in a heartbeat. "Does the OR know she's next?"

"Art booked her to follow Ramos."

Ginger left him alone in the trauma room. The door remained open as he opened a sterile DPL kit and studied the woman's body from the blood soaked head bandage to her legs. With a major head smash like this, what did it matter if she had a ruptured liver or torn intestine? Something about the injury pattern told Voight she was going to die.

He nicked the skin above the woman's belly button with a scalpel, praying the abdominal fluid would come back clear as gin. Voight pushed a stiff plastic catheter through the woman's abdominal wall without local anesthetic. She had not budged when he cut into her frigid skin. The fluid exiting from her abdominal cavity was pure blood.

"Ughh," said someone behind him. "That's gross."

Voight withdrew the catheter from the woman's abdominal cavity. Next to him, Karen Kingsley, a Harvard medical student rotating on Scott's service, wore a short white coat and blue scrubs.

"You seen Chalmers?" he asked.

"Who's Chalmers?"

Before Voight could respond, Ginger appeared. "A Mr. Ferrone wants to see this patient." She motioned with her eyes to the corridor outside. "Says he knows her."

Voight eyed the cashmere shoulder standing in the corridor behind Ginger. "I'm doing a procedure."

The senior Ferrone said, "I'm a lawyer, sonny. I know all about patient confidentiality."

"Ginger, close the door."

Anthony's voice receded down the hall. "Insolent little bastard!"

Ginger closed the trauma room door, grinning. "My money says he chews out Doctor Scott. And you're next, Voight."

"You ready to exam her?" Voight pried open Ashley Laughton's eyelid. "Where's the family?"

“Not in the waiting room.” Ginger handed Voight an ophthalmoscope.

Voight leaned over and held Ashley’s right eyelid open with his thumb and forefinger. He squinted through the ophthalmoscope into Ashley’s pupils. “She’s got edema,” he said. “Brain’s swollen.”

He leaned on the bedrail for a long moment before running a finger along the edge of the head bandage. “Do we know what’s under here?”

“You really want to look before The Charmer gets here?” Ginger said, placing her hand on Voight’s shoulder.

Chalmers. The bastard who was trying to end Voight’s surgical career. He straightened up and patted Ginger’s hand. He went over to the door and locked it.

“What the hell. Just a peek.”

CHAPTER SIX

10:16 PM
Saturday, February 4th
Weather Service Forecasting Office
Washington, DC

He gave it to Larry Colt in Philadelphia. Then, he sent it to his old friend Homer Struthers in Beantown. It wasn't just that he knew them personally, it was always fun sharing the evolution of one of these things. Finally, he sent the beginning of it out on the NOAA Weather Wire and the NOAA Weather Radio, KHB -36 and KEC-92. He sent it out on RAWARC, the Radar Reports and Warning Coordination System and on NAWAS, the National Warning System. Then, he sent it out on the regional warning system for the Washington region and surrounding counties in Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware.

There was no doubt about it.

The precipitation would be snow. No rain with these numbers. So, the question was how intense would it be, for how long, and how much accumulation? The critical time frame for their area wouldn't be until tomorrow, Sunday. And probably into Monday. Tonight he'd *allude* to what was coming.

He composed his report and typed it up. 10:20 PM EST Saturday February 4th, 1978

Snow is expected to move to the coast during Sunday afternoon and continue into Sunday night. The areas most threatened by heavy snowfall will be eastern and central Maryland, Delaware, and eastern Virginia.

In the morning he'd beef up the warning.

Tomorrow, he'd tell the truth.

* * *

11:59 PM
Saturday, February 4th
Eastport Medical Center, ER

Voight hooked a finger under the bloody gauze wraps and gently lifted up on the stiff head bandage. He inspected her scalp. What he saw in the depths of the wound made his hands shake. A primal reflex fired a shot of pain through his gut like a fist jabbing him.

The top of woman's skull was shattered.

Voight slid his bloody bare finger along the edge of the head bandage, calculating the damage. Brain tissue was exposed deep in the scalp laceration. Chalmers would have to decompress her. The neurosurgeon would have to turn a skull flap and remove loose bone fragments, and when he was done with that job he'd have to clean up road dirt and somehow close her scalp.

"Want gloves, Tim?" Karen said.

The English neurosurgeon would tear Voight to shreds if he didn't know the extent of her head injury and what to do about it. Was there any place here to just call it quits? Any shred of wisdom in pursuing minimal treatment? *Or was he reluctant to take her to surgery because he was afraid of creating his sister all over again? Another veg?*

"Did you see brain tissue?" asked Karen Kingsley. She leaned closer to him. Her perfume mixed with the smell of gasoline.

Voight held the edge of the bandage. "That's cerebral cortex."

“Art thought he saw loose bone fragments,” Ginger said. Releasing the bandage, Voight donned sterile gloves and returned to the stretcher. He gently peeled off layers of gauze. Then, with a finger he probed a blood clot matted to the woman's cold wet hair. He knew the clot was stuck to the shattered skull, glued to tan brain tissue like icing on a cake.

“Doesn't look good.” Ginger leaned over the woman.

There was only one thing in the human body with that distinctive tan-gray color: brain. “What did you notice when you touched her, Karen?” Voight asked.

“Like she's cold. Real cold.”

Voight studied the woman for a long time, watching her chest rise and fall. He pulled down the blankets and peered at her pale abdominal skin and the patch of brown Betadine solution from the abdominal tap. Then he noted a gold bracelet and gold earrings contrasting obscenely with her pallid complexion. He became aware of her hips, her breasts.

The phone rang. Ginger grabbed it. “Scott wants you in the bay.”

Voight glanced at the woman. “Is her paper work completed?”

“Except for permission for surgery.”

Voight left the trauma room with the Harvard medical student trailing him. He absently eyed an unshaven street person huddled inside a frayed army coat, lying on a newly parked stretcher outside of the x-ray suite across from the bay. The man's chest heaved rhythmically. Voight stopped and held Karen Kingsley back. “Guy's gonna vomit. Get a nurse.”

The man with disheveled hair knotted over a ragged coat collar began retching, his chest heaving, the stench of partially digested food, stale booze, body odor reaching him. When the figure rolled over and gasped, it was a woman.

Voight was about to enter the bay when a rabid commotion broke behind him. A stretcher pushed by two paramedics swept into the bay. Half-upright on it, a man fought leather wrist restraints. He screamed, “You motherfuckers can't keep me here...I got my rights. You fucking bastards! I'm warning you...”

The paramedics parked the gurney in a bay room slot. Faded green curtains closed around the cubicle next to Danny Ferrone. The man's vulgarity exploded from behind the curtain. A nurse ran past Voight with a syringe. He envisioned the nurse injecting sedative through filthy jeans, deep into thigh muscle. No sterile technique. No informed consent. Watch for flailing boots. Street people hatching thick medical records. Voight wondered if the man on the stretcher differed fundamentally from Tony Ferrone. Maybe a Vietnam Vet without Ferrone family money?

A pediatric resident passed Voight and Karen Kingsley in the corridor. A tiny brown bear hugged the tubing of the stethoscope draped about her neck. “Saturday night,” she said.

“Com'on, Karen,” Voight led her across the bay to Danny Ferrone. He stopped several feet from the stretcher. Scott was adjusting a leg dressing. Danny's father stood across the stretcher, silent, eying Voight. When Scott finished the leg bandage, he motioned for Voight and the student to join him.

Scott faced Anthony Ferrone. “It’s more than just a burn, Anthony.” Scott placed a hand on the senior Ferrone’s shoulder. “His left leg’s broken, thigh bone. His right leg’s badly crushed.”

“What are we waiting for? Arrange for a helicopter.”

“Give me a few hours,” Scott pleaded, folding his arms. “It would be foolish to transfer Danny now.”

Voight watched Scott glance at Danny, his boss rummaging around in his vast store of surgical knowledge, teasing out the most compelling argument to dissuade Danny’s father from his son’s transfer. Scott needed Danny in Eastport overnight at the very least. They needed time to stabilize Danny’s blood pressure, pulse and improve his urine output. For starters, Danny needed liters of IV fluid.

And temporary skin cover. Voight had forgotten about that little stumbling block. Danny’s burns would leak like the proverbial sieve.

“The fractured femur, Anthony,” Scott began slowly, pointing to his own thigh. “Movement could stir up a fat embolus, chunks of debris from the marrow cavity. A sizable piece of fatty tissue could travel from his thigh to his lungs or brain. It could kill or paralyze Danny. We need time to stabilize the leg and replace his fluid losses.”

Anthony Ferrone glanced at Voight. “If it weren’t you telling me this, Wendell, I’d say no.” A moment passed, the senior Ferrone clasping his hands together, trapped in Scott’s logic. Then, in a soft voice, he said, “When he’s stable, get my Danny ready for Boston.”

“We need a reasonable time frame,” Scott insisted.

“I’d like Betty to see him,” Ferrone said, turning to leave. “Then we’ll visit Tony. That’ll give you time to do what you have to.”

“A few hours won’t be enough, sir,” Voight said.

“If your boy here can’t get it done, Wendell,” Anthony Ferrone said, motioning to Voight. “Get someone else on Danny’s case.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

12: 45 AM
Sunday, February 5th
Eastport Medical Center
ER

Scott met Voight and the medical student in the trauma room. Voight watched his Chairman scan the paramedic's report and perform a brief examination of Ashley Laughton. Voight called the operating room and was informed they would be ready for his patient in thirty minutes. Then Scott informed him that Anthony and Betty Ferrone had visited their eldest son on West Two and had returned to the ER. Having once again failed to arouse Danny, the Ferrones had left the Emergency Room.

