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The Fixer



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhat secrets are his family keeping? A month ago, Rick Hoffman was a popular journalist. Now, having being fired by his magazine, he is penniless and alone. At least he still has keys to his father's house, empty since he moved to a nursing home after a stroke. There, hidden in the walls of his father's attic, Rick finds something that could change his life: bundles of cash worth millions. He knows he shouldn't spend it without knowing where it came from. But his bed-bound father can no longer speak. If he could, he'd tell his son just how much danger he is in... PREVIOUS TITLES: The Moscow Club; Extraordinary Powers; The Zero Hour; High Crimes; Paranoia; Company Man; Killer Instinct; Power Play; Vanished; Buried Secrets; Suspicion Extrait1On a lovely West Cambridge street this 1903 Queen Anne

home is on a large level lot with many mature trees. Graciously proportioned rooms and elegant millwork. Pocket doors and two working fireplaces with original ceramic tile. The house is in need of updating, please see attached home inspection report. The house was a dump. There was no way around it. The listing had been online for seven months, and it had generated a flurry of interest at first and one offer so lowball that the real estate agent refused to dignify it with a reply. The agent had written the ad himself and was justifiably proud of it. It was a great ad. It was also a steaming pile of horseshit, as everyone eventually discovered when they got a look at the house. An absolute lie. The place was a disaster. A money pit. Potential buyers usually fled after spending a minute or two stumbling through the decaying interior. So Rick Hoffman, who'd left the family house on Clayton Street in Cambridge seventeen years ago, solemnly vowing never to return, was now camping out in what used to be his father's study, on the second floor. December in Boston could get awfully cold, but he'd turned off the heat, which was ridiculously expensive, so he was sleeping fully clothed in a sub-zero expedition sleeping bag on the old leather couch, next to a space heater. The study smelled vaguely of cat piss. Glassed-in legal bookcases lined the walls, tall and rickety. On his father's desk was an ancient IBM PC, an early-computer ivory, that belonged in the Smithsonian, and an Oki Data dot-matrix printer. If the 1980s ever came back, he'd be all set. His old bedroom, where he'd lived until he went off to college, had become a storeroom for broken furniture and cardboard boxes of files. So he slept on the leather sofa in a room as cold as a meat locker with the faint aroma of cat urine in the air. This was, he realized, the lowest point in his life. He had nowhere else to live. A week earlier he'd been forced to move out of the Back Bay apartment he'd shared with his (now) ex-fiance until Holly had announced she no longer wanted to marry him. He'd spent a few nights in a motel on Soldiers Field Road in Brighton, but his money was running out fast. He had no income anymore. He'd sent out his résumé to dozens of magazines and newspapers, with no reply. He'd sold his watch, a nice Baume Mercier, on eBay and unloaded most of his fancy clothes on a website that let you buy or sell gently used, high-end clothing. His money was almost gone. He was lucky he had a place to crash for free. But it didn't feel so lucky, sleeping in the cold hovel on Clayton Street, the house he and his sister had grown up in. Wendy, three years younger than Rick, was living in Bellingham, Washington, with her partner, Sarah, who owned a vegan restaurant. Just sell the damned place, she'd told Rick. The house is shit, but the land's got to be worth a couple hundred thousand bucks. That's money I could use. Until Holly had broken off the engagement and kicked him out of their apartment on Beacon Street, that had seemed like a decent plan. But Rick needed a place to live, at least until he found another job, got back on his feet.***Two months ago, he'd been the executive editor of Back Bay, a glossy magazine devoted to the rich and the famous in Boston, the movers and shakers. It had just enough slavish coverage of celebrity chefs and posh weddings and best bartenders to ensure a nice, fat magazine, and just the right dash of snarky knife-edge balance, really to hook covetous and aspirational readers who considered themselves smart and sophisticated but actually weren't. Seven or eight years ago, a local private-equity maestro named Morton Ostrow took over the joint, infusing Back Bay with cash, made it slicker and glossier, a rich man's plaything. He ushered in a golden age of big salaries and almost unlimited expense accounts. You had to spend money to make money! he liked to say. He moved the magazine's offices from a cramped but elegant redbrick town house on Arlington Street in the Back Bay to a converted mill building on Harrison Avenue, in the newly desirable, artist-infested SoWa district in the South End. Brick and beam, huge nineteenth-century industrial windows, and polished concrete floors. Parties at dark, bunkerlike clubs no one could get into, sponsored by Ketel One or Stolichnino. Rick, who'd rented the movie *All the Presidents Men* at an impressionable age and had been obsessed with it, had always wanted to be Woodward or Bernstein, an intrepid reporter who specialized in ferreting out high-level government fraud and conspiracy. He went to work for *The Boston Globe* in the Metro section and got a lot of attention for an exposé he did on private, for-profit prisons. He did an article about corruption in the city's taxi business and a series on how easy it was to get out of drunk-driving charges in the state. He might, he told himself, have been on the upward trajectory toward Woodward-and-Bernsteinism if he hadn't met Mort Ostrow at a book party in Cambridge. Ostrow, a short, squat frog of a man, liked Rick right away. He was hired away from the *Globe* at a ridiculous salary to beef up Back Bay's coverage of the power elite scandals at Harvard, intrigue at the State House, gossip among the pashas of the hedge funds. He was given license to puncture and skewer. He acquired a big apartment on Beacon Street and a beautiful blond girlfriend to go with it. He and Holly went out to parties or dinner almost nightly. He could get a table at the tiniest, most exclusive restaurant, the kind that's booked months in advance (not years; this was Boston, after all), at half an hour's notice. When he wore suits, they were made by Ostrow's tailor (working buttonholes on the cuffs, Super 130s, fully canvassed), at

