



FRANDORF

A REASONABLE  
MADNESS

FRAN DORF

**A  
Reasonable  
Madness**

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Mandarin

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### **A Mandarin Paperback**

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## **A Reasonable Madness**

He led David down a flight of stairs at the back of the building, then through a long hall with rooms on either side, closed doors.

"She's in this one," he said, stopping in front of the second door on the left. He put his hand on the knob, but turned back. "There's one thing I maybe should have mentioned."

"What's that?"

The sergeant let go of the knob. "Well, it's the thing that really got us going when she first confessed. Really thought we had a suspect. Murder two, maybe one. Would have been a lucky break. Course, witness or not, Culligan's not convinced the Wade woman isn't involved somehow. He says — "

"What was it that got you going, sergeant?"

"Well, Mrs. Wade knew something about the murder. It had to do with how many wounds there were, a detail we deliberately held back from the press. Sometimes we do that."

"So I've heard. How many were there?"

"Ten. Vertical on the face. Parallel. Coroner says it reminds him as if an animal had clawed her with all ten claws. Only, most of the wounds are pretty neat. Like a surgeon might of done it. Had to be some psychopath to do that kind of thing — get a woman down and take the time to make ten neat slashes, right there on an open street corner, where anyone could of come along. Course, I don't suppose the killer would have been counting, do you?"

**For my Parents**

**And for Bob and Rachel  
who make it all worthwhile**

**They cannot scare me with their empty spaces  
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.  
I have it in me so much nearer home  
To scare myself with my own desert places.**

**ROBERT FROST**

# *Prologue*

NO OFFICE should have been as hot as this one, no work as tedious, no building as quiet.

Lilly Dunleavy stopped typing and listened. Without the steady tap-tapping of her fingertips on the computer keyboard, there was no sound at all except for the muted hum of the computer terminal. Not even the air-conditioning system, normally a dirge of clanks and drones, made a sound. There had to be something wrong with the thermostat. She'd adjusted it downward three times now, and it was still sweltering hot.

Lilly glanced at the clock. It was after eight, and it was an oven in here. Maybe the whole system had been turned off for the night. Who cared about Lilly Dunleavy, working late on Allen Haverhill's damned report—was anything more boring than corporate divestiture—which had to be finished tomorrow, or goodbye job? Who cared about Lilly, the lowest of the low, secretary to a mere account executive who was pretty low himself? For nearly two weeks now, the mayor had been reminding the city daily: "Everyone pitch in. Save New York's energy during the heatwave." Maybe it was a decree from City Hall. No air conditioning at night. But everyone was long gone now, and there was no one to ask except maybe some janitor, whom Lilly might or might not find somewhere on any of sixteen floors.

Lilly glanced back at the screen, flickering white letters on blue, then stood up to stretch her legs. She glanced over at the useless pane of glass. What the hell were the windows there for, always shut, not even a latch? Air-conditioned air. Which was okay, except when the air wasn't air-conditioned.

Absently, Lilly walked over to the window and glanced down at the sidewalk, two floors below. There didn't seem to be much traffic, no one out walking, but that was understandable this late in a nonresidential neighborhood. It was dark now on the street. Only the light of a street lamp.

And something else.

At first Lilly couldn't make out what she was seeing. Everything seemed to have been washed, drained of color. A dark shadow on the sidewalk, a hulking, kneeling figure. No, *two* figures. One lying down. That one was a woman—Lilly could see the outline of a pair of high heels. Why weren't the feet moving?

The other figure was kneeling over her. But what was he doing?

Lilly put her palm up to the glass, trying to focus.

She saw the glint of a knife in motion, followed the blade with her eyes.

Not stabbing. Slicing. Again. Again. Again. Small, slow, careful movements, a pantomime in black and gray, in motion and shadow. Up. Down. Then up again. The motion reminded her of carving. Like carving a turkey.

She understood.

She watched, struggling for an idea of what she might do. Open the window, scare him away? No. She remembered now. It was glued shut, and she was two floors up. Maybe she could pry it open. With what?

