

Chapter Five



The room was dark when he entered, and he pushed his dark hair off his forehead in a gesture suited to a much younger man. In the gleam of light from the corridor, he saw his face in the mirror of beaten silver just inside the door.

Damon was tired. The timeless, power-draining period spent inside the Dreamworld was written in the drawn look in his eyes. He didn't like the way he wore his efforts so clearly, on his face, in the fatigue present in his movements.

It wasn't the place itself that exhausted him; on the contrary, it was his favorite place in the world, the only place he could relax and do what people did outside the catacombs and outside his father's sphere of influence. He could have a beer, walk, feel the cool air, meet some people, make friends. There was no room for that outside the Dreamworld. No, it wasn't the place, but the expense of energy it cost him to get in and out. That, despite his efforts to convince both Aria and his father that his strength was waxing, was almost beyond him.

And there was more, of course, lots of reasons to be tired.

In a very real way, he had been at war for a century and more. In the years that had preceded, the outcome had never, ever seemed in doubt. In the bid for power within the family, his sister had shown time and time again a desire for supremacy which he could not match. In fact, he had much less taste for blood than he had been obliged to demonstrate again and again. What Damon would really have liked was to be left alone, to live quietly. But no matter where he went or what disinterest he professed, Aria would never believe him. Wherever he went, she would consider him a threat. So he kept fighting, however half-heartedly. It was a tradition. Family politics.

Through decades of watching and manipulating, he had become weaker, not stronger. Arabella watched to learn to exploit. He had watched and become sad.

He knew, and knew it painfully, that Arabella was their father's heir in spirit as well as name.

"Whoa, Bro. What's the narcissism for? Checking your ugly mug for signs of life?"

Damon braced himself, didn't turn. Arabella.

"You shouldn't be in my room, little sister," he said, trying to be calm. Anything else would be a weakness she would twist for her own advantage.

"I've come to offer you my help. Surely even you can tell by now you need it." She stood, her form rising out of the darkness, detaching itself from the shadow of the wall.

"Thanks but no thanks," he said, feeling himself dropping into her same sarcastic mode. What could she possibly want, except for revenge on him for introducing their father to her duplicity. "I've had all the favors I can use today."

"I insist," she spat. She was at his side, serpent-like, a finger jabbing in his ribs. "You've

been so kind. I hardly want to go any deeper in your debt.”

Stay cool, he told himself. The Dreamworld swam in his mind. Take some comfort there. “Aria,” he said. “I’m not in the mood for sparring. Say what you must and get out. I want to rest.” He tried to achieve the infuriating big brother tone that he should always use on her, the only thing that annoyed her enough to dull her deadly sharpness. Today, it wasn’t going to work. He was just too ragged. “What debt are you talking about?”

Aria guffawed, and threw herself backward onto the low couch by the wall. “Well, you know, Dame,” she said. Her voice was almost friendly, casual, familiar. Little Aria and her favorite big brother. “Father may be right after all.”

“What are you talking about, Arabella?” he asked.

“Just a few days ago, I was talking to Father. He said to me, ‘Daughter, dearest, my life and hope. . .’ You do understand, do you, Dame? We’re very close, Father and I. He said, ‘Dearest, I do believe your brother is beginning to mature, to grow up after all these years.’”

“Aria,” Damon said, wearily. “If your purpose is to make me lose sleep, you’re only succeeding because you won’t stop talking. I know what Father thinks of me. I do what he tells me and I try. I know he would like me to be more of a schemer like you but I am what I am. I don’t think the Hunter is a factor, even if you want me to believe it. Just... leave me alone.”

Chuckling, she reached her hands over her head, stretching cat-like along the sofa. “So tell me, dearest screw-up brother, why it is that my dearer Papa seems to be treating me rather less like a favorite the last couple of days? I’ve told you something. Now you come clean. What do you know?”

Damon tried, and was only partially successful, to turn his initial smirk into a look of blank confusion.

“He took you into the Dreamworld to play with his disgusting little girl-prize. Not me. So, I assume you must know something more than I do at present about his plans. I’m at a loss. Yes? Come on, Dame, what’s this all about?”

He shook his head. “Aria, you may not believe me, but he hasn’t told me anything. Not really.”

“And what does ‘not really’ entail?”

He shrugged.

“So, what did you find out there anyhow, my little starry-eyed romantic? True love? Boyish companionship? You are pathetic. Someday, I’m going to tell Father about these little forays of yours. It’s no wonder you have no energy left to contribute to this family. What do you think? Is it time to cancel playtime for Damon?”

Damon knew, from their father’s insinuations, that he was quite aware of his son’s excursions into the Dreamworld. Even so, she maddened him. If there was an angle, any kind of advantage, she would find it. “Father and I caught her, the two of us. She’s just a thirteen year old, a child. She must have some potential, I guess. I don’t know any more than you do, I’m sure. There’s a chance she’s got power, and if she does, he’ll make it his own. What else? She –”

Arabella cocked her eye at him; he had stopped short and turned his head away, ostensibly to examine the mirror.

“You may be the older one,” she said, “but you’re completely inept. You’ve been in the Dreamworld with the girl: so what? What happened?” She paused in mock horror. “Does something suddenly make sense?”

“Something like that,” he said tightly, steeling himself to say no more.

“No. . .” Arabella pursed her lips. “I’ll get it out of you.”

In the next instant, he was flung out of his seat. She landed on top of him as he was hitting

the carpet. “Out with it, sweet, dear brother,” she snarled and grabbed his throat in both her hands. “She. . .” Aria repeated. “She *what*? Said, did, was – what?”

Her fists flew away from his neck and came down to make contact with his stomach. This time he was ready and caught the blow but was too slow to counterattack. She rolled away and stood.

She smiled innocently. “Damon, you’re getting teeth. I hope it doesn’t hurt your poor sensitive gums too much. Unbelievable. Stupid little boy. Never knows when he’s lost.” But she was the one sounding wounded for once. Her influence with her father was on the wane, for maybe the first time in their long struggle. Was Arabella losing her proficiency at the ‘game’? He had scored a point, and he should be happy.

“Get out, Arabella,” he said, standing and brushing himself off.

“I’m not worried,” she said. “Father has pretended to be displeased with me before. It’s a little ploy of his to bring out the best in me. He doesn’t try it on you because there’s nothing to surface. ‘Kill him, grab her’, that’s your job. Not a ruling bone in your body. Mother –”

That was the jab he had been waiting for with trepidation, Aria’s lowest blow. He lunged at her but she was too quick, side-stepping him and disappearing into the hallway with a parting shot:

“You have no idea how deep my plans run! Prepare yourself.”

