

Chapter 16

Familiar Faces

Sometime before midnight, Kand and Doug took an exit off of the Long Island Expressway and saw Manhattan's mass of buildings. New York City itself is huge. They had already been driving within the city limits for about fifteen minutes. Doug had been here before and he was impressed by the sheer size of the place. Boston's downtown was barely an outpost by comparison.

They had used the Jeep's police scanner to monitor the activity of their pursuers. This was the most information Doug had had since sitting in Dr. Currier's secret office. The scanner provided some help and some entertainment during the ride.

Apparently, the military officer at the listening post, Fort Hero, took a half hour to get to a phone. At first, the local police treated the situation as if it were just some mischievous kids. Police in Montauk and East Hampton were looking for the Jeep, but Doug and Kand were an hour away by then.

After a while, the police chatter started to diminish, but FBI chatter picked up. They heard some discussion about shutting down all roads from the island, and a lot of local police departments were unwilling to assist. So far, Doug heard that the airports were considered the primary targets, and that the major highways were being watched.

Kand decided it was time to ditch the Jeep and get into the city some other way. By the sounds coming from Doug's

empty stomach, it was also a good time to get something to eat. Pretty much everything was closed except for a convenience store near the bottom of the highway ramp. Doug pointed toward it, and saw Kand shake his head.

"No, not yet," he said. Doug felt the urge to slump in his seat and frown like a petulant kid. He resisted it.

"We've got to find the railroad," Kand added.

"Oh, I saw the tracks awhile back," Doug said. "South of us." Kand turned the Jeep left and headed south on the four-lane road. Doug was right. They crossed tracks after about half a mile, but saw no station.

"We've got to follow this," Kand said. He turned onto a side road that followed the tracks. It was in an extreme state of disrepair, and it was unlit. Doug worried that this trip would attract some attention by itself.

After another mile, the road came out onto another major thoroughfare. There was still no sign of a station. Kand turned right and found a better road that followed the tracks. Finally, the road opened up into a well-lit parking lot.

"There it is," Doug said, pointing at the platform at the other end of the lot. It was still a hell of a long way off. Whoever the people were who would tolerate parking way out here better have been well-paid. From what he knew of New York workers, they probably were.

Kand drove to the small building next to the loading platform. There was a large wooden board with schedules

stapled to it. Doug opened the door to get out and saw Kand motion to him to stop.

“No. Don’t get out. Wait,” he said. Doug was puzzled. “What day is today?” Kand asked.

Doug suddenly realized he had no idea. Was it still Tuesday? Wednesday? He also knew that Kand would have even less of an idea than he would.

“It’s probably Tuesday,” Doug said, “or maybe Wednesday.”

“That’s okay. It’s a weekday.”

Kand read the schedules from his driver’s seat. As he neared the time they needed, he read them aloud.

“Ten-sixteen, twenty-two past eleven, twelve thirty-one! Last one.” He looked at the Jeep’s clock. It read 12:02.

Kand wheeled the Jeep around. Again, Doug had the sensation of almost flipping, but the Jeep held to the ground. Maybe these things were more stable than he thought.

Kand headed for the other side of the parking lot, where Doug first thought about how far the walk would be. He drove the Jeep up onto the embankment between the lot and a canal. The canal smelled like a sewer, and was full of shopping carts and plastic bags. Doug could swear they were about to drive into it when Kand yelled at him to get out.

Kand pulled the Jeep out of gear and left it running. He ran to the back of the vehicle and waved at Doug to join him.

“Push,” he said. Both of them pushed the Jeep down into the canal. The front end disappeared into the muck, and

Doug heard the engine sputter to a halt as soon as the tailpipe was in. At that point, the Jeep stopped with much of its top half still out of the water.

“Ah,” Kand waved at the Jeep. “This will slow them down a little.” Then he started running toward the platform, which was, to Doug’s disappointment, awfully far away.

They ran across the empty parking lot, through the yellow light underneath each pole. Kand pulled ahead of Doug and did not look back. Doug looked around as he ran, and saw cars on the big roads, but nothing that looked like it was coming for them.

