

# ❖ Chapter One

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## *The Players*

Dan Delgado

Dan Delgado was a workaholic. He prided himself on being one of the first people in the office each morning and one of the last to leave. He traveled for business three days out of five, and sometimes over the weekend, meeting with both established and prospective clients.

At thirty-nine and a vice president of Stellar Point Financial on LaSalle Street in the heart of Chicago's banking district, he knew what he had to do to get to the next level. In his five years with Stellar Point, he had grown right along with the company, promoted from an account rep to a client services manager and then to vice president. But that was two years ago, and now he seemed stuck; he was losing momentum.

He grumbled aloud as he looked at his watch. It was quarter after five and he would have to leave soon. It seemed completely unreasonable that he had to arrive at "the lodge" – what kind of a place was that for business training? – precisely at eight o'clock for check-in. Couldn't he just show up for the first session on Thursday morning? Wasn't it bad enough that he had to miss two days of work because of this course without having to leave early?

When his boss, Peter, had told him he was one of four people selected to attend the program, Dan believed at first that this was his ticket to a promotion. Then he heard the rest. "I think this training will really

help you with your interpersonal skills," Peter had told him.

Dan still bristled at the memory of Peter's comment. There was nothing wrong with his interpersonal skills, he thought, as he walked briskly down the corridor, his footsteps sounding heavy even on the thick carpeting. He communicated just fine, and, hell, he was a leader. Just then an attractive young woman rounded the corner and walked toward Dan. His scowl changed instantly into a winning smile. When it came to women, he thought smugly, he certainly didn't have any problems with his "interpersonal skills."

That thought brought up the memory of Christine and the six-month affair that nearly ended his marriage to Donna, his wife of eleven years and mother of their two children. There had been no pressures with Christine; everything was easy. Then Donna found out. While Donna went to a counselor for three months, Dan had agreed to be "more sensitive" to her needs. To him, that meant giving her more spending money and letting her do whatever she wanted with the house and the kids.

Donna never seemed satisfied. They lived in Wilmette, one of the most exclusive suburbs on the North Shore, with a monthly mortgage payment that would choke a horse, but she still wasn't happy. The woman was impossible, but he had to keep it together for the sake of the kids. Being divorced wouldn't do any favors for his career, either.

Dan arrived at his office, which was small but had a coveted window overlooking LaSalle Street. He was prouder of that stupid window than any achievement award he had ever received. He remembered the day that he was promoted to vice president and moved into that space. He had called his parents in Arizona. His mother had answered the phone in a breezy way that let him know it was already cocktail hour. Dan asked to speak with his father.

"You got an office with a window?" his father had laughed sarcastically. "Where the hell have they been keeping you all this time? The broom closet?"

He had laughed right along with his father, kicking himself for saying anything about the promotion. Nothing would be good enough for his old man.

Riled up by memories of his father, Dan abruptly issued orders to his assistant as he prepared to leave the office. "I'm going to be gone from work for two days, but I've taken care of everything. Nobody needs to touch anything, okay? The only thing left is the Johnson account. They are expecting a call from us on Friday, which I'll make myself. The Johnson account will mean a significant amount of money under management, and I don't want anyone else making that call. Tim has been working with me on this, but I don't want him doing anything. I've already told him that."

Dan clenched his jaw. This stupid course would come up just as he was bringing in one of the largest clients he'd ever landed. He had it all set with Johnson's guy for a trip to Vegas compliments of Stellar Point. Dan already knew how to hide it on his expense report, but if that's what it took, he'd do it. He seethed inside when he thought of the timing. He should be living it up at the Bellagio, not going to some retreat out in the woods.

"You can reach me by cell phone. If anything comes up, get in touch with me right away," he continued. "Don't think twice about it. If there's anything you think I should know, call me."

From the moment he merged onto Lake Shore Drive and drove up Sheridan Road to Wilmette, Dan was on his cell phone. Pulling his midnight blue BMW into the driveway of the stately, but overpriced, brick colonial, he knew that no one was home. Donna must have taken the kids somewhere. Probably shopping, he grumbled to himself.

Upstairs, Dan found his empty suitcase right where he had left it after asking Donna if she would pack for him. Inside was a note: "Pack your own suitcase. I have enough to take care of around here without doing that. PS: I hope this course helps you figure yourself out. Nobody else can, and I'm tired of trying."

