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MARY
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Where Are You Now?

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Where are you now
Who lies beneath your spell?

—"The Kashmiri Song,"
Words by Laurence Hope
Music by Amy Woodforde-Finden

1

It is exactly midnight, which means Mother's Day has just begun. I stayed overnight with my mother in the apartment on Sutton Place where I grew up. She is down the hall in her room, and together we are keeping the vigil. The same vigil we've kept every year since my brother, Charles MacKenzie Jr., "Mack," walked out of the apartment he shared with two other Columbia University seniors ten years ago. He has never been seen since then. But every year at some point on Mother's Day, he calls to assure Mom he is fine. "Don't worry about me," he tells her. "One of these days I'll turn the key in the lock and be home." Then he hangs up.

We never know when in those twenty-four hours that call will come. Last year Mack called at a few minutes after midnight, and our vigil ended almost as soon as it began. Two years ago he waited until the very last second to phone, and Mom was frantic that this slim contact with him was over.

Mack has to have known that my father was killed in the Twin Towers tragedy. I was sure that no matter what he was doing, that terrible day would have compelled him to come home. But it did not. Then on the next Mother's Day, during his annual call, he started crying and gasped, "I'm sorry about Dad. I'm really sorry," and broke the connection.

I am Carolyn. I was sixteen when Mack disappeared. Following in his footsteps, I attended Columbia. Unlike him, I then went on to Duke Law School. Mack had been accepted there before he disappeared. After I passed the Bar last year, I clerked for a civil court judge in the courthouse on Centre Street in lower Manhattan. Judge Paul Huot has just retired, so at the moment I'm unemployed. I plan to apply for a job as an Assistant District Attorney in Manhattan, but not quite yet.

First, I must find a way to track my brother down. What *happened* to him? Why did he disappear? There was no sign of foul play. Mack's credit cards weren't used. His car was in the garage near his apartment. No one of his description ever ended up in the morgue, although in the beginning, my mother and father were sometimes asked to view the body of some unidentified young man who had been fished out of the river or killed in an accident.

When we were growing up, Mack was my best friend, my confidant, my pal. Half my girlfriends had a crush on him. He was the perfect son, the perfect brother, handsome, kind, funny, an excellent student. How do I feel about him now? I don't know anymore. I remember how much I loved him, but that love has almost totally turned to anger and resentment. I wish I could even doubt that he's alive or believe that someone is playing a cruel trick, but there is no doubt in my mind about that. Years ago we recorded one of his phone calls and had the pattern of his voice compared to his voice from home movies. It was identical.

All of this means that Mom and I dangle slowly in the wind, and, before Dad died in that burning inferno, it was that way for him, too. In all these years, I have never gone into a restaurant or theatre without my eyes automatically scanning to see if just maybe, by chance, I will run into him. Someone with a similar profile and sandy brown hair will demand a second look and, sometimes, close scrutiny.

I remember more than once almost knocking people over to get close to someone who turned out to be a perfect stranger.

All this was going through my mind as I set the volume of the phone on the loudest setting, got into bed, and tried to go to sleep. I guess I did fall into an uneasy doze because the jarring ring of the phone made me bolt up. I saw from the lighted dial on the clock that it was five minutes to three. With one hand I snapped on the bedside light and with the other grabbed the receiver. Mom had already picked up, and I heard her voice, breathless and nervous. "Hello, Mack."

"Hello, Mom. Happy Mother's Day. I love you."

His voice was resonant and confident. He sounds as though he doesn't have a care in the world, I thought bitterly.

As usual the sound of his voice shattered Mom. She began to cry. "Mack, I love you. I need to see you," she begged. "I don't care what trouble you may be in, what problems you have to solve, I'll help you. Mack, for God's sake, it's been ten years. Don't do this to me any longer. Please . . . please . . ."

He never stayed on the phone for as long as a minute. I'm sure he knew that we would try to trace the call, but now that that technology is available, he always calls from one of those cell phones with a prepaid time card.