the friends-and-family rate. He had a weekly breakfast with Mort Ostrow at Morts regular table at the Bristol Lounge at the Four Seasons. While it lasted, it was a pretty nice life.***The space heater buzzed and snarled. He heard something... scurrying somewhere within the walls nearby. A soft commotion, a rodent scabbling. Mice? Rats? Squirrels? Anything could have gotten in through the chimneys or vents in the long years the house had stood unoccupied. Rodents or birds could be living in the walls. He got up from the couch, listened in silence for a moment, heard the muted scabbling sound from inside the studys back wall then slammed the wall with his fist. There was a great crash as one of the bookcases toppled, hurtling its contents to the floor, its glass front shattering. Shit, he said. At least the scabbling sound had stopped. Broken glass was scattered everywhere, jagged shards twinkling in the morning light. Red bound volumes of The Massachusetts Law Reporter were arrayed on the floor. Ricks father, Leonard, had been an attorney, a solo practitioner whose clientele included some sketchy characters: strippers, porn purveyors, club owners. Hed rented an office on Washington Street in downtown Boston. But hed always kept a duplicate set of his law books in his home study. Rick went to fetch a broom and a dustpan to sweep up the broken glass. The broom closet was off the kitchen, down one floor. A thick blanket of dust and debris had collected on the wooden stairs, including some crumpled Narragansett beer cans and a discarded foil condom wrapper. Teenagers had gotten into the house hence the broken window but probably not squatters. No long-term residents. The house had been rented for most of the eighteen years since Lens stroke. But as the place slowly deteriorated and repairs were left undone, the quality of the renters deteriorated along with it. The last ones were so rowdy and degenerate that the neighbors started complaining. Three years ago Rick had given up renting the house altogether. The hallway was dark the lightbulbs in the ceiling fixture were burned out but he knew the way by heart. He could navigate the house blindfolded. He found the broom closet and located a tangle of plastic shopping bags but no brooms. And an old carpet sweeper that, even if it still worked, wouldnt pick up most of the shards of glass anyway. He looked around the kitchen. More beer cans here, and beer bottles, and discarded Big Mac cartons. Dont move, asshole! someone shouted. Rick jumped, startled. He spun around, saw a tall, skinny, balding man in a barn coat, jeans, and boots. Oh, its you, the man said. Hey, man, good to see you, Rick! Oh, hey, Jeff. He smiled with relief. Been a while. Sorry, dude, didnt mean to scare you. I thought it was those damned Rindge and Latin kids again. He held up a key ring and jingled it. Wendy gave me a set of keys a couple, three years back and asked me to keep an eye on the place. No problem. Rick shook his head. And listen, I really appreciate it. Jeff Hollenbeck lived next door, had grown up there and inherited the house after his parents death. He was a year or so younger than Rick. He and Rick werent friends, exactly, but used to play a lot of one-on-one basketball in Jeffs parents driveway using the hoop mounted to their garage. Jeff, always tall and skinny and athletic, usually won. When Jeff went to Rindge and Latin, the local public high school, Rick had gone off to the Linwood Academy, a private school, so their already minimal friendship had been attenuated further. Also, Jeff began to make fun of Ricks faggoty uniform the blue blazer, white shirt, and striped crimson-and-gray repp tie. All legitimate grounds for ruthless teenage mockery, but not great for their friendship either. Apparently, Jeff had gone through a druggy phase in high school, came close to being expelled once, but straightened up in time to go to Bunker Hill Community College. Rick didnt remember what Jeff did for a living something in the construction trade, maybe? His balding head was close-cropped on the sides. As a teenager hed worn it down to his shoulders. Now, as if to compensate for the hairlessness up top, he had a goatee, wiry, gray-flecked. His eyes were a watery blue-gray. I think the word got around the high school that the house is empty, and theres this gang of kids who use it for partying and screwing and whatever whatever. If I ever hear them, I show up and shoo em away. Hows your dad doing? Rick smiled sadly, shook his head. Same. Same, yeah? I guess hes still in that nursing home? Rick nodded. He eats and gets parked in front of the TV all day and thats his life, you know...? It was beyond sad, actually. It was heartbreaking the way his father had ended up. Wendy still out in Oregon? Washington, but yeah. And youre the grand pooh-bah of Boston Magazine? Rick shrugged, too weary to correct Jeff on the name of the magazine, which would also mean setting him straight on Ricks job title, which was no longer any title at all. Plus, there was something enjoyable about being out in the real world, where the news of his firing actually hadnt made it. It was refreshing to visit a place where no one could hear the low beating of the tom-toms. Which he himself hadnt heard until it was too late. He was the last person to figure out he was going to get sacked. His numbers subscriptions and newsstand sales, anyway were looking great. Hed told Holly he was expecting a raise. There was even talk of end-of-the-year bonuses if the magazine was ahead of plan. Later, of course, he found out that the gossip that his days were numbered had been burning up the wires for weeks. Mort had made a couple of disastrous market calls. Hed

lost a big bet on a gold mining company and a Chinese timber firm. His fortune had gone poof, just like that.