Dan crumpled the note, stuffed it into his pocket, and then start-

ed to pack for a trip he definitely did not want to make. Before going he made himself a quick sandwich, left the crumbs, empty milk glass, and a bread knife covered with mustard in the middle of the counter. He threw his suitcase in the car and left.

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Paula Jensen

Paula Jensen was in a race against the clock. A graphics designer in the marketing department at Stellar Point Financial, she had been working on the layout for the redesigned web site. She had promised her boss, Sylvia, she'd have it done by Friday, then Monday, and now it was Wednesday, and she was trying to finish before she had to leave for this course that Sylvia had signed her up for.

She ignored her cell phone ringing in her purse. The voicemail chime went off, but she didn't have time to think about it now. But when it rang again, Paula couldn't resist answering. It was her friend, Kelly.

"We're going out after work tonight," Kelly coaxed.

"Count me out," Paula told her. "If I don't finish this project, I'm screwed. I'm already late as it is."

"Come on. Just for one drink before you have to go get your head shrunk, or whatever it is you're doing."

Paula gave in. "Okay, okay. I'll try to stop by, but I can't stay long because I've got to be somewhere up north by eight o'clock."

"Or what, they'll lock you out? Good, then you can come back here and play with us on the weekend."

Paula laughed. "Let me go so I can finish this and meet you guys later."

Switching off her phone, Paula kicked herself for agreeing to meet with them. She would be lucky to finish this design by six, and then she had to go home and pack, and...her key! She had to give her extra key to Kelly, who was going to take care of the cat while she

was gone. She had nearly forgotten. Now she would have to meet with them, but one drink and that was it.

Just before five-thirty, Paula finished the design, saved it into the shared files where the team could access it, and sent an email to her boss. Logging off her computer, Paula knew Sylvia would love what she created; Sylvia was always pleased with her work and never gave her much grief about missing deadlines. Maybe she really did do her best work under pressure.

But if that were true, would Sylvia be sending her to this course? At first Paula had been pleasantly surprised when she had been approached to take a special program that the company was offering to just a few attendees. It had all sounded fine to her, until Sylvia made the comment: "I think this could be good for you, Paula. You have a lot of potential—a lot more than you realize."

If that didn't sound painfully familiar.

At twenty-eight, Paula knew she was a lot like her dad. He never made much money but always had a scheme that would make him rich some day. None of his ideas ever panned out, of course, but he knew how to have a good time. In the middle of it all was her mother, always looking at how much things cost, always complaining about the mess she had to clean up. Her mother wouldn't know a good time if it kicked her in the butt. How her parents ended up together was a mystery to her. Wasn't it that way with most people's parents? Her mother had a look of constant strain and disappointment on her face. When she finally gave up trying to bully her husband into shape, she started on her kids. The more her mother nagged, the more Paula tuned her out. In her last birthday card, her mother wrote, "I hope your twenty-eighth year brings you a sense of direction." What kind of person would write that in a birthday card?

Her phone rang again; it was Kelly, wondering what was taking her so long.

Paula caught up with Kelly and three other girlfriends, Meagan, Rachel, and Loreen, at a noisy bar/restaurant nearby. She knew she

had to get going soon, but she promised to stay for one drink. They sat around the table, laughing and gossiping about their friends, their friends' relationships, and guys they used to date. At the time Paula was not in a relationship, but that was fine with her.

"So where is it you're going again?" Meagan asked.

"I'm going to this course to become enlightened." Paula faked a meditative posture, her eyes closed. "Don't you think everybody should be enlightened? Besides, it's three days in the country at a lodge with all expenses paid. What's not to like? I wish you were all coming with me." There was more truth in that statement than she wanted to admit.

"This isn't some kind of religious thing is it?" Rachel raised her eyebrows, as if in shock.

Paula contemplated her beer glass. "What do you think? Do you think I'll have to take some sort of vows there?"

"Poverty would be easy; you're broke half the time," Kelly joked. Paula slapped her hand playfully.

Loreen smiled sweetly at her friend. "What about obedience?"

"Oh, let's not forget chastity," Meagan added.

Paula laughed it all off. "It's not like that at all," she said, rolling her eyes. "It's something for work."

Kelly persisted. "So are you going to come back all different?"

