



**BARRY,
HAL,
AND
OLLIE**

A NOVELLA

BY

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Chapter One

“Hey, Barry.”

“Hey, Hal.”

“Hey, Ollie.”

“Any word on the docks?”

“Nah, everybody’s clammed up like usual when it’s a Marscapone thing. But I got eyes and ears there now, something should turn up by the weekend.”

“There’s not any more activity at the usual Baltic Sea ports. I think they’ve gone underground.”

“How has shipping activity remained the same but wire transfers have quadrupled?”

“Maybe it’s just fees and payoffs.”

“That still wouldn’t account for all of it. That money’s got to be coming from somewhere and it’s got to be going somewhere.”

“And all the warehouses were clean?”

“I don’t wanna do that search again. Those places are filthy.”

“Life is filthy, slick.”

"You didn't see these places, Ollie. Some of them hadn't been cleaned out in years -- they're dummy storage, in case somebody comes looking."

"I'll do heat-signature scans in Philly and New York just to make sure. This is a tasty little nugget. Even the little guys wanted me to check it out when I told them it might have something to do with chemical weapons."

"This problem's gonna get a lot worse before it gets better."

"I don't know, Ollie. There are a lot of initiatives out there working for disarmament. I think they're making a lot of headway."

"War is good business, Barry. That's the paradigm that needs to change."

"There are good businessmen in the world too, Ollie."

"Yeah, but they never get anywhere. Those are the guys the bad guys climb on top of to get to the top."

"But there's gotta be more good than bad."

"Ollie's got a point, though, Barry. It's about who's got influence, not how many good guys are second-string."

"I'm gonna go check out a lead I got from the Girlfight Club."

"Dinah told Diana you guys call them that."

"I didn't make it up!"

"Nah, she found it 'amusing.' She was all 'Does Mercury's herald wish to join our fight club for girls?'"

"Aw, man."

"She loves you, slick."

"I'll be back in a few."

Whoosh!

"He's terrified of Diana."

"And you're not?"

"No."

"No? Just . . . no?"

"No."

"Well, I'm not *terrified* of her, I just choose my battles."

"She looks down on men, Ollie, and she uses her empathy for people as a weapon. I'm not afraid of her, I feel sorry for her. She just wants to fit in, but she doesn't know how superior she can come off."

"I guess."

"Did you really hit Barry with a boxing-glove arrow during one of the training exercises?"

"He told you?"

"The recruits have been talking about it."

"I was trying to make a point about timing, about how you can beat even great speed with timing. I should've let Barry in on it."

"He thinks you disrespect him."

"I don't disrespect him! I just want him to . . . loosen up, see alternate perspectives on things."

"So you hit him with an arrow."

"Sure loosened his ass up that day."

"He's a good guy, Ollie."

"I know, Hal. He's a saint."

"Don't be an ass."

"You don't be an ass."

Seconds pass; grass grows; traffic flows.

"So, timing?"

"Yeah, timing and . . . Barry has tells. Whenever he's gonna change direction, he does jukes, like an NFL running back."

"He does?"

"Yeah. It's sort of funny. No one's going to be able to tackle him."

"But how do you see the jukes?"

"Well, when he's comin at ya, there are like these waves of energy in his aura, ya know? When he starts and stops, the waves ripple. Here he comes now. Hey, Barry."

“Hey, Ollie. Hey, Hal.”

“You find anything?”

“I didn’t expect to find much. Just checking out a congressman’s office files for unusual activity on Baltic issues. I’ll do more in the morning. I’m tired and starving. Are we fine with our presentation tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I’ll finish it up tonight. Go get some sleep.”

“See you guys.”

Zip!

“Ripples in his aura?”

“Little ripples, yeah.”

“You’re a freak.”

“Don’t tell my mama.”

Chapter Two

“Hey, Barry.”

“Hey, Hal.”

“Hey, Ollie.”

“Time synchronized?”

