

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories
in the *Sidney Sheldon* tradition



MANOJ PALWE

Senior Immigration Consultant

dreamvisas.com

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About the Author

Manoj Palwe knows that the most dangerous deceptions always happen inside a closed system.

For over two decades, he has operated at the highest levels of global immigration law. As a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC R422575), a CAPIC Fellow (R11592), and President of Taurus Infotek (Dreamvisas) in Canada and India, his career has been defined by reading the fine print, analyzing complex international frameworks, and understanding how rules are enforced—and how they are broken.

Behind this sharp analytical mind is a man raised on the masterpieces of suspense. As an avid, lifelong reader who spent decades devouring the works of Sidney Sheldon, Dick Francis, and Frederick Forsyth, Manoj became obsessed with the mechanics of the perfect plot twist.

He paired this literary obsession with a boundless, high-energy love for the arena. A truly energetic sports enthusiast, Manoj has spent over fifty years keenly following, analyzing, and actively playing almost every single sport featured in his universe—from tennis and cricket to hockey and football (gladly leaving the high-speed cockpits of motorsport to the professionals). He knows the physical toll, the locker-room dynamics, and the psychological grit of these games firsthand.

In his groundbreaking 12-book series, *Clean Sport*, *Dirty Games*, he fuses his professional mastery of institutional systems, his athletic background, and classic page-turning thriller structures. The result

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is a premium collection of technical, high-stakes suspense thrillers that expose the gritty reality behind the glamorous facade of elite sports. When Manoj writes a cliffhanger, he isn't just inventing fiction—he's writing from a lifetime of knowing exactly how the world, the game, and a great book work.

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organisations, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, actual events, or actual organisations is entirely coincidental.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have, for as long as I can remember, loved two things equally and in roughly the same way: the literature of suspense, and the ritual of the white-flannelled game.

Sidney Sheldon taught a generation of readers that a thriller could begin on any continent, in any drawing room, with any kind of woman — provided she was clever, beautiful, and inadequately accounted for by the men around her. The white-flannelled games, in their own way, do the same. A cricket Test runs five days. There are scoreboards, cameras, polite handshakes, and an entire economy of secrets running beneath.

These eleven stories are an experiment in placing the one tradition inside the other. All eleven are set against the architecture of cricket — Lord's, Wankhede, Kensington Oval, Sharjah, Eden Gardens, Newlands, the IPL auction floor, Galle Fort, an English county ground, the National Stadium at Karachi, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground. All eleven are entirely fiction. The crimes are imagined. The people are imagined. The audit trails, the consortiums, the brigadiers, the umpires, the wives, the daughters, are all imagined.

A word of reassurance is owed here, more than in a lighter book, because these stories travel through real countries, real conflicts, and real institutions, and some of them touch matters — partition, civil war, dispossession, intelligence services, sitting governments — about which feeling properly runs deep. So let me be plain. The settings are real; everything that happens in them is invented. There is no real syndicate, no real ledger, no real corridor, no real official, no real minister, brigadiar, banker, or board behind any of these tales. Where a story brushes against history, it does so to honour the

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people history actually wronged, never to allege a real crime by a real person. Any resemblance between a character here and an actual individual, living or dead, is coincidence and nothing more.

What is not imagined is the central proposition. Wherever very large amounts of money cross very many borders in front of very large crowds, there is always — and there has always been — a second match being played, in a quieter language, on a darker court, by people the cameras never quite catch.

These are stories of those people.

And one last word on what is true. Cricket is full of real ground that bears looking at: stadiums raised on land that someone once held; broadcasting and franchise arrangements that move more money than most national budgets; tours and series freighted with politics that the players never chose; histories that great clubs tell carefully, and selectively, and sometimes not at all. I have taken these real features of the game — the contested deed, the laundered rights fee, the bought selection, the buried name — and asked, of each, the only question a suspense writer ever really asks: what if there were something inside it that was never meant to be found? Everything else I made up. The grounds are real. The secrets are mine.

I hope you enjoy them. I hope, more, that they remind you why we never quite take our eyes off the ball.

— Manoj Palwe

Pune, 2026

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He had told her, on the morning of his death, that the boy was coming home. He had not told her in which sense.

11. THE MCG BOXING DAY

Ninety thousand people in the stands. One small parcel of land that had never been theirs.

STORY 1

THE TWELFTH MAN

He was never on the team sheet. That was the whole point.



1

The man died at 9:47 p.m. London time, and he died because he had asked the wrong question of the wrong person at four o'clock that afternoon.

His name was Daniel Brett. He was twenty-six years old. He was a junior physiotherapist with the England cricket team, engaged to a girl named Sophie who taught Year Three at a primary school in Reading, and he was going to be married in October. He had told four people that afternoon how much he was looking forward to it.

At 9:47, in the service stairwell between the third and fourth floors of the Danubius Regents Park Hotel, a hand closed around the back of his neck from behind. There was no struggle. There was a single dry sound, like a small branch snapping. Daniel Brett's body folded against the wall, slid down two steps, and came to rest with one arm raised, as if he were waving at someone he had just recognised.

His phone was lifted from the inside pocket of his jacket. The killer's gloved hand wiped the railing in a slow, careful arc. Then the door at the top of the stairwell opened, closed, and the killer walked, unhurried, through the back kitchens of the hotel and out into the warm London night.

The porter found Daniel at 11:14. He had been dead for one hour and twenty-seven minutes.

2

Three hundred miles away, in a windowless room on the fourth floor of a building in Geneva that did not appear on any postal directory, an analyst named Lucien Aubert was eating a tuna sandwich and watching grainy CCTV footage on a monitor.

He froze the frame. He chewed slowly. He swallowed. He put the sandwich down very carefully, picked up the encrypted handset on his desk, and dialled a number he had been told, four years earlier, to dial only in the event of one specific thing.

The line picked up on the second ring. It did not speak.

Aubert said, “He is alive.”

Long pause. Then a voice he had heard only twice in his career said, “Are you sure?”

“I am looking at him. He is walking out of the lobby of the Regents Park Hotel in London. The timestamp is twenty-one forty-nine.”

Another pause.

“Burn it,” the voice said. “Burn the footage. Burn the workstation. Go home and tell your wife you are taking her to your mother's house in Annecy for three weeks.”

“Sir, if he is alive, then —”

“I know what it means. Go home, Lucien.”

The line went dead. Aubert sat very still for a long time. Then he stood up, walked to the door, and was shot in the throat before he reached it.

3

In a small flat in Maida Vale, Anya Rao was making the kind of evening for herself that she made most evenings, which was to say no evening at all — the radio low, a mug of tea going cold on the windowsill, a single plate of dal and rice she had cooked the way her mother cooked it and would, as usual, half finish. The flat was small and very tidy in the particular way of a person who lives alone and has decided to be precise about it. On the mantelpiece, between two unlit candles, stood a photograph of her brother Rohan: mud-streaked, laughing, one arm around his captain.

She had been picking at the rice and not really watching the radio when she found herself, as she often did, talking to the photograph. It was a habit she had never told anyone about, because it sounded like grief gone strange, and it was not that; it was only that Rohan had been the one person on earth she had never had to translate herself for. He had been four years younger and had teased her without mercy — had called her, from the age of nine, the Prosecution, because she cross-examined waiters about whether the fish was truly fresh. She still wore his college sweatpants. They had gone soft and grey and shapeless and they were the most expensive thing she owned, by the only measure that counted. Some evenings she put them on and could almost hear him in the next room, complaining that she had stolen them, that she stole everything, that the Prosecution rested only when it had taken the last of his things.

She had eaten perhaps half the rice. She rinsed the plate. And then she sat down cross-legged on the living-room floor, in her brother's old sweatpants, and slid a USB drive into the side of her laptop.

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The drive had arrived that morning by recorded post. The envelope had been padded, brown, unmarked except for a printed label in her name and the number 287 written by hand in the bottom right corner.

Two hundred and eighty-seven had been her brother Rohan's Test cap number. He had earned it at twenty-two, in Hyderabad, against Australia. He had taken five wickets in the second innings and been carried off the field on the shoulders of his teammates. There was a photograph of it on Anya's mantelpiece. Rohan, mud-streaked, laughing, one arm around the captain.

He had been twenty-four when he was found dead in the bathroom of a hotel suite in Galle. The verdict had been suicide. The belt had been from a hotel dressing gown that, the cleaning staff later confirmed, Rohan had not been issued. He had been left-handed. The ligature mark on his throat was that of a right-handed man.

Anya had been twenty-eight then. She was thirty-two now.

The drive contained thirty-eight encrypted audio files. She opened the third.

The voice that spoke was English, public-school, unmistakable. She had heard it twice in her life. Once at a charity dinner in Mayfair, and once on a television interview about the future of the game.

It said: "We will not be needing the boy after Galle. Make it neat."

Anya did not move for a long time. The flat ticked around her. Somewhere outside, a fox barked.

She closed the laptop, stood up, walked to the bedroom, and pulled a suitcase from under the bed.

4

By midnight she was in a small Georgian hotel in Bayswater under the name Indira Pillai, her mother's maiden name. The passport was legal. It was inadvisable. It would do.

She had a press pass for tomorrow's Test in the name of a freelance journalist in Sydney, a woman Anya had paid eighteen hundred Australian dollars to be ill that week. She had a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of the National Crime Agency. She had a delayed email, set to send at four o'clock the following afternoon, addressed to the editors of three newspapers in three time zones, with a copy of the thirty-eight audio files attached.

If she cancelled the email by four o'clock, it would not send. If she did not, it would publish itself.

Anya had built her plan in fifteen hours. She knew, with the cold clarity of a lawyer who had spent her career drafting documents she might one day be killed for, that fifteen hours was not enough.

She also knew that fifteen hours was all she had.

5

At seven the next morning, in the back garden of a sixteen-bedroom house in Holland Park, Sir Edmund Calloway sat in a wicker chair under a flowering magnolia and read *The Times*.

He was seventy-three. Chairman of the Marylebone Heritage Trust for nineteen of those years. Knighted in 2014. Three grown children. Six grandchildren. A wife of forty-six years.

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His secretary brought him a cordless handset on a silver tray. “Sir Edmund. Geneva.”

He took it. He did not speak.

The voice in his ear said, in the soft, careful Russian he had learned at Sandhurst sixty years ago, “The boy is dead. The analyst is dead. The footage is destroyed.”

“And the woman?”

“The woman is in London. She arrived last night. She is in a hotel in Bayswater. We are watching.”

“Watch her,” Sir Edmund said. “Do not touch her. She is too clever to be touched in a hotel. We will see her at the cricket.”

He clicked the handset off. He sipped his coffee. He smiled at his wife through the kitchen window. She blew him a kiss and held up a single white rose.

“For the lapel,” she called.

“Bring it out, my darling. Bring it out.”

6

The cab dropped Anya at the Grace Gate at half past ten. Navy linen dress, small straw hat, dark glasses she did not strictly need. The August sun was thin behind a grey ceiling of cloud.

She showed the freelance pass at security. The man behind the desk looked at the photograph, looked at her, looked at the photograph again, and waved her through.

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Inside the ground the noise rose around her: the murmur of eighty-seven thousand people taking their seats, the popping of the Tannoy, the distant rolling of the heavy roller across the square. She climbed to the press box. She sat down between a Sky journalist she did not know and an old man from the Hindu.

She did not look at the players' box. She did not look at the President's Pavilion. She did not look at the Long Room balcony where, she knew without checking, Sir Edmund Calloway was at that moment receiving a glass of sparkling water from a steward.

She looked at the pitch. Twenty-two yards of cut earth, rolled and pressed and brushed.

Rohan, she thought, would have loved this pitch.

She blinked twice, hard. She put on the dark glasses.

7

Three rows behind her, a man in a charcoal suit and a sky-blue tie sat down quietly and opened a copy of the day's order paper.

Long face, narrow shoulders, unremarkable, slightly tired — a senior civil servant on a day off. His name was not on any guest list. His pass said Karim Shafi, freelance, Lahore. The man it had originally been issued to was at that moment lying in a Karachi morgue.

He had flown into Heathrow the previous evening on a Bahraini passport. He had flown out of Karachi on an Omani one. He had been declared dead, by his own brother-in-law on national television, in a car bombing in Karachi in March of 2019.

He had been, until that bombing, a Test cricketer. He had played eleven matches for Pakistan. He had once, on a wet morning in Wellington, bowled a New Zealand top order out for fifty-two.

He had been, since the bombing, something else.

He watched the back of Anya Rao's head from three rows away. He had not yet decided how he was going to kill her. He had decided only that he would do it before tea.

8

Lunch was at one. Anya did not eat. At twenty past, a young Lord's intern came up to her — a girl of about twenty-two, in a blazer two sizes too big — and said, very politely, “Excuse me, are you Miss Rao? Sir Edmund Calloway sends his compliments and wonders whether you would care to take a glass of wine in the President's Pavilion before the afternoon session.”

Anya smiled. “How kind. Yes, please.”

She followed the girl down a flight of carpeted stairs, along a corridor lined with portraits of dead men in cricket whites, and into a small private room with leaded windows that looked directly out onto the pitch.

Sir Edmund stood up. Tall, silver-haired, navy blazer, MCC tie. He smiled with great warmth, as if greeting an old friend.

“Miss Rao. How very good of you to come.”

He poured her a glass of Sancerre. He gestured to a small leather armchair. She sat. He sat opposite. He crossed one long leg over the other.

“You look,” he said, “remarkably like your brother.”

9

Anya took a small sip. She set the glass down on the side table.

“Sir Edmund. My brother was murdered.”

He nodded gently, as if she had said something about the weather.
“He was. I am very sorry.”

For a moment Anya did not breathe. “You admit it.”

“I admit that your brother was murdered. I do not admit, and I never shall, that I had anything to do with it. But of course you have come here believing otherwise, and you have, I imagine, taken a number of precautions.”

He smiled. The smile did not reach his eyes.

“I imagine there is somewhere in the world, in a sealed envelope or on a delayed email, a set of audio files. I imagine that those files are set to release themselves at a particular hour today unless you, personally, prevent it. I imagine you came here to look at me, to know me, and to decide whether to let them release.”

“Yes,” Anya said.

“Then let me tell you, my dear, what you do not know.”

He stood. He walked to the leaded window. He looked out at the pitch.

“Your brother was not killed because he refused to bowl a no-ball. Your brother was killed because he discovered, three weeks before

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his death, what the no-ball was for. What every no-ball, for nineteen years, has been for. He came to me, in fact. He came to my office at the Trust, on a Tuesday afternoon in May. He sat where you are sitting. He told me what he had found. He said he would not be silent.”

He turned from the window.

“I begged him to be silent.”

“And you killed him when he wasn't.”

“No, my dear. I did not.”

10

She did not, at that moment, know whether he was lying.

She knew only that the voice on the third audio file was unmistakably his.

“Tell me, then. Who did.”

“Have you ever heard of an organisation called Heritage Sporting Futures Limited?”

“No.”

“It is a company registered in Mayfair. Three directors and forty-one employees, on paper. It owns broadcasting rights, in two specific Gulf jurisdictions, to a particular bilateral tournament that, by some quiet design, never quite happens. It clears, on average, one hundred and forty million dollars a year. It does not, in any conventional sense, sell anything.”

“What does it sell?”

“It sells overs. It sells deliveries. Every fixed no-ball, every dropped catch you and I and the public have endured for nineteen years, is not a fix. It is a settlement. It is the back-office of an arms-procurement network operating between Karachi, Sharjah, Geneva, and a small port in Mozambique. Cricket, you understand, is the only legal commerce on earth that moves billions of dollars in and out of all the same jurisdictions, simultaneously, in real time, in front of cameras. It is the perfect cover.”

He smiled.

“It was not my idea. I inherited it. The man who created it died in 1997. The man who ran it before me retired in 2009. I have been, for fourteen years, its custodian.”

“And my brother?”

“Your brother was killed by my custodian-in-waiting. The man I had personally trained, since 2011, to take over from me. The man who, four years ago, decided that he no longer wished to wait.”

“And now?”

“And now,” said Sir Edmund, “he is sitting three rows behind your seat in the press box, waiting to kill you.”

11

For a long moment, Anya did not speak.

Then she said, “Why are you telling me this?”

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“Because, my dear, I am seventy-three years old, I have a grandson who will, in eight years, be sitting his Cambridge entrance, and I do not wish to spend the last decade of my life in a custodial wing in Belmarsh. My custodian-in-waiting, on the other hand, has decided that the survival of the operation requires my death, your death, and the deaths of perhaps eleven other people who know fragments of the truth.”

He stood again. He walked to the window.

“So I propose, Miss Rao, an arrangement. You will not release the audio files at four o'clock. You will, instead, release them at eight. By eight o'clock, my custodian-in-waiting will have been arrested in the players' tunnel on a tip from a senior officer of the National Crime Agency, who happens to be a school friend of my younger brother. By eight o'clock, the offices of Heritage Sporting Futures will have been sealed by the Serious Fraud Office. And by eight o'clock, I shall be on a flight to Buenos Aires.”

“No,” said Anya.

“No?”

“No. The files release at four. You do not fly. You stand trial.”

He looked at her with something almost like respect.

“My dear, you do not have the standing to make that decision.”

“My brother does.”

“Your brother is dead.”

“Yes. Yes, he is.”

She stood. She did not finish the wine. She walked to the door. She put her hand on the brass knob. Then she turned.

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“Sir Edmund. There is one thing I would like to know before I leave this room. The custodian-in-waiting. The man who killed Rohan. What is his name?”

Sir Edmund Calloway smiled, very faintly, and named him.

Anya did not, at first, react. She thought she had misheard.

He repeated the name.

She stood at the door for a long time, her hand on the brass knob, her face very still. Then she opened the door, walked along the corridor lined with dead men in cricket whites, climbed back up the carpeted stairs to the press box, and sat down in her seat as if nothing in her life had changed.

12

At four o'clock, on a balcony of a small Georgian hotel in Bayswater, an automatic process running on a laptop checked a single mailbox for a single email subject line. It did not find the cancellation. It pressed send.

Thirty-eight encrypted audio files, with translation and provenance, went out simultaneously to the chief editors of the Financial Times, the New York Times, and Al Jazeera English.

At four-fourteen, a senior officer of the National Crime Agency, sitting in a car parked on the north side of the Nursery, received a phone call from a number he had been waiting for. He nodded once. Three plainclothes officers entered the players' tunnel from the back of the Warner Stand and arrested a man in a charcoal suit and a sky-

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blue tie who was sitting very calmly, with no luggage, on a bench by the changing-room door.

The man did not resist. He smiled.

He said, in a voice that was unmistakable to anyone who had ever heard it on a thirty-eight-file USB drive, “Tell my sister that the Twelfth Man was never me. It was always her.”

