



DRAKE AND VOSS PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS

# The Map of C.

*a 321Lumina.com book*



by Blurt Snodgrass

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*A Drake & Voss Novella*

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## Chapter One

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She arrived on a Monday in March, the first real spring day — the kind that made the city look freshly considered, the light doing something generous with the bay and the white buildings and the green of the hills that had been soaked through all winter.

Marta Freed was sixty-three. She carried nothing except a small notebook and the composure of someone who had already done the hard work of grief and was now in the portion that came after — not healed, not resolved, but arrived at the place where you could function in the grief rather than being consumed by it. She wore her hair in a grey braid, practical shoes, a coat that had been good once and had become comfortable. She looked at the office the way people looked at a space they were deciding about.

She decided.

She sat down.

"My husband died fourteen months ago," she said. "His name was Oren. We were married twenty-seven years."

"I'm sorry," Flora said.

Marta received this. "We were both cartographers. We met at a conference in 1987 and argued about projection methods and went to dinner and never quite stopped." A pause that had something fond in it. "He made maps professionally — survey work, mostly, land trusts, conservation projects. But he also made private maps. Places that mattered to him. He had a particular style for them, different from his professional work — more feeling in the line, you'd say. The contours placed not for accuracy but for — love is the right word. For love of the place."

"How many did he make?" Flora asked.

"Eleven. I have ten." She looked at the notebook in her lap. "After he died I went through his papers. There was a journal he'd kept — not personal, more a professional log, notes on projects. In the margin of one page, something he'd written to himself." She opened the notebook and turned it to face Flora, a single line copied out in careful handwriting:

*The map of C. is the one I should have shown her.*

Flora looked at it.

"You don't know where C. is," she said.

"No."

"Or what it means that he should have shown you."

"No." Marta's voice was steady. "I know that he didn't show me. I know there was something he thought about showing me and decided not to, or didn't find the moment for, or —" She stopped. "I don't know which. That's partly what I want to find." She looked at the cork board. "I want the map. It's the last thing of his I don't have. But I also want to understand the line." She paused. "He was a man who was careful about what he kept. If he wrote that, he meant it. And I'd like to know what it meant."

Flora looked at her.

"Ms. Freed," she said. "If we find the map, we may find other things. Things he chose not to show you."

"I know that," Marta said. "I've thought about that for fourteen months." She met Flora's gaze. "We had a good marriage. I believe that entirely. If there was something he didn't show me, it wasn't because we didn't trust each other." She paused. "But there are things you don't show people not because of trust but because of — time. Or courage. Or because you want to protect them from something and you haven't quite worked out whether the protection is for them or for you." She looked at the notebook. "He ran out of time to work it out."

"All right," Flora said. "Tell me everything you know about his private maps."

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Nancy wrote: *Marta Freed. 63. Cartographer. Husband Oren, deceased 14 months.*

In the margin: *map of C.*

Below that: *clear today. Good start.*

She looked at what she'd written. Read it back. Then she wrote the time beside the margin note, the way she always did, and turned her attention to what Marta Freed was saying about the eleven maps she had and the one she didn't.

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## Chapter Two

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The eleven maps Marta had were of: a canyon in Utah where Oren had done his first solo survey work in 1979; the house he'd grown up in, in Flagstaff, drawn from memory in 1994 after his parents moved away; three separate maps of the Marin headlands at different seasons; a stretch of the Sacramento River delta; the neighborhood in the Richmond where he and Marta had lived for twelve years before moving to the Sunset; and four others — a beach in Baja, a forest in Oregon, a volcanic field in New Mexico, a small bay in Washington state.

"All the private maps," Marta said, "are places he spent significant time. Not just visited. Lived in, for a while. Survey work usually." She paused. "The earliest is 1979. The latest is 2018."

"Is there a gap?" Flora asked.

Marta looked at the list she'd brought. She had known Flora would ask.

"1984 to 1987," she said. "The period before we met. He had private maps for the late seventies and early eighties, and then there's a gap, and then they start again in 1987 — one of the Marin headlands is from the autumn we met." She paused. "Which means C. is almost certainly from 1984 to 1987. Which means I don't know anything about where he was or what he was doing during those years."

Flora looked at her.

