

the
ORG

A NOVEL

SCOTT BRODY

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*To my family: Judy, Leigh, Dave and Rick, for
their support and constant encouragement, and
to Cassie, for keeping me company.*

Author's Note

This book is a work of fiction in its entirety, and all characters, incidents and dialogue are the product of the author's imagination.

Whenever real agencies, businesses, media, institutions, and locations are mentioned, they are used fictionally. No connection between them and this book is claimed or implied by the author or publisher.

The political party called EcoPartyUSA, also called the EcoParty, in this book is wholly imaginary and is not meant to depict any real organization.

There is no connection between the fictional EcoParty and the Ecological Party of Uganda (EPU), the manufacturer of ECOPARTY brand apparel (Quanzhou Onen Ecommerce Co., Ltd.), and/or the manufacturer of ECOPARTY brand cutlery, napkins and serving ware (Party City Corporation).

This takes place a few years in the future...

1

SHE WAS CONFLICTED about whether to buzz Yosef in or not. Marianne had been spiraling down ever since that night with Eitan a couple of weeks back. It had started off well but veered off the rails after her fifth drink. Or was it her sixth? She had lost count. He was terrible, she knew that, and she remembered the pain. Since then, she rarely left her upper Manhattan apartment. She made a series of tearful phone calls to him, which didn't go well either. She could tell Eitan was losing patience with her. The calls got shorter and his tone got harder until he stopped answering most of them. So, she was surprised when he called and told her he was sorry and had bought her a gift he wanted to send over to her.

“For me? That sounds nice.”

“I haven't been very good lately,” Eitan said in his soft Israeli accent. In the background she could hear the

murmur of his office. She didn't know exactly what he did, but she knew he had an important job.

"I want to show you I'm sorry."

"You don't have to buy me anything," she said.

"I know, but I saw it and thought you'd like it," he said.

She felt herself giving in to him again. "Why don't you bring it over?" she asked, adding, "I'm alone."

"I wish I could, but I'm very busy today. I'm going to have Yosef bring it to you."

Yosef was Eitan's driver. He had driven them to several dinners and assignations in the Consulate's limousine.

"I want to see you; you bring it," she said. "I don't want to see Yosef."

"I can't, but I'll see you later tonight," he said.

"Promise?" she asked.

"Yes, promise."

She relented. "OK, he can come. I'll listen for him buzzing later."

She went back to bed after the call. The curtains were already drawn against the daylight. Marianne was twenty-six and pretty, with sandy brown hair which was uncared for today, matching her mood. It had been days since she had showered or changed her clothes. She hadn't eaten much or slept for more than a few hours each night. Her roommates were out so she could avoid human contact.

When the buzzer rang around 5 PM, she knew it was Yosef. She didn't want to open the door for him. She knew he'd tell Eitan how bad she looked. She waited.

Eitan had told Yosef she was home and expecting him, so when he got no reply, he waited a few minutes and started buzzing again. She knew she had to buzz him in. When she finally did, but when she opened the apartment door, there were three men with Yosef who forced her back into her living room. They were dark haired and olive skinned, and they looked at her with a cold detachment. Her heart raced.

Yosef was in charge. Saying nothing to Marianne, he grabbed her arm and told another one of the men to hold her. The man spun her around so her back was to him and covered her mouth with his other hand. Realizing she couldn't breathe, she panicked, kicking and struggling for air. The man holding her squeezed tighter and told her to be quiet. She kept struggling in his grasp and pulled the two of them closer to the door to the patio, which she had opened earlier.

Yosef opened a small pouch he was carrying and pulled out a syringe filled with clear liquid. He held it up to the light to be sure it was ready for use. When Marianne saw the needle, her panic ratcheted up and she fought frantically against the man holding her. She was gasping for air now. She freed one arm and started flailing at him. The other two men laughed as she fought against the man holding her.

"Help him hold her down," Yosef barked at them.

Marianne grabbed a wine bottle from a table next to her and threw it at Yosef a few feet away. Her aim was true—she hit him on the head. He lurched back,

dropping the syringe. Blood coursed down his forehead and into his right eye. Holding his head, he wavered and struggled to keep his balance. Stepping to his left, he accidentally crushed the syringe he had dropped.

He was enraged. She had destroyed the mission. His head was throbbing, the wound would need suturing. He looked around for an option.

“Off the patio. Throw her,” he barked to them. “Now. Quickly!”

