

New York Times Bestselling Author of *Borderline*

NEVADA BARR

"Exciting and intelligent... Barr skillfully builds suspense."

—*The Dallas Morning News*

LIBERTY FALLING

AN ANNA PIGEON NOVEL





LIBERTY

Falling

NEVADA BARR

For help on this book, I thank the staff of the Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty National Monuments; the Park Police on Ellis and Liberty (and yes, they are all handsome); the staff boat captains, and especially Becky Brock, who gave me the place and a bed to sleep in while I did my research; an individual who is too shy to be named; and Charlie DeLeo, who kindly let me use him in the story. And thanks to Fred Shirley for his time and expertise.

Since the writing of this book, plans have been made to stabilize the buildings on Islands II and III, though no work has yet begun. It is hoped that if the structures can be saved, there will be funds to restore them. Contributions toward this future restoration can be made to The Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation; e-mail:

[\["mailto:pr@ellisland.org"\]pr@ellisland.org.](mailto:pr@ellisland.org)

FOR T R I S H: once my agent, twice my editor, always my friend

1

Of course Molly would live; anything else was unthinkable. But Anna was thinking it.

Concerned for her mental health--or their own--the nurses at Columbia-Presbyterian had banded together and banished Anna from the hospital for twelve hours. Once pried free of the rain-streaked monolith housing umpteen floors of misery, Anna fled the far reaches of the Upper West Side, spiraling down into the subway with the rainwater. Huddled on the Number 1 train, she rattled through the entrails of Manhattan to the end of the line: South Ferry. The subways weren't those she'd known as a young woman--a wife--living in New York City with Zach. These were clean, silver. They smelled of metal and electricity, like bumper cars at the carnival. Graffiti artists, frustrated by the glossy unpaintable surfaces, made futile attempts to etch gang symbols and lewd declarations of adolescent angst in the plastic of the windows. Vandals lacked patience and dedication.

At South Kerry, Anna sprinted up the stairs and burst from the station like a deadline-crazed commuter and across the three lanes of traffic that separated the subway from the pier. The National Park Service staff boat, the Liberty IV, was waiting at the Coast Guard clock, floating on the tip of Manhattan Island. Anna got aboard before they cast off. Kevin, the boat captain, winked. "I wouldn't have left you." She knew that, but she'd needed to run, to see the planks of the pier passing beneath her feet, to feel she'd outpaced the demons, beaten them to the boat. Ghosts can't cross open water.

On shipboard, she kept running. Avoiding kindly questions from Kevin, she left the warmth of the cabin and went to the stern. Under the dispirited flapping of the American flag, she watched the skyline, dominated by the twin towers of the World Trade Center, recede, carried away on the wake of the Liberty IV. Patsy Silva, the woman on Liberty Island with whom Anna was staying, referred to this pose, this view, as her "Barbra Streisand moment." It was the East Coast equivalent of Mary Tyler Moore throwing her hat into the air in downtown Minneapolis.

Crossing the harbor, Anna tried to fix her mind on the movie that had burned that image into the collective unconscious of a generation of theatergoers, but could not remember even the title.

The NPS boat stopped first at Ellis Island. From there it would continue its endless triangle, ferrying staff to Liberty Island, then the third leg of the run, back to MIO, the dock shared with the Marine Inspection Office of the U.S. Coast Guard where Anna had boarded. Farther out in the harbor, the Circle Line ferried its tourist cargo in roughly the same path but docking at different points on the islands. Anna was bunking in Patsy Silva's spare room in a cozy little cottage on Liberty Island in the shadow of the great lady herself. The view from Anna's bedroom--could it be duplicated--would jack the price of a condo into the high six figures. As it was park housing, Patsy and her roommate paid the staggering sum of one hundred and forty

dollars a month; recompense for living in an area a GS-7 on NPS wages couldn't possibly afford.

Loath to go "home" immediately, to strand herself amid the all too human accoutrements of coffee cups and telephones, Anna thanked Kevin, disembarked at Ellis, the Liberty IV's first stop, and slunk away, keeping to deserted brick alleys.

For ease of reference, Ellis was divided into three "islands," though all three of its building complexes shared the same bit of earth and were joined together by a long windowed walkway. Island I was the facility the tourists saw. Spectacularly refurbished in 1986, it housed the museum, the Registry Hall, the baggage room and the service areas through which twelve million of the immigrants who poured into America from 1892 to 1954 had passed. Vaulted ceilings, as airy as those of a cathedral built to worship industry, intricate windows, modern baths, electricity, running water--all the state-of-the-art nineteenth-century architecture--had been lovingly restored to its original grandeur. And returned, Anna had little doubt, to its original cacophony. At Ellis's peak, ten thousand souls a day were shepherded through the "golden door" to America.

Now Ellis, in season, saw eight to ten thousand visitors from all over the world each day. The raucous babble of languages must have seemed familiar to the old building.

Echoing off acres of tile in cavernous rooms, the din gave Anna a headache. She'd arrived in New York two days before.

After a day of staring blindly at exhibits, she'd been driven to Islands II and III. In these crumbling urban ruins she'd found solace.

