

PROLOGUE

Sometimes, when you least expect it, you find just what you've been searching for—even though you might not have known that you were searching at all. It's a remarkable thing when it happens, and it happened to me recently on a trip to Zurich. I was there on pleasure, just visiting a friend, and I decided to take a train to the university one afternoon while he was at work. I ate lunch and strolled around the campus for a while, eventually ending up where I always end up, at the science library. I wasn't looking for anything in particular, just browsing through some archived lecture material when I ran across a series of journals written by a surgeon named F.T. Blood. Long forgotten, apparently. Nothing on the Internet, and the name didn't ring a bell. Which was astounding, really, because the volumes I started flipping through had obviously been penned by a genius of the highest caliber. There were four notebooks in all, three of them outlining the procedure Dr. Blood had been working on at the time, and one filled with a variety of extremely complex chemical formulas. The earliest entry was from 17 October 1942, the latest from 28 January 1947. The pages had yellowed and some of the ink had faded, but enough of the text had been preserved for me to know that I was looking at something extraordinary. When I

read through some of the pages and started considering the possibilities, I knew that the notebooks had to be mine. I still feel sort of bad about taking them, but I doubt they'll ever be missed.

And I think they're going to do me a world of good.

Part 1

Thrasher

1

He couldn't get her out of his mind.

Not that he wanted to. He was enjoying thinking about her, and there wasn't much else to do at the moment anyway.

Kei Thrasher was sitting on a plastic chair in the emergency room, waiting to be seen for an infection. It had started out as a paper cut, of all things, a slit about the size of a mouse whisker on the print side of his left index finger. He'd been opening envelopes and shredding their contents, had gotten a little carried away and a little careless. That was a week ago. Now his finger looked like a steamed hotdog.

Thrasher should have sought treatment sooner, but he didn't. He'd put it off, and now he was going to have to be admitted to the hospital for a course of IV antibiotics. He knew this because he used to be a doctor himself.

His finger was red and fat and it hurt like crazy.

But he still couldn't get her out of his mind.

She had been working in the deli at the supermarket where Kei shopped. He was passing by on his way to the fresh produce one day when he noticed her for the first time. Green eyes, olive complexion, smile radiating like some kind of magnetic force, beaming past the stainless steel meat slicer and straight to Kei Thrasher's heart.

"Can I help you?" she said.

Kei glanced down at her nametag. Anna. She wore a hairnet and an apron and black leather shoes. She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

"Sandwich," he said.

"You want a sandwich?"

"Yes."

He didn't usually order anything at the deli, couldn't afford to, but at that moment he would have handed over his entire paycheck for one slice of cheese.

"What kind of bread?" Anna said.

"It doesn't matter."

She looked across the counter at him and laughed.

"Are you serious?" she said.

"Yeah. I don't care. Just pick something."

She opened the clear plastic bin where the fresh bread was stored, pulled out a twelve-inch sub roll, one of the brown ones with flaky stuff on top.

"Did you want a whole sandwich, or just half?"

"Half."

She kept asking him questions, and he kept responding with one-word answers. The exchange went on for several minutes, and Kei finally walked away from the counter with some

kind of meat and some kind of cheese and lettuce and tomatoes and spinach and cucumbers on some kind of bread. He headed straight for the checkout aisles, completely forgetting about what he'd come for in the first place.

Several weeks and a dozen or so sandwiches later, he finally worked up the nerve to ask her out.

“Mr. Thrasher?”

A pretty young woman in scrubs stood at the entrance to the examination rooms. Clipboard, purple stethoscope. She smiled, held the door open with her shoulder as Kei rose and grabbed his gym bag and marched forward. He followed her to an area with a big 3 painted on the wall, climbed onto the padded table while she pulled the curtains around.

His finger was throbbing.

“I’ve been out there for five hours,” he said. “I need something for pain.”

She looked at her clipboard. “I’m going to get your vitals and ask you a few questions, and then I’m going to draw some blood. After that, the doctor will—”

“I don’t want to wait that long,” Kei said. “I need something now.”

She sighed, looked annoyed. Kei knew what she was thinking. Another addict seeking narcotics.

“Are you allergic to anything?” she said.

“No.”