"You never asked?" she said. Not a judgment — a genuine question.

"I asked," Marta said. "Early on. He said he'd done some survey work in the southwest, that it was interesting country, that he'd tell me about it sometime." She looked at the notebook. "Sometime never came. And after a while I stopped asking because he'd stopped finding the moment and I didn't want to push." She paused. "I know how that sounds."

"It sounds like a marriage," Flora said.

Marta looked at her. "Yes," she said. "It does."

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Nancy found the project records in three days.

She had the dates — 1984 to 1987 — and Marta had given her Oren's professional associations, the land trusts he'd worked with, the conservation organizations. Nancy worked through them with the methodical patience of her archive work, the professional contacts, the thirty years of a court stenographer's accumulated network now deployed in an unexpected direction.

On the third day she found a reference in the records of a land trust based in Tucson — a survey project in 1985 in an unincorporated community in Cochise County, Arizona. The surveyor listed was Oren Freed.

She looked up the community.

Cascabel, Arizona. Population approximately sixty. Situated in the San Pedro River Valley, in the Sonoran Desert, between the Rincon Mountains and the Galiuro Mountains. Known among birders and naturalists. Unknown to most everyone else.

C.

She wrote it on the notepad. Looked at it.

Then she wrote it again in the margin, in the shorthand, and looked at that too.

Both versions said the same thing.

Good day, she thought. Clear.

She brought it to Flora.

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## Chapter Three

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Flora went to Cascabel on a Wednesday.

It was a twelve-hour drive — she could have flown to Tucson and driven two hours, but she wanted the drive. She wanted the approach. She wanted to arrive at a place the way Oren Freed had arrived at it in 1985, overland, the landscape becoming itself slowly, the desert announcing itself at the edge of the Mojave and deepening as she drove east and south through a country that was large enough to make most concerns feel appropriately sized.

She left on Tuesday evening and drove through the dark to Willcox, where she slept four hours in a motel that smelled of highway and air conditioning, and woke before dawn and drove the last two hours as the sun came up over the desert, the Dragoon Mountains turning from purple to pink to the specific orange of a sky that had no clouds to complicate it.

She found Cascabel on a road that didn't look like it led anywhere and turned out to lead everywhere. The San Pedro River ran at the bottom of a shallow valley, lined with cottonwoods that were just beginning to green up, and on the benches above the river were small houses and large spaces and the particular silence of a place where people had chosen to be rather than ending up.

She had a name and an address from the land trust records.

Felix Arroyo. A house at the end of a road with no name.

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Back on Clement Street, in the office above the dry cleaner, Nancy made coffee and then made tea and drank the tea and looked at the cork board.

*Marta Freed. 63. Cartographer. Husband Oren, dec.*

The map of C.

She had found it. She had found that C. was Cascabel, Arizona, a dot in the Sonoran Desert, a land trust survey in 1985. She had given Flora the name and the address and the drive time and Flora had said *good work* and *I'll leave Tuesday evening* and *can you hold the office*.

Nancy had said yes.

She was holding the office.

It was the first time in two years that Flora had been gone overnight.

Nancy sat at her desk and looked at the notepad and thought about this.

It was not a worrying thought. Flora had been overnight before — cases in Sacramento, a trip to Portland, the Fresno drive last November. The office had been held before. Nancy had held it. She was holding it now.

She was fine.

She picked up her pen and wrote the date and the time and *Flora: Willcox overnight. Cascabel Wednesday*. She wrote it in the margin next to the case notes.

She looked at what she'd written.

She read it back.

She put the cap on her pen.

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The thing about the managing was that it was invisible from the outside.

That was the point of it. That was the work.

Nancy had developed, over the past two years — over longer than that, she knew, but two years was when the work had become effortful rather than automatic — a set of systems layered inside her existing systems. The existing systems: the dated, timed, margined notes. The archive. The shorthand. The thirty years of professional discipline that had made her precise at things other people left to chance.

The new systems: reading the margin twice before continuing. Writing the date on every page, not just the first. Keeping the notepad in the same place on the desk, always, the alignment unchanged. Checking the coat hooks — her hook, the right hook — whenever she entered the office.

Small things.

The small things held the larger things.

