



*REFUGE Of  
The BRAVE*

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**Part 3 – Refuge of the Brave**

# The Visitor

The moments between suspicion and certainty had been brief.

Dayce had been silent in the cab during the ride back to Alan's apartment. He had merely uttered an address to the driver, then leaned back and watched her face as the car darted through the midtown traffic. Catherine looked at him briefly a few times, if only to let him know that she knew what he was doing, that she understood what he was looking for in her countenance, and that she was determined that he would not find his answers there. She had glanced in the rear view mirror a few times and caught the lingering, suspicious glare of the cab driver, a young man obviously new to the job, confused by the total silence of his passengers. She relaxed back into the seat slowly, ignoring the scrutiny of two pairs of eyes. She focused her attention on the buildings streaking past her window in an irregular blur of grey and brown.

Dayce had been properly attentive and polite when they reached Alan's address. He had held the cab door for her, paid the fare, held the front door open to ease her passage, allowed her to enter the elevator before him. His actions were no different than they always had been, but she noticed that they seemed forced now, the product of a focused intent to remain civilized. His intensity was disquieting, as it had been that day when she approached him on the ledge just days before he was to leave for college. As she had not known who his anger was directed at then, so she could not guess now.

Dayce took his key to the apartment and opened the door to her, his face blank as she walked past and into the whitewashed living room. She heard the door close softly behind her -- an ominous sign -- and watched as Dayce walked directly to the bar cart. He threw ice cubes into two glasses and poured, not stopping to ask her if she wanted a drink. He knew she did.

"Where's Alan, Cathy?"

'Yes.' she thought, 'he would know that. He would understand my actions. If he had been able to do it himself, he would have. I have nothing to be afraid of.' She took the glass he held extended to her the ice tinkling in the silence, the glass cold and wet against her skin. She took a sip, not taking her eyes from his.

"Where do you *think* he is?"

Dayce looked around the living room carefully. His face seemed different now, outward -- focused, as if his concerns now were with people he could not trust. He put a finger to his lips, as if he feared they may be heard. He pointed below them, towards the ground -- and what lay beneath the ground. She nodded silently, her eyes proud.

"Who..."

"Elliot Burch."

He stood before her, his eyes holding the first traces of a question she knew he had no right to ask. His smile told her that the question had occurred to him, had flashed briefly through his mind, then died unasked; the answer he had sought was there, in her face and in the gentleness that had accented his name as she said it aloud.

"And all this time I thought you were powerless." He shook his head slowly, sitting down across from her. "How long have you known Burch?"

"Four years. We were involved. Briefly."

"How involved?"

"A few dates, nothing more. I called it off during our investigation of one of Elliot's subcontractors."

"What brought you back together?"

"A cave-in in the tunnels. Jacob and Vincent were trapped. Elliot gave me the tools we needed to free them. No questions asked."

"Sounds like a loyal friend. That's rare these days." His expression changed suddenly; recall mirroring itself in his features. "Didn't your office stop construction of the tower he planned to build? I seem to remember talk of a Burch Tower back in the late 80's. It was supposed to be over 150 stories tall. I saw the schematics and architects renderings in the papers. What became of that?"

Catherine was reluctant, but she knew she had to be honest now -- that she had made Dayce a part of her actions without his knowledge. She owed him the full truth.

"Elliot proposed to me during our investigation of the citizen's group that was trying to block the building. They were already blasting the foundations. You can imagine what that would have meant to the runnels."

Dayce nodded. He understood what had happened now, making her explanation unnecessary.

"I promised to marry him if he would halt construction of the building. He refused..."

"I'm liking this man more and more every minute, Chandler. Why wasn't the building completed?"

"We found out that Burch was funding the sabotage himself through operatives using laundered money. It was all a sham. His building permit was revoked."

"So he doesn't know about the tunnels?"

She shook her head. "He's been through part of them, but not deep enough to know how extensive they are. I made him promise not to ask me about what he had seen, in exchange for my help in getting his father out of protective custody." Dayce's eyes narrowed, but she shook her head slowly. "Sorry. I made a promise, too."

"I understand

"But now he's going to have to be told about the tunnels. That was the condition he placed on his help in freeing Alan."

Dayce gulped down his drink quickly, then moved to the bar cart for a refill. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Can I see him?" he asked, not turning.

"He's pretty scared and confused. I think we should both see him, don't you?"

He turned to look straight at her, his eyes bright. "Eventually."

She looked around the apartment slowly. "What do we do now? What about his belongings?"

"I'll take Herkimer with me back to Connecticut this afternoon. There are some things I have to do up there. I'll be back in the city tomorrow." He paused, looking around the room carefully. "This is going to be home for a while, so I'd better get used to it."

Catherine looked startled "They'll never let you stay here, Dayce."

"Why not? I'm on the lease."

"You're..."

"Just in case. This loft is now in both our names. Technically it is all Alan's, but legally I have every right to reside here. They can't seal the place. And they have no grounds for any type of search."

"What about the house?"

"I have friends who will keep an eye on things while I'm gone. I'll take care of that while I'm up there."

An angry 'meow' sounded nearby, in the kitchen. A single orange paw protruded from the base of the cabinets, barely visible in the shadows. Slowly, half a set of whiskers appeared, then half a face, one large orange eye fixing on them menacingly. Dayce walked to the kitchen and lifted Herkimer into his arms, cradling him like a baby -- his fingers playfully taunting just above the outstretched paws, just out of reach.

"Come on, buddy" he said in mock discomfort, as if bracing to carry a heavy burden. "Your new life is just beginning..."

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Catherine nudged the thick folder with her toe. The sheer weight of it made its presence felt in her calf muscles. She could barely move the sheaf with her foot. She stared at it warily through the steam rising from her cup of tea. 'This is stupid.' she said to herself. 'It isn't going to go away.' It seemed almost like a serpent blocking her way along a narrow path -- a path where steps could not be retraced. She could delay as long as she pleased, but sooner or later she would have to deal with the obstacle.

The papers inside were crisp and dry from years of storage -- from years consigned to a lower bookshelf in Dayce's study. Some of the sheets were filled with highlighting and pencil scratches -- barely legible. As she thumbed quickly through the first stack, a thin newspaper clipping fell from somewhere inside the stack. A faded black-and-white photograph of a young Jacob Wells stared up at her from the sofa cushion beside her. She picked it up and laid it on the table next to her cup, then started to read Dayce's notes.

### **McLelland Subcommittee Hearing - March 26, 1953**

9.00 Pater, John Appeared nervous, defiant. Questioned in detail about his neurological experiments and their results. Refused to divulge any information to questioners.

Personal history	Born 1911 in Petrograd, Russia Emigrated to United States in 1933
Education history	Doctorate in Chemistry - St John's. NYC

Work history	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (11 times)
Previous experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (27 times)
Current experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (17 times)
Notes	Refused to present
Location of Notes	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (6 times)

10.30 Wells, Jacob. Appeared staid, unemotional. Questioned in detail about his radiation exposure research and his results. Questioned about his theory of 'residual immunity'. Questioned about missing experimental data and missing notes. Refused to answer most questions

Personal history	Born 1918 in Birmingham, England. Emigrated to United States in 1936
Education history	Doctorate in Medicine - St John's, NYC
Work history	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (11 times)
Previous experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (27 times)
Current experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (17 times)
Notes	Refused to present
Location of notes	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (6 times)

1.00 Kambaugh, Richard. Defiant. Extremely intelligent. Questioned in detail about his genetic research. Completely unresponsive to all questions.

Personal history	Born 1927 in Worcester, Massachusetts.
Education history	Doctorate in Microbiology - Seton Hall, NJ
Work history	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (11 times)
Previous experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (27 times)
Current experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (17 times)
Notes	Maintained complete silence
Location of notes	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (6 times)

2.50 Acondia, Mevera. Quiet, but a strong undercurrent of anger. Questioned in more detail than the others. Political background in college detailed. Remained impassive and restrained in the face of accusations from all interrogators. Definitely hiding important information – made no bones about it. Responsive concerning general physics principles, but unresponsive to questions about "Serum 2K-5" and "Radionomy".

Personal history	Born 1929 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Emigrated to United States in 1944.
Education history	Doctorate in Physics - Columbia, NYC
Work history	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (19 times)
Previous experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (44 times)
Current experiments	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (31 times)
Notes	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (12 times)
Location of notes	5 <sup>th</sup> amnd. (11 times)

There was more. Much more. Page upon endless page of questions — questions repeated endlessly in the face of consistent refusals to say anything beyond "I refuse to answer....." The questions were not probative -- there seemed no need. None of the men seemed willing to talk. It struck her as odd that there was so little personal history on any of the men. There were birth dates, birth cities, the most elementary credential information -- and nothing else. Their personnel files were sparse -- salary information and research assignments. Their resumes were similarly uninformative. Most of the

addresses in the men's final records did not exist now. Their professional references were circular -- each using the others. There seemed no thread common to the four -- no single trait that tied these men together nor reason for their rebellious silence. Only their scientific backgrounds seemed binding -- that and their schooling in New York City.

She read on through the numerous interrogations of April and May -- the continued silence of the men in the face of rising public and government fury. The accusations of political impropriety began in mid-May -- the final desperate act of men determined to get the information they wanted at any cost. There were a few articles on physical attacks, against the men -- and editorials that spoke of the need for strong measures in a time of uncertainty, for the abandonment of principles in the name of principle -- for ends justifying means in a time when neither seemed to matter.

In late May, the final confrontation had been planned. The committee had threatened to jail the men for continuing contempt if they failed to respond during the final session. There was anticipation of a public lynching -- the grand spectacle of the rebellious brought to their knees through the will of the complacent. The stage was set for one final session -- four men, together, jailed and disgraced.

It was not to be. The headlines of the May 29, 1953 editions screamed the news -- all four men had vanished from their homes the previous night. The surveillance had broken down in some manner that no one could explain. Agents had watched the men return to their homes that night, alone, watched as room lights sprang to life, then died as the night wore on. No one was seen entering or leaving any of their homes. But next morning, none of the men appeared. Their buildings were searched. There was no trace of the 'Chittenden Four'. No papers, no books, no clothes -- nothing but four empty hotel rooms and ashtrays filled with cigarette butts and used matches. It was as if the smokers of those cigarettes had never existed.

Their homes in Connecticut had been seized by the state, but they offered nothing in the way of answers. The homes were empty of anything save a few sticks of furniture. There were no letters in the mail boxes, no calls to the phones. The grass stood high and unkempt around their homes, the dust lay thick on the chairs and tables. The windows stood as black rectangles by night, no light having been seen in them for months. Neighbors had seen no one approach or leave the houses -- not for many months. The men had no friends in the nearby towns, no friends among the staff. These men were like ghosts -- their absence more celebrated than the years of their presence or their work.

Warrants were issued, searches were conducted, investigations were pressed around the world---all to no avail. The men had no family, no friends, no spouses, no children -not even a pet remained behind to mark their past. There were no bank records, subscriptions to professional journals, no letters of farewell to colleagues at the lab. It was if these men had never lived on earth.

Catherine shut the folder and threw it on the table, the pages spilling out onto the floor. She rubbed her eyes, then leaned back and stared at the whitewash of the ceiling. It was a featureless spread of white -- no line or shadow to break the flow of colourlessness. When she could stand the sight no longer, she pulled her coat on and fled the apartment needing the colour and cold of the streets for a few fleeting hours -- the reassurance that she was still part of a world of living beings.

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"What's his name?"

"Herkimer."

The young man shook his head slowly, eyeing the orange ball of fur at his feet warily. "Well, it's certainly original, I mean for a cat."

Dayce laughed softly, pulling his shirt off quickly and gathering a clean one into circular folds, then pulling it over his head and down his chest slowly. He pulled his suit pants off, tugging on a pair of faded tattered jeans and a pair of running shoes.

"How long will you be in the city?"

"I don't know. It may be a long time."

"Do I know him?"

"There's no 'him', Michael." He saw the look of doubt that met him, smiling in answer "Well, there is a 'him', but that's not why I'm going back."

"I repeat... do I know him?"

"Alan Trescoe..."

"Not... Mark's husband?" Dayce nodded.

"I thought he was kidnapped."

"He was."

Michael shook his head, a long whistle accentuating the movement "You didn't..."

"No, I didn't. You know me better than that."

Michael walked to Dayce and put his hands on Dayce's shoulders, his eyes dark and knowing. "I know you well enough to ask. You've done a lot of crazier things in your life."

Dayce answered Michael's look, his eyes dark -- his smile gone. "You don't know a thing about this, Michael. You don't know where I am or when I'll be back. I doubt anyone will ask, but if they do -- that's the story. In the meantime, the place is yours. Keep the cat fed and happy. Watch the pipes, water the plants, keep the property reasonably clear. *And no parties in here...*"

Michael flopped back into the chair, his blonde hair falling in a cascade down nearly to his shoulders -- the green of his eyes more subdued now, softer -- like distant ocean water or the leaves of a distant spread of trees in summer. "You know I don't have parties..." Dayce fixed him with a withering glare. "...at least, not anymore. I have a lot to keep me occupied this winter and spring."

"Such as?"

"Such as an exhibition in Boston in March. Such as a commission for a museum in Hartford. Such as four private tutorials a week for the next four months."

"Not here, I hope!"

"Now you know I always tutor my students in their own homes."

Dayce sighed in relief. "Good. I don't want these floors to look like the ones I saw the last time I came to your loft."

"Ah, such is the price of the professional artist!"

"Which is nothing compared to the cost of professional floor refinishing!"

Dayce walked to the study, his voice muted now, echoing against the walls of the living room. "What about Robin?"

"She's history. Has been for some time."

Dayce stuck his head out the study doorway, looking at Michael curiously. "I thought you were crazy about her?"

"I was."

"So what happened?"

"The craziness wore off. Boredom took its place."

Dayce vanished again, then reappeared, with a huge stack of books and manila folders. He nearly toppled over as he neared the chair beside the front door, but managed to keep the unwieldy stack together in time to manoeuvre it against the back and sides of the chair. The stack leaned to one side against the armrest, but he caught it in time.

"What's all that for?"

"A client," he answered absentmindedly -- checking the contents of a few of the folders. "Just some information I thought might be useful."

"Are you taking the computer?" Dayce nodded. "Good. I hate all this modern electronic stuff."

Dayce chuckled. "You hate it because you don't understand it"

Michael stood up and walked behind the sofa, leaning against the back, facing Dayce, late afternoon sun streaming through the crystal portals of the front door falling on his neck and chest. "How's Cathy?"

Dayce barely looked up. "Chandler's fine."

"Has she changed much since she was here last?"

"Yes. But not in any way that you'll be able to see. She's a little more jaded now -- a little less naive."

"Well, she's been around you for months now. What could one expect?" Michael smiled at his friend affectionately, "You have that effect on people."

"I know. One of my worst character faults, right?"

"Just the opposite," Michael said softly. "You just make people face things they've spent years trying to avoid. They have to stop hating you for that before they can thank you." His answer was a raucous laugh. "What are you laughing at? You know it's true."

"At least you and Chandler have thanked me. I can't say as much for anybody else."

"Come on, old friend. What about Julie? And Steven? And Marleen? And..."

"I didn't do anything for them that anyone else couldn't have done."

Michael put a hand on Dayce's shoulder. "You keep thinking that," he said softly, walking towards the kitchen. "You want any coffee? I've got a pot brewing."

"Yeah, in a minute. I just need to get a few more things out of the study." He vanished behind through the doorway, but his voice filled the room as he shouted from the study "That coffee... you know how I like it."

"You bet I do." Michael answered sarcastically. He was through the swinging door before Dayce could answer. The sound of his chuckle came and went with the swinging of the door.

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The afternoon sun fell in spikes of yellow between the buildings, the gaps between spikes great grey spreads of concrete. In those moments when the sun split the wall of brick and steel to the west, she could feel the warmth on her face and hands -- her eyes forced half-closed by the brightness. Then she would plunge into the shadows again, the light would fade quickly, her sight returning. The warmth faded less quickly, helped by great pillars of steam rising from the grates that lined the street.

She passed the dingy windows of pawn shops and wholesale clothing stores, the glass soaped ineptly with words like 'SALE' and 'CLEARANCE'. There was an occasional empty store, padlocked and protected by gates old with rust and peeling paint. The grime seemed to be seeping from the buildings to the sidewalks -- in dark trails of discoloration that spread down the walls and to the gutters, then down the gutters to the sewers. The macadam was more grey than black, but it did not sparkle, even in the sunlight. The cracks and potholes were as grimy as the sidewalk, as neglected as the windows and the merchandise behind those windows.

But there *was* life here. The street was alive with people braving the icy winds. They kept their faces down, hidden from eyes they imagined followed them as they walked. Heads were raised only at intersections, searching quickly for signs of a maniac cab or delivery truck -- then lowered again when the safe ground of sidewalk was reached. There was an occasional furtive glance into a window or door, a motion stopped short by the sight of some imagined treasure. But there was no human contact here. No eyes met, no words were exchanged. There was only wordless, silent motion.

It was the doorway that brought her up short, the numerals over the door jarring her memory. They stood sharp and clean against glass that shone crystal clear in the afternoon sun. She hesitated for only a moment, then pulled the door open quickly, the shadow of the golden numerals '777' falling on her back as she headed down the narrow hallway into the shop.

An elderly gentleman stood behind an ancient cash register -- the counter around him stacked with books nearly up to his chest. The smoke of his pipe wafted past him, the aroma pleasant and soothing. As he looked up, a faint smile shone from behind his white beard.

"Nice to see you, Miss Chandler. It's been such a long time. Come to rescue another first edition from the loneliness of my dusty shelves?"

Catherine extended her hand in greeting, her smile more in answer to what he had not said. "Nice to see you, Mr Smyth." She let a moment pass. "And how is Kristopher?"

"At peace with the world. And himself."

She looked towards the back of the store towards the stack of books where they had met. "I wish he were back among those books now. I miss him. I miss his..." She paused, unsure of what she meant to say. "...his childlike view of the world." She looked at Mr Smyth intently. "Where do you suppose he is right now?"

He looked back towards the shelves of books. "He's on the other side, Miss Chandler."

"Do you think he's as happy there as he was on this side?"

Her only answer was a sidewise tilt of Mr Smyth's head and a twinkle in his eyes. She turned and headed down an empty, dusty aisle. The store had changed little in the nearly three years since she had first set foot inside. That day remained clear and bright in her memory, as did the enigmatic man she had met between these shelves. She found herself smiling broadly to herself, remembering the absurd encounters with Kristopher Gentian, the exasperation he kindled in her, the admiration she felt for his independence and his audacity, the unsolved mystery of his appearance -- and his disappearance, remembered an exquisite oil painting hanging in Vincent's chamber -- his parting gift to the person who had salvaged his ruined career. She still believed he was alive somewhere, the ultimate trickster and manipulator -- but she found herself wishing now that he truly were a ghost -- a spirit who could materialize now that she needed someone like him. She longed for his lust for life, for his unfettered spirit and impish nonchalance in the face of any and all authority.

She neared the classical poetry section, the books a crazy-quilt mix of old leather-bound beauties and ragged, dirty paperbacks. She reached for a volume of Blake, half-hidden on the highest shelf. She brushed the dust off the pages and the binding, opening it carefully. The book was in pristine condition, the pages unmarked and clean. She pulled the book to her chest and moved on slowly.

As she neared the far corner of the shop, she stopped -- remembering. She looked around carefully, searching the aisles for signs of... she shook her head, sighing deeply, berating herself silently for being so silly. Ghosts did not appear on demand -- in lower West side used book shops. Then she remembered that she did not believe Kristopher was dead. But he was as inaccessible as a ghost to her, alive or dead. There seemed little difference now. Kristopher was as lost to her now as her parents -- alive in the past and in her mind.

She walked quickly back to the counter, laying the book carefully on the top of the smallest stack and pulling her wallet open. Mr Smyth looked at her over the rims of his glasses, his eyes warm and, incredibly, touched with remorse and sympathy. She felt almost he understood her pain. She pulled several bills from her wallet, but he put the book in a brown paper bag and pushed the bills away gently, his eyes never leaving hers.

She tried to force her hand forward, but she knew he would not take her money. She smiled in answer, taking the package and nodding slightly. He smiled in answer.

As she walked away, she could feel a cold chill pass over her, but she felt certain it came from the cracks in the doorjamb or the window. She put her gloved hand on the knob turning for a final glance back at the books and the old man who served as their ageless devoted guardian. She felt a stab of jealousy for him and pain at having to leave this haven of silence and peace.

"Goodbye, Kristopher" she said softly, pulling the door open and vanishing into the dusk. 'The light tinkle of the bell on the door as it slammed shut behind her was the only reply.

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The smell of freshly brewed herbal tea filled the passageway, its aroma inviting, warm like the light from the torches that lit the way to this place – like the candles that glowed on the desk and the bookcase. Dayce found his pace quickening as he neared the chamber. He found himself smiling as his gait quickened -- an almost involuntary expression of joy fired by some long forgotten desire brought to life, like the Phoenix of a childhood dream rising from ashes he had thought long dead and cold. He knew that Vincent would be there – and – the thought of Alan drove him faster now. He rushed into the chamber, then drew up short.

Vincent sat beside the bed, watching over the silent, sleeping figure buried beneath a mound of blankets and pillows. Only Alan's copper-streaked hair and chiseled face were visible in the tangle. The pattern of the comforter rose and fell slightly with his chest, his face serene.

Dayce crept to the bedside and sat down on a footstool at Vincent's feet. His arm found the side of the bed for support and he rested his head against his hand, looking at Alan, the traces of a smile haunting the edges of his lips.

"How long has he been asleep?" His tone was hushed, his eyes never leaving Alan.

"Hours. He didn't want to, but I insisted. He would have gone on for hours more with his questions."

A chuckle was Dayce's only answer.

"This time is rest for both of us," Vincent added.

"Where's Chandler?" When no answer was forthcoming, Dayce looked at Vincent. Then he understood. "Don't worry. I always call her that. I never felt comfortable calling her 'Catherine'."

Vincent smiled in answer. "I've never called her anything else." He paused. "She went above to rest. She'll return tomorrow."

Dayce moved gently onto the bed, leaning quietly over Alan. With a single movement, he drew his finger across Alan's forehead, pushing his hair back out of his eyes gently, then slowly drew his hand to the cheek, his fingers resting along the side of the face, his thumb moving back and forth gently, like a silent windshield wiper, brushing the non-existent tears from his cheek. There was no moment of self-consciousness, no hesitancy, no reluctance. For some brief span of seconds, it was as if he were alone in the chamber. Then he remembered.

When he turned to look at Vincent, he felt a brief stab of an emotion he had thought dead within him -- respect. He knew he felt it not because Vincent had remained in the room - not because there was no sign of judgment or contempt in the eyes, but because the eyes had remained calm, loving, and direct. Dayce understood, in this brief instant, that this was what he had demanded of people above, what he had spent a lifetime seeking futilely in the friendships of his life above -- this moment when he did not have to see a glance averted or a head held down in shame or pity - -and for the first time in his life, he heard himself saying, "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

This was the question he had sought to hear in reply, had yearned a million times to hear. These two words said more about Vincent as a man and as a human being than all the scientists and philosophers and psychiatrists of countless generations could say in their millions of words. He could see in Vincent's eyes more than this -- that the question was genuine.

"For nothing I needed to worry about." he heard himself answer, but the real answer was there, in Dayce's eyes. In the moments of silence as their eyes met, their kinship was sealed forever.

"You love him very much."

"As much as I dare allow myself."

"Why don't you tell him?"

Dayce rose slowly so as not to disturb Alan and pulled his-jacket off. "It's too soon."

"Why?"

"He's been through too much. Losing Mark, the trial." He looked around the chamber slowly. "Being brought here without warning. He needs time."

"And what about your needs, Dayce?"

He hadn't expected the question. He turned abruptly, his hands finding the footboard of the bed, his eyes empty now, and tired. "My needs can wait"

Vincent stood up and walked to his side, then turned to look at Alan. "'Look at him. He's alone in a world of strangers. He's been brutalized, convicted of a crime he did not commit, snatched from the only safety and security he's ever known into a darkness more terrifying than blindness.'" He put a hand on Dayce's shoulder and turned to look at him. "How can distancing yourself from him help him?"

"It's more *complicated* than, that, Vincent..."

"No. It isn't. It's as *simple* as that."

"Alan doesn't need me like that. He didn't need anyone in the world except Mark, and he's gone. He has strengths I can't conceive of, forged of years of darkness and rejection. Now he has you and Chandler and your friends down here. I can't teach him anything here -- I wouldn't know how or where to begin. You... he needs you and Chandler to teach him about this world. The only thing he needed me for was to protect him and I failed. The one value I could offer..."

"Is yourself," Vincent interjected quickly. "You did your best. So did Catherine. What happened was not your doing. All battles may be won or lost, but justice rarely victory. Surely you understand that."

"Yes."

Vincent squeezed Dayce's shoulder, then headed for the doorway, his fingers dragging off of his shoulder and down his back, reluctant to break their comforting touch. At the opening, he turned. Dayce remained immobile, his hands clutching the footboard tightly.

"That man loves you, Dayce. What you can grant him is far more important than anything Catherine or I can provide. But first, you have to grant it to yourself."

Dayce turned slowly, his expression puzzled. "What?"

"Forgiveness."

Dayce lowered his head slowly, his eyes closing as if under a painful blow.

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"He's below, with Alan."

Catherine nodded slowly, her eyes fixed on the darkness of the park spread out before and beneath them -- touched here and there by the cold circles of light from the street lamps that coursed their way between the trees. A light wind stirred the dead vine branches that twisted over the balcony railing beneath her fingers.

"I'm glad. It's all so new to him."

"To both of them. They're going to need each other now."

Catherine sighed. "Dayce will never admit that." She drew a hand across her forehead, pushing her long hair behind her ear and looked at Vincent intently. "How's Alan?"

"Perhaps better to ask 'How's Dayce?'"

"Why?"

Vincent leaned against the wall, his dark cape stirring in the wind, the length of his hair hiding his face and eyes from her, but his voice revealing the emotions his hidden features could not convey. "He's in a great deal of pain, Catherine. He blames himself for what has happened."

"Did he tell you that?"

"Yes. He's afraid to give Alan what he need most."

"You understand how he feels about him?"

"I can see how he feels, Catherine -- but it becomes real only in moments when those feelings are invisible to Alan."

"Vincent, there are many things about Dayce that you may not be able to understand. Things that have nothing to do with the fact that he's gay. I know him better than anyone. I love him as if he were my own brother -- more than that. He's endured things in his life that no man should have to bear. Most people see only his house and his car and assume those things were handed to him on a silver platter. They look at his family background and think he didn't have to work for what he's accomplished. They have no idea.." She caught herself. "Vincent, they look at him and think those things -- when it's *me* they should be thinking them about."

"No, Catherine..."

"Yes. As hard as it's been these past years, it's nothing compared to what Dayce has had to suffer through." He turned to look at her, his eyes inquisitive. "I think of that night when I was attacked. Then I imagine a thousand nights like that stretched out before me, to be endured, for the sake of my life's dream. That's what he has to look back at, every day of his life."

"What did he have to suffer through?"

She shook her head. "He'll tell you, Vincent. In his own words. In his own time."

"To carry it for such a long time." His voice trailed off slowly. "And yet Dayce is one of the strongest men I have ever met, Catherine. It's there... in his eyes, his face -- his words..."

"You've seen in him what I saw in him many years ago."

"I watched him tonight; with Alan. It was only a moment. He was lost in his feeling for the person he loved, and for an instant, he was unprotected. There was such gentleness there, such empathy and love. He was touching Alan, yet it was almost as if his touch was comforting both of them -- and me. For a moment, I saw myself bending over you, your face covered with bandages, your eyes unable to see. I remember how I felt in that moment -- in *those* moments -- and saw it made real for me by a stranger's touch on another man's face. I could feel that touch as surely as if it had been me he were comforting."

"He feels what you were only just beginning to feel. Vincent. Only he feels it fully, completely. He understands what that feeling means, the power it brings to heal -- or destroy. And he's afraid of that power. He's seen it destroy too often. He's seen its counterfeit side a thousand times. And every time he watched it destroy, he found it easier to bury that feeling deeper inside him. That it lives within him at all is a tribute to his character."

"I told him he needed to forgive himself, Catherine. I may have spoken too hastily."

She raised a hand to his face, her fingers resting gently under his chin. "He does, Vincent. But not in the way you meant. He needs to learn to trust that feeling again, like he did when we were young." She kissed him gently, then rested her head against his chest. She felt the fold of his cape unfold her in the darkness, the chill of the wind against her arms and neck vanishing in a wave of warmth. "'And so do I,'" she added softly, the words lost in the wind.

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Alan stirred restlessly beneath the blankets, his eyes blinking a few times. Slowly, he pulled himself to a sitting position, the pillows cascading to the floor from beside him. He felt for a few of them, propping them behind him and leaning back, pulling himself out of sleep by what seemed almost like an act of will. He sighed deeply, the echoes surrounding him.

"Good morning."

"Dayce!" The word sounded surprised, excited as it rang through the chamber, and in to the passageway outside.

"No-need to tell the entire tunnel community you're awake." Dayce said easily, moving to the bedside seat quickly and pouring a cup of tea for Alan. "They'll find out soon enough."

"How long have you been here?"

"All night. I didn't want to wake you."

"Where's Vincent? And Catherine?"

"Vincent went to get some sleep. Catherine should be here soon."

Alan looked anxious for a moment. "Have you slept any since yesterday?"

"No. I wanted someone here in case you woke up." His voice dropped lower. "I didn't want you to be

left alone."

"Thanks." Alan said though not without a telltale pause. "Is that tea I smell?"

"You bet." Dayce handed him a cup, then poured one for himself. "I'm afraid coffee is a luxury down here. You better get used to this."

"That's okay. I love tea." He took several sips. "I'd better feed..." His expression changed suddenly, his face crossed by lines of concern. "Herkimer..."

"He's okay. I took the furball up to my place in Connecticut. He's being well cared for."

"I keep forgetting..."

"He'll be fine. Don't worry."

"Okay. I won't. Only, if anything happens to him..." He fixed Dayce with a playful threatening look, took several more sips of tea, then set the empty cup and saucer on the nightstand beside the bed. Playfully, he rolled over under the covers, moving closer to Dayce. "Did you know about this place before Cathy brought me here?"

The change of subject and the question surprised him. "Yes."

"Did you plan to have me brought here?"

"No." he answered truthfully, then silently regretted it.

"So this was Cathy's idea?" Dayce could not read his tone.

"Yes. I guessed that only after it was over. I don't think I would have allowed her to do it, had I known."

Alan looked at Dayce strangely, like a co-conspirator in some harmless game whom he suddenly discovered was playing by another set of rules. "Why not?"

"It will only make things harder for you. If you're ever to go back."

"Go back?" There was no mistaking his tone now, or his motive. "Who the hell wants to go back?"

Dayce moved to sit on the bed, taking one of Alan's hands in his. He searched for the right words. "You want to stay down here?"

Alan's expression was bemused, his eyes bright and alive. "Of course. Why would I want to go back above?"

"What about your friends?"

"I'll make new ones down here. I've already started."

"What about your writing?"

"There's paper down here. And writing instruments. And books."

"What about..." He searched for a word, but none came.

"Dayce, Vincent told me a lot about this place. It's a place where the outcast can find shelter and solace and the dead of spirit can live again. That's what he said. Well, what better place for me?"

"Have you told Vincent this yet! Or Catherine?"

He shook his head. "I was too busy asking questions. I was too busy asking Vincent about the tunnels, about the world down here, about his own life." Alan looked around the chamber, his free hand and arm spread wide. "Did he tell you this used to be his brother's chamber?"

"No."

"He told me all about his brother. Devin, I think his name was." His voice dropped slightly as he remembered. "He died recently. From the way Vincent was talking, I decided not to ask how. But I know how much Vincent loved him. He told me he didn't feel any sense of betrayal in having me stay in this chamber. He was so kind to me."

"Yes," Dayce said tonelessly, his mind unable to focus on Alan's words nor find an opening for any sort of comment. He listened helplessly.

"And he told me about how he met Cathy. How he found her in the park the night she was attacked. How he and the others down here saved her life. How they fell in love. Now I understand how he knew who she was that night -- how she found out about the attack before anyone else."

"Yes."

"I still don't know why he couldn't testify for you though. When I asked him that, he said he would explain later. I didn't press him about it. I had too many more important questions."

Dayce shuddered slightly. "You haven't looked at Vincent yet, have you?"

"No. All we did was talk. I can tell from his voice though, from the way it sounds when he talks about Catherine. He must be beautiful."

"He is, Alan." Dayce managed. "In the ways that really matter."

Alan took Dayce's hand in both of his and held it gently. Dayce felt certain the caressing of the fingers was not conscious. "Well, you know what I've always said." He moved Dayce's fingers to his wedding band slowly. "We see what is important."

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"This is important." Joe said slowly, handing the file folder across the desk. "It ties Chandler to Jacob Wells."

Moreno studied the folder carefully. "You're sure the guy is Jacob Wells?"

"Yes. Look at the newspaper photograph. Then look at the police photograph. The police file."

Moreno studied the two photos carefully and sighed. "Can you believe it? What was he arrested for?"

"Murder. He was found in the office of Alan Taft, a lawyer on Park Avenue, Taft was dead and the

arresting officers said that Wells was kneeling over the body and that his office had been ransacked."

"But wasn't Taft killed by someone else?" Moreno thumbed through the file quickly. "Yeah, right here. It says that Wells was released after it was discovered he had nothing to do with the murder."

"True enough, but look at the name of the person who handled the case."

Moreno looked at another form. The name 'Catherine Chandler' stood as mute testimony. "Coincidence?" he said, looking up.

Joe shook his head. "Read the newspaper article on Wells. About his appearance before the McLelland Subcommittee. Look who provided his legal representation."

Moreno found the clipping again, read carefully, then stopped and sighed again. "'I guess we're beyond the realm of coincidence here. But look, Joe, there's nothing here to indicate that Catherine is involved in anything illegal. She obviously knows who this guy is, but that's all we have. What have you got to tie her to anything illegal?"

"I showed her the federal warrants for his apprehension. She didn't seem to care."

"Why should she care? These warrants don't really say why they want him. It could be something completely innocent. Did they tell you why they want this guy?"

Joe shook his head slowly. "All the Justice Department would say is that they want to find this guy, if he's still alive. I gathered from his tone of voice that the matter was serious."

"Would it help if I called officially?"

"I doubt it. I got the distinct impression that the matter was classified. I didn't press my luck."

Moreno stood up and walked to the window ledge, pulling one of the venetian blind slats up and staring out at the city. The glare of the light beyond was a shock. His gaze settled on the Hudson River, visible in the breaks between the buildings. The water dark and streaked with waves. He saw several boats rushing across the water, like tiny white minnows frolicking in childlike abandon. For a moment, he wished he was on one of them.

"What do we do, John?"

He heard the question. It was Joe's tone that made him turn so suddenly. There wasn't a shred of anger or vindictiveness there -- it sounded more like the resigned plea of a parent desperate to help a child in trouble -- or of a lover who faces the loss of their love to some power beyond their control. Moreno's face betrayed his reluctance. He knew that he could no longer maintain his neutrality -- that he must betray either justice or friendship in this moment.

He moved to the edge of the desk, leaning against the edge and looking down at Joe. "What do you want to do, Joe?"

Joe leaned forward, rubbing his eyes with his hands. He seemed to be weighing some question in his mind. When he looked up, Moreno saw more clearly the dark circles under the eyes -- the energy and enthusiasm drained and replaced by -- what? He had always suspected that Joe's feelings for Catherine went beyond mere professional courtesy. He had not suspected they went as far as Joe's face seemed to betray.

"John, less than a week ago, Chandler threatened to kill me if I persisted in this. If you had told me a

year ago that either one of us could be brought to the stage where we would threaten the life of the other, I would have thought they were insane. And yet..." He fell silent for a moment, weighing his words carefully. "Maybe she was angry about the conviction -- losing the case -- I don't know. The Trescoe prosecution has been pretty hard on her. Maybe I picked the wrong time to confront her with all this."

"She knows that you know?"

"Yes. At least, I gave her a copy of the file. I haven't seen her since the day Alan Trescoe was kidnapped."

"What did you say to her that made her threaten you?"

"I got excited. I was angry at DiCenzo. I think he knows what happened to Trescoe, but I can't be sure. I confronted Chandler with my suspicions. I told her I was going to keep digging until I learned the truth." He continued, almost helplessly. "I told her I'd see them both in prison if I found out they were concealing anything."

"About Trescoe?"

"About anything."

"Did you mean it?"

"Come on, John. I was upset."

"Are you sure you weren't jealous, Joe?"

He hadn't expected the question. He glanced at Moreno, a futile attempt to suppress the anger and denial serving merely to underscore the truth of Moreno's question. Joe got up and walked to the window, pulling the blind up, light flooding the room -- the glare blinding them both briefly.

Joe did not answer. He tried to focus on some familiar landmark nearby -- some building or park, some hard and fast feature to serve an anchor in this moment. He had not acknowledged this question through all the days and nights spent in pursuit of a truth whose cost was greater than he had considered. In this moment of sunlit clarity, he knew he had to face the truth of it. When he turned to look at Moreno, his eyes were clear and his expression serene.

"I care about Catherine Chandler, John. I don't want to see her get in any deeper than she already is."

"You're not answering my question, Joe." He paused, but Joe remained silent. "Do you love Catherine Chandler?"

"Of course I do, John. I love her, just like I love a lot of..."

"Joe." Moreno shook his head sadly. He walked to the window and looked directly into Joe's eyes, his voice dropping. "Are you in love with Catherine Chandler?"

"Is that what you think, John?"

He nodded.

"You're saying I'm doing this because I'm jealous. Who am I supposed to be jealous of?"

Moreno sighed. "Anyone close to her. Devin, before he died. This man Dayce DiCenzo..."

"DiCenzo is gay, John ..."

"He's still close to Catherine, Joe -- in a way you aren't. And Elliot Burch. You've always worked just a little bit harder on the cases where he's been involved." Joe looked away, not answering. "Come on, Joe. I'm your friend. I'm not blind. I think part of it is professional, but the greater part of this is personal -- you're allowing your personal feelings for Catherine to drive you into actions you wouldn't consider if it were anyone else."

"So you're saying I should ignore all this..." He pointed to the file on the desk.

"I'm saying you had better stop lying to yourself, Joe -- before someone gets irreparably hurt. I agree that this is unsettling stuff. I just think it might be better if someone else pursued this matter. I don't think you can separate yourself from the object of your pursuit."

"I can't just walk away from this, John. No matter what you think... what Chandler may think... I'm doing this because I care about her. I don't want to see her hurt. I would hope she would do the same for me, if the situation were reversed. And the fact that I care about Catherine is beside the point. If I didn't care, I wouldn't be spending every hour of spare time on this stuff." He looked at Moreno, determination set in his eyes and his voice. "Are you going to pull me off this?"

"No. But I can't allow you to use this office for your work. You have other cases that need attending to -- including the Trescoe kidnapping. I know you'll continue with this on your own time no matter what I tell you now, but let me give you some advice." He put a hand on Joe's shoulder and waited until Joe's eyes found his own. "If you love Catherine Chandler, you'll go easy. She's pulled you out of more than one burning building in these past six years. Maybe it's her turn. Don't press so hard, Joe. Help her if you can, and if there's no other way -- but just be damn sure it's her you're helping."

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Catherine sauntered slowly down the South Well and towards the Main South Tunnel, her hand following the stones for support. She moved slowly, the weight of the back-pack slung over her shoulder suggesting caution. The stones were wet with snowmelt, the light from the shaft above glinting off the stone steps.

As she reached the bottom step and turned towards the main chamber complex, she heard footsteps approaching from the darkness ahead. She stopped, momentarily startled -- until she recognized Dayce's whistle. She sighed deeply, her heartbeat slowing as the momentary fear passed.

"Hiya, Dayce!" she called into the dark, the words echoing up and away from her.

"Hiya, Chandler," came the reply. She spotted the red spark of a lit cigarette in the darkness, then the dim outline of the approaching figure, then the familiar face and reassuringly insolent smile. He moved to her, embracing her warmly.

"I'm glad to see you made it back safely," she said. "How's Alan?"

"He's right at home." He saw her look of surprise and doubt. -- "At least, that's how it seems. He's not afraid anymore."

They sat down on the bottom step, close to the wall to avoid the drops of condensation that fell in an

unending cascade into the central part of the well, the water eating away at the stone. Dayce pulled the pack of cigarettes from his denim jacket pocket and offered her one. She took it, leaning forward to let him light it for her. She took two puffs quickly, then crushed the stub in a pool of water beside her.

"I shouldn't keep smoking, Dayce. The trial's over."

"What difference does that make?"

"A bad habit. I prefer to leave it behind"

"Take your comfort where you can get it, that's what I always say." He leaned back against the stone, looking up at her with ill-disguised anticipation. "Well?"

She pretended not to understand the question. "Well what?" she finally asked.

"What did Maxwell want the other day?"

She pulled the shoulder bag from her shoulder and dropped it at his feet with a thud. "That." She answered.

"What did he say to you after I left you alone?"

"He threatened to put the two of us in jail. He thinks we know more about Alan's kidnapping than we admitted to the judge."

Dayce threw his head back and laughed, the sound drowning out the drip of the water from above. The pure gaiety of it startled her. She had expected any reaction but this. "What are you laughing at? I thought you'd be angry."

"Hell, no. Never get angry at someone when they tell the truth. I didn't know he had it in him. I knew he was a decent lawyer, but I never had much respect for his character judgements." He paused for a moment, the sound of his laughter fading but traces of it remaining audible in his smile. "What did you say?"

"I threatened to kill him."

A smile of incredulous pleasure lit Dayce's face. "Well, well, Chandler. You've come a long way, haven't you?"

"He pushed me to it. I don't think he really believed me."

"Don't kid yourself, Chandler. The day may come when you'll have to make good on that threat. We're in more trouble than you think."

"Why?"