Scott peered over the rim of his half-glasses. "Karen, why didn't they perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation on her at the scene?"

Kingsley hesitated. "They thought she was beyond help?"

"What?" Scott said, frowning. "A thirty year old beyond help?"

Voight observed annoyance flitter across his boss's face. Karen asked, "Sir, why no cardiac resuscitation?"

"You want to keep the cold blood in her arms and legs, away from her heart," Scott said. "Once you've got her core temperature warmed – tell her how to do that, Tim."

"First, give warm IV fluid."

"They did the proper thing by warming her slowly," Scott said, nodding. "Warm IV fluid, blankets. If that doesn't work, we'll put a catheter into her abdominal cavity and give her warm saline right into her belly. We're not withholding *any* treatment. What about cardiac bypass to warm up this woman?"

Karen shrugged. "I suppose..."

"Absolutely," said Scott. "In extreme cases. Osborne waves?"

"Something to do with hypothermia and her EKG?"

"Does she have them?" Scott pressed.

Voight looked up at the woman's EKG on the overhead monitor. "Seems a little academic doesn't it, sir?"

"It's never academic," Scott said, raising his voice. "Not for the first few hours of treatment. You, of all people should know that."

"Think she's got a chance?" Karen Kingsley asked.

"Everyone's got a chance," insisted the Chairman of the Department of Surgery. He looked down at Ashley Laughton.

Voight pictured the woman's brain caught in a dangerous squeeze play, a nasty blood clot trapped inside her unyielding skull, pressure inside her skull astronomical, wringing the very humanness out of her gray matter, leaving a tangle of neural fragments. It would leave the hypothermic woman a vegetable like his sister Dawn. *And he was stuck with Chalmers tonight.*

"When is a hypothermic patient considered dead?" Scott asked.

Voight thought his chief was being a bit too Socratic. Asking a medical student hard questions in the middle of the night? He stroked his mustache and waited.

"When they're flat line?" Karen Kingsley said.

"Nobody who's cold is declared dead until they're *warm* and dead," Scott declared. He threw a harsh glance at Voight.

Voight handed Scott the bag of bloody fluid from his abdominal tap of Ashley's belly cavity.

"Make sure Doctor Chalmers knows about this." Scott studied the bag. "When was her last menstrual cycle?"

"Wasn't anyone around to ask," Voight confessed.

"Get Danny up to the unit," Scott said. "And do a pregnancy test on Ashley."

* * *

1:16 AM
Wentworth Drive

Anthony Ferrone parked the Bentley beside his wife's BMW in the four-car garage. He trailed her into the house. Betty disappeared into the dining room to pour herself a scotch. He grabbed the portable phone and dialed a number by heart. He stepped down into the moist interior of a sun porch off the end of their Wentworth Drive home.

He closed the door behind him.

The phone rang. He calculated the number of hospital admissions his oldest son had endured since the war. Tony, beyond his father's advice. And now Danny, so terribly injured.

An official-sounding voice answered on the fifth ring. Flipping on the porch lights, Anthony felt moisture on his face. "This is Attorney Ferrone calling from Eastport."

“Your business, sir?”

“I wish to speak to the Governor.”

“The Governor is asleep. Would you care to leave a message?”

“Attorney Anthony Ferrone.” He let silence intrude. “I’m a close friend.”

“One moment, Mr. Ferrone.”

The melodic voice was unmistakable. “Anthony,” the Governor of Massachusetts answered. “How the devil are you, dear? Shall I expect a visit in the near future?”

“I wish it were that sort of a call, Maggie.” He lifted the insulated cover of the tub and felt a wave of moist air rush over him. “My son's been in an accident. He's suffered a terrible burn.”

A short pause ensued. “My word. I'm truly sorry. Tony's been through so much.”

“It's Danny.” His voice faltered. “He's in the ER at our little hospital. With a burn this big, Maggie, it would be quite hopeless to expect our local doctors, you know...they aren't used to this sort of thing. I wondered if you might call Shriners?”

“Mass General?” asked the Governor. “I do know Edgar Fitzgerald somewhat. A surgeon, I believe.”

Anthony closed the glass door behind him and left the stifling heat of the porch. He wiped sweat from his brow. “I imagine Danny’s equipment will fit in a helicopter.” Anthony had no idea if it would take an ambulance or a space ship to move his son.

In the pause that ensued, Anthony wondered if Maggie was thinking about her own boys. They'd played with Tony and Danny as kids. Finally she said, "I'll do everything I can."

"You know I'm grateful, Maggie." Anthony peered out the window.

Gwen Scott was walking up his driveway.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1:16 AM
Sunday, February 5th
Wentworth Drive, Eastport, MA

The Ferrone's brick colonial sat on a cul de sac with untrammeled snow extending from the shrubs next to the house to the plowed street, a massive structure with flanking wings and twelve-over-twelve windows. Gwen Scott trudged up to the front door between banks of hard January snow. There were no snowman, no forgotten sleds, no snow fortress. Pristine, untrammeled snow. A readable sign that Anthony and Betty's grown children Tony and Danny had not borne them grandchildren.

Gwen huddled inside her parka and drew the scarf over her cheeks, her nostrils tingling. She rang the doorbell. Her heart thumped in her ears. She prayed Betty wasn't fall-down-pass-out drunk.

A rustling noise, a soft curse. The door cracked open.

"Thank God you're here." Betty Ferrone wore a navy blue woolen suit, a white silk blouse and a string of pearls from Olympian oysters. On her feet she wore oversized fur slippers Gwen assumed belonged to Anthony. Gwen inhaled scotch.

Inside, Gwen pulled off her scarf. They hugged. Mothers. She caught vagueness in Betty's expression. Her neighbor took her coat and stumbled to the front closet. They sat on a mauve patterned couch facing each other.

"I'm so sorry, Betty," Gwen said.

The glass came up to meet the tears. Betty swallowed a slug of scotch, plunked the glass on the coffee table. An errant ice cube rattled across the glass surface.

Anthony appeared in the doorway. "Gwen, thanks so much for coming." He crossed the living room and bent and kissed her on the cheek. "Danny's badly banged up."

"Is Tony alright?" Gwen asked.

Anthony straightened his tie and smoothed his dark suit with his palms. He moved to the front entrance and pulled on his overcoat. "For the moment our concern is Danny."

"Wendell mentioned burns," said Gwen.

"Eastport isn't the place for him." Anthony's smile grazed her. "No offense, Wendell runs a good little hospital, but it isn't Mass General."

Gwen nibbled on her fingernail. *A good little hospital.* Not the first time Anthony had disparaged her husband's teaching program.

"Give Danny our love," Gwen said as he left.

Betty stood. "Be right back."

When she returned Betty carried a glass of white wine and a fresh glass of scotch. She placed them on the table with napkins. "Would you like a snack, dear?"

Gwen shook her head. "Exactly what happened tonight?"

Plucking a tissue from her sleeve, Betty wiped her eyes,. Took a gulp from her glass and swirled ice cubes to assess the damage. She set the glass on the coffee table. “Danny apparently lost control of his care...burned a large area of...of his body, broken leg too. Senior’s picking up Danny’s Uncle Silvio. They don't want me down there tonight.”

“We’ll call Wendell for an update later.” Gwen’s neighbor didn't become taciturn obnoxious until she was ready to pass out.

“Danny and Ashley were going to tell us something this weekend,” Betty said. “She's not from money, God knows. A knockout. Quite intelligent. I think Danny was going to announce wedding plans.”

Gwen stared at Betty. “Imagine, little Danny engaged.”

Gathering up the glasses after more small talk, Betty stood. She seemed to remember something, then blinked away the thought. Betty disappeared into the kitchen. Gwen heard the refrigerator spit out ice cubes. A few crashed to the floor. Scotch kissed the rim of Betty’s glass when she returned.

Betty handed Gwen a full Riedel glass.

“Thanks.” Gwen sipped her chardonnay. Anthony would never consider keeping anything in his basement cellar easily obtained by the average working stiff.

Betty glanced off toward the kitchen. “Ashley’s father died years ago. Why would a mother push her daughter into figure skating?”

“Tony's admission was a surprise.”

Betty shrugged. "It's been going on too long. Thank God for your dear Wendell and the Vietnam Study Group. It's the only time Tony gets to process his demons...when his brother's not around to listen."

Gwen knew Tony had seen a lot of action. She and Betty had traced the map of Vietnam in the Ferrone kitchen with each letter Betty received from Southeast Asia. As Tony's unit moved and engaged the enemy, Betty pushed another colored pin into the map. When Tony signed up for his third tour, Betty ripped the map down.

"How will Tony react to his brother's injuries?"

Betty's eyes wandered, found Gwen's. "Tinkle time."

Betty waddled down the hall off to the right and Gwen stood, stretched her legs, circling the room, examining reproductions of two Monets and a Degas in a study. Anthony wouldn't know the difference between a Degas and a dego, but Betty appreciated the Impressionists.

The toilet flushed down the hall. Betty belched, passed gas.

"Danny' a good driver," Betty said, shuffling between the coffee table and the couch, swaying. "Maybe a...truck ran them down."

