

NINA KIRIKI HOFFMAN

HAUNTED HUMANS

ONE

Dorothy Jean demain, presently known as Dorothy Jean Hand, sometimes called Dot by people who didn't know her and almost always D.J. by those who did, gripped the phone handset between her ear and shoulder. Her right hand held a pen poised over a carbonless message pad; her left hand sorted the Mental Healing Center's mail. The four office hours following Friday's lunch break stretched ahead, aggravated by dealing with the operator who had picked up when D.J. rang the answering service.

"Sandy, have you checked account 551 for me yet?" D.J. said as patiently as she could, breaking in on two minutes of inane chatter.

She listened to Sandy splutter through a message for Dr. Arlene Bollings, D.J.'s boss, managing to extract relevant information with great difficulty. She was just about to demand the phone number of the person leaving the message when Sandy broke in with, "Uh, but-- hey, Dot, there's a message here for you, too."

"Let's finish with the first one, please." D.J. could hear her voice tightening. She wanted to grab Sandy and shake the information out of her like salt. But she was in secretary mode right now, level, efficient, no matter what the circumstances. She hunched her shoulders, then took a calming breath.

"But the one for you is creepy." Sandy's voice was high, her words slow. D.J. wondered what she looked like; all she could tell was that Sandy chewed gum loudly and snappingly, and occasionally smoked; the small sucked intakes of breath were a giveaway.

"I still need the phone number on this one, Sandy." Sandy had purged vital information from the files without communicating it before. D.J. had learned the hard way to persist with her.

After three tries, Sandy managed to tell her the phone number. D.J. wrote, sighed, and said, "Is that it for this message?"

"Yeah, I guess. There's one from that psycho nutcase Dr. Kabukin's seeing--"

D.J. resisted an urge to ask just which psycho nutcase. Dr. Kabukin handled therapy cases, while Dr. Bollings did divorce, custody, and criminal evaluations for the courts. D.J. generally liked Dr. Kabukin's patients better. Most of them were interested in changing. Most of Dr. Bollings' patients were interested in fooling the doctor.

"-- a couple real boring messages for the other doctors, and then this one for you. It's pretty weird, Dot."

"Why don't you read it to me? And get it over with? D.J. poised her pen at the top of the next message blank, wondering if Sandy would communicate any of the information in order.

"To, uh, Dorothy Jean, from Chase. Do you suppose that's a first or a last name?"

To stop her hand from shaking, D.J. pressed the pen down on the message form so hard it punched through several sheets. "Go on."

"There's, like, no number. It just says, 'You know what I need and I'm coming to get it.' Don't you think that's weird?"

D.J. said nothing.

"Well, I do. Kind of creepy. Did you get that? 'You know what I need and I'm coming to get it.' Dot, you still there? Darn, I bet she hung up. Why do people always hang up on me?"

Deciding to take this as a suggestion, D.J. quietly lowered the phone's handset until it clicked into the cradle. Chase? It couldn't be Chase. She stared over the four-foot-high divider that separated her desk and computer hutch from the office waiting room, her gaze finally settling on the crystal vase of Double Delight roses Dr. Kabukin had brought in that morning and set among the magazines and self-help books on the glass-topped table between the two blue-and-white striped couches. Look how pink and white the roses are, D.J. thought, just like a baby, perhaps, or the hopes of a young girl on her wedding night.

From the white walls, colorful abstract pictures glowed in the sun slanting through the picture window. Leftover Oregon raindrops glistened on the lawn out front. Everything in D.J.'s view looked cool and clean and calm. Untouched tranquility, like her life before Chase.

She shuddered and lifted the phone again. For a moment she closed her eyes tight, concentrating on crashing all the thoughts she didn't want to entertain.

She pressed autodial for the answering service, and smiled down at the message pad when Poppy picked up.

"Account 551, please," D.J. said, and took the rest of the messages without a hitch.

Morgan Hesch sat on one of the puffy striped couches in the Mental Healing Center waiting room and stared at the bits of dirt he'd tracked on the white speckled rug. Why did they have a lawn out front if they wanted to keep the rug clean? Well, yeah, there was a brick walk that wound across the lawn, but what if you were coming from the other direction? And the lawn was green and healthy, but there were those flower beds. Somebody must rake the edges all the time to

make the dirt look so -- so clean. Like nothing had ever stepped on it since the dawn of time. Morgan hated that kind of clean. If blackboards were bare in his college classes when he got there, he always chalked something on them before he sat down. If the dirt were blank he just had to put a footprint in it. If things were wide open, any force, good or evil, could enter and control them.

So the floor was no longer blank, either, not peppered with those chunks of earth that had fallen out of the waffle-stomper soles of his hiking boots. Morgan looked at the bits of squared dirt and slid his left hand in between the third and fourth buttons on his shirt, hiding it against his chest. One of his insiders, Shadow, always wanted to hide Morgan's hands.

"Miss Deej?" Morgan said, his knees knocking against each other, not because he was cold, just to be doing something.

He could only see the top of her head over the wall that hid the desk from him and everybody else. She had messy frizzy brown hair that she parted in the middle. He watched the part lean back until he could see Deej's eyes, green like the devil's, over the divider as she looked at him.

"Yes, Morgan," she said. One of her better voices. Not the first-time-&phone voice which said, I'm-here-to-help,-don't bother-to-know-I'm-human. Definitely not the I-can't-have-a-relationship-with-you-because-it-wouldn't-be-professional voice. She'd given up on that one after he'd been seeing Dr. Dara Kabukin for two months. Not the don't-bother-me-I'm-in-the-middle-of-something voice, and not the okay,-okay-yes-I-guess-I-can-look-up voice. More of a I-don't-know-what-I'm-doing-but-I'm-glad-for-a-distraction voice. Actually he didn't think he'd ever heard her use this one before.

Morgan figured Deej must have insiders since she had lots of voices like he did. Also, she was one of the few people who could recognize his insiders just by the way they talked. Even Dr. Dara got confused sometimes, but Deej always knew who was talking if it was anybody she'd ever talked to before. Timmy liked to play tricks on Deej, but even he was happy when the tricks didn't work. Morgan wondered if Deej had ever thought about being a doctor. Even though her hair was messy and she had the devil's eyes, he might go see her if she was a doctor.

"I'm thirsty," he said.

"Would you like some water?"

"Yes, please. And paper? Pencil?" The voice that asked the last part belonged to the newest insider, who wasn't used to using Morgan's vocal cords and wasn't supposed to talk until Morgan had gotten to know him, anyway. The new insider's voice hadn't sorted itself out yet; it sounded a lot like Morgan.

Deej stood up so he could see about a third of her, the top third. She was wearing a blue and white shirt, and some little bits of color on her lips,

just  
the outside edges. Mostly if she had any color on her lips it was all over  
them.

Today was not like other days.

She held out some white paper and a pencil with a blunt tip. After he took the  
things from her, she headed into the other room, the one with the sink and the  
little baby fridge and the table where you took tests.

The new insider was clamoring to get its hands on the paper and pencil.

Morgan's

appointment with Dr. Dara wouldn't start for another fifteen minutes. Morgan  
asked this anxious new insider if fifteen minutes would be enough, and the  
insider said he'd do what he could, if it was okay with Morgan. Sure, said  
Morgan. He sat back and let go of his hands. The insider used the left hand to  
draw a picture real fast of a man's face. The man had dark thick eyebrows and  
shadowy eyes and his mouth was wide but it sure wasn't smiling. What  
interested

Morgan as he watched the picture form in front of him was that it looked like  
a  
photograph, with gray places under the nose and eyebrows, like parts of the  
face  
stuck right out of the paper and had shadows. He had never drawn anything like  
this before.

He finished. DeeJ brought him a cup with water in it, then looked at his  
picture  
without asking and dropped the water. The water splashed on DeeJ's sandals.  
Some  
hit Morgan's hiking boots, but most of it hit the rug.

"Miss DeeJ," said Morgan.

"Ah, ah, ah, oh, I'm sorry, Morgan," she said, breathing like a dog on a hot  
day. "I'll get you another."

"Miss DeeJ, you having a seizure?" he asked.

"Well, maybe, yes, maybe," she said, and ran into the sink-fridge-test room.

Today was definitely not like other days. Morgan had never seen DeeJ upset  
before.

When she came back, she handed him the water without spilling any and said,  
"Morgan, who is that a picture of?"

"I don't know. One of the insiders did it."

"Which insider?"

"Now, Miss DeeJ," said Clift, "you know it would be unprofessional of us to  
discuss our case with the secretary."

"Oh, come on, Clift," said DeeJ. "I'm not asking you for a diagnosis or even  
intimate personal details. I was just wondering which one of you did it."

Clift thought that over, and said, "Well, the truth is, Miss DeeJ, we can't  
tell  
you which insider. Somebody new is all we know."

"Do you know who the man in the picture is?"

"Do you?" asked Mishka in her little baby girl voice. She thought it was a game. She was three and thought most things were games.

"Do you?" DeeJ repeated.

"I asked you first," said Mishka.

"I asked you second, and two is bigger than one."

"Well, I don't know," Mishka said, but at the same time the left hand was writing something on the piece of paper. Morgan looked down. "Chase Kennedy," the words said.

DeeJ put her hands over her mouth. Her eyes got wide.

"Somebody you know?" Saul asked, with an ugly edge to his tone. Saul was mean to everybody. Morgan didn't like it when Saul took the voice because he made people not like Morgan.

"Somebody you know?" DeeJ said, right back. She'd met Saul before and she still liked Morgan. One of the few.

"No," said Saul.

"How could you draw a picture of somebody you don't know? Did you see his picture in a magazine or something?"

"There are some things mankind was not meant to know," said the Shadow in his creepy echoey voice.

"How about woman kind?" asked DeeJ, but just then the phone rang and she disappeared back behind her desk. Her voice turned into the polite-to-company voice she always used on the phone as she said, "Good afternoon, Mental Healing Center, may I help you?"

Dr. Dara came out of the door to the back hallway, smiling and leading a young fat woman toward the door to outside. "All right, Elena, same time next week?" she said, her voice faintly accented. Only two of the insiders had accents that

Morgan could hear, and they were Valerie, the Southern one, and Saul, who was from New Jersey. The rest of his insiders sounded pretty much like people on TV.

Dr. Dara was from somewhere else. England? England, even though she had narrow black eyes and totally black hair like people from Japan.

The fat woman stared at the floor, mumbled something, glanced up quickly at Dr.

Dara and then away again. Morgan remembered being like that when he first started seeing the doctor, not being able to look anybody in the eye, not being able to talk clearly, not wanting anybody to look at him. When the insiders had

first come, they made him do things and he was in trouble all the time because of them and he couldn't get them to cooperate. Even though it was his body, they didn't listen to him. Not till Clift came, and started getting everybody to work as a team. Morgan studied the patient. She wore a big ugly navy-blue dress, and a belt that cut into her middle, and her hair was heavy and tangled, her face greasy, with little sores on it.

Mishka felt sorry for her and said, "Bye bye. Bye bye."

The fat woman looked at him like she was scared, which probably wasn't what Mishka meant to happen. Mishka wasn't very good at figuring out how people would feel about what she did. The others tried to talk her out of taking control without asking, but she had these impulses all the time and you couldn't watch out for them twenty-six hours a day. Morgan shrugged. "Sorry," he said. Then he gave speech number six, one Dr. Dara had drilled him on for several weeks: "Didn't mean anything by it. Have a nice day."

"Thanks," said the fat woman, trying to smile and frowning instead.

"Take care, Elena," Dr. Dara said, escorting her out the door. She sighed as she shut the door behind the woman, then turned. Every hair was in place -- Clift sometimes called Dr. Dara "Helmet-head" -- and her lipstick was bright and even. She smiled. "Morgan," she said.

"She's a new one, right?"

"Absolutely new. You were very good, Morgan. Come on back to the office. What have you drawn today? Who did it?"

"It's a picture for Miss Deeje," Morgan said. "A guy named Campbell did it."

Deeje stared at him.

"He just told me, Deeje. I didn't know before, honest. Gary Campbell."

"Gary?" said Deeje, her voice high and little like Mishka's. Definitely Morgan and Deeje had something in common. Morgan wondered what she would say if he asked her for a date. He had the impression that people in the office weren't supposed to date patients.

The new insider, Gary, was trying to get a word out. Morgan thought that was pretty pushy for somebody who'd just come to him, so he and Clift squashed the guy down. "Wait your turn, Gary," Morgan said, but he handed the picture to Deeje.

"Thanks," she said, still in that little high voice.

"I like you, Miss Deeje," Morgan said, figuring that would be something she'd remember he had said until he finished talking to Dr. Dara, and then he might ask Deeje about the date idea.

"Come on, Morgan," said Dr. Dara.

As Morgan followed Dr. Dara back into her office, Clift came out. "Let's not discuss integration today, Doctor, all right? You know we're not a true multiple, and I think integration would be bad for Morgan. If anything, he needs

to build himself up at the expense of the rest of us. He's still too wide open.

Imagine us picking up another one. I can't seem to convince him to close the door. You get him started thinking he can work us in here with him and he'll start accepting any damn Tom, Dick, or Mary that comes along and knocks."

"What topic would you suggest, Clift?" asked Dr. Dara.

"We definitely, definitely, need more work on socialization. That speech worked

-- wasn't that great? We've said that about six times in the correct context since last week, and Morgan's finally starting to believe it works. I tell him things and tell him things and he just doesn't pay attention, but when you tell

him, he actually listens."

"Well, yes, that is my function, Clift. Let me just check with Morgan, see if he's got an agenda for this afternoon, all right?"