Or so the rumors had it. Rick found out over breakfast at the Four Seasons, after he'd ordered, before he'd finished his first cup of coffee. It wasn't that he was being fired, that wasn't it at all; his job was being eliminated. Mort was discontinuing the print edition. He could no longer afford the fat salaries and the expense accounts. Anyway, the luxe strategy wasn't working. The ad guys were always having to discount to fill the pages, too obviously stuffing the remnant space with house ads. Time for some disruptive innovation! He was slashing the payroll, letting his overpaid editors go. Staffers were getting converted to freelance, paid by the piece, meaning by the post. Rick was certainly free to pitch stories to the new editor/publisher, a loathsome little squirrel in Chuck Taylors and Ben Sherman and ironic Buddy Holly glasses whom Rick had hired as a web editor a year earlier. By the time his prosciutto-and-roasted-asparagus omelet had arrived, Rick had lost his appetite. ***Still living across the river? Jeff said. Nah, I'm moving out. Rick didn't want to get into the gory details. Not with Jeff Hollenbeck, anyway. An arched brow. Moving in here? Rick shook his head. I mean, for a little while, yeah, but it's time to sell. They've been showing it for a while now. I guess no bites, huh? Rick spread out his hands. We got one lowball offer. Place is a shithole. Definitely needs work. But it's got good bones. Someone wanted to invest some time and money into it, it could be sweet. That's sorta what I'm thinking. Maybe get a carpenter in here, a plasterer, sand the floors, new paint.... You're not thinking of doing it yourself, are you? No way. Not my skill set. You hire someone yet? He shook his head again. Bank accounts a little light. Maybe a couple of months down the road. He said it in an offhand way, as if it was only a matter of time before a tsunami of money started pouring in. Jeff shifted his weight from foot to foot. I wouldn't mind taking a crack at it. You know that's what I do, right? Oh yeah? Yeah. Builder, carpentry, gut renovations, the whole nine yards. He pulled a business card from the front pocket of his barn coat and handed it to Rick. It said JEFF HOLLENBECK BUILDERS. Got a couple guys working for me now. I don't know what kind of quotes you're getting, but I don't mind giving you a break, you know childhood friends, all that. Huh. He'd never thought about Jeff as a serious adult, let alone a successful builder. You wouldn't believe what houses on this block are selling for, man. It's crazy. It's like you know the D'Agostino place across the street? Sure. I think they got one-point-five mil for that place, and it's not nearly as nice as this... could be, I mean. A million and a half bucks? For that dump? I know, it's crazy. I mean, you put some good work into this place, you could get two mil easy. More, even. I don't really have the... liquidity, I gotta be honest with you. Jeff nodded. We could do a deal, maybe. Like, my company does the work and I get a cut of the sale. Work out something that's good for both of us. He took out a pack of Marlboros and a Zippo. Mind? You kidding? Anything to get that cat piss smell out of my nostrils. Jeff chuckled as he lit a cigarette. Luckily I don't smell it. Upstairs in my dad's office, that's where it's bad. Plus, we've got critters living inside the walls. Jeff exhaled twin plumes of smoke. So what do you think? Rick was quiet for a long moment. He thought, What the hell. This could be fairly painless. When could you start? Anytime. Like now. Business slow? Always slows down in the winter. I mean, I've got a couple of big jobs lined up starting March or April.... It's an interesting idea. If we can work it out, I mean. Well, so think about it. Meanwhile, let me check out what that smell is upstairs. I got a pretty good idea I know. Jeff followed Rick up the stairs. Jeez, he said, toeing the condom wrapper. Can't even clean up their own shit. When they got to the study, Jeff said, So that was the crash I heard. He snorted. Oh yeah, I smell it now. That's nasty. Hold on, I'll be right back. He galumphed down the staircase. Rick was picking up the larger pieces of glass when Jeff appeared in the doorway, a shop broom and dustpan in one hand and a crowbar in the other. Thought you could use this. He handed Rick the broom and dustpan. Then, wagging the crowbar, he said, If you're serious about doing work on the place, I can open up the wall and see what the problem is. Rick shrugged. Go for it, why not. Jeff walked carefully to the middle of the room, weaving around and through the broken glass. Then he stood, head cocked, listening. A moment later, the rustling started up again. Jeff followed the sound to the back wall, then stood still for a few seconds more. He opened the closet door, heavy and paneled, with an ornamented brass knob. He noticed the dangling string, the pull cord, and tugged it to switch on the bare bulb mounted on the canted ceiling. Jeff nodded, smiled. They're in the crawl space. Squirrels, I betcha. They get in through roof vents or they chew holes in the soffit. Evil little buggers. He hoisted the crowbar and slammed its hooked end into the back wall of the closet. A chunk of the wall came away with a screech. It wasn't plaster and lath, Rick saw, but a flat piece of plywood, ten or twelve inches across, a couple of feet long. Here she comes, Jeff said. Easy. Jeff stepped aside as the long board toppled to the closet floor in a cloud of plaster. A tall hole had opened in the back wall of the closet, too narrow to get through, but enough to glimpse the dim interior. There was a scree sound and a quick pitter-patter, like rain on the ceiling, the

