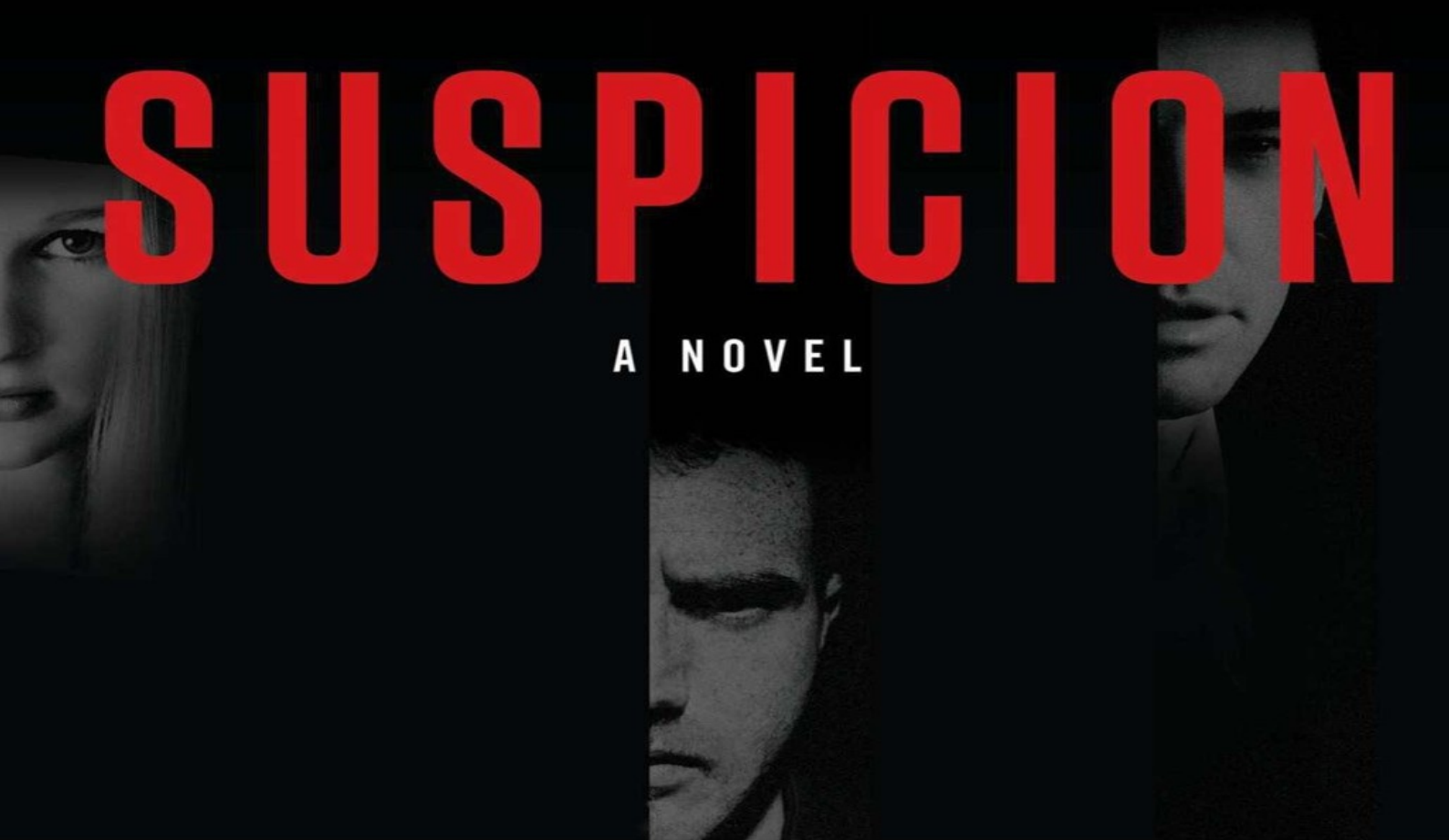


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JOSEPH FINDER

SUSPICION

A NOVEL



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Red Carpet: The Connection between the Kremlin and America's Most Powerful Businessmen

SUSPICION

JOSEPH FINDER

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— est. 1852 —

DUTTON

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For Dan Conway

PART ONE

1

Sometimes the smallest decision can change your life forever.

Abe Lincoln's bodyguard decides to stay for another drink at the bar at Ford's Theatre during intermission.

The archduke's driver makes a wrong turn in Sarajevo because he refuses to ask for directions. (Men, right?)

You finally listen to your know-it-all brother-in-law and invest everything you have with a guy named Bernie Madoff. Steady returns, dude. A no-brainer.

The tyranny of small decisions, someone once called it. The gate of history turns on small hinges.

Danny Goodman's nightmare began with a quick handshake and a friendly smile.

