

## Part II

Lefoure had been almost asleep that night when it came to him: *when B equals zero*. At first it was just the answer to the equation, the only answer that fit, but then he realized its larger significance. He threw his clothes back on and raced to the hospital. How could he have missed it? A plus B cannot equal A.

Unless B is zero.

Apparently, they had been talking in code, Merwin and the woman. It was a simple arithmetic relationship once you gave it some thought. Lefoure simply hadn't thought about it, had simply assumed that Merwin's mind had come up with a mathematical absurdity and pushed itself off the track. Now, looking at the empty bed where the object of the last four years of his professional life had been just two hours ago, Dr. Sam Lefoure realized that he'd been duped.

But why?

Lefoure's interest in Merwin was certainly intense, and he had devoted years of his life to him. He had written thirteen articles for *JAMA*, and University Press had just published his book about Merwin's condition and case history – *Porphyry's Syndrome: Why We Murder Those We Love*. But he tried to imagine why anyone would have developed a romantic interest in this psychotic individual, particularly a woman as amazing as Carolyn. Did Merwin possess a male version of the same sexual charisma that Carolyn had? Were they mutually drawn to each other? If the young man were half as irresistible as Carolyn, they were both in trouble. Dr. Lefoure would have been forced to admit that he himself had fallen under Carolyn's sway as well. He had in fact had some trouble concentrating on his casework as long as she was in the room, and now he realized that's probably why he hadn't worked out the simple math problem, why he had let his patient slip away.

*The sally port.*

Another piece of the puzzle slid into place. Dr. Lefoure realized that B zero could only have meant the lower level of the facility under B wing. That was where the sally port was, their only chance at escape. Merwin was telling her in code to meet him there. And that's why Carolyn had said goodbye to Lefoure at the restroom as soon as they passed B wing. She must have slipped away from the guards who were escorting her and found her way downstairs. Merwin had almost certainly made it out in a trash bin or laundry cart. Once in the sally port, they could have stowed away in a transport bus.

Lefoure called transportation. "When did the last bus leave?"

"Who's asking?"

"Sam Lefoure, J-Cat, ninth ward. One of my patients has escaped."

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure!" he shouted into the phone.

Lights went on and sirens blared. The bolts were thrown on all the inside gates and security guards appeared out of nowhere. The PA announced a code orange and ordered a total lockdown. It was 2:17 in the morning, so most of the other inmates were asleep anyway. Sergeant Cochrane, who had come to know the doctor and his work, entered the room where Lefoure still stood looking at the empty bed.

"When did you last see him?" asked Cochrane.

“Three hours ago. He was strapped to the bed. I don’t know how he could have done it.”

Cochrane used his forefinger and pinky to hold up the keys to his handcuffs. “Maybe like this?”

Lefoure realized that nothing was impossible.

Half an hour later, Warden Tomlinson burst into the room, his hastily knotted tie so far off center it looked like a noose.

“Lewhore! I’m gonna kick your ass up in between your shoulder blades. Do you have any idea how much paperwork this is gonna cause me? I am *trying* to run a nice quiet prison here for the criminally insane. Why are you letting my little lunatics out?”

“What? I didn’t let Merwin escape. You can’t blame this on me.”

“I can do whatever the fuck I want. I’m the warden here. And don’t tell me you’re not to blame. You’re the one who insisted on bringing that skirt with the pussy lips on her neck into my prison.”

Lefoure tried to stare him down but couldn’t. Hands on his hips and his head bowed low, he said, “So what do you want me to do now?”

Tomlinson stepped very close and stared until Lefoure looked up again. The warden was nearly seven inches taller. He spoke softly, menacingly.

“I want you to bring his sorry, self-mutilating ass back here before the press shows up. Clear?”

~

Merwin sat on the edge of the bed, the glare from the TV illuminating his pale skin. He had managed a way to work the remote control with his small assortment of fingers. Carolyn was in the bathroom washing the blood out of her neck folds with a damp wash cloth.

“How’s your hand feel, darling?” she called out musically.

“Much better now that the darvocet’s kicking in.”

Carolyn came out of the bathroom mopping her neck with a motel towel. She had on only a bathrobe. “I’ve missed you, Merwin.”

“I’m glad we’re together again,” he said, switching off the TV.

He thought about how it felt to hold a knife to her throat again. He shuddered.

Once they had made it to the sally port, they had been forced to put on a show for the two guards on the waiting bus. Carolyn used a piece of gauze to lash a knife (she had smuggled it in) to Merwin’s damaged hand. Then they made it look as though he were holding her hostage, the knife to her throat. At first the two guards on the bus didn’t seem to be taking them seriously enough, so Merwin managed, by ripping out a couple of stitches, to direct a stream of his own blood onto the old wound on her neck. The guards then complied with their requests. For all the fugitive couple knew, the two guards were still bound together with their own cuffs, socks stuffed in their mouths, lying in the back of the bus in the parking lot of McDonald’s on 805. It was there that Carolyn hotwired a small, green Honda Civic and drove them to this rural motel.

