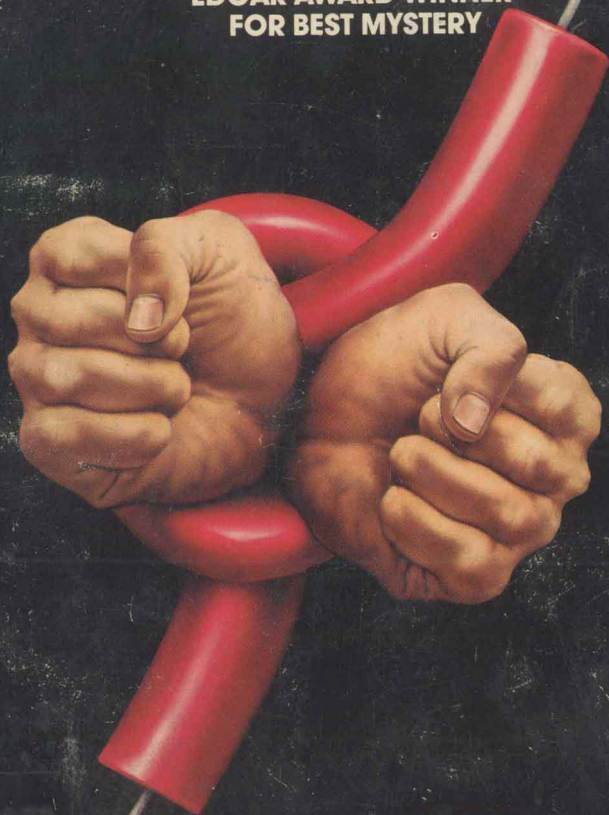


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# **CATCH ME: KILL ME**

**WILLIAM H. HALLAHAN**



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# **Part One**



# **LEARY**





**BORIS KOTLIKOFF** was last seen by his associates at 11:10 in the morning.

He'd set out from his office on East Forty-third Street for the train station, holding his black umbrella against a wind-driven pelting rain. In his left hand he carried an attaché case and a brown manila envelope.

By the time he'd reached Forty-third and Lexington, his trousers were wet to the knees, and the frail umbrella seemed ready to buckle. He hurried across the intersection, walking in a loose and bobbing gait once described by a literary critic as "giraffe-like, stately and undulate." When he'd reached Grand Central, he followed the concourse to the waiting room. He glanced at the four-sided clock as he strode toward the men's room. 11:23.

In the lavatory, Boris Kotlikoff put his attaché case under a sink and approached the urinal. Behind him a large, flat-faced man stepped through the doorway and leaned against the tile wall, watching him. An elderly man who was washing his hands exited. Another clattered out of a stall and wet his fingers under a tap and shook them in a flurry and left.

Kotlikoff was alone with the man leaning against the wall. Abruptly four other men came in and moved in a tight bunch behind Kotlikoff. Almost casually, one hugged Kotlikoff's thin form from behind and held him in a firm grip as another pressed a hand over Kotlikoff's mouth. Still other hands now gripped his arms,



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unbuttoned his wet raincoat, pulled the right coat sleeve off his arm. His rain hat tumbled to the wet tile floor. His umbrella fell and was trampled by muddy feet. The tail of his coat dragged. From his shirt cuff popped a white button that fell to the floor when his shirt sleeve was yanked and snatched up his arm.

He was borne to the floor. There, his head and neck and upper back were held rigid in a man's lap while the same soft, thick palm increased its pressure over his lips and jaw. His legs were braced by other hands so that he could not bend them. His right arm, bare to the triceps muscle, was laid across a man's knee. Two hands quickly, deftly, tied a yellow rubber tube above his elbow, around his thin biceps and triceps. Tightly. The large basilic vein, which leads directly to the subclavian vein, swelled.

It was a frozen tableau. In just a few seconds the four men had seized Kotlikoff and laid bare his right arm, and now, squatting in a group, were holding him rigid on the wet floor, all his major joints braced against movement. Everything was done in absolute silence. No one had spoken. All eyes stared at the swollen basilic vein at the joint of his arm.

A fifth man opened a clear plastic case and lifted out a hypodermic syringe. He glanced at it, then squatted over Kotlikoff. Outside, someone began pounding on the door. All eyes watched the needle descend. Kotlikoff inhaled violently when he felt the steel tip of the needle touch his vein. He tried to shout through the thick palm over his mouth. The four men redoubled their hold on his writhing body.

