



**PROBABILITY
OF
DETECTION**

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Prologue

The missionary had been to the farm before, a cluster of decrepit buildings on the outskirts of the village, where an elderly man named Ishmael had recited his daily prayers, cared for his orphaned grandson and tended a few sheep. She had brought medicine, drunk tea, and purchased vegetables she did not need, simply to supplement the old man's meager income.

But all that was before the grandson had grown and gone off to join the militia, before the old man had passed away. After that, the farm had fallen into ruin, the surrounding fields overgrown with weeds, the barns and outbuildings leaning like old men themselves.

She had been brought back to the farm, she and the other four, bound and blindfolded. But even blindfolded, she had been there often enough to recognize the smells, the sounds of other farms in the distance. Then she recognized the grandson's voice. Later, she became sure it was him, despite the traditional keffiyeh covering his face, the gun belt, and the swagger.

Why had they been kidnapped? Probably because they were easy targets. Their captors were not professional criminals, they were barely more than boys, who only a few years before had been chasing a soccer ball around a dirt playground. The fact that she

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and the others were missionaries was probably of no real importance to them, though the hard-core among them doubtless used that fact to justify the abduction.

She had lived in the valley long enough to feel certain the kidnappers did not intend to harm them. She and the others were merely pawns, chess pieces in the complex battleground that Lebanon had become. That did not guarantee they would come to no harm, of course. But if both sides were patient, if no one did anything foolish, she believed they would be OK.

She lay back on the cot, watching a sliver of moonlight that shone in through the single window, repeating the words of a Psalm that had been her theme ever since coming to the valley, words that had become her lifeline in the past weeks.

*Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs.*

Early Aramaic versions of the scriptures translated the last line as "the valley of tears" or "weeping," a translation that made sense given the parallel image of springs. It also spoke to her own experience.

"Blessed are those whose strength is in you," she whispered. "Blessed are those whose strength in is you."

From beyond the outbuildings came gunshots, and then shouting. An explosion of gunfire followed, and more shouting. Doors slammed in the house, cries of pain and anger. In the midst of the chaos, she heard a sound that confused, then dismayed her. Some of the shouting was in English.

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Chapter 1

The conditions for finding a missing person were bad and getting worse. The day had dawned humid, the sun filtering through layers of mountain haze. The forecast called for temperatures in the 90s, unseasonably hot for spring in Vermont. The air was a sponge and thunderstorms were likely.

Darcy Cameron's hiking boot came down on a dew-soaked rock and slipped. The next moment, she was down, draped over a fallen tree, a broken branch sticking up like a dagger inches away. If she had fallen on it, the branch would have impaled her.

She picked herself up and whistled softly. Pepper, a four-year-old black Lab wearing an orange search vest, leaped a fallen tree and bounded to her side.

"I'm OK, girl," Darcy said. She squirted her water bottle into the dog's open mouth and took a drink herself. "OK, let's go."

The dog moved off, zigzagging through an area that looked like the aftermath of an apocalyptic battle. Recently logged, it was covered with gnarled trees, stubs and broken branches, the leftover rubble of the timber harvest. Last winter's ice storms had added to the devastation, bringing down countless branches and smaller trees. The forest floor was thick with wild blueberries, bittersweet

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and honeysuckle, pioneer species that always appeared after logging.

The ground began to slope uphill, and the tangle of wood became even denser, a larger-than-life game of pick-up-sticks. Several hundred feet further, they came to a level area and Pepper's behavior changed. She stopped and put her nose high into the air, her whole body tense. Ahead of her lay a massive pile of fallen trees and branches, thrown together by the elements. Roughly round and at least a hundred feet in diameter, it looked like a primeval fortress.

Pepper's behavior became more frantic now. She darted around the pile, looking for a way in. She spotted a narrow opening, climbed up, and crawled into the mass of debris, disappearing from sight.

Darcy headed for the spot where Pepper had entered the pile, hindered by the slash and branches. Before she got there, Pepper crawled out, leaped to the forest floor and ran to her, barking furiously. There was no mistaking this behavior. She had made a find.

"Show me, girl. Show me."

Pepper ran back to the pile and crawled in. Darcy grabbed her radio. "Base, this is Unit 14. I have K-9 alert and find behavior. Going is difficult. It'll take me a couple minutes to work to the site. Stand by."

