

# **THE FORGERS**

ALSO BY BRADFORD MORROW

*The Forger's Daughter*

*The Prague Sonata*

*The Uninnocent*

*The Diviner's Tale*

*Ariel's Crossing*

*Giovanni's Gift*

*Trinity Fields*

*The Almanac Branch*

*Come Sunday*

# **THE FORGERS**

**Bradford Morrow**



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THEY NEVER FOUND his hands. For days into weeks they searched the windswept coast south of the Montauk highway, fanning out into the icy scrub that edged the dunes, combing miles of coastline looking for a possible small makeshift grave where the pair might be buried. February flurries and short daylight hours hampered their efforts, erasing any telltale disturbances in the sand and semifrozen dirt. Speculating that the severed hands might possibly wash up on shore if his attacker had thrown them out into the churning surf, they scoured the shallows during low tides. Unless salt water had scrubbed his fingernails clean, there was a chance his nails might harbor forensic evidence—especially if he had fought with his assailant, which the disarray at the crime scene suggested he had. Still, the search turned up nothing. It was as if his hands had

simply joined together at the wrists, become a pair of wings, and flown away across the gray Atlantic.

The poor wretch survived ten days in the intensive care unit of a New York hospital where he had been transported at his sister's request. In and mostly out of consciousness, he was unable to speak to either his sibling or the police because whoever dismembered his hands had first struck him with brutal precision on the back of his head—he had been working at his desk quietly, as was his solitary predawn habit—leaving him unconscious in a bath of coagulating blood on the floor of his beachfront studio.

The intruder, it seemed, had been expert at his grisly task or else lucky in the extreme. No signs of forced entry. Marble rolling pin used to crack the victim's skull was from his own kitchen. Neither footprints nor fingerprints found. No valuables had been stolen, no money, no jewelry. A vintage Patek Philippe Calatrava, an heirloom from his father, lay unmolested, its second hand tracing serene circles, on the victim's desk. And because the altercation had occurred sometime before sunrise, neighbors had seen nothing unusual in what dim gray-green light the early winter day afforded. After the savagery, it seemed the intruder, much like the hands, had vaporized. None among the regular ragtag of sunrise joggers, who daily ran up and down the beach no matter what the weather, and sleepy dog walkers bundled against the chill had seen anything suspicious. Nor had anyone nearby been awakened by shouts or screams, the incessant crash and hiss of the ocean's waves having drowned out any such noise, if noise there had been. Besides, all the windows on either side of the house were closed, their curtains drawn tight.

When the postman arrived early on his route to deliver another of the many parcels that came to this address from here and there around the world, he found the front door ajar, which made no sense given how cold the weather was. Over the years, he and the victim had become if not friends then friendly acquaintances, which made it all the more unbearable that, after calling out softly then loudly, over and over, stepping unsure and trembling into the foyer—this was a day he had hoped would never happen to him or anyone else he knew—he discovered the body at the far end of the cottage. Even after an ambulance and police vehicles pulled into the narrow lane in front of the cottage, shattering the peace of this solitary neighborhood like meteors hitting a monastery, the man with no hands was still clinging, with a firm spirit if little else, to life.

The most puzzling discovery investigators made at the scene was of a number of handwritten letters and manuscripts by political and literary lights from earlier eras, all scattered in chaos around the studio. Rare books also carpeted the floor, their covers splayed like dead birds, inscription pages torn from many of the bindings. Lincoln and Twain, Churchill and Dickens, a trove of Arthur Conan Doyle documents lay together with dozens of others. Most had been vandalized, ripped to shreds or splattered with blood and ink from an array of antique ink pots once neatly arranged in a cabinet but now tossed about. Whether any manuscripts or signed books were missing was difficult to determine since there appeared to be no catalogue of the collector's holdings, and a check later with his insurance company would reveal that they hadn't been scheduled or insured. But because so many other valuables had

not been taken, including books in cases that lined the walls of the studio, the prevailing assumption was that no literary treasures had been stolen, either. What possible logic would dictate the assailant destroy so much precious holograph material only to steal away with others? No, the felonies here appeared to be wanton destruction of valuable property and a severe assault with probable intent to kill, not mere theft.