mad scrambling of small creatures. Squirrels, Jeff announced. Knew it. He coughed. Whoa. Gross. Rick stepped closer to get a look. Hate squirrels, Jeff said. Nothing more than furry-tailed rats. Then he jammed the crowbar into the wall once more and ripped out the adjoining board. It squealed as it came out, nails screeching against wood, and clattered to the floor. No plasterboard here, Jeff said. Strange. Like they just painted over this plywood. What is it, a nest? Rick asked. I don't want the goddamned squirrels running around inside the house. Nah, if there's a nest, it's probably on the other side of the house. This right here is their latrine. Latrine? Squirrels don't soil their own nests usually. Think they're still in there? Rick asked. Maybe, maybe not. If they've got babies in the nest, they're not leaving. So now what? Trap 'em, that's the best way. Or chase 'em out of here. Then seal up the holes with hardware cloth or steel mesh. Rick could now see into the crawl space a little more clearly. In the faint, dappled light from a lot of little holes in the roof, he guessed a pile of some sort was silhouetted, a heap a few feet tall. Careful where you walk, there, dude, Jeff said. Rick took a few more steps, through the opening, into the crawl space. He hunched over because of the steeply pitched roof, there wasn't enough room to stand. You know, Jeff said, if you want to open up some of these walls up here, we can get some more square footage on this floor. Bedroom nook, a kids room, whatever. Could even put in skylights that would be nice. I've had good luck with Velux Cabrio balcony roof windows. As Rick's eyes adjusted to the dark, he moved closer to the pile. A black plastic tarp, on top of what were probably boxes. Now the boarded-up section of the closet wall made sense. At some point in the century or so of the house's history, the crawl space, normally wasted space, was used for storage. Maybe it was accessed through the closet. A trapdoor, a removable panel, was put in. Maybe it was part of the original construction. Careful in there, Jeff said. I've seen squirrels attack people, you know. They don't even have to be rabid. You invade their nest... Rick tugged at one corner of the tarp, but it wouldn't lift up; it was stapled to another piece of tarp. He yanked harder this time, and a couple of staples popped and sprinkled to the floor, and now he could see inside. Jesus, he said. He looked again. What he saw didn't register. You get bit? Jeff said with a cackle. The light in there was bad, but there was just enough to make out the engraved number 100 and Ben Franklin's face. It seemed a mirage. He stuck his hand into the hole in the tarp and pulled at the first thing he could grasp. A wad of hundred-dollar bills, it looked like. A band bisecting the packet, printed twice with the number \$10,000. His hand was actually trembling, he realized. Dude, what is it? Jeff said. Nothing, Rick said. His first instinct was to conceal. Without even thinking about it, he swiveled, placing his body between Jeff and the tarp-covered heap, blocking Jeff's view.... view of what? Whatever was in that hulking pile, a couple of feet high by maybe four feet wide, Rick knew what was on top of it: packets of money. Packets of hundred-dollar bills. Maybe not the whole pile; that would be crazy, flat-out inconceivable. Packets of money atop... what? A pile of papers, maybe files. The whole pile couldn't be cash. That wasn't possible. He tossed the packet back onto the heap. He couldn't think clearly. He needed to look again, but without Jeff around. Because what he'd seen had blown his mind. He'd held, in his very own hand, ten thousand dollars. A hundred hundred-dollar bills. In one single packet. And that was just the top of the pile. Money that obviously wasn't his father's, because Len had no money. Looked like cash you were holding there, Jeff said. Something about his tone, lower and insinuating, had changed. He sounded more aggressive. A shadow obscured his face. Rick couldn't see his eyes. Rick tried to give a dismissive chuckle, but his mouth was dry and it came out hah, more scornful than he intended. I wish. He clambered out of the opening in the wall, forcing Jeff to back up out of the way. Bunch of old register receipts is what it is. Well, let's drag it out here into the sunlight. Another time. Rick sounded weary and bored. He glanced at his watch. I'm going to need to get going. Well, now, hold on a sec do we have a deal? In principle, yeah. But we've got to talk about what kind of work you'll be doing, how long it's going to take, all that. Well, sure. I'm not thinking a gut renovation, just so you know. Rick put a hand on Jeff's shoulder, on the coarse cotton duck of his barn coat, guiding him out of the room and toward the stairs. Minimal destruction. Repairs and improvements, mostly. Second and third floors. Paper over the cracks. I don't know as I agree about that, Rick. There's rotten wood all down through the middle of the house. Serious water damage. Probably from a worn pipe bootwaters been leaking into the ceiling for years. Or maybe it's from stopped-up gutters or leaking chimney flashing. Rains been seeping down into the house for years, making wet spots. Causing wood rot and mold. Gonna have to cut out the rotten wood and plaster in some parts. Not everywhere. Just some parts. Rick groaned. You serious? I'll take you through and show you. Rick shook his head. I believe you. But I'm gonna want you to draw up a plan. Put it down on paper so there's no misunderstanding. Sure, sure. How soon could you do it? I could get started on it tonight. Like I said, it's slow, this time of year. Sounds good, Rick said. *** As soon as he'd gotten Jeff out of the house, Rick rummaged in the kitchen drawers and found a

flashlight. He clicked it on but its batteries were dead. He found a D cell battery nestled among an assortment of stray Ziploc sandwich bags and swapped it for one of the old ones, and that provided enough juice to generate a feeble light. He went back upstairs to his fathers study. Its window looked out onto the Hollenbecks yard, which meant that Jeff could see into the room. But pulling the venetian blinds closed would cast the study into darkness, and the overhead light was burned out here, too. It also would look strange for him to pull the blinds, as if he were trying to hide something from Jeff. He left them open and returned to the crawl space. It still smelled of squirrel urine, but now he barely minded. He directed the sputtering beam of watery light at the tarp-covered pile. He yanked at the tarp, hard, and popped some more of the staples. He pulled the flap back and shone the light to see what was there. It was a neat square stack about a foot and a half tall and maybe two or three feet per side. It gave off a musty odor. From what he could discern, by directing the failing light back and forth over the pile and lifting random packets, it was all banknotes. Top to bottom. He was able to count 398 packets before the flashlight died. Most of them 290 packets were hundred-dollar bills; the rest 108 packets were fifties. He found a dog-eared gas station receipt in his wallet and scrawled a calculation on it. The total was 3,440,000 dollars. More than 3.4 million dollars. He felt a strange vertiginous sensation, as if he were plummeting headfirst into space. His head was spinning, swimming. He picked up one of the packets of hundreds and rifled through it with his thumb. He inhaled its musk. He could smell mildew and tobacco, solvent and ink and sweat. Some of the banknotes looked as if theyd never been circulated: They were crisp and unmarked. Others were dog-eared and creased. He glanced at the off-center engraving of Ben Franklin on the front of the banknote, with shoulder-length hair and a constipated expression. It certainly looked legit, not counterfeit, though he was no expert. How long had this pile been walled up here? The bills looked new uncirculated, anyway but theyd probably been inside the wall for a few decades. He only knew he couldnt leave them here. He grabbed a handful of plastic supermarket shopping bags from the broom closet a couple from Star Market and a couple from Whole Foods, from the old days, when they used to give out plastic bags. The packets of cash fit into six bags, but when he tried to lift one of them, the bag broke and the cash tumbled to the floor. He doubled each bag, then hauled them downstairs two at a time, handling the flimsy bags gingerly. When hed gathered them at the foot of the staircase, he tested carrying two at a time. Not possible; the weight he could manage, but the cash was too bulky. He didnt want to risk a bag failure between the house and the car, cash spilling across the driveway. Especially if Jeff were watching from next door. Why the hell wasnt he off on a job somewhere, renovating a Watertown condo or building a spec house? What did he do all day when he didnt have a job scheduled? The trunk of his old red BMW 3 Series the red had been a mistake, one of a long line of mistakes; cops really did go after red cars more often was stuffed with crap. A gym bag, a pile of magazines hed optimistically planned to read on the elliptical trainer, a set of jumper cables. He rearranged the junk, jamming old Entertainment Weeklys and Back Bays as far back as possible, until there was room for the six bagsful of cash. Then, after looking around outside to make sure Jeff or anyone else wasnt for some reason watching, he trundled the bags carefully to the trunk. Then he got into the drivers seat and sat there, thinking for a moment of where he might take 3.4 million dollars for safekeeping. The obvious place, of course, was a bank. A safe-deposit box. He didnt have one; all he knew about safe-deposit boxes was what hed seen in the movies and on TV. He seemed to remember a standard size of a few feet long by maybe eight or ten inches wide. Did they come in larger sizes? He assumed you could request a larger one if you wanted. His bank had a branch office in Harvard Square. He started the car and maneuvered down Clayton Street to Huron Ave, and then over to Garden Street toward the square. Hed begun to think more clearly now, and he started having second thoughts about carting six grocery bags of cash into the Bank of America. Was it even legal to store cash in a safe-deposit box? He pulled the car over to the shoulder in a no-stopping zone and switched on his blinkers. He loaded the Safari browser on his phone and searched. The answer wasnt clear. Banks had to notify the IRS of any deposits of more than ten thousand dollars. But that referred to deposits into bank accounts. Not stashing away packets of cash. Still, in this post-9/11 age, banks probably had to pay close attention to the movements of large quantities of cash, right? In case it was connected to ill-gotten gains? Maybe the US government could even confiscate your cash if it thought you were engaged in criminal activity. He wasnt sure, but it wouldnt have surprised him if that were true. If he wandered into the Harvard Square branch of the Bank of America toting six shopping bags full of cash, mostly hundreds, that was as good as blowing a trumpet and announcing to the world that he was a coke dealer. He would be observed, no question about it how could any banker who wasnt too busy texting or checking her Facebook page fail to observe him carrying in a load of cash? Then the teller would summon the assistant manager,

