

Episode 8

22 / Trepidation

The swarthy-skinned man stood in the doorway of Henry McAllen's office in the History Department of Boston University with his arm extended toward Sandra.

"Who are you?" Sandra asked as her heart began to race. Two things concerned her: First, this man she did not know seemed to know her and who she had come looking for. Second, he seemed to be implying that the person she was looking for was in some kind of danger.

"Look, I know — I think I know where Henry is," the man said. "But if we don't go now, it may be too late. It probably is already too late."

"I don't even know who you are," Sandra said. She glanced down at the cell phone in her hand. She had just been talking to her mother about the Sunrise Society which Henry McAllen had been writing about before he went missing. Sandra clutched the print-out of the draft e-mail in her right hand.

"You can call me Michael," said the man.

"That doesn't tell me anything," said Sandra as she stood up wondering how she could possibly make an escape. She eyed the window behind her. It was locked and she was sure the man, Michael, could easily reach her before she had a chance to climb up on the desk, unlock it, and jump out. The only other way of escape was the door, and Michael was blocking it. He didn't look unusually strong, but Sandra feared she would get the worst of it in a scuffle anyway. She wondered if he was armed.

"We don't have all day," Michael said leaning against the door and folding his arms across his chest. "You are coming with me."

"And if I don't want to?" Sandra said.

"I will make you."

"Where are we going?" Sandra said wondering when she had agreed that they were going anywhere together.

"Not very far," said Michael. He stepped back from the doorway and motioned for her to come. Sandra sighed and slid her cell phone into her pocket. At least I can call for help if I need to, she thought. She stepped around the desk and headed to the door. This close, she could see the scar on Michael's face better. It was long and dark red, stretching from the middle of his forehead to the middle of his nose. She wondered how he had gotten it, and immediately began to think that he was part of a gang or some sort of drug dealer.

Michael spun around and started down the dimly lit hall toward the door Sandra had come in. Seeing her chance, Sandra turned and darted in the opposite direction. If the door at the other end of the hall was unlocked she could get out and get to her car.

Her attempt at escape was short-lived. She felt Michael's hand close like a vise-grip on her elbow before she had taken three strides. "I can't let you do that," he growled in her ear in a low tone, painfully aware that they were standing in the middle of a hallway between two unlocked doors. Anyone could walk in at any minute, and anyone could be in one of the other offices. "Promise you won't try that again," Michael said.

Sandra hesitated.

"I thought you wanted to find your friend," Michael said. He loosened his grip on her elbow.

Sandra nodded once silently.

"Now, follow me," Michael said.

A brisk wind had picked up and the sun dipped low on the horizon as Michael walked hurriedly across the stone walkways of the tree-lined plaza toward the Mugar Memorial Library. He glanced over his shoulder to make sure Sandra was following him.

Sandra was following him with great trepidation. She had no idea of this man's intentions. She was pretty sure he didn't want to kidnap her, and that gave a small measure of relief. But she couldn't shake the worry that chimed in her head. She slipped her hand into her pocket and painstakingly tapped out a message to her mother on her cell phone as she walked: In trouble. Come quickly. @ Boston U. Mugar Lib. Bring help.

Sandra sent the message and stepped into the library. Michael led her past the research desk to the elevators. They boarded one of them. Instead of pressing a number to go to one of the floors, Michael pressed the B button. Sandra assumed it would take them to the basement, and her heart clenched with the thought of going down but never coming up again. There was a beeping sound, and the LED display flashed, "Insert Key". Michael reached into his pocket and brought out a single gold key. He stuck it into the keyhole and turned it once and then pulled it out. The elevator started to move.

Down, down, down.

23 / Underground

The elevator jerked to a stop and the doors slid open. Sandra could see that they were in a storage area. Stacks of boxes overflowing with books lined the walls. The floor was made of concrete. There were a few chairs and an old rusty desk scattered about the space. Michael led her to the right as the elevator shut behind them. Sandra was wondering if she would regret her decision to go along with this. She wondered if Henry himself was behind the bizarre events of the last twenty-four hours. Had he faked his disappearance?

There was a short flight of steps leading to a hall that was on a lower level than the rest of the basement. Along the hallway were doors leading into what Sandra presumed were classrooms.

"The school built these during World War II," Michael said as he walked past the first few doors. "Then, everyone was afraid that Hitler would spread his bombing campaign to U.S. shores."

Sandra nodded, but wondered how he knew that and why it mattered.

Finally, they reached a door near the end of the hall. Michael turned the brass knob and leaned in to the door as though it were heavy. "This is what we came for," he said.

As soon as he had opened the door, Sandra rushed past him into the room. Henry McAllen was sitting on the floor reclining against the wall. Sandra stopped short just past the door and stared for a moment. The odd angle of Henry's head told her something was desperately wrong.

"Henry?" she called.

There was no response.

Sandra walked over and shook him by his shoulder. His head lolled to one side. "Henry!" she called shaking him again. She placed her fingers in front of his lips and then her fist over his chest. There was nothing — not a breath, not a heartbeat.

"He's...dead," Sandra said slowly rising to her feet again.

"That's what I suspected," Michael said.

"You did this, didn't you?" Sandra said. "How else would you have known where he was?"

"No, I didn't kill him," Michael said. "But I have a good idea of who did. I tried to get to him before they did, but I didn't."

Sandra looked at him doubtfully.

"Trust me," Michael said. "I'm on your side."