At four-eighteen, Sir Edmund Calloway walked out through the back gate of the President's Pavilion to a black car waiting on Wellington Place. The car took him to Northolt. A private aircraft took him to Argentina. He died, of natural causes, in a coastal town outside Buenos Aires, in 2031.

At four-twenty-one, in the press box, Anya Rao's phone vibrated. It was a video.

Rohan, her brother, four years older, thinner, alive — sitting in a sunlit room she did not recognise, looking straight at the camera. Behind him, on a wall, was a calendar showing today's date. And a voice she had heard on the USB, the voice of the man she had just helped to arrest, said softly from off-camera: Tell your sister that the Twelfth Man was never me. It was always her.

Anya stared at the screen.

Her brother smiled at her. It was the same smile that had been carried off the field at Hyderabad on the shoulders of his teammates.

He raised one hand and waved.

13

The name Sir Edmund had spoken in the President's Pavilion, the name of the custodian-in-waiting, the name of the man who had killed Rohan, was not the name of the man arrested in the players' tunnel.

It was the name on Anya's mother's marriage certificate.

It was Anya's father.

She sat in the press box and watched the last hour of play and did not move. The young Australian opener brought up a hundred. The crowd rose. The cathedral light slanted gold across the pavilion roof.

She made herself, in the noise, set it out plainly, the way she would have set out a brief — because she had learned, in fifteen years of law, that the only way to survive a thing this large was to name its parts. There was a syndicate; she had understood that much from the first audio file. It did not fix matches in the crude old way, ball by ball. It traded, instead, in certainty: it arranged outcomes of whole series and tournaments years in advance, sold that certainty to sovereign funds and betting houses through a clearing structure that touched four continents, and protected it by removing anyone who learned too much — a physiotherapist in a stairwell, an analyst in Geneva, a left-handed bowler in a Galle bathroom. At the top of it sat men like Sir Edmund Calloway, who owned the game's institutions the way other men owned shipping lines. And the syndicate's man inside her own family — the one who had identified Rohan as a risk, signed off on his disappearance, and kept him alive only as leverage — had not been a stranger at all. The custodian-in-waiting, the name Sir Edmund had spoken, the architect of four years of her grief, was the soft-spoken accountant from Bandra who had read her bedtime

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stories. The network had a face, and the face was her father's, and she had just, with thirty-eight audio files and a delayed email, brought the whole of it down on him.

Her brother was not dead. Her brother had never been dead. He had been, for four years, a prisoner. The body in the Galle bathroom had belonged to a Tamil hotel porter of approximately the same height and build, paid in advance, paid post-mortem to a widow in Jaffna who had never asked questions.

Her father — the soft-spoken accountant from Bandra, the man who had read her bedtime stories about Rama and Sita, the man who had wept at her law school graduation — had ordered all of it.

And he had ordered, this morning, her own death.

At six o'clock the umpires drew stumps. The crowd stood and applauded. Anya stood and applauded with them.

She had freed everyone but herself.



STORY 2

THE BOMBAY DECLARATION

*A billion people watched. Only one of them knew what was really
happening.*



1

At 7:14 p.m. Indian Standard Time, with India needing nine runs off the final over of the World Cup final, Vikram Sethi looked up at the camera, smiled the famous smile that sold three brands of motorcycle and a soft drink, and tugged twice at his collar.

Six thousand miles away, in a marble-floored room in Geneva, an old man in a wheelchair touched his own collar twice and laughed.

In the broadcasters' box at the Wankhede Stadium, Zara Qureshi pulled the headset away from her ear and felt the floor disappear from under her chair.

It was not a signal she had ever seen Vikram make before. But she knew, with a cold certainty that started in her stomach and rose like a tide, that it meant her father was about to die.

2

Three months earlier, in a hotel suite on the seventy-second floor of the Burj Al Arab, a man who had introduced himself only as Mr. Hassan had shown Zara two photographs.

The first was of her father, gaunt, in a room with bare walls, holding a copy of that morning's Dawn newspaper. The brigadier's hair, military-clipped, was white at the temples. He was looking directly at the camera. His eyes were terrible.

The second was of her fiancé, Vikram, walking out of the Curtain Bluff in Antigua with a woman who was not Zara.

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Mr. Hassan had explained, with the courtesy of a man arranging flowers, that her father would live if she did one small thing. She would, in three months' time, on the night of the World Cup final, persuade her fiancé to give a televised post-match interview in which he would say — in precisely these words, in Hindi — that the Pakistani bowlers had played with great honour.

Zara had asked why. Mr. Hassan had said, “For peace, Miss Qureshi. Only for peace.”

She had not believed him for a second. But she had agreed.

She had not known, then, that her fiancé was already working for the other side.

3

Zara Qureshi was twenty-nine years old. She had been born in Lahore in a hospital wing donated by her great-uncle, a textile magnate. She had been raised in St. John's Wood from the age of seven. She had read English at New College, Oxford. She had been on the cover of three Pakistani magazines, two Indian magazines, and one British one, and she had presented cricket on three continents.

She had been engaged to Vikram Sethi for nine months. The engagement had been announced on the morning of the Indian Premier League final, in a press release that crashed Twitter for forty minutes. Her father, the brigadier, had not, formally, given his blessing.

He had, instead, on the morning of the announcement, sent her a single sentence by encrypted message: Do not marry that boy. I will explain when I am next in London.

He had been due in London the following Tuesday. He had not arrived.

He had vanished, between his car and his front door, in the suburb of Bahria Town in Rawalpindi, on a Sunday evening in February. The Pakistani authorities had described it, with the careful vocabulary of a country that did not, officially, lose retired brigadiers, as a misunderstanding.

4

Vikram hit the ball over long-on for six. The stadium erupted. India had won.

Zara stood up in the broadcast box. She did not take off her earpiece. She walked down four flights of stairs in heels she could no longer feel. She walked through the players' tunnel, past two security officers who knew her by sight, and onto the outfield.

The Indian team was a knot of bodies in the centre of the square. Vikram was being lifted onto shoulders. The crowd was on its feet. Fireworks were beginning to bloom over the Arabian Sea.

The boundary cameras turned, instinctively, towards her.

She walked into the centre of the square. The knot of bodies opened for her. Vikram, drenched in champagne, his hair sticking up in seven directions, opened his arms.

“Jaan,” he said.

He kissed her. The cameras flashed. She slid the small recorder into the inside pocket of his blazer as she kissed him back.

The recorder had been broadcasting, on a private frequency, for forty seconds.

5

What Zara had learned, over three months, in fragments — in a parking garage in Dubai, in an old bookshop in Knightsbridge, in a coffee house on Park Street in Calcutta — was that the consortium that had taken her father was not, primarily, in the business of cricket.

The Calcutta fragment was the one she would remember longest. The man who agreed to meet her was a retired Reserve Bank settlements clerk named Probir Sengupta, seventy years old, who would talk only at a particular marble-topped table at the back of a coffee house on Park Street that had not changed its ceiling fans since 1961. He stirred sugar into his coffee for a long time before he spoke. ‘You are asking,’ he said at last, ‘how you move four billion dollars between two countries that will not clear a single rupee through each other's banks. I will tell you, because I am old and they cannot hurt me more than my heart already intends to. You do not move money, Miss Qureshi. You move television rights. A broadcaster in Singapore pays for a tournament. The tournament pays a production house in Dubai. The production house pays a rights agency in Mauritius. The agency settles, at the end, against an arms invoice that was never an arms invoice because on paper it is camera equipment.’ He tapped the marble. ‘Cricket is the only thing on earth that both governments will let cross the border freely. So they made the money wear cricket's clothes. Your father's tournament is not a tournament. It is a doorway with a scoreboard painted on it.’ He finished his coffee and would not let her pay for it, and she never saw him again; when she telephoned

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the number he had given her, three weeks later, it had been disconnected.

It was in the business of arms.

Specifically, it was in the business of moving, through a proposed bilateral cricketing tournament between India and Pakistan, the laundered proceeds of an arms-trafficking network that ran across the Line of Control and into Central Asia. The tournament was a project of four billion dollars in television rights, eight hundred million in betting markets, and an open, permanent, deniable financial corridor between two countries that did not, officially, talk to each other.

It would be approved, by both boards, on a Tuesday morning three weeks after the World Cup, on the strength of one fact: the public goodwill generated by an Indian captain praising the honour of Pakistani bowlers, on live television, in front of one billion viewers, in the most-watched cricket match in history.

That sentence was the keystone. Without it, the tournament could not be sold to either government. With it, both governments would have no choice.

Vikram had been recruited two years earlier. The woman in Antigua had been his handler. The collar-tug Zara had just witnessed was not a signal to kill her father. It was a signal that the keystone was now, irrevocably, in place.

Her father had been the price the consortium had paid to keep Zara silent until the final ball was bowled. He was not, Zara now believed, dead. He was redundant.

6

Six thousand miles away, in a marble-floored room in Geneva, the old man in the wheelchair watched the kiss on a screen and stopped laughing.

He was eighty-four years old. His name had been struck from a Pakistani military rolls in 1974. He had been the elder brother of a brigadier whose retirement, in 2019, had complicated certain arrangements considerably.

He had been told, since the age of six, that his older brother was a hero. He had been told, since the age of nineteen, that he himself was not.

He had, at thirty-one, defected. He had, at forty-four, built the consortium. He had, at sixty-eight, decided that one of his great-nieces was going to be the most-photographed woman in South Asia, and that one of his nephews-in-law was going to be the most-photographed batsman in the world, and that the two of them were going to be engaged.

He had assumed neither of them would ever know that he existed.

He had not, the screen now informed him, assumed correctly.

7

Zara turned to the cameras. She did not let go of Vikram. She kept her arm around his waist. She smiled the smile that had sold the motorcycles and the soft drink.

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She said, in clear, careful English, in a voice that the Star Sports floor manager would later swear made every hair on his arms stand up:

“My fiancé did not win this match tonight. My fiancé lost it three years ago, in a hotel in Antigua, to a woman whose name I am about to read out.”

Vikram's smile did not move. His face went very still. His hand, around her waist, tightened.

“She is a Polish national,” Zara said. “She entered the United States in 2021 on a Lithuanian passport. Her name is Aleksandra Wolanin. She is at present employed by a private intelligence firm registered in Geneva under the name Sentinel Strategic Holdings. The firm is wholly owned by a consortium that has, for the past nineteen years, been laundering arms-trafficking proceeds through the broadcasting rights of cricket tournaments in three jurisdictions.”

The Wankhede was silent now. One hundred and thirty-three thousand decibels of crowd noise had been replaced by a single low, confused murmur.

“This tournament,” Zara said, “the bilateral series that is about to be announced, is not a tournament. It is a corridor. It is the same corridor my fiancé has been operating for two years. It is the corridor that has my father, the brigadier Yusuf Qureshi, in a farmhouse outside Murree.”

She let go of Vikram. She took one step back. The cameras zoomed.

“My fiancé is going to kindly remove his blazer,” Zara said, “and his blazer is going to be handed to the senior officer of the Mumbai Police now walking onto the field. Inside the inside pocket is a small recording device. The device has been broadcasting, for the last three

minutes, on a frequency monitored by the Bureau Chief of the BBC, the Bureau Chief of Al Jazeera, and a senior officer of the Indian Research and Analysis Wing whom my father saved at Kargil. The device contains audio, recorded in this stadium tonight, of every word my fiancé has spoken into his earpiece since the start of the seventeenth over.”

Vikram did not move. His face had gone the colour of old paper.

“Take off the blazer, jaan,” Zara said, gently. “Please.”

8

Vikram Sethi was arrested at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport at 03:17 the following morning. He was attempting to board a private aircraft to Mauritius on a passport issued in the name of a cousin who had died at nineteen.

Brigadier Yusuf Qureshi was released from a farmhouse seven kilometres south of Murree at 11:40 Pakistani time the same morning. He was, when found, gaunt, dehydrated, missing one tooth, and entirely alive.

The bilateral tournament was cancelled by the Indian Board's general body on Tuesday morning. The Pakistani Board's announcement followed on Wednesday afternoon. Three names disappeared from a Forbes Asia list within the week. Two passports were revoked. A Cypriot subsidiary of Sentinel Strategic Holdings was raided by the Cypriot Securities Commission on the following Monday.

Aleksandra Wolanin was found in a small hotel in Vienna eleven days later. She was alive. She declined, courteously, to speak with anyone.

9

Six months later, on a clear December afternoon, Zara flew to Geneva.

The hospice was a low white building on the lakeshore at Vésenaz. The man in the wheelchair was in a private room on the second floor. He had asked, finally, to meet his great-niece.

He was very small. His skin was the colour of parchment. His eyes, when she walked in, were her father's eyes.

“You favour your grandmother,” he said in Urdu. “She was the most beautiful woman in Lahore in 1958.”

Zara did not sit.

“You took my father,” she said.

“I gave him back.”

“You ordered him taken.”

“I did.”

“You ordered me used.”

“I did.”

“Tell me why I am here.”

He smiled. It was the smile of a man for whom one final joke was a great pleasure.

“Because, my child,” he said, “the consortium has not been destroyed. The consortium has only been moved. To football. To Qatar. To a tournament beginning in eighteen months.”

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He extended one trembling, papery hand.

“And you, of course, will help me. Because you have not, in fact, saved your father.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said the old man, “that your father has been in on it from the beginning. He was the principal officer of the consortium's Pakistani station from 1994 to 2019. The brigadier you adored, my child, was the brigadier I built. His abduction was a courtesy. His abduction was the price he insisted upon, so that you would never know.”

He coughed delicately into a handkerchief.

“I am leaving you, my child, eight hundred million Swiss francs and a great deal of unfinished business. The boy at the airport in Mumbai will be returned to you in two years. He is a useful boy. He is, alas, your cousin.”

Zara stood in the small white room for a long time. Outside the window, on the lake, a single sailboat moved slowly south.

She had freed everyone but herself.

10

She did not take the eight hundred million Swiss francs.

She flew back to London the next morning, and within the week she did two concrete things, both small, both irreversible. The first was that she telephoned the director of a sports network that had, three days after the World Cup final, offered her the largest contract ever

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given to a cricket presenter in the subcontinent — a flagship nightly show, a sum that would have made her independent for life — and she declined it, politely, finally, without explaining why. The network assumed she was holding out for more. She was not. She had simply understood, in the white room at Vézenaz, that a famous face is the most useful instrument a consortium can own, and that she had been one all her life without knowing it, and that she would not be one again on anyone's terms but her own.

The second thing was that she opened a new notebook — a plain one, bought from a stationer's on the Edgware Road — and on the first page she wrote a single word, and underlined it twice. The word was football. Beneath it she wrote: Qatar. Eighteen months. Sentinel. And beneath that, in the small careful hand of a woman who had spent her life learning that the game on the field is never the only game: the corridor is not destroyed. It has only changed sports.

She did not yet know how she would do it, or whom she would tell, or what it would cost her. She knew only that the old man in the wheelchair had made one final error, the same error they all made — Sir Edmund in his pavilion, Mr. Hassan with his photographs, her own father across thirty years. They had all assumed that the most-photographed woman in South Asia was a face to be used, and never once a person who was watching back.

She closed the notebook. Outside, London was grey and ordinary and free. She put the kettle on, and began.



STORY 3

THE CARIBBEAN OVER

She came for a wedding. She stayed for a war.



1

The envelope contained one item: a ticket stub for a T20 international played in Barbados three years earlier. On the back of the stub, in her dead husband's handwriting, were five words and a number.

If I die, sixteenth over.

Isabel Marchetti-Cross read it forty times on the flight from Gatwick. She read it again, sitting on the balcony of her suite at the Sandy Lane, with the sun setting copper over the Caribbean Sea. And then she remembered: her husband had not watched cricket. He had hated cricket. He had called it, with the contempt of a man who had been bullied for not playing rounders at his English prep school, a colonial farce.

Which meant the ticket stub was not a memory. It was a will.

2

Isabel was thirty-four. She was half Italian, half Trinidadian, a widow of eleven months and a barrister of nine years' standing at Lincoln's Inn. Her husband, Charles Cross, had been forty-eight when he had died on the eighteenth green at Sandy Lane of what the Barbadian coroner had recorded as a sudden and complete cardiac event. Charles had run a hedge fund. He had run, at the time of his death, two billion three hundred million pounds of other people's money. He had left her, in his will, every penny.

He had also left her, in a safe at the back of his dressing room in a flat in Eaton Square that Isabel had not known existed, a single padded

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envelope addressed in his own hand: For my wife. Open only on Barbados.

She had found the flat the night before the funeral. She had found the safe at three in the morning. She had found the envelope at four. She had found the combination written on the inside of the cover of a copy of Wisden 2018 that Charles had never read.

She had spent eleven months trying to forget the envelope. She had given up on the morning the first anniversary card arrived, signed only with a number.

The number was 287.

3

She went to the match. Kensington Oval, day-night, the West Indies against a touring side from Pakistan. She sat in the Greenidge & Haynes stand, three rows back, in a yellow sundress that drew the cameras but not, she hoped, the wrong eyes. The Bridgetown sun pressed down on the pavilion roof. The smell of fried saltfish drifted up from the boundary.

She watched the sixteenth over of the first innings. Nothing happened. A medium-pacer bowled six dot balls. The crowd booed.

She watched the sixteenth over of the second innings.

The West Indian captain hit the second ball for six. The third ball was a wide. The fourth ball — and here Isabel's hand tightened on the armrest — the fourth ball was a slower bouncer, and the batsman ducked, and his helmet came off, and the camera lingered, for one

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tenth of a second longer than it should have, on the face of a man in the third row of the President's Pavilion.

Isabel knew that face. It was the face of the man who had paid for her husband's funeral.

His name was Roland Aubrey-Pierce. He was a private banker from Geneva. He had been her husband's closest friend at Oxford. He had stood, at the funeral, three rows behind Isabel, weeping silently into a black silk handkerchief.

He was at this moment looking up at the camera as if he had been waiting for it.

4

The bar at the Sandy Lane that evening was nearly empty. A retired American golfer was telling a story he had told many times, to a young woman who had heard it once before. A waiter in white moved unhurriedly between the rattan chairs.

Isabel ordered a vodka tonic. She did not drink it. She sat at the far end of the bar with her back to the room and waited.

At ten past nine, Roland Aubrey-Pierce sat down beside her.

“Isabel.”

“Roland.”

He was sixty-one. He was tall, slim, deeply tanned. He wore a linen jacket the colour of unbleached paper. He smelled, very faintly, of vetiver.

“I had hoped,” he said, “that you would not come.”

“Did you.”

“I had also,” he said, “rather hoped that you would.”

He ordered a single malt. He did not look at her.

“There is a great deal,” he said, “that I owe you.”

“There is a great deal,” she said, “that you owe my husband.”

“Yes.”

He turned to her then. He had blue eyes. They were, she realised with a small shock, full of tears.

“He was the love of my life, Isabel.”

She set down the vodka tonic.