They picked her up. She fought against them as hard as she could, kicking, arching her back, trying to break free with her arms. She was out of breath now, battling them while her chest was burning. Suddenly she was enveloped in cold as she saw the patio beneath her and the railing looming up. A scream welled up from inside her and suddenly she was free of their grasp. Her stomach flipped when she saw there was nothing under her and she felt the wind accelerating as she dropped. She braced herself just before she hit the parked car beneath her 2.3 seconds later at 51 miles per hour.

AS THEY CARRIED her out to the ninth-floor patio and over the railing, Yosef shot a video to show they had completed the mission, if not as planned. No matter, now they needed to go. Neighbors might have heard their scuffling or seen her fall. He grabbed paper towels from the kitchen area and cleaned up evidence of the wine bottle, the broken syringe and its contents. He tore

off another sheet to mop the blood off his face. He tried to put the furniture back as it had been, then hustled his men out of the apartment, making sure the door locked behind them. The four men walked down the ninth-floor hall, rigidly, acting calm and nonchalant until they got to the door to the stairs. They pushed it open and took the nine floors to the ground at a quiet run. At the bottom, one started to speak.

“Shut up,” Yosef hissed at him, dabbing at the blood running down his forehead with the folded paper towel.

The doorway let out at the rear of the building. It was getting dark already. As cold as it was, nobody was in sight. The men walked quickly around the building and to the street. They came out about thirty yards from where Marianne had landed. They turned the other way and walked to the next avenue. One hailed a cab and left, another got in a parked car and drove off. The other two walked ten more blocks, where one got a cab. The last man walked twenty more blocks before getting his cab.

THE BODY LAY silently where it had landed, cradled in the indented top of the parked car, cooling in the wintry night air. Some people coming home from work heard her land or saw her fall. Neighbors in the building heard her screams. A few minutes later, a police cruiser pulled up with lights flashing. Two cops secured the scene from the gathering crowd and reported the DOA. One backed into the street and looked up the building, noticing

the open patio door nine floors up. Some lights in the apartment were on. Christmas lights blinked off and on. From the dispatcher's call, detectives were assigned the case, and the Coroner's office sent a crew. The incident investigation began.

At the NYPD's 33rd Precinct, Detectives Swann and Mallory were up next. A young woman deceased, falling from an apartment in Washington Heights was the description. The uniforms on the scene did their jobs, taped everything off and were canvassing the building. The Crime Scene Unit had gotten everything they could so far, which wasn't much. The detectives examined the scene and caught up on the investigation.

Detective Harold Swann was African-American, in his fifties, and on the force for twenty-six years now. He was recently partnered with Evan Mallory. Tall and athletic looking with red hair and moustache, Mallory made Swann laugh. He was young, single, and rambunctious. He'd get fired-up over things all the time. Sometimes Swann calmed him down, other times he'd give him his head and see where it took them. Mallory was a good cop with good instincts. Mostly it worked out well. Nobody's right all the time.

The deceased was named Marianne Wolfe. The family lived in Philadelphia. Wolfe lived in New York and rented a bedroom in the apartment of one Steve Goldman and his girlfriend Diane Miller. Mr. Goldman made the identification, shocked and distraught. The

detectives established right away they were all followers of the EcoPartyUSA.

“Oh boy, the EcoParty—those people are whackos,” Mallory said. “Full of conspiracy theories. Always saying someone is out to get them.”

“Never heard of them,” Swann said.

There was no evidence of suicide so far, and if it was homicide, it looked like someone she knew, since there was no forced entry or sign of robbery. They did find signs of a struggle and subsequent cleanup, so the detectives theorized right away this was no accident. The body was now at the Medical Examiner’s office pending autopsy. That was about all the detectives could do that first night.

THE PHONE RANG at the EcoPartyUSA office in West Philadelphia. James Roth managed the operation that night, which he often did. Five years out of college at twenty-seven, James was slim, 5’9”, wearing his usual sneakers and jeans with an Oxford shirt and a sweater. With his stringy-looking hair, he looked kind of one-off preppie. As he reached to answer the phone, he noticed it was the Hot Line blinking red, so he picked it up with a simple “Hello” instead of the standard public greeting. He sat down at the Operations table.

“Hi, James...” It was Frank Moore, who ran the Philadelphia regional office of the EcoPartyUSA. He paused, and the tension in his voice caught James.