Gwen slid over to Betty on the couch and took the glass from her, placing it on the coffee table. "Let's get you to bed."

A frown skated across her neighbor's plethoric face. "What if Danny's so bad..."

Betty wept quietly. After a moment, she struggled to her feet. She tottered in the cramped space between the coffee table and the couch. Suddenly off balance, she lost her footing and pitched forward, falling across the coffee table.

“Betty?” Gwen jumped up.

The empty scotch glass seemed to hang in the air for a moment, then rolled across the rug. Betty slithered off the table and dropped to the living room rug.

“Betty?” Gwen jumped up.

Betty's glasses, half-off, lay crumpled under her face, her cheeks pressed against the rug, lips distorted. She groaned. Gwen stepped out from behind the coffee table and kneeled. She slipped the bent glasses from beneath the angle of Betty's heavy jowl.

Gwen rolled the heavy woman on to her back. Betty opened her eyes. She drew in a deep breath and began to hiccough. The old nurse in Gwen kicked into action. She pushed Betty onto her side. Gulping air Betty rolled her eyes. She vomited on the rug. Gwen held Betty's head up as the stench reached her.

It took Gwen an hour to get Betty's suit off, clean her up and deposit her in bed, naked. She doused the rug with a full bottle of club soda. The stench improved with rug cleaner.

Later, in the disorienting hours before dawn, Gwen poured herself another full glass of Anthony's best Chardonnay. She decided to sleep on the couch. Before pulling an afghan over her shoulders, she turned up the heat and dialed the hospital from a kitchen wall phone.

The operator informed her Doctor Scott was in the OR.

Was her husband operating on Danny?

Or Ashley?

CHAPTER NINE

1:25 AM
Sunday , February 5th
Eastport Medical Center
ER

Voight felt his scrotum tighten when the neurosurgeon's English accent drifted down the hall and stopped outside the trauma room. A knot in Voight's gut pinched him like a surgical clamp. The trauma room door flung open.

“Ah, you.” Bruce Chalmers raised his hands as if deflecting a blow.

Chalmers led Ginger into the room. He wore a pin-stripped suit over polished black laced shoes. His cloths contrasted with the green curtains. Chalmers stood beside Ashley's stretcher and held his hands behind his back, expectant. “Well, get on with it.”

Voight was determined to keep his mouth shut. Just deal the facts of the case. No matter how much he might be provoked, he'd stick to the case. "This is a thirty-odd year old white female with an open skull fracture and probable subdural hematoma."

"I don't imagine the chart is within bloody walking distance, is it?"

Voight picked up the thin ER chart marked *Ashley Laughton* and handed it to the neurosurgeon. Chalmers pretended to grasp the chart.

Voight held onto to it. *Oldest goddamn cheap trick in the book.*

Chalmers, waiting for the resident to release it, would let it go as if he hadn't had time to grasp it. The chart would hit the floor and fall apart, scattering sheets of paper. Chalmers would deride the resident on his hands and knees retrieving and shuffling mismatched paper.

Voight gripped the metal chart.

Chalmers brushed him with a look of contempt. He ripped the chart from the resident's grasp. "Any other trauma, Ms. St. Onge?"

"Just her," Ginger said, her gaze on the hypothermic woman lying immobile on the stretcher.

Chalmers smirked. "Did our cervical spine expert here evaluate her?"

"She's ready for the OR," Ginger said. "If you agree."

Voight felt his hands curling, some atavistic neural circuit begging to convert them to knots, as if he might be permitted to momentarily lose control and smash the son-of-a-bitch in his white pearlies.

Chalmers didn't seem to notice.

Ginger glared at Voight, forcing him to step back.

Chalmers read the chart, ignoring them. He was about Voight's height at six foot one, silvery white hair combed straight back with menacing blue eyes and a rigid carriage. The dark pinstripe suit was immaculately tailored, nothing like Voight's off-the-rack navy suit.

Chalmers bent to examine the comatose woman's eyes. Ginger handed him an ophthalmoscope. Focusing the light, Chalmers peered through the woman's pupils, accessing visible retinal arteries, searching for edema and tiny hemorrhages, careful to not let his French cuffs touch the frozen woman's skin.

Voight watched with a grudging sense of respect as Chalmers perform a thorough examination -- reflexes, muscle testing, pupils, check for Doll's eyes, test for a response to painful stimulation. No wasted movements. When he got to the head bandage, Chalmers glanced briefly beneath the stained gauze. "Bloody awful."

Voight looked at him. "Open head wound."

"Quite."

Moving to the middle of the trauma room, Chalmers unbuttoned his suit coat. A scowl emerged and gum darting meekly about his mouth. Voight assumed it was a skill Chalmers had mastered in order to chew while wearing a surgical mask. Neither then nor now did the gum conceal the thin reek of bourbon.

"Other injuries?" Chalmers shook his head. "Abdominal trauma?"

Voight held up the plastic bag full of bloody fluid. "Her belly tap."

Chalmers hooked his thumbs into his vest pockets. “Doctor, am I to divine the significance of that collection of body fluid?”

“It's a positive tap, blood from her abdominal cavity.” The arrogant turd knew what Voight was showing him. “Probably her spleen. Left-sided head trauma, abrasions on her left flank, two left rib fractures...looks like nine and ten. Right over the spleen.”

“You're quite certain? The spleen, is it?”

Don't back down a voice in his head begged him. *Don't fucking back down.*

“Relatively sure.”

The neurosurgeon walked past Voight. He circled the stretcher like a vulture and stood at the foot of the bed. He folded birdlike arms and studied Ashley Laughton's covered form.

Voight tossed the peritoneal lavage bag onto the counter top. Ginger called for an orderly to clean the floor. The ventilator fired breaths into Ashley Laughton's lungs. EKG monitor chirping a slow heart rate. Chalmers scribbled his opinion in her chart.

A few minutes later, an orderly tapped on the door, then entered. Ginger pointed to the floor. He swirled a mop over dried blood.

“Cervical spine films?” Chalmers said, reading Voight's mind, a hint of amusement.

Voight stared at the neurosurgeon, his breath suspended between inspiration and exhalation. *Say it.* “C-spine's negative. She's hypothermic.”

“Do you think the cold protected her brain, Doctor?” Chalmers stood perfectly still, gum in motion, lips ambivalent, favoring disgust.

“Frankly, I think she's as close to being dead as she can be.” Let the son-of-a-bitch challenge me on my prognosis. No one, not even Chalmers, would know for hours how bad her brain had been damaged.

Chalmers shifted his weight. “Ms St. Onge, please call the OR.”

“We're warming her slowly,” Voight said. Chalmers wouldn't know how to manage a hypothermic cat if it fell into his bourbon.

“What *is* her temp?” Chalmers smiled as if Voight were a child.

Ginger answered. “Our clinical thermometers don't register low enough to tell. Art's got some special thermometers in the ICU.”

“So she's frigid, eh?” said Chalmers. “What's her Glasgow Coma Scale?” The neurosurgeon was referring to a standard neurological assessment tool. Sixteen normal. Low numbers bad.

“Six.” Nearly dead. Morgue numbers.

“A possible subdural,” Chalmers said. “On her CT scan it wasn't possible to distinguish between a subdural and a superficial intracerebral hemorrhage, is that correct?”

“You've seen the CT?” Chalmers knew the results of the head CT scan Art Cunningham had ordered. The bastard had gone to x-ray before coming to the ER. Chalmers was playing with him, again. “You chaps must explore the abdomen, eh? Did Wendell confirm?”

“We'll double team her.”

The three of them stood in silence, Ginger listening with a phone against her ear. Chalmers moved to the door. “Is she cross-matched for at least six units of blood?”

“Done,” Voight said.

“Do you have an operative permit?”

“Mrs. Laughton's on her way here.”

“It's imperative we not waste time with this poor soul.” Chalmers glanced at Ginger. He held the trauma room door open, ignoring Voight. “Nurse, call the family at home and obtain permission immediately.” He slid his jaw sideways. He actually smiled at Voight. An iceberg radiated more warmth.

Chalmers strode out of the trauma room.

CHAPTER TEN

1:40 AM,
Saturday, February 5th
Eastport Medical Center
ER Lounge

Voight sat beside the cop and waited for him to regain his composure. The Massachusetts State trooper hunched forward on the ER lounge couch and deep-breathed. His crisp blue uniform was stark contrast with road salt stains on his shoes. The cop, Philip Kellogg, mopped his forehead with a crumpled tissue. Voight remembered sleeping on the worn couch during endless nights on trauma. He'd been a fourth year medical student during a month elective to help him decide if he wanted to do his surgical residency at this Harvard affiliate program north of Boston.

A battered radio oozed the Commodores *Three Times a Lady*.

Kellogg forced himself to deep-breath, as if he were attempting to inhale the night.

“You OK, Phil?” Voight leaned closer.

Kellogg's hands trembled, cradling a second Styrofoam cup of coffee. “I pulled her out before we got to him.”

“We're doing her tonight,” Voight explained. “She's busted something in her belly, too.”

The trooper nodded, swallowed a mouthful of coffee, hunched over, the Styrofoam cup in both hands. “Never seen anything like it, Tim.”

“Was she completely submerged?” Stories about kids surviving intact after thirty, forty minutes in frigid water intrigued him. What about an adult? “Was her head under water?”

Kellogg pawed at a drop of coffee beaded on his dark tie and eased the coffee cup onto the floor between his legs. He held up his hands. “Look at me. I'm still shakin'.”

