

P329

Chapter Forty-One: 7:30am (pps329-341)

A: Craig hides in the boot lobby (329-332)

7:30 a.m.

7.15

Craig opened the side door of the garage and peeped out. Dawn had broken, somewhere beyond the snow clouds, and he could make out the shape of the main house, a dark grey mass against a lighter grey sky. There were three lit windows in the gable end of the house, but the curtains were drawn in each of them: no casual observer could see him.

He glanced back to where Sophie sat. He had turned out the lights in the garage, but he knew she was in the front passenger seat of Luke's Toyota, her anorak pulled close around her against the cold. He waved in her direction, then stepped outside.

Moving as quickly as he could, lifting his feet high as he stepped in the deep snow, he went along the blind wall of the garage until he came level with the front of the house.

He was going to get the Ferrari keys. He would have to sneak into the boot lobby at the back of the kitchen and take them from the key box. Sophie had wanted to go with him, but he had persuaded her that it was more dangerous for two people than for one, and she had seen the sense of that.

He was much more frightened without her beside him. For her sake, he had to pretend to be brave, and that made him feel braver. But now he had a bad attack of nerves. He could easily be caught, and he did not know what he would do. He had never been in a real fight, at least not since he was about five years old. He knew boys who got into fights, and all of

How does this fear manifest itself?

? Details?

How would he know their names? And would he use them? ?

them, without exception, were stupid (Nigel, Elton and Daisy) were none of them much bigger than Craig, but all the same he was frightened of them. It seemed to him that they would just know what to do in a fight, and he had no idea.

Craig?

He looked along the front of the house. He was going to have to pass the windows of the drawing room and the dining room, where the curtains were not drawn. The snowfall was not as thick as before, he thought, and he could probably be seen by someone glancing out.

He forced himself to move forward.

He stopped at the first window and looked into the dining room. Fairy lights flashed on the Christmas tree, dimly outlining the familiar couches and tables, the television set, and the four oversize children's stockings on the floor in front of the fireplace, stuffed with boxes and packages.

There was no one in the room.

The snow seemed deeper here, blown into a drift by the wind off the sea. Wading through it was surprisingly tiring. He almost felt like lying down. He realised he had been up for twenty-four hours without sleep. He gritted his teeth and pressed on. Passing the front door, he half expected that it would suddenly fly open, and the Londoner in the pink sweater would leap out and grab him. But nothing happened.

As he drew level with the dark dining room windows, he was startled by a soft bark. For a moment his heart beat like a drum, then he realised it was only Nelson. They must have shut the dog in there, he thought. Nelson recognised Craig's silhouette, and gave a low let-me-out-of-here whine. "Quiet, Nelly, for god's sake," Craig murmured. He doubted whether the dog could hear him, but it fell silent anyway.

He passed the parked cars. Their sides as well as their tops were all white, so that they

looked as if they might be snow all the way through, snow cars for snowmen. He rounded the corner of the house. There was a light in the window of the boot lobby. Cautiously, he peeped around the edge of the window frame. He could see the big cupboard where anoraks and boots were kept, a watercolour of Steepfall that must have been painted by Aunt Miranda, a yard brush leaning in a corner—and the steel key box, screwed to the wall.

The door from the lobby to the kitchen was closed.

He listened, but could not hear anything from the kitchen.

What happened when you punched someone? In the movies, they just fell down, but he was pretty sure that would not happen in real life. More important, what happened when someone punched you? How much did it hurt? What if they did it again and again? And what was it like to be shot? He had heard somewhere that a bullet in the stomach was the most painful thing in the world. He was absolutely terrified.

He grasped the handle of the back door, turned it as gently as he could, and pushed. The door swung open. He stepped inside. The lobby was a small room, about six feet long, narrowed by the brickwork of the massive old chimney and the deep cupboard beside it. The key box hung on the chimney wall. Craig reached to open it. There were about twenty keys on numbered hooks, but he instantly recognised the Ferrari keys. He was about to unhook them when someone rattled the handle of the kitchen door.

Craig's heart leaped in his chest.

The person was trying to open the door between the kitchen and the lobby. He or she had turned the handle, but was obviously unfamiliar with the house, and was pushing instead of pulling. In the moment of delay caused by that, Craig stepped into the coat cupboard and closed the door behind him.