• • •

Whenever he drove up to his daughter's private school, the Lyman Academy, Danny couldn't help thinking of stately Wayne Manor, the baronial mansion outside Gotham City where Batman lives as Bruce Wayne. If only he were driving the Batmobile instead of a 1997 Honda Accord.

Lyman was the most exclusive private girls' school in Boston, and most of the other cars in the pickup line were gleaming luxury SUVs: Range Rovers or Mercedes-Benzes or Land Cruisers. Today though, Abby would be spared the public humiliation of an Accord sighting, because her father had arrived twenty minutes early for the afternoon pickup. He had an appointment with the head of the Upper School, Tinsley Thornton, whom everybody called Lally.

Lally. No wonder the place made Danny uncomfortable.

He parked in the side lot, where the teachers parked, and where his dented old Honda didn't look quite so out of place.

• • •

The office of the head of the Upper School was at the end of a long corridor next to the headmaster's office and Admissions, which might as well have been labeled REJECTIONS. You either had to know someone—several someones—to get into Lyman or be able to write a check sizable enough to build a new library. Danny had been fortunate: The foundation his late wife, Sarah, had worked for was endowed by a guy who also happened to be chairman of Lyman's board of trustees.

Lally Thornton welcomed him to her large, oak-paneled office with a concerned look, clutching his hand in two of hers. Her steel-gray hair was held back with a black velvet headband. She wore a black turtleneck, a double strand of pearls, and perfume with the strong floral smell of urinal cake. Her air

of lethal graciousness always reminded Danny of that socialite girls'-school headmistress who shot the diet doctor years ago.

"Is everything all right with Abby at home?" she asked with hushed concern, settling into a low brocade chair while Danny sat on the couch at a right angle to her.

"Oh, yeah, she's—doing well." He swallowed hard.

"It must be so difficult for her."

He nodded. "But you know, Abby's a strong kid."

"Losing a mother at her age. What a terrible thing."

Danny nodded. She must have just reviewed the file. "I had a quick question about the Italy trip," he said.

She lit up. "It is *such* a profound experience," she said. "You'll see. It changes them. They come back different people—more aware of the world, more appreciative of different cultures, and, well, it seems to just dissolve all those cliques, all those silly tensions between the girls. I'd even call it transformative. Abby—oh, she's going, isn't she?"

"Well, see, that's the question."

"She must. She absolutely *must*. It's the trip of a lifetime."

He blotted his damp palms on the knees of his suit pants. "Right, I know, I've heard. . . . But Abby—well, you know how idealistic these girls can be at that age. She's sort of concerned that some of her classmates might find it difficult to go."

"Difficult?"

"The five thousand dollars, I mean. Not everyone can afford it, and, you know, that bothers her." Danny tried to sound casual. As if he were a hedge fund tycoon with a social conscience. Instead of a writer whose advance on his latest book had run out months ago.

What Lally apparently didn't know was that he was more than a month late with this semester's tuition. He had no idea how he could possibly come up with it—let alone five thousand bucks for a trip to Italy on top of that. Lyman had the biggest endowment of any private school in the United States. He was fairly certain they'd squeak by a bit longer without his lousy sixteen thousand dollars.

He imagined her reply: *Why, that five-thousand-dollar fee, that's merely a suggestion, a recommendation. Of course it's waived if it's a hardship for any family.*

He felt a single fat bead of sweat trickle down behind his left ear, then down the side of his neck, and under his shirt collar.

"Isn't that thoughtful of her? Well, you tell Abby that if any of her friends aren't going to Italy because of the money, their parents should say something to Leah Winokur right away. We have scholarships for deserving minorities."

"Of course." He'd come here to try to finagle something that might enable Abby to go to Italy. A price break, maybe. A loan. Something. A scholarship for minorities didn't exactly help. The only minority that Abby Goodman, blond-haired and blue-eyed, belonged to at this school was Girls Whose Parents Didn't Have a Summer House. "You know, I do wonder whether it might be difficult for other parents, too—not minorities but not, you know, the very wealthy. To pay that kind of money on top of everything else."

"I doubt most Lyman parents would consider that a hardship. After all, no one *has* to go to Italy."

With a smile as cold as a pawnbroker's, she said, "Was there anything else?"

2

The halls were crowded with teenage girls. It rang with squeals and shouts and laughter. Some of them walked arm in arm or hugged one another. Danny often marveled at how affectionate girls that age were and couldn't help contrasting them with teenage boys, who smelled like old gym socks and zit cream and expressed affection by punching one another on the shoulder.

He waited for Abby with a deep sense of dread.

Not going on the Italy trip, she'd said, would be social death. She'd be a pariah. He'd told her he'd think about it. He'd see what he could do.

Meeting with Lally Thornton had been a desperation move, a Hail Mary pass that didn't completely work. No need to let Abby in on just how bad things were. How they were basically living on fumes. He wanted her life to be as normal as possible, given the circumstances.