Tell me about it. And Voight heard the dreadful sound. It came back to him over and over. The snap of dry branches. The face of a dead farmer in a mahogany casket.

Voight gulped his coffee.

Kellogg said, "She never twitched, nothin'."

"Was she breathing?"

The trooper's cup shook all the way to his lips. "We didn't get squat from her...you know, vitals," he said, swallowing. "She was cold. I figured, dead. The fuck do I know."

The lounge radio droned louder with a rip from *Saturday Night Fever*. Voight got up and turned it off. "What can you tell me about the mechanics of the accident?"

Kellogg got up and wandered to the refrigerator, added a slug of milk to his coffee. He said he'd been in his patrol car at the end of his shift when the call came in. Voight recognized the section of I-95 North past Revere. "I was technically off duty."

"Were they both inside the Porsche?"

"Just the burned dude."

"And you were alone?"

"Some guy stopped to help, puked all over himself when he saw the burned guy. Flecks of shit on his beard. So I called for back-up. I go down to the car...windshield's all fucked up. That's when I remember the kid from Pittsfield. Mustang Kid. What a fucking mess *that* was."

Voight tried not to groan out loud. He casually eyed his watch. He waited.

"Rookie year there was this accident with a bunch of drunk kids...Christmas. We'd got a nice snowfall like everyone wanted, but these kids got to boozing, cracked up

a Mustang on the pike right at the Lee exit. I almost flipped my turkey dinner. It was the windshield I remember. The fucking windshield. Shit, the kid couldn't see through the salt and road crap. Wipers broken. Anyway, when I saw the Porsche's windshield..."

"Shattered?"

"Like it'd been smashed with a sledge hammer."

Voight leaned forward. "The woman probably struck the windshield before she was...where did you say you found her?"

"I didn't."

Voight waited, not daring to peek at his watch again. Should've been in the operating room fifteen minutes ago. Cunningham and Chalmers would be prepping the Laughton woman, screaming for Voight's ass.

"Anyway, she's in the gully," Kellogg said. "Underwater 'bout fifteen feet away from the car. Last week's melt? She's in it."

"Was there much blood at the scene?"

"Naw, just a goddamn hand sticking out of the slush. Man, the water was fucking freezing. Her body looked like a piece of ice, just a frozen fucking hump. So I pulled her outta the water. She looked dead."

Voight hoisted his coffee, eyed his watch. "No pulse?"

Kellogg's eyes narrowed. "I'm no doctor, Tim."

Voight scribbled some notes. He got up and called the OR. They wanted him ten minutes ago. "You found him alive inside the Porsche?"

“Slumped over the wheel,” said Kellogg in a monotone. “Like he was dead. I woke him up. By now my fucking feet are soaked, frozen stiff as a midnight dick. Man, he was all covered with soot, car smoking like a barbeque. Kellogg finished his coffee in one swallow. “Smelled like a pig roast down there.”

“They say his father’s a big name lawyer.”

“Paramedics got real serious when they saw his name.”

“Thanks for your help, Phil.” Voight shook the trooper’s hand.

“What happened to that 'porter Rican from the flats?”

“Went to surgery a couple of hours ago.”

“No kiddin’?” Kellogg shook his head. “What a fucking night. “Some kind of a looker that frozen broad, huh?”

“I remember her in the Olympic trials, a skater.”

“Think she's got a chance, Tim?”

“Naw.”

* * *

1:42 AM
West Two

Tony Ferrone closed his door and lay back on his hospital bed. Alone finally, he flipped opened a paperback novel, his place marked by a frayed '74 Boston Gardens Celtics ticket. He'd had some sort of prescience, a premonition. He was sure of it.

Because he'd marked that page weeks ago, long before his brother's accident. How had he known?

Tony had planned to read the passage to Danny. It would be his last attempt to explain what had happened to him in the claustrophobic Vietnam jungle ten years ago. His cleansing. His confession for having committed a crime.

Resting an elbow against the pillow, Tony read out loud,
"...he stands still a moment. He has made up his mind. We look around -- but we are no longer alone. A little group is gathering, from the shell-holes and trenches appear heads. We get a stretcher. Kat shakes his head. 'Such a kid---' he repeats it. 'Young innocents.'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1:59 AM
Sunday, February 5th
Eastport Medical Center

Art Cunningham ripped down his mask, snapped off his gloves, and searched the OR corridor outside Room Four. Why wasn't Voight down here with the hypothermic woman? Christ! Voight's probation had transformed him into a study in paranoia. *Not too many chances left to impress Wendell Scott, buddy.*

Back inside the operating room Cunningham found Ramos struggling to awaken from Stockwell's concoction of anesthetic gases. The liver laceration from the knife assault had penetrated his belly wall below the right rib cage. Cunningham had sutured the injury, leaving a drain, letting the intern, Duane Paine, close the belly.

It would take Stockwell a few minutes to restock his anesthesia machine and put the hypothermic woman asleep. Cunningham dialed the ER and asked for Ginger. Interesting, he reflected, if the attacker's knife had sliced into Ramos's abdomen an inch to the left, the feisty little bastard might've died on the street.

Stockwell lifted the stretcher's side rails. He pushed his patient out of Room Four. "Another triumph for modern surgery," the anesthesiologist said as he passed Cunningham.

Someone picked up the ER phone. "Art? Ginger's left."

"Any messages for me?"

The ER nurse who replaced Ginger spoke said, “Tim’s wondering about the head injury. Says she's brain dead. He called the morgue.”

Cunningham flinched involuntarily as if someone had sucker punched him in the gut. “Did you say...*the morgue?*”

“Patient’s blood pressure wasn't responding to our fluid challenges. And, of course, she's pretty cold. Tim says with that skull fracture and brain injury—“

“—for Chrissakes! Wait a minute!” He pressed his eyeballs and his world turned black. When Cunningham released the pressure on his eyes, Mona was standing in front of him.

“We're ready for you,” Mona said. “Doctor White's got a fractured ankle. Says he'll go before you if you're patient's not here in five minutes.”

To the ER he said, “Hold a sec.” Then, to Mona, “That goddamn fool wants to bump a multiple trauma for a friggin’ ankle?” He turned his back on Mona and watched the scrub tech, Celina, work a brush over her forearms at the nearby sink. He whispered into the phone, “Voight pronounced her brain dead?”

“Tim waited until Chalmers had left,” the ER nurse said. “You know how it goes with Tim, considering every angle.”

You know how it goes with Tim. Cunningham watched Celina’s elbows drip, hands up as she walked into Room Four.

“She’s thirty-two years old!” Cunningham snorted. “Get her up here, *now!*”

* * *

Cunningham dictated a detailed operative note on Victor Ramos and slumped onto the couch in the OR lounge across from Bruce Chalmers. Preoccupied with the financial section of *The Boston Globe*, Chalmers ignored Cunningham. Within minutes, Karen Kingsley walked in and joined Cunningham on the couch.

“So, Doc?” Cunningham asked. “What’s with the old geezer in the ER bay?”

“Tim says perforated appendix.”

“Do they teach you at Harvard to formulate independent opinions?”

She smiled, embarrassed. “Guess I agree with him. Most of the pain’s in his right lower abdomen.”

“Think the man could have anything else?”

The electric doors at the end of the hall opened. An orderly pushed the hypothermic woman down the corridor toward them. He handed Mona units of blood while reciting numbers on the frigid packs.

“Could be a perforated ulcer.” The medical student trailed Cunningham down the operating room corridor. “Maybe diverticulitis.”

Voight joined them from the men’s locker. Cunningham challenged him on the sluggish IV rate Voight had ordered for the hypothermic patient with both a head and a belly hit. “Treat shock first, Doctor Voight,” Cunningham said, standing at the OR desk. “*Then* worry about the patient’s squash.”

“Probably won’t matter anyway.”

“That why you contacted the morgue?” Cunningham approached the tall resident and gently grabbed Voight’s scrub top. “Tim, that son-of-a-bitch Chalmers will crucify you if you give him *any* excuse. Now, go on and get your patient ready for surgery.”

Cunningham went to the scrub sink outside Room Four. He opened a scrub pack as the student came out of the room. “You OK?”

“It's like I just saw her for the first time.” Karen bit her lip, her mascara in rivulets. “I examined her in the ER with Tim earlier, just, you know, an examination, reflexes, eyeballs, twitches, whatever. But just now, I saw a person lying there.”

“You're trained to evaluate a trauma victim,” Cunningham explained. “To see a piece of meat on a stretcher, if you’ll excuse the brutal reality of it. Out of the blue you see the face, the hands. It's the tap root into your humanity.”

“She’s so close to my age.”

“Inside that broken skull lives a real person, someone who may share your feelings, your values. Maybe she's applying to grad school or planning her wedding.”

“I feel so stupid.”

"Never feel stupid about showing compassion."

“She's beautiful, you know?”

“She hit your ‘person’ button in your psyche. It takes awhile to learn to become more circumspect.”

Cunningham exhaled. Yeah, like the times in Qui Nhon when I got so stinking puke-your-guts-out drunk I lay with one boot on the floor of the hooch and a flashlight focused on the canvas roof so I would know which fucking end of my filthy world was

up and which end was down. So I could drink myself into oblivion to wash the stench of flesh from my hands and the stink from my nostrils of young grunts with no legs and no arms and a gut pile for a belly button.