Damon landed on the floor, and lay there panting. At times like this, which were far too frequent lately, his world seemed to be falling apart. The jab might have been cut off before it was uttered, but he felt the damage done. Do something, a voice in his mind urged him. Do anything, but don’t let her win today.

So he ran.

He ran through the corridors, feet echoing on the stone. He didn’t care now who saw him or recognized his speed for the desperate confusion it represented. There was a tickle in his eyes and he knew he was crying. This was the ultimate humiliation. At least Arabella hadn’t seen. What could he be doing now but running away from her, from her hateful voice?

But it wasn’t that at all. And his feet took him unerringly to the one place he knew he shouldn’t want to be.



Maggie Stuart was flying again.

She was above Westbrook, high enough to see the serpentine curve of its streets, meant to boggle traffic, over its canopy of 20-year foliage, high above the park behind her own school.

She banked and glided, savoring the bite of the cool spring air, and flew north, away from the city and deep into the suburbs. Swooping lower, she let her fingertips brush the young leaves of the apple trees, their white blossoms luminous in the semi-dark. She saw the tarred roof of the elementary school over to her left, and swept straight down through the canopy of trees, and straight through the roof as if it had no more substance than a dream itself.

Everything went dark, as if someone had flipped a light switch. Out of the blackness came a deep voice – “I have to talk to you,” it said. Her own voice, echoing hollow, “Mr. Hunt. . .”

Silence then, a white buzz of it. People walked by her in the school hall, their mouths opening and closing, ridiculous, pointless. Her ears were blocked with cotton. She moved through them like a fitful ghost, misplaced at noon. Information came to her, trickling in the corners of her mouth, water droplets. School. . . Jason.

... Mom. . .

A wave of panicked nausea swept her. Propelled by heaving disgust, she flew straight up again, bursting through the tarred roof and through the sky towards her own house in a broad, dizzying arc. Little peculiarities caught her eye, trapped crystal-precise. There was a strange tree, no, a bush on Dunsinene. . . There was a dog. . . There was something in the southern sky, a candle flame, jumping and flickering. By its light she could make out a huge room, a cathedral, a cave, and there was a design painted on the floor, but she couldn't make it out. There were other people flying now, unwelcome fellow acolytes of her new power, each wearing a distorting red mask. Silently, they came from all sides. The mouths of the masks gaped, full of silvered teeth, glistening.

The air felt heavy now, impossible to breathe, impossible to sink through it even if she hadn't been able to fly. Her eyes burgeoned with shapes: foul, black after-images, pre-images, maybe. Before she could understand what she was looking at, the ballooning forms around her became solid enough to start to leak. Seeping streamers of red trickled, joined, poured at last. Everything was blood before her eyes, pounding in her head. She made a last, feeble effort to wing herself aloft and broke from the thick air suddenly on the surging hot updraft from below.

The heat lingered, but even more so did the horrid after-images of obscene explosions, black creatures rupturing into goutts of blood. But her flight was free again, and memory is short in dreams.

Maggie looked down and saw, far, far below, the roof of her own house. She raised her arms above her head. Her house was burning. Somewhere below, she heard her mother screaming. Her nightgown billowed up around her face and she dropped down like a elevator whose cables have snapped.



The stark sodium lamps in their wire cages gave steady light, blurring into halos of color in the corners of his eyes. He could have perhaps fooled himself about what he was doing, until he came round the final corner and found her there in front of him.

Maggie was half asleep, stretched out with her hands in front of her. The shackles made her wrists look tiny. She seemed very fragile in the long white dress. This was his father's chosen nemesis, this little girl. This was the girl he'd carried out of the school to the waiting helicopter, heavy in his arms with the weight of her unconsciousness, the one whose father he had brought from Paris in case his intervention was necessary.

And so much like the waitress who he'd taken home with him from the bar. The girl, the woman, with the dark hair, and brown eyes quite like his own, the one who had listened to him whine and been really so nice about it. Who had ripped him off, taken all his money, although he hadn't minded. After all, he could make as much of that in the Dreamworld as he wanted.

But that night, sitting and listening to her, being listened to. This was her, the girl who had run from him, then let him befriend her. Who had made him feel, if only for a moment, like a normal man.

Who had to be dealt with.



I came fully awake as Damon lifted me violently by my shackled hands and shook me. I held my breath as he scrutinized my face, stared into my eyes. There was no outpouring of power as there had been when I faced the Burnt Man. I could almost believe this was just any person, not the son of my jailor.

He exhaled and the steel went out of his hands, although he still kept me suspended above the rock. "It is you," he said.

"Damon –" I said weakly. "Put me down, put me down."

Instead, he shook me again. "It is you," he said. "It was you all the time. 'You're lucky to have a father,' you said. I should have known right then. What have I done?"

In desperation, caught by his strength and my own lack, I started going over what I knew. This, he was Damon. He was the Burnt Man's son. That demon himself, he was capable of things that had been impossible outside my imagination before. I was a prisoner. I was being tested. Every word counted.

"Damon," I said, but wit and resolve were deserting me. I remember his head on my lap, the quick kiss on my forehead as he tucked me into his own bed, that careful near-respect he had shown in all his dealings with me. Somehow all those people in the Dreamworld were a little real, real enough that they could be interacted with, just like I had discovered. Somehow, he had thought I was one of them, a Dreamworld person, not myself, not his father's quarry. And he had acted like he needed a friend, a confidante. . .

I realized I had made a conscious decision somewhere between my rude awakening in Damon's grasp and this present moment, only seconds later. I had to grow up. It had already begun to happen, this having to stop being a child in some ways, to accept awareness of adult responsibilities. I could have no one to turn to. Just as Damon was alone, so was I.

And there was more than my own safety to consider. I didn't question the knowledge. This Burnt Man wanted me to do something, and this had put into jeopardy not only my own existence but much more, all of my world. My mother. My way of life. People I hardly knew. Jason. None of whom could help me, or even understand the odds, I was sure. How would I describe what was happening to me? The dream of a girl with an overactive imagination.

He is *nice* – the thought came to me with ridiculous force. He was not as suited to this kind of scheming and manipulation, not like his father. But it was with his family he would always stand, that he had to stand. No doubt, no choice. He had suggested just that in the Dreamworld; his main goal was to gain his father's affection. But my head was aching. There was more to consider, an insistent memory. My dream swam back. *Momma, screaming. My house on fire.* . .

"My mother," I said, hoarse. "My house burned down. My mother. . ."

