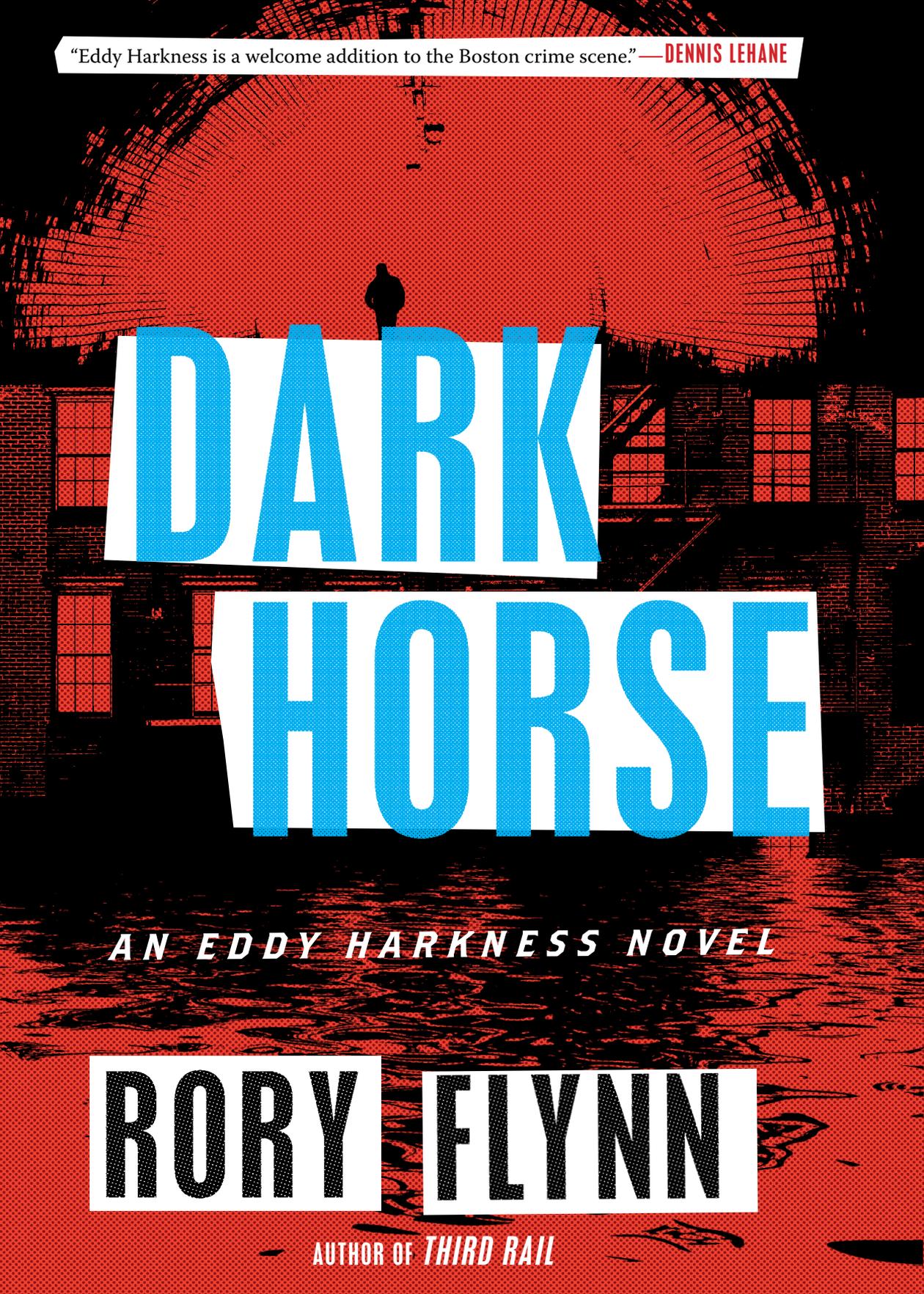


"Eddy Harkness is a welcome addition to the Boston crime scene." —DENNIS LEHANE



DARK HORSE

AN EDDY HARKNESS NOVEL

RORY FLYNN

AUTHOR OF *THIRD RAIL*

DARK HORSE

AN EDDY HARKNESS NOVEL

Rory Flynn

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

BOSTON NEW YORK

2016

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For James Ryan

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1

DETEKTIVE EDDY HARKNESS sweeps his hand along the inside of the windshield to clear the fog and searches for stragglers or thrill-seekers. He finds only dark windows, empty sidewalks, and street signs shaking in the wind. Albrecht Street is already a raging river and the emerald sky dumps more water by the minute. Cardboard boxes and suitcases, lost during the frantic evacuation, circle in the brown water, rising fast now that the sewers have given up.

