

CHAPTER 1

March 4, 1949

The stalker's eyes, frosty, intense, never left the woman. His brain, carefully trained for the process, recorded her every step, her every movement and gesture as he moved expertly through the early evening crowd in Manhattan's Pennsylvania Station. At one point, a heavy-set woman with a child attached to each side of her shabby winter coat stopped directly in front of him, momentarily blocking his view, and he roughly shoved her out of his way. She turned to give him a withering look, but he was gone.

If the object of his pursuit was aware of the danger the stalker presented, she did not show it in her expression, which remained calm and confident. But her movements suggested that she at least suspected his presence. Both of them, the man and the woman, were aware of the possibilities tonight. One could win and one could lose. Her loss could be her freedom or, even, her life.

At first glance, nothing about the attractive young woman who had stepped off the train from Washington, D.C. would seem unusual. But only at first glance. Wearing a fitted black wool coat and a black beret cocked fashionably over her left brow, she moved briskly, like a mechanical doll with a short circuit, first going one direction and then another, up one flight of stairs and down a different flight; moving forward, turning, retracing steps. She entered the two

story women's room on the lower level and seconds later emerged through the upper level door. A silent signal from the stalker alerted another follower, a woman, who went into the restroom.

A casual observer might have conjectured that the subject of their interest, whom they called "the package," was lost or bewildered by the five thirty crunch of commuters rushing by, but the self assured way in which she walked, in whichever direction, belied that conclusion. She did, however, seem to be looking for someone in the crowd, even as she thumbed through a magazine at a newsstand. Finally, after a last glance over her shoulder, she left the station and went out into the chilly Manhattan night, using the busy 34th Street exit. At that moment, they were now three, but that would soon change.

At New York City's Foley Square headquarters of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Al Belmont, the assistant special agent in charge, was monitoring an extensive surveillance operation, puffing on the ever present cigar clenched between his teeth. Remarkably, Ed Scheidt, Special Agent in Charge of the New York City FBI office, and Robert Granville, Chief of the Espionage Section, were both "on the street" supported by two dozen agents. It was an extraordinary level of Bureau activity, even for New York.

In Washington, D.C., J. Edgar Hoover sat in his office, waiting. When he received word, he would place a call to President Harry Truman. Hoover was not happy about what was happening in Manhattan at the moment, had not been happy about any of it from the beginning. His had been a different solution to the problem, but, uncharacteristically, he had allowed himself to be talked into a distasteful, risky operation. The chief of the world's top intelligence agency waited now in the smaller of his two private offices, a single Acco-bound folder resting on his highly polished desk. The file was new, numbered "65 58365." The first two numerals identified the nature of the case: Espionage.

Although his position often required him to play a waiting game, J. Edgar Hoover never did so with any measure of patience. In this case, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was particularly impatient.

At ten minutes after six o'clock, forty minutes after her arrival in Manhattan, the young woman in black boarded a crowded Eighth Avenue northbound train, clutching a large leather handbag to her chest, shoving into standing space where she remained until, many blocks later, she found a seat. At the 181st Street station she left the train, moving along with the crowd toward the 181st Street exit. Suddenly, she reversed her direction and walked, alone, toward the northern most exit, one leading to 184th Street.

Outside the station, she stood looking about her. On Broadway she walked past 187th Street, then continued to 193rd. The evening was growing colder, with the temperature just above freezing. With black gloved hands she pulled the lapels of her coat closer, then stopped and walked into a small, brightly lighted coffee shop. One would assume her purpose was to order something warm to drink, but she was out on the street again within two minutes, hardly time enough. Continuing north on Broadway, she crossed to the east side of the street and stood in front of a drug store. After some seven minutes of standing and pacing, she left the corner and walked south.

The unmarked black Ford sedans winding through the streets of Manhattan had radio contact with headquarters but not with each other, which meant the man in the cigar cloud and his radio operator, Flo Bachrach, had their hands full controlling a street operation of this magnitude.

In Brooklyn, at 178 Ocean Parkway, an older Jewish couple waited for their only daughter, a bright, successful young government worker in Washington, who had telephoned a few days earlier to say that she would spend the night with them. She was faithful about coming to New York to see them whenever possible; usually, like today, on

a Friday. Their daughter was a source of enormous pride to both parents. A cum laude Barnard graduate, she was in the process of completing a brilliant Master's Degree program at American University.

Entering a cigar store on the corner of Broadway and 193rd Street, the young woman inquired of the proprietor where she might find a restroom. And not one in a tavern, she said. She did not want to go to a tavern.

"Well, there's Bickford's. It's a nice restaurant," he offered.

At exactly the time the woman disappeared into the cigar store, a short, stocky, fair haired man left the tunnel leading from the 191st Street station of the 7th Avenue subway. Hurriedly he walked north on the east side of Broadway and made his way to a drug store on the southeast corner of 193rd Street, diagonally across from the coffee shop the young woman had entered earlier. A few minutes later he left the store carrying a small package and stood on the street, waiting. After five minutes, he went one block down to 192nd Street, crossed over, and stood at a bus stop. Twenty minutes passed; then, after having ignored several southbound buses, he boarded one going that direction, twice glancing over his shoulder as he climbed the steps.