"Do you honestly think Joe won't be able to find out about Jacob Wells? Everything I researched is in the public record. It won't be long before he ties it together. He paused for a moment, watching her face for any sign of emotion. "The things I gave you to read... did you read them?" She nodded. "Do you understand now what's at stake? When he finds this information, it becomes all the more tempting for him to dig deeper. I don't think he'll back off now that Alan is missing. He'll be on both of us, every chance he gets."

"I know that. We have to make some decisions."

"We have to do more than that, Chandler." Her eyes met his, an unspoken question hanging in the air between them. "We have another problem down here."

"What problem?"

"Alan. He wants to stay here permanently."

"*What?*"

"You heard me. He wants to remain in the tunnels for good. He never wants to go back above."

Catherine shook her head slowly a few times. Dayce could not read her expression. When she looked up at him, he saw what he had feared -- a look of despair. "That will be difficult. I don't know if Father will permit it. The Council has very strict rules on who may remain here permanently. And I know from personal experience..."

She stopped abruptly. She had no right to tell Dayce about Kanin -- not before she could talk to him herself.

"What do you know?"

"Only that escape from the legal system above is not permitted here. Alan may have to go back eventually. I don't know..."

"But he's innocent. We both know that. Vincent can testify..."

"Vincent can help, but I don't know if that will be enough. Alan was convicted. That's all Father and the Council will see. Vincent may be able to sway them but with things the way they are -- Father's anger and guilt over Devin's death. He might not even allow this to come to the full Council."

"So what do we do now?"

"We talk to Alan together -- the three of us."

"I have friends above who would look after him. He could start a new life away from the city -- away from the memories. He'd be nearby so I could see him often."

"You'll be watched, Dayce. And so will I. We can't take that chance -- not for a long time. So long as Joe is nosing around, we can't risk taking Alan back above."

Dayce inhaled deeply, leaning back and folding his arms behind his head, his fingers interlocked. He was looking up the shaft, toward the light. "Well, Chandler, it seems we've put Alan into a bit of a dilemma."

"It's better than a prison cell, Dayce. You know what would happen to him in prison."

"Yes, I do. Graphically."

She stood up slowly, using Dayce's shoulder as support. He reached for the backpack and struggled to his feet, slinging it over his shoulder. "I want you to read everything in here, Dayce. It's what Joe gave me to try to convince me to tell him what I know about Jacob Wells. Maybe you can find something we

can use, some information I overlooked."

"And where will you be?"

She turned slowly, her face as serious as the tone of her voice. "I have an apology to make. An apology that's long overdue."

She turned away and walked rapidly away from him, not waiting to answer the unasked questions she knew she was leaving behind. In moments, she was lost in the darkness.

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It took only moments for the figure in the hallway to fashion the acetate key from the mold, surreptitiously filing away the unnecessary material until the jagged edge that remained fit the deadbolt lock perfectly. He was through the door in an instant between heartbeats.

The apartment was empty and dark. In the darkness, his eyes found the telephone. He pulled a small black case from his coat pocket and unzipped it quickly. Working with the speed of a magician and the skill of a surgeon, he had the back of the phone off. He affixed the bypass circuit to the main line, careful to reconnect the ringer, then activated the unit and resealed the phone, setting it back down on the table next to the answering machine, careful to position it exactly as he had found it.

He moved quickly to the windows. Pulling aside the material, he affixed a tiny black box the size of a pack of matches to the top of the center support beam for the curtain rod, taking care to position it over the back of the support for camouflage. He stepped back and looked at the rod from several angles. The device was not visible from any angle unless one knew it was there.

He took one final look around the room, then moved to the door. He listened intently, then pulled the door open, then closed behind him. With the acrylic master, he carefully relocked the deadbolt, then snapped the newly-sculpted plastic in half and pocketed the pieces. He was down the hall and through the stairwell door a moment later.

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Kanin sat in his work chamber, a charcoal-colored slab of slate on the table before him. The surface was smooth and fine-grained, the edges coarse and flecked with tiny crystals that caught the light from the torches in the wall, magnifying it, then relinquishing it to fall on the wall in mottled hues of grey and silver.

A small rectangle of paper stood before him, propped up against three tattered books. He studied the words carefully, his mind visualizing the spacing and placement necessary to hew the words into the stone. He had sat like this for over an hour, rejecting first one then another, not satisfied with any of the layouts he could envision. Many hours of wasted effort and discarded stone had taught him not to make one chisel strike on the rock until he could envision the finished work. This would be no exception.

"Another rush job?"

He looked up, startled. "No." he said, extending his arm. His wife moved to his side, taking his hand in hers, kissing it gently, then moving beside the table, his hand falling to her waist. Her other arm cradled their son, sleeping quietly in his mother's arms. She moved slowly so as not to awaken him. "Just a tunnel marker for the South Tunnel Project. We don't want anyone taking the wrong tunnel on their way to the hydroponic gardens."

She looked at the virgin stone. "Not much progress since I left."

"Nope. I can't get the layout right in my mind. I don't want to have to start over again once this is finished. There's nothing on my schedule once I finish this." He looked up at her, his eyes bright and expectant. "I thought we might take some time for ourselves once this is done. A couple of days in the old Governor's Island chambers?"

She smiled in return, her free hand running through the tousled hair that streamed down the back of his neck. She drew her fingernails through his hair gently, sensuously. He let his head drop back, relishing her playful touch.

"Don't start," he joked "At least, not right now."

"I think I can manage until you finish this. But not much longer than that." she said. Her voice gay and affectionate.

He leaned against her, hugging her waist and moving his hand to the small of her back, his fingers moving in slow circles. "Me either."

They heard the footsteps in the same moment. Kanin straightened up quickly. Olivia did not move away from him. She drew her hand away from the back of his head reluctantly and took one of the baby's hands in her fingers.

Catherine paused briefly at the chamber opening, her eyes taking in the scene quickly, her features melting into a combination of reluctance and resignation at the prospect of a difficult moment she could not avoid. She felt as if she were intruding, but some small part of her was grateful that Olivia was here.

"Am I interrupting anything?" she asked, stopping just inside the door. "Not at all," Olivia answered, smiling warmly. "Come on in."

Catherine moved slowly to the side of the table, her eyes falling on Seth. She moved slowly to the side of the table and lifted her gloved hand to caress the little boy's hair, her touch as light as the stray shadows that fell over his face as he nuzzled closer to his mother. "He's grown so much since I saw him last."

"Mary weaves him new clothing once a month now. He'll be walking soon." Olivia said softly.

"Has he said his first word yet?"

Kanin shook his head. "I thought he said 'papa' last week but Olivia's ears are better mine. She says I was just hearing what I wanted to hear." He took his wife's hand kissed it gently, smiling up at her. "I think she just wants his first word to be 'momma'."

Olivia glared at her husband as only a spouse can, a baleful combination of resentment and love whose two messages only a loved one could decipher.

"How old was Luke when he said his first word?"

"Thirteen months. And his first word was definitely 'daddy' -- or so one of my letters said."

Olivia smiled, but the smile was touched by sadness. "It was 'daddy'. I wanted him to know who you

were when you got back from... from above..." She broke off quickly -- this was a subject she did not wish to pursue. "Little did we know..."

Catherine held Olivia's glance to allow her to see her own expression. Though Olivia had never spoken a disparaging word to or about her, Catherine knew that she held her part responsible for her husband's twelve month prison ordeal -- an ordeal that had separated him from his wife and newborn son -- a son who would die less than two weeks before Kanin's release. Through the months of Kanin's time behind bars, Catherine had watched his first son growing stronger under the watchful eyes of Olivia and Vincent and Mary. She had helped when she could -- with toys and clothing and storybooks. She had read countless stories to Luke, listened as Vincent's gentle voice had lulled him to sleep with tales of his father, sat with Olivia as the child nursed -- both as comfort to Olivia and commitment for herself to a cause she felt responsibility for. During the long months, she had visited Kanin as often as she could, carrying messages of love and reunion to him from below -- and messages of expectation and deliverance from above. She told her countless times that it was not guilt that drove her, but loyalty to her friends -- to a family she had helped split. She told herself this, through the darkest days and the brightest, to make those days easier to bear.

She had struggled to help Kanin gain his release from prison. Mrs. Davis had been agreeable to the shortest sentence demanded by law -- and had even appeared at Kanin's first evaluation as a character witness. She had found peace for herself in Kanin's surrender and atonement for the loss of her son. She had pleaded with the evaluation committee, her voice never breaking but testing those limits more than once, 'Kanin Evans took my son's life. That cannot be changed. But he came to judgment of his own will. He has a son of his own now. My child can only live on inside me -- and in what Kanin Evans teaches his own son'.

But it was not to be. A childhood cold had turned to pneumonia. Antibiotics had not proven effective. Despite Father's best efforts, Luke had died on a cold October night ten days before Kanin was to be released. She had rushed to Olivia's side that night, ready to accept any words Olivia might choose to hurl at her, any accusation she might choose to make. Instead, Olivia had dissolved into tears in Catherine's arms. No words had been spoken at that moment. None had seemed necessary. But when Catherine was about to head back above, Olivia had stopped her. "Please tell Kanin," she had said, her eyes dry and held levelly, no pity or empathy in her voice.

When Catherine had faced Kanin across the clear plastic of the prison visiting pen, his smile vanished slowly as he looked at Catherine's averted eyes, tears barely held in check at the corners. She felt he had guessed even before she had uttered the horrifying words. Kanin had sat motionless for a long time. She could see the muscles of his neck held taut against the spasms of emotion being suppressed -- his eyes wide and wet, but he did not break. He nodded once to her, then held one hand against the glass, his fingers spread. She raised her own hand to mirror his through the glass, her eyes trying to convey to him what she dared not trust to her voice. He was gone a minute later, and she had remained seated -- her eyes staring straight ahead, her hand fixed to the cold glass -- until the guard had come and pulled her away from the booth.

Through the months that followed, Catherine had been there for Kanin and Olivia's reunion, for the announcement of their new baby, for Olivia's delivery and for Seth's naming ceremony. Kanin had reassured her many times, explained that he held no unexpressed anger towards her -- she had merely been doing her job, as well as facing a woman on the brink of emotional collapse. She knew he was sincere.

But there had always been a hint of resentment in Olivia's eyes -- some unexpressed anger at her part in taking her husband from her side. Though never expressed in words, it found its expression in a dark, moody edge to her voice and her eyes whenever they spoke.

Now she faced them both openly, ready to face whatever retribution fate intended she bear.

"Well, I'll leave you two together." Olivia said quietly, cradling Seth in her arms and heading for the door.

"No, wait," Catherine said, her hand reaching out and touching Olivia's arm as she passed. Olivia stood next to her, attentive, no trace of emotion shaping her features. "I want you both to understand this." She paused, uncertain of how to continue. "I've always meant to say this to both of you, but the time never seemed to be right. I could never really understand why I've always felt the need to say this -- until now." She turned to Kanin, her eyes bright and clear. "I'm sorry for not standing by you, Kanin. I'm sorry I didn't do all I could to see that you didn't have to return above." Kanin made a move to speak, but she quieted him with a raised gloved hand, commanding his silence. "I know you don't blame me for your decision, that you think I was doing my job -- and I was -- but I know now that I did the wrong thing. You were right when you told me you had already paid the price for your action, that you lost far more than jail could take from you. I should have accepted that, should have tried to convince Father and Vincent that another person's pain is not yours to relieve at such a cost. Mrs. Davis suffered, I know that -- I saw her face when she talked about her son, about watching him die -- but you saw it too, Kanin. You suffered more in those fourteen years than anyone." She sensed Olivia watching her, sensed some change in her face, some slight softening of her features, but she did not turn to her. She was watching Kanin's eyes. "I've just watched an innocent man destroyed by the system I delivered you to. Now he stands convicted of a crime he did not commit, alone, captive in a world he cannot see. I've watched my colleagues above merely doing their jobs as they condemned a helpless victim to a criminal's fate. And I did all I could to prevent that, Kanin, and I failed." She could feel the tears welling now, but she gathered some final bit of inner strength and stood firm in her determination to keep her confession unemotional, an appeal to justice, not pity. "I owed you as much, Kanin. I failed you, too. And I failed Olivia. And I failed Luke." It was becoming difficult now to keep her eyes clear and straight, but she pressed resolutely on. "I wanted you both to know this -- that I was wrong then. I've tried to do the right thing for Alan Trescoe. That will be for others to judge. But part of what I did for him is meant for you, Kanin -- to not permit another innocent man to suffer."

Kanin said nothing. His eyes told her everything she needed to hear. There was forgiveness there and pride. He inclined his head slightly.

She turned to Olivia slowly. There was understanding in the gaze that met hers, and the unmistakable acknowledgement of a debt paid and forgiven. Slowly, Olivia lifted Seth from her arms and extended him to Catherine.

Catherine cradled the child in her own arms, his tousled locks falling against her shoulder, his hair mingling with hers. She could feel the tears washing over her cheeks now, her ability to restrain them gone. She smiled, her hand caressing Seth's neck gently, his tiny arms clutching her coat automatically, his tiny mouth opening in a sleepy yawn, then closing again as he nuzzled closer to her. 'Thank you.' Catherine's lips mouthed silently as she pulled Seth closer.

Olivia nodded slightly in answer, her smile underscoring the moment -- serving as her own silent acceptance.

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"I can feel water in the air." Alan said, drawing a hand across his face, wiping away the moisture that had condensed on his forehead and cheeks. "And I hear the sound of a waterfall."

"Be careful," Vincent said softly. "Keep hold of Dayce's arm. The ledge drops away here to the river below."

Alan tightened his grip on Dayce's shoulder as they edged their way along the water swept ledge above the falls. The rock: was covered with glinting flecks that were water, the crystals of stone muted and dark beneath the silvery coating of spray. The three of them moved out of the mist to a dry spot, then stopped. Dayce guided Alan to a sitting position, his back to the stone wall. Vincent sat next to Alan, between him and the edge of the pathway. The shudder of the waterfall crept through the stone beneath them, its gentle massage barely discernible where skin and stone met.

"Tell me what you see, Dayce," Alan said suddenly.

Dayce looked out, slowly moving his eyes from the waterfall to the river far below, then to his left, to the point where the water ran its course over jagged rocks, then plunged into the depths. His words were like the stone around them -- sharp and clean. As he spoke, he noticed that Vincent's eyes were closed. When he finished, Vincent opened his eyes slowly and looked at him, nodding approvingly.

"I could see it just as you described it, Dayce," Vincent said. "You have a wonderful descriptive style."

"Not often, Vincent. Only when the view is as magnificent as this." He looked at Alan, his glance gentle. "Can you imagine it, Alan?"

"Yes. It sounds so much like upstate New York -- where David and I were going to live. The waterfall, the canyon, the river rushing over the rocks. It's like I'm home."

Dayce squeezed Alan's hand gently, but he looked at Vincent "You are home, Alan, For as long as you wish to remain here." Vincent nodded silently, his smile a silent acknowledgement of Dayce's unspoken question.

Alan was silent for a few moments. When he turned to Vincent, his expression was different -- as if he had just remembered some long-forgotten question. "Vincent, may I look at you?"

"What do you mean?"

"It just occurred to me, I have no idea what you look like. I've looked at Catherine and Dayce, but not you." He raised his hands slowly, waiting.

Vincent looked at Dayce, his eyes fearful -- but he did not move backwards. Dayce's glance moved between the two of them, then settled on Vincent, the unspoken question hanging between them. Vincent nodded slowly, but the fear remained. Dayce moved next to Alan and put an arm around his shoulder. "Alan, there's something you must know before you touch Vincent."

"What?"

The sound of water rushing over stone far below them filled the silence, magnifying it. Dayce looked at Vincent, sorry now for placing his friend in an uncomfortable position. He opened his mouth slightly, but Vincent's upraised hand silenced him before he could speak. Vincent moved closer to Alan, stopping inches from his raised hands. He took Alan's wrists gently in his hands and pulled his outstretched fingers towards his face.

The fingers moved slowly over the eyes and forehead, then moved down the nose. As his fingers painted their sensory canvas in his mind, Alan's face remained unchanged, immobile -- his eyes fixed and bright. Slowly, Vincent withdrew his hands and allowed Alan's their freedom. The fingers moved over the cheeks and down to the lips -- the fingers moving slowly and delicately over the lips, then down.to-the jaw, then lower to the massively muscled neck. Then, slowly, they moved back up the side

of the face -- moving through the hair and down the back of the neck to the shoulders.

"Give me your hands," Alan said softly.

Vincent obeyed, moving his fingers into Alan's. The tips of Alan's fingers lingered at the edge of Vincent's nails, tracing the sharp edges with a gentleness and lightness that seemed almost sensual. Slowly, the touch moved down the fingers -- tracing the palms - then on down to the wrists and the forearm. Dayce studied the faces of the two men closely. He was surprised to see more fear in the eyes of the man who could see than in those of the man who could not.

Slowly, almost hungrily, Alan moved forward, his hands coming to rest against Vincent's chest. He drew back slightly, almost instinctively, but caught himself and moved closer to Alan. "You don't have to be afraid, Vincent. I won't bite you." was Alan's only acknowledgement of his reaction. Alan moved his hands over the massively muscled chest and then, tentatively, up towards the shoulders and neck again. Then slowly satisfied that he had grasped the full reality of the man and the nature of his relationship to Catherine, to himself -- Alan nodded his head gently, over and over. "Now I understand." When he raised his head to look in Vincent's direction his words served as reassurance to Vincent -- as gratitude to Dayce.

"I envy Catherine."

In the cascade of questions that followed, Dayce found little to offer. This was a moment for revelation and revealed, alone. Silently, he drew away from them to a ledge beyond a bend in the cliff. He stood, alone, perched on a windswept ledge, his mind filled with thoughts of another day like this, on a ledge like this --only this time Catherine was not there to offer him the solace he needed.

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The light that marked the entrance to Jacob's chamber hung thick and stagnant in the passageway as Vincent approached. He felt vaguely uneasy, as if the light were an obstacle to his progress, a warning of what lay beyond. The days since Devin's death had found Father more and more reclusive, his time spent exclusively in books and papers - the children's lessons handed off to Mary and Olivia and a handful of others. Their last meeting had been strained. He feared this one would be worse.

"Hello, Vincent. I'm so glad to see you." Mary's gravelly voice greeted him as he entered the familiar confines of Father's chamber. A stack of dishes on makeshift trays stood beside the doorway, a supply of unburned candles was stacked neatly on the bed. The bedclothes were rumpled, the mattress askew from its frame, the blankets and comforters heaped in snowdrift array against the headboard.

Father sat at his desk, raising his head to acknowledge Vincent's entrance, but no word of greeting rising to join Mary's. He sat back slowly, his arms relaxing against the sides of the massive leather chair, his head falling back lazily, but his eyes alive with fire and flare. He seemed to be waiting, alert and expectant, like a shark circling a wounded fish.

"How are you, Father?"

"Fine. How is Catherine?"

"She is well, Father."

"I understand from Olivia that she is defending an accused murderer." He laughed, no trace of respect or compassion accompanying the sound -- only the stale malice of indifference. "I find that ironic."

"She is defending an unjustly accused man. Or rather, she was."

"And how do you know this?"

"I witnessed the crime, Father. Of course, you might have known that if you had set foot out of this mausoleum in the past three months."

Vincent knew his words were dangerously close to a pulled trigger, but the lethargic smile never left Father's face. Only the fire in his eyes intensified.

"I have my sources, Vincent. Perhaps they are a little late with their news, but it eventually reaches me. So she was his defender. How did she do?"

"He was convicted."

The smile intensified, matching the brightness in the eyes. "Well, I guess Catherine will understand what it means to lose now. Won't she?" He looked up at Vincent with eyes that went beyond what he could believe a face could show in its worst moment of pain or despair.

"Would you like her to join you here, Father? Perhaps we could arrange to have the entrance to this chamber sealed? Then you could join Devin in death."

"Vincent!" The cry was Mary's.

Vincent went on, oblivious to her plea. "That might be appropriate, Father. You were never there for Devin while he was alive. Perhaps this could be your atonement."

"Vincent, stop!"

Father slowly moved to stand, but the look in Vincent's eyes stopped him halfway. He wavered, half-standing, half-sitting, for a moment, then slowly sank back into the chair. "Mary, would you leave us alone, please?" was his sole response -- that, and the ominous drop in the tone of his voice. As Mary turned to leave, another voice stopped her.

"No, Mary. Stop where you are." She obeyed, wavering between returning to and heading towards the door. It is important that you hear what I am about to say. As a Tunnel Council Member, you must know."

She returned to the chair next to Father, her eyes fearfully looking from one to the other of them, anxious and confused.

"The man Catherine defended was found guilty. He is innocent. I know this without question."

"But what can we do, Vincent?" Mary asked, prompted by the concern she was unable to suppress. "We can't help him in prison."

"He is not in prison, Mary. He is in Devin's chamber, at this very moment".

Father's eyes shot to Vincent's face, but the warning he saw there kept him from speaking. Mary could only look once at Jacob fearfully, then back to Vincent when the explosion that she expected did not come. She leaned forward in the chair.

"How?"

"Catherine arranged to have him abducted and brought here. She could not see him go to prison for a crime he did not commit"

"Why here?"

"He is blind, Mary. He cannot return to his life above. He would be recaptured. Catherine has brought him to the tunnels for safety."

"What's the man's name?" Mary asked.

"Alan."

"How old is he?"

"Thirty-six."

"What about his family?"

Vincent shook his head slowly.

"His wife?"

Vincent paused for a moment before he answered. "Alan is homosexual, Mary."

"Ah, yes." The voice was Father's. "Is this Catherine's latest offering? She takes my son from me. Then she fails in her professional duty to defend this man. And now she kidnaps him and brings him to the tunnels, without even a hint of approval from me, from the Council? And on top of everything else, the man is helpless to move freely in the tunnels! Not to mention a convicted felon!!" He turned to Mary, his voice ugly. "Is there any tunnel law she has not broken?"

Mary did not answer, but Vincent did. "Only one, Father. And I intend to break that law myself."

In the silence that followed, Mary stood and faced Vincent, her eyes half-question, half answer. She knew what he was going to say.

"Alan wishes to remain in the tunnels permanently as a citizen. He wishes sanctuary. I intend to see that it is granted"

The sound that greeted the words was as unexpected as a cool breeze in a desert. Laughter filled the chamber, rising and expanding as it went on. For a moment, it seemed that Father had descended into madness, the sound of his laughter fueling his fall. When it subsided, Mary felt relief -- Vincent, apprehension. Slowly, Father pulled himself up and walked to his desk. His hand vanished deep into a pile of papers, his movements seemingly haphazard. Finally, his hand reappeared clutching a faded, yellow-brown scrap of paper; he extended it slowly to Vincent, his eyes leveled and clear.

"Perhaps you would like to refresh your memory of our Constitution, my friend. You seem to have forgotten it these past months."

"No, Father. I know the words."

"Then you know that such a request will not even come to the full Council. It violates the Ninth Article. You know you need a majority of votes to obtain full sanctuary. I do not believe a majority of the Council will vote to break the law."

"You may know the words, Father, but apparently you have long forgotten the intent. I will bring the question to the Tunnel Council at the next meeting. In three days. Alan will present his statement at that time and the Council may question both he and his supporters."

'My voice carries many votes, Vincent. It would be foolish to waste the Council's time. The law is clear.'

"It is the Council that will decide, Father -- not you." He moved to the door slowly, then turned "Article Nine has many clauses, Father, in case you had forgotten. You might wish to read them more closely."

He was gone in an instant. Jacob turned and threw the paper back on the desk, the slice of his arm in space releasing the anger left unexpressed in the minutes just passed. He returned to his chair, Mary taking his elbow as he faltered. The fire was gone from his eyes now, his face worn and deeply-lined, as if deflated. The change frightened Mary. She took his hand in hers. "What is happening to you? I've never seen you and Vincent quarrel so."

He seemed not to have heard. Quickly, his fingers began running through the stack of papers on the desk, his eyes intent on some unseen object. Mary remained silent for a few moments, then moved her hands forward and grabbed Jacob's hands, her grip halting his fevered search. He did not resist her, but he would not face her. He remained staring straight ahead, his breath coming in short, controlled bursts. He seemed to be somewhere far away in this moment, as if her grasp held nothing more than a ghost of flesh and blood, soulless, driven by forces she could not see or understand.

"Please let me help you with this...whatever it is. I can't let you sink further out of my reach, Jacob." She looked at him intently, her voice a naked plea. He did not move, did not respond. "I love you, Jacob. Don't you understand that?"

Slowly, his hands drew away from the confines of her fingers, their motion slowly picking up speed, resuming their maniacal search through the clutter. He did not turn to look at her, did not acknowledge having heard her words -- his silence now more brutal than anything he had said to Vincent. It was like a slap across the face, his silence, leaving no outward mark on Mary's face as she rose, but scarring her soul more deeply than any physical slap could scar her cheeks.

Without a word, tears breaking out and over her eyes and down her cheeks, she ran from the chamber -- leaving Father to his silence, both without and within.

# The Victim

"You're lying, Miss Chandler."

"Of course I am, Mr Bellasco. But then, I'm not under oath, am I."

It had been an unpleasant hour for Catherine, feigning cordiality to the two federal agents, maintaining a decorum and a civility in her tone as their questions moved from the banal and the general to the specific and the personal. She had held steady at their mentions of her relationship with Elliot Burch and Devin Wells, had betrayed nothing by her face or her voice.

But now the questions had turned threatening. She had deflected their questions about Alan by invoking attorney-client Privilege. They had not pressed her on the abduction - they had no evidence to tie her to Alan's disappearance. Too many people had seen her and Dayce in the restaurant while the abduction was taking place. She had planned their alibi well that morning, down to drawing attention to them in the restaurant and ingratiating themselves with the waitress, drawing her into a long conversation about the trial. In this, she had been thorough.

Passing over the abduction, the agents had moved on to Jacob Well's federal warrant. They would not tell her who had given them her name. It had not bothered her -- she knew who the source had been. She felt the anger rising in her again, but she marshalled her strength and met the barrage of questions head-on.

She had not denied knowing Jacob Wells. There was too much evidence to make such a denial credible. She decided to mix truth with fiction, to weave a tapestry that would buy time and send the agents down more blind alleys than could be dealt with reasonably. When they had asked where Jacob Wells resided, she had answered "I don't know." -- then invoked attorney-client privilege when asked for information about his ties to Alan Taft. One of the agents had threatened her, claiming she could invoke no such privilege as she was not his attorney of record. She had smilingly asked him to check Jacob Wells' police file in the Alan Taft murder. The agent had complied, then sheepishly apologised when he saw that she had provided the service claimed. From that point on, the accuser had fallen silent, allowing his superior to handle the questions.

The last question had been too much, even for her. She had decided to answer with the most outrageous tale she could think of. The ploy had worked -- the agent never for a moment could believe it had been the truth.

"He presides over an underground kingdom of outcasts and miscreants, with a man-beast as protector? I've got to hand it to you, Miss Chandler. You almost had me going there for a minute."

"I thought you'd like it," she answered. "I can take you to one of the magic doors to the kingdom, if you like."

The man leaned back slowly, folding his arms across his chest, his sigh deep and quick. "No thank you, Miss Chandler. One wild goose chase a day is enough for me. Let's move on, shall we?"

"Glad to. More coffee, Mr Norris?"

"No thanks."

She sat back, one of her white porcelain mugs in her hand, the sound of her blows against the lip to cool the coffee the only sound in the room. She looked at Mr Bellasco expectantly, waiting.

"Miss Chandler, your record for the District Attorney's office is superlative. I've seen your files. You would be an asset to any law enforcement agency in this country."

"Thank you, Mr Bellasco. You're very kind."

"You brought down some of the biggest. Elliot Burch." He glanced up briefly looking for reaction of any kind to the name or the use of it in an accusation of illegality. Catherine remained immobile, attentive, her face did not change. "Mitchell Denton..., Max Avery" he paused, turning a page in his notebook. "Oh, I see you had a little clash with the local authorities over the death of Stanley Kazmareck."

"Thanks to your CIA friends."

"Who?"

"Your friends from Langley. How are things at conspiracy central, Mr Bellasco? How our Gourinista friends these days?"

"The Gouranistas are a myth, Miss Chandler."

She sighed deeply. "Right. I keep forgetting. At least you've got the denial wording down pat. Right down to the tone of voice. You certainly do know the drill."

"Now, Miss Chandler. We don't cross turf. We only know what they tell us."

"And that is all you're going to find out, Mr Bellasco."

He looked at her, his smile gone -- but he had no adversary to attack. She had said it simply, not as a threat or as a taunt, but as a simple matter of fact. He knew it was probably pointless to continue the questioning, but his experience told him what kind of a game was being played by each of them. He recognized a master player when he saw one and longed to prolong the game. 'Even the experts make a wrong move sometime.' he thought.

'Not true, Miss Chandler. I have found out one thing.'

"What's that?"

He leaned forward, taking the white ceramic pot and pouring himself a coffee. "You make an excellent cup of coffee." His smile matched hers now. She nodded in answer.

"What did Jacob Wells tell you about his work at Chittenden, Miss Chandler?"

"Nothing of any importance. I discovered he was questioned by the McLelland Subcommittee in 1953, that he was harassed and slandered when he refused to testify and that he vanished. before he could be incarcerated. But you already know all that, don't you?"

"He never explained what he was working on?"

"No. And I never asked him. He was a wrongly accused murder suspect, nothing more. Devin asked me to help him. I did it out of friendship. I didn't care about his past and I don't care now about his past. I got him released from jail and got a conviction against Alan Taft's real murderer. Once Wells

walked, my job was finished"

"And you haven't seen him since?"

"Not that I can recall."

"Nice evasive answer, Miss Chandler."

"Thank you." While Mr Bellasco turned the pages of his notebook, she waited, aware that Mr Norris was still watching her. She looked over to him for a moment. Smiling, her eyes meeting his directly. He did not smile in answer, but she noticed that his posture relaxed as she turned back to his partner.

"You said that Devin Wells asked you to help his father?"

"That's right."

"So Devin Wells was in New York in October of 1988?"

"How would I know. I didn't ask where he was calling from."

He opened a thin file folder and tossed it across the table. She glanced at it for a moment. She knew what it contained. She had seen a copy of it, days before, in Joe's stack of information. She had formulated her answer before she heard the question.

"Mr Devin Wells was in Seattle, Washington, on that date, Miss Chandler. Working as a security guard."

"They do have telephones in Seattle, I believe?"

"How did he discover his father was in jail? Mr Wells placed no telephone calls while in custody. Who tipped him off?"

"I couldn't hazard a guess, Mr Bellasco. Maybe a friend, Devin had hundreds of friends, as I'm sure you're aware."

"We talked to the guard who controlled that cell block. On the morning when you started to represent Jacob Wells, he claims that you were late for a deposition of another prisoner. He claims that while passing Mr Wells' cell, you seemed to recognize him and stopped, frozen in your tracks. He claims that Mr Wells looked at you, seemed to recognize you, and turned away."

"What's your point?"

"Why would he act like that when he saw you if he had never seen you before? Why did you react to seeing him in jail if you hadn't known him before?"

"You're mistaken, Mr Bellasco. Mr Wells and I had met before. He just didn't know that I worked for the District Attorney. He was surprised and a little embarrassed to be seen in jail. He didn't know that I already knew about the charges against him."

He raised his eyebrows a bit and his eyes grew wider, as if he were surprised at the quickness of his adversary's mind. He did not believe a word of it -- he knew that she knew he did not believe a word of it -- and his smile betrayed his skepticism. Catherine answered with a smile that seemed to say 'I know you don't believe me, but I don't care.' He was growing to respect her more with every question -- and every answer. His informant had been correct when he had said, "She's a formidable opponent."

Daniel Bellasco respected formidable opponents.

"Of course. And you being his friend and all, you did everything you could to help him."

"Yes. Just as I would help any friend in trouble."

"That's admirable, Miss Chandler. Admirable. Such loyalty is rare these days. So many people willing to sell out their friends, their colleagues..."

"Yes. But you see, Mr Bellasco, I'm worth over five million dollars. I don't need to 'buy' or 'sell' anything or anyone -- and wouldn't even if I didn't have a dime to my name."

"So I've been told. Your friends are quite unanimous in their declarations of your integrity and your moral fire. At least, those friends you had prior to joining the District Attorney's office in 1987." He leafed through several pages of his notebook, noting information she could not guess. "Almost all of your friends say the same thing. That in late 1987, after your mysterious attack and 10-day disappearance and your broken engagement, you became a virtual recluse." He thumbed through a few more pages, then stopped on a blank page and looked up at her, waiting.

"That's not true." She looked at him, her smile unchanged, her eyes twinkling with enjoyment. "I became a *total* recluse."

"Why is that?" Mr Norris asked, grasping at the chance to ask an innocuous question.

She turned to look at him benignly. "Why don't you have a madman slash your face ten times, right down to the bone, with a pocketknife -- then have a stranger suture your wounds with common thread -- then lie comatose for ten days, in agony. You do that, then come back to see me. If you can still ask that question, I promise I'll answer you." She turned back to Mr Bellasco. "I trust we're clear on this."

He nodded slightly, clipping his pen to the top of the notebook, flipping it shut and returning it to his inside coat pocket in the same motion. "Perfectly clear, Miss Chandler. I... we apologize."

He stood up slowly, gathering his coat into his arms. Norris followed, reluctant to end the interrogation so soon, but glad to escape this woman's relentless, silent intimidation. He took his coat from the stand by the door and pulled it on quickly, then pulled the apartment door half open and waited.

Bellasco joined him at the door, but turned back to Catherine. "Wait for me by the elevator," he said softly, his eyes not leaving her. Norris shuffled out slowly, muttering some words of acknowledgment as he pulled the door closed behind him.

Catherine watched as Bellasco studied the room intently. His eyes wandered over her furniture and the bric-a-brac that lined her shelves and tables. He noted the antique porcelain vase on the mantle next to him and the collection of jewel eggs that dominated the lighted glass display *étagère* near her desk. When his eyes reached the Mark Ventura work on the table near the window, his glance stopped. She turned to note which object he was staring at, then turned back to him, her smile unchanged. When his eyes met hers, they were relaxed and calm, as if a question had just been answered without the need for further thrust or parry.

"I see what you mean when you say you don't need to worry about buying or selling. Some of these pieces are priceless."

"You know antiques, Mr Bellasco?"

"Daniel," he said his voice casual. "And yes, I know something about collectibles, although I specialise in old books and manuscripts."

"I agree. There's nothing like an old book." She waited in the silence, but he made no comment. "Surely you didn't stay behind to appraise my decor!"

"No, I..." He stumbled slightly -- the abrupt break in his voice alerting Catherine that what he was to say was unexpected, not a part of the questioning. "Miss Chandler, would you consider having dinner with me tomorrow evening?"

It was the last thing she had expected him to ask. She fought to keep her face rigid against the onslaught of emotion she felt within. She knew she must be careful here, not betray her terror. She found herself instinctively answering "Call me Catherine," in order to buy a few moments.

In those moments, while Daniel smiled at her apparent acceptance of a more casual tenor to their exchanges, she weighed the danger of refusing with the benefit of accepting and maintain some control over the direction of his inquiries. She could do much to protect the others by keeping a wary eye on the enemy.

"Certainly, Daniel. Call for me at 8:00."

He smiled sheepishly, backing into the door in his haste to leave before she could change her mind. He blushed slightly, but Catherine only smiled warmly -- then pulled the door open and headed for the elevators. She remained in the doorway, nodding as he rounded the corner and threw an insolent smile at her before vanishing down the hallway.

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A single metal lamp threw a harsh glare against the corner desk on which it rested, and against the dingy green and grey of the wall and window frame nearby. The light cut a sharp line across the corner, the clutter of papers and half-smoked packages of cigarettes bathed in a confection of light and shadow -- the tattered calendar and half-drawn shade cut by the edge of the glare, the shadows above made darker through contrast. The smoke that rose from the overfull ashtray spiraled towards the lamp, then vanished abruptly as was drawn up and away into the darkness. The lights of a computer console flashed sporadically, but their activity was drowned out in the harshness of the light from the corner. The man seated at the desk stared intently at the computer screen, his hands flying across the keyboard seemingly at random, save a steady progression of words ran across the screen, then back to the next line, in movements as quick as the finger that created them. There was no emotion on the man's face, no reaction to the content of what he typed.

A phone lying half-buried in the clutter sprang to life, its shrill ring muted by layers of debris and discard. His left hand flew into the pile, almost disappearing -- then pulled the receiver out of the stack, his movement automatic. He propped the phone in his neck and returned to his typing.

He listened for a few moments to the voice at the other end, his hands continuing their dance over the keys. He pulled a cigarette from his mouth slowly and crushed it slowly in a lone open spot in the ashtray, then leaned back in his chair, the supporting joint emitting a long, protesting squeak.

"Yeah, we got it all. The whole conversation." He paused. "She's going out with him tomorrow night." He listened intently, then hastily scribbled an address onto a notepad and stuck it to the top of the computer console. "I will. It's time."

The phone was back in its cradle and his fingers were back at the keyboard in almost the same

moment.

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"You will all have completed *Oedipus* by Monday morning. We will discuss the text then. Your oral drill will take place the following day."

A groan met Mary's words, the collective sigh of her seven best students filling the chamber. She tilted her head to the side and fixed the closest students with a withering stare. It was like this every year -- the educated trying to teach the significant to the reluctant. And every year, the discussions went on long into the evening and night as the reluctant discovered the words and the meaning of the play and of the history behind the words.

"I hope this one is easier than *Hamlet*." Moira said sheepishly.

"It is," Mary answered. "'And it's shorter, too.'" she said, anticipating Conrad. "Don't forget I want each of you to memorize one speech from the play to perform at the monthly pageant." Her raised hand and warning glare stifled another round of sighs and though she heard the beginnings of their discontented rumbles as they shuffled out of the chamber, books and papers slung under their arms and their conversations coming in furtive, hushed whispers.

"You still have difficulty teaching the older children Shakespeare, don't you?"

She looked up, her head dropping wearily onto her hands raised in front of her. "I'm afraid that's one of the universal emotions, Vincent. When I taught above, the reactions were exactly the same. Of course, they always end up wanting to read more when I'm through with them." She stood up slowly and walked to the front of the desk, her arms folded. "Do you remember when you took my Classics class?"

"How could I forget? The look on your face when I told you I had memorized the entire text."

Mary laughed, her eyes filling with remembrance of the moment. "I didn't believe you. I put you in front of everyone and forced you to recite the play. I thought you would falter after a few lines."

"Yes. I believe you stopped me after ten minutes."

"I never doubted you again, Vincent." She walked to him slowly, her eyes downcast. Her arms remaining crossed over her chest. When she reached the stone wall next to him, she leaned gently against it, her eyes moving up to meet his, a trace of her smile remained, made bittersweet because she knew he had not come here to discuss literature or drama. She felt the beginnings of discomfort of emotional distance.

"You know why I'm here?"

"I know what you want me to say. I just don't think I can, Vincent." She looked up at him slowly, her eyes wet with unshed tears, the sound of regret in her voice taking their place. "Father is deeply hurt. I've never seen him this angry and confused. He refuses to..." Her voice faltered for a moment. "He refuses to talk to me about Devin... or anything else. I had to threaten to get him to attend Devin's internment. Now he has to face the prospect of a sanctuary debate and a stranger living in Devin's chamber. It's too much for him, Vincent."

"He has to face these facts, Mary. They won't go away. He can't wish them away by hiding in his chamber and pretending the rest of us will make everything better for him." He looked deeply into

Mary's eyes, his meaning underscored by the severity of his glance. "He can't use the past as a weapon against me."

"Vincent, he isn't trying to hurt..."

"He's trying to manufacture blame where no blame exists. It's almost as if he were trying to drive a wedge between Catherine and me -- between Catherine and the rest of the community. I won't permit that to happen, Mary."

"You're wrong. Father loves Catherine. We all do. You know that."

"Do you, Mary. Does *he*?"

"You know he does. He's just hurt because she went behind his back..."

"You sound like a cheerleader now, Mary. It's becoming difficult to tell you apart. Is your love so blind that Mary Corwell no longer exists? Does his voice now fill your mind as well as your mouth?"

She backed away from him slightly, her brows lowering, her lips straight and compressed in anger. "You have no right to be deliberately cruel to me."

"You're selective in your application of that rule, Mary."

"You know I supported Devin in his final wish. I have no power over Jacob's feelings."

"Yet you mouth his platitudes even now."

She stared at him, aghast. "You, of all people, you want me to abandon the man I love?"

"No, Mary. I want you to stand on your own two feet and tell me how you feel. I don't want to hear Father speak through you. It isn't becoming to bear his malicious words from such a kind and gentle woman as you."

She turned away quickly, walking back to her desk. She used the corner for support, not turning to face him. "You know how I feel, Vincent. You know the law..."

"Article Eight. Sanctuary shall be extended to citizens of the world above only in the following circumstances. One, imminent threat of death or imprisonment, for political beliefs or acts of legal and protected civil disobedience, for any person innocent of or not responsible for the actions which impel the quest for said sanctuary. Or, two, any person escaping confinement for acts they did not commit or actions or beliefs they are legally permitted to perform or hold and which are not recognised by the legal code of the world above."

She turned slowly, her face tight. "Your memory is as sharp as ever. The words are clear, I believe."

"The words are clear, but the intent was never meant to bar the innocent. Surely you know that."

"I know what the words say. I have to stand with Father. I don't see how one could believe otherwise. We don't take convicted felons into the tunnels." She turned quickly, her voice dark and dead. "Ask Kanin Evans. Or better yet, why not have Catherine ask him."

Vincent sighed deeply. "Catherine has made her peace with Kanin... and Olivia. Kanin long ago stopped

using guilt as a weapon against others. They forgave her for her mistake. She was not responsible for Luke's death." His voice changed now, the gentleness gone. "Father's weapons are finding new and skillful users. I never thought you would become one of them, Mary. The Mary I remember would never use them. Perhaps the Mary I remember died with Devin." He looked at her sadly. "Perhaps you both did."

He was out the door and down the passageway before she could answer.

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A soft rustling sound wafted in through the open balcony doors of Catherine's apartment the soft white curtains billowing into the apartment, swept by invisible, warm fingers of wind from the city beyond. A rare night of warm southerly winds had blanketed the city, making the early February evening feel like late May. Catherine welcomed the chance to cleanse the stale, dead air in her apartment.

