

1.

June 11, 2 p.m.

Seconds to decide.
Swerve left? Swerve right?
A steep drop into brush? Or a narrow shoulder that ends in a cliff wall?

Left.

Instinct.

Colter Shaw spun the wheel of the rental Kia sedan hard, braking intermittently—he couldn’t afford a skid. The vehicle, which had been doing forty along this stretch in high mountains, plunged into foliage, narrowly missing a collision with the boulder that had tumbled down a steep hillside and rolled into the middle of the road before him. Shaw thought the sound of a two-hundred-pound piece of rock rolling through brush and over gravel would be more dramatic; the transit was virtually silent.

Left was the correct choice.

Had he gone right, the car would have slammed into a granite outcropping hidden by tall, beige grass.

Shaw, who spent much time assessing the percentage likelihood of harm when making professional decisions, nonetheless knew that sometimes you simply had to roll the dice, and see what happened.

No air bags, no injury. He was, however, trapped inside the Kia.

To his left was a sea of mahonia, otherwise known as Oregon grape, benign names both, belying the plant's needle-sharp spikes that can penetrate cloth on their effortless way into skin. Not an option for an exit. The passenger side was better, blocked only by insubstantial cinquefoil, in cheerful June bloom, yellow, and a tangle of forsythia.

Shaw shoved the right-side door open again and again, pushing back the viney plants. As he did this, he noted that the attacker's timing had been good. Had the weapon fallen sooner, Shaw could easily have braked. Any later, he'd have been past it and still on his way.

And a weapon it must have been.

Washington State certainly was home to earthquakes and seismic activity of all sorts but there'd been no recent shivering in the vicinity. And rocks that are this big usually stay put unless they're leveraged off intentionally—in front of, or onto, cars driven by men in pursuit of an armed fleeing felon.

After doffing his brown plaid sport coat, Shaw began to leverage himself through the gap between door and frame. He was in trim fit, as one who climbs mountainsides for recreation will be. Still, the opening was only fourteen or so inches, and he was caught. He would shove the door open, retreat, then shove once more. The gap slowly grew wider.

He heard a rustling in the brush across the road. The man who'd tipped the rock into Shaw's path was now scabbling down the hillside and pressing through the dense growth toward Shaw, who struggled further to free himself. He saw a glint in the man's hand. A pistol.

The son of a survivalist and in a manner of speaking a survivalist himself, Shaw knew myriad ways of cheating death. On the other hand, he was a rock climber, a dirt bike fanatic, a man with a profession that set him against killers and escaped prisoners who'd stop at nothing to stay free. The smoke of death wafted everywhere around him, constantly. But it wasn't that finality that troubled him. In death, you had no reckoning. Far worse would be a catastrophic injury to the

spine, to the eyes, the ears. Crippling his body, darkening the world or muting it forever.

In his youth, Shaw was called “the restless one” among his siblings. Now, having grown into a self-professed Restless Man, he knew that such incapacity would be pure hell.

He continued to squeeze.

Almost out.

Come on, come on . . .

Yes!

No.

Just as he was about to break free, his wallet, in the left rear pocket of his black jeans, caught.

The attacker stopped, leaning through the brush, and lifted the pistol. Shaw heard it cock. A revolver.

And a big one. When it fired, the muzzle blast blew green leaves from branches.

The bullet went wide, kicking up dust near Shaw.

Another click.

The man fired again.

This bullet hit its mark.

2.

June 11, 8 a.m., six hours earlier

Shaw was piloting his thirty-foot Winnebago camper through the winding streets of Gig Harbor, Washington State.

With about seven thousand inhabitants, the place was both charming and scuffed around the edges. It was, to be sure, a harbor, well protected, connected to Puget Sound via a narrow channel through which pleasure and fishing craft now glided. The Winnebago motored past working and long-abandoned factories devoted to manufacturing vessels and the countless parts and accessories with which ships were outfitted. To Colter Shaw, never a sailor, it seemed like you could spend every minute of every day maintaining, repairing, polishing and organizing a boat without ever going out to sea.

A sign announced the Blessing of the Fleet in the middle of the harbor, the dates indicating that it had taken place earlier in the month.

PLEASURE CRAFT NOW WELCOME!

Perhaps the industry was now less robust than in the past, and the organizers of the event wanted to beef up its image by letting lawyers and doctors and salesmen edge their cabin cruisers up to the circle of the commercial craft—if that geometry was in fact the configuration for fleet blessing.