At FBI headquarters in New York, Raymond Whearty, now an assistant U.S. attorney and former head of the Foreign Agents Registration Section of the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., was another who waited impatiently. Down the hall, a matron sat idly waiting. Bob Granville had asked her to stay tonight because they were bringing in a woman; normally, she would have been home by now

The women's room at Bickford's was clean and well appointed. After a few minutes, the young woman emerged from the restaurant and was back out on Broadway, where she turned and went north. Immediately, the stocky, fair haired man came into view, walking toward her. For a moment, it looked as if he were going to greet her, but some

gesture, some signal, must have put him off and he continued walking in the opposite direction, passing her in the process. They went on this way for half a block, when he whirled, retraced his steps and caught up with her. Neither spoke, and they walked side by side for several steps before he pulled away and rushed to a bus stop at the corner of Elmwood and Broadway. And she, meanwhile, walked leisurely to the next corner and turned left for one block, up an empty, unlighted street. She turned again and went back to Broadway, where she caught the 7th Avenue subway.

There was desperation in the radio room. One of subjects was now on a bus and the other on a subway. What if they didn't get together? What if she didn't make the transfer? If it didn't work tonight, would it ever work? Would the pair take the risk if they were aware of being tailed? The question of "another time" was burning into Granville's brain. This was a cat and mouse game of the first order. No doubt the mice knew the cats were out tonight, knew they were closing in. If it didn't happen tonight, the mice might never come out of their holes again. Granville listened to the latest report on his radio. "They never touched," he complained to Scheidt. "Nothing transferred."

Leaving the subway at Times Square, the young woman once again stood outside a cigar store for several minutes, this one on the northwest corner of 7th Avenue and 42nd Street, before walking west. As if from nowhere, the fair haired man suddenly appeared about fifteen feet behind her. For more than two blocks he kept precisely the same distance between them; then, without apparent warning, he took off running, dashing across 9th Avenue, where he boarded a bus. The young woman broke into a run and, at the last possible second, hopped on board the same bus.

The couple left behind more than one surprised surveillance agent. But two agents in one of the black Fords had not been left behind; they pulled alongside the bus, where the man and woman were clearly in view, seated several rows

apart. At 14th Street, the couple left the bus and walked briskly to 8th Avenue, where they entered the BMT subway station.

The Ford pulled to a stop in a loading zone directly in front of the station and its occupants hurried inside, their quarry still in sight. The man and woman were walking together toward a train; the agents followed, closely, but not too closely. If the surveillance subjects were aware of two men who boarded their train at the last minute, they did nothing to show it. The followers settled into separate seats at the rear of the car, caught their breath, relaxed their muscles ever so slightly, and went about the business of locked on watching. Moments later, both men visibly tensed as the nearly empty car ground to a noisy stop at the next station. No one moved, not until the final second before the door slammed shut. And in that final second, the mysterious couple bolted from their seats and were out of the train and running across the platform. The agents made a desperate dive for the door, but were not in time. They watched in dismay as the car pulled from the station, with them inside.

Belmont, his ever present foggy halo overhead, slammed down the telephone. Bachrach immediately began directing all cars to the area where the suspects had left the train.

The chase that so interested Mr. Truman and Mr. Hoover in Washington continued on in America's sweetheart city, in wild, vibrant Manhattan. By now it had gone from Penn Station to uptown, uptown to midtown, downtown, cross-town to Times Square, through the chilly neon lit night. It was a deadly game played out to the cacophony of impatient taxicab horns and elevated trains and the nighttime people noises that make Manhattan unique.

Granville was thinking about this city, about the possibility of losing the suspects altogether in its labyrinthine possibilities, when he came to a conclusion. If they were found again, here in Manhattan on this noisy March night, he would arrest them. From the beginning, the decision

to arrest or not had been his. And now he made it. There would be no waiting to make certain that documents had changed hands. There was no worry about not having an arrest warrant; after all, Granville assured himself, the law provided for an arrest without warrant under these circumstances.

At that very moment, the news burst through the static. The subjects had been spotted. Together. Down on 15th Street and 3rd Avenue.

“Let’s go!” Granville yelled, shoving the accelerator to the floor and turning on the siren. With the wail of the siren and the high-pitched squeal of the car’s noisy fan belt, a give away trademark of the Bureau’s black Fords, they raced downtown from Broadway and 180th Street. Careening onto 14th Street, the siren was silenced by design, and the car slowed by traffic. They dodged taxicabs and ignored red lights, nearly clipping the coat tails of pedestrians taking too long to cross intersections.

The woman in black and the fair haired man stood watching, rooted to the sidewalk as Granville whirled the car around a post supporting the Third Avenue El and brought it to a screeching halt at the curb. He leaped from the car and grabbed Judith Coplon’s arm.

“FBI! I’m special agent Robert Granville. You’re under arrest,” he told her.