

Chapter 37

THE NECTAR OF FAMILIARITY

THE HOUSE ACROSS from St. Paul's Anglican had sprouted a For Sale sign. The tattered net was gone, its poles consigned to discards in the drive—stereo equipment, broken chairs, a headboard minus frame. The grasses of the bottomland had been mowed down. The unshorn creek banks raised a sort of Mohawk through the stubble. Nothing moved except the cars on Hwy. 6. Through the scruffy pines surrounding the abandoned property, chicory and Queen Anne's lace stood utterly becalmed.

Bombshell dropped, Dr. Colton had wrapped up summarily. Normally, he stayed behind his desk when we were done. This time he'd decided to escort me to the door, allowing him to slip in chatily that Luke had gone to Hamilton with Mr. Shen. Ferrying a member to the VIA station.

Pieces being moved around the board again.

Out loud, I'd wondered who'd gone with them. Luke's mobility depended on a two-man escort.

Marion.

Which left Cook or Kirin to unload on—not the deepest in his counsels.

The kitchen had been empty when I'd gone to look for Cook, though something rich and garlicky was roasting in the oven. I'd gone out on the stoop to check for Kirin's Honda, but it wasn't

there. I'd spotted Cook, however, at the far end of her garden hacking at a stalk of Brussels sprouts. Watching her, I'd idly started worrying my keys. I'd utterly forgotten that I'd jammed them in my pocket after Marion had told me I was free to leave.

It was almost disappointing when the Jaguar purred to life. How much simpler if it hadn't, if all I'd heard was chugging or the stomach-sinking silence of ignitions wires cut. I'd have had the righteous fuel then to storm inside, burst in on Dr. Colton, level accusations

...

...and what? Stomp off in a huff? Thumb a ride north to Toronto? Make myself forget the Farm, the Caucus, Luke? Hell, I'd done it once before. How hard could it be?

But the engine had rolled over. No one had been lying. I could have left the first day if I'd wanted to.

The western sun was pouring through the windshield. In contravention of good eco-sense I turned the motor on and let the AC run. Across the road, the front door opened and a stick-thin woman in a tank-top dragged a faded plastic Santa down the stoop. She stopped to catch her breath and didn't seem to notice me—the gleaming silver Jaguar in a rural church's parking lot. Perhaps she'd gotten used to it.

I sank down in the seat and closed my eyes.

Of course the promise to restore my memories came at a price. Too much had gone into taking them away for the undoing to be otherwise. But killing? For a group complicit in the dropping of me, homeless, in Toronto fifteen years ago? A confrerie about to disband anyway? People I felt absolutely no commitment to?

Not true. There's one.

The rush of earlier, beside the pond with Luke, swept over me. If not for that, I'd be inclined to write off Dr. Colton as a nut. Psychics at Fort Meade? MKULTRA? 2561-G? BRAZIER? Grist for Hollywood, chocolate for the paranoid. But Luke—the very fact of him, his memory of years I hadn't lost, the stirrings of telepathy between us—washed away the scepticism.

Brothers.

Twins.

Extraordinary twins.

Empath and transmitter.

Telepaths.

Dr. Colton's fears about us had been anything but baseless. Where I'd gone with Luke was like a meltdown in a nuclear reactor. Left unchecked, the scalding *just because we can* of our telepathy would vaporise the moral shells containing it. Yet here he was, tickling the tail of the dragon, hoping that it wouldn't turn and grill him to a cinder.

He clearly knew the beast. "I can't help but notice, David," he'd opined instead of laying out precisely what he meant by *point the gun*, "you're more intrigued by 'how' than troubled by the notion."

Accusation? Or nasty little dig? Whichever, he'd declined to tell me more.

"We'll meet again," he'd finished up. "You, me, John and Luke. You can give us your decision then."

Yeah, right. Decisions mean you have a choice.

Say I went back home—slipped the car in gear and headed north toward Toronto. All other things aside, I'd have to contact Byron and MacKenzie. They weren't about to drop Cassandra Island and the Caucus just because I'd ceased communication. *Oops, sorry, false alarm* wasn't going to wash. Partial truths weren't going to cut it either.

