

A WOMEN'S MURDER CLUB THRILLER

UNLUCKY

13

JAMES
PATTERSON

THE WORLD'S BESTSELLING THRILLER WRITER

AND MAXINE PAETRO

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PROLOGUE

KA-BOOM

ONE

IT WAS AN ugly Monday just after noon. There had been no sign of sun so far, just a thick fog that had put the blocks to traffic around the Golden Gate. I was behind the wheel of the squad car, and Inspector Rich Conklin, my partner of many years, was in the seat beside me when Claire called my cell phone.

Claire Washburn is my closest friend, and also San Francisco's Chief Medical Examiner. This call was strictly business.

"Lindsay," Claire shouted over the braying of car horns. "I've got two DBs in a single-car smash-up and I don't know what the hell I'm looking at. If you and Richie are in the neighborhood, I could use another opinion."

She gave me her location, and I told her we'd be there

as soon as weather and traffic permitted. I repeated to Rich what Claire had said and turned the car around.

My partner is smart, steady, a glass-full type of guy, and on this particular day, he was pretty happy with himself.

He said, "Claire wants us to look at a traffic fatality?"

"She doubts it's an accident."

I followed Lincoln through the Presidio and past the Crissy Field Overlook toward the bridge as Conklin called Brady and told him we were answering Claire's call. He phoned Claire and said we were about eight minutes out, then picked up where he left off, asking my advice on his romantic dilemma.

"It's Tina's birthday. We've been together for two months," he said. "So what do I get her that means 'I like you a lot *so far*'?"

This line of conversation was tricky. Rich is like a younger brother to me. We're tight. We talk about everything. But, his ex-girlfriend Cindy is my home girl. And Cindy was still suffering from their breakup six months ago. She hadn't given up hope that she and Richie could get back together.

To tell the truth, I was hoping for that, too.

I kept my eyes on the road, staying on Lincoln, a two-laner flanked by historic buildings on the left and a parking lot on the right for visitors to the bridge. We drove slowly past the nifty old houses on Pilots' Row and then hit a wall of traffic.

"Looks like we're walking," I said.

I braked on the shoulder, turned on the flashers, grabbed my Windbreaker, and locked up. Then my

partner and I started up the incline. Richie didn't miss a beat.

"So I was thinking I'd get her a pair of earrings. Or does the *ring* in *earring* send too much of a message?"

"Not unless they're diamonds," I said.

"Hah," said Conklin.

I said, "Rich, in my humble opinion, you and Tina are at flowers and dinner. That's safe, sweet, and her mother won't send out invitations."

"Okay. And do I sign the card *love* or not?"

I couldn't help it. I rolled my eyes and threw a sigh.

"Richie, do you love her? Or don't you? *You* have to figure that one out."

He laughed.

"Could you stop giggling?" I said.

He gave me a salute and said, "Yes, ma'am, Sergeant Boxer, ma'am. And could you put in for a sense of humor?"

"You're asking for it," I said.

I gave him a little shove, and he laughed some more, and we kept walking up the incline, passing cars that were inching forward and passengers who were getting out, shouting curses into the fog.

My cell phone rang again.

Claire said, "Hurry up, okay? I can't hold off the damned Bridge Authority much longer. The tow truck is here."

TWO

THE SCENE WAS surreal, and I don't use the term lightly.

From what I could see, a late-model red Jeep had lost control in the outside northbound lane and then careered across five lanes before hitting the walkway barrier and slamming into the railing, which was bulging to accommodate the Jeep's front end.

All but one lane had been closed, and a narrow ribbon of traffic was open to alternating northbound and southbound traffic that crawled past the Jeep, which was swallowed by fog up to its tail lights.

Law enforcement vehicles were haphazardly parked on the roadway: Bridge Authority SUVs, Fire Department, CHP vehicles, black-and-whites, and personnel to match were all clumped up around the Jeep. I saw people I knew

from the ME's Office shooting pictures of the accident. A traffic cop heaved over the railing.

At the same time, a tow truck was pulling into position to remove the Jeep, in prep for reopening the road, the only thoroughfare between San Francisco and Sausalito.

A Bridge Authority uni checked out our badges and called out, "Dr. Washburn, you got company."

Claire came out from behind her van, shaking her head, and said, "Hey, you guys. Welcome to some kind of crazy. Let me give you the tour."