Chalmers walked up to the scrub sink tying on a mask. “Arthur, who will assist me?”

“Paine.”

Chalmers pursed his lips. “An intern, Arthur?”

“Yes, a good intern.”

“Haven't you a more senior resident for me? This will be bloody touchy.”

Whole fucking case is going to be bloody bloody. “All I've got.”

“Yes, well that Foisey fellow's a second year?”

“Foisey's backing up ICU. And the floors.”

“She's a friend of Doctor Scott's,” Chalmers pressed.

“No one understands the number of bodies we have to work with better than Wendell Scott.”

Chalmers fired Cunningham a look of disdain and disappeared into Room Four.

CHAPTER TWELVE

2:36 AM
Sunday, February 5th
OR

Voight crossed to the middle of Operating Room Four. He found a small space on the crowded floor between the operating table and two tables of sterile instruments. Deep-breathing, he inhaled his mask against his teeth while drying his hands with a sterile towel.

Before him, Ashley Laughton's naked form angled on the narrow table, propped up to permit Chalmers access to her skull. The neurosurgeon would stand behind Ashley's head. Her belly was horizontal for the abdominal surgeons.

Mona, the circulating nurse, checked the Foley catheter in Ashley's bladder, making certain urine dripped into a bag under the OR table. Chalmers and the intern, Davis, scrubbed in silence at the sinks outside the room. The only sound was water splashing off the scrub sinks. No banter between surgeons.

Donning gloves from a small sterile table, Voight dipped a sponge mounted on a hemostat into iodine disinfectant and painted Ashley Laughton's belly. The anesthesiologist applied antibiotic ointment to her corneas and taped her bruised eyelids closed.

"The operative and anesthesia permission forms are on the front of the chart," Voight said. "Her mother's in the ICU waiting room."

Mona bent over the suction bucket. "Put this between the teams?"

"Favor Chalmer's reach," Voight said. Stockwell squeezed a dose of muscle relaxant into the woman's IV tubing. He checked connections between the endotracheal tube and the corrugated tubing attached to his machine. Overhead, a monitor recorded the pulse rate, EKG waveform, body temperature, and oxygen saturation.

"Did Messenger Service bring the blood?" Voight asked Mona.

"In the 'frig." She recited a preop sponge count with the scrub tech, Celina. Instruments, sponges and needles were recorded on Mona's clipboard before either team cut skin.

Ashley's arms were spread out on arm boards like a Christian icon. He removed the gloves and crossed the room. Celina held out his gown. Voight slipped into the arms of the gown as Bruce Chalmers strode into the room, his arms dripping soapy water.

Chalmers accepted a towel without comment. He dried his hands and forearms with a swift, practiced routine. "Do you have my razor?"

Mona stood before him with a Gillette. He donned gloves and accepted the razor without comment. Chalmers began the ceremony of shaving Ashley Laughton's torn

scalp, his menacing eyes darted about the room, cataloging the back table laden with instruments. And Mona's buttocks as she bent to connect the cautery.

Chalmers's razor strokes avoided exposed skull fragments. A plastic-lined bucket beneath the headrest caught gobs of wet, matted honey-colored hair dropping from Chalmer's razor. The neurosurgeon swept Ashley's bare scalp with a finger.

A pall of sadness came over Voight, a mixture of dread and despair, studying her body, taking in the globular breasts rising with each breath of the anesthesia machine, her flat abdomen where they'd leave a vertical scar. He experienced something else as well. *Anger*. And he knew why. Seeing Ashley Laughton, he imagined his sister Dawn.

What the hell are we doing here?

Chalmers tossed the razor into a bucket. It clanked against the stainless steel and rattled to the bottom. "Bone wax, Mona?"

"Yes, Doctor," Mona said. "In the room."

Voight rolled the small prep table into the corner. Bone wax was a combination of beeswax and antiseptic Chalmers would push into the broken skull to stop marrow bleeding. Bonewax. Something else for The Charmer to bitch about.

"My head lamp?" Chalmers peeled off his prep gloves, discarded them into the bucket.

"I'll get it," Mona said. She left the OR.

"Celina, make certain I'm not crowded." A piece of gum snapped behind Chalmer's mask.

Celina slid a doe-eyed glance at Voight. "Yes, sir."

Chalmers surveyed the room. His eyes settled on Voight. Then, Chalmers moved to Celina for his gown. “Do you have the bipolar cautery?”

“Yes, Doctor,” Celina said.

Mona hurried back into the room carrying Chalmer's headlamp. She placed the plastic halo with a small light over the neurosurgeon's cap on his forehead, keeping her body away from his.

“Ready Bruno?” Chalmers asked the anesthesiologist.

“Not quite.” Stockwell added a layer of tape to the arterial line he had inserted into Ashley Laughton's wrist artery moments earlier. The rigid plastic tube jutted out of the artery. A proverbial double-edged sword, the catheter permitted a quick read of sudden blood pressure changes. But, if it ever fell apart unnoticed beneath the drapes, the woman would lose a massive volume of blood in seconds.

“Bloody well isn't enough room in here,” Chalmers complained. “Celina, move your Mayo stand to the feet. These chaps won't mind.”

Celina slid the Mayo stand a little and re-aligned her instruments on it. Mona donned sterile gloves and began prepping the woman's shaved scalp with a nylon scrub brush, creating swirls of soap, avoiding the laceration. Rivulets of golden fluid ran from the woman's scalp down over her neck muscles.

“It's taking longer to prepare her for surgery than to do this bloody case,” said Chalmers to the back table. “Towel clip, Miss!”

Duane Paine, the intern, sauntered into the crowded room. He accepted his towel and moved to the far corner out of the way of Cunningham and Chalmers.

* * *

2: 50 AM
Operating rooms

Each surgeon squared off his anatomic territory, Chalmers securing a patch of torn scalp, Cunningham squaring towels over Ashley's belly. After throwing several laparotomy sheets over her body, two rectangles of prepped skin reminded them a living human lay buried beneath the layers of sterile drapes. Without warning a heavy metal abdominal retractor slithered from Celina's grasp and rattled to the floor.

“Be careful with *my* instruments, if you please.” Chalmers peered over his half-glasses. “Does Wendell expect to scrub, Arthur?”

A senior Attending surgeon always scrubbed with the surgical residents. Wendell Scott had given Cunningham more leeway because of his Vietnam experience. “Doctor Scott's in the building,” Cunningham said, probing the rib margin draped into the field, searching for anatomic landmarks. Voight watched him, planning the incision, deciding for himself what he would do if Art Cunningham handed him the scalpel.

““Knife,” Chalmers said. “Be ready, Miss.”

Cunningham walked past Paine and positioned himself across from Voight. He looked over his mask. “Go ahead, Tim.”

The two surgical teams bent to their work.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

3:18 AM
Saturday, February 5th
OR

“Stay focused,” Cunningham said in a soft voice. “Knife to Tim.”

He was in his element now. He glanced up at the anesthesiologist. “OK, sir?”

“Go,” said Stockwell.

Voight moved with catlike motion. The abdominal skin separated as the blade swept from Ashley's breastbone to above her pubic hair. Blood welled up from in wound. The muscles not yet in view, fat guarded the deep layers. Voight tattooed oozing vessels

with the cautery, leaving a signature of black burn points like ants along the cut. Burning human flesh odor rose from the belly wound and the circular incision

Voight glanced sideways. Wisps of smoke rose from Chalmer's cautery, clots dripping onto the floor at Paine's feet. The neurosurgeon teased away bits of scalp tissue, advancing into the shattered skull.

"Focus damnit," Cunningham said, tapping Voight's knuckles with a clamp.

Without warning, Chalmers bellowed Duane Paine's name. Voight looked at Cunningham, then to the head of the table. Paine was pressing the cautery stick into Chalmers gloved hand.

"Did I ask for this?" The neurosurgeon's hand went limp. The plastic stick fell out of his grasp, rolled off the drapes and dropped to the floor with the weight of its wire.

"Doctor, did I *ask* for the cautery?"

Voight looked up, caught Paine's stare.

Chalmers turned back to the skull and dabbed at the clots clinging to the ring of hemostats hanging from the scalp. "Don't think for me, p-l-e-a-s-e." Chalmers dragged out the last word like a rubber band. "Replace the contaminated cautery unit, Mona."

It was at this moment that Karen Kingsley entered Room Four with her arms dripped soapy water. Voight watched her take in the crowded scene, hesitating at the door, sensing the tension.

Voight dropped his gaze to the belly and worked the knife deeper into the abdominal muscle layers. Reaching for the cautery, he glanced over to the door.

The Harvard student was gone.

“Suction!” Chalmers said at the head of the table.

Voight caught Paine's movements. The intern handed over the suction to Chalmers keeping his hands away from the open wound and eyes fixed on the woman's scalp.

“Is this thing on?” Chalmers waved the suction.

“Mona?” Paine asked.

“No, no...nooo, Doctor,” Chalmers interrupted. “I will ask about the equipment. Your task is to hand me what I need. Neurosurgery is a complex specialty. Unlike hemorrhoids and colostomies.”

Cunningham eyed Voight. “Open the peritoneum.”

“Forceps.”

Voight sensed more than saw Mona bending over the suction machine. Saw Chalmers focus on the circulating nurse's buttocks again. How many times would the bastard have trouble with it?

“Scissors to me,” Voight said, head bent over the incision. “You got the suction, Art?”