Harkness slows the squad car to keep the engine from flooding.

“No one left, Harky,” Patrick says. “Whole neighborhood’s empty. Everybody’s gone, like they’re s’post to be.”

A roiling clump of brown fur and glinting eyes swims past. “Except the rats.”

“Bad sign when the rats start leaving, right?”

“Oh yeah.” Harkness keeps the squad car moving so they can finish the last blocks of the neighborhood check and head back to Narco-Intel.

Just before dawn, a weakening tropical storm meandering off the coast of Rhode Island hit a wall of cold air and turned ambitious. The winds ramped up to hurricane force and the storm took an unexpected jag northwest. The National Weather Service didn’t even have time to name it. Now Hurricane X churns over the North Atlantic, about to make landfall near Boston. Mayor O’Mara shut down the airport, trains, and trolleys. He ordered all citizens to

shelter in place, evacuating only the Lower South End, protected from the storm surge by a rotting wood and earthen dam at the end of an abandoned industrial canal. If the Channel Dam gives way, the rising waters of Boston Harbor will sweep through Albrecht Square, empty now.

Almost empty.

A gunshot echoes over the frantic windshield wipers and the drumming rain. Harkness pulls the squad car to the curb.

"S'post to be a drive-by," Patrick says.

"Yeah?"

"So keep driving by, boss. Let's get the hell out of here."

"Can't pretend you didn't hear that."

"Hear *what*?"

Another gunshot cracks above them.

Harkness stares into the darting eyes of his partner, so much happier back in Dataland than out on the street. "So what was that?"

"Some yahoo exercising his Second Amendment rights?" Patrick holds up his hands. "Let it slide, Harky. For once."

Harkness shoulders open the door, and trash-laden brown water swirls into the patrol car. He picks up a crowbar from the floor and steps out into the knee-deep river raging down the street. "C'mon."

"*Gross.*" Patrick squeezes his eyes closed and opens his door. He trudges through the cold water to the sidewalk and climbs up on a lamppost base. The wind rips back their orange raincoats, and rain soaks their uniforms. "So we gonna go door to door," Patrick shouts, "all community-outreach-like?"

Harkness nods, eyes almost closed against the rain, dark hair whipping across his face.

"We don't even know where those shots are coming from, Harky."

Another shot sends glass raining down on the sidewalk from a hotel's top-floor window.

Patrick just shakes his head.

"Let's go." Harkness rushes to the front of the building—door locked, entryway clogged with bloated bundles of the *Globe*. Back when Harkness was a beat cop, a semi-recovered crackhead named Chai ran the Hotel Blackstone, more shabby than chic, where aspiring rockers, poets, and ill-informed European travelers rented rooms by the week. The coffee shop served piles of sweet potato

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fries that worked as reliable beer sponges. The maids and bellboys did a lucrative side business in short-term love. Now the Blackstone's a drug-infested SRO nightmare that the city's been trying to shut down for years.

They pop open the door with the crowbar and step inside. A light flickers in the gloom from the empty desk clerk's booth, where rows of plastic-tagged keys hang above an overturned red plastic chair. Harkness and Patrick follow a thin path where trudging footsteps have etched away a layer of grime across the lobby to reveal white tile.

Harkness clicks his radio to call in, his "Investigating shots fired" lost among dozens of urgent reports from across the rain-soaked city. Cars are abandoned on flooded Storrow Drive. A power station just exploded and shut down the Back Bay. Looters are smashing boutique windows on Newbury Street.

"Upstairs," he says. They cross the lobby and climb the steps, the still air thick with the sharp smell of aging piss. At the top floor, Harkness counts the doors until they come to the center.

Harkness nods Patrick toward the closer side of the door and he takes the other. They press their backs against the cracked yellow plaster.

"Sure this is the right one?" Patrick whispers, still huffing from the stairs.

A shot rips through the door between them and dim light filters through the splintered hole.

"Seems likely." On a normal patrol, they would have called for backup and waited. But this is no ordinary day. Harkness smacks the crowbar on the door. "*Police,*" he shouts. "Drop the gun and open the door, hands in the air. Now."

Another bullet cracks through the door.

