

What follows is the opening chapter of CHILLING EFFECT
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To be published September 2004 by University Press of Colorado.



It was the ghastliest fax I ever received.

I was alone in the office, sitting at our secretary's desk, when it arrived. I'd been looking through the jumble of supplies in Beverly's bottom drawer, hoping to find a new cartridge for my printer, and just as I gave up the search I heard the rattle of the fax machine. It's an old one, and it groans when summoned into service like an arthritic doorman whose stiff joints protest when he has to get up to admit a visitor.

I watched idly as the first sheet emerged, expecting to see the letterhead of some other law firm, or perhaps a meeting announcement from the Boulder County Bar Association. But as it rolled out I saw that the page was blank, except for the unreadably small source information at the top-- and the neat even handwriting, a single line about a third of the way down:

IS THIS THE KIND OF CASE YOU HANDLE? I'LL BE CALLING.

All these months later I can still summon up those tidy letters if I close my eyes and try, but it's the sheet that followed this one that sometimes still unrolls in the eye of my memory unbidden, and unwelcome. I watched the second page of the fax slide from the machine, so dark in spots that it glistened and curled with the weight of the ink. I pulled it out straight and as the image resolved in my perception I hunched my shoulders, as though by folding up my own body I could protect it from the knowledge of that one, so small, so violated, and even in black and white so obviously dead.

I looked away, but not before noting that the eyes were wide open, watching things that nobody should ever have to see.

I wanted nothing to do with it. You'd have to be crazy in some particularly ugly way to send something like that, I figured-- to fax it, for God's sake, to someone you didn't know. I'd had enough crazy in my law practice the last few years; it wasn't romantic or interesting any longer. So when the phone rang ten minutes later I pretended to be a secretary, and told the woman she'd have to call back when one of the lawyers was in. I didn't really think she would, but I was wrong. She called back that evening, late, while I was preparing to leave for the day. My partner Tory took the call, and that was where all the trouble started, our first step along the crusade route.

At first it seemed the crusader would be Tory, and she's a far more plausible knight than I am-- fearless, even reckless sometimes. But the mission became mine almost without my noticing. My friend Andy Kahrlsrud has recommended that I make an effort to understand why it happened that way.



I'm Lucinda Hayes, attorney, practicing in Boulder, Colorado. I wasn't born in Colorado. I came here to go to law school, and stayed. Boulder is a garden of transplants; almost everyone here is from somewhere else, so that's not unusual. But sometimes I think the particular place of my birth and upbringing, and my chosen exile from it, have shaped my path more than any other influence.

Try it yourself. Ask an American born before about 1957: What's the first thing you think of when you hear *Dallas*?

Where Kennedy was shot. Or maybe *John Kennedy*, or *President Kennedy*. That's the response you'll get, almost every time.

Nearly anyone old enough to remember it will give you that answer. Except for people who lived there at the time-- you'd expect them to say something else, perhaps *my home town*, or *where I was born*, and most Dallasites will. But not me: I answer like an outsider. It's my home town, all right, but for me it will always be first the place where the President was shot and killed.

Perhaps it's because that day I experienced for the first time a feeling that's haunted me, on and off, ever since: the impression that nearly everyone else understands something that I don't, has signed on to some agreement without inviting me to join it. I was a bit older when I started to think that those of us who were somehow excluded from this arrangement needed to look out for each other. And older still before I realized how many of us believe we're in that category, including some I wouldn't necessarily commit myself to looking out for. Leonard Fitzgerald, for example. No doubt there's more to this strange fragment of identity that I still haven't understood. But I know it started that day, or perhaps the day before.

November 1963

I was nine, in the third grade, Miss Brewer's class. President Kennedy was going to be in Dallas. That's what he was called in my house, at least by my father: President Kennedy. Others, I knew, just called him Kennedy.

The day before he was to come, Miss Brewer told us we'd be making flag pictures during Art. Because of the President's visit, she said.

Kennedy is a traitor, said one of the boys.

Do you know what that means? asked Miss Brewer.

It means he's a faggot, said another boy, and some of them laughed. I didn't know what faggot meant, and I was unsure about traitor, but I raised my hand and said my father said he was a good President.