Isolated from the public by an inlet where Circle Line ferries disgorged two-legged freight, Islands II and III had been the hospital wards and staff living quarters when Ellis was an immigration station. One of the first American hospitals built on the European spa principle that light and air are actually good for people, its many rooms were graced with windows reaching nearly from floor to ceiling. The infectious disease units on Island III were interconnected by long, freestanding passages, walled in paned glass Ellis had boasted a psychiatric hospital, two operating theaters, a morgue and an autopsy room. At the turn of the century, the hospitals on Ellis were showcases for modern medical practices. That, and the fact that at one time or another nearly every disease known to man was manifest in at least one hapless immigrant, lured students and doctors from all over. They came to Ellis to teach, learn and observe.

In the early fifties the hospitals had been abandoned. Unlike the registry building on Island I, they'd never been restored.

There had never been funds to so much as stabilize the structures. Thus Anna loved them, found in them the peace the sprawl of New York City had destroyed even in the remote corners of her famed city parks.

On these abandoned islands, as in the Anasazi cliff dwellings in Colorado, the sugar mills on St. John, the copper mines on Isle Royale, Nature was taking back what had once been hers. Brick, glass and iron were wrapped with delicate green tendrils, vines content to destroy the manmade world one minute fragment at a time. Walls disappeared behind leafy curtains. Glass, shattered by the vicissitudes of time and vandals, was slowly returning its component parts to the sand that had been dredged from the Jersey shore to build the island. Four stories above this landfill, hardwood floors, sloped with moisture, grew lush carpets of fine green moss on the mounds of litter half a century of neglect had shaken down from the ceilings.

The rain that had been an unrelenting mirror of Anna's spirits since she arrived in New York blew down through chimneys, in windows, through ragged sockets of ruined skylights. Rain worked its silent progress down walls and pipes and electrical conduits of the old structures till, days after the skies cleared, it would rain in the maze of tunnels and corridors beneath the ancient buildings.

Protected by the covered walkway connecting the islands, Anna threaded her way through the detritus of a functioning park and odd stores remaining from a long history as a public trust. When Ellis was abandoned, it was left almost as if the bureaucrats and medical personnel would return. Files, desks, furniture, dishes, beds and mattresses clogged the old rooms.

The corridor she followed curved gently, joining the three building complexes together. At best guess it was three or four hundred yards long, but the curvature warped the distance, giving a sense of an endless hallway to nowhere. Electrical cable dripped from the ceiling in knotted gray swaths, but no lights burned on the second and third of Ellis's "islands." What light there was leaked in through arched windows spaced down the walkway, each curtained in June's voracious greenery. Gouts of ivy and feathered fingers of locust broke through the glass, reached into the dim hall, greening the light and bringing in the rain. Spiderwebs caught the drops and converted them to emerald and diamond. Last year's leaves littered the floor.

Past the inlet between Islands I and II the corridor forked, the left branch leading underneath the buildings of Island II. The way was blocked by piled boxes of deteriorating manuals. Beyond, Anna could hear water--more than the hypnotic drip drip of creeping rain--and guessed the passage would be flooded.

Farther along the connecting passage, two wooden doors opened into a large room. The ceiling was partially destroyed, exposing bones of iron that divided the darkness above. The floor was soft with a mix of dirt, plaster and decomposing plant material. Slipping through the jam of rusted hinges, Anna skirted a frightening chunk of machinery. Once a mangle for cleaning and sterilizing hospital linens, it was now rusted immobile. Squatting over a quarter of the room, it suggested a malevolent past it had never possessed, hinted not at pink-cheeked laundresses but at inquisitors and iron maidens.

Skirting the mangle, Anna trod soundlessly, wanting to keep her whereabouts

unknown, at least for a while. The back of the laundry room let into the first in the line of four-story interconnected buildings that made up Island II. The buildings were in a row: the psychiatric ward, hospital wards, living quarters and one of the islands' two operating theaters.

The buildings were tied together by long hallways, one on each of the four floors. Two days' wandering had yet to bring Anna into all the rooms. From cellar to attic they enclosed hundreds of thousands of square feet of shadow and memory.

At the staircase in the psychiatric ward, she began her climb. The steps were rotting, the ceiling hanging in tatters. Walls were clamp to the touch. Plaster had fallen away and choked the steps till she walked on a ramp only partly divided by treads. Eroded plaster revealed walls of red stone blocks mortared together. Time, like a cancer, had eaten away at each layer of building material till the walls had the look of leprous and decaying flesh.

Anna found it beautiful, and wondered at herself. Was it merely the twisted set of her mind, or was this mosaic of ashes to ashes and dust to dust a thing of beauty? The latter, she decided. Her heart was lifted by the tiny clutches of fragile moss, by the down of a pigeon feather on the dappled gray of old wood. The stark and perfect walls of Columbia-Presbyterian, where Molly was interred, burned her with their sterility, their stink--if not of death, then of the weapons with which humanity waged war against it. Here in the mold, in the leaves and rain and growing mountains of bird shit, life was rich, fecund, strong enough to tear down the best man had to offer.

Each floor gained brought Anna closer to the sky, to the elements. The stairwell told its story of exposure in increasing amounts of damage. The five flights of stairs, from cellar to fourth floor, ascended in an angulated corkscrew fenced on one side by the wall and on the side of the stairwell by the high iron grating that graced all public areas in the psych ward, a net of metal girding the world into two-inch squares. On the third floor the stair treads were gone. Anna eased up on metal risers, the wood of the steps frayed away in splinters. From the third to the fourth floor even the risers had succumbed. Rust ate through bolts and metal tore away. From above rain dripped through a skylight framed in leaves--not from the massive and venerable trees outside but from the struggling, anemic upstart of an oak no more than four feet high and rooted in pigeon droppings and plaster dust on the top-floor landing.