She looked worried, and as we closed in on the Jeep, I saw why. The windshield had exploded outward, the front end was crushed accordion-style, and as I peered into the passenger compartment, my scalp actually crawled.

I've seen a lot of gruesome scenes in my fourteen years in Homicide, and this one vaulted to the top of the "most gruesome" list. I mean, number one.

Two adults, white male in the driver's seat, white female in the passenger seat, both looked to be in their late teens or early twenties. Their arms were akimbo and their heads thrown back, mouths open in silent screams.

But what drew my attention directly were the victims' midsections, which were gaping, bloody holes. And I could see where the blood and guts had gone.

The driver's side was plastered with bits of human debris mixed with fragments of clothing and other detritus I couldn't identify. One air bag was draped over the steering wheel. The other covered the passenger from the thighs down.

Claire said, "We've got blood and particles of human

tissue stuck all over everywhere. We've got damage to the seat belts and the dashboard and the instrument panel, and that's a button projectile stuck in the visor. Also, we've got a dusting of particulate from the air bags sugaring everything.

"These areas right here," she said, pointing to the blown-out abdomens of the deceased, "this is what I'm calling explosive points of origin."

"Aw, Christ," Rich said. "They had bombs on their laps? What a desperate way to kill yourself."

"I'm not ready to call manner of death, but I'm getting a handle on cause. Look at this," Claire said. She got an arm around the passenger and leaned the young woman's body forward. I saw spinal tissue, bone, and blood against the back of the seat.

My morning coffee was now threatening to climb out of my throat, and the air around me seemed to get very bright. I turned away, took a couple of deep breaths, and when I turned back, I had the presence of mind to say, "So, this bomb, or should I say *bombs* plural, blew all the way through the bodies?"

Claire said, "Correct, Lindsay. That's why my premature but still educated opinion is that we're looking at a bomb that exploded from inside the abdomen. Abdomens, plural.

"I'm thinking belly bombs."

THREE

THE LUNCH-HOUR RUSH had escalated from peeved to highly outraged. Traffic cops were taking crap from irate drivers, and TV choppers buzzed overhead like houseflies circling a warm apple pie.

The tow truck operator called out in my direction, “Hey. Like, can someone extract the victims? We gotta open the bridge.”

Here’s what I knew for sure: I was the ranking homicide cop on the scene, the primary investigator until the case was permanently assigned. Right now, my job was to protect the scene from contamination, and, no joke, the scene was a six-lane highway.

I marched over to the tow-truck driver and told him, “Thanks, but the wreck is staying here and please extract your truck from my bridge.”

As the tow truck moved out, I addressed my fellow law enforcement officers, saying, "Whatever this is, it's *not* an accident. I'm locking the bridge down."

"Bravo," Claire said. "We agree."

I dismissed nonessential personnel and phoned Charlie Clapper, head of CSU. I told him to drop whatever he might be doing and hustle over.

"Jam on the gas and jack up the sirens," I said.

I reported in to Brady, told him what I knew. He said he would get hold of the chief and the mayor, and would be on scene ASAP.

Yellow tape was unspooled and a perimeter was set up with a wide margin around the Jeep. Roadblocks were placed at both ends of the bridge. Conklin and I documented the scene with our cell-phone cameras and notepads and chewed over some theories.

I was enormously relieved when Clapper's van came through with a flatbed truck behind it. Both vehicles parked outside the cordon, and the unflappable Clapper and half a dozen criminalists disembarked.

Clapper is a crisply turned-out man in his late forties, a former homicide cop, and a very fine CSI. I went over to him and said, "I don't think you've ever seen anything like this."

After I briefed him on what I was calling a crime scene, we walked over to the wreck and Clapper poked his head into the vehicle.

He took a long look, then backed out and said, "It's an explosion, all right. But the way I understand belly bombs, they're mechanical devices, surgically implanted. Powder.

Cap. Detonator. I don't see wires. I don't smell explosive powder. And this is strange," Clapper continued. "The blast was restricted to the front compartment. Bombs of this type are meant to blow up not just the vehicle, but everything around it. You're right, though. This is a new one on me."

I said, "We've run the plates, but I want the bodies ID'd before *Eyewitness News* notifies next of kin."

I pointed to a red nylon backpack in the rear foot well. After a tech shot photos of the bag and the fairly untouched rear compartment, I gloved up and unzipped the bag. Inside was a toy dog, a bunch of CDs, cell-phone charger, and a blue spangled wallet.