"Okay," said Clift grumpily and subsided.

"Did you find the tape in the dictaphone?" Dr. Bollings asked D.J. as D.J. handed her a stack of message slips and opened and sorted mail.

"Oh," D.J. said. With the picture Morgan had drawn in front of her, she had trouble concentrating on work at all. She turned the picture face down and forced all her thoughts about Chase away. She had a lot of practice ditching thoughts of Chase, but she knew she would have to think hard about him soon. This was just too weird. Something must have happened. She needed to find and read some recent newspapers, though she had been avoiding news in the three years since the trial. "It's been such a madhouse I haven't gone into your office since lunchtime. Is the tape long? I'll stay till I finish typing it."

"Just a few letters, but they should go out today."

"I'll get right on it." She got the tape out of Dr. Bollings' dictaphone, plugged it into her own, rewound it, started the computer, macro'd up the letter

format, and began typing, putting her brain on auto.

Dear Dr. Kennedy:

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I was pleased to receive your recent inquiry regarding office space. Regrettably, I must tell you that our last vacancy was filled a month ago. If I can be of any help to you in recommending other local office facilities, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Arlene Bollings, Ph.D.

The tape went on: "Oh, D.J., would you look up that address? It's on the envelope in the out basket."

Damn, thought D.J., I was in such a hurry to get the tape I forgot to check the out basket. Just then Dr. Bollings came out of her office with a handful of papers and gave them to D.J.

"Thanks, Boss," D.J. said and sighed.

"You're in some kind of mood today, aren't you?" asked Dr. Bollings. "What was your first clue?"

The doctor just smiled. "Lucky the schedule's light today. Rest up over the weekend. I've got five reports to dictate, and I plan to spend a lot of Saturday over a hot mike, so you'll have plenty to do on Monday."

"Promises, promises," said D.J. She sorted through the stack of papers, found the letter and envelope from Dr. Kennedy on the bottom of the pile.

D.J. put the letter on the copystand next to her keyboard and positioned the cursor a line below the date so she could type in the address. Dr. Chase Kennedy, Ph.D.

"Arlene!" D.J. cried.

TWO

D.J.'S LANDLADY AFRA was watering the dwarf dahlias in the front planter at the Coat of Arms Apartments building when D.J. parked her six-year-old silver Tercel in the car port. D.J. groaned before she climbed out of the car and locked the door. Afra always wanted to talk, and D.J. was definitely not in the mood today.

"You got plans for the weekend, hon, or you going to spend it holed up with the TV again like the last six weeks? Have you thought about getting some sun? You're so pasty!" Afra said as D.J. trudged up the concrete walk toward the front door.

"Have you heard about UV?" D.J. said, then really wondered. Afra was who knew how old; her face was leathery and worn like any skin tanned by years of sunlight.

"UV? Is that short for some new kind of perversion or drug? I have trouble keeping up with the kinds of mischief you youngsters get into anymore."

"Uh, no, it's ultra-violet rays from the sun. They cause cancer."

"Doesn't everything" Afra said.

Before she could get started on another topic, D.J. said, "I've got to get inside and make dinner. I'm tired."

"'Course you are, not enough fresh air, too much television, and improper nutrition." Afra waved her hand in a shooing motion. D.J. escaped. She checked her mailbox, afraid. She'd signed up here as D.J. Hand, and had paid to keep



her  
number unlisted. But if Chase could track her to her job, he could track her  
to  
her home.

The only thing in her mailbox was the fall catalog for Community Education.  
She  
carried it upstairs to her second floor apartment, feeling relieved when she  
had  
fastened the chain from the inside.

Then she turned around to face her studio apartment and saw the writing on the  
wall. Red spraypaint, right across her Van Gogh and Rembrandt art prints.  
"Only  
you can purify me. Only through your blood will I be saved.

She would never forget his handwriting.

She had seen it in the love notes he'd left with flowers when he had courted  
her, four years ago. Later, she had seen his handwriting on the anonymous  
notes  
that the police found next to the corpses. She had seen it in the letters  
Chase  
wrote her from Death Row.

Those letters had finally driven her to give up a paralegal position with a  
future in it at one of the big law firms in San Francisco and move north, to  
Spores Ferry, Oregon, a town of a hundred thousand, as small a place as she  
could live in and not go crazy, she figured. Gary Campbell, the first  
detective  
who had seriously listened to her when she mentioned her suspicions about her  
boyfriend to the task force, the one she had kept in contact with after the  
sentencing hearing, had told her she didn't even have to open the letters.  
Chase  
couldn't get her, he said. But she opened the letters. She had to. Finally she  
had run anyway. She hadn't left any forwarding address anywhere, not even with  
her mother.

And maybe she had been right, and Gary had been wrong. Maybe Chase had been  
playing with her, through the trial, the sentencing hearing, even his going to  
jail for three years, just so he could come back and find her now, hidden as  
she  
was, ferreting out her job and her apartment and everything she had to cling  
to  
in her new existence.

A knock sounded on her door. She jerked and gasped, dropping her mail and her  
purse. Her heart speeded. She looked around for anything she could use as a  
weapon, grabbed an antique umbrella she had picked up at a yard sale, and went  
to the door.

Through the peep she saw Morgan's gaunt young face, his wispy black mustache.  
He  
had done something to his hair; instead of hanging lank and half over his  
face,  
it had height to it. Mousse? Gel? Morgan with fashion sense? A frightening  
thought. And he was standing up straight. Usually she saw him slouched on a  
couch. He was taller than she had thought.

"You alone?" she asked through the door.

"Deej, you know me better than that."

She slipped the chain off and turned the locks. "I just got home," she said.  
"I  
wasn't expecting you for another hour."

"Would you like me to go away for a while?" asked his fruitiest and most refined voice.

"No, Clift; I was just explaining why I haven't had time to change. Actually, I'd like you to come in."

Morgan blinked and stared.

"Actually, I'm kind of scared right now." Her voice wobbled. She reached out and took his narrow hand, pulled him into the apartment. "Look." She pointed to the graffiti.

"Messy," said Morgan in an approving voice.

She looked sideways at him, this gawky college boy with his many voices, and thought, what a thin reed I'm leaning on. I should send him home and talk to the police. Tell them my history, ask them to find out whether Chase is still in jail or not. "Morgan, did you really ask Dr. Kabukin if it was all right for us to see each other?"

"No," he said.

"What? But you said--"

"Sure," said Saul. "She would have told me to forget it, so I decided not to ask her. What do you think, lady, it's productive for a psycho to date his doctor's secretary? Jeeze, take a minute to think."

"Wait a second. I'm not the doctor around here. How would I know? Besides, you lied to me."

"Like no one's ever done that before?" Saul said, sneering.

"Morgan never did before," said D.J.

"How would you know?" Saul said.

"Shut up, Saul," said Clift. "D.J.'s right. Morgan never lied to her before. Of course, this particular lie was hopelessly transparent. Why did you believe it? You could have checked with Dr. Dara before you said yes to us. Usually you're so efficient."

"I--"

"I doubt it's the body," Clift continued, holding out his arms and looking down at Morgan's slender frame. "I've been trying to get him interested in swimming, but one of the others died by drowning and won't go near water. Or is this a body type that appeals to you?"

"No, I --"

"Wait a minute," Clift said. "Wait. A. Minute. It's Gary, isn't it?"

D.J. sighed and closed her eyes.

"That prick?" Saul yelled. "You know he's a cop? We got a damned cop in here with us. Pushy rude bastard!"

"D.J., is that the story? It's Gary you want to see?" Clift asked. "Was the picture that important?"

"I'm sorry, Clift. Sorry, Morgan. I think I know . . . ." She couldn't believe what she was about to say. D.J. had never known quite what to make of Morgan and his many voices. Dr. Kabukin was not a slave to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders the way Dr. Bollings was; she didn't diagnose her patients with number codes you could look up to identify their particular disorder. So D.J. didn't have a convenient label for Morgan. She just thought he was funny, and found several of his voices willing to play games with her, even though they also enjoyed irritating her.

But Gary -- that was a different story. If Gary were Gary Campbell, the cop she had known in San Francisco . . . . How could she deny it? How could Morgan possibly know enough about her to draw a picture of Chase Kennedy out of the blue? The explanation she came up with was too silly to think about. But she had to think about it anyway. Maybe all the voices in Morgan were indeed different people. Maybe he was psychic and tuned in to all these other people, or maybe --

"Clift, are you a ghost?"

"Why, D.J., you're the first person besides Morgan to come up with that explanation. I'm flattered."

"Yes, but would you answer?"

"And I've told Dr. Kabukin about that, too, but she continues to nurse her own pet theories. We do make progress, when she gives us ideas about how to handle society in a way that won't scare it, but when she tries to get us to consider getting together, one has to shudder."

D.J. tried a different tack. "How did you die, Clift?"

"In a ridiculously mundane fashion. A car crash. I had always hoped that I would irritate some rival intellectual into committing a fiendishly clever murder, but

I didn't live long enough to achieve maximum irritation and my dream death. No, instead I was out driving to the university library one night when a drunk in a big American car crossed the center line and plowed right into the side of my small Japanese car, crushing it and me between his grill and the wall of a bank. A savings and loan, if I recall correctly. At least there was a metaphor there."

"What year was this?"

"Two years ago."

"Where?"

"East Lansing. They're very into big American cars there. Did you know that a number of car makers have factories there?"

"No," said D.J. "So how did you find Morgan?"

"Well, I was frustrated about suffering such a meaningless death, so I didn't feel ready to shuffle off this mortal coil. On the other hand, haunting a sidewalk or an auto junkyard didn't fulfill my need for some kind of recognition either. I was drifting around aimlessly, trying to figure out what I could do in my powerless state when I felt this peculiar pull from the west, and thought what the hell. I gave in and found myself sucked right into Morgan's body. He was playing with a Ouija board at the time. Since I arrived I've tried to discourage him from engaging in this game, but he's not always amenable to direction. Worse, he doesn't seem to need the board anymore; random spirits just show up here and crowd in with the rest of us."

D.J. bit her lower lip. She had found Clift the most reasonable of Morgan's voices, but just now she didn't know what to believe.

"But, to bring us up to speed, we were talking about Gary, weren't we?" Clift said.

She swallowed, and said, "I think I know Gary from when he was alive."

"Really? I thought that was just an attention-getting device on his part, claiming he had something to tell you. When we get somebody new we usually try to gentle them down for a while before we let them play with the body. They can get us in a lot of trouble if we let them out unsupervised. When Saul first came, Morgan woke up in a bordello across a state line, and went into shock. He's never quite recovered from the mortification. He's awfully young, something Saul refuses to take into consideration. But if Gary was telling the truth . . .  
.  
. May we sit down?"

"What? Oh, sure, sure," said D.J., clearing a stack of books off a chair for him. She closed and locked the door, then said, "Would you like something to drink? I've got instant coffee or tea or lemonade."

"No, thanks," said Clift. "We need a little quiet to thrash this out amongst

ourselves. Excuse me, please."

"Sure," said D.J. She went into the kitchen and poured herself a nip of brandy, swallowed it without tasting. She coughed as the warmth bit into her, then decided to put some water in the kettle for tea anyway.

She was leaning on the counter, staring at the kettle and wondering if it would boil as she watched, when a new voice called to her from the living room/bed room/dining room. "Doro?"

She straightened, gripping her elbows so hard she could feel her fingertips drilling in to her skin. After a moment and a couple of deep breaths she walked out into the living room and looked at Morgan.

His eyes, usually a pale blue, looked darker, and his mouth wore a crooked smile she had never seen there before, but she had seen it. She had seen it.

"Ain't this a bitch?" he said, and laughed, deep and low.

"Gary," she whispered, chilled.

"Poor bastard, lonely kid, just wants to make some friends, doesn't know how to talk to girls, invites in the wide world of spirits. Christ, Doro, never thought I'd see you again this way."

"Gary," she said, clutching her elbows, her shoulders bunching higher.

"Yes, well," he said, and tilted his head in a certain way, so that he was looking up at her from under his brows, "the world being as it is--Christ, Doro, what a world! -- I think we should talk about the case again."

"Gary, how did you die?"

"That's the point, isn't it? Chase has escaped."

D.J. let out a scream just for the hell of it, releasing tension, then said, "Well, I kind of thought--" and pointed to the writing on the wall. "And he left messages for me at the office."

Gary looked up and his eyes went wide. "God, Doro! Get out of here!" "Without a game plan? Let's think this through first."

"He knows where you live! Go somewhere else immediately."

"Oh, come on. I don't want to run around like a headless chicken. Let me pack a few things, and get my credit card and my bank numbers and like that."

"All those things can be traced. Ditch them."

"That doesn't make any sense. How could Chase trace my credit card and my

bank?"

"You asked how I died. He came for me as soon as he escaped, and --" He closed his eyes, masked his face with his hands, and said in a low voice, very quickly, "tortured me to find out where you were, and killed me."

D.J. hesitated. She looked away. "You knew where I was?"

He sighed. He looked at her. "I shouldn't have, but I wanted to keep track of you. Followed the transfer of ownership on your car through the DMV. I knew your new name and your p.o. box number, the town." He paused, grabbed breath, looked away from her. "He -- Doro -- he -- I didn't want to tell." He pressed his mouth shut, then looked up at her from under his brows. "I couldn't stop myself from saying it. I couldn't stop myself." He closed his eyes tight and thumped fists on his head.

She let go of herself and gripped his fists. Tears spilled down her face. "I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Yes, well, there's no going back, and time is running past us. Pack what you need and let's get out of here."