Fingers hooked through the rusting mesh, feet reaching for stumps of metal the color of dried blood where risers had once been, Anna pulled herself toward the tree, the watery gray light of day.

When she'd gained the new-made earth on the fourth floor, she let herself stop. Walls built when labor was cheap and money plentiful shut away the high-pitched squeal of bunched humanity. Savoring a silence only made deeper by the monotonous symphony of water, she breathed deep of the moldering air. It stank with life. She had no doubt spores and microbes were thick, each breath a colloidal suspension of mist and microscopic worlds.

Turning from the silver-bright garden under the skylight, she picked her way through the remnants of what had apparently been a mess hall when the Coast Guard used the island in the 1940s. This high up, Anna had little faith in the floor and trod with great care between fallen chunks of ceiling and the inviting but treacherous stretches of greening. The far wall, facing south, away from the peopled part of Ellis, was alight with windows. Ducking through one of these glassless apertures, she breathed a sigh of relief. Resting against the stone of the window ledge, she took in an aching lungful of air. This was the place she'd found her second day in New York, the place she'd claimed for her own. A tiny private wilderness in the megalopolis that consumed the Eastern seaboard.

Her window overlooked a deep balcony the width of the room, thirty or more feet. The balustrade was of brick, laid in a lattice pattern, welcoming light and air. To the left was the red-tiled roof and green copper rain gutters of the next building in the complex. A locust tree, easily a hundred feet high, pushed branches over the balcony rail, lending this fourth-story aerie the snug mystery of a tree house. Beyond this kindly embrace, Anna could see the rain-pocked water of New York Harbor and, if she squinted through the leafy canopy, the head and upthrust arm of the lady on nearby Liberty Island.

Here Anna felt safe. From what, she would have been hard-pressed to say. Perhaps from prying eyes or well-meant inquiries. from the gabble of tourists and the strange uninterrupted hum of Manhattan across the water. Here she could let herself think, free from the fear that thoughts would overwhelm her and she would run screaming into the ocean or, worse, huddle in a closet somewhere under the pitying eyes of those not yet insane.

Human frailty was cumulative. Anna did not find safety in numbers, only the pooling of neurosis. Seldom did she feel comfort in another's arms, only the adding of their burdens to hers. To think of Molly, she needed to be alone in the pure clean air above the huddled masses yearning for God knew what ridiculous bullshit.

In April Molly had come down with pneumonia. True to form, she'd not gone to the hospital. One of her clients at the ParkView Psychiatric Clinic was a thoracic surgeon with deep insecurities about his sexuality. Halfway through a session he'd gotten off the couch--Molly did use an actual couch, a very fine one of wine-colored Moroccan leather with ebony lion's-paw feet--and diagnosed his psychiatrist. Two days later the doctors were saying the pneumonia was a blessing in disguise. Because of it, they'd found an undiagnosed heart problem: clogged arteries. Bypass surgery was recommended.

When the pneumonia was cured, Molly went in for the procedure. All had gone well except that Molly's lungs would not pick up where they'd left off. Thirty years of Camel non-filters, Dewar's Black Label and considering riding the escalator at Blooming-dale's a form of aerobic exercise were taking their pound of flesh. Dye was injected to discover why her lungs were failing. The dye damaged her kidneys. At

fifty-two, Anna's sister was on a respirator, a feeding tube and dialysis. The doctors, or more accurately, Dr. Madison, said there was no reason why Molly should not recover, but it would be very, very slow. Unsaid was the obvious: There was equally little reason why she should not die.

Except that Anna would not have it.

Except that Anna could not bear it.

And there was nothing she could do. Helplessness bound her in tight coils, making her muscles twitch and her lungs pinch.

Guns, knives, courage, strength, cunning, wit, anger, chutzpah, stamina, skill, experience were as confetti, feathers on the wind in the face of this creeping death.

If anyone was to go mano a mano with the killer, it had to be Molly. Anna could only stand on the sidelines and cheer her on.

Too restless to retain her perch on the sill, she stalked across the rubble-strewn balcony, snatched leaves from the tree, stalked back. Face half a foot from the brick, she stood without moving for nearly a minute.

I'll wear out the fucking pom-poms, she thought. Revenge of the Cheerleaders. Low comedy. Life and death. The life and death of the dearest person in the world.

2

Self-medicated with a decent Beaujolais, Anna fell out of consciousness before ten p.m. The wine was searing nerve ends already flayed raw, and her sleep was infiltrated by scenes of loss. Handicapped by a dreamscape's malicious illogic, she desperately sought everything from woolen socks to the antidote for an injection that induced death by madness.

Around midnight, alcohol jangle and a pulsing jungle beat scraped at nightmare and nightmare became reality. Visceral pounding invaded her room, thudding that mimicked migraine and loosened marrow from bone. Opening her eyes did nothing to banish what sounded like the score to a Dean Koontz musical.

Patsy's spare room, only slightly larger than the single metal-framed cot Anna slept in, was piled to the ceiling with the oddments of a nomadic lifestyle. At the foot of the bed, hiking up nearly the width of the wall, was an old-fashioned sash window propped open with atwo-by-four Patsy left there for that purpose. Noise poured in on adamp wind.