She knew this. She had known people, in her years in courtrooms, in the legal and administrative architecture of the city, who had held themselves with the same small-thing discipline, who had maintained function through sheer meticulous attention to the infrastructure of daily life, and she had watched them do it with the respect of someone who recognized real work.

She was doing it now.

She was, she believed, doing it well.

What she did not know — what she had not found a way to know — was how long she could continue to do it without saying so. Without saying: I am doing this. Without saying: there are days.

She had written *tell Flora* twice in the margin of the notepad since November.

She had not told Flora.

She looked at the notepad.

She was fine today. Clear today. The case notes read back accurately. The margin said what she'd written in it. The coat was on the right hook.

She picked up her pen and wrote one more thing in the margin, below the case notes.

*Tell Flora.*

She looked at it.

She tore the page out carefully, along the perforation, so that the facing page showed nothing. She folded it once and put it in her pocket.

She made a second cup of tea.

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## Chapter Four

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Felix Arroyo's house was adobe, old in the way that desert buildings were old — not crumbling, not preserved, simply present, the same color as the earth around it, as though it had decided to grow there rather than be built.

The garden was extraordinary.

Not formal — not the kind of garden that announced itself as a garden, with beds and borders and the human geometry of right angles. It was a garden that had been accumulating for decades, a garden that had evolved in conversation with the desert rather than against it. Palo verde and ironwood and the specific grey-green of creosote. A saguaro that had been there long before the house. Beds of desert wildflowers, some already blooming, orange and yellow and a purple Flora didn't know the name for. In the middle of it all, under a mesquite tree that was just coming into leaf, a table and two chairs and a man in his mid-seventies reading something in the morning light.

He looked up when he heard her car.

He was seventy-four, which Flora had known, but seventy-four in the desert looked different from seventy-four in the city — leaner, more weathered, the face organized by sun and years into something that had stopped negotiating with time and simply inhabited it. Dark eyes, white hair, the hands of someone who had spent decades in this garden.

He looked at her without getting up.

"Ms. Voss," he said.

She had called ahead.

"Mr. Arroyo," she said. "Thank you for agreeing to see me."

"Sit down," he said. He indicated the other chair. "I made coffee. Are you a coffee person or a tea person?"

"Coffee," she said.

He poured from a pot that had been sitting in the sun. Desert coffee, she would think later — the taste of it was strong and slightly sweet and entirely specific, the kind of taste that would exist only in this garden, in this light, at this hour.

"You said on the phone," he said, "that you were looking for a map."

"Yes," Flora said. "A map of this place. Made in 1985 by a man named Oren Freed."

Felix Arroyo looked at his coffee cup.

"Oren," he said.

He said it the way Theodore Brant had said *Consolation Reyes* — carefully, like testing whether the name still sounded right. Like a name you had not said aloud in some time.

"He died," Flora said. "Fourteen months ago."

Felix was quiet.

"I know," he said. "I saw the obituary."

"His wife hired me," Flora said. "Marta. She has all his private maps except one."

"The map of Cascabel," Felix said.

"Yes."

He looked at the garden. The saguaro stood against the desert behind it like something that had decided to make its point slowly, over a century or more. The wildflowers moved in a small morning wind.

"He made it the last week he was here," Felix said. "September 1985. He spent a week drawing it — we'd go out in the mornings, I'd show him places, and he'd sit with his board and his pens and I'd wait and watch him work." He paused. "He drew the way other people pray. Very still. Very inside something."

"What kind of places?" Flora asked.

"The springs," Felix said. "The ruins. There's an old homestead site north of here, adobe walls still standing, I don't know how many years. The bend in the river where the cottonwoods flood in spring and the herons nest.

The ridge where you can see four mountain ranges at once." He looked at the table between them. "The places that are the heart of a place. The things you'd show someone if you wanted them to understand where they were."

Flora sat with that.

"How long were you and Oren —" she started.

"Three years," he said. "On and off. The way things were then. He came for the survey and he stayed through the summer and then he went back to the city and came back the following spring and stayed again." He paused. "And then he met someone."

"Marta."

"He wrote me," Felix said. "1987. He said he'd met someone at a conference and she was a cartographer too and they'd argued about projections and gone to dinner." He almost smiled. "He said he thought she was the one. He was sorry. He hoped I understood." He looked at the garden. "I understood. He was not the kind of man you didn't understand."