I had been planning what I would say to him and rushed now to make him hear me out before he hung up. "Mack, I'm going to find you," I said. "The cops tried and failed. So did the private investigator. But I won't fail. I *swear* I won't." My voice had been quiet and firm, as I had planned, but then the sound of my mother crying sent me over the edge. "I'm going to track you down, you lowlife," I shrieked, "and you'd better have an awfully good reason for torturing us like this."

I heard a click and knew that he had disconnected. I could have bitten my tongue off to take back the name I had called him, but, of course, it was too late.

Knowing what I was facing, that Mom would be furious at me for the way I had screamed at Mack, I put on a robe and went down the hall to the suite that she and Dad had shared.

Sutton Place is an upscale Manhattan neighborhood of town houses and apartment buildings overlooking the East River. My father bought this place after putting himself through Fordham Law School at night and working his way up to partner in a corporate law firm. Our privileged childhood was the result of his brains and the hard work ethic that was instilled in him by his widowed Scotch-Irish mother. He never allowed a nickel of the money my mother inherited to affect our lives.

I tapped on the door and pushed it open. She was standing at the panoramic window that overlooked the East River. She did not turn, even though she knew I was there. It was a clear night, and to the left I could see the lights of the Queensboro Bridge. Even in this predawn hour, there was a steady stream of cars going back and forth across it. The fanciful thought crossed my mind that maybe Mack was in one of those cars and, having made his annual call, was now on his way to a distant destination.

Mack had always loved travel; it was in his veins. My mother's father, Liam O'Connell, was born in Dublin, educated at Trinity College, and came to the United States, smart, well-educated, and broke. Within five years he was buying potato fields in Long Island that eventually became the Hamptons, property in Palm Beach County, property on Third Avenue when it was still a dirty, dark street in the shadow of the elevated train track that hovered over it. That was when he sent for and married my grandmother, the English girl he had met at Trinity.

My mother, Olivia, is a genuine English beauty, tall, still slender as a reed at sixty-two, with silver hair, blue-gray eyes, and classic features. In appearance, Mack was practically her clone.

I inherited my father's reddish brown hair, hazel eyes, and stubborn

jaw. When my mother wore heels, she was a shade taller than Dad, and, like him, I'm just average height. I found myself yearning for him as I walked across the room and put my arm around my mother.

She spun around, and I could feel the anger radiating from her. "Carolyn, how *could* you talk to Mack like that?" she snapped, her arms wrapped tightly across her chest. "Can't you understand that there must be some terrible problem that is keeping him from us? Can't you understand that he must be feeling frightened and helpless and that this call is a cry for understanding?"

Before my father died, they often used to have emotional conversations like this. Mom always protective of Mack, my father getting to the point where he was ready to wash his hands of it all and stop worrying. "For the love of God, Liv," he would snap at Mom, "he sounds all right. Maybe he's involved with some woman and doesn't want to bring her around. Maybe he's trying to be an actor. He wanted to be one when he was a kid. Maybe I was too tough on him, making him have summer jobs. Who knows?"

They would end up apologizing to each other, Mom crying, Dad anguished and angry at himself for upsetting her.

I wasn't going to make a second mistake by trying to justify myself. Instead I said, "Mom, listen to me. Since we haven't found Mack by now, he's not worrying about my threat. Look at it this way. You've heard from him. You know he's alive. He sounds downright upbeat. I know you hate sleeping pills, but I also know your doctor gave you a prescription. So take one now and get some rest."

I didn't wait for her to answer me. I knew I couldn't do any good by staying with her any longer because I was angry, too. Angry at her for railing at me, angry at Mack, angry at the fact that this ten-room duplex apartment was too big for Mom to live in alone, too filled with memories. She won't sell it because she doesn't trust that Mack's annual telephone call would be bounced to a new location, and of

course she reminds me that he had said one day he would turn the key in the lock and be home . . . Home. *Here.*

I got back into bed, but sleep was a long way off. I started planning how I would begin to look for Mack. I thought about going to Lucas Reeves, the private investigator whom Dad hired, but then changed my mind. I was going to treat Mack's disappearance as if it had happened yesterday. The first thing Dad did when we became alarmed about Mack was call the police and report him missing. I'd begin at the beginning.