She studied the massive heap before her. She would never be able to get into the tiny space through which Pepper had crawled. She circled the pile in search of another entry point, still struggling over the debris, till she found a space that looked big enough for a human to squeeze through.

A low rumbling in the distance had resolved into sharper booms and cracks. It was getting dark fast. The storm was close. She mumbled a short prayer that it wouldn't track directly over their location.

Working her way through the opening took several minutes.

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She wished she'd brought her leather gloves. Broken branches scratched her hands, and she didn't even want to think about what kind of wildlife might be lurking in the pile.

She inched forward carefully, not wanting to dislodge anything that might bring the whole structure down on her head. A moment later she emerged into an open space and realized that the pile was actually a huge donut-shaped structure, like an open-air theater. Inside was a large flat area, surprisingly clear of forest rubble. In the middle sat Pepper, her tail wagging wildly. She'd found what she was looking for.

Darcy assessed the situation, her breath coming back to her in harsh gulps, her heartbeat steadying. She'd seen suicides before, but this was bad. There was blood everywhere. The woman sat on a stump, slumped over against a branch. The gun was on the ground below her outstretched hand, blood dripping from her fingertips.

The only way to deal with a horrific situation like this was to follow procedures. The subject was obviously beyond help. She'd decided to kill herself, and she'd made a mess of it. Instead of a quick shot through the head, which seldom left much blood, the victim had aimed for her chest. And it had obviously taken more than one shot to finish the job.

Darcy reached for her radio and took several more deep breaths before pushing the transmit button.

"Base, this is Unit 14. I have a confirmed black tag."

Dan, their base operator, was cool and professional. "Message received, 14. Confirming your black tag at 1:27 p.m. Secure the area."

Darcy shook her head wearily. Her blond hair, plastered to her head with sweat, felt like a damp helmet. She gazed at the limp body and sighed. "You know, you could have found a more convenient place to kill yourself."

The woman opened one eye. "Yes, but what fun would that have been?"

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She sat up, wiping away a glob of stage blood that had dripped in her eye. "Besides, a real suicide isn't going to make it easy for you."

The victim was Ellen Westheimer, a member of the Vermont K-9 Search and Rescue team, a master at hiding herself, and an essential part of the team's training days. The word was that if you could find Ellen, you could find anyone.

She looked at her watch. "Damn, forty-three minutes. You are hard core."

"High heels slowed me down," Darcy said. "I'll do better next time."

The first fat raindrops began to fall as Pepper circled Darcy, gazing expectantly at her. Darcy grabbed a tennis ball from her pack and threw it a few feet. To search dogs it was always a game, whether training or a real search, and the reward at the end was a chance to play with their favorite toys. Even dogs that specialized in cadaver work wanted their reward after a job well done. It was not unusual to see them cavorting playfully around human remains, completely indifferent to the horror nearby.

Darcy had joined the K-9 search and rescue team a year earlier, shortly after moving to Vermont. Before the move, she'd had a husband, a job at a prestigious Boston law firm—the same one where her husband worked—and an equally prestigious mortgage in the suburbs. Three years into the marriage she discovered her husband's secretary was providing him with services that weren't exactly covered in her job description.

They were divorced a short time later, after which the atmosphere at Lessard, Sterling and Jacobs cooled glacially. She was passed over for promotion, while her ex was made a partner. The whispers among the senior partners—whispers that were not-so-subtly allowed to leak out to the staff—suggested that Darcy might want to consider what her next career move would be. She had beaten them to the punch, announcing that she was moving to Vermont to open a private practice.

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"Vermont?" her colleagues had said. "What the hell is in Vermont?"

To begin with, she had told them, her father. Upon his retirement, he had moved to The Village, an exclusive retirement community in Eastham. Not long after moving in, he'd been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Then came Darcy's divorce. All in all, it hadn't been a great year.

She had moved to Eastham because it was as good a place as any to escape to, and because she was damned if she was going to let her father slip into the twilight of dementia without getting to know him better.

But Eastham, Vermont was a world away from Boston and the adjustment hadn't been easy. The night life in town consisted of pool at the Rusty Gate Grill, the ladies' book group at the library, and the occasional concert at the church. The locals were friendly once you got to know them—it just took twenty years to know them.