“8:30”

“Same.”

“Alright, I’m gonna go take position up top. When the van arrives, wait for them to make contact before we move in.”

“Do you need a sweep first?”

“Nah, I’ve been scanning since we got here. No new players.”

“Alright, see ya, Hal.”

“Fly right, buddy.”

“Say, Ollie?”

“What’s up, slick?”

“Could I ask you a question . . . a question about Dinah?”

“I’ll do the best I can. What’s going on?”

“Well I had a mission team-up with her a couple of weeks back and she, I don’t know . . . she . . . it’s probably something I shouldn’t worry about. God knows she clears as many cases as Jesus.”

“What’s going on, Barry?”

“So, we get into this warehouse, we get the drop on our guys, but then she, like, holds me back. I didn’t know what was going on. She goes in there and goes into this whole damsel-in-distress act.”

“Oh yeah, that’s a classic.”

“So then the guys start to get handsy with her and start to ask her for favors to thank them, right? And then, WHAM, she lets ‘em have it! End of story, case closed, and I’m clean-up, right?”

“Yeah, so you got a share of the collar, didn’t you?”

“No, that’s not it, it’s just . . . we could’ve had those guys dead to rights, but she stops me to . . . I don’t know . . . to play a game? Like, I know she’s got her whole schtick about going undercover and catching people off-guard and I get that and she’s a master at it.”

“Yeah, it’s more than a schtick.”

“You’re right, it’s a craft, and I get it, but . . . I don’t know. Is it cool for her to be having fun out there? I mean, is that . . . something to worry about?”

“Well, she’s not having fun, Barry. Dinah’s what you might call a . . . a morality compass.”

“A morality compass?”

“Yeah, a morality compass. Like, she’s trying to see what’s inside a person’s soul, you know? And if you’re found lacking, she metes out her own . . . special . . . punishment.”

“But . . . but, is that our job? Aren’t we just supposed to catch the bad guys?”

“I don’t know, Barry, what is our job? And what gives the right of the people who do mete out punishment to mete it out?”

“They go to law school. They become judges and congressmen.”

“Well, Dinah’s been to the only law school that counts. Her whole life’s been preparing her for this.”

“Look, I know she’s got a lot of stuff going on and I . . . I’m fine with whatever she needs to do to be as high-quality an operative as she is. Like, whatever she has to do is fine, but . . . I just get concerned when it seems like the act isn’t just an act, you know?”

“Barry—“

“I’m just afraid that the little things I’ve always suspected about her are getting worse.”

“Barry, listen—“

“Like, I get the whole wig thing. I get that she’s using the ‘blonde bombshell’ stereotype to psych out her enemies, and it works you know? It *works*. But beneath it, it always seemed like there was something *real* there. Some real *hatred* for herself, maybe the part of her that couldn’t *be* that blonde, I don’t know.”

“No, Barry, it’s not—It’s complicated. I’m gonna tell you something only because I can tell . . . I can tell you really care about her, and I respect that. I respect anyone else who can see in her what I see in her.”

“She’s my first-choice mission team.”

“I know. I saw your reports. The thing is, Barry, Dinah *is* a real blonde.”

“What are you talking about? I’ve seen her take off the wig.”

“No, what you see under the wig is not her hair.”

“She wears two wigs?”

“No, she dyes her hair black.”

“What? She dyes her blonde hair black and then puts on a blonde wig?”

“That’s where she gets her name from. Canaries are yellow.”

“But what does that . . . what does that mean? Which is the act?”

“I told you. It’s complicated. Listen, you can’t tell *anybody*.”

“Okay.”

“I mean it.”

“*Okay*.”

“I’m only telling you because most people . . . most people when they talk about Dinah it’s always like they’re so impressed you know because she’s . . . you know, she’s pretty intimidating . . . physically.”

“I know what you mean.”

“I mean, like, Iris is gorgeous, Barry. Don’t get me wrong.”