I knew people down at the courthouse, which also houses the District Attorney's office. I decided that my search would begin there.

Finally I drifted off and began to dream of following a shadowy figure who was walking across a bridge. Try as I would to keep him in sight, he was too fast for me, and when we reached land, I didn't know which way to turn. But then I heard him calling me, his voice mournful and troubled. *Carolyn, stay back, stay back*.

"I can't, Mack," I said aloud as I awakened. "I can't."

2

Monsignor Devon MacKenzie ruefully commented to visitors that his beloved St. Francis de Sales Church was located so close to the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine that it was almost invisible.

A dozen years ago, Devon had expected to hear that St. Francis would be closed, and he could not in honesty have contested the decision. After all, it had been built in the nineteenth century and needed major repairs. Then, as more apartment buildings went up in the area and older walk-ups were renovated, he had been gratified to see the faces of new parishioners at Sunday Masses.

The growing congregation meant that in the past five years he had been able to carry out some of those repairs. The stained-glass windows were cleaned; years of built-up soil removed from the murals; the wooden pews sanded and refinished, the kneeling benches covered with soft new carpeting.

Then, when Pope Benedict decreed that individual pastors could decide to offer a Tridentine Mass, Devon, who was proficient in Latin, announced that henceforth the eleven o'clock Sunday Mass would be celebrated in the ancient tongue of the Church.

The response stunned him. That Mass was now filled to overflowing, not only with senior citizens but teenagers and young adults who

reverently responded *"Deo gratias"* in place of "Thanks be to God," and prayed *"Pater Noster"* instead of "Our Father."

Devon was sixty-eight, two years younger than the brother he had lost on 9/11, and uncle and godfather of the nephew who had disappeared. At Mass, when he invited the congregation to silently offer their own petitions, his first prayer was always for Mack and that one day he would come home.

On Mother's Day, that prayer was always especially fervent. Today, when he returned to the rectory, there was a message waiting for him on the answering machine from Carolyn. "Uncle Dev—he called at five of three this morning. Sounded fine. Hung up fast. See you tonight."

Monsignor Devon could hear the strain in his niece's voice. His relief that his nephew had called was mixed with sharp anger. Damn you, Mack, he thought. Haven't you any idea what you're doing to us? As he tugged off his Roman collar, Devon reached for the phone to call Carolyn back. Before he could begin to dial, the doorbell rang.

It was his boyhood friend, Frank Lennon, a retired software executive, who served as head usher on Sundays and who counted, itemized, and deposited the Sunday collections.

Devon had long since learned to read people's faces and to know instantly if there was a genuine problem. That was what he was reading in Lennon's weathered face. "What's up, Frank?" he asked.

"Mack was at the eleven, Dev," Lennon said flatly. "He dropped a note for you in the basket. It was folded inside a twenty-dollar bill."

Monsignor Devon MacKenzie grabbed the scrap of paper, read the ten words printed on it, then, not trusting what he was seeing, read them again. "UNCLE DEVON, TELL CAROLYN SHE MUST NOT LOOK FOR ME."

3

Every year for the past nine years, Aaron Klein had made the long drive from Manhattan to the cemetery in Bridgehampton, to place a stone on the grave of his mother, Esther Klein. She had been a lively fifty-four-year-old divorcee, who died at the hands of a mugger as she was on her daily run early one morning near the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Aaron had been twenty-eight then, newly married, comfortably secure in his upward climb at Wallace and Madison Investment Bankers. Now he was the father of two sons, Eli and Gabriel, and a small daughter, Danielle, who bore a heartbreaking resemblance to her late grandmother. Aaron never visited the cemetery without once again experiencing anger and frustration at the fact that his mother's murderer was still walking the streets, a free man.