Then, out for a run with Pepper one day, she'd met Janis Levine, who headed up the area's K-9 search and rescue team. Janis invited her and Pepper to join them for a training session.

It had been one of the most physically demanding days of Darcy's life, and she loved every minute of it. For eight hours, she and Pepper—who seemed born for search and rescue work—climbed hills, forded streams, and tramped through dense thickets of underbrush. She did not think about her father, her struggling law practice, or her ex-husband.

Within months, Darcy had become a full-fledged member of the team, and search and rescue work became an antidote to her law practice, which increasingly felt like an exercise in drudgery—filing papers, placating clients, and arguing with opposing lawyers about whose fence was over which line. Rescue work, on the other hand, was straightforward and elemental: Find a missing person before they died.

Ellen removed her stained shirt, stuffed it in a plastic bag and

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pulled a fresh one from her pack. "Nice day, huh?"

"Lovely," Darcy said, mopping the back of her neck.

"Make you wish you were back in that air-conditioned high-rise?"

"And miss all this? No way."

Ellen took a long tug from her water bottle. "How's Marshall?"

Darcy snickered. Not many people called her father by his first name—another thing she appreciated about the people on the search and rescue team. Unlike other folks in town, they didn't seem impressed that her father was famous, nor exhibit a morbid curiosity about his condition.

"The same. Sharp enough to come up with a lame excuse for blowing me off."

"Bingo?"

"Bridge. Which he doesn't even play." Although The Village offered a full schedule of social events and activities for residents, her father rarely took advantage of them except, she suspected, as a reason to avoid seeing her. "Sometimes I wonder why I even moved here."

Ellen gazed at her levelly. "You moved here to be close to him, even if he doesn't appreciate it."

"Thanks," Darcy said, forcing a smile.

The rain began to fall in earnest now. The women pulled out waterproof ponchos and donned them. As they did, Darcy's radio crackled. "Unit 14, this is base. Return to base immediately."

She hit the call button. "It'll take us a while. The going's rough and we're about a quarter mile from the trail. We need to take a break first."

"Just return to base, Darcy."

Darcy glanced at Ellen. There was genuine tension in Dan's voice, and he'd used her name instead of her unit number—a breach of protocol that was unlike him. She pressed the transmit button again. "What's the story?"

"Darcy, this is not a drill. This is a code 2." Code 2 meant a real

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search.

"We're on our way."

By the time Darcy and Ellen returned to base—a clearing just off a dirt road at the foot of Mount Connell—the rain had begun to let up. Most of the other team members had already arrived and were packing up, throwing equipment into vehicles, putting dogs in their crates. There was no time for the usual banter that came after a successful training session.

Darcy called to Dan as she headed for her truck. "Where are we going?"

Dan acted as if he hadn't heard her, slamming the door of his ancient Subaru and tearing off down the road, spattering mud as he did.

She shook her head, wondering what that was about, and pulled down the truck's gate. "Pepper," she called. "Come on, girl."

Pepper hopped up into her crate. Janis Levine trotted over as Darcy pulled off her backpack and tossed it into the truck. "Where's the search?" she asked. "Apparently Dan couldn't be bothered to tell me."

Janis put a hand on her shoulder. "Darcy."

Darcy turned to face her. Janis was normally all business on a search, the last person to waste time with small-talk.

"What?"

"We're going to The Village."

Darcy's heart sank. "Oh, God."

Janis nodded. "It's your father."

Ned Epstein took the last gulp of lukewarm coffee and turned back to his computer. It was shaping up to be another slow news day in Vermont, another evening newscast filled with background video of cows grazing and stories about the record-breaking Girl Scout cookie seller.

The police scanner crackled in the background. For the most

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part, the scanner was useless—the police chief trying to locate his one officer or someone complaining about a noisy neighbor—but once in a blue moon the chatter turned up something interesting.

Ned tuned in as the dispatcher was saying something about a missing person. He cranked the scanner up. An elderly man with Alzheimer's was missing from a retirement complex in Eastham. Search and rescue workers were being called to the scene.

He grabbed a pen to jot down the details, but it was dry. "Great. Just great." He dug through the loose jumble of writing implements in his drawer, muttering about the station's inability to provide its staff with anything as complicated as a working pen.