"I know. I know what you mean."

"So when people talk about her it's always like they can't believe that this blonde bimbo can kick so much ass, you know?"

"Bimbo?"

"Yeah, that's what she's going for. Bimbo. Not bombshell."

"I always thought 'bombshell.'"

"Bombshell is more like Betty Grable or Jayne Mansfield. You know, with the long flowing dresses?"

"Got it."

"But people really believe that about her. That she dresses that way because she's just easy. It can be hurtful."

"I'm sure."

"But I've never sensed that with you. You don't judge her. I respect that."

"How many people know?"

"Just you, me, and her mom, now."

"Not even Hal?"

"Not even Hal."

Silence sharpens the moment to a speedy resolution.

"Hey Barry, I'm sorry about the glove thing."

"Don't even worry about it—that was amazing. There's our guy."

"But you—"

"I'm getting into position. All mics are on."

"Ollie, can you get a bead on them?"

"I've got eyes on threeee . . . four, now. I can take them out one by one or with one shot."

"Alright stand by on that. Barry, go ahead and start tapping the lines from here to Port 19. That's as far as I see activity."

"Hal, Barry says Dinah's been expressing herself creatively again."

“Oh man, she should sell tickets. Remember San Francisco?”

“Ha! She had that man crying real tears.”

“She’s an artist—wait, he just started dialing . . . on my mark, set . . . *GO!*”

Chapter Three

“Hey, Barry.”

“Hey, Hal.”

“Where’s Ollie?”

“He’s gonna catch up later. How’s it look?”

“Pretty dead. I think they found out they were made and are transitioning.”

“Oh, where they don’t just stop so we know they made us, but just slowly trickle off?”

“The North Front Boys are new to the international trade, but you gotta give ‘em credit for going with the fundamentals before getting fancy.”

“So what’s their next move? They absorb and then redistribute local, right? Cut off larger ties?”

“If they’re smart. I don’t know how smart they are. I haven’t been able to key in on Marscapone’s motivations yet.”

“I know, right? I thought it was the wife for the longest, but she’s as clean as a whistle. Most boring tail I’ve done in years. She paints . . . all day.”

“No living family, heir to a tire fortune, no outstanding childhood trauma, doesn’t participate in power grabs . . . He ships in raw materials for expensive goods, but also ships in cheap pre-manufactured goods . . . ? And what does that have to do with the chemical and industrial centers?”

“You detected any pathologies?”

“No. He’s inconsistent with his discipline. I guess he thinks he’s keeping his people on their toes.”

“Listen, I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“What’s going on?”

“I just wanted to tell you my thinking . . . my thinking on Ollie has changed.”

“There he is now.”

“Where?”

“On the next rooftop over. You seem him climbing down the fire escape?”

“Oh yeah, I see him. I guess now’s not such a good time.”

“I never knew what the big deal was anyway.”

“You know what the big deal was, I told you a million times. The guy—I thought the guy just tried too hard, you know. Too hard to be the ‘hip’ one.”

“I just never saw it.”

“You never saw it? You never saw how he’s always trying to pull people into his conversations, seeing if he can push their buttons? He always has to be the center of attention.”

“Ollie likes people. He likes to see what makes them tick.”

“You’re always—!” Barry stopped short, knowing what was ahead.

“What? Defending him? Is that what you were going to say? You’re starting to sound like Iris, Barry.”

“Do you know I once saw him carrying his lunch down the hall looking for people to talk to because the lunch room was empty? What kind of guy—“

“You saw Ollie carrying his lunch down the hall? Was he headed towards Dinah’s office?”

“Well, I didn’t see him personally—“

“Is someone *gossiping* about Ollie? What is this, third grade?”

“Hey, Barry. Hey, Hal.”

“Hey, Ollie.”

“Those fire escapes aren’t up to code. Which is a drag because the only reason these people put Paloma into office was because he was raised in this neighborhood and he said he cared.”