She snapped open the curtain and walked away.

Kei’s first date with Anna was like something out of a dream.

A wonderful dream.

They ate dinner at a nice seafood place, and then they walked along the beach holding hands in the moonlight. Kei couldn't remember what they talked about, but he could hear the waves gently lapping the shoreline and he could smell Anna's long black hair and he could feel the cool January breeze coming off the Gulf. They stopped and kissed and he held her tight and never wanted to let go.

The nurse came back with two white tablets in a little plastic dosing cup.

"What is this?" Kei said.

"Ibuprofen."

She handed Kei a cup of water. He swallowed the pills. She took his blood pressure and temperature, inserted an IV in his left forearm, drew several tubes of blood for the lab.

"You're pretty good at that," Kei said, referring to her skills with a needle.

"I get lots of practice."

She said it in a cold, matter-of-fact way, as if she didn't enjoy her work very much. Maybe she was just having a bad night, Kei thought. She started him on normal saline at 100 ml an hour, hooked him up to an EKG monitor, gathered her things and hurried off to check on another patient.

A young male resident named Bennington came in a few minutes later and told Kei what he already knew, that they were going to admit him and start him on antibiotics. They would monitor his blood work for a couple of days, and then maybe discharge him with a special IV line so he could continue therapy at home.

"After you're discharged, a nurse will stop by your house and administer the medication once a day," Dr. Bennington said.

"Would it be possible for me to have a private room while I'm here?"

“Actually, that’s all we have at this facility. One patient to a room, even on the regular floors.”

“Good.”

Kei didn’t bother telling anyone that he’d once been an emergency room physician himself. He didn’t want any special treatment, and he didn’t feel like going into the story behind why he wasn’t a doctor anymore.

It was after midnight by the time they wheeled him into his room on the fourth floor. He climbed into bed and switched on the television, kept the volume low and tried Anna on his cell.

No answer.

It had been four days since their date, and she hadn’t responded to any of his calls or texts or emails. Which seemed absurd, based on the great time they had and the last words she’d said to him after he kissed her goodnight.

“Talk to you soon,” she’d said.

Kei wondered if her definition of *soon* was different than his. He’d wanted to talk to her five seconds after he drove away from her house.

A man wearing white scrubs and a long white lab coat walked into Kei’s room pushing a medication cart, one of the newer ones with a computer monitor mounted on top.

“My name is Brent,” he said. “I’m your nurse tonight.”

“Hello, Brent.”

“How are you doing?”

“I could use something for pain.”

“I’m still waiting for your admission orders to come through. How would you describe your pain on a scale of zero to ten, zero being no pain at all and—”

“About an eight right now,” Kei said.

“Okay. I’m sure the doctor will order something, and I’ll get it to you as soon as it’s available. In the meantime, I’d like to do a quick physical assessment and go over some questions with you.”

“Sure.”

Brent grabbed a pair of gloves from the dispenser on the wall, pulled his stethoscope out of his lab coat pocket and listened to Kei’s chest and belly. He performed a basic neurological exam, and then he took a long look at the infected finger.

“How did you cut yourself?” he said.

“On an envelope. It was nothing, just a paper cut, but then it kept getting a little worse every day. Now it feels like someone sliced into it with a hacksaw.”

“Don’t worry,” Brent said. “We’ll get you fixed up.”

“I hope so.”

Brent pulled his rolling computer closer to the bed and started going through the questions on the admission database. By the time he finished, it was on record that Kei Thrasher was a forty-four-year-old Caucasian male with brown hair and blue eyes. He was six feet seven inches tall, two hundred and fifty-four pounds. No history of diabetes or cancer or heart disease. No drugs, no tobacco, one or two beers a day, maybe three or four on special occasions. He listed his occupation as bartender, although he was actually a promotion away from holding that title at the restaurant where he worked. No history of mental illness—at least none that Kei felt was relevant enough to share at the moment—and no physical complaints other than the finger.

“Who would you like for us to contact in case of emergency?” Brent said.

Kei thought about that for a few seconds. He didn't have any family that he kept in touch with on a regular basis, and most of his friends had abandoned him when he lost his license to practice medicine.

Anna was the only person who came to mind.