Patrick gives Harkness a flat stare, clicks his radio to leave the channel open, not that anyone's paying attention. "Party time."

"Cover the door." Harkness cuts down the hallway to the other wing of the hotel. He pops a door and it flies open to reveal a dim living room, empty except for a jumbled pile of bicycle frames. He walks slowly to the far corner of the room, where a row of windows faces an air shaft. He grabs a tattered green T-shirt from the floor and wipes the window to clear away the grime.

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Looking across the air shaft into the apartment, Harkness sees a young boy leaning against a radiator, tethered to it by a thick, shiny chain around his waist. He waves a gun with one hand and scratches his back with the other. Sensing someone watching, he turns. The boy can't be more than fourteen but looks exhausted as an old man, eyelids drifting down as he stares at Harkness and wonders why there's a cop in the empty room across the air shaft.

They look at each other for a moment. Then the boy holds up his hand and lets the gun drop.

Harkness nods, turns to retrace his steps.

Patrick's face glistens with sweat. "Harky, we got to get out of here, like now."

"Hang on." Harkness kicks open the bullet-pocked door and they take cautious steps into the apartment. Guns drawn, they walk past a sagging couch and a wooden table crowded with bottles and cans. A flat-screen flickers in the corner, the Weather Channel showing clouds swirling and wind-whipped weathermen in slickers shouting silently. Patrick cuts right to check out the kitchen, Harkness left to the bedroom. No one lurks in the trashed rooms, narrow hallways, or closets. They reconnect and inch toward the living room, where the skinny boy stands next to a white radiator, a body sprawled on the floor a few feet away.

"All clear. Just the kid." Patrick holsters his Glock.

"And a dead guy." Harkness leads the way across the living room, tinted green by the storm's aquatic light. The floor is thick with McDonald's boxes, scratch tickets, and wadded clothes.

The boy backs against the radiator.

Patrick walks up to the body. "*Shit*, man. This sad motherfucker's still warm."

"Check him out," Harkness says. "I'll talk to the kid."

Patrick nods, pulls on thin plastic gloves. "I get to have all the fun."

As Harkness walks toward the boy, he bends down to pocket a snub-nose, its grip wrapped with grimy medical tape. "It's okay, kid," he says softly.

The kid's face is light coffee brown with the scared blue-gray eyes of a German shepherd puppy. He's about ninety pounds of raw nerves, wearing a gray T-shirt and cheap jeans that hang limply

from his narrow hips. All Harkness feels is shivering bones. The boy says nothing as Harkness pats him down.

“Got a name?”

The boy stares at him, pale eyes glowing in the gloom. He reaches around and scratches his back.

“*Lord said to Noah, there’s gonna be a floody, floody,*” Patrick sings to himself.

“Find anything?”

“No blood, wounds, whacks,” Patrick says. “Just a wad of cash in his pocket and a big honking needle mark on his left arm. Don’t take a genius to come up with the cause of death.”

“ID?”

“Nothing yet.” Patrick peels off his gloves and throws them on the floor. “Leave it for the techs.”

“No one’s coming back here for days.” Harkness turns to the boy. “Who’s that?” He points at the body.

The boy just keeps staring.

“Kid don’t have much to say, does he?” Patrick tosses over the dead man’s key ring and Harkness reaches up to catch it. He opens the cheap lock and unwraps the shiny chain from around the boy’s waist.

The boy darts toward the door.

Harkness reaches out an arm to snag him. “Hold on a second.”

The quiet boy’s breathing like he just finished a marathon. His eyes ping back and forth and then linger on the couch.

Harkness is a legendary finder of drugs, money, guns, shell casings, cell phones, and the other well-hidden debris of the drug trade. But this hide is easy to spot. The kid might as well be pointing a finger. Harkness walks over to the couch and pushes his hand beneath the cushions. Nothing. Then he reaches back in the gritty space between the cushions and feels a slit in the lining. Reaching farther, he feels plastic. He pulls out a thick quart-size bag jammed with rubber-banded bundles of packets, each stamped with a blood-red horse.

Harkness holds out the bag to Patrick.

“Mother lode, Harky. That’s more than a kilo.”

Harkness stuffs the drugs in a yellow evidence bag and tosses it to Patrick.

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He catches the bag, holds it up. “Know anything about this, skinny kid?”

The boy says nothing.

“Waiting for his lawyer, I guess.”

“The kid’s deaf,” Harkness says.

“How the fuck do you know that?”