"Okay." She got her big duffel out of the closet and began throwing clothes into it.

"Can I help?" asked Morgan, the Gary look in his face gone, his voice scared.

"Sure," she said. She looked around, then grabbed one of her spare purses, a big one made of turquoise rip-stop nylon. "Why don't you go in the bathroom and put the stuff from the medicine cabinet in here? Thanks, Morgan. Thanks for everything."

"Some date," he said, but he didn't sound unhappy.

She smiled, then frowned as he disappeared. "Can you ask Gary if I should call the police about this?" she yelled.

"Wait until you find a safe place to call from," Clift called back.

D.J. did a swift job of packing all her favorite clothes and tucking important papers in her purse.

"Here," said Morgan, coming out of the bathroom with a bulging purse. Without pausing for breath, Gary's voice came out: "He's probably watching the building right now, and for sure he'll follow your car, especially if he sees you carrying luggage. I bet he's out there waiting to find out how you've reacted to the note. What does he know so far? No police have showed up, not much of an outcry. Maybe he thinks you're too spooked to do anything about it. Maybe he's coming in to get you right now."

"He doesn't know about you, though."

"We can't know that for sure. I mean, he can't know about me, Gary, but he might know about Morgan; he knows where you work. Can we stash your stuff away from the apartment? That way someone could pick it up later without tipping him by going into your apartment."

"I have storage space in the basement."

"After that we can drive to a public place and catch other transportation," Gary said. "We should be able to evade him long enough to get you some protection."

With Morgan acting as scout, D.J. carried her things down to the basement, which had an in-building access stairway, and put them in her storage space, pondering whether to padlock them in or not. She had never had anything disturbed in the basement. On the other hand, if Chase were here-- he had made a science out of sneaking into places where people lived and studying them, while people were present and asleep. Wanting to study people's lifestyles was one curiosity he hadn't bothered to hide from D.J. when their relationship was most intense. His favorite movie was Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. "Just the little bits of life he sees, don't you love it? All those stories lying there unveiled. You can learn so much by walking around at night and looking in through windows."

She stared at her storage space and shuddered. Nothing could keep him from pawing through the skins of her new life. She closed the door and fastened the padlock.

Like a padlock would stop him, any more than her locked apartment door had.

"So where should we go?" she asked, turning toward Morgan, who was standing a few feet away.

At the top of the basement stairs, a man stood backlit by daylight.

THREE

D.J. gripped Morgan's arm and drew him quietly back toward her. Though there was a light on in the basement, it was dim compared with the daylight coming in through the building's back door. There was a chance Chase hadn't seen that Morgan was down here.

"Yes," said that thrilling rich voice, Chase's voice, that once had fueled her fantasies and later haunted her nightmares, "where should we go?"

D.J. looked around for anything that would serve as a weapon. There was some community property scattered around the common area between the storage closets, things nobody really wanted but had neglected to throw out. She found a dead-headed mop and gripped it with both hands.

His voice sank to a near whisper, curling its way down the stairs. "If you had a choice, where would you go? I want you on my altar, Dorothy Jean. I need you

to  
be my sacrament this time. Only you can give me last rites."

"Young man!" Afra's voice came from somewhere beyond Chase. "Do you have legitimate business in my building? If not, I'll have to ask you to leave."

The shadowed head looked up, away; and then he was gone, his footsteps pounding down the hallway toward the back door of the building.

Finally D.J. let the trembling take her, now that the immediate danger was gone. Her shoulders shook, but her hands were locked around the mop-stick. Breathing fast, she glanced at Morgan, saw that he had moved into the shadow of one of the storage cabinets and was holding a splintery baseball bat over his shoulder. Something about his expression told her Gary was the one behind the eyes.

"D.J.? You down there? What was that all about? Some young hooligan making an obscene phone call in person?"

At last D.J. drew in a deep breath and lowered the mop. "Afra. Afra. Oh, Afra," she said, her voice quavering. She walked toward the steps and looked up. "Thanks, Afra."

"For what? I did wonder if it was exactly an appropriate moment to bring out my hand-gun, but the way things are these days, I thought it better to be safe."

"Much better," D.J. said, climbing the stairs. Morgan followed her. They both held onto their makeshift weapons. "I have to tell you about him." She glanced down the hall toward the back door, which was still open. She and Morgan ran to look out, heard a car engine growling around a corner, gone beyond sight.

"Sounds like a beetle," said Saul.

"You know cars?" D.J. asked.

"Any amateur can tell a beetle," Saul said, "but as a matter of fact, yes, I know cars. One of the few things that kept my interest before I jumped off that bridge in Jersey."

"What's all the fuss about? Who's your young man, D.J.?" Afra said. She was, indeed, holding a large revolver, barrel pointed floorward. "I never heard him come in. And I was keeping an ear out."

"Afra, this is Morgan, a friend from work. Morgan, this is Afra, my landlady. Can we go to your apartment? I've got to tell you about that man."

"You vouch for this rude young man?"

D.J. glanced at Morgan. "Oh, yes, Afra. He has rough edges, but he's really very sweet."

Morgan's eyes widened. She knew it was Morgan inside, and that relieved her. She



didn't want Saul talking to Afra.

"All right," said Afra. She still looked suspicious. "Come on in." They followed her into her apartment. Inside, every flat surface that wasn't designed for people to sit or walk on bore treasures from the sea: twisted driftwood, sand-scoured glass, a crab carapace, bowls of water with shining rocks lining the bottom, fragments of sand dollars and shells, gull feathers. The air smelled salty.

"Have a seat. I'll bring you some tea," said Afra, disappearing into the kitchen.

D.J. sat on the couch and tried to figure out how to frame an explanation.

Morgan flopped down beside her, turned on his side so he could watch her. "Miss Deej?" he said.

"Morgan," she said. She smiled at him.

"You really think I'm sweet?"

"You are sweet."

"Not just because of Clift and Gary and Mishka and Shadow and Elaine and Saul and Timmy and Valerie?"

Elaine? Valerie? thought D.J., but aloud, she said, "Just because of you."

"Wow," he said. "Nobody ever said anything like that about me. No girl ever said anything nice about me before."

"Really? Not even the ones inside you?"

"Well," he said, and frowned. "But that's different. It's not like they have a choice."

"Oh, Sweetie," said a new voice from Morgan that D.J. hadn't heard before, a rich husky female voice, "we've got a choice, all right. We could be insulting you all the time; but Deej is right. You are sweet."

"Wow," said Morgan. He lay back and stared at the ceiling.

"Who were you talking to?" Afra asked, coming in with a tea tray, a Japanese tea pot and three small handle-less cups.

"Morgan does impressions," D.J. said.

"Really? Who was that supposed to be? Lauren Bacall?"

"They're not famous people," Morgan said, "just people I know."

"Odd," said Afra. "How could you take an act like that on the road?"

"Dr. Dara says it's more like they're different parts of me, or, like, I choose

a different voice to express different things."

"D.J. Bubbe," said Afra. "A friend from work?"

"That's not important right now," D.J. said. "What's important is that I have to leave the building, because that guy you chased off knows I live here. He's looking for me. He wants to kill me. He's already killed four other people, Afra. You've been trying to find out about my past, well, here it is. His name's Chase Kennedy. Do you remember the case? He was my boyfriend in my other life, and while he was romancing me, he was murdering other women. I worked with the police to catch and convict him. He was on Death Row last I heard, but today, I got messages from him at work, and when I came home, I found a message from him there, and Morgan was just helping me move out when he showed up and you got rid of him. I've got to find someplace to hide."

"Are you serious?" Afra asked.

D.J. stared at her.

Afra said, "He scared off awfully easy."

"He likes being alone with his victims. It's one of his things. Besides, that was a pretty big gun you had."

Afra poured tea. Morgan sat up and accepted a cup. D.J. accepted a cup too, and watched her hostess. After they had sipped in silence for a little while, Afra said, "You're thinking about this wrong. Better if you fort up here, get your protection, keep a vigil; call the police. They could watch outside, catch him trying to get in. There you are. No running and hiding. A running target's a lot more vulnerable than somebody who chooses her own ground."

D.J. looked at Morgan, wondering if Gary had two cents he'd like to toss in at this point.

"If you'll sit there with that gun in your lap, I'll watch out the front window while Doro calls the police," said Gary. "Good thing it's still light."

Afra's eyebrows lowered at this new voice from Morgan, but she set down her cup and retrieved the gun from a drawer by the front door.

"Phone's over there," said Afra, pointing toward the kitchen.

"Gary, you know anyone up here?" D.J. asked, heading for the phone.

"I don't think so."

Afra said, "How come you introduced this boy as Morgan and now you're calling him Gary?"

"Morgan has a different name for each voice, Afra. I know it sounds weird, but

.

. . . "There was no way D.J. could explain this sensibly. Frowning, she paged through Afra's phone book until she found a non-emergency number for the police and dialed.

A woman answered. D.J. pulled herself together. "Hi. I was wondering if you could help me. I think someone's trying to kill me."

The woman listened while D.J. ran the story past her. The woman said someone would be over to check the handwriting on the wall soon.

D.J. hung up and felt despair. How could anybody take her seriously? "Did that sound convincing?" she asked Morgan, wondering if Gary was still in the forefront.

He was. "Don't worry. They should check everything, no matter how strange it sounds. Especially in a community like this one, where there probably isn't a lot going on. You won't have to talk them into it. The evidence will."

D.J. replaced the phone book on the lower shelf of the phone stand. "I sure hope so." She tried to compare herself with people she had observed when they came to be evaluated by Dr. Bollings. No, she wasn't hysterical or tangential; her orientation as to time and place were good; she didn't sound irrational. Of course, some of the most coherent-sounding people turned out to be the really disturbed ones. Maybe her affect was too flat. Maybe she should have talked faster.

But really, the situation was absurd.

She remembered the stab of terror she had felt when Chase's voice came from the shadow at the top of the stairs, and she sank down slowly and smoothly until she was sprawled on Afra's rug. He was here. He was coming for her. He had killed before. Even Gary hadn't been able to stop him. Nobody knew where he was.

She lay immobilized for a while, her gaze fixed on a water stain on the ceiling that looked like a skull. Her hands and feet felt as if they were miles away, and she couldn't seem to move them.

Sounds came through the cotton over her ears, but for a time she didn't sort them out. A hand touched her shoulder and she jerked, then lay still. A head interrupted her focus on the ceiling. Young face, Fu Manchu mustache, wide worried blue eyes. "Deej? Miss Deej?" the mouth said.

She blinked and noticed that she was breathing.

Afra's face appeared beside Morgan's. "Child? Child, are you all right?"

D.J. brought a hand up, rubbed it over her face. "What happened?" she said.

"You kind of fainted," said Morgan, his brows pinched together above the bridge of his nose. "I never seen a girl do that before."

D.J. closed her eyes and tried to reconcile this with her own image of herself.

It was hard. "Sorry," she said.

"Good Lord," said Afra, "if anyone ever had an excuse to faint, you do."

"I thought people only fainted because of bad corsets," D.J. said, and tried to sit up. Morgan put a hand under her elbow and helped her. "Thanks," she said, looking at him. Saul's sneer lifted the corner of his mouth, but his eyes looked kind.

A knock sounded on the door, and Afra went over to let a uniformed policeman in.

With Saul's help, D.J. struggled to her feet. She looked at him and smiled. He smirked back and pinched her rear.

"You're such a shmuck," she whispered.

"So they say," he whispered back, and slid an arm around her waist. "Put your arm around my shoulders and I'll help you over to the couch."

Furious, she obeyed him. As he let her down on the couch, his hand strayed up to feel her breast so quickly no one could have noticed it except the two of them.

"Stop it," she whispered through clenched teeth as he sat down beside her, still smirking. "Think what you're teaching Morgan."

"Exactly," he whispered. "Kid's way too passive."

Afra brought the policeman over. "This is Officer Vance," she said. "Can you talk to him, D.J.?"

D.J. rubbed her eyes, licked her lips. "I guess," she said. When she lowered her hands to her lap, Morgan took one and squeezed it just a little. Glancing at his profile, she couldn't tell who he was. His grip was warm and firm, so probably not Morgan. Even if it was that asshole Saul, she decided, it felt better to have someone hold her hand than to be alone with this. She suspected that Saul was supportive under his abrasive behavior.

Of course, she'd been wrong about a man before.

Still, she held onto his hand and looked at the officer.

Officer Vance was young and sandy-haired, and had a sad long face that made him look as if he belonged in a British comedy: wide blue eyes, long nose, long chin. He took out a notebook.

She told him about the messages at the office, the letter Dr. Bollings had received, the spray-paint upstairs. "I'll never forget his handwriting. And then we saw him."

"What?" His wide eyes went wider.

"He was here in the building. He cornered me and Morgan in the basement, but

Afra drove him out with a gun. Then we came in here and called you."

"You didn't tell the dispatcher you'd made visual contact with the subject," said Officer Vance.

"Didn't I? I . . . was having kind of a delayed reaction, I guess."

"She fainted after she hung up the phone," Morgan said.

"Mrs. Griffin, did you see this man?"

"I certainly did," said Afra. "Saw and heard him. Talking trash to D.J. down the stairwell, nasty stuff, like religion only twisted."

"Can you describe him?"

"A tall fella with a good pair of shoulders on him, at least six feet high, maybe more. He had short dark hair, thick black eyebrows, kind of a narrow face with hollows under the cheekbones. Big hands. He was wearing a green coat that covered up his other clothes, but he had leather shoes, not tennis shoes or whatever they call those things that come in those lurid shades. And he ran away right quick when he saw my gun."