The rustling sound returned. Catherine walked slowly to the open door, pulling her terrycloth robe tight around her waist. She was not shocked to see Vincent standing against the balcony wall, his hair swept across his forehead by the wind, his cape molded body. She walked straight into his arms, the warmth of his body and of the wind caressing the naked skin of her arms and face.

When she looked up, she knew what had drawn him to her tonight. His eyes held the first hint of pain and despair she had seen there since Devin's death.

"I'm glad you came tonight."

He sighed, drawing a hand to her face and framing her cheek with his fingers, his eyes bright. "I needed to see you, alone. It's been such a long time since..." His voice failed him for a moment. "Since we've been together."

"Not by choice, Vincent. So many nights these past weeks, I've longed to be with you."

"I know."

"There's been so little time. I was sure things would turn out differently."

"So was Dayce. He is having a difficult time, Catherine. He feels he let you both down."

"Dayce still feels overprotective of me. He always has."

A gust of wind pressed against them, nearly knocking Catherine over. Vincent swept out quickly, moving around her waist and pulling her to his side, her body up against his. In that moment, through direct sensual perception, the extent of his longing for her was clear. In the shock of their mutual realization, their eyes met in understanding. Catherine moved her arms around him and pulled him tighter against her, the movement of her legs and abdomen accentuating the sensation, prolonging it, leaving no desire unexpressed in the silence. As their lips met, then parted, the warmth spilled from their mouths to their throats, then flushed their bodies with a jarring sensation of power. It was over in moments, but the memory remained through the words that followed.

"Dayce loves you, Catherine. He always will feel overprotective of you."

She sighed "'And Alan?'"

"He seems determined to punish himself for that, too. He sees Alan's decision to seek sanctuary as a

punishment. He doesn't see it as a choice."

"I can talk to him about it, if you wish."

"It may help." He seemed reluctant to continue, but Catherine's inquisitive glance told him she knew there was more to his visit than this. "We have another problem, Catherine."

She remained silent. Vincent did not know that there was even more to face than his unvoiced problem, but she knew this was not the time to burden him with her troubles above. "What is it, Vincent?"

"Father is opposed to Alan's sanctuary request."

"How strongly opposed?"

"Unalterably opposed. I see no chance of swaying him."

"Did he say why?"

Vincent turned away, reluctant to continue. Catherine took his shoulder in her hand and slowly tried to turn him to face her. Slowly, he turned in response to the pressure of her touch. "He feels we betrayed him."

"We? You and I?"

He nodded. "And others. He blames us for Devin's death. He will not listen to reason. He hasn't left his chamber for over a month. He refuses to discuss his mental state with anyone. Even Mary is having a difficult time taking care of him."

Catherine shook her head sadly, the wind her only ally in keeping her eyes dry. "Perhaps if I spoke with him..."

"No, Catherine. He will not speak with you. I will not have you hear his accusations now. We know they are born of grief and guilt. He must work through those afflictions himself."

"What about the sanctuary question?"

"He has said he will not even bring it before the Council, but he cannot do so if the proposal is brought by another Council member. I intend to do so at the next meeting."

"You will stand against Father before the Council?" She looked at him, a sudden wave of emotion sweeping through her -- an emotion she could not name, but which felt like what she had felt once before on a sunny cliff miles and years behind her. "You'll do it for Alan?"

"No, Catherine. For justice."

"May I be there?"

He looked at her lovingly, his eyes gentle. "It may be difficult. Alan must prepare his statement and defend his request to the members. Perhaps it would be better if both you and Dayce were present"

"Have you asked Dayce about this?"

"Dayce loves Alan, Catherine. No matter what choice Alan makes now, I doubt that Dayce will stand against him."

"You don't understand Dayce yet, Vincent. He may do more harm than good standing beside Alan and yet remaining silent."

"I understand Dayce better than you think I do. Whatever guilt he feels, however deeply, he thinks he has hurt Alan; neither of those feelings will be made more bearable by refusing him the chance to see the man he loves safe and protected. He needs that now, Catherine." He laid his hand gently on Catherine's cheek, his voice gentle but firm. "He needs those chances more than you need them. Whatever Alan is to you, he's much more to Dayce."

Catherine nodded. "I will speak to both of them tomorrow morning. I'll do whatever you think best on Alan's behalf."

As Vincent turned towards the wall, Catherine's hand slipped around his waist and held him firmly. He turned, his eyes reluctantly searching out hers, his sigh betraying the thought that had hung between them for what seemed like endless minutes. Slowly her arms worked their way around his waist, completing the circle, then breaking apart – one to his shoulder blades and the muscles of his upper back, the other down sensuously exploring the curves below his waist, reaching where neither light nor wind could touch in this moment. Vincent raised a hand to the open 'V' of her robe, tracing a delicate, gentle path along the top of the fabric, the tip of his fingernail tracing the shape in the skin of her shoulder, of her neck, of her breasts. Her sigh matched his in the wind, her touch as intimate and as sensuous. She slowly backed away from him, her hands reaching into his and gently urging him towards the window, towards the darkness of her bedroom. For a moment, he paused -- and the wind died away to near silence, the sound of their breathing caught up with the rustle of the vines. Then, almost imperceptibly the wind rose behind him as he stepped forward into the darkness -- the line of shadow between blackness and starlight moving slowly down her face and neck to her arms, washing over her wrists to her fingers, then vanishing as her outline disappeared through the window. The shadow wave broke over Vincent's body quick as the wind now, and in a moment he had been washed into the darkness with her. Only the wind remained to mark their passing, and an errant lace curtain caught by the wind's greedy hands and molded against the glass doors -- its delicate edges held firm against the hard, clear glass.

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"You're lying." Alan said playfully, the cool spray of the waterfall covering his face and its roar nearly blocking out the words.

"N, I'm not. Every word of it is true."

"You really did that on a final exam?"

"You bet I did. Funny thing was, the professor was so shocked that I would dare do such a thing that he ended up passing me anyway. He told me my methods would prepare me for the way it really was out there."

Dayce could hear Alan's laugh intermittently, the water of the falls pounding his naked body. "You don't approve of my method?"

"Bribing a mock jury foreman in a mock trial? Rigging a verdict you knew was impossible on the evidence? Doing everything you could to get your client off?" He paused for a moment, his voice solemn, but with a touch of sarcasm. in the phony cadence of its syllables. "I think it's great. Certainly

a perfect window to your soul, if one were needed."

"What do you mean?"

"You despise losing."

"Yes, that's true."

"Part of the truth, anyway."

Dayce had started soaping his chest and shoulders, then covered his tangle of curls in a blanket of white foam before ducking back under the water, the clear, cool water invigorating against his olive skin. The hair of his chest and arms was matted in tight swirls where the water had washed days of grime away. His muscles stood out sharply, the rivulets of water finding the shallows and depressions along his shoulders and upper arms, washing down between the well-muscled chest, then down the sturdy legs and on to the Razor Run beyond the pool.

He could hear Alan moving slowly along the rocky bank, his hands dislodging an occasional stone to fall with a splash in the shallow water just below his feet. He came to rest on a small outcrop near the edge of the falls, peeling his shirt off in order to enjoy the sensation of the water. It was a motion made without any self-conscious break, no moment of pause. Dayce watched as Alan stretched his muscles, raising his arms over his head, his hands locked together, then twisting his torso to one side, then the other. The movements had the fluidity of the water around them, the gleam of the stone above them, the living energy he could feel rising within him. It was a moment of complete sensuality molded by a human form, the living call of flesh and blood for feeling and sensation. The shock of what Dayce felt it doing to him was as of ice water thrown in his face, and as welcome -- but he did not resist. He tore his eyes away from Alan reluctantly, soaping his torso and legs in silence. ·

"What did you mean by that?"

"By what?"

"When you said it was 'part of the truth'."

Dayce's question was nearly lost in the roar of the falls, but through the transparent mist he could see Alan's face in attentive repose, his body remaining stretched and feline against the stone. "I meant that I don't know you well enough yet to know why you hate defeat so much. Knowing that you do was easy. Knowing why will take time."

"You could always ask Chandler."

He shook his head slightly, stretching further, his muscles taut to the breaking point. "She wouldn't tell me. And anyway, there may be more than one reason. She may only know one of them."

Dayce stood immobile in front of the water, the milky white spray cascading over his shoulder. He fixed Alan with a glance he was glad Alan could not see. "She knows all of them, Alan."

"So I was right?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've never much cared to learn about people from their friends. I prefer to gain my own insight on a personal basis." He sat up slowly, rubbing the drops of water from arms. "My vision may be gone,

but I can see with the best of them."

Dayce chuckled. "So I've noticed."

"That's why I prefer to learn about you myself." He paused for a moment; his face lost the gaiety of the moment, its features hardening. "Dayce, may I ask you something personal?"

"Sure."

"Are you afraid of me?"

He did not know where the question came from, but he knew his answer had to be truthful. He could not lie to this man. "A little."

"Why?"

"You're... you're a lot like a man I lived with for a long time, Alan. He was every bit as insightful and gentle as you are. He came the closest to... to..." His voice faltered. He was afraid to say it.

"To breaking through your defenses, Dayce?" The sound of his name pronounced so gently, almost an afterthought to the accusation, startled him. He did not answer.

The next minutes were a single sensation of purpose and fulfillment joined. Slowly, Alan untied the laces of his shoes, slipping them off with his socks and setting them aside. He stepped down from the rocks into the shallow water, the rippling crests of the wavelets breaking against his calves. He waded out into the pool, the spray running down his face in clear rivulets, his hair turning the color of caramel as water streaked through it, then the color of a deep Autumn sunset, bands of copper and tangerine bright against the dark blonde wisps, each intermediate shade caught in the reflected light and streaked in single strands or whole locks across his forehead.

His outstretched hands found Dayce's chest, lingered momentarily -- then went flat against the wet skin, the fingertips spread flat and working upwards, to the broad shoulders and across the chest. Alan raised one hand to Dayce's face, a single outstretched finger gently moving along the glistening lips and then upwards again, moving through his hair and coming to rest in the nape of his neck, the fingers not still for a moment, but never leaving the back of Dayce's neck -- their caress made tangible in Dayce's slow lowering of his head to meet Alan's touch, his answer in his acceptance of the man's touch.

"You can touch me too, Dayce." Alan said simply.

Dayce's hands drew upwards, fighting against an enemy Alan could not see and Dayce could not face. With a diamond-cutter's touch, they caressed Alan's chest and shoulders. With slow, sensuous movements, Dayce's touch hardened into a gentle massage. Alan responded, moving his shoulders rhythmically against the pressure, yet rising hungrily towards the touch. Alan's eyes blinked as the water from the spray spread in a fine mist to enfold them, then faded away. Dayce noticed that a rivulet of water had collected on Alan's brow, hanging on the brow, ready to course down his nose and to his eyes. He bent forward and gently kissed the droplet from his brow, the water cool and clean to the taste yet mixed with the salty taste of Alan's skin. He did not remove his mouth, instead allowed his tongue to course over the hair of Alan's brow, then to the other, then around his eye and down to the eyelids, the touch of his lips light and delicate as the mist that hung in fine drops on his eyelashes. Alan did not resist -- he lifted his head hungrily to Dayce's mouth, his lips full and parted slightly. There was no hesitation as Dayce took the offering, his own lips parted, their tongues mingling hungrily. Each searching the other -- their hands encircling each other, drawing them together into a common

sensation.

Slowly, Dayce backed beneath the waterfall, the cascade falling across his shoulders, then his chest, then moving in a line along his outstretched arms as he moved behind the veil of water into the darkness beneath the rock. Alan's arms lay in Dayce's, upturned, the water moving up his arms to his chest, then his shoulders -- finally washing over his upturned face, washing away all save the surrender to this moment and the serenity that they knew lay before them.

Then only the sound of rushing water remained, that and an occasional low moan that was neither water nor wind. The curtain of mist hung unbroken over the pool now, an opaque whirl of cloud and muffled roar -- its delicate edges held firmly in place by the hard, clean stone.

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The warming breezes were a distant memory, a vague reminder of a wonderful night with Vincent, as Catherine felt Daniel Bellasco's arm take hers and guide her across Sixth Avenue. The wind brought a few flakes of snow, the advance scouts of an army that threatened to paralyze the city. The storm was predicted to be a two-day affair, but these first flurries were early by hours.

Dinner had been a subdued affair, Catherine barely noticing the food or the surroundings. Their conversation had been equally casual -- with no single mention of law enforcement or federal warrants. Daniel had asked her about her childhood and about law school -- she had asked about the paths that had led him to work for the FBI. She felt none of the strain of planning each and every word and gesture. Of funneling her emotions and her facial expressions into a single expression of detachment. She sensed no professional motive to this time together, and that bothered her now. She did not want to lead this man on, but self-preservation demanded that she allow him to be a part of her life. And there was always the possibility she could discover his connection to Joe and to the DA's office -- or so she told herself.

"Did you enjoy dinner?" he asked, his arm touching her elbow and guiding her over a broken stretch of sidewalk, then dropping away once the way was clear.

"Delicious. Best I've had in a long time."

"I can imagine, what with the court case and all. I know how difficult murder cases can be."

His voice sounded strange to her now, compassionate and empathetic. "You sound like you feel sorry for me."

He shook his head. "I feel sorry for both of you. Your client got a raw deal and now he's been abducted by God knows who. You and your friend lost your first murder case." He threw a quick glance at her, the streetlight they were passing catching his eyes under the shadow line of his beret "I think you hate to lose as much as I do."

'Careful, now,' she thought. "I do," she said easily. "But I would gladly give up every case I ever tried in exchange for the Trescoe verdict. It's hard to stand by an innocent man convicted."

"You're sure he was innocent?"

"Absolutely." She turned and fixed him with a knowing glare. "You've surely read the case file. You made that clear two days ago. What does your experience tell you?"

"He's innocent."

"How would you have voted if you had been on his jury?"

"I would have voted to acquit. The evidence was clearly insufficient to convict – to people like you and me."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you and I have seen tens of thousands of pages of depositions and evidence and statements and insurance claims and all the attendant legal artifact system. We have a sixth sense, you and I. We know when our client is innocent and when we know we're defending a dirtbag. That's what leads many of us to drugs and alcohol as our closest friends in our thirties, ulcers in our forties, and heart attacks in our fifties. We struggle to set the guilty free and must stand by and watch the innocent suffer. Sometimes it's the other way around, but you know how rarely that happens."

"I think that's one of the reasons I wanted to go into corporate law. I would have some choice over my clients. I wouldn't have to defend people I knew were guilty.:" She chuckled softly. "Little did I know..."

"And of course, daddy helped out there, too." She stopped and looked at him closely, but there was no malice in his voice -- no accusation in the features of his face. The salt and pepper hair, the gentle eyebrows over the blue eyes, the strong cheekbones and lantern jaw were set in relaxed repose, as if his statement were a mere matter of fact, open neither to rebuke or revision.

She chuckled. ""Why don't I feel insulted?"

"Because it wasn't an insult. It's no crime to enter the same profession as one's father." He paused, looking at her. "Unless it's not what one truly wants to do with their life, unless reason tells you you belong in another field and you choose to ignore your reason in favor of some misplaced emotional imperative. Then it becomes a guilt that will eventually destroy you."

They walked on, slower now and more relaxed.."I never told my father how much I hated corporate law, Daniel. I guess he always assumed I was happy because all he saw was the expensive suits, the perfectly-coiffed face and hair, the perfect representative at parties and pretrial briefings. I never had the heart..."

"To tell him you hated the whole pretense?"

She shook her head. "It wasn't really a pretense. A lot of it was inertia. My father spoke of a law career for me -- I grew up around lawyers, heard nothing but legal arguments and was reading books on law when I was ten years old. Even my best friend wanted to be a lawyer."

"Dayce DiCenzo is your best friend.? I didn't know that."

"We grew up together. It wasn't pretense for him, let me tell you. His father was adamantly opposed to Dayce's choice of careers. But Dayce had the strength to stand up to him. Later, when his father became convinced that Dayce wasn't going into law just please *him*, he relented and supported the choice."

"And you didn't want to stand up for yourself?"

"I never really knew I'd made a mistake until years after I left school. I coasted along almost ten years, wining and dining corporate clients and their friends, writing up and researching precedents. I never went to the front lines of the profession ---I knew what lay there, and I didn't want any part of that."

"Surely your father knew you were unhappy."

"He never let on, but I'm sure he was disappointed that I had no interest in taking over for him. He assumed I would become the 'Chandler' of 'Coolidge, Chandler and Coles' when he died. There had even been some talk of fixing me up with the elder Collidge's son-but I nipped that in the bud early on."

"Not your type?"

"He's certainly adequate on a professional level -- maybe just a shade too adequate. He just wasn't my idea of a strong, independent or compassionate man."

"What about Elliot Burch? When I think of Mr Burch, 'compassionate' is hardly a description that springs to mind."

Catherine stopped abruptly, Daniel stopping a split second later and looking at her simply, no trace of hidden meaning hung in the air between them nor in the tone of his question. "He is... in ways the newspapers don't find newsworthy."

Daniel put his hands in his coat pockets and pulled out a half-smoked packet of cigarettes. He extended the package towards her. She shook her head gently at the offer. He smiled mumbling, "I should have known," then pulled one out between his lips and brought a lighter up to light it in a single motion made to appear effortless through years of repetition.

..And I didn't mean to imply that Mr Burch wasn't your type. I know quite a bit about Elliot. I can understand his falling in love with you. And vice-versa."

She looked at him, her eyes wide. "Did he tell you that?"

"Not in words, Catherine. In his tone of voice when I brought up you way he spoke about you. That told me more than his words possibly could. As if he were still in love with you."

He was looking at her in the half-light, the glow of his cigarette standing ember in the darkness. She nodded slightly, feeling there was no sense in lying about a feeling and a truth she knew that he already had discovered. "You'd rather not talk about it?"

"Not really. Elliot and I are very good friends. Nothing more."

Daniel resumed their walk towards her building, taking her arm again as they crossed the street through the thickening snow - the edges tinted a bright green in traffic signals, then cast in shades of amber and red as they reached the safety of the curb a few steps ahead of the transit bus that squealed to a stop at the corner behind them. They walked slower now, Catherine's apartment building looming over the centre of the block, most of its windows still lighted with the early hour and the sound of traffic below. As they neared the front door, Daniel slowed his gait perceptibly, as if he did not want the evening to end. "Hey, it's too early for the grown-ups to go inside." He smiled, pointing at the coffee shop, brightly lit, on the corner of the next block. "You feel like a warm cup of cocoa?"

She smiled in answer. "Sure. I'll even buy!"

Daniel's smile was like a glimpse of a full moon through a jagged spread of cloud – a bright beacon in a cold, bleak landscape. He took her gloved hand in his own and pulled her along for a few feet, then broke into a slow run, like some impudent kid brother bent on proving his superiority over an older

sister by taunting her into a race toward some shared childish object of victory. Catherine was glad it was merely a cup of cocoa as she rose to his unvoiced challenge, her hair trailing behind her in the wind and snow as she matched him stride for stride up the nearly deserted street, their laughs like those of children in a world made of moments like this.

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"You did *what*?"

"I climbed the face of El Capitan without ropes."

She looked at him aghast. She could tell he was strong enough to accomplish the feat, that he had the sinewy build that could make such a feat possible. She simply could not fathom such recklessness in this man, who had spoken before of his love for his sisters and his former wife -- of his devotion to a friend dying slowly of leukemia -- of his love of life and his determination to protect the lives of others.

He could sense the disbelief. "You don't believe me do you?"

"Well..." she stumbled.

He pulled his billfold out of his coat pocket and dug through it for a worn, yellowed newspaper clipping. Unfolding it carefully, he laid it on the table in front of her, next to her cup. She picked it up at the edges, reluctant to damage the tattered paper further, and read the short article carefully. She looked at the face in the photograph accompanying the article. It was definitely Daniel Bellasco.

"I'm sorry I didn't believe you, but..."

"I'm the last person on earth you would expect to do such a thing?"

She smiled sheepishly, nodding and folding the clipping carefully, before handing it back him. He replaced it lovingly in his wallet. "Well, they say we all do one thing in our lives we truly wish we hadn't. This was mine."

"Why did you do it?"

"A good friend from training school told me if I could do it, then any danger I faced as a Special Agent would seem minor by comparison."

Catherine laughed easily. "Was your friend right about that?"

Daniel looked at her intently, his gaze steady and unreadable. "No," he said softly. He did not elaborate. She could sense no clue to what type of danger he might have faced that could seem more threatening and his glance warned her against probing further. "So tell me more about Elliot Burch," he said, trying to make his words seem more casual than their purpose.

She fell silent for a moment, the set of her jaw tightening to match the intensity in her eyes... "Elliot was my El Capitan." she said.

Daniel's laugh attracted the attention of several other diners, their furtive glances moving to them, then sliding off and away "And since then, have you faced any greater dangers?" He smiled in answer to her nod. "It seems we're both victims of the same myth, aren't we?"

"They would have been harder to face without Elliot."

"I understand." He took the check and fished inside his coat pocket for a few tattered singles. He stacked them as neatly as he could over the check, tossed a couple of coins on top of the pile for a tip, and stood up slowly, waiting for Catherine to follow.

She followed him back out into the cold, raising her collar against the chill and the fury of the wind-driven flakes of snow, coming faster now. They thrust their hands deep inside their coat pockets and hurried quickly down the half-block to her apartment building, unconsciously hurrying their pace the closer they came to warmth and protection of the lighted lobby. They were in the elevator, up to her floor, and standing before her apartment doorway brushing the snow from their hair and shoulders before Catherine noticed that she had not invited him upstairs and that he had not asked her permission. They caught each other's gaze and seemed to realize this together. Her glance seemed astonished, his apologetic.

"I didn't mean..."

"Don't be silly. Come on in." She led the way, taking his coat and scarf and hanging them on the wicker tree next to the door. He stood rubbing his fingers and upper arms for a moment, driving the last vestiges of numbness out of his hands.

"Can I get you anything? Coffee? Tea?"

"No thanks," he mumbled. "I can only stay a few minutes. Long day tomorrow." He sat down on the loveseat facing the balcony, careful not to let his shoes brush against the material. Catherine sat across from him, the balcony doors rattling against the wind's relentless knock. "Listen, I didn't mean to pry about Elliot Burch back there. It's really none of my business."

"You're only doing your job. I often found myself in the same position when I was in the District Attorney's office."

"I've always hated it when I grow to like the people I'm forced to question. It's tough when you really don't want to succeed with your assignment. It's almost like treason, except I don't know you that well yet. Let's call it mild betrayal in this case."

"You're not betraying me. You have questions to ask and a trail to follow. I'm simply someone on that trail. There simply isn't anything I can tell you about the man you seek."

He smiled gently. "Which is not the same as saying you have nothing of value to say about him." He studied her face closely, a quizzical expression never quite forming, but merely hinted at in her eyes. "Listen, Catherine, I think you know more about Jacob Wells than you've told me. You say there isn't anything you *can* tell me about him now. Maybe you're protecting this guy. Maybe you're acting out of some oath of friendship or affection. Maybe you promised his son you would keep quiet. I can understand those kinds of promises. I've made them myself sometimes. I won't press you about it any further. Just be aware that there are people in the Bureau who are serious about this..." His voice trailed off slowly as his eyes focused slightly above her head. Catherine caught the change in his expression and whirled around, her own face a mirror of Danial's shock. She could see nothing behind her save the dark windows and the flakes of snow crashing against them in a fury. She turned back to him fearfully.

"What is it?" she asked breathlessly.

He did not answer. He stood up and moved to the center window behind her. Cautiously, his hand reached up and moved over the curtain rod to a dark shadow hidden by the support beam. A slight tug

dislodged the black box hidden by the support. He drew it towards him, then turned and raised a finger to his lips ordering Catherine to remain silent.

She watched as he walked slowly back to the sofa, not comprehending what he had discovered. Gently, he set it on the coffee table between them and sat back down, his eyes never leaving hers. Slowly she realized what he had found.

"A bug?" she mouthed soundlessly. He nodded.

Quickly, she jumped to her feet and looked frantically around the room – driven by some nameless mix of fear and anger. Her eyes moved from object to object, her gaze never resting on a single fixture for long, but each movement of her eyes searching for the misplaced shadow, the out-of-the-ordinary combination of object and setting, the decorative object with an altered perspective. It was as if the force driving her sight were determined to find the one leaf in a pile whose position had been altered by an errant gust of wind. Part of her knew it was hopeless, but that part of her was not in control at this moment

Her glance moved to the phone, and she froze. Daniel followed her eyes then moved slowly to the tiny table. He pulled a tiny device from one of his coat pockets and snapped the incoming phone line into it, then inserted the other connector into the jack at the base of the unit. A tiny red light glowed atop the device. Catherine knew what it meant before his eyes met hers. She trembled now, her anger driving her fear aside.

She hesitated, but she knew she had to know. She fixed Daniel with a look that held a single question. He shook his head slowly, his eyes remaining placid and direct. She knew he was not responsible in the next moment.

He gestured to the door. Grabbing their coats and scarfs, they slowly pulled the door open and escaped the apartment.

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"What the hell is going on?"

Daniel shook his head slowly, the coffee in the mug before him untouched over the long minutes of silence that stretched behind them. She was fighting for control, but her eyes carried the emotional burden she dare not let creep into her voice. There were other people in the diner now and she dare not let her voice rise above a whisper. She did not know whom among them she could trust.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"I was looking just over your head at the windows when I noticed a shadow against the wall that was a little too high up and a little too short to be a part of the curtain support. The closer I looked, the more odd it looked. I wasn't sure until I got right under the window and looked up."

"You've seen that type of device before?"

"Not in the Bureau. We use a smaller device, easier to hide. This is from a private firm of some kind. Someone is interested in what's going on in your life, Catherine, besides the Bureau. Besides, we would need an authorization signed by a federal judge to plant a device of this kind, and I can assure you this case simply isn't important enough to warrant such drastic action." He paused for a moment, his mind racing over the possibilities. "Unless there's stuff they haven't even told me."

"I can't believe your superiors think I know anything about some forty year old warrant!"

"Neither do I, Catherine. That's why I said it looks like someone else is keeping tabs on your actions and your conversations." He looked at her carefully, concern evident in his eyes and in his tone of voice. "Can you think who might be taking such an interest in your private affairs?"

"No."

"Fallout from the Trescoe case? Maybe Mrs Ethridge..."

She shook her head savagely. "Impossible. She didn't blame Dayce or I for what happened to her husband. She blamed Joe Maxwell."

"What about Joe Maxwell?"

Catherine started. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, quite simply, could he be behind this?"

"Why would Joe do such a thing to me? And how would you know about..." She stopped short, a connection falling into place in her mind. "Joe was your source about my connection with Jacob Wells, wasn't he?"

"No."

"Then why would you ask if Joe could be behind bugging my apartment? You refused to tell me who your original source was! Now you expect me to believe..."

"Joe Maxwell was not the person who led us to you, Catherine! I haven't even interviewed Maxwell or Moreno yet! Moreno let us examine your employment records, but we didn't have time to talk to him. No one in the District Attorney's office was our source!"

"Then why would you think Joe..."

"Well, you did get pretty nasty after the Trescoe abduction. The judge told us as much. I simply thought that he probably suspects you know where Alan Trescoe is and is doing everything he can to find out whether his suspicions are correct or not"

"I already told you..."

"Look, I know what you told *me*, Catherine, but that's unimportant right now. Someone out there is after you in a big way. It isn't the FBI. It isn't any legal investigation I've been able to discover. I haven't had time to talk to your old coworkers yet. It has to be somebody else." He regretted saying it when he saw the after-effects in her face. A wave of terror froze Catherine's eyes. Her hands were trembling now, but not from the cold outside. "Hey, look..." he said softly, his hands extending forward slowly to take hers.

She pulled back instinctively at his touch, but slowly relinquished as she felt the warmth and reassurance of his fingers as they clasped and steadied her. Her eyes had been two cold ovals of white, but now she found herself soothed by his kindness and by the firm strong bond she felt from his unobtrusive touch and gentle glance. She stopped trembling after a few minutes, his hands leaving hers the moment she had calmed enough to take a sip of her coffee.

"I'm sorry, Daniel. I didn't mean to..."

"Come on, Cathy. I would feel the same way if the situation were the other way around."

She looked up slowly, almost sheepishly. "What am I going to do now..." she said, more a statement than a question.

"Is there some place else you can stay tonight?" She nodded. "Good. I'm going to do some checking tomorrow. Can you tell me where we can meet tomorrow evening? I promise I'll do everything I can to get to the bottom of this."

"I'll be at 320 West 62nd Street. Apartment 4."

"Trescoe's loft?"

She nodded. "Dayce is staying there. I'll spend the night with him."

"Fine. I'll be there around six o'clock. In the meantime, don't go back to your apartment. Don't touch any of the equipment we found. Whoever planted it may be watching the building. I'll get us a cab now and we'll ride around for an hour or so, just in case." She nodded again. "You're sure you'll be all right tonight?"

"Yes."

"Okay." He studied her face for a few moments, his anger rising to equal her despair. "Don't worry, Catherine. We'll find out who's behind this."

She sighed deeply, her eyes lifeless and distant. "That's what frightens me the most

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Dayce looked up from his book quickly as the sound of a key entering the door lock the room. Slowly, the door opened and Catherine appeared from the darkness of the hallway, her hair and shoulders wet with melted snowflakes, her shoulders stooped and rounded, her eyes on the floor. When she caught sight of Dayce on the sofa, she smiled briefly and pulled herself straighter, but she knew it was too late before the effort was completed.

"Hiya, Chandler. Where have you been?"

She shuffled to the overstuffed chair nearest her and dropped into it, her arms and legs spread in a haphazard array, her coat flaps falling away from her against the arms of the chair, her hair a tangled frame surrounding a pale face with tired, lifeless eyes. Dayce had never seen her this listless, this disheveled.

"What is it? What's happened!"

She dragged her hands across her eyes, wiping the melted snow off her face. When she could trust herself, she looked at him. "I'm in trouble, Dayce."

"How?" He bolted upright. "Did somebody hurt you?"

"No." In the silence that followed, Dayce moved to sit on the edge of the coffee table in front of her. He sensed in the silence an emotion he had never known in her before – fear. "Two FBI agents paid me

a visit yesterday. They were acting on a tip that Jacob Wells was still alive and that I had information concerning his whereabouts."

"The FBI is looking for ... *Jacob Wells?*"

"That was the story. I answered what I could of their questions -- avoided any discussion about Alan or Mark or anyone else not directly connected to Jacob. I tried to find out who their source was who led them to me, but Daniel wouldn't tell me."

"Daniel... *who?*"

"Daniel Bellasco." She looked at him intently, her head cocked to one side, as if this were not the reaction she expected. "You know this man?"

"No."

"But the way you reacted just now..."

"I don't know him, Catherine. Go on. What else happened."

"Daniel took me to dinner tonight." She caught the look on Dayce's face and added "strictly as friends. He seemed like an interesting person, and I felt I could keep an eye on things better if I tried to find out as much as I could about why the FBI was still interested in Jacob Wells."

"You won't find out that way, Chandler, trust me. Actually, you probably fell right into this guy's trap. I'm sure he wants to keep just as close an eye on you as you do on him."

"I was careful. I didn't answer any questions about Jacob. Or anybody else, for that matter. It was strictly personal talk, backgrounds, childhood experiences, professional stories. Nothing that might be useful to him."

Dayce shook his head. "Every word you say to these guys can be useful to them. You have no idea what this guy knows about you, your past, your professional life. You may say something quite innocent on a totally benign subject and find out later that it doesn't jibe with what he already knew about you. *Wham!* He's got you. He knows he can't trust you and he sets off digging into every little detail about your past."

"I didn't get a sense of that at all, Dayce. I think he may be interested in me romantically."

"So much the worse. Certainly you have no intention of letting things go very far."

"I love Vincent, Dayce. I simply want to keep an eye on Daniel. From what better spot than as a close friend?"

Dayce whistled softly. "This is a dangerous game, Chandler."

She sighed, sitting up and staring directly at Dayce -- her eyes flashing in the shadow from the window that cut diagonally across her face. "Even more dangerous than you think, my friend."

"What do you mean?"

"My apartment and phone line have been bugged."

Dayce leaped to his feet. "What?!"

"We found them tonight. There was a transmitter hidden over the curtain rod above the doors in my living room and a unit inside the telephone."

Dayce lit a cigarette, his hand shaking with the violence he would not allow expression through words. He got up quickly and walked to a window, peering out at the dark shapes of buildings and through a haze of white. "How long?"

"I don't know. Maybe days -- maybe months. The last time I cleaned the tops of the rods was last April."

"Have you... any idea who might have done it?"

"No. I believe Daniel when he says the Bureau had no authorization to do it. Hell, Dayce, they didn't even question me for the first time until yesterday."

"What about Maxwell?"

She joined him at the window, leaning against the frame -- the window fighting both wind and the waves of snow. She watched the spark of his cigarette reflected in the glass, coils of smoke rising up and away from them in silence in illusory victory over the storm's reflection. "I don't believe he would ever do such a thing to me..."

"Maybe not personally, Chandler -- but perhaps someone he's hired -- a private investigator with free reign would consider this a minor step to take. And the information he may have now..."

She shook her head slowly. "It may be worse than that." She studied his face as he turned to her, his eyes holding a question he could not guess. "Vincent."

"What about him?" She did not answer, only lowered her eyes a bit, avoiding the question she could see shaping itself in his. "You don't mean that Vincent... that he may have been heard..."

She nodded, taking the half-smoked cigarette from his hand and taking a long draught of it, blowing the smoke out the side of her mouth contemptuously. "We both may have been heard, Dayce. Vincent spent nearly the whole night with me a few days ago."

"Christ. Would there be any way they could tell -- from the voices or -or anything else that Vincent..." It was a question better understood in the stumbling than in the words themselves. She knew what he meant. She did not blame him for asking.

"No." She looked up, her voice gentle. "Vincent is human, Dayce."

"I know that, Cathy. A lot more human than anyone else I've ever met."

She leaned forward, her head falling against his chest. Exhaustion finally laid claim to her muscles and her mind, tearing her from the sensations of cold and pain and fear that seemed to close in around her now. All she felt in this moment was Dayce's warm supportive hands on her shoulders and his cheek against her hair, his fingers trailing through the hair on her shoulders, his touch part soothing, part warming -- like the fibre touch of a comforter one has grown to depend on for protection from the cold and unseen monsters of childhood. She nuzzled into his chest and felt the onrush of sleep, the sound of tiny ice dancers tapping against the window as lulling and reassuring as a gentle rain. The slow, rhythmic rocking of Dayce's body and a softly hummed lullaby were last things she felt and heard

as sleep claimed her in welcome triumph.

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The morning dawned dark and snow-filled, the storm hugging the seaboard as if clinging for its life to the stone and cement of the great cities of the east in a hopeless quest for a safe, warm port -- but with only the desolation and decay of winter spread before it in lifeless subservience to the pleading moans of the wind. The streets were irregular bands of white and grey, like bandages wound and pressed between the buildings to stem some grey tide. The windows along the street were lit, but no human figures passed their beckoning lights nor stopped to spy the treasures they protected. The cars parked along the curbs were bumps of white, with an occasional lone antenna raised to the wind, proclaiming a radio or a tape player hidden somewhere beneath, safer now than the items locked away behind the windows of the shops. There was no movement on the street all, save an occasional layer of snow breaking away and falling from a ledge or pushed away by the endlessly curious hands of children. The snow was unbroken on the street, new and as pure as the bloom of a white rose in early spring.

The forecast was for another full day of heavy snow, with two feet expected to paralyze city, and three feet its suburbs. Dayce and Catherine listened to the radio anxiously while they ate breakfast, speaking not at all of last night or of the last months -- but remembering the time. When days like this were welcome, when the only news worth hearing on radio was that school was closed, then each bursting from their houses and meeting on the ledge, sleds in hand, to spend the day in gay abandon on American Flyers, the thirty second rides down the hill more than making up for the twenty minute trudges back to top. The highway had been an unpaved road in those days, with no adult traffic to interfere with their physical and mental flights of fancy in a world safe and clean -- a children's paradise.

"I remember the last time we spent a day on Melkoff Hill, Chandler. You didn't want to take that one last ride when it got dark and I had to talk you into it"

"I remember you talked me into a broken wrist!"

He laughed gently, taking their plates to the kitchen and pouring her another cup of coffee. "I remember you shouldn't steer into fence posts when you sled down a hill."

"I wouldn't have broken my wrist if you had gone home with me when it got dark."

"No, you wouldn't have broken it if you hadn't hit the fence! At least, I got to be the hero that day."

"Hero, hell! I remember my father fawning over you for bringing me home safely, for braving the snow and tending my wound. Little did he know..."

"And you never told him?"

"I told him I slipped on a patch of ice in the road..." She fixed him with a mighty stare. "Saved your backside again, didn't I? I seem to remember a lot of that in those days."

"You did a lot of saving it after you had gotten it and me into trouble!"

Dayce sipped his coffee slowly, his eyes never leaving her, his smile as white as the porcelain mug. "And you loved every minute of it, Chandler."

She smiled in answer. "Every minute." She glanced at the clock in the living room and started. "I have to go below."

"We have to go below, you mean."

"You? Why today? It's awfully nasty out."

"I want to see Alan today."

"The Council meeting isn't until tomorrow night."

"It has nothing to do with the meeting. I just miss him..."

She looked at Dayce closely. There was a look in his eyes she knew all too well. "I understand"

"What are we going to do about Alan's sanctuary plea?"

She shook her head slowly, her sigh deep and long. ...I don't know. Father's opposition will carry many voices, but there's no way of telling how many votes it will sway. I know we can count on Vincent and Kanin to vote with Alan. I imagine Father and Mary will vote against. That leaves three votes. We need two of them."

"Who are the other three?"

"You don't know them well. One is Pascal. Another is William."

"He's the cook, right?" She nodded. "And Pascal is the guy who handles the communications and the codes, if I remember." She nodded a second time. "Who's the third?"

"Jamie."

"I met her! She seems to have a level head on her shoulders. Wasn't she with Devin the night he died?"

"Yes."

"How many of those votes do you think we can get?"

Catherine pulled her coat on slowly. "Pascal is a probable vote for Alan. William is a probable vote against. I think Jamie will be the deciding person."

"She struck me as fair and honest when we talked."

Catherine turned to face Dayce, her face clouded. "Jamie also has much to prove to Father. She is the youngest Council member, and the least experienced. She may fear Father's anger if she goes against him."

"I've read your tunnel laws, Catherine, and the Article in question is vague. I would think they would side with the ambiguity and not the wording."

"These people aren't lawyers, Dayce, and they don't think like that. The wording is vague enough to allow for rejection of Alan's request. If his request is denied, he will have only 24 hours to leave the tunnels before he faces imprisonment there."

"Great. Prison underground or, as an alternative, prison above ground."

She looked at him, her eyes dark and sombre -- her features strong and certain. "It won't come to that, Dayce. I hold Alan's future in my hands. I won't allow Father to stand in the way as retribution for my helping Devin. Not so long as I live."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Nothing, I hope." she said, pulling the door open as Dayce finished pulling his own coat and gloves on. "Everything, if I have to."

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Vincent's arms enfolded Catherine, his cape nearly hiding her in its folds and his embrace every bit as warm and as sheltering. "I was worried," was his sole greeting, his gentle kiss on the warm skin at the nape of her neck the only greeting he would allow them in front of the others.

Dayce moved slowly to Alan's side, meeting his hand halfway in its rising to greet him. He slid his fingers between Alan's, then slowly his hands coursed down the fleece-lined forearm to his shoulder. He bent down and gently kissed Alan, oblivious to Vincent and Catherine for a moment. Alan's lips were yielding and hungry beneath him, more longing than greeting in their touch and in their lingering against his. "You made it," he said softly.

"Of course we did." Catherine said happily, tugging her scarf and gloves off. "You didn't think a little thing like a blizzard would stop us."

"Not when the destination is so inviting," Dayce added, smiling at Vincent.

"Or the visitors so welcome," Alan added.

"Is the storm bad?" Vincent asked, his concern obvious in spite of his efforts. "We hear from some Helpers that it's the worst in many years."

"It's bad. We only had a short walk to the warehouse in order to reach an access to the tunnels. I wouldn't want to have to walk any distance in it, though. Our footprints were disappearing behind us as we walked."

"So you aren't trapped here," Alan said, the disappointment in his voice playful and taunting.

"Not by anything so fragile as snow, Alan." Catherine said, her voice light and warm.

He smiled in answer, walking to her and embracing her. It had been many days since he had seen her. "Have you come to help me face the Council?"

"Yep," Dayce answered easily. "But I don't think you'll need it. How could anyone not want to protect you."

"I think Vincent can tell you who," he answered, a note of seriousness creeping into his tone. "We're beneath Greenwich Village now, Dayce, not *in* it."

Dayce looked at Vincent questioningly. "It will be a fight, Dayce. Father is..." Vincent's voice trailed off reluctantly. "There is opposition, strong opposition. You have read Article Eight?"

"Yes. The case seems clear."

"I haven't heard it yet, Vincent. Will you read it to me?"

Vincent moved to his desk and lifted a tattered, brown piece of parchment. He studied it for a moment, then read aloud, his voice firm and emotionless. "Article Eight - Right Of Sanctuary -- Sanctuary shall be extended to citizens of the world above in the following circumstances. One: imminent threat of death or imprisonment for political beliefs or acts of legal and protected civil disobedience, for any person innocent of or not responsible for the actions which impel the quest for said sanctuary, *or,*" Vincent's eyes rose to Dayce's for a moment, as if to underscore what he was about to read, then returned to the parchment. "Any person escaping confinement for acts they did not commit or actions or beliefs they are legally permitted to perform or hold and which are not recognized under the legal system of the world above."

"Those are the only conditions?" Dayce asked.

"Those are the conditions for granting sanctuary. Unfortunately, the wordings of the clauses which revoke sanctuary, once granted, present a problem." His glance returned to the parchment. "Sanctuary lawfully granted, may be revoked for any infringement or violation of Tunnel World law as laid out in the Tunnel World Civil Code. Sanctuary may also be revoked if determination is made that it was granted in error or that the sanctuary candidate is guilty of any crime in the world above." Vincent sighed, drawing breath to read the next passage. His tone changed slightly, the words coming slightly slower now. "No evasion of law in the world above shall be deemed grounds for sanctuary in the Tunnel World. Innocence shall be the determining factor in all sanctuary petitions. In cases where innocence is in doubt, judgment shall tend to the victim until such evidence appears which contradicts their petition for sanctuary."