"No," Flora said. "I don't think he was."

"Did she know about me?" Felix asked. "Marta."

"She knew some of it," Flora said. "She said they'd talked about it early in the marriage and reached an understanding." She paused. "She didn't know your name. She didn't know Cascabel."

Felix nodded slowly.

"He kept Cascabel for himself," he said. "I think I understand why."

"Why?" Flora said.

Felix looked at the mesquite tree above them, the new leaves translucent in the morning light.

"Some places are the most yourself you've ever been," he said. "Some years. And those years are —" He stopped. "You can't always explain them to the life you live afterward. They don't translate. Not because they're shameful but because the language is different." He looked back at Flora. "He was thirty-one here. He was just — beginning to know who he was. That's a private thing, to know who you are. You don't necessarily show people the room where you figured it out."

Flora looked at him.

She thought about the drawer in the desk on Clement Street. The piece of paper in it.

She thought about the Farallon Islands postcard and Nancy not being sure if she'd put it there.

She thought about the recorder and the recording she hadn't played back.

Rooms where you figured things out. Private maps of the years you were becoming yourself.

"He wrote in a journal," Flora said, "after he died —" She stopped. "Before he died. In the margin. *The map of C. is the one I should have shown her.*"

Felix was very still.

Then he stood up, without saying anything, and went into the house. Flora heard him inside, moving carefully, the sounds of a man who knew where everything was in a house he had lived in for a long time.

He came back with a cardboard tube. Sat down. Placed it on the table between them.

"I've kept it for forty years," he said. "I knew it was hers, in the end. I just didn't know who she was yet."

Flora looked at the tube.

"May I?" she said.

He indicated yes.

She opened it carefully and drew out the map, unrolling it slowly, weighted at the corners with the coffee cups.

It was the size of a large drawing board. Hand-drawn in ink, with color washes in places — the river in blue-grey, the mountains in a dusty purple, the desert floor in a pale ochre that shaded to green along the water. Every contour line placed with the precision Marta had described, but with something else too — something in the weight of the line that was not technical. The loving placement she had described. The feeling in the mark.

In the bottom right corner, in small neat lettering: *Cascabel, Cochise County, Arizona. O. Freed, September 1985.*

And below that, smaller still, almost a note to himself: *for F., who showed me where everything is.*

Flora looked at it for a long time.

Felix was looking at the garden.

"He should have shown her," Felix said quietly. "Marta. Not the map specifically — she's a cartographer, she would have understood the map in five seconds. He should have shown her this was where he learned to be himself. That would have been a gift." He paused. "But we don't always give the gifts in time."

"No," Flora said. "We don't."

She rolled the map carefully and slid it back into the tube.

"She'll understand it," she said. "When she sees it."

"Yes," Felix said. "I think she will."

Flora stood. She picked up the tube and held it.

"Mr. Arroyo," she said. "Marta is going to ask me about you. I'll tell her what I can tell her — your name, that you're here, that you kept the map." She paused. "She may want to write to you."

He looked at the garden for a moment.

"Tell her she's welcome to," he said. "I'd like to know who he became. Who they were."

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## Chapter Five: Nancy

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She woke on the second morning knowing it was Wednesday before she looked at anything.

This was still reliable. The days of the week, the structure of the week, the way Wednesday felt different from Tuesday in the body — that was still there. She had noticed, with the attention she brought to monitoring now, that some things went and some things held. The calendar held. The names held, mostly, the important names. The professional knowledge held — the law, the procedure, the taxonomy of a courtroom, the grammar of evidence. These were laid down in a different way and they held differently.

What slipped was the recent. The thing she'd been about to say. The word for the object in her hand. The margin note she'd written an hour ago.

She had developed, without naming it, a method for this: write everything. Read it back. Trust the notes rather than the memory of writing them.

She got up and made tea and looked at her own notepad on the kitchen table, which was where she'd taken to keeping it overnight. She had written, before bed: *Wednesday. Flora in Cascabel. Hold the office.*

She looked at this.

Wednesday. Flora in Cascabel. Hold the office.

Yes.

She got dressed and went to the office.

