

Author of *The Red Syndrome*

HAGGAI
CARMON

**"Tight and
fluidly written."**
— *Booklist* on
The Red Syndrome

THE
CHAMELEON
CONSPIRACY

A Dan Gordon Intelligence Thriller ©

**HAGGAI
CARMON**

**THE
CHAMELEON
CONSPIRACY**

LEISURE BOOKS



NEW YORK CITY

To Ella, whom I loved even before she was born.

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INTRODUCTION

On this one-hundred-year anniversary of Ian Fleming's birth, Dan Gordon may become the new James Bond, to rid us of post-Cold War threats. Fleming's novels have created an image of the successful intelligence officer, who saves the world equipped with a Walther PPK and a martini shaken, not stirred. This tuxedo-clad hero seems to comprise the Empire's entire intelligence service. While both are masters at the game, Dan Gordon is closer to the reality I know. He is unarmed. He actually writes reports and worries about receipts. He operates within a professional structure where approvals are necessary. While he is mindful of the chain of command, Dan is an independent, self-sufficient, and smart risk taker. After discoursing on life in the CIA to a group of high school students, I was asked, "Yes, but tell us about the time you were surrounded by a bunch of bad guys all pointing their guns at you. How did you get away?" Dan Gordon understands that the essence of the profession is to take all the necessary risks to get the job done without ever allowing yourself to be surrounded by those bad guys, especially if they're armed. What he shares with the Bond character is his intelligence, his tenaciousness, and his love of good food, although Dan doesn't insist on five-star cuisine. And, so far, Dan hasn't run into the easy and beautiful women of the Fleming tales. And, in my long CIA career, neither have I.

Khomeini's 1979 overthrow of the Shah was the only successful religious revolution in modern times, helped by a confluence of factors, not the least of which was President Carter's pressure on a Shah dying of cancer to increase human rights. More Iranians died at the hands of the new commissars than under the reviled SAVAK, the Iranian internal security service. Driven by nationalist and theological ambitions, Iranian military expansion was blunted by the long and bloody Iran-Iraq War. But its policies have not changed—only its tactics. Within easy reach of Iran's Shehab III missiles, Israel is only too aware of the threat. However, while the media focuses on Iran's nuclear, missile, and satellite-launcher programs, the regime of the mullahs has turned into a state mafia, a veritable criminal syndicate *sans frontières*. Under the radar, the Islamic Revolution's storm troopers, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, is involved in terrorism (according to the State Department), arms shipments and assassinations (according to the media), and illegal financial transactions (according to the Department of the Treasury).

Haggai Carmon convinced me of his intelligence bona fides in the first minute I spoke with him. He writes convincingly about the intricate world of intelligence. He understands the feeling of the intelligence officer's solitary walk to the lesser-used departure gates of international air terminals as he heads for nontouristic destinations. He brings to life the tension that characterizes the work of the clandestine operator in a hostile environment, where the opposition is not just the police, but the bloc *komites*, or Iranian moral police, and a citizenry cowed into submission into reporting all "suspicious activities.

The vivid descriptions in *The Chameleon Conspiracy* bring the reader inside the story. A Haggai Carmon story requires an alert reader. Each page reveals new layers that the protagonist and the reader discover together. His use of suspense keeps the reader alert. Carmon succeeds in the first rule of the

suspense writer, to have the reader wonder, *What would I do in that situation?* and compelling him to turn the page to find out how the fictional protagonist did it and survived to the end of the story. Whether he writes about Jaffa or Iran, it is like being there. And finally, as a longtime practitioner of clandestine tradecraft, I take my hat off to Haggai. Not all real intelligence officers have Dan Gordon's savvy or imagination, the author's gift to his brainchild.

Andre Le Gallo

Andre Le Gallo had a successful career with U.S. intelligence. As an operations officer with the CIA's clandestine-operations arm, he worked in collection, counterintelligence, and covert action, including special operations. His overseas assignments total twenty years, eleven of them as chief of station in four countries. Serving for thirteen years at CIA headquarters, he held senior positions in the Directorate of Operations, was the National Intelligence Officer for Counterterrorism (National Intelligence Council), and was a senior DO representative in the Inspector General Corps. Andre Le Gallo is the author of The Caliphate, a thriller inspired by his long career as an intelligence operative.

CHAPTER ONE

Sydney, Australia, August 17, 2004

“I’m not Albert C. Ward III. My name is Herbert Goldman! There must be a mistake.” The man in the hospital bed was insistent.

I was amused.

“Look here,” he tried again, when he saw my knowing smile. “I’m a sick man. The doctors say I shouldn’t get overexcited. What you’re doing to me is murder, you’re killing me!” Seeing that I wouldn’t budge, he rolled his eyes. He was dressed in a hospital gown that bared his backside, and a feeding tube crawled under the top part. Looking at him, I almost felt sympathy. Albert C. Ward III could have been any other patient in the ward: a slight, almost unnoticeable middle-aged man, lying there now like a deflated balloon. But that was Ward’s greatest asset. Who’d be suspicious of a small man in his late forties, whose few remaining teeth weren’t in such great shape? He had thinning hair that he combed sideways, applying the “savings and loan” comb-over: saving on the side where it still grew, and loaning it to the side where hair was long gone.

We had just met for the first time, but I knew who I was dealing with. Right there in his hospital bed, he might have seemed older than his years, and he might have seemed humble. Albert C. Ward III was humble; he wouldn’t confront or cross you on anything, unless you were an investor or a banker sitting on some money, while he was thirsty for cash. The problem was that he was always thirsty. To quench that thirst, Ward would become a human chameleon and change from nobody to somebody in a heartbeat—a sneaky little devil, who’d siphon money from banks and walk silently away while the banks collapsed into the receiving hands of federal regulators for being under-capitalized, while investors lamented the loss of their uninsured savings, and while American taxpayers picked up most of the bill. Yes, that was Ward’s expertise. He was a banker for a new era: he banked on people’s foolishness and greed. A con artist of epic proportions.

Ward was the only patient in a small room at the internal-medicine department of Macquarie Street Hospital in Sydney, Australia. It was a public hospital in the city center, not far from my hotel. Ward could have been mistaken for the man behind the counter at the post office...the refrigerator repairman, maybe. But that’s not entirely fair to say. Those good people never made history. Albert C. Ward III did.