She had been struck in the back of the head with a heavy object. Her cell phone was on the ground beside her. Had she sensed danger and taken it out of her pocket to try to dial 911? That possibility was the only one that made sense.

She had to have been attempting to call. The records the police obtained showed she had neither made nor received a call at that time.

The cops thought it was a random mugging. Her watch, the only jewelry that she ever wore at that time of day, was missing, as was her

house key. "Why take her house key if whoever killed her didn't know who she was and where she lived?" he had asked the cops. They hadn't had an answer to that one.

Her apartment had its own street-level entrance around the corner from the doorman-monitored main entrance of the building, but as the detectives who worked on the case pointed out, there was nothing missing from it. Her wallet, containing several hundred dollars, was in her pocketbook. Her jewelry box, open on the dresser, held the few pieces of valuable jewelry he knew her to own.

The intermittent rain began to fall again as Aaron knelt down and touched the grass over his mother's grave. His knees sank into the muddy ground as he placed the stone, and whispered, "Mom, I so wish you had lived to see the kids. The boys are finishing the first grade and kindergarten. Danielle is a little actress already. I can just see her in a dozen years auditioning for one of the plays you'd be directing at Columbia."

He smiled, thinking of what his mother's response would be. "Aaron, you're a dreamer. Do your math. By the time Danielle is in college, I'd have been seventy-five years old."

"You'd still be teaching and directing and you'd still be full of spunk," he said aloud.

4

On Monday morning, carrying the note Mack had dropped in the collection basket, I set off for the District Attorney's office in lower Manhattan. It was beautiful out, sunny and warm with a balmy breeze, the kind of weather that would have been appropriate for Mother's Day instead of the cold, wet day that had spoiled any hope of outdoor gatherings.

Mom and Uncle Dev and I had gone out to dinner Sunday night. Obviously the note that Uncle Dev handed us sent Mom and me into a tailspin. Mom's initial reaction was to be thrilled that Mack might be so near. She has always been convinced that he is far away in Colorado or California. Then she became fearful that my threat to find him had put him in some kind of jeopardy.

At first I simply didn't know what to think about it, but now I had a growing suspicion that Mack might be head over heels in trouble and trying to keep us away from it.

The lobby at 1 Hogan Place was crowded, and the security was as tight as it gets. Even though I had plenty of identification, without a specific appointment to see someone, I could not get past the guard. As the people on line behind me began to get restless, I tried to explain that my brother was missing, and we might finally have something to indicate where we could begin looking for him.

"Ma'am, you'll have to place a phone call to Missing Persons and make an appointment," the guard insisted. "Now, please, there are other people who need to get upstairs to their jobs."

Frustrated, I walked outside the building and pulled out my cell phone. Judge Huot had been in civil court, and I never had much contact with the Assistant D.A.s, but I did know one, Matt Wilson. I called the District Attorney's office and was connected to his phone. Matt wasn't at his desk and had recorded the usual answering machine instructions. "Leave your name, number, and a brief message. I'll get back to you."

"This is Carolyn MacKenzie," I began. "We've met a few times. I was Judge Huot's law clerk. My brother has been missing for ten years. He left a note for me yesterday in a church on Amsterdam Avenue. I need help to see if we can track him down before he disappears again." I finished by giving my cell phone number.

I was standing on the steps. A man was going past me, a square-shouldered guy in his midfifties with close-cropped gray hair and a purposeful stride. I could tell that he had overheard me because, somewhat to my dismay, he stopped and turned around. For a moment we eyed each other, then he said abruptly, "I'm Detective Barrott. I'll take you upstairs."

Five minutes later, I was sitting in a shabby small office that contained a desk, a couple of chairs, and stacks of files. "We can talk in here," he said. "Too much noise in the squad room."

He never took his eyes off my face as I told him about Mack, only interrupting me to ask a few questions. "Calls only on Mother's Day?"

"That's right."

"Never asks for money?"