"My girlfriend," he said.

He gave Brent the name and number, knowing that she wasn't really his girlfriend yet, unsure as to whether she even wanted to see him again.

"I think that's all I need for now," Brent said. "I'll go check on your pain medicine."

"Thanks."

Kei clicked through the cable television channels, stopped on an old black-and-white monster movie. Brent came back about thirty minutes later, piggybacked Kei's first dose of antibiotics into the saline drip the ER nurse had started earlier.

"And I have your pain medicine right here," he said, reaching into his lab coat pocket and pulling out a capped syringe.

"What is it?"

"Morphine."

"Okay."

Brent clamped off the drip for a few seconds while he injected the contents of the syringe into the IV port closest to Kei's arm.

Immediate relief.

"I'll be back to check on you in a little while," Brent said. "Don't hesitate to call if you need anything."

"Thank you. I think I'm good for the night."

Brent switched off the overhead fluorescent on his way out, left the door cracked about six inches.

Kei adjusted the bed to a comfortable position. He wanted to watch the rest of the movie, but he couldn't keep his eyes open. He turned the volume all the way down, drifted off, feeling no pain, resting better than he had in days.

And then a loud thump jarred him awake.

The light came on, bright and harsh and unsettling, and an old man wearing a hospital gown staggered into the room and started shouting for help. Kei sat up, squinted him into focus. He was bald and barefoot and his arm was bleeding where he'd ripped out his IV.

He was obviously confused. Kei had dealt with plenty of similar cases when he was a doctor. Kei pressed the call button, but before any of the nurses had a chance to respond, a man in a dark blue suit ran in and grabbed the old guy by the shoulders.

"Come on," the man in the dark blue suit said. "We need to get you back to your room."

But the old man didn't want any part of it. He turned and started hitting the man in the dark blue suit with his bony fists, and then he turned back toward Kei, frantic and out of breath and pleading for help as if his life depended on it.

"It's me!" he shouted. "Anna! Please help me!"

2

The man in the dark blue suit looked over at Kei.

Not a glance, closer to a stare.

Maybe it was Kei's imagination, but it seemed as if the man in the dark blue suit was very nervous about something. Or maybe Kei was misinterpreting the expression on his face. Maybe it was one of concern rather than anxiety. The old man was probably his dad. Or grandfather, maybe. The man in the dark blue suit was probably around forty, and the old man appeared to be in his late seventies or early eighties.

The old guy was still shouting, pleading for help, emphatically trying to establish his identity to someone named Anna. Or claiming that his own name was Anna. He was obviously very upset about something, and it was difficult to discern the exact message he was trying to convey, but it was clear that the name Anna played a big part in whatever was going through his mind. His room must be right next door, Kei thought. He must have overheard Kei answering questions for the admission database. That was the only time Anna had been mentioned, and it seemed like too much of a coincidence for the old man to have picked the name at random.

Brent and two female nurses rushed in with a wheelchair and forced the old man to sit down, and then one of the women pulled out a hypodermic and injected something into his left thigh. Whatever it was, it calmed him down immediately. They wheeled him out of the room, and the man in the dark blue suit followed.

The entire occurrence had probably lasted less than a minute, but Kei was wide awake now, and his finger was hurting again. He gave the staff some time to get the old man settled back into his own room, and then he pressed the call button and requested something for pain.

“I’ll tell your nurse,” a female voice said over the intercom.

Kei waited, stared at the television, wondered how the movie had ended. Probably the same as most of them, with the monster being destroyed and the villagers living happily ever after—especially the man and woman who’d managed to fall in love along the way.

There was some kind of cop show on now. Guns and car chases and all that. Not really Kei’s thing, but he didn’t feel like going through all the channels again. He left the volume down, checked his cell phone for messages. Nothing. He tried not to worry about it too much. It was the middle of the night, after all. Maybe Anna would get back to him in the morning.

Brent came in holding a syringe in one hand and a liter of normal saline in the other. The bag from the ER was almost empty. Brent was staying on top of it. He was a good nurse. He hung the saline on the rolling pole next to the bed, ready to be changed over before the pump started beeping. He went through the pain assessment scale again, and Kei told him it was a seven this time.

