



# Pattern Assessment

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I AM AN ANALYST by training. I understand how to collect pieces of information, break them into smaller bits, link them together. My job has always been to accept the facts I encounter.

Toward the beginning of summer, I began to have trouble sleeping. I grew tense, became easily startled. This agitation only dissipates when I am with my son, Jacob. He is eleven weeks old and lives with his mother in Queens. The first time I saw him was the day after she gave birth. She sat on her hospital bed, our boy in her arms. When I bent down, he opened his gummy eyes, as if he sensed my presence. I wasn't sure what to make of him then. A bundle of skin, as fragile as anything I've seen. Now he has wispy black hair, and when I am near his tiny face and body I feel almost as if I am stitched into the earth, an integral part of this world.

Then, when I leave him, the unease returns. Looking back over my life here in New York, a life I do not love, I see its origin. A clear summer day, sunlight glinting off the Midtown skyscrapers. I sat in my office on the thirty-third floor, drafting a threat profile for an investment target. At five minutes to the hour, every hour, I try to take a break—stretch, visit the coffee room, check my phone. Otherwise this body, now forty years old, complains. That afternoon, an ex-colleague forwarded me an article. A lawsuit had been filed against my old bosses at Massey Walls and Associates. In the article, they were described as the contractors who designed the Agency's enhanced interrogation program, with scare quotes around "enhanced interrogation." The suit had three plaintiffs: two

former detainees and the relative of a third who died in custody. I knew the two former detainees. Also the dead man. Knew them well, or as well as someone in my position gets to know someone like them.

My first reaction was a selfish one: I skimmed the article for my name. There was no mention of any Daniel Gonzales. Then I located the court document. While I was a CIA officer I had sovereign immunity. But that protection didn't extend to after I left the Agency and started working for Massey and Walls' outfit. A decision I made because, like everyone else, I wanted in on the post 9/11 payday.

I was also thinking of my son. He would learn about his father when he was older, and I didn't want him reading a biased account of my work.

The article was extremely short. It sketched the program and described Massey and Walls' background in the Air Force and as psychologists. The court document—the civil complaint—was a hundred pages. For the rest of the day, I did little else but read it. I had to take a break when Bruce, who heads the Global Security Team and who's also ex-CIA, asked me to attend a meeting about investment opportunities in Africa.

I recognized many of the incidents described in the complaint. There were two clear mentions of me, neither by name: I was simply “an interrogator.” According to the first, I visited Hamza Ben Daoud at the Salt Pit, an Agency-run prison in Afghanistan. Hamza, a Libyan, had developed an eating disorder during his imprisonment, and he was always asking for American junk food. He was one of the first detainees I questioned, and I pitied him, with his scruffy salt-and-pepper beard and shrinking paunch. One day I noticed a pudgy soldier scarfing down cheesy fries at the mess hall, and I thought of Hamza, though I had not seen him since the end of his interrogation a month before. That evening I brought him dates and a candy bar. An Almond Joy. Detainees at the Salt Pit were kept in darkness and isolation, and he cowered when the light flickered on. It took him a moment to recognize me. He was on the concrete floor, one wrist chained to a bar projecting from the wall. I did not want to cover my nose, but the stench from the toilet bucket and perhaps from Hamza himself was overpowering. I gave him the dates and the candy bar, and he began begging me to help him. He spoke English well, and he said he had answered my questions. I was sorry he was not free, and said so. According to the complaint, I asked his forgiveness for torturing him. They got that wrong.

I never apologized for interrogating him, or for any torture. The document also says I was his only visitor at the Salt Pit, though he was imprisoned there for more than a year. That may well be true. Afterward he was sent to Bagram Air Force Base, where he was held another year. There they confined him in a series of cages, with bright lights on at all hours. Then in 2005 they turned him over to the regime in Libya, where he remained incarcerated until the uprising six years later.