She was doing better than a lot of girls her age would have done. She was strong, but her mother's death had hit her hard. For months, her default expression had been a Darth Vader mask of anger. What could she blame her?

He didn't look forward to giving her the bad news about the one thing she was looking forward to.

From behind him came a rumbling basso profundo. "Oh, Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes," sang a school security guard, Leon Chisholm. He was a black man of about sixty with close-cropped white hair and a wide, open face. He wore wire-rimmed glasses and had a gap between his front teeth; the vibe was part professor, part prizefighter. He'd spent twenty years with the Boston Police Department, so he was probably able to handle a few mean girls in Lululemon yoga pants.

"Officer," Danny said with a grin, and clapped him companionably on the shoulder. When Leon's oldest daughter, Rebecca, had graduated from Bunker Hill Community College—the first in the family to go to college—Danny had helped her get a job with a publisher in Boston. Leon liked Danny more than any of the other Lyman dads who said hi and actually chitchatted with him. To most other Lyman parents, Leon was invisible.

Then Danny caught a glimpse of Abby near the front lobby—her silvery metallic fringed scarf, then her face. Smiling, which surprised him. He couldn't remember when he'd last seen her smile. She was walking arm in arm with her new BFF, Jenna Galvin.

Jenna Galvin seemed to be Abby's polar opposite: She was small and dark-haired and chubby, where Abby was slender and graceful and blond. Jenna seemed sour, aloof, even arrogant, whereas Abby was sweet-natured and sociable. Or had been, anyway, until six months ago. Jenna had just transferred to Lyman as a junior, which was unusually late to start a new school, and had apparently been an outcast there. Abby, empathic as ever, and maybe also a bit rebellious, had felt bad for the new girl and befriended her. Now they were inseparable.

Abby's face lit up when she saw her father, which was disorienting—was she smiling at someone

else? She maneuvered nimbly through the teeming horde of girls and threw her arms around him.

First uncoerced hug in eleven months, Danny thought. But who's counting?

"Oh my God, Daddy, thank you!"

For what? he wanted to say.

She hugged him even harder. He still hadn't gotten used to how tall she'd grown. "Thank you thank you. I just saw my name on the Italy trip list. I *knew* you'd let me go. You are so *awesome*."

"Abby, honey—"

Jenna touched her arm. "My dad's here, come on." A sleek silver-haired man in an expensive-looking camel-colored suit entered the lobby and gave Jenna a kiss.

"Abby, wait—what are you talking about?" Danny said.

But Abby didn't hear him. She'd turned around and was talking to Jenna. Abby said, "I know, right?" before turning back to her father.

"Daddy, is it okay if I go home with Jenna?"

He felt a flash of irritation. She never seemed to want to spend time at home. But he said only, "Well, I don't know. I'd rather not have to drive out to Weston to pick you up."

"Esteban will take her home," Jenna said.

Esteban was the Galvins' driver. Jenna's father was some kind of investor and had a lot of money even by Lyman standards.

"Abby," Danny said, but then someone tapped him on the shoulder. He turned.

The silver-haired man. Thomas Galvin.

He appeared to be in his late forties. His blue-gray eyes were like steel against his deep tan. His suit was exquisitely cut, his pale blue shirt perfectly pressed, his tie neatly knotted. Everything in place. Danny's crappy sport coat, which he'd bought off the discount rack at the Men's Wearhouse Black Friday sale, felt itchy.

"Just wanted to introduce myself," the man said, offering his hand. "Tom Galvin."

"Dan Goodman."

Abby was already out the front door with Jenna.

"Nice to meet Abby's dad. She's terrific."

"Most of the time," Danny said with a grin.

"Jenna couldn't ask for a better friend."

"Well, it's great to meet you, too."

"Listen, thanks for letting me kick in on that Italy thing." He had the accent of a kid out of South

"Kick in?"

"Abby has been a lifesaver for our Jenna. You have no idea."

"Hold on a second. You paid for Abby's trip to Italy?"

"For totally selfish reasons, trust me." He lowered his voice to a confidential mutter. "This is Jenna's fourth school in three years. She was already begging to leave until she started hanging out with Abby. And she sure as hell doesn't want to go with the class to Italy if Abby's not going."

Danny's cheeks grew hot. He was astonished, and embarrassed. And angry, though he rarely let anyone see his anger.

How much had Abby told her friend? She couldn't possibly know how bad their financial situation was, but she must have said something. This was beyond embarrassing; it was demeaning. This rich guy was treating them like a charity case.

"That's extremely generous of you," he said, "but I can't accept it."

"Please. It's for my daughter."

“I’m sorry. I’ll call the bursar and set them straight. But I really do appreciate the thought.” He smiled, then turned and pushed through the front doors.

The sun dazzled his eyes. A gleaming black Maybach limousine was parked at the curb. It had to belong to Galvin. A man in a uniform of black suit, white shirt, and black tie approached Abby and Jenna with a cardboard Starbucks take-out tray and handed them each a cup. Galvin’s chauffeur must have gone on a Starbucks run.