They both grasped the velvet lining of the abdominal cavity with forceps. “Not too deep,” Cunningham said, tapping the peritoneal tissue with the suction tip where he wanted Voight to cut. As Voight slit open the peritoneal sac with the long-handled scissors, blood clots gushed out onto the sterile drapes.

“Something's busted,” Voight said. “That's a shitload of blood.”

“You're a regular genius, Tim,” Cunningham snorted. “Is a shitload more than a liter?”

Voight glanced up at Cunningham.

They both started giggling.

Voight reached into Ashley's incision. He wiggled his gloved hand into the depths of the wound, working past loops of intestine. The sleeve of his gown turned red.

Chalmers exploded into profanity at the head of the table. Voight jerked his hand out of the belly. He glanced at Cunningham, then up at Chalmers who was glaring at Duane Paine.

"Poole suction," Cunningham said. He attacked the puddle of blood overflowing the abdominal wound and spilling onto the drape. The tiny holes of the metal suction plugged with fresh clot. Cunningham leaned over the body. "Focus, Tim."

"Cautery!" hissed Chalmers from behind the draped skull. "Pass me the cautery, P-l-e-a-s-e."

Stockwell leaned over the drapes and looked directly at the neurosurgeon. "Blood pressure's dropped to sixty."

Chalmers spoke without looking up from the scalp wound. "Perhaps she needs more fluid, Bruno?"

"Why didn't I think of that!" Stockwell slapped his forehead. "Any part of that brain operation you'd like me to do, Brucie?"

Stockwell shook his head and sat down.

Chalmers' jaw moved. He didn't answer Stockwell. Instead, he teased the delicate lining of Ashley's brain near the laceration. He had the good sense not to provoke the anesthesiologist any further.

Voight glanced up at Paine. The intern was staring at the scalp, pressing the cautery into Chalmer's hand. The brain sac lay slack, drained through the tear. Chalmers performed a maneuver a few millimeters from the brain with a pointed scalpel blade. It seemed to Voight as if Chalmers was merely staring blankly at the back of the woman's head so delicate were his movements.

“Suction,” Chalmers said, softly.

Paine inched the tip of the suction toward the scalp, lowered the metal tip near the skull opening.

“No, no, no!” Chalmers glared at Paine. “For God's sakes! Don't suction near the brain!” Chalmers's face ripened above his mask. “If you suck out pieces of her brain, you'll turn her into an intern.”

The room fell into an ugly silence.

Voight dabbled at clots floating among loops of intestine with the suction. He turned his head ever so slightly to observe Chalmers. The neurosurgeon's hands were folded on his chest. A priest before the sacraments. Voight experienced a familiar loathing.

But, Chalmers wasn't through.

“Arthur?” Chalmers stared at Voight. “Are you losing blood?”

“Some.”

Cunningham yanked on a metal retractor and motioned for Voight to probe the upper abdomen. Voight reached past bloodstained lap pads under the shiny metal retractor

blades. This time he probed deep in the abdomen with a gloved hand, using what Scott called ‘the eye on the finger’.

He hesitated. “Art?”

The uterus felt like a huge pear. He carefully felt other familiar organs. Then, he found it. A soft mass, a blood clot stuck to the spleen.

“Spleen?” Cunningham asked.

“Feels like it.” Voight pulled his blood-smeared glove from the lower belly. “But, you’d better check out her uterus.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

3:47 AM
Sunday, February 5th
OR

He knew Cunningham would start with the questions. Operate and answer details about the case. How they learned. How residents were stressed so they could handle it.

“What grade splenic injury does she have?” Cunningham asked.

“If Grade One’s a small tear,” Voight said. “Got to be a Three...maybe a Four.”

Stockwell leaned over the drapes. “Boys, I’ve given her two more units of blood. Her pressure’s still in the eighties.”

“We’re getting control, Bruno,” said Cunningham. “Go ahead, Tim.”

Voight weighed his options. If they could save the organ, they’d stop the hemorrhage and save the spleen’s immunologic function. It was a judgment call.

“We’ve got to consider splenic salvage.”

“Think and operate at the same time.”

Voight probed blood clot near the spleen, lifting the edge of the stomach nearby. As if sitting inside a cockpit, his hood and mask contracted around him. He felt hot. Focusing his mind into the depths of the wound, he permitted others in the OR to fade as if someone had turned down the volume on his world. Here, in this compressed moment his talent lay in his hands.

“Well?” said Cunningham.

Voight imagined the melon-sized organ shattered just out of sight in the left upper abdomen. Then, he saw a squirt of blood. A lacerated artery? He reached overhead and adjusted the light. He slid his forceps into the wound. With gentle traction, he tore a chunk of clot off the spleen and held it up in the teeth of his forceps.

“Christ Tim!” Cunningham sounded exasperated. Blood flooded the belly cavity.

“Pack it.”

Voight reached into the belly cavity. He cupped out a slippery handful of clot.

“Upper pole branch of the splenic artery. Or a short gastric.”

“Pack it for now.”

Voight saw a pumping blood vessel. Or at least something spurting blood. “Large clip,” he said to Celina.

“Give him a lap pad,” Cunningham said. “Clean up the field.”

Voight swiped at the stream of blood with the lap pad. Blood welled up under his hand. “Clip.”

Cunningham held up his hand. “Hold the goddamn clip. Lena, give me another lap pad.”

“I see it, Art. Clip...”

Cunningham's eyes flashed under the bright lights. “And I said pack the son-of-a-bitch!”

Inserting four large squares of sterile cloth over the spleen, Voight pressed his hand against the spleen, his arm submerged in the wound up to his elbow.

“I see an arterial pumper.”

“You can't see shit! Don't go blindly clipping where you think you see a bleeder. Make sure, especially around the fucking spleen!”

Voight strained to eye Chalmers without moving his head. The neurosurgeon, considering something, turned toward Cunningham. But he changed his mind and asked for a saline-soaked cotton pledget.

The tension in the room slackened.

“Are we taking it out?” Cunningham said.

Voight, hand in the belly, applied pressure to the bleeder. Ashley Laughton's heart beat against the back of his hand through the thin muscular diaphragm. “It’s all busted up.”

“Sounds like a decision.”

“Should I pull out these packs?”

“Your call.”

“We could just cut out the lower pole,” said Voight. “You know...eyeball the rest of the spleen...see if it’ll make it.”

“Make up your mind.”

“Theoretically, we should preserve the upper pole.” Voight glanced at Cunningham. “Her immune function would be intact.”

“Professor, does it stay in or come out?”

Voight tapped the drapes with the gold-handled scissors. “With a head injury...that is, she’s not responding in a meaningful fashion to stimuli...we wouldn’t necessarily know if she did begin to bleed again from the part of the spleen we left in. At least, it might be a little more difficult to determine what’s going on.”

“True, true and related,” said Cunningham, exhaling.

“There’s an argument both ways...”

“And the winner is?”

Stockwell peered over the drapes at Voight. “She’s still in shock, boys.”

“Maybe if we can control the bleeding vessel-”

Cunningham grabbed the Metzenbaum scissors from Voight’s hand. He plunged the instrument into the belly and slipped the open blades behind the spleen. He nicked the restraining ligaments behind a mass of clots. With the spleen’s attachments severed, Cunningham withdrew the scissors. He handed them to Celina.

“Art? What’re you doing?” Voight said.

In one move, Cunningham reached into the incision. Peeled the spleen into the wound with its blood vessel moorings still attached. Celina slapped a large curved vascular clamp into his outstretched hand without being asked.

“Don’t move.” Cunningham eased the clamp into the wound. He eased the jaws around the pedicle containing the bleeding splenic artery and veins. Then, he snapped it closed.

Less than a minute had elapsed. The lifeless spleen lay limp beyond the clamp.

“Go ahead, Tim. Cut it out.”

Voight put out his hand for scissors. “You stole my case.”

“No shit, Dick Tracy.”

“I could’ve done that.”

“Instead, you gave me a PhD dissertation on her surgical options.” Cunningham looked up at Voight. “With a head injury, we can’t risk having to come back for re-bleeding. So? We take the fucking thing out, got it?”

They replaced the huge clamp with several smaller hemostats secured to individual veins and arteries. Voight expertly tied off blood vessels as Art Cunningham removed clamps, releasing tissue from the curved jaws as Voight cinched down his knot.

“Think she’s pregnant?” Cunningham asked, probing the pelvis.

“Poor thing,” Mona said, leaning over the wound behind Voight with a hand on his back.

“Question is,” Voight said. “Will the fetus make it?”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

4:58 AM
Sunday, February 5th
West Two Surgical Floor

“Mitsie’s upset with Norton.” Voight said, struggling to keep up with Cunningham as his chief resident charged up the West Wing stairwell ahead of him. Cunningham’s OR clogs clanged on the metal stairs. “He’s the black insurance salesman in ICU...Bed Three...thoracic aneurysm with pneumonia. She says he needs to be checked out, stat.”

Cunningham stopped at a door marked with a red 2. They exited the stairwell. Cunningham led the way down the darkened corridor to the nurse’s station.

“That sucker could blow any minute,” Cunningham said. “Which brings up a basic surgical principle.”

Voight spun the circular chart rack in the middle of the nurse’s station. “Which is?”

“Some diseases can’t be cured.” Cunningham slid out a chart. “We try and make a show of it. But, in the end it’s wasted motion.”

“The surgical principle?”