"Never." I had put the note in a plastic sandwich bag. "I don't know if his fingerprints might be on it," I explained. "Unless, of course, he had someone else drop it in the basket for him. It seems so crazy that he would take a chance on Uncle Dev spotting him from the altar."

"Depends. He might have dyed his hair, could be twenty pounds heavier, be wearing dark glasses. It isn't hard to disguise yourself in a crowd, especially when people are wearing rain gear."

He looked at the scrap of paper. The writing was plainly visible through the plastic. "Do we have your brother's fingerprints on file?"

"I'm not sure. By the time we reported him missing, our housekeeper had dusted and vacuumed his room at home. He shared the student apartment with two of his friends, and like most of those places, there were at least a dozen others who were in and out every day. His car was washed and cleaned after the last time he used it."

Barrott handed it back to me. "We can run this paper through for prints, but I can tell you now we won't get anything. You and your mother handled it. So did your uncle, the monsignor. So did the usher who brought it to your uncle. My guess is that at least one other usher might have helped to add up the collection."

Feeling as though I needed to offer more, I said, "I'm Mack's only sibling. My mother and father and I came in to register with the familial DNA laboratory. But we've never heard from them, so I guess they've never found anyone who could be even a partial match."

"Ms. MacKenzie, from what you tell me, your brother had absolutely no reason to willingly disappear. But if he did that, there was and is a reason. You've probably watched some of these crime programs on television so you probably have heard that when people disappear, the reason usually ends up being an accumulation of problems caused by either love or money. The jilted suitor, the jealous husband or wife, the inconvenient spouse, the addict frantic for a fix. You have to reexamine all your preconceived notions about your brother. He was twenty-one. You say he was popular with the girls. Was there one special girl?"

"No one his friends told us about. Certainly no one who ever came forward."

"At his age, a lot of kids gamble too much. A lot more experiment with drugs and become addicted. Suppose he was in debt? How would your father and mother have reacted to that?"

I found myself reluctant to answer. Then I reminded myself that these were questions my mother and father had undoubtedly been asked ten years ago. I wondered if they had been evasive. "My father would have been furious," I admitted. "He had no use for people who threw away money. My mother has a private income from an inheritance. If Mack needed money he could have gotten it from her, and she wouldn't have told Dad."

"All right. Ms. MacKenzie, I'm going to be perfectly honest with you. I don't think we have a crime here, so we can't treat your brother's disappearance as a crime. You can't imagine how many people walk out of their lives every day. They're stressed. They can't cope, or even worse, they don't want to cope anymore. Your brother calls you regularly—"

"Once a year," I interrupted.

"Which is still regularly. You tell him you're going to track him down, and he responds immediately. 'Leave me alone' is his message to you. I know it sounds rough, but my advice is to make yourself realize that Mack is where he wants to be, and the most connection he wants to have with you and your mother is that one Mother's Day call. Do the three of you a favor. Respect his wishes."

He stood up. Clearly our interview was over. Clearly I should not waste the time of the police department any longer. I picked up the note and as I did, reread the message. "UNCLE DEVON, TELL CAROLYN SHE MUST NOT LOOK FOR ME."

"You've been very—honest, Detective Barrott," I said, substituting the word "honest" for "helpful." I didn't think he had been helpful in the least. "I promise I won't bother you anymore."

5

For twenty years, Gus and Lil Kramer, now in their early seventies, had been the superintendents of a four-story apartment building on West End Avenue that the owner, Derek Olsen, had renovated for student housing. As Olsen explained when he hired them, "Look, college kids, smart or dumb, are basically slobs. They'll have boxes of pizza piled up in the kitchen. They'll amass enough empty beer cans to float a battleship. They'll drop their dirty clothes and wet towels on the floor. We don't care. They all move out when they graduate.

"My point," he had continued, "is that I can raise the rent as much as I want, but only as long as the common areas look sharp. I expect you two to keep the lobby and hallways looking like Fifth Avenue digs. I want the heat and the air-conditioning always working, any plumbing problems fixed on the double, the sidewalk swept every day. I want a quick paint job when a space is vacated. When the new arrivals come with their parents to check out the place, I want all of them to be impressed."