"I went to college with Paloma. He didn't act like he was from this neighborhood."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"He didn't act . . . you know . . ."

"No . . . what?"

"Poor."

"Hm. Well, he was. And I worked on his campaign. And now I'm going to have him clear his morning for me tomorrow. How's it look?"

"Pretty dead. If they're more than fifteen minutes late this time I don't think it's happening."

"Cool. I've got work to do tonight anyway. Where am I set up?"

"Third building over. Behind the gargoyle."

"You know those things are supposed to ward off evil spirits?"

"Are you feeling warded off?"

"Hell, no. My spirit's as light as fletching."

"Stay safe."

"Stay safe, Ollie."

A masked vigilante is seen scurrying across rooftops.

"The point I'm trying to make is that I've been seeing another side to him, that's all. He's starting to make a little more sense to me."

"Bruce is such an asshole. Big scary monster in his pointy hat."

"Why're you bringing Bruce into this?"

"Because I know Bruce is the only person who would read that much detail into something as insignificant as someone walking down the hall carrying their lunch. Plus I know you've been working with him a lot lately. I know how you guys like to geek out with your *CSI* toys."

"The point I was trying to make is that I'm . . . I'm good with you and Ollie's friendship. I'm finally getting good with it."

"Thanks for the approval."

"That's not what I mean."

Hal swooped into the air; all law-abiding and sky-cop.

“They *should* pay attention.”

“What?”

“People should pay attention to us. We defend them. We protect them. They should know who we are. And we should know each other better.”

And with that he was off, like a guardian of all creation.

“I know you, Hal.”

Chapter Four

“Hey, Barry.”

“Hey, Hal.”

“Hey, Ollie.”

“Where’s the mark?”

“Inside the Lincoln.”

“I like when I get to drive the fancy cars.”

“If he doesn’t step out to call for a new driver, remember to give the signal.”

“I always remember to give the signal.”

“You never give the signal, Ollie.”

“You *never* give the signal, Ollie.”

“I give . . . ‘signals.’ My technique is very nuanced.”

“Why don’t you just say that you forget them?”

“Why don’t you just say that you’re an asshole?”

“The signal is a tip of the cap with a wink.”

“That’s pretty elaborate.”

"It is literally one gesture."

"Every time we make the signal something too simple, you say you did it and we missed it."

"Most of those times you did."

"Why do we make him inside man?"

"Because I got the skills, slick. And I know the lingo."

"I *know* the lingo . . . I'm just . . . "

"You don't come off as natural as you'd wanna."

"He's just gotta work on his delivery, that's all. And he's gotta love it. You gotta love being that person, brother. That's when it feels natural. When you love being in that skin."

"The way I was raised . . . I guess I tried pretty hard to fit in with one crowd, and . . . never gave much thought to the other groups."

"Well they were out there. Trying to fit in themselves. Sometimes not knowing how."

"I got a card from those kids we rescued from that 'summer camp' for underprivileged youth. Remember Big Boy and Lorenzo?"

"Aw, *man*. Remember that dance they'd always do?"

"To this day it's the funniest thing I've ever seen."

"I was Lorenzo's advocate. They were great kids."

"That's *right*. You did take him through the system. Did he ask you to take him to McDonald's?"

"For every meal. I don't where he put it."

"He says he gives it to Big Boy."

"How are they doing?"

"Big Boy got a job as a teacher's aide. He thinks Lorenzo might need a little help with some guys from the neighborhood. He asked if we'd look into it."

"I have a lot of faith in those boys."

From a distance you can see smoke rising from the rooftops.

"We're never gonna get anywhere if we don't agree on a signal."

"How about a yawn?"

“No, we can’t make it any bodily functions because you forget and just do them.”

“That only happened twice.”

“Three times.”

“You weren’t even *there* the third time!”

“I was there literally three-fourths of a second after it happened.”