"Your gun?"

Afra got her gun out of the drawer again. The officer made a note.

"Have a sniff," Afra said. "Haven't fired it since my nephew took me target shooting six years ago."

Officer Vance duly sniffed the barrel and handed the gun back to her. "Exactly why did you bring the gun out in the first place?"

"Well, I've got a responsibility to my tenants. I keep track of most things that go on here. I had a very bad feeling about that young fella. He waltzed right in here without so much as a by-your-leave, climbed the stairs, came clattering back down, headed for the basement just like he knew where it was. I don't know. My alarms just went off."

"Do you pull your gun often?"

"First time since about three years ago. There was a squabble in one of the apartments. A man was whaling on his wife, and she was screaming. I called the police, but they didn't come fast enough to suit me, so I went up there and showed him my gun and told him to git. Which he did. And of course she got right after him; they left together the next week." She looked at the policeman. "It's not like I wave this thing around promiscuously. Just when I need to."

"I see," he said drily. "All right, I think I'm ready to go look at the apartment."

Morgan stood and tugged D.J. to her feet. "Ready for this?" he whispered. He

wore Saul's sneer again.

She felt angry. She wasn't sure Morgan could control his ghosts, but she thought, from what Clift had said earlier, that Morgan had some say in who was acting. Why was he siccing Saul on her? Clift, Gary, Morgan, any of the rest of them would have been better, even Mishka or Shadow.

Saul's smile widened. "Yeah, give it to me, baby," he whispered, his hand squeezing hers with steady on-and-off pressure, thumb pressing into her palm, a stand-in for sex, his leer told her.

"Not now!" she muttered, jerking her hand out of his and stalking around the table to the door. She led the officer and Afra and Morgan upstairs, then fumbled for her key, realized she had left her purse in the basement, had dropped it when she grabbed the mop. "Damn," she said.

Morgan reached past her and tried the doorknob. It turned and the door opened.

"Okay. From now on, don't touch anything else, all right?" said Officer Vance.

Maybe there had been a perfect print on the doorknob, D.J. thought. Damn. She led Vance in and pointed to the red spraypaint. The message was still there. For

a moment she had been afraid that it had disappeared and Vance would think the whole thing was some kind of moronic stunt. But it was still there: "Only you can purify me. Only through your blood will I be saved." Chase's sprawling bold

"O"s and "I" pegged the phrases down.

"What does it mean to you, Ms. Hand?" Vance asked.

"I --" Chase had a magic chant that came out of him when the lovemaking was at its most intense. D.J. had never had a traditional religious upbringing, so she

wasn't sure exactly what the chant meant. When he said it she was usually pretty

far gone into her own sensations, but now she remembered it: "You are my redemption, you are my savior, you renew me and cleanse me, through you I find the kingdom of heaven and I am born AGAIN, oh, oh, wash my sins away. . . ."

Later she had thought about it even though she didn't want to. It reminded her of movies about the Catholic church: confession, then penance and -- absolution,

was it? Chase had never confessed to anyone; but maybe he knew he'd done something wrong. Maybe he thought of D.J. as a cure for his badness.

It had taken her more than a year to get over the nauseated feeling she got every time someone expressed even the slightest sexual interest in her.

"I think it means he wants to kill me," D.J. said in a thin voice. "He never used to think about me as the-- the sacrifice, but I betrayed him . . . . I helped them put him away . . . ."

Saul slipped his arm around her and pulled her up against him. She glared at him, her best melt-butter-at-five-paces sizzler, and he grinned and winked at her.

Dimly she realized that she was never nauseated by Saul or even scared of him.

Only furious. She dug her elbow into his side, and he relaxed his grip but didn't let go of her. "I helped them put him away," she said in a stronger voice, anger underlying it. "And he should have stayed there. How did he get out?"

"I can't go into detail," said Vance. "But he did escape. He's considered armed and extremely dangerous. Since he's found you here, it might be best if we took you into protective custody."

"Yes," said Morgan, in Gary's voice.

"I'm packed and ready," said D.J. She frowned. "Does this mean I can't go to work?"

"He knows where you work."

"Oh, yeah. Damn! I'll have to call my boss."

Officer Vance said, "Is there anything else you can tell me about his habits that might lead us to him?"

"He drives a Volkswagen bug," said Saul. "We heard it leaving after Afra chased him off."

Vance's eyes narrowed. He studied Morgan for a moment, then shrugged.

"Thanks."

He turned to D.J. "Let's get your things."

"They're in the basement."

They left the apartment and headed downstairs again, Vance leading the way, followed by Afra, Morgan and D.J. in the rear.

D.J. caught Morgan's arm and slowed him, letting the others get ahead of them. "How come you guys have been letting Saul maul me?" she whispered.

"He makes you mad, and that's better than scared," muttered Clift.

"Prick!" she whispered.

For a second, Clift looked wounded, but then Saul came back, with his nasty grin. "Hey, baby," he murmured, "I know this body ain't much to look at, but I got techniques that could keep you happy."

She felt heat in her cheeks.

"You look great in red," he whispered and laid his hand on her blush.

For a hot furious second she glared at him without moving away. Then something inside her crumbled and she stepped closer, putting her arms around him, pressing her face into his chest. He was crazy. He was haunted. He was probably very bad for her. Maybe she was really bad for him. Morgan was confused enough as it was without some kind of love life.

And yet. In the midst of this crashing chaos, with whatever fragile recovery she'd made since leaving Chase threatening to tear apart, here was wavery

Morgan, standing as stable as he could. Even Saul was comforting, in a perverse way. And almost exciting. Which made her want to tuck in her enlightened woman's card and hide her face from anybody with self-respect.

"Hon," murmured a woman's voice, tinted with a slight Southern accent and higher than the female voice D.J. had heard from Morgan before, "we can do this later. Maybe we should try not to be too weird right now."

She let go of him and rubbed her eyes. "I -- I feel mixed up."

"No wonder. I'm a bit of a blender myself, hon; can't imagine how I'd feel meeting somebody like us, but having that piled on top of this other --" Morgan pursed his lips and looked down toward the front hall, where Afra and Vance stood looking up. "Come on. Sort it out later."

D.J. took his hand and headed down the stairs.

FOUR

They're monitoring everything. They said this call's okay, since I'm still at the police station. Officer Vance says if you can bring a dictaphone and the tapes and a computer to the station, they can get them to me. I don't know. You might just want to hire a temp." D.J. paused for breath.

Dr. Bollings said, "I think that would probably be best. How are you holding up?"

"Not too well," said D.J. She stared down at her lap. She was still wearing her office clothes, turquoise and silver shirt, black skin, dark stockings, black flats. Usually the first thing she did when she got home from work was change into jeans and a big loose shirt. "And-- Doc, I did something really stupid." She hesitated.

"Yes?" said Dr. Bollings.

"I made a date with one of Dr. Kabukin's patients. He said he checked it with her, but he told me later that was a lie."

"Oh, Dorothy Jean!"

"I realize it was stupid and probably a violation of office policy."

"Absolutely. But I don't know if we've ever articulated that policy. Tacit understanding isn't the same as something written down." Silence. "Which patient?"

D.J. squeezed her eyes shut. "Morgan," she said in a small voice. Of all Dara Kabukin's patients, Morgan was probably the most obviously askew.

A sigh.

D.J. looked up. Around her the business of the police station went on, people



working at desks, some bringing people in, others answering phones, leaving, talking with each other. No one was paying any attention to her. She stared at her skirt, at the black pleats. "Doc, I may be setting Morgan's progress back hundreds of years."

"I'll let Dara know," Dr. Bollings said in a dry voice.

"The more I know him, the more I like him," D.J. said.

"For now, I think your seeing Morgan is contraindicated, at least until Dara has had a chance to meet with him and assess the effects of these developments."

"I don't think I get to see anybody anyway," said D.J. "I'll try to call you again in a couple of days, if it's okay with the police."

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" Dr. Bollings asked.

"Just --" D.J. picked at the pleats in her skirt, staring down, trying to think.

She couldn't think of anyone she wanted contacted, certainly not her mother; Afra knew, Gary knew; her other friends, people she had met at community choir, she didn't even know most of their last names or phone numbers. She would have to call the director and tell her she couldn't make it to rehearsal. "Tell Dr. Dara and Dr. Earl and Dr. Brad I won't be in?"

"Surely," said Dr. Bollings.

The next day crawled by. D.J. and a female detective named Rae stayed in a cheap hotel, where the odor of cigarette smoke clung to the orange drapes and bedspreads despite wide open windows, and all the light bulbs were 40 watts.

"I hate waiting" D.J. said midway through the afternoon after numberless games of cards and Saturday morning cartoons. "Giving all my power over to him. Reacting instead of acting. Are people out there looking for him?"

"You better believe it," said Rac. "Us and the Feds."

"Have they found anything yet?"

"Nothing substantial. We're circulating pictures, asking questions, following leads."

Somewhat comforted, D.J. poured herself some coffee from the thermos on the dresser and sat down to play more cards.

Too restless to sleep long, D.J. was watching the 6:30 a.m. news Sunday morning with the sound down low when she heard about the attack on Afra. In a second she was shaking Rae awake, then turning up the sound. ". . . stabbed seven times. Mrs. Griffin was hospitalized following the midnight assault and is reported in critical condition," the newswoman's voice was saying while the television showed a picture of the Coat of Arms Apartments building without identifying its location. "The reason for the attack remains a mystery, but local authorities are warning residents to lock and deadbolt their doors and to be extra

cautious  
about strangers."

D.J. felt frozen. "Why didn't you take the gun to bed with you?" she  
whispered.

"Why wasn't somebody guarding you? Why didn't you come with me?"

Rae was on the phone, talking in a low voice, still rubbing the sleep out of  
her

eyes. D.J. twisted one hand inside the other. She wished Gary were there,  
talking sense to her, the way he had during the other bad time, telling her  
she

hadn't done anything to make Chase the way he was, that there was nothing she  
could have done to stop him even if she had known what he was doing that she  
wasn't a horrible person just because a monster had chosen her to love. She  
closed her eyes and clutched her nightgown in her hands and tugged. The fabric  
was too strong to rip. Why hadn't she figured that he would go after Afra?  
Wasn't Afra the one who had foiled his last attempt at a kill? Didn't it make  
logical sense?

Would he go after Dr. Bollings next?

"I have to call," said D.J., surging up off her bed and going to Rae. "I have  
to

call my boss. Maybe he's already gone after her. What about Dara. What about  
Morgan. I don't think he knew Morgan was there. What if he drove a little  
distance away and saw all of us coming out of the building? I don't even know  
Morgan's phone number! But Chase knows everything he's been watching maybe he  
can find Morgan. I don't know where Morgan lives. He killed Gary and Gary was  
a

cop. Gary couldn't stop him. He tortured Gary. He might torture Morgan. Then  
Gary would have to go through that twice and everybody else in Morgan and  
Morgan

--"

Rae shook her shoulders. "Get a grip, D.J."

D.J. blinked and said, "I have to call Dr. Bollings."

"They've dispatched somebody to the residences of all the doctors in the  
office.

They're all fine. We've advised Dr. Bollings and Dr. Kabukin to either leave  
town or come in for protection -- "

"And Morgan?" How could she have gone with the police on Friday night and left  
Morgan to fend for himself? Even though it had been Gary who said good night  
to

her. "Good," he had said, "now that I know you're safe, maybe I can figure  
something out."

"Protect yourself," she had told him.

"Oh, I will," he said. He had retrieved the baseball bat.

Tears in her eyes, D.J. had kissed Morgan/Gary good-bye, the first time she'd  
ever kissed Gary. During the case she had been too emotionally bruised to do  
anything besides hang onto him, and afterward she had left. Now his  
desperation

matched hers. It had been hard to let go of him.

Yes, if Chase had only driven a little ways away, and had turned back to see that embrace, he would be gunning for Morgan too.

"What if he's already killed Morgan!" she cried, pulling on her hair.

"Shh," said Rae. "Round him up, okay, Rifkin?" She listened, then looked at D.J.

"You have an address for him?"

"No. Dr. Kabukin knows, but I don't. Yesterday was our first date."

"Boy," said Rae. "Some fun." She told the person on the other end to check with

Dr. Kabukin to get a twenty on Morgan Hesch, and hung up.

D.J. twisted her nightgown. "Is Afra still alive?"

"Not dead, but still critical. Still comatose. One of the other tenants heard a shot and came down and interrupted the attack."

"A shot? Did they find the bullet?" I hope she killed him! D.J. thought.

"Yeah. Lodged in a wall. It may have nicked him; the lab results aren't in on all the blood yet."

"He didn't leave a trail, huh?"

"If he did, the paramedics messed it up getting in and getting her out of there."

"Oh, God." Still clutching at her nightgown, D.J. sat on her unmade bed.

A loud knock at the door made her jump, her heart pumping.

Rae picked up her gun and went to the door. Standing to one side, she said, "Who's there?"

"Mitchell," said a woman's voice.

Rae opened the door and let in a short, older woman. "My relief," she said to D.J. "D.J., this is Detective Mitchell."

"You're leaving?" D.J. said, then hated herself for sounding so despairing.

"It's my day with the kid, and I have two weeks' worth of laundry to do," Rae said. "Don't worry. Livvy will take care of you."

D.J. stood up. Business mode, she thought, and held out her hand. "I'm sure she will. Nice to meet you, Detective."

Mitchell had a firm handshake and a no-nonsense face.

Rae dressed. "Downtown I'll keep you posted on Mrs. Griffin's progress." Rae picked up a paper sack of her things, shook hands with D.J., and ducked out the door.

