

## Chapter 1

“So, where are you headed?”

“I’m trying to get to New York City.” Reacher said.

“Hop in, I can get you as far as New Jersey.”

Reacher walked around the car and hopped in on the passenger side. He pushed the seat all the way back, but it still wasn’t far enough for his legs to stretch all the way. Reacher was used to that. His massive 6’5”, 250 lb frame didn’t fit well into most vehicles. Actually, he preferred it when truckers picked him up because he was most comfortable in the cabs of eighteen wheelers. Unfortunately, Reacher had to take what he could get. Thumbing rides was getting increasingly more difficult, especially for a big guy like him.

“What’s your name, boss?” The driver asked as he pulled back onto the highway.

“Jack Reacher, but everyone calls me Reacher.”

“Well, Reacher, my name is Bill Parks. But most people just call me Bill.”

Reacher smiled. “Do you make a habit of picking up hitchhikers?”

Bill shifted gears as the car finally reached a reasonable speed. “No, sir. Just a momentary lapse in judgment I think.”

Reacher laughed. “It’ll be okay. In fact, we have a long drive ahead of us, so I’m willing to buy you dinner whenever it’s time.”

“Well, just hold your horses there, sonny.” Bill said. “We can cross that bridge when we get to it. What brought you out here hitchhiking in the first place?”

Reacher paused. This was the part that tended to scare people. Ironic that someone willing to pick up a big man like Reacher would suddenly be spooked once they found out what

he was doing with his life. He had watched many a driver get second thoughts after he talked about himself.

“I move around a lot.” Reacher said. “And I don’t own a car. So, I rely on public transportation or hitchhiking to get from place to place.”

“I see.” Bill replied, looking at Reacher from the corner of his eyes. “You move around a lot for work?”

“Mostly for recreation.” Reacher said. “I spent my entire life on army bases. My dad was a marine, and I later joined the military police.”

“I didn’t know I had an army man.” Bill said. “Did you see any action?”

“Lots.” Reacher said, looking out of the side window. “As military police, I’ve been in some dark corners of the world.”

Bill nodded. “Well, someone would have to be a damn fool to mess with you. You’re a big ole fella.”

Reacher smiled and continued to look out of the side window. “There’s some nice country through here.”

Bill nodded. “You said it. It’s a great place to live. People talk bad about Jersey, but there’s lots of nice places in the state.”

Reacher saw the sign a few miles back when they crossed the Delaware Bay. He had been wandering all over the country since he left the service, but he never spent a lot of time in New Jersey. He supposed it couldn’t hurt to spend a little time there.

Bill continued to talk as Reacher sat in silence. Part of his attention was on Bill’s stories, but he was mostly focused on the road and the scenery in the area. Bill spent the next hour telling

Reacher about his life and growing up in the little town of Hammonton, NJ. He said that Atlantic City overshadowed the whole area, and that tourists often came to town looking for trouble.

Reacher nodded along with the stories, but he was only tuned in to the important parts.

“Hey, there’s a diner about two miles up the road.” Reacher said. “Why don’t you stop and I’ll buy you dinner?”

“Well, I sure do appreciate the offer, son.” Bill said. “But I’m in kind of a hurry to get home. The ole ball and chain is becoming a lot more chain than ball lately if you get my drift.”

Reacher smiled. “I avoid relationships for that reason.”

Bill laughed. “Well, it sounds like you’ve got the world figured out. Ever think about what you are going to do next?”

Reacher shook his head. “I spent the first 36 years of my life having my whole life mapped out and planned by other people. Now I’ve kind of taken the opposite approach. I go where the wind takes me.”

“That kind of life sounds like it would be fun for a while.” Bill said. “But I think it would eventually get old. Just because you ain’t in the military no more doesn’t mean you can’t have a little structure to your life.”

“I would agree for most people.” Reacher said. “But I’ve tried to settle down, and it never works out for me. The things you own end up owning you.”

“Well that’s a bitch slap of truth right there, fella.” Bill said. “Sounds lonely as all hell. But you ain’t wrong. Do you want me to drop you at the diner?”

“No, that’s okay. I’d rather hang with you as far as you can take me.” Reacher said. “Finding rides out of town isn’t the easiest thing to do.”

“Okie dokie.” Bill said. “I can take you as far as Gotham, which is about a half hour north of here.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Reacher said.

Bill turned on the radio for the rest of the drive. He listened to some country/bluegrass station for a while, but then he turned it to a news radio show where some politician was rambling on about this or that. Reacher never really paid much attention to politics. Too messy. Politics was often a roadblock in his line of work, and politicians were some of the slimiest characters he had know.

A half hour later, Bill let Reacher out at the exit to Gotham city. Reacher thanked him and started walking toward the city. He could see the city in the distance, but it was still a couple of miles away. Soon he reached the city limits where a sign said: “Gotham City: Home of The Batman.”

“The Batman?” Reacher mumbled to himself. “I’ve got to see this.”

## Chapter 2

Reacher's stomach was growling, so the first order of business was to find a place to eat. When he was in a new place, he would often try places at random. Sometimes he'd ask the passerbys where the best place to eat was. In this case, he decided to ask a couple of people where he should eat, and they all said the same thing: *The Iceberg Lounge*.

Twenty minutes later, Reacher was at a table in the lounge. He looked around and realized that the place was a weird mashup of nightclub and restaurant. Restaurant by day, nightclub by night. The place was practically empty, except for a man working the bar, a woman who was waiting tables, and one other table across the room with what looked like a woman and her husband.

They wanted to put Reacher near them, but he requested a table along the back wall so that he could see the entire room. Force of habit leftover from his days in the military. Hope for the best, plan for the worst.

The waitress set a glass of ice water on the table. "What can I get you, honey?"

She was a middle-aged woman, still fairly slender and good looking, but the years hadn't been kind to her. There were lines along her face where wrinkles were starting, and there were a few streaks of grey in her hair.

"Coffee. Black." Reacher said.

"Anything to eat?" She asked.

"What do you recommend?" Reacher asked.

She smiled at him, and tapped her pencil on the pad she was holding. "Get the Big Kahuna Breakfast. You look like the kind of guy who could handle it."

Reacher smiled back at her. "Then I'll have that, please and thanks."

He closed the menu and handed it back to her. She took it and went off to fetch his coffee. The man at the bar kept glancing over at him. The waitress returned a few minutes later with his coffee.