Anna slept as she swam and bathed, most sensibly and comfortably naked. When traveling, she brought pajamas lest she frighten the natives. Pulling them on against air too cold for June, she wove her way through the boxes to lean on the window-sill.

Across a black harbor Manhattan's skyline glittered, a perfect Broadway postcard. On the water, lit up like a lantern, floated the perpetrator of Anna's nightmare: a party boat. Patsy had warned her, but she'd forgotten. From Memorial Day to Labor Day they circled Liberty Island like hungry coyotes around a newborn moose calf, pressing as close as they dared without risking life and limb. Weddings, graduations, unspecified revelry, proving, if nothing else, that disco was not as dead as it deserved to be.

The festivities would grind on till two or three hours past midnight. Anna felt her way back to bed. The teensy light on her alarm told her it was 12:03. No rest for a while. She was annoyed on principle, but knew the wine would have ruined her sleep without the advent of the floating circus. Knowing she was as isolated in the midst of one of the world's largest cities as she would have been on the mesas of southern Colorado, she slipped on moccasins, pulled a Levi's jacket over her pajamas and went out through the kitchen door.

The physics of sound waves would dictate that the noise out of doors was in actuality louder than it had been in the room, but without walls and the dull air of even a well-ventilated house, it seemed less toxic. Wind off the water was cold, heavy with moisture. Stars that, in the grand scheme, had only recently been dimmed by Manhattan's glory and would be shining still when the last lightbulb on earth burned out, showed through jagged rents in the storm. Tomorrow--today--should show a more

amiable face of summer. For the nonce, the cool gusts of midnight suited her, cooled the fevered sweat of wine gone cruel and reminded her the world was a place of the senses and not only of the mind.

A twisting sidewalk led from the cluster of employee houses. Cutting through a hedge black and shining with raindrops, Anna walked onto a broad circle paved in a circular pattern of brick and gray slate. East-northeast was Manhattan, looking magical and small. Due east was the lady. Luminescent in copper aged to a fine verdigris patina, Liberty stood shoulder to shoulder with the land, her face turned determinedly out to sea, her torch, newly gilded, catching the light of sixteen high-intensity lamps. Like most other Americans, Anna's ancestors had come through this harbor, passed the lady, disembarked at Ellis Island. But for her and Molly there were no stories. The only daughters of two black sheep, they'd known only one of their four grandparents and nothing--not even the names--of their great-grandparents.

Anna walked along the island's perimeter and around the remains of old Fort Wood, build in the 1800s to protect New York Harbor. The walls of the fort were shaped like the Star of David and made of solid granite. Inside, the fort had been filled in to make a base that lifted the lady's skirts twenty yards above the top of the old walls. Even without history gilding it, it was easy to imagine the impact this glorious woman would have, seen from tired and hopeful eyes in need of new dreams.

Below Liberty's left foot, set into a grassy bank separating the harbor walk from the statue, was a metal grid thirty feet long and six wide. From beneath probed the impressive beams of fourteen high-pressure sodium lights, illuminating the massive drapery of the gown and the bottom of the book and firing the underside of jaw and crown.

From the party boat anchored offshore, the music shifted to an all-bass rendition of "Staying Alive." Unable to resist, Anna ran up the grass, walked to the middle of the light grid and struck the pose made famous by John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever. She doubted that at this hour anyone on the boat, barring the crew, would be sober enough to focus their eyes, but she amused herself considerably.

"You. Buddy. Come off of there." A deep voice, rich with the neighborhood warmth of Brooklyn, came through the blaze.

Anna shaded her eyes. A futile gesture. Full bore of the sodium lights had induced terminal night blindness. Anxious to get out of the spotlight, she leapt for the grass.

"Easy now, buddy. You take it easy. Don't want you strainin' nothing. Including my patience. You probably just got yourself lost."

The voice was not peremptory but oddly gentling, the way people talked to growling dogs and lunatics. Off the grid, Anna could see the outline of the man who had called to her. Light blue shirt, gold badge: Park Police, supposedly tough guys. Or perhaps more accurately, highly trained professionals taught to distrust. The avuncular tone

seemed out of character for addressing a night intruder. Then she remembered the pajamas. She was wearing a pair of flannel PJs given to her by the Cumberland Island fire crew as a joke. They were pale pink and patterned with fat brown bear cubs.

This Park Policeman thought she was a wandering nutcase. And so she was. Anna laughed, realizing as she did that it was not the most reassuring course she could have taken. To her embarrassment, she couldn't stop. The disco pose, the pajamas and three days of too much stress and too little sleep had rendered her borderline hysterical. "It's okay," she managed.

"Sure it is, buddy, sure it is. Everything's gonna be okay. Take your hands out of your pockets now and come on down here where I can see you."

Mustering a semblance of self-control, Anna held her hands out where the policeman could see she was unarmed, and walked slowly down the grassy slope. "My name's Anna Pigeon," she said. "I'm staying with Patsy Silva." She could see him now. He moved his hand away from the butt of his pistol and his face relaxed.

"That's right. I remember a lady was visiting Pats. In that jacket with the short hair, I thought you was a guy." Respectfully, he refrained from mentioning the pajamas.

"You get a lot of weirdos out here?" Anna asked.

"Not a lot. Kids sometimes. You can land a little boat anywhere. I shoo 'em off."