“How’s the old man doing?” Kei said.

“I’m really not allowed to talk about that. It’s a confidentiality issue.”

“Is he still next door to me? Or did you move him closer to the nurses’ station where you can keep a better eye on him?”

“He was never next door to you.”

Brent administered the morphine. Kei experienced a wave of nausea this time, but it passed quickly. The pain in his finger clicked off like a switch.

“He kept saying the name Anna,” Kei said. “I thought he must have overheard me when I gave you her phone number.”

“I don’t see how he could have,” Brent said. “Anyway, it’s a common name. Maybe it was his wife’s name. Or his mother’s.”

Kei nodded. That made sense. The poor old guy was probably thinking about someone from long ago.

Brent spiked the new bag of saline, tossed the old one in the trashcan on his way out of the room.

Kei fell asleep right away.

Anna was sitting across from him at the seafood place. Table for two, view of the Gulf, guy on a stool playing an acoustic guitar next to a small dance floor in the corner.

“What kind of name is Kei?” Anna said.

“It’s Japanese. Apparently my mother spent some time over there while she was pregnant with me. I have a picture somewhere of her standing in front of the Tokyo National Museum. She looks like she stuffed a watermelon under her shirt.”

“So your parents traveled a lot?”

“It’s a long story.”

“I like long stories.”

The waiter came with their drinks. Kei didn't feel like sharing the details of his childhood with Anna right then. The abandonment. The foster homes. Too boring and too embarrassing for a first date. So he changed the subject.

"There's a concert at the amphitheater next weekend," he said. "Want to go?"

"I don't know. Maybe. What night is it?"

"I don't remember."

Who's playing?"

"I don't remember that either."

Anna laughed. "You're crazy," she said.

Kei wanted to lean across the table and kiss her. He didn't, of course. Not then. But he wanted to.

"I'll be right back," he said.

He got up and walked over to the guy playing guitar in the corner, whispered a request in his ear. A few minutes later he and Anna were up on the floor, slow dancing to "A Tomorrow Like Yesterday," the classic ballad from the fifties.

"I don't think I've ever heard this song before," Anna said. "But I like it."

"One of my favorites," Kei said.

Her body felt perfect next to his, like it belonged there. When the song ended, they walked back to their table, sat down to the two steaming plates of food that had been brought while they were gone.

"Here's your breakfast, Mr. Thrasher."

Kei woke up, blinked a few times, looked around the room. It took him a few seconds to remember where he was.

Television, IV pump, side rails.

The hospital.

The blinds covering the window were closed, but he could see light around the edges so he knew it was daytime.

“Where’s Brent?” he said.

“He went home about an hour ago. It’s a brand new shift now, and I’m going to be your nurse for the day. My name’s Ashley.”

White scrubs, tall and slender, long blond hair tied back in a ponytail. Squeaky white nursing shoes. Some kind of perfume or scented lotion that Kei didn’t really care for. She adjusted the height on the bedside table and positioned it across the bed. There was a tray on it with a glass of orange juice and a cup of coffee and a plate covered with a blue plastic dome.

Ashley checked the IV bag, which was still over half full.

“When are they going to let me out of here?” Kei said.

“You’re scheduled for a PICC later this afternoon. That’s the IV line you’ll be going home with. So you’ll be NPO after breakfast. That means—”

“I know what it means. Nothing by mouth.”

“Right. So eat up while you can. If all goes well, the doctor will probably discharge you tonight.”

“Who’s my doctor?”

“You were assigned to the hospitalist service. They work shifts, just like the nurses, so it changes every twelve hours. I think Dr. Garcia is on today. She should be making rounds in just a little while.”

“Thanks.”

“How’s the finger?”

Kei showed it to her.

“It’s not as red as it was,” he said. “And I think the swelling has gone down some. No pain right now.”

“Good. I’ll be back in just a little while to check on you.”

Ashley left the room. Kei lifted the dome from the plate and set it aside. Scrambled eggs, two strips of bacon, two slices of toasted white bread cut diagonally into triangles. Everything looked okay, not bad for hospital food, but Kei really wasn’t very hungry.

