

## THE LIBRARIAN

### CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO:

My breath was caught in my chest. I had to force myself to breathe and I could feel the prickly sting of ugly perspiration. But I recalled what I could do of yoga, concentrated on inhaling and exhaling and attempted to achieve calm. When I had something close to it, I decided to return to the party through the side door. I don't know why I didn't just get out of there.

When I did re-enter the living room, nobody seemed to notice, nobody seemed to care. They were still flies, intent on their own business, making small leaps from place to place to feed, to drink, to buzz with each other. Niobe wasn't there. Neither was Jack. Nor Stowe, nor McClellan for that matter, nobody I really knew. McClellan's secretarial friend was there, avidly talking to an older man who looked like he had a lot of money.

The drapes were open and I went to the window and looked down and out. What was I looking for, Niobe?

The house was built on a small ridge. At the front of the house, at the main entrance with the sweeping circular driveway, this was the ground floor, at the back it was the second story. And it rose one more story above us, bedrooms mostly. Directly below me there was a stone patio, surrounded by a wall in a semi-circle, and three paths from there leading down to the fields, the stables, the barns and breeding shed. The paths were lined with lantern lights, smaller and smaller as they wound down into the perspective painting of country wealth, twinkling as hopefully as stars.

I tried to mingle in, but I couldn't really talk, I was mouth dry and tongue-tied, confused. I heard buzz words in the buzz, I heard oil and war, I heard money, business and anti-business, disaster for the nation, have to hold on, ruin all we've gained, worse than the Clintons. Then I saw someone I recognized, but didn't know, the Senate Majority Leader, and I drifted toward him, he was talking with a congressman from Texas and someone in oil, who had a pipeline deal in Iraq, and their eyeballs were popping and their faces were as fierce as flies when you see them in a photography taken through a microscope.

I wanted to go back where I belonged. Into the peace of the library, surrounded by books, by considered statements, exclamations that, no matter how impassioned, would wait, quietly for a considered response, no matter how opinionated or biased, would wait, quietly, for research into their proofs and into other points of view.

So I did. I went back through the side door, into the library. I was alone there. I touched some of the books, I sighed, I pitied myself and my withdrawal from life and wished, foolishly, that I could be a man of action, of encounter, of wild face-to-face interactions, instead of a filer, a sorter, a reader, a keeper of the records of other people's deeds. I left the books, dry and dusty and so full of so many words, that so often didn't matter, that so often were ill-assembled, that were so often shrill and weak or sententious and pretentious, all those excesses of verbs and adverbs and adjectives and extravagances of metaphors and similes and the showings off of how smart and erudite and educated and arcane and esoteric and polylingual a writer could be, Ezra Pound with his "Δρvas, your eyes are like clouds ... plura diafana ... Heliads lift the mist ... the brightness of 'udor ..."

So I sat down at the computer. And started browsing through those of Stowe's files that I had entered already. There were items that were mysterious. There were lists of names that meant nothing to me. It was part of his technique to research people before he did deals with them. So there were lots of names and financial profiles and sometimes one of those names would show up as "a deal" and frequently they were just lists.

I put in Scott's name. I found two letters of thanks, from the last election, one was clearly a form letter ...

That's where I was when they came in. The one with the scar and the white hair came in the main door. The other one, the old guy, with the drinker's nose and a shoulder holster making a visible lump under his jacket and the thuggish presence of a cop, he came in the side door, with Jack behind him.

At that moment, from the faces of them, from the presence, the Gestapo assurance of them, at that moment I entered a state of belief. Whatever she said, yeah, I believed it now. The guy with the scar down from his eye to his jaw, he was happy to see me, in that scary way that people who like victims are happy to see someone they think they can hurt.

"Hey, hey, what's happening," I said.

"You're going to have to come with us," Jack said.

"What, you have a warrant or something?" I asked.

"Just come on," Jack said.

"Look, I'm outta here, I don't know if Alan, Alan Stowe knows what you're doing ..." I had turned in my chair and I stood up and thought my chances were better against Mr. Evil over there with the white hair, after all, there was just one of him and the door was this big huge thing

and I might be able to get around him, whereas there were two of them crowded by the side door and I'd have to push through Morgan and ... and I tried to remember the name she'd told me and all that came to my faintly hysterical mind was spaghetti, and I knew it was wrong it was Spinnelli, but she'd said I'd never see Spinnelli, he was the electron man. No this was ... Ryan? and he killed people?

A little assurance, a little bravado ... I bet they could smell my fear, like Dobermans. But still, nobody moved but me, and I went forward, right toward scar-face Parks, and a little step around him and his hand came out of his pocket and I was zapped.