One detail set Ward apart from the other patients in the hospital: a uniformed Australian policeman sat beside him, making sure that Ward wouldn’t vanish again. Ward lay there in a simple metal-frame hospital bed, its white paint chipping around the edges. The room was clean, almost sterile, but no one would linger unless they had to. The unbroken view of cement wall, the smell of antiseptic mixed with human urine, and the hollow eyes of patients for whom this would be the last stop ensured that.

For Albert C. Ward III, it was definitely not the last stop. This was his usual route—feigning a

critical illness, approaching death's door when he felt the law closing in on him. The history Albert C. Ward III made wasn't an achievement to be inscribed on his tombstone when the time came. He wouldn't make the record books. But still, he was a champion of something. Otherwise, how could he have evaded law and justice for nearly two decades, not to mention evading me for longer than any other target I'd ever chased? Well, he had come close.

The only available pictures of him, dating back to high school, were on my desk, at home, and even in my car. Ward was a wanted man. Everyone was after him, including the FBI and the Office of Asset Recovery and Money Laundering of the U.S. Department of Justice (with me their senior investigative attorney). All of my life—three years at the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, and the time spent earning my Israeli and American law degrees—had been leading up to this. As an investigative attorney at DOJ, I'd been finding the money launderers, the scammers, the con artists who made off with other people's money and stashed it away in sunny, far-off places and brought it back to the United States. Sometimes I also brought home the perpetrators. We called them absconders, targets, or defendants; the tax havens of the world called them investors. Obviously there was an ongoing conflict between me, the asset hunter, and these exotically located asset protectors. A better word would be *battle*, or even *war*. *Conflict* is a laundered word for stiff-upper-lip delegates at the UN.

We had long been at war with the money launderers and their guardians. And when you're at war, you enlist the finest. As for whether I fit into that category, well, you could ask any of the people who dealt with me professionally—that is, if you could get into prison to find them. So although I had pity for the chameleon that was in Albert C. Ward III's bed, I was still awed by how he had managed to pull it off. Not once, not twice, but eleven times. And those were only the cases in which the FBI had determined him to be the main suspect. Who knew how many others there had been?

"Mr. Ward," I said. "I'm quite impressed with your display. But would you kindly stop the drama and talk to me?" His resistance impelled me to try again.

"Here you go again," he sighed. "I'm not Ward, my name is Herbert Goldman." I noticed a slight accent when he pronounced the word *here*.

"I need to rest, I don't feel too well. You'll have to excuse me." He closed his eyes and turned his face to the wall. I stood there for five more minutes until a nurse came in.

"Please, you are disturbing our patient," she said, in a tone reserved for intruders aged ten and younger. I had thought Albert C. Ward III was disturbing my patience.

The policeman looked bored as he sat there apparently not listening. He never said a word.

The cafeteria outside was just about to close for the day. There was only one other diner, a man with a protruding nose hair noisily slurping a soup that even from a distance smelled like my socks after two weeks of basic training in the desert. I was hungry, and meat loaf with potato pancakes seemed safe. But one bite was enough. The meat loaf was probably made of the ass of an ass, and the potato pancakes tasted as if they had been fried in castor oil and lightly seasoned with sawdust. The plate smelled of ammonia. I pushed the tray away. Even my voracious appetite had its limits. Anyway it was time to write my report on my meeting with Ward. My boss, David Stone, the director of the Office of Asset Recovery and Money Laundering, was going to love it.

Walking to my hotel, I thought about how long I had waited to face Ward, how long I had mentally prepared what I would say to him. But when the time had finally come, there had been no bombast, no fireworks. Just hollow emptiness. I wasn't recognizing yet that the battle wasn't over, it had just

begun.

It wasn't just the anticlimax, I quickly realized. I was still disturbed by the meeting and didn't quite know why. Something just wasn't sitting well.

I pulled out my cell phone and called Peter Maxwell, the curly-haired, easygoing Australian Federal Police agent assigned to help me. I decided not to share with him the tinge of doubt I had.

"I think it's him all right," I told Peter. "Let's wait for the U.S. Department of Justice to prepare the request for provisional arrest with a view toward extradition. Meanwhile, just make sure he doesn't leave the hospital until the request arrives."

"He isn't going anywhere, might," said Peter.

"What do you mean, might?" I asked in a startled voice. "He could still leave?"

Peter, with his heavy Australian accent, had actually meant "mate."

"I mean, we've a court order for the next twelve days on local Australian fraud offenses. Until then, you're safe, but the criminal division of the Justice Department better hurry."

"What did he do this time?" I asked.

"Sold the same real-estate property to three different people," said Maxwell, chuckling. "But the land wasn't even his in the first place."

The next call was to David Stone in Washington, DC.

"David, I just saw the Chameleon."

"Good. What's the latest color?" David never was much for emotion. He could be elated, but he'd speak with the same tone of a voice as if I'd told him it was sunny outside.

"Sick man, hospital bed. But David, it's going to be harder this time for him to change it up. He gave me a show that unfortunately won't be coming to a movie theater near you. The hot part is that the Australians have him on unrelated charges."

"We're sure it's him?"

"Pretty sure. The guy I saw matches Ward on seven points. Some physical, some circumstantial."

"Only pretty sure?" asked David.

I hesitated. "There are a few things that are still holding me back," I said. "He's been calling himself Herbert Goldman."

We talked over some procedural stuff, how the Australians would need to positively ID him before they'd extradite him.

"But that crap's not the problem," I said. "The Australian police can verify our ID information. Anyway, I'm after the money, not the body." I paused. "Any word on the U.S. request for his provisional arrest? We only have twelve days to get that provisional arrest request here."

He sighed. "Hold on. I need to take another call."

A few minutes later, David came back on the line and told me that the FBI had just received a memo from the Australian Federal Police that the suspect hadn't been fingerprinted yet, because he was in the hospital.

"They didn't?" I said. "Well, I think I can solve that problem."