Inside the wallet was a driver's license.

"Our female victim is Lara Trimble, twenty-one, lives in Oakland," I said.

There was a mess of paper litter in the rear compartment foot well and I found myself staring at something that might be important.

"Can you shoot that?" I asked.

Once forensics had photos, I lifted out a hamburger bag that hadn't been damaged in the blast.

"Hello," I said out loud. "Is this where they had their last meal?"

Clapper said, "Thank you," and then deftly took the bag from my fingers and sealed it in a glassine envelope. "This is what we like to call evidence."

Claire joined us and said, "Charles, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking that this scene is going to be on the na-

tional news in a wink. The FBI, Homeland Security, ATF, as many Feds as can fit on the deck will be here in a half hour and the bridge will be closed until next Christmas. For twenty-four hours, anyway.”

The Golden Gate Bridge was a high-quality target, an American icon. Bombs on this bridge would scare everyone in San Francisco. It was scaring the crap out of *me*.

I called Brady’s cell and said that we were looking at possible terrorist activity.

He said, “Shit. Of course we are.”

Then we all stood around in the swirling fog and waited for the Feds to arrive.

PART ONE

SAVE THE LAST DANCE FOR ME

CHAPTER 1

A WEEK AFTER belly bombs exploded inside two graduate students in a red Jeep, and because nonmetal bombs were of major concern to federal law enforcement, the Feds were working the terrorist implications. And they'd pretty much shut the SFPD out of the case.

While the FBI huddled and labored at our local FBI offices, the tide of worldwide headlines about a mysterious one-car crash that tied up the Golden Gate Bridge for an afternoon receded and were replaced by breaking news of a movie star's divorce, political shenanigans, and a significant freeway pile-up in south LA.

Meanwhile, the SFPD was treating the belly bombs as an unsolved crime, very likely a double homicide, and by SFPD, I mean Claire, Clapper, Conklin, and me.

It was just after 6:00 p.m. on a Monday night, and Con-

klin and I were at our desks in the Hall of Justice, home to the criminal courts, the DA's Office, and the Southern Station of the SFPD. Homicide is on the fourth floor.

My partner and I work at facing desks in the bullpen, a windowless, twenty-by-twenty-foot square of fluorescent-lit gray linoleum floors and dingy walls of unknown color. There are twelve desks in this room. At the moment, we had the room to ourselves and were reviewing the sparse facts of our belly bomb case.

Over the past couple of days, we'd interviewed the victims' families. Lara Trimble's grief-stricken loved ones swore that Lara had no enemies and that she was a music student, not a political activist.

David Katz, the young man who had driven the Jeep, had been doing postgrad work in psychology. Besides being shattered, his parents were completely dumbfounded by their son's unexplained and tragic death. They hadn't even the slimmest guess as to why David and Lara had been killed.

Our week of thorough investigation into Trimble and Katz's backgrounds and associates bore out the opinion of their family circle. These kids were not radical anything. They were victims.

Claire was still working with Clapper on what could have been the explosive element and its delivery system, but for now, all we had was comprehensive documentation of the demolished car and a Whitman's Sampler of trace evidence courtesy of the FBI.

Essentially we had zip, zero, nothing to go on that hadn't been evident when we stood on the bridge a week ago.

I looked at the scene photos for the hundredth time, scrutinizing them for something, anything, I may have missed. But when the night shift began filtering into our humble squad room, I was ready to close the book on the day.

I got my gear together and waved hello to cop friends and goodnight to Richie, leaving him on the phone cooing to Tina. My seven-year old Explorer was waiting for me in the lot on Harriet Street, and when I turned the key, she started right up.

Twenty minutes later, I came through the front door of the roomy apartment I share with my husband, Joe, our six-month-old baby girl, Julie, and Martha, my border collie sidekick and Julie's best doggy friend.

I called out, "Sergeant Mommy is home," but there was no clicking of doggy toenails on hardwood, no "Hey, sweetie."

It was way too quiet. Where *was* everyone?

I had my hand on the butt of my nine as I went from room to room and back around to the foyer, the little hairs on the back of my neck standing up as I checked reference points: keys missing from the console, baby bottle in the sink, Joe's slippers by his chair, empty crib—when the front door swung open.

Martha shot through the opening and jumped up on me. My gorgeous and wonderful husband was right behind her, wheeling our child's stroller into the foyer.