Shaw, a professional reward seeker, was here on a job—the word he used to describe what he did. *Cases* were what law enforcement investigated and what prosecutors prosecuted. Although after years of pursuing any number of criminals Shaw might have made a fine detective, he wanted none of the regimen and regulation that went with full-time employment. He was free to take on, or reject, any job he wished to. He could choose to abandon the quest at any time.

Freedom meant a lot to Colter Shaw.

He was presently considering the hate crime that had brought him here. In the first page of the notebook he was devoting to the investigation, he'd written down the details that had been provided by one of his business managers:

Location: Gig Harbor, Pierce County, Washington State.

Reward offered for: Information leading to the arrest and conviction of two individuals:

—Adam Harper, 27, resident of Tacoma.

—Erick Young, 20, resident of Gig Harbor.

Incident: There have been a series of hate crimes in the county, including graffiti of swastikas, the number 88 (Nazi symbol) and the number 666 (sign for the devil) painted on synagogues and a half-dozen churches, primarily those with largely black congregations. On June 7, Brethren Baptist Church of Gig Harbor was defaced and a cross burned in the front yard. Original news story was that the church itself was set on fire but that was found to be inaccurate. A janitor and a lay preacher (William DuBois and Robinson Estes) ran outside to confront the two suspects. Harper opened fire with a handgun, wounding both men. The preacher has been released from the hospi-

tal. The janitor remains in the intensive care unit. The perpetrators fled in a red Toyota pickup, registered to Adam Harper.

Law enforcement agencies running case: Pierce County Public Safety Office, liaising with U.S. Justice Department, which will investigate to determine if the incident is a federal hate crime.

Offerors and amount of reward:

—Reward one: \$50,000, offered by Pierce County, underwritten by the Western Washington Ecumenical Council (with much of that sum donated by Micro-Enterprises NA founder Ed Jasper).

—Reward two: \$900 offered by Erick Young's parents and family.

To be aware of: Dalton Crowe is actively pursuing the reward.

This last bit of intelligence wasn't good.

Crowe was an unpleasant man in his forties. Former military, he opened a security business on the East Coast, though it wasn't successful and he shut it down. His career now was freelance security consultant, mercenary and, from time to time, reward seeker. Shaw's and Crowe's paths had crossed several times, on occasion violently. They approached the profession differently. Crowe rarely went after missing persons; he sought only wanted criminals and escapees. If you shot a fugitive while you were using a legal weapon in self-defense, you still got the reward and could usually avoid jail. This was Crowe's approach, the antithesis of Shaw's.

Shaw had not been sure he wanted to take this job. The other day,

as he'd sat in a lawn chair in Silicon Valley, he had been planning on pursuing another matter. That second mission was personal, and it involved his father and a secret from the past—a secret that had nearly gotten Shaw shot in the elbows and kneecaps by a hitman with the unlikely name of Ebbitt Droon.

Risk of bodily harm—*reasonable* risk—didn't deter Shaw, though, and he truly wanted to pursue his search for his father's hidden treasure.

He'd decided, however, that the capture of two apparent neo-Nazis, armed and willing to kill, took priority.

GPS now directed him through the hilly, winding streets of Gig Harbor until he came to the address he sought, a pleasant single-story home, painted cheerful yellow, a stark contrast to the gray overcast. He glanced in the mirror and brushed smooth his short blond hair, which lay close to his head. It was mussed from a twenty-minute nap, his only rest on the ten-hour drive here from the San Francisco area.

Slinging his computer bag over his shoulder, he climbed from the van and walked to the front door, rang the bell.

Larry and Emma Young admitted him, and he followed the couple into the living room. He assessed their ages to be mid-forties. Erick's father sported sparse gray-brown hair and wore beige slacks and a short-sleeved T-shirt, immaculately white. He was clean-shaven. Emma wore a concealing, A-line dress in pink. She had put on fresh makeup for the visitor, Shaw sensed. Missing children disrupt much, and showers and personal details are often neglected. Not so here.

Two pole lamps cast disks of homey light around the room, whose walls were papered with yellow and russet flowers, and whose floors were covered in dark green carpet, over which sat some Lowe's or Home Depot oriental rugs. A nice home. Modest.

A brown uniform jacket sat on a coat rack near the door. It was thick and stained and had LARRY stitched on the breast. Shaw guessed the man was a mechanic.

They were doing their assessment of Shaw as well: the sport coat,

the black jeans, the gray button-down shirt. Black slip-ons. This, or a variation, was his own uniform.