Assured he was reassured, Anna stuck her hands back in her pockets and hugged her jacket around her for warmth. "Party boat woke me," she explained.

"They'll do that. You want to see the statue? Cleaning crew's gone. I thought I'd tuck her in for the night. I wouldn't mind the company. I'm Hatch. Well, James Hatchett, but it's always been Hatch."

There was a wistful air to the invitation, and Anna realized how lonely--and deadly dull--the midnight-to-eight-a.m. shift would be. "Hatch," she said. "That would be great. Just one law-enforcement person on?" she asked as she fell into step beside him.

"Just one."

"What if something happens?"

"I guess I dial nine-one-one," he said, and laughed.

No backup: Anna had worked without backup half her career, but here in the city it surprised her.

The entrance to the lady through the pedestal was in keeping with the beauty of the statue. Two bronze doors, decorated with a bas-relief glorifying industry, rose over twenty feet. Hatch pushed them and they glided quietly on metal tracks laid in the

granite floor. Inside was another set of doors, more pragmatic in nature. They were of glass with modern locks.

Beyond, at the entrance to a one-and-a-half-story room with a mezzanine, white security arches like those used in airports to detect metal stood sentry. Visitors had to walk through them. Security measures had begun appearing in parks and museums all over the country. A sad commentary on the times.

Hatch disappeared momentarily; then the hall was filled with light. When he returned Anna saw him clearly for the first time. He was young--somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-five--big and, she suspected, deceptively soft-looking.

Olive skin, close-cropped black hair and an inky mustache suggested an Italian ancestry that clashed with the surname Hatchett. The uniform of the Park Police fit him snugly, as if night duty on Liberty had put a few pounds on what had been a football player's physique. Dark eyes under thick straight brows were his finest feature. Hatch wasn't a smiling man, yet his face was pleasant. He stood with the easy hip-shot stance of a man accustomed to easing his back from the constant weight of a duty belt laden with gun, nightstick, pepper spray, cuffs, extra magazines for the 9mm, flashlight and other items carried by choice, departmental directive or necessity.

"That's the original torch," Hatch said with pride. "Old Charlie keeps her shined up like new. Charlie's been the Keeper of the Flame forever--maybe thirty years. He keeps the torches lookin' good. Says God sent him to do it. I guess that's as good an explanation as any."

Anna walked around Liberty's first light. Polished and glowing by the good offices of God and Charlie, it was displayed in the monument's base. The torch was of stained glass. Irregularly shaped panes in pale gold, white and ocher licked up like flames. In the old days the torch had burned from within. Its light was feebler but perhaps, Anna thought, admiring the delicate craftsmanship, shone with greater warmth.

Hatch took her to the balcony of the torch room, then up again into the bottom of Liberty herself. First dreamed of in 1865, then built with a skeleton of iron, sinews of rivets and beams and a skin of glowing copper, completed in 1886, she was a greater wonder of modern technology than all the cybermagic of Silicon Valley. Greater because the least mechanical could grasp how it could have been done and yet marvel at the magnitude of the task. The lady could be worshiped in human terms, not gigs and bytes but "How big is it?" and "What does it weigh?"

Skirting of green floated away by the ton, falling in soft folds off massive girders. Leaning back, Anna let her eyes follow the graceful infrastructure upward. An elevator for those who couldn't walk the 354 steps carried visitors to what was called 5-P--the fifth floor within the pedestal. The elevator was an afterthought, the technology born later than Lady Liberty.

Piggybacked into the space next to the main elevator, accessible only by squeezing in

between the main elevator and the iron girders, was a small emergency elevator pod. The pod was later still and looked it: ovoid and sleek and mostly of glass.

It was a tool for law enforcement and emergency medical personnel, Hatch explained as he gallantly gestured her in first, then mashed in next to her. She in her pajamas and he in his gun, they stood close as lovers as the elevator, belying its high-tech exterior, vibrated and jolted upward. Anna was put in mind of the orgasmatron in Woody Allen's *Sleeper* and had to work at not laughing lest she be forced to explain herself.

"S-eight. See, the S is for Statue, the 8 means eight stories up," Hatch said as the elevator jerked to a stop. "From here on we're on foot."

Stepping around an I beam running slantwise across the elevator's exit, Anna eased out. From this height she could see to the lady's neck. Tightly coiled spiral stairs of iron squirreled into the gloom.

"Step aerobics," Hatch said, and started up.

In the higher reaches of the statue, girders closed in, forming partial floors and shadowed recesses joined by girded catwalks. Anna had been to the crown once before, years back, when she'd lived in New York with her husband. Then it had been packed with people. And hot. Mostly she remembered feeling faint and claustrophobic. The journey up had taken over two hours. Tonight, running after Hatch, the climb took minutes.

Breathing hard, they stood before the row of small windows, the jewels in the crown. The room was ten feet wide and seven feet high. The windows, eye level for the five-foot-four-inch Anna, looked out over a piece of Brooklyn to the Verrazano Narrows Bridge at the mouth of the harbor. Behind Anna and Hatch, in the lady's head about where doctors say the personality is located in the human brain, were three spotlights powerful enough to push their rays out from the crown.

They lit up the room till every detail was harsh and clear. It was all of metal and spotlessly clean.

"Gum," Hatch said when Anna commented on it. "The cleaning crews come every night and scrape off gobs of gum."