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The office in the morning, before the dry cleaner opened and the steam started coming up, had a particular quality that Nancy thought of as itself. The room being what it was without anyone in it to observe it being what it was. She would arrive and for a few minutes she would be in the room as it

was before her, and then she would sit at her desk and the room would become itself-with-Nancy and the day would begin.

She hung her coat on the right hook.

She filled the kettle and put it on.

She sat at her desk and opened the notepad and wrote the date — *Wednesday, March* — and the time.

She looked at what she'd written.

She wrote it again in the margin, with the time.

Both versions said the same thing.

Good.

She looked at the cork board. *Marta Freed. 63.* The copied line in Marta's handwriting: *The map of C. is the one I should have shown her.* Flora had pinned it there on Monday because it was evidence of the thing they were looking for, the starting point.

Nancy looked at it.

The map of C.

She had found C. She had found Cascabel, Arizona, the land trust survey, the name Felix Arroyo in the property records. She had given all of it to Flora and Flora had driven through the night and was now somewhere in the Sonoran Desert, in the morning light, finding whatever there was to find.

Nancy had held the office.

She made tea.

She sat at her desk and looked at the notepad and looked at the cork board and looked at the Farallon Islands postcard above the door and looked at the note on card stock gone slightly yellow — *What do you actually know. Not what you feel. What you know.*

She looked at that for a long time.

What do you actually know.

She knew there were days. She knew the days had been more frequent than they used to be. She knew that the managing was working but that it was working harder than it had worked six months ago, a year ago, two years ago. She knew the shorthand had gone slightly wrong and that she was compensating with a slower, more deliberate hand that was not quite

the shorthand anymore. She knew she had written *tell Flora* twice and not told Flora.

She knew she was going to have to tell Flora.

Not because she couldn't manage. She could manage. She was managing right now, alone in the office, Wednesday morning, everything in its place.

Because Flora had found the piece of paper in the bin in November, she knew that. Flora thought she hadn't looked — Nancy had not looked up, had not appeared to notice, had been at her desk when Flora set the piece of paper in the drawer. But Nancy had heard the drawer. She knew the specific sound of the specific drawer and she had heard it open and close and she had not looked up.

Flora had put the note in the drawer.

Flora knew.

And Flora was going to wait — was being careful, was giving Nancy the dignity of arriving at her own moment, was doing the exact thing Nancy would have done in Flora's place — but waiting was also its own kind of carrying, and Flora had been carrying it since November, and that was four months, and that was enough.

Nancy picked up her pen.

She wrote *tell Flora* in the margin.

She looked at it.

She did not tear it out.

She looked at the clock. Flora would call this evening, from the motel or from the road, the way she called when she was away. She would call and Nancy would answer and they would talk about Cascabel and the map and Felix Arroyo, and it would be a good conversation, the kind they had when a case was moving in the right direction.

And then.

Nancy looked at the margin note.

She took the page out — carefully, along the perforation — and folded it once.

She put it in her coat pocket.

She sat for a moment.

Then she took it out of her pocket and unfolded it and smoothed it on the desk and looked at it.

*Tell Flora.*

She picked up the pen.

Below *tell Flora*, in the same hand, she wrote one more word.

*Today.*

She folded it again.

She put it in her coat pocket.

She made a third cup of tea, which was too much tea, and she sat at her desk and she looked at the cork board and she waited for the day to do what days did.

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Flora called at six-fifteen from a payphone outside the motel in Willcox. She had found Felix. She had the map. She was driving back in the morning and would be in the office by afternoon.

Nancy said: good. She said: tell me about him.

Flora told her about the garden and the desert coffee and the map unrolled on the table with the coffee cups weighting the corners. She told her about *for F., who showed me where everything is*. She told her that Felix had kept the map for forty years because he'd known it was someone's, he just hadn't known whose.

Nancy listened with the full attention she brought to important things.

When Flora finished, Nancy said: "She'll understand it."

"Yes," Flora said. "I think so."

"Get some sleep," Nancy said. "Drive carefully in the morning."

"I will," Flora said. "Good night, Nancy."

"Good night," Nancy said.

She hung up.

She sat for a moment with her hand on the phone.

Then she took the piece of paper out of her pocket and set it on the desk.