“Been watching my lips when I talk. Most kids would have just shouted instead of shooting out the window. And how many people around here keep the sound off on their TV?”

“Like none.”

Harkness kneels down in front of the boy and his hands move in fluid motion, telling him that everything’s going to be okay.

The kid signs back, hands a blur. He says the dead guy’s his uncle, and that other people, bad ones, are on their way to the apartment.

Harkness tells him not to worry, they’re leaving.

Patrick’s eyes open wide. “When’d you learn that?”

“Taught myself a little American Sign Language one summer when I was a kid, back in Nagog.”

“Must’ve been one boring motherfucker of a summer.”

“You have no idea,” Harkness says. “Give him your candy bar.”

“How do you know I got one?”

“You’re Patrick Fitzgerald, aren’t you?”

Patrick reaches into the pocket of his jacket and holds out a Mars Bar like he’s feeding a tiger. Deaf Kid takes off the wrapper gingerly, sniffs the candy bar, then devours it.

“We really gotta clear out of here, Harky.”

“Okay, okay.”

“Like now.”

Their radios blare the department-wide emergency tone for the first time Harkness can remember and they stand still for a silent moment listening to the dead air before the dispatcher’s terse voice echoes through the room. “All units. Channel Dam breached, major flooding expected. Leave evacuation zone immediately and await further . . .”

Harkness picks up Deaf Kid, throws him over his shoulder, and runs toward the door, Patrick following. Their footsteps echo down the dank green stairwell, walls darkened by hundreds of trailing hands.

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Outside, the brown water's halfway up the squad-car door. Harkness wades in up to his waist, Deaf Kid slung over his shoulder, and looks into the flooded car, laptop and radio already underwater. Dunkin' Donuts cups swirl like cheerful boats in the back seat.

Patrick pauses in the hotel entryway. Cars are starting to break loose in the rising water and drift down the street. "Hey, Harky," he shouts over the howling storm.

"What?"

"Don't know how to swim."

"Now you tell me." Harkness nods toward the hotel. "Inside, quick. Get back upstairs."

The water running down Albrecht Street reverses, flowing away from the square — slowly at first, then faster. Harkness turns to see what's happening.

The seething wave blossoms, fat with trash. Plastic bottles fleck its crest. Foam blows like spit. Cars rise up its face and smash with the crunch of metal and glass. Harkness keeps Deaf Kid turned so he can't see the wave rushing at them — five blocks away, then three blocks, two . . .

Waist-high in whiskey-colored water, Harkness reaches for his belt and unclips his handcuffs. He wraps one cold steel cuff around his wrist then clicks the other closed around Deaf Kid's narrow ankle as the wave sweeps over them.

2

THEY THRASH THROUGH the tempest, swept underwater and dragged down with the cars, trashcans, and stinking debris, the dirty water pulling at them with greedy hands. Harkness struggles toward the dim light above them, swimming with one flailing arm and dragging Deaf Kid cuffed to the other.

Harkness grabs the door handle of a Town Taxi floating by and climbs aboard, pulling Deaf Kid up on the roof by his leg. Skinny chest heaving, the boy sprawls on the slippery surface and coughs up a spume of sepia water.

Harkness takes Deaf Kid by the shoulders and looks into his dimming eyes. The boy's stunned and about to go into shock. Harkness reaches in his pocket for the key, unlocks the handcuff around Deaf Kid's narrow ankle. He nods at the OFF DUTY light and the kid latches onto it.

They ride on the taxi's roof past warehouses and apartment buildings, the street a raging river, the cab a lurching, rudderless barge. They're half drowned and lashed by rain but grinning. For one stolen moment they revel in just being alive.

Then the street tilts down and the cab rushes past apartments, corner stores, and a payday-loan office. Ahead, Albrecht Square glows orange from a burning apartment building, black smoke billowing from every window. Darker shapes dot the water, some flailing and screaming, others floating face-down.

S — A man leans out of the second-floor window of an apartment
N — building, long dark hair hanging in wet tendrils as he shakes his head

at the chaos and destruction — a musician, waiter, night watchman. Doesn't matter. He looks alert and strong. They lock eyes as the cab floats closer. Harkness points down at Deaf Kid then toward the apartment. The man nods, ducks inside, and comes back with others, who lean out the row of windows.

Harkness stands on the roof, gets his footing, then waves at Deaf Kid to get up. Standing but shaky, he angles his dirty Keds like he's on a surfboard. Harkness grabs the kid by the waist.