She began banging at the window with her fists, little fists on a huge expanse of glass. Later, she would remember pounding, pounding, screaming. *But she couldn't break the glass*, and he was still there, doing his killing pantomime.

She could throw the paperweight from her desk at the window, the one with the coins imbedded in it; or maybe she could smash the computer monitor through the window, ripping the tangle of wires and the plugs from the keyboard. She would scare him away.

But then he would see her.

She stopped banging.

Suddenly the hulking figure straightened up and became a man. The other figure, the woman, lay on the sidewalk, motion-

less but for the slight twitching of one hand and the movement of a dark shadow—the pool of blood widening around her head.

He was walking toward Eighth Avenue now, slowly, as if he were strolling through the park. Why was he walking so slowly?

She wanted to back away, but she remained transfixed, her hand on the glass, her eyes on the man. She could still see him as he walked. But he had no face!

No. It was a mask, a ski mask. She could see the place where the eyes were cut out, almond shapes, black hollows for eyes.

The killer was looking around him as he walked, and then he looked up. Lilly was no longer safe behind glass, safe with distance, and dark.

The killer's eyes looked at her, registered her face just for the briefest instant. The black hollows of eyes held her, as if the man had reached up through the glass, placed his hand on her shoulder, breathed on her face. She realized she was part of the scene in black and gray. Him. And his victim. And *her*. She heard her fingernails screech down the glass, shrill, cold. Teacher-nails on the blackboard. Twelfth grade, Mr. Larson. He loved to do that, watch the kids squirm.





PART ONE

Culligan:  
*Logic*



# 1

FOR THE FIRST TIME in nearly a year, David Goldman's private line rang while he was in session. Only a few people had the number—his soon-to-be-ex-wife, his best friend, his parents, a few others—and they were all well aware that the only time to reach him was between ten of and ten after the hour, unless it was an emergency.

Forty minutes into the session, lulled by the rhythm and cadence of his patient's voice, mildly startled, more than a little annoyed, David picked up the receiver.

"Dr. Goldman?" A deep booming voice. "This is Sergeant Jake Ammonetti, Nineteenth Precinct."

"How did you get this number, sergeant?"

"I called your office a couple of times and kept getting that machine, so I tried your home. Your wife gave me the number."

What the hell was Allison doing in the apartment? "Yes, sergeant," David said, "how can I help you?"

"We got a patient of yours down here, I think you'd better get over right away. Name's Wade."

"Who?"

"Laura Gardner Wade. Says you're her..." He started to say "shrink," then said, "psychiatrist."

"But I don't have a patient by that name. I..." Wait a minute. He didn't, but he did—almost. A Laura Wade had come in on a consultation earlier in the year, maybe back in January. Mild depression. Very lovely woman. David thought the session went well, wondered why she never came back.

"Dr. Goldman?"

"Yes. I know her." He glanced over at his patient, Pepper Moran. He had to be very careful what he said while she was sitting there listening.

"We have to send Mrs. Wade down to Bellevue if we can't get her out of here, Dr. Goldman," Ammonetti said.

*Bellevue?* "What happened?"

"Your patient confessed to a homicide. Woman murdered last night down on Seventh and Twenty-ninth. Maybe you heard about it on the news."

As a matter of fact, he had. He'd done some case reviews at home last night, then turned on the television news for a little while before going to bed. What were they calling him for? It sounded like Laura Wade needed a lawyer, not a psychiatrist.

"Yes. I heard about it, sergeant."

"Of course, I knew right away something was up the minute she walked in," Ammonetti said. "I never figured a woman could of done this thing anyway, not this woman. I mean, she comes in here—she's quite a looker, your patient, doc—wearing a three-piece pink number that must have cost eight hundred bucks if it cost a penny. And when she said she was Laura Gardner Wade...well, right away I recognize the name—I mean, we shop there all the time, you can get some real bargains in Gardners. And then she said she lived up in Connecticut, in Fairfield County. Pretty exclusive digs for a Manhattan street killer. I told Culligan she was a confessor right away."