Carolyn slipped off the bathrobe in one graceful motion, letting it fall on the floor. Merwin looked up at her naked body in the dim light. He took her hand between his two

bandaged stumps and pulled her onto the bed. He rolled onto an elbow and looked into her hypnotic eyes.

“Why did you try to kill me, Merwin?” she asked.

Merwin closed his eyes and rolled over again. Now they both lay on their backs looking up at the acoustic ceiling of the motel room. He tried to find patterns in the random hills and valleys of plaster.

“You should have stayed in theater, Carolyn. You have no understanding of math at all.”

Now she half turned to look at him. “What do you mean?”

“A mathematician doesn’t ask why, Carolyn. There is no why. There are only the eternal and unchanging laws of the universe and what we do in reaction to them.”

“Dr. Lefoure writes in his book that you were frustrated by your love for me. That you tried to kill me in an attempt to gather eternity into that one moment, to stop time from changing what we had.”

“Lefoure’s a wanker. He knows nothing about me. He kept me there for four years and never once asked me to tell him what happened. He just said, ‘Paint me a picture,’ and ‘Tell me about your stepfather,’ and ‘How does being institutionalized make you feel?’”

Carolyn laughed, a spring meadow laughter like a child’s.

“What nobody seems to understand is that there *aren’t* any reasons or first causes, there are only events moving forward according to laws we can’t change. What I did to you could have been calculated from the beginning of time, and so could everything that happened before and since. Where we go from here is determined by an impossibly complex but perfectly calculable equation which, if we had enough space on our hard drives, we could work out. We could draw maps of the future. I can argue all day long that my life is mine to lead, that my decisions are mine to make, but at the end of the day, I am the puppet of my own psychology which in turn is governed by my physiology. That’s run by chemistry, and chemistry is run by the physics of subatomic particles.”

Carolyn smiled at him. “But I love you, Merwin. I choose to love you.”

Merwin wanted to say no, that’s not true. Love, he wanted to say, is just an attraction of one organism which is responding to its own biological needs within an environment which at that moment includes another, desirable organism. That it is explainable, measurable, reducible. But the words stuck in his throat. Damp curls of hair lay clean and soft in the smooth hollows above her collarbones. Her hands, small, were laced together across her belly, gently rising and falling. He looked into her eyes.

He loved her, too. Could it have been a choice?

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Cochrane pushed the Crown Vic over 110, and Lefoure watched the speedometer from the back seat. As they raced westward through the hills, he found himself praying, pleading with God to keep Carolyn safe. He’d learned that investigators had traced their path from CMF in Vacaville to a little motel south of Napa. They were desperate now, and there was no telling what Merwin would do to her if cornered. As the psychiatric consultant, Lefoure knew it was his responsibility to make sure the situation didn’t

escalate. In the distance ahead, he could see taillights. He reached across the seat to the two-way and picked up the mic.

“This is Dr. Lefoure. Is anybody there?”

“Strike Team Delta. This is Sanders.”

“Listen, Sanders. I want you to make sure no one gets hurt in that motel. There’s a woman in there, and I’m . . . Just be careful, will you?”

“Can’t guarantee anything, chief. Gotta protect the public.”

Lefoure pressed the mic against his forehead. Cochrane spoke.

“Hey, what is it about this girl, Doc?”

Lefoure couldn’t answer.

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After they made love, Carolyn slept. She lay on her back with no sheet to cover her. Here in a motel once again, and once again in the presence of the man who had nearly taken her life, she was comfortable enough to sleep completely exposed. Inside her, a microscopic egg was being fertilized.

Merwin watched her as she slept, remembering the time he’d been in the back seat of his parents’ Bronco, driving back from Dillon Beach on route 37. He was twelve, so his sister Nila must have been nine. She was asleep next to him, and he was reading something by Heinlein. The car was about to crest a hill when Nila sat upright and screamed. Dad hit the brakes and the car swerved onto the shoulder. As it moved off the road, another car immediately appeared over the hill coming the wrong way in the lane they’d just left. The other car was doing at least eighty-five. Nila told them all afterwards that she’d been dreaming. She had floated up above their car and seen the other one coming towards them in the wrong lane. None of them had ever talked about the event again.

Merwin bent down and kissed Carolyn’s forehead, breathing deeply her smell.

He whispered, “A girl.”

Merwin didn’t even flinch as the door was kicked open, he just continued to stare down at her. He didn’t hear the shouts, didn’t pay attention to the wild, swirling shadows that played across the walls as the team shined their spotlights into the room. He ignored their commands, spoken through bullhorns. When the first bullets sank into his back, his neck, the occipital lobe of his brain, he continued to look at her until her shape dissolved into the bright flash of light that was the last thing Merwin ever saw, until his lifeless body fell forward, the exit wound that was his face coming to rest somewhere in the vicinity of a certain vulva shaped scar between Carolyn’s mouth and her bare woman’s breasts.