"Why is this a matter of taking sides?" Sandra said her voice almost a shriek.

"Calm down." Michael looked over his shoulder as though he were worried someone might hear them.

"Who did this if it wasn't you?"

"People in high places — at least one person. I'm not at liberty to disclose their names," Michael said. "You should be glad that I found you first, because they're probably going to come for you next."

"If I'm in danger, then I have a right to know who these people are," Sandra said.

"Trust me, it's better that you don't."

Sandra shook her head, bewildered at the new knowledge she had suddenly learned. "Why were you looking for me anyway?" Sandra demanded. "And who are you?"

"One question at a time," Michael said. "Henry led me to you. You were working with him on a book, I believe?" His eyebrows raised in a question. Sandra nodded. "And I already told you my name is Michael."

"That doesn't tell me anything about who you are or why I should keep on trusting you or that you didn't do this." Sandra jabbed a finger toward Henry McAllen's limp body. "And if you don't tell me, I'm going to call the police and turn you in for murder and attempted kidnapping." She pulled her phone out of her pocket, wondering if her mother had gotten her text message and if she was doing anything about it.

"You can't do that," Michael said his eyes suddenly opened wide. He reached behind him, pulled a gun out of his waistband and pointed it at her. "Don't."

"You can't stop me," said Sandra, but her voice wavered. She flipped the phone open with a shaking hand.

There was a loud blast as Michael fired the gun. Sandra screamed and jumped back, tripping over Henry's body and landing on the floor on the other side of him. I'm not hurt. I'm not hurt, she thought to herself.

But her phone had been blasted into tiny pieces.

24 / Sunrise Society

By the time Nehemiah Dunn finished telling Ginny Boone everything that had happened over the past few weeks — from the meeting his now dead father had summoned him and his sister to at their old home in Massachusetts to the break in at his home just two days ago — he was surprised that she wasn't laughing at him.

"I know it sounds crazy," said Nehemiah. "But everything I've told you is the truth." He sat back in the worn cloth seat as Ginny fingered the pearl necklace around her neck thoughtfully.

"No, no," the historian said. "I've heard stranger things that turned out to be true. You may not believe it, but I've heard threads of your story from other sources as I've studied down through the years."

Ginny carefully turned the pages in the worn leather-bound book that Nehemiah had retrieved from the lighthouse at Tongass. The late-afternoon sun filtered in through the blinds behind her, and dust motes floated in the shafts of light over her shoulder. "Sometimes," she said, "the strangest things are actually the truest."

Nehemiah just nodded.

"Well, this certainly seems to be authentic," Ginny said at length. "Not forged." She pulled a magnifying glass out of her desk drawer and peered closely at the pages. "It belonged to Wolcott Ellsworth, and it seems to be a lesson book — the kind that schoolchildren wrote in during that time period." She turned more pages in the book. One particularly brittle page came apart as she turned it. "Fragile, fragile," she muttered.

Ginny tapped the side of her head as though she were trying to remember something. "If I recall correctly, the Ellsworths are related to the Websters." She looked at him as though he could help her remember.

"I don't know who the Websters are," Nehemiah said.

"Noah Webster," said Ginny.

"Noah Webster?" said the dictionary man?

"Yes, but he was far more than the dictionary man," Ginny chuckled. She flipped to the back of the book and studied the last few pages.

"Ah," she said, tapping one page thoughtfully. "Did your father tell you anything about the Sunrise Society?"

"Yes," Nehemiah said. "He said that was the society the thirteen formed to carry on the legacy of the Correction."

"I see," said Ginny. "Well, do I have something to show you." Ginny spun around in her desk chair just as her cell phone jingled. "Oh, who is that now?" Ginny said rummaging through the papers on her desk top until she found the phone. "That's my daughter," she hesitated.

"You can go ahead and take it," Nehemiah said.

"Hello, Sandra. Is this important?" Ginny said. "I'm kind of occupied --"

Nehemiah studied the degrees and medals on Ginny's wall as she talked on the phone. He checked his watch and figured Tonya and Cody would have been home for at least an hour now. He would call them to make sure as soon as he got out of the meeting with Ginny.

"Yes, I do. You told me about him," Ginny said into the phone.

"...What? Why? It's not that much anyway..." She pulled the phone away from her ear and stared at the screen. "Hello? Hello?" she called. Evidently receiving no answer she sighed and hung up. "Now, where were we?" she said.

"You were asking about the Sunrise Society," Nehemiah said.

"Yes, that," Ginny said. But before she could say anymore, her phone beeped and she picked it up again. Furrows creased her brow as she read a message on the phone screen. "I have to go," she said suddenly getting up from her seat. "And you are going with me."

"Pardon me," Nehemiah said standing up as well. "You're, uh, we're...what?"

"I said you're going with me," Ginny said. "You are a police officer, right?"

"Yes," said Nehemiah.

"Are you armed, Officer Dunn?" Ginny said grabbing her purse and keys from the hook on the wall.

"I have a gun in my car," Nehemiah said still bewildered at the sudden route their meeting had taken.

"Good," Ginny said. "I suggest you go get it. We may need it."

"Lady, please explain yourself," Nehemiah said using the tone he normally reserved for belligerent persons who were violating the rules of the road.

Ginny stopped with her hand on the door knob and turned to face him. "We are going to the rescue of a lady in distress. You are not opposed to that, are you?"

"N-no," Nehemiah said. But he thought to himself, What am I getting myself into?