Sunday after Rae left was pure hell. By six p.m. D.J. wanted to strangle

Mitchell, who was close-mouthed and mean and seemed to resent looking after D.J.D.J. said, "Come on. You can at least tell me if Morgan's alive or dead."

After fifteen minutes of silence, Mitchell sighed. "They picked him up. He's all right. They've got him in protective custody down at the jail."

"Couldn't he come here?"

"Jail's for his own protection. He's crazy as a bedbug."

Crazy? D.J. felt blank. Then she remembered how Timmy liked to sneak up behind the divider at the office, then leap up with a loud boo and revel in her screams. How sometimes Mishka just sat and sobbed, not even knowing what to do with the tissues D.J. offered her. How Shadow, sounding like an old radio show, was prone to making dark and esoteric pronouncements that didn't make sense once you dissected them. How even Clift could get on her nerves if he watched her too closely and commented on her every move, analyzing the way she bit a pencil or scratched her nose.

That had been before she started talking to him, though. Once they began having conversations, her belief in his craziness had evaporated.

She sighed. She guessed she should just be happy that he was safe, and that the police and the FBI were taking this seriously. After another block of television-filled, conversation-empty time, D.J. said, "Could I go to jail?"

"There's no television in the cells, the beds aren't comfortable, and the food's much worse, but hey, if that's your pleasure, I can take you in."

"I'll pack."

FIVE

Morgan had stubble. He looked pale, sad, and confused. The door to his cell was locked.

"Oh, Morgan!" D.J. said. She turned on Mitchell. "How come he's locked up? He's not a suspect! . . . Is he?"

"No. Like I told you before, it's for his own protection. If you heard the way he was talking . . ."

"Doro, what are you doing here?" Gary said. "I thought they had you farmed out someplace."

"Yeah, they did, but I'd rather be with you. I was going nuts wondering if you were all right."

"'Course I'm all right. I don't think it's a good idea, your being here. Chase is canny. He could get in here somehow and get you."

"Oh, yeah, Loon? Just how?" asked Mitchell.

"Pose as an informant, a delivery boy, even an officer; get pulled in for something simple like disturbing the peace; if he dyed his hair, accessorized with a mustache, eyebrows, teeth, changed his clothes, he could slip right past you people. You've got other things on your minds."

Mitchell's jaw dropped for a brief second before she closed her mouth. D.J. felt delighted.

D.J. said, "I'm not good at sitting around a room with nothing to do and no one to talk to. Officer Mitchell was with me as a guard, but she's not very friendly. I thought you'd be much more entertaining."

"Undoubtedly," said Clift.

"I could come with you to wherever it was you were," Gary said.

"Officer Mitchell doesn't think so. She says she couldn't keep you under control. How come you convinced everybody here you were crazy?"

"Morgan doesn't coordinate well when he's wakened from a sound sleep," said one of the women, the one with the Southern accent. "I had to do the initial talking, and for some reason that spooked them." Morgan's face smiled. It was another new expression, self-contained and narrow. It reminded D.J. of a cat.

"Are you Valerie or Elaine?" D.J. asked.

"Valerie, sugar."

"Hi."

"Hi, honey."

"Glad to meet you," D.J. said, and Morgan got up and came to the bars, staring into her eyes. His own had a touch of green in them now. She studied them so she would know Valerie again by something other than her voice. She held out her hand. Morgan's lashes fluttered down, then opened again as he took her hand. The little cat smile widened into something friendly.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, hon," said Valerie. She kissed D.J.'s hand, then looked confused.

D.J. squeezed Morgan's hand. She thought about her talk with Dr. Bollings. "Morgan, what if I'm bad for you?"

"Deej, you're not the problem," said Clift.

"What if I'm making you sicker?"

"Oh, please!" said Saul. "You know we're not sick! In fact, I think you're the only one who knows it besides us. At least I thought you knew it. They brainwashing you, babe?"

D.J. looked away, closed her eyes. It Was time to make a decision about this. Dr. Kabukin and Dr. Bollings thought Morgan had some kind of mental illness, and D.J. respected them as professionals. On the other hand, she knew Gary was real, and she felt that all the others had independent existences, too. Time to believe in herself again instead of the experts, after these torturous years of doubting everything she had ever known. She opened her eyes and stared up at Saul. "No," she said, baring her teeth in a nasty grin at him and pinching his cheek. "I know you're not crazy."

"What a load of bullshit!" said Mitchell. "I ought to lock you up for being crazy too!"

"Hey, Morgan, you want to go to a hotel with me?" D.J. said.

His eyes lit up. "Miss Deej!" he said, himself at last. "You're teasing."

"No. All you have to do is prove to Officer Mitchell that you'll, uh, cooperate, not wander off, obey orders. Not get us in danger."

"There's no way he can prove that to my satisfaction," said Mitchell.

D.J. frowned, wondering if Mitchell had enough power to make decisions about her and Morgan. Business mode, she thought. I put on my persona, I know where everything goes, I am unfailingly polite, organized, relaxed, I can follow the chain of command, I know how to find out what I need to know. I get things done. Business mode. Even though, in her relaxed clothes, Reeboks, jeans, and a big black T-shirt, she wasn't dressed for it. "Who's your superior? Who assigns the duties around here?"

Mitchell snorted. "On a Sunday evening? Good luck."

"Excuse me, Morgan," D.J. said, and wandered out into the main room of the station. "Somebody in charge here?" There were a lot fewer people in the station than there had been Friday night. She headed for the front desk. "Sergeant?"

"Yes?"

"Hi. I'm D.J. Demain. I've got somebody assigned to protect me while this guy, Chase Kennedy, is trying to kill me. Mitchell, the woman who's guarding me, isn't -- I just wondered if there was anybody else you could assign?"

He smiled at her and said, "Pleasant isn't in the job description for guarding witnesses, Miss Demain."

"You're right. What I'd really like is for me and my friend Morgan to go underground in a hotel, but Mitchell doesn't think she can handle him. Is self-confidence in the job description?"

"She scared of that skinny guy?" he said.

"Well, he talks in strange voices."

He looked at her for a while, then glanced around the room. "Hey, Harley, you doing anything specific tonight?"

A man in plain clothes who had his feet up on a desk and a True Romance in his hands glanced up. "Waiting for anything that might develop," he said. He was a large man with thinning brown hair. He looked sleepy.

"You want to watch a couple of witnesses overnight?"

"They going to do anything interesting?"

The desk sergeant looked at D.J. and raised his eyebrows.

"It's our second date," D.J. said to Harley. "I sometimes go all the way on a second date."

"I'm game," Harley said, lowering his feet and rising. He was taller than D.J. had thought; his clothes were sloppy yet suitable-- a biscuit-brown suit, a half-untucked white shirt, a medium-width red tie loosened at the neck. He folded his magazine, tucked it into his inside jacket pocket, and ambled over. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," said D.J., holding out her hand. "D.J. Demain."

"Just call me Harley. I don't tell anybody my, first name." His handshake was enveloping but gentle.

"My friend Morgan is locked up. He's the other witness. Could somebody let him out?"

The sergeant handed some keys over to Harley, and D.J. and Harley headed for the jail cells. "You're with the kook?"

"Mm," said D.J., nodding.

"This does sound entertaining."

Morgan was in a far comer of his cell, curled up nose to knees, and Mitchell was standing close to the bars, glaring at him.

D.J. said, "Hey, Morgan, look what I found! It's Harley. He's taking us to a hotel now."

Morgan scrubbed a hand over his face and unfolded.

"What?" said Mitchell, outraged.

Harley unlocked the door, and Morgan came over, eyes wide.

"Hi, Morgan," said Harley, holding out his hand;

"Hi, Harley." Gary was the one who answered. He grinned and shook hands. "You got any shaving gear? I'm starting to irritate myself."

"We could stop at a twenty-four-hour market on the way over, if you two will crouch down in the back seat while I go in and make the buy."

"No problem," said Gary.

"Either of you have any money?"

"I do," said D.J. She opened her purse and fished out thirty dollars. She handed him the bills.

"Hot damn! We could pick up some doughnuts and hot coffee. Make a shopping list, kids. Let's go."

"Harley, you haven't seen what I've seen," Mitchell said.

"I'm sure that's true," said Harley. "What are you talking about?" "He's possessed."

"Morgan?" Harley said. "Any truth to the rumor?"

"Yeah," said Gary.

"Demons?"

"No. Ghosts."

"None of them is the Devil?"

"Nope. Just normal people."

"Good. Because that Satanic cult stuff gets on my nerves. If you started chanting in tongues and spewing pea soup I might have to get rough."

"Nothing like that," said Gary.

"Good. Let's go."

Harley made them wait in the stairwell with their luggage while he checked the parking garage. He made them duck down in the back seat before he drove out of the parking garage into the street. "It's likely he saw you come in, D.J.," he said. "Or at least possible. Let's not take any stupid chances."

"Fine with me," said D.J., lying down on the back seat with her head near Morgan's. She was just glad that Harley drove a large American car with lots of leg room.

Morgan peeked at her, and Mishka began giggling.

"Who's that?" Harley said, driving. "That you, D.J.?" "Uh," said D.J.

"Peek-a-boo," Mishka said at the same time, her voice high and sweet and bubbly.

"Peek!"

Harley glanced back over the seat. Mishka hid her eyes with her hands, then pulled her hands aside and said, "Peek!"

"Eerie," said Harley.

D.J. sighed. "That's Mishka. She's three."



"A three-year-old ghost?"

"Eyoo," said D.J., who hadn't considered it like that.

"How'd she die?" Harley said.

"Morgan?" D.J. said.

Mishka's eyes clouded. Her mouth trembled. "Water," she murmured. "Wah wah."

D.J. reached out and stroked her hair. "It's okay. It's okay. Look, now you have a big old body to play in."

Mishka calmed, then disappeared. Saul's sneer showed up in her place. "Don't I, though?" he said, and leered at her.

"Not as big as Harley's," said DJ. "Low blow, babe."

She smirked at him.

"So who's this one?" Harley asked.

"Saul. Some punk from Jersey." D.J. stuck her tongue out at him.

"Give it to me, baby," said Saul.

"Shut up." She said it lazily, her previous instant fury with anything Saul said gone.

He shrugged and smiled.

"How many are there?" Harley asked.

D.J. tried to count in her head. "Eight?" she asked Morgan.

"Think so," he said in his own voice. "Plus me."

"So who's that?"

"That's really Morgan," D.J. said

"Whom did I meet in jail?"

"Listen carefully, Buford," said Gary. "Take a wild guess."

The car jerked. The wheels squealed. The car continued driving, though; Harley did not turn around. "No," he said in a low voice.

"Sorry to bring it up this way, Harley. Guess I should have waited till we got to the hotel."

"No," said Harley.

"All right. I'll shut up now. If you want, I don't have to talk to you anymore.

Just make sure they get the bastard for me, before he gets Doro."

Without another word, Harley pulled into a parking lot. He turned the car off. After a couple minutes' silence, he said, "Stay down, you two. I'm locking you in. Don't you dare show yourselves." He got out of the car and slammed the door shut.

They lay in silence for a while. Outside the car windows, darkness lay, the edge taken off it by the big lighted sign of the supermarket. The car smelled like vinyl. D.J. realized the night was cold, and wished she had taken a jacket out of her duffel, which was safely locked in the trunk. "Morgan?" she whispered at last.

"Yeah?"

"Gary knows Harley?"

Morgan sighed. "I forgot my speech, even though Dr. Dara taught me and taught me. 'I didn't mean anything by it. Have a nice day.'"

"I don't think that would work on Harley, hon."

Morgan sighed again. Then Gary said, "I consulted with him on a case when he was working up in Seattle. Never knew he was down here now, otherwise I'd have said we should get in touch with him. We've never met face to face, but we spent hours on the phone. Just couldn't resist telling him that way, and I guess I should have. It seemed like such a great joke."

They lay in silence. D.J. wondered what she would do if a face appeared at the window staring down at them. What if it were Chase? She hid her face in the crook of her arm.

A key rattled in the lock, the door opened, and Harley tossed a loaded brown paper bag over the seat-back. Morgan caught it before it could land on D.J.'s head. The car engine growled to life and they were traveling again.

Harley drove erratically for a while, turning corners quickly, slowing, starting, pulling over. They even hit the freeway briefly. No one spoke.

Finally they stopped somewhere else. "Stay down," Harley said in a remote voice, leaving them again. When he came back after a little while, he dropped a key with a plastic tag on D.J.'s head. She grabbed it.

"I've gotten us two connecting rooms, just in case you kids want a little privacy for your second date," Harley said.

"Thanks," D.J. said.

"The rooms are around back where the entrances can't be seen from the road." He started the car again. After a short trip, he turned the engine off and said, "The coast is clear, kids. Let's make a break."

When D.J. tried to sit up, she discovered how stiff she was from an hour of crouching. Harley hauled their things out of the trunk and took them into a room. Morgan groaned and sat up, grabbing the grocery bag. "Do you think he

hates me?" he asked.

"No," said D.J. "He's just upset."

"I don't want him to hate me. I like him."

"So do I." She peered out the window, saw that they were in a sheltered spot and she couldn't see anybody else around, just some quiet cars pulled up to anonymous doors in the anonymous dark, lit only by orange outdoor lights placed at intervals along the motel's back face.

"Come on," she said, clutching the key to room 156.

They got out and unlocked the door.

D.J. had to smile. One-fifty-six was a double double. So maybe Harley hadn't taken her absolutely seriously when she told him about its being the second date. She and Morgan had a choice.