At one time, Ned Epstein had been the dean of the Boston news scene, the only one viewers trusted to deliver the news to them, good or bad. For ten years, he had covered scandals at the state house, disappearing crime bosses, and evaporating budget surpluses. He was as much a fixture as Faneuil Hall or the swan boats.

Then came Rachel Wilder, a rising star from a small Buffalo affiliate, one of the new breed of anchorpersons—tough, attitude-laden, and of course, drop-dead gorgeous. If Ned had doubts about her experience or reporting abilities, he was too much the gentleman to share them with anyone.

Ned and Rachel became a team, and Ned admitted to himself that they made a good one, a balanced pair—the beautiful young woman with the intense eyes and sympathetic manner for the younger audience, Ned's reassuring presence for the station's long-time viewers.

He'd had a passing moment of concern when he suspected the news director was assigning Rachel the best stories, but he decided to hold his fire. She was young and needed the experience, and it was no skin off his nose. He was Ned Epstein.

Then came signs of trouble, little things at first: The makeup person hurried through Ned's makeup because Rachel's required more time. A light burned out in Ned's office and the maintenance

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people took three days to replace it because they'd been supervising the addition of a private bathroom to Rachel's office.

Magnanimity only went so far. He'd just decided it was time to speak to the news director about the situation when he got a call from the station owner himself, Dexter Buchanon. As a rule, Ned only saw Buchanon occasionally, at the company party in the fall when profits were announced, or when Buchanon wanted a celebrity to MC one of the many charity functions his wife oversaw.

But Ned suspected another reason for Buchanon's summons. The company now owned four television stations, and there had been talk of developing a magazine show to be aired by all the stations. If the show was a success on a local level, there was a good chance it would be syndicated, and Ned was the obvious candidate to anchor the show.

Meanwhile, he would use the occasion to bring up the matter of Rachel. Nothing heavy-handed, of course, just a hint that perhaps it was time for her to move on to something more fitting her obvious talents. He felt a little guilty about going over the news director's head, but why not go right to the top? After all, he was Ned Epstein.

The meeting took place in Buchanon's corner office in Boston's John Hancock Tower, looking out over Copley Plaza and the Charles River beyond. There was the usual small talk, then Buchanon explained that the company had recently purchased a station in Vermont and needed someone to anchor the news there.

Ned instantly thought of Rachel. It would be a nasty trick, dispatching her to the wilds of Vermont, but it was time to play hardball. "I've got the perfect person—"

Buchanon shook his head. "This is an important new market for us. We need someone with experience, someone who isn't going to drop the ball."

The realization hit Ned like a cold wave at Revere beach. He was being moved down to the farm team. They'd been grooming

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Rachel to take his place.

He argued briefly, and considered marshaling his forces to fight back. He still had his fans. A write-in campaign might make the bastards see how ridiculous this was. But he knew that underneath the kid gloves, Buchanon was wearing brass knuckles, and in the end he'd gone quietly.

Channel 34 in Rutland was even worse than Ned had imagined, a decrepit facility in a concrete building at the edge of a strip mall parking lot. Before arriving, he had entertained a fantasy of elevating the station to award-winning status, making it his springboard back to the big time. It didn't take him long to realize that as far as the Buchanon Media Group was concerned, WOFB was not a springboard. It was a pasture.

He considered quitting, escaping to Cape Cod where he still owned a small house, the last remnant of a failed marriage. Unfortunately, the other remnants of that marriage included a hefty alimony payment and child support. So he hung on, biding his time till he could retire and write his memoirs, in which he planned to get complete and vicious revenge.

Of course, before he could do that, he'd have to find a working pen.

He finally unearthed a pencil and scribbled the details as they came over the scanner. The missing man's name was Marshall Cameron. Ned hesitated for a moment, then put in a call to The Village, where a woman who called herself the Community Affairs Director said, "Can I help you?"

"I understand you have a missing person there?"

"That's right."

"And his name is Marshall Cameron?"

The woman sighed. "Yes it is."

"Not *the* Marshall Cameron."

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid so."

"*And that's what's happening in the world tonight?*" he said.
"That Marshall Cameron?"

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"Yes, sir. That Marshall Cameron."