I waited until evening visiting hours to return. The corridor and the nurses' station were empty, so it wasn't hard to borrow a plastic bag and a doctor's white coat from a nearby closet. Ward was sound asleep and snoring. A policewoman read a newspaper beside him. Nonchalantly, I slid one hand into the bag and, with my fingers protected by the plastic, picked up the empty water cup from his side table. With my other hand I peeled the bag off and over the cup, enclosing it in the bag without adding prints of my own, and walked away, returning the coat to its place. The policewoman didn't even blink.

Peter Maxwell was sitting at his desk, rubbing his eyes over a pile of papers, when I arrived. I held up the plastic bag. “Check the prints on the cup, and match it with the sample the FBI sent you. That’ll convince you.”

“Dan, I’m already convinced, but it may not be enough for the court. There could be an argument that this fingerprint evidence was compromised.”

“That’s not for the court,” I said. “It’s for law-enforcement purposes. I’m afraid if there’s any doubt about his identity, he’ll be let go even after the extradition request comes in. The prints on the cup will do for now.”

After a pause, Peter agreed. I’d liked him from the moment we’d met. He was a tall, brown-eyed, well-built man in his midthirties. He was always smiling, willing to help, and never put bureaucratic obstacles where none were necessary. He also had that quirky, uniquely Australian sense of humor that can inject levity even into the most serious circumstances. So can I. During one of our conversations, somehow the subject of Jewish holidays came up. “Sounds mighty complicated, mate,” he said.

I smiled. “Not really. It can be summed up easily: Our enemies tried to destroy us. They couldn’t. We survived. Let’s eat.”

When I’d seen his toothy grin, I knew that he got it.

Back to Albert C. Ward III, now claiming to be Herbert Goldman. He had all the reasons in the world to fight extradition to the United States. In fact, he had eleven good and solid reasons, each of them a case bundled neatly into an indictment. He was on the line for ninety-eight counts of bank fraud, money laundering, grand larceny, and more.

We were all lucky that con men who thought they could outsmart the world usually made one mistake too many. Albert C. Ward III’s mistake was trying to scam someone who didn’t deserve it. I was, indirectly, how I’d finally found him. I know I should never trade luck for skill, but there are exceptions.

Sheila Levi was forty-one, with no special attributes. She wasn’t very pretty, or rich, or smart. But she was a nice woman, and she’d had the misfortune to fall in love with Ward. Sheila had worked as secretary in a small Sydney law firm and had never married. Ward had charmed her, wined and dined her, and soon moved in with her to the one-bedroom apartment she’d bought after years of saving every penny, taking a big mortgage.

The rest of the story was sadly predictable, as I realized when she met me for lunch the day after my frustrating hospital interview with Ward. At his suggestion, she had taken a second mortgage on her apartment and given him the money to “invest in their future.” She’d given him the jewelry she’d inherited from her grandmother, which he sold immediately. But Sheila still had faith in him. Why?

“I wanted so much to marry and have a family,” she said, sobbing, sitting opposite me in the dining room of my Sydney hotel. “He proposed marriage, and I believed him. My dream collapsed just a few hours before the wedding ceremony. How could I have known that he was already married?”

I nodded sympathetically.

“I know it makes me sound stupid, but I really loved him and believed what he told me. That’s where I went wrong. Now I don’t have him, and I don’t have my apartment. I couldn’t make the payments, and the bank foreclosed.”

“Where do you live now?”

“I share a rented room with a waitress I work with.”

“A waitress?”

“Yes,” she said faintly and apologetically, lowering her eyes. “I lost my job as well. My employees were sick of me being distracted, and the creditor phone calls got out of hand. I’m waitressing now in

two different restaurants.” She dried her eyes. “Today is my day off.”

I felt mounting rage. Cheating banks out of their money was bad enough, but cheating a trusting woman who’d had almost nothing to begin with and was then left with even less was appalling. But more than just that, something didn’t make sense. If Ward had scammed millions from U.S. banks and investors over the years, why was it worth his while to scam a secretary out of something as modest as her grandmother’s jewelry? Where had all that money gone?

I flew back from Sydney to New York. After those three long days of travel, including a layover, I went to my office and read an e-mail from David that had just come in.

Your report that you found Albert C. Ward III in Australia is apparently inaccurate. The FBI compared the finger-prints of Albert C. Ward III maintained in its database with prints lifted from the cup you gave the Australian Federal Police, and against subsequent prints obtained by the Australian police after you left. They told me an hour ago that the prints don’t match. The person you saw in the hospital bed is not Albert C. Ward III. The U.S. will not request his extradition. David.

The triumph I’d felt on the flight from Sydney had turned out to be fleeting, and was immediately replaced with bitter disappointment. How could this have happened? I’d followed my hunch as well as procedure, and still failed. I’d lost the round, but I didn’t lose the lesson. I thought of a phrase from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” I wasn’t ready to wear my failure like an albatross around my neck. How come when I managed to pull off a task, there was nobody around, but hey, when I failed, there were plenty of witnesses? When I fucked up an exercise during my Mossad training, my instructor had told me sarcastically, “You have to learn from the past experiences of others, although I’m sure you’ll find new ways to err.” It had hurt.

I shut the office door and collapsed into my chair, trying to figure out what to do next. I was facing a brick wall. I’d tried to scale it and failed.

Should I throw in the towel? How long do you keep digging before you concede that the well is dry? Not here, buddy.

My father had taught me that while a defeat is sometimes just a temporary setback, surrender makes it permanent. I wasn’t there yet, far from it. I was determined to win, but how? I would have to start again from the beginning.

CHAPTER TWO

Manhattan, New York, November 2003

The sun wouldn't shine that morning, and the skies would only lighten to pencil gray. Glancing at the glowing red digits of the clock, I could already feel it. It was six forty-five A.M., and only the slowly fading darkness told me it was already morning. When I finally got out of bed, I instantly regretted it. There had to be a better way to start the day than waking up in the morning.

It was one of those days I dreaded. No pressing duties to perform at the office, just routine, snail-paced progress in the money-laundering cases I investigate for the U.S. Department of Justice. I forced myself not to return to bed, looking through the window at the cars passing through the Chelsea streets. New York City was unusually quiet. I felt strangely out of place. After twenty of years in the U.S., many of them right there in that apartment, I felt a pulling away. From the moment I'd landed in New York, I had considered it my home, and the U.S. my country and my future. But the dreary color outside made me long for the Israeli sun. Not the scorching rays of August that melt the asphalt, but the caressing sun of May and June that wraps you like the warmth of loving arms.