Deaf Kid looks confused. Harkness smiles, then lifts him up in the air like a sack of leaves and gives him a precisely timed toss toward the waiting hands. Strangers reach out to pull him inside the apartment.

Harkness watches as Deaf Kid squirms in a window and disappears. Then the long-haired guy shakes his head and waves his hands in front of him as if trying to ward off a demon. As Harkness turns, a sizzling black cable coils around his neck and pulls him from the roof of the taxi.

Looking out into the dim, rain-slashed afternoon, Harkness sees a battered white trailer bob in a construction site like a child's toy. Water laps against the stained-glass windows of the red-brick chapel for merchant sailors. Wayward sailboats and floating cars cluster around the courthouse. Only the roof deck remains of the late-night whiskey bar, no loss there — the drunks kept May awake.

Next to the Northern Avenue Bridge, three Harbor Patrol boats, blue lights flashing, surround the harbormaster's shack. Harkness thinks it's strange — that building's been empty for decades — then his gaze wanders to an orange emergency raft gliding through the seaport's streets, now more like canals. Harkness focuses, remembers lying in the bottom of one of those rafts, a Harbor Patrol officer shouting down at him in the rain. But he doesn't know how he got home or how long he's been here in their apartment, staring down at his flooded neighborhood.

He's not even sure anything he sees is real. Is he back in their apartment or dreaming about it?

The parquet floor shifts and sways like the basket of a hot-air balloon. Harkness touches the wall to still it.

When he closes his eyes he sees Albrecht Square flooded and

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burning and wonders if it was all just a nightmare. Then Harkness raises his hand to touch the bandage on his chest. He pulls away the white tape and lifts the bandage to reveal a silver-dollar-size circle of blackened, blistered skin just below his collarbone, the raw wound covered with clear ointment.

He winces and presses the bandage back in place.

Light footsteps slide across the floor, and the bedroom door inches open.

“Hey, you’re supposed to be asleep.” Candace’s dark eyes look concerned, her face even more pale than usual. She’s wearing her good-luck outfit—Celtics sweatpants and a time-thinned Misfits T-shirt—and she clutches a splayed copy of *All for One*, her comfort book.

“I’m awake, right?”

She puts her arms around Harkness and holds him close, tears trailing down her cheeks. “*Jesus*, Eddy. You stepped in it this time.”

“I’m okay,” he says, voice hoarse. He’s swallowed seawater and gutter water, sewage and gasoline, who knows what else.

“Better be.”

“How long have I been here?”

She squints. “You don’t remember anything, do you?”

“Not really.” Harkness shakes his head slowly.

“You got smacked in the head, zapped by a live wire, and half drowned,” she says.

He nods, remembers fragments—the orange emergency raft, a doctor’s neutral face hovering in a white room.

“You’re lucky to be alive, Eddy.”

Harkness says nothing.

“You were in the hospital for three nights,” Candace says. “They were worried about brain swelling but it didn’t happen. You’ve got a concussion but they said your head would start to clear in a week or so. You’re just supposed to chill out and keep your head elevated. Plus you’re on pain meds, antibiotics, and a bunch of other drugs.”

“How’d I get here?”

“Ambulance from the hospital,” she says. “Your friend Lattimore made it happen.” Candace nods toward the window. “Neighborhood’s all messed up. They’re calling it the Inundation District now,” she says. “Remember all that fancy Dutch flood stuff they told

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us about when we moved in here? The reservoir beneath the building, the electrical room on the upper floor?"

Harkness nods, has no idea what Candace is talking about.

"It worked. No water. No problems. Like the flood never happened."

But it did, Harkness thinks.

Candace puts her book on the bedside table and holds out an Elvis-worthy handful of pills in her working hand. When she was seventeen, Candace lost her left hand in a small-plane crash that killed her mother and sister. The accident seems prophetic to Harkness now though he can't say exactly why.

"Time for more drugs," she says.

Harkness stares at the bright capsules in her palm, and then Candace's hand is empty and the water glass on the nightstand is drained. He wonders if this is what Alzheimer's feels like.

The apartment seems too quiet. "Where's . . ." He searches his sputtering mind for Candace's daughter's name. "May?"

Candace tilts her head. "She's downstairs at Nate and Shawna's, playing with Jenna. Wanted to keep the noise down so you can rest."

"She okay?"

"May's fine," Candace says. "To a three-year-old, being trapped at home during a storm is an adventure."

"Oh."