Damon's eyes took on an even more haunted cast. "I'm so sorry," he said, his voice strained and almost inaudible. "I didn't do it. My sister, she was. . . It was her job to make sure there was nothing for you to return to, so you'd want to stay. . . So you'd have no other choice. . ."

Damon laughed, sounding distant and lost. "I don't know what I'm doing," he said, and lowered me back to the rock. He turned and left without a backward glance.

I sank into the thin foam, wrists prickling. Across the gap between their shelves, Jason was sitting erect, straining against the chains around his wrists. Aaron was half asleep, looking at us both with slitted eyes. "He didn't hurt you, did he?" said Jason.

Not enough to matter, I thought, and shook my head. "He didn't hurt me." My mother was dead. It had been clear enough. I was really alone now. I had to be strong.

He didn't say anything else. "How are you doing?" I said.

He took a moment to think before answering. "I'm mad as hell, but this thing is really big than that. Isn't it?"

“Yeah,” I said. “I guess so.” My mother.

He sighed. “I know I can’t really blame you – well, if it makes you feel better, I’m spreading the blame around a bit now. That guy, Damon –”

”What about him?” I said, quickly.

Jason was reluctant. “I don’t know what he’s told you, but I know he’s done some really bad things.” Aaron, silent, was nodding grimly.

I nodded. “I know.” I knew; he couldn’t. Saint Maggie, she would spare Jason the burden of knowing just how bad the things Damon’s family were capable of could be.

“I mean really bad,” he said. “Look, Mags, when he grabbed you – well, I was more angry that I was caught up in it than I was worried for you – but if it came down to it, I would always side with you against any of them.”

Deliberately, I changed the subject. “What happened to you?”

He touched the bruised lip. “The welcome wagon was a bit rough. That Damon guy – he told them to do this.”

I was silent. *Damon was nice*, I thought, *but he could do things like this*. “Jason,” I said quietly, “I don’t know if you care, but if it comes down to it, I’ll always side with you against them.”

It was his turn to nod. “That’s really good to hear.” I could almost hear his thoughts, no magic needed. *Maybe Maggie was at the center of all this chaos, but maybe she was herself to be trusted. Still, he wasn’t going to let his guard down yet.*



Janice slammed the phone book down on the hotel table where Nick was trying to eat his room service meal.

“What if the phone’s tapped?” she said. “I can’t let them start buggering around until we know they’re needed.”

“Jan, I doubt you can keep the police out of a murder investigation just by refusing to talk on the phone.” He speared some carrots, wishing for wine to wash down the bland food. “What if the room’s bugged? Then you’ve already screwed up. Stop pacing. If they tap the phone, they tap the phone. Unless you want to ask them if you can slip across the street and use a pay phone, you might as well sit down and try to relax.”

“You’re a wonderful help,” said Janice, acidly.

“At least try to think of the police as being on *our* side. You seem to think they’re out to get Maggie themselves. They’re your only hope. Face it, Jan. We have to prepare for the worst, and part of that is being totally unable to do anything.”

Jan’s face twisted in anger. Her makeup was in crow’s feet around her eyes. “Maggie is not dead. I would know.”

“Oh yeah?” said Nick, looking once regretfully at his food, which would probably be even worse cold, before standing to properly enter the fray.

But Janice cut off whatever would have come out. “You’re such a lot of help. I really appreciate your sensitivity this far. ‘One room’s enough for the two of us. I’ll take care of her. Save the city some money, nudge nudge, aren’t I funny.’ Chauvinist pig.”

“I wasn’t trying to be funny, Jan,” he sputtered. “I meant what I said. I want to be close to take care of you.”

“How about that. Everyone downstairs thinks I’m your mistress.”

“We were married,” he said.

Jan guffawed. “Don’t remind me.”

“That’s not the way it looks at all. They just think I’m concerned. It’s natural. Come on, it was your idea to pose as boyfriend/girlfriend anyway. Don’t I remember right? Nick visits Jan, they have a nice slumber party, and in the morning, good golly the house is on fire?”

“Ha,” said Janice. “If it weren’t for my legal debts – still – not to mention trying to recover otherwise from what you put me through getting Maggie back, I would be married again, this time maybe even happily. I’m twenty-one thousand in debt. The wolf is at the door. And now you show up with the ‘dear daddy’ routine. What kind of a life do you think Maggie is getting?”

Nick didn’t respond for a minute. Instead, he turned and ground his fist into the picture window. Janice slumped into the chair and held her head in her hands. “You could have said something, gotten in touch.”

“I left that to the lawyers. You haven’t exactly been easy to find. I haven’t exactly been eagerly searching.” He opened his mouth, but she was quicker. “Shut up, Nick. I don’t want to hate you more than I already do.”

She stood and picked up the telephone book again. She spoke softly as she paged into it, to herself: “If those jerks had just left me my planner – left my purse – took my planner –”

Nick tried to imagine what he would say next, and if there was a couth way to get back to dinner. It was crappy he still felt hungry, when Jan seemed to be falling apart in front of him.

She found the number she was looking for and dialed deliberately, tearing starting again at the corners of her eyes. She waited.

Then: “Hello, Harry. . . Oh, I know, I’m so sorry. I never would have if there’d been any choice. . . Yes, partly Maggie but – how do I tell you this? It sounds too incredible. . . My house. It’s my house, Harry. It burned down. . . No, I’m in a hotel. They’re keeping me here, the police, until. . . I’m sorry. There’s more. Maggie’s gone, she’s disappeared... I would appreciate the help, of course. . . Oh, could you? That would be wonderful. I’ll talk to the detective here. . . Oh, wonderful. That’s even better. Thank you so much, honey. It’s so nice having my own personal lawyer. . . Yes, of course there’s no rush. . . I understand. Don’t worry, I’ll be fine... See you tomorrow, then. Until then, sweetheart.”

Janice turned triumphant to Nick. She said nothing but picked up the purse and fished out a small makeup bag. She disappeared into the washroom. Nick heard water running.

“Honey,” he said bitterly. It sounded odd coming out of Jan’s mouth. Honey. Some rich lawyer. Some rich lawyer who couldn’t make time for his girlfriend until ‘tomorrow’, even though her daughter was missing and her house would probably always smell of smoke, if there was even enough left to salvage. Lover boy hadn’t even asked her the details.

Feeling put out and with the need to do something, he went to the telephone himself and buzzed the front desk. While he waited for someone to answer, he tried to piece together what he would say to the detective to convince him it was completely necessary for Jan to remain at the hotel. That was obvious, wasn’t it? She needed police around her, not just some lawyer-guy called Harry. A bit belatedly, he guessed the detective would probably insist on that anyway and wished he had thought of that a moment before.