When Adam Diehl finally died, anything he might have been able to say about the assault—who was behind it, what motivated such barbarity—perished with him. To this day, it grieves me to acknowledge that his death under the circumstances was a tragic if godsent blessing given what an appalling life, mute and prosthetic, he surely would have faced had he survived. Sign language and even speech, given the brain damage that resulted from his head trauma, would have been forever beyond his grasp. He had been, according to his sister, Meghan, ever a recluse, but his injuries would decidedly have isolated him far beyond whatever pleasures he took from living the phantom life. No, surely it was better to lie peacefully in a pretty, manicured cemetery than suffer through the daily grind of such disablement. Isn't the butterfly whose wings have been plucked by a heedless child better off crushed beneath his heel than left in the grass gazing up at the sky, flightless?

Meghan, whom I'd been seeing for a few years before this incident took place, called me with the horrid news. She was sobbing so hysterically that her breath came in jerky bursts and her words cascaded in raw fragments over the sketchy cell phone connection. Hearing the cries of children at play in the background—why weren't they in school?—I realized she had left work for



the comparatively more private precincts of Tompkins Square to reach out to me. Not knowing what to say, I said nothing, but just listened to her, my beloved Meg, as she told me everything she knew about what had happened. I remember feeling numb and dislocated, alone at my kitchen table, wishing for all the world I was right there with her, kissing away her tears, holding her tight against me.

Divorced, sweet-spirited, an unpretentious, even earthy woman with flame-red hair who in her late thirties could easily pass for someone ten years younger, Meghan ran a used-book shop in the East Village that specialized in her twin fields of interest, art and cooking. She had learned early on to be independent when she and Adam were orphaned in their preteens—boating accident off Montauk, where the family owned the small beachfront house that Adam later appropriated for his studio hermitage—and were raised in Manhattan by a bookish aunt. In those childhood years they had grown unusually close, relied on each other for support and companionship, behaved themselves in front of their bibulous guardian but created a childhood world of their own, one that for a number of years was only really populated by two. Though Adam was the elder sibling, Meghan had always been more outgoing, so she sheltered him in a way, even mothered him at times. Generous to a fault, she let him have the Montauk residence and, as I began to notice, had often paid his bills when he fell behind. As she filled me in on what last details she knew about his injuries, I pictured her in the square, walking alone beneath the barren trees in the drizzle under heavy purple clouds, and my heart went out to her.

"Where is he now?" I asked, trying to be calm enough for both of us.

"They've taken him to an emergency room in Southampton."

"So he's alive," I said. "That's promising, right?"

"Just barely, he's critical, they told me he lost a lot of blood—" and she broke down crying again.

I waited a little before asking, "Meg, when did all this happen? Do they know who did it?"

"This, this morning," she answered. I assumed that her ignoring my second question meant she knew they didn't, or maybe it wasn't a priority for her just then.

Since I owned a car—a true city girl, Meghan didn't know how to drive—I offered to take her out to the hospital right away. We would have to rent one, as mine was in the repair shop, but that presented no problem, I assured her.

"God, I don't know if I can face seeing him. Is that bad?"

"Of course not. He probably wouldn't even know if you were there with all the drugs they must have him on," I reassured her. Then, "You want me to come meet you?"

"Later, yes," she said, abruptly having stopped weeping. "It's nice of you to offer, especially since you never really liked my brother."

"I never said that," was all I could manage, and though she wasn't entirely wrong about my feelings, I admit I was dumbstruck it would occur to her to say such a thing under the circumstances. But Meghan was devastated, I reminded myself, overwhelmed by such unexpected, staggering news. It was imperative I say nothing to risk our spiraling into some needless,

counterproductive quarrel. My job wasn't to contradict but to let her know she wasn't alone, that she could count on me. She had, after all, been a rock for me at a time when I needed support not long after I first began dating her. Now it was my turn.

"Look," I ventured. "I'm sure he'll be okay. He's a healthy guy, so that's in his favor. People survive worse."

News of Adam Diehl's assault stirred a lot of interest in the rare book world, at least for a time, even though he was not a major player or even a figure who was all that well known in the trade. Everyone was deeply disturbed by the events, horrified that one of their own, a fellow book lover, would suffer such a macabre attack. At the same time, the usual questions everyone outside this rarefied literary community asked—who did this? wasn't Montauk always such a safe place?—were supplemented by a profound interest in the books themselves. Who would wantonly destroy books of such quality? Who knew that this Diehl fellow had amassed such an extensive collection? And what was going to happen to the books that weren't destroyed? No one asked me anything outright, about either the collector or his library, but my relationship with his sister was generally known, and I could sense the unasked questions behind expressions of condolence and concern from fellow bookmen.