These days, people want you to confess, to say that you're sorry. I always believed we had nothing to apologize for. We were protecting our country, we believed certain things were necessary and we acted accordingly. But what if we went too far? In the news article, a so-called human rights expert said, "What happened in the wake of 2001 fits into a pattern of abuse." Well, if there is a pattern of abuse, then I am part of it.

After that day, I began reading about torture. At the Agency, and while a contractor at Massey Walls and Associates, we talked about "enhanced interrogation." Like everyone else, I knew the term was a euphemism. When you see a man stuffed in a three-by-three foot box, or kept in a room so cold his body turns blue, it's clear that pain is an essential element in what is happening.

Another phrase I heard, though less frequently, was "learned helplessness." Massey and Walls got this concept, I read, from the psychologist Martin Seligman. In the 1960s, Seligman found that prolonged mental and physical suffering created total submissiveness, or "learned helplessness," in dogs. Massey and Walls wanted to produce this state in detainees. Although Walls attended a meeting of intelligence officers at Seligman's house in 2001, Seligman said he was unaware of their work. When he discovered how his research had been used, he was reportedly "grieved and horrified."

I spend much of my free time reading about these things. Then, at least twice a week, I visit my son. Jacob has his mother's nose and my eyes, although she says it's too soon to tell: his bridge may become more prominent, and the eyes of babies often change from blue to brown. I don't care how his nose looks, or which color his eyes are, but I enjoy tracing resemblances. He is a beautiful boy, and I hope he will be strong.

He is, also, surprisingly quiet. Not just quiet. As if he's in his own universe. He rarely cries or makes any noise during my visits, and his expression suggests he's half asleep even when he is not. Initially I thought this was normal. Then

I remembered the fits of other newborns. I decided it was a quirk of Jacob's personality. A calm baby, simple as that. But still it troubled me.

A week after reading about the lawsuit, I broached the matter of Jacob's behavior with his mother, Maya. Although we were already separated, she conceived Jacob after we met for a drink near my house in Alexandria. An occupational therapist, she was attending a conference in D.C. Months later, she called to say she was pregnant. I was surprised she wanted to keep the baby. She comes from a Catholic family, so maybe that influenced her thinking. Anyway, the prospect of becoming a father filled me, unexpectedly, with excitement. I got a job in New York at JPMorgan Chase, leaving a position in D.C. at a political risk analysis firm (a position to which I was better suited), so I could be part of his life.

I asked her if Jacob might be sick. She stopped washing the dishes, turned and gazed at me. We were in her apartment. Scrubs hid her figure, and her long black hair disappeared into a bun. Although she's an attractive woman, she did not look her best. Traces of small, post-pregnancy pimples dotted her cheeks, and a puffiness around her eyes showed me she was exhausted. She said, "Why do you ask that?"

I was on the living room couch. Jacob lay in his bassinet beside me, staring at the ceiling for no reason. I had carefully rehearsed the words in my mind, but "sick" seemed improper after being uttered aloud. "Maybe he's not getting enough to eat?"

Right then keys jangled at the door. Maya's mother entered, saying she had forgotten her phone. She cares for Jacob while Maya is at work. An immigrant from the Philippines, she retired recently from her job as a secretary after raising Maya and her sister and building a life here. While Maya and I were married, she smiled whenever I spoke and plied me with lumpia, humba, dried mango. Now she does her best to ignore me.

Maya repeated her question, resting a hand on her hip.

"Who's sick?" her mother asked, collecting her phone from the kitchen table.

"He thinks Jacob might be," Maya said. Maya's mother glared at me.

"Jacob seems very quiet. Isn't that strange?"

"She's lucky her baby's quiet." Maya's mother refers to Jacob as *her baby*. "I've raised two children. The baby is healthy. Fine." She waited for anyone to disagree, chin thrust out, eyes wide. When no one did, she kissed Jacob and her

daughter on the cheek and hurried out.