"Your wording is faulty there. Whoever drafted this Article needs some grounding in legal ethics."

"Father prepared the sanctuary clauses." Vincent said slowly.

"I rest my case. You had no lawyers to assist you in preparing this document?"

"I don't know. I became a part of this world well after it was founded. I always assume Father and John Pater drafted these articles."

"There are loopholes in those sentences large enough to drive a truck through, Vincent. At least the dangerous clauses come after the stated rights and preconditions." He leaned back against Alan's legs, his eyes on the ceiling. "Has anyone ever been denied sanctuary under this clause?"

"Yes."

"What were the circumstances?"

"Kanin Evans was stripped of his citizenship for over a year. Catherine can tell you about that case."

"She has. Anyone else."

"John Pater was expelled from the tunnels under these provisions."

"He broke the laws of the world above, didn't he?"

"No. He broke Tunnel World law."

"Seems cut and dried. Anyone else?"

"Not that I can remember. A childhood friend of mine voluntarily left the tunnels many years ago and turned to crime, but the prisons above dealt with him. He was stripped of his power and expelled from these tunnels over three years ago." Vincent paused to look at Catherine. ..He nearly killed Catherine."

Dayce bolted upright "What was his name?"

"Mitch Denton. He used to run the docks down..."

"I know who he is, Vincent."

Dayce's words and tone sent a chill through the room, Catherine looked at Dayce, her glance one of disbelief and concern. "You *know* who he is. Not you *knew*?"

I know who he is, Catherine. I defended him in a drug bust in Providence last year."

"You *defended* Mitchell Denton? *Last year*?"

"About 32 years old, six foot, brown hair, green eyes, flashy dresser -- claims he used to head the union workers in the northern Brooklyn docks?"

"That sounds like Denton," Catherine said slowly. She looked at him, her face ashen. ""You *defended* him?"

"Yeah. You know how it goes, Chandler. Nine out of ten people we defend are guilty. You know it. I know it."

"You had no way of knowing, Dayce." His next words were to Dayce, but his eyes never left Catherine's face. "What can you tell us about what happened?"

"He needed a lawyer. He asked around and was given my name. I did the best I could to save him from a lengthy prison term. The judge gave him two years, but the last I know, he jumped bail about six months ago and fled the state."

"What have they done to try to find him?" Catherine asked, her voice hollow, barely audible.

"Not much. Cocaine bail-jumps are a nickel a hundred. If he stumbled and fell in a police station doorway, I doubt anyone would recognize him. He's probably fled the country by now."

"No." Vincent's voice was like a cannonball landing in the breach -- a dead, certain sound. Mitch would never leave the country. I know him too well..."

"Why were you shocked a minute ago, Dayce?" Catherine asked. "It was when I said he had nearly killed me. What did that sentence do to you?"

He looked at her, his face expressionless but his eyes alive with thought, with connections falling into place. "He told me he shot some pesky woman DA down here who was messing around with his business. I didn't take him seriously -- there are no District Attorney's in New York City. I thought it was the usual cocksure bragging they all do, especially to their lawyers. I never imagined it could have been true - -or that he tried to kill you."

"He nearly succeeded." Catherine looked at Vincent for a moment in wordless acknowledgement. "Vincent took me to the hospital. If it hadn't been for him..."

Dayce looked at Vincent. "Didn't you try to find him?"

"I did find him. I killed three of his henchmen."

"And you didn't kill Denton?!"

Vincent shook his head slowly. "I couldn't. I nearly did. I had him trapped cowering. I could feel the anger and the thirst for justice rising in me. The power that drove me then was the certainty that Catherine would probably die. But at that moment Catherine called out to me from her hospital bed. I knew she would live, that she would return to me. And in that moment, something drained out of me. I couldn't kill the man I had known since childhood, not in that moment. He was broken, defenseless, beaten, I saw no need to kill him. I left him cowering in that walkway, whimpering and helpless.

"You should have killed him." Dayce said slowly, his eyes on Catherine. "If I had known any of this while I was defending him..." He turned and smashed his fist against the desk. "He nearly killed the one... the one person who..." His voice faltered. He looked Catherine for help and for forgiveness, not knowing quite what it was he needed to be forgiven for.

"You did the right thing, Vincent" Alan's voice came from nearby, quiet and firm.

Dayce walked slowly to his side, his hands taking Alan's in his own. "How can you say that, Alan?"

Alan looked in Dayce's direction, his eyes wide. "Listen to me, Dayce. This is very important. I know what you're feeling right now. Believe me, I do. I've been to this place before, this moment of truth, where victim and tormentor meet. I know you want blame yourself for helping this man. I know you want to blame Vincent for not killing him. In cold blood or warm doesn't matter. He wouldn't have been any less dead. But the price of the kind of justice you think should have been done is eternal guilt. No matter how right you think you are, no matter how deserving you think this man is of death, you cannot want it so much that it blinds you to your own mind." Dayce felt Alan's fingers tighten around his hands. "Don't you think I felt like you feel now -- like Vincent felt in that walkway? The night they captured the men who blinded me..." Alan's eyes left Dayce for a moment now, fixed on a terror they could sense only from his face and from the ominous change in his voice. "I know the power Vincent felt that night. I felt it, too. I could have taken red-hot poker and run them through every last one of them. I could have stuck pins and needles into their eyes and listened as their own eyesight was destroyed, listened to their shrieks and moans as I was forced to listen to my own..." He looked in Vincent's direction, his eyes brimming, his voice nearly breaking, but caught and held firm by a strength they could all feel. "But if I had done that -- if I had exacted an equal toll from them for their brutality, then how could I ever face my own soul again? What would have made me different from them? Would it have brought my eyesight back? Would it have reversed one single solitary moment of torture?" He shook his head slowly. "Instead of one blind man and four men forced to pay for their crimes, the legacy of that action would have been five men blinded -- all of them by a relentless, mindless fury with nothing to hold it in check except humanity and morality. They lost sight of their humanity that night. And I have to live with their loss. But how in God's name can you think I could willingly and knowingly drop my own humanity and exact from them what I damned them for losing unwillingly? No matter what span of moments might have brought me joy seeing them suffer, that span would have ended. And when it ended, I would be alone with the knowledge that I was more damnable than they -- that I willingly and with full knowledge renounced the one thing that I held firmly against them. My humanity. My own power to overcome the rage and the inhuman drive for revenge. My certainty that, no matter how low others might sink or how cruel or inhumanly they might treat me, that I would not allow my humanity to be at the mercy of their actions, of their inhumanity. I knew, that night, that I could not allow that power into my heart, Dayce -- not for a moment. If I had it would have made a home there. A permanent home. And it would have destroyed what remained of my

humanity." He held Dayce's hands to his lips gently. "Of my ability to love." Dayce looked up at him silently, his eyes wide, his mouth set in anguish and anger. "Dayce, we need to keep a tight grip on our humanity -- even when we can feel it being torn away from us. We have to fight back that power with every fibre of our beings and say 'No! I will not give in to hate!' Because if we don't, if we toss aside our ability to forgive and to show mercy, then we become no better than those we forgive. We turn into one common herd of victims and tormenters, with timing the only difference between them. And we give up the key to our humanity." Alan moved a hand over Dayce's face gently, his forehead pressed against the hands clenched in front of him. "I won't give that up, Dayce. Vincent wouldn't give that key up. I don't expect you to give it up either, my love.,.

Dayce looked at Vincent slowly, but his head was down hidden by his hair and the hands pressed to his eyes. Catherine stood quietly beside him, tears running down her cheeks, her sobs inaudible in the silence. She smiled at Dayce, nodding slightly. Her hand moved to Vincent's shoulder, and he rose at her touch, his eyes averted. Slowly, they left the two alone, their shadows rising, then falling away in the flow of the torch in the tunnel.

Dayce wavered for a moment, his head trembling slightly as thoughts and feelings buried for years fought their way out of the dark corners of his mind and of his soul -- thoughts and feelings which had nothing to do with justice, but everything to do with forgiveness and humanity. Alan's words cut like a knife through years of anger and denial, and Dayce felt naked in the light of their power, naked and exposed. He knew that Alan would have to be told of the reason for his anger, that in this moment of revelation there was no place for him to run, no walls he could erect against the feelings he felt rising inside him, no words he could use to fend off this quiet assault against his will and his self-imposed loneliness and self-defeating guilt. If Alan could walk into Hell and walk out again intact, what feeble excuse could he offer himself for his own exile? Alan had lost his sight and his trust in men. What tangible values had he lost to equal this? He shook his head savagely. There was no one to see the despair in his eyes.

"Alan..." he started guiltily, his voice low.

"I care about you, Dayce."

"Alan... please... there are things you don't know..."

Alan smiled, the dim light dancing through the strands of his hair. "I know. I know it must have been something horrible to make you quite so bitter. But I accept that, Dayce. I always have accepted that. Now you know why."

His words were like separate blows against his body, each leaving an indelible mark of pain in his mind and in his heart. This was not the price he had expected to pay. It was too intangible, too painless. Too easy.

"You may not feel that way when I tell you."

Alan extended his hand slowly. Dayce took it gently in his fingers and moved to sit beside him. He looked deeply into Alan's eyes, but he knew the only power he held now was in his touch and in his voice. He framed Alan's face in his hands and drew him towards him, kissing his forehead gently. Alan did not resist, did not make any movement of his own.

He let Dayce do what he wished. Slowly, he sensed Dayce's hand tracing thin paths through his hair, his fingers trailing gently down to the nape of his neck, then resting there briefly, his motive as gentle as his touch.

"Tell me now. Tell me everything."

For hours, Dayce spoke to Alan of his past, of the coldness and indifference of his parents, of the long and lonely nights spent with strangers, of the hours and days and years of intimate indifference -- and of the self-imposed seclusion of his heart and mind against any feeling or emotion. As he spoke, he could feel the layers of indifference and hatred peel away. He felt as if he had been deprived of air for those many years, and he drank in the fresh air and sunlight of Alan's voice and touch, like a drowning man who, with the last of his strength and self-preservation, hurls himself onto a sunlit beach.

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Their walk back to his chamber had been a silent one, the sound of their steps against the worn stone of the tunnel floor the only sound to mark their passing. Catherine felt Vincent's arm around her waist, holding her close to him. She felt a force rising within her, partly from his reassuring touch and partly from the strength of the words they had just heard. She felt, in some dark corner of her mind, a tinge of guilt -- of anger at herself -- for a reason she could not grasp. She had felt all the things Alan had spoken of -- the anger, the desire for revenge -- but these feelings had passed with time and with Vincent's healing touch. As they entered his chamber, she pushed the thought from her mind.

Vincent sat on the edge of his bed, his arm moving slowly from around her waist to her hands, his head down. When she heard his words, she knew he felt as she did. "That man is going to remain in the tunnels, Catherine. I'll see to that." He spoke slowly, his words measured against the anger he felt for Father and the respect he obviously held for Alan.

"He's quite an impressive young man," Catherine said gently, her arm encircling Vincent's shoulders slowly, her chin falling gently against the top of his head. Vincent's hands moved to hers, covering them firmly, finger against finger, his palms soothing and warm against the backs of her hands. "To have kept such a tight grip on his humanity against so many disappointments..."

"He puts us all to shame. How could they..." She stopped abruptly. This was part of her discontent. She knew, suddenly, that the thing which she felt 'put them to shame' was the same unacknowledged feeling of guilt she had tried to fight off during their walk. It sprang from some source within her, some fear unfaced -- some personal guilt with a price that remained unpaid. She moved to sit beside him, one hand remaining on his shoulder as comfort... "You mean, how could they have convicted him of murdering anyone?" He nodded "It's something I could never make you understand. I've never understood it myself. Fear, probably -- mostly. People fear what they can't understand, just like children."

"You saw them together just now. What is it they fear, Catherine? What is it about they cannot understand?"

She shook her head, sadly. "I can't answer you, Vincent." She sat silently for a few moments knowing the futility of trying to explain the irrational and make it sound logical and good." When she spoke again, her voice was edged with the sound of warning. "When Alan speaks before the Tunnel Council, do not be surprised to find that that same fear has crept into your world also."

He looked up at her, the pain in his face now touched by anger. "We have many homosexual men and women in the tunnels, Catherine. No other group of people has required protection as greatly in these tunnels. No one I know on the Council has ever objected before, nor has there been the slightest....."

"This time may be different, Vincent. Alan is a convicted man. He is also blind. Those obstacles may be the excuses Father needs to keep Alan out of your world."

"After Alan speaks, I cannot see how any of the Council members could allow themselves to be swayed by Father's petty anger."

She sighed. "I hope you're right, Vincent."

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Catherine pulled the key from the door to Alan's loft absentmindedly. When she looked up, she was shocked to see Daniel sitting on the sofa, his cashmere coat folded neatly on the cushion beside him. Dayce sat across from him, a drink in his hands, a half-burned cigarette in his lips. He turned at her entrance, then sprang to his feet to help her with her coat.

"You were out in this storm?" Dayce asked sternly, his concern evident. She looked at him closely, but there was no hidden motive to his words, no warring in his face. The concern and the question were genuine.

"I didn't go for. Just to the corner." She smiled at Daniel warmly, extending her hand as she walked to the sofa and sat beside him. "Good to see you again, Daniel."

He took her fingers in his hand for a moment, but he did not smile. He seemed reluctant to look at her, his words coming reluctantly. "I didn't mean to surprise you, Miss Chandler. Mr DiCenzo has been a most gracious host."

Dayce had resumed his seat across from her. He took a long swig of the drink, then a final puff of his cigarette before crushing it in the ashtray. She noticed that he continued to crush the stub into the ceramic long after the glow of flame had died.

"What's the matter?" she asked, looking from one to the other.

Neither spoke for a few moments. Then Daniel made a move forward. Dayce's voice stopped him. "I had better do this, Dan." He nodded slowly, leaning back, his hands in his lap.

"Do what?" Catherine asked, leaning forward.

"Cathy, something has happened..." Dayce stopped for a moment, his eyes offering her warning that this was not to be a simple task. She had never seen him like this before – tentative, uncertain. Even the night he had watched Christian die a long painful death in his arms, he had been able to tell her afterwards of the things they had said, of the things he felt in those hours. This was something new in Dayce. He seemed frightened, something she had never seen in him before.

"Dayce, what is it?" she asked her voice a command.

"It's Nancy Tucker."

Her best friend from college. The one person who had supported her in her personal quest for independence from the 'expected', the 'right thing to do'. The one anchor she had found when it seemed Vincent would be lost to her forever.

"What's wrong?!" she said, her voice half-question, half demand.

"Cathy..." Dayce began, then steeled himself and looked into her eyes, his hands taking hers in a grip of steel. "Nancy, her husband, and their daughter have been killed."

In the shock of the moments after these words hit her, Catherine felt as if a huge razor sharp blade had swept through her, severing every support within ---a painless destruction of one of her most cherished ties to her past--- and her future. Her Godchild, no more than five the last time she had seen her. Thomas Tucker, the man her friend had told her was the kindest, most thoughtful father she could ever have asked for. Nancy -- the free spirited photographer turned housewife and mother -- whose childhood dream of exploring the world had been replaced by an adult dream of a loved husband and a beautiful child. Nancy, who had understood her pain at the prospect of losing Vincent -- a man she had never met -- and who offered her solace and forgiveness for choosing a road apart from the rest of their friends. All were dead. All were gone. Without warning.

Dayce maintained a firm grip on her hands, but she did not try to break away. She merely stared at him, all signs of awareness and aliveness within her now hardened into a lifeless dead stare. The face of a catatonic, or a zombie. But he was certain she could still hear him through the immobility and silence. "It looks like it was a ritualized killing. They were tied together in the dining room, face down. Their throats were slashed."

She heard the words. She could not make them real. The final moments of her last visit -- Nancy at the door, bathrobe pulled tight against the chill in the air, the smiling face and hand raised in warm salute to her decision to return to Vincent -- these images could not be dislodged by the words she heard dimly through the fog of shock and stillness.

She captured some sense of the room -- of Daniel sitting across from her silently, his face down -- of Dayce clutching her hands. She knew there was more. She could not speak the words, but Dayce read them in her eyes.

"There was a message written on the dining room wall." He paused for a moment, but knew he had to say it all now, to spare her the double shock of withholding anything in this moment. "It was written in blood." He held her firmly, sensing her hands beginning to shake.

She gathered her strength and turned to Daniel, her face white and empty, her voice dead. "What did it say?"

Daniel looked at her, his face a mask of pain and empathy. Reluctantly, he pulled a photograph from a file on the table in front of him. He held it so she could not glimpse the front of it, but she could see the faint lines and spaces through the cheap developing paper. She watched as he fought back some involuntary impulse within, then, slowly, the words reached her.

"CC -- He should have killed me when he had the chance. Denton"

She heard the words in the first moment. In the second moment, she felt nothing. Dayce lost his grip on her hands and she fell to the floor -- to welcome insensibility. She was unconscious before her head hit the table.

# The Vote

Dayce gently lowered Catherine onto the bed. He had already peeled off her heavy coat and scarf, tossing them aside on the hallway floor as he carried her to the bedroom. There was a cut over her right eye where her head had struck the edge of the coffee table, a thin trail of blood reaching towards her chin.

"I'll get a cold rag," Daniel said quickly, rushing to the bathroom. He found a clean washcloth and quickly ran it under the cold water. He grabbed a fresh hand towel as he headed back for the bedroom.

Dayce loosened the collar button of her shirt, pulling the flaps aside. He rested Catherine's head gently on the pillow, careful not to let the blood touch the pillow cover. Daniel threw the wet cloth to him across the room, then sat down on the bed across from Dayce, the clean towel at the ready. Dayce gently cleaned away the blood from her cheek and from around the wound. She moaned a few times, but she did not regain consciousness.

"See if you can find some bandages and some disinfectant," he said gently, pressing the cool cloth to her forehead and her throat. His touch was gentle, his free hand supporting her head beneath the pillow, his touch softer and, he hoped, more reassuring should she come out of it quickly.

Daniel had found a tin box of bandages and a half-used roll of white gauze in the medicine cabinet. Dayce cut a length of the white mesh and folded it over several times into a makeshift bandage. He secured both ends across the wound with adhesive, careful not to trap any of her hair beneath the tape. A faint trace of red slowly soaked the bandage, then seemed to stop as her body fought back against the wound. Slowly, she stopped moaning and the perspiration that had soaked her hair and her face disappeared. He lowered her head to the pillow. She remained still when he drew his hand away from her, her breath coming in long waves now, her face serene in sleep.

"What do you think?" Dayce asked.

"It's just shock, mostly. I think she'll be out for a few hours. That was a pretty nasty bump on the head she took."

"Maybe a doctor should take a look at her."

"Do you know who her doctor is?"

Dayce shook his head. "I can have my doctor take a look at her, but I doubt he'll come out in this storm."

Daniel nodded in agreement. "I think she'll be okay. She needs some rest and some care. This would be a hell of a shock for anyone."

"Nancy Tucker was Catherine's best friend."

Daniel looked at Dayce intently. "One of them, at least." He looked down at her face, now turned to one side, the bandage looming on her forehead. Suddenly he noticed something near the bandage. "It looks like this has happened before." Slowly, he moved a finger and brushed aside a few strands of hair next to her left ear. The faint trace of a long, thin scar hugged the hairline next to the ear. "Do you know anything about this?"

Dayce studied the scar for a moment. "Not really. I remember she had some stitches for a cut on her arm when we were kids, but I don't remember anything on her face like this. Maybe it's a remnant

from the attack."

"Back in '86?"

"Yeah," Dayce answered his gaze moving to her again as she stirred "Her face was pretty badly hacked up."

"I know, I've seen the police files. She was damn lucky." Dayce knew what was coming next. "You don't think the murder of the Tucker family could be connected to her attack in the park, do you?" Dayce shook his head slowly. "I came down to see Cathy in the hospital after her surgery in '86. She told me what happened to her. That was a case of mistaken identity. The Tucker murder obviously wasn't."

"I remember seeing the case she was going to press against the men who attacked her in her files. Seems they were found cut to pieces in an abandoned brownstone in the Village. The autopsy surgeon said it looked like they had been disemboweled with razor blades." He looked at Dayce, his eyes asking the question that hung in the air between them.

"I don't know, Dan. I never asked Cathy about that. She told me she knew nothing about how that woman or the three men died, but I do know the brownstone was owned by a mutual friend of ours." He paused for a moment "That friend died several years ago."

"Of what?"

Dayce fixed Bellasco with a glance that was part answer, part warning. "AIDS."

Daniel got up and walked to the window behind Dayce, lifting one of the translucent shell blinds. The air beyond was thick with snow, but the wind had abated somewhat. The bricks in the building next door were caulked with thick patches of white. His breath condensed into ice the moment it touched the glass of the window. "What do you think the message means?"

Dayce turned slowly, his mind racing with questions he knew he would have to ask of her when she awakened. But this man was an unknown quantity. He believed Catherine when she had told him of his discovery of the bug in her apartment. His instincts told him that this man was as confused and unsure as he was himself. But his hidden voice told him to be careful. He knew, somehow, that Vincent was the meaning behind the message -- and the killer of the men in that brownstone. He knew Catherine would explain to him when she was able. And he knew, from the deepest part of his love for her, that he would reveal nothing of his beliefs, his instincts, or the counsel of his hidden voice.

"I think it was some lunatic. I think maybe Cathy has a secret admirer of some kind, or a disgruntled former target of one of her prosecutions. I don't think it was anything personal."

"Any ideas on who 'Denton' might be?"

"There are thousands of Denton's in the world. I defended a Denton once in Connecticut, another in Rhode Island. I have a cousin named Denton. It's a common name."

"I'll find out how common when I look into Miss Chandler's case load. Maybe that will tell us something."

Dayce looked up quickly. "Us?"

"Don't you want to find out who's behind this?"

"Of course..."

"I think Miss Chandler is in danger. If this maniac was willing to do this to a friend and her family, I can't begin to imagine what he would put Catherine through."

Dayce noted the tone of voice as Daniel had pronounced her first name. He knew, suddenly, that it was more than a professional motive that drove this man. He turned back to Catherine so that Daniel could not see the realisation in his face. "Maybe we'll know more when Cathy wakes up." He turned back when he knew it was safe. "In the meantime, what do you propose we do?"

"I'm going down to the District Attorney's office and do some checking. I think you should stay with her. Make sure you lock up after I leave. And don't let anyone you don't know into this apartment. I'll be back tomorrow morning." He paused for a moment "Do you have a gun?" Dayce shook his head slowly. Daniel reached into his coat and pulled out a small black automatic pistol. The metal gleamed in the faint light. "You know how to use one of these?" Dayce nodded a few times. "Good. Keep this with you."

Daniel stood up quickly and reached for the phone on the bedside table. He dialed a number and waited briefly, his eyes on Catherine's face. "Norris? Yeah, listen... meet me at the District Attorney's office in 30 minutes... [ don't care how you get there... we have some work to do... right... bring it along, then... fine." He slammed the phone down and headed for the door. Dayce's voice stopped him.

"Isn't this illegal?" he asked, lifting the gun in the air. "I mean, leaving it with a civilian?"

"Sometimes we have to bend the rules," he answered, then vanished out the door. His footsteps paused for a moment in the living room. Dayce could hear him snap his briefcase shut and the sound of the door as it closed behind him. He turned back to Catherine.

"We sure do..." he said softly.

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"What's the matter, Vincent?"

Alan's smile vanished abruptly, replaced by concern in his eyes and his voice. They had been discussing what he would say to the Tunnel Council during his sanctuary hearing. The mood had been jovial and reassuring. Vincent relishing one of Alan's tales of mischief from childhood. Suddenly, his face had gone blank. He had turned away in the middle of a sentence, his eyes narrowed.

"Vincent... what is it!"

He turned back to his bewildered companion quickly, his voice calm and reassuring but his eyes apparently intent on a vision he could not guess. "Something has happened to Catherine. I must go to her."

"What? How do you know?"

"I know, Alan. Trust me."

"You can't go out in this storm. It's too dangerous."

Vincent stood up quickly. "I must go to her."

"You don't even know where she is."

Vincent paused for a moment, then turned quickly to Alan. "What is your address above?"

"320 West 62nd Street. Apartment 4. Top floor." he answered, aghast. "You aren't going to risk going there?"

"I'll go to her apartment first. It's safe. There's no need to go above ground. There is a tunnel directly to her building."

"And if she isn't there? You'll go to the loft?"

"Yes."

Alan extended his hand uncertainly, his eyes frozen with fear. "Vincent?" he said softly. Vincent took the hands in his own, his touch gentle and reassuring. "*Please* be careful."

Vincent clasped Alan's hand gently. "I will."

He was through the doorway and heading above before the smile of relief had fully formed on Alan's face.

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Vincent fought his way through the mass of snow that had accumulated against the walls ringing the roof of Catherine's building, his hair and cape matted with huge spreads of white crystals and shimmering drops. Fighting the wind and the snow, he scaled the wall and slowly made his way down the one level to her balcony, brushing aside the snow that crowned the stone wall as he made his way to her balcony doors. The sense of dread that had washed over him below was less insistent now, like the throb of a toothache succumbing to aspirin. The sense was still with him, but it no longer pushed aside all other thoughts. He knew now, clearly, that she was not inside the apartment.

He opened the door cautiously, the darkness inside nearly total. The thin scrim of the curtains held most of the feeble light in check, the familiar shadows in their familiar places as he scanned the living room quickly. Then, his eyes stopped dead. Her telephone tape was winding forward, cycling through a call in progress. He heard the faint click of unused tape spinning into the mechanism, then another click and a voice in the dark. "Cathy, it's Joe Maxwell. I have to talk with you immediately. It's an emergency. Please call me when you hear this, no matter what time it is. Please call me, Cathy!" The call ended and the tape wound forward again, a final click echoing through the room -- then silence.

He moved to her bedroom, but the darkness there was total. He knew she was not in the apartment. Slowly, he made his way back to the open door to the balcony. He caught sight of a tiny black box on the table. Slowly, he picked it up and examined it closely. He had never seen this among her possessions before. He looked at the tiny, mesh-covered circle at one end of the box.. He could not guess its purpose. The rest of the box was a solid black, made of what seemed to be a type of plastic-light metal. It seemed to serve no purpose he could imagine. Intent on discovering its purpose, he placed it carefully in a pocket of his cape and slipped through the door, closing it silently behind him.

He made his way back to the basement tunnel entrance, then backtracked along a shallow tunnel westward towards Fifty-Ninth Street. He headed above ground through a seldom used basement entrance to an aging brick edifice that now served as home to scores of senior citizens and widows living out their days on the pensions of their dead husbands, with only cats and canaries for company. Only one aged Helper lived in the building now, the tunnel kept open strictly for her occasional visits below and for emergencies.

Stealthily, Vincent crept through the alley towards Alan's building, then scaled the side joints to the

roof. He crept slowly towards a skylight that looked into the living room, careful not to announce his presence before he was sure it was safe. Carefully, he peered through the crystal-laced glass. He saw no one.

He could not hear through the howl of the storm -- could not sense if there were others in the apartment with her -- but he knew she was close by. He knelt down beside the skylight housing, using it as a buffer between his body and the icy wind and snow. Huddled like this, alone and shivering in the face of the storm, he waited -- waited for a sign it was less dangerous inside than where he cowered now.

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Dayce had kept vigil over Catherine for over three hours, wiping her face occasionally with the cool rag and snapping to attention at any sign of restlessness from her. She had moved little in that time, her head occasionally shifting first to one side then the other, her arms restlessly rising to her chest, then falling back to her sides again in rhythmic jerks. She seemed to be trying to speak occasionally, but there were no words he could understand. He was sure she was having nightmares in her sleep. He could not imagine how they could be any worse than her final waking thought.

Suddenly, her eyes opened. struggling against the rebellion of mind and body. She felt as if her eyelids were attached to heavy lead weights, as if the act of lifting them would require more strength than she could summon from her entire body. She heard the call of sleep coursing through her consciousness and she longed to succumb, but a stronger force impelled her to throw off the chains of insensibility. She wavered for a moment, unable to believe what her instincts were telling her, but she refused to fight it. She turned her head slowly to Dayce, her eyes alive, her lips struggling to form the words she knew in her heart. "Vincent is nearby."

Dayce smiled, glad to see that she was not delirious. "Come on, Cathy. Take a sip of this." He moved a waiting glass of cool water to her lips. She took a swallow, more to overcome the dryness in her throat than from thirst, then hauled herself up on one elbow and looked at Dayce intently. "I *know* Vincent is nearby. Please check the windows."

"Cathy, you fainted. You hit your head pretty hard..."

"Please, Dayce. Just check the windows that lead to the roof."

He smiled, as if to humour her. Then he headed towards the back bedroom and the bathroom, he saw nothing through the skylights in those rooms. Then he headed for the living room, checking all the windows carefully. The snow on the wooden braces was undisturbed, the drifts on the ledges remained finely-sculpted snow-waves of ice crystals rising to fine tapers at their crests. He saw no sign that even a bird had been near them.

He was halfway across the room, headed back to Catherine, when he heard the tapping. Looking up, he saw Vincent's face filling one pane of the skylight over his head, one of his tapping rhythmically against the glass. His hair was coated with snow, but his eyes were flashing. Quickly, Dayce found the latch pole. He pushed the lock aside and pushed up on the skylight. It gave way reluctantly, the metal locked in a crust of ice, but when Vincent gathered the lower edge in his hand and pulled, the entire fixture rose in answer. Quickly, he climbed over the edge and dropped to the living room floor. The skylight was back in place and locked in seconds.

"Vincent! Are you crazy!? What the hell..." He helped him brush the snow from his cape and hair. "What are you doing here?"

"Where's Catherine? What's happened to her?" he asked, his breath coming in short, tortured bursts.

"She's in the bedroom. She had a nasty fall and hit her head." He rushed behind Vincent as he hurried to the bedroom. At the threshold, he stopped, his eyes falling on her face lying framed by a white lace pillow. She smiled at her first sight of him, her eyes filling with tears. He moved to her quickly, pulling her up into his embrace. The fear which had drawn him here was gone now, replaced by relief and a sense of wonder.

"Are you all right?" he asked, noticing the bandage on her temple for the first time.

She shook her head, not trusting her voice. The terrible images were returning now. Even Vincent's presence could not dispel them. She buried her face on his shoulder, sobs racking her body sporadically.

Dayce sat down next to the bed, his eyes meeting Vincent's. Vincent's face was torn by pain – the pain of seeing the one he loved in pain. His eyes held a naked plea to Dayce, to try to explain what had happened without adding to Catherine's burden. He knew there was no way he could do this. He shook his head slowly, then sat back and watched as Vincent tried to comfort her. He remained silent for many minutes.

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The shadows fell long and deep across the walls and ceiling as Dayce finished the stale remnant of his scotch, the bitterness jolting him awake. He had sat for a long time in the gathering dusk as the light beyond the living room windows faded slowly from pristine white to mottled grey, then to deepening shades of taupe and mauve and indigo. There was still a thin stream of filtered blue in the western windows, but total darkness was moments away. He rubbed his eyes, feeling the exhaustion in the muscles of his arms and legs.

He had left the two of them alone. He knew Catherine was in no condition to speak about the death of her friend -- that she would need time, and Vincent's help -- to regain her foothold. He did not want her to have to face the ugliness again -- not in words.

He raised his head slowly at the sound of the bedroom door opening quietly, then closing. Vincent approached him slowly, eyeing the open windows warily. Dayce quickly went around the room, lowering the rice-paper blinds over each window, throwing the entire room into darkness. He lit several large candles on the coffee table, the faint yellow circles throwing huge shadows over the walls and ceiling.

Vincent moved to the sofa slowly. He sat down gently, his hands held together in front of him, his eyes sick and sad in the half-light. Dayce waited patiently, his arm along the length of the window frame, his drink glass held limply in front of him.

"You must have questions..,,

Dayce walked slowly to the bar and refilled his glass, the high-pitched tinkle of the ice filling the room with the out-of-place sounds more suited to a celebration than to the sorrow and suffering it had witnessed in the past hours. "Why don't you start with what Catherine told you this afternoon?"

Vincent sighed deeply. "Very little. She did not wish to speak of it and I did not press her for an explanation. I knew..." He looked up suddenly. "I knew she was in pain and came to her. It is part of the bond we share, Dayce."

"I know that."

"I could feel something was wrong. I knew she needed me."

Dayce looked at him sadly. A lot of things made sense now. "Whenever she's in danger, you can sense it?" Vincent nodded slowly. "And you come to her when her life is threatened." He nodded again, but the tone of Dayce's words was changing now, his words more like statements than questions. "And you've killed to save her life... many times." Dayce did not need to look at Vincent for an answer -- it was all too clear to him now. He moved to the sofa, sitting down beside his friend. For the first time in his life, he had no words for what he felt.

Vincent looked up, his face blank of any expression Dayce could read, his eyes lifeless and dark "You must hate me....",

Dayce looked up, confused. "Hate you? Why should I hate you for protecting..."

"Not for protecting her." His voice faltered, seeming to lose its driving force in the span of these few words. He fought to control his emotions as he gathered what strength he could from his trust of this man. "For allowing her to risk her life. For not demanding that she..."

Dayce sat down next to Vincent, glass in hand, his mind searching for the truth Vincent seemed to have lost -- for the unspoken key to the guilt and shame now tearing his friend apart. "What could Catherine have done? Quit her job? She knew the dangers when she took the position, Vincent. She accepted those dangers. I can't believe she went on accepting greater and greater risks to her safety, knowing that you would always stand between her and her targets." He moved closer, his arm encircling Vincent's massive shoulders. "No, my friend. Catherine Chandler is many things, but she is not a vigilante. She did not use you as a tool. You can't try to shoulder a guilt that isn't yours to bear."

Vincent raised his eyes to Dayce's, the first traces of hope and acceptance overcoming the pain. He looked at Dayce, and for a moment, he was a child again -- caught between his instinct and his intelligence -- with only Devin's guiding words to show him a way through the anguish. The moment flashed and died. Dayce couldn't accept so easily what he now knew was true, Vincent thought -- unless Dayce felt a guilt equal to his own. No such guilt seemed possible in this man. He turned away in one last attempt to reject the gift of forgiveness.

"Vincent, I know something of what you feel right now. Guilt for taking the only path possible. Anger and shame at having to do things you knew were... were wrong. But sometimes... sometimes, we have to do those things, Vincent. The causes may be different. You were saving the life of someone you loved. I was..." He paused, searching for the right words. "I was lost in an anger and a hatred every bit as strong as your love for that woman in the next room." He could see Vincent's eyes in the darkness, intent, attentive. "We both know what it feels like to have no choice, Vincent. Don't lose yourself in the past by judging yourself guilty now."

"And what of Catherine's life now? I've brought these horrors to her."

"No, Vincent, you haven't."

"I spared Denton. I've killed so many others who threatened Catherine's life. Why not him? A moment of weakness... three innocent people's lives hung in that moment. I could have saved them."

"That's crazy, Vincent. You couldn't know he would do this. You spared a childhood friend. You refused to kill a man in cold blood." His words did not seem to be reaching Vincent. He reached forward quickly, his hand slipping under Vincent's chin and forcibly turning the massive face towards him. Vincent did not resist, though Dayce could feel the muscles of the neck tense in an effort to lower the head. He fought back, refusing to allow Vincent the escape of avoidance. Could you have killed Mitch Denton in cold blood, Vincent?"

The question hit him like a gust of the wind that hammered at the windows -- cold and unforgiving. He

shook his head. "No..." he finally answered, almost inaudibly.

"Should I have killed Denton when I had the chance? Should I have turned against him and used his trust against him, making certain he was locked away?" Vincent shook his head again. "All right. I don't feel any guilt for having defended Denton. I was doing what I was trained to do, something that had to be done if we are to remain civilized. You did the same when you spared his life. You granted him a chance to turn his life around. *He* bears the responsibility for wasting that chance. But you share none of his guilt, Vincent." He looked deep into Vincent's eyes, now brightly reflecting the candlelight, wet with unshed tears. "*None* of it."

Vincent's hands found Dayce's wrists, holding on for support, his voice coming in short bursts, like the slowly gathered power of a ledge of snow breaking free and growing stronger as it cascades down a steep slope. "It's so hard to accept... things would have been so different now... if only..." He shook his head, then met Dayce's eyes directly, his own glance strong and clean. "You don't blame me for this?" he asked, the first hint of hope finding its way into his deep, calm voice.

"No. And neither does Catherine."

He allowed himself a faint smile his eyes shining at the sound of her name. "You know this? She told you this?"

"I know *Catherine*, Vincent. That's all I need to know." He drew his friend into an embrace, their pain held in check by a common measure, a common bond.

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Catherine awoke just before midnight, her face illuminated by a bedside lamp -- its translucent white shade seeming to add to the light from within. She felt Vincent's hand holding hers, sensed his eyes watching her carefully. She tried to move her head to look at him, but a spasm of pain shot through her shoulders.

"Don't try to move your head," Dayce said softly from somewhere in the darkness. "Lie still."

She clasped Vincent's hand more tightly, an answering firmness her only answer. She struggled to force the fog from her eyes and from her mind, the brightness of the light making both difficult.

"Can I have some water?" she asked. A glass touched her lips gently and she drank greedily, the cool liquid filling her throat. "How long have I been asleep?"

"Almost seven hours." Dayce answered. His figure appeared from the darkness at the end of the bed, moving to sit beside her. He looked drawn and tired in the harsh light. "You've had a bad fall."

"Vincent?" she said softly, as if to assure herself she was really awake.

"I'm here." came the soft reply from close by.

"Daniel?" she said softly.

"He's gone. To check out your run-in with ..." He stopped, reluctant to say the name aloud.

"Denton." Catherine finished for him, her face growing hard. "How much has Vincent told you?"

"Everything."

She nodded. "Then you understand."

"Not exactly." His voice sounded strangely solemn. "But we can talk about that later. We have more important things to discuss now."

"All I want to do right now is find Denton." Catherine said slowly, hatred and determination breaking through the calm of her voice.

"As do we," Vincent added.

"What do we do now!"

"I think we have to assume that Denton is going to target another person or persons close to you, Catherine. I need for you to give me a complete list of anyone close to you – I don't care how tenuous the connection. Anyone you think Denton might target, I want their names. They need to be warned."

"What about Daniel?"

"He's taking the slow route right now. I think we should keep him a few steps behind us. The more he digs, the greater the risk he'll uncover things that can't be explained." He looked at Vincent. "We can't give him any reason to suspect there is any more to this than simple revenge."

"That may be difficult." Catherine said slowly.

"Why?"

"When he reads the file on the case, he's sure to discover the photographs of the three bodies they found in the warehouse. Two of them had their necks broken, but the third was..." She stopped, not wanting to say it aloud. There were wounds on the third victim that would be difficult to explain."

Dayce sighed. "We'll deal with that when and if we have to. Now what do we do about you, Chandler?"

"What about me?"

"What if Denton decides to target you next time?"

"He won't. Remember what happened the last time he tried to kill me."

"I remember what *almost* happened. I don't think Denton is going to challenge Vincent directly, but he knows how he can hurt Vincent without risking a confrontation. He can hurt the people close to *you*. I think what happened to Nancy Tucker and her family is only the beginning."

"I don't want anyone else to be hurt by this bastard. I want to deal with him once and for all."

"The way to do that is to remove any other possible targets. Do you have any friends in the city? Anyone you feel might be at risk?"

She paused to consider, her eyes narrowed "Jenny Aronson is my best friend here in the city. My father was very close to a woman named Kay Loring. His secretary Marilyn Campbell is also a good friend." She paused for a moment, lost in thought. "Elliot Burch of course," she said reluctantly. "and Joe Maxwell."

"Anyone else you can think of?"

"No. Everyone else I'm close to lives below."

"All right. I think you should call each of them and explain the risk they might be facing now. Perhaps

those who can afford to do so should leave the city for a while ---stay with friends or relatives -- make sure they are surrounded by other people at all times."

"I'll speak with them."

"You should probably stay in this loft until we find out more. Is there any way Denton could possibly know you're here?"

She shook her head. "Not unless he's been following us. I've only been to this building a few times, but it's so close to my apartment..."

"There's a tunnel entrance in the basement of the building next door," Vincent offered. "I can show you when you're able to move around. You won't have to risk returning to your apartment."

"If I'm going to move here, there are a few things I have to get. Files, mostly. And personal diaries and books. No sense in leaving them where Denton can get his hands on them. I can use the tunnel entrance to the building and return the same way. No one will be able to see me enter the building, or leave."

"I should go with you, Catherine" Vincent said quickly.

She shook her head. "I'll be safe in my own apartment, Vincent. It will only take minutes. You have more important things to do." She turned to Dayce, a sudden thought moving her to ask suddenly, "Who is with Alan?"

"Jamie is with him. He's fine. Dayce will join him later tonight."

"I should be all right by early morning. We can go to the tunnel entrance then." Vincent nodded in answer. She turned to Dayce slowly. "What about Daniel? What do we tell him?"

"I'll see him tomorrow. He told me he had some news when he called earlier tonight. Until then, we don't tell him anything. We let him tell us." Dayce turned to Vincent, his words measured. "Vincent. would you get me another cup of tea from the kitchen, and a cup for Catherine as well?"

Vincent understood. He kissed Catherine gently on the forehead as he rose, then moved slowly to the door. He closed it behind him, as he knew Dayce wanted.

Dayce looked at her in a way she had never known from him before. His face was serious, his eyes closed -- the kind of look one assumes when one has already made up one's mind. She felt that this moment was important to Dayce in some way, important beyond the normal course of their friendship -- of right and wrong -- important to him personally, as her actions were in some way his actions -- as if her decisions were a reflection of more than her own mind -- as if her words would stand as judgment of them both.

"Those men who attacked you... Vincent killed them, didn't he?" She nodded, uncertain what his reaction would be. "Denton's henchmen?" She did not nod, but he answered. "How many others have there been, Cathy? Her long pause, her averted eyes -- these told him what he wanted to know. "All in self-defence -- or in defence of your life?"