After Adam was transported to New York City, I did accompany Meghan to the hospital once before he passed away. Her anguish at seeing him, wrists and head bandaged, leashed to an impressive array of machinery, ignited in me a mosaic of conflicting responses. As anyone would be, I was agonized by Meghan's grief and fear and appalled to see him lying there in such a state,

helpless in the carnival-bright, less-than-antiseptic ICU. Despite the detail in which she had already described his injuries, I had not expected his condition would be quite this bad—I pictured him gravely maimed, not in mortal danger. Yet at the same time, I was still smarting from her comment about my uneasy relationship with her brother, which left me in the unenviable position of having to pretend I was more upset by his state than, in shameful reality, I was. I don't care to admit it, but a kind of melancholy emotional paralysis veiled itself behind my expressions of loving concern. No civilized person likes to see a fellow human suffering, and I do believe myself to be, despite any faults I might have, civilized. In short, it was a sorry vigil and I did my level best to measure up.

"Adam," Meghan whispered, breaking the unhappy silence of the room as she leaned close to his gauze-obscured face. Bruises beneath his eyes made him look as if he hadn't slept for a year, while his aquiline nose gave him a kind of dignity amid the ruin. I had never before noticed that his was almost identical to his sister's nose. "Adam, honey. I'm right here pulling for you. Everybody is."

He did not—could not?—respond.

When Meghan side-glanced me, nodding toward her brother, inviting me to add a few words of encouragement, my numbness morphed into a further deepening sadness for her. It seemed inevitable that she was going to be left without any family in this world, the aunt who raised her having died around the time Meghan and I first started dating, and I would soon enough constitute whatever "family" she had.

Taking my cue, I whispered, "Adam, I want to echo what Meghan said, if you can hear us. You've got great care here, the best. You just hang in—"

His eyes, which had been closed, came half-open as his head turned a painful inch toward me on his pillow.

"Adam?" blurted Meghan, hope rising in her voice.

"I'll go get somebody," I told her, and hurriedly left the room.

By the time I returned a minute later, following his day nurse into the room, he had slipped back into a semicoma while Meghan stroked his once-again unresponsive face. As we were leaving the hospital, she did register surprise at his reaction to my presence, saying, a little plaintively, "He seemed to recognize your voice more than mine."

"Like I said before, I don't think he's really capable of recognizing anybody what with all the drugs they have him on. He just seemed to be in a lot of pain suddenly."

"You're probably right."

"Look, main thing is I'm glad we were there to help as best we could."

"Me too," she said, slipping her arm around my waist. "I'm glad you came with me."

"No more of this business about me not liking your brother, okay?"

"I'm sorry I said that. Promise I won't do it again," and drew me closer.

Relieved, even feeling a little vindicated, I leaned over and kissed her before hailing a cab back downtown.

Adam died a few days later. Although Meghan went to visit her brother every morning and evening, I'm embarrassed to admit I came up with legitimate

excuses that kept me away from the hospital after that first visit. I made up for my pitiful absence at his bedside by throwing all of my best energies into helping her arrange for cremation and burial. Close as we had long been, we were never closer than during that time. She spent every night over at my floor-through just off Irving Place, near Gramercy Park. We quietly cooked dinner together, me acting the role of sous-chef as she grilled scallops one evening and roasted duck another. Sleepless, we shared wine and screened old science fiction flicks like *Metropolis* and *The Island of Lost Souls*. We made love with a fervor only a close encounter with death can inspire in the living. In the simplest of ways, we embraced life by embracing each other. To be sure, Adam was never too far from our minds throughout this period of survivalist mourning, with Meghan remembering happy moments from their past and me listening to each one, knowing that these memories were her best legacy and, as such, were to be respected.

Each of us had already been separately interviewed by the investigators and, after exhausting and even demeaning hours of interrogation, deemed not to be, in that wretched phrase, "persons of interest." That they had shown particular interest in me was unnerving, to say the least, but after discovering I was home asleep and had neither motive nor means they let me go and pursued whatever meager leads they had. They brought in others for questioning, as well, a few from the rare book field, all of whom appeared to have passable alibis. Asked if I knew this dealer or that collector, I answered honestly that I did and considered them all to be above reproach, for whatever my opinion was worth.