“Concierge,” said the woman at the desk, as Jan emerged from the bathroom, flashed him a quick look he could only think was contempt, and picked up her purse.

“Going to get some answers,” was all she called over her shoulder as she headed out of the hotel room into the hall.



As a name, John Tamblyn was no more really to the detective than a hairstyle is to most people. A convenience, a way for others to recognize him. The name rang false to him still, every time he heard anyone say it – like something pulled out of a telephone book at random, which it was, in fact. How did most people feel about their names? Were the ones chosen for them by their parents an integral part of their being, or did they feel as disassociated from these strange labels as he did from his? He had been freed early from the fetters of his birth name. It was no longer a part of him – if it had ever been.

Convenience, he told himself, is as good a reason as any. So John Tamblyn it was, and had been for years. He had a good job, one where his services were needed only infrequently but desperately when they were, enough to make anyone feel special. He had a nice, comfortable place to live, activities to keep him from boredom. There was money for almost anything he wanted, because his needs were minimal.

He was good at what he did, but Anna Gerrin had been right about his limitations.

The interview with Jan Stuart was a disaster from the beginning.

Tamblyn was not pleased to have landed this particular duty; it was about as far from his regular activities as pumping gas to the Pope. He was not good with people, a fact which he defended with a certain amount of hostile pride.

Tamblyn understood the reasons Morritz had given him this particular assignment, if not the wisdom. He was an atypical police officer. There was nothing particularly intimidating about him, in fact. He dressed casually. People assumed he was a detective for no more reason than that he was shabby and reminded them of a tall, thin Columbo. People felt comfortable, because they thought they knew his type. He was actually far more reassuring before he opened his mouth, and demonstrated conclusively how little he liked interacting with the public. If he was supposed to reassure Jan that everything possible was being done, he was the wrong person for the job.

But Tamblyn's first impression of Jan Stuart was not of a woman desperately worried about a missing daughter, but of someone with a bull-headed determination to obstruct every attempt at progress.

When they met, she was rushing through the lobby on her way out of the building, with two cops running after her.

"Sir!" called one of them, recognizing Tamblyn. "Stop that woman"

Tamblyn reached out and caught her arm. She twisted and spat at him like an angry cat. His eyes widened, and he struggled to hold her until the two officers arrived to help. As soon as they were on the scene and she was hopelessly outnumbered, she wrenched her arm from John's grasp with a furious look and stood quietly enough, rubbing her wrist.

"You're the detective?" she said. It was more of an accusation than a question.

"John Tamblyn, Ms. Stuart," he told her. It was not hard to guess correctly at who she was.

"Don't *Ms. Stuart* me, buddy boy," she said, her voice dropping into a dangerously low range. "If I'm here because my house burnt down, then I should be able to come and go as I please. If the police want to keep me here against my will, then they'd damn well better charge me with something."

"Ms. Stuart," repeated Tamblyn firmly. "Ms. Stuart, this is a very serious matter. We are trying to protect you..."

She laughed, loud and harsh, so that every head in the lobby was turned their way.

Tamblyn lowered his voice. "Ms. Stuart, please." He indicated the conference room where the police had set up a temporary headquarters and she proceeded him inside with controlled agitation. This was not a woman who had acquiesced anything. He could picture her making another break at any moment.

“Good,” she told him as they passed into the room. “This is what I wanted anyhow. Maybe you can explain something to me.”

She brushed aside another attempt on his part to take her arm and stalked across the room to the evidence table. When she turned again to face him, a plastic baggie was hanging from between her index finger and thumb. Inside was a child’s watch.

He stared. “Ms. Stuart, your daughter is missing. It’s understandable that you are upset. But I assure you the police department...”

That’s as far as he got. “This is Maggie’s watch.” Jan’s eyes narrowed. “They found it in the school, kicked and stepped on. It stopped on the afternoon she disappeared, just after two-fifteen.”

He said nothing. The Stuart child’s watch was not something he had known about. The specific evidence in the disappearances had been far less important to him than the blood over the gym floor which didn’t conform to any known type, and of course that terrifyingly casual photo of a man he’d thought long dead.

“Okay,” said Jan, putting the watch down and sitting down. John took the chair beside her. “It’s some kind of game, and you’ll deal me in when I behave. Just tell me, please. Tell me something. Give me some meager part of the truth and I promise I’ll sit pretty until you find Maggie.”

Tamblyn felt his scalp crawl under his hat. He removed the battered fedora and placed it on the table beside them. “Ms. Stuart. . .”

“Jan,” she corrected. It was nearly a plea, a vast change from her attitude the moment before.

“Jan. All right.” He sat forward, bending over his knees. “Please remember that what I tell you is in confidence.” She waited expectantly. Tamblyn was seized by a sudden desire to tell her everything, or at least enough for her to kick up a fuss when she was told the case had dead-ended. *No, she could cry, I know about the blood, about the pentagram of candles on the gym floor, about the fact that none of the children who’d witnessed the events of the afternoon could remember anything about their fateful ‘assembly. . .’*

He had paused a little too long. Jan got up abruptly and grinned with no hint of good humor. “Fine,” she spat. “You’re like the rest of them. Why should I be surprised? I know about the other missing kids. I probably know far more than you think, but it’s just not enough. My daughter might be dead, and you’re want to be good cop and bad cop all in one.” Where had that image come from? Jan’s eyes misted over, and Tamblyn couldn’t know that she had received a sudden strange flash of vision. In her mind, she saw Maggie bent and huddled in a pile of rags in an alley. Cops and robbers. The moment passed.

“Ms. Stuart?” asked Tamblyn gently.

She snarled, recovered. “I’ll be in my room.”

He followed her up.

Leaving the hotel after a brief, just as uninformative encounter with Nicholas Marino, the boyfriend, he had walked first to where his car was parked to check the messages on the cellular phone answering machine: nothing. Then, obviously not really needing to return to work if his only responsibilities were in a hotel room fuming and in all probability cursing him, he went for a walk in the park, grabbed a hot dog from a vendor for lunch, and found a bench by the fountain.

It was always his hope on days like this that he had cultivated a seedy enough appearance that no one would choose to sit by him, and especially that no one would talk to him. Maybe in New York people would, but this was Canada after all, the country where no one has to put up with ugliness if they are able to close their eyes or walk one more block. Tamblyn did not cultivate

casual conversation.

Today, however, he knew there was someone following him, not through any sixth sense that he would make Morritz believed he was in possession of, but because the man hadn't taken any pains not to be seen.