and...It no longer seemed like such a good idea to bring all this cash into a bank. In fact, it didn't seem like such a good idea to carry his cash anywhere in those crappy supermarket bags. Not just because of the risk of the bags splitting, but also because anyone could see their contents. That was just asking to get mugged. He turned off his blinkers and pulled back into traffic and headed back the way he'd come, then over to Mass Ave, where he found a 7-Eleven. Parking the car in a space he could monitor from inside the store, he quickly bought a box of Glad trash bags (ForceFlex, black, extra strong) and returned to the car. Standing at the trunk, about to pop the lid, he suddenly became aware of how exposed he was. Any passerby, anyone peering out of a car in the honking, snarling traffic, would be able to see into the trunk. All that cash that insane, scarcely believable quantity of cash wasn't something you wanted to put on display. He pulled the car out of the space, turned it around, front end out. Safer this way. Now maybe someone inside the store could see, if he happened to be looking. But there seemed to be no one in the 7-Eleven except the cashier. He pressed the button on the remote and the trunk opened, and there they were, six bulky overstuffed shopping bags, the diaphanous plastic strained to the breaking point. He glanced over his shoulder for the third time, reassured no one was watching, and set to work pulling a big opaque black trash bag over each smaller one, jammed with legal tender. Then he slammed the trunk closed. He looked around again, just to make sure no one had seen anything, and then he glimpsed a truck lumbering by with COSMOS SELF STORAGE painted on its side, and he had an idea.***Cosmos Self Storage was a tall boxy cinder block building on a short block of matching cinder block buildings off Fresh Pond rotary, a faceless row of automotive glass companies and plumbing supply firms. It looked freshly painted, bright yellow, like a Crayola box. He parked right in front and locked the BMW when he entered. Inside it was cavernous, warehouselike. The storage units were rows upon rows of converted industrial pallet racks. Sitting at a desk behind a window was a young guy with big eyelet piercings in each earlobe. He answered Rick's questions in a tone that made it clear he'd rather be doing anything other than sitting in a box in a self-storage facility. He slid a clipboard through the slot. Ten minutes later, Rick had rented the smallest storage unit available. It was located on an upper level, like all the smallest units, reachable only by means of a rolling steel ladder. Motion-sensor lights came on as he went down the aisle looking for the locker. He found number 322 and pulled the ladder over to it, climbed to the top platform, and tried his key. The lock came open, but it took him a while to figure out how to open the roll-up steel door. Calm down, man, he told himself. He took a deep breath, then surveyed the space. The unit was maybe four feet wide by five feet high by six feet deep. More than enough space. Its interior was clean and dry. It would do just fine. An anonymous locker in a building where no one seemed to be paying much attention to anyone. He rolled a dolly out to the parking lot and unloaded the trunk. Ten minutes later he'd moved all six black trash bags into the storage unit. Even though there didn't seem to be anyone else loading or retrieving stuff, no one here but the guy with the big holes in his earlobes, Rick still was careful not to open the bags until he was crouched down inside the unit. Not that he needed to. He just wanted to see if the money was still there, if it was still real. He resisted the urge to count it again. Looking around the coast was clear he reached into one of the bags and pulled out a few packets and slid them into the inside zippered pocket of his Mountain Hardwear down jacket. Then he grabbed more packets, stuffing one into each of the four pockets. His ski parka was now worth a hundred thousand dollars. A little spending money. When he was finished, he rolled down the steel door and locked the Master Lock and glanced around, his heart pounding, sweat droplets breaking out on his forehead. He tugged at the lock a few times to make sure it was secure. There was probably only one person who would know how the hell all that cash ended up in the house on Clayton Street, walled up in the crawl space. How it got there and what it was doing there. Only one person. And that guy Rick's dad couldn't speak. 4