“I don't,” she said, “understand.”

“No,” Roland said. “No, of course you don't. Not yet.”

5

He told her, that night, on the terrace of the Sandy Lane bar, the things Charles had not told her in seven years of marriage.

Charles had loved him. Charles had loved him since Oxford. Charles had, on the night before he had proposed to Isabel, told Roland that he could no longer continue to lie. He had told Roland that he was going to marry. He had also told Roland that he was going to begin, in the privacy of his hedge fund's accounts, a slow and deniable skim of three percent on a transactional flow that, at the time, neither of them had fully understood.

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The transactional flow was the Caribbean Over.

For nineteen years, Roland told her, a consortium of private bankers in Geneva had been laundering money for a sanctioned Venezuelan general through the broadcasting and franchise rights of West Indian T20 cricket. The mechanism had a terrible elegance: every over of every match was a numbered account, every delivery a transaction. The sixteenth over of the day Charles had attended, three years ago, had cleared one hundred and forty million United States dollars in proceeds from the Venezuelan oil-for-arms trade.

Charles, on the morning of his death, had skimmed three percent of nineteen years.

He had not died of a heart attack. He had been killed, on the eighteenth green at Sandy Lane, by his caddie, with a single injection of a synthetic compound that mimicked acute cardiac failure. The caddie had been a Cuban national named Reinaldo. The Cuban had been paid eight thousand United States dollars. The Cuban had been found, by Isabel, three days ago, in a shallow grave behind a beach bar in Bathsheba on the windward coast.

“And the money?” Isabel asked.

“The money,” said Roland Aubrey-Pierce, “is hidden in a trust in Curaçao under your mother's maiden name. The combination to the safe in Eaton Square unlocks not only the envelope you have already opened but also a sealed instruction to the trustee.”

“How much?”

Roland exhaled. “Four hundred and twenty million dollars.”

She did not, at first, react.

“And what,” she said at last, “do you want from me?”

“I want,” Roland said, “to come and work for you.”

6

The plantation house was in the hills above Holetown. It had a fountain in the drive, a chapel in the garden, and a Steinway in the morning room. It was owned, on paper, by an offshore trust whose ultimate beneficiary was a sheikh in Abu Dhabi who had never visited Barbados.

It was, in fact, Roland Aubrey-Pierce's private residence.

Isabel arrived on the Saturday night in a green silk dress and her grandmother's diamonds. She drank Roland's rum. She danced with two ministers, a former England fast bowler, and a Saudi diplomat with very small hands. At ten minutes past eleven, she walked into Roland's private study, locked the door behind her, and sat down at his desk.

She had forty-seven minutes before the security sweep. She had memorised the layout from a photograph she had paid a maid eight thousand United States dollars to take. She opened the safe with the combination her husband had whispered, on his deathbed, to a hospice nurse who had loved him and who had, eleven months later, given the number to his widow.

Inside were three things. A ledger. A passport in Roland's name with the photograph of someone else. And a Glock 19 with the serial number filed off.

She took the ledger. She took the passport. She left the Glock.

She had nearly reached the French doors when the lights came on, and Roland Aubrey-Pierce, smiling, raised a glass of his own rum and said, “My dear, I have been waiting for you for eleven months.”

7

He did not have her killed. He sat down opposite her on a long sofa upholstered in pale yellow linen. He poured her a rum of her own.

“Isabel,” he said, “I am going to tell you the truth.”

“You have,” she said, “already told me the truth.”

“I have told you,” he said, “the truth that suits both of us. I have not, yet, told you the other truth.”

She set the rum down.

“The Venezuelan general,” Roland said, “did not order Charles's death.”

“Then who did?”

“The Heritage Caribbean Trust did. The Trust, you understand, is not a Venezuelan operation. The Trust is a private undertaking of nine men who, over forty years, have used the West Indian game as their banking system. The general was a customer. He was not, ever, a director.”

“And the directors?”

“Eight of them are dead. The ninth is sitting in front of you.”

He smiled.

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“Charles did not skim three percent without permission, Isabel. Charles skimmed three percent at my request. I have been, for fourteen years, slowly liquidating the Trust from the inside. The four hundred and twenty million dollars in the Curaçaoan trust is not stolen money. It is the only money on earth that does not, in any meaningful legal sense, belong to anyone. It is freedom.”

She did not move.

“Why did Charles die?” she asked.

“Because,” Roland said, “the Cuban, Reinaldo, was hired by the Trust's eighth director — a man who died of natural causes four months after Charles, in a yacht fire off Mustique — to remove Charles before Charles could become a witness against the rest of us. The eighth director did not know that Charles was, by then, the eighth director's only remaining ally.”

He set down his rum.

“I asked Charles, eleven months ago, to marry me. I did not, of course, mean that literally. I asked him to come away. I had built, for the two of us, a small house in Sicily, and a small life. Charles said no. Charles said he could not leave you.”

His voice did not break, but Isabel saw, in his eyes, that it might.

“He did not, Isabel, love me more than he loved you. He loved us, I think, equally. I have, for eleven months, hated you for that. I have decided, this week, to stop.”

8

She did not answer him immediately. She looked, instead, at the ledger on her lap. She turned it over in her hands.

“What is this,” she said.

“That,” Roland said, “is a list of the eighty-one men, in nine countries, who are still alive and who have, at one point or another over forty years, been customers of the Trust. The list contains a current British prime minister, two American senators, four sitting heads of state, and one member of the House of Lords. It contains, also, the man who ordered Charles's killer hired. He is not dead, Isabel. The yacht-fire story was a fiction. He is alive, and he is in Geneva, and he is the reason I have, for fourteen months, been afraid to leave this island.”

He looked at her.

“If you and I publish that ledger, Isabel, we will both die before Christmas. If you and I burn it, the man in Geneva will be content to leave us both alone. He will be content because the four hundred and twenty million dollars in the Curaçaoan trust is a sum he can absorb. He is not greedy. He is only careful.”

“And the third option.”

“The third option,” Roland said, “is that you and I marry.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“Not, Isabel, in any genuine sense. I am sixty-one. I am, as you have perhaps gathered, not interested in your particular charms. But you are a barrister of Lincoln's Inn. You are the widow of an English hedge fund manager. You are, by birth, half Caribbean. There is no one on earth less suspect than you. If you and I marry, the man in

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Geneva will be content to assume that the four hundred and twenty million is, finally, going home. He will not chase you. He will not chase me. He will, in due course, die of an old man's diseases in his eighty-third year.”

“And after that?”

“After that, my dear, the Trust dies with him. The eighty-one men on that list will live out their lives in peace, and none of them, including the British prime minister, will sleep entirely well, because they will never know which of them is in possession of the ledger.”

He smiled.

“They will, in fact, be in possession of the ledger. Because, on our wedding day, I shall give them each a single page, in a sealed envelope, in the hand of my solicitor. The page will be their own. They will know, then, that we know.”

“That is,” Isabel said, “an extraordinary plan.”

“Yes,” Roland said. “Isn't it.”

9

She walked out of the plantation house at midnight engaged to be married a second time. She walked out also wearing, taped to the small of her back, a digital recorder that had captured every word.

She had two options. She could destroy the recording. She could, alternatively, take the recording to a senior officer of the Serious Fraud Office in London on the morning she landed, and watch, from a respectful distance, as eighty-one men in nine countries received, simultaneously, on the same Tuesday, a knock at the door.

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She made herself, sitting in the dark of the car, reason it through coldly, the way she would have reasoned a brief. The recording was not a shield; it was a fuse. If she handed it to the Serious Fraud Office, she would set in motion a prosecution that touched a sitting prime minister and four heads of state — and long before any of them saw a courtroom, the man in Geneva would understand that the ledger had moved, that Roland had turned, and that Charles's widow was the one who had carried it out. She would not survive that knowledge by a fortnight; neither would Roland; the eighty-one names would simply close ranks and the Trust would bury them both the way it had buried Charles and the Cuban in Bathsheba. But if she let Roland's plan stand — if she married him, and the sealed pages went out, and the four hundred and twenty million appeared to be quietly going home — then the man in Geneva had no reason to move against her and every reason not to. Her safety did not lie in exposing the Trust. It lay in becoming, herself, the deterrent: the unremarkable Lincoln's Inn widow whom no one would suspect of holding the only ledger that could end them, and whose death would be the one event guaranteed to release it. Deleting the recording was not surrender. It was arming the only weapon that would actually keep her alive.

She walked through the dark garden, past the chapel, past the fountain, to the car waiting in the drive.

She thought about the photograph of Charles on Roland's desk. The one she had not, in seven years, seen. The one of Charles at twenty-two, laughing on a punt on the Cherwell, his head on Roland's shoulder.

She thought about the eleven months she had spent grieving for a man she had not known.

She thought about the four hundred and twenty million dollars.

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She took out her phone. She opened the recording. She paused. She looked, for a long moment, up at the plantation house with its yellow lights and its single piano playing in the morning room.

Then she deleted the recording.

Grief, she had learned, was just another currency.



STORY 4

THE SHARJAH GLASS

Twenty-two yards of cricket. Twenty-two billion dollars of secrets.



1

The hotel room was on the forty-third floor. The view was of the desert, the floodlit stadium, and beyond it, the black Gulf. The desert wind, the famous shamal, carried fine sand against the floor-to-ceiling glass with a sound like dry rain.

Naina Sehgal sat on the edge of the bed in a white silk robe and listened to the man in the bathroom take a phone call he should not have been taking.

He was speaking Russian. Naina did not speak Russian. But she heard, three times, a number: forty-two million. And once, very clearly, a name: her own.

She did not move for ten seconds. She listened to the soft murmur of the call, to the rush of the air conditioning, to a single fly somewhere near the curtain. Then she stood up, walked, barefoot and silent, to the dressing table where his open briefcase sat between an unopened bottle of Krug and a copy of the next day's Khaleej Times. She lifted out four document folders. She photographed every page on her phone, one by one, on a setting she had configured a year earlier never to write to the cloud.

She slipped the folders back. She closed the case.

She was in the corridor, then in the service stairs, then in a taxi at the rear porte cochère, before the bathroom door had opened. By the time the man, whose name on the visitor log was Anton and whose real name was something else, realised she was gone, she was thirteen kilometres away, in an all-night café on Al Wahda Road, ordering a Turkish coffee with hands that, to her quiet astonishment, did not shake.

She had been hired to audit a cricket board. She had just become, without quite understanding how, the target of a contract.

2

Naina Sehgal was twenty-seven. She was, in the words of her senior partner at the Singapore office of the Big Four firm that employed her, the best forensic accountant of her generation. She had a first in mathematics from Imperial. She had an MBA from INSEAD. She had a photographic memory. She had a fiancé she had met at a Diwali party at the Singapore Cricket Club. She had a controlled-substance problem she had been managing, in private, for eight months.

She had also, since the age of three, had a mother who was a photograph and a sentence. The photograph stood on every desk Naina had ever owned: a young woman on a beach in Goa, laughing, one hand raised against the sun. The sentence, delivered by her father once and never repeated, was that her mother had drowned in the sea off Goa in 2001, when Naina was three, and that the body had never been recovered. Naina had grown up an only child of an absence. She had taught herself, young, to trust only what could be reconciled — every figure traceable to a source document, every balance closed — and she had wondered, in the colder hours, whether she had become a forensic accountant precisely because there was one account in her own life that had never balanced: a mother who had gone into the water and left no entry, no body, no proof, nothing but a laughing woman on a beach and the unfinished arithmetic of a child's grief.

She had been seconded, six weeks earlier, to audit the books of the Asian Cricket Confederation in advance of an ICC-mandated transparency review.

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She had flagged, on her third day, a discrepancy. A series of broadcasting payments routed through a Cypriot subsidiary did not, in any year, match the contracted rights fees. The shortfall, summed across nine years, came to approximately forty-two million United States dollars.

She had been told, by her senior partner in Singapore, to leave the discrepancy alone. She had been told, by a courteous emissary from the Confederation's chairman, that the matter was a known clerical artefact.

She had been offered, in her own hotel suite the previous evening by Anton-who-was-not-Anton, two glasses of an excellent Sancerre and a very thinly veiled suggestion that she might wish to take an extended holiday in the Maldives, all expenses paid.

She had smiled. She had said yes. She had gone with him upstairs.

While he was in the bathroom, she had photographed every document in his briefcase. And now, on Al Wahda Road, at two-fifteen in the morning, she sat over a Turkish coffee she had not touched, and she scrolled, slowly, through forty-one pages of evidence that she did not, yet, fully understand.

3

By dawn, she understood.

The forty-two million dollars was not the discrepancy. It was the audit footprint of the discrepancy. The actual quantum, once Naina followed a single payment all the way through, was twenty-two billion United States dollars. She traced one transaction to be sure of the method: a broadcasting rights fee of nineteen million dollars, paid in

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March of the previous year, that left a Cypriot subsidiary as a clean media invoice, was netted against a nominee company's loan in Mauritius, surfaced six days later as a settlement through an Emirati exchange house, and arrived, stripped of every fingerprint, in an account she could not name. One payment, four jurisdictions, seventy-two hours, and the money had changed from sanctioned capital into a television contract and back again. There were nine years of them.

Twenty-two billion dollars over nineteen years. Sharjah was not a cricket stadium. Sharjah was a clearing-house.

The clearing-house had three primary clients. The first was a private Russian network laundering sanctioned capital. The second was a North Korean cyber-proceeds operation. The third — and Naina, sitting in a café smelling of cardamom and stale frying oil, felt the back of her neck go cold — was a serving member of the Indian cabinet, who had assembled, over six years, an off-books fund of three thousand seven hundred crore rupees to finance a domestic surveillance programme that had not, in any forum, been authorised.

The minister's name was a name every Indian schoolchild knew. He was the third most-photographed man in the country. He was on the cover of Time magazine the week Naina found him in the ledger.

And the senior partner in Singapore who had told her to leave the discrepancy alone was the minister's wife's first cousin.

4

She did not go back to the hotel. She paid her bill. She walked, in the still-cool morning air, to a small office in the Al Quasimia district that

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opened at six. She bought, with a credit card her firm did not monitor, a one-way ticket on the 11:40 Emirates flight to Frankfurt.

She did not, however, board it.

She bought, with a second card, a separate ticket on the 09:15 Etihad flight from Abu Dhabi to London via the duty-free transit. She bought, with the same card, a hotel reservation in Geneva she would never use. She walked to a third office and arranged, with a courier company she had used on three previous audits, the immediate same-day shipment of a small sealed envelope to a post box in Frankfurt that belonged to a man she had met once, at a wedding in Delhi, four years earlier.

His name was Vir Mehrotra. He was twenty-eight years old. He was a junior officer of the Enforcement Directorate of India. He was idealistic. He was in love with a woman who would not have him. He had spent the previous winter convalescing in Frankfurt after a hit-and-run in Mumbai that had not been a hit-and-run.

5

Anton-who-was-not-Anton woke at seven-fifty. He had not been drugged. He had simply slept the deep sleep of a man who has, over a long career, learned to take certain pleasures wherever they are offered.

He padded into the empty bedroom, looked at the rumpled bed, smiled, and said, in Russian, to the empty room, “Auditor, auditor.”

Then he saw, on the bedside table, a single Polaroid photograph that had not been there the night before.

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Eleven Stories

It was of his own face, sleeping, taken from less than a metre away, with a small red dot — almost certainly a laser pointer — placed neatly in the centre of his forehead.

Anton-who-was-not-Anton stopped smiling. He went to the briefcase. The case was closed. The four document folders, when he opened them, were undisturbed.

He sat down very slowly on the edge of the bed and dialled a number in Moscow. He spoke for a long time. He was sweating. The voice at the other end did not, at any point, raise itself, which was, for Anton-who-was-not-Anton, much worse than shouting would have been.

When he hung up, he reached for the unopened bottle of Krug, opened it with one hand, drank half of it from the bottle, and then dialled, with the other hand, a number in Sharjah.

“The auditor,” he said, “has been here. She has photographed everything. She has gone.”

There was a pause. Then the voice in Sharjah said, with great politeness, “Then you, Anton, will find her.”

6

Vir Mehrotra read the envelope in a public library in Frankfurt on a Tuesday afternoon. He read it twice. Then he was very quietly and very thoroughly sick into a wastepaper basket.

He made four phone calls. The first was to his mother in Lucknow, to tell her, gently, that he loved her and that he would be unreachable for some weeks. The second was to a man he had known at the Indian Police Service Academy who was now stationed at the Indian High

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Commission in The Hague. The third was to a woman at the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in London, whom he had met at a conference and who, on a single sentence from him, would agree to a meeting at six the following morning. The fourth was to the small, grey-haired Italian priest at the Frankfurt cathedral, in whose confessional he had, eight months earlier, told the truth about the hit-and-run.

The Italian priest listened. The Italian priest said, gently, that one should not, in general, take confessions outside the box, but that he would, in this particular case, make an exception.

Vir gave the priest a small encrypted drive and told him where to send it, if Vir did not, within three days, return.

Then he boarded a plane to The Hague.

7

Naina did not, in the end, go to London.

At Frankfurt airport, in the transit lounge, she had been intercepted by a German woman of about fifty wearing a navy trouser-suit, who had said, in faintly Bavarian English, “Miss Sehgal. I am very pleased to meet you. My colleagues in Singapore have spoken of you for two years.”

Naina had looked at the woman. The woman had shown her, briefly, an identification card. The card was not German. It was not, in any technical sense, anything.

“Where are we going?” Naina had asked.

“To a small house in Iceland,” the woman had said. “There is a person who has been waiting to meet you for many years.”

8

Reykjavík was full of grey weather and a low pewter light. The car drove her north along the coast for two hours. The road thinned. The sea opened out on the right, and on the left there were lava fields the colour of charcoal.

The house was a small white timber bungalow with a green roof, set back from the water. Smoke rose from a single chimney.

The German woman did not get out. She said, “Walk to the door. You are expected.”

Naina walked to the door. The door opened before she knocked.

The woman who stood there was sixty-three years old. She had white hair cut short. She wore a dark woollen sweater and jeans. Her eyes were Naina's eyes.

She had been told, since the age of three, that her mother had drowned off Goa in 2001.

“Oh, Naina,” the woman said. “Oh, my child.”

Naina stood on the doorstep in the cold Icelandic wind and could not speak.

9

Her mother made her tea. Her mother made her sit by the fire. Her mother told her, very slowly, the truth.

Her mother had not drowned in 2001. Her mother had been, since 1996, the senior most undercover officer of an Indian intelligence service Naina had not, until that afternoon, known to exist. The service did not have a name. It did not have a building. It did not have, in any traceable bureaucratic sense, a budget. It had, at any given time, perhaps eleven officers. It reported, by tradition, to a single member of the Prime Minister's Office.