Graffiti's big too. Kids and not-mature adults get bored standing so long on the stairs and they gotta scribble or scratch on something. Lot of wear and tear, you gotta figure. In summer from ten in the morning till four there'll be twelve to fifteen visitors in this room all the time."

Fifteen. The space felt just comfortable for Anna and three quarters of the beefy policeman.

The appropriate remarks on the view, the structure and the heat of the lights having

been made, they started down. Hatch pointed out the ladder leading to the torch. Access was locked; the torch was Charlie's exclusive domain. Visitors had not been allowed up for over fifty years.

At the top of the pedestal, just below Lady Liberty's feet, where the elevator stopped and visitors pooled, Anna and Hatch went out one of two double doors onto a stone balcony sixty feet above the island. The view back toward Manhattan was spectacular, and hidden as they were in the lee of the statue's skirts out of the wind, they were comparatively warm.

The balcony was protected by a parapet with shallow crenels, like the tower of a medieval castle. Hatch swung his legs through a gap and sat down, feet dangling over space. "The smoking lounge," he told Anna as she came up to lean on the wall beside him. From the breast pocket of his shirt, he removed a foil packet, the kind in which Anna used to carry joints during her misspent youth.

His blunt fingers were surprisingly dexterous, and as he uncurled the edges, Anna couldn't believe he'd be stupid enough to smoke marijuana on duty in front of a stranger.

She was right.

"My cigarette," he said, holding the forlorn crushed object up for inspection. "I used to smoke two packs a day. For the last five years I been down to a pack a month. This is my spot. One a day after I put the lady to bed. Don't smoke at all on my weekends." He looked to see if Anna was laughing at him. She wasn't. She knew the value of ritual in ordering the mind and lending meaning to lost souls. "Gauloises," he told her, indicating the cigarette. "They're French. Kevin gets 'em for me in the city. It's kind of a tribute, see. The lady came from France, and in Paris, they got a little bitty statue just like this one to welcome us when we go over there. That's really something, isn't it? These two ladies facing each other over the ocean welcoming strangers back and forth. I'm going to Paris someday just to see her sister." Hatch lit up, took a drag. Anna stared across the water at the endlessly fascinating hive of humanity that was New York City. To her, the tobacco smelled like smoldering manure, albeit fresh manure, but Hatch seemed to be enjoying it.

She kept him company till he'd smoked it down to where he was about to burn his fingers, then watched as he took a tin the size gourmet hard candies come in from his shirt pocket and opened it. Inside was fine, white sand. "Pinched from the Waldorf-Astoria. Peacock Room, no less. First-class all the way, that's me." Hatch smothered the butt in the sand, capped the tin and put it back in his pocket.

"There go your pals." He nodded in the direction of the harbor between Liberty and Ellis Islands. The party boat was motoring away, trailing sound after it like a bad smell. "Maybe you ought to put those pajamas to work," he said, and Anna laughed. "Somebody oughta be getting some shut-eye."

"You're on till eight in the morning?" Anna asked as he locked up behind them.

"Usually. Today I've got a double shift. I'll be on till five tomorrow."

Anna groaned her sympathy and took her pajamas back to bed.

Anna was persona non grata in the ICU till noon. During the morning hours doctors would be doing things to her sister; things she had to accept on faith as benevolent or make herself crazy. Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center was one of the best in the world, Dr. Madison one of the finest heart and lung specialists in the hospital. There she must enter into a realm where she was not particularly comfortable, that of trust.

After the nocturnal ramblings with James Hatchett, she thought she would be able to sleep in, but a cloudless peach dawn had found her sitting at Patsy's dining table watching ferries drag sleepy Staten Islanders to jobs on Wall Street and beyond.

Unable to remain within the house walls, she had emerged onto Liberty proper around ten a.m. Since ten-thirty she'd been pacing on the top of the old fort, watching the clock for the Liberty IV. Each new Circle Line ferry, bristling with tourists, full to capacity with maybe a thousand people, amazed her. Towns all over the world must stand empty so that Liberty Island might be populated from Memorial Day to Labor Day. There was nothing to "see" at the monument, nothing that in the years since Lady Liberty's completion and the first boatload of tourists hadn't been done better and more efficiently by Walt Disney. Habit and the memory of a dream Americans no longer had was keeping them coming.

But the lady was real. Even these dull-eyed, camera-wielding masses seemed to sense it. Why else would they stand three and four hours in line, inching step by step up the spiral staircase, a double helix of DNA moving along Liberty's spine, for a meager peek at the harbor through the stingy glass jewels in her crown?

Only the day before, much of which Anna had spent on her deteriorating fourth-floor balcony, Patsy had been squiring around a professor from Vermont who made studying overcrowding in America's National Parks part of his life's work; whether it's better to let a lesser number of visitors have a quality experience, or to continue in the democratic practice of letting everyone be disappointed equally. And too, how much love can a limited resource--even one made by talented and industrious Frenchmen--stand?

"Christ," Anna whispered. Perhaps it was lack of sleep that was poisoning her outlook. No; it was the crowds. Hadn't rats, packed too many to a cage, begun to devour one another and commit other antisocial acts? As the herd of tourists pushed by, portions of them or their swinging baggage jostling portions of her anatomy, Anna felt her teeth growing sharper and the urge to bite forming deep within her ratty little soul.