"Grab a hot dog, sit down," he said to the air, and was gratified by what probably was the most desirable response. Hunt circled the bench and sat, crowding Tamblyn's space in the way he had, knee resting against the other man's knee. Hunt, thought the detective, was never one to miss a chance to gain a psychological edge over an opponent.

"I've been looking for you," said the detective, refusing to look at Hunt and concentrating instead with deliberate focus on his lunch.

"You lie." Hunt chuckled. "Besides, you must know when I don't want to be found, there is nothing in the world you can do to draw me out. I can't be baited."

"And what is this then?"

"Now," said Hunt, "I want to be found. Or rather, I want you to do me a favor."

The detective scratched his lower lip, wondering if there was mustard there. Hunt, and here, and John Tamblyn could do nothing except play along. "Teaching school, I hear. What would the good citizens of Westbrook think if they knew?"

"More your P.R. problem now than my principal concern," said Hunt. "Would you believe I really wanted to start over, that I was nothing more than a school teacher for years?"

"No," said the detective, "Frankly no. What was it, what pushed you over this time? That fiasco, a dead cop, weird blood, occult symbols, mysterious helicopters in suburbia – do you think we're idiots? Even before I found you smiling out of that school photo –"

"– you had no idea what was going on. Admit it. You've leapt to a conclusion perfectly in hindsight. I bet you were thrilled with that picture. You always liked easy answers. Don't you want to hear my side of it?"

"I'm tired of your excuses, your games and your lies." Tamblyn was quiet; there were people near. When he continued, he turned to Hunt and spoke softly. "You would have to do a lot of convincing to make me believe you're not at the bottom of this."

"Too much of a coincidence, is it?" Hunt stood. "Walk with me," he said. "Too busy here. Trust me," he continued, when the detective made no move to follow. "Flesh and blood." He held out his hand and Tamblyn took it reluctantly, and got to his feet, sweeping the last crumbs of hard roll from his coat toward an attentive pigeon.

"I came because of the disturbances. You know the kind of thing." It was a bit of unexpected information from Hunt.

Tamblyn grimaced. There had to be a purpose in his being forthcoming. "Too well. And so you went back to school."

"Not at first. I thought – suburbs, you understand. Lots of crazy stuff happening behind closed doors. I thought it was a guy with something illicit locked up in his basement, some minor talent with delusions of mage-hood. I came across the truth pretty much by accident, and then I didn't move quickly enough. I wasn't – John. You've got to believe me. I had no idea it would be a thirteen year old girl. She would have been five or six when I got to town, and still I knew something was up."

Tamblyn, feeling old emotions boiling up like magma in a vent, said crossly, "Another little girl."

Immediately, he thought he'd crossed the line in a bad way, and flinched from a blow that was never offered. Hunt chuckled instead, the serious gravity which had characterized him so completely a moment before giving way to something harder and crueler. "Yeah," he agreed,

“another little girl.”

Together they went, side by side, down to the water and along the quay. The silence between them was easier than speech. The detective had noted before that they had more in common when they had nothing to say. Finally, it was he that spoke.

“You said you needed a favor.”

Hunt chuckled again. “I thought you had conveniently forgotten that,” he said.

“Hardly,” said the detective, smiling. “I’ll take any chance I get for you to owe me.”

“One problem – I tend not to repay my debts.”

“We’ll see.” The detective bent, straightened, shied a rock into the water. His only living kin was back, and looking again for handouts. “What can I do for you, brother of mine?”

Hunt smiled. “And I thought you had disowned me completely.”

“You’ve never missed a chance to remind me of my greatest, dirtiest secret. I’m curious why you didn’t this time.”

“I knew I could count on you,” said Hunt, almost fondly, neglecting to answer, or answering both the question and the offer at once. “You’ll never be a mercenary like me. You’re all soft, thank whatever forces will still help me. Trust you to be nostalgic about what a bastard I am. Come on.”

The apartment Hunt took him to was a hole by any standards, a room and a kitchenette in a run-down building, with a bathroom down the hall. The detective entered his plea that they not stay there long, and Hunt concurred. It was, he said, a temporary necessity. He could hardly return to his comfortable suburban split-level now, could he, not after he had been identified.

“Oh yes, the photograph,” said Tamblyn. “Letting us find that seems like a strange oversight. You’re slipping?”

Hunt looked up, eyes cold. “I wanted to make sure nobody else got hurt. And put you on to me. They drop the investigation yet?”

Tamblyn laughed, ironically. “The investigation, and me. Yes, your name is guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of all who hear its terrible syllables uttered, isn’t it. The Hunter is back. Lock up your children and wives.”

“Don’t make jokes.” Hunt, pawing through a mess of belongings on the floor, thrust a bundle and a coil of rope at the other man. “It was quick and painless. If I can use my notoriety to my advantage, it’s nice for a change. So what, pretend to investigate for another couple of weeks and stick it in ‘Unsolved?’”

It was sickening, the way he tended to jump to correct conclusions. If Morritz was impressed with his mysterious detective, he’d think Hunt was a gift from heaven. “Hunt,” said Tamblyn tersely. “What’s going on here?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” Hunt straightened, half a head shorter than the other man but that was never a disadvantage for him. “I would like to know as well. I have my suspicions. That’s all I can say.”

There was a note of honesty in his voice which Tamblyn was afraid for the moment to touch. He let it go.

They left, Hunt locking the door behind them. He flashed the key to the desk clerk as they went out of the building onto the street. “I rent by the day,” said Hunt. “No one likes to admit they’re going to stay in a place like this long.”

“Where now?” said the detective, but Hunt preceded him, passing silently into an alley. It was beginning to get dark, twilight dropping its dusky canopy over the city. Eventually they came out of the maze of back streets into a low, shaded park. Hunt motioned, and the detective followed, the two moving like cats through the night. In a gully surrounded by concrete pipe and a fringe of

trees, Hunt stopped and took the bundle from the detective's arms. It was a very private place; for all it was in the middle of the city, it gave the impression of being completely isolated.

"Now will you tell me what this is all about?" said Tamblyn, whispering. It didn't seem right to raise a voice in this place.

"Little brother," said Hunt, "I need to be a leech." He unfolded the cloth wrappings and pulled out the trappings, all the things that the detective thought he had left behind when he rejoined the real world: the long rusted knife, the candles, a thick piece of chalk worn to a knuckle, other things, bits of shiny metal, a book.

Tamblyn closed his eyes, felt his nerve leave him. "Anything but," he said.

"It's a girl's life," said Hunt. "One of my students."