“Thanks, Esteban,” Abby said. She turned as Danny emerged, beaming excitedly, her eyes shining. “Everything okay, Daddy?”

He beckoned her over. “Boogie,” he began quietly, using the pet name he never used around anyone else.

“Oh God, I’m so so so excited,” she interrupted. Then followed a torrent of words—*pasta* and *gelato* and *shopping*—that Danny couldn’t quite follow. She grabbed both of his elbows. “I’m going *Italy!*” she almost sang.

He hadn’t seen her this happy in years. Dimples had appeared on her cheeks, her smile so wide it looked like her face might crack in two.

Now what? Tell her there’d been a mix-up?

Danny had once made the mistake of opening a link a friend had sent him. It was something called a crush video. It showed a woman stepping on a tiny kitten with her stiletto heels. It was one of the sickest, most disturbing things he’d ever seen, and he wished he could *unsee* it.

Telling Abby the Italy trip wasn’t going to happen would feel a bit like that.

“Dan,” Galvin said by way of greeting as he came out the front door, lowering his BlackBerry.

Danny approached and said, in a low voice, “I can only accept this if you’ll let me pay you back.”

Galvin’s eyebrows shot up. He nodded solemnly. “If you don’t, I’ll send my goons after you.” He gave Danny a wry smile.

“I mean, no offense, but it’s a little awkward. We don’t even know each other.”

“Which is crazy, right? Given how close Abby and Jenna are? Listen, come over for dinner tomorrow night, wouldja? The boys are home from college, and they love Abby, and Celina is making her famous *arroz con pollo*.”

What could he say? The guy was shelling out for his daughter’s trip to Italy. Dinner with his family was the least he could do.

Much later, he’d replay that moment over and over again in his head.

He thrust out his hand and smiled. “Sounds great,” he said. “Thanks a lot.”

3

When Danny opened the door of the two-bedroom on Marlborough Street, he was greeted by the loud thumping of a dog's tail against the floor. Rex, their arthritic chocolate Lab, struggled to get up from his bed near the kitchen.

"That's okay, buddy, no need to get up for my sake," he said, coaxing Rex back down onto the plaid dog bed, stroking his graying coat, massaging his haunches. Rex was thirteen years old, which was old for the breed. His muzzle had gone silver, his amber eyes clouded with an opaque cataract haze. He'd belonged to Sarah, went with her after the divorce, and then had moved in with Abby. The old boy, profligate with affection, had heroically gotten Abby through her mother's death.

The red message light on Danny's phone was blinking.

Eight voice mails. Seven from one particularly odious and persistent collections agent named Tom Santangelo of Asset Recovery Solutions, who seemed to have trained at the Bada Bing school of debt collection. His "solution" was to "garnish" Danny's wages.

Garnish. Such a benign-sounding word. Like parsley sprigs and radish roses.

And what wages?

He'd replayed, over and over, that odd exchange with Tom Galvin. *Thanks for letting me kick in on that Italy thing.* Who was the guy, really? In the age of the Internet, the information had to be out there, and Danny, if nothing else, was an ace researcher.

Sitting at his desk in the small alcove off the living room that was now his "study"—his office had become Abby's bedroom—Danny opened a browser on his old MacBook Pro. LinkedIn had a long list of Thomas Galvins. Halfway down that roster was a Thomas X. Galvin who'd graduated from Boston College, worked for Putnam Investments, and was the founder, chief executive, chief investment officer, and managing director of Galvin Advisers on Saint James Avenue in Boston.

Bingo.

Rex, who was now curled atop Danny's shoes, heaved a long soulful sigh and nuzzled even closer.

Galvin Advisers of Boston, Mass. The website was nothing more than a secure portal, a page showing an overhead view of Boston's Financial District, and a log-in box that asked for user name and password. Above it, the words: *This website is intended solely for the employees and investors of Galvin Advisers.*

...

Danny's girlfriend, Lucy Lindstrom, arrived with dinner in a white plastic bag. Takeout from a place on Newbury Street: a salad for her and linguine with shrimp scampi for him. He could smell the garlic, the warm olive oil, oregano, a vinegary bite.

She leaned over to stroke Rex's face, causing him to close his eyes in bliss. Then she gave Danny a squeeze and a kiss. Her hair gave off a faint whiff of cigarette, which told Danny she'd spent the day doing outreach. She was a psychiatrist for the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, and she spent two days a week on the streets of Boston, trying to bribe and wheedle homeless people to come in and get treated.

She wore a pale gray turtleneck under a blue V-neck sweater with black jeans and a great old pair of black leather boots that Danny loved seeing her in. She was wearing her chunky black glasses, which Danny was convinced she used to make herself plainer, and thus less vulnerable, at work. It gave her a sort of winsomely studious look.