A bell had been ringing in the back of Ned's mind and now clanged loudly. There had been a rumor that Marshall Cameron had retired to Vermont and was living in seclusion at an undisclosed location. Now he knew why. Cameron had Alzheimer's.

That settled it. Normally, the story of a missing senior citizen would only rate a brief mention during the noon report and a follow-up later. But this was Marshall Cameron. He was a household name. Hell, he was an icon. And even though he'd retired years ago, anything that involved him was news. On top of that, he had Alzheimer's, which gave the story a sympathy angle.

The more Ned thought about it, the better the story got. The Village was a five-star retirement community that catered to retired colonels and Westchester executives, people who could afford the best money could buy. A place like that should be able to take better care of its well-heeled residents. Which made this the perfect story: a well-known celebrity, a tragic disease and a potential scandal.

Ned grabbed a limp tie hanging from a nearby coat rack and headed for the back of the station, bypassing the office of WOFB's news director, Jack O'Brien. He was supposed to ask O'Brien for permission whenever he wanted to use the satellite truck, but he didn't feel like getting into an argument about it today. This was a story that cried out for a live remote, but satellite uplink time was expensive and it was the end of the month, when O'Brien always had his eye out for unnecessary expenses. Ned decided to do the story first and answer questions later. The German defense.

He stuck his head into the engineering closet, where Jim "Granny" Granucci, the station's cameraman-engineer-Mr. Fixit was hunched over a printed circuit board with a soldering gun. Granny was usually up for an adventure.

"Come on," Ned said. "Get a driver for the truck and grab a camera. We're going out."

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Granny shook his head without looking up from his work.
"Truck's in the shop."

"What? What the hell's it doing there?"

"Brakes are shot."

Ned groaned. "I don't believe this." Did nothing around this two-bit station ever work right? "How am I supposed to do a remote without a satellite truck?"

Granny, who spent most of his time arguing with the management about the sad state of the station's equipment, wasn't inclined to be sympathetic. "Good question."

Ned considered his options. A live update was out, but he could still do a segment for the evening news. "OK, just grab a camera. We'll take the van."

"Where we going?"

"The Village, over in Eastham."

Granny's eyebrows shot up. "Whoa. Breaking news. Pilferage from the petty change jar. On the trail of Metamucil junkies."

"I'll explain on the way. Just get the camera."

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Chapter 2

Darcy drove furiously, tailing the other searchers, muttering under her breath, "Come on, come on." She drove as if she could make up for lost time, time that had passed years ago, long before they'd gotten the call about the search. They were only a few miles from The Village, but it was still taking too long. Every minute counts when a person is lost, especially an elderly person. Especially your father.

Normally the radios crackled with chatter as the team neared a search, but not this time. The radios were quiet, and Darcy knew why. This wasn't just any search, they were searching for Darcy's father. They were searching for Marshall Cameron.

For twenty years, Marshall Cameron had hosted the television news magazine TimeLine. His calm demeanor had comforted viewers through international crises and economic hard times, terrorist attacks and Washington scandals. Everyone in the country knew who Marshall Cameron was. Sometimes Darcy thought they knew him better than she did.

For most of her childhood, her father had been on the road, traveling the world and providing the networks with stories from whatever hot spot he could lie, cheat, or bribe his way into. His

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career left little time for family, and even his sporadic visits to the states ended when he and Darcy's mother divorced just before Darcy's seventh birthday. Later, after landing the TimeLine assignment, his life was more settled. But his increasing fame left even less time for a personal life, or so it seemed.

When he retired, Darcy had hoped they'd be able to build the relationship they'd never had. The results were disappointing, to say the least. For the most part, her father rebuffed her attempts to visit him, saying he didn't have time. The few times he could not put her off, they dined quietly at the Eastham Inn and Darcy returned home, no closer to understanding who her father was or what made him tick.

The caravan of searchers roared off the state highway onto The Village's tree-lined driveway. The Village was laid out like a college campus. At its heart was a palatial administration and community building known as the Village Square. On either side were the residences, luxury apartments in separate buildings designed for independent living, assisted living and total care. Around these were gardens—English, Japanese, French—and nestled in the trees at the edge of the grounds were million-dollar private homes for people who couldn't countenance the idea of sharing a wall with neighbors.