Her mother had placed her, at fourteen, into a particular boarding school in Pune. She had placed her, at eighteen, into a particular London college. She had placed her, at twenty-five, into a particular Big Four firm in Singapore. She had placed her, at twenty-seven, into a particular audit at the Asian Cricket Confederation.

She had placed her, three nights ago, into Anton-who-was-not-Anton's hotel suite on the forty-third floor.

“Why?” Naina said.

“Because, my child, you are the only person we have who is clean. You have no fingerprints. You have no file. You are not, on paper, an intelligence officer. You are an auditor. You photographed those documents in your own initiative. You will publish them, through Mr. Mehrotra in The Hague, in your own initiative. You will, in twelve days, be on the front page of every newspaper in three countries. And the minister, my dear, will fall.”

Naina set down her tea.

“And my fiancé?” she said, very quietly. “The one I am supposed to marry in March.”

Her mother smiled, sadly.

“He is one of us,” she said. “He was supposed to tell you tonight.”

10

Vir Mehrotra published the documents in The Hague at six o'clock on a Tuesday morning. By Tuesday night, three resignations had been announced in New Delhi. By Wednesday, the Sharjah stadium had been sealed by Emirati authorities. By Friday, Anton-who-was-not-Anton had been arrested in a hotel in Antalya by Turkish intelligence on a tip Naina had not, herself, known had been given.

Naina did not return to Singapore. She did not, in any official sense, exist for fourteen months.

When she finally landed at Changi, in the spring of the following year, her fiancé was waiting at arrivals with a small bunch of marigolds. He took her hand. He did not, at first, speak.

Then he said, “I would like to apologise.”

“For what,” she said.

“For lying to you,” he said, “for three years.”

She looked at him. She thought about the small white house on the Icelandic coast, and her mother's eyes, and the laser-pointer dot on Anton's forehead, and a fly near a curtain on the forty-third floor of a hotel in Sharjah.

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Eleven Stories

She put the marigolds in her left hand. She held his hand with her right.

“It is alright,” she said. “We are even.”

The match, it turned out, had been fixed before she was born.



STORY 5

THE EDEN GARDENS LEDGER

*One hundred thousand spectators. One missing scoreboard
operator. One war.*



1

It rained on the morning of the final. By midday it had stopped, and the Eden Gardens outfield, soaked and shining, smelled of wet earth and bruised grass. By the time the toss was made, the sun was hammering down through a thin, sick haze, and the scoreboard operator, a quiet man named Pradeep Saha who had worked at the ground for thirty-one years, did not arrive at his post.

He was found at four o'clock that afternoon in a service room behind the Pavilion End, his throat cut, his right hand missing, a single playing card placed on his chest. The card was the Queen of Spades.

And in the family pew of St. Paul's Cathedral, half a mile away, Sarayu Mitra-Banerjee, lighting a candle for her dead mother as she did every Sunday, felt her grandmother's gold locket grow inexplicably cold against her skin and did not know why.

2

Sarayu was forty-one. She was a barrister of the Calcutta High Court. She had been divorced for six years. She was raising her twelve-year-old daughter Ila on her own in the wing of a colonial-era bungalow in Alipore that her grandmother, the matriarch Pramila Mitra, allowed her, in exchange for a fortnightly Sunday tea, to occupy free of rent.

She had not, in twenty years, asked her grandmother about her grandfather. She had not, in fifteen years, asked her grandmother about her father.

Her father had died in a road accident in Salt Lake in 2008. The accident had occurred at four in the afternoon on a clear October day

in light traffic at a junction her father had driven through twice a day for nineteen years. The truck that had killed him had carried registration plates that had, on inspection, been issued to a registered owner in Asansol who could not, when located, remember owning any truck.

Sarayu had known, from the day of the funeral, that her father had been murdered. She had also known, from the day of the funeral, that the decision to murder him had been made inside the very bungalow in Alipore where her grandmother now took tea on Sundays.

She had spent twenty years deciding to do nothing about it. She had spent twenty years, instead, being a barrister, and raising a daughter, and lighting a candle once a week at St. Paul's.

3

The parcel arrived on the Monday morning. It was addressed to her in the careful Devanagari hand of Pradeep Saha, posted on the Friday before the final. The postman, who had known her for nine years, would not, when she asked him later, remember bringing it.

Inside the parcel was a small blue scorebook, identical in every visible respect to one Pradeep Saha had given her as a child, in which he had taught her to score a cricket match by hand at the age of seven, sitting on a bench at the Maidan in February of 1992.

On the inside back cover, in a hand that was not his, was a list of names.

Forty-one of them. Beside each name was a date. Beside each date was a number.

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She recognised the third name on the list. It was her grandfather's. The date beside it was 14 August 1947. The number was 219.

She recognised the seventh name. It was the founder of a steel dynasty that now sat on the Forbes list.

She recognised the seventeenth name. It was the father of the current Chief Minister of West Bengal.

She recognised, with her heart climbing into her throat, the thirty-ninth name. It was her own father's, dead these eleven years. The date was 14 October 2008. The number was 12.

There was a fortieth name. There was no date beside it.

The name was hers.

4

She did not go to the police. She sent her daughter, the same evening, with a small overnight bag and her favourite book, to the farmhouse of a school friend in Santiniketan two hours away.

She packed the bag herself, which she had not done since Ila was small. She folded the favourite book — a battered Feluda omnibus — on top, and a second jumper Ila would say she did not need and would, two nights later, be glad of. Ila watched her from the bed, twelve years old and far too quick, and said, 'Maa, why are your hands shaking?' Sarayu said they were not, and Ila said, 'You always do that thing with the corners. You're squaring the corners. You only square the corners when you're frightened.' And Sarayu sat down on the edge of the bed and held her daughter's face in both hands for a moment longer than was casual, and looked at the small fierce

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intelligent face that her grandmother had already, in the upstairs study, begun to covet as the ninth keeper of the oath, and she said: 'I need you to go and be bored in Santiniketan for a few days while I sort out a tedious family thing. Eat too many sweets. Finish the book. Do not, under any circumstances, become as clever as you are pretending not to be.' Ila grinned. Sarayu did not. She had understood, packing the bag, exactly what she was protecting, and exactly what her grandmother intended to do with it if she failed: not kill the child, but raise her — make of Ila, in twenty years, what Pramila had made of the family. That was the thing worse than the truck in Salt Lake. That was the thing she would declare early to prevent.

She paid, in cash, for a security detail of three men to remain with Ila at the farmhouse for as many days as it would take. She told the school friend, calmly, that there had been a small family matter she needed to attend to alone.

She rang her chambers and asked her clerk to clear her diary for ten days.

Then she drove, alone, in her own car, with the windows up and the air conditioning on, the four kilometres from her own wing of the bungalow to the front gate of her grandmother's wing.

Her grandmother was waiting for her in the upstairs study, in a chair Sarayu had not entered the room to see since the age of nineteen. The study had been her grandfather's. After his death, it had become her grandmother's. Sarayu had been forbidden, by family rule, from entering it at all.

It had not been forbidden, that afternoon, in any formal way. Her grandmother had simply known she would come.

5

Pramila Mitra was ninety-one. She was very small. She sat in a high-backed chair upholstered in dark green silk. She was wearing pearls, a white cotton sari with a navy border, and her grandmother's gold reading glasses. She poured Sarayu a cup of Darjeeling with the steadiness of a woman of thirty.

“You are late, child,” she said in Bangla. “I had expected you on Tuesday.”

Sarayu sat. She did not speak.

“You have seen the scorebook,” Pramila said. “Of course you have. Pradeep was a good man. He was also, as it turns out, a sentimental one.”

“You had him killed.”

“I had him retired. The killing was, regrettably, a matter for our friends. I was not consulted. I would, of course, have consented.”

Pramila took a small sip of tea.

“On the night of the fifteenth of August, 1947,” she said, “in this room, in this house, seven men swore an oath. They agreed that, whatever became of this new country of ours, their families would not suffer the indignities of the families of the old. They would, in particular, not suffer the indignity of paying tax. They would, accordingly, operate among themselves a private settlement system, by which their accounts would be cleared, hidden where necessary, and destroyed where unavoidable.”

She smiled.

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“The system was to be administered through cricket. Cricket, you understand, was the only institution in this country in 1947 that crossed every line of caste, language, and faith. Every Ranji match, every Test, every domestic fixture for sixty years has carried, in its scoring conventions, a coded settlement record. The blue scorebook is the master ledger. Pradeep Saha was its keeper. Your grandfather, the third name on the list, was one of the seven.”

She set down her cup, and for a moment there was something almost like pleasure in the old face. “You want an example. You are your father's daughter; you want the document. Very well. The Ranji Trophy semi-final at this ground in February of 1971. Bengal against Bombay. You will find, if you look, that the number eight batsman for Bengal was run out, backing up, for a duck, in the forty-fourth over — a small, forgettable dismissal in a match Bengal won comfortably. It was not forgettable. The scorer recorded the mode of dismissal, the over, and the bowler's figures in a particular configuration that cleared eleven lakh rupees between a jute exporter and a customs officer, against a consignment that had never passed through any port. One run out, my child. Eleven lakh. Nobody who watched that match saw anything but a boy who failed to ground his bat. That is the beauty of it. The settlement is always hidden inside the one thing every spectator believes he understands.”

“And my father.”

“Your father, my child, was the thirty-ninth. Your father broke the oath. Your father intended, in the autumn of 2008, to take the ledger to a junior officer of the Enforcement Directorate. He did not survive his decision. The number 12 is the over in which the order to remove him was given.”

Sarayu set down her tea.

“And the fortieth name.”

“The fortieth name, my child, is undated because the date has not, yet, been decided. The decision is mine. The decision is one I have, for ten years, been hoping not to make.”

“Why are you making it.”

“I am not, my child, making it. I am offering you a choice. You will, on Friday morning, take the seat at the head of this family that has been waiting for you since the day you were born. You will become, by the simple fact of inheritance, the eighth keeper of the oath. Or you will not, and the decision will be made for me.”

She looked at Sarayu over the gold reading glasses.

“You will have understood by now, of course, that I am not your grandfather's widow. I am the seven men. Your grandfather was a name on the list. He was not, in any meaningful sense, a man of decisions. I have been, since 1947, the seventh keeper. I have been, since 1947, the architect.”

6

Sarayu sat for a long time. The room was very still. Outside, the late afternoon light fell at a low angle through the lattice screens, and dust motes turned slowly in the air.

“And if I take the seat,” she said at last.

“Then your daughter will, in due course, take it after you. She is twelve, my child. She is, already, more intelligent than either of us. She will, in twenty years, be a very fine keeper of the oath.”

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Sarayu looked at the cup in her hands. The tea had grown cold.

“You arranged my father's death,” she said.

“I did.”

“You arranged the death of Pradeep Saha, who taught me to score a match when I was seven.”

“I did.”

“You will, if I do not take the seat on Friday, arrange mine.”

“I will. Regrettably.”

Sarayu did not move for a long time. Then she said:

“I will take the seat on Friday.”

Her grandmother smiled. It was not a triumphant smile. It was the smile of a woman who had carried a thing for seventy-eight years and was, at last, permitted to set it down.

“Thank you, my child.”

Sarayu stood. She kissed her grandmother on the forehead. She walked, without hurrying, out of the study, down the wide marble staircase, past the portraits of the men in white kurtas who had been the seven names on the list, out through the front door, into her car, and out of the gate.

She drove, then, not home but to her chambers.

7

She did not turn on the chambers lights. She sat at her desk in the gathering dark, and she drafted, in her own hand, the petition.

She did not draft it under the ordinary procedures of the High Court. She drafted it under the Maintenance of Internal Security records procedure, a sealed application route used for matters of national security or of the personal safety of judges. The procedure was rarely invoked. When invoked, it bypassed the High Court's listing officer, the Registrar General, and the public docket. It was directed, in confidence, to the Chief Justice of India.

The Chief Justice of India was a man named Justice Arijit Mukherjee. He had been her father's college roommate at Presidency from 1972 to 1975. He had been the godfather of her christening. He was the only man in India who could, on the strength of a single envelope, summon, on twenty-four hours' notice, the directors of the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Enforcement Directorate, and the Income Tax Department, and order an integrated raid on any premises in the Republic.

She drafted the petition until two in the morning. She typed it, herself, at six. She sealed it in a green folder. She enclosed the small blue scorebook. She enclosed a sworn affidavit signed by Sarayu Mitra-Banerjee, granddaughter of the architect, advocate of the Calcutta High Court, the only living person in India who could authenticate the document.

She took the seven a.m. flight from Calcutta to Delhi.

She delivered the green folder to Justice Mukherjee's private secretary at twelve minutes past eleven. She drank a cup of coffee in

the Supreme Court canteen. She caught the four p.m. flight back to Calcutta.

She was home before her daughter's bedtime.

8

On Friday morning at nine o'clock, Sarayu Mitra-Banerjee dressed in a plain white sari and walked across the bungalow garden to take her seat as the eighth keeper of the oath.

Her grandmother was already in the study. Two of the older cousins, both men in their seventies, both members of Parliament, had flown in from Delhi the previous evening. They stood when she entered. They bowed slightly. They were, in the soft formal Bangla of the family, very pleased.

Her grandmother handed her the ledger. Her grandmother handed her a small brass key.

At nine-fourteen, the bungalow telephone rang in the hallway.

Pramila Mitra raised her eyebrows. One of the cousins answered it. He came back into the study after thirty seconds.

“Memsahib,” he said, “there is a commotion at the gate.”

At nine-eighteen, a senior officer of the Central Bureau of Investigation, accompanied by a deputy director of the Enforcement Directorate, twenty-three uniformed officers, and a magistrate of the Calcutta High Court, entered the bungalow.

Pramila Mitra looked at her granddaughter. She did not say anything for a long moment.

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Then she smiled, very faintly.

“Oh, my child,” she said. “Oh, my very clever child.”

Sarayu held the ledger in her left hand and the brass key in her right. She had been the eighth keeper of the oath for precisely eighteen minutes.

It had been long enough to inherit the only signature that could destroy it.

“Daadu,” she said gently, “you taught me a great deal. You taught me, also, this: that some innings are won by declaring early.”



STORY 6

THE NEULANDS FORECAST

*She read the wind for a living. She had not, until that Tuesday,
read the men who paid her.*



1

On the morning of the third day of the Test, Dr. Antje van der Westhuizen stood on the upper balcony of the South African Weather Service station at Cape Point and watched the south-easter come up off the Atlantic.

She had not slept. She had been reading, since two in the morning, an email from a man in Geneva who had asked her, very politely, in the careful English of a non-native speaker, to revise upwards her published probability for rain at Newlands between two and four o'clock that afternoon, from the current 14 per cent to 71 per cent.

The email had offered her, in compensation for the small inconvenience, the equivalent of nineteen years of her current salary at the Weather Service.

She had not, in nineteen years, been offered the equivalent of nineteen years of anything.

She watched the south-easter come up over the bay. The barometer in the corner of her office, an old brass instrument her grandfather had owned, was rising. The rain at Newlands between two and four would not, she knew with the certainty of a woman who had been reading those particular winds since the age of nine, be anything close to 71 per cent.

It would be 3 per cent. It would, in fact, be cloudless and dry, and the South African captain, a stubborn left-hander whose grandfather had played alongside her own grandfather at the same club in Stellenbosch in 1958, would, on a dry track in the afternoon sunshine, almost certainly knock off the 184 runs South Africa required to retain the Mace.

Unless the published forecast persuaded the umpires, at the start of play, to extend the lunch break.

2

Antje was forty-six. She had a doctorate in atmospheric physics from the University of Cape Town. She was the senior meteorologist of the South African Weather Service. She was, by the slightly informal arrangement that governed Test match cricket in the Cape, the official forecasting authority whose published predictions, transmitted at nine in the morning and again at twelve-thirty, governed the match referee's decisions about play.

She was unmarried. She lived with two large rescue dogs in a small bungalow in Tamboerskloof that she had inherited from her grandfather. She owned the bungalow outright. She owned, in addition, the small farm in the Bo-Karoo that her grandfather had also left her, on which her mother, who had Parkinson's disease at sixty-three, lived in dignified and very expensive home care.

The home care, she had calculated the previous evening on the back of an envelope, would last, at the current rate of consumption, another fourteen months.

After that, she would have to choose between selling the farm and selling the bungalow.

3

The email had been signed only with initials. The initials were M.D.

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The email had specified the bank account, in Liechtenstein, into which the payment would be made. The email had specified that the payment would be made in two tranches, half on receipt of the revised forecast and half on confirmation that the lunch interval had been extended past three o'clock. The email had specified, also, that any communication of the offer to a third party would be regarded as a withdrawal of acceptance and would, regrettably, be followed by such other consequences as the senders saw fit.

The email did not, in any technical sense, threaten her mother. The email did not need to.

Antje had spent the four hours between two and six in the morning doing four things. She had verified, through a former student of hers who worked at the South African Reserve Bank, that the Liechtenstein bank account specified in the email belonged to a shell company registered in the British Virgin Islands. She had verified, through a small private investigator in Cape Town, that the IP address from which the email had been sent was a coffee shop in Geneva that was, that morning, closed. She had pulled, from the Weather Service archive, every forecast she had personally issued in the last eleven Cape Town Tests. She had compared each forecast against the actual weather that had occurred at Newlands on the day in question.

She had been, in nine of the eleven Tests, within 5 per cent of the actual outcome. She had been, in the remaining two, within 11 per cent.

On the third day of the Centurion Test against India in November of 2023, she had been within 2 per cent of the actual outcome. The actual outcome that day had been twenty-three minutes of light rain

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at three-twelve in the afternoon. South Africa had been bowled out, in the resumption after the rain delay, for 92.

Antje had not, in November of 2023, been offered nineteen years of her salary.

She had, in 2023, simply made a mistake.

She poured herself a cup of coffee. She watched the south-easter come up. She decided, then, that she would not write back to the man in Geneva.

4

She drove down to the Weather Service office in town and made the published forecast that her honest reading of the instruments dictated. Rain probability between two and four: 14 per cent. She transmitted it at nine a.m. precisely. She walked, then, to the office of her director, a kind grey-bearded man named Pieter du Toit who had been her doctoral supervisor twenty years earlier, and she closed the door behind her and she told him everything.

Pieter listened. Pieter did not, at first, speak. Pieter walked, when she had finished, to the small window of his office and stood with his back to her for some time.

“Antje,” he said at last, “you should not have come to me.”

“I know,” she said.

“You should have, my dear, taken the money.”

She did not, for a moment, breathe.

“Pieter.”

He turned. He looked at her with eyes she had known for twenty years and which, she now realised, she did not know at all.

“Antje, my dear. Sit down. I am going to tell you the things that, in November of 2023, you did not understand.”

5

She did not sit down.