That day, after school, the boy who'd said President Kennedy was a faggot informed me that my father was a nigger-lover.

I know, I said, although I hadn't. From the way he said it, it was like being a faggot. But I was loyal to my father and said I know, without flinching. The boy looked at me hard and spat on the ground at my feet. But what he said then was not as mean as I had expected: *I hate this school. Nothing ever happens here.*

Maybe he would have been meaner if I hadn't been a girl, and hardly worth bothering about. I can't remember any of the boys' names, and not that many of the girls'. But I remember Celia, of course. She was my best friend.



Tory's my best friend now, I suppose, although I think her best friend is her lover Linda, so where does that leave me? We've been law partners for nearly nine years, Tory and I. Hayes and Meadows, PC. Sometimes she's granite, and I lean against her when I start to wobble. Other times I worry that the burden of the bad times a few years ago will drag her back to the dark place in her mind, where she's already done enough time. I try to keep an eye on Tory's moods, and around the time we met Peggy Grayling I thought she was getting edgy. Her sarcasm was less playful, more stinging, and she'd taken to correcting my grammar, not just on paper when she proofread my legal work, but while we were talking. When I'd mention this to her, she'd disclaim any worries other than the usual one about how we were going to survive as lawyers in a town where there were too many of them, but I thought I knew better.

That evening-- the evening of the day the fax arrived-- she stood framed in my office door, one hip cocked. "Do you know anything about a Margaret Grayling calling this morning? She's on the phone now, says our secretary told her to call back later. Has Beverly stopped taking messages?"

"It was me," I admitted. "I got the call, but I thought she was a nut case, so I put her off. I didn't think she'd call back."

"Well she did. She's on the line now. What's so nutty about her?"

I was reluctant to mention the fax, and knew I didn't want Tory to see it. She needs crazy even less than I do, and she's more drawn to it. But I realized I needed some evidence to back up my impression of the woman's instability. "It looks like some little girl was murdered horribly. I don't know who this woman is or what she wants, but I guess she actually had a crime scene photograph, and faxed it here before she called. It was awful. Worst I've ever seen. We don't need those kinds of clients, Tory. Can't you refer her to Billy?" Bill Woodruff officed across the hall from us, a nice young lawyer with so much enthusiasm and so little judgment that he would take any client that moved.

Tory inclined her close-shorn copper head. "Depends. What does she want with a lawyer?"

I shrugged. “I think she knew the little girl, maybe she was related to her. So she faxes over the photo and asks me if that’s the kind of case we might be interested in. I don’t know why she picked on us. Maybe our ad.” After some debate, we’d recently placed an ad in the Yellow Pages.

“Where’s this fax?” asked Tory.

“I don’t know, Tory. Jesus, I threw it away. Why would you want to see it? Didn’t you get enough of that at the DA’s office? It was horrible.”

“What’s this, then?” Some uncanny impulse had turned her gaze toward the chair next to me. My battered leather briefcase rested there, a sheet of paper protruding unevenly from the top. She walked over and pulled out the spotty-looking sheet of paper.

I peered at it. “I guess that’s it. I must have stuffed it in there.”

But she wasn’t listening. She was looking at the photograph.

“Tory? Don’t look at it. It’s pointless. Throw it away, OK? No, give it to me, I’ll toss it. Here.” I held out my hand.

She shook her head abstractedly and turned to walk back toward her office, gripping the fax with both hands. As she passed under the old chandelier in the reception area her face caught the light and I could see her expression—one that I knew and didn’t like. The child’s photograph had drawn her in, forged some connection to her tangle of loyalties and yearnings in the instant it struck her eyes. I heard her sit down in her creaky desk chair, could barely discern her murmur into the phone. I tried to shrug and get back to the billing records I was working on, but ten minutes later I could see that one of the lights on the telephone was still lit and I knew that Tory had not told the woman that we were the wrong firm to help her.

I rose and walked to her office, dread rising in my body like a fever. The only light in there was the greenish glow from the banker’s lamp on her desk.