They'd been going out for three years, but they'd known each other since freshman year at Columbia. Back then, before life had kicked them both around, Lucy Lindstrom seemed unattainable. To Danny, she was the It Girl of his college class. She had blond hair that came down in unruly ripples to her shoulders, a sharp nose and chin, blue-gray eyes, a dazzling smile, an endearing overbite.

Back then, she'd been way out of his league. Frankly, she still was.

The two decades since college had etched faint lines around her mouth and vertical worry lines between her pale eyebrows. It wasn't just the years; she'd also survived an unhappy first marriage.

Danny knew she was overly sensitive about the signs of aging, indoctrinated like most women by fashion magazines.

Danny couldn't care less. He thought Lucy was more beautiful now than when she was a freshman. She set the round foil take-out pans on the dining table and eased off their cardboard lids.

"Hard day?"

"Mostly a lot of walking around. I need a shower." Lucy never complained about her work. He admired that.

"Glass of wine first?"

"Sure, why not?"

He pulled the cork out of a chilled bottle of Sancerre and poured them each a glass. They clinked. The wine was crisp, citrus and chalky.

"Street outreach?"

She nodded. "There was this guy at South Station today, sleeping on a bench. He looks like he's seventy, but he could be ten years younger—you know how the street ages them. Well, the police tried to take him to one of our day shelters, but he refused to go. Really fought with them. So I tried."

She looked pained, as if reliving the moment. And at the same time tender, transported. She felt a deep connection with the homeless guys. As far as Danny was concerned, they were vagrants and bums, but they were Lucy's children, her wards, not her patients.

"I told him it's getting to be really cold at night and he should sleep at the Night Center, not out on the street. But he said people were tampering with his food and they'll get to him if he goes to sleep. He started babbling—all kinds of nonsense. Word salad."

He nodded. "Paranoid schizophrenic." He found her work fascinating but also fundamentally baffling: How could she bear taking care of people who didn't want her help?

"Probably. We need to get him on Risperdal, but first I need to get him to talk. So I asked if I could sit with him and he said no. I said I just wanted to help. He said, 'What the hell can you do for me?' So I said, 'Well, I have cigarettes.' And he said, 'Oh, okay.'" She took a sip of wine.

Danny laughed. "Suddenly you couldn't shut him up."

"I gave him a five-dollar gift certificate for McDonald's, a cigarette, and a pair of white tube socks."

“So he’s coming in to see you?”

She shook her head. “Later, maybe. First I have to get him to trust me. But you know, there’s something really . . . moving about this guy.”

“How so?”

“There’s an intelligence in there. A really great, interesting mind locked away, deep inside. It’s sort of heartbreaking.”

The phone rang.

No, he thought. *Don’t let it be Tony Santangelo from Asset Recovery Solutions again.* He was about to let it go to voice mail when he checked the caller ID: 212 area code and the name of his literary agency, Levitan Freed Associates.

His agent, Mindy Levitan, rarely called except when she was in the middle of negotiating a deal for him.

It couldn’t be good news.

“How’s life in the salt mines?” Mindy said. She had a raspy voice from years of smoking, which she’d only recently been able to quit with the help of a Russian hypnotist.

“Excellent,” he lied. “Deep into it.” For several years now, he’d been working on a biography of a nineteenth-century robber baron named Jay Gould.

“Good, good. That’s what I like to hear.” She said it without enthusiasm. “So listen, Danny. Sorry to call you at suppertime, but I just got into my country house and checked my messages. And I got a call from Louisa.” Louisa Penniman was Danny’s editor. She was a legendary editor of “serious” nonfiction. She’d made her bones on “inside the Beltway” books about politics and a couple of presidential memoirs. She was widely feared and even more widely disliked.

“You’re breaking up,” Danny said. “I’m losing you.”

“Nice try. We’re both on landlines. Listen, this is serious, Danny. She wants to cancel the book.”

4

Danny felt his mouth go dry. “She wants to cancel because I’m a few months late?”
“First, kiddo, it’s not ‘a few’ months, it’s *fifteen* months—”

“Okay, but—”

“You know how bad things are in the industry. Publishers are all freaking out about e-books. They’re looking for any excuse to cancel contracts these days.”

“Was there ever a time when things *weren’t* bad in publishing?”

Mindy gave a quick, rueful laugh, more a bark. “Louisa Penniman doesn’t screw around.”

“This isn’t just a threat? I mean, you think—she’s actually serious?”

“As cancer,” Mandy said. Then, quickly, she added: “Sorry. Bad choice of words.”

• • •

Mindy Levitan had gotten him a bigger advance for his biography of Jay Gould than he’d ever expected. It helped that his first book, *The Kennedys of Boston*, had been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, even though it didn’t sell particularly well. Or actually win the Pulitzer, for that matter.