"Hey, Julie," Joe said, "Look who's home."

I threw my arms around his neck, gave him a kiss, picked up my darling girl, and danced her around. I have

to say, Julie is the most gorgeous baby on the planet—and I'm not just saying that because she's ours. She's got her daddy's dark hair and both of our blue eyes, and actually, I can't take her out without people rushing over to her and saying, "Oh, you're so cute. Do you want to come home with me?"

And Julie will smile and put her arms out for them to take her! It's kind of a riot—and it kind of scares me, too. I can't turn my back on Julie for an instant, because she might go with *anyone*.

"We played a little softball in the park," Joe told me.

"Oh, right. Good idea."

"She said she's going to sleep through the night."

"Ha-ha. I want that in writing."

"Why don't you take off your piece and your shoes and stay awhile," said my husband, clicking on the evening news. "Soup's on in ten minutes."

Love, love, love coming home. Just love it.

CHAPTER 2

I SPENT HALF the night talking to Joe about the belly bombs. And it wasn't just pillow talk. Joe Molinari was former FBI, also former deputy director of Homeland Security, and now a highly regarded consultant who was content to be Mr. Mom while I fulfilled my calling in Homicide.

Joe had been over the case with me a few dozen times already, and he said, when we were under the covers in the dark, "Sooner or later, the bomber is going to take credit for this."

I said, "Huh," and rooted around in the creases of my mind, thinking that for certain bombers, that was true. But not all of them.

I remember that Joe got up for the baby twice. I did it three times, and suddenly it was eight and I was late.

At nine-ish, I parked my car in my favorite spot in the shade of the overpass and went directly to the ME's Office. The reception area was full of cops and plainclothes guys standing around, wishing for cigarettes and hoping for autopsy reports.

There was a new girl at the front desk who said her name was Tasha. I told her that Claire was expecting me, which was a lie that Claire always backed up.

I found Claire in the autopsy suite, stripping off her gloves as her assistant rolled a corpse out of the room toward the cooler.

She said, "I love how I think about you and you just materialize."

"You got something?" I asked.

"Yeah. If I hadn't had my hands full of internal organs, I would've texted you."

Claire unsnapped her gown and hung it on a hook and peeled off her cap. I followed her through to her office, dying every second to know what kind of news she had.

She settled in behind her desk, rolled her chair until she was in just the right place, and said, "I got something from Clapper that he got from the Feds. What the belly bombs consist of."

"Holy crap. Tell me."

"Here's the nutshell version. Trace of some kind of magnesium compound was found in stomach contents that were sprayed around the Jeep. The compound was ingested—you with me so far?"

"If I was any more with you, I'd be sitting in your lap."

"Stay where you are. I've got no room on my lap."

“Fine.”

“Okay, so, this compound interacts with stomach acid.”

I blinked a few times, then said, “You’re saying that those kids *ate* something and when it got to their stomachs—*ka-boom*.”

“Exactly,” said Claire.

Until new or contrary evidence challenged our theory, I was calling the belly bomb case a double homicide.

CHAPTER 3

I WAS STILL wrapping my mind around bombs you can eat when Claire picked up her ringing phone and got into something long and windy with a lawyer who wanted her as an expert witness.

While I waited for Claire's attention, I stared at the picture on her desk of the four of us in what we cheerfully call the Women's Murder Club. The four members are Claire, Cindy, Yuki, and me.

Claire was the bosomy African-American stalwart in the middle of our group, a mom three times over, my best buddy for the past dozen years, a woman with a heart big enough to move into and set up housekeeping.

To her right was Cindy, a sweet-looking bulldog of a reporter, working the crime desk at the *Chronicle*, who'd helped me bust a few criminals in her search for an exclu-

sive story. Cindy and I have fought at times. Lots of times. She doesn't back down until she's tried every possible way around me and a few impossible ones. But I know her well and love her fiercely.

To Claire's left was Yuki Castellano, who had given up private law to prosecute bad guys for the DA's Office. She's a bird-size beauty, a high-speed talker, a brilliant woman who has caught some bad breaks and still never says die.

I was the tall blonde on the end of the line, wearing my working-cop clothes and a sour expression. Bah. I don't know what was bothering me the day that picture was taken. Well, taking a guess, maybe our new lieutenant, Jackson Brady, had stepped on my toes.