Meanwhile, the press, initially drawn to the maiming and murder of Adam Diehl, began to lose interest. One hometown tabloid had dubbed the slaying “The Manuscript Murder.” Despite the mildly clever alliterative, the phrase didn’t gain much traction—who in the tabloid public gives a good goddamn about literary manuscripts, not to mention rare books?—and the story itself faded from the near-front pages toward the middle and then out of rotation sooner than I or anyone else in the book trade, peripheral or otherwise, might have expected.

During this time, Meghan and I cocooned ourselves away from others, which allowed her, whose resilience profoundly impressed me, a chance to begin her process of healing. We did find ourselves inevitably returning to the subject of who might possibly have wanted to hurt Adam, slay him in such a way, with Meghan concluding there was a strong chance it was someone we didn’t even know.

“He had his own life out in Montauk,” she said, with frustrated resignation. “Close as we were, there’s all kinds of things I’m sure he kept from his little sister.”

I nodded, thinking, Truer words were never uttered.

DYING IS A DANGEROUS BUSINESS. A liberation from suffering, a release from life's problems, death is also an indictment. Once we're dead, secrets that we so carefully nurtured, like so many black flowers in a veiled garden, are often brought out into the light where they can flourish. Cultivated by truth, fertilized by rumor, they blossom into florets and sprays that are toxic to those who would sniff their poisonous perfumes. While I did my best to shelter Meghan from certain unsavory discoveries that were made about her brother's life—like many a sibling, she understandably didn't want to believe he was anything other than an innocent victim—some damning details would soon enough vine their strangling way into the light. Details that, as fate would have it, I had already surmised about Adam but could not before his death practically or honorably



reveal to her. Details that I myself was duty bound to help transit from that darkness of secrecy into truth's awkward glare. Salt on the wound, I know, and yet it would prove to be an unavoidable seasoning.

Now that I am on the subject of truth, it is important that I offer a confession. Or, rather, an illumination in order to bring into better focus Adam Diehl's unfortunate death and by way of explaining how I knew what I knew, or believed I knew, about his hidden life.

You see, like Adam, I myself was once a forger. Undeniably, and even unashamedly, triumphantly a forger. There was a time in my life when nothing gave me more joy than forging letters and manuscripts by my favorite writers. Nor was I some naif off the boat who was taken in and, if you will, pimped out by dealers who used my unique handiwork to make millions for themselves while I was left the breadcrumbs. No, I knew who I was and what I was doing. I learned the ropes and forged, ha, my path. And I adored my job. It is no exaggeration to state that the tremulous thrill that surged through me when I lowered my nib to virgin paper was the most erotic feeling I could possibly imagine, the most intoxicating, the most resplendent. The satisfaction of virtuosity put to the test was like none other, was what I lived for and what Diehl possibly strived for, too, though I suspect the gentle art of forgery never gave him the visceral stab of pleasure that it invariably gave me. When I conceived and penned the inscription of an esteemed master in a copy of his or her rarest book—sometimes to a family member, other times to a fellow novelist or poet—an edgy sublimity settled over the moment. It was like electric stardust, say, or a kind of aurora borealis of the mind. Truly, happiness beyond words.

Part of what lay behind this unique feeling was the high-wire nature of the act itself. As a skilled craftsman, the forger has but one chance to get it just right, or else instead of making a book more desirable, more valuable, he has wrecked the thing. But when it is done expertly—and in my heyday I was nothing if not an expert, I think perhaps the finest expert at work during my transient time in the trade—heaven shone down and a choir of rebel angels sang. The rest was about the tense, satisfying pleasure of knowing something others might only try and fail to guess at. Whenever I sold my handiwork to an experienced bookseller for a considerable sum, I knew I had once again hoodwinked the world even as I had ironically made it a richer, more luminous place. I thought—rightly in the beginning, wrongly later—I could rest assured that my spurious inscribed books, my fake letters and manuscripts could travel the precincts of bibliographic connoisseurship with the perfect invisibility of the authentic, above reproach, for all intents and purposes *real*. Such refined beguilement was the alpha and omega of my art.

For most of my adult life I was a man who was all about ink and paper and first editions. Vintage papers for early correspondence and holograph manuscripts, hand-mixed inks, irreproachable, for lavish inscriptions. Not words so much as letters, their connectors and flow, were what mattered most to me, at least in the beginning, back when I was starting out. Each letter required the right presence and pressure, the tender weight of ink, old sepia, faded black, on my small canvas. The ascenders, the descenders, the choreographic shape and spirit of a comma, these were what kept me up at night. The precision of a period. Single quotes like

black crescent moons in a parchment sky. The adage has it, *Do what you love*. This was what I loved.