“He was napping earlier,” Maya said softly, searching out my eyes in the way she has, as if she were able to examine my motives. “That’s why he’s quiet.”

I wondered if she suspected something was amiss, but I decided to drop the matter. Though I am Jacob’s father, I am also the outsider.

I asked to stay longer than usual, and Maya said I could watch Jacob while she showered. I heard the bathroom door close and the faucet start, the pipes thumping. While alone with my son, I made silly as well as frightening faces, like I’ve seen other parents do. Jacob hardly reacted. I also spoke to him. I told him he would become an intelligent, caring, upright man. At times he seemed to react, but at others his eyes wandered to the ceiling or a spot on his bassinet. Eventually he fell asleep.

On the F train that night, en route to Jersey City, I noticed a slender man standing in profile across the car. For a moment I experienced a flicker of recognition: I was looking at Ahmed Yusuf Ali, conjured into New York from Somalia. Then he shifted and I saw his head was too round, his eyes too small. In fact, he looked nothing like him.

When I returned to my apartment, I opened the complaint on my laptop and reread the account of Ahmed’s detention. After being abducted in Mogadishu, he endured a variety of “highly coercive methods” during his five years of imprisonment. These included starvation, mock executions and stress positions, such as being hung naked from the arms. At one point, he had an object forced into his anus. Probably a tube for rectal feeding. When Ahmed was finally released, he was given a document certifying he posed no threat to the U.S. Unable to find his wife in his homeland, he remarried. He has lost his sense of taste and smell, according to the complaint. He suffers from chronic pain, nightmares, flashbacks, dizziness, confusion. Often he feels like he is not himself.

An apt choice of words: *not himself*. Massey and Walls wanted, I think, to make the prisoners *not themselves*. That way they would confess everything.

I live in a high-rise in Jersey City, blocks from the Hudson, in a unit on the twenty-ninth floor that overlooks the water. After re-reading the section on Ahmed, I moved to the living room windows, which span the wall. The apartment manager described the view as superb. You can see the roofs clustered by the waterfront, then the broad ribbon of the river, then Manhattan itself. At

night the city emerges as an impressive matrix, but during the day I cannot say I find it beautiful. I grew up outside D.C., and I have always preferred the drowsy suburbs. When I moved I thought, mistakenly, that Jersey City would give me some distance from the city's tumult.

Standing there that night, the lights started to blur together, and I felt as if I were back in an interrogation cell. As a general rule, I was the talker—the rapport builder. I had no background in such things. Before 9/11, I worked as an analyst in the Agency's Counternarcotics Center, sifting through travel records and credit card purchases to track drug traffickers. Then, when the planes hit, they needed people, and it didn't matter if you lacked experience or the language skills. It turned out I had a knack for relating to detainees and earning a modicum of goodwill. I am patient, and I would ask about their families or their lives, then listen. But it didn't matter if you got them to answer your questions. There was always the moment when the knuckledraggers appeared.

At times, I admit, I ended up doing more than talking. One of those times was with Ahmed. Though the complaint describes this incident with only a few lines, I remember it, and Ahmed, well. He cooperated during our sessions, but another interrogator suspected him of being less than forthcoming. This interrogator insisted on being called his nickname, Spider. He was tall and imposing, with bulging eyes and a distant demeanor. A definite knuckledragger, he often slapped the detainees, darting out his hand before they could react. He would also seize their faces with his long fingers. After he received the go-ahead from Massey and Walls, he told me he needed my help, and we brought Ahmed to a room where three assistants were waiting. Ahmed was naked, and because his leg had been broken during his capture, he needed to hop down the hallway. Spider forced him onto the center of a plastic sheet, his cuffed hands over his head. Then he had us raise the corners to form a basin. Once everything was as he wanted, he dumped buckets of ice-cold water over him. Ahmed bellowed and convulsed as he became partly submerged in the freezing water. Soon Spider said his own hands were cold. He indicated we should exchange places. I declined but he insisted. "This is interrogation," he said, smiling. "This is how you obtain the truth." In the end, I dumped more water onto Ahmed. His cries reverberated in the small room like so many detonations, like explosions produced by his body and mind. After almost an hour, we stopped to question him, at which point it was clear he was willing to say anything, true or

false, to appease us. The cast around his broken leg had begun to disintegrate, as the complaint recounts. For the next session they furnished him with a new one, protecting it with a plastic bag.