Shaking myself out of memory lane, I went to the kitchen. I took a carton of orange juice from the half-empty refrigerator—extra pulp, the way I like it—and drank it directly from the spout, flooding my chin and neck with juice.

Damn whoever designed that stupid spout, I thought.

I wiped my chin, took a deep breath, and resigned myself to going to work. *Con men absconding from the U.S. beware,* I thought. I was cranky, and ready to take it out on whoever's file happened to be on my desk that day.

There has never been a shortage of new cases coming to my office from various U.S. government agencies. Major insurance fraud, telemarketing scams, banking fraud, and money laundering related other white-collar crimes are the usual stuff. They expect us to find the perpetrator and recover the loot if either is located outside the United States. Once U.S. borders are crossed, foreign rules apply, leaving the U.S. government with little or no independent investigative and enforcement power. When a U.S. state or federal criminal case has foreign aspects, U.S. law-enforcement authorities can get police-to-police assistance from the more than 170 countries belonging to Interpol. Additionally, around forty-eight countries have bilateral MLAT, or Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties, with the U.S. for helping each other obtain evidence in criminal trials. That's the easy part.

Civil cases are even trickier than criminal cases. They are hamstrung by legal, bureaucratic, and political constraints that make it tougher for federal agents to pursue debtors for money outside the U.S. than it is for private creditors. The MLAT, limited to criminal cases, tends to be practically useless. Foreign courts take pride in their country's sovereignty and loathe attempts by foreign governments to twist their arms. And they aren't always eager to help the U.S. recover dirty money

that might be bolstering their own country's economy.

That's how I got my office. The sign on the office door read TAT INTERNATIONAL TRADE, INC., intended to mask our identity as the New York extension of the Office of Asset Recovery and Money Laundering of the U.S. Department of Justice. We have the expertise and the budget to go after white collar crooks wherever in the world they are playing, and mostly winning, mind games designed by the culprits' lawyers, accountants, and investment consultants to keep us from getting their clients on the money. Most of the time we outsmart them and beat them at their own game. FinCEN, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, is the much-larger U.S. Treasury intelligence agency that searches for assets within the United States. But they do their job from behind a computer monitor, while we go out to the streets of Geneva, Liechtenstein, the Cayman Islands, and all the other locations favored by the money launderers of the world.

I like my job. It offers complete independence outside the U.S., yet affords the entire might of the U.S. behind me. That is, provided I conduct myself as a straight arrow. This only gets tricky when dealing with what I'll call cultural differences. David expects me to operate as legally and ethically as if I'm operating within the U.S. But I'm not. I'm dealing with dubious and shady characters in offshore tax shelters, far from the reach of U.S. law enforcement. For them the phrases *comply with the law* or *rules of ethics* are good for a laugh. They're over there to avoid the law, so it's a bit far-fetched to expect us all to abide by it.

Fairly early in the game, I saw the futility of convincing my superiors that we couldn't win the war of minds against lawless targets by behaving like nineteenth-century gentlemen. Fighting international crime and terrorism effectively, recovering stolen money, and disrupting terror attacks against the U.S. can mean resorting to Machiavelli. He put it best when he wrote in *The Art of War*, "No enterprise is more likely to succeed than one concealed from the enemy until it is ripe for execution."

"Do you expect us to apply Machiavellian methods or act like the criminals you chase?" David had once asked, hearing me air these frustrations. I'd known that he sympathized with what I was saying, but unlike me, he had clearly defined lines he would not cross.

"Of course not," I'd said.

But we both knew damn well that insisting that I comply with each and every U.S. rule fit for U.S. domestic cases, as well as with the foreign country's laws, was like sending a one-legged man to compete in an ass-kicking contest. Adhering to ethics is vital in intelligence gathering, because it constantly reminds you that your opponents can operate without any.

"What's the alternative?" David had said with a sigh.

It was a rhetorical question. We both knew the State Department would be knocking on David's door once some country started whining that I had bent the rules.

"David, there haven't been any complaints," I'd protested. He'd raised his eyebrows. "OK, just one. But I was exonerated, remember? I have a clean conscience."

"No, Dan, you have a bad memory."

But he hadn't continued, so I went on. "There must be some places where I can have some leeway. I'm not asking for permission to break foreign countries' laws, but this strictness is crippling me."

"You know we can't do that as a matter of policy," David had said calmly. "But..."

He'd let it hang in the air. "But you'll look the other way if it's not egregious, and if I don't get caught," I'd said.

He'd smiled, and that was enough for me. I've always been a deeply religious follower of the

eleventh commandment as it applies to intelligence agents: Thou Shalt Not Get Caught.

CHAPTER THREE

That gray November day marked my introduction to the Chameleon case. Inside my Manhattan office were four newcomers that were impossible to ignore—battered brown cartons on the floor. A Post-it on the top carton read, “Dan, read these files and talk to me. David.”

The FBI had decided to take a fresh look at a universe of high-dollar bank and other fraud cases that were committed within the past fifteen-or-so years, had seen indictment, involved scamming \$1 million and up, and were never prosecuted, for lack of defendants.

Why now?

I suspected the FBI was dumping these cases on us because they thought terrorist financing might be turned up. The perpetrators of these stale high-dollar cases had similar MOs, had been out of the country for a while before the scams, and had all vanished afterwards.

A single page would keep me busy for six days reading bank statements and about other fraud cases.

The computer-generated sticker label with a bar code on the first file’s front read “U.S. v. Albert C. Ward III, aka Harrington T. Whitney-Davis, case #86-981.” I pulled out a fresh yellow pad and a sharp pencil. I would get the facts first. I started with the FBI report. On its front page was Albert C. Ward III’s enlarged black-and-white photo and bio. Ward was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on March 27, 1959. He attended the Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School’s Evening School, and graduated in June 1977. Ward had worked at several minimum-wage jobs in the greater metropolitan area of Milwaukee until hired by a local security company. Following a two-week training session, Ward was given a patrolman’s uniform and was assigned to the North Lake Drive area.