Then I got caught. The industry—a small subculture where pebbles dropped in a pond can create tidal waves; a tribe of brilliant children—roiled for a while in the aftermath of my conviction. Perhaps “roiled” is too strong a word, a little egotistical of me to frame it in such a way. Still, as I was later told by a number of friends in the trade who, despite my downfall, would eventually remain friends, various perfectly authentic letters and signatures in all manner of first editions were suddenly suspect, and some dealers were as loath to buy as collectors. The same experts who before had bought my offerings with utmost confidence were now questioned by special collections librarians and others who wanted reappraisals of authenticity for works acquired during my admitted years of activity, especially when it came to authors that had been my specialty, Conan Doyle and Sherlockiana being at the top of that list. Parts of the autograph market briefly stalled, as markets do when doubt is injected into their body politic, but not for long, especially given what a comparatively small niche I had occupied.

Whether it was because I was represented by a shrewd attorney, which I was, and a wise and respectable man to boot, or because this particular lily-white collar crime was one that the police and prosecutors didn’t take as seriously as other scams—it was far more sexy to bust an insider trading hedge fund bigwig than some fellow who could write an H. G. Wells postcard—I managed to get a good plea bargain. I had never been in trouble with the law before, didn’t have so much as a parking ticket in my record, and that naturally helped me, too. The fact that I hadn’t stolen anything, as such,

further figured into my overall picture as a positive factor. After consulting with my lawyer, I confessed—no need for the bother of a trial—and was convicted and sentenced.

In exchange for my full cooperation and in light of that prior clean record, punishment was limited to probation, a substantial fine, repayment plus interest to buyers, what seemed like endless hours of community service sweeping leaves and litter in city parks, and an agreement going forward to help the authorities identify forgeries like the ones I used to make with such aplomb. The pact I made with myself was that I would turn a new leaf. Many bridges had been burned, I knew, but rare book dealers, lest I depict them wrongly as a community of authorities that could be duped, are for the most part very sharp, honest, and thoughtful individuals. When asked by the police if I felt forgery was rampant in the trade, I told them no, that, with all modesty, it took someone of my caliber and sophistication to get past any of them. Lesser practitioners were inevitably shot out of the sky like low-flying birds. Not to brag, but it took a raptor like myself to clear the range of their canny buckshot, at least while my long flight lasted. Over time, to my great relief and even joy, a number of people forgave or forgot—I was always well liked in the industry and I insisted wherever and as often as I could that most of the books and manuscripts I handled were not forged, a courteous lie that no one could disprove—my reputation was slowly rehabilitated. I even did freelance work at one of the auction houses, vetting upcoming lots for possible impostors among the literary jewels that collectively brought millions in their rooms.

So, yes, my dirty secret was exposed, my cherished *affaire de coeur* with pen and paper was over. I suffered as a result—and deservedly—but also strove for and mostly attained my redemption, though of course there were some people in the trade who shunned me forever after.

The posthumous revelations of Diehl's secrets, on the other hand, so to say, left the man unshielded, and because of the tenuous dots that connected him and me via Meghan, I wasn't overly surprised that the investigators called me back in. When they explained they wanted me, of all people, to have a look at some of the damaged books and manuscripts, I figured the exercise had as much to do with giving me yet another look as a possible suspect as it did with confirming or denying the items were forgeries or materials were forger's tools. I showed up on time—confident but not overly confident, friendly but not suspiciously friendly—with the simple desire to give them the information they sought and be back home in New York that night in time for dinner with Meghan as usual.

Did I recognize any of these items? they asked, handing me a tray and then others with dried blood- and ink-soaked documents in them opened to pertinently inscribed pages or leaves. Grateful I didn't have to wear surgical gloves because I wasn't asked to touch anything, I honestly answered, No. That is, for instance, I recognized that this was the first edition of Dickens's *American Notes* published in London in 1842, both volumes sadly torn out of their bindings but with a contemporary inscription and Dickens's characteristic Slinky of narrower and narrower squiggles beneath his signature looking plausibly correct. But did I recognize this specific volume? No.

What would something like that be worth? they asked.

In fine condition, as it might have been before the incident, and if the recipient here was a friend of the author—I couldn't make out the name, I apologized—perhaps fifty to seventy-five.

Dollars?

Yes, well, thousand dollars I mean.