“In November of 2023,” Pieter said, “you were not, in fact, in error. The forecast you issued on the morning of the third day of the Centurion Test was the forecast that this office issued. The forecast this office issued was, however, not, in any technical sense, the forecast you had drafted. The forecast you had drafted gave a rain probability between two and four of 8 per cent. The forecast this office transmitted, with your name attached, gave a rain probability of 51 per cent.”

Antje stared at him.

“You altered it.”

“I altered it. I altered it because I had been told to alter it. I had been told to alter it by a man in Geneva whose name has, over the past eleven years, been on every Test match in South Africa for which the forecast has, by you or by your predecessor or by my own student in Pretoria, been notably consequential.”

“How much did he pay you.”

Pieter smiled. It was not, in any usual sense, a smile.

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“He paid me, my dear, in instalments. In one large instalment he paid for my wife's cardiac surgery in Geneva in 2014. In another he paid for my son's law degree at Yale. In a smaller instalment, more recently, he paid for the upkeep of my mother-in-law's care home in Pretoria, which I had no other means of affording.”

He sat down.

“I am telling you this, my dear, because I do not, this morning, intend to alter your forecast. I have been, since 2014, a frightened man. I have been, since this email arrived in your inbox at one a.m., a man who has been told that this morning's transmission will be the last forecast I will be permitted to issue in this office. I am to retire, effective Friday, with a pension package of three million rand. You are to be promoted to my position, with a salary increase that will, at last, cover the cost of your mother's care home.”

He looked up at her.

“The man in Geneva has decided that you are, my dear, a more reliable forecaster than I am.”

6

Antje did not, immediately, leave. She did not, immediately, sit down. She walked, instead, to the small window behind Pieter's desk, the window through which one could, on a clear morning, see the western edge of Table Mountain.

“Pieter.”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Whose money is it.”

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“The money,” Pieter said, “originates with a Dutch family in Curaçao who control three reinsurance pools holding, between them, some seventy-four billion dollars. For fourteen years those pools have written the weather-derivatives contracts behind every Test in this country, in Australia, in England, and in the West Indies. The arithmetic is simple and obscene: they make about eleven million dollars on every Test, and they tilt the odds by paying the weather services of all four countries to publish forecasts, on roughly one consequential day in five, a little gloomier than the sky deserves. The referees are bound by the playing conditions to give a published forecast presumptive weight. So they extend lunches, delay tosses, and call off play in weather fit for cricket. Small losses to the broadcasters and the crowd, each time. Nine hundred million dollars to the pools, across fourteen years and four countries.”

Pieter laced his fingers together.

“This morning,” he said, “your honest forecast will, in approximately twenty minutes, be re-issued from this office over your name. The re-issued forecast will give the rain probability between two and four at 71 per cent. The match referee, an Australian whom I have known for thirty years, will receive the re-issued forecast at nine forty-five. He will extend lunch by ninety minutes. The reinsurance pools will collect, by the close of play, approximately eleven million dollars.”

“You will, on Friday, become director of this office. You will, my dear, be twenty-three months ahead of your mother's care-home schedule.”

7

Antje walked out of Pieter du Toit's office at nine twenty-three. She did not go to her own office. She went to the car park. She drove out of the Weather Service compound at nine twenty-six. She drove not home but to a small cottage in Constantia.

The cottage belonged to a woman named Naledi Mthembu. Naledi was fifty-eight. She was the senior investigative journalist of the Mail and Guardian. She had, eleven years earlier, when Antje had been a young researcher at the University of Cape Town and Naledi had been the parent of an undergraduate, asked Antje for a small favour involving an examination paper. Antje had refused the favour. They had, in the years since, become slow and careful friends.

Naledi was in the back garden when Antje arrived. Naledi was watering tomatoes.

Antje told her everything. Naledi listened. Naledi did not, for some moments, set down the watering can.

“Antje,” she said at last. “What do you want me to do.”

“I want you,” Antje said, “to publish at nine forty-five.”

“At nine forty-five there will be no time to verify.”

“At nine forty-five,” Antje said, “the verification will be the falsified forecast itself, which will appear in the public Weather Service feed in the next twenty minutes over my name. You will, alongside it, publish the honest forecast that I am about to email you from this kitchen. You will, also, publish the email I received at one this morning.”

“And the man in Geneva?”

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“The man in Geneva,” Antje said, “will know, at ten o'clock, that I have, in his estimation, made a mistake. He will, accordingly, instruct the Dutch family in Curaçao to instruct the reinsurance pools to instruct the man who has held my mother's care-home contract for nineteen months to terminate it.”

Naledi set down the watering can.

“And then?”

“And then,” Antje said, “the story I am about to give you will, with your usual efficiency, dominate the front pages of three continents by nightfall. The Dutch family will, by the close of play tomorrow, be the subject of a Curaçaoan financial-services inquiry, a Dutch parliamentary inquiry, and the unwelcome attentions of the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the United States Treasury, who have been waiting, since 2019, for a reason to look more closely at the reinsurance pools. By Friday morning, my mother's care home will have been the recipient of a charitable contribution of nine hundred thousand rand from the South African Cricketers' Association, who, as it happens, are the secondary beneficiaries of the weather-derivatives contracts and who will, on this single Friday morning, be unable to refuse a public request from the captain of the South African Test team.”

Naledi stared at her.

“You have arranged that.”

“I have arranged that, Naledi, between two and four in the morning. I have not slept, but I have, I think, been efficient.”

8

Naledi published the story at nine forty-three.

The match referee, sitting in his office at Newlands at nine forty-seven, received two text messages. The first was from Pieter du Toit's office, transmitting the revised rain probability of 71 per cent. The second was from a senior officer of Cricket South Africa, who had, three minutes earlier, opened the Mail and Guardian website on his telephone.

The match referee read both text messages. The match referee, at nine forty-nine, made a decision that he had not, in twenty-eight years of international officiating, ever previously had to make.

He overruled the published forecast. He instructed the umpires to commence play, in clear and sunny conditions, at the scheduled time of ten o'clock.

South Africa, on a dry track in the afternoon sunshine, knocked off the 184 runs they required.

The Mace was retained.

And the crowd, by mid-afternoon, knew. The Mail and Guardian story had moved through the Newlands stands the way news moves through a cricket ground — phone to phone, neighbour to neighbour, the oak-shaded grass banks below the mountain humming with it. When the captain came out after tea, somebody on the Railway Stand unfurled a bedsheet on which had been scrawled, in dripping black paint, **WE BACKED THE WEATHER LADY**, and the bank around it stood and cheered, and the captain, who did not yet fully understand why, raised his bat to them anyway. The next morning's Cape Times ran the match report and the scandal as a single front page, under a

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headline a sub-editor would later be quietly proud of: SUNSHINE, AND A FORECAST OF JUSTICE. A radio caller that evening, an old man from Athlone who said he had watched cricket at Newlands for sixty years, told the host he had never in his life cheered an accountant or a weather report, and that he wished, just this once, to do both. The host let him.

Pieter du Toit was, on the Friday morning, not promoted out of his position. He was, on the Friday afternoon, escorted from the Weather Service offices by two officers of the Hawks Priority Crime Investigation Unit. He was, on the Monday morning, charged under the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act.

9

Antje did not, in the end, become director of the Weather Service.

She was offered the post on the Friday afternoon, by the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment in person, in a small office in the Pretoria parliamentary precinct.

She declined it. She told the minister, in the careful English of a woman who had been awake, by that point, for fifty-eight hours, that she had decided to spend the next fourteen months at her mother's bedside in the Bo-Karoo.

She also told the minister, before she left, that she had no further professional opinions to offer on the weather at Newlands.

She drove home to Tamboerskloof. She walked her two large rescue dogs along the contour path on the slopes of Table Mountain. She watched, from a small bench at the top of the path, the south-easter come up over the bay.

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On the bench beside her, when she sat down, was a small white envelope. The envelope had not been there a moment before. It was addressed to her in a hand she did not recognise.

Inside was a single sheet of paper. On the sheet, in the same hand, was a single line.

“Dr. van der Westhuizen, you have read this wind correctly. You will, alas, not be permitted to read the next one. — M.D.”

Antje looked at the line for a long time. She looked, then, up at the sky.

The south-easter was rising.

She had read it correctly, this time. She did not, sitting on the bench above the city of her grandfathers, know if she would read it correctly again.



STORY 7

THE AUCTION FLOOR

Eighteen crore on the table. Forty-nine seconds on the clock. One bidder who was not supposed to be there.



1

The hammer came down at eighteen crore exactly.

The room itself had been roaring for ninety seconds before it fell. The IPL auction floor was not a boardroom and never pretended to be one: it was a hotel ballroom dressed for television, four hundred chandelier-lit seats, the eight franchise tables ranged on a raised horseshoe under banks of studio lighting that pushed the temperature up degree by degree through the long afternoon. Each table had its paddle, its laptops, its huddle of analysts murmuring into the ears of owners; each had a small electronic console whose button, when pressed, threw that franchise's logo and bid onto the twelve-metre screen above the auctioneer's rostrum with a soft electronic chime. The auctioneer, a silver-haired man with a microphone and a gavel, had a voice like a metronome — eight crore, eight-fifty, nine, nine to the Mumbai table, nine-fifty — and between bids the room made the particular sound of a great deal of money holding its breath: the hiss of the air-conditioning, the click of camera shutters, the rustle of four hundred people leaning forward at once. When a bid crossed ten crore the screen flashed gold and the crowd exhaled in a single rush, and the young players waiting in the green rooms below could hear it come up through the floor like surf.

The room rose. The eight franchise owners on the upper tier stood, in the slightly synchronised manner of men who had paid, between them, thirty-eight thousand crore over fifteen years to own the league. The Bollywood actor who fronted the Bangalore franchise punched the air. The Mumbai owner's daughter, twenty-four years old, in a cream silk sari, smiled the smile that had, eight months earlier, sold a luxury sedan.

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The young West Indian batsman whose name had just become the most expensive in the auction's history sat in a green room four floors below the ballroom and wept quietly into his hands.

His agent, a tall, thin Englishman named Charlie Whitcombe, did not weep. Charlie Whitcombe had, at the moment the hammer fell, glanced at the bidder card raised on the upper tier of the auction floor.

The card was the card of the Chennai franchise.

The Chennai franchise, three minutes before the bidding had opened on his client, had been in possession of a remaining purse of fourteen crore.

2

Charlie Whitcombe walked out of the green room at five past four. He walked through the service corridor of the Trident hotel, past two security officers who knew him by sight, and into the small staff lift at the rear of the building. He rode the lift to the fourth floor. He walked along the carpeted corridor of the fourth floor to a suite at the end. He knocked.

The door was opened by a woman of about sixty. She wore a grey silk sari. She had short white hair. Her name was Mrs. Kanchana Iyer. She was the senior accountant of the Chennai franchise.

“Charlie,” she said.

“Mrs. Iyer.”

“Charlie. We were not expecting you.”

“No,” Charlie said. “I imagine you were not. Mrs. Iyer, the bid you have just made on Marlon Joseph was for eighteen crore. Your remaining purse was fourteen. May I, very briefly, ask where the additional four crore originated.”

Mrs. Iyer did not, at first, speak. She looked, instead, at a small Burmese teak cabinet on the far wall of the suite.

“Charlie,” she said. “Sit down.”

3

She did not, when he had sat, offer him tea. She did not, when he had sat, sit down herself.

She walked to the small Burmese teak cabinet. She opened the top drawer. She took out a single buff-coloured folder. She walked back to the small marble coffee table in front of Charlie's chair. She set the folder down on the marble.

“Charlie,” she said. “I am going to ask you a question. The answer to the question, I am sorry to say, will dictate the next ninety seconds of your life. You will, accordingly, think very carefully before you give your answer. Do you understand me.”

“Yes.”

“Charlie. Are you, this afternoon, my friend, or are you my client's agent.”

Charlie Whitcombe looked at the folder.

Then he looked at Mrs. Iyer.

“Mrs. Iyer,” he said, “I have, in twenty-two years, been both. This afternoon I should, in candour, like to be both.”

Mrs. Iyer smiled.

“Charlie. Very well.”

She sat down.

4

She told him, in the soft Madras-accented English of a woman who had qualified as a chartered accountant in Coimbatore in 1989, three things.

The first was that the four crore had originated from a private account in Singapore controlled by a man Charlie knew but had not, in eleven years, suspected of any involvement in the Chennai franchise. The man was Marlon Joseph's stepfather. Marlon's stepfather was a Trinidadian shipping broker who had, two years earlier, in a small ceremony in Port of Spain, married Marlon's mother.

Marlon's stepfather had, six months before this afternoon's auction, made a small loan to the Chennai franchise of approximately four crore Indian rupees. The loan had, by mutual agreement, been disguised in the franchise's books as a sponsorship payment from a Trinidadian rum brand that did not, in any meaningful commercial sense, exist.

The four crore was now, by the structure of the loan, the bid that had purchased Marlon Joseph for the Chennai franchise.

“In effect,” Charlie said, slowly, “Marlon's family has paid for him.”

“In effect, Charlie. Yes.”

“Mrs. Iyer. That is, by any sensible reading of the IPL governance code, a clear violation of section 14.3.”

“It is, Charlie. Yes.”

“Mrs. Iyer. Why are you telling me.”

Mrs. Iyer smiled again. It was a smile of which Charlie Whitcombe would later find himself afraid.

“Because, Charlie,” she said, “the second thing I am about to tell you is that Marlon's stepfather is not, in fact, his stepfather.”

5

She opened the folder. She turned it. She slid it across the marble.

Inside was a single photograph. The photograph had been taken, by the time-stamp on the bottom right corner, in Port of Spain in March of the previous year. It showed, on the steps of a small registry office, a wedding party. Marlon's mother, in a cream lace dress, was kissing the cheek of the man Charlie now knew as Marlon's stepfather. Beside them stood Marlon, in a dark suit, smiling.

Beside Marlon, also in a dark suit, smiling, stood Charlie Whitcombe.

Charlie looked at the photograph for a long time. The photograph had been taken on a day on which he had, in fact, been the best man at the wedding. He had not, until that moment, thought of the wedding in any sense other than as a small private family occasion to which he had been kindly invited.

“Mrs. Iyer.”

“Yes, Charlie.”

“Mrs. Iyer. I am, this afternoon, asking the wrong question.”

“Yes, Charlie. You are.”

6

She told him the third thing.

The man who had married Marlon Joseph's mother was a Trinidadian shipping broker. He was also, by an old and quiet arrangement that had operated between London and Port of Spain since the 1990s, the principal beneficiary of an offshore trust that held, among other things, the franchise rights to the Chennai team.

The Chennai team's nominal owner, the Indian industrial conglomerate whose name appeared on the franchise letterhead, was not, in fact, the ultimate beneficial owner of the franchise. The ultimate beneficial owner was the trust in Port of Spain. The conglomerate was a fronting arrangement. The conglomerate's chairman was a man who had been paid, for nineteen years, a small consulting fee to lend his name to a franchise he did not, in any meaningful financial sense, own.

The trust in Port of Spain had purchased the franchise, in 2008, with the proceeds of the sale of a parcel of land in Tobago that had, in 1962, been the personal property of a man named Marlon Joseph Senior. Marlon Joseph Senior had been Marlon's grandfather. Marlon Joseph Senior had been an English county cricketer who had, in 1959, played a single Test for the West Indies in Manchester, taken three wickets, and never been selected again.

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Marlon Joseph Senior had also been, by means of a small bedroom transaction in a Manchester hotel in May of 1959, the biological father of a child whose adoptive name would, fourteen years later, become Charles Whitcombe.

Charlie's mother had not, in twenty-two years of his professional life, told him.

She had, however, three months earlier, on her deathbed in a hospice in Hampshire, written him a letter. The letter, sealed in a small white envelope, sat at this moment in the inside pocket of Charlie's suit jacket. He had been carrying it, unopened, for eleven weeks.

7

Charlie did not, in Mrs. Iyer's suite, open the letter.

He looked, instead, at the photograph of the wedding party in Port of Spain.

Marlon Joseph, the young West Indian batsman who had, twelve minutes earlier, been purchased by the Chennai franchise for eighteen crore, was Charlie Whitcombe's nephew.

Marlon's stepfather, the Trinidadian shipping broker who had funded the four-crore loan, was Charlie's half-brother.

The trust in Port of Spain, which had owned the Chennai franchise since 2008, was, on Charlie's mother's death three months earlier, by the terms of his grandfather's will, sixty per cent owned by Charles Whitcombe.

Charlie had been, for eleven weeks, the largest single owner of an IPL franchise. He had not known.

Mrs. Iyer poured him a glass of water from the small carafe on the marble table.

“Charlie,” she said. “Welcome.”

8

“Mrs. Iyer.”

“Yes, Charlie.”

“Why are you, this afternoon, telling me.”

“Because, Charlie, the governance code violation we have just committed will be discovered, by the IPL Anti-Corruption Unit, within forty-eight hours. The franchise will, accordingly, be sanctioned. The sanction will, by precedent, be a deduction of nine crore from next year's auction purse, a public reprimand, and the forfeiture of Marlon Joseph's contract.”

“Or?”

“Or, Charlie, you will, by close of business this evening, walk down the corridor to suite 4011, in which the General Manager of the IPL Anti-Corruption Unit is at this moment having a private tea, and you will, with the authority of the principal owner of the Chennai franchise, voluntarily disclose the violation, propose a remedy, and offer to fund a one-time charitable contribution to the IPL Players' Welfare Trust of, let us say, six crore. The General Manager will accept the disclosure, accept the remedy, accept the contribution, and, in due course, in his quarterly report, record the matter as a self-reported clerical irregularity. The franchise will retain Marlon

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Joseph. The franchise will retain its purse. The franchise will, alas, henceforth, be a franchise you can no longer pretend not to own.”

Charlie looked at the small white envelope in his inside pocket.

“Mrs. Iyer.”

“Yes, Charlie.”

“Did my mother know?”

Mrs. Iyer did not, for some moments, speak.

“Charlie,” she said, very gently. “Your mother, my dear, did not, in 1959, regret the night she spent in a hotel in Manchester. Your mother regretted, very much, the forty years that followed it. The letter in your pocket will, I think, explain. I am sorry, my dear, that you did not open it sooner.”

Charlie sat for a long time in the small marble-tabled suite on the fourth floor of the Trident.

He understood, sitting there, exactly what the walk down the corridor would cost him, and it was not money. Charlie Whitcombe had been, for twenty-two years, the most invisible man in cricket — the agent in the second row, the name on no letterhead, the figure who arranged everything and was photographed in nothing. Invisibility had been his whole craft and his whole protection: a man who owned nothing could be blamed for nothing, owed nothing, and was free, always, to walk away. To go to suite 4011 was to end that, permanently. The moment he disclosed the violation in his own name, he would cease forever to be Marlon's anonymous agent and become, on the public record, the principal owner of an IPL franchise — scrutinised, accountable, named in every story, a man who could no longer pretend not to own the thing he owned, nor pretend the boy in the

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green room downstairs was a client rather than his sister's grandson, his own blood. He would be giving up the one thing he had spent his life building, which was the right to stand at the edge of the room. He would be stepping, at fifty-one, into the centre of it, in the light, where he had never once wished to be.