"Mind if I ask you a question?" Reacher said as he unfolded his silverware from the napkin it was wrapped in.

"You can ask me any number of questions for however long you'd like." The waitress gave him a coy smile.

"Where can I find the Batman?" Reacher asked.

The waitress snorted, stifling back a laugh. "Why would you want to do that?"

"I'm new in town. I want to see his show." Reacher said.

"Show? There's no show." She replied. "You don't find Batman. He finds you."

"So, it's not a show?" Reacher said.

She laughed. "No. He's more of a vigilante. But you only have to worry if you're a criminal." She eyed him up and down.

"Vigilante?" Reacher said. "Well, now I really need to meet him."

The waitress laughed and went back to the kitchen. Five minutes later, she brought him his food: eggs, bacon, sausage, home fries, and a short stack of pancakes. It was a lot of food, but he hadn't eaten since the day before and it was already noon. He ate all of the food and must've drunk a whole pot of coffee. He leaned back in his chair, feeling full and content.

A chubby man came from the back. His belly stuck way out in front of him. He wore a black pinstripe suit and carried a cane. He was smoking a cigarette (in a cigarette holder) and

wore a tall hat. He looked over at Reacher, then started walking towards him. He sat down at the table across from him.

The man stared at Reacher, and Reacher stared back at him. They sat like that for several seconds. Reacher was a military man with training. He was patient, and nobody intimidated him. He learned a long time ago that, if a man stares you down, you don't back down. You don't look away. You maintain eye contact until they turn away. Reacher could hold that gaze for days if he had to.

Finally the man spoke. "You were asking about Batman in my club. I want to know why."

Reacher was silent for a moment. Then he spoke. "What's it to you?"

"It's my club." The man said. "I don't want no friends of Batman in my club."

"I'm not his friend."

The man's face wrinkled and he squinted his eyes. "That's not how it seems to me. What do you want with him?"

Reacher held up his hand to the waitress. "Check, please!"

She nodded and walked over to the cash register. The man continued to stare at him. Reacher looked at him like he was a bug, some kind of pest that he would need to swat away. Reacher's mother told him that he needed to give others a chance to walk away before a fight, and he lived by that rule pretty religiously.

The man slammed his fist on the table. "I'm talking to you!"

"It's none of your business." Reacher said. "It's nobody's business but my own. If you can't accept that, then I don't know what to tell you."

“Do you even know who I am?”

Reacher looked him up and down. “A really bad dresser?”

The man’s face turned red, and he reached into his jacket to pull out a gun. A revolver. Six shooter. Reacher recognized the make and model right away. Smith & Wesson 500 double action five shot with a stainless steel revolver. Before the man could aim it at him, Reacher snatched it out of his hand and pointed it back at him. But only for a second. He spun the cylinder out of the gun and the bullets dropped onto the table. Then he took the gun apart and laid it on the table.

The waitress returned with his check, and Reacher threw a twenty dollar bill onto the table. Then he stood up and turned to walk outside.

“Okay, boys.” The man in the suit said. “Get him.”



### Chapter 3

Two large bouncers came from behind the man and stood in front of Reacher. Reacher was a big guy, but these guys were almost the same size. They both looked like they spent most of their days in the gym. One guy was bald with a goatee and a plain black shirt. The other guy had long hair and a long beard, the hair pulled back into a ponytail. And he was wearing a suit.

“You don’t want to do this.” Reacher said.

“I think we do.” The guy with the ponytail said.

“You can leave when Mr. Cobblepot says you can leave.” The bald guy said.

“Cobblepot?” Reacher said. “Look. I’ll make you a deal, Mr. Cobblepot. I’ll throw another twenty on the table for damages, and you let me walk out that door. And we all forget we ever knew each other.”

“Damages?” Cobblepot said. “What damages?”

Reacher grabbed the long-haired guy by his ponytail and yanked backward. Then he punched him in the throat. The guy fell into the table, knocking off the silverware and dishes, clutching his throat. The bald guy looked at Cobblepot, who held up his hand as if to tell him to wait a minute.

“You’re very quick with your hands, Mr...what’s your name?”

“You can call me Reacher.”

Cobblepot moved past the bald guy and stood in front of Reacher. “Well, Mr. Reacher, nobody comes into my club and starts whacking my guys around.”

“I didn’t.” Reacher said. “I was minding my own business and you came to me, remember?”

“What do you want, Mr. Reacher?” Cobblepot asked.

“I just want to be left alone.” Reacher said. “Now, I’m going to leave. You can tell your boy to stand aside, or I can do to him what I did to your other guy. Your choice.”

The bald man looked at Cobblepot. Cobblepot sighed and said, “Okay. You asked for it.”

The bald guy moved closer to Reacher and took a swing at his head. Reacher ducked and, on his way back up, drove a punch right into the guy’s ribs. He stumbled backward, gasping for air, but he managed to catch himself. He lunged at Reacher and tackled him to the floor. He was trying to get on top of him, but Reacher was too fast. When his back hit the ground, he focused his energy on twisting sideways, throwing the guy off of him. Within seconds, he was back on his feet.

The bald guy was in the process of standing up when Reacher moved on him and kicked him in the face. The guy flew backward into a table and chairs, all the silverware falling onto him as he crashed through to the floor. Then Reacher moved to stand in front of Cobblepot, who looked at both his men grunting on the ground.

“This isn’t over!” He shouted, turned, and ran out of the room.

Reacher made his way to the door and stepped out onto the street. The sun was shining, but there was a dark aura about this place. He couldn’t put a finger on it, but he could tell that Gotham City was not your typical tourist city. He decided to walk around and get a feel for the lay of the land.

In the distance, he saw a skyscraper and, on the side, was a huge sign that said *Wayne Enterprises, Inc.* He decided he would head toward that and see what he could see. A few blocks later, he heard a siren. A cop car swooped in behind him with its lights flashing. In the split

second that he had a choice, he mulled over his options: stay and be arrested or run away. He decided that he'd get more answers if he stayed. So, he put his hands in the air and turned around slowly.

Two cops emerged from the car with their guns trained on him. "Don't move, asshole." The driver said. "You're under arrest."

The other guy quoted him his rights, put cuffs on him, and put him in the back of the cop car.

From the backseat, Reacher leaned up to the cage between him and the officers. "So, does Cobblepot have all of Gotham PD in his hip pocket? Or is it just you guys?"

"Shut up, asshole." The driver said.