B: Kit betrays Miranda's hiding place (332-333)

He had done it without even thinking. As soon as he was inside, he realised it would have been almost as quick to go out of the back door into the garden. He tried to remember whether he had closed the back door. He thought not. And had fresh snow fallen from his boots on to the floor? That would reveal that someone had been there in the last minute or so, for otherwise it would have melted. And he had left the key box open. An observant person would see the clues and guess the truth in an instant.

He held his breath and listened.

Nigel rattled the handle until he realised that the door opened inwards, not outwards. He pulled it wide and looked into the boot lobby. "No good," he said. "Door and a window." He crossed the kitchen and flung open the door to the pantry. "This will do. No other doors and only one window, looking over the courtyard. Elton, put them in here."

"It's cold in there," Olga protested.

"Oh, stop it, you'll make me cry," Nigel said sarcastically.

"My husband needs a doctor."

"After punching me, he's lucky he doesn't need a fucking undertaker." Nigel turned back to Elton. "Stuff something in their mouths so they can't make any noise."

Elton found a drawer full of clean tea towels. He gagged Stanley, Olga, and Hugo, who was now conscious, although dazed. Then he began to drag the bound prisoners into the pantry one by one.

"Listen to me," Nigel said to Kit. Nigel was superficially calm, planning ahead and giving orders, but he was pale, and the expression on his narrow, cynical face was grim, and Kit saw that beneath the surface he was wound up as tight as a guitar string. "When the police

get here, you're going to go to the door," Nigel went on. "Speak to them nicely, look relaxed, the law-abiding citizen. Say nothing's wrong here, and everyone in the house is still asleep except you."

Kit did not know how he was going to appear relaxed when he felt like a man in front of a firing squad. He gripped the back of a kitchen chair to stop himself shaking. "What if they want to come in?"

"Bring them in the kitchen. We'll be in that little room." He pointed to the boot lobby. "Get rid of them as fast as you can."

"Toni Gallo is coming along with the police," Kit said. "She's the head of security at the lab."

"Well, tell her to go away."

"She's going to want to see my father."

"Tell her she can't."

"She may not take no for an answer—"

Nigel raised his voice. "For crying out loud, what is she going to do—knock you down and walk in over your unconscious body? Just tell her to fuck off."

"All right," Kit said. "But we need to keep my sister Miranda quiet. She's hiding in the attic."

"Attic? Where?"

"Directly above this room. Look inside the first cupboard you come to when you enter the dressing room. Behind the suits you'll see a low door leading into the roof space."

Nigel did not ask how Kit knew that. He looked at Daisy. "Take care of it."

C: *Miranda locks Daisy in the attic (334-335)*

Miranda was looking through the hole in the attic floor into the kitchen. She saw her brother speaking to Nigel and heard his words as he betrayed her.

She leaped to her feet. She crossed the attic in a moment and crawled out through the door into Daddy's suit cupboard. She was panting hard, her heart was racing, and she felt flushed, but she was not in a panic, not yet.

She had heard Kit say the police were coming, and for a joyful moment she had thought they were saved. All she had to do was sit tight until men in blue uniforms walked in through the front door and arrested the thieves. Then she had watched and listened with horror as Nigel rapidly devised a way of getting rid of the police. If it worked, she had decided, and the police seemed to be about to leave without arresting anyone, she would open a bedroom window and start screaming. Now Kit had spoiled that plan.

She was terrified of meeting Daisy again, but she held on to her reason, just.

She jumped out of the cupboard into the dressing room. Her immediate plan was to hide in Kit's bedroom, on the other side of the landing, while Daisy searched the attic. That would not fool Daisy for more than a few seconds, but it might just give Miranda long enough to open a window and yell for help.

She ran through the bedroom. As she put her hand on the door knob, she heard heavy boots on the stairs. She was too late. Daisy was outside.

The door flew open.

Miranda hid behind the door.

Daisy stormed through the bedroom and into the dressing-room without looking back.

Miranda slipped out of the door.

She crossed the landing and stepped into Kit's room. She ran to the window and

pulled back the curtains, hoping to see police cars with flashing blue lights.