"You know you asked me the same questions about May like an hour ago, right?"

"Don't remember that."

"Check this out." Candace holds up the front section of the *Globe* and waves it, trying to bring back fast-thinking, relentlessly focused Eddy. "Building manager dropped this by a couple of days ago. He thought you might want an old-style copy, for your scrapbook or something."

Harkness stares at the giant headline that screams FLOOD. In a black box at the top the mayor warns people to stay off the streets until further notice.

Candace opens the paper. "You're a bright spot in the storm." There are photos of the Charles River rushing across the Esplanade, rows of commuter trains underwater in the South Station rail yard, the UMass Boston campus cut off from the mainland by the storm

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surge. Then he sees a black-haired cop who looks like he just got sprayed with a fire hose standing on the hood of a floating cab, a scrawny kid hovering just above him in mid-toss while waiting arms reach down to grab him.

"I don't remember anyone taking pictures."

"Cell phones, Eddy. Someone's pretty much always taking pictures."

Harkness wonders where Deaf Kid is now, and Patrick. He turns to Candace. "Hey, help me find my uniform."

"Got to be kidding," she says. "They cut off what was left of it in the ER."

"There's another one somewhere." He tries to remember where.

"Eddy, you're supposed to take at least another week off to recover. You got whacked around. And you're not acting normal yet, just so you know. Even for you."

He closes his eyes, sees nothing but water and fire.

"Anyway, you can't go anywhere. No one can. The mayor says we all have to stay put until the electricity's back on and the flood starts to go down."

"When's that supposed to happen?"

"Pretty soon," she says. "Wasn't as bad as it could have been. Dodged a bullet, that's what they're saying."

"Who's saying that?"

The room shifts again and Harkness lurches toward the bed. He hears Candace talking in the distance. The room darkens as a cloud crosses the dim sun hovering over Chinatown.

A high oscillating note, warm as a Stratocaster playing through a vintage tube amp, rings in his right ear then moves to the left. George got a Strat for Christmas once, Olympic white with a tortoiseshell pick guard. Harkness wonders where his brother's guitar ended up, reminds himself to ask. It's probably worth a pile now and George always needs more money . . .

Harkness's knees give way and he sprawls on the bed. "Sorry, really tired." Candace lifts his head gently to put a pillow underneath it, then covers him with a blanket. *Like a body at a crime scene*, he thinks as he drops into deep, black sleep.

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That night Harkness patrols the streets of the Lower South End before the flood, his drug-slowed dreams summoning up the neighborhood he knew when he was a rookie — restaurant-supply stores, a tearoom for readings, old-style Irish pubs, cheap hotels and apartments that rented by the month. Albrecht Square had the worn charm of Dirty Old Boston. It was the Scollay Square that the city fathers couldn't tear down.

Then the light over the neighborhood shifts to verdigris and the streets stream with stinking water, sweeping him away. Harkness's legs uncoil in his sleep as he sinks underwater and tries to swim.

Churning her narrow legs, Little Dorothy kicks closer, her pink dress billowing like the poisoned scrim of a jellyfish. She turns her head to reveal the vernixed oval of bone where her face once was before she became just another dead girl. Years ago, Harkness found Little Dorothy hidden behind the wall of a Fenway meth lab, her stiff, starved body stuffed head-down in a bucket of sodium hydroxide.

No matter how many years pass, no matter how many other bodies he sees, Little Dorothy still travels with him, a memory he can't drink away.

The underwater revenant points a pale finger at Harkness and opens her tattered mouth to give out a burbling laugh, a message to Harkness and all of the other survivors.

The storm may be over. But the damage is just beginning.

3

A DIVING MASK HANGS from the coat rack in the corner of Harkness's office and a striped beach towel waits in the center of his desk topped with a Post-it note that says *Gone Swimmn!* Harkness smiles and shakes his head. He's back at work at Narco-Intel headquarters, four floors above Boylston Street. Patrick and the others have had a week to mess with his office.

"Thanks, people," Harkness says to the detectives hanging around his office door. "I'm amused and honored. Now get back to work."

They drift back to their cubes. Harkness looks out his window at cobblestoned Copley Square, ornate Trinity Church to the left, somber Boston Public Library to the right, the shimmering blue spear of the Hancock Building rising behind them both. Generators roar on Boylston Street, sunny and hot now that the last of the storm has spiraled out over the North Atlantic. Hoses spew murky water from basement bars. City workers in emergency vests shovel mud into green plastic barrels, feed downed branches into roaring chipper. Students, scholars, and bums step carefully along the crooked wooden walkways that cross the watery edges of the square.