Also, he had to admit that his proposal had been damned good. Even better was Mindy’s pitch to publishers: *No one knows who Jay Gould is anymore, she’d written in her cover e-mail. Yet no one had heard of some Olympic track star shot down in World War II, but Unbroken was a massive bestseller. Nor had anyone heard of a serial killer who menaced Chicago during the World’s Fair, which didn’t stop readers from buying The Devil in the White City: It’s all in how the story is told.*

And Danny knew how to tell the story. Jay Gould was a railroad speculator and a strikebreaker and one of the richest men in America, an inside trader and a virtuoso at bribery, a scammer and a liar who actually bragged about being “the most hated man in America.”

Random House, HarperCollins, and Simon & Schuster had all bid, but Louisa at Triangle had topped them all. The money sounded good at first—until you subtracted Mindy’s fifteen percent and spread the payments out over the three years, at least, it would take him to write the book. Plus, a big chunk of the money wouldn’t come in until the trade paperback was published, at least a year after the hardcover. Not that he was complaining: He got to do what he loved, and if he lived frugally and didn’t go on any trips to the Caribbean, he could have made it.

But then came the call from Sarah.

His ex-wife had just gotten the results of a biopsy. There’d been no lump, nothing on a mammogram. Just a little warmth and redness in one breast she noticed one day. The skin felt different, hard and taut like an orange. Her lymph nodes were enlarged. Her doctor had told her it was probably an insect bite, and he’d prescribed antibiotics.

Her doctor was wrong.

~~The survival rates for inflammatory breast cancer weren't great. She was a single mom, and she was frightened.~~

One minute Danny was researching the Great Southwest Railroad Strike of 1886, and the next he was Googling estrogen receptors. Sarah's second husband had taken a job at a firm in Manhattan, and their eventual breakup had been acrimonious. And the guy was a jerk, as Sarah had finally come to realize. She needed Danny's help.

He began eating a lot of cafeteria meals at the Dana-Farber cancer center.

For the first time in years, his daughter actually seemed to need him around, too. She needed a steady presence. She also needed someone to drive her to dance practice and play rehearsals and sleepovers. While he waited in the cramped back room of the dance studio, he researched chemotherapy and radiation and hyperthermia and raw apricot seeds and vitamin B17.

And Jay Gould moved to the back burner.

Because Mr. Gould, as fascinating as he was, wasn't as important as Danny's daughter, or his ex-wife, whom he'd never stopped loving even when she stopped loving him.

"Danny?"

"What?"

"I said, we need to figure out what's next. How soon can you get me a hundred, hundred fifty pages? To see if we can keep them on the reservation. Keep her from canceling."

"You think that'll do it?"

"Might. Who knows? It's the only card I have to play. So you'll do it?"

Danny wasn't even close to having a decent hundred-plus pages, and he wouldn't be for at least a month. But if the book was canceled, there went his entire income stream.

Danny swallowed hard. "No problem," he said.

5

Lucy looked at him, arched her brows, and smiled sadly. “How bad?”
“Very.”

He told her what Mindy had to say. And about his meeting with the head of school. And then about the surprise loan from Thomas Galvin.

“Oh,” she said. “That’s generous.” She didn’t sound enthusiastic.

“Lucy.”

She avoided his eyes.

“Let’s hear it,” he said.

“Well, are you sure that’s really a good idea?”

“Why not?”

“I just think it’s weird for this guy who doesn’t even know you to pay for your daughter to go on a trip.”

“It’s unusual, I’ll give you that. Though he invited us over for dinner tomorrow night.”

“I work tomorrow night. I mean, if I was even invited. Does Abby know about this?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Never underestimate teenage girls. They notice everything. And they can be manipulative. Believe me, I used to be one.”

“Maybe.”

“I just think it’s not a good idea to borrow money from this guy you barely know. It just—well, it sends up a red flag.”

“You know what’s not a good idea? Charging five thousand bucks for a friggin’ school trip to Italy. The way this school just takes for granted that parents can shell out that kind of money.”

“You’re just figuring this out?”

“No, but it still annoys me. What it’s doing to Abby.”

“So we’re really talking about Abby’s new friend.”

“Abby gets driven home from the Galvins by a Hispanic servant wearing a chauffeur’s uniform, okay? There’s something wrong with that.”

“I wouldn’t mind it.”

“She’s a kid. And it’s not her life. It’s someone else’s.”

“Exactly. That’s not her life, and she knows it. That kind of thing isn’t going to turn her head.”

“How could it not? It’s like when someone says to you, ‘Doesn’t that tag inside the neck of your T-shirt bother you? Doesn’t it itch?’ And all of a sudden, what do you know?—it *does* itch. That tag starts driving you crazy.”

“The itch being—what? Living with a father who adores her but doesn’t happen to be a

zillionaire?”