After two uneventful years as a patrolman, Ward was promoted and became a night-shift-duty manager. His supervisors described him as a highly motivated and effective employee who sought adventure. They also indicated in his job-evaluation report that there were a few instances when he had been too aggressive toward his fellow employees, including one incident in which he’d punched a coworker. Ward had been arrested, but was later released when the employee refused to press charges. No intracompany disciplinary recommendations were made.

In 1980 Ward left that employment and applied for a passport. He left the country in May 1980, on board a Panamanian-registered freighter sailing from Seattle to Hong Kong. Ward had filed no tax returns after 1980. A search for family members came up empty. There were no records of his reentry into the U.S. His name and Social Security number had nonetheless started reappearing on credit reports in 1985. A national-database search showed that Ward had lived in eighteen different locations throughout the U.S. since 1985, mostly in Michigan, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New York, and Florida. An inquiry with landlords and neighbors at these addresses had yielded very little.

Those who remembered Ward described him as a reclusive, nonconfrontational, and quiet person who kept to himself. One neighbor mentioned that Ward listened to strange music. A landlord who lived close by described visitors to Ward’s apartment as people who didn’t fit in the neighborhood, and who’d come during odd hours of the night.

It was the one unusual detail in an otherwise routine and bland report, but there was nothing to substantiate a suspicion or lead me anywhere. Criminals flock with people of their own feather. And the music? My son listens to music I'm convinced was recorded with a knife grinder, a train on rusty rails, and an empty tin trash can dragged on the pavement. But that didn't prove anything other than odd taste in music.

The rest of the information detailed Ward's history of indictments, using and discarding aliases. His modus operandi was a good old hit-and-run. Amazing, but true. He had always slipped out of the hands of the law.

Ward's earliest recorded sting happened in a small town in South Dakota. Ward appeared there one day in 1985 as Harrington T. Whitney-Davis. He rented a nicely decorated office in a building housing a local savings bank and incorporated Fidelity Trustees of America, Inc. Ward came to the savings bank, introduced himself to the bank manager as manager of a new branch office of a national financial company, Fidelity Trustees of America, Inc., and suggested business cooperation. Of course neither company had any connection whatsoever to the reputable Fidelity financial and securities companies.

It hadn't taken long to convince the bank manager to market "limited edition" treasury securities offered by the fancy-name, trust-inducing company of Ward, now Harrington T. Whitney-Davis. No hard sell was necessary. Ward had told the manager that the savings bank would act only as intermediary, selling the securities to its customers, assuming no risk, while collecting hefty commissions. Ward's business had come at the right time. The bank manager was being pressed by his board of directors to improve the bank's balance sheet and was looking for ways to expand its product line. The manager quickly agreed, and the savings bank started offering these supposed treasury securities to the bank's customers as a solid investment vehicle. The promised interest rate of 14 percent gave a significantly higher yield than the interest paid by the usual securities issued by the U.S. government, or deposits insured by the FDIC.

The problem was that the securities Ward offered were fictitious. There's no such thing as a limited-edition treasury security. It was a scam in the fullest meaning of the word. All that Ward had to do was use his pompously named corporation and generate official-looking stationery confirming that the bank had purchased Ward's bogus securities on behalf of a bank client, or even on behalf of the bank itself.

During the first three months, the bank sold \$14.4 million worth of Ward's limited-edition treasury securities. In the beginning, when customers wanted to liquidate their holdings, Ward's company promptly paid the bank, which in turn credited the customers' accounts. There was no reason for anyone to suspect that anything was wrong. The bank had collected nice commissions. The manager and the board of directors were happy. So were the bank's customers. Through word of mouth, sales increased even further. To emphasize the exclusive nature of the investment, the bank manager had decided that the securities would be sold only in units of \$10,000, and only to the bank's customers. If you were banking elsewhere, you had to first open an account at the savings bank to be allowed to purchase these wonderful securities.

Other banks in town, which saw their business volume shrinking, wondered why they couldn't offer the same securities to their own customers. Following a few phone calls by other bankers to the South Dakota Department of Commerce and Regulations' Division of Banking, which regulates financial institutions, and to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, which at that time regulated federal savings banks, questions arose. A federal bank examiner called the bank manager for an interview without telling him why. The manager mentioned the call to Ward, whom he knew as Harrington

Whitney-Davis.

Ward knew what the manager didn't: it was time to take off. He disappeared immediately, together with more than \$20 million. Angry customers demanded their money back from the bank. But the bank couldn't help. In fact, the bank became one of the victims, having invested heavily in Ward's phony securities. The end was inevitable. The bank became insolvent and was seized by regulators.

Ward's next scam was more complex. He moved to Nebraska, assumed the name of Harold S. McClure, and incorporated Lincoln Premiere Equity, Inc., as an investment club for senior citizens. Of course, that name had no connection to any genuine, reputable business entity. "Harold" ran ads in the local newspapers claiming, confusingly but impressively, "Lincoln Premiere Equity's CDs are purchased from federally insured banks to secure the Certificate of Deposit Program of the FDIC."

Ward opened a bank account at a local bank and deposited the money he'd received from locals hungry for a high yield. A typical investor paid \$100,000 and believed he was buying a federally-insured certificate of deposit. Ward used the money to purchase CDs, which to the bank manager's delight he left at the bank. But there was a subtle little detail to this scheme. Ward used the CDs as collateral for loans he personally took out. The bank enabled him to pull off the scam, because many investors were deceptively induced by the bank to sign a contract naming Harold S. McClure as the "trustee" of their money.

The result was obvious. The victims lost all their money when "Harold," now believed to be Ward, defaulted on the loans and disappeared.

The FBI believed that Ward then moved to Indiana, called himself Marshall Stuart Lennox, and incorporated Windsor, Hamilton & Pierce Investments, Inc. He rented a nice office and offered unsophisticated investors historical bonds, such as railway bonds. These were once-valid obligations of American corporations, but are now worthless as securities and only collected and traded as memorabilia. Ward marketed the bonds at prices ranging from \$100,000 to \$250,000—the same bonds that collectors buy for \$25 to \$100. Ward, or rather Marshall Stuart Lennox, described the bonds as "backed by the U.S. government" and "payable in gold." To add credibility to the genuine bonds' inflated prices, Ward attached valuations by "world-renowned experts," confirming that the bonds were worth significant amounts of money, far above the price the investors were asked to pay.