Massey and Walls devised this and other techniques, supervising our work and occasionally participating. Sometimes a prisoner was hooded before being doused with water, which made them feel as if they were drowning. Another variation was the now infamous waterboarding, when a hooded detainee was strapped to an angled board, their head lower than their feet, while water was poured over their mouth and nose. Massey and Walls offered to instruct me in these methods. I declined. Another interrogator told me he had undergone waterboarding as part of his military training. He said it was like having your mouth and nose sealed by a wet hand. Or like breathing water. Your mind, he said, goes into an uncontrollable panic.

At my apartment that night, I eventually returned to my laptop and the complaint. There I came across a fact about Mohammad Zaman, the Afghani prisoner who died, and whose relative is one of the three plaintiffs: he was waterboarded eighty-three times during a single month. I knew relatively little about waterboarding. After some research, I found out its use dates back to the Spanish Inquisition. More recently, the Khmer Rouge relied on it to exact false confessions. Most surprising: during the military tribunals that followed World War II, the U.S. prosecuted it as a war crime. Japanese soldiers were convicted of torture for waterboarding. Some received lengthy prison sentences. Others were hanged.

The gray dawn, seeping through the uncurtained windows, roused me from the screen. I had spent the entire night reading. Though I lay on the couch to rest then, I managed only an hour before I had to leave for work. On my commute, I felt the juddering of the train deep in my bones.

That afternoon, Bruce said he wanted to show me something. He brought me to the Executive Conference Room. Bruce had hired me because of a mutual acquaintance—he used to work in the Agency’s Open Source Center—but the favor this connection had won me seemed to be fading.

He pointed to a glass case against a wall. Inside were two flintlock pistols, their metal dulled by age. According to the display signage, they were the weapons Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr had used in their duel two centuries before. JPMorgan Chase had acquired them. Why was Bruce showing me this?

He thought I was a history buff. He had seen me reading a book in the ground-floor cafe, and I'd told him it was about the Vietnam War. In fact, I'd been researching the torture of suspected communists in South Vietnam, an operation run by the Agency and local forces. The U.S. exported these interrogation methods to armies and police departments across Latin America and Asia.

Bruce contemplated the firearms. Then he scrutinized me. He wanted more of a response. I told him I did enjoy studying history. Actually, I had no interest in the pistols. They were tools used to settle a personal rivalry, nothing more. He moved on to the real reason for our chat.

"Lately you've seemed preoccupied. Out of it. *Elsewhere.*" He ran his hand over his shaved head, and his wedding band left a red streak against his cream-colored skin. Gradually this mark faded. "Something I should know about?"

I searched for an excuse. "My son," I murmured. "He's sick."

"Sorry to hear that," he said. "What about your latest assessment? It's overdue."

"I'll have it done today."

"Whatever's going on, I need you to deal with it. OK?" He strode to the windows on the other side of the room. Then he spun. "Another thing. I was going to attend CSC this week, but my wife is bugging me to take her to Maine. The conference is a waste of time. Still, we need someone there. Hit the big presentations, see what people are gabbing about. Can you do that?"

I told him I could. After returning to my desk and finishing my assessment, I checked the details for the Corporate Security Conference. I noticed a nest on the stonework of a nearby building. I waited, but no bird came.

Finally I opened the video I had transferred to a thumb drive. Early on, interrogations were recorded. Then, when news broke of the black sites, the counterterrorism director ordered the tapes minced. Before that, and soon after receiving my new assignment, I duplicated a recording to study the interrogation techniques. The tapes proved unhelpful, but I never destroyed my copy.