Onto this idyllic setting, the barely-controlled chaos of a search had descended. Fire and rescue vans, police cruisers and searchers' vehicles were already packed into every available space and crammed in at odd angles beside the reflecting pool and Japanese garden. The groundskeeper, an elderly, red-faced man in green work clothes, paced the driveway, shaking his head as he surveyed the damage.

Darcy drove passed the Village Square, where the press had already begun to arrive. A half-dozen television vans and satellite trucks had been sequestered away from the action in a parking lot beyond the gardens. She was surprised they were there already, and just hoped the idiots wouldn't get in the way.

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Darcy and Janis wedged their vehicles into the last available spaces on the lawn. Darcy glanced back at Pepper, who was curled up in her crate, exhausted after the morning's training. She would be fine for awhile.

The rest of the team had gathered at the front entrance of the Village Square, waiting for instructions. Janis sprinted toward them with Darcy following close behind.

"Stand down, people," Janis hollered. "Save your energy. You're going to need it." She didn't need to say more.

Darcy began to follow her into the building, but Janis stopped and turned to her. "Take a break. I'll be back with the details as soon as I can."

Darcy shook her head. "Oh, no. There's no way I'm going to stand out here twiddling my thumbs."

Janis glared at her. Members of the team rarely challenged her authority. But Darcy wasn't backing down this time. "All right," Janis said finally. "Let's go."

The lobby of the Village Square was an atrium, sunlight sparkling down from skylights onto hand-made Italian tiles. A seating area featured matching Tuscano leather loveseats, the oak coffee table between them bearing neatly-placed copies of *The Robb Report* and *Executive Traveler*. It looked like the lobby of a five-star hotel.

Generally, the atrium was busy with people coming and going, signing up for bridge games, debating which of the Virgin Islands was the best for vacationing. Today, it was vacant except for a massive state trooper at the entry, who momentarily barred the women's way until he saw their search and rescue badges and waved them towards a brightly lit hall.

The Vermont State Police, the agency with the ultimate responsibility for finding missing people, had commandeered The Village's main conference room as their command post. The room was dominated by a huge oval conference table and floor-to-ceiling

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windows framing a perfect view of Mount Connell.

At present, the elegant atmosphere of the room was marred by the horde of law enforcement personnel crowded into it. The conference table was piled high with forms, maps, radios and other search paraphernalia. To one side was a bulletin board with a topographic map, concentric circles forming a bull's-eye around The Village.

Barked commands and bits of cell-phone and radio conversations filled the air. At the center of the chaos was Sergeant Jacqueline Bradley—Jackie, to those who knew her well enough—the state police's incident commander for the search. Bradley was talking intently with Eastham's police chief, Harvey Warren, a hefty man whose girth attested to too many coffee breaks spent at the Donut Hutch.

Darcy saw Warren and groaned inwardly. When she arrived in Eastham, Harvey Warren had been one of the first people she'd met. She'd quickly sized him up as a self-important blowhard who was ingratiating to those he respected and condescending to those he didn't. He was forty-two, divorced, and gave off the unmistakable signs of a man on the make.

Darcy had fended off his not-so-subtle advances as politely as she could—it didn't pay for a small-town lawyer to get on the wrong side of local law enforcement. Eventually though, she'd had to tell him bluntly—thanks, but no thanks. She'd tried to be nice about it, explaining that she was recovering from a painful divorce and wasn't looking for anyone right now. She avoided telling him he wouldn't be in the running even if he were the last available man in Vermont. Possibly on the planet.

Chief Warren wasn't used to being turned down or ignored, and his attitude toward Darcy had been surly ever since, especially after she began dating one of his officers. And although she'd stopped seeing the guy, Warren still acted like a jilted lover around her. He was the last person she wanted to deal with in a search for her father.

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Janis and Darcy threaded their way through the maze of bodies toward Bradley and Warren. Bradley wore a look of thin-lipped annoyance as she spoke to the chief. "Why do we have to go through this every time? We keep telling you to call us right away."

Warren looked like a pitcher who had been reluctantly hauled from the mound. "We did call you—"

Over his shoulder, Bradley saw Janis and Darcy approaching them. She gave Darcy a hard, sympathetic look. "Don't worry. We'll find him."

"Sure," Darcy said, not meeting her eyes. They both knew that no search was a sure thing.