"Yes." she answered faintly.

She could not discern his motive, nor the reason he took her hands in his suddenly and held them to his lips, his eyes never leaving hers. He kept her hands cradled within his for a long time, his eyes never leaving her face, his smile evoking more sadness in her than relief -- his face at peace with her, yet seemingly torn by some sight within himself that her words had made more difficult to behold.

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Daniel leaned back and rubbed his eyes gingerly, trying to drive the sleepiness and the strain back through sheer physical resistance. When he had last glanced at the clock hanging on the wall across from him it had read 7:22. Now its black hand approaching the mechanical intimacy of midnight. He felt a burning sensation in his back that threatened to climb to his shoulders. He stood up slowly, the sensation draining instead to his legs, making his knees unsteady for a moment. He needed more coffee as an antidote to the words spread in the mass of files on the table.

He had sent Norris home hours ago, his colleague having spent most of his strength fighting the storm to get to the office before it was to close. He had been too tired to contribute anything of substance to their discussion. Daniel had thought it best that he got some sleep.

He pulled up one of the metal blinds that ringed the room. The snow was still falling though the worst of it had passed. He could see the tops of buildings several blocks away now through the haze of white, the tiny crystals still flocking around the brightest lights like fluffy cotton moths. He watched as a lone car tried valiantly to make its way down the long length of the unplowed street far below. It managed to slide around the corner and vanish into the night. All was still now, the city a wasteland of motionless white -- the air a frenzy of dancing crystals.

He walked slowly to the door of the conference room and pulled it open, the darkness of the room broken only by the soft glow of light from beneath Joe's office door. Quietly, he approached the door and knocked a few times.

"Come in," Joe called.

Daniel opened the door a few inches just enough to be able to talk. "Can I see you a minute, Mr Maxwell? I have some questions."

Joe hurled a final dart at the board hanging on the wall across from him, then flicked the book he was reading shut with a single brusque movement of a single finger. He bounded to his feet eagerly -- a little too eagerly, thought Daniel. They returned to the conference room in silence, each of them taking a cup of fresh coffee from the carafe that stood invitingly on a small table next to the window. Daniel in the chair, one foot raised to the cushion of a chair next to him. The discomfort in his back faded as he settled in.

"This is quite an impressive casework record. I had no idea Miss Chandler was in so many, shall we say, interesting cases."

"Chandler was the best assistant DA we had," Joe answered.

"She resigned over the Trescoe case, I assume?"

"No," Joe answered after a pause. "she resigned a few weeks before."

Daniel shuffled the papers for a moment, then found the one he had been seeking. He checked it for a moment, then nodded. He put the file aside. "It says in her file that her resignation was over a conflict of interest. I assumed that meant she wanted to defend a man your office intended to prosecute. I can see I was wrong about that." He looked at Joe intently. "Exactly why did Miss Chandler resign?"

Joe was reluctant to answer, but knew that to lie to this man would be useless -- the matter was dealt with in her letter of resignation. "I guess I got a little too inquisitive about one of her private relationships."

Daniel retrieved her letter of resignation which he had set aside in a small stack of papers in front of

him. "That would be Devin Wells, wouldn't it?" Joe nodded. "The son of the man we're looking for." Joe said nothing. "Exactly what action did you take that would anger Miss Chandler to the point of abandoning such a promising career?"

"I had her followed," Joe answered sheepishly.

"Your own employee. And, from what I gather from Miss Chandler, your friend? Why didn't you simply ask her about Devin Wells?"

"I did. The answers I got weren't the truth."

Daniel sighed. "Did she break any law by associating with this man?"

"No, but he has a history of felonious activities. Fake identities. Falsified passports. Counterfeit credentials. I felt it would look bad for the department if it was discovered she had a personal association with..."

"With *what*?" Daniel asked. Joe did not answer. He seemed uncomfortable, nervous. Daniel had already guessed why, but he wanted to hear it from Joe without being confronted with the suspicion. He looked at Joe calmly, his expression open and accusatory. Joe understood. "You were jealous, weren't you?"

Joe cupped his hands around his coffee cup, the tips of his fingers barely touching the Styrofoam. He grinned sheepishly, barely looking up. "Yeah, I suppose I was."

"You said you had her followed. Did that lead to anything concrete?"

"We had dinner one night, the three of us. Some of what Devin told me didn't ring true. I decided to follow them. They went into Central Park, to one of the drainage complexes. They walked inside the tunnel together. I waited for over a half-hour. Cathy came out alone, I waited. Devin never did come out of there. I thought that it was pretty strange."

Daniel nodded, checking off something on a list in front of him. "Strange, yes -- there's no law against being strange." He picked up a pencil. "Which tunnel did they enter?"

"The large one about 500 yards north of the pond, about level with 70th Street."

Daniel wrote the information down on a clean legal pad sheet, then looked over again, as if this were merely the first of a series of hurdles successfully leaped. "Didn't your superior tell you to cease the surveillance activities?"

"Yes, he did. And I did so. I told my informant to cease all surveillance the night I was ordered to pull back."

"So you haven't followed Catherine Chandler since that night?"

"No."

"You haven't confronted her or harassed her or had any non-professional contact with her?"

"Not since the day of Alan Trescoe's abduction -- the day she threatened to kill me if I didn't stop what I was doing."

Daniel smiled. "A wise action on your part, Joe. I can understand her anger."

Joe sighed. "I guess I can, too. I may have gone overboard a bit ---what with the trial and losing the guy before we could get him behind bars."

"I wouldn't be so anxious to get this guy behind bars if I were you. Your jury really blew that one."

"Apparently *they* felt we had enough evidence."

"Apparently my ass, Maxwell. You know and I know your case was circumstantial down to the last detail. No jury would have convicted this man if he hadn't been a homosexual, and you and I know it. So don't cough up your 'sanctity of the jury' theory to me. I'm not a first year student."

Joe was surprised at the restrained anger, the violence that touched the words and the voice that had said them. He knew that Daniel was correct -- that his case had been weak and circumstantial. But he resented the implication behind part of what he heard. "I didn't prosecute Alan Trescoe because he's gay -- I prosecuted him because I think he killed his lover."

"Tell that to Mrs Ethridge. Or her daughter."

Joe made a movement to protest, but Daniel's raised hand stopped him. He could tell the effort would be wasted.

"Tell me one thing, Joe. Are you still in love with Catherine Chandler?"

Joe shook his head slowly, but he did not speak.

"I see. All right, let's move on. Tell me about Mitch Denton."

"We prosecuted Denton for extortion, embezzlement, attempted murder. We were on the verge of breaking his influence over the unions at the Brooklyn docks. An investigator from the union was killed by Denton."

"Frank Sweeney?"

"Yes. His car was rigged with a bomb outside one of the dockside bars while he was meeting with Chandler and one of Denton's potential recruits. She convinced the guy to testify against Denton. We had to put him and his family into a witness protection program."

"And they remain there," Daniel said slowly, checking another item from his list. "As it turned out, their testimony could not be used."

"Denton abducted Chandler and threatened to kill her unless we dropped the prosecution. She fought her way out of the car and ran, but the son of a bitch...."

Daniel looked at a notation on his list. "Shot her in the back," he said softly. Joe nodded.

"She turned up at the emergency room of a nearby hospital."

"I know."

"Did you ever ask Miss Chandler how she managed to walk or crawl nine blocks to the hospital with a bullet in her lungs, inches from her heart?"

"I assumed she was found by someone and brought there."

"Sure, Mr Maxwell. A deserted warehouse in that section of the city -- with no one living within three

blocks. You really think someone heard the shooting, rushed to her body, took her to the hospital -- but refused to go inside or even alert the medical staff? Just deposited her and walked away, hoping she would be found? How logical does sound to you?"

"Not very."

"I see it one of two ways. Either Chandler took Denton up on his offer if she backed off, then he double-crossed her -- shot her as a warning -- then left her on the emergency room doorstep..." Joe fixed him with a doubtful glance. He knew that neither of them believed that. "Or else, someone carried her out of that warehouse and took her to that hospital -- someone who feared being seen."

"Why would someone fear being seen by strangers at an emergency room?"

Daniel looked at Joe, his expression unreadable. He did not offer an explanation. He merely waited, as if to allow Joe to think of an explanation on his own.

"Maybe Devin Wells..."

"Hardly, Maxwell. Devin Wells was in Australia when this little incident occurred. We have documentation of that fact." He smiled now, a smile every bit as unreadable as it had been before. "Care to try again?"

Joe could feel the rising anger of challenge rising within him, the anger of being confronted by a peer who had drawn him into a game with marked cards and now held what he knew to be a winning hand. He refused to raise the ante. "Not really. I don't think it has any bearing on this discussion."

Daniel shook his head sadly. "It has everything to do with this. Denton tries to cut a deal, then nearly kills Chandler. Somehow, she shows up at a hospital emergency room and survives. Denton disappears. Your investigation dies. Now, suddenly, four years later, we have a family of three butchered and a message written in blood -- a message that can only be interpreted one way. Chandler fainted when I told her about this..."

"You've told, Cathy?"

"Yes. She knew the message was meant for her -- and for whoever this 'He' is. 'He should have killed me when he had the chance,'" He looked at Joe intently. "Someone was with her that night -- someone who cared enough for her to risk his own life and get her out of that warehouse and to a hospital. Apparently, this guy came back and wiped out Denton's inner circle -- everyone but Denton. For some reason, he didn't kill Denton. The message says as much. Why?"

"I don't know. It doesn't make sense..."

"Unless this guy knew Denton -- had some reason to spare his life."

"Kill the guards and not the king? It doesn't figure..."

"Unless the king and the killer share some common interest, or share some common link their past."

Joe finished his coffee in one gulp and walked to the table, refilling his cup in the silence.

When he returned to his chair, his hand was shaking. "And Catherine Chandler ..."

"Is the point at which they meet."

"Jesus..." Joe looked ashen now, his face drawn and white. "And Denton is using people important to

Cathy..."

"To attack whoever this 'He' is."

"That would mean..." Joe looked at Daniel, the first traces of fear making their way past his defenses.

"That would mean you're a potential target, Maxwell. And Dayce DiCenzo. And any other person close to Catherine Chandler."

Joe took a swig of the hot coffee, barely noticing the shock of painful protest from the lining of his mouth and throat. "We have to find this guy."

"We will. But there's more to this situation than Mitch Denton. There's Jacob Wells."

"You think this old guy is involved?"

Daniel shook his head, moving slowly to refill his own cup with fresh coffee. "No, not directly. But I think he would know who this mysterious man is."

"How does that follow?" Joe asked, confused.

"An old man, wanted for over forty years, who vanishes mysteriously in 1953 and has never been since. Except once..." Daniel opened a folder and threw it across to Joe. It was the murder investigation file on Alan Taft. A mug shot was clipped to the file.

"How does this tie in?" Daniel threw an aged clipping across the table. Joe compared the photographs carefully, lowering the two papers simultaneously. "Jacob Wells. So what? I knew all this already."

"But you didn't know this." He threw a photograph to Joe from the stack of papers in front of him. Joe picked it up carefully, almost fearful of what he would see. After a few moments, he lowered the photograph and said to Daniel, his voice low. "Has Chandler seen this?"

"No. She tap-danced around the question when I asked her about it before. I let it go."

"And now?"

He did not look up as he answered. "We have more important things to worry about now. Before this afternoon, it was a simple case of a fugitive. Now it's multiple murder. There are a lot of innocent people at risk. My sole concerns are protecting Catherine Chandler and finding Jacob Wells. He might be able to tell us what we need to know to trap this maniac."

"But the picture..."

"Forget about the picture. Right now, we have to decide how to protect Catherine. And her friends."

Joe shook his head sadly. "She may not want my help."

Daniel looked up quickly, his eyes softer. "She will."

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Alan's fingers closed tentatively around the cup, a few thin rivulets of water pouring over his fingers as they spilled over the brim. He steadied his grasp and leaned back slowly drawing some of the water into his mouth. He lowered the cup to his lap, his free hand leveling out a space on the blankets in front of him. Carefully, he set the cup down.

"Thank you..." His voice trailed off. He seemed to struggle to find the right name.

"Jamie." the voice answered gently. "My name is Jamie."

"Right. Sorry. With so many new names these past days..."

"It's okay. I never remember the names of new helpers until I've used it at least three or four times."

"I know what you mean. I have to hear a voice and a name together for a long time before I'm comfortable. Sometimes I get two people who sound so much alike, I end up calling them by the other's names."

"At least I can keep my mouth shut when I don't remember a name."

"How old are you, Jamie?"

"How old do I sound?"

Alan thought for a moment. "Your voice sounds intelligent beyond its years. I'd guess you're 23 or 24."

"You'd be right," Jamie said.

"Well, which one is right?"

"No way, my friend. Be grateful I admitted as much as I did!" she said playfully, laughing in answer to Alan's chuckle.

"At least I didn't embarrass you by saying something stupid, like thirty or thirty-five."

"Or fifteen," Jamie added, laughing easily with him. "Actually, I like being the age I am right now. I'm old enough to leave the tunnels if I choose to, but not so old that the men down here don't ignore me."

"Any men friends?" Alan asked.

She shook her head, then chided herself softly for the gesture she suddenly remembered meant nothing. "Nope. I think they're afraid of me."

"Why?"

"Well, I'm not exactly what you would call... demure." Alan laughed easily. "I tend to say what I mean and I don't sugar-coat my opinions the way some folks think I should."

Alan was silent for some moments, then he looked straight at her, his eyes filled with the sparkle of discovering a kindred spirit. "You're a liberated young woman!"

"God, I hate that word!"

"Then it must be pretty close to the mark, then."

"I prefer 'independent'."

"They're pretty much the same thing to most men, Jamie. If you have an opinion of your own and refuse to back down in the face of the typical male ego, they label you a feminist."

"You're smiling..."

"Of course. I have the greatest respect for women who don't let men rule their lives. God knows, they'll do it if you give them half a chance."

Jamie chuckled. "Devin used to talk like that. He was always teasing me. He used to call me the damndest names!"

"Like what?"

She paused for a moment, slightly embarrassed. "Like 'Tiger' and 'Arrow'..."

"Arrow?" Alan said, his amusement making the word seem incongruous.

"I'm an expert archer. He started calling me 'Arrow' when I started beating him in archery. Later on, he meant that my verbal arrows were every bit as deadly as my wooden ones."

"Arrow," Alan repeated softly a few times. "I like it. It fits you."

"Devin always said it did."

"Devin must have been an interesting man."

"Well, that's the understatement of this or any other year. Except for Vincent, I don't think I've met anyone quite so unique."

"Catherine told me you were with Devin the night he left this life."

"Yes."

Alan noted the change in Jamie's voice, the hint of sorrow that had crept in an instant into their happy exchange. He wanted to say something, some word of apology that would only make her feel worse. He let the moment pass. "Devin and Vincent were very close, weren't they?"

"They were brothers. In every way that matters."

"And Devin brought the world above back to you down here. He told you of all the wonderful places above he visited."

"Yes. He left Catherine and Vincent a scrapbook filled with writings and photographs of the places he went and the things he saw."

"God, I'd love to have Catherine read some of that to me."

"Why not ask her to bring it down? I'd be glad to read some of it to you... and describe the pictures to you."

"Sure. I'd like that." Alan answered softly. His voice had lowered, a serious tone softening his enthusiasm. He felt strange in broaching the subject, but something impelled him to say it. "Jamie, you know that I... that I'm..."

"Of course, Alan. Vincent has told me everything."

He nodded a few times, his lips forming a sombre smile. "I just wanted to be sure. I didn't want you to think..."

"We're friends, Alan. That's all we are. But that's more than enough for me. Anyway, all the people I know who fall in love end up screwing up their lives."

Alan's laughter echoed through the chamber, out to the passageway beyond. God, there's one thing that's true in both worlds! It's amazing how the healing power of love usually ends up inflicting more serious wounds than were there before the working of its magic powers!"

"Well, don't you agree?"

"Well, yes and no. Yes, I agree that the wrong love does more harm than good. But no, if the love is shared and it's right, I think it's the strongest power on earth." He paused for a moment. "Or beneath it." he added, smiling.

Jamie sighed. "The only love I've ever seen that I know is really true down here is Kanin and Olivia."

Alan was surprised. "What about Vincent and Catherine?"

Jamie was silent for several moments, reluctant to continue. She looked at Alan, his expression one of waiting, and of wonder. "Catherine doesn't live down here, Alan. She is not a citizen of the tunnels. I can't count their relationship."

"Why hasn't Catherine ever joined you? Do you know?"

"No. She nearly came below permanently, after her father died -- but she has too many ties above to give it all up. She truly loves Vincent, but I'm not so sure she loves the tunnels so well. She needs the sunlight."

"She must be torn so badly -- to be caught between the man you love and the world you love. I'm not sure I would act any differently in her place." His voice perked up. "Fortunately, I won't have to."

Jamie looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"Surely you've been told that I'm going to seek sanctuary here?"

Jamie looked down at the floor, her mind racing, her mouth set and hard. When she could trust herself to speak, she managed, "...of course. How silly of me. Father did say something about that..."

"I know. The Tunnel Council is going to be called tomorrow." The eagerness in his voice propelled the words from his mouth. He had not caught her despair. "I can't wait.:"

"Neither can I," Jamie said quickly, summoning as much enthusiasm as she could though her anger and surprise. "It will be good to have you with us. You'll be able to teach us all so much."

Alan smiled. "And you'll teach me, as well."

Jamie stood up quickly, anxious to escape the chamber before Alan could sense the uneasiness in her voice or hear its reflection in her words. "Listen, I'll get your dinner now, and we'll talk some more. Will you be all right for a few minutes?"

"Sure," he answered.

"I'll be right back!" She fled the chamber, her steps accelerating not towards the kitchen chamber, but towards Father's library -- her anger building as quickly as the beat of her heart in her chest as she ran on into the dark.

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Jamie rushed into the Library, breathless from the long run from Devin's chamber. She looked around the shelves intently, trying to discern Father's profile from among the stacks of brown and weathered

spines and shelves that surrounded her.

"Jamie," came a soft voice from somewhere to her right. Mary's voice.

"Mary, have you seen Father today?"

"No, child. Father is still... feeling unwell."

"You mean he's still sulking. And I'm not a child anymore, Mary. How many times..."

"You're right. I apologize. Old habits..."

"I don't have time for that now, Mary." She fixed her with a harsh stare, her eyes alive with anger and accusation. "Is it true?"

Mary looked confused for a moment, then her features softened in understanding. "You mean Alan?"

"I mean about the Tunnel Council meeting tomorrow night!" Jamie said angrily. "Is it true we are to vote on a sanctuary petition for Alan?" Mary nodded slightly, averting her eyes. "And Father didn't tell us ahead of time?!" Jamie continued, her tone harsher now.

"What difference does that make?"

"We always have seven days on petitions of this kind, to give us time to talk with the petitioner and get to know their background and their reasons for coming below. I never heard of a sanctuary vote without notice to the Council members."

"Well, this was so sudden..."

"Then why didn't Father schedule the vote for next week? Why only a few days' notice. When I was told of the meeting, I wasn't told it would have anything this important on the agenda."

"There are other things to decide. The South Tunnel Project, the new library chambers..."

"Those things could have waited another week, Mary. We've managed without both those projects for years."

"Father simply wanted..."

"I suspect what Father really wants, Mary. I had to find out for myself..."

"What did you suspect, Jamie?" They whirled around quickly. Father stood in the doorway of the chamber, carrying a candle in his free hand and a sheaf of parched papers beneath his other, his balance precarious as he tried to keep the papers tightly in place while holding himself upright with his cane. He seemed tired and pale even in the candlelight, his eyes dark and narrowed, his mouth small and drawn in the darkness. He looked almost like a stranger to Jamie.

Jamie walked slowly to the chamber door, her facial muscles pulled tightly in a futile attempt to hide her anger. "You don't think you can get away with this, do you?"

"Get away with what?"

"Jamie seems to think," Mary began but Jamie set upon her instantly.

"So now you're even answering questions for him, Mary? What will it be next?"

"Jamie!" Mary's gasp was one of shock and hurt.

"Father has left his chamber, Mary," Jamie said slowly, the edge in her tone cutting off any thought of answer. Slowly, she turned to face Father. "Isn't it time for you to get up there and clean up his mess?"

Mary made a sound that sounded as simple as a sigh and as soft as a drop of water trickling over stone. It was a suppressed scream. With an angry glare at Father she rushed from the chamber, the sound of her sobs fading to silence quickly.

"That was cruel, Jamie."

"You should understand cruelty, Father. You're such an expert these days."

Father held her glance for a moment. Jamie could read nothing in his expression. She felt certain he might have struck her had either hand been free. He struggled to the huge table in the middle of the chamber, his cane clattering over the stone and down the metal steps that led down the carved incline to the lower floor. In those seconds, Jamie could hear Father's breath come faster -- but by the time he had seated himself in the huge wood back chair and lighted the candle he had brought with him and set it in a wax coated base, his breathing had returned to normal. He allowed himself a few moments more before he looked up at Jamie.

"You've become quite a little orator, Jamie. I knew you were ready for the Council."

"Don't patronize me, Father. Maybe Mary lets you talk to her like a chambermaid, but I'm not Mary."

"You are not many things, Jamie."

"You really thought you might get away with it, didn't you?"

"What crime is it you think I wanted to 'get away' with, Jamie?"

"Why wasn't I told about Alan's sanctuary petition?"

"I felt certain Vincent or Catherine would tell you. Vincent has known about it for days. I was busy with other matters."

"What matters, Father? Hiding in your chamber? Holding hands with Mary?" She walked to the railing, her voice dropping. "'Or maybe lining up enough votes to keep Alan out of the tunnels?"

"Why would I want to do that?"

"I don't know. I only know we should have been given time to discuss it with Alan, before being forced to a vote."

"So. talk to him. No one is preventing that."

"And what about Mary? And William?" Father did not answer. "Neither has set foot near that chamber since Alan arrived here." Father turned away, leaning back in the chair as he turned his face barely visible in profile. "Or have you already arranged their votes?"

No answer came from the recess of the dark chair. Father did not move.

"Or did you think you might keep me in-the dark until the question was called and count on some misplaced sense of loyalty or indebtedness to you to sway my vote against Alan." Father still did not move or answer. He seemed almost frozen in place, his lips and nose visible from where she stood, but the rest of his profile hidden by the wing of the chair. His left hand gripped the arm of the chair, but there was no tension in the fingers. He seemed almost the embodiment of a statue.

"Well, my debt to you is long paid for, Father. So was my mother's. You won't be able to use those as weapons against Alan." She paused for a moment, her eyes on his hand. "Or Catherine."

She watched as the tendons in his fingers tightened and his fingers gripped the arm of the chair tighter, his hands trembling slightly in the half-light. She knew her words had struck some chord in him, had named part of the answer.

"I know why you're doing this, Father. You hate Catherine. You'll do anything you can to hurt her now. Shut out Vincent and Catherine from your life -- sequester yourself in this phony martyrdom -- use others to keep Catherine's charge out of the tunnels -- even lie to Kanin and I by keeping this sanctuary vote secret from us. You pretend more emotion over Devin since his death than you ever showed him when he was alive." The fingers shook more now, as if they were fast to the chair and the ground beneath were shaking. "No wonder Devin left. I used to blame him for abandoning his life here. Now I understand. You couldn't stand by him in life. You couldn't even stand by him in death. All you have left for yourself now is your anger. And your guilt. Those are the only children you'll ever know." She sighed deeply, turning to the doorway but turning back as she reached the threshold. She could see none of his face from here, only the hand clinging to the arm of the chair. It stood out now, the only living part of him she could see. It looked cold and lifeless in the reflection of the candle and the torches, as dark as the stone of the walls that surrounded them.

At that moment, her anger spent, she looked from his hand to the stone, one to the other. It seemed impossible to tell the difference.

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The morning seeped in between the crack of the blinds -- through the gaps between wood and window -- down through the skylights half-buried in snow. The storm had spent its final fury in the darkest hours of morning, then pushed on.

Catherine awoke easily. She had slept many hours after her fall. Only a pain killer for her head had made her drowsy enough to sleep at all. The first bright rays of sun had been enough to wake her.

Vincent sat in the chair beside the bed, his eyes on her, open and alert. She knew he had not slept at all this night. The smile in her eyes as she looked into his made words unnecessary. She held out her hand. He took it gently, leaning forward to caress her fingers.

"When did the storm stop?"

"A few hours ago."

She sat up in bed slowly, the pillows behind her warm and comfortable.

Dayce?"

"In the living room. Asleep."

"For how long?"

"Not very long. He had a hard time..."

"I know," Catherine said sadly. "He'll need time for this, Vincent. He'll think that he could have done something about Denton. He'll just add this to the guilt he feels about Alan."

"I'll speak with him. Catherine. Tonight. Before the sanctuary meeting. We need Dayce's voice."

"I want to be there too, Vincent."

He shook his head slowly. "No, Catherine. You have to remain here. You've had a terrible shock. Your fall was not minor. And you must remain here in case Daniel shows up today. He'll suspect you if you were both missing from this apartment. He saw your injury and knows it was serious."

"But Vincent, I can help Alan."

"No, Catherine -- you cannot. You cannot even be heard before the Council. You know the rule. Alan must have one sponsor from below, but may have only have one outsider speak for his petition before the Council. Dayce can offer more for him now than you. Dayce needs to do this, Catherine. For himself, as well as for Alan."

"Can't an exception be made!"

"I doubt Father is in any frame of mind to grant exception to our rules while he remains convinced of your complicity in Devin's death."

"Does he intend to hide behind that anger forever?"

Vincent sighed. "It would seem so."

Catherine pushed the covers aside quickly and sat up. She closed her eyes and swayed slightly for a moment, but gently resisted Vincent's extended hand and offer of support. "I can do it. I'm just a little woozy." She pulled on a man's cotton robe that Dayce had left at the foot of the bed, its folds swallowing her in a tangle of white. She jerked the belt tight around her waist with a quick snap of her wrists and pulled her hair back into a makeshift ponytail, taking a discarded rubber band from the top of the dresser beside her to secure the unruly tangle. Slowly, she pulled the blind aside and looked out on the scene -- a spread of snow-cruled red bricks and icicles. The dim light cast the scene in a strange blue luminance -- the icicles catching the light and concentrating it in long streaks of azure.

"It looks so damn dead out there," she said softly - the resignation that coated her voice flat and spiritless.

Vincent rose slowly, watching her face. He did not answer. He understood this was not a time he needed to speak.

She trudged to the kitchen, turning the light on quietly, so as not to disturb Dayce -- his figure barely visible in a tangle of makeshift pillows and blankets on the sofa. She found the coffee-maker and surreptitiously opened drawers and cabinets to gather the ingredients together for breakfast. She was ravenous, the hunger of nearly a day without food -- and she needed something to fill the time, to fill the moment and the moment-after-next with some purpose, no matter how simple. She knew she would have to string together an infinite number of such moments to get through the days ahead. Right now, she thought, it's coffee. Coffee and toast. A small goal, but at least a goal.

Vincent leaned against the counter watching her in silence. He knew she was acting to block out pain,

to keep from thinking of the brutal loss of her childhood friend, of Alan's coming moment of confrontation, of a world that seemed to be closing in around her on all sides. He felt the pain of isolation now, of being by her side but unable to protect her from the attacks. For years, through countless moments of danger, he had never feared for Catherine as he did now -- a fear more threatening and violent than any assassin's bullet or henchman's knife.

As the coffee-maker came to life, filling the air with the comforting aroma of morning, Catherine pulled a loaf of bread from the breadbox and unwrapped it. She pulled a sharp knife from the holder on the counter and prepared to cut a fresh slice from the home-made loaf, but her hand stopped halfway -- her fingers shaking slightly. Vincent watched as she slowly pulled the knife back down, resting her wrist against the counter for support. Her eyes were closed. She seemed to be lost in some vision of her own, her grip on the knife handle tightening for a few moments, then slowly relaxing as she opened her eyes. She turned to look at Vincent for a moment, her eyes dark. When she reached forward to slice the bread now, her grip was steady and her aim true. She attacked the loaf savagely, but with the precision of a gem cutter. The sweeps of her arm were long and forceful. Again and again, she drew the knife across the loaf. Like the shrill of a teakettle on a red-hot burner that has been switched off, the sweeps of her arm slowed, then stopped. When she stopped, her eyes were clear again, her hand relaxed. She looked down at the counter for a few moments, then threw the knife aside and reached for the coffee cups and saucers. Even Vincent understood that she had cut far more slices of bread than the three of them would eat that morning.

The living room was a dark wall lined with diffuse squares of blue light, the fingers of the day forcing their way past the edges of the blinds, only to be swallowed by the dark within. There was no sound beyond the windows, no low rumble of traffic nor deep rumble of jets passing overhead. None of the usual sounds of an awakening city filtered through the blinds with the light.

Catherine walked softly to one of the corner windows overlooking the end of the street. She gently unwound the drawstring from its lash on the window frame and slowly drew the delicate latticework blind upwards. Snow was piled against the lower pane of glass, mounded into a perfect hill of white -- crystals of ice extending upwards towards the long horizontal wooden frame. She lifted the shade higher, the blue light beyond gaining enough of a foothold to form a long, narrow corridor of light on the wooden floor behind her. Through the upper pane, the scene below filled her eyes. It was a nearly solid sheet of white as far as she could see -- with only the long, vertical grey shafts of the buildings poking their massive bodies through the snowdrifts. She could not see any cars -- they were white dunes scattered in ordered rows along the building edges. No footprints marred the long expanse of white. The traffic signals on the corner stood as flashing yellow guards over a landscape where the concepts of red or green seemed meaningless. All else was buried -- the newsstands, the bushes, the bases of the parking meters... only their grey heads poking above the snow, their red and yellow calls to justice useless now. There was no one to see them. She had never seen a storm like this -- not in the city. Only her childhood brought forth memories of motionlessness this total -- this silent. She secured the blind and walked back towards the kitchen, her head down.

As she passed Vincent, his arm reached out and barred her way. She felt his arm course off of her chest, but he did not let her pass. He took her shoulder in his hand and gently turned her to face him, his touch more firm than forceful -- his eyes filled with a sympathy that went beyond her own sadness. He brought a clenched fist under her chin and gently urged her face upwards until their eyes met. Even in the bright light overhead, her eyes were dark and lifeless. A reflection of her spirit remained in that darkness and made it harder to bear the sight. It was like standing on the shore of a dark sea, moonlight and barren, watching a loved one struggle against the currents and the wave's one could neither stem nor slow. And in that final moment, when the last bit of light and life are overcome, wishing one could throw oneself into the maelstrom. He bent down and gently kissed Catherine, a hopeless gesture known to be hopeless before it was completed. He felt no response in her lips, no tightening of her arms around him. It was as if her drowned body had washed ashore on that black,

moonlit beach and he had kissed those lips in a desperate attempt to breathe life into a form he knew to be lifeless. He drew his hand gently through her hair as he let her pass. She stopped for a moment and leaned against him, her eyes not looking into his, her arms by her side. It was a desperate final gesture of rebellion against defeat and pain.

She filled a coffee cup with the steaming liquid and set it close to Vincent. She filled a second cup quickly, took a sip, then added sugar and cream to cut the strength, Vincent took a sip from his mug. He said nothing while she pulled the toasted slices from the toaster and threw them down on the plate, placing a pat of butter on the bottom slice, then draping the other on top to soften it. After a few seconds, she spread the soft, yellow cream over both.

"Have some toast, Vincent. You haven't eaten in a long time."

"As you wish." he answered.

She glanced up at the electronic clock on the wall behind her. It read 6:18.

A strange sound came from the darkness of the living room -- a voice of sorts, but speaking sounds that were not part of any language. The blankets were thrown aside and Dayce's figure rose slowly, his hands rubbing his eyes, his hair scattered in random locks over his head, his voice guttural and half-asleep.

"Izzat cuffreeshh?"

"What?" Catherine said softly, walking to the open square of the serving port that separated the dining room from the kitchen. "You need to speak English, Dayce."

"I said, is that coffee fresh?" He fixed Catherine with a contemptuous glance. "You need to learn how to speak 'Exhausted'."

"Yeziutsfreeshhhh." She answered, turning to the counter and taking a clean mug from a mug tree beside the stove. She leaned her head back and smiled slightly. "You see I *can* speak 'Exhausted'."

Dayce chuckled, rising from the sofa and extending his arms towards the ceiling, stretching and rolling his shoulders and head in sensuous circles. He pulled a white down comforter around his shoulders and walked towards the kitchen, stubbing his toes only once in the dark and successfully suppressing a swearword to cover the pain. He stopped in the doorway, surprised. "You're still here?" he said to Vincent.

"I stayed all night. I wanted to be sure both of you were protected"

Dayce put his hand on Vincent's arm for a moment as he passed, a wordless expression of thanks. He made his way to one of the benches of the enclosed breakfast nook and lay down, his head and back pressed against the whitewashed wall behind, his legs stretched out on the bench, the white blanket drawn around him. He watched as Catherine prepared his hot coffee and toast. "Thanks," he said as he took the mug from her and took a long draught. He held the steaming cup under his nose, drinking in the smell with the steam.

Catherine moved to the bench across from him. She watched as he munched his toast peacefully, Vincent sipped his coffee in silence.

"When is Daniel coming back?"

"Sometime this morning. He had some things to check out last night down at the office. I think he was going to check out your work records and try to get information about the murders."

"And when is Alan's sanctuary meeting with the Council?"

"Seven o'clock." Vincent answered softly.

"You should be here when Daniel arrives, Chandler. *If* he arrives." Dayce added. "Is the storm over?"

"Yes. It looks like we got about 30 inches of snow. The drifts are much higher. He may find it difficult to get here this morning..." she stopped, looking at Vincent. "Vincent agrees with you that I have to be here when Daniel gets back. I just wish..."

"Don't worry, Chandler. Vincent and I will speak with Alan. I want you to stay here." He turned to Vincent, concerned. "There's no chance of Denton knowing about..."

"No. No way. Only you and I know Catherine is staying here."

"And Daniel." Catherine added. "But you're right -- there's no way Denton can know where I am now."

"Good." Dayce said quickly. "I want you to stay here today and tonight -- at least long enough to talk to Bellasco and find out whatever you can about things."

She sighed. "I'm sure he'll have several things to ask *me*, too."

"You can handle that, right?" She nodded.

"Good. Vincent and I will return after the meeting with the news of the vote. We'll use the old tunnel entrance in the basement building next door."

The light was growing stronger now, the outlines and forms in the living room b now visible as ghosts of chairs and tables and plants. The blue glow had diffused to a pale grey that seemed to brighten as they watched, the room coming to life before their eyes. Vincent finished his coffee and turned to them. "I must go, Catherine. There is much to be done before the meeting tonight"

She stood up slowly, moving to his side. "You promise you'll come back tonight?"

"Of course," he said, drawing her into an embrace. She put her arms around him, reluctant to see him leave. She felt his lips on her hair, as gentle and delicate as the touch of a falling snowflake.

Vincent walked to the living room the light from the skylight falling across him in bands of blue-grey and gauze-white. Catherine handed him the latch pole and he pushed the lock aside, then pushed the transparent bubble up and off the opening. A few faint wisps of snow fell through the opening, their crystalline edges, catching even the weak light splitting into a rainbow array that filled the room. He crouched down, then sprang upwards with a mighty push of his massive thighs. His hands clasped the edge of the fixture, then pulled him up and over the edge. He pulled his cape from behind him, turned for an instant and looked down at her -- her hair bright in the light from the kitchen fixture, her body split asunder by the light from beside her -- one eye bright and shining in the lamplight, the other hidden by total darkness. Seconds later, he was gone -- only the faint grey of morning and a cold wind in his wake. Then the skylight was replaced by hands she could not see, leaving the room darker -- and colder.

"That's a handy skill he has there, Chandler."

She turned to Dayce, her expression invisible in the shadow that cut across her face. "One of many," she answered.

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Vincent walked slowly along the tunnel towards his chamber, the last traces of the crust of snow on his cape and hair melting to liquid as he went. Though he had only been exposed to the wind for a short time, it had borne on its frigid fingers, myriad tiny flakes of snow blown across roofs and down the back alleys in airborne abandon. The snow from above had stopped hours before, replaced by a far more dangerous storm – the windswept snow of the earth.

He had stopped briefly at the kindergarten chamber. He watched as Mary led the class in a reading of a child's fable from tunnel mythology. She had turned when she noticed the attention of the children had been drawn to the doorway. Her surprised 'Oh!' had been like a static charge, the sound of the word running the length of her body, like a chill. She had asked if he would like to continue the reading, but he had declined. He continued on, left with a feeling he could not describe, but which seemed to quicken his gait as he went on towards his chamber. It had almost seemed that Mary had been slightly afraid of him, but he forced the feeling from his mind.

He knew the hours ahead would be difficult. Past sanctuary petitions had always served to bring out the territorial traits of some of the Council members -- long suppressed emotions of ownership and exclusivity in a kingdom they had neither discovered nor created, but with the coming of those who would seek citizenship in this place, the feelings many had sought to escape from were found to have lain buried inside them. And lying dormant for years in some hidden corner of their souls, the feeling would surface in bitter anger that others might wish to lay claim to some part of this small, dark world. Vincent had always listened to their words -- sometimes in horror, sometimes in shame -- but always with a heightened sense of the difference between him and those who spoke so eloquently against holding open the arms that now so completely protected *them*. It was almost as if they resented the one seeking refuge as a constant reminder of their own forsaking of the world above -- as if their very presence below was a rebuke for their own unwillingness to face the more difficult path above, or their own weakness in admitting to defeat when struggle and confrontation might have made their world above a more livable place, a world to be fought for instead of run from.

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As he passed Alan's chamber, he glanced in quickly. Alan sat with Jamie on the floor, their hands filled with playing cards. 'Dayce brought them down for us,' Alan had said. 'I'm teaching Jamie how to play poker.' The piles of stones in front of them -- Jamie's noticeably larger than his -- spoke of how well his lessons were being mastered. Jamie smiled at Vincent and shrugged her shoulders, slightly embarrassed. As he turned to leave, she had asked if she could speak with him before the meeting that night. He had nodded, his eyes calm.

His chamber was dark when he arrived at the doorway, the candle within having long before burned to extinction. The air in the chamber was beginning to lose that familiar odour of scented wax, replaced by the cold aroma of wet stone. He moved quickly to the storage chest at the foot of his bed and took two huge orange candles from deep within, dipping their fresh white wicks into the flame of a torch beside the door of his chamber. The candles sprang to life in his hands, filling his room with bright yellow light as he placed them in separate holders on his desk. He watched as tiny pools of clear wax formed at the base of each wick, the pools expanding in ever-widening circles -- the flames losing their brilliance as the pools grew. Slowly, the pools stopped growing as the flame ate at the liquid wax and turned black, the tear-shaped tongues of flame settled into two molten yellow beads, their dance throwing Vincent's shadow against the wall behind him.

He moved slowly to his bed, tossing his cape aside and lying down gently on the comforter, not bothering to pull the covers down. He found the cooler air invigorating, the faint chill of the tunnel rock welcome. He closed his eyes and turned to face the stained glass wall beside the bed. The light danced in the colours, running along the finely-etched edges between the globs of red and green and blue in razor runs of metal that glowed like silver strands coiled in a bed of gemstones. He tried to smile, tried

to capture the reflections in his own heart and see them as colorful points of joy and light, but he could not force the foreboding from his mind. Catherine's fear and anger were beginning to consume her -- he could feel that -- but a far worse enemy was laying siege to Catherine now, an enemy Vincent had never known in her before. Mistrust.

He had felt it the moment she awakened this morning, a cold and dark force within her that had swept away all traces of contentment and acceptance she had come to feel since Devin's death. Even the injustice of Alan's conviction and her part in his abduction and sanctuary in the tunnels had not destroyed her spirit, her newfound strength of choice and responsibility. But now, in the space of one day, the supports had buckled. The certainty and the will to act were gone now, replaced by feelings Vincent could find no words for. He knew these feelings were spreading quickly within her, that some important part of her had died in that moment when she had learned of Nancy Tucker's death -- and that her mind and her heart were closed to all now, even to him -- and there were no words he could use or glance he could bestow to break through this kind of wall.

He did not know how long he had lain like this, his eyes on the silvery streaks and colored drops of the window -- his mind searching for an answer to Catherine's mistrust and his own growing fear for her emotional balance. He heard the sound of footsteps behind him and rolled over quickly. The candles had burned over two inches lower, grotesquely shaped rivulets of wax dribbling down the sides and collecting in brittle mounds at the base of the holders. He stared intently at the outline in the doorway.

"Jamie?" he said softly, sitting up.

"No," the figure said softly, moving forward into the light.

"Oh. Hello Mary. Is the lesson over?"

She sat beside him on the bed, her voice low. "Yes. I left Jennifer to collect their assignments. She's been wanting to take more responsibility in the classes for a long time. I thought it was time."

"Good," Vincent answered. "She'll do a good job." Mary was silent. "What is it, Mary?"

"Vincent, I'm sorry if I seemed... startled... before..."

"I should have told you I was coming.,."

Mary did not look up, did not answer for a long time. "I thought... I thought Jamie might have said something to you."

He looked at her. "No. Not yet." He paused, inviting an answer. Mary remained silent. "Is there something I should be told?"

"No. It's just that she and Father..."

"What about Father? What has happened?"

Mary looked away, unable to face him. He reached out and turned her towards him, his eyes narrowed. "What has happened between them?"

Mary looked up into Vincent's eyes, her own filled with fear and the beginnings of the tears she had kept bottled for hours. "Jamie and Father had a terrible fight, Vincent. Over Alan."

"Why?" Vincent asked, his voice a command for the truth.

"Jamie blamed Father for not telling her the Council would decide on Alan's petition at the meeting tonight. She blamed Father and I for keeping it a secret. She thinks Father is going to try to arrange enough votes against Alan to defeat his petition and that he had deliberately withheld the subject of the meeting from you and the others... She said such cruel and terrible things... she was like a stranger to me... to both of us."

Vincent sighed. "What did Father say?"

"I don't know. Jamie was so... so cruel to me. I had to leave."