They finally reached the platform, and ducked into the shadows behind the wheelchair ramp. Doug bent over with pain. He had been worked before, but had never been this hungry. He had a major cramp in his stomach.

As Doug caught his breath, Kand spoke quietly. He did not even seem winded.

“This is good for now. We have at least 15 minutes.”

“Kand,” Doug said between breaths. “How are we going to pay?”

Kand reached into a pocket in his belt and uncovered a roll of bills. Doug thought the outer bill was a ten. If they were all tens, he was carrying a lot of money.

“You mean we could have had food this entire time?” Doug was pissed.

“We’re in a hurry, but I’m hungry as much as you. We can eat in the bar car.”

“Bar car,” Doug said aloud. He figured this would be a really neat thing on Boston’s railways.

They hid in the shadows for another few minutes. Few cars pulled into the lot near the small building while they watched. In most cases, a person got out, kissed someone, and walked up to the platform. If this was an outbound train, Doug guessed that cars would probably be lined up waiting for people returning from New York by now.

“Into the city,” one of the folks who got out of the cars said. He meant Manhattan. People who lived near it always called it that, and it annoyed the hell out of New Englanders like Doug. New York’s universe of suburban hangers-on was larger than any other. He had once heard the term as far out as New Haven, during a business visit with Joe Franklin.

“What city?” Doug had asked. “Bridgeport?”

The stare that he got from the client at that moment caused him to get goosebumps. Franklin covered up for him pretty quickly, by laughing at his obvious joke. The trouble was, Doug was serious.

He didn’t get invited to any more meetings with that client. Now as Doug hulked in the dark, fearing for his life, and nearly shivering, the term still grated on him.

A few minutes later, they heard the train approach. Kand stood up carefully and motioned for Doug to stay down. The train screeched to a halt by the platform, and Kand finally motioned for Doug to follow. He climbed the railing above and reached back for Doug, who climbed it without his help.

They ran for the nearest open door, and a short but rotund conductor greeted them just inside.

“Evening, boys,” he said in an uncommonly deep and gruff voice. “Tickets?”

The conductor looked out at the platform and shut the door. Kand unrolled some of the money from his belt and handed it to him.

“For both of us,” he said.

The conductor made some change from his pocket. He hadn’t even told them how much the ride cost, but he handed Kand a generous amount of change.

“This car is closed,” he said, then he motioned to the car ahead of it. “Up here, you’ve got the run of the car,”

“Where is the bar car?” asked Kand.

“Ah, where the action is,” said the conductor. “Next car up. Follow me.”

The train began to move. At that moment, Doug turned around to see through the windows. He saw a police car entering the far end of the lot, red lights spinning on the roof. It drove quickly past the place where they ditched the Jeep and sped toward the building.

Doug felt incredibly anxious. The train was nowhere near traveling speed yet.

“How many stops ‘til New York?” he asked.

“The city?” the conductor asked, pausing for Doug to agree. Then he went on. “Oh, just one more stop before Penn. We’re express from there.”

They followed the conductor to the bar car. As they entered, Doug noticed that the car was well lit, and he noted that it was in rough shape compared to Boston's trains. And that wasn't saying much.

The bar car appeared to be where the action was. At least a dozen people were sitting around the car, some at the bar, and some in the booths. There were more people at the other end, but they were hidden behind the bar wall.

"This is what you're looking for," said the conductor with a gesture. Then he waddled away as Kand and Doug walked directly to the bar. He ordered a shot of Scotch, and Doug looked at him with surprise, then ordered the same.

"So," Doug began, "you have a lot more going on than just a lone store-owner, don't you?" He had wondered about Kand's background ever since he used the icon to cut Doug from the backboard.

Kand took a sip of his Scotch and didn't look at Doug. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"The boat, the antenna, the driving. Nobody just figures that stuff out."

"Maybe it was luck."

"No. I think you've got some kind of specialized training or something."

Kand then looked at Doug. "Do you think I am a terrorist?"

"What?" Doug said almost soundlessly.

Kand looked back at his Scotch and downed the last of the shot. "In time," he said.

"What, in time?" Doug asked. He was getting annoyed at everyone being top secret. "What the fuck is going on?"