I turned into a cartoon character. I turned into a scream that could not be heard. My hair stood on end, my heart said, 'wah, wah, wah,' my fingers and toes stood out and I hurt. I hurt and I fell to the floor. The guy with the scar loomed over me. I felt like a fish flopping on the floor of the fishing boat, except I wasn't moving. I couldn't move. He examined me, like he was looking for what would hurt. He pulled back his foot. I could see that from the periphery of my vision. He waited until I knew that he was going to kick me and he could see that I knew, we exchanged that information, building the intimacy of torture. He was going to hurt me until I belonged to him.

I wondered, if I burrowed deep, deep inside, could I find some strength to resist this? But why? What was I fighting for? What were they fighting for? That uncertainty was a place of tearful weakness, it was the residence of surrender, humiliation and spiritual debasement, yet, where else did I have to go?

He kicked. Into my ribs. Hard. It hurt, but they didn't crack, nor did he reach my organs.

Then he looked away from me. Behind him. I tried to lift my head and couldn't. I was still in that shocked mode. But I could hear the voice.

"Not here," Stowe said.

"We just incapacitated him," Morgan said.

"Not here," Stowe said. "Don't let the guests see either. You should have waited and picked him up away from here ..." there was no reply to the rebuke, "... what are you going to do with him?"

I think that Stowe meant how are you going to get him out of here, but Jack took it to mean what were they ultimately going to do with me and he didn't reply. My body was returning to some sort of normality now, I could tell that I had control of my limbs.

The silence kept going on and on and the longer it went on the clearer my understanding was. If Jack had said, 'we're just going to question him,' or 'take him to HSHQ and run a check,' or 'detain him until we're certain,' of whatever, I would have surrendered into acquiescence as so many of my ancestors did when they said climb into these nice railroad cars you're going to resettlement camps, but Jack's reluctance to lie directly to Stowe kept him from misleading me and kept me from deluding myself.

Tears ran down my cheeks, I could feel the obscene and humiliating trickle. I knew also, that on my way to dying it would get a lot worse. My humiliation, I mean. When Stowe stepped out, I could see Parks turn away from me to watch the boss go.

It was my moment. I leapt up. Well, I tried to leap. It was pretty wobbly and lame. Parks turned back. He looked at me curiously as if I were a fish that could talk. There was a story, not so long ago, in the paper, about such a fish. It was a carp. A Latino worker in a Hasidic fish

market in Brooklyn was about to cut its head off. The carp spoke in Hebrew. The Latino didn't recognize the language and ran screaming for the owner, who did. The strangest things go through my mind at times of stress and that's what went through my mind, so I screamed out in Hebrew, "Today I am bar-mitzvah!" which is all the Hebrew I remember.

The three of them looked at me very curiously.

I ran. There were only two doors. The doors were closed and the doors were blocked. So I ran in the opposite direction, toward the windows, which were covered by the drapes. They were big windows.

Ryan made a move toward me. To get away from him, I scrambled up on a table, big library table, there were two of them in a line, so I went running along the first table and jumped to the next one.

They were laughing at me. They were coming after me, but in a casual stroll. Parks was waving his stun gun at me the way a mugger waves his knife.

There was the window in front of me. I knew that on the other side there was one and a half story fall. Not two suburban stories, seven or eight feet each, no, rich man's stories, fourteen feet and another two feet thickness for the floor, you never heard the people upstairs at Stowe Stud Farm, no way. And the landing, solid stone.

I jumped.

I jumped as hard as I could into the drapes, hoping to go through them and out the window. I got tangled in them. But my forward momentum did carry me through, the heavy fabric wrapped around me. The crashing of the glass was muffled, so was the crying of the alarms that I set off. I

went out past the window ledge. Of course, once I realized I was out and falling, fear prompted me to try not to fall and I clung onto the drapes. They didn't tear, but my weight and momentum pulled the rod off its hooks and though I went down, I went down slowly ... again ... I had odd thoughts ... it was very quick in real time ... slow in subjective time ... there are all these crazy Jews, tough Jews, in Israel, in the Mossad and in the army and all of that, but the last time, the only time, I could think of a Jew like myself, a librarian Jew, a would be poet Jew, pulling a stunt like this was Danny Kaye in *The Court Jester*, swinging outside the castle on a rope.

The drape got me to within a foot or two of the ground. I let go. I fell and I rolled. I looked back up. The old guy, with the fat nose, had a gun out, I ran. I pointed myself to the darkest darkness, ran, jumped up on the wall and jumped down off it, onto the lawn, tumbled and rolled, heard them yelling. Heard the alarms too. Started running, away from the lights. Then the alarms went silent. I was running, feet on the beautiful grass, hunting for the safety of the dark and I knew they were coming behind me.