He felt and saw the needle enter his basilic vein. The door pounding insisted with the heel of a fist. Boom. Boom. Boom.

All watched intently as the man's thumb pressed the plunger, forcing the clear fluid to flow into Kotlikoff's vein. Twenty cc. Fifteen cc. Ten cc. Five cc. Finished.

Smartly, the man withdrew the needle. Then he stood

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up and nodded to the others. The banging caused him to look toward the one guarding the door.

The four released Kotlikoff and stood up to stare down at him. One of them untied the rubber tube. Kotlikoff, panting, sat up and examined the bleeding red hole in his arm; with astonished eyes he studied the four men, then turned to the man with the syringe.

"Get up," said the leader. He spoke in Russian.

Kotlikoff rose in slow horror. He raised his fists and shook them. "What have you done? What did you put into my arm?"

"Lower your voice." The leader put the syringe back into its plastic case and pushed it into his raincoat pocket. He looked at his wristwatch, then peered carefully at the pupils of Kotlikoff's eyes.

"Lower my voice! Voice!" Kotlikoff shook his fists. His whole body trembled; he felt himself rising; he grew. The walls of the room stretched like sheets of rubber, and the six faces before him floated and stretched while his body rose far above his feet, a rising elevator.

*"Boris, put the book down and eat," said his mother's voice. A vast and blinding wheat field in the steppe leaped away into infinity.*

*"It is forbidden by Soviet law," said his father, "to teach the Talmud to any child under eighteen."*

Boris Kotlikoff's extremities tingled as the drug flowed through the ventricle and aorta of his heart and from there flooded the arteries and capillaries of his brain: his hearing intensified; his jaw clenched; he found it increasingly difficult to move. He was transfixed by the visions that flickered through his mind. "This is what it is like to be insane."

In less than one minute after entering, Boris Kotlikoff stood in the middle of the men's lavatory in Grand Central Station, jaws locked, arms held rigid, staring fixedly at the wall. He was immobilized and mentally

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incoherent, his mind imprisoned by 20 cc of some unknown drug.

“Come on, Gelb,” said the men’s-room attendant. “Hurry up.”

Patrolman Gelb hurried. He opened his rain slicker as he followed the porter down the escalator steps. Clearing his holster through the slit of his tunic, he unsnapped the thin leather hold-down strap. His other hand drew out his nightstick. Armed with the gun and the club, he ran across the waiting room behind the attendant.

As they approached the lavatory, six men exited, escorting in their midst a tall, thin man.

“What’s going on?” called Gelb. “What were you doing blocking that door?”

“It’s perfectly all right, officer.”

“It’s not perfectly all right, and I didn’t ask you. I asked him.”

“He’s with us.”

“I didn’t ask you! Hey, you a dummy or something? What were you doing blocking that door?”

“Our friend, he got sick, officer. This man was just keeping people out, in case he vomited.”

Gelb shook the nightstick at the man. “I’m asking you once more—what were you doing blocking that door?”

“It is as he says. I was detaining people in the event that our friend got sick on the floor.”

Gelb’s eyes went over the faces of the group. They were foreigners. What was the accent? Russian or Polish: it sounded just like his grandfather’s accent. One of the men was holding a muddy umbrella and a large manila envelope. “Who’s sick?”

“He is.”

Gelb looked. The thin man’s eyes were fixed, staring without comprehension. He was panting rapidly through his locked teeth, his head bobbing to his breath’s tempo.

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Saliva bubbled at the corners of his lips and he seemed about to vomit.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Too much lunch, officer. Too much tipping."

"Tipping?"

"Alcohol. Drinking. Please, officer, we've done nothing wrong. Our companion is sick and we should get him home. I assure you, it is all right. Would you help us get a cab?"

Gelb felt the man's fingers tuck something into the side opening of his tunic. He looked doubtfully at the man's face, then at the attendant. "How's everything in there?"

The attendant shrugged. "Okay. What could they steal?"

Gelb looked again at the sick man. His pupils were noticeably dilated, giving him a staring look more crazy than drunk. "Can you make it to a cab? Are you able to walk? Are you going to be sick?" He waited, watching the staring eyes. Another man poked the sick man on the arm. "Nod your head. Nod!"