“How about I reach into the glove compartment?”

“Fine.”

“Do you have your gloves?”

“I’ll stash some.”

“Do you have the cell with the transceiver?”

“Don’t they scan for that sort of thing on their compound?”

“You won’t make it on to the compound.”

“You don’t think so?”

“They don’t let new guys see the compound. As soon as he doesn’t get a call back clearing you, he’s gonna have you drop him off at the bus stop.”

“They take buses?”

“That’s how they lose tails and bugs. They control the routes and the drivers, so whenever they’re at a stop they get picked up right away, and they take them to either their destination or they transfer at one of those big transit centers.”

“That’s something else Paloma was supposed to look into. Upgrading those transit centers. He gave a whole presentation about taking public transportation into the future. What a load of bull!”

“The package is coming down the elevator. You remember the signal?”

“A tip of the morning and a smile.”

“How in God’s name have you lived this long?”

“I was born under a lucky star. We’ll work it out, slick.”

And with that, our brave hero disappears over the rooftop, the sun glistening off a dashing smile.

"I'm getting into position."

"Aren't you worried at all?"

"He'll be fine."

"Are you sure?"

"He just likes to mess with you."

"How do you know?"

"He's taking off his gloves. *On my mark . . .*"

Chapter Five

"Hey, Barry."

"Where's Hal?"

"He's gonna catch up later. How's it look?"

"The same. There's a lot of activity, but most of it's just offloading and uploading ground transport."

"We'll know the ships are gonna be comin' in when the longshoremen start comin' out of Georgie's Pub."

"Man, those guys can put it away."

"Some pigeons built a nest in the *u* of Georgie's sign."

Time flies.

"I don't like to eat alone."

"What?"

"Most everything else I don't mind doing alone, but there's something about eating alone . . . When I got back to the world, I had to make . . . I had to make certain kinds of adjustments."

"I understand."

“For my emotional . . . “

“I get it.”

“Certain memories, you don’t know why you can’t let go, you know?”

“I do.”

“So, before I got back to the world, when I *would* eat, I would have, sort of, conversations with people.”

“That understandable.”

“Yeah, except, they weren’t pleasant people and they weren’t real. I knew that. But they were cruel, evil, vindictive. The type of people who when you mess up they always tell you they told you so because it just confirms the view they already had of the world. Really small, petty people. I guess you could say they were not the good parts of me. And eating got to be . . . when you’re alone, the only thing you’ve got to look forward to is eating and sleeping. You wait to eat, you eat, then sleep, then wake up and go back on the hunt so you can eat again. So when eating got to be . . . difficult, it really made you wonder what was the point, you know? Like, why am I living if there’s no joy in life? When I was doing something like hunting or building, this was never a problem, but when I would sit down and have nothing to listen to but the waves . . .the waves started to have . . . I don’t know . . . voices. Anyway, I like company when I eat now.”

“Makes sense.”

“Maybe.”

The sound of a hundred rushes being swept over a cobblestone floor.

“I don’t like to sleep in the dark.”

“You don’t like to . . . “

“I don’t mean I need to have a light shining over me, I just have to be able to see a light on in the house somewhere. It was pitch black when my mom—”

“You don’t have to explain. So how does Iris . . . ?”

“She says she’s gotten used to it. She always leaves the hall light on if she goes to bed after me. She says she can’t go to bed in the dark now either.”

“That’s love.”

“I guess.”

“You didn’t have to tell me . . . “

"I did it for me. I've been forgetting who I am recently. Usually my wife is good for keeping me accountable to myself but . . . I've gotten better at hiding from her."

"What's that you always say about marriage?"

"It's the one place where you don't have to hide anything, I know. And I don't. I know in my mind that Iris would accept anything I did and still love me but . . . who wants a wife in love with a loser? I want her to be proud to be in love with me. And if she sees I'm not the man she thought she was, it's just gonna diminish it."