Paula shook her head and chuckled. "Not me!" She didn't have to change. She didn't have any "strategies that were killing her." She liked her life, she thought. She had great friends, a really good job, and while she was low on cash most of the time, she didn't have much to worry about. It's not that she didn't have ambition; she had a zillion ideas in her head although putting them into action was another thing.

Finishing her beer, Paula begged off having another, saying she had to go. Remembering her key at the last minute, she gave it to Kelly, who promised to feed the cat, and left before they convinced her to stay any longer. It was 6:25 when she hailed a cab at the

corner; twenty minutes later she was at her apartment. Throwing things into a duffel bag, Paula looked around for her cat and found him asleep in the middle of her unmade bed. Grabbing her car keys and a bottle of water, she dashed downstairs to where her car was parked, pulled off the latest parking ticket from the windshield, and stuffed it into the glove compartment with the rest of her collection.

She thought about putting the top down on her bright red VW Beetle convertible but decided it was too cold. She hated the thought that summer was over or officially would be in a few days. As far as Paula was concerned, autumn sucked and winter was worse. Lake Shore Drive was a sea of brake lights as Paula guided her Beetle from lane to lane, jockeying for the best position. When she finally hit the highway, she floored it. She had a little less than an hour to get to the lodge, and she just might make it.

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Alex Madison

Alex Madison was ready to log off his computer at 5:30 when the email icon popped up. Clicking on the inbox, he scanned the latest missive from Frank, complaining about how the new database project was being handled. Without replying, Alex hit “forward” and sent the email to his boss, Maureen, along with a one-line note: “Another example of Frank’s attempt to undermine this project.”

Logging off, Alex reached for his laptop and double-checked that he had both his cell phone and Blackberry with him.

Frank looked up from his cubicle as Alex walked by; neither man acknowledged the other.

Alex had informed the team that he would be out Thursday and Friday at a course being held at a lodge approximately an hour north of Chicago. Although he had been concerned initially about being out of the office for two days, Maureen had never wavered about

him going. He had met with his staff earlier in the day, received an update on their projects, and ignored most of Frank's tirade on everything taking too long. The rest of the day his eyes had barely left his computer screen.

In the parking garage next door, Alex opened the back of his black Lexus RX 330 SUV, making sure his suitcase was there. Then sliding into the driver's seat, he put his briefcase next to him on top of the latest issue of *Consumer Reports*, which he enjoyed reading in his spare time. As he pulled out onto the street, he was able to get a clear signal on his cell phone and called his wife, Ann, leaving her a voicemail message.

At the red light Alex changed from his regular glasses to his prescription sunglasses. He would have plenty of time to get to the lodge, which suited him just fine. He never liked rushing around or being late. There was really no need for it, not if people planned ahead of time. That's one of the reasons he and Ann had decided not to have children. People they knew who had children were always frantically running from one place to another. Their lives were messy and disorganized.

Of course, his own childhood hadn't been anything like that. The middle of three children, with an older sister and a younger brother, he had grown up in a quiet and orderly house. His parents had raised him and his siblings to be disciplined, self-reliant, and responsible, which they saw as the keys to success for African-Americans today. He didn't remember being unhappy. No, he didn't remember anything like that at all. It was a smooth and quiet childhood, and he grew up just fine.

He was a good student, taking advanced classes through high school. Some kids called him "The Brain," which was to be expected since he did have the highest grade point average of the class, while others called him "The Robot." He never fully understood why he was tagged with that nickname. It still hurt a little when he thought about it, even these many years later. Otherwise people

had not paid much attention to him one way or the other. Accepted to Northwestern University's School of Engineering, he spent four years among peers who had similar interests. After graduation he evaluated numerous job offers and decided to stay in Chicago to take his first job as a computer programmer. Later, fascinated by the field of data management, he joined Stellar Point Financial when it was just starting up. Now at age thirty-eight he was a project manager and, his irritation with Frank aside, it was a pretty good job. He would probably stay with the company for a while.

About five years ago, he had met Ann through a friend. He had dated off and on but did not have many serious relationships. Dating had always seemed superficial to him, but with Ann it was different. Spending time with her was like spending time with himself. They decided to get married about two years ago. Considering the divorce rate, he and Ann were fortunate that they were so compatible.