A confessor? And who was Culligan? David sighed. "All right, sergeant, I'll be there as soon as I can."

He hung up. Pepper, her arms folded, was looking over his head at the wall behind his desk. David's credentials were hanging there—diplomas, certifications, a citation for a paper on anxiety—arranged in a mishmash of frames just to the right of the clock. The "hour," he noted, was almost up.

"I'm sorry, Pepper, there's an emergency. I have to cut our session a little short."

Pepper Moran stood up. "If you have to go, you have to go. I understand." Her expression was devoid of the slightest trace of understanding.

David took off his glasses. "We'll continue this next week, Pepper. Okay?"

"Okay, but next week let's do it without your specs," she said, smiling. "You look cuter that way."

He waited until she closed the door behind her before getting up. She was a difficult patient, Pepper—a hotshot advertising executive, and all she could think of was having a husband and a

family before her biological clock ran out. David didn't like putting people in categories, but it seemed to him that Pepper Moran belonged to a growing one. And lately she'd been blatantly seductive, complimenting him at every turn, crossing her legs, giving him long meaningful stares, the whole bit. Did she think he was her answer?

He made a couple of calls to cancel his five and six o'clock patients, then went into the bathroom to splash water on his face, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror before he flipped off the light. What was it Pepper had called him a few weeks ago? "Stop looking at me that way," she said. "You look like a brooding Adonis." Brooding, he may have been, but Adonis? At best it was a Semitic sort of look, large jaw, biggish nose, dark hair—but for the blue eyes. He was over six feet tall, but pretty skinny. Even at thirty-nine. Some Adonis.

On his way out the door, he ran into the ubiquitous Mrs. Frangipani, collecting her mail in the vestibule.

"Good afternoon, doctor. Everything all right?"

Mrs. Frangipani lived in an apartment over David's office, which occupied the entire bottom floor of the brownstone—a turn-of-the-century Greek revival intricately carved with a lot of very sooty gargoyles. Sometimes it seemed a little dingy for a place where psychological healing occasionally occurred. He tried to lighten up the place by keeping geraniums in the window boxes. Mrs. Frangipani occasionally took it upon herself to water them, that is, when she wasn't collecting her mail.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Frangipani. Everything's fine."

He headed outside and stood for a moment on the sidewalk in front of the stoop. It was a quiet, shaded side street between Columbus and Amsterdam. Quiet and shady, but hot. Another boiler, the kind of day where you wish you were anywhere on earth but in Manhattan, in a jungle of sweating cement and flesh. The geraniums looked wilted, and the air stank, the legacy of a recently settled garbage strike. Heading east, toward Central Park, David had to walk around a man standing at the end of the block, insisting that he repent, for the hour was near.

He hailed a cab without much difficulty at the corner: it was filthy inside, and the driver kept cursing at the top of his lungs in a language David couldn't quite identify, and the guy drove like a

maniac. None of which made much of an impression on David. He was trying to recall whatever he could about Laura Wade.

She lived in Connecticut—Easterbrook, a name he remembered because he and Allison had stopped there on their way up to Cape Cod one summer. One of those sedate Waspy towns along the coast where all the people walking along the main street of chic shops and eateries seemed to look alike, dressed in ultracasual, outrageously expensive sportswear. They'd had lunch in a sunny, plant-filled restaurant that featured the best stew he'd ever tasted and a view of a quaint harbor and Long Island Sound that was spectacular. The experience had not been enhanced by the three slack-jawed crows at the next table, wearing tennis whites, munching radicchio salad and trumpeting their mean-spirited gossip in loud, shrill voices.

He remembered thinking at the time that Laura Wade seemed somehow not right for that town. And there was something about her that had bothered him. He certainly couldn't recall anything she had said that might enlighten him as to why she would do something as desperate as walk into a police station and confess to a murder. Confessors were usually psychotics, and she hadn't seemed even remotely psychotic. Or had he missed something? Of course, a lot could happen in six months.