One investor became suspicious, contacted the Federal Reserve, and was told that the U.S. government was not backing these bonds. When confronted, Ward smoothly replied, "The Federal Reserve simply doesn't want you to cash it in, because if everyone did that, there'd be a run on the bank and the U.S. economy would collapse." But within the hour, Marshall Stuart Lennox had disappeared.

Similar sting operations in various forms followed in other unsuspecting small towns in the Midwest. Complaints to both state and federal authorities mounted, but the investigations led to indictments that went nowhere, because the defendant was nowhere to be found.

For more than a decade, Ward was an enigma. Nobody knew where he was, or could even accurately describe how he looked. He had shunned the ordinary business-publicity photos, and the descriptions his victims gave fit a million other men. All the FBI had concerning Ward's description was a high school photo more than twenty years old, and his fingerprints taken in 1979, when Ward had been arrested for assault. Ward's legacy ended abruptly in summer 2001. That was the last time there were complaints about scams fitting Ward's modus operandi. Had Ward died? No death certificate bearing his name or any of his aliases was issued anywhere in the U.S.

Had Ward left the U.S.? If so, how? His U.S. passport, issued in 1980, had expired in 1990. The State Department reported that this passport hadn't been renewed. Had a new passport been issued

bearing any of the aliases the FBI said he used for his scams? The State Department said no. Was Ward in prison on an unrelated conviction? Again, the FBI said no.

The mantra *think outside the box* rang in my mind. They were the words of Alex, my Mossad Academy training instructor, repeated in his Canadian accent. “Your rivals aren’t ordinary people. They operate differently, so why would you expect them to think like an average Joe? Put yourself in their skin. Then take one step forward.” *Good*, I thought, *as long as we aren’t on a cliff’s edge*.

What did I do to deserve these damned stale cases? Suddenly angry, I tossed a heap of paper off my desk. It was useless—plenty more was still piling up on my desk. Why the hell was the FBI dumping these cases on us two years after the last scam and almost two decades since the first one, and where was the international connection? I silently cursed the anonymous FBI agent who had cleared his desk at my expense. I wished he’d drown in paper. I couldn’t decide who to grumble to first—David or the FBI.

When I cooled off, I remembered what Alex had always told our class: “When you find yourself at a dead end, start from the beginning. One step back may not be enough, because it will lead you to the same brick wall. Revisit all assumptions, and recheck all facts. One or more could be flawed.”

OK, Alex, I thought with a mental sigh, if you could only see how I apply your wisdom. I wondered what had happened to him. Ever since I’d left the Mossad, Benny Friedman, my classmate, had been the only lifeline to my professional past. For all I knew, Alex was still in the system, or maybe growing flowers in his village in northern Israel, enjoying retirement. I read the files again. Two hours later, I still couldn’t find anything I’d missed the first time. The only mention of anything foreign was Ward’s departure from the U.S. in 1980. But he returned sometime in 1985, as the credit reports showed. There went the international connection. I had no idea where to begin.

Think outside the box rang again.

The only thing left for me to do was go back and check the raw intelligence data the FBI was analyzing.

I was frustrated and intrigued at the same time. How could somebody evade the law for so long? It was clear that Ward knew well how to assume new names and identities. Was thinking that he had employed that skill to vanish, thinking within the box or outside it? I needed something to hang on to in this case, or the file would grow moss on my shelves, and I’d be getting polite but persistent reminders from David to report progress.

I called David Stone in Washington, DC, grimly bracing myself.

“David, how come you agreed to take Ward’s cases? They’re so stale that even the bookworms who lived in the reports died of old age.”

“Dan, the FBI is fairly confident that Ward is outside the United States,” he said. “That makes the case ours, at least as it concerns the \$311 million he stole.”

I was startled for a moment. “\$311 million? The amounts in the file don’t even come close to that.”

“Do the math again,” said David. “Eleven known cases—he fared nicely.”

“OK, I’ll look again at the numbers. But what makes them think he’s outside the U.S.? There’s nothing in the file to indicate that. Or the FBI is holding an ace up their sleeve.”

“The Bureau won’t tell us. So I guess it’s intelligence, not facts or evidence, and you know how zealously they protect their sources.”

“What do you mean they won’t tell us? Last time I checked we work for the same government.”

“No need to be sarcastic,” said David, trying to calm down my mounting temper, which he knew only too well. David himself could have a bit of a temper too, but he kept a much tighter lid on his

than I did mine. “To the extent that any of it is grand-jury material, they can’t share it with other sections of the government working on the civil side of the case.”

That’s bull, I thought. “Well, David, as an attorney for the government I can receive certain grand jury material for use in performing my duty. Besides, this case appears to involve bank fraud, so there’s an additional specific language allowing the disclosure. Let’s chew the fat here.”

I could almost hear David’s silent and subtle smile over the phone.

“You’re right,” he finally agreed.

“And?” I asked hoping to get support here. “Why is U.S. law enforcement extra-interested nowadays in high-dollar cases, even if stale? Have they just remembered it has an international aspect and the post–September eleventh public outcry made them resurrect paper cadavers?”

“Go figure,” he said, joining in my despair.

I kept on pressing, “Unless someone at the FBI simply wanted to get rid of these cases to better his or her statistics, hoping we won’t cry foul, they’d better tell us what they have, or they’ll find these cases back on their desk in no time, dead and aging bookworms included.”

“Dan,” said David in his calm voice. “Think about how the Bureau handled the S-and-L cases in the eighties.” I remembered it well. Neither the Bureau nor federal prosecutors went after the money looted in bank and savings-and-loan frauds. We went only after perpetrators. The statistics we tracked were numbers indicted and numbers convicted. The government wasn’t going after the money.

“True enough,” I said. “Back then we never went after the money. But I never understood why.”

“One reason, I’d say,” answered David, “was because going after the money would have required separate civil proceedings. Decision makers concluded that these would be resource-intensive cases, with little likelihood of recovering anything.”