“Sit down, sir,” Larry said.

Shaw took a comfortable overstuffed armchair of bold red leather and the couple sat across from him. “Have you heard anything about Erick since we talked?”

“No, sir,” Emma Young told him.

“What’s the latest from the police?”

Larry said, “He and that other man, Adam. They’re still around the area. The detective, he thinks they’re scraping together money, borrowing it, maybe stealing it—”

“He wouldn’t,” said Emma.

“What the police said,” Larry explained. “I’m just telling him what they said.”

The mother swallowed. “He’s . . . never. I mean, I . . .” She began to cry—again. Her eyes had been dry but red and swollen when Shaw arrived.

He removed a notebook from his computer bag, as well as a Delta Titanio Galassia fountain pen, black with three orange rings toward the nib. Writing with the instrument was neither pretense nor luxury. Colter Shaw took voluminous notes during the course of his reward jobs; the pen meant less wear and tear on his writing hand. It also was simply a small pleasure to use.

He now wrote the date and the names of the couple. He looked up and asked for details about their son’s life: In college and working part-time. On summer break now. Lived at home.

“Does Erick have a history of being involved in neo-Nazi or any extremist groups?”

“My God, no,” Larry muttered as if exhausted by the familiar question.

“This is all just crazy,” said Emma. “He’s a good boy. Oh, he’s had a little trouble like everybody. Some drugs—I mean, after, well,

after what happened, it's understandable. Just tried 'em is all. The school called. No police. They were good about that."

Larry grimaced. "Pierce County? The meth and drug capital of the state. You should read the stories in the paper. Forty percent of all the meth in Washington is produced here."

Shaw nodded. "Was that what Erick did?"

"No, some of that Oxy stuff. Just for a while. He took anti-depressants too. Still does."

"You said, 'after what happened.' After what?"

They looked at each other. "We lost our younger boy sixteen months ago."

"Drugs?"

Emma's hand, resting on her thigh, closed into a fist, bundling the cloth below her fingers. "No. Was on his bike, run into by somebody who was drunk. My, it was hard. So hard. But it hit Erick in particular. It changed him. They were real close."

Brothers, Shaw thought, understanding quite well the complex feelings the relationship generated.

Larry said, "But he wouldn't do anything hurtful. Never anything bad. He never has. 'Cepting for the church."

His wife snapped, "Which he didn't do. You *know* he didn't."

Shaw said, "The witnesses said it was Adam did the shooting. I haven't heard where the gun came from. Does Erick own one? Have access to one?"

"No."

"So it would be his friend's."

Larry: "Friend? Adam wasn't a friend. We never heard of him."

Emma's ruddy fingers twined the dress hem. A habit. "He's the one did the cross thing too, burning it. And the graffiti. Everything! Adam kidnapped Erick. I'm sure that's what happened. *He* had a gun and made Erick come with him. Hijack his car, rob him."

"They took Adam's truck, though, not Erick's."

“I was thinking about that,” the mother blurted. “Erick did the brave thing and threw his keys away.”

“He had his own bank account?”

The boy’s father said, “Yes.”

So they wouldn’t know about withdrawals. The police could get that information, what branches he’d been to. Probably already had.

“You know how much money he has? Enough to get very far?”

“Couple thousand, maybe.”

Shaw had been examining the room, observing mostly the pictures of the Youngs’ two boys. Erick was handsome with bushy brown hair and an easy smile. Shaw had also seen pictures of Adam Harper, posted as part of the reward announcement. There were no mug shots, though in both of the photos in the press he was looking into the camera with caution. The young man, whose crew cut was blond with blue highlights, was gaunt.

“I’m going to pursue this, try to find your son.”

Larry said, “Oh, sure. Please. You’re nothing like that big guy.”

“Didn’t like him one bit,” Emma muttered.

“Dalton Crowe?”

“That was his name. I told him to leave. I wasn’t going to pay him any reward. He laughed and said I could stuff it. He was going after the bigger one anyway, you know—the fifty thousand the county offered.”

“When was he here?”

“Couple days ago.”

In his notebook Shaw wrote, *D.C. present at offerors’ house. June 9.*

“Now, let me tell you how I approach this. It won’t cost you anything unless I find Erick. No expenses. If I locate him, you’ll owe me that \$900.”

Larry said proudly, “It’s \$1,060 now. One of my cousins came through. Wish it was more but . . .”

“I know you’ll want me to bring him home to you. But that’s not my job. He’s a fugitive and I’d be breaking the law if I did that.”