She went and opened the connecting door, already unlocked on Harley's side. Morgan closed the room's curtains and turned on a few lamps. This motel was a step up from the one D.J. had stayed in with Rae. There was stationery and a Gideon Bible in the desk drawer, and the light bulbs were at least sixty watts.

From the other room came the sound of television. She knocked on the open connecting doorway and entered when Harley nodded to her.

She said, "I was wondering about Afra's condition. My landlady, Afra Griffin. She was attacked last night. Mitchell wouldn't tell me much about her."

Harley grabbed the phone and dialed, spoke quietly while D.J. leaned against the wall and looked at the television: a TV movie about an abusive husband and a passive wife, with children thrown in for plot complications. Morgan wandered in carrying a Saran-wrapped sheet of mixed doughnuts. "Want to take a shower," he said. He put the doughnuts on the table at Harley's elbow and retrieved his suitcase from where Harley had left it after unpacking the car.

"Harley's finding out about Afra," murmured D.J.

Morgan gave her a look then, his eyes dark and so wide she could see the whites all the way around the irises, his mouth hanging slightly open. A chill iced her spine: it was the first time he had really scared her. Then he blinked and looked at her from under his eyebrows, a Gary look, put an arm around her shoulders, kissed her cheek, and disappeared into their room. She stood looking after him, her hand to her cheek.

"The news is not good," Harley said as he cradled the handset.

She stared at him.

He got to his feet, walked over, and took her hands. "Come on, sit down," he said, leading her to the bed. She sat, and he sat in a chair across from her,

still holding her hands. His brown eyes looked tired. "She's gone," he said gently. "Your friend is gone."

Shock stilled everything in her for a long minute. Then all her connections let loose and she collapsed backward onto the bed, her hands pulling out of his. "No," she muttered. "No."

It's all my fault. If I had never moved in to her apartment, if I had never gotten to be friends with her, if Chase had just killed me when he came for me instead of Afra stopping him, maybe she'd be alive today.

Surely death and destruction shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of chaos forever. Amen.

D.J. put her hands up around her neck and squeezed her throat.

Harley gripped her wrists and pulled her hands away. D.J. coughed.

"You didn't do it," Harley said, holding her wrists.

"It happened because of me." Her voice hurt coming out. Hot tears spilled out of her eyes, streaking down the sides of her head. A moment later she was swallowing choked sobs and trying to twist away from him. He released her and got up. She cuffed tight, burying her face under her forearms, crying. How could this be? Afra, watering the dahlias, whispering to her that the tenants in 2D were probably going to have a baby, and wasn't it a pity, the way they fought? Afra, sniffing at science. Afra offering her Dutch cocoa on a rainy winter night. D.J. remembered a constellation of photographs in driftwood frames, laughing young men and women, babies, children, that had sat among conch shells on Afra's piano: relatives. Sons? Daughters? Grandchildren? All bereft now. And no chance for her, for any of them, to say goodbye.

"It should have been me," she whispered. She didn't have anybody who'd remember her, except a mother who didn't know whether she was alive or dead anyway, and a ghost.

"It shouldn't have been anybody!" Harley yelled. "Get it through your head! It shouldn't happen at all, but it is happening, and you can't control it! The only one who can control it is Kennedy, until we catch him, and don't you think we blame ourselves -- don't you think we know it's our fault that he got away in the first place and that he's getting away with this now?" His face was red with rage.

D.J. rubbed her eyes until she saw purple stars, then looked up at him and detached herself from within. He's upset, she thought. Do I need to be upset now? Maybe I should save it for later. She crushed her anguish down and let control filter to the fore. "I'm sorry," she said in a steady voice.

"Yes, well," said Harley, his voice stabilizing too. He wiped his forehead with

a handkerchief. "Best I can do is watch you two carefully, stop it from happening here."

"I'm going to bed now," D.J. said in a small voice.

"D.J . . . "He slumped in the chair. "I'm sorry. That outburst. I'm sorry. I didn't think I would --"

"It's all right," she said.

"No," he said, "but it happened. I'm sorry you lost your friend. Is there anything I can do?"

"I don't. . ." She pushed herself up, managed to get to her feet. "Can't think of anything. I'm really tired."

"Yes. Leave the door open, kiddo. If you need anything in the night, give a yell."

"Okay," She stumbled into the other room. He followed a minute later, carrying her duffel, and put it on the dresser. The sound of the shower still came through the bathroom door. Harley ambled back into the other room without saying anything else, and D.J. dragged over to her duffel, pulling a nightgown and her toiletries purse out but then lying on the bed with them beside her, without the energy to do anything else.

An arm was around her. D.J. opened her eyes. The last she remembered, she had been lying on her back, but now she was cuffed up, her nightgown still clutched in her hands, the heat of a body at her back, the soap-clean scent of a stranger in her nose, and a strange arm resting around her, its hand flat on her stomach. Light leaked from the bathroom; all the other lights in the room were out. She glanced down at the arm, saw it was a man's, naked, thin but sinewy, with a growth of fine black hairs on it. She lay for a while staring straight ahead at the wallpaper, which had a faint rick-rack pattern, brown on beige. It came to her that Afra was dead. A black knot twisted her stomach, and hot tears seeped from her eyes. She let go of the nightgown and put one hand on Morgan's hand on her stomach. He murmured something and pressed up against her back, digging his chin into her shoulder. Suddenly she wanted to be held more than anything else. She lifted his hand and rolled over to face him. He had shaved. His eyes were closed, and his slow breath flickered the ends of his mustache.

"Valerie?" she murmured. "Valerie?"

After a moment his eyes opened. It was too dark for her to see their color. "Hon?" murmured Valerie.

"Could you hold me, please?"

Valerie stretched and yawned, patting her mouth as she did. Morgan was wearing a

pair of jockey shorts, nothing else. He looked more muscular naked than he ever had inside his clothes. Valerie put her arms around D.J., stroking her back in soothing circles.

D.J. closed her eyes and relaxed, curled against Morgan's front. After a long moment, she said, "Afra's dead."

"I know, sugar. I know." The massage was smooth, calming. D.J. drifted back to sleep.

Daylight was sifting through the curtains. D.J. woke up feeling sticky. Her mouth tasted like moldy cheese. Morgan was asleep. D.J. slid out of his arms, grabbed her purse, and went into the bathroom.

She felt much better after a shower, deodorant, baby powder, and teeth brushing.

She was ready to eat something, anything. She wondered if Harley had eaten all dozen doughnuts in the night. After sliding into her sweaty T-shirt, she sneaked

back out and ransacked her duffel for other clothes, then retreated to the bathroom again, glancing at Morgan before she shut the door. She stopped when she realized his eyes were open and he was looking at her.

"Pasty," said a new voice coming from his mouth.

"What?" D.J. straightened. She clapped a hand over her mouth, felt her eyes going wide.

Morgan struggled up on his elbows. He squinched his face up, then relaxed it into a frown.

"Too soon," said Clift, rumbling a little. "Way too soon." Evidently he wasn't good at mornings. He waved a limp hand at D.J. "Go get dressed."

D.J. ducked into the bathroom and dressed slowly. The new voice. Familiar.

Afra's.

SIX

Morgan?" She said when she came out of the bathroom. She had picked one of her dresses to wear today, a crush-proof comfortable polyester number in burgundy. Morgan had pulled on jeans and had his head bent forward, brushing his hair down

over his face. "What?" asked the Lauren Bacall voice from beneath the hair.

"Elaine?" said D.J., sitting on the bed beside Morgan. The voice wasn't Valerie's; it sounded deeper, devoid of accent, and smokier.

"Mm-hmm," said the Lauren Bacall voice. "I'm the hygiene nut." She tossed her head back and brushed the hair out of her face. "You should have seen this boy before I got here. Talk about socially unacceptable!"

"Does he like it, that you -- take care of him?"

"'Course! He's grateful. He's not stupid, you know; he realizes that this kind of maintenance makes people accept him more. Nobody else ever taught him these things. Mostly his mother just left him in the basement and told him not to make

any noise." She finished brushing. "Got a robber band, sis?"

D.J. searched through the purse Morgan had filled with her bathroom supplies, found the pouch with hair things in it. D.J. wore short permed hair at the moment, but she had had her long hair days, too, until she got tired of having to deal with it all the time. She handed Elaine a braided elastic loop, and Elaine twisted it around Morgan's long black hair, making a ponytail down the back.

"Normally he likes the jungle look, so he can hide behind his hair if the moment demands it. But I think we can do without that today," Elaine said.

Harley stood on the threshold of their room and knocked on the door sill. "Decent?" he said.

Morgan's lip lifted in Saul's sneer, but he didn't say anything out loud.

"Come on in," D.J. said. "I'm starving."

Morgan looked through his suitcase and pulled out a white shirt with billowy sleeves, like the shirts pirates wore in Errol Flynn movies. "Eh?" Saul said, as he held the shirt up to his chest, lifting one of the sleeves, shaking the lace-edged ruffled cuff at her.

"Who does your shopping?" asked D.J.

"It's a constant battle," Saul said. "Mostly we shop in thrift stores, so we can get a piece of clothing for each of us." He slipped the shirt on over his head.

"I don't think our style makes us popular at parties. The bits don't go together."

"Does that voice trick work for you or against you?" Harley asked.

"What do you mean?"

"You could put it all together into some kind of act, if you had a writer. It's uncanny how different your voices are."

"That's what I thought," Afra said. "Lots of potential."

D.J.'s face prickled and her fingers tingled.

"Shut up," said Clift. "Not yet." He sat down on the bed next to D.J. "You're pale. We're sorry, Deeje. I know it's a shock. It's a shock to us too, every time this happens. We haven't settled in yet."

D.J. gripped a fold of her dress, staring down at the material. "There's some kind of selection process, isn't there? I mean, not every single person who dies comes and gets inside you, only special ones --otherwise you'd be legion, right? You have ghosts from all over the states! How do you pick them?"

"I suspect a prerequisite for it is that we have to believe in ghosts, one way

or another, to become them," Clift said. "Another thing that distinguishes us from garden variety ghosts is that we are impregnated with some sense of mission, at least initially. Violent death seems to have quite a bit to do with it. Then there's resonance. Morgan isn't the only ghost magnet in the world, but he emits a certain resonance that appeals to a select few, namely those of us here. In effect, there's quite a strict entrance exam."

She twisted her dress between her hands. "Does Morgan have any say about this?"

"I want her," Morgan said. He patted D.J.'s shoulder. "I like her. She's real nice. You want her to go away, Miss Dee?"

"No, of course not," she said, turning to look at him through a glaze of tears.

"I can't quite understand it yet, but I'm glad she's here. But I just worry about you, Morgan. It must be so crowded inside you"

"I have all these friends to talk to," he said.

"But what if they all want to talk at once?"

"I tried to introduce us to Robert's Rules of Order, but the others say that's silly," Clift said. "If we didn't like each other, this would be a nightmare. However, I admire all of us."

"Even Saul?"

"Oh, yes. He's a pain in the butt, but he doesn't mean anything by it. He has certain strengths the rest of us don't."

Harley vanished into his room and returned with half a dozen doughnuts, which he offered to D.J. and Morgan. D.J. grabbed three cake doughnuts. Morgan took one glazed twist.

"Aren't you, like, eating for twelve?" Harley asked Morgan.

"Most of us don't care for sweets," said Clift. "This is for Gary."

"Oh, God," Harley said, sitting down at the table. "Gary." He mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. "I think I better get this straight now. D.J., you buy this whole ghost-possession thing?"

"Yes," mumbled D.J. around a mouthful of doughnut.

"Even though it makes no sense."

"I don't think I can explain it any other way. Besides, Gary --" "Gary?"

"I knew Gary in San Francisco, Harley. He says he consulted with you on a case while you were in Seattle. Were you in Seattle before you came to Spores Ferry?"

"Oh, God," said Harley.

"How could he know that if he wasn't Gary?"



"Maybe he's psychic."

"You accept psychic but you don't believe in spooks?"

"I don't know what I believe." He stared at Morgan. "Gary?"

"Buford?"

Harley cringed. "Don't call me that!"

"Heh heh heh." Gary wolfed his doughnut. "Okay, Harley."

"You used to be a sensible guy," Harley said after a pause. "How . . . the hell

. . . are you surviving this? Surviving. Is that the word? If that is you in there, isn't it driving you crazy?"

Gary frowned and stared at the rug. After a long silence, he said, "I woke up."

He glanced at Harley. "You know how I died?"

"Heard," said Harley.

Gary looked at D.J., then shrugged. "I never wanted to feel anything again.

The

sleep was such a relief. I think I stayed in it for a while. Fact, Clift tells me I was gone, nowhere, null, a couple weeks, before I woke up.

"Probably the last thing I was thinking about besides pain was Doro. I knew the

boyfriend was looking for her, and I had aimed him right at her. I opened my eyes, and there she was. There you were," he said, looking at D.J., "at least the top of your head, over that wall. Hair color and style changed, but then you

looked up, and there were those eyes. Never forget 'em."

She stared at him, a trembling smile surfacing.

"I couldn't figure out how that happened. Which was the dream? Death, or waking

up? Then all these people started talking to me, all these strangers, big blonde

woman, little baby girl, professor type, black kid, a whole bunch of them, saying 'Settle down! Settle down, brother, let us explain.'"

He sat still for a while, staring toward the curtains, then frowned and glanced

down at his hands. "Well, it was one wild explanation. But you know . . ." He looked up at Harley, smiled. "It's nice in here. Never been close to so many people. I was a loner before, and I thought this was my worst nightmare, but actually --"

Harley shuddered. "More power to you."