Then he stood, kissed Mrs. Iyer on both cheeks, and walked down the corridor to suite 4011.

He had carried the unopened letter for eleven weeks because opening it meant becoming someone. He understood now that he had already become him. The letter could wait until tonight. The boy could not.



STORY 8

THE GALLE LIGHT

*The lighthouse had stood for three hundred years. It had been
watching the wrong sea.*



1

The body washed up on the rocks below the Galle Fort lighthouse at twenty past five on the morning of the second day of the Test.

The fishermen who found it did not, at first, recognise the man. The sea had been at him for some hours, and the white linen jacket he had worn into the water had wrapped itself, the way wet linen will, around his face. One of the fishermen, a thin old man in a torn brown sarong, pulled the linen back with the handle of a paddle and looked, for a moment, at the face.

He set the paddle down. He sat on the rocks. He lit a cigarette with hands that shook.

The dead man was the chief selector of the Sri Lankan Test team.

Four hundred metres away, on the upper terrace of the Amangalla hotel, Tehani Wickramasinghe stood at the breakfast bar in a cream linen dress and listened, with the polite interest of a woman who did not yet know who the dead man was, to two French tourists arguing in a low whisper about which day of the Test had begun and whether the Test would, in fact, continue.

2

Tehani Wickramasinghe was thirty-six. She was a forensic genealogist. She had a small office on Baudhaloka Mawatha in Colombo, two assistants, and a roster of approximately three hundred clients, most of whom were estates of Sri Lankan origin trying to establish ancestral title to land that had been lost, in one

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way or another, during the twenty-six-year civil war that had ended in 2009.

She was in Galle for two reasons. The first was a client. She had been retained, two months earlier, by an elderly Tamil widow named Mrs. Padma Selvaratnam, who lived in a small flat in Wimbledon, to establish, with documentary certainty, that a particular two-hectare parcel of land in the village of Talpe, eleven kilometres east of Galle Fort, had been in continuous lawful ownership of the Selvaratnam family from 1908 until 1983.

The second reason was that Tehani had, three weeks earlier, received a letter, postmarked Hambantota, in a hand she had not seen in twenty-two years.

The letter was from her father.

Her father had died, by the Sri Lankan state's reckoning, in November of 2003. He had been a colonel of the Sri Lankan army. He had been declared, by the official inquiry, killed in action in an LTTE ambush on the A9 highway south of Vavuniya. The body had never, officially, been recovered.

The letter, twenty-two years late, had said only: My dear Tehani. I am alive. I have always been alive. I am writing to you now because I am dying. Please come to Galle on the date below. Please come alone.

3

She had come.

She had spent the previous afternoon in the small Land Registry office in Galle, working through the deeds for Mrs. Selvaratnam's

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two-hectare parcel. The deeds, in two large leather-bound ledgers that had not, in their visible condition, been opened in nineteen years, were both legible and complete. The parcel had been in continuous Selvaratnam ownership from 1908 until 1983. In April of 1983, four months before the Black July pogroms that had set the civil war in motion, the parcel had been transferred to a Sinhalese family named Karunaratne. The transfer had been recorded as an arm's-length sale at a price of forty-one thousand rupees, which had been, at the time, approximately the market value of half of the parcel.

The Karunaratne family had, in 1991, sold the parcel to a Sinhalese shipping company. The shipping company had, in 2008, sold the parcel to a Sri Lankan tourism conglomerate. The tourism conglomerate had, in 2013, sold the parcel to a Singaporean hotel group. The Singaporean hotel group had built, on the parcel, a luxury beach resort that had opened in 2017.

Mrs. Selvaratnam, in Wimbledon, in her small flat with the photograph of her dead husband on the mantelpiece, was the rightful owner of a beach resort.

Tehani had also, that afternoon, found a second thing. She had not, originally, been looking for it. She had found it by accident, in the back of the second ledger, on a page that the Land Registry clerk had not, in nineteen years, turned.

The page contained a list of fifty-two land transfers, all in the Galle and Matara districts, all dated in the eight weeks following the Black July pogroms in 1983. Every transfer was from a Tamil family to a Sinhalese family. Every transfer recorded a sale price that was, on Tehani's quick reckoning, between thirty and forty per cent of the

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market value of the parcel. Every transfer was signed, in the witness column, by the same notary public.

The notary public's name was a name Tehani knew very well.

It was her father's.

4

She had met her father at six o'clock that evening, in the small private garden of a guest house at the southern end of the Fort. He was an old man. He was very thin. His hair was white. He wore a faded blue shirt and a pair of khaki trousers that hung from him.

He had stood up when she had come into the garden. He had said, in Sinhala, "My daughter." She had not, for a long moment, gone to him. Then she had walked, slowly, across the garden and put her arms around him.

She had not wept. She had not wept in 2003. She had not wept in 2007 when her mother had died. She did not weep now.

He had told her, in the careful Sinhala of a man who had not, in twenty-two years, spoken to anyone who had known him as a young man, the truth.

He had not died in November of 2003. He had been, since 1983, an officer of a particular section of the Sri Lankan military intelligence service that did not, in any official document, exist. The section had been responsible for the financial dimension of certain operations during the civil war. The financial dimension had included the systematic legal acquisition, between July of 1983 and the end of 1985, of approximately four hundred Tamil-owned parcels of land in

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the south-western coastal districts of the country, by means of forced sales conducted under threat of further violence.

He had been, in 1983, twenty-six years old. He had been a junior officer. He had signed, as notary public, fifty-two of the transfers in Galle district. He had not, then, understood what he was signing.

He told her about one of them, because she asked, and because a number is a place to hide and a name is not. There had been a family in Talpe — the Nadarajahs, a schoolteacher and his wife and their three children — who had farmed two hectares of coconut and cinnamon for four generations. On a morning in August of 1983, eight days after the burning began in Colombo, two men in civilian clothes had come to the Nadarajah house with a deed of sale already typed, and a price written on it that was a third of the land's worth, and her father had come behind them in his uniform, with his notary's seal, to make it lawful. The schoolteacher had not wanted to sell. The men had said nothing about that. They had simply remarked, pleasantly, standing in the doorway, that it was a dangerous season for Tamil families in the south, and that a man with three children might think hard about how far it was to the nearest army post, and whether the post would come if it were called. The schoolteacher had signed. Her father had pressed his seal into the wax and witnessed it and dated it and given the family forty-eight hours to leave the house their great-grandfather had built. 'I told myself,' her father said, looking at his hands, 'that if I did not seal it, a worse man would, and the family would get nothing at all instead of a third. I told myself that for two years, my daughter. It is the most expensive lie I have ever bought. The Nadarajahs went to a camp near Batticaloa. I do not know if the children lived. I have signed, in my life, one good piece of paper and fifty-two bad ones, and I sealed every one of the bad ones with a steady hand.'

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He had understood, by 1985. He had not, between 1985 and 2003, found the courage to leave.

In 2003, on a Tuesday afternoon in Vavuniya, he had walked away from a checkpoint into the jungle. The official inquiry, four months later, had recorded his death. He had been, since 2003, living under a different name, in a series of small villages in the south of the country, as a teacher of mathematics at a series of small Buddhist schools.

He was, in the small private garden of the guest house at the southern end of the Fort, dying of pancreatic cancer. He had perhaps three weeks.

He had asked her to forgive him.

She had said, “I will think about it.”

5

She had not, that evening, returned to her room at the Amangalla. She had walked, instead, along the rampart of the Fort, in the warm sea air, to the lighthouse. She had stood on the rocks below the lighthouse for some time. She had thought, then, about Mrs. Selvaratnam, in the small flat in Wimbledon, with the photograph of her dead husband on the mantelpiece. She had thought about the two-hectare parcel of land in Talpe, on which a Singaporean hotel group had built a luxury beach resort.

She had thought about the fifty-two transfers in the back of the second ledger, every one of them signed by her father.

She had walked back to the Amangalla at one in the morning. She had slept until five.

At twenty past five, on the rocks below the lighthouse, the chief selector of the Sri Lankan Test team had washed up dead.

By breakfast, the news was everywhere.

6

The chief selector's name had been Mahendra Karunaratne. He had been fifty-seven. He had been the grandson of the Sinhalese family who had purchased Mrs. Selvaratnam's two-hectare parcel in Talpe in April of 1983.

He had been, since 2017, on the small private payroll of the Singaporean hotel group that owned the beach resort. The payroll was disguised, in the hotel group's accounts, as a consulting fee for the management of the resort's small cricket academy, which the resort operated for guests' children during the December and January high seasons. The fee was approximately seventy thousand United States dollars per year. The fee had been, by Tehani's reckoning, sufficient to fund, in part, the private school education of the chief selector's two daughters at a particular boarding school in Surrey.

The chief selector had also been, on the previous afternoon, in the small Land Registry office in Galle, at approximately the time Tehani had been working through the deeds for Mrs. Selvaratnam's two-hectare parcel.

He had not, the clerk had told Tehani when she had returned that morning, signed the registry's visitor book. He had simply, the clerk

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recalled, walked through the office, looked over Tehani's shoulder at the page she was reading, and walked out again.

He had walked, the clerk now thought, very fast.

7

By eleven that morning, Tehani had reached two conclusions. The first was that Mahendra Karunaratne had not, in any usual sense, drowned. The second was that the man who had killed him was, in all probability, a man who had been sitting at the breakfast bar of the Amangalla in a cream linen dress, eating a small papaya and listening to two French tourists argue.

He had been killed because Tehani's father, dying in a guest house at the southern end of the Fort, had decided to clear his conscience. He had been killed because Tehani, going through a Land Registry ledger no one had opened in nineteen years, had found his name. He had been killed because the Singaporean hotel group could not, in any practical sense, allow Mrs. Selvaratnam's claim to be filed in a Colombo court.

He had been killed, in particular, by someone who had wanted Tehani to understand that her involvement in Mrs. Selvaratnam's claim was, by the standards of the Singaporean hotel group, not consistent with her continued ability to walk along the rampart of the Fort at one in the morning.

Tehani spent the second hour of the morning sitting on a small bench at the southern end of the Fort, looking out at the sea, thinking.

Then, because she could not yet bear to go back to the guest house, and because the Test was the only ordinary thing left in Galle that

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morning, she walked up onto the rampart above the ground and watched the cricket for half an hour. The Galle International Stadium lay just inland of the Fort walls, so that from the ramparts one looked down on the whole green rectangle of it, the players small and white below, the sea at one's back. Sri Lanka were batting. A young opener Tehani did not know was playing beautifully — late, soft-wristed, turning the spinners off his pads into the gaps with the unhurried certainty of a man who had grown up on these tracks. A few hundred locals sat in the shade of the rampart trees and on the Fort wall itself, where they had watched Tests for nothing for thirty years; a vendor moved among them with a basket of cadju and a flask of plain tea. When the opener brought up his fifty with a clip through midwicket, the wall stood and clapped, an old soft rolling applause, and a man near Tehani said to his son, in Sinhala, that this boy would play a hundred Tests. Tehani watched the ball run down to the boundary below the lighthouse, the lighthouse under which a dead man had washed up at twenty past five, and thought: they have been playing cricket on this ground, in the sight of that lighthouse, on land that all of it once belonged to somebody, for as long as anyone here can remember. The game goes on above the deeds. Somebody has to read the deeds. She finished the small cup of tea she had not remembered buying, and walked back down off the wall.

Then she walked, slowly, in the rising heat, back to her father's guest house.

8

He was sitting in the garden, in the same faded blue shirt, drinking a small cup of weak tea.

She sat down opposite him.

“Father.”

“My daughter.”

“Father. I am going to tell you what I am going to do. You will, please, listen.”

He nodded.

“I am going,” Tehani said, “this afternoon, to file in the District Court of Galle, on behalf of Mrs. Padma Selvaratnam of Wimbledon, England, a claim for the recovery of the two-hectare parcel of land in Talpe and for damages of approximately one hundred and forty-eight million United States dollars, being the value of the luxury beach resort constructed on the parcel by the Singaporean hotel group between 2013 and 2017.”

Her father did not, for a moment, speak.

“I am also going,” Tehani said, “to file with the claim an affidavit listing the fifty-two transfers in the back of the second Land Registry ledger, naming every Tamil family who lost land, and identifying, by name and rank, every officer of the section of the Sri Lankan military intelligence service who participated in the program. The affidavit will name you. The affidavit will, in the public docket of the Galle District Court, identify you as a notary public who, between July of 1983 and the end of 1985, witnessed transfers under duress in violation of section 6 of the Notaries Ordinance.”

“My daughter.”

“Father. Please.”

He set down his cup.

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“My daughter. They will, then, kill you.”

“They will, father, certainly try.”

He looked at her for a long time. Then, very slowly, he smiled. It was the smile she had not seen since she had been a child of nine. It was the smile she had carried, for twenty-two years, inside herself like a small private treasure.

“My daughter. There is, then, one thing I must give you.”

He stood. He walked, with difficulty, into the small ground-floor room of the guest house. He came back, a moment later, with a small leather-bound book.

“My daughter. This is the original ledger of the section. It contains the names of every officer who participated in the program, in every district, from 1983 until 1985. There are, in total, four hundred and seventeen names. The ledger has been, since 1985, in my possession. It is, I believe, the only existing copy. The Singaporean hotel group has, I believe, paid, over the years, approximately twenty-three million United States dollars to a series of officers in the relevant section to ensure that it never surfaced. The officers, in 1985, had no idea that I had taken it.”

He set the ledger in her hands.

“My daughter. You will, with this, almost certainly survive. They will not, knowing what you have, dare to kill you. They will, instead, try very hard to take it from you. You will, accordingly, before you file the claim this afternoon, deposit the ledger with three different bar associations in three different countries.”

Tehani held the small leather-bound book in both hands.

“Father.”

“Yes, my daughter.”

“Was Mahendra Karunaratne killed because of me, or because of you?”

Her father did not, at first, answer.

Then he said, very gently, “My daughter. He was killed, I believe, because of both of us. We have been, you and I, in this matter, the two ends of a single rope. He was, I am very sorry to say, the man at the centre of the rope.”

9

Tehani filed the claim at twenty past three that afternoon. The ledger was, by six o'clock, on its way to the Bar Council of India in New Delhi, the Law Society of England and Wales in Chancery Lane, and the New York City Bar Association at 42 West 44th Street. The accompanying letter, signed by Tehani, was clear about its instructions.

She returned to Colombo on the morning of the third day of the Test.

Mrs. Padma Selvaratnam, in a small flat in Wimbledon, took the phone call from Tehani's office at lunchtime. She did not, at first, speak. Then she said, in careful English, “Thank you, my dear. Thank you very much.”

She put down the telephone.

She walked to the mantelpiece. She picked up the photograph of her dead husband.

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She held it in both hands for a long time.

Then she said, in Tamil, in the small empty room, to the photograph:
“My love. We have come home.”

Three thousand five hundred miles away, in the small private garden of a guest house at the southern end of Galle Fort, an old man in a faded blue shirt closed his eyes, in the soft late-afternoon light, and was, by the small careful clock of his cancer, dying.

He had, in the end, signed only one good piece of paper.

It had been the last one.



STORY 9

THE HUNDRED- POUND CAP

*Her grandmother had been the first. Her granddaughter was
about to be the last.*



1

The cap had been presented to her by an old woman in a wheelchair at the long room of the County Ground at Worcester at twenty past ten on a wet Sunday morning in May. The old woman was eighty-eight. The old woman was Doreen Henley. Doreen Henley had, in 1958, been the first woman in England to be awarded a county cap.

The cap was made of dark blue velvet, lined in pale yellow silk, with the silver and red badge of the county embroidered above the brim. It cost the County, by the line item in the published budget, one hundred pounds.

Olivia Henley, twenty-four years old, the new captain of the county women's first eleven, the granddaughter of the old woman in the wheelchair, accepted the cap with both hands. She kissed her grandmother on both cheeks. She put the cap on. She walked out onto the wet outfield at the start of the toss.

She did not, at twenty past ten on a wet Sunday morning in May, know that her grandmother was about to kill her career.

2

The toss had been won by the visiting captain. The visiting captain had elected to bowl. Olivia had walked back to the dressing room. Her grandmother had been wheeled, by the kindly long-room steward, to her usual seat in the second row of the members' enclosure.

At ten thirty-eight, with three runs on the board and Olivia not yet in to bat, the County's chief executive, a short, bald, anxious man named

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Patrick Hollings, walked, very fast, into the women's dressing room without knocking. He did not look at the players. He looked at Olivia.

“Olivia. A word. Outside.”

She followed him into the small carpeted corridor.

“Patrick.”

“Olivia. The cap. The cap your grandmother just gave you.”

“Yes.”

“Take it off, please.”

She took it off. She held it in her hands.

“Patrick. What is wrong.”

“Olivia,” Patrick Hollings said, in a voice she had not, in three years of knowing him, heard. “The cap your grandmother just gave you is not the cap I prepared for you this morning. I prepared the cap. I packed it into the presentation box at eight forty-five. I locked the box. I gave the box to your grandmother at ten fifteen. Your grandmother did not, in any moment between ten fifteen and ten twenty, have access to the cap I prepared. Your grandmother has, however, just given you a cap. The cap your grandmother gave you is not the cap I prepared.”

Olivia looked at the cap in her hands.

“It is the same cap, Patrick.”

“No, Olivia. It is not.”

3

Patrick took the cap from her hands. He turned it over. He showed her the inside of the brim.

Sewn into the inside of the brim, in fine red silk, was a small line of letters and numbers that Olivia had not, when her grandmother had presented the cap to her, noticed.

The letters and numbers read: D.M.H. 1958. — O.H.H. 2026.

“That is not,” Patrick said, “the standard embroidery. The standard embroidery, on the inside of the brim, on every cap this club has presented since 1958, is the recipient's initials, the year of award, and the words For the County. The standard embroidery does not include the initials of any other player. The standard embroidery does not, in particular, include the initials of the player who first received the cap. The cap you are wearing has been altered. Olivia, your grandmother has substituted the original cap.”

Olivia stared at the small line of red silk.

“D.M.H. is my grandmother.”

“Yes.”

“O.H.H. is me.”

“Yes.”

“And the rest of it.”

“The rest of it, Olivia, is the original cap. The cap your grandmother received in 1958. The cap she wore in every match she played for this county between 1958 and 1972. The cap she retired with. The cap that

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was, by club regulation at the time, surrendered to her on her retirement and that has been, in the club museum, since 1972.”

Patrick looked at her.

“Olivia. Your grandmother has, this morning, stolen her own cap. She has substituted it for the cap I prepared. She has handed her cap to you. She has, by the wording of the embroidery, declared you her successor. She has, also, broken into the club museum.”