In front of me in real life, Claire picked up her intercom line and yelled into her phone, "Tell Inspector Orson to cool his giant heels and I'll be with him in ten minutes. Hey, tell him to get coffee. I like mine with a lot of sugar."

Claire slammed the phone down and said, "No peace for the weary."

"I think you mean 'No rest for the wicked.'"

"That, too."

The phone on her desk rang.

"Don't take that, okay?" I said. "What do you make of this ingestible bomb?"

"Well," said Claire. She uncapped a bottle of water and took a really long pull. Then she said, "Since you ask, I believe this belly bomb was as personal as a knife."

"Meaning?"

"It was a micro-bomb so it was easy to disguise. Limited

impact because it was only meant to kill one person at a time.”

“So these kids were targeted?”

“Not necessarily. Could have been random. Remember the psycho who put cyanide inside Tylenol capsules.”

“So those one-person bombs were a kind of message?”

“My thoughts exactly,” said Claire. “Both of us go to the head of the class.”

CHAPTER 4

CLAIRE'S ASSISTANT, TASHA, appeared in the doorway of Claire's office and changed the subject big time.

She said, "Yuki Castellano is on line five. Wants to speak to both of you. She said, and I quote: 'If you don't put them on the phone, you'll be sorry you came to work today.' Unquote. She was kidding, right, Dr. Washburn?"

"Was she laughing?" Claire asked.

"Well, yeah. The cutest laugh I ever heard."

Although Yuki was our resident bad news bear, she'd been quite merry lately. She'd won a couple of cases and was getting along well with her big hunk of burning love boyfriend.

Tasha shot a look at me. "Doctor, all of your friends try to walk right over me."

Claire said, "That's them teaching you to push back. Thank you, Tasha." Then she stabbed a button, putting Yuki on speaker.

Yuki chirped, "I knew you two were together, goofing off, eating doughnuts, drinking coffee, livin' la vida loca."

"Are you high, sweetie?" Claire asked.

"You bet I am. Love makes me a little goofy."

"Tell us something we don't know," I said.

"Okay, how's this? Brady and I are getting married."

Yuki let loose one of her trademark delightful merry-bells chortles. There was a long pause as Claire and I stared at each other across Claire's desk, just trying to comprehend what Yuki had said.

Claire recovered first.

"Did I hear you right, Yuki?" she said. "You're not fooling with us, are you?"

"I'm at the bridal shop. Right this minute."

I had just gotten used to Yuki dating my boss—now she was marrying him? Well, never mind the kink their relationship had put in the chain of command. Yuki was getting married.

"Oh. My. God," I said, "Did you expect this? Or were you surprised by what could be the best news of the year?"

"Sur-prised!" she shrieked. "Brady's divorce came through. So he just hangs up with his lawyer, rolls over in bed, and he says to me, 'Nothing to stop us now.'"

Yuki treated us to another round of happy-over-the-moon laughter, then took a breath and chirped, "We're saying the I do's on Saturday."

I said into the speaker phone, "Saturday? What Saturday? This Saturday?"

"Yes. So listen, I hired this great wedding planner, and all you girls have to do is put on the dresses and show up. Details to follow."

"We're wearing bridesmaids' dresses?" I asked, totally horrified.

"Of course. Pink ones. Off the shoulder. Big skirt."

Well, Cindy and Claire would look good in pink. I would look like a half-baked ham.

"Don't worry, Linds," Yuki said. "You can use it after the wedding. It's a nice little cocktail dress."

"And I was just sitting here wishing I had an off-the-shoulder pink cocktail dress," I said, laughing in order to keep the terror out of my voice. "Can I get a tiara to go with that?"

Yuki laughed and said, "I'm kidding about the dresses, girls. I'm not having any maids of honor, none of that. Having a judge. Having vows. Having food. Having dancing. Sound okay?"

"Brilliant," Claire said. "We're throwing your engagement party. For four. Tonight."

Right after we said good-bye to Yuki, I left Claire's office, jogged through the breezeway, and entered the back door to the lobby of the Hall of Justice, with its super-size ceilings and garnet-colored marble walls. I took the stairs to Homicide and after passing through the squad's outer office went through the little swinging gate and into the bullpen.

I said, "Yo," to our PA, Brenda, and then made my way

around the desks in the bullpen. I found Brady in his hundred-square-foot glass cubicle at the far end.

He looked just like always—delts and biceps pulling the fabric of his blue shirt, white-blond hair pulled back and banded in a short pony, head bent over his computer.