Fifteen minutes later, Reacher was sitting in an interrogation room. It was kind of dim because one of the lights was burned out. There was a cheap old camera on a tripod in the corner. The table and chairs were made of metal. A camera was recording them from the ceiling. He thought it was odd that there were two separate cameras, but he shrugged it off. After sitting for a half hour, the door opened and a man walked in.

"Jack None Reacher." He said. "Formerly of the 110th. Military Police. Topped out at major. Lost the title and wound up earning your way back to it. One silver star. One purple heart. Did I miss anything?"

Reacher looked up at the man. He was tall with strawberry blonde hair and a thick mustache. He wore glasses, but he looked rough around the edges. He was built solid, like he worked out, but he wasn't huge like the bouncers at Cobblepot's night club.

"That about sums it up." Reacher said. "Are you on Cobblepot's payroll too?"

The man laughed. "I wouldn't be caught dead at Cobblepot's night club. Let alone let him buy me off. My name is Gordon, and I have a few questions to ask. If I like the answers, you can walk out of here."

"That's very kind of you." Reacher said.

"Let's cut the shit." Gordon said. "Why are you here?"

"Your goons arrested me." Reacher said sarcastically.

Gordon sat in the chair across from Reacher and sighed. "I figured an ex-military cop would be cooperative. You know, a little professional courtesy."

"Professional courtesy goes both ways." Reacher laid his cuffed hands on the table.

"Come on, now, detective. You know you want to make me feel like you're on my side by taking these off."

"That's commissioner. Not detective." Gordon said, pulling out a ring of keys and removing the cuffs. "I'll ask you again...why are you here?"

"Isn't it a little odd for the police commissioner to do a basic interrogation?" Reacher asked.

"You know what they say: if you want something done right..."

Reacher shook his head. "That's not it. You're practically foaming at the mouth. I think you're here because you know who the Batman is."

## Chapter 4

Gordon was silent for several seconds before he replied. "What makes you say that?"

"I'm a random drifter." Reacher said. "And, while you don't know how much of a threat I pose to your city, the odds of me doing anything truly damaging are pretty low. I'm just one guy."

Gordon laughed. "You really don't know Gotham City at all, do you?"

Reacher shrugged. "I don't, but that doesn't matter. My point is that I am low-hanging fruit. I've done nothing but beat up a couple of bouncers...bouncers who attacked me first, I might add...in some seedy nightclub. That kind of thing shouldn't even get on your radar. So, considering the way Cobblepot reacted when I asked about the Batman, I'm assuming it's a touchy subject. I'm betting you've told your staff to tell you when someone talks about the Batman so that you can interview them personally. Where I'm from, that's called covering your tracks."

Gordon nodded. "You must've been one hell of a detective, Mr. Reacher..."

"Just Reacher."

"Well, Reacher, the only flaw in your logic is assuming why I would want to know about anything Batman related." Gordon replied. "I'm the commissioner of police. The Batman is a known vigilante and a fugitive from the law. He's literally one of the biggest investigations we have going. Don't you think that's my job to talk to anyone who might know something about him?"

“You’re not a poker player, are you Gordon?” Reacher asked. “Because you’d be pretty bad at it. Notice, first and foremost, that you didn’t deny anything I said. So, you do know who the Batman is.”

“Before I comment on that, I have to know one thing.” Gordon said. “What is your interest in the Batman?”

“Pure curiosity, which gets stronger by the minute as people keep acting strange every time the Batman is mentioned.” Reacher said. “I saw him mentioned on the sign to the city when I got here. I thought he was some sort of performer, like with the circus or something.”

Gordon shook his head. “Why didn’t you say that to Cobblepot? You could have avoided all of this.”

Reacher sighed. “Because it was none of his business. I’m not obligated to talk about anything unless I choose to. That’s the difference between me and you, Gordon. I don’t back away from my principles just to avoid a fight.”

“Maybe you haven’t heard of the phrase ‘pick your battles.’” Gordon replied. “You don’t have the fight today because you are still gathering intel. Only a fool would go looking for a fight.”

“I’m nobody’s fool.” Reacher said. “And I never go looking for a fight. Trouble usually finds me.”

Gordon stood up. “See that’s the difference between me and you, Reacher. Trouble rarely finds me because I don’t go looking for it.”

Reacher was silent.

Gordon tapped on the glass as he left the room. "Let him go!" He shouted to the people behind the glass.

"Gordon!" Reacher said.

Gordon paused in the doorway. "Yes?"

"I'd like to meet him." Reacher said.

Gordon sighed. "Be back here at 10 PM." Then he walked through the door and it slammed shut.

Ten minutes later, another officer came and got him. They took him to the front and paired him with an older cop who was in charge of releasing people from custody.

"A wad of cash totalling two hundred and eighty eight dollars." The man said. "An expired passport. And one folding toothbrush."

Reacher gathered his things and left the station. The day had gotten away from him. It was now 6:30 in the evening, and he was hungry again. This time he found a little diner near the station. He ordered a cup of coffee, a cheeseburger, and french fries.

When he was done his meal, he walked around looking for a hotel. If he was going to meet Gordon at 10 PM, he figured he'd better find a room. He didn't like to leave a place in the middle of the night, especially if he didn't have a ride. There were no seedy motels nearby, which is what Reacher would have preferred. But he ran into a high rise hotel called *The Hotel Belle Monico*.

Reacher requested a room on the ground floor. He didn't like the idea of only being able to use the stairs or the elevator to leave the building if there was an emergency. It limited his

options. He wanted to be able to go out a window if he had to. Part of his training: pick the safest place with the most exits that is reasonably secure.

He got his key and walked to the room. He decided to take a nap. Sleep while you can because you might not get a chance to later. He had the same philosophy about food. Some things never change. He set the clock in his head to 9:30 PM, laid on the bed, and took a nap.

At 10 PM he was at the station. Gordon was about ten minutes late, but Reacher wasn't in a hurry.

"You say you want to meet the Batman?" Gordon said. "Follow me."

Gordon took him to an elevator and pressed the button for the top floor. When they reached the top floor, Gordon led him down a hallway to the exit, which was stairs that led to the roof. They stepped out onto the roof and walked across to what looked like a spotlight.

Gordon turned the spotlight on and light shot through the darkness. Reacher looked up at the sky and saw the bat signal for the first time.



## Chapter 5

“Is this a joke?” Reacher asked.

Gordon shook his head. “You said you wanted to meet the Batman. This is your best chance.”