The whiteboard sign mounted outside Leonard Hoffmann's room said, in big flowery purple letters: A sign like that hung outside every resident's room at the Alfred Becker Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. It was meant to remind the nursing staff that their charges were real people with real families and lives, give them something to chat about. All the nurses and health care aides acted as if they liked Len a lot, probably because that was part of their job, to make visiting family members think that each Dad or Grandma was their very favorite. Which had a certain piquancy to it. Because if Leonard Hoffman did have the power of speech, they'd all love him for real. He'd had what people called an outsize personality. He was endearing, funny, corny. He loved women, flirted with them in a way that was flattering, that didn't seem at all icky, especially coming from an older guy. Women were always girls to him. They were honey and sweetheart and doll. If a massive stroke hadn't robbed him of his ability to wheedle and charm, he'd have the nurses glowing around him, wagging their index fingers, mock chiding. He could never resist a pun or a groaner. Leonard, in full command of his

speech, would have asked the squat dark-haired nurse Carolyn, with a wink, You sure youre not Greek?

Cause you look like a goddess to me! He would have told the sloe-eyed nurse Jewel, the Saint Lucian beauty, You must be JamaicanJamaican me crazy!And they would have loved it.Hed been something of a ladys man, in his day. He was always a flamboyant dresser, favoring bold striped shirts and double-breasted pinstriped suits like Al Capone might have worn and bright ties with matching pocket squares.Now he wore drawstring pants and a pajama top.But life wasnt like To Kill a Mockingbird. Lenny wasnt exactly Atticus

Finch, and Rick wasnt Scout. There was nothing soft-focus about their relationship. It was tense, distant, frustrating.You havent touched your lunch, Rick said.The meat loaf was a revolting beige, the peas a hideous electric green. Len, pre-stroke, would have patted his food with his fingertips in response and said, There, Im touching it.But Len now just looked at Rick balefully. His expression rarely changed. He had a penetrating, almost horrified stare, as if hed just glimpsed something blood-curdling. Rick visited his father almost every

Sunday, had done so as often as possible since the stroke, but he still couldnt get used to his fathers harrowed expression.Actually, he said, I dont know how they expect you to eat that shit. But theyre not going to let me give you any ice cream if you dont eat your meat loaf.His father turned his head toward the window and watched the Brookline traffic, a gob of spittle on the left side of his mouth. Rick took the napkin from his lunch tray and daubed the spit away.It had been a bumpy ride since Lens long-suffering, loyal secretary, Joan, had discovered him sprawled out on the floor in his office after lunch one day eighteen years ago. An ambulance had rushed him to Mass General, where they determined hed had what they called a left-side blowout. His left internal carotid artery, stiffened and gummed up from seven decades of steaks and ice cream, had burst, cutting off blood flow to most of the left hemisphere of his brain. He had a huge lesion in the frontal, temporal, and parietal lobes.They put him on a ventilator, explained that he was likely now a global aphasicmeaning he couldnt speak, probably couldnt read or write, and they didnt know how much he understood of what was said to him. Rick figured his father would be a vegetable. Wendy, being younger, deferred to her brother on all decisions.After a week, Leonard was shunted to a rehab facility, where he seemed to make progress for a while. An occupational therapist had taught him to walk again, which he did now in a frantic, staggering way, swinging his stiff right leg around in a circle. Most of the time he used a wheelchair. His right arm didnt work anymore. The right side of his face drooped. A speech pathologist, a large black woman named Jocelyn, tried in vain to get him to communicate. It didnt look good.Then one day, Jocelyn grabbed Rick in the hall outside his fathers room and said, He understands. I know he does.She pulled him into the room and demonstrated by putting some objects on the table in front of Len. A key ring, her watch, her glasses. Leonard, would you please look at the watch? she said.Len moved his eyes to the right and stared, unmistakably, at her pink Fossil.There was, Rick thought sadly, someone inside there.But apart from that one parlor trick, Len seemed to make no progress, and a month later he was moved to the nursing home to sit in a wheelchair all day in front of the TV. Rick still had no idea how much his father understood when you talked to him.He was unshaven this morning, or maybe just poorly shaven, clumps of gray beard scattered here and there like tumbleweed on his chin and his sunken cheeks. His fingernails were long and ridged and yellow, badly in need of clipping.Hey, Dad, Im having some work done to the house.Len turned and looked in his direction. His expression was hostile, disdainful, the way he constantly looked these days.Talking to his father felt like talking to himself, except that Rick kept some topicsHolly and all that, the flaming wreck of his careercarefully off-limits.You remember Jeff Hollenbeck next door? Hes a contractor now, and hes going to give me a good price.Len stared, blinked a few times.Remember I said were going to sell the old place, now that no ones living there anymore? He sidestepped the fact that he was sleeping on Lens couch. That was too depressing to talk about; Len didnt need to know.So I wanted to ask you something. He watched Lens eyes. I found something inside... inside the house. He waited a beat, glanced back at the door, then back at his father. Inside the walls. Next to your study.I thought it was Rick! a loud female voice exclaimed. Rick turned, saw the aide he liked the most out of all of them, a heavyset blonde named Brenda, swoop into the room. She was probably fifty and wore her thick glossy hair in a pageboy. She wore baby-blue scrubs and had rhinestone-speckled harlequin glasses, which seemed to be an artsy affectation. The rhinestones glittered in the light from the ceiling. She smiled her big gummy smile. Wait, its not Sunday, is it?Nah, decided to shake things up a bit.Phew, I guess Im not losing it after all.My dad treating you okay?Your dads a sweetie, she said. We all love Leonard. They both knew that Brenda had no idea what Len was like, whether he was a sweetie or an ogre. The man didnt talk, didnt even react. But Rick appreciated her saying it just the same.She glanced at her watch. Its almost time for Judge Judy, and I know he doesnt like to miss that.Dad and I are going to talk just a little more. His