Deciding that Lake Shore Drive would be too crowded, Alex headed out on I-90/94 toward O'Hare and then took the exit for the Edens Expressway, heading north. It was only six o'clock, two hours before he had to get there, and he didn't want to be too early. Being born and brought up in the city, he always felt uncomfortable when driving away from it. The directions indicated that they would be in a fairly remote area and that also made him nervous. He wouldn't know anyone there, and he didn't want to sit around with a bunch of strangers waiting for the course to begin. He'd get off the highway soon, look at the map again, and grab something to eat. That would kill some time; besides, he was getting a little hungry.

He drove in silence. He'd been thinking about the title of the course ever since he first heard it. He didn't like not being able to figure out what survival strategies he had that were killing him. He didn't like surprises or being caught off guard. And there was another thing that made him uneasy. It was the fact that Maureen had indicated only a few people from the company would be at-

tending. Perhaps there would be people from other companies as well, which would fill up the room. He sure didn't like the idea of being only one of a few people in a class that was designed to be participatory.

Maureen had told him she thought the course would help him. Alex recalled her exact words: "I believe this may help you open up, develop your people skills, and be a better manager."

Alex certainly knew he was quiet, but he didn't understand her comment about "opening up." He managed his data projects very well. He communicated clearly with his colleagues and direct reports, with the exception of Frank who was getting to be such a problem he should be fired. But as far as he knew, no one complained that they didn't understand him. There was something about this course that just wasn't sitting right with him, but as usual, he kept his thoughts to himself.

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Sarah Albrecht

Sarah Albrecht fretted as she looked at the clock and hustled for the express train from Northwestern Station to Mount Prospect, where she lived. It was the same train she always took, but this time it was different: She would be gone for three whole days, and it might as well be a month for all the preparation she had to do. She couldn't believe Bernie had asked her to go to this course—never mind at the last minute.

Of course she had said yes because Bernie was her boss and it was her job to handle things for him. Bernie was the CFO and the head of the entire finance group at Stellar Point. If going to this course was going to help him, then she'd do it. She just wished he had told her sooner.

At forty-one Sarah had been Bernie's administrative assistant for four years. She took pride in how responsible she was. She knew

Bernie counted on her for everything from his schedule and his correspondence to reminders about his doctors' appointments and his children's birthdays. She doubted Bernie had any clue how much she really did for him. And, of course, there was Charlotte, Bernie's wife, who figured she could call with anything she needed—dinner reservations, flights for the family vacation, you name it.

Sarah sighed. It was all part of her job. She was worried about being out of the office on Thursday and Friday. Something could come up she hadn't anticipated. Bernie had told her not to fret so much, that they'd get along fine without her. Well, she hoped that was true, but she doubted it.

As the train pulled out of the station, Sarah's thoughts shifted to home. Tonight's meal was in the refrigerator. Beth, her twelve-year-old, had been told to pop it in the oven. Even Kyle could do it although she didn't like the idea of a ten-year-old near the stove. Little Stevie was only eight, and he couldn't pour himself a glass of milk without help. Sarah felt a stab of guilt so deep she winced. She had never been away from her children, especially not overnight. Her husband, Stephen, sometimes traveled for his job, but it was different for men. Women were the ones who kept things together.

Sarah reeled in her wandering thoughts. For Thursday night's dinner, she had made beef stew and had frozen it in a container marked "Thursday." She should have made biscuits, too. Maybe she could do that before she left. Friday's planned meal was spaghetti and meatballs, which was Kyle's favorite. She had plenty of fruit and vegetables in the refrigerator and homemade cookies in the jar. She had made sure they wouldn't lack for anything. They'd hardly know she was gone.

Sarah glanced at her watch. The train would get to her stop about 5:30. She could run home, grab her suitcase, make the biscuits for tomorrow, and hit the road by 6:30 at the latest. She probably wouldn't have any time to eat dinner before she left. Sarah felt in her coat pocket for a Snickers bar. She took a bite and then stuffed it away.

Stephen met her at the door with a big smile, which was a surprise. He must have come home early. Stevie ducked under his father's arm. Anticipating a hug, Sarah opened her arms. Instead, Stevie leaped about a foot in the air in excitement. "Dad's taking us out for pizza!" he yelled out.

"What? But I made the casserole," Sarah said, stunned. They were treating her absence like some kind of holiday, and she wasn't even gone yet.

"Honey, don't you worry about a thing," Stephen assured her. "You just concentrate on yourself right now. We'll be fine."