There was no one outside.

She peered in the direction of the lane. It was getting light, and she could see the trees laden with snow at the edge of the wood, but no cars.

She almost despaired. Daisy would take only a few seconds to look around the attic and make sure no one was there. Then she would check the other rooms. Miranda needed more time. How far away could the police be?

Was there any way she could shut Daisy in the attic?

She did not give herself a split second to worry about the risks. She ran back to her father's bedroom. She could see the door of his suit cupboard standing open. There was no sign of Daisy: she must be in the attic right now, staring around with those bruised-looking eyes, wondering if there were any hiding places big enough to conceal a grown woman, somewhat overweight.

Without forethought, Miranda closed the cupboard door.

Its simple catch would break easily, and there was no lock. But it was made of solid wood. If she could jam it shut, Daisy would have trouble busting it open, especially as she would have little room to manoeuvre inside the cupboard.

There was a narrow gap at the bottom of the door. If she could wedge something into the gap, the door would be stuck. What could she use? She needed a piece of wood, or cardboard, or even a sheaf of paper. She pulled open her father's bedside drawer and found a volume of Proust.

She started ripping pages out.

*It's unclear to me**** how a sheaf of paper could jam a door shut when pushed by a strong, determined woman. Why not a bed, a chest, or a heavy trunk?*

D: Kit lets Toni in (336-339)

KT: Why was the puppy called Osborne?

JT: Later when they are in the house and Toni's mother goes to sit by the Christmas tree I feel something is going to happen to her or that she's going to do more

Kit heard the dog bark in the next room.

It was a loud, aggressive bark, the kind he gave when a stranger came to the door. Someone was outside. Kit pushed through the swing door that led into the dining room. The dog was standing with its forepaws on the windowsill.

Kit went to the window. The snow had eased to a light scatter of flakes. He looked towards the wood and saw, emerging from the trees, a big truck with a flashing orange light on top and a snowplough blade in front.

“They’re here!” he called out.

Nigel came to stand beside him. The dog growled, and Kit said: “Shut up.” Nelson retreated to a corner and lay down.

The snowplough cleared a path eight or ten feet wide. It passed the front door and came as close as it could to the parked cars. At the last moment it turned, sweeping away the snow in a curve in front of Hugo’s Mercedes and Miranda’s Previa. Then it reversed to the garage block, turned off the drive and cleared a swathe of the concrete apron in front of the garage doors. As it did so, two cars came past it, using the track it had made in the snow, and pulled up at the door: first, a light-coloured Jaguar S-type, then a police patrol car with blue-and-white markings.

A figure got out of the Jaguar. It was a tall, slim woman with bobbed red hair, wearing a brown leather flying jacket with a sheepskin lining. In the flashing blue light from the police car, Kit recognised Toni Gallo.

Nigel said to Kit: “Get rid of them.”

“What’s happened to Daisy?”

“She’ll take care of your sister.”

“She’d better.”

“I trust Daisy more than I trust you, now go to the door.” Nigel went into the boot lobby with Elton and shut the door.

Kit went to the front door.

Toni was helping someone out of the back of the Jaguar. Kit frowned. It was an old lady in a long wool coat and a fur hat. He said aloud: “What the hell...?”

Toni took the old lady’s arm and they turned around. Toni’s face darkened with disappointment when she saw who was at the door. “Hello, Kit,” she said. She walked the old woman towards the house.

Kit said: “What do you want?”

“I’ve come to see your father,” Toni said. “There’s an emergency at the laboratory.”

“Daddy’s asleep.”

“He’ll want to be woken up, trust me.”

“Who’s the old woman?”

“This *lady* is my mother.”

“And I’m not an old woman,” said the old woman. “I’m seventy-one, and as fit as a butcher’s dog, so you mind your manners, you cheeky young whippersnapper.”

“All right, Mother, he didn’t mean to be rude.”

Kit ignored that. “What’s she doing here?”

“I’ll explain to your father.”

The snowplough had turned around in front of the garage, and now it returned along the track it had cleared, heading through the woods towards the main road. The police car reversed away from the house, and the Jaguar followed suit. Toni turned to wave.

Kit felt panicked. What should he do? The cars were leaving and Toni was still here.