Since arriving at the Farm, I'd been puzzled by the cavalier reaction to my sending CSIS info from Cassandra Island. I'd been thinking maybe it was bluster, and that Dr. Colton cared a whole lot more than he was letting on. It wasn't that. He'd merely played the CSIS angle perfectly. By letting me provide them with enough to pique their interest, he'd ensured that now, no matter what, I'd have to tell them everything or shun them like the plague. And not just now. Forever. In short, he'd cleverly contrived things so I'd have to throw my lot in with the Caucus, since exposing them put me at risk from BRAZIER, too. As he'd pointed out, it wouldn't take too long for CSIS' interest in a bunch of psychics to go down the

pipeline to the States.

Across the way, the skinny woman was unhooking blinds and curtains. The rooms behind the windows had a pre-abandoned look, with boxes stacked against the walls like monuments to transience.

I'd started over once before with just a couple thousand bucks. How hard could it be with millions? For sure, Byron and MacKenzie would devote themselves to finding me. But for how long? I wasn't some rogue agent with state secrets up for grabs. Their bean counters would never allocate more funds than I could match; I'd always have the monetary upper hand. And what really waited for me in Toronto? A clever, over-decorated flat in Little Italy? A regulated life distracting me from mysteries now solved? I'd touched magic at the Farm. There'd be no going back.

I could get a new identity. Move somewhere else in Canada. Change countries altogether. Acquire a South Seas Island if I wanted. Surely vanishing without a trace was nowhere near as tough as fiction made it out to be. I didn't have a clue how it was done, but I could always pay someone who did. Too bad the accidental killing of their customer had forced me to break ties with Scott and Daryl years ago. They'd have been the ones to know a guy who had a friend who knew somebody...

Scott and Daryl... the X-Men... Cowboy... Raymond... Ironic to be sitting here and thinking of Toronto. The nectar of familiarity had lost its sweet—the sloping lawn, the missing house, the pond I couldn't see whose outlet carved a channel to the creek. Every memory that mattered had included an imaginary friend. Joy of place had never really been a part of it, that sense of *I own this* that gilds nostalgia when revisiting the sites of childhood. I'd come for Luke, always Luke—the hollow I'd been trying to fill and never quite succeeded.

The air conditioning was getting cold. I straightened up and turned it off. Across the way, a muddy pickup slowed and parked beside the lane. A burly teen descended and attacked the junkpile, stomping Santa, smashing chairs and chucking everything in back.

Unlike the woman in the house, he stopped and stared. A lot.
I spun the wheels for him turning south on Hwy. 6.



It was close to dinnertime when I got back. Luke had come and gone again—more Caucus members leaving. I'd scarcely been aware of them except at meals yet I could feel their dwindling numbers like a slow leak in a tire.

Supper was moussaka. Cook's face crumpled when I told her I was going to pass.

"If you want to be alone, I can bring it to your room," she offered.

I pecked her on the cheek.

"Thanks, but no. I need a change of scenery."

I drove to Lady Jo's and gorged myself on diner food with all the sides. Not quite Cook's moussaka but exactly what I needed. A journey of a thousand miles may start with the first step, but comfort food provides the wherewithal to take it. I finished off with cherry pie and two scoops of the best ice cream I'd ever tasted.

"From Hewitt's, down in Hagersville," the waitress told me.

A visit to the hair salon had tightened up her cap of steel-grey curls. I wondered if she'd worn her hair that way when Luke and I came here with Dr. Colton. She'd assumed he was our granddad. Because he looked the part, or based on how we interacted? If the latter, what had she observed? Spare the rod and spoil the child discipline? Affectionate, hair-tousling indulgence?

Who—*what?*—had Dr. Colton been to me and Luke back then?

The man himself out on the veranda when I turned off Nebo Road. Legs crossed in a wicker chair, he looked smaller—frailer—than he did behind his desk. Surprised, I parked behind the house and walked around. He greeted me politely and invited me to sit. I apologized and said I had some business to attend to. He nodded, showing no surprise.