“So, you shine this light in the sky and he what?” Reacher said. “He just flies in to meet you like a bug?”

Gordon laughed. “This spotlight is faulty. It comes on at the strangest times. And, if you leave it on long enough, you can see strange things.”

“Now I really do believe you know who he is.” Reacher said.

“Believe it or not, I don’t.” Gordon said. “I never really cared who he was. He’s more of an ally in a common fight. He helps us in the areas where things get a little gray legally. If you know what I mean.”

Reacher nodded. “I know exactly what you mean. But I’m surprised the Feds don’t come in and shut this down. You working with a known vigilante can’t be good press.”

“We don’t work with him.” Gordon said. “Not officially. The official policy is to arrest the man known as Batman on sight.”

“You live in a delusional world, commissioner.” Reacher said. “The only reason the Feds don’t come in here is because they have bigger fish to fry. They aren’t going to waste their time on a guy who is actually helping take scumbags off the street. So, you don’t have to play this silly game. The one where you pretend like you aren’t aiding and abetting a known criminal. Because, if the Feds ever DO show up, you’re going down for this.”

“I bet you have all sorts of friends, don’t you?” Gordon said sarcastically.

“I just call things the way I see them, commissioner.” Reacher said. “People just don’t like the truth.”

Before Gordon could respond, they heard a noise behind them. Reacher turned and saw a man in a giant batsuit. The man was tall, but just a bit shorter than Reacher, with the same sort of build.

“You wanted to see me?” Batman said, his voice masked by electronic means.

“I wanted to meet you when I thought you were a circus act.” Reacher said. “Now I have about a million questions for you.”

“No questions.” Batman said. “You met me. Now you need to be on your way.”

“Everybody’s trying to get rid of me.” Reacher said. “But you should know that I don’t take orders from nobody. Not anymore.”

“It’s for your own good.” Batman said. “Gotham is run by crime bosses and thugs. It’s not a very safe place for tourists.”

“I can handle myself.” Reacher said.

Batman moved closer to Reacher and looked him in the eye. “You stay in your hotel room tonight, and be gone first thing tomorrow morning.”

Reacher turned to Gordon. “Who does this guy think he is?”

Then he turned to reply, but he was gone.

“He does that.” Gordon said, flipping off the bat signal.

Reacher went back to the hotel for the night. He set the alarm in his head for 6 AM and laid down to sleep. When he woke up, he was very aware that it wasn’t morning. He was disoriented, so he rolled over and looked at the alarm clock, which read 1:23 AM. Then he heard

it. The sound that woke him. A scratching sound coming from the window. He walked over and peered out through the curtains. As he did, someone crashed through the window and landed on top of him.

“Hello, darling, your pussy...” She paused. “...cat is here.”

Reacher threw her off of him and jumped to his feet. The woman was wearing a tight black leather suit and a mask. The mask made her ears look like a cat.

“Does everyone in this town dress up in a costume?” Reacher asked.

She did a front flip toward him. “I am Catwoman. Hear me roar!”

Reacher was silent.

“A little birdy told me that you are looking for Batman.” She said.

“Cobblepot?” Reacher said.

She nodded seductively and moved closer to him. He could feel her breath on his neck as she sniffed his body. He pushed her away from him.

“Easy, tiger.” She said. “I just want to have a little fun with the guy who beat up the Penguin’s men.”

“I don’t want to hit a woman.” Reacher said. “But you need to leave.”

“Ooh, big tough guy gonna make me leave?” She said, purring afterward like a cat. “But we are just getting to know each other.”

She moved closer to him. He tried to back away, but he was up against the wall. Before he could speak, he heard the sound of knives on metal. The Catwoman had claws in her gloves, and they were out. She ran a claw down his cheek. Reacher grabbed her and threw her out of the window she came in.

He climbed through the broken glass to get outside, where she was already on her feet. She ran at him and, with the claw on her right hand, swiped at his face. The blades from two fingers caught his forehead and he started bleeding. The blood ran down his face and into his eyes.

He turned toward her and stood with his hands in a boxing stance. He moved toward her, but she flipped by him, this time slashing his side.

“Come on, baby.” She said. “I love it when men play hard to get.”

Reacher squared up in front of her again. This time he made a move like he was going to punch her, but he pulled back instead. She was in the middle of another flip, when he caught her arm and one of her legs. He flung her sideways into the trash cans on the street. He moved toward her like he was going to get on top of her. Before he could, he was knocked over by someone else. From the ground he saw Cobblepot, and he was floating above him with his umbrella.

## Chapter 6

Reacher was no stranger to fighting more than one opponent, but this might have been the weirdest fight he'd ever been in. Being attacked by a woman in a cat costume and some guy who looked like (and actually identified as) a Penguin was not something he would have ever guessed he'd be doing.

He stood back to his feet. Catwoman and Cobblepot were both in front of him now.

"Cobblepot." Reacher said. "What are you doing here?"

"You made a mess of my club." Cobblepot said. "Now it's time to pay the price."

"No, your bouncers made a mess of your club when they tried to mess with me." Reacher said. "Some people learn not to mess with me fairly quickly. Seems you're not that type of person."

"You're so adorable." Catwoman said, as she moved to the side.

Catwoman and Penguin both moved to either side of him, trying to hit him from the side. Before they could get beside him, Reacher moved quickly toward Cobblepot and landed a punch to his stomach. He bowed over quickly, gasping for air. He turned to defend against the Catwoman, but she was gone. He looked around and saw her climbing the hotel building. Reacher turned back to Cobblepot and punched him in the face. He went backwards onto the ground and laid on the pavement groaning.

"Take the hint, and leave me alone." Reacher said and walked away.

He decided to find another place to stay. He would need something a bit more incognito. He had managed to talk the people at his current hotel into half the price for a room, but they made him give him his real name and show them ID proving it. His passport was expired, but it

was all he had, so they let it slide. He hailed a cab and told the driver that he wanted to go somewhere a little more off the radar. The driver brought to the narrows. He could see that it was run down and crime ridden. A real slice of hell on earth. His kind of place.

The driver dropped him at a seedy motel that still charged by the hour. He talked the clerk into giving him a room for \$40. He went to the room and laid down. The clock in his head said it was 3:06 AM. He closed his eyes and went to sleep.