father had never watched Judge Judy or any other court show, back when he was able to voice his opinion; he doubted Len liked it now. And if he did, he had no way of letting anybody know. Leonard, what about your lunch, honey? she said. Not hungry today? I don't think he's a big meat loaf fan. As Brenda began to leave, Rick asked, Do you have a pair of nail clippers? Of course. She swiveled to one side and plucked a pair of clippers out of a dresser drawer, handing them to Rick with a flourish. Let's see your hands, Dad. He took hold of Len's left hand and began to clip his father's thick, grooved nails, and Brenda drifted out of the room. Rick clipped slowly. His father held out each hand, one at a time. It felt oddly intimate. It was like taking care of a small child. He thought about how everything sooner or later comes back around. He realized with a jolt that his eyes had teared up. He stopped clipping. Jeff and I were doing some exploratory demolition, he said quietly, and we opened up the wall next to your study, at the back of the closet. Len's mouth was frozen in that haughty expression, but his watery eyes seemed anxious. They followed Rick's. There was money back there. A huge amount of money. Millions of dollars. How did it get there, any idea? Rick swallowed, waited. Is it yours? Len's restless eyes came to a stop, looked directly into Rick's. Is it? The old man's eyes bore into his. Then he began to blink rapidly, three or four times. Nervously, maybe. Are you signaling me, Dad? His father was able, at times, to blink: once for yes, twice for no. But not always, and not consistently. Did he sometimes lose the ability; did it wax and wane? Or did he grow weary of trying? Rick had no idea. The blinks stopped, then resumed after a few seconds. How about you blink once for yes and twice for no. This cash I found is it yours? Once for yes, twice for no. Len looked straight, unblinking, into Rick's eyes, held his gaze for a few seconds. Then blinked twice. No, Rick said. It's not yours, correct? Nothing. Then one blink. Yes. Okay, were getting somewhere. Rick's heart rate began to accelerate. Do you do you know whose cash it is? Nothing. Five, ten seconds went by, and Len didn't blink. He looked away, then blinked a few times, but it didn't seem to mean anything. Dad, who does it belong to? Rick asked, before remembering he couldn't ask a question that didn't have a yes or no answer. Let me try again: Do you know whose cash it is? Now Len blinked rapidly, not just once or twice. Many times, too many to count. It was hard to tell, but he looked frightened. He had a hundred thousand dollars in cash burning holes in his down parka and no room on his credit cards. His Citicard MasterCard, his Bank of America Visa, his Capital One MasterCard all maxed out, all as worthless as Confederate dollars. He was carrying around an insane amount of cash, with many times that sitting in a storage locker, in a world where fewer and fewer people took cash anymore. Who used cash in any serious quantity? Drug kingpins and Mafiosi. Criminals. The infamous Boston mobster Whitey Bulger, hiding out in Santa Monica, paid his rent in cash, Rick had read somewhere. Sure, you tip bellhops and parking valets with real money. But buy an airplane ticket with cash and you'll have Homeland Security crawling up your ass. He drove to Harvard Square and circled around for ten minutes, looking for a parking spot, before he realized he could now afford to park in that damned overpriced parking lot on Church Street. At the Bank of America branch next to the Harvard Coop, he deposited nine thousand dollars into his checking account. Then he opened an account at Cambridge Trust bank, across the street, and deposited nine thousand five hundred dollars into it. As long as he kept deposits under ten thousand bucks, he'd be fine. He saw a sign for Citizens Bank on JFK Street and stopped in there. Now he had 28,500 dollars in three separate bank accounts, with temporary checkbooks to go with them. It seemed like a small fortune. By the late afternoon he was back at the house. The side door off the driveway, which opened into the kitchen, was unlocked. Strange. He didn't remember leaving it unlocked. He wondered if Jeff had. When he opened it, he noticed a file folder that had been shoved under the door. He picked it up and flipped it open. It contained a stapled thatch of papers on Hollenbeck Construction letterhead. It was a construction proposal, clearly done on some template, listing the scope of work. Demolition and renovation, the dates when work was to begin (tomorrow!) and completed (the end of March). A lot of legal gobbledeygook. And a standard payment schedule, including deposit. The cost was reasonable, but there was no mention of any sort of barter deal. Nothing about his doing the work and getting paid from the proceeds of selling the house. All payments to be made in cash, starting with Deposit: \$8,000. If there was any doubt about whether Jeff had seen the cash, there wasn't any longer. He hesitated, thought about arguing with Jeff, then decided it wasn't worth it. He pulled out a pen and signed each copy of the agreement. Then he stepped outside. Jeff's house had been unimproved for decades, except for an exterior paint job not that long ago. The side door to his house also opened into the kitchen. Jeff's kitchen, with its sheer curtains on the door and yellow wallpaper patterned with miscellaneous fruits, its Kenmore range and refrigerator, looked perfectly preserved, identical to the way it had looked when Rick and Jeff were kids. Rick slipped the copies of the contract under the door, along with a check written on one of the new bank