"What did Jamie say, Mary?" Vincent said, his voice harder now, and colder.

"Why don't you ask me?" came a voice from nearby. Jamie stood in the doorway, her form a black outline against the pale orange light beyond. "I'm the one who said them."

Mary stood up slowly, her eyes fixed on Jamie, her hands trembling at her sides. She looked at the dark shape in the doorway in terror. She looked back to Vincent quickly then turned back to Jamie again, her hands drawn into tight fists at her chest. She backed up against the bed slightly as Jamie walked slowly past her and sat at Vincent's desk, her face calm, her eyes flashing.

"What did you say to Father?" Vincent said.

"Nothing he didn't deserve to hear long ago." Jamie answered, her eyes never leaving Mary's face.

"Mary told me you were deliberately cruel to both of them."

Jamie smiled. "Not deliberately cruel. Just honest. Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference." She saw Vincent's demanding glare and went on. "I sent Mary out before I confronted him. After all, there was Father's mess to clean up. Isn't that Mary's job these days? I mean, since Father so bravely and courageously faced his own son's death."

Mary stood up and headed for the door, her voice breaking. "I won't stay here and be insulted."

"Then why don't you leave while I insult you?" Jamie said contemptuously.

"Jamie!" Vincent said quickly, but Mary was already out of the chamber and gone. He turned to Jamie angrily. "Why did you say that to her?"

"I told her exactly what I thought of her. *And* Father."

"What made you angry, Jamie?"

"Vincent, you know it's customary to give the Council members seven full days' notice when sanctuary petitions are brought -- time for us to talk with the petitioners and get a sense of them as people. I had to find out about Alan's petition from Alan -- and I didn't find out until yesterday! The meeting is in a few hours." Vincent was listening his anger subsiding. "Even you didn't tell me!"

"I assumed Father would tell you. I already know how I am going to vote."

"And what about the rest of the Council members who will vote? Mary will do whatever Father asks of her, of course..."

"I think you fail to give Mary enough credit, Jamie. Did you *ask* her?"

"Mary does whatever Father orders. We both know that."

"I know she is fair in these matters, Jamie. Your anger towards her has nothing to do with Alan or this petition. You're angry because Mary is not as strong or independent as you want her to be." He looked at her intently, his eyes gentle, his smile sad.

"Maybe. I won't lie to you, Vincent. I hate to see her manipulated. Since Devin's death, Father has turned into... I don't know... it's like he's taken his anger and allowed it to fester these past months. He led us to believe he had accepted Devin's decision just before Devin left us. Then he went into seclusion for months... just him and his books, and his letters and his cook and maid... that's all Mary has become to him... he cuts himself off from the rest of us and then expects us to treat him like a leader when he deems it necessary. He takes his hatred and turns it against Catherine and Peter Alcott. How many times have you spoken with Father since Devin died?"

"Not many" Vincent said weakly.

"Hell, he couldn't even be at his son's side when he died. I had to do that!"

"Devin asked for you to be there, Jamie. He knew Father would find it difficult..."

She shot to her feet, her face swept by rage and frustration. "What do you think it did to *me*!!? You think I sat there like a stone statue while I watched my friend..." Vincent was surprised by her sudden outburst. He looked at her intently, his eyes wide and frightened. "Everyone else had someone to turn to when Devin died. You and Catherine had each other. Father had Mary. You all had your own private worlds at the end. You could imagine whatever you liked, imagine all kinds of beautiful final moments for yourselves and not watch him slowly... not see him die before your eyes. You didn't have to stand over him and call out to him, begging him to stay just a few seconds longer... pounding his chest... all of your books and plays, your endless shelves of words... none of you knew how much I..." Her voice finally shattered and fell away as she broke down in his arms, her sobs completing her sentence. She clutched Vincent's shoulders and hung on, the pent emotions of many months finding release in this span of moments, her anger and love fused in one final act of cruelty and rebellion turned against herself.

"Jamie..." His voice was soft and compassionate. He tried to look at her, but she merely held him tighter, afraid to let him see her face. "Why didn't you talk to us about this? Why did you..."

Her tears came faster now, her grasp on him tightening as the sobs wracked her shoulders. Suddenly, Vincent understood the feigned impatience in Jamie's exchanges with Devin while he was alive. He had always thought she was jealous of him... jealous of his freedom in a world forever closed off to her. Now, in this moment, he cursed his ignorance and his lack of insight into this woman -- his failure to see that she was no longer the child he had always seen in his mind. Somewhere in those years behind him, with his waking moments filled with thoughts of Catherine, Jamie had become a woman. With no-one to confide in, caught in a world she both loved and resented, she had discovered the man who seemed the most out of reach was the one man she had quietly loved. He understood now why Devin had wanted her at his side at the end. He had guessed what lay behind her taunts and teases.

"Jamie... I'm sorry... I didn't know..." he said softly, his arms enfolding her. He held her tight, his body absorbing the shudders of her body like blows -- his hand gently caressing her hair and her back -- the only bandages her wounds could accept in this moment.

Slowly, the sobs stopped. She pulled away from Vincent as far as her strength and his embrace would allow. When she found the strength to look at him, her face composed, the red streaks on her cheeks the only trace of her outburst. She looked up at him, vulnerable, her trust the only calming aspect to be sensed in the moment.

"I didn't mean to do that... I really didn't..." She tried to stand, but Vincent's firm grip on her shoulders

held her fast. She wriggled a few times, hoping his grasp would loosen and let her stand -- escape his scrutiny.

"Why didn't you tell anyone?" Vincent asked. There was no accusation to his tone, no unspoken anger or blame.

"Who was I to tell? You had your own troubles. Father would have dismissed it as another adolescent fantasy. I didn't trust anyone else enough to..."

"What about Catherine?" Jamie tilted her head slightly, startled at the suggestion. "She could have spoken with you about Devin. She would have kept your secret had you asked her -- even from me."

"I didn't think Catherine was that close to Devin."

"She was, Jamie. She cared for Devin very much. She understood Devin better than of those who knew him below."

"Do you think she would still... now that Devin is..."

"Yes, Jamie. You can talk to Catherine about him. Devin made a scrapbook of his travels and his thoughts. He gave it to Catherine. Perhaps she would share it with you."

Jamie managed a smile, her eyes bright and wet "I'd like that."

Vincent rose, pulling her up with him, his hands remaining on her shoulders for comfort. "Do you want me to ask?"

"No. Please let me do it. Besides, I've never had a really long talk with Catherine. It's time I did."

She nodded once, acknowledging she was all right. She clasped Vincent's hand for a moment. "Well, Vincent -- in a few hours, our lives may change, I know how you and I will vote. I know that Father and Mary will stand against us. That's 2-2."

"What do you think the others will do?"

"I know William will probably side with Father. He usually does. And I think Pascal will side with us. You know he isn't likely to vote against -- he has already voted to admit two people fleeing unjust accusations above."

"3-3. Still deadlocked."

She sighed. "I guess it will all come down to Kanin. I wish I knew how he sees this situation."

"He tends to read tunnel law as literal. You know that. But he has been on the other side of a vote of this kind. And he has been imprisoned above. He may consider that when the time comes."

"I hope so." Jamie said softly. "If the vote goes against Alan, I won't be able to remain here."

"What do you mean?"

She looked at him sadly, her voice hard and calm. "If Alan is forced to leave the tunnels, then I go with him." In answer to his look of surprise and shock, she added, "...and I'm not alone."

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The radio brought only constant news of the storm that had swept the coastline from Virginia to Maine, leaving in its wake eroded beaches, bone-chilling winds, and more snow than many people had seen in their lifetimes. While New York City struggled under thirty inches, the suburbs to the north and west were digging out from over three feet. Traffic was at a standstill in the city while the snow plows fought the wind to a draw up and down the long avenues. No sooner would one street be cleared than the wind would pile new drifts on the streets behind. It was a battle of inches and of determination between exhausted city workers and the icy fingers of the northwest wind.

Catherine spun the dial until the strains of a Viennese operetta filled the room like warm waves of sunshine -- the musical equivalent of a window opened to a fresh late-April breeze. She had changed the bandage on her forehead, the fresh piece of gauze as white as the snow outside. The dull headache that had stalked her all morning was gone now, replaced by a sensation that was less than pain but more obtrusive than a strand of hair fallen against her skin. She knew the feeling was there, but not the need to try to brush it aside.

Dayce had dressed quickly and headed below. They had spoken little through the morning -- her thoughts were too obvious to him. There was nothing they needed to say to one another. He understood her anger. She understood his guilt. Neither could help the other so soon after the explosion that had shattered their lives. It would take time before either of them could face the wounds of the other. Self-preservation had taken control of each of them. Yet, through the span of one moment, they had found a respite from pain. At the door, she had stopped him, her eyes staring at him with the bright certainty of youth, the fervour of a hardened warrior from some ancient religious sect. "Do what you have to do for Alan. For both of us." His eyes met hers with equal intensity, equal feeling -- and in that moment they found a bond stronger than any they had ever known. He had kissed her forehead gently, whispered, "I will." before vanishing in the darkness of the hallway.

The hours between that kiss and this moment were like a flat stretch of sand in her mind with no ripple or dune to offer relief from the emptiness. She remembered lying down on the sofa, her hand shielding her eyes from the snowy light now forcing its way into the room. Her thoughts went quickly from Nancy, to Vincent, to Alan and Daniel and Joe and Devin -- in an endless avalanche of emotion with no center and no end -- an avalanche from which there seemed to be no refuge she could take. Emotions swept through her, tying pieces of the avalanche into a solid, powerful wall of rock that seemed to rush upon her but in the moments when she felt she would be crushed beneath, she found the wall had been torn asunder and had rushed past her, shards of the stone strewn throughout her mind and her heart. And in those moments when she felt the worst was passed, a new wave of emotion would rush upon her -- its stone memory-fresh and razor-sharp.

The light from outside cascaded into the room, the thin paper blinds no match for the rays that reflected. from the snow cover, to the ice-encrusted window ledges of the buildings around -- the rays feeding on themselves and in return fed upon by the brilliance of the sun, their rays merging and spreading out over the city as the last of the storm clouds scurried past the tops of the skyscrapers and rushed out to sea. Catherine drew several of the blinds upwards, the brilliance filling the room like a warm flood of yellow molasses -- the rays sticking to everything they touched. A crystal mobile in the window caught the light and scattered it against the walls, the brickwork, the waxed wood floors, the colors of the rainbow spread in sun-tossed array throughout the room. At some other time, she would feel lightness and joy at this moment -- expectant at the end of nature's onslaught and beginning of man's reclamation of the city and the beginning of life stirring outside her windows. She felt none of these things. These windows were the transparent bars of her prison now -- this city a cold and deadly presence to be feared. She felt trapped, like the sun rays in the crystal of the mobile, her reflection falling in deep grey between the rainbows around her. Angrily, she shook her head and turned up the volume of the radio. The sound cut off feeling, and she stared out at the awakening city below her, her mind fixed on the music.

Looking out at the intersection to the east, she watched as a taxicab struggled to a stop at the end of the unplowed street. The door flew open and Daniel's familiar figure threw several bills through the passenger window, then pulled a long winter coat tighter around his body as he plunged knee-deep into the snow as he headed slowly for the front of the building. He looked up once and caught Catherine's glance high above him. He waved once, watching her as she waved through the window. Then his form vanished from sight. She walked to the intercom and buzzed the door open before he could sound the bell. She heard the faint click of the mechanism in the wall as the circuit was broken and the door in the lobby fell open. He seemed unconcerned, his gait neither hurried nor hesitant.

She walked to the door and unlocked the two locks slowly, then pulled the two deadbolts. She pulled the heavy door open and stood in the doorway listening to the sound of the ancient elevator as it creaked and groaned to a stop -- a faded red arrow pointed towards the basement coming to life in a feeble burst of flashes that finally settled on a dim red glow. The door shuddered open slowly. Daniel walked slowly down the hallway, his face a mottled red from the chill of the street air, his pant legs stained dark with melted snow. He held his expensive briefcase clutched tightly to his chest, buried beneath his coat. He looked tired and disheveled, but his expression was not what she expected. He was smiling.

"Good to see you up and about, Miss Chandler. We had our doubts last night."

She backed into the apartment to let him enter, pulling the door closed behind and securing it while he pulled his coat off and pushed his shoes off his feet, setting them on top of one of the wall heating units to dry. He tossed his briefcase to the sofa, then turned to face her. "How's the cut?"

"Fine," she answered. She headed for the kitchen automatically. "I'll get you some coffee," she said quietly. He threw more of the curtains upwards, the glare overpowering the last of the secluded shadows. He looked out at the expanse while she poured his coffee, then joined her as she set the cup beside his briefcase and settled into one of the chairs, he took a long gulp, barely noticing the taste, then pulled the satchel open and withdrew a sheaf of papers. She watched him, uncertain of what to expect.

"You look half-dead. How much sleep did you get?"

He looked up, bewildered, almost as if he had not heard her -- or as if her words were irrelevant now. "Sleep?" he asked as if the word were from a language he had never heard. "Oh, sleep... right... no, I was awake all night. So much interesting stuff to go over." He looked up at her, his words strung together like popcorn kernels on a Christmas tree garland. "I've arranged for surveillance of all your close friends in the city, Catherine. They've been told to avoid staying alone until we know where Denton will strike next. I've alerted the city police to be on the lookout for him and distributed a description to all law enforcement agencies in New York and Connecticut. I don't think he'll show his face for a while. The son-of-a-bitch isn't going to get you. I can promise you that."

'He thinks he knows,' Catherine thought, grateful for his swift actions, but resigned to the hopelessness of the task he had set himself to perform. 'He thinks he can protect' me from this man. He thinks he can stop a killer whose range so far exceeded the world Daniel knew that his protection might just as well be a whistle around her neck. The world she and Denton knew was greater than this man could know --or protect her from. "Thanks." she answered. "I'm worried about Jenny Aronson."

"She's been sent out of the city for a while. She was told you were fine and that you would contact her at her sister's house in Virginia when it was safe to return."

"Good. How about Marilyn and Joe?"

"Marilyn has moved to Seattle. She left the city during the Trescoe trial. If you want to write to her

when this is over, I have her new address. As for Joe, he told me he knows how to take care of himself. Still, we have a man watching his apartment and another shadowing him during the day."

"Did he say anything about... Nancy Tucker... or me?"

Daniel threw her an odd glance, as if her question betrayed some emotion she had tried to conceal from him, but in a moment of crisis had forced its way up and past the anger inside her. He smiled. "He asked me to tell you he was sorry about Nancy and to tell you to take care of yourself until this maniac is found"

She nodded, turning away so as not to let him see her eyes. "Did you find out anything else?"

"No... except that the killings happened less than three days ago and that the fingerprints at the scene are Denton's. There was a second set of prints, but we have no record of who they belong to. He may have had an accomplice... or they may have belonged to a family friend or one of the weekly domestic employees. We're checking that out now."

Catherine sensed that Daniel was merely marking time, that he had learned far more last night than he was alluding to now. His sentences seemed to be strung together by pauses, not for thought, but for time -- mere empty, soundless seconds meant to cover his eagerness to move on to other subjects without making it too obvious this was his intent. As much as she felt this man might care about her as a woman, she knew he still placed his duties to his superiors far above any loyalties he felt towards her as a friend. She knew that no matter how protective this man seemed, he was still someone to be feared.

"I have some other questions for you, if you feel up to it."

"Sure."

"How did you come to be involved with Mitchel Denton?"

"We were prosecuting him for tactics he was using in overseeing the Brooklyn Docks. We had a witness willing to testify to a killing he witnessed that we linked to Denton."

"Jack Sweeney?"

"Yes. His family is in one of your protection 'Programs'. We never got the chance to use their testimony. Denton disappeared before we could apprehend him."

"I noticed in the file that you had an even closer contact with Denton."

"Yes. He strong-armed me into his limousine and threatened to kill me unless I told him where Sweeney was. I bought time by offering a deal if he would let me go, then I attacked him and fled the car."

"You were shot in the back while fleeing?"

"Yes."

"You ended up in a hospital nine blocks away?"

"I don't remember anything from the instant the bullet struck until the moment I woke up in recovery at the hospital."

Daniel looked at her, a faint smile spreading across his face. "So you have no idea how you got to the hospital?"

She smiled in return. "No. I was unconscious."

"I see," Daniel answered softly. "Of course." He paused for a moment. "You owe someone a huge thank you. Apparently they managed to frighten Denton and his men off before they could finish you off, then take you nine blocks to safety. Not many people are so lucky."

"No, they aren't," she said easily.

"Well, whoever they are. I thank God for them," he said slowly. She could not read the change in his voice except that she knew some part in him knew that she knew who had protected her that night -- and that in this moment he was glad this stranger had been there to save her. "Now, I want to ask you a question. I need to have you tell me the truth now, Miss Chandler. It might mean the difference between life and death for you and for other people close to you." She nodded faintly, inviting him to continue. "Four years ago you intervened to free Jacob Wells from an unjust murder charge. I know that you knew who he was before you met him at Rikker's Island. We know he was alive and well four years ago. I ask you now, is Jacob Wells still alive?"

A beat passed. "Yes."

"And you know where he is -- or was -- as recently as last Fall? Before Devin Wells died?"

"Yes."

Daniel sighed softly, but he smiled at her gently. "Thank you, Miss Chandler. I wasn't sure you would be honest with me. I'm glad I was wrong."

"And thank you, Daniel."

"For what'?"

"For not asking me where Jacob Wells is now."

He looked at her openly, his smile relaxing. "I never ask questions I know won't be answered."

She did not nod or smile in answer, only studied him impassively. "You haven't asked about my resignation. Surely Joe had something to say about that."

"Yes, he did. He told me you were the best Assistant DA he ever had. And that he was more concerned for your safety than anything else."

"Did he explain why he followed Devin and I and why he put me under surveillance without coming to me first?"

"Yes," Daniel answered. "but Joe doesn't know when to stop being a District Attorney, and start being a friend. Especially in your case."

"Why especially in my case?" She looked at him for a moment, refusing to believe what his statement seemed to be saying. "You don't mean to tell me..."

Daniel was silent for a few moments, then answered softly, "I know where the questions end, Miss Chandler. For guys like Joe Maxwell, the questions never end."

She knew this man was treating her differently. She knew he would have pressed anyone else for more information about Denton, about Jacob Wells, about Devin. It was as if he were a victim of the same affliction as Joe, but different in some way she could not put her finger on. Where Joe pressed too hard, Daniel pulled back. Where Joe was combative and confrontational, he was empathetic and accommodating. It was as if Joe were trying to force her into a mistake while Daniel was circling, like a jungle cat stalking its prey, waiting for that one moment of weakness, of opportunity, where defense would be useless and escape impossible. Of the two of them, she feared Daniel more.

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Dayce found Alan seated on the floor of his chamber, playing solitaire. Jamie was lying on the unmade bed, leading over the edge, watching Alan's every move in undisguised amazement at his dexterity and memory. Vincent sat next to Alan, cross-legged, his eyes alive with the same feelings of amazement and respect. They all looked up as he entered the chamber, but Alan was first to speak. "Hey, Dayce," he said softly, extending his arm towards Dayce, his fingers spread apart. Dayce locked his fingers around Alan's and allowed himself to be drawn to the floor. Alan's arm went around his shoulders quickly while his lips moved to Dayce's cheek in fleeting welcome. "We were afraid the storm would keep you away."

"They've got the major streets pretty much open, but the city is still snarled. I used the tunnel in the building near the loft. It wasn't that tough." He looked to the others quickly. "Are we ready?"

"As ready as we can be," Jamie answered, her face hard.

"How is Catherine?" Vincent asked softly.

"Resting."

"She won't be at the meeting?" Alan asked.

"No," Vincent answered, caressing Alan's shoulder reassuringly. "Our laws allow only one from outside the tunnels to speak for your petition. Dayce felt he should be your sponsor from the world above."

"I just wanted her there for moral support."

"She sends her love and her support, Alan. And she'll be down as soon as she recovers from her injury."

Alan shook his head sadly. "Vincent told me about her friend and her family. I can't believe anyone would kill for no reason." He stopped, then added softly, "...well, maybe I can believe it... but I can't understand how one can do something like that and still call themselves human." He turned to Dayce suddenly, concern tinging his every word. "Is Cathy safe?"

"Yes. She's in your loft. Denton has no way of knowing that. There's an FBI special agent who is seeing to her safety. She'll be all right, Alan." Dayce took his hand and held it gently in his own. "Don't worry about anything right now except what you will say to the Council."

"I'm kinda' nervous."

"Don't be," Jamie said easily. "You'll be among friends." She looked at Vincent and Dayce, her face a stark contrast to the safe, secure tone of her voice. She was grateful for this one moment, that Alan could not see her as she spoke. "The Council rarely rejects petitions for citizenship."

"Just be honest and tell the truth. Your reasons for coming below mirror many other peoples." Vincent added. ".And once the petition is approved, you will never be in danger from above."

"I can stay forever?"

"Yes," Vincent said gently. "For as long as you wish."

"That's all I ask," Alan said, leaning against Dayce playfully. Dayce returned the shove gently, their arms moving around each other in tickling attack, their bodies falling together to the chamber floor, their high, thin shrieks of laughter filling the room.

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The Tunnel Council meeting had been subdued. There was little of the carefree banter discussion that normally went on before Father's gavel sounded and the business agenda was addressed -- there was virtually no laughter or argument as the minor items on the agenda were dealt with in assembly-line fashion, little emotion being shown even by those who dissented from the majority positions on these items. The South Tunnel Project approved unanimously, as was a new library chamber in the northern tunnels and a requirement for additional readings in philosophy before bestowal of teaching status in that discipline. As the meeting progressed, the minor items were disposed of with unprecedented speed, no one seeming to wish to break the tenseness at the table. Only Kanin seemed unaffected by the other members -- his face remaining serious and calm, as it always was at these meetings. Dayce and Alan sat quietly off to one side, quiet and attentive.

"And so, the vote being 7-0, the proposal is approved."

Father set the page in front of him and affixed a wax seal to the base, adding his signature beside it. Each of the others who had voted in the affirmative signed as the document passed to them, each affixing their own seals into hot wax beside their names. When the page reached Father, it was placed on the pile of other approved resolutions, ready for binding.

The final petition lay in front of Father. Everyone present knew what it was. Father looked down at it. He seemed reluctant to pick it up, but he saw the eyes of the others on him, expectant, waiting. Slowly, he lifted the sheet and began to read. "Be it enacted, from this date, that the petitioner -- Alan Mark Trescoe -- be granted sanctuary in these tunnels and full citizenship." Father raised his head slowly. "Is the petitioner present?"

"Yes," Alan said softly. He stood up, his movements halting and jerky.

"Does the petitioner have a representative from above?"

"Yes." Dayce said, his voice clear and slightly louder than necessary.

"Does the petitioner have a representative from the tunnels to stand by him at this time?"

"Yes." Jamie had leaped to her feet faster than Vincent could respond. They looked at each other for a moment, then Jamie turned to the head of the table. "I will stand for Alan and speak on his behalf."

Vincent looked over at Dayce, his eyes surprised.

"The petitioner's representative from above will be first to speak. What is your name?"

"Dayce DiCenzo."

"And what is your relation to these tunnels, Mr DiCenzo?"

"I am a friend of Catherine Chandler's."

"But you are not a helper."

"That is not required, Father." Vincent said softly, but his voice carrying a warning edge to it. Everyone present was aware of the warning.

"Of course. Mr DiCenzo, you wish to speak for Mr Trescoe. You are permitted five minutes. At the conclusion of your statement, members of this Council are permitted to question you. Do you understand these restrictions?" Dayce nodded. "Please stand at the end of the table so we may see and hear your statement."

Dayce walked to the foot of the table slowly and stood before the Council, his head raised. He looked back to Alan for a moment, his glance softening slightly as he caught sight of his face reflected in the dim torchlight, the hair as yellow as the flames. He turned and looked at the faces before him, then began speaking -- his voice calm and respectful.

"I come before you in support of Alan Mark Trescoe. I have known Alan a short time - and about these tunnels and the people who inhabit them shorter still. But it took only a moment for me to understand what these tunnels mean to all of you, and the people you represent here in this Council. And it took less time for me to know that Alan Trescoe is worthy of joining you in these tunnels, in sanctuary from a world above that has taken away his sight and which now threatens to take away his freedom.

"The night I first learned of these tunnels, I met many wonderful people -- and I met Vincent, who is one of the most extraordinary humans I have ever encountered" Dayce noted Vincent's demeanor change slightly on hearing these words, his eyes brighter and more proud than they had been a moment before, but his embarrassment evident in his bringing his hand to his forehead in a futile attempt to hide his eyes from the others. "The sorrow of the occasion of my meeting most of you was more than overcome by curiosity and my admiration for what has been achieved here. And in those moments I realized that this was a world where Alan could start life over again. A world without prejudice and hatred. I felt I could help him discover the benefit of remaining here spending the rest of his life among you. But I did not have to convince Alan of the soundness and rightness of this decision. He reached it without my help, or the help of anyone else who stands by his side now. He 'saw' this world with his heart and his mind. The sight he was deprived of in the world above was not important -- not a part of his decision. He saw this world the way it should be seen." Dayce looked over to Alan, face barely visible in the darkness. "He saw what was important."

"I love Alan Trescoe. The same as many of you love others in your life." He paused for a moment. "The same way Vincent loves Catherine." He caught Jamie's smile and nod of encouragement and smiled in return. "And I want the man that I love to have the best life possible, a life free of attack and abuse and imprisonment. He deserves a life of thought and of affection -- the same thought and affection he shows to those he loved and loves. He deserves to live among you, to learn from you, and in ways you cannot imagine, teach you. That is Alan's special sense and his special gift. To all of us."

Dayce fell silent, watching the faces around the table. "I can answer your questions now

No one spoke for several seconds. Then Father leaned forward, his voice low. "Of what crime is Alan accused above?"

"Murder," Dayce answered.

"What was the verdict of the jury that tried him?"

"They found him not guilty of murder, guilty of second-degree manslaughter."

"Who was the murder victim?" Jamie asked

"His lover. A man named Mark Ventura."

"And to the best of your knowledge, did Alan commit the murder he was charged with?"

"No. He was a victim in the same attack."

"How can you be sure of this?" Father asked.

"Because Vincent witnessed the incident." Dayce said quietly.

Mary and William looked at Vincent, their faces inquisitive. He nodded silently, his eyes moving from one to the other as he did so.

"So Alan is innocent?" Jamie asked, her tone abrupt.

Dayce nodded. He was keeping an eye on Father, but he had not raised his eyes since his first question. He seemed intent on his own thoughts in this moment.

"Our helpers above have told us that the police think Alan was kidnapped. What will the courts do if Alan is not found?"

"They will issue warrants for his arrest and begin an investigation. Also, the FBI will be called in if it is definitely established that a kidnapping did take place."

William and Mary sat back in their chairs, their eyes moving to Alan simultaneously.

"I have an important question." A voice said quietly. Everyone turned to Kanin, who had sat quietly through Dayce's speech and the questions. "You state that you love Alan. If he is granted sanctuary in these tunnels, are you prepared to join him here? Will you come below as a citizen of the tunnels?"

Dayce looked Kanin directly in the eyes, his voice calm. "In time, yes. For now, I can best serve Alan and his safety by remaining in the world above."

"And can you guarantee the authorities will never be able to trace Alan to these tunnels?"

Dayce lowered his head slightly, but he would not lie. "No, I can't. There's always a chance these tunnels might be found. But that would be true if Alan were granted sanctuary or not."

Kanin nodded once, his expression unreadable. He looked over at Alan, studying him in silence -- but Dayce could tell he was seeing more than Alan. He could not guess what past sight Kanin was reliving in this moment.

"What skills would Alan bring the tunnels?" William asked abruptly.

"Alan has a college degree in philosophy. He has written a book and several plays. He also can serve as a teacher of Braille and of hand sign language should any other citizens of this world fall blind."

"These tunnels are a treacherous place even for those of us who can see clearly. Does Alan require assistance in moving about in this world?"

"For a time, yes. But Alan can learn his way in time and become basically independent of that kind of assistance. He can learn to 'see' using methods we do not use."

"And what if his sanctuary is granted, but your citizenship is not?" Father asked. He was looking straight at Dayce, his face cold and hard. The question seemed beyond mere concern or empathy -- it sounded almost like a threat.

"Certainly there are cases of tunnel citizens in love with people above?" Dayce said, his voice smooth as velvet, his eyes moving to Vincent for a moment, then back to Father. "It doesn't seem to have torn the fabric of this society apart." His voice was respectful, but there was a hint of confrontation there that the others did not catch, a hint that seemed to say 'Don't fuck with me, friend.' Only Alan and Vincent were aware of the change.

"You would continue to maintain your relationship with Alan?" Mary asked

"Yes."

"And if the authorities above should ever be able to track you here?" she continued.

Dayce looked at Mary, his smile somewhat muted now. He knew this was not her question -- that it was Father using her to mouth for his own fears. He wanted to spare her this, but his love for Alan far outweighed his desire to keep silent about the things he knew.

"Did they track you or your son here, Mary?"

Her eyes widened in an instant, the colour seeming to fade as they widened to two pale ovals in the reflected torchlight behind her. She trembled slightly for a moment, falling back against the chair, as if her muscles had lost all power save that of responding to gravity. She turned to Father quickly, desperately. "You promised me..." but did not finish the sentence. She could only look at Father in horror.

"What has Mary or her son to do with..." Father sputtered.

"Mary did flee to these tunnels with her son when a Federal warrant was issued for him 1968, did she not? I believe it was for draft evasion?" Dayce looked at Mary, his eyes gentle. "I'm sorry, Mary, but the question would seem to be relevant."

"How... how could you know this?" Father said, aghast.

"I have access to a nationwide criminal justice data file. I am a defence lawyer, Mr Wells. I know quite a lot about defending people." His tone was unmistakable now -- his adversarial position tangible now to everyone at the table. "I was asked a question about surveillance by the authorities. I was merely asking why such a thing would be an issue in this case, but not an issue in 1969. I think my answer was adequate. Unless your sanctuary law is fluid."

"I was never a danger to the tunnels," Mary said quickly, her glare at Dayce defiant.

"Neither will I be," Dayce answered.

"I don't see what my son's case has to do with this one."

"Then perhaps you should not have asked the question," Vincent said looking at Mary intently.

He watched as she shrank back into her chair, her face ashen. She lowered her head slightly, steadying her grip on the armrests through sheer force of will. After a few moments, she looked up at Dayce, her voice calm. "I apologize. I did not mean to suggest you were a threat to the tunnels." There was no hint of sincerity in her voice as she spoke, no emotion of any kind except a sense of vulnerability without protection.

"Are there any further questions of this witness?" Father hissed. No one spoke. "This witness is excused with the thanks of this Council," he continued, without looking up. Dayce moved back to his seat beside Alan, taking his hand in silence and caressing it gently through the silent moments. Only the rustle of paper and shuffling of chairs broke the silence and the tension.

"Will Alan's representative take the floor?" Father said. Jamie jumped up and moved to the end of the table, her eyes bright and her movements eager, the suppressed power of motion visible in the tensed muscles in her arms and shoulders as she stood waiting.

Father finally looked up, his eyes calmer, his anger fading as the seconds passed. "You also have five minutes in which to speak."

"I won't need five minutes."

"Proceed," Father said nervously.

Jamie stood straight, her eyes never leaving Father's face. "I have spent many hours with Alan since he came to us as a fugitive from the world above. I've talked to him about many things of importance, both to him and to me. He has a lot to offer us, both as a teacher and as a student. He has skills we need. We have the support and nourishment he needs. He lost the most important person in his life. He almost died trying to save him. Vincent sent him on his path to Catherine and to us."

"Not only does Alan have a right to expect our protection, we have a moral obligation to allow him to remain with us. He can't stay above without being found and jailed. We have a history of extending our hands and our hearts to those accused unjustly. I see no reason to oppose his petition simply because he might constitute a threat to the tunnels. We live with that threat every day of our lives. It is a fool's excuse.

"I have watched the leader of our world turn his back on his own son at his greatest moments of need. I have watched while citizens of this world have cowered in their chambers while Vincent and Catherine and others have risked their lives for the safety of this place. Now Father would have us stand tall and proud behind a loophole clause in law that serves to welcome those with no hope and no refuge above, into a world we claim is better and more just than the world above. We've always prided ourselves on these tunnels being a refuge. I can't bear to see them turned into a retreat for weaklings.

"I speak for many when I state now that if this petition is refused, I will leave the tunnels permanently. I will leave this world of love and support behind forever, because by rejecting principle for safety's sake, it will have lost any value or meaning to me -- and to others for whom I speak. It will become no different than the world above. It will become a maze of holes in the earth filled with people who do not deserve its sanctuary. It will become a refuge for cowards."

She did not take her eyes from Father as she walked back to her chair. She could sense the surprise on the faces of those she passed, the shock of her threat electric in the air around them, reflected in the unseen faces around them. Not a person in the room believed she was bluffing with her threat.

"We may have questions for you." Father said quietly.

"I will answer no questions." There was no shred of uncertainty in her voice. "As a Council member, I am under no obligation to answer questions on this matter. I have given my statement I've said all I have to say."

"I see," Father answered contemptuously. "Very well. We will now hear from the petitioner. Will Alan Trescoe please step forward?"

Dayce let go of Alan's hand as he stood up, half rising in his chair, only to be forced down by Alan's insistent push. Slowly, Alan walked across the room to the end of the huge table, stopping inches away from the table edge. He stood still before them, his eyes set on a point slightly above Father's chair, his face calm and composed. He brought his hands forward to touch the end of the table, then drew them slowly to his side.

"Alan Trescoe, you appear before this Council to ask for sanctuary. Your lawful rights have been granted with the statements we have just heard. We do not grant those who sanctuary voice before this Council. Your only voice is your sanctuary petition, we have read -- and the words of your supporters. You are permitted, however, to clarify any remarks your supporters have made and to answer our questions. Do you understand these rights?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to clarify or amend any of the statements made to this Council by your supporters?"

"No. They have spoken their minds. While I did not know of Jamie's stand before this meeting, I cannot ask her to act against her own beliefs. I would have liked no one threatened by my actions except myself but that no longer seems possible. I do not want to see this place threatened by my presence, but my wish remains to remain here and to live the rest of my life working with and for the citizens of this world."

"Does anyone have any questions?"

There was a long silence. Then, just before Father rose, a voice stopped him. "If your petition is denied, what will you do, Alan?"

Alan turned in the direction of the voice and answered solemnly, "I will return above to face my prison sentence."

"Thank you." Kanin said softly. "I only wanted someone to ask it." He looked at Father, his eyes knowing, his smile one of sorrow and remembrance of the time when no one had asked it of him.

Alan inclined his head slightly and waited.

"If there are no more questions, the petitioner and his representative from above will leave this chamber while the Council deliberates and votes." He turned to Dayce. "You will accompany Alan back to Dev... to his chamber?"

"Yes," Dayce answered, walking to Alan's side and guiding him gently towards the chamber door. Alan struggled to keep his body out of Dayce's grasp, determined to show the Council that he could manage his way without help. As they watched, he mounted the stone steps to the chamber door and moved past the torches that hung there, Dayce just behind but close enough to prevent any injury should Alan's steps carry him towards fire or stone. Alan did not miss a step as he vanished from the chamber.

"Does anyone wish to add anything further before the vote?" Father said quickly, too anxiously.

"I do," Vincent said abruptly. He turned to Father, his countenance and voice equally angry. "Why have you chosen this path?"

Father looked up quickly, his surprise obvious in the unrhythmic jerk of his head. "What path?"

"This determination and stubborn refusal to deal with Alan as you would anyone else in similar circumstances."

"I do not see my treatment of this petition as any different from anyone else's request to avoid punishment above."

"Alan is guilty of no crime, Father."

"His jury felt otherwise."

"His jury does not govern here."

"I agree. Tunnel Law governs here. And Article Eight is quite explicit on this matter."

Vincent shook his head quickly. "Article Eight is ambiguous on this point. Sanctuary is granted prior to the exception for lawbreakers. The intent of the article was to offer sanctuary first unless the petitioner was guilty of their crime *in actuality*. That does not apply to Alan."

"You say it does not apply to Alan. Twelve others decided differently. We have only your word that he did not kill this man."

The others looked at Father, aghast. "You think I would lie about this?" Vincent said.

"I think you would lie for a friend of Catherine's, yes. You've said you would do *anything* for her. We have all heard you say as much. Why wouldn't you lie to save her friend?"

"I would never lie to shield a murderer. Not even for Catherine."

Father leaned back in his chair, a smile spreading over his face. "Perhaps not. But even if you are telling the truth, we cannot afford to risk this man's presence in the tunnels. There is a warrant for his arrest and the FBI is looking for him as well. We cannot take such a chance."

"A warrant is not the same thing as guilt of a crime. The sanctuary clause..."

"Is explicit. Shall I quote it."

"We all know the clause, Father. We don't need your rendition at this moment" Jamie said angrily.

"Listen, I hate to deny anyone sanctuary here. But what if Father is right. With two groups after Alan, that makes him a greater risk than we should have to bear. There's more at stake here, than one man's life. I mean, it isn't as if Alan will die if he can't stay here. After all, Kanin came back." William looked to Kanin for support, but found none in his words or his eyes.

"Yes," Kanin said heavily. "I came back."

"So, I say we don't risk the rest of the community. Once Alan has served his served his time, we would welcome him. Gladly."

"Did you take a good look at Alan, William?" Vincent asked quietly.

"Yes. What are you driving at?"

"What do you think will happen to him in prison?"

"What does that..."

"Shut up!" Kanin said suddenly, the words sounding as if they had been ripped from his mouth, torn away from some remote part of his memory.

"I only meant..."

"You don't know what the hell you're talking about, William. I suggest you not say anything more about this subject." Kanin turned to the others. "None of you know what Alan will face in prison." He paused for a moment, then fixed Father with a fierce stare. "Would you like a graphic description of what it was like for me?"

"No. It has no bearing on this petition."

"You're a coward, Father," Jamie said suddenly, with no effort to conceal her contempt. "I never could figure out how you managed to climb to leadership of the Tunnel Council. Watching you, these last days, I understand."

"Stop it! All of you, please!" Mary had risen to her feet, but the words had taken a few moments more to reach them. Her features were contorted by rage. "I call the question of sanctuary to a vote!"

Vincent tried to take one of her hands, but she drew it away -- the flash of her arm's movement like that of a finger withdrawn from a hot stove. She looked down at the table, her hands in front of her, her head shaking slightly. Slowly, she caught her breath and went on, the words coming in short, raspy bursts. "I... have... the right... to call the question. I have... done... so... now." She looked up slowly. "I want... this... to... stop." She turned to Father, eyes flashing, body drawn tight as she sank back into her chair.

Vincent had drawn his hand away slowly, shaking his head. He turned from them and brought his clasped hands to his forehead, his face hidden by the balls of his fists. It would have seemed like a moment of prayer were his hands not trembling so.

Father drew himself up to the table and took the sanctuary petition in his hands. He poured a layer of wax at the base of the document, then passed it to the end of the table to his right. The vote would proceed in order around the table. "A vote to affirm shall be marked by seal. A vote to deny shall be entered by passing the document on." He looked at William. "Shall we begin?"

William looked at the document for a moment, then silently passed it to Jamie. She took the page without looking at William, turned to look Father directly in the eye, then slammed her mark into the hot wax -- her hand twisting several times, the movements forceful and angry. She passed the sheet to her left, to Pascal. He had been strangely silent, giving no sign of his feelings in the matter. He looked at the petition for several seconds, then slowly raised his seal and pressed it into the slowly hardening wax. He did not look up as he passed the document to Father.

Father looked at the two affirming seals briefly, then handed the document to Mary, his seal untouched. Mary's fingers trembled as she took the sheet of paper from him, her eyes caught by his

and held. She forced her eyes from his and turned to Vincent slowly, her gaze dropping to the table as she turned, not to have to face the more powerful gazes she knew were fixed on her.

Vincent did not hesitate for a moment, his seal burrowing deep into the wax. The three affirming seals stood boldly out from the irregular expanse of reddish wax. Silently, Vincent handed the petition to Kanin. All eyes rose now. Everyone knew the count was 3-3. Kanin would decide the matter.

Kanin looked around the table at the faces of his friends. He looked down at the paper for several long moments, his hand beginning to shake. But the shaking was not fear. It was anger. This was a position he had not chosen to be in, did not want to be in. He stood up slowly, his eyes on Father, then moving to Vincent slowly. Father's glance was expectant -- Vincent's, empathetic.

Slowly, he pulled a pen from his leather jacket. He wrote something at the base of the document near the bottom of the wax, then drew his seal firmly into his hand and struck it into the nearly-cool wax. He tossed the paper to Vincent, then turned and ran from the chamber without a word.

"What has he written?" Jamie asked, her voice dark.

Vincent unfurled the parchment paper and looked at it, then looked up -- his eyes soft and vaguely smiling.

"Abstain," he said softly.

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Joe leaned against the side of his car, his dark, down-lined, leather jacket shiny and stiff in the chill of night. He had sat for hours in the car, the heater fighting the chill to a draw. His leg muscles had started to cramp from his long wait and he decided to brave the cold and the drifting snow in order to ward off their rebellious spasms. He kept his eyes on Catherine's apartment and on the door to her building, waiting for either to announce her return. He was beginning to lose hope.

Suddenly, the lights blazed forth in her living room. He could see the delicate lace curtains and the shadow of a figure moving across the living room, the shadow falling on the ceiling of the room -- the long hair bearing witness to Catherine's presence. He started quickly across the street, chiding himself for allowing her to slip past his watchful gaze.

The doorman stopped him as he headed for the elevators. He found it odd -- he had never seen a doorman assigned to her building before this night.

"Who do you want?" the man asked insolently, his uniform and cap spotless and unwrinkled.

He was much larger than Joe physically, but not yet out of his twenties. It seemed odd to Joe to see a doorman this young. Joe forced the thought from his mind. "Catherine Chandler."

"Sorry," the stranger said. "'She isn't here."

"Of course she is. Her lights are on," Joe said as he tried to move past the man. He felt a muscled arm grab him around the bicep and hold him in place, refusing to let him pass. The man threw Joe back several paces and loomed in front of him.