“I think I know how you must feel,” she was saying. She swiveled around in her chair, seeing me at the door. *What?* I mouthed at her, but she just shook her head and turned back to the phone. The gruesome fax was lying on her desk next to the phone, its creases softening slightly as though she had smoothed it out.

“Sure we can. Sure,” she said. “In person would be much better, I agree. I think tomorrow would be OK. Let me look. Hold on for a moment, please. Please. I’ll be right

back.” She punched the mute button on her phone, and laid the receiver down tenderly next to the photo.

“She’s the mom,” she said.

“What?”

“Hers.” She gestured toward the fax. “Her mom.”

“Well, is she okay?”

“She’s not okay, Cinda. Her little girl was tortured and murdered. She’s never going to be okay. She wants to come talk with us.”

“What about?”

“A lawsuit. For her daughter’s death. We’re the ones she wants to represent her. She says she’s met you. Do you remember her?”

I shook my head and looked down at the carpet, which I noticed was stained pretty badly in spots. “I don’t know her. I don’t think we can do anything for her, Tory. You know we can’t bring her daughter back.”

She looked at me with scorn, then picked up the receiver again and punched the mute button. “Mrs. Grayling? Why don’t you come over here about ten tomorrow, and we’ll talk with you then? We don’t charge for an initial consultation. One thousand seven Pearl Street, right over Pasta Jay’s. Are you all right now? Is your husband there? Oh. Well can you call a friend? Good, why don’t you do that? Right. Take care, and we’ll see you at ten.”

She hung up and sat down in her wooden swivel chair, then swung it round to face me. “*Can’t bring her daughter back,*” she mimicked. “When was the last time we represented someone who actually hoped to get back what she’d lost? The one whose husband ruptured her spleen and messed her head up so bad she’ll be in therapy until she dies? The one who got raped at knifepoint and then the guy slashed her face up because she didn’t fake an orgasm?”

I made a gesture of surrender.

“That lady knows we can’t bring her daughter back,” said Tory. “Or I think she does. And if she doesn’t we can certainly make that clear. She just wants the same thing our other clients want.”

“I’ve been wondering about that lately,” I said, sinking into the chair across from her desk. “What is that?”

“What is what?” She was pacing now, the room too small to contain her energy.

“What our clients want.”

“I think they want a person on a tall bench in a black robe to tell them and the world that it’s not right what happened to them. It’s not *acceptable*. They want to know that someone is responsible for what they lost, and is going to have to pay for it.”

“Well, someone killed her daughter. Does she know who it was?”

“Yeah, she knows. A guy confessed.”

“So she wants us to sue him?”

“He was prosecuted for it last year,” said Tory. “In Chicago. Acquitted, NGI.”

Not guilty by reason of insanity. “I suppose we could sue him anyway,” I said skeptically. “Insanity’s not quite as good a defense to a tort as it is to a crime.”

Tory shook her head. “She says she doesn’t want to sue him. He’s locked up in the psych ward, he’s never gonna get out, and he’s got no money.”

“Then who?” I asked. “Who does she want us to sue?”

Tory turned back to her desk, scrabbling through piles of paper, looking for something. “I believe the word is *whom*. And I don’t know whom she wants to sue. Something about an accomplice, I couldn’t quite get it; she got very quiet toward the end of the conversation. She’s coming in tomorrow, ten o’clock. We’ll find out then. Now you better go home.” She found a half-gone yellow legal pad, and started to make a bulleted list.

“What about you?”

“I’ll be right behind you,” she replied without looking up, and added another bullet to her list. I could almost smell the mania rising in her veins, and I thought, *God help you, whoever you are*.

I woke up the next morning in time for a run, but it was snowing lightly, a drippy puky nuisance snow that extinguished my interest in outdoor exercise. Even after an exceptionally thorough pass through the Boulder *Daily Camera*, I was dressed and ready for work by seven forty-five. When I got there the place felt chilly and awfully quiet under the fluorescent lights. Margaret Grayling wasn’t expected until ten, and I knew that Beverly wouldn’t be in until eleven because Tuesday is the day she and her chronically unemployed husband Charley have

couples therapy. I didn't want to sit down in the bleak emptiness of my office, so I left my briefcase on my desk, stuffed a printout of the brief I was working on into my backpack, and decamped for the Trident across the street. Half coffeeshop, half used bookstore, the Trident is an old Boulder tradition that Starbucks will never replace. It's Buddhist-owned and operated and they make great coffee there, but I like it mostly for the curious stillness that permeates the air and underlies the buzz of steam and reggae music and conversation.