His point was that the U.S. government had been leaving millions of stolen dollars on the table, and U.S. taxpayers of course picked up much of the tab. Since that time, however, changes in federal criminal law have allowed us to get restitution, in criminal prosecutions, of ill-gotten gains resulting from crimes for which we got convictions. I’d been involved in many of these cases myself.

“But that doesn’t explain why the Bureau waited so long,” I said in frustration, David’s compliment notwithstanding. “Maybe it landed on the table of this year’s recipient of the phlegmatic agent award?”

“Let me make some calls, and I’ll get back to you,” concluded David.

CHAPTER FOUR

Getting David's help was the easy part. I had been working for him long enough to know he accepted reasoned arguments and never dug in his heels in a position proven wrong. But people change when they see retirement coming up. And in any case, David would still need to crack some bureaucratic walls. If you spend enough time in Washington, you know that sometimes it'd be easier to get a date with a reigning Miss America than to move things faster between government agencies. For sure, I knew that I had to get a breakthrough before David retired. With his clout and experience, he could back me up on almost anything. But when a new chief comes, things could be different, for better or—more likely—for worse, just because he'd be new on the job.

A week later I went to Washington for a routine staff meeting. After the pep talk, David asked me to stay.

"I thought it over and made some inquiries," said David. "The bottom line is that the FBI did have a reason to send us these files. But before we go over them, let me call in Bob Holliday. He's my new deputy."

"Who is he?"

"He's a Department of Justice veteran with many years of successful commercial-litigation experience, but with no international exposure. I hope you'll help him get acquainted with your work."

Bob Holliday had wide shoulders, smart brown eyes, and a thick mustache, and appeared to be in his early fifties. We shook hands when he walked into the office.

"Dan," said David, "I concluded that the Bureau has already found common points. All of the names used during the scams were of white American males who one: were born within a few years of one another, but had no apparent connections among them; two: had obtained passports also within a few years of one another; three: left the U.S. and then disappeared; four: resurfaced years later just long enough to scam banks for millions with a reasonably consistent modus operandi—for example, never a bank insider, so never named on a list of persons barred from employment in financial institutions, but gets bank insiders to provide investor victims—and five: disappeared again without trace."

"I see," I said with a mild tone of sarcasm. "What do we have here twenty years later?—millions gone, multiple names, one scam each, consistent MO, no investigative direction."

David smiled, and turned to Bob. "What do you think?"

Bob Holliday wasted no time in getting to the Bureau's motives. "At this point the Bureau sensibly concludes that it could spend scads of resources on these dogs and still come up with nothing re terrorist financing or anything else. Wanting at least to improve its statistical picture, and with money plus an international link such as the use of passports, albeit tenuous in the extreme, the Bureau thinks of David and off-loads eleven open cases. David thinks of you. Voila!"

Bob Holliday sounded as if he knew what he was talking about. Normally I didn't like it when someone came across as too self-assured, but I didn't mind it with Bob. He managed not to let confidence slide into arrogance the way a lot of people do.

He continued. “The Bureau came up with these cases when trying to look for terrorist financing where they’d never looked before. But it hit a dead end with them domestically.”

“But why just now?” I queried. “And where is the international connection? Just the passports?”

“I know that the international angles are questionable,” conceded David. “All I’m going to tell you is that the dollar amounts in these scams are so high, and it’s so common for proceeds of large scams to leave the U.S., that it seemed worth our taking them on, at least preliminarily. I don’t want to tell you any more about the Bureau’s analysis, because I want you to take a completely fresh look at them. I’m interested in whether you see something in them that others haven’t.”

I returned to my office in New York and sat motionless behind my desk looking at the files, going back over each of the eleven cases. Were there eleven perpetrators, or just one with many aliases? There were conflicting assumptions in the FBI reports. Apparently, I wasn’t the only one confused.

I read each and every bit of testimony of the victims, the bank managers, and the landlords. Their descriptions of each perpetrator were very similar, except for one person who recalled the con man speaking with a slight accent. I was intrigued by this detail and pulled out the FBI FD-302 interview report from the file. Louis B. Romano, of 45–87 West Street, Gary, Indiana, was interviewed at his home by an FBI special agent. I looked up Romano’s number and dialed.

An elderly woman answered. “I’m sorry,” she said when I asked for Romano. “My husband passed away two years ago. Is there something I could help you with?”

I hesitated. “Well, ma’am, I’m sorry for your loss,” I said. “I’m Dan Gordon, an investigative attorney with the Justice Department. Your late husband was interviewed a few years ago about one of your tenants, and I wanted to ask him a few more questions.”

“Who was the tenant? Maybe I could help you. We’ve got only two rental apartments, and I remember most of our tenants.”

“The tenant was Marshall Stuart Lennox. Ring a bell?”

“Of course I remember him.” She paused. “If you don’t mind me saying, I never really liked the guy.”

“Why?”

“He was a real oddball. Never opened his mail.”

“How’d you know?”

“I saw unopened envelopes in the garbage bin a few times. Back then, we were living in an apartment we own in the same building. And I never saw him use his mailbox to leave letters for the mailman to collect.” She let it sink in. “He also installed a telephone line under a different name.”

“And how did you come across that?”

“After he left, a bill came to that address with a strange name on it. I opened it, and the telephone number was the same as Lennox’s. I have no idea why he did it, but he never left a forwarding address—just took off.”

I sat up in my chair. “Do you still have that phone bill?”

“Nope, I threw it out ages ago. The charge was for, like, \$6, so I guess the phone company just wrote it off.”

“So what name did he use for the bill?” I asked, trying to keep too much interest out of my voice.

She sighed. “It’s been forever—I really couldn’t tell you. But I think it was just a regular American name, nothing special. You know, Jones, Brown, Evans.”

“Your husband mentioned that Lennox had an accent. Did you notice that too?”

“No, but Louis was always the one who dealt with him. I know he had one, though. Louis used to teach drama and English, so he always did notice accents. I did hear about it. Louis liked to identify

people's origin and background by listening to them talking. After listening to a person's dialect, Louis could tell where the person grew up, and sometimes how educated he was. He loved doing that.