Gary burst out laughing, leaned against D.J. She smiled, finding his joy infectious.

"Know what?" Gary said when he had stopped laughing. "I can't even buy a beer."

Harley frowned. "Do you want one?"

"Not especially. It just strikes me as --" He shook his head, smiling. "And voting. Boy. Can't wait to see how we handle that. And registering for selective service?" He frowned. "We do that yet?" He listened to something D.J. and Harley couldn't hear. "Oh, of course, we'd qualify for an exemption." He shook his head. "Kid's been in therapy for three years already and he's only nineteen. Nobody gets a normal adolescence."

"Cut to the chase," Clift said.

"Sorry," said Gary. "Right. The point is to stop the boyfriend."

"Already a lot of people working on that."

"We have certain resources they don't have."

"Like what?"

Morgan drew in a deep breath, sat up straight, licked his lips. Afra said, her voice tight with pain, "My name is Afra Griffin. He came to my apartment."

Harley's eyes went wide. He hunched his shoulders.

"His hair was different. Blond. It was the middle of the night, and I was asleep. I had my gun on the bedside table, on a shelf you couldn't see without being in the bed. He didn't know. He taped my mouth. He tied me . . ." She glanced at D.J., stopped. She looked at Harley. "Gary said it was his standard M.O. They probably told you all that. I got a hand free, but by that time he, well, I couldn't aim as well as I used to. Shot him in the arm. Right forearm. Stopped him. He had to go tie a bandage around it, and then noise came from upstairs. Shot woke up the Lutzes. So he scampered out of there."

Her eyes closed, and her face tightened, as if suddenly Morgan were all cheekbone and temple. She opened her eyes. "He asked me things at first. Where D.J. was. He'd rip the tape up off my mouth so I could answer, then put it down again. I told him you went with the police. Then, when I didn't have any more answers, then, he just . . ."

She shook herself. "Here's what I remember. He was wearing gray pants, a white shirt, red suspenders. He had bleached his hair platinum blond since the day before. By the time he left, his shirt was bloody and his pants were too. So he would have had to change them, either dump them or clean them. He had a big army overcoat he took off before he started on me, and he wrapped up in it before he ran away. I heard that beetle noise, like Saul said. VW Bug. So. You're looking for a blond who drives a VW and wears a full-length army jacket, olive drab. He's got a gunshot wound in his right forearm."

"I'll phone that in."

Gary said, "What are you going to tell them when they ask where you got the information?"

"A witness." Harley struggled to his feet. "Don't worry. I can make this fly somehow. I'll be right back."

D.J. turned to look at Morgan, took his hands.

"You told me he did impressions," Afra said, and smiled.

"That sounds more believable than the reality, doesn't it?"

Afra rolled her eyes, something D.J. had seen her do a dozen times in her previous incarnation. It meant what a world, what a world. She said, "You see, I've been telling them Harley's right. We could put an act together, if we had the right script. Did I ever tell you I used to be in the theater?"

"You never did," said D.J.

"Morgan doesn't know what he wants to do when he grows up," Afra said. "From what he tells me, he's just sampling various classes in school. I think we have a future in stand-up, but I haven't convinced any of the others."

"A bit too public for my palate, sugar," said Valerie, distaste in her voice. "I would vastly prefer it if we just kept our little oddities to ourselves."

"Yes, but we never do," said Clift.

"That's because of Timmy and Saul," Valerie said. She wrinkled her nose. "I wish those boys would observe a few civil niceties. And you, Cliffie, have the lecture habit."

"I don't think I could give it up if I tried, Val."

"Oh, I don't know," Valerie said in a considering voice. "I just think we haven't found the proper motivation yet."

Harley wandered back in. "Well, they took notes when I talked to them. Seems like they think insanity is contagious, and that I caught it from you, Morgan. Somebody'll be along soon with some real breakfast, D.J."

"Good," she said, her stomach chiming in with a rumble, even though she had tried to quiet it with the doughnuts. "I forgot to get any dinner yesterday."

"McNamara will bring us something good. Wonder what's on TV." He went toward the television and D.J. had a terrible sense of déjà vu: watching the news Sunday morning, hearing about the attack on Afra. What if the news this morning brought more evil? Whom had she forgotten to protect this time?

"Don't," she said in a little swallowed voice. And not only that, but right after the television announcement, Rae had disappeared. "Harley!" she cried. "Are you going to leave us too?"

"What?" he said.

"Like Rae. Yesterday. Suddenly someone came along and relieved her. I know you shouldn't have to work twenty-four hour days or anything, but I just. . ."

"Oh, that? No, I told downtown I'd stick with you, at least for the next two days. I may need a little time off now and then. Couple hours to go feed the cat, collect the mail. But I figured nobody else is going to make the adjustment I did."

"Meaning me?" Gary asked.

"Yeah. I still don't quite believe in you, but I do give you credibility. I think other people could easily make a mistake about you."

"They do all the time," Clift said.

Harley nodded, frowning. He looked at the television, now in reach, then glanced at D.I. "You don't want me to turn it on?"

"I don't want to hear that there's been another attack."

"I've already talked to downtown today, and they would have told me. Let's just check in with one of the morning programs. I need a news fix."

"Okay," said D.J. She looked at Morgan. "Any of you play cards?"

"I know one called Misery," said the Shadow's deep echoey voice.

"You'll have to teach me," D.J. said. She had never had an extended conversation with the Shadow. She wondered how he had died, who he had been. He couldn't really be an old radio play character, could he? Getting to know Morgan would take a lot of time and work.

"With great pleasure," the Shadow said.

"So which one's that?" asked Harley, glancing away from Regis & Kathie Lee.

"Shadow," D.J. said, as the Shadow geared up and produced his long spooky laugh that started at a medium pitch and sank down into very low registers.

Harley made a face as if he had smelled something bad.

"Oh, come on," said D.J. "He's just a kid. How old are you, Shadow?"

He glared at her. "Sixteen." It was the first time she had heard him say something in a normal voice. He sounded sullen and young.

"You can sound scary if that's what you want," she said. "How do we play Misery?" She retrieved Rae's cards from her luggage and began shuffling.

"Deal thirteen to each," he said in his spookiest voice.

They were playing their second hand when a knock came on the door of Harley's room. Harley switched off the television, reached for his gun, and eased to the connecting door. "Who's there?"

"Breakfast," said a voice through the door.

Panic started in D.J.'s chest and spread through her like fire feeding on lines of oil. She stared at Morgan. Morgan laid his cards down and looked out from under his brows.

"Don't open the door," D.J. whispered to Harley. Morgan was on his feet, carrying his body with a focus and intensity foreign to him. "It's him."

SEVEN

B.J. Crept across the bed and picked up the phone. She felt as if she had swallowed a stone, and it lay in her stomach, pinning her down. She could not escape. Why even think of it?

Calm, she was calm. She had Things to Do. She dialed 911. Morgan walked silently to the outside door of their room. He gripped the knob.

"Breakfast?" said Harley in a sleepy voice. "I didn't order any breakfast. You sure you got the right room?"

"Ambulance, fire, or police?" said a voice in D.J.'s ear.

"Police," she whispered. She realized that she didn't even know what hotel they were in, Or the address, having come in blind the night before. She grabbed an ashtray off the bedside table and fished the matchbook out of it. "I'm D.J. Demain, a protected witness, here with Morgan Hesch and Detective Harley." She studied the matchbook. "We're at the Lamplighter Inn, 1342 Benjamin Boulevard, and Chase Kennedy, the escaped murderer, is trying to get into our room. Room 154, around the back. Please send help." She cradled the phone silently.

Morgan was watching Harley for a cue. Chase's voice said, "Room 154, that was my instruction from Detective McNamara." Chase sounded honestly confused. "But I'll leave if you want me to."

D.J. felt cold. Chase knew the detective's name. Had he killed him? How else would he know where to come? If he had done something to the detective, he probably had the police car, the gun, the radio . . . he had found her job, and her apartment. There was no escape. She closed her eyes and shivered. She remembered this kind of cold from before, the Arctic place she had gone when she realized Chase was who he was and she had made all these wrong assumptions, when she had learned she could never trust herself again. She had lived with this cold for a long time before anger thawed her out. Maybe this brief tropical period had been an illusion.

"Wait a sec," said Harley, his voice still sleepy. "What kind of breakfast you got ?"

Morgan whispered, "Doro, get in the bathroom and lock the door."

She stared at him. How could she leave him alone out here with Harley and Chase?

How could any of them be here? What if Chase did something awful, shot Morgan

and Harley? There was no escape.

She felt so cold . . .

Maybe she could stop Chase somehow. It had happened before. She had to remember that. Maybe if she wasn't out here Morgan and Harley would both die and Chase would get away. Again. More deaths on her head. No, she couldn't stand that. Not again.

Anger sparked somewhere inside. She could fight. She could go down fighting.

"Do it," Morgan/Gary whispered.

She didn't have any special defense training, and she knew she wasn't as strong as Chase physically. Much as she hated to admit it, she could help Morgan and Harley best by being out of the way and as safe as possible. She scooted into the bathroom and locked the door, then looked through her toiletries purse for weapons. A perfume bottle. She could spritz that in Chase's eyes if he somehow got through the door. Baby powder. Throw it in his face. Cold cream: squirt it on the floor in front of the door and make it slippery? She did it, spreading the pale goop with her hands. She lined up the rest of her arsenal on the counter, then worked the towel bar out of its holders. Whatever else happened, she wanted to take a big swipe at him, break his nose at least, his head at best, his balls.

She sat on the closed toilet, the towel bar over one shoulder, and listened. Anger burned slow and steady.

What happens if I die? Morgan wondered. Gary had the body; they all thought that was best; nobody was going to argue at a time like this. Gary had faced situations like this before. He was tense but relaxed.

If I die, Morgan thought, we all die. He thought about each of his insiders, all their differences, all their samenesses; how Mishka loved ice cream and Elaine hated it, but put up with it for Mishka's sake; how Timmy taught the rest of them to play hopscotch, which a few could remember from grade school days but most had forgotten; how Valerie loved wind and wanted to run out into the middle of it any time it was blowing; how Afra knew the names of every flower, and the Shadow the names of every comic book hero; how Saul was hot for anything female, but usually wilted if any of them gave him a second look; how Clift liked to confuse people who thought Morgan was stupid by being smarter than they could ever be; how Gary liked to laugh, so deep it felt like it came from his toes.

He couldn't die. He barely even knew Afra and Gary yet. Where would all the insiders go if they lost him?

Gary clenched his jaw, feeling fire sear through his muscles. He wanted to kill Chase, stamp him out, crush him. He wanted to whip welts into him, smash his head between two rocks and destroy that corrupted brain. He drew in long draughts of breath, trying to calm himself, but it was difficult: hadn't he come

back just to do this one thing? What else was there? His goal was just the other side of a door. All he had to do was open the door and grab.

"Maybe, if it's a real good breakfast, I'll open the door," Harley said. "I guess I am kind of hungry."

"Sorry. Just McDonald's, but there's a lot."

"Sounds great," said Harley. "What's the password?"

"Password?"

"Yeah, you know, there's always a password."

"The password is --" The sound of a shot.

"Go!" yelled Harley to Gary, backing into room 156 and slamming the connecting door shut, locking it. Gary opened the outside door, glanced out, stood back as Harley took a look out. Then Harley, gun in hand, ran past Gary.

Peering around the doorsill into Room 154, gun aimed in, Harley said, "Drop it."

A shot answered him, smashing into his car where it stood parked in front of the door. Harley fired an answering shot and ducked back. Two more wild shots sounded from Room 154, with no provocation. "Lucky he favors knives," Harley muttered to Gary. "No aim. Get me a pillow."

Gary opened and closed his fists, then, blowing out breath, went to get a pillow.

A head poked out of room 152. Harley gestured the man away, hoping he would take the hint and hoof it out of range. He glanced behind him, saw someone else peering out. He flashed his badge and the person ducked out of sight.

Gary handed him a pillow. Harley held it out in front of 154's open door, attracting two more shots.

Harley jerked the pillow back, whispered to Gary, "Sound like a service revolver?"

"Uh-huh."

"Six shots. With the one he used to shoot open the door, that should do it. I think Mac carried a revolver. You think he knows how to reload?"

"He always used knives," Gary said, his voice flat and harsh. He noticed the police cruiser pulled up behind Harley's. The heat inside him was making him light-headed. He was having trouble paying attention, finding it impossible to drop down into the cool, calculating mindset he had used when police work had demanded it before.

"I'm pretty sure I winged him," Harley muttered. He edged close to the door and yelled, "Throw the gun out or I'll open fire."

Sounds of movement, the skitter of a wheel on one of the beds as the furniture shifted.

"Come on," Harley said, "we have you trapped, and you're out of bullets. What are you going to do? Might as well give up."

The revolver clattered out the door to land on the concrete walkway outside.

"Okay. I'll be coming in now," said Harley. "Don't do anything foolish." He peeked around the edge of the door. The sound of a rifle cocking sent him jumping back. The rifle blast smashed the grill of his car.

Two more cruisers pulled up, lights revolving, sirens silent. Car doors opened, cops hiding behind them. "Got him trapped in room 154," Harley yelled, "but he's got a rifle. Stay out of the line of fire."

He turned to Gary. "Get D.J.. out of here," he said.

Gary wanted to argue. He flexed his fists, wishing Morgan had more muscle, Gary wanted to get his hands around Chase's neck, watch as the life left his body. How could he trust Harley to get Chaise, when Gary couldn't even trust himself? He had known Chase was going to kill him, but he had given Chase the information he wanted anyway. He knew he would have done anything Chase asked in the end, just to get the pain to stop.