“You can’t shine shit.”

Voight opened the chart. He thought about his comatose sister. Vegetative. Still ambivalent about their efforts for Ashley Laughton. Maybe they were wasting their time with her, too. *Maybe?* He stood beside an IV pole as Cunningham read the last entry on Tony Ferrone's progress sheet and shook his head. He started down the darkened corridor.

Voight followed his chief resident to the open door of Tony Ferrone's room. They tiptoed in. The bed was empty.

A figure behind the door. "You bring my medication?"

Voight stared into Tony's face. Danny's brother wore a haunted look. Voight went back to the nurse's station, retrieved a small cup with pills from a nurse. Tony accepted the paper cup from him. Voight took the only chair in the room. Cunningham pulled back the curtain and sat on the empty bed next to the door. Tony was sweating.

"Sure you're all right?" Voight said.

Tony swallowed the pills without water. "What's all right?"

Had Wendell Scott not warned Voight that once the memory trigger had been pulled you could never put the emotional round back in the barrel? What had this poor bastard gone through in Vietnam?

"You got to admit," Cunningham said, in what Voight assumed was his way of going for Tony's emotional underbelly. "If you weren't under fire, this wasn't a bad time of day in Nam."

Dark Ferrone eyes flickered with interest. "You?"

"Sixty-eight," said Cunningham matter-of-factly.

Tony Ferrone raised his substantial eyebrows. “Did my second tour in '68. Khe Sanh.”

“Qui Nhon,” Cunningham said. “Although I choppered up into I Corp near the DMZ a few times. I belonged to a Wound Data Munitions Effectiveness Team. We studied what all that shit you guys fire at the enemy actually did to people.”

“Khe Sanh, no picnic,” Tony said in a hollow voice. “First attack lasted twelve days. I’m forty-two and it’s like it happened yesterday.” He stared at Voight without moving a muscle. “How's my brother, Doc?”

“It's a big burn, Tony,” Voight said. He remembered stories Art had told him about 'crispy critters', victims of napalm jungle bombing, lethal cooking, civilian murder with solid gasoline. “Doctor Scott’s assessing his status.”

“Think he'll make it?”

The question was asked with nonchalance. Only later in the weekend would Voight learn the depth of Tony’s anguish about his brother’s multiple injuries, wounds mimicking war trauma. Voight said, “Can't answer that question.”

“How's your leg?” Cunningham asked.

“Probably hit a nerve with the insulin needle.” Tony rubbed his thigh. “Hurts, but it's not inflamed.”

Cunningham got up from the bed. “Let’s see.”

Slowly, Tony stood and dropped his pajama pants to the floor. Cunningham ran his hand along Tony's thigh. Voight noted a red flare where Tony had injected his insulin. A depressed scar gouged the skin near Tony’s knee.

“Where do you usually inject?” Voight asked.

“I rotate sites.” Tony pulled on his pajamas and lay back on the bed. “Belly, arms and legs. What’d you think?”

“We’ll try antibiotics.” Cunningham said.

They negotiated an awkward silence, Cunningham on the bed, sitting with his eyes on Tony. Voight observed the two old warriors assessing each other. He secretly eyed his watch wondering how much snow had accumulated.

Tony said to Art Cunningham, “You’re older than the other residents?”

Cunningham smiled. “I was in general practice near the Canadian border in Maine before the war, Fort Kent. Missed the action in surgery. I logged a lot of hours putting you guys back together, experience I didn’t want to waste. I’ll practice surgery ten, fifteen years, then quit.”

Tony shrugged. “I didn’t bring back anything useful.”

Cunningham sat on the empty bed. “Met my lady in Qui Nhon. She works here at the hospital.”

“Docs had it easy.” Tony threw Cunningham a thin smile.

Voight watched his chief bristle.

“The REMFs weren’t any kinder to us,” Cunningham said.

“You never saw action,” Tony said. It was a statement.

Voight waved his hand. “What’s a REMF?”

Tony glanced at Cunningham. He smiled broadly for the first time. “Tell him, Doc.”

Cunningham turned to Voight. “REMF means a rear-echelon mother fucker, the guys never went into the bush. Just sat in Saigon and partied. Now, there’s assholes claiming they were in the Nam who never left the World.”

“True enough, Captain,” Tony said, raising an eyebrow. “You done it, ain’t nothing to lie about.”

“True words.” Cunningham nodded.

“Guy at Mount Holyoke, built a teaching career around a lie.”

Cunningham shook his head. “I knew a commander who traded a surgeon for plywood. Doc fucked his woman, so next thing he’s packed on a chopper to a forward firebase. Died a month later during a mortar attack.”

Tony lay still, gazing at the ceiling. “We didn't have plywood...or women.”

Maybe not plywood, Voight thought.

“You been in harm’s way, Doctor Voight?” Tony asked, knowing. “You have no idea what fear is.”

“A lot of kids died in my lady's arms,” Cunningham said, leaning back on his elbows. “No one had it easy.”

Tony shrugged. “Body bags hold no pain.”

Cunningham rose. He crossed to Tony’s bed. He held out his hand. “We'll talk more later, troop.”

Tony accepted Cunningham’s handshake, sitting up on the edge of his bed. Voight shook hands with Tony and felt the calluses on his fingers.

“Get some rest, Doc,” Tony said. “My brother’s gonna need you. How’s Ash?”

“She’s got a bad head injury,” Cunningham said at the door. “We removed a busted spleen. Our neurosurgeon cleaned up her squash. We don’t know her prognosis.”

* * *

5:19 AM

West Two

Voight trailed his chief resident from Tony Ferrone’s room. He was surprised when Cunningham took a left down the corridor instead of a right to the nurse’s station. “Body bags hold no pain?” Voight said to Cunningham’s back. “This guy’s certifiable.”

Cunningham stopped at a window at the end of the corridor. They stood in silence, watching snow swirl past the glass. Voight could just make out the parking lot where his Toyota truck was a hump in the unplowed lot.

“Plows’ll be out soon,” Cunningham said, his hands in his pockets. He turned to Voight. “I’m going to tell you something. So you’ll understand a bit about this Ferrone guy...and about the war.”

“What did Tony mean by that comment about body bags?”

“Tony’s screwed-up. He saw some bad shit in Vietnam. It’s got something to do with surviving, or being mangled, but still alive. Scott mentioned it to me. Overdose of survivor’s guilt. Guy’s carrying a ton of pain.”

Voight checked his watch. Outside the window he thought he detected the faint lighting of dawn, as if God had shined a flashlight on the cloud cover. "I've got to check Norton."

"The sense of fuzzy reality of early morning in this hospital brings me back," Cunningham said, as if Voight weren't there. "Who knows? Maybe it's this Ferrone guy." Cunningham ran a finger across the window sill and folded his arms. "It was the pauses in the craziness that I remember most. Not just the mutilated bodies or the incessant shelling. I remember the nights when it was quiet, no artillery activity in the sector."

Voight stood beside him in the near dark, his eyes felt as if they had been irrigated with sulfuric acid. He didn't give a rat's rectum about Vietnam. He wanted to check Norton and go to his room and sleep.

"It was an alluring hush," Cunningham said, softly. "Eighty proof quiet. My first day in Nam was the worst."

Voight checked his watch. "It's after four, you know."

Cunningham stared out the window. "Shut the fuck up and listen...and pray you never go to war."

Voight sat on the windowsill. He drew his lab coat around him.

"I was attached to the Wounds Data Munitions Effectiveness Team, like I told Tony," Cunningham said to the window. "My first patient in Qui Nhon blew my mind. I arrive in-country on a flight from Saigon on Black Baron Airlines, jet-black choppers. Rode the coast, rising and dropping like a fucking runaway elevator. How the pilots

avoided taking fire. Door gunners were crazy fuckers, sprayed everything with fifty-caliber machine gun fire.”

Voight rubbed his eyes. Given twenty seconds of quiet, he'd be asleep.

“There’s this black guy, my first patient,” Cunningham started, ignoring Voight. “I notice he’s wearing a morgue tag on his fatigue pocket. Figure these clowns have a sense of humor.”

Voight listened with mild interest.

““You been to the morgue?” I say to him. Uniform’s all fucked up, muddy. Anyway, the guy says, ‘Yes sir,’ ‘Not many guys walk out of the morgue, troop,’ I say. ‘Scared the shit outta me, Doc. Had a toe tag.’” Cunningham explained to Voight that at this point he suspected a joke. ““OK troop,” I say. ‘What the fuck's going on here?’ Guy says, ‘See, I got me stinkin' drunk last night, went out near the perimeter, passed out. Charlie mortars our compound, caught guys smokin' dope near the wire, wiped'em out. The fuck I didn't get wasted I jus' don't know. Next day, morgue detail comes 'round for bodies. Put my sorry ass in a body bag.’ So I say to him, ‘You woke up in the morgue?’ ‘There I be...lying on a slab with them other stiff's, toe tag an' all.’ I say, ‘Troop, that must've been fucking scary.’ And he comes back and says, ‘Naw, not that part, Doc. I weren't scared 'til I asked the guy next to me for a cigarette.’”

Voight shook his head, not wanting to laugh, too tired not to giggle.

Cunningham walked down the dark corridor toward the nurse’s station. “Life's a crap shoot,” he said over his shoulder. “And we don't know who's banking for the house.”

Voight caught up to Cunningham. “Your point?”

