

**Chapter Twenty-Six, in which a faint is feinted, twice,
people are reflected poorly, and a nod is indeed as good
as a wink.**

The firemen found Sylvia first, and content that she was breathing and warm, didn't do what she expected and open the door to the garage. She kept her eyes closed, now pretending the faint that had been real, feinting a faint she thought, and listened intently. They were just waiting, milling about. She had been right to be paranoid.

The door to the condo opened again, and Sylvie heard voices that she assumed were police officers, and then one voice she knew all too well, that of James's mistress, for she might as well call it what the press were about to, Mary. How the fuck did she get here so quickly, Sylvia thought, beginning to sit up. But as she moved she realised that she had currently been apparently forgotten and she sank gently back to the floor, but with her head where her feet had been, and having grabbed her pocket mirror from the bathroom counter.

With careful angling she could just make out figures in the living-room, strange floating images reflected back in the 10x magnification, wildly out of focus. But yes, it was Mary and she had arrived with the police, plain-clothed police, whom Sylvia recognized nonetheless, *not so much from the shoes*, but because she knew the chief from social functions she had attended with James.

The chief immediately cleared the room of firemen, telling them to check the ventilation system for the whole building, and then to return. Somewhat surprised, but obedient, they left the room. One young fireman turned to look towards the bathroom, obviously having not forgotten their other charge, but also unwilling to countermand an order from those so well positioned to destroy his career in a politically run city. He caught Sylvia's eye, and she winked at him, hoping he would understand. To her great relief, he winked back and walked quietly out of the room with his superiors, in rank if not in character.

As Sylvia continued to watch in amazement, Mary pulled a laptop from the large briefcase she was carrying, identical to James'. The police chief nodded to another man unknown to Sylvia, who then opened the door to the

garage and Mary alone went in. Sylvia could only wait and stay as still as possible. A very long five minutes passed, and Mary came back into the living-room, laptop in hand as well as a file folder of papers. Cool as a cucumber she slid them into her briefcase, put the laptop where its twin had been, and left the condo with the strange man. Mary was a professional Sylvia realised, possibly a plant from the beginning. She hadn't shown a flicker of emotion and had just spent five minutes alone with the corpse of her lover. A shudder went through Sylvia's body as she woke up again to the reality of the danger she was in and the kind of people she was hoping to bring down.

Within seconds of this strangely well-orchestrated performance, the condo filled back up with firemen as well as uniformed police officers and paramedics. The paramedics came to Sylvia first, who managed to quickly slide the mirror she had been holding under the claw-footed bathtub so out of place in the sterile condo. But James had thought it opulent, to use his word, and bless him for thinking so she thought as the mirror vanished to a quick inspection, and the paramedics started asking her questions. Sylvia thought it wise to continue to act confused, although it was becoming less of an act, and brokenly told the story of seeing his shoes by the door to the garage, and then smelling the familiar odour of exhaust.

When they started to ask about James' recent behaviours and moods, obviously circling around the question of whether this was suicide as seemed so likely from the appearance of things, Sylvia decided it was time to faint again and felt herself being put on a stretcher and wheeled from the condo. As they placed her in the ambulance she again saw the young fireman who had understood her wink. He nodded at her, and they both couldn't help but grin, because a **nod was as good as a wink** and they understood each other perfectly.