Then, without my asking, he offered me his phone upstairs, "...

since there are no others in the house.”

One step ahead, as always.



It's nice to know that if you pay your broker well enough, you can call him any time and have your holdings liquidated, all of them, and moved offshore. Just like in the movies.

And it's reassuring to discover that for double his commission, he'll arrange to get your money and convey it to you later—even if the means aren't strictly licit.

But what's really comforting is finding out that if you triple the amount of the already doubled figure, and delicately hint you're in the market for a new identity, he'll concede—no promises—perhaps he does know someone with a friend who knows a guy...

Who needs the Scotts and Daryls of this world when all you have to do is call your broker?

I located Dr. Colton afterwards and thanked him ever-so-politely for the phone. There was still no sign of Luke and Marion and Mr. Shen. With nothing else to do, I gravitated to the library. Books and me and homelessness appeared to be ingrained.

By the standards of my former Yonge Street haven, this one wouldn't cut it as a reading room. But something about shelves of books that go up to the ceiling fools the eye. The pregnant weight of hidden words makes everything look lofty, particularly when you sit cross-legged on the floor and scan the bottom rows.

It seemed odd the Caucus hadn't chucked my stash of science-fiction. The desquamating spines looked out of place. But someone had decided they should stay. The someone who had left my taste for fantasy intact? It couldn't be coincidence I'd re-read nearly all of them: Zelazny, *Eye of Cat*; Henderson, *The People*; Asimov, *Foundation*; Vinge, *Psion/Catspaw*. I wondered how my younger self had felt about the heroes, psychic loners trying to adapt or angrily rejecting their humanity. The telepath. The empath. The transmitter, like the Mule in Asimov's *Foundation*.

To which, had I been reading Le Carré back then, I could have added now the sleeper, the defector.

Or the guy who just stopped emailing.

It was tempting to send Byron one last missive:

“The group you seek presents no threat to national security. It is they who are at risk, from military and intelligence communities both south and, in all likelihood, north of the 49th. If you want to find the psychics who went missing, try your brethren in the States, c/o BRAZIER, Fort Meade, Maryland. As for the suicides, no one ordered anyone to drown themselves. There is no cult, no Jim Jones avatar. And Subira’s guess was right: I am a member of the Caucus. As such, I can no longer in good conscience send intelligence.”

Too bad I couldn’t do it. It was tantamount to painting AWOL! on my forehead.

I pulled John Wyndham from the shelves—*The Chrysalids*—but by page five I hadn’t registered a single word. My thoughts were still on Byron. In a quirky kind of way, it felt wrong to leave him hanging. He was a decent sort of guy. He might even understand my backing out. His boss, though—she’d never let a rung in her ambition’s ladder slip away so easily. Better to say nothing and just monitor my inbox. One of them was bound to get in touch.

Satisfied, I took another stab at Wyndham.

Jimmy-Dean.

I looked up. There was no one in the room.

Luke?

Not so much his name as the idea of his name.

Hey, there, buddy.

Not so much a greeting as the feel of a greeting.

What’s up?/Where are you?

No sending or receiving. Just thoughts, like prayers with someone answering.

Whitechurch, coming up to Nebo. Be home soon.

Night-road, headlights, fields speeding by. An overlay of distance, time, direction. No words, and yet remarkably precise.

Want me to come over to the cabin?

Kinda tired.

Gritty eyes, things glazing over.

Yeah, me too.

Colton wants to see us in the morning.

Two lines at right angles, a dry-as-dust hypotenuse.

Oh?

You'll need to be awake for that.

Tomorrow, then/Sleep well/Sweet dreams/G'night.

A mutual receding, sinking down, becoming still.

My geek-for-hire once waxed eloquent about what she called “daemons” on my Linux server—little programs lurking round in memory, sleeping till some higher process quickens them. Invoked, they do whatever magic they were conjured for, then sink back to the netherworld and wait again.

A beam of light swept round the room and tires scrunched outside.

Telepathy with Luke. My daemon process.