I kept my eye on the time as I marked up the brief, and dashed back across the street to the office at five minutes to ten, but Grayling must have arrived early. I could hear talking as I entered the reception area, two voices drifting out of Tory's office.

"Journalism," the not-Tory voice was saying. "University of Illinois at Chicago."

"And Alison's father?" Tory's voice had none of its usual edge.

"We're separated," she said. "Divorce underway. He's an academic too. Geology, Northwestern University. Glaciers, mostly. He's still there."

I stepped into the room. "Hi, sorry. I guess I'm a little late. I'm Cinda Hayes." I offered my hand to the slender grey-haired woman sitting in Tory's guest chair. She turned her face up as she took my hand in hers; the face and the hand were both worn, both beautiful. About fifty, I guessed; no makeup, no hair dye. Her hair fell in careless streaky ripples to her shoulders, and the only jewelry in sight was a thin gold chain around her tanned neck. She certainly didn't look crazy.

"Cinda," she said softly, in the voice I had heard on the telephone. "I'm so glad to see you again."

"Me too," I said inadequately and probably ungrammatically, but her greeting had made me uncomfortable. I had no memory of ever having met this woman before. "Let me unload this thing"—I hefted the backpack off my shoulder—"and get a notepad, and I'll be right back." The red light on my desk phone blinked, suggesting that a caller had left a message on my voicemail, but I ignored it and rummaged for a legal pad, then rejoined Tory and Margaret Grayling.

"Yes, it was," she was saying in response to some question of Tory's I had not heard. "He thought the only thing was to go on, with our lives, you know. I don't mean right away, of course. But after the funeral, and then the investigation, and then this man who called

himself Wolf was arrested, and then the trial, everything.” Her voice trailed off. “After that he said to me, you can’t be mired in grief forever. You have to go on. Life is good. I know he meant well, and I didn’t want to force my grieving onto him. So we went our own ways.” She fell silent, nibbling thoughtfully on her thumbnail.

I looked at Tory, and her look back said *Take it away*.

“I’m sorry, I know I came in late,” I began. “Who is Wolf? What trial was this?”

“Wolf is the one who killed my daughter Alison,” she said. “He was a young man, from a dreadful family, apparently. He was charged with sexual assault, sexual assault on a child, felony murder, murder with premeditation, various crimes. Quite serious crimes. There was something terribly wrong with him, of course.”

“So the picture you faxed me yesterday—that was Alison?”

She nodded. “I thought you needed to see the photograph to understand why I want to pursue this. There was no doubt this man was the one who . . . did those things. He confessed almost as soon as the police came to his door. He lived across the street from Alison’s school. Apparently he had watched her for weeks from the upstairs window when she and the other kids were on the playground. She was, I don’t know. Noticeable. She was a shining star. I know every parent thinks that, but it was true of Alison. She was very blonde and had long, long legs for a nine-year-old, and she just ran rings around the other kids, in every possible way.” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “Then-- then he saw her and I believe he wanted to make her a part of his own world, which was very dark and ugly.”

My pen completely still, I watched her face then; not a single tear glazed the surface of her eyes, and her voice was steady but extremely soft. Her words were eloquent enough to have been rehearsed, but I didn’t think they had been. Despite the violence and loss in her story a curious peace clung to her, rather like the silence beneath the clatter of coffee cups in the Trident. She sighed and looked down at her ringless hands, spreading the fingers as if to dispel some tension there.

“Mrs. Grayling,” I began.

“Please, Cinda, call me Peggy. You don’t remember me, do you?”

I could feel a flush of embarrassment crawling around my hairline. “I’m sorry. I meet so many people and I’m not good at---“

“No, of course. No reason you should. My sister Celia was a friend of yours when we were all growing up. Back in Dallas.”