I was puzzled when they asked me if I had ever heard of one Henry Slader, to whom Adam had been apparently paying monthly installments for some acquisition or another. Regarding him, I could only shrug. "Nothing unusual about installments," I told them. Not being used to the high prices rare books often traded for, they expressed particular interest in the fact that thousands of dollars were in play here.

"Nothing unusual about the money, either," I assured them. "Like that Dickens we were just looking at, these aren't your everyday run-of-the-mill books we're talking about."

Their turn to shrug.

The interrogation or consultation, whatever it was, went along like this for an hour or more before they arrived at some questions I had more or less anticipated, given they could get others to do their verifications and appraisals for them.

Just a few more things that interested them, if I didn't mind. Did Adam Diehl and I ever discuss forgery? Did we ever do business together? Did he ever approach me, as his sister's boyfriend, for any favors or advice regarding forgeries?

No, no, and no, I told them, forthright and if anything a little insulted. Maybe my mild annoyance showed or

maybe it didn't. Either way, I answered all their questions to the best of my knowledge. Had they a lie detector and examiner there, I would gladly have agreed to answer again and let the inky needle's failure to jump reassure them.

What I could say, and did, was that some of the regrettably damaged works were not fakes, as far as I could tell, and that they could run my opinions regarding each individual item past any number of other specialists in literary artifacts and they would find most if not all of them would likely concur with me. They assured me they would do just that, thanked me, and said I could go. I sensed they might have been disappointed, but what did I know?

While I had over the years strongly suspected him of being a member of my erstwhile fraternity of forgers, I had never brought the matter up with Diehl, just as I told the cops, and obviously I never betrayed any of my suspicions to Meghan. But when, over a glass of wine before dinner, I revealed where I had been that day and the sorts of questions the authorities were asking me about forgery, rather than being concerned how it went, she rebuked me for not having told her I was called in, first, and second, that I had any idea about Adam and forgery.

I said, "I know I should have told you they called, but I guess I wanted to protect you from having to worry about it. You've got enough on your hands as it is. And as for Adam, you're all too aware I didn't know him that well. Did I ever even lay eyes on his collection?"

No need to relate every turn of the screw as our evening spiraled downward from there. Suffice it to say the poor woman turned on me for a few really rotten days and nights, threatened never to see me again. She was,

and I state this with a curious sort of admiration, harder on me than the police had been.

"How could you not have known about Adam? There's no way you couldn't have known," she said, her voice tight, her face half as red as her hair.

"Suspecting and knowing are two very different animals," I countered.

"Do you understand how humiliating this is? What if it gets around everywhere?" she asked. "My customers will laugh behind my back, or worse, they'll feel sorry for me. I could lose my business."

"But you, you haven't done anything wrong. Nobody's accusing you of anything. And nobody but you is accusing me of anything, either."

"Between you and now Adam, why should anybody trust me any more? Why should I even trust myself?"

Knowing I might better keep my mouth shut, but in a fit of exasperation, I said, "Speaking of trust. When they questioned you, did you tell them you thought I didn't like your brother? Is that why they dragged me back in today?"

"I never said anything of the kind."

"Because I couldn't help but wonder, while I was sitting in their airless room going around in circles with them, if that wasn't why I was there."

It went on like that, my feeble attempt at accusation having fallen flat. She suspected me of having been a pernicious influence on Adam, even of having worked secretly with him, all kinds of crazy things. I'd never seen her act like this before and was at a loss what to do beyond telling her she was wrong.

Eventually the hostility, or anger, or shame, or the thorny combination of all of those and more passed.



Meghan and I had weathered tough times in the past and we were going to get through this one, too. What she didn't know, could never know, was that even if I had bothered to work with her brother, my influence on him would have been beneficial rather than pernicious—at least to his craft—but that I would never in a hundred millennia have shared my techniques, my supply sources, my tools, my *passion* with Adam Diehl or anybody else. It is possible that although she couldn't fathom why I so adamantly denied having anything to do with Adam's forgery, the adamancy itself and the indisputable truth of my denial finally got through to her.

When we made up, strolling through Tompkins Square for coffee while she was on a lunch break, I told her, "Look, Meg, after what you've been through, it's a wonder you've held yourself together as well as you have."

A cynic might see these words as clichéd, but they were offered in good faith. And sometimes, in the right circumstances, even the simplest cliché can carry profound weight. If, as Emerson wrote, every word was once an idea, every cliché was once a revelation.