At that point, the train started to slow down. It never even got to traveling speed. Kand looked up and glanced at Doug, then at the windows.

"What?" the conductor asked of nobody. He then left the car, presumably to go find out what was going on.

"We've got to leave," said Kand.

Doug looked up at him quizzically, and he nodded at the windows. The ceiling and windows reflected the pulsing red lights outside. It was pretty obvious what they were.

"The last car is closed," said Kand. Doug knew immediately what he meant. It might be a decent place to hide.

"It's also back toward the cops. There'd be no escape," said Kand.

"Are you thinking aloud?" Doug asked him.

"C'mon," he said quietly. "Not urgently."

They got up off the barstools and started ambling toward the rear car.

"Hey!" hollered a voice behind them. Doug turned around. The bartender pounded two thick fingers on the bar where they sat. Kand quickly reached into one of his pockets and dropped a twenty into the bartender's hand.

"Keep it," he said. The bartender was not amused. Doug figured the twenty barely covered the two drinks.

They left the car and stepped into the entryway. Kand opened the door on the opposite side of the car from the police. Doug suspected they would probably be too smart for that.

“Dude, this isn’t going to work,” Doug said.

“We have immediacy on our side,” said Kand.

Doug looked out through the open door.

“Go!” said Kand. “I’ll be right behind you.”

The jump down was probably 5 feet. Doug dropped to the ground and fell over. He rolled over the hard gravel and stopped just before it dropped off into the trees. The gravel was surprisingly sharp and painful. Doug stood up slowly, feeling like he had been tenderized.

Doug saw lights coming toward the train from way behind him on the tracks. He was surprised to be so far ahead. There was still no sign of Kand.

He ducked into the brush near the treeline. This was just a thin barrier of woodland between the tracks and a run-down business district, and there was as much industrial clutter in the woods as there were trees. Doug had to be careful to step around tires, shopping carts, pallets, and plastic bags.

He hid behind a stand of trees as the lights came closer, and looked up at the train to see Kand. Finally, a shape looked out from the doorway and jumped. He had no trouble on the landing. He reached up to close the door and then ran directly down to Doug.

“You’re sticking out like a sore thumb,” he said.
“C’mon.”

Doug looked down at his clothes, forgetting that he was dressed mostly in white. It was a hazard of dressing in clothes found on a pleasure boat.

Kand ran through the woods until he came to a fence. Doug followed as Kand looked for a hole. He remembered hanging around places like this when he was in high school. Somehow, there were always holes in these fences if you looked for a few seconds.

Kand looked back at the train. The police carrying the lights had reached the train and climbed onto the rear car.

“I left the other door open,” said Kand. “They will look for us on the last car first, and then on the other side.”

They found a hole in the fence and climbed through, into a storage yard full of concrete pipes and culverts. Most of the pipes were too small or too disgusting to climb into. The dark hulk of a building dominated the cluttered yard, and there were fences on both sides of it.

They ran through the yard toward the building and what had to be the front gate. The area beyond it was well-lit.

In the blackness, Kand and Doug felt the fence for a handhold. There was no way they could climb this fence, which must have been 12 feet high. They turned back and ran to the other side of the building, where another stretch of fencing separated them from another brightly-lit yard. With the light glaring starkly over the fences and the building, the yard they were in seemed even darker.

Kand suddenly fell in front of Doug. He had tripped over a section of corrugated metal, and it crashed and clanged against several other pieces of metal. The crashing seemed to go on forever.

Kand stood up and they looked at each other in silence. Almost on cue, they could hear the voices of men coming from the train. A beam of light darted toward where they were standing. Another beam of light started to search through the woods where they had been. Then there were more. The light beams started to focus on the hole in the fence where they had climbed through.

Kand and Doug reached up to the dark fence. There were no handholds. No footholds. The fence surrounded the yard except the back side where they had come through. Kand ducked and started to skulk behind the concrete pipes, making his way toward the back fence. Doug followed. It was their only option.

Doug looked above the pipes to see men with flashlights coming down the path they had taken. They spread out as soon as they were in the lot. Kand and Doug stayed low behind the pipes and culverts, until they were just ten feet or so from some of the men.