Harkness turns to find Esther Vieramenos standing in his doorway. She's tall and birdlike, wearing a gray sweater on a hot day, dark bangs falling in front of darker eyes that lurk behind thick black-rimmed glasses. Her ID hangs from her narrow neck on a summer-camp rawhide lanyard. She looks like a detective someone bought on Etsy.

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"I tried that shit, boss," she whispers.

“What shit?”

“Dark Horse.”

“You mean you gave it a little taste, right?” Harkness busted her years ago when she was a coke-dealing Brandeis chemistry major. Now she’s the Narco-Intel lab rat.

She shakes her head. “Nope. Swiped a gram from Evidence and snorted it low and slow all during the flood. Savored it like a wine taster.”

Harkness looks up at the ceiling. “I’m going to have to unhear that.”

Esther’s their canary in the coal mine. She thinks like an addict because she used to be one.

Or maybe still is.

“I was stuck at home in Waltham, boss. Couldn’t go anywhere. Sheltering in place was a big bore. Moody Street was flooded. Internet was out. Wanted to see what all the fuss was about.”

Harkness holds his hand up. “Still unhearing.” When Harkness drafted Esther for Narco-Intel she promised to stay on the straight edge. “Backsliding?”

“Nope,” she says. “Just doing some not-so-scientific research.”

“Sure.”

“Dark Horse is messed up.”

“You mean deadly,” Harkness says.

“Way too strong for what it’s going for on the street.” Esther shrugs. “Maybe they’re getting people hooked, then they’ll jack up the price. I’ll take a closer look at it in the lab.”

“Do that. But just a look, okay?” Harkness steps toward Esther and stares into her dark brown eyes, checks that her pupils aren’t constricted. At least she’s not high on the job. He couldn’t have let that slide. “Still getting tested?” Esther’s contract includes random drug testing.

“Yeah?”

“If you ever test positive I’ll have to fire you, you know that, right?”

Esther shrugs. “Don’t worry about me, boss. I got buckets of normal pee. People’re peeing for me all over the city.”

“Thanks for that,” Harkness says.

Now Patrick’s hovering at his office door.

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"I want full lab results next week, okay?"

Esther nods and turns. She runs her hand along Patrick's chest as they pass. "Hey, Patrick. I may be half Cuban but I'm all yours." She beams an unhinged smile at her office rival.

"I don't hang with freaky chicks who collect pee."

"Your loss." She clicks the door closed.

"Welcome back to the garden of misfit toys an' shit," Patrick says.

"Glad to be back."

"Feeling better?"

Harkness sits down at his desk. "Kind of. What'd I miss?"

"A week of flood duty with some clown lieutenant from A-One," Patrick says. He points down at the square. "We guarded a burnt-out power station. Cordoned off the flooded T station over in Maverick Square. Shoveled fish in the North End. That was a really fun day. The city's going to stink forever."

The roiling green clouds of the hurricane rained biblical hauls of fish down on the city—cod, stripers, small sharks, rays, and thick globs of jellyfish. Sucked up from the Grand Banks, now they clog alleys and dry on rooftops.

"It'll pass," Harkness says. "Everything goes away."

"Deep, boss. Think I'll write that down," Patrick says, but doesn't.

Harkness nods toward his dual computer screens, one playing the local news with the sound off, the other crowded with DEA trend data, the OD list from Boston City Hospital, and hundreds of unanswered e-mails. "Trending?"

"Just junk, junk, and more junk," he says. "Startin' to look like the Salvation Army around here. Every now and then I actually miss good ol' Oxy. At least people knew what they were getting with pills."

"We need to flag Dark Horse," Harkness says.

"Why? It's just old-style black tar. Crap heroin from California."

"Esther says it's weird."

"I say Esther's weird."

"Agreed, but we're getting more confirmed overdoses." Harkness points to the screen. "Send out an info request to the network. I don't want to keep finding Dark Horse bags next to dead people."

S — Patrick holds up his hands. "Done, boss. Department-wide?"

N — Harkness thinks. "Put it out to the whole network."

“Whatever you say, Harky. But this one’s not worth the trouble. Black tar ain’t nothing new.”

“We’ll see.”