Challenging herself to have at least one unjaundiced thought before lunch, she turned her back on the next wave of humanity and stared over the water toward the Verrazano

Narrows Bridge. The rain was gone. Sun lay on the world like a blessing. Sparkling blue, the harbor belied all rumors of pollution. Sailboats took the place of butterflies, buildings in Brooklyn and Staten Island the place of cliffs and forests, the graceful line of the bridge that of distant mountains.

Grudgingly, Anna admitted it was a glorious sight, stunning and not without magic.

A sharper sound cut through the low-grade fever of noise. It moved out through the crowd like ripples on a pond, a sound every law enforcement officer becomes attuned to. Like a shepherdess listening to her flock and knowing a predator is among them, Anna knew that something alien, hostile, disturbed the visitors. Without making a conscious decision, she ran toward the epicenter of the noise.

Dodging somnambulant tourists, she scattered "Excuse me's" and "Pardons" liberally as she ran across the pedestal. On the Manhattan side of the monument's base the crowd had separated out: a ring of those not understanding, not wishing to get involved, then a space, then a denser ring of well-wishers and ghouls packed together.

"Step back. Back, please. Give them room." Anna recited the official litany as she squeezed through to the inner ring.

Crumpled on the granite was a boy no more than ten years old, from what Anna could see of his face. His little body was sprawled in the awkward way of violent death. Mechanically, she felt for a carotid pulse. CPR didn't even cross her mind.

The kid was wearing a tractor cap, slightly too large and pulled down till it bent the tips of his ears outward. Still, she could see his head had split, burst on impact. The crown of the cap was crushed flat to the eyebrows as if he'd landed squarely on his head. Blood, a single clean-looking fragment of skull bone, and gray matter had been forced out the left temple.

"He jumped," said a scrawny young man in huge denim shorts and a T-shirt that read, "Been There, Wrecked That."

"Naw, man, he was pushed." This from a disembodied adolescent voice behind the first speaker. "That cop shoved him off. I was looking when he did it."

Anna looked up. Twenty yards above them, framed in the gray stone of a shallow crenel, was James Hatchett.

3

Step back. Back, please. Give us room." Anna looked up to see the gray and green of the monument's emergency medical technicians bearing down on her. Out of uniform, out of her own park, her EMT skills redundant, she melted into the crowd.

As the medical technicians closed around the child's corpse, she glanced at the parapet sixty feet above. Hatch was gone.

Curiosity egging her on, it crossed her mind to seek him out, pepper him with questions, but given the circumstances, one evening's acquaintance was not enough to presume upon. For a while--an afternoon, a week, a month, depending on what had actually happened--Hatch would be subjected to interrogation by all and sundry.

Turning her back on the hubbub, she walked toward the dock. Around her, tourists speculated in half a dozen languages as to what had occurred.

A perspiring woman with a toddler in one hand and a hot dog in the other stopped Anna and asked.

"I think a water main broke," Anna told her, and moved on.

Despite the graphic and gory vision she'd been witness to, she was oddly unmoved. Training warned her of post-traumatic stress with its potpourri of delayed reaction miseries, but she doubted that was the case. Over time one did become desensitized. The child's face, the blood and brains on the stone, would be filed away with other like horrors and probably never referred to again unless a similar incident brought them to mind.

Aware of the innate selfishness of the human heart, she realized that the heaviness she was experiencing--a depression that felt more like physical exhaustion than mental disorder--was because the accident had brought death too vividly to the fore: Molly's death, Anna's young husband Zach's death, her own death. With that thought came an unsettling sense of life's being meaningless, either too short or too long.

To her relief, the Liberty IV was motoring up to the quay. She began to run the last fifty feet, an uncomfortable reprise of fleeing Manhattan the day before. Lest she look as haunted as she felt, she forced herself to slow to a walk.

Liberty IV was a trim little ferry with a high snug bridge above a passenger cabin, a square box with padded benches for fifteen or twenty people. A walkway ran between the rail and the cabin from the bow to the flat open area in the stern. There the American flag flew, rain or shine.

Cal Jackson, a black man so skinny his considerable strength seemed to emanate from skeleton rather than muscle, made an unerring toss of the rope, lassoing the thick

wooden upright that supported the dock. No one currently working on Ellis or Liberty, the two parts of the National Monument, had ever seen him miss. Cal never boasted. He just never missed. At first Anna had thought him a young man, but on talking with him had revised her opinion. He looked maybe forty, but he talked of having worked on a fishing boat off Long Island in the early fifties and hiring on as a deckhand on a boat that supplied oil rigs off the coast of Texas in the early sixties after he got out of the Navy. He had to be close to retirement age.

Today Dwight Alvers captained the Liberty IV. Though sunlight and relative solitude tempted her, Anna climbed the short stairs to the bridge.

"Look what the cat drug in," Dwight said, and moved amiably aside to let her squeeze by. Patsy had gotten her in the habit of riding up on the bridge for the trips from island to island. The captains never seemed to mind the company and the view was good. There were two long-legged stools in front of the instrument panel, a radar screen hanging down in the middle of the window over the bow, a walking space no more than thirty-six inches wide, then a deep, butt-high wooden shelf finishing the small cabin. This shelf, with the captain's log and his lunch box, was Anna's favorite place.