Two of the men stood guard at the entrance to the pathway while the others searched the yard. Through one of the pipes, Doug could see feet heading toward the spot where Kand fell. He looked up at the guards. One of them turned toward them, and he ducked quickly behind the pipe. Doug got

a quick glance at the guard, and it was a woman. He also thought she looked familiar.

Doug tapped Kand on the shoulder, about to whisper something about the woman.

“Hey!” a voice called, as a beam of light hit the back of Doug’s head. He turned around. More lights, and more police started to move toward them.

Kand and Doug stood up, raising their hands above their heads. They had not been ordered to, but it seemed like the right thing to do.

One of the police stepped forward. He was tall and thin, and Doug recognized him immediately.

It was Eric from the Free Majority.

Doug lowered his hands. He was full of words, but he could not think of a single one that could begin a sentence. He looked at the woman standing guard, and realized it was one of the students with Eric that day at the lunch spot. She was a philosophy major or something. Doug could not remember her name, but he remembered that he thought she was cute.

He did not recognize some of the others, except for one guy. It was Brey. Doug wasn’t sure whether to be confused or enraged. He seemed to be stifling a smug facial expression.

Doug looked at Kand, who had also dropped his hands. He seemed far less confused, and he also had plenty of words.

“How long have you been chasing him?!” he demanded. He ran toward Eric, and looked like he was going to deck him. Brey and another guy held him back.

“They have done nothing to you! Your concerns are with me, and mine with you,” Kand screamed.

“Stop,” said Eric.

“Your understanding is completely misguided, and you are threatening to cause-”

“Stop!” Eric hollered this time, though he still showed a measure of calm.

“-an upheaval you could not foresee, nor control!”

Kand continued. “There are better ways!”

“That’s not what we are doing!” Eric yelled. Then he looked around and lowered his voice. “We are working for the same goals you are. You just-“

“You are not!” Kand yelled. He was about to get out of the grasp of the two guys holding him back. “Your plan will destroy more than it creates!”

“It is going to work, but it was kicked into gear prematurely, that’s all!”

“You have to stop this!” Kand screamed.

“Too late! The only way out is through!” yelled Eric as he stepped right up to Kand’s face. Doug thought this was pretty brave, since Kand was searing with rage and seemed just about to break away from the men.

Finally Doug found words. “What are you talking about?” he yelled. “And where are my friends?”

Kand and Eric spoke at the same time.

“I told you these people are dangerous,” said Kand. “Fear for your friends!”

“No! They are fine! But they did not have what we needed. You have started a plan in motion that now has to follow through,” said Eric.

Kand turned back to him. “It does not have to-“

“What do I have?” Doug asked.

“We have to get moving,” said Eric.

“What do I have?” Doug asked again.

“Not now! We have to leave,” said Eric in a loud, hissing whisper. “Before the real cops get here.”

Doug looked at the fake cop standing next to me and laughed aloud. Everybody else stopped what they were doing and looked at him.

“None of you are real police?” he asked.

Eric shook his head. “No,” he said. “And at this point, you wouldn’t want us to be.”

Doug turned and looked back at the train. He could see shadows in the windows, looking at them, and the shapes of at least two men walking along the tracks, one of them fat.

“He’s right, for now,” Doug said, mostly to Kand. “We’d better play along.”

Kand was furious. He stood up straight and looked at the two guys holding him. He lifted his arms to shake them off. They let go.

“Will you come with us?” Eric asked him.

“I do not condone your plot. It is still wrongheaded, and must end.”

“We will need your help,” said Eric.

“You will have none,” Kand answered.

Doug took a tally of the number of phony police who were chasing them. There were five of them; the girl, Brey, two guys from the Free Majority seminar, and Eric.

One of the men held out a couple pair of handcuffs. Kand and Doug balked immediately.

“It will help with the charade,” said the man.

Doug looked at Eric, and he nodded in agreement. Kand and Doug turned around and allowed the man to cuff both of them. The cuffs were colder and heavier than the ones used by the federal agents. Doug figured it was because they were outside.

He looked at the ground as we walked, partly to help with the appearance, but mostly because he was pissed off. Doug knew Kand was furious as well. These people had been responsible for overturning his life, and probably Kand’s as well. They were responsible for the disappearance of Rich and Vanessa, and they now had put Doug and Kand in handcuffs. They had no reason to trust them, but they had no choice.