The video is almost two hours long. During the first half, a contractor questions a naked Mohammad Zaman. Mohammad refuses to cooperate, cursing and at one point throwing a toilet bucket at his questioner. During the second half, he undergoes waterboarding. At the end, he vomits into his hood and begins screaming. Not long after the video was recorded, he was left half naked

on the concrete floor during a cold night, with both hands chained above his head. In the morning he was dead of hypothermia.

I played the video at my desk, earbuds in. My muscles tensed. The recording was nauseating. That's why the director ordered the tapes destroyed. I recalled Walls huddled with the supervisor after Mohammad's death, their furious whispers. The video should be part of the record.

The ACLU was representing the plaintiffs. In a fit of high-mindedness, I dialed their office downtown. The phone rang once before I hung up. I didn't want to endanger myself. Especially not with Jacob around.

I restarted the video, paying attention to each detail, every facial expression and question. When Bruce stopped by to say he was leaving early, I hit pause. His gleaming face gave me a jolt, but the screen was hidden from view. "What are you so scared of?" he said, laughing. It occurred to me then that Bruce and I are more similar than I wanted to admit.

That night, while walking across the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge, the warm gusts coming off the East River blew me into the railing. Descending into Queens, I took the train to my ex-wife's apartment in Jackson Heights, though it was not one of my usual days for seeing Jacob and I did not call beforehand. I arrived after eight, later than I would have liked. At the door I told Maya, lamely, that I had been in the area. She wore loose-fitting pajamas, and her thick hair lay across her back. Her jaw had clenched. I wondered, as I had before, how much she knew about my work with the Agency. If Jacob found out, I would have to explain my actions. There was a long silence. Then she told me I could stay fifteen minutes.

Inside the only sources of illumination were the light over the kitchen sink and the TV, which was playing at a low volume. The dimness made the apartment seem like a cave. Maya sat on the couch. To her left, a mound of laundry—whether soiled or clean, I couldn't tell—overflowed from the lone upholstered chair.

Jacob rested on a cotton blanket spread over the Persian carpet. The TV cast a flickering light over him. I moved aside a stack of dirty dishes in the kitchen sink and washed my hands to avoid spreading germs. Then I joined Maya on the couch. Soon I was on the floor beside Jacob. For the first time that day, I felt a sense of rightness—of naturalness—in the world. Yet Jacob hardly stirred. I put his little fingers in my palms and whispered to him that he had grown. His

eyes skated over me, settling on the ceiling. When I glanced at the TV, I saw a man stalking another in a crowd. Maya watched me from the couch.

“Has Jacob been active today?” I asked, unsure how to phrase the question.

“He’s been like this.” Maya yawned. “He was asleep until you came.”

Maybe his waking on my arrival was a sign. I thought of the disorder in the apartment. Of Maya’s fatigue and Jacob’s lethargy. My chest constricted. This was not the life I wanted for my son.

During the train ride, I had considered what I might say. I rose and explained that, while we separated for sensible reasons, it would be better for Jacob if I were with him more often. I proposed getting back together for his sake. “I am worried about our son,” I explained.

Maya sat up slowly. “Jacob’s fine, Daniel. Is something else going on?”

Maybe she had a point, but I thought I knew what was best for him.

“I wanted a child. A child, not a husband.” She closed her eyes briefly. “You can come and see him.”

I argued with her, unsuccessfully. After five more minutes, she told me she wanted to go to bed. She asked me to leave. Before I rose, I kissed Jacob on the forehead.

The CSC was days later. I showed up at the Javits Center with a growing indifference to my work and a dread that my future would make me into a failed father. Then I saw John Walls listed as a speaker. The schedule described him as a former military psychologist and current executive of JW Solutions, a consulting firm that “trains at-risk personnel to avoid and, if necessary, survive hostile situations.” He was part of an afternoon panel titled “The New Frontier for Executive Protection.”