“Celia,” I said, blank for a moment until light broke through. “Celia Quinn? Oh my God, you’re Peggy Quinn? Of course I remember you.”

She smiled again, that Madonna-like blessing. “It’s been a lot of years, hasn’t it? A couple of years ago Celia ran into your sister-- Dana, is it?-- in Neiman-Marcus, and asked her about you. When she heard I was moving to Boulder she told me that you were living here, that you were a lawyer. So---” She spread the slender hands again.

Peggy Quinn had been eight years older than we were, an aloof princess whose boyfriends, dates, and clubs I heard about from Celia. My clearest memory of her didn’t feature her presence at all-- one Friday night when I slept over at Celia’s and Peggy was out on a date, the two of us had raided her closet and tried on her clothes, her wool suits and high-heeled shoes as desirable and distant as the outfits we saw in magazines. Her parents were proud of both of them, but it was Peggy’s photographs, in strapless gowns and cheerleader uniforms, that dominated their living room.

Then something went wrong, I never knew what. Only that Peggy had left home abruptly, before graduation, and gone to live with an aunt in Chicago. When I went to stay at Celia’s after that most of the photographs were gone, and Peggy’s closet was empty.

“Oh my God,” I said again, mindlessly. “How is Celia?”

“She’s fine. Her husband is a dermatologist, they live in Fort Worth. They have”-- here she paused for the merest of moments-- “two little girls.”

There was more I could have asked about why she had left home and what she had done, but I thought I could sense Tory growing restive. “So,” I said, “what brought you to Boulder, after you decided to leave Chicago?”

“Oh,” she said. “The *sangha*, my community. Dorje Dzong.” I knew I had heard the words but had to think for a moment where, then remembered. The name of the local Buddhist congregation.

“I see,” I said. Perhaps this explained something, at the very least her air of calm and control. “So, this man Wolf lived near your daughter’s school. And this was where?”

“Oak Park,” she replied. “The public schools there are very good.”

Another silence. “And so,” said Tory eventually. “The trial?”

She shook her head; at first I thought she was trying to shake off the memory, but her words described a different negation. “I wasn’t allowed to attend,” she said.

“*What?*” Tory said it, but I had the same reaction.

“The prosecutor,” said Peggy Grayling. “He was a very nice young man, John. He explained that witnesses couldn’t be in the courtroom, except during their own testimony.”

“Oh, yes,” I said. “The Rule.”



Full name: The Rule on Sequestration of Witnesses. Rule 615 of the Colorado Rules of Evidence. Like most lawyers, I had learned about it in law school. Any party to a trial can invoke it to keep the witnesses out of the courtroom until after they’ve testified. It prevents them from consciously or unconsciously conforming their testimony to that of the preceding witnesses. My Evidence professor had taught it to us, but he had neglected to mention that judges often refer to it simply as The Rule, or perhaps he didn’t know—he was many years past his last courtroom appearance. At the beginning of my first trial as a young prosecutor, when I was as nervous as coffee, Judge Harold Ramos had summoned me and defense counsel to the bench and asked formally if either party wished to invoke The Rule. My opponent said We do not, Your Honor, and then Ramos looked sternly at me. I had no idea what he was asking, and neither his expression nor anything else in the situation made it look like a good idea to inquire. Finally I said, in desperation: “Your Honor, we would like to invoke *all* the rules.” Ramos, who had the best poker face of any judge I have ever encountered, burst into a massive belly laugh, joined by the defense lawyer and the stenographer who had heard the exchange. I wished only that the floor would open up and swallow me, but somehow I got through the morning. At the noon recess, the defense lawyer took me aside and sympathetically explained which rule The Rule was. His name was Sam Holt, and his unstudied kindness made me wonder why I’d never tried harder to know him when we had been law school classmates.

A few years after he taught me about The Rule, Sam and I became lovers. I sometimes felt as though he'd taught me half of everything I knew about law, and as much about love. But he didn't live in Boulder any longer; he had moved to New York to practice law in a place where an accomplished Black man was not an object of curiosity or admiration simply for being that. I had spent a few days there with him about a month before Margaret Grayling sent her fax to our office. We had enjoyed our time together, but I didn't know when I would see him again.