The Jaguar stopped suddenly.

Kit hoped the driver had not seen something suspicious and decided to investigate.

The passenger door was opened, and a small bundle fell out into the snow. It looked, Kit thought, almost like a puppy.

The door slammed and the car continued to reverse away.

Toni went back and picked up the bundle. It was a puppy.

Kit was bewildered, but he decided to not to ask questions. "You can't come in," he said to Toni.

"Don't be stupid," she replied. "This is not your house, it's your father's, and he'll want to see me." She continued walking slowly towards him with her mother on one arm and the puppy cradled in the other.

Kit felt stymied. He had expected Toni to be in her own car, and his plan had been to tell her she could not wait inside, so she should come back later. For a moment, he considered running after the Jaguar and telling the driver not to go away without Toni. But the driver would surely ask why. And then the police in their car might stop and ask what the fuss was all about. It was too dangerous: Kit did nothing.

Toni came to a stop in front of Kit because he was blocking the doorway. "Is something wrong?" she said.

He was stuck, he realised. If he persisted in trying to obey Nigel's orders, he might bring the police back. Toni on her own was more manageable than the police force.

"You'd better come in," he said.

"Thanks. By the way, the puppy's name is Osborne."

E: Miranda warns Toni (339-341)

AB: Does Frank find the abandoned car after he leaves Toni at Steepfall?

Kit stood aside to let them in.

Toni and her mother stepped into the hall. "Do you need the bathroom, Mother?" Toni said. "It's just here."

Kit watched the police car drive away into the woods, its blue light still flashing. The Jaguar reversed on to the garage forecourt, then drove after the police car. Kit relaxed slightly. He was saddled with Toni, but he had got rid of the police.

He went back into the house.

There was a loud bang from upstairs, like a hammer hitting a wall.

"What the heck was that?" said Toni.

Miranda had taken a thick sheaf of pages from the book and folded them into a wedge which she had shoved into the gap under the cupboard door. But she feared that would not hold Daisy for long enough. She needed some more solid barrier. Beside the bed was an antique commode chest used as a bedside table. With a huge effort, she had dragged the heavy mahogany chest across the carpet, tilted it at a forty-five degree angle, and jammed it against the door. Almost immediately, she had heard Daisy pushing at the door from inside the cupboard. When pushing failed, she banged.

Miranda guessed she was lying with her head in the attic and her feet in the cupboard, kicking the door with the soles of her boots. Miranda could see the door shuddering, but it did not fly open. However, Daisy was tough, and she would find a way.

Miranda looked out of the bedroom window. To her dismay, she saw a police car with a flashing blue light heading away from the house. "Oh, no!" she said aloud. The car was already too far away for the people in it to hear her scream. Was she too late? She ran out of

Might she try to barricade it with something more?

the bedroom.

She stopped at the top of the stairs. Down in the hall, there was an old woman she had never seen before, going into the cloakroom.

What was happening?

Next she recognised Toni Gallo, her father's security head, taking off a leather flying jacket and hanging it on the hatstand.

A small black-and-white puppy was sniffing Daddy's Wellington boots.

Kit came in through the front door and closed it behind him.

There was another bang from the dressing room. Kit said to Toni: "The children must be awake."

Miranda was bewildered. How could this be? Kit was acting as if there was nothing wrong....

He must be fooling Toni, Miranda realised. He was hoping to deceive her into thinking that all was well, then either persuade her to leave, or overpower her and tie her up like Daddy and Olga and Hugo.

Meanwhile, the police were driving away.

Toni closed the cloakroom door on her mother. No one had yet noticed Miranda on the landing above them.

Kit said to Toni: "You'd better come into the kitchen."

That was where they would jump her, Miranda guessed. Nigel and Elton would be waiting, and they would take her by surprise.

There was a crash from within the bedroom: Daisy had broken out of the cupboard.

Miranda acted without thinking. "Toni!" she screamed.

Toni looked up the stairs and saw her.

Kit said: "Shit, no—"

Miranda yelled: "The thieves, they're here, they've tied Daddy up, they've got gu—"

Daisy burst out of the bedroom and crashed into Miranda, sending her tumbling down the stairs.