Sarah opened the freezer, took out Thursday's meal, and set it in the refrigerator next to the casserole that wasn't in the oven like it was supposed to be. She opened her cookbook to her "quick biscuit" recipe, reading the list of ingredients through tear-blurred eyes. She felt Stephen's firm hands on her shoulders.

"Honey, we're going to do great. Please get your things together. I don't want you rushing on the road, and there's bound to be traffic."

"Fine," Sarah said, slamming the recipe book shut. She ran upstairs.

Her suitcase was packed. She had done that early in the morning while everyone else slept. Now, with nothing to do, she changed out of her clothes into a loose top and pants that were a little too tight around the waist. Resigned, she descended the stairs to the living room where her family waited. Sarah plowed ahead with instructions for homework, showers, brushing teeth, and taking care of the dog.

"Honey, it's time for you to be hitting the road," Stephen said gently but firmly. He kissed her on the cheek.

Despite his impatience to begin the pizza run, Stevie wrapped his arms around her in a long, clingy hug, which she found satisfying. Beth simply returned her embrace, and Kyle barely leaned forward as she tried to hug him. Stephen held the door open as Sarah rushed out and got into her old green Toyota Corolla before the kids could see her crying.

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The small lodge nestled against a high hill. The property had miles of trails for cross-country skiing or, in the other three seasons, hiking or jogging. The building was a classic A-frame with a steeply pitched roof that nearly touched the ground. Tall pine trees ringed the lodge. In the cleared meadow beside it stood two oak trees, long since grown together into one massive network of bark and boughs. Behind the lodge was a spring-fed pond, and down the path beyond the pond were two guest cottages.

Lining the stone steps of the entrance were pots of yellow and rust-colored chrysanthemums. In mid-September they were the first dramatic colors in a landscape that would soon turn into an autumn panorama. In spite of the warmth of the day, the air was quickly cooling off as the sun set behind the hill.

Pulling up the long driveway, Sarah was the first to arrive. Parking her car, she called home on her cell phone, careful not to waste the minutes but wanting them to know she had arrived safe and sound. Beth hung up before she had a chance to talk to Stephen.

His tires spun over the gravel as Dan turned his BMW into an empty space. Seeing the woman in the car talking on her cell phone, he thought about calling home but decided against it. He didn't have anything to say to Donna, and he was sure she didn't have anything to say to him. The woman in the car caught his eye and waved. Dan glanced back at her, the corners of his mouth barely curving upward. It was going to be a long three days.

Alex arrived five minutes later. Along the way he had stopped at Burger King for a hamburger and a Coke, but now seeing only two other cars in the lodge parking lot, he wondered if it was still too early. He glanced at his watch again. It was 7:50 P.M. and check-in time was 8:00 p.m. He looked around but saw no one. Retrieving his suitcase and briefcase, he walked with even, measured steps toward the front entrance.

The others were already inside the lodge when, at five after eight,

Paula roared up the driveway. Her gas tank warning light had come on fifteen minutes ago, and she knew she probably had just a couple of gallons left, plus some fumes. Grabbing her stuff out of the back seat, she sprinted for the front door.

A fire crackled in a stone fireplace along one wall of the Great Room. Comfortable chairs and sofas were angled toward the fireplace, clustered in intimate groups of twos and threes, inviting quiet conversation. At the other side of the room stood a long table. The caramel coloring of the wood glistened in the firelight. On the table stood a large fall arrangement of red, orange, and yellow flowers and four individual envelopes. On each envelope was a person's name.

Dan snatched his envelope from the table and tore it open.

"Oh, are we supposed to open those?" Sarah asked hesitantly. "I'm Sarah by the way. I'm the executive assistant to our CFO." She held her envelope up like a small placard. "See?"

He was in a course with an admin? Dan scowled. What was his boss thinking? A chill crept over him. Maybe they were trying to get rid of him; he'd have to get to the bottom of this! Dan ignored her.

"You must be Paula," Sarah smiled, handing an envelope to the other woman in the group.

"And Alex." She handed him his envelope. "What departments are the two of you in?"

"Marketing. I'm a graphics designer," Paula said, looking around the room.

"Tech," Alex said.

"We're the only ones here from the looks of it," Dan said. "I busted my ass getting here, and there's no one here for check-in."