Bradley led them to the topo map of the area, circles showing half-mile and full mile distances from The Village. The one-half mile circle had been broken into irregular shaded areas that indicated where search teams would be sent. "Chief Warren has just been filling me in on the initial search," she said. "They began with a hasty search of the immediate area—"

"When was that?" Darcy asked.

Bradley frowned. She didn't like to be interrupted, and they all knew what Darcy was getting at. Local police often tried to find missing persons by themselves without calling in the state police and search teams. It was an ego thing—the police never wanted to admit they might need help with anything that happened on their turf. Occasionally, they were lucky and found the person. More often they ended up calling the state police hours later, no closer to success and having wasted precious time.

Bradley ignored Darcy's question. "Marshall Cameron didn't show up for his usual 7 a.m. breakfast," she said. "The Village staff checked his apartment and then the other buildings, but failed to find him. They informed the Eastham police department at 7:50."

Janis closed her eyes and shook her head, but said nothing.

Darcy turned on Warren. "You guys have been screwing around here since 8 o'clock this morning without calling us?"

Warren raised a hand. "Now look—"

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"No, you look. Do you have any idea what happens to an elderly person who gets lost? An elderly person with Alzheimer's? They get cold, even in warm weather. They travel, sometimes for miles."

Janis positioned herself between Darcy and Warren, her hands raised. "Darcy, calm down—"

"Calm down? That's my father out there. He's been missing for God knows how long, and this nitwit is acting like Barney Fife going after a moonshine still."

Warren's neck reddened like a Roman candle about to go off. "We have our own K-9 unit," he said through clenched teeth. The Eastham police department had recently acquired a German shepherd. Darcy knew about the shepherd. She also knew that Warren hadn't had a chance to show the dog off yet.

"That's great," she said. "Did he find a track?" The German shepherd, like most police dogs, was a tracking dog and had been bred to follow scents on the ground. Tracking dogs were great if you had a starting place where they could pick up a scent, such as the scene of a crime. But for open-ended searches—lost children, people in avalanches, and most other search and rescue operations—air-scent dogs like Pepper were better. They could detect the most minuscule amounts of human scent in the air, even just a few scent molecules in millions of air molecules.

Warren glanced away. "No, he hasn't picked up anything. Yet."

"So how long were you planning to—"

"All right," Bradley said. "That's enough." A few heads turned in their direction, though most people went about their business; searches tended to make for short fuses and arguments were common. "Chief, your men have their assignments. I suggest you go brief them and get cracking."

Warren started to open his mouth, then changed his mind and left.

As Warren disappeared into the mass of swirling activity Bradley said, "Here's where we're at."

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She briefed them as if the missing person were a total stranger. "The subject is a seventy-six year old man with early-stage Alzheimer's missing since 0700 hours. The place last seen was his apartment. According to the staff, the last person to see him was an express deliveryman who was seen outside his apartment yesterday afternoon."

"Have you talked to the deliveryman?" Darcy asked.

"Still trying. The staff couldn't identify which company it was, so we're calling them all to see if we can find him."

"I thought visitors were supposed to check in at the reception desk?"

"They are. But this one managed to slip by. We're not sure what happened."

Bradley studied a clipboard and said casually—too casually, Darcy thought—"We'll have a POD for you later on."

The POD—probability of detection—was a formula based on the weather, wind speed, angle of the sun and other factors. After years of experience, rescue workers had found it to be a reliable gauge of whether a missing person was likely to be found or not.

Normally, Bradley calculated the POD before they began searching. If she hadn't—or if she didn't want to share the results with them—there was only one good reason.

Before Darcy or Janis could speak, Bradley said, "Eastham Police called us in at 1330 hours." The police had already searched Cameron's apartment, the other buildings and the grounds, but found no trace of him or clues to his whereabouts. In addition to Chief Warren's dog, the state police had their own tracking K-9s, none of which had been able to find Cameron's track.

Darcy calculated backwards. "So it's possible that he's been gone for over twenty-four hours."

They all knew what that meant. After twenty-four hours, the chances of survival for a lost Alzheimer's patient grew thin.

Bradley fixed Darcy with a hard look. "Hang in there. You're one of the best searchers we've got. We're going to need you."

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Darcy closed her eyes, nodded, and took a deep breath. "All right."

Continue reading Probability of Detection.