Narco-Intel’s mission is “to take an unconventional, more effective approach to drug interdiction.” Just how unconventional is an ongoing topic of discussion among Boston Police Department commanders, who regard the Bad Boys of the BPD with a mix of respect, eye-rolling, and worry that they’ll go too far, again.

The Narcotics Information Network was one of Harkness’s first innovations, a network of unlikely sources—bodega owners in Dudley Square, single mothers in Bromley-Heath, neighborhood dog walkers on Castle Island, art students in grimy Fenway basement apartments. Thousands of eyes on the street will turn up everything from empty heroin packets to cell-phone photos of users to addresses of potential dealers—all fed into a database that Patrick calls Big Data on Drugs.

Patrick reaches for the card taped to a bottle of Jameson on the briefing table. “Least you could do is open the note, Harky.”

“Was just about to do that.”

Patrick rips open the tiny envelope. “Card says ‘Fantastic job, as usual. Get well soon. Apply this to affected areas.’” Patrick holds the card up to the light. “Bet one of his doofus helper dudes wrote it—the commissioner’s just not that funny. Looks like he really signed it, though.”

“Quit reading my mail,” Harkness says, not looking away from his computer screen.

“All’s I get is hardware catalogs and postcards from the gym.”

“Maybe you ought to go sometime.”

“To the hardware store?”

“To the gym. Or at least the swimming pool.”

Patrick flails his hands in front of him. “Now that’s just crazy talk, Harky. We ain’t gonna see another hurricane like that for years, that’s what they’re saying on TV.”

“Who, Fox?”

“No, real people.”

Harkness stands and the room blurs and sparkles. He wavers, then sits back down, pressing his fingertips on his desk to keep from keeling over.

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“You okay?”

Harkness gives a small nod, eyes closed. “From that concussion. Supposed to take it easy for another week or so.” A question surfaces in Harkness’s sputtering mind. He opens his eyes. “What about the kid?”

Patrick thrusts out his phone. “Seen this?”

Onscreen, Harkness throws Deaf Kid over and over from the top of a floating cab into the waiting arms of strangers who seem to be several floors above, thanks to editing that adds yards to the toss. The screen blazes with the words HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES!

“What the hell’s that?”

“Animated GIF thingy,” Patrick says. “You’re a meme already. Gone viral.”

“Can’t antibiotics kill that off?”

“Most people would love that kind of attention.”

“That’s the problem.”

Patrick watches Deaf Kid go airborne one last time then pockets his phone. “Deaf Kid checked out clean from the hospital, except he’s underweight. And stone-deaf, course. You called that one. Kid doesn’t even have a real name.”

“What?”

“Birth certificate says Unnamed Boy. Mom never got around to fixing it.”

“Relatives?”

“Dead junkie sprawled next to the radiator actually was his uncle. Went by the name Levon Ashmont.”

“His uncle chained him to a radiator, really?”

Patrick shrugs. “Had like a dozen priors. Violent offender. Big-league dealer, which explains the value pack of junk stuck in the couch. Anyhow, you got to admit, the kid’s kind of a wildcat.”

“Weren’t we all,” Harkness says. “Any other family around?”

“Father got shot dead last year in Dudley. Mom’s crazy, ended up in MCI. Got diabetes something awful. They ran out of things to amputate.”

“Where’s the kid now?”

“Department of Youth Offenders has him.”

“DYO?” Harkness shakes his head. “He didn’t do anything wrong. They won’t know what to do with him.” DYO is legendary for no-

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show caseworkers who let kids fall through the cracks. He gets up from his desk and stalks toward the window to stare down at Copley Square. "Let's get him out of there."

"When did we get in the deaf-kid business?"

"Since we found one."

Patrick joins him at the window. "You and your strays, Harky. Got to say, I'm thankful, being one. On the other hand, I think you got enough already."

Harkness goes silent, narrows his gaze at the steps of the library.

"See something, say something." Patrick intones the Homeland Security creed without enthusiasm.

"That guy coming out of the library? Recognize him?" Harkness points to a short guy with a backpack, his smoke-bush hair swaying in the wind.

Patrick shakes his head. "Looks like any other dumb-ass student."

Harkness grabs his badge and throws on his gun belt and leather jacket. "Looks like Mouse. Dealer out in Nagog. Remember him?"

"Oh yeah, that guy. Major douche. Sold that nasty smart drug." Irresistible, expensive, and deadly, Third Rail is a Narco-Intel Hall of Famer.

"Mouse owes me."

"Owes you what?"

Harkness holds up his left hand, most of its index finger missing. "A finger."