"And you want to help her?"

"I'm the only one in a position to, and only with your help."

"What is the danger?"

Hunt reached out and cupped the other man's face in his hand. "Too great," he said, a hissing whisper. "I think you know what I'm talking about."

There was no refusing, Tamblyn knew. It was a pact as old as time, and just as enduring. "Flesh and blood," breathed Tamblyn, the sound strangled, spittle bubbling on his lips.

"'Til death do we part," said Hunt. "You've been playing magician too long, witch-boy. Have you forgotten the real stuff?"

Hearing his station nickname on Hunt's lips made him cold. "Wait," said Tamblyn.

Hunt's forefinger itched a line along the other man's jaw.

The detective forced himself to stare into his brother's eyes. "I've never known you to be an altruist, my friend. And yet here you are, rushing to a little girl's rescue like an avenging angel, sound and fury and the most forbidden magic. I don't believe for a moment that you actually care about her – how could anyone touch that black thing you call a heart and expect to live?"

"I've changed," said Hunt hoarsely. "I don't care whether you believe it or not. A prize of immense power is at stake here. She's going to get swept away. I – owe her."

"For what?" whispered Tamblyn, pulling his chin out of Hunt's forgetting hand. "I thought you didn't repay debts."

"Maybe it's not for something she's done yet."

Tamblyn stared. Hunt had gone back to his preparations, unsheathing the rusted knife and sharpening one end of the chalk. Finally, the detective said, "I see."

"Probably not," said Hunt, "but let's not debate that. You know what I've done, and what price I have to pay. You, and no one else in the world, know that. She's about my only chance for redemption. I just want to take a little look-see. That'll determine everything else I do." He grimaced, deep in thought for a moment, then continued. "I don't like the idea someone else's got dibs on her."

"You're crazy," said Tamblyn, and stood. For a moment, he was still, gathering his resources for flight. But Hunt was quicker, and threw him to the ground, pinning him by his neck to the surface. The stone chilled him immediately. The sun was down, and air and ground both were cooling. Tamblyn heard his own breath, quick and ragged, as he tried to fight. Hunt flipped him onto his front, seemingly without effort. The detective felt tears coming. Could he do nothing?

His own stupid fault, he'd waited too long. With Hunt, half the danger was in words, half the combat skill lay in language. Get suckered into conversation with him, and you were already lost.

Hunt tied his brother's arms with the rope they had brought and knotted the other end around his feet. "You won't believe this," he told Tamblyn as he sat the other man up to face the

crude circle forming on the gully's floor, "but I feel terrible about doing this. I need you."

Tamblyn was silent.

"Now," said Hunt, "let's begin, shall we?"



There was silence in the gully over the two prone men. A jogger, far off the beaten track, came across them and thought they were drunk. It wasn't worth a second thought to her. From the place she paused to appraise them before moving on, the darkness obscured the fact that one of the two was bound hand and foot.

Time passed, bringing the night into a new inky depth, and suddenly one of the men came upright with a sharp intake of breath. His eyes were wide and unseeing, and when he spoke it was no more than a breath. The other man was nearly unconscious and paid no attention.

"God, John, it's Char."

Hunt fell back into the trance, the initial shock of his findings enough to force him out, but his need great enough to drive him back in. Knowing what he might soon be up against was one thing, but divining his own next move would depend on things he could only learn if his mind was left to wander free.

At his side, John Tamblyn bled and shivered in the cool evening air.



Hunt snapped out of the second trance with blood beating against his temple.

Knowing it was Char was bad enough. Knowing that alone was cause for more than usual caution.

Tamblyn was slumped in the same position as Hunt had left him.

"Dear bro," said Hunt. "Dear bro." Perhaps Tamblyn hadn't even heard Hunt return the first time, and was still unaware of the ancient power lurking at the heart of the Westbrook mystery. That would be best.

It was well after midnight, but it still would be too much of a risk carrying a bleeding and unconscious man out of the park and maneuvering into a cab for the trip back to his room.

Hunt slapped the other man's face, wishing he'd brought a thermos of water along with everything else. If not to revive him with a drink, then for something to dash in his face. Wake him up, clean him off, stash him away. Then, on to business.

Tamblyn came to with a gurgle, phlegm built in his throat and sinuses. Hunt tsked; spring allergies. John was playing the macho fool as usual and taking no medication. He almost said as much, but didn't. Save the clever remarks for baiting. Now was the time to coddle.

Tamblyn was still bleeding where Hunt had made the cut, a slow ooze from the incision. All in all, practice had told, Hunt noted with satisfaction. Wide enough, ragged enough to bleed throughout the ritual, but not enough to put his life in danger. Not yet, at any rate. Hunt grunted, frustrated, as Tamblyn slipped away again.

Hunt put his thumbs along the oozing cut and pressed. The lips of the incision flared and the blood began to flow more briskly again.

"Now, now," said Hunt sympathetically as Tamblyn gasped and rolled his eyes up to his tormentor's face. "Cooperate. You've been exemplary so far, John, a very good boy. Let's not give me any nasty stories to carry back to Mommy, all right?"

"Hunt," gaped Tamblyn, awake through a red haze.

“Very good,” said Hunt. “Elementary recognition appears to be functioning. Let’s get on to other things, shall we? I want you to talk to me, my brother.”

Tamblyn was aware of the hard irregularity of the surface beneath him. They were still in the park. It was late. The night was clear and a breeze tickled his face; sweat was evaporating from his brow. Hunt was kneeling beside him, one hand on his arm as if ready to take his pulse. Other than the discomfort, Tamblyn was also dizzy, even lying down. He wondered how much blood he’d lost. His pants legs felt stiff.

Hunt, seeing a partial success, jerked the other man to his knees. Tamblyn swam, seeking balance, while Hunt’s hands steadied themselves on his shoulders. He felt Hunt prod him, trying to force him to his feet. He resisted, but more because of inertia than in conscious defiance. He could no longer find his tongue.

“Talk,” said Hunt again. “I’d like to keep you alive, John. It’s so handy having my own personal blood bank.”

Tamblyn managed a frustrated swing that Hunt used to sweep him to his feet. He caught the detective around the waist and held him upright until John felt his head clearing.

“Easy now,” said Hunt, soft.

“You are – bastard,” managed Tamblyn, hardly audible. The tongue was there after all, just ten times thicker than it ought to be. Totally drained, he allowed Hunt to support him and they moved slowly back toward the road.

When Tamblyn’s eyes rolled shut, Hunt prodded him in the ribs.