When the taxi pulled up in front of the police station on Ninety-fourth Street, he handed the driver his fare and headed inside, expecting the madhouse scene familiar to anyone who watched as much prime-time television as David had watched in the nine months since Allison left him. It wasn't anything like what he expected. The atmosphere was quiet, orderly—rows of battered desks, steel file cabinets, glass-enclosed offices along the back wall—although there was a young Puerto Rican couple making a loud fuss in Spanish to a uniformed officer just beyond the reception area.

The officer at the front desk showed David into one of the offices.

"Sergeant Ammonetti, this is Dr. Goldman. Says you called him."

"Yeah, be right with you." Ammonetti, who was on the telephone, motioned David into a chair. "He's down in court today, Dammon."

David had expected a large man to match that booming voice, maybe even a cigar. Ammonetti wore Coke-bottle glasses and was thin and pale, almost sickly. Didn't the police have strength and size requirements?

"Christ, you'd have to go way back in the files for that, Ammonetti was saying. "Maybe six, seven years. Computer might tell you something. Listen, I gotta go, someone's in my office. I'll call you later on that other thing."

Ammonetti stood up behind his desk, whose surface David could barely see for the clutter of files and papers, the butt-filled ashtray, the three empty coffee cups, the half-eaten donut, and the teddy bear with the sign around its neck that said, "Best daddy in the world."

David shook the man's hand. "Tell me what's going on, sergeant."

"Like I told you," Ammonetti said, "she's a confessor. We get 'em all the time. Came in, said she wanted to confess to the Harmon murder. She wasn't talking crazy or anything, like confessors usually do, so I called Culligan—"

"Who's he?"

"Henry Culligan. Detective in charge of the case. At first we really thought we had a break. I mean, it only happened yesterday. Sometimes this kind of case can go on for weeks before we get anything at all."

"What kind of case is this one?"

"Odds are it's a mugging. Random victim. Which is one more reason I spotted her for a confessor—she said she knew the victim."

"Why would you think it's a mugging? I thought most homicides are between people who are related."

"They are. But these circumstances are all wrong for that. Locale is wrong. And it was pretty brutal for someone who knows the victim. Still, wouldn't rule nothing out at this stage of an investigation. But you want to know my hunch? There's gonna be another one just like it. What we've got here is the first in a series—you know, a serial killer with a particular m.o. I hope I'm wrong."

"I hope so too, sergeant. Doesn't a person have to have a lawyer present to give a confession?"



"She waived her right to counsel, doc. That means—"

"I know what it means."

"Anyway, Culligan was all set to book her. She laid out the whole thing for us. How she told her family she was going to the movies and instead she went to the woman's house and followed her. Even gave us a motive—said her husband and the victim were having an affair. I'll tell you, we get a lot of confessors in here, but I never seen the likes of this one."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she had poise. Usually a confessor will give you a story that's...well, you know, unglued. Like they'll say they got little antennae on the top of their head that send out signals to kill people. One time I had a guy come in here and confess to a rape by long distance. Told me his, ah, genitals...well, you must hear this kind of thing all the time. Being a psychiatrist."

As a matter of fact, now that he was in private practice, David didn't hear this kind of thing much at all.

"Anyway, doc, this Wade woman had it all worked out. I almost believed it myself, she was so good. Every element down. Place, time, date, method, motive. She really wanted to be booked. Even figured out a place she could say she threw the weapon and we'd never recover it. In the Hudson River. Usually they don't have the presence of mind to concoct such a believable story."

True enough. A person in the grips of a psychotic delusion, Variety B paranoid psychosis—in which they felt so evil they were compelled to confess to a terrible crime they hadn't committed—would probably appear crazy, might well be babbling, or hallucinating. Probably wouldn't have the presence of mind to concoct a believable story.

"So why didn't you believe her, sergeant? Any reason besides your hunch that the murderer is a serial killer—and Laura Wade is a confessor?"

"Why? Because not fifteen minutes after Culligan got her confession, we had a witness walk in downtown, at the Tenth. Said she saw the whole thing from above, from a second-story window, in an office building."

"And?"

"And the witness said the perp was a man. Wearing a ski mask, but definitely a man. Had the victim down on the