Cunningham stopped. “This Laughton woman. You’ve got her...what? Brain dead? I say I don't know. Chalmers is hedging. And then again, what about Danny?”

“We can do a lot with Danny,” Voight said. “We can deal with his burns, fix his fractures. He can make it.”

“Tony saw a lot of his buddies die after they were wounded. Saw them suffer with injuries just like his brother’s.”

“You’re not suggesting Tony’ll pressure Scott into treating Danny real aggressively if we decide it’s futile?”

“There’s a fucking greasy idea.” At the nurses’s station, Cunningham pulled out a chart from the rack.

“Futile?” Voight asked,

“Tony may ask us to *withdraw* treatment.”

Voight stroked his moustache. “Near miss? Got a finger shot off.”

“I noticed,” Cunningham said. “Tony’s carrying something deep inside. So far he’s never let it out. Something happened in Nam. Lot of grunts felt responsible for their buddies deaths. Tony’s going to have a say in what we do, you watch.”

Voight dropped into a chair. “If Danny’s father can’t move him to Boston, there’s gonna be one ugly fucking power struggle.”

“Between Scott and Danny’s father?” Cunningham asked.

Voight stretched his legs. “And between Tony and his father.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

6:10 AM
Sunday, February 5th
ICU

Voight decided to stay awake, wired by Art Cunningham's story. He was worried about Tony's mental state and uncertain about Ashley Laughton's prospects. He decided to wait for her anesthetic to wear off before repeating a neurologic examination.

Ashley required three additional units of blood in the Post Anesthesia Care Unit before she was transferred up to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit on the fifth floor. What chance did she have, really? And her fiancée? Both had lethal injuries. Were her surgeons playing God?

If Danny stayed at Eastport Medical Center, they'd spend hours in the next few days cutting dead skin from the sensitive burned areas, chipping away dead tissue with scissors and forceps, later replacing it with skin grafts. Weeks repeating the process using

temporary cover on exposed bare spots. Months rehabilitating him. And when he saw himself in a mirror would he ever go out in public again?

The surgical intensive care unit lay wedged between the East and West wings of Eastport Medical Center's fifth floor. Two rows of three beds lined opposite walls with a central nurses station and matching isolation cubicles facing each other at the ends of the room. Subdued light illuminated the main room noisy with ventilators, EKG machines, suction equipment and busy nurses. IV poles, dressing carts, laundry bags, stretchers, blood pressure monitors, clogged the floor space, yet work in the big room somehow remained orderly.

Behind the central nurses station a single door led to the storage room. It was stuffed with back-up equipment, a hamper for dirty laundry, cafeteria trays waiting for food services to retrieve them, the interns and residents' backpacks, nurse's pursers and bags, a refrigerator for everyone's lunches, shelves of IV bags, extra IV poles, tubing, sheets, towels, soap, mops and brooms, tape, suture sets, and any other instruments not locked up in the tiny medication room next to Isolation Room One. Beside the refrigerator on a counter were a coffee urn, Styrofoam cups, sugar packets, stirrers, and cream and milk in the refrigerator. The other door in the storage room led to a small bathroom.

Exiting the elevator on the fifth floor, Voight entered the ICU and crossed the main room and headed for the storage room. A battered Sony on a shelf over a sink in the crowded room lamented the in-coming storm as he shut the storage room door. "*...early morning report...snow falling...heavy snow is expected in the next twenty-four hours with*

twelve to sixteen inches accumulation in some areas...winds gusting up to fifty-five miles per hour anticipated in the northeast...driving should be limited to emergencies..."

Styrofoam cup brimming with black coffee, he left the storage room and stopped in front of Bed Two. The unit was a soft hush of beeps and ventilator hisses and subdued indirect lighting. ICU at night. An attempt to pretend these desperate souls were sleeping, almost normal.

Norton was asleep. His EKG tracing unremarkable, the pulsating aneurysm bulging between his lungs at bay. Mitsie Taylor, an English nurse who'd arrived from London several years ago with Chalmers, waved from Bed Three. Ashley's head bandage was blood-soaked, her endo tube attached to a ventilator. Over in Bed Six, Victor Ramos slept with his belly bandages exposed.

Voight crossed the big room to the sliding glass door of Isolation Room One. He peered in. A thin nurse named Marilla rattled off serial numbers on a unit of blood to a blond nurse. The blond nurse, Beth, whose hips Voight was quite certain were on swivels, winked at him.

Beth slipped out of the isolation room. Her fragrance rose like pheromones in his nose. He smiled as she passed him and leaned through the isolation room door as Marilla plugged the bag of blood into Danny's IV tubing. She hung the bag overhead on a pole.

"How're his vitals?"

"They want to transfer him, *today*," said Marilla. "Can you believe it? With a storm coming in?"

At that moment Danny moved his head. Voight pulled on a gown, donned a mask and gloves, and entered the isolation room. He crossed to the bed.

“Can he hear us?”

“With those ears?”

“Maybe we should assume he can.”

Marilla threw him a sour look. “You doing the dressings or what?”

She peeled open a stack of sterile gauze rolls and lined them up next to a small mountain of gauze squares on a sterile towel covering the bedside table. Unscrewing the top of a huge jar of white cream, she put it on the table, stuck a tongue depressor into the untouched swirled surface of antibiotic cream and headed for the door.

“Going to help me?”

Voight didn't really give a damn if the official ICU bitch left the room and went home. Close-mouthed Cunningham thought she was a lesbian. *Not that it matters*, Cunningham always added with a chuckle.

Marilla turned up the radio. Something by *Boyz to Men*. Interrupted by a cryptic weather report similar to the one Voight had just heard in the storage room. Voight picked flakes of dead skin from Danny Ferrone's face with forceps and scissors. Danny eyes closed. Sunken to the bottom of his sooty orbits like marbles in a bowl.

Marilla injected a slug of morphine into the IV tubing. She flushed it into Danny.

“Want me to page Cunningham?”

“He'll be along.”

Voight cut away soaked bandages covering Danny's chest, picked away dead skin, leaving questionable patches, not certain if it would survive or not. Smearing white cream onto the scalded skin, Voight applied gauze rolls and wrapped Danny up like a mummy.

An orthopedic contraption designed to keep his broken left femur on traction hung from a pin in Danny's knee. The weights dangled from a pulley rigged up at the end of the bed, fighting his thigh muscles, keeping bone ends in proper alignment. Throughout the bandage change the canvas bag with the weights swayed.

He unwrapped soaked gauze layers from Danny's right leg. The skin below the knee was mangled. Muscle showed through a huge laceration.

Voight cut away black edges of the ragged wound over Danny's shin. Marilla held up the leg by the heel while he wrapped gauze over sterile pads. The heavy dressing soaked through with blood immediately.

"Make sure he gets enough morphine," Voight said.

"Like, I wouldn't?"

* * *

6:56 AM

ICU

Voight stripped off his gown, mask and gloves and slid open the door. Cool air rushed into the room. He crossed the main ICU room to Bed Three. Behind the curtains, Voight studied the head bandage, imagining what it concealed. If Ashley didn't regain consciousness they would have to consider her an organ donor.

Mitsie appeared. Her brunette hair spilled over one shoulder. Her dark eyes danced. “Get any sleep?”

“Doesn’t look like a sleep type of weekend.”

Mitsie radiated a freshness Voight loved, a groomed and sexy appearance, a permanent blush on her cheeks as if someone were constantly embarrassing her. And it seemed no matter what time of night or day, Mitsie was upbeat.

She stepped behind him and dug her fingers into his shoulders. Voight could have dropped dead asleep with the kneading. Mitsie leaned close to his ear, whispered, “Wouldn't it be lovely if we got stuck here?”

“They say it’s a major storm.”

Voight noticed Mitsie always wore loose clothing, but it didn’t conceal what he perceived to be a terrific body. Closing the chart, Voight got off the bed and eyed Ashley’s ventilator settings. It seemed as if Ashley had relinquished her existence to him, trusting him in her comatose state to choose wisely for her. Comatose. Dependent. He said to Mitsie, “She’s not going to breathe on her own for awhile.”

Complete life support.

Bending over, Voight listened to her chest with his stethoscope. He edged the disc over her skin. He heard nothing unusual in her lung fields, hesitating to listen to her heart. Not so much listening, Voight found himself reflecting. Tried to concentrate, pressing the stethoscope firmly against her skin. Grazed her nipple with his hand, ventilator firing, her chest rising, her breast against his hand. He marveled at her softness, the sensuous fullness of her.

For an agonizing moment he didn't move his hand. *You're a professional, for chrissakes.*

Then Voight stood slowly, looked around. He drew the johnny over her.

Mitsie approached him. "Quite the beauty, eh?"

"I'm going to repeat my neurological exam later."

"I'll be with Doctor Chalmer's craniotomy in Five."

* * *

7:15 AM
ICU

Later, Voight returned to Ashley's bedside. He tapped out her reflexes, manipulated her legs for range of motion and the possibility of a missed fracture. He found nothing to suggest even sparse neurological function, muscles flaccid, lifeless, as if disconnected from her cerebrum.

Was there a possibility she'd become a donor?

Voight sat at the nurse's station in the middle of the big ICU room. He glanced at Danny's cubicle. Then over at Ashley's. Ashley Laughton. Sleeping Venus. Nymph on a pallet. Brain dead?

He glanced back and forth. Between Ashley and Danny Ferrone.

The kernel of an idea crept into Voight's mind.