He awoke at 6 AM like he originally planned. He found another seedy diner and had breakfast. He took his time, drinking lots of coffee and eating a big meal. His task for the day was to do some research on the Batman. When he was finished eating, he threw a big tip on the table and walked out. He took a cab to the library.

Reacher was never the type to embrace technology. He only needed a handful of things to live, and computers and cell phones were not a part of that. But Reacher knew that computers could be useful for digging up information. He remembered how crude they used to be when he was in the army. The machines they had were big boxy things that sat on desks. Now, computers seemed sleek and stylish and futuristic. Like something from the Jetsons.

He spent a couple of hours researching and looking up incidences of the Batman and Gotham City. Gotham's story was that of mob bosses and whack jobs who dressed up in costumes to terrorize the city. During his research, he noticed something about the Batman. Whoever he was, he was well funded. In two separate stories, there was talk of a car built a bit like a tank and an airplane that looked like a bat.

He had been convinced that Gordon knew who Batman was. Maybe Gordon was telling the truth. But there was one person in town that Reacher was convinced had to know, even if he

didn't admit it. He shut off the computer and left the library. When he was outside, he hailed another cab.

"Where to?" The driver asked.

"Wayne Enterprises." Reacher said.

Ten minutes later he was in the lobby. When he approached the entrance, he felt very tiny against the backdrop of the skyscraper in front of him. He felt the same way in New York City, where he'd occasionally drop by to visit his old girlfriend, Jodie Garber. They had decided to part ways, but he thought about her often.

Reacher had to decide what tactic to take. Should he walk to the front desk and ask to meet with Bruce Wayne? He figured that a guy like Wayne probably had gatekeepers with specific instructions to keep guys like Reacher out. So, in the end, he decided to go about it in a more covert manner. He bought a baseball cap and a bouquet of flowers and walked in like he was a delivery person. The people at the front desk looked at him as he went by, but they didn't say anything.

He found a placard on the wall that had a list of people's names and offices. Bruce Wayne was pretty much the only person of interest on the top floor. He imagined that it was sort of like a penthouse suite in a hotel, where his office was unnecessarily large to show off how much power and money he had.

The elevator door opened to a huge reception area with lots of desks and busy people working. He approached a woman who was sitting at the front desk with a headset on.

"Can I help you?" She asked, only moving her eyes up from the computer screen where she had been typing.

“Yes, I am here to see Bruce Wayne.” Reacher said.

“What’s the name for the appointment?” She asked.

“Tell him Reacher is here to see him.”

“I don’t have anyone by that name on record.” The woman said. “You’ll have to make an appointment and come back another time.” She went back to typing and ignored him.

Reacher leaned across the desk and pulled a wire from her computer screen. “I’m going to need you to call him now, please.”

“I’m calling security.” She said and picked up the phone.

Reacher snatched the phone from her hands and put it back in the cradle. Then he walked past her desk into the office space behind her. There were cubicles everywhere, but he eventually found the corner office. He opened the door to Wayne’s office just as a security guard showed up behind him.

Bruce was in his office and looked up when the door was opened. His mouth dropped open just a little bit in surprise.

“There’s the look I was expecting.” Reacher said.

“Excuse me?” Bruce said.

“I’m here to continue our conversation.” Reacher said. “From last night.”



## Chapter 7

Bruce Wayne dismissed his security and invited Reacher to have a seat at his desk. He walked around to his plush, high-backed chair and sat down.

“I expected you to deny it.” Reacher finally said after a long moment of silence.

Bruce leaned forward on the desk. “How did you figure it out?”

Reacher chuckled. “It’s not that difficult. All it takes is someone willing to do a little digging.”

“What do you want, Mr. Reacher?” Bruce asked.

“Just Reacher. Honestly, I just wanted to meet the Batman.” Reacher said. “My initial reason was pure curiosity. Then Cobblepot sicked his goons on me because I talked about it. Gordon had me arrested. Cobblepot and the crazy cat lady show up at my hotel room last night. I guess I wanted to see what all the fuss was about.”

“Wait, so you took on the Penguin and Catwoman by yourself?” Bruce said.

Before he could reply, Bruce’s secretary poked her head in the door. “Mr. Wayne, I think you should check out channel 9.”

Bruce grabbed a remote from his desk and hit a button. A cabinet opened on the wall across from him, and a TV emerged from a hole in the wall. He pressed another button, and the TV came on. He turned it to channel 9, where the Joker was standing behind a woman who was tied up in a chair.

“I’ve been trying to show you Batman’s true colors for years!” The Joker yelled into the camera. “Now it’s time for another demonstration.”

“This is the strangest city I’ve ever been to.” Reacher said.

Another person emerged from behind the Joker. He was wearing an all green suit with a white dress shirt and a black tie. His hat was also green, with a question mark on the front. He had a scepter in his hand that swung freely as he walked.

The Joker clapped slowly and jumped so that he could click his feet together in mid air. He let out a long, growling, scary laugh. “Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Riddler!”

“Okay, does this city just manufacture lunatics in costumes?” Reacher asked. “Why are there so many of you that dress up like that?”

Bruce smirked. “Gordon once told me it was escalation. That me wearing a mask invited others to step up and do the same.”

The Riddler came into the frame and spoke into the camera. “Batman will have to solve three riddles if he wants to find her.”

The camera panned over to their hostage. Upon closer inspection, the hostage was revealed to be Barbara Gordon, the commissioner’s daughter.

The camera panned back over to the Riddler. “And here is your first riddle. I have branches, yet I have no leaves, no trunk, and no fruit. What am I?”

The Joker came back on the screen. “You have 12 hours to solve the riddles or we put a bullet in the girl’s head. See you soon!”

The screen went black for a second, then the newscasters came back on to discuss what had happened.

“So, do you have any plans for the next 12 hours?” Bruce asked.

“Yeah, me getting out of this goofy town.” Reacher said.

“Are you joking?” Bruce said. “Yesterday we couldn’t get rid of you. Now you’re just going to up and leave?”

“I did what I came here to do.” Reacher said. “It’s nothing personal. I don’t stay in one place that often.”

“Yeah, but they have the commissioner’s daughter.” Bruce said. “That doesn’t bother you?”

“I don’t even know who she is.” Reacher said. “How can I be bothered if I don’t even know her?”

“Some might say that’s a callous attitude to have.” Bruce said, standing up from his desk. “The Joker and the Riddler are both formidable on their own. Together I’m going to have trouble dealing with them. I need someone watching my back.”

“I don’t work well with others.” Reacher said, also standing up.