"No one has come in this front door since I came on duty. You must be mistaken."

Joe eyed the man warily. He knew he was no match for this man physically. He backed off. "Look, I

know she's up there. I saw her lights."

The doorman lifted a walkie-talkie to his mouth and spoke brusquely. "Hey, Bob -- Terry here. You got the Chandler vehicle down there?"

"Affirmative," came the raspy reply. "Car hasn't left the building all day."

The man looked at Joe, triumphantly. "Her car hasn't entered or left the building all day. She hasn't come in this door all day. And she isn't in her apartment. Hasn't been in several days. We were told she's on vacation." He waited while Joe seemed to be trying to think of something to say. "Anything else?"

Joe shook his head several times. "No. Sorry. I'll try another time." He headed back out of the building slowly, looking back as the doorman returned to his chair by the front door and resumed reading his newspaper. Looking back over his shoulder, Joe heard the door that led to the basement garage open, then close with a loud thud. He heard the voice over the walkie-talkie squawk, "Hardisons, apartment 12F entering from garage level." The doorman looked back as a young woman and her young daughter appeared from the stairwell and headed for the elevators. "Ten-four." the doorman said lazily, then returned to his reading.

He headed back to his car and looked up at Catherine's apartment. The windows were dark, no sign of light or life within. He leaned against his car for a few minutes, but she did not emerge from the building. No car pulled out of the garage door that fed into the alley next to the building. There was no sign of Catherine Chandler at all -- yet he knew what he had seen just minutes before. "How the hell could she..." He scanned the roof, but dismissed the thought quickly. The buildings on either side were not the same height as her apartment building. There was no way out of the building that way...

He stopped abruptly, struck into numbed inner silence by a thought that was breaking open before him, taking shape as the seconds passed, spreading like the white-hot magma from a volcano. The rumble of a subway train shook the sidewalk and the grate near him, the rising steam vapour the wispy evidence of life and movement beneath his feet.

Suddenly Joe understood.

He was back in his car and headed south before the last rumble from the subway below had faded away to silence.

# The Vantage Point

There was silence at the Long table in the aftermath of Kanin's unexpected departure. Vincent had watched as Kanin had stalked from the room, his head down. When he slowly turned back to look at the others, only Jamie's head was unmoved, her eyes as bright and determined as they had been.

Father sat looking at the parchment still held between two aged fingers, the four seals at its base standing out through the translucent paper, out only three of the seals carrying any meaning. Vincent could not see the expression on his face, nor guess what his next words would be. Such an action had never happened in the Council before -- at least not in Vincent's memory.

Vincent turned back to Jamie. Her expression was hopeful. She smiled at Vincent, a faintly discernible raising of the corners of her mouth -- a faint nod accentuating the smile by suggesting she knew exactly what must follow now and was pleased at Kanin's decision.

"Well," Father finally said, his voice listless and unfocused. "Does anyone have anything to say?"

"What can we do?" Mary asked plaintively.

"Are there provisions for abstentions?" Pascal asked quietly. "I don't remember whether the laws take this into account."

"They don't," Vincent answered softly.

"No one ever imagined that a Council member would not vote on an issue." William added. "When the laws were drafted, there was no reason to expect something like this to happen."

"So now what happens?" Pascal asked. "Maybe Vincent can talk to Kanin..."

"No." Vincent said slowly. "None of us may speak with Kanin about this petition and then accept his vote. That wouldn't be fair to either side. Besides, Kanin did vote by seal. He voted to not decide this question."

"Since there weren't four seals for approval..." William began, but Jamie cut him short.

"Sorry, William. That isn't how law works. Kanin sealed the petition only with his silence on this issue. As a matter of fact..." She looked at Vincent expectantly. "What was the maxim of law above they taught us?"

"*Quinteca conscentiri.*" Vincent said softly.

"What does that mean?" William asked.

Vincent looked at him reluctantly. "Silence gives consent"

"So, by the maxim of the laws above, Kanin's silence can be seen as giving consent to the petition!" Jamie asked.

"No," Vincent said gently. "Kanin was silent only on the question of sanctuary, but he did not remain

silent in actual fact. He wrote the word 'ABSTAIN' on the petition and affixed his seal to it. His meaning here is crystal clear. He refuses to decide this issue with his vote."

"Maybe Kanin is too close to this. Considering what he went through when he went to prison, I can understand why he wouldn't want to vote on this."

"But all he had to do was vote 'yes' and he could have spared Alan the same fate."

Vincent looked at Jamie affectionately. "But Jamie, Kanin has more than just himself and Alan to consider. He also has a wife and child." Jamie looked at him, confused. "How could Kanin vote to permit sanctuary and face Olivia again? She went through a year of agony and the death of a child because her husband returned to pay his debt to the society above."

"But he was *guilty* of a crime. There's a difference!"

"I know that. Alan knows that. But the rest of you are at the mercy of my word and Alan's denial. Try explaining to Olivia why her husband had to suffer while Alan does not. I don't envy you that task."

"Then why didn't Kanin vote with Father and the others?" Jamie asked.

"Because he believed Alan and me. Because he knows what would happen to Alan in prison. Because he has a generous nature and doesn't want to sentence another man to that load of agony unless he were certain of the rightness of his decision. He wasn't."

"He was trapped," Mary said sadly.

"Yes." Vincent nodded. "He was. Wasn't he... *Father?*"

All eyes moved to Vincent quickly ---all except Father's. He remained seated, staring at the petition, his eyes down.

"What do you mean, Vincent?" Mary asked not quite believing what she thought she heard in Vincent's tone. It sounded almost accusatory, as if he felt this had been Father's plan all along.

Vincent did not speak. He merely stared at Father through the long silence, his expression measured and knowing.

"Father?" Mary asked, turning rapidly and placing a hand on his arm, her voice desperate. "Answer him. What does Vincent mean?"

"Vincent is speaking of the power of edict."

Jamie sprang to her feet, her features twisted by rage. "The power of edict to Council decisions!"

"The Council reached no decision, Jamie." Father said.

"Sanctuary is a *Council* matter. It is a lawful Article. It is not subject to edict!"

"All matters not resolved by Council are subject to edict. That power is Tunnel World Civil Code. Certainly you remember your history lessons?"

Vincent stood, his massive figure bringing the argument to a rapid halt. He was stooped over the table, his shoulders down, his hands spread before him for support. Slowly he raised his head and looked at

Jamie sadly. "Jamie, you cannot win this battle. The power of edict is clearly spelled out in our laws. The Council reached no decision. The head of the Tunnel Council can, under these circumstances, issue a decision by edict."

"But Vincent..."

He cut off her protest with a raised hand and a glare that grew in intensity as it left her face and moved to Father's. "Father knew this would happen. Don't you understand that? He knew Kanin would never send Alan above -- but he also knew that Kanin would be unable to face those he doomed to a lonely vigil, waiting for his return from prison. Kanin would not vote on this issue." He stood, his eyes looking down on Father for the first time -- with mistrust and hatred. "Didn't you, Jacob?"

The sound of Father's first name, pronounced with such suppressed intensity, brought the room to silence and terror. Father slowly backed away from the table, his eyes fearful yet strangely determined. Mary had stood also, standing between Vincent and jerking between the two in helpless, jerky movements.

"I shall issue a written decision on this question tomorrow morning at 10:00 o'clock. My edict shall constitute the final action on this petition." Slowly, he rolled the paper into a roll and walked away from the table, his eyes not leaving Vincent's until he was forced to turn at the staircase. At the top of the stairs, he turned, "Meeting Adjourned." he said softly, then disappeared.

William shook his head slowly as he lowered his huge body back into his chair. He looked at Vincent. "I didn't know this would happen, Vincent. If I had..." He looked at the others. "Perhaps I can..."

"You can't." Jamie said, her words like drops of soft lead against stone. "One vote. Once the petition is passed from your hand without your seal, there is no second chance. And you know the law. Only one petition for sanctuary is permitted." She looked at Vincent, sighing deeply. "There is nothing we can do to change the decision now."

Pascal looked at her, his concern obvious. "Jamie, you didn't really mean it when you said you would leave the tunnels?"

"Yes, I did. I will not remain here if Alan is turned away. Neither will many others."

"But you've spent your whole life here. You don't know anything about the world above. And we need you here."

"I can learn about the world above. I'm not a child anymore. If Devin could do it, then so can I!"

"We don't want you to leave, Jamie!" The cry was Mary's.

Jamie looked at her with ill-disguised contempt. "Ah, the rubber-stamp can actually speak!" She paused, shaking her head slowly. "You're a little late, Mary."

"Please, Jamie! I didn't want it to come to this! I would have voted to affirm only..." ..

"If only Jacob would love you?" Vincent asked softly.

Mary turned to him, her face a mask of pain and frustration. She seemed to be about to deny Vincent's words, to cry that she had not wanted to hurt anyone. But just when her lips parted, she sagged, as if the air had been let out of her body. She saw the futility of fighting words she knew to be true -- everyone present knew to be true. And in that moment of realization, she lost the strength of whatever

certainty she had clung to during these long minutes. She lowered her head slowly, her body falling back into her chair silently. She did not answer, did not look up.

Slowly, the others shuffled past her and out of the chamber, none of them saying a word to her or to any of the others. Pascal and William passed Vincent, their heads lowered. Pascal put his hand on Vincent's arm and squeezed it gently, then moved away.

Jamie followed quickly. She did not look up as she passed them. At the top of the stairs, her steps became a steady pounding of running as her footfalls against the stone echoed back to the Council chamber from the darkness outside.

In the silence that filled the room like a thick fog, Vincent could only stare at the frightened figure seated beside him. Her eyes avoided his, her head turned to the empty chair by her side. Vincent shook his head sadly. There was nothing more to be said, no more words of comfort to be offered. This was a pain and a guilt Vincent felt no desire to ease or assuage. He left the chamber, soundless as a shadow.

Alone with her choice and her guilt, Mary dropped her head to the table and wept. She was not sure for whom.

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The last hour had passed slowly. Dayce lay on Devin's bed, his back pressed to a multitude of pillows that lay piled against the ornate mahogany headboard -- his legs spread apart, his arms encircling Alan's chest. Alan lay against Dayce, his back finding comfort against Dayce's chest -- his legs thrown over Dayce's, his hands resting on Dayce's lazily. When he lay his head back against Dayce's chest, he would turn to one side or the other, his hair falling in coppery waves against Dayce's neck and jaw. They had talked little during this hour. These moments seemed properly silent, a time for thought and for touch. A few of these moments had been spent in pure sensual pleasure -- Alan turning and drawing Dayce's face to his, their lips barely touching in these moments -- the unreleased desire behind these kisses building within them, then passing as their lips melted together and the depth of what they felt for each other found expression in the movement of their hands, their tongues, their bodies. In these moments, each found from the other the wordless acknowledgement that their unvoiced thoughts were of a shared desire. Dayce would let Alan tum away when he wished, but he never let his hand leave Alan's body. Whether draped against his arm or lazing in the tangle of copper and gold of his hair, this was one contact he would not relinquish. The touch of this man was like a bandage for his own wounds. "I love you; Dayce."

The words came from nowhere. Only the touch of Alan's fingers coursing over the hair of his forearm and a slight movement of his head as he relaxed deeper into Dayce's chest marred their immobility. And now these words, seeming to say what until this moment had merely been sensed in brief moments.

The gentleness of the words stood in stark contrast to the shock of destructive power they sent through Dayce. He could feel his body tense at the sound, his mind trying to find the words to push this feeling aside, to not have to deal with a feeling he desperately sought and yet dreaded with each passing day. He could not find the words to name what he felt, to warn Alan of the mistake of trying to love him. Every fibre of his being was screaming out to accept the words, to echo them, to accept from Alan what he had accepted from no man before.

"Thank you for the things you said on my behalf," Alan added.

Dayce pulled him closer, felt Alan's hands on his arms in answer. He hoped Alan would understand his answer to his first statement as the answer to the second. "I meant every word."

"I know."

"I only hope it was enough."

Alan half-turned, his cheek resting against Dayce's chest. He could hear the beating of the heart beneath his ear, feel Dayce's fingers course through his hair. "It was enough for me. That's what matters most." He felt Dayce's lips against his neck and rolled his head higher against his chest, reveling in the touch.

The sound of footsteps in the corridor outside reached them. Dayce raised his head and Alan turned towards the doorway, his arms falling back to rest along Dayce's arms. Vincent entered the chamber slowly, his face composed, his eyes bright. He sat at the foot of the bed, one leg drawn across the other.

"Is the vote over?"

"Yes," Vincent said softly.

"And...?" Alan asked, his eyes shining.

"I don't know."

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Dayce said. "What was the vote?"

"The vote was 3 in favor and 3 opposed"

Alan moved his head quickly back towards Dayce's face, then back to Vincent again. He looked confused. "I thought there were seven members on the Council."

"Who abstained?" Dayce asked, understanding too well what had happened.

"Kanin Evans."

Alan sat up, his eyes wide. "Abstained? Why?"

Vincent took one of Alan's hands in his own, caressing it gently as he spoke. "Kanin faced a similar situation, Alan. He went above to face a prison term for a crime he did commit. Now Father had asked him to send you above to face something he could not in good conscience, ask you to face."

"But then why..."

"Alan, Kanin left behind a wife and a newborn son. They faced a year of torture. By the time he came back, his son had died. His wife was grief-stricken. She still bears the scar of his exile. He could not vote in your favour after the pain and suffering he caused his own family. He was in an impossible position." Vincent watched as Alan's face relaxed. "He didn't want to hurt you or his family. He took the only way out he could see that would protect both of you."

"Was it... me." Alan asked, his voice weak.

Vincent clasped his hands firmly, his voice steady. "No, Alan. Remember that. It had nothing to do with you. If it weren't for the legal problem, I think the vote would have been unanimous in your favour. Remember that."

Dayce sat up behind Alan, his arms encircling him gently. "So what happens when a vote is tied?"

Vincent looked at Dayce, afraid to go on.

"Do I have to leave?" Alan asked, his voice thin and fearful.

"Father has claimed the right of edict, He will announce his decision at a special Council meeting tomorrow morning."

Dayce looked aghast. "You mean, Jacob Wells gets to decide? By himself?" Vincent nodded.

"How did he vote tonight?" Alan asked. The silence that greeted his question answered his question. He drew closer to Dayce, his eyes dropping. "I guess I'd better stop thinking about a life here..." His voice trailed off, the silence reflecting his sorrow.

"There's nothing we can do?" Dayce asked.

Vincent shook his head. "We can try to persuade Father at the next meeting, but the right to edict is his. He is president of the Council. And the petition cannot be presented again."

"Ever?" Alan asked.

"Until the reasons for the refusal have been met. Father will state those in his edict but we know what they will be."

"What about Catherine? Have you..."

"Not yet."

"Maybe it would be better if I..." Dayce began, but a shake of Vincent's head stopped him. His eyes met Vincent's in helplessness. "This will kill her. She risked so much..."

Vincent rose slowly, his hands remaining for a moment clasped around Alan's in support. "I promised Catherine I would return tonight. He looked at Dayce earnestly "Will you stay with Alan?"

He nodded, the side of his face pressed against Alan's coppery locks, his eyes brighter than the light should make them. Vincent paused at the chamber door for a moment, his gaze falling on the two of them. He felt hopelessness wash over him like a wave, leaving only bitterness and resentment in its wake.

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Catherine had spent the hours of the afternoon in another world, of solitude and sunshine -- of unrestrained freedom and unremitting cold. The loft seemed too confining to her, too much like a prison. She longed for the light of the park, the effort of forcing her way through the snow. She knew that there would be few people out, but she had promised Daniel to remain inside until Dayce returned, She had tired of the radio -- the too frequent interruptions for weather news -- and she had turned instead to Alan's book. She had spent the day with his words, their gentle truth and insight a welcome escape from despair. As she read on, she could not help but think, 'If he could live through this horror, what right do I have to complain'.

She had reread one passage several times, its tone and meaning reaching some part of her she could not name. She read the passage again, the words now a part of her memory.

'The things we hold most dear, most important in our lives, can turn against us in less time than can be imagined. The hands of a sculptor can be crippled by disease, by accident, by insight lost or by talent drained through indifference. The swift legs of the athlete can be severed, their bones destroyed by cancer, their joints made fast by arthritis. The eyes, our windows to the world, can become useless circles of colour, through simple accident or the darkest evil intent of man -- through torture, rage, or age in measures too great. The love of those we think we need, we count as measures of our lives -- this is the most easily lost of all -- the foundation within us more delicate than most, but most likely to crack and fall when needed most.

It is in those moments when we lose the things we value most that the common measure of our strength stands revealed to all, but to none more completely than to ourselves. For some, the loss is enough to topple each support - even those that remained intact. They die inside the pillars crumbling one upon another like spires of sand on some tide-engulfed beach. For others, the loss can do no more than destroy some small part of our strengths, the waves against these spires borne and broken, the spires of sand torn by the water and the wind, but standing firm in spite of scars and cracks -- the imperfections borne forever.

Finally, for some, the loss is just as real and just as painful as for others, but their strength within absorbs the blows without a telltale crack or scar to mark the pillars -- the waves from the ceaseless tides of life are split and tossed aside to crash upon weaker walls, and spirits more of sand than of stone. The sum of all our strengths support us and buy us time to shape and hew fresh strength for future blows -- or refashion strengths untouched into pillars more strong and sturdy than before. And through our labours, we discover that the strength was there, within us, all along -- to be called upon when all seemed hopeless.'

It was late now, the windswept glow of sunlight around the loft dying slowly to a pale green-tinged yellow, then down again to indigo shades of blue and grey. There were lights blazing forth in the buildings across the street, in the distant towers that poked above them, in diamond-bright stars in a clear sky that draped over all, seeping into the shafts between the buildings then bursting forth as from a geyser to spread across the tops of the windows.

She had watched as the pale rectangle of the skylight echoed the draining colors, turning to a black rectangle bereft of the light of even a single star -- the black rectangle darker even than the dark of the room beneath. Now she lay on the sofa, Alan's book lying finished beside her, the oval of light from the reading lamp bathing her face and upper body in brilliance while leaving the rest of the room unrevealed. She was near sleep.

The tapping came twice... the sound of bits of ice or pebbles against glass, but coming too rhythmically to be either of these intruders. She jumped up quickly and walked to the skylight. She knew he was there -- even before she had pulled the shades shut in all the windows and raised the skylight with the Jong stick. She saw Vincent's hand grasp the window and pull it aside, his form filling the rectangle for a moment, then a black form filled the room as he leaped to the floor, his cape spreading like an eagle's wings through the brief second of his fall.

She embraced him, the chill of the night soaked into his cape, his clothing, his hair. She felt his arms around her -- like fingers of ice against her thin nightgown. She shivered at his touch, but her mouth found and held his against hers. She exulted in the flood of his cold touch, of his warm tongue mingled with hers.

When she pulled back to look at him, she knew something was wrong. Her eyes searched his, not quite

believing it could be true.

"What happened?" she asked.

He led her back to the sofa, the light falling on her as before, his face caught in random bits of reflection from her gown, from the white leather of the sofa -- the spark in his eyes muted in the shadows. He took her hands in his. "The Council deadlocked, Catherine."

She looked at him blankly. "How can seven people..."

"Kanin abstained from the vote."

She nodded. She understood Kanin's reluctance to decide such an issue. It was too personal, too close. "What happens now?"

Vincent sighed heavily, his eyes fixed on her hands held before him, his mind lost in a moment's vision of his own making. He finally focused on her face again, his voice reluctant. "President's edict."

"You mean... *Father* will decide?"

"Yes. Tomorrow morning"

Vincent was shocked to see Catherine's face change before his eyes, the elements seeming to melt, then harden in ever-changing shades from disbelief to anger, then to contempt. Her eyes retreated from lustrous green to pale emerald, then the colour seemed to fade as the dark ovals widened, driving the colour aside. Her lips moved to two thin smears of red, set tight and taut, her mouth hard and closed. She was looking in his direction, but he knew she was not seeing his face -- she was seeing some vision of her own, the ruthlessness of her face its only release she would permit. When she finally seemed to see Vincent again, her eyes were frightening in their intensity.

"No." she said, her tone calm, but certain. "He will *not* decide."

"But Catherine..."

"*You* will decide, Vincent."

He looked at her, unbelieving. "I do not preside over the Council, Catherine."

She looked at him for a moment and smiled, but her smile carried not a trace of affection or empathy or pride. For one brief moment, he sensed some emotion behind her smile that he had never sensed before -- but he forced the thought from his mind in the next instant. He could not accept revenge as a motive, not from the woman he loved.

"Tell me, Vincent," she said slowly, every word measured. "Why did the three who voted against Alan fail to support him?"

"You know the reasons, Catherine. We all knew them before the petition was brought."

"The jury verdict and the warrant for Alan's arrest?"

It seemed more statement than question, but Vincent answered, "Yes."

Catherine got up and walked to a table in the corner and reached into her briefcase. Inside, Vincent

could see huge stacks of folders and papers banded with brown and green. She pulled out a stack of papers and thumbed through it, then pulled a single sheet from the sheaf and walked slowly back to him, the pale rectangle of white paper becoming clearer as she approached, then bathed in the bright light that lit the spot where she had lay moments before. She dropped the file folder on the table beside him and handed the sheet in her other hand to him. The dark rectangles of typing bled through the paper. She held the paper before him, her face composed and unsmiling.

Vincent read the paper for several moments, then raised his eyes to hers. "Good God." he said softly. "This can't be true..."

"Look at the date." She watched as he raised his eyes slightly, then returned to the words beneath. She watched him in silence.

When he finished reading, he looked up at Catherine. She could not read his expression in the darkness. She waited in silence.

"Catherine... how long..." He struggled for his words now, his voice beginning to falter. "How long... have you known..."

"Almost a month." She walked to the bar slowly, leaving Vincent with his thoughts. She knew she could not help him in this moment. The circumstances allowed him no refuge. They both understood that. She poured a half glass of scotch for herself, turned and took a long sip, watching Vincent's inner struggle with his thoughts. She knew what it was doing to him. It had done as much to her, but she knew his pain and anger would be worse. She watched as he slowly read the other pages in the file, his eyes lifting from the pages occasionally -- his gaze moving to some far-off vision of his own. He did not turn to her, did not ask any questions. The minutes stretched behind them, the sound of the pendulum clock on the wall behind her accentuated by the silence, the mechanical movement like the steady drip of water on stone. She took another mouthful of scotch, her eyes never leaving his hands. She saw them tremble only once.

He would need her soon. She understood that. She had been able to face the betrayal and the loss of trust on her own and had kept the knowledge to herself. But this was Vincent's own family -- his only unquestioned tie to the world around him, a world of humans -- a world he desperately sought but of which he knew he was not a part. He would need to grieve -- time to heal. Time to regain the strength she knew he carried within. She would be there when he needed her.

But for now, downing the last of her drink, she knew he was alone with his knowledge and his pain. The sum of his strengths would protect him where she could not.

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"There must be a way to stop him!"

Jamie's words named what everyone in the chamber was thinking. Vincent's eyes never left Catherine's face. She watched the others, their faces morose. Dayce sat beside Alan, his arm around Alan's shoulders. Alan had said nothing while those around him spoke. For a moment, she regretted her decision to return with Vincent to face them, but she knew she must stand by Alan in this moment.

"There isn't anything we can do. Not the way I read your laws." Dayce said, a hint of contempt creeping into his voice.

"Perhaps we could call for another vote. After all, it doesn't seem fair to allow a single citizen to dictate law in the event of a deadlock on the Council."

"Tell that to whoever drafted your laws, Jamie." Dayce said slowly. "The law is specific. Your people supported it back when the documents were drafted. There's nothing to be done about it now." He looked at Catherine intently. "Obviously none of those who drafted these laws was a lawyer or a historian."

"How many edicts have been handed down before?" Catherine asked.

Vincent thought for a few moments. "Six or seven. Most of them declare certain outer sections of the tunnels off limits. There are many unexplored tunnels that lead away from the limits of our own world. There were expeditions into some of these many years ago. Some never returned. Finally, Father and John declared certain tunnels off limits. Most of those edicts were handed down in the late 1950's. I was a child then -- I don't have a very clear memory of those times."

"Any others?"

Vincent seemed reluctant to continue. He looked at Catherine, his eyes beseeching her not to press on with her questions. But there was no softening in her eyes -- no signal to him that he could remain silent. "Yes. One other. The Council deadlocked over a sanctuary petition in the early 1970's. Father's edict led to the expulsion of another tunnel citizen."

Catherine stared at him for a few seconds, her eyes wide and frightened. She understood. "Mitch Denton?" she whispered.

Vincent nodded. He turned to the others, his eyes sad. "There were those who felt we could reclaim him from the mistakes he had made above. We tried to convince Father to allow him another chance with us. But Father would have none of it. He was adamant that any breaking of law above was sufficient for expulsion and exile. The fact that Mitch had a warrant for his arrest hanging over his head was the final nail in his coffin. The fear of discovery was even stronger in those days than today. I fought for Mitch then. It did no good."

"So he was delivered above, to prison." Catherine said tonelessly. "To a world of men who taught him how to kill without feeling or remorse." Her gaze did not fall on anyone present -- it was almost as if she were addressing an unseen presence in the room. "It could all have been prevented -- Frank Sweeney's death, my wounding," she paused, the first signs of emotion creeping into her voice. "The death of my friend and her family. All of that because..."

"What are you talking about, Cathy?" Jamie sputtered. "I thought Denton was gone."

"No, Jamie." She jerked her head to Vincent.

"He's not gone. He killed three people -- a friend of Catherine's and her husband and child."

"But why? Why hurt Cathy's friends?"

"

To hurt us all, Jamie. To get back at Catherine and I for nearly destroying him"

Jamie shook her head slowly. "More blood on Father's hands."

"That's not fair, Jamie. How could Father have known!"

"How could he have known," she snorted. "He spends twelve hours a day reading every book ever written and you ask a question like that!"

"I'm sure he felt he was doing the right thing."

"Well, you can think whatever makes you feel better, but not me!" She fixed Vincent a steely glance. "What does Father have to do to make you turn against him, Vincent? Does he have to kill one of us? Kill Catherine?" She saw his anger rising, but went on heedlessly, "Is there any part of you that doesn't worship at Father's altar!"

"Jamie, please." Alan began.

"Quiet, Alan," she said quickly, her tone softening slightly. "This concerns Vincent me." She turned back to Vincent, her eyes ablaze. "Well?"

"I can't speak for Father, Jamie. I don't know what he feels. I don't pretend to understand his intransigence on these questions. But I don't blame him because he followed his convictions. It isn't his fault that Denton chose the path he has taken."

"Of course not! I'm sure Father meant his vote for exile and expulsion to teach Mitch a valuable lesson about life and love and loyalty. And Mitch certainly learned the lesson well, didn't he? How many people has he killed -- that we know about? How many suffered at Father's callous hand? How many deaths has Father's intransigence wrought?" Vincent remained silent, his eyes downcast. "Once... just once, I'd like to see you stand up to Father! I'd like to see you speak your mind and not give a damn what that bastard thought of you! For thirty years, you've been at his beck-and-call, protecting these tunnels and keeping them safe for his rules and his manipulations! You've killed at his command, turned your back when he punished those who dared speak against him -- it's almost like you're Father's personal pet!!" He looked up at her quickly, fury rising in his eyes. "Hell, even a dog will bite its owner's hand if it hurts him too often!"

Vincent leaped to his feet, his anger released in one violent lunge upwards. He stood over Jamie, his eyes ablaze. Then, slowly, he backed away a step and sighed, regaining composure -- as if he were surprised to find himself standing, the moment between lost to his conscious memory.

"What a shame you never got that angry at Father during the Council meeting. It might have done some good then."

"Please stop." The cry was Alan's, and it brought the room to silence. "I don't want you to fight among yourselves -- especially over me. It isn't anyone's fault." He grabbed Dayce's hand tightly, his eyes resigned. "I can go back above to face their prison, if I have to. As long as I know you'll be here when I get out..."

Dayce turned to him, taking his hands in his own. "We don't want you to go back, Alan. You have no idea what it will be like."

"I know what to expect. I... I know what goes on in those places. As long as I don't have to see it..."

Jamie fixed Catherine and Vincent with knowing stares, then slowly walked out of the chamber.

Catherine looked at Vincent, her expression an open plea for help. Slowly, he moved to the floor beside Alan and knelt down. "Alan, listen to me. I want you to tell me the truth. Don't tell me what you think I want to hear, what you think Dayce or Catherine or anyone else wants you to say. Just tell me the truth. Do you want to remain in the tunnels forever?"

They watched as Alan's fingers moved slowly over and among Dayce's, luxuriating in the touch, afraid to

lose their hold on the one solid mooring they had found. Alan's eyes were fixed on Dayce, lustrous and green in the light, his features serene in the thought as he answered softly, "Yes."

"Then you will." Vincent said softly -- his hand reaching forward and grasping Alan's shoulder for a moment in support. He looked up at Catherine, determination and strength lighting his face.

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Catherine leaned slightly against Dayce as the elevator screeched to a stop, the doors clattering open slowly to the hallway, the darkness unrelieved by any light from the dead bulb in the dingy fixture overhead. Her head was aching now, the long walk through the tunnels and the brief run through the bitter cold darkness outside had conspired to resurrect the pain she thought she had overcome. The effects of the scotch were beginning to wear off now, the light-headedness returning.

Dayce thrust his key into the door and helped her inside, pausing briefly at the threshold to pick up a small envelope that had been slid under the door. He turned on the lamp near the sofa and helped her off with her coat, then tore the flap aside.

"What's that?" Catherine asked when she opened her eyes.

"It's from Bellasco. He wants one of us to call him. Says it's important."

She started to get up but he took her shoulder in his hand and forced her to lie back down. "You lie down. You've got to take it easy for a while." He pulled his scarf and gloves off and went to the kitchen. He jammed the telephone receiver into the crook of his neck and dialed a number quickly, then filled a teakettle with water and put it on the stove. He was reaching for the mugs when a voice answered.

"Bellasco? Yeah, it's me... no, no... just went for a short walk... We were both feeling a little restless... no, we didn't... what... *what???*..." He turned to look at Catherine quickly, then turned away, his voice barely audible now. She heard only a few more short bursts of conversation, then a muffled 'I will... then, silence.

Catherine pulled herself to her feet and walked to the kitchen, her face cast by curiosity and concern. She stood silently a few feet from Dayce. He did not look at her, but continued the automatic movements necessary to brew two cups of tea.

"Well?" she said slowly.. "What's happened?"

He had been unwrapping a tea bag, but she watched as he slowly put the half-opened white envelope down on the counter, saw his body rise and fall once as he took a deep breath. When he turned to face her, she saw the reflection of his words in his eyes before he spoke them, and what those words left unsaid. "Catherine... it's Jenny Aronson..."

For some span of moments she could not remember, her face was frozen -- a collection of features caught in shapes and shadows that added up to no discernible sum -- like collection of features from many people and many moods combined into some lifeless icon of a human countenance, but with no defining emotion to give meaning to the result. Then slowly, Dayce watched as her hand closed around one of the mugs and, turning, hurled it against the brick wall behind them -- her body unleashing the fury she had found no words or outward expression to relieve. Her body sank slowly to the floor, only Dayce's swift hands around her waist preventing her from crashing into the wall herself. Fighting, he knelt and tried to move to embrace her, but her arms struggled to fight him off, to push him aside. Slowly, sounds forced their way from her throat. They did not form any human words that Dayce could understand, but slowly they became some animal form of the word 'No!', the endless guttural moan and her arms beating slower and slower against him the only protest she could summon. Gradually, he

was able to move in front of her, his arm around her -- holding her tight in his embrace, his quiet 'ssshhhhhh' breaking through the final throes of her rebellion and quieting her. There was one final 'No', clearly human, then the answer of her own arms around him, for support -- her only point of safety and hope left in a world she felt was no longer hers to live in or trust.

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Hours later, Catherine sat pressed into a corner of the sofa, a half-drunk cup of tea mixed with scotch beside her. Her hair hung in matted strands, her eyes were dark circles, still and lifeless even in the bright lamplight. It seemed to Dayce that she had moved beyond shock, beyond any capacity to think or feel or reason. Even the will to live seemed crippled within her now. She had mumbled incoherently while he had led her back to the sofa, had sat now for hours without expression. He had forced a few sips of tea., then added some scotch to try to relax her, to force sleep. Her trembling had stopped a few minutes ago. Now, dimly, he could sense some awareness to the glance that remained fixed on some distant spot.

"Cathy?" he said softly, moving to sit beside her, his hand touching her forehead gently.

She pulled her eyes to him lazily, the muscles around her mouth loose. She seemed to hear him. Her eyes were focused now, her skin warm now to his touch, her head held steady. He brought the mug to her lips again and let her swallow another mouthful of the mixture, pulling it away only when she pulled her tips away from the edge of the cup. He set the cup down gently.

"Cathy, can you hear me?"

She nodded, her eyelids lifting wider for a moment, her lips moving as if she wished to speak. Dayce put a finger to her lips and shushed her quietly.

"I'm taking you away from here. Away from New York. Tonight."

Her eyes widened, two pale ovals in the lamplight, her head shaking in the first desperate waves of denial, but he took her face in his hands and looked deep into her eyes, his voice remaining cool and empty of any emotion save love. "You have to leave the city. You're at too great a risk. This bastard tracked your friend to another state. He's got to have contacts in important places. We have no way of knowing where you can be safe."

Her eyes fell to the floor. He guessed what she was trying to say. "No, Cathy. That's the first place he'll look for you. He could be in contact with someone from the tunnels. That's the last place you can go to be safe. And Vincent can't protect you from this guy. He nearly killed you the last time. This time, he won't stop to bargain."

She looked at him, her eyes fixed in terror.

"I'm going to take you away from the city. Tonight. You'll be as safe as possible, until we can find this maniac and either get him behind bars or kill him. He'll have no way of finding you -- no way to trace you."

She struggled to find her voice, to say what she desperately wanted said. "Vincent..." she managed weakly, her hands moving to Dayce's arms, struggling to rise.

"I'll tell Vincent when I get back. He'll understand, Catherine." He saw the fear and the desperation in her eyes. She could see the empathy in his as he spoke now, understanding. "If you love him... if he loves you... then he'll understand why you have to leave. Don't worry."

She was breathing faster now, the terror and fear melting away under new feelings forcing their way to the fore -- feelings that she had nothing to fight for now, nothing to hold her to the world she had known. She also knew she had no claim on the world she craved at this moment, that Dayce was right. She was a threat and a danger to everyone now.

"Where are we going?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

Dayce shook his head slowly. "You'll know when we get there. I don't want to say anything aloud until I get back and have this loft checked out -- I don't want our listeners to know anything. No, only I know where you're going -- and it's a place where no one will know to look for you. You'll be safe and protected and will have time to think."

She nodded quietly. She knew he was right, but that knowledge did not make this moment any easier for her to bear. He saw her despair in her eyes, took her hands in his and spoke softly. "You love us all enough to fight for us. Now you have to love us enough to leave us. To keep yourself safe and alive." He kissed her forehead gently, then looked at her warmly. "You can do it, Cathy."

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The silence in the chamber was complete. Father sat at the head of the table, a stack of papers before him. He sat shuffling them slowly, turning one aside and reading the next, then turning it aside. Even the sound of the paper seemed muffled. Mary sat, her hands folded in front of her, her eyes down. William and Pascal watched Father as he read, neither speaking nor looking at each other. Kanin sat quietly across from Jamie, his eyes meeting hers occasionally. She had smiled at him once. He knew she did not blame him for his decision. Her smile was still there now as he looked at her. She sat erect and her fingers intertwined in front of her. She seemed unusually eager for the meeting to begin. He could not guess why.

Father pulled his pocket watch from its pocket and opened it. He looked up, his face creased with concern. "Vincent is late. Does anyone know where he is?"

"I'm right here," came a voice from the stairs. Slowly, Vincent walked to his chair and stood behind it. He did not move to sit down. He looked at Father intently. "You can begin the meeting, Father," he said.

"Will you sit down?" Father asked.

"No," Vincent answered, his voice low. "I prefer to stand."

Father looked at him for a few seconds. He raised his gavel and slowly pounded the base three times. "I call this meeting of the Council to order. All being present. I move that we proceed to business." He paused for a few seconds. "Are there any motions before I begin?"

"Yes." Vincent answered. "I have a motion to propose."

"Very well," Father said quietly. "You may proceed."

Vincent's voice became louder, as if he were addressing the Council, but his eyes never left Father's face. "I have discovered another citizen of the tunnels who is in violation of our laws." The table stirred. All eyes moved quickly to Vincent. Father sat back in his chair slowly, his eyes narrowed. "There is an active warrant for this person's arrest -- a warrant we were not aware of when citizenship was granted."

"Who is it?" Mary asked.

Her question was echoed around the table. Father's raised hand and his long, "...Ssshshhhhh" silenced the others. "Is this person aware of the penalty for this act?"

"Yes," Vincent answered.

"Immediate exile or imprisonment," Kanin said quickly.

"But if they have been a good citizen..." Pascal began.

"No excuse." William said quickly. "You know the rule."

"Three members of this Council voted to return Alan Trescoe to his jailers because of this rule, Pascal. Surely we do not grant exceptions. Father and Mary and William made that clear at our last meeting."

"Yes," Kanin said slowly. "We all heard their arguments."

Vincent looked at Father, his face blank. "The authorities have been seeking this person for quite some time. The longer this person remains among us, the greater our chances of being discovered. This person knew full well the disaster that discovery would bring our world. But they did not care. They sought our refuge and our collective bond rather than face their accusers above."

"How could we not know?" Mary asked. "How was this person able to hide this from us?"

"It does not matter," Father said quickly.. "They must be immediately expelled from the tunnels. They must return above to face their crime." He turned to Vincent anxiously. "I have an expulsion edict prepared for Alan Trescoe. We can add this person's name to the edict before it is validated and sealed." He looked up for a moment, pen in hand, a piece of parchment paper in front of him. "Who is this person?" Father asked. He readied his pen ready to write Vincent's answer.

Vincent pulled a single piece of paper from his shirt and handed it to Jamie, his eyes downcast. He turned away from the table. Slowly, Jamie unfolded the paper and looked at it. She looked at Vincent, but he did not return her glance. She turned and faced others, her eyes dark with anger, with hatred.

"Who is it, Jamie?" Mary asked, her voice insistent.

She looked at Mary for a moment, forcing the words past clenched teeth and a jaw set in blind malice.

"This... is... an FBI warrant.... for the arrest of..." She turned and looked at Father. "Jacob Wells."

Father looked up quickly, then sprang to his feet, his face distorted by rage and disbelief. "Let me see that!!" he screamed.

Jamie handed the paper across the table to Kanin. He looked at the document closely, then raised his head to the others. "It's true. I should know. I've seen enough of this kind of document to know one when I see one." He turned to face Father. "This is an FBI warrant for your arrest. It's dated five months ago."

"It can't be!" Mary shrieked. She turned to Father, her hand on his arm. "Tell them it's a mistake, Jacob! Tell them!" she screamed.

Father tried to reach Kanin and take the paper, but he pushed it across the table to Pascal. Father

helplessly tried to shuffle around the table, but it was hopeless. Pascal passed the warrant to William. William read it quickly, then fixed Father with a glare of contempt.

"Let me see it!" he screamed again. William gently laid the paper on the top of the unfinished edict in front of Father's chair. Father struggled to his chair, tossing his cane on the table top and grabbing the paper into his hand. He read it quickly, then looked to the other faces around him. His hands trembled with rage. "This cannot be... I have done nothing... for forty years... I have done nothing to deserve this."

The others looked at him in silence. No one spoke.

"I left their world... I built this Council... this world!! You all know that!! I have no guilt, no crime to pay for. I left their worthless papers behind!!"

Mary looked up slowly, but she looked at Vincent, not Father. He was still looking away from them, his eyes invisible in the torchlight. Slowly, she moved away from Father - towards Vincent's empty chair.

Father's eyes, the eyes of a trapped animal, found Vincent. "I know who is behind this!! You!!! You and Chandler!!! You have always wanted control of this Council!!! The power -- the fruits of my labours!!! You and Catherine -- I know what you both want!! You want to rule my world, King and Queen of the tunnels!!!! I know it!!!"

Pascal and William exchanged looks and slowly backed away from him, their eyes wide. Vincent slowly turned towards Father, his eyes more controlled than he had thought he could keep them. There was pity in his glance. He understood now how ugly this emotion truly was.

"I know... I know what you're doing! And I won't permit it! You won't defeat me with a little piece of paper!! All of you -- hear me!! You won't....." His voice trailed off slowly. He grabbed his cane quickly. Mary backed farther away, moving closer to Vincent for protection. Father rushed past her and up the stairs, his cane tapping the stones loudly. He reached the door, turning to address them one last time. "You won't get away with this!" he said. Turning, he eyed the torch beside the doorway. With a swift movement of his arm, he brought his cane up, then down through the piece of wood. The torch splintered in front of him, the lighted end flashing into hundreds of brilliant yellow sparks, then showering to the stone floor and flickering out. He stormed out of the chamber before the last ember had faded from yellow to red.

There was a dead silence in the chamber. Mary made a few anguished steps towards the doorway, but she stopped after only a few feet, her strength gone, her eyes wide and brimming with tears. She turned slowly to look at Vincent, her shoulders hunched, her body stooped and sagging. It was as if the air had been let out of her figure, leaving what remained without support -- without substance. A tear found its way down her cheek as she struggled to find her voice.

"Vincent." she muttered.

He turned to look at her, the effort to remain unemotional showing now in the tensed muscles of his face, in the single beating artery in his neck that rose and fell now, beating against his white shirt.

Mary walked to him, stopping beside him, her arms at her sides, her face lifted to his. "Vincent... how could you..." She stopped, shook her head sadly, tried again. "How could he... do this?" He stared at her. He could feel his own control starting to fade now. "I don't know, Mary. I don't know."

She struggled to touch his arm, to keep her eyes on his, to restrain that which could be restrained only so long as she did not say what she was feeling. Then she did say it, and all control left her -- all

restraint was gone in an instant. "I love him, Vincent..." she said, the tears washing over her face, her voice cracking.