"Sounds like marriage is a lot of pressure."

"It is, but . . . it's a good pressure. It's pressure you put on yourself to be a good person, not just for yourself but for somebody else, somebody you care about."

"I don't think I need the state giving me a piece of paper to do all that."

"It's not about the state. The state is a proxy. It's an institution that two people are declaring themselves accountable to. But it's not for the state's sake. It's a statement you make to each other."

"Yeah but we can make a statement to each other alone eating Chinese."

"It's not the same. And believe me, women know it's not the same. No matter what they tell you, no matter how cool they seem, they know it's not the same."

"I know."

"You sound like you're thinking about something."

"It's not me. I'd do anything for Dinah. I'm just not sure she's ready for that . . . kind of commitment."

"You're making the decision for her."

"Trust me. If Dinah ever tied the knot, she'd put an immense amount of pressure on herself to be the kind of wife she would admire, you know? And I just don't think she'd handle that pressure very well at this point in her life."

"Well there's never a point in your life when a switch turns on."

"That'd be nice."

"Sometimes taking the leap turns the switch on for you."

"I could see that."

"It's taken some adjustment for me to get to know you, Ollie. We . . . interact with people in different ways. I've never been the type . . . I've never been the type of person who attracts a crowd."

“That’s because you’re always running away from them.”

“That not what I mean.”

“That’s not what I mean. I’m not talking about your speed. I’m talking about your comfort zone. Whenever you do start to attract a crowd, you make up some excuse to disperse it.”

“No . . . “

“Your problem is, Barry, you don’t ‘count’ the people who are paying attention. You’re looking so hard for *certain* people to pay attention, that you’re ignoring everybody else. The little people. But there’s a lot of them.”

“That makes me sound . . . Hollywoody.”

“Have you ever wanted to be a star?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.”

“Well figure it out and then start owning it. Life’s too short.”

A short life ends somewhere, too soon.

“I don’t know how you started up with the ‘slick’ thing, by the way.”

“It’s . . . just a nickname, Barry.”

“I’ve got a nickname. It feels disrespectful.”

“You’re a tightass, dude.”

“And you’re a hippie. So what’s your point?”

“Alright, Barry, I’m gonna let that go. You deserve the respect befitting your station, noble sir.”

“I know I do. Say, do you and Hal talk trash about what a boring husband I am?”

“I do because I’m insecure. But Hal’s always defending your life choices, actually.”

“Really? Hal?”

“Really.”

“I’d think he’d be the last person to . . . he’s never been one for the long-term thing.”

“Doesn’t mean he’s not looking for it.”

“Yeah, but you can always tell yourself there’s someone else and then you’ll never settle on anyone. You can search forever.”

“And it’s a big universe.”

Chapter Six

“Hey, Barry.”

“Hey, Hal.”

“Hi, Dinah.”

“Hi, Diana.”

“Are you guys all caught up?”

“You and Diana go in hard and Barry and I scope out which way the rats scatter.”

“Get a lock on all cell-phone activity after the bust. One of them’s got to call the ship’s captain to tell him not to come in to port.”

“Check.”

“Diana and I will go up top and survey aerially. Dinah, you can take position on the cat’s walk.”

“Nah, those things make me nervous. I’ll take the crow’s nest.”

“Suit yourself. Barry, watch Dinah’s six while she’s making her climb, then meet me at the fish market entrance.”

“Copy.”

Barry and Dinah

“So Diana said she and Bruce are going to work on deciphering the North Front hard drives we recovered?”

“Sure. ‘Deciphering.’”

“What? Bruce and Diana—?”

“I’m just playing with you. I have no idea what’s up between those two.”

“You two and your billionaire playboy boyfriends. Real men have mortgages.”

“Ollie’s not . . . I think he’s just a millionaire,” Dinah said, sheepishly.

“Really? Is that what you just said? *Just* a millionaire?”