The two walked to the door and out to the elevators.

“I don’t work well with others either.” Bruce said. “But I could use your help. You took on the Penguin and Catwoman by yourself. I could use someone like you watching my back.”

“You need a sidekick.” Reacher said.

“I had one.” Bruce said, the color draining from his face. “But The Joker...well...he...I don’t have a partner anymore.”

Reacher was silent. He could tell that the issue was a sensitive one, so he left it alone. The elevator dinged and opened on the ground floor.

“At least come to my house.” Bruce said. “You said you wanted to meet the Batman. How about a tour of his cave?”

“You live in a cave?” Reacher asked. “Why would you do that to yourself?”

“I don’t live in a cave.” Bruce said. “And you’re definitely going to want to see this.”

When Bruce stepped outside, a limousine swiftly pulled to the curb. A man in a suit got out and opened the rear door. “After you, sir.”

“Thanks, Alfred.” Bruce climbed into the back of the limo and Reacher followed.

“You don’t seem like the kind of person for all of this.” Reacher motioned with his hand at the car and the building.

“It’s not me at all.” Bruce said. “But the best disguise is a personality that nobody thinks could take on the Batman. I play a billionaire playboy during the day so nobody questions my activities at night.”

“Smart.” Reacher said. “But it sounds exhausting.”

“You have no idea.” Bruce said, then opened the hatch to the driver’s seat. “To the cave Alfred.”

Alfred gave Reacher a funny look, but all he said was: “Yes, sir.”

## Chapter 8

“I take it back. I’m glad I stuck around to see this.” Reacher said, looking around the cave.

The cave really was a sight to see. The entire shell of the cave was made of rocks forged over millions of years of change. The equipment Bruce installed in the cave existed as if it sprung from the cave itself. A large multi-network computer system sat at the center of it. The Batmobile and the Batplane sat near the opening. Along one wall were several suits, not all of them made just for Bruce. There were different sizes and shapes.

“I’m glad you like it.” Bruce said. “But I’m more worried about the commissioner’s daughter right now.”

“Here’s the way I see it.” Reacher said. “They are using the girl as bait to draw you out. Which means they have some sort of trap set for you. Assuming the trap isn’t the riddles themselves, which are also meant to make you jump through hoops, tire you out, etc.”

Bruce looked at computer screen and played the recording again. The Riddler’s words echoed through the cave as he spoke.

“I have branches, yet I have no leaves, no trunk, and no fruit.” Reacher repeated.

“Keyword there is branches.” Bruce said. “He’s talking about a bank. The question is, which bank?”

“Obviously Gotham is going to have national chains and banks with headquarters in other cities.” Reacher said. “But this is personal to them. They want to hit you where you live. How many local banks does Gotham have?”

“Just one.” Bruce said. “There used to be two until the recession drove the other one out of business. Gotham National Bank.”

“That’s it.” Reacher said. “You’ll find your next clue there somewhere.”

“Yeah, but Batman doesn’t go out during the day.” Bruce said. “And people are going to wonder why a billionaire playboy is running around solving clues. I could really use your help. If it’s a matter of money, I could pay you whatever sum you want.”

Reacher held up a hand and waved the last comment away. “I don’t want your money. I’ll help solve your riddles. When I’m done, you can take care of the bad guys on your own.”

“Well, I hope you change your mind, but I’ll take what I can get.” Bruce said. “I can fit you with an earpiece so that we can talk to each other. I’ll stay on the computer if you need me to look something up, and you can be the man on the ground. Is there anything else you need?”

“I don’t suppose you have a gun?” Reacher said.

Bruce shook his head. “Batman doesn’t kill people.”

Reacher smirked. “Why not?”

“It’s what separates me from them” Bruce said. “I’m taking the law into my own hands. I need to have a boundary somewhere that I don’t cross. Or else I’m no better than them.”

“First of all, you’re already better than them just by deciding to do something.” Reacher said. “So many people sit around and watch their world fall apart. They complain, but they don’t do anything about it. Our world is built by individuals, people who decided to rise to meet whatever challenge is before them. You don’t have to wait for permission to act.”

“Tell that to the police.” Bruce said. “Gordon is sympathetic to the Batman, but by law he is supposed to arrest me on sight.”

“The public owes you a debt of gratitude.” Reacher said. “You serve their interest, and you do it for free.”

“That’s great, but I still don’t want you to kill anybody.” Bruce said.

Reacher shrugged. “I may not be given a choice. The difference between me and you is that I’m willing to do what is necessary, even if it means my hands get dirty in the process. Get your retaliation in first. If you don’t, you’re damning yourself to this life forever. Prison bars and insane asylums won’t hold these lunatics, not when they are this far gone.”

The weight of Reacher’s words moved Bruce to total silence. He’d never thought of it that way. That by not killing criminals such as the Joker, he’d been damning himself to be the Batman forever. Perhaps his choice to not kill really was keeping him from hanging up the cape and cowl for good.

“Still, I don’t have any guns here.” Bruce said. “I have body armor if you want it. Grappling hooks. Batarangs. Stuff like that.”

Reacher held up a hand. “I’m okay. I don’t really need any of that for what I’m going to be doing anyway.”

“Okay, then let’s get you to the bank.” Bruce said. He pressed a button on the computer dashboard. “Alfred, ready the limo. Reacher is going back to town.”

“I’m already ready, sir.” Alfred said. “I anticipated that you’d say that.”

A half hour later, Reacher was at Gotham National Bank. The first thing he did was scan the outside of the building for anything looking like a clue. He saw nothing, so he went inside and approached the counter.

“I’d like to open a savings account, please.” Reacher said to the teller.

She instructed him to have a seat in the waiting area and that someone would be with him shortly. He moved to the waiting area and sat down. He could see most of the bank from where he was sitting, but nothing caught his eye as being out of place. He scanned the waiting area, looking for clues. There were chairs along the wall, surrounding a small table that sat in the middle. On the table were some blocks and toys for kids. A stack of magazines sat at the end of the table.

Reacher stood up and walked over to the magazines. There were several, and he started flipping through them. When he got to the bottom, there was a magazine with a clown on the front. He picked it up and thumbed through it and a small card fell out of it onto the floor. He picked it up and flipped it over. It was a joker card, and the next riddle was written on it.



## Chapter 9

Reacher stuffed the card into his pocket. He stood up and walked to the counter and cancelled his appointment, claiming that he wasn't feeling well. Then he stepped outside and pulled the card from his pocket to read it.