“Come on, old guy,” he breathed into the detective’s ear. “Stay with me.” Then, continuing in a lighter tone, he hiked Tamblyn’s arm over his shoulder. “What was the name of that pretty constable who works with you down at the station? Karen? Carol? What was it? Come on, John. Talk to me. He hitched Tamblyn up.

“Carla,” said Tamblyn, groggy. “It’s Carla.”

“Good boy. Stay with it. What about the regular duty sergeant? Can you remember him?”

“Porsten? No, McCaully.” Tamblyn, on some of his own power now, took a firmer grasp on Hunt’s hand. “Tom McCaully. New guy. Porsten’s gone. Silvia. Not he.”

“Right. Good, good.” They reached the edge of the park where Hunt hailed a cab. “You’re going to be fine, Johnny. We’re both going to be just fine.”



“It’s a good thing they had me in chains when he came by,” said Aaron, low and dangerous. “I would have killed him.” I almost laughed at his solemnity, but held back. They were my allies, they had to be. Aaron couldn’t mean it literally, anyway.

Aaron turned his cold blue eyes on me. “I don’t know you, barely even to see you. And you don’t know me from an extra set of chains. So, why don’t you fill us in on what you know about this whole thing, and we’ll get acquainted?”

All laughter drained out of me. He was remarkably focused and composed, and seemed capable enough. He hadn’t been someone I’d ever really noticed, except to know he was one of Scott Saunders’ friends, and was the only boy who consistently outscored the girls on math and science tests. Scott I’d noticed because he hung around with Jason. I knew nothing outstanding about Aaron other than scholastically, and by chance, we had never ended up in a class together in all the years we had been at Westbrook. Still, not every smart person is, or chooses to be, very social. There was nothing worse than choosing to underestimate someone, especially someone who could look at you so steadily and searchingly.

I told them what I could about my impressions of the catacombs, which seemed like a good

place to start. I didn't want to start earlier, with Mr. Hunt's strange behavior. What I did tell them in addition to what Jason already knew involved Mr. Sterling and his odd complicity in their captivity. I was reluctant to talk about the Dreamworld, more than I would have imagined. It had taken on an intensely personal dimension. When I recounted the barest of details about the actual events there, I managed to completely avoid mention of the Burnt Man and my new powers, even as I reached into my own arms for the faint tingle telling her they were still there, although held at bay by the suffocating effects of the shackles. I was still different.

"Is that everything?" said Aaron, more like a prosecuting lawyer than a confidante. I got the impression that every word I said was entering Aaron's ordered mind in memo form.

I looked down, wishing my moment on the spot was over. Hiding my own transformation was unfair. More than unfair; it might be fatal in the long run if either of the boys could somehow use the new information I'd gathered for their mutual benefit. "No," I said sadly, realizing it was going to be easier to come clean about the powers than about what Damon had meant when he had picked me up by the wrists and shook me like a terrier with a rat.

Jason blinked. "Well?"

I had to explain the hard stuff, it might be vital to all of them to know what I did. But how to say it without sounding crazy or arrogant?

"I've been changed," I said meekly.

Neither of them moved.

"I – can do magic now," I said, feeling like a fool. Why should it feel so awkward to tell the truth? "I started to have odd things when I came down here – I don't know. I had a dream about – have you seen him? The man?" No answer, which I took as a no. "He's Damon's father, or that's what I've been told."

"His father?" Jason jumped on it. "I heard a voice in my head. . ."

"You *did* hear him," I said, excited now. "I thought you hadn't, when you kept running away. That was him, right. Oh, all right. You can believe me."

"I heard the singing. Did you? Back at school?"

"The boy. I heard it too. I fainted after class, and Mr. Hunt. . ." I stopped, hoping that Aaron wouldn't follow this line. It was still an avenue I didn't want to pursue. *A glass of water already poured for her, and she goes out like a light. . .*

"Is that it?" said Aaron, still probing. "You two both heard – is that what you were talking about? This change?"

I sighed, miserably. "No, there's more. In the Dreamworld, without these. . ." I rattled the chains ". . . I can do a lot more. I could change my age. I could. . ." but I really hadn't experimented much more than that. Bitterly, I regretted the amount of time I'd wasted when I had, at least in semblance, my freedom. "I know I'm capable of a lot, and that's why he's got the chains on me, because they stop me from being able to tap the power."

Aaron shook his head. "Incredible. No, bizarre. What do you think, Jay?"

Jason looked down. "I have to tell Maggie about the blood, right?"

Aaron shook his head gently, and told me for him.

"Mr. Hunt is involved," I said at the end of it, knowing I had no choice. "I know. I don't know how either, but he is. He. . . kept me after class. That's how I was outside the auditorium. He offered to take me home. If I'd gone, maybe I would have got away."

"Or not," said Jason, remembering and shivering.

"All right," said Aaron. "The point is, there's got to be a way out of this, right?"

He looked at me, as if to say, *there's always a way out*. It was more reassurance than I could ever remember receiving.

“Right,” I said. “I’ll find it.”

“And we’ll help you find it,” he said.

I wanted to smile, but it seemed too earlier for relief. Instead, I nodded. “What next?”

Aaron looked at Jason, and Jason looked at me. Then all three of us began to laugh.

“We sound so dumb,” said Jason at last, and I nodded.

“If it wasn’t for everything – and for the evidence –” I shook the chains again.

“Can’t take those for granted,” said Aaron. “Jacob Marley’s frigging ghost.”

“I’m so glad we’re all getting on,” I said.

Jason sat up. “That boy singing – I heard it here too.”

“When?” said Aaron.

“Just – when I was coming here after they beat me up. I heard him singing. It sounded like it was coming from a long way off, but I heard it. It made me think about Scott.” He looked suddenly surprised, as if hadn’t known that last part until he said it out loud.

I grimaced. “I haven’t been doing too well at figuring things out. I can’t imagine how we’re going to get ahead of him.”

“Ahead of who?” asked Aaron.

“Him. The Burnt Man. Our host.” I crowded myself over onto my elbow. “Him. He’s what we’re up against. Doesn’t matter how you want to look at it. No matter what we win or lose, it’s going to come down to him.”

I sounded more sure than I felt, but the sureness was increasing. I lay back. *Us versus him. Me versus him.* It all came down to that.



“I should be ashamed of myself,” Hunt told himself. It was noon hour in the big city, and at Toronto Metro Police Headquarters. Officers going for lunch and citizens using their lunch hours to file complaints made for chaos. This, not late at night, was when the station was most vulnerable.