Dwight was thick and red-necked. Anna didn't know if his politics fit, but his neck was the color of old brick. Hair bristled blond from creased, burnt-looking skin. His eyes were deep-set beneath brows bleached white. The nose, decidedly too delicate for the beefy face, sat aloof above a wide mouth. Narrow lips and a frown that showed Dwight's genes more than his disposition gave him a forbidding look. The crew cut and single diamond stud in his left ear didn't help.

Today he'd been unmasked. Events conspired to reveal what lurked in the heart of this man.

The console, the instrument panel--whatever one called the dashboard of a boat--was crowded with stuffed animals.

Boneless lions and elephants like the ones that kids called Beanie Babies slouched on the radar screen and peeked from beneath charts. Anna recognized Nola from The Lion King and a crustacean in red velveteen that might have been from The Little Mermaid. Bears were well represented, as were dinosaurs. The keeper of this menagerie was the frail, intellectual-looking child of eight or nine who had been hidden behind Dwight's considerable self.

"What's all the excitement on Liberty?" Dwight asked. "The radio's been jammed with emergency chatter."

Anna looked at the man's son. "Jumper," she said, and left it at that.

Dwight whistled long and low; then he too shelved the subject till little pitchers took their big ears elsewhere.

"My son, Dwight junior," the captain said proudly. Anna and the little boy murmured "Howdoyou do" in unison. "We call him Digby," Dwight said.

"That's so people can tell us apart," Digby volunteered.

"Two peas in a pod, right, son?"

"Two peas."

Cal cast off and Dwight turned his attention to conning the Liberty IV away from the dock and clear of the dredging barge that toiled most hours of every day keeping the boat channel from silting in. Various creatures, animated by Digby, assisted in the process. A turquoise burro rode the top of the wheel, and a grape-colored, forked-tongued beast that more closely resembled a slug than a snake insinuated itself into the crook of Dwight's elbow.

"How come you're not in school?" Anna asked, and was startled at how like her maternal grandmother she sounded.

At the querulous tone, Digby looked injured. "It's summer," he said.

"Monday, Wednesday, Friday Dig usually has piano, but his teacher's sister's having her baby today. C-section. So Dig's come to work with me. Dig's a musician. A regular Liberace."

Digby rolled his eyes and Anna laughed. "Harry Connick Junior?" she offered.

"Maybe..." Clearly Digby didn't want to be pigeonholed this early in his career.

As Manhattan, already formidable, grew to fill the windscreen, Anna watched Digby's zoo wander across Dwight's bridge and felt better than she had since she'd arrived in New York the previous Thursday.

The boat became part of the balletic weave of ships in the harbor. Out the starboard side of the cabin, Anna could see the statue. A helicopter chopped the air over the plaza. No doubt retrieving the dead child. Ahead was the distinctive geometric shape of Ellis Island.

"I was one of the last immigrants through there, did you know that?" Dwight said.

Anna didn't know whether to believe him or not. He liked to string her along to see how long it would take her to get a joke.

The past few days it had been quite a while. Not feeling mentally acute, she just nodded.

"No kidding. I was a little shaver, not more than four years old. I came over from Czechoslovakia with my mom. She was an old widow lady of twenty-two. That was in

1951. We were just about the last folks through."

"I was born here," Digby said proudly. "Right there." Using the tail of an armadillo as a pointer, he indicated most of Brooklyn.

In need of harmless conversation, Anna asked: "Do you remember any of it?"

Dwight shook his head. "Not much. But when I started working here, it was like that baseball guy said, *deja vu* all over again. I'd remember stuff I'd never thought of before. Just little scenes and things. Mom remembers, though. She had to stay out there close to a week. Some kind of paperwork snafu. My grandmother, or the lady that would be my grandmother soon as her son and my mom got married, came out and got me, so I was only there maybe overnight.

"They must have known they were closing up shop soon. The people Mom spent her time with were these old geezers who'd worked Ellis since day one--"

"That'd be fifty-nine years, Daddy. They'd be too old," Digby said.

"Hey, tell it to your grandma. This is her story."

"You tell Gramma," Digby said in a tiny voice only he, Anna and a brown plush turtle heard. Anna gathered that Gramma was a formidable woman.

"Ma came home from that week on Ellis with enough stories to last a lifetime. People born, people hanging 'emselves rather than be sent back to the old country, ghosts and royalty, a lady in the loony bin found dead wearing nothing but her knickers, operas, ball games, this shock treatment machine they rolled from ward to ward, guys falling in love with gals who didn't speak a word of their language, folks with money stuffed in their shoes. Good stuff. There's tapes from lots of immigrants in the library. They got Ma to make one.

"Never make it, Cal," he hollered out the window as the deckhand tossed the rope expertly over a piling. "Cal missed his calling," Dwight said as he cut power and let the Liberty IV drift gently dockside at the Marine Inspection Office in Manhattan. "He should have been a bronc roper."

For Anna's money, the boat trip had been too short. The hospital, the ICU, Molly on tubes and drugs, exercised an uncomfortable polarization. Anna could not bear to be away and couldn't stand being there. Once in either place--at Molly's side or tucked in the city exclosure of Ellis or Liberty--she was okay. In transit, both ends of the journey attracted and repulsed her simultaneously. Time went out of whack, either passing with mind-bending rapidity or creeping by so slowly she could hear her bones shrinking with the onset of old age.

True to expected perversity, the subway ride to the Upper West Side ate up several years of her life. At twelve-thirty she was eating pizza at a stand-up table in a sidewalk