“Anyway, I didn’t know who Ollie was when I met him.”

“Yeah, but it’s the type. Women like you and Diana only date guys that can make your head spin.”

“Ollie is nothing like Bruce.”

“You know what I mean. Wine ‘em and dine ‘em types. Razzle-dazzle ‘em.”

“Ollie didn’t razzle-dazzle me. He took me for hot dogs on our first date.”

“Hot dogs from where?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“He flew you to Coney Island, didn’t he?”

“You need to stop being so judgmental.”

“Just callin’ em like I see ‘em.”

“And what about you three?”

“What about us?”

“You think I can’t see what’s going on, here? You’re trying to fit round pegs into square holes. You think you guys might make a good combo but the reason Hal is friends with you is not the same reason he’s friends with Oliver. You’re all in it for entirely different reasons.”

“And what are those?”

“You fight against anything that proves a threat to women or children. You protect the family. With Hal, it’s anything that threatens law and order. Whatever the law is, that’s Hal’s sacred duty. With Ollie, it’s any sort of social injustice. He can’t stand seeing the little guy get screwed. All three of you,

really excellent at what you do, but all in it for different reason. I don't know how you think you're gonna be able to find chemistry."

"Men don't find 'chemistry.'"

"What?"

"Chemistry is just a term women came up with to use when they don't want to sleep with ugly dudes. We either get results or we don't. That's what's going on here."

"Alright, Barry. You know, you're kinda sexy when you get all insensitive."

"I know it. Why do you think I learned to run so fast?"

"To run from the ladies?"

"The fellas, too. I'm pretty."

"Oh my God, you are a cornball."

"You're clear. I'm gonna scout sightlines and then rendezvous with Hal."

"Keep a weather eye."

"Watch your cover."

Hal and Diana

"Sorry you got my detail. You have good first-engagement vision."

"Why would you feel the need to apologize?"

"I know you're not my biggest fan."

"Where does that come from?"

"I've messed up enough of the relationships in my life with women to recognize the firm but passive way you all express disdain."

"It's not disdain, it's . . . bewilderment. I am saddened that you cleave so religiously to this masculine notion of acquiring sexual conquests."

"What? This has nothing to do with work?"

"This has everything to do with work."

“Yeah, but I thought this had to do with you just not giving me credit for my battlefield skills. This is a personal thing?”

“I do not understand the distinction.”

“What business is it of yours who I sleep with?”

“It’s a mark of your character. If you fall so easily for such a tired narrative, I am suspect about your abilities to engage with our enemies on a . . . sophisticated level, strategically.”

“What narrative?”

“You know the one.”

“Which one?”

“The one about what a real man is. About how many notches he can put on his . . . bedding?”

“Bed post.”

“That makes more sense.”

“Diana, I want you to know that I . . . first, that I’m embarrassed that my . . . sexual life is so . . .”

“Obvious?”

“Damn. Is that what it is?”

“You have an intentionality when you are sexually aroused. But it’s only with *new* women.”

“Second, who I sleep with has nothing to do . . . has nothing to do with being a real man. I do it because . . . it’s more about being a real person. It’s hard to explain.”

“It’s more about proving you were there.”

“It’s more about having some evidence I ever existed. It’s hard to explain.”

“It’s about leaving a legacy.”

“I can’t help feeling that when I’m gone, there’ll nothing left to remember me by. Like, when I’m gone, all memory of me will just . . . disappear. I guess I just wanna . . . make sure people will remember me. I know, I’m probably not explaining myself very well.”

“So you engage in an act that reaffirms life. Except you’re not doing it to procreate.”

“It’s hard to explain.”

“Take stock of your intentions, Hal. I do not hold you in disdain, but rather in the greatest respect. I am just . . . bewildered by you.”

“Fair enough. You’re clear. I’m gonna scout sightlines and then rendezvous with Barry.”

“Eye on the horizon.”

“Keep your cover clear.”