He needed to destroy Chase. He never wanted to face that dark weak place in himself again.

"Get her out of here," Harley said again.

Gary closed his eyes. The rage was so hot inside him he couldn't think straight.

"Come on," whispered Valerie, "Consider Doro. Life's more important." In the dark stage that was Morgan's mind, Valerie reached out and touched Gary's forehead. Her fingertips were cool. The red rage ran out of his soles as cool flowed from her hand. Gary took a deep breath, nodded to Harley, then went to knock on the bathroom door. "Come on, Doro, we have to run."

"Is it really you?"

"Who else? Come on!"

She opened the door a crack and looked out, towel rod at the ready. He grabbed her wrist and pulled her out the door. They ran away from the room where Chase was trapped and around the side of the building.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, still gripping the towel rod. "What are we doing? All we need is a tank. We could ram fight through the building and run over him. Turn him into slime." Her breath was coming in ragged gasps and her face was bright red.

Gary said, "It's almost over. He's trapped. He's got to surrender or he's going to die." His voice was tight with residual rage. He still felt a terrible need to go back, walk into the hail of fire, and take Chase out himself.



"We can't leave now!" D.J. said.

"We can't help, Doro. Somebody else will do it."

"What if they don't? What if he gets away again?" A tear streaked down her face.

"What if it starts all over?"

He took a deep breath and let it out, then gathered her into his arms, wishing he had Valerie's healing touch, wishing Doro's arguments didn't echo his own. He could feel how stiff and tight she was, but after a long moment her shoulders eased, relaxed.

"I hope he dies," she whispered. "Can't trust prison to hold him. I don't think I could stand it if this happened again. I'd kill myself first."

"Sometimes that's not a final solution," Saul muttered.

"Shut up," Clift said. "Deej, we have to delegate this time. Lord knows we're used to that. We have to trust somebody else to do the job for us."

After a silent moment, she said, "I just want it to be over."

They stood quiet for a little while, and then he sighed and released her. He said, "Let's go to the motel office, get the evacuation of the other rooms in motion."

D.J. sat in the waiting area of the motel office drinking instant Sanka and trying to relax. Every time she let her mind go, she thought of Chase; legions of "what-ifs" rattled their spears, pricking her composure. Instead of thinking she stared at her hand, watched it shake as it held the coffee cup; watched the trembling of the dark liquid.

Morgan sat down beside her on the fatty brown couch, staring at the police officer at the motel desk. The officer had a hand-held radio, and he was talking alternately into it and the phone. Tension radiated from him.

D.J. handed Morgan her coffee cup. "Unleaded," she said.

He took a sip, grimaced.

Distant pops sounded. The officer at the desk tensed.

Morgan jerked and dropped the paper cup. Coffee spilled on the brown rug.

"Morgan?" D.J. said.

Morgan stared at her, his eyes so wide she could see the whites around the irises, his mouth open slightly.

D.J. went cold, remembering the last time he'd given her that look. She couldn't look away. He seemed frozen in position, one of his hands clutched tight on the

couch's arm, the knuckles white with strain, the other hand biting into the couch cushion between him and D.J.

"Morgan," she whispered.

A voice came from the police radio. The officer listened, his eyes closed in concentration, shoulders hunched. Then he blew out breath and stood up. "It's over."

D.J., staring into Morgan's unblinking wild eyes, knew the officer was wrong.

EIGHT

Harley staggered into the office and headed straight for the coffee table. He had lost his suit jacket somewhere, and sweat dripped from his forehead, patched his shirt under his arms and suspenders. After he had mixed up a cup of instant from the hot water in the big pot, he turned to D.J. and Morgan.

Morgan was leaning back on the couch, his head lax, only white slits of eyes showing. D.J. sat forward on the edge of the couch, her face chalky, her eyes dark, her hands clenched on one another.

"You don't look relieved," Harley said.

"The fight's here," she whispered, and glanced toward Morgan without turning her head.

"Shee-it!" said Harley. Clift's list of qualifications for ghost-possession came back to him: believe in ghosts; have a mission; violent death; resonate right. "They wouldn't invite him in!" he said.

"He's never waited for an invitation."

Morgan's jaw worked, made a clicking noise. His mouth closed. His eyelids fluttered, then opened, their pale blue stained with brown. "Puny," he said, his voice low and thrilling. He flexed his hands, then looked around. "Dorothy Jean! At last! You don't know what I've gone through to get to you."

"Yes, I do," she said. "Get out! Die, Chase! Just -- die!"

"I already did that," he said. His face darkened. "It hurt, and not in a good way."

"Get out of Morgan!" She pulled her hands apart, made fists, and began pummeling Morgan's chest.

"Hey! Is this any way to treat the one who loves you? Although it does feel .

. so good . . ." He smiled at her. Suddenly she remembered one evening, before she knew much about Chase. They were having a candlelight dinner at her apartment. She had made a spectacular meal, because she was sure Chase was the one she'd been looking for all her life, and the way he responded to her had her

convinced he felt the same way about her. They had finished dessert and were looking at each other. D.J.'s mind, at least, was in the bedroom, where she had covered the lampshade with a pink scarf and left some sandalwood-scented candles burning.

Chase picked up one of the candles on the dinner table and tilted it so that hot wax poured onto his palm. "Mmm," he said. "So good. So good." He slowly dripped a circle on one palm, then switched hands and dripped more wax on the other. Wondering if it was some erotic turn-on she'd never heard of, D.J. had packed up the other candle and tried dripping a drop on her own palm. At the stinging pain of the burn her hand jerked. She set the candle upright and looked at Chase with horror; he was so absorbed in what he was doing that he never noticed. She blinked. Maybe she was hypersensitive to pain. Maybe that was it.

Pretending she had to go to the bathroom, she went to her room and blew out the candles there. People did have different ideas of pleasure, she told herself, but she didn't want him practicing his brand on her.

Still, she had thought Chase was near enough to perfect not to worry about.

She stopped pounding on him. He gripped her shoulders, drew her against him. "The hair, you have to change that," he said. "It's ugly. Not like an angel's anymore. But now you're a dirty one. I forgot. Now you're a dirty one." Then he ground his mouth against hers, forced hers open and thrust his tongue in. After her first startled fury, she was going to bite down on his tongue, but Harley grabbed her from behind and pulled her out of Chase's arms.

"Gary!" Harley said. "Can't you do something?"

Chase laughed. "Invoke your little police friend," he said. "I killed him once, and I'll do it again."

"Clift?" asked D.J.

"Detective?" said a strange voice from behind them. D.J. and Harley turned.

A uniformed officer stood there. "They need you for testing," he said.

"Something's come up," said Harley. He reached behind him, then turned to Morgan and handcuffed him. "I need to question this witness before I wrap it up. I suggest we go somewhere more private," Harley said to D.J. He turned back to the other officer. "Okay if we borrow your cruiser, just to sit in?"

The man shrugged, then held out keys. "Right there," he said, pointing a thumb over his shoulder.

"Thanks, Fletcher. This shouldn't take long." He dragged Morgan up off the

couch  
by the handcuffs, then took him outside and pushed him into the back seat.  
"Sit  
up front, D.J.," he said, climbing into the car.

She got in beside him and looked back through the divider at Morgan. "Can't  
you  
do something?" she asked, not knowing to whom she was appealing.

"I'm trying Dee!" cried Clift. He gulped.

"The little professor," Chase said. "I'll step on him like a bug. The sluts I  
shall slit from crotch to throat. I missed my chance to do that to the old  
lady,  
but now that I have another chance, I'll do it correctly. I haven't decided  
what  
to do to that pesky nine-year-old boy yet, but it's delicious to think about  
my  
options. And the baby. I don't know if she's dirty yet." He frowned. "But she  
will be. Maybe not right away. But after I deal with the others." He sat back  
and smiled. "The cop. The cop. He was so much fun the last time. I'll make it  
even better this time."

"Morgan!" D.J. said. "Kick him out. Kick him out."

Morgan blinked, then looked at her with his own pale blue eyes. "Kick him  
out?"  
he said in a slow voice.

"You don't want to keep him, do you?"

"No! I don't like him at all."

"Kick him out."

"I don't know how."

"Ask the others."

"Okay." Morgan closed his eyes.

D.J. sat back. Business mode, she thought. Business mode. Everything has a  
place; how do I get rid of something that doesn't belong? Delete it on the  
computer. Shred the file. For a minute she visualized Chase as a paper ghost,  
going into the shredder whole and coming out as narrow crimped strips of  
paper.  
See him get out of that one.

Dump the trash. Edit the bad phrases out of the report. But Morgan wasn't a  
computer.

What would Dr. Kabukin do?

What was she always trying to get Morgan to do? Integrate. And Clift said nos  
it  
would make them all disappear, and leave Morgan confused. What if they each  
grabbed a piece of Chase and wouldn't let go, though? Maybe if they pulled him  
to pieces, the pieces would be easier to get rid of.

Shredding.

"Morgan," said D.J.

"I'm trying to kick him out but he won't go! Even Gary can't hold him!"

"Morgan, integrate him."

"What?" He sounded panic-stricken. "I don't want him in here!"

"Each of you take a different piece."

"No! I don't want anything he has!" "Is what you're doing working?"

"No! We keep trying to beat him up, but he's stronger. He's awful, D.J. He looks around and everything he sees is ugly and he makes us look at it like that and we can't find our own eyes. He looks at us and we're all ugly. And we get all weak when he looks at us like that! All my insiders had ugly places in their vision, but we talked about them and they got better, but he won't let us talk, he won't listen, he just hurts us and hurts us --"

"I know."

"He's going to poison us!"

"Yes. But maybe if you all integrate him, the doses will be small enough for you to survive. Clift said integration would destroy your insiders."

"Destroy . . ." Morgan closed his eyes again.

After a long moment of restless silence, Morgan opened his mouth. "Dorothy Jean!" cried Chase. "Never forget. I always loved you, even after you betrayed me. I love you now even though you've betrayed me again. My lamb, my savior, my judas --"

"Shut up!" said D.J., fighting tears and anger.

Morgan began coughing and choking. Harley climbed out of the car and opened the back door, standing back a respectful distance, but watching Morgan.

What have I done? D.J. thought. If they take the pleasure he had killing those women, if they take that he likes pain, if they find out why he did it, won't that turn them into him? Won't they do it themselves? What about little Mishka?

She's too young to understand. What about Saul? What if he turns really nasty the way Chase was? What about Valerie, what if she takes that hate he had?

Morgan was coughing deep coughs that forced their way up from the bottom of his lungs. He was holding his stomach with his hand-cuffed hands, curling up.

After what seemed like a long time, when he was actually coughing up blood, he stopped, and slumped, exhausted, on the back seat.

"Now," he said in a hoarse whisper. "Now we're going to close the door, okay? Close the door."

"Buddy?" Harley said, stooping to stare at him.

Morgan looked at him with bloodshot eyes, wiping his mouth on his pirate sleeve.

"You need a hospital or something?"

Morgan swallowed. "Glass of water?" he managed.

Harley ran inside and came out with a big paper cup of water. He climbed in the back seat with Morgan, pushed him upright, and held the cup to his lips. D.J. hugged herself, wondering if Chase would make a move, strangle Harley with the handcuffs, push the water in his face and make a break. But Morgan sipped, coughed, sipped, sagged against the seat.

"Did you do it?" Harley asked.

"Yeah," said someone. It was hard to tell who, Morgan's voice was so strained. It sounded like it might be Gary. "You were right, Doro; couldn't take him in a fight, but when we went to -- pull him inside us, the way Morgan does with ghosts, he came apart."

"Does this mean you're all -- polluted by him?" she asked in a small voice.

"Ah, sugar," said Valerie, and took another sip of water. "Not like we didn't have our dark sides before."

"Are you going to kill people?" D.J. asked, her voice still high and tiny. She put her feet up on the seat and hugged her knees to her chest, her back against the passenger door.

"As the oldest, I took that part," Afra said, her voice clear. "I can own it without acting on it. Just as you could know about horrors and not become them. We have the power to say no."

"No more ghosts," Clift said.

"No more ghosts," agreed Elaine.

"You don't mind if I leave these cuffs on you for now, though, do you?" Harley asked.

"Cuffed me wrong," said Gary. "Should have done it behind my back, Buford."

"I know," said Harley.

"I don't mind," said Morgan. "Except I'd like breakfast."

"So would I," Harley said. "We've got to hang around here until the crime lab finishes, got to have our hands and guns tested -- you know the routine, Gary-- but I bet we could order something in." He went into the hotel office.

Morgan leaned forward, looking through the divider into D.J.'s eyes. She stared

back, saw his eyes darken into Gary's. "Doro," he whispered. "I took the love."

"What?"

"They let me take what I could stand of him, and I took the love he had for you."

She closed her eyes. "I don't want that back

"It's the cleanest thing he owned."

"Put it away, Gary. "She stared into his eyes. "Whatever happens now, let that be just between us. All eleven of us, but --"

He took a deep breath, let it out. "All right," he said. "All right." He leaned back and relaxed against the seat. "As long as there's a future at all."

Was that possible? All the parts of Morgan she had begun to fall in love with, infected with pieces of what she most wanted to escape?

She looked at him. His eyes were closed and his breathing had slowed into sleep.

She was tired of running away. She couldn't abandon him because he had followed her advice.

By the time Harley was back with food, she was thinking of ways to cover up spray-painted graffiti on apartment walls.