



Slocomb removed the handcuffs and wrapped the kid in an old army blanket to stop his shivering. Glovsky rummaged through the equipment lockers until he found a ragged set of overalls, size small, and a worn pair of National Park Service field shoes. He gave both to the youth with instructions to go to the bathroom and change out of his wet clothes.

The officers watched him limp to the bathroom and close the door behind him. Then Glovsky spoke. "What do ya think?"

Slocomb tapped a finger to his temple. "A little wet upstairs, maybe." Already he had replayed their mad chase down the perimeter path. Only craziness would explain it.

"You gonna call command?"

"Let's hear what he has to say first."

While the youth was changing, Glovsky put on another pot of coffee then decided to boil water for tea. A kid wasn't supposed to drink coffee. He mopped the puddle and turned up the heat. Slocomb hung near the radio, gripped by a strange sense of awkwardness. Clearly he had overreacted. This was just a kid. A crazy, crying kid. But how could he have known?

The youth emerged from the bathroom, shuffling in big shoes and swimming in baggy overalls. He looked more like a kid than ever.

They hung his wet clothes over a heater, gave him hot tea, and sat him on a chair. He told them everything—from the bus trip Wednesday night to his capture on Liberty Island seventy-two hours later. He began with the club and Miss Cutter and the Days Hotel on Eighth Avenue and what they had seen of New York since arriving Thursday morning. He explained that the paper taken from his pocket was not an attack plan but the club's itinerary, and that Trump Towers, the Chrysler Building, and the Brooklyn Bridge were not targets but some of the engineering marvels they had come to visit. He said he had gone to Howard Johnson's at five in the morning because the holy month of Ramadan had begun,

and he had to eat breakfast before starting his fast at dawn. The compass was a special one to find Mecca when he prayed, the washed-out phone number was his teacher's cell, and the other paper was from a girl he knew. He told them how the club had planned to visit Liberty Island, but when that was cancelled they had voted to see Ground Zero instead. Everyone had gone except he and Edgar McHugh. Edgar had gotten sick, so Miss Cutter had given them permission to wait at the hotel. But he had ditched Edgar and had come to see the statue. All he had wanted to do was to take some pictures.

Officers Slocomb and Glovsky listened, blinking often. Plain-spoken truth seemed strange on a night like this, especially after such craziness. They gave each other doubtful looks. Was this really some Ohio kid visiting the big city for the first time, some kid who just happened to be a Muslim, a kid who had managed by some miracle to get on the island?

"Taking pictures, eh?" Glovsky said.

"Where's the camera, then?" Slocomb asked.

The youth said he had lost it.

"Hmph," Glovsky grunted.

"So you knew the statue was closed?" Officer Slocomb said.

The boy nodded.

Officer Glovsky shook his head. "Didn't your folks ever teach you to keep off the grass when the sign says so? You were trespassing."

The kid dropped his gaze, staring at the floor.

"What we want to know is how you got out here," Officer Slocomb said.

"Yeah," Glovsky echoed. "And who helped you?"

Then the youth told them the rest of his story, speaking calmly, not struggling to remember. He seemed sure of his words. When he finished he said, "I'm sorry I ran. I really am. I was just afraid."

Silence followed, and once more the officers of the National Park Police stared at each other. Either the kid was a unflinching liar—an aptitude that didn't agree with his face—or this was one

of those stories too unbelievable not to be believed.

Glovsky said, "Some security, eh? Sounds like Newman and the boys were keeping out of the weather."

Slocomb didn't react. He had heard of freak breaches in security—a visitor separated from his tour group wandering unnoticed into the West Wing of the White House; an illegal alien found asleep in the cockpit of an A-10 at a Tucson airbase. It happened.

"Could have been worse," he muttered.

Glovsky nodded, knowing it was true.

"One more question," Officer Slocomb said after a pause.

The youth met his gaze.

"You didn't do anything to ..." He hesitated, deciding that it was too far-fetched. "Did you feel the ground shake when you were out there?"

"Did you hear some God-awful screech?" Glovsky interjected.

Without hesitation, the youth replied, "No sirs, nothing like that."

And even then he was telling the truth.



Jet fighters passed low over the island again, rattling windows. Slocomb picked up the radio handset. It was time to send those boys back to bed.

"Central, this is Liberty. Intruder apprehended," he announced, then paused. How should he put this? It hadn't been a false alarm exactly. He moistened his lips. "Cancel that security alert, Central. Hold backup, please. Intruder is an unarmed minor, possibly in need of medical assistance. Determining status at this time. Will advise. Over."

Glovsky was mopping again. Static crackled across the radio.

"Liberty, please repeat. Did you say 'unarmed minor'?"

Slocomb recognized the Texas drawl of Deputy Chief Perez. Had they gotten *him* out of bed? Slocomb drew a breath. "Affirmative."