“Aiding and abetting,” Emma said. “I watch all the crime shows.”

Colter Shaw tended not to smile but when meeting offerors, he occasionally did, to put them at ease. “I don’t apprehend. I deal in information, not citizen’s arrests. But if I can find him, I won’t let the police know where he is until there’s no chance he or anybody else’ll be hurt. You’ll need a lawyer. Do you know one?”

The regarded each other once more. “Fellow did our closing,” Larry said.

“No. A criminal lawyer. I’ll get you some names.”

“We don’t have . . . I mean, we could work out a home equity thing, I guess.”

“You’ll have to. He needs good representation.”

Shaw reviewed his notes so far. His handwriting was small and had once been described as balletic, it was so beautifully drawn. The notebook wasn’t ruled. Shaw didn’t need guidance. Each line was perfectly horizontal.

For another twenty minutes Shaw asked questions and the couple responded. Over the course of the interview, he noted that their adamant view that their son was innocent seemed objective; they simply could not accept that the son they knew had committed this crime. The idea bewildered them. The sole perp had to be Adam Harper.

When he felt he had enough information for the moment, he put away the pen and notebook, rose and walked to the door. The parents agreed to send any new information they heard from the police or friends or relatives Erick had contacted for money or other help.

“Thank you,” Emma said at the doorway, debating hugging him, it seemed. She did not.

It was the husband who was choking up. He fumbled whatever he was going to say and just gripped Shaw’s hand. Larry turned back to the house before the first tear appeared.

As he walked to the Winnebago, Shaw was reflecting on the one subject he had not mentioned to Emma and Larry: his policy not to accept a reward from family members if the search revealed that their missing loved one was dead. No reason to even bring up the possibility, even though it seemed more or less likely to Shaw that their second child had been murdered as soon as Adam found he had no more use for the boy.

3.

Why should I talk to you?” the man scoffed.

Dressed in a faded jacket of cracked brown leather, jeans and boots, Adam Harper’s father, Stan, continued to stack cartons of motor oil on a dock. He was a ship’s chandler, an outfitter, and apparently getting an order ready to load onto a delivery boat when it arrived back in the berth.

The air was richly scented, pine and sea waste and petroleum.

“I’m helping Erick Young’s family find their son. The last the police knew, he and Adam were together.”

“You’re after that reward, I’ll bet.”

“I am, yes. Now, is there anything you can tell me about Adam that could help? Where he might go? Friends, relatives he’d be staying with?”

“Put that away.” Nodding at the notebook and pen in Shaw’s hand. Shaw slipped them into a pocket.

“Don’t have any idea.” Harper was solid as a tree, with sandy-gray hair and a rosy complexion, nose slightly ruddier than cheek.

Erick’s family had offered money for someone to find their fugitive son; Stan Harper had not. As far as Shaw knew, he might hope his son successfully escaped from the law. There was no reason for him to say a word. Still, he wasn’t stonewalling. Not exactly. Three stacked car-

tons later, Harper turned. “He was always a problem. Moods this, moods that. Said it was like bees buzzing around him all the time. Made it hard on us too, you can believe. He didn’t get that. It was all about him. Trouble at school, counsellors calling all the time. Had some fights, him and me.” A glance toward Shaw. “But that’s fathers and sons. Happens to everybody. Easier for us when he quit school and started working trades. Day labor, mostly. If he was on staff, he’d get fired in a split.”

Shaw would tread lightly with his next question. Bigotry, he’d found, was often handed down from parents to children like hair color and heart trouble. He had no problem calling out a racist, but at the moment his mission was to gather information. “The incident at the church? The cross, the graffiti. Did he ever talk about doing anything like that?”

“Never heard him. But I gotta say, me and him, we didn’t talk about much of anything. After Kelly passed—after my wife passed—he went even further away. Hit him hard. I was like, *it’s coming*, her passing, and I tried to get ready. Adam, he just didn’t think she’d ever . . . Denied it, you know?”

“Any friends in supremacist groups? Was he a member of any community like that?”

“What’re you, like a bounty hunter?”

“I make my living finding people.”

Whether this answer satisfied or raised questions, Shaw couldn’t tell. Harper hefted two big cartons at once with little effort. They must’ve totaled fifty pounds.

Shaw repeated the question about neo-Nazis.

“Not that I ever heard but he was . . . you know, was impressionable. He met some musicians once, and for a year that was all he was going to do. Be a heavy metal star. That was the whole world to him. Then he gave it up. Was going to build skateboards and sell them. That went no place. Fell in with a bad crew in high school, shoplifting and drugs. He did whatever they wanted.