Hunt slipped around the long line of civilians waiting for information. He’d been here before to orient himself. Just because Tamblyn was unaware of his brother’s presence in the city didn’t mean he had to be similarly ignorant. He slid a blank business card through the scanner and the security turnstile unlocked obediently for him. Only once was he challenged, on his way out of the elevator already nearing at his objective. He scanned the name-tag and grinned.

McCaully. “Tom, hi, good to see you again.” And he breezed on past.

At a desk where the corridor opened up to a row of offices, Hunt saw the woman who would be his ‘Open Sesame.’

“Carla,” said Hunt, smiling charmingly. “I’d remember a pretty face like yours anywhere. You probably don’t remember me, right? John’s brother. We met about a year and a half ago.”

“Oh, yeah.” She was polite, unconvinced. Not by him, Hunt noted, but by her own recollections. When had she met him? It was gone, obviously, faded from memory.

“No, huh?” he said breezily, smiling broader. “Well, it doesn’t matter. Look, love, the thing is this. John’s laid up with the flu, and he needs a couple of files from his office. If you don’t mind, that is.”

She frowned, but not to refuse. “No, I guess that wouldn’t be a problem.” No questions after his health, Hunt noted. His brother was obviously still his same congenial self around the office.

“Thanks.” Hunt, needing an excuse to pause, let his attention be taken momentarily by the

coffee maker. There were a couple more things he needed from Carla.

She beat him to the next question. “You checked in with the duty sergeant?”

“Tom? Yeah, of course. Look, is there a key or something? I thought I had it but I must have left it on the kitchen table.”

She was all smiles now. Dropping a couple of the right names was a wonderful way in. So much easier than lies or a break-in. Especially if you had the right kind of *something special* to smooth the way. “All right. You’re going to be a problem all over, aren’t you?”

“Yes ma’am,” said Hunt, his bashful best. Perfect. Carla slipped a trio of keys off a large master ring and put them in Hunt’s palm.

“There’s two for the file cabinets. I bet John-boy didn’t even think of those. There’s coffee – well, you can see for yourself. Don’t forget to drop a quarter into the basket. You’re not much like him.” Her eyes narrowed, considering him, looking for resemblance.

“I favor Mom,” he said, and the phone rang. He slipped off down the hall, returning her good-bye wave as she picked up.



Several hours had passed in the usual bustle and business of the day before Carla Szaba thought to ask if anyone had seen John Tamblyn’s brother leave the station.

Tom McCaully was sure he hadn’t, and couldn’t even remember seeing him at the coffee machine or out to the washroom.

Carla expressed her anger – *what if the guy’s made off without bothering to return my keys?* – with a fist balled up inside the opposite hand as she stalked the corridor down to Tamblyn’s office.

His was the last in the row of doors, right at the corner, and nominally, everything looked okay. The frosted glass door gave little indication of anything beyond, and it was locked when she tried it. Fuming, she found the master key on the ring and shoved the door open.

“Oh. No,” she said.

The computer terminal was on, blinking for input in a high-security mode. The rest of the room was in chaos, files upside down, maps spread over the floor and chairs, the drawers in the desk pulled out and upended. In the center of the room, a section of carpet had been pulled up and a small cavity Carla had never known was there loomed empty. Whatever prize Tamblyn had been guarding was gone now.

The Venetian blind on the window was askew and when Carla pulled it aside, the window, one of the last remaining in the building that could be opened, had been left unlatched and ajar. Below, it was a two-storey drop to the fire escape. The three keys were sitting in a neat line on the sill, insult for the injury.

She was still standing looking out with the blind balanced on her shoulder a few minutes later when some other officers came in to see what her exclamation had been about. Szaba felt stunned. The security of the station had been violated. And it was worse because of the way it had been done. This was no simple crook. This was someone with the know-how to enter the most secure levels of the computer system, to locate and crack a lock-box hidden in the floor, and then who jumped, like a fly, thirty feet straight down to a narrow metal walkway. And worst of all, this someone had waltzed in and done it under her nose, with her complicity. Guiltily, she knew she had liked the guy, even if she could hardly remember him. There was no way she’d be able to give more than a basic, and incomplete, description.

And then, Carla Szaba realized the full enormity of what she’d done, allowed a stranger, with no identification, enter the secure office of a detective of police, without so much as

supervision or getting him to sign the log. It was incomprehensible. Except, she'd done it.

"Mario," said Carla to the nearest officer she could identify out of the corner of her eye, "you'd better take me to Morritz. I'm in a lot of trouble."



The subject of Carla Szaba's impending discipline had crossed town while she was still sitting at her desk oblivious to her indiscretion. In the squalid flat, Tamblyn was doing well; as well, at least, as Hunt could afford at the moment. He was also drugged to the teeth and handcuffed to the bed.

He opened his eyes with difficulty as Hunt came in, a thick sheaf of papers in the bag on his back. That was the limit of his ability.

"Having fun, Johnny?" said Hunt, throwing down the bag and pouring a glass of water from the kitchenette sink. Sitting on the bed next to Tamblyn's head, he fed the other man a steady dribble of liquid until the detective shook his head.

"Don't worry. I'm not a monster – yet." Hunt carefully lifted the plastic top off the steaming styrofoam tub of soup. "I've got dinner. Don't you love playing hostage? I'll even escort you to the bathroom later if you're good."

It took a good half hour to feed Tamblyn the drugged soup and get him to the toilet and back. The detective hadn't protested the feeding this time, even though by now he knew where the sedatives were coming from. He also knew he had to keep himself alive, and Hunt knew he knew.

Tamblyn, exhausted and passing out again, heard Hunt unpacking the papers he'd taken from the police station. He was completely out by the time, hours later, when his brother exclaimed his success. Last night's excursion in the park had set some signposts out for him, but they were useless without the road map he had cobbled together from Tamblyn's files. And of course, the office had yielded more than he had hoped. But he could hardly want Tamblyn madder than he was already going to be, so Hunt didn't gloat.

Then there were only a few things left to do. Even though the papers taken from the office would be useless to Tamblyn without what he had learnt in the blood trance, Hunt carefully burned every one in the sink. That was another nice thing about living in a cheap-slum apartment: no smoke detectors to interfere with the easy disposal of evidence.

Next, he put a jug of water within easy reach of Tamblyn's prone form, with a mug beside it. He also left a thermos of soup and a large packet of crackers. Let John think he was going to be there a long time, and he'd be less likely to discover the handcuff key at the bottom of the water jug until it fell out into his last glass.

The last thing he did was take his brother's hand and ease the signet ring off his right fourth finger.

"Here's looking at you, kid," he said, and, Tamblyn's car keys in hand, he set off.