I realized I had let my attention lapse, and I forced it back to Margaret Grayling and her story.

“But *were* you a witness?” Tory was asking. “I mean, did you have some evidence to give?”

“No, I wasn't, not in the end, because the verdict was not guilty. By reason of insanity. But if he had been convicted, I would have testified at the sentencing, is what this young man John told me. On-- I think he called it the victim impact. So, just in case it happened that way, I couldn't be allowed into the trial.”

It was Tory's turn to shake her head. “Doesn't sound right to me. If it had been me prosecuting, I would have argued that a witness who's just going to testify at sentencing isn't subject to The Rule.”

Mrs. Grayling shrugged lightly. *What do I know?* said her expression. “But I've been told that in a civil trial, I'd be allowed to attend every day of the trial, even if I were going to be a witness.”

“That's right,” said Tory quickly. “Because you'd be a party to the case. The Rule doesn't apply to parties.”

“So this man, Wolf-- he was acquitted?” I prompted her. “By reason of insanity?”

She nodded. “I wasn't there to hear the testimony, of course, but apparently he was a very, very disturbed man. His name was Leonard Fitzgerald, but he had decided to call himself Wolf. Or sometimes Dire Wolf, I'm told. He had a whole fantasy life, and this

basement apartment where he pursued it. The psychiatrists didn't agree altogether, John told me later, but every one of them thought he was severely. . . I don't know what. Impaired. Damaged. But there are so many people like that, aren't there?" She opened her hands outward like a book, a gesture of resignation, or benediction.

"Mrs. Grayling," Tory began.

"Peggy, please," she said. Her calm amazed me; I wondered if it was chemically maintained.

"Peggy," Tory agreed. "Peggy, when you called last night, you asked me about what happens when one person suggests that another commit a crime. Do you have some reason to think that someone else suggested your daughter's murder to Leonard Fitzgerald?"

"That's the thing, exactly, that I wanted to ask you about. Yes, I have some reason, but I need to know for sure. I really need to know," she repeated, with the first hint of urgency I had heard.

"What is your reason for thinking someone else was involved?" I asked. Tory's notepad, I noticed, was nearly as blank as mine. Nothing appeared on it after Peggy Grayling's name, address, and telephone number.

"John, the prosecutor, told me that part of what convinced the jury that Wolf was not guilty by reason of insanity was the videotape." This was the first I'd heard about a videotape. A small shard of memory turned and stirred in my mind.

"Apparently it was a pornographic tape," she continued. "A snuff film, John called it. They found it in Wolf's VCR, and the lab said he probably had copied it off of one he rented from a shop somewhere. They never found the place he rented it from. Chicago is a big place," she added unnecessarily.

Then I remembered. The Chicago Snuff Film Trial, the papers had called it. I had read about it the previous spring. It had featured many elements that made it a show trial: the lucid but very crazy defendant, the battle of the psychiatric experts, the film that some of them opined had finally pushed him over the edge, the NGI verdict.

"This was all about a year ago, right?" I asked her.

She nodded and then crossed her arms and leaned forward, the hem of her pale linen shirt sliding down over the knees of her corduroy jeans.

“I want to see that tape,” she said.

No, was my first reaction. *No, you don't. No, you can't. Not if I can help it.* I was already harboring a passionate wish to protect this woman from any further sorrow. But Tory's reaction was more professional, and more constructive.

“Did you say the jury watched the tape?” she asked.

Peggy nodded.

“Then it must have been an exhibit. It will be an official part of the trial record. That's a public document,” she concluded confidently. “I'm sure we can arrange for you to see it. If you really want to,” she added more soberly, having caught my look, perhaps.

“Well, yes,” said Peggy Grayling. “I did think of that. I'm a trained journalist, you know. Here's what I discovered. The trial record, including the exhibits, including the videotape, is in the Clerk's Office of the court. It cannot be removed, although copies may be made if they are made within the confines of the Clerk's Office. There is a copying machine there for that purpose. Only, of course, a copying machine is not useful for making a copy of a videotape. For that you need a videocassette machine. And there is none there.”

