

WE WEREN'T MOVING. WE'D HEARD SIRENS WAILING IN THE distance, so we were all on the platform side of the train, keeping a close watch out the windows. Three men in rain-soaked trench-coats hurried past. "They're bringin' in the big guns," Mason said. "De-tectives. What's takin' Jack so long?"

As if in answer to his question, the coach doors slid open. "I couldn't get through," Jack said. "The cops wouldn't say—. Somethin' happened in Pullman A." He took the seat across from Mason and told what he saw... Not much. And the police wouldn't talk to him.

The door opened again. Mr. Wheeler came in and stood with his hand on the back of the first seat. "I know you're all wonderin'. "I was helpin' passengers with their bags when A.R. called." Arnie Richmond was the Pullman conductor. "He said to come quick—urgent business. He didn't want to say over the radio in case a passenger was listening. When I got there—"

A broad-shouldered man in a trench-coat entered behind the conductor, carrying a plastic-covered brown fedora. He put a hand on Mr. Wheeler's shoulder and gestured for him to take a seat. The man threw his hat on a vacant seat and opened his coat to reveal a gold badge hanging on a cord around his neck. "My name is Gordon Watchford," he said. "I'm a detective with the District of Columbia police department."

Two officers came in and the detective took a few steps forward to accommodate them. One of them whispered in his ear. Out the windows, I could see more officers pointing flashlights under the coach. "There's been an incident in the last Pullman car," the detective said. "Apparently a female passenger was robbed and killed, maybe not in that order. Anyway, until we get things sorted out, stem to stern, this train is on lockdown."

"Who was it?" Jack asked. "What passenger?"

"We rounded up as many passengers as we could in the terminal. Now we're inspecting the cars, inside and out. Guards will be posted on both sides. Once that's done we'll be conducting interviews, so we need you to stay put. Nobody leaves until we've talked to everybody. Just stay in this car and don't touch anything that doesn't belong to you. Mr. Wheeler says the coach ahead of this one is empty now, so we'll be conducting our interviews in there. Like I say, just sit tight until we call for you."

"Is there anything we can do?" the conductor asked.

"We can provide coffee, sodas an' snacks for you and your men," Jeremy added."

"Thank you, no. I don't want anyone going forward or back. Does this car have a restroom?" Mason pointed to the front of the car. "I know you've all got other places to go and things to do, so we'll try to get through this as quickly as possible."

"My wife's gonna be expecting me," Jack said.

"And my wife's here to pick me up," Mason said. "We always meet out front."

"I've given Mr. Wheeler permission to call the Amtrak dispatcher from the station's office."

"He has your home numbers," the conductor said," so he'll call to let your families know that you're being detained—and why. We'll make an announcement inside the station, and there'll be an officer at the gate to talk to folks."

"Who was it got killed?" Jack asked again.

Mr. Wheeler answered softly. "Mrs. Benton, the senator's wife."

My mouth fell open and I held my breath. *Oh no! That nice lady! My God, what—?*

The detective said, "If any of you noticed anything peculiar or suspicious on this trip, write it down. It'll help when we question you. We appreciate your cooperation." He stepped back and gestured for Mr. Wheeler to lead the way forward.

I fell back into my seat, unbelieving, picturing Mrs. Benton's face, hearing her polite sweet voice.