They heard the squeak of the front-door hinges, the thud of Abby putting down her backpack, the *thump-thump-thump* of Rex’s tail against the floor. Abby was talking to the dog as if he were either a young child or a moron. “How was your *day*, Rex? Have you been a *good* boy? Oh, why is your collar still on?” The dog’s prong collar jingled. “Let’s ask Daddy if he remembered to take you out for a walk.”

When she walked to the kitchen, she looked more like a woman, less like a girl. In the couple of months since she’d become best friends with Jenna, she’d started dressing differently. Instead of her everyday uniform of light blue Juicy sweatpants and a plaid fleece-lined flannel shirt, untucked, she’d wear preppy-looking twin sets and leggings. She’d started using makeup. He wanted to tell her to stop, slow down. You have your whole life to be a grown-up. You only get to be a girl for a few years.

“For you.” She pulled an envelope from the pile and dropped it on the table. He recognized the cream-colored paper stock of a Lyman Academy envelope. “Looks like another bill,” she said. “Are we behind on the tuition again?”

“We’re fine,” he said. “Nothing to worry about. You have dinner yet? I’ve got some shrimp and linguine left, if you want it. Or I could make, I don’t know, macaroni and cheese?”

“No, thanks,” she said, her tone softening a bit. “I ate at the Galvins’.”

“Great,” he said, trying to sound upbeat. Lately she’d been having dinner most nights with Jenna and her family. Who could blame her? Dinner with just the two of them was often strained, punctuated by long silences. But still . . .

“I guess I get to meet them tomorrow night.”

She nodded. “I know. You’ll like them a lot.”

“Hey, Abby,” said Lucy, coming up from behind and giving Abby a quick peck on the cheek. “I love those flats. Tory Burch?”

Abby looked uncomfortable but, at the same time, pleased. “I guess.”

Danny used to worry about how his daughter would get along with his girlfriend. But she and Lucy seemed to be friends. Maybe it was because Lucy never tried to take Sarah’s place. Maybe it was because Abby wanted another mother figure in her life. Maybe it was because Sarah had married a man Abby didn’t like.

“They’re so cute,” Lucy said.

“Are they new?” Danny asked.

Abby’s face reddened. She looked around theatrically and said, “What is this, like, the Style Network? Um, can I go do my homework now, please?”

“In a moment,” Danny said. “We’re talking.”

Abby folded her arms and compressed her lips, making it clear how much talking she planned to do.

“I asked, are those shoes new?”

Abby looked at him steadily for a long moment, as if deciding how to reply. Finally, she said, “They’re a gift from the Galvins, okay?”

“That’s so nice,” Lucy said, trying to calm the waters. She busied herself at the dining table, which was piled with books and papers and junk mail. She was smart enough not to get involved any further.

“A gift? For what occasion?”

“Occasion?” Abby’s eyes widened. “I mean, for standing there like a dork, watching Jenna buy stuff when we were at the Natick Mall this afternoon, because I don’t have a credit card and I don’t have any money, and she probably just felt sorry for me.”

“She felt *sorry* for you?”

“She has her own Platinum American Express card and I don’t even have, like, a debit card.”

“That’s terrible. How can a girl show her face if she doesn’t have a Platinum AmEx card?”

Abby smoldered silently.

“If you wanted to buy something, you could have called me. You know that.”

“And you would have said no.”

“Maybe yes, maybe no. But at least you should have asked.”

“Oh yeah, sure, I could see that. Like, ‘Hi, Dad, I just saw the cutest pair of Tory Burch flats and Jenna just bought a pair and can I have two hundred dollars to buy them, too?’ Like you would have said yes? At least why don’t you be honest with *yourself*?”

“Two hundred dollars?” Danny said. “You’re damned right I would have said no.”

“See?”

Obviously, his daughter didn’t mind receiving charity from the Galvins. “You girls spent the afternoon at a shopping mall? What about your homework?”

“I didn’t have my laptop with me.”

“Why not?”

“You’re talking about that MacBook that weighs, like, a thousand pounds? I don’t think so.”

“You carried it around all last year and didn’t mind.”

“And the year before and the year before and the year before. It’s a dinosaur. It should, like, be on *Antiques Roadshow* or whatever.”

He tried not to laugh. “If you need a new laptop, we can talk about it,” he said. “Until then, why don’t you invite Jenna over here sometime? Maybe you two can actually get some homework done.”

Abby stared with incredulity. “Are you serious?”

“If you’re concerned about privacy, I can go out and work somewhere while you girls are here. Find a Starbucks, whatever.”

“You don’t get it, do you?”

“What am I not getting?”

“You think I want her to see this . . . this *veal cage* we live in?”

Danny couldn’t help bursting out laughing.

“It’s not funny!” she protested.

“Of course it’s not, sweetie,” Danny said. When her mother was well, before her second marriage broke up, Abby had lived in a rambling old six-bedroom Victorian in Chestnut Hill that belonged to her stepfather, a partner in a big Boston law firm. Now she had no stepfather—not that she minded that—and no rambling house, and no mother.