“Shit, they really get you coming and going, don't they?” offered Tory.

“I did try bringing in a dual-deck videocassette machine, to make a copy,” Peggy went on. “That request got me an audience with the Clerk, himself. The first time I met with him, he listened to my request and then asked me to come back the next day. When I did, he informed me that he had reviewed the exhibit and that in his opinion it was copyrighted material, and consequently could not be copied without the permission of the copyright holder. I asked him who that was, and he said he did not know. By now I was thinking this conversation could have been a case study for my students in interviewing a reluctant public official. I'm afraid I rather gave up, then. I was getting ready to move here, and my husband was encouraging me to let it go. But I can't, you know,” she said, the urgency in her voice again. “I can't.”

“This accomplice you mentioned,” I asked her. “You meant by that the videotape?”

“Whoever made it,” she replied. “I haven't seen it, of course. But if the jury thought it made the Wolf do what he did, it must have more or less recommended the assault and

mutilation and murder of little girls. Like mine.” Her voice grew soft again, and on her face I saw for an instant the anguish that had hidden behind her professional rendition.

I looked at Tory, but she was staring rigorously out the window, although there was nothing to see but a pair of finches flitting around our bird feeder. “So,” I ventured, turning back to Peggy Grayling, “you think you want to sue whoever it was made this videotape, if it seems that the tape encouraged Leonard, Wolf, to do what he did?”

“Precisely. Can you do that?”

“I don’t know,” I said doubtfully. “There’s a big First Amendment question here, isn’t there?”

I had meant the comment for Tory, but Peggy spoke first. “I’m a journalist. Nobody understands the importance of freedom of speech better than I do. But--”

Tory rose from her desk chair. “Peggy,” she said firmly, “Cinda and I need to talk about this, do some research. This is an extremely interesting question you’ve brought us, and a hasty answer would be ill-advised. Can we call you in a day or two?”

“Of course,” she said at once, rising to her own feet. She was even smaller than she had looked in the chair, much shorter than either me or Tory, and quite slender. “Thank you so much,” she said, holding out her hand to me.

“Good to see you again,” I said as I pressed it. “Did we get your phone number?”

She nodded. “Tory has it. Thank you, too, Tory.”

“No problem,” said Tory. I could almost feel a cold front sweeping through the small room; I nearly heard the windows rattle.

“I can let myself out,” said Peggy, and she turned and vanished with a dancer’s light grace. We watched her departure in silence.

‘No *problem?*’ I repeated after I heard the main office door close behind her. “What is that supposed to signify, Sister Frostbite? Last night you were falling all over yourself to get the woman in here. Suddenly you can’t wait to hustle her out the door.”

“What hustle? I didn’t *hustle* anything.”

“Well, I sure think you would’ve, if you’d had to. You just didn’t have to because she has such lovely manners that she hustled herself out to save you the trouble. What’s going on?”

Tory paced over to the window and back, then sat down again and played a tattoo on the desktop with her pencil before finally speaking. “Cinda, I hate this idea of blame the book, blame the movie. We can’t do what she’s asking. It’s censorship. Trying to stop someone’s speech because some wacko acted out his fantasies then blamed his crime on pornography. Ted Bundy all over again. It’s bullshit.”

“What censorship? I didn’t hear her say she wanted to stop anyone’s speech.”

“It’s the same thing. Like making a filmmaker pay a huge fine if you don’t like what he shows in his movies. You said yourself it’s a First Amendment issue.”

“I said *question*. I don’t know the answer. Anyway, it’s not a matter of whether we like it, Tory. It’s whether it encourages someone to murder a little girl.”

She muttered something then, but I didn’t catch it.

“Say that again?”

“I *said* Brianna Fucking Bainbridge. Is who you sound like. Maybe you and she ought to get together on this, really step all over the First Amendment. I’m going over to the gym. See you later.”

See, she *has* been getting edgy, I told myself. It wasn’t until much later that it occurred to me how completely we had traded positions on Margaret Grayling and her lawsuit.