They entered the trail in single file and followed it back to the gap in the fence. Eric went through first, and directed the rest up the embankment to the tracks. Doug looked up and saw the fat conductor and another man walking toward them.

As they started the short climb, Doug was close enough behind Eric that he could speak quietly to him.

“Did you mean it about Rich and Vanessa?” he asked.

“Shhh,” Eric said without turning around.

“If they are okay, just hold up a hand or something,”

Eric lifted his right hand and pointed down the right-of-way behind the train. He held his hand up for a second.

“Make sure headquarters is notified. Situation stabilized,” he hollered to the others. “I’ll talk to the engineer.”

Eric turned and headed toward the conductor and, Doug guessed, the engineer. He paused to watch.

“Move along,” said a stern voice behind him. Doug played the role and continued up the hill and down the tracks.

Brey was in front of them, and turned around. “Hey, why not issue a fatwa or something?” he said. Doug narrowed his eyes, guessing he was addressing Kand.

“Wrong fucking nationality, asshole!” said Kand.

“Death to America! Allah ackbar!” said Brey, laughing.

“You need to read your geography,” said Kand.

“Move along,” said the stern voice from behind, this time with an extra push at Kand that Doug felt was going way beyond the call of duty even for a real cop.

“Stop it!” Doug hissed.

“Just playing the role,” Brey said.

“We’re out of earshot and you know it,” Doug stated.

“Keep your pants on,” said Brey. Doug felt a sudden urge to strangle him. Brey swelled with the power associated with his badge. It didn’t help that he was an asshole already.

They were about halfway back to the station when Eric caught up. He was huffing from his run. In the distance behind, Doug heard the powerful metallic jerk of train cars pulling to a

start. Nothing else sounds like that. The sound carries the triumph of industry conquering distance, the danger of equipment beyond human scale, and the optimism of a journey about to begin.

Doug got back to the situation at hand.

“Get these fucking things off of us,” he said to Eric, referring to the handcuffs. Part of the reason was that he wanted to throttle Brey, walking ahead.

“In time,” said Eric. He turned around to see if anybody on the train was watching.

“It is time,” Doug demanded.

“Just wait,” he said, and continued walking next to him.

They walked on in silence. The trudge took a lot longer than Doug had thought. The train was moving for only a few minutes before it stopped. The sky was pitch black. They could barely see the tracks, so the walk was very slow. Doug realized how tired he was, and hungry. All he had after he first noticed he needed food was a Scotch.

“By the way, we’re hungry,” Doug said.

Eric nodded.

They finally reached the end of the parking lot at the station. Eric pulled keys out of his pocket and walked behind Doug. He undid the cuffs, and Doug rubbed his wrists for the second time in two days.

“We barely got you out of there,” he said. “Feds are waiting for you at the next stop.”

“Hm,” Doug said. He wasn’t sure how grateful to be.

“It took forever to get through to the rail dispatch,” Eric told me. “We were lucky.”

“Lucky?” Doug asked.

The other phony cop behind him undid Kand’s handcuffs. It took him a few seconds more to undo his cuffs, probably because he was unwilling to.

Finally, Kand’s hands were free. He held his wrists just like Doug. Eric walked toward him slowly as Kand looked up.

“I am sorry,” he said to Kand. “We had to do this to get you out of there.”

Kand seethed. He breathed heavily through his nose and still looked like he was about to kill Eric. The other two men came closer. Doug felt his fists clench slightly.

“I will help you,” said Kand.

Eric appeared stunned.

“I will help you because you are greatly in need of it.”

“Thank you,” said Eric.

“Do not thank me,” Kand said. “I want you to know the damage you are about to do. I believe I can help you see.”

Doug felt relief. Everybody did. They piled into one of the red police cars, which were unmarked except for the bright red lights on the roof. One of the students stepped into a car and shut them off. Eric got into the driver’s seat of the other car. The girl got into the other side. For some reason, Doug chose that car to climb into. He and Kand got into the rear seat.

Doug finally remembered her name. It was Beth.