"Did he discuss Lennox's accent with you, or just mention it?"

"Well, he said Lennox definitely didn't grow up in Wisconsin, which is what he told us."

"What made him say that?"

"Louis used to go every summer to Wisconsin to teach drama to local kids in a summer camp. He could do that accent really well. So, one day he mentioned to Lennox that he'd been teaching in Oconomowoc, in the lake country. Lennox tried to change the subject, and he mispronounced *Oconomowoc*. Then Louis made a joke about people from Wisconsin saying 'cripes' a lot, but Lennox didn't seem to get it either. Louis thought it was really weird. But I told him, 'What do we know? Maybe Lennox left Wisconsin when he was young. Anyway,' I said, 'why should we care? He pays rent on time and doesn't damage our property.' "

It wasn't much, but was at least something. "Did your husband continue to be suspicious of Lennox?"

She thought for a moment. "I don't know if I'd call it suspicious. He was just a little uneasy about him. He thought maybe Lennox had made it all up—had this crazy idea that maybe he was on the run from the police. Anyway, I don't know if it's important, but Louis said something once about how Lennox stretched his *a*'s and *h*'s."

"What, like a Southern drawl?"

"No, not like any American accent he knew. He'd taught speech for years, so Louis really knew his accents. Once he said he was sure that Lennox wasn't even American. But you know, that was before nine eleven. What did we know?" That was an attention-grabbing remark. I picked up on that.

"Why do you mention nine eleven?"

"Well, you know..." She sounded reluctant to pursue the point. "He had sort of dark skin. Not like he was black or Latino. Just a little darker than your typical Wisconsin dairy farmer, I guess, who's as white as his cows' milk."

I thanked her and hung up. I hadn't considered that direction. The yearbook's black-and-white photo wasn't high quality enough to set Ward—or Lennox?—apart from the other awkward teenagers on the page. I flipped through the file quickly. The FBI field office in Milwaukee reported on state records that showed that a Marshall Stuart Lennox was born in Meriter Hospital, Madison, Wisconsin on June 11, 1960. His parents were Arthur James Lennox and Gretchen Melanie Lennox, née Schilling. Lennox attended local public schools and dropped out during the eleventh grade. He was issued a U.S. passport on May 1, 1980, and left the U.S. on a student charter flight to Athens, Greece. Both his parents died in a car accident two years later. Lennox had no siblings or any other known family members. A more recent report indicated that the neighborhood he grew up in had changed—people had moved out and small businesses and garages had moved in. From those who'd stayed behind, very few people who were interviewed remembered the family.

The first two aliases I'd randomly checked, Lennox and McClure, had some things in common: they both belonged to young men who grew up in the Midwest, had no known living relatives, and both had left the country in 1980.

I flipped through the pages of the FBI report and its attachments, pulling out the file on the first-reported savings-bank-fraud case in South Dakota. There, the con man had presented himself as Harrington T. Whitney-Davis. The FBI report went over the history of Harrington T. Whitney-Davis: born in Fargo, North Dakota, on April 6, 1959. Like a junkie looking for a fix, I quickly ran my eyes over the interesting, though now less relevant, stuff. All I wanted to know at that moment was whether

Harrington T. Whitney-Davis had gotten a passport and left the country.

He hadn't, or at least the FBI report said nothing about it. My hopes deflated. The strange thing was, the name Harrington T. Whitney-Davis stopped appearing on mailing lists, credit reports, and IRS records in 1981. I opened the next file folder.

The con man in this one had appeared in a small town in Nebraska as Harold S. McClure. The FBI report gave his date of birth as March 1, 1958. I wasn't interested in the rest of the bio. Not just yet. Right now, all I needed to know was if he had disappeared from the U.S. like the others. It took just one glance to find out. Yes, Harold S. McClure had applied for a passport in July, 1980, and left shortly thereafter for Canada through a land-border crossing. Soon, his name stopped appearing in public records, until it resurfaced years later in the U.S. for a few months.

One thing was clear: we had ourselves a *modus operandi*. It was all too much to be a coincidence. Operating now with a solid lead, I decided to check the other eight names in the FBI file later. I had a direction. Three, maybe more, young American men in their early twenties left the United States in 1980, showing signs of life just long enough to carry out highly lucrative scams. Did Ward have anything to do with their disappearances? Did he know that they were absent from the U.S.? And if so, how? And then there was one more intriguing question. Without physical evidence, how did the FBI tie the eleven scams to Ward, despite the eleven different aliases? I couldn't answer the first two questions, but I could take a stab at the third by asking the FBI itself.

I called FBI Special Agent Kevin Lee, the last agent named in the topmost file. After the unavoidable cordialities, I asked him how they had connected Ward to all eleven scams.

"Well, our guys down at Quantico are pretty good at this type of analysis," he told me. "The physical descriptions of all the defendants made by all victims generally matched Ward's. We've a similar MO, and based upon that and other evidence we concluded that all the cases were perpetrated by one person."

"Other evidence? What evidence? I thought I had it all in the file."

"Let me look," he said. "This case is old."

You're damn right about that, I thought.

An hour later he called. "OK, we also discovered that each perpetrator used the same Delaware incorporation-service company to incorporate all the companies used in the scams."

"Did you interview the principals of the service company?"

"No. The company went out of business, and the directors disappeared without leaving a trace."

"Any additional evidence?" Based on what he'd told me, the FBI's backing seemed thin. "You know, as in, did you ever have the witnesses take a look at Ward's high school photo in a spread? Ask them to pick out the guy they gave their money to?" I tried not to sound like I was criticizing their work.

He sounded vaguely annoyed. "Well, I'll have to look up the file again. It was a long time ago. Anyway, all eleven aliases were of white males born between 1959 and 1962 in the Midwest."

"Did anyone check any passport applications of these people?"

"No. The State Department gets rid of routine passport applications after one year."

"So there's nothing on file?"

"The State Department may have something more. Why don't you ask them?" he said, having lost interest. I hung up, shaking my head at the apparent incompetence. It would be my job to pick up the slack.

I called the principal of the Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School's Evening School, from which Ward had graduated, identifying myself and my business. The secretary told me politely that

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