"Bruce, can you hear me?" He said.

"Copy." Bruce replied. "I hear you loud and clear. I see you too. I hacked into the security system at the bank."

"I found the next clue." Reacher said. "It's written on a playing card."

"What does it say?"

Reacher looked down at the card. "You're nearer to finding us than before, you'll never know what's in store. Reading questions is your penance, where can you finish a book without finishing a sentence?"

"That one is kind of tough." Bruce said. "It seems to me that the answer should be a prison."

Reacher thought for a moment. "Maybe. The thing about a riddle, though, is that it's designed to lead you to think one way to trick you. Your immediate answer is too simple. It can't be just a prison."

"Or maybe they are making the clues easy as part of the plan." Bruce said. "Sending us on a wild goose chase is entertaining for them, but I know the Joker. He likes confronting me. He toys with me."

“Because you won’t kill him.” Reacher said. “I read this riddle and the word that sticks out to me is ‘penance.’ That implies a self-punishment, which is the most brutal punishment of all.”

“Of course!” Bruce exclaimed. “Arkham Asylum. It’s where the Joker and the Riddler were locked up.”

Reacher walked back to the limo. “Alfred, can you take me to Arkham Asylum?”

Alfred nodded and opened the door for him. “Right away, sir.”

Twenty minutes later, the limo sat outside of the Asylum. Reacher started to get out, but Alfred stopped him.

“Arkham Asylum is no joke, sir.” Alfred said. “Do be careful.”

Reacher nodded and stepped out of the car. The sun was starting to go down, and the giant castle-looking building before him seemed more eerie because of it. He stepped to the entrance and pushed open the giant wooden door.

“This is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.” Reacher said. “I don’t even know where to start.”

“I do.” Bruce said. “Go to the desk and request to visit the Riddler’s former cell. If it’s not there, then it’s probably in the Joker’s cell.”

“They aren’t going to just let me back there.” Reacher said. “These guys obviously broke out. Maybe I am to figure out how they did it so that I can break in.”

“Go outside and wait for my signal.” Bruce said. “You’ll know it when you see it.”

Ten minutes later, the Batplane flew past the Asylum. Reacher looked into the sky and saw Bruce eject from the plane wearing the Batman suit. As he fell to the ground, his cape turned into a wing-shaped parachute, and he floated safely to the ground.

“Nice entrance.” Reacher said. “You masked superheroes sure like to ramp up the drama, don’t you?”

“It was the fastest way here.” Batman said and walked inside.

The people at the desk stopped when they saw Batman walking toward them. The whole office went quiet.

“We need to see the Riddler’s former cell right away.” Batman said.

The receptionist hit a button and the door to the cells unlocked. “Come on back.” She said.

Reacher and Batman found the Riddler’s former cell with the help of one of the nurses.

“Search the room.” Reacher said. “I’ll stand watch.”

Batman was in the cell for a few minutes before he emerged. “I couldn’t find anything.” He said.

Reacher thought for a moment. “The other key to that riddle is ‘without finishing a sentence.’ The whole riddle is about breaking OUT of Arkham.”

“Good call.” Batman said.

He walked back into the room and started tapping on the walls, looking for loose stones or any clue for how they may have gotten out of the cell. Several minutes later, he found a loose stone at the bottom of the wall under the bed. He pulled it loose and found a giant metal box

behind it. He pulled out the box and opened it. Empty, except for one playing card laying face down at the bottom. He took it outside and handed it to Reacher.

Reacher read the card. "Now you know how it feels, locked inside with no appeals. You'll find us waiting with no reservation, near an animal who's on vacation."

"That's an elephant joke." Batman said. "It's a play on the old joke 'what has four legs and is always ready to travel?' The answer is an elephant, because it has a trunk."

"They are at the circus." Reacher said.

"Not just any circus." Batman said. "Haly's circus. It's a slap in the face."

"Why?" Reacher asked.

"Because that's where the Joker killed my last partner." Batman said.

Before Reacher could respond, the door to the cell slammed shut behind them.

## Chapter 10

Batman ran to the door and started tugging on the bars. The door was locked. He tried to see who pushed the door, but the corridor was empty.

“Tell me you’ve got something on that belt to get us out of this.” Reacher said.

Suddenly, the building rumbled as if there was an earthquake.

“What was that?” Batman asked.

“That sounded like an explosion.” Reacher said. “Can you get us out of here?”

“I have a small torch on my belt.” Batman said. “I’ll use it to destroy the lock on the cell.”

Alarms were going off all throughout the building, but the cell remained locked. A few years back, Arkham built a special wing for criminals like the Joker. Normally, the alarms being set off would open all the cell doors. But in this wing, it worked from a separate system designed to keep an outside attack from freeing people like the Joker.

Batman put the torch to the lock. He could hear people yelling from beyond the wing they were in. A few seconds of fire and the lock popped, opening the cell door.

“Let’s get out of here.” Reacher said. “It’s time to go to the circus.”

“Oh, so you’re coming with me now?” Batman asked.

“Nobody puts me in a cage.” Reacher said.

“The Batplane is on the roof.” Batman said. “Follow me.”

When they made it to the plane, Reacher strapped in beside of Batman in the copilot’s seat.

“What’s our play?” Reacher asked.

“Go to the circus. Capture the Joker and the Riddler. Free the girl.” Batman replied.

Reacher shook his head. “I meant more of a plan for how to do that.”

“You’re the military man.” Batman said, steering the plane off of the roof and into the air. “What do you got?”

Reacher thought for a moment. “Dammit! How did I not see it before?”

“What?” Batman asked.

“This whole thing.” Reacher replied. “We thought it was a ruse to draw you out. To trap you. But that’s not what they were doing at all.”

“What were they doing?”

“It’s like Garber always said: work the clues.” Reacher said. “We were chasing the riddles, thinking that their significance was only in finding the next clue. But it’s not. The answer to the riddle is actually a part of their plan. What were the answers to the riddles?”

“Bank. Asylum. Circus.” Batman said.

“Right.” Reacher said. “Each answer represents a part of their plan.”

“They are going to rob Gotham National Bank.” Batman said. “But to do so, they needed to lock us up.”

“Hence the asylum.” Reacher said.

“So, what does the circus have to do with it?” Batman asked.

“I haven’t figured that out yet.” Reacher said. “Perhaps that really is where they are keeping Barbara.”