I'd had a few issues with Brady since he'd taken over my old job as squad boss. From the first, I bucked at Brady's impersonal management style. But lately, I hate to admit, I've become a fan. He's impartial. He's decisive. And he has a track record as a really good cop.

I knocked on Brady's glass door. He said, "Come in, Boxer."

I did and kept coming, all four steps to his desk. Then I grabbed his shoulders and kissed him.

"Congrats, boss."

The look on Brady's face was priceless.

"Thanks."

I was grinning my face off as I crossed the squad room to my desk and Conklin's. My partner looked up from his computer and said to me, "I saw you kissing up to the boss."

"He and Yuki are getting married. Swear to God. And we've got a hot lead. So, let's get to work."

CHAPTER 5

I SWUNG DOWN into my desk chair and said to my partner, “The explosive material in the belly bomb is a magnesium compound and the victims ingested it.”

“They ate it? And it exploded? That’s not possible.”

“I’m quoting Claire, who got that from the FBI lab. They found a trace of the compound in the stomach contents. Seems that stomach acid activates the explosion.”

“Damn,” Conklin said, rocking back in his chair. “Do the Feds have any theories as to who put this stuff into the food?”

“Not yet. I’m way open to anything you come up with.”

I pulled up the scene pictures again, this time focusing on the hamburger bag and waxed-paper wrappers among the pile of litter on the floor. The hamburger bag had come from Chuck’s Prime, a chain of fast-food restaurants

that had made a name for themselves for hamburgers of superior grass-fed, made-in-America beef.

I turned my computer so Conklin could see the photo and said, “Look here. I think Trimble and Katz had a couple of Chuckburgers—and sometime not long after that, they blew up.”

Conklin said, “There’s a Chuck’s in Hayes Valley, about fifteen minutes south of the bridge.”

We signed out a squad car and Conklin drove. I listened to the car radio with half an ear while Conklin said, “I should tell you, Linds. I eat at Chuck’s twice a week. Maybe more.”

“I’ve had a Chuck’s bacon burger a few times and have to say, they’re pretty tasty.”

“Yeah,” Conklin said. “Might be time for a change.”

Twenty minutes later, we parked at the corner of Hayes and Octavia near the park known as Patricia’s Green and in the heart of the Hayes Valley commercial district, a strip with trendy shops, boutiques, restaurants, and cafés.

In the middle of the block was a big parking lot, and beside the lot, like a sunny seaside trattoria, was Chuck’s.

The outside tables were shaded by market umbrellas, and inside, a counter wrapped around two walls, and square wooden tabletops formed neat lines. Few people were eating burgers at this time of morning, but the serving folks were ready for the lunch crowd, smartly dressed as they were in aqua cowboy shirts with pearl buttons and tight white jeans.

I badged the girl at the cash register and asked to speak to the manager. Mr. Kent Sacco was paged and about

thirty seconds later, a pudgy man in his early thirties came from an office at the back and greeted us with a sweaty handshake and a business card.

We took a table by the front windows and I told Mr. Sacco that the victims on the bridge last week may have eaten their last meal at Chuck's.

I said, "We need to see your security tapes."

"Sure. Whatever I can do for you."

"We need contact information for your kitchen and serving staff."

Sacco took us back to his office, where he printed out a list of personnel with copies of their photo IDs. He left us briefly and returned with security DVDs from the four cameras, two positioned inside and two outside the restaurant.

On the way out, Conklin bought burgers and fixings to go. In the interest of full disclosure, when we got back to our desks, I offered to take one of those sandwiches off Conklin's hands. I was nearly starving. Still, I scrutinized the meat very thoroughly. Then I closed the sandwich and ate it all up. It was delicious.

Conklin and I watched videotape for the rest of the day, jumping a little when we found the gritty images of David Katz and Lara Trimble ordering hamburgers, sodas, and fries to take out. A young cowgirl behind the counter took their order and their cash, then handed them the bag of food. The victims took the bag and left with their arms around each other.

We looked at the footage forward and back, enlarged it, sharpened it, focused on every area in the frame.

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No one but the girl behind the counter had spoken to Trimble and Katz, and there was no altercation of any kind.

I called Clapper and brought him into the loop. He asked me to forward the employee contact material to him and said he'd call his FBI contact.

"They're gonna tear Chuck's apart," he said.