Anna still hadn’t messaged him back. He didn’t know whether to feel sad or concerned at this point. She was probably all right. She probably just didn’t feel like talking. Maybe she was busy at work. Or maybe she just didn’t like Kei as much as he liked her. Maybe there was someone else in her life. Kei felt as though he’d known her forever, but he hadn’t. They’d only been out the one time. He drank the coffee, watched a few minutes of a morning news show on television, decided to get out of bed and take a little walk.

He got up and put on the robe and slippers he’d packed in his gym bag, and then he unplugged the IV pump, which immediately switched over to battery power. He rolled the pole out into the hallway, looked left and right, decided to walk toward the nurses’ station. Not that he needed anything. He just thought they should know that he was out and about. He passed the room next door to his, and the next room, and the next, the first two with contact isolation signs on the doors and the third wide open with a white-haired woman sitting on the side of the bed eating breakfast.

The fourth door down was open as well, but the room was vacant. The mattress had been stripped and there was a mop and bucket in the corner. The patient must have been discharged,

Kei thought. The housekeeping staff members who'd had been in the process of cleaning the room must have taken a break. Or maybe they had been called elsewhere. A stat clean on another unit, maybe. It appeared as though they had left in a hurry.

The room was a mess. A pair of soft wrist restraints dangled from the bed frame, and a length of oxygen tubing—still connected to the regulator on the wall—hissed on the floor next to the bedside table. There was a bloated plastic trash bag about a foot inside the threshold, its contents spilling out onto the grungy tiles. Kei saw some wadded-up surgical tape and some empty packages that had once contained gauze for dressings, along with a plastic wash basin and two disposable drinking cups.

And an insulin syringe.

Kei didn't know if the syringe had been used, but it definitely didn't belong in the regular trash. As he bent down to pick it up, intending to drop it into the nearest sharps container, he noticed the word *HELP* scratched out in pencil on a torn and crumpled menu from the dietary department. He turned the tattered piece of card stock over, and on the other side, written in the same shaky scrawl, were the words *TOMORROW LIKE YESTERDAY*.

3

Kei figured the note had been written by the same confused old man who'd been shouting for help last night. The only thing that didn't make sense was that the old man had written down part of the title of the song Kei had been thinking about, the song he'd requested at the seafood restaurant, the song he and Anna had danced to. Odd to say the least. Shocking, really.

TOMORROW LIKE YESTERDAY. The words sent a chill up Kei's spine as he read them again.

Squeaky footsteps.

"What are you doing?"

Kei stood up and turned around. It was Ashley.

"I was just going for a walk, and I noticed the mess here on the floor," Kei said.

"You need to get back to your room. Dr. Garcia is making rounds now, and I wouldn't want you to miss her. Anyway, you shouldn't be digging around in the trash."

"What happened to the patient in this room?" Kei said. "Was he discharged?"

"I'm not allowed to discuss—"

"You can't tell me if he was discharged or not?"

“You need to get back to your room, Mr. Thrasher.”

Kei didn't like being told what to do, and he didn't like Ashley's condescending attitude.

“You see that?” he said, raising his voice, nearly shouting now as he pointed down at the insulin syringe. “Think you might want to take care of it?”

Ashley's face turned red. Kei figured the response was partly because she was annoyed with him and partly because she was embarrassed that one of the nurses had been so careless.

“I'll take care of it,” she said.

Kei turned around and started pushing the IV pole back toward his room. As he made his way down the hall, he noticed the paperwork caddies mounted outside each doorway. Brushed stainless steel with a plastic binder slid into each one. Notes on the patients, Kei supposed, hard copies waiting to be transcribed into the computer. He stopped outside his own room, pulled the binder out of the caddy and opened it to the first page. It was his medication record.

“I'll take that.”

A petite middle-aged woman with short black hair and a metal clipboard stood half a meter to Kei's right with her hand held out. The ID badge clipped to her lab coat pocket said *S. Garcia, MD*.

Kei handed her the binder.

“I was just looking to see if it was time for my pain medicine yet,” he said.

“Let's go in here and talk about it.”

“Okay.”

Kei walked into the room, plugged the IV pump back into the wall socket, sat on the edge of the mattress and guided the bedside table out of the way. Dr. Garcia walked in and closed the door behind her.