He gathered her into his arms drawing her close to him -- her face against his massive chest, her tears soaking the delicate white fabric -- her hands clutching his arms for support, for something to hang on to that she could trust. Her sobs seemed to attack her body in waves, each wave washing down her shoulders and body to her legs -- each sob endured begetting another, stronger rush of anger and love. There was nothing Vincent could do except hold her -- hold her and stand in the face to accept the brunt of what she could not accept. She clung to him like a mother to her son at her husband's funeral-- as a last hold on a love she knew was not hers any longer.

"Let me help you to your chamber, Mary," Vincent said softly. He looked up at the others, his eyes drained and tired. "We'll meet here after dinner... decide what's to be done. Is that acceptable to everyone?"

The others nodded gently.

Slowly, his touch gentle -- he helped Mary up the stone steps and to the doorway. She kept her face pressed against him, her arm around his waist for support. She nearly vanished inside the folds of his cape. Her sobs slowly faded as they walked slowly out the doorway, past the wreckage of the torch. One final ember flared bright and red beneath Vincent's feet, then sank into blackness as the last of its life fuel was consumed.

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The miles had melted by in silence, the first hints of the coming sunrise scattered across the eastern horizon. The stars slowly blended back into the shimmering blue-green spread of light that climbed slowly from the horizon. The shapes of the buildings that raced past the car were still jet black, the snow a gunmetal blue ocean lapping at their foundations.

Occasionally, off to their left, the dark coil of the Hudson River would peek from between the rounded hills and groves of dead trees -- the black spread of water laced with tiny white blobs that were large, flat chunks of ice topped with snow. An occasional light flickered on the other side of the river, and once she spotted a long string of lights, like an electric caterpillar, making its way slowly south towards the city. Whether the train carried people or freight she could not tell.

As they left the interstate behind, Catherine realized suddenly where Dayce was taking her. She watched the roads narrow first to four lanes, then to two -- and then to twisting, double-lined coils of black asphalt that climbed slowly into the hills and bluffs of northern New York. She understood why he had brought her this way. It was many miles further than the shortest route. No one would be watching.

The hills grew to small mountains as they moved steadily northward. The roads had been plowed completely here, the severity of the winters this far north past making it necessary to concentrate on staying ahead of the snows. There were icy patches here and there, the wind's signature as it shaped and reshaped the landscape with its icy fingers, but Dayce was an expert at driving in such weather. They were across the Hudson River and heading into secluded northwest Connecticut before the first yellow glints of sunlight forced their way over the tops of the hills to their east.

"You think I'll be safe at your house?" Catherine asked suddenly.

"Completely. The property isn't in my name or any name Denton could tie to either of us. You won't be alone. Michael is staying there, too,"

Her face brightened. "Mike Resnick?"

"Yeah. He's looking after the place and taking care of Herkimer. You won't be by yourself."

She managed a weak smile at the thought of seeing Herkimer again, and knowing that Michael would be there, "I always liked Michael. Very much."

"The feeling was always mutual, Cathy."

"I don't want to put him in any danger without his knowing."

"We'll explain everything to him."

"Everything?" Catherine asked, turning to look at him.

"Everything,..." he said slowly, his smile visible in the coming light of morning, his eyes still hidden by the shadow of the roof over their heads.

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"You knew I had a crush on you in high school, Cath. Don't kid a kidder!"

Catherine managed a weak, defenseless smile of agreement. "The funny thing was, I always thought you were more attracted to Dayce than to me."

Michael laughed, the sound refusing to grant her a moments respite in self-pity or despair. One simply could not look beyond the moment when this man smiled, or laughed. The contrast was too great, too difficult to challenge. One simply allowed oneself to be swept into his gaiety and refusal to accept pain. "Funny thing is, for a while there, I probably was. The early teens are a tough time. Dayce was one hell of a man, even then. We all knew he was old for his years, but I damn well could have sworn he was an adult when he was twelve!" She nodded in agreement, her smile reflective. "Remember when he first told us he would live on this ridge someday and have a house that overlooked the entire valley? Everyone laughed at him except for two people."

"I didn't laugh because I knew Dayce better than they did. We spent months' worth of hours here growing up. I knew he meant it."

"And I knew why he meant it." Michael added, smiling.

"So I saw the power and you saw its source?" Catherine asked.

He looked at her, his eyes proud. "I like that analogy. It's perfectly accurate."

"Little did we know..." She stopped abruptly, unsure of how much Michael knew -- then chiding herself silently. Of course he knew.

"Someday you'll forgive Dayce for those years."

She looked at him, more puzzled than hurt. "I forgave Dayce long ago. I thought he knew that. I've never spoken against the choice he made." He did not answer. "Dayce still thinks I blame him?"

"Hell, he still blames himself. He's harder on himself than anyone else. But I do know what he used to

tell me about you whenever he wrote from college. He said that seeing you was like a trip to a confessional. He needed to do it, but he didn't particularly enjoy the things that weren't said"

"I wanted to see more of Dayce while he was in school. I told him that."

Michael swung around to face her, his blonde hair glinting in the reflection from the fire in the fireplace behind him, his voice calm. "Cathy, if you were ever sentenced to prison, how would you feel about having those you love and whose respect you wanted visit you there?"

"I don't know. I suppose I would feel ashamed."

Michael nodded. "You understand?"

"But I never judged Dayce as harshly as he thinks I did. I didn't want to see him throwing his life away. I hated the impersonality of it all, and the danger. I didn't want to see him give up his humanity so cheaply. He's worth more than that."

Michael stood up and walked to the fireplace, taking another log from the stack near the holder and throwing it onto the bed of embers, the flames springing to violent life, a cascade of yellow sparks rushing up the flue and out of sight. He turned slowly and leaned against the mantle. I don't think that's why you blamed him, Cath. You know what his parents did to him that night. Dayce worshipped the ground his father walked on. He struggled for years to save enough money to pay for half his first year of college. He worked two jobs to buy his own car so his father could take his mom on that vacation that summer. He lived and breathed law, just like his father had hoped. And then, in the space of five minutes, his world was destroyed. And for what?"

Catherine was silent. She had known parts of this. She had not known until now about the car, the vacation, the depth of his feelings for a father that had rejected him in less time than it had taken to utter the words of his own destruction. He had never let on to this, never admitted how deep the wounds of rejection had been. At times, she had considered him heartless. She knew now that she had been unfair to him in those moments.

"Think about it, Cath. Put yourself in his place. You've struggled for years to achieve the grades to get into one of the finest law schools in the country. You've worked and scrimped and saved to pay half of your own way, to make it easier on your parents. You're all set for classes, have an apartment rented and your books. You're a week away from your first class. And then, with no warning and less sense, you're unceremoniously thrown out of your own house by the people you trusted the most and told you're no longer a member of the family you loved. The money you had counted on to pay for half your education is gone. You have classes that take 18 hours a week to attend and another 80 to prepare for. You have rent to pay for, tuition and board, no time for any kind of job that will let you stay in school. You've just been stabbed in the back by your own flesh and blood. But you have one thing going for you. You're attractive. You have a great body and a beautiful face. People will pay to be with you, for sex -- yes, but sometimes just for companionship and comfort. You can work for ten or fifteen hours a week and make enough to keep your head above water, enough to finish the work you started -- to achieve the goal you set for yourself."

She looked at him intently. Some part of her understood his motive, but there was something else at work within her. Some part of her understood now what defenses she had used to not face this. She could feel Michael's words attacking these last defenses with the skill of a diamond cutter. This was the part of Dayce she had never understood---the coldness to those he did not trust, the ability to destroy an opponent with no thought to any consequence except truth -- the wariness and the distance. She wanted to understand the things Michael could see in him that she had never had the chance to see. She did not resist.

"Dayce has a rare gift. It's the one thing about him that attracts us both, that let you and I understand that day when everyone else laughed at him. No matter how much you try to avoid it, it's what drives him -- the spark that keeps him going."

"What is it?" she asked.

He shook his head slowly, sadly. "No, Cath. I can't explain it to you. My words would describe it for me, but not for you. You have to reach that understanding yourself. When you do, you'll understand Dayce completely -- and forgive him."

She pulled her knees up close to her chest, resting her arms across them, then her chin on top of her crossed arms. "You think I still blame Dayce?"

He nodded. "Yes. For the same reason you blame yourself for what's happened to your friends and to Alan,"

She looked up at him, her eyes wide, a strand of hair falling over her brow. He saw the unasked question in her eyes, but would only smile in answer. He turned and took a poker from the brass stand next to the grate, stoking the fire to life in silence.

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The night had been a restless one for the six who found themselves seated around the huge table. Traces of sleeplessness haunted the eyes of Vincent and Jamie. There were red splotches on Mary's cheeks and around her eyes, the only traces remaining of her tears. William and Pascal were sombre. Kanin wore a look of painful acceptance. This was a moment none of them had ever expected to face.

The chair at the head of the table was empty.

Vincent drew himself up slowly and stood as straight as a night without sleep would allow. He had felt Catherine's violent reaction during the night as a violent shudder in his own body, then as sharp, hot pain that had slowly faded to insensibility. He had sensed no fear in these moments, no cause for him to venture above. He knew he would be with her in a few hours. It made the thought of what was to come in those hours easier to bear. "Does anyone wish to speak?"

Silence reigned for several seconds. Then Kanin spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. "I wish it hadn't come to this. I would have voted to affirm."

"We could not ask you to vote against your conscience." Vincent said slowly. "There was no way to know what would happen."

"How did you find out about the warrant against Father?" Pascal asked.

"A helper." he answered. He sensed the motive of blame in Pascal's tone and decided not to mention Catherine. That time would come. For now, he knew the wound was deep and wide enough. There was no need to make it worse, to make the healing more difficult than it already promised to be.

"Has anyone seen or spoken with Father?"

Vincent shook his head. "I went to his chamber this morning. His bed was unrumpled. Some of his books were missing. His desk was rifled, the drawers open and in disarray. I fear he may have fled."

"Where could he flee?" Mary asked sadly. "And why would he do that? He knows we would not turn him over to any authorities."

"He is not thinking clearly, Mary. He hasn't been the same since Devin's death. Maybe he needs time by himself, to think."

"But why would he take things with him?" William asked.

"I don't know, William. We don't know what was taken, so I can't answer. Perhaps reading material." Vincent sighed deeply. "It doesn't seem important right now. At this point, we have to decide what is to be done."

"I think we should carry on the Council in a normal fashion until Father returns. We can deal with the issue of his exile at that time. In the meantime, we still must act on Alan Trescoe's sanctuary petition."

"Do the two of you still feel Alan must return above?" His glance took in William and Mary. They exchanged glances, then each nodded reluctantly. Vincent turned to Kanin. "Do you feel Alan should return above?"

Kanin shook his head slowly, but he added, "But if Father is to be exiled, I can't see allowing Alan to remain here. Not so long as there is a warrant for his arrest."

Vincent's glance moved slowly to Pascal. He shook his head from side to side slowly. "I still vote to permit him to stay. Since he is not yet a citizen, I choose to treat him as a petitioner not bound by our laws. Father is a different case."

Jamie sighed. "Still 3-3." She looked at Vincent. "I guess we have no choice."

The others looked at each other, then at Vincent. "What do you mean?" Mary finally managed.

Vincent fell silent, seating himself slowly and drawing his hands in front of him. He looked at Jamie, his expression solemn.

"Vincent and I are leaving the tunnels." she said slowly.

There were gasps from Mary and William. Kanin lowered his head. He knew better than to argue. Pascal gasped, "But why?"

"We cannot remain in the tunnels so long as there is not unanimity on this question. Some of you see Alan's presence in our world as a threat to the safety of your families and friends. We must respect that stance. But there are many explored sections of tunnel that are not part of our world. Jamie and I will take Alan there. There are others who have agreed to assist us. So long as Alan remains outside the confines of our world, you need not fear your discovery. We will provide for his safety."

"But where will you go?" Mary asked.

"There is a vast section of tunnels north of the Rikker's Channel which are not claimed as part of this Council's domain. There are chambers there, fresh water and limited access to the world above. There are helpers within reach should there be an emergency, but no direct access to those tunnels. We can maintain ourselves there until we decide how to resolve the sanctuary question in this Council."

"But who will preside over this Council? With Father and you gone..."

"I believe Pascal is senior member. He will preside over this Council and this world until these issues are resolved. Does anyone object?" There were no protests. "Very well."

Kanin raised his head slowly and looked at Vincent, his eyes marred by the same pain as his voice. "When will you go!"

"Tonight. It's nearly a full day's journey."

"Does Alan know how difficult it will be for him and for you?" William asked.

"Yes," Jamie said quickly. "His only hope is to remain among us in these tunnels. Until he can enter this world as a full citizen, he is willing to endure anything. Even the blindness and fear of this Council" She pulled her parka around her shoulders and moved towards the door quickly, stopping only to address Vincent. "I'll be with Alan. Whenever you're ready." She was gone in seconds. ·

The others watched her departure with mixed sadness and resignation. Slowly, Vincent turned and walked towards the door without an added word. As he approached the doorway, a voice stopped him. "We're only doing what we think is right." William said.

Vincent stood for a moment framed in reflected torchlight, one arm raised, his hand on the stone wall for support. He looked at them for a moment, his face creased with pain and loss, but his voice firm and controlled as he answered.

"So are we." In the next moment, he was gone, only the shadow of his cape on the wall for an instant, then merely the echo of his words in the stillness of the chamber around them.

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"Do you want to bring this now?" Jamie asked, holding up a thick blanket, obviously hand-made, a haphazardly cut emblem of a bird adorning the centre and a jagged lightning like border of white silk adorning the edges,

"Yes," Vincent answered softly.

Jamie placed the blanket, folded neatly, into the huge, tattered steamer trunk that lay open at the foot of Vincent's bed. It was filling rapidly now, the most important parts of Vincent's life packed in careful stacks. There were several books, many journals and folders and sheaf's of paper, and many carved gifts from the children he had amassed through the years, each one given a special place on his desk. She also noticed a few photographs stuck into a huge leather-bound volume of poetry.

Vincent had been strangely silent as they had made their way back to his chamber and begun to gather his things together. She knew there would be many more trips back here -- to retrieve things that were not vital to their first days of exile, to gather items too large or too heavy for the three of them to manage. She noticed that Vincent was working very slowly, holding each object in his hand -- weighing it, yes, but in scales that were more imagined than real. She knew he was seeing the span of years between each object and this moment, weighing in his mind how much each possession meant to him now and how much it might mean in the days ahead.

"Is there anything I can help you do?" Alan asked, bringing her back to the moment and the task at hand.

"No. We'll get your belongings after we finish here."

"What about yours?"

"I'll come back for mine. Vincent has the most to bring so we thought we should start here."

"How far away are we going?"

"Several miles. We will be moving to a very old section of tunnels beneath the northern end of Manhattan. No one has occupied the chambers there for over forty years."

"Why were they abandoned?"

Vincent's words filled the silence, low and toneless. "There was talk of a new underground railways system back in the early thirties. They had begun dynamiting the tubes. The people who lived there must have feared for their lives and deserted their chambers. When the project was cancelled, no one returned. When the chambers were searched in the fifties, all they found were ashes from ancient fires and scraps of newspapers from decades before."

"Why are they still empty?"

"All tunnel accesses to the surface in that area were sealed in 1953, by edict. With no ties to the surface for food or fuel, no one wished to settle there. Also the journey to the northern tunnels is a difficult one."

"Whose edict?"

There was a moment of silence, made more jarring by its mere presence than by the answer waiting at its conclusion. "Jacob Wells."

"Did he ever explain why?"

"Father doesn't explain edicts, Alan." Jamie said quickly.

"Will there be people to help us?"

"Yes," Vincent answered. "There are many helpers above. We will reopen some of the old paths to the surface. We will have others joining us in the days ahead. There will be food and fuel. And time to plan for the future."

The sound of footsteps stopped him. Dayce appeared at the chamber door, his leather jacket shiny with cold, his fingers still red-tipped from the icy winds above.

"I know who that is!" Alan chirped, his eyes bright.

Dayce moved quickly to Alan's side, kneeling down and kissing him gently on the side of his head. His lips stayed pressed to Alan's hair a moment longer than greeting would require, then he turned to look around the chamber. "Looks like someone is packing for a long trip." He looked at Vincent, his face hard. "We need to talk."

"All right." Vincent stood up slowly and waited as Dayce knelt back down to speak to Alan. He whispered something in Alan's ear that neither of them could hear. Alan nodded as he listened, his face unchanging.

As they walked slowly away from the chamber, the silence seemed to follow them as a separate entity,

leaving them in some unknown world of quiet anticipation. They made their way to the Waterfalls. The huge chamber of rock was thick with light that cascaded through the distant opening like the water over the rapids far below them, erasing all thoughts of winter or cold. The rays were wet with warmth and colour.

They sat on the promontory, wind spray barely reaching the skin on their arms and faces - the sound of water boiling over the razor-sharp rocks beneath them barely audible through the mist.

"What's happened?" Vincent asked slowly.

Dayce looked at him, surprised. "You know?"

Dayce fell silent for a moment, then took a handful of pebbles from the footpath near him and tossed them absentmindedly into the abyss. "Catherine is gone," he said slowly.

Vincent turned to him. "Gone where?"

""To a safe place." He turned to Vincent, his voice gentle. "Vincent, Catherine's friend, Jenny Aronson. Do you know her?"

"Catherine has spoken of her, many times."

"Denton got to Jenny and her sister. They're both dead."

Vincent turned away slowly, his hands moving to his eyes -- his face vanishing behind his fingers. Dayce could not be sure he was being heard, but he went on. "Catherine is at the end of her endurance, Vincent. She's lost her two best friends above. We lost for Alan here below. She has Joe on her trail and a federal agent curious about her past and about Jacob Wells. She knows she's the focal point, the center of everything that is going wrong now for the people she cares about. For Alan. For you. As long as Denton remains alive and free, she knows that those close to her are in danger."

Vincent did not move his hands. His words came from beneath clenched fists. "She should have come below."

"No. That's the last thing she could do."

Dayce took the arm closest to him and pulled it gently, trying to force Vincent to face him. Slowly, he turned his friend towards him and pushed the hands down by his side, his eyes catching and holding Vincent's sternly.

""Listen to me, my friend. If you love Catherine... truly love her... you will let her go for now. There is nothing you can do that will help her through this. All her resources need to be directed to her own healing. You cannot be there for her, Vincent... because there is no 'there' for you right now... not for either of us... not even for her." He raised his hands to Vincent's face and held him firmly, their eyes locked. "Catherine loves you. Remember that, in the days ahead. She'll be safe and she'll have time to heal herself... but this is a healing that neither you nor I can help with. She needs to decide, Vincent... once and for all time. And we can't be there to cloud her judgment."

"But... but I love her. I want..."

Dayce shook him gently. "What you feel for her...what you want for her... those things aren't enough. Not for her. For all the times when you imagine her beside you in your dreams, she is the actual person who must inhabit that body and that mind that you conjure. Unless it is what she truly wants for

herself, for her life... then all she can ever be is a phantom of your desires. If you truly love her, you must let her go. For a time. For her own good, Vincent... and for yours."

There were tears in his eyes now, his arms kept away by Dayce's strong hold on his face. He tried to bring his hand upwards, to hide his sorrow, his shame -- but Dayce refused to let him hide his feelings. Vincent's hands closed over Dayce's arms, his voice coming through suppressed sobs.

"What can I... what can we do?"

Dayce smiled warmly, his own eyes betraying the difficulty of this moment, of the pain accepted and felt in his own private acknowledgment of the loss. "Help Alan. Help me keep him protected. Help Jamie and the others. You have much to do in the months ahead. They'll look to you for strength and for leadership. You pour yourself into that, for now." Dayce paused for a moment, his hands moving down to Vincent's shoulders. "And you remember Catherine in those spare moments when your mind is free to wander. You remember what she feels for you and what she is going through to find her way. Your love is as strong as any I have ever seen, Vincent. It has sustained both of you before. Let it sustain you now... until she can find her way back."

Vincent's tears broke in this moment, and he moved forward slowly, trustingly, into Dayce's arms. Without a moment of doubt or hesitation, Dayce slipped his arms around Vincent's shoulders and held him gently -- let him cry -- a pillar for one whose strength had given way in this moment to despair.

He slowly rocked Vincent's body, his arms surrounding and protecting him, his head held high in silent dignity. This strongest part of him had remained alive, through the years of anger and hatred, to comfort now another lost and kindred soul.

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Low clouds hugged the moon, their skeletal tendrils etched by the pale, ghostly light. Like ragged moths formed of translucent cloth and wind spray wings, they sought the moon's brightness -- accentuated it through contrast. Their edges caught the rays and soaked them up, leaving the sky darker -- the few faint wisps of cloud not caught and held by the light scurrying past quickly, escaping the grasp of the icy fingers. A sky of the dead.

The month behind her stretched like a string of empty bottles trailing a drunkard, her memory of the hours and days as fragmented and diffuse as those of that alcoholic. The snows that had welcomed her to Connecticut were gone now, the first waves of warmth having washed over these hills -- the dunes of snow and ice washed away by the first surging tides of Spring.

But this night, Winter clung to the hills with a tenuous grasp. Catherine pulled the collar of her parka tighter around her neck in a futile attempt to ward off the cold breeze that stirred amidst the branches around her, scattered the few dead leaves that crunched beneath her feet. The low-hanging branches slashed her face as she passed, invisible in the dark, each slash like a silent, painful rebuff from the immobile sentries that surrounded her. They seemed almost reluctant let her pass as if her very presence on the ledge was an affront -- a force of vitality and life trespassing in a world of decay and death. She pressed on, ignoring the inanimate enemies all around her.

She could barely make out the ledge. A long, wide streak of total blackness stood out against the deep greys and indigos ahead of her -- the shapes of shrubbery and sky framed by the dark of space beyond the edge of rock. It seemed strange to her that emptiness could stand out so sharply in the face of wood and tone and cloud, that the pitch of empty space should seem real, the shapes around her, unreal. The wind burrowed through the not-quite black forms around her, their edges made blurry and indistinct under the constant lashing. Only the black strip of sky ahead of her remained unchanged,

immobile -- fixed, like a distant black horizon over a sea of grey. She headed straight for it, her stride not breaking in the face of the wind, her eyes as fixed as her goal, and as dark.

As she broke free of the thickest stand of trees, a shaft of moonlight fought its way through the low scud overhead, bathing the ledge in momentary brightness -- the edge of the cliff caught in a luminous splendour for a moment, then fading rapidly as another cloud was caught and held by the light, its feathery edges like a latticework of crystal and cotton. The light scattered, then fell away from the cliff -- its clean white rays splitting into hues of gold and red and yellow, then lost in the shadows and crags of clay and rock. The faded light left the sky blacker, the faint wisps of motion barely visible now lost in a glare of grey.

In that brief moment, she caught sight of the stone bench. She approached it slowly in the darkness, feeling ahead of her carefully. Her fingers finally found the cold, flat stone. She sat down quickly, facing the valley. Small beads of perspiration had collected on her forehead, but the wind and the cold had worked to clear her brow, a brow now crossed only by lines of longing and of pain.

There were lights scattered across the matted grey of the valley beneath her, faint and forlorn in the night, like a handful of sequins tossed over a spread of black cloth -- their sparkle overpowered by the darkness, the reflected moon rays too strong to leave them unrevealed in the night, but not strong enough to bring them into sharp focus against the background. She knew many of the residents of those ill-lit houses. One of them had been her own as a child. But they were strangers to her now, their presence a painful reminder of a time more innocent than this, more clean. A time of sun-washed days and carefree nights of safety and security had been the beacon, the promise this vista held for her, spread out in shades of changeless black and white. Now they served only as a ceaseless reminder of innocence lost, of promises unfulfilled -- homes to strangers who would not understand her pain, her desperate longing for the world that promise held, her anger against an enemy that stood resolutely against her silent cry for help.

She scanned the sky for the moon, but there was no sign of it where it had shone moments before. No circle of light shone to mark its hiding place behind the spread of cloud, no errant ray lit the scud. The sky merged with the black streak now, no break visible where earth and sky met in the distance. The sky seemed to flow ahead and below her now, as if the ledge stood on the edge of the world -- with only a void beyond the lip of rock a few feet ahead of her. For one brief instant, she thought that she could step from the edge and float forever in this darkness, caught up with the clouds and the wind -- fall forever through the void, never to be touched again by pain or fear -- or hope.

The wind kicked up behind her, gently urging her towards the edge. She braced her back against the wind's suicidal nudge. The leafless fingers of the trees behind her seemed to reach towards her, the individual branches like a multitude of hands outstretched in a desperate quest to push her from her tenuous perch. She could sense their malignant reach, but she did not turn. She merely drew her arms to her sides and buried her hands in the deep pockets of the coat. The smell of rain reached her through the branches, pushed on by the wind's messenger gusts. Leaves rushed at her, then past her and over into space. She felt a tinge of jealousy as she watched them vanish into the shadows, but the feeling was as brief as each leaf's brief perch on the edge of the void. 'They're already dead.' she thought, as the gust of wind faded, leaving the stone around her littered with the lifeless children of the lifeless forms now silent and still behind her.

She wished the rain would come now. She longed for its liquid touch against her face, her hands -- a reminder of his touch, like cool liquid metal running over her, traces clinging to her long after his fingers had passed. She wanted the feel of another living being in her arms, the sound of another heart beating against her chest. The weeks behind her had been lonely, but that loneliness had been borne by choice -- a quest for the healing power of time and distance to work their magic. This loneliness -- this was despair, relentless and unforgiving. She longed for a solitude she knew did not exist -- where her mind

would be unfettered by those around her, but reassurance by the physical presence of others remained.

She heard the snap of dry grass behind her, faint in the wind but clear in the crisp air. 'Probably a raccoon.' she thought to herself. She turned quickly, trying to make out shapes in the darkness. The sound had faded, did not return. There was only the sound of leaf and limb in motion now. The lights of the house shone clear and bright through the trees -- luminous rectangles of light hanging in the sky, the walls invisible in the night. The lights seemed to call to her through the trees, to beckon her to warm and protection. She shuddered slightly, the promise of warmth making her feel colder. It would be so easy to flee now -- so easy to take refuge within those redwood walls. Their lure was almost physical now, like the smell of coffee on a winter morning. But she knew the danger of safety, of sheltering herself against the world. She turned away from the sight.

Slowly, she slid down the face of the stone bench -- her back pressed against the frigid stone, her legs crossed beneath her. She could feel the wind's icy touch sweep past her neck -- her hair blowing across her brow. But now her back was protected against the worst of the chill. Her neck fell back against the edge of the stone; her head fell back still farther. All above her was blackness. And now, faint at first but growing with each passing moment, the rain began to pelt her face and legs. She could feel the drops a fraction of a second before they hit, the air filling with water and the unmistakable smell of rain and autumn colours. She thought she could detect the faint aroma of burning logs from the fire he left behind her. Closing her eyes, she let the water wash over her cheeks, run through her hair, collect against her eye lids and between her lips. She opened her lips from time to time -- the rain running down her throat. The water tasted of bark and brine.

As the rain increased, Catherine suppressed the instinct that drove her to seek shelter. She forced herself to remain immobile in the dark-- a dark shape open to the storm, like the stone pressing against her. She felt as if she were a part of this place -- a living component in a dead landscape, her pain the tangible anguish of the lifeless forms around her. She opened her eyes against the torrent. She turned her head quickly as the drops filled her eyes, stinging her. Strands of her hair were matted now against her forehead and cheeks, the water draining down to her neck and down the collar of her parka, soaking her back and her chest. This was the feeling she longed for, of motion against her lips, her breasts.

The touch of the water seemed almost human, gentle and sensual in the darkness. This was sensation without object, she thought -- without goal. Sensation as its own goal, its own reward. The excitement of it made her shudder in the darkness -- this shudder different from the ones which served to ward off the chill. This was a shudder from within -- not very different from those she felt in those golden moments in his arms -- in his bed.

For the first time in months, she completely abandoned herself to touch. She spread her arms wide against the stone, her arms braced on the stone bench -- her hands hanging free in space, water collecting on her fingertips in majestic drops that fell softly to earth beside her. She pulled her parka open -- the cotton of her peasant shirt soaking up the drops greedily, then clinging to the bare skin beneath, molding itself to her body. Her neck collected the raindrops into a single stream of water that traced a path past her shoulders, between her breasts, to the skin of her stomach, pulled tight and flat. She could feel the individual drops strike her all over", each drop like a finger of an unseen hand caressing her.

She could sense light all around her through her closed eyelids. She opened her eyes quickly, but it was dark all around. Suddenly, the rumble of thunder enfolded her. She felt the rumble in the rocks against her skin, in the echoes which fed upon themselves across the valley and up the rock face to her. The sound roiled on, softer and lower with each passing moment.

'Alive,' she thought. 'This is what it means.' The words forced their way through her reverie. She knew

now that this was part of the promise she always felt when she had come here as a child. It wasn't merely the solitude she found here. It wasn't Dayce who gave this place its special meaning for her. It wasn't Vincent who shared those moments of discovery in her youth. It was this moment -- and all the moments like this she had treasured as a child -- that were the measure and the meaning of her need for this ledge. The days spent here in carefree abandon, aware of nothing but sun and stone and the fresh, cool gusts of wind up these walls had been her motive. Memories of the softness and smell of the wild grass around her came rushing back now. The smell of pine needles and wild hyacinth filled her mind. The green and silver of maples and birch, the harvest colors of maple and ash and oak, the green-tinged sunrises and burgundy sunsets filled her eyes. Whatever she felt for anyone, for her life itself, had been forged here in this alcove. The others gave her life meaning, but the foundation was all around her. She understood that much now. This was the hold the world held on her -- not friends nor career nor the promise of wealth and fame. It was this moment, and all those that had preceded it - moments where the intensity of life broke through everything else in an exhilarating rush of sensation and sensuality. The others were loved and longed for. This place was the key to what love and longing could evoke in a human spirit. They were the flames of the fire of her life -- this place was the spark.

She stood up quickly, walking towards the edge, towards the glistening line where rock and sky met. She flung her arms wide in the rain, the wind driving the drops past her. Another flash of light struck her, silhouetting her against the sky. She felt as if she were the source of the light now, the source of the water that drove past her and down -- down into the darkness. In the reflected light, she could see the ragged shapes of the clouds spread across the valley and the rugged outcrops of stone on either side of her. A lone pine tree stood for a moment on the top of the tallest outcrop to her right, a lone sentry standing guard over nothingness -- the ledge falling away beneath its limbs -- the jagged rocks far below like rows of grey teeth. The thunder rumbled around her again, her arms quivering in answer, taut and motionless.

She heard a sound behind her again, the crack of brush. She turned quickly, drawing her arms to her chest and kneeling down. Her eyes searched the reeds and stones quickly. She thought she could make out a dark shape several feet away. She crawled towards it slowly. The shape moved slightly. Catherine stopped, the sound of her breathing filling her ears. She looked closer. Then another flash of lightning lit the ledge. The dark shape stood out orange now against the cobweb of yellow reeds and stalks.

"Herkimer!"

A plaintive 'meow' sounded from the grass. He moved slowly towards her, huddling against the stone bench for protection against the rain and wind. His fur was soaking wet -- his left paw betrayed a slight limp -- his eyes stood out orange and yellow in the dark. As she reached the stone, she cradled him in her arms. He crawled into her lap, allowing her to draw him into her arms and against her chest. She pulled her parka closed to protect him from the rain and hugged him close to her, his purr sounding in her ear. She kissed him on his muzzle, stroking his back and sides. She felt tears gathering in her eyes.

'I won't do this,' she heard herself thinking, nearly aloud. The joy she felt rising in her was pushed back -- the emotion it kindled was stifled and died within her, unreleased. She could not say why she refused to feel. She knew part of it was the fear, always with her, that to give in would mean to lose what little control remained -- that allowing herself to cry now would open some hidden, long-locked door deep within her. She did not know what other motive drove her now, what undiscovered part of herself had taken control. She knew only, in some nameless way, that to face it now could drive her over an edge more threatening and deadly than the one which opened a few feet in front of her.

Herkimer's tongue was working the skin of her neck, taking in the rainwater -- its rough edge painful, yet sensual at the same time. She could barely feel the warmth, the gentle stroking. Her fingers worked their way idly, almost unconsciously through the fur behind his ears, but there was no tenderness in her touch, no wish to encourage nor curtail. It was mere sensation now, drained of all

purpose or power to heal. The warmth, insistent and seductive as it spread against her throat, was the last thing she remembered as the darkness enclosed her...

'You'll remember. You'll remember... every time you look in the mirror'. The words rang through her mind, but there was no person speaking the word -- no face to attach to the human sounds around her. There were shapes barely visible in the darkness -- dark and menacing, like those one sees all round when entering a dark, unfamiliar room. She tried to reach out into the darkness towards the sound -- to fend off some invisible threat. She could not remember clearly what it was that threatened her -- the words had been relegated to some distant corner of her memory and forgotten -- forgotten in a frenzy of panic and pain. She thrashed about now, struggling against unseen hands and unrevealed bonds. The words echoed around her, and the more she struggled, the louder and more insistent they became. 'Every time you look in the mirror...' -- she could not block it out, could not free herself of the grip of some strong, unseen hands, could not answer the taunting, accusing voice. She wanted to scream now, to overpower her tormenter. 'Then I won't look into mirrors again!' she found herself thinking -- then saying -- then screaming, her head jerking from side to side in fury and anger -- the sounds of her words filling her mind, mingling with those of her unseen torturer. A flash filled her consciousness, her throat paralyzed as she closed her eyes, trying to avoid the brightness. It swept past her eyes in an instant -- she could feel something strike her cheek -- only the pain was gone now, the voice echoing around her more faintly, the terror draining out of her as darkness enveloped her. She felt herself falling now -- her screams inaudible even to herself. She seemed to be moving in slow motion. She caught glimpses of her arms flailing at her sides. There was blood on her arms, but she could not feel any pain. She felt herself turning in space -- around and around -- but she could not make out anything in the darkness.

Suddenly, she stopped. It felt as if she had fallen against a mattress or a grass-covered meadow. There was no pain now, only a sense of being supported -- lifted -- but no motion, no movement in the dark. It seemed more like the surrounding blackness was moving past her. Then there was nothing. She tried to look at her arms again, but there was only blackness all around. She looked down, but saw only the unrelieved darkness that surrounded her.

But there was a presence close by -- she could feel that. Faintly at first, but growing stronger with each passing moment. She could hear the sound of her heart beating in her throat as the presence came closer. Terror gripped her again at the prospect of the tormentor's touch, but she did not scream. She lay very still in the darkness, knowing whatever it was would find her -- had to find her.

The terror moved closer out of the darkness -- a shape darker than the pitch that surrounded her -- a shapeless, faceless figure in the distance growing steadily closer. Slowly, the shape molded itself into that of a human figure clad in a black hood the edges like black satin, surrounding an invisible face. The figure was so close now, she could touch it! -- but she had no way to reach the apparition. No fingers, no hands, no arms. Try as she might, she could not move. It was not fear that held her captive now, but wonder. She knew that this dark figure was the key to her despair -- the sentry standing watch over her soul.

Slowly, two hands rose to the sides of the hood. She tried to focus on the hands now -- looking for a telltale clue to the identity of her tormentor. It was a hopeless struggle. The more she tried to focus, the more indistinct the hands became. Flesh or fur or bone -- they could be any of these.

As the silent figure slowly pulled the hood back, she could feel the terror rise again -- the terror of knowledge. She did not want to know! She heard herself screaming soundlessly to the figure, 'No! No! I don't want to know who you are! What you are! Torment me, if you must -- torture me beyond human endurance if you will -- but please don't make me face you!' Her words fell soundlessly down and away from them, like stones flung from a cliff, like pebbles dropped down a well, their echoes faint and helpless in the dark.

Then the hood fell away silently. She saw the face of her tormentor, the face of the one who allowed no peace of mind or spirit -- the face of her greatest enemy. She screamed now, her eyes held immobile against her desperate attempts to shut them or turn away from the spectre. But it was too late -- the figure held her glance knowingly, a smile spreading slowly across her features, in cruel answer to her screams for mercy. When the figure smiled in answer to her screams, she knew with desperate finality that it was not a reflection -- that the face beneath the hood was her own...

Catherine awoke screaming, the echoes from the rocks below her answering in words she did not understand -- the unintelligible screams of one awakening from a nightmare. She pulled herself to her feet quickly, her hands brushing the rain-drenched strands of hair from her face. It took her a few moments to realize that she had been dreaming, but she remembered every moment of it -- the attack, the healing, the confrontation with her worst fear. There was no mistaking what she had seen, no denying her desperate cry *not* to have to face the darkest part of herself.

She felt a stab of pain in her left leg. She looked down, to find the material of her jeans torn and traces of blood soaking the material. Three long gashes snaked down her thigh. She looked around frantically, remembering suddenly that Herkimer had been asleep on her lap. She finally spotted him near the edge of the cliff, licking his paw slowly. In her desperate struggle to awaken herself, she must have frightened him -- and he had reacted as any living creature would when confronted with the unexpected or the threatening. He had lashed out and escaped to safety. He stood now several feet away, watching her warily. As she approached him, he backed up a step, but trust overcame fear and he allowed her to approach. In moments, she was sitting on the edge of the cliff, her legs dangling in space, her hand stroking Herkimer gently, the tenderness of her touch reassuring. He flopped down on the stone next to her, his head thrown back to meet her caresses, his purr sounding louder as she stroked his head and neck.

She could not be sure how long she had slept, but there were on the distant horizon faint hints of the coming sunrise. Thin layers of dark grey hugged the line where the sky met the earth -- invisible if one tried to look at them directly, but visible as one turned away. The songs of birds were beginning now, a few calls rising from the trees behind her. Herkimer turned his head quickly a few times at the sounds, then returned to his languor.

She searched the sky for any sign of the moon, but the clouds still clung tenaciously to life. The rain had stopped, however, and the floor of the valley was a tangle of sparks and cobwebs -- the sparks flickered in the windows of houses and shops -- the cobwebs marked the roadways visible now as they snaked away to the east, like an iridescent web of some giant spider.

The air was colder now and the breeze had picked up. The dampness of her clothing made it feel even colder, each gust of wind sapping the warmth from her body. She found herself shivering involuntarily, her bare skin open to the assault. She did not draw back to the shelter of the bench.

The apparition in her nightmare filled her mind. The nameless terror she had found beneath the hood had been herself. She did not know what the dream meant. It was not denial - she knew she had never lied to herself about her choices in life. It was not fear of making a decision ---she had made her decision in leaving New York behind. It was not fear of Vincent -- she had overcome that long ago. She could find no word for the dream, no event or emotion from her past to explain the face beneath the hood -- or her screams as that face was revealed.

'Then I must look harder,' she found herself thinking. There must be an answer. Some part of me *must* understand. The force that held her captive to a world she mistrusted, a world of misery and despair -- where hope might struggle through ceaseless years in search of justice and integrity, while indifference and hatred gained far greater reward and spread ever-wider with each passing day. 'one can only fight a losing battle so long.' Dayce had said. It explained so much about his character, his unwillingness to

judge others by the same exacting standards he used to render judgment against himself. Only he had found a way to reconcile himself to the pain --had fought to a point where he could accept the desolation of the world around him, yet find enough to feed his spirit and calm his soul. This place was a part of it, she understood that. The distance from civilization, the solitude and the restorative power the ledge and this vista offered -- these were the forms of his weapons. He drew his strength from this setting, the strength of an unbroken span from childhood.

But she shared this same unbroken span in this place. The endless summer days and carefree years of her youth were hers to draw upon; hers to shape as a shield against the world she had grown to loathe but could not bear to leave. She could find no reason for the desperate fear that drove her to this place now as an escape. The walls of stone stood now as walls, silent and impenetrable, like a fortress. She started 'A fortress,' she remembered. Devin had used that word -- she tried to remember in what context. 'A fortress on a tranquil beach.' -- that's what he had said he always searched for as a refuge against the world. He had never found it in life. His years of searching had been the only protection he could find. She knew now, in this moment that she had found what he had spent half a lifetime seeking. And she realized something else in the same moment -- that such a fortress could never have held him as it held her now. Fortresses were never meant to serve as the hiding places of cowards. They stood as final refuge for the brave souls who dared to build them, and to defend them.

The words on Devin's headstone haunted her -- the words that spoke of silent, unobtrusive strength. He meant them for her and for Vincent -- the two banks of the river of his life. She understood what his tribute meant; but she could not understand what he had seen in her that merited such a tribute. She loved Vincent -- but then so did many others. That required no unusual inner strength. She had stood by him when he faced his moment of revelation about his father, but so had many others. She had strengthened his resolve when it seemed his friend might face a lifetime in a circus sideshow, but it had been his own loyalty and integrity that had tempered his wanderlust for some brief span of time -- enough time to help another find their own way. These had not been the strengths he had seen. The answer must lie elsewhere -- in his scrapbook -- somewhere in the thousands of words he had saved for her and for Vincent. She struggled to remember.

She remembered his passages about Alicia, the one woman he had found to love among the countless strangers of his life. They spoke of her courage and her tenacity -- her lust for life and for adventure -- attributes that Catherine knew she shared in some measure. But then, so did many other people in his life through years of trudging to the far corners of the world, of never settling long enough to set down more than the most cursory of roots. They had not inspired Devin to set down as tribute the words that stood to mark his final resting place.

'This is hopeless,' she thought. There were no words that she could summon now. With the first subtle shades of the approaching sunrise fleeting along the eastern horizon, through the tops of the trees far below, she stood for one final moment on the edge of the promontory. She knew she would find her answer here -- on this ledge where the things she valued and the world she loved met, in windswept rock and broad expanse of earth and sky. Somewhere in the days that had led her to this place lay the answer, the key to her life and to her future. It was here, waiting to be grasped, to be felt again in future sunny days of joy and freedom and love recaptured.

At her feet, she felt the gentle nibbling of Herkimer's head and neck against her ankle. She lifted him into her cradling arms, holding him close -- her hands caressing his orange fur gently, comforting him. She turned towards the house, the lights of warmth and safety beckoning to her through the trees. This was her refuge now, her sanctuary -- her lonely haven of solitude in a world she knew had once been hers -- and would be hers again someday.

*[The End of the 'Catherine Chandler' Trilogy ]*