Kotlikoff nodded slowly.

"See? He's all right. He needs to sleep it off."

"You want to go with these men? Ha? Do you?"

Kotlikoff put a hand out tentatively. Slowly. His fingers gripped the policeman's wrist, and Gelb felt the soft warmth of the fingertips as the man's eyes goggled at the name plaque on the breast of his police tunic—madly, myopically.

"Gelb," said the patrolman, drawing back the rain slicker still further. "Harry Gelb is what it says."

The mouth gulped air, trying to speak. Gelb studied again the man's eyes. "What did you give him?"

"Give him? He gave himself. Too much drink. He's very despondent. There was a death in the family. Please, officer, let us take him to his bed. You wouldn't want him to get sick all over the floor here, would you?"

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Gelb hesitated, then shrugged. "There's plenty of cabs right at the top of the escalators."

The group moved rapidly away, urging haste on the plodding sick man. The back of his raincoat was stained with dirty wet streaks.

Gelb sheathed his pistol and nightstick as he watched them. The walk of the thin man was stiff, unnatural, not drunken, and Gelb frowned at it, squinting past the crowds that gradually closed around the group.

"Okay," he said to the onlookers. "Show's over." He took several steps forward, then stopped, then hesitantly walked into the shuffling crowd to the escalator where he put his fingers into the side opening of his tunic and extracted the bribe: a ten-dollar bill. As he reached street level, the party, in two taxis, drove away in the downpour. Gelb shrugged and descended the escalator again.

"Hey, Gelb!" The attendant hurried to him with an attaché case.

Gelb took it. "Them?"

"Yes, the sick one. He was carrying it."

Gelb took it over to the marble ticket counter and laid it flat on a ledge, where he sprung the two latches to open it. There were three books on top, plus a typewritten manuscript. In one corner lay a vial, a hypodermic syringe and an orange, also a train ticket to Poughkeepsie, a small appointment book and a spiral pad. At the bottom, in a clear plastic sleeve, he found a card: Alien Registration Card, United States Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Department of Justice.

The sick man's picture was affixed to the card. Name: Boris Kotlikoff. Status: Conditional Entrant. The card was numbered: 18,707,493.

Patrolman Gelb reached into a compartment and withdrew a small piece of black cloth.

"A skullcap," said the attendant.

"Yarmulke."

"Ha?"

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**"Yarmulke. You wear it in a Jewish synagogue."**

**"Yeah, that's what I said: a Jewish skullcap."**

**"I'd better call this in. It may have been a snatch."**

**"If it was, Gelb, they'll hang your ass over a door-knob. You let them guys hustle that man right out of here."**

**"Thanks for telling me." Gelb thoughtfully touched his wrist where Boris Kotlikoff's fingers had held it.**

At 1317 EST, teletypes in various governmental agencies in Washington, D.C., abruptly stopped. A minute later the signal bells began to toll.

One of the addresses was a section of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Department of Justice.

**STAND BY FOR BULLETIN. STAND BY.**

**FBI FOLEY SQUARE NEWYORKCITY INVESTIGATING A REPORT FROM NYPD OF POSSIBLE ABDUCTION THAT TOOK PLACE AT 1127 EST IN GRAND CENTRAL STATION. VICTIM IS TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED AS BORIS KOTLIKOFF EXPATRIATED RUSSIAN POET CURRENTLY A RESIDENT OF US WITH STATUS OF CONDITIONAL ENTRANT. LOCAL OFFICE HAS DISPATCHED INVESTIGATORS. ADDITIONAL DETAILS FORTHCOMING AS ACQUIRED. 1315 EST NYC.**

The FBI agent reached precinct headquarters at 1331 EST in a heavy rain. He mounted the six steps to the station house and stepped past the two green lights that flanked the doorway. Inside, he was confronted by a rope from which hung a sign:

**PLEASE STOP. IDENTIFY YOURSELF.  
State Your Business.**

The desk lieutenant sat at the precinct desk, writing in the Arrest Records Book. The agent held up his ID to the desk lieutenant, who nodded at it and pointed his pen at the precinct house sitting room. "He's in there."

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At the entrance to the sitting room the agent paused to look at the patrolman who sat in shirt sleeves at a table with a mug of coffee, filling out a report form. Behind him, rain washed down the windowpanes. Along the walls were typewritten cards detailing the perimeters of each patrol post in the precinct. Above them, mug shots of criminals and gamblers were tacked to the walls.