“I see you didn’t eat your breakfast,” she said.

“I wasn’t very hungry.”

Dr. Garcia listened to Kei’s chest with her stethoscope, and then she looked at his finger.

“It’s still hurting?” she said.

“A little. Not as bad as last night.”

“Scale of zero to ten?”

“About a four, I guess.”

“I’m going to discontinue the morphine. You can call your nurse as soon as I leave, and she’ll bring you a dose of ibuprofen. Has anyone talked to you about the home healthcare service yet?”

“Not really. But I was wondering if it was going to be a problem.”

“Why would it be a problem?”

Kei paused, hesitant to tell the doctor about his current living situation, feeling like a total failure as the words spilled from his lips.

“I’ve been staying in a storage unit,” he said. “There’s a twenty-four-hour gym nearby. That’s where I shave and take a shower and everything.”

D. Garcia laced her hands together, nodded contemplatively.

“I think we can work around that,” she said. “It’s no problem, really, as long as you have a physical address. A nurse will come and administer your antibiotics once a day for one week. It only takes a few minutes to hook everything up, and then you can disconnect the IV tubing and flush the line yourself. The nurse will teach you how. Oh, and you’ll need to keep your hospital ID bracelet on until your treatments at home are complete.”

Kei fought the urge to tell Dr. Garcia about his past. There had been a time when he could guide an endotracheal tube down a patient's throat with one hand and insert a central femoral line with the other. That was an exaggeration, but he'd been a first-rate emergency room physician before everything went sour. He'd been one of the best in the country. Other doctors took notes when they observed his techniques. He didn't need a nurse to show him how to disconnect the tubing from an IV drip and flush the line.

But once again he decided not to talk about it.

"I've been trying to save enough money to get a real apartment," he said.

"What kind of job do you have?"

"I work in a restaurant."

"And do you like that?"

"Not particularly."

"Have you thought about going to school? The local colleges have some excellent programs, and you could check to see what kind of financial aid is available."

"Thanks," Kei said. "Maybe I'll look into it."

"Good. You should be able to go home tonight, so let me just say that it was a pleasure to make your acquaintance, and I hope everything works out well for you. Any questions before I leave?"

"Were you taking care of the elderly gentleman in four-twelve?"

She glanced down at her clipboard. "Oh, yes. I discharged him to a long term care facility earlier this morning. Why do you ask?"

"Just wondering," Kei said.

He knew she wasn't going to tell him the old guy's name, or which nursing home he'd been sent to.

"Well, have a good day," Dr. Garcia said.

She exited the room.

Kei reached over and picked up a piece of toast from his breakfast tray, nibbled on it as he thought about the note he'd found on the old man's floor.

HELP on one side and *TOMORROW LIKE YESTERDAY* on the other.

The old man was confused, no doubt about it, and it seemed that he might have been experiencing paranoid delusions. Which wasn't terribly uncommon among geriatric patients in the hospital. Strange surroundings, people in strange clothes walking around doing strange things. It could be very unsettling sometimes. Kei understood that quite well. He'd been in the middle of it for years. What baffled him, though, was that the old man had kept shouting the name *Anna*, and then he'd written down the title of the song Kei and Anna Parks had danced to—the melodic ballad that Kei had already started thinking of as *their* song. Mentioning one or the other might have been a wild coincidence. But both? It was nothing short of bizarre.

And Anna still hadn't returned any of Kei's calls or texts.

Not that Kei thought one thing had anything to do with the other. It was highly unlikely that the old man's rants and scribbles had anything to do with what was going on in Kei's life. Such a correlation didn't even make sense.

But still.

Kei couldn't stop thinking about it. He wanted to talk to the old man, ask him about the name he'd shouted out and the song title he'd written down. He wanted to talk to the old man, and the only way to do that was to find out which nursing home he'd been sent to.

He needed to know the guy's name.

He unplugged again and walked out into the hallway again. As he made his way back toward the nursing station, traveling as fast as he could with the cumbersome IV pole, he could see that the blue plastic binder was still in the stainless steel caddy outside room 412. Maybe the old man's records were still in the binder. All Kei needed was a quick peek.