He came closer, tried to put his arms around her, but she bucked away. “I just want to make sure you give yourself enough time to do your homework. This is a really important year. You know that. This fall, you’ll be applying to colleges, and—”

“Seriously?” she said, stiffening. “Seriously?” Then, yelling: “I don’t *believe* this!”

She spun around and ran into her bedroom and slammed the door.

Lucy glanced up from the dining table, gave a sad smile. She didn’t need to say anything. She felt bad for both father and daughter; she understood the complexity. Her marriage, to an architect, had broken up, though amicably; her son, Kyle, was a sophomore at Bowdoin. She’d been through all this

She ran her fingers through Danny’s hair. “No one ever said teenagers were easy,” she murmured.

6

Lucy woke early and made coffee for the two of them before leaving for work. Danny managed to get in a solid hour of writing before he heard the music coming from Abby's room.

Thumping, floor-vibrating bass, some kind of hip-hop. It wasn't so long ago that Abby awoke to some sweet twangy ballad by Taylor Swift or one of her many clones. Now everything she listened to sounded the same: Auto-Tuned vocal tricks and rants about being "on the floor" in "the club."

Twenty minutes later, he was sitting at the dining table reading *The Boston Globe* and sipping coffee from an oversize white mug that said *I ♥ My Daddy* in the spindly printing of a five-year-old. The Y looked like Poseidon's trident. Abby had made it at a friend's birthday party at a clay workshop in Brookline where kids decorated ready-made pieces of ceramic pottery. More than a decade ago, and he remembered it as if it were a few months.

Abby emerged from the bathroom in a steam cloud, wearing a bathrobe, hair wet from the shower. She came over to the small kitchen without acknowledging his presence and poured herself a bowl of Cinnamon Roll Frosted Mini-Wheats, doused it with Lactaid milk, and brought it over to the dining table.

"Any left for me?" she asked as she sat down.

"Any what?"

"That." She pointed at his coffee mug.

He grinned. "You're too young to get hooked on caffeine."

She slid the pile of mail in front of her and began flipping idly through the envelopes. "I mean, it's not so not a big deal when I sleep over at the Galvins'. Celina always makes *café con leche* for Jenna and me."

"Celina is their housekeeper? Or their cook?"

"Keep up, Dad. She's Jenna's mom." She picked up the cream-stock envelope from Lyman and slid a finger under the flap. He didn't want her looking at the reminder note—no need for her to worry—but he also didn't want to make too big a deal of it, so he said nothing.

"Well, you're not at the Galvins', are you?" he said, and he couldn't hide his smile.

He'd solemnly sworn, when Sarah and he first saw that whooshing heartbeat on the fetal monitor, never to say all those trite, predictable things that all parents seem to say. Like: *As long as you live under my roof, you'll live by my rules* and *Because I said so* and *I don't care what the other kids do* and *Don't make me stop this car*.

He put the milk away in the refrigerator, and then he heard a high-pitched sound, a stifled cry, and he whirled around.

Abby was holding the Lyman letter in a trembling hand. The paper rattled. Her face had gone pale.

"Hey, don't worry about it," he said. "The check's a little late. I have to move some money

around.”

She was crying with an abandon that Danny had seen her do only once before, in the hospital room right after Sarah had died. There was barely any sound. Like she was gasping for breath. Or hiccupping. Her eyes were wide, her mouth open and downturned. She looked almost in shock. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

Danny felt his insides clutch. She was overreacting, but he couldn't stand seeing her in pain. “Boogie,” he said softly, coming over to her and circling his arms around her shoulders from behind. “Abby. Baby, what's wrong?” He glanced at the letter and felt his stomach drop. Even though he glimpsed only fragments of sentences, it was enough to understand:

. . . regret to inform . . . leave us no choice . . . immediate payment is received. . . . Abigail's school records . . . assist in the transfer to another school . . .

Unless Lyman Academy received sixteen thousand dollars by five P.M. on Friday—three days from then—Abby would have to leave the school.

He squeezed her tight, her tears scalding his forearm, her chest heaving.

“Listen,” he said, softly yet firmly, “that's not going to happen, okay?”

Then came a rush of words in one terrible anguished sob, most of which he couldn't make out. Just the words *all my friends* and *Daddy*.

The shape of her mouth when she'd let out a cry was precisely the same as it had been seconds after she'd been born, when the nurse had taken her, all of six pounds, from the obstetrician's gloved hands, swaddling her expertly in a blanket, and put her down on the warming table. Then this tiny infant had curled her tiny hands into fists and let out a great big gusty cry, the first of her life, announcing, *Hey, I'm here!*

And he knew he'd always do everything in his power to protect this little creature.

“Sweetie,” he said. “Listen to me. Don't even think about it. That is *not* going to happen. You have my word.”

But he knew his assurances were hollow, his promises empty, and he wondered whether she knew it, too.

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