“Patrick. She is in a wheelchair.”

“Yes, Olivia. She is. And yet.”

4

Olivia walked back into the dressing room. She did not put the cap back on. She set it, very carefully, in her kit bag. She padded up. She walked out at the fall of the first wicket. She made forty-three on a wet pitch on which the ball was holding up and turning. She got herself out caught behind off a ball she did not need to play.

She walked off in the small Worcester rain at twelve-fourteen. She did not, at lunch, go to the players' table. She went to the second row of the members' enclosure. Her grandmother was sitting in the wheelchair, in a heavy grey coat, with a small thermos of tea.

“Granny.”

“Olivia, darling.”

“Granny. You broke into the museum.”

“I did, darling. Yes.”

“Granny. Why.”

Doreen Henley smiled. It was the smile of a woman who had, in her time, also batted on a wet pitch in Worcester. She poured Olivia a small cup of tea from the thermos. She handed it across the wheelchair.

“Darling. Sit down. I am going to tell you a very small story.”

5

“In 1958, darling, I was twenty-three years old. I had been playing for this county since I was sixteen. I had been told, by the chairman of the cricket committee, on a Friday afternoon in April, that I was to be the first woman to be awarded a county cap. I had been told, on the same Friday afternoon, that the cap was being awarded to me on one condition. The condition was that I would, after receiving the cap, marry a young man of his choosing.”

“The young man was a junior solicitor of his acquaintance whose family owned a great deal of land in Herefordshire. The young man was, I had been told privately by a girl I had been at school with, not, in his romantic preferences, available for a marriage of any conventional kind. The marriage was, accordingly, a marriage of convenience for the young man and a marriage of obligation for me. The chairman explained, on the Friday afternoon, that the marriage would, in due course, also resolve a small financial difficulty in which the cricket committee found itself.”

“I had said no, darling. I had said no on the Friday afternoon. I had said no on the Monday morning. I had said no on the Wednesday

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afternoon, on which the chairman had visited me at my parents' house in Pershore.”

“On the Saturday morning of the following week, I had been informed that the cap, regrettably, would no longer be presented to me. The cap, regrettably, would be presented to a young woman from Surrey of more amenable disposition. I had cried, darling, on the Saturday morning. I had cried for three hours in my mother's kitchen.”

“On the Saturday afternoon, my father had come home from the County offices, where he had been a clerk for thirty-one years. My father had set on the kitchen table a small dark blue velvet cap, lined in pale yellow silk. He had said, ‘Doreen, my dear, this cap is yours. I have not, in thirty-one years, taken anything from this County. I have, today, taken one thing. I have taken your cap. I have taken the cap they prepared in your name and that they intended to give to the girl from Surrey. The girl from Surrey will, on Monday morning, be presented with the second cap that I have, this afternoon, ordered from the embroiderer in Hereford. The chairman will not, I think, notice the difference. He will, in particular, not notice that the girl from Surrey, on Monday morning, will have, in fact, the cap that I had prepared for her, not the cap that he had prepared for you.’”

“Darling, my father had taken my cap home for me. I have, since 1958, worn that cap in every match.”

“The chairman, on Monday morning, was not, in any sense, aware. The girl from Surrey, on Monday morning, was duly capped. The girl from Surrey, on the Tuesday morning, in a quiet meeting in the chairman's office, declined the marriage. The marriage, accordingly, did not take place. The chairman, in due course, was replaced. The girl from Surrey and I have been, since 1958, very close friends.”

“And in 1972, darling, on my retirement, I duly surrendered my cap to the club museum. But the cap I surrendered was the one my father had quietly made for me in 1958 — the one I had actually worn for fourteen years. And the cap the Surrey girl surrendered to her own club's museum, on her retirement, was the one the chairman had originally prepared in my name. So for over fifty years, darling, each museum has displayed the wrong cap under the wrong name: Surrey shows, as mine, a cap I never wore; Worcestershire shows, as hers, a cap she never wore. Two honest mistakes, sewn in silk, sitting in two glass cases two counties apart.”

“Until this morning, darling.”

6

Olivia did not, for some moments, speak.

“Granny. Why did you tell me this. Today.”

“Because, darling, on Thursday morning, in this same long room, the County will present its 2026 women's cap to a young woman of, I am told, considerable promise. The young woman is named Saffron Hadley. Saffron is nineteen. Saffron has been, since the age of fourteen, an extremely promising player. Saffron has been, also, since the age of seventeen, the personal protégée of the present chairman of the cricket committee, a Mr. James Hollings, who is your chief executive Patrick Hollings's older brother.”

“Saffron has been told, three weeks ago, in a small private meeting in the chairman's office, that the cap is hers on the condition that she will, in due course, marry the chairman's son. The chairman's son is twenty-eight, unmarried, and works in his father's family insurance

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business in Birmingham. He is not, in his romantic preferences, available for a marriage of any conventional kind. The marriage is, accordingly, a marriage of convenience for the chairman's son and a marriage of obligation for Saffron. Saffron has, like me in 1958, said no. Saffron has, like me, been told that the cap will be presented, instead, to a young woman of more amenable disposition. The young woman is, I understand, also nineteen, and was, until this morning, in my judgment, in fact your future opening partner.”

“Darling. The chairman's son has, in 1996, been the only beneficiary of a small Irish trust that holds, among other things, the licensing arrangements for the county's commercial naming rights. The trust pays the county, annually, approximately one million one hundred thousand pounds. The trust is, by the deed, payable only if the chairman's son is, in any given year, a person of, and I quote, settled domestic disposition. The phrase, darling, was the chairman's grandfather's coded way, in 1996, of stipulating that the chairman's son would have, in due course, to be respectably married.”

“If Saffron does not, this Thursday morning, accept the cap, the cap will go to the second girl. The second girl will, also, in due course, decline. By the end of the season, the chairman will have lost the trust money. The County will, accordingly, be in a financial position from which it will not recover. The County will be, by the start of the 2027 season, in administration.”

“I have, accordingly, this morning, given you my cap. The cap is yours. The cap is also, by virtue of the embroidery, the only cap in the club's history that has been worn by two captains. The cap will, on Thursday morning, be in the museum, with a small new placard explaining that on the Sunday before, the present captain wore the original 1958 cap on the recommendation of its original owner, and

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that on the Thursday, the 1958 cap was returned to the museum in its proper place, alongside the 2026 cap of the new young woman.”

“The 2026 cap, darling, will be presented to Saffron's friend. The 2026 cap will be presented in front of every reporter on the women's circuit. The reporters will, in due course, have been told by me, between now and Wednesday, the small story I have just told you. The reporters will publish. The chairman will resign. The Irish trust money will, by the careful work of a solicitor I have retained in Dublin since Monday, be redirected to the County in any event, on the strength of a small ambiguity in the 1996 deed that has not, until this week, been noticed.”

“Saffron will, in due course, marry whomever she pleases. The County will be, by the start of the 2027 season, solvent. Your career, darling, will continue.”

Olivia stared at her grandmother.

“Granny. The cap I am wearing is going to end my career.”

“Yes, darling. For three weeks. Possibly four. Patrick will, when he understands, be very angry. Patrick will, in due course, be Patrick's brother's successor as chairman, in which capacity, in approximately six weeks, he will reinstate you. You will, in the interim, give two interviews to the BBC. The interviews will be the most-watched interviews ever given by a county cricketer, men's or women's. You will, on the strength of them, in November, sign an England contract.”

Doreen Henley took a small sip of tea.

“Darling. There is, of course, one thing I have not told you.”

“What.”

“The Surrey girl, darling, was your other grandmother.”

7

Olivia walked back to the dressing room at one. She unpacked her kit bag. She took out the cap. She turned it over. She looked, for a long time, at the small red silk embroidery.

D.M.H. 1958. — O.H.H. 2026.

She had, until that morning, been one woman.

She put the cap back on. She walked out, in the lifting rain, for the resumption of play.

She had inherited two grandmothers, one County, a sixty-eight-year-old conspiracy, and a single piece of velvet. The afternoon's batting, in comparison, was the small part of the day's work.

8

She did not, in the end, simply wait three weeks to be quietly reinstated.

On the Thursday morning, in the long room at Worcester, when the 2026 cap was presented to Saffron Hadley's friend in front of every reporter on the women's circuit, Olivia Henley walked to the front of the room — uninvited, still suspended, the suspended captain who was not supposed to speak — and asked, politely, for the microphone. Patrick Hollings, who by then understood everything, gave it to her. And Olivia told the room, plainly, what the cap on the inside of her own kit bag meant: that in 1958 a young woman had been offered this

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county's first cap on the condition that she marry a man chosen for her, and had refused, and had nearly lost everything for refusing; that the same offer, in the same county, in almost the same words, had been made three weeks ago to a nineteen-year-old; and that she, Olivia, was wearing the 1958 cap that afternoon not as a breach of regulation but as a statement, on behalf of two grandmothers and a girl named Saffron, that the price of a cap in this county would never again be a woman's marriage. She held the velvet up so the cameras could read the red silk on the brim — D.M.H. 1958. — O.H.H. 2026 — and she said that she intended, with the club's permission or without it, to have a third line added the day Saffron Hadley earned her place on merit alone.

The chairman resigned by the evening post. The Irish trust money was redirected, as Doreen had arranged. Patrick Hollings, in due course, succeeded his brother, and reinstated Olivia not in six weeks but in nine days, on the grounds — recorded in the minutes — that the club could not credibly suspend a captain for honouring its own founder. The two interviews Doreen had predicted were given; they were the most-watched ever given by a county cricketer; and in November, as Doreen had also predicted, Olivia signed an England contract.

She had it written into the offer, in her own hand, that the cap stayed with her.



STORY 10

THE KARACHI INNINGS

He had told her, on the morning of his death, that the boy was coming home. He had not told her in which sense.



1

The call came at twenty past four in the morning. The maid, who slept in the small room off the kitchen, woke her at twenty-three minutes past four to tell her that the gentleman from the cantonment was on the telephone.

Begum Saira Rashid, sixty-four years old, the widow of Major-General Hamza Rashid, retired, walked along the dark hallway of the bungalow in the Defence Housing Authority, Karachi, Phase Six, in a navy cotton dressing gown, and picked up the receiver in the small alcove off the sitting room.

The gentleman from the cantonment, a Brigadier whom she had known since 1979, was very kind. He said, in the careful Urdu of a man who had, in his career, made calls of this kind perhaps eleven times, that her son, Lieutenant-Colonel Faraz Hamza Rashid, had been killed at three-forty-seven that morning in an ambush on the Karakoram Highway, twenty-three kilometres south of Skardu, in the course of a counter-insurgency operation he had not, by any official record, been part of.

The gentleman from the cantonment said, in addition, that the body would be returned to Karachi on the army's regular morning flight, and that the funeral would be the following afternoon at four o'clock, and that he was, very, very sorry.

Saira said, "Thank you, Brigadier. Thank you for telling me yourself."

She put down the telephone. She did not, for a long moment, breathe. Then she walked, in the navy cotton dressing gown, to the small puja-style cabinet on the far wall of the sitting room, in which her late husband had kept his cricket trophies, and she opened the third

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drawer down, and she took out a single black-and-white photograph of her son at the age of nine, in cricket whites, holding aloft a small silver cup he had won at the Karachi Grammar School junior tournament.

She held the photograph in both hands for a long time.

She did not weep. She had not, in forty-two years of being a soldier's wife, wept at four in the morning.

Then she walked back to the telephone, picked up the receiver, and dialled the residence of the Director-General of Inter-Services Intelligence.

2

The Director-General, a man named General Khalid Saigol, had been a junior captain in 1979, when Hamza Rashid had been his battalion commander. He had been, in 1991, the godfather at Faraz's circumcision ceremony. He had been, between 1994 and 1998, a guest at the Rashid bungalow every Thursday evening, when the cricket talk had been long and the whisky private and the family young.

He picked up the telephone himself.

“Saira.”

“Khalid. I am calling you because I need to know, before I bury my son this afternoon, one thing.”

“Yes, Saira.”

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“Khalid. Hamza, on the morning of his death, told me that the boy was coming home. Hamza told me this at six in the morning of the fourteenth of February in 2023. Hamza was found dead in his study at eleven that same morning. He had, by his own hand or by another's, been shot once through the left temple with his own service revolver. The investigation, as you know, concluded suicide. The investigation, you and I both know, was not, in any meaningful sense, conducted.”

“Saira.”

“Khalid. On the morning of his death, Hamza told me that the boy was coming home. I assumed, at the time, that he meant Faraz. I assumed Hamza was telling me, in his usual oblique way, that Faraz was being recalled from his deployment in Waziristan. Faraz was not, in fact, recalled. Faraz remained on active deployment from February of 2023 until this morning. Faraz has not, in the intervening three years, been home for more than four weekends.”

“And so?”

“And so, Khalid, I do not, this morning, believe that on the morning of his death, my husband was talking about Faraz. I believe, this morning, that he was talking about a different boy.”

The line was, for some moments, silent.

“Saira. You should not.”

“Khalid. I should.”

Another silence.

“Saira. Not on the telephone.”

“Khalid. I will come to your office at nine.”

“Saira. The cantonment will be, at nine, in the middle of the funeral preparations. There will be press. You will not be able, with any discretion, to enter the cantonment between now and four this afternoon.”

“Khalid. I will, accordingly, see you at ten o'clock tonight at my own house.”

She put down the telephone.

3

The funeral was at four o'clock at the cantonment cemetery in the Defence Housing Authority, Phase One. The body, having been flown down from Skardu on the morning flight, lay in a flag-draped coffin in the small whitewashed chapel adjoining the cemetery. The cricket team of Hamza Rashid's old battalion, in cream and dark green ceremonial dress, stood guard in pairs at the four corners of the coffin.

Saira sat in the front pew, in a white cotton sari, between her younger sister, who had flown in from Lahore that morning, and her late husband's only surviving brother, a retired ophthalmologist from Murree.

The cantonment imam, a tall thin man with a soft beard, gave the prayer. The Director-General of ISI, in a dark suit, read a short passage from a notebook. The captain of Faraz's old battalion delivered the eulogy. The eulogy described, with great economy, a soldier of forty-one years who had been, on the morning of his death, fifty kilometres beyond the area he had been authorised to enter, on an operation that had not, by any official document, existed, in the

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company of two men of his battalion whose names were not, in the eulogy, given.

The bugler played the Last Post. The flag was folded. The flag was given to Saira. Saira held it in her lap.

She did not weep.

Halfway through the eulogy, in the silent moment between the words of the captain of Faraz's old battalion, she noticed a young man in a charcoal suit, in the third row of the chapel, on the right-hand side. He was perhaps thirty-five. He had her husband's eyes. He had her husband's nose. He had her husband's small habit of pulling at the back of his collar with the index finger of his right hand.

He had, in particular, a small scar at the corner of his left eyebrow that was, in shape and position, identical to a scar that Hamza had carried since the age of seventeen.

Saira did not, in the chapel, indicate that she had seen him. She turned, once, very slowly, and looked at him for the length of a single breath. He met her eyes. He did not, in any way, react. He looked, then, down at his hands.

The boy was, in fact, coming home.

4

At ten o'clock that night, the Director-General of ISI was admitted to the bungalow by the maid. He had brought, in his official car, a small leather briefcase. He sat down opposite Saira in the sitting room. He poured himself, with great care, a small glass of mineral water from the tray on the coffee table.

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“Saira.”

“Khalid.”

“Saira. I will tell you, this evening, what I should have told you on the fifteenth of February in 2023. The young man you noticed this afternoon, in the third row of the chapel, on the right-hand side, is named Suleiman Hamza Rashid. He is thirty-six years old. He is the son of your husband by a relationship your husband undertook between February and November of 1989, with a young woman of Lebanese citizenship, in West Beirut, where your husband was at the time deployed as a military attaché.”

“The young woman became pregnant in May of 1989. The young woman declined an abortion. The young woman gave birth to Suleiman in February of 1990. Suleiman was raised by his mother, alone, in Beirut, until the age of eleven, at which point his mother died of a brain haemorrhage in the small flat in which she had been raising him on her own. Suleiman was then, by an arrangement quietly made by your husband and a colleague of mine in our Beirut station, brought to Pakistan on a Pakistani diplomatic passport and placed in the care of a family in Abbottabad with whom he lived until the age of eighteen.”

“Suleiman was, between 2008 and 2014, a student at the Pakistan Military Academy. He was, between 2014 and 2023, a serving officer of the Pakistani army. He was, between February of 2023 and this morning, a serving officer of this service.”

“He was, since February of 2023, the operational commander of the unit that has, with appropriate deniability, conducted certain operations along the Line of Actual Control that I am not, in this room, going to describe.”

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“On the morning of his death, Hamza had decided to bring Suleiman home. Hamza had decided, in particular, to acknowledge Suleiman publicly as his son. Hamza had not, in thirty-four years, told you. Hamza had decided, on the morning of the fourteenth of February in 2023, that the time had come.”

“Hamza was, accordingly, at eleven that morning, in his study, with his own service revolver, by the hand of an officer of this service whom I had personally instructed, killed.”

Saira did not, for a long moment, move.

“Khalid.”

“Yes, Saira.”

“You ordered my husband killed.”

“Yes, Saira. I did.”

“Why.”

“Because, Saira, Hamza's intended acknowledgement of Suleiman would, by Suleiman's own family circumstances, have made public the existence of a son of a Pakistani general by a Lebanese citizen of, as it happens, a particular family in West Beirut. The particular family in West Beirut had been, for nineteen years, the family with whom this service had been conducting a discreet financial arrangement that funded, among other things, certain procurement activities in the southern Mediterranean. The acknowledgement would have made the financial arrangement, in time, untenable. The arrangement, Saira, was, in 2023, worth approximately one hundred and forty million United States dollars per year to the operating budget of this service. The arrangement is, today, worth two hundred and twenty million dollars per year.”

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“And my son this morning.”

“Your son this morning, Saira, was killed in an entirely genuine operational ambush by a Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan unit operating in the Skardu corridor. Your son's death was, in no respect, the work of this service. Your son's death has, however, by a tragic coincidence of timing, created the only circumstance under which Suleiman's existence can now be made public without significant consequence. The country has, this morning, lost a war hero. The country will, in due course, learn, from a brief and respectful press release issued by my office, that the war hero had a younger brother whose existence had been, for reasons of operational security during the brother's military service, kept private. The country will, accordingly, welcome the younger brother, who will, by the end of the month, have been promoted to the rank his older brother held at his death, and who will be, by the end of the year, the head of a small new directorate of this service that will, with appropriate publicity, conduct entirely lawful counter-narcotics operations along the Iranian frontier.”

Khalid set down his glass.