He slowed his pace and glanced into the room. The trash bag was gone, and a man in a gray uniform was mopping the floor. Kei lifted the binder out of the caddy and was about to flip it open when someone snatched it out of his hands.

It wasn't Ashley this time. It was the young lady who'd taken Kei's blood pressure earlier, the patient care associate working this end of the hall. Kei couldn't remember her name, and she was standing at an angle where he couldn't see her ID badge.

"Still need to write down his last set of vitals," she said, nodding toward the binder. "You okay?"

"Yes. I was just—"

"You were just being nosy, huh? Seems to be going around these days."

She smiled and walked away.

4

Kei's fifteen-year-old Toyota Camry was in the visitor's lot where he'd parked it yesterday. After signing the waiver that allowed him to walk out of the hospital unassisted, he made his way toward the car, the ports from his brand new PICC line dangling annoyingly against his right bicep.

He'd decided to forget about the business with the confused old man. Just a bizarre coincidence. Had to be. Anyway, the words *TOMORROW LIKE YESTERDAY* didn't necessarily refer to the title of the song Kei had been thinking about. Maybe the old man was simply trying to tell the dietary staff, or the nursing staff, or whoever he was trying to get help from, that tomorrow he wanted the same menu as yesterday. Whatever the case, Kei didn't have time to dwell on it. He had some errands to run, and he needed to talk to Anna and find out why she hadn't returned his calls. If she didn't want to see him again, he would have to accept that and move on.

But he hoped that she wanted to see him again.

And again.

And again.

He hoped it with all his heart.

He unlocked the Camry, slid into the driver's seat and started the engine, noticing right away that one of his headlights was out. Another expense, he thought. It was always something. He exited the hospital lot and headed toward the steel and concrete structure he slept in at night. He refused to call the place home, even on a temporary basis. It was a hollow cube that sheltered him from the elements while he struggled to reassemble his broken life. It was a stark reminder of the mistakes he'd made, and he couldn't wait to move out of it.

He decided to stop at Anna's first. Her apartment complex was a couple of miles past the storage facility, but it was already after 9:00 p.m. and Kei was afraid she might be in bed asleep if he showed up much later. Some mornings she had to be at work by six, which meant she probably got up at four-thirty or five. Maybe it was already too late to be stopping by, Kei thought. But he didn't turn around. His stomach had been in knots all day. He needed to see her, even if it turned out to be the last time.

He steered into the parking lot, found a place close to her building, killed the engine and eased out of the car. His finger throbbed and the new IV line caught on his shirtsleeve every time he moved a certain way. All this from a paper cut, he thought.

He climbed the stairs and walked to Anna's door and rang the bell. No answer. He knocked, and then knocked louder, finally deciding that she must either be out of the apartment or a very sound sleeper.

Or intentionally avoiding him.

That was another possibility.

Maybe, after their date, she had run some sort of background check on Kei and had decided to bail before things went any further. Understandable, in a way, but Kei hoped that she would at least allow him explain the circumstances behind all of that before giving up on him forever. All he wanted was a chance.

He turned to walk away, and then he noticed that the front window of Anna's apartment didn't have any curtains. It wasn't that they were drawn, or partially drawn. They just weren't there. He cupped his hands against the window to block the reflection from the light over the stairwell, saw right away that the floors and walls were bare.

Miscellaneous bits of trash on the carpet, wires sticking out of the cable TV outlet.

Kei had stepped in for a couple of minutes when he picked Anna up for their date, and the apartment had been fully furnished at that time. In fact, Kei had made some sort of comment about it, complimenting Anna on her taste in décor.

Now the place was totally empty.

Kei stood there for a few seconds, trying to imagine how this could have happened. Anna hadn't mentioned anything about moving. Seemed like she would have, but maybe not. Maybe she wanted to see how things went before revealing any details about an upcoming relocation. Then maybe she'd gotten scared off by the background check. If she'd done one. Which she probably had, Kei decided, the more he thought about it.

So that was that. Anna had changed residences and she wasn't returning Kei's calls and there was nothing he could do about it except move on.

And he would have. He would have given up right then if it hadn't been for the old man at the hospital.

IT'S ME! ANNA!

TOMORROW LIKE YESTERDAY.