That morning, I wandered in and out of presentations and meandered through the expo hall, wanting and not wanting to spot Walls, or “Doc Walls” as we used to call him.

At 1 P.M., I found a seat in the designated room. Walls hunched forward at a covered table, his plume of white hair and crisp white goatee contrasting with a lustrous tan. Beside him sat the other speakers: a security officer for an insurance company and a principal in a risk management firm. Once the discussion began, Walls seemed the least knowledgeable, but he aggressively criticized statements he disagreed with. For some reason, I recalled him saying years ago, with relish, that he was a self-made man. He offered this information after I

mentioned my father had worked for the Agency.

He didn't spot me. The panel ended, and I waited as he chatted with another audience member. When he started toward the door, I approached. Spying me out of the corner of his eye, he faced me squarely, as if he were bracing for a tackle. "Danny boy! You don't look so well."

We updated each other about our lives, not that either of us cared. When he pressed me about my health, I told him I was sleeping poorly because of Jacob. Finally I said I wanted to talk in private. The room was empty by then, but I shut the door. I asked him about the lawsuit.

"Danny, you don't have to worry—you're not wrapped up in that."

I explained I wasn't worried for myself. He smiled as if he knew better. "Everything we did was authorized. The media's out to get us, that's all." He paused. "I warned against excesses."

"You and Massey designed the program."

"Yes. And maybe some people crossed a line."

There would always be this excuse, regardless of whether Massey and Walls approved the techniques. "And if they find some of the recordings?"

"What are you talking about? Those were destroyed."

I nodded.

"Look, we tried to stop at one point, and they told us to keep going." Anxiety surfaced in his face, unmistakable and frightening. "It was an emotional time."

Walls was asking for a show of solidarity. I nodded again. He boasted about his company before we separated. Outside it was raining, a downpour that continued through the night. The lawsuit was hopeless, according to Walls. But I wanted there to be some accounting. I also needed to be an example to my son. At the office I made a copy of the video and mailed it to the ACLU.

Clips showed up everywhere in the media, brutal and sickening. As I watched the coverage, it dawned on me that I'd sent the recording partly because I wasn't named in the lawsuit. My role in the program would, I felt reasonably sure, stay secret.

Not long afterward, Massey and Walls settled with the plaintiffs. The details were confidential, but I assume the government made a big payout. I'm not sure what role, if any, the video played. It's likely the settlement was already under negotiation.

A few days before that, a CNN reporter interviewed Hamza, the Libyan plaintiff, in his home. Through a translator, Hamza said he had not watched the video and did not know Mohammad. He expressed his hope that the lawsuit would prevent torture from happening in the future. He avoided looking at the camera. He seemed on the verge of collapsing. “Since then, nothing is the same,” he said. “I am no longer fully alive.”

As I listened to the commentary, I wondered how quickly Hamza and Mohammad and the others would be forgotten. I, too, would be part of this forgetting. Inevitably I would think about those times less and less.

I asked Maya again to get back together. It was the day after the settlement, and I’d arranged to bring takeout to her apartment. At first Maya got herself—but not me—a plate. Then she got me one, too. Jacob was awake in the bassinet. “I need to be a good father to him,” I said.

She chose her words with care: “After everything you’ve done, how can you keep asking that? I’m trying to be generous.” There was a silence. “You’re lucky I let you see him.”

*After everything you’ve done.* She was looking at me with undisguised repulsion. She knew about my role in the program, I realized. She’d always known. I’d been considering legal options to obtain partial custody of Jacob, but I decided then that taking such a path would likely harm him. I needed to accept a situation I’d helped create. I’m still trying to do this.

Before I left that day, I slipped my index finger in Jacob’s palm. He gripped it tightly, and I bent down to kiss his hand. I waited a few moments for him to look up, but when he finally did, his eyes passed over me, as if he were searching for someone else.