“Saira. Suleiman has been, since the age of eleven, in our care. Suleiman has been, since the age of eighteen, our officer. Suleiman has been, also, since the age of fourteen, a boy who has not had a mother. I am asking you, this evening, in your own house, with my hand on my heart, to receive him. I am asking you because I owe Hamza, in my own conscience, the favour of his last instruction. I am asking you, also, because Suleiman has, since he was a boy in Abbottabad, kept a small photograph of you in his wallet. He has not, in any of the years I have known him, asked me a single question about you. He has been, however, by the small careful intelligence of a boy who has been a boy alone for many years, waiting.”

5

Saira did not, for some moments, speak.

She stood. She walked, in the small lamplight, to the puja-style cabinet on the far wall, and she opened the third drawer down, and she took out the small black-and-white photograph of Faraz at nine, in cricket whites, holding aloft the small silver cup.

She walked back to her chair. She sat down. She held the photograph in her lap, beside the folded flag.

“Khalid.”

“Yes, Saira.”

“You are going to do, this evening, three things. The first thing is that you are going to instruct your driver to leave my driveway. The second thing is that you are going to walk, alone, the eight blocks to your own house, in the cool of the night, which will, I think, be good for you. The third thing is that you are going to tell the boy, on his way home this evening from wherever he is at present sitting, that his mother has invited him to come to her house, immediately, with a small overnight bag, and that he will, with her permission, sleep in his brother's old room. He will eat, in the morning, the parathas his brother used to eat. He will, in the evening, on the small terrace, drink the tea his father used to drink. He will, on Sunday afternoon, attend, with me, at the cantonment ground, the friendly match between his father's old battalion and the Pakistan Air Force, which will be played in honour of his brother. He will, in due course, by his choice and by my permission, address me as Maa.”

She set the photograph beside her on the small side table.

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories

“And then, Khalid, when the cricket has finished on Sunday afternoon, and when the boy has eaten the small dinner that I will have caused to be prepared in his honour, and when the boy has been driven home, by my driver, to whichever apartment he keeps in this city, I will, on Monday morning, in the company of my younger sister and my husband's surviving brother, walk into the office of the Director General of the Federal Investigation Agency, who is, as it happens, my younger sister's son-in-law, and I will, on that morning, with a small affidavit I have, since seven o'clock this evening, been preparing in my own hand on my husband's old writing paper, give a statement.”

“The statement, Khalid, will identify you as the person who, on the morning of the fourteenth of February in 2023, ordered the murder of my husband. The statement will name the officer who carried out the order. The statement will name the Lebanese family in West Beirut. The statement will identify the financial arrangement. The statement will, by Wednesday morning, be on the desk of the Prime Minister.”

“You will, accordingly, on Wednesday afternoon, resign. You will, on Wednesday evening, be charged. You will, in due course, in the manner of your service, be hanged.”

“The boy, Khalid, will not, in this matter, be told. The boy will not be implicated. The boy will, in due course, take the position you have, this evening, offered him. The boy will, in due course, in his own way, know that his father's killer was, in fact, dealt with by his mother. The boy will, accordingly, understand, in his own time, that his mother was a person he could, when the time came, trust.”

She lifted the small black-and-white photograph and placed it, very carefully, beside the folded flag.

“Khalid. Go home now, please.”

Khalid Saigol stood. He was, by his own service's standards, a brave man. He had not, in his career, taken an order from a woman in a navy cotton dressing gown. He took, however, this one.

He walked, at fourteen minutes past eleven, the eight blocks home, in the cool of the Karachi night, alone.

6

Suleiman Hamza Rashid arrived at the bungalow at half past midnight, with a small leather overnight bag and a single small bunch of white tuberose. The maid, who had been told to expect him, opened the door without speaking.

Saira was sitting on the small terrace at the back of the bungalow, in a white shawl, with a small thermos of tea, beside the folded flag and the photograph of Faraz at nine.

Suleiman stood, for a moment, in the doorway.

“Begum Sahiba.”

“Suleiman.”

She did not stand. She looked at him for a long time. She did not, at first, speak. Then she said, in the soft Urdu of a woman who had been, for thirty-four years, a mother, “Beta. Come and sit. The tea, beta, will be cold.”

He sat. She poured.

Somewhere, in the dark garden, a koel called.

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories

She had, in one day, lost a husband, lost a son, and acquired a son. She had also, in one day, by the careful arithmetic of a woman who had been the wife of a major-general, condemned an old friend to a noose.

She passed the small cup of tea across the table to her dead husband's living son.

It was, by any measure, the longest innings of her life.

7

On the Sunday, at the cantonment ground, his father's old battalion played the Pakistan Air Force in the friendly arranged in Faraz's honour.

Saira sat in a cane chair beneath the single old shade tree at the boundary's edge, in a grey shawl, with Suleiman beside her in a plain white shirt, and for the first time in three days she let herself simply watch cricket. The ground was rough by Test standards — outfield patched brown in the February dryness, a sightscreen made of whitewashed board, a scoreboard worked by hand by two soldiers with hooks and painted tins. The battalion batted first. A young havildar opened, a left-hander, and played, in the third over, a cover drive so clean and so unhurried that the small crowd of soldiers' families along the boundary made the low collective sound that cricket crowds have made on that ground for seventy years. The ball ran down to the rope near Saira's chair. A boy of about six chased it, picked it up in both hands, and threw it back the four feet he could manage, and a fielder jogged over and lobbed it the rest of the way, and ruffled the boy's hair, and the boy ran back to his mother glowing as though he had taken a wicket at Lord's.

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories

Saira watched the havildar bat for an hour. He made fifty-one and was bowled trying to force the pace, and he walked off past her chair, sweat-darkened and grinning, and saw the General's widow under the tree and stopped and bowed his head to her, and she inclined hers in return. Beside her, Suleiman watched it all with the still, careful attention of a man learning the shape of a life he had not been allowed to have. 'Faraz used to open,' Saira said quietly, not looking at him. 'He drove like that. Off the back foot, very late.' Suleiman said nothing for a moment. Then he said, 'Abba taught him?' — using, without quite deciding to, the word for father. 'Abba taught him,' Saira said. 'On this ground. In that net, the far one, where the wall has the crack.' Suleiman looked a long time at the far net with the cracked wall. Then he said he would like, if she would permit it, to learn where everything was. She said she would show him. The Air Force came out to bat. The light went gold over the cantonment. Somewhere a tea urn hissed, and the scoreboard soldiers turned their painted tins, and two brothers' worth of cricket sat, for one afternoon, in a single living son under a shade tree, beside a woman who had buried one of them and would, on Monday, avenge the other.



STORY 11

THE MCG BOXING DAY

*Ninety thousand people in the stands. One small parcel of land that
had never been theirs.*



1

At eleven o'clock on Boxing Day morning, with the temperature at the Melbourne Cricket Ground forecast to climb to thirty-eight degrees and the queues outside Gate 3 already four deep, a young Wurundjeri woman named Jarrah Dunolly walked out to the centre of the wicket in a pair of borrowed cricket boots and a plain white t-shirt, accompanied by the eleven players of the Australian Test team in their formal blazers, and delivered, on a microphone connected to the public address system, a Welcome to Country that lasted four minutes and eleven seconds.

The Welcome to Country had been requested, eight weeks earlier, by the Chief Executive of Cricket Australia, by way of an email to the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. The email had specified that the Welcome would, in keeping with all such Welcomes given on the ground since 2017, be brief, dignified, and substantively unobjectionable to a televised audience of approximately seventy-six million people in twelve countries.

Jarrah Dunolly's Welcome to Country was brief. It was dignified. It was, in substance, unobjectionable.

Until she came to the third sentence.

2

She said, in clear Australian English, in the careful microphone-trained voice of a twenty-eight-year-old PhD candidate in Indigenous land law at the University of Melbourne who had given perhaps forty such Welcomes in her professional life:

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories

“The ground on which we are standing today, the ground on which this stadium was built between 1853 and 1854, the ground on which the matches of this match are about to be played, is, by a deed of trust dated the seventeenth of November in 1853, the unceded and continuing property of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples of the Kulin nation. The deed of trust was lodged in the Land Titles Office of the Colony of Victoria in November of 1853 by William Barak, leader of the Wurundjeri at the time, on the advice of a Welsh solicitor named Owen Llewellyn, who, between 1851 and 1855, conducted the only known body of Indigenous land-trust work in the colony.”

“The deed of trust has not, in the one hundred and seventy-three years between its lodgement in 1853 and this Boxing Day morning, been formally extinguished, vacated, surrendered, sold, or otherwise legally disposed of. The deed of trust is, accordingly, by the operation of Victorian property law as it has stood since 1858, a continuing equitable interest in the land on which the Melbourne Cricket Ground sits.”

“The deed of trust was, until last Tuesday afternoon, in the small archive room of the Land Titles Office in 285 La Trobe Street. It has been, since five o'clock last Tuesday afternoon, lawfully registered with the Federal Court of Australia under proceeding number VID1147 of 2026.”

“The hearing of the proceeding will commence in the Federal Court at ten o'clock on the morning of the fourth of January, by which time the Test match presently scheduled on this ground will have concluded.”

“In the interim, the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples are pleased to welcome the players, officials, broadcasters, and crowd of this great

match to our country. We hope you have, today, a wonderful day's cricket.”

She bowed slightly. She walked, in her borrowed cricket boots, off the centre wicket and back to the boundary.

3

In the broadcast box, the Channel Seven director, a forty-six-year-old woman named Lauren Bilski, who had been directing Boxing Day Tests for fourteen years, did not, in the four minutes and eleven seconds, blink.

The Welcome had been pre-recorded for delay-broadcast on a three-second buffer. The three-second buffer existed, by Channel Seven's own broadcast standards, to handle the rare instance in which a Welcome to Country contained material that was, in the broadcast lawyers' view, defamatory or otherwise inadmissible. The three-second buffer had been used, in Lauren Bilski's fourteen years, on six occasions, and always to mute brief profanities or partisan political slogans inserted in defiance of the agreed text.

It had not, in fourteen years, been used to suppress a four-minute, eleven-second piece of property law.

Lauren Bilski did not, at the third sentence, instruct the buffer.

She made a single quiet phone call to the senior broadcast lawyer of Channel Seven, who was, on Boxing Day morning, in his pyjamas in a small house in Brighton, watching the coverage with his children. The lawyer, in his pyjamas, listened to Lauren Bilski for fourteen seconds. The lawyer said, “Lauren. Run it.”

She ran it.

It went out, in real time, on a feed that was, by the second minute, being mirrored on twelve continents.

4

The first email from the Cricket Australia chief executive's office arrived in Jarrah Dunolly's inbox at twelve minutes past eleven. The email was polite. The email asked her to please come, at her earliest convenience, to the chief executive's box on the upper level of the Members' Pavilion.

Jarrah declined.

The second email, at twenty minutes past eleven, was polite and firm. The third email, at twenty-six minutes past eleven, was firm. The fourth email, at twenty-eight minutes past eleven, was a single sentence from the chief executive himself: "Dr. Dunolly. We must talk."

Jarrah, at twenty-nine minutes past eleven, did not reply.

She was, by that point, seated in a small private box on the lower level of the Olympic Stand, with three Wurundjeri elders, two members of the Victorian Bar, the lead solicitor of the Indigenous Land Council Legal Service of Victoria, and a single quiet observer from the office of the federal Attorney-General, who had been informed, by Jarrah's senior counsel, at six o'clock that morning, of the precise content of the third sentence.

She had a small bowl of fish and chips. She had a glass of mineral water. She watched, with great pleasure, the Australian captain, who

had taken guard at the city end at eleven thirty-eight, drive the first ball of the day, an inswinger from the West Indian opening bowler, past mid-off for four.

The MCG rose. Boxing Day at the MCG, Jarrah's father had told her at the age of seven, was the best day on the Australian sporting calendar.

It was, today, even better than that.

5

The thing she had not, in the four minutes and eleven seconds, said, was the thing that the chief executive's office had not, by twelve forty-three, yet realised.

The thing she had not said was that the deed of trust lodged in November of 1853 was not, in fact, a freestanding instrument. The deed of trust was the first and operating instrument of a small private trust that had, in 1853, been settled by William Barak on a single named trustee.

The trustee, by the four corners of the 1853 deed, was the Welsh solicitor Owen Llewellyn. The trustee's powers, under the deed, descended in the male line of Owen Llewellyn's family. The trust, in effect, was the only Indigenous land-trust in Australian colonial history of which a continuous trusteeship had survived, by the small administrative habits of an obscure family of Welsh solicitors, into the modern era.

Owen Llewellyn, in 1853, had two sons. The elder son had died, childless, in 1891. The younger son had emigrated to Wellington, New Zealand, in 1879. The younger son's descendants, by Jarrah's careful

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Eleven Stories

genealogical research over four years, had been continuously identifiable, in the public records of New Zealand and, latterly, of Sydney and of Melbourne, into the present generation.

The present trustee of the trust was a fifty-eight-year-old former barrister of the Melbourne Bar, who had retired in 2019 to a small organic vineyard in the Yarra Valley.

He was Jarrah's father.

6

The chief executive of Cricket Australia, a man named Greg Tomlinson, was admitted to the small private box on the lower level of the Olympic Stand at one minute past three.

He was, by Boxing Day standards, sweating. His shirt collar was unbuttoned. He was carrying, in his right hand, a small bottle of mineral water.

“Dr. Dunolly.”

“Mr. Tomlinson.”

“Dr. Dunolly. May I sit?”

“Please, Mr. Tomlinson.”

He sat.

“Dr. Dunolly. The substance of your Welcome.”

“Yes, Mr. Tomlinson.”

“Dr. Dunolly. You and I both know that the deed of trust, by the operation of statutory limitations, the Native Title Act, and the

SUSPENSE IN WHITES CRICKET

Eleven Stories

doctrine of laches, is, in any meaningful litigation, very unlikely to succeed.”

“Mr. Tomlinson. I am, at present, holding a doctorate in Indigenous land law that I was, three weeks ago, awarded summa cum laude by the University of Melbourne. I am, in addition, the daughter of the trustee. I am, in further addition, the senior researcher of the Indigenous Land Council Legal Service of Victoria, which has, since 2019, conducted the most successful Indigenous land-trust litigation in this country since the Mabo decision. I am, lastly, accompanied this afternoon by Mr. Antony Hartigan KC, who is sitting on my left, who is, as you know, the most senior native-title silk in this country, and who has, since six o'clock this morning, been on the record as our lead counsel.”

Greg Tomlinson did not, for a moment, speak.

“Dr. Dunolly. What do you want.”

“Mr. Tomlinson. The trust, in 1853, was settled on the land that was, in 1853, the open camping ground of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples. The land is, today, the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The trust does not, by its own terms, seek the closure of the ground, the demolition of the stadium, or the cessation of cricket. The trust seeks, by its own terms, two things.”

“The first is the formal restoration, in the official name of the ground, of the original Wurundjeri name. The original name was Yarra-Yarra. The first cricket match played on this ground was played in 1854, between the Melbourne Cricket Club and a touring side from Sydney, and the score-sheet of that match, which is, today, in the museum of the Melbourne Cricket Club, records the ground in three places as the Yarra-Yarra Ground.”

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“The second is a small annual payment, by the trust holding the leasehold of the ground, of one per cent of the gross gate receipts of the Boxing Day Test, in perpetuity, to a fund administered by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, for the purpose of supporting Indigenous cricket programs and the maintenance of the original Wurundjeri language. One per cent of the gross gate receipts of the Boxing Day Test is, in the most recent published year, approximately two hundred and twenty-six thousand Australian dollars. It is, by any reasonable accounting, a sum that you, in your present office, can authorise without consulting the board.”

“In exchange, Mr. Tomlinson, our litigation, which is, as you correctly observe, by no means certain in any court, will be withdrawn, by Mr. Hartigan KC, at a small press conference at ten o'clock on the morning of the fourth of January, on the steps of the Federal Court, in the presence of yourself, three of our Wurundjeri elders, and the Premier of Victoria.”

7

Greg Tomlinson sat for a long moment.

Then he said, “Dr. Dunolly. Done.”

He extended his hand across the small marble table.

Jarrah did not, for a moment, take it. She looked at him.

“Mr. Tomlinson. There is one further thing.”

“Yes, Dr. Dunolly.”

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“Mr. Tomlinson. On the agreed naming change. The Members' Pavilion of the ground, which is, as you know, named for a former Premier of Victoria, will be, by the conditions of the trust settlement, renamed, by the second day of the next Boxing Day Test, the William Barak Pavilion. The Long Room of the Members' Pavilion will, on its eastern wall, by the next Boxing Day Test, display, in a place visible from the main entrance, a single oil portrait of William Barak in the dress of an elder of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung peoples, in a frame paid for by Cricket Australia, painted by an Indigenous Australian artist of my choosing.”

“Dr. Dunolly. The Members' Pavilion, today, is the oldest continuously functioning members' enclosure in any cricket ground in the southern hemisphere.”

“Yes, Mr. Tomlinson. It is.”

He looked at her for a long moment. Outside, on the field, the West Indian opening bowler bowled the Australian captain a short ball that the captain pulled for six. The MCG rose.

Greg Tomlinson smiled. It was the smile, Jarrah saw, of a man who, on Boxing Day morning, in the best Test ground in the world, knew when he had been outplayed.

“Done, Dr. Dunolly.”

She took his hand.

8

On the fourth of January, on the steps of the Federal Court of Australia in Melbourne, Antony Hartigan KC withdrew, as promised, the proceeding in VID1147 of 2026.

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Eleven Stories

On the second day of the Boxing Day Test the following year, the Yarra-Yarra Ground (formerly the Melbourne Cricket Ground) opened the William Barak Pavilion. The opening was attended by ninety-one thousand people. The Welcome to Country was delivered, again, by Dr. Jarrah Dunolly.

In the Long Room, on the eastern wall, where the oil portrait of William Barak now hung in the dress of a Wurundjeri elder, painted by a Yorta Yorta artist Jarrah had chosen, the members filed past it on their way to lunch the way members had filed past portraits in that room for a hundred and seventy years. A boy of about eight, in a too-large MCC tie that was plainly his grandfather's, stopped in front of it and read the small brass plate aloud, slowly, the way children read things they have decided are important — William Barak, Ngurungaeta of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, on whose Country this ground stands — and then asked his grandfather whether Barak had ever seen a Test match here. The grandfather, a man who had held his membership for fifty years and had, a year earlier, been among those most loudly opposed to the renaming, looked at the portrait for a while and said that no, Barak had died before the first Test, but that he had lived right here, on this exact grass, when it was open country, and that he had been the one who made sure his people were remembered on it. The boy considered this. Then he said it was a good thing the painting was in the best room, then, and went in to lunch. The grandfather stayed a moment longer.

She did not, this time, lodge anything beforehand.

She did not need to.



END OF THE COLLECTION

*Some innings, you'll have noticed,
are won by declaring early.*

— M.P.

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