For twenty years the Kramers had faithfully followed Olsen's instructions, and the building where they worked was known as upscale student housing. All the students who passed through it were fortunate enough to have parents with deep pockets. A number of

those parents made separate arrangements for the Kramers to regularly clean the lodgings of their offspring.

The Kramers had celebrated a Mother's Day brunch at Tavern on the Green with their daughter, Winifred, and her husband, Perry. Unfortunately, the conversation had been almost completely a monologue from Winifred, urging them to quit their jobs and retire to their cottage in Pennsylvania. This was a monologue they'd heard before, one that always ended with the refrain, "Mom and Dad, I hate to think of you two sweeping and mopping and vacuuming after those kids."

Lil Kramer had long since learned to say, "You may be right, dear. I'll think about it."

Over rainbow sherbet, Gus Kramer had minced no words. "When we're ready to quit, we'll quit, not before. What would I do with myself all day?"

Late Monday afternoon, as Lil was knitting a sweater for the expected first child of one of the former students, she was thinking about Winifred's well-meant but irritating advice. Why doesn't Winifred understand that I love being with these kids? she fumed. For us, it's almost like having grandchildren. She certainly never gave us any.

The ring of the telephone startled her. Now that Gus was getting a little hard of hearing, he had raised the volume, but it was much too loud. You could wake up the dead with that racket, Lil thought as she hurried to answer it.

As she picked up the receiver, she found herself hoping that it wasn't Winifred following up on her retirement speech. A moment later, she wished it had been Winifred.

"Hello, this is Carolyn MacKenzie. Is this Mrs. Kramer?"

"Yes." Lil felt her mouth go dry.

"My brother, Mack, was living in your building when he disappeared ten years ago."

"Yes, he was."

"Mrs. Kramer, we heard from Mack the other day. He won't tell us where he is. You can understand what this is doing to my mother and me. I'm going to try to find him. We have reason to believe that he's living in the area. May I come and talk with you?"

No, Lil thought. No! But she heard herself answering the only way possible. "Of course, you can. I . . . we . . . were very fond of Mack. When do you want to see us?"

"Tomorrow morning?"

Too soon, Lil thought. I need more time. "Tomorrow's very busy for us."

"Then Wednesday morning around eleven?"

"Yes, I guess that's all right."

Gus came in as she was replacing the receiver. "Who was that?" he asked.

"Carolyn MacKenzie. She's starting her own investigation into her brother's disappearance. She's coming to talk to us Wednesday morning."

Lil watched as her husband's broad face reddened, and behind his glasses, his eyes narrowed. In two strides his short, stocky body was in front of her. "Last time, you let the cops see you were nervous, Lil. Don't let that happen in front of the sister. You hear me? *Don't let it happen this time!*"

6

On Monday afternoon, Detective Roy Barrott's shift was up at four p.m. It had been a relatively slow day, and at three o'clock he realized that he had nothing to command his immediate attention. But something was bothering him. Like his tongue roving through his mouth to find the source of a sore spot, his mind began to retrace the day, searching for the source of the discomfort.

When he remembered his interview with Carolyn MacKenzie, he knew that he had found it. The look of dismay and contempt he had seen in her eyes when she left him made him feel both ashamed and embarrassed now. She was desperately worried about her brother and had hoped that the note he'd left in the collection basket at church might be a step toward finding him. Although she hadn't said it, she obviously thought he might be in some kind of trouble.

I brushed her off, Barrott thought. When she left she said she wouldn't bother me again. That was the word she used, "bother."

Now, as he leaned back in his desk chair in the crowded squad room, Barrott shut out the sounds of the ringing telephones that surrounded him. Then he shrugged. It wouldn't kill me to take a look at the file, he decided. If nothing else, to satisfy myself that it's nothing more than a guy who doesn't want to be found, a guy who will one