accounts. He thought about knocking on the window and asking about the change, the money terms they hadn't agreed to, but decided it was better not to get into it. Jeff had seen something; he'd seen the money, that was obvious. But it was only a glimpse. He had no idea how much there was. Rick was already zipping up his sleeping bag and arranging himself uncomfortably on the couch when the realization hit him, like a clap of thunder: He didn't have to stay here anymore. He didn't have to live like the impoverished, scraping person he used to be. He could stay in a hotel. He could stay in the Four Seasons if he wanted to. Tomorrow he'd find someplace decent to stay. Tonight he'd relish his last night in the sleeping bag on the leather sofa in his father's office. Now that he had a choice whether to sleep here or not, he could think of it as slumming, as camping out. He got back off the couch and walked through the rooms on the ground floor. It smelled faintly of natural gas down here, not squirrel piss but not alarmingly so. An odor put out by the gas stove, maybe a minuscule leak from the pilot. Behind the stove, the wallpaper was scorched where there'd been a cooking accident years ago. A grease fire from when Wendy had experimented with deep-frying a turkey. He found the place outside the kitchen pantry where his and his sister's growth was recorded in horizontal lines made with pen or marker. They'd stopped measuring by the time he and Wendy got to high school. Maybe he and his sister had refused to submit to the indignity any longer, the ruler on top of the head, all that. He didn't remember anymore. He had no nostalgia for the house but couldn't help feeling a slight pang when he saw those lines. RICKMARCH 2 8550" ... RICKNOV. 14 9264" ... Between the ages of seven and fourteen he'd had his major growth spurt. The marker on the pantry wall showed it. Soon that would be gone, the wallpaper stripped off, the walls repainted, along with the scorch mark in the kitchen and the divots and dings and scrapes of a house where two kids had grown up. He went back upstairs, turning off the lights behind him. He cranked up the space heater and settled down to sleep on the leather sofa. In the middle of the night a creaking noise woke him up. He opened his eyes. The only light in the room came from the streetlight on Clayton Street. The noise had sounded as if it came from inside the house, maybe down one flight. Someone on the stairs? He waited, listened. The house was old and had always made odd, random settling sounds throughout the day, like an old person sitting down stiffly in an armchair. You noticed it more at night when everything was quiet. That was probably all it was. He turned over, closed his eyes. The leather sofa squeaked as he moved. He heard it again, and this time it definitely seemed to be coming from the stairs. The sound of a footstep, a heavy tread taken carefully. No mistaking it. He sat up, felt his heart start clattering, slipped out of the sleeping bag, and then got to his feet softly, quietly. He listened. Another creak. It sounded as if it was coming from right outside the closed door to his father's study. He slid barefoot along the floor, carefully the floor in here creaked just as much as the stairs until he reached his father's desk. He looked for a weapon, or something that could function as a weapon. There was his father's ancient computer, an IBM, under a plastic dust cover. He slid open the center drawer, looking for something, a pair of scissors, a paper cutter, a stapler, something heavy or sharp. Nothing just some old pencils. A sharp pencil could be used as a weapon, but you had to get close up, if it came to it, and that he preferred not to do. Revue de presse Prasié for The Fixer [I]f you're in the mood for tense, witty angst about closed-down career opportunities and dirty money cleansed by family redemption, The Fixer is the way to go. --The New York Times Book "Joseph Finder takes a familiar story and gives it a unique spin in his latest page-turner, "The Fixer."" Associated Press Joseph Finder has written a tense, fast-moving thriller bearing the warning that there may be things you don't know and should know about your family. Washington Times Adroitly told with a riveting cast of three-dimensional characters and enlightening reveals aplenty, Finder's latest standalone should be on everyone's summer reading list. The Strand Magazine Joe Finder moves from action to psychological thriller in his scintillating, Boston-based new novel There's a wondrous noir aspect to "The Fixer" that also recalls Dennis Lehane at his best. But Finder, thankfully, isn't nearly as dark or bleak, and remains a storytelling maestro whose latest hits all the right notes. The Providence Journal "Finder can make reading about someone walking across a room excruciatingly suspenseful This is a thriller that is as much about redemption as it is about escape. A remarkable exciting read. Booklist, starred review The Fixer is [Finder's] most personal book.... a lively page-turner with smart, tight dialogue. --The Houston Chronicle So many surprises, this book is a definite page-turner and a whole lot of fun to read. A thriller that will keep you up late to find out what will happen next. 5 Stars for this one! Suspense Magazine The Fixer is a page turner with deep emotional resonance as it explores the mysteries between all fathers and sons. CT News Engaging, easy and quick reading, along with a practiced blending of action and dialogue. San Antonio Express News Praise for Joseph Finder and Suspicion: A master of the modern thriller. The Boston Globe "A can't-miss thriller... Suspicion is arguably Joseph Finder's best novel to date, and he's one of the best thriller

writers in the business. He's a master at making the reader feel every emotion, jump at every shock and squirm with every twist that Danny must overcome. Associated Press "[Suspicion] sets the suspense level to a pitch that will keep even the coolest readers sweating." The Boston Globe Lock yourself in a room with Suspicion and don't come out until you've read every last word. Completely original, emotionally satisfying, expertly twisted, and genuinely entertaining. Suspicion is the thriller to read this year. I loved it. Lisa

Gardner Joseph Finder has always been out there on the front edge of things. With Suspicion he does it again, giving us a novel that is as timely and cognizant of contemporary society as it is a startling seat of the pants thrill ride. In Finder's hands one man's fight for survival becomes an everyman's journey to the light.

Michael Connelly Suspicion is Joseph Finder at the absolute top of his form: a heart-pounding, sweaty-palmed, utterly terrifying ride. Tess Gerritsen "Is this Joseph Finder's best thriller yet? It gets my vote. So many twists and shocks. It kept me reading all night." R.L. Stine "Finder fans as well as devotees of action-packed suspense have a great read ahead. The taut pacing, staccato chapters, and ingenious plot, especially Finder's characteristically creative use of digital surveillance techniques, guarantees a literary thrill ride."

Library Journal, starred review "There are many authors who take a reader 'slowly into that good night.' However, the real genius knows how to create the ultimate lead-in. They are the wordsmiths who can, in one page or one paragraph, grab the reader's attention and never let go...A true genius wordsmith, this is one author who has created solid suspense gold." Suspense Magazine "[A] lean, crisp thriller a zipping Jaguar of a ride...The plot turns three major ones as shocking as they are believable...his spare, laminated style is several cuts above that of most thrillers." Publishers Weekly "Thriller veteran Finder merits applause for this streamlined story made believable by Danny's everyman character; readers will find his palpable guilt and fear instantly relatable." -Booklist "Full of intriguing characters, squirmy, fast-paced action and a nifty, convoluted plot, Finder's latest is a real keeper. It's likely to keep you flipping pages until you reach the final, unexpected conclusion." -Lansing State Journal From the Hardcover edition.