Kei had decided that the old man's verbal and written attempts to reach out were nothing more than a series of strange coincidences from a fearful and confused mind. Kei the former physician had decided that. Kei the scientist. It was the only rational explanation.

But the fact that Anna had suddenly cleared out of her apartment made him start thinking about everything again. Was it possible that Anna had somehow communicated with the old man? Was she the one who needed help?

Not likely. In fact, it was so *unlikely* that Kei started wondering about his own thought processes over the past few days. It was quite possible that his infatuation with Anna had affected his ability to think straight. As a former medical professional, he knew that such issues were fairly common. But even as this realization sunk in—knowing that pursuing the matter any further would probably qualify as obsessive behavior on his part—he stepped over to the unit next door and rang the bell.

The peephole darkened, and a few seconds later a man wearing gym shorts and a sleeveless white T-shirt opened the door. Thirty-something, overweight, heavy black stubble on his face and neck, tan lines on his arms just below the deltoid muscles. He was holding a beer in one hand and a disposable butane lighter in the other. The last half inch of a filter-tipped cigarette dangled from a dry and crusty pair of lips, severely chapped, probably from overexposure to the sun.

“Can I help you?” he said.

“I'm looking for the woman who lived next door, and I was wondering—”

“Ms. Parks. Yeah. Some guys came and got all her stuff yesterday. Woke me up with all the bumping and banging. There was a truck out in the parking lot for about two hours. At least.”

“Have you seen Ms. Parks around here lately?” Kei said.

“It’s been a few days, I guess.”

“Did she mention anything about moving?”

“Not to me. But it’s not like we hung out or anything. I didn’t even know her, to tell you the truth.”

The man finished the rest of his beer in a single gulp, dropped the smoldering butt into the can. The hot ash sizzled when it hit the wet aluminum. He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a fresh cigarette, held it and looked at it but didn’t light it.

“Did you happen to notice the name of the moving company?” Kei said.

“No. It was just a plain white truck. The guys wore jeans and T-shirts. So what’s going on? She in some kind of trouble?”

“I don’t know,” Kei said. “Does the landlord live here somewhere?”

“There’s a married couple that manages the property. Mr. and Mrs. McFadden. They’re usually in the office during business hours. They live down in one-sixteen, but they really don’t like to be bothered after hours unless it’s an emergency. You a cop or something?”

“Just a friend. Thanks.”

The man thumbed the flint wheel on his cigarette lighter as Kei turned and headed back toward the stairs. He thumbed it several times, as if he was having a hard time getting it to light.

Kei walked down to 116. Mr. and Mrs. McFadden answered the door together. They stepped out onto the stoop together. They didn’t look very happy. They didn’t invite Kei to come inside. Kei explained the situation. Mrs. McFadden walked back into the apartment for a few seconds, and then she came back out.

“We found this in our mailbox this morning,” she said.

She handed Kei a standard sheet of copy paper, creased where it had been folded in thirds. It was a note from Anna, apologizing for vacating the apartment on such short notice and acknowledging the consequential loss of her security deposit. No explanation for the seemingly abrupt decision to move, no forwarding address. The note had been printed out from a computer and signed at the bottom in black ink.

“Are you sure this is her signature?” Kei said.

“Why wouldn’t it be?”

“I don’t know. I’m just trying to understand why she would—”

“I’ll be right back,” Mr. McFadden said, snatching the note from Kei’s hand.

Kei and Mrs. McFadden shared an awkward moment of silence under the yellow porch light while they waited for Mr. McFadden to return.

He came back out with a copy of the lease.

“Looks the same to me,” he said, comparing the signature on the rental agreement with the signature on the note.

He handed the papers to Kei.

“Yeah,” Kei said. “So I guess that’s it.”

“Better that it happened now instead of later,” Mrs. McFadden said.

Kei had told the McFaddens that he and Anna were engaged to be married. Otherwise they probably wouldn’t have shared any information. It was a wonder they had anyway.

“Thanks so much for your time,” Kei said.

He walked back out to his car, pulled his keys out of his pocket, stood there for a few seconds looking at his own reflection in the front driver’s side window. He was thinking about

that first kiss on the beach when a gunshot rang out and the glass shattered and he fell to the pavement.