"You Officer Gelb?"

"Yeah."

"You got the attaché case?"

Gelb reached down and lifted it up on the table.

The agent laid it flat and snapped open the two latches, then looked at the books, the material, the hypodermic syringe, the vial and the manuscript. He lifted out the orange, then examined the yarmulke and the train ticket, and studied the Alien Registration Card. "This the only identification?"

"That's what was in there when I opened it, nothing more or less."

"No? No other cards? No wallet? By law, this card is supposed to be on his person—in his wallet. Was his wallet in this case when you opened it?"

Gelb made a sour face at the Fed and sipped his coffee.

The Fed snapped the case shut and sat down.

"Okay, officer, lay it out for me, all nine yards—from the beginning."

Two FBI agents entered Kotlikoff's apartment at 1335, admitted by the building superintendent.

"See? I told you no one's here."

"Tell me again where they are."

"She and the baby are in Poughkeepsie with her parents and he's at work."

One of the agents strolled around the apartment. The other opened the desk drawer under the telephone. He

## LEARY

lifted out a small telephone address book. "What's the name of the family in Poughkeepsie?"

"Ah, jeez, Johnny, that's a tough one. Let me see."

The agent scanned the alphabetical list of names. "Corson. Is that it?"

"Yeah, that's it. Corson."

"Two twenty-seven Midway Avenue."

"I guess. I don't know."

The agent dialed his office and asked for Fowler. "Okay. We're here. Empty. Super says Mrs. Kotlikoff and a small child are visiting her parents in Poughkeepsie. I have an address here for a Manny Corson, 227 Midway Avenue, Poughkeepsie, and a phone number." He read the phone number, then glanced at the superintendent. "Was Mr. Kotlikoff diabetic? Yes? Yes, diabetic? Super says Kotlikoff is a diabetic. Okay. Where? Wait." He wrote on a piece of paper. "Brooklyn? Okay."

The agent put the phone down, then handed the paper to the other agent. "His office. Find out when he left and where he was going. I'll be at the Office of Vital Statistics in Brooklyn."

The agent drove the interagency motorpool automobile over the Brooklyn Bridge at 1355 EST. He parked at the Office of Vital Statistics, Flatbush Avenue Extension, and entered the office marked "Marriage Licenses," where he consulted the register. He searched for several minutes.

"May I use your phone?" he asked the clerk.

"Official business only," she said

He held up his ID card, then dialed. He asked for Fowler. "I'll read it to you right off the register. Boris Kotlikoff and Amy Corson. She's a citizen. License issued Kings County, Brooklyn—yeah. October 14, year before last. Marriage filed—by Rabbi Oscar



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Leiberman, yeah. In Brooklyn. On October 17, same year.”

Leary was the first to arrive.

He entered the seventh-floor conference room of the State Department just across the hall from the Undersecretary's office shortly after 2:30. As he took off his wet raincoat and laid it, folded, on a side table, he noted the familiar conference room odor of stale tobacco smoke.

He put his wet attaché case next to a chair and, sitting down, removed his glasses and dried them with a tissue. The furnishings of the windowless room were completely familiar to him. Most of them, installed before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, had been there like a stage setting through all the international crises since World War I—the nightmares of three generations: the 1929 Crash, the Depression, the rise of Hitler, Manchuria, the Panay incident, the reoccupation of the Ruhr, the invasion of Poland, the Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia, the Japanese ultimatum, Pearl Harbor, World War II, the War Crimes Trials, Israel, Korea, Berlin, Cuba and Vietnam. This conference room probably appeared and reappeared in more published memoirs than any other conference room in Washington. And in it, all the celebrated figures who'd helped create history had left behind, masked by the odor of tobacco smoke, the more permanent smell of the twentieth century, the sour armpit odor of anxiety.

It was aptly called the Mad Hatter's Tea Room.

Leary removed Kotlikoff's dossier from his attaché case and, with it, a crossword-puzzle magazine. He opened the magazine to an unfinished puzzle and commenced to work on it.

Powell strolled in a moment later. He nodded to Leary, yanked off his wet raincoat and sat down. “The sky is falling. The sky is falling,” he murmured, then blew a soft quavering whistle while he idly unbent a