*Tell Flora.*

*Today.*

She looked at it.

Tomorrow, she thought. Tomorrow was also today. Tomorrow Flora would be back. Tomorrow was soon enough, and specific enough, and she had the piece of paper in her pocket to remind her.

She turned off the office lights.

She went home.

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## Chapter Six

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Marta Freed came in on Friday morning.

She sat in the client chair and Flora unrolled the map on the desk and set the coffee cups at the corners, the way Felix Arroyo had set them, and Marta looked at it.

She looked at it for a long time.

Nancy wrote the time in the margin and then she put her pen down and she did not write anything else because sometimes the thing to do was to not write anything.

Marta looked at the contour lines, the river in blue-grey, the mountains in dusty purple, the desert floor in ochre shading to green. She looked at the precision of it, which was professional, and at the feeling in it, which was not. She looked at the note in the corner: *for F., who showed me where everything is.*

"He drew it the way he drew things he loved," she said.

"Yes," Flora said.

Marta looked at the map for a while longer. Then she reached out and touched the edge of it — not the map itself, just the edge — with two fingers.

"He should have shown me," she said. "Not because I didn't know — I knew enough. But because this is —" She stopped. "This is where he learned to read himself. The way you learn to read a place. Slowly, by walking it. He should have let me see that he'd walked it."

"He knew it," Flora said. "At the end. He wrote it."

"Yes." Marta looked at the note. *The map of C. is the one I should have shown her.* "He knew." She was quiet for a moment. "That's something. That he knew."

Flora rolled the map carefully and slid it into the tube. She held it for a moment, then passed it across the desk.

Marta took it.

She held it the way you held something you had been looking for for a long time — not tight, not loose. Just present. Aware of the weight of it.

"The man who kept it," she said. "Felix Arroyo."

"He said he'd been keeping it for someone," Flora said. "He didn't know who. He said he'd like to know who Oren became."

Marta opened the small notebook. She wrote the name carefully, and the place. She looked at what she'd written.

"I'll write to him," she said. "When I know what to say."

"He'll be there," Flora said. "He's been there a long time."

Marta stood. She put the map under her arm, the way she'd carried the notebook when she came in — something worth carrying, held close.

At the door she paused.

She looked at the office — the cork board, the two desks, the window onto the street, the postcard above the door.

"He used to say," she said, "that the best maps were made by people who loved the place. Who'd spent enough time in it that the map was a memory as much as a record." She looked at the postcard. "That's what this is, isn't it. This room."

"Yes," Flora said. "I think that's what it is."

Marta nodded.

She left.

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The office was quiet after she'd gone.

The steam was coming up through the floor — someone below was pressing something, a good smell, warm wool, something being made ready. The street outside was doing its Friday afternoon thing, the week loosening, the weekend beginning its approach.

Nancy was at her desk.

She had her hand in her coat pocket. Her hand was around the piece of paper.

She had been carrying it since Thursday morning.

She looked at Flora, who was writing up the case at her desk, the recorder on the corner of the desk not pressed, just there, the way it was always just there.

She took the piece of paper out of her pocket.

She stood up.

She walked to Flora's desk.

She stood at the edge of it — not sitting, not at her own desk, just present in the way she was present when something was serious.

She set the piece of paper on the desk.

Flora looked at it.

*Tell Flora.*

And below that, in different ink:

*Today.*

Flora looked at the piece of paper for a long time.

Then she looked up at Nancy.

Nancy was standing at the edge of the desk with the steadiness she had — the steadiness that had nothing to do with certainty and everything to do with having decided.

"I need to tell you something," Nancy said.

The office was quiet.

The steam came up through the floor.

On the wall above the door, in Nancy's handwriting on card stock gone slightly yellow, the words she had said to Flora once and couldn't remember saying:

*What do you actually know. Not what you feel. What you know.*

"I know," Flora said.

"I know you know," Nancy said. "But I need to tell you."

Flora put down her pen.

She looked at Nancy.

"All right," she said.

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*The dry cleaner below closed at six.*

*On the second floor, the light was still on.*

*The sign on the frosted glass door was still slightly crooked.*

*Neither of them had fixed it.*

*Neither of them ever would.*



*End.*