Paula stretched her arms over her head, showing an inch of trim waistline between her slacks and her top. A tattoo was etched around her navel. Sarah pursed her lips primly but stood a little straighter and tried to suck in her stomach. "Well, perhaps someone will be here shortly," Sarah offered.

The welcoming notes were brief, giving each person his or her

room number and a key. For those who had not eaten, a cold buffet would be available in the kitchen. Otherwise, they were free to go to their rooms where they would find further instructions.

Dan wadded up the welcome note and stuffed it in his pocket next to Donna's and left to look for his room. Sarah watched him nervously.

"I'm hungry," Paula grinned at the others. "Wanna raid the kitchen?" Sarah had decided it might be easier to start her diet while she was away from home and her well-stocked refrigerator. Still, she couldn't let Paula eat by herself. "I'll come with you."

"Alex?" Sarah smiled at him.

He shook his head and looked down at the note in his hand, reading it again as if he had missed something the first two times.

In the kitchen Paula and Sarah found trays of cold meats and cheeses and baskets of rolls. Bottled water and juice were arranged in a decorative metal tub of ice. Paula babbled about nothing much as she made a sandwich. Sarah listened, marveling at how someone so thin could eat so much. She was happy that she had made a friend right at the start.

"I'm not sure what this is all about, but my boss wanted me to come, so here I am," Paula said, spreading mustard on her French roll.

"Well, I for one am very glad you're here." Sarah slipped another slice of cheese into her sandwich. "My boss wanted me to attend, too, of course." She didn't add the part about Bernie asking her as a last-minute substitute because everyone else was too valuable to be away from the office.

Upstairs on the second level, where the guest rooms were, Dan turned on all the lights in his room, threw his suitcase on one of the twin beds, and looked around. It was modest and clean, and thank God, he was by himself. He hadn't even thought of the possibility that he might be staying in some dormitory with a roommate. On a small desk was another envelope with his name on it. Tearing it open, Dan scanned the short note. "Welcome to *Your Survival Strategies are*

*Killing You! – The Eight Principles You Must Follow to Thrive in Life and Work.* Your assignment for tonight is to DO nothing. Just BE. In the morning, come to the Great Room. The first session will start promptly at 8:00 A.M.”

Peter had to be out of his mind for suggesting this! Dan paced around the room. Sitting down at the little desk, which was about the size of the one in his son’s room, Dan took out his laptop and a stack of papers. He had a proposal to work on, and if he had a free night, he was going to make the best of it.

In his room next door, Alex read the same note: “Your assignment for tonight is to DO nothing. Just BE.” That was puzzling. Just be what? He would have liked more instructions and some idea of what was happening the next day, other than that the session would start at 8:00 A.M. He called Ann at home, told her he had arrived, and then after a brief conversation, he hung up. Taking his laptop out of his briefcase, Alex opened a file he had been reviewing earlier: a technical manual written by one of his direct reports.

No longer hungry, Paula excused herself from the table in the kitchen. She had her cell phone out even before she got to her room. Without even reading the note on the desk, she collapsed across the bed and talked.

After Paula left, Sarah rinsed both of their plates in the sink, dried them with paper towels she found on the counter, and after opening a few cupboards, put them back in the right place. She looked longingly at a basket of big cookies, took one, and then reached for a second. In her room she read the note assigning her “to DO nothing. Just BE” and wondered what that could mean. Sitting by herself, she noticed how fat her thighs looked in her slacks. She looked around the room for something to occupy her time, and then got an idea. She took a little notepad out of her purse and wrote a brief welcome note to the other three.

She slipped the note under Dan’s door. He noticed it a half hour later on his way to the bathroom. After reading the first line, he

threw it in the trash, where he had already deposited Donna's note and the welcome letter.

Paula was still gabbing on the phone when Sarah approached her door and wouldn't find her note until the next morning. Alex saw the note, read it, and put it on the desk, next to the one telling him to "DO nothing." He continued working on his laptop until he had finished reviewing the document. Then he opened his copy of *Consumer Reports* and read until he felt drowsy.

By quarter to eight on Thursday morning, Sarah, Dan, and Alex were in the Great Room. Sarah attempted to make light conversation with the two men, but neither seemed very interested. Silently, they filled their plates with muffins and fruit and helped themselves to coffee. A sign in the Great Room told them that at five minutes to eight, they could enter the session room. At 7:55 A.M., the door on the right was opened.