“We’ll go to the bank first.” Batman said.

Moments later they could see the bank. There was a huge hole in the side of the building. People were making their way out over top of the rubble. Emergency crews were on the scene. It was chaos.

“Look around.” Batman said. “Find a vehicle that’s moving overly cautious. They have to know that we weren’t going to stay locked up for long. It must’ve been a simultaneous hit. One of them locked us up, while the other hit the bank.

“Look.” Reacher pointed south towards Gotham Harbor. “See the van?”

“Got it.” Batman said.

“Hang back.” Reacher said. “Don’t get too close. We don’t want them to know we are following them.”

They tailed the van all the way to the harbor. Batman landed the Batplane in a parking structure several blocks away.

“Let’s go.” Batman said.

Reacher and Batman walked to the docks. As they approached, they could see that Barbara was tied up. Her face was gagged, but she was trying to talk. It came out muffled and unclear. Batman pulled the gag off of her mouth.

“It’s a trap.” She said.

Before they could turn around, they could hear laughter behind them.

“Ha. Ha. Ha. Ho. Ho. Hee.”

Reacher and Batman turned around. The Joker was holding a detonator.

“Give it up, Joker. We figured out your little game.” Batman said.

The Joker feigned being scared and then laughed again. “This is the game. You see, I’ve rigged the dock with explosives. When I push this button, the supports to the dock will explode and you’ll be pulled into the water. See those fins in the water? A little gift from the circus. Their newest shark tank exhibit.”

The Riddler stepped up beside of the Joker. “And I have put together a little shock collar for them to get them in a good mood for you.”

The Joker laughed. “You lose, Batman.” Then he pressed the button and the dock exploded.



## Chapter 11

Reacher sprung into action. As the dock was falling, he ran and leapt towards Barbara, who was still tied to the chair.

“Do you have a knife?” He yelled, grabbing the chair and pulling her to the surface.

Batman swam toward them, pulled a batarang from his belt, and used it to cut Barbara's ropes. “Stay with me.” He said. “Grab onto my belt.”

The fins in the water were circling them, getting closer with each passing second. The force of the docks sliding into the water was pulling them away from the shore. Batman wasn't trying to swim to the shore. He was treading water.

“Do you have a plan before we get eaten by sharks?” Reacher gasped, sucking in a mouthful of water.

“Be patient.”

Moments later the Batplane was hovering above them. Batman pulled a grappling gun from his belt and shot it towards one of the wings. When the rope was secure, he handed it to Reacher.

“Get her to safety.” He said.

Before Reacher could speak, he pressed another button on his belt and the plane flew upward. Barbara grabbed onto Reacher and the two were pulled out of the water by the plane, which dropped them onto the shore moments later. Batman was ready to bring the plane back, when one of the sharks bit into his arm. The teeth broke through the suit and into his skin. He screamed in pain.

Reacher yelled from the shore. “Lower the plane!”

Batman punched the shark in the back of the head several times and it released him. When it did, he pressed the button and the plane lowered. Reacher jumped into the plane and into the pilot's seat.

"Does this thing have any onboard weapons?" Reacher asked.

"Missiles and guns." Batman said, fighting off another shark near him.

Reacher flew the plane out to where Batman was. He aimed the plane's guns at the fins in the water and fired a few rounds. He could see the water turn red where the bullets hit. Another shark had bitten through Batman's suit, this time in the left leg. Reacher fired again and the shark went belly up.

He looked around but saw no other fins. He opened the hatch to the plane and climbed out onto the edge. He stretched out his hand.

"Grab it!" He yelled.

Batman swam towards the hand, and held his own hand in the air. Still too far away. Reacher slid back into the cockpit and lowered the plane a bit more. Then he climbed back out onto the wing and held out his hand again. This time, Batman's hand wrapped around his, and he hauled him up onto the plane. The two slid back into the cockpit, shut the hatch, and flew back to the shore.

The Joker and the Riddler were there. The Joker was standing behind Barbara, holding a gun to her head.

"Don't even think about it, Batsy." The Joker yelled. "Get out of the plane and we'll talk."

Before Batman could reply, Reacher fired the gun from the plane and it hit the Joker right in the shoulder, spinning him around and knocking him back. Another shot hit the Riddler in the leg and knocked him down.

“I’m tired of talking.” Reacher said.

Moments later, the plane was on the ground and Reacher went to Barbara to check on her. He could hear sirens in the distance. The cops were coming.

“We have to go.” Batman said weakly. “They will arrest both of us on sight.”

“Are you going to be okay?” Reacher asked Barbara.

Barbara nodded. “Yes. I’ll take care of this. You guys go. Thanks for your help.”

A half hour later they were back at the Batcave. The computer was playing the news, and the newscasters were talking about the newest attack by the Joker. Reacher helped Bruce dress his wounds.

“Do you plan on staying in Gotham for long?” Bruce asked.

Reacher shook his head. “I’m out first thing in the morning.”

“You can sleep here tonight.” Bruce said. “And tomorrow you can have Alfred take you anywhere you want.”

“Thanks.” Reacher said.

It was several hours before Reacher could get to sleep. He set the alarm in his head for 7 AM and closed his eyes. He dreamed of clowns and sharks and bats. It was the weirdest dream he had ever had. In the morning he awoke to a huge breakfast made by Alfred.

“Damn.” Reacher said when Alfred brought him a tray. “I could get used to this.”

Alfred smiled and walked away.

An hour later Alfred dropped Reacher at the edge of town.

“Are you sure I can’t take you somewhere else, sir?” Alfred said. “You don’t have to hitchhike. That’s incredibly dangerous.”

“No, thanks, Alfred.” Reacher said. “This is what I do.”

“Seems like a lonely existence.” Alfred said. “You and Master Bruce have that in common.”

Reacher smiled. “That we do.”

“You’re welcome at Wayne Manor anytime.” Alfred said and held out his hand.

Reacher shook his hand. “Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Alfred got back into the limo and drove away. Reacher looked at the sign next to him. “Gotham City: Home of the Batman.” A sign that lured him into one of the strangest cities he’d ever been to. He took a deep breath and looked at the sky. Something streaked across the sky.

“Must’ve been a bird.” Reacher said. “Or a plane.”

Then he shrugged and put the sign to his back and started walking. A half mile down the road he was standing at an entrance ramp to the interstate. He put one foot on the road and one on the shoulder, and when he heard a car, he stuck his thumb out.