“You know, when I heard from the cops about the church, I wasn’t surprised. Not like *oh shit* surprised. I figured he’d snapped. I could feel it coming. Since his mother died.”

Stan walked to the edge of the dock and spit, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“That Erick kid, you oughta check him out.”

Shaw replied, “He doesn’t seem to have any connection with supremacists. No history of hate crimes.”

Harper’s eyes narrowed. “You know, Adam took off for a while. He was away for three weeks, a month, I don’t know. After we lost Kelly. He just disappeared and when he came back he was different. He was better, his moods. I asked him where he’d gone. He said he couldn’t talk about it. Maybe he hooked up with some of those assholes then.”

“Where?”

“No idea.”

“Can you give me the names of friends I can talk to?”

A shrug. “Couldn’t tell you. He wasn’t a boy, you know. He had his own life. We didn’t chat on the phone, like he did with his mama.” Harper received a text and then replied. Looked over the still water of the harbor. Then back to the cartons.

“Was he straight?” Shaw asked.

“You mean . . . like, not being gay?”

Shaw nodded.

“Why you wanta ask something like that?”

“I need all the facts I can get.”

“Only ever saw him with women. None of ’em for very long.” A sigh. “We tried everything with him. Therapy. Yeah, that was a joke. Medication. Always the most expensive ones, naturally. And that was on top of Kelly’s bills too. Doctors and hospitals.” He nodded toward the shack that was the corporate headquarters for Harper Ship Services, Inc. “I look like I can afford Cadillac health insurance?”

“Nothing worked for Adam?”

“Not much. Just being away wherever he went, that three or four weeks.” The crowning carton was placed on the stack. “Maybe he got a kick out of learning to burn crosses and spray paint churches. Who the fuck knows? I got paperwork to do.”

Shaw gave him a card with his number on it. “If you hear from him.”

The man slipped it into his back pocket and gave a cynical smile, which meant: Helping you get your blood money.

“Mr. Harper, I want to get both of them back safe.”

Harper turned but paused halfway to the shed.

“It was so damn frustrating. Sometimes you just wanted to shake him and say, ‘Get over yourself. Everybody’s got the blues. Just live with it.’”

Back in the Winnebago, Shaw brewed a cup of strong Honduran coffee, poured in some milk and sat down at the table.

He spent the next half hour or so calling some of the Youngs’ relatives. They were sympathetic but had no helpful information. Then on to Erick’s friends. Those willing to talk could offer no insights into where he might have gone and generally expressed dismay that he’d been implicated in a hate crime. One classmate, however, said that since his brother died “he’s just like . . . he’s not really himself, you know what I mean?”

Shaw spoke to Tom Pepper, a former FBI special agent and a friend with whom he rock-climbed occasionally. Pepper may have been retired but he was just as connected in law enforcement now as he had always been and was current on a robust security clearance. He also enjoyed staying in the investigation game and Shaw sometimes called Pepper for an assist. He now asked for the name of somebody involved in the investigation, either in the Pierce County Public Safety Office or the local FBI field office.

A reward seeker's relationship with the police is complicated. Law enforcers have no problems with tip lines, like Crimewatch, whose purpose is to gather information from those who have personal knowledge of an incident. Cops are, however, reluctant to give much assistance to an active investigator like Shaw. Reward seekers, as opposed to tipsters, have been known to muddy up cases, occasionally even resulting in a suspect's escape when police were close to an arrest. Seekers also sometimes end up injured or dead, which complicate a cop's life to no end.

Still, Pepper's name carried some weight and so did his assurance that Shaw wouldn't get underfoot and could even possibly prove helpful. The Pierce County detective running the case, Chad Johnson, spent ten minutes filling Shaw in on the details, which Shaw recorded in his notebook. Johnson provided particulars on Adam Harper, supplementing what the young man's father had said.

When they disconnected, Shaw made another cup of coffee and flipped through the notebook.

June 7. Around 6:30 p.m. Erick Young went to the Forest Hills Cemetery on Martinsville Road in Gig Harbor. This is where his brother, Mark, who died sixteen months ago, is buried. He went to the gravesite frequently.

At some point shortly thereafter, Erick was seen in the company of Adam Harper in the cemetery, according to witnesses. Erick had no apparent prior connection with Adam.

At around 7:30 police responded to reports of a shooting at Brethren Baptist Church. Victims—a lay preacher and a janitor—reported that two suspects, later identified as Adam and Erick, had placed a cross in front of the church and set it on fire. The church was also defaced with Nazi swastikas and obscenities.

When the preacher and janitor ran outside to try to tackle the suspects and hold them for police, Adam drew a gun and shot at them, hitting both.

The suspects fled in Adam's ten-year-old red Toyota pickup truck, registered in Washington State. Erick's car was found parked near the cemetery.

None of Erick's social media posts suggest racist leanings. Adam has no FB, Twitter or Instagram account.

Neither is gay; unlikely there was a sexual encounter.

None of Erick's other family members or friends have heard from him. There is no particular location he might have run off to that his parents and friends know of.

The authorities were forensically able to link the defamatory graffiti on the Brethren Baptist Church to similar incidents in Pierce County over the past year and a half.

The suspects are believed to still be in the Tacoma area, since both Adam and Erick emptied savings accounts over the past several days, and there have been two sightings of the pickup via video surveillance. Probably gathering money for a long-distance escape from the area.

Erick Young has been working part-time in a rehabilitation center for troubled youths and getting a B.A. at a local community college. He excelled in math, history and biology. But after his brother's death, he became moody and his grades dropped and attendance at work became a problem. His girlfriend broke up with him because of his moods. Parents described him as "confused and vulnerable."

Adam Harper has a history of depression and other emotional problems. A drifter. He's taken classes at community college but never graduated. He's worked trades most of his life.

He has been arrested on shoplifting and minor drug possession charges. He has no obvious history of white supremacist or racist organizations, though father pointed to his disappearance for 3 to 4 weeks out of town. Hooked up with a group then?

Adam has few friends and the ones the police contacted, as well as a couple of family members, were unaware of anyone or anyplace he would be inclined to flee to.

His residence, a small apartment on the east side of Tacoma, was searched. There was no evidence of any extremist affiliation.

Firearm used in the shooting was a Smith & Wesson .38 Police Special, registered to Adam's father.

Neither of the suspects' phones are active.

Both men have passports. Erick's is still in his parents' home.

A video of a currency exchange showed two men, in sunglasses and wearing hoodies, changing \$500 U.S. into Canadian. They matched the general builds of the suspects.

Shaw scanned these notes, sat back, closed his eyes, digesting what he'd read, drawing conclusions about the incident and the people involved.

His phone hummed. It was Chad Johnson.

"Detective?"

"We've got them, Mr. Shaw."

Fastest reward job on record. No money. But the good news was that he could now return to his other mission: tracking down his father's secret.

Echo Ridge . . .

“Anybody hurt? Did they resist?”

A pause. “Oh, we haven’t apprehended them yet. I mean, we’ve *located* them. They’re in Adam’s pickup. There was a sighting of it headed north on I-5. Then they turned off on surface roads and were still heading north. Making for Canada, of course. We’ve got a task-force on the apprehension detail. Ten person.”

The last word stumbled out. Johnson had recently been trained not to use the male gender if possible, Shaw guessed.

“Should get them in the next hour.”

“Good.”

“Sorry about the reward, sir.”

He didn’t sound too sorry, Shaw thought. Maybe the Ecumenical Council and the high-tech wunderkind Ed Jasper were contributing the bulk but the rest of the cash would have to come out of his budget.

Shaw thanked him. He sipped a bit more coffee, then sent a text to Mack McKenzie, his D.C.-based private eye, requesting three items of information. Shortly after, she responded, answering all of them with the level of detail that she was known for.

Shaw read the reply closely and, after scanning a map, fired up the Winnebago’s engine. He pulled out of Harper’s parking lot, surveyed the vehicles nearby—those parked, as well as those in motion—then drove onto the uneven road. He steered east out of Gig Harbor, his GPS directing him to a trailer camp, where he’d park the Winnebago and Uber to a car rental agency to pick up a sedan or SUV. He edged the camper as far over the speed limit as he dared without getting pulled over.

He couldn’t afford any delays. Time was vital.

An hour later Shaw was steering his rental Kia along a mountainous route fifty miles east of Tacoma in the beautiful country approaching Mount Rainier National Park. Winding roads, panoramic views, verdant forest, formations of rock shiny and pitted as wet bone.

He eased out of a climbing switchback and onto a straightaway, a hillside face on his right, and began to accelerate.

Then a moving shadow caught his attention.
The boulder was cartwheeling toward the road